

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

Chapter 251 Got back

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The two got back into the car.

Alana fastened her seatbelt and glanced curiously at Stephan. “Why are we heading back so soon?”

Stephan replied with a straight face, “I’m getting hard. I couldn’t stand it anymore.”

Stephan glanced at her. “What’s wrong? Don’t you want to go back?”

Alana thought to herself, I just don’t want to go back so soon to get fucked.

Stephan curled the corner of his lip nonchalantly. “We’ve got business to attend to tonight. If you still want to hang out with them, I’ll bring you back next time they organize a gathering.”

Alana closed her eyes for a moment; sometimes she really didn’t want to understand what he was saying.

She deliberately changed the subject. “By the way, I won so many rounds for you tonight. How much did we actually win?”

“I don’t know. At a guess... probably a few hundred million.”

Alana’s hand trembled violently. She looked at Stephan, her clear almond-shaped eyes filled with disbelief. “How... how much?”

She hadn’t misheard, had she?

A few hundred million?

Seeing Alana’s shocked reaction, Stephan thought to himself, “I almost forgot...my girlfriend is the kind of woman who has to pay him back in five installments for a dress that costs fifty thousand.”

A few hundred million...that was simply too astronomical a figure for her.

He cleared his throat and toned it down a bit. "Just kidding. It's probably a few millions."

Alana gasped.

Jokes aside, but a few millions was still a ton of money, wasn't it?!

She never would have guessed that Stephan's friends...every single one of them would be this rich.

Could it be... that they were all second, third or even fourth-generation rich kids? Do they all come from wealthy families?

Then Stephan... wasn't he even richer than them?

But back to the point.

She blinked her beautiful eyes,

hesitating for less than a second.

"Um, could you give me a cut of that hard-earned money?"

After all, she had played a part in the several million he'd won.

"I'm not asking for much, just a third, no, a fifth would be enough,"

Stephan glanced at her, and she stared at him with wide, hopeful eyes, her gaze betraying her unhidden anticipation.

"You want some?"

She nodded. "Mm-hmm, I do!"

No one would turn down money.

She was just an ordinary person, earning only a few thousand dollars a month, so she knew all too well how hard it was to make a living.

The millions Stephan had won tonight were likely more than she could earn in a lifetime of hard work.

Stephan curved his lips and seized the moment to say, "Alright, if you do exactly as I say tonight, I'll give you all the money I won."

“Huh?!”

Wait, was he taking advantage of the situation?!

Her cheeks flushed slightly, and the tips of her ears burned. “You... want me to think it over...”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “Is there really anything to think about?”

“A few millions in a single night...you’ll be happy, and so will I...”

Alana bit her lip, closed her eyes briefly, then took a deep breath. “Alright, I accept.”

Stephan smirked, his scheme having succeeded. “Fine. Tonight, I want you to seduce me.”

Her eyes dilated.

Back at the house.

Unsurprisingly, Stephan and Alana spotted a large, discreetly wrapped box sitting by the door.

Stephan raised an eyebrow, unlocked the door with his fingerprint, and then picked up the box, carrying it inside.

Alana, feeling she had no choice, followed him inside.

The two of them went back to the bedroom together.

The man opened the box, revealing a multitude of intimate items.

Stephan looked up at her. “Come take a look. There are quite a few good things in here.”

Alana didn’t dare to walk over and look. Her face flushed, she said, “I won’t look. I... I’m going to take a shower first.”

Stephan curved his lips and asked deliberately, “Aren’t you going to pick out a nightgown you like to wear?”

Alana’s breath caught. “You... just pick one for me.”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “Alright, go in first. I’ll bring it to you once I’ve picked one out.”

Alana gave a perfunctory reply and hurried into the bathroom.

Once the door was shut, she pressed her slender back against the frosted glass, her heart pounding wildly.

Just get by!

I have to hold on!

So what if she has to wear that kind of outfit to seduce him?

She could do it.

For millions, she had to do it!

Even without the millions, he would have made her do it anyway!

Her boyfriend was a wild beast.

She slowly slipped off her clothes and stood under the shower.

The trickling water droplets fell onto her body, creating a hazy, warm mist.

From bottom to top, her slender legs were straight and delicate; her full hips and narrow waist were so voluptuous they couldn't be grasped in one hand. Every inch was a flawless beauty, enough to set a man's blood boiling.

The man knocked on the tightly closed door.

"Open up. I've picked out your outfit."

A deep, magnetic voice echoed through the room, causing the woman in the bathroom to tremble ever so slightly.

Alana bit her lip and reached up to turn off the shower.

She grabbed a pink bath towel to cover her body, then took slow, deliberate steps toward the door.

Seeing the blurry, slender figure outside the door, Alana unconsciously clenched her legs together.

Uncertain, she spoke up, "Um, I'll open the door, and you can pass the clothes through."

"Okay."

Hearing this, Alana finally felt at ease as she turned the doorknob and opened the door a crack.

But just as she opened the door, the man thrust his knee right through the opening.

Alana let out a startled cry and scrambled backward.

In her panic, the bath towel slipped from her hands and fell to the floor.

The moment Stephan stepped inside, he took in every inch of the girl's beauty.

His eyes darkened instantly, and a fiery intensity flared within them.

Even though he had seen it countless times and touched it countless times.

Yet every time he admired her, his blood still boiled with primal desire.

The man's gaze was intense, excessively heated, and completely unabashed.

Alana instinctively covered her chest with both hands and shyly stepped back. "You...how did you get in here?"

Stephan took a step toward her, each footfall deliberate, as if he were treading on her heart.

Her heartbeat was racing out of control.

The man stared at her, his voice low and hoarse. "I came in to help you get dressed."

Alana couldn't help but keep backing away. "No, I can do it myself..."

"I know, but it'll be more satisfying to tear it off after I help you put it on."

She gulped.

What kind of twisted fetish is this?!

The man's gaze was intensely predatory, like a starving wild wolf eyeing its prey, ready to pounce and devour it at any moment.

Alana couldn't help but keep backing away.

Until her slender back pressed against the cold wall, leaving her with nowhere else to go. She knew that tonight, there was no escape.

The man before her wouldn't let her go easily.

Yet even though she had mentally prepared herself, when the moment actually arrived, she still couldn't help but feel shy and nervous.

As Stephan approached Alana, he unbuttoned his shirt without hesitation.

One, two... The rest, in his impatience, he simply ripped open.

Several buttons snapped off, falling onto the damp floor. After struggling to stay upright for a few moments, the shirt finally parted lifelessly, falling to the floor.

Next came the man's belt, then his pants...

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Chapter 252 Bit by bit

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Alana's breathing grew increasingly rapid, her cheeks flushed an unusual shade of red.

Wasn't he supposed to help her get dressed?

How... how could he have undressed first?

She knew she shouldn't look, but her eyes had already drifted upward involuntarily.

Those fluid muscle lines, taut and powerful, each one brimming with explosive energy, radiating an overwhelming aura of masculinity.

Further down, beneath the sharply defined eight-pack abs, lay that alluring V-line, and that highly explosive, imagination-stirring...

Alana couldn't help but look away.

At that moment, the heat in her cheeks surged violently, as if they were about to catch fire.

She desperately wanted to flee, but her feet felt as if they were weighted with lead; she couldn't move an inch.

She could only watch helplessly as the man's footsteps grew closer and closer.

Until he stopped right in front of her.

His muscular frame pressed against her without restraint, like a red-hot iron.

Alana instinctively raised her hands to push against his chest. "Stephan, don't..."

Stephan lowered his gaze to meet hers, his eyes burning with an intensity that was almost unbearable.

"Don't what? We agreed...tonight, you'd make the first move. I've been waiting for you to make the first move."

Alana was at a loss for words.

She lifted her slightly moist eyelashes and met the man's dark eyes, which held a deep, intense longing. Her heart fluttered slightly.

Remembering her promise to him, she bit her lip and mustered her courage.

Her hands, pressed against his chest, slowly traced upward until they reached his neck. With her hands no longer blocking him, their bodies pressed even closer together.

Stephan's gaze burned with intensity as he waited for Alana to make her next move.

Alana stood on tiptoe, pressing her soft lips gently against his thin ones.

She didn't stop there, but instead mimicked the way he usually treated her, bit by bit, tentatively taking his lips into her mouth.

Stephan locked his gaze firmly on Alana's eyes, his own eyes gradually darkening and deepening, so deep they seemed capable of sucking the person before him right in.

His Adam's apple bobbed. Her movements were clearly inexperienced and lacking in technique.

Yet, strangely, the attraction he felt for her was irresistible.

Still, he bit back his desire, forcing his eyes shut, and savored the moment.

Even though, at that moment, his inner defenses were on the verge of collapsing completely.

Alana kissed the man for a long time, yet he didn't move a muscle.

She grew tired of standing on her tiptoes.

Could it be that, after all her efforts, he still showed no obvious reaction?

But if Alana had dared to look down at that moment, she would have been absolutely shocked.

But she was too absorbed in the moment to think about it.

Alana was utterly baffled. Could it be because she had only kissed his lips?

After thinking it over, she changed her approach. She'd heard that a man's Adam's apple was very sensitive.

Was that true or not?

Never mind...she'd find out for herself.

Driven by curiosity, Alana relaxed slightly, then stood on her tiptoes again, pressing her soft, red lips against the man's prominent Adam's apple.

Sure enough, the moment her lips touched it, his Adam's apple twitched.

A flicker of delight welled up inside her. Just as she thought.

It was worth all the trouble she'd gone through. Her joy overcame her shyness.

She decided to press her advantage.

"Mmm..." A low, sensual voice escaped the man's throat, sounding almost pained.

Alana blinked.

Could it be that she bit too hard?

She wasn't quite sure...it was her first time taking the initiative, so she definitely hadn't been gentle.

She wanted to pull away.

But the next second, her slender waist was gripped by the man's two burning-hot hands, and he pressed her hard against him...

The turn of events was so sudden.

Just moments ago, she had been in control, but in an instant, Stephan had taken complete command.

The man's sudden assertiveness left Alana feeling completely overwhelmed.

She stared wide-eyed in bewilderment; the intense, unashamed lust in his eyes sent a chill down her spine.

"No, didn't you say I was supposed to take the initiative? Why did you..."

Stephan clenched his jaw. "You're so slow, I just can't stand it anymore..."

Alana's cheeks flushed red.

"Didn't you say I was supposed to put it on? I haven't put it on yet..."

Stephan's voice was hoarse. "No rush. We have plenty of time tonight for you to get it on." He tightened his grip slightly, and the soft flesh of her waist easily left a mark under his fingers.

Alana's body swayed uncontrollably. In a daze, she thought to herself, "I'm doomed. When I wake up tomorrow, I'm sure to see marks all over my body."

The night was, indeed, a long one.

The man deliberately dragged things out.

In the bathroom, the sound of water flowed continuously.

Stephan dressed Alana in fabric so thin it was almost transparent, staging a wet-look seduction.

Her delicate, fair skin, like the finest white jade, was irresistibly alluring.

He turned her over, and she found herself propped helplessly on the sink with her hands. Her slender, beautiful back and perfect curves were fully exposed.

His large hands gently pressed against her back, pushing it down slightly to form a seductive curve.

Alana propped herself up feebly with her hands, lifted her head, and saw her reflection in the mirror.

The thin fabric clinging to her body hung precariously.

Her cheeks were flushed, her lips full and red.

Her almond-shaped eyes shimmered with moisture, her gaze mesmerizing, a mix of desire and allure.

Behind her delicate, fair form stood a man with a healthy, tanned physique.

Muscular, powerful.

Seductive and sexy.

Exuding masculine charm.

The man pressed himself tightly against her back, his dark eyes locked firmly on her, brimming with a dangerous desire to conquer.

His muscles were taut, beads of sweat sliding down his temples, trickling along his jawline onto his powerful, rippling abs, the sexual tension was at its peak.

Alana bit her lip, unable to resist writhing her slender, delicate waist.

Stephan couldn't resist the seductive siren in the mirror; he leaned down, his burning chest pressing against the girl's delicate, slender back.

He clamped his thumb and forefinger around her delicate chin, turning her face toward him, then leaned in for a deep, passionate kiss.

She didn't know how much time had passed.

Alana, completely limp, was carried out of the bathroom by the man.

He held her as if cradling a baby.

Step by steady, laborious step, they made their way to the bed.

Then, they both fell onto the bed...

The impact was too intense.

Alana couldn't help but bite the man's shoulder. "Enough...enough..."

Stephan didn't respond; he lowered his head and buried his face in the crook of her delicate neck...

From the bathroom, they moved to the bed, then the sofa, and against the floor-to-ceiling windows.

Traces of their passion were left in nearly every corner of the room.

When the passionate rounds of sex ended, Alana had already fallen into a deep, exhausted sleep.

Stephan, however, remained full of energy, with boundless vigor. They say a man starts his decline at twenty-five.

But Stephan was clearly the exception, the kind of man who only gets better with age. He gently wrapped his arms around her and leaned down to kiss her fair, delicate forehead.

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Chapter 253 Sudden visitor

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The bed and the floor were in complete disarray.

It was no longer possible to sleep there.

Stephan carried Alana into the bathroom, gave her a quick wash, then carried her to the guest room next door to sleep on the clean, fresh bed.

They both had a good night's sleep.

When Alana woke up, her whole body ached terribly.

She saw the man still lying in bed, his limbs wrapped around her.

She pouted, struggled to extend one slender leg, and with her pale, delicate foot, gave his calf a firm kick.

“I’m hungry.”

After a whole night of activity, it would be strange if she weren’t hungry.

Stephan had actually already woken up, but the warmth and softness in his arms made him reluctant to let her go.

He might as well just keep holding her and lying there. After all, it was still the weekend, and there was no need to rush off to work.

Stephan opened his eyes and kissed her tenderly on the brow and eyes. “Just lie there. I’ll go make you a nutritious breakfast.”

Alana grumbled, her voice lazy and tinged with weariness.

Letting go of the girl in his arms, Stephan got up and went to the bathroom. After brushing his teeth and rinsing his mouth, he left the room.

He went to the kitchen, opened the fridge, and looked to see what food was left, intending to cook her a bowl of rich noodle soup.

But to his surprise, the fridge was completely empty, there wasn’t even enough to make a bowl of noodles.

With no other choice, he had to go out to buy some.

But not long after Stephan left, someone arrived at his house.

Cynthia, who rarely had a free weekend, came by Stephan’s place to see how he’d been doing lately.

She also wanted to pay a surprise visit to see if he’d been bringing women home behind her back.

After all, he had promised her that he would bring her a daughter-in-law by the end of the year and let her hold a grandchild the following year.

But seeing is believing, and hearing is deceiving.

How could she know if it was true unless she came to see for herself?

Cynthia had a key to the house, so she walked right in without any trouble.

Once inside, she called out a few times,

“Son?”

“That good-for-nothing...it’s almost ten o’clock. He can’t still be lying in bed, can he?” Cynthia muttered to herself, then immediately headed upstairs toward the bedroom.

Cynthia walked up to the bedroom door, her hand on the doorknob, ready to push it open...

If she went in, she was sure to find a room that hadn't been tidied up yet, along with the lingering scent of hot, passionate sex.

Just as she was about to push the door open.

A deep voice came from behind her.

"Mom, what are you doing here?"

Cynthia paused, turned around, and saw that Stephan had returned.

He was wearing a black shirt, his hair slightly disheveled.

In his hands, he carried fresh vegetables he'd just bought from the supermarket.

When Cynthia saw her son, her hand on the doorknob instantly withdrew.

"I just came by to see how you've been doing lately."

Stephan frowned slightly. "You came to see me without even giving me a heads-up first?"

Cynthia shrugged it off. "Oh, come on, is it really necessary to give advance notice? I'm visiting my own son. If I want to see him, I'll just come over, do I need to pick a specific time?"

Stephan remained expressionless. "I was just worried you'd have made the trip for nothing."

"It's the weekend. If you're not at home, where else could you be? Even if it were a wasted trip, it wouldn't matter. I just came to check in. If I see you, fine; if not, I'll just leave."

"Mom, from now on, if you want to see me, give me a call first. No matter where I am, I'll come see you right away. There's no need for you to go out of your way to come here yourself."

"It's no trouble! I'm more than happy to do it...I just wanted to come see you in person!"

Stephan gave a forced smile. "Now that you've seen your son...and he's as lively as ever, can you go home with peace of mind?"

Cynthia frowned, her tone displeased. "I've only just arrived, and you're already shooing me away?"

“No. It’s just that my place is too humble; I don’t have much to offer you.”

“I don’t need you to entertain me. I just came by to take a quick look.”

“Just taking a look? So much so that you want to go into my bedroom?”

Cynthia retorted irritably, “What’s the matter? Is your bedroom off-limits?”

Stephan blinked.

It wasn’t tidied up yet, so naturally, it wasn’t fit for visitors.

He had his pride, too. The floor inside was littered with used tissues, several lingerie sets and sex toys he was yet to use on Alana, in his haste last night, the bag of explicit items he had bought had been thrown onto the floor, there were also several torn pieces of clothing...

Even the sheets were all damp.

“I’m going to take a look at your room.”

As soon as Cynthia finished speaking, she reached out to try to open the bedroom door.

Stephan immediately stepped forward to block her hand. “Mom, don’t go in. The room’s a mess...I haven’t cleaned it up yet.”

“It’s fine. I’ll go in and help you clean it up.”

He stood at the doorway of his bedroom, not budging an inch. “If my dad finds out your noble hands are helping me clean my room, he’ll skin me alive.”

Cynthia smiled calmly. “He won’t find out. Besides, he doesn’t even know I’m here. Move out of the way!”

Stephan refused to move.

The more he tried to keep Cynthia from entering, the more curious she became.

What on earth was in his bedroom?

Was it something he didn’t want his own mother to see?

Surely... he wasn’t hiding a woman in there, was he?

The more she thought about it, the more excited she got!

The more she thought about it, the more she had to see!

“Fine, so you won’t let me, huh! I’m going to open your bedroom door today and find out for myself!” Cynthia immediately reached out, trying to push him aside.

Stephan stood as solid as a mountain, not budging an inch.

“Mom, don’t do this. Your son needs a little privacy too.”

Cynthia snorted with a laugh. “What kind of ‘personal privacy’ is so secretive that even your own mother can’t look? Besides, what storms hasn’t your mom weathered? Be reasonable. Move aside! I’ll just take a quick peek and be on my way!”

“Mom, you’re asking for too much.”

Cynthia glared at him. “Tell me the truth, are you hiding a woman in this bedroom?”

“No.”

He was hiding a woman, but not in this bedroom.

This bedroom was a total mess...his mother might faint!

Cynthia didn’t believe him. She shoved Stephan aside with all her might, reached out, and was about to open the door...

Just as she was about to push the door open, Cynthia’s phone suddenly rang.

Stephan spoke up at just the right moment, “Mom, your phone is ringing. It might be someone with an urgent matter.”

Cynthia shot him a glare, but with no other choice, she withdrew her hand and pulled out her phone to check.

It was a call from the hospital, it might actually be an emergency.

Cynthia answered the call.

After answering, her expression instantly turned serious. “Oh, okay...All right, all right. I’ll head to the hospital right away.”

When she looked up again, Stephan’s towering figure was blocking the doorway to his bedroom once more.

Cynthia gritted her teeth in frustration, but she didn’t have time to waste arguing with him.

“You little brat, there’s an emergency at the hospital. I need to get there right away. This time, you’re lucky. I’ll let you off the hook.” With that, she hurried downstairs and left.

Stephan watched Cynthia leave, raising an eyebrow slightly.

It was indeed a narrow escape.

He was still holding the grocery bag from the supermarket and was just about to head downstairs.

But just then, he caught a glimpse of the door to the next room suddenly opening a crack, and a dark head poked out.

A pair of dark, clear eyes met his gaze unexpectedly.

Stephan stared into those eyes, a faint, enigmatic smile playing on his lips.

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Chapter 254 My mom was here

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Alana, having been spotted, felt slightly embarrassed. She decided to just push the door open and step out.

“Did someone come by just now?”

“Yeah, my mom was here.”

Her breath caught. “Your... your mom was here? Well, then I...”

“You weren’t spotted.”

Hearing this, she couldn’t help but breathe a sigh of relief.

She seemed to think of something and asked again, “Then the bedroom...”

“She didn’t have time to go in and look.”

Alana breathed a sigh of relief again.

Thank goodness she didn't see it all that mess, otherwise, the woman would have never looked at her son the same.

Stephan took a step toward Alana, raising an eyebrow slightly. "What's wrong? Don't want your future mother-in-law to see?"

Hearing this, Alana shot the man a playful glare. "Who would want her to see all that?!"

Stephan lowered his gaze, slowly drawing closer to her, his tone growing increasingly suggestive.

"See what, hmm?"

Alana blushed, too embarrassed to say it.

She pushed him gently with her hand. "Stop it. Go to the kitchen and make me something to eat!"

Stephan smiled, reaching out to gently brush her soft lips. "Huh, that little mouth of yours...you're getting more and more used to bossing people around."

Alana blushed. "After the way you wore me out last night, who else am I supposed to boss around?"

Stephan asked deliberately, "Don't you like it?"

"I didn't like it!"

"I don't believe you. Last night, you were clearly urging me to go harder...you were like...Stephan...harder...more...more..." He let out dramatically mimicking her voice.

Alana stamped her foot, her embarrassment turning to anger. "STEPHAN!"

Seeing the girl's fierce expression, Stephan couldn't help but laugh out loud, his chest rumbling with delight.

He raised his hand and ruffled her hair.

"All right, sweetheart, I won't tease you anymore. I'll make you something to eat right away."

Alana huffed, "Go on, then. I'm going to tidy up your bedroom!"

If Stephan's mother suddenly changed her mind and came back to check on his bedroom, it would be a disaster, she could vividly recall how his mother had cursed her "supposed boyfriend" for being that rough in bed, not knowing she was actually calling her son names.

Stephan was once again charmed by her cuteness and said with a smile, "Okay! But you should keep resting. I can tidy up the bedroom later."

Alana puffed out her cheeks in frustration. "No way! I have to clean it up right now...to cover my tracks! Hurry up and go!"

"Fine, fine, fine!" Stephan found it both amusing and exasperating as Alana practically pushed him downstairs.

Alana opened the door and stepped into the messy bedroom.

Seeing the floor littered with used items, and the passionate scenes from last night replaying in her mind, frame by frame, she bit her lip as the heat in her cheeks rose once again.

That bastard!

After Cynthia arrived at the hospital, she hastily called an emergency meeting regarding a single special patient.

After the meeting, she finally had time to reflect on Stephan's strange behavior from earlier.

She gritted her teeth. "Something's definitely off!"

Darla, sitting nearby, overheard Cynthia's mutterings and asked curiously,

"Auntie, what's wrong?"

Cynthia blurted out instinctively, "I suspect my son is hiding a woman in his golden nest, deliberately keeping it from me!"

Upon hearing this, Darla's expression changed.

Cynthia turned her head and saw that Darla didn't look well. She instantly realized what she'd said and quickly backtracked.

“Darla, I’m sorry. I’m just speculating; I’m not certain it’s true. I just stopped by my son’s place. He seemed a bit evasive, so I got suspicious, but I didn’t actually see any woman there.”

Darla forced a smile. “Oh.”

But in reality, she knew there must have been a woman at Stephan’s house.

Although she wasn’t sure why Stephan hadn’t made his relationship with that woman public in front of his parents, the fact remained that she was indeed living with him.

Thinking back to what she’d discovered at the movie theater yesterday, she couldn’t help but clench her fists.

She wanted to give up, but she just couldn’t bring herself to do it.

After all, Stephan was the man who had made her heart race more than any other she’d ever met.

Yesterday at the movie theater, she had witnessed Stephan kissing Alana with those captivated, burning eyes.

That night, she even had a dream.

In her dream, Stephan appeared in her bedroom, pinned her down on the bed, and looked at her the same way then he had hot passionate sex with her/

The dream and had so thrilling and real.

When she woke up, she had been all hit and bothered and she had to touch herself while moaning out his name.

She hadn’t had a dream like that in ages. She never expected that after seeing Stephan so passionately devoted to another woman, she would have such a dream that very night, and the man in her dream was none other than Stephan.

She never imagined that Stephan, of all men, could so easily stir her desires, and even enter her intimate dreams to spend a night of passion with her.

Unfortunately, it was only a dream.

Even just a dream was enough to leave her endlessly yearning for more.

If it were real, wouldn’t that mean...

Just the thought of that scene made Darla’s legs go weak.

Cynthia asked in surprise, “Darla, what’s wrong? Why did your face suddenly turn so red?”

Darla snapped back to reality, her expression slightly awkward.

“Nothing.”

“Auntie, I have something to take care of. I’ll be going now.” Darla quickly returned to her office, then pulled out her phone and made a call. “Have you heard anything about the person I asked you to investigate?”

“Good. Send the files to my email right away.”

After hanging up, Darla immediately turned on her computer, logged into her email, and found a file that had just been sent to her.

Clicking on the file, she found it contained nearly every detail of Alana’s life.

It was Alana’s personal file; she had obtained the information through some special channels.

After skimming through it, Darla smiled dismissively.

She finally understood why Stephan hadn’t brought Alana home to meet his parents.

It turned out that, given Alana’s background, she simply wasn’t presentable.

What right did a woman like that have to compare herself to her?

She had been feeling quite anxious at first, but after seeing this detailed dossier and realizing she outclassed Alana in every way, she felt certain of victory.

She was certain that a wealthy family like the Hudsons would never accept a woman with no background, a person who had been abandoned by her own parents!

She couldn’t fathom what gave that woman, Alana, the audacity to act so arrogant and smug in front of her.

Was it just because of that little bit of affection Stephan showed her? Ha, how naive!

After finishing breakfast together, Stephan and Alana went out for a walk to help with digestion.

As they were walking, a large golden retriever suddenly came running out, circling excitedly around Alana and Stephan.

Alana recognized it immediately as Luca's golden retriever.

After all, they'd spent quite a bit of time together.

Pleased by the surprise, she bent down and ruffled the dog's head. "Ollie, what are you doing here?"

The golden retriever couldn't speak, but it happily barked at Alana several times. Then it stuck out its tongue and licked her soft palm.

Alana couldn't help but laugh. "Stop licking...it tickles..."

He gave the golden retriever a slight kick with the toe of his shoe, looking rather displeased. "Go on, you slobbering dog. Get lost. Don't lick my woman!"

The big golden retriever stuck out its huge tongue and huffed at Stephan.

Stephan remained expressionless as he reached out and pulled Alana up from where she was bent over. "Lana, this dog is too sleazy...just like its owner. Don't pay it any mind."

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Chapter 255 That obvious

Chapter 255 That obvious

The golden retriever stared at Stephan.

Did he think it was just a dog that couldn't understand human speech? It barked at Stephan, "Woof woof woof!"

Luca, holding a large orange cat, walked over from a distance. "Stephan, whose dog are you calling sleazy?"

Stephan looked up, not at all surprised to see Luca. If the dog's here, the owner can't be far behind.

“Isn’t that obvious?”

Luca snorted.

He turned to look at Alana. “I was wondering why Ollie suddenly started running so fast, turns out it was because he saw you.”

“You haven’t come to see them in a while; they’ve all missed you.”

Alana smiled slightly. Animals, just like people, have feelings. Having cared for them so diligently for so long, she had grown attached to them.

It wasn’t only the pets who missed her...she missed them, too.

“Luca, as long as you don’t mind, I’ll come by to see them more often when I have time.”

Luca smiled. “Of course I don’t mind, I’d love it if you came to see them every day.”

“Ahem, ahem!” Stephan let out.

They were chatting so happily, was he just not even there? And what was with this talk of visiting those two stinking pets every day? Did he really think he didn’t know where Luca’s true intentions lay elsewhere?

Stephan didn’t know that Luca had already personally told Alana he wished her well with her relationship, so he subconsciously assumed Luca still had ulterior motives toward her.

Luca looked at Stephan and asked pointedly, “Stephan, you’re not actually getting jealous over this, are you?”

Stephan took Alana’s hand, their fingers intertwined.

In doing so, he displayed the sparkling diamond ring on Alana’s little finger.

With a smirk, he boasted, “What’s there to be jealous of? After all, I’ve already secured her for the rest of her life.”

Luca was taken aback when he saw the diamond ring on Alana’s little finger. “Alana, are you... are you planning to marry him...”

Alana couldn’t help but blush; she was too embarrassed to say it.

Alana was too shy to say it, but Stephan had no qualms about it...he even had the nerve to say;

“That’s right. She’s going to marry me and become my lawful wife.”

“When the time comes and we get married, I’ll send you an invitation...I might invite you to be the best man at our wedding.”

Alana secretly pinched Stephan’s thigh.

He was really getting out of hand.

Stephan remained unfazed by Alana’s pinch. Such a light touch wasn’t enough to hurt him; it only made him think she was flirting.

Luca slowly pulled his gaze away from the two of them holding hands.

He looked at Stephan and said earnestly, “Stephan, I haven’t known Alana for very long, but I used to have feelings for her, and I genuinely want the best for her. If you end up marrying her, better treat her well or I won’t go easy on you!”

Stephan chuckled derisively. “Don’t worry, you won’t get the chance.”

Hearing Luca’s words, Alana felt a pang of emotion and said sincerely, “Luca, thank you.”

Luca smiled. “As long as you’re happy. If you get married, I’ll definitely be there.”

Alana nodded. “Okay.”

Luca took a deep breath. “I won’t keep you any longer. Ollie, let’s head home.” He waved to the golden retriever.

The golden retriever obediently walked over to him and left with him.

However, as they left, the Golden Retriever kept looking back every few steps, clearly reluctant to part with Alana.

Alana smiled and waved at the golden retriever.

Stephan observed her reaction. “Do you really like dogs?”

Alana nodded. “I do. Dogs are so cute.”

Stephan suggested, “How about we get one too? We could get a cat or a dog of our own. Then, when we get home from work every day, we could take them out for a walk.”

Although he wasn’t too keen on a pet competing with him for his girlfriend’s affection.

But there was nothing he could do about it...after all, she liked them.

Alana looked up at him with a serious expression. “If I really get one, won’t you be upset? You’ve gotten jealous of Luca’s dog several times, and you say nasty things to the animals too...”

Stephan chuckled and couldn’t resist pinching her soft little cheek. “That was a dog owned by another man. How could it be the same as one we raise together?”

Alana blinked.

“It is different and I’ll be nice to them. But let’s just forget about it. After all, having a pet takes a lot of time to care for. Let’s wait until we get married before we consider getting one.”

“Alright, I’ll go along with you.”

The two of them took a stroll around the neighborhood before heading back to the apartment.

No sooner had they returned than Alana was led by Stephan into the room they had just tidied up.

As the man pinned her down on the bed again, Alana’s eyelids twitched violently. “You... you’re doing this again?”

“Mm-hmm.”

Stephan sat up slightly and pulled out the last condom from the drawer. “Your man has plenty of stamina you know.”

Alana sighed, heavily.

After the storm had passed, Alana was held in Stephan’s arms.

She raised her limp hand and poked him in the chest.

“Don’t forget to transfer the money to me.”

Stephan smiled amusedly. “You’re this exhausted, and you’re still thinking about money?”

Alana shot him a withering glance. Wasn’t that a given?

She’d gone through all that trouble to satisfy him, wasn’t it all for those few million?

“Hurry up!”

“Okay, okay, I’ll transfer it to you right away.”

Stephan picked up his phone and promptly transferred ten million to Alana.

Alana checked her phone and saw that the man had transferred ten million to her.

She instantly perked up.

Her back didn’t hurt anymore, and her legs didn’t feel sore. “Ten million?”

“Didn’t you say you only won a few million?” Stephan raised an eyebrow. “I’ll give you plenty of it, consider it a reward for serving me so well!”

Alana pouted, thinking to herself, How nice.

It’s just a matter of satisfying his special kinks in bed, and he’s rewarding her with all this pocket money.

If there’s a next time, and a time after that... Wouldn’t she be rolling in it?

No wonder Eve works so hard to please her boyfriend, if she pleases him well, he gives her cars, money, and jewelry. Who wouldn’t be thrilled by that?

“Um, if I work this hard again next time, will you give me something too?”

Stephan chuckled and pinched Alana’s cheek. “You little money-grubber! My card is in your hands. Use it however you like...if I give you any more, I won’t have any pocket money left!”

Alana blinked. Oh, right...she did have his bank card.

Oh my, what a shame...she hadn’t even used it once yet, and she had no idea how much money was actually in there.

Oh well, never mind. She wasn’t materialistic anyway, so she’d just save that money and use it when she needed it later.

Over the weekend, the young couple were practically glued to each other every moment. Once the weekend was over, they naturally returned to their regular work schedules.

Stephan had to go on a business trip for a few days; his flight was the next morning.

Alana wanted to go with him to the airport, but she didn’t even have time.

As they parted, Stephan hugged Alana, reluctant to let her go.

“Is there anything you want me to bring back for you?”

Alana replied earnestly, “Just come back soon.”

After a brief pause, she blushed and added, “Most importantly, remember to miss me.” Stephan chuckled softly, cupped Alana’s face, and kissed her deeply.

They lingered close for a moment.

He curved his lips. “I know exactly what you want. When I get back, I’ll make sure to satisfy you.”

Alana gasped.

He never takes anything seriously.

Stephan asked, “How about I buy you a car when I get back? If I don’t have time to drive you to and from work in the future, you can drive yourself to the office.”

Alana smiled. “I’ll have to get my driver’s license first.”

“You’re so smart...getting your license will be a piece of cake.”

“You’re such a smooth talker!”

Stephan chuckled and pinched Alana’s ring-adorned hand. “You’re not allowed to take that ring off. You have to wear it all the time...to remind everyone that you’re already a taken woman.”

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Chapter 256 No ordinary man

Chapter 256 No ordinary man

Alana asked deliberately, “What if I don’t wear it?”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “Then I’ll just have to resort to some unconventional methods to make you obey me.”

She scoffed.

Fine, he won.

They didn’t have time to linger; the young couple said their goodbyes and parted ways.

Stephan was going on a business trip for two or three days, but he didn’t know exactly how long it would take.

But the moment he left, she couldn’t help but to start missing him.

Being apart during the honeymoon phase was a bit of a torture.

Still, she hoped she could channel those feelings into her work to make the difficult time a little easier.

When she arrived at the office and stepped into the elevator, she ran into Cole, whom she hadn’t seen in nearly a month.

Cole was wearing a gray suit and a pair of silver-rimmed glasses, still looking every bit the refined yet rebellious intellectual.

He looked at Alana, a gentle smile playing at the corners of his mouth. “Lana, it’s been a while.”

Alana paused for a moment, instinctively taking him in. “Are your arm and leg all healed up?”

A month ago, when she’d seen him at the hospital, both his calf and arm had been in casts.

She had assumed his recovery would take at least three months.

Cole nodded. “Yes.” His gaze fixed on Alana, his eyes holding a certain depth.

Alana felt a bit uneasy; her slender fingers unconsciously tightened around her handbag to distract herself.

The elevator was dimly lit.

But a glimmer of light appeared on Alana’s finger, catching the eye.

Cole couldn’t help but look over and was immediately drawn to the sparkling diamond ring on her little finger.

His eyes darkened slightly. “Lana, what is that on your finger?”

The pink diamond ring on Alana’s pinky finger sparkled so brightly it was impossible to ignore.

Seeing that Cole had noticed it, Alana nodded openly and admitted, “It’s a diamond ring.”

Staring at the dazzling pink diamond, Cole’s throat tightened involuntarily. “Did...he give it to you?”

Had their relationship progressed this quickly in such a short time?

Alana nodded again. “Yes, my boyfriend gave it to me.”

Cole stared at her, his tone becoming somewhat confrontational. “Why would he give you a ring?”

Alana was at a loss for words. “Cole, please don’t ask me anything about this anymore, okay?”

But Cole couldn’t control himself. He stepped forward and grabbed her shoulders.

“Answer me!”

“Are you going to marry him?”

Alana looked him straight in the eye, her tone serious. “Whether I marry him or not has nothing to do with you anymore.”

His current panic stood in stark contrast to her composure.

Cole’s eyes flashed with fury as he gripped Alana’s shoulders, unable to resist tightening his grip.

Alana felt the pain in her shoulder and frowned, but she gritted her teeth and endured it.

Cole couldn’t help but ask, “Lana, have you met his family yet? Are you sure his family would approve of the two of you being together? I’m begging you...please think this through carefully, okay?”

“Don’t gamble away your lifelong happiness so lightly. Stephan isn’t the kind of man you can entrust your life to!”

“Cole, don’t grab me like that...it hurts!”

Only then did Cole notice that Alana's face looked off, and he quickly pulled his hand away.

He took a step back. "Sorry...I lost control again."

Alana pressed her lips together and said nothing.

It felt as though the elevator was rising exceptionally slowly at that moment.

Cole stopped pressing Alana for answers, and his demeanor gradually returned to calm, though he seemed dazed and hadn't yet recovered from the news he'd just received.

They stood on opposite sides of the elevator, neither of them speaking. Until the elevator doors opened.

Alana hurried out.

Cole's deep voice suddenly rang out behind her.

"Lana, that man, Stephan, he's not as simple as he seems."

Alana frowned, didn't turn around, and kept walking away.

But Cole's words kept echoing in her mind: "That man, Stephan, is no ordinary man."

What did Cole mean by that?

Was he trying to sow discord? Cause a misunderstanding between her and Stephan?

No matter what he said, she wouldn't believe him.

Meanwhile, Cole's gaze fixed intently on Alana's retreating figure as he clenched his fists so tightly that the veins stood out.

Alana returned to her desk, turned on her computer, and went about her work as usual.

She had already chosen to block out what had just happened, treating it as if nothing had occurred.

Someone noticed the ring on her finger and let out a gasp.

"Wow, Alana, you're actually wearing a ring!"

One by one, colleagues began to gather around, curiously examining the diamond ring on her hand.

“Is that a diamond ring on your finger?”

“Did your boyfriend give it to you? It’s so sparkly...this must be a real diamond ring, right?”

Alana hadn’t expected that simply wearing a ring would attract so much attention.

“My boyfriend gave it to me.”

“Wow, your boyfriend really treats you well...he actually gave you a diamond ring!”

“And it’s a pink diamond...doesn’t that make it even more expensive?”

“Alana, your boyfriend is quite a mystery. You’ve been dating for so long, yet you’ve never brought him out to meet people. Is he really that rich?”

“He’s not some rich kid, is he?”

“How did you meet your boyfriend?”

Listening to her colleagues’ chatter and gossip, Alana felt awkward and didn’t know how to respond.

Seeing Alana remain silent, Danielle suddenly spoke up, “Lana, you don’t actually have a boyfriend, do you? Are you just a kept woman?”

Alana frowned and warned, “Danielle!”

Carla spoke up in Alana’s defense, “Danielle, I know you’re jealous of Alana for having such a generous and wealthy boyfriend, but just because you’re jealous doesn’t mean you have to spread rumors about her, does it?”

Danielle pouted. “I was just guessing. It’s not my fault she took it seriously.”

Carla retorted, “Fine, I’ll guess that you’re being kept by an older man and you rush off to serve him the moment you get off work!”

As soon as Danielle heard that, she flew into a rage. “Hey, Carla, that’s going too far!”

“Who was the one who went too far in the first place?”

Danielle was momentarily speechless and didn’t say another word.

Alana glanced at Carla, approving of her boldness. “Carla, I’ll treat you to lunch.”

Carla smiled. “Hehe, thanks, Lana. I’ll gladly accept!”

At lunchtime, Alana treated Carla to a meal at a hot pot restaurant.

While they were eating, she received a message from Stephan.

Stephan: [Reporting to my dear wife: I've gotten off the plane and arrived at the hotel.]

Attached was a photo of his hotel room.

Alana's smiled and immediately replied,

Alana: [Got it.]

She didn't even realize that, without noticing, she had grown accustomed to his use of...
"My dear wife."

After a moment's pause, she updated him on her own situation.

Alana: [I'm having hot pot with my colleague.]

Then, following his lead, she snapped a photo of the hot pot and sent it to Stephan.

Stephan's message arrived the very next second.

Stephan: [Is your colleague male or female?]

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Chapter 257 The cleaner

Chapter 257 The cleaner

Alana: [Female.]

She then asked deliberately.

Alana: [Is there any woman in your room?]

Stephan: [No, it's just me. I'm staying pure and chaste for my dear wife at all times.]

Alana couldn't help but chuckle.

Carla glanced at her with a sweet smile, Alana looked as if she'd just tasted honey, it was truly enviable.

"Lana, you're smiling so happily at your phone, is that your boyfriend?"

Alana nodded. "Yeah."

"He left on a business trip this morning. He just arrived at the hotel and is updating me on his daily routine."

Carla chuckled, "That's great. These days, there aren't many men who take the initiative to check in with their girlfriends and keep them feeling secure all the time!"

Alana smiled, "Maybe so."

Carla blinked curiously. "By the way, what does your boyfriend look like? Is he very handsome?"

Hearing this, Alana suddenly remembered the photo booth pictures she'd taken with him on that date.

She pulled out her phone, selected a proper photo from the collection of Polaroid-style snaps they'd taken that day, and handed it to Carla to look at.

Carla took one look and was instantly blown away.

"Wow, he's so handsome! He looks even better than the male celebrities on TV!"

Alana smiled and said, "The camera didn't do justice to him. I think he's even more handsome in person than in photos."

Carla's eyes lit up. "Oh my gosh, Lana, you've really hit the jackpot. I'm so jealous! If Danielle found out, wouldn't she be green with envy?"

After a brief pause, Carla's expression suddenly turned mischievous. "Ahem, ahem, if I may ask, is he... you know... good in bed?"

That was a bit out of line, wasn't it?! So Alana quickly changed the topic.

All day long, Alana kept receiving messages from Stephan, who was proactively updating her. For example, he'd let her know where he was going, what he was doing, and who he was meeting with.

It gave her a deep sense of security.

Plus, seeing his messages allowed Alana to confirm he was doing okay, which put her mind at ease.

After work, she returned to Stephan's house, took out her keys, inserted them into the lock, and prepared to open the door.

But unexpectedly, the door swung open from the inside.

Alana looked up and immediately saw Cynthia standing inside the doorway.

Their eyes met, and both saw the shock on each other's faces.

Cynthia was stunned to see her. "It's you?!"

She had come over secretly while her son was away on a business trip to check the place, hoping to find any signs that another woman had been living there.

But just as she had arrived, she heard a noise outside the door. She opened it to find...

Alana met Cynthia's stunned gaze, and her mind went completely blank.

Oh my

God!

This was terrifying!

She'd come back to her boyfriend's house and actually ran into his mother?!

What kind of terrifying showdown was this?!

Waaah, this is killing her...what on earth was she supposed to do?

Alana was panicking inside; she suddenly lost her ability to speak, stammering incoherently as her mind turned to mush.

"Dr. Cynthia? What a coincidence! I can't believe I ran into you here..."

Oh my God, what did she just say?

Ran into you here?

This was her son's house.

The real question was, why was she here in the first place?

Cynthia nodded. "It is a coincidence, but this is my son's home. It's perfectly normal for me to be here. But you...Why are you here?"

She looked Alana up and down, her eyes widening as a terrifying suspicion began to form.

"You aren't... my son's..."

Alana gasped.

If she said the truth, would Stephan's mom warmly accept her.

What should she do?

She wished Stephan was here but he wasn't.

Who was going to save her now?!

Cynthia spoke up, "You aren't, by any chance, the cleaning lady my son hired, are you?"

Alana blinked.

No way...she'd been on pins and needles, and Stephan's mother had only guessed she was a cleaning lady?!

Cynthia certainly wouldn't consider of her as her son's girlfriend.

Because, as far as she knew, Alana was a woman with a boyfriend who she had cursed out at the hospital.

And that boyfriend, naturally, had nothing to do with her son.

If they really were involved, they wouldn't have been so distant with each other that day at the hospital.

Alana's tense heart suddenly relaxed.

She couldn't help but laugh out loud...a laugh that was both awkward and embarrassed.

"Hehe, Dr. Cynthia, you guessed right, I'm the cleaner."

Cynthia was pleasantly surprised. "Oh my, I never would have thought my son would hire you as a cleaner. When did you start working as my son's housekeeper? Was it a few

months ago, before my son examined you, that he hired you? If that's the case, it explains why my son examined you...so you two knew each other?"

"Not very...well..." Alana drawled.

Convinced she'd figured out the relationship, Cynthia warmly invited Alana in.

"Come on in! Let's talk inside!"

"Thank you!"

Alana desperately wanted to escape, but right now she was even more curious to know why Cynthia was here.

Could it be that she was trying to expose her?

And if she did expose her, how would Cynthia treat her then?

Wouldn't she immediately order her to break up with Stephan and then kick her out of his house?!

Oh God!

Just thinking about it was terrifying!

Alana's mind was racing with anxiety; she felt as if she were standing on the edge of a precipice.

"Well then, Dr. Cynthia, I'll take you up on that."

Cynthia smiled warmly, looking very kind and approachable. "Don't be shy...just make yourself at home. By the way, I have something I'd like to ask you!"

"Huh?!"

What was it?!

Don't say it like that...it was making her so nervous.

Cynthia led Alana straight to the sofa and sat her down.

She asked casually, "Um, what's your name again?"

Alana was incredibly tense, mustering all her composure to respond.

“Alana Martin.”

Cynthia nodded. “Oh, Lana. Sorry about that...I’m getting on in years, and with so much on my plate, I tend to forget things.”

Alana managed a polite smile.

In reality, she was panicking inside.

Cynthia asked, “Oh, by the way, you’ve been working for my son for quite a while, haven’t you?”

Alana kept up her smile, trying hard not to let it slip, “Yeah, quite a while now.”

Cynthia clapped her hands excitedly. “That’s wonderful! Then you must know a lot about my son!”

Alana swallowed.

She was in big trouble!

Stephan, please end your business trip...come back right now!

I need you!

But her inner cries were destined to go unheard by the man far away.

Cynthia spoke with a smile, “Alana, tell me...has my son been bringing women home lately?”

Oh no, the very first question was already so hard to answer.

If she admitted that Stephan had brought a woman home, would Cynthia think she was a loose woman...someone who moved in with Stephan right after they started dating?

But if she didn’t admit it, how could she break out of this deadlock?

Never mind, she’d just have to take it one step at a time!

Alana took a deep breath and spoke very carefully, “I’m sorry, Dr Cynthia, I’m not really sure. Every time I come over, I just tidy up the house and then leave.”

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Chapter 258 This girlfriend of his

“I hardly run into Stephan...no, Mr Hudson...when I come here, so I really don’t know.”

Cynthia looked at her skeptically. “Is that so? But I think my son must have brought a woman home. Just look at that shoe rack...there’s a pair of pink slippers. Those are clearly meant for a woman!”

“If he wasn’t bringing women home, would he have women’s shoes ready at home?”

Alana’s breath caught, and her nerves instantly tensed.

She clenched her teeth. “Those... slippers are mine.”

Cynthia was taken aback. “Huh? They’re yours?”

“Yes, I bought them myself. Every time I come over to clean the house, I put them on before I start working.”

Cynthia nodded, satisfied that the mystery was solved. “Oh, I see.”

But then she changed the subject. “But I found women’s clothes in my son’s room! How do you explain those women’s clothes?”

“What?!”

Wait, Cynthia actually went into Stephan’s room too?!

Oh God!

How... how am I supposed to explain this?!

You blockhead, think fast!

“Well...” Alana fidgeted, torn between her thoughts. “Dr Cynthia, there’s something I’m not sure if I should say.”

Cynthia was so curious. “What is it?”

Alana’s face flushed crimson as she stammered, “Well, there was this one time... I came to clean for Mr Hudson, and I found... I found...”

Cynthia couldn’t help but press her, “What did you find?!”

Alana closed her eyes and instantly gave up resisting. “I found him wearing a woman’s skirt, dancing ballet in his room.”

Cynthia’s eyes widened.

Cynthia was stunned. What...what the hell!

Her son...her strong, masculine son who always looked so manly!

Was actually secretly wearing a woman's skirt and dancing ballet in his room?!

The image was too jarring...she couldn't even bear to think about it!

Cynthia felt her vision go dark; she almost fainted.

No way, no way?!

Her son...could it be... that he's never been into women?

Could this girlfriend she suspected he has... actually be a guy?!

If he were a man, that would perfectly explain why he never had a girlfriend and why he never brought one home to introduce to his mother.

The reason had been confirmed.

Her son was gay!

He likes men!

Cynthia looked utterly devastated. "Alana, thank you for telling me all this. I think I understand now."

Alana blinked. "Huh?!"

Wait, what exactly did the older woman understand?

Cynthia fought back her pain. "All right. Thank you for taking care of my son's house. I think I need to go now."

If she stayed any longer, she feared she might break down.

Alana asked with concern, "Mo...no, Dr. Cynthia...are you all right?"

"I'm fine...I'm fine."

Cynthia waved her hand, then stood up, walking somewhat unsteadily.

Alana was concerned and couldn't help but grab Cynthia's arm. "Dr. Cynthia, you don't look quite right. Why don't I drive you home?"

Cynthia waved her hand again. “No, it’s okay. I’ll have the driver come pick me up.”

With that, she pulled out her phone and made a call.

“Right now...immediately...come to my son’s house and take me home!”

After hanging up, she said to Alana, “Go back to work. I won’t disturb you any longer.”

Alana bit her lip. “Dr. Cynthia...”

Cynthia insisted, “Just focus on your work. Don’t worry about me...I can get home on my own. I’m this old...I’ve seen it all. It’s no big deal. Nothing is a big deal!”

“Oh, all right...” Unable to persuade her to stay, Alana slowly let go of Stephan’s hand.

However, she only felt a little more at ease after watching Cynthia walk out of the apartment and get into the car that had come to pick her up.

But she wasn’t completely at ease.

She thought it over carefully. What exactly had she said wrong?

To cause her future mother-in-law’s mood to shift so drastically all at once?

Was it just because she’d mentioned that Stephan wore women’s skirts and danced ballet in his room?!

So, could Dr. Cynthia have misunderstood and thought Stephan had some kind of mental health issue?

No, she had to tell Stephan about this immediately.

Alana decisively pulled out her phone and dialed his number.

Stephan had just wrapped up his day’s schedule and was riding back to the hotel.

When he received Alana’s call, the corners of his mouth couldn’t help but turn up, and he answered immediately, “Sweetheart, what’s up?”

Vance, the driver and assistant sitting up front, heard the term “sweetheart” and got goosebumps from the shock.

Even more outrageous was that Stephan had deliberately put the call on speakerphone.

Of course, if he’d known what Alana was about to say, he certainly wouldn’t have taken it upon himself to put the call on speakerphone.

Alana sounded frantic on the other end.

“Stephan, it’s a disaster! I’ve done something really stupid!”

Stephan found it amusing; judging by her frantic tone, he could tell just how tensed the woman on the other end of the line was.

“What stupid thing did you do that ruined your mood?”

“Well, it’s just...”

“Don’t worry, just tell me slowly. I’m listening.”

“Your mom just showed up!”

“Huh?”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “My mom came by the house again?”

Alana nodded, her face creased with worry. “Yes, and she spotted me!”

Stephan’s eyes lit up. “What? Did she figure out you’re my girlfriend?”

Alana shook her head. “No, she didn’t realize I’m your girlfriend. She thinks I’m a cleaning lady you hired.”

Stephan scoffed.

Unbelievable!

Absolutely ridiculous!

That was fucking ridiculous!

He gave a half-smile. “Why didn’t you deny it? Why didn’t you just admit you’re my girlfriend?”

Alana nearly lost her temper at that, “How could I possibly admit that? It was just me and her at the time...you weren’t even there. With an unknown fate hanging over me, how could I just admit it so easily? What if your mom doesn’t like me and kicks me out right away?”

“No way. My mom will definitely like you just as much as I do.”

“But even so, with you not by my side, facing your mom all by myself...I got really nervous and scared!”

Stephan cleared his throat and rubbed his nose, feeling a bit guilty. That was true.

It didn't make much sense to leave his girlfriend alone to face his hot-tempered mother while he was away.

His girlfriend happened to be an over-thinker.

"And then?"

Alana took a few deep breaths to calm down before recounting the incident seriously.

"Then she had me sit down and asked if you'd been bringing women home lately."

Stephan perked up again. "And what did you say?"

"I said I didn't know. I'm just a housekeeper...of course I have to protect my employer's privacy. I wouldn't reveal a single detail!"

Stephan laughed in exasperation. "Lana, did you really put yourself in the role of a cleaning lady?"

Alana gave an embarrassed smile. "I was just... too nervous. If you can get into character, you should do it as soon as possible. Otherwise, if you get caught, it'll be a disaster."

Stephan sighed.

He was speechless for a moment. "Then what?"

"Then she asked about the pink slippers on the shoe rack."

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "I know. Those pink slippers were the ones I bought for you...they even have cute bunny patterns on them. So, when she saw those slippers, she was absolutely convinced I'd brought a woman home, right?"

Alana was surprised. "Wow, Stephan, you're really smart...you guessed it right on the first try!"

Stephan sighed again.

Who wouldn't?

Chapter 259 Figure that out

Chapter 259 Figure that out

If Stephan couldn't even figure that out, how stupid would he be?

Alana added, "But I told her those pink slippers are mine...I bought them specifically to wear while cleaning the house. And that cleared up her suspicions."

Stephan grimaced and thought. 'Mom, you're so easy to fool!. You've been completely played by your future daughter-in-law...do you even realize that?!'

That said, Alana's quick thinking in that moment was pretty impressive.

"And then?"

Alana paused for a moment. "Then... she went into our bedroom and found those dresses you bought for me..."

Upon hearing this, Stephan perked up instantly. "What? What did you say in the end? Did you confess that the dresses were yours, or did you just say they might be evidence that I brought a woman home?"

After all, discovering the dresses was really hard to explain.

Alana stammered, "Neither... neither..."

Hearing this, Stephan grew even more curious. "Then what was it exactly?"

"I'll tell you, but don't get mad."

Stephan smiled. "Don't worry, I promise I won't get angry."

What does this have to do with him?

Was she really being this cautious?!

Alana took a deep breath. "Alright, I'll tell you. I came up with something on the spot and said, 'I was cleaning your apartment once and happened to see you wearing a skirt, dancing ballet in your room.'"

Stephan's eyes almost popped out of their sockets.

The silence was deafening.

Vance couldn't hold it in any longer, he burst into laughter.

Alana heard it and immediately grew tense.

"Who...Whose laughter is that?"

And it sounded so lecherous.

It scared her.

"Stephan, is there someone else with you?"

Stephan shot a dark, piercing glance at Vance, his expression a mix of amusement and disdain. "Assistant Vance, is that so funny?"

Vance felt a chill run down his spine and instantly stopped laughing. "No, it's not funny... Not funny at all."

Although Vance was on the verge of tears at that moment, he still managed to suppress any sound of laughter.

Stephan shot Vance a sharp glare before switching his phone back to speaker mode and muting it.

Sure enough, one really shouldn't be too flashy; otherwise, it's easy to make a fool of oneself.

He explained to Alana on the phone, "Don't worry about that laughter just now, it was a dog. Don't pay it any mind."

Vance blinked.

A dog?

He was a dog?

He really couldn't laugh anymore.

Alana just went, "Oh," and didn't press the matter.

"Um, you don't mind if I tell your mom about you dancing ballet in a skirt, do you?"

Stephan sighed, heavily.

Could he say he really did mind?

“Lana, what were you thinking back then?”

Saying that a grown man like him was wearing a skirt and dancing ballet?!

That was just completely out of line!

Alana answered honestly, “I don’t know what I was thinking either. It was just... a sudden flash of inspiration, and the words just came out.”

“By the way, your mom, after she heard me say that, her expression was really off. She looked like she’d been struck by lightning, completely dazed and disoriented, staggering around and barely able to walk straight. And she left pretty quickly. I only called you after I saw her get into the car.”

“I have no idea what happened. Why don’t you call your mom and ask?”

After all, given the situation at the time, she must have been really worried.

Stephan took a deep breath. “Even if I don’t call to ask, my mom will definitely think I’m seriously ill.”

“Huh?”

Stephan chuckled, “What normal man would wear a skirt and dance ballet at home?! When I’ve never shown any interest in the profession?”

Alana blinked.

That was true.

But she’d been so nervous at the time that her mind just couldn’t process it.

Her mind had just gone off on a wild tangent, coming up with all sorts of ridiculous, outlandish answers.

“So what should I do? I’ve already said it, there’s no taking it back now. Why don’t you... go explain it to your mom?”

“Or maybe you could just say I’m sick, that I have hallucinations from time to time and I was just rambling?”

Stephan was both exasperated and amused; this was getting more and more ridiculous.

She’d even gone so far as to suggest he was sick. But it was clear she was truly at her wit’s end.

“Don’t worry, I’ll find a way to explain everything to her.”

Alana nodded eagerly. “Mm-hmm. When you’re explaining things, could you... maybe help me salvage my reputation while you’re at it?”

After all, she’d just made a pretty bad impression...would Stephan’s mother misunderstand her?

Just thinking about it gave him a headache. Stephan was so exasperated he laughed. “What image do you need to salvage? You were playing the part of a cleaning lady just now, not my girlfriend.”

Alana slapped her forehead. “Oh, right. I almost forgot, this was a scene, and I wasn’t really in character.”

Alana suddenly realized, “But what if your mom finds out about us later? How are we going to explain that? Are we supposed to say the young master fell in love with me while I was working as a cleaning lady?”

Stephan’s brow lifted.

That was quite the wild idea.

He rubbed the bridge of his nose. “We’ll deal with that later. Let’s handle this first.”

“Yeah, you’re right. So I’ll have to put you through the trouble of handling it.”

Alana remembered something else and continued, “Oh, right. I won’t be staying here for now. To avoid your mom showing up unannounced at any moment to snoop around, I’ll have to go back to my own place.”

“Anyway, since you’re not here, it’s pretty dangerous for me to keep living here.”

Stephan frowned. “No way. What if you don’t come back to my place?”

Alana couldn’t help but say, “Did I say I wouldn’t come back to stay? Besides, your mom is a ticking time bomb. If I stay here now, she could drop by at any moment. If she comes again, I won’t have enough excuses to cover for myself. Also, I was nearly scared out of my wits just now.”

Stephan chuckled. “That’s ridiculous. Your guts were practically in your throat?”

Alana snorted, “It was even worse than that.”

Stephan was amused again, and he couldn’t help but picture her adorable, pouting face with her cheeks puffed out.

“Alright, alright. Then when I get back from my business trip, you have to come stay at my place too.”

Alana brushed it off. “Well, we’ll see. After all, your place isn’t exactly safe.”

It was as if the sky had fallen.

After the young couple ended their call, Stephan immediately called Cynthia.

Cynthia was still in the car, unable to come to terms with it.

Her mind was still reeling from the shocking news that her son was gay.

The driver heard the phone ringing and couldn’t help but remind her, “Ma’am, you have a call.”

Cynthia felt utterly hopeless. “Never mind. I’m in no mood to answer the phone right now. After raising him all these years, to find out he’s gay...I don’t know how to accept that.”

The veteran driver was taken aback and, not hesitating to ask a seemingly basic question, inquired, “Ma’am, what does ‘gay’ mean?”

“It means a man likes men.”

The veteran driver was stunned...he’d just stumbled upon a major scandal.

Oh my God!

The young master actually likes men?!

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Chapter 260 Already met her

Chapter 260 Already met her

No wonder...no wonder the young master hasn’t brought a girlfriend home all these years. So that was why...he likes men!

“Madam, please take care of yourself.”

Cynthia closed her eyes, her face filled with anguish.

“Madam, perhaps you should answer the call. It’s not good to let it ring like this.”

Cynthia took a deep breath, wiped away a tear of bitterness, and finally pulled out her phone to see which inconsiderate person was calling and ruining her mood even more.

When she looked at the screen, she realized it was her dear son.

Cynthia felt even more heartbroken and answered immediately. “You little brat! You’re going to drive your mother to her grave with all this nonsense!”

“If I hadn’t gone over to your place today, I’d never have known you actually like wearing skirts and dancing ballet!”

“Spill the beans...you haven’t brought a single woman home all these years. Is it because you like men?!”

Stephan gasped.

He’d just had a run-in with his girlfriend, whose imagination runs wild, and now he was having another one with his equally outlandish mother.

Business trips were hard enough as it is, but getting riled up twice in a row just made it even worse.

Stephan took a deep breath. “Mom, what on earth are you imagining these days?”

Cynthia gritted her teeth, “I’m not imagining things, I’m making a perfectly reasonable assumption!”

“You’re a grown man, and you’ve got a pile of women’s clothes in your room. I thought you’d brought a woman home and that’s what she’s been wearing!”

“If it weren’t for that cleaning lady you hired telling me you wear them to dance ballet, I wouldn’t have known you had such a bizarre hobby! Tell me, do you like men?!”

Stephan looked up at the sky at a 45-degree angle, his expression one of utter exasperation.

“No. Your son is straight, he only likes women and I’m pretty sure that’s confirmed.”

Cynthia frowned. “Then how do you explain the fact that you wear skirts and dance ballet?”

Stephan decided to make the best of a bad situation. "You said yourself it's just a hobby. So what if your son has some quirky hobbies?"

Cynthia blinked.

She gave a look of disgust, like an old man on the subway staring at a phone. "Don't you think this hobby is pretty perverted?"

Stephan sighed. "Yes, your son's hobby is perverted."

Cynthia was confused.

After a long moment of silence, she asked uncertainly, "Are you serious? You really don't like men...you like women?"

"Yes."

Cynthia retorted, "Then what about your girlfriend?"

"My girlfriend... you might have already met her."

"What?" Cynthia couldn't quite make him out. "Speak up! What did you just say?"

The corner of his mouth twitched slightly as he changed the subject. "Never mind. I'll bring her home to meet you eventually anyway."

"Don't sneak into my house anymore. Otherwise, if you scare your future daughter-in-law away one day, your son will end up all alone sooner or later."

Cynthia snorted. What did he mean, his daughter-in-law running away from him? She hadn't even seen a shadow of her!

"Speaking of which, the cleaning lady you hired, how come it's the same girl you inspected back then? I was completely taken aback when I opened the door and saw her. It's such a small world, I've run into her several times in a row."

Stephan curved his lips. "Well...fate could be planning something."

Cynthia suddenly perked up. "You know what? We really do have a connection. I even ran into her the last time I went out to eat at a restaurant. I don't know if she was just nervous or what, but she actually called me 'Mom'!"

"Oh my gosh, that really gave me a start. I thought I must have heard wrong."

Stephan's eyes lit up. "Really? Did she really call you that?"

“Oh my, I must have heard wrong. I don’t even know her that well...why would she call me ‘Mom’?”

Stephan’s lips curled into a smile. That wasn’t a slip of the tongue, it came straight from the heart!

What did that mean?

It meant that Alana already saw herself as his wife.

Not bad...it seemed he’d already made significant progress in winning her over.

Stephan cleared his throat and decided to test his mother’s reaction. “Um, Mom, what do you think of a girl like Alana, cute and bubbly, with a personality as pure as a little white rabbit?”

Cynthia was puzzled. “What do you mean, ‘what do you think’?”

Why on earth would he suddenly start praising a girl as cute and innocent as a little white rabbit?

She’d never once heard her own son praise any woman like that.

“A girl like her...what do you think about her becoming your daughter-in-law?”

Cynthia was instantly alarmed. “Are you out of your mind? She’s already taken...she has a boyfriend if I remember correctly. Don’t even think about pulling some crazy stunt, trying to force your way in, breaking up a couple, and robbing that girl of her happiness!”

“Besides, she might not even be interested in you. You’re so old and a total old fox...I’m almost too embarrassed to say it.”

Stephan was perplexed.

Alright! This was just like her!

The undisputed champion of putting her son down.

He couldn’t take it anymore. “I was talking about a girl like her becoming your daughter-in-law, not me wanting to be the other man and meddle in someone else’s relationship.”

“Oh, you should’ve said so earlier. I thought you’d set your sights on that young lady and wanted to steal her away from her boyfriend. That’s out of the question...we’re a respectable, well-established family. We don’t do that kind of immoral nonsense!”

Stephan gulped.

“Oh, actually, your dear mother doesn’t have many requirements. As long as she’s a wonderful woman, that’s fine. The main thing is that you like her; we won’t worry about the rest for now.”

Stephan asked the question just for the sake of it, “Alright, I’ll hang up now.”

After hanging up, Stephan couldn’t help but smile. He immediately sent a message to Alana.

Stephan: [Last time you said you saw my mom at the restaurant...did you actually call her “Mom”?]

[I didn’t expect you’d be so eager to call my mom “Mom.” Have you already secretly accepted in your heart that you’re Stephan’s wife?]

[Tsk, I never would’ve guessed you were this kind of woman!]

Alana, upon seeing the message was shocked.

She was so embarrassed she rolled around on the bed.

The sky was falling!

He actually found out about this.

Did she just give him another thrill??

Stephan teased her on purpose;

[My dear wife, call me "husband."]

Alana replied, her face flushed;

Alana: [I’m going to sleep. Don’t disturb my rest.]

Stephan: [Call me 'husband' before you go to sleep.]

Alana: [No way, no way, absolutely not! I’m not going to give you the satisfaction!]

[Anyway, you’re not here with me, so there’s nothing you can do about it!]

Stephan scoffed.

Alright then, the little white rabbit’s getting feisty...she’s even daring to defy him through the phone.

Good, very good. Just wait until he gets home and deals with her!

Alana tossed and turned in bed for a while, originally intending to just go to sleep.

But suddenly she remembered something, sat up, opened the drawer, rummaged around, and pulled out a bank card.

This bank card was given to her as compensation by the mother of that little boy after she nearly got into a car accident last time.

There were 200,000 dollars in the account, but she hadn't touched it.

She'd been looking for an opportunity to return the card, but she'd been quite busy lately, so she hadn't had a chance.

After a moment's thought, she picked up her phone, thought it over carefully, then dialed a number and tried calling.

After about thirty seconds of ringing, the call was answered.

A gentle, pleasant voice drifted over the line.

"Hello, may I ask who's calling?"

Alana froze upon hearing the voice.

For some reason, it felt a little familiar.

But she didn't dwell on it. "Hello, may I ask what your relationship is to Jamin?"

The other person paused for a moment before speaking slowly, "He's my son."

Alana gave a polite smile and continued, "Hello, Ma'am. My name is Alana. This is about that accident the other day..."

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Chapter 261 To extort money

⋮

Before she could finish, the other person suddenly hung up.

Alana froze.

What's going on?

Why did she hang up so suddenly?

She hadn't even finished speaking.

Could it be that the other person misunderstood her and thought she was calling to extort money?

She just wanted to return the bank card.

After thinking it over, Alana sent a message to explain why she had called.

But after she sent the message, the other person didn't reply for a long time, and she didn't know if they'd even seen it.

Alana thought about it for a moment, then let it go.

After all, she'd said what she needed to say and made it clear she wanted to return the bank card. If they didn't want it, then it wasn't her problem anymore.

Putting down her phone, Alana put the bank card back in the drawer, then turned off the main light, leaving only a dim nightlight on.

Then she lay down on the bed, pulled the covers over herself, hugged one of Stephan's pillows, closed her eyes, and, breathing in the faint scent unique to him that lingered in the pillow, slowly drifted off to sleep...

Little did she know.

In a certain villa, a woman had lost all hope of sleep because of that phone call...

A large hand rested on the woman's shoulder.

“What’s wrong? It’s so late, why aren’t you resting?”

The woman looked up. The man before her was her husband, Henry.

She furrowed her brow, pondering for a moment, then couldn’t help but take his hand. “Honey, I told you I had a daughter before I married you, right? I... I want... to bring her back to live with us. Is that okay?”

Upon hearing this, Henry’s expression softened slightly. “It’s been so many years.

Your daughter must be all grown up by now.”

The woman nodded. “Yes, she’s grown up. If I do the math, she’s almost twenty-three now.”

Henry spoke up, “Honey, when you were with me back then, you promised me that since you’d decided to marry me, you’d cut all ties with your past...including your daughter. And you also promised to care for my daughter, Darla, as if she were your own. If you bring your daughter back to live with you, where does that leave Darla?”

“I...” The woman choked on her words, her expression instantly filled with conflict and anguish. “Does that mean I shouldn’t have anything to do with her for the rest of my life? She’s out there now, and as her mother, I don’t even know if she’s doing well.”

Henry replied calmly, “She’s an adult now and capable of taking care of herself. Since you were heartless enough to abandon her back then, don’t go soft now. Even if you bring her to live with you now, she might not be grateful to you. It might even cause friction between her and Darla, she might hate you think you abandoned her for this family.”

The woman lowered her eyes. After much hesitation and inner struggle, she finally let go of the idea.

She thought to herself that over the years, she had secretly sent money back to her hometown, enough to ensure her daughter was living a comfortable life.

So, even without her as a mother by her side, her daughter would still live comfortably.

To avoid running into Cynthia again, Alana went straight back to her small rented apartment after work the next day.

Little did she know that because of this decision, Darla, who had been trying to talk to her, was turned away several times.

Darla had originally intended to find Alana to persuade her to break up with Stephan.

After all, given Alana's background, she was truly not a suitable match for Stephan.

Her advice to break up with Stephan was for Alana's own good; after all, the Hudson family would never accept her.

The sooner they parted ways, the sooner she would be free.

But to her surprise, after waiting outside Stephan's house for several nights and being turned away repeatedly, she never once managed to meet Alana.

Only then did she realize that during the nights Stephan was away on business, Alana wasn't staying at his house.

So, she had been waiting in vain.

Darla frowned. It seemed that sitting around waiting for something to happen wasn't going to work; she'd have to take the initiative.

Alana hadn't returned to her apartment for quite some time, and the neighbors all assumed she had moved out.

It wasn't until she returned that they realized she hadn't left.

An elderly neighbor ran into Alana and couldn't help but ask, "Lana, where have you been all this time? I haven't seen you around at all."

"Um..."

"I was staying at a friend's place for a while."

The elderly neighbor asked curiously, "A friend's place? Male or female? It isn't your boyfriend, is it?"

"Lana, I don't mean to pry, but I just think girls like you should take good care of yourselves. You shouldn't just go stay at a guy's place the moment you start dating him. If you end up pregnant before marriage, that'll be a real mess!"

Alana blinked.

She forced a smile. "Auntie, you've got it all wrong. It's a female friend of mine, not a boyfriend."

"Oh, so it's a girl! Why didn't you say so sooner!"

The neighbor asked again, “But aren’t you seeing someone now? Why haven’t I seen you bring your boyfriend home?”

Alana really didn’t want to talk about it. Every time she ran into an older woman these past few days, she’d get asked the same question. It was driving her crazy.

She made an excuse: “Auntie, the elevator’s here. I’ve got to go. Bye.”

Then she practically fled out of the elevator.

She really hated it when these older women gossiped about her personal life. Not only did they have no sense of propriety, but they also loved to meddle in other people’s business.

Back in her rented apartment, she shut the door.

Alana. finally felt at ease.

She hadn’t been back for a while, and a thin layer of dust had settled over the place.

On the day she returned, she gave the place a thorough cleaning to get it neat and tidy. To be honest, it had been a long time since she’d done such physically demanding housework.

At Stephan’s place, there was a robot vacuum to sweep the floors, and cleaning staff came by from time to time to clean and disinfect, she never had to lift a finger.

So, coming back to her own apartment and having to do everything herself, she was already finding it a bit hard to adjust.

Habits really are a scary thing.

Alana took a moment to catch her breath, then walked into the kitchen to make herself a bowl of instant noodles.

She topped the noodles with fried egg and a few greens for a balanced meal.

That way, Stephan wouldn't criticize her dinner for being unhealthy.

But living alone, she didn't worry too much about what she ate, as long as it filled her stomach, that was enough.

As she ate, she couldn't help but think of the noodles Stephan used to cook for her.

In comparison, she felt his cooking was still a bit tastier.

Her longing for him grew even stronger.

Come to think of it, this was already the fifth day of his business trip.

So, when would he be back?

Just as she was thinking this, her phone suddenly rang.

Alana thought it was Stephan calling, but when she picked up the phone, she saw it was an unknown number.

Could it be a scam call?

She hung up without hesitation.

But the very next second, the phone rang again.

It was that anonymous number again.

Alana frowned, thought for a moment, and then answered the call.

“Hello, who is this?”

There was a moment of silence on the other end before a voice spoke slowly,
“Lana, it’s me.”

The moment Alana heard that voice, she recognized the caller instantly.
“Darla? How did you get my number?”

Darla’s tone was flat. “How I got your number isn’t important. What matters is that I’d like to talk to you.”

Alana instinctively refused, “Sorry, I don’t think we have anything to talk about.”

Darla laughed and asked, “Is it that you don’t think we have anything to talk about, or are you afraid to talk to me?”

Alana scoffed.

She must be overthinking it!

Darla spoke calmly, “Don’t you want to know about the real Stephan Hudson?”

Alana furrowed her brows.

Chapter 262 The heir

About the real Stephan Hudson?

What exactly did she mean?

Darla continued, "I'm at Lush Café. I'll be waiting for you. Don't be late." With that, she hung up the phone without waiting for Alana's reply.

It seemed as though she was certain Alana would go.

Alana grimaced.

She really didn't want to go, and let Darla wait in vain at the café all night. But on second thought, she quickly finished her instant noodles, tidied up the kitchen, and left the house.

Because she, too, wanted to know what Darla was up to.

She arrived at the agreed-upon café.

Alana walked in and saw that Darla was already sitting at a table in the corner, waiting.

She paused for a moment, then continued walking over.

When Darla saw Alana, the corners of her mouth turned up slightly. "Alana, I really didn't expect you to actually show up."

Alana frowned.

Wasn't it Darla who asked her to come?

Wasn't coming here exactly what Darla wanted?

If she hadn't come, Darla probably wouldn't have been happy about it.

But Alana didn't feel like dwelling on it. She sat down across from Darla and asked bluntly, "What's on your mind? Just get to the point."

Darla took a leisurely sip of her coffee before speaking. "Alana, tell me...how did you end up with Stephan Hudson?"

She was curious to know what tactics Alana had used to reel Stephan in.

She'd been trying to get close to Stephan for so long, yet hadn't made any progress.

He seemed to have absolutely no interest in her, which was deeply frustrating to someone as proud as she was.

It had always been other men who pursued her, longing for her but unable to have her. But with Stephan, she'd stumbled more than once.

So she wanted to know exactly what clever tactics Alana had used.

Alana's tone was utterly calm. "How we got together is my private business...there's no reason I'd tell you."

Darla smiled, a hint of sarcasm lingering in her expression.

"I suppose you must have used some underhanded tactics, which is why you're being so secretive and reluctant to tell me, isn't it?"

Alana shot Darla a glance, her tone neither submissive nor arrogant. "As expected, a dirty person sees everything as dirty."

Darla's smile faltered slightly, then returned. "What? Did I say something wrong?"

Alana replied calmly, "You are wrong. Stephan and I are together because we truly love each other and have won each other over with sincerity, not through the scheming you're always spouting."

"People aren't fools. They won't look at you with newfound respect just because you play a few mind games."

Darla really wanted to applaud Alana for finding such a brilliant excuse for her scheming.

"Brilliant...truly brilliant! Alana, you're smarter than I thought."

Darla continued in a friendly tone, "However, I'd still kindly advise you not to stay with Stephan any longer, because... you're simply not good enough for him!"

Alana fell silent for a moment.

This scene felt somewhat familiar, as if it overlapped with a scene from her dream.

But in the dream, Darla had been accompanied by Stephan's mother.

But now, Darla was alone.

Perhaps because she had already experienced this in her dream, Alana appeared unusually calm at that moment.

"Whether Stephan and I are a suitable match isn't something you alone can decide."

Darla sneered. "Lana, you're a girl abandoned by your parents, raised in the countryside by your grandmother since childhood. You have no status, no connections, you're just a pitiful little nobody who can't hold her own in public. You have nothing, and you're utterly worthless. What do you have to offer that makes you a match for Stephan?"

It wasn't that she was intentionally belittling Alana; it was simply that, compared to her, Alana was utterly worthless.

What she said made perfect sense.

Alana's expression darkened. "Darla, how do you know?"

But she quickly realized, "You've been investigating me?"

Realizing that all her private matters had been laid bare before Darla, she couldn't contain her anger. "Darla, do you know that privately investigating someone is against the law?"

Instead of getting angry, Darla smiled, her lips curving upward. "Don't ask me how I know. You should be asking yourself: with your background, how could you possibly be the wife of Stephan, the heir to the Hudson family, the most powerful clan in the country?"

Alana keenly picked up on the key words in Darla's statement and recoiled in shock.

"The Hudson family? The heir?"

Seeing Alana's incredulous reaction, Darla couldn't help but laugh. "What's the matter? You've been with him for so long, surely you must've figured out his social status?"

Alana's eyes were filled with bewilderment.

Although she had already suspected in her heart that Stephan wasn't a man from an ordinary family.

But she never imagined his status would be so... exalted as to be out of reach.

No wonder he could so casually buy her gifts worth tens of millions.

No wonder the rich second-generation kids at the gatherings he took her to treated him with such respect.

It turned out his status far surpassed that of his all his friends.

She should have realized this long ago, but... she didn't want to think about it, nor did she want to speculate.

She'd rather just stay with him, oblivious to the truth.

But now, Darla had personally exposed the truth.

She remembered asking Stephan once what his relationship was with the great Hudson family. He said there was absolutely no connection whatsoever. Just the same surname.

At the time, she had truly believed him.

Darla watched her reaction, smiled, and continued, “Lana, regardless of whether you knew Stephan’s true identity before, the gap between you two is so vast that it’s impossible for you to be together. His parents would never approve of you two being together.”

“So, I’m giving you this friendly advice: break up sooner rather than later, before things get so messy that everyone ends up in a devastating situation.”

Alana’s mind was in turmoil, but she didn’t want Darla to see even a hint of it. Nor did she want to be easily discouraged by her.

She shook her head firmly. “No, I don’t want to break up with him.”

Even if she and Stephan were to part ways in the end, it wasn’t up to Darla to be the one to say it.

Darla curled her lips. “You don’t want to break up with him because you found out his true identity and now, you’re trying to climb your way up to him, a rags-to-riches story? Do you even have the right to say that?”

Alana shook her head.

No, that wasn’t it.

It was because she was clinging to that warmth she shared with Stephan. But there was no need to explain that to Darla.

Darla sneered, not wanting to waste any more time on a vain woman like Alana.

Chapter 263 As lowly as dust

Chapter 263 As lowly as dust

“Alana, I came here today to advise you to know your place. If you’re breaking up, just

break up...don't covet what doesn't belong to you! The Hudson family is out of your league! If Stephan's parents found out about you, do you really think you'd be standing here so brazenly in front of me?"

"If you don't want me to tell his parents about you, break up with him immediately.

Otherwise... the consequences will be more than you can handle!"

Alana's fingers trembled slightly.

She tried to stay calm. "Stephan... he'll protect me. He wouldn't... let me be put in such an hurtful situation."

Darla couldn't help but laugh, mocking Alana's naivety. "Are you kidding me?"

"Do you really think Stephan would go against his parents for your sake? Don't be silly! Even if he loves you to pieces, so what? No matter how much he loves you, could that ever be more important than his parents? In the end, he'll give you up because his parents won't let you into the family!"

The tension in Alana's heart was so tight it felt like it might snap at any moment.

But the tighter it pulled, the calmer she became.

She stared at Darla and retorted, one word at a time, "Darla, what makes you think Stephan's parents wouldn't like me?"

"Just because I have no parents, no status, and no connections, do you think they'd hate me and refuse to let me be with Stephan? I've always believed that the parents capable of raising Stephan to be so outstanding aren't that superficial."

Darla laughed. "Setting aside whether Stephan's parents are shallow or not, let's just talk about you and me. Between the two of us, do you think his parents would choose me, someone of equal standing and exceptional ability, or you, who has absolutely nothing to offer?"

"In what way do you think you measure up to me, and what makes you think you could ever win them over? Stop trying to make a scene and acting like a clown in front of me, okay?"

Alana looked Darla straight in the eye and retorted, "Who exactly is the clown here? Is it me, who's good for nothing, or you, who's the imposter?"

Darla's expression shifted slightly. "You!"

Alana stated matter-of-factly, “Darla, you pride yourself on being noble and exceptional, a perfect match for Stephan. Yet you think I have no parents, that I’m worthless, and that I fall short of you in every way. Yes, my parents abandoned me when I was very young. I was raised by my grandmother. If it weren’t for her, I doubt I’d have made it this far.”

“I know I have no connections. With no family to support me, I’ve had to rely solely on myself, working my way up step by step to where I am today.”

“Even though I’m all alone, I’ve never once thought of giving up. I’ve remained strong and worked hard to make the most of every day, hoping that one day, I’ll make something of myself.”

“And you, Darla, you’re truly lucky. From the moment you were born, you were born into a privileged family.”

“Born into a wealthy and noble family, you’ve never wanted for anything, and your life has been nothing but smooth sailing.”

“You don’t have to work hard, in fact, you can obtain things effortlessly that ordinary people can’t achieve no matter how hard they strive. Take education, for example. Or a career.”

“I admit it, you’re exceptional, and you’re far more capable than I am. But you have no right to look down on me, because if our roles were reversed and you were in my position, you might not be as outstanding as I am. And if I were in your position, I might very well be just as capable as you. So why do you feel the need to act superior in front of me?”

Darla frowned. “Alana, don’t make excuses for yourself! It’s a fact that I’m of noble birth and you’re of lowly status!”

“Wealthy families value a match of equal standing, it’s a fact that you’re not good enough for Stephan! I’m kindly advising you to leave him, but you’re not appreciating my good intentions.”

“If anything happens in the future, don’t say I didn’t warn you!”

Alana replied, “Then thank you for the warning. But whether I leave or not is my own business. And as for matters between Stephan and me, I hope you, Miss Gordon, won’t go out of your way to meddle in our relationship.”

Darla laughed in exasperation; she had truly never met such a shameless woman.

“Alana, you’ll regret this!”

Alana replied, “Whether I regret it or not has nothing to do with you. I don’t want to say any more. Anyway, I’m putting this out there: I won’t break up with Stephan easily!”

She paused, then fixed her gaze on Darla and said, enunciating each word clearly, “As for you, Miss Gordon, you who pride yourself on being a high-society lady...your character should be far superior to that of an ordinary girl like me. Surely you wouldn’t do something as morally reprehensible as meddling in someone else’s relationship and becoming a homewrecker, would you?”

“You!”

“I’m leaving!” Without giving Darla a chance to respond, Alana decisively stood up and turned to leave.

Darla laughed bitterly, her fists clenched tightly.

She never would have thought that Alana was so stubborn, no matter how she tried to persuade her, she refused to break up with Stephan!

Then again, having finally managed to hook up with a man like Stephan, how could she possibly be willing to let him go?!

It’s okay; sooner or later, she’ll expose Alana’s true, ambitious nature.

Alana returned to the apartment, feeling as if all her strength had drained away. She sat down on the cold floor, completely exhausted.

Darla’s disparaging and condescending words echoed vividly in her mind. Actually, Darla was right.

For wealthy families, the most important thing is a match made in heaven, equal status and compatibility.

No matter how noble or well-reasoned her words might sound, they were nothing more than a desperate struggle to vent her frustration over the unfairness of fate.

A person’s fate is predetermined from birth.

Some are born in Rome, while others are as lowly as dust.

No matter how skillfully she rationalizes it, she cannot resist the injustice of fate from the very beginning.

So, what should she do now?

Was she really going to part ways with Stephan just because their social statuses don’t match?

But if they really did part ways, wouldn’t that be exactly what Darla wanted?

Thinking of Darla's threats.

She said that if Stephan's parents found out about her, it would cause a huge scandal.

If Stephan's parents found out about you, do you really think you'd be able to stand here so brazenly in front of me?

*If you don't want me to tell his parents about you, break up with him immediately.

Otherwise... the consequences will be more than you can handle!*

Do you really think Stephan would defy his parents for you? Don't be ridiculous!

So what if Stephan likes you? Even if he likes you, could that ever be more important than his parents?

In the end, he'll give you up because his parents won't let you into the family!

That voice echoed in Alana's mind like a nightmare, over and over again.

Her fingers trembled uncontrollably.

At that moment, she truly wished Stephan would appear by her side, hold her close, and tell her that no matter what, he would never leave her.

But he was away on a business trip; he wasn't there...

Alana clenched her teeth and couldn't help but pull out her phone. Her fingers trembling, she struggled to find his number.

She dialed the number...

[Sorry, the number you dialed is currently busy. Please try again later...]

Alana slowly lowered her phone.

Never mind. He must be busy; she wouldn't disturb him...

On Stephan's end, he was on an important call with a client.

After hanging up, he returned to the hotel, went into the bathroom, and took a hot shower.

When he stepped out of the shower, he glanced at his phone and realized Alana had called him.

To be honest, it was rare for that girl to call him first.

Stephan raised an eyebrow. Being this proactive, could it be that she missed him?

Come to think of it, he'd been away on a business trip for nearly a week.

He planned to return tomorrow; he'd booked an afternoon flight and would arrive that evening.

However, he didn't plan on telling her; he wanted to surprise her when he got back.

Stephan immediately video-called Alana.

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Chapter 264 Silly girl

Chapter 264 Silly girl

A simple phone call just wouldn't satisfy him.

If he couldn't hug her or kiss her, at least seeing her pretty little face would do.

The video call rang on for a long time, but Alana still didn't answer.

Stephan frowned and, with great patience, dialed again.

It was so late, had she already gone to sleep?

If she was asleep, I'll be disturbing her.

Stephan thought that if she didn't answer this call, he wouldn't call again.

But unexpectedly, at the very last moment, the call connected.

Soon, a delicate, fair face appeared on the phone screen. Her features were delicate and beautiful, her skin so fair and supple it seemed as if water might ooze out if pinched.

Her eyelashes were long and curled, like the fluttering wings of a butterfly, trembling ever so slightly, especially her eyes, large and round, with distinct black and white irises, clear as crystal, pure without a single blemish.

She appeared to be sitting on the bed, holding the little white rabbit stuffed animal he had given her.

Her pointed chin rested against the rabbit's head, her grape-like eyes wide open, staring at him blankly.

She looked so soft and sweet, so adorable.

Stephan's heart melted as he looked at her, and he asked with a smile, "Why did you call me just now?"

Alana was also staring at the man on the screen. He appeared to have just finished showering; he was wearing a white hotel bathrobe.

His hair was still damp, not yet dried, and slightly disheveled. But that couldn't hide the striking handsomeness of his features.

No matter the angle, his beauty was flawless.

Alana hugged the little rabbit in her arms tightly, a pang of longing in her heart.

"You're not by my side. I miss you."

Hearing this, Stephan's heart softened even more. "I'll be back soon," he said.

Alana asked earnestly, "When exactly is 'soon'?"

The man teased her, "'Soon' means exactly that."

Alana pouted, feeling a little disappointed, but she didn't say anything. After all... he was the CEO of the Hudson Group; work came first.

She couldn't throw a tantrum either even though she was feeling a little down right now and really needed his company. She really wanted to tell him about Darla.

After all, she couldn't keep it a secret, Stephan would find out eventually.

But it wasn't something she could discuss over the phone; she'd just have to wait until he got back.

Stephan sensed that something was off with her. "What's wrong? You seem a little down tonight."

Alana took a deep breath and forced a smile. “Nothing.”

“Speaking of which, why didn’t you answer the phone just now? You weren’t sneaking off to see another woman behind my back, were you?”

Stephan chuckled. “No way. I was on a call from a client, then went back to my hotel room to take a shower. When would I have had time to see another woman?”

“I don’t believe you. Pan the camera so I can see the room you’re staying in.”

Stephan found it amusing. “Fine, fine, I’ll grant your wish.”

He panned the camera, showing Alana every corner of the room.

He even went into the bathroom to take a look around.

“See? It’s just me. No other woman, not even a single strand of a woman’s hair.”

Alana smiled, her lips pressed together.

“Not bad. You’re still upholding your chivalry.”

Stephan asked pointedly, “What about you? You haven’t been hiding other men in your room, have you?”

Alana pouted. “No way.”

“I don’t believe you. Pull your collar down a bit. Let me see if there are any strange marks underneath.”

Alana blinked.

She’d thought he’d ask her to turn the camera around so he could check the room, but she never expected him to ask her to pull down her collar.

He’s such a pervert.

She was currently wearing a creamy white nightgown with a round neckline.

The neckline was quite low; if she pulled it down even a little, he’d probably be able to see everything.

She chuckled, “No way. Why don’t you pull yours up?”

Stephan smiled. “So you wanted to see me? You should’ve said so earlier. I’ll show you. I’ll show you everything.”

With that, the man's large hand grabbed the sash of her bathrobe and gave it a slight tug...

Alana's face flushed instantly. "Ah! Hurry up, put it back on!"

"Isn't this what you wanted?"

Alana covered her eyes with her hands. "No, I don't! Hurry up and put it back on, or I'll hang myself!"

Stephan chuckled at her reaction. "You've seen this so many times, and you're still shy."

Alana said, her face flushing, "Can't you... let me play coy for a bit?"

Pretend?

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "Oh, so you're just pretending. I wouldn't have guessed, you're actually quite the shy flirt."

Alana gasped. She still wasn't as shameless as he was. "I'm not talking to you anymore. I'm going to rest."

Stephan stared at her, his eyes darkening. "Don't hang up. Let me look at you a little longer."

Alana's heart fluttered unexpectedly. She bit her lip. "Aren't you tired?"

Actually, she didn't want to hang up either.

But she was worried he was too exhausted and wanted him to get some rest early.

Stephan curved his lips. "Seeing you instantly revives my weary heart. How could I possibly be tired? You're the cure for me."

Alana couldn't help but blush. "Here we go again...you're such a smooth talker."

Stephan's eyes sparkled with sincerity as he emphasized, "It's not smooth talk...it's

the truth. Everything I've said comes from the bottom of my heart...it's what I truly want to tell you."

Alana's heart was deeply moved once again.

She hadn't been in the best of moods tonight. But hearing his thoughtful words instantly warmed her heart.

All those negative emotions gradually faded away.

In truth, upon learning he was the one from the Hudson family, she had felt a bit overwhelmed and deeply insecure.

She was afraid she wasn't good enough for him.

She was afraid he would look down on her, and she was also afraid her parents would disapprove of her.

The more she loved him, the more she couldn't help but scrutinize herself, every aspect of who she was, to see if she was a good match for him.

The gap was just too wide, and it really left her feeling overwhelmed and highly emotional.

These emotions aren't something she can simply process on her own.

So, she needs to wait for him to return and be completely honest about all of this.

Problems need to be resolved; avoidance will never solve them.

Instead, they only make the situation more complicated and serious.

She didn't want Darla to use these matters to threaten her, becoming an obstacle to her relationship with him.

Rather than living in constant fear under Darla's threats, it would be far more cathartic for her to come clean on her own.

Alana's eyes welled up with tears. "Stephan, we have to make this work."

He was the first source of warmth in her life that she wanted to hold tightly in the palm of her hand.

She didn't want to let him go.

But at the same time, she didn't want him to give her up either.

Stephan chuckled softly. "Silly girl."

What on earth was she imagining this time?

Haven't they always been fine?

He said softly, "Wait for me to come back. I'll bring you a gift."

Alana nodded. "Mm-hmm."

In the end, she didn't know how she'd fallen asleep. It seemed she'd been holding the rabbit, lying down to keep chatting with him, and then drifted off without realizing it. She didn't even hang up the video call.

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Chapter 265 To swindle

Because Stephan wouldn't let her turn it off; he said he wanted to look at her a little longer.

Stephan was also lying in bed, one hand behind his head and the other holding his phone, gazing at the girl's sleeping face on the screen.

Whose girlfriend sleeps so soundly and looks so beautiful? His.

He was practically itching to lick the screen.

It was just a shame he couldn't hold her while he slept tonight. He felt a hollow emptiness inside.

All he could do was watch her like this, to soothe his lonely heart. "The long night drags on, and I can't sleep."

He was dying to go home.

His phone was almost out of battery.

Stephan wanted to find a charger to recharge it.

The girl on the screen, who knows what she was dreaming about...suddenly clutched her little rabbit tight, her eyes twitched

"Stephan, don't leave me..."

Stephan frowned, just as he was about to tell her he wouldn't leave her.

But the next second, the phone ran out of battery and shut down automatically. The girl on the screen vanished just as suddenly as the black screen itself.

Damn it!

Stephan frowned deeply, quickly grabbed the charger, and plugged it in. Once the phone booted up again, he wanted to call her.

But then he realized she was already asleep. If he called her now, he'd probably wake her up.

He thought of the slightly reddened, moist corners of Alana's eyes, his heart was in turmoil.

Why was this night dragging on so long?

Please, let tomorrow come soon...

Alana slept until she woke up naturally.

It was just past six in the morning.

It was just beginning to get light outside.

When Alana got out of bed, she noticed her pillow was damp.

She stared at the damp spot on her pillow, frozen for a moment.

She didn't know how it happened, but she had actually dreamed of Stephan.

She dreamed that Stephan had returned from a business trip, and she confessed everything to him.

But unexpectedly, the moment she finished speaking, Stephan coldly announced their breakup.

"Lana, you've really let me down. How could you keep this from me for so long?"

Alana frantically denied it. "I didn't. I just hadn't found the right moment to tell you."

Stephan showed not the slightest flicker of emotion. "Regardless, I know now. You're nothing but a woman abandoned by her parents. You have nothing. You're not worthy of being with me. Let's break up."

Alana's eyes welled up with tears. "But I love you!"

Stephan sneered, "Love? Who needs your love! Your love is worthless!" Hearing this, Alana felt as if she'd been struck by a bolt from the blue; her whole body felt like it was about to collapse.

She never would have imagined such words could come from Stephan's mouth.

He was so heartless.

It was clearly him who had pursued her in the first place...

Alana snapped out of her reverie, but she still felt somewhat dazed.

They say what you think about during the day appears in your dreams at night.

Whatever she feared, that's exactly what she dreamed about.

But thankfully, it was just a dream...not reality.

Alana got out of bed, went into the bathroom, splashed some water on her face, and tried to clear her head.

After freshening up, she had no appetite for breakfast.

She grabbed her phone and left the apartment.

There was a breakfast stall downstairs, so she bought a steamed bun and a cup of soy milk.

After quickly finishing her breakfast, she hopped on her electric scooter and headed to the office.

As she passed an intersection, she stopped to wait for the traffic light.

Alana noticed a crowd gathering by the sidewalk.

It looked like they were watching some kind of commotion.

Alana didn't want to get involved, but she thought she spotted someone she knew.

She hesitated for a moment, then parked her electric scooter by the roadside and walked over to take a look.

"Ow...that really hurts!"

"It was that little brat! He deliberately shoved me while I was walking...now my whole body feels like it's about to fall apart!"

"I didn't! You're lying...that's not what happened at all!"

"Hey, hey, hey! You're twisting the facts!"

“Everyone, come over here and judge for yourselves! A kid pushes an old lady over and still thinks he’s in the right!”

“Quick, get his parents out here! I want them to take responsibility for this!”

An elderly woman in her seventies or eighties sat on the ground, clutching a little boy’s shirt tightly to keep him from leaving.

The little boy was dressed in a small suit, carrying a small backpack; his fine clothes made it clear he was the child of a wealthy family.

Alana stepped closer and instantly recognized the boy as Jamin, whom she had met twice before.

The bystanders around them were all just gawking at the spectacle, unaware of what had happened, and though they had gathered, they didn’t take any action.

Jamin’s shirt was being held tight by the old woman; his face was flushed with anger, but he was powerless to do anything about it.

He had never encountered a situation like this in his entire life.

Alana could have simply ignored the situation; she was in a hurry to get to work.

But seeing Jamin looking so anxious and helpless, she felt a twinge of sympathy.

After a moment’s thought, she pushed her way through the crowd and called out, “Jamin!”

When Jamin saw Alana, his eyes lit up as if he’d found a lifeline.

“Pretty lady, please save me!”

Alana immediately walked over to Jamin, gently placing her fingers on his head, her gaze firm. “Tell me, what happened?”

Perhaps sensing Alana’s concern, burst into tears and pointed at the old woman on the ground.

“It’s this old lady who’s slandering me! She was trying to cross the street just now. She told me she had trouble walking and was using a cane, so she asked me to help her cross. I saw she was limping, so I kindly helped her. But after just a few steps, she suddenly fell down and insisted I’d pushed her on purpose!”

Hearing this, the old woman immediately retorted, “Nonsense! It was clearly you who pushed me! Are you related to this little brat? That brat just pushed me over and hurt my

leg. You have to take responsibility. Pay me tens of thousands of dollars right now, and I'll let you off the hook! Otherwise, none of you are leaving here today!"

Alana comforted the crying Jamin, then glanced at the old woman on the ground.

"Ma'am, did you hurt your leg? If your leg is injured, I'll call 911 for you and have you taken to the hospital."

The old woman shouted, "I'm not going to the hospital! I want you to pay me compensation!"

Alana said calmly, "If you don't go to the hospital, how would we know how serious your injury is or how much treatment will cost?"

"Here's what we'll do: I'll call the ambulance and have you taken to the hospital for a checkup first. We'll find out what caused this leg injury. If it really was this child who knocked you over and hurt your leg, we'll reimburse you for the medical expenses."

Upon hearing this, a flicker of guilt crossed the old woman's eyes. "There's no need to go to all that trouble. Just give me the money right now, and I'll go to the hospital for a checkup myself!"

Alana said, "We don't think it's a bother."

"Get up, ma'am. Don't make things difficult for a little boy who was only trying to help you." Alana tried to help the old woman up, but she refused, insisting that Alana pay her compensation before she would get up.

Not only did Alana sense something was off, but the people around them did too, and they all tried to persuade her.

"Old lady, get up and let's go to the hospital together!"

"Exactly. Go to the hospital for a proper checkup, and you'll find out what the problem is."

"If you won't cooperate and go to the hospital for a checkup, could it be that you're faking your leg injury?"

"Exactly. At your age, deliberately trying to swindle a young boy, don't you feel ashamed?"

The old woman's face flushed red as she insisted, "I didn't! It was this little brat who pushed me!"

"Then why don't you go to the hospital? The other person is willing to cover your medical expenses, but you won't even go. Could it be you have something to hide?"

The old woman did indeed have something to hide.

Her leg wasn't injured at all, it was all just an act.

She usually enjoyed pulling these kinds of scams to swindle a little money.

Chapter 266 This rich kid

Chapter 266 This rich kid

When the old lady saw the little boy, alone with no family him around and dressed so expensively, she knew he must be from a wealthy family.

For a child from a wealthy family, money is the last thing they lack. A few words of intimidation were enough to make him hand over the money, sobbing and all.

She'd pulled this off a few times before, so she decided to take it a step further.

She hadn't expected to get a helper before she could even swindle him.

Alana paused for a moment before continuing, "Ma'am, if you don't want to go to the hospital with us for a checkup, and you're not going to let us off the hook, then I'm going to call the police. I recall there's a police station nearby. If I call the police, they should be here in no time."

The old woman's expression changed instantly. "Call the police? Who told you to call the police? It's just a matter of paying ten thousand or a few thousand dollars, why would we need to call the police?"

"You rich people, you won't even pay a few thousand yuan to an old woman like me?!"

Alana frowned. "Being wealthy is one thing, but being wronged is another. This little boy had a heart full of kindness, a desire to help others, and a sense of justice, yet you exploited his goodness to blackmail him and tarnished his innocence!"

"Because of your ulterior motives, you might leave a psychological scar on him, he might even grow cold-hearted in the future and be afraid to help others freely."

“And do you have a grandson? Don’t you fear that by doing this, your grandson might one day face the danger of being falsely accused and extorted by others?”

The old woman choked on her words, momentarily unable to retort.

Alana frowned and said, “I have a grandmother who’s about your age, so I don’t really want to make things difficult for you. But if you keep pestering me, I’ll call the police right now.”

The old woman could tell Alana was no pushover. Being the type to bully the weak and cower from the strong, she had no choice but to let go of Jamin.

Alana then successfully led Jamin away from the crowd.

Jamin wiped away her tears and said gratefully, “Thank you for helping me just now.”

Alana replied earnestly, “You’re welcome. What are you doing here? Where’s your family?”

Jamin pouted. “My school is nearby. The driver dropped me off and went back. I

thought school was too boring, so I snuck out for a walk. I never expected to run into something like this.”

Alana frowned. “You’re not in class? You snuck out of school?”

Jamin looked a little guilty. “I...I just came out for a walk. I’ll be back in a little while.”

Alana’s tone turned serious. “Skipping class is wrong. Did your teacher know you snuck out of school?”

“I don’t know.”

Since he’d already snuck out, how could his teacher possibly know?

Alana winced in exasperation. “You’re not allowed to skip school anymore. This time you ran into an old lady trying to swindle you, and you were lucky to run into me. But what if next time you run into child traffickers who kidnap you and take you to be sold for your kidneys?”

Jamin was confused. “What’s...child traffickers?”

Alana explained with a straight face, “They’re bad people who use a sharp, big knife to cut open your stomach, make a hole, and then rip out your kidneys!”

Jamin's face went pale instantly. "What? Is it that scary?"

Alana nodded, her expression grave. "You bet it is. So from now on, never go out alone. No matter where you go, your Mom and Dad have to be with you, okay?"

Jamin pouted. "But Mom and Dad are so busy every day, they don't have time to be with me..."

He wanted to go out and play, there were so many places he wanted to visit, but he couldn't go anywhere.

He was so envious of those kids who had their parents to go out and play with them.

Unlike him, he had classes during the day and more classes at night. It was so tiring. He didn't even have time to play.

Upon hearing this, Alana felt a pang of sadness.

When she was a child, hadn't she also been a child without her parents by her side?

But he was different, he still had his parents by his side.

His parents loved him, that was his good fortune.

Alana ruffled Jamin's hair. "Then just act cute and beg them to spend more time with you. You're so adorable, as long as you act cute and roll around, they'll definitely make time for you."

"Really?"

"Really."

Jamin puffed out his chest, standing tall and proud. "But I'm a real man, how could I just go around acting all cute? That's something only girls do!"

Alana found it a bit amusing. "Boys can act cute too. Only kids who know how to act cute get treats. Do you want Mom and Dad to spend more time with you, or do you want to be a 'real man'?"

Jamin blinked.

After a moment's hesitation, he admitted, "I want Mom and Dad to spend time with me."

Alana nodded. "Exactly."

Jamin blinked his big, adorable eyes. “Then, pretty lady, if my parents are busy, can I come play with you?”

Alana replied tactfully, “I’ll have to see. If I’m free, sure.”

Jamin nodded. “Okay. But speaking of which, didn’t I give you my phone number?”

Why haven’t you contacted me? I’ve been waiting for you to contact me so we could play together.”

Alana said, “I did call you, but your mom answered, and she hung up after just a few words.”

“Huh?” Jamin froze. “But my mom never told me about that!”

Alana thought for a moment. “Maybe your mom doesn’t want you to interact with strangers too much. She’s afraid I’m a bad person with bad intentions toward you.”

Jamin shook his head. “That’s not it at all! You’re obviously a good person, I like you.”

Alana smiled. “Let’s not worry about that for now. Where’s your school? I’ll walk you back.”

Jamin pointed in a certain direction.

Alana glanced in that direction; it looked like a private elite school.

Rumor has it that tuition for students there can run into the hundreds of thousands dollars a year.

Some people are just born with an advantage.

She couldn’t even bring herself to dream of attending a private school like that.

She recalled her childhood, when her aunt’s daughter attended an elite school costing over a few thousand dollars a year, Alana on the other hand attended a public school without much funding.

Her aunt said her daughter was born into a life of wealth and privilege, so she should attend the best schools and associate with the most outstanding people.

But Alana was just a child abandoned by her parents, unwanted by anyone. She was lucky just to have the chance to go to school, why should she be picky about which school was good or bad?

Her aunt's daughter wore princess dresses every day and had been raised to be a spoiled princess.

Alana, on the other hand, wore hand-me-downs every day, dirty and disheveled.

That was just how it is for a child without parents to love her, it was lucky enough just to be alive and grow up. What else could she possibly ask for?

Alana pushed aside her lingering resentment and took Jamin's hand, intending to lead him to her little scooter.

Jamin hadn't expected Alana to suddenly take his hand; a faint blush spread across his fair, delicate cheeks.

"Your hands are so soft and delicate." As he spoke, he couldn't resist squeezing her fingers.

Why did it feel like she was being teased by a child?

Alana didn't respond; she simply led him over to her scooter.

"Good boy, hop on my scooter."

Jamin took a few steps and straddled the seat.

He looked her up and down curiously. "Your scooter is so cool! I've never ridden one like this before. Is it an expensive bike?"

Alana swallowed.

This rich kid!

After a moment of silence, she reminded him, "Hold on tight to me, or you might fall off."

Jamin went, "Oh," and obediently wrapped both arms around Alana.

Alana started riding her little electric scooter, carrying the little bundle of joy to his school.

Jamin sat behind Alana, feeling the breeze in his face the whole way, and squealed with delight.

They arrived at the school gate.

Alana glanced at the name engraved on the stone monument at the entrance...Aifenli Private School.

She felt that the names of some private schools were pretentious and ostentatious.

They had a strong foreign vibe, as if they were supposed to be high-end and prestigious.

Jamin hopped off the scooter, still buzzing with excitement. “We’re here. This is my school.”

Alana noticed his hair was almost blown into a frizz, looking like a little disheveled.

She reached out to smooth it down and said gently, “Okay, I see. Go on inside.”

Jamin looked at Alana with a hint of reluctance in his eyes. “Do you want to come in and take a look around my school?”

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Chapter 267 Crash out in his mind

Alana shook her head. “No, thanks. I have to rush to work.”

Jamin asked with a hopeful look, “Then next time you have time, can you come to school to see me?”

Alana didn’t want to refuse him. “Sure, we’ll see next time I have time.”

Jamin smiled and immediately said, “Call me next time, I’ll definitely pick up!”

Alana nodded and urged him, “Okay, you should head back now. Otherwise, your teacher will get worried if she finds out you skipped class.”

“Alright.”

“Bye-bye.”

“Bye.”

Alana waved goodbye to Jamin and prepared to ride her scooter away. A frantic voice echoed from afar, growing louder as it approached.

“Jamin, where did you just go?!”

Alana subconsciously turned her head and saw a woman hurriedly pulling Jamin into her arms.

There were also several men dressed in suits, wearing sunglasses, and with strong, muscular builds accompanying the woman.

It was obvious that she had an extraordinary identity.

However, it was a little unfortunate that the woman had her back to her, so she couldn't see what she looked like.

Agnes stared at the boy in her arms, anxious beyond words. "Where did you run off to just now? Your teacher called me and told me that you skipped class. I hurriedly brought a group of people over to look for you."

"If we couldn't find you, I was almost going to call the police!"

Jamin lowered his head, knowing that he had caused trouble. "Mommy, I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

Agnes said angrily, "There won't be a next time. If there is, I'll lock you up and give you a good beating!"

Jamin let out an "oh," but couldn't help speaking again. "Mommy, I just met a bad grandma who wanted to extort money from me, but a pretty lady appeared. She helped me and even brought me back to school!"

Agnes froze. "Pretty lady? Which pretty lady?"

Jamin said, "The pretty lady from the last time we almost had a car accident, the one you gave the bank card to!"

"Look, she's still over there!"

Jamin raised his hand and pointed in the direction where Alana was.

Alana hadn't left yet. When she saw Jamin pointing at her, she also waved at him.

She was thinking that Jamin's mother had given her a bank card the last time. Should she take this opportunity to return it?

But woman holding Jamin didn't even look over. She suddenly picked him up and hurried into the school gate.

"Jam, let's go back to school first."

Alana froze, and her thought of going forward to ask her something instantly disappeared.

She just felt that woman was rather strange.

She had helped her son, yet not only had she not received a word of thanks, the woman had instead directly carried her son away.

She looked like someone of status, so how could she be so impolite?

Could it be that she looked down on her? Was she afraid that Alana would extort money from her?

“So inexplicable.”

Alana muttered under her breath and directly rode away on her little electric scooter.

Agnes hurriedly carried her son and ran into the school.

She looked just like someone with a guilty conscience, afraid to face the daughter she had once abandoned.

Seeing Agnes’ reaction, Jamin couldn’t help frowning. “Mom, what’s wrong?”

“The pretty lady just waved at us. Why didn’t you wave back at her and instead run away carrying me?”

Agnes was still shaken. “Son, how did you meet her?”

Jamin said seriously, “Didn’t I just tell you? I kind of helped an old grandma cross the road, but that grandma suddenly fell down and said that I deliberately pushed her. She even tried to extort money from me and wouldn’t let me leave. It was the pretty lady who appeared and helped me get away from that old grandma. She even rode her bike and brought me back to school.”

“So that’s what happened...” Agnes murmured to herself. She really hadn’t expected the world to be so small. She had thought that their last meeting had happened quietly and would be the end of it, but unexpectedly, after going around in circles, they had met again.

Jamin couldn’t help asking, “Mommy, you still haven’t told me why. Why didn’t you greet her just now, and instead ran away carrying me?”

Agnes was silent for a moment before looking at Jamin. “Jam, in the future... try not to have contact with that pretty lady, okay?”

Jamin was confused. “Why?”

“I’ve met her three times already. Once might be a coincidence, twice might be an accident, but meeting her a third time means that she and I are destined to meet, right?

Isn't that what your dramas always say? Why can't I have contact with her? I even promised her that we'd play together again when we have time!"

Agnes suddenly became agitated. "No!"

Jamin was even more confused. "Why?"

"Mommy, your reaction today is so strange!"

"Why can't you let me continue having contact with her?"

"And she said she called me before. Why didn't you tell me?"

Agnes' fingers trembled slightly, and she said somewhat out of control, "There is no reason. In any case, listen to Mom and have less contact with her."

Otherwise, she was truly afraid that some things would become impossible to control.

Jamin refused. "Mom, she isn't a bad person. She just helped me..."

Agnes' tone instantly became stern. "Jamin, can't you listen to me?!"

Jamin was instantly speechless.

He didn't say anything, but his eyes couldn't help turning red.

His eyes accused his mother of how excessive she was being.

Agnes' eyes became even redder.

She had her reasons and couldn't easily acknowledge Alana.

She had already tested Henry, and his meaning was very clear. He wanted her to completely sever that little relationship with Alana.

If Alana recognized her as her mother and the mother and daughter became entangled with each other, and Henry found out, the consequences would be unimaginable.

Moreover, the money she had secretly transferred to Alana behind Henry's back would also be discovered.

As for Henry, he did love her and was willing to overcome everyone's objections and marry her into the Gordon family for her sake.

But he had an extremely strong desire for control and didn't want her to do anything against his wishes.

Over the years, she had always listened to him and had grown accustomed to listening to him...

Alana hurriedly rushed to the company, but she was still late.

Deputy Director Grace couldn't help criticizing her. "Lana, why are you late? We're going on a business trip today. Don't you know?"

"A business trip?"

Alana froze. "When was it announced? Why didn't I know?"

Grace frowned. "Last night, in the group chat. Didn't you see it?"

Alana blinked.

What good employee was so dedicated that they stayed up late at night watching work group messages?

Besides, last night she had been on a video call with Stephan for a long time. They had fallen asleep without ending the call.

She had dreamed of something unpleasant that night, so she wasn't in the mood to look at her phone either.

After one thing led to another, she overlooked the group messages.

Alana picked up her phone. "I'll check it right away."

But unexpectedly, her phone was out of battery.

She was somewhat helpless. "Grace where are we going on the business trip? How many days will we be gone?"

Grace said unhappily, "Vinox, about five days. There's no time. Go back and pack your things right now. The plane is at ten this morning! Come directly to the airport when you're done."

Alana said "oh" and turned around to go back again.

She thought that Stephan hadn't even returned from his business trip yet, and now she had to go on a business trip too.

The life of a wage earner was truly bitter.

Alana went back and packed a few changes of clothes, along with some daily necessities. She left carrying a suitcase.

She brought a power bank with her and charged her phone on the way.

When she turned on her phone, she looked through the group messages, and sure enough, there was a message about the business trip.

There was also a list of several employees going on the business trip, and her name was among them.

Among them, Alana also noticed that Cole's name was on the list.

She frowned slightly, silently exited the group, and opened Stephan's message box.

[I'm going on a business trip today.]

Stephan, who was just about to board the plane, saw the message:

What the hell?!

Did it have to be such a coincidence?

He had just asked his assistant to change his flight to the morning flight so that he could rush back to accompany her.

His fingers moved, and he replied,

[Where are you going on a business trip? How many days will you be gone?]

Alana: [Vinox, about five days.]

Vinox?

Stephan raised his eyebrows. Wasn't that where he was currently on his business trip?

Since she was coming here for a five-day business trip, there was no need for him to hurry back anymore.

Vance was carrying large and small bags, his own luggage, as well as Stephan's luggage, and was as exhausted as a pug.

And suddenly told they had to stay back made him want to crash out.

But how could he crash out on his boss?

He had no choice but to crash out in his mind.

Home Chapter 268 Sharing a room

Chapter 268 Sharing a room

The group arrived at the hotel and checked into their rooms.

Alana and Carla were sharing a room.

Grace and Danielle, Cole had a room to himself.

Alana was very pleased with this arrangement. After receiving her room key, she and Carla carried their luggage and swiped the card to enter their room.

“Wow, the room is so big!”

As soon as they walked in, Carla set down her suitcase and flopped onto her single bed.

Alana set down her suitcase, walked to the window, and opened the curtains.

The view revealed the hotel’s rear mountain, a golden maple forest, the scenery was absolutely stunning.

She’d heard that this area was actually a resort district in Vinox.

Carla came over too, her eyes wide with wonder.

“Wow, this place is so beautiful!”

“The scenery in the mountains must be beautiful. Should we go up for a walk?”

Alana chuckled. “First you were talking about soaking in hot springs, then you want to go hiking. Why do you keep changing your mind so often?”

Carla blinked, “I just want to do it all!”

Alana smiled and couldn’t help but pull out her phone, snapping a photo of the scenery outside.

Then she sent it to Stephan.

[I’ve arrived at the hotel. This is the view from my room window, it’s beautiful, isn’t it]

Since she'd been with Stephan, she'd found herself increasingly drawn to sharing these little moments of beauty with him.

Perhaps she'd been influenced by him.

When he was away on business trips, he also loved taking photos to share with her. Because of him, her once-closed heart was gradually opening up.

At that moment, Stephan was on his way to Alana's hot spring resort. Seeing the photo she sent, he couldn't help but smile.

He replied, "Hmm, it's beautiful. Which room are you in at the hotel?"

Alana blinked. Did he really need to ask which room she was in?

He was asking way too many details, someone who didn't know better might think he was coming over to catch her in the act.

But he was on a business trip, and so was she, they were probably a million miles apart. [Room 2011.]

[Are you staying alone?]

[No way. The company's budget is tight; there's no way they'd give employees their own rooms.]

Stephan raised an eyebrow, looking a bit disappointed.

Looks like he couldn't just move into her room after all; he'd have to book a separate room.

I'll just stay in the room next to hers.

At night, he could have her sneak over to sleep with him.

Ugh, it sounds like they were having an affair.

Stephan looked up and glanced at Vance.

"Vance, book me a room at the Lisha hot Spring Hotel, one right next to Room 2011."

Vance, exhausted from being put through the wringer all day, replied, "Mr. Hudson, I'm driving."

"Fine, take your time driving. I'll book it myself."

Stephan looked up the hotel front desk's landline number and dialed it directly to book the room.

He got straight to the point. "Hello, please book Room 2012 for me."

"I'm sorry, sir, but Room 2012 has already been reserved."

"What about Room 2010?"

"That's already been booked as well."

He was at a loss for words; he couldn't even be close to his wife.

The front desk clerk politely asked, "Room 2009 is currently available. Sir, would you like me to book it for you?"

Stephan furrowed his brow and asked, "Who booked Room 2010?"

Stephan was a powerful figure so people could hardly ever say no to him.

Stephan frowned. A Cole?

Could it be that good-for-nothing Cole?

Could it be that Alana came on this business trip with Cole?

A man and a woman traveling together on a business trip?!

Probably not. Alana said she was staying in a double room, which means there were other female colleagues traveling with her.

Stephan paused for a moment. "Alright, book Room 2009."

"Sure, sir. We'll check you in right away..."

Alana didn't know Stephan was coming to this hot spring resort. She replied to him, [My colleagues and I are going to soak in the hot springs. I'll chat with you later.]

However, she had left in a hurry and hadn't brought her swimsuit. Going to the hot springs without a swimsuit wouldn't be very convenient.

Carla said, "Good thing I was smart enough to bring a few extra, I'll give you one!"

With that, she immediately opened her suitcase and pulled out several swimsuits in different colors.

There were pink, orange, blue, and purple ones.

Alana was stunned. “You... brought this many swimsuits on a business trip?”

Carla blinked, “I heard we were staying at a hot spring resort, and we’re here for five days, of course I had to pack a few extra sets.”

Alana was at a loss for words.

Carla asked cheerfully, “Come on, which one do you like? Pick one!”

Alana hesitated, “Will a swimsuit that fits you actually fit me?”

“They’re standard sizes, so they should fit.”

“Alright, then I’ll take one.”

Alana picked out a purple one.

Carla clicked her tongue. “Not bad! You picked the purple one right away. I hear that in men’s eyes, purple is the most alluring color!”

Alana shot Carla a playful glare. “Nonsense. I just thought this purple one looked a bit more modest.”

Carla grinned, “Hehe, never mind. Grab the swimsuit and head downstairs to meet up with Grace.”

The two of them tidied up a bit, then left the room carrying their bags.

The hotel had a dedicated hot spring area, which was said to be quite large.

After Alana and Carla met up with Grace and Danielle, they entered the hot spring area and were amazed by its sheer size.

The hot spring area was divided into pools of various sizes.

For example, there were mugwort baths, red wine baths, milk baths, petal baths, and so on.

There were both public and private pools.

The four of them first went to the changing room to put on their swimsuits.

After changing, they emerged one by one.

Just as Danielle emerged in her swimsuit, she happened to run into Carla. She gave Carla's figure a blunt once-over. "Tsk, Carla, your figure isn't anything to write home about. Those breasts...flat as a runway."

Carla was livid. Pointing at Danielle, she sneered, "Haha, your breasts are huge...so big they're sagging like slippers. They're absolutely hideous, yuck!"

Danielle glared at her, "How dare you?!"

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Chapter 269 Good for nothing

Chapter 269 Good for nothing

Just then, Alana walked out.

Both of them looked over at the same time, their eyes widening in shock.

"Holy crap!"

"Holy crap!"

The girl had a delicate, beautiful face, a slender, fair neck, and sexy, shapely collarbones. She was wearing a purple one-piece swimsuit with a triangle-strap ruffled skirt, her figure was shapely and well-proportioned, her waist slender and graceful, and her full breasts seemed ready to spill out.

Especially those two slender, fair legs—not only would men drool at the sight, but even women couldn't help but let their eyes light up.

Her milky-white skin, paired with the purple swimsuit, looked so alluring it was enough to set anyone's nerves on edge.

Alana noticed that they were all staring at her intently and couldn't help but feel self-conscious.

She covered her slightly exposed chest with both hands. “Um, what’s wrong? Does this outfit look bad on me?”

Carla snapped out of it and blurted out, “No! Oh my god, Lana, your figure is just too amazing. What man could resist seeing you dressed like this? I really wish I were a man so I could make a move on you!”

Alana couldn’t help but blush. “You’re exaggerating.”

Carla affirmed, “I’m not. Don’t underestimate your charm!”

Danielle pouted. Though she wasn’t convinced, she had to admit that Alana’s figure was so stunning it would make any woman jealous.

Not only was her skin fair and smooth, but her bust was ample without being excessive. Her waist was so slender a man could easily wrap one hand around it.

And then there were those hips, those legs...

Grace couldn’t help but sigh, “Alana’s figure is a gift from nature, such natural beauty is hard to resist. We ordinary people just can’t compare.”

Alana blushed. “Grace, don’t tease me.”

Grace shrugged. “Alright, let’s not waste time on this. Let’s go pick out a bath.”

Carla immediately piped up, “I want a petal bath!”

“I want a milk bath!”

Carla shot Danielle a glance. “I’m not planning on taking a bath with you!”

Danielle huffed, “Me neither!”

Grace looked at her group of restless subordinates and sighed in exasperation, “Then let’s split up and take separate baths.”

“What’s the fun in bathing separately? It’s more fun to have company and chat!”

Carla said, hooking her arm through Alana’s, “Lana, I’ll take a fragrant petal bath with you!”

Alana nodded. “Sure.”

The four of them went out together and happened to run into Cole, who was also coming out of the men's locker room.

Alana and the others were taken aback when they saw him.

Carla asked directly, "Manager Cole, didn't you say you weren't going to soak in the hot springs?"

Cole's eyes immediately fell on Alana among the four. Seeing the purple swimsuit she was wearing and her stunning figure, his eyes darkened.

He hadn't expected her to look so beautiful and sexy in a swimsuit...

He quickly averted his gaze and explained, "I said I wouldn't soak with you ladies, but I never said I wouldn't come soak on my own."

Carla nodded. "Alright then, Manager Cole, you can soak on your own. We girls will go soak together."

With that, the group prepared to leave.

Cole couldn't help but suggest, "After we're done with the hot springs, shall we all grab a meal together?"

Carla had no objections. "Sure, let's grab a meal together after we're done!"

The others had no objections either.

After all, that's standard procedure on a business trip.

Since everyone was on board, Alana naturally didn't want to be a killjoy and object.

Cole glanced briefly at Alana and continued, "Alright, let's all meet up at the restaurant in an hour for dinner."

The four nodded in agreement, and then Carla led Alana away.

Alana remained silent the entire time.

Cole couldn't help but keep his gaze fixed on Alana, unable to look away for a long time.

Stephan arrived at the hotel and immediately checked into Room 2009.

After putting his things away, he glanced at his phone.

He saw a message from Alana saying she was going to soak in the hot springs.

Stephan couldn't help but imagine the sensual scene of Alana wearing a sexy swimsuit, soaking in the hot spring pool.

Surrounded by mist, her fair skin and delicate figure took on alluring, seductive poses in the bath, constantly tempting him...

Stephan couldn't help but swallow hard.

He hadn't tried being in the hot springs with her yet...

He was starting to feel like giving it a try.

It should be quite thrilling.

Just then, Vance came over and knocked on the door.

"Mr. Hudson, this hotel has hot springs. Should we go soak together?"

Stephan replied casually, "If you want to soak, go ahead on your own. I'm going to find my girlfriend and soak with her."

Vance eyed him.

Alana and Carla sat down together in the petal-filled hot tub.

A layer of rose petals floated on the surface, filling the air with an alluring fragrance.

Carla sighed, "It smells so good, feels so comfortable, and the temperature is just right!"

Alana nodded; it really was wonderful.

She had been quite tired, but after soaking for a while, she felt much more refreshed.

After soaking for a while, Carla started to get restless; she felt that simply soaking in the hot spring wasn't quite enough.

"Lana, do you want to take a picture?"

Alana was surprised. "Huh? In the hot spring? Take a picture?"

Carla nodded. "Yeah, it's a rare chance to soak in a hot spring, how could we not take some photos to remember it for years to come?"

"Then you can pose, and I'll take them for you."

“No way! We’re all here together, let’s take a group photo!”

“Uh, well...”

Carla held up her phone, encased in a waterproof sleeve. “Don’t hesitate. I’ll take a picture of you first, and then you can take one of me!”

“Then we’ll edit them up and post them on our stories!”

Carla opened the camera app, aimed it at Alana, and couldn’t help but exclaim, “Lana, you’re so beautiful! You look just as gorgeous in the camera’s default shot! Don’t be so stiff...strike a pose!”

Alana felt shy in front of the camera. “I’m not very good at posing.”

“I’ll show you. Turn to the side, hold a bunch of roses in front of you, and pretend you’re about to blow on them. Make it a little more alluring...don’t be so stiff!”

For some reason, Alana actually struck the pose just as Carla had instructed.

Surrounded by mist, the young woman in a purple swimsuit had half her body submerged in the rose-petal-filled pool.

Her slender, fair hands cradled the roses as she leaned in, her delicate face close, her red lips slightly parted, her breath as fragrant as orchids.

Her moist eyelashes and naturally alluring gaze made her look like a seductive water nymph...exquisitely beautiful and utterly enchanting.

“Yes, yes, yes, just like that!” Carla snapped several shots in quick succession.

Alana set down the rose. “Is that okay? Should I take a picture of you?”

“No, no, no...take a few more! I love taking pictures of beautiful women!”

After fiddling around together for quite a while, they finally managed to take quite a few memorable photos.

Carla sent all the photos she’d taken of Alana to her.

“Check these out...every single one is a masterpiece. You’ve got top-tier looks and you are absolutely stunning. No editing needed at all!”

“You could post them directly to your story!”

Alana blushed. “Post them? No way, that’s too embarrassing.”

She rarely posted anything on her story to begin with, let alone photos like these.

“Oh my gosh, if I had your face and figure, I’d post every single day! I’d be so mesmerized by myself, and I’d mesmerize everyone else too!”

Alana shook her head. “Forget it, forget it.”

Carla batted her eyelashes. “Then send it to your boyfriend! See how he reacts! I bet he’d be so dazzled by your beauty he’d want to grab you and turn you into sauce!”

Alana couldn’t help but blush.

“Okay, this is getting ridiculous.”

Carla chuckled a couple of times and urged, “Lana, send it already! Such a beautiful photo...are you sure you don’t want to show it to your boyfriend and get him all excited?”

Alana bit her lip. She didn’t know why, but she suddenly remembered how her boyfriend had sent her plenty of photos of his abs recently to seduce her, leaving her completely distracted.

Perhaps because they were a world apart, a tiny bit of mischief crept into her heart.

She wondered how he’d react if she sent him these photos.

Whatever his reaction, as long as it didn’t cause her any trouble, it was fine.

Besides, sending him photos like this might make it look like she was deliberately trying to seduce him.

But... so what?

He wasn’t even by her side anyway; even if she teased him, there was nothing he could do about it.

So, at Carla’s urging, Alana picked out a few photos and sent them to Stephan.

Then she asked, in a perfectly innocent tone.

[Do you like the photos I just took?]

Little did she know that the photos she sent had inadvertently revealed her location...

When Stephan saw the photos Alana had sent, a surge of anger instantly welled up in his throat.

Damn it!

How could she be so seductive and alluring?!

What man could possibly resist that soul-stirring look of hers?

He just couldn't hold back anymore!

He wanted to rush over to her and take her completely!

He quickly replied, [Are you blatantly trying to seduce me?]

Alana couldn't help but blush. [No, I just sent it to you to see. Do you like it?].

It was more than just pretty!

So hot he wanted to pin her down and do it right now!

Stephan gritted his teeth, struggling to suppress the desire surging through his body.
[Nice photos. The angles are all pretty daring. Who took them?]

Alana: [My coworker.]

Stephan: [Male or female?]

Alana laughed.

[A woman.]

Stephan's lips curled into a smile. Thank goodness it was a woman, not that good-for-nothing guy.

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Chapter 270 Let go

Chapter 270 Let go

But then he had a second thought.

Stephan: [Is that Cole guy there with you?]

Alana's eyes widened, and she quickly said,

[No way! I'm only with one female colleague!]

Stephan's lips curled upward. Very good.

Now, it was his turn to go find her.

Alana had no idea that Stephan was already on his way to find her.

She put down her phone and glanced at Carla. "Carla, I'm done chatting for now. I'm going out for some fresh air."

Carla was busy editing photos. "Go ahead, but come back soon. We've all made plans to go out for dinner together later!"

"Okay." Alana climbed out of the petal-filled tub, grabbed a clean white bath towel, and wrapped it around herself to cover her strikingly curvaceous figure.

But just as she stepped out, she bumped into a rock-hard male body.

"Sorry, I..." Alana clutched her towel and looked up, and a familiar, handsome face instantly caught her eye.

Her eyes widened in disbelief.

"Ste..."

Stephan didn't give the girl a chance to speak; he reached out, grabbed her arm, and pulled her into a private bath next door.

Even as the man pinned her against the wall, Alana's mind was still in a daze.

It felt like a dream.

"What are you doing here?"

Wasn't he supposed to be on a business trip?

How did he get back so quickly?

Stephan's gaze roamed freely over Alana, even though she was wearing a white bathrobe, it couldn't shield her from his intensely passionate stare.

“Take a guess.”

Her head was spinning. “Could it be... that your business trip is also in Vinox?”

Apart from that explanation, she simply couldn’t think of any other reason why he would suddenly appear before her.

He curved his lips, his long fingers gently pressing against her chin. “You’re smart...you guessed right.”

Her almond-shaped eyes widened in surprise. Was it really that coincidental?

His business trip happened to be in the exact same place as hers...

No wonder he knew the weather in Vinox so well and even asked which hotel she was staying at.

So, he had actually planned... to come find her.

She couldn’t help but ask, “Aren’t you on a business trip? How did you find the time to come see me?”

Stephan took a step forward, pressing even closer to her, his gaze intense as he fixed it on the girl before him. “At a time like this, does that really matter, hmm?”

Only then did Alana realize how intimately close they were standing.

Her face flushed slightly, and she couldn’t help but push him gently away with her hand, her voice soft. “Stephan, don’t do this. Be mindful of where we are.”

Stephan chuckled softly. “There’s no one else here. What’s there to be mindful of?”

Alana swallowed.

She was at a loss for words.

She couldn’t help but remind him, “But we’re outside. Someone could walk in at any moment.”

Stephan curled his lips, unconcerned. “So what? I’m soaking in a hot spring with my girlfriend. Does anyone have a problem with that?”

Well...

That was true.

Stephan couldn't help but wrap his arm around the girl's slender waist, effortlessly pulling her into his embrace and holding her even closer.

He lowered his head slightly, his thin lips brushing against her soft, fair earlobe,

"Did you miss me while I was away on business?"

Alana felt a tingling heat radiating from her ear; she instinctively bit her lip, her voice growing even softer and weaker.

"I did..."

Stephan gently bit her earlobe, his voice low and hoarse. "How much?"

Alana blushed. "Just... just a lot..."

Stephan coaxed her gently, like a wicked big bad wolf tempting an innocent little white rabbit.

"Where exactly do you want it, hmm?"

Alana blushed even more.

Seriously, he starts acting up the moment we meet.

She glared at him with her almond-shaped eyes, her gaze moist and alluring. "Stephan, stop fooling around. Be serious."

He couldn't resist cupping her fair, rosy cheeks, holding her gaze with eyes that grew deep and dark. "Do you want my kiss? Or do you want me to cover your whole body with kisses and take you fiercely?"

Alana's ears turned so red they seemed ready to bleed.

She was too embarrassed to say it.

Stephan simply leaned down and captured her soft, delicate lips with a kiss.

It had been over a week since their last kiss, and he'd missed it so much that he immediately went into full-on conquest mode.

Alana was thinking the same thing, but she couldn't be as blunt as him.

With him taking the initiative, she couldn't help but respond passionately.

Her slender hands slowly slid up from his chest, wrapping around his long neck.

In the cramped, warm room, the two of them kissed each other passionately, oblivious to the world around them.

Passionate and self-forgetful, their embrace was tender and lingering.

In that moment, it felt as though the whole world belonged only to the two of them. Before she knew it, Alana felt a chill run over her body.

Her dazed mind snapped back into focus.

It turned out the man had suddenly reached out and ripped her bathrobe open.

He casually tossed the robe onto the floor.

Before she could regain her composure, the man stepped back slightly, his gaze roaming freely over her.

She was wearing a purple swimsuit, and her exquisite, curvaceous figure was fully exposed to his gaze.

Her full breasts, her slender waist that could barely be encircled by one hand, and those two long, straight legs.

Having just soaked in the hot spring, her skin was soft and rosy, still exuding a faint, delicate scent of rose petals.

She was like a walking siren, her scent intoxicating and her beauty irresistible.

The man stared at her intently, the heat in his eyes growing even more intense.

His gaze was as if he were looking at a plate of delicious pastries, ready to pounce on her at any moment and take a big bite.

Alana couldn't help but feel shy; she instinctively brought her hands to cover her chest, trying to block the man's overly bold gaze.

"Stephan, you..."

But the next second, her hands were seized by the man and raised high above her head.

Stephan's voice was low and hoarse. "Don't cover them. It's beautiful. Don't cover it up. Let me take my fill of the view!"

Her cheeks flushed a tempting shade of red.

“No, don’t look at me like that. It’s too embarrassing...”

Stephan asked quietly, “Why are you embarrassed? My girlfriend is dressed so beautifully and seductively...isn’t she just doing it on purpose to show off to me?”

“Besides, who was the one acting all flirty just now, sending me those kinds of photos to tempt me, hmm?”

Alana couldn’t help but turn her flushed face away; she was too embarrassed to answer his question.

If she’d known he was here, she never would have been so bold as to send him that kind of photo.

But it was too late now.

She never expected him to show up so quickly.

It caught her completely off guard.

Alana blinked her beautiful eyes and protested softly, “Stephan, could you let go of me first, please?”

Once he let her go, she’d find an opportunity to escape!

“I won’t let go. Not only won’t I let go, but I want to fuck you right here...”

The man leaned in close, his husky, seductive voice whispering directly into her ear.

It made her ears burn.

Alana’s almond-shaped eyes widened in shock, and she couldn’t help but squirm.
“Stephan, you can’t! I won’t let you do this!”

But the man clung to her tightly; her writhing only intensified the friction between their bodies.

Alana could feel his body growing hotter by the second.

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

Chapter 271 Soak together

Chapter 271 Soak together

Her situation was growing increasingly precarious.

Stephan bit her rosy cheek. “If you won’t let me do that, then surely we can just soak in the hot spring together?”

Alana’s cheek was kissed by the man, and she instinctively bit her lip. “No, we can’t! I’m leaving!”

Anyway, being alone with him would only make things more dangerous.

Especially in a place where someone could walk in at any moment.

Stephan chuckled, “You can soak with your coworkers, but you can’t soak with me? Alana, you’re playing favorites.”

“I don’t care. If others can have it, so can I. Today, I want you to soak with me until we’re both satisfied!”

Stephan didn’t hesitate to rip off his bathrobe and pick her up.

Alana let out a startled gasp and instinctively wrapped her arms around his neck. She watched helplessly as he carried her, step by step, into the warm bath.

The moment they entered the tub, she turned away from him, trying to escape.

Stephan curved his lips. Now that she was in his den, how could she possibly escape?!

Before Alana could climb out, Stephan forced her to the edge of the tub, braced his hands on either side of her, and kissed her deeply.

Alana kept trying to dodge him, but she couldn’t escape; the man succeeded effortlessly.

Half their bodies were submerged in the bath, and the water, which had been calm at first, gradually began to ripple and surge.

Vaguely, one could make out the figures entangled beneath the water.

Carla didn’t see Alana return, so she sent her a message, but she didn’t reply. “That’s strange. Didn’t she say she was just going out for some fresh air and would be back soon? Why hasn’t she come back up yet?”

Thinking that it was almost time for their dinner date, Carla went out to look for her.

“Alana?!”

“Alana?!”

“Where are you?”

“Lana, if you can hear me, please answer! We’re supposed to go out to eat together!!!”

Alana’s face flushed crimson; she was already lost in a daze of passion. But she still heard Carla’s voice, and her senses gradually returned.

She couldn’t help but nudge the man in front of her.

Her voice was soft and sweet, tinged with a faint, weary hoarseness.

It was utterly enchanting.

“Stephan, that’s enough... enough...My colleague is looking for me...”

Stephan wrapped his large hand around her slender waist, his thin lips pressed against the tender hollow of her neck, leaving his mark on her again and again.

“Let her look for you. Today, no matter who it is, no one is taking you away from me.”

Alana bit her lip, a mist of moisture gathering at the tips of her eyelashes.

Her hands pressed helplessly against his chest, yet she couldn’t stop him from doing as he pleased.

Her voice was pitiful, tinged with pleading.

“Stephan, can we go back? If we go back, I’ll let you do whatever you want...”

Stephan couldn’t help but chuckle softly as his slender fingers gently pinched the area just below her navel.

“You won’t be able to escape even if we go back. Just for spreading rumors to my mom that I wear skirts and dance ballet, don’t even think I’ll let you off the hook that easily!”

Alana gasped.

Wait, hasn’t it been several days since that happened?

And he’s actually planning to settle the score with her later?

How could he hold a grudge for so long?

Cole heard Carla's voice and lost all interest in soaking any longer. He quickly slipped on a bathrobe, tying the sash as he hurried out to meet her.

"Where's Alana?"

Carla shook her head. "I don't know. She was just with me a moment ago. She said she was going out for some fresh air, but it's been half an hour now and she hasn't shown up."

Cole frowned. "Have you called her?"

Carla replied, "I have. I sent her a message and called her, but she's not answering the phone or replying to my messages."

Cole clenched his fists, growing increasingly anxious inside.

Grace and Danielle heard the commotion and came out.

Grace speculated, "She hasn't gotten lost, has she?"

Danielle muttered under her breath, "Getting lost in a place this small? That's just plain stupid."

Hearing this, Cole shot Danielle a sharp, disapproving glance.

Danielle immediately shrank her neck, feeling guilty.

Cole ordered, "Since Lana is missing, let's split up and look for her. Call me when any of you find her, and we'll meet up at the designated spot later."

Carla and Grace had no objections. "Okay."

Cole turned to Danielle, "Danielle, do you understand?"

Danielle pouted. "Got it."

The group began to split up.

Little did they know that Alana was in the private bathhouse closest to them, being ruthlessly and wildly ravaged by a man.

Alana heard the voices outside and turned pale with fear.

She reached out and tapped the man's chest...not too hard, not too soft, just a gentle tickle.

“Stephan, can you hear that? They’re looking for me. You have to stop!”

His eyes darkened, his hoarse voice tinged with smoldering desire. “How can I possibly stop now?”

Alana said anxiously, “I don’t care! If you don’t stop, they’ll find me!”

His long, slender fingers squeezed her slender waist slightly harder, a wicked smile curving his lips. “So what if they find you...If they find me here with you... wouldn’t that be quite the thrill, hmm?”

Alana tensed.

No way!

He’s so bold...he doesn’t even care if someone catches us?!

She was frantic with worry and gently pushed against his rock-hard chest. “I...I’m not as shameless as you! Before anyone finds us, stop this right now!”

Stephan leaned down to kiss her, smiling reassuringly. “Don’t worry, this is a private bath. No one will come in.”

“I don’t believe you! Stop it right now!”

Stephan raised an eyebrow mischievously. “Want to scream again? Do you want to attract a crowd of onlookers?”

“Go ahead. The louder you scream, the more excited I get.”

Alana was so ashamed and furious she could do nothing but open her mouth and bite down on the man’s shoulder.

She was trying to get him to let her go.

Stephan’s expression instantly lit up with pleasure, his voice sexy and seductive. “Ooh, baby, that feels so good. Keep biting!”

Aaaah!

This pervert!

Cole came by the door of a private room and knocked.

He heard no response, and his eyes darkened.

He couldn't help but grab the doorknob. This time, without a moment's hesitation, he swiftly opened the door and pushed his way inside.

He could now clearly see the scene inside the hot spring room.

Alana was almost completely submerged in the hot spring, with only her head and neck visible, her eyes wide with shock.

The water in the pool was rippling quite strongly, constantly undulating, but a layer of flower petals floated on the surface, obscuring the view of what lay beneath.

When Alana saw Cole enter, she looked like a startled deer, her eyes wide with panic.

"Cole, what...what..."

Cole's voice was deep and low. "I'm sorry, I couldn't hear your reply. I was just searching for you."

Alana was frantic, afraid Cole would notice something was wrong. She couldn't help but urge him to leave. "I'm fine, just get out!"

"Are you alone in here?"

As he spoke, his gaze couldn't help but take in the hot spring room.

It was a very small room with almost no furnishings...nothing but the hot spring pool where Alana was lying.

As he watched the water rippling faintly and moving behind Alana...it looked like she was trying not to make a sound.

Cole felt an inexplicable sense of unease.

Seeing Cole's gaze sweeping the room, Alana grew increasingly nervous. She nodded eagerly. "Yes...I'm the only one here."

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Chapter 272 Her anxiety

Chapter 272 Her anxiety

“Cole, please leave, okay? I...ahh...feel very uncomfortable with you here.”

Cole looked at her again.

At that moment, she was in the steamy hot spring pool, her long, jet-black hair dripping wet, with a few strands clinging to her delicate face.

Her cheeks were rosy, like a delicate blossom, and she was breathtakingly beautiful.

Cole couldn't help but recall the moment she had appeared before him in that purple swimsuit...

It had been nothing more than a fleeting glimpse, yet it lingered in his mind, tugging at his heart.

He never imagined she could be this beautiful. But the thought that this beauty no longer belonged to him, but to another man...

Cole clenched his fists. “Lana...”

Alana seemed to guess what Cole was about to say and couldn't help but interrupt, “Cole, please, just leave, okay? If you don't leave now, I'll call for help!”

Cole saw the anxiety and fear in her eyes and took a deep breath. “Alright, I'll go.”

After a moment's pause, he couldn't help but remind her, “Everyone's looking for you so we can all go out to eat together. Get ready...don't keep them waiting too long.”

Alana nodded eagerly. “Okay, okay. You go ahead and leave. I'll get ready and meet up with everyone right away.”

Cole could tell she was trying to get rid of him as quickly as possible. His gaze swept over the pool once more; he pursed his thin lips but said nothing, simply turning to leave.

As he left, he closed the door behind him.

Seeing that Cole had truly left, Alana finally let out a sigh of relief.

But suddenly, Stephan had stopped moving.

There was no sign of moving in the pool.

She couldn't help but feel anxious again. "Stephan?! Stephan, Cole has left. You can come out now!"

"Stephan, come out now!" Alana called out several times in a low voice, but Stephan still didn't emerge from the hot spring pool.

She instantly felt a wave of fear wash over her.

Could it be that...he'd already...

The more she thought about it, the more terrified she became.

Alana swam around, but sensing no sign of him, she couldn't help but burst into tears. "Stephan, don't scare me like that!"

"Waaah, what am I supposed to do if you're dead?"

Just as she was panicking and feeling helpless, the man's jet-black head suddenly popped up out of the water.

Seeing his handsome face emerge from the water, Alana was both startled and overjoyed.

She couldn't help but swim up to him and hug him tightly.

"Stephan, you scared me to death! For a moment there, I thought you had drowned."

Stephan propped himself up, cupping her face with one hand.

Seeing her reddened, tear-filled eyes, his gaze darkened.

"Are you crying? Were you that worried about me?"

Alana clenched her fists and gave his chest a hard punch. "Stephan, I won't let you play jokes like that again!"

He was such a big man, yet he suddenly vanished into the water, and she couldn't find him...she was truly terrified.

She was afraid she wouldn't find him, afraid of losing him.

Seeing the girl's reddened eyes, Stephan's heart stirred. He couldn't help but lean down to kiss the wet corner of her eye, gently soothing her.

"Okay, I won't joke around anymore." Alana sniffled pitifully and continued, "And you're not allowed to act so recklessly like that again!"

He fixed his dark eyes on her, feigning ignorance.

“Which part exactly?”

Alana couldn’t help but glare at him, her almond-shaped eyes brimming with annoyance.

“You know exactly what I mean!”

“Anyway, if you ever dare to mess with me like that again, I’m punishing you with a month of abstinence!”

Stephan frowned. “A month of abstinence? That’s practically a death sentence!”

“I don’t care!”

It was because she’d been too easygoing that this jerk had gotten so out of hand.

Just now, if she hadn’t quickly pushed his head into the hot spring, Cole would have caught them.

Just thinking about that scene...it was both dangerous and thrilling.

She was scared out of her wits.

Stephan pinched her pretty little cheek with a smirk. “Well, if that’s the case, I’ll just have to force my love on you.”

Alana blushed and glared at him in disbelief. “You...you...you...”

That’s just too much!

“I’m going out. I’m not talking to you anymore!”

Stephan chuckled softly. Seeing his little white rabbit about to lose her temper, he knew when to stop and didn’t tease her any further. “Sweetheart, my dear wife, I was just joking. Don’t ignore me, okay?”

Alana said, her face flushing with embarrassment, “Anyway, just stay away from me for now. I don’t want anyone to find out you’re here.”

He smiled and retorted, “What’s the matter? Afraid Cole will find out you’re sneaking around here with me, up to no good?”

She glared at him again. How dare he say that?

Was what they were doing something they could show anyone?

Stephan chuckled, "Alright, come to my room tonight and sleep with me. I'll play along with you for a bit."

Alana was stunned. "Come over again tonight?"

Stephan smiled and asked, "Do you want to? If you want it, I can give it to you."

She immediately shook her head. "No, no!"

He was too much; she couldn't handle it.

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "Then come to my room. I'll hold you while we sleep."

She grimaced.

Just sleeping?

"I share a room with another colleague. If I go to your room, she'll definitely find out."

Stephan played the stubborn, deadpan card. "I don't care. I have to hold you while I sleep tonight, or I won't be able to fall asleep. If you don't come sleep with me, I'll sneak into your room and hold you while you sleep."

She really didn't know what to do with him.

She relented helplessly, "Fine, fine, I'll figure something out. I'm going out first. You can't leave until I'm gone, got it? Otherwise, you'll be sleeping alone tonight!"

Stephan laughed.

Alana's legs felt incredibly weak.

She silently cursed the man in her mind.

Only then did she slowly emerge from the hot spring, pick up the bathrobe from the floor, and quickly wrap it around herself to cover the suggestive marks all over her body.

She tied the robe in a hasty knot, glanced back at the man, and silently parted her rosy lips.

"Remember what I just said, or you'll be in for it!"

Stephan chuckled, neither confirming nor denying her warning.

Only then did Alana find the courage to walk to the door and open it.

But to her surprise, the moment she opened the door, she saw Cole still standing outside...

The moment she saw Cole still standing outside the door, Alana's heart nearly stopped from the shock.

Cole noticed the fleeting panic on Alana's face and instinctively looked inside the door.

Alana reacted even faster, darting out and slamming the door shut.

Although she might have seemed like a guilty party, with Stephan still inside, she couldn't worry about that anymore.

Alana closed the door just in time; even if Cole wanted to keep watching, he couldn't see anything now.

Alana stood in the doorway, looking at Cole nervously. "Cole, why are you still here?"

He couldn't possibly have actually seen or heard anything, could he?

Cole stared at the tightly closed door. "I wasn't entirely at ease leaving you alone, so I stayed to wait for you to come out so we could leave together."

Alana couldn't help but say, "I'm out now. Shall we go?"

Cole lowered his gaze and glanced at her.

Although she had been trying to stay calm, the fleeting panic in her eyes betrayed her anxiety.

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Chapter 273 Kiss you to death

Chapter 273 Kiss you to death

Cole recalled the ripples in the water just now, and... the bathrobe carelessly tossed on the floor...

His gaze swept over Alana's unusually swollen lips, and his fist clenched unconsciously.

He wasn't a three-year-old child, nor was he some inexperienced man; naturally, he understood exactly what those marks meant.

For a moment, he wanted to push her aside, storm into the hot spring room, and drag that man out.

But...He had no right to do so now.

Even if he did storm in, it wouldn't do any good.

It would only make him look even more like a clown.

Cole took a deep breath and suppressed his surging emotions.

"Alright, let's go."

At a French restaurant, Alana, Cole, and the others sat at a square table.

Carla sat next to Alana. "Yuan Yuan, where did you go just now? We've been looking for you for ages and couldn't find you."

Alana cleared her throat nervously. "Sorry, I went somewhere else for a bit, and then I accidentally fell asleep, so..."

Carla realized, "So you fell asleep. No wonder you didn't answer my calls or reply to my messages."

Alana lowered her head, looking embarrassed. "Uh-huh, I'm sorry. I caused you all trouble just now."

Danielle snapped, "It was more than just trouble! If we hadn't found you, we almost turned the whole hotel upside down. Especially Manager Cole, he was about to call the police just now!"

Hearing this, Alana couldn't help but glance at Cole.

Cole met her gaze; the eyes behind his glasses were dark and intense.

Alana instinctively looked away, unable to hold his gaze any longer.

She ate the meal with her mind elsewhere.

After the meal, the group gathered again to discuss tomorrow's work schedule.

The purpose of this business trip was to inspect the branch office in Vinox, assess the progress of product promotion, research competing products, and understand customer needs, among other tasks, over the course of five days.

After everyone confirmed their respective responsibilities, they went back to their hotel rooms to rest.

Grace gave a final reminder: "Remember, we're meeting at 8:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. We'll have breakfast and then head out to the branch office together."

Everyone replied in unison, "Got it!"

Alana and Carla returned to their room, freshened up briefly, and then each lay down on their single beds, pulling the blankets over themselves.

Carla, full of energy, chattered on in bed about her experience at the hot springs and mentioned that they would go again tomorrow night.

Or climb the mountain behind the hotel to enjoy the scenery, and so on.

Alana responded half-heartedly, her mind already wandering elsewhere.

Suddenly, her phone vibrated, signaling a new message.

Alana picked up her phone and glanced at it. As expected, it was from Stephan.

[My room number is 2009. When are you coming over?]

Alana froze. [Your room is two doors down from mine?]

Stephan: [Yeah, on purpose. So it's easier for you to come over and sleep with me.]

Alana was speechless.

This man was too calculating?

When she didn't reply, Stephan asked again;

[When are you coming over? I'm already lying in bed.]

He sent over a photo of his abs.

The man lay on the bed, his long, slender fingers lifting the hem of his pajamas to reveal the well-defined eight-pack beneath.

On those sexy, alluring abs, there were even a few faint, suggestive scratch marks left by her.

The whole thing was so provocative and sensual.

A clear-cut attempt at seduction.

Alana couldn't help but blush. Biting her lip, she quickly replied, "Wait a minute, my coworker isn't asleep yet."

She planned to wait until Carla fell asleep before sneaking out.

But she hadn't counted on Carla being such a chatterbox at night, once she lay down on the bed, she kept rambling on about all sorts of things.

Stephan: [Hurry up. I'm waiting for you!]

How could something like this be rushed?

Carla asked Alana if she wanted to go hiking together tomorrow, but when she didn't get a response, she couldn't help but call out, "Lana?"

"Lana, are you asleep?"

The lights in the room were already off. It was pitch black...so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face and it was impossible to tell whether the other person was asleep or not.

Alana closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep.

She thought to herself that if she just pretended to be asleep, Carla would have no one to chat with and would naturally fall asleep too.

Carla sighed, "Ah, such a lovely night, and yet you're already asleep. What a shame."

"But I'm not sleepy yet. What should I do? I don't feel like sleeping."

Alana pouted.

Please, just get sleepy already!

After who knows how long, she finally heard Carla snoring and grinding her teeth.

After all that fuss, she finally fell asleep.

If Carla didn't fall asleep soon, Stephan, with his short temper would be breaking down the door any minute.

Alana slowly climbed out of bed, put on her shoes in the dark, and then tiptoed toward the door.

She held her phone in her hand, using the faint light from the screen to guide her way.

She didn't dare turn on the flashlight, it was too bright, and she was afraid it would wake Carla.

She moved forward in small, laborious steps.

Suddenly, Carla let out a shriek.

"Ouch, don't walk there!"

Alana shuddered in fright; her heart nearly leapt out of her chest. Had Carla woken up?

And discovered she was sneaking out?

Before she could turn around to take a closer look, she heard Carla's shrill voice again.

"Handsome guy, don't go! Let me give you a kiss!"

"Let me feel your abs!"

"Hehe, I've got you now...see if you can get away!"

"I'm going to kiss you to death, mwah mwah mwah..."

Alana blinked...what the...

Turns out she was just talking in her sleep...the kind of dream Carla was having was very concerning.

Alana let out a sigh of relief and finally opened the door with confidence, slipping out.

The moment she stepped out and quietly closed the door, the door next door clicked open.

Alana looked up and happened to lock eyes with Cole as he stepped out of his room.

She felt a bit flustered. She hadn't expected Cole to be living right next door.

And now, of all times, she'd run into him.

"Um, it's so late...aren't you asleep yet?"

Cold stared at her and asked in return, "What about you? It's so late, aren't you asleep either?"

"Yeah, I'm not sleepy. I just came out for a walk."

"Me too."

She felt a little awkward. "Um, maybe we should just walk on our own."

Cole spoke up, "Want to walk together?"

Alana instinctively refused, "No, thanks. I'll just walk by myself."

His eyes darkened. "Lana, do you really have to reject me that much? Even if you don't have feelings for me anymore, can't we just chat like ordinary friends?"

Alana shook her head. "It's not that. I just feel that since I have a boyfriend, I should keep my distance from other men."

Cole couldn't help but frown. "You're keeping your distance from other men, but what about him? Would he keep his distance from other women for your sake?"

Alana was silent for a moment. "The most important thing in a relationship is mutual loyalty. Keeping your distance from the opposite sex is just basic. I'll be loyal to him, and at the same time, I'll trust that he'll be loyal to me."

Cole thought she was too naive. Even he couldn't guarantee a lifetime of loyalty to a single woman...let alone any other man.

And definitely not a man like Stephan Hudson!

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Chapter 274 Be faithful

Chapter 274 Be faithful

“Alana, Stephan isn’t just anyone. He’s the heir to the Hudson family, a man of noble standing, surrounded by a bevy of women and countless temptations. How could he possibly be faithful to you?”

Alana frowned. “Cole, just because you can’t do something doesn’t mean no other man can. I trust Stephan.”

For a moment, Cole wanted to pry open her skull to see what her brain was made of, how could she be this foolish?

“Alana, he might not be worth your trust.”

Alana pressed her lips together. “I know very well whether he’s worth my trust or not.”

Stephan furrowed his brow. “What exactly do you know? If you really knew, you wouldn’t still be with him. Stephan is far too far above your station; you two aren’t a match at all.”

Alana found it somewhat amusing. Darla had said she and Stephan weren’t a good match, and now Cole was saying it again.

Why did they both have to keep reminding her, over and over again, that she and Stephan weren’t a good match?

But was whether she and Stephan were a good match something they could decide with a few words?

“You say I’m not a good match for him, but who am I a good match for then? You? By your own logic and actions, how are you any different from what you think Stephan would do to me?”

“I...” Cole was at a loss for words and couldn’t come up with a rebuttal.

That was true.

From the start, he’d known the gap between him and Alana was too wide, and he’d assumed his parents wouldn’t approve, so he’d planned to be with her just for fun.

And that was exactly what he did. Always leaving her by the side to be with other women.

It was until she left him that he realized just how important she was to him. At the very least, during the time she was gone from his life, he wasn’t happy.

Every day, he wondered: Was it that easy for her to cut him off?

Didn't she love him anymore?

What did he really mean to her?

After all, she had seemed so fond of him before, wanting to be with him every single moment.

But then she cut him off completely; he didn't even have a chance to contact her.

Alana paused for a moment before continuing, "Cole, I don't want to say any more than that. I'm leaving now. You do as you please."

Seeing Alana about to leave, Cole couldn't help but reach out and grab her wrist.

"Lana, don't go..."

She frowned at him. "Cole."

His Adam's apple bobbed as he looked at her with intense, heartfelt sincerity. "Lana, I really don't want to let you go. It wasn't until I lost you that I realized how important you are to me. I'm not as magnanimous as I thought I was. Every time I see you with another man, I get jealous, I care deeply, and I even go crazy."

"Just thinking about you laughing in another man's arms makes my heart ache so much I can barely breathe!"

"I suffer every single day. Do you understand that?"

Alana shook her head. "Cole, I don't understand, and I don't want to. I'm begging you, spare me, and spare yourself, okay? Find a woman who's right for you, someone of your social standing, someone who's your equal, and someone who loves you. Okay? Don't keep wasting your time on me."

Cole's breath caught. "But I want that woman to be you. No one but you."

Alana still shook her head. "Cole, why are you still doing this? Don't think that hearing these words from you will move me. In fact, I'm not moved at all. All I feel is a heavy burden. Your feelings only make me feel trapped and suffocated."

"I don't like you acting this way. I'd rather you were the way you used to be...the person who didn't give me any attention."

Cole's eyes darkened with pain as he asked, unwilling to accept it, "Lana, if I went back to the way I used to be, would you still fall for me?"

Could it be that she had fallen for the Cole who didn't care about her?

Alana felt helpless. “Cole, why don’t you understand? Things between us can’t go back to the way they were. Don’t hold on to that. If I don’t like you, I don’t like you. No matter how you change now, my feelings for you won’t change at all.”

Cole asked bitterly, “Is there really no possibility at all?”

She nodded earnestly. “Really. Let me go, and let yourself go too.”

“Holding on to this only inconveniences both of us.”

Cole instinctively tightened his grip on her wrist.

Alana looked at him, her expression unchanging, as if not a single ripple of emotion stirred within her.

Cole’s grip tightened and loosened, loosened and tightened.

He wrestled with himself internally, unable to find an answer.

Alana remained still. She sincerely hoped Cole would truly come to terms with the fact that their relationship was impossible, and then let go of her hand on his own. Just as the two stood locked in a standoff.

There was a click.

The door to Room 2009 next door swung open.

A tall, slender figure slowly emerged, appearing as if out of thin air, gradually revealing its form.

Alana and Cole instinctively looked over.

Her eyelid twitched violently.

Cole, however, couldn’t help but furrow his brow. “Stephan?”

Stephan wore a black deep-V nightgown, walking at a leisurely pace, his handsome face devoid of any expression.

His gaze swept over Cole’s hand clasping Alana’s, and the corners of his mouth twitched slightly, his eyes icy cold.

“Cole, the homewrecker, holding my girlfriend’s hand right in front of me...that’s not right, is it?”

Alana was startled by the dangerous glare Stephan directed at her and instinctively pulled her hand away from Cole's grasp.

But Cole's grip was too tight; she couldn't break free at once.

Seeing this, Stephan gave a cold smile, clenched his fist, and strode forward, launching a fierce punch straight at Cole's face.

Seeing this, Cole immediately let go of Alana's hand, took a few steps back, and dodged Stephan's punch.

Stephan seized the opportunity to grab Alana's hand, pulling her into his embrace.

His large hand clasped her waist, shielding her firmly.

He raised his gaze to Cole, a mocking smirk playing at the corners of his mouth.

"Cole, you dare to steal my woman? Let's see if you're even worthy."

Cole saw the defiance in Stephan's eyes, and his anger flared instantly.

How dare he?

How dare Stephan, of all men, so effortlessly steal Alana's heart?

Where, exactly, had he gone wrong?

Perhaps it was a deep sense of resentment.

He swung his fist and charged at Stephan without hesitation.

Stephan's eyes darkened; in an instant, he raised his hand and caught Cole's fist barehanded.

Cole's eyes turned crimson as he strained with all his might.

"Aaaah!"

"Stephan, Alana is mine...I haven't lost to you!"

But to his surprise, his all-out strike failed to budge Stephan even an inch; instead, Stephan clamped down on his fist with an iron grip.

Immediately after, Stephan swept his leg upward, delivering a vicious kick to Cole's knee.

The movement was clean and precise, yet brutal and ruthless.

Cole let out a pained groan as his knees buckled, and he instantly collapsed to the ground.

Without hesitation, Stephan shook off Cole's grip and delivered another kick to his lower abdomen.

The powerful impact sent Cole flying through the air; he tumbled several times before crashing to the ground.

Stephan had been far too brutal.

Cole felt darkness wash over his vision; his stomach cramped in agony. He opened his mouth and let out a wail as he spat out a mouthful of blood.

Stephan expression remained cold as he moved to strike Cole's again.

When Alana saw Cole coughing up blood, her heart skipped a beat. She quickly grabbed Stephan's hand, shaking her head to stop him.

"Enough! Stop hitting him. Let's go."

If this continued, someone might end up dead.

Stephan's knuckles twitched, and his icy gaze fixed on Cole. "Cole, for my girlfriend's sake, I'll let you off this time. But this is a one-time exception. If you ever bother my woman again, next time, I'll send you straight to meet the King of Hell."

Speaking in a cold tone, he grabbed Alana's shoulders and pulled her into his room.

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Chapter 275 Stringing me along

Chapter 275 Stringing me along

With a loud thud, the door slammed shut.

Cole watched as Alana was taken away by Stephan, disappearing from his sight, and his eyes instantly welled up with tears.

The pain in his heart was a hundred times more intense than the physical pain. Hah, he had lost after all...

And in such a humiliating way...

Stephan led Alana into the room and pinned her down on the bed, holding her tightly.

Feeling the pressure radiating from the man, Alana felt a pang of guilt.

She spoke up, "Stephan, let me explain."

Stephan pinched her cheek between his thumb and forefinger, leaving a dent in her skin, causing her rosy lips to pout.

"Explain what? Explain why I've been waiting for you here like a stone statue, while you've been out there getting all cozy with another man?"

Alana immediately shook her head. "No. I waited until my colleague fell asleep, then came out to find you right away. But I didn't expect to run into Cole...he stopped me."

Stephan snorted with a laugh. "And then? You just let him hold your hand without putting up a fight? And when I tried to beat him to death, you even stepped in to stop me."

Alana shook her head. "It wasn't like that."

Stephan asked, "Then what happened?"

"I..." Alana hesitated, wanting to explain but not knowing how. "Anyway, there's nothing going on between me and Cole. I just didn't want you to become a murderer."

Stephan laughed bitterly. "Alana, are you trying to drive me crazy with that explanation?"

Alana was at a loss. "Then how do you want me to explain it? There's nothing between us to begin with...even if I tried to explain, it wouldn't make any sense!"

Stephan clenched his teeth and, without hesitation, silenced her tongue-tied lips with a kiss.

These lips were so soft, so tender, and so alluring...yet why can't they utter a single decent word?

Just a bunch of nonsense.

Alana nearly suffocated from the man's kiss.

Stephan bit her lip. “Alana, I really want to kiss you to death!”

Alana caught her breath and looked at him with a shrug. “Then go ahead and kiss me to death! As long as it makes you feel better.”

Stephan gripped her chin. “Rather than kissing you to death, I’d much rather fuck you to death!”

Alana was stunned beyond words.

Stephan chuckled darkly, his large hands landing on her body as he tore off her dress without hesitation.

“Tonight, don’t even think I’m going to let you off the hook. Even if you beg for mercy, I won’t show you any mercy!” With that, he yanked open a drawer, pulled out a dozen or so packets of condoms in one go, and tossed them onto the bed.

Seeing this, Alana’s eyes widened in shock.

Thinking of the man’s strength and stamina, she instinctively took a step back.

But it was already too late.

That night was wild.

The room was thick with a sensual atmosphere, and the sound of their heavy breathing never ceased.

The entire night passed without a moment’s pause.

Alana’s back was about to snap.

An angry man was simply brutal beyond belief.

Her voice was laced with tears, sounding broken and pitiful.

“Stephan, I was wrong. Please, spare me...”

He bit her ear, deliberately tormenting her. “Where did you go wrong?”

Alana was dazed and barely conscious.

“I...I don’t know. I just know I was wrong...”

Stephan was once again driven to laughter by her, “Lana, I can tell you’re just stringing me along!”

He picked her up and pinned her against the wall.

His long fingers gripped her chin, lifting her flushed cheeks to face him. His thin lips parted slightly. "Cole stays in Room 2010. I'm in 2009. The two rooms are separated by just a single wall."

"Guess what...with all the noise we're making in here, do you think he might hear us?"

Alana's back pressed against the cold wall, and she shuddered.

Her senses began to return.

Upon hearing the man's utterly malicious words, her eyes widened in shock.

"Stephan, you..."

Stephan curled the corners of his lips. "What about me? Am I a bad person? A jerk? A pervert?"

Alana blinked.

Stephan's voice was low and hoarse. "Now, this pervert is going to tease you mercilessly!"

Alana's breath caught. "No, Stephan, don't go too far!"

"I'll go too far...and I'll go even further!"

Stephan pressed his lips against hers without hesitation.

Alana hadn't expected him to be this wild; her eyes reddened involuntarily, and tears welled up.

Stephan kept kissing her, moving from her lips to the tip of her nose, then down to the space between her eyebrows, her forehead, and the corners of her eyes...

He tasted the bitter flavor of her tears and paused.

He slowly lifted his head and saw Alana's reddened eyes, brimming with tears, and her pitiable, heartbroken expression.

His heart clenched painfully.

No matter how angry he was, seeing Alana looking so pitiful and wronged, that anger should have vanished without a trace.

Stephan cupped Alana's face, pressed his forehead against hers, and breathed deeply.

He gazed into her tear-filled eyes, his heart heavy with regret.

“Alana, I’m sorry...I admit it...I was jealous. I saw you and Cole getting all touchy-feely, and it drove me crazy with jealousy!”

“On the surface, I pretended not to care about your relationship with Cole, and I tried to convince myself not to care. But whenever I see you with him, I just can’t help it...I get mad. I get so consumed by jealousy...”

Alana’s eyelashes fluttered. “But you said before that you didn’t mind...”

Stephan said softly, “That was a lie. There’s no way I wouldn’t care. The more I care about you, the more it bothers me.”

Alana bit her lip. “But I really don’t have any connection with him at all. I don’t feel anything for him.”

“You two have known each other for so long. I feel cheated. I should have known you longer.”

Alana sighed. “It doesn’t matter. We weren’t even in the same class back then...he just helped me a few times.”

Stephan fixed her with his dark eyes and asked, “What did he do to help you?”

Alana thought back to what had happened and found it hard to bring up. “I... was being bullied, and he stepped in to help me.”

Stephan’s breath caught in his throat.

He never would have imagined it was for this reason.

Had she actually been bullied?

Although he had never experienced bullying himself, he knew how deeply it could scar a person.

Especially for a girl who wasn’t even an adult at the time.

Stephan felt a pang of regret, realizing he might have touched a raw nerve.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought that up.”

She shook her head. “It’s okay. It’s all in the past anyway. Besides, you’d never guess that the person who bullied me was Cole’s own sister.”

Stephan frowned. “His sister?”

Alana nodded. “Yes, you’ve met her before, the woman who was showing off in front of me when you brought me the brown sugar ginger tea last time I forgot to pick it up.”

Stephan’s eyes darkened. “So it was her.”

“I really regret not beating her right then and there.”

“Yes, the two of us should have beaten her to a pulp.”

Alana couldn’t help but chuckle.

Stephan asked quietly, “Sweetheart, tell me...how did she bully you?”

He was going to help her get back at that woman, tenfold, no, a hundredfold.

Alana thought for a moment, then shook her head. “Never mind. I really don’t want to bring up those old bullying incidents again.”

They weren’t exactly pleasant memories, and she didn’t want to relive them.

Stephan gently rubbed her delicate cheeks with concern. “Alright, then I won’t bring it up.”

But that didn’t mean he was going to let it go.

Alana wrapped her arms around his neck, gazed at his handsome face, and said earnestly,

“So, can we just let this go?”

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Chapter 276 Her own accord

Chapter 276 Her own accord

“Shall we both let it go?”

“Okay, I’ll do as you say.” Stephan leaned down to kiss her, gently, with a touch of tenderness.

Alana responded to him of her own accord.

As the saying goes, what happens in the bedroom stays in the bedroom.

After their passionate encounter, the young couple was back to being sweet and loving again.

After their passionate encounter, Alana was exhausted and fell into a deep sleep.

Stephan went through his usual post-coital cleanup routine before finally lying down on the bed, holding her close as he drifted off to sleep.

After being away on a business trip for over a week, he finally got a good night’s sleep. However, just before falling asleep, he recalled what Alana had told him about being bullied by Cole’s younger sister, and a dark, menacing glint flashed in his eyes.

He picked up his phone, called Vance, and lowered his voice.

“Look into Cole’s sister for me. While you’re at it, find a few people to teach her a lesson. Do it as soon as possible!”

Vance, rudely awakened from his dream of meeting the love of his life...frowned deeply.

Seriously, it was the middle of the night! Not only are you not sleeping, but you’re disturbing the peace too!!!

The next morning, Alana was woken up by a ringing phone.

Still half-asleep, she reached under her pillow for her phone and answered it instinctively.

“Hello, who is this?”

Carla shouted, “Alana, it’s me! It’s Carla! I got up early this morning and didn’t see you. Where on earth did you go?”

“Huh? Me?” The moment Alana heard that, the last trace of sleepiness vanished from her mind. Oh no!

Last night, she’d planned to spend the night at Stephan’s place and then slip back to her suite in the morning before Carla woke up.

But she'd stayed up too late last night and ended up falling asleep.

"Um, Carla, sorry about that. I'm an early riser, so I went out for a walk."

Carla realized, "Oh, I see. That really scared me...I thought you'd gone missing again. Since you're just out for a walk, hurry back. We agreed yesterday to meet at 8:30 this morning, we have to see a client in a little while!"

Alana nodded quickly. "Okay, I know. I'll be right back."

After hanging up, Alana realized she was still lying in Stephan's arms, held tightly by him.

She looked up and saw the man staring at her intently with his deep, dark eyes.

He looked like a little puppy that had just realized it was about to be abandoned.

Alana felt terribly embarrassed. "Um, did I wake you up?"

Stephan chuckled, "With all that noise, it would be strange if I hadn't woken up."

"Sorry, I have to go with the rest of the team to inspect the branch office this morning, so..."

Stephan pinched her cheek. "After staying up all night last night, do you really have the energy to go? Why don't you just take the day off and stay in bed with me instead?"

Alana blinked.

She didn't believe that the "rest" he was talking about actually meant rest.

He had incredible stamina; he could spend the entire weekend wrestling with her in bed. Rather than "resting" with him in bed, she'd rather go out for a walk and catch her breath.

Alana asked earnestly, "Aren't you supposed to be busy with a business trip?"

"It's over. I was planning to go back yesterday, but when I saw you were coming to Vinox on a five-day business trip, I changed my flight at the last minute."

Alana asked curiously, "When did you reschedule it for?"

"Five days from now."

She was shocked.

Wasn't that exactly when she was supposed to return?

Stephan looked at the girl in his arms, a smirk playing on his lips. “We’ll go back together then.”

Alana hesitated. “Um, so every night for these five days... you’re not going to... keep asking me to come over and sleep with you, are you?”

Stephan raised an eyebrow, a faint, ambiguous smile playing at the corners of his mouth. “My dear girlfriend, I’m staying five extra days for you, so you’ll come sleep with me, right?”

What a scheming man, always looking out for his own interests.

Alana cleared her throat. “My dear boyfriend, I think you’re a grown man...a twenty-eight-year-old, no less. You don’t need someone to sleep with you, and I’m sure you sleep just fine on your own.”

Stephan tapped her pert little nose with a slender, elegant finger. “I’ll ask you just once: are you coming over to sleep with me or not?”

Alana blinked, pretending not to fall for it. “Um, let’s not talk about this right now. I have to get up and go find Carla, or she’ll start calling to nag me again.”

She was just about to wriggle out of his embrace. But he was quicker, rolling over to pin her delicate body beneath him.

Alana realized that beneath the covers, they were both still completely naked, and now that they were pressed so closely together, she couldn’t help but blush.

She weakly pressed her hands against his chest, trying to stop him from getting any closer.

“Stephan, it’s early in the morning...what are you doing?”

Her wet, almond-shaped eyes widened as she looked at him with a mix of nervousness and wariness, as if guarding against him doing anything else naughty.

Stephan let his muscular frame press down on the girl, reveling in the soft, delicate beauty of her warm, supple body.

He stared down at the blushing, bashful girl beneath him, his gaze deep and intense, his hoarse voice carrying a threatening edge.

“Alana, if you don’t come sleep with me tonight, don’t even think about me letting you out.”

“You!”

Alana blushed even more deeply, trying to persuade him. “Stephan, if I sneak over to sleep with you every day, my colleagues will find out.”

Stephan chuckled derisively and retorted, “You’ve already spent one night with me, what’s four more nights?”

Alana was at a loss for words.

Or rather, she was completely at his mercy.

Since the hard approach didn’t work, the man switched to a softer one, acting like a big golden retriever, burying his handsome face in her chest and nuzzling against her.

“Be a good girl, my dear. Come sleep with me. I just can’t sleep comfortably without my sweet, soft girlfriend to hold me at night.”

Alana’s face flushed crimson.

He could rub all he wanted, but wasn’t the spot he was rubbing a bit too much?

But soon, the man wasn’t just rubbing his face against her anymore.

Instead...

He smirked wickedly. “If you don’t agree, I’ll just have to make you agree by force.”

Alana was instantly terrified, her heart racing with panic, truly afraid that the man might actually take matters into his own hands. “Fine, fine, I’ll agree. Is that good enough? You, you, you... get off me right now...”

Stephan’s scheme had succeeded. He lowered his head and gently kissed her rosy, tempting lips. “My dear wife, you’re such a good girl.”

Alana pouted and pushed against his solid chest again, but she couldn’t budge him, he was too heavy.

“Get off me already.”

Stephan knew when to stop and quickly rolled off her.

But he still couldn’t help feeling a bit unsatisfied.

After all, his girlfriend’s body was so soft and fragrant, he wanted to hold her like this forever.

Alana caught the man's leering gaze, her heart fluttering. She scrambled to her feet, grabbed the sheet to cover herself, picked up the nightgown lying on the floor, and hurried into the bathroom.

The girl was flustered the whole time, failing to fully conceal her beauty.

In Stephan's line of sight, her back was bare, its contours beautiful and delicate.

Below her slender waist, two plump, round buttocks jutted out slightly, their curves smooth and pert. As she ran, they trembled with each step, like two soft, fragrant, and delicious jellies.

There were even two large, excessively red fingerprints on them. Seeing this, Stephan's expression changed.

Instantly, he remembered how he had... last night.

He ground his back teeth. Damn it!

She's already brazenly teasing him first thing in the morning! It seemed last night's lesson hadn't been enough.

After changing into her nightgown and freshening up, Alana hurried back to the room she shared with Carla.

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Chapter 277 Completely unfazed

Chapter 277 Completely unfazed

She hadn't taken her room key with her when she left, so when she reached the door, she knocked.

"Carla, I'm back. Could you open the door for me?"

Carla's loud voice came from inside, "Okay, give me a few minutes, I'm at the bathroom."

Alana sighed.

Just then, there was a click, and the door to the next room opened.

She turned her head and happened to lock eyes with Cole.

Cole didn't look well; he had thick, dark circles under his eyes that even his glasses couldn't fully hide.

After getting kicked twice by Stephan last night and witnessing Alana being taken by the man and knowing she spent the night at Stephan's room, Cole had barely slept a wink all night.

Thinking back on what had happened last night, Alana felt incredibly awkward facing Cole now; she wished she could vanish right then and there.

She wished Carla would just open the door already!

Cole paused for a moment, then greeted Alana first, "Good morning."

Alana replied awkwardly, "Good morning."

"Mm." Cole let out.

The atmosphere remained tense.

Alana hesitated, then began, "Um, about what happened last night..."

After what had happened, she hoped Cole would come to his senses, it was no longer possible for them to be together.

But before she could finish, another door opened.

Grace and Danielle both walked out.

Seeing Alana standing there with Cole, they both froze for a moment.

Danielle asked sarcastically, "Lana, what are you doing standing outside Manager Cole's room this early in the morning?"

Could it be that she was secretly trying to seduce Manager Cole behind her back?

Alana spoke up, quickly, "I was just taking a stroll, alone."

Danielle didn't believe her for a second. "Taking a casual stroll in a nightgown? Who are you trying to fool?!"

Alana glanced down at her nightgown, a very modest one, not at all revealing or scandalous.

She retorted, “Is there a rule against taking a walk in a nightgown?”

Danielle snorted coldly, “No, but who knows where you’re going for your walk? You aren’t just strolling right into Manager Cole’s room, are you?”

Alana frowned, about to retort.

Cole suddenly spoke up, scolding her, “Danielle, will you just shut the fuck up?! Alana and I have nothing going on, we just happened to run into each other at the door!”

Upon hearing this, Danielle’s expression shifted, and she instantly fell silent.

Alana glanced at Cole in surprise, seemingly not expecting him to explain it himself.

Cole turned to her as well. “Lana, go back to your room and freshen up. We’ll meet in the lobby downstairs in a moment.”

Alana nodded. “Okay.”

No sooner had she nodded than the door behind her swung open.

Carla burst out, completely unfazed.

“Oh my, Lana, sorry to keep you waiting!”

“I ate way too much last night. My poop was so hard and long, I almost couldn’t get it out!”

No sooner had she finished speaking than she noticed the three people standing outside the door suddenly all turning to look at her.

Carla’s eyes dilated.

“Haha, you guys... you’re all here...”

Help! Could she please immigrate to Mars right now? She couldn’t face anyone anymore.

After changing her clothes, Alana quickly joined Cole and the others.

After breakfast, the group got into the car and headed to the branch office.

Meanwhile, Stephan was still lying in bed, trying to regain his strength, waiting for another round of action tonight.

A call from Vance interrupted his rest.

Stephan answered the call. “What is it?”

“President, I’ve finished investigating Cole’s sister, as you requested.”

“Her name is Camila. She’s been spoiled her whole life; her family indulged her every whim, which has given her an arrogant and domineering personality.”

“Back in school, she nearly ended up in trouble with the police for bullying her classmates, but her family managed to smooth things over, and she got off scot-free.”

Upon hearing this, Stephan’s expression instantly turned cold. “How exactly did she bully them?”

“Apparently, she hired a few thugs from outside the school to bully the classmates she didn’t like. As for the specifics of the bullying, I’m not entirely sure.”

“Her family used some influence to cover it up. I only managed to dig up a few scattered details by tapping into my dark web contacts.”

Stephan’s fist clenched unconsciously.

Hiring a few thugs from outside the school to bully classmates she didn’t like.

Was Alana one of those classmates?

At the thought of that possibility, he felt a surge of anger mixed with a heart-wrenching pain that left him breathless.

If it was Alana, he dared not imagine just how terrified and helpless she must have been at that moment.

How had those thugs bullied her back then?

How could a small, helpless girl like her possibly fight back?

She must have been utterly desperate.

No wonder she refused to tell him about it.

After all, who could calmly face the pain they’ve endured and expose those wounds to others again?

And this was just one incident that had come to light, how many more times had she suffered in private?

Stephan didn't even dare to think about it.

He even wished he could travel back to Alana's school days to protect her and keep her from suffering even the slightest harm.

His eyes darkened as he clenched his jaw and said, "Vance, make the arrangements. Don't let this Camila get away with it."

Vance looked surprised. "President, why...?"

"There's no 'why.' I just can't stand the sight of her."

"Understood."

Vance, too, couldn't stand people who engaged in school bullying.

Why should a person who bullied others be able to live her life just fine, day in and day out, as if nothing ever happened?

Meanwhile, those who were bullied were likely to be left with indelible scars for the rest of their lives because of those experiences.

It was just not fair!

Even if the CEO hadn't said anything, he would have taken matters into his own hands!

Far away, Camila had no idea that disaster was about to strike. She was out shopping and enjoying a spa treatment with her girlfriends.

Little did she know that danger was closing in on her...

After hanging up the phone, Stephan thought back to Alana's seemingly nonchalant demeanor when she mentioned being bullied.

His heart ached for her all the more, and he longed to appear before her immediately to give her a warm embrace.

To tell her that no matter what she had gone through, he would always stand by her and make life easier for her from now on.

But knowing she was still at work, he forced himself to hold back.

Still, Stephan took the initiative to send her a message, openly expressing his feelings.

[Sweetheart, I love you...every part of you.]

Alana was on her way to the branch office when she saw Stephan's message. His sudden confession made her cheeks flush involuntarily.

Seriously, why did he suddenly say that?

It was so cheesy and it made her feel so shy.

[Why are you saying this all of a sudden?]

Stephan: [I wanted to. Don't you like it?]

Alana blushed. Of course she liked it, who wouldn't like a boyfriend who frequently expresses his love for her like this?

Just as she was about to reply, Carla had somehow slipped up close and, upon seeing the message Stephan had sent, instinctively read it aloud.

"Sweetheart, I love you...everything about you."

"Wow, did your boyfriend really say that? He's so good at this!"

Upon hearing this, Cole couldn't help but glance at Alana.

He never would have expected those words to come from Stephan, that man who always seemed so cold and ruthless.

He'd assumed Stephan was the aloof type, someone who looked down on everything and everyone.

But he never imagined that, in private, Stephan would be so...

If he were to be honest with himself, he knew he wouldn't have been able to say something so bluntly.

But if he had given Alana attention back then and had been this expressive, would the outcome have been different?

Grace and Danielle couldn't help but turn their gaze toward Alana.

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Chapter 278 Showing off your love

Alana suddenly became the center of everyone's attention, and her delicate, fair complexion flushed even more deeply.

She spoke shyly, "Carla, don't say that so loudly."

Carla grinned, "Oh, it's fine! Everyone's here anyway...showing off your love isn't such a big deal!"

Alana was very embarrassed, and her face grew even redder.

Carla asked curiously, "By the way, does your boyfriend spoil you?"

Alana nodded, her face flushed. "Yeah, he really spoils me."

"How does he spoil you?"

Alana thought for a moment. "He buys me pretty dresses and nice jewelry. He cooks for me and does my laundry. He even handed over his bank card for me to manage. If I run into trouble, he helps me solve it. Basically, when I'm with him, he thinks of everything for me and takes care of everything, I don't have to worry about a thing."

Carla was both shocked and envious. "Wow, your boyfriend is absolutely amazing! He's literally the perfect boyfriend of my dreams!"

Carla never imagined a man like that existed in real life...he feels like a one-in-a-million find!

Cole clenched his fist, feeling equally shocked and bewildered inside.

He hadn't expected a man like Stephan Hudson, so aloof and powerful to go to such lengths for a woman.

If it were him, could he take better care of Alana than Stephan?

Cole felt he probably could now. He had learnt so much about taking care of a woman, things he didn't even try to learn before.

He could buy her clothes and jewelry.

He didn't know how to cook, but he could learn to cook for Alana.

As for doing laundry, he could handle that too.

If Stephan can do it, what can't he do?

Besides, he had an advantage over Stephan: he had met Alana earlier than Stephan, had once helped her, and had given her warmth at some point.

That was something Stephan could never match, no matter what.

He clearly had the upper hand over Stephan, and he had more time and more chances to express his feelings to Alana and keep her firmly in his grasp.

But... he was the one who failed to see the treasure he had before.

As a result, he lost her, and without even realizing it, he pushed her into Stephan's arms...

Even if it weren't Stephan, it could have been some other man...

Grace couldn't help but sigh, "Alana, these days, there aren't many men who are so considerate and know how to take care of their women. You should cherish him."

Alana nodded and smiled. "I know, I'll cherish him."

Cole's heart sank once more.

Danielle said bitterly, "Oh please! Alana's just lying. How could there be a man like that in this world! She must be making it up to trick us!"

Because she herself had never met one.

Carla snorted lightly. "Just because you haven't met one doesn't mean they don't exist in this world, they're just rare. It just so happens that our Lana is kind-hearted and beautiful, so she's met a man who's just as wonderful."

Danielle pouted, feeling resentful inside. Why did all the good men have to go to Alana?

It was so unfair!

Carla shot Danielle a glance before continuing, "Plus, Alana's boyfriend is really handsome...way better-looking than any TV heartthrob, and he's got such a masculine charm!"

"He's handsome, has a great body, and is so considerate...he's practically perfect!"

Danielle felt even more uneasy as she listened. "Carla, you say Alana's boyfriend is handsome, could he possibly be more handsome than our Manager Cole?"

Carla nodded immediately. “Absolutely! I’ve seen a photo of her boyfriend, he’s even more handsome than any man I’ve ever met before.”

No sooner had the words left her mouth than Carla sensed something was off, and she glanced sheepishly at Cole.

Oh no...praising another man as more handsome in front of the boss. Would she get the short end of the stick at work from now on?

That damn Danielle!

She must have deliberately set this trap just to make her fall into it!

Sure enough, upon hearing their conversation, Cole’s gaze grew even colder.

Seeing Carla at a loss, Danielle couldn’t help but smirk triumphantly. “In my book, no matter how handsome a man is, he can’t hold a candle to our Manager Cole!”

“Manager Cole is the most gorgeous man in the world!”

“And I also believe that Manager Cole is more considerate and caring. Being his girlfriend must make you the happiest woman in the world!”

Carla swallowed.

Cole, who had just been praised as the most handsome man in the world, wasn’t particularly pleased; his expression remained icy.

Come to think of it, he had been in a position of advantage...but he had lost all that because he never put her first.

On top of that, he couldn’t match Stephan in looks, martial prowess, or social standing.

So, what chance did he have of competing with Stephan for Alana?

Upon careful comparison, he realized he had already been utterly defeated.

Yet the thought of the woman he loved now belonging to another man was something his heart simply couldn’t accept, leaving him in constant torment day after day.

Danielle shot Alana a glance. “Lana, you’re always going on and on about how much your boyfriend spoils you and how wonderful he is, but who exactly is he?”

“It’s been so long, and you’ve never brought him out to meet us. It’s only fair you tell us his name, don’t you think? If you keep hiding him, we’ll start to think you’re just pulling our leg.”

Alana paused for a moment. "His last name is Hudson."

"Hudson."

Danielle was taken aback. Though some people bear that surname but there was one family that only comes to mind at the mention of the Hudson.

The "Hudson family" was the city's most prominent and wealthy clan.

Carla was equally surprised. "Lana, your boyfriend isn't by any chance a member of the prestigious Hudson, family, the country's most prominent and wealthy clan, is he?"

Alana hadn't answered yet.

Danielle couldn't help but laugh. "How stupid can you be, Carla? How can Alana possibly date someone from a wealthy family like the Hudson's? Does an ordinary person like her even have the clout to mingle with people from such a wealthy family?"

Alana blinked, rapidly.

Carla retorted, "What's wrong with being an ordinary person? Does being ordinary mean you can't meet a rich man? Haven't you read any of those 'domineering CEO' novels? Where the domineering CEO has a one-night stand with Cinderella, and then falls in love with her, at first sight?"

Alana glanced at Carla in surprise.

No way?

Carla had actually guessed correctly, she and Stephan had met through a one-night stand.

Come to think of it, the way she met, got to know, and fell in love with Stephan really was just like the descriptions in those novels...so dreamlike and unreal.

Danielle snorted dismissively. "Come on, that's a novel...fodder for ordinary people's daydreams, not reality! Can you stop daydreaming, please?"

Carla retorted, "Some novels forms from real life experiences! Who knows? Maybe it really is possible?"

After saying that, she glanced at Alana. "Right, Lana?"

Alana smiled, her lips pressed together.

Danielle continued. "But it certainly won't land on a loser like you!"

“I never said it would happen to me. How about it happens to Alana?”

Danielle scoffed. “That’s even less likely, if it doesn’t happen to me, it certainly won’t happen to her!

Carla was stunned. “Oh my god, it’s bad enough that you’re ugly, but you’re also living in a fantasy world! The world doesn’t revolve around you!”

Cole suddenly spoke up, “Even if you actually manage to date a rich person, it doesn’t mean you’ll end up getting married in the end. A sparrow is still just a sparrow; don’t expect it to turn into a phoenix one day.”

After saying that, he deliberately glanced at Alana.

He knew that right now, he was essentially cutting off his nose to spite his face.

But he had already lost his mind a little; if he wasn’t going to have it easy, Stephan certainly wouldn’t be able to fly off into the sunset with Alana so easily either.

Alana pressed her lips together, saying nothing, but suddenly felt a heavy weight in her heart.

Danielle and Carla fell silent as well.

Although they didn’t understand why Cole had interjected, they knew he was speaking the truth.

Not a single word was spoken among the group until they arrived at the branch office. Upon arrival, the branch manager came down personally to greet them.

As they stepped into the elevator, Cole suddenly leaned close to Alana and asked in a voice only she could hear.

“Is he really that good to you?”

Alana instinctively looked at him and asked softly, “Do you think I’d joke about something like that?”

Cole curled his lips. “I’d actually prefer it if you weren’t being serious, if you’d just said it to deliberately brag to me.”

That way, he’d still have a chance to take advantage of the situation.

Chapter 279 Get your hopes up

Chapter 279 Get your hopes up

Alana took a deep breath. “It’s true. Truer than gold. So please, don’t get your hopes up.”

Cole pressed his lips together tightly, his jaw set as he said, “I also hope you don’t get your hopes up too high about marrying Stephan. Everyone wants to marry into a wealthy family, but it’s not that easy to get in.”

Alana closed her eyes briefly, unwilling to respond.

Stepping out of the elevator, Alana and Cole were escorted into the reception room to have a cup of tea and relax.

They then proceeded to the conference room for a meeting that lasted over two hours, nearly three.

Alana took out the notebook she had prepared and began taking meeting notes.

The meeting was long and tedious, filled with a lot of pointless chatter.

She found herself dozing off...after all, she’d been kept up late the night before and had gotten up early, so she hadn’t had enough sleep.

Still, she pulled herself together and jotted down all the key points.

After the meeting, she took another tour of the branch office.

She made her way through nearly every department, from R&D to Product Development and even popped into the production line.

Finally, they had dinner together to wrap up the day’s schedule.

Back at the hotel, Alana immediately sent a message to Stephan:

[It’s over. Just got back to the hotel. I’ve been on my feet all day...I’m so exhausted.]

She didn’t usually vent to others, not because she didn’t like to, but because there was no one she could confide in.

But since she’d been with Stephan, she’d unconsciously started sharing all her little mood swings with him.

She knew this was a sign that she was growing increasingly dependent on and trusting of Stephan.

Stephan replied quickly: [Sweetheart, you've worked so hard. Come over to my place right away. I'll give you a nice massage.]

Alana felt a warm glow in her heart as she smiled and asked, "You know how to give massages?"

Stephan: [Yeah, a stick massage.]

Alana froze. A stick massage?

Was there such a thing?

Why hadn't she heard of it before?

But she didn't usually go to massage parlors, so she didn't know how many types of massages there were.

She didn't hesitate to ask, "What is a stick massage? Is it comfortable?"

Stephan couldn't help but laugh when he saw Alana's question.

If you asked him, this little white rabbit was truly innocent, like a blank sheet of paper.

[Hmm, it's very relaxing. Come over right now, and I'll explain to you exactly what a 'stick massage' is.]

So, while Carla was asleep, Alana actually snuck out to meet Stephan. She simply wanted a massage from a man to soothe her weary body.

But if she'd known what he meant by "stick massage," she definitely wouldn't have agreed to meet him so quickly.

As soon as she reached the door of Room 2009, she knocked.

The man opened the door and eagerly pulled her inside.

Alana felt herself grow light as he effortlessly lifted her by the waist and strode toward the bed in a few long strides.

He laid Alana down on the bed and immediately pressed himself down on top of her. Alana quickly pressed her hands against his chest to stop him from getting too intimate.

"Wait, weren't you supposed to give me a massage?"

“What are you trying to do?”

Stephan smiled. “Sweetheart, this is exactly what I’m doing...giving you a massage.”

“Huh?”

Alana looked puzzled. “How are you supposed to give me a massage while you’re pinning me down?”

“Well, that’s exactly how a stick massage is done.”

As he spoke, the man’s muscular frame pressed down on her and shifted forward slightly.

Alana’s eyes widened instantly.

Even if she were the slowest to catch on, she realized what he meant.

Ashamed, she clenched her fists and punched him hard.

“Stephan, are you messing with me?!”

She’d come running over all excited, only to fall right into the trap the big bad wolf had set for her.

How could she have been so stupid?

Stephan smiled gently. He’d successfully teased her; the way her cheeks puffed out in anger was truly adorable.

He took her fist in his hand and leaned down to kiss it. “I’m not messing with you. I’ll really give you a massage.”

Alana’s cheeks flushed a deep red, making her look incredibly alluring.

“Stephan, I don’t want that kind of massage!”

That rascal...he was taking advantage of the fact that she wasn’t an intellectual and just teasing her!

Stephan curved his lips. “Fine, I won’t give you the stick massage for now.”

Before she could react, the man deftly flipped her over.

Her skirt was lifted.

A chill ran down her legs.

Her slender legs were gripped by his large hands.

Alana sensed danger.

“Ahhhhh, no, please don’t! Didn’t you say you wouldn’t give the stick massage yet? Stephan, you lied to me!”

No sooner had the words left her mouth than she felt the man’s hands kneading her calves with just the right amount of pressure, not too hard, not too soft. It felt incredibly comfortable.

Stephan placed Alana’s legs on his own thighs and began massaging her calves carefully.

“Is this area a bit sore?”

Since she’d said she’d been walking all day, her calves must be quite sore.

Alana nodded immediately. “Yes, yes, yes...exactly where you’re massaging right now. Stephan, you actually know how to give a massage?”

And it feels so good, so relaxing.

Stephan explained, “I didn’t know how to do it before, but when I heard you’d been walking all day and were exhausted, I specifically looked up some videos and learned it just for you.”

Alana’s heart fluttered uncontrollably.

He actually... just because she said she was tired from walking all day, he went out of his way to find a video, learn how to give a massage, and then gave her a massage just for her?

He didn’t know how to do it before, but he was willing to learn for her.

He wasn’t like some men who only make empty promises and paint rosy pictures.

Instead, he’d take practical action and treat her well.

She was even willing to believe that when he said he would marry her, he really meant it, and wasn’t just deceiving her to be with her.

She couldn’t help but ask, “Stephan, why are you so kind to me?”

She even felt she didn’t deserve his kindness.

Stephan looked at the girl lying face-down on the bed.

She was lying with her back to him, so he couldn't see the expression on her face.

But he guessed she was doubting herself again.

The corners of his mouth turned up slightly, and his deep, magnetic voice was gentle.
“Because I love you. Because you're worth it.”

Alana's nose suddenly stung, and she felt like crying.

How did he know exactly what she needed?

It was always like this, he knew exactly how to soothe her emotions.

When she was at her most insecure, he reaffirmed her time and time again.

What was redemption?

Stephan was her salvation!

He was like a raging fire burning with unbridled passion, warming her cold, long buried heart.

She couldn't help but climb out of bed, turn around, kneel before him, wrap her arms around his neck, and press her lips firmly against his.

Stephan was taken completely by surprise by her sudden kiss.

But he quickly turned the tables, gripping the back of her head and deepening the kiss. Their lips and teeth intertwined, their breaths mingling.

When the kiss ended, Stephan cupped Alana's flushed cheeks, watching her pant softly in his arms.

“Why did you suddenly decide to kiss me?”

Alana slowly reached out, her slender fingers gently tracing the man's sensual, full lips.

Suppressing her shyness, she pressed her lips against his with just the right amount of pressure. “I... like your mouth. I wanted to kiss you.”

Stephan curved his lips and leaned down again to capture her lips.

He nuzzled against her from time to time, his voice low and husky as he asked, “Is it just my lips you like? Don't you like any other parts of me?”

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Chapter 280 In details

Chapter 280 In details

Alana's face flushed crimson, as delicate and vibrant as a red plum blossom against the snow.

"I like other places, too."

Stephan was captivated by her words and couldn't resist teasing her. "Which parts exactly? Tell me in detail."

Stephan pouted playfully, "Stephan!"

This man couldn't stay serious for even a second.

Stephan's lips curved upward. "All right, I won't tease you anymore."

"Do you want me to keep massaging you?"

"The full-body kind."

Alana blushed. "Just don't get any funny ideas,"

Stephan chuckled softly and pinched her delicate cheek.

"If I really wanted to be naughty, you wouldn't be able to escape. After all, right now, it's just the two of us in this room, a man and a woman alone together. How could you possibly escape?"

Alana scoffed.

Well, he had a point.

So she simply gave up, lay back down, and let the man continue his massage. As he massaged her, Alana gradually let herself go.

"Oh my, right there...that feels so good!"

“That feels so good!”

“Keep going, keep going!”

“Stephan, you’re so good!”

“Faster!”

“Harder there...”

Stephan couldn’t help but grit his teeth. “It’s the middle of the night...don’t moan so seductively!”

Alana blinked innocently. “Sorry, it feels so good, I just can’t help myself.”

“I’m about to lose control too.”

Alana froze. “What can’t you hold back?”

The next second, she felt a chill run down her body.

The man had actually yanked her nightgown off.

Wait, he just ambushed her out of nowhere!

The man’s powerful body pressed down on her as he said, with a straight face,

“Sweetheart, a massage is more comfortable when you’re naked.”

Alana’s mind went blank.

Oh no, she felt like she’d been set up!

Just as Stephan was about to make love to her, her phone suddenly rang.

“Wait, someone’s calling me. I’ll just take this call!”

Stephan leaned down to kiss her, his breath hot against her skin.

“Sweetheart, don’t worry about it. It’s definitely a prank call.”

Alana grew anxious. “What if it isn’t?”

“Stephan, control yourself a little. Don’t be so horny all the time!”

Stephan chuckled, “Don’t you think I know who’s making me so horny?”

Alana blushed, too embarrassed to say anything, and quickly grabbed her phone to glance at the caller ID.

“It’s my colleague Carla calling.”

She thought to herself, hadn’t Carla been asleep when she left?

And now she’s awake and suddenly calling her?

Stephan gave a half-smile. “Your colleague sure knows how to pick the right time to call.”

Alana cleared her throat and explained, “She must have woken up, realized I wasn’t there, and called to check on me.”

Stephan snorted with a laugh, rolled over, and got off her.

“Answer it. I’ll deal with you after you’re done.”

Alana quickly answered the call.

Carla spoke up, “Hello, Lana, where have you run off to again? Grace just called me a moment ago, saying we need to go to Manager Cole for a debriefing meeting. I was just about to wake you up, but I didn’t find you in bed.”

Alana didn’t feel comfortable admitting she was fooling around with her boyfriend. “Uh, I’m out for a walk.”

Hearing this, Carla was completely reassured. She yawned lazily. “Alright, hurry back. We’ll get ready and head over to him.”

“Okay, I’ll hang up now.” Alana hung up the phone, then looked at Stephan with an apologetic expression.

“Sorry, you heard it too...I have to go to a meeting, so I can’t stay and do that with you.”

Stephan gave a forced smile. “A meeting in the middle of the night? That little scoundrel, he did this on purpose, didn’t he?”

Come deliberately scheduled the meeting at this late hour to prevent him from having any meaningful time with Alana.

Looks like I didn’t beat him hard enough last night...that jerk hasn’t learned his lesson.

“Well, I’m not sure about that, but the boss said we had to have a meeting.

Everyone else is going, so I’d feel bad if I didn’t go.”

“I’ll ask you just one thing: when are you resigning?”

“I’ll resign as soon as I get back.”

Stephan snorted lightly, then reluctantly let her leave.

When Alana returned to Room 2011, Carla couldn’t help but remark.

“Lana, you have so much energy. It’s so late, and you actually went for a walk. Didn’t you walk enough today?”

As soon as Carla had returned to her hotel room, she was so exhausted her legs were giving out. She took a quick shower and went straight to bed.

Who would’ve thought Alana could actually sneak out for a walk? She’s got to be one tough cookie.

Alana gave an awkward smile, too embarrassed to admit she was in her boyfriend’s room for a secret massage date.

Alana and Carla went to Cole’s room. The door wasn’t closed, so they walked right in and found Grace and Danielle already there, sitting on the sofa with Cole.

Cole looked up and glanced at Alana and Carla.

“Come sit down.”

Alana and Carla didn’t hesitate; they quickly found seats and sat down.

Cole spoke up, “Let’s start today’s debrief.”

“Grace, you go first.”

One by one, they took turns sharing their insights, perspectives, and takeaways from the day.

Before they knew it, two hours had passed.

Everyone was nodding off.

But Cole wouldn’t let them go, so none of them could leave.

They had thought it would just be a simple debriefing meeting that would be over in half an hour, but they never expected it to take this long.

Moreover, he called out each person individually for criticism, posing questions far more pointed than usual, as if he were deliberately trying to trip them up.

Yet his questions were so spot-on that they couldn't refute them; they could only accept them with grim faces.

By the time it ended, it was already 3 a.m.

Everyone was absolutely exhausted.

Carla went back to her room, muttered under her breath that Cole had gone off the deep end tonight, and then collapsed into bed.

Alana also wanted to lie down in her own bed and rest.

But thinking that a certain man might still be waiting for her, she sneaked over to his room on tiptoe.

She ran to his door and knocked. Sure enough, he hadn't gone to sleep and came to open it quickly.

Seeing his tall, slender figure standing in the doorway, his deep eyes fixed intently on her, Alana instantly let down her guard, collapsing wearily into his arms and allowing herself to lean on him. "I'm so sleepy."

"I'm both exhausted and sleepy."

Stephan instinctively caught Alana, wrapping his arms tightly around her delicate, limp body to keep her from falling.

He lowered his gaze slightly and saw her eyes, reddened from exhaustion. He pursed his thin lips, then picked her up, closed the door, and turned to lay her down on the bed to rest.

He carefully tucked the blanket around her. After turning off the light, he lay down beside her, gently patting her back to lull her to sleep.

"If you're sleepy, just go to sleep."

Alana naturally nestled into his embrace, her eyelids drooping. "Stephan..."

"I...I actually have something very important to tell you..."

She hadn't told him yet that Darla had come looking for her.

"Hmm, whatever it is, let's talk about it tomorrow."

“Rest is more important.”

Alana, half-asleep, closed her eyes.

“Alright, then... we’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

Alana slept soundly that night.

She didn’t know how much time had passed, but in her daze, she sensed the man holding her close suddenly let go.

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Chapter 281 Welled up

Chapter 281 Welled up

Feeling the loss of that burning warmth, she clung uneasily to the blanket, trying to hold onto that last bit of heat.

Before long, she caught the scent of breakfast.

Her stomach promptly growled in protest.

Alana slowly opened her eyes and saw Stephan at the table, arranging the breakfast delivered by room service.

Stephan looked up. “Awake?”.

“Mm-hmm.”

“Get ready. Come up and have breakfast.”

Alana, feeling unusually playful, reached out to him with a soft, pleading gesture. “I don’t have the strength. Come pick me up...”

Stephan curved his lips. “Getting flirty this early in the morning?”

Sure enough, she shouldn’t have sent him any suggestive signals.

Alana quickly pulled her hands back.

Seeing her guarded expression, Stephan couldn't help but smile affectionately. "I was just teasing you."

Girlfriends are the most fun...just a little teasing and she's all flushed.

Alana puffed out her cheeks. Hmph!

Teasing her again!

Stephan curved his lips into a smile as he strolled leisurely to the bed. He slipped his arms under her armpits and lifted her soft, limp body right up.

Her hair was a bit tousled from sleep, with several soft strands standing on end.

Combined with her still-dazed expression, she looked adorably dazed and cute.

Stephan raised his hand and ruffled her soft hair, then couldn't resist leaning down to kiss her cheek.

He left a red mark on her cheek.

Alana pouted. "Hey, your saliva got on my face..."

"My girlfriend is just too cute. I couldn't help myself."

Stephan pinched the tip of her nose. "Besides, I've practically kissed that little mouth of yours to pieces, and now you're complaining about my saliva?"

Alana sighed.

Oh well, she'd chosen him herself, so she might as well spoil him.

After a quick wash, Alana sat down with Stephan to eat breakfast.

The hotel's breakfast spread was lavish, featuring seafood congee, assorted pastries, crispy chicken feet, steamed rice rolls, bone broth, and desserts.

Alana was cradled in Stephan's arms, sitting on his lap as he fed her bite by bite.

Blushing, she said, "I can eat by myself. Feeding me like this makes me feel like a three-year-old."

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "What's wrong with being a child? I just want to spoil you like a child."

Alana's heart fluttered. She realized she was truly starved for affection; the mere fact that he said he wanted to pamper her like a child was enough to move her to tears.

"Stephan, I've realized you're really good at loving people. If I didn't know I was your first love, I'd think you were some kind of master of romance."

Stephan curved his lips. "Everyone has the capacity to love. It's not just me, you have it too."

Alana blinked and said earnestly, "But I feel like what I've given you is nowhere near as much as what you've given me."

He pinched her cheek affectionately. "You gave yourself to me...that's the greatest love you could ever give me."

Thinking of all the pain she'd endured from bullying in the past, he just wanted to treat her even better, to make up for it all.

Alana felt a lump forming in her throat again.

Some men are overly calculating in relationships, afraid of giving without receiving anything in return.

But some men feel they haven't given enough, afraid their woman might suffer any injustice.

Whether a man loves you or not, you can always feel it.

She took a deep breath and decided to be honest with him.

"Stephan, didn't I tell you last night that there was something I wanted to talk about?"

Stephan nodded. "Yes, what is it?"

Alana paused for a moment, then spoke slowly, "Stephan, actually, I..." Suddenly, her phone rang again, cutting off the words she was about to say.

Alana took out her phone and saw that the call was actually from her hometown.

She glanced apologetically at Stephan. "Sorry, I need to take this call."

Stephan ruffled her hair. "Go ahead."

Alana answered the phone; it was her uncle's voice on the other end.

"Lana, it's bad news...something's happened to your grandmother again. Hurry home!"

Alana's breath caught in her throat. "What happened to Grandma?"

"Oh dear, it's just that she's getting on in years and loves to keep herself busy. She'd only just broken her arm a while back, but she was in such a hurry to get out of the hospital. And now, just a few weeks after being discharged, she's fallen again!"

"This time it's worse than last time. She hit her head. They took her to the hospital and said it's a cerebral hemorrhage. She's still in the operating room right now!"

"She's so old...we don't even know if she'll make it out of surgery. You need to come back right away to see her one last time!"

As soon as Alana's heard this, her face went pale, and her fingers began to tremble uncontrollably.

Grandma had fallen, hit her head, and suffered a cerebral hemorrhage...it was worse than last time...

The more she thought about it, the more panicked she became, and tears welled up in her eyes.

She looked at Stephan, like a helpless child. "Stephan, what should I do? Something's happened to my grandmother again..."

Stephan immediately embraced her and soothed her gently, "It's okay, it's okay.

Grandma is blessed with good fortune; she'll be just fine. I'll go back with you. Let's go see your grandmother right now."

Alana's eyes were red and wet, but she forced herself to calm down.

"You're coming back with me? Won't that interfere with your work?"

Stephan replied earnestly, "Nothing is more important than you."

Tears welled up in her eyes again. She nodded and quickly pulled out her phone.

"Okay, okay! I'll book a flight right away!"

Don't panic, absolutely don't panic!

I have to hold it together on the way back!

Seeing her hand trembling as she held the phone, Stephan couldn't help but say, "I'll book the tickets. You go pack your things, we're leaving right away!"

“Okay! You book the tickets; I’ll go back and pack.” Alana wriggled out of the man’s embrace and tried to stand up. But her legs gave way, and she nearly fell.

Stephan caught her just in time.

Concerned about her condition, he said, “I’ll have my assistant book the tickets. Let me walk you to your room first so we can pack together.”

Alana nodded. “Okay.”

She had no time to think about anything else right now; she just wanted to get back as soon as possible to see her grandmother and make sure she was safe.

Stephan called Vance and instructed him to book the earliest flight to the countryside.

Then, supporting Alana, he walked with her to the room she shared with Carla.

Alana knocked on the door quickly.

“Who is it?” Carla’s tone still carried the irritation of having been woken up.

She had been forced by her boss to work late and attend a meeting last night, so she had gone to bed late and just wanted to sleep in a little longer this morning.

As it turned out, whether a boss is handsome or not, anyone who demands overtime isn’t a good boss!

Alana hurriedly said, “Carla, open the door quickly! It’s urgent!”

Carla snapped awake. Oh my god!

Alana was out for a walk again this early in the morning?

But that wasn’t the only thing that shocked her.

When she opened the door and saw the man standing next to Alana, a man so handsome he looked unreal, her eyes widened in shock.

“You, you, you...” He looks so familiar, but she couldn’t quite place him.

Stephan introduced himself, “I’m Alana’s boyfriend.”

Carla realized, “Right, right, right! I remember now...you’re her boyfriend! Wait, Lana, how come your boyfriend is here too?”

Alana hurriedly explained, “He’s here on a business trip too.”

Carla glared at her. “No wonder you’ve been going out for walks every morning lately...so you’ve been sneaking off to meet your boyfriend!”

Alana said, “Carla, I don’t have time to explain this to you. There’s an urgent matter back home, so I have to rush back. I’m just here to pack my things. My boyfriend is here to help me pack.”

“Oh, okay.” Although Carla didn’t quite understand, she stepped aside to let the two of them enter the room together.

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Chapter 282 Right behind

Chapter 282 Right behind

Alana and Stephan hurriedly packed her luggage; in less than a few minutes, they had almost finished.

Alana didn’t want to leave without saying a word. She had originally planned to ask Carla to help her take a day off, but when she thought of Cole being in the next room, she decided not to bother Carla.

But as it turned out, just as Alana and Stephan stepped out of the room, they ran right into Cole, who had just come out as well.

Grace and Danielle also came out of their room.

Carla was right behind Alana.

For a moment, the sight of Alana and Stephan standing hand in hand was caught by their eyes.

The scene was quite dramatic, but Alana had no time to worry about anything else.

She glanced at everyone and stated simply, “Let me introduce you...this is my boyfriend.”

Grace and Danielle saw the handsome man standing beside Alana and both stared in astonishment, their eyes wide with surprise.

He was way too handsome!

Just last night, Danielle had suspected that Alana was exaggerating her boyfriend's looks, how could anyone be more handsome than her beloved Manager Cole?

But now that she saw him in person...

Well, she guessed she just hasn't seen enough of the world.

No wonder Alana remained unfazed by Manager Cole's repeated advances, it turns out her boyfriend is simply breathtaking!

Not only his looks, but his physique is absolutely killer too.

Seriously, where on earth did Alana find a boyfriend like that?

She was so jealous!

When Cole saw Alana holding Stephan's hand and appearing before everyone with such confidence, his eyes darkened instantly.

He met Stephan's cold, slightly defiant gaze, which seemed to tell him he was nothing but a complete clown.

Ignoring their shocked stares, Alana looked at Cole and said bluntly, "Manager Cole, I have some family matters to attend to and would like to take a few days off."

Cole, unwilling to let Alana leave with Stephan, frowned and asked, "We're on a business trip, and this is only our third day...a critical moment. What could possibly be more important than work?"

Alana took a deep breath. "Do you really need to know the reason?"

Cole nodded. "Yes. Without a valid reason, I won't allow you to leave in the middle of this."

Alana clenched her fists, her voice trembling slightly. "Fine, I'll give you a valid reason. My grandmother fell and hit her head. She's in the operating room right now. Is this still less important than work?"

Cole's pupils contracted.

Alana's breathing evened out. "I don't need to ask you for time off anymore. I'm officially notifying you right now: I'm resigning. From this moment on, I'm no longer under your supervision, so you don't need to approve my leave."

Cole instinctively tried to stop her. “Lana, I’m sorry. I didn’t know it was for this reason...”

Alana nodded. “I know. You’re just doing your job. But I’ve wanted to quit for a long time. This time, I’m officially resigning and leaving the company. My grandmother’s condition has taken a turn for the worse, so I may need to stay in my hometown for a while. Rather than putting you in a difficult position by taking leave, I’d rather just resign. I hope you’ll approve it.”

Cole anxiously tried to step forward to explain, “No, that’s not what I meant...”

Stephan stepped directly in front of him, reached out, and pushed him aside without hesitation. “My girlfriend and I have a flight to catch, so we’re leaving first.”

Cole couldn’t help but say, “Lana, let me walk you out!”

Stephan snorted derisively, his dark eyes fixed on Cole with a warning glint.

“She has me, her boyfriend, to take her. There’s no need for you to go out of your way.” Cole looked at Stephan, his fist clenching tightly.

Alana had no desire to stay any longer. She lowered her head and said, “I’m sorry, everyone. I’ve caused you trouble this time. Goodbye.”

Stephan also said goodbye to Alana’s colleagues, then pulled her suitcase and wrapped his arm around her waist as they left.

Cole could only watch them leave helplessly, feeling powerless and tormented, his heart aching as if it were being torn apart.

Carla couldn’t help but lean closer to Danielle and whisper, “Did you see that? I told you Alana’s boyfriend was handsome, didn’t I?”

“And he actually dared to stand up to our Manager Cole. I bet he’s no ordinary guy.”

Danielle snorted. “Is a man with a mysterious background someone a woman like Alana could easily control? He’s clearly just a broke loser dressed up in fancy clothes!”

Carla was shocked at Danielle’s words.

What a terrifying woman...she can’t have him, so she deliberately slanders him!

Grace looked at Cole and couldn’t help but ask, “Manager Cole, now that Alana has stepped away, what should we...”

Before she could finish, Cole’s phone suddenly rang urgently.

He motioned for Grace to pause, then pulled out his phone to check, it was actually a call from the hospital.

Cole answered, and the caller spoke first.

“Hello, are you a family member of Camila?”

Cole frowned, a sense of foreboding washing over him. “Yes, I’m her brother. Has something happened to my sister?”

The doctor said, “Your sister was beaten up, sustaining multiple comminuted fractures. She’s currently in the operating room undergoing emergency surgery. Please come over to pay the surgery fees.”

Cole was stunned. “What?”

His sister had actually been beaten up?

And she has multiple comminuted fractures?!

Out of the blue, how could something like this happen?!

“Doctor, who beat my sister like this?”

“I’m not sure. Someone left your sister at the hospital entrance. When we went out to check on her, she was lying motionless on the ground, unconscious.”

Cole furrowed his brow; his gut told him this wasn’t a simple matter. “Alright, I understand. I’ll head to your hospital right away.”

He hung up the phone.

Cole turned to Grace and the others. “Something’s happened to my sister, she’s been admitted to the hospital. I have to go back and see her. As for the situation here, I’ll have to ask you to take charge and continue with two of your subordinates.”

Grace felt as if the sky had fallen, for the backbone of the operation was gone. “Just the three of us...me, Carla, and Danielle?”

“Yes. I trust you, Director Grace, to handle this.”

Grace sighed, heavily.

Ha, a team of five suddenly down to three...the workload had doubled. Who could easily guarantee they’d handle it well?

But with no other choice, she nodded in agreement. “Alright, you can go. Leave the rest to us.”

Cole nodded, turned around, and went back to pack his things and leave.

Leaving Grace, Carla, and Danielle behind, the three of them were inwardly grumbling and complaining.

Meanwhile, Stephan and Alana had already arrived at the airport and successfully boarded the flight.

Stephan had booked first-class tickets; the flight would take about two hours.

He hoped Alana would lie down and rest for a while.

But she was in no mood to sleep; she kept checking her phone for any updates from her aunt.

She was in agony.

Fearing she might become anxious and stressed, Stephan asked a flight attendant to bring her a cup of hot water.

He tested the water’s temperature first, making sure it was drinkable, before handing it to her.

“Have a sip of warm water.”

Alana’s mouth was parched; as soon as she saw the water, she leaned in and took a big gulp.

Stephan set the remaining water on the table, then wrapped his arms around Alana and spoke gently to comfort her.

“Don’t worry, and don’t be anxious. Grandma will be fine.”

Alana buried her face in his chest, feeling the warmth radiating from him. She bit her lip, fighting back tears, and said, “Yes, I believe Grandma will pull through.”

Meanwhile, after contacting Alana, her uncle secretly reached out to Alana’s mother.

“Agnes, something’s happened to mom again. She’d just been discharged from the hospital when she fell and hit her head, and now she’s back in the operating room.”

“We don’t know the full extent yet, but the doctor said she might not make it.”

After all, she’d already undergone surgery for her broken arm last time, and now she’s facing another one. She’s an elderly woman in her seventies or eighties...even the strongest body can’t take much more.

Agnes face paled. “What? How could this happen? Didn’t I ask you to take good care of her? How did she end up hitting her head again?”

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Chapter 283 Very opportunistic

Chapter 283 Very opportunistic

Miranda took the phone from her husband to talk to Agnes herself.

She felt a bit guilty though; she dared not admit that after the elderly woman was discharged, she hadn’t really taken good care of her, she’d merely fed her a meal on time.

She had thought to herself that since the old woman had already been discharged, she must be fine, so it wouldn’t hurt to check on her a little less, but who could have predicted this would happen?

Besides, it wasn’t her fault. It was the old lady’s own fault for not staying in bed and always running around recklessly.

“Oh, it’s not my fault. Mom was running around before her arm had even healed. See? Now she’s gotten herself into trouble.”

“The surgery will cost two million. Transfer two million right away, or we won’t be able to afford it!”

Agnes was stunned. “Two million? What kind of surgery is that expensive?”

In reality, it didn't cost two million at all, just a few hundred thousand, but Miranda had grown accustomed to extorting money from Agnes, so she didn't feel the slightest bit guilty.

"The old lady's fall was serious this time. We've hired a team of expert professors, so of course it's going to be expensive. What if she dies on the operating table? Hurry up and transfer the money!"

Agnes didn't think twice about it. After all, they were family, there was no reason Miranda would deceive her.

She replied eagerly, "Okay, I'll transfer the money right away. Whatever happens with her, you must call and let me know!"

Upon hearing that Agnes was willing to send the money, Miranda beamed with joy and readily agreed.

"No problem!"

After she hung up, the two million dollars was transferred almost immediately.

She thought to herself with glee, "Agnes is so easy to manipulate. Over the years, I've practically raked in tens of millions off her."

She never would have guessed that after that woman left home, she'd become so wealthy, who knows what kind of tycoon she's hooked up with.

But no matter what, as long as she got the money, that was all that mattered.

Thanks to Agnes, her whole family had made a fortune.

As for Agnes' daughter, Alana, while her mother was out there hooking up with rich men, she remained a lonely, unwanted little girl. It just goes to show that a daughter born to a lowly woman is destined to lead a miserable life!

After receiving that call from Agnes, Miranda couldn't help but feel restless.

With the old lady in trouble, wouldn't it be unfilial of her, not to go back and see her?

The woman was like a mother to her and had literally raised Alana.

What if...just what if...she didn't go back and missed her final moments?

The more she thought about it, the more her heart burned with anxiety!

Just then, she saw her husband walk in and immediately rushed over to him. “Henry, something’s happened to the old lady. I need to go home.”

Henry frowned. “What’s happened to her this time?”

Agnes said anxiously, “She hit her head and is in the operating room right now, fighting for her life. I’m afraid she might not make it, so I have to go back!”

Henry confronted her, “Have you forgotten the vow you made to your mother, that you’d never go back to see her again?”

Earlier, Miranda had callously abandoned Alana, leaving her in the woman’s care. She was furious and told her that if she dared to abandon the child and leave, she would cut ties with her and never have anything to do with her again.

In the heat of the moment, she had sworn that she would never go back and would never even look at the old lady again.

Now, more than a decade had passed; that anger had long since faded away with time.

Why should she still be dwelling on it?

Besides, could she really stay angry at her for the rest of her life? She retorted, “

“Henry, if your mother were going into surgery, would you really be so indifferent that you wouldn’t go back to see her? I see this woman as my own mother!”

Henry was momentarily speechless; he had no rebuttal.

“Alright, go back. But don’t get yourself into too much trouble.”

After all, her so-called family didn’t seem like good people, they were very opportunistic. He had seen through their true colors back then, which was why he had firmly opposed Agnes continuing to associate with them.

Agnes nodded. “Okay.”

Two hours later, Agnes and Stephan successfully arrived at the Airport. It was the same hospital as last time.

As soon as they left the airport, Alana hailed a taxi and got in with Stephan. There was traffic on the way to the hospital.

What should have been a ten-minute drive took a full half hour to reach the hospital.

Alana was so anxious her palms were sweating.

As soon as the car stopped at the hospital, she couldn't wait to open the door and jump out, rushing inside.

Stephan stayed behind to bring up the rear, retrieving the suitcase from the trunk and tipping the driver a small amount.

Alana stepped out of the elevator and arrived outside the operating room on the fifth floor, where she saw her aunt, uncle, and the others waiting.

The group was seated in two rows of chairs, the atmosphere somewhat somber.

The light in the operating room was still red; her grandmother hadn't been brought out yet, and her condition remained unknown.

Miranda looked up and saw Alana rushing in. "Oh my, Lana, you're back! How did you manage to get back so quickly this time?"

It had only been about four hours since she'd called.

Alana walked over with reddened eyes and asked, "How long has Grandma been in the operating room?"

Miranda replied, "I'd say about five hours. She's been in there this long and we still haven't heard anything. She probably won't make it."

Hearing this, Alana's tense nerves snapped instantly. She shook her head urgently, "No, she won't! She won't die!"

"Grandma will definitely be okay! Auntie, how have you been taking care of Grandma? When I left, didn't you all promise you'd take good care of Grandma? How come she's having trouble again so soon?"

As soon as her Aunt heard this, she couldn't sit still. "This has nothing to do with me! It wasn't my turn to look after the old lady today...it was Miranda's turn. She didn't take good care of her, so don't blame me!"

"Grandma was fine the days I took care of her. The moment it was Miranda's turn, something went wrong. That just shows she wasn't paying attention. If you're going to blame anyone, blame her, just don't drag me into this!"

The moment Miranda heard her sister-in-law calling her out, she flew into a rage and immediately dropped all pretense.

“Why is it my fault? Do you dare say you kept a close eye on her every day when it was your turn to take care of her? Aren’t you the one who’s been slacking off? You only had time to peek in and bring her a meal now and then, but you didn’t bother with anything else. And you have the nerve to criticize me? Do you have no shame?”

Hearing this, the younger sister-in-law felt a bit at a loss for words. “Anyway, the old lady had her accident while you were taking care of her today, not when I was looking after her, so it’s not my fault.”

Miranda laughed in exasperation. “You, you, you! You shameless thing! You’re not exactly a model of responsibility yourself, yet you have the nerve to blame me!”

“Besides, am I supposed to keep an eye on the old lady every single moment? My own family doesn’t need looking after? Why would I spend all day watching her when I have nothing else to do?”

“Anyway, I’ve got my own things to do. It’s not my fault, it’s that old woman who can’t keep still. She had to wander all over the place, which is why she fell!”

Her sister-in-law muttered, “What do you mean ‘wandering around’? She clearly had to pee and went to the bathroom. No one was there to help her, and the bathroom floor was slippery, so she fell and just bumped her head.”

Upon hearing this, Miranda lost her composure instantly. “Say one more word, and I’ll tear your mouth off!”

Alana pieced together the whole story and felt her heart break. It turned out they hadn’t been taking proper care of Grandma at all.

They’d promised so much, but in reality, they hadn’t done much at all.

Her poor grandmother...she’d clearly injured her arm in the fall, suffered such a serious injury, and couldn’t take care of herself.

Not only was there no one to look after her, but she was also being mistreated at every turn.

Grandma even told her not to worry about her, saying she was doing just fine.

Even though Grandma was clearly not doing well herself, she kept trying to reassure her. She truly regretted not quitting her job back then to stay and take care of her grandmother.

Alana burst into tears. “Stop arguing! All of you, shut up!”

Miranda instantly redirected her anger at Alana. “Lana, who do you think you are? How dare you shout at us?!”

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Chapter 284 Shifting the blame

Chapter 284 Shifting the blame

Alana, her face flushed from crying, retorted, “What am I? I’m Grandma’s granddaughter...isn’t that enough to give me the right?”

“You promised so earnestly back then that you’d take good care of Grandma. To ensure you did, I even sent you a portion of my monthly salary as a little extra. Now that something’s happened to Grandma, not only do you show no remorse or self-reproach, but you’re shifting the blame. Is this how elders are supposed to behave?”

Miranda laughed in exasperation and pointed at Alana, scolding her, “Oh, so now you’re blaming us for not taking good care of her? If you’d taken good care of her, why did you leave in the first place? You should have just stayed and looked after your grandmother!”

“It’s not like we didn’t try to get you to stay and take care of her, you were the one who insisted on leaving. Now that something’s happened to her, you’re blaming us. Why don’t you blame yourself?”

“Blame yourself for being so heartless back then and not staying to keep caring for the old lady! If you’d listened to us back then, quit your job, stayed to take care of your precious grandmother, and maybe even gone on a blind date with a man from a good family...wouldn’t it have been better to get married and have kids here?!”

“At the end of the day, you’re nothing but an ungrateful wretch. At the critical moment when your grandmother needed you, you ran off for the sake of your job. So what makes you any different from us?!”

“Don’t pretend to be the good guy...you’re just as selfish as the rest of us!”

Alana trembled all over. Her lips moved as if she wanted to say something, but she lacked the strength to argue back.

Miranda pressed on, “Got nothing to say, do you? Did I hit a nerve?”

“Look at you...you’re just like your mother: heartless, ungrateful, cold, and selfish! You graduated from college. You could have easily stayed home and found a job, but you insisted on going all the way to town. It’s obvious you just wanted to cut ties with us. Calling you an ungrateful wretch wouldn’t be an exaggeration!”

The other relatives all agreed with Miranda’s words and began pointing fingers at Alana.

The implication was clear: she shouldn’t have left; she should have stayed put, taken care of her grandmother, and seen her through to the end.

Seeing these relatives with their aggressive, accusatory expressions, it was as if Alana alone was to blame for what had happened to her grandmother.

It was as if she were some heinous, unforgivable villain.

Alana was forced to back away repeatedly. Her legs gave way, and she nearly collapsed to the ground.

But a strong arm wrapped around her slender waist just in time. He held her tightly against his chest.

Alana lifted her tear-filled, blurred eyes and dimly made out the man’s handsome, chiseled features.

Her panicked and helpless heart instantly found a place to rest.

Seeing Alana in such a heartbroken state, Stephan felt a pang of pity.

He raised his gaze, his icy stare sweeping over Miranda and the others.

“You call her an ungrateful wretch, but what about you? Alana isn’t a direct relative. Logically speaking, she has no responsibility or obligation to care for her grandmother.”

“On the other hand, you are her grandmother’s direct relatives. Not only have you failed to take proper care of her and neglected your duties and responsibilities, but you’re also shifting all this onto Alana. Don’t you find that shameless? If we’re talking about ungrateful people, aren’t you the ones who are truly heartless and ungrateful?”

“Did her grandmother raise all of you just to turn out like this? Are you all just animals? No, calling you that would be an insult to animals, you’re worse than beasts!”

Some relatives felt guilty after hearing Stephan’s words. They knew full well that supporting and caring for the elderly was the responsibility and duty of their immediate family members.

But they had simply taken advantage of the fact that Alana had no parents to protect her and was, to them, an outsider...that was why they had deliberately bullied her.

When Miranda saw Stephan step in to protect Alana, she stared in shock, her eyes wide. "You... who are you? This is our own family business. What business is it of yours, an outsider?"

Stephan introduced himself, "I'm Alana's boyfriend, Stephan."

Miranda and the group of relatives were instantly stunned.

They never expected that Alana had actually brought a boyfriend back with her this time.

The last time she sent me a photo of her boyfriend, he looked far too handsome to be with her, and they thought she'd just grabbed a random picture off the internet.

Miranda never imagined there really was such a handsome guy in real life.

And the man standing right in front of me was even more handsome than the one in the photo.

Miranda retorted defiantly, "So what if you're Alana's boyfriend? Alana doesn't even have the right to say anything, so you, as an outsider, certainly don't!"

"Oh?" Stephan's lips curled into a cold smile. "Alana and I don't have a right?"

"Do you want me to call a lawyer right now to teach you both a lesson on what the crime of abandonment entails?"

Miranda and the others panicked instantly.

"What do you mean, 'abandonment'? Don't talk nonsense! We do take care of the old lady from time to time...we just don't watch over her every single moment!" The Aunt yelled.

Stephan retorted, "If it's not abandonment, then why are you asking Alana to take care of your own mother for you?"

The group was speechless, at a loss for words. The man's logic was too sharp; they were no match for him.

Stephan pulled out his phone and said calmly, "I think I'll call a lawyer right now to settle this. Let's have a proper discussion and see if what you're doing constitutes abandonment."

The group instantly wilted.

They were the classic bullies, picking on the weak and bullying the vulnerable, believing that might make things right.

“No, no, no! Let’s talk this out!”

“Exactly! We’re all family, why are you making such a big deal out of this?”

Stephan sneered, “Why didn’t you speak to Alana like that just now? Did you think she had no one to protect her?”

Miranda and the others were once again thrown into speechlessness.

Stephan pulled the girl in his arms closer and declared firmly, “From now on, I’ll protect her. As long as I’m here, no one will ever be able to bully her.”

Miranda and the others exchanged glances.

Who would’ve thought that even a sourpuss like Alana would one day have someone to protect her.

They really underestimated her.

Alana couldn’t help but lift her gaze to look at the man standing up for her.

At that moment, he seemed to radiate a dazzling light that enveloped her completely. She was deeply moved. As far as she could remember, no one had ever stood up for her with such unwavering resolve.

Like an impregnable fortress, he stood before her, shielding her from harm. She couldn’t help but clasp his hand tightly, her tears already flowing freely from the overwhelming emotion.

She must have done many good deeds in her past life, which is why she had met a man like Stephan in this one, a man who would protect her so fiercely.

With Stephan’s arrival, the atmosphere grew tense and awkward.

Everyone seemed to have run into a brick wall; no one dared to utter a word.

Stephan looked at this group of suddenly silent quails, his lips curling into an expressionless smile. “Apologize to my girlfriend. If you don’t offer a proper apology for this, I will still pursue this to the end.”

“To make us apologize to a junior? You must be joking...”

Before Miranda could even finish the words, she suddenly met Stephan's gaze cold as an icy river, and shuddered in fear.

What kind of man was this? His gaze was terrifying, like the King of Hell himself, giving off the feeling that he could take a life at any moment.

Stephan stared at Miranda, his eyes sharp and cold. "Say it again: apologize."

Miranda asked tremblingly, "Aren't you Alana's boyfriend?"

"Acting so lawless in front of us elders...aren't you afraid we might disapprove of you two being together?"

The others weren't willing to apologize so easily either.

"Exactly! If you keep acting so arrogant, we won't let you stay together!"

Stephan sneered, "Do Alana and I need your permission to be together? Who do you think you are? What right do you have to dictate my relationship with Alana?"

Stephan adopted a forceful tone, "You won't apologize, huh? I'll call a lawyer and have them say you not only neglected the elderly but also abused them, causing them to end up in the operating room..."

Miranda's eyes widened. "You... what proof do you have?"

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Chapter 285 The worse

Chapter 285 The worse

"I just recorded it. Everything you said is clearly captured on my phone's voice memo. As soon as I call my lawyer over, this recording will serve as evidence!"

Hearing this, the group instantly panicked.

"No, no, no...don't call a lawyer! We'll apologize right away!"

“Alana, I’m sorry. We went too far just now.”

“Yeah, yeah, we were just venting our anger and talking nonsense. Don’t take it seriously!”

“We’re all family here. Please talk some sense into your boyfriend and don’t let him call a lawyer!”

Alana looked at her relatives, who had suddenly started groveling before her, and found it amusing.

Now that they were being threatened, they suddenly felt she was family. Why hadn’t they ever treated her like family before?

If they’d truly considered her family, she wouldn’t have applied to a university so far away back then, nor would she have stayed there to work after graduation.

But her grandmother was still in the operating room, so she wasn’t in the mood to dwell on it.

Every second counts in the operating room, what kind of behavior was this, all this arguing and commotion out here?

“I accept your apology, but I won’t forgive you. Besides, the person you’ve truly wronged is Grandma, not me.”

Hearing this, everyone exchanged glances, unsure of what to say.

They were afraid that saying too much might provoke Alana’s boyfriend.

Anyway, Alana’s boyfriend couldn’t possibly protect her forever. Once he’s gone, it won’t be too late to pick on her then.

As the saying goes, a gentleman’s revenge is never too late, even after ten years!

Just then, the operating room door suddenly swung open.

A doctor emerged, his expression grave.

Alana immediately stepped forward to ask,

“Doctor, how is my grandmother?”

The doctor sighed. “We’ve done everything we could. You... should start making arrangements for her funeral.”

“This is the critical condition notice. Could the patient’s next of kin please come forward to sign it?”

When Alana saw the critical condition notice the doctor handed her, her legs went weak, and she nearly lost her balance.

Stephan walked up behind her and quickly caught her.

He looked up at the doctor. “Is there really no hope at all?”

The doctor shook his head. “The elderly patient suffered a severe head injury, with significant cerebral hemorrhage and other serious conditions like cerebral infarction. Our hospital’s capabilities are limited; we are unable to perform such a complex surgery.”

“Even if we did, she’d only end up in a vegetative state, never to wake up, confined to a hospital room for the rest of her life, dependent on machines and medication. Rather than that, it’s better to let her pass away peacefully.”

Hearing this, Alana felt her heart take another crushing blow.

The doctor said again, “Please have a family member come sign the critical condition notice.”

Alana shook her head, weeping; she simply refused to sign.

She couldn’t believe it, her grandmother, who had been full of life just a month ago and had even asked her to bring her boyfriend over, was about to leave her like this.

She refused to believe it!

Miranda stepped forward. “I’ll sign it! Since none of you are willing to be the bad guy, I’ll do it! She’s lived a long enough life anyway, let’s give her a better end! Rather than letting her lie in bed as a vegetable, suffering a life worse than death, it’s

better to let her die sooner and be reborn!”

Once the old woman was dead, her assets would belong to them.

After all, she hadn’t made a will before her death, so Alana, an outsider, had no right to inherit anything.

Alana looked at Miranda in disbelief. She never would have imagined that such unfilial words could come from an elder.

Did they really want their grandmother to die?

Miranda was about to sign the critical condition notice. And no one else stepped in to stop her.

Alana hurriedly said, “No, don’t sign it! This is just the worst-case scenario. Maybe the surgery will be successful, and Grandma won’t end up in a vegetative state?”

Miranda couldn’t help but frown. “Oh, come on, don’t stop me! Even if the surgery is successful, your grandmother’s body is already in such bad shape. Even if she recovers, it’ll only be temporary. What if something happens to her later and we have to spend more money? It’s not coming out of your pocket, it won’t hurt you!”

“It’s better to give her a quick end than let her linger on like this!”

“That’s right. She’s so old; she doesn’t have much time left anyway.”

Tears streamed down Alana’s face as she broke down, “What if Grandma still wants to live? What if she’s trying her hardest to hold on?”

“You’re so casually cutting her life short, did you even ask her what she thinks?”

Miranda retorted, “So what do you want to do? The doctors have already issued a critical condition notice, which means she’s at the end of her life. Do you really expect them to defy the laws of nature and save her?”

“I...” Alana was at a loss for words, but a wave of despair washed over her.

That’s right...she wasn’t a doctor. What could she possibly do?!

The doctor couldn’t help but urge her, “Sign it quickly, there’s no time to waste.”

Alana clutched the critical condition notice tightly, refusing to let Miranda sign it.

“No, I can’t...”

Grandma can’t just die like this...

Miranda was furious but couldn’t do anything about Alana for the moment.

That damn little bitch, always ruining her plans!

Stephan couldn’t bear to see Alana in such agony. He looked up at the surgeon.

“Doctor, your medical skills here may not be up to par, but if a top-tier medical team from abroad were to perform this surgery, wouldn’t the success rate be higher?”

The doctor immediately replied, “If a top-tier medical team from abroad were to perform this surgery, the success rate would at least increase to thirty or forty percent.”

After all, this place wasn’t a first-tier city, it was a third- or fourth-tier one, and its medical standards were nowhere near as advanced as those of the top-tier facilities in the capital and abroad.

Moreover, the medical equipment there was far superior to what their hospital could offer.

Stephan said, “I’ve already contacted a top-tier medical team from the capital before coming here. They’ve arrived at the Airport and will be here in about ten minutes. Could you help her grandmother hold on for just those ten minutes?”

The doctor was stunned. “Holding on for ten or so minutes is certainly no problem, but have you really managed to bring that top-tier medical team from abroad here?”

After all, a top-tier medical team like that isn’t something just anyone can summon.

Stephan nodded. “That’s right. They’ll be here very soon.”

The doctor asked uncertainly, “Can you guarantee they’ll actually come?”

After all, every minute of delay puts the patient at greater risk. Their hospital couldn’t afford to take that risk.

Stephan spoke with absolute certainty, “I stake my life on it!”

Perhaps it was the man’s commanding gaze, but the doctor was convinced and immediately said, “Then we’ll do our best to hold out until they arrive.”

Stephan nodded. “Alright, thank you.”

The doctor decisively re-entered the operating room to save the elderly man’s life.

Miranda and the others, having overheard Stephan’s exchange with the doctor, were all stunned.

“What does that mean? You called in the top medical team? When did you do that?” Alana was also curious.

Stephan looked at her and explained specifically to her, “I was already preparing for the worst on the plane. If the doctors here couldn’t save your grandmother, I would have called in the top medical team from the capital, and then from abroad to see if there was any chance of saving her. If necessary, I might have arranged for her to be flown out of the country.”

Alana's heart swelled with emotion. So, without her knowing, he had quietly made all these arrangements for her.

She took his hand and said, her voice trembling with emotion, "Thank you. Stephan, thank you."

Stephan gently patted her head in a soothing gesture. "There's no need to be so formal between us. Besides, I believe Grandma will pull through."

Alana nodded vigorously. "Mm-hmm."

Miranda couldn't believe Alana's boyfriend was that capable, that he'd actually managed to bring in a top medical team.

"Hey, just because you say the top medical team is coming, does that mean they'll actually show up? You aren't trying to deceive us, are you? Delaying things on purpose so we won't sign the critical condition notice?"

Stephan raised his gaze to look at Miranda, a chilling coldness in his eyes. "Do you really think I'd joke around with someone's life?"

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Chapter 286 Enslaved me

Chapter 286 Enslaved me

Miranda choked on her words, her rebuttal lacking conviction. "Who...who knows you! We don't even know you that well."

Her uncle also came to Miranda's defense, "Bringing in that top-tier medical team is going to cost a fortune, isn't it? We're just an ordinary family, we can't afford that kind of money!"

"We're not paying for any of those expenses!"

"Exactly. We didn't call in that medical team. Even if they're specifically here to operate on the old lady, we won't be responsible!"

“Yes! If they manage to save the old lady, that’s one thing, but if they don’t, whose fault is that?”

The others chimed in one after another.

Hearing these irresponsible remarks, Alana couldn’t help but flush with anger. “Are you... are you still my grandmother’s family?”

Her grandmother was in the operating room, fighting for her life, yet they stood outside without even a thought of using their savings to save her.

How could anyone be so selfish?

Stephan had seen enough of Alana’s so-called family today. He spoke coldly.

“I called in the medical team myself. I will cover all the costs...not a single penny needs to come from you ungrateful wretches.”

Miranda and the others breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing they wouldn’t have to cover the medical bills.

But hearing Stephan call them ungrateful wretches left them deeply offended.

They felt that simply bringing the old woman to the hospital was already the height of kindness and duty.

Some people with ulterior motives and no moral compass wouldn’t even bother with their own elderly mothers, leaving them to die at home, left to fend for themselves.

They’d already brought the old woman to the hospital, what more could they possibly want?

Oh well, since Stephan was willing to cover the medical bills anyway, they couldn’t very well keep nitpicking and making accusations.

If he were to change his mind and refuse to cover the medical bills, they’d be in dire straits.

The cost of the top medical team was beyond their means, they couldn’t afford it even if they sold everything they owned.

Sure enough, in about ten minutes, the medical team from the capital arrived at the hospital.

After quickly assessing the patient’s condition, they immediately implemented an efficient treatment plan and entered the operating room to begin resuscitation.

Time was ticking away.

Every minute and every second felt like an agonizing wait.

Alana prayed incessantly in her heart, begging for her grandmother's safety and wishing for her to live a long and healthy life.

Grandma had worked so hard her whole life and hadn't enjoyed a single moment of happiness yet; she couldn't just be cruelly taken away like this. Perhaps Heaven had heard Alana's silent prayers.

A ding!

The red light outside the operating room suddenly turned green. With a whoosh, the operating room doors swung open.

Several top-tier senior professors and specialist doctors emerged together. They all turned to look at Stephan, their voices filled with respect.

"Mr. Hudson, we've done our duty, the surgery was a success."

Stephan nodded. "Thank you for your hard work."

Upon hearing this, Alana's tense body instantly relaxed.

Overcome with emotion, she threw her arms around Stephan, crying and laughing at the same time. "Stephan, this is wonderful!"

"Grandma's surgery was a success!"

Stephan curved his lips, pulled her close, and gently kissed her forehead and eyes.

"Yes, Grandma pulled through."

Miranda rushed over to the doctor in shock. "What does that mean? If the surgery was successful, does that mean the old lady is okay?"

A white-haired elderly man replied, "She's still in the critical phase and needs to remain in the intensive care unit for twenty-four hours of observation."

"If she's out of danger after twenty-four hours, then she'll likely be fine."

Miranda asked uncertainly, "Does that mean she might not end up in a vegetative state, lying in a hospital bed for the rest of her life, waiting to die?"

The elderly man nodded. "Yes."

Miranda sighed in awe.

“That old woman really has a strong will to live. Even after a fall like that, she managed to pull through.”

The others also felt that the old woman was meant to live.

The white-haired elderly man continued, “Fortunately, the patient has a strong will to live, which is why we were able to save her life. We’ll keep her under observation and have her stay in the hospital for a while.”

Upon hearing this, Alana’s eyes welled up with tears.

Grandma really did want to live.

Thankfully, she hadn’t signed any DNR form just now, that’s what saved her grandmother.

After the surgery, Grandma was wheeled into the intensive care unit for observation. Because the patient’s condition was unstable, the doctors did not allow family members to enter for visits; they could only watch from outside the door.

Miranda was the type to treat people differently depending on their status; seeing how capable Stephan was, she couldn’t help but offer a few words of praise.

“Oh my, I really have to thank your boyfriend, Alana.”

“If you hadn’t brought your boyfriend back, your grandmother probably wouldn’t have made it out of the operating room alive.”

The others chimed in, “That’s right, Alana, where on earth did you find a boyfriend like that?”

“He’s handsome, so capable, and can even bring in top medical team from anywhere, he must be rolling in cash, right?”

They all stared at Stephan, as if they were demons eyeing a god, curious about his identity.

Stephan stood silently beside Alana.

Alana glanced at this group of ill-intentioned relatives and said calmly, “My boyfriend is just an ordinary person.”

Miranda didn’t believe her. “Oh, come on. Can an ordinary person really call in the capital’s top medical team? That must have cost millions, right?”

Could an ordinary person really spend millions at a go?

Was Alana trying to fool them?

Alana remained expressionless. “So what?What does that have to do with you?”

Miranda and the others frowned.

Miranda put on a brave face. “We’re just looking out for you.”

“Exactly! If you ever make it big, don’t forget us, the relatives who raised you!”

Alana scoffed. “Did you raise me? Shouldn’t it be ‘enslaved me’?”

“For a girl, you sure don’t know how to speak properly!”

“We were just teaching you life skills, it was all for your own good!”

“Exactly! How can you take our kindness for granted like that?”

Alana closed her eyes briefly, not even wanting to waste her breath on them.

Stephan shot a glance at Alana’s group of terrible relatives.

One minute they were one way, the next they were completely different.

He’d really seen it all.

Even with all his experience, he’d never seen anything this outrageous.

And Alana, had she really grown up in this kind of family environment?

It was hard to imagine how she had managed to endure it all, or just how much she must have suffered.

The more he thought about it, the more his heart ached for her.

Why hadn’t she ever told him any of this?

Did she think he would abandon her or distance himself from her because of these terrible relatives?

Whatever the reason, it wasn’t her fault.

It was because he hadn’t given her enough that she felt so insecure and couldn’t trust him.

So, it was his fault, not hers.

After waiting at the hospital for a while, Miranda and the others decided the old lady should be okay, so they gradually went home.

Alana remained at the hospital to stay with her grandmother.

Stephan, of course, stayed with her.

The young couple sat in chairs, snuggled close together.

Alana buried her face in his chest and suddenly said in a subdued voice, “Stephan, I’m sorry...”

Stephan lowered his gaze to look at her in his arms. Her eyes were still red-rimmed, a sight that tugged at his heartstrings.

“Why are you apologizing to me?”

Alana lowered her gaze. “For bringing you here and making you witness all this.”

That was why she had been reluctant to reveal her true background to him.

After all, who would accept a girlfriend with such a complicated family background?

Let alone marry her and bring her home as a wife.

Even she despised herself, how much more so would others?

Stephan found it amusing. “Is it just because of this that you feel guilty toward me?”

Alana looked at him with reddened eyes. “Don’t you... mind?”

Stephan asked earnestly, “Why should I?”

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Chapter 287 The way

Chapter 287 The way

“These aren’t things you could have chosen for yourself. You were simply born into it, what does it have to do with you?”

Alana pressed her lips together. That was true, but not everyone understood it the way Stephan did.

“Stephan, earlier this morning, wasn’t there something I wanted to confess to you?”

Stephan nodded. “Yes, you wanted to tell me about this, right?”

Alana shook her head. “Not just that.”

He asked quietly, “What else?”

Alana paused for a moment. “Actually, I grew up at my grandmother’s house and was raised by many different families. My parents divorced when I was five.”

“They each went on with their own lives and didn’t want me anymore. My biological father, my mother, they all abandoned me, my father had said he didn’t want me because I’m a girl and can’t carry on the family line.”

“I also heard my mother found a new man, and for his sake, she didn’t want me either. Back then, no one wanted me. They all saw me as a burden, a burden standing in the way of their happiness.”

Perhaps the memories were too painful; she took a deep breath before continuing.

“Later, my grandmother took me in and raised me.”

“Grandma’s family all objected. They didn’t want me either. They thought Grandma was too old and incapable, why should she raise a child that even her own parents had rejected?”

“Raising me would cost a great deal of money, and they didn’t want Grandma to bear that burden. They wanted me to fend for myself. But Grandma stood her ground against everyone’s objections, kept me by her side, and watched me grow up. From elementary school all the way through college, it was Grandma who paid for everything. To me, Grandma is like my savior. She gave me a second chance at life, which is why I’ve become the woman I am today.”

“Without Grandma, I probably would’ve ended up on the streets, maybe an orphanage...maybe dead.”

Stephan gazed deeply at the girl in his arms, striving to recount her years-long journey in a calm tone.

Though it was just a few brief sentences, they left him breathless.

Even as an outsider, hearing Alana's story would fill anyone with waves of despair. How had she managed to endure all this alone, at such a young age?

He couldn't even bear to think about it.

And now, how much courage must she have mustered to confess these traumas to him?

No wonder, whenever she faced him, there was always a faint, indescribable sadness lingering in her eyes.

Stephan couldn't help but pull the girl closer, his heart aching with sorrow.

"You didn't dare tell me the truth before, were you afraid... that I'd look down on your background?"

Alana shook her head. "It wasn't just that. I was afraid of being abandoned again."

Stephan's Adam's apple bobbed, and he found it extremely difficult to speak.

He couldn't help but cup her face, his dark eyes staring fixedly at her. Gritting his teeth, he said word by word, "Alana, I will not abandon you. No matter what you're like, I will never abandon you."

"The person I love is you, all of you. No matter what happens, I love you. I will never dislike you just because you have flaws."

Seeing the man's determined gaze, Alana bit her lip, the heat in her eyes uncontrollably overflowing.

Tears welled up and slid down from the corners of her eyes.

Stephan saw them, lowered his head, and gently kissed them away, his breath warm.

"Alana, whether you believe me or not, I will always be by your side."

Alana's throat choked with emotion, and she had no way to express how she felt at this moment.

She nodded repeatedly, unable to resist leaning closer, wrapping her arms around the man's slender neck and kissing his thin lips.

No matter what, at this moment, she was willing to believe him.

Stephan also kissed her deeply in return, his movements incredibly gentle.

As if cherishing a precious treasure he held in the palm of his hand.

Even if everyone in the world didn't want her and abandoned her, he would still hold on to her tightly.

In his eyes, she wasn't a burden but a precious treasure that he could long for but never easily attain.

To him, she was one of a kind, irreplaceable.

No one knew how long they had been kissing before the two of them embraced each other tightly again, releasing their emotions.

After Alana confessed her circumstances, the heavy burden in her heart finally felt much lighter.

It turned out that confessing everything wasn't so difficult after all.

She had simply worried too much, being afraid of this and that, which instead held her back and caused these things to become a burden in her heart.

Now that the burden had been lifted, she felt completely at ease.

And fortunately, the man she loved wasn't like the others. After hearing about her background, he didn't despise her or abandon her.

At this moment, Alana felt very satisfied and incredibly fortunate. There was even a sense of unprecedented happiness surrounding her.

This... was what it felt like to be loved, right?

Because she had been deprived of love for so long, she had almost forgotten what it felt like to be deeply loved by someone.

Stephan rested his chin against the girl's soft head, enjoying the warmth and happiness of this moment.

"Alana, actually, I also want to tell you about my identity. The truth is..."

Alana gently interrupted him. "I know."

“You’re the heir of the Hudson family, the number-one prestigious family in the capital, and also the president of the Hudson Group, the Stephan Hudson.”

Stephan smiled. “You guessed?”

Alana honestly said, “I just felt that your identity wasn’t simple. You usually dress in suits and formal clothes, the underwear you wear costs me a year’s salary, and the gifts you give me cost tens of millions. How could an ordinary person possibly afford them?”

“So I guessed that you must be the young master of some prestigious family! But I didn’t expect your identity to be this damn... great!”

She had originally wanted to say that word, but Alana felt that it was rather vulgar, so she forcibly changed it to another word.

After a pause, she continued, “Actually, the moment I truly found out about your identity was because of Darla.”

“Darla?”

Stephan frowned. “What does she have to do with this?”

Alana told him honestly, “She came to find me and happened to tell me about your identity. She thought my background wasn’t a good match for you, so she asked me to break up with you.”

Stephan sneered. “Who does she think she is? What right does she have to persuade me to break up with you?”

Alana nodded. “Exactly. That’s what I said to her too.”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “So, you weren’t frightened by my identity and didn’t have thoughts of backing out and breaking up with me?”

She said seriously, “I was actually frightened, and I did have the thought of breaking up with you. But that isn’t something Darla can decide, right?”

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Chapter 288 No say

Chapter 288 No say

“No. She has no say.” Stephan declared.

He then held her hand. “Don’t ever break up with me, Lana. I won’t be able to survive it.”

Alana smiled. “I’m not sure I would survive it either.”

He hugged her, tightly, assuring her that there would be no secrets between them anymore. He then urged Alana to go have some rest.

While keeping watch alone, Stephan sensed a shadowy figure lurking nearby. His sharp gaze swept over the area.

“Who’s there?”

The figure vanished in a flash around the corner.

He frowned and couldn’t help but take a few steps toward the corner.

It was late at night, and all was quiet.

The sound of black leather shoes tapping against the cold floor echoed distinctly.

Agnes hid in the shadows. Hearing the footsteps drawing closer, she clenched her teeth but still didn’t dare to show herself; instead, she turned and ran into the stairwell.

It was late, and she didn’t know who this man was. Although she was curious why he had been waiting outside the old woman’s hospital room all this time, she didn’t feel comfortable confronting him directly.

She had come back secretly and didn’t want to alert her family just yet.

Stephan walked to the corner and saw that the figure had already vanished into the hallway.

His eyes darkened. Judging by the silhouette, it must have been a woman.

So, who exactly was that sneaky woman?

The following morning, Alana was awakened by the light streaming in through the window.

She let out a soft moan of discomfort and instinctively tried to roll over to go back to sleep.

But as if realizing something, she sat bolt upright in bed. Her head was buzzing.

She recalled what Stephan had told her last night. He had told her to go to bed and rest, and that when he got sleepy in the wee hours of the morning, he would come and wake her up to keep watch.

But now it was daylight, why hadn't Stephan come in to wake her up yet?

It didn't take long for her to realize that Stephan had tricked her.

He never had any intention of waking her up. He had used the excuse of letting her sleep first just to put her at ease, so she wouldn't worry so much.

Alana bit her lip, her eyes reddening.

"Stephan, how could you do this..."

She hurriedly threw off the covers and ran out without even bothering to put on her shoes.

As soon as she stepped outside, sure enough, she saw Stephan standing like a statue, staring intently outside her grandmother's intensive care unit.

His tall, slender figure stood incredibly tall and imposing.

Alana's voice was hoarse and choked with emotion as she called out, "Stephan!"

Stephan turned his head. "You're awake?"

Having gone without sleep all night, dark circles had formed under his eyes, and his eyes were bloodshot; his exhaustion was evident.

Alana couldn't help but throw herself into his arms, hugging him tightly with a heavy heart.

"Stephan, you rascal!"

"You tricked me again! You promised you'd wake me up in the middle of the night, why didn't you?"

But Stephan only noticed that she had run out barefoot. He furrowed his brow. "Why aren't you wearing shoes?"

Alana looked up, her eyes glistening with tears. “It was more important to come see you right away than to waste time putting on shoes.”

Those words reminded Stephan of the time she’d told him she’d been in a car accident, and he’d rushed out to find her.

In the rush, he’d forgotten his shoes.

She had seen him without shoes and asked him about it; he remembered that he had answered her in much the same way.

Stephan curved his lips and couldn’t help but lift the girl in his arms.

“Your feet are delicate...unlike my own.”

“Let’s go back so you can put your shoes on.”

Alana stroked his brow and eyes with concern, saying earnestly, “Stephan, it’s your turn to rest, do you understand?”

“Look at those dark circles under your eyes. After I carry you home, you’re going straight to bed to rest. Otherwise, I won’t let this go!”

Even though she was concerned for him, she couldn’t help but speak with the toughest words.

Stephan smiled. “Lana, I’m not as weak as you think.”

“But your body isn’t made of iron...you need rest too! I don’t care. Your dark circles are so bad, you have to rest!”

“Alright, I promise.”

Alana was delighted and couldn’t help but give him a quick kiss on the lips.

But since she hadn’t rinsed her mouth yet, she didn’t dare go deep, she just gave him a light, butterfly-like peck before quickly pulling away.

Little did she know that after he laid her on the bed, he grabbed the back of her head and deepened the kiss.

After being pestered for a while, Alana finally pushed him away in shock. “You... don’t mind that I haven’t brushed my teeth and my breath stinks?”

Stephan chuckled, “Not at all. My girlfriend smells wonderful from head to toe...not a hint of bad breath.”

Alana blushed and scolded him playfully, “Regardless, I have my image to worry about. You’re not allowed to kiss me when I haven’t brushed my teeth!”

Stephan chuckled, “I’ll kiss you whenever I want. Who are you to stop me? I’m going to kiss you right now!”

“Oh, come on, don’t kiss me. Go lie down and rest!”

“I’ll rest after I kiss you!”

“Stop it, Stephan!”

Miranda, who had come to the hospital early that morning to visit, and her eldest daughter, Joan, passed by the ward.

Seeing Alana and Stephan playfully bickering inside, they both couldn’t help but frown.

Miranda was utterly disgusted; the scene inside was simply too much to bear. “Oh my, how shameless! Flirting with men right here in the hospital!”

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Chapter 289 Dream on

Chapter 289 Dream on

Joan had witnessed Stephan’s domineering and powerful attitude as he protected Alana yesterday, and she had already been deeply captivated and won over by such a man.

If only a man like that would protect her the way he protects Alana, how wonderful that would be!

Just thinking about it made her feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

She looked at Miranda and couldn’t help but say, “Mom, I really like Alana’s boyfriend. He’s tall, handsome, stylish, and charming, he’s exactly my type. Why don’t you talk to Alana and convince her to let me have her boyfriend?”

Miranda looked at her daughter in disbelief. “You’ve fallen for Alana’s boyfriend? He snapped at your mom yesterday, he made me so furious I almost had a heart attack. Not only did you not stand up for me, but now you’ve fallen for him?”

Joan said earnestly, “Mom, don’t you think he looked really cool yesterday?”

“Plus, he was able to easily bring in the top medical team over, that means he’s really rich!”

“Didn’t you always want your daughter to find a rich boyfriend? Isn’t the guy right in front of you the perfect match?”

Miranda blinked.

Well... she had a point.

Joan said with a straight face, “Mom, Alana is just a little sourpuss, an ugly duckling. How could she possibly be worthy of such a handsome and wealthy man?”

“You’re always saying I’m the most beautiful princess in the world, and I deserve the richest, most handsome man in the world. Now that this man has appeared, shouldn’t he belong to me, the princess?”

“Besides, I think he appeared in this world just to meet a princess like me. I’m the princess, so he must be the prince. Fairy tales always say that princes are meant to be with princesses!”

Miranda nodded. “My dear, you’re right. Alana is nothing but a little slut, she’s not worthy of a good life. You’re my precious daughter, born to be a princess. All the good men and wealthy men in the world should be revolving around you!”

“I’m going to make Alana break up with her boyfriend right away. And while I’m at it, I’ll have her set you up with him!”

Joan couldn’t help but laugh, wrapping her arm affectionately around Miranda.

“Mom, you’re so good to me! Once I’ve made it big, I’ll never forget you. Then I’ll take you and Dad to live the high life together!”

Miranda was instantly overjoyed, as if she were already dreaming of a life as a wealthy socialite.

“All right, I’ll be waiting for that day to come!”

Alana finally managed to persuade Stephan to go to bed after much coaxing.

However, he hadn't had time to eat breakfast yet, so she planned to call her aunt to come relieve her, then go buy him some breakfast.

Unexpectedly, as soon as she stepped out of the ward and closed the door, she saw her aunt and her eldest daughter already waiting outside her grandmother's room.

Alana walked over to greet them. "Good morning, Auntie."

She paused for a moment, then looked at the girl standing next to her aunt, a slightly plump girl wearing a pink princess dress and a ponytail.

"Cousin."

Joan crossed her arms, gave a haughty snort, and shot Alana a sidelong glance. Because she had always looked down on Alana.

Seeing that Stephan wasn't by Alana's side, Miranda immediately launched into a lecture in the typical stern, parental tone.

Placing her hands on her hips, she said, "Alana, what was that all about just now? You weren't paying proper attention to your grandmother, instead, you were flirting with your boyfriend. What if something happened to her?"

Alana explained, "I only went into the ward with my boyfriend for a few minutes. It didn't take long."

Miranda's tone was sharp and accusatory. "A few minutes isn't a delay? If your cousin and I hadn't rushed over in time, who knows what might have happened. Seriously, you're an adult, you have no sense of propriety!"

Alana said, "Auntie, if you thought I wasn't taking good care of her, you should have stayed to look after her last night."

Miranda laughed bitterly. "What's the matter? I just said one thing to you, and now you're taking offense?"

"How can I dare? It's just that I was afraid you'd think I didn't know my place.

If you knew your place, you would've been the one taking care of her."

Miranda glared at her. "You!"

She never would have thought that after venturing out into the world, this little brat would become so sharp-tongued.

How much better that meek, submissive little girl was, she'd do whatever she was told without daring to say a single word in protest.

If you asked her to help with chores, she'd do it; if you asked her to cook or do laundry, she'd get right to it.

Now, Miranda doubted she'd even respond if she called out to Alana now.

Miranda snorted, "Just as I thought, she's come out of college and turned all high and mighty!"

Alana blinked.

Excuse me, but where exactly did you see that she's become so high and mighty?

She didn't even want to respond, it was a waste of her breath.

"Since you and my cousin are here, could you please keep an eye on Grandma for a bit? I haven't had breakfast yet, so I'm going out to grab something." With that, Alana started to leave.

"Wait!" Joan called out to her.

Alana turned to look at Joan. "Is there something else?"

Joan tugged at Miranda's arm. "Mom, don't forget the main business!"

Upon hearing this, Miranda cleared her throat and asked Alana in a serious tone, "Lana, Auntie is going to ask you a few questions. Answer honestly."

Alana asked, "What kind of questions?"

"Well, about your boyfriend, is he from this country? How many people are in his family? Are his parents still alive? How many brothers and sisters does he have? And most importantly, how much family wealth do they have?"

Alana frowned. "Why are you asking all this?"

"I'm just looking out for you. Who knows if the guy you're dating is reliable or not? But if your boyfriend was able to bring in a top-tier medical team to operate on grandmother and arrange such excellent post-operative care for her, he must be well-off, right?"

Alana was speechless.

Seeing the greed in Miranda's eyes, she didn't even want to answer.

She took a deep breath. "Auntie, just say what you mean. Don't beat around the bush."

Hearing this, Miranda stopped beating around the bush and said bluntly, "Lana, you can't even hold onto a man this wealthy. Why don't you just let your cousin have him?"

Alana's jaw dropped. She couldn't believe her ears. "What did you say?"

She wondered if she was hearing things.

Miranda said, shamelessly, "Oh, I just mean you should give your boyfriend to your cousin!"

Alana felt as if she'd heard a tall tale. "Auntie, you want me to give my boyfriend to my cousin? Are you crazy, or am I?"

Miranda said, "Oh my, I'm serious. I don't think that guy is right for you. Break up with him right away. Auntie will find you someone better!"

Alana laughed in exasperation; she'd never heard anything so outlandish.

"And then what? You'll find me a better one, and I'm supposed to just hand my boyfriend over to my cousin? Why don't you give that 'better' guy to your daughter? Can't you find one?"

It was obvious she had her eye on her boyfriend and was trying to get her to break up with him so she could swoop in.

Was she stupid?

Agree to this ridiculous demand?

"Oh, come on, I've told you before, you can't keep a rich man. Look at you, no father, no mother, nothing. If his family finds out, do you think they'll accept you? If you let him go to your cousin, and she ends up with him and marries into his family, you might even get a little of that good fortune in the future!"

Joan lifted her head haughtily. "Exactly. As long as you're willing to break up with your boyfriend and help bring us together, once I marry him, I won't forget your kindness."

Alana scoffed.

How has the world gone so mad that it's become unrecognizable to her?

"I'll give you two words."

Miranda asked curiously, "What two words?"

“Dream on.”

Both mother and daughter were momentarily stunned.

Miranda was furious, “Lana, you’re so ungrateful!”

Joan retorted angrily, “Lana, what makes you think you can outdo me? I believe that any man I set my sights on will eventually fall at the feet of my princess dress!”

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Chapter 289 Dream on

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Unexpectedly, as soon as she stepped out of the ward and closed the door, she saw her aunt and her eldest daughter already waiting outside her grandmother’s room.

Alana walked over to greet them. “Good morning, Auntie.”

She paused for a moment, then looked at the girl standing next to her aunt, a slightly plump girl wearing a pink princess dress and a ponytail.

“Cousin.”

Joan crossed her arms, gave a haughty snort, and shot Alana a sidelong glance. Because she had always looked down on Alana.

Seeing that Stephan wasn't by Alana's side, Miranda immediately launched into a lecture in the typical stern, parental tone.

Placing her hands on her hips, she said, “Alana, what was that all about just now? You weren't paying proper attention to your grandmother, instead, you were flirting with your boyfriend. What if something happened to her?”

Alana explained, “I only went into the ward with my boyfriend for a few minutes. It didn't take long.”

Miranda's tone was sharp and accusatory. “A few minutes isn't a delay? If your cousin and I hadn't rushed over in time, who knows what might have happened. Seriously, you're an adult, you have no sense of propriety!”

Alana said, “Auntie, if you thought I wasn't taking good care of her, you should have stayed to look after her last night.”

Miranda laughed bitterly. “What's the matter? I just said one thing to you, and now you're taking offense?”

“How can I dare? It's just that I was afraid you'd think I didn't know my place.

If you knew your place, you would've been the one taking care of her.”

Miranda glared at her. “You!”

She never would have thought that after venturing out into the world, this little brat would become so sharp-tongued.

How much better that meek, submissive little girl was, she'd do whatever she was told without daring to say a single word in protest.

If you asked her to help with chores, she'd do it; if you asked her to cook or do laundry, she'd get right to it.

Now, Miranda doubted she'd even respond if she called out to Alana now.

Miranda snorted, “Just as I thought, she's come out of college and turned all high and mighty!”

Alana blinked.

Excuse me, but where exactly did you see that she's become so high and mighty?

She didn't even want to respond, it was a waste of her breath.

"Since you and my cousin are here, could you please keep an eye on Grandma for a bit? I haven't had breakfast yet, so I'm going out to grab something." With that, Alana started to leave.

"Wait!" Joan called out to her.

Alana turned to look at Joan. "Is there something else?"

Joan tugged at Miranda's arm. "Mom, don't forget the main business!"

Upon hearing this, Miranda cleared her throat and asked Alana in a serious tone, "Lana, Auntie is going to ask you a few questions. Answer honestly."

Alana asked, "What kind of questions?"

"Well, about your boyfriend, is he from this country? How many people are in his family? Are his parents still alive? How many brothers and sisters does he have? And most importantly, how much family wealth do they have?"

Alana frowned. "Why are you asking all this?"

"I'm just looking out for you. Who knows if the guy you're dating is reliable or not? But if your boyfriend was able to bring in a top-tier medical team to operate on grandmother and arrange such excellent post-operative care for her, he must be well-off, right?"

Alana was speechless.

Seeing the greed in Miranda's eyes, she didn't even want to answer.

She took a deep breath. "Auntie, just say what you mean. Don't beat around the bush."

Hearing this, Miranda stopped beating around the bush and said bluntly, "Lana, you can't even hold onto a man this wealthy. Why don't you just let your cousin have him?"

Alana's jaw dropped. She couldn't believe her ears. "What did you say?"

She wondered if she was hearing things.

Miranda said, shamelessly, "Oh, I just mean you should give your boyfriend to your cousin!"

Alana felt as if she'd heard a tall tale. "Auntie, you want me to give my boyfriend to my cousin? Are you crazy, or am I?"

Miranda said, "Oh my, I'm serious. I don't think that guy is right for you. Break up with him right away. Auntie will find you someone better!"

Alana laughed in exasperation; she'd never heard anything so outlandish.

"And then what? You'll find me a better one, and I'm supposed to just hand my boyfriend over to my cousin? Why don't you give that 'better' guy to your daughter? Can't you find one?"

It was obvious she had her eye on her boyfriend and was trying to get her to break up with him so she could swoop in.

Was she stupid?

Agree to this ridiculous demand?

"Oh, come on, I've told you before, you can't keep a rich man. Look at you, no father, no mother, nothing. If his family finds out, do you think they'll accept you? If you let him go to your cousin, and she ends up with him and marries into his family, you might even get a little of that good fortune in the future!"

Joan lifted her head haughtily. "Exactly. As long as you're willing to break up with your boyfriend and help bring us together, once I marry him, I won't forget your kindness."

Alana scoffed.

How has the world gone so mad that it's become unrecognizable to her?

"I'll give you two words."

Miranda asked curiously, "What two words?"

"Dream on."

Both mother and daughter were momentarily stunned.

Miranda was furious, "Lana, you're so ungrateful!"

Joan retorted angrily, "Lana, what makes you think you can outdo me? I believe that any man I set my sights on will eventually fall at the feet of my princess dress!"

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Chapter 290 Upside down

Chapter 290 Upside down

Alana couldn't be bothered to keep talking to them. "You two can keep dreaming. I'm off to have breakfast."

She turned and walked away.

Miranda and Joan were furious at Alana's arrogant attitude.

They were used to Alana doing whatever they told her to do. Now that she wasn't obeying them, they felt she was an ungrateful wretch with ulterior motives!

Joan stomped her feet in anger. "And to think I used to give her the clothes I didn't want anymore to wear. Is this how she treats her own cousin?"

Miranda retorted angrily, "That wench! She even freeloaded on plenty of meals at our house!"

They made no mention of the fact that Alana had been treated like a slave by their family for years.

And she'd even pocketed the money Alana's mother had given her.

Joan seemed to think of something, her eyes lighting up. "Mom, Alana's gone to eat breakfast now, but her boyfriend's still there!"

"Her boyfriend should still be resting in the ward. Mom, tell me...if I went in there right now to seduce him, do you think he'd be swept off his feet by my stunning beauty?"

Upon hearing this, Miranda naturally encouraged her, "My dear daughter, if a ugly duckling like Alana could seduce that man, then you, being so beautiful, will surely drive him wild with desire!"

Joan smiled. "Mom, just you wait. I'm going in right now to snag that man and make him your golden son-in-law!"

Miranda nodded. "Alright, I'll keep watch outside for you. If Alana comes back, I won't let her in!"

"I love you, Mom. My future happiness depends on you!"

"Go on, go on!"

Joan immediately flicked her hair and walked toward Stephan's hospital room with a graceful sway. "Hehe, you handsome, rich hunk...this princess is here to grace you with her presence."

Joan opened the door and slipped quietly inside.

As soon as she entered, she saw the man lying on the bed.

A handsome, chiseled face with sharp, striking features.

Arched eyebrows and starry eyes, jet-black hair and red lips. His beauty was intensely striking yet exuded a powerful masculine charm.

Joan couldn't help but marvel: How could there be such a strikingly handsome man in this world?

To be honest, the moment she laid eyes on him yesterday, she was instantly captivated.

It wasn't just his looks; his commanding yet aloof aura had completely captivated her. The moment she saw him, she felt he was the partner she had been searching for her entire life.

Joan slowly walked up to Stephan, her gaze lingering on him with adoration.

Looking at his broad shoulders and narrow waist, it wasn't hard to imagine what a breathtakingly masculine physique lay beneath his clothes.

She couldn't resist reaching out, wanting to touch him, to lift the hem of his shirt...

But before she could make contact, a strong, muscular hand suddenly seized her wrist. The force of the grip was so intense that she couldn't help but cry out in pain,

"Ah!"

Stephan had opened his eyes; his dark, pitch-black pupils held not a shred of warmth. He stared at the unfamiliar woman before him. He was always sharp; even in his sleep, he maintained a sense of vigilance.

He had sensed her the moment she pushed the door open.

But since she moved so cautiously, he assumed it was Alana returning, afraid to wake him, and thus moving quietly.

He, too, had not moved rashly at first.

But as she drew closer, he caught a scent vastly different from Alana's.

It was a sickening, foul odor that evoked a physical revulsion. Only then did he realize that this woman was not Alana.

"Who are you?"

"Who gave you permission to come in here?"

Joan said with a look of hurt on her face, "I...I'm Alana's cousin, Joan. It was Alana who asked me to come in and keep you company."

"Let go of me! You're hurting me!"

When Stephan heard Joan say that Alana had asked her to come in and keep him company, his brow furrowed slightly.

He was resting...would Alana really ask a woman to come in and disturb his rest?

It was full of holes...did she really think he was stupid?

But Stephan still let go of her hand, simply not wanting any physical contact with her.

"Get out. I don't need company here."

Joan had finally managed to get in; she hadn't even managed to seduce Stephan yet, there was no way she was going to leave so easily.

She plopped herself down on the bed where Stephan was lying and said in a sweet, coquettish voice, "Don't be like that. You must be bored all by yourself. I came in to keep you company and cheer you up!"

Having been disturbed, Stephan no longer felt like resting.

He sat up from the bed and shot Joan a blank look.

"Oh, what do you want to talk about?"

Joan batted her eyelashes. “How did you end up getting together with my cousin?”

Stephan gave a faint smile and asked in return, “What does that have to do with you?”

Joan speculated, “Handsome guy, you’re so good-looking...it must have been my cousin who pestered you relentlessly, seducing you, which is why you ended up with her, right?”

Stephan gave her a half-smile. “Is that how you see your cousin?”

Joan blinked again, feigning innocence. “I’m just guessing!”

A faint smile tugged at Stephan’s lips. “Quite the opposite. It was me who fell for Alana at first sight and pursued her relentlessly until she agreed to be with me. It’s as simple as that.”

“What?!”

Joan was stunned. She had assumed Alana had been the one to shamelessly seduce this man, which was why they’d ended up together.

She never would have imagined that it was actually this man who made the first move on Alana?

What gives?

Hmph!

Alana couldn’t hold a candle to her in any way. If Alana was capable of making this man pursue her, then so was she!

Joan asked pointedly, “Handsome guy, what do you think of me?”

“What do you mean, ‘what do you think of me’?”

Joan flicked her hair, unintentionally exuding her charm.

“I mean... In your opinion, who’s better...me or my cousin?”

Stephan sized up Joan: rough skin, a bulky figure, and she was actually wearing a pink princess dress.

It was a bit of an eyesore.

Most importantly, she was emitting a foul, nauseating odor.

Unlike his girlfriend, who was not only clean and fair-skinned, but also cute, soft, and fragrant...a delight to touch and smell.

“You’re no match for her.”

Joan took this to mean that Alana was nowhere near as beautiful as she was. She gave a coy smile. “So, when you see me, do you feel the urge to pursue me?”

Stephan gave a forced smile, “Sorry, I feel the urge to kick you right across the room.”

No, no, no....she must have heard wrong!

She’d heard “take the initiative to pursue” as “take the initiative to kick you across the room.”

She said shamelessly, “Handsome guy, do you believe in love? The moment I laid eyes on you, I knew you were the man I wanted most in this lifetime, and the love I longed to experience with you.”

“If I agreed to be your girlfriend, would you break up with my cousin for me and be with me instead?”

Upon hearing this, Stephan’s thin lips twitched slightly. He couldn’t even be bothered to call her out.

“Who gave you the nerve to think I’d break up with my girlfriend for you?”

Joan retorted, “Just because I’m prettier than my cousin, have a better figure than my cousin, and I’m superior to my cousin in every way...wouldn’t it be perfectly normal for you to give her up for me?”

Stephan laughed. The world had truly turned upside down.

He had no idea what this woman had been feeding herself since childhood to be this delusional.

“Miss, have worms eaten your brain? Is there nothing left but a pile of mush?”

“You say you’re prettier than Alana and have a better figure. If you don’t have a mirror at home, surely you have a bladder? Go take a leak and take a look at yourself, see what you’re really made of.”

“As for you claiming you’re superior to Alana in every way...sorry, I don’t see it. The only thing I do see is that you’re more ‘ordinary yet confident’ than she is.”

“Since I’m worried you might have a screw loose, let me explain exactly what ‘ordinary yet confident’ means. Got it?”

Joan’s eyes widened in shock. “You...you...how dare you say that about me?”

“My mom said I’m the most beautiful princess in the world, how can you be so blind?! Also, it’s true I’ve gained a little weight lately because my mom has been feeding me, I was going through something, okay?! But as long as I’m willing to lose it, I’m still the most beautiful woman!”

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Chapter 291 Ruin their fun

Chapter 291 Ruin their fun

“It’s your good fortune that I’ve taken a liking to you!” Joan thundered.

Joan couldn’t help but roll his eyes dramatically.

Good fortune?

More like bad luck!

He had no patience left to waste on this idiotic woman in front of him.

“Get the hell out of here right now!”

Joan jumped to her feet and began stripping off her skirt.

“I’m not leaving. I just don’t believe it, you can’t possibly remain indifferent to this gorgeous body of mine!”

Alana returned with the breakfast she had bought and saw Miranda standing outside the hospital room where Stephan had just been.

She was straining to hear, her ear pressed against the door, as if listening for any sound from inside.

She was even muttering to herself.

“Daughter, hang in there! Go get that man!”

Alana sensed something was off and couldn’t help but walk over. “Auntie, shouldn’t you be watching Grandma? What are you doing here?”

Upon seeing Alana return, Miranda instantly straightened her back and blocked the doorway.

“Alana, don’t go in!”

Alana felt like laughing. “My boyfriend is resting inside. Why can’t I go in?”

Miranda retorted defiantly, “You just can’t go in, period!”

Alana couldn’t help but push Miranda. “Move out of the way!”

Miranda was plump and round, with the strength of an ox, and to her surprise, Alana couldn’t budge her.

Miranda said fiercely, “I won’t let you! My daughter’s in there, doing naughty things with your boyfriend. Don’t go in and ruin their fun!”

“What?” Alana quickly caught on. Her eyes widened in disbelief as she asked, “Your daughter is in there seducing my boyfriend?”

Miranda glared back, denying it. “What do you mean, ‘seducing your boyfriend’? It’s your boyfriend who has his eye on my daughter...he’s the one who asked her to go in and keep him company!”

Alana shook her head. “That’s impossible. My boyfriend would never do something like that!”

Miranda snorted derisively. “What man doesn’t have an affair?”

“Besides, you’re just boyfriend and girlfriend...not husband and wife. Why stop him from finding a better woman?”

Alana refused to believe it. “Move aside. Let me in!”

Miranda said, “There’s no way I’m moving out of the way and letting you ruin their fun!”

“If you know what’s good for you, you’d better break up with him right now!”

Alana laughed in exasperation, “You two...you and your daughter, are completely crazy!”

Miranda said shamelessly, “Hmph, as long as my daughter and I can live a good life, I don’t care about you!”

Alana felt a surge of anxiety; she had no idea what was going on between Stephan and Joan inside.

She never would have imagined that Miranda and Joan could be so shameless.

Knowing full well that Stephan was her boyfriend, they still went so far as to try to snatch him away, what’s the difference between this and some ancient tyrant snatching a beauty off the street?!

It was utterly shameful!

How could she have such disgusting relatives?

Just then, Joan’s heart-wrenching scream echoed from inside the room.

“Ah!”

Miranda gasped, “Oh my God, why is my daughter screaming so loudly?”

“Did that man take my daughter’s virginity? That’s so crude! If that’s the case, I’ll make him take full responsibility for my daughter!”

“Alana, you mustn’t go in and interrupt their fun!”

Little did she know, her daughter was being beaten up inside.

Alana was frantic with worry and wanted to rush in, but Miranda held her back with all her might, not letting her get even an inch closer.

Suddenly, the hospital room door flew open, and a bulky figure was simply tossed out. Like a piece of ragged cloth, she was tossed right at Alana and Miranda’s feet.

Miranda looked down and only then realized that this swollen, pale, shapeless mass was actually her daughter, Joan.

Seeing Joan’s bruised and swollen face and her barely covered body, she was terrified.

Instantly, she took off her own coat and covered Joan with it.

Joan buried her face in Miranda's arms, sobbing uncontrollably, utterly heartbroken.

Miranda immediately looked up and saw the man standing at the door. She snapped at him, "You bastard, what have you done to my daughter?!"

Stephan cracked his knuckles. He never hit women, but today, a conceited, self-absorbed, and shameless woman had made him break that rule.

He simply couldn't hold back, his hands were itching to strike!

He glanced at Miranda with a blank expression. "Ask your daughter yourself what she just did to me."

A flicker of guilt crossed Miranda's eyes, but it vanished just as quickly.

"What... what could my daughter possibly have done to you? It must be you who did something to my daughter, and stripped her of her skirt! Have you no shame?"

"Let me tell you this: if you did something like that to my daughter, I'm definitely calling the police, and I'll make sure they punish you severely!"

"Of course, if you want me not to call the police, that's fine, but then you have to take responsibility for my daughter and marry her!"

Instead of getting angry, Stephan smiled. "Are you sure it was me who did this, and not your daughter shamelessly seducing me? If that's the case, then go ahead and call the police."

"Anyway, there are security cameras in the ward. When the police arrive and review the footage, they'll see the entire sequence of events, how your daughter just stripped off her own clothes in the ward and tried to sexually harass me."

Upon hearing this, Miranda instantly lost her nerve.

She hadn't even considered the possibility of security cameras in the ward.

If things were really as that man said, wouldn't calling the police make her look like a thief crying "catch the thief"?

After all, she knew exactly what kind of ulterior motives her daughter had when she went into that man's room just a moment ago.

Miranda couldn't help but exchange a glance with Joan in her arms. Seeing the panic and fear in Joan's eyes, she confirmed her suspicions.

Upon hearing this, Alana also pieced together the sequence of events.

Her face turned an unusually pale shade, and she immediately walked over to Stephan, grabbed his hand, and asked with concern. “Stephan, are you okay? Did Joan bother you?”

Stephan immediately wrapped his arm around Alana and said with a feigned air of innocence, “Darling, you know I was asleep just now and didn’t feel a thing. She barged in while I was resting and tried to seduce me.”

“I treated her with every courtesy and respect, considering she’s your cousin, but I never expected her to try to take off her skirt and throw herself at me.”

“She should take a good, hard look at herself. A woman like her...so brazen and shameless, climbing the social ladder by any means necessary, how could I possibly be interested in her?”

“So I didn’t even touch her, I just kicked her right out the door. You have to believe me!”

When the man finished speaking, a hint of grievance seemed to linger in his deep voice. It successfully made Alana feel both pity for him and a surge of anger, compelling her to want to stand up for him.

He’d traveled all this way to come home with her to visit her grandmother and had helped her so much, yet she’d let him suffer this injustice... it was simply unforgivable!

“Mm-hmm, I believe you!”

She patted Stephan on the back, then glared at Miranda and Joan. “Joan, you’ve gone too far! Don’t you have a boyfriend of your own? How dare you shamelessly flirt with my boyfriend? No matter what, I’m calling the police to report you for sexually harassing my boyfriend!”

Stephan curved his lips, unable to help but relish the feeling of being protected by Alana.

As soon as Miranda and Joan heard that Alana was determined to call the police, their faces instantly turned pale.

Miranda immediately said, “Don’t call the police! I was just joking!”

Joan also pleaded anxiously, “Exactly, cousin! We’re all family, there’s no need to make a big deal out of this!”

Alana trembled with rage as she pointed at Joan and demanded, “So, you really went into the hospital room just now and seduced my boyfriend? And you even... you even took off your own clothes...”

Joan felt guilty; the ward was under surveillance, so there was no point in denying it now.
After all, she really had done that.

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Chapter 292 Mother hen

Chapter 292 Mother hen

Seeing this, Alana rushed over without a word and slapped Joan across the face.

She hit her with almost all her strength.

It left Joan's face swollen and red.

Joan let out a piercing scream.

Miranda instantly shielded her daughter in her arms, like a mother hen protecting her chicks.

Furious, she shouted, "Lana, what are you doing? How dare you hit your cousin? Have you lost your mind?!"

Alana clenched her teeth tightly. "Not only am I going to hit her, I'm going to take her to the police station!"

Miranda gritted her teeth in fury. "You...you...you! We're family, and yet you're being so ruthless. Aren't you afraid of karma?"

Joan covered her swollen face and said shamelessly, "Exactly. I was only seducing your boyfriend...it's not like it's some huge crime. It's your boyfriend's fault for being so handsome! Being handsome is his fault!"

Alana laughed in exasperation. "You don't think you're in the wrong, do you? Fine, I'm calling the police right now." She decisively pulled out her phone.

Miranda and Joan lost their composure again and hurriedly stood up to stop Alana.

“No, no, no...don’t call the police!”

“Em... Let’s talk this out!”

“Don’t be so ruthless!”

“If your cousin ends up in jail, her whole life will be ruined!”

“That’s right. Grandma’s still in a coma. If she wakes up and finds out you’ve had me taken to the police station, she’ll be so furious she’ll die of shock!”

When Alana heard Joan mention Grandma waking up, she realized that if she sent Joan to the police station, it might actually kill Grandma...she couldn’t help but clench her fists a little tighter.

No matter what, Grandma was still very weak and couldn’t handle any stress.

“Apologize. I want you to apologize to my boyfriend right now!”

“Well...” Miranda and Joan were still hesitating, unwilling to apologize so easily.

Alana said, “If you don’t apologize, I’ll call the police!”

At that, the two stopped hesitating, walked obediently up to Stephan, and bowed their heads to apologize to him.

“We’re sorry. It was our fault just now. We won’t do it again.”

Stephan didn’t even glance at them.

“Get out.”

The mother and daughter had never been treated so humiliatingly before.

But there was nothing they could do, after all, they were the ones who had wronged him first.

With this having happened, the mother and daughter no longer had the face to stay, so they hurriedly left.

Alana was a bit hesitant to face Stephan at that moment. “I’m sorry.”

Because she had let Miranda and her daughter off the hook.

Stephan cupped her head in his hand and gently stroked it several times.

“It’s okay, I understand. You have your own concerns.”

“After all, your grandmother hasn’t woken up yet, and you didn’t want to make a big deal out of it and embarrass her.”

Alana couldn’t help but embrace Stephan, burying her face in his chest as tears welled up in her eyes. “Stephan, thank you for understanding me.”

Stephan couldn’t help but smile. “Silly girl. I haven’t lost anything. Besides, she didn’t harass me. Even if we called the police, they’d just take her to the station for a talking-to, nothing serious.”

“Also, if I were in your shoes, facing a situation like this, I would’ve made the same decision as you, so there’s no need for you to blame yourself.”

Alana gave a quiet “Mm-hmm,” but hugged him even tighter.

She was so grateful that, at her most helpless moment, he had been by her side to offer his support.

Stephan patted Alana on the back, but then seemed to remember something. “Oh, right, I forgot to tell you something.”

Alana slowly lifted her head. “What is it?”

Stephan said, “Last night, when I was outside Grandma’s hospital room, I saw someone lurking around nearby. They didn’t leave for a long time.”

Alana froze. “Who was it?”

Stephan shook his head. “I don’t know. It was too dark to see clearly, but judging by the silhouette, it looked like a woman.”

“There are security cameras in the hallway. If you want to know who it was, you can ask the hospital to pull up the surveillance footage.”

Alana paused.

A woman?

For some reason, a vague memory of someone began to surface in her mind.

Could it be... her?

Stephan observed her reaction. “Do you want to check the surveillance footage?”

Alana pressed her lips together and said calmly, “No need. I think I can figure out who she is.”

Stephan looked at her for a few more seconds, gave a faint “Hmm,” and didn’t ask any further questions.

Alana took a deep breath and composed herself. “Let’s eat. I just went out and bought you some breakfast.”

Stephan curved his lips. “Okay.”

Meanwhile, Miranda and Joan, mother and daughter, practically fled in panic.

Once they’d escaped the hospital entrance, thinking Stephan and Alana wouldn’t chase after them, they couldn’t help but start cursing under their breath.

Miranda said angrily, “What kind of man is that? He has no manners at all. Just look at his demeanor, he’s clearly not from a wealthy family!”

Joan clutched her swollen cheek and stomped her foot in anger. “Exactly! And he just threw me out, that’s way too much!”

“But Alana is even worse, what gives her the right to hit me? With that sourpuss face of hers, it’s her good fortune that I even took a liking to her boyfriend!”

Miranda said through gritted teeth, “That damn little slut Alana, she’s been out in the world for a while and her nerve just keeps growing. Now that she’s Mom’s favorite, I’m really afraid she’ll try to steal Mom’s fortune from you one day!”

Joan said, “Mom, you can’t let Alana get away with this!”

Having been slapped by Alana, she now hated her with a passion and didn’t want to give that little slut a single advantage.

Miranda snorted coldly. “Don’t worry. She doesn’t have what it takes!”

The mother and daughter were just about to hail a cab to leave.

Suddenly, a voice called out to them.

Miranda and Joan both turned to look and instantly saw a woman wearing sunglasses and dressed in an exceptionally elegant, high-end outfit.

The woman had a graceful figure and impeccably maintained skin; she looked like a girl in her twenties, her age impossible to guess.

Yet one could still sense the weight of the years radiating from her.

Joan couldn't help but ask, "Who are you?"

Hearing this, Miranda immediately tapped Joan's hand and whispered a reminder, "Shh, she's Alana's mother. You should call her 'Auntie.'"

Joan froze, staring at the woman in disbelief. She never would have imagined that Alana's mother would be so beautiful and elegant, with such a great figure.

Compared to her own mother, who was bloated like a balloon, looked old and haggard, and acted like a shrew.

Miranda had no idea her own daughter was badmouthing her. If she ever found out, she'd surely slap herself silly for giving birth to such a creature.

Just then, she spotted Agnes approaching. Her eyelid twitched, and she grinned as she hurried over to greet her.

"Oh my dear, why are you back?"

Although Agnes was wearing a pair of sunglasses, she couldn't hide the exhaustion on her face. "After hearing about her condition, how could I possibly stay still and just wait for news? That's why I came back to see her."

Miranda immediately interjected, "Oh, come on, I told you there's no need for you to come back. Everything's fine. Mom had surgery yesterday, it was a success, and she'll be waking up soon. There's no point in you coming back; Mom doesn't even want to see you!"

Also, Alana was still in the hospital, and she certainly didn't want the two of them to run into each other.

If they did run into each other, wouldn't all the money she'd secretly siphoned off this woman over the years be exposed?

That was a massive sum, tens of millions...and she had already spent most of it.

Agnes said earnestly, "It's rare for me to come back, so I definitely want to see her. I won't feel at ease until I've seen her. Even if she sees me and wants to hit or scold me, I won't hold it against her."

Agnes had spent the entire night in the hotel room last night thinking it over, and she'd finally come to terms with it.

Running away wasn't a solution.

She had to face this!

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Chapter 293 In poor health

Chapter 293 In poor health

Besides, she hadn't seen the woman in over a decade. Her mother was getting old and in poor health; she didn't know when she might pass away.

The time she had left to see the old woman and be with her was growing shorter with every passing day.

Could she really be so heartless as to never see her again for the rest of her life just because of a grudge from over a decade ago?

If that were the case, she would truly be too selfish and heartless.

Miranda blurted out instinctively, "No, you can't go!"

Agnes was puzzled. "Why?"

Miranda said nervously, "Even if you want to go, you'll have to wait until Mom's condition stabilizes first."

"She just had surgery and hasn't woken up yet. Even if she does, seeing you would be too much of a shock for her! If you truly care about her, you shouldn't see her just yet."

Hearing this, Agnes grew even more worried. "She had surgery? She hasn't woken up yet? I wanted to visit last night, but I saw a strange man watching over her room, so I didn't dare to approach."

Miranda didn't feel like explaining further to Agnes. "Oh, never mind that for now. You should go home first. I'll let you know if there are any updates on Mom."

Agnes said earnestly, “But I want to go see her right now. I came over last night, but I haven’t had a chance to see her yet. I want to see her while she’s still asleep. Once I make sure she’s okay, I’ll leave.”

Miranda was growing impatient. “Sis, why are you so stubborn? It won’t do any good for you to go see her now. The old lady’s still under observation in the ICU. None of us can get in, let alone you. Don’t waste your time!”

Agnes said, “I’ll just stay outside. I just want to catch a glimpse of her from a distance, I’ll definitely not go in and disturb her.”

With that, Agnes tried to enter the hospital.

Miranda quickly stopped her. “Sis, you really can’t do that!”

Agnes found this strange. “Miranda, why are you stopping me from going in to see her?”

She was just going to take a quick look from outside the ward, wasn’t even that allowed?

The more Miranda tried to stop her, the more suspicious she became.

Could it be that Miranda was deliberately hiding something from her regarding the old woman?

Agnes speculated, “Miranda, is it possible she isn’t out of danger yet?”

Miranda shook her head. “Oh, no.”

Agnes pressed, “Then why won’t you let me see her?”

Miranda was still struggling to come up with an excuse when suddenly, her phone rang. “Hold on a sec, I need to take this call.”

Miranda gripped Agnes’ hand tightly to stop her from slipping into the hospital.

With one hand, she quickly pulled out her phone and answered the call.

“Hello, who is this?”

It was a call from the hospital.

“Hello. Your mother-in-law has just regained consciousness.”

Miranda had specifically instructed them to call her immediately if the old lady showed any signs of waking up.

Her expression changed. “The old lady’s awake?”

“Yes.”

“All right, all right, got it.”

Miranda looked up at Agnes.

Agnes had also heard the conversation, and her eyes sparkled with uncontrollable delight.

“She’s awake? Thank goodness! I’m going to see her right now!”

Miranda’s expression immediately turned cold. “Now that Mom’s awake, you absolutely must not go see her! Do you want Mom to see you and get so upset that she passes out again?”

Agnes felt a sharp pang in her chest. Clenching her teeth, she said resolutely, “I won’t go see her. I’ll just take a quick look from a distance to make sure she’s okay.”

Miranda thought to herself, she couldn’t keep blocking Agnes from seeing the old woman forever. Even if she stopped her this time, what if Agnes snuck off to see her again next time?

It would be better to let Agnes see her right under her nose; that way, if any problems arose, she could handle them as they came.

With that in mind, she nodded in agreement. “Alright, but you can only take a quick look from a distance. Don’t stay too long, and don’t let her spot you.”

Of course, she didn’t want Agnes to meet with Alana at all.

Agnes agreed, “Alright, I know what to do.”

Meanwhile, Alana had just finished coaxing Stephan to finish his breakfast when she heard a commotion coming from her grandmother’s intensive care unit.

The two of them immediately rushed into the room.

Alana saw her frail, pale grandmother, her body covered in tubes, open her eyes.

Without hesitation, she rushed over.

“Grandma!”

“Grandma, you’re awake! Thank goodness, you’re finally awake!”

She immediately took her grandmother’s hand, so overcome with emotion that she could barely form coherent words.

She hadn’t expected her grandmother to wake up so quickly.

She thought Grandma wouldn’t wake up until at least twenty-four hours had passed, the critical period.

But as long as she woke up, that was a good thing.

Stephan didn’t step too close; he stood at a distance, watching Alana reconnect with her grandmother.

Having just had a brush with death, Grandma surely had plenty of private things to share with Alana.

Still, her grandmother’s awakening was a positive development, so he immediately grabbed his phone and notified the doctors, asking them to come check on her.

Grandma took Alana’s hand in hers. Seeing Alana’s face, which was a mess from crying, she forced a comforting smile.

“Lana, don’t cry. Grandma’s fine, really.”

Alana nodded, her voice choked with emotion. That’s right, Grandma was okay.

So she stopped crying.

But her tears were completely beyond her control. No matter how much she wiped them away, more would keep flowing.

She could only comfort herself by thinking that these weren’t tears of sadness or grief, but tears of joy.

“Grandma, you just woke up. Does anything hurt?”

Grandma shook her head. Instead of mentioning any discomfort, she said, “Lana, Grandma just can’t let go of you, so I haven’t been able to bring myself to leave so soon. If Grandma were to suddenly pass away, leaving you all alone and helpless, it would break my heart.”

That was why she fought so hard on the operating table, just to hold on a little longer, to survive and catch one last glimpse of her precious granddaughter.

And while she was at it, she made sure to pass on everything she needed to.

As soon as Alana heard this, her tears flowed even more freely.

“Grandma, please don’t say that any more...”.

“No, Grandma has to say it. I’m afraid if I don’t say it now, I won’t have another chance. I have to make sure everything is settled so you won’t have any worries in the future. Only then will Grandma be able to leave with peace of mind.”

“I still have a savings book. There’s over a hundred dollars in it, plus some jewelry, my dowry from back then and the betrothal gift your grandfather gave me, all kept in a small wooden box. I hid that little wooden box under the old peach tree by the front gate. Go home, grab a shovel, and dig a little...you’ll find it.”

“Oh, and the deed to the old house is in there too. The government is planning to expropriate and demolish our old house, the compensation is over four million.”

With tears in her eyes, Alana asked, “Grandma, why are you telling me all this? These are your personal belongings.”

Her grandmother said weakly, “I’m getting old. We come into this world with nothing and leave it with nothing. So, I’ve decided to leave all these things to you.”

“Over a hundred dollars, plus the four million in demolition compensation, and the jewelry I’ve kept for years, that should be more than enough for you to live comfortably for a long time.”

“If you get married, this money and jewelry can serve as your dowry. A dowry is a woman’s confidence; if you marry, having a substantial amount of money will ensure your in-laws won’t look down on you.”

“If you never marry, you can use this money to start a small business, or you can do nothing at all and still live a very comfortable life.”

“As long as you’re comfortable, Grandma can rest easy after she’s gone...”

Alana shook her head, tears streaming down her face. “No, I don’t want it. Grandma, you’re going to live to be over a hundred years old. I only want you, I don’t want any of these things.”

Grandma gripped Alana’s hand tightly. Seeing that she had shed so many tears, she tried to raise her hand to wipe them away, but she had no strength.

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Chapter 294 Meager possessions

Chapter 294 Meager possessions

"You silly girl," She said helplessly. "Be a good girl. Whether Grandma lives to be a hundred or not, these things are what I've always wanted to leave to you."

"Grandma doesn't want to leave these things to your uncle and aunt. They have money, a house, a car, their family is happy and complete. They don't need Grandma's meager possessions."

"But you're different. I'm all you have and I want to make plans for you; otherwise, I won't feel at ease."

"Waaah, Grandma..."

Alana couldn't help but bury her face in her grandmother's lap, crying so hard that her eyes and nose were running, looking quite a mess.

Grandma struggled to lift her hand and gently stroked Alana's back. "Lana, don't cry."

"If I hand over her assets to you, your uncle and aunt will definitely not agree. They'll do everything in their power to stop me from passing this inheritance on to you, they'll try to keep it all for themselves."

"I know them well. They're all selfish and greedy, they just want to seize all my assets!"

"When they found out the old house was being demolished and there was over four million in compensation, they tried every trick in the book to force me to hand over the deed. When I refused, they wouldn't even bother with me anymore, they just left me to fend for myself."

"I've lost all faith in them, so I don't want to leave them a single penny."

"Quick, get your phone out and record a video. Grandma will repeat what she just said, so it'll be legally binding. Even if I were to suddenly die one day, you'll have this recording as evidence, and they won't be able to do a thing to you."

Alana still shook her head. She selfishly thought that as long as she didn't agree to her grandmother's request, her grandmother would never be able to bear leaving her.

She wanted Grandma to live a long, happy life.

Grandma said earnestly, "Lana, if you don't agree, I won't be able to rest in peace. Do you really want to see Grandma die with a heavy heart?"

Accidents could happen at any moment. She'd been lucky to survive this time, but what about next time?

On the operating table, there were several times when she felt she had already stepped into the gates of death, with no way back.

If she hadn't fought with every ounce of strength to claw her way back to life time and time again, she probably would have...

So Grandma wasn't willing to take that chance; she had to be fully prepared.

Alana's heart ached terribly; she didn't want to see the disappointment in her grandmother's eyes. "All right, Grandma, I promise."

Grandma finally smiled with relief. "Take out your phone and record a video for me."

She was too weak to write right now, so she could only ask for a verbal agreement.

Hopefully, it will be useful.

Alana took out her phone, tapped the video recording mode, and slowly aimed the camera at her grandmother on the bed.

Only then did Grandma speak. "I, Ximena Brosnan, hereby unconditionally bequeath all my assets, including liquid assets and real estate, to my granddaughter, Alana Martin." At the end, she emphasized, "To her alone."

Alana's fingers trembled as she saved the video.

"Grandma, that's all."

Grandma smiled with relief. "Yes, I can finally rest easy."

Even if she were to die the very next second, she would die with peace of mind.

Only after making arrangements for her final affairs did Grandma have the presence of mind to notice the handsome, tall man standing in the room.

“Lana, he... who is he...?”

Upon hearing this, Alana wiped away a tear, stood up, and glanced at Stephan.

Stephan seemed to understand the look in Alana’s eyes and walked slowly toward her.

As he drew near, Alana took his hand and, together, they turned to face her grandmother.

“Grandma, I forgot to introduce him to you. His name is Stephan Hudson. He’s the boyfriend I brought home to meet you.”

Stephan chimed in, “Hello, Grandma.”

Grandma looked at the man whose hand her granddaughter was holding tightly, her eyes filled with surprise and delight.

She recognized him too, she had seen this man in the photos Alana had sent her.

She never expected Alana would actually bring him home to introduce him to her. And in person, he was even more handsome than he looked in the photos.

Grandma was so moved she could barely hide her nervousness. “Hello... hello...”

“My granddaughter is out in the world making her way, you’ve been by her side, taking care of her, haven’t you?”

“Thank you so much for looking after her for me.”

Stephan replied gently, “Grandma, it’s only my duty. Besides, it’s not just me looking after her, she takes good care of me too. We look out for each other.”

After saying this, he gave Alana a deep look.

Alana looked back at him, biting her lip, her eyes moist and filled with emotion.

Seeing the two of them gazing at each other so tenderly, Grandma couldn’t help but break into a broad, joyful smile.

“Good, good, good. I’m so happy that you two can be together and build a life side by side.”

“And now that Alana finally has someone by her side who can care for her and look out for her, I feel much more at ease.”

Stephan turned to Grandma again, his tone earnest. “Grandma, rest assured. I will treat Alana well from now on. I won’t let her suffer or feel wronged.”

Grandma nodded, her smile widening.

“Good, good, very good. I believe you! My Lana has found someone who truly cares for her. Grandma is so happy for you.”

Alana’s eyes welled up with tears again.

“Grandma...”

Her heart felt bittersweet.

Because in this household, Grandma was the only one who was sincere, who truly had her best interests at heart, and who genuinely cared for her.

Before Alana could say anything, a group of doctors appeared, saying they wanted to give Grandma a thorough physical examination.

Grandma resisted the doctors a little. “No need for a checkup, no need. Let’s just leave it at that.”

She felt she had said everything she needed to say and made all the necessary arrangements.

Besides, Alana had a man by her side to take care of her, so she had no worries about the future.

Even if she were to die right now, it wouldn’t matter.

Also, she was afraid of medical exams.

The thought of all those cold medical instruments being used on her made her tremble with fear.

Alana gently reassured her grandmother,

“Grandma, be good. The doctor is just

going to check you over, nothing bad will happen.”

Grandma sighed. “Oh, Grandma just wants to spend a little more time talking with you. Let Grandma say a few more words to you and your boyfriend.”

She was truly afraid that if the hospital took her in for tests, she wouldn’t be alive to talk to her granddaughter anymore.

She actually still had so many questions she hadn’t asked yet.

Alana said, “Grandma, once you’ve finished your checkup, we’ll have plenty of time to chat.”

Grandma was about to refuse, but just then, two figures burst in.

“Mom, you’re awake!”

“Grandma, you’re finally awake! We’re so happy!”

“Heaven has seen us through! Mom, you weren’t meant to die!”

The visitors were, of course, Miranda and Joan, who had been notified.

Both mother and daughter had loud voices, and the moment they appeared, they started shouting so loudly it sent everyone reeling.

Seeing that the two of them were about to rush over to Grandma, who had just moments ago been resisting the idea of getting checked, she immediately changed her tune: “Come on, come on, doctor, take me for the exam right away!”

Agnes had originally come with Miranda and the others, but since she couldn’t go into the ward, she had to hide outside.

When no one was looking, she peeked into the room.

She saw her mother lying weakly in bed, and at the same time, she saw Alana inside as well.

She was taken aback, she hadn’t expected her daughter to be back as well.

But upon reflection, Alana had grown up with the old woman and was closest to her. And since her grandmother’s condition was serious enough to require surgery, it was impossible for her not to be concerned.

Still, she wasn’t ready to face Alana yet.

She also noticed a man standing right next to Alana.

Although the man had his back to her, she couldn’t make out his face.

But there was something familiar about the way he walked away.

It seemed like...

Last night, when she had sneaked over, the man she saw was him.

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Chapter 295 Missed out

Chapter 295 Missed out

And seeing how close he was to her daughter, could it be... that there was something more between them?

Were they dating?

Her daughter...could she already have a boyfriend?

Come to think of it, she was twenty-three or twenty-four now... it was perfectly normal for her to have a boyfriend.

Agnes felt a bit dazed. Without even realizing it, she had missed out on so many years with her daughter.

Her daughter was even in a relationship, and as her own mother, she didn't even know who this boyfriend was.

Thinking about it carefully, her heart grew increasingly bitter, and she felt even more guilty toward her daughter.

She wasn't sure if it was because her gaze was too intense or what.

Alana seemed to sense something and instinctively glanced back at the hospital room door.

Agnes's heart skipped a beat, and she quickly looked away.

Alana turned back and saw that the hallway outside the room was completely empty, with no one in sight.

But just a moment ago, she had felt as though a pair of eyes had been watching her the whole time.

Could it be that she was hallucinating?

But she didn't dwell on it; for now, her grandmother's condition was the priority.

Agnes' heart was racing; Alana had almost caught her just now.

They say a mother and daughter were connected by a special bond; if she stayed here any longer, Alana would surely sense something was off.

Agnes thought it over, then quietly put on her sunglasses and turned to leave.

After all, she'd already managed to catch a glimpse of the old woman. Seeing that her mother had regained consciousness put her mind at ease.

The doctor first conducted a preliminary examination on her grandmother to confirm she was out of the danger zone, then scheduled a full-body checkup for her.

The entire process took several hours to complete. By the time it was over, Grandma was too exhausted and had to lie down on the hospital bed to rest.

The results came back quickly.

The results showed that the injury to Grandma's head was not serious.

Although the internal bruising hadn't completely cleared, it would gradually dissipate over time with medication.

So, to be on the safe side, Grandma will need to stay in the hospital for a while longer. As for how long the treatment would last, that depended on her condition.

It could be two weeks, a month, or even longer.

By then, all sorts of relatives had gathered at the hospital, crowding outside Grandma's hospital room.

Upon hearing that she would need to remain in the hospital for observation and treatment for more than two weeks, each had their own thoughts.

Miranda asked, "If she has to stay in the hospital for more than two weeks, how much will that cost?"

The doctor replied honestly, "At least several hundred thousand, if not a million."

After all, the treatment would undoubtedly involve the best available medications.

While hundreds of thousands or even a million was nothing to the wealthy, for an ordinary family, it was a sum they could struggle to earn in a lifetime.

So as soon as Miranda and the others heard how much it would cost, they lost all interest in treating the old woman.

They even had the cruel thought that it would have been better if the old woman had died in the operating room, it would have been the end of it, and they wouldn't have to spend any more of their money on her.

Now that she's been saved, not only do they have to spend money on her treatment, but they also have to spend time caring for her.

Just thinking about it made it seem like a bad deal.

So the group exchanged glances and began discussing their options.

"Should we treat her?"

"If we treat her, who's going to pay for it?"

"If we don't treat her, we'll just take the old woman home, she probably won't live much longer anyway. Then wouldn't the surgery have been for nothing?"

"But if we do treat her, it'll cost money, endless amounts of it. Who could possibly afford that?"

"Come to think of it, isn't the old lady's house back in her hometown slated for demolition? I heard the compensation could be over four million. Why don't we have her hand over the deed to the house so we can sell it? That would give us the money for the treatment, wouldn't it?"

"Exactly. She's so old, she must have saved quite a bit by now. She never seems to use that money anyway!"

"I think she should use her own money to pay for her treatment!"

Alana felt a wave of chill wash over her when she heard her relatives were already making plans to dip into her grandmother's secret savings.

She couldn't understand it. They were all her grandmother's own flesh and blood children she had raised and nurtured.

Why, now that her grandmother was sick and needed money, were they unwilling to pay for her treatment?

Was this what human nature was really like?

Was human nature really this cold and heartless?

Could they really stand by and watch their own mother suffer from illness without batting an eye?

She didn't understand. She really didn't understand.

Miranda said, "But the old woman's money and land deeds are all hidden away; none of us know where she's stashed them."

The others agreed. "Yeah, we've asked her dozens of times, but she won't tell us. She's so stubborn, she'd rather die than let it slip!"

"If you ask me, the old lady is pretty shrewd. She'd never agree to spend her own money on her medical treatment!"

"I mean, she's so old. You can't take money or property with you when you die. Why does she keep hiding it instead of bringing it out?"

"We're her own flesh and blood, don't these things belong to us?"

"Exactly. Does she really want to give it to an outsider?"

That "outsider" was clearly a reference to Alana.

Alana closed her eyes briefly, not wanting to say anything.

Stephan stood beside her and gave her shoulder a gentle pat with his large hand.

At that moment, Miranda turned her gaze to Stephan.

Thinking of the humiliation she and her daughter had just suffered at his hands, she couldn't help but start scheming again.

"Alana, isn't your boyfriend quite wealthy? He can even call in the top medical team from anywhere in the world. So, why don't you have him help cover the expenses for your grandmother's illness?"

Alana frowned and stepped in front of Stephan. "Auntie, have some decency, will you? Grandma is family, yet you won't even pay a few hundred thousand dollars in medical bills. And now you have the nerve to ask a complete stranger to help cover it? Don't you find that ridiculous?"

Miranda felt a pang of guilt. "Isn't he your boyfriend? We're all family, he's not really an outsider."

The others nodded weakly, their arguments sounding a bit flimsy.

Alana didn't give them the satisfaction. "Oh, I thought in your eyes, I was an outsider too. After all, when you were just trying to divide Grandma's estate, you didn't think to treat me as family and give me a share."

Miranda's eyes darted away. "Oh, come on, that's not the same thing at all. You can't lump them together."

Alana retorted, "It is the same thing! When you need me, you treat me like family; when you don't, you cast me aside as an outsider. Either way, you've reaped all the benefits."

"Do you all think I'm stupid? That I can't see through any of this?"

Miranda, used to having a thick skin, grew even more defiant. "Your boyfriend's rich, isn't he? It wouldn't hurt for him to chip in a little, would it?"

Alana laughed bitterly. "My boyfriend has money, but he worked hard for it. Whose money comes easily? If your money comes so easily, then hurry up and pay for Grandma's medical bills!"

Miranda blinked. "Anyway, my family doesn't have any money."

The others also looked distressed.

"My family can't contribute much either."

"Yeah, I've been working for so many years, and living expenses are so high, I haven't managed to save much at all."

Alana found it amusing. "You've all bought houses and cars in the city, and your kids attend elite schools that cost tens of thousands, or even over a hundred thousand a year, yet you claim you have no money? Doesn't it sting a little to say that?"

It was bad enough that they have money themselves, but to covet their grandmother's meager savings, they really are selfish to the core.

Miranda instantly lost her composure and pointed at Alana, saying, "Lana, don't spout all that moral high ground. If you're so capable, why don't you pay for the old woman's medical treatment yourself! Don't just blurt out whatever comes to mind!"

Alana took a deep breath. "Fine, I'll pay for Grandma's treatment, but I hope you'll stop coveting her meager savings."

As soon as she said this, the others all protested.

"If we're not after it, does that mean you're going to be?"

“Who do you think you are? How dare you set your sights on what belongs to us?!”

“You’re just a junior, you’ve really got some nerve!”

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Chapter 296 Fierce kiss

Chapter 296 Fierce kiss

Alana took a deep breath, forcing herself to suppress the rage welling up inside her.

“Fine, if you want me to stop coveting it, then you’d better pay for Grandma’s medical bills.”

This money absolutely had to come from these relatives, it couldn’t possibly come from Stephan.

Otherwise, if he agrees once, there’ll be a second time, a third time... Then Stephan would be nothing but a money making machine!

She didn’t mind being taken advantage of herself, she was used to it. But she absolutely wouldn’t allow her boyfriend to be taken advantage of!

The moment those words were spoken, everyone fell silent.

After a long moment, Miranda let out a soft snort. “Even if we don’t pay the medical bills, you have no right to set your sights on this old woman’s assets!”

Alana couldn’t help but clench her teeth.

She felt both furious and powerless inside.

Sometimes, there really was nothing you can do against such shameless, unscrupulous people.

Stephan had also stood there watching this family’s drama long enough. He spoke slowly, his deep voice strong and commanding, striking a chord with everyone present.

“First of all, Alana’s grandmother isn’t dead yet. She is free to dispose of her personal assets as she sees fit, she can give them to whomever she chooses. You have no right to interfere.”

“And as for you ungrateful wretches who won’t even pay for the old lady’s medical bills, do you really think Alana’s grandmother would leave her private assets to you?”

“Have you been daydreaming too much lately, to the point where you’re starting to fantasize about things that don’t belong to you?”

“Besides, her grandmother isn’t even dead yet, and you’re already eyeing her meager inheritance. Are you all just waiting for her to die with hearts as cold as ice?”

The group was instantly silenced by his barrage of questions, their faces flushing crimson as if their true thoughts had been laid bare.

My goodness, who was this guy? How was he so sharp and fearless?!

Stephan glanced at them, his tone calm and measured. “By the way, you don’t want to pay the medical bills, do you? Well, I still have that recording of you abandoning her. How about I contact a lawyer right now, or call the police...”

The moment the relatives heard this, they instantly lost their nerve. “No, no, no, we’ll pay!”

“Right, right, it’s just a few hundred thousand in medical bills, we can afford that.”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s no big deal. No need to involve lawyers or the police or anything like that...”

After all, they were all people who valued their reputation. If the matter blew up and people found out they were refusing to pay for the old lady’s medical treatment, who knows what kind of backbiting and insults they’d face.

Alana looked at Stephan, both surprised and delighted. She never would have thought he could so easily resolve her grandmother’s medical bills with just a few words.

He was so amazing!

She was growing more and more in awe of him!

Stephan saw the sparkle in Alana’s beautiful eyes and his thin lips curved into a smile.

His fingertip gently brushed against Alana’s soft, delicate cheek.

“Everyone says your man is amazing, he won’t let anyone push him around.”

Alana nodded and praised him without hesitation, “Yes, you’re the most amazing man in the entire universe.”

Stephan chuckled softly, slowly drawing closer to her, his deep voice sending shivers down her spine.

“Once this is over, remember to make it up to me.”

Alana couldn’t help but blush.

She knew full well what kind of mischief he had in mind.

But he had helped her and her grandmother so much; it was only right that she make it up to him.

She bit her lip and relented, her voice soft and coy.

“Mm, once we get back, you can do whatever you want...”

Stephan’s breath caught in his throat.

Damn it!

Who could resist that?!

He really wanted to pick her up right then and there and take her as soon as they got back to the room!

But he knew better than to lose his composure in public, so he managed to hold back. Once the medical bills were settled, they began discussing who would take turns coming to the hospital to care for Grandma.

After all, Grandma couldn’t take care of herself in the hospital and needed someone to look after her.

As usual, the group started passing the buck, claiming they each had their own things to do.

They were all quite shrewd, thinking that since they’d each contributed to the medical bills, Alana, who hadn’t paid her share...should take on the responsibility of caring for Grandma.

After all, she had come back, and she’d even brought her boyfriend with her; the two of them taking care of one elderly person shouldn’t be too difficult.

Alana actually didn't mind; she felt she should take good care of her grandmother, and even if they hadn't said anything, she would have taken care of her anyway.

But Stephan couldn't stand seeing Alana get bullied and treated unfairly by this group.

So he suggested that if they wouldn't come to the hospital to care for their grandmother, they should hire two caregivers to take turns looking after her.

Hospital caregivers are expensive, one costs seven or eight thousand, so two would run fifteen or sixteen thousand.

In any case, there were two options: either provide the manpower to care for her, or pay for it!

His tone was forceful, and his presence was overwhelming.

These relatives, being the type to bully the weak and fear the strong, didn't dare to go head-to-head with Stephan. In the end, they agreed that each family would send one person to take turns coming over to care for her.

Each family would take care of her for a week, then it would be the next family's turn. And just like that, the matter of caring for Grandma was successfully resolved.

Since Alana had taken care of Grandma last night, she could go home and rest tonight.

Besides, Alana and Stephan hadn't changed their clothes yet, they'd been wearing the same outfits for nearly two days, and they were starting to smell, so they needed to go to the hotel to change and do laundry.

Alana had come back with a suitcase, but Stephan hadn't brought one.

So, after checking into a hotel near the hospital, the two went to a nearby mall to pick out some new clothes for Stephan.

Alana carefully selected several suitable tops and pants for him and asked Stephan to go to the fitting room to try them on.

Stephan smiled and said, "No need. Everything you picked out is exactly my style."

Alana blushed. "Then let's just buy them."

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "Hmm, besides tops and pants, shouldn't you buy me something else too?"

"Socks?"

“Hmph!”

Alana couldn't help but chuckle. “I know...I also need to buy you underwear. How many pairs do you want? I'll buy them all for you.”

Stephan raised an eyebrow playfully, “As many as I want? Are you spoiling me that much?”

Alana nodded, saying quite earnestly, “Mm-hmm, I'm spoiling you. Go ahead and pick some out.”

Stephan curved his lips, unable to resist cupping Alana's face and planting a fierce kiss on her. “That's your reward!”

Alana blushed, clenched her fists, and gave him a soft tap. “Stop fooling around. Mind your manners!”

Stephan rubbed her flushed cheek. “With a girlfriend this beautiful, I just can't help myself.”

Alana swallowed.

There was just no dealing with him.

Blushing, she quickly picked out several pairs of underwear for him.

She knew he was well-endowed, so she had to pick out larger sizes.

Stephan watched her furtive movements, suppressing a chuckle. “I wouldn't have guessed it, but my girlfriend's quite the expert. Have you been secretly studying my underwear?”

Alana couldn't help but shoot him a playful glare.

“I'm not as perverted as you are. You're the one who's been studying mine, aren't you?”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “When have I ever studied yours?”

Alana gritted her teeth. “You're asking that on purpose. My purple pair of underwear is still missing. Did you take it and hide it on purpose?”

Stephan couldn't help but laugh. “You're just now realizing I took them on purpose?”

Alana glared at him.

So embarrassing, I don't want to talk about it anymore.

Stephan curved his lips, leaned in close to her on purpose, and whispered, “I’ve been keeping those purple panties as a treasure. Every now and then, I take them out to smell them. They have your scent on them...it’s really lovely.”

Alana’s head almost exploded.

Aaaah!

I can’t take it anymore!

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Chapter 297 The situation

Chapter 297 The situation

After finishing their shopping, the young couple headed back to the hotel together.

Alana urged Stephan, “You go take a shower first. I’ll go next.”

Stephan simply pulled Alana into the bathroom with him.

“No need to make a fuss...let’s shower together.”

Once Alana was dragged inside, he began undressing her without a word, and soon she was completely naked.

Then he began undressing himself.

Alana’s cheeks flushed bright red, thinking the man intended to take advantage of the situation.

But to her surprise, he simply finished undressing, turned on the shower, and pulled her under the stream to rinse off.

Stephan squeezed out some body-wash, worked it into a lather, and then ran his hands over Alana’s body, massaging her inch by inch.

His large hands, slightly calloused, rested on Alana's body. The stimulating sensation of friction generating heat caused her to unconsciously feel a strange sensation.

She bit her lip and said awkwardly, "I... I'll do it myself..."

Stephan chuckled softly, leaned in close, and bit her rosy cheek. "With me here, why would you need to do it yourself?"

"Stand still, and let me take good care of you."

Alana's was too embarrassed to look him in the eye, but he cupped her chin and leaned down to kiss her deeply.

After the man patiently washed her clean, he gently coaxed her into washing him as well.

Alana couldn't refuse, so she washed him again, using the same method he had used on her.

After washing his upper body, Alana dared not glance at the man's lower body; biting her lip, she said, "That part... you, you can wash it yourself..."

It was too spectacular...one shouldn't look where one shouldn't.

Stephan's curved his lips. "No way. I've already washed yours clean, so you have to wash mine clean too."

The two of them fumbled around in the bathroom for quite a while.

What should have taken half an hour ended up dragging on for nearly an hour.

After they were clean, Alana was carried out of the bathroom by Stephan, and they lay down on the bed together.

Alana's cheeks were flushed, and her breathing was still a bit ragged.

Stephan could tell she was exhausted, so he didn't push her any further. He leaned down to kiss her beautiful eyes and brows, then said gently;

"Go to sleep." He turned off the light.

The room was plunged into darkness.

But Alana wasn't sleepy yet.

She raised her hand slightly and traced the vague, handsome outline of the man before her.

“Stephan...”

Stephan replied softly, “Hmm? Is there something else?”

Alana said earnestly, “Grandma might have to stay in the hospital for quite a while. I won’t be able to leave anytime soon.”

“If you have important matters of your own to attend to, you can go ahead and leave. You don’t need to worry about me.”

Stephan took her soft hand in his. “I’m not leaving.”

Alana shook her head. “But you have your own responsibilities. You’re the CEO of Hudson Group, you must have a lot on your plate. You can’t stay here with me all the time.”

Stephan gently cupped her face. “Alana, it’s true that as the CEO of a conglomerate, I have a lot on my plate every day. But even if I don’t go to the office for a while, the company won’t grind to a halt.”

“My other subordinates aren’t incompetent. Even if I’m not there, they can manage things just fine, so you don’t need to worry about my work. Besides, with what happened to your grandmother, these are the hardest days for you. How could I possibly leave you behind during your most difficult time? I’m worried about you, so I’m staying here with you. Wherever you are, I’ll be there.”

Every word of this struck deep into the softest part of Alana’s heart.

While her heart ached, she couldn’t help but feel a surge of sweetness.

She was grateful to him, grateful for all he had done for her and her grandmother.

And she was grateful that, even in her darkest hour, he had insisted on staying by her side.

He could have left...and even if he had, she would have understood.

But he chose to stay, for her sake.

How could her heart not be deeply moved by him?

But love was a two-way street; just as he considers her, she considers him too.

Actually, she didn’t want him to get too involved in her family matters. She didn’t want to burden him too much.

She sniffed. “Stephan, don’t worry about me too much. Even if you’re not by my side, I can take good care of myself.”

Stephan replied, “I know. I believe you, too. Even without me, you can take good care of yourself. But staying here with you is my own choice. I’m willing to stay and stand by you through thick and thin.”

“Even if you run into trouble, having me by your side means there’s one more person to help solve the problem.”

Alana couldn’t help but say, “But...”

Stephan gently interrupted her, “No ‘buts.’ I know what you’re worried about, and I know that pushing me away and asking me to leave right now is for my own good. But how can I possibly leave you in such a difficult time? The harder it gets, the more we need to stand together.”

“Lana, I just want you to know that no matter what you face, I’ll be by your side, through the good and the bad. And as I’ve said before, I’ll always be by your side. I mean what I say, and I’ll never go back on my word.”

Hearing this, Alana could no longer hold back. She clung tightly to him and began to sob bitterly.

Stephan awkwardly tried to comfort her, “Don’t cry. It’s only natural for me to react this way. If I were the one facing this, at the moment when I’m most vulnerable and tormented, would you really let me bear it alone?”

Alana shook her head, still crying. “No, I wouldn’t...”

Stephan smiled and gently wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes. “Exactly. If it were me, I’d do the same.”

Alana’s tears flowed even more freely. “Stephan, I love you...”

Stephan paused for a moment, his voice deep and firm. “I love you more.”

Alana couldn’t help but lean in and kiss his full lips.

He responded to her gently.

Late into the night, after opening their hearts to one another, the distance between them grew ever closer.

It seemed as though nothing could stop them from being together now.

Late at night, since Miranda was on night duty tonight to care for the old lady, Agnes was able to take the opportunity to come by and check on her.

Agnes slipped silently into the ward and looked at the elderly woman, who was already fast asleep.

Her face was aged and wrinkled, her hair gray and sparse, and her body was as thin as a stick.

With every glance, Agnes' heart ached a little more.

Hadn't Miranda told her that she hadn't neglected her mother in the slightest?

Why did the woman look so frail?

It was as if her body were nothing but skin stretched over a skeleton, fragile enough to shatter at the slightest touch.

And even though she hadn't returned home all these years, she made sure the woman had never been short of money.

Every month, she would send Miranda 200,000 dollars.

One hundred thousand for the old woman's living expenses, and one hundred thousand for Alana's living expenses.

Most people couldn't even earn 100,000 dollars in a year.

Yet the elderly woman and Alana each had 100,000 to spend every month, they should be living quite comfortably, enjoying a life of luxury.

But seeing the old woman looking so emaciated, it didn't seem like she was doing very well.

Agnes quietly wiped away a tear and whispered, "I'm so sorry I took so long to come see you."

But the elderly woman, already fast asleep, did not hear her call.

And that was exactly what she wanted.

She had come secretly, not wanting to disturb her, for fear of upsetting her.

Now, she didn't even dare to touch her.

All she could do was watch, lost in thought and filled with pain.

How could she possibly face the woman now?

She felt so guilty...

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Chapter 298 For a long time

Chapter 298 For a long time

Agnes sat by the bedside, silently keeping the elderly woman company for a long time.

It wasn't until Miranda came in to urge her to leave that she reluctantly got up.

Once outside the ward, Agnes couldn't help but confront Miranda. "Sister-in-law, didn't you tell me that you've been taking excellent care of Alana and Grandma all these years, feeding them well and treating Grandma to the best? Why does she look so malnourished?"

Miranda felt guilty. "Oh, come on. Look at all the bumps and bruises the old lady has picked up lately, one arm, one head. She's even had two surgeries. Even the healthiest person couldn't withstand that kind of ordeal, let alone an elderly woman in her seventies or eighties. If you ask me, I think she'll be back to normal in a few more months."

Agnes thought to herself, That explanation seems reasonable.

Given the surgeries she'd undergone recently, the woman's physical condition was bound to be much weaker than usual.

But she still had her doubts.

"Sister-in-law, you said she broke her arm last time while working in the fields. I don't understand, I give her 100,000 dollars every month. Isn't that enough to cover her daily expenses? Why does she still need to work in the fields?"

Miranda gave an awkward smile, thinking to herself, That's because she never actually gave the 100,000 dollars to the old lady in the first place.

But she certainly couldn't admit that.

"Oh, that's just how the older generation is, they love to tough it out. She's used to being frugal and hardworking; she feels uncomfortable if she doesn't work in the fields every day."

Agnes felt a pang of unease. "Once she's fully recovered, you'd better keep a close eye on her and make sure she doesn't go out to work in the fields again. Her body can't take even the slightest bump or bruise anymore."

Miranda nodded. "I understand. I don't need you to tell me, I know exactly what to do."

Hearing this, Agnes said gratefully, "Thank you so much for everything, Sister-in-law. All these years, I really can't thank you enough. You've helped me so much."

Miranda smiled and, putting on a brave face, replied, "Don't be so formal...we're all family."

She paused for a moment. "But my mother-in-law needs to be hospitalized for a while, and that's going to cost a lot. You know, maybe you could..."

Miranda winked at Agnes, her gaze sending a very obvious hint.

Agnes didn't hesitate for long. "I'll cover all of Mother's medical expenses."

After all, she hadn't contributed any labor, so chipping in some money was the least she could do.

Upon hearing this, Miranda's face instantly broke into a wide smile.

Sure enough, with Agnes as her cash cow, she didn't have to worry about paying the medical bills.

Not only did she not have to worry, but she could also make a tidy profit in the process.

Agnes, of course, had no idea what Miranda was thinking. She never could have imagined that Miranda had been scheming against her for all these years.

"By the way, Sister-in-law, I'd like to ask you something."

Miranda, basking in the joy of making money, spoke to Agnes in a naturally gentle tone, full of patience.

"Sis, what is it?"

“I saw my daughter, Alana, today. She’s back, and she was with a young man. Is that man...”

Agnes hesitated for a moment. “Is he her boyfriend?”

At the mention of Alana and her boyfriend, Miranda’s expression instantly darkened. “Yes, he is her boyfriend.”

“But your daughter is such an ungrateful fellow. For the sake of that boyfriend, she’s actually turned against our whole family. It’s a total waste of all the care and effort we’ve put into raising her all these years!”

Agnes’ expression shifted. “How could that be...Isn’t the man she’s dating a good guy?”

Miranda said shamelessly, “How could he be any good? Not only is that man good-for-nothing, but he’s also incredibly scheming. The moment he showed up, he started sowing discord within our family. Your daughter has been corrupted by him, she’s completely on his side instead of ours, turning her back on her own family. She’s truly heartless and ungrateful!”

Listening to this, Agnes couldn’t help but feel embarrassed and guilty. “How could this have happened...”

She truly never imagined her daughter would turn against her own family for the sake of a man.

Miranda snorted coldly. “How could it not be like this? Alana grew up without parents to guide her, so she went off the rails. Her whole mindset is warped!”

“These days, Alana only wants to be close to men outside the family, not her own relatives. If we say a few words to her, she’ll even fight with us!”

Agnes’ heart ached unbearably. “I’m sorry. It’s my fault...”

It was her fault for abandoning Alana all those years ago. That’s why she hadn’t raised her properly, and that’s why she’d turned out this way...

“Sis-in-law, please try to talk some sense into her. Don’t let her keep seeing that man.”

“How can I talk to her? She’s got a terrible temper these days, she won’t listen to anyone. Anyway, your daughter is completely beyond help, she’s a total failure! She’s a complete and utter good-for-nothing!”

Miranda’s two consecutive blows made Agnes’ face grow paler and paler, until she could barely stand.

Her mind was filled with Miranda's words:

"Your daughter is completely beyond help, she's a total failure! A complete and utter good-for-nothing!"

Her heart was filled with unbearable pain and regret.

If only she hadn't abandoned Alana back then and had kept her by her side, the outcome might have been different.

Alas, there are no "ifs"...

Seeing Alana in such a dazed and confused state, Miranda felt an inexplicable sense of satisfaction.

Why should Agnes, that woman, be living so comfortably after running away from home all these years?

She was doing this just to spite Agnes!

After all, the frustration she'd endured from Alana today had to be taken out on Alana's mother.

Agnes left the hospital, her spirit broken.

She walked alone down the street, aimlessly.

A desolate wind swept past her in gusts, sending waves of chill from the top of her head to the soles of her feet.

Suddenly, she didn't know where to go or what to do. Nor did she know if the choice she had made back then was the right one.

For the sake of her own happiness, she had ruthlessly abandoned her daughter.

But no matter how heartless she was, she couldn't completely sever her feelings for her daughter.

No matter what, she was still Alana's biological mother.

What biological mother doesn't want her daughter to live a good life, filled with joy and happiness?

But if she hadn't left back then, how could a woman with a young daughter have made a life for herself?

She had no choice.

Leaving her daughter behind was a selfish act, driven by the desire to create a more comfortable life for her, rather than continuing to endure hardship together.

She believes her choice was the right one.

Although her choice wasn't wrong, that doesn't mean she truly made no mistakes.

Can the years she missed out on spending with her daughter, and the years of raising and educating her, really be made up for by simply admitting she was wrong?

So, what should she do now?

Should she choose to let things slide and leave Alana to fend for herself? Or should she find a way to reunite with Alana and make amends?

Agnes hesitated and wrestled with her decision for a long time before finally deciding to call Henry.

Henry asked first, "How's the old lady doing?"

Agnes whispered, "She is out of the danger zone now."

Henry said, "Since she's out of the danger zone, that means she's all right now. Come back right away, our son has been begging you to spend time with him every day."

Agnes bit her lip. "Henry, I'm back home. I saw my daughter, Alana."

Henry paused for three seconds before asking calmly, "And then?"

Agnes gathered her courage and said, "I want to reveal my identity to her."

Henry's tone turned icy. "And once you've acknowledged her, you'll bring her back to the Gordon family?"

"Agnes, don't forget what you promised me."

Agnes clenched her teeth, her breathing slightly unsteady. "But so many years have passed. Seeing her all alone, I just can't bear it..."

Henry said, "No matter how much it pains you, since you've already promised me to cut all ties, don't look back."

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Chapter 299 Buy it yourself

Chapter 299 Buy it yourself

“And don’t think I don’t know that all these years, you’ve been secretly supporting her. I may not say anything, but that doesn’t mean I don’t know, nor does it mean I approve of what you’re doing.”

“Everything you have right now belongs to me, Henry Gordon. As long as I don’t agree, I can take back everything you possess. Do you understand?”

Agnes detected a hint of threat in Henry’s tone, and her body trembled slightly.

So, he had known all along about what she’d been doing behind his back.

Had he remained silent all this time, waiting for the right moment to use this against her as leverage?

Agnes’ eyes reddened slightly. She opened her mouth, then closed it again, unable to speak.

But in the end, her hand still fell limply to her side...

The next morning.

After Alana and Stephan got up and had breakfast, they packed a bowl of nutritious congee and went to the hospital to visit Grandma.

As soon as she stepped into the ward, she heard Miranda, in the bed next to hers, snoring so loudly it sounded like a pig’s squeal.

Looking up, she saw Miranda lying in bed, covered by a blanket, sleeping soundly, drool trickling from the corner of her mouth, her snoring deafening.

Her grandmother had long since been woken by Miranda's snoring, her brow furrowed in utter disgust.

Last night, that woman's snoring had kept her from getting a good night's sleep.

But since she was a patient in need of care, she couldn't really say anything.

Alana and Stephan walked in hand in hand. When Grandma saw them, her expression instantly softened.

Alana said softly, "Grandma, I've come to see you."

Stephan chimed in as well. Standing beside Alana, he gave off the distinct impression of a husband following his wife's lead.

"Grandma, Alana and I have come to visit you too."

Hearing this, Grandma's eyes crinkled into a smile.

"Oh my. Seeing you both has really lifted my spirits."

Alana pulled up a chair and sat down by Grandma's bedside, asking kindly,

"Grandma, have you had breakfast yet?"

Grandma shook her head. "Not yet. Your aunt was too busy sleeping, she was snoring like a pig. I couldn't even wake her

up. How could she possibly care about me?"

Alana frowned, thinking to herself that she really should find two caregivers to look after Grandma, it would be much more reliable.

After all, professionals should handle professional matters.

Her aunt and the others were used to being so laid-back; they had absolutely no experience taking care of the elderly.

"Grandma, I brought you some porridge. Let me feed you a little first."

"Okay."

Stephan stepped forward proactively, pressed a button on the hospital bed, and raised the headrest slightly to make it easier for Grandma to eat.

Alana also took out the porridge and, using a spoon, fed Grandma one spoonful at a time.

Grandma cooperated willingly and ate more than half the bowl.

The porridge was warm and nourishing.

After eating it, her pale complexion improved considerably.

With her energy and spirits restored, Grandma couldn't help but become more talkative. Especially when faced with Stephan, that handsome, nearly six-foot-tall guy, her granddaughter's boyfriend, she was very curious.

"Mr. Hudson, I didn't get a chance to ask you yesterday, how did you end up dating my Lana?"

Stephan's brow twitched slightly, but before he could answer,

Fearing he might tell the truth, Alana couldn't help but interject, "Grandma, why are you asking him and not me?"

Grandma laughed. "I want to hear it from your boyfriend. Is that okay?"

Alana bit her lip, shot Stephan a glance tinged with playful reproach, and said, "Stephan, Grandma's asking you, you'd better answer properly."

Stephan raised an eyebrow and said deliberately, "How do you want me to answer Grandma? Should I tell her you were lusting after my sexiness, shamelessly pestering me, and trying to be my girlfriend?"

Alana's eyes widened instantly.

The world has turned upside down!

It was clearly him who was being shameless and persistent, begging her to be his girlfriend!

"You...you're talking nonsense!"

Stephan saw the girl's face flush and found her utterly adorable. Smiling, he continued to tease her, "How am I talking nonsense? Don't you have even the slightest bit of interest in me?"

Alana blushed. "No, no!"

“Grandma, don’t believe him! He’s the one who kept pestering me and chasing after me, I wasn’t the one being clingy!”

Grandma giggled as she listened; this young couple was truly adorable.

The more she watched them, the more she thought they were a perfect match.

Miranda had already been woken up by the commotion. Hearing Alana and Stephan teasing and joking with each other, she couldn’t help but roll her eyes.

Flirting like that...don’t they know when to stop? Don’t they even ask if she wants to hear it?

She just wanted to get a good night’s sleep, but damn it, she was woken up by all that lovey-dovey nonsense!

Hmph, as the saying goes, “Those who flaunt their love die young!”

Did anyone really say that?

She didn’t care!

Alana heard a faint sound coming from the next room. She turned her head and saw Miranda lying on her side, staring at her with wide eyes.

“Auntie, are you awake?”

Miranda snorted coldly and sat up quickly. “With you shouting that loud, how could I not wake up?”

“I did it on purpose. I just didn’t want to see you sleeping so soundly.”

“You!” Miranda clenched her teeth, about to snap at Alana, but when she saw Stephan’s stern, handsome face and his icy gaze, she forced herself to swallow the curse that was on the tip of her tongue.

She took a moment to compose herself, then asked with a forced smile, “Lana, you brought breakfast for your grandmother, did you bring any for your aunt here?”

Alana didn’t give her an inch. “Nope. If you want some, go buy your own.”

Miranda gasped.

That little brat!

Now that she’s got someone looking out for her, she’s getting even more arrogant!

She turned and went straight to the elderly woman in bed to complain.

“Mom, look at the granddaughter you’ve raised, she has absolutely no manners. I’m her aunt, her elder, after all. Is that any way to speak to an elder?”

Grandma frowned. “Lana didn’t curse at you, did she? How is that being impolite?”

“She just didn’t buy you breakfast. You’re perfectly capable...why didn’t you go buy it yourself?”

Miranda was indignant. “Mom, I took such good care of you last night. How can you take sides with a stranger instead of helping me?”

Grandma replied irritably, “Alana is my granddaughter...how could she be a stranger?”

“Besides, you say you were taking care of me, but you ran off to the bed next to mine and slept like a log, snoring like a pig, impossible to wake up. Is that what you call taking care of me?”

“Don’t try to make yourself look good!”

Miranda clenched her teeth, dying to curse at the old woman for being so ungrateful!

She’d even stayed behind to keep vigil and take care of the old woman, what more could she possibly want?

But she dared only curse under her breath; she didn’t dare say it outright.

After all, she was still eyeing the old woman’s secret stash of cash and the deed to the family home back in their hometown.

All told, it amounted to several million, she’d take whatever share she could get. After all, who would ever turn down extra money?

“Oh, I’ll be more careful next time. Don’t sweat the small stuff.”

Grandma snorted and didn’t bother to make a fuss about it anymore.

After all, she had already seen clearly what kind of people she had raised.

She ignored Miranda and turned to look at Stephan, flashing him a kind smile. “Young man, come sit by my side with Lana. Grandma has a lot to ask you both.”

Stephan obediently sat down on the edge of the bed. “Grandma, just tell me straight out, what’s on your mind.”

Grandma nodded and asked with a smile, “Do you mind if I ask you a few personal questions?”

Stephan replied, “Not at all. Ask whatever you like, Grandma. I’ll answer anything I can.”

“All right, all right.”

Grandma had a straightforward nature; she didn’t beat around the bush. Whatever she wanted to ask, she asked directly.

“Where are you from?”

“I’m from Critport. My parents are alive and well. I’m an only child. My family is fairly well-off, we have a car and a house, and I have no financial debts.”

Grandma was taken aback. She had merely asked where Stephan was from, but she hadn’t expected him to provide such a detailed answer.

Still, these were exactly the things she’d been wondering about.

And, on the surface, his circumstances seemed quite favorable.

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Chapter 300 My money is hers

Chapter 300 My money is hers

Grandma felt that if her granddaughter were to be with him, Alana likely wouldn’t have to endure any hardships in life anymore.

She nodded with a smile. “Not bad, not bad. Lana, your boyfriend is quite honest. Not only is he handsome, but he’s also honest and straightforward, no hidden motives. He’s a good man you can trust.”

Alana blinked.

Honest?

No hidden motives?

That was a million miles away from Stephan, wasn't it?

Stephan glanced at Alana and continued, "Grandma, I actively pursued Alana, and she's the woman I truly love. She's my first love, my one and only, my first girlfriend, and she'll be my last."

Grandma listened and grew even happier. "Really? That's wonderful. Lana, you've hit the jackpot!"

Alana couldn't help but blush.

She thought to herself, This man really knows how to talk.

Stephan turned his gaze back to Alana, his eyes growing tender and affectionate.

"And I hope that I can marry her, make her my wife, and walk hand in hand with her for the rest of our lives."

Alana met the man's gaze, which was overflowing with tenderness, and her heart gave an unexpected, violent flutter. It was beating so fast it felt like it was about to leap right out of her chest.

Her grandmother couldn't help but look at Alana, and she, too, saw the deep affection in Alana's eyes for the man.

The deep affection the young couple held for one another was so intense it seemed ready to overflow.

Stephan's gaze fixed intently on Alana's beautiful face. Though his eyes were on her, his words were directed at her grandmother.

"Grandma, I truly want to marry your granddaughter. Please talk to her and convince her to agree to marry me, so I can have her openly and honestly."

Alana bit her lip, her cheeks growing even redder.

What was going on?

It felt as though the man were proposing to her right in front of her grandmother.

Her heart was beating faster and faster.

Grandma chuckled to herself. "Well, Grandma can't make that decision for you. You'll have to work hard to get Lana to agree to marry you herself. Always listen to Lana, okay?"

Whatever she wants to do, let her do it. I support her unconditionally and I hope you do too.”

Alana felt even more embarrassed. “Grandma...”

Grandma smiled. Sensing that Alana might be feeling a bit insecure, perhaps thinking she wasn’t good enough for him, or perhaps worrying about something else, she encouraged her, “Lana, if you like him and feel happy being with him, be brave and go after your own happiness. But no matter what you decide, I will support you.”

Stephan took Alana’s soft hand in his and squeezed it gently. “Did you hear that?Grandma told you to be brave.”

Alana’s cheeks flushed crimson.

In truth, after going through so much with him, she had already decided in her heart that she wanted to marry him.

She just hadn’t found the right moment to bring it up.

And now... wasn’t this the perfect opportunity?

“Stephan, actually...”

Before she could finish, Miranda rudely interrupted her and started coughing.

Alana and Stephan frowned.

They had almost forgotten there was an annoying presence right here.

Miranda said bluntly, “Mom, how can you just let Alana decide her own marriage so easily? You’ve only just met her boyfriend, you don’t even know if he’s reliable or not.

How can you just agree to let them be together so easily?”

“If you ask me, Alana should be exposed to more men so she can clearly see what kind of man is actually suitable for marriage and a life together!”

Stephan shot Miranda a blank look, his gaze as cold as a frozen pond, tinged with a hint of murderous intent.

“Oh, so you think I’m not cut out for married life?”

Miranda met Stephan’s terrifying gaze and couldn’t help but tremble.

But then she remembered that her mother-in-law was in the hospital room, Stephan couldn't threaten her there.

With that thought, her confidence returned.

"You're too handsome, you're obviously a womanizer. You've never been short on women! Once you're married, you'll definitely go out and have fun, cheating and visiting brothels!"

Stephan gave her a smirk. "How do you know that all married men cheat and visit prostitutes? Is your husband one of them, by any chance?"

Miranda glared at him. "You, you, you...your husband is the one who does that!"

Stephan laughed. "Sorry, I don't have a husband."

Miranda clenched her teeth. "Regardless, marriage requires the basics of daily life, food, clothing, shelter, and daily necessities, and all of that costs money. Having children costs money too. How much money does your family have? Is it enough to cover your expenses after marriage?"

Stephan's tone was utterly detached. "My family isn't short on money. I own a company worth tens of billions. Money begets money; it only grows, and would never shrink. As long as Alana marries me, my money is hers, and hers is still hers."

The moment Miranda heard this, her eyes widened in shock.

She couldn't believe it.

A company worth billions?!

Goodness gracious?!

She couldn't even begin to imagine it!

She even felt that even if she used all ten fingers on her hands and all ten toes on her feet, she still couldn't count how many zeros there were in those tens of billions!

Her fingers trembled uncontrollably. This guy really is a prime catch!

Oh my, how could such a hot catch have been snatched up by that little slut Alana?

Just listen to this: after they get married, his money will be Alana's money, and Alana's money will still be her own.

Was that even something a person should say?

Hearing that made her heart ache so much she felt like she was going to die of anger!

If all that money belonged to her, she wouldn't know how happy and blessed she'd be!

If she can't have this, then she'll just slander it!

Miranda said without hesitation, "I don't believe it! Mom, you can tell this guy's a total con artist, he's playing with your granddaughter's feelings!"

Grandma was completely taken aback.

She hadn't even recovered from the shock of learning her granddaughter's boyfriend was a billionaire when Miranda accused him of being a fraud who was deceiving her granddaughter's feelings.

Upon hearing this, Alana immediately spoke up in Stephan's defense, "Grandma, don't believe what Auntie says. I believe in Stephan's feelings for me are real. He wouldn't deceive me."

Miranda retorted sharply, "How can you say he wouldn't deceive you? He even claimed to own a company worth tens of billions, who would believe that? I could say I'm the richest person in the world, would you believe me?"

Alana frowned and said, "Auntie, there are always people more capable than us, and there's always something beyond what we can imagine. Just because you don't believe it doesn't mean it isn't true."

Miranda put her hands on her hips and said brazenly, "I just don't believe it, unless he can give me a hundred million right now!"

Alana was speechless.

Miranda actually thought she could get a hundred million for free? She was dreaming.

Stephan couldn't be bothered to deal with someone like Miranda, who was just sour grapes. The only way to deal with someone like that was to prove her wrong with hard facts.

He turned to his grandmother and said earnestly,

"Grandma, it's my fault. I should have prepared the dowry to marry Alana before asking for her hand in marriage. I'll go back, prepare a generous dowry, and then formally come to ask for her hand in marriage."

Grandma smiled warmly and didn't press the issue with Stephan. "All right, all right. Grandma is very happy that you have this intention. All I hope is that you two can be together for a long, long time."

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