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It was not a matter of being invited or not. Rather, nobody was willing to send them off even if they attended the event.

Damian patted him on the shoulder. "Don't be too greedy, Lucas. You already have the missus at home. Don't collect so many sidepieces outside. I thought you would never be caught dead sleeping around before."

His words were more or less a veiled insult at Ashlyn.

Damian did not actually know who Ashlyn was. He only recognized her from the trending posts on Twitter for being Jared Quickton's girlfriend. While he was also a rich kid, Jared was not a part of their circle of friends who grew up together.

And yet, they all saw Lucas bring Ashlyn along with him today. Damian had to admit that the woman truly was a master manipulator if she could manage to both snare Jared and have Lucas wrapped around her pinky.

In his eyes, even Hera was better than Ashlyn. At least Hera was a daughter of the upstanding Chapman family.

The atmosphere in the private room cooled dramatically. The neutral expression on Lucas's chiseled face quickly clouded over.

Before Lucas could say anything, Winsor was already pointing an angry finger at Damian and saying, "What exactly do you mean by that, Larson? What's wrong with my goddess? And what's all this about Lucas sleeping around? Watch your mouth, or I'll watch it for you."

"Since when have any of my private matters been your business, Damian?" Lucas's voice was completely devoid of any warmth. The threat in his voice was obvious.

Damian felt a chill run down his back. "Lucas, you know I'm just looking out for you."

In the next second, Lucas's tone grew colder than humanly possible. The words fell from his lips icily. "There won't be a next time. Am I clear?"

By now, the atmosphere in the private room was practically colder than the dead of winter. Obviously, the two men, Lucas especially, were determined to defend Ashlyn no matter what.

Lyanna felt her heart sink yet again.

Faced with the current situation, Joseph's expression was unpleasant as well. Regardless of what he

wanted to do, his mother still recognized Ashlyn as an honorary sister. By all accounts, he was supposed to address Ashlyn as his aunt as well. Even if he chose not to call her that, he was still duty-bound to defend her as a member of the Field family.

So, as much as he liked Lyanna and wanted to get into Damian's good graces, he was still going to defend his aunt. Joseph's voice was filled with a warning when he spoke, "Damian, you would do well to watch your words next time. Ms. Berry isn't the type of woman you think she is."

The two big shots of their group had spoken. No one expected Joseph—who had a long record of trying to court Lyanna—to defend Ashlyn as well. Everyone in the room was stunned. Who exactly is this Ashlyn?

Most of the rich heirs gathered here for the party brought along giggling escorts in their arms, but it was an unspoken rule that these women were nothing but just toys for the night.

Ashlyn's arrival made all of the other women pale in comparison. That included Lyanna, who was also a highly sought-after actress in the entertainment industry. Lucas did not introduce Ashlyn when he brought her here, so all of them just naturally assumed that she was a trophy for him to parade around, the type of woman who made a living by pleasing rich men.

Lyanna quickly smoothed over the situation with a smile. "My brother was just joking. Please don't be angry with him, Lucas."

At this moment, a knock sounded at the door of their private room.

"Oh, that must be the cake," one of the other rich heirs attending the party said hastily.

He went over hurriedly to open the door. As expected, it was Lyanna's cake. The attendant wheeled the magnificent double-tiered cake into the room on a trolley.

The tense atmosphere relaxed slightly.

True to her reputation as someone well-versed in the entertainment industry, Lyanna could still smile pleasantly even after that tense accident. "Well, since today is my birthday, why don't we all take a picture together?"

She then handed her phone to the waiter who delivered the cake earlier. "Excuse me, but can you help us take a picture?"

Pleasantly surprised, the waiter agreed immediately.

Snapping into action, everyone else promptly stood up and started arranging themselves beside Lyanna, making sure she was at the center of the group. The magnificent double-layered cake was placed in front of her, making her the undisputed center of attention.

Only two people remained seated, looking absolutely unbothered.

Ashlyn's mouth curled in a vaguely mocking smile. "I'm sorry, but I'm not close with Ms. Larson."

The beautiful woman rose to her feet slowly, commanding the attention of everyone else in the room. Her charming aura could not be outshone even if she were standing beside the famed personality of Lake City, Lucas.

Lyanna's smile slowly stiffened at the edges. "Are you still angry, Ms. Berry? If so, I do apologize on behalf of my brother."

"Can an apology bring the dead back to life?" Ashlyn lowered her eyes, refusing to look at Lyanna any longer.

Lyanna did not expect Ashlyn to be so haughty and difficult to deal with. She fought the urge to grit her teeth in annoyance. She knew that the only reason why Ashlyn could be so blatantly disrespectful was that she had Lucas at her beck and call. "I know you're upset, Ms. Berry, but we're all friends here—"

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"Unfortunately, I don't think we're actually friends." Ashlyn interrupted Lyanna mid-sentence.

A certain gleam flashed across Ashlyn's lovely eyes. "It's your birthday today, Ms. Larson. I know that all of you will call me a bully if my request is too much, but I won't tolerate the blatant disrespect your brother showed me just now."

Lyanna looked at Ashlyn, forcing herself to smile pleasantly. "Then what are you asking for, Ms. Berry?"

Everyone could hear Ashlyn's cold voice ring throughout the private room clearly. "The Larsons have a plot of land in the southern outskirts of the city. That particular piece of land isn't worth a lot because it's abandoned and located in a remote area. A lot of people have been negotiating with Mr. Larson to purchase it recently, but he just kept increasing the price until it currently stands at one hundred and fifty million. If you're truly keen on making it up to me, how about this? I'll buy that piece of land for eighty million."

Everyone was shocked at her impeccable logic and crystal clear reasoning.

Damian gnashed his teeth in frustration upon hearing Ashlyn's request. "You—"

Lyanna tugged him back warningly. "Don't be impulsive, Damian."

She then looked at Ashlyn and said politely, "This is a matter that concerns business, Ms. Berry. I'm afraid that neither my brother nor I can decide on that. You'll have to meet my father personally."

At this point, Lucas was nearly green with envy. His mind was churning with thoughts.

If she wants land, I've got plenty of it too! I don't even want my money, she can just take it all!

Why is she so obsessed with the Larsons' worthless piece of land anyway?

It was infuriating. The frustration boiled in his veins quietly until Lucas felt like he would go mad with the annoyance of it all.

"Goddess, are you sure you have eighty million?" Winsor asked worriedly, looking at Ashlyn anxiously. "That's eighty million you're talking about."

Nobody else in the room actually believed that Ashlyn could produce eighty million on a whim. Naturally, the Larson siblings were no exception. That was why Lyanna urged Damian to be calm and bide his time.

"Of course, I have the money. After all, I have every intention of buying that land." Ashlyn's expression remained frigid. "Eighty million. No more, no less. I know that the Larsons won't gain anything by hoarding that piece of land either."

Gritting his teeth tightly, Damian stared at Ashlyn. "Is it right for you to be so pushy, Ms. Berry?"

Ashlyn blinked innocently. "Is it right for Mr. Larson to raise the price of the land every time someone comes to negotiate?"

While Lucas did not know why Ashlyn was dead set on purchasing that particular piece of land, he did keep it in mind. In the next moment, he made a call to the Larson patriarch, putting it on speaker. "Mr. Larson, if I were to purchase that piece of land on the outskirts of the city, what's the price you can offer me for it?"

Mr. Larson's overly excited voice was heard through the speakers, threaded with a hint of disbelief. "Mr. Nolan? Well, that piece of land is almost a thousand hectares, but it isn't worth very much because of its location. You've always had a good eye for property though, Mr. Nolan. Why are you interested in this particular plot of land?"

Lucas's voice was impatient. "Cut the chatter. Just tell me how much you want for it?"

"If it's for you, Mr. Nolan, I can give you the lowest price for it—fifty million."

"I'll send my assistant over tomorrow to sign the papers." As soon as he was done speaking, Lucas hung up the phone with a click.

At this point, Lyanna and Damian's expressions could only be described as ugly and uglier, as if they were just slapped in the face by someone in public.

It was one thing to discreetly make acquaintances with Lucas and get in his good graces. It was another thing entirely to see their father practically fall over himself to flatter and accommodate that same arrogant man who thought he was better than the rest of them.

Lyanna grew up as the center of attention in her world. In school, she was the prettiest girl. In university, she was the most desirable young woman. When she started to make a career in the entertainment industry, she became a highly sought-after actress, secure on her pedestal.

Therefore, this was her first time being so shamefully humiliated in public. She shot a look of both anger and embarrassment at Lucas.

The man did not hesitate to trample viciously all over her dignity just to help Ashlyn. Even if it was her birthday, he still did not bother to show her a single shred of respect.

On the other hand, Damian just stared at Lucas in shock.

The Larsons were always looking for a good opportunity to suck up to the Nolan family. If Joseph did not like Lyanna, the Larsons probably would not have been deemed worthy enough to present themselves before Lucas.

Although all of them grew up together and went to the same school, it was an unspoken fact that Lucas regarded only Joseph as a close friend. A natural extrovert, Joseph was a social butterfly who liked to make friends. Everyone who wanted to win Lucas's favor would flatter Joseph as well. Naturally, the rest of them proceeded to defer to these two men as the leaders of their group.

However, Lucas was notoriously difficult to get along with. Winsor still made a point of gathering with them regularly, but he did so purely just to spite Lucas. The two of them had been rivals since their schooling days. Even now, they were still at each other's throats.

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Damian never expected Lucas to fall out with them just for the sake of a woman. Everyone else gathered here was also utterly shocked by Lucas's actions. Even Joseph was startled.

Is Lucas always so domineering?

His current attitude was no different than the mad kings of old who led their kingdoms to ruin.

Arching her fine brows, Ashlyn swept a contemptuous look over everyone gathered in the room. She lifted her hand elegantly to cover a yawn. "I'm tired, Lucas. Send me home."

As soon as she was finished speaking, everyone watched in shock again as Lucas proceeded to stand up slowly and escort her to the entrance.

Joseph rose to his feet as well, shooting an apologetic look at Lyanna. "I promise I'll explain it to you another time, Lyanna. Damian, you really shouldn't have insulted Ashlyn like that."

He left the room. The other escorts accompanying the wealthy men here whispered among themselves jealously, staring enviously at Ashlyn's retreating figure.

No one could deny that good looks were an unfair advantage.

One of the women whispered, "Hey, she's called Ashlyn, right? I think I saw her trending again today."

"Trending where?" Winsor hurriedly pulled his phone out, opening Twitter and scrolling frantically.

"Well, I'll be damned," he swore in surprise.

"What? What is it?" Everyone started to ask curiously.

Winsor displayed the screen of his phone for them to see, smug as anything. "Our goddess just took a picture with Mr. Field and Chief Chase. She was awarded a silk banner today."

Everyone else promptly pulled out their phones and started scrolling through Twitter as well.

"Man, I can't believe she's so skilled in combat!"

"Dude, forget that! She saved a couple of kids and caught the human trafficker behind the entire thing too!"

"Wow, she really is committed to upholding justice, huh?"

"Well, of course. You don't see Chief Chase personally handing out silk banners every day, do you? That would already be cool enough, but she got a photo op with Mr. Field too!"

"Okay, but what about her origins? She can be the new female avenger, but that won't necessarily mean that she comes from an upstanding family," a woman said. Her comment sparked another wave of heated discussion from the crowd.

Standing alone in front of her magnificent cake, Lyanna could only fume impotently. It was her birthday today.

She was supposed to be the center of attention. Everyone was supposed to be gathering here to celebrate her birthday.

How dare everybody just ignore me like that?

They were all talking about Ashlyn. Even if the other woman was no longer in the room, she still managed to snatch the spotlight away from Lyanna.

Lyanna's birthday party was all but ruined now, thanks to Ashlyn.

Cursing Ashlyn's name bitterly, Lyanna grabbed her bag and stormed out of the private room in a huff, slamming the door behind her.

Damian hurriedly chased after his sister.

Lyanna's sudden departure finally snapped the crowd out of their fervent discussion.

"Hey, the cake hasn't been cut yet!"

"She didn't make a wish either!"

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When Ashlyn left the private room, she was walking quickly. Lucas caught up to her in a few long strides and grabbed her wrist tightly. "I already bought that piece of land for you—why aren't you happy?"

Ashlyn stopped walking, throwing a venomous glare at him. "I could have bought it myself. You didn't have to give it to me as a gift."

"I'll transfer the land directly under your name tomorrow," Lucas said forcefully.

Joseph caught up to them just in time to hear Lucas say that. He shook his head. Lucas truly was a mad king willing to do anything for his queen. A piece of land worth fifty million meant nothing to him if it was a gift for her.

Despite himself, Joseph was curious. "Ms. Berry, what are you going to do with all this land?"

Ashlyn's gaze drifted to the world outside the doors. "I'm not telling you that."

The three of them left the club together. Joseph resigned himself to being the driver. He heard the two of them speak up at the same time as soon as they got into the car.

"Bayview Villa."

"Whitland Villa."

"Can you two please make up your minds?" Joseph could already feel the oncoming migraine. "Ladies first."

Lucas's frigid voice was unyielding. "She's not going anywhere except back with me to Whitland Villa."

Lucas's gaze was disdainful when he looked at Joseph. While Joseph was his best friend, he was definitely less reliable than his assistant, Spencer.

"Lucas, don't you dare do what I think you're planning." Ashlyn snarled as she glared at Lucas, feeling her humiliation turn into anger. She knew that he was hoping to get lucky with her in bed tonight. "There's no way I'm going back with you."

Snorting coldly, Lucas met her glare with one of his own, making sure she could see the darkly irritated look in his eyes. "You will come home with me. Don't take me for a fool—I know you're planning on fooling around with Jared at Bayview Villa."

His pointed words were both bitter and jealous at the same time.

Joseph was doing a very good job at pretending he was suddenly deaf. He wondered how Lucas could still lord over Ashlyn so blatantly when Lucas already knew that Ashlyn was Jared's girlfriend.

But that doesn't make sense either!

Joseph was under the impression that Whitland Villa was Lucas and his missus's little love nest. Lucas was so annoyingly secretive about the place that he never even allowed Joseph—his best friend—to visit the villa at all.

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If Ashlyn followed Lucas home, she would just be offering herself up to Mrs. Nolan's wrath on a silver platter. Joseph sighed again. Maybe Mrs. Nolan has already moved out. Lucas is divorced, after all.

It's got to be like that. How else can Lucas bring Ashlyn home so casually?

Ashlyn pursed her lips. She turned to glance at Lucas, trailing her eyes across his sculpted features, precise and coldly handsome. It was an undeniable fact that this damned man was as good-looking as they came.

She could not help but struggle. "Let go of me—oh—"

Ashlyn found her lips occupied before she could make another sound. Lucas kissed her hungrily, devouring her lips with fervent intensity. She welcomed him in with a sigh. The taste of him silenced all of her protests. She knew that if she threw any further tantrums, he was going to literally kiss her to death.

Joseph's eyes widened. To put it delicately, this was wild.

He did not know that Lucas could be so feral.

Directly kissing a woman into submission? Now that was something he could grudgingly respect.

Impressive!

Joseph floored the gas pedal, speeding along hurriedly until they reached the gates of Whitland Villa.

When Lucas finally released Ashlyn, she was a gloriously disheveled mess with a swollen lip and flushed cheeks.

Opening the door without another word, Lucas practically dragged Ashlyn out of the car. His hand was locked on her wrist, preventing any chance of escape.

Ashlyn let him lead her away unwillingly. She wanted to struggle, but her traitorous body refused to listen to her, feeling weak all over.

She could even feel the Spirogyra squirming excitedly through her blood. Feeling all that frantic wriggling terrified her as if the Spirogyra would burst from her veins anytime, puncturing her arteries and leaving her to bleed to death.

That was why Ashlyn obeyed Lucas quietly, fearful of what might happen if she resisted. Her body was as feverishly heated as Lucas's kisses, and her legs quivered as if they would give way anytime.

Her unsteady footsteps stumbled as Lucas pulled her toward him insistently.

Dark with desire, Lucas's eyes roved over Ashlyn's flushed face hungrily, drinking in her features that were as alluring as any flower in full bloom.

His lips turned upwards in a wicked smile as anticipation built in his chest. A forceful tug of his hand brought Ashlyn crashing into his arms. He swept her off her feet easily, hoisting her in his arms bridal style. "I love it when you show your sensitive side."

Lucas smirked. A single touch is all it takes to tame you.

Ashlyn glared at him viciously, but there was no actual strength behind it. In her current condition, she could only lie limply in his arms. Lucas only found her feistiness an added challenge, every knit and furrow of her brows a devastating arrow to his heart. His abdomen ached with the force of his desire.

Back in the car, Joseph watched Lucas's figure retreat into the house after scooping Ashlyn into his arms.

Lucas is definitely divorced. There isn't any other explanation. Joseph thought in disbelief.

He rubbed his arms sheepishly, shaking his head at the unsolicited public display of affection.

"Nice to see you two don't need to come up for air," he mused out loud. "What's the rush, anyway?"

Pursing his lips, Joseph turned the car around and left.

Half a world away in her apartment, Lyanna was standing on her balcony, a lit cigarette in her hand.

Damian looked at her worriedly. "Lyanna—"

"Shut up." Lyanna threw him a cold look. "You idiot! Why did you have to run your mouth and insult that whore?"

"I couldn't stand it. I was angry for you too," Damian said frustratedly. "I mean, you've liked Lucas for so many years now. How can you bear to watch her put her paws all over him like that?"

"That doesn't mean I need you to interfere either." Lyanna took a long drag on her cigarette, still glaring icily at him. "You better think before you speak next time, or I'll tell dad about everything you've done behind his back—every single thing. I can't wait to see how he's going to deal with you then."

"Lyanna—Lyanna, please forgive me. I swear I'll listen to you next time." Damian said hurriedly, blood draining from his face.

Lyanna had always been the ambitious one as well as the family favorite. Ever since they were young, Damian always listened to her.

Although she was the model younger sister in public, always addressing him respectfully with the appropriate titles, everyone in the Larson family knew that Lyanna was the actual mastermind behind any scheme that involved the two siblings.

Slowly exhaling a ring of smoke, Lyanna said, "I don't care what else you get up to outside, but don't meddle in any of my business."

"But, Lyanna, I think Lucas is serious about that woman," Damian said cautiously, watching Lyanna's expression carefully.

"So what?" Lyanna inhaled a lungful of smoke vengefully. "A whore will always roll in the gutters. Unlike her, I have a good family background and societal standing. What can Ashlyn do that I can't? There isn't any man in this world that I can't conquer."

"There are literally so many other people who want to date you, Lyanna. Why are you so obsessed with throwing away your dignity to chase after Lucas?"

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Lyanna's lovely face was contorted into a twisted mask of jealousy. "I've been in love with him since we were kids. I promised myself I would become Mrs. Nolan when I grew up. If even that cheap b*tch Hera can smile and flirt with him, how dare he not even look at me?"

"I can't stand this insult, Damian. There's only one family with the name Berry in Lake City, and they might as well be trailer trash. Do you really think the Nolan family can accept a girl from that type of family as a daughter-in-law?"

Damian swallowed nervously. "But didn't we hear that Lucas was married? There's already a Mrs. Nolan."

Lyanna chuckled coldly. Judging by what she knew of Lucas, hell would freeze over first before he ever got married.

"If he were really married, I'm sure we would at least see his wife at one point. That incident where he rescued people on a plane? I'll bet it's another underhanded trick to promote South Star Airlines. Just look at their stock prices—it's been going up continuously over the past few days!"

"Lyanna, I know you're the smarter one and that you've always been more proud of yourself than I am, but I'm worried for you." Damian heaved a sigh.

Lyanna glanced at him impassively. "I told you, stay out of my business."

Damian's lips moved like he wanted to say something, but in the end, he could only nod. "If you say so..."

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At this moment, in the Whitland Villa, two intertwined bodies grappled back and forth on the large bed.

The air was heavy with musk, sweat and desire.

The man's low groans and the woman's breathy whimpers echoed through the room in time with each other, rising and falling to compose a sensuous symphony.

Lucas's large hands gripped Ashlyn's waist tightly as he worshiped her, the passion in his dark eyes threatening to melt her into nothingness.

Even as she threw her trembling head back, Ashlyn clung desperately to her last shred of resistance, unwilling to let herself fall into that mesmerizing abyss.

But it was not a choice. Everything was working against her, stripping her resistance away and silencing any refusal.

Lucas groaned, and the sound alone was almost enough to send Ashlyn over the edge. He embraced her tightly. "Lyn..."

Through the pleasant haze in her mind, Ashlyn could vaguely see Lucas's face grow closer.

Lyn. It was a name she never heard anyone call her since her mother passed away.

It was comforting to hear it again.

Their tangled affair lasted through most of the night, fueled by Lucas's insatiable appetite. Finally, with every last drop of her energy spent, Ashlyn eventually drifted off into a deep sleep.

After being fed well, the Spirogyra in her body settled down as well. As Ashlyn slept, unbeknownst to her, the sated Spirogyra glowed faintly as it lay docilely within her blood vessels.

Lying beside Ashlyn, Lucas gazed at her sleeping features hungrily. Even in sleep, she was luminous. Her finely arched brows were furrowed slightly, lending her a regal look as if something in her dreams made her uneasy.

Her features were enchanting, pulling him deeper and deeper into her world. Lucas could not resist grazing his hand across her smooth cheek, pinching it mischievously as the urge occurred to him.

Ashlyn made a disgruntled sound through her nose but did not stir. She must have been truly tired out.

He adored Ashlyn's unrestrained passion in bed, finding her unbearably gorgeous when she fully gave herself over to her desires. Lucas could not help the stupid grin that spread across his face. With his thirst slaked, he was content. Both his mind and body were satisfied.

As long as Ashlyn was with him, Lucas could feel every cell inside his body hum with calm contentment. But without Ashlyn, he would always inevitably descend into a spiral of dark frustration.

Lucas let out a long exhale. He still could not get to the bottom of his tangled thoughts, but he just knew that he did not want to leave Ashlyn.

Settling down beside her, Lucas pulled Ashlyn into his embrace easily, feeling the weight of her slender body in his arms.

He closed his eyes, surrendering to sleep.

It was a good night's sleep.

The next morning, Lucas washed himself up quickly, changing into a new set of clothes.

He walked over to the bed, looking at the woman who was still sleeping deeply there before checking the time. Quickly kissing Ashlyn once on the lips lightly, he hurriedly rushed downstairs and drove away from the villa.

The loud rumble of the engine coming from the garage made Ashlyn stir. She frowned as she jumped down from the bed. Her lack of sleep last night was manifesting itself in the form of her dry eyes.

Ashlyn looked out of the window just in time to see Lucas drive away in a black Bentley, vanishing from her line of sight.

She glanced at the clock. It was barely six in the morning. Frustration was starting to build in her chest. She was a notoriously light sleeper, and not getting her quality sleep made her want to beat up the closest person in her vicinity.

Ashlyn washed her face casually before looking at her clothes. Lucas had torn them into unwearable scraps of cloth yesterday night.

She rummaged through his wardrobe for one of his shirts, putting it on. A further search produced a pair of slacks which she pulled on as well.

Grabbing her bag, Ashlyn opened the door and left the villa.

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Ashlyn was already walking for five minutes now. She had made it out of the villa district but was not able to hail a cab yet.

She was feeling irritated when her phone rang insistently.

It was Lucas. She pressed the answer button.

“Where did you go, damn it?”

The cold voice that reached her ears conveyed its master’s unamused mood quite adequately.

“What do you want?” Ashlyn’s tone was even ruder than Lucas’s.

Holding his phone to his ear, Lucas’s expression darkened noticeably. He was carrying a bag of fresh seafood that he bought from the morning market.

He had decided to go to the market this morning to buy fresh seafood just for Ashlyn.

And yet, this was how she decided to repay him, by vanishing without so much a single explanation.

When he returned to the villa and found the house empty, he flew into a terrible mood.

He went through a rapid series of emotions, ranging from frustration, irritation, panic, and maybe even the slightest hint of disappointment.

That led to him calling Ashlyn immediately.

“Where are you?”

“Going home.”

Hearing Ashlyn’s annoyed voice inexplicably made Lucas feel better. “Home? What home? Your home is right here.”

He put the bag of fresh seafood into the kitchen, striding to the living room to pick up his car keys before heading out. “I’m coming to fetch you now.”

Well, I don’t need you to. Ashlyn was about to retort when she heard Lucas end the call. The beeping sound of the disconnect tone reached her ears.

He hung up on her, just like that. Ashlyn was furious, but she put her phone into her pocket and continued walking forward, hoping that she could find a cab before Lucas got here.

Unfortunately for her, the surrounding areas were entirely villa districts. Cabs were rarely seen here, if ever.

In the distance, Ashlyn could already see Lucas’s Bentley speeding towards her. He pulled up beside her with a loud screech.

Under his straight nose, Lucas was pressing his lips together tightly. He opened the car door and pulled Ashlyn inside without another word. Obviously, he was in a foul mood.

He growled angrily. “Why didn’t you wait for me to come home?”

However, his frown suddenly eased when his gaze landed on her. His dark eyes swept over her from head to toe. Ashlyn looked different today.

The black shirt she wore looked very familiar, almost like it was one of his. The same could be said for the khaki slacks she sported. The oversized shirt hung loosely on her slender frame, tied in a messy knot above her waist that exposed a hint of fair skin.

A thick man’s belt held up her loose slacks, flattering her slim waist and tempting him to see if he could close his entire hand around it. She had casually folded up the over-long pant legs as well, exposing her delicately pale ankles.

These clothes were supposed to be men’s formal wear and yet Ashlyn managed to make them look like the perfect vacation ensemble.

She had done her hair in an intricate braid that hung in front of her chest loosely. If someone gave her a

hat to complete the look, she was all set to be lounging by the beach instead of walking beside the road.

There was no way else to describe it. Ashlyn was beautiful. Even wearing his clothes, she was drop-dead gorgeous.

In fact, the thought of her wearing his clothes was enough to make Lucas swallow in anticipation, feeling a pleasant heat build in the pit of his stomach.

That thought alone was enough to make him feel burn with longing, feeling unbearable heat snake through his stomach intimately.

Lucas stared at her domineeringly. "Have you ever wore any other men's clothes?"

Ashlyn just glanced at him, baffled. "Are you out of your mind? Why would I do that?"

Does that mean she hasn't? Lucas felt his originally envious heart soar victoriously but kept his expression neutral.

He just sneered coldly, sparing another glance at her. She only wore his clothes before. Lucas turned to look at her fully, committing the sight to memory. Their tumultuous relationship remained messily tangled and undeniably close, just the way he liked it.

On the other hand, Ashlyn was questioning Lucas's sanity. She had no idea why he suddenly seemed so angry in one moment before looking extremely happy in the next. Whatever it was, he was annoyingly prone to mood swings like these since their divorce.

"I wanted breakfast." Lucas hoisted her bodily into the car. "So I went out to buy some ingredients."

His hands tightened on the steering wheel imperceptibly. "Why did you leave?"

"Why wouldn't I leave? You woke me up so rudely." Ashlyn said mutinously. Lucas was making her already frayed nerves unravel even more quickly.

She needed her sleep to function. When they were still married, Lucas was careful to make as little noise as possible when he had to wake earlier for work so that he would not wake her.

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Lucas drove quickly, flooring the gas pedal. Soon enough, they were back at Whitland Villa.

By now, Ashlyn was a bit hungry herself. Since Lucas already bought the ingredients, she did not mind making breakfast personally.

After all, nothing could beat the sheer happiness of taking a nap after having a filling meal.

With her mind made, Ashlyn did not object as Lucas led her into the villa.

The sight that met her eyes left her stunned. Inside the living room, a few live crabs were scuttling around here and there, parading about the room as if they owned it.

Seeing someone intrude on their newfound territory, the crabs even scuttled towards Ashlyn quickly, clicking their pincers threateningly.

“Why are you just standing there?” Lucas asked, walking over with his car keys when he saw her stand dumbly at the door.

“Lucas, why the hell didn’t you put them in the sink?” Ashlyn pointed at the freely roaming crabs. It was far too early for a headache. “You know what? I give up. I order you to take care of it.”

Feeling sleepy already, Ashlyn was rubbing her eyes to keep herself from nodding off. “Just call me when you’ve finally cleaned them up. I’m going to take a nap.”

Yawning, she made her way to the bedroom. Suddenly worried that Lucas would slack off, she was about to turn back and tell him what he actually needed to do when she saw him tie an apron around his waist.

The sight was jarringly hilarious. The pink floral-print apron tied around Lucas’s waist was a stark contrast to his black button-down shirt and casual pants. Even as she watched, he snapped on a pair of rubber kitchen gloves and prepared to face the crabs.

Even dressed like this, Lucas was still handsome enough to make the earth itself shake in fear.

She bit back the instructions she was about to give him. Lucas had already caught most of the escaped crabs, sticking them back into the bag and walking towards the kitchen.

Alright, he can probably handle it. Ashlyn thought to herself.

In the kitchen, Lucas dubiously poured the crabs, some oysters, a couple of scallops, and a few squids into the sink. The crabs were still waving their pincers at him smugly.

He stared at the sink full of squirming seafood before him, feeling a headache start to build.

In hindsight, he probably should not have bought seafood. He should have bought beef or mutton instead. As someone who never handled fresh seafood before, he did not have any idea on how to prepare it for cooking.

Heaving a sigh, Lucas pulled out his phone and started to search the internet for help.

By the time he was finally finished with cleaning all of the seafood, it was almost noon.

He went upstairs to wake Ashlyn immediately.

In the bedroom, Ashlyn was sprawled on the bed sleeping deeply. Her beautiful face was as peaceful as a newborn baby's. Her dark hair spread around her head like a halo, still wavy from the braid she had tied it in earlier.

Ashlyn was awoken by someone nibbling on her lips.

Her lashes fluttered open like a butterfly spreading its wings. Ashlyn saw the very familiar man holding himself above her, a very distinctive floral-print apron tied around his waist as he gently bit and sucked on her lips.

Lucas's outrageously handsome face shone under the sunlight, exuding a deadly charm. His eyes were half-closed, long lashes brushing across his cheeks. His nose brushed against Ashlyn's face occasionally as he continued his ministrations.

There was a lingering hint of passion in his affection. What they were doing now felt just like what they used to do before their divorce.

But we're divorced! Ashlyn grumbled internally. This bedroom held all their memories of the past four years.

Before she could start having any second thoughts, Ashlyn pushed Lucas off her ferociously. She sat up, making the thin blanket covering her fall onto the floor.

Lucas looked slightly annoyed at being interrupted. His voice was husky with desire. "You're awake?"

He licked his lips as if he were not satisfied yet, eyes shining hungrily like a wild animal.

Ashlyn stretched lazily, making her slim waist sway temptingly with the motion. She pulled on her slippers and walked towards the kitchen, her long hair drifting behind her. "Are you done cleaning them?"

In the next second, Lucas strode over to her and grabbed her arm. Ashlyn's back crashed against the cold wall as he pinned her against it. His breath was hot on her face. Before she could speak, he sealed her lips with his again.

His burning kisses were desperate, pushing against her lips forcefully as he kissed her again and again.

Just then, Ashlyn's stomach growled insistently. Breathlessly, she placed her hands on Lucas's chest and pushed him gently. Her voice was soft and weak. "I'm hungry."

“You get a pass for now.” Lucas said lecherously, sweeping her off her feet and carrying her to the kitchen.

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Lucas Nolan was also hungry.

Ashlyn Berry walked to his back and untied his apron. She then slid herself into the apron and started to prepare lunch.

Instead of dawdling around, Lucas stayed behind in the kitchen to help Ashlyn.

From time to time, he would take a peek at the busy girl next to him. There was a faint warmth in his eyes.

At that moment in time, the air of superiority around that man suddenly had a humanly touch to it.

It was soon twelve noon

The table was filled with seafood dishes.

The aroma of each dish was different, but nonetheless, they were tempting altogether.

Out of the blue, the door creaked open.

The butler had returned from his errand. Upon stepping into the kitchen, he could smell the scent of a freshly made meal.

When he saw Ashlyn standing in the dining room, he almost thought he was in the wrong place.

“Mrs. Nolan, you’re back?”

After his divorce, Lucas had returned to his hometown for quite some time.

Who would have thought that he would meet Ashlyn right away once he came back?

The butler put down the luggage in his hands at once and exclaimed, “Mrs. Nolan, are you getting back together with Master?”

Ashlyn squinted her eyes at Lucas. It’s all your fault!

“Ah, I came back to cook for Lucas because he wanted me to. So here I am! Anyway, nice to see you, Louis!”

“Master, why don’t you keep Mrs. Nolan around? She’s not only a gorgeous woman but also good at

cooking.” The butler walked to the dining table in excitement, “Mrs. Nolan, don’t leave us again!”

Ashlyn hurried on to reply, “I still have some chores to do at home! I’ll be leaving after lunch.”

Ashlyn did not know how to deal with seniors who treated her well, especially Louis Turner who had been so welcoming of her ever since she married into the household.

Lucas’s dark eyes were staring at Ashlyn grimly, which somehow infuriated her.

In an instant, she lost her appetite even though a scrumptious meal was laid out in front of her.

On the other hand, Lucas was devouring the seafood on the table in a jovial mood.

Ashlyn rolled her eyes and grabbed her purse. “I am leaving now.”

Lucas suddenly spoke, “Didn’t you know that you left behind quite a few of your clothes in the closet?”

Ashlyn examined the menswear on herself and glared at Lucas. “Thank you, but I like what I am wearing now.”

She had made up her mind to not touch anything Lucas had bought her.

Lucas watched on as Ashlyn sashayed to the exit of the restaurant. As she left, he smirked.

Didn’t you say you like my clothes?

In the afternoon, Spencer White brought back to the Whitland Villa a pile of men’s clothing, all of which were what Lucas would usually wear except that they were one size smaller.

Spencer grumbled, “What’s wrong with Mr. Nolan? Why did he ask for so many clothes that are not his size? He can’t even wear any of it!”

The butler had a mysterious smile on his face. “You’ll see later.”

Pfft! As if I care about what Mr. Nolan’s going to do with these clothes! My job here is done!

The moment Ashlyn reached home, her phone rang.

It was an unknown caller. She hesitated a while before picking the phone up.

“Ashlyn? It’s me, Blair!”

Blair waited for the person on the other end of the call to respond, but he didn’t hear a response for quite some time. Puzzled, he checked his phone. Hmm...this can’t be wrong. I am indeed calling Ashlyn’s

number!

He then continued on the phone. "Ashlyn, you do remember me, right?"

Ashlyn finally replied blandly, "Yes I do."

"You have to save me, Ashlyn! I am about to break down! I am losing everything to Tinsor! I am really at my wits' end, Ashlyn. I didn't dare to call my brother so I called you instead. You have to save me!"

Blair was squealing like a pig while he sobbed over the phone.

Meanwhile, at the club, Tinsor had a look of disgust on his face. "Blair, quit your teary act! It is annoying me."

However, Ashlyn's voice remained cold. "Blair, if you give Lucas a phone call, I am sure he will be willing to help you out."

"Ashlyn, my brother will definitely beat the hell out of me if he hears about what I've gotten into! He will definitely confiscate all of my allowance for the next month. Please, Ashlyn, you are the only one in the family who I am close to!" Blair blubbered like a child who had lost his favorite toy.

He then continued to wail, "Ashlyn, I know you are the most capable person in the family, and I look up to you the most! So please come and get me out of here! Oh, remember to bring some money! They are not letting me off unless they get their cash."

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Before Ashlyn Berry could make a reply, Blair Nolan had hung up the phone.

He looked at his gambling buddies in front of him gleefully. "Tinsor, you have experienced how scary Ashlyn is. If you do not want to experience her wrath, it's better if you return me my money right now."

"Why should I? I have rightfully won the money from you through a proper game of cards, so why can't I keep the money?" Tinsor grunted.

Henry Golding, one of the youngsters close to Tinsor, chimed in, "Forget about getting back your money, Blair! Isn't Ashlyn going to bring you money? We can continue gambling after this! I would love to get some more moolah from you, hahaha!"

Blair was flabbergasted. He yelled at the smoking teenagers sitting across from him, "Tinsor, have you not learned your lesson from your previous encounter with Ashlyn? How can you still be so truculent? Also, can y'all stop smoking? Ashlyn won't be pleased with all this smoke."

Tinsor gazed at Blair indifferently and pointed at the teenagers sitting next to him. "Quit smoking and

clean up this place. I do not want to leave a bad impression on Ashlyn!”

“You are worried about leaving a bad impression on Ashlyn? Huh, since when you have a liking for women of her kind?”

“Just shut your trap and tidy up!”

At Tinsor’s order, the youngsters got on their feet to clean the place.

When the servants came to serve them drinks, they were surprised. Hurriedly, they said, “Sirs, just let us do the cleaning! You don’t have to trouble yourselves!” However, no one seemed to pay any attention to them.

“Blair, is your brother really getting married? Is Ashlyn going to become your sister-in-law for real?” Henry sputtered.

Blair remained silent. Last time at the Jaquin Residence, Blair had sensed an unsettling vibe around Lucas and Ashlyn. Thus, he figured it was best if he commented nothing on their marriage.

“Where did you hear that from? Ashlyn doesn’t want to marry Blair’s brother!” Tinsor arched a brow. “Let me tell you all something. My brother is pursuing her now! If anything, Ashlyn will be my sister-in-law instead!”

Blair was disgruntled. “You’re a liar! Your brother is pursuing Ashlyn? Bah, he is not worthy of Ashlyn!”

“Where did you get the idea that my brother is not worthy of Ashlyn? Is the Jaquin family a joke to you?” Tinsor stood on the sofa and had his arms on his waist as he glared furiously at Blair.

Just this moment, the doorbell rang.

Blair made a break for the entrance. When he saw Ashlyn outside, he gladly shouted, “Ashlyn!”

Ever since Ashlyn had saved him at the Jaquin Residence last time, Blair was very fond of Ashlyn, especially since he had great respect towards those who were skilled in close combat.

In his eyes, Ashlyn was the righteous Wonder Woman who was undefeatable.

The youngsters all gaped their eyes in awe when they saw Ashlyn.

What a beautiful lady!

Ashlyn’s hair draped around her waist, and she had an elegant smile that could rival that of a princess.

No wonder Tinsor’s brother wants to pursue her!

“Milady!” Tinsor immediately leaped off of the sofa and ran to welcome Ashlyn. “Milady, please come in!”

Ashlyn’s eyes scanned the room, and to her surprise, the place was spick and span.

Her attention eventually shifted to Blair who only had a singlet top and a pair of trousers on. Blair noticed her gaze at himself and chuckled awkwardly, “Hehe, I wasn’t lying when I said I lost everything! They even took off my clothes! Hehehe... so you did bring the money, right?”

“Nope.” Ashlyn was nonchalant.

“Huh? You didn’t bring any money with you?” Blair was suddenly on tenterhooks. “Ashlyn, you can’t be kidding me, right? You’re my only hope!”

“You guys are playing poker? Mind if we play a few rounds? It’s been a while since I last gambled.” Ashlyn glanced at the cards on the table and strolled towards it.

The people in the room were astounded.

This pretty gal here knows how to play poker?

Blair was also stunned. “Ashlyn, do you seriously know how to play poker? I don’t want to see you strip like me in case you lose.”

Lucas will definitely kill me!

However, Henry was accepting of the idea of Ashlyn joining them for a game. “Ashlyn, you do look like someone who knows how to play a hand. C’mon guys, let’s sit down for a game!”

Ashlyn nodded lightly but she had no expression on her face.

Her attitude towards strangers had always been cold and impassive.

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Henry Golding was slightly disappointed by the unexpectedly bleak reception of him by Ashlyn Berry. He had always thought that he would be well-liked by everyone wherever he went. “Tell me, Ashlyn. Am I ugly?”

Ashlyn sized Henry up. In her opinion, he was actually quite cute. If not for his horrendous outfit, he could have been quite a dashing little prince.

Hence, she replied truthfully, “You’re not ugly, but you dress ugly.”

A grin broke up on Henry's face almost at once. "Then how do you think I should dress?"

Thank God it's not because I am ugly!

"Um, maybe something like what Blair is wearing now." Ashlyn pointed at Blair. He only had a white singlet and a pair of jeans on. Together with his white Vans, Blair looked like a girl's teenage crush in high school.

But Henry could not agree with Ashlyn. "You want me to dress like Blair? He dresses like a homeless man!"

Blair was offended by Henry's remarks on his appearance. "Hey, shut your mouth!"

"Are you guys still playing?" Tinsor was tired of Henry being at the center of attention, especially now that Ashlyn was with them. Tsk. Do you even know her?

Kill me please.

Stop being such a suck-up.

Ashlyn saw the boys quarreling among themselves and couldn't hold in her smile.

Now with a gentle grin on her face, her expression softened a lot.

The few youngsters caught sight of her unintentional smile and were awestruck.

"Oh my Ashlyn, you are a goddess!" Henry quickly responded.

All of these youngsters had older siblings to dote on them. Thus, they were quite outspoken and playful.

Certainly, they had seen a lot of pretty girls before.

In fact, they were even friends with many influencers or celebrities around their age.

However, none of the people they met before had exuded such a dignified aura around them as Ashley had.

After everyone sat at the table, the game of cards began. Ashlyn was the first player to make a move. After rearranging her deck, Ashlyn smiled as she played her hand.

Tinsor howled in dismay right away. "Oh shucks, my hand is smaller than that!"

However, even though the youngsters were off to a rough start, they were able to play a few hands that

somewhat impressed Ashlyn.

Still, Ashlyn won the round of poker.

Ashlyn slapped her cards on the table. Plush!

“It can’t be!”

Tinsor and his friends stared at Ashlyn in frustration.

They could not believe that they had lost.

Unsatisfied with themselves, they went for a few more rounds. Still, Ashlyn emerged as the victor for each of the games afterward.

Not before long, Ashlyn had a stash of cash in her hand.

The money she won in less than an hour was more than all the money Blair had lost to them earlier.

Tinsor’s and his friends’ wallets seemed to be getting thinner as time went on.

When Tinsor finally realized how much he had lost to Ashlyn, he asked her shakily, “Milady, h-how are you so good at this?”

Blair was delighted now that he had his revenge.

No one expected Ashlyn to be such an adept player of poker.

A few hours soon passed. The sky was starting to darken.

Ashlyn got on her feet and glanced at the stack of money she won before turning her gaze to the few rascals who had suffered an overwhelming loss to her.

“Alright, we are done for today! Blair will treat us to dinner at the Imperial Hotel!”

“We’re having dinner at the Imperial Hotel? There’s no way we can get in there! We need a reservation to be seated at the Imperial Hotel!” Blair didn’t mind treating everyone, but he was concerned about getting a seat at the Imperial Hotel.

Everyone in the region knew how difficult it was to secure a reservation at the Imperial Hotel. According to hearsay, reservations at Imperial Hotel had to come in at least one week before.

If the lot of them just walked in without making any reservations, they would surely not be seated.

However, Ashlyn was resolved to spend the money she won on the kids themselves. "Let's just go there. There will be seats for us."

Ashlyn and the youngsters were in one of the private rooms of a leisure club that also housed many other sports and entertainment facilities.

Before leaving the place, Blair, who had booked the private room under his name earlier, excitedly dashed to the counter to pay the rental fees.

However, on his way back, he heard a familiar voice coming from one of the private rooms.

"Hayden Haddock, get off of me, you monster! Believe me when I say my brother will slaughter you!"

A man shouted back, "F*ck you, little sl*t! You think I'm scared of your brother? Everyone knows he doesn't care about you! I'll get myself inside you tonight for sure!"

It's Naomi!

Anxiously, Blair barged into the private room where the noise had come from. "Naomi!"

The private room reeked of alcohol and some unknown substance. A few men were sitting on the sofa and each of them had a lady in one arm. In one corner, Naomi was pressed under a man with her skirt torn. Her fair shoulders were in plain sight, and there were bruises on her face. She looked disheveled, and the man on her seemed to be the one who had done that to her.