

Lost Me Gained Regret

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Chapter 171

Lloyd was at his wit's end, and with another slap, his hand landed on the r man's head, spittle flying. "Damn it, you'll be the death of me! That's not an ex- wife. That's a curse!"

"Boss," The raspy-voiced man gestured toward the boot still on my face. "Maybe you want to take your foot off first?"

Only then did Lloyd glance down, shivering, as he quickly retracted his foot. Right at that moment, someone yanked open the garage door!

Initially, I thought Gary's guys might have seen me get kidnapped while dropping off some stuff for me and sent someone to rescue me.

But as I looked up, I saw Bryant's cold, sinister face.

Wasn't he out shopping for tampons for Margaret when I called earlier? How did he make it here so fast? We were at least an hour's drive from BlessedCare Medical Facility.

"Oh, Mr. Ferguson!" Lloyd, who was all bluster a moment ago, suddenly became meek. "I've heard so much about you!"

Bryant's face was frosty, his tone sending shivers down his spine, "This is your reason for kidnapping my wife?"

"It's all a big, fat misunderstanding. I wouldn't even think about it, no matter how gutsy or fearless I was." Lloyd was trying to pass the buck, pointing at Allen with a sycophantic laugh. "We were just inviting Mrs. Ferguson over for a chat. Look, Mrs. Ferguson's uncl is here, too!"

"Is that so?" Bryant sneered, clearly not buying it.

"Of course! Lloyd was grinning like a sunflower, pushing Allen forward. "If you don't believe me, ask him. He just wanted to borrow some money from Mrs. Ferguson."

Bryant eyed them, his gaze dangerous and narrow. "Borrow money?"

His presence was so imposing that Allen couldn't muster the courage to speak.

Finally, Lloyd said, "Allen borrowed a payday loan from me, and now, he owes me ten million with interest."

dobte?" Br "Oh, I see. Kidnap my wife, thinking to threaten me into paying off this jerk's debts?" Bryant chuckled darkly. "Lloyd, if I don't give you a lesson, you'll forget who runs RiverCity."

"Mr. Ferguson, Just as Lloyd tried to force a smile, Bryant's face darkened as he threw a ust as punch straight to his jaw, knocking the burly man to the ground with a single blow!

It was the first time I realized Bryant was so skilled. His movements were quick, ruthless, and precisel

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Chaos erupted immediately as Bryant's men clashed with Lloyd's, turning the scene into a free-for-all. I seized the chance, scrambling across the sand to the other side, with Allen moving faster than me..

I quickly blurted out, "Untie me!"

He hesitated, seizing the moment to haggle. "I'll untie you if you help me pay off the money."

"In your dreams!" I glared at him disappointingly, "Stealing Aunt Cheryl's emergency fund wasn't m epough Now, a kidnapping? Allen, you've got a death wish! If you don't want Bryant to deal with you, untie me now!"

"If you don't help me pay off my debt, I'd rather be dealt with by Bryant than get cleaned up by Lloyd and his crew!" Allen was playing the martyr.

But those in the payday loan business at Lloyds level were all tainted with shades of the com underworld, employing methods even more ruthless than Bryant could conjure.

Glancing at the chaotic brawl amidst various metal rods, I saw guns tucked into the belts of several men! They had guns!

I The sight nearly stopped my heart, and panic set in. Desperate, I lied, "Okay, I promise I'll help you pay back the money!"

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"Seriously?" Allen was skeptical.

I was fuming "Yes, seriously! Hurry up!"

Thrilled to bits, Allen scrambled to untie the ropes binding me."

But as I was about to enjoy my freedom, someone abruptly grabbed my arm from behind. Before I could even resist, I felt the cold metal against my temple. Having watched my fair share of crime dramas and war movies, I knew it was the barrel of a gun. My body tensed up, and I dared not move, letting the man pull me to my feet.

"Mr. Ferguson, stop it, or there'll be trouble with Mrs. Ferguson." The moment the person behind me spoke, I recognized the raspy voice.

At that point, his men were mostly down, clearly outmatched by Bryant and his crew.

Bryant stopped and smirked coldly, "You'd have to be a fool to think I'd let you harm her. None of you are leaving this place alive if you dare lay a finger on her."

The raspy-voiced man faltered, trying to sound tough, "But, Mr. Ferguson, your stance, it doesn't seem like you're planning on letting us go."

"Kidnap my wife, and I have to show you the ropes. Otherwise, you lot will start thinking you run the place." With a calm and cold demeanor, Bryant straightened his disheveled shirt and walked over. He had a sense of control and strategy about him.

As he approached step by step, the man holding the gun trembled. "Don't come any closer!">

I couldn't help but tremble myself, tears uncontrollably streaming down my face.

A gun wasn't like any other weapon. A slip of the hand could easily end a life. At that moment, even the bravest soul would show his fear. Bryant stopped several feet away from us, extending his hand. "Let my wife go, and I'll settle Allen's debt.">

"Really?" The raspy-voiced man questioned, giving Lloyd, already battered and bruised, a look for confirmation.}

As Lloyd was about to nod, several cars pulled up at the entrance, seemingly Lloyd's reinforcements, which gave him confidence. "Mr. Ferguson, you've harmed so many of our brothers. Simply settling a debt might not..."

Before he could finish, Bryant took advantage of the momentary distraction, quickly grabbed the gun from the man's hand, and yanked me into his arms!! Bang! The raspy-voiced man somehow managed to throw the gun away, and Lloyd caught it, firing a shot behind me! But the pain I anticipated never came. After a brief moment of dizziness, Bryant had positioned himself in the bullet path!

"Bryant!" I screamed, reaching out desperately to feel his back, finding a damp warmth at his shoulder blade.

It was blood.

"Mr. Ferguson!" Kevin, guarding the door, rushed over and helped me support Bryant as we made our way out.

"Mr. Ferguson, Lloyd is one of my men. What happened here deserves an explanation, doesn't it?" A bald guy flanked by his crew blocked

our exit at the entrance.

Seemingly oblivious to the pain, Bryant glanced at him, his voice cold as ice, "Your men kidnapped my wife. Don't you think you owe me an explanation?"

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"Give me that piece of land in West End, Mr. Ferguson," the bald guy said indifferently, "Messing with Mrs. Ferguson was his first mistake. As for the rest, I've taken care of it for you, Mr. Ferguson. You'll be pleased with the outcome."

With a slight smirk, Bryant replied in a cold, harsh tone, "Deal.">

"Mr. Ferguson, Mr. Ferguson..." Lloyd begged.

Lloyd then realized the reinforcements weren't there for him but were using the situation to curry favor with Bryant.

Panicked, he dashed out, clinging to Bryant's legs, begging, "Mr. Ferguson, please, have mercy on me!"

"Kevin." Bryant's voice was icy.

With a swift kick, Kevin sent Lloyd sprawling, "Before laying a finger on Mrs. Ferguson, you should've weighed your odds. Too late for pleas now!"

Yet, undeterred, Lloyd crawled back, grabbing at my feet. "Mrs. Ferguson, Mrs. Ferguson, I was blind to your grace! Please spare me!"}} My hand pressed firmly over Bryant's wound, the anger bubbling up inside at the thought of who had shot him. "Get lost!"}

In the next second, Kevin kicked Lloyd aside and ushered us into the car. Kevin took the wheel while Bryant's men filled the other vehicles, a convoy of cars speeding down the highway.

Bryant glanced at me. "Not scared?"

"Terrified!" I was petrified, especially unable to let go of his wound. "Kevin, speed up! Call the hospital and get them ready!"

Bryant chuckled lightly. "It's a minor injury. Why the panic?"

"You're losing blood fast! How is this a minor injury? Do you need to be on death's door to consider it serious?"}

While feeling the blood oozing continuously, tears streamed down my face uncontrollably.

He wiped my tears away and gently cleaned the dirt off my face with a tissue. "Thought you were set on the divorce. Why the fuss now?" I said furiously, "You're a psycho!"

Divorce aside, I never wished harm upon him, especially not the harm from saving me.§

He looked at me, his tone infuriating, "Yes, I am the crazy guy who took a bullet for you, the crazy guy who dropped everything to save you when he heard you were in danger."

Feeling drained, Bryant found a more comfortable position to lean into, his voice tinged with lethargy and weariness, "Gary called Kevin." When hearing that, something clicked, and I hesitated before asking, "Where's your phone?"

Bryant said, "Left it in the rush."

I pressed, "At Margaret's hospital room?">

Bryant was surprised. "How did you know?"

I forced a smile. "The kidnappers made me call you. And Margaret answered."@

Bryant frowned. "She didn't spout nonsense, did she?"

I repeated Margaret's words. "She said you were out buying her tampons."

"Cough..." Even Kevin couldn't help but cough lightly at that, Bryant's face darkening.

He eyed me, asking, "You believed that?"

"Well, she's your darling, isn't she?"

Helping her out with those small tasks wouldn't be a huge deal." I tried to

keep my voice steady. But deep down, there was a slight discomfort. I admit I wasn't big-hearted enough to let go.

Bryant sighed, "Stupid girl."

I wanted to retort, but considering his injury, I held back.

Kevin inquired, "Mr. Ferguson, about that West End land, are we handing it over?"

Despite The Ferguson Group branching out into various sectors of

over the years, real estate remained a cornerstone. West End was the focus of RiverCity's development efforts these past years.

Bryant narrowed his eyes, a meaningful smile playing on his lips.

"Let them have it. But they'll have to learn to swallow what comes with it. Just wait."

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"Okay" Kevin let out a sigh of relief.

Once we arrived at the hospital, Bryant was immediately taken into the emergency room on a gurney.

The hospital lights were glaringly bright, and it was only then that I realized how pale Bryant had become from losing too much blood. He had been trying to keep his spirits up in the car to keep me from worrying.

A wave of fear gripped me tightly as the ER doors swung shut. Breathing became a struggle. I leaned against the wall, unable to pinpoint how I was feeling. All I knew was that when the doors finally opened, the doctor came out to announce they had successfully removed the bullet and that Bryant would be fine with proper rest, and I let out a massive sigh of relief.}]

While walking into his room, I felt his piercing gaze fixed on me as if trying to see right through me.

I pursed my lips and poured him a glass of water. "Kevin returned to get your stuff and clothes. I'll leave once he gets here."

He gave a half-smile, "Leave?"

"Yeah." I nodded, "Today... thank you."

I doubt I could have left that place unharmed if it hadn't been for Bryant. I didn't know where Allen got the courage from. But he somehow got tangled up with the mob.

Bryant smirked, "Jane, I've realized you're quite heartless."

I asked, "What do you mean?"%

He raised an eyebrow, "Who I the bullet for?">

I had no reply, looking down. "For me."

"So, you're just going to leave me here alone?" He sounded almost pitiful.}

I took a deep breath. "Bryant, I appreciate what you did, but..."

We were adults. I didn't spell it out for him but continued, "Besides, I'm not leaving you alone. Kevin will take care of you.">

"Kevin? A guy? What does he know about taking care of someone?" Bryant skipped my first point, voicing his disdain.

At that moment, Kevin came in with a suitcase, stopping as he caught the exchange between me and Bryant. "Indeed, Mr. Ferguson's right. I'm not one for taking care of others.">

I didn't expect him to so blatantly side with Bryant. But then again, Bryant was his boss.

I insisted, "Maybe you could give it a try?"

Bryant gave Kevin a look. "I'm thirsty."

"Right." Kevin quickly grabbed the glass of water from the bedside and handed it over.

Bryant scoffed, "Man, I'm injured. Do I look like I can hold a glass?"D Relying on men for caregiving might indeed be a stretch.

I inserted a straw into the cup and held it to his lips. "Here."

"That's it?" Bryant seemed somewhat disappointed.

I sighed. "What else? You're too big for me to carry."

"Bry..." Suddenly, the door burst open, and Margaret rushed in looking m distraught Bry, I heard you were hurt. Where? Is it bad?"

Bryant shot Kevin a questioning look.

Regretting it, Kevin slapped his mouth before hurriedly explaining, "... ve I just went to get your phone..."}}

'Don't blame Kevin. I forced him to tell me!" Margaret pushed me aside, snatching the glass from my hands, and sat beside the bed with a tender gesture. "Want some water? Let me help you drink."

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It didn't surprise me at all, not a ripple in my heart.

Wherever Bryant was, she was like a dog spotting a hot dog stand, ready to do anything, which was hardly shocking.

Bryant's expression darkened slightly, his voice cold, "I'm not thirsty anymore."

"How can you not be thirsty? Wasn't Jane just about to get you a drink..." Margaret's pretty face was all scrunched up in confusion, but then she mumbled, "Well, it figures. She doesn't know you like I do and can't even tell when you want something.">

With that, she set the water glass aside.\

I had been worried about Bryant getting hurt and was looking for a chance to ask him about Margaret. And the opportunity had presented itself on a silver platter.

I turned to Bryant, my lips curving slightly. "What have you decided about her?"}

We had talked about it during the day, and by then, he should have come to a decision."

"Decided what?" Knowing perfectly well that "she" referred to her, Margaret asked with suspicion.

Bryant glanced at me, his gaze mild. "Aren't you being a bit too much of a fair- weather friend? I'm still a patient here."}

"But she's not." I looked at Margaret mockingly.

Margaret had talked about fainting in the hospital earlier, yet she had walked all the way here without mentioning any pain. Her recovery was remarkable.

But I knew the cut she had received during the day wasn't deep. Being as cautious about her life as she was, she wouldn't risk a wound that could potentially be fatal.

Then, I added deliberately, "Bryant, you know this situation better than anyone. I won't let it go easily. If you don't do it my way, that's fine. I'll handle her myself!"

Bryant's brow furrowed slightly, "I'll do it your way!"

"When?" I pressed.

Still confused, Margaret shook Bryant's arm. "Bry, what are you guys talking about? I don't understand a word."}]

Bryant, who had injured his shoulder, winced in pain, his voice tinged with coldness, "Let go!"

"Oh. Being scolded by Bryant before me made Margaret lose face, and she pouted, "Fine, but don't be mean to me! What are you two even talking about?"

I couldn't stand her act any longer and smirked, "We were discussing sending you abroad. Which country would you prefer? Oh, and the Ferguson family will only cover your one-way ticket. Once you're there, you're on your own. Best of luck."

Margaret was shocked, her confusion becoming panic as she listened, her face growing paler, finally turning to Bryant in disbelief. "Bry, she's lying, is she? You can't possibly send me away and then abandon me!"&

To her, it was worse than death.

Having relied on the Ferguson family her whole life and leading a lavish lifestyleN the thought of having to fend for herself in a foreign land where she didn't speak the language was worse than death.

Bryant looked at her, his gaze dark and unreadable, but he confirmed, "It's as she said."

Tears welled up in Margaret's eyes as she shook her head in denial. "No... don't do this. I won't go! I won't!"N

"It's not up to you anymore." Bryant's voice turned icy, "I was thinking of waiting until you were a bit better to decide on this, but seeing as you're already bouncing back, let's say in a couple of days."

"Kevin, book her a ticket for the day after tomorrow. Any of the places Jane mentioned, let her choose." Bryant instructed.

"Understood, Mr. Ferguson," Kevin responded.

Margaret looked at him in disbelief, tears streaming down her face. "Bry, I said I won't go. Didn't you hear me? Please, don't want to be that far from you! You promised to take care of me. Why are you listening to her now!"

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"I can't believe you forgot about me and Jane's baby. How could you?" Bryant's eyes were as cold as a mid-winter frost, his voice sending a chill down everyone's spine.

Margaret was a mess, sobbing uncontrollably like a frightened rabbit. "I didn't mean to. I had no idea she was pregnant, Bry! You know I did what I did just because I was terrified of losing you. I lost my senses! If I had known, I wouldn't have dared, and I'm pregnant, too. Would I have risked my child if I had known it would lead to this?!"

What a drama queen Margaret was. She must put on this kind of performance for Bryant all the time. One face in public, another behind closed doors.!

I couldn't help but interject with a cold tone, "Who even knows who the father of that child is if it can even stand the light of day."

Margaret's face visibly stiffened, her finger trembling as she pointed at me, outraged by the insult, "What are you even saying, Jane?"

"Enough," I sighed, "I'm tired of arguing with you. Since you're so keen on looking after Bryant, be my guest. It's the last night before you leave the country. Take good care of him."@

With that, I walked away from the hospital room.}]

It was the least I could do as his ex-wife. I ignored the commotion behind me, not looking back as I headed for the elevator."

A strong grip seized my arm as I was about to turn a corner. "You're not leaving."}

His voice was deep and compelling, brooking no argument.

I stiffened, "Someone is already taking care of you."

I've never been one to force myself where I'm not wanted.

Bryant said, "She left."

"Left?" I was stunned. Given Margaret's character, I would've expected another dramatic performance to make Bryant change his mind. How could she give up so easily??

He sounded resigned, "Whether she left or not, why don't you return and see for yourself?"

"You know I don't do standbys." Still, I tried to pull away.

Perhaps my movement aggravated his wound, and Bryant winced in pain, "Ah... I think my wound reopened."

"Liar." Even as I said it, I instinctively checked his back, and indeed, blood was seeping through."

Bryant caught my look, asking, "Do you still think I'm lying?"

I lowered my head. "No."

Bryant urged, "Going to struggle again?"

What more could I say? After all, that bullet was meant for me. It would've for me.

likely been through my head if Bryant hadn't taken it.&

When we returned to the room, Kevin tactfully made himself scarce. Before Kevin left, he whispered to me not letting Bryant hear, "You should've seen how devastated Margaret was. Mr. Ferguson didn't even spare her a glance. He's determined to protect you this time."

Hearing that, I paused mid-wash, realizing I wasn't as pleased as I thought I would be.

Perhaps the desire for something long-wanted, something you'd m wanted for too long lost its allure once it was within grasp.

Moreover, I had a feeling Margaret wouldn't give up so easily. Until she was on that plane, I couldn't fully let my guard down...

I managed a smile as I said, "Hope so."

I hoped Bryant would seek justice for his child and not disappoint us again.

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In the dead of night, as I dozed off beside the hospital bed, I felt what seemed like dry fingers brushing against my face. "Idiot, you'd believe anything anyone tells you."}

"Hmm..." I swatted the hand away and rolled over, realizing I was supposed to be caring for a patient. I shot upright and blurted out, "What did you just say? Are you feeling okay?"

All I could see was Bryant's closed eyes and his steady breathing.

I wondered if I was hearing things. I didn't give it much thought, chalking it up to being rattled by the day's event and my nerves frazzled. I drifted back to sleep without much ado.

The following morning, Kevin brought us a special breakfast from a traditional diner known for its delicious brunch, all to Bryant's tastes. But after only a few bites, Bryant excused himself to attend to business matters. Kevin had brought more than just breakfast. A hefty stack of documents awaited Bryant. Being the CEO of Ferguson Group was no walk in the park.

As I munched on my breakfast, I occasionally glanced his way. The warm winter sun streamed in, casting a soft glow around him, highlighting his perfectly chiseled profile, the glasses perched on his high nose, and his lips slightly pursed.}

I had to admit the man was easy on the eyes. If only he weren't such a jerk.>

After breakfast, Gary called to ask when he could deliver the fingerprint analysis results.

"Right away. Still at the Riverview Estate," I responded immediately.

After a night in the hospital, I was desperate for a shower and a change of clothes.

Hanging up, Bryant caught my gaze. "Leaving again?"}

"I'll be back." I offered a reassuring smile. "I've got a surprise for you when I return."}

That way, I wouldn't have to worry no matter what Margaret tried to stir up. In two days, she'd have no choice but to leave. And perhaps then, Bryant and I could finally sever ties.

He raised an eyebrow, asking, "What kind of surprise?"}

"You'll see." With that, I hurried out of the hospital.

The nurse had just had Bryant's medication changed that morning, and with Kevin staying in the room, there was nothing to fret over.

A sleek black Bentley slowly pulled up before me as I waited by the curb for my rideshare.

Given yesterday's ordeal, my first instinct was to flee!}

"Ms. Webster." As the window slid down, a stylishly dressed, sophisticated woman greeted me. Sporting a deep shade of lipstick, she radiated serenity and maturity.§

She appeared to be in her early thirties.

I paused, "And you are? How do you know me?"

"I'm Kathy Larson, Mark's sister." She offered a slight smile. "There's something we need to discuss privately, Ms. Webster."

There was a faint familial resemblance to Mark in her features. Yet, I had never heard Mark mention he had a sister.

I was cautious about getting into cars, "You and he..."

"He always wears a charm bracelet around his wrist since he was a kid and even showers with it on. You were probably talking to him on the phone right before yesterday's incident."

Kathy easily divulged these details.

Without further objection, I got into the car.

Once inside, Kathy said, "Ms. Webster, I'm taking you to a place."

"As long as it's not to kill me and chop me off," I quipped.

The car weaved through traffic, eventually arriving at a peaceful street in an affluent neighborhood, mirroring the upscale tranquility of the Ferguson Mansion The Ferguson family's wealth was no secret. But the Larson family seemed to embody a more understated type of wealth, their exact standing compared to the Fergusons a mystery

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The car rolled to a graceful stop before a grand estate, its façade imposing and majestic. Quick on his feet, the driver stepped out to open our doors.

Kathy, her posture ramrod straight, a testament to her upbringing, led the way in black kitten heels, guiding me through the main entrance. "Ms. Webster, I've invited you here today for a favor."}]

I asked, "What kind of favor?"

"You'll see soon enough." Her words piqued my curiosity, though I've never been one to pry too deeply.

But as we meandered through the garden, and I glimpsed through the glass of the scene unfolding in the family's private chapel, I was stunned. Mark was on his knees, his back a canvas of brutal wounds, yet his expression bore no trace of pain or rage, only an unsettling calm, like the still surface of a dormant pond.}

The irate matriarch, standing over him, lashed out again, her voice seething, "Mark, don't think for a second I can't deal with you! If you die, I'll adopt another heir to continue the Larson family!"}

"Then do so," Mark replied, his tone a mix of deference and disdain, not moving an inch, enduring the pain with clenched teeth.

I felt a sympathetic twinge of pain and was about to step forward when Kathy held me back, leaving me to inquire awkwardly, "Is... is that his... mother?"

But I remembered Mark telling me his mother had passed away!!

"That's my mother," Kathy explained with a calm that mirrored Mark's, her voice soft, "He's shunned the Larson family's influence for years, only to tap into it last night to teach Lloyd and his gang a lesson for you.">

"What?" I was utterly confused.

I hadn't contacted Mark since being kidnapped the night before. Why?

Kathy continued, "The Larson family has kept a low profile in RiverCity for years, steering clear of the muddy waters of politics and crime. But Mark's actions last night dragged us back to square one.">

Her words were cryptic, yet the implication was clear.

Kathy slowly added, "However, it is exactly what my mother wants. She's never been content with our quiet life, and what happened last night conveniently forces Mark into an arranged marriage."

"Arranged marriage?" I was stunned.

Due to his gentle and calm demeanor, Mark would make any woman happy as his wife. But I remembered he had someone he loved.

Kathy's gaze briefly met mine. "Yes, an arranged marriage with another rich family. But he doesn't want it, as you might have guessed."

"I see." I nodded, instinctively defending Mark, "He's in love m Marriage should be about mutual affection, not convenience."

For someone who'd held onto love for twenty years, compromise was out of the question.

The softer one person looked, the more determined he became when it was about matters of heart.

"You..." Kathy frowned slightly, "Don't you know who he's in love with?"

"No," I admitted, thinking Kathy was probing for information, "He om mentioned there was someone but never revealed who."

"What if I asked you to convince Mark to accept the arranged marriage to ease into it for his good?" After an moment of hesitation, Kathy spoke again, "Ms. Webster, my mom has no patience. If Mark continues this way, it won't end well for him."

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I had a hunch that there was more to the Larson family than met the eye, but it didn't feel right to pry into their affairs, especially with Kathy, someone I had just met.\

Hesitating a bit, I shook my head. "Sorry, I can't get involved. Mark has his reasons to stand by, and as his friend, all I can do is support him."

To harbor feelings for someone for two decades while keeping a cool head, he must've considered every angle. It wasn't my place to interfere.

Kathy's expression didn't sour, and she asked with an even tone, "Aren't you curious who he's fond of?"

I answered, "He'll tell me when he's ready."

It meant he didn't want me to know if he hadn't told me yet. I also felt that in friendship, it was okay to have our secrets. There was nothing wrong with that.

Kathy suddenly shifted the topic. "After he graduated, my grandma hoped he'd take over the family business early on as Bryant did. But he refused, choosing instead to study abroad and then moved on."}

"Do you know why?" she asked.

A middle-aged woman angrily throwing down a whip snapped me back to reality. "I guess he probably doesn't want to be tied to the Larson family."

Kathy's eyebrows lifted slightly in surprise at my frankness, but she didn't deny it, "That's part of it. He despises the Larson family the most. But he still shares their blood. Hating them doesn't change that.">

Before I could reply, the footsteps approached, and a large hand pulled me back. Mark stepped before me, his tone thick with wariness and anger. "Kathy, who gave you the permission to bring her here?"}

Kathy frowned. "What, am I going to eat her up or something?"

"You wouldn't eat anyone." Mark scoffed sarcastically, "But I wouldn't put it past your mother.">

He said in a deep voice, "If you drag Jane into this again, don't blame me for being ruthless."}

"When have you ever spared me any kindness?" Kathy said indifferently, looking at me, "Ms. Webster, I might need your help with Mark's wounds. He's wary and doesn't want the Larson family's staff involved."}

With that, she placed a bottle of ointment in my hand. Under Mark's suspicious gaze, she calmly said, "Siblings, after all. Isn't there any trust? Don't worry. My mom won't know Ms. Webster was here.">

"That'd be best." Mark didn't appreciate the gesture, grabbing my arm and leading me away from the Larson family.

Before getting into the car, I noticed the bloodstains visible through his white shirt on his back and offered to drive. "I'll drive."

"Okay." He got into the passenger seat.

As we drove off, I hesitated before asking, "The person who... hit you earlier is?"

Mark suddenly fell silent with a flash of deep red in his eyes, quickly fading away. "You saw?"

"Yeah." I nodded.

He hesitated, then resignedly lowered his eyelids, chuckled softly, masking the self-mockery and sarcasm in his eyes, and said cryptically, "Jane, would we still be friends if I told you I was a bastard?"

His tone was casual, but I heard a careful caution in it. He seemed afraid.

Feeling surprised and a pang of empathy, I hit the brakes and pulled over, looking at him sternly. "Why? Wouldn't we be friends? Mark, our friendship isn't about who you are, but because you are you."}}

"Really?" A hint of a smile finally appeared in his eyes.

I nodded, replying, "Of course, it's true."}

Chapter 180

"When I was brought back to the Larson family that year, everyone called me a bastard." Mark paused, his beautiful eyes swirling with complex emotions. "But I knew he had deceived my mom..."

That was when I realized that even Mark, who was as gentle and refined as he seemed, had his share of a miserable and prolonged past. Mark's dad, his mom's first love, had married someone else for the sake of his family, all the while keeping it a secret from her. When his mom found out, Mark was almost born.

"My mom took me far away, but we still couldn't escape Violet's vengeance."> "She..." His voice choked up, his eyes revealing a mix of pain and deep-seated hatred that was quickly masked. His hand tightened into a fist at his side, knuckles turning white.

Hearing that, I felt a heavy sadness.}

When Mark was eight, his mom must have been only in her early thirties. Yet, she paid such a painful price for misjudging someone.

Mark managed a bitter smile as he continued, "According to Violet's plan, I was supposed to die, too, but since Violet couldn't have children of her own, Gladys wouldn't let her lay a finger on me.")

At that moment, I truly understood that human lives were cheap in the eyes of the wealthy. It was all about benefits and schemes.

I said, "And Kathy..."

"Violet adopted Kathy before she brought me back to the Larson family." Mark's voice carried a hint of irony, "Violet went to an orphanage and picked the child who looked most like Neil."

Neil was his father. Violet was the middle-aged woman who had been hitting him earlier in the chapel.}

"No wonder... you don't want anything to do with the Larson family." I fell silent and then curiously asked, "Kathy mentioned that you took care of Lloyd yesterday?"

"I intended to rescue you." There was a touch of melancholy and helpless amusement in his eyes. "I was too late. But when I arrived, I ran into your uncle coming out. He mentioned Lloyd had been bullying you."

He probably meant to say Lloyd had stepped on my face with his shoes. But to spare my feelings, he didn't say it outright.

I bit my lip, "So you hit him?"D

"Yeah." Mark nodded, touching his nose. "After I got the full story, I also gave your uncle a piece of my mind."

My eyes lit up. "Really?"

Seeing my approval, he smiled. "Happy to hear he got what was coming to him?">

"Yeah, very much." I nodded without hesitation.}

Allen had it coming.

Then, I looked at him again, a bit worried. "But next time, please don't be so impulsive."}

More often than not, people like us were better off playing it safe. We didn't have the luxury to act impulsively.

He chuckled. "Impulsive?"

I nodded. "Yeah, impulsive."

"Don't worry," He seemed utterly confident, looking like he had m everything under control. "That woman won't dare to lay a hand on me again."

'That woman' naturally referred to Violet.

"Look at all the injuries you've got. Isn't that trouble enough?"

I sighed, pointing at his back. "And now you've stirred up this engagement mess.

Do you think you can handle the consequences?*"%

A spark lit up in Mark's eyes, his voice clear and melodious, "You don't want me to get engaged?"

"Yeah, that's right." I smiled, nodding,

"You have someone you like, right? I hope you can achieve your heart's desire and live the life you

want."B

Arranged marriage was like putting a living person inside a lifeless shell Inside were benefits, money, social connections, and obligations, but no affection.

He looked straight at me. "Do you think I can achieve my heart's desire?"