

Lost Me, Gained Regret (Jane and Bryant Ferguson)

Chapter 441

It felt like getting caught in the act, even though that wasn't the case. Still, I couldn't help feeling a bit guilty as I looked towards Bryant Ferguson. "Mr. Ferguson, he's here to pick me up, so... I won't trouble you any further, thank you!"

With those words, I made my way to the car, leaning on it as I approached.

"You..." Bryant looked at me with concern, his eyes swirling with emotions. He caught up in one stride but didn't say much, only helping me into Gregory Ford's car.

Then, turning to Gregory, he said coldly, "There's no need for misunderstandings. She was drugged. I'm handing her over to you because I trust you're not the type to take advantage of someone in her condition."

Gregory let out a chuckle, "Mr. Ferguson, your concern is amusing. How I conduct myself is none of your business. If I recall correctly, you and Jane aren't involved anymore."

Bryant's posture stiffened, a moment of confusion passing before he spoke again, "This kind of situation... it's best handled when both parties are sober and willing."

He looked at me deeply, his voice restrained. "Take good care of her!"

With that, he closed the car door and walked away quickly, as if afraid he might regret his actions. Yet, every step he took was filled with reluctance.

Gregory signaled the driver to start the car, then snatched away Bryant's jacket from behind me.

Pulling me onto his lap with a firm arm, he gave me a cold look, "You didn't think to call me when things went south?"

"Weren't you still mad at me?"

I gave him a smile, pointing to the cut on my lip, "It's not even healed yet."

Gregory snorted with a hint of laughter, "Remember the spanking, but not the lesson."

I reached my hand around his neck, asking with a smile, "So, are you going to spank me again?"

Perhaps it was the drugs talking, but my mind was unusually straightforward, voicing thoughts without any filter, acting without hesitation. Under normal circumstances, I could never be this bold. Gregory raised his eyebrows slightly, surprised. "When you deserve it, yes."

"Naughty Gregory!"

It was a phrase I often used when we were kids, and now it slipped out naturally. Both of us saw the surprise in each other's eyes.

His response was sharp, "You remembered everything?"

"Yeah."

I suddenly felt hotter, trying to wriggle out of his grip to return to my seat.

Gregory held onto my hand, asking, "Why run?"

"I'm hot..." As soon as the words left my mouth, I wanted to sink into the ground from embarrassment.

The wave of heat within me threatened to overwhelm me.

"Easy, don't fuss."

He held me still, his voice soothing, "Just bear with it a bit longer; we're almost home."

Then, he glanced at the driver, instructing, "Drive faster."

The car sped all the way to the apartment complex.

But instead of taking me to my place, he brought me to his on the fifth floor.

No sooner had he laid me on the sofa than his phone rang, and Ike's chirpy voice came through.

"Uncle! Did you pick up Auntie yet? Layla and I are still out playing."

"Got her."

Gregory sat on the sofa, turned on the speakerphone, and tossed it aside before leaning down to softly kiss the corner of my lips. "Then you better not bully Auntie!"

Gregory arched an eyebrow, a hint of mischief in his tone, "And what counts as bullying?"

The cool breeze from the air conditioner contrasted with his warm breath on my skin, tickling slightly.

Ike seemed to ponder for a moment before declaring, "If you make Auntie's lips bleed, that's bullying!"

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Despite the effects of the drug, I was embarrassingly flustered.

In the next moment, he nibbled at me again, lightly. His eyes sparkled as he perfunctorily addressed the person on the other end of the line, "Got it, wise beyond your years," and then he hung up. His lips found the corner of mine again, whispering, "May I?"

This man did it on purpose. He hadn't asked before biting me.

My heart was pounding, and in a moment of boldness, I shut my eyes, wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling him closer, and kissed him first.

I felt my ears burning up.

But it was okay. I could blame it on the drug.

Gregory seemed pleased. He kissed me gently, cherishing each moment, his voice low and husky, laughter spilling between our lips, "Just friends?"

The question was a boomerang.

He's been holding grudges since he was a kid.

My consciousness started to blur. "Mmm..."

"Mmm?"

He bit me lightly, pulling me back to a semblance of awareness, "How many 'just friends' like me do you have?"

"None..."

My eyes were tightly shut, lost in his kisses, I murmured, "Only you, Gregory, only you."

"When things went south, you didn't call me. Even when you got your memory back, you kept it from me."

Gregory's lips brushed against my ear, "You really do treat me like a 'just friend,' colder than with your ex, much colder."

My fingers tangled in his soft hair, trying to explain with the little lucidity I had left, "It's not like that. It just so happened Bryant was there too. I didn't know who drugged me, couldn't trust anyone else."

"Oh..."

He chuckled, his hand slowly moving down, caressing the soft flesh of my waist. "Glad you finally decided to speak up; I thought you were going to stay silent again."

I knew he was referring to the past two years.

I decided to play the "mute" he accused me of being, staying silent.

His warm lips left my cheek, and for a long moment, there was no movement, the air thick with tension.

Finally, a soft sigh filled the room, tinged with resignation.

He moved at last, his defined fingers gripping my ankle, slipping off my high heels.

He paused, as if checking for any blisters or sores from the shoes.

As my blurry eyes met his, filled with desire, I read the unspoken offer.

"Do you want to?"

Classic Gregory.

Outwardly rebellious, the quintessential bad boy.

Yet, he had been unwavering in his search for me for over two decades.

But his underlying motive was love, not possession.

Even now, presented with the perfect opportunity.

He still chose to sweep me up in his arms, pressing his lips passionately against mine before heading towards the bathroom. "Your legs..."

The drug had hit me hard, slurring my speech into soft whispers.

It was clear how much the person who drugged me despised me.

Gregory, carrying me effortlessly, reassured, "Carrying you is no trouble at all."

Chapter 443

In a luxurious hotel, Summer Taylor stepped out of the shower, only to be greeted by a chilling phone call.

On the other end, Mark Larson stood by the window, his gaze sharp and dangerous. "Did you take my words for granted?" he asked, his tone laced with a threat that was hard to ignore.

Choosing Summer in the first place was a calculated move by Mark. She seemed alone and easy to manipulate, not particularly bright in his estimation. But he knew if she ever stepped out of line, he wouldn't hesitate to cut her loose.

Gripping her phone tightly, Summer was taken aback by how quickly Mark had caught wind of the incident, but she was prepared. "Did I do something wrong again?" she feigned ignorance, trying to sound as innocent as possible.

Mark's voice was heavy with accusation. "You drugged Jane at the party!"

There were few lines that Summer could cross that would truly provoke Mark, but this was one of them.

"What? Someone drugged Ms. Webster?" Summer acted shocked, as if the news was completely new to her. "That's impossible. How could anyone dare at such an event... Wait, what kind of drug? Is Ms. Webster okay?"

Mark was not easily fooled. "Was it not you?"

"Of course not," Summer shot back, her sincerity sounding a bit too rehearsed.

"You just warned me tonight. Even if I wanted to, I wouldn't dare... And where would I even get such drugs?"

Yet, Mark had done his homework. "I've checked the CCTV footage from the banquet hall. You had the waiter deliver that juice to her."

"But you must have seen, I never touched that glass!" Summer argued, banking on a moment of blindness in the surveillance.

During a quick turn, she had slipped the substance into the drink, a move hidden from the cameras by her body.

As Mark pondered, Summer pressed on, trying to soften her tone. "I just knew you cared for her and thought, as a future 'lady of the manor,' I should look out for her."

Mark's tone darkened. "Don't meddle in things that don't concern you!"

"I won't do it again," Summer promised, her voice meek, but inside she was smirking at the situation.

To her, it seemed Jane was the real victim here, caught in the web of a man's possessiveness. If Jane had left with Mark that night, he would probably be thanking Summer instead of threatening her. Changing the subject, Mark hit a nerve. "I heard you're joining the reality show that Becky is a regular on?"

Caught off-guard, Summer blinked and then lied smoothly. "Yes, I was invited by Aria. She probably wants to curry favor with Bella Taylor..."

The door suddenly opened. Ivy stood there, having caught the tail end of Summer's conversation. The mention of Bella seemed to unsettle her.

Bella had been nothing but generous to Summer, who in return seemed to lack genuine affection.

Summer feigned surprise, then quickly masked her annoyance, turning to Ivy with a sweet smile. "Oh, Ivy, is something the matter? Does mom need me?" "No." Ivy's voice was tense, revealing her struggle to keep calm. "Your mom warmed up some milk for you. I'll leave it here."

"Thanks."

Once she was alone again, Summer's demeanor shifted, her voice now laced with panic. "What if Ivy heard me calling Bella Taylor?"

Mark's response was cold, a mocking laugh through the phone. "And you can't handle that?"

Summer, pretending to be flustered, assured him, "I... I will handle it!"

But inside, she was calm. She knew how to play Bella, who felt guilty for being absent in her "daughter's" life. As long as she manipulated that guilt, she could explain away almost anything.

Hanging up, Summer allowed herself a triumphant smile. She wondered how Jane was handling the aftermath and how Mark would react if Jane had indeed spent the night with Bryant. The thought made her smile wider, reveling in the chaos she had orchestrated.

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Summer stood by the floor-to-ceiling windows for a while, listening to the faint sounds from outside before turning around to chug down the glass of milk that was on her bedside table. Holding the empty glass, she opened her bedroom door and stepped out.

Hearing the noise, Bella looked up, her heart aching a bit as she remembered what Ivy had told her earlier about Summer. She wondered how Summer had managed to grow up, how much hardship she had endured. It had been over a year since she returned, and yet, she still didn't show genuine closeness to Bella, her own mother. Her guard was always up. Ultimately, Bella blamed herself for being too negligent in the past.

Seeing Summer approach, Bella pretended not to know what was on Summer's mind.

"Mom, what's wrong?" Summer asked.

"Nothing," Bella replied, suddenly pulling her into a hug, caressing her head. "Honey, you can call me whatever you feel comfortable with. It's just a title, it doesn't matter. We have all the time in the world to grow closer, let's take it slow."

The unexpected embrace made Summer stiffen up.

Bella usually appreciated these affectionate gestures, but only when Summer acted obedient and compliant, so this behavior from Summer wasn't out of the ordinary.

However, she had braced herself for a confrontation or blame, like being called out for addressing her mother by her name or being an ungrateful child, but it never came. There was no reproach. That left Summer unprepared and, frankly, shocked.

Growing up in an orphanage, Summer learned to expect punishment for both doing nothing wrong and making mistakes. No one had ever held her and spoken kindly to her when she was in the wrong. Bella was the first. Summer was adept at masking her true feelings, always hiding any trace of darkness with a facade of sweetness and compliance. But this time, she froze, feeling as if something within her was breaking free, warming her from the inside.

Before she could fully comprehend her feelings, Bella placed a blueprint of a mansion in her hands, saying softly, "Take a look, do you like it? You've always liked Vista Town, right? I've decided, we'll make our home there. If you like this house, we'll go reserve it tomorrow." .

"It'll be in your name, a gift from me."

Summer looked at the blueprint of the standalone mansion with a front yard and a swimming pool at the back, the best Vista Town had to offer. Usually, she would accept Bella's gifts with feigned enthusiasm, but this time, she looked at Bella and shook her head, "You said it, it's our home. Wherever you are, that's my home. So, the house should be in your name."

This was a departure from her usual tone, somewhat stilted. Speaking the truth for the first time felt awkward. Bella was surprised, "What did you say?"

"Nothing!" Summer quickly placed the blueprint on the sofa, standing up awkwardly and hurrying back to her bedroom.

Bella turned to Ivy, tearful, "Did you hear that? She said wherever I am, that's her home!"

"Yes, I heard it..." Ivy was equally surprised. This was not typical of Summer; she had always accepted valuable gifts without hesitation. If not for the paternity test, Ivy might have doubted whether Summer was planning to take what she could and leave.

Bella wiped away her tears, picking up the blueprint, "We'll buy the house tomorrow." It was time to give her daughter a real home.

Summer, back in her bedroom, berated herself for being foolish. A house worth millions, and she had almost rejected it because of a few words from Bella? Impossible. She was just afraid of future consequences, wanting to leave cleanly when the time came. Real estate was complicated; cash was simpler.

Yes, that had to be it. She couldn't possibly expect anything from a ludicrous notion of familial affection, especially since she wasn't Bella's biological daughter. The kindness shown to her now was all based on that mistaken belief. She was nothing but an interloper.

Gregory carried me into the bathroom, setting me down on the marble countertop, his nose brushing against mine. "Jane, I'm a man with needs. It'd be a lie to say I don't want you." "Especially when it's someone I've waited years for."

"But our first time shouldn't be like this."

"Do you understand?"

I felt utterly miserable, but I still clung to a sliver of rationality. Yes, I owed him an explanation. It wouldn't be fair to either of us to rush into this without clearing the air. Gregory turned on the cold water, filling up the bathtub before looking at me, "Do you want to undress yourself, or should I help?"

He was considering my lack of strength, but his words felt embarrassingly intimate. With a teasing smile, he lifted me off the counter, "Then you take a bath, I'll go get your clothes."

He left the bathroom, gently closing the door behind him. But the moment he turned away, his eyes were cold, void of the warmth and tenderness he had shown moments before.

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The person who spiked the drink, never let him find out!

Gregory's eyes narrowed dangerously as he walked over to the living room and picked up his phone, dialing quickly, "Ophelia, when did you start getting so slow at this?"

On the other line, a girl's voice responded, "Mr. Ford, I was just heading to the elevator, I'll be there in a minute."

A minute later, the front door was pushed open from the outside.

Ophelia, clad in a striking red dress and heels, stepped in, freezing for a second when she saw Gregory standing in the living room perfectly fine.

No herbal concoctions, why did he need her to deliver medication?

Gregory, worried about the person in the bathroom, immediately reached out, "The pill?"

Snapping back to reality, Ophelia quickly rummaged through her purse and handed him something, "One should do the trick."

While talking, her gaze swept through the living room.

In an inconspicuous corner of the sofa, there was a pair of women's high heels.

Gregory was usually meticulous, but the blanket on the sofa was crumpled, as if someone had just been lying there...

"Good."

Gregory pocketed the pill, finally sparing her a glance, his voice lazy, "Decided to switch up your style, huh? Ditching the usual monochrome for once?"

"Ah... Yes!"

As his right-hand woman, Ophelia knew how sharp his instincts were. She immediately laughed, "My mom insisted I go on a blind date, even bought this red dress for me."
"Your mom's got good taste."

Gregory smiled lightly, a hint of apology in his voice, "Sorry for messing up your date. This all happened so suddenly..."

"No worries!"

Ophelia flashed a professional smile, shrugging, "Work comes first, and besides, that guy and I weren't a good match anyway. Your call came at the right time to save me."
"Alright then."

Ophelia glanced through the slightly ajar bedroom door, hearing the faint sound of water from the bathroom, and tactfully said, "I should get going then!"

Once out of the building, Ophelia took off her heels and angrily threw them to the ground.

After all these years...

She thought, if it wasn't her, Gregory wouldn't have anyone else either.

Yet, here we are, some temptress making herself at home.

But then, Ophelia smiled.

It was a failed seduction attempt anyway.

Even after being drugged, Gregory only had her deliver the antidote, didn't spend the night with that siren!

No real victory there.

After a cold shower, the heat inside me finally subsided a bit.

My sanity was more or less restored.

Thinking back on my actions just now, I felt a mix of embarrassment and shame.

"Knock, knock-"

The bathroom door was knocked on, and Gregory's voice came from the other side: "All done?"

"Yeah, finished!"

I put on a gray bathrobe, didn't even lift my head as I walked past him, "Christine Jackson and Ike must be home by now, I should head back."

"Wait."

Gregory grabbed my arm, handing me a small bottle, "The effects might not have fully worn off yet, take one of these." "Okay."

I took the pill, and he chuckled softly, "Planning to head back in my bathrobe?"

My mind was a mess, only then realizing that going back like this would be impossible to explain, "What should I do then?" "Your clothes."

Gregory pointed towards a green sundress hanging on the bathroom door handle.

Surprised, I looked at him, "How did you have..."

-My clothes.

Before I could finish, I remembered.

It was left here when I visited him at River Villa, soaked from the rain, and somehow it made its way to Vista Town.

Meeting his amused gaze, I quickly grabbed the dress and retreated back into the bathroom.

After quickly changing, I rushed out, feeling the awkwardness and guilt of what felt like a one-night stand.

I hurried back home, not even waiting for the elevator, taking the stairs instead.

Hearing my entrance, Ike looked up from his puzzle, "Auntie! You're back!"

As he said it, he scrambled up and ran over to hug me.

I lifted him, pinching his cheek, "Yeah, I'm back."

"Gregory picked you up early, how come you're just getting back?"

Christine observed, then noticed, "Wait, you changed clothes?"

I stayed silent, heading to the kitchen to pour a glass of water, taking the pill first.

Then I faced Christine, "There was a bit of an incident at the party."

Christine frowned, "What happened?"

It wasn't something for kids, so I looked at Ike, "Ike, how about you go take a bath, alright? I'll tell you a bedtime story later."

"Okay!"

The promise of a bedtime story sent Ike darting into the bathroom.

After adjusting the shower for him, I came back out.

I tossed the pill bottle to Christine, "Someone drugged me."

"Drugged? What kind of drug?"

"What else could it be that's not for kids' ears?" I retorted.

Christine shook the pill bottle, quickly asking, "So, this is like the antidote?"

"Seems like it."

"And then..."

Christine gestured downwards, getting into the gossip, "Gregory didn't do anything to you? Even after you were drugged, he's still hung up on something from two years ago?" "It's not that."

Thinking back to the recent events made my cheeks warm, but I managed to keep a cool facade, "He didn't want to take advantage of the situation."

Christine held up a finger, marveling. "I didn't expect the guy to be such a knight in shining armor."

The next afternoon, Gregory received a call from Edith Ford.

"I heard from the doctor you had him check on your leg first thing in the morning. What's going on with your leg? I thought it was getting better?"

This doctor should've been in broadcasting, not medicine.

Gregory, with little appetite, idly played with his takeout, his voice lazy, "Couldn't resist, did a bit of exercising."

"Exercising?"

Edith echoed.

It was unbelievable. Her brother was the kind of person who would lie down rather than sit, sit rather than stand, and even lean against something when standing. And now he took up exercising.

Edith had a sudden realization, "Wait, what kind of exercise are we talking about?"

Gregory choked, noticing the cleaning lady entering the bathroom, he quickly said, "Auntie, don't bother with the gray bathrobe."

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On the other end of the line, Edith instantly knew something was off the moment she heard the news.

Raising an eyebrow with intrigue, she teased, "What's that supposed to mean? Who's been wearing that robe? Come on, bro, spill the beans or else..."

Gregory, utterly unfazed, didn't even bother to look up. "Or else what?"

Edith smirked. "I'll hop on the next flight home and take my son with me."

Stripping him of his backup, she was playing hardball.

Putting his work aside, Gregory lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "Jane was here last night."

Edith gasped. "That's quick progress, isn't it?"

Already in bathrobes!

"Bullcrap."

Gregory cursed with a laugh, then got back on track. "She was drugged, almost certainly by Bella's daughter."

He had made a few calls right after Jane had left the previous night to check the guest list of the party.

It was a who's who of the entertainment world, and the only person Jane knew there was Bella.

Bella's care for Jane seemed genuine.

The only possible culprit left was Summer.

"Bella's daughter?"

Edith puzzled. "Does she have a beef with Jane?"

"Two years ago, the fake that Dorothy Myers brought in to replace Lilliana? That was her."

Edith grew more shocked. "Isn't she Bella's daughter? Why would she do something like impersonation..."

"I'm asking you to find out, aren't I?"

"...Alright."

Now in the loop, Edith dropped the gossip, getting back to business: "Bella's a tough nut to crack. Rumor has it, only her close confidante Ivy knows all her secrets." "Ivy?" Gregory frowned. "Her agent?"

Edith nodded. "That's right."

Gregory flicked his cigarette ash. "Then think of something."

"Think of what exactly?"

Edith paused, then laughed in frustration. "You want me to deal with her agent?"

"Women have their ways of talking. Isn't this your forte?"

Rolling her eyes, Edith conceded. "Alright, wait and see. And don't forget, this is going to cost you extra."

"Deal."

For once, Gregory was generous. "I'll cover your travel expenses as well."

"Thanks, boss!"

Pleased, Edith then grew contemplative, cautiously probing, "How's your mood been lately? What does the doctor say?"

His therapist was a friend of hers, though not a close one.

At the mention, Gregory extinguished his cigarette. "Mostly stable."

As long as Jane doesn't provoke him, like she did last night, he could keep his emotions in check.

Hearing this, Edith ventured, "So, nothing happened between you and Jane last night?"

"...Not really."

Jane had kissed him. Does that count?

He thought back to the moment she had nestled into his embrace, whispering softly as she drew herself up to kiss him.

Her long hair cascading down, creating a stark contrast against her pale, delicate skin...

The way she breathed in his arms...

Just one glance was enough to kindle all his desires.

Yet, in the end, he had restrained himself...

He was afraid she'd regret it once sober.

He wanted her willing.

Both in mind and body, utterly and willingly his!

Edith, picking up on the hesitation, prodded further, "Didn't you take the chance last night to ask her what she's been up to these past two years?"

"No."

At that moment, seeing her in such discomfort, Gregory had other things on his mind.

He was completely focused on suppressing his own desires, almost choking himself in the process.

Pondering, Edith casually asked, "Have you ever thought about what kind of answer you're hoping for?" "What do you mean?"

"Do you want to hear she's been doing well, or not?"

Faced with this question, Gregory leaned back in his chair, momentarily stiffening, his gaze deepening.

He had never considered what answer he truly wanted. All he wanted was to understand what he meant to her.

As for whether she's been faring well...

He'd be laughed at for admitting that for the first twenty-plus years of his life, all he wished was for her happiness, her life to be smooth sailing, regardless of whether he was by her side. He just wanted her to be alive.

But these past two years, he wished for her to be well, but only with him.

If Jane wasn't with him, no matter how well or poorly she was doing, he'd want to torment her.

He couldn't stand seeing Jane with someone else.

Nor could he trust her with anyone else.

She was too naive; she needed him.

When silence lingered, Edith wondered, "Gregory? Are you listening?"

"I am."

Gregory snapped back to reality, forcing a smile. "I hope she's doing better than me."

"Got it."

"What did you get?" Gregory asked.

Edith merely raised an eyebrow. "Guess?"

She had realized that if Gregory knew Jane had been struggling with depression, barely making it out, and then to be deliberately made things difficult for and treated coldly by him, Gregory would probably lose

it.

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Edith quickly changed the topic to avoid his guess, "Do you remember what day it is tomorrow?"

"What day?"

"Your own birthday, you goof!" Edith was exasperated. "It's the perfect day to invite Jane out and introduce her to your childhood buddies."

"Oh." Gregory was indifferent. "I forgot. We'll see." .

"What do you mean we'll see?"

With a grand gesture, Edith declared, "I've got the place booked, and I'll handle the invites. You better muster up some liquid courage and sweep her off her feet."

After ending the call, the cleaning lady had just finished up and was leaving.

Gregory, fighting through the pain in his legs, slowly made his way to the bathroom and picked up the bathrobe Jane had worn.

After ensuring it was dry, he folded it neatly and placed it on the bedside table, right next to an ugly, but sentimentally valuable, bunny piggy bank.

It was a piggy bank from twenty years ago, handmade by her.

And now, another one, twenty years later, also handmade by her.

Fiddling with the piggy bank, an idea crossed Gregory's mind, leading him to make a call, "Ophelia, I need you to check something for me." "What do you need?"

"Check if Jane has any travel records from two years ago."

"Jane...? But I thought you two had..."

"Ophelia, that's none of your concern."

"My apologies, I overstepped. When do you need it?"

"As soon as possible."

Hanging up, Gregory felt a bit clearer about his thoughts.

Jane had mentioned she wasn't around Bryant during those two years.

And he hadn't heard from her at all.

The only possibility was that she was abroad.

If she was, then Bryant's influence wouldn't reach there, making it easier to track down her activities during that time.

As evening approached, I had just finished giving Ike a bath when I saw Christine storm in, clearly upset.

"What's wrong? Trouble with the store negotiation?"

Christine had come to Vista Town specifically to negotiate a lease for a new store, which would be a significant step for Janedream's brand development.

That afternoon, she had a meeting scheduled with a shopping center manager about it.

Christine, standing under the air conditioner vent to cool off, was livid, "It was a disaster. They outright refused to lease to us."

"Why not?"

"Who knows."

"And they agreed to meet with you why?"

"Beats me."

Christine rolled her eyes, "You wouldn't believe it. They said founders like us couldn't possibly do well with a brand."

I frowned, "Founders like us?"

"Yeah."

The more Christine thought about it, the angrier she got, "What do they mean by 'us'? They even accused us of not being committed..." "Could there be some misunderstanding?"

Meanwhile, Gregory faced his childhood friend Clarence, who was lounging on his sofa, "Did you really say that to Christine?"

"Yeah."

Clarence was nonchalant, "Greg, those types of people need a lesson, no need to thank me."

Gregory smiled wryly, sensing something off. Clarence, feeling a chill, thought he must be imagining things.

He explained, "I checked their company info. The founder is Jane, who left you two years ago. Greg, you can't trust someone who plays both sides. I rejected them on the spot." Gregory glanced at him.

Encouraged, Clarence went on, "Greg, trust me, I even told them you'd rather be alone than give her friend a second glance."

Gregory's fists clenched, turning to Dailey for confirmation, "Did he really say that?"

Dailey, always stoic, just nodded.

Coffee stains dotted his dark shirt, a souvenir from when Christine had thrown her drink at Clarence, splashing him too.

Clarence looked at Gregory, expecting praise, "I did good, right? Letting that Jane know she can't expect anything from you..."

Gregory was fuming. "Why didn't you discuss this with me first?"

"I wanted to surprise you."

Listening to Christine rant, I caught the name, "Greg?"

"Yeah, Greg."

Christine was furious, "Seems like he knows you. Said we should stay away, claiming with Greg around, Janedream won't stand a chance here in Vista Town."

I pondered silently, "Anything else?"

Christine added, "Said he's surrounded by real ladies, not someone indecisive like us."

I was taken aback, then chuckled, "He wouldn't have anyone else."

"Wait..." Christine paused, "You know this Greg?"

"Gregory."

Christine was even more outraged, "What's his deal? Acting nice to your face but pulling this behind your back?"

"It's probably not his doing."

I speculated, "Must be his friend's idea. He probably doesn't know..."

After all, he was still holding me close just last night.

My phone suddenly buzzed.

[Jane, tomorrow's Gregory's birthday. I've booked a spot, and he asked me to send you the location.]

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"Sure thing, thanks, Edith," I replied quickly.

No sooner had I texted back than Edith sent over the location. Thinking of Ike, she chose a famous club in Vista Town known for its serene environment, a place suitable for kids too. Christine leaned in, "News from Gregory?"

"His sister," I clarified, handing her my phone. "It's Gregory's birthday tomorrow. Wanna join the fun?"

Christine, still miffed about the afternoon's events, questioned, "You sure about going?"

"It's probably just a misunderstanding. His friend might be there too. Why not clear the air face-to-face tomorrow?"

A misunderstanding meant there was a chance to clear things up.

Christine gave me a look of exasperated affection, "For your sake, fine!"

"You're the best!"

I winked at her and lifted Ike off the carpet, "Ike, it's uncle's birthday tomorrow. Let's go pick out a gift for him, shall we?"

I hadn't forgotten Gregory's birthday and had even prepared a gift in advance. But if his friends were joining, the gift I had in mind seemed somewhat out of place.

Ike blinked his large, innocent eyes, "Yay! Let's pick a gift for uncle!"

The next morning at SZ Technology, in the CEO's office, Ophelia swiftly went through the information her subordinate had gathered, her eyes narrowing slightly.

Everyone thought Jane had spent the last few years in RiverCity, contentedly being Mrs. Ferguson. Turns out, she had been in France? And... not only did she have depression, but she had also attempted suicide.

Was this all for Gregory's sake?

If Gregory heard about this, who knows how much it would break his heart!

After a moment, Ophelia pulled one of the reports and handed it over, "This report, you never handed it in, I never saw it, and no one ever looked into it, got it?" "Understood!"

Her subordinate left, feeding the document straight into the shredder.

Lucius, having witnessed the scene, walked straight into Ophelia's office, "Isn't this what Greg asked about this morning? Why destroy it?"

Lucius was in the know as well. Given he was in charge of the overseas operations, Ophelia could only get the information through him. So, he had a copy too. Ophelia cursed his nosiness internally but kept her cool, "You forgot Greg's rule? We each have our duties and don't meddle in each other's."

If she had known it wouldn't be this easy, she wouldn't have gone through him. Lucius, always so by-the-book and blindly loyal.

Lucius stared at her, cautioning, "Just don't forget Jane's place in Greg's heart. If you play games with her, you might not even know how you end up dead." They had all been picked by Gregory from an orphanage years ago. Cared for and nurtured. Gregory treated them well, like brothers, not just subordinates.

Lucius knew he couldn't repay Gregory in any other way but with loyalty and dedication.

Ophelia's face, devoid of makeup, showed no emotion as she calmly stated, "If you don't tell, no one will know."

"This is betrayal!"

"Lucius."

Ophelia suddenly stood up, starting to unbutton her shirt with her neatly trimmed nails. One button, two, revealing a hint of cleavage...

Taking off her glasses, she gave Lucius a look filled with allure, "How about you take me to bed then? I've never been with anyone before. It would be a first, you wouldn't be

losing out." "Ophelia..." Lucius swallowed hard, trying to suppress his rising desire. "Don't do this. A girl should respect and love herself!"

Ophelia looked him straight in the eye, whispering, "Don't you like me?"

Back when Gregory had chosen them, two girls and four boys, the other girl being stationed in the Nordic countries, it wasn't surprising the men found themselves drawn to her.

After his nap, Ike grabbed my phone and dialed Gregory.

Gregory picked up quickly.

"Uncle, happy birthday! You at the office or home?"

"Home."

"Then tonight, let's go to your birthday party, okay?"

"Sure."

Gregory sounded in good spirits, agreeing readily. Then his tone cooled a bit, "Is she around?"

"Who?"

"You know who."

"Jane!" Ike, proud as if holding a treasure, handed me the phone, "Uncle's asking for you."

Taking the phone, I asked, "What's up?"

"Jane, today..." He paused mid-sentence, only leaving a message, "Meet you in the garage at six."

Then he hung up, not even giving me a chance to reply.

Beside me, Christine was still holding a grudge, "With that attitude, are you sure yesterday was a misunderstanding? Maybe you don't know him as well as you think. Don't fall for him again so soon."

I laughed. "When did you become so vindictive?"

"When have I ever not been, when it comes to you?"

Christine poked my head, "I just can't stand seeing someone badmouth you. Doesn't matter if it's Gregory's friend or the Emperor of Heaven himself."

Seeing Ophelia's name on the caller ID, Gregory ended his call with Jane and picked up.

Chapter 449

Given Ophelia's efficiency, it was about time she delivered some results.

He was desperate to know.

What exactly happened to Jane two years ago?

He asked, "Did you find anything?"

"Yes."

Ophelia began in her usual organized manner. "Your hunch was correct. Two years ago, Jane went abroad, to France. I've sent all the related documents to your email just a minute ago."

Gregory let out a sigh of relief, "She's been overseas all this time?"

"Correct."

"Go on."

"But she wasn't alone."

Ophelia's tone remained steady, "She was accompanied by Mark. Mark owns a villa in France, and that's where Jane has been living for the past two years."

Gregory's grip on his phone tightened, "Is this information confirmed?"

"Lucius helped me with the investigation."

Continuing, Ophelia dropped another bombshell, "Mark initially stayed with Jane for just over a month before he had to return due to business with the Larson Group. After that, he frequently visited her, staying for days at a time."

There was a long silence on the other end of the line.

Gregory pinched the bridge of his nose, feeling a surge of anger boiling inside!

So, this was why Jane had been so evasive every time he brought it up?

Still, Gregory wasn't ready to accept this just yet, his voice hoarse, "What has she been doing in France these two years?"

"Studying design, becoming Dave's protégé."

Ophelia teased out the information, "Apparently, all arranged by Mark."

Gregory's knuckles turned white from the grip, his tone dangerously low, "That's it?"

"...That's it!"

Ophelia intended to stand firm but feared the blowback, "Don't worry, I'll keep digging. I know your relationship with Jane is special, I won't miss any detail."

"Greg..." Ophelia softened her tone, trying to be the voice of reason, "Maybe Jane thought you were gone after that explosion and made her choices. You can't blame her, after all, even the police had reported your death..."

Crash!

The sound of something smashing violently came through the phone, followed by a burst of static.

Ophelia, satisfied, dived back into her work.

Having been by Gregory's side for years, she learned one thing: in any situation, there's only success, no failure.

Before, she hated to see Gregory disappointed.

Now, she didn't want to disappoint herself.

Gregory's eyes were bloodshot, a deep crimson. Fury pushed him to the edge, his leg pain forgotten as he kicked over a trash can.

But the more he vented, the more fiercely the fire burned-almost to the point of madness!

Ever since Jane reappeared, his temper had cooled, hardly anything could disturb his mood.

But whenever he did lose it, it was worse than before!

She knew exactly how to push his buttons!

Just the other night, as she lay in his arms, softly cursing him, he thought, maybe it's time to let go! To forget everything from the past.

As long as she was with him now, that was all that mattered. But what about her? It seems, not so much!

The thought of her and Mark together in France was driving him insane.

He didn't even dare to think deeper.

Trembling, he poured out some lithium carbonate and swallowed it dry.

He didn't even bother with water.

Time seemed to stretch endlessly, so much so that his phone, flung far away, vibrated several times unnoticed.

He slumped on the couch, his gaze unfocused, staring blankly out the window.

"Hello, the person you're trying to reach is currently unavailable. Please try again later..."

The cold, mechanical voice echoed again.

I tossed my phone into my bag, turning to Ike. "Your uncle's still not picking up. Should we try knocking?"

His cars were still parked outside. He must be home.

"Okay!" Ike nodded vigorously.

Christine signaled to me while on a call with a client, "You go ahead, I'll wait here."

I led Ike upstairs, ringing the doorbell.

This time, the door was quickly answered.

Gregory opened the door, his demeanor icy, his usually lively eyes now devoid of warmth, his voice tinged with sarcasm, "Jane, aren't you tired of this act?"

"What?"

"I mean, you acting like you're so into me,"

Gregory smirked, his gaze dropping to Ike, mockingly adding, "And 'going out of your way' to look after my nephew. Doesn't putting on this facade tire you?"

I was taken aback, my nails digging into my palm, a familiar pain resurfacing, "What do you mean....."

"Uncle!" Ike, always sharp, glared at Gregory, his eyes reddening. "What are you talking about?! Aunt Jane has been nothing but kind to me, very kind! You have no right to bully her!" "Come back."

Gregory grabbed Ike by the collar and hauled him inside, scoffing, "Don't call her that without asking if she even wants to be your aunt!"

Chapter 450

I stood frozen in place.

Ike wriggled out of his restraints and rushed back to me like a little cub, clutching my legs as tears streamed down his face. "That's not true, Uncle, you're being so unfair!"

Hearing this, Gregory chuckled, his gaze steady on me. "Is that so?"

I guessed he had misunderstood something. The things he said were meant to test me. He was staring at me, waiting for me to provide a contradicting answer. This was probably the last chance he was giving

me.

Slowly, I diverted my gaze, crouching down to hug the sobbing Ike, wiping away his tears. "It's okay, Ike. Uncle was wrong. Can you give your sister a little time? I need to explain something to your uncle, alright?"

The little munchkin blinked his teary long lashes, his voice soft and milky. "Okay..."

"Chris." I dialed Christine's number.

She answered with confusion, "What's up?"

"Can you come up to the fifth floor? Take Ike to the birthday party, will you?"

"Sure." Christine sensed something was off in my tone and agreed promptly, but she couldn't help asking with concern, "What's going on?"

I pressed my lips together, "I'll explain tonight."

Soon, Christine arrived to take Ike away, leaving me and Gregory alone, one standing outside, the other inside. In a standoff. Annoyed at each other.

I glared at him, licking my dry lips. "Gregory, has anyone ever told you you're being childish?"

He was generally a great guy. Just too sharp-tongued. Never knew how to speak kindly. As a kid, unless I was in tears, it was rare to hear him say anything nice. But as a child, I was the same. Spoiled, willful. We were born the same, but the experiences of the past twenty-plus years had changed me, forced me to evolve. Me and him, we had become entirely different people.

Gregory tapped his cheek with his tongue, "Jane, you won't even give me an explanation before you start lecturing me?"

"Do I dare?" I smiled faintly, looking at him. "Is it about what happened two years ago?"

"Yes."

"You looked into me?"

"Yes."

"What did you find?"

"What do you think?"

At his counter-question, I fell silent. For the last two years, between searching for him, learning from Dave, and battling depression, I can barely say I did anything else. Yet, he was upset.

My phone suddenly rang, displaying Mark's name. Gregory's expression turned even colder, and I immediately understood what he was upset about. Somehow gathering my courage, I stepped forward, disregarding his icy demeanor, and stood right in front of him.

"Me and Mark..." Under his intense gaze, I grabbed his shirt collar, stood on my tiptoes, and kissed him. The man was momentarily stunned! The next second, unable to hold back any longer, he wrapped his arms around my waist, lifting me slightly, responding with a stormy kiss. Bit by bit, kissing me until I could barely breathe!

I lost my strength, wrapping my arms around his neck, stepping back, my eyes glistening with tears, my voice soft yet firm, "Me and Mark, we've never kissed like this."

"Gregory, I think I know what you found out." I leaned against his forehead, "I can explain. During those two years abroad, I lived in a house that was Mark's; he did take good care of me, but it was just that, nothing beyond friendship. Even when he occasionally came to France for business and checked in on me, we never stayed under the same roof."

After thinking it over, this was what he must have been upset about. I wasn't sure at first, but seeing his reaction to the caller ID, I was instantly sure. Hearing this, Gregory pulled me close again, still deliberately stern, "What else, Jane? Say it all at once."

I was taken aback, "What else did you find out?"

"What should I have found out?"

My eyes flickered uncertainly. I didn't know the extent of his network, but since he found out even where I lived was Mark's, he must know everything else...

I hugged him, hesitating to speak, "Gregory, it wasn't serious... and it's cured now."

This time, he was the one who froze.

"Cured?"

"Yes." I nodded, "Mark introduced me to a great psychologist, a very gentle woman who helped me a lot..."

"Psychologist?" He suddenly grasped my shoulders, creating some distance between us, his eyes stormy with emotion!

Only then did I realize. "You... didn't know about this?"

"Psychologist..." Gregory murmured softly, his gaze deepening. "You... had depression? When did this happen?"

"A long time ago!" Realizing he was unaware and not wanting him to feel guilty over this, I half-truthfully said, "It was diagnosed before your accident."

He suddenly pulled me tightly into his embrace. "Jane, are you an idiot? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I am an idiot." I patted his head, "That's why I need Gregory, right? According to the law of conservation, a smart person is paired with an idiot, isn't that so?" "You'd be the death of me." Gregory pinched my face, exasperated yet affectionate.

Suddenly, I felt a pang in my stomach, about to tell him I needed to visit the restroom when his phone also started ringing.

