

Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 101:

“How much do you need?” Margaret asked.

Cathryn held up five fingers.

Margaret’s eyes widened. “Fifty thousand? Mrs. Brooks, I only make eight thousand a month—I can’t possibly—”

Cathryn waved her hands quickly. “Not fifty thousand. Just five hundred.”

Margaret blinked in disbelief. “You don’t even have five hundred?”

Cathryn gave a sheepish smile. She didn’t have a single dollar to her name. “Don’t worry,” she whispered. “I’ll pay you back.”

Margaret slipped a wad of bills into Cathryn's hand, her voice firm but gentle. "Here. Don't bother paying me back."

The money felt heavier than its value. Cathryn managed a strained smile. "I'll return it," she insisted.

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Five hundred wasn't much for a gift, yet even that came at a cost for Margaret. Margaret's wages came from long hours and calloused hands. Cathryn resolved to make every bill count—something simple but thoughtful for her husband.

After changing, Cathryn set out with Gavin, who drove her to Olekgan Mall.

The glass tower glittered with luxury on its upper floors, but Cathryn bypassed the polished displays and headed straight for the basement, where ordinary shoppers moved in steady currents between crowded aisles.

A modest tie shop caught her eye. She paused, running her fingers over the rows of fabric until she found something practical and understated—something Damien would actually wear.

Upstairs, Vanessa strolled arm in arm with Jordyn. Her sharp gaze flicked downward, and a smirk curled her lips. "Look at that. Cathryn is shopping in the bargain section. I knew that auction bravado was nothing but an act."

To Vanessa, anyone who shopped in the basement had already admitted they were poor.

At the last auction, Cathryn had stirred up such a storm that Douglas and the others had ended up in detention.

With money and influence, the Grant family bought every favor they could find, spending a fortune to clear Vanessa's name. But with her grandfather still awaiting trial behind bars, Vanessa's hatred for Cathryn burned hotter than ever. Just thinking of her made Vanessa grit her teeth.

Jordyn curled her lip and sneered, "Looks like Cathryn has sunk to bargain-bin shopping. Maybe she's hunting a tie for that chauffeur she married."

A hard line cut across Vanessa's jaw. "If Cathryn hadn't meddled, your father would never have whipped you, and Dr. Clarke wouldn't have denied you the scar-fading potion. Cathryn is nothing but a curse."

Jordyn traced the ugly scar along her neck, her eyes flashing with fury. She'd pinned her hopes on the last remnants of Adrian's potion left in the bottle, trying to replicate whatever miracle it held. Labs and hospitals had managed to identify the ingredients, yet without the exact proportions, no one could recreate the formula. That left Jordyn with a disfiguring scar that might never fully fade.

Jordyn started down the stairs. "Since we ran into Cathryn, let's go say hello."

Vanessa grabbed her sleeve. “Cathryn is cunning. What if that chauffeur is with her? We’d better plan our move before we confront her.”

Jordyn gave a curt nod. “Solid point.”

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Chapter 102:

A sudden idea lit Jordyn’s face. She pulled out her phone and called Zoe. “Have someone bring Dad’s whip to Olekgan Mall.”

Since she had to live with this scar every day, Jordyn would make sure Cathryn couldn't enjoy her life either.

A frown crossed Vanessa's face. "Even if you lash Cathryn, Dr. Clarke can heal her scars with his potion."

Jordyn's voice dropped, dark and menacing. "What if the whip cuts across her face instead?"

Vanessa murmured, "Facial skin is too delicate... One strike to her face, and no medicine could restore her to her original beauty. And if—"

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Jordyn cut her off with a cruel smile. "If the whip strikes her eyes, nothing in this world could fix that."

A slow smile lifted one corner of Vanessa's mouth. "Picture her scarred and sightless, broke and abandoned. Her chauffeur would walk away, and strangers would cross the street rather than look at her."

A harsh chuckle escaped Jordyn. "That's exactly the outcome I want for her. I want her to wake up every morning wishing she could end it, only to realize she doesn't have the courage to take her own life."

Soon enough, the whip was delivered by Zoe's people. Jordyn slipped it carefully into her bag and followed Vanessa down the stairs.

Meanwhile, inside the shop, the clerk glanced up and asked Cathryn, "Ma'am, who are you buying the tie for?"

"For my husband," Cathryn replied.

"And what price range are you aiming for?"

"Nothing beyond five hundred."

At that moment, Vanessa stepped forward, her voice soaked in derision. "Cathryn, you tossed cash around at the auction like you owned the room. Now I see you can't even spring for a tie over five hundred."

Jordyn doubled over with a harsh laugh. "Oh, Vanessa, you should just say it—what chauffeur ever needs a proper tie?"

All along, Zoe had suspected Cathryn had landed herself a loaded husband. Now Jordyn felt she'd finally seen the truth: Cathryn's husband was just that pathetic, middle-aged

driver, not some magnate. After all, a genuine tycoon who rode in a Maybach would never wear a bargain-bin tie.

Cathryn's brows drew together at the sight of Vanessa and Jordyn.

Vanessa's smug smirk widened. "Surprised?" she asked. "Here I am, free as can be."

Cathryn truly hadn't expected it. The list of the Grant family's misdeeds was long enough to bury them, and she'd assumed they would be held far longer.

But in Olekgan, power and money bent the law, and a few well-placed bribes could change everything.

A faint smirk curved Kathryn's lips. "Believe whatever you like," she said. "Stunt or not, Mr. Brooks still allowed me to keep the painting he paid thirty million for."

The memory of that day—the secretary inviting Kathryn upstairs in front of everyone—seared Vanessa like a brand. Rage trembled through her.

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Chapter 103:

“Don’t get arrogant,” Vanessa snapped, jabbing a finger at Cathryn. “The next time I see Mr. Brooks at the office, I’ll make sure he learns exactly who you really are.”

“You actually work at Brooks Group?” Cathryn blurted, stunned.

Vanessa lifted her chin, pride glinting in her eyes. “My office is on the same floor as the CEO’s. Running into Mr. Brooks is nothing unusual for me.”

Cathryn went rigid. Brooks Group was notorious for its brutal hiring standards. Vanessa slipping through their doors was the last thing she’d expected. But a moment later, the explanation felt painfully obvious. A pampered, incompetent girl like Vanessa couldn’t have earned her way in. Douglas must have pulled every string he could to plant her there, hoping she’d worm her way into Andrew’s good graces.

Everyone said Andrew was still unmarried. It was clear Vanessa had her sights set on becoming his wife.

For the briefest second, envy tugged at Cathryn's heart. If only she could find a place inside Brooks Group herself.

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"Ma'am, shall I wrap this tie for you?" the clerk asked, holding up the one Cathryn had chosen.

Cathryn reached for her wallet, ready to pay and leave, but Jordyn's voice cut in. "I'll take care of it. Think of it as a present—for my middle-aged brother-in-law."

Cathryn's eyes gleamed as she pointed to another tie on display, finer and richer in fabric. "Then I'll have that one instead," she said.

The clerk fetched it with a bright smile. "A perfect choice, ma'am. This is our finest piece—two thousand. It's a bit above the five-hundred budget you mentioned."

Cathryn returned the smile, her tone gentle. "That's alright. My sister will handle the bill."

Jordyn's jaw tightened until it looked like her teeth might crack. She'd meant to flaunt her wealth and watch Cathryn squirm, but Cathryn stayed steady, flipping the game and making her pay far more than she'd intended. Two thousand was nothing to Jordyn—less than the cost of a single fancy dinner. But being played so cleanly made her seethe.

Still, Jordyn paid, no longer with triumph, but with bitterness.

Cathryn accepted the wrapped tie and headed calmly for the exit.

Jordyn's gaze flicked to Vanessa, passing an unspoken cue.

Vanessa stepped forward, blocking Cathryn's path. "At the last auction, there were a few pieces..."

"...Mr. Brooks didn't take them home. Want to know where they went?"

Cathryn halted mid-step.

A sly smile curved Vanessa's lips. "If you're curious, then follow me."

Cathryn trailed after Vanessa and Jordyn into the deserted alley behind the mall.

At the mall’s main entrance, Gavin lingered anxiously, scanning the crowd. No sign of Cathryn. He pulled out his phone and dialed—no answer. Unease prickled up his spine. He punched in another number.

“Mr. Brooks,” he said tightly, “your wife went missing after walking into Olekgan Mall.”

Across town, Andrew’s expression darkened in the middle of the boardroom. Without a word, he shoved back his chair and strode out.

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Chapter 104:

Meanwhile, in the alley, Cathryn's eyes swept the shadows. Empty. For a heartbeat, relief washed over her. She straightened her shoulders. She wasn't some fragile flower. If it came down to a fight, two pampered girls who'd never carried more than a designer handbag were hardly a threat.

"Where did those pieces end up?" Cathryn asked evenly.

Vanessa's lips curved into a smile sharp as glass. "At the Brooks estate."

Cathryn's brow knit. "You're playing me."

Vanessa fluttered her lashes, feigning innocence. "You wanted to know. I told you. They're in Mr. Brooks's home. How is that playing you?"

Cathryn's stomach twisted. Something was off. Vanessa and Jordyn had lured her here on purpose. Her gaze flicked through the dim alley again. Still no one else. What was Jordyn plotting?

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The answer came with a vicious hiss.

A whip cracked past Cathryn's ear, close enough to sting the air.

Jordyn stood there gripping a whip studded with cruel barbs. Cathryn jolted. That whip. The sight of it yanked her straight into the black pit of childhood terror—the sound, the sting, the agony that tore flesh from bone. Her skin went clammy. Her breath caught.

Cathryn spun to run, but Vanessa lunged and locked her in a merciless grip.

“Her face!” Vanessa shrieked, eyes blazing with cruelty. “Slash it open! Blind her! Let her rot where no one dares look at her again—”

Jordyn advanced, slow and deliberate, hatred burning in her gaze.

Cathryn went pale, the color draining from her skin as a tremor ran through her.

Jordyn lifted the whip high, mimicking Richard's brutal stance.

“Go to hell, Cathryn!” she roared.

Cathryn's knees buckled. Her eyes squeezed shut.

Crack!

The lash struck flesh with a sickening sound, like skin being torn open. But the pain never came.

Instead, Cathryn was swallowed by a familiar embrace, her nose filling with that clean, familiar scent. She looked up.

It was Damien.

Andrew's arms were locked around her, his body shielding hers completely. His suit jacket was shredded across the back, blood already seeping through where the barbs had ripped into skin. His face was ashen, his lips pressed into a hard line.

"Damien... are you all right?" Cathryn's voice fractured, terror and raw concern clawing up her throat. The whip's torment ran bone-deep—only someone who'd been lashed could truly understand it.

Tears blurred her vision. "Why would you throw yourself in front of me?"

Andrew's lips had gone pale, but his eyes held hers—steady, unyielding. “So this is how much it hurts. Is this what you endured all those years?”

Cathryn's tears spilled over, hot tracks down her cheeks.

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Chapter 105:

She had been only five when her mother lost her stability and Zoe stepped into the Moore home. From that day on, Richard had raised that same whip against her. Every lash had carved her childhood into ribbons of pain. Every time, she had crawled away broken, hiding in the attic, sobs smothered into silence—unseen, uncared for, a little girl discarded like refuse.

Cathryn nodded through her tears, droplets slipping onto his bloodied hand. “It hurt... It hurt so much that I wanted to die.”

Andrew’s hold tightened. His voice dropped, a vow forged in steel. “From this day on, no one will ever lay a hand on you.”

Footsteps thundered in the alley. Gavin burst in with a team of bodyguards.

“What the hell are you doing?” Jordyn shrieked as rough hands wrenched her arms behind her. “You can’t just restrain me!”

Vanessa clawed at the ground as she was dragged away by her ankle, shrieking like a banshee.

Earlier, when Vanessa had wrapped herself around Cathryn’s waist, a man had rushed in without warning—shoving Vanessa aside and taking the whip’s blow meant for Cathryn.

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Vanessa’s eyes darted to him. She hadn’t seen his face clearly—only that strong silhouette. But something about it snagged at her memory.

That figure... why did it feel so hauntingly familiar?

She didn't have time to dwell on it. The black-clad guards, eyes hidden behind dark glasses, shoved Vanessa and Jordyn out into the crush of people in front of Olekgan Mall. They hit the pavement hard, utterly humiliated.

Passersby slowed, steps faltering as curiosity rooted them to the spot.

A flush of shame swept over Jordyn and Vanessa. They snatched at their clothes, eyes darting, and bolted for their car.

"That driver husband of Cathryn's always throws his weight around because he works for the Brooks family." Jordyn's voice was low and sharp, each word a brand. "I swear I'll make him pay."

Vanessa frowned, her mind racing. "Who was the man who shielded Cathryn?" she asked, eyes narrowing.

Jordyn's breath caught as she recalled the suited figure who had thrown himself in front of Cathryn. The moment had been a blur, but the profile had stayed with her—clean jaw, aristocratic bearing. He seemed like the same devastatingly handsome man Cathryn had hired for a charade at the courthouse, the one who had supposedly "tied the knot" with her later at city hall. That single encounter had left such a deep impression that Jordyn had dreamed of him that night, every detail impossible to forget.

Her brows knitted tighter. Could that handsome man really be more than someone Cathryn had hired to play a part?

Vanessa tilted her head, suspicion sharpening her tone. “Do you think that man in the suit is Cathryn’s husband?”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” Jordyn snorted, brushing a hand through her hair as if to sweep the thought away. “Cathryn’s a penniless divorcée. No normal man would want her.”

Jordyn was certain. That man carried himself like someone born to command rooms. Thousands of women would throw themselves at him if he ever said the word. There was no way he’d marry a newly divorced woman like Cathryn.

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Chapter 106:

“Then why did he step in and take a lash for her?” Vanessa pressed.

Jordyn’s mouth twisted. “He’s probably being paid by Cathryn’s husband to play the knight. I bet Cathryn’s husband has been milking the Brooks name for favors.”

Vanessa chewed on that, then nodded. The explanation fit—well enough.

After a beat, she exhaled. “What do we do?”

Jordyn’s smile was all teeth. “Easy. My mother is close with Mrs. Brooks. I’ll have her mention how Cathryn’s husband has been abusing the Brooks family name. Once Mrs. Brooks hears, she’ll fire him—and Cathryn and her husband will be out on the street.”

Vanessa’s eyes lit up, a flicker of astonishment breaking through her practiced poise. “Your mother actually knows Cara?”

Jordyn leaned back with the easy composure of someone...

...used to being admired. A faint smile played at her lips. “Of course. They are best friends.”

The words landed like a spark. Vanessa felt ambition flare inside her, sharp and bright. If she wanted to claw her way up—if she wanted, one day, to step into the glittering life of being Andrew’s wife—this was her opening. Jordyn was no longer just a casual acquaintance; she was a stepping stone.

Andrew refused the hospital outright. Instead, he demanded the doctor come to the house and treat him there.

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Cathryn steadied his weight as they crossed the threshold together, guiding him toward the guest room. But the moment they reached it, he stopped and refused to step inside.

Margaret hurried over. “The guest bed is far too stiff. Mrs. Brooks, keep holding your husband up. I’ll fetch some blankets to soften it.”

Andrew’s tall frame leaned heavily against Cathryn, and she could already feel herself starting to buckle. There was no way she could keep him upright much longer. Her brows drew tight. “Forget the guest room. Let’s go to my room instead.”

“Yes, Mrs. Brooks.” Margaret pushed open the master bedroom door.

Andrew quickly gave Margaret a discreet thumbs-up. She bit back a grin, pleased to finally be of use.

As soon as Andrew collapsed onto the mattress, the extent of his injury became clear. Dried blood had sealed the wound, and his shirt had stuck to the raw skin beneath.

“Margaret,” Cathryn said as she braced Andrew’s body, “I’ll hold him steady. Help me get his clothes off.”

Andrew’s eyes flicked to Margaret in a sharp warning. She caught it instantly and pressed a hand to her forehead. “Mrs. Brooks, I can’t. The moment I see blood, I’ll faint dead away...”

Cathryn let out a tired breath. “Fine. Boil water, then. And bring me a clean pair of scissors.”

Margaret scurried off, then returned quickly with steaming water and scissors. She shut the door behind her as she left.

Cathryn took the scissors and carefully cut away the fabric near the wound, easing the shirt off without tearing the injury further.

Andrew tilted his head toward her. “Not bad,” he murmured. “You know what you’re doing.”

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Chapter 107:

She offered a wry smile. “You learn from experience. When I was younger, I didn’t know how to handle my wounds. Every time I yanked my clothes away, the cuts tore open again, and I had to endure the pain all over.”

A shadow crossed Andrew’s face. “Have you thought about how you’ll make Richard pay?”

Cathryn froze mid-motion. The plan had lived in her head a thousand times. Once she rebuilt herself, she would repay each lash and strip the Moores of everything. But her hatred went beyond the whip. It was about their audacity in claiming her mother’s life.

Andrew pushed himself up, eyes fixed on her. “The whip is in my hands now. I could have someone give Richard a taste of it.”

She shook her head slowly. “That’s far too easy for him. I want his reputation destroyed and his spirit broken. I want him tormented until he drives himself mad.”

That kind of ruin would satisfy her far more than a single flogging.

Andrew inclined his head. “Tell me what you need. I’ll help you.”

Cathryn paused to consider. “Could you dig into Zoe White’s history for me? Find out exactly how she and Richard first crossed paths.”

“Consider it done,” Andrew replied, eyes bright with intent. There was hardly anyone—except Kestrel—whose past he couldn’t unearth.

Cathryn set the scissors down. “The shirt is cut away from the wound. Could you sit up and slip it off yourself?”

He lay back, all strength seemingly gone. “I’ve got nothing left. I can’t move.”

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Cathryn tugged at his arm. “Let me help you up.”

But his frame was too broad and solid; she couldn’t budge him. Andrew gave her a puppy look. “Every movement’s torture. If I try to shift, the pain rips through me.”

Cathryn let out a long breath. “All right. I’ll take it off for you.”

A faint grin tugged at the corners of his mouth. This was exactly the answer he’d been waiting for.

Her slender hands moved across his chest, searching for the fastenings of his jacket.

Andrew sucked in a sharp breath. “Cathryn, the buttons are higher up, not down there.”

Color rushed into her cheeks. “Oops. Sorry.”

His eyes lingered on her flustered face, teasing. “I’m yours—every inch of me. You don’t need to apologize for touching.”

She shot him a glare. “No one’s eager to touch you. You’re hurt, and yet you still can’t keep quiet.”

His smile widened. The sting of the lash felt almost like a gift—it had led him to her room, to her careful hands.

The jacket slipped off without much trouble, but the shirt clung stubbornly.

“Try to push yourself up a little,” Cathryn urged, her fingers pinned beneath him.

Andrew knit his brows. “I don’t have any strength left at all...”

She leaned over him, half her body draped across his as her fingers worked clumsily at each button down his chest.

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Chapter 108:

Her touch was warm and careful, yet every brush of her fingertips sent a jolt through him, heat pooling low and deep.

As her hands drifted lower, she had to bend closer, her body brushing against his. Without realizing it, her chest pressed against his arm—something she didn't notice, though Andrew felt it far too clearly.

He turned his head. Her face was right beside his, her scent lingering in the air until it wrapped around him.

When she finally looked up, their faces were only inches apart. The realization hit her at once—she was practically sprawled across his chest. Heat rushed to her cheeks.

“All done,” she whispered, trying to pull back.

But her arms were still trapped beneath his weight, leaving her unable to retreat.

Andrew didn't move. His gaze stayed locked on hers. "Cathryn, you're skilled."

Her throat tightened. Skilled? They were just buttons.

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His voice dropped, rough and rich. "Why not let your hand wander a little lower and see what your effort earned you?"

Her breath hitched, and in that instant, she understood. He was aroused.

Fury flashed in her eyes. "You're impossible. Even injured, you still won't stop with the teasing."

She shoved at him with everything she had.

But Andrew moved abruptly, shifting his weight and rolling, trapping her beneath him.

Cathryn held herself rigid, barely daring to breathe, terrified that even the slightest movement might tear open Damien's wound. "Stop acting reckless. The doctor is almost here."

Andrew's arms cinched tighter, as if she were smoke he feared would slip through his fingers. "When is my birthday?"

"May twenty-first." Her voice was steady now; she'd carved the date into her memory like a scar.

"Then why design cufflinks for Andrew, but forget me?" His gaze turned soft and wounded, like a dog left out in the rain, heavy with grievance.

She lowered her lashes. "Those cufflinks were repayment for a debt, nothing more. Forgetting your birthday... that was my fault."

Andrew's eyes swept over her delicate face—lips like sun-warmed berries—and something in him unraveled. He bent, brushing her mouth with a hesitant kiss. "I was wrong first. I should have asked before losing my temper."

The memory made her flare. "And you wrapped your hands around my throat."

His brows drew together. “It was your chin, was it not?”

“It was my neck,” she snapped.

He caught her hand and guided it to his own throat. “Then choke me back.”

She jerked away. “As if I would waste the energy.”

Andrew laughed under his breath and stole another quick taste of her lips. She wasn’t recalling the truth so much as pouting, needling him with stubborn indignation.

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Chapter 109:

His voice dropped into a velvet plea. “Honey, let me move back into this room.”

“No.” She turned her face away, like a door shutting.

That night still stung. She had ordered his bedding moved into her room, only for him to reject her in front of the household staff. The humiliation had burned; the servants must have thought she was throwing herself at him, desperate to share his bed. Did he expect her to have no pride at all?

“Honey, please...” Andrew burrowed against her chest, nuzzling like a spoiled boy.

She pushed his head away. “Do not call me that.”

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“But you are my wife,” he murmured.

“Our marriage lasts only a year. Such an endearment feels unnecessary. And who knows? Vanessa might marry Andrew one day. That might even speed up our separation.”

Andrew snorted, sharp as a whip crack. “She is not worthy of him.”

“Why not? She is the only daughter of the Grant family. Douglas may be detained, but the Grants’ roots in Olekgan run iron-deep. He’ll be free soon enough. Few women in the city match Andrew, but Vanessa does.”

His tone turned flinty. “I decide who is worthy—and she is not.”

Cathryn’s smile curved, thin and cool. “You do not choose who becomes Andrew’s wife. That is your brother’s prerogative, not yours.”

A sharp knock jarred the tension. “Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, the doctors are here,” Margaret called out.

Andrew frowned and muttered, “Damn nuisance. Couldn’t arrive earlier or later—they barge in now.”

Cathryn slipped from his hold and opened the door. A male doctor and a female doctor stepped inside.

Andrew lifted a finger, pointing straight at the female doctor. “She leaves.”

The two doctors traded a startled look.

Andrew clasped Cathryn’s hand. “I am married. I will not let another woman touch me.”

“I am a physician,” the female doctor replied, voice level. “Patients are patients—gender does not matter.”

Andrew’s eyes turned hard. “It matters to me.”

The male doctor sighed and said to his colleague, “You’d better wait outside.”

Reluctantly, the female doctor surrendered her kit and withdrew.

Cathryn rounded on Andrew. “Stop being difficult. The wound is deep. Without proper treatment, it will fester. Is that what you want?”

Andrew gave the male doctor a cool, assessing look. “Then you cooperate with him.”

Left with no choice, Cathryn served as the assistant, following the male doctor's quiet instructions.

The male doctor chuckled. "Mrs. Brooks, you are deft. Anyone watching would think you had felt the lash and tended wounds yourself."

Cathryn fell silent.

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Chapter 110:

Andrew's tone dropped to a dangerous murmur. "Get it treated. Finish up and get out."

The male doctor pressed his lips together, reading the undercurrent in the room, and bent over the gash in Andrew's back. He worked quickly, brow furrowed. When he finally spoke, his voice carried the weight of a warning. "This wound is deep. Over the next couple of days, you may spike a fever more than once. If it doesn't break after medication, you must get to a hospital."

Cathryn inclined her head. "Understood."

As the doctor snapped the clasps on his kit, he hesitated, eyes flicking to Andrew's back. "This isn't just any lash mark—this is a gangland-style whipping. Those barbs leave scars that don't fade."

Cathryn's gaze slid to Damien. "Don't worry. I'll have Dr. Clarke prepare the scar-fading potion for you."

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Andrew gave a faint smile, utterly unbothered. "Don't trouble Dr. Clarke over this. A scar is nothing—as long as you can bear looking at it, so can I."

Color rose in Kathryn's cheeks. "You didn't mind mine. Why would I mind yours?"

Her mind flickered to the night he had treated her back, the press of his lips against her skin still vivid.

Andrew's voice warmed, playful as a caress. "You are breathtaking—graceful, gorgeous, with long legs I couldn't keep my hands off. I should be the one afraid you'll mind me."

Cathryn shot him a sharp look. Shameless—talking like this with the doctor still here.

The male doctor, well into his forties, hurried through the last of his instructions and clutched his medical kit as if it were a shield. Their intimacy clearly made him itch to escape.

Andrew shifted lazily on the mattress. "Doc, should I keep completely still? Best to stay right here on this bed?"

The doctor blinked, momentarily thrown. The injury was on his back, not his legs. He began carefully, "There is no strict ban on moving. Just rise slowly—"

Andrew's stare sharpened into a blade, stopping him short.

The doctor darted a glance at Kathryn and immediately caught on. He forced a tight smile. "Right. Severe, indeed. Best to stay in bed and avoid moving at all."

Andrew gave Cathryn a meaningful look.

Cathryn saw right through his little act. But since he'd taken the blow for her, she decided to let it pass.

Once the doctor left, Cathryn turned to Margaret. "Bring my husband's pillow and blanket into my room, please."

Margaret's face brightened at once. "Right away!"

Margaret carried Andrew's bedding over and set it neatly at the foot of the bed. "Mr. Brooks, would you like me to tuck you in?"

Andrew reached out and snatched Cathryn's blanket, tugging it over himself with a stubborn grin. "I'll take this one."

Margaret glanced at Cathryn, silently asking for guidance.

Cathryn let out a resigned sigh. "Fine. I'll use his blanket tonight."

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