

Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 201:

After hanging up, he turned to Margaret. “How exactly did Cathryn end up with the footage?”

Margaret took a moment to sift through her memory. “She borrowed a nurse’s laptop. Next thing I knew, she pressed a few buttons and the footage just popped up.”

A knot formed between Andrew’s brows. Was it possible Cathryn was Kestrel?

But it didn’t add up. Cathryn had barely gone to school. Reading was hard enough for her, let alone hacking.

“How did she even type anything in?” Andrew asked, not bothering to hide his suspicion.

Margaret demonstrated by pecking at an imaginary keyboard with one finger. “She just tapped like this, several times.”

A faint smirk tugged at Andrew's lips, some of the tension finally easing. Pecking at the keyboard with one finger—if that wasn't the definition of a computer newbie, he didn't know what was. Someone like Cathryn, who barely knew her way around a computer, couldn't possibly be Kestrel... could she?

He dismissed the idea with a shake of his head. But the question kept nagging at him.

How had Cathryn gotten the footage?

Maybe she knew Kestrel. That had to be it.

"How can you just do nothing after everything your wife has been through, Mr. Brooks?" Margaret's voice broke—raw and trembling. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

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Annoyance flickered across Andrew's face as he pinched the bridge of his nose. "Margaret, enough with the crying. She's still alive, isn't she?"

Stunned, Margaret stared at him, her face ashen. "Is that all you have to say? She's your wife. After everything that's happened, all you can manage is 'she's alive'? How heartless."

His patience snapped. “And who are you calling heartless now?” he shot back, his voice sharp.

Margaret bit down on her lip, forcing herself silent. Andrew’s cold dismissal of what those men had done to Cathryn had ignited her fury, and it had slipped out before she could stop it.

“Those five men have already been dealt with. Thrown out.” Andrew’s words came icy and final. “Let’s just say they won’t be showing up anywhere again.”

A deep frown creased Margaret’s forehead. “Just tossing them out isn’t nearly enough. If it were up to me, I’d make sure they never saw daylight again.”

Andrew answered with a cold, humorless chuckle. “And you’re the one accusing me of being heartless.”

Margaret’s voice trembled, anger barely contained. “Those monsters assaulted Mrs. Brooks. Maybe you can brush it off, but I can’t forgive—”

Andrew cut her off with a glare. “Where are you getting this nonsense?”

Margaret faltered, her confidence evaporating. “Did... did I say something wrong?”

A flash of anger crossed Andrew's face as he clenched his fists. "Let me make this clear. They never got anywhere near her. I won't listen to you spreading those lies."

Margaret stared at him, disbelief giving way to hope. "You mean nothing happened to her?"

Andrew's jaw tensed. "That's right."

Relief nearly buckled Margaret's knees, and this time her tears were from overwhelming joy. It made sense now why Andrew had seemed so unbothered—Cathryn hadn't been violated.

"Thank goodness," Margaret sobbed. "I was terrified she—"

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A sharp glint flashed in Andrew's eyes. "Cathryn doesn't know what really happened, does she? She also believes she was violated?"

Margaret gave a small nod.

"The gossip downstairs is disgusting, and then she saw the video herself..."

Andrew's fists tightened again, a storm gathering in his expression. No wonder Cathryn had suddenly blurted out that insane talk about remarrying Liam. Liam, who had her mother's blood on his hands—how could she possibly want to go back to him?

And her instinctive recoil from his touch finally made sense. Cathryn must have convinced herself those five men had violated her. That belief was why she'd demanded a divorce.

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The realization hit Andrew like a punch to the gut. He loved Cathryn more than anything in the world, yet she saw herself as defiled. The thought tore him apart.

Andrew spun around and slammed the door open with sudden force.

Cathryn remained motionless, her body curled away from the doorway. She hadn't shifted at all—silent, still. She'd cried for hours until she was drained, and now only quiet tears traced down her cheeks.

The noise made her flinch. She turned as a shadow fell over her—and strong arms wrapped around her, pulling her tight against a solid chest. A familiar scent washed over her, one she could recognize even in her sleep.

Damien had returned.

Before she could push him away, his lips crashed onto hers, fierce and unstoppable. The kiss swallowed her words and stole the air from her lungs, leaving her dizzy and breathless.

“Mmh—” Cathryn's fists landed weakly against his chest.

Without hesitation, Andrew caught her wrists and pinned them, deepening the kiss.

A furrow formed between Cathryn's brows. Then, without warning, she sank her teeth into his lower lip, biting down hard enough to draw blood.

The metallic taste spread between them.

She wrenched herself free, panting. "It's dirty."

Andrew gripped Cathryn's chin, forcing her to look at him.

His eyes blazed. "Who are you calling dirty?"

Her gaze dropped, her voice trembling on the edge of silence. "Me."

Her reply hit him hard, pain blooming through his chest. He held her gaze, his voice low and steady, as if he could press the truth into her very soul.

"Cathryn, you're not dirty."

Her nose stung as tears spilled faster down her cheeks. She wanted to trust him. She wanted to believe no one else had touched her. But doubt still clung to her, clawing too fiercely to shake.

Andrew tipped her chin up again, refusing to let her hide. “Listen to me, Cathryn. No matter what happens, I will never let you go.”

Cathryn shook her head, tears pouring without restraint.

Andrew pulled her back into his arms, his hand smoothing over her hair. “Nothing happened,” he said firmly. “They never laid a hand on you.”

A wave of shock flickered across Cathryn’s face, but just as quickly the light drained from her gaze. Damien must be lying—trying to comfort her.

Tears streamed down Cathryn’s cheeks as her voice faltered. “I already know what happened. I saw everything on the security camera...”

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Without a word, Andrew reached for his phone, selected a video, and angled the screen so Cathryn could watch.

In the footage, Cathryn lay sprawled on the bed, completely still, eyes squeezed shut, unaware of what was happening around her. Five men crowded in—belts unfastening—and one of them clambered over her, tearing at her clothes.

“Stop!” Cathryn cried, throwing her hands over her eyes, unable to take any more.

Andrew gently pulled her hands away from her face.

In the footage, the men pushed and shoved each other, laughing crudely, eager to get their hands on Cathryn. Then the door burst open with a thunderous bang. Andrew charged in with his men, sending the intruders sprawling across the floor.

Tears spilled over as Cathryn’s eyes widened in disbelief.

Andrew lifted a hand, smoothing her hair, and reassured her softly. "I didn't lie. They never laid a finger on you."

Cathryn's whole body trembled. She collapsed into his embrace, sobs wracking her chest. "I'm not tainted... No one violated me..."

Andrew pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead. "No matter what happened, I would never think less of you. You're not stained in any way."

Cathryn blinked back her tears, her words shaky. "Then why did you get so upset about me and Liam?"

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A dry chuckle escaped Andrew as he tapped her nose with a hint of teasing. "It wasn't your past that bothered me. I just can't stand that you still think about him. It kills me that he was ever part of your life."

Cathryn shook her head quickly. "I never had feelings for him. The only reason I stayed with him was because my parents pushed me into it."

"I know," Andrew murmured, pulling her close to his chest once more.

She pressed her face against him, leaving a messy trail of tears and a runny nose on his dress shirt and suit jacket.

Leaning close, Andrew whispered near her ear, “So, do you still want to remarry him?”

A deep flush warmed her cheeks. That excuse had been nothing but a lie—she would have chosen to vanish entirely rather than return to Liam. She buried herself even deeper in his arms, her face burning with embarrassment.

But Andrew wasn’t about to let her dodge him. His teeth grazed her ear as he whispered, “Are you still planning to divorce me?”

Cathryn fidgeted in his hold, squirming like she wished she could sink into the floor.

Andrew caught her by the nape of her neck. “Careful. If you keep wriggling, you’ll end up lost inside my jacket.”

Her voice came out low and sulky. “Cut it out.”

A chuckle escaped Andrew. “All right. I’ll stop.” His fingers drifted through her hair, his smile filled with quiet promise. He would never let anything hurt her again.

Then something troubled his thoughts, and the smile faded. “Cathryn, do you know Kestrel?”

The question jolted her; her eyes snapped wide. So Damien was searching for Kestrel too? Whoever held that code would rule the future of tech—rise to the very top overnight.

Could Damien really think he stood a chance against Andrew for the family’s legacy? If so, she couldn’t trust Damien with the code. Damien might share Brooks blood, but as an illegitimate son, he would never have Andrew’s power or reputation. If she ever had to choose a partner to collaborate with, there would be no hesitation. She would choose Andrew without a second thought.

Cathryn shook her head quickly. “Who’s Kestrel? I’ve never heard of them.”

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Andrew's tone sharpened. "Then how did you get the hospital surveillance video?"

Her voice wavered. "It... someone sent it to me in an email. There wasn't a name."

A shadow passed over Andrew's expression. So that was it. Still, it didn't make sense. Why would Kestrel send the video to Cathryn if she truly had no connection?

"Can you pull up the email for me?" he asked. Maybe tracking the sender's address would give them a lead.

"It was an auto-deleting email," Cathryn lied. "It disappeared as soon as I read it."

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“That’s all right. My tech team can recover deleted messages,” Andrew replied without missing a beat.

Left with no other choice, she opened her inbox and nudged the laptop toward him.

Andrew immediately got his hackers involved. They dug for a while, but eventually admitted defeat. “Kestrel’s encryption is on another level. There’s nothing for us to trace.”

Cathryn raised an eyebrow. Of course they couldn’t recover it—no such email had ever existed.

A faint sigh slipped from Andrew. “You’re not to blame. Kestrel would never leave any trace behind.”

Cathryn pressed her lips together, suppressing a smile. Inside, she thanked him for the quiet respect he’d just paid her.

She leaned in, burying her face against his chest, her arms looping around his waist as if she could anchor herself there. “Don’t leave tonight, okay?”

Andrew stroked her hair gently, his voice soft and steady. “Okay.”

Cathryn jabbed a finger at him, making her stance clear. “No funny ideas. Just share a bed.”

A trace of amusement sparkled in his eyes. “Just share a bed,” he agreed, the promise unmistakable in his tone.

He settled beside her, keeping her close as he pulled the blanket up over them both. Every muscle in her body ached from crying, and her nerves were frayed to the breaking point. The comfort of his arms finally allowed sleep to claim her.

When her breathing evened into a peaceful rhythm, Andrew eased himself out of bed. Making sure she rested was only part of what he had to do tonight.

He stepped into the hallway, closed the door softly behind him, and pulled out his phone. “Find Richard and bring him to me. Tie him up,” he instructed his head of security.

There was no doubt in Andrew’s mind about who had poisoned Cathryn with those lies about her being violated. Richard was the source of her torment.

Andrew had gone to such lengths to shield her, only for her own father to dig for ways to break her down.

The last time Andrew had considered using that special whip on Richard, Cathryn had stepped in, insisting a beating would be far too merciful. He’d assumed it was just her compassion showing through. No matter how heartless Richard became, he was...

...still her father—the man her mother had once loved. Cathryn might have no trouble punishing Jordyn or Zoe, but she could never bring herself to strike Richard.

Andrew, however, didn't mind playing the villain. Right now, the urge to strangle Richard with his own hands was nearly impossible to ignore.

A luxury car rolled to a stop, and Richard stepped out. He took only a few unhurried strides toward the mansion's glowing lights when a coarse sack dropped over his head. A sharp blow followed, and darkness swallowed him whole.

When Richard came to, the stench of rust and oil filled his lungs. His wrists and ankles were bound tight, the ropes biting into his skin. He tried to rise, but a brutal kick crashed into his ribs, slamming him back onto the concrete.

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Chapter 205:

“Who are you? How dare you lay hands on me?” Richard wheezed, writhing in pain.

Bootsteps echoed through the cavernous factory—heavy, deliberate. From the dim light emerged a pair of polished leather shoes. The man towering over Richard radiated menace, though his face was still half-lost in shadow.

Richard squinted up—and froze.

The man was young, strikingly handsome, with aristocratic features and a poise that belonged in a ballroom rather than a ruin. Yet the handgun he twirled between his fingers made one thing chillingly clear: this was no gentleman.

“W-who are you?” Richard stammered, fear strangling his voice. This man was no ordinary person.

“The one who has come for your life.” Andrew’s words were quiet, but they cut like steel. With a flick of his wrist, the magazine slid from the pistol, the metallic click echoing through the empty space.

Richard shrank back, terrified—yet he still forced a brave front. “Do you even know who I am?”

“Richard Moore.” Each syllable landed like a contemptuous slap. The pistol caught the light, throwing off a cold gleam.

Richard swallowed hard. His name—his title as Moore Trading’s CEO, the connections he flaunted—none of it mattered here. Still, he lifted his chin. “I’m also father-in-law to Liam Watson, the CEO of Watson Tech. That company is about to go public.”

Andrew spun the gun lazily, caught it, and tilted his head. “I heard you have two daughters. Which one did Liam marry?”

“I have only one daughter, and that is Jordyn. Cathryn has already been disowned.” The words left Richard’s mouth with a snort of disdain.

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Andrew’s gaze hardened as he snapped the magazine back into place. “Both are your daughters, yet you show such blatant favoritism, Mr. Moore.”

“Cathryn is a disgrace!” Richard spat. “She threw away the title of Mrs. Watson for some pathetic loser.”

Andrew’s eyes narrowed to slits. “And who, exactly, are you calling a pathetic loser?”

“Cathryn’s husband,” Richard said, spitting to the side in defiance—though his voice trembled.

Andrew’s thumb hovered near the trigger. The silence turned suffocating.

At last, Richard rasped, “Who are you really, and why have you kidnapped me?”

“You should be asking yourself,” Andrew muttered, his eyes glinting, “who it is you’ve offended.”

Before Richard could react, the gun’s butt slammed into his skull. Pain detonated behind his eyes, and warm blood seeped down his temple.

“You... you’re hired by that old, pathetic man Cathryn married to,” Richard croaked, panic climbing. His thoughts spun wildly. Today, he had only truly provoked two people—Cathryn and that useless husband of hers, Gavin. This young man had to be Gavin’s hire.

Richard spat blood and glared up with forced bravado. “I underestimated him. An old fool, yes, but well-connected enough to send a thug like you.”

Andrew straightened and lifted one hand. From the shadows, someone placed a whip into his palm.

“Killing you would be letting you off too easily.”

Richard’s eyes widened. Recognition struck like lightning. It was the same whip he had once used on Cathryn—one that had vanished without a trace.

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Chapter 206:

After Cathryn left the Moore household, Richard hadn’t even bothered to investigate. But now, staring at the coiled leather in a stranger’s grip, a sick realization clawed at him. How had that whip—his whip—ended up in this man’s hands?

Andrew’s fingers tightened around the handle, the braided leather catching the dim light. “I’m here to make you suffer.”

Richard's face drained of color. He thrashed and tried to scramble backward across the floor. "W-what do you want?"

Andrew flicked his wrist. The whip cracked through the air with a sound like tearing metal—sharp and merciless.

"What you did to Cathryn back then," he said, his eyes like shards of glass, "I am returning in full. Let's hear your cries, Mr. Moore."

Andrew drew his arm back, muscles tightening, and the lash snapped forward.

"Ah—"

Richard convulsed, curling on the floor like a fish thrown onto dry land, his cries ragged and desperate.

Andrew didn't pause. Three more lashes struck in swift succession, each one a thunderclap of pain.

Richard's body jerked, then went slack. His eyes rolled back, and he crumpled into unconsciousness.

"Wake him up," Andrew ordered.

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A bucket of water crashed over Richard's head. He jolted awake with a gasp, sputtering and shivering as the sting of his wounds surged back all at once. He started babbling, the words spilling over each other.

"How much is Gavin paying you? I'll give you double... or triple. Just spare me..."

Andrew's expression didn't change. The whip hissed through the air again, the next strike carving its warning across Richard's back.

Richard's lips trembled violently, pale and shaking. When bribery failed, he grasped for threats instead.

"I—I am close friends with Andrew Brooks, CEO of Brooks Group. If you harm me, Mr. Brooks will never let you off—"

He threw the name out like a lifeline, desperate to drag this man back from the edge.

Andrew arched a brow, the corner of his mouth lifting into a cold, mocking smile. "I'll be waiting for him to confront me."

The words chilled Richard more than the water had. This man feared nothing. He must be a mad dog—someone with nothing to lose.

“Please... please let me go!” Richard wailed, his voice cracking. “The pain—if you keep going, I’ll die...”

The agony was beyond imagination, beyond any nightmare he’d ever dared to dream. Each lash felt like it had been forged in hell.

Andrew steadied the whip, letting the leather coil languidly through his grip. His eyes burned.

“When this whip tore into Cathryn’s skin,” he said, voice low and lethal, “when she pleaded for mercy... did you think of sparing her then?”

Richard’s lips quivered. His eyes went wide and glassy, terror shining through. “Who... who are you really?”

Andrew was about to speak when the shrill buzz of his phone cut through the air.

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Chapter 207:

“Damien... where have you gone?” Cathryn’s voice drifted through the line, groggy and languid, heavy with exhaustion.

The hard edge in Andrew's expression melted at once. His lips curved into a tender smile. "I just stepped out for a cigarette," he murmured.

Cathryn let out a sleepy hum, her words slurred with drowsiness. "But you promised you would stay and share a bed with me..."

"I'm coming back this instant," Andrew replied, indulgent and soft.

After he hung up, he tossed the whip to the bodyguard.

"What should we do with Richard?" the bodyguard asked, jerking his chin toward the man sprawled helplessly on the floor.

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Andrew's eyes hardened to steel. With a look of disdain, he said, "Take him back to where you picked him up. Just make sure he's breathing."

His fate, Andrew knew, was not his to decide. That judgment belonged to Cathryn. No matter the depth of Richard's sins, he was still her father by blood—and once, long ago, he had been the man Bettina loved. That tangled web made Cathryn's heart too complicated to sever cleanly.

Andrew dared not make the choice for her. One wrong step could cost him her trust.

From the floor, Richard coughed up a bitter laugh, spittle and fury spilling with it. “Just wait. Mr. Brooks will see you dead.”

Andrew smirked, his lips curling with cruel amusement. “I’ll be waiting.”

Before leaving, Andrew seized a fistful of Richard’s hair and yanked, tearing it out at the roots. He let it scatter like withered straw. Then, with Cathryn weighing heavily on his mind, he strode out, quickening his pace back to the hospital.

Inside the dim ward, Cathryn was already fast asleep.

Andrew slipped beneath the covers and stretched out beside her. As if sensing him, she instinctively nestled closer, seeking the warmth of his body.

His smile softened. He gathered her into his arms and held her.

Cathryn stirred, sniffed, and wrinkled her nose. “Why do you smell like blood?”

His body went rigid for the briefest moment. Then he masked it with a calm reply. “It’s nothing but smoke. Has illness dulled your senses?”

She rubbed her nose against his chest with a weary sigh. “All I ever breathe in is disinfectant. It makes me nauseous.”

Without another word, Andrew stripped off his clothes and lay bare-chested beside her.

Her fingers brushed over the smooth planes of his torso, and her lips curved unconsciously at the familiar, comforting feel of him. He caught her wandering hand in his, tightening his grip. “No touching.”

Cathryn pouted in protest, her voice barely above a whisper. “Like I don’t really want to touch you.”

Andrew pulled her snug against him, restraint etched into the taut lines of his body. It wasn’t that he disliked her touch—it was self-control. His strength had returned, and his desire with it. But this was neither the place nor the time. She was still weak, and under the sterile glow of the hospital, he forced himself to deny the urge clawing at him.

To divert his thoughts, he asked softly, “Have you thought about what to do with Richard?”

Cathryn’s lashes fluttered open, their tips brushing his skin as she lifted her gaze. “I remember... before Zoe and Jordyn came into our lives, he was good to my mother and me,” she said quietly. “But once they appeared, he tormented my mother until she lost her mind. Then he turned his cruelty on me...”

The memories resurfaced with a sharp sting—painted in blood and tears. She trembled.

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Chapter 208:

Andrew stroked her back in slow, steady circles, his voice low and reassuring. “Don’t be afraid, Cathryn. You’re no longer that helpless child. You have me now.”

“I hate him,” she admitted, her voice uneven and raw. “Yet... he was my dad. And he was once the man my mother loved.”

In Olekgan, everyone knew Bettina's love story—how she had crossed oceans for the man she adored, even breaking ties with her wealthy family. Richard had clawed his way up from poverty, building his fortune at her side.

Cathryn had thought more than once of ending him, but a nagging fear lingered: would her mother's spirit despise her for it?

Andrew's voice cut through her turmoil. "He caused your mother immeasurable pain."

Her brow furrowed. "I have always doubted their love. Perhaps it was nothing more than an illusion. For now, just keep him alive."

Relief washed over Andrew. He silently thanked his earlier decision not to take Richard's life.

"Richard may have raised me," Kathryn continued, her tone hardening, "but Zoe and Jordyn—I will never forgive them."

The memory of that night in the general ward flickered back, burning through Kathryn. Zoe had orchestrated it all: the five men, their criminal records, the terror that had nearly shattered her. Even recalling it now made her shudder.

Andrew's jaw tightened. "Whatever you decide, tell me. I will see it done."

Her eyes lifted to his, searching. “Did you uncover anything about Zoe’s past?”

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“She is far from clean,” Andrew said bluntly.

“Do you have proof?” Cathryn pressed. Richard likely knew something of Zoe’s questionable past, but now that Zoe bore his name as his wife, he would shield her at all costs. For the sake of the Moore family’s reputation, even her darkest secrets would be buried deep.

Andrew’s hand lingered in Cathryn’s hair, his voice low and deliberate. “Jordyn may not be Richard’s daughter by blood.”

Cathryn froze, eyes widening. In the hush of the dim room, they glimmered like glass catching stray light. For a long moment, silence stretched. Then her lashes trembled, and tears gathered until they spilled freely. “Is that true?”

Andrew’s palm slid to her cheek, warm and steady. “I already have Richard’s hair. I’ll send someone to find a way to get Jordyn’s. A DNA test will give us the answer.”

Cathryn blinked through the tears, her resolve hardening even as they streaked down her face. “No. I’ll get Jordyn’s hair myself.”

For eighteen long years, Jordyn’s presence had been a thorn lodged deep in Cathryn’s life—eighteen years of silent wounds and Richard’s merciless coldness. He had mistreated his own daughter, lavishing tenderness on an outsider, turning everything into a cruel joke.

Andrew reached up and brushed away her tears with a gentle stroke of his fingers. “All right. I’ll protect you, no matter what.”

He understood too well the weight she carried. Some truths—especially the ones that scarred the soul—could only be unearthed by her own hand.

Cathryn’s voice steadied, determination lighting her eyes. “The grand mansion they live in... it was bought with my mother’s money. Every wall, every corner, is threaded with her memories. I must take it back.”

But the odds towered over her like an unclimbable mountain. The estate’s market value had soared to fifty million, while she was drowning in debt—still owing Andrew twenty million. To dream of buying it back felt like trying to reach the stars with bare hands.

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Chapter 209:

And yet her thoughts circled back to Andrew. The code she had created—if she sold it to him—could fetch a hundred million, easily.

She knew Andrew wouldn't hesitate to strike a deal with her. But how to approach him? That required careful thought, careful timing.

Then, as if struck by lightning, Cathryn's mind snagged on another thread. Her voice cut through the silence. "Zoe plotted everything that happened to me in the general ward... but why was I transferred there in the first place?"

Andrew froze, his throat tightening. He swallowed, then forced the words out, his lie smooth. "I was unconscious at the time, so I can't be certain. But I suspect Karl had a hand in it."

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Cathryn's lashes fluttered as she blinked at him. "Why haven't I seen Karl around these days?"

A shadow crossed Andrew's face. "He made a mistake. I reassigned him to a subsidiary."

"Oh." Cathryn's voice turned soft, almost absent.

So it had been Karl who transferred her to the general ward—the same Karl who had fallen off the cliff in Andrew's car, convinced she was Cara's ally and hungry for revenge. The motive fit.

She didn't press further. Instead, she nestled against Damien's firm waist, letting the steady rhythm of his breathing lull her into sleep.

Morning came.

Margaret pushed open the hospital room door with a bright smile, only to flush scarlet at the sight before her. The blanket had slipped to the floor, and sunlight spilled across Andrew's bare torso, gilding the ridges of muscle in warm light. He held Cathryn securely in his arms, her lips resting unconsciously against his chest.

Nothing indecent had happened, but the tableau still whispered intimacy—enough to make Margaret’s thoughts wander. She remembered checking on Cathryn in the dead of night—alone then.

But now, Andrew was here.

Andrew stirred, his sharp gaze meeting hers. “Enjoying the view?”

Margaret spun around, covering her face with both hands. “Forgive me, Mr. Brooks. I didn’t mean to intrude...”

Andrew didn’t move, careful not to wake Cathryn. His voice lowered, cool and even. “Did you need something?”

“The doctor said both you and Mrs. Brooks can be discharged,” Margaret replied quickly.

Andrew’s expression softened. “And Gavin?”

“He’s fine—just several broken ribs. He’ll need a month of rest.”

Andrew nodded. “Give him two months off. Have the chauffeur ready to pick us up.”

“Yes.” Margaret slipped out, closing the door quietly behind her.

Cathryn awoke feeling lighter than she had in days, her body restored by deep rest. Her eyes fluttered open, greeted by the sight of Damien’s chiseled chest. A mischievous impulse took her—she leaned in and gave him a playful nip.

Andrew hissed softly, flinching before turning a tender gaze on her. “Cathryn.”

Her lips curved as she admired the faint bite mark on his skin. Tilting her face up, her eyes sparkled. “This dessert is quite delicious.”

Something in her look sparked a fire in him. His breath caught. In one swift motion, he rolled, pinning her beneath him.

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Chapter 210:

“Careful, Cathryn,” he murmured, voice rough. “You’re turning me on.”

“Already?” she teased, tilting her head.

Andrew drew a slow breath, gritting his teeth as he adjusted Cathryn’s clothes. “Not here. Not now.” Her pneumonia had been severe—she still needed time to heal.

Cathryn pouted, rolling her eyes. The sight of his honed body fanned an ember of desire in her, but if he wasn’t in the mood, so be it.

Andrew swung his legs off the bed and reached for yesterday’s clothes. “Margaret left clean ones at the bedside. Change, and we’ll go home.”

At the word home, Cathryn’s face brightened. She hopped off the bed, practically vibrating with excitement.

“Slow down,” Andrew chided with a fond chuckle. “You’re not fully recovered.”

She froze, taking in his half-dressed state. “Are you planning to go out like that?”

“I’ll change in my own room,” he said evenly. His clothes still smelled of Richard’s blood, and he didn’t want Cathryn anywhere near it.

“You’re not allowed to,” she shot back, frowning. “Have Margaret bring your clothes here.” If he stepped into the corridor like this, every nurse would stare.

Andrew’s mouth quirked in understanding. “Very well. I’ll stay put. But, Cathryn... you’ll have to help me get dressed.”

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He tossed the soiled clothes aside and instructed Margaret to bring fresh ones.

Inside the room, they bickered and laughed as they dressed each other. Outside, Margaret let out a long sigh.

“Mr. Brooks, Mrs. Brooks, it has been more than an hour. Are you still not ready?”

Andrew's voice drifted through the door, amused. "Mind your own business."

Margaret bit her lip and shook her head. Two adults, and yet they behaved like children—making her sigh again.

Another half hour passed before the couple finally emerged, arms wrapped snugly around each other.

Margaret opened her mouth to speak, but her eyes snagged on the fresh kiss mark darkening Andrew's neck. She looked away at once, heat rushing to her face. "The driver is waiting outside," she murmured.

Now Margaret understood the delay—they hadn't been dressing. They'd been flirting. Even on the verge of discharge, they couldn't help themselves.

Cathryn glanced up and spotted the love bite peeking from beneath Andrew's collar. Her cheeks ignited. She quickly fastened his top button, muttering, "People can see..."

Andrew caught her hand and, with a teasing grin, undid the button again. "Let them," he said lightly. "So they'll know it was you who did it to me."

"You're impossible!" she spluttered, giving him a shove.

He put on a wounded look. “You’re the one who climbed on top of me, nibbling and kissing like I was a feast. How can you blame me now?”

Around them, the bodyguards and house staff dipped their heads, shoulders trembling with suppressed laughter.

Cathryn’s face flamed so hot she thought it might burst. Why did he always tease her in front of others? She shot him a fierce glare, her voice low but sharp. “Enough.”

Andrew let out a low, unguarded laugh and swept her into his arms. “All right. I’ll stop. When we’re back home and the door is shut, we can take our time—and talk as long as we want.”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 211:

Cathryn pinched his side playfully. In response, he bent and brushed a tender kiss over her hair, the warmth lingering between them.

The memory of what they'd endured—the brush with death, the long night of fear—made Andrew acutely aware of how she leaned toward him now, drawn closer with every step. That new dependence sent a quiet thrill through him, a feeling he didn't want to let go of.

Hand in hand, they stepped out of the room—only to find a car already waiting at the entrance.

Andrew's gaze lifted, catching on the sleek shape of it, and his eyes widened in surprise.

At the wheel sat Yosef Sugden, the driver, and he'd brought the Maserati—the very car from that storm-lashed night when Cathryn had been hurt.

Cathryn's gaze lingered on the car ahead, a strange flicker of recognition tugging at her memory. She opened her mouth to speak, but Andrew bent without warning and swept her into his arms.

“Your body hasn't healed yet. I'll carry you.” His voice left no room for protest.

The warmth of his chest pressed against her as he strode forward and lowered her into the car with surprising gentleness.

Questions still hovered on the tip of her tongue, yet before a single word could escape, his mouth descended on hers. The kiss was searing, relentless. Thought dissolved into heat, and the world narrowed to the heady taste of him. Breathless and dizzy, she forgot entirely what she'd meant to ask.

The slam of the door and a cheerful voice shattered the moment. "Mr. Brooks, I am Yosef Sugden. From today on, I will be driving you and your wife."

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Yosef's eyes flicked to the rearview mirror, catching a glimpse of Cathryn flushed and clinging to Andrew while Andrew held her pinned against the seat. His grin faltered instantly.

Mortified, Cathryn tore herself away as if she'd been caught doing something forbidden. They'd kissed in cars before, but Gavin had always been discreet—raising the partition or stepping out for a smoke, knowing exactly when to disappear. This new driver, apparently, lacked that sense of tact.

Andrew's brows drew together, his tone sharp as steel. "Didn't Gavin teach you any rules?"

Yosef snapped his gaze forward, hands tightening on the wheel. Cold sweat broke over him. First day driving his employer, and he'd already blundered—would he be dismissed before the engine even warmed?

Yosef had been with the household for years, but while Andrew was abroad, his tasks had been small errands. Gavin handled the real duties. Only Gavin's recent injury had opened this seat to him.

Yosef's voice quavered, panic leaking through. "G-Gavin said... eyes shut, ears closed. Never ask, never pry. Only follow the orders of Mr. and Mrs. Brooks."

Andrew's gaze bored into the back of his skull. "And if our words differ, whose command do you obey?"

This time Yosef answered without hesitation, Gavin's instructions echoing in his mind. "Your wife's."

Andrew leaned back, the faintest curve tugging at his lips. "Good."

Cathryn's laughter broke the tension, bright and unrestrained. "My husband's the one paying your salary, not me."

But Yosef looked utterly sincere as he glanced at her in the mirror. “Gavin told me—around here, Mrs. Brooks, you have the final say. Even Mr. Brooks listens to you. So I will too.”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 212:

Andrew reached forward and gave Yosef’s shoulder a firm pat. “Not clever, but obedient. That will do.”

Yosef’s grin returned, wide and boyish, flashing a row of immaculate white teeth.

To his credit, his driving was flawless—smooth and measured, without a single lurch. The gentle rhythm of the road lulled Cathryn, and soon her head rested against Andrew’s shoulder once more. Sleep pulled her under.

Her dreams carried her back to that sodden night outside the airport—rain pelting down in violent sheets, the world blurred by water and despair. She had stood alone, clutching the vial of antivenom to her chest, when a Maserati with the plate A000001 glided to a halt before her. Hope surged in her chest, a fragile flame. Then, without warning, the car had rolled away, abandoning her in the storm. Tears had mingled with the downpour as she broke, sobbing into the night.

With a sharp gasp, Cathryn jolted awake just as the car stopped in front of the estate.

Andrew brushed a hand across her forehead, his touch tentative. “What is it?”

Cathryn’s gaze darted around the car, her chest tightening as though an icy hand had seized her heart. Every detail screamed familiarity. The same car.

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She flung the door open and stumbled out. Her steps carried her straight to the rear bumper.

There it was—the plate.

A000001.

The memory struck like a thunderclap: blinding headlights, her body plunging into rainwater, her desperate eyes locking onto the plate number before the car vanished into the darkness.

Her breath caught. It had been him. Damien. He hadn't let her in that night.

Andrew followed, his face pale, panic flaring in his eyes. "Cathryn, wait. I can explain—"

"Then explain," she shot back, her voice sharp enough to cut glass.

He swallowed, faltering. "I... I..."

Words tangled on his tongue, flimsy and unconvincing. He hadn't expected her to confront him so suddenly, his cover story unprepared.

She narrowed her eyes. "You're not about to claim Karl was behind the wheel that night, are you?"

Relief flickered across his face like a drowning man finding driftwood. “Yes—Karl. It was Karl driving that night.”

Her lips curved into a bitter smile. “And pulling over, then bolting off again—that was his idea too?”

Andrew nodded too quickly, too eager. “Yes. Exactly. All him. I wasn’t even there. I was at the hospital.”

Cathryn stepped closer, her stare drilling into him. “If you weren’t in the car, then how do you know it stopped and then sped away?”

His expression stiffened. Kathryn was testing him.

Fury surged through her. Her fists thudded against his chest, each blow carrying the weight of her pain.

“I carried your blood samples all the way to Bluufburg. I dragged myself through Ironwood Mountain, begging Dr. Clarke for that antivenom. I kept it pressed to my chest through a storm. On the flight back, I was already burning with fever, but I didn’t dare move, didn’t dare sleep—afraid it would spoil...”

Andrew’s frown deepened. So much had happened in those days—Karl had been sent overseas, Gavin was hospitalized—he hadn’t even had the chance to ask for details. And now he understood just how much she had endured for that single vial.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 213:

Cathryn's voice rose, trembling with rage and grief. "Do you have any idea how harsh it is in those mountains? The mosquitoes were huge—I was covered in swollen welts. I stumbled again and again before I finally found Dr. Clarke. And every time I fell, I curled around that vial just to keep it safe. And then you—you wouldn't even let me into the car in the middle of the storm!"

Her sobs broke free, jagged and unstoppable. "If I'd been even a moment later getting back to the hospital, you'd be dead by now!"

Her voice shattered. She crumpled under the weight of it, crying.

Andrew's eyes burned, shame flooding him. He gathered her into his arms, holding her as if he could keep her from falling apart. "Cathryn... I'm so sorry."

Cathryn sank her teeth into Andrew's neck, the sharp sting of skin giving way beneath her bite.

His eyes flickered, and a low groan escaped him. His hand pressed to the back of her head. "Harder," he urged.

The metallic tang of blood filled her mouth—vivid and hot. She released him abruptly, wiping her lips with trembling fingers.

Andrew's hand rose, cupping her throat with surprising gentleness. "Again," he whispered, coaxing her, almost pleading. He would endure anything if it meant she could bleed out the storm raging inside her.

Cathryn's lashes clumped with tears as she spat bitterly, "You think one bite erases everything you've done? Do not fool yourself."

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His gaze deepened, heavy as iron, holding her captive. “Then let me stay by your side,” he said slowly, “and atone—for a lifetime.”

A flicker of emotion passed through Cathryn’s eyes. A lifetime. Their contract bound them for merely a single year. Where did he get the idea of a lifetime? Questions clawed at her throat, but she held her tongue. Part of her wanted an answer, while another part feared what it might be.

With a sudden sweep, Andrew lifted her into his arms and carried her upstairs. He moved carefully, each step betraying restraint. She had only just recovered, and he dreaded the thought of breaking her. Yet since morning, he had felt her brush against him—her fleeting touches sharp with intention, her taunts deliberate.

She wanted him.

In the car, he had sworn to wait until she was fully recovered. But after her tears, her bite, her trembling fury, he could not wait any longer. If her anger were a fire, he would quench it the only way he knew. And making love was the only language he knew for easing her storms.

He laid her on the bed with slow reverence.

Cathryn yanked the covers over herself, her voice hoarse. “Go away. I am tired.”

But Andrew bent low, claiming her mouth.

Her body betrayed her at once. A soft moan slipped free, her arms curling instinctively around his neck. No matter how bitter her words, her body never lied.

Andrew was careful—tender. Every movement was deliberate restraint. He did not take her for long; the moment her shudders quieted and satisfaction softened her breath, he stilled.

A sheen of sweat glistened across her brow as she lay against his chest, breathless and dazed.

His lips brushed her hairline. “Still angry?”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 214:

Cathryn narrowed her eyes, realizing this was his way of making amends. And she had given in to his touch far too easily. She shot him a glare, turned her face aside, and answered with silence.

He chuckled low in his throat, sliding an arm around her shoulders. “If your temper still burns, I can ease it again.”

Her cheeks flared. She squirmed and muttered, “You make it sound as though I’m taking advantage of you, when we both know it’s the opposite.”

Andrew studied the flush in her skin, the faint tremor of satisfaction she would never confess aloud. She hid her wants behind stubbornness, but her body spoke louder than any denial. He tipped her chin up until their eyes met.

“Cathryn, I can buy back your mother’s mansion for you.”

She blinked—then burst into laughter, pointing at him in disbelief. “You? Don’t joke with me.”

His jaw tightened. “Do you think I can’t afford it?”

Her nod was sharp, certain. “You can’t.”

Her mind raced as she weighed the reality. Damien was an illegitimate son; he had money, enough for comfort and luxury, but a fifty-million-dollar mansion was another world entirely. And Richard—cold, calculating Richard—would never sell.

Her mother had always had an eye for investments, and the estate’s location was unmatched—like a quiet sanctuary tucked into the heart of a bustling city, a rare gem that would only appreciate with time.

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Besides, Richard had swallowed up all her mother’s assets. Even with Moore Trading’s accounts frozen, his pockets were far from empty. Forcing him to give up that mansion would take more than money. It would take power. And in Olekgan, only Andrew possessed that kind of power.

She had once toyed with using Damien to get closer to Andrew, but Damien’s jealousy made Andrew a rival in his eyes. She had tried approaching Gavin and Ethan, but they always made excuses, never introducing her to Andrew. It seemed she would have to rely on herself.

Andrew’s patience thinned. He pinned her beneath him, teeth clenched. “You underestimate your husband.”

She poked his chest, teasing. “You know your limits, don’t you? You simply lack the ability.”

His eyes narrowed, a dangerous glint stirring in their depths. “Who exactly are you calling incapable?”

Her lashes lifted, her gaze unwavering. “You.”

In an instant, the covers tumbled around them. Andrew dipped low, his breath grazing her ear, his voice molten with challenge. “Then let me prove what I can do...”

Cathryn had baited him on purpose, and he was more than ready to answer. No restraint this time—she would feel his response, here and now.

That same night, Richard was spat out like refuse, dumped broken on his own doorstep with no phone, no strength, not even the dignity to call for help.

By dawn, he was little more than a heap of bruises and torn clothes, his breathing faint and ragged, as if life clung to him out of sheer spite.

When the heavy oak door swung open that morning, the housekeeper nearly tripped over him. Her gasp sharpened into anger.

“Good heavens! You sorry wreck,” she snapped, disgust dripping from every word. “Could you not collapse somewhere else? Dying at our door like some bad omen!”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 215:

Her voice carried through the quiet house, rousing Zoe from sleep. She shuffled forward, slippers scuffing the marble, hair mussed from dreams.

“What’s all the yelling about this early?”

The housekeeper jabbed a finger at Richard's sprawled figure. "Some vagrant beaten half to death. Left here like rubbish. Look."

Zoe's lip curled in disdain as she spat at the battered Richard, not recognizing him. "Ugh. Get rid of him quickly."

From the doorway, Jordyn emerged. Her gaze fell immediately on the ragged figure sprawled across the gravel, and she didn't recognize him either. The stench of sweat and dirt wafted toward her; she wrinkled her nose in revulsion. Without hesitation, she marched over and drove her foot into his skull several times, her kicks sharp and merciless.

"Figures my morning would start off like this," she snapped. "Some bum had to pick our doorstep."

Earlier, Vanessa's call had shattered Jordyn's sleep. Breathless with agitation, Vanessa recounted what she'd seen at the hospital—Cathryn striding out, flanked by bodyguards and maids as though she were royalty.

Dread had coiled around Jordyn's chest, forcing her to call the head nurse at Olekgan Hospital. Only then did she learn Cathryn hadn't been raped after all—she'd been saved by some Mr. Brooks. Worse still, the head nurse who had dared mishandle Cathryn had been beaten and thrown out of Olekgan.

Jordyn's jaw had clenched until her teeth ached. Why did Cathryn always manage to land on her feet?

Vanessa's voice had quivered through the line, haunted by the image of Cathryn's triumphant departure. "She looked so untouchable, Jordyn. Guards, maids... Do you think she actually married into a powerful family?"

Jordyn had let out a sharp, derisive laugh. "Don't be absurd. Those servants, those cars—they belong to the Brooks household. She's nothing more than one of their hired hands."

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Understanding had dawned in Vanessa's tone. "That explains it. I thought I recognized a few faces—Brooks family staff."

Cold certainty laced Jordyn's reply. "She got lucky, that's all. Word is a Brooks man intervened."

Vanessa hesitated, uncertain. "But there are only two Brooks men—Andrew, who runs the empire, and young Nick, Cara's boy. Nick is barely eighteen, still studying abroad."

"There are plenty of people surnamed Brooks in Olekgan. And some distant cousin of the Brooks family can play the hero," Jordyn had dismissed with a wave of her...

...hand. She refused to believe anyone in the Brooks family would ever take Cathryn seriously.

But Vanessa's unease had lingered. The Brooks line was notoriously small—no convenient side branches, no spare sons hidden away.

Still seething, Jordyn stormed out of the house. A commotion by the gates caught her ear: a servant shouting, voices sharp with disgust. On the ground lay the same filthy man, unmoving.

“Out of my way!” Jordyn snapped, her fury spilling over as she unknowingly struck Richard again and again, her heel grinding against his temple.

The servant caught her arm in alarm. “Miss Moore, please stop—he’s breathing. If you keep kicking, you’ll ruin your shoes with his blood.”

Zoe barely glanced at the ragged body. Richard hadn’t returned home the previous night, and unease gnawed at her. At her age, with her looks fading, she could no longer rely on charm to hold him. Now that Richard had inherited Bettina’s fortune and still looked relatively strong, temptation must be circling him like vultures—women half her age, eager to replace her. The thought that he might have spent the night with other women sent a chill through her.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 216:

Then Zoe's eyes snagged on the car parked just beyond the gate. A flicker of hope jolted her.

"Wait—Richard's car is here. Did he come home?"

The servant shook her head firmly. "I opened the gates at dawn. I didn't see him."

Zoe frowned, confused. "Then why is the car here without him?"

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At that moment, the bodyguards arrived, dragging the filthy man by his arms and legs.

As they passed, Zoe glanced down again—and froze, her breath catching like ice in her lungs. “Stop.”

The bodyguards halted.

“Turn him over,” Zoe commanded.

When they complied, Zoe felt the world tilt beneath her feet.

It was Richard.

“Honey!” Her knees buckled, and she collapsed beside him.

Richard’s face was unrecognizable under grime, his body a canvas of welts and bloody gashes. He clung to life by a thread.

“Get him to the hospital!” Zoe cried, her voice raw.

What followed blurred into sirens, frantic hands, and the sterile sting of antiseptic. Jordyn and Zoe shadowed the gurney as Richard was rushed into emergency care.

Hours later, the doctors emerged with grim expressions and a sliver of relief: he would live, though he had been ravaged by a hundred cruel strikes. Healing would take time.

Richard soon regained consciousness. He couldn't lie on his back, as...

...most of his injuries were on his back. The pain forced him to lie face down on the bed.

Jordyn hovered at his bedside, fury burning through her like acid.

"Dad," she hissed, "was this Cathryn's doing?"

Jordyn had pushed Richard to confront Cathryn, and now he lay broken while Cathryn thrived—untouchable. Her gaze drifted to the angry welts slashed across his back, and her stomach twisted. She recognized the handiwork: the custom-made whip, the same cruel instrument once used to torment Cathryn, the one that had later ended up in her hands.

Zoe's eyeliner framed her eyes like black daggers, sharpening every glare. She ground out through her teeth, voice low and venomous. "The nerve of Cathryn and that husband of hers. Two nobodies, daring to lay a finger on the CEO of Moore Trading."

On the hospital bed, Richard lay prone, his cheek pressed into the stiff sheet, silent. The thrashing he'd taken the night before still clung to his bones—and it had knocked some sense into him.

That man with the gun had mentioned Cathryn's name more than once. This couldn't be unrelated to her. The thought gnawed at Richard, relentless, refusing to be shaken off.

Yet logic fought it. Cathryn was nothing—no wealth, no power, certainly no way to brush shoulders with men who lived by the gun, let alone hire one. And Gavin—Andrew's butler—was little more than a servant puffed up on borrowed authority. For all his swagger, he was still just a butler. The notion that he could command killers was laughable.

More absurd still, Richard had beaten Gavin bloody the night before. By the time Richard was dragged off into the dark, Gavin should have been lying in an emergency room, not orchestrating revenge.

The face of the man with the gun surfaced in Richard's mind. The way he carried himself. A presence forged in steel—too precise, too ruthless. He was not the sort of man one stumbled across by chance. Whoever had the power to command someone like that was not ordinary. Not by a long stretch.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 217:

A cold suspicion coiled in Richard's chest, tighter with every breath. Piece by piece, it assembled into something monstrous.

Could it be that Cathryn's husband wasn't who Richard thought?

Beside him, Jordyn and Zoe kept up their ceaseless sniping. With a guttural roar, Richard clutched his temples.

"Enough! Both of you!" he bellowed. "Do you want my head to split open?"

The words cracked through the room like a whip. Instantly, silence fell.

Richard's scowl deepened, his voice raw with frustration. "Fetch the doctor. Why does my head feel like it's tearing apart?"

"Dad, you're hurt this badly—of course it's going to be rough. You'll have to endure it," Jordyn blurted, the words tumbling out too fast. Her pulse thundered in her ears. If Richard pieced together that the pounding in his skull came from her kicks, she was finished.

"You insolent brat!" Richard's roar shook the walls. "Is that how you speak to your father?"

Not even a flicker of concern in her voice. After twenty-one years of coddling her, this was what he got.

Zoe shot Jordyn a warning glare, silently ordering her to shut her mouth. Jordyn had been spoiled rotten by Richard—always putting herself first.

Zoe still remembered how Jordyn had cried for days after a single lashing. Now Richard lay beaten half to death, yet all Jordyn could offer was a curt "endure it." Anyone would have been furious.

A shrill ringtone cut through the tension. Jordyn snatched up her phone, her voice softening like silk. "Liam."

The reply was anything but sweet. “When are you going to introduce me to Kestrel? You keep feeding me excuses. I’m starting to think you never knew Kestrel at all—that you lied to me.”

Jordyn’s throat went dry. “Liam, please... Don’t be angry. I swear I’ll deliver Kestrel’s code to you.”

Her plan had been simple: marry into the Watsons, become Mrs. Watson, and use that power to hire the best hackers money could buy to track Kestrel down. But Watson Tech’s IPO dragged on endlessly, and the hackers she’d recruited had only traced Kestrel as far as being somewhere inside Olekgan. They swore that once Kestrel resurfaced online, they would pinpoint the exact location and alert her at once.

“Give me a deadline,” Liam snapped. “If you don’t bring Kestrel to me by then, we’re finished. Divorce.”

Her teeth sank into her lip until she tasted blood. “Three days. Give me three days.”

“You said it, not me. Fail, and I’ll see you in court,” Liam warned.

The words seared through her like a lash—and she couldn’t even protest. She’d been foolish to claim she knew Kestrel in the first place.

Desperate to redirect him, she asked softly, “Liam, when will Watson Tech finally go public?”

“It was ready to move,” he growled, “until someone leaked the earnings report. Now our credibility is in tatters. The only thing that can save us is Kestrel’s code.”

Her pulse spiked. “Is the financial situation truly that dire?”

“Temporary cash-flow strain,” he muttered. “Once we secure Kestrel’s code—”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 218:

Richard's hand shot out. He ripped the phone from Jordyn's grasp and barked into it, "Even if you obtain the code, it cannot be converted into cash overnight. If Watson Tech intends to list publicly, regulatory audits are unavoidable."

Richard knew those audits well—merciless and meticulous. With rumors already whispering about Watson Tech's dried-up coffers, no regulator would ever grant approval without hard proof of capital.

On the line, Liam faltered, then tried to recover. "Richard, surely you have assets of your own. Could you bridge me through—just this once?"

Liam counted on Jordyn's favored status. He had helped her sweep Bettina out of the picture, and with Bettina's assets absorbed into Richard's control, he assumed that fortune would trickle into Jordyn's hands eventually. He simply hadn't expected Watson Tech's crisis to hit so abruptly.

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Richard hurled the phone onto the coverlet. "Moore Trading's accounts are frozen. I don't have a single cent in liquid cash."

Richard had once welcomed Jordyn's marriage into the Watsons, seeing it as a lifeline for his own sinking empire. But now Liam dared to ask him for rescue? Rage seared through his veins.

Still, Liam pressed. “Just carry me through. Once the IPO clears, I’ll pay you back in full.”

Richard’s face turned crimson. “Every penny is locked. Ask the bank if you doubt me!”

Then clarity sliced clean through Richard’s anger. He had been blind before, convinced Cathryn had lowered herself to wed a servant. But what if she hadn’t? What if she had married into Olekgan’s high society?

Jordyn had dismissed Cathryn as “used goods,” but to Richard, a woman’s beauty outweighed any supposed blemish of her past. Beauty forgave everything. Zoe was proof enough—her background had been unimpressive, yet she had still managed to snare him in his youth.

Richard made up his mind. He wouldn’t rest until he knew exactly who Cathryn’s husband was.

Meanwhile, Liam sat paralyzed, flailing in the quicksand of his own disaster.

“You gave Andrew your business card, didn’t you?” Richard barked. “Go to him.”

Jordyn’s eyes flashed with sudden hope. “Yes! If Andrew backs us and Brooks Group lends its name, Watson Tech’s crisis can vanish overnight.”

Liam faltered. “But how am I supposed to get Andrew to meet me?”

“Fool,” Richard spat. “Jordyn knows Kestrel. Tell Andrew you already have Kestrel’s code. He’ll come to you then, without hesitation.”

At last, Liam’s spirits surged. “Yes... yes. Richard, you’re brilliant.”

Off to the side, Jordyn’s stomach twisted. Her painted smile faltered.

She was trapped in her own lies. Where in the world was Kestrel?

After the call, Richard dismissed them with a flick of his hand. “Leave me. I need quiet.”

When the door closed behind Zoe and Jordyn, Richard reached for the phone and dialed the police chief, his voice low and cold. “I want you to find out exactly who Cathryn married.”

The police chief’s reply came swiftly and clipped. “Sorry, Mr. Moore. That’s classified.”

Richard went rigid, the words striking him like a hammer blow. Classified? For a name? Looking into someone's husband was hardly a matter of national security. Why treat it like top-secret intelligence—unless Cathryn's husband truly was untouchable, someone with power far beyond Richard's reach.

The longer he sat with it, the more unsettled he became. Desperation made his fingers itch for another number. He placed the call, his voice low and urgent. "Can you help me get in touch with the Mafia overseas?"

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 219:

The world was never painted in neat shades of black and white. Justice often faltered, and those who deserved ruin found ways to remain untouchable, shielded by wealth or influence.

The Mafia existed in that twilight space—an unseen hand operating outside the law, sometimes even above governments. For the right price, they would deliver. And if one lacked money, then blood would suffice. A life traded for a life.

A voice, cool and measured, came through the line. “You know the rules. One request only. And the cost will be heavy.”

Richard’s assets had been frozen in the fallout of the scandal, but he could still scrape together millions if pressed. He did not hesitate. “No problem.”

“Then state your request.”

Questions boiled inside Richard, but one demand rose above them all, burning hot in his chest. “I want the name of the man married to Cathryn Moore—my eldest daughter.”

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“Wait.”

The line went dead.

At Crownspire Villa, the sound of running water drifted faintly from the bathroom. Cathryn had stepped into the shower. Andrew lay sprawled across the bed, gaze half-lidded, when his phone vibrated. It was Mark.

“Mr. Brooks, Richard Moore just reached out to the Mafia.”

Andrew’s lashes lifted. His voice was cool, edged with boredom. “What does he want?”

Andrew already suspected the answer. Richard was probably scrambling to learn the identity of the man who had beaten him so mercilessly the night before.

Mark confirmed it. “He wants to know your name—who Cathryn’s husband really is.”

Andrew’s mouth curved, a faint flicker of amusement crossing his features. “Smarter than Zoe and Jordyn, at least.” Richard had finally realized that Cathryn’s husband was no driver or butler.

Mark continued, “I checked his accounts. Not much cash on hand. I can quote him something steep enough to shut him down.”

Andrew arched a brow. “Telling him the name ‘Damien’ is fine.”

The world knew him as Andrew Brooks. But the name Damien Brooks? Only a select few knew it. Even the household staff had no idea Andrew and Damien were the same man.

Mark scrolled through a list. “Most of his accounts are frozen. He could maybe scrape together a few million. How high should we go?”

Andrew’s eyes glinted like a blade. “My name is not something he can buy with spare change.”

Mark’s gaze landed on a property in Richard’s asset list. “He owns a mansion.”

Andrew’s smile deepened, sharp and deliberate. “Then take the mansion.” That house had once belonged to Cathryn’s mother. He would claim it back—for her.

Not long after, Richard’s phone rang. He snatched it up, his voice tight with impatience. “Tell me—what is Cathryn’s husband’s name?”

A cold chuckle slipped through the receiver. “Shouldn’t you ask the price first?”

“Name it.”

“The Moore estate.”

For a heartbeat, Richard couldn’t breathe. “What did you just say?”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 220:

“The Moore estate. Sign it over.”

Then the fury came crashing in, hot and wild. Richard slammed his fist against the headboard. “A name. I only asked for a name! And you dare demand the Moore estate? Do you have any idea what it’s worth? You couldn’t buy it for fifty million—”

The line clicked dead.

Richard’s breathing turned ragged. But beneath the rage, dread pooled—cold and certain. If that was the price, then Cathryn’s husband’s name carried weight beyond anything he had imagined.

Minutes dragged. Finally, Richard swallowed the bile in his throat and dialed again. His voice shook with restraint. “My assets are frozen. The Moore estate is the only roof my family has left.”

I cannot hand it over, but I will mortgage it. Six months. That’s all I can offer.” Six months should be enough time to pull Moore Trading out of its crisis.

The voice on the other end was cold as steel. “One month.”

Richard ground his teeth until his jaw ached. His pride screamed in protest, but he forced the word out through clenched teeth. “Deal.”

“Damien Brooks.” With that, the line went dead.

Richard stared at the phone, the name echoing through his skull. Damien Brooks? A Brooks?

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His mind clawed for the connection, but the name rang hollow. Not a single face in the sprawling Brooks clan fit. A stray cousin? A black-sheep man tucked away in some distant city? Or maybe Jorge had an illegitimate son stashed somewhere?

Whoever this Damien was, there was no way he could eclipse Andrew.

Regret crashed over Richard like a rogue wave. He should have asked who had beaten him last night. Instead, he'd given up a property worth fifty million, only to get back a name he'd never even heard of. Brooks—such a common surname. Who knew which one Cathryn had married?

Richard hissed a curse through clenched teeth. No wonder they called the organization the Mafia. Wolves in suits, ruthless enough to almost con him out of his mansion for a single scrap of information. Thank heaven for his split-second cunning—he had mortgaged the property, not signed over the deed outright. One more reckless move, and his entire household would have been out on the pavement.

Still, none of it mattered if his next move landed. Once Liam laid eyes on Andrew, and the Moore and Watson families restored their alliances with Brooks Group, the entire board would tilt back under his control.

Meanwhile, steam curled off Cathryn's damp hair as she stepped out of the shower. She called Jordyn. Today, she needed a strand of Jordyn's hair—one clean sample for the DNA test against Richard.

The call clicked alive. Jordyn's voice blazed down the line, sharp as broken glass. "You have some nerve calling me! Was it you who had some thug attack Dad?"

Cathryn froze, her heart jolting. Richard was attacked?

Jordyn's voice cracked through the phone like a whip. "You ungrateful wretch! How dare you raise a hand to your own father? Heaven will strike you down for this!"

Cathryn felt a memory flare to life. Back in the hospital, she'd caught the coppery scent of blood on Damien's clothes. She had woken groggy from a too-deep sleep and let the detail slip away with the morning. Now it returned, sharp and accusing.

Could Damien be the one who had struck Richard?

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 221:

It fit. Damien thrived on retribution. Richard had hurt her, and Damien had struck back for her sake.

Cathryn's lips curled. "I am not frightened of divine retribution," she said, her voice light but edged. "If heaven possessed any sense, you would be first in line."

"You will burn for that!" Jordyn spat. "I curse you to join that wretched woman you call mother in hell."

A shadow passed over Kathryn's face. Jordyn had no right to condemn Bettina. Kathryn clenched her hands to stop them from trembling, then steadied her voice. "Let's meet up. I have something for you."

Jordyn's tone sharpened into mockery. "You are broke, Cathryn. What could you possibly have that I do not?"

Cathryn said the name without hesitation. "Are you searching for a coding genius called Kestrel?"

Silence crackled on the line. Then Jordyn, caught off guard, blurted out, "How do you know about Kestrel?"

Cathryn let out a cold chuckle. "You and Liam have been telling anyone who would listen that I never went to school, that I am illiterate. Do you really believe your own lies?"

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Jordyn's words thinned into a whisper. "You... But you really never had proper schooling..."

Cathryn's voice turned flat and hard. "You know why I did not attend, or are you going to pretend ignorance now?"

Back when Cathryn reached elementary school age, Bettina had already been in no state to take care of anyone, not even herself. Zoe had leaned in to Richard and painted Cathryn as slow, a child who would only embarrass the family if sent to class. One educated daughter sufficed, Zoe had said. The other would remain at home to tend their mother and thereby be useful.

Only later did Cathryn learn the name for what had baffled her as a child—dyslexia—yet numbers and code had always bent to her like willing metal.

Fortunately, a mysterious organization that scoured the world for talents of all kinds had found Cathryn.

Zoe had breathed a sigh of relief when Cathryn left home—no competition for inheritance, no threat to the family’s standing. That was how Cathryn had finally gotten her chance at an education.

“Liam thinks I cannot read a sentence,” Cathryn said, letting the sting show through a smile. “But you should know better, Jordyn.”

Something like regret tugged at Jordyn’s composure. She had forgotten—perhaps chosen to forget—Cathryn’s quieter brilliance.

“With what you call amateur skills,” Jordyn scoffed, “you might be able to tamper with surveillance footage, but knowing Kestrel? That is another matter.”

Cathryn’s laugh was soft and sure. “Do you suppose I spent ten years inside that organization for nothing?”

Jordyn’s attempts to find the group online had turned up nothing—no footprints, nothing to latch onto. The unknown had always unnerved her.

“If you want to find Kestrel, meet me at the café,” Cathryn said, and ended the call.

Cathryn returned to the bedroom, where Damien lay sprawled across the bed, a small smile tugging at one corner of his mouth. He looked as though he had enjoyed himself.

“Did you rough Richard up?” she asked, voice low.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 222:

“I did.”

“How?”

“With that whip,” he said simply.

Cathryn stared at him. Gratitude flared. “Thank you for standing up for me,” she whispered.

Andrew’s grin was boyish and steady. “I thought you would be angry.”

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Cathryn smiled. She resented Richard, yet the thought of striking her father still made her stomach knot. Damien had done what she could not.

“I do not want to be branded as a woman who harms her own father,” she whispered, eyes downcast.

Andrew reached out, his palm warm against the curve of her neck. “Do not worry, Cathryn. I will handle the dirt. You just keep moving forward with clean hands.”

She met his gaze and caught the tenderness in his eyes. “How far would you go for me?”

His lips parted, voice rough. “I would kill him.”

Cathryn let out a startled laugh. “Do you think you are some crime boss, striking people down at will?”

Andrew only arched a brow, the hint of a dangerous smile ghosting across his face. He was not merely a crime boss—he was a sovereign who commanded both the shadows of the underworld and the polished facades of high society.

Cathryn shoved him back against the pillows. “You stay in bed and keep dreaming. I am going out to meet Jordyn.”

Andrew pushed up on his elbows, unwilling to yield. “Then I will come with you.”

She planted her foot firmly against his chest, pinning him down with surprising authority. Her delicate brows drew together, sharp with warning. “You are far too dangerous with that charm of yours. You are not coming.”

Jordyn had a way of stripping Cathryn of everything she held dear. The last time Damien crossed her path, Jordyn had dismissed him as nothing more than a pretty prop—some hired man meant to needle Liam. If Jordyn laid eyes on Damien again, Cathryn knew she would stir up trouble.

Andrew curled his fingers around Cathryn's ankle, his thumb gliding over the curve of her foot. His lips quirked into a slow, taunting smile. "What? Afraid she might try to steal me away?"

Cathryn tried to wrench free, but he tugged her effortlessly into his arms. His hand slid up her smooth leg, heat flickering in his gaze. "She could never measure up to you..."

Fearing Andrew's desire would take over, Cathryn quickly broke from his grasp and stood, smoothing her dress as if to steady herself. "Just send a few bodyguards to trail me from a distance. That will be enough."

Andrew's grin remained wicked and unrepentant as his tongue swept across his lips. "Then do not be long. Come back quickly."

She leaned down, brushed a kiss across his forehead, and whispered, "Wait for me at home."

But the moment the door closed behind her, Andrew rose from the bed. Without hesitation, he slipped out and followed the car she had taken.

Cathryn reached the café before anyone else. She took a seat by the wide window, slipped her phone from her bag, and tapped the screen with practiced ease until familiar lines of code filled the display.

It was her very first program—the flawed beginning of her journey. At first glance, the code looked clean, almost elegant, yet she still remembered the stubborn bug that had once hidden like a splinter beneath the surface. For three relentless years, she had worried at it, polished it, refined it, until perfection finally bowed to her will.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 223:

As she studied the lines now, her thoughts drifted—unbidden—to Andrew. Already, her mind was arranging strategies like chess pieces: what to say when she stood before him, how to hold her ground, how to strike if she had to.

Elsewhere, Andrew's car crawled through a snarl of traffic. His phone buzzed, and his hacker's voice cut through the speaker, sharp with urgency. "Mr. Brooks, Kestrel just logged in."

Andrew's spine stiffened, one hand tightening against his knee. "Where?"

"Maple Avenue. A place called Serendipity Café."

Andrew's eyes narrowed, a shadow sweeping over his expression. That was exactly where Cathryn had gone. Could it be that she was Kestrel?

"Step on it," Andrew snapped at Yosef.

Yosef leaned hard on the horn, frustration thick in his voice. "Mr. Brooks, the street's jammed. Event traffic. We can't move forward or back."

Andrew's jaw clenched like a steel trap. He spoke into the phone. "Hack into the café's security feed. I want a list of everyone inside."

Back in the café, the door swung open and Jordyn strode in with her usual air of superiority. She spotted Cathryn by the window, the glow of the phone reflecting off her face.

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With a smug tilt of her chin, Jordyn marched over. “So? What is it you want to hand over to me?”

Cathryn rose, calm and steady—then her hand flashed.

The slap cracked through the air, sharp enough to turn heads.

Jordyn staggered, her cheek instantly burning red, disbelief twisting her features. “How dare you strike me?” she spat, clutching her face. Rage glittered in her eyes like broken glass.

For years, it had always been Jordyn’s hand that delivered the blows, while Kathryn endured in silence—the family’s favored punching bag.

Cathryn smiled, her lips curving with a sweetness that cut like sugar laced with poison. “Of course I dare. And I’m not stopping there. I think I’ll take some of your hair as a keepsake.”

Before Jordyn could retreat, Kathryn’s hand shot out. She clamped down on a fistful of Jordyn’s hair and yanked—hard. Strands tore loose with a cruel snap.

Jordyn shrieked, hands flailing as she tried to grab Cathryn's hair in return. But her arms were too short; she couldn't reach. She stamped her foot, her face twisted with fury. "Do you know what happens when you touch me?"

Cathryn gave her hair another punishing jerk, dragging Jordyn slightly off balance. "Why don't you enlighten me?"

The question stole the words from Jordyn's mouth.

In the past, she had only needed to threaten Cathryn with Bettina, and Cathryn would become the perfect doormat, enduring every strike in silence. If Cathryn ever resisted, Jordyn would run to Richard. One complaint, and Cathryn's back would be laid bare beneath the lash. But Bettina was gone, and Richard was recovering in a hospital bed, beaten with his own whip. Cathryn had no weak spot left.

Jordyn's voice dripped venom as she spat, "You still have that old man you married. I'll find someone to smash his legs!"

Cathryn threw back her head and laughed, the sound cutting through the café like a blade. "Oh, Jordyn, you poor fool. Did it never cross your mind to ask whether Gavin was even my husband?"

A flicker of panic darted across Jordyn's face, her certainty cracking. If Gavin wasn't the man—then who was?

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 224:

Her thoughts leapt to that striking figure she had glimpsed with Cathryn outside the courthouse. Too young. Too commanding. Far too magnetic to waste himself on a discarded divorcée.

Just then, a waiter passed by, balancing a steaming cup of coffee.

Jordyn's hand darted out faster than thought. She snatched the cup and hurled it at Cathryn with all her strength.

The liquid exploded across Cathryn's shoulder, scalding hot. Some splashed upward, searing into her eyes and blinding her in a white-hot haze.

The waiter blanched as his tray tipped, splattering more liquid down Cathryn's front. "I-I am terribly sorry, ma'am!" he stammered, his voice cracking with panic.

"It is not your fault," Cathryn replied, her tone measured and calm despite the chaos.

"Please, at least freshen up in the restroom," the waiter urged, his eyes flicking to her soaked hair and blotched blouse.

Cathryn's vision prickled, but she allowed herself to lean on his arm, letting him guide her away with quiet dignity.

At the table, Jordyn pressed a trembling hand to her scalp, the sting of torn hair burning like salt in a wound. Cathryn's words from the call echoed now with bitter clarity. That "something" Cathryn had in store for her had been a slap—sharp enough to scorch her pride.

Rage bloomed hot in Jordyn's chest. Her gaze snagged on the phone Cathryn had left behind, still unlocked, the screen glowing like a forbidden door.

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Jordyn snatched it up, a sneer curling her lips. “Let’s see who your husband really is.”

But the moment her eyes fell on the display, the sneer faltered. Instead of a contacts list or social feed, a maze of intricate code filled the screen—the very algorithm business magnates had been hunting for months, whispered about in closed-door meetings and dark web forums alike.

Just then, Jordyn’s own phone chimed with a call, jolting her. It was the hacker she had hired. “Ms. Moore, Kestrel just surfaced.”

A chill crawled up her spine. “Where?”

“Serendipity Café. Maple Avenue.”

The name struck like lightning behind her eyes. Kestrel—the elusive phantom of the digital underworld, the one CEOs offered fortunes to find—was actually Cathryn.

Jordyn’s hand quivered around the phone. So this was how exceptional Cathryn really was...

Meanwhile, inside a sleek black Maybach stalled in traffic, Andrew drummed his fingers against the window, his jaw set hard. His convoy of bodyguards was useless in the gridlock, and his anxiety only deepened. Kestrel was in that café—and so was Cathryn. He was eager to meet Kestrel.

A call cut through the tension. His hacker again. “Mr. Brooks, we breached the café’s surveillance. Live feed is streaming to your screen now.”

Andrew tapped the icon without hesitation.

“We ran facial recognition,” the hacker continued. “Kestrel is her.”

The feed zoomed in. By the window sat a lone woman, utterly absorbed in her phone.

Andrew leaned forward, his gaze locked on the device clutched in the woman’s hand on the feed. “Zoom in on her phone,” he ordered, his voice low and unyielding.

The image sharpened, magnifying until the screen filled the display.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 225:

“That’s it—the code!” the hacker’s breath hitched, awe spilling from his throat. “She is Kestrel.”

Only half the string was visible, yet half was enough. The hackers Andrew hired had memorized those fragments after endless nights of study. Recognition struck instantly.

“Never thought Kestrel would be a woman,” one of the hackers muttered, stunned.

Andrew’s expression remained unreadable. He’d known Kestrel was a woman all along. “Show me her face,” he said, his stare riveted on the silhouette. Something about the curve of her shoulders, the tilt of her chin, felt hauntingly familiar.

The camera angle shifted. The woman lifted her head.

Andrew stilled. Ice flooded his veins.

Jordyn.

The hacker's voice crackled through Andrew's earpiece, oblivious to the storm breaking inside him. "Target identified: Jordyn Moore, daughter of Richard Moore..."

Andrew's eyes darkened, fathomless as midnight tides. Memory struck him like a blow—the day he had registered his marriage with Cathryn, the tracker had flared. Kestrel had been there. Jordyn had been there. And now, once again, their signals overlapped. Jordyn had studied computer science abroad. Too many coincidences.

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The truth settled like a blade against Andrew's throat. Jordyn Moore was Kestrel—the phantom he had hunted for years. Yet she was also Cathryn's sworn enemy.

A bitter taste rose in his mouth. He rolled a cigarette between his fingers, irritation gnawing at him.

"Mr. Brooks," the hacker ventured hesitantly, "do you want us to keep digging?"

Andrew lowered his lashes, masking the storm in his eyes. His voice was calm—icy. “No. From today, stop tracking Kestrel.”

“What? But this is the chance—your chance to secure the code, to—”

“No longer necessary.” Andrew cut the line.

If the choice stood between Cathryn and the future of Brooks Group, the company could burn.

He would choose Cathryn.

Meanwhile, inside the café, Jordyn was about to slip Cathryn’s phone back when it buzzed with an incoming call. The name flashing across the screen—Brooks.

Jordyn’s pulse slammed. Could it be Cathryn had latched onto someone from the Brooks family? Among the men suitable for marriage, only Andrew fit the bill. Vanessa had whispered of Andrew’s return, and Cathryn’s divorce had followed soon after. The pieces clicked into place with frightening precision.

Jordyn clenched her fists, nails biting into her palms. No. Impossible. Cathryn was nothing more than a discarded divorcée. How could Andrew Brooks—the head of Brooks Group—ever glance her way?

Then again, there were plenty of men surnamed Brooks in Olekgan. It might not be Andrew.

In the restroom, Cathryn rinsed the coffee from her face, slicked her hair back, and straightened her jacket. By the time she emerged, Jordyn had vanished.

Cathryn slipped the strands of Jordyn’s hair she had yanked earlier into a clear plastic bag. The stinging coffee had been worth it—she’d collected exactly what she came for.

She picked up her bag and phone. The screen was still unlocked, displaying the very first line of code she had written years ago.

A decoy.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 226:

Within moments, Cathryn hacked into the café's surveillance and confirmed that Jordyn had snooped. It did not matter. That early program carried a hidden bug—useless to anyone but her.

What mattered was the reminder: time was against her. She needed to get closer to Andrew, and soon.

Opening Brooks Group's careers page, Cathryn scrolled. Vanessa had already wormed her way inside, dreaming of becoming Mrs. Brooks.

Cathryn figured that since she could not approach Andrew through Damien, she would do it as an employee. Eventually, every employee crossed paths with the boss.

Outside, Andrew's Maybach screeched to a halt in front of the café. On the feed, he spotted Cathryn—calm and unruffled—sipping her coffee. Relief surged through him, loosening the tightness in his chest. Her missed call had nearly driven him mad, spurring him to tear through traffic.

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At that moment, Jordyn stepped out of the café. She froze, struck by the sight of the man leaning against the Maybach, a cigarette smoldering between his fingers. Command radiated from him, effortless as a king in exile. Even his profile carried danger, sculpted to ruthless perfection.

Her breath hitched when he lifted his head and those sculpted features came into full view. It was him—the same man who had walked into city hall and registered a marriage with Cathryn.

Jordyn stepped closer, her voice sharpened to a blade. “What is your name?”

Andrew exhaled a ribbon of smoke, his gaze cool and unhurried. “Damien.”

“Damien...” Jordyn repeated, testing the name on her tongue. She sifted through her mental catalog of wealthy men, but none fit. The Brooks family tree was small, and there was no Damien on it.

Her eyes flicked to the row of bodyguards behind him. “Then what are you? One of the Brooks family’s security?”

Andrew lifted a brow, offering no denial.

Jordyn's gaze clung to him, her breath catching on the sheer perfection of his face. "So you're the one married to Cathryn?"

A lazy curl of smoke slipped past Andrew's lips. "That's right."

Relief surged through Jordyn, though her chest still tightened. Earlier, when she'd seen the name Brooks flash across Cathryn's screen, dread had stabbed her. For one wild second, she had believed Cathryn had truly married Andrew.

Yet the man before her was nothing like the whispers she'd heard. He was elegance carved into flesh—long-limbed, striking, with the kind of presence that could snare a heart in a single glance. How could this possibly be the disfigured, crippled Andrew people gossiped about?

Her thoughts knotted, split between envy and disbelief. Who could have imagined Cathryn's second husband would outshine even the brightest idols?

Jealousy seared through Jordyn like a brand.

In that instant, she made a silent, merciless vow.

This man would not remain Cathryn's for long.

Jordyn couldn't tear her eyes from the man standing before her. He towered over Liam by nearly a head, his striking looks eclipsing Liam completely. Whatever faint interest she'd ever had in Liam evaporated in an instant.

Andrew stood with a cigarette balanced lazily between his lips, his dark gaze fixed on Jordyn. "Ms. Moore, you're the star student on campus, right?"

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 227:

Jordyn's pulse quickened as she met his smoldering stare, drawn into its quiet intensity. He wanted to know about her. The thought that Cathryn's husband might be interested in her sent a sharp, heady rush of jealousy and possessiveness through her chest. She made up her mind on the spot—Cathryn's husband would be hers.

Through the soft veil of smoke, Andrew's features looked even sharper, almost magnetic.

Heat bloomed in Jordyn's chest, stealing her breath. Since the scar, Liam had kept to a separate room at night, leaving her with nothing but a hollow ache. After so long without intimacy, an almost reckless pull tightened in her as she stared at the man in front of her.

She hooked her fingers around Andrew's tie, a sly spark dancing in her eyes. "So, Damien... does programming catch your interest?"

He let her draw him in, lowering his head until he hovered close, his voice low and deliberate. "I'm quite interested."

Her eyes gleamed with mischief. "Then why don't we slip away somewhere quiet tonight and have a nice discussion about it?"

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Andrew's lips curved as he tipped his head in agreement. "Alright."

Jordyn pulled a room card from her purse and slid it into his shirt pocket with deliberate slowness, her voice low and teasing. “Olekkan Grand Hotel. Tonight.”

Andrew’s smirk deepened. “Going after your sister’s man? Sounds like you’ve done this before, Ms. Moore.”

Jordyn fluttered her lashes, smiling coyly. “Men seem to like the fantasy. I’m making it easy for you. Tell me, Damien, don’t you want—”

Andrew’s chuckle was quiet, amused. “I want it.”

Jordyn pressed closer, her palms gliding over the hard lines of his abdomen as she murmured, each word dripping with mischief, “No wonder the Brooks family keeps you as their bodyguard. They clearly like their men built like this.”

The bodyguards behind Andrew kept their faces blank, lips pressed tight as they fought to suppress their laughter—silently grateful for the sunglasses that hid their amusement. None of them had ever witnessed their employer being mistaken for a mere bodyguard, much less being openly “taken advantage of,” and the absurdity of it made it nearly impossible to stay professional. It was the kind of day they would never forget.

“Catch you later.” Jordyn gave Andrew’s solid chest a teasing squeeze before she sauntered off, her hips swaying deliberately with each step.

A snort escaped one of the bodyguards.

Andrew turned sharply, his tone edged with warning as he glared at him. “You think that’s funny?”

The bodyguard struggled to smother his grin. “Mr. Brooks, I can’t believe you actually let her take advantage of you.”

The head bodyguard cuffed the man on the back of the head. “Idiot. Mr. Brooks is flirting on purpose. It’s all part of the plan.”

The bodyguard still smirked, emboldened. “Mr. Brooks has all kinds of tactics. Why resort to using his looks?”

Andrew strolled up to him, his voice smooth and dangerous. “Show me your hand.”

Still grinning, the bodyguard held out his palm.

Andrew pressed the glowing tip of his cigarette into it. “Laugh it up now.”

Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 228:

The bodyguard hissed, jerking back in pain.

The head bodyguard rolled his eyes. “Serves you right for being so blind.”

By the time Andrew got home, Cathryn was seated at her desk, her expression distant as she stared at the computer screen.

“Rough day?” Andrew asked, stepping closer and slipping an arm around her shoulders.

Without a word, Cathryn reached for a clear plastic bag containing strands of Jordyn's hair and handed it to him. "Have this tested for paternity against Richard."

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Andrew took the bag, studying her. "And if it turns out Jordyn isn't Richard's daughter?"

A faint, sharp smile tugged at Cathryn's lips. "I've been done with the Moores for ages, and the result won't bother me in the least. But it'll eat Richard alive, and that will be satisfying."

She wanted the unfaithful Richard to face the true nature of the mistress he'd defended all this time. How would proud...

Richard flinched at the thought of what he would feel if he discovered the daughter he'd cherished for twenty years wasn't even his.

"Why do you smell like perfume?" Cathryn asked, lifting her head from Andrew's embrace to sniff at his collar.

Andrew tilted the fabric toward his nose. The faint floral scent was unmistakable—Jordyn’s. He straightened, avoiding Cathryn’s gaze, and muttered, “I picked up a new aftershave today.”

Cathryn nodded distractedly, her mind already drifting. “Oh.”

She tilted her head, her voice soft but curious. “Damien, mind if I ask you something?”

Andrew brushed a thumb along her cheek, a gentle smile tugging at his lips. “Go ahead.”

Cathryn’s lashes fluttered as she asked softly, “So, which company do you work for?”

His brows flickered, a hint of surprise crossing his face. “What brings that up?”

She tugged at his arm with a grin. “I just want to know. Tell me.”

A quiet laugh escaped him before he answered, “The Brooks Group.”

Cathryn’s eyes brightened. “You work for the Brooks Group?”

Andrew gave a faint shrug and an easy smile. “Just a low-level department manager—nothing that matters.”

Cathryn inclined her head, thoughtful. Compared to Andrew, who was the head of the entire Brooks Group, a mere manager’s role did seem trivial.

“I’ve been thinking about applying for a position there,” Cathryn said, flipping open her laptop to a blank résumé.

Andrew’s brows shot up. “You’re serious about joining the Brooks Group?”

Cathryn gave a small nod.

Andrew studied her for a moment before asking, “What makes you want to work?”

She hesitated, lowering her gaze. “I’m still young. I can’t keep living under your roof without contributing anything... And I still owe you thirty million.”

Andrew’s arm slid around her waist, pulling her closer. “There’s no yours or mine. This place belongs to both of us.”

Cathryn kept her thoughts buried. Their marriage contract was only good for a single year. When that year was up, she was expected to walk away from the Brooks family with no strings attached. Andrew might sound tender now, but when the deadline came, she had no doubt he would push her out without a second thought.

Andrew brushed a teasing kiss over Cathryn's lips, his voice threaded with playful arrogance. "The thirty million was a joke. Whatever I earn is already yours. You should be spending it, not chasing jobs like the rest of the world."

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 229:

Cathryn's laugh slipped out, light and musical. "Good thing you're not sitting on some vast inheritance. I'd hate to become one of those society wives who parade around with their husband's credit card and nothing else."

A shadow stirred behind his gaze, quick as a ripple. He tested her, his voice lowered—almost dangerous. “And if you were that kind of wife?”

She leaned closer, a smile tipping her lips. “Then I would divorce you on the spot.”

She had already served her sentence in Liam’s house—three years as nothing more than a decorative spouse, a bird pampered but trapped, her wings clipped so she couldn’t fly. She had clawed her way out of that cage once, and she would never return.

Andrew’s expression darkened at her words, though he recovered quickly. Good thing he hadn’t revealed his true identity to her yet, or she would likely walk away without hesitation.

“So,” Cathryn said, breaking the moment, “what department are you in at Brooks Group?”

Andrew parted his lips to answer, but she silenced him with a palm pressed to his mouth, her smile turning mischievous. “On second thought, don’t tell me. They ban office romances. If I manage to get in, we’ll just pretend we’re strangers.”

His smirk curved—slow, confident. “Chances are, we won’t even cross paths.”

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His office sat like a fortress at the very top of the tower—so far removed from the employees below that only a handful had ever caught a glimpse of him since his return from abroad.

Cathryn gave him a shove. “Leave me alone. I need to finish my résumé. You’re too distracting.”

Andrew lounged back against the bed, his eyes fixed on her as she hunched over the laptop, frowning.

On the screen, the résumé header read only: Cathryn Moore. No education listed. No employment history. Just empty spaces staring back at her. After she left the organization, she had been dragged back to the Moore family. Soon, she had married straight into the Watsons, she had never once stepped into a classroom properly, nor had she ever tasted the rhythm of work. Her résumé was a hollow shell.

Cathryn tapped at the keyboard with one finger, her thoughts turning darkly playful. She could hack into the national database and conjure a college diploma in minutes. For her, it would be child’s play. But forgery was a federal crime, and even her recklessness had limits.

Still, without credentials, she had no chance. Brooks Group was merciless in its selectivity; her application would be discarded long before anyone bothered to read her name. She bit at her nails, gnawing anxiously.

Andrew watched her struggle—watched her peck clumsily at the keys—and sighed. “Need help?”

She nodded without a word.

He pulled the laptop toward himself. “Alright. What diploma do you have?”

She shook her head once.

“No college? High school, then?”

Another shake.

His brows knit. “Elementary, at least?”

A beat of silence—then the soft admission. “Never.”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 230:

The word struck him like a stone to the chest. He hadn't imagined this. The Moore family was wealthy, yet their eldest daughter had been left with nothing. His voice gentled. "Then how did you learn to read?"

Her lips curved with quiet pride. "I taught myself. Online."

For a moment, he saw not the woman before him, but a small, solitary child hunched over a flickering screen, stubbornly piecing letters together while her mother slipped into madness and her stepmother poured venom into her father's ear. The image clawed at him.

"I'll teach you from now on." He reached out and ruffled her hair, tenderness masking the tightness in his throat.

Cathryn swallowed. “Maybe I should just claim I finished elementary school and forge a certificate. Nobody would care. K through twelve is compulsory, anyway.”

Andrew shook his head. “Forget it.”

Forging an elementary diploma wouldn’t help her application. Instead, he typed a single, unflinching word into the education field: None.

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“And work experience?” Andrew asked quietly.

She spread her hands. “I’ve never had a job.”

He exhaled and typed the same word again: None.

The résumé looked bare, fragile as glass. Cathryn stared at it, her heart sinking.

“Is Brooks Group really that strict with hiring?”

“Four rounds of screening,” he said.

Her eyes brightened. “And the last one? Is it with the CEO himself?”

A faint smirk tugged at his mouth. “With thousands of employees, the CEO would never waste time on that. He only shows up for the highest executive posts.”

Her hope wilted, shoulders sagging. It seemed that if she wanted to stand before Andrew, she would first have to get into Brooks Group on her own merit.

“Do you think I have a chance?” Her gaze lifted—earnest and vulnerable—as she searched his face for encouragement.

He looked at the résumé—nearly empty, almost laughable—then back at her. A slow smile touched his lips. “Of course you do.”

She let out a weary sigh. “You’re only saying that to make me feel better.”

Andrew slipped an arm around her shoulders, his voice low and reassuring. “Come on. The Brooks name still carries weight. That has to count for something in those halls.”

Cathryn wriggled free, pressing her face into the pillow with a muffled groan. “You told me there are four interview rounds. Influence won’t charm every single panel. You’re not Andrew himself.”

The corner of his mouth curved.

Funny thing was—he was.

“Stop running in circles,” he drawled, leaning over her laptop. With a swift tap, he sent the application straight into Brooks Group’s inbox. “There. Let’s see what fate decides.”

She rolled onto her back, eyes fixed on the ceiling. “Fine. Wherever this leads.”

The moment Andrew stepped out, he pulled out his phone and dialed Ethan. His tone was clipped and decisive. “I just forwarded a résumé to HR. Skip the process. Give her the job.”

“Understood,” Ethan replied crisply.

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Message from Noa: Have a beautiful morning dear ones, God loves you and Noa wishes you all the best (٠ ð ٠ - ٠) ✨

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 231:

Andrew's smile lingered—faint and private. He didn't want Cathryn working at Brooks Group; it was too risky. She might piece together who he really was. Yet if she wanted the opportunity, he would clear every obstacle for her. Doing things for her pleased him—a quiet satisfaction he would never admit aloud.

Ending the call, he glanced at his watch. By now, Jordyn was probably already at the hotel, waiting.

Andrew lingered at the bedroom door for only a heartbeat before pulling it open. “I need to step out for a while. I won’t be long,” he said casually.

Cathryn hardly blinked. She had grown used to his abrupt departures. Instead of questioning him, she simply murmured, “Come home soon.”

Moments after the echo of his footsteps faded, Cathryn’s phone buzzed with a new message. She unlocked her screen to read it, and her breath hitched.

A photo filled the display—Jordyn sprawled in black lace, lips curled into a smug smile—followed by a taunting line: “Waiting for your husband at the Olekgan Hotel.”

Heat seared through Cathryn’s chest, a sharp ache of rage and disbelief. Jordyn again. Always Jordyn, circling like a vulture, determined to rip her man from her grasp. But how had Jordyn uncovered the truth that Damien was her husband? And worse—was that where Damien had gone tonight? Straight into Jordyn’s arms?

Cathryn’s pulse pounded as she dialed Yosef. “Where did Damien go?” she demanded, her voice tight.

Yosef glanced at the storefront Andrew had disappeared into. “He went into a drugstore.”

Cathryn's brows knit. A drugstore? At this hour? "Which one?"

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"Springwell Pharmacy, Ashford Avenue," Yosef replied.

She ended the call without another word and slipped into her own element. Her fingers flew over the keyboard. In seconds, she'd broken into the store's security feed.

Onscreen, Andrew came into focus—broad shoulders, calm as ever, scanning the shelves. Rows upon rows of condoms stretched out before him.

A young clerk, cheeks glowing pink, stepped hesitantly closer. "Looking for something particular, sir? I could make a few recommendations."

Andrew's composure never faltered. "Something that keeps her comfortable," he said, his voice low but clear. "A little fun, without compromise."

The clerk blinked, startled by the consideration. "Most men only think of themselves," she murmured, almost shy. "Your wife must be a very fortunate woman."

He accepted a box of strawberry-flavored ones from the clerk, studied it briefly, then shook his head. “She doesn’t care for scents.”

Quickly, the clerk switched it out. “This one is unflavored—extra thin.”

Andrew nodded. “I’ll take ten boxes.”

The clerk’s eyes flew wide. “Ten? Each box has five... Most couples don’t—”

“Not enough for me.” His brow lifted ever so slightly. “I go through them fast.”

Color rushed down the clerk’s neck as the implication hit her harder than any flirtation. His sheer presence already made her pulse unsteady—tall frame, restrained power in every line of him—but now, hearing the heat threaded beneath his words, her throat went dry. She found herself licking her lips, helplessly caught. Whoever his woman was, she was blessed beyond measure.

“Your wife is truly lucky,” the clerk breathed, envy lacing her tone.

A fleeting smile softened Andrew’s face. “I only hope she’ll officially be my wife soon.”

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 232:

His voice gentled at the thought of Cathryn. To him, they were bound only by a contract, not yet united by the vows he wished his grandmother could witness. He pictured the wedding he owed Cathryn—the grand gesture, the proper welcome into his world.

The clerk packed the boxes into a bag, and Andrew settled the bill.

“Thank you.” He took the bag—ten boxes weighing it down—and left.

Cathryn's fingers clenched around her phone, her body cold despite the storm raging inside. His words—"I only hope she'll officially be my wife soon"—sliced her open.

She was already his wife, which meant the woman he longed to wed wasn't her. And when had she ever told him she disliked flavored condoms? Buying that many... He must have been planning a night with Jordyn. Once again, Jordyn had managed to steal her husband away.

The betrayal hollowed out her chest. With Liam, betrayal had been revolting but tolerable—she had never loved him. But Damien was different. Living beside him day after day, she had let her heart tilt in his direction. If he had truly gone to Jordyn—the woman who had killed her mother—it would destroy her. Damien could have chosen anyone, anyone but Jordyn.

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Cathryn shoved the anguish down, her spine stiffening. No more waiting. No more guessing.

She stormed out of the room, rushed into the garage, and slid behind the wheel of a sports car. The engine roared to life, its growl matching the fury thundering through her veins. Her GPS pulsed, the arrow locked onto Damien's Maybach, gliding toward the Olekgan Hotel.

Cathryn's stomach lurched.

So it was true. He really had bought those condoms to meet Jordyn.

Jordyn's name flashed through Cathryn's mind like a neon sign—bitter and electric. Her eyes burned. She slammed the accelerator as if she could crush her fury beneath her foot. The sports car answered with a feral roar, tearing open the night as she weaved through traffic.

Inside the Maybach, Yosef kept his hands steady on the wheel, the picture of composure—until a shrill, high-pitched growl closed in from behind. He flicked a glance at the rearview mirror, his face tightening. “Who is insane enough to race down Olekgan at this hour?” he muttered. “Do they want to die?”

Andrew glanced at the mirror to get a better look. A flicker of recognition danced across his furrowed brow. That car... something about it felt too familiar. But he dismissed it as just another rich kid's midnight joyride.

On the seat beside him sat a small paper bag: the condoms Andrew had just bought, and a neat little chestnut cake for Cathryn. One quick U-turn and he'd be on his way home. He imagined her surprise—her smile. He didn't spare the sports car another thought.

Then the sports car lunged ahead, swerving hard. Tires screamed as it cut across the Maybach's path and skidded to a dead stop right in front of them.

Yosef's blood ran cold. He stomped on the brake. The Maybach shrieked in protest, its nose diving as the bumper stopped a hair's breadth from the sports car's door. One more heartbeat, and neither car would have survived the impact.

Yosef's heart lurched into his throat. He cranked the window down, thrust his head into the night air, and bellowed, "Are you trying to get yourself killed? If you're so bent on dying, do it at home—stop making the rest of us pay for it!"

Inside the sleek sports car, Cathryn's gaze locked onto Damien through the Maybach's tinted glass, fury sparking in her eyes like a struck match. Damien, sneaking around with Jordyn under her very nose? He must be courting trouble.

The sudden stop hurled Andrew forward. Instinctively, he curved an arm around the chestnut cake, shielding it as if it were porcelain. His muscles absorbed the jolt; without them, his bones might have broken.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 233:

“Damn,” Yosef muttered, jerking his head back inside.

“Mind your tongue.” Andrew’s frown deepened at the outburst.

Yosef blinked at him, hands gripping the wheel. “Mr. Brooks, the car ahead—”

“Call the police,” Andrew cut in, irritation roughening his voice. “Let them sort it out.” His thoughts flicked to the cake cooling in its box. One more delay and it would lose its warmth—its taste.

Yosef swallowed. “Mr. Brooks, that car looks like one of ours.”

Andrew’s eyes lifted. A white Porsche. Familiar, but he couldn’t place which year he’d bought it. His garage overflowed with toys—he only ever drove the Maybach or the Maserati.

“Is Gavin still on leave?” Andrew asked.

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“Yes.”

Andrew’s frown hardened. Someone at home was bold enough to take his car?

Yosef suggested, “Mr. Brooks, should we call the police? Maybe a thief’s making a getaway.”

Andrew’s glance turned to ice. “A thief who steals my car and drives it straight toward me? That would be a very stupid thief.”

Yosef scratched his head. “True. A really dumb one.”

Meanwhile, Cathryn’s anger simmered hotter as Andrew remained in his car. Guilt must be gluing him to the seat. Fine. If he wouldn’t come to her, she would go to him.

Cathryn flung the door open and stepped out.

Yosef’s eyes went round. “It’s Mrs. Brooks.”

Andrew stared. Cathryn drove his car? And at this hour—tearing down the road like a storm? Was she so desperate to see him that she couldn't wait? He lowered his window, a smile already forming.

Cathryn stalked straight to his door.

As the glass slid down and his face came into view, he murmured softly, "Cathryn—"

Her hand cracked across his cheek before he could finish. "Damien! If you're tired of me, then say it. Ask for a divorce. But sneaking behind my back? Pathetic. I thought you were better than this. You know Jordyn and I are sworn enemies, yet you booked a room with her? How many times have you slithered into her bed? A man with no self-control is as rancid as spoiled milk. You make me sick."

Her fury spilled over; her fists rained down on him like a sudden downpour.

Andrew caught her wrists, stunned. "Cathryn, when did I ever have an affair with Jordyn?"

Tears glistened on her cheeks as she struggled against his grip. "Don't play dumb. Jordyn texted me—she booked a hotel room for you. I wondered why you were out so late, only to find you rushing to her. You even bought ten boxes of condoms! Aren't you afraid you'll wear yourself out?"

Her glare could have cut glass. She wanted to claw his too-handsome face, erase whatever charm lured women in.

Andrew finally understood. Jordyn's provocation. Cathryn's misunderstanding. "Cathryn, I wasn't going to Jordyn." His voice gentled as he brushed a thumb across her tear-streaked skin. "I was on my way home."

She flinched from his touch. "Home? This road leads to the Olekgan Hotel. Still lying to me?" Crownspire Villa sat in the opposite direction.

From the front seat, Yosef raised a timid hand. "Mrs. Brooks, we were about to turn around up ahead."

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 234:

Cathryn's eyes flicked to the U-turn sign ahead, then back to Andrew.

He nodded. "We were going to turn around."

Her brows knitted, suspicion and confusion tangling in her gaze. "Why drive so far just to make a U-turn?" He could have turned back right after leaving the pharmacy.

Andrew lifted the small box he'd been guarding. "Because there's a bakery around here. Last time, you devoured two slices of this chestnut cake. I knew you liked it, so I came specifically to buy it for you."

Cathryn's gaze lingered on the cake in his hand.

A rich, chestnut-scented thing, it seemed to carry warmth all on its own. Something in Cathryn's expression softened, though she couldn't remember ever eating chestnut cake before.

Andrew's voice held a quiet note of reminder. "Last time, Yosef and Margaret came here to buy the cake. You said it was smooth and delicious. You polished off two pieces without stopping."

The memory flickered back—Cathryn had tried a chestnut-flavored cake, sweet and velvety, and she'd even meant to ask Margaret to buy more. But life, as usual, had swept the thought away. She had never realized her offhand praise had lodged itself so firmly in his mind.

A flicker of guilt tightened her chest. Then her gaze drifted to the boxes stacked by his seat, and she asked, almost accusingly, “Then why did you buy so many of these condoms? And when did I ever say I didn’t like the flavored ones?”

Andrew’s answer came steadily. “They were for us—so we wouldn’t end up in situations like today, where we need them but have none, killing the mood...”

He trailed off. The smile that had been playing at his lips faltered, then froze. Slowly, his eyes lifted to hers, a flicker of suspicion in them. “How do you know I said you didn’t like the flavored ones?”

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He had only mentioned it to the shop clerk. No one else had been around.

Cathryn’s eyes flickered anxiously, darting as though searching for an escape. In her rush, she had forgotten the boldest sin of the night—tapping into the pharmacy’s surveillance feed and eavesdropping on Damien’s quiet exchange with the clerk.

Her gaze finally landed on Yosef.

Andrew's sharp eyes followed, narrowing on the same man.

Poor Yosef had been shrinking into himself all along, desperate to disappear before he got caught in the crossfire of their charged silence. The moment their combined stares pinned him down, he jolted like a guilty thief.

"You were spying on me?" Andrew's voice snapped like a whip. He snatched a magazine from the seat and hurled it across the car.

Yosef yelped, throwing up his hands to shield his head. "I swear I'm innocent!"

Cathryn silenced him with a single cutting glare. Yosef sealed his lips at once, remembering Gavin's clear order—her word was law.

Andrew tugged open the car door and swept Cathryn into his arms. His embrace was firm, unyielding. "The last time I bought condoms, they were strawberry-flavored. I noticed you

looked uncomfortable.” Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 235:

“Y-You’re slandering me,” she stammered, burying her burning face against his chest. “I never—”

“Think back,” Andrew whispered, his lips brushing her ear. “You squirmed. You did not like it.”

Her mind betrayed her. She remembered the faint discomfort, the restless shifting she’d thought had gone unnoticed. Yet he had noticed. He always noticed.

A rush of warmth softened the frantic beating of her heart. In three short months, this man she barely knew had shown her a kind of attentiveness her own family never had. A mother too fragile to care for her, a father who saw discipline as favoritism cloaked in cruelty—neither had ever offered her what Damien gave so effortlessly.

“The chestnut cake will be ruined if it gets cold.” His tone lightened suddenly. He pulled a neat parcel from the crook of his arm, tore off a piece, and held it to her lips.

Cathryn tasted it without protest, and the rich chestnut filling melted across her tongue.

“Good?” he asked softly.

Her throat tightened. She nodded, blinking back the sting of tears. “Delicious.”

Andrew exhaled with a mock sigh. “Cost me dearly, you know. Not just the price—your fists, too. And, worst of all, being accused of having an affair.”

Her lashes lowered. Shame pooled inside her, heavy and sour. She had acted impulsively—questioning Andrew without understanding the situation, even striking him.

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“Did I hurt you?” Her voice came out small and uncertain as she tilted her face toward him.

He brushed a crumb from the corner of her lips with his thumb, smiling in that infuriatingly tender way. “You were right to smack me. I should have spoken first instead of leaving you to guess.”

Cathryn nodded. “It’s your fault for not saying anything.”

His hand tapped her forehead in a light reprimand. “You are too shy. One little word—condom—and you blush. The last time I mentioned buying them, you flushed like a schoolgirl.”

Mortified, Cathryn slapped her palm over his mouth. Yosef was still in the driver’s seat, stiff as a board, no doubt hearing every word—and Damien, unashamed as ever, seemed to enjoy making her squirm.

Andrew kissed her palm.

Cathryn let her hand slip free, her expression unreadable.

He offered her another bite, his tone deep and coaxing. “Anything you desire, Cathryn, I will place it in your hands.”

He meant it—Bettina’s assets and prized antiques, the Moore estate, and even the lives of Zoe, Jordyn, and Richard.

Cathryn inwardly scoffed. Damien, for all his swagger, survived only because he sheltered beneath the Brooks family’s roof. Without Andrew, he would be stripped bare—a man with nothing but empty boasts.

Andrew shifted the chestnut cake in his arms, shielding it as though it were precious. He wanted her to taste it while it was still warm.

Cathryn's gaze flicked to the dark fabric of his suit, now pressed with the outline of the box. "That suit costs a fortune. You shouldn't ruin it over a few bites of cake."

His laugh was a low rumble, tinged with warmth. "It's only a suit. But if you eat cold cake and fall ill, that would trouble me far more."

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 236:

Neon glow from the passing streets spilled across her face, catching on her lashes as they trembled. For the first time in years, she felt the fragile weight of someone's care. But she couldn't allow herself to drown in fleeting tenderness. Damien could murmur soft words, yes, but affection without power meant nothing. Andrew commanded influence—her mother's antiques, and the fate of both the Moore family's and the Watson family's businesses. Those were the things that mattered. She couldn't afford distraction. She needed to win him completely.

Her thoughts scattered when Andrew's voice cut in, low and deliberate. "Do not move."

Cathryn stilled, her breath caught.

He leaned closer. His eyes lingered on her lips before he swept his tongue across her cheek, catching a crumb.

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The atmosphere turned intimate in an instant.

Heat surged through her, flooding her face. "What... what are you trying to do?" she whispered, her voice trembling.

His chuckle brushed her skin. "Indulging in chestnut cake."

She frowned. “There’s still some left—”

But he ignored her protest, trailing his mouth along her skin, teasing away the stray crumbs.

“Sweeter when it comes from you,” he murmured, his breath hot, laughter threading the air as he pressed her back against the seat.

Her palms braced against his chest. “I have questions for you,” she said quickly, trying to steady herself.

He lowered his head, lips grazing her collarbone. “Ask.”

“Why does Jordyn know your name? Why was she waiting for you at the hotel?” Her fingers curled into his hair, her eyes sharp with suspicion.

Andrew’s body tensed, betraying what his expression tried to conceal.

“Did you seduce her on purpose?” Cathryn pressed, her voice fierce despite the heat in her cheeks.

He arched a brow, a wry smile tugging at his mouth. “I only used a bit of charm. It was for your sake—to ease your anger.”

Her eyes narrowed. “What exactly does that mean?”

His chuckle was low, evasive. “You’ll understand soon enough.”

Meanwhile, at the Olekgan Hotel, Jordyn had prepared herself—skin perfumed, hair smoothed, her figure draped in silk—as she waited for Damien.

After the scar carved its cruel reminder across Jordyn’s skin, Liam never touched her again. Zoe had taken Jordyn for laser treatments, a sterile attempt to erase the past, but Jordyn didn’t stop there. She let ink turn pain into art—a thorny rose blooming defiantly where the scar had once ruled. Now, unless someone studied her too closely, no one would guess that beneath that sultry bloom lay an ugly scar.

Newly emboldened by her reflection, Jordyn traced her fingertips along her curves, a sly smile playing at her lips. Tonight, she would tempt, lure, and claim Damien for herself. Handsome Damien—Cathryn’s perfect husband. The thought stung like salt in a wound. Why should Cathryn have it all?

Jordyn had taken Liam once before; she could just as easily take Damien. And when she did, Cathryn would once again be the fool left behind.

A soft electronic beep shattered the silence—the sound of a key card unlocking the door.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 237:

Jordyn's cheeks flushed with heat. She killed the lights, slipped on the lace blindfold she'd prepared, and stretched across the bed like an offering, ready for Damien's hands to unveil her.

The door eased open. Footsteps—cautious, deliberate—crossed the threshold.

Liam stepped inside.

An anonymous envelope had delivered the card to him earlier that evening. He hadn't used one since that failed rendezvous with Cathryn at the Olekgan Hotel, when Jordyn had shown up in her place.

Who would suddenly send him a key card? This time, though, he was certain—it had to be Cathryn. She must have changed her mind.

The thought quickened his breath as he approached the bedroom. There, sprawled on silk sheets, a woman in lace lingerie arched like a vision. Her curves glimmered in the dim light, the blindfold lending a forbidden edge.

Liam's chest tightened. Cathryn—so modest, so untouchable—had never dared wear something so intoxicating. Could she really have done this for him?

Desire gripped him, reckless and consuming.

He flicked on the light.

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“Damien, you’re here,” Jordyn purred, lips curling into a sultry smile.

Liam froze.

Not Cathryn. Jordyn.

And Damien? Who the hell was that?

Rage surged through him like fire. Jordyn had the audacity to betray him.

“Damien,” Jordyn murmured again, eyes closed, reaching toward him.

Liam’s face hardened, shadows sharpening across his jaw. With a violent tug, he yanked her upright.

The blindfold slipped, baring her flushed face. Eyes still closed, she nestled against him, sighing dreamily. “Damien, you really came.”

“Open your eyes,” Liam growled, his voice dark with fury.

Her lashes fluttered. When she saw him, all color drained from her face. “How... how is it you?”

His grip tightened on her jaw. “You dare cheat on me?” His words were venom.

The slap cracked through the room—sharp and merciless.

Jordyn cried out, clutching her cheek. She stumbled as she tried to run, but he seized her again before she could flee.

“You cheated with Cathryn too!” she screamed through tears. “That makes us even!”

“Even?” His eyes blazed. “Do you know your place? I married you so you’d serve me at home, nothing more. Don’t speak to me of fairness.”

Her sobs turned raw. She had never imagined Liam saw her as so small—so disposable.

“Divorce!” he roared, yanking her by the hair. “We end this tomorrow!”

The word struck Jordyn like a blade. For a moment, panic threatened to crush her. She couldn’t divorce. Once Watson Tech went public, being Mrs. Watson would carry the prestige women clawed and bled for. She would not give it up now.

Her tears vanished as quickly as they'd come. Her voice softened, trembling, desperate.
"Liam, you're here."

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 238:

He hesitated.

Jordyn glanced down at her lingerie, gasped dramatically, and covered her chest with both arms. "Why am I dressed like this? Where am I?"

Suspicion narrowed his eyes. “You reserved this room yourself. Do you not remember?”

“I don’t.” She clutched her head as though in pain. “I met Cathryn at a café. She gave me coffee. After that, everything went black.”

Her voice broke, weaving a snare.

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Jordyn added, “She set me up, Liam. She knocked me out, sent me to the hotel, and tricked you into coming here so you could catch me in bed with someone else and divorce me.”

Something flickered behind Liam’s eyes, doubt threading through his anger. Did Cathryn truly want him to divorce Jordyn? Did she now wish to remarry him after everything?

Before he could untangle it, Jordyn flung herself into his arms, her voice breaking with practiced fragility. “Liam, you need the programming code. I’ve poured three years of my life into it, working day and night, just so I could give you a surprise. I never thought Cathryn would uncover it—or worse, try to steal it from me.”

The word “code” cut through the haze of his thoughts like a blade. He stiffened, pulling back just enough to search her face. “What did you just say?”

Tears spilled down Jordyn's cheeks as she clutched his sleeve. "I never told you before... but Liam, I am Kestrel."

His eyes widened, the name striking like a thunderclap. "You... what?"

"I am Kestrel," she repeated, each syllable deliberate, as though the weight of the name alone could make it true.

Liam's brows furrowed, disbelief warring with the frantic beat of his heart. "How could that be?" Why hadn't Jordyn mentioned this earlier?

Jordyn drew a shuddering breath, her tone steeped in sincerity. "Because the code was flawed. There was a bug buried in the latter half—one that could undo everything. I've been fixing it, so I didn't admit it before."

A spark lit in Liam's eyes, hope clashing with suspicion. "And now?"

Without hesitation, Jordyn unlocked her phone and thrust it toward him. "Now it is ready."

He seized the device, his pulse racing as lines of code filled the screen. His chest tightened, each breath sharp with disbelief. "This... this is the program the entire industry has been hunting for?"

Jordyn gave a small nod, her tears catching the light like jewels.

Liam's grip on the phone trembled. He stared at her, searching for cracks in the façade, desperate for certainty. "Are you truly Kestrel?"

Jordyn dabbed at her damp cheeks with the back of her hand, her voice trembling just enough to tug at sympathy. "I have a master's degree from overseas. My specialty is programming."

Liam faltered, surprise flickering in his eyes. For a heartbeat, he almost forgot how different Jordyn was from Cathryn. Jordyn had the glitter of credentials—Befbridge's finest university, a degree that carried weight, the prestige of formal education. Why couldn't she be Kestrel?

With sudden fervor, he pulled her into his arms. "Jordyn, you're really Kestrel? Why would you keep something so important from me? I almost hurt you."

Jordyn pressed her cheek to his chest, letting his warmth envelop her. Her lashes fluttered with feigned modesty. "The code wasn't ready. I wanted to perfect it and then surprise you."

Liam cradled her face between his palms, his gaze shining with adoration. "Surprise me? You astonish me. The genius everyone in the industry worships turns out to be my wife. Jordyn, you're extraordinary. Having you as my wife is the greatest fortune of my life."

Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 239:

Her lips curved in a shy smile as she nestled against him. But in the shadows of her heart, relief hissed like steam from a cracked pipe. Thank heaven she had visited Cathryn earlier and unexpectedly gotten her hands on the program. Without it, tonight would have ended in disaster.

The thought of Cathryn being Kestrel—the one coveted by every mogul in the business—made Jordyn’s insides twist with envy. Worse still, Cathryn had managed to capture a man as striking as Damien.

Jordyn's jaw clenched. "Cathryn knows I'm Kestrel. She tried to steal the code, pretending it was hers."

Liam let out a sharp laugh, dismissive and cruel. "Cathryn? That girl never stepped foot in a classroom. She can barely string the alphabet together. Does she truly believe she can impersonate you?"

Jordyn covered her face, letting her shoulders shake as if in defeat. "She struck me to get the code."

His eyes softened. He brushed her cheek with tender fingers, his voice a soothing vow. "Don't cry, my darling. I'll avenge you."

A tear slid down her cheek. Her voice broke with emotion. "I don't deserve to be your wife. Just now, you raised your hand to me and spoke of divorce."

Regret clouded Liam's face. He wiped her tears away with his thumb.

"I was a fool. Divorce will never again cross my lips."

At his words, Jordyn's tension eased, her fear loosening its grip.

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He tightened his embrace. “Next week, we’ll go to the Brooks Group. Once Andrew sees the code, he’ll definitely partner with Watson Tech. With the Brooks Group’s backing, Watson Tech will soar and go public in no time.”

Anticipation lit Jordyn’s eyes like jewels catching sunlight. The vision of power and prestige gleamed before her.

That night, Liam and Jordyn had sex in the hotel bed.

Jordyn should have been jubilant—Liam had finally come around. Yet as she stared into the darkness, another face intruded on her thoughts. Damien. Broad-shouldered, magnetic, dangerously irresistible. Her heart betrayed her. She edged away and murmured, “Let’s sleep.”

Liam tugged her waist with a lazy grin. “You always love when I hold you to sleep at night.”

She shifted farther, frowning. “It’s too hot.”

She would never relinquish the title of Mrs. Watson. Yet Liam’s embrace lacked the fire she craved. Damien, with his wicked allure, haunted her every thought. A secret vow burned in her chest. She would find a way to have Damien—and make Cathryn bleed with betrayal.

The following morning, Jordyn stormed back to the Moore residence. Her fury erupted the moment she saw Zoe. “Why did you let that organization take Cathryn back then?”

Zoe blinked, caught off guard. “Why ask me that now? I thought they were an underworld syndicate. I was certain once they took her, she’d never return. But she did—alive, unharmed.”

Jordyn’s eyes blazed. “That’s where she learned everything and became Kestrel.”

The revelation struck Zoe momentarily silent. “What? Cathryn is Kestrel? But you said Kestrel once taught you at your university.”

A scowl darkened Jordyn’s face. “That master’s degree of mine was nothing more than Dad’s donation buying a diploma. I never set foot in a lecture hall. How could I know Kestrel? I lied to Liam.”

Zoe let out a long sigh. She should have figured it out sooner. If Jordyn truly possessed such skill, she never would have needed to smother Cathryn’s brilliance all those years ago.

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Once The Foolish Wife, Now His Eternal Obsession

Chapter 240:

Jordyn's expression hardened. "If Liam discovers the truth, he'll leave me for Cathryn. And Andrew—he's searching for Kestrel as well. If Cathryn reaches Andrew first, we'll be cornered."

Zoe's fingers tightened around the edge of her chair, her voice taut with unease. "You're walking a dangerous line. Without the code, the lie will slip sooner or later."

A slow, icy smile curved across Jordyn's lips. "Luckily, the code Cathryn guarded so carefully is now in my hands."

Zoe's eyes lit with sudden triumph. "The heavens must be on your side. Since you hold the code, then you are Kestrel."

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Jordyn inclined her head, her smile sharpening. “Of course. The mogul everyone’s chasing is me now.”

Pride flickered across Zoe’s face, softening her features. “That’s my daughter. Bold as ever.”

A glint of steel hardened Jordyn’s gaze. “But to make Kestrel’s name unshakable, Cathryn must vanish.”

Zoe hesitated, lips pressed in thought. “Give me time. I will find a way.”

Jordyn’s patience snapped, her tone edged with frustration. “Why waste time? You disposed of Bettina with ease—why not use the same tactics on Cathryn? She dogs our every step.”

A weary sigh escaped Zoe. “Cathryn is no Bettina. Since Bettina’s death, it’s as though fire itself fuels Cathryn. She’s sharper, faster, and always striking before we do.”

With a sharp crack, Jordyn hurled her cup to the floor, shards scattering at her feet. “She has grown powerful, yes—but she has also mastered the art of seduction. That decrepit butler is not her husband. Her husband is Damien—handsome enough to shame a leading actor.”

Zoe's head snapped up at the name, her eyes narrowing. "Damien?" The syllables stirred something half-buried in her memory.

"Liam couldn't hold a candle to Damien," Jordyn muttered, Damien's face flickering in her mind like a spark she couldn't smother. Just thinking of him made her itch with longing.

Zoe gave a derisive scoff. "So what if he's handsome? Men like that are usually leeches—polished on the surface, living off women behind the scenes."

"Hardly. He's a bodyguard for the Brooks family," Jordyn countered.

"The Brooks family?" Zoe's eyes widened, a shadow of recognition flashing across them. Then it struck her. Cara had once mentioned—almost casually—that Andrew sometimes went by a lesser-known name: Damien.

"Wait. Are you telling me Cathryn's husband goes by Damien?" Zoe asked slowly, her voice tightening. "What is his surname?"

"Who cares what his surname is?" Jordyn replied with a frown.

But Zoe had already gone pale. As fragments of Cathryn's odd behavior knitted themselves together in her mind, the truth dawned—cold and undeniable.

Damien was Andrew.

Jordyn arched a brow. “Hold on... you know him, don’t you?”

“N-no... never met him.” Zoe’s gaze darted aside, her voice faltering under the weight of the lie. The truth had to stay buried. Jordyn was impulsive, shallow, reckless—a woman who couldn’t keep a secret even if her life depended on it. If she discovered Cathryn’s husband was Andrew, she’d start scheming to make him hers, and in doing so, she would jeopardize her status as Mrs. Watson.

Zoe knew Jordyn needed careful guidance, every step of her future planned with precision. But Jordyn was right about one thing—Cathryn had become a dangerous variable. She had to be removed before she dismantled everything they had worked for.

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Cathryn stiffened, her cheeks aflame. He was the one who always bought the condoms and used them; she'd never paid attention to what kind they were.

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