

The Heart System #Chapter 221 - Read The Heart System Chapter 221

Chapter 221: Chapter 221

I took another sip of wine. The warmth spread through my chest, and the vibe in the room softened. Kayla tucked her hair behind her ear and shifted on the couch. Mendy kept swirling her wine, smiling like the evening finally felt right. And Penelope... she sat back with one leg crossed over the other.

Her tight shirt stretched over her chest, and naturally, my eyes drifted down.

Like, gravitated.

She had the kind of chest that made focusing feel like a challenge. Maybe it was the wine, or maybe it was just me being an idiot, but my eyes kept sliding back there even when I tried to keep them up.

And then she looked at me.

She didn't say anything. Just raised one brow, slowly, like she had caught a dog stealing food. Then she shook her head and rolled her eyes in this "men are hopeless" way before looking back at the others.

I cleared my throat and looked away, rubbing my jaw like that would somehow erase the moment.

Jesus. Get it together.

"So," I said after taking a sip, "yesterday's storm was crazy. I thought my car was going to be buried by morning."

"It almost was," Penelope said. "Mine froze shut. I had to kick the door open. Like literally kick it."

Huh. So she had a car? I didn't know that.

Mendy nearly spit her wine. "No way."

"Way," Penelope said. "My neighbor saw me and asked if someone locked me inside. I told him none of his business. Old bastard."

Kayla laughed into her glass. "Why do I feel like you scare every neighbor you have?"

"Because I do," she said proudly.

I smiled a bit. "The roads were hell. I almost spun the car when I drove Kayla to her place."

Kayla shivered. "I thought we were going to die, seriously."

"You are alive," I said. "And the car is alive. So we are all good."

Mendy leaned forward with interest. "What are you guys doing for New Year's?"

"Not sure," Kayla said. "My mom wants me home, but I kind of want something more fun than sitting on a couch watching a countdown."

"Same," Penelope said. "I usually go out drinking but I might stay home this year. Too cold and too many idiots."

I shrugged. "I don't know yet. Might be working that day."

"Working on New Year's?" Mendy asked. "That is depressing."

"It is life."

Mendy giggled. "That is fair."

For a moment, everything was peaceful again. Kayla slowly finished her glass, leaning sideways on the sofa and letting her head rest on the cushion. Penelope kicked her feet up on the edge of the coffee table and sank deeper into her seat. Her shirt tightened again, and I bit the inside of my cheek so I would stop staring.

Too late. I did it again.

She caught me again.

This time she smirked, then brushed a strand of hair behind her ear and pretended she hadn't noticed.

I looked away for real this time.

Outside, the breeze shook a thin branch against the window. Snow scattered in little bursts across the glass. Warm air hummed from the heater. The clinks of wine glasses settling down echoed softly in the living room.

"Okay," Kayla said, sighing contently. "This is... nice. Like... actually nice."

"It is," Mendy agreed. "Feels like things are finally normal again."

"Hopefully it stays that way," I said under my breath.

Penelope let out a long sigh through her nose. "Well, for tonight at least, I am choosing to not be a bitch. So consider yourselves blessed."

Kayla laughed. "Thanks... I guess."

Penelope raised her glass toward her without looking. "You are welcome."

We all finished our wine gradually, the conversation drifting from random small talk to stupid jokes, to comparing who had the worst job experiences. Mendy had the worst stories, hands down. At one point, she described a customer who tried to return a burger because "it smelled too burger-y," and we all choked laughing.

By the time our glasses were empty, Mendy clapped her hands together with a bright smile.

"Alright, everyone stay here!" Mendy said, hopping up from the couch with a spark of excitement. "I am going to grab the game from my room. One sec! Oh, can you actually help me, Evan? It's kind of... where I can't reach."

"Sure."

I pushed myself up from the single armchair and followed her down the short hallway. Her room was small, warm, and neat in a way that made it painfully clear she lived alone. Bed made tight. Small desk with a couple of pens laid in a straight line. A scented candle half-burned on the dresser. She didn't look like she had touched anything out of place in weeks.

Mendy walked straight to her wardrobe, opened the left door, then pointed upward.

"It's up there," she said. "Under those blankets."

I nodded and stepped closer. The top shelf was pretty high, so I went on my toes, pushed the folded blanket aside with my forearm, and felt around until my fingers hit cardboard. I pulled the box out.

I lowered it and turned toward her. She stood close, hands clasped in front of her, smiling with this soft mix of excitement and nervousness.

"Uh, Evan?" she mumbled quietly, then said something so quietly I barely caught a single syllable.

"Sorry?" I asked. "What did you say?"

She cleared her throat, cheeks turning pink. "I... I was just wondering what you and Penelope talked about earlier."

"Oh. That." I adjusted the game box in my arms. "I just told her to go easy on Kayla and that she is trying her best. Hope it worked, though."

"Oooh..." Mendy nodded slowly. "Right. Yeah. Of course. I hope she does too."

"Hmm."

"Umm..."

We stood there like two teenagers pretending we were not awkward as hell. Way too close, neither of us moving, the silence stretching.

I pointed toward the hallway with one finger.

"Should we... go?"

"Oh. Yeah! Yes, sure." She stepped aside quickly. "Let's go."

We headed back out, walking shoulder to shoulder down the quiet corridor. The warmth of the living room drifted toward us as the soft chatter of the girls filled the space again.

When we stepped inside, Penelope was sipping her wine lazily, one leg crossed over the other, completely in her own world. Kayla was scrolling on her phone but lowered it the second we returned. They both looked up at the same time.

"Got it!" Mendy announced.

She hurried to the middle of the room, setting the Twister box on the carpet. She knelt down, opened it, and pulled out the rolled mat, smoothing it across the floor with both hands. The plastic sheet slapped against the carpet and spread out into a bright, chaotic mess of colored circles.

Blue, red, yellow, green. All in rows. All looking like an invitation for someone to destroy their spine.

Twister, huh?

I stared at it and could already feel my body protesting.

"I am going to break both my legs playing this," I said, rubbing my thigh. "I swear."

"Good," Penelope said. "Finally something fun to watch."

Kayla snorted. "I am not flexible at all. I am going to die in the first thirty seconds."

Mendy finished smoothing the mat and sat back on her heels, glowing with excitement.

"Okay!" she said, clapping her hands. "It is all set!"

And with that, the game night officially began.

The Twister mat lay across the living room floor like an open trap waiting to ruin someone's dignity. Mendy stood beside it, spinning the plastic wheel a couple of times, too excited for her own good. Kayla looked terrified. Penelope looked entertained. And me? I was already regretting my life choices.

"Alright!" Mendy said. "Who wants to go first?"

"You invited us," I said. "You pick."

"Okay. Evan and Kayla!" she said immediately.

Kayla groaned. "Of course..."

Penelope leaned back on the couch, lifting her wine glass. "This will be good."

Kayla kicked off her shoes and stepped onto the mat, smoothing her dress behind her thighs. She looked at me with "please don't let me break something" eyes. I placed my feet on the mat too.

Mendy grabbed the spinner. "Right foot, red!"

Kayla stretched awkwardly, wobbling like a baby deer. I planted my foot on a red circle.

"Left hand, yellow!"

Kayla leaned forward, her hair brushing the mat, her dress riding up her thighs. I reached across her to get to a yellow circle, and for a split second I accidentally caught a tiny glimpse of the edge of her underwear. I snapped my eyes away instantly, looking at the ceiling like God Himself was judging me.

Kayla groaned. "This is already hell."

"Oh, it gets worse," Penelope said with a smirk.

Mendy laughed. "Okay! Right hand, green!"

I leaned more.... well, Kayla also leaned more. We were one wrong breath away from face-planting. My arm went between her side and the mat, practically under her shoulder. She was warm, shaky, and trying so hard not to fall that it made her entire posture tremble.

"Left foot, blue!"

Kayla tried shifting her weight, but her dress rode up again. She yelped, pulling the hem down with one hand.

"No adjusting your clothes!" Penelope said.

"That rule is not real," Kayla replied. "I refuse."

I laughed and held my position, muscles burning already.

"Okay, okay," Mendy said. "You two look like tangled cables. Penelope, your turn."

"Ha! Finally."

Penelope got up and strode over, her tight pants hugging her hips. The second she stepped on the mat, she raised her eyebrows at me like she already knew she was about to destroy me.

"Kayla, you can step out," Mendy said. "If you keep playing, you'll flash the whole room."

Kayla practically rolled off the mat and collapsed on the couch. "I hated everything about that."

Penelope cracked her knuckles dramatically. "Alright, Evan."

"Oh boy..." I muttered.

Mendy spun the wheel again. "Right hand, red!"

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I reached forward. Penelope slid her hand onto the red beside mine, leaning close. The faint floral scent of whatever cheap perfume she used hit me.

"Left foot, yellow."

We shifted. She bent over, placing her foot on a farthest yellow circle. And that was when I realized her shirt was loose. And thin. And there were her nipples, poking through the fabric like sharp little reminders that I was absolutely not supposed to be staring.

I swallowed.

Penelope noticed.

"Right foot, green!" Mendy called.

I stretched over her leg, practically half-draped across her back. She bent lower, her hair falling forward. The mat crinkled beneath us.

"Left hand, blue!"

"Oh, come on," I muttered, reaching awkwardly across her. My arm slid right beside her ribs and my face ended up inches from her cleavage. The thin shirt dipped forward, giving me a perfect downward view.

She shifted her weight and her chest pressed against my upper arm.

I nearly lost my balance.

Kayla snorted wine out of her nose. "Oh my god..."

Penelope didn't move away. If anything, she held her position deliberately still, like she knew exactly what was brushing my arm. The mat under her hands stretched tight, pushing the outline of her breasts against the fabric.

My gaze dropped for half a heartbeat, stupid reflex.

She caught it again.

"You are hopeless," she said quietly. "Pervert."

"Left foot, red!" Mendy called.

Penelope twisted smoothly like she practiced yoga every morning. I tried matching her movement and instantly regretted everything. My leg slipped between hers in a very compromising angle.

"Careful," she said. "If you fall on me, I swear—"

"Trust me, I am trying," I whispered.

My face was practically next to her hip. Her perfume. Her breathing. Her everything. This game was a trap.

"Right hand, green!" Mendy announced.

I lunged. Penelope lunged. Our arms crossed, and I ended up half-supported on her back. My chest brushed her shoulder blades.

Kayla covered her eyes. "This is obscene."

"Hey!" Mendy said. "This is a family-friendly game!"

"No," Kayla replied. "Not the way these two are doing it."

Penelope gave a single laugh, short but real. "Evan is the one shaking like a chihuahua."

"I am trying not to suffocate you."

"Then move your face away from my neck."

I did. Barely.

"Left hand, yellow!" Mendy sang.

Penelope went first. I followed, but my hand slipped the tiniest bit. My balance tilted. My weight shifted.

"Ah, shit—"

I fell. Straight onto her.

We collapsed in a heap as the mat slid under us. Penelope groaned loudly as I accidentally landed half on her thigh, half on her stomach.

Kayla rolled on the couch laughing. Mendy covered her mouth, eyes wide.

Penelope tried pushing me off. "Get off, get off, get off!"

"Sorry!" I scrambled backward, hands slipping on the plastic.

"Winner!" Mendy declared. "Penelope!"

Penelope dusted off her shirt, adjusting her bra-less top in a way that absolutely drew more attention to it.

"Of course I won," she said. "I have balance. And dignity. Unlike you."

Kayla wiped a tear from her eye. "We need to play this again."

"No," I said. "Absolutely not."

Mendy clapped her hands. "Come on! That was fun! Round two!"

I groaned. "My spine is in six different timelines."

Penelope smirked. "Good. This means I can beat you again. And plus, it's now Mendy's turn."

Mendy set the wheel again, humming as she sat cross-legged on the floor. "I think I'm gonna pass. Don't wanna break my neck and die."

The snow outside kept falling. The room felt warm, alive. The wine glasses on the table were half empty, their reflections glowing soft in the light.

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It was already close to eleven, and the energy in the room had finally died down. All four of us had migrated back onto the couches after the chaotic Twister match, half-sprawled like survivors of some disaster. Mendy was leaning back against the armrest, her hair messy, cheeks flushed from laughing. Kayla lay sideways on the couch with a pillow under her head. Penelope sat in the single chair with her legs crossed, lazily swirling what little wine was left in her glass. I was half sunk into the other couch, staring at the ceiling like it might give me answers to life.

Yeah. We were done.

I clapped my hands sharply. "Alright. Fun's over. I should go before I pass out on this couch. I have work tomorrow."

Penelope lifted her head. "Oh. Can you drop me off too?"

"Sure." I looked at Kayla. "You coming?"

Kayla waved a hand. "Nah. Girl's night. My friend is coming over. She'll be here in like thirty minutes then I'm off as well."

I nodded and stood up. My legs cracked loud enough for everyone to hear. "Jesus... Twister is a sport."

Mendy got up too. "Thank you guys. Really. It was fun."

"No, thank you," I said. "Seriously, that banger of a burger was a masterpiece. We should do this more often."

Her cheeks tinted red. "I'm glad you liked it."

Her smile lingered a little too long. And I remembered what Penelope told me earlier. About how Mendy kept talking about me. About how she might actually like me. I looked at her shy smile now... and yeah. It wasn't a stretch at all.

She really might be into me.

But I shook the thought away before I tripped over it. Later. That was a later problem.

"Anyway," I said. "Thanks again, Mendy."

Penelope let out a long stretch, placing her hands behind her head. "Alright, come here," she said as she stood up. "Hug time."

Mendy laughed nervously but stepped into Penelope's arms. Penelope squeezed her like she was juicing a lemon. Mendy let out a little squeak.

"P-Pen... you are crushing me."

Everyone laughed. Penelope finally let her go, patting her shoulder.

Kayla got up too and hugged Mendy, soft and warm. Then let her go.

I cleared my throat. My turn.

Mendy opened her arms, shy and hesitant, and I stepped forward, giving her a short but warm hug. She smelled like vanilla and something sweet. She held on for a second longer than I expected, then stepped back, smiling at the floor.

"Take care, Evan," she said.

"You too."

We said our goodbyes again, then I headed to the corridor, grabbing my jacket from the coat rack. Mendy waved from the doorway until we both stepped off the small porch and into the cold suburban night.

The street was quiet. Snowflakes drifted down slowly. The streetlights cast soft halos on the ground. The whole neighborhood looked gentle and asleep.

We walked to the car, our breath fogging in the air. Penelope wrapped her arms around herself.

"You are freezing," I said.

"No shit. I dressed like an idiot." She slid into the passenger seat.

I got in on my side, shut the door, and turned the engine. The heater started pushing warm air, though it would take a second to fully kick in.

Penelope rubbed her arms rapidly. "Brrr. So fucking cold. I can't even feel my nipples."

"You could've worn a jacket."

She glared at me. "You think I didn't plan on wearing one? I forgot it at home. And don't start with the lecture. Just warm me."

The heat slowly started filling the car. Penelope leaned forward, stretching her hands toward the vents like she was worshipping a tiny god.

I eased the car out of the spot and glanced at her. "You warm yet?"

"No," she muttered. "Hurry up and drive. The faster the heater hits me, the better."

I chuckled, backed onto the road, and began driving through the quiet, snowy street. Penelope leaned back in her seat, eyes half-lidded, letting the warm air finally reach her.

"Mm. There we go," she said softly. "Still freezing... but getting there."

Outside, everything was calm. Fewer neon signs. Shorter apartment buildings. A lot more darkness. The soft kind. The peaceful kind.

Inside the car, it smelled faintly of wine, melted snow, and Penelope's perfume.

And the night felt slow. And strange. And maybe a little comforting.

The heater humming softly filled the car with warm, comfortable air. Penelope let out a low groan of relief and stretched her legs toward the floor vents.

"Mmm... finally warm," she murmured.

"Yeah," I said, eyes on the road. "Told you to dress for winter."

"Shut up." But she smiled.

The streets were almost empty now, the snow falling slow and steady. The kind of quiet where every thought in your head felt louder.

After a minute of silence, Penelope spoke.

"Tonight was good."

"Yeah. Mendy needed it."

"She did." Penelope glanced at me. "So. About her."

I raised an eyebrow. "What about her?"

"You know." She pointed at me lazily. "Do you like her?"

"I told you. She's a friend," I said. "I care about her, but that's it."

"Right." She leaned back. "I kinda figured. You don't really go for girls like Mendy."

I glanced at her. "Okay. And what is that supposed to mean?"

"Sweet. Soft. Innocent." She waved her hand. "Guys like you don't fall for that."

"I don't have a type."

She laughed under her breath. "Bullshit."

"Explain."

"You like girls who push back," she said. "Who bite harder. Girls who walk in and take what they want."

She shrugged. "Not the soft type. Not the fragile type."

"That's a big assumption."

"It's an accurate one."

As she said that, she shifted in her seat. A slow motion, casual but definitely intentional, making her shirt lift enough to reveal her stomach. Smooth skin, warm from the car heater. My eyes flicked down before I could stop myself.

And my dick responded instantly. She didn't miss that. Not even for a second. Her gaze dropped, slow as hell, to my lap. Her lips parted in a soft, amused "oh."

"Well," she said. "Look at that."

"Keep your eyes up," I muttered.

"I would," she said, her voice lower, "if you stopped giving me things to look at."

I gripped the steering wheel harder, grounding myself. She shifted again, crossing her arms under her breasts, pushing them together. Her nipples were poking through the thin fabric, hard from the cold she walked in with.

Heat stirred inside me. Pressure tightening between my legs. Her eyes drifted there again.

"Mm-hmm," she hummed. "Not flustered, huh?"

"I'm not flustered."

"No," she agreed. "You're horny."

I didn't answer.

She didn't need me to.

Penelope leaned back against the seat, smirking like she had just discovered a cheat code.

"You know," she said, her tone playful and taunting, "guys don't get that hard for 'just friends.'"

"Drop it."

"No."

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She stretched her arms above her head again. Her shirt lifted even more this time, exposing half her ribs, the dip of her waist, a glimpse of the curve under her breasts.

I looked away. She noticed and then... she smiled.

"Relax," she murmured. "If I wanted to do anything, I'd say it. I'm not exactly subtle."

"You don't say."

Penelope laughed, low and warm.

"I saw the way you were looking at me during Twister," she said. "And earlier, outside with the cigarettes. You're a hunger-and-denial type, aren't you?"

"Penelope—"

"You want," she cut in softly, "but you don't let yourself have it unless someone drags it out of you."

She traced a finger lazily along her thigh.

"And I do love dragging."

My cock throbbed against the fabric. She glanced down again. This time, she bit her lower lip.

"Wow. You're really trying to hide it, huh?" she whispered. "Sweet. But useless."

I exhaled slowly, trying to keep cool, but the heat was there, burning, pulsing, growing.

Penelope sank deeper into the seat, spreading her legs slightly, her shirt still lifted enough to show her stomach. Her voice lowered to a whisper that crawled right under my skin.

"Tell me something," she said. "If I sat on your lap right now... would you still pretend you weren't hard?"

"Penelope."

"Relax," she giggled. "I'm not going to do it. I just like watching you try to stay calm."

Her eyes slid over my body—slow, confident, knowing.

"Next time maybe don't wear pants that make it so easy to see."

I muttered something under my breath.

She grinned. Victorious.

But then her tone softened just a little.

"Still," she said, "thanks for what you said about Mendy. Just don't hurt her."

"I won't."

"Good."

"And if you ever want to stare at my tits again... you don't have to pretend you weren't doing it."

I groaned. "Jesus Christ."

She laughed loud enough to shake the inside of the car.

I shook my head once, flicked the indicator, and rolled the G-Wagon into a narrow, snow-dusted alley. No lights, no cameras, just the faint orange glow from a distant streetlamp. I killed the engine and turned to Penelope.

She was already smiling, slow and filthy.

"Well," she purred Penelope, kicking off her heels and swinging one smooth leg over the center console, "if you're not gonna be Mendy's boyfriend, it's not really stealing, is it?"

Before I could answer she was in my lap, dress riding up to her hips, thighs straddling mine. Her lips crashed into me, hot, hungry, tongue sliding straight in. My hands dove under her tight t-shirt instantly, shoving it up over those massive fake tits.

Fuck, they were perfect. Heavy, round, zero sag, skin silky over the firm implants. Huge pink areolas, thick nipples already rock-hard and begging.

"God, I fucking love these big fake tits," I growled against her mouth, squeezing them hard, thumbs flicking the nipples. "So round, so perfect. You paid good money for these slutty plastic udders, didn't you?"

Penelope moaned, grinding down on the bulge in my jeans. "Mmm-hmm. All for boys like you to play with. You can't get enough of my bolt-ons, can you?"

"Never," I rasped, pinching both fat nipples and rolling them roughly. "These big fake fuck-bags were made to be mauled."

She laughed breathlessly, reached down, and yanked my zipper open. My cock sprang out, slapping against her bare thigh.

"Look at this fat dick," she cooed, wrapping her manicured fingers around it and giving a slow, teasing stroke. "Already leaking for me. You've been dying to stuff something warm all day, huh, baby?"

"Keep stroking and find out how fast I paint those perfect tits," I warned.

Penelope smirked, pumped me faster, twisting her wrist just right. "That's exactly what I want. Want you to cover my fake slut tits in cum. Show me how much you love them."

I shoved her T-shirt up to her neck, exposing those perfect, heavy fake tits. Pink areolas, wide, soft circles the size of silver dollars, framed thick, gumdrop nipples already stiff and begging. I latched onto the left one like I was starving, sucking hard, tongue swirling over that huge pink circle, teeth scraping the sensitive peak.

"Fuuuck," Penelope hissed, fingers threading through my hair, pulling me tighter. "Suck my fake tits, baby. You love these big pink nipples, don't you?"

I growled around her flesh, switched to the other tit, flicking the wet nipple with quick lashes of my tongue before drawing it deep into my mouth again. The implants made them sit high and proud, barely jiggling even when she rolled her hips. Perfect plastic perfection.

She reached down between us, shoved her skirt higher, and yanked her thong to the side. No time for niceties. I lifted my hips just enough for her to line me up, then she sank down in one slow, greedy slide.

"Oh my god," she moaned, head falling back against the roof. "Mendy has no fucking clue what she's missing. This cock is fucking made for me."

I grabbed her ass with both hands and slammed her down harder, burying myself to the hilt. The car rocked gently on its suspension, windows already fogging.

"Ride me," I ordered, voice rough. "Show me how much better you are than her."

Penelope grinned, wicked and breathless, and started moving, slow, grinding circles at first, then hard, fast bounces that made her tits slap against her ribs. Every drop took me deep, her pussy hot and slick, clenching like it was trying to keep me inside forever.

"Look at these fat fake tits bouncing for you," she panted, grabbing them herself, squeezing hard. "All for this dick. Mendy could never handle you like this."

I leaned forward, caught a nipple between my teeth again, tugging until she cried out. My hands dug into her ass, guiding her rhythm, faster, harder, the wet slap of skin on skin filling the car.

"Fuck yes," I groaned. "Milk me with that perfect cunt. Take every inch."

She rode me like she was trying to prove a point, hips rolling, grinding her clit against my base on every downstroke. I could feel her getting close, pussy fluttering, breath hitching.

I slid one hand up, thumb finding her swollen clit, rubbing tight circles. "Come on my cock, Penelope. Show me who this dick really belongs to."

That did it.

She slammed down one last time and shattered, back arching, tits thrust forward, a broken cry ripping out of her as her pussy clamped down hard. I could feel every pulse, every squeeze, her juices soaking my lap.

I wasn't far behind.

"Gonna fill you up," I growled, thrusting up into her spasming cunt. "Gonna pump this greedy pussy full."

"Do it," she gasped, still trembling. "Breed me. Mark me so Mendy never forgets whose dick I stole."

Three more brutal thrusts and I lost it, cock throbbing, hips jerking as I unloaded deep inside her. Rope after rope, thick and hot, flooding her until I could feel it leaking out around my base. She kept grinding slow, milking every drop, moaning softly into my neck.

We stayed like that for a long minute, her on my lap, my cock still buried inside, both of us breathing hard, windows completely steamed.

Then Penelope went still... wait. Where was the UI? I just had sex, right? Where was the EXP I earned?

She leaned back slightly, expression suddenly calm, almost gentle.

"Evan," she said softly, pushing my shoulder. "Evan... wake up."

I blinked.

The alley was gone. The car was gone.

I woke up on the couch, blinking slowly. My neck hurt, and for a second I didn't know where I was.

Then I saw them.

Mendy. Kayla. Penelope.

All standing there. All looking straight at me.

And I had a massive boner.

I immediately sat upright, grabbed the nearest pillow, and covered myself.

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry," I said, rubbing my face with one hand. "It was a dream. Seriously. I'm sorry you had to... see that."

I checked the time on my phone. Midnight. Perfect.

Mendy looked awkward, holding her hands together. "Y-yeah, it happens to all guys. Right?"

Penelope squinted. "Did you cum?"

"NO," I said. "No, Jesus. It was just—I woke up like this. I'm not... I didn't do anything. Just—sorry."

Kayla pushed a strand of her hair behind her ear. "Well... it's not exactly my first time seeing it."

Penelope and Mendy both snapped their heads toward her.

Kayla's eyes widened. "J-joking. Just joking." She forced a laugh and looked down at her knees.

Mendy gave a nervous smile but it was clear she didn't fully buy that it was a joke. She looked between us, confused.

"I think I should just go," I said, standing up carefully, keeping the pillow in front of me. "Thanks for everything, Mendy. Really."

Penelope rolled her eyes. "At least wait until your dick goes soft. Calm down."

"Penelope," Mendy said, embarrassed. "Don't say those things. You're making him feel worse."

I honestly just wanted the night to end so I could crawl into a hole and die quietly.

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What the hell kind of dream was that? Fucking Penelope in my car? Jesus. Her fake tits were apparently so burned into my eyeballs that they started showing up in my dreams. And yeah, she was hot. Stupidly hot. I wanted to fuck her so bad in real life too, but I knew I shouldn't. But would I?

I probably would. I wanted to pin her down and just go nuts on her.

I tried to shake the thought off and walked to the door. I grabbed my jacket and zipped it up, hiding my boner at least a little. Kayla stepped toward me too, fixing her hair. Penelope unplugged her phone from the charger and sighed.

"You're gonna drop us, right?" Penelope asked. "Like a true gentleman."

"Yeah, yeah," I said. "I will. You guys ready?"

"Yep," Kayla said. Then she lowered her voice and muttered, "Not as ready as your member though."

I pretended not to hear that.

"Mendy, I'm really sorry again," I said. "You shouldn't have seen that. I was tired after the game and... well—"

"It's fine," she said with a small, awkward smile. "It happens. Don't worry."

"Thanks for understanding."

"Come on," Penelope said, opening the door. "Let's go before he pops another boner."

I shook my head and stepped outside. Kayla and Penelope hugged Mendy first. I stood there on the porch, kicking at the snow with my boot. This was so damn embarrassing. Why did I have a dream like that? Why now?

When they finished hugging, I turned and gave Mendy a small wave. She waved back with that sweet smile of hers. Then the three of us walked down the street toward the car and got in.

This time Penelope took the passenger seat, while Kayla slid into the back. I turned the engine on and the heater kicked in, humming softly. I took a second before pulling on my seatbelt, letting the warmth hit my frozen face. When I glanced left, I noticed Mendy watching us through her living room window.

"Wow," Penelope said, still staring at her friend but talking to me. "You could be worse than Richard actually, Evan."

"No," I said, pulling away from the curb. "It was a genuine mistake. For real."

Penelope leaned back and crossed her arms. "Right. Mistake. Sure."

"It happens," Kayla said from behind us. "But Jesus, dude, you are one unlucky guy. You know that?"

"Yeah," I muttered. "God."

"What were you dreaming?" Penelope asked. "About me?"

My heart dropped. She said it jokingly... but shit. She nailed it. And I had to answer or she'd know I actually dreamt about bending her over in the car. Total disaster.

"Nah," I said quickly. "I don't really remember. One of those dreams, you know."

"I also never remember my dreams," Kayla said. "Then they come back randomly during the day. Weird brain stuff."

Penelope leaned closer and whispered right into my ear, "I heard you muttering my name in your sleep, you fucking liar."

I immediately checked the rear mirror to see if Kayla heard that, but she was looking at her phone, not paying attention. Then I looked at Penelope. She was smirking like she owned the world. She slid her seat back and put her foot on the dashboard, dirty boots and all.

"Anyway," I said. "I'm sorry. Again."

"Stop being a bitchy girl. I'm joking," Penelope said with a laugh. "It happens. I also came in my sleep two months ago."

"You did?" Kayla asked. "That never happens to me."

"Okay, how about we change the subject?" I said. "Cute dogs. Cute cats."

"Cute pussies?" Penelope asked.

Kayla laughed. Penelope laughed with her. Then... both of them slowly stopped, like they suddenly remembered they were supposed to hate each other.

But something in their faces changed. They weren't glaring anymore. They weren't clenching their jaws. It actually felt like they were warming up to each other. Or, well, began to tolerate each other.

Honestly?

If my embarrassing boner disaster brought them closer...

Eh, I'd take that.



NEW MAIN QUEST

Title: Corporate Betrayal

Task: Find the mole in TechForge

Reward: +950 EXP, 1500c

The Quest notification appeared again on my screen. A mole in the company. Out of more than a hundred workers in TechForge, this was going to be a nightmare. Nala was already driving herself crazy over it. I heard her get up in the middle of the night, pacing around and muttering to herself before finally lying back down. She wasn't sleeping properly anymore.

I checked the clock on the wall. Ten in the morning. Greg would be heading to Emilia's house soon to look for more evidence. Hopefully we weren't too late. The guy was fast and never wasted time.

"Fuck..."

I needed to focus on the mole for now. Form a plan. Figure out how to expose them. Nala had already started taking action. Even I wasn't allowed to bring my phone inside the building anymore. Security kept all the phones locked up. It would slow the mole down, but it wouldn't solve anything. We needed something permanent. We needed to find the person and deal with them. I trusted our CEO with this because corporate work wasn't exactly my field.

I heard Nala knock on her glass door and saw her gesture for me to come in. I got up and walked toward her room.

"Hey," Nala said as she opened the door. "We've got a problem."

I entered the room and nodded. "Alright, hit me. What happened?"

She closed the door and went back to her desk, shutting her laptop. I sat down on the small couch.

"I had security count the phones this morning," she said. "At nine, they had a total of one hundred and fifty-four."

"Only one-fifty-four? That's... surprisingly low."

"Some people didn't bring theirs since they already knew security would take them. But that's not the point," she said. "Ten minutes ago I asked them to count again."

"And?"

"They told me there are now one hundred and fifty-three."

"Great," I said. "So someone took one. The mole grabbed their phone back? Or maybe someone just left the building early."

"No one left. Adam says nobody came to ask for their phone. So one phone was stolen."

"Adam, the security guy, right?" I asked. "Where does he keep the phones?"

"In his office," she said. "When you enter the building, the room on the far left. It has SECURITY written above it."

"Yeah, I know the place," I said. "There isn't much space to hide in there. Anyone would see someone sneaking in. Especially Adam."

"Maybe Adam is the mole," Nala said, rubbing her temples. "I don't know what else to think."

"Adam doesn't have clearance for anything important," I said. "But what if he's working with someone? He gives the partner their phone back and pretends nothing happened."

"That was my thought too."

"But then why would he tell you about the missing phone?" I asked. "If he were the mole, he'd probably lie. I don't think it's him."

"I'm desperate enough to point at a houseplant and accuse it," Nala said, dropping her face into her hands.

"We'll figure it out," I said. "Project Phoenix is paused, right?"

"Yeah. We can't move forward until we deal with this."

"But how do we find the mole if there's nothing for them to leak?" I asked. "We should continue the project and keep our eyes open."

"I thought about that. But it's risky," she said. "Project Phoenix is all I have, Evan. If it fails or gets leaked before it's ready, I'm ruined."

"Hmm." I grunted. "What's the board saying?"

"Nothing," Nala groaned, rubbing her forehead. "But Marcus is chewing me alive. Keeps hinting I'm a terrible CEO, and if Guy were in charge none of this would've happened."

"He can suck my dick."

She let out a short, humorless laugh. "Maybe he's right? I don't know, Evan. I feel like I'm screwing up."

"Alright, breathe," I told her. "I'll go talk to security and check the cameras with Adam. Someone had to walk into that room."

"Okay," she murmured. "If you find anything, call me."

"Call you with what?" I raised an eyebrow. "Start a campfire outside and send you smoke signals?"

Her face blanched. "Huh?"

"Or I can write a note, strap it to a pigeon, and hope it knows your address."

"What are you—"

"I don't have a phone, Nala. That's the joke."

"Oh." She finally registered it and gave a tiny laugh. "God, I'm slow today. This mole is turning my IQ into room temperature."

"Yeah," I chuckled, getting to my feet. "Anyway, I'm off. Let's hope something shows up."

"Thank you, Evan. Seriously. You and the girls are the only ones I trust in this entire building."

"Always." I leaned down, gave her a quick kiss, then stepped out.

As I walked toward the elevator, the situation played on repeat in my mind. Someone had slipped into the security office without being noticed. Someone grabbed a phone without being seen on camera. Someone who knew exactly what they were doing. This wasn't random. Nothing about it was sloppy.

I hit the elevator button.

A moment later, someone stepped up beside me. Amelia. The same woman from the bus—the perfume one. She adjusted her glasses and stared straight ahead, pretending I wasn't there. Fine by me.

The elevator dinged. We stepped aside for people coming off, then got inside together. As she lifted her finger to press a button, we locked eyes accidentally.

"Oh. Evan." She blinked, surprised. "Hey. Thought you were someone else."

"Morning," I replied. "You look... exhausted. Or distracted. Or both."

"Yeah," she admitted, letting out a breath. "I'm avoiding everyone until this mole is caught. Not talking to anyone. But since there's literally no chance you're involved, I guess you're safe to talk to."

"Thanks," I muttered. "I guess."

Chapter 225: Chapter 225

She hit the button for the ground floor. We stood there listening to the elevator's cheap music—some royalty-free jazz that felt like it wanted to die. Amelia fixed her hair in the mirror. Her glasses sat perfectly on her face, sharp and neat. Her pencil skirt hugged

her hips so tight it was almost unfair, and her white shirt looked like it was giving everything it had to keep her chest contained.

I rubbed my eyes and yawned. Emilia, the mole, the missing phone—none of it was letting me sleep.

"So," Amelia spoke up, still staring at the mirror. "What's your take on the mole? Any theories?"

"No idea," I muttered. "I just hope we catch them before everything goes to shit."

She nodded slowly. "Yeah. Same here."

The doors opened. She stepped out, gave a short little nod, and headed toward the lobby exit. I turned right and walked toward the security office.

Camera hanging above? Good. That one's pointed straight at the door. Whoever went in would be on that feed.

Adam pushed himself off the wall when he saw me coming, hands resting on his belt like he was posing for a poster. "Evan, right? Ms. Nolin told me you'd be dropping by."

"Yep."

"Alright. Come in. I'll get you started on the cameras. I'd stay with you, but I've still got rounds."

"That's fine."

He scanned his card and opened the door.

The security room was trying its best to look professional, but it wasn't winning. On the left, a large desk sat under three monitors—live feeds, recordings, software, all crammed together. A half-eaten cup of instant noodles was glued to the desk with dried sauce. A fork still stuck out like a flag. A walkie-talkie buzzed faintly next to a notebook full of messy handwriting.

On the right side of the room was a tiny bathroom. The door was open enough to see a dripping sink leaking into a stained floor tile. The single stall door was shut. A mop bucket sat in the corner like it had given up on life, and an old ladder was leaned against the wall.

The whole room smelled like the inside of a cheap microwave.

Adam pointed at the largest monitor. "Footage is here. Camera fifteen faces this hallway."

"Where are the phones stored?" I asked.

"Under the desk."

"Under?"

I crouched and stared at two wide plastic storage tubs. Blue and red. Industrial-style. Phones stacked inside like bricks. Hundreds. Each with stickers or tape labeling the owner. My own phone sat right on the top of the red crate, tempting as hell.

Adam sat at the computer and clicked through menus until the hallway feed appeared.

"There." He pushed the chair toward me. "Rewind, fast-forward, jump through timestamps—everything's on the bottom bar. Pretty straightforward. If you need me, I'll be outside."

"Got it."

He nodded once and stepped out.

I slid into the chair, cracked my knuckles, grabbed the mouse, and dragged the timeline all the way back to early morning.

The screen flickered with grey hallway frames.

"Alright," I muttered. "Let's see what the hell you did... you sneaky piece of shit."

I rewound the footage and let it run from nine in the morning. The screen showed the usual company flow—people walking past the hall, some leaving, some arriving. A woman slipped near the elevators and Adam helped her up. Nothing looked strange.

I sped the footage up. If someone went into the security room, it would be obvious. Nine-thirty... nine-fifty... ten. No one even glanced at the door. Adam came in once to count the phones, then left. That was it.

"Did I miss something?" I muttered.

I rewound and watched again, slower this time. Same result. Nobody entered. No suspicious movement. No one hovering around the door. It looked like a completely normal morning.

Alright... maybe Adam counted wrong?

I pulled the crates out and counted the phones myself. It took a little while, but I made sure each one was accounted for. When I reached the last phone, I blinked.

One-fifty-four. Exactly what the number should be.

But Nala said Adam counted one-fifty-three.

"Okay... so he screwed up," I muttered.

Just as I reached to push the crates back under the desk, I heard a soft creak. Not loud, but enough to freeze me for a second. It came from the bathroom.

The stall door had been closed when I came in. Now it was open.

I tensed and walked toward it. Before I even got close, someone shot out from behind the bathroom door and drove their fist straight into my face. My ears rang, my vision shook, and the guy sprinted for the exit.

Adrenaline kicked in instantly. I stumbled once, then ran after him.

"STOP HIM!" I yelled. "HE'S THE MOLE!"

Adam jumped so hard his hand hit his walkie-talkie. The culprit barreled past him, practically pushing him into the wall. I kept chasing, my boots slapping the floor hard as we hit the main corridor.

The guy rushed through the double doors toward the stairwell. He didn't look back. I followed him through the stairwell door and down the steps. He was fast—jumping two at a time. When he hit the last few stairs, he leaped the rest and landed awkwardly but kept running.

I tried to do the same, slipped on the icy water dragged in from boots earlier, and crashed on my side. The pain hit my elbow and hip, but I forced myself up right away and kept going.

He cut between the parked cars, his long coat snapping behind him in the wind. The snow on the asphalt was thin enough to slip on but thick enough to slow me down. I stayed three steps behind him, close enough to make out the cap pulled low on his forehead, the sunglasses hiding half his face, and the neck gaiter covering his jaw.

"Stop!" I yelled, breath already burning my chest. "You fucking rat!"

"Leave me alone!" he shouted back, voice muffled and panicked.

He squeezed between two vans. I followed the same path and clipped my shoulder against one of the mirrors hard enough to sting. He didn't slow down. Once he reached the far edge of the parking lot, he leaped over a low metal fence that separated the lot from the sidewalk. He stumbled on landing, boots skidding across the icy concrete, but he recovered instantly and kept sprinting.

I vaulted the fence right after him and landed better, but he'd already widened the gap again.

The sidewalk in front of TechForge wasn't crowded—most workers were inside. The street was a two-lane road with patches of dirty snow pushed to the curbs. Cars and buses rolled by slowly, their tires hissing in the slush.

He ran for the crosswalk without stopping. A taxi screeched as he bolted right in front of it. I had to slow down or get sent flying over the hood.

He darted into the closest alley.

I followed the trail of footprints stamped into the snow. The alley was narrow, the walls on both sides tagged with old graffiti. Dumpsters lined the left side, overflowing with cardboard and half-frozen trash bags. A few wooden pallets were stacked by a back door, covered with icicles hanging like teeth.

The smell of wet garbage and cold metal filled the space.

At the end of the alley was a brick wall—maybe ten or twelve feet high. A dead end. And the culprit was there, looking for an escape.

For a second I thought I had him cornered.

I pushed harder, boots slipping a little. "Got you now—"

Instead of panicking and backing up, he grabbed hold of a rusted metal ladder bolted to the right wall. I hadn't even noticed it at first. The ladder rattled like it was going to fall apart, but he climbed anyway. His boots hit the rungs fast, almost frantic.

I lunged and reached for his ankle. My fingers brushed the fabric of his pant leg.

He kicked down wildly.

His heel slammed into my forearm. Pain shot up to my elbow, enough to throw me off balance. I lost the grip I barely had.

He reached the top and pulled himself over the roof edge, disappearing from sight.

"Shit—"

I grabbed the ladder and tested a rung. It wobbled under just the pressure of my foot. The bolts were loose, rust creeping around the edges. If I climbed at full speed, the whole thing might rip straight out of the brick.

I cursed under my breath and climbed anyway—but slower. Careful. And that hesitation cost me his lead completely.

By the time I was halfway up, the rooftop was silent. No footsteps. No shadow passing by. He was already gone—maybe jumped to another building, maybe hid behind one of the air vents. Either way, I wasn't catching him now.

I exhaled hard, muscles tight with frustration, and stepped back down onto the wet pavement.

Steam drifted from my breath into the cold air. My heartbeat thudded in my ears. A dull ache throbbed across my cheek where he punched me earlier, and my arm pulsed with the pain of the kick.

The alley was quiet again. The only sounds were the dripping of melting icicles, the distant hum of traffic, and a garbage truck far down the street.

I stared at the wall he climbed and rubbed my jaw.

"Son of a..."

I kicked the side of a dumpster. The metal clanged loudly, echoing between the walls. Snow slid off the lid and smacked the ground in a wet heap.

The irritation settled deep in my gut. The bastard got away. Out of the building, past us, into the streets, and gone.

The mole escaped right from under my nose. No name. No face. No clue. Just a fading trail of footprints in the snow... and a headache that was getting worse by the second.

I pushed myself back toward the main street, breathing through the cold stabbing at my lungs. My jaw hurt from the punch, my ribs ached from slipping in the snow, and the worst part? I had nothing. No face, no ID, no clue who the asshole was.

Cars rolled past, headlights slicing through the falling snow. People hurried by, collars up, boots crunching. I scanned for anyone I could stop.

A woman in a beige coat was about to pass me, holding her phone in one hand. Perfect.

"Hey—sorry," I said, stepping toward her. "Can I borrow your phone for a moment? I really need to call someone. It's urgent."

She flinched a little but nodded. "Uh... sure. Here."

"Thank you." I grabbed the phone carefully and typed Nala's number.

It rang a few seconds. My heart hammered like it wanted out of my chest.

Then she picked up.

"Hello? Who is this?"

"Nala! Lock the whole place down," I said immediately. "Right now. Count who's in the company one by one. Whoever is missing is the mole."

"Evan? What—what's happening?"

"He was hiding in the security room," I said, still panting. "He got away. Just do what I told you, okay? Lock everything down. I'll come to the company in a few minutes."

"Alright," she breathed out. "O-o-okay. Are you okay?"

"Yeah... kinda." I wiped the snow off my jacket, shaking my head. "Don't worry. Just do it."

"Okay. Come back safely, Evan."

"Yeah. I'll try." I handed the phone back to the woman and muttered, "Thanks," then turned and started walking.

Fucking hell... what a mess.

♥□♥□♥□

Chapter 226: Chapter 226

With Adam slumped in the chair, Nala, Marcus, and I were huddled around the monitor, watching the footage. The screen flickered, showing me stepping out of the security room and chasing after the mole. He shoved Adam aside and bolted through the door before I could catch him. The camera cut, now outside, capturing the chase in the parking lot. He weaved between cars like a shadow, impossible to pin down, and then, impossibly, he climbed the fence and disappeared onto the sidewalk. The footage froze there. No more cameras. Nothing.

"My god," Nala breathed, her hand gripping the edge of the desk. "You could've been seriously hurt."

I rubbed the back of my neck, still feeling the rush of adrenaline from the chase. "Yeah... well, luckily, I'm not dead."

"The fuck were you doing?" Marcus growled, turning his glare toward Adam. "Huh? Aren't you the security?"

Adam shrank in his chair, muttering something inaudible.

"I... Mr. Hale, it caught me off guard," he stammered.

"Bullshit," Marcus spat. "You good-for-nothing bastard. You let the mole escape."

Before Adam could respond, Marcus yanked the chair around, forcing him to face him. Adam tried to avert his eyes, like a scared kid caught sneaking cookies.

"You're working with him, right?" Marcus demanded, jabbing a boot at the chair's legs. "That's how he got in here."

"Leave him alone," Nala said sharply. "It caught him off guard—you can see that in the footage."

Marcus's gaze snapped to her. "We pay him so we aren't caught off guard, aren't we, Nala?"

I held up my hands. "Let's just calm down. Have we called the cops yet?"

"Cops?" Marcus barked. "If cops get involved, we're fucked. Throughly fucked. No cops. We handle this ourselves."

Shit. That wasn't exactly reassuring.

"Evan, I'm trusting you on this one," she said, turning to me. "Can you... check the room? Maybe the mole left something behind. We'll wait outside."

Adam hesitated. "I—I can help, Ms. Nolin—"

"You aren't helping anyone," Marcus cut him off. "In our eyes, you could be working with the mole, idiot."

Marcus turned back to me.

"We trust you. Do what you gotta do, Evan."

I nodded. "Hmm. Right..."

I watched as Nala and the others left, shutting the door behind them. The silence hit me like a wall. This was my scene now. Time to think. Step one: retrace the mole's path. I'd seen the footage, but that only got me so far. Then I heard it—a soft noise from the bathroom.

The stall had been closed when I entered earlier. That could only mean one thing: the mole had been hiding here. Worth checking.

"Okay... let's see," I muttered.

Wow. I really was turning into the melancholic detective the girls teased me about. All I needed now was a pipe and a long brown trench coat to complete the look.

I stepped into the bathroom, eyes scanning quickly. To my left, the sink. Next to it, a countertop. I crouched and opened the cabinet underneath. Just old cigarette packs, some unopened noodle packs, nothing unusual.

I closed it and froze in front of the stall. Bootprints. Two of them on the toilet lid.

The mole had been standing there—or crouching—hiding his feet from view. But... how did he even get in? No keycard, no cameras triggered. That didn't make sense.

I stretched, thinking it over, then climbed carefully onto the toilet lid to inspect the ceiling. Square drop ceiling tiles—your classic office grid—stared back at me. One looked slightly misaligned. I reached up, punched it aside, and peered into the space above.

There was enough room to crawl.

I hopped down and grabbed a ladder leaning against the mop bucket. Positioning it under the hole, I climbed carefully, making sure not to disturb the bootprints. My head poked above the ceiling tiles. The space was tight but navigable—a dusty maze of pipes, wires, and HVAC ducts.

"Guess there's only one way to find out."

Crawling felt awkward at first, my knees scraping against sharp edges of metal and dust falling into my eyes. I forced myself to slow down, adjusting my grip on the ductwork above me. The mole had clearly known this space, moving with ease where I struggled. The vent separated into multiple directions, forks branching left and right. The floor below had faint, worn X's marked on the panels, barely visible. Curious. I decided to follow them, hoping they'd lead somewhere useful.

After a few tense minutes, I came to a dead end. My stomach dropped, and I swore under my breath, feeling frustration mix with exhaustion. I leaned against the side of the vent, taking a moment to breathe. My chest heaved, sweat dripping into my eyes, making them sting. I pressed my forehead against the cold metal and tried to calm down. This wasn't just a vent—it was a labyrinth, and one false move could land me in a mess I didn't want to think about.

"Huh?"

Then I looked up. A rope dangled from the ceiling above, frayed but surprisingly sturdy. My fingers trembled slightly as I reached for it. I took a deep breath, planted my feet on

the vent floor, and hoisted myself up. The climb was short, but my forearms screamed from the effort, and the rope swayed slightly with each movement. I winced as my knuckles scraped against the rough fibers, leaving tiny streaks of blood.

When I reached the next section, I paused, letting my legs dangle for a moment, catching my breath. The air here was even drier, dust swirling in the faint light filtering through the tiles above.

"Gotta move. Come on, Evan."

I crawled again, muscles burning, sweat slicking my palms. The vent twisted sharply to the right, forcing me to pivot awkwardly, knees scraping metal. My breathing came in short, ragged bursts. The further I went, the tighter the space became, the metal walls pressing in on me. Each inch forward was a fight against fatigue, dust, and the claustrophobic weight of the ceiling.

Another fork appeared. I paused, noting more faded X's on the panels below. I followed them. A few minutes later, I hit another dead end. Damn it.

Then I saw it: another rope, hanging from above, thicker this time. Unlike the last one, it wasn't frayed, just dusty. I tested it gently. Solid. Thank god. I wrapped my hands around it, took a deep breath, and began the climb. My legs kicked weakly against the vent floor, scraping gravel and metal, but I kept my balance, slowly pulling myself higher. At the top, I stretched my arms over a support beam, hoisting my body fully onto it. My chest burned, lungs screaming, but I forced myself to pause, letting my body settle before moving again.

Crawling resumed, slower now. And it lasted for fucking hours... or so how it felt. I'd come to another dead end, and find another rope. Climb, continue. The same shit.

Finally, I reached the end. Only one exit remained. A small grate, ceiling-level, stared at me like a portal to freedom. I rested my forehead against it, taking a long, shaky breath. Kicking it hard, it popped out with a metallic clang, startling me. The sudden rush of fresh air hit my face, a mix of wind, ozone, and the faint scent of rain.

I slid through the opening, muscles trembling from the exertion, heart hammering in my chest. I lay flat for a moment, catching my breath, letting the cool air wash over me, eyes scanning my surroundings.

I was on the roof.

The city sprawled around me. Dim lights reflected off glass and concrete, the hum of traffic far below. Satellite dishes and HVAC units crowded the space, steam rising from vents like ghostly tendrils.

"Fucking hell."

A door caught my eye—plain, nothing fancy, just the kind of simple, beige metal door you'd see on any office building. I walked toward it, boots crunching against the gravel, the wind tugging at my hair. I reached for the handle and tried it. Locked.

I stepped back, brushing dust off my jacket, eyes sweeping across the rooftop. Pipes, vents, and AC units sprawled out like a tiny city, their shadows stretching across the gravel. Through the narrow window in the door, I could just make out a flight of stairs leading down into the building.

I tried the handle again. Locked.

I forced it harder. No give.

No way it was opening, this thing was solid. Which meant the mole had access. He had a key.

I exhaled hard, the kind of breath that carried the last mile of the chase with it. My hand slipped into my pocket, fingers brushing past lint before finding my crumpled cigarette pack. I tapped one out, lit it, and drew in a slow breath as the smoke curled into the night.

Below, the neon city glowed, sharp, loud, alive, nothing like how I felt after chasing that damn mole across half the district.

"Well," I muttered, a grin tugging at my lips despite the exhaustion. "Shit just got interesting..."

♥□♥□♥□

Chapter 227: Chapter 227

Who knew a company would have its own medical team?

I sat on the examination bed, legs dangling slightly while a nurse dabbed some antiseptic across my shoulder. The sting made me grit my teeth. The room itself looked more like a mini-clinic than some corporate first-aid closet. Bright, white LED lights hummed overhead, illuminating everything with that sterile, too-clean glow. Cabinets lined the walls—glass-fronted ones filled with neatly labeled supplies, bandages, alcohol wipes, sealed syringes. The smell of disinfectant hung thick in the air.

A heart-rate monitor blinked idle beside me, reflecting faint green light across the metal countertop. A rolling medical cart sat next to the nurse, filled with gauze, wraps, little metal tools clinking every time she reached for one.

And standing a few feet behind her—arms crossed, posture stiff, eyes dark with worry—was Nala. She didn't blink, didn't look away. She watched every move the nurse made like she was making sure no one dared hurt me further.

"I'm really okay, Nala," I said. "You can go."

"No way." Her voice was firm, absolute.

I sighed, slumping my shoulders just a little—then hissed when the nurse pressed the gauze down harder than expected. "God... shit."

Nala's jaw tightened. She bit her lower lip—not out of worry, but pure anger. "This damn mole..."

"How's the lockdown going?" I asked through clenched teeth. "You manage to count the workers?"

"Nothing will come from that," she muttered, eyes staying on the nurse's hands. "There were twenty-five people on break. And eighty-two that were out for lunch."

"Fuck," I said, rubbing my forehead with my uninjured hand. "I really thought something might've come from that."

"Yeah..." she whispered, frustrated.

"At least we know how the culprit got to the security room," I said. "He used that ventilation system."

Nala nodded slowly. "He crawled through, grabbed his phone, then leaked whatever information he learned today. Then I'm guessing he doubled back to drop the phone off so no one would notice it was missing."

"That's when I caught him," I said. "He probably couldn't go back into the vent because he knew the ladder would make noise."

"It's good," Nala said softly. "He panicked and ran. At least he didn't wait in the stall and let you walk away. If he got the jump on you..."

She didn't finish the sentence. Her eyes shifted downward.

"Hmm. He's an amateur anyway."

"It's done," the nurse finally announced. She peeled the gloves off with a snap. "Your shoulder won't scar. As for your hands—avoid using them too much for a day or two, Mr. Marlowe."

"Right. Thank you."

I stood, slowly, groaning at the pull in my shoulder. I grabbed my jacket, but before I could slip it on, Nala stepped in front of me, took it gently from my hand, and helped me into it. Her fingers brushed my arms, careful, almost delicate compared to her usual confidence. I rolled my shoulder—sharp sting, but nothing I couldn't handle—and exhaled.

"I knew I shouldn't have skipped P.E.'s rope climbing back in high school," I said with a weak laugh.

Nala didn't laugh. Instead, she turned to the nurse. "Is he really going to be okay?"

"Yes, don't worry, Ms. Nolin," the nurse replied with a small smile. "He'll be just fine."

We stepped out of the room together, the door clicking shut behind us.

The hallway outside had changed since earlier—it felt heavier, thicker with tension. The fluorescent lights overhead flickered slightly, casting everyone in a pale, uneasy glow. Employees walked past in hurried steps, their faces tight with stress, their shoulders hunched. No one spoke. Not a word. The usual office chatter was gone, replaced by the eerie silence of a place on edge.

Two security guards stood at opposite ends of the hallway, watching everyone closely. Their hands hovered near their belts, brows furrowed, swapping looks that said they were just as stressed as the workers.

I reached out and pressed the elevator button. The metal panel clicked, a faint glow lighting up under my finger.

We stood there in silence, waiting, the tension settling over us like fog.

You could practically hear hearts beating in that hallway.

"Everyone's on their toes, huh?" I asked.

"They are." Nala adjusted her ponytail with a tired sigh. "And for a good reason. What you went through... it scared them."

"It scared me too," I muttered. "Thank God he didn't have any weapons."

"Mhm."

The elevator dinged open, and we walked in. She pressed the ground floor, and the soft music started playing. Kind of unfitting for everything going on. Nala turned toward the mirror, trying to fix her hair and smooth down her pencil skirt. Her ponytail was half

falling apart and she looked exhausted. All the stress and running around was dragging her down.

Then she looked at me through the mirror—eyes worried, almost studying me. I didn't realize she'd been watching until I tilted my head and caught her gaze. I just smiled and threw a peace sign at her reflection.

"You're not shaken at all," she said. "If I were you, I'd be... traumatized right now."

"Hey, I grew up in some shitty neighborhoods," I said. "I'm used to this kind of crap. What I'm not used to is all this—moles, corporate bullshit, secret projects."

Nala chuckled. "Corporate bullshit, huh?"

"Yup. That's even scarier."

The doors opened and we walked out. Nala slowed down halfway across the lobby, taking a long breath. The entrance was locked; two security guards were blocking it. Workers standing behind them were arguing and complaining that they couldn't leave. The guards weren't budging.

"You earned a break," Nala said, turning to me. "Can you drive home safely?"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm good," I said. "I think I'll just go lie down."

She leaned toward my ear. "And have some fun with our maid?"

I shook my head. "Nah. I'm actually gonna lie down. Like, die on the bed type of lying down."

She laughed under her breath and signaled the security guards. They immediately understood, stepped aside, and unlocked the door just for me. A few workers tried to slip out behind me, but the guards blocked them again.

"I'm off, then," I said. "Be safe, Nala."

"You too," she replied softly. "See you at home."

♥□♥□♥□

I pushed open the penthouse door and stepped inside. The whole place was silent; no heels clicking on the marble, no music, no voices. Everyone was still at the office. I kicked my shoes off by the entrance, tossed my keys into the bowl on the console table, and headed straight for the kitchen.

I opened the fridge, grabbed a cold beer from the door shelf, twisted the cap off, and took a long pull. The chill felt perfect after the day I'd had. I carried the bottle with me, set it on the dining table, and wandered down the hallway toward the bedrooms.

Minne's door was cracked open about six inches, soft light spilling out.

I nudged it wider and looked in.

Holy fuck.

Minne was lying completely naked on top of her covers, knees bent and spread wide, one hand working slow circles over her clit while the other was at her mouth, two fingers sliding in and out between her lips as she sucked on them shyly. Her eyes were closed, cheeks bright pink, little muffled whimpers slipping out every time her fingers pressed a little harder.

"Well, well," I said quietly, leaning against the doorframe. "I thought our maid was supposed to be working."

Her eyes snapped open. She froze, face going scarlet in half a second, and yanked both hands away like she'd touched a hot stove. "M-Master! I—I thought the apartment was empty—"

I stepped inside, closed the door softly behind me, and crossed the room before she could grab a blanket. I caught her wrist gently, guided her back down onto the mattress, and eased her knees apart again.

"Shh, it's okay, baby." I settled between her thighs, drinking in the sight of her flushed, glistening pussy—so pink, so wet, so damn cute. "Look at you. You're soaked. Were you thinking about me?"

She bit her lip, gave the tiniest nod, voice barely a whisper. "Y-yes, Master..."

"That's my good girl."

I leaned down and dragged my tongue slowly up her slit, tasting her sweetness. She jolted, a soft cry escaping her lips. I did it again, slower this time, parting her folds with the flat of my tongue before circling her entrance and flicking up to her clit. She was trembling already.

Her hands flew back to her mouth, sucking on those two fingers again, trying so hard to stay quiet. I let her. I sealed my lips around her clit and sucked gently, then a little harder, fluttering my tongue in quick flicks. Her thighs shook against my shoulders.

I slid one finger inside her—tight, hot, dripping—and curled it upward, stroking that perfect spot that made her back arch off the bed. She whimpered around her fingers, hips lifting toward my mouth.

I added a second finger, scissoring slowly, stretching her while my tongue kept circling her clit in steady, wet strokes. My free hand slid up her stomach, cupped one small breast, rolled her nipple between my fingers until it stood stiff and needy.

"You're so pretty like this," I murmured against her, letting my breath tease her clit. "So wet for your Master."

She moaned, muffled and shy, rocking into my mouth. I licked faster, sucked harder, matching the rhythm of my curling fingers. Her walls fluttered around me, thighs trembling harder.

I pulled back just long enough to blow a cool stream of air over her clit and watched her squirm. "Let me hear you, baby. Don't hide those sweet sounds."

Minne pulled her fingers from her mouth with a soft, wet pop, both hands clutching the sheets instead. "Please... please don't stop, Master..."

I didn't.

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I dove back in, tongue lashing her clit, fingers pumping faster, thumb brushing the sensitive spot just above her entrance. I moved up her body just enough to take one nipple into my mouth, sucking in time with my tongue below, grazing it gently with my teeth.

Her breathing turned into soft, desperate cries—"Master, Master, please—" over and over, higher and needier each time.

I curled my fingers harder, sucked her clit between my lips, and fluttered my tongue fast and relentless.

That broke her.

Minne's whole body went stiff, thighs clamping around my head, back arching clear off the mattress. A long, shaky cry tore out of her as she came, hard, pussy pulsing wildly around my fingers, fresh wetness coating my hand and chin. I kept licking gently, drawing it out until she was trembling, oversensitive, pushing weakly at my shoulders with little whimpers.

I finally eased off, pressing soft kisses to the inside of her thigh, her hip, her stomach, working my way up until I was hovering over her flushed, dazed face. She was glowing, eyes glassy, lips parted.

I brushed a strand of hair from her cheek and smiled.

"Feel better now, baby?"

Minne nodded, still catching her breath, then reached up, wrapped her arms around my neck, and pulled me down into a soft, grateful kiss that tasted like her and felt like home.

Minne's chest was still fluttering with tiny aftershocks, skin glowing with a faint sheen of sweat, when she looked up at me through half-lidded eyes.

"Now it's Master's turn to feel better," she whispered, voice soft and shy, but the hunger underneath was unmistakable.

I gave her a slow, wicked smile and stood just long enough to kick my jeans and boxers away. My cock sprang free, thick and aching, the head already glistening with pre-cum. I crawled back onto the bed, knelt between her spread thighs, and leaned forward until my shaft rested heavy and burning-hot across her soft belly. A fat bead of pre-cum leaked out instantly, painting a shiny trail over her skin.

Minne's small hands were on me in seconds. Delicate fingers wrapped around the swollen head, her index finger tracing slow, teasing circles through the slickness, spreading it, feeling how hot and hard I was for her. She bit her lower lip, cheeks flushed scarlet, eyes wide with that perfect mix of nerves and excitement.

Then, without a word, she hooked her hands behind her own knees and pulled her legs back until they were almost pressed to her shoulders. The movement opened her completely, her soaked, puffy pussy and tight little pink asshole completely exposed, glistening under the bedroom light. She held herself there, offering everything, trembling just a little.

I gripped the base of my cock, lined up, and pushed.

One long, smooth thrust and I sank into her to the root. Minne's back arched clear off the bed, a sweet, broken cry spilling from her lips as her walls fluttered and milked me in rhythmic pulses.

"Fuck, baby," I groaned, holding perfectly still for a heartbeat just to feel her squeeze. "I'm talking to Jasmine tonight. Gonna get you all oiled up and ready for me, because tomorrow I'm sliding into this perfect little ass," I said, brushing my thumb in a slow circle around her untouched hole.

Minne's eyes flew open even wider. "M-my... ass?" The word came out half-shocked, half-moan, but her pussy clenched so hard around my cock I almost saw stars.

I leaned down and kissed her, deep, filthy, swallowing every little gasp, then trailed my mouth lower, catching one small, stiff nipple between my teeth. I sucked hard while I started to move.

Slow at first. Long, deep strokes that dragged every inch of me against her sensitive walls. Each time I bottomed out she let out the sweetest sound, half sigh, half whimper, her fingers digging into my shoulders like she was afraid I'd disappear.

"You feel so fucking good, Minne," I rasped against her skin, hips rolling in a steady rhythm. "This tight little pussy was made to take Master's cock, wasn't it?"

"Y-yes, Master," she panted, nodding frantically, voice trembling. "Only for you... always only for you..."

I picked up speed, hips snapping harder, the bedframe creaking in protest. Her small tits bounced with every thrust, nipples hard and pink and begging for attention. I caught one between my teeth, tugged just enough to make her cry out, then soothed it with long, wet licks while I pounded deeper.

Her first orgasm hit like a wave. A sudden, sharp cry tore from her throat, back bowing off the mattress, pussy clamping down so tight I had to fight to keep moving. I slowed just enough to let her feel every inch drag through her spasming walls, then sped up again while she was still shaking, chasing the next one.

"Again," I growled, voice rough with need. "I want you to cum on my cock again, baby. Show me how much you love being fucked like this."

Minne whimpered, nodding, legs trembling in her own grip. I shifted my angle, grinding the head of my cock against her front wall on every stroke, my thumb finding her swollen clit and rubbing tight circles.

"Master... oh god... it's too much..." she gasped, but her hips rolled up to meet every thrust, chasing the pleasure.

"Not too much. Perfect. You're fucking perfect."

I kissed her again while I drove into her harder, faster, the wet slap of skin on skin filling the room.

Her second climax hit even harder than the first. Her whole body seized, thighs quivering violently, a broken wail tearing from her throat as her pussy gushed around me in hot, rhythmic pulses. I could feel every contraction, every squeeze, and it almost dragged me over the edge with her.

"Oh, fuck, Minne. I'm gonna cum." I moaned. "Mm... fuck. Fuck. Fuck."

"Please, Master. Give it to me..."

I slammed into her a few more times, riding the aftershocks, then pulled out at the very last second. My hand wrapped around my slick cock and I stroked once, twice, three times.

I came with a low groan, thick ropes of cum shooting across her belly, her tits, splattering over her ribs and dripping down the sides of her waist. Pulse after pulse, I painted her skin until there was nothing left and I was shaking just as hard as she was.

We collapsed sideways together, limbs tangled, breathing ragged. I pulled her into my arms, pressing lazy kisses to her temple, her cheek, the corner of her mouth while the aftershocks rolled through us both.

Minne curled against my chest, sticky and glowing, fingertips tracing slow, idle patterns through the mess I'd left on her stomach. She looked up at me, eyes soft and sated, and gave the tiniest, happiest smile.

"Thank you, Master," she whispered, voice small and hoarse.

I kissed her forehead, holding her tighter. "Anytime, baby. Any fucking time."

Minne's small hand found mine, guiding my index finger through the warm, sticky mess on her stomach. She scooped up a thick dollop of my cum, brought it to her lips, and slipped my finger into her mouth. Her tongue swirled slowly, deliberately, big doe eyes locked on mine the whole time as she sucked me clean.

My spent cock twitched against my thigh, then started hardening again almost instantly.

"Okay," I rasped, voice rough, "how the hell am I supposed to calm down when you do shit like that?"

Minne pulled my finger out with a soft pop, cheeks pink. "Oh... I'm sorry, Master. If I disturbed you I'll—"

"Get on my dick," I cut her off, rolling fully onto my back. "I want you to bounce on it. Now."

"Yes, Master!" The words left her mouth in an eager squeak.

She scrambled up, straddling my hips in seconds. One tiny hand wrapped around my now fully-hard cock, lined me up, and she sank down in one smooth drop. A breathy moan spilled from her lips as she took every inch, her slick walls still swollen and sensitive from earlier.

"Fuck, yes," I groaned, hands settling on her narrow waist. "Ride me, baby. Show Master how grateful you are."

Minne braced her palms on my chest and started moving: slow rolls of her hips at first, then quick, eager bounces that made her small tits jiggle and her breath hitch. Every time she slammed down, the wet sound of her pussy swallowing me filled the room.

"Look at you," I growled, thumbs stroking the soft skin just above her hips. "So greedy for cock. You love being full of Master, don't you?"

"Y-yes," she whimpered, speeding up, thighs trembling. "Love Master's big cock... feels so good inside me..."

I slid one hand up, cupped a breast, rolled her nipple between my fingers. "Faster, baby. Make that pretty pussy cream all over me again."

She obeyed instantly, bouncing harder, head tipping back, little cries spilling out with every drop. I could feel her getting close already, walls fluttering, breath hitching, thighs shaking.

"Master... I'm..." She muttered. "Oh... I'm..."

I moved my hips upward, sliding my cock all the way inside. "Do it, Minne."

That sent her over.

Minne's whole body locked up, a high, broken moan tearing from her throat as her pussy clamped down in rhythmic pulses, soaking my lap. She kept riding through it, frantic and shaking, until the waves finally slowed.

I gripped her hips hard, thrusting up to meet her a few more times. The sight of her, flushed, sweaty, utterly wrecked, pushed me right to the edge.

"Fuck—here it comes—"

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I pulled her down one last time and let go. My cock throbbed hard inside her, pulse after thick pulse of cum flooding her pussy until I could feel it leaking out around my base. The orgasm rolled through me in long, heavy waves, hips jerking with every spurt, breath ragged.

When it finally ebbed, Minne collapsed forward, boneless, her head settling on my chest right over my racing heart. I was still buried deep inside her, softening slowly, our combined mess already starting to drip.

I brought one hand up, stroking her damp hair gently, patting her head in slow, soothing circles.

"Good girl," I murmured, voice low and warm. "Such a perfect good girl for Master."

She made a tiny, happy sound and nuzzled closer, completely spent and utterly content.

- Sexual Activity Completed

Partner: Minne

EXP Gained: +210

Star Rating: 4.5 ★★★★

Reason: -

Huh, 210 EXP. Not bad. To think I was scraping by on five or ten when I first started. Things have changed quite drastically.

Another UI flickered into view, showing Minne's interest had ticked up three points. I'd learned by now that raw sex alone rarely moved the needle with her. This time it did. Must've been the way I treated her, like she was actually worth something.

"Thank you for..." Minne started, voice soft against my chest, "not being like Guy, Master."

My stomach twisted. "Oh..."

Just basic human decency and the system rewarded me. Fucking Guy. No wonder the bar was in hell.

I pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I'm the lucky one, Minne. You're one of the best things that's ever happened to me."

She let out the tiniest, happiest giggle. "Hehe... thank you."

WOMEN - INTERACTIONS

=====

Jasmine: Interest: 40 / 60★★

Kayla: Interest: 13 / 60★

Tessa: Interest: 27 / 40★

Kim: Interest: 35 / 40★

Delilah: Interest: 75 / 80★★★

Cora: Interest: 100 / 100★★★★★

Mendy: Interest: 6 /20

Nala: Interest: 66 /80★★★

Penelope: Interest: 5 /20

Minne: Interest: 20 /40★

Ivy: Interest: 2/20

=====

Progress:

★★☆☆☆ - 20 Interest: Milestone reward

★★☆☆☆ - 40 Interest: Milestone reward

★★★☆☆ - 60 Interest: Milestone reward

★★★★☆ - 80 Interest: Milestone reward

★★★★★ -100 Interest: Milestone reward

=====

Select a woman to track progress.

Another milestone hit. While my cock slowly softened inside her and I kept stroking her hair, the reward popped up: 240 EXP and nothing else. I'd take it.

Evan Marlowe (Lvl 11)

Age: 21

Height: 180 cm

Weight: 74 kg

EXP: [ ] 1022/2970

Minne carefully slid off me, a trickle of cum following her as it ran down her thigh. She stood at the edge of the bed and gave a small, polite bow. "May I clean myself, Master?"

"Go ahead, baby."

"Thank you." She padded toward her bathroom, bare feet silent on the floor.

I pulled my jeans back on, buckled up, and left the room. Grabbed my half-warm beer from the dining table on the way, then dragged a chair over to the massive window overlooking the city. Snow was starting to stick now. New Year's Eve in a couple days.

I lit a cigarette, took a long drag, and just stared out at the lights.

Ten o'clock today. The empty apartment. The blood on the ceiling. The mole. All of it was closing in.

The shower hissed on behind Minne's door. For a second I pictured joining her, water running down her small frame, pressing her against the tile, but I shut the thought down. She was still easing into all this. No need to push.

Another drag. Then a knock at the penthouse door got my attention. Who would be here at this hour? Everyone was meant to be on lockdown at the office.

I stubbed the cigarette out, walked over, and checked the peephole.

Emma.

Nala's cosplay friend. The one who'd recommended Minne for the job in the first place. She stood there in a black hoodie and ripped jeans, hands in her pockets, expression flat. Half-lidded eyes, the kind of lazy smile that never quite reached them. Like she was permanently unimpressed with the world.

I opened the door. "Hey."

"Hello," she said, voice flat and serious. "Evan, right?"

"Yep." I stepped aside. "Nala's not home, and Minne's in the shower, but come in."

"Thank you." Emma unwrapped a long black scarf, shrugged off her coat, and hung both on the rack like she'd done it a hundred times. I gestured toward the living room and she followed without a word.

We sat, me on the long sectional, her on the opposite couch. The air-con hummed overhead, sucking the last traces of cigarette smoke out of the room.

"Coffee?" I offered.

"No thanks. I'm actually here for Minne."

"She'll be out in a minute." The shower had just cut off down the hall.

Emma dropped onto the opposite couch. The silence stretched just long enough to get awkward.

I cleared my throat. "So... I heard you have a YouTube channel. Minne said it's pretty big."

Emma blinked once, slow, like a cat. "A YouTube channel."

"Yeah."

For a second she just stared at me, expression unreadable. Then the corner of her mouth twitched, barely a smile, more like a warning.

Before she could answer, Minne stepped into the living room.

Fuck me.

She was a walking wet dream: sheer black babydoll so thin it clung to every curve, lace cups doing absolutely nothing to hide her stiff pink nipples. The matching thong was little more than a whisper of fabric between her thighs, held up by a delicate garter belt

and glossy thigh-high stockings that made her slim legs look endless. Freshly showered skin still glowed, damp hair tumbling over her shoulders, cheeks already pink with excitement.

"M-Master," she started breathlessly, clutching a tiny silk robe she clearly forgot to put on, "I bought this yesterday just for—"

Her eyes landed on Emma.

Time stopped.

Minne's face went nuclear red. A high, mortified squeak escaped her lips. Emma's gaze did a slow, deliberate sweep from the gartered thighs up to the barely-covered tits, then she lifted one hand and gave a single, solemn thumbs-up.

Minne shrieked, spun around, and bolted. The bedroom door slammed like a gunshot.

Emma turned back to me, deadpan. "So. Same as Guy. Fucking the maid because she's the maid. Noted."

"No, wait—"

She snorted, finally cracking a crooked grin. "I'm kidding. Minne won't shut up about how you're apparently some saint." She kicked off her boots, stretched her legs out on the ottoman, and flexed her feet in thin black ankle socks with tiny white cats printed on them. "And no, I don't have a YouTube channel."

I exhaled, tension bleeding out. "Okay... then what do you do?"

Emma wiggled her socked toes lazily, watching me with those half-lidded eyes. "I sell pictures of these. Sometimes the socks come off. Sometimes I wear panties for three days straight and mail them to whoever pays the most. That's the 'channel' Minne was too embarrassed to explain."

I glanced down automatically. Her feet were small, high-arched, toes flexing playfully against the soft cotton. Something about the casual way she showed them off, like she knew exactly what she was doing, sent heat straight to my groin.

"You're staring," she said, voice low and amused. "That's fifty bucks for the socks, a hundred if you want them on my feet while I take the pictures. Special rate for friends of Minne."

I dragged my eyes back up. "People actually pay that?"

Emma's smirk widened, slow and dangerous. "Last pair went for four hundred. Some guy begged me to step in cake frosting first." She tilted her head, cat-like again. "Want to find out why?"

"Nah, thanks." I shrugged. "But seriously, thanks for the offer."

Minne walked in a few seconds later, wearing her maid outfit. She tugged at the hem of her dress like she was trying to make it longer, then stepped into the living room with her chin almost glued to her chest. Poor girl looked like she wanted to evaporate. Honestly, if I were her, I'd dig a hole in the carpet and crawl in.

"I, uh..." I rubbed the back of my neck. "I gotta go. Got some stuff to take care of."

"Would you let Minne go for a few hours, 'Master' Evan?" Emma asked, voice flat as always. "She wanted to go shopping today."

"Sure, sure," I said, looking at Minne. "You don't have to ask me for permission like that, alright? If you wanna take a break, just tell me you're going and that's it."

"B-but Master—" Minne tried.

"I'm off," I cut in as I stood. "Nice talking to you, Emma. And... again, thanks for the offer, I guess."

"Anytime." She smiled lazily. "Bye, 'Master' Evan."

I sighed. "Yeah, yeah."

I walked to the rack, grabbed my jacket, and slipped it on. When I glanced back, both of them were watching me—Minne giving a tiny nervous bow, Emma waving at me with those bored, half-closed eyes of hers. God, she was a weird one.

I stepped out the door, rolling my shoulder to loosen up. Then I headed toward the elevator and hit the button.

Guess I was going to kill time outside until ten.

"Great," I muttered. "How the fuck am I supposed to wait now..."

♥□♥□♥□

Chapter 230: Chapter 230

I jolted awake when someone knocked on the car window. My neck hurt from the angle I'd knocked out in, the heater was blowing warm air straight at my face, and outside the snow drifted down in slow, lazy flakes. It was already night—clouds hiding whatever

stars might've been there, street completely empty except for the two silhouettes beside my car.

Tuck and Greg.

Tuck knocked again. "Wake up, princess."

I opened the door and stepped out, rubbing my eyes. "Ugh... yeah, yeah. I'm up."

"You waited here the whole time?" Tuck asked, eyebrow raised.

"Yeah." I checked my phone. "Like six hours."

Greg let out a quiet sigh. "Come on. Let's get this shit done."

We headed toward the apartment building. The front door was cracked open—someone didn't bother closing it properly. We slipped inside, boots squeaking against the damp floor, then climbed the stairs. I swear my chest got tighter the higher we went. Felt like my heartbeat was thudding in my ears louder than our footsteps. Every step felt wrong, like my legs wanted to go backward instead.

Finally, we reached Emilia's floor. Her door wasn't fully shut either. Tuck crouched and pulled out a small roll-up pouch full of picks and tools. She didn't even need the whole set—two twists, a click, and the door gave way.

We slipped in one by one. I shut the door behind us.

Tuck already had his gloves on while Greg kneeled beside his backpack and unzipped it. He pulled out a rectangular UV-scanner—looked like a chunky black flashlight with a three-inch panel attached—then handed it to Tuck. With a deep breath, he flicked a switch, and the lights in the room seemed to dissolve into this strange violet-blue wash.

The effect hit fast.

Before the tech lit up the place, everything looked normal. Just a regular messy apartment.

But under the UV?

"Jesus..." I breathed.

There was blood everywhere.

On the floor in long, fat swipes. On the walls in wide, uneven smears. On the curtains—streaks running straight down from the top rod. Even on the ceiling. Someone had tried to clean, but Tuck's scanner made every missed spot glow like neon paint.

I stepped closer and looked down. Under my boot, faint wiped circles glowed—someone scrubbed the floor hard but not enough to hide anything from this kind of tech.

Tuck grunted. "Shit. That's too much blood for someone to walk away from."

My throat tightened. "Emilia..."

Greg stayed quiet, but the way his jaw set told me he was thinking the same thing I was.

"Yo," Greg finally said, crouching and pointing at a trail near the door. "Check this. Pattern's off. Not a drag. Looks like... walking. Someone stepping through their own blood and heading toward the exit."

I moved beside him, and we followed the glowing footprints—they led straight to the front door.

I opened it, hand a little shaky, and Tuck raised the wand beside me, sweeping the hallway.

"Whoever it was walked out on their own feet," he muttered.

Or walked out carrying her.

My stomach twisted hard.

We followed the tiny droplets of blood up the stairs. Under the faint UV glow from Greg's scanner, the trail looked weak, like Emilia barely made it this far. Each little spot faded the closer we got to the next floor. When we reached the landing, the last drop sat right in front of a door with MERIDINN written on it.

Tuck crouched and checked the floor. "Trail ends here. Nothing else."

"So what do we do?" I asked. "Knock?"

"What choice do we have?" Greg muttered.

"I could pick the lock," Tuck said. "These doors are junk. I can open it in ten seconds."

"No," Greg said right away. "No illegal shit, boys. Hide the UV light. Evan, knock."

"You sure?"

"Yes. Go."

Tuck shoved the scanner into Greg's backpack. I stepped forward and knocked. Something or someone shuffled on the other side—a scuffle, then a thud, then a quiet hiss of pain.

The door cracked open.

An older man in his fifties stood there rubbing his knee. He looked jittery, like someone who'd been startled awake or someone trying to hide. Maybe Emilia was inside. Maybe not. I forced myself to keep moving.

Tuck kept his voice flat. "Evening."

"Sir," Greg added. "We're friends of Emilia. We knocked on her door and got no answer. Do you know where she is?"

"Emilia?" he asked, confused. "Who is that?"

"You know who she is," I said, stepping forward. "Tell us where she is and things don't have to get ugly."

"Ugly?" He backed up. "L-leave me alone!"

He tried to shut the door. Tuck shoved it back and grabbed the man by the throat, forcing him backward into the apartment. Greg looked around quick to see if anyone could hear, then we slipped inside and shut the door.

I stepped into the living room and froze. The TV blared, some chipper weather guy warning that tomorrow's snowstorm would bury the city. The couches were a mess: crumpled chip bags, half-eaten crusts, sticky rings from forgotten beers. A cheap humidifier wheezed on top of the TV stand, doing absolutely nothing to mask the sour stench of stale beer and something worse underneath it.

I dropped into a crouch behind the nearest couch, heart already kicking.

That's when I saw it. Blood. Not a smear, not a drop, five perfect, glistening finger marks soaked deep into the fabric, like someone had collapsed right here, slapped a desperate hand against the cushion, and tried to push themselves back up.

"Hey!" I called out, voice cracking. "Blood here. A shit-ton of blood."

Tuck didn't even glance back. He yanked the guy up by the collar, slammed him against the wall, and pinned him there with a thick forearm across his throat.

"Where's Emilia?" Tuck growled, low enough that the words felt like gravel.

"I... she's in my bedroom!" the man choked out, eyes bulging. "I swear to God!"

"Bedroom..." I muttered, already moving, the word tasting like rust in my mouth.

The first door opened to a bathroom: blood-soaked bandages heaped in the sink, a pair of tweezers lying on the cracked tile, still wet and red.

The second door was already ajar. I shoved it the rest of the way.

There she was.

Emilia lay on the bed. Her stomach had been wrapped tight with bandages. Her left eye was a black-purple bruise. Cuts marred her arms. She looked like she'd been through hell, but she was breathing. Slow, ragged, but breathing.

Alive.

NEW MAIN QUEST-COMPLETE!

Title: Safe & Sound

Task: Make sure Emilia is safe.

Reward: 750c

Tuck stepped into the doorway holding the man by the collar. Greg hovered behind him, jaw clenched, clearly not happy about the house invasion but keeping his gun ready.

"That the girl?" Greg asked, voice flat. "Damn."

"She's hurt bad," I said, kneeling beside the bed.

The landlord hovered in the doorway, wringing his hands. "You're... not here to kill her? Guy... are you not his men?"

"FUCK GUY!" I roared. The walls practically shook.

"What happened?" Tuck asked, calm as ever, still pinning the old man with one arm.

"His—his men came," the landlord stammered. "They jumped Emilia. Beat her bloody. But she—she fought back. Knocked both of them out cold and ran. Ended up here, banging on my door at three in the morning."

"To here?" I said. "Why?"

"I'm the landlord. I, uh, she—she knew I was a doctor. She was bleeding everywhere. I told her she needed a hospital, but she begged me—no hospitals. Said if Guy found out she was alive, he'd send someone to finish it."

"Fuck," I breathed.

Greg's face had gone the color of old paper. "Guy?"

"Yeah," the landlord whispered. "TechForge's ex-CEO. The Guy Nolin."

"Jesus Christ, Tuck." Greg took a step back. "We're going up against a guy who golfs with the chief of police. I'm out. We are leaving this house right now and we are never speaking of this again."

Tuck let the old man go with a disgusted shove. "You a pussy Gaper."

"Look," the landlord said, voice trembling, "I was a doctor once. I did what I could—stitched the worst of it, cleaned her up—but she's lost too much blood. She needs real care."

I was already thinking. "TechForge has a private medical room-thingie. Full trauma setup. No public records."

Tuck frowned. "How do you know that?"

"I've been there, visiting Nala once," I lied. "Forget about that, Tuck. Help me get her up."

Tuck slid his arms under Emilia like she weighed nothing and settled her across my shoulders in a fireman's carry. She was burning with fever, dead weight, breath shallow and wet.

Greg just stood there, disbelief carved into every line of his face. The name Nolin had hit him like a bullet—he was already tucking tail, already calculating how fast he could disappear.

One surname. That was all it took.

I adjusted Emilia's weight and headed for the door. Snow was starting to fall outside, fat silent flakes that stuck to the blood on my sleeves.

SHOP

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- Aphrodisiac Drink (10c)
- Silk Lingerie Set (25c)
- Sensual Massage Oil (15c)
- Mystery Pleasure Toy (30c)
- Flirt Potion (20c)
- Hypnotic Perfume (40c)
- Time Stop (90c)
- 500 Dollars (50c)
- 1 Ability Point (150c)
- 1 Mastery Point (160c)
- Main Quest Unlock (Bought)

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Credits: 950c



I swiped away the UI and then groaned as I walked.

She was alive...

Phew.

Fucking phew.

