

DON'T MESS WITH THE GIRL WITH CANDY

Chapter 9

"It's insured," Shanley replied, his voice a low, pleasant rumble. His eyes were locked on hers. "If it gets damaged, you won't have to pay."

No payment required?

"Alright, then." With her main concern addressed, Juniper agreed readily. Before getting in, she took a quick photo of her electric scooter's location to have Luella send someone to pick it up.

Shanley's gaze followed hers to the inconspicuous scooter parked in the corner. The vehicle looked old and unremarkable, but to a trained eye, it was clear this was no ordinary scooter. It had been rebuilt with top-of-the-line components, giving it performance that surpassed some sedans. It was easily worth five million.

A fake heiress who rode a five-million-dollar custom scooter, came to the black market alone, and could take on five men at once?

Shanley looked away from the scooter and back at the girl who was now sitting in his car, swinging her feet as she gazed out the window. The intrigue in his eyes deepened.

Inside the car, the silence was thick. Felton and Flint kept stealing glances at the girl in the back through the rearview mirror. Juniper sat with her knees together, her backpack on her lap, and a candy in her mouth, her expression calm as she watched the scenery fly by. This quiet, well-behaved demeanor made it hard to reconcile with the image of the fierce fighter who had just taken down five men without breaking a sweat. It was incredible.

"Thank you for yesterday," Shanley said, turning slightly to look at the girl. "I'm Shanley Schwartz. It's a pleasure to meet you."

He extended his hand, a hint of warmth softening his usually cool and noble features.

"My name is Payne," the girl replied, turning her head but not taking his hand. She merely gave him a brief glance. "Helping others is a virtue. You don't need to thank me."

A virtue?

Shanley's lips curved. "Well, if you ever need any help in the future, Ms. Payne, feel free to contact me," he said smoothly. He then very naturally took out his phone and said, "Let's exchange contact details, shall we?"

Juniper was about to refuse, but then she remembered that the Sigma Network's headquarters were in Borealia. She didn't know much about the area. Having a local contact might not be a bad idea.

"Okay."

She took out her phone, but just then, Flint spoke from the passenger seat. "Boss, your grandmother just messaged, asking about the jade bracelet. What should I tell her?"

Jade bracelet? Juniper's thumb paused.

"I can't very well tell her you spent thirty million and still couldn't get it, can I?"

Thirty million? Juniper's head snapped toward Shanley, her brow furrowing. So, he was the rich idiot who had driven up the price!

Her expression instantly turned to ice. She shut off her phone and put it away.

"What's wrong?" Shanley felt a subtle shift in the air, a puzzled look in his deep eyes.

Why was she suddenly upset? Had Flint's talking bothered her?

He shot a warning glare at Flint.

Flint nearly bit his tongue, shrinking back into his seat and shutting his mouth.

"Is there a problem, Ms. Payne?" Shanley asked, leaning slightly closer. His voice was noticeably softer.

Juniper crossed her arms, turned her head away, and closed her eyes, completely ignoring him.

They were sitting close enough that Shanley could see her clearly. A stray lock of hair was tucked behind her ear, revealing its delicate shell. The sunlight streaming through the window highlighted the graceful line of her jaw. A faint blush of anger colored her cheeks, making her look like a feisty kitten with its fur on end.

Shanley found the little wildcat endearing and had an urge to stroke her hair and soothe her, but he suspected he might get scratched if he tried.

Felton and Flint struggled to suppress their laughter. In all their years with the boss, they had never seen anyone give him the cold shoulder like this. And what was even more surprising was that the boss wasn't angry. In fact, he seemed to be... indulging her?

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Thirty minutes later, the GPS route became more and more remote, the roads increasingly treacherous.