

N Destiny 881

Chapter 881

“Exactly! We’ll be sure to offer you all the help you need, no matter what it takes.” Jared promised, clenching his fists.

“Come on. Stop making fun of me!” Sean tried to dismiss his friends’ encouragement with a bashful look on his face. “Miss Meyers isn’t going to even look at me.”

“But I saw the affectionate look on her face this morning when she looked at you. Trevor expressed his envy toward Sean.

On the other hand, Richard was standing at the door outside the meeting room, quietly listening to the conversation among his subordinates, until he heard a curious voice from behind him. “Why didn’t you go inside, Richard?” Willy asked.

It was then that Richard finally opened the door and startled the three of them, making them feel annoyed about the unpredictable appearances that their superior always made.

“What were you guys talking about?”

Willy asked out of curiosity. “Is there anything new about our assignment?”

“Oh, nothing. We were just talking about Miss Meyers and Sean,” Jared blurted out.

It was then that Trevor quickly shifted his gaze to their boss as he noticed the nonchalant expression on his face. Then, Richard turned around and wrote something on the whiteboard, revealing his muscular back as he faced away from them.

“You are only allowed to talk about work here. Nothing else more, including personal matters.” The man wrote on the whiteboard and made his order heard.

In that instant, all four men kept their mouths shut, feeling helpless yet surprised that their boss demanded them to keep their light-mindedness in check, even though that was what they had been doing all the while.

For that, they all proceeded to focus on their job without saying a single word more. When it was Sean's turn to present his job, he made a trivial mistake but was treated harshly by Richard with some mean criticisms. Although Sean was upset about that, he kept his feelings to himself, thinking his

mistake wasn't so severe that he deserved to be meanly criticized.

On the other hand, Angela was sitting beside a fountain while fiddling with the grass in a bored manner. At the same time, she shifted her gaze everywhere, from the sky to the grass, until her eyes fell upon the water where a little fish was swimming around her feet.

At that instant, she was tempted to catch it out of a whim, so she extended her arm to reach it. However, the fish looked as if it was trying to toy with her, dodging Angela's catch and forcing her to bend over for better reach.

Nevertheless, she suddenly lost her footing and accidentally plunged into the depths of the pond. "Ah..." The lady found herself drenched from head to toe in a disheveled manner.

At the same time, she lost interest in catching the fish, but when she looked back at it in the water, she felt as if she had been tricked by the animal.

This fish was trying to fool me. Just wait and see. I'll be back with a net next time," Angela said in frustration and made her way toward the base's entrance.

Since Angela was wet, she was desperate to get a shower. Nonetheless, when everyone saw her state, they all asked her what had happened in a concerned manner, to which she explained that she had just fallen into the water.

While Angela later returned to her room to get changed, one of Richard's subordinates entered the meeting room to deliver some documents and casually told the five men about what he had just heard. "Miss Meyers fell into the water just now," he stated casually.

Chapter 882

“What? Is she hurt?” “I’m not too sure, but she definitely looks wet from head to toe.”

The next second, Richard sprang up from his seat and opened the door, leaving the meeting room in a hurry. In the meantime, his subordinates were left wondering where he was going as they exchanged gazes with each other.

Angela went into Richard’s room with her clothes in her arms. She hurriedly turned on the shower because she felt extremely cold as it was fall now.

Richard pushed the door to his room and heard the sound of water coming from the bathroom. He didn’t have to ask to guess who was inside, so he exited the room and continued back in the direction of the conference room.

After Angela showered, she felt that her whole body was warm, and she simply sat in Richard’s room and read a book as if his room was hers.

At noon, she went to the dining hall. After she had prepared her meal, she sat down at the table where Trevor and the others were sitting. Richard also sat down right across from Angela..

“Miss Angela, I heard that you fell into the water this morning. What happened?”

Trevor asked curiously.

“Ugh, let’s not talk about it. I fell into the spring behind the mountain.” After Angela finished speaking, she glanced at the man sitting directly opposite her.

“How did you fall? Did you slip?”

“No, there was such a big fish in that spring. I wanted to catch it, but I slipped and fell instead. Boohoo!” Angela recounted the events with a depressed expression.

Jared almost burst into laughter from the side, but fortunately, he controlled it.

“Sean, do you have time in the afternoon? Let’s find a fishing net. We’ll go and get that fish back, shall we?” Angela asked Sean.

Sean nodded almost without hesitation. “Okay! Let’s do it.”

Seeing that he readily agreed, Angela smiled happily. “Well, it’s settled.” Trevor and Jared looked at each other. Sure enough, Angela was interested in Sean. At this moment, the man opposite Angela said, “My subordinates don’t have time to accompany you to fool around.”

“Boss, I do-” Before Sean finished speaking, he met a pair of seriously cold eyes, and his words were forced back into his throat.

Angela blinked. “I am only borrowing them for half an hour.”

“It’s not a matter of time; they can’t lose their discipline, and they shouldn’t spend their time on things outside of work.” Richard’s eyes were cold; he looked like he would not be easy to deal with.

The other three felt that there was something wrong with the boss’ emotions.

Angela couldn’t help but choke, after which she had no choice but to turn to Sean. “Sean, can you find me a fishing net after this? I’ll go by myself.”

‘No problem. I remember there is one in the tool room.” Sean was very happy to help her.

“Angela, is it fine for you to go alone?”

“Of course, there’s no problem! Don’t underestimate me. I swear to bring that fish back to make soup.” Angela was determined to get the fish.

This time, Jared couldn't hold back his laughter. Trevor quickly tugged on Jared's clothes to stop him.

Angela also laughed. "Just wait and see! I will definitely get it back."

"Miss Angela, we believe in your ability," Trevor hurriedly chimed in. After the meal, Sean found her a light and functioning fishing net in no time.

Angela decided to set off after taking a break.

After the meal, everyone on the base performed their duties. Angela was the most leisurely person among them. She changed into sports attire, picked up the fishing net, and went out.

The scenery along the way was picturesque, with gold and orange leaves carpeting the ground. Fall was, beyond a doubt, a perfect time for outdoor activities.

In the conference room, there were four people who were working obediently.

Trevor suddenly had a whim and glanced at Jared and Sean. "The boss isn't here, so should we sneak out to help her with the fish?"

Jared was the most playful and was the first to raise his hand in approval. "Okay, okay! I like doing this kind of thing the most."

Sean also felt that he could be lazy today. "Okay, let's go!"

Only Willy was sticking to his post. He told them, "Make it quick, alright? I'll cover for you all in the meantime."

"Okay, Willy. You're my best pal!" Trevor patted Willy on the shoulder, and the three of them hurriedly opened the door of the conference room.

Chapter 883

Next to the small mountain spring, the water was clean and clear. There was a fish the size of one's palm swimming there. It was very eye-catching as it turned over and rolled leisurely in the spring.

Angela squatted down with a smug smile like a hidden hunter. "You can't run away now!"

After speaking, Angela stretched out her hand and put the fish net into the water, and then stared at the fish so intently that she didn't notice when someone approached her from behind.

The man wrapped his arms around himself and quietly watched her clumsily fishing for the fish. Angela had gotten a lot of leaves in her net. When she was about to stand up to clear it, a male voice suddenly came from behind. "Do you need help?"

"Ah!" Angela turned around in fright.. There was a lot of moss under her feet, so her body lost balance, and she suddenly lurched toward the spring.

Before it was too late, a long arm grabbed one of her arms and pulled her up quickly.

Angela's whole body slammed into the man's well-built chest. Other than the pain in her nose, her head was dizzy from the impact, so she raised her head suddenly in anger.

The man was worried about whether he had hit her with too much force, so he lowered his head.

Their two faces were almost pressed together as their noses tips faced each other. Moreover, their breathing came close together, and their eyes were looking at each other.

It was as if the air had frozen at this moment.

Angela's face flushed red to the roots of her ears. She was about to take a step back, but her feet were still slippery. Hence, she hurriedly grabbed the shirt on the man's chest as her body leaned into his.

"Can't you make some noise next time? You'll scare me to death," Angela said angrily.

Richard took her hand, and they came to the flatter ground on the side. "Fishing is not suitable for girls."

"Then you help me! Say that earlier next time!" Angela smiled happily.

At this moment, hiding behind a big tree 30 feet away were the three others. Their three pairs of eyes widened in disbelief as they exchanged glances.

The suggestive scene just now naturally did not escape them. It seemed that their presence was pointless; their boss had taken the lead in helping the damsel in distress. Moreover, just now, they had hugged each other so tightly.

"Let's leave." Trevor waved his hand, and the other two walked away in the direction of the way they came.

Sean asked, "Does the boss like Angela?"

"Duh! Anyone who can see knows that," Trevor said with some annoyance. "The boss is too selfish. He doesn't allow us to help because he is saving the chance for himself!"

Sean suddenly understood the scolding he got in the conference room in the morning. Sigh! I can't be too enthusiastic about Angela in the future, or I'll be taught a lesson.

"The boss has good taste, and Miss Angela is a good match for him." Jared was happy he witnessed what happened.

"To be honest, it's time for the boss to get married at his age. I used to worry that he wouldn't pursue any woman at all, but now it seems that I'm worrying too much! The boss is full of skills!" Trevor said with admiration.

"Then we can assist him well in the future and let them be together. This way, we can make Miss Angela our comrade." Jared smiled.

“That is a must.”

Chapter 884

The three of them went back while chatting, and next to the spring, Angela looked at the man squatting there fishing for fish. He looked like he had removed his cold and inhuman side for the time being and became a little warmer.

Her heart fluttered for no reason.

She didn't care about the fish that caused her to fall into the water at the moment but began to think about why Richard suddenly appeared there.

Did he come for me? Was he worried about me?

At this moment, the fishing net appeared before her, and the fish that was caught in the net jumped around, looking panicked.

“Wow! You caught it.” Angela was overjoyed and then looked at the fish. She thought that it looked rather pitiful out of the water, so she put the net into the water.

The fish wanted to break through the net several times, so Angela sighed and said to it, “Since you look so pitiful, I'll let you go!”

After speaking, Angela turned the fishing net over and let the fish go directly while the man beside her looked at her speechlessly. Soon, she fluffed her long hair as she explained, “I forgive it. I won't catch it and make soup with it.”

Richard's gaze deepened a little; a girl exuding kindness was the most mesmerizing.

Angela stood up, and suddenly there was a flash of light in her eyes. She hurriedly looked over at what was shining in the middle of the spring.

“What is that?” Angela asked, pointing to

the shiny object.

Richard turned his head to look at it. Inside a gray-white stone, there was a translucent, shiny object, but it was stuck in the rock and only revealed a small edge.

“Wait here,” After Richard finished speaking, he took off his shoes and socks and went into the water to get it for her. Angela couldn’t help but be moved. Is he retrieving the shiny thing for me?

Richard took the object out of the water, and it turned out to be a small, natural white crystal.

“Wow! It’s a crystal!” Angela happily took it over, blinking her beautiful and brilliant eyes.

The man’s gaze was directly attracted to her. In his eyes, this woman’s eyes were clearer and more beautiful than the crystal.

“I got something good!” Angela happily held the crystal but was quickly reminded of something. “If we can turn it into necklaces, how about we make one for each of us?” she asked the man.

“I don’t wear things like that.” Richard refused.

“But you got it out of there!” Angela was looking forward to sharing it with him.

“Keep it for yourself.” After Richard finished speaking, he sat aside and put on his shoes and socks. Angela looked at him, her gaze shining. The more he didn’t want it, the more she wanted to

give it to him.

I’ll see if he dares to throw it away! She couldn’t help but feel a sense of dominance in her heart..

“Captain Lloyd, why are you suddenly kind enough to come to help me?” Angela sat on a rock, holding the crystal in her hand.

“I promised your parents to protect you,” Richard explained lightly.

Angela’s eyes flashed with disappointment. It turned out that he didn’t come because of her at all!

Moreover, everything he did for her now was just his duty.

“I’m not that pampered. You don’t need to protect me in everything.” Angela resisted him like a rebellious child, and after she finished speaking, she stood up and pointed to the mountain road before them. “I’m going to climb the mountain. You don’t need to come with me.

“Don’t be ridiculous. Let’s go back.” Richard stood up and ordered.

Chapter 885

“I’m not your subordinate, and I’m not required to listen to your orders.” Angela finished speaking and decided to climb the mountain.

Richard’s patience was limited, and he didn’t like others disobeying his orders. He stepped forward, and when Angela had just walked forward a few steps, he grabbed her hand and led her down the mountain.

“Hey! Richard, let me go! You can’t be so bossy.” Resentment welled up in Angela as she pushed away his hand.

Seeing that she was about to get away, in the next second, the man lifted her legs and carried her on his shoulder. Angela felt that she was turned upside down and was taken aback.

“Richard, let me go!” Angela was so angry that she kicked her legs, but the man ignored her struggle and carried her to the gate of the base, attracting everyone’s attention.

At this moment, the three people who were standing nearby drinking water looked at this scene in shock.

Jared patted Trevor on the shoulder. "You said what you said just now a little too early. The captain doesn't know how to pursue girls properly."

"How can the captain treat Angela like this? He's not being gentle!" Sean also sighed.

Angela was carried by Richard all the way to the door of her room before he put her down. She flushed with anger, but the man turned and left as if nothing had happened.

"Hey, Richard! I hate you," Angela blurted out angrily.

Richard's footsteps stopped suddenly. He paused in place for a few seconds, and then he turned his head slightly. "I don't need you to like me."

Angela had just regretted her impulsive words, but seeing the man's reaction, she suddenly became angry again. "Don't worry. I will never like you in this life."

Richard frowned and walked away.

Angela took a few deep breaths as she was so angry. I've never met a man as difficult as him.

At this time, Trevor and Jared came over and saw Angela standing at the door, holding it with her face flushed and resentful. So, they smiled and came to comfort her.

"Miss Angela, are you alright?"

"Did our captain hurt you?"

Angela smiled gratefully at them. "I'm okay, but thank you."

“Our captain is usually a very nice guy. He’s like a brother to us. Maybe he’s been among men for too long, so he doesn’t know how to be gentle with girls. Don’t blame him.” Trevor tried to say good things about Richard.

Angela waved her hand generously. “I didn’t take it to heart; I’ll just have to see him less in the future.”

At 9.00PM, Angela felt a little itchy, so she wanted to take a bath. But thinking of her relationship with Richard, she didn’t want to go to his room to shower. She would rather go to the public bathroom.

Hence, Angela took her pajamas and towel, then went to the public bathroom. She found one that was empty and started to shower.

When she came out wearing her conservative pajamas after showering, she suddenly bumped into Jared and Trevor ahead. They were only wearing bath towels around their waists.

Oh my God!

Instead, it was the two of them who were shocked. They hurriedly tried to cover themselves.

“Miss Angela, why are you taking a shower here?” Trevor asked in surprise with his back turned.

“Yeah! A lady like you shouldn’t be here.”

Chapter 886

“Yes, we almost came out in our underwear,” Jared added.

“Fortunately, we wrapped ourselves in bath towels; otherwise, we would be embarrassed to death.”

Richard calmly listened to their explanation, but his face was still a little ugly.

What the hell is this woman angry about? I only disallowed her to climb the mountain! With her physique, even if she can climb up, she definitely won’t be able to come down.

Now, at this time, she went to the public bathroom to take a bath. There were so many men there, yet she was not afraid at all.

“Captain, go and admit your mistake to Miss Angela and let her go back to your room to take a shower! She really scared us to death,” Trevor said,

“Go back to your room and rest,” Richard said to them, turning around and closing the door.

The two looked at each other for a few seconds but had no choice but to go back to the room. It seemed that they had thought too much. The captain doesn't care about Miss Angela at all!

Richard returned to the sofa and picked up the book he was reading just now, but he suddenly had no interest. He took a deep breath and dropped the book. Angela's appearance after her bath involuntarily appeared in his mind. He had to admit that her flushed face had a special kind of charm.

Does she want all the men in the base to appreciate her freshly showered appearance? Richard let out an irritated sigh, got up, and pushed the door to go out.

Angela had just taken a shower and was about to go to bed when there was a knock on her door.

She felt a little odd. It was so late, so who was looking for her? She got up and opened the door, only to see a tall figure with an oppressive aura outside the door, blocking the light outside.

“Do you need something?” Angela self consciously crossed her arms after realizing she was not wearing a bra.

Richard gave her a withering look as he ordered, “You are not allowed to use the public bathroom for your night showers.”

She narrowed her eyes and asked, “Why not?”

He met her incredulous gaze steadily and said, "Because it causes inconvenience."

Frustration welled up in her. She had already gone out of her way to not make trouble for him, and she could not understand why he was nitpicking on her still.

He did not turn away and leave. Instead, he paused for a few seconds before saying, "I'm sorry I was harsh with you today."

Angela blinked, clearly caught off-guard by his out-of-the-blue apology. When she recomposed herself, she looked away from him and muttered, "Apology not accepted."

"You wanted to hike, right? Be up at 6.00AM sharp tomorrow and I'll take you there," Richard said.

Her competitive side came out as she retorted, "As if I'd back down from that."

"We'll meet at the entrance. Don't be late."

"I won't, she bit out.

Richard spun on his heels and walked away just as Angela closed the door. She glanced at the time and saw that it was drawing near to 11.00PM. I have to sleep now, or I won't be able to wake up in time and I'd never hear the end of it!

She burrowed into bed, but her mind kept replaying his apology and the events from earlier. In hindsight, it appeared that she was the one in the wrong. After all, she was the one who got mad and started the whole conflict in the first place.

And the only reason why she was mad was that she found out Richard was only here to protect her at her parent's behest. In other words, she was just another job.

Chapter 887

A bitter laugh then escaped Angela as she realized she was more upset about this than she should be. What am I getting so worked up for anyway?

She tried to analyze her own feelings, but she ended up boring herself to sleep instead.

The next day, Angela's alarm rang at precisely 5.50AM. She bolted upright in bed and threw the covers off, then hurried into the adjoining bathroom to wash up. To call it a bathroom was an exaggeration though, as it was more of a washroom with a small showering space.

It was 5.59AM by the time she was done putting on her clothes. She hurtled out of her room toward the entrance of the base, whereupon she saw Richard's tall and straight silhouette standing there.

She walked up to him, and he made it a point to glance at the watch on his wrist. "You're late by a minute."

Defiance colored her delicate features as she glowered at him and said, "Okay, fine, I'm late. Are you going to punish me? Go

on, tell me what you want me to do to make up for my tardiness."

Richard gazed down at the girl who was openly challenging him, and his eyes lingered briefly on her shell-pink lips. He swallowed, and there was a steely edge to his expression as he barked, "Let's go."

Angela had been waiting for him to mete out punishment, but when he did not, she couldn't help feeling a little disappointed.

Presently, he carried a backpack full of everything he thought they would need for a hike. Angela, on the other hand, was wearing a cap and sunblock, knowing that UV rays were the most vicious foes she could meet on this hike other than the mountainous terrain.

Just like that, the both of them hiked up along the groove through which the mountain spring water flowed. There were no steps here or mapped-out trails for novice hikers, making the hike a tough exercise-albeit, an authentic one.

Angela kept up her pace with Richard, but halfway through, she was starting to regret her decision to agree to the hike. Goodness, this trail is hard. It was no wonder he had forbidden her from going hiking on her own last night; she would have lost her way or tripped several times in a row.

However, she was not a quitter, and pride had more to do with that than ambition. She didn't want Richard to laugh at her after all the big talk she had given him last night.

When it came to slopes or uneven ground, Richard would hike up first, then turn and offer her a hand so that he could help her up.

Thankfully, it did not take long for them to reach the rocky terrain where the trees were not quite as tall, and the shrubbery was not quite as dense.

The ground here was rife with wildflowers, and Angela exclaimed in awe, "This is amazing!" She picked a couple of flowers and formed a bouquet, then sniffed its sweet fragrance as she tried to keep up with the man in front of her.

Richard walked ahead for a few minutes before turning around to see if Angela had followed him. When he saw that she had fallen behind by a dozen feet, he stopped and planted his hands on his hips to wait for her. She's not here to hike, he decided grimly. This is just a field trip to her.

"I'm thirsty," she said when she reached him, panting. "Did you bring water?"

He unzipped his backpack and took out the standard-issue canteen, which he handed to her. She twisted open the cap and gulped down a few mouthfuls of water, then passed the canteen back to him.

Chapter 888

Angela had been wiping the corners of her mouth when Richard took the canteen wordlessly and gulped down some water.

She paused and gaped at him

incredulously as a fleeting thought crossed her mind, Does that mean we indirectly kissed? A pink flush crept over her cheeks, and she wondered how he could so readily drink from the same canteen she had used mere seconds ago.

Oblivious to her thoughts, Richard shrugged on his backpack and pointed to the tallest summit in the distance. "That will be our destination, so let's move!"

Her eyes widened at the sight of the summit, which looked grayish-blue under the thin layer of mist that shrouded it. "I'm sorry. Are you suggesting we climb all the way up there?"

"Yes, how astute of you," Richard drawled

sarcastically. He raised a brow at her and asked snidely, "You're not scared, are you?"

Falling for his trap, Angela snapped, "Of course I'm not scared! Ill climb that mountain without a problem!"

He smirked. "Then, shall we go?"

She watched him turn and memorized the silhouette of his back as he trekked forward. Though her legs were already wobbly and her clothes soaked through with sweat, Richard did not look the slightest bit out of breath. If one didn't know better, they would think he had been walking on flat ground all this time.

"Richard, wait up!" Angela cried out as she tossed aside the wildflower bouquet and ran up to him.

Hiking was, she decided, absolute torture at this point. But she refused to give up; her pride and determination did not allow her to even though she was on the brink of collapsing.

Before long, they reached a slope that inclined at a sixty-degree angle. Just looking at it made her weak.

As though sensing her reluctance, Richard threw an amused look over his shoulder at her, taking in her defeated expression.

“Captain Lloyd, pull me up” Angela said, reaching out her arm toward him

He looked at her hand and naturally gripped it. For some reason, this gesture warmed her. At least he’s not leaving me out here to perish on my own, she thought, cheering up considerably. “You know, you didnt have to apologize to me last night,” she began hesitantly, her exhaustion compelling her to re-evaluate her conscience. “I should be the one to say sorry instead.”

Richard stared at her in surprise, only to see her grinning sweetly back at him. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were twinkling with mischief. She looked so bright and beautiful at that moment that even the wildflower field around them could not compete with her smile.

Just as Richard was lost in her eyes, she playfully tugged on his arm and pulled him close to her. The poor man was already in a daze, and the sudden pull made him take one step closer to her.

They ended up standing so close together that the tip of Angela’s nose nearly pressed up against his chest. She had only wanted to tease him for fun; this proximity was not what she had planned for at all.

Her breath hitched, and she narrowed her pretty doe-eyes for a second before looking up to see the perfect, sumptuous curve of his lips. Abruptly, she found herself thinking audaciously, What if I kissed him?

Mind and body coordinated, Angela rose on the tip of her toes, and before Richard could react, she gave him a quick peck on his lips.

Startled by the unexpected kiss, Richard looked at the girl incredulously, but she had already pulled away from him and ran away like a kitten that got caught scratching up the furniture.

Meanwhile, Angela was blushing madly as well. She couldn’t believe she had kissed him. Of all the ways she thought this hike would go, this was not one of them!

As for the man who had just gotten a peck on his lips, he stood frozen in place and did not try to go after her. The soft touch of her lips on his earlier had stunned him, and he was having a hard time recollecting his thoughts.

After a while of running, Angela slowed to a stop and panted as she turned to look at him. When she realized that he did not catch up to her, she winced and decidedly waited for him to come over to give her a harsh talking-down.

Richard straightened his backpack and tightened his grip on the straps as he trudged over to her. Blood rushed to her face when she registered his approaching figure. To hide her embarrassment, she looked down and picked up a random blade of grass, then toyed with it to look busy as she sneaked a glance at the man's expression.

If he looked furious, then she would apologize immediately.

Much to her astonishment, however, he looked as stoic as ever when he came to a stop next to her. Upon seeing that she was running the flat of her thumb along the length of the grass, he pointed out, "Don't play with the grass, not this one, at least."

"Huh? Why not?" She did not get to hear his answer before she broke off in a hiss. The tough and sharp edge of the grass had cut her finger while she was distracted, drawing blood.

She tossed the offending blade of grass aside exasperatedly and frowned at the blood beading from the cut on her finger. Without a second word, Richard unzipped his backpack and produced a band-aid. He then cleaned her small wound with a piece of tissue before taping the band-aid on it.

Chapter 889

Angela was standing on higher ground, making her half a head taller than Richard and allowing her to look at him from an angle she never had seen before. She took in his defined brow bone and the straight line of his nose.

He had his gaze down as he helped put a band-aid over her finger, and his dark eyelashes hid the steely look in his eyes. He looked almost... gentle, the most tender she had ever seen him..

Startled by the contrast between his present demeanor and his usual stoic self, Angela could only gape at him speechlessly. After a while, she blushed and said apologetically, "I'm sorry for what I did earlier. I hope I didn't offend you." She was filled with regret over how forthright she had been.

"Just don't do it again," Richard said as he looked up at her, his eyes like two clear pools. He seemed unaffected by the kiss as if it meant nothing to him, like a piece of lint on his coat.

Disappointment flashed in her eyes as she pulled her finger away from him. Then, she took a breath and promised, "I won't do it again."

He eyed her darkly for a second, then slung his backpack over his shoulders as he declared, "Let's call it a day and go back to base."

She was not so prideful as to have no self awareness, and she knew she could never make it to the summit. Nodding, she said obligingly, "Okay."

With that, she took the first step to dismount from higher ground, but her foot landed on a wobbly rock that detached from the soil.

She swayed, but before she could fall, a large hand gripped her shoulder and steadied her.

Angela looked up at the man who kept her from stumbling and falling down the slope, but she felt defeated. Did the kiss mean nothing to him? Doesn't he feel anything at all?

Richard let go of her shoulder, but offered her his hand as he said, "Come on, I'll hold your hand until we reach the foot of the mountain."

She stared at his hand, and her mind wandered for a brief few seconds. He was always there when she needed his help, making sure she didn't get hurt. He didn't look like he knew how his gestures could give her the wrong idea, and how he could easily lead her on to think he liked her when in truth, taking care of her was nothing more than an obligation on his part-nothing personal.

"No, thanks," Angela said, turning him down with a smile as she took on a formal tone.

With long strides, she trekked down the way they came. From the back, her slender frame looked like it could carry the weight of the world.

Richard stared at her retreating figure for

a beat or two before he followed her,

striding easily, but very well-paced.

Hiking up a rocky mountain like this was comparatively easier than going down it.

At any given moment, Angela could very well step on a loosened rock and fall, especially since the trees here that she could hold onto for support were no better than saplings.

Richard walked ahead of her, and whenever there was uneven terrain or steep slopes, he would stand close to her, ready to catch her if she fell.

Presently, she was holding onto one of the smaller trees, hoping that it could hold her weight until her foot found a solid rock to stand on below the slope.

However, the tree was so young and weak that she uprooted it completely, causing her to fall backward when she skidded on the ground.

Chapter 890

She let out a shriek just as Richard reached out to catch her, keeping her from hitting the earth. He pulled her against him and held her there while her arms snaked around his waist instinctively.

She was pressed up to his chest, still dazed from the fall as her heart beat frantically under her rib cage. Tired from the hike, she nuzzled into his broad and firm chest, then closed her eyes as she relished the break in the exercise.

He did not push her away but merely watched as she closed her eyes and lay there. Her cheeks were flushed, and there were beads of sweat on her forehead that sparkled under the sun. He softened at that moment and let her lean into him, holding her.

Upon sensing his relaxed stance, she smiled.

Around them, the mountain breeze whistled through the trees, and the sun was beaming down on the mountain, coating everything in its gentle, golden rays. For a moment, everything came to an idyllic standstill.

Angela could hear Richard's strong and steady heartbeat. Inexplicably, her own heartbeat quickened as well, as if trying to match up to his.

"Captain Lloyd, are you always this dedicated to every target you are assigned to protect? I guess what I'm trying to say is, if I were any other girl, would you be this kind to her as well?" she asked slowly as she looked up at him.

He met her eyes, his gaze smoldering and dark.

Angela blinked, looking into his eyes as she asked, "Would you let her use your bathroom and let her go in and out of your bedroom as she likes?"

Piggyback her when she gets hurt? Leap to protect her and shield her from every harm at any given moment? If she were the one holding onto you now, would you hold her even tighter?"

Angela wasn't sure why, but her eyes grew misty as she spoke. Flustered, she looked down and broke away from his intense gaze.

Richard was speechless, floundered by all the questions she threw at him. He wasn't sure where to begin.

She waited for his response, but when he didn't give her one, a bitter smile curled on her lips as she asked challengingly, "It's not rocket science. All you have to do is answer yes or no."

“I don’t want to answer,” he said monotonously as he let her go and turned to walk ahead.

It was at that moment that Angela was sure she was nothing more than a job and that he would have shown the same level of dedication even if she were any other girl. She was not special at all.

In that case, she did not have to torture: herself and delude herself into thinking she was different, that she meant something to him.

Fortunately, the trail got easier as they neared the foot of the mountain. When she took the final step to dismount from the hike, Angela thought her legs would give up on her.

She quickly found a large and flat rock to sit on, then called out to the man ahead of her, “Hey, you go ahead! I’m going to stay here and catch my breath for a bit.”

Richard glanced at her for a while and left without another word.

The base entrance was just nearby anyway. There was no point in him dawdling here to take care of her. That was what she told herself as she watched his retreating figure, but for some reason, tears sprang up to her eyes once more.

She sniffed to ease the prickling sensation in her nose. Crap, what’s wrong with me? Pull yourself together, Angela. You were the one who asked him to leave, and now that he did, you’re crying about it like some kid abandoned in a playground? Snap out of it! You’re just a job to him. Just someone he has to protect. You’re not his girlfriend. Remember that.