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Skylar's eyes drifted toward the black Porsche and landed on Sheldon, who had gotten off the car and was currently waving at her across the distance.

While Tobias went to park the car in the garage, Skylar opened the front door and stepped aside to let Sheldon in.

Sheldon had a cheeky grin on his face when he clarified, "I'm just here to crash. I won't disturb you two."

Skylar blushed slightly as she put down her bag. Even though she had not been here for a long time, everything looked pretty much the same. For some reason, she felt slightly edgy, as though she was a guest here.

When Tobias came in, he told Skylar to wait for him as he had some business affairs to handle, to which Skylar nodded obediently before going upstairs to take a shower.

After coming out of her shower, she saw Sheldon sitting in the living room with his long legs resting on the coffee table.

"Are you watching a TV series?"

On the TV, the male lead was earnestly professing his love to the female lead.

Skylar rubbed her forehead, never expecting Sheldon to like watching romance dramas. She remembered watching this particular series when she was in elementary school.

At that time, she was young and easily tricked into believing that true love existed.

Skylar sat on another sofa with water still dripping from the ends of her hair. Sheldon yawned before remarking, "It's quite a nice series. Don't all you girls like watching these kinds of romance dramas?"

Skylar vaguely sensed that there was a hidden meaning behind his words and wondered whether she was becoming paranoid.

Before long, Sheldon fell asleep and started snoring on the sofa. Hence, Skylar switched to another movie to watch. Just as the movie was reaching its climax, Tobias came downstairs.

Skylar's eyes were still fixated on the TV screen.

Tobias sat beside her and glanced at Sheldon snoring away on the sofa.

Suddenly, moans of pleasure came from the movie playing on the screen.

"Let's not watch anymore." Skylar had turned slightly red in the face and was grateful for the dim lights.

Tobias slowly leaned forward to kiss her lips. "Why not?"

His warm breath tickled the shell of her ear and the sound of his soft yet heavy breathing was all she could hear.

His husky voice filled her ears and she stared transfixed as his gaze turned heavy with desire. As if having a mind of its own, her hand reached for the remote control to switch off the TV.

Feeling an itch in his nose, Sheldon opened his eyes drowsily only to see his brother pressing Skylar to the sofa while kissing and fondling her.

He started grumbling in his heart. Why are they in such a hurry? I mean, c'mon. On the couch? What do they take me for? Air?

He immediately squeezed his eyes shut, pretending to be asleep as he was afraid of seeing too much.

"Baby, let's go upstairs."

Sheldon's whole body had tensed up with cold sweat coating his back. Oh, thank God. Finally, they're taking it elsewhere.

The next morning, Sheldon went downstairs to see Skylar coming out of the kitchen with an apron tied around her waist right before noticing the piping hot food served on the table.

Skylar's face was without makeup, but with her exquisite and striking features, she managed to give off an exotic vibe.

Sheldon had to admit that Skylar was very beautiful, even more so than her sister Avery.

He pulled out a chair and sat down. Three plates of visually pleasing spaghetti Aglio olio were placed on the table.

“Where’s my brother? And what’s wrong with your voice?” Sheldon queried.

He suspected that the two of them had taken things too far last night and that Tobias was still sleeping due to overexertion.

“He’s showering upstairs. He’ll be down soon.” Skylar sat across Sheldon and gave him a pair of cutlery as her cheeks heated up.

She must have screamed her voice hoarse last night.

Recalling the past, Sheldon said wistfully, “My mother used to be busy all the time and would always leave my brother and me at home. The two of us only knew how to cook noodles, and my brother’s cooking was beyond horrible.”

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It was the same for Skylar, or perhaps even worse. Her grandmother would lock her up at home alone whenever she went out and did not allow her to use the stove at all. Hence, she did not even have the luxury to cook noodles.

Every time she was hungry, she would munch on raw instant noodles or stale bread. As a result, she had suffered from severe malnutrition since young and it could be seen from her appearance during her schooling days.

Tobias came downstairs after changing into a pair of black trousers and a light blue shirt with a silver-grey striped tie to match it, looking cool and attractive.

“Tobias, can I still stay here tonight?” Sheldon asked while eating his spaghetti. He would rather hide away here than listen to Claudia breathing down his neck at home.

“No.”

Sheldon frowned at his brother's point-blank answer. "You're so mean..."

"Why did you get up so early? You should rest more. You don't look so good." Tobias gazed at Skylar who had been busy in the kitchen the entire morning.

Skylar touched her face in response.

"I didn't want the two of you to go hungry and as the only female here, I couldn't just sleep in and let you two starve."

Tobias was not moved by Skylar's thoughtfulness because he felt that she should rest more. She was already thin to begin with and what was worse, she seemed to have lost weight.

She was so skinny that people might think she was a victim of domestic abuse.

Sheldon was shooed out of the house by Tobias right after he finished his breakfast. The former had agreed to meet some friends at the cybercafé earlier on and had grabbed Tobias' car keys just before leaving.

Skylar was about to clean up the dishes when Tobias stopped her. "Just let me do it. I can do a better job."

Skylar couldn't help but think Tobias was underestimating her. It's not like I'm handicapped. How bad can I be at washing the dishes?

"Doesn't your brother need to work?" Skylar was rather curious about Sheldon.

In her mind, Sheldon always seemed so free.

"No. He's unemployed, but it's a good thing because it's one less thing for me to worry about."

Sheldon's current way of life was probably something many people could only wish for.

Since Tobias would probably head to the company, Skylar planned to go shopping with Penelope and make a trip to her university after that.

After Tobias was done tidying up the kitchen, he did not immediately leave like she thought he would. Noticing the brown briefcase on the sofa, she picked it up so that she could hand it to him.

“Are you chasing me away?” Tobias hugged her waist from behind, resting his chin on her head.

“I’ll wait for you to come home. Just focus on work and don’t worry about me.” Skylar placed her hand on his arm, soaking in the warmth from his embrace as his white sandalwood scent filled her senses.

This scent used to haunt her, but now, she found comfort in it.

Before Tobias left, he took out a gold card and placed it on the table.

“I just opened a shopping mall. Go there for some shopping if you’re bored. You don’t need to pay for anything. I’ll leave this card here. The address is on your phone.”

Skylar picked up the gold card and smiled a toothy grin. “Why Mr. Ford, are you throwing money at me this early in the morning? What if I get too used to this and become a materialistic gal someday?”

Tobias would not mind even if she did. With tender affection, he brushed a kiss on her forehead, her eyes, her nose, and finally her lips.

“All you need to do is be a good girl. Spend as much as you like. I can afford it.”

It was a simple promise, one filled with conviction. Tobias never doubted his ability to satisfy a woman’s desires, both in terms of money and bodily pleasures.

Skylar stood by the door to see Tobias off.

Upon hearing her whisper his name, Tobias turned around. “You’ve been looking at me like this for quite a while now. Is there something else?”

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“I’m thinking of visiting my mother. Do you know if she’s well enough to see me?” Skylar had dreamt about her childhood several times already.

She was still not mentally prepared to face it.

“Don’t go just yet. I’ll ask the doctor tomorrow and arrange a suitable time for both of you to meet.”

Skylar suddenly realized that Tobias did not keep track of her mother’s condition, so he was in the dark just as much as she was.

They were not related to each other whatsoever, so Tobias was not obligated to care for her.

Skylar watched Tobias’ tall and straight back as he walked away and retrieved her gaze only after a long time.

As usual, Tobias walked in long strides, picking up the pace as he went.

Meanwhile, Skylar shuffled back tiredly with an odd gait.

Last night had completely drained her. She resembled a rag doll during the entire process, allowing Tobias to do whatever he pleased with her body.

She threw on a simple outfit and went out to meet Penelope who was waiting at a nearby café.

When Skylar arrived, she saw Penelope wiping her tears away with a piece of tissue. Then, her gaze landed on the table which was littered with balled-up tissue papers.

Skylar could only imagine how long her friend had been crying.

“Babe, you’re finally back. Do you have any idea how much I missed you?” Penelope seemed to have her hands full as she cried and wiped her snotty nose, all the while not forgetting to drink her hot chocolate.

Skylar raised her hand to call for the waiter and ordered a cup of lemon tea. She decided not to have any caffeinated beverages lest she struggled to sleep at night.

She took the seat across from Penelope’s and said, “Haven’t gotten over the last guy you dated? How long has it been? Judging by your speed, isn’t breaking up a common occurrence?”

As it turned out, Penelope was not crying because of her breakup, but because she was swindled out of her money.

She had fallen victim to a long con and all of her money was gone. To make matters worse, she now owed a huge debt. She did not dare to tell her family about this because she knew that telling them would be useless anyway.

Even if she reported this to the police, they wouldn't be able to catch those people. The police claimed that they had received many cases like this and getting back the money would be close to impossible.

The more Penelope thought about it, the more hopeless she felt. Every tear she cried was for each cent she lost. In the end, she sobbed uncontrollably while announcing, "Skylar, I fell victim to a long con but you can't tell anyone about this."

Skylar, who was still wet behind the ears, did not know what Penelope meant. Frowning her brows, she asked, "What do you mean 'fell victim'? You look fine."

Penelope wiped her eyes and explained, "The other day, a man messaged me on WhatsApp. He was very handsome and gentlemanly. Later on, he said he was in the investment industry and gave me the website for a very good project, saying that we could all earn money together. It was as if he brainwashed me and I kept putting money in. Just a few days ago, I realized that he was a scammer because I couldn't withdraw any of the money I put in. All of my savings are gone now and I even invested half a million. My whole life is done for."

Skylar was listening intently the whole time.

By the time Penelope was finally done, there was a look of astonishment on Skylar's face. She swallowed before asking, "Where did you even get half a million?"

"I borrowed it and I don't have a single cent to pay it back. I'm going to officially be a debt dodger from now on. Even if I sell myself, I won't be able to gather so much money."

Skylar never thought that Penelope would do something like this because as far as she knew, Penelope had always been shrewd and more mature than those of her age.

Penelope's parents were both honest workers. They were not well off, so Penelope had always aspired to marry into a rich family since junior high.

She had a bumpy love life. Even though she had dated a few young men from wealthy backgrounds, none of them worked out in the end.

All the men gave her the same reason; they weren't meant to be.

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Skylar was also affected by this, she started to become pessimistic after witnessing too many incidents like this happening to Penelope. She felt that it was unrealistic and impossible for Tobias and her to be together because of the ever-present chasm between them.

Probably everyone in the country knew of Ford Group. Meanwhile, she was just an ordinary person amidst the crowd.

Skylar had never encountered anything like this before. Seeing the pitiful state Penelope was in, she decided to ask Tobias if there was a way to get the money back.

"I'll ask Tobias and see if he can help," Skylar told Penelope.

Penelope had a very bad impression of Skylar's so-called boyfriend and stubbornly refuted, "You're being too naive. No one would want to get involved in something like this. He doesn't even care about you that much, so why would he bother himself with my problem? What's the use in asking him for help? Is he going to lend me money?"

Penelope still believed that Skylar was being led on by that man.

Suddenly, her eyes widened as she made a wild speculation. "Do you think that man is a scammer too? They slowly approach you, then get you to apply for a loan and run off with all your money. Let me tell you, men with killer looks are the worst. I mean, no straight woman can resist tall, and handsome men, right? You have to be smart or you'll end up like me. If that happens, crying would be useless."

Skylar was amazed by Penelope's overactive imagination. Even in her current fix, she managed to whip up an interesting theory.

Skylar pondered for a moment but still decided to discuss it with Tobias to get a definite view. She knew that he definitely had someone at his company who could trace the IP back to the scammer.

Skylar stayed at the café with Penelope for quite some time, so her plans to head to the university had to be shelved.

She told Tobias her location and the latter said he would come and find her after leaving the company.

It was already late afternoon, so Skylar went to the display case by the counter to buy something to eat.

Penelope stopped her, saying, “Don’t buy the food here. They’re too expensive. I can’t afford to eat all these in my current state.”

Skylar ignored her. Afraid that her friend would be hungry, she ordered an extra piece of cheesecake.

As evening approached and the sky darkened with it, Tobias finally showed up.

Penelope took a sip of coffee, showing open hostility toward the man.

“Why did you call me over here?” Tobias habitually raised his hand to caress Skylar’s hair.

Penelope’s eyes followed his movements. Even though she had already sworn off choosing men based on their appearances, she had to admit that the man beside Skylar still gave her the same impression as the first time – personable, mature, and handsome.

Penelope was reluctant to tell outsiders about the trouble she got herself into, so she remained silent.

Skylar kept it simple by saying, “My friend was swindled out of half a million. Is there a way to get it back?”

“Internet fraud?” Tobias cut to the chase.

Skylar nodded while Penelope bowed her head.

“Don’t get your hopes up. It’s difficult,” Tobias answered.

Penelope spiraled into further despair. She had heard enough of this at the police station and did not want to hear it again.

Putting up a tough front, she said, “You don’t need to help me find a solution, Skylar. I will handle it myself.”

Skylar protested with a heavy heart, “How are you going to get so much money? Just wait until I receive my pay from shooting. I’ll help you.”

What Skylar said brought Tobias’ mind back to the time when she sacrificed herself to get money for Jeremy’s illness.

He did not know if it was stupidity or naivety that fueled her to put herself on the line for the sake of others.

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Knowing how hard things had been on Skylar over the years, Penelope did not want to implicate her. She could not bring herself to let Skylar pay for her own mistake.

Tobias took out a checkbook from his suit pocket and wrote a cheque for half a million before giving it to Skylar.

“Don’t worry yourself sick over this. It’s not that big of a deal anyway,” he said in an exceptionally calm tone.

Penelope was dumbfounded. Skylar held onto the cheque, steeling herself before extending it toward Penelope.

Despite finding it improper, she had no choice. Currently, her top priority was getting Penelope out of this predicament.

As Penelope stared at the string of numbers written on the cheque, she became tongue-tied and was even more curious about this man’s story.

She smacked the cheque on the table and resolutely refused it. "I won't take it. Why should I take your money? It's better that you figure things out with that wife of yours at home instead."

Tobias cast Skylar a long and meaningful look. She really does tell her best friend everything.

Never one to be good at giving explanations, he did not explain himself to Penelope. Moreover, he found it unnecessary to talk about personal affairs with people who were irrelevant.

What upset him was the fact that Skylar did not seem to trust that he would never take Tanya as his wife.

Meanwhile, Penelope took Tobias' lack of explanation as an admission by silence, she was certain that Skylar would come to regret this relationship in the future. There were no short of young girls committing suicide for men like him.

As it was getting late, Skylar vehemently persuaded Penelope into accepting the cheque, but it was to no avail.

In the end, Skylar could only give up. Perhaps Penelope would change her mind when she really ran out of options.

The three of them exited the café with Tobias taking the lead and the two girls walking behind him, arm in arm. Like two school girls crushing on a senior, the two of them giggled softly as they stomped on his shadow.

Tobias gallantly offered to bring Penelope home first.

As they rode in his spacious Porsche SUV, Penelope whispered into Skylar's ear, "You should keep your guard up. Spending money on you doesn't mean he loves you. Don't let all this materialistic stuff cloud your judgment."

Through the rearview mirror, Tobias spied the two girls whispering to each other. Both of them seemed to have endless topics to talk about.

Even after so many years, Penelope still lived in the same old house.

The family of three lived in a space of about ten square meters where there was only one room. They slept on a bunk bed and for privacy purposes, she had installed a curtain on the upper bunk.

Her home was close to the one Skylar used to live in and was only two to three minutes away by foot.

Penelope was the one who accompanied her the most throughout her childhood.

When they arrived outside her house, Penelope gave Skylar an inquisitive look, seemingly asking where she was going with this man.

Not long after Penelope left, Skylar heard someone calling her name.

She turned around and saw her cousin, Kevin Watts, carrying a backpack. He was wearing black-rimmed glasses and was clad in a baggy school uniform. He had mild acne and light stubble, all typical characteristics of an adolescent boy.

With a broad grin on his face, he greeted Skylar enthusiastically.

Tobias went for a smoke, seemingly unwilling to have any interaction with Skylar's relatives. Or perhaps, he felt that it was a waste of his breath to entertain a mere high school student.

As for Skylar, she had not seen Kevin for a long time.

He told her that his father had been sacked and went out looking for a job every day, but oddly, none of the factories were willing to hire him.

Skylar gazed at Tobias' towering figure in the distance, watching as puffs of smoke cloaked his features. Does he have anything to do with this?

Logically speaking, it would be easy for her uncle to find a job since there was currently a shortage of skilled workers and all the factories would be jumping at the chance to hire one.

After exchanging pleasantries with Kevin, she finally left.

"Finished?" Tobias hooked an arm around Skylar's waist, letting her lean into his embrace.