

Recovery Of Love Chapter 1 - 10

Chapter 1 Got Rid of Him

My name is Robyn Landon. Today, I found myself sitting in the audience of my husband's beauty pageant competition. Yes, you heard it right. I had to watch my husband pick the winner and couldn't even feel a hint of jealousy.

The event took place at the Monreso Exhibition Center. To be honest, I hadn't planned on coming, but when I heard that my husband, Ian, would be presenting the awards, I couldn't resist being part of the audience. Ian was the President of Winter Medical Group, a family-owned business with a chain of plastic surgery and general hospitals.

During the award ceremony, he appeared on stage with the hostess, waving to the crowd. He was dressed in a sharp black suit and even wore the tie I personally picked and gifted him on his birthday. He had a tall, well-built physique and handsome facial features. He also exuded elegance and charm. He was always the center of attention, no matter where he went.

As soon as he stepped into the spotlight, the girls next to me started screaming his name in shrill and ecstatic voices.

"Let's give a big round of applause to Eileen for winning this year's beauty pageant!"

The audience erupted in applause.

I couldn't help but look at Eileen's overly artificial appearance, which left me unimpressed. Deep down, I knew that this beauty pageant was sponsored by the Winter Group to promote their plastic surgery hospitals. So, Eileen became their poster girl. Yet, my husband, Ian, would rather choose someone who had undergone numerous plastic surgeries than spare a single glance at his seemingly ugly wife, who had not undergone any of those. Truth be told, apart from the slap-sized purple birthmark on my face, my features were still quite refined. Other people might feel sympathetic upon seeing it, but Ian found it utterly repulsive.

Eileen gave her acceptance speech on stage.

“First and foremost, I want to thank Mr. Winter for presenting me with this award, and I’m incredibly grateful to all my friends who supported me...”

Her tearful appearance made it seem as if she had gone through tremendous hardships to achieve this victory.

After her speech, I couldn’t help but watch as she willingly embraced Ian, almost as if she wanted to bury her head in his arms. As someone in the audience, scenes like this had become all too familiar to me, and it didn’t faze me at all.

Once the award ceremony ended, I didn’t return home. Instead, I parked the Porsche my in-laws had given me in a discreet spot at the parking lot and waited quietly inside the car. After about half an hour, I saw Eileen and Ian walking arm-in-arm toward the parking lot. They were chatting and laughing, and Ian even displayed a rare form of affection—something I never received from him.

They got into a black car with tinted windows right in front of me, and it was impossible to see inside. Nonetheless, the car started shaking within a few minutes, and the motion grew more intense. I couldn’t resist disrupting their moment and called Ian upon seeing that.

As expected, the car stopped rocking as soon as his phone rang.

“Are you done with work?” I spoke calmly; there was no need to hide my emotions.

On the other hand, he sounded exhausted. “I’m still busy. Don’t wait for me tonight; I have an important client meeting.”

“Really? Sounds exhausting. From the sound of it, I assume your meeting is at the gym?”

“The gym?” He hesitated for a moment before responding with anger, “I don’t know what you mean!”

“Oh, it’s nothing. I just wanted to let you know that we’re getting a divorce!” My voice remained steady, with a sense of indifference in it.

He couldn’t believe what I just said as he questioned me sharply, “Divorce?! Did I hear

that right?"

"You heard me loud and clear," I firmly replied.

Ian snapped back at me with disdain, "Do you even have the right to bring up divorce?"

"Oh, so now I need to pass some kind of exam to ask for a divorce?" I retorted sarcastically. I had no intention of putting up with his annoying behavior. His condescending attitude may work for other women. Unfortunately for him, he held no sway or intimidation toward me. Ian's biggest pet peeve was being challenged, especially so by a woman he never took seriously. I could practically feel him grinding his teeth, wishing he could rip me apart right there and then.

As he had no other outlet for his frustration, he used Eileen as an object to vent, causing the car to rock even more violently. I could hear her moans that would make anyone blush over the phone.

"Let me show you how I love other women," he said, attempting to disgust me, not realizing that I couldn't care less.

"This is why this marriage should end. End of story," I declared firmly.

Ian was completely infuriated and shouted, "Fine! Let's get a divorce! But don't expect to get a single penny from me!"

I could only force a wry smile. I never had any intention of gaining anything from him. If it weren't for the entangled history between our families, I would have never wanted to marry him. I spent my days in an empty house, pretending not to know about his affairs with other women.

"Sure, the divorce agreement is in your study. Don't forget to sign it." I had prepared the divorce agreement a few months ago but never found the right opportunity to tell him. He was possessive, you know? He could kick women out of his life without a second thought, but he couldn't stand the idea of being kicked out by a woman. I feared his retaliation, so I didn't bring up the divorce until now.

"Get lost, you ugly woman! Your face is just plain repulsive," he insulted me and hung up

the phone hastily.

The more he acted all high and mighty, the more I wanted to disgust him. I had no intention of indulging him, especially with his nasty attitude toward other women. Moreover, to avoid any future denials from him, I recorded our conversation as evidence. After the mention of divorce, I didn't return to that house. I had everything packed when I left. I drove aimlessly through the streets. Although I was surrounded by bustling lights and sounds, I had nowhere to call home. The house I spent a year and a half in had several servants, but it felt cold and empty. Naturally, I wouldn't linger there even if there was even a bit of warmth left in that dreadfully lifeless building. I also didn't want to return to the house and deal with the gossip that came with it.

I spent the night in the car. The next morning, I went to the used car market in Monreso and negotiated with several car dealers. Eventually, I settled on a reliable dealership. The Porsche was a gift from my in-laws for marrying into the Winters, and the car was under my name. Right now, my top priority was getting some cash, and my other plans would eventually be dealt with.

After we agreed on the car's price, we completed the transfer at the dealership that same day. Due to my mediocre driving skills. It naturally caused quite several scratches on the car. Therefore, the price was heavily discounted—I received around 120 thousand.

Thankfully, I wouldn't starve or freeze in the short term with that lump sum of money. Later, I rented a temporary apartment, not for emotional healing, but to plan for my future.

Before I married Ian, I was just a regular surgeon, with average experience, doing mundane work at the hospital. Life became rather routine for over a year, and my only social activity was liking posts on social media and envying the lives that other people led.

On this particular day, I was lounging on the couch as usual, engrossed in my phone. I opened my social media feed and came across a post from Jude, an old colleague from

my medical training days at the hospital. In a moment of impulsiveness, I decided to reach out to him.

‘Hey, are you there?’ I messaged him.

‘I’m here. Finally decided to contact me, huh?’ he replied promptly as per usual. It seemed like he was subtly expressing his displeasure that I hadn’t reached out to him in over a year. To be honest, he had a point; I didn’t even invite him to my wedding when I married Ian. I felt a twinge of guilt for bothering him out of the blue after all this time. Regardless, we quickly caught up as old friends, and I shared some details about my current situation.

‘What are your plans for the future?’ he responded.

‘I remember you mentioning that you have connections and that you can easily arrange for someone to study abroad.’

Chapter 2 Transformation

Jude was brought in as a highly talented individual from another country. He was young, driven, and had already reached a senior position before turning 30. Currently, he not only served as the department head but also held a professorship at the medical school. With his extensive network, he had mentioned on multiple occasions the possibility of furthering my education abroad using his special channels.

“Have you made up your mind?”

“Yeah... I have. I don’t really have any other options, so I’m here. You know, bothering you,” I replied, self-deprecatingly.

He didn’t seem bothered by my remark. “Alright, I’ll give it a try.”

“Good. Let’s pick a date, and I’ll treat you to a meal.”

I was actually surprised that Jude readily agreed to my suggestion. “There’s no need for a meal at the moment. Consider it a favor you owe me. We can figure out the details later.”

Jude gracefully declined my invitation, and I wasn't too disappointed by that. He was a well-known and busy professional, after all. It took a week before I received his notification. In the meantime, I made sure to get everything prepared. Jude informed me that he had arranged for me to study at the top medical institution in Elysara.

Studying there was the aspiration of countless medical professionals, including myself. If it weren't for getting married to Ian because of some trivial family matters, I would have pursued this opportunity long ago.

To be honest, I owe Jude a great debt of gratitude for this arrangement. He took care of everything—from visas to plane tickets—and all I had to do was simply pack my bags and embark on a journey of further education abroad. This was all thanks to his meticulous planning. Besides, this journey would last for three years.

After three years of intensive studies, I also made significant academic contributions in the field of surgery. I published numerous scholarly papers, participated in multiple medical competitions, and even garnered awards. Some of my work was covered by academic forums and media outlets in the country.

Unfortunately, due to my appearance, I declined media interviews, preferring not to be in the public eye and avoid attention from others. People often made jokes about my looks, and while I try not to feel insecure, it was not always easy to brush off those comments.

After a great deal of contemplation, I finally made up my mind to get rid of the birthmark on my face. Fortunately, I received a substantial scholarship during those three years, along with fees from published papers and some earnings from part-time work, which provided me with a nice nest egg. They said that our bodies were a gift from our parents, but this purple birthmark had such a profound and negative impact on my life that I couldn't help but go against conventional wisdom.

I was determined to choose a top-tier institution to perform the cosmetic procedure.

Although I was also a surgeon myself and had some training in medical aesthetics, I couldn't operate on myself. So, I invested a significant portion of my savings to undergo

medical aesthetics treatment.

Let me clarify one thing in advance—I only had the purple birthmark removed. I didn't opt for any other procedures like photo-rejuvenation or a nose job. I wanted to maintain a completely natural look. While my savings were almost depleted, getting rid of that unsightly birthmark made me feel a lot more self-assured. In conclusion, it was totally worth it.

As my studies came to an end, my remaining savings wouldn't sustain me any longer.

Thus, I started applying for jobs on domestic recruitment websites. After I had spent three years abroad, I was still having a hard time adjusting to life overseas.

Soon after I sent out my resume, I received a response from a private comprehensive hospital in my home country. Just as I was reveling in the joy of the opportunity, I received a call from Jude.

“Congratulations on your return! You've already started applying for jobs back home,” he said with an almost spy-like tone as if he knew every detail.

“I just received the hospital's response, and you already know about it,” I replied lightheartedly.

Jude didn't challenge me and calmly smiled. “Great. I'll be at the airport to pick you up.”

“Oh, there's no need for that, Jude. I know you're busy, and I don't want to inconvenience you.”

“Well, you're just as stubborn as I am. It's settled—I'll pick you up.”

Although I didn't know Jude that well, our relationship was fairly solid. Still, I never realized he had a chivalrous side to him. Stubborn as I was, I couldn't easily turn down his offer, and I didn't want to disregard his kind gesture.

I booked a ticket back home and didn't bother saying goodbye to my classmates in Elysara; I only bid farewell to my mentor. I also informed Jude about my departure in advance, and he was already waiting for me at the airport. When I arrived at the pickup area, I spotted Jude among the crowd, but he had a puzzled look on his face. It was clear

he couldn't recognize me until I approached him.

"Hey, Jude!" I waved at him.

He glanced at me absentmindedly and then looked away. After a moment, he seemed to realize something and turned his focus back to me.

"Are you... Robyn?" His expression evidently showed that my transformation was quite significant.

"Well, did I change all that much? I'm standing right in front of you, and yet, you still didn't recognize me," I said with a chuckle.

I only got rid of the purple birthmark on my face; I didn't go through plastic surgery. Was the difference really that noticeable? He examined me carefully and couldn't help but pinch my cheek.

"The birthmark on your face is gone, I see. You look like a total babe now! If you join a beauty pageant, you'd easily snatch the crown," he teased.

While I felt a little embarrassed by his actions, I didn't want to back away. So, I changed the subject to ease the situation.

"By the way, how did you find out that I was applying for jobs back home?"

"You applied to the hospital where I work now, and all the department heads are eager to get you on board," he explained with enthusiasm.

His words surprised me. I had only sent out a job application, and it was already causing a stir even before I started working at the hospital.

"Really? I'm just a young doctor. They're really overestimating me," I replied humbly.

He raised an eyebrow and retorted, "Everyone wants graduates from the medical holy land. The fact that you studied there and are returning makes you a hot commodity."

I agreed with him. It was true that graduating from the medical holy land in Elysara set one apart. Plus, the country strictly prohibited talent outflow, so someone like me, who managed to go there for further studies and return, was in high demand.

"I should thank you. If it weren't for your thoughtful arrangements, I wouldn't be where I

am today,” I sincerely thanked him. Without him, I might still be an ordinary doctor getting bossed around by my ‘betters’.

“Oh, stop it with your excessive politeness. I’m excited to work with you again,” he said, extending his hand for a handshake.

I shook his hand without hesitation, just like when I was rotating through his department during my training.

After some small talk, he helped me with my luggage and headed toward the parking lot. In the car, he asked me about my ex-husband, Ian. Nonetheless, I didn’t go into detail about my past; I didn’t even say a bad word about Ian.

“He’s such a blind guy. He’s probably regretting his choices now that you’ve moved on and become so successful,” Jude said, unintentionally mocking Ian.

If I had revealed that Ian was my ex-husband, he probably wouldn’t have teased me like that. Ian was surrounded by beautiful women, and if he ever regretted anything, it would be like regretting eating too many veggies.

“You know, it’s been over a year since you got married, and I’ve never seen you flaunt anything on social media. You’ve been all mysterious about it,” he commented.

I could only force a bitter smile and replied, “There’s nothing worth showing off. It was a marriage on paper only, and posting about it would only make people laugh.” Even the wedding was just a simple family gathering.

Ian Winter would never have exposed me to the world back then, especially with half of my face covered in a purple birthmark. I’m certain that he probably felt like he was watching a horror movie every single time he laid his eyes on me.

Jude quickly picked up that I wasn’t interested in talking about the past, so he stopped bringing up such topics. He had initially planned to settle me down before going to the hospital, but an urgent situation at the hospital required him to handle it immediately.

Chapter 3 Hospital Encounter

“Understood. I will head to the hospital right away.”

A grim-faced Jude hung up the phone, stepped on the gas pedal, and drove toward the hospital.

“Did something happen, Jude?” I asked, noting his grave demeanor.

“Previously, there was a three-year-old child diagnosed with heart disease. Due to the high risk of that particular surgery, no hospital was willing to accept the child.” He sighed wearily.

“As the head of the Cardiothoracic Surgery Department, I couldn’t bear seeing the child’s parents endure such heartache day and night. Hence, after seeking the hospital director’s advice, I accepted the child as my patient.”

Then, he continued with a slight smile on his face, “Soon, we formulated a treatment regime based on the child’s condition. Fortunately, the operation was a success.”

Admiration dawned upon me after I listened to Jude’s elaboration, for he had the courage to accept a patient with a challenging health condition when no one else had the guts to do such a thing. “Then, shouldn’t you be thrilled that the surgery was a success?”

“Of course. However, the child is too young. His condition keeps recurring. He has already undergone three surgeries.”

The frown on his face deepened as he elaborated, “If we are to include this surgery, I’m afraid it will be his fourth time. And for a child who has undergone three major surgeries, the surgical risk for this fourth one will undoubtedly increase. I fear he will die on the operating table.” Jude’s palms were sweaty as he tightened his grip on the steering wheel. At the same time, I wondered what kind of heart disease was plaguing the child. Just what heart disease would cause his condition to relapse and repeatedly undergo surgery numerous times?

“Do you have the child’s medical records? Do you mind if I take a look?” In the end, curiosity got the best of me. Thus, I asked Jude for the child’s medical records.

He immediately handed me a tablet containing them.

After I laid my eyes on the child's chest X-ray before the operation, I involuntarily frowned and couldn't help but feel a chill running down my spine. Such a rare disease! Since there are only a few successful cases of this particular surgery worldwide, I can barely imagine how difficult it is for Jude to perform it.

I turned off the tablet and fell silent. In my mind, I recalled that not only did I participate in a seminar that touched on the topic of this disease when I was studying in Elysara, but I also went to observe this particular surgical procedure. It was an especially complicated surgery. Even a slight mistake could result in its failure.

Jude's car had pulled over at the hospital not long after I was immersed in my train of thought. Once we got out of the car, I trotted into the hospital building along with him. At this moment, the child was already sent to the operating room. His body looked as though it was being strung up by intubations and his life was clearly in critical condition. Meanwhile, the child's parents and the other family members cried outside the operating room. When they saw Jude, they approached him and questioned, "Dr. Fulton, just tell me how much money you want. I will pay you even if it means to sell everything I have. I'm begging you. Please! Please save my child! He is dying!"

"That's right, Dr. Fulton. We have spent a great deal of money, yet he is still dying. In fact, the child's condition is getting increasingly worse with each treatment. You'd better not be scamming us out of our wallets."

Jude didn't explain himself when faced with these denunciations. Instead, he merely instructed the other doctors and the head nurse to prepare for the surgery. They were currently racing against time, for even a second of delay would put the child's life in greater danger.

"Robyn, I'm afraid I need you to participate in this surgery," he said. I was aware that Jude had noticed that I had vague knowledge about this kind of disease while I browsed the child's medical records in the car earlier, so I immediately took the hint and nodded.

Alas, just as I was about to prepare for the surgery, the child's family members stopped me.

“What? Are you letting this young lady perform the surgery?” an old man asked while pointing at me. By the looks of it, he should be the child's grandfather or someone with similar seniority.

Nonetheless, I paid no attention to them. I knew that family members couldn't be expected to stay rational and calm at such a critical moment, so I disregarded their obstruction and went to disinfect and change into a surgical gown without answering their questions.

“What's wrong with this hospital? Are all their doctors this unprofessional? I'm going to lodge a complaint about you and sue you in court.”

“My child was healthy before getting sent here. But now, he needs to undergo surgery almost every day.”

The words that escaped the child's family members' lips sounded increasingly harsh. One family member even went as far as immediately calling the relevant departments and demanding a reasonable answer.

As this matter soon garnered the hospital director's attention, four renowned specialists showed up in the operating room while Jude and I studied the surgical approach.

“Gentlemen, you guys are...” Jude was a little puzzled.

“The group's board of directors has sent us here to conduct a consultation. We will be performing this surgery.” Shortly after the four specialists stated their purpose here, they began studying the surgical approach for the child's surgery, completely ignoring Jude and me.

Due to time constraints, they couldn't sit down and take their time to discuss how to go forward. They could only intensively analyze the child's condition in the operating room. Although these four specialists seemed to be veteran doctors, they also had no idea how to operate when faced with such a challenging case.

Therefore, Jude approached them and began introducing me upon seeing such a scenario, “Dear seniors, I am sorry to interrupt, but this is Robyn Landon. She has just returned from studying abroad. She has encountered a similar condition prior to this and has formulated a surgical approach as well. I think it is feasible, so I shall let her explain it to you.”

Earlier in the car, I formulated a surgical approach based on the child’s condition and related cases. Besides, he approved it after I showed it to him, so it shouldn’t be difficult to convince them.

“Greetings, dear seniors. In order not to waste time, I will briefly outline my surgical approach—” Just as I was about to explain, I got cut off. “Young lady, let me ask you, have you ever performed such a surgery?” One of the specialists stepped forward and questioned me.

It was as clear as day that these specialists disagreed with me due to my age. In addition, it would be a good slap in their faces if they adopted my approach.

Still, as I truly never performed such surgery before, I truthfully shook my head and said no.

“We are more experienced than her. How could she possibly have a deeper insight than us?”

“Who will bear the responsibility if something goes wrong?” another specialist added.

Although I was tempted to refute them, I didn’t want to engage in a verbal dispute. After all, they were indeed far more skilled than me.

“Do not assume that you are qualified to give bits of advice simply because you have broadened your horizon by reading more modern medical books and learning several modern medical skills.” Nonetheless, I chose to ignore such an offensive statement, let alone get angry because of it.

I simply glanced at the child on the operating table. Regardless, I felt nothing but pity for the him instead of being overwhelmed by righteous fury after getting besieged by

countless verbal abuse by these seniors.

Then, I stepped aside, kept silent, and let them discuss things amongst themselves.

Sure, the four elders had outstanding achievements in their respective fields. Yet, when they actually sat down for a discussion, they had issues reaching a common understanding, for they each held their own opinions.

Every minute and every second passed by. A well-built man wearing a surgical gown and a mask entered the operating room at this moment.

“May I know what the conclusion is? Can the four of you begin performing the surgery now?” he asked the four specialists.

The four specialists avoided eye contact with the man. Then, they merely exchanged uneasy glances with each other and fell into a long silence.

The man reprimanded them sternly, “I’ve noticed you guys have been discussing for a long time while I was in the control room. We have asked you here to solve the issue! You’re not here to settle your debate when a life is on the line!”

As for me, I was stunned when I heard the man’s voice. In an instant, my mind brought me back to three years ago. My ex-husband sounded the same as this man when he scolded me in the past. Even his voice is strikingly similar to my ex-husband’s!

“Mr. Winter, the risk of this surgery is extremely high, and the child is too young. So, we fear that the success rate of this surgery is less than 5%.”

Mr. Winter?! Are these specialists addressing him as Mr. Winter?! Can he be... Is it possible... A sudden realization hit me. The Winter Medical Group has plenty of hospitals under them. Maybe this hospital is also under the group.

“They are right, Mr. Winter. This surgery is extremely risky. Not one Cardiothoracic surgeon in all the hospitals under the Winter Medical Group dares to perform this surgery.” Jude came to the rescue right when the tension heightened. At the same time, his words also verified my inner thoughts. This man really is Ian Winter, my ex-husband! So, I swiftly moved behind the nurse and deliberately stretched my mask, wishing it

could stretch up to my eyes and cover them. I may be doomed if Ian recognizes me! He and I are simply incompatible. There is nothing but sorrow whenever we meet. After all, it was I who kicked him to the curb back then. He can destroy me solely because of that.

“So, you mean all the doctors and specialists in my company are incompetent?”

Ian was still the same—straightforward and without any consideration for others’ feelings whenever he talks. As such, even Jude found it way too awkward to answer him.

“Listen up. I’ve already instructed someone to console the child’s family members outside. I don’t care what approach you use, but I want to see this child being pushed out of this operating room safe and sound. It’s fine even if he can’t be as lively and energetic as other children. But at least he can breathe, walk, and play!”

As expected of Ian’s way of doing things—only results mattered but not the process.

Meanwhile, the four specialists held their breath in fear. Then, all four looked at me for help, utterly powerless.

“Mr. Winter, this is Robyn Landon, who has just returned from studying abroad. Today is her first day reporting to duty at our hospital.” Jude took advantage of the situation, dragged me out of hiding, and introduced me to Ian.

I was so shocked that I broke out in a cold sweat. Chill ran down my spine, and I didn’t dare to look into Ian’s eyes, rightfully fearing that he would recognize me.

“A new doctor? Why didn’t the hospital director report this to the company?”

Jude hurriedly explained, “She hasn’t had the chance to meet the director yet, but she has encountered such a disease, so I asked her to join this surgery. I have seen her surgical approach, and I think it’ll work.”

“Robyn Landon? That’s odd. Why do I feel like I have heard such an awkward-sounding name before?”

Even though we were married for more than a year, Ian never called me by my name at all. Even if we occasionally bumped into each other somewhere, he still couldn’t be bothered to do so as he found my name difficult.

I feared that he would remember me, so I quickly stepped in and explained, “I have published articles in medical journals. Perhaps someone has mentioned my name to you.” “Fine, fine. Since even Dr. Fulton strongly recommends you, you probably do have something up your sleeve. Besides, these four old men have failed to devise a surgical approach. So, let’s go with yours!”

Chapter 4 A Successful Surgery

“But... just to be clear, you recommended her. So, if anything goes wrong, you’ll be taking the heat.”

Jude and I exchanged a look, and I nodded to show him that I was confident in my skills.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Winter. I trust Robyn. If something goes south, I’ll take full responsibility,” Jude said.

Ian was waiting for that response. As long as someone was willing to shoulder the risk, the success or failure of the surgery did not matter to him. I couldn’t help but despise Ian’s character. From this point on, the image of him in my mind had completely crumbled. I even found trash more dignified than him.

“Alright, you guys keep going. I’ll be in the director’s office, waiting for some good news.” Despite the life-and-death situation, he just casually threw out those words and walked out of the operating room. After Ian left, the other experts in the room changed their tune.

“Now that Dr. Fulton is willing to take the risk, and the plan was made by this young lady, we old folks won’t meddle,” one of them chimed in.

“Yeah, the hospital needs fresh blood like you, and the new techniques you bring. We’re just a bunch of old-timers, so it’s better for us not to interfere.” They all spoke grandly, probably just trying to avoid taking responsibility.

Jude and I shared a knowing glance, exchanging a bittersweet smile. Then, we ignored these old coots and proceeded with the plan I had devised and started the surgery. Jude

was the lead surgeon, and I assisted to make sure he didn't make any mistakes. After all, even the tiniest slip-up could cost the child's life on that cold operating table during such a delicate procedure.

As time passed, my worries proved to be unfounded. Jude remained steady throughout the entire procedure, surpassing my expectations—he really was a top-notch talent.

Four hours later, the child's heart finally started beating unaided. The surgery was a success, and we both breathed a sigh of relief. Alas, the other experts in the room had faces as dark as the dark sky, and their eyes were filled with nothing but enmity.

After we left the operating room, the family members swarmed around us, completely disregarding Jude, who was already perspiring from exhaustion.

“Don't worry. The surgery was a success. Thanks to Dr. Landon,” Jude said, refusing to take all the credit. The family members finally let go of their anxieties upon hearing that the surgery went well.

I shook my head, signaling to Jude that he didn't need to introduce us to the families. I didn't want any suspicion of snatching any credit; I was just trying to help him. If the surgery had failed, it wouldn't just be a blow to him, but it could also jeopardize his medical career.

These family members were no pushovers, and I didn't expect them to thank me.

Nonetheless, the hospital leadership highly valued the success of this surgery. Mr. Ziegler personally received us and invited Jude and me to his office.

Ian was leisurely sipping his tea in his office.

“So, you're Robyn?” Mr. Ziegler asked.

“Yeah, I am.” I nodded in response.

“Oh, truly a young talent. The hospital received your resume, and all the department heads are competing to hire you,” Mr. Ziegler chirped. He was grinning from ear to ear, showing his excitement. He didn't even care that it might have been rather inappropriate.

“You're overestimating, Mr. Ziegler. I'm just a newcomer. I don't have the qualifications

to be recognized by the hospital leadership,” I replied. I did enjoy the praise, but I still stuck to formalities.

“Don’t be so modest. I’ve seen enough people like you.” Ian, who was sipping his tea, seemed to dislike all the pleasantries between people. Well, I couldn’t blame him; someone like him, who was accustomed to living the good life, probably wouldn’t understand social niceties. I had to admit, this guy’s sharp tongue was no joke.

I stood there, itching to give him a good slap for his caustic remarks. The sudden silence was getting awkward, and Mr. Ziegler quickly poured me a cup of tea to ease the tension. Mr. Ziegler said in a hushed tone, “Well, Mr. Winter actually meant that he admires you. Don’t take it to heart.”

Admires me? Did he really, though? Also, it was also impossible that I would take his words to heart; I don’t even care about him. I was just annoyed. I was trying to be considerate to poor Mr. Ziegler here, and after four hours without water, I felt a bit thirsty, so I instinctively took off my mask and had a sip.

As I was drinking, I glanced at Ian from the corner of my eye, and it seemed like he was looking in my direction too. Then, he nonchalantly stood up, walking toward me while sipping his tea and smacking his lips.

“Have we met somewhere before?” he blurted.

Oh, no! Could it be that he recognized me? My heart was pounding, and my brain was racing to find a solution. To diffuse the awkward situation, I decided to meet his gaze head-on, not letting him see any trace of nervousness. Our eyes locked again, but this time, I noticed a playful glint in his eyes.

“I have a pretty average face, so people tend to think that I look familiar wherever I go.” Clearly, my explanation didn’t convince him, and he shook his head. “No, it’s not that. I had this indescribable feeling of familiarity the moment I laid my eyes on you.”

He paced around me, seemingly oblivious to Mr. Ziegler and Jude’s presence. In fact, he couldn’t recall what made me familiar even after scrutinizing it for a while. Well, he

never really paid attention to me three years ago, and I was pretty sure he erased any memory of me long ago. Besides, I had changed quite a bit in both appearance and personality, so it was unlikely he'd remember me instantly.

Then, he stared at me for a few more seconds as he sipped his tea and said, "Hmm, you've got a nice figure."

Nice figure? What did that even mean? Could he possibly have some ulterior motives toward me? Nonetheless, he never used to stare at me like that when I was married to him.

Jude noticed Ian's strange gaze and quickly intervened, "Mr. Winter, the success of the surgery owes a lot to Robyn's surgical plan."

"Absolutely, she's an exceptional talent, bringing such a remarkable gift to the hospital right after she decided to join us," Mr. Ziegler chimed in, agreeing with Jude.

Ian chuckled sarcastically, "Yeah, such an exceptional talent. I wonder where she'd fit best in the organization."

His words had an eerie tone, sending chills down my spine. Jude and Mr. Ziegler exchanged puzzled looks.

"Mr. Winter, what do you suggest?" Mr. Ziegler asked politely.

Ian glanced at me once again, pondered for a few seconds, and then said, "Last month, my secretary got pregnant and resigned, leaving a vacant secretary position."

I almost lost my cool upon hearing that. Even if I had to set everything else aside, including our less-than-happy marriage, did he really think I went abroad for three years just to become his secretary? Mr. Ziegler and Jude looked just as incredulous.

"No way, Mr. Winter. I can't handle the secretary job, so you'll have to find someone else for that position," I firmly refused. There was no way I'd ever dream of becoming his secretary. If anything, that was something straight out of my nightmares!

"Oh? Not willing to follow the company's arrangement?" Ian resumed his high and mighty attitude, wielding his power over me.

“I specialize in surgery, so I should be in a role that aligns with my expertise and makes the best use of my skills.” I didn’t indulge him during our divorce, and I certainly wouldn’t start now.

“Oh? Making the best use of your skills, huh? What if I disagree?” He lit a cigarette and began taking a deep drag.

“And what if you do? Besides, I haven’t officially started working here, so I’ll just find another opportunity elsewhere.” I maintained a strong and unwavering tone.

Ian had never been challenged like this before, and his temper flared up immediately. He flicked his cigarette, sending it flying several feet away as he said angrily, “I finally figured out why you seem so familiar. You’re just like that utterly repulsive woman.”

That woman? He was talking about me, wasn’t he? While other women would bow down to his every command, I was the one who dared to stand up to him.

“Well, I won’t be a bother here any longer since you find me repulsive.”

Chapter 5 Jude Offends Ian

I didn’t want to stay even a moment longer. Just as he detested me, I loathed his face. We were never meant to get along in the first place. If I continued to get involved with him, it would only be a matter of time before I ended up in trouble.

Seeing my determination to leave, he threatened me, hoping to make me back down.

“You want to leave? Go ahead and step out this door, then! Give it a try and see if any hospital dares to take you in!”

I let out an inward sigh. This jinx is like a pest that can’t be gotten rid of no matter how hard I try!

I knew full well that Winter Medical Group had many medical experts and thus held a significant position in the medical community. At the moment, it seemed that I had only one option, which was to leave Monreso and seek a living in another city.

Ian continued, “How could I bear to let someone as talented as you go, Miss Robyn...

How about this? I'll give you some time to think it over." The way he looked at me got weirder and weirder. In the past, he had looked at me with nothing but disgust in his eyes. "I've thought it over, and I don't have the makings of a secretary."

Unfortunately, when it came to dealing with me, he was always on the losing side. I knew his tricks all too well. He had dealt with countless women in the past, but his repertoire was quite limited. Unless he got something on me, these cheap tricks of his would only work on those women who were afraid of him.

I had just returned to the country, and he didn't even recognize me. Since he had nothing on me, I had nothing to fear.

Ian's expression contorted a bit as he suffered another defeat. "Don't jump to conclusions so quickly. Your curves alone demonstrate that you have a natural talent for this. I'm sure you'll become a capable secretary." After flashing me a wicked smile, he casually walked out of the hospital director's office with his hands in his pockets.

Jude could only fume in silence at his attitude. "How can there be a company president like him threatening to ruin someone's future by giving the word?"

Anyone with any sense could see what Ian was planning.

I couldn't help but wonder. With so many women surrounding him, why would he target me as soon as we met today? Why didn't he do that earlier?

Graham also felt helpless. "You're right, but he's the company president."

"But that doesn't mean we should let a rare talent go to waste, right?" replied Jude, getting more and more agitated as he spoke.

I smiled at them; to me, it wasn't a big deal. "Never mind, Jude. There's no need to get upset. It's not a big deal, anyway. If there's no room for me here, there'll always be room for me somewhere else. I can live in another city just the same."

"Sigh! What a shame! A rare talent is so hard to come by!"

Graham's regretful tone of voice made me feel a warmth that I hadn't felt in a while. "Mr. Ziegler, it's really kind of you to meet with me in person. Honestly, I'm kind of flattered.

Sorry that I won't be able to work under you."

The way Graham looked at me told me that he wished me to stay. However, he had no say in this matter and was also unwilling to throw me under the bus as he was aware of Ian's behavior. "Don't mention it, Miss Robyn. All we can do is hope that Mr. Winter will change his mind. I don't want to lose such a great talent either."

Changing Ian's mind is even harder than draining the Pacific Ocean. I nodded to Graham with a smile, saying, "Thank you for your compliment. Well, I'll get going. I'm not going to take up any more of your time."

I left after saying goodbye to Graham.

Jude came after me. He seemed downcast and low-spirited, completely unlike his previously high-spirited self. "Robyn, what's your plan after this?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. I just returned from abroad, so I'll rest for a couple of days to recover from jet lag before figuring out what to do."

"Alright. Just let me know if you need any help. I have friends in other cities who might be able to help you."

"That's too much trouble for you, Jude. I haven't thanked you properly for what you did."

I felt bad that he was already considering my future plans for me when I had yet to properly thank him for helping me study abroad.

"You don't have to. If you hadn't been there at today's surgery, I might have already submitted my resignation to Mr. Ziegler's office by now."

"Still, your unparalleled skills are the key. While the strategy was crucial, the surgery wouldn't have been successful without a skilled chief surgeon."

Jude blushed at my compliment. "Stop making fun of me, will you? Let's go and get you settled first."

With his help, I settled into a hotel for the time being, planning to rest for a couple of days before making further decisions.

At first, I thought my refusal to compromise would allow me to walk away from this

without having to deal with Ian anymore. However, I underestimated his methods.

The next morning, while still asleep, I vaguely heard someone banging on the door. I sluggishly opened the door, only to see Jude standing outside, panting. “Jude? What brings you here so early in the morning?”

“Robyn, let me show you something...” Jude took out his phone and scrolled for a while before opening a short video app.

I rubbed my dry eyes while staring at his phone. Surprisingly, four old men appeared on its screen. “Aren’t they the four experts from yesterday? What’s the matter... Why are they all dressed up?”

Seeing that I hadn’t grasped the situation, Jude explained anxiously, “Robyn, take a closer look! Winter Medical Group held a commendation ceremony last night for yesterday’s surgery. The spokesperson for the group claimed that yesterday’s surgery was performed by these four old men and that they were the ones who devised the surgical strategy! The success of the surgery signifies a breakthrough in our medical technology, so all media outlets are reporting on this! How can you still be able to sleep?”

In my heart, I remained totally unperturbed, even somewhat disdainful. “Oh, come on, Jude! Is that all?”

“What? Can you just swallow this? You and I performed this surgery together, so why are they getting a commendation for it?”

I tried to calm Jude down, but to my surprise, he dragged me out of my hotel room. I was still in my nightgown, unkempt and unwashed since I hadn’t freshened up.

After shoving me into the passenger seat, he got into his car and stepped on the gas, leaving the hotel.

“Jude, where are you taking me?” I asked, holding tightly onto the door handle. The car was speeding so fast that I was afraid I might get thrown out of it.

“We’re going to confront them!”

“Confront them? Where are we going to confront them? And who are we going to

confront?”

“We’re going to Winter Medical Group to talk to Mr. Winter!”

At that he was taking me to Winter Medical Group to confront Ian, I was taken aback and immediately asked Jude to stop the car. “Jude, can you pull over to the side? It’s really not necessary to confront anyone. I don’t care about it at all…”

Jude was too emotional to listen to me, though. He drove on, speeding all the way.

By the time we arrived at Winter Medical Group headquarters, my legs had turned to jelly. Who could have imagined that Jude could be such a hothead?

“Robyn, I must stand up for you today, even if it means I’ll lose my job,” said Jude while dragging me into the company building.

I covered my face with my hand along the way.

We entered the elevator and went all the way to the top floor. As soon as we got to the president’s office, Jude didn’t even bother to knock; he pushed the door open and entered right away.

The moment we entered, we happened to see Ian slapping a beautiful woman.

Slap! A loud slap echoed through the room.

“Don’t you dare use pregnancy to threaten me. Get lost! Are you even worthy of marrying me?”

The woman fell to the ground after being slapped in the face. At the sight of Jude and me, she covered her swollen cheek and ran away in tears.

Damn it, this guy never changes his ways! I swore inwardly. What a relief that he never touched me! If I got pregnant, I probably wouldn’t end up any better than this.

Ian was enraged that we caught him in this embarrassing situation. “Who let you in?”

Jude stood in front of me. “Mr. Winter, we didn’t mean to offend you, but we’re here to seek an explanation.”

“An explanation? What kind of explanation?”

“Mr. Winter, I just want to know why the four of them were commended when Robyn

and I were the ones who performed the surgery?” asked Jude, showing the video on his phone.

Ian glanced at the video on the phone’s screen. He replied indifferently, “Who can prove that you two were the ones who performed the surgery?”

“Other doctors and nurses present at the scene saw it! If you don’t believe me, you can get them here and confront them about it!”

As a business elite, Ian didn’t take a nobody like Jude seriously. “Confront them? Haha... What do you think you are? Yeah, you have high academic qualifications, but it means f*cking nothing to me!”

His attitude was so cocky that I couldn’t stand the way he threw his weight around any longer. “Did you not brush your teeth this morning? You have such a foul mouth!”

Even though I rebuked him, the man seemed pleased to see me rather than angry. “Miss Robyn, judging by your appearance, I think you’re the one here who hasn’t brushed your teeth. Are you so eager to come and see me?”

There’s that disgusting behavior again! I grabbed Jude’s hand. “Let’s go, Jude. What’s the point of arguing with someone like him? It’s a waste of breath!”

As I forcibly dragged Jude away, I glanced back and saw Ian put his hands in his pockets with a smirk on his face.

Chapter 6 He Is After Me

After the incident, whenever I recalled the look on Ian’s face, I had a bad feeling about it. A couple of days later, an incident happened that confirmed my bad feeling.

That noon, I wanted to invite Jude to lunch and bid farewell to him as I was preparing to leave Monreso. I called him a dozen times, but his cell phone could never be reached.

Presuming that he had turned it off during surgery, I stopped trying to call him.

Consequently, I went to the restaurant alone for lunch. As soon as I finished ordering my food and sat down, I overheard a husband and wife chatting nearby. The husband

sounded agitated; I saw him holding today's newspaper in his hands. "Look at how such a sacred profession has been tainted by this bunch of people!"

The wife chimed in, "That's right! He looks like a person of some worth, but he's just making money via unethical means! He's totally lacking in medical ethics. No wonder he became a department head at such a young age. He must have pulled some strings."

Their conversation caught my attention. I stood up and pretended to scan the QR code with my phone to pay the bill, but while they weren't noticing, my gaze rested on the newspaper. It had an eye-catching headline that read, 'A Doctor Investigated for Receiving Bribes from Patient.' Right below the headline was a picture of Jude. Although his eyes were masked in the photo, I recognized him at a glance.

Jude accepting bribes from a patient? How is that possible? He's a person of integrity and doesn't seem like someone who's motivated solely by profit! "No, I have to go and ask him about this."

Instead of finishing my meal, I left the restaurant and hailed a cab to the hospital. I asked around at Jude's department, but he didn't show up for work today. The other doctors avoided answering my questions, so I had no idea where he could be.

I decided to go to the hospital director's office to find out what had happened. "Sorry to bother you, Mr. Ziegler, but I want to ask what happened to Dr. Fulton. Why isn't he showing up for work today?"

Graham was also feeling overwhelmed by this, as the relevant department leaders and Winter Medical Group's executives were all closely following the situation. It wasn't until he saw me that his furrowed brow finally relaxed.

He explained the whole situation to me. "Here's what happened: the surgery a couple of days ago was a success thanks to both of you, but the child still had to be hospitalized for observation and recovery," he said. "The child's family gave Dr. Fulton an envelope containing money as a token of apology for their previous misunderstanding. Initially, he didn't want to accept it, but the child's family insisted. In the end, he pretended to accept

the money, but then he promptly had the money delivered to our hospital's payment counter to cover the patient's medical expenses."

His explanation made me heave a sigh of relief. Indeed, Jude wasn't the kind of person who was hungry for money. "What happened after that?" I asked further.

"After that, someone made an anonymous phone call to the mayor, accusing Dr. Fulton of receiving bribes from patients—a serious violation of rules and a breach of discipline."

"What?" I stood up upon hearing this. How can there be such a thing happening?

Graham continued, "After getting information about this, I immediately spoke to Dr. Fulton in private, and he explained the situation to me. However, when the group's executives came to investigate and collect evidence, they found only surveillance footage of him accepting the money but no evidence of him paying for the patient."

Listening to his explanation, I instantly realized that someone was framing Jude on purpose. "But didn't Dr. Fulton entrust someone to pay the money? Why not just have that person come forward as a witness?"

I thought this could be an opening, but I saw Graham pinch his nose with a sigh. "Sigh! That's where the problem lies."

"What do you mean? What's the problem?"

"Dr. Fulton had a scheduled consultation that day, so he left the envelope in his office and rushed out after saying something."

"What did he say?"

"He was in a rush, so he simply told his colleagues that the money was given by a patient, and whoever wanted to go to the outpatient department could take the money to help the patient cover their medical expenses. However, the payment counter at the outpatient department didn't receive the money, and the envelope disappeared without a trace. No one admitted to taking it, and without any evidence, we can't unjustly accuse anyone."

The situation might seem complicated to others, but my first reaction after I understood the whole story was to think of that jerk. Yes, it was none other than Ian.

“Where is Dr. Fulton? I tried to call him, but I couldn’t get through to him.”

Graham replied, “He’s now suspended and under investigation. During the investigation, he’s not allowed to have any contact with the outside world.”

Hearing that Jude was being detained, I got anxious. He’s even denied the opportunity to prove his innocence! Someone must have arranged it this way on purpose. “Sorry for taking your time, Mr. Ziegler. I’ll go talk to Mr. Winter and see if there’s any room for negotiation.”

Graham was puzzled as to why I would want to talk to Ian about this, but he refrained from asking the question.

After saying goodbye to him, I hurried to Winter Medical Group headquarters.

Taking the elevator to the top floor, I came to the door to the president’s office. Just when I hesitated to knock on the door, I heard something from inside the room. I held my breath, trying my best not to let the sound of my breathing interfere with my hearing. I heard an affectedly sweet voice say, “Ian, my godfather wants you to visit his place at the end of this month. He wants to have a good drink with you and also set the date for our wedding.”

Huh? Set the date for our wedding? Did I hear that right? Don’t tell me this guy is getting married?

I recalled our marriage back then. It was merely a result of family pressure, and he had reluctantly agreed to it. After our wedding, he ignored me—his legal wife—and spent his days fooling around with other women.

“Sure. Tell your godfather that once I’m done here, I’ll bring some good wine and drink with him to our hearts’ content.”

I could tell from the man’s tone of voice that he was only feigning affection for the lady. Knowing his true nature, I found it hard to believe that such words could come from his mouth.

“It’s settled, then! Don’t go back on it, or my godfather won’t let you get away with this.”

“Alright, alright, don’t worry. I’ve promised to marry you. Am I the kind of person who goes back on his word?”

Damn it! He’s full of sweet talk!

Ian’s words irritated me so much that I gnashed my teeth in anger. As my head was closer to the door, I accidentally bumped it against the door with a thud.

“Who’s there?”

Crap!

Just when I was about to make a quick escape, the door suddenly opened.

A voluptuous woman stood at the door. As my gaze traveled up, I was startled to see a face full of plastic beauty before me. Isn’t she Eileen Keyes, the winner of the beauty pageant competition three years ago? I can’t believe that Ian still hasn’t gotten tired of her and is even going to marry her after three years! This really subverts my understanding of him!

Seeing that I was silent for a while, Eileen asked, “Who are you? And what business do you have here?”

“I am—”

Before I could finish, Ian appeared behind Eileen, saying, “Well, if it isn’t Miss Robyn Landon! Please come in!” All of a sudden, he behaved like a gentleman without making that disgusting face.

However, I didn’t want to step into his office, even if there was someone else present.

“No, I’m not going in. Let’s just talk here at the door.”

Ian’s face darkened when he saw that I still wouldn’t give him an out.

“I’m here for what happened to Dr. Fulton—”

“Yeah, right. Why isn’t he following you around like a stalker today? It’s him who recommended you to be my secretary.” The man started to change the subject, even shooting glances at me while Eileen wasn’t noticing.

“Secretary?” Eileen darted a glance at me. She asked, “Ian, are you changing secretaries

again?”

“Just a passing fancy. The previous secretaries were incompetent, and my company never keeps idlers,” replied Ian. He sounded serious, but the truth was either he had gotten tired of them or they had gotten pregnant.

“Is that so?” Eileen was skeptical; I could sense the hostility in her eyes.

To dispel her doubts, Ian tried to send her away. “Eileen, wait for me in the car, okay? There’s something that I need to talk to Miss Landon about. Once I’m done, I’ll join you for some shopping.”

Eileen wasn’t convinced, though. “Why do you need to talk in private? Can’t I stay and listen as well?”

Unable to order her around, Ian wore an affectionate expression and even wrapped his arms around her waist. “Good girl, just go downstairs and wait for me. I’ll take you to pick your wedding gown later. How about that?”

This trick probably had always worked like a charm on Eileen, who beamed with joy at once. She turned around, threw her arms around Ian’s neck, and kissed him passionately, leaving lipstick on his face. “You’re so sweet, Ian! I’ll wait for you in the car.”

Overjoyed, she wiggled her hips, flaunting her gorgeous figure as she left the president’s office with her bag in hand.

After she had left, Ian shot me a roguish look and sauntered over to his desk. Then, he took a black package out of a drawer and tossed it toward me. “Here, change into it. We need to have an in-depth conversation about Dr. Fulton’s situation,” he said, reverting to his true self again.

I looked at the package on the floor. Although I had no idea what it contained, I knew it wasn’t anything good. I hesitated for a long time, unable to figure out what this guy was up to.

“What are you waiting for? Pick it up and change into it! If you don’t change into it, there’s nothing to talk about.”

I stared at the package on the floor, then at the man, who looked all smug and confident. He pouted his lips, signaling me to pick it up.

I reluctantly picked up the package. The moment I opened it, I turned red in the face. The package contained a few lace strings tied together to form a garment. If I were to wear this, it would be like a few strings hanging on my body, barely covering anything!

Chapter 7 I Am His Prey

“Put it on. This will be your uniform from now on.”

Uniform? Pfft! I can't believe he has the audacity to say that!

Just as I cursed him inwardly, a realization dawned upon me. I had thought he was taking revenge on Jude for offending him a few days ago, but I didn't expect that this was actually his plan to kill two birds with one stone. He was sorting Jude out while simultaneously using this to blackmail me. Sigh! I underestimated this guy. Jude's strong recommendation of me must have made him realize that we're close. He's certain that I wouldn't stand by and do nothing, so he's using this to catch me in his trap.

Since he was trying to have leverage over me, I had to strike back, of course. “Was it you who orchestrated what happened to Jude?”

Ian raised an eyebrow, probably not expecting me to be so blunt. Still, he acted as if he hadn't heard it and continued, “Didn't I say it already? If you don't put on this outfit that I handpicked for you, I won't discuss anything with you.”

“Handpicked? Haha! So, you've long anticipated this. It was also you who had someone frame Dr. Fulton, wasn't it? What a vicious man you are!”

The man showed no signs of displeasure at being exposed by me. Instead, he seemed excited. “Oh, don't be so hard on me, Miss Robyn! I didn't realize that you're not only beautiful but also sharp-witted. You see, as the president of a company, I'm thirsting for talented individuals like you. I need someone like you by my side to help me out, isn't that right?” He strode up and stood tall before me.

Looking at his handsome face, I felt an urge to slap him. “Mr. Winter, you and I don’t speak the same language. We’re not of the same kind, and I’m not the woman you think I am either. Please don’t waste your precious time on me.”

This was a point that had already been proven three years ago.

He replied, “Why keep me at arm’s length, Miss Robyn? From the first time I saw you, I thought you were special. Your body is perfect, and your face is delicately pretty. Hmm... And your scent is so enticing...” Leaning closer to me, he took a deep breath with a dreamy expression. If I hadn’t taken a few steps back, he might have pounced on me. Before our divorce, he wouldn’t even touch me because of the ugly blemish on my face. And now, he was putting on this laughable demeanor. I wondered how he would react when I revealed my true identity. “Weren’t you disgusted with me before?” I blurted out without thinking.

“Before?” he asked, puzzled.

I quickly came up with an explanation. “Just a few days ago, you said I was as annoying as a certain woman. Have you already forgotten about that?” If my mind had been a bit slower, the consequences would have been unimaginable. It was me who asked for a divorce back then. How could he swallow such humiliation? He would want to rip my heart out and eat my flesh!

“It was just a casual remark. You don’t have to take it to heart, Miss Robyn. That woman isn’t qualified to be compared with you.”

Is there such a big difference between having a blemish on my face and not having one? Can’t he recognize me at all? “Oh? In what way am I better than her?” I asked casually, wanting to know what my past self was like in his mind’s eye.

Asking that question turned out to be a mistake; Ian’s expression turned sour in an instant. “That woman? Ha! She’s hideously ugly with a disgusting birthmark on her face! That’s especially off-putting,” he replied. “There’s also her family, who are all pieces of trash. They used whatever connections they had with my family to blackmail me into

marrying her—”

My mind went blank for a moment. I had thought he merely disliked me for being ugly, but little did I know that even my family was so despicable in his eyes! Infuriated by his shamelessness, I glared at him and stepped forward, raising myself on tiptoe.

Thinking that I was trying to console him, he leaned forward with a smile on his face.

Slap! A loud slap reverberated around the room, hitting its target exactly.

It also left him dumbfounded. His face had disbelief written all over it; I was probably the first person to ever strike him since he was born. After a while, he slowly asked, “Miss Robyn, would you like to explain how this slap happened?”

“Oh, there’s nothing much to explain. I just felt the need to stand up for a fellow woman.”

A strange smile appeared on his face at my reply. “Oh? So, you like to stand up for others, huh? Very well, Miss Robyn Landon. Jude Fulton’s fate depends on your sincerity today. Otherwise, there’s nothing to discuss.” He sat on the couch next to him while covering his burning cheek.

If I hadn’t feared that he would retaliate against my family, I would’ve just revealed my identity. I didn’t want to submit to his tyranny by sleeping with him, but from what had happened to Jude, it was evident that this guy had a vengeful streak. I could bear it if it were just me, but if my family were to suffer needlessly because of me, I would never forgive myself for that. Even though I had already left that household, I couldn’t act rashly in the heat of the moment. “Mr. Winter, Dr. Fulton is a good doctor. Do you have to ruin his life just because he offended you?” I questioned.

“Offending isn’t the right way to put it. That being said, I can’t stand arrogant people because they’re talented. I have no shortage of talented people here.”

I thought of Jude. He was already considered a renowned medical expert, but he was worthless in the eyes of this man. I was lucky to have made a clean escape after offending him back then. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have only been my reputation at stake. My life would’ve been in danger, too! “Since your company has no shortage of talented people, it

certainly doesn't need a mediocre person like me. Sorry to take up your time!" I replied with a look of displeasure.

I crumpled the lace strings into a ball and hurled it at him. There was no way I would compromise. Anyone could make me kneel, but Ian Winter wanting me to submit to him was something I deeply resented.

"Stop right there!" thundered the man in a stern voice just when I was turning the door handle. "Are you treating my office as your home, where you can come and go as you please? Let me tell you something, Robyn Landon! The truth is, I am after you. If Jude Fulton wants to clear his name and prove his innocence, only you can help him. You should think this over carefully."

Telling the truth at last, huh? Haha! But this is so ridiculous. He's scheming to attain a woman whom he once abandoned! Poor Jude, he was too impulsive and allowed this guy to target me. Am I going to fall into his hands again after escaping from his clutches with great difficulty? No!

My mind was in turmoil. I was really afraid that if I were to leave through that door, Jude's situation would become more difficult. However, staying here would only lead to one outcome—obediently changing into the garment and letting Ian have his way with me! As a result, I stood frozen in place.

Before I knew it, Ian appeared behind me, getting very close as his hand kept playing with my hair. I shuddered involuntarily in fear.

"You know what? I'm a hunter, actually..."

A hunter? What kind of hunter? A hunter for women?

He brazenly sniffed all over me like a pervert. "And you, Miss Robyn Landon, are my prey. In fact, the prey isn't my goal; I simply enjoy the hunting process—"

I immediately pulled away from him. "Just what are you trying to say?"

His smile grew more and more sinister. "I can tell that you still care about Jude Fulton, Miss Robyn. Surely you won't just stand by and do nothing?"

I had a bad feeling about this; this guy must be up to something crooked again. “So what if I won’t? Jude helped me before, so it’s only right that I should help clear him of the false accusations.”

Ian seemed to have been waiting for me to say that. “Great! What a loyal friend you are!” he remarked. The next moment, he continued, “Since we’ve made things clear between us today, I won’t make things difficult for you. You’ll do something for me, and if you can accomplish it, I’ll definitely clear his name. How about that?”

His words made me breathe a sigh of relief. “What is it? As long as it doesn’t violate moral and ethical principles as well as laws and regulations, I’ll do my best.” I didn’t rush to agree. Dealing with someone like him required vigilance; you never knew when he might lay a trap and wait for you to walk into it.

“Rest assured, Miss Robyn Landon. I’m sure you have the ability to handle this.”

As it turned out, Ian wanted to build the largest plastic surgery hospital in Monreso, and the first and foremost hurdle was to solve the issue of land ownership. In Monreso, where every square foot of land was worth a pretty penny, land was always the most critical factor for competition in every industry. And now, the land that Ian had his eye on was under firm control by a real estate developer.

“As long as you can secure that piece of land, Jude Fulton will return to his original job position.”

Compared to his tyranny, I preferred the latter option. So, almost involuntarily, I agreed without even considering the task’s difficulty. It was only after agreeing that I regretted it, but it was already too late.

“The hunt has begun, then... I’m looking forward to your success, Miss Robyn Landon.”

At this moment, I realized that the man had indeed laid a huge trap, and I had jumped right into it without hesitation.

Chapter 8 Asco Group

For the next few days, I ran around like a headless chicken. As a medical student, I lacked business acumen and had no experience in negotiating business deals. I hadn't a clue where to start. I first visited Graham to seek his advice. After gaining some insight, I researched the information about the real estate group.

As the largest real estate conglomerate in Monreso, Asco Group was in an entirely different league from Winter Medical Group. In fact, it even had an overwhelming presence.

The piece of land controlled by Asco Group wasn't included in the company's future plans, so it was scheduled for auction. At first, I thought that with Winter Medical Group's resources, winning the auction for the land shouldn't be difficult. However, Winter Medical Group was completely disqualified from bidding because Ian had once offended Timothy Holland, Asco Group's chairman.

After some inquiries, I learned that Timothy was considered a rising star in the business world. He was young and enterprising, a determined man who wouldn't allow anyone or anything to influence him. He was unmoved by money or beautiful women; instead, he dedicated his heart and soul to his career, to the point that he remained single even when he was old enough to get married.

No wonder Ian Winter couldn't handle this. But then again, if he couldn't handle this, how could I? At the thought of this, I found myself facing a difficult situation. I couldn't help but blame Jude for this. Seriously, Jude, I told you not to confront that guy, but you wouldn't listen! And now, look at the mess we got into. Not only is your reputation at stake, but you even got me dragged into this!

I let out an inward sigh. Thinking back, I recalled that Jude was the one who had arranged for me to further my studies abroad. I owed him such a big favor, and this was the only way I could repay it. I had no choice but to bite the bullet and go through with it. I arrived at Asco Group headquarters as a representative of Winter Medical Group.

The receptionist at the front desk was a dashing young man who was very polite.

“Greetings, miss. How may I help you?” he said, greeting me warmly.

“I’m from Winter Medical Group and would like to meet with Mr. Holland.”

The receptionist was quite hospitable at first, but his expression turned cold as soon as he heard that I was from Winter Medical Group. Still, for the sake of professional courtesy and maintaining the company’s image, he didn’t give me a hard time. “Sorry, miss, but Mr. Holland has instructed that we do not entertain anyone from Winter Medical Group.” Uh... I was at a loss for words. I didn’t expect the receptionist to be so straightforward. I thought about leaving, but on second thought, if I were to do so, the whole land deal would fall through. “Hey, handsome. The thing is, I’m not really from Winter Medical Group,” I quickly whispered to the receptionist, trying to gloss it over.

To my dismay, the receptionist didn’t buy it at all. “You don’t have to do this, miss. Someone else has tried this before. Please go back!”

He remained polite, and if I were to insist on going in, it would only make me appear importunate. I didn’t want to embarrass myself like that in front of people coming and going. “Sorry to have bothered you,” I apologized. So what if I’m well-prepared? I got stopped at the front desk right away without even getting a chance. I left the company’s lobby in frustration.

As I strolled down the street, I couldn’t help but curse Ian aloud. “You scoundrel, now you know how bad it is to offend someone, don’t you? Why did you have to offend Timothy Holland, of all people? And now what? You’ve run out of options, so you let me make a fool of myself! You’re such an *sshole! Serves you right for being arrogant and looking down your nose at everyone...” I swung my purse repeatedly at a tree by the roadside to vent my frustration.

However, I failed to notice someone passing by and ended up hitting him by mistake.

“Mm...” The man let out a muffled grunt of pain. By the time I realized what had happened, he was already hunching over in pain, his face flushed with agony written all

over it.

I promptly apologized, “Sorry! I’m so sorry, sir. Did I hurt you? Sorry that I didn’t notice you passing by. Are you alright?” Seeing him struggling to stand up straight, I felt extremely guilty. It was apparent that he was in considerable pain.

“It’s... It’s okay...” He merely gave me a wave without looking up. His voice didn’t sound like he was okay, though.

“Sir, I’m a doctor. May I check where you got hurt?”

Hearing that I wanted to check his injury, the man became rather agitated. Despite having to hunch his back, he insisted on keeping his distance from me. “N-No, it’s not necessary. I’ll be fine after resting for a bit... You may go now...”

I was surprised; he actually didn’t hold me responsible for the accident and even urged me to leave. I quietly moved aside, squatting on the roadside while watching him in silence. I was afraid that something might happen to him, as I didn’t want to get entangled in any further complications. Unless I was certain that he was completely fine, I couldn’t leave with peace of mind.

It wasn’t until several minutes later that he slowly straightened his back at last. His face was red, and small beads of sweat appeared on his forehead.

“Sir, are you okay?”

He was startled the moment I spoke. “Why are you still here? I told you that I wouldn’t hold you responsible. Why are you still sticking around?”

I was taken aback. It was my first time coming across such a situation. I was the one who caused the accident, and yet the victim didn’t hold me responsible and even wished for me to leave. “I was worried that something might happen to you, so I didn’t dare to leave. Please forgive me, sir!” In any case, the accident was my fault. Taking responsibility was the most basic quality of being a decent person, no?

“Never mind, just be more careful next time. If it were someone else, you wouldn’t have gotten away so easily.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll definitely be more careful next time, I promise...” I nodded vigorously. He darted a glance at me, but instead of lingering, he turned around and left right away. I noticed that he was heading toward the main entrance to the Asco Group building. Could he be an employee there? I wondered to myself. All of a sudden, an idea struck me—maybe I could plead with him to take me inside. It might not work, but it was at least worth a try. After all, I had no other options at the moment. Hence, I immediately caught up with the man. “Sir! Sir, please wait a moment!”

When he heard me calling him, the man paused and looked back, asking, “Is there anything else?”

It wasn’t until then that I finally got a good look at his face; I hadn’t dared to meet his gaze just now because I was in the wrong. He was handsome and upbeat, his looks resembling those of a male celebrity. The heroic charm oozing from his features made me unable to resist taking another look at him.

“Uh, sir, are you an employee of the Asco Group?” Asking this bluntly might come off as impolite, but I couldn’t worry about it now. I brazened it out and stood there.

The man glanced at me again. He replied thoughtfully, “Sort of. What’s the matter?”

“That’s great! Sir, can you do me a favor? I’ll buy you dinner afterward.”

He didn’t refuse. “What is it?”

Seeing an opportunity, I hurriedly said, “Sir, here’s what happened. I’m here on behalf of a friend to discuss something with Mr. Holland, but I didn’t make an appointment, so the receptionist wouldn’t let me in.” I made up a random excuse; I couldn’t possibly reveal that I was representing Winter Medical Group. If he held the same bias against Winter Medical Group as the receptionist had, my lifeline would be cut off. “So, I was hoping that you could help me and see if you could take me in. Of course, I promise I won’t tell Mr. Holland that it was you who brought me in.” I raised my hand to my ear, making a gesture as if swearing to God.

He put his hands in his pockets, looked down at me, and then smiled. “Well, it’s not a big

deal. I'm interested in our dinner, though. I'll decide on the place."

"Uh... Oh, okay, sure! The place is up to you, of course," I replied, still surprised that he actually agreed so readily. And besides, the cost of this was merely a meal.

"Just follow me and walk straight ahead without talking."

"Okay, I got it. I won't cause you any trouble."

And so, I obediently followed behind him.

Chapter 9 Starting Off on the Wrong Foot

The man's build was similar to Ian's, so walking close to him should be able to block me from the receptionist's view.

As we approached the front desk, I stuck closely to the man, keeping my head down and trying to appear as inconspicuous as possible.

However, it didn't help that the receptionist had eyes like a hawk. I wasn't sure if he noticed me, but he came right over in our direction. Seeing the situation, I instantly tugged at the man's shirt in an attempt to hide behind him. "Can you help me? Don't let the receptionist spot me. He's a tough one, and I don't want to get kicked out again."

Seeing me sticking so closely to him, the man was rather embarrassed. Just when the receptionist was about to say something, he wrapped his arm around my shoulders and deliberately raised his voice. "Don't worry, no one dares to stop you with me around."

As soon as he said that, I was surprised to see the receptionist hesitantly returning to the front desk. When I glanced back at him, I noticed that he was looking at me in a way that I couldn't decipher.

Phew! That was close! I almost got kicked out in front of everyone again, but luckily, I avoided it with this handsome guy's help. "Thank you for helping me out," I said to the man.

Just when I was about to break free from his hold, he whispered, "Don't move, he's still watching. Let's keep up the act until we're inside the elevator."

“Oh, okay.” I dared not disobey him, so I obediently let him continue holding me as we entered the elevator.

It was only when the elevator door closed that my heart finally sank back into my chest. However, the man was still holding me around the shoulders, making me feel really embarrassed. “Um... Sir, we’re already in the elevator...”

Only then did he release his grip and press the floor button as if nothing had happened.

“By the way, you want to see Mr. Holland, don’t you?”

“Yes, that’s right. I’m not sure which floor he is on, though. Can you please tell me?”

Instead of answering, he just pressed the button for the middle floor.

No one else got in throughout the elevator ride, and in no time, we arrived on the floor I needed.

Ding! The elevator door opened. He said politely, “Here we are.”

“Oh, great! Thank you so much, sir. How about we exchange our numbers so that I can buy you dinner later?”

He smiled and then took out his phone as we exchanged our contact information. I was about to ask for his name so that I could save it in my contacts, but when I looked up, he was already gone.

The floor was bustling with people working in their offices. Everyone was in a hurry, seemingly busy with never-ending tasks, unlike in other companies, where things seemed more sluggish.

I casually asked a man nearby about Timothy’s office. “Excuse me, sir, where is Mr. Holland’s office?”

The man pointed in a direction without even looking up from his computer screen. He said, “Go inside and turn right. It’s at the far end.”

“Oh, okay. Thanks!” I followed the directions given and walked down the long corridor; it took me a long time until I reached the right turn. “Turn right... It’s at the far end...”

After making the turn, I first passed by the secretary’s office.

“Miss, who are you looking for?” A woman wearing a formfitting skirt and a red blouse called out to me. Her blouse was tightly tailored, highlighting her graceful figure and the striking cleavage below the neckline.

This lady must be Mr. Holland’s secretary. I quickly averted my gaze and replied, “Hi, I’m here to visit Mr. Holland. Can you tell me if he’s in his office?”

The woman looked me up and down before asking, “Do you have something to discuss with Mr. Holland?”

“Yes, our company is interested in bidding for a piece of land scheduled for auction by your company. I’m here on behalf of my company to talk to Mr. Holland about this.”

She adjusted her gold-rimmed glasses. “Did you make an appointment with him?”

I shook my head.

“That won’t do. Meeting him without an appointment will disrupt his schedule.”

I quickly explained, “All I need is a few minutes! I won’t stay long. Please, could you make an exception?” Trying to close a deal in a few minutes was simply an impossible task, but meeting Timothy in person might leave a chance for further negotiations in the future.

“Alright, then. You wait here!” She went to one of the offices, presumably to report on this. A moment later, she came back, saying, “Sorry, but Mr. Holland said he’s very busy today and doesn’t have time to see you.”

“Huh?” I had been full of expectations just moments ago, mulling over the wording and contemplating how to introduce myself. And now, my mood plummeted. Since he’s busy, I’ll wait here until he finishes his work. “Can I wait here for him, then? I won’t disturb you all,” I pleaded.

“Hmm... You can wait here. We’ll see if Mr. Holland will see you when he’s done with his work.”

With her approval, I stood in the corridor and waited. I dared not even use my phone while waiting, fearing that I might miss the chance to greet Timothy if he came out.

Apparently, however, I was overthinking it. I kept waiting until 6.00PM, but there was still no sign of him. I watched as the employees started leaving for the day.

Seeing that I had been waiting all afternoon, the secretary didn't have the heart to let me continue waiting in vain. "I think you should go back. Mr. Holland is known for being a workaholic, and he hates being disturbed while he's working. I'd say you should come back another day."

Since she had said that, I had no choice but to leave despite my reluctance. After all, Ian had offended Timothy in the first place, and I was here on behalf of Winter Medical Group, so I couldn't afford to offend Timothy again. And besides, I hadn't eaten lunch, and my stomach was growling with hunger. So, I decided to find a place to eat. Right now, only good food could comfort me for having such a bad day.

After coming downstairs, I stood outside the company's entrance, ready to hail a cab to Food Street for a meal. As I waited for a cab, a voice rang behind me. "Did you get to meet Mr. Holland today?"

I turned around to see the man whom I had hurt by accident earlier. "Mr. Holland was too busy, so he didn't have time to see me. I'll have to come back another day, I guess," I replied with a tinge of disappointment.

"Is that so? That's a pity, then."

In reality, I didn't feel too upset about not meeting Timothy. People like me, who belonged to the middle and lower classes of society, had no luxury of meeting someone from high society as we pleased. "It's alright, there'll be another chance. Still, thank you for helping me out," I said to him with a smile.

"Are you thanking me in words only?" he hinted, clearly still looking forward to the dinner I had promised him.

I had always been the type who avoided owing any favors, just like what happened with Jude. "No, of course! You've helped me a lot today, and I hurt you by accident, too. In any case, I should treat you to dinner," I replied. "Today is fine, so let's do it today. You'll

decide on the place.”

“Alright then, I won’t hold back. I’m also hungry right now.”

Although I had a bad feeling about this, he didn’t seem like a bad person, so I didn’t think he would make me spend too much. However, I was still working on my job, and there wasn’t much money left in my bank account.

He hailed a cab and politely opened the door for me, even going out of his way to protect my head from the cab’s roof. I sat in the back seat whereas he took the passenger seat.

The cab took us straight to a bustling commercial area, which was also known for its high-end establishments. As soon as we got out of the cab, I regretted it. Our surroundings were filled with a dazzling array of upscale restaurants—the kind that could bankrupt me with just one meal.

“Come on, let me take you to a place I often go to.”

Often? Don’t tell me it’s some kind of Michelin-starred restaurant. I followed him all the way in anxiety.

Eventually, we arrived at a tiny eatery that was less than ten square meters in size. I was totally stupefied. The place was crowded, with tables and chairs placed right on the pedestrian pathway, like a street vendor’s setup.

“You have to be on the lookout for city management officers at all times while eating here,” the man joked as he skillfully found a spot near the edge of the pedestrian pathway and sat down.

What he said was true; operating the business on a pedestrian pathway like this would surely attract the attention of city management officers, and they might end up facing fines. Despite that, the place was surprisingly crowded, and it seemed to be the only eatery of its kind in the whole commercial area. “Sir, is this place clean and sanitary?” I asked under my breath, afraid that others might overhear.

The man replied nonchalantly, “Clean and sanitary restaurants can’t beat the taste you get here.”

I was speechless. What else can I say? I can only hope that I won't get diarrhea later.

"Okay..." In an instant, I wasn't interested in good food anymore. I had no choice but to change the subject, saying, "Sir, I still don't know what to call you."

"Hmm... I guess I'm only a little older than you. Just call me Brother," he replied thoughtfully.

"Brother?" I was startled for a moment. How did we suddenly become like relatives?

"What's wrong? Is it not okay? Do I look so old that you want to call me 'uncle' instead?"

"No, that's not what I meant. 'Brother' is just fine," I replied. After all, it was just a meal, and we might not have any more contact in the future, so I decided to simply go along with it.

"What about you? What should I call you?" he asked me in return.

"I'm Robyn Landon." I was a straightforward person and didn't see any reason to keep my name a secret. A name was just a name; there was no need to be so secretive about it.

"Robyn Landon? That's a pretty name."

"Thanks!"

Chapter 10 Bumping Into Eileen

"I'll go for some frog legs. Here's the menu. Just order whatever you want to eat," he said, handing me a greasy menu for me to order from it.

I took the menu and looked through it, having no idea what to order. Especially after listening to him order the frog legs, which totally killed my appetite, I didn't feel like eating anything at all. However, not ordering anything would seem impolite, so I said, "I'll have a serving of fried rice, then." A plate of fried rice was inexpensive, and compared to other dishes, it seemed to be the safest choice.

After placing the order, we sat and chatted for a while, waiting for the food to be served. Soon enough, his frog legs were brought to our table. Even from a distance, I smelled a

strong fishy odor, which almost made me puke. It had been this way since I was little; whenever there was any hint of a fishy smell, I found it hard to bear, perhaps due to some physiological reasons.

The man couldn't wait and immediately picked up a piece of frog leg and stuffed it into his mouth, looking quite satisfied.

I swallowed, not because I was craving the food, but because I was trying to suppress the urge to throw up.

Seeing me hesitating to touch the food, he urged, "This is their signature dish. Come on, give it a try."

I waved my hand in refusal. "No, I'm good. I can't really enjoy such indulgence in food."

As I said that, my fried rice was served. I looked at the edge of the plate, and there were some black unidentifiable bits that were truly hard to accept. In the end, however, I couldn't resist my hunger. I had no choice but to pick up a spoonful and take a bite.

"Mmm! This is surprising..." I took another bite; indeed, it tasted pretty good.

Overcoming my prejudice, I ate several more mouthfuls.

"Don't just focus on your fried rice. Come on, have some frog meat. It's tender and delicious."

I kept my head down, engrossed in eating the fried rice, not noticing that he had picked up a piece of frog leg and placed it on my plate. "Give it a try! Don't be afraid. I guarantee that after one bite, you'll want a second," he said.

I swallowed again, but after recalling the experience with the fried rice, I decided to give it another chance. Summoning up my courage, I put the piece of frog leg into my mouth.

The moment I chewed it, the juices burst out of the meat, filling my mouth and nose with a fishy smell. I quickly closed my eyes and gulped it down, but as it went down my throat, its fishy smell lingered, incessantly invading my nostrils. "Sorry, I need to go to the restroom," I said, clapping my hand over my mouth, enduring the unpleasant smell while hurrying to the first-floor restroom of a nearby shopping complex.

I rushed into the women's restroom. As soon as I turned around the corner, I bumped into someone. The considerable impact caused the person to stagger a few steps. She almost lost her balance, but thankfully, my quick reflexes allowed me to steady her.

The person swore, "Is there a ghost haunting you? Why are you running so fast?!"

I promptly apologized, "Sorry, I didn't mean to..." The moment I looked up, I was rendered speechless. The person I bumped into was none other than Eileen, the woman Ian was going to marry. No wonder her voice sounded familiar; it was as if I had heard it somewhere before. It's a small world indeed. With so many people around, how did I manage to bump into her of all people? I should've bought a lottery ticket. The odds of this are even lower than winning the lottery, yet here I am, running into her.

Eileen also recognized me. "How come it's you? You're Ian's secretary."

I had no time to argue with her, though. The fishy smell kept filling my nostrils, and the nausea was getting stronger and stronger. I had to cover my mouth at once. At this very moment, all I wanted was to find a spot to throw up.

Eileen, however, was relentless. She blocked my path, saying, "Don't think you can brush me off with just an apology because you're Ian's secretary. He just bought me this evening gown, and I'm supposed to accompany him to an important gathering tonight. If you ruin it, can you afford to compensate me?"

Her evening gown did look expensive, but I took a glance and saw that it was in perfect condition. Observing her haughty demeanor, I guessed she was merely seizing the opportunity to make a fuss. Perhaps she still held a grudge against me for the time Ian had made me stay with him alone the other day.

"Don't stop me!" My stomach was already churning violently.

I wanted to push Eileen away and rushed to find a spot to vomit, but she thought I wasn't taking her seriously and wouldn't let go. "You think you can run away? Come back here!" She held firmly onto me.

The moment she held onto me, I instinctively tried to break free, causing a strong reflux

to surge up. My throat had lost its ability to swallow. I couldn't hold it any longer; I was feeling too uncomfortable.

Blaaargh!

The fried rice I had just eaten, mixed with gastric juices, came out and landed on Eileen's hand. Not only that, but some of the vomit even splattered onto her evening gown.

She dropped her jaw in shock, her eyes wide open in disbelief. The next moment, a piercing shriek echoed in the restroom, almost piercing my eardrums. "Aaaah!" she screamed at the top of her lungs.

This alerted Ian, who happened to be in the men's restroom. Thinking that Eileen was being assaulted, he rushed in with a toilet plunger he found somewhere.

"Ian, look at this! This woman vomited all over me!" Eileen complained to him while pointing at the food particles on her arm.

Seeing that it was me, Ian wore a somewhat awkward expression. "What are you doing here?"

I patted my chest to soothe myself for a moment. After throwing up, I felt much better.

Only then did I take my time to reply, "What's the matter? Am I not supposed to be here?" Even though I was in the wrong, I had no intention of playing nice with him.

"Did I hear that right, Ian? Is this the secretary you hired? How dare she speak to you like that?" Eileen couldn't believe her ears when she saw how cocky I sounded. As a secretary, how dare she be so disrespectful to her boss?

That was right. I didn't give a sh*t about Ian; it was just that he had some leverage over me for the time being.

Ian was silent at first, taking out some tissues to wipe the vomit from Eileen's body.

"Ian, why aren't you saying anything? Don't tell me you're..." Eileen looked at me with terrified eyes.

"Stop imagining things. How could I be interested in her?" Ian replied. His expression was unnatural when he said this, but he managed to maintain his composure.

Eileen didn't notice the subtle change in his demeanor, but I saw it clearly. It was just that I had no intention of exposing it.

"Then you have to stand up for me and fire her. I don't want to see her ever again!" demanded Eileen. It was easy to tell from her jealousy that she felt insecure about her relationship with Ian. Especially, she looked at me in a way as though I were trying to steal her man. I was sorry to say this, but I had zero interest in the man she treasured so much.

"Let's not bother with her. We should go back to the hotel and get you washed," replied Ian as he took Eileen's hand.

Feeling hurt that her man didn't stick up for her, Eileen said, "Ian, why are you protecting her instead of standing up for me?"

After darting a glance at me, Ian leaned closer to Eileen and whispered something in her ear. Since they were at a distance, I couldn't hear what they were saying at all.

Eileen seemed delighted afterward. "Is that so? You should've told me earlier. Never mind, I'm a forgiving person, so I won't lower myself to her level."

You won't lower yourself to my level? I'm just looking the other way! I knew full well what kind of person this man was. Let her enjoy her little moment of pride, but she'll soon get jilted and be left crying for help.

Ian said to me, adding, "Oh, let me remind you that the public outcry has been getting stronger these days. If you don't want Dr. Fulton to sink into depression for being embroiled in public scrutiny, you have to get up to speed on the task I assigned to you." His so-called reminder wasn't out of goodwill; he was clearly telling me to give up and submit to him. Not a chance!

I really couldn't stand his attitude, so I went to the sink to wash my face and hands. After wiping the vomit from my clothes, I left right away, letting this dirty couple talk about me behind my back. Today was already a bad day, and now I had to deal with this. I felt incredibly vexed.

“You took forever to come back here! I’m almost done eating,” said the man, happily eating away and picking his teeth at the eatery. He looked quite handsome, but his behavior was so contrary to his appearance.

I was fuming. Had he not made me eat that piece of frog leg, I wouldn’t have run into those two people.

“What’s wrong?” he asked curiously, noticing my displeasure.

“Nothing. Are you done eating? If you’re done, I’ll pay the bill.” I took out my phone, ready to pay the bill by scanning the QR code.

“I already paid the bill, so consider this my treat. You owe me one, and you can treat me another time.”

What? This guy is playing with me! Don’t tell me he has some ulterior motive? Ahem! Ahem! Stop it, I’m being too narcissistic. This is our first meeting, so there’s no way he could be interested in me. I’m not some stunning beauty, anyway. “Fine then, I owe you one, and I’ll treat you another day. It’s getting late already, so I’ll head back now.” I picked up my purse and was about to leave.

As soon as I got up, I saw Eileen walking in my direction with Ian on her arm.