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Indeed, Thomas did not disappoint Skylar. At the end of the day, he only called her here because he needed her help.

"You're talking to the wrong person! We already broke up," she lied.

Avery stood up and argued, "I clearly saw Tobias send you back last night. Stop beating around the bush and just admit that you don't want to help the family."

Right then, Skylar recalled Avery saying that she wished to reconcile with her. It looks like she can't keep up the act anymore.

"Fine, I'll get straight to the point. I'm not a part of this family, so I'm not obligated to help you. Also, you overestimated my importance to Tobias. Do you really think he'd immediately come to your aid with just a word from me? This isn't playing house."

Thomas' face darkened in response to Skylar's candor, but he had to suppress his rage and stop himself from lashing out at her.

"Are you just going to watch me go to jail? You're still my daughter after all." He played the family card again.

Skylar shrugged her shoulders. "I'm fine with that. I have a murderer as a mother, so having a father who's placed behind bars is nothing."

As Thomas' chest heaved, he felt like he could explode at any moment.

Skylar walked to the door to take off the shoe covers when the phone in her bag rang. She knew who it was without needing to look. It was an exclusive ringtone she had set for Tobias, but her phone hadn't rung for a whole month since then.

While taking off the shoe covers, Skylar picked up the call. "Still not done yet? I came to pick you up. I'm outside now."

Skylar didn't expect Tobias to come and pick her up since he said he would be busy. If the Joneses saw him, she feared that Thomas would shamelessly voice some conditions that were to his benefit.

At that thought, Skylar ended the call, wanting to leave immediately when Hayden stopped her. "Aren't you going to thank us for letting you eat at our home? Even dogs wag their tails in appreciation, you piece of filth."

Skylar halted in her tracks as fury surged in her. "I didn't even have a bite. Besides, I would never have stepped foot inside this house if you hadn't tricked me," she retorted in a sarcastic tone.

Avery sat back and watched from the sidelines while Thomas glared daggers at his son. "How can you talk to your sister like that, Hayden? This is also her home, so it's perfectly normal for her to eat here."

Hayden's face contorted with disdain as he watched his father curry favor with Skylar. "Dad, is this really necessary? How long do you think Tobias will stay with her? Since when were you so naive? Desperation has made you blind."

Until now, Thomas couldn't tell if Skylar was still involved with Tobias, so he stayed silent for a while, lost in his thoughts.

As Skylar studied this family of four, a wave of disgust washed over her.

Suddenly, a honk sounded outside the house. Skylar was afraid that Tobias was getting impatient and rushing her to leave.

Hence, she took out two hundred in cash from her purse and put it on the shoe rack by the door. "Consider this as the fee for my seat at the dining table. Thank you for your hospitality."

Then, she opened the door without glancing back. Immediately, she spotted Tobias in the car as the car door was left ajar. He was in a black suit with one hand resting on the steering wheel and the other holding his phone, seemingly looking at something.

Thomas followed behind her and was surprised to find Tobias right outside his house.

He stood rooted to the ground as fear crept up his insides. If he hadn't restrained himself earlier and said some nasty things to Skylar, the outcome would have been disastrous.

Finally finding his voice, he pressed Skylar, "I thought the two of you broke up?"

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"I didn't say we couldn't get back together, did I? Are you here to see me off?" Skylar countered in a flat tone.

Anxious, Thomas glanced at Tobias, who was sitting in the car. Although he muttered a yes to Skylar's question, his feet had already taken him to Tobias' car.

Tobias raised his eyes to give Thomas a cursory glance. He couldn't be bothered with customary pleasantries and maintained his indifferent expression without uttering a word.

"Mr. Ford, I'm sure you haven't had anything to eat yet. Would you like to come in for a meal?" Thomas plastered a flattering smile on his face.

Skylar never thought that someone as cold-hearted and unfeeling as Thomas was capable of having that expression.

"No need," Tobias responded tersely.

Skylar skirted past Thomas and hopped into the front passenger seat, urging Tobias, "Let's go. I couldn't stomach anything here, so I'm hungry now."

Tobias' eyes flicked toward Skylar, clearly sensing the sour mood she was in, and surmised that the Joneses must have mistreated her. I clearly told her not to come, but she didn't listen to me. This woman really has a knack for tormenting herself.

It wasn't easy for Thomas to get an audience with Tobias. The other time when his precious daughter was bullied by Tobias, he had waited at the hotel lobby for a whole night before

getting the chance to see Tobias. Now, he greatly regretted his actions and cursed at himself for letting his anger get the best of him.

Otherwise, he could have made a better impression on Tobias.

Thomas grabbed the door, preventing Tobias from closing it. "Mr. Ford, can you spare me ten minutes? I need your help with something."

Tobias glanced at Skylar, letting her make the decision.

Pursing her lips, she declared, "Let's go. I don't want to be here a second longer."

Thomas was boiling with frustration, cursing at Skylar silently for being ungrateful and not knowing her place. How dare she act all snobbish with me right now? Has she forgotten how pathetic she was when she came here asking me for money to pay her school fees?

Before Skylar attended high school, she needed thirty thousand for her school fees. Her grandmother couldn't afford it, so she told Skylar to come over and ask him for money.

Thirty thousand was nothing to him, but he still hadn't wanted to give it to her. Since he had already divorced Miranda, he considered the child as hers and wanted to cut ties with her for good.

Furthermore, Skylar's birth was an accident. Miranda was the one who begged him to keep the baby.

Nevertheless, Thomas recomposed himself and started to play the pity card, wearing a dejected look on his face. "Just come in and sit for a while. Please be understanding."

Skylar thought she was hallucinating when she heard the plea in his tone.

Tobias pondered over it for a while. If he didn't give Thomas a chance now, Thomas would definitely continue pestering Skylar, so he figured that he might as well make things clear between them once and for all.

With that, Tobias killed the engine and stubbed out his barely smoked cigarette before getting out of his car.

However, Skylar remained seated in the front and grabbed Tobias' arm. In a gentle voice, he coaxed away the gloom on Skylar's face. "Be a good girl. Come down with me, hmm?"

This scene was deeply embedded into Thomas' mind. The ruthless and strong-willed CEO, Tobias Ford, was actually so protective of Skylar and treated her so gently.

Thereafter, Skylar followed Tobias out of the car without protest as though she was possessed.

Just then, Tobias' phone rang. Skylar was accustomed to Tobias' busy schedule and had grown used to his long conversations over the phone. She also knew that he would sometimes speak in a foreign language.

Skylar went into the house first. When the servant saw her come back, she picked out the shoe covers from the trash bin and handed them to her.

Tobias, who came in after Skylar, saw the whole scene. While his chiseled face remained expressionless, there was an ominous gleam in his eyes.

"Is this how your family treats guests?" His frosty voice could probably form icicles.

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The servant didn't know who Tobias was. Having worked here for many years, she was an expert in pleasing her employers, so she knew that bullying Skylar would make Irene, Hayden, and Avery very happy.

"I just threw them away, so it's not like they're dirty," she rebuked.

Sensing Tobias' displeasure, Thomas went to the shoe cabinet to personally take a pair of indoor slippers for Skylar. He even castigated the servant, "Can't you do your job well? Didn't I tell you to prepare some slippers for my daughter? Why did you give her shoe covers?"

The servant was given an earful by Thomas, but she couldn't seem to remember him giving her that instruction. Furthermore, when Skylar came here the first time, he didn't seem to have any objections when she gave her the shoe covers.

The servant shot pleading looks at the rest of the Jones family, but of course, they couldn't be bothered with her as they were still in shock due to Tobias' sudden appearance in their home.

Avery was the only one who remained calm since she had seen Tobias walking Skylar back to the dormitory, so driving here to pick her up was nothing.

Skylar didn't change into the men's slippers Thomas had offered her because it was obvious that he had prepared them for Tobias and not her.

Although Irene was reluctant, she pretended to be welcoming, curling her lips into an obliging smile.

She personally poured a drink for Tobias, but the latter looked at the cups on the table and heartlessly turned her down, "I don't take outside drinks."

Upon hearing that, Irene became visibly awkward, unsure of what to do.

Hayden was dumbfounded when he saw Skylar and Tobias still together. Isn't Tobias about to marry soon? Just what kind of relationship does he have with Skylar?

Sitting on the sofa, Tobias casually grabbed an orange from the fruit plate and held it in his palm.

Oddly, the orange seemed to be dwarfed by the size of his palm.

Without further delay, Thomas respectfully handed the proposal he had prepared in advance to Tobias.

"Mr. Ford, can you take a look at this proposal? I believe that if we work together, it'll be a win-win situation."

Tobias took the proposal from Thomas' hands. Curious about its content, Skylar leaned over to get a glimpse.

It was packed with words and difficult to comprehend at first glance.

Tobias skimmed through the proposal, then snapped the folder shut before tossing it onto the coffee table.

"It's a mess of an abandoned project and you want my collaboration? On what grounds? You can stop dreaming."

Skylar stared at Tobias as her admiration for him shot through the skies. While she couldn't understand a thing in the proposal, he was able to pinpoint the problem after barely a few glances.

Thomas grimaced and said, "Please, Mr. Ford, on account of Skylar."

In contrast to Thomas' agitation, Tobias peeled the orange in a nonchalant manner and soon, a citrus scent permeated the air.

He placed the peeled orange on the coffee table and replied, "Well, that depends on Skylar."

Just like that, Tobias gave Skylar the power to decide the fate of a project worth billions.

Thomas saw that there was still hope since Tobias did not outright reject him.

It seemed like they had all underestimated how much Tobias indulged Skylar.

Skylar ignored the pleading gaze Thomas was sending her. She had never imagined that she would one day hold such power over Thomas. How the tables have turned.

Smiling wryly, she said, "I'm not all that important, so there's no need to consider me."

Tobias was very pleased with her answer. His woman should never allow herself to be taken advantage of. Although he would have helped Thomas if she relented, he would have been disappointed at the same time.

If she were easily exploited and succumbed to every threat thrown her way, his future with her would be a bumpy journey or perhaps completely impossible.

This was a practical way of thinking. He didn't need a meek and spineless woman as it would only result in more conflicts in the future.

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Panic rose in Thomas' heart as his right ear rang. "Skylar, I've worked hard for so many years, all for the sake of my children. You may not know this, but I'd already planned to give you a portion of the shares because you're still my child after all."

With a look of disdain, Tobias watched Thomas' poor attempt at convincing his daughter, probably regretting all of his past actions.

Skylar did not believe Thomas at all. "I don't care about all of that. Let's not owe each other anything so that no one would be a burden to the other."

As his patience reached its limit, Tobias' dark eyes gleamed. "Stop making things difficult for her. You're a grown man, so take responsibility for your own actions. I'll give you my answer now. I won't help you, and there's no use in harassing Skylar about it either."

Overwhelmed with despair, Thomas looked like he had aged overnight. Even his voice sounded choked. "Are you really just going to watch me grow old and die in prison?"

Skylar's heart clenched in her chest. Revenge did not seem as sweet as she had imagined it to be.

She turned to Tobias and asked softly, "Will he really die in prison?"

With a cold glint in his eyes, Tobias answered, "Unlikely. At most, his assets will be liquidated."

With that, he checked his watch. "Your ten minutes are up. If that's all, I'll be taking Skylar away now."

Looking haggard and utterly miserable, Thomas kept mum and stopped trying to persuade them because he knew that it would only irritate Tobias all the more.

After Skylar left with Tobias, Thomas remained frozen to the spot like a statue.

Seeing that, Avery quickly went over to support him and added fuel to the fire. "Dad, didn't you see how Skylar turned her back on us? Why are you still expecting her to help you? She's nothing but an ingrate."

Thomas heaved a sigh. "If Tobias doesn't offer us a lending hand, it'll be difficult for us to turn things around this time."

Irene rolled her eyes at that. "What's the big deal? I can just ask for my father's help. He and Tobias' mother have been friends for many years. Skylar isn't all that great."

Meanwhile, Skylar muttered to herself in the car, "I bet they're backstabbing me right now."

At the traffic light, Tobias raised his hand and caressed Skylar's hair. "Maybe."

Skylar sighed as if accepting her fate. "My life is just crappy. Do you think changing my surname will give me better luck? I don't wanna be associated with the Joneses anyway."

Tobias let out a faint smile. "There's no need for that. Now that you've met me, no one can bully you no matter what."

Skylar looked slightly dazed as she parted her lips to speak, but in the end, she withheld the words gnawing at the back of her mind. Is my luck really turning around, or is this relationship doomed from the start? She constantly felt that she didn't belong in Tobias' world. Even though she liked him, the gulf between them was just too wide.

Tobias took the route back to Skylar's university, so she thought he was sending her home, but later on, he made a few turns and drove toward the only high-end villa within three kilometers of the university.

On the way there, Skylar asked him in confusion, "Where are you taking me?"

However, Tobias didn't answer her even when the car pulled up in front of a European-style villa. He took out a bunch of keys from the armrest compartment and dangled them on his index finger in front of Skylar. "Didn't you always say that you live too far from your university? This is the closest villa there is. From now on, you're the owner of this villa."

Skylar didn't take the keys from him due to the lingering fear in her chest as she recalled the incident with Zoey. Perhaps another woman would waltz into this villa as well.

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Tobias noticed the worry written on Skylar's face. An unobtrusive smile appeared on his face as he said, "You're the owner here. Give me your identity card later. I'll transfer the ownership to your name."

Skylar swallowed thickly. This gift is even more extravagant than a black card.

Shaking her head, she questioned, "Are you throwing your money at me?"

A trace of incredulity flashed across Tobias' eyes. He furrowed his brows and deepened his voice. "Can't I? Isn't this every woman's dream?"

When he relaxed his brows and seemed less unapproachable, Skylar reached out and took the keys from him. Then, thinking that this gift was nothing but a hot potato, she threw the keys back to him.

"It's too expensive. I can't take it. I'm afraid I might die from all the money being thrown at me."

Turning back to the front, his signature cold expression slipped back into place. "Unlikely. You'd be stuffed to death at most."

As they entered the villa, Skylar half-expected to see someone like Laura who was tasked to take care of the place, but she was only greeted by silence.

This villa wasn't very big, but the decor was exquisite and screamed money. A winding mahogany staircase connected the floors, and there was an antique touch to the entire place, exuding a retro vibe. It looked like a beachside villa people often saw in movies.

Drawing in a long breath, she noticed two pairs of matching indoor slippers, one pink and one grey, neatly placed on the shoe rack. She gingerly changed into the slippers and stood in the living room with her eyes darting around the place.

After a moment of silence, Tobias asked casually, "So are you happy with this place? I've already settled the application for you to live outside campus. Once you're done filming, you'll move in here with me. Didn't you say that you didn't feel secure? Seeing me every day will solve that."

Naturally, Skylar didn't believe his words. Before he disappeared, he had told her that they would see each other very often, but he vanished for a month after that without contacting her at all.

Perhaps she would end up living here by herself, but that didn't seem like such a bad thing.

Skylar went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator to find that everything was stocked up. There were even several types of peanut butter. Seeing as the vegetables and fruits were neatly sorted in storage boxes, she surmised that whoever did this must have OCD.

Tobias stood next to the refrigerator, holding it open. His towering figure was a head taller than it. "Can you cook? I don't know how to do anything of that sort, so you'll have to take care of me in the future."

"I can, but my cooking is not tasty. I always ate instant food that needed minimal cooking," Skylar replied curtly.

Speaking of this, Skylar suddenly felt ashamed as she recalled what the influencer lookalike Sheldon brought along the other day had said to her. Us girls should have more class when choosing the food we consume. She had even said it while looking down her nose at her.

Needless to say, she wished to be classy too, but she could barely make ends meet, so it was out of the question.

Before going to university, she never had meat fondue before because she couldn't afford it.

After closing the refrigerator, Tobias locked eyes with Skylar. His gaze was gentle and bewitching when he chided her, "Your life is an absolute disaster. Learn how to cook from now on! I'm not planning to hire a servant here. Having others around gets annoying."

Skylar averted her gaze and looked slightly uncomfortable. He seems to think it's a woman's job to cook. Typical male chauvinist. Why can't he learn to cook too?