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The perceptiveness of Kate's words had Skylar thinking that the former could have easily been a relationship coach if she ever stopped being a manager. Kate then retrieved an envelope from the drawer which she passed to Skylar. "Merry Christmas. Take the festive season to rest and recharge. I'm confident that you've got a shot at becoming the hottest starlet in the country." Skylar had never gotten a Christmas present from anyone before; Kate was the first to give her. Kate may be a tough talker, but inside, she was a real teddy bear. That gesture alone had Skylar profoundly moved, so she did not mind whatever was inside. Every year, she always felt left out when Eva and Timothy gathered around the Christmas trees, waiting to open up their presents. As for her, her name would never be found tagged onto any of the presents. Miranda's life sentence was a source of shame for friends and family who knew about it, and the disparity in treatment was obvious from those who had redirected their vitriol toward her mother onto her. Kate's envelope opened to reveal one-thousand-and-one dollars in cash— a symbolic and powerful angel number. Skylar appreciatively tucked that away inside her own pocket.

On the way home, Skylar stopped over to get some festive decorations which she hoped to embellish her empty house and add to the festive cheer with. She was determined to have herself a good time, even if she were to spend it alone. The goodies on the coffee table that Tobias got for her were collecting dust exactly where he left them. Amongst these were several bottles of reds of which she was not knowledgeable about, though the packaging might suggest that they could be quite pricey. On Christmas Eve, Skylar was called several times by an insistent Miranda to head over to

Wesley's, so she randomly picked out a few of those things Tobias got for her and made her way there.

Miranda was present to receive her at the door, but not Thomas.

The former was similarly not in the best of moods. "Where's he?" Skylar asked. "I don't

suppose that he has gone home to be with his wife and children for the holidays."

Miranda was visibly annoyed by that. "Well, excuse me. I'm his wife now, remember?

He said

that he'll be back late because something cropped up at work."

Skylar could only smile at Miranda's flair for self-deception.

It was particularly lively inside Wesley's home. Eva was there showing off her new coat

when Skylar stepped in.

Fendi's Spring Collection. Skylar was able to recognize it at first glance because that was

the exact piece she wore for the shoot.

"It's absolutely gorgeous, Eva."

"I bet it costs quite a bit. Kudos to Eva to be working under a great boss."

"Is your boss married?"

The relatives were fawning all over Eva and doing a fine job sucking up to her.

Skylar had only learned that Eva had recently broken off with the boyfriend she was expected to be marrying, citing incompatibility in their personalities; but everyone knew that

the truth may be closer to the latter setting her sights higher since joining the Ford Group.

Unlike in the past, the relatives came up to greet Skylar warmly this time round.

Her younger cousin, Timothy, was especially thrilled to see her. He dashed into the room

and came back out with a notebook which he passed along.

"Could I have your autograph, Skylar? There are many girls in my class who would like to

have it."

Skylar did not expect that she would be that popular amongst high-school students.

Eva rolled her eye at Timothy and seized him by the collar. "Why's a kid doing all this nonsense and not focusing on his studies? There are no decent people in the

entertainment

business these days."

The mouthy Eva could always be counted on to say something irksome.

Skylar frowned as she retorted, "Wouldn't you like to know how many office scandals

involving female secretaries or assistants cozying up to their own bosses? It's hard to say

whether secretaries are all good people either."

The tension in the air was positively volatile.

Miranda nudged at Skylar with an elbow to get her to shut up. Skylar was unhappy with those relatives who asked about the marital status of the boss, as though they were hoping for Tobias to marry Eva. In your dreams, people.

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Sharon really pulled out all the stops when it came to the dinner fare. With a glass in hand,

Skylar quietly ate at her seat next to Miranda.

“What’s next for you, Skylar? Are you seeing Harry right now?” Eva asked.

Skylar smiled. “Not much. I’m leaving everything to the agency, and just going with the flow.”

Eva sneered, “Aren’t you going to think about your own future? You’ve quite a lot of people

online getting on your case right now.”

“Really? I recall receiving quite a lot of praise as well.”

Eva mumbled under her breath, “Unambitious good-for-nothing. Some things just never

change.”

Then, Elaine butted in, “I’d say, Skylar, you should be looking for a boyfriend as you aren’t

getting younger. You’d do well to temper your expectations, and just find someone who

treats you good.”

Miranda slammed down her cutlery and glanced over to Elaine, “Whoever said that Skylar

doesn’t have a boyfriend? Haven’t I mentioned before that she’s dating Eva’s boss, Tobias

Ford?”

That had Eva scoffing, “How could I not know whether my boss is seeing anyone when I’m

at his side all the time? I bet Skylar must be bluffing, Aunt Miranda. It’s not as though she’ll

automatically be able to snag someone like Mr. Ford just because she’s some small-time

celebrity.”

Skylar had enough of Eva’s constant heckling which showed no signs of letting up even

during dinner on Christmas Eve. “What am I to do should I snag him by accident, I wonder.”

No one else believed her, save for Wesley and Sharon who had met Tobias before.

With a sly smile, Eva fished out her own cellphone. “I’ve my boss’ private number right here

and am about to call him to exchange festive greetings. How would you like to say a few words to him, Skylar? It should be pretty normal to chat with your own boyfriend, no?"

Skylar shrugged nonchalantly. She reckoned that Eva must be thinking that she would only be fitting for someone like Jeremy.

Eva boldly dialed Tobias' number in full view of all the relatives present and went on to

switch her phone to hands-free.

The phone rang for a protracted period before someone picked up.

"Hello?" A deep voice came back from the end.

Eva was a bundle of nerves as it was the first time she initiated a call to Tobias outside of work.

"Hi, Mr. Ford. It's Eva."

"What is it?" There was a lot of chatter on Tobias' side, from which Skylar was able to pick out Claudia's speaking voice.

She supposed that his family was at the dining table too.

"I just wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas." Eva's heart was almost pounding at her throat.

"A Merry Christmas to you as well."

Eva took a deep drawl. Her breathing was a little disheveled and her expression was akin to that of a love-struck adolescent.

"Might you, by any chance, know Skylar Jones, Mr. Ford? She'd like a word with you."

A wintry disconnect-tone emanated chillingly from the receiver end—Tobias had hung up.

Skylar was stunned. What's wrong with Tobias? Is he not even going to humor me? She had

already figured out what she wanted to say to him as well.

Miranda started complaining, "What's with Tobias? That's a bit of an overreaction, isn't it?"

That only gave the sniggering Eva more ammunition to work with. "Hmm, I wonder why your

own boyfriend doesn't recognize you. How about you start explaining to everyone why you

tried to lie? We're family, so must you keep trying to show me up?"

Skylar acted with restraint even though she was seething inside. "There's nothing I can do if

you don't believe me, but since when was I able to show you up? What am I compared to the

apple of everyone's eye?"

Elaine said sardonically, "Can't you tell your cousin's just showing her concern, Skylar?"

What

do you hope to accomplish by lying? Do you take all rich people for fools? He must prefer

smart and learned women who could become assets to him."

Skylar regarded those trenchant relatives with scrutiny. "So, all of you are in the opinion that

I ought to be settling for some average Joe, huh."