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Skylar stared up at him in a daze, clutching the necklace in her hand. If she remembered correctly, the price of this necklace was about seven hundred when bought online.

Thinking that she was waiting for him to put it on, Tobias reached out to take the necklace from her, but she didn't let go of it.

"Why did you choose this brand? And why a little black swan?" The blunt words finally left

Skylar's mouth. She had an inkling that Tobias had not personally picked this necklace. He

was the kind of person who thought the more expensive the gift was, the better. He would not

usually even consider buying anything that was priced less than a thousand.

Tobias could tell from her expression that she didn't like the gift as much as he thought she

would. He'd asked Susan to help pick the necklace out, and all his secretary had told him was

that the brand was popular amongst young people.

He didn't know how much it had cost either; after all, it was the company's money, and he

couldn't be bothered to care.

When he first laid eyes upon the necklace, he hadn't been sure if it was gold or silver and

didn't even like the pendant on it but felt like he didn't understand a young person's tastes

enough to question it.

"You don't like it? I thought it suited your image; it's youthful and cute,"

Tobias explained. He

had put effort into preparing this gift for her and was slightly hurt that he hadn't gotten the

response that he'd been anticipating.

Skylar instantly put her acting skills to good use, a bright smile blooming across her face as

she clung onto his arm and nuzzled him as a cat would. "Of course I like it. I'd love anything you give me. Help me put it on, would you?"

After freezing for a split second, he did as she asked, clumsily fastening the necklace around her neck. Skylar could tell from his grumbling about the thin chain and tiny latch that this was likely his first time doing such a thing. Then, she set about cutting the cake into slices, giving the first slice to Tobias. Sharing cake with someone else was one of the staples of celebrating a birthday, after all. Without thinking too much into it, Tobias shook his head and rejected the cake. "I don't like sweet things," he said. "Plus, you won't have enough cake left over if you give some to me. You can go ahead and eat it all." This birthday celebration was making Skylar feel some very complicated emotions. She once again reminded herself to not expect too much from him; it was good enough that he'd remembered in the first place. I'll just pretend he has diabetes and will get horribly sick if he eats a single bite of cake or something. Skylar was nibbling away at her cake when Tobias' phone screen lit up with a push notification from a social media app. It was a post about the incident that had happened at the shopping mall earlier. Her hands trembled as they gripped tightly onto her paper plate, her eyes widening as she watched him pick up his phone. Not bothering to put her cake down first, she instantly got to her feet and shot her hand out to grab ahold of his wrist. She didn't care if she was acting suspiciously; Tobias looking at any of the pictures or videos from the event today was the last thing she wanted.

It would be a humiliating slap to her face. The man glanced at her with mirth shining in his eyes, one hand reaching up to caress the side of her face. "What are you so nervous about? It's not like you were cheating on me. I was there, and I saw everything, so you don't have to explain yourself to me either. This wasn't something you could have prepared for... It's just... I now understand why my mother kept nagging and telling me she didn't like that your job requires you to make so many public appearances." His tone was deep and sincere, tugging at Skylar's heartstrings. "To be honest, I also somewhat regret letting you stay in the entertainment industry to chase your own dreams. I put you in a position where you have to face so many risks and danger."

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"You regret your decision? But I can't give up my career because of you now. I've worked so hard to get to where I am today." Tobias' heart lurched to the bottom of his stomach. Skylar had become someone just like him, possibly because he had been a bad influence on her, or maybe because they'd spent too much time together. Skylar from the past would never have answered this way. Back then, all she wanted was to pursue love; she never had any plans for her career or her future. She had sacrificed everything for her ex-boyfriend and had even been willing to give up her life for him. All Tobias had done was throw out a casual, curious question, and she'd answered without missing a beat. Skylar's breath hitched in her throat when she saw his gaze grow sharp, his expression

seeming to darken under the dim glow of the dining room lighting. A moment of tense silence passed, and Tobias eventually deleted the push notification. It was getting late. Skylar hadn't brought any clothes over, nor were there any of her belongings here at Tobias' place, so it would be inconvenient for her to stay the night. To add to that, there were no women's hygiene products in the house she could use, and she didn't want to leave the house the next morning looking like a mess. She brought this up with Tobias, explaining how she had a shoot early the next day. She needed a good night's rest.

However, the man had no intention of letting her leave. His grip on her waist tightened slightly, the warmth of his touch burning through her clothes. "Are you really going to leave me all alone like this? Come on... Stay for a while longer." Men would say anything and everything they thought their partner wanted to hear whenever they wanted to have sex — the stoic, proud Tobias was no exception. Skylar internally rolled her eyes; she knew that he wasn't physically capable of feeling lonely and always preferred having his own time and space. His hand slowly inched down her body, settling on her thigh, where he rubbed small circles into her skin. "What are you waiting for? Follow me upstairs. Let me give you one of the most memorable birthdays of your life." The sudden sound of a phone ringing interrupted the moment. Tobias got up to answer it, his warmth instantly disappearing as he pulled away. Fiddling with her collar, she watched him walk off to one side and furrow his eyebrows, placing one hand on his hip in exasperation. "Go see a doctor if you feel sick. I don't know how to nurse you back to health."

Something about the response gave her an uneasy feeling deep in her gut.

It couldn't have been a man calling. Tobias wasn't gay, and no guy in their right mind would try to go to him, of all people, for comfort. It had to have been a woman calling.

The man abruptly ended the call and threw his phone somewhere, coming back to her and lifting her chin up so he could look into her eyes. "The night is still young, and I promise to give you plenty of time to rest."

Skylar hesitated only for a few seconds before letting him pull her upstairs.

Elsewhere, Idania nearly threw her phone onto the floor in anger. She'd gone to such lengths to pretend she was ill so that she could get back together with Tobias. All she got in return was coldness for her efforts.

She couldn't wrap her head around how he could bear to be so cruel towards her when they used to be in love in the past. I'm sure things would be different if it weren't for Skylar.

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When she attempted to call him again, all that greeted her was a robotic voice. Idania slumped against the couch, staring up at the ceiling with a bitter, sarcastic smile.

Tobias didn't care about her at all, even after she'd told him that she was alone and in pain.

He didn't care if she died or lived.

Several hours later, Skylar carefully crawled out of bed while Tobias was still asleep, aware that he was a light sleeper and an insomniac.

Heading for the bathroom, she picked up his toothbrush before setting it back down, remembering his OCD.

Her complicated family background had shaped her into a sensitive people-pleaser who hated making other people upset. "Remember your roots," her grandma always reminded her. "You don't have the luxury to be reckless or stubborn. You should be grateful to have clothes on your back and a roof over your head."

All those memories came flooding back to her as she stared at the reflection of the Swarovski necklace around her neck, and she chuckled. She still didn't know who had picked out this necklace, but she guessed that it was a woman. There was nothing in the bathroom that belonged to her. So, she picked up some mouthwash and gargled it as best as she could. When she went back to the bedroom, Tobias was already awake. Even in this dazed, sleepy state, he still looked as unapproachable and stoic as ever.

He glanced up at the clock. Why is she packing her stuff at six-fifteen in the morning...

"Wait for me. I'll send you," he said before he yawned, pushing himself out of bed to draw the curtains.

Tobias hated getting up early more than he hated not being able to fall asleep. After long periods of insomnia, he'd grown to prefer sleeping for as long as he could to escape the stress of his daily life.

"I think it's better if you don't." Skylar pursed her lips. "The pictures the paparazzi took last time are still fresh in the public's minds, and I don't want to cause any more trouble for the company."

He sighed. "Are you worried about causing trouble for the company or for yourself?"

"Both." She busied herself with putting her hair into a neat ponytail. "We share a mutually

beneficial relationship after all.”

He decided to leave it at that. He wanted his rest too, and he knew he'd be in a horrible mood

all day if he left his bed this early in the morning.

When he was starting up his business, he had a habit of waking up early and being able to

survive on two or three hours of sleep daily. However, that was no longer the case.

Skylar bent down and kissed his forehead, just like how he used to kiss hers, and he hummed

in contentment.

He settled by the window and watched her stand outside the gates, occasionally glancing

down at her phone. It looked like she was trying to book a car from an e-hailing service.

There's no one that's coming around here at this time of the day.

Minutes later, a Rolls-Royce Phantom drove out of the garage and stopped right in front of

Skylar. The car window rolled down to reveal Tobias sitting in the driver's seat. “Get in. I can't

let you wait forever for a taxi that won't arrive.”

She looked at the time on her phone and back at him before apprehensively getting into the

backseat, worried that they might get ambushed by paparazzi again.

The light in Tobias' eyes dimmed. “You're acting like a robber slipping into his getaway car.

Are we going to have to sneak around like this for the rest of our lives?”