

Love Coming from the Least Expected Chapter 361

"Has everything been dealt with?" I shifted my attention over to the pregnant woman sitting at the backstage. She must've been instigated by Crystal to come in here. Without the invitation card given to her by Crystal, she wouldn't have been able to enter this place.

Sabrina had a melancholy look on her face as she uttered, "She's such an abhorrent woman. Eight months ago, when Zach was still in the army, she tried to force the responsibility of her child onto him. If it wasn't for her baby's sake, I would've taught her a lesson."

"I'm sorry, Sabby. Because of my negligence, you ended up getting insulted. Nicole was my classmate back in high school. I didn't know that she still has feelings for me."

Zachary was holding Sabrina's hand nervously. "Don't be angry with me anymore, okay?"

"Humph, I'll forgive you only if you manage to do something that cheers me up." Sabrina turned her head away from him.

"It's my fault that you guys were caught up in this quagmire. I am sorry." I gave them a terse explanation regarding the whole incident with Crystal while rubbing my fingers. "Sabby, you should refrain from contacting Crystal in the future. She's very troublesome and irascible. Trust me, you don't want to get involved with her," I added.

"Oh, I see. I was wondering how it couldn't have been a coincidence that Zach's classmate from high school suddenly appeared on our wedding day. Crystal must've been the one pulling the strings in the dark. Humph, I'll make sure to pay her back two-fold if she ever gets married in the future."

"Calm down. Don't do anything stupid," I quickly responded.

"Yeah, yeah.. You worry too much, Eve. I can handle myself." Sabrina let out a sigh.

Gazing at the expression on her face, I knew she wasn't going to dismiss her grudge with Crystal so easily. Crystal is very cunning and mendacious. What if Sabrina ends up falling into her trap?

"Don't worry. Zach is a smart guy. I'm sure he'll be able to protect Sabrina from Crystal. If anything does happen to Sabrina, he'll be there for her." Christopher passed me a glass of wine. After taking a sip of the wine, I

finally came back to my senses. What exactly am I doing here right now? I took a look around and saw a lot of people still glaring at me.

“Hey, I think we should go. The people around us are scrutinizing my every move.”

“Okay, let’s leave. We should get into a private room and enjoy ourselves there instead.” Christopher held my hand before heading toward the exit.

Seeing as such, Monica quickly went after us. “Chris, are you leaving already?” she queried with a sad face.

“Yeah, Eve and I have some matters to attend to.” Christopher held tighter onto my hand.

“Julia misses you a lot. You should visit her whenever you’re free. She gets very lonely since Darius rarely comes home nowadays.” Monica was staring intently at Christopher. She didn’t even spare me a glance.

“I know. I’ll be sure to pay her a visit together with Eve. Bye.”

“Wait!” Monica took out an entry ticket to a piano recital and handed it over to Christopher. “This is the entry ticket to my piano recital. I have saved this one especially for you.”

Christopher was reluctant to take the ticket. “Why is there only one ticket?”

“Sorry, I was only able to save one ticket.” Monica finally decided to look at me as she uttered, “Ms. Tanner, I forgot to save a ticket for you. I hope you won’t be mad.”

I waved my hand and feigned a smile in response.

“Chris, you’ll be there right?”

Monica shoved the ticket into Christopher’s hand. Christopher reluctantly accepted the ticket and inserted it into his pocket. “I can’t make any promises. I’ve been quite busy recently, so don’t get your hopes up. However, I will be bringing Yvonne along with me if I do make it to your recital. After all, you’re her sister as well.”

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I threw a sideways glance upon hearing Christopher's words. I appreciated his effort to keep a distance from Monica whenever they were in each other's presence. Even when they were standing next to each other, he would keep repeating that he saw her as a sister. He did all these just so I would feel more reassured.

What he did not realize was that everything had changed from the moment I learned that I wasn't terminally ill. I had vowed to never leave his side after I saw hopes in the prolonged darkest times.

If my experiences in life had taught me anything, it was this—live in the moment and cherish the present.

After being given the opportunity to live again, I had decided to cast away my sense of insecurity. Unfortunately, I was disqualified from the National Youth Art Exhibition and Contest due to my absence from the third quarter contest. Otherwise, I was convinced that in my current state of a peaceful mind, I would be able to create a better art piece.

I walked out of the event hall and made a phone call to Sabrina. We agreed to meet up at night before I hung up the phone and got into the car. Christopher stuffed the concert ticket into my hands and said, "Dear, I'll leave this to you, and I'll support every decision that you make."

"Maybe you should go," I said hesitantly.

"Hmm?" Christopher feigned anger. "Are you trying to push your husband into the arms of another woman?"

"I'm not. Since your mother was already displeased with us, we shouldn't make the matter worse for her. Besides, you've already made it clear that you only see Monica as a sister, so I'm not going to be jealous about her. Just go and I'm sure your mother will appreciate it," I trod carefully while observing Christopher's facial expression.

As the man started to get worked up for real, I quickly added, "Why don't I come with you? It'll be like you treating me to a concert. Does that sound all right?"

Only then Christopher's face lit up. He pinched my cheek playfully and said, "I won't say no to you if you want to watch the concert. Just make sure you don't fall asleep during the session."

"I won't. My dream was to become a painter. Music is part of arts too, so don't think that I don't enjoy music," I retorted. However, I must admit that I don't fully appreciate music concerts per se. Mmm... I might really fall asleep at the concert.

Christopher suddenly turned to me and asked in all seriousness, "You mentioned that Crystal had stolen your artwork in the past. How did that happen?"

Christopher's unexpected question took me by surprise. Since he knew I could paint, I was under the impression that he knew everything about me. But now, that notion was being challenged. "You really don't know?" I asked.

"I really don't," the man answered while furrowing his brows.

I poked my finger on his forehead, trying to flatten the frown. "Sometimes I feel like you already know everything that has happened to me, and that you can do anything. And now it seems like there's a limit to the things that you know about me," I teased.

"After all, I'm only human. I can't really have everything covered," the man said while pulling me into his arms, and patted my buttock softly before he resumed a serious tone, "Stop fooling around. Tell me what happened."

I pursed my lips before I slowly explained, "Frankly, it was a rather complicated incident. A few years ago, I painted a piece of artwork, Autumnal Panorama. But for reasons unknown to me then, it fell into the hands of Crystal. I was kept in the dark all this while by many of my family members including my respected grandma and my dad. It wasn't until recently that I was told what happened."

"It was indeed an excellent piece of artwork. Eve, you should have more confidence in yourself," Christopher said while rubbing my nose.

"You're talking as though you have seen the painting yourself. Crystal ended up taking the artwork to Eastsummer. I believe it's still in one of their drawing rooms." I shrugged. I used to be consumed by gloom and grief when I thought about my art piece that had been stolen. But now, I was confident that my best work was yet to come.

"You don't know that. I might have seen it with my own eyes," the man said with a mysterious wink. But he kept his lips tight when I asked him to elaborate.

"You're tricking me again. There are less than ten people who had seen the painting."

"What if I'm one of the ten people?" Christopher then pulled out his phone and showed me a picture on his screen. My jaw dropped when I saw what was on it. "How did you get hold of my template and draft illustration?"

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“Why don’t you take a guess?” Christopher kept his phone and looked at me expectantly.

Well, how would I know? I gave him a nudge and pleaded, “Please, I beg of you. I’m really curious. It’s fair enough that you knew about my hobby of painting. After all, I did paint a few times every now and again when I was younger. However, I don’t even have the physical copy of the draft template of this painting. So how do you have a scanned version of it?”

“You really have no clue? What a silly woman.” Rubbing his chin, Christopher seemed to be weighing his choices. In the end, the man decided to hold off telling me until the good news was released two days later.

I rolled my eyes at him. “Why would I ask you if I have any clue at all?” Still not giving up, I started to move about on his body in an attempt to coax an answer out of him. As a result of that, I had inadvertently inflamed the carnal urge in him as his eyes shone with blazing desire in the next instance.

Sensing how Christopher’s lower region was reacting to me, I panicked and quickly jumped off his body. The next thing I knew, the man had driven the car into some woods. To put it simply, we had given the car a good shake whilst parked in the woods. Christopher only let me go because we were meeting Sabrina for the night.

What a scoundrel!

In the end, Christopher was still tight-lipped about how he came to be in possession of the draft work of my painting. I then recalled a conversation he had with Monica when he said that he had started paying attention to me, and then fell in love with me some ten years ago.

At that time, I thought he only said that for Monica’s benefit. But now, it seemed like he was telling the truth. I had been racking my brain to recall all the interactions I had previously had with Christopher, but my efforts were in vain. I arrived at the conclusion that this man was like a mysterious book. Each time I thought I had gotten to the last page, I would find out that there were more pages underneath.

At night, we went to Sabrina and Zachary’s presidential suite for the newlyweds’ after-party. Many of Christopher’s ex-comrades were also

invited to the party. One of whom was Sean. A new scar could be seen across one of his cheeks.

All the friends gathered around and started to invent games to play with Sabrina and Zachary. One of which was to dangle an apple in between them, and the couple had to eat the apple with hands behind their back. Another game was to get a blindfolded Sabrina to correctly identify Zachary's hand from among the groomsmen's hands.

It only took seconds for Sabrina to find the right hand. The bride took off her blindfold and let out a bright smile. "This is a piece of cake. I had already engraved every detail of his hand in my memory when I was going after Zach and held his hand for the first time. There's no way I'll make a mistake."

Upon Sabrina's revelation, some people cheered and whistled, whereas others started to tease the couple. Zachary flushed like a tomato instantly. "It was me who went after you. It's just that I did it so subtly it wasn't obvious to you."

"Is that so? I'm curious as to how you have won Sabrina over. Why don't you share with us?" I joined the crowd and asked with an impish smile.

Zachary finally relented and shared his story, "I've been in love with Sabrina since we were kids. She used to live across from me. While other kids thought she was rough and overbearing, I saw a different side of hers. Sabrina would bring some slices of bread to the park to feed the stray cats. Whenever the cats were injured, she would bring them home and tend to their injuries. She was such a kind person I couldn't help falling for her."

"Aww, you're such a lovely childhood sweetheart! Cheers to you two! Here, you two are going to finish this drink together. Bottoms up!" I said while sliding over a glass of beer.

Christopher already had quite a lot to drink as the night deepened. He held onto me and kept muttering that he wanted me to have a grand wedding reception, in which I would wear the fairest wedding gown and be the center of every girl's attention. After a while, he quietly led me to the balcony, and then rested his head on my shoulder before he whispered, "Eve, we got married in such a rush I felt like I owe you a beautiful wedding ceremony. At that time, you were struggling to make a decision due to my family background. So, I had no choice but to act fast so that you wouldn't run away from me."

"You fool!" I let out a smile and held him back. "Well, didn't you promise that you'll cherish me for all eternity? I'll need you to keep doing that, for if you don't, my heart will be broken into a thousand pieces."

"I wouldn't dare to hurt you!"

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The after-party went on until late into the night. As I looked helplessly at a group of drunken men and turned to Sabrina for help, the woman was already on her way back to her bedroom with Zachary in her arm. She turned to me and said, "Eve, I'm gonna have to count on you to look after these men. After all, I'm the bride, and tonight is my wedding night. You know what that means, don't you?"

She was right and her argument was indisputable.

Together with some hotel staff, we put every one of the men back to their respective bedrooms. After making sure they were all settled in, I went back to Christopher's room and gave him a nudge. "All right now. There's just me here. You can stop pretending to be drunk."

The man continued to sleep soundly. I poked at him a few times and finally realized that he really was drunk.

After our conversation at the balcony, Christopher said that he was planning to feign being drunk in front of his friends so he didn't have to drink so much. What a liar!

"Hah, good luck with the hangover tomorrow," I muttered while covering him up with a blanket. On second thought, worrying that he was going to have a bad hangover the next day, I decided to go out and get some hangover remedy at the drug store.

On my way to the drug store, I walked past Lyle's parked car by the roadside and was glad that no one was inside the car. Now that Crystal was back in the scene, there was no doubt she would latch herself onto Lyle and create all sorts of trouble. I sped up my pace to the drug store and decided to take a different route on the way back. As soon as I stepped into a small alleyway, I was met with an angry stray dog which started to chase after me. I panicked and ran deep into the alleyway.

"Lyle, please don't be angry. I swear I didn't do it on purpose. You see, you've missed me too. Or your body wouldn't have reacted to me right now."

After sprinting for a few minutes, I was catching my breath in front of a big tree when I saw Crystal and Lyle yards away from me. Urgh! Of all the

people in Avenport, I have to bump into them. Crystal kept rubbing her body against Lyle. As though that wasn't enough, she then slid her hand underneath the man's clothes for more actions.

"Stop it, Crystal," uttered Lyle as he removed the woman's hand and rejected her for the first time. "I'm glad that you're back and you seem to be doing well. But, I think it's better that we take a break from seeing each other for the time being."

"Lyle, please don't do this to me. You're the most important person in my life. I'll be lost without you." Crystal's eyes brimmed with tears. She bit her lower lips and continued, "I know you didn't approve of the things that I'd done on that deserted island. But you must understand, I was so terrified at that moment. I'm only human, and any desperate human would do anything to stay alive when death is imminent."

"What about Yvonne? She too was only human." Lyle scoffed with a look in his eyes of utter indifference.

"Please don't compare the two of us. You're not regretting choosing me over Yvonne, are you?" the woman said as she slowly slid out of her dress and started to grind her body against Lyle's. "I was in such distress that I couldn't think straight. I regretted the moment we left the island. But those people on the boat wouldn't let me go back for you. Can you please believe me?"

Only a fool would believe what she said. Even I can tell she's full of nonsense. Surely Lyle should know better. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to withstand the woman's seduction.

"All right. I believe you."

Okay then. I seemed to have overestimated his intelligence.

"That's so great! I knew you still love me. Let's get married, Lyle. Didn't you want us to be married before? Let's do that and be a legally wedded couple." Crystal started kissing Lyle, who finally gave in, and pressed the woman against a wall. As he did that, the corner of Crystal's lips curled up in a satisfactory smile.

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At this point, it would be no surprise that a passionate scene would ensue. I wanted to leave but was afraid that the stray dog would chase me again. As a child, Crystal had pushed me into a dog's kennel and the memory still haunted me so much so that I felt no love for small, cute animals.

I squatted behind the tree and looked at the moon with my face in my hands. I wanted to confront those two and shout at them not to engage in such activities in public. Adults might come across them or even worse, they might scare little children. Even if they did not scare little children, they might trample the grass and plants. We are supposed to take care of the environment.

"Crystal, are you really willing to marry me?" Lyle took Crystal's leg and twirled it around his waist. He pushed her against the wall, without the tenderness of the past but just lusty release of pent-up desires.

"Of course, Lyle, I have always wanted to marry you but you just can't forget Yvonne. I'm jealous, don't you know? Every time we quarrel, it's because of her. You even went to see her to get back together again. I was really sad at the time." Crystal put his arms around Lyle's neck while receiving the man's passionate advances and trying to say things that would arouse the man's sympathy.

"Lyle, I am giving you all that I have. Are you really ready to reject me? You see, your body still longs for me. Otherwise, why are you so excited? We fit so well. Stop being angry about those petty little things, okay?"

"Petty little things?" For a moment, Lyle's gaze turned cold and an evil smile crossed his lips. "Well, we are not angry."

"Then, shouldn't you propose to me?" Crystal muttered.

"Am I not proposing to you now? Look, we are joined together as one. You love my strength so much. Don't tell me you will take someone else." Lyle voice came out in a shout.

"Oh! I love you the most. You feel so good. Come on, move harder!"

"You little slut. You are more and more lustful. Do you really want to marry me instead of Benjamin?"

Their conversation turned more and more blatant. Even if I covered my ears and did not look, I could not pretend that I had not heard anything. How long would the two of them continue their raunchy moments? Are they not afraid of someone coming here and robbing them seeing their vulnerable position?

By the tone of Lyle's voice, it seemed as if he had no intention of marrying Crystal. I felt gratified. Crystal had been so arrogant and in the end, if no one wanted to take her hand in marriage, it would serve her right. I really wanted to tear her heart out when she found a pregnant woman to spoil Sabrina's wedding ceremony.

I took out my mobile phone and played out the sound of police sirens, appearing to become louder and louder, as if coming up the alley. Lyle suddenly exclaimed, "There is a car coming, hurry up."

"Ah... Let's continue in the car then. You carry me on your back."

After the two had fled some distance away, I stood up from behind the big tree and laughed so hard that my whole body shook. Hopefully, Lyle would not be traumatised by the incident.

Grandma had never been fond of Crystal. From the incident of the banquet when I confronted her and Grandma held back Lyle to prevent him from interfering, so many things have happened. I hope Lyle will follow grandma's advice to marry another woman. It's not that I want Crystal to remain a spinster, but I'm more worried about grandma. After all, she treats me very well.

If I had to make a choice, I would always choose to protect someone closer to me.

After Sabrina's wedding ceremony, out of the blue, I received a call from the person in charge of the National Youth Art Exhibition and Contest. They said that my painting was well received and hoped that I could attend the banquet of young artists they had organized and be interviewed by reporters.

I thought I had heard it wrongly. "Hello, have you made a mistake? I had some health issues so I did not send in an entry for the present contest."

"Ms. Tanner, you are so humorous! Your entry is already displayed at the exhibition. How can it be a mistake? It's okay if you don't wish to be interviewed. Nevertheless, you must come for the banquet. There'll be many well-known masters there. Don't you feel tempted?"

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Of course, I was tempted. Although all art lovers go abroad to learn painting from their admired masters, it was only because local painters

would not accept disciples or they would just accept one or two. Some would not even show their faces.

However, what did I paint and when did I send in the painting? Why do I have no idea?

Christopher was holding popcorn and watching TV dramas with me. He was so bored he was about to fall asleep. Seeing me answering a call and then standing motionless, deep in thought, he asked, "What's wrong? Has something happened?"

"Well, I'm actually a little confused." I knocked on my head. "The art exhibition organizer actually called me and said that my paintings received a good review. Don't you think it's strange? This time the organizers gave everyone two months but I haven't even touched a pen for two months. When did I give them the painting? Was it when I was sleepwalking?"

"Silly girl, maybe you were sleepwalking then?" Christopher pointed in the direction of the exhibition and said, "Would you like to go and take a look? There are so many beautiful paintings on display and there are also advantages for you to look at other people's paintings."

"Great, let's go now. I can't wait. If I got it wrong, it will definitely impact my life."

I hurriedly asked Christopher to drive us to the exhibition but when I saw the painting there, I was stunned and looked back at him in disbelief. Isn't this the painting placed at home, covered by a canvas?

"Come closer, so you can see it clearly." Christopher took my hand, walked down the corridor step by step; then, he pointed to the painting and said, "Look, it's a perfect and beautiful painting. Otherwise, it will not be placed in the most central position."

Gently and carefully, I stroked the picture frame. Then, my eyes fell on the picture and for a while, I felt a little teary.

The whole painting presented a dark gray mode. Even the background was a bleak grayish black. Dilapidated decomposing fallen leaves and the dried grass looked desolate. A bird perched on a tree lifted its head as if wailing in sorrow and the sky was covered with dense dark clouds, staining the ground with a dark brown tone.

A woman with disheveled hair was lying on the ground, facial features unseen. Under her feet was a huge gray-black whirlpool, as if about to suck her in as her feet had become blurred and were already partially inside the whirlpool. She raised her head to the man standing in front of her with the light of infinite hope shining in her eyes.

The man was a tall fair figure in bright colors contrasting sharply with the surroundings as if he was from another world.

His handsome facial features were exactly the same as Christopher's with strong edges. He looked handsome, play boyish, and mischievous with an air of cynicism. However, his gaze at the woman on the ground was soft and gentle. His right hand was extended towards the woman and the sunlight breaking through the clouds shone on this outstretched hand, giving it a golden glow.

His slightly parted elegant lips seemed to say, "Come with me. I'll take you away from this hell."

I titled this painting "Salvation." It was meant to be a gift for Christopher. When it was not finished, he wanted to see it every day. On the day it was completed, we were having conflicts. After that, we went for our honeymoon and until now, I have not had the time to tell him that the painting was done. So, it was to my utter surprise to see it exhibited here.

"This piece is my gift to you. Now that you've sent it here, it is no longer yours," I murmured.

This painting expressed the feeling of seeing hope and redemption when I met Christopher in my desperate circumstances. At that time, I completely regarded him as my one and only hope.

"I am the man in this painting. How could it belong to anyone else? I've asked the organizers. They will display it for a while, after which, there will be a charity auction. I will buy it back, then hang it in our home," Christopher said with a smile.

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"It feels weird having to purchase my own painting." I was still reeling from the experience. Attending the Young Achiever's banquet was a huge surprise, but I was even more surprised by the fact that Christopher had submitted this painting on my behalf.

"It doesn't matter. I may lack a lot of things, but the one thing that I don't lack is money." Christopher picked up my hand and placed it over his heart. "During the entire month that you were gone, I stayed in our house every day, doing nothing and just staring into space, thinking of you. They told me that you were dead, but I never once believed them. You're such a silly girl that even God won't take you in. You still have so much living and growing up to do."

“What a bast*rd! Why would you bring that up again? You’re making me tear up!” I pouted and playfully punched Christopher.

Christopher planted a kiss on the corner of my eyelid and said softly, “I know better than anyone else just how much you love painting. I looked at this painting that you did for me and thought to myself that I must share this gift with everyone. I want everyone to witness the depth of our love. From the moment I saw your Autumnal Panorama, I knew immediately how passionate you were about art. So, I told myself that I must put you on that stage again and let the whole world witness your dazzling talent.”

I wiped away my tears and held Christopher’s hand in my own. Then, I asked him a question that had been troubling me for a long while, “How did you know that was my painting? Christopher, you really are such a mysterious person! I feel as if you can see right through me. Tell me, is there anything at all about me that you don’t know?”

“Yes, I didn’t know that you were going to marry Lyle. If I had known, I would have stopped you, but sadly, I was serving in the army at that time.” Christopher cupped my face, gazed into my eyes, and said earnestly, “When I found out that you were unhappy in your marriage, I felt terrible and blamed myself for it. If only I had returned earlier, you wouldn’t have suffered so much.”

I was surprised by Christopher’s words. He talks as if we had known each other since we were young, but I really can’t recall when and how I met him. Was it during that kidnapping incident? A lot of kids were involved at that time though... and I barely said a word to anyone. Anyway, as far as he was concerned, it was Crystal who had rescued all of them back then, not me.

It was amazing that, for all these years, I had faithfully guarded the secret of Crystal’s glory. She had received a lot of perks because of her alleged heroic role during the kidnapping episode. Not long after that incident, she held an art exhibition. As a new school artist, the prominent families would usually have ignored her.

However, in their gratefulness to her, a huge crowd had shown up at her exhibition. The media, too, had given her plenty of attention. After that, Crystal became some sort of celebrity in Avenport.

However, the truth was that I was the one who had saved everyone at that time, not Crystal. I had not told anyone about that, not even Christopher. I was the one who had lured the two kidnappers away, secretly called the police, and busted the doors open. Unluckily for me, one of the kidnappers had knocked me to the ground, and I lost consciousness.

When I came to, the person who was hailed as a hero was Crystal. I could only watch quietly as everyone rushed up to her and thanked her earnestly while she shamelessly told them that it was no problem at all. It should have been me receiving all that gratitude, not her.

At that moment, I understood that Crystal was already an angel in everybody's eyes, so it was easy for them to believe that she had been the hero. If I had been the one standing in her place, they would not have believed me so easily. Even if I had told them the truth, they would have thought that I only wanted to steal some attention.

During that incident, I had begged the kidnapers to spare Christopher's life, but he would not have known about this since he had lost consciousness after being stabbed by one of them.

"Have we really known each other for so many years? Why don't I remember any of this?"

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"Come with me! Let me show you something!" Christopher tugged me out of the exhibition hall and we left. Back at our home, he turned on his laptop and turned the screen to me. He pointed at an icon and asked, "Look in here! Do you know what this is?"

I glanced at him suspiciously and clicked at the icon that Christopher was pointing at. My eyes widened at the contents. I flipped through the pages on the screen. It was a chat history between Christopher and a girl.

The conversations were not flirtatious in nature; it was just two people sharing stories of their lives and sending encouragement and support to each other. The very last message was a message that I had sent to Key when I was living in a small seaside town.

The message read, Even though I had suffered a shipwreck at sea before, I can still appreciate the beauty of the ocean now as I stand on the beach of Summerbank. Tell me, Key, what should I do with my dying days so that these last three months will not be in vain?

There was no reply to that message, but on the very next day after that, Christopher had appeared in front of me.

"So, did you manage to locate me through this little nugget of information?" I was still holding the laptop in my hands. My mind was still digesting this new revelation. No wonder Christopher had found me so

fast and was so sure that I was alive; I had been messaging him all day every day unknowingly. It was as good as confessing the truth to him.

I stared at Christopher incredulously. "You are Key? The Key that I had been chatting with online all these years?"

"Yes, I am Key!" Christopher nodded, then said in a somber tone, "I told you we've known each other for many years. Throughout all those years, you have shared with me all your thoughts and confessed to me your love for painting. Eve, we met much earlier than you can remember, and I know all your stories. For example, I knew that you would seek revenge by secretly adding salt into Crystal's water bottle whenever she teased you so that she would not dare to drink any water all day... I also know—"

"Hold on, stop talking. Let me digest this. Why does it feel like we were actually dating online?" I blinked a few times, feeling a little mad. Back then, I had thought of Key as my confidant. I had kept no secrets from Key. Who would have thought that Key was actually Christopher? Doesn't this mean that Christopher knows all my embarrassing stories? Including the story of when I got my first period?

I did not have a mother to prepare me for womanhood. I did not even know how to use a sanitary pad. I had complained to Key who had then sent me a video tutorial on how to use one. Back then, I thought of Key as my wiser, older sister.

I could not bear to think about all the things that I had told Key anymore. It was just too embarrassing and all I wanted at that moment was to sink into the ground. I can't believe Christopher was the one who had taught me how to use a sanitary pad and that's not even the most embarrassing thing! I can't take this shame, but I don't think I can bear to look Christopher in the eye for the next three days!

"Why didn't you ever confess your feelings to me? You're not lying to me, are you?"

"Silly girl! How could a man confess his feelings so casually? If he does, then his feelings must not be true." Christopher lightly nudged me.

"How could you be Key? How could such a tough guy like you use such a feminine nickname? I've always thought that Key was female!" I was still in disbelief. When I first started chatting with Key, I was only thirteen years old, and Key was still young too.

"I didn't think much about it! 'Key' had seemed like a friendly name. Anyway, it worked, didn't it? It got you to start chatting with me!" Christopher said proudly and pressed a kiss on my forehead. "So, you see,

I've already got you wrapped around my finger from the time you were thirteen! You won't be able to leave me now!"

Due to my ill health and lack of nutrition, I was small at thirteen years old. Isn't it a little bit too much that he liked me when I was thirteen?

I playfully bit down on Christopher's arm and cried, "You old man! You pedophile!"

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When Christopher heard my exclamation, his expression shifted. He lightly patted my cheeks and retorted, "Eve, you're one year older than me. Should you really be calling me an old man?"

My cheeks turned red immediately. He never failed to make me blush every time he called me by my nickname. He tilted his face towards me. His eyes were bright with a mischievous light.

I playfully kicked him and snapped, "So, you fell in love at just twelve years old then? You asshole!"

Christopher smirked. He pulled me into his arms, spun me around, and pressed me against the wall in one smooth motion. "Since you keep calling me names, I think I should live up to those names. Shall I do to you what an asshole would really do?"

"We haven't had lunch yet. I'm hungry," I said, playfully patting his cheek as he brought his face close to mine.

"Why don't we do something fun first? When we get home, I'll make your food while you relax on the couch and watch some TV. How does that sound?" Christopher whispered suggestively to me as he rained kisses on my lips and neck. His hands strayed down to my belt and he expertly undid it with his fingers.

"I don't... Fine..." I gave in weakly as Christopher's lips and hands became more and more persuasive. I could only hold onto his waist and let him have his way with me. This man is such an animal! When he wants it, he must have it regardless of the place and time!

However, what surprised me the most was the fact that Christopher was Key. Key had been a very special person to me. All those years, it had been Key who comforted me when I was upset. He encouraged me when I felt helpless and gave me ideas and inspirations when I had none.

Key was “the person” in my life from the time I was thirteen until I turned nineteen. I had thought of Key as family. I wrapped my arms around his neck. An intense feeling washed over me, over and over again, like waves crashing onto a shore. I asked Christopher in a low voice, “Where did you disappear after I turned nineteen?”

“Well, I joined the army then. I had no way of communicating with the outside world while I was there. I left too suddenly, and I’m sorry about that. I should have let you know where I was going.” Christopher pulled me tightly against him. “Eve, if I had known that my disappearance would cause you so much pain, I will definitely have done things differently if I had a second chance.”

“It’s alright. As long as we are together now, that’s good enough. Don’t you think so, Key?” I said with a wink. I had called him ‘Key’ deliberately.

Christopher’s spirit lifted again when he heard me call him by his old online nickname. He kissed me again and said, “Call me ‘Key’ again. I like it when you call me in that voice with that look on your face.”

“Key!” My lips twitched. “Isn’t that just another name for you? Lover boy!”

“It’s not the same person! It was Key who had brought us together!”

After we made love, I still did not get that lunch that Christopher had promised to make for me. His phone rang and he reluctantly told me that there was an urgent work matter that he needed to attend to. “I have to go into the office right away. I’ll get my assistant to send over lunch for you.”

“There’s no need for all that trouble. I’ll just make myself some lunch,” I said as I urged him to hurry up and go handle his work emergency.

Christopher quickly got dressed and then, he asked me to tie his tie for him. After that, he left and I pulled on my own clothes and was about to walk into the kitchen to see what I could make for lunch when a knock sounded from the front door. Christopher must have forgotten to take something with him!

I walked towards the door to open and called out, “Chris, did you forget something? I knew it! You’re usually so careful, but whenever there’s an emergency, you’re just a mess...”

The rest of my sentence was caught in my throat as I stared in surprise at the person on the other side of the door. It was Christopher’s mother, Julia.

She was dressed immaculately in a dress and a blazer. Confidence and dominance radiated from her. She looked at me indifferently and said, "Are you going to invite me in?"

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Can I say no? I thought secretly to myself. Obviously, I can't do that. God sure has a sense of humor giving Christopher a mother like Julia! I knew that she had deliberately called Christopher away to the office so that she could see me alone. However, I had no choice but to invite her in.

Although Christopher and I did not have a wedding, we were still married. This meant that Julia was my mother-in-law, even if she was not fond of me, I still had to be cordial to her. I politely invited her into the house and poured her a cup of tea. Julia surveyed the state of the house. I saw her lips twitch disapprovingly when her gaze fell on the unmade bed. I hastily stepped forward and closed the bedroom door.

"Mrs. Lane! Here, have some tea!" Christopher had repeatedly requested me to address his parents as 'Mom' and 'Dad', but knowing that his mother disliked me, how could I bring myself to call her 'Mom'? That would upset her even more.

Julia stared at me for a while. Then, she sat down with a look of disgust at the couch that I had just tidied up a moment ago. She kept silent and went on to scrutinize me.

Well, the house is messy, but I can't help it! Your son and I just had it on the bed and the sofa, and if I had not stopped him, you would probably have walked in on us making love on the carpet right now! I thought helplessly to myself.

"You don't go out for work? Do you just stay at home all day?" Julia finally spoke. She sounded displeased.

"Uh, yes!" Is Julia actually taking an interest in me? Is she starting to accept me? I really was naïve to be so optimistic even in such circumstances. Julia had made sure her son was out of the way before she came over. She obviously had no good intention if she did not want Christopher around during her visit.

"As a woman, it's absolutely fine if you don't work. As long her husband has the money, he'll be able to provide her with everything that she desires. If nothing else, the Lane family definitely is not short of money." Julia delicately sipped the tea that I had poured for her.

Then, she frowned and said, "This tea was given to Gordon by someone who came to visit from the capital. It was just a small box of loose tea leaves. It disappeared from our house the very next day. I thought Darius had taken it, but it turns out, it was Chris who had brought it here."

I smiled nervously. I did not know what to say to Julia's remark. Christopher had brought home that box of tea leaves. He had said that it was very good tea and he wanted to enjoy it at his own pace, but I did not know how to appreciate it and had drunk it as if it were my everyday breakfast tea. I had kept it in the kitchen, oblivious to the fact that it was such a special tea.

"Well, Chris really likes tea. I guess that's why he bought it here," I said with a nervous chuckle.

Julia glanced at me reproachfully and said quietly, "Chris likes black tea, not green tea."

I could not say anything and pretended to be oblivious to her insinuation. Yes, Christopher hates green tea! In fact, he'd rather drink plain water than green tea. I'm the one who loves green tea. I know that the tea is good, but I didn't know exactly how special it is.

"Ms. Tanner, I think you know the reason for my visit." I should be grateful that Julia was speaking frankly to me instead of playing games with me.

"Mrs. Lane, please just speak your mind." Julia and I looked at each other unwaveringly, neither one of us was willing to back down. "There are some things which, I'll do to the best of my ability for you if you ask of me. However, there are also some things that I will not agree to even if you were to point a gun to my head because those are the things that I cannot concede to."

"That's fair!" Julia placed her cup back on the table. Her tone was cold and arrogant as she continued, "Chris has always been a very independent child. We have never interfered with his decisions and we allowed him to do whatever he wants. He grew up with Monica and they had a great relationship all these years. I've always thought that he would marry her."

Julia picked up her cup of tea again and stared coldly at me over the rim of the cup "If I really wanted to drink this tea, I could easily buy it for myself. There are many ways for me to get it. Similarly, if I wanted you to leave Chris, I could easily do that. I have many ways of getting what I want, but I chose to come to you directly. Do you know why?"