

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 111

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 111 A Torture

The knocking continued as I scrambled to get out of bed and put on a coat.

The noise grew louder as I got to my living room. I had no choice but to answer the door before the neighbors filed a complaint against me.

I could have sworn I was this close to biting Dominic's head off when I saw him at my entrance as soon as I opened the door.

"Are you out of your mind? I need my rest even if you don't. You're so inconsiderate."

Standing under the dim light, Dominic did not say a word but merely stared into my eyes.

He actually looks quite scary.

No, I shouldn't cave. I need to look imposing since I've started a fight with him.

Straightening my back, I continued scolding him, "What are you looking at? Your actions have successfully unleashed my wrath. If you're thinking of finding faults with me in the wee hours, please do so in the morning. Bye!"

As I was about to shut the door, he slammed his fist on it.

"Hey... What are you trying to do? What's this all about? Hey, Dominic, don't pretend!"

I thought he wanted to throw a punch at me, but he just fell on me unexpectedly.

Panic-stricken, I hugged him and realized that he reeked of alcohol.

Did he hit the bar again? What's up with him? Is he drunk again?

For a while, I shook him, patted him, and yelled his name, but he did not move a muscle nor give me any response.

Subsequently, I painstakingly pushed him toward the wall so I could see him face to face. Darn it, he has dozed off!

This is ridiculous! What am I supposed to do now with a drunkard?

Recognizing the fact that I had no other option, with all my might, and dragged him to my couch. Then, I sat panting on the floor.

Geez, he's so heavy. Oh my poor, frail body.

After catching a breather, I kicked him twice and slapped him on the face multiple times. Like a corpse, he was so still.

I mumbled, "He never fails to create trouble for me even when he's drunk."

No, I can't allow him to put up a night here. I must get help.

I searched his body for a long time and yet I could not find his phone.

When I was about to return to my room to get mine, he grabbed my hand.

"Don't go... Please don't go..."

I faltered at his soft request. Who is he asking to stay? Camille, I bet. Wow, what a pair! He misses her so much albeit being as drunk as a skunk.

I tried to wriggle my hand out of his grip. However, no matter how hard I struggled, he would only tighten his vice-like grip while repeating, "Don't go..."

"Hey, are you putting up an act here? Let me go, you're hurting me. I'm not Camille, okay?"

Out of strength, I sat down on the couch.

Perhaps it was because I stop resisting him, he loosened his grip, and it was less painful for me.

Seeing that he was trying to take off his tie, I helped him untie it. I think he must be feeling uncomfortable.

Seriously, why don't you go home when you're drunk? Why did you come to me?

I was really angry to see him so wasted; I pinched him twice.

Doesn't he know how bad his health is? Yvonne and Benjamin say that he almost died due to intoxication. Look at you now, don't you care about your life?

I had no clue what made him drink excessively. He's got everything. So, why?

"Don't go..."

"Okay, okay, fine. Stop talking and go to sleep." I found his repeated utterances very irritating.

My words seemed to work like a charm. Moments later, he fell asleep.

After so much torment, I was exhausted. Whatever, let me get some shut-eye too.

Yawning, I sat on the floor and leaned toward the couch.

The position was rather uncomfortable; my neck was sore and the floor was chilly. I tried to adjust myself subconsciously.

Peeking through my bleary eyes, I saw Dominic sleeping like a baby.

Little by little, I carefully moved my hand out of his palm. Thankfully, he was not awakened by my movements.

Heaving a sigh, I went to my bedroom and picked up the duvet.

Forget it, I'll put up with this just once.

When I returned to the living room, I saw him attempting to remove his clothes. After pondering, I decided to fetch a pail of warm water from the bathroom.

I helped him to remove his jacket, necktie, and lastly, I unbuttoned his shirt.

Using a wet towel, I wiped his face and upper body.

Then, I covered him with the duvet.

Taking a deep breath, I said under my breath, "You should feel more comfortable now since you look so at ease."

Leaning on the couch, I plopped down on a soft cushion.

After monitoring him for a while, I was relieved to see him sleeping peacefully. I should go back to my room too.

Before I could stride forward, he gripped my hand once again.

Frustrated, I turned around only to find him snoozing away. However, his hand was clasping on mine tightly, as if he was very determined to keep me by his side, knowingly.

"Hey, what game are you playing? I want to go back to bed too." I was exasperated.

I gave up after fighting with him silently for about five minutes. Fine, I'll stay, okay?

I went back to my lonely spot, shared the duvet with him, and slept by the couch.

When I got up the next day, the sun was already shining brightly.

Stretching my aching body, I struggled to stand on my feet. Privately, I promised not to let myself suffer in this manner ever again.

Oh gosh, I have pins and needles all over. The soreness on my neck is killing me! I should be grateful that I didn't get a stiff neck.

Rubbing my eyes, I noticed that Dominic was still sleeping like a log on the couch. I channeled my frustration at him and kicked him in the leg.

Seriously? How could you enjoy a deep sleep while I was tortured all night long? What a jerk!

I went back to my room and turned on my phone. It was already one in the afternoon.

Suddenly, a scary thought came upon me and I started worrying about Dominic.

Is he all right? He isn't dead, is he? He's been sleeping for so long and yet showing no signs of waking up.

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Holding my phone, I rushed back to the living room to check on Dominic, but I was puzzled when I saw that there was no one on the couch. Wasn't he lying there two minutes ago? Where is he?

At that moment, I heard the sound of water splashing coming from the bathroom. I hurried over and knocked on the door. "Dominic, are you in there?"

There was no answer. I asked a few more times but did not get any reply.

“Hey, cat got your tongue? I’ve been standing here for a long time asking if you’re in there, but you don’t even bother answering.” I was on the brink of launching into a heated tirade when the door opened.

“Domin... Y-You...” My voice faltered. That was because he was standing at the bathroom door, naked as a jaybird.

He did not have a single piece of clothing on him, not even his underwear!

Despite that, he did not seem the least bit ashamed. He crossed his arms over his chest calmly and said, “It’s not anything you haven’t seen before.”

What’s that supposed to mean? Even though we’ve done it, I have never looked at his naked body so directly.

When I returned to my senses, I covered my face with my hands and turned my back to him. “Y-You’re a pervert. Why did you take all your clothes off?”

“Do you shower with your clothes on?”

“I... Well, then you shouldn’t have opened the door,” I mumbled.

“You kept knocking on the door.”

“Dominic Hartnell! That was because you weren’t giving any response. You should’ve just answered me!” I rushed out of the room, feeling uneasy.

I was livid.

To think that I took such good care of him for so long. I wiped him down, tucked him in, and I even slept on the couch for the whole night! I was worried that he was feeling unwell. However, now it looks like I shouldn’t have done all that. All he does is annoy me as soon as he wakes up. I should’ve thrown him out yesterday. Who cares what happens to him!

I had made my decision. After he was done with his shower, I would kick him out.

When the sound of running water stopped, I got off the couch immediately and ran to open the front door, waiting to usher him out the door.

I heard the bathroom door open, and I turned around yelling, “Dominic, you...”

Once again, my voice trailed off. I slammed the front door shut.

“Where are your clothes? Why didn’t you put on your clothes after you’ve showered? And that’s my towel! Mine!” I yelled furiously, my hands and lips trembling.

How dare he use my Doraemon towel? That's my beloved Doraemon! And its eyes are covering that spot! That bulging spot!

"Why are you so upset? Here, I'll return it to you then," Dominic replied.

When I saw him calmly removing the towel, I quickly shouted, "Don't move!"

Looking puzzled, he asked, "Don't you want it back? You're still not happy even if I return it?"

What the hell! He must be doing it on purpose! He has ruined a perfectly good towel, so why would I want it back?

I took a deep breath and said through clenched teeth, "Consider it a gift from me. I want you to put on your clothes right this instant and get out of my sight!"

With the towel wrapped around him, Dominic sauntered over to the couch and sat down. "Those clothes are so dirty. Do you seriously think I'm going to put them on?"

I was on the verge of tears. My voice wavered as I said, "Can't you just put up with it for a while? When you get back to your house, you can wear whatever you want."

Dominic looked up and glanced at me. "No, I won't put up with something like that when it comes to clothes... And people."

What the heck? He's always nitpicking about something! So what does he mean? He can't be thinking of staying here! If I have to spend any more time with him in the same room, I'm going to explode!

I waved my hand, admitting defeat, and grumbled, "All right, fine. I'll go and get some new ones for you now, happy? After I return with your clothes, you have to change into them and leave. Do you hear me?"

Dominic shrugged with a noncommittal smile.

I glared at him, then turned and went to my bedroom, locking the door behind me.

I was afraid he would barge in while I was changing if I did not lock it.

After changing, I went to him and held out my hand. "Give me money."

Although I had agreed to go out and buy him some clothes, I was not going to use my own money.

Thankfully, Dominic was well off and did not mind it at all.

He rummaged through his coat on the floor for his wallet, then took out a credit card and gave it to me. "Don't get me a cheap outfit," he said.

I grabbed the card and clicked my tongue. "Don't worry. Those 'cheap' stores only open in the mornings."

Just as I was about to reach the front door, he suddenly called out, "Wait!"

Furious, I spun around and yelled, "What else do you want?"

"My size. Do you know my size?"

Is that all? I waved my hand as I replied, "It's not like I haven't bought clothes for you before. I remember your size."

As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I froze.

The first time I bought him clothes was because I wanted us to wear matching outfits. However, I was afraid that he would be unwilling to wear it. After much probing, I finally managed to get him to tell me his size, and I had remembered it since then.

After that time, he had told me with a smile that he would only wear the clothes I bought for him.

Haha! What a childish promise, but those words sounded so sweet and melted my heart at that time. I wonder how many clothes Camille has bought for him.

As I gazed at Dominic, who was silent, I suddenly felt like bursting into tears.

I wonder if he remembers what I said to him before.

"Right, I'll be going out then," I said and hurried out without a backward glance.

After the door closed, I looked back. A feeling of dismay crept into my heart.

Forget it. Why am I thinking of all this? It's all in the past. I should just quickly get him some clothes so that he'll leave.

There was a supermarket nearby where I could have bought his clothes. However, when I thought of how nitpicky he was, I decided to take a taxi to the commercial district in the city center.

I wanted to avoid any chances of him being overly critical about the clothes I bought and refusing to leave.

After arriving at the commercial district, I headed straight to the most expensive menswear boutique there.

I had never gone into that store before, but thanks to Dominic's expensive tastes, I got to broaden my horizons.

Dominic had a good figure, so he was sure to look good in anything.

I raised my hand and signaled for the sales assistant, then told her grandly that I wanted the most expensive clothes in the shop, from innerwear to outerwear.

When she heard that, she beamed.

With the shopping trip done and dusted, I headed straight home.

As I stood at the door fishing in my handbag for my key, I could not help gritting my teeth as I thought about how he would react. If he dares to utter a single complaint about these clothes, I'm going to chase him out of the house and let him run around naked!

I unlocked the door and walked in. As soon as I saw the people on the couch, my knees buckled.

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Love the Second Time Around Chapter 113 Back Together Again

"Dad, Mom, you... What are you doing here?" I was so surprised that I could barely get the words out.

"If we didn't come over, were you still thinking of keeping it from us?" Dad looked especially serious, and his tone was a little stern.

I had barely recovered from the shock of seeing them when his words threw me for a loop.

What am I keeping from them?

At that moment, Dominic got up from the couch and walked over to me, then took my hand.

I moved away instinctively. What on earth is he doing? Can't he see that Mom and Dad are right there? It's already very odd that he showed up here suddenly and answered

my phone, but now he wants to hold my hand? Doesn't he think this is big enough of a mess as it is?

I widened my eyes and glared at Dominic, shooting him a look to warn him not to do something reckless.

However, he acted as if he did not get my hint at all. He gripped my hand tightly and said something that made me even more dumbfounded.

"Lian, I've already told them the truth. With things the way they are, we shouldn't keep it from them any longer," Dominic said.

I looked at him suspiciously, worried that he was about to get up to no good.

He's been calling me by my full name since we met again, and if he's not calling my name to scold me, then it's to threaten me. Lian—that's the affectionate nickname the old Dominic would use. Also, what does he mean when he said he told them the truth? What shouldn't we keep from them? That's so strange. What do we have to hide from them anyway?

"Lili, why don't you just admit it? Your dad and I won't object to it. We're happy and relieved to hear that the two of you got back together."

Huh? Is there something wrong with my ears? Or did Mom make a mistake? Who got back with whom? Dominic and me? That's ridiculous!

I shook my head vehemently and explained, "Mom, you're mistaken. I didn't get back together with Dominic."

Mom looked a little unhappy at that. "What's the matter? I said we won't object to the two of you getting back together, so why don't you admit it?"

I was confused. Why do I have to admit to something that didn't happen? I have to explain what happened last night. They must've seen Dominic coming to my house, that's why they got the wrong idea.

"Dad, Mom, I'm serious. We're— Hey! Dominic, what are you doing? Stop it! I haven't finished talking! Dominic—"

"We need to talk," Dominic interjected.

I grabbed his hand and said, "Fine, all right. Just don't push me."

I have something to ask him too. I want to know what's going on.

He stopped pushing me but did not let go of my hand. He continued holding it as he turned to my parents and said, "Please excuse us."

Then, he dragged me into the bedroom.

Once the door closed, Dominic released my hand without saying a word.

I moved a few steps away to keep a safe distance from him. "Dominic, what on earth did you tell my parents? Why do they think that we're back together?"

Dominic sat down shamelessly on my bed. "They came looking for you and saw that I was here, so naturally, they were curious about our relationship."

My eyebrows twitched, and I said coldly, "Even so, you shouldn't have spouted nonsense. It's going to be a pain to explain our way out of this."

"Then what do you think I should've done?" Dominic retorted. He did not feel the least bit guilty. Instead, he deliberately played dumb and threw the problem back at me.

Exasperated, I could feel a headache brewing. Holding in my anger, I replied, "You could've said that you got drunk and had to stay over at my place for one night. That's not too difficult to say, is it?"

Suddenly, Dominic smirked and said in a mocking tone, "If you went to Shannon's house and saw a half-naked man there, and she gave you that explanation, would you believe her?"

I was momentarily taken aback and at a loss for words.

"You... Don't change the topic. We're talking about my parents now. Anyway, you shouldn't have lied to them and told them that we're together."

After a brief pause, I added, "You ought to know that my dad is an old-fashioned and strict person. If you don't explain things clearly now, it'll be even harder to do so later."

Dominic looked at me closely for a while, then said, "When your parents came, I thought it was you, and I opened the door with only a towel wrapped around me. Even if I didn't say anything, what do you think would come to their minds when they saw me like that?"

Those words made my blood boil. If my parents had not been in the living room, I would have cursed aloud.

However, I could only restrain my anger and growl in a low voice, "So whose fault is it? I told you to get out of my house, but you refused. Now, look what you've done. I don't even know what I should say."

While I was seething with rage, Dominic appeared unruffled and calm.

He told me that the best solution was to play along and admit that we were an item again. My parents would probably only stay for a few days. So, while they were around, we would pretend to be a couple. After they left, we would each go our separate ways.

I did not want to agree to it. No matter how I looked at it, it seemed like a bad idea, and it still meant that we would be lying to my parents.

However, since my parents had seen him in my house and in that state, I had no other choice.

After all, friends of the opposite sex would not usually end up naked in each other's houses.

Moreover, no normal woman would allow a naked man to stay in her house while she went out shopping.

If I insist that nothing is going on between Dominic and me, Dad might think I'm provoking him. After all, he doesn't believe in premarital sex, and he thinks one-night stands and booty calls will tarnish the Zanetti family's reputation. That's a minefield I don't want to navigate.

I sat at the dressing table and looked at myself in the mirror. I was frowning deeply.

"T-Then let's agree that we'll only act like a couple in front of my parents. However, you're not allowed to get handsy. When they leave, we'll forget that this ever happened. After some time, I'll find a chance to tell them that we broke up."

I'm sure they'll believe that.

However, as soon as I said that, Dominic's expression inexplicably turned sour.

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Love the Second Time Around Chapter 114 It Is Only Acting

Seeing that Dominic remained silent and looked somewhat gloomy, I could not help grumbling inwardly.

What's up with him now? Wasn't everything all right earlier? Why do I feel a sense of coldness radiating from him?

I waited for a little while, but he still did not say anything. "Dominic, did you hear what I said?"

When Dominic looked at me, it seemed as if there was a smoldering glint in his dark eyes.

Huh? I was stunned for a moment, wondering what I had done to anger him.

"Let's go back out," he finally said.

I breathed a sigh of relief, thankful that he did not object to my request. As such, I would take it that we had a verbal agreement.

Yes, we should go back out. We've been in the room for almost twenty minutes.

The moment I placed one hand on the doorknob, he took my other hand.

I froze, then decided to let him hold my hand. Holding hands was still within the acceptable range of actions.

I opened the door and said with a bright smile, "Dad, Mom."

Dad looked at me sternly and said, "I almost thought that you weren't planning on coming back out."

I chuckled. "I'm sorry, it's my fault. Dominic and I are indeed back together, but I didn't mean to keep it from you. We just got back together not too long ago, so I wanted to wait until things are a little more stable before telling you."

As expected, Dad's expression relaxed when he heard that. Mom smiled.

She walked to me and took Dominic's and my hand in hers. "With Dom looking after you, your dad and I won't have to worry about you as much."

I felt the urge to sigh. Even after five years, my parents' liking for Dominic had not lessened. In fact, it seemed like it had only grown.

If it had been some other guy who was half-naked in my house, they probably would not have let it slide that easily.

Dominic's face broke into a tender smile that I had not seen in a long time. "Don't worry. I'll take good care of Lian. We have let go of each other once before, and I won't let the same thing happen twice."

When I heard those words, my heart began racing.

Taking a few deep breaths discreetly, I reminded myself that we were only acting. No matter what sweet nothings Dominic uttered, I should not take them seriously. Alas, my parents were utterly charmed by Dominic.

Since we had managed to cover things up, I did not want the conversation to continue revolving around Dominic and me.

I pulled Mom over to the couch and asked, "Why did you come here so suddenly? You didn't even give me a call beforehand."

If you had called, all this wouldn't have happened.

Mom smiled as she replied, "Your dad came to give a speech at a nearby university, so I decided to accompany him. Besides, it would give us a chance to see you."

I said rather gloomily, "You still should've given me a call. I could've gone to pick you up. What if you came all the way here and I wasn't home? Wouldn't that have been a waste?"

My dad piped up, "We came with a few other teachers, and we did try to call you when we arrived. You were the one who didn't even bring your phone out with you, yet you have the nerve to say that we didn't call you. Check your phone and see how many times we have called. You've always been careless since you were little. Fortunately, Dom was home. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to get in."

Surprised, I ran my hands over my pocket, then searched my handbag that I had tossed onto the coffee table. So, I really didn't bring my phone with me.

At that moment, Dominic walked over and gave me my phone. "You dropped it in the bedroom while you were changing."

"Oh," I mumbled as I took the phone, shooting him a displeased look.

If he knew I didn't have my phone and found it on the floor, why didn't he answer Dad's call? If he had, we wouldn't be in this mess!

Dominic seemed to guess my thoughts because he explained that he had not known my phone was in the bedroom.

He had been in the living room all the time and did not realize anything. It was only after my parents arrived and told him that they had been trying to contact me that he found my phone.

It sounded reasonable and logical, but I was still unhappy.

As for my parents, they kept telling Dominic that it was no big deal. They even told him not to worry about it.

Tsk! If it's not a big deal, then why blame me for not answering the phone?

Seeing them so biased toward Dominic was making me feel uncomfortable. Who's your biological child here?

I glanced at the time. Since it was almost five o'clock, I changed the topic and said, "Dad, Mom, are you hungry? Why don't I take you out for dinner and book a hotel room for you?"

"No need to bother about a hotel. The school has arranged our accommodation. Let's go for dinner."

I nodded. Then I gave Dominic the clothes I had bought and told him to go and change.

Although I still felt uneasy around Dominic, I could not help being captivated by his handsomeness when he stepped out of the bedroom in his new outfit.

And it was not just me. Even Mom stared at him admiringly.

With his good looks, well-built physique, and that exorbitantly priced outfit... Hmm, not too shabby.

When we were outside, I was about to hail a taxi. However, Dominic said that he had brought his car.

Dominic and I led the way while Mom and Dad trailed a few meters behind us. I was not sure if they were doing it on purpose, but at least it gave me a chance to talk to Dominic without being overheard.

"When did you get someone to send a car? Isn't your phone missing? I searched everywhere for it last night, but I couldn't find it."

He glanced at me, then said lightly, "I drove here."

I gazed up at him in surprise for a few seconds. "You drove here? When? Last night?"

He gave a grunt of acknowledgement.

His response made my blood boil. Without thinking twice, I grabbed his arm and scolded furiously, "Are you crazy? You drank so much last night, yet you drove here yourself? Do you have a death wish?"

Dominic looked down, his gaze falling on my hand that was grabbing his arm. Then, he asked in an indifferent tone, “Weren’t you the one who wanted me to die sooner? Why are you saying all this now? Have you come to care for me?”

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Love the Second Time Around Chapter 115 The Apple Of Their Eyes

Dominic’s glare was so powerful I felt like he was burning a hole right through me. I loosened my grip on his arm immediately.

I began to feel a little guilt-stricken. Perhaps I had reacted a little too strongly just now.

“Don’t take it personally. I’m a caring person by nature. I would’ve said the same to anyone else.” Even after explaining myself, I still felt somewhat uneasy. I turned around and saw that my parents had caught up with us.

I seized the opportunity to hook my arm through Mom’s while instructing Dominic, “Why don’t you go and bring the car over? We’ll wait for you here.”

Before Dominic could answer, Mom was already expressing her displeasure.

Patting my hand lightly, she voiced her disapproval, “Lili, stop ordering Dom around. Your dad and I have legs. We can walk.”

I retorted with a pout, “What’s the big deal? He’s my boyfriend now. Can’t I ask him to drive the car over? Dominic, are you going to do it or not?”

An idea had popped into my head when I heard Mom speaking up for Dominic. He was the one who suggested putting on an act for Mom and Dad. Why shouldn’t I grab the chance to order him around? He won’t dare to show any hints of unhappiness in the presence of my parents no matter what I ask him to do. This is the perfect opportunity for me to give him an eye for an eye. If I miss this opportunity, I may never have another chance to repay him for what he did to me.

I deliberately lifted my chin in a defiant manner to show him that I had the upper hand now.

In fact, I not only had the upper hand — I was practically his boss.

Right after that, I saw Dominic’s thin lips curve into an indulgent smile as he said to Mom, “Helen, Lian is right. I’m her boyfriend. My only duty is to make her happy. Now that you’re here, I want to make sure you’re happy too. Please give me a minute. I’ll be right back with the car.”

The man walked off after that. I was still trying to process what he had just said.

That indulgent smile on his lips and that doting look in his eyes felt so familiar. I was somewhat reminded of the good old days where Dominic had showered me with nothing but love and devotion.

I was only shaken out of my reverie when I heard Mom praising Dominic again. I pinched myself discreetly to stop my train of thoughts. No more thinking about such things!

It was not enough for Mom to go on and on about how wonderful Dominic was. She even turned to Dad, expecting him to join her in singing my boyfriend's praises.

Dad was a little more reserved, but it was still clear from the look on his face that he was very pleased with Dominic.

Looking at Mom and Dad's reaction, I felt an urge to bang my head against the wall. Why are they so happy with Dominic?

Dominic came back with the car very quickly. He got out of the car and opened the car door for Mom and Dad. He was even more proactive and attentive this time than when he drove Dad to his class reunion.

Both my parents were extremely impressed with Dominic, and it showed on their beaming faces. I even seemed to detect more fondness and affection on their faces when they were looking at Dominic than when they were looking at Louis, their own son.

I opened the door to the front passenger seat and climbed into the car, silently complaining about the situation in my heart.

As we drove off, I could hear Dominic saying, "David, I heard that you're in town to give a speech at a university. I suppose it's Lightspring University?"

Dad answered enthusiastically, "Yes. I was not keen on the idea at first, though. There are many other teachers in the university. Moreover, I am almost in retirement. But Helen said we could drop by at Lili's for a visit, and the university kept inviting me to come over. So eventually, I agreed."

Dominic responded very quickly, "That's because you're a knowledgeable and polished speaker. Any reputable tertiary institution would love to have you grace their events."

That was music to Dad's ears. Having been an educator all his life, there was nothing he loved more than being complimented on his accomplishments and expertise in the education field. Dominic was spot-on in currying Dad's favor.

As I listened on, I was trying my best not to show my disdain.

There was more. Knowing that Dad and Mom must have booked their accommodation near Lightspring University, Dominic suggested we have our dinner at a restaurant in the vicinity of their hotel to not tire them out.

Having impressed Dad with his thoughtfulness, Dominic then turned to Mom and engaged her in a cheerful conversation for the rest of our journey.

I rolled my eyes. What a bootlicker!

Over dinner, Dad and Mom took turns to enthusiastically pile food on Dominic's plate, completely oblivious to the fact that there was already a mountain of food on his plate.

As for me, I was left to fend for myself. My parents had practically forgotten that they still had a daughter.

Noticing that I was munching on a stalk of celery, Dominic placed a piece of short rib on my plate. He tenderly stroked my hair and said, "Don't just munch on vegetables. You should eat some meat too."

Mom joined in, saying, "Lili, look how nice Dom is to you. Don't just keep eating alone. Share some of your food with him."

When I heard that, I almost burst into tears. Am I missing something here? The two of you have been piling food on his plate and ignoring me all this while. If I don't feed myself, I'm going to die of starvation. There is a mountain of food sitting on his plate now while my plate is empty!

I wolfed down the piece of short rib before retorting, "He has hands. He can help himself. Dominic, more short ribs, please!"

"Hey, you're being childish. Dom, ignore her. You don't have to share your food with her." Mom was losing her patience with me.

Another piece of tender, juicy short rib appeared promptly on my plate. Dominic said smilingly, "It's all right, Helen. I enjoy watching Lian eat. The more she eats, the happier I am."

"All right. Let's all just have a peaceful meal." Dad finally broke his silence.

I made Dominic share his food with me for the rest of the meal, and he made sure every request I made was acceded to.

I ended up having a very satisfying meal. On the other hand, the pile of food in front of Dominic was almost untouched by him.

We did not leave right after the meal as Dominic had also ordered a fruit platter and some desserts.

He seemed to be doing quite a good job at entertaining my parents while tending to me. I happily faded into the background and kept myself busy with the food and drinks.

While I was enjoying my pudding, Mom started talking again. "Dom, I suppose Lili and you are living together now that we've seen you at her place?"

Dominic did not reply, shooting me a glance instead.

I caught his eye and almost choked on my pudding.

What's he looking at? Doesn't he know he's supposed to answer in the negative?

I hurriedly interjected, "Mom, you're thinking too much. We've not progressed that far..."

Dad interrupted me with an authoritative wave of his hand, "We know very well what you young people are up to, even if we don't spell it out. You don't have to lie out of consideration for our feelings. If you're living together, you can tell it like it is."

Plop. I dropped my pudding onto the floor. Oh gosh. Where are the boundaries you used to draw, Dad? What happened to the Zanetti family rules? Have you thrown all that out the window because of Dominic?

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 116

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 116 A Promise From Him

I was in a state of utter confusion.

I had agreed to put on an act with Dominic because I knew Dad and Mom would make some assumptions about us. Now, however, it seemed like they were practically jumping to all sorts of conclusions about us.

They not only thought that we had a physical relationship, they even assumed that we were already living together.

Most importantly, Dad was not angry about it at all.

Good heavens, when did my parents become so liberal? Are they just especially benevolent toward Dominic? "Dad..."

Dad waved his hand dismissively and cut me off. "Lili, Dad used to be strict with you because you were still young. You're older now and have even been married once. You know what's right and what's wrong. You know what's best for yourself."

I was moved by Dad's words. He was not the kind of father who said "I love you" to his children, but I knew he was strict toward me because he loved me.

Dad stood up from his seat and walked toward us. He stood between Dominic and me and held our hands. Putting my hand in Dominic's, he said, "Dom and you have missed a chance with each other in the past. Your mom and I are rooting for you to have a happier outcome this time around. Dom, I'm entrusting my daughter to you. Please treat her well."

Dominic looked at my father and nodded. Then he turned to me, looking rather serious.

I felt him squeezing my hand as he said, "Rest assured, David. I promise you I will take good care of Lian for the rest of our lives."

"Very well, Dom. I trust you." Dad was looking completely satisfied.

I looked at Dominic with a mix of confusion and annoyance. What audacity he had to make such a promise in front of my parents.

We were only supposed to be putting on an act. After what he just said, how were we going to explain things to my parents when the time came to cut our act?

All of a sudden, I began to feel afraid. Things seemed to be progressing much faster than I had expected.

I was distracted for the rest of the evening.

However, Dominic did not seem to notice anything amiss. He was still keeping my parents entertained and happy.

When we left the restaurant, it was almost half-past nine in the evening.

Before we dropped my parents off at their hotel, Dad told us that we could drop in on his talk at the university the next day if we were free.

Dominic immediately accepted the invitation and promised that we would be there.

I shot him a look, but it was too late for me to say anything in refusal of my father's offer.

Dominic and I only left the hotel after we watched Dad and Mum enter the elevator.

"Let's go. We should go home now." Dominic held my hand to lead me to his car.

I shook his hand off and took two steps back, saying, "You go ahead. I'll take a taxi."

The situation was getting too messy. I did not want to see him, neither did I wish to talk to him.

Dominic did not seem to hear me. Instead, he waved his hand and called out, "David, why are you here again?"

I froze for a moment before turning around to look behind me, only to see that Dad was not there. Good heavens. You're playing such a trick on me at a time like this?

Before I could react, I found Dominic holding my hand again. This time, I did not shake his hand off.

Half-annoyed and half-amused, I chided him, "You're so childish!"

He rolled his eyes at me and said, "If I'm childish, then you're stupid."

"Humph!" I was so annoyed that I could not think of anything else to say.

Dominic continued to lead me by my hand, walking a little ahead of me. Looking at our adjoining hands, my mind started to wander. As long as we continue acting like a couple, does that mean we can continue to spend time with each other?

"Hey, what are you thinking about? Get in the car!" Dominic's booming voice shook me out of my reverie. That was when I realized I was standing right beside the car.

I opened the door and got inside. Showing my irritation, I glared at Dominic and said, "Why did you have to be so loud? You gave me a shock."

Dominic replied nonchalantly, "I wasn't loud. You got a shock because you were lost in your thoughts. Tell me. What were you thinking about? Were you thinking about me?"

Caught off-guard by his correct guess, I turned away from him to face the window. "Stop flattering yourself. I wasn't thinking about you."

Unsure if I had just lied to him or myself, I let out a secret sigh.

It began to rain halfway through our journey. Mom especially called to tell me to remind Dominic to slow down and drive carefully.

The weather had started turning colder. We seemed to be getting more sudden downpours that lasted for days in a row.

The rain seemed to be pouring more heavily the closer we got to my house.

Listening to the rain pelting down on the car, I began to worry. I had not brought an umbrella with me because I did not expect it to rain.

When we were almost there, I told Dominic, "You can stop at my block here. I'll run right in. You don't have to get out of the car. The rain is too heavy."

Dominic did not answer me, so I took his silence as assent.

When we reached my block, I got ready to get out of the car. Suddenly, his hand shot out and pulled me back. "Hold on."

I was taken by surprise. I had no idea what he was about to do. I watched in shock as he opened the door on his side and got out of the car. What's the meaning of this? We've reached my block, and instead of letting me get out of the car, he got out of the car himself?

Ignoring his instruction, I decided to open the door to take a look at what he was getting up to.

The moment I opened my door, I saw Dominic standing soaking wet in the rain, holding an umbrella out for me.

He offered me his hand to help me out of the car. Then he put one arm around me and said, "Let's go."

As I made my way from the car to my block in his embrace, I felt like I was floating in a dream.

Although his clothes were dripping wet and felt cold to the touch, I did not feel cold at all. On the contrary, I felt warm and protected.

A little voice in my head was calling out to me to push him away, but I could not bear to do it.

The man walked me all the way up to my apartment, opened the door, and led me inside the house.

Looking at the state he was in, my heart ached a little.

I pulled out a chair for him and handed him a face towel for him to dry himself.

Using another towel to dry his hair, I said, "I'll make some ginger tea for you. Drink it before you go."

Dominic caught my hand, looked straight into my eyes, and said, "Look at the state I'm in. Do you really want me to go?"

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 117

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 117 Bunking With The Big Bad Wolf

I was slack-jawed at his implied request to stay, and it took me a good while to regain my composure.

Once I did, though, I shoved the face towel at him and eked out, "I can't host two people here. Dry yourself off; I'm going to make some ginger tea."

Once I reached the haven known as my kitchen, I went through the motions of making ginger tea like a robot, chopping the ginger stiffly.

When Dominic called out to me about his intention to shower, I lost my attention for a split second and cut myself. The pain was enough to jolt me out of my trance.

The water began running in the bathroom, and I stared out the window and sighed.

I guess he can continue couch-surfing in my place for one more night.

After I plastered the cut, I dug through my pantry for a fresh piece of ginger and got back to work.

Dominic was still in the shower when I had finished brewing the ginger tea. Just then, a thought struck my mind. He got caught in the rain, as well as all the new clothes he bought. What's he going to wear, then? I don't want him parading around naked in my house.

I ran back to the bedroom in search of the clothes he was wearing earlier. It turned out he had thrown the entire set into the dust bin.

Ah, it must be nice to be rich; his clothes aren't that cheap.

Frowning, I pondered what to do next. What on earth can he wear? My clothes?

Flinging my wardrobe open, I turned its contents upside down in search of suitably large clothing for him to wear. Alas, my efforts were futile.

Just as I was knee-deep in concern, I suddenly remembered a parcel Calvin had dropped off earlier. Didn't he say that there were Dominic's clothes in it? Yes, yes, I think he did. Now, where did I place that parcel?

I searched high and low before locating the parcel on the balcony. A thin layer of dust had settled on it.

After I dusted the parcel down, I opened it and began digging through the items. I pulled out a long-sleeved T-shirt and a pair of sweatpants triumphantly. Oh right, his underwear too. Can't forget that.

I walked back to the bathroom and placed his clothes on a rack outside before shouting through the door. "Dominic, I put your clothes outside. You can wear them after your shower. Don't take too long, or the ginger tea's going to cool down."

Once I finished my sentence, I scuttled out immediately. The morning's events remained fresh in my mind, and I was legitimately worried about the door opening without warning.

His body's pretty hot, but I might have to wash my eyes if I keep ogling him.

Only after settling everything at home did I pull out my phone to text my mom. Initially, I had planned to call her, but I thought my parents might already be asleep at this time.

It was not an important message anyway; I just wanted to tell them that we had arrived safely.

A moment later, Dominic emerged from the bathroom.

I hurried to the kitchen and got a glass of ginger tea for him. Relief flooded my body as I watched him gulp the tea.

"Why do you have my clothes?"

Did he forget that he arranged for his clothes to be sent here in the first place? I enlightened him about the situation.

After that was over, I cleared my throat and said, "You can bunk here for one more night on the couch. I'll get you some blankets in a bit."

Dominic pulled me into him in response. I blocked him and said hastily, "Hey, we agreed on this. You can't lay a finger on me."

His lips curved into a smirk. "You said we can't be touchy in front of Mom and Dad. We're alone now."

Bewildered, I retorted, "Get your head right. They're my mom and dad, not yours. Don't go around calling them your parents; others will get the wrong idea. And I said we can't get handsy with each other anywhere, not just in front of my parents!"

Dominic seemed contemplative as he asked, "Is it?"

I nodded immediately to make my point.

A sneer appeared unexpectedly on his face. "So what? You think you can get away from me?"

I was struck by an epiphany. I've invited the big bad wolf into my house.

Meanwhile, Dominic's hand had begun roaming across my body. Panicking, I yelled, "Stop! Y-you, can't you wait for me to shower first? Ok, I'm going to the bathroom now."

He stared at me briefly before releasing me. A lazy smile stretched across his face. "Go on, then. Give yourself a nice, clean scrub. You're not escaping anywhere."

I shuddered at his ominous declaration. A moment later, I sprinted into the bathroom and locked the door behind me.

Leaning against the door, I took a couple of deep breaths to compose myself.

Stupid! Why did I mention a shower of all things? I sound like I'm trying to clean myself for him to feast on! How could I be so easily seduced? He just braved the rain to send me home, for God's sake! A moment's weakness, and now I'm the sacrificial lamb.

More annoyingly, I realized after I showered that I had not brought any clean clothes in with me.

And Dominic brought the towel out in the morning. What am I supposed to do now? Do a nude run?

I seriously contemplated the possibility of spending the night in the bathroom.

That would have been a viable option if the steam from my shower had not all but dissipated a few moments later, leaving me shivering and sneezing from the cold night air.

A knock sounded on the door, and I heard Dominic's voice. "I'm going to kick the door down if you don't come out."

I muttered my request timidly, "C-could you get my pajamas for me? They're right near the bedhead."

He came back quickly. "Open the door. I'll pass it to you."

Once again, my brain demonstrated its unflinching ability to let me down at the most critical of moments. I opened the bathroom door instead of having him place my pajamas outside.

One little gap was all it took for Dominic to come bursting into the bathroom. My naked form was now under his scrutiny.

Stunned, I stood frozen to the spot.

Dominic took advantage of my shock and carried me straight to the bedroom. I only managed to regain my ability of speech when the two of us tumbled onto the bed. "Y-you! Dominic! You *sshole!"

He smirked and lifted my wrists above my head, swooping down to devour my lips.

At that moment, only one thought seemed to cross my mind. You brought this upon yourself.

His hands roved as he deepened his kiss. I had long given up on fighting back. Instead, I comforted myself at the thought that this was not our first roll in the hay anyway.

In the heat of our passion, a phone began ringing loudly. It was a call for Dominic.

I thought he would ignore the call since we were about to get hot and heavy.

To my surprise, he got up and answered the call. He even sought the privacy of the living room.

I lay on the bed, puzzled. After some thought, I covered myself with the blanket and walked to the door.

I wanted to know who was calling him at this hour.

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 118

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 118 My First And Only Love

Lurking at the doorway, I heard Dominic utter Camille's name.

I froze in surprise. My whole body felt like it was in pain, most of all my heart.

Ah, how could I forget that Dominic has a fiancée? I must be the silliest woman on earth. The only people who could contact him at such a late hour are either his family or his partner, the enviable Camille.

The ache in my heart was unbearable, and I felt suffocated by the immense sorrow in my being.

I slammed the bedroom door firmly and locked it before laying back in bed.

That phone call served as a timely reminder of the impropriety of my actions and eliminated all thoughts of Dominic's ambiguous and heart-fluttering actions earlier that day.

Soon, I heard a few knocks on the door. Dominic was asking me to let him in.

That was fast.

Instead of getting up, I yelled, "My period suddenly came!"

There was only silence on the other side of the door. I was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to pull the wool over his eyes.

Alas, my relief lasted but a couple of minutes. Dominic began knocking on the door as he declared coldly, "If you don't open the door, I'll kick it down myself."

I buried my head into the blankets to block him out.

Slam! My ears rang painfully from the loud noise. When I lifted my head, it was to the sight of my bedroom door hanging weakly on its hinges. One more kick, and it'll completely detach from its frame.

Since I did not own the house I was living in, I obediently opened the door for Dominic. My wallet would weep if I needed to get a new door installed for my landlord.

Once the door was open, Dominic pinned me down on the bed and placed a hand between my thighs, catching me unawares.

I immediately shuddered under his touch and screamed angrily, "Dominic, that's enough!"

He arched a brow in response and asked, "Is your period a passing visitor or something?"

Pettily, I turned my head to the side and muttered, "It was just an excuse."

He forcefully turned my head to face his and teased, "Excuse? Lying about one's desires isn't a great habit."

"I'm not lying about my desires! I can't continue sleeping with an engaged man! Dominic, aren't you ashamed of your actions? Didn't Camille call you just now? How could you bring yourself to pounce on me immediately after ending the call with your fiancée? I may not like her, but as a fellow woman, I can't make her suffer a cheating partner, even if she's the most immoral person on earth."

Dominic fell silent at my virtuous outburst. An ugly sneer, however, soon appeared on his face.

“Liliana, aren’t you being a hypocrite? If she hadn’t called, what do you think we’ll be doing right now?”

I pursed my lips, flushing in anger. Stiffly, I replied, “Well, now’s a good time to start fixing our mistakes. We can’t sink further into the rabbit hole.”

Tears pricked at my eyes, and I had to look away from him as I continued, “Plus, you’re about to marry Camille.”

This last bit struck him dumb, and he stared at me wordlessly for a long time.

I struggled against his hold to no avail. Finally, I pleaded, “Let me go.”

Instead of freeing me, he tightened his hold on me. Anger seeped into his features.

It was my turn to be surprised; I had no idea what had invoked his ire.

He lowered his body further, plastering our fronts together. With his face barely inches from mine, he growled, “Are you bothered about me dating Camille?”

I bit my lips and arranged my features into a calm expression. “Of course I am! I told you before in the hospital that I didn’t want to be attacked by anyone. Camille’s anxious about you, and your mother forbade me from approaching you. If they knew about our rendezvous, they’re going to give me h*ll. I can’t and won’t want to deal with that.”

Just as I ended an explanation, there was a sharp pain in my shoulder. That *sshole bit me!

“Hey, Dominic! What’s wrong with you? That hurts!”

He dialed back on his force, though he kept his teeth on my shoulder. He mumbled, “Is that all?”

Infuriated, I shouted, “What do you mean that’s all? Why don’t you let me bite you instead? It hurts like sh*t!”

Dominic merely clamped his teeth down on my shoulder once more before demanding, “Is your fear of being chewed out by them the only reason for rejecting our arrangement?”

Only then did I understand the context of his earlier question.

“Well, of course. What else could I be bothered about? Jealousy over you? Stop daydreaming.”

I even smiled to put my point across.

Dear Dominic Hartnell, the only thing I can do to save myself is a constant reminder that you're no longer mine.

I had come to realize that no amount of time or pretense could diminish the fact that Dominic was my first and only love.

That was partly the reason I had married Julius in such a rush; it was but an attempt at numbing myself in the wake of our breakup.

Dominic lifted his head and narrowed his eyes at me.

“Whatever bothers you is of no concern to me. Listen carefully.” He paused as a chilling smile appeared on his face. “No matter who I marry in the end, as long as I intend to keep you by my side, you have no choice but to obey. I hope you haven't forgotten what I told you before; you owe me this.”

I was dumbfounded by his demands. Does he mean to make me his mistress?

Once I regained my faculties, I gritted out, “Dominic, you're despicable.”

His hand had begun trailing across my body as he grinned wickedly at me. “What does it matter to you whether I'm despicable or not? You have no choice but to accept my demands, anyway.”

I kept my mouth zipped since there was no arguing with him.

Dominic was particularly rough in our lovemaking session that night. I pinched him on the back and muttered, “Hey, go easy.”

He merely grinned devilishly and said, “I guess I'm not working hard enough if you still have the energy to talk back.”

His response made me fume.

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 119

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 119 All Bite And No Bark

Every time we made love, Dominic seemed nothing short of an insatiable beast. I ended each session feeling like a limp rag doll.

Last night was no exception. It seemed like it was dawn by the time I collapsed into an exhausted sleep.

If not for the phone ringing incessantly on my bedside table, I might have slumbered until the following night.

When I picked up the call and heard Dominic's voice, I thought I was still dreaming.

Didn't he sleep with me last night? Why is he calling me from inside the house?

I hung up the call in a blur. My brain slowly awakened after I vegged out on the bed for a few more minutes.

What was he telling me on the phone? Oh, he wants me to get ready because he's arriving in half an hour to take me to my father's talk.

It was a struggle to sit upright in bed. Glancing at the clock, I realized it was one in the afternoon.

Hmm, less than two hours to my dad's talk. Dominic can't be human. Where does he find the energy to get up so early in the morning after last night's activities?

I did not know when he had left, but it must have been pretty early.

I had only half an hour to get ready, but I did not have the energy to wash up any quicker.

Dominic arrived as I finished my shower.

"Did you take my house keys?" I asked after getting over my surprise.

He did not refute my guess, and I could not be bothered to interrogate him further.

We left at close to two in the afternoon. If there aren't any traffic jams, we should be able to make it to Lightspring University just in time for his talk.

My stomach began grumbling in protest after last night's strenuous activities.

I glared at Dominic. He doesn't care about me at all if my parents aren't around. He didn't even think to get me something to eat.

Spying a convenience store up ahead, I got Dominic to stop the car.

I sped into the shop and picked up a couple of snacks. To that, I added two chicken sandwiches, a hotdog, and two cans of my favorite lemonade. I wrapped up my purchase gleefully before returning to the car.

Dominic stared at me quizzically as I boarded the car with bags of food in hand. He sounded incredulous as he asked if I was planning to finish everything.

I tossed him a disdainful stare and complained about my hunger.

“That’s none of your concern. I’m starving, and even if I can’t finish the food, seeing this whole pile makes me happy. Someone happy and full like you won’t understand my joy.”

Dominic’s attention was on the road as he replied lightly, “Who told you I’m full?”

Thanks to the chicken sandwich in my mouth, my voice was muffled as I said, “You left so early in the morning. Why wouldn’t you have eaten since then?”

“I had back-to-back meetings the whole morning. There wasn’t time to eat.”

I swallowed my sandwich and scoffed. Who’s going to believe your sob story? Grabbing a bite can’t take you more than a couple of minutes.

Still, my heart softened as my gaze landed on the bag of food. “I still have a sandwich. Do you want some?”

“I’m driving.”

I removed the sandwich from the bag despite having warned myself that I should ignore him. “I’ll feed you, then. Do you want it?”

Dominic seemed chuffed by my offer. There was a ghost of a smile on his face as he nodded.

I tore the sandwich into bite-size pieces and fed him, even offering a can of my beloved lemonade to him.

All the while, I wished I could slap some sense into my love-addled brain. What’s wrong with you? He’s going to think you’re all bark and no bite!

When we were about to reach Lightspring University, Dominic suddenly stopped the car on the side of the road. He got off and bought a bouquet from a small florist shop.

“Why are you getting flowers?”

“So you can give these to your dad after the talk is over, silly.”

His thoughtfulness surprised me; a gift for my dad had not crossed my mind.

Given our rather late departure and detours along the way, we made it to Lightspring University with barely a few seconds to spare.

I ended up texting my mom about our arrival instead of calling my dad. Dominic and I entered the lecture hall via the back door.

The hall was teeming with people, and there were only seats left in the last two rows.

I pulled Dominic with me toward some seats near the wall.

In truth, I had never been to a single one of my dad's talks. While he had taught me when I was young, my childish self had found it annoying, which resulted in complete avoidance of his public talks.

As the talk progressed, I was pleasantly surprised at how humorous my dad was. Every once in a while, he would crack a joke to break up the serious mood. The students in the hall seemed to hang on his every word.

My dad was peppered with questions from the audience once the talk ended. My mom accompanied him while Dominic and I headed outside the hall to wait for them.

About ten minutes later, my parents finally left the lecture hall with some of my dad's colleagues in tow. I had met some of them in the past.

I pulled Dominic along as I approached my dad. Passing the flowers to him, I said, "Dad, Dominic bought these for you. We wanted to pass these to you right after your talk, but we were seated at the very end; it was hard to make our way to the stage. So we waited here."

My dad seemed to be floating on cloud nine at this point. He received the flowers with the brightest smile on his face, muttering that timing was secondary to our intentions.

"David, I envy you for having a daughter. Look at how sweet she is. She showed up for your talk and bought you flowers."

The person who had spoken was my dad's colleague, Harry Lindt. Like my dad, he was a university lecturer.

I smiled bashfully at his praise. "Hello, Professor Lindt."

Harry was close to my dad and had dined with us at home on several occasions.

He smiled fondly at me before turning his attention to Dominic. The smile faltered.

His puzzled expression set off warning bells in my head. Harry had been a guest at Julius' and my wedding. He probably did not know about my divorce, and it hardly seemed like an appropriate conversation topic between him and my parents.

I heard him asking hesitantly, "Lili, who's this? He's not your husband, I presume. They don't quite look alike."

My brain froze up as I struggled to come up with a reply. Above all, I was worried that Harry's question might have upset my dad.

To my parents, my divorce could not be anything but an embarrassment.

My dad's response, however, startled me. He answered casually, "Lili and Julius are divorced."

Harry was rightfully shocked. After all, I had been married to Julius for all of six months.

He smiled awkwardly before staring at Dominic once more. There was a hint of curiosity in his gaze as he asked, "So who is this?"

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 120

Love the Second Time Around Chapter 120 This Arrangement Ends With Your Marriage

Everyone's attention landed on Dominic at that instant, including my dad. They seemed to be holding their breath in anticipation of his reply.

I felt overcome with an inexplicable sense of nervousness, almost reminiscent of my feelings last night.

Things would be a lot less complicated if only my parents were around, instead of a number of my dad's colleagues in tow.

Dominic told me last night that I had no choice but to stay with him. Even if I had conceded to his request, our relationship was nothing more than a scarlet letter on my head.

I could not let my parents suffer humiliation twice, let alone from the adultery of their daughter, which was undeniably worse than divorce.

As these thoughts crossed my head, I tugged on Dominic's hand, hinting at him to watch his words.

The annoying man grabbed my hand instead and announced, "Good day, everyone. I'm Liliana's boyfriend, Dominic Hartnell."

I closed my eyes, willing the heavens to strike me dead with lightning.

There's going to be h*ll to pay when this facade we call our relationship eventually crumbles.

An array of expressions appeared on the faces of my dad's colleagues. However, they greeted Dominic affably after his introduction.

A female lecturer even congratulated my dad, though I found her expression rather crude. "Mr. Zanetti, Lili has great taste. This fellow looks like a much better bet than her ex-husband."

I wanted nothing more than to leave this place. After greeting them, I excused myself on the pretense of buying things and pulled Dominic away with me.

Once we left the lecture hall, I stalked off moodily until I located a bench and sat down.

After stewing in silence for some time, I lifted my forlorn gaze to Dominic.

"Why did you say you were my boyfriend? We agreed that we would only put on this act in front of my parents. Now that my dad's colleagues know about you, my dad's going to be humiliated again when we break up."

Dominic suddenly moved closer to me, warning flashing across his eyes. "You're going to break up with me? Have you forgotten what I told you last night?"

My anger boiled over, though I was careful to keep my volume down. "I'm concerned because I haven't forgotten what you said last night. Our relationship is just a show, yet you insist on me staying by your side. What am I? An indentured mistress? If my dad knows that his daughter is an adulteress, the shame is going to shorten his lifespan by decades!"

He tilted my jaw in response. "Don't worry. Your parents won't know a thing as long as you obey my orders."

I shrugged his hand away. What can I do to fix this?

Staring at the dust that had collected on the floor, I made a decision.

Lifting my head to meet Dominic's gaze, I said, "Let's make a deal. Promise me you'll honor this agreement, ok?"

He gestured for me to continue speaking.

“This thing between us ends once you get married; we’ll go our separate ways when that happens. While you remain unmarried, we can treat this as dating around, but I refuse to be your mistress once you’re legally bound to someone else.”

His inky-black pupils focused on me, and he seemed like he was in deep thought.

I fiddled with my fingers anxiously, unsure if he would agree to my proposal.

If he rejected it, I could not come up with a better idea to persuade him.

It seemed like a century later when he finally said, “Ok.”

I let go of the breath I had been holding subconsciously. Great. That gives us a few more months. After that, I can always claim personality differences for causing our breakup. That’s pretty believable.

Suddenly, I recalled how Dominic had always twisted my words to his benefit. I warned, “I’m serious. Since you have agreed, you have to stick to your end of the agreement. Don’t fob me off with excuses when the time comes.”

Again, he replied simply, “Alright.”

Ok, as long as he agrees. If he tries to renege on our deal, I’ll turn his life into a living h*ll!

My mom called just as I ended my conversation with Dominic. She wanted to know where we were.

I had her wait at the university’s entrance with my dad for Dominic and me.

However, I did not see either of them when we arrived at the entrance. After another call, I realized that my parents had gotten lost on campus grounds.

I asked Dominic to wait as I prepared to head into the university to look for them. Surprisingly, he offered to track them down instead.

His devotion to our couple’s act was admirable. He seemed like an eager boy scout whenever it came to anything that involved my parents.

Since he was volunteering his services, it would be remiss of me to reject his kind offer.

While I waited for them at the entrance, I noticed a large pharmacy across the street.

Ah, I should get some birth control. Probably something with longer-lasting effects. I can’t even remember where I kept my old stash. I better be more diligent about taking the meds; downing morning-after pills can’t be good for my body. If I end up pregnant, it

can't end well for anybody. That stupid Dominic's not considerate enough to wear a condom, so it's entirely up to me.

Rushing into the pharmacy, I completed my purchase quickly.

As I put the pills in my purse, I could not help but sigh at his selfishness. All men care about is to meet their needs but it is us women who bear the consequences.

Somehow, I was in a great mood as I waited for the traffic lights. I decided to reward myself for my foresight with an ice-cold popsicle.

When I got back to the university entrance, Dominic was already waiting with my parents.

He approached me and asked where I had gone. I took the popsicle out of my mouth and waved it proudly in front of him.

He told me off instead for eating cold things on a chilly day, claiming it was unhealthy.

I pouted and ignored him. Eating popsicles in winter was my favorite pastime; it did not matter how low the temperature dropped.

My mom defended Dominic, saying he only had my best interests in mind. She rounded off her defense by calling me out on my ungrateful behavior.

It was a good thing I had long become immune to the fact that my parents largely sided with Dominic's opinions over mine.

Dinner time was fast approaching, and we headed for a restaurant Dominic had picked. I did not mind, as long as everyone enjoyed the meal.

My phone pinged a couple of times with incoming WhatsApp messages during dinner, and I pulled it out to check who was texting me.

It was Nicholas telling me about how busy he had been with filming. He followed this up with questions about how I had been.

As I tapped out a reply to Nicholas, I sensed Dominic's gaze on me, and I shivered involuntarily.