

TSBMMOUS 151

Chapter 151: He Wanted Her Body And Her Heart

As she looked at Lucas, Ayla asked, "Why did you come to see me all of a sudden? Did something happen?"

"I'm just worried about you. You moved to another place out of the blue, so I went to the Clark family villa to see if you were there. I'm aware that you wouldn't want to go back there, but you'll be with Brian, won't you?"

This was what worried him the most.

Besides, he could tell from Brian's eyes that no matter what happened, the only man who could stand at Ayla's side was Brian.

It could never be him.

Ayla shook her head.

"Lucas, you don't understand. There are some things that I have to do by myself."

"What are you planning to do? Are you getting back together with him?"

Was it because what he had done for her paled in comparison to Brian's efforts?

"Lucas, you misunderstand me. I don't want anything to do with him. Didn't you say that you'd trust me?"

Ayla knew that Lucas might have some misunderstandings due to the fact that she was with Brian right now.

But she still hoped that he could understand her. When she was with Brian, there was an indescribable feeling in her heart. She couldn't figure out what it was.

But now that she was an employee of the Clark Group, everything was beyond her control.

He would know whatever Ayla was thinking, so what she needed to do right now was to finish what she must do as soon as possible, and then leave Brian.

Upon seeing her resolute determination, Lucas believed that she must have a plan.

As long as she was fine, nothing else mattered.

Besides, it was better if she stayed with Brian for now.

If either Tatum or Haley found Ayla, he wouldn't be able to do anything to save her.

Just like what happened in the past, Tatum found out Ayla's whereabouts through Lucas.

After Tatum received the news, he took her abroad and imprisoned her in his villa.

Although she was given enough food, he still forcibly injected her with drugs without even telling Lucas. Tatum had no plans of sending her back to Antawood from the start.

After he got what he needed from her, there was no way he would spare her life.

And even if he didn't kill her, she would be doomed to rely on taking drugs for the rest of her life. It was already nine in the evening when Lucas and Ayla finished their dinner.

She insisted on going back to the company in order to avoid running into Brian.

And so, Lucas drove her to the company.

"Ayla, give me the address of your new apartment. I'll visit you whenever I'm free."

She wrote down her address on a piece of paper and gave it to him.

"HM Garden? It's in the golden district of the city. Brian does treat you well."

Lucas put away the note, and added, "It's getting late. You promised me that you're not going to stay up late. Get some rest as soon as you get home, alright?"

How he wished he could stay by her side, but alas! It was impossible.

Even if he cast aside his hatred and took her far away, he didn't want to rob her of her realizing her dreams. Ayla nodded in response.

"Don't worry, I will. I'll take better care of myself from now on."

After saying that, she walked towards the office.

Lucas stood beside his car as he watched her walk away.

Once he saw her safely go inside, he got in his car and drove away.

When Ayla entered the office, she smelled the putrid odor of smoke before she turned the light on.

With her hand still beside the door, she was deciding whether to turn the light on or not.

While she was hesitating, Brian flipped the switch.

"Oh, you're back from your date? Why don't you come inside?"

Ayla entered the room.

"Mr. Clark, why are you sitting in the dark?"

"I've been waiting for you."

Brian knew that she would go back to the company to avoid seeing him.

She would rather stay in the office than in the apartment.

The second she saw him, Ayla regretted going back to the company.

She shouldn't have returned. She should've just gone to the apartment directly and made him wait all night.

"I just left something in my office. I'm going home soon."

Ayla went to her desk to grab a document.

But before she could make her way outside, Brian halted her.

"Lala, you should know what I want to ask."

He saw how differently she treated him compared to Lucas.

Ayla shook her head, looking at his hand holding her wrist.

"Mr. Clark, I honestly don't know what to tell you. I have nothing about work to talk to you now. And my personal life has nothing to do with you."

"Is official business the only thing we can talk about? We slept on the same bed last night, remember?"

Brian embraced her. He hated how intimate she was with Lucas. Even though Ayla was enclosed in his arms, she still felt so far from his grasp.

She looked at him dead in the eye, and asked, "What else do you want? Haven't you had enough?"

Brian had kept her by his side, but no matter how hard he tried, she wouldn't give her heart to him.

"It's not enough! What I want is this!"

He reached out, clutching her chest. He wanted her body and her heart, both.

"Mr. Clark, don't be so greedy." Ayla was still calm despite his sudden reaction.

He was overestimating himself. Why on earth would she give her heart to him again?

Two years ago, she suffered through so much pain. She even got wounded and almost died.

Falling in love with anyone again was probably difficult for her now.

Brian leaned closer to hear ear, and whispered, "Yes, I am greedy! Never have I failed to get what I want, and you're no exception."

Ayla nestled in his arms.

"Let's wait and see if you're right." She evoked a charming smile.

"Anyway, I'll head home first. I won't disturb you anymore, Mr. Clark."

She stood on tiptoe and gently kissed his cheek, leaving a light pink lip print, and then she left.

Brian watched as she walked out of the office.

How could he not understand that she was still avoiding him? If he hadn't waited for her in her office, she might've stayed here until midnight.

It was good that she went back.

He didn't want her to collapse again because of overworking.

Brian made himself busy in his office for almost an hour before he went back to the apartment. He figured that Ayla might've gone to bed at this time, but he was wrong.

She was still in the living room.

"Why haven't you gone to bed? Were you waiting for me?" Brian dropped his briefcase, took off his jacket and threw it on the sofa.

When he embraced Ayla, she didn't move away from him. She was too focused on the fashion magazine in her hand. Brian took it away from her and said, "Why aren't you responding?"

He hated it when people weren't answering him.

Ayla cast him a glance and asked, "Mr. Clark, what do you want me to tell you? Do you want me to say 'welcome back'? You know that I don't like to lie, right?"

"Okay, then tell me the truth," he replied with a chuckle.

"I don't want to." Ayla turned her gaze towards him.

All she had to do was to do her job well.

And as for everything else, she just let him do whatever he liked. Why did he have to force her?

Chapter 152: Will You Marry Me

As soon as Brian came back, the servant brought him a cup of coffee. And when she was about to leave, he stopped her.

"Wilma, get a cup of milk for Lala."

However, Ayla shook her head in refusal.

"No, thanks. I don't want one."

"Have a glass of milk before you go to bed. Go to sleep early. You have work tomorrow."

Brian was implying that she was almost late for work today, so she should be earlier tomorrow.

However, she wasn't sleepy yet. If she were sleepy, she would've locked the door and gone to sleep. Her mind was a mess as she thought about Lucas' matter. She thought that she might've made the wrong decision.

If she hadn't returned that time, things wouldn't have turned out like this.

"What are you thinking about? Are you thinking about Lucas?" Brian asked calmly, noticing that she was staring blankly into space again.

'What on earth is on her mind?' Glancing back at him, Ayla asked, "How can I miss him? Now that you're here with me, do I really need to think of another man?" Brian fixed his gaze at her bare face.

Even with such fair skin, free from embellishments, she was still so beautiful and charming that it caused him to gradually fall for her.

“Whether it’s true or not, I like it.”

Wearing a smile, he picked Ayla up and carried her to the bedroom. She wrapped her arms around his neck.

What was about to happen was unavoidable, and she didn’t want to escape anyway.

As he stood beside the sofa with a glass of wine in his hand, Lucas contemplated on how he could help Ayla.

Not only did he want to take her away from Brian, he also hoped that she wouldn’t be taken advantage by anyone anymore.

Back then, he had used her for his own interests as well, but now, he wanted to make up for his sins with all his might.

However, Tatum had been putting pressure on Lucas.

Recently, there was even a batch of goods that had been confiscated by Jaime.

Tatum lost his temper, so he asked Lucas to take actions against Brian at once.

Lucas knew that he shouldn’t follow that order for Ayla’s sake, but he didn’t have much time to delay what he had planned to do.

Suddenly, Haley knocked on the door.

“Lucas, may I come in?”

“Of course.”

He turned to look at her.

“Didn’t you mention that you were feeling unwell? Why don’t you get some rest?”

Haley walked towards him, taking the goblet from his hand.

“I’m fine.”

“Is that so? If you’re not feeling well, you can go to the hospital. Don’t pretend that you’re fine. I know that you haven’t been eating well lately.”

Lucas stared at her face and found that it was still pale.

Haley made him sit on the sofa, and asked, “Lucas, will you marry me?”

She then placed his hand on her belly. Startled, he asked, “What are you trying to say?”

“Why would you ask that, Lucas? Don’t you get it? I’m pregnant!”

Haley held his hand tightly.

“You don’t want to admit it’s yours, do you? You are the only man I’ve ever had s*x with. And now I’m pregnant. If you don’t marry me, my dignity will be ruined.”

Haley had already gathered that Lucas might not take responsibility, but she had some tricks up her sleeves. She had been with him for so many years, so she knew him well.

Otherwise, she wouldn’t have come up with this idea.

It was so easy for her to make him impregnate her.

As long as she willed it, she could have a child.

“Haley, you do know that what happened between us was an accident, don’t you? I never wanted any of that to happen.”

If Lucas had to take responsibility for Haley, then what would happen to Ayla? What should she do? On top of it all, he didn’t harbor any feelings for Haley.

A marriage born out of responsibility and without love would only lead to unhappiness. It was not what he wanted.

“But you can’t let me raise this child alone just because you don’t want to take responsibility! What if the child asks me about his father in the future? What should I tell him? Should I say that his dad didn’t want us?” Haley stared into Lucas’ eyes.

“The baby is already a month old. No matter what you say, I’m not going to get an abortion!”

Lucas still hadn’t figured out how to help Ayla, but another problem with Haley had arisen. He had no more strength left to deal with all these problems.

“Haley, listen to me.” He tried to persuade Haley to reconsider having this child.

“No! I don’t want to hear it! I won’t abort this child. Even if you don’t want me to do so, I will give birth to my baby!”

Once she had her heart set on something, Haley’s mind wouldn’t change anymore.

Because if she easily changed her mind, she wouldn’t have gone through so much trouble to get pregnant in order to be with Lucas.

Why would she give up just because he didn’t want to marry her? He could tell that she was adamant on her decision, but that wasn’t what he wanted.

“Haley, let’s talk about this later, alright? You can’t have this baby.”

Haley got up from the sofa, walking out in silence.

She was upset.

Lucas wanted to hold her hand, but it slipped, causing her to fall to the floor.

"It hurts!" Haley covered her belly with her hands.

Her face was pale, and she was breaking into cold sweat.

"Lucas, take me to the hospital!" Lucas quickly picked her up.

"Haley, listen to me. You're gonna be fine."

Haley prayed that nothing would happen to her and her baby.

All she wanted was Lucas.

It was only when Ayla heard the steady breathing beside her ear could she feel a fleeting moment of peace.

However, she still wasn't ready to sleep.

She pulled the white robe beside her, put it on and stood in front of the French window, staring at the moonlight through the thin curtains.

When Ayla opened the curtains and the window, the cold wind helped her clear her mind.

Ever since she came back to A City, she had been facing everything alone.

She lost her body to Brian again, and perhaps, she was also about to lose her heart.

After a while, she looked at the man lying on the bed.

She hated him with every fiber of her being, so much that she wanted to kill him and erase everything from her past.

However, she could no longer erase it from her heart.

Was Brian nice to her because he wanted to make it up to her? Or was he actually in love with her? Even though she was always giving him the cold shoulder, he never got angry.

Although in bed, he was still in control.

Ayla sat on the bedside, staring at his handsome face.

It was only when he was sleeping that he looked so harmless.

And only during this time would she be willing to get a bit closer to him.

In all honesty, they shouldn't have been together in the first place.

They were from two different worlds, but they ended up crossing paths with each other.

And then she fell in love with him.

That was when her life became miserable.

And now that two years had passed, he was still lingering in her heart. Ayla had thought that she'd be able to forget all about Brian.

Unfortunately, she met him again by chance.

Clearly, she rejected each of his advances, but she still surrendered to him in the end because he remained in her heart.

If he was no longer in her heart, then she would rather die than let him touch her. Brian was not a good man, and yet she had feelings for him.

If he knew how she felt for him, how would he react? Would he drive her away just like what happened two years ago? Would it just end up like how it did back then? Would she still feel pain?

Chapter 153: She Didn't Give A D**n, But Other People Did

When Haley woke up, she saw Lucas standing outside the ward through the glass window. Perhaps it was because he knew that she was pregnant, he opted to smoke outside. She touched her belly and propped herself up.

At the same time, a nurse on duty entered the room.

"Haley Green, you're not allowed to move yet. You just had an accident, almost causing a miscarriage, so you need to rest."

"I'm doing fine."

Haley turned her gaze towards the window, causing the nurse to look as well.

"I'll tell your husband to come in."

Lucas happened to notice that she had woken up, so before the nurse could tell him to go inside, he had already thrown away his cigarette and walked in.

"Haley, are you feeling better now?"

He looked at her with worried eyes.

Haley nodded.

"I'm okay. I just want to rest some more. I think I'll get better after a few more days of rest. Fortunately, nothing bad happened to the baby."

Upon seeing how hopeful and excited she was when talking about the baby, Lucas swallowed his words back.

Asking her to have an abortion would be too cruel.

That baby in Haley's womb was a living thing. He refused to be like Brian.

That man doubted that the baby in Ayla's womb was not his, so he forced her to abort it.

Losing a baby was a pain that could not ever be erased.

And so, Lucas didn't want Haley to suffer through that kind of pain. And as a result, he was caught in a dilemma.

Lucas had been too careless when it happened. He didn't think about what he was doing, so he ended up in this situation.

Haley held his hand, and said, "Lucas, I won't force you to be with me, but even if you don't want this child, I will keep it. It's our baby. I love you, so I will love him just the same."

For a long time, Lucas was just muttering to himself, and then he said, "Sorry."

"Don't apologize because I don't want to hear it." Haley shook her head.

"Lucas, I'm a bit hungry. Can you get me something to eat?"

"Sure. Stay put and focus on resting."

When he walked out of the ward, she smiled.

"Be a good boy, dear. It all depends on you whether Mommy can be with Daddy."

Although Lucas had been working for Tatum for as long as he could remember, he could never be ruthless.

Perhaps it was possible for him to harm strangers, but he couldn't do anything to Haley, not to mention Ayla.

Meanwhile, as Ayla opened her eyes, she realized that she was inches away from Brian.

She was resting her head on his arm, and his other arm was wrapped around her waist.

However, she didn't remember what time exactly she fell asleep last night, but she recalled that she had chosen to sleep on the side of the bed far away from him.

Seconds later, Brian opened his eyes.

"Good morning."

Last night, Ayla was having a hard time sleeping. He couldn't figure out what she was thinking.

She went to bed very late and kept her distance from him.

Naturally, it made him unhappy. And so, he pulled her back into his arms while she was asleep.

That was the reason she woke up to such an intimate position with him.

Ayla was still dazed.

When she heard his voice, she immediately got up.

"I...last night..."

Did she move closer towards him on purpose? It was so humiliating

“What happened last night?” Brian also sat upright, leaning against the headboard, and then lit up a cigarette to smoke.

Ayla shook her head.

“Nothing happened.”

Quickly, she got out of bed and rushed towards the bathroom.

Month’s end was approaching, and so was the fashion season.

The first and second batch of clothes for the fashion show had already been finalized.

For the third batch, Brian had asked Linda and Ayla to each turn in fifteen sets in order to catch up with the fashion season next month.

Few of the second batch of clothes were designed by Linda, because she had put all of her attention on Brian.

In truth, she seemed more interested in him than the fashion season.

As he sat in his office, Brian looked at the designs for the first two batches of clothes.

Linda’s style was completely different from Ayla’s.

Ayla’s design was simple yet elegant, while Linda’s was enchanting.

Moments later, Anna walked in.

“Brian, did you put these together?” Brian took out some of Linda’s designs.

“Linda only turned in three sets of designs, and they were all designed in Italy. Although, I personally think they’re not that bad.”

Upon hearing him praise Linda, Anna felt a bit jealous. She didn’t mention to him that Lucas went to the villa looking for Ayla, and Brian pretended to be oblivious.

Besides, there were some things that he thought were unnecessary for him to know.

“Brian, you seem quite taken by Miss Linda’s designs.” Anna used to be very picky about Ayla’s design.

And now, she had a lot more things to say about Linda’s.

It wasn’t that she meant to deliberately make things difficult for Linda like what she had planned before; it was just that Linda’s designs weren’t that good in truth.

“Anna, there are two sides to every story, so don’t be so prejudiced when you’re looking at things. After all, Miss Evans is a partner we can trust.”

Brian could tell what she was thinking, even though Anna wasn't expecting him to go home with her to accompany her, nor would she ask him of his whereabouts lately. She knew what he meant.

He was reminding her of what she had done to Ayla before. It was she who had prevented him from seeing her designs. In reality, Brian had his own thoughts.

No matter what it was about, he would do whatever he had set his heart on.

While Ayla was preoccupied with work, he received a call from Hayden.

He was asking her to have lunch with him, so she agreed. He sent a driver to pick her up.

Coincidentally, Linda saw her getting into a car.

'If she's capable of getting into such a luxury limo, she probably has a powerful background in Antawood. Does she have another man besides Brian?'

Instead of following Ayla, Linda went back to the office. She stayed there alone, looking at the design drafts that Ayla hadn't put away.

Afterwards, she took out her phone and took photos of all of Ayla's designs.

"Ayla, I am going to destroy your life!"

Linda didn't care about her designs because she didn't like Ayla's style.

However, that didn't mean that others wouldn't like so if all of Ayla's designs would become unusable, then all of the clothes during the fashion season would be Linda's designs! In that case, not only would she be able to discredit Ayla, she could also improve her own reputation! On top of that, she could leave a striking impression on Brian.

It was just a simple plan, but she could hit two birds with one stone.

While swiping across her screen, she saw an eye-catching design. A smile appeared on the corner of her red lips.

Chapter 154: Rumors

The moment Ayla arrived at the restaurant, she noticed that Hayden was already waiting for her.

"Uncle Hayden, have you been waiting for a long time?"

"It's fine. I don't have anything better to do today. I suddenly thought of you, so I decided to give you a call. Did I interrupt your work?"

He smiled at her and poured her a glass of water.

"Not really." Ayla shook her head.

In all honesty, she actually needed to relax. She had almost finished her design, so she didn't have to worry about it that much.

"I heard that the Clark Group will hold a fashion show next month. You're their designer, right? Then you must be very busy!"

Although Hayden barely cared about the company's dealings, he was still keen on what was happening around him.

Moreover, the Clark Group had invited numerous celebrities and ladies to the fashion show.

Even Miley and Molly received an invitation. It wasn't surprising that he knew about it.

Ayla took a sip of water.

"Actually, I'm not that busy. I just need to submit my design drafts, and the others will do the rest."

There were several assistant designers and interns, including an overall assistant for the Design Department.

In reality, she didn't have that much to do.

"Oh, I see. Then I'll have to see that fashion show," said Hayden.

"That's great! I'll be glad if you can attend!" Ayla grinned.

She was worried that she might be too busy to inform him of the fashion show.

As Hayden picked up some food for her, he said, "Ayla, you need to eat more to replenish your strength."

He kept his eyes on her as he happily put food on her plate.

Ayla looked so much like that woman at the airport.

The familiar figure he had seen at the airport that day might be the woman he had missed so much.

Unfortunately, he didn't try to ascertain the truth. He regretted the fact that he didn't do it.

When Brian went into the office of the Design Department, he tried to look for Ayla, but he couldn't find her. He glanced at the design drafts on her desk and said nothing. He also noticed that Linda was working hard.

It was already lunch break, and everyone else had taken a break. It was strange that she was all alone here.

As soon as Linda raised her head, she noticed that Brian was there.

"Mr. Clark, what are you doing here? Are you looking for Ayla? She just went out. I overheard her talking on the phone, and then saw her going into a luxurious limo," she remarked casually.

Just as that one saying said, even if the speaker had no particular intention in saying something, the listener might read into it on his own.

That was what she hoped would happen.

Brian just gave her a faint hum in response and was about to leave the office without saying anything else.

“Mr.Clark, would you like to have a cup of coffee with me if you’re not too busy?” Linda got up from her desk and approached him.

However, he just stared at her without giving a response.

“Or would you like me to make you a cup of coffee instead?” Linda added.

“Sounds great! It would be my honor to taste the coffee made by one such as yourself, Miss Linda.”

With a faint smile on his lips, they went into the tea room together.

There were good coffee beans and a coffee machine in the room.

Not ten minutes later, Linda managed to prepare two cups of fragrant coffee and placed them on the round table.

“It smells nice.It’s a cup of good coffee,” he said to Linda while stirring the coffee with a small spoon.

As she grabbed the milk and sugar, she asked, “Mr.Clark, you prefer drinking black coffee, right?”

After saying that, she put milk and sugar into her coffee.

Brian nodded.

“Miss Linda, you seem to know my preferences well.”

“It’s not that I know your tastes well.It’s just that your temperament shows that you prefer strong and pure coffee.Although it’s bitter, it gives a long and fragrant aftertaste.”

Linda sipped her coffee.

“Is that so?” Brian also took a sip of his.

“This coffee is really good.You’re not just a talented designer, you’re also great at brewing coffee!”

“I’m flattered, Mr.Clark.It’s also because the coffee beans I used are of premium quality.They’re the purest first-class coffee beans from Jamaica.”

Linda also liked to drink coffee, so she knew a little bit about to Brian smirked in response.

As they sat in the tea room, they made small talk and spoke about irrelevant matters.Linda was a sensible person.She knew that the more anxious she was, the faster she would lose something.

While they were busy chatting in the tea room, it was inevitable that someone might see them.

And this matter would quickly spread around the office.

People in this building started talking about them in just one afternoon.

The attitudes towards this matter varied from person to person.

Some had good things to say, while others expressed their disapproval.

Only Ayla ignored such issues.

Some people had said that Linda was attracted to Brian because of his good looks and wealth, while others said that he had grown tired of the women around him, so he wanted something new.

And so, he decided to be with a beautiful foreign woman.

In reality, it wasn't that Ayla didn't give a d**n.

It was just that she had expected that Brian and Linda might get into a relationship.

That woman had always been actively dating people. She had always been this way, even in Italy.

After she finished working, Ayla put away her drafts, grabbed her handbag, and went out.

As soon as she arrived at the first floor, she saw Brian and Anna coming over. He was wearing a black suit, and on the other hand, Anna was wearing a bright red luxurious evening dress.

They probably had a dinner party to attend tonight.

Ayla was happy to see them together.

This way, Brian wouldn't bug her tonight.

Just as she stepped out of the company's building, Brian pulled her arm.

"Mr. Clark, what's the matter? I'm off duty now." Ayla pointed at her watch.

She didn't want to delay him, and she didn't want him to cause trouble for her either.

Brian gestured to a man to call him over.

This man looked a bit familiar.

Ayla didn't know his name, but she was certain that he was one of Brian's underlings.

"Hank, drive Ayla back to the apartment," he said.

He couldn't take her home by himself, so he arranged a driver for her instead.

Anna saw this scene, but she didn't know how to react.

Brian watched Ayla get into Hank's car.

After the car drove away, he took the key from Anna.

"Brian, have you heard the rumors circulating in the company this afternoon?" Anna asked as she sat in the passenger seat.

"No, what is it?" Brian asked indifferently.

He didn't seem to be interested in such trivial matters.

Anna leaned against the seat of the car and said, "The employees are talking about you and Linda."

Although she didn't go into that much detail, he understood what it meant.

“Really? And do you believe any of it?” Brian responded with a question.

He knew that Anna never indulged in gossip, but if the rumors had circulated, people were bound to believe it, weren't they?

“Are you really planning to be with Linda?” She didn't actually believe it.

Even if something happened between Brian and Linda, that woman would probably be the one who initiated it

Chapter 155

Brian didn't respond. He didn't give a d**n about what people thought of him and Linda. He was the only person who had a say in his personal matters.

“Brian, you should know that Linda is a woman who do things with a clear purpose. Besides...” Anna paused.

She abhorred the idea of seeing Brian so mesmerized by Linda and listening to her words.

“Anna, I thought you knew me well,” he said lightly.

When he was with Ayla in the past, Anna always remembered her place and knew how to behave.

But now, she intervened in his decisions and listened to rumors and hearsays.

Hearing his response put her mind at ease.

If she really knew him well, she should know what kind of person he was by now.

And even if he wanted a woman, he'd be able to handle it well.

He would never let himself be the topic of rumors.

Just like it was in Ayla's case, he was indifferent to her within the premises of the company.

However, he allowed her to live in his apartment just so he could keep her by his side.

At the dinner party, Brian and Anna walked into the venue, arm-in-arm.

As soon as they entered, they ran into Toby and Molly.

It wasn't surprising, considering that they all lived in the same city.

Moments later, Molly found the chance to speak to Brian.

“Mr. Clark, what a coincidence! Oh, so Miss Anna's with you today instead? I thought it would be Miss Woodsen!”

Molly approached Brian and then turned her gaze towards Anna who was at the other side of the hall.

“You seem to know a lot about me, Mrs. Brown,” he sneered.

It seemed that they had already found out that Ayla had returned, but that didn't surprise him.

Last time, she saw Ayla talking to Hayden at the airport, so it wasn't strange that she had met with Toby upon her return.

"Besides knowing that Ayla is back, I know nothing else. Mr. Clark, you should go out with her! Even though two years had passed, Miss Woodsen is still your wife, isn't she?"

She didn't want to see Ayla driven away by Brian again and that she could have the chance to be with Toby.

As he took a sip of his wine, Brian said, "Thanks for your concern, Mrs. Brown, but I'll handle my personal business on my own."

Anna came over and noticed that Molly was talking to him.

"Brian," she called out.

"I see. Then I won't take up any more of your time."

Molly smiled at him then went back to Toby.

"What did she talk to you about? It's not about business, isn't it?" Anna glanced at her.

She knew that Molly had worked in her family's company for two years now.

Although she was the Secretary General, it was nothing more than a glorified title. She wasn't capable of doing anything.

Considering that fact, she probably wouldn't talk business with Brian.

Perhaps it was about Ayla; she was the only link that those two had.

"You're right. She didn't come to talk business with me. Our Clark Group and their Smith Group are now rivals, not partners," he sneered.

Should he be happy that so many people cared about Ayla? Anna was about to say something more, but several bosses suddenly approached Brian.

"Mr. Clark! How have you been doing? I heard that you have a new development program. Do you have any intention of looking for a partner?"

"Of course, Mr. Moore. As long as you're willing, we'll consider a cooperation between our companies."

Brian seldom went out for social engagements.

If it weren't for the fact that it was difficult to turn down invitations, he wouldn't have attended any of them.

Anna had told him that he should go out and socialize for the sake of next month's fashion show. She said that it would be highly beneficial for their work.

Successive batches of company leaders came to greet them after the first ones.

Toby and Molly were standing nearby.

“Honey, Mr. Clark appears to be charismatic. Wherever he goes, he manages to steal your thunder,” she said.

Molly was lost in thought.

She was already in love with Toby, but if she had met Brian first, would she have fallen in love with him instead? Perhaps she would.

Any woman would lose their mind upon seeing such an excellent and charming man. But the more incredible a man was, the more hearts he would break.

In the past, Ayla disappeared for two years because of him.

Anna had been with him for so long, and she still hadn't received a proper title. But those two women weren't the only ones around him.

“What's wrong? Are you upset?” Toby smiled faintly.

Naturally, he knew what kind of person Brian was. “No, I'm not. You're the only man in my heart.”

She held onto his arm.

“Honey, I'm feeling a little unwell today. Let's go home early!”

“Why are you feeling uncomfortable again? I think you've been eating less lately. I'll take you to the hospital tomorrow.”

Toby arranged her shawl for her, and then they said goodbye to the host of the banquet and left.

Touching her belly, Molly said, “Okay, let's go to the hospital together tomorrow.”

‘Maybe it would be good news,’ she thought.

Brian saw the way Toby looked at him before he left.

Perhaps he still hated him because of Ayla. He already had Molly and the Smith Group.

Wasn't that enough for him? If he continued being this greedy, it could cause him to lose everything.

“Brian, it seems that Mr. Brown still has feelings for Ayla. Don't you think so, too?”

Anna looked at him as she stood next to him.

How charming Ayla was for being able to make three men fall head over heels for her.

Even Brian was doing all he could to keep her by his side.

“Mr. Brown has a wife already. What else is there to think about? Is it even necessary to think of this matter?” Brian smirked.

He had never been afraid of competition between him and Toby when it came to work, but he didn't want to be at odds with him.

Besides, Hayden hadn't done anything to offend Brian.

"I hope that's what you're really thinking."

Anna picked up a glass of wine and drank it all down. She was able to deduce the true meaning of his words.

'Some people are meant to be together. So, the only woman he wants right now is still Ayla'

As that thought crossed her mind, she clenched her fists and gritted her teeth.

'I still can't win his heart, can I?' They had been together for over ten years, and she had gone through hell and back for him, but she still hadn't gotten anything in return.

It was true that she did all out of her own volition, but it still pained her heart.

After leaving the party, Brian told the driver to send Anna to the villa.

"Brian, are you still not going to come home?"

"Anna." He stared into her eyes.

"Listen to me. You're drunk. The driver will take you home."

Anna knew what he meant. He was implying that he was going back to Ayla.

"I see. I guess I'll head home."

After saying that, she sat in the car and told the driver to get going.

As he sat in his car, Brian didn't leave right away until he received a call from Jaime.

"Jaime, how's it going?"

"Mr. Clark, Tatum wants to negotiate with us."

Jaime had been in Thailand for several months, fighting against Tatum for various businesses.

And because Brian had more power and influence, he was able to completely control the shipping rights, causing Tatum to be agitated. If he wanted to continue making any money, he must talk to Brian.

Chapter 156

"I need some time to think about it."

Brian knew that Tatum only wanted to benefit from his supply and distribution channels. But he wasn't going to negotiate with him until he was certain of what happened to Ayla.

Surely, Lucas had to be present during the negotiation, which was the only way to make her understand the whole matter. She shouldn't blame him for his ploys because he was doing it all for her sake.

Two years ago, no matter what kind of suffering Tatum put Ayla through, Brian would inflict twice the pain on him.

He had had no connection to Tatum for a long time.

This time, perhaps, he could make an exception.

Jaime nodded.

“I see. Boss, I’ve had the drug delivered to you. You’ll get the package within two days.”

That drug was developed two years ago.

But for a weak woman like Ayla, she must’ve gone through so much hell to become who she was today.

“Got it. You can take a break now. Call me if anything notable happens.”

After the phone call, Brian drove to the apartment.

As soon as he arrived, he noticed that the lights weren’t on. He looked at the closed door of the bedroom.

Ayla must’ve found out that he had a social activity tonight, so she came home early to get some rest.

He had drunk some wine and now felt a little tipsy. He decided that he wouldn’t let her just sleep so comfortably.

The truth was, it was impossible for Ayla to fall asleep so early, so when she heard someone enter the apartment, she closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep.

She knew that it was pointless to lock the door.

He could go in and out freely in her original apartment, let alone his own.

Just as the door opened, Ayla heard his footsteps drawing closer and closer towards her, and the smell of alcohol wafted into her nose.

Ever since she stayed with Brian, she knew that she would never return to who she was.

This man had the capability to make her surrender to him bit by bit.

He sat on the bedside, touching her face. He noticed that her long, curly eyelashes were fluttering lightly.

A smirk appeared on Brian’s lips.

He had initially thought that Ayla had gone to sleep, but it turned out that she was just pretending.

However, he wasn’t going to wake her up.

Naturally, he had a way to wake her up.

Brian bent over, pressing his lips against her cherry pink lips.

As he indulged himself in the sweetness of her lips, he found himself unable to stop.

For the past years, he had been missing everything about Ayla.

He thought that she had died in the sea, but now she had returned.

Now, he wanted to make sure to do everything in his power to return things the way they were.

Ayla realized that it was useless and foolish to pretend to be asleep.

To be honest, whether she was asleep or not, Brian would do whatever the hell he wanted.

'But isn't he going too far?' Kissing her was tolerable, but how could he begin to undress her now? It was unbearable! As soon as Ayla opened her eyes, she slapped Brian's face.

"You b*****d!"

To alleviate the pain, he stroked his cheek.

"You slapped me. Why would you do that?"

Ayla curled up on the bed.

"Oh, Mr. Clark? I had no idea it was you. I thought it was just some random rogue."

She wasn't going to admit that she did it on purpose.

Besides, he deserved to be slapped for taking advantage of her while she was asleep!

"Oh? Is there anyone who would dare sneak into my apartment?"

Brian wasn't angry that she slapped him.

Ayla had pretended to be asleep to prevent him from having s*x with her, so he had to pay the price for doing so.

That price was a slap across the face.

But now that he had received a slap from her without complaint, Brian thought that he had to make it more worthwhile.

"Well, now I'm here. I don't think anyone will be bold enough to lay a finger on you."

Brian wrapped his arms around Ayla's waist, pulling her into his arms.

With her face against his chest, she heard his strong heartbeat and smelled the odor of alcohol exuded by his body.

What he said just now was an excuse to hug her.

What a shameless man! Ayla didn't dare to yell at him. It was enough to curse him in her mind.

Brian held her chin with his fingers, raised her head slightly, and looked into her eyes.

"What were you thinking of just now?"

"Nothing."

As she shook her head, her eyes brimmed with dishonesty.

Brian indulged her duplicity.

“Good.”

Those words didn't mean that they were going to stop.

On the contrary, it marked the beginning of what they were about to do. He started kissing her all over her face, slowly making his way to her lips.

“Now do you see who it is?” he asked while she was catching her breath.

His kiss felt so tender that she could barely resist.

Her chest heaved up and down as she took deep breaths.

“Lala.” Brian kissed her again.

Ayla was so irresistible to him, making him addicted to her like a drug.

The moonlight shone through the thin gauze curtain, adding to the romantic atmosphere.

After they were done, Ayla was so tired that she fell asleep.

And by the time she woke up, the sun had already shone outside.

She glanced at clock and found that it was already ten in the morning! As soon as she got up, she felt the soreness of her body, and she noticed that Brian was already gone.

She fumbled across the bed to feel his heat, but the other side of the bed was already cold.

‘He probably left early, didn't he?’ Exhausted, Ayla went into the bathroom to relieve her pain with hot water.

An hour later, she finished her bath and put on her clothes.

Upon seeing her come out of the bathroom, the servant approached her and said, “Miss Woodsen, you're awake. I've prepared something for you. You can go to the dining table to eat.”

Ayla nodded.

“Thank you.”

As she sat alone in the dining room, looking at the dishes on the table, she thought that it was too extravagant.

“When did Mr. Clark leave?” she asked the servant.

“He went out around eight o'clock. He mentioned you were tired and needed to rest, and asked me not to wake you up.”

The servant stood aside, pouring a glass of water for Ayla.

Ayla was rendered speechless.

‘Brian, you shameless man!’

How could he say something like that to the servant? The servant wasn't a fool.

She probably understood what he meant! If she kept staying by his side, her image would be ruined.

Two days ago, when the servant saw them kissing in the living room, she was almost choked by rice.

Today, he did something stupid again.

It might give the servant the wrong idea! If Ayla didn't go to the company for a long time without a proper reason, rumors would circulate about her in the design department!

Chapter 157

When Ayla entered the office, she immediately felt the strange atmosphere, and she knew that those unfriendly gazes were cast upon her.

Had she accidentally offended them again? Linda came over to her side, and said, "Ayla, don't think you can come to work only when you want just because of your relationship with Mr. Clark."

Displeasure was evident in her tone.

Ayla was shocked.

How could Linda say something like that? It was like she was trying to accuse Ayla of being Brian's mistress.

All the rumors in the office yesterday were about Linda, but Ayla didn't want to get involved.

"Don't look at me like you're innocent. At the morning meeting, Mr. Clark mentioned it himself. He said you wouldn't be able to come to the company today. I think only an idiot wouldn't figure out what he meant. Don't even think of telling me that you didn't sleep with him last night!"

Linda's blatant words humiliated Ayla.

What was more, she said it to her in front of everyone in the office.

Ayla now realized that it was Brian who prevented her from having a foothold in the Clark Group. But she wasn't going to let him have his way.

"Miss Linda, you need to have evidence to prove your claims. Yesterday, all our colleagues were talking about you and Mr. Clark, and now, you're telling me that I was having an affair with him? Who are you trying to shame, me or you?" Ayla smirked at Linda.

"You... Whatever!"

Linda walked away and went back to her desk.

'Don't look down on me just because you're a talented designer. As long as I'm here, I'll make sure you won't have a good future!' Ayla hardly cared about the whispers in the office, but she was going to talk about this with Brian.

If he kept acting like this, she would have no choice but to leave.

The Smith family villa was busy at the moment.

Toby accompanied Molly to the hospital for a checkup.

It turned out that she had been pregnant for a month.

Naturally, Hayden was the happiest person upon hearing that news.

A lifelong marriage could not be sealed without a child.

Back then, because Molly couldn't get pregnant, they had even considered adoption.

But now, she was pregnant at last! This was truly a joyous event for the Smith family.

As soon as Molly stood up, Toby grabbed her arm and asked, "What are you going to do? You should be careful. Tell me what you need and I'll get it for you. Perhaps knowing that Molly was pregnant made Toby feel differently about her. A while back, he didn't want her to get pregnant at all.

But now that she was, it actually made him really happy.

"I'm fine. Don't be so paranoid."

Molly knew that her period had been delayed for a long time now, and she was always exhausted.

She figured that she might be pregnant, so she went to the pharmacy to get a pregnancy test, only to find out that she was pregnant.

And in order to verify it, she asked Toby to take her to the hospital.

Since she was now pregnant with a child, she believed that Toby would care more about her.

During these past few years, their relationship only appeared to be great on the surface.

In reality, they were hiding the fact that they were both unhappy, but they never said it out loud.

Molly did love Toby.

Even if she had to use her child to bind him for a lifetime, she was willing to do so.

She didn't want him to be with any other woman, because she believed that she was the only one who could be his wife.

"Molly, from now on, you should stay at home and conserve your energy. Don't go to work anymore. The important thing is to keep your child healthy,"

Miley remarked.

Molly nodded and said, "Yes, I think so, too. The doctor told me to be careful for the first trimester and avoid getting tired. For the sake of my baby, I'll stay at home and take good care of myself."

She touched her belly.

Finally, she was going to be a mother.

Certainly, Toby agreed with her.

After he decided not to give her any water with contraceptive pills, he had made up his mind that Ayla might not be his future nor his happiness.

But despite that fact, he still wanted her to be happy.

When Ayla's shift was over, the only people that remained in the office were Linda and her.

Linda said that she had to stay in the office for the design draft, but in reality, she was actually waiting for Brian.

She knew that Ayla was going to meet him under the guise of working overtime, so she stayed here until he would arrive. And just as she had expected, about an hour after her shift was done, Brian arrived at the design department.

"Aren't you finished with your work yet?" he asked as he fixed his eyes on Ayla.

Brian had initially thought that she wouldn't be able to go to the company today. Perhaps he had underestimated her stubbornness.

"I'm about to leave."

Ayla picked up her handbag, walked to the door, and stood face to face with Brian.

"Mr. Clark, you should stop spouting nonsense in front of everyone. I don't want to be the subject of other people's gossips," she whispered to him as she glared at him with a threatening gaze.

Upon hearing that, a smirk appeared on Brian's lips.

"That's because others like to jump to conclusions, not to mention what I said was true."

He noticed the anger in Ayla's eyes.

She was a really short-tempered individual.

What happened last night wasn't something he could've done on his own.

What a man and woman needed to commit the act of love were mutual feelings. Was she trying to pin all the blame on him? "I'm done talking to you."

After she walked a few steps, Brian grabbed her hand.

"Ayla."

"What? Let me go!" she growled.

'Is he crazy? Or is he just determined to ruin my peaceful life?' But this was not the right time for an argument.

Although she was done with her designs, there were still a lot of things that needed her attention.

Unfortunately, Brian always kept her at her toes.

"Ayla, you can't escape me. And I know for a fact that you don't care about other people's opinions."

Brian knew her all too well.

She was just making up an excuse to distance herself from him, but that wasn't possible.

"Mr. Clark, I don't want any more trouble. You've already forced me into living at HM Garden. So could you at least ignore me in the company and pretend that I'm just another one of your employees? Just leave me alone, okay?"

Ayla had long known about all the women in the company that had regarded Brian as the man of their dreams, so she didn't want to be the target of public criticism, and neither did she want to be subjected to their poisonous glares.

The most terrible thing about women was that they'd do anything to get their hands on what they wanted.

Perhaps Ayla wasn't an exception to that characteristic. But at least now, she wasn't one of them yet.

"That depends on your performance tonight." Brian leered at Ayla.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the corridor, Linda had been watching them the whole time. She didn't say anything, but Brian was a perceptive individual.

He was capable of detecting the presence of people and things around him.

"Maybe you'll be more satisfied with Miss Linda," Ayla replied.

'My performance tonight? Do I really have to discuss this kind of thing with him?' Anything that a man said while in bed was unreliable, and Ayla had never planned to believe it.

With that, she turned around and made her way to the elevator.

There were too many people who would bend over backwards for Brian, so she thought that she was disposable.

Wouldn't he just get tired of her in the long. However, the day when he would get tired of her seemed to be a bit far away.

Chapter 158

As soon as Ayla left, Linda came over, and asked, "Mr. Clark, what's going on? Did you need to discuss something with Miss Woodsen?"

She then wrapped her arms around one of his arms.

"Not really. I was just passing by," said Brian, glancing at Linda indifferently.

"Well, do you have time to invite me to dinner tonight?"

She raised her head, gazing at him with seductive eyes, But Brian withdrew his arm, and said, "Miss Linda, don't you have to work overtime tonight?"

Linda backed away from him, humiliated.

She had tried her best to seduce him, but he didn't seem to be charmed at all. She had believed that she was an attractive and enchanting woman.

As long as she gave someone the slightest hints of invitation, many men would fall before her feet.

Was Brian immune to her wiles?

'That's impossible'

In her eyes, all men were the same. She was determined to capture his heart.

"Well, maybe we can have dinner some other time instead," Linda said awkwardly after Brian rejected her.

She felt ashamed of herself after that blunder.

Hearing that put a smile on his lips.

"Got it. Then I won't take up any more of your time."

He wasn't in the mood to waste his time on her right now. He couldn't figure out what Ayla was thinking.

Yesterday, all kinds of rumors arose about him and Linda, saying that they were having an affair in the company.

Ayla didn't even bat an eyelash, nor did she ask him about it.

And after what happened today, she reminded him to ignore her while they were inside the company.

But why would he subject himself to her commands? Moments later, he drove back to his apartment.

When he arrived, he saw Ayla sitting at the dining table alone.

The servant was surprised to see him.

"Mr. Clark, you're back."

"That's right."

Brian took a seat at the table, glanced at Ayla, and asked, "Aren't you going to ask me anything?"

Looking back at him, she said, "Mr. Clark, I've already made it clear to you while we were in the company earlier. I hope you can just listen to me."

It was possible for him to be in a relationship with another woman, but she honestly didn't want it to happen.

There was no way she could stand to see it happen! But even if she was unhappy about it, she wasn't going to let him know how she really felt.

Indeed, she was also a woman.

Seeing Brian with other women made her feel like her heart was laden with a heavy burden. She felt that she should've just completely cut her ties with him two years ago.

Brian stared at her intently.

"So you are generous enough to let me be with another woman, aren't you? Don't you want to be the only one?"

All he wanted was her. He had begun to abstain from other women, all because of her.

Was she really so cruel that she didn't give a d**n about his feelings at all? As Ayla held her chopsticks, her hand froze.

"Mr. Clark, a heart that has been shattered can no longer be restored to how it used to be."

Back then, she loved him so much that she gave him all the love she could possibly give, but he took it for granted and cast it aside.

Now, she no longer wanted to give it to him.

If she was destined to get hurt because of love, then the pain she had suffered in the past should be enough to last her a lifetime.

She wasn't sure if her heart could take another beating.

Noticing that she had put down her chopsticks and was about to leave, Brian asked, "How could you possibly know that if you won't even try?"

He was no ordinary man. He was Mr. Clark, and he owned every inch of her being. He was the only man who could tell her to die if he wanted. He didn't want to take extreme measures by forcing her with vile methods, but she was always forcing his hand.

'Give it a try?' She couldn't afford another heartbreak again.

In her mind, she believed that she couldn't fall in love with anyone for the rest of her life anymore. She even believed that she was destined to be alone forever, but Lucas had given her everything she had right now. She should have faith in him, shouldn't she? That night, Brian and Ayla lay on the same bed, but thought of different things.

He was determined to take her back.

Ayla shifted her gaze towards the window, tears welling up in her eyes.

She thought that she had already grown numb to the pain, but why was she shedding tears? During that year, Brian was the only person she ever thought of.

It didn't matter whether she was in pain or not.

But now that he was right in front of her and begging her to come back, she couldn't bring herself to agree. When he woke up in the morning, he sat on the sofa in the living room.

"Here, keep it. If you change your mind, you can come back to me anytime. But no matter what your decision is, you can no longer go back to Lucas," he said to Ayla.

At last, she got her ring back.

She thought that he had already thrown it away, but it turned out that he had kept it.

Perhaps he wasn't as heartless as she believed him to be.

"You didn't throw it away?"

She had finally gotten her ring back, but she was no longer worthy to wear it.

Dazed, she stared at the ring.

This was Lucas' promise to her and she accepted it as a way to reciprocate the love he had given her all these years.

However, did she still need it now? Brian stood up.

"It's just a ring. Why are you so moved?"

Naturally, he knew that she was crying last night.

Was it really that painful to stay by his side? For so long, he knew that she was not as strong as she portrayed herself to be.

She just didn't want to be vulnerable in front of him.

And because of that, he decided to let her make her own decision.

If she still wanted to be with Lucas, he would give her that chance.

Whether she could make that happen or not all depended on her and Lucas.

Tightly grasping the ring, Ayla said, "There are some things that you'll never understand."

Just as he couldn't understand love, all he cared about were his own desires.

If he wanted someone, he would take them by h**k or by crook.

He didn't care whether the other party even agreed to it or not.

He wasn't the kind of man who could utter the words "I love you."

On the other hand, she was just a simple girl who wanted a quiet and simple life.

Even if it was just an ordinary life that allowed her to work in the office every day, she would still enjoy it.

She wasn't even sure if Brian could give her everything that she wanted, and neither could Lucas.

"Fine. I don't understand. But tell me, what's so good about Lucas? If you investigate his real identity, you'll find that he's not who he claims to be."

Perhaps Lucas was more complicated than he thought.

The Collins family was once very prosperous.

However, it fell from grace overnight, and Lucas was the only survivor. He had a very complicated background.

Brian, on the other hand, used his own hands and capabilities to gain everything that he had.

When Ayla watched him turn around, her heart skipped a beat, causing her to stride forward and wrap her arms around his waist.

She pressed her face against his back.

'Why can't I just let him go? How come he always has a hold in my heart?' Brian held her hands.

"He's staying at the Hyatt Hotel. You can go to him if you want. I won't stop you. But I suggest you don't go. You should know that there's another woman with him."

Despite knowing that she might not listen to him, still, he decided to warn her for her own good.

Someday, she would understand.

Ayla still hadn't removed her arms from his waist.

"Lala, if you don't let go of me, I'll have to make you," he said helplessly.

He had already given her back her ring and given her absolute freedom, but it wasn't of his own volition.

She shouldn't make him change his mind and make him regret his decision.

Chapter 159

Brian had just turned around when he felt soft lips pressing down on his.

This was the first time Ayla had taken the initiative to kiss him.

He didn't want her to kiss him just because he had returned the ring to her. He didn't want her to go running into another man's arms once they were done.

Ayla's kiss was inexperienced. But she put her soul into it, turning her into a seductress, making Brian helpless and unable to refuse her.

"Did you kiss me just to repay me, Lala?" he said softly.

As his gaze found hers, Brian felt his stomach drop away.

He was becoming more and more weak-kneed before Ayla with each passing day.

The kiss she had given him didn't even qualify as one, but it filled him with satisfaction and relief.

Ayla didn't say anything but merely looked at him, because it was not a reward.

She had never thought of repaying him in this way. She had just been overcome with the sudden urge to do it.

That was all.

She knew Brian wouldn't care, but she had still done it.

Brian flashed her a charming smile, one that she had never seen before.

Ayla didn't go to see Lucas once she left the apartment.

Instead, she went to office.

She knew Brian wasn't lying when he said that Lucas and that woman were in a relationship.

And she didn't want to ruin their relationship by appearing suddenly before them.

Lucas had done a lot for Ayla these past two years.

All she wanted was for him to be happy.

After the morning meeting, Ayla and her assistant, Ellie, went to JJ Department Store to recce the site.

The fashion show would be held there one week later.

Ayla wasn't supposed to be there, but Anna and Brian were having a meeting in the company and so they had asked her to do the task instead.

The first batch of this season's clothes were in the mall's underground warehouse and she needed to check on them.

Ayla and Ellie walked up to the first floor of the mall where the clothes were being brought out.

Their first thought was that the space was cluttered and congested, nowhere near airy as the outside.

Anna had made this plan.

Brian had raised an objection when he had come to see the venue.

This small space couldn't hold many people.

But in order to make sure that the clothes made it to the high end, he had reluctantly given the nod.

After all, the JJ Department Store was the largest mall in Antawood.

The commodities there were all luxurious and pricey, and ordinary people could not afford them.

Ayla was greeted by the manager of the shopping mall.

Since the mall was also a subsidiary of the Clark Group, Brian had called the manager in advance, instructing him to receive and treat the designer well.

The manager dared not defy Brian.

"Hello, Miss Woodsen. I am the manager of this shopping mall. My name is Zayn Cohen," the middle-aged manager said as way of introduction and handed Ayla a business card.

Ayla took the business card and said with a slight smile, "Mr. Cohen, please call me Ayla."

Zayn looked mildly horrified before recovering.

“Please let me take you to the office upstairs first. We can go to the underground warehouse later,” he said.

Ayla nodded.

She followed Zayn into the glass- enclosed elevator from where they could see the mall from every angle.

He pointed to the second floor where women’s wear lined the walls.

“This whole floor is for women’s wear, Miss Woodsen. In the future, Mr. Clark will set up an exclusive shop on this floor for our brand,” Zayn said.

He was proud of the soaring sales that the shopping mall was turning out every month.

Ayla looked at the people milling about.

It was not a weekend, but there were still quite a few people here.

The women here were all from rich families.

However, to Ayla’s surprise, she ran into a couple in a corner of the third floor.

Haley was holding on to Lucas’ arm, and he was carrying several shopping bags full of baby products and clothes.

Ayla knew that Lucas was with another woman, but she had never expected to meet them like this.

The air between them became strained.

Haley recognized Ayla at once, having met her before.

Lucas pulled away from Haley the moment he saw Ayla. It didn’t matter to him in that moment that Haley was pregnant.

Haley was not a fool.

She knew that he was behaving like this because of this woman’s presence. She also knew that her intuition had been right, that perhaps this woman in front of them was exactly the woman who had been pestering Lucas all this time.

“Why are you here, Lala?” Lucas asked, a little anxiously.

He had wanted to hide his relationship with Haley, but hadn’t been able to.

Haley had hounded Lucas over and over again, asking him to go shopping for the baby with her. He had agreed because he was worried about her, about her pregnancy. He hadn’t, in his wildest dreams, expected to meet Ayla here.

Ayla looked steadfastly at Lucas and said, “I have business here.” Her voice was calm.

She hadn't expected to meet him like this either. She looked down at the baby products that Lucas was carrying.

Maybe Brian had known all of this.

Maybe that was why he had asked her not to go looking for Lucas.

Maybe he just didn't want her to be sad.

"Lucas, who is this beautiful lady? Why don't you introduce us?" Haley said sweetly.

She was obviously marking her territory because she was clear on the fact that the baby in her belly was important to her. She wouldn't allow anyone to take this happiness away from her.

Ayla didn't ignore Haley's subtle movement.

She just looked at her curiously as she thought, 'She is pregnant, and I'm guessing that Lucas is the father'

"Hello, I'm Haley Green. Lucas' fiancée," Haley said.

She knew that Lucas would never tell Ayla about their relationship, so she had to take the initiative to introduce herself like this.

She was always the one to take the first step in her relationship with Lucas.

'Fiancée?' Ayla thought, her heart aching, but she didn't show it.

"Hello, Miss Green. I'm Ayla Woodsen, a friend of Lucas."

She didn't want anything more to do with Lucas. But she still had the ring that Brian had given back to her that morning.

Things had probably changed with time, but she didn't know for sure.

"Lucas, should we invite Miss Woodsen to dinner or at least have a cup of tea together? I'm a little tired after the day's shopping. And a little hungry. The baby is protesting," Haley said, a whine in her voice.

It was clear that her words were directed at Ayla.

Ayla, on the other hand, understood what Haley meant.

She shook her head.

"No, thanks. I have other business to attend to."

"Lala," Lucas said, making to stop Ayla as she turned to leave.

He wanted to tell her that it was not what she was thinking. But he couldn't say it.

"Lucas," Haley called as she took his hand and pulled on it.

"I'm tired. Let's go back."

As she spoke to Lucas, Haley glared at Ayla, venom in her eyes.

Now that she finally found the woman with Lucas, she wasn't in a hurry to make a move yet.

Lucas had no choice but to leave with Haley.

They had just entered the elevator when a tall figure made its way over to Ayla.

Chapter 160

Ayla lowered her head, her gaze fastened to the shiny, black shoes before her. Her sight traveled upwards and met with the eyes of the man that owned them.

"Why are you here?"

Brian didn't plan to go there, but the thought of Ayla all alone changed his mind.

However, he did not expect the scene that greeted him.

Lucas hadn't explained himself probably for Ayla's own good.

Perhaps he too, wanted to protect Ayla.

The disappointment on her face didn't go unnoticed by Brian.

'Does Ayla really care about Lucas?' Brian carefully kept his roiling emotions from showing on his face.

"Can't I be here?"

Despite her unhappiness, Ayla forced a smile.

Seeing this, Brian was irritated almost immediately.

Why did she pretend to be strong in front of him? Ayla looked at Brian and shook her head.

"I didn't mean that."

She didn't want to let Brian see her embarrassment.

She had always told him that she would rather be with Lucas, but how could she keep up the pretense when Haley introduced herself as Lucas' legitimate fiancée? "Shall we get going? Didn't you have something else to do?"

Brian wrapped his arm around Ayla's slender waist and gently led her towards the elevator.

She reluctantly followed, as Zayn, who had been accompanying her, had left earlier.

"You were aware of everything that was happening, weren't you?" Ayla asked.

Their bodies almost made contact in the constricted confines of the elevator.

Ayla felt disconcerted as Brian's hot breath touched her skin.

"Yeah," Brian replied quietly.

He didn't bother lying to Ayla. He was certain he knew more about Lucas and Haley than she did.

"You've always known, haven't you?"

Ayla regarded him thoughtfully.

Did he do all of this for her sake? Was she being too stubborn? She suddenly felt a twinge of tenderness in her heart.

Brian enveloped Ayla tightly in his strong arms, and rested his chin atop her head.

His voice was soft when he spoke.

"Come back to me, okay?"

It was a gentle question, not a coercive statement.

Ayla blinked at Brian's cajoling tone.

Didn't his attitude change a bit too fast? She could hardly believe it.

When Ayla didn't answer, Brian didn't force her.

The elevator announced their arrival to the underground warehouse, and both silently got off.

What welcomed them was a small room with a row of racks that bore twenty suits of clothes.

"So, what do you think? Are you satisfied with it?"

Brian swept his arm to showcase the first batch of clothes, and waited for Ayla's reaction.

His trust in Ayla was so profound that he didn't question any aspect of her work.

Ayla delicately touched the clothes' material and relished in its good quality.

Drafting the designs wasn't her only assignment.

She was also supposed to sew the samples herself.

Ayla hated to admit it, but Brian having handled the rest helped her a lot.

She felt herself relax.

As the tension melted away from Ayla's shoulders, Brian smiled.

"Good, I'll consider your reaction a yes. The fashion show will start next week. I can assure you there will be no problems."

Brian watched as Ayla checked the clothes for the umpteenth time.

He crossed his arms and regarded her with a frown.

"You're just busying yourself needlessly. Why don't you rest instead?"

His frown deepened as he observed the dark circles under her eyes and the fatigue in her movements.

Besides, after seeing Lucas with Haley just now, she needed time to adjust her mood.

Ayla threw a disbelieving look over her shoulder to Brian.

“You must have underestimated me, right? I don’t need to rest.”

Ayla returned her attention to the clothes. She wasn’t so fragile that she couldn’t handle her duties herself.

Brian eyed her warily.

She was acting normally; perhaps she didn’t love Lucas that deeply, after all? “I couldn’t tell if you are a cruel woman or a heartless one.”

Brian rummaged in his coat pocket and took out a pack of cigarettes.

As he pulled out a stick, it was immediately snatched from his fingers.

“You can’t smoke here. Cigarette odor will stick to the clothes. Worse, you’ll burn the entire collection down.”

Ayla looked at the man in front of her with annoyance.

If she was a cruel and heartless woman, didn’t she become the same as him? No words were spoken between the two as they left the warehouse, leaving Ellie to tidy up the clothes by herself.

Brian opened the door to the passenger’s seat and Ayla reluctantly got in.

Instead of heading to the company, however, the car stopped in front of a cafe.

Ayla shot Brian a suspicious look.

“What are you doing?”

“Having some coffee,”

Brian blithely replied, an innocent look on his face. He opened the door and got out of the car.

“But we should be going back to the company right now,” Ayla said in confusion, gawking at Brian’s back.

She had never considered him to be such an idle man.

As Brian disappeared inside the cafe, Ayla had no choice but to get out of the car and follow him.

When she walked in, she saw that he was already seated.

“Have a seat. I have already ordered a glass of orange juice for you.”

Brian looked at Ayla thoughtfully and marveled at her ability to conceal her feelings. She seemed to have improved at it, for her face bore no traces of her emotions.

It was better that way, compared to other women who resorted to crying and throwing a tantrum.

Ayla didn't refuse the orange juice and tiramisu that were laid before her, but she didn't hesitate in voicing out her opinion about his choice of beverage.

"Thank you for taking me here, but I prefer drinking coffee."

For Brian to order orange juice for her...Did he just treat her like a child? It was an act of kindness on his part, so Ayla decided to let it go.

After dining, they went back to the company together.

A while later, as she was seated at her desk, Ayla took out a ring from her bag and looked at it thoughtfully.

'Should I keep this ring?' It was a promise between her and Lucas at that time.

The time had come to end it.

Linda observed Ayla from afar.

'Ayla went out for a while and came back with a strange look on her face. Whatever could have happened?' Curiously, she heard that Mr. Clark had gone out too.

His destination was Prario, the same as Ayla.

Linda stood up from her desk and brought her empty water glass with her. As she passed by Ayla's desk, she saw that she was pensively staring at a simple ring.

"Ayla, when you came back from your errand, all you did was gaze at that ring. Did someone propose to you or something?" Linda sneered.

'It is just a plain ring. Of course, it couldn't possibly be from Brian. Such a modest ring wouldn't be from him'

Ayla ignored the nasty look on Linda's face as she put away the ring.

She kept her voice even when she spoke.

"I didn't know that you have such a vivid imagination, Miss Linda." it was none of her business.

Linda didn't talk loudly, but it had enough volume to be heard by everyone in the Design Department.

All of their attention focused on Ayla.

Ayla said nothing. She just let them think whatever they thought of her. Her explanation would only be regarded as excuses, anyway.

When Ayla got off work, she received a call from Lucas.

"Lala, I'm outside your company building. Shall we go out and have a talk?"

Lucas wanted to explain to Ayla that she was mistaken.

Haley claimed to be his fiancée, but he never agreed to it.

Even if Haley gave birth to their child, he was determined not to marry her.

Without hesitation, Ayla replied, "Okay, wait for me. I'll be there in a few minutes."

The time had come to talk.

It didn't matter whether they had met or not, too many things had already happened which made their relationship quite complicated.

She had gotten along with Lucas for two years.

No matter what was in store in the future, Ayla would still consider him as a friend.

Ayla hung up the phone and got ready to leave.

Seeing this, Linda packed her handbag and followed Ayla downstairs.

Lucas was waiting for Ayla outside the company while leaning against his car.

How could Brian be unaware that Lucas was just outside Clark Group? Without their knowledge, he already knew that Ayla would be meeting with Lucas.