

In a Love Nest with the Aloof CEO Chapter 361

Skylar acted as she believed him, but she could not help but suspect deep down in her heart. When I'm not around, has he been seeing another woman?

She had no idea what type of sport Tobias had in mind, so she casually changed into some activewear. Her face looked even tinier under the baseball cap.

The minute they were heading out, she suddenly remembered something. "What about the meatloaf?"

"I'm not eating that!"

Tobias' unthoughtful response broke her heart.

Later, they arrived at the golf club, where Skylar saw Brayden and a few more strangers around the same age as Tobias.

All of them had the same charisma of passion and wealth.

Almost all of Tobias' friends had heard about his new girlfriend, and one of them recognized Skylar right away.

"I didn't expect Mr. Ford to have gotten into the entertainment industry." The man who recognized Skylar was John Carson, the owner of Countryfuse Pictures.

Compared to the last hangout with Tobias' friends, Skylar noticed this bunch of people seemed civilized; they were especially more polite towards ladies.

To Skylar's amazement, Brayden had also brought along a female company.

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She could not help but whisper curiously into Tobias' ear, "Who's that woman with Brayden?"

"His wife..." Tobias replied.

Skylar could not imagine how Penelope, pregnant at home, would feel if she found out Brayden was bringing his wife to play golf.

After all, when rich people came to the golf club, their real intention was not to play golf most of the time.

Their primary purpose would usually be the business conversation over the dinner table after the golf session.

And so when Skylar overheard them mention Quest Group, she turned extraordinarily interested.

One of them said provocatively, "Thomas seems desperate this time. I heard that he is going to marry his daughter to the rich to rescue the fate of Quest Group."

Tobias asked, "Which daughter?"

The others were puzzled by his question. "Thomas has only got one daughter, doesn't he?"

Skylar tried hard to disguise her emotions. Thomas has hidden his secret well. Who would've believed that he has two daughters?

At that moment, Tobias suddenly added, "I'm planning to take over Quest Group."

His statement left the whole room speechless. That was, without doubt, an investment that would provide no returns. It was hard to believe someone would actually considering investing in a rotten industry.

Brayden was the only one who knew the real reason behind Tobias' investment – to please his woman. But Brayden doubted if the price was overly unworthy.

A big boss always plays big.

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While everyone present was advising Tobias to reconsider his decision, he suddenly said faintly, "I'll need all your help to resolve the mess in Quest Group. It shouldn't be a big issue as long as we find a profitable way to clear the debts."

Skylar moved away from the group then, not being able to bear listening further on the topic.

She randomly picked up a golf club and stared into the vast field. She had no idea how to hit the golf ball.

Just then, Tobias appeared by her side and pulled her into his embrace gently, whispering in her ear. "Let me teach you. Don't feel bored while you accompany me here. You should try to blend in with my social group so that we can all have a similar lifestyle. We still have a lifetime ahead of us."

At the dinner table, Brayden was busy putting food on his wife's plate. He recalled that Penelope mentioned his wife looks old and faded after giving birth to a few children. Penelope had even commented that no man would ever be attracted to his wife.

Brayden had no clue how Penelope had gotten to this conclusion. He wondered if she merely intended to induce conflict into their marriage.

Brayden's wife, namely Zelda, was a gorgeous woman with an elegant look and the perfect body. No wrinkle of age could be observed on her face, and her behavior was modest, given that she was someone from a family of status.

In fact, Penelope was like a speck of dust if compared with Zelda.

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Penelope was evidently still living in the past, dreaming that her children would pave the way for her success.

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After three rounds of drinks, Tobias excused himself and Skylar, unwilling to linger.

After the two of them had left, Zelda sniggered, remarking, "I keep seeing that girl featured on the entertainment news lately. She's thinner than she appears on television and very pretty indeed. I never thought I'd finally get to meet a woman with enough charm to melt Mr. Ford's heart of stone. She has a bright future ahead of her."

Jovially, Brayden retorted, "Would she be able to capture Tobias' heart if she wasn't pretty? Off the top of my head, theirs is the most stable relationship that Tobias has had thus far."

Zelda grinned. "Men are all the same. They'll always fall for youth and beauty. Old women like us spend every waking moment on skincare, but a smooth, pretty face like that instantly throws us out of the running. She's got such an alluring scent, too."

Sensing that the conversation was verging on dangerous territory, Brayden hastily volunteered, "Well, in my heart, my wife is the most beautiful woman of all. No one else even comes close."

Zelda bestowed a gracious smile on him. "I'm glad you know that."

As the car sped past a cafe Skylar frequented, Tobias' earlier words sprung unbidden to mind, in which he'd persuaded her to give up on eating food from common places.

Skylar felt foolish. She had naturally wanted to share the things she loved with Tobias.

However, she wondered if he would think it immature or naive of her. Even worse, he might despise her as someone who had no taste or sophistication.

Tobias' daily lifestyle consisted of golf, fine dining, toting designer goods, and wearing bespoke clothing. He was not a part of high society – he luxuriated in it.

Skylar, however, consistently felt like an imposter amidst these gorgeous trappings. Her constant unease made her feel a sense of suffocation.

Instead of heading straight home, Skylar ordered the chauffeur to make a detour to the cinema. Even if Tobias was reluctant, she was determined to have him watch her latest film, *Virgo*.

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She'd bought tickets to the midnight screening. Lit only by the dim glow of the aisle lamps, she was virtually unrecognizable in the darkness of the cinema.

Once they'd settled into their seats, Tobias immediately vigorously pulled the armrest, transforming the seats into one long seat. Clutching a bucket of popcorn in her hand, Skylar rested her head against his chest, deeply inhaling the fragrance of white sandalwood that was tinged with a faint whiff of alcohol.

Before the film could begin screening, however, Skylar heard a young couple chatting behind them. They spoke loudly with no consideration of cinema etiquette whatsoever.

From their raised voices, Skylar guessed that they were teenagers, probably no older than twenty.

The boy was declaring loudly, "Don't go home tonight. Let's go to the cybercafe first. We'll head over to the hotel at six in the morning. It'll be a new day then, and we can save a day's worth of fees."

The girl was enthusiastically commending his proposal. "Honey, you're really clever! It's such a good plan. Which hotel should we go to?"

There was a pause before the boy spoke again. "Let's go somewhere cheap. We'll be able to spend the amount we've saved on better food then. Haven't you been craving lasagna? We might even be able to get a steak to share!"

If Skylar hadn't met Tobias, she feared that she might very likely have been in their shoes. After all, the biggest obstacle to young love was very often the lack of money to fund it.

Even after the movie began, however, the couple did not pipe down. Skylar distinctly heard the girl quip, "Skylar's very pretty. With that vixen-like face, she's managed to make this retro movie rather refreshing to watch."

Amused, Skylar couldn't decide if she should be flattered to receive such a double-edged compliment.

She turned her attention to Tobias. Throughout the movie, however, his face remained utterly expressionless. At the climax of the film, even she could not resist dabbing at her moist eyes.

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Tobias, on the other hand, looked completely unmoved. A casual observer would not have guessed that he was watching the same movie as Skylar.

After the lights came on, both Skylar and Tobias stayed to watch the credits roll as the cinema gradually emptied. Witnessing her name on the big screen, Skylar felt a renewed sense of accomplishment rise within her.

Turning to Tobias, she exclaimed gleefully, "Do you think I'll get an award for this?"

Patiently, Tobias replied, "Sure."

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At his answer, she raised an eyebrow skeptically. Tobias was evidently uninterested in the entire affair.

They remained in their seats until the janitor looked at them meaningfully, prompting them to leave. Skylar hurriedly followed Tobias out of the cinema.

She held out her hand, but the man adamantly refused to take it. Inwardly, she marveled at Tobias' audacity. Throughout the film, he'd copped multiple feels in the darkness of the cinema. However, he'd returned to his callous self right after the lights came on.

Can't he even hold my hand? Skylar agonized.

At the exit, they ran into the pair that had been blissfully announcing their plans to the entire cinema. The girl was now squatting in a corner earnestly convincing her mother, saying, "Mom, I'm going to stay over at my classmate's house for the next two days. I won't be coming home."

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Skylar felt a grudging sense of admiration for this young girl's dedication to her relationship. Not only did they have to last the night at a cybercafe, but they would also have to drag their wearied bodies, stained with the smell of beer and cigarettes, to a cheap hotel at the crack of dawn. The thought of the journey they would have to undertake was fatiguing enough.

Ruefully, she supposed that the happiness the young couple got out of being together would be worth all that toil.

Seeing Skylar thus distracted, Tobias challenged her rudely, "Why are you always staring at other people? Are you envious of them? She's got a boy toy to spend the weekend with. Is that what you're lusting after?"

Undeterred, Skylar replied with a toss of her head, "Well, is mine willing to spend the weekend with me?"

At her words, Tobias froze, wrinkling his handsome brow.

He was not troubled by the fact that Skylar had referred to him so dismissively, but rather that he was indeed unable to dedicate the entire weekend to her.

They descended by elevator in silence. When the two of them stepped out into the chilly night air, a gust of cold wind blew past them. Tobias instinctively drew Skylar into his warm arms, murmuring in a tender tone, "I know I don't spend much time with you. I promise it'll get better once this year is over."

Skylar smiled but did not allow herself to be taken in that easily. After all, the year had only just begun. Who knows if I'll still be with Tobias next year?

Her mind flashed back to the food she'd been preparing halfway that had since been left to grow cold. Unwilling to let it go to waste, she yearned to head back home to complete her preparations.

Similarly, Tobias was ready to head home. He, too, had work left unfinished. The two of them thus agreed to proceed straight back.

When they stepped into the house, however, Tobias immediately swept Skylar up in his arms, hoisting her up into the air before setting her down on the top of a low dresser. He then spread her legs open and stood before her expectantly.

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In a hoarse voice, he said, "What are you waiting for? Do you need me to teach you how to share what's on your mind? I was afraid that if I didn't do something tonight, you'd be wondering if I was having somebody else on the side all over again."

Tobias had evidently taken Skylar's look of unhappiness throughout the day to heart.

Skylar wreathed her arms tightly around Tobias as he pressed himself against her.

The next day, Skylar visited Penelope at her home. "Skylar, I need to tell you something. Brayden said he's going to gift me this apartment," Penelope whispered conspiratorially as she leaned in towards her friend.

Skylar was certain that men who proclaimed that women looked their best when they were pregnant were telling the most barefaced lie possible.

Surveying her best friend critically, Skylar noted that Penelope had grown plump. Her greasy face was dotted with spots and her nostrils flared.

Dressed in dowdy, loose maternity clothing, Penelope looked a whole ten years older than the attractive girl Skylar knew her to be. Compared to Zelda, Brayden's wife, Penelope was worlds apart.

Instead of congratulating her, Skylar prodded, "Do you think Brayden will marry you? Your belly is growing larger day by day. It isn't easy being a single mother! You're still young. Why don't you look for someone faithful and reliable? Married men are dangerous creatures to get involved with."

Skylar was not much older herself, but she spoke with the worldly wisdom of her elders. After all, with matters of children being born out of wedlock, the one who suffered the most was inevitably the mother.

Thus, despite Tobias' reassurances to the contrary, Skylar always ensured that she dutifully took her birth control pills. The possibility of side effects was one she was more willing to risk than having to raise a child alone.

Penelope smirked, maintaining her confidence. "You're right. I'm young, so I think I'll be able to compete with his old hag of a wife! I've already decided that after this baby is born, I'll

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immediately invest heavily in cosmetics to regain my youthful, radiant look. So what if Brayden's married? He can always get divorced," Penelope concluded contemptuously.

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Seeing that her efforts at wresting Penelope from her daydream were futile, Skylar left the topic at that. She hastily swallowed her next few words of caution.

Penelope sprawled on the sofa, scrolling through her phone and enthusiastically picking out clothes for her unborn child. Skylar snuck a glance over her shoulder.

Seeing that the other woman was browsing luxury brands such as Burberry and Gucci, each item of clothing exhibiting a minimum price tag of a thousand, Skylar suggested kindly, "The baby will grow up really fast. There's no need to buy such expensive clothes if he outgrows them every few days."

Scornfully, Penelope answered, "My family was too poor to buy me good clothes when I was young. I won't let my son suffer from the same fate! His father's a rich man. We'll spare no expense for his child, I'm sure."

Helplessly, Skylar replied, "All right. I have to be on set later, so I'll head back now. Tobias is waiting for me downstairs."

Spitefully, Penelope said, "Why didn't he come up here? Does he not want to see me that badly?"

Skylar heaved a sigh. "You're overthinking things. He's smoking in the car. Besides, he doesn't really know you, either, and might be afraid to make things awkward."

Penelope happily replied, "Well, he's Brayden's friend. I'm sure we'll have plenty of opportunities to get to know each other in the future."

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Skylar massaged her temple in despair. No matter how awful Penelope's desires were, she nonetheless loyally wished the best for her.

However, Skylar decided to refrain from advising Penelope based on any sort of moral standards, seeing as to how the latter was clearly unfazed by them.

As she waited for the elevator to rise, Skylar felt the insistent buzzing of her phone in the bag. She immediately fished it out and held it to her ear without bothering to note who the call was from.

"I'm sorry, but perhaps we shouldn't contact each other anymore. I don't want any trouble," Harry's voice blurted out over the line. He sounded as if he was in a great hurry to end the call. "I called to know if Ingrid has caused you any problems."

Skylar bit her lip. She was touched that amidst Harry's difficulties, he'd nonetheless thought to spare some concern for her wellbeing.

"Nope," she replied, then hung up the phone quickly. She had never doubted the arrangements that Kate made for her. This imaginary affair between Skylar and Harry, meant to captivate public interest and generate publicity, had been the only dubious move.

Instead of reaping the supposed rewards of this partnership, Skylar had only suffered as a result.

The mention of Ingrid sent a shiver down her spine.

Kai had warned Skylar about Ingrid in particular, vehemently contending that Ingrid was a most fearsome match.

When Ingrid had still been a teenager in school, she'd gotten into multiple fights. One of her notable achievements included sending her opponent into the ICU.

Even though years had passed since then, the other teenage girl was still relying on a respirator for life support.

The other girl's parents, naturally, demanded blood. Discontent with the settlement offered them by the Fords, they sought a reprisal in court.

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However, the might and wealth of the Fords were unrivaled. They won the suit effortlessly, and the incident even added to Ingrid's bragging rights of being absolutely untouchable.

Compared to his sister, Sheldon's low profile was considered the preferred choice. He was useless, but even if he failed to help the Fords, at least he did not hinder them.

When Skylar got downstairs, Tobias' car was already waiting for her. She slid into the passenger seat and waited to recollect herself.

With one hand on the steering wheel, Tobias darted a sideways glance at Skylar. "That was quick," he commented. "Didn't you say you had things to discuss?"

Skylar looked down, twisting her hands together. "I didn't want to say too much and agitate Penelope. She still thinks Brayden will marry her. I'm afraid she won't be able to accept the truth."

Tobias contemplated their surroundings. Penelope's dwelling was somewhat in the outskirts of the city. The apartments here, based on Tobias' keen eye, were approximately five hundred thousand square feet.

The man scoffed. "Brayden's rather stingy, setting her up here. Is the apartment bought or rented?"

"Rented," Skylar replied.

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Skylar vaguely recalled Penelope once boasting to her that Brayden had paid three months of rent all at once, which added up to a grand total of nearly one thousand seven hundred.

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Tobias gave a low whistle. “The bar’s really getting lower and lower these days, isn’t it? All you have to do to buy a woman over is to rent her an apartment, and she’ll gladly carry a child to term for you.”

Skylar felt her dislike for Brayden swell into intense hatred. No amount of wealth was enough to conceal the fact that he was fundamentally a loathsome character.

Annoyed by Tobias’ flippant response, she snapped, “Do you want to get out there too, then? Since women nowadays aren’t as much of goldiggers as they were before, you definitely won’t be lacking in a supply of young girls for your harem.”

Tobias wisely refused to allow himself to be drawn into such a conversation. He had never treated his women meanly. Besides, ever since meeting Skylar, he had never considered putting himself back out on the dating scene.

They drove in companionable silence to the set, where Tobias dropped Skylar off. Hannah was already waiting for her in the dressing room.

As Tobias drove away, his secretary called to inform him that Claudia had arrived at the office.

Tobias hurried into the office to find the woman seated by the side, her long legs crossed elegantly. She was wearing an emerald-green dress that showed off a slender figure despite her age.

“You left the office already so early in the afternoon?” Claudia chided teasingly.

“No one said I have to be here all the time. Did you come here just to interrogate me about my working hours?” Tobias curtly replied.

“Everyone’s having a field day with the news that you’re taking over Quest Group. I really can’t comprehend how you can absorb such a liability just for that woman. You must be mad,” Claudia answered frankly, delving right into the heart of the matter.

Tobias had not imagined that the news would travel so quickly.

“It has nothing to do with her. Nobody can force me to do things I’m not willing to. I was fully on board with taking over Quest Group,” Tobias said gruffly.

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Claudia decided not to pursue the matter. Knowing her son's obstinacy, challenging him would only harden his heart further.

"Bring her back home tomorrow. We can have dinner together," she suggested in a milder tone.

Tobias raised his head and met Claudia's eyes with a piercing gaze before he said evenly, "It's not convenient. She's very busy..."

"You've dated for quite a while now. Is it so difficult to persuade her to meet your mother?" Claudia interrupted.

Unbothered by the note of warning in Claudia's voice, Tobias continued, "Relax, we're not preparing to marry each other just yet. We can have dinner with or without her."

"Why are you being so defensive of her? Are you afraid I'll drive her away?" Claudia sniffed, looking hurt.

She had meant it as a joke, but Tobias immediately agreed. "I'm afraid you'll skin Skylar alive. I don't want to upset her. She's young and might not be able to withstand your vicious words."

A look of discontent appeared on Claudia's face. Whenever the conversation veered towards a sensitive subject like this, a dead-end was inevitable.

"Ingrid's back home. I think Dad's attention will be fully focused on her for a while," Tobias remarked. He, too, was all too familiar with the tension that hovered over both their heads and was anxious to change the subject.

Disdainfully, Claudia replied, "Having a daughter like Ingrid is just retribution for Xander."

Tobias merely shrugged, reserving his opinion.

Xander had a terrible habit of spoiling Ingrid. He lavished a tremendous amount of affection and gifts on his daughter; Ingrid could do no wrong in his eyes.

Tobias, however, privately wondered if Ingrid was a displacement of the love Xander had wanted to pour into his marriage instead.

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Xander had never displayed much affection for either Tobias or Sheldon. Neither had he done much by way of his role as a father. In all of Tobias' childhood memories, not a day went by without Xander and Claudia getting into one fight or another.

Claudia radiated an air of sophistication outwardly but resembled a demon at home. Xander's temper only served to add oil to the hellfire.

Whenever Tobias meekly crept up to his parents and begged them to stop fighting, Xander would inevitably direct his rage towards him. Bellowing with tremendous fury, Xander had, on numerous occasions, lambasted Tobias with all sorts of abuse, saying that he was a bastard who should never even have been born.

Tobias had since thoroughly internalized this school of thought, often feeling that he didn't deserve to live. People who had borne witness to Xander's cruelty had often called him inhumane – even worse than an animal.

It was Skylar's first appearance on a reality show.

Before the filming again, no one knew that Harry would be featured on Battle of Stars until he showed up on set.

The man had grown leaner. Attired in a jacket and shorts – from which his thin legs jutted out like sticks – along with a white baseball cap, his appearance was completely lacking in masculinity.

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Having just hung up on him earlier that afternoon, Skylar felt a little awkward coming face-to-face with Harry again.

Harry sat a little way off from her in the dressing room. At last, he brought his chair over and sat next to her.

"Are you OK?" he asked in a low voice.

Skylar slowly took off her earrings and replaced them with small pink studs before replying to Harry deliberately, "I'm fine. I didn't lose any limbs, so I think I'll still survive."

Harry's face was thin and wan in Skylar's mirror. Looking at this ghost of his past self, he brooded over how long he would have to remain under Ingrid's vengeful clutches.

Outside, Harry's fans had swarmed in and surrounded the set. In order to generate a little more buzz, Kate had helpfully exposed Skylar's filming schedule and location to various fan clubs.

Hearing the crowd clamor for her, Skylar felt both flattered and overwhelmed. She straightened her face, however, nodding and waving politely to her fans.

She intentionally drew nearer to Winnie, keeping her distance from Harry. It did not stop her from fearing the watchful gaze that might be scrutinizing her every move behind the screen, though.

On the other hand, Winnie was obviously displeased with the fact that Skylar's fans outnumbered hers.

During the games segment, the contestants sat in a circle, guessing the lyrics of songs that were playing in turn. Each of them sat on special collapsible chairs, holding a bucket of water. If they gave the wrong answer, the chair would immediately tip backward and launch the bucket of water onto the helpless contestant.

The actors from Unrequited Love were on one team, while the hosts were on the other.

Skylar worried a little if the makeup artist had received the memo and used waterproof makeup.

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Eager to prove herself, Winnie fought for a chance to answer only to fumble.

Her entire team was punished accordingly. The chairs tipped backward and Winnie seized the opportunity to pour her bucket of water over Skylar as well.

Skylar was utterly drenched from head to toe. Presuming that this was part of the show's entertainment, the audience roared with laughter.

Skylar shook herself off, but her wet hair clung like tendrils to the side of her face. As she had predicted, her makeup, too, had run.

Winnie smiled patronizingly, declaring, "I was going to pour it on the floor! My hand just slipped."

Skylar scowled at her. She had no doubt that Winnie had done so on purpose.

The next few rounds yielded the same result. Winnie promptly gave wrong answers and continued pouring water onto Skylar.

Skylar, however, refused to retaliate. The filming took a technical break when water entered her microphone. When the crew ran over to change it, they kindly offered her a few towels for her to dry herself off.

She hung the towel over her head to cover her face. Her mascara had streaked, and so had her lipstick. Unable to stand by idly any further, Harry rushed over and draped his dry towel over Skylar's shoulders.

Turning off his microphone, the man asked softly, "Are you stupid? Why don't you pour your water on her?"

Skylar could not reject Harry's gesture in front of such a large crowd.

Even though the weather was warm, her wet clothes stuck to her skin. She let out a gigantic sneeze.

After the filming session had finally ended, she charged straight back to the dressing room to warm herself.

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Hannah, meanwhile, was fuming. “Winnie was clearly sabotaging you! Didn’t you see that look of glee on her face?”

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Winnie, who was standing bone-dry behind them in the dressing room, laughed delightfully. “I’m really sorry. I’m rather weak, and I can’t balance very well. I hope you’re OK, Skylar. The audience seemed to have really enjoyed themselves because of you, though. We can credit today’s success entirely to you.”

Skylar was in the midst of removing her mascara when she looked coolly at Winnie, who was stifling a giggle behind her manicured hands. “It’s fine. It’s just a show.”

Winnie patted Skylar’s shoulder encouragingly. “That’s the right attitude! I was worried that you might take offense. You look just like a panda with your smudged eyeshadow and mascara. You’d better remind your makeup artist to use waterproof makeup next time.”

Skylar refused to dignify the woman’s condescending remarks with a reply, and merely gazed at her steadfastly until Winnie turned away uneasily.

By the time Winnie and her assistant had exited the dressing room, Skylar had finished changing.

When that episode finally aired the same week, Winnie emerged on social media sites as a trending topic. Skylar persuaded Kate to buy over multiple verified accounts, who whipped netizens up into a frenzy with a few notable hashtags: #SoreLoserWinnie #IStandWithSkylar

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Winnie was right. The episode was a success, but not in the way she had hoped. It went viral for the purported story of Winnie deliberately sabotaging Skylar. Netizens filled in the rest of the blanks with their own gossip.

Skylar's refusal to retaliate was heralded as a commendable display of sportsmanship. Her public image instantly did a 180-degree about-turn when netizens fussed over her graciousness in the face of defeat even though they hotly demanded why she had allowed Winnie to bully her.

The entire debacle resulted in propelling Skylar's Instagram followers to nearly one million.

Kate was over the moon. She continually praised Skylar for her self-restraint when Winnie had been stomping all over her.

Skylar lowered her gaze modestly. Scrolling through her phone, she smiled, saying, "Social media sites love siding the victim."

On the other hand, Winnie was the recipient of the torrent of abuse that poured in from all over the Internet.

What a b*tch! How could she treat Skylar that way?

She's a terrible person. Winnie obviously planned the whole thing.

Disgusting. She's evil.

The onslaught of harsh comments filled every one of Winnie's posts on Instagram and flooded her direct messages. Winnie read a few, then flung her phone away from her in vexation.

She finally understood how Skylar had managed to keep her cool despite her repeated torments. Skylar had even maintained her demure smile, refusing to change out of her sodden clothes.

Skylar had wanted the image of her pitiful self to be seared in everyone's minds, knowing that netizens would pounce on it with their pity and indignation. There was no need for her to retaliate as the netizens would rip Winnie to shreds for her.

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It was no coincidence that multiple verified accounts had been able to expose so many of Winnie's questionable acts simultaneously. Winnie's reputation had been thoroughly dragged through the mud practically overnight.

Winnie was certain that Skylar had bought over those influential social media accounts.

Intent on getting her revenge, Winnie and her manager, Cindy, stormed over to Valerie, the CEO of Royal Entertainment.

Even though Winnie and Skylar were managed by the same company, the former was prepared to fight tooth and nail to prove that Skylar's behavior was akin to betraying the company.

Just as Winnie barged into Valerie's office, she was greeted by the sight of Tobias already seated within.

Dumbfounded at the sight of the company's owner, Winnie halted in her tracks, then stammered, "Tobi..."

Tobias frowned as he remarked sharply, "Who are you to call me that?"

Winnie gaped at the man uncomprehendingly. Floundering, she explained, "I'm Sheldon's girlfriend, don't you remember?"

Tobias leered at her. Winnie was indeed compatible with Sheldon. Neither of them seemed very bright.

The woman's next statement confirmed that to be true. Before Tobias could say another word, she immediately launched into a long rant.

"Ms. Fey, Skylar's totally evil! We're colleagues, yet she stepped all over me to give herself a boost in popularity. Everyone's cursing me on Instagram now, calling me a sore loser. Skylar sabotaged me on purpose! I did nothing to her. She's so jealous of me," Winnie whined.

Seeing that the owner of Royal Entertainment was present, Winnie thought she would maximize the opportunity to expose Skylar's true self to Tobias. Winnie was determined to let Tobias know just how much of a b*tch Skylar was.

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Valerie, however, cleared her throat sharply, indicating that the conversation was over.

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Winnie, however, did not get the hint. She continued lamenting, "I'm losing fans like crazy! Everyone's saying that I'm a terrible person. All I did was try to boost ratings and make the show a success. Skylar agreed with me! Now she's turned around and backstabbed me without caring about how the company looks. She's so selfish!"

In a stern voice, Valerie replied, "Enough. I don't want to hear another word from you. Mr. Ford and I have work to discuss."

Winnie froze. Relying on her relationship with Sheldon, Winnie arrogantly retorted, "Ms. Fey, how can you say that? Don't you care about me? Can you really stand by and watch your artists behave maliciously without doing anything?"

Tobias grinned at Winnie. "What's going on? Tell me, then."

The woman paused, realization dawning upon her. Tobias doesn't know what's going on! That must be why he didn't take me seriously at first.

Winnie recalled Sheldon having once told her offhandedly that Tobias liked Skylar because he found her innocence enchanting.

Sheldon had also emphasized that Tobias didn't like women who were complex and manipulative, particularly those domineering and career-driven ones.

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Winnie fished for her phone, then played the episode for Tobias to view. The number of viewers had now climbed to a staggering few hundred thousand.

Tobias finally caught a glimpse of Skylar being wickedly doused by Winnie's buckets of water. Skylar looked rather delicate when she was soaking wet, rubbing her eyes as if in extreme discomfort. However, she soldiered on bravely until the end of the episode.

Beside Tobias, Winnie was chattering on. "This was all for the show, of course. Afterward, Skylar privately went to get several verified accounts on Instagram to slander me by saying that I had done it intentionally."

Valerie swiftly tried to rescue Winnie. "It was just acting. Besides, the ratings this week were excellent."

Tobias, however, remained silent as he watched the entire episode to the end. He then turned towards Winnie, his gaze unfathomable.

Winnie, interpreting his silence as agreement, continued to denigrate Skylar.

As she spoke, Tobias reached for a cup of hot tea that was still steaming on the desk beside him. He looked intently at Winnie, then raised his cup.

The stream of hot tea soon cascaded down Winnie's head and back. Fortunately, the tea had been left to cool for a while – the woman would certainly have been scalded if otherwise.

As the last drops of tea trickled down Winnie's face, she gaped with mute horror at Tobias.

"It's just acting. Don't take it to heart," Tobias said cheerfully. His eyes, however, were venomous.

Looking at the dazed look in Winnie's eyes, Valerie reflected that the woman's outstanding talents and looks were surely nature's way of compensating for her lack of intelligence.

Otherwise, how could she not have had the patience to wait just a little while longer before condemning Skylar? Had Winnie totally forgotten that Tobias was sweet on Skylar?

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Before Tobias left, he solemnly reminded Valerie to look after Skylar. It didn't matter whether she was popular; he didn't want her to be put under too much pressure.

Valerie naturally had no objections and was bent on showing Tobias her newest marketing strategies.

Tobias waved Valerie's enthusiasm aside dismissively. "I'll leave matters in your capable hands. Other than anything concerning Skylar, you can inform me of everything else via email."

Valerie nodded, privately envying Skylar of her good fortune.

Tobias sauntered out of the office only to find Winnie squatting in the hallway outside, sobbing into her phone. "I didn't do anything wrong! Why is everyone out to get me?"

His towering figure loomed over her. Realizing that he was next to her, Winnie hastily raised her head to look at him, still sniveling.

In an unhurried manner, he informed her, "There's no use you crying to Sheldon. He won't be able to do anything for you."

Winnie wiped her face on her sleeve. It did nothing much to improve her tearstained face and swollen eyes.

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"Tobias, Skylar isn't as innocent as you think. She's a malicious person! She's going all out to achieve fame right now regardless of what it takes, even if it means trampling all over everyone else. Everything I said in the office was true," Winnie insisted brokenly.

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Whether out of sheer defiance or stupidity, Winnie stood her ground. Tobias eyed her as he lit a cigarette and spewed out a mouthful of smoke, sneering, "Don't call me Tobias. We're not related, and neither are we on intimate terms with each other. Who said I liked innocent women? They always end up being quite foolish like you."

Winnie cringed when she remembered that Sheldon was still on the other end of the line, hanging onto every word.

Tobias headed downstairs to wait for Skylar, who had excitedly told him earlier that day that she would be in the studio recording her new single, Demon.

Tobias had never heard Skylar sing. He thought she should focus on honing her acting skills rather than embarking on a whole other endeavor entirely, but he didn't have the heart to say so.

After all, as the saying went, a jack of all trades was very often a master of none.

Skylar's emerged breezily from the office, carrying only a thermos flask in one hand.

Tobias drew another long puff of his cigarette. Ash drifted onto his pants, which he dusted leisurely off.

Watching Tobias from afar, Skylar paused to admire the fine silhouette his handsome profile cut against the night sky.

When the man turned to look in her direction, she hurried over, waving wildly to him. "Are you here to fetch me home?" Skylar asked, her eyes shining.

Tobias, however, had urgent matters to attend to at the office. Since he had promised to spend the day with Skylar regardless, he had no choice but to bring her to the office with him.

Even though it was nearly midnight, the fluorescent office lights in the Ford Group building were still ablaze. Skylar groaned inwardly. Don't these people have anything better to do than to work? I'd rather be sleeping! She recalled reading somewhere that working long hours and not getting sleep increased one's risk of getting a stroke.

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Skylar had long bemoaned the amount of time she dedicated to her work. The employees at Ford Group, however, were on a whole different level of commitment.

Only the very young and able-bodied could possibly hope to keep up in this intensely competitive and draining environment.

Eva was still in the office. She'd always been jealous of her cousin. They'd last met each other at their family dinner but had not been in contact since.

Eva caught a glimpse of Skylar's resentful face as the latter sat in the office. If not for Tobias sitting next to Skylar, Eva would have hurried past without saying a word.

Skylar set her thermos flask and brown coat down on Tobias' desk. The Hermes logo gleamed under the harsh white glow of the fluorescent office lights. Not too long ago, Eva had haughtily presumed it to be a fake. Alas, she had been quickly proven wrong.

As Eva tidied up the documents that had been scattered all over the table, she watched Skylar and Tobias out of the corner of her eye. Skylar was sitting rigidly on the sofa while Tobias coaxed her, "Are you tired? If you're sleepy, I can get the chauffeur to send you home. I did keep my promise of accompanying you today, after all, so don't say I didn't."

Peevishly, Skylar retorted, "I sound like a task you're way too eager to tick off your to-do list. If you're that unwilling, or you think that I'm a hindrance to your work, I'll leave, then."

Undeterred, Tobias continued in a meeker tone, "Why would you say that? That's not what I'm thinking at all. I'll head off to my meeting first. I'll do my best to be back as soon as possible."

Eva raised her head slightly, sneaking a look at Tobias stroking Skylar's hair in an effort to pacify her. Watching that, she felt a growing bitterness rise within her.

Despite the woman that Skylar had grown to become, she was still that unwanted, unhappy girl in Eva's mind. Skylar was a mediocre performer with nothing especially worthy about her.

Eva thus could not even begin to fathom why Tobias was so enamored with Skylar. Wasn't like supposed to attract like? Eva thought cattily.

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Tobias, in the meantime, straightened his tie and headed out of the office.

This left Eva with Skylar. It was so quiet that one could hear the minute rustling of the pages as the former flipped through them.

Skylar did not even glance at Eva. She took out her phone and began scrolling flippantly through social media, occasionally breaking into a yawn. Her bent head exposed the creamy white skin at the nape of her neck. At that moment, unconsciously, Skylar looked the very image of alluring femininity.

On her screen, Skylar saw that Penelope had posted a new Instagram story.

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Why don't you treasure what I give you? Penelope had written feelingly in small, white text against a plain black background. She had evidently done so with the intention of soliciting comfort from her friends on social media.

Skylar pondered this for a while but ultimately scrolled away without reacting to it.

"We've been continuously working overtime lately because of your father's company," Eva intoned, breaking the hush in the office. She picked up the last document and added it to her neat stack, then strode over to Skylar.

Skylar turned to look at Eva, then said quietly, "Eva, what are you blaming me for? I don't get a single cent from Quest Group, you know."

Eva was dressed in a rather risqué, fitting blouse and mini-skirt. She'd left the top three buttons of her blouse undone, exposing a peek of the smooth white skin on her chest for all to see.

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Skylar realized that Eva had a rather impressive figure, being treated as she was to a rather expansive view of Eva's body through the plunging V-neck that the blouse now afforded.

So this is the view Tobias sees every day! Skylar mused.

Eva replied coldly, "You know very well what I'm talking about. You made such a scene during the family dinner. Everyone was so upset."

Skylar reclined against the sofa and batted off a yawn. "Do you mean that you were upset, wondering how on earth I could have managed to snag Tobias? You don't think I'm good enough for him, do you? Are you upset that I'm doing better than you?"

Skylar's jeers had accurately pierced right to the heart of Eva's disgruntlement.

The other woman snorted. "In real life, ugly ducklings don't magically turn into swans. Tobias' mother came over to the office today, and I overheard them talking about you."

From the exultant look on Eva's face, Skylar instantly perceived that it had not been a pleasant discussion.

She looked at Eva with distaste. "Keep whatever you heard to yourself. I'm not interested."

Eva smiled slyly. "I suppose you know just as well as I do what transpired during that conversation. I have to say it was pretty generous of his mother, though, inviting you to dinner."

Eva's words struck Skylar like a bolt of lightning. Racking her brains furiously, Skylar struggled to remember if Tobias had raised this matter with her. Was it because there wasn't time?

In her mind, she had already begun frantically ransacking her wardrobe for suitable clothes to wear to this meeting.

Eva grinned unkindly. "Mr. Ford refused, though. He said that the two of you weren't getting married anytime soon and that there was no reason to bring you home to meet his family."

At that, Skylar felt a wave of disappointment wash over her. However, she had to admit that that was a more likely response of Tobias'.

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Determined not to let Eva get the better of her, she flashed a dazzling smile in return. "I didn't expect you to be in the habit of eavesdropping, Eva. It's true, though. We've decided to take things slowly."

Eva shrugged carelessly. "Good luck, then. When you eventually get married, if you do, I'll be the first to congratulate you."

A while later, Tobias stepped out of the meeting room wearily. His mind was throbbing with the seemingly infinite number of emergencies he would have to attend to. His thoughts, however, were arrested at the sight of Skylar sitting forlornly on the sofa. She was waiting for him.

The man's tense features softened. He crossed over to Skylar and ran his fingers through her hair lovingly. "Come on, I'll send you home. You haven't eaten anything yet, have you? What would you like?"

Skylar shook her head. "I don't eat anything after six in the evening. It'll make me gain weight."

Tobias' attention was abruptly drawn to the fact that Skylar did look a lot thinner than she had a while ago. She had always been slender, but now, she was on the verge of appearing bony.

After all, part of Skylar's job, being in the entertainment industry, was to conform to their beauty standards, no matter how oppressive.

"What's the point of living if you don't get to eat good food?" Tobias said, trying to tempt Skylar.

It didn't take much for him to persuade her. She, too, was of the firm conviction that food was one of the things that made life enjoyable.

Skylar thus relented quickly. Her first thought was of having a simple plate of pasta to satisfy her hunger.

However, she stifled her craving in consideration of Tobias' refined taste. She thus suggested boldly, "Let's eat seafood. The kind that costs no less than a thousand per person."

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As she'd expected, Tobias didn't bat an eyelid. As long he could do so, Skylar could consider all of her wishes granted.

She had imagined supper to be an intimate affair between herself and Tobias. As they were driving towards the restaurant, however, a car stopped before them. It was Sheldon.

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