

The Contracted Ever After (Cordelia and Ronan) Chapter 1 - 10

Chapter 1

Cordelia woke up in the middle of the night, feeling utterly knackered.

Long story short, no one would believe it, but she had slept with Ronan last night. It was her first time, and it didn't feel particularly special, just painful. What left a deep impression on her was when Ronan's beard brushed against her cheek, his breath on her neck, his kisses on her ear, and his deep voice accompanying their physical contact, making Cordelia's body unbearably hot. Throughout the process, Ronan kept murmuring a name into Cordelia's ear. Despite not being able to make out the name, it did nothing to lessen Cordelia's excitement and nervousness.

In the middle of the night, Cordelia woke up. Ronan was still asleep. She glanced at the man's serious face and somehow felt closer to him. She craved the warmth of his embrace and even fantasized about continuing to lie next to him, holding him as she slept. But she knew that if she didn't leave now, it would mean trouble. Ronan was the CEO of Lumos Enterprises, who had slept with an intern, Cordelia. She knew the consequences would be dire. At best, she would lose her job and be kicked out; at worst, she would be labeled as "the intern who seduced the boss." Her reputation would be shattered, and she would have no place in Millstone. Yesterday was the first day of team building, and Ronan got drunk in the evening. He grabbed Cordelia's hand, who was helping him to his room, and kissed her without warning. Cordelia initially wanted to resist, but when she saw Ronan's face, she was somehow in a daze and couldn't resist. Before this, Cordelia hadn't even had any direct contact with Ronan.

Cordelia stumbled back to her room, pretending that nothing had happened, until six in the evening, when several buses arrived and were parked in front of the hotel to take them back to the company.

Cordelia got on the bus with another intern, Brooklyn. As soon as they got on the bus, they saw someone sitting in the first row, resting with his eyes closed, giving Cordelia quite a start. If it was not Ronan, who else could it be?

The bus was filled with people, with only the seats next to and behind Ronan empty. Cordelia's face immediately turned red, and since she and Brooklyn were late, they had no choice but to sit behind Ronan.

“Didn't Mr. Evans drive here himself? Why is he taking the bus back with us this time?” Brooklyn whispered in Cordelia's ear: Brooklyn had a loud voice, and even when she was “whispering,” everyone could hear her clearly.

“I don't know,” Cordelia replied, looking down at her feet.

When she got on the bus, she tried to hide her face, afraid that Ronan would recognize her. But she also had a glimmer of hope that perhaps Ronan didn't remember what happened last night. Even if he did, he wouldn't know that it was Cordelia since he hadn't had any contact with her before, and he was drunk, and the lights were off for most of the night.

The ride was long, and Brooklyn started playing with her phone. Cordelia wanted to do the same, but she couldn't find her phone anywhere.

Cordelia nudged Brooklyn, “Can you call my phone? I can't find it.”

“Where did you leave it?” Brooklyn asked as she dialed Cordelia's number.

The ringtone sounded, but it wasn't coming from Cordelia's bag or her suitcase, but from the seat in front of them, more precisely, from Ronan's hand.

Cordelia tensed up, feeling as if all the hairs on her body were standing on end.

Chapter 2

On the bus, Ronan's presence had turned the colleagues into silent statues, making Cordelia's phone ringtone sound like a freaking fire alarm in the quietness.

Last night, Cordelia had helped a wasted Ronan back to his room, and her phone, stashed in her pocket, must've slipped out while she was undressing. After the wild night of passion, she'd completely forgotten about the phone's existence.

The sudden ringtone scared the crap out of Cordelia, but she quickly got her shit together. It seemed that Ronan's reason for taking the bus today might have just been to wait for her, his "target." He might have known that she was the one he'd been with last night, or he might have not. But when the phone rang, and considering what Brooklyn had just said to her, she guessed that Ronan was in the know.

That thought made Cordelia feel pretty awkward.

Brooklyn looked at Cordelia with a puzzled look, then glanced at Ronan, clearly indicating, "What the hell is going on?"

"Stop calling." Cordelia held Brooklyn's hand. She couldn't handle more embarrassment. She didn't even know how to explain this mess.

"What on earth is going on? How did your phone end up in Mr. Evans hands?" Brooklyn whispered to Cordelia, her curiosity sparked.

"I..." Just as Cordelia was drowning in embarrassment, Ronan in the front row suddenly turned around, nearly scaring the shit out of Cordelia.

"Is this your phone?" Ronan asked Brooklyn, holding up Cordelia's phone, which was displaying "Crazy B." Crazy B was the nickname Cordelia had given Brooklyn.

Brooklyn, looking like a deer caught in headlights, nodded, and said, “Yes, Mr. Evans, Cordelia couldn’t find her phone, so I called it.”

Brooklyn even mentioned the name “Cordelia,” now there was no way for Cordelia to avoid this topic.

“Your phone? You left it in the front seat when you were carrying your suitcase.” Ronan’s gaze turned towards Cordelia. His eyes were indifferent but dark, familiar yet uniquely Ronan’s. Cordelia was utterly lost.

“Oh, I’m such a klutz. Thank you, Mr. Evans.” Despite her nervousness, Cordelia thanked Ronan, took the phone from his hand, and played along with his act.

After diffusing the awkwardness, Ronan turned back around.

Although Cordelia appeared to be looking at her phone, she wasn’t really seeing anything. The way Ronan had returned her phone seemed to be a reminder that last night’s event was over! Cordelia was a grown-up, she could handle this. She’d already planned to chalk up last night’s event as a dream.

She didn’t know if Ronan remembered her name, was that a good thing or a bad thing? Cordelia began to hope against hope. He had so much on his plate every day, how could he possibly concern himself with such a trivial matter?

Half a month passed in the blink of an eye, and Cordelia hadn’t seen Ronan again. Even for company meetings, only the higher-ups were present, and she was just an intern who could stay or leave. Apart from worrying about her future at Lumos Enterprises, Cordelia occasionally thought of Ronan, and that passionate night.

After all, it was her first time.

One day, the landline on Cordelia’s desk rang.

“Cordelia?” The voice on the other end of the phone asked.

Cordelia felt a rush of nervousness. The voice, why did it sound like Ronan? Ever since that night, Ronan’s voice uttering “Turn off the lights,” had been echoing in Cordelia’s mind, so the voice was not unfamiliar to her.

“Yes.”

“Come to my office.”

“Huh?”

“Come to my office, The voice repeated.

“Okay.” Cordelia felt anxious, thinking it couldn’t be work-related. The gap between her and Ronan’s positions was too huge. Even if there was a work-related issue, they wouldn’t come to her. Could it be about the team-building day? Was Ronan trying to let her go, to prevent more people from finding out about that day?

When she knocked on the door of Ronan’s office, Cordelia found that Ronan wasn’t as absent-minded as he was on the team-building day. Instead, he was sizing her up from head to toe, the scrutiny making Cordelia’s heart flutter. And those scrutinizing eyes, though deep, were incredibly captivating to Cordelia.

So, Cordelia just stared greedily at Ronan, making him slightly uneasy. “Is there something on my face?” he asked Cordelia,

Cordelia snapped back to reality. “Huh?”

Ronan didn’t continue the topic. Instead, he asked Cordelia directly, “Will you marry me?”

Cordelia furrowed her brows. “Huh?” She said again. This topic was way off from what she’d been thinking.

Chapter 3

Cordelia looked around, finding no one else in the office.

“I’m talking to you.” said Ronan..

“What?”

“Marry me.” Ronan repeated.

Cordelia's mind slowly returned to the topic "Marry me." She was a bit shocked. She had thought about marriage before, but with only a month left until her college graduation, she wasn't even considering it.

Cordelia wondered, was Ronan testing her? After all, for a CEO, having a relationship with an intern was not necessarily a loss, but it wasn't a good thing either. He might have wanted to know if Cordelia had any plans of crossing the line.

Cordelia felt conflicted. For her, Ronan's warm embrace and his gaze, plus their unexpected romp in the sack, set him apart from other men. But she knew, whether in this life or the next, they could never be together. The reason Ronan proposed to her, a woman who wasn't his social equal, was definitely not because he liked her. Thinking back to Ronan's warning when he returned her phone, Cordelia was certain that he was just worried she would cause him trouble.

So, she lied, "I have a boyfriend."

"Are you two planning to get married?" Ronan asked.

"Oh, not yet. We haven't graduated yet, no financial foundation," Cordelia responded, keeping her cool.

"So, how far have you two gone?" Ronan seemed unexpectedly interested in Cordelia's personal life.

Unsure of what Ronan was thinking, Cordelia answered, "We...are living together already."

What she meant was that she had a boyfriend, they'd done the deed, she didn't want her boyfriend to overthink, and she wouldn't go around talking about sleeping with other

men. She would keep what happened at the team building event a secret and put Mr. Evans' mind at ease.

“Living together?” Ronan frowned slightly. She was clearly a virgin that night.

Seeing his reaction, Cordelia knew what he was thinking. She quickly added, “We have been dating for several years and only moved in together after the team building event. After all, we just moved out of the dorms and found a suitable place.”

“Don't you want to know why I want to marry you?” Ronan was not particularly shocked to hear about Cordelia's boyfriend.

“Why?”

“My grandfather is very ill and wants to see me married before he dies, but I don't have a girlfriend. As for why I chose you, you know better than anyone. I looked around, and you were the best fit.” Ronan sat in his office chair, confident.

“You're the best fit,” was, no doubt, a blow to Cordelia's pride. They'd hooked up, which made her the perfect fit. If he asked someone else, there would have been a lot of hesitation, but with Cordelia, he could have skipped that step.

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Although she knew Ronan didn't want to marry her because he liked her, hearing his reason, Cordelia couldn't help but feel disappointed. It seemed he not only remembered that night but remembered it very clearly. Ronan's voice revealed his disdain for Cordelia. Even though he was asking for her help, he still looked down on her.

In his eyes, she was just a calculating woman trying to hook up with her boss. She'd slept with him and deliberately left her phone in his room. She clearly wanted a rich husband but pretended to be innocent and pure. How could she expect him to respect her?

"Name your price, whatever you want," Ronan said dismissively. "But try not to go over five million."

Five million was indeed a large sum, but for Cordelia, it was not irresistible. After a silence, she delicately suggested, "Mr. Evan's, you could consider a fake marriage."

"If

my grandfather found out, it would be a big problem."

"Besides, the marriage license is secondary. The important thing is to find someone. Only when my grandfather sees this person will he be at ease." Ronan answered Cordelia's question with surprising patience.

Cordelia slowly nodded, then bit her lip in thought, considering how to turn him down.

Seeing Cordelia's hesitation, Ronan added, "This marriage has a time limit. If you agree, we can get the marriage license tomorrow. As for the end date..." "I disagree!" Cordelia firmly declared.

Ronan's unfinished sentence never got the chance to be spoken. He just stared at Cordelia. This was the first time someone had rejected him, with no bargaining whatsoever.

Chapter 4

Ronan was sizing up Cordelia, trying to figure out her real agenda for spending the night with him. Did she purposely leave her phone in his room to grab his attention? But now

that she was playing hard to get, he was seeing her in a new light. Still, if she changed her tune later, he would think even less of her. After all, playing hard to get was so last season in his book.

“Alright, you can leave now,” he said coldly.-

Back in the office, Cordelia wasn't pissed, just a bit bummed out. But since she had turned Ronan down, she decided to put it all behind her. What mattered most now was staying with Lumos Enterprises, the cream of the crop in Millstone.

While mulling over this, she got a message from her brother, Adrian. [Cordelia, the doc said you need to drop by the hospital at 4 p.m. today.]

Cordelia replied. [I'll still be at work at 4.]

[Then you deal with the doc yourself.] Adrian retorted.

Cordelia knew it was no use talking to Adrian about this. It was already 3 p.m., and if she was to make it to the hospital by 4, she needed to leave the office at half past three. That meant she had to ask for leave again from the finance director.

Cordelia was top-notch, an outstanding student in college, and had made a name for herself, at work after graduation. But her frequent absences, especially now when it was crunch time for interns, didn't look good.

Just as she expected, when she went to ask for leave, the finance director, Jordan, said, “Cordelia, even though you're a good egg, your constant absence's make it hard for me to write a glowing report for you. You want to stay with Lumos Enterprises, don't you?”

“Lumos Enterprises is a great company, and of course, I want to stay. But I do have things to sort out. I promise to make up for any work I miss,” Cordelia said humbly.

Jordan reluctantly agreed, and Cordelia was off, catching the bus to Millstone Hospital.

Cordelia's mom had been lying in the neurology ward for two years.

"Cordelia, your mom's hospital bill is due. Did you bring the money today?" Dr. Devon, her mom's attending physician, was well aware of Cordelia's family situation. He knew that Adrian was a deadbeat and that Cordelia had been hustling to pay the medical bills.

"Oh, I didn't bring it. I won't get paid until the day after tomorrow," Cordelia mumbled.

"Make it quick then, or the hospital might have to take action," Dr. Devon warned.

"Got it," Cordelia mumbled.

After visiting her mom, who had been on oxygen for the past two years without ever responding to Cordelia's words, she left the hospital.

Cordelia's father had been a project manager at a construction site, and they used to be a happy family of four. But six years ago, he tragically fell to his death from a twenty-story building. The incident hit Cordelia's mother hard, leading to her car accident. The compensation from her father's death and the settlement from the car accident had kept her mom in the hospital for over five years, but eventually, the money ran out.

Once the money started drying up, Cordelia began doing odd jobs at school and tutoring to pay her mom's hospital bills.

Her brother suggested they pull the plug to save money, but to Cordelia, that was heartless. Having a mother to call, even if she didn't respond, was better than not having her at all.

Now, holding her mom's hand, Cordelia said, "Mom, I'm preparing for my CPA exam. I know you'll help me pass. Once I do, my salary will skyrocket, maybe even reaching a million a year. Then, paying your medical bills will be a piece of cake."

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Cordelia even managed to smile at her mom, who gave no response. For the past six years, Cordelia had been hoping for a miracle, for her mom to suddenly—wake up and talk to her, just like when she was a child, calling her Della.

"I have to get back to work now. I haven't passed the CPA yet, so my priority is to stay with Lumos Enterprises, Cordelia psyched herself up.

Staying with Lumos Enterprises meant a steady paycheck, at least enough to cover the rent and her mom's medical bills, But with her constant absences, staying on was becoming a tall order.

Chapter 5

When Cordelia left the hospital, it was already past eight in the evening. The sky had started to drizzle, and she took the bus back to the office. As soon as she stepped into the office lobby, she spotted Ronan, tall and straight, with one hand in his trouser pocket and the other holding a mobile phone, chatting with the receptionist. The bright and dazzling lights in the lobby made him look even more superior and aloof..

Suddenly, Cordelia felt a rush of nerves. Over the past few months, she hardly had any face-to-face contact with him. Why did she keep bumping into him lately?

As he walked past her while on the phone, Cordelia quietly said, "Mr. Evans," but wasn't sure if he heard her. After taking the elevator upstairs, she turned around to find that Ronan had disappeared into the deep night.

The rain was heavy tonight. She wondered if he had an umbrella.

Her father used to forget his umbrella when he went out, and she had to run after him to hand it over. He would pat her head and say, “Della’s all grown up and starting to take care of her old man now.”

Tears blurred Cordelia’s vision.

Cordelia worked till four in the morning. She didn’t plan to go back to her rented room, but to take a short nap in the office and then continue working. No sooner had she laid down on the desk than her phone rang and woke her up.

Seeing that it was Dr. Devon calling, Cordelia immediately picked up. Over the past two years, when Dr. Devon called, it was either about her mother’s deteriorating condition or a reminder to continue paying the hospital bills.

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“Cordelia, after you left yesterday, your mother started to have a fever. Our preliminary suspicion is that there is phlegm accumulation in her lungs...”

“Is it serious?” Cordelia asked anxiously, standing up from her seat.

“Calm down. We’ve already given her emergency treatment, and her condition is temporarily stable. But the surgery from yesterday and this month’s hospital bill adds up to over sixty thousand. Can you pay for it all at once? You’ve been delaying payment, and it’s hard for me to defend you at the hospital... Also, your mother’s situation is quite unusual. You and your brother are both working. Can you hire a caregiver? Regular turning and cleaning can prevent a lot of infections...” Cordelia was stunned. After working all night, her eyes were lifeless. The news hit her like a bolt out of the blue.

Forget sixty thousand, she couldn't even come up with six thousand right now. She felt trapped.

Her monthly internship salary at Lumos Enterprises was only six thousand five hundred, and she had to pay rent. Plus, her salary wouldn't be paid for another half a month. Even if she could get her CPA certificate and earn a lot of money, that wouldn't happen until next year.

She also knew that Dr. Devon had done everything he could to help her. If it weren't for him vouching for her, her mother might have been kicked out of the hospital long ago.

Sixty thousand was a fortune. She had already borrowed money from all her relatives, and no one was willing to lend it to them now.

Feeling helpless, Cordelia suddenly remembered what Ronan had said last night. Compared to five million, sixty thousand was a drop in the bucket.

Cordelia's resolve began to waver. She had once believed she could earn five million, but now it seemed like nothing more than a pipe dream.

Her mother needed a caregiver, something Dr. Devon had mentioned before, but she had been unable to afford it. Now, the consequences of not hiring a caregiver had become apparent; her mother's lungs were accumulating phlegm due to a lack of proper care. Therefore, hiring a caregiver was a necessity for her mother. Cordelia knew that Ronan was well-off—and that he could easily find a woman to marry. Last night, he said that he had “already asked many people.” She wondered if anything had changed since last night. With that thought, Cordelia anxiously got up and went to the door of Ronan's office.

It was just past five now, and Ronan's office was still empty. Cordelia stood at the door, waiting for his arrival. Just as Cordelia was so tired that she could barely stay awake, Ronan arrived.

Chapter 6

The moment Ronan saw Cordelia standing at the door, he knew she had changed her mind. He couldn't help but sneer at her pathetic attempt to play hard to get.

Cordelia quickly pulled herself together, knowing she was there to ask for his help, she tried to sound pleasing, "Morning, Mr. Evans."

"You're up earlier than me." After saying that, Ronan opened the door, sat in his office chair, turned on the computer, and started checking files.

"Did you come to see me for something?" He asked Cordelia without much concern.

Hearing his hoarse voice, Cordelia remembered he didn't have an umbrella in the rain last night, and quickly asked, "Mr. Evans, did you catch a cold? Remember to drink more warm fluid, okay? Got any meds?"

Being caught in the rain was a big deal. Her father once worked overtime in the rain at a construction site and ended up bedridden for days.

"Just spit it out if you have something to say." Ronan's voice was somewhat impatient. To him, Cordelia's concern was just a show.

"Mr. Evans, do you still stand by what you said yesterday?" Cordelia asked, bracing herself.

"What?" Ronan didn't even look up.

Was he playing dumb, or had he genuinely forgotten? “The thing about getting married you mentioned.” Cordelia’s voice was a bit shaky.

It was as if Ronan had just registered what she was talking about, “That? What’s the issue?”

In fact, Cordelia had already expected Ronan’s attitude. Once she sought him out, he would put on airs. But even if he did, Cordelia had no choice. She had already lost the initiative. Now Ronan was in complete control of the situation; she could only be at his mercy.

“Do you still need someone to marry?” Cordelia tried to make her voice sound as pleasing as possible.

And this attempt to please was not lost on Ronan. “Yes.” Ronan lit a cigarette and sat back in his chair, staring at Cordelia.

“You asked me yesterday, and I didn’t think it through at the time, but after giving it some thought, I think I can do it.” Cordelia tried to hide her embarrassment.

But in Ronan’s eyes, her face was just a mask of pretense. “I do need someone to marry. That’s a fact, but how do you know I haven’t found the one I need?” Ronan retorted.

“Huh?” Cordelia’s eyes showed her impatience as she quickly thought about where she could get the money if Ronan’s path didn’t work out.

Seeing Cordelia’s expression, Ronan thought to himself, she thought she was the one in control but was now being controlled. He had thought she was confident, but now he saw she was just a small fry, getting all flustered.

“Why did you suddenly change your mind? I remember you saying you already have a boyfriend.” Ronan asked after a moment of silence.

“You said I could make terms yesterday. I’m doing this for money, and you’re doing it to give your grandpa peace of mind. It’s a win–win. I think that’s reason enough.”

“Alright. You’re pretty straightforward,” Ronan smirked. “Can I ask why you need money at such a young age?”

Cordelia thought for a moment. If she told others her mother was seriously ill, it would definitely expose her constant leaves of absence, which would affect her job at Lumos Enterprises. Since she had already lied about having a boyfriend, she might as well use the “boyfriend” as an excuse.

“You might already know, the housing prices in Millstone are very high. If my boyfriend and I don’t eat or drink, we might still need two hundred years to afford a house. My boyfriend told me yesterday he is going to intern–somewhere else. I want to earn some more money during this time, and surprise him when he comes back.” Cordelia’s ability to make up lies was pretty impressive, with no flaws.

“Will your boyfriend agree to this?” Ronan continued.

“Of course he won’t. I’ll lie to him. A thorough lie.”

“How much money do you need?” Ronan continued to ask coldly.

“How much can you give?” Cordelia returned to her serious demeanor.

Ronan had initially thought of saying five million, but seeing her eagerness to earn money, and his growing dislike for Cordelia, he suddenly didn’t want to make it easy for her. He wanted to give her a hard time.

“A basic salary of one million. Plus...” Ronan casually said, “There will be some specific terms, I will give you a written agreement later, it will include performance assessment content. In general, making five million a year here is no big deal. If you work here for two years, I’ll give you a house.”

Cordelia was stunned. Five million a year? Was making money with Ronan that easy?

“Okay, then we have a deal. Let’s exchange contact information. If you need anything, you can inform me anytime.”

Chapter 7

Ronan’s Facebook name was his real name. He was the kind of guy who had status and didn’t need to hide behind an alias. His name said it all.

Cordelia took a look at Ronan’s posts, but there was next to nothing, except for some articles shared by Lumos Enterprises PR Department.

To keep Ronan from sticking out like a sore thumb in her phone, Cordelia renamed him as John Doe in her messenger. After she added him, John Doe sent a message. [Sign the contract tomorrow. Pick up the marriage license.] True to his word, Ronan was all business.

Cordelia replied with a simple, [Okay.]

After work, Cordelia swung by Lumos Plaza to grab a new shirt for their registration. Lumos Plaza was also one of Ronan’s many properties.

The next morning, Cordelia put on some extra makeup. Her skin was naturally flawless, and with the added makeup, her features were even more striking. She put

on her new shirt. She looked stunning in the mirror, but she didn't feel anything. After all, she had to look decent for the registration.

The morning bus was a bit crowded. Just before her stop, a message from Ronan popped up in her messenger. [Come to my office.]

Cordelia replied. [10 minutes.]

When she arrived at Ronan's office, her outfit turned his head, especially the curve of her chest, which reminded him of that night. His thoughts wandered for a moment, but he didn't say anything. He was Cordelia's sugar daddy.

There was another person in the office, Ronan's legal advisor, who had Cordelia sign a few agreements. The gist of it was that Ronan's wealth was none of her business, the marriage was to be kept under wraps, but Cordelia would receive a million-dollar payout at the end of the contract. There were also bonuses during the contract period. The bonus details were as follows."

First, make Grandpa laugh once, ten grand.

Second, cook a tasty meal for Grandpa, twenty grand.

Third, accompany Grandpa to the hospital once, a hundred grand.

Fourth, attend to Grandpa's funeral after his death, a cool million.

Finally, Cordelia saw the most important clause. From the day the agreement was signed, Ronan would give Cordelia a down payment of two hundred grand. Note clause. For any matters not covered in the contract, Ronan had the final say.

These bonuses took Cordelia by surprise. All she could think was that Ronan was loaded. And all the bonuses were about his “Grandpa.” The money for one hospital visit alone could pay for a nurse for her mother for ten months.

Cordelia found herself hoping that Grandpa would live a long life. That way, she’d have a steady stream of income and no more worries about her mother’s illness. Ronan’s pay system was similar to that of Lumos Enterprises. The base salary wasn’t high, but if you did a good job, you could rake in a hefty sum at the end of the month. This motivated people to work hard.

Cordelia thought to herself, “I must do well, and earn more money.” She signed her name without hesitation.”

“Have all the documents–been prepared?” Ronan asked Cordelia in a cold tone.

“Yeah, they’re all ready.” After saying this, Cordelia took out the documents from her bag and placed them on Ronan’s desk.

Ronan gave it a glance, then said, “Let’s go.”

Getting the marriage license took only ten minutes. Although everything felt surreal to Cordelia, she was technically a married woman now. When she got back to the office in the afternoon, she went about her work as if nothing had happened. But one thing was bothering her, why hadn’t the two hundred grand arrived in her account yet?

That two hundred grand was the emergency relief fund that could solve her pressing issues.

Chapter 8

Mom's surgery and hospital bills hadn't been paid off yet, and it was making Cordelia edgy. Dr. Devon told her today was the final deadline for payment.

But when she saw Jordan, was still in a meeting in the company conference room, she guessed Ronan was probably in there as well. Sending him a message now would not be the best timing; it would rub him the wrong way. All she could do was wait patiently.

Past 10 p.m., after working overtime, Cordelia trudged into the elevator, utterly exhausted. It just so happened, that Ronan was already in the elevator when she got

1. in.

Seeing Ronan seemed to perk her up a bit, and she moved to stand in a corner of the elevator.

The money issue had been gnawing at her for a while now. "Mr. Evans," She said, plucking up her courage when she saw no one else was around.

"Mm?" Ronan replied casually, standing in front of Cordelia without turning around to look at her.

Their conversation was nothing like what you'd expect from a married couple.

"I remember the contract mentioned a down payment of 200,000 after signing... that money..." She treaded carefully since she was talking about asking for money.

"You haven't gotten it yet?" Ronan asked, still not turning around to look at her.

"Mm, not yet."

"You in a hurry?"

Cordelia was so anxious she was about to tear her hair out. The day was almost over.

thought the lawyer had transferred it to you already. Send me your bank account number.” Ronan was straightforward, not dwelling on whether she was in a hurry or not. He asked for her account number directly.”

This straightforwardness made Cordelia feel a bit relieved. “I’ll send to you once I get on the bus.

When they got to the first floor, Ronan left the elevator without a word.)

The bus wasn’t crowded. Cordelia got on, took out her bank card, and sent Rohan a clear picture of the card number. Not long after, she received a transfer of 200,000.

Just when Cordelia was inwardly praising Ronan for being so decisive, she received another message from him. [If you were a little more diligent and typed the numbers, the transfer might have been 30 seconds faster.]

Was he calling her lazy?

Cordelia was worried this would affect her marriage performance and felt the need to over-explain. [Oh, Mr. Evans, the bus was crowded, it was inconvenient to type.]

[You’re in such a hurry, but you’re afraid of inconvenience?]

So, it all came back to her being desperate for money.

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As Cordelia was contemplating how to respond, she received another message from Ronan. [This Saturday, come to Birchwood with me to visit my grandfather, Barney.]

Cordelia felt a pang of anxiety, and then asked. [How many days are *we* going for?]

[We're leaving Saturday morning, staying one night, and coming back on Sunday.]

To be honest, when she saw that they were going to Barney's house, Cordelia was happy. After all, all her performance wages were based around him. Only by seeing him could Cordelia get more money.

On Friday, Cordelia went to visit her mom in the hospital. Her mom was doing much better after the surgery. Cordelia even talked to Dr. Devon about hiring a suitable nurse to help out.

However, when she got to her mom's room, she saw her rarely seen brother Adrian. Adrian wasn't exactly a success story, but he had recently gotten a new job as a chauffeur for a tech company CEO. His driving skills were decent.

"Cordelia, how about I set you up with a boyfriend?" Adrian said with a grin.

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Cordelia ignored Adrian. What good could come out of his drinking buddies? Moreover, she was officially married now. There was no way she'd betray her husband and give Ronan something to hold against her.

"Not interested. I don't have the time right now. We can talk about it once Mom gets better." Cordelia held her mom's hand tightly, pressing it against her face.

"Wait till mom gets better? You might be waiting a long time," Adrian said casually.

Cordelia didn't appreciate his remark, but she didn't respond.

“I remember you had quite a few suitors back in the day. And about that guy who passed away... Are you still planning on never marrying because of him?” Adrian had come to the hospital to pester Cordelia. He hardly ever visited their mom.

“Don’t mention him! You have no right!” Cordelia said sternly.

Seeing Cordelia getting upset, Adrian dropped the topic. It was a painful memory for his sister, and he didn’t want to upset her. He paused for a moment before saying, “Alright, alright, I won’t bring it up again. Don’t get so worked up. But the guy I want to introduce to you this time is Mr. Colby’s son. He’s a second-generation rich kid, handsome, and wealthy. Are you sure you don’t want to consider it?”

Cordelia didn’t respond, completely disregarding Adrian’s suggestion.

Seeing Cordelia so stubborn, Adrian couldn’t help but get angry. “Cordelia, you need to know your place! You’re pretty, but there are plenty of girls like you out there. Don’t think too highly of yourself! Mom’s medical bills need to be paid, and as her daughter, you’re not even considering her medical expenses. You’re heartless!”

Cordelia closed her eyes, letting Adrian’s words breeze past her like the wind.

“Ungrateful,” Adrian muttered angrily when he saw Cordelia ignoring him. He then left the room.

Chapter 9

Lumos Enterprises was a mile away from school. To make life easier, Cordelia shared a two-bedroom apartment near the company. Meanwhile, Adrian was living solo in their mom’s house.

Saturday, 10 a.m.

Ronan picked up Cordelia from her place.

At Ronan's request, Cordelia was dressed to the nines – white t-shirt, red mini skirt, white sneakers, looking fresh and full of pep. Young people always looked good no matter how they dressed.

This time, Ronan didn't drive. He and Cordelia were sitting side by side in the back seat. When Cordelia got in the car, Ronan just glanced at her, not saying a word.

Once they hit the highway, Cordelia suddenly remembered an unresolved issue. Did their marriage of convenience include sex? She had hastily signed the agreement without asking and was totally thrown off by her financial straits.

Considering they were putting on a show for Barney and were heading to his place soon, they were bound to share a room for the night. Would he want to...you know? The thought sent Cordelia into a flurry of anxiety.

Not sure if the driver knew about her and Ronan's deal, she texted Ronan to avoid the driver overhearing. [Mr. Evans, does our agreement include that?]

Ronan leisurely picked up his phone when he heard the notification sound and checked the message

Cordelia sat up straight. From the corner of her eye, she saw Ronan replying rather dismissively. She tightened her grip on her phone.

Soon, a "1 new message from 1 contact" appeared on her screen. She unlocked her phone to check her chat with John Doe.

[Which one?]

Cordelia's mind was about to explode. He was being so nonchalant about such an important question. Was he genuinely clueless or just playing dumb?

[That one.]

After a while, her phone dinged again, she quickly checked her phone.

[What do you think?]

Upon seeing the reply, Cordelia was on the verge of a breakdown and was speechless. Just as Cordelia was unsure how to respond, she heard him say, "Am I John Doe?"

Caught off guard by his question, she glanced at him. He was looking at her phone. The chat showed that she was texting John Doe.

"Huh?" Cordelia was confused, but quickly said, "That's just a pseudonym. I was afraid if I put Mr. Evans, people might figure it out and blow our cover."

She was trying to assure Ronan that she was not blabbing about their relationship, on the contrary, she was being discreet.,

Ronan didn't want to continue the conversation and turned his gaze back out the window.

Cordelia thought to herself, "Why is Ronan being so cold? Can't he just answer a question properly?"

If he was not answering her on messenger, she would just ask him directly. She didn't care whether the driver knew or not.

"Mr. Evans, did you bring condoms?" Cordelia asked Ronan seriously.

She absolutely couldn't get pregnant. She needed to get her CPA, become a successful career woman, and make money. She couldn't let a child obstruct her career. Hearing Cordelia's question, Ronan turned to look at her slightly frowning, as if thinking, "Why is this girl so unladylike?"

"I didn't bring any." After saying that, he looked out the window again..

Cordelia swallowed hard, clearly nervous. But then again, him not bringing a condom could've meant he was not planning on doing it. After the last time, he

could've been thinking she was a burden and was having regrets. Now that he was clear-headed, he wouldn't make the same mistake again, right? Besides, as the president of Lumos Enterprises, why would he want a lowly intern to bear his child?

Feeling relieved, Cordelia let out a sigh.

Chapter 10

By the time they arrived at Birchwood, it was already 4 p.m..

Before getting out of the car, Ronan said to Cordelia, "Mind your manners when you address me."

"Huh? What?" Cordelia didn't get it.

"No more, Mr. Evans."

Cordelia thought for a moment, then said without hesitation, "Alright, hubby."

This response was so quick; "hubby" was said so naturally, it surprised Ronan a little. He guessed she probably called her boyfriends that all the time. Girls these days were quite open-minded. This thought made Ronan a bit uncomfortable.

However, Cordelia knew full well. He had given her so much money, she had to put on a more convincing act. Cordelia was always professional, not the kind to work only under pressure from the boss. She was fully aware of her situation.

Upon arriving at Barney's house, Cordelia immediately became serious. She knew she needed to comfort an elderly man with a severe illness, and she was afraid any carelessness could upset Barney. She reminded herself to stay alert.

Ronan's grandfather used to be a law professor at Birchwood College, highly respected within the legal field. He even appeared on TV as a guest, discussing some legal issues in marriage. No wonder Ronan said that his grandfather would be able to tell if the marriage license was fake. How could such an intellectual not see through a fake marriage license?

Ronan's grandmother passed away last year. This year, his grandfather was diagnosed with lung cancer. Ronan had lived with Barney and his grandmother since he was a child, and the bond was very strong. Barney hoped to see Ronan's life complete before he could pass away peacefully.

Barney's kind eyes scanned Cordelia, "How old is Cordelia?"

"Twenty-three," Ronan said.

Cordelia was a little taken aback. How did Ronan know her age? But then she remembered, he had glanced at her driver's license when they registered. That glance allowed him to answer Barney's question very naturally in front of him. He was a crafty one.

"A good bit younger than you," Barney said to Ronan. "eight years?"

"Yes." Ronan smiled, speaking in a kind tone that Cordelia rarely heard.

“With her being so much younger, you must treat her well.” Barney’s smile became even more benevolent.

“Of course.” Both Ronan and Cordelia sat on the couch. Ronan grabbed Cordelia’s hand and casually kissed it.

A wave of electricity seemed to surge through Cordelia, making her feel tingly all over. Cordelia wanted to pull her hand away but was afraid to blow their cover, so she just let Ronan hold it, her palm getting sweaty.

“Cordelia is an intern. She didn’t want her coworkers to know about the marriage, to avoid gossip. But…” Ronan’s tone suddenly became a bit suggestive. He even glanced at Cordelia, his eyes seemed to be talking, looking at Cordelia with a mixture of teasing and playfulness. “But recently, we felt it was the right time, so we registered our marriage, and I brought her to meet you.”

No doubt, by “right time,” Ronan meant they had sex.

“It’s a bad time for you guys to come. I didn’t know you were coming, and the housekeeper has already taken another job. There’s no one to cook. Let’s eat out,” Barney said, then suddenly remembered something. “If your grandmother was still here, she would’ve made you handmade pasta. You loved it since you were a kid.”

As he spoke, Barney’s eyes welled up.

Barney was a scholar. He and his wife never hired a housekeeper. After his wife passed away, Ronan wanted to hire a full-time housekeeper and a couple of caregivers for Barney, but Barney said, “I’m an old man now, no need for such fuss.”

Barney lived alone, with occasional help from a housekeeper to cook.

“I can make handmade pasta. If Barney doesn’t mind, I can do it. I often cook for Ronan. Right, hubby?” Cordelia stood up, speaking naturally and appropriately. Her offer to cook was partly moved by the story of Barney and his wife, and partly because of the money. She remembered clearly that the contract stated, that a delicious meal could earn her twenty grand. Plus, her display of affection with Ronan was so convincing, that Barney would be pleased and more at ease.

Ronan sat on the couch, legs crossed, hand on his chin. He didn’t expect Cordelia to be so proactive. He wondered if she was taking this opportunity to get into character or was just acting. But her performance was beyond professional.

“Alright, Grandpa. Let her do it, Ronan smiled and spoke.

Then, Ronan’s gaze swept across Cordelia’s face meaningfully. Cordelia, looking as if she had been seen through, went to the kitchen.