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Clarissa got back to her room and changed into a fresh set of clothes, regaining her composure as she tried to banish the image from her mind.

Meanwhile, Ellie dragged the prankster along.

"Apologize, Damon! Are you afraid of admitting what you've done?"

Damon looked awkward and was about to flip out from being pushed around by Ellie. However, at the sight of Clarissa, he held his anger in.

The twitch of his lips seemed odd juxtaposed against his handsome face. Embarrassed, his ears flushed beet red.

"Um… I'm really sorry! I had no idea that you don't know how to swim…"

"It's alright. It's just a misunderstanding," Clarissa tried to lighten the mood.

Damon's ears went vermillion at the sight of her smile.

Ellie seemed to have caught onto something and nudged Damon. "Hey man, what are you doing, acting all coy in front of Clarissa, you-"

"Shut up, Ellie," Damon interrupted Ellie before the latter could finish her sentence. He shot a glance at the breathtaking Clarissa and darted his eyes immediately before turning to shoot a warning glare in Ellie's direction.

The latter was grinning from ear to ear. Damon looked at Clarissa, trying to sound serious, "Why don't you give me your number so that I could ask you out for a meal sometime, you know, as my way to apologize to you."

"It's alright."

"Sure!" Ellie had betrayed her friend right then as she blurted Clarissa's number out loud. She was all smiles as she said, "Damon, Clare is my bestie. You can treat her to a meal but do not ever bully her again or you're good as dead."

"Right. You know I'll never do that."

Then, Damon turned to Clarissa again, "You'd better get some rest. I'll call you."

When it was time for dinner, Damon was hanging around Ellie and Clarissa. Jeremy observed them intently from afar, his lips twitching as he cast a glance at Matthew who had been on the phone for quite some time.

Jeremy gestured discreetly in the trio's direction. Matthew traced his gaze and narrowed his deep-set gaze at the sight.

Jeremy was inexplicably pleased with Matthew's reaction.

Damon seemed to have cracked a joke that set Clarissa off chuckling. It was a crisp, hearty chuckle, almost as pleasing to the ears as tinkling bells. Matthew tapped absentmindedly on his lap at the sight before him.

After noticing that he had hung up the phone, Jeremy approached him and asked in a low voice, "Matt, that girl sure gets a lot of attention. Did you really…"

Matthew remained impassive as he shot another glance toward the trio, his thoughts running wild.

Jeremy smirked and said nothing further. Deliberately, he said aloud, "Ellie, Damon, why don't you guys come over here? I'm getting all lonely here."

Ellie rolled her eyes at his remark. Clarissa stole a glance in the men's direction and retracted her gaze right away.

Damon whispered, "Clare, are you afraid of Uncle Matthew too? To be honest, I'm not too fond of him either. I think somehow he's the type to make people anxious. But don't worry, I'm right here with you."

Their huddled conversation in a rather intimate fashion did not go unnoticed. A sharp glint fleeted across Matthew's eyes.

The trio approached Matthew and Jeremy. Damon obviously tried to let Clarissa sit beside him. However, Jeremy deliberately separated the two and pushed Clarissa toward Matthew's side.

"Mr. Jeremy, this is my friend, Clarissa. Clarissa, Mr. Jeremy."

Ellie thought the two did not know each other and introduced them.

"I'm like a brother to Ellie, Ms. Quigley."

Clarissa smiled awkwardly and said, "Mr. Jeremy."

Jeremy continued to tease her, "Why the formality? Well well… I think it's quite interesting when someone addresses you like an elder. Am I right, Matt?"

It was a private joke between him and Matthew.

Ellie did not notice the undertones in Jeremy's words and said, "You're my uncle's friend. Drop the act. You're only fooling those gullible young girls out there. Nobody here will be tricked by you."

"What act? I'm the nation heartthrob, alright?"

"You don't stand a single chance against Uncle Matt."

Jeremy did not try to refute her. He chuckled as he cast a glance at Matthew, his lips curving into a devilish smile.

"I will gladly let him take the limelight if it were Matt. I think young and matured women alike would like to marry Matt. Right, Ms. Quigley?"

"Huh?"

Clarissa was stumped when she was called out and mindlessly nodded along.

"Haha… So can I say that Ms. Quigley is keen to marry Matt too?"

A pin-drop silence ensued.

Everyone was bemused. Clarissa was the first to respond. Her face was already crimson red when she shook her head repeatedly.

"No, no. Quit joking, Mr. Jeremy. He's an elder figure…"

"Mr. Jeremy, that's not funny. You've crossed the line," Ellie scowled at him.

Jeremy threw Matthew a look.

The latter shot him a stone-cold look to warn him off. Jeremy shrugged as he snickered.

"Okay, I'll stop with the jokes. Please don't mind me, Ms. Quigley. Surely, you have a lot of men pursuing you since you're so gorgeous."

"No…"

Ellie was irked by Jeremy's attempt to corner her friend and berated, "Mr. Jeremy! What do you mean? Why do you keep ogling at Clare? She's like my sister. You should mind your manners since you're the senior here!"

Jeremy was initially stumped, then broke into a roar of laughter as if he had just heard her crack a joke, "Hahaha! Matt, listen to her! We are the seniors…"

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Sparing Clarissa, the others were stumped by Jeremy's odd remarks.

Her face flushed with bright pink as she recalled something.

He must be teasing me because he misunderstood things between me and Matthew…

Didn't Matthew clarify things with him?

Bewildered at the unwarranted teasing, Clarissa shot Matthew a glance. The latter said nothing. However, his deep-set gaze glinted briefly.

"Jeremy."

Matthew's tone was not at all stern, but he was essentially telling Jeremy off.

The latter knew better than to continue blabbering and steered the conversation as he talked business with Matthew.

Clarissa had been uptight throughout the whole exchange, forming a stark contrast against Matthew's relaxed manner. He had a cigarette in one hand, and a spoon in the other, nonchalantly picking on his food.

She had her eyes on a particularly savory dish. However, it was not long before the dish was whisked away from her sight. Dejected, she put down her utensils and sipped on her drink.

Someone seemed to have caught onto her disappointed look and passed the dish back to her. Her eyes lit up at the dish and hurriedly picked on the food.

Matthew puffed on his cigarette, his lips curving into a smile, amused at Clarissa's demeanor.

Clarissa headed back to her room after dinner. She dozed off into slumber and had only woken up at night.

Roused by the bustling music outside, she made her way to the bathroom to freshen herself up before heading outside.

In the hallway, through the windows, Clarissa noticed that the yard was brightly lit as it bustled with the sounds of her friends barbecuing and drinking. She leaned languidly against the window, the corner of her lips curved into a slight smile at the sight before her.

Somewhere not far from where she was standing, Matthew transfixed his gaze at the woman who had a smile on her face.

He decided to approach her.

"Aren't you going to join them?"

Clarissa was slightly surprised to hear a voice. Noticing that it was Matthew, she smiled. "Uncle Matthew, what about you? Why are you not joining them?"

"Well, some would say that I'm too old to party," he smirked.

"Pfft…" Clarissa could not help but chuckle. "Uncle Matthew, I told you it was just a joke. Are you still holding grudges against me or what?"

He met her gaze, his obsidian eyes darkened.

"What if I say yes?"

"Um…" Clarissa was at a loss for words. "Uncle Matthew, I was just joking. I'm really sorry about that."

Just when she thought that he was really furious at her, he parted his lips. "Well, I was joking too."

Clarissa was rendered speechless.

Can he stop being so intimidating?

Feeling ill at ease, she twitched her lips unconsciously. It did not go unnoticed.

"Aren't you going to thank me?"

She had only snapped out of her thoughts when he posed the question. Yes, I didn't drown thanks to him saving me at the pool this afternoon.

"Right, I should. Thank you, Uncle Matthew."

After muttering her thanks, Clarissa realized that it seemed like she had been thanking him countless times ever since she had met the man.

Amused at the notion, she said, "Uncle Matthew, I'm not really sure how many times I've thanked you, and I don't know if I'll ever thank you enough for what you've done for me."

He raised a brow. "You don't know if you can ever thank me enough?"

Clarissa nodded her head. I guess the best way to repay will be to marry you.

She shook her head in an attempt to dismiss her wayward thoughts. Clarissa lifted her head, only to be met with Matthew's deep-set scrutinizing gaze. It was as if he was trying to look into her soul.

His unnerving stare made her fidget with unease. She averted her gaze and felt the warmth of his body edging close.

Clarissa could almost feel his breath brushing past her cheeks. The domineering aura of the man with statuesque, chiseled features made her all jittery.

"What's the next line, Clarissa?"

Matthew's hands propped against the window as he leaned forward, inching closer to her.

The proximity was suffocating. Her breath hitched as her face went stiff. Instinctively, she leaned back as the man invaded her personal space. Suddenly, she felt an almost scalding touch on her back, sending tingles all over her body.

Matthew disregarded the stiffened state of the woman before him and pressed on.

"So you can't thank me enough. What should we do about it?"

"I… Um…"

"Uncle Matt?"

The suggestive atmosphere was interrupted by Ellie's curious inquiry.

Clarissa pushed Matthew away in a hurry as she tried to recollect herself. She pretended to gaze out the window as Matthew set himself straight.

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"Clarissa? Uncle Matt? What are you two up to?"

She had actually noticed the duo from some distance away. However, owing to Matthew's towering figure, she could not clearly discern what the two of them were doing.

Ellie had only noticed an odd vibe lingering in the air as she got closer to the two.

"What's the matter?"

Clarissa made her way to Ellie's side and circled her arms. "Ellie, I'm famished. Could you barbeque something for me?"

"I was just looking for you. Uncle Matt, aren't you coming too?"

Matthew felt his fingers that just moments ago lingered on Clarissa's back. "Why don't you girls head over there first? I'll be there in a moment."

As the two girls made their exit, Matthew stood against the window and lit another cigarette.

The smoke coiled in the air as he narrowed his eyes at Clarissa in the yard. Damon was obviously trying to appease her by handing her plates of barbequed meat and assorted food. Then, the young man took a seat and muttered something to the girl.

The charming young man was obviously disarmed by the girl whom he liked, and were all smiles before Clarissa.

Well, her smile is captivating.

Matthew heaved out a long sigh. He furrowed his brows, preoccupied with his thoughts.

"Clare, what were you doing with Uncle Matt back there? Things seemed weird between the two of you."

Ellie handed Clarissa a bottle of beer and the duo clinked bottles with each other.

At her friend's question, Clarissa shifted in unease. She lowered her gaze in contrite and said, "Oh, I was just thanking him for saving me in the morning."

"Right, if it wasn't for him saving you, and for doing the CPR, you would have been in danger."

Clarissa's heart skipped a beat when she heard Ellie.

CPR?

Does that mean that we've…

"Speaking of which, what do you think of Damon?"

Ellie had not noticed her friend's odd demeanor. Grinning, she edged closer to Clarissa and pressed on.

"What about him?"

"Oh, cut the crap. don't pretend like you have no idea that the guy is crushing hard on you. I will say that he's quite an amateur when it comes to this though. I know this Damon pretty well. Even though he's not that matured, and he's had some experience being in a relationship, bottom line, I know he's not a playboy. I really think you should give this a try if you're feeling something for him too!"

"I know he's a great guy. But you know how it is for relationships. I really have no idea where this is going."

Ellie relented, not trying to push her luck. "Haha… I guess you have a point. Let's just see how things go. If he somehow manages to move you, it's not too late for you to consider giving him a chance then. Cheers, girl! This really brings me back to the night when we graduated. It's been a really long time since I've felt this relaxed…"

Clarissa gave her a smile. The two of them clinked bottles again as they started to drink to their heart's content.

Clarissa had lost count of how much she had to drink. The others had long dispersed but Ellie and she were still going at it.

Damon tried to join the girls' talk but Ellie chased him away.

She even wrapped herself around Clarissa, insisting that her bestie was hers, and hers only.

Clarissa, on the other hand, smiled helplessly at her friend's demeanor. Even though her head was all muddled from the alcohol, she was still perfectly conscious. After her friend chased Damon off, she sat there quietly as Ellie wrapped her arms around her.

She lifted her head and noticed the stars strewn across the night sky.

Squinting her eyes, Clarissa noticed that Ellie had fallen into slumber as the latter no longer muttered anything.

Clarissa tried to get up but her legs failed her. Just when she thought she was going to fall, Clarissa found herself in a firm embrace.

The alcohol blunted her response. She lifted her head, only to be greeted by double visions. In an attempt to steady the flickering image before her, she reached out her delicate hands and cupped the face before her.

Clarissa's words were slurred. "D-don't… move."

Moments gone by before she finally registered the face before her.

"Hmm… Uncle Matthew?"

She sounded like she was doubting herself.

"Are you drunk?"

Matthew folded her in an embrace, his hands steadying her. He could not help but notice how her attitude toward him differed when the girl was sober. Her wary and cautious self dissipated into thin air, leaving only the meek and obedient girl in his arms. Her voice was so soft that he felt it tickling against his ears. There was a tinge of coolness to her fingers, although her palms felt soft as feathers while cupping his face.

"No, I'm not drunk."

"Yeah, right."

Drunk people never admit that they're drunk.

"I need to… send Ellie back to her room."

Despite herself being all hazy from the alcohol, she still remembered her friend. She turned around, but her friend was already nowhere to be seen.

"Eh? Where's Ellie? Ellie…"

The way she scrambled for her friend put a smile on Matthew's face.

"She's already back in her room. Are you heading back to yours as well?"

Almost half a minute passed by before she muttered a response. "Oh, okay."

Okay?

Matthew swooped her up, and her head spun from the abrupt motion. She clutched his neck tight as she shut her eyes. Her lashes fluttered as she moaned lightly into Matthew's neck.

"My head is spinning."

Her voice was coquettish and alluring.

Matthew felt his body stiffen and gulped. He paused in his tracks for a moment before making his way into the hotel.

He took her back to his own room and put her on his bed.

As soon as she was on the bed, Clarissa wriggled herself out of her clothes after turning to her side, entirely out of habit. Soon, she had stripped off her clothes and was only in her innerwear. Matthew had no intention of averting his gaze. Instead, his eyes burned at the sexy sight before him.

Just when the woman was about to remove her bra, he leaned forward in a swift motion and stopped her. His breathing became ragged as he edged closer to the woman.

Clarissa knitted her brows, forming a little v on her forehead when she realized that she could not move. Still in a daze, she opened her eyes.

After registering the face before her, she was almost pleading.

"Uncle Matthew, please unhook it for me…"

Matthew was flabbergasted.

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Matthew could feel all his self-control and rational self dissipating into thin air as she moaned.

He lowered his head and sucked on the woman's slightly parted lips. Everything was as sweet as he imagined as her moans became muffled.

His breathing became increasingly ragged as he inched close to the woman beneath him. He traced her velvety smooth skin down from her arms. Her soft skin was irresistible, and Matthew found his breathing increasingly erratic as his Adam's apple constricted from the surmounting desire coursing through his body.

"Hahaha…"

Suddenly, laughter could be heard coming out from the door. Matthew froze right then.

He closed his eyes and drew himself away from Clarissa's lips. Then, he jolted away from the bed and turned around to head for the bathroom.

Clarissa was still blissfully unaware, and bit down on her lips. She stripped off her bra, turned to her side, and dozed off clutching the covers.

Matthew had only come out of the shower after some time. His upper body was bare, exposing his muscular and firm chest. He stood at the side of the bed with only a towel wrapped around his waist, and his obsidian, deep-set gaze darkened further at the sight of the woman's flawless back. Matthew stood there and transfixed his gaze on the woman for some time before he put on some clothes and headed out the door.

Clarissa was finally awake. She sat on the bed, holding her head in pain. Her brain was in disarray, unable to recall what had happened.

I was drinking with Ellie… What happened then?

And this room… I think this is Matthew's room. Why are my clothes splattered all over the floor… even my bra? We're just short of a man's clothes from confirming that something happened here…

"Oh man…"

Dismayed at what might have happened the night before, Clarissa hugged her head. Did I…

I don't suppose-

Clarissa hurriedly jumped off the bed and scrambled for her clothes. She put on her clothes in a jiffy and tried to scurry out of the room.

Her mind started to go into overdrive trying to recall what had happened the night before as soon as she was back in her own room. Besides, I'm not the type to go out of hand when I'm drunk… Matthew is so many years my senior. I'm overthinking this. Nothing happened, period.

Matthew had been unfazed when she was drugged back then after all. Now that he knew that he was so many years her senior, Clarissa had faith that nothing could have happened between the two of them. He is a gentleman.

It was time for breakfast, and Clarissa made her way to the dining hall. She bumped into Matthew and noticed that he was sitting by the window alone. Aside from breakfast, there was a laptop on the table. Well, he seems busy.

She was contemplating whether she should say hello. Right then, Matthew glanced in her direction. The impassive gaze incited an inexplicable feeling in her. He did not avert his gaze from her.

In the end, Clarissa relented and headed in his direction.

"Uncle Matthew, morning!"

Under his scrutinizing gaze, she shifted in unease. Her lips twitched and managed a thin smile.

"Did you bring me back to your room yesterday? I'm sorry for getting so drunk, and for occupying your room. Haha… I hope I didn't trouble you too much."

Matthew raised a quizzical brow and finally parted his lips to speak. His tone was icy cold.

"No."

Relieved at his answer, Clarissa beamed with a sweet smile. "Uncle Matthew, I'd better not interrupt your breakfast then, excuse-"

"Have a seat!"

Clarissa knew it was an order, rather than a warm gesture.

She had a bad hunch about it all. After she took a seat, the breakfast she ordered was sent to their table. Clarissa said nothing, but she was actually hoping that she could finish her breakfast in a heartbeat.

On the other hand, Matthew seemed to have lost interest in his work. He sipped on his coffee in a relaxed manner and occasionally glanced at Clarissa as she ate.

She felt her face getting hotter with each passing moment under his gaze, until…

Cough, cough…

She finally choked on her food.

Clarissa hurriedly grabbed a glass of water and washed it down her throat. She could not hold it in anymore and lifted her head, and locked eyes with Matthew's obsidian, deep-set gaze.

"Uncle Matthew, would you please stop staring at me like that? It's so weird. Or do you have something you want to say to me?"

"Why can't I look at you?"

"No, it's just weird that you keep staring at me when I'm eating. I'm sure that you will feel the same if I ogle at you while you eat."

"You can try."

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Clarissa found it hard to communicate with him.

"I'm full. Uncle Matthew, I'll be going now. Goodbye!" With that, she stood up and left for her bedroom.

The next moment, she noticed he was following her.

Having no idea of his intention, she ignored him while quickening her pace.

After she entered her bedroom, the man pressed his hand against the door to prevent her from closing it.

When she instinctively looked up, her eyes met his cold gaze. Inexplicably, she became a little fearful of him. "Uncle Matthew, is there anything else?"

Before she had even realized it, Matthew pushed open the door and slid into her room.

With her brows knotted, she walked into the room after him.

She felt suffocated at his formidable presence; it seemed as if her room had suddenly shrunk. Standing meekly before him, she asked, "Uncle Matthew, do you have anything to say? Did I do something wrong?"

Matthew subconsciously tightened his hands in his pocket. He fixed his eyes on her as if he was trying to see through her.

"Have you forgotten about what happened yesterday?" he finally asked.

"Uh, I... I do remember something..."

"What do you remember?"

"I remember that Ellie and I have drunk quite a lot…" she trailed off as that was all that she could remember.

Matthew pursed his lips. "That's it?"

"I normally fall asleep when I'm drunk. But Uncle Matthew, why are you asking me this? Did I do anything else?"

Matthew fell into silence for a while. Suddenly, he moved toward her, forcing her to take a few steps backward.

Clarissa had her back pressed against the door. Her eyes grew wide, looking at the man looming over her. "U-uncle Matthew…" Her voice was trembling.

"You couldn't recall it?"

She was clueless at his words. Recall about what?

Before she could say anything, she saw Matthew lowered his head, moving closer to her. Their faces were only inches apart when all of a sudden, his phone rang, ruining the atmosphere between them.

Matthew narrowed his eyes at the interruption. He then pulled himself away from her to answer the call.

Clarissa heaved a sigh of relief, and that was when she realized the back of her shirt was drenched in sweat. She sat on the couch that was a distance away from Matthew, looking warily at him.

Matthew cast his eyes over her while talking to the phone. "Alright, I got it. I'll head back right now."

After he ended the call, he looked at Clarissa and said, "Try to recall until you remember it."

With that, he turned and left the room. As his figure vanished from sight, Clarissa loosened up and then slouched into the couch.

Her face flushed. What was Uncle Matthew trying to do to me just now? And… What is it that I'm supposed to recall?

After a few days of relaxation, Clarissa returned to D City. Ellie was the one who drove her back to her apartment.

As soon as she arrived home, she received a call from someone who was not on her contact list.

She was hesitant to answer the call when she remembered it was Matthew's number.

The phone continued to ring for a long time. Having no choice, she could only answer it.

"You're finally back?"

"Yes, Uncle Matthew," she replied.

"Come down."

"What?" She was unsure if she heard it wrong.

"Come down. I'm waiting for you outside your apartment." With that, he hung up on her.

Clarissa's face contorted as she clasped her hair fervently like a madwoman. Eventually, she recollected herself and got changed before heading out of her apartment.

Matthew saw Clarissa from a distance away through the car window. The young lady was wearing a white t-shirt coupled with an oversized jumpsuit. Her face with little make-up on made her look even more youthful.

Clarissa initially thought she could just talk to him for a short while outside the car, but the driver threw her plan into disarray when he opened the car door for her to get into the car.

The cool air in the car was soothing, but it failed to tranquilize her mind. She grew anxious by the minutes when Matthew, sitting next to her, kept staring intently at her.

Feeling awkward, she shifted in her seat, stroking her hair in a vain attempt to block his gaze.

"U-Uncle Matthew, where are we going?"

"To eat."

"But I've eaten just now. I…"

"But I haven't!" He managed to silence her with his domineering reply.

"Just keep me company," he said seriously in a deep voice.

Yet, his remarks somehow sounded equivocal and intimate.

Clarissa tucked her head in while slightly shifted her body, trying to hide her blushing face.

Then, she said in a muffled voice, "Uncle Matthew, actually you can also ask Ellie to accompany you. How about I call her over? She told me she missed you a lot, but she thought you're still on a business trip."

"What about you?" Matthew's eyes flickered. He moved closer to her, asking bluntly, "Do you miss me?"

Clarissa froze and held her breath at his question.

Matthew's eyes darkened while whispering in her ears, "Clare, do you miss me?"

"U-Uncle, I… I do miss you." She stuttered, with her heart pounding like crazy. Thinking it sounded too intimate, she quickly added, "I… I mean… just like Ellie does."

Matthew had little mercy on her though the young lady's face already turned red, holding a breath that she didn't realize she was holding.

With a smile, he stroked her face with his finger, whispering in her ears once again, "Clare, so you do miss me, huh?"