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Love Coming from the Least Expected

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Before finishing my drink, I spotted Christopher's mother on TV. This time, instead of wearing an evening gown, she was decked in a professional black suit. Clearly, she was an intimidating career lady. Her expression was calm as she answered the reporters' questions with a pleasant smile on her lips.

I glanced at the TV and realized it was about a new amusement park being developed by his family's business. Christopher's mother was the idol of all women.

"Christopher, is your mom a fierce woman? Is she scary?" I asked in a small voice.

Christopher put his coffee down and pondered my question. After a while, he answered, "She's quite fierce. My dad dare not utter a word whenever she gets mad. No one in my family dares to go against her."

"Oh..." I swallowed nervously. Will she give me a hard time? Christopher will protect me, of course, but that's his mother. If she finds out about me, I doubt she'll accept me easily.

Perhaps my expression seemed grim, for Christopher burst out laughing and ruffled my hair. "My mom will only yell at her loved ones. If she hates someone, she will flash them a wide grin. I'll be delighted if she yells at you the first time you meet."

I shot him a smile and said nothing else. Shortly after, a couple behind me started feeding each other ice cream and drinks. The lady even ended up sitting in the man's lap.

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There was a partition between us, but I could see everything clearly through the gap. I found the sight disgusting and whipped my head around. Seeing my reaction, Christopher slapped his thigh and declared, "Come on up."

Bemused, I shook my head. I refused to act intimately with him in public. It would be embarrassing if we ran into someone we knew.

After that, we went to a few clothing stores. I picked a few outfits for Christopher, which he paid for. In the end, he picked one for himself. I compared the prices between the ones I chose and the one he chose for himself. The ones I chose were around one hundred grand each, while he paid four hundred and seventy thousand for his after getting a twenty percent discount. Is he compromising his standard because of me?

I was so engrossed in my thought that I stood in front of a store without moving. Suddenly, Christopher pulled me into his arms and brushed a finger across my waist. "I nearly forgot to get that. Thank goodness you still remember it. Let's go stock up for the next six months."

"Ah!" I belatedly realized where we were after he pulled me in. It was an adult shop. This was my first time here, so I lowered my head shyly without looking at the shop owner. Christopher showed me a few boxes of condoms and inquired earnestly, "Do you want spiral condoms? Super thin condoms? Or dotted ones?"

"How would I know!" My cheeks flared up in embarrassment as I kicked Christopher's leg.

"Darling, I'm being liberal here. That's why I'm asking for your opinion." Christopher didn't even flinch at my kick. He waved his hand and told the shop owner, "Get me five boxes each."

"Sure! I also sell other interesting stuff in my shop. Are you interested?" The shop owner proceeded to introduce the various stuff on his counter. I never knew there were so many sex toys available and started wringing my hands nervously, eager to leave the shop. Alas, Christopher gripped my arm and showed no signs of leaving.

"Let me go!" I pinched his waist.

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“No can do. If you try to leave, I’ll kiss you right here, right now.” Christopher narrowed his gaze and snickered. I knew he would do just that, so I dared not move an inch.

Instead of finding out what Christopher bought, my gaze landed on some contraceptive pills. I told the owner, “I’d like to buy one box of this.”

When the owner handed me the box, I was about to take it from him when Christopher toss it back with a frown. “Don’t use this.”

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“Why?” I blinked in confusion. With the pills, we can still have sex if we run out of condoms. Isn’t it a good alternative?

Christopher grabbed the box and tap it on my forehead before returning it to the owner. “You silly girl. This kind of thing is harmful to your body. Why would you take it?”

Glancing at Christopher, I was about to tell him that taking one pill occasionally would be fine but promptly changed my mind. As I thought about how he showed his concern for me, warmth enveloped my heart.

Christopher had asked the store owner to wrap everything up in an enormous shopping bag. I was stunned to see his purchases. What did Christopher buy? This is such a huge bag.

When we exited the store, I was in a hurry and nearly ran into someone at the corner. I hastily stepped back and picked up the person’s bag, which had dropped to the ground. “I’m sorry. It was an accident. Are you all...” I trailed off after noticing who it was.

Christopher and I had just talked about Julia earlier, and now we’ve bumped into her.

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“Are you from the Tanner family?” Julia glanced at me and took her bag from me. It was a question, but she sounded sure about it.

“Hello, Mrs. Lane!” I straightened my back nervously, as though I was a child about to meet the principal after making a mistake.

“Hello, Ms. Tanner!” Monica nodded and flashed a smile. Beside her was Darius’ wife, Shelley Lighton. Their hands were laden with shopping bags. It was obvious that Julia was here to spend quality time with her future daughter-in-law. My expression grew awkward.

“Are you shopping?” Julia asked calmly. She seemed quite pleasant. I knew that was how influential people treated other ordinary people—with a distant and polite smile.

“Yes, I’m here to stroll around.” I was praying fervently that Christopher had spotted his mom and sister-in-law, and would be smart enough to hide somewhere until they left.

I wasn’t prepared to reveal my relationship with Christopher to the public as I wasn’t confident at all. My thought was that we needed to hold it back for at least one month. If Julia found out I slept with her son right after I got a divorce, the consequences would be horrible.

Alas, Christopher hadn’t heard my prayer.

“Why did you run away so fast? Help me with the stuff. They’re so heavy.” Christopher’s voice rang out from behind me. Stuck in a tight spot, I could only offer Julia an awkward smile.

“Chris? Why are you here?” Julia asked in surprise when she spotted him. Her gaze also flitted to me.

“To stock up on stuff. Mom, didn’t you say you have an important afternoon tea date? Why are you shopping now?” Christopher didn’t seem worried at all. He gestured at the shopping bags in his hands. I immediately imagined the scene of Julia spotting the adult products in the bag. Ugh, I wish the ground would open up and swallow me whole.

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“Yes, it’s an important afternoon tea date. I’ve asked Monica out a few days ago. You told me you’re busy and refused to accompany us. But look at you now, you’re clearly not busy at all,” Julia chided unhappily and pulled Monica to stand in front of her.

“Monica’s going to hold a piano concert a few days later. She is kind enough to make time for me, so it’s time for you to do the same. Come with us now.”

Christopher scratched his head, seemingly stumped. “I can’t. Ms. Tanner agreed to help me choose some stuff and hold my shopping bag. In return, I have to deliver her luggage to her house. I don’t want to go back on my word.”

Having said that, Christopher tossed the shopping bag in my direction. I instantly reached out to catch it, but the stuff was too heavy and landed on the ground instead. Without hesitation, I gritted my teeth and picked the bag up.

“Oh? Chris, you know Ms. Tanner?” Monica pointed at us in surprise. My heart raced in alarm as I was afraid Christopher might say something inappropriate. It felt like my heart was about to leap out of my chest any minute.

“Of course we know each other. Besides...”

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When Christopher paused deliberately, my heart almost stopped beating. If we weren’t in public, I would’ve leaped onto him and pinched him forcefully.

After shooting me an assuring look, Christopher replied, “Mom, you know her too. Why are you so forgetful? Ms. Tanner gave you your favorite walnut cookies on Dad’s birthday. I remember you only shared it with Dad that night and refused to spare me one. I would never forget that.”

“I’m old and forgetful,” came Julia’s cool reply. “Can’t you hold your stuff yourself? Stop bullying her. Put the shopping bag in the car instead of asking her to hold it.”

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“Chris, you shouldn’t bully women, especially a married woman. If someone else finds out, they will mock us,” said Shelley. Her unkind statement sounded like she was insinuating that Christopher and I were involved in an immoral relationship. Frowning, I racked my brains to recall when did I offend this woman.

“Shelley, don’t worry about it. I paid Ms. Tanner to carry my stuff. Who dares to mock me? I can help that person carry their stuff as long as they can offer me what I want, right?” Christopher replied nonchalantly while lighting up a cigarette.

“Chris, you’re smoking again. How many times I’ve said that smoking is bad for your health? You always like to smoke in front of me, huh?”

“See? Monica cares so much about you. What an ungrateful brat,” reprimanded Julia as she tugged on Christopher’s earlobe. “I’ll ask the driver to send Ms. Tanner back home. Let’s go to Clove Eatery now. Monica has two movie tickets. I don’t have time to watch the movie with her, so you should go with her.”

I realized Monica had retreated backward while frowning at Christopher. There was a hint of tenderness in her gaze as she stared at Christopher adoringly. I felt uncomfortable with her action. After all, the man she was staring at was my boyfriend, yet I could not and dared not admit it.

I was nothing compared to Monica. Clearly, Julia adored her and treated her as a future daughter-in-law. It was obvious by the way she kept trying to match them up. As her love rival, my only advantage was that Christopher loved me.

Monica was born into an influential family and had graduated overseas. She was also a famous pianist. On the other hand, I had nothing to boast about.

“Mom, are you seriously asking me to watch a yucky romance movie? I’ll fall asleep during the movie. Ask Shelley to watch the movie with Monica. Darius is busy inspecting some upgrading work in the city, so he’s too busy to spend time with her. Alright, that’s enough. I need to go now. Zachary is waiting for me,” declared Christopher hastily.

He wagged a finger at me. “Well? Why are you standing there? Hurry up and bring the stuff to my car.”

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Finally, the ordeal was about to end. I wiped the sweat off my forehead and gripped the huge bag in my hand, about to leave. Suddenly, Shelley stopped me and asked, "Chris, what did you buy? This is such a huge bag."

She reached out promptly to open the bag. My mind went completely blank. Shit. It's full of condoms and random mysterious adult stuff. How should I explain and pretend I know nothing about them?

Christopher grabbed her arm to stop her. "Shelley, some men's stuff isn't suitable to show women."

"Huh? You're being secretive." Shelley's interest was piqued.

"Of course. Only Zachary and the others can go through the bag. Are you sure you want to take a look?" In return, Christopher folded his arms and gestured for Shelley to go ahead.

"Shelley, stop it. Some things are better left unknown." Julia gave a dismissive wave and ordered, "We'll be waiting for you at Clove Eatery. If you don't show up, I'll tell your dad tonight that you bullied me and Monica."

"Mom, you're no longer young. Don't you feel shy saying that in public?" Christopher seemed exasperated.

Seeing that, I finally realized where Christopher got his childish and coy actions from.

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In the car, I returned the bag to Christopher and collapsed into the chair quietly. Christopher ruffled my hair affectionately with a smile. "Were you scared?"

I glared at him. "I was so frightened my legs went wobbly. Your mom saw me holding a bag full of condoms. I'm so embarrassed!"

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Christopher burst out laughing and teased me for being a coward. I took a condom out of the bag and tossed it at him. "Hurry up and send me back home. You have a pretty date waiting for you at Clove Eatery, after all. Remember to take away some food for me later."

"Do you want me to bring you back a couple's set?" Christopher teased. "You're jealous."

"No, I'm not!" However, my denial sounded like the cover-up of a guilty person.

"Alright, you're not jealous. By the way, I left something for you on the coffee table. After considering carefully, give me your answer. I'll be waiting for you," said Christopher out of nowhere.

When we arrived, Christopher gave me a steamy kiss and flashed his headlights three times as usual. He was about to leave when I yelled out, "Christopher, what does flashing the headlights thrice mean?"

"Why don't you make a guess? Eve, I'll wait for your correct answer." With that, Christopher stepped on the accelerator and sped away. It just so happened that a car was driving past, so he flashed the headlights three times on purpose and stuck his head out of the window.

"If you get it correct, you'll get a prize. Let's see who gets the correct answer first. I still remember the story about the planes and love." Christopher grinned.

I watched as his flashy sports car sped away. Pouting, I muttered to myself, "Why is he so mysterious? I'm sure I'll be able to get it right!"

Back home, I rummaged around the coffee table before noticing a card. It was an invitation card, so I thought it was for a party or something similar. When I read it carefully, it turned out to be an invitation to join a contest—the National Youth Art Exhibition and Contest.

It seemed like it was a reputable event that would be held three months later. I spotted a few renowned artists among the judges who I got to know when I first started learning how to draw. Recently, most contests had turned into publicity stunts and

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advertisements, but still, the top three winners of the contest had to be capable enough to secure the spots.

Where did Christopher get the invitation from?

I held the card as mixed emotions overwhelmed my heart. Christopher seemed strangely confident in my skills. He was sure I could produce a breathtaking art piece. I had no idea where he got his confidence from.

My first thought was to say no. The contest would be held three months later. It would take around six months for the few rounds of exhibitions to end. I was certain I wouldn't even qualify for the second round with my horrible drawing skills.

Strangely, Monica's face popped up in my mind. She was glowing brightly like the moon, while Christopher was burning like the sun. One of them was burning with passion, while the other was as gentle as flowing water.

After our previous discussion, Christopher didn't mention he wanted to bring me back home again. Is he giving me a chance to show my talent and let me shine so I can visit his parents confidently?

As I caressed the card, my heart leaped in joy. He had paved the path for me, so I should forge ahead bravely and show my talents. No one would want to be a nobody. In the end, I kept the card carefully in the drawer.

I took out my easel as inspiration flowed out like water escaping a dam. I hurriedly drew everything out on paper. Eyes that couldn't cry; the blissful feeling; everything could be expressed in a painting.

When my phone rang, I thought it was Christopher. I answered and asked with a smile, "What is it?"

Lyle's voice sounded over the line. "Yvonne, forgive me for saying those words back then. I was too mad to see you and Christopher together. Come downstairs. I'm waiting for you here. I need to talk to you about something important."

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The phone screen clearly displayed an incoming call from Lyle. Having never reset my data or deleted his number, his contact was still saved as “my beloved” in my phone, and the sight of it made me want to throw up. I need to change his contact name as soon as this call is over.

No, I needed to change my phone number to a new one. That way, Lyle wouldn't be able to call me if he found himself locked out again.

“Can't you just tell me through the phone?” I wasn't stupid enough to go and meet him in person all by myself.

“It has to do with your grandma,” he replied. “You care about her, don't you?”

There was a brief pause from my side. “Wait for me.”

I couldn't care less about Lyle, but my grandma was a completely different story. I'd been worried about her ever since Lyle had gotten himself involved with Crystal, who I was sure was planning something sinister. Every time Crystal and I had a conversation, she would talk about Lyle as if he was a toy we were fighting over.

Whatever decisions Lyle made were his business and his business only. What concerned me was if grandma would get hurt as a result of him and Crystal getting married.

Descending the stairs, I spotted Lyle smoking a cigarette as he stood under a large tree by the entrance. He seemed stressed; there was a constant wrinkle between his eyebrows, which was surprising. I thought he'd be constantly over the moon considering the gorgeous lover he had waiting at home for him.

I approached him and stopped with about six feet of space left between us. “What happened with Grandma?”

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"You're living together with Christopher now?" he retorted.

"Why are you asking me that?" His tone annoyed me greatly. "I've already told you that it's none of your business."

"I've been thinking, Yvonne," Lyle suddenly interjected. "You can't go on like this. I know you feel hurt because I chose Crystal. But did you really have to go and become Christopher's mistress just because of your grudge against me? What's going to happen when he marries Monica? You can't let yourself get thrown away and fall into despair once more."

Not this again. "You care way too much about your ex-wife," I huffed, frowning. "Besides, the story of you and Crystal getting married has already been published in the papers. Aren't you scared that a reporter might take a picture of us here like this? Aren't you scared of what they might write about us? Or is that what you want: to be the main character of a love triangle?"

"I care about you out of the kindness of my heart, for goodness' sake." He rolled his eyes. "You once told Bianca that you hated mistresses and homewreckers the most, so why are you becoming one yourself?"

At that, my breath hitched in my throat. Those words had stabbed right through my chest like an invisible dagger. Back then, I'd chosen to marry Lyle because I loved him all while knowing that the girl he was truly in love with was Crystal. And now, Christopher and Monica were yet another picture-perfect couple that I was trying to insert myself into because of my love for Christopher.

Christopher could eat dinner with Monica and his family every night while I was left alone at home, ordering delivery food and waiting for him to pay me a visit.

This is embarrassing.

Lyle perked up when he saw that I didn't have a response, mistakenly thinking that he had managed to convince me. "Listen to me: leave Christopher. If you need anything, you can always come to me! I'll help you as much as I can. All I want is for you to lead a better life than this, Eve."

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I instantly snapped awake from my daze and pushed him away. "I've become this way because of you! What were you thinking? Did you not want your ex-wife to have another guy in her life so that she'd stupidly wait around for you to come back to her? Just for her to then get all heartbroken again when that doesn't happen? I won't fall for that anymore, so leave me alone!"

I raised my chin high up in the air as I swept my hair over my shoulder. Pride and insecurity; vulnerability and stubbornness; these were all the qualities that made me who I was as a person.

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