

The Day I Kissed An Older Man By Cher the Cherished

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Not wanting to wake her up from her dreams, Jeremy got up and walked to the door. He planned to go take a short rest in the study but just when he was about to reach the door, he suddenly realized something was off.

'How come I don't hear any breathing sound coming from the bed at all?' A jolt shot through his heart and he quickly turned on the light. He scanned the room and a frown immediately appeared on his face when he realized there was no one in the room at all.

He hurriedly walked to the bed and pulled off the blanket. It was empty!

'Where could that little rascal be at this time of the night?'

He took out his phone and called her, only to find her phone was ringing on the bedside. That phone used to be his but he already gave it to Corinne.

'How come she didn't bring her phone out?'

A sudden thought occurred to him and he quickly walked over and opened the wardrobe. Her clothes were gone!

His pupils shrank to pinpoint size and his face darkened. "Bowen!" he shouted.

Bowen hurried over and asked, "What's the matter, Mister Jeremy?"

Jeremy glared coldly at him and asked, "Where's she?"

Bowen looked bewildered. He glanced around the empty room, then at the men's clothes in the wardrobe, and immediately knew something was wrong.

“Mister Jeremy, ma’am went straight back to her room after dinner and we never saw her coming down. She has been feeling easily tired lately so she always goes back to rest in her room quite early in the evening. I’ve even instructed the other servants not to bother her!”

Jeremy’s jaws tightened as he gritted his teeth. “Well, what are you still standing here for? Go find her! Don’t even think of coming back here if you don’t find her.”

“Yes, Mister Jeremy. Please don’t worry. We’ll look for ma’am right away,” said Bowen fearfully.

However, they looked throughout the night and when morning came, they still could not find any sign of Corinne which was weird since all of the surveillance footage did not show her leaving the house at all.

Jeremy sat resignedly and silently on the first floor’s sofa. His eyes were red and there was a cloud of sinister air surrounding him, making him look like one of those

malevolent and

bloodthirsty gods.

‘She has run away,’ he thought. Just how desperate was she to get away from him that she

went through all the trouble to make sure she was not captured by the surveillance cameras and only took the route where she knew there to be the surveillance cameras’ blindspots?

‘Good. Very good. I expected nothing less of you, Corinne Carew,’ said Jeremy to himself.

Failing to find Corinne, Bowen and the other servants were waiting anxiously for Jeremy to meet their punishments.

The air in the room was thick with tension and every sound Jeremy made caused the servants to want to get down on their knees and beg for mercy.

At that moment, Tommy hurried over and reported, "Mister Jeremy, we've checked the airport, bus stops, and hotels. There were no records of Ma'am ever going there. We also went to the Carews' house but she wasn't there as well. They said ma'am went over yesterday but they did not see her since she took back all the engagement gifts you asked me to send over to their house."

Jeremy leaned against the sofa and put his hand on his forehead. He looked exhausted, depressed, and murderous all at the same time as if the whole world was hanging by a thread.

After thinking about it, Bowen bravely opened his mouth and said, "Mister Jeremy, ma'am had someone deliver her things yesterday and I'm guessing those are the engagement gifts Mister Jenkinsons are talking about. I've asked the servants to put them in the storeroom."

Jeremy narrowed his eyes wordlessly.

"Mister Jeremy, ma'am seemed to have only taken with her the paintings you gifted her and nothing else."

'Well, she certainly planned this well. She even made sure to return the engagement gifts,' thought Jeremy.

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'What's she trying to pull? Is this her way of cutting ties with me? Well, dream on, Corinne Carew!!

Jeremy finally opened his mouth and said fiercely, "Continue to look for her! Go to the ends of the earth to find her if you have to! You don't stop looking until you find her!"

Tommy tried to ignore the chill running up his spine as he said, "Yes, sir!"

A month later.

The city of Thalassa was one of the stops in Michel's the renowned painter Art Exhibition.

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World Tour

The lady greeter at the entrance of the gallery was dressed in her elegant work clothes with a light orange silk scarf around her neck. Her makeup was exquisitely done which complemented the professional smile she had on her face as she welcomed the guests into the exhibition.

The gallery was one of the most high-end galleries in the whole of Thalassa. The guests were all dressed in expensive and classy tailored suits or couture gowns. However, the smile on the lady greeter's face was immediately replaced by a frown when she saw a twenty-year-old girl dressed in casual clothing appear at the entrance.

"Excuse me, miss but I'm afraid I can't let you in," said the lady greeter.

Corinne stopped walking and raised her eyebrow at her. "And why is that?"

"Because this exhibition is for guests only and you don't look like it so I can't let you in. Please leave the premises right away," said the lady greeter rudely.

Corinne frowned and said, "If I read correctly, the sign in front of the building said the exhibition is free to the public."

"That's right. This exhibition is free but it's only for the customers who could afford the paintings. There's no point letting you in since you don't seem like you can afford anything inside," said the lady greeter haughtily.

Corinne smiled. "Is that so? How do you know I can't afford to buy the paintings?"

The lady greeter looked up and down at Corinne's clothes with a contemptuous expression on her face. 'Light blue shirt, baggy jeans, a pair of white sneakers. I have to admit she's pretty enough to carry off something so simple but it's obvious those clothes are under the hundred-dollar range. Besides, those clothes will look so out of place in the gallery.'

Thinking of this, the lady greeter then impatiently said, "Miss, please take a good look at

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yourself before asking me that, and if there's nothing else I can help you with, I strongly advise you to let me get back to my work."

"There is something you can help me with. I've come to view the exhibition."

The lady greeter laughed as if she just heard the funniest joke in the world. "Did you not see that all the guests who were allowed to go in were all dressed in formal clothing? I can tell from the way you're dressed that you couldn't even afford the cheapest painting inside the gallery so what would be the point of letting you in?"

Besides, the guests will question the reputation of the gallery if I let someone like you in. They

I

might even think all the famous paintings we have are counterfeits. So I would greatly appreciate it if you stop making my life difficult and leave here immediately!”

Corinne narrowed her eyes. “Whoever said that one has to be in formal dress to be allowed into an exhibition? There’s no such rule!”

The lady greeter finally lost her composure. “Our gallery says so! Now are you going to leave or do I need to ask security to escort you out?”

Corinne nodded indifferently. “Go ahead! Call security! In fact, why not call the manager too!”

The lady greeter rolled her eyes at Corinne. “Huh! Our manager is waiting for our VIP guests to come so he doesn’t have the time for someone like you!”

At that moment, who should appear at the entrance but the manager himself?

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“Why are you shouting so much? Are you trying to ruin the gallery’s reputation by letting our guests see you acting like a crazy woman?” scolded the gallery manager after walking over.

The lady greeter immediately dropped the attitude when she saw the gallery manager. “Sorry, sir. There’s a woman who’s causing trouble here. She didn’t dress according to the dress code. but she insisted on going in,” she said innocently.

The gallery manager took one look at Corinne and his face immediately changed. He bowed to her and said servilely, “Miss Carew, you’re here!”

The lady greeter was stunned and bewildered. “Sir, who’s-”

Corinne smiled. “Yes, I’m here but your gallery doesn’t seem to welcome someone who’s dressed like me.”

The gallery manager smiled awkwardly before he glared at the lady greeter for offending Corinne. He then quickly apologized to her, “I’m so sorry about the staff, Miss Carew. She’s just a temp so she’s not familiar with the gallery’s rules yet. Please don’t get angry. I promise I’ll fire her immediately.”

“I’m not interested in the gallery’s human resource issues so it’s up to you whether want you to fire her or not. But you should know that art is for the masses and not only for the rich. How people want to dress is only up to them so you shouldn’t encourage a corporate culture of judging people by their clothing here,” said Corinne languidly.

The gallery manager nodded his head repeatedly and smiled ingratiatingly. “Yes, you’re right, Miss Carew. We’ll learn from this lesson and train the staff properly.”

Corinne raised an eyebrow. “May I go in now?”

“Of course, of course. This way, please, Miss Carew,” said the manager respectfully.

Corinne entered the gallery at a leisurely pace.

The lady greeter watched in bewilderment as Corinne went in. Then she asked the gallery manager quizzically, “Sir, who’s that b*tch?”

“You better watch your mouth! That woman is Miss Carew, our most esteemed guest. Don’t you know that anyone who crosses her will be in serious trouble?!” reprimanded the gallery

manager.

‘What? So the VIP guest the gallery manager has been waiting for is this inappropriately dressed woman?’ The lady greeter found that hard to believe so she asked the manager again, “But she doesn’t look like she has money! Sir, who exactly is she?”

The gallery manager looked disgustedly at the foolish lady greeter and said coldly, “That’s not something you need to know. I’m now officially letting you know that you are fired. Go to the

accounts department to get your final paycheck and leave right away. Our gallery doesn’t need someone as shallow and vulgar as you to work for us.”

The lady greeter was dumbfounded. She never imagined the gallery manager would fire her so she started to panic. "Sir, please don't fire me. I didn't mean to do it. Please give me another chance."

The gallery manager ignored her pleas, shook off her hands, and dusted the spot where she touched him with a disgusted expression on his face. He then turned around and quickly went back into the gallery to hobnob with the VIPS.

"Sir," Anger and resentment filled the lady greeter's heart but alas, she still crying had no choice but to go to the accounts department to get her final paycheck.

The gallery was playing soothing, classical music and the guests who came were mainly there for the more famous and iconic paintings.

Corinne stood alone in a place where there were fewer people and looked at the still-life painting hanging on the wall with a thoughtful expression on her face. To be honest, she was

not very

interested in this kind of commercial art exhibition, and the only reason she was there was because she heard Michel would be attending the exhibition as well.

According to the information Marvin gave her, Michel was her mother's art teacher and the only lead she had who could give her more clues as to who her mother was.

Therefore, she wanted to take this opportunity to ask Michel about her mother.

'Who's my mother? Who were the people chasing after her? Is she still alive? There are so many questions I want to ask him,' thought Corinne.

At that moment, the gallery manager approached her respectfully and said, "Miss Carew, did you see any paintings you like? Would you like me to tell you the story behind the paintings?"

Corinne was pulled back from her thoughts. She glanced indifferently at the gallery manager and said, "Not at the moment but I'll let you know if one ever catches my eye. By the way,

when will Michel be here?"

The gallery manager sighed and said, "Unfortunately, there has been a schedule change. Michel was supposed to attend this exhibition as well but his wife suddenly fell sick just when he was about to fly here. He decided to stay back in Phinacea to take care of his wife so he wouldn't be coming to our country for the foreseeable future."

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'He's not coming?' thought Corinne with a frown. "This isn't good since I can't fly overseas at

the moment."

Jeremy looked all over the place for her in the past month. She was sure she would be found as soon as he found the record of her flying out of the country. During this one month, she never used her card to buy anything. Instead, she used either Aaron's or Xante's card to buy the things she needed to avoid Jeremy finding her.

She did not have the time nor the energy to pretend to be Jeremy's wife so that he could please his elders anymore. The most important thing for her to do now was to find out who her mother was and what happened in the past to make her abandon Corinne.

If her mother was still alive, she would find her no matter what.

If her mother was dead, then she would find out who killed her so that she could

avenge

her!

The gallery manager noticed the bored expression on Corinne's face so he said, "Miss Carew, if you're not interested in these paintings, there are a few paintings over there by another painter. Would you like to take a look?"

Corinne came back to her senses and asked, "Do you have any paintings by Nellie Nymphaea?"

The gallery manager was a little taken aback by her question. "Yes, it just so happens we have two of her paintings. Nellie Nymphaea is Michel's proudest student so he'll always exhibit some of her paintings alongside his. This time is no exception. But not many people have asked about her. She's not that popular in the international art scene because her style was too unique. Besides, no one knows what her real name is and there seems to be no publicity around her. I'm quite surprised to find out you're interested in her paintings."

Corinne did not want to explain herself so she simply said, "Where are her paintings? Take me

to them."

"Yes, Miss Carew. Please follow me this way."

"Here are the two paintings, Miss Carew. It is said Nellie Nymphaea painted this when she was still a university student." The gallery manager raised his hand to introduce the two paintings on the wall.

One painting was a depiction of a man's silhouette, which gave Corinne a feeling of déjà vu, while the other painting was a realistic rendition of a landscape.

"I want both of them. Please wrap them up for me," said Corinne.

The gallery manager's favorite customers are those who never asked for the price when buying. He smiled politely and bowed ingratiatingly, "Certainly, Miss Carew. Please wait here

for a moment and I'll arrange someone to wrap it up for you."

"Okay."

The gallery manager walked away, leaving Corinne to stare at the paintings hanging on the

wall.

'Mom drew this when she was still in university. Her style still has a certain warmth to them so that must mean she was happy and carefree then. Could that man be someone who she used to love? Could he be my dad?' thought Corinne.

"Miss Carew, it's been a while," said a familiar voice.

Corinne snapped out of her trance and turned to look at the handsome man standing behind her.

The man smiled at her while his dark eyes sparkled flirtatiously.

Corinne frowned in alarm when she realized who the man was. "What are you doing here?"

Jason was wearing a well-tailored dark brown suit. His innate nobility mixed with a little impishness radiated from his whole body as he smiled and said, "I heard two of the paintings

luck." by Nellie Nymphaea would be exhibited here so I came here to try my

Corinne raised an eyebrow. "Well, sorry to say but Lady Luck doesn't seem to be on your today. You're just one step too late 'cause I've already bought the two paintings."

side

Jason took one step toward her and the smile on his face became even wider. His eyes seemed to be drawing her in and he said, "No, that's where you're wrong. Lady Luck is indeed on my side because I came here to see you and here you are."

The corners of Corinne's lips twitched for a moment. "He's still as flirtatious as ever."

Previously, she wanted to buy the three Nellie Nymphaea paintings in his gallery but not only did he not sell them to her but he even teased her about it. Later, she only managed to get the three paintings with Jeremy's help. Therefore, it was not weird that Jason knew about her obsession with Nellie Nymphaea.

There was one other thing she could not help but think Jason and Jeremy were in it together since the two of them were friends for many years. Thinking of this, Corinne became even more cautious. "You came here to see me? Why?"

Jason narrowed his eyes. "I have something to discuss with you."

"And that is?"

Jason smiled. "Why don't we grab a bite together after the exhibition? It's been a long time. since we last saw each other so it'll be great if we can sit down and catch up with each other."

Corinne was not interested in that. "Sorry, but I'm not free after this. If you have something to say to me, you can say it now. And if you can't, then the matter must not be urgent so it can

wait."

Jason did not know whether to laugh or cry; he was, in fact, a little hurt by her heartlessness.

"Corinne, we're friends, right?"

Corinne suddenly remembered how he helped her to get a change of clothing after she fell into the pond and how after that, she agreed to be his friend.

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Do you treat all your friends this cold?"

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Corinne frowned. "Why don't you just tell me what is it you came here to see me for? I don't like it when others beat around the bush!"

Jason sighed helplessly. He then smiled wryly and said, "Corinne, you don't have to put your guard up around me. I just wanted to help you."

Corinne was unmoved. "Help me? How?"

Jason stepped closer to her and looked at her bare face with passion in his eyes.

"Corinne, I might not know why but I can tell you're looking for Nellie Nymphaea and I might be able to help you with that."

Corinne's eyes turned sharp. It was obvious he got her attention. "You know where she is?"

Jason smiled mysteriously. He deliberately avoided answering her question to keep her curiosity burning and instead asked, "Now do you want to have lunch with me?"