

The Untouchable Ex- Wife

Chapter 1141

Leia's tone was firm because she didn't want either of them to have any regrets. She left the apartment and took the elevator downstairs, and wasn't surprised to find that Xavier didn't come after her. Leia's lip curled in disgust, and she wiped her tears away furiously. "Ugh, all men are pigs! There's no end to their greed!"

At that moment, she felt as if she had been sinking into an abyss she couldn't pull herself out of.

Come to think of it, she was probably cursed to only have one-sided loves- first with William Jones, now with Xavier Stuart. All she ever amounted to was the 'rebound'... fated to return to the sidelines once the actual love interest returned.

It was tragic.

Was this fate? If it was, maybe she should just do away with love for the rest of her life! Leia soon returned to Carmine Pawnshop, cutting a miserable figure. However, when she stepped through the front door, there was a loud 'pop' overhead as confetti rained down on her.

"Welcome back, Miss Osborne!"

Chase had a saucer of olive oil, anointing her to do away with bad luck, while Renee unleashed party poppers all around in celebration. They had been waiting for her for some time now, and happily celebrated her return.

"It's been hard on you, Leia!" Renee had puffy eyes as she gave Leia a bear hug. Her eyes gleamed as she whispered excitedly, "So? How did it go last night? Did you manage to seal the deal?"

The chemistry between them had been all too obvious last night, and

Renee was convinced that it was just a matter of time. Luck had not been on their side for a while now, so Renee would be happy if Leia managed to find love.

"Renee, don't mention that name around me ever again if you consider me your friend... or

it's over between us," Leia told Renee and everyone else, her tone uncharacteristically grim. She had been hurt terribly, so it was only natural that she wanted to distance herself from everything related to that man.

"Well... Alright, as long as you're home." Renee could not bring herself to ask Leia what happened, despite her overwhelming curiosity. Inwardly, she was cursing Xavier—what on earth did he do to hurt Leia so badly?

Nonetheless, after half a watermelon, two mangoes, three packs of cherries, dozens of

grilled skewers, and a pot of stewed mutton, Leia felt slightly better.

She burped in satisfaction and slammed her hand on the table as she declared, "Men are all just condiments. They're nowhere as delightful as a good meal, so getting sad over them would just be bringing myself unnecessary grief."

"Exactly! They are just condiments-they're just nice sometimes, but they're not a necessity," Renee echoed.

"Cheers!" Both women exclaimed as they clinked glasses.

Renee was supposed to only be Leia's chaperone, but somehow her sadness also arose as she drank, and she began to complain through tears and snot, "I'm telling you, Leia, Xavier isn't that bad... When it comes to people like Stefan Hunt, you'll be left wondering why you're even alive... Did you know he completely forgot about me? He'd even be lovey-dovey with Seraphina right in front of me! I'm supposed to be his wife, but I feel like the other woman now. Do you know how much that hurts?"

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Leia's heart ached for Renee as she listened to her complaints. "I get it, Renee, I really do... As for me, I'm Seraphina to Xavier Stuart. He just wants me as his rebound, and uses me like a tool to make him feel better about his unrequited love. His ex just needed to shed a tear... and I lost."

Leia looked contemplative, then suggested, "Why don't you cry to Stefan? Maybe he'll remember you then."

Renee was a little tipsy after all the liquor, and actually thought Leia's suggestion made sense. "Hey, you're right. I'm his real love interest, so why should I suffer?! I should just go to him and start crying... I wouldn't know unless I try, right? Make yourself at home, Leia. I have something to deal with right now."

Stefan had clearly abducted Jovan to get back at her! Spurred on by that thought and liquid courage, and having come up with a plan to demand Jovan's release, she chugged her drink and got up, ready to leave.

Leia was drawing a blank, and quickly chased after her. "Where are you going, Renee?"

"To find Stefan, and cry him a river!" Renee said cheerfully. Stefan was spiteful, but she was sure his grudge would disappear when he saw her cry.

"I-I'm going too!" Leia exclaimed, wobbling to her feet.

"Yes, let's cry together and hysterically—as many times as we want until we annoy him. Let's see if he will still harass me after." Renee took Leia's hand, and they left menacingly. Beside them Chase and Plum, Leia's maid, were left exchanging glances.

"Are those two really going to be alright?"

"Probably. Individually, they're scary when they lose it, so they'll probably be invincible if they lose it at the same time."

They held faith in Renee and Leia's abilities, and allowed them to do as they liked.

Renee whipped out her phone and smoothly keyed in Stefan's number-she may have blocked him across the years, but she always saved his number. She called the number and waited.

Stefan just happened to be chugging glass after glass with Xavier at the most expensive booth seats in Bar of Fame, and had left his phone with Elijah.

Elijah answered Renee's call, and the woman immediately snapped, "Where are you, Stefan Hunt?!"

"Who is this?" Elijah asked warily, finding the voice somewhat familiar. "It's Renee. You left me a note asking me to find you, didn't you?!"

"R-Renee..." Elijah was overjoyed-it was the missus! The ancient ship he swore fealty to was sailing again!

"We're at the VIP Zone of the Bar of Fame. Hurry over to the second floor— your seat is waiting!" Elijah said quickly, happy to help.

Hence, Renee and Leia took a taxi despite being absolutely drunk, and headed straight towards the Bar of Fame!

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Chapter 1143

Stefan and Xavier were lounging at the VIP booth seats on the second floor of Bar of Fame, watching as people flailed around on the dance floor.

They were drinking tequila from Massimo-the texture was smooth, and it was highly intoxicating. Specifically, Xavier was doing the drinking, while Stefan was just offering company. He knew that his alcohol tolerance was average, so he basically avoided it. On the other hand, Xavier was chugging glass after glass relentlessly, as if he was in mourning.

“Stefan, I’m telling you... You really shouldn’t fall in love. It’s sweet at first, but after that, it’s just pain and bitterness. I’m done!” Xavier declared emotionally as he twirled the blue liquor in his glass, staring at the myriad colors overhead.

“Who did you fall in love with this time?” Stefan asked casually, looking noble and aloof as he leaned against the red cushioned seat, one leg crossed over the other. He was used to having his friends ask him out to drink their sorrows away every other day.

Still, he was curious which woman it would be this time... Who had reduced Beach City’s famous Casanova to this?

“I’m not in love-she was, and I let her down. I just feel bad for her... I’m a terrible human being!” With that, Xavier chugged another glass.

Life was certainly hard-he could no longer love, but he had thoughtlessly messed with a woman who really loved him. Now, he ached from guilt, but he could not do a thing about it. “You’re not in love? With that wretched state you’re in? Just admit it, there’s no need to be stubborn. Falling in love is not something to be embarrassed about.” Stefan knew the truth-if a man was drowning his sorrows, feelings were definitely involved. Stefan had no idea why Xavier was trying to hide it.

“You’re a coward. You can’t even confront your true feelings,” Stefan said neutrally, snatching Xavier’s glass from him.

“Look who’s talking, Stefan. Are you really that brave? You’re more pathetic in love than I am-at least I never had an actual relationship, and there were regrets at worst. Don’t you think having a relationship and then losing it is much more pathetic?”

Xavier shook his head, staring at Stefan sympathetically. Compared to Stefan’s tormented marriage, his relationship with Leia was insignificant-children playing house, at best.

“My relationship is perfectly fine. Seraphina and I respect each other very much,” Stefan retorted nonchalantly.

“Oh, just shut up. Is it even a marriage when respect is the first thing you mention? That’s a platonic partnership at best, and ask yourself... does your heart race when you’re with her?” Xavier rolled his eyes and scoffed.

Stefan became quiet because he knew the answer.

If anything, his relationship with Seraphina was one of duty and gratitude in fact, they were going to marry, but he had never felt any lust for her, even when they shared a bed. He had even consulted a specialist about it, convinced that he was ill, only for the specialist to tell him that everything was fine-that it was all in his head.

Apparently, his heart was sealed with a lock, which only the right person would unlock. If this issue persisted, he would surely become ill eventually!

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Chapter 1144

That was why Stefan urgently needed to find the one who could 'unlock' him, so that he could be normal again!

"Your silence only proves me right. See? You agree with me that you don't love Seraphina at all, and you'd be hurting her and yourself if you kept bumbling on and marrying her, y'know?" Xavier naturally saw everything clearly because he was close to Stefan, and Stefan saw Xavier clearly too.

Stefan did not love Seraphina, just like Xavier did not love Leia... therefore, as a scumbag with a conscience, he would never allow himself to hurt Leia, or his good friend to hurt Seraphina.

"I really don't love Seraphina, do I?" Stefan narrowed his eyes, working hard to ponder on the fact before asking a soul-searching question. "But who is the one I love if not her?"

After all, he was constantly aware that he loved a certain person with every fiber of his being, and it was a love ingrained to his very bones. Judging from his memories, it had to be Seraphina, who braved hell and high water to stay with him, never abandoning him even in his darkest moment...

But if that was true, why did he feel like something wasn't right?

"Why are you asking me? You should be asking yourself-whoever's face comes to mind the instant you mention 'love' is most likely the person you love," Xavier suggested, being a veteran in relationships. In Xavier's case, nothing came to mind when he thought of the

word... he probably didn't love anyone other than himself!

"Love..." Stefan's face turned troubled as he racked his brain-after all, the person that first came to mind was his sworn enemy!

Meanwhile, said enemy had appeared, striding upstairs towards him and stomping angrily with each step.

Xavier noticed that Leia was with Renee, who was walking as loudly as she could. As if feeling guilty, he slid close to Stefan while rubbing his eyes and asking nervously, "S-Stefan, am I seeing things or do you see it too?"

"I do," Stefan growled, his handsome face scowling as he watched Renee and Leia stride past their bodyguards and walk up to them.

He could clearly feel his heart racing.

It was an unfamiliar feeling-his adrenaline was kicking in, spiking his senses for danger and excitement!

"You're more competent than I thought," Stefan said haughtily as he stared at her. After all, he was the hunter here, setting a trap and waiting for

Renee to bite. He just didn't expect that she was bold enough to leap into that trap! Anyone could fall in love with that!

"Shut up and give him back to me, and I'll let bygones be bygones,* Renee demanded viciously-she was dazed at first, but sobered up when she saw him.

"What if I refuse?" Stefan rested his chin on his hand, his gaze cool and imposing. Everyone around them gave them a wide berth out of fear.

After all, Stefan Hunt was basically the king of Beach City-his every step could quake it, and the further they were from him, the better.

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Chapter 1145

Renee stood before Stefan, angrily glaring at him as the atmosphere grew tense. Even Stefan's bodyguards were holding their breaths, ready to jump into action at any moment.

However, the standoff lasted little over ten seconds as Renee's eyes suddenly turned watery.

"If you don't... I-I'll cry!" She stammered, and started bawling. "Boo-hoo... Please, Stefan Hunt... CEO of H Group and the god of Beach City... Please, give him back to me..." She was crying so loudly that the whole bar seemed to quake, causing everyone in the bar to turn towards the VIP area curiously. Stefan was utterly mystified—this woman never seemed to behave like a normal person, and he was completely caught off guard!

To make things worse, Renee had become so experienced in crying that her tears and snot were flowing freely while her eyes and nose had turned red. She looked so miserable that she could give professional actresses a run for their money!

"No... Please... If you're upset with someone, go mess with them... Please don't involve innocents... Boo-hoo... If you hate me, you can hit me, you can curse me or even kill me if it satisfies you... It doesn't matter how you torment me or punish me... I

won't complain at all as long as you're satisfied..." The woman sobbed,

wiping her tears away. "Here," she gasped, picking Stefan's hand up

and aiming it at her face. "You can hit me!

Just do whatever you want, don't hold back... or you'll get stressed!"

That was not all—Leia, spurred on by liquid courage, was spouting all sorts of nonsense to back up her friend!

"Oh, you're such a scumbag! Where's your conscience?! Just because you have money, you resort to vile crimes like abduction and blackmail?

Renee's just a student, but she's already had children with you, and you refuse to acknowledge her because of your post-nut clarity?! Aren't you afraid of karma?!" Immediately, everyone was in an uproar, and all of them were condemning Stefan.

"He's such a piece of crap... Bullying women, really?!"

"Poor girl... She's crying so miserably... Who's going to help her?!"

"To think I used to worship Stefan... But that's a wolf in sheep's clothing for you. Let's call the cops, or there'll definitely be trouble!"

Stefan was silent, clenching his fists and feeling extremely uncomfortable. Renee was crying to pressure Stefan, while Leia had her hands on her hips as she rambled on with ridiculous slander to incite public outrage.

"Boo-hoo... Please, Mr. Hunt, please spare us... Please give him back to us... We won't ever upset you anymore... We will hide our faces forever..."

"Yeah, you better give him back or we're calling the cops! Threatening a student to have sexual liaisons with you and even making her pregnant?! Let's see how you'd explain that to the po-po!"

"You must want to die, both of you!" Stefan bellowed at the two crazed women suddenly.

"Argh! Help! He's threatening to kill us!" Leia screamed at the top of her lungs. "Everyone, look—the CEO of H Group was exposed for blackmailing and is now threatening us with violence!"

Though Renee was not that brave, Leia had no such misgivings—she would not rest until she destroyed every ounce of dignity Stefan had!

Nearby, Xavier was a little drunk, but became sober the instant he saw that it was none other than Leia Osborne who was causing a fuss!

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Chapter 1146

Xavier strode up to Leia, grabbed her wrist, and said quietly, "What are you doing? There's a limit to making jokes, and don't you know what will happen if you make Stefan angry?"

Leia's gaze was muddled even as she turned to Xavier, but she only got more upset.

"Everyone, see? This man is no angel too, forcing himself on students just like his best friend. In fact, he's worse-the student had ten babies with him. Pigs like him should be given the electric chair!"

With that, everyone's attention turned to Xavier in record time.

"Exactly how much did you drink, woman?! Get a grip!" Xavier could smell the pungent scent of alcohol from Leia's mouth, and had to clasp his hand over her mouth to stop her from saying anything else.

"Look! Mmph-the scumbag is trying to kill me! Oof!"

Leia struggled violently, but Xavier simply scooped her up in his arms." Come with me. I can't let you run around like this."

"Hey, what are you doing?! Let me go! I need to expose him! I—" Leia protested but Xavier ignored her.

Xavier knew Stefan-Leia would suffer horribly if she kept this up, so this was the only way to save her. He carried Leia out of the bar, even as she kept flailing like a fish in his arms.

However, she could not free herself, and was helplessly taken away...

With that, the rowdy mob screaming for Stefan's blood was leaderless, and no one made a sound.

Stefan stared at a teary-eyed Renee with a smile that did not reach his eyes. "Go on, cry.

Weren't you being so emotional just a moment ago?"

"Uh..." Renene felt a little awkward as she wiped her tears. At this point, crying wasn't an option without Leia's support, because doing it alone was a little... weak.

Naturally, she had cried herself weary and used up all her patience, so she glowered as she cut to the chase, "Our time is valuable, so tell me-what do I have to do for you to let him go?"

Jovan was blind and hardly athletic-Stefan could kill him easily as if he was crushing an ant with his boot. She certainly could not afford to upset him...

"Why should I spare him? He sabotaged my business and harassed me all the time." Stefan remained seated, haughty as ever.

"So you're admitting to abducting him! How much bad blood could there be between brothers?! But word of advice-don't kill him, or you'll have your comeuppance for being an ingrate!" Renee warned, pointing at his face. She wanted to stop Stefan from hurting Jovan for both their sakes-Jovan was basically his parent reincarnated, and how was it different from patricide if Stefan killed him?!

Stefan, however, was left frowning in confusion. "What are you talking about? What bad blood with what brother?"

"I know you never considered Jovan a brother, but you are his biological brother. I'm telling you not to hurt him if you want to avoid divine retribution!" Renee declared righteously.

"Jovan?" Stefan came to a realization and chuckled coolly. "So, you're actually talking about Jovan after all that?"

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Chapter 1147

Renee did a double take as she wondered what Stefan was talking

about. Who else would I come for?"

Stefan stayed silent, and simply stared at her with a meaningful look in her eyes.

Renee lost her patience, and glanced at her surroundings before quietly saying,

"I've cried and begged-I've prostrated myself as much as I can, so please,

haven't you had enough? Let him go, or you'll suffer too if I expose you."

"So, you're done with crying and begging... and now you're threatening me?"

Stefan folded his legs and smiled meaningfully, twirling his glass of tequila and

taking a sip of it. "Don't you know what the price for threatening me is?"

Renee rolled her eyes at the man's love of being dramatic-what else could it be

other than another round of bickering?

"I don't want to cause a scene, and no one wants word of this to get out," she

retorted staunchly. "But if you insist, I don't mind knocking your teeth out!"

Stefan was surprisingly not upset, and actually teased her, "That actually rhymes.

Maybe you're working part-time as a rapper?"

Renene was speechless-when did he become so cringeworthy?! That was the

worst joke she'd ever heard!

"Since you came for Jovan, I'm curious to ask-how far would you go for him?"

There was a gleam in Stefan's eyes as he looked at her. Truthfully, he had no idea

where Jovan was, but he was still curious about how far she would go for Jovan.

Renee was no fool, however, and sneered, "Judging from that question, I guess

you're not letting him go unless you get to mess with me?"

Stefan raised a brow. "That's one way to put it, yes."

Renee suppressed her rage and asked calmly, "Then, tell me-what form of

harassment would it take for you to be satisfied?"

She would stick to what she said before-she did not want to cause a scene, and would

resolve the issue as subtly as possible. After all, beneath the appearance of their

current enmity was their complicated past—it hit too close to home, and she would

rather keep everything buried in the past where no one would find it.

"You love Jovan, don't you?" Stefan asked Renee, resting his chin on his hands.

Renee stayed silent and scowling. Anyone else would not hurt her if they asked

that question. But it had to be Stefan, and it made her throat tighten. After all, she

could never tell the man before her that it was he whom she would love for all

eternity!

However, Stefan took Renee's silence for admission, and his sharp gaze turned

cold. Even if he did not want to admit it, he knew very well that he was very upset

at that moment. He did not know what he was upset about, but it was clear that

he was!

And like an obstinate child who refused to lose, he was bent on interrogating the

woman for the truth.

"I can see that you love him very much. Is that why you eloped with him, and

betrayed me?" The memories he lost had been an inner demon that hounded him

relentlessly. He knew he should let sleeping dogs lie, but he simply could not

resist!

It would be best if he could remember everything!

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Chapter 1148

Renee was so tired that she decided to just give up and claim responsibility for everything.

"If you say it's true, then it must be true. You don't have to hold out hope for me because I'm obviously blindsiding you so that I can be with Jovan. I only cared for you to silence my conscience, so come at me if you still bear a grudge-don't hurt Jovan, he's just an innocent victim I manipulated!"

"Come at you?!" Stefan snorted in disdain, slowly rising to his feet and walking up to Renee.

"Do you know what's the worst torment for a woman?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm inexperienced when it comes to being a sicko," Renee replied with an impassive look. She knew that he probably hated her to the bone, and must have thought of hundreds of ways to torment her.

But it was fine-was she not fortunate if her sacrifice could be traded for everyone's happiness?

"I guess I can tell you..." Stefan said with a vague smile, putting a hand around her waist and pulling her towards him. He leaned down and murmured in her ear viciously, "It's by having her spread her legs for another man even though her heart belongs to another... to put it plainly, sleep with me."

Renee did a double take, and whispered, "You're sick."

If she remembered correctly, Jovan said that before too-there were times when she wondered if Jovan possessed Stefan after the transfusion and passed on his deviant tendencies. Why else would he seem to mimic Jovan so often?

"Is that a yes?" Stefan was trying to probe Renee to see how far she would go for Jovan, only to have her react nonchalantly.

For some reason, that left him feeling mysteriously dejected.

It was certainly weird-he was the one in control here, so why did the woman before him remain inscrutable?

"Or perhaps you're affording me the chance to say no, Mr. Hunt?" Renee suddenly smiled, remaining calm even as she provoked Stefan.

"No!" Stefan snapped, his stern glare making him look as if he wanted to devour her. "You don't get to say no!"

And with that, he led Renee out of the Bar of Fame as everyone looked on, holding her slender wrist as he pulled her to his sports car and jammed his foot on the pedal.

He never said a word as he drove.

Renee had no idea where he was going to take her or what he was going to do to her, so she did not ask. There was no escape now that she had fallen into his hands-she could only hope that he would not hurt more innocents after he had enough fun and cooled off, so that everything could come to a stop.

Meanwhile, Stefan drove out of the bustling city center to a quiet beach.

Renee had been uncomfortable at first, but that feeling slowly faded since it was a very long journey. All she felt was weariness, and her eyelids grew heavy...

Stefan simply kept steering the car through the coastal roads. To be honest, he did not have a destination. He just wanted to keep driving forward with her in his car, ideally for all eternity.

Ocean waves could be heard on both ends of the road, and the stars were exceedingly bright. Anyone would be happy to feel the sea breeze brushing against their face.

Why the romance, damn it?! He was supposed to be tormenting her!

And yet, said romance soon disappeared due to a certain sound...

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Chapter 1149

Hearing the rhythmic snoring, Stefan turned around to find that Renee was fast asleep without a care. Furious, he spun the steering wheel and jammed his foot on the brakes.

As the car came to a screeching halt at the turn on a coastal zone, Renee immediately jolted awake and reached for the car door handle, looking around in panic, “Argh! What happened?! Was there an earthquake?!”

She saw that the car had stopped by the beach, enveloped in darkness and silence— danger seemed to lurk everywhere.

Meanwhile, Stefan opened the window to let the fresh breeze in, looking up at the starry sky above.

“Carefree, aren’t you?” He scoffed flatly as he lit himself a cigarette, exhaling a puff of smoke.

“Someone who knew better would know you’re due for punishment, but those who don’t would think that you’re here to sightsee.”

Embarrassed, Renee hastily tidied her appearance and cleared her throat.” Sorry I wasn’t taking this seriously. Should I be more worried about not meeting your expectations? If that won’t do, I could cry for you again...”

As soon as she said it, she started bawling, “Please, I’m begging you, Mr. Bigshot CEO. Let me go, I won’t do it again... Please don’t torture me anymore...”

Stefan breathed another puff of smoke in frustrated silence-she really would be the death of him!

“See? That reaction was fantastic but you refused to play along. How am I supposed to do this?”

Renee kept flirting with him, but the fact that the man refused to play along made things awkward.

One could never cook without ingredients-how was she going to achieve anything if she was forced to match this stoic guy?

“You can shut up now,” Stefan growled through the smoke-this woman was brazenly messing around even though her doom was at hand!

“Fine, you’re the boss. You said to shut up, so I’ll shut up.” Renee reclined against her seat and kept her mouth shut-she had no choice but to be fully compliant. Maybe if she managed to cajole Stefan, he would not keep harassing her and Jovan, or even take her to the beach in the middle of the night, just to make her watch him smoke.

The sight of cigarettes certainly tickled her nicotine addiction.

Hence, braving the risk of being kicked out of the car, she asked gingerly, “Hey, do you have more? Can I have one?”

Stefan was dumbfounded, but Renee pressed, “It’s not like we have anything better to do.”

Stefan snorted. “You’re outrageous.”

He brought her out here to mess with her, and get his revenge for her duplicity... only for her to treat this as a pleasure trip, even asking if she could have a cigarette!

She shot him a look, and complained, “It’s fine if you don’t want to give me one. There’s no need to be so petty.”

And with that, neither spoke as Renee kept watching him smoke, while the atmosphere between them stayed awkward.

Still, Stefan was certain proof that someone up there played favorites. That chiseled, perfect face could give star actors a run for their money, and his aloofness made his very presence irresistible.

Even as Renee stared at him, she could not help gulping as she restrained herself from leaning in to kiss him

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Chapter 1150

Stefan did not miss Renee’s fidgeting, but misunderstood it as her craving a cigarette.

Frowning, he lectured her like a father would, “You’re a woman, but you smoke?”

His judgy tone pissed Renee off, and she straightened herself menacingly as she snapped,

“What’s wrong with women smoking? Why are men allowed to do it, but not women?”

“Men are different from women,’ Stefan said stubbornly.

“In what way?” Renee demanded sharply. “From my perspective, women can do anything men can, but men can’t do everything women can. In that respect, women are nobler than men!”

“How so?”

“Women are more empathetic, sentimental, and kinder. Most importantly, they can bear children, and men can’t. Think about it—every human being came from a woman, so why are men allowed to smoke but women aren’t?”

Stefan actually could not come up with a retort against Renee’s eloquent logic, and she snorted. “See? Can’t argue against that, can you? Give me a reason if you think of one that’s reasonable.”

Seizing the moment while Stefan was spaced out, she snatched a cigarette from his box and ignited hers with his.

This time, Stefan did not stop her. He somewhat agreed with her perspective that women

were nobler than men, as they were an amalgamation of that which was beautiful, while men embodied bloodlust, death, and violence.

As Renee smoked, she leaned very close to Stefan. Their faces were so close that they could feel the other's breath on their skin. It was a delicate exchange, as addictive as nicotine-one could get lost in it without realizing.

"I smoke because I'm frustrated. What reason do you have to smoke?" Stefan asked Renee, staring at her through the smoke with a penetrating gaze.

Why did he feel like he had stared at her beautiful face countless times, and yet completely forgot about it?"

"I'm frustrated too," Renee rasped, closing her eyes after slowly calming herself.

"What's frustrating you?" Stefan asked, his eyes sharply studying her. 'I don't think Jovan would leave you frustrated. Don't you agree?"

He knew very well what Jovan was-plain Janes would certainly go crazy for him, but it didn't make sense that a strong, independent, and smart woman like Renee would do the same. That was why he had a hunch that Jovan was just a diversion. She was probably carrying more secrets than she let on, and it was those secrets that compelled her to walk into his trap.

"You're wrong. I'm not as complicated as you think—Jovan is my only concern, and all I want for him is to live his days in peace and bliss..." Renee spoke quietly as she stared at the cigarette between her fingers, and added quietly, "I've only taken a liking to the scent of nicotine over the last few years-it offers me brief respite."

Jovan was a burden, but she would only be fine if he was, because it was Stefan who had done this to her.

However, those words left Stefan incensed. He snuffed his cigarette and leveled an icy glare at her, then demanded through clenched teeth, "You love him very much, is that it?"