

Standing before Love Chapter 282

Sean's statement stoked the flames of the already-heated discussion. There were those who remained suspicious of Myra and they challenged her to speak up for herself to prove she wasn't guilty. However, these keyboard warriors were quickly shut down by others who relentlessly called them out for their jealousy, claiming that they only vilified Myra because they couldn't stand to see her better off than their sorry lot. Soon after that, the vicious comments stopped and all seemed to have been perfectly resolved.

Presently, Leo's expression remained unchanged, but he felt like he was walking on clouds as he left Tony's office after the latter had increased his yearly bonus. He had only just come out of the office when Ivy was about to enter. He assessed her impassively and did not notice the frosty look in her eyes as he greeted with a smile, "Miss Ivy, Director Hart appears to be in a good mood today. Now would be a good time to let him know about the newly-revised investment funds allocated for the FDI Project."

The FDI Project was one that Tony had been keeping an eye on recently but yesterday, the Finance Department had miscalculated the investment funds to be allocated. Leo was only trying to be helpful when he advised Ivy to report the mishap to Tony now; it would be easier on her, seeing as the latter was in a pleasant mood.

However, when Ivy heard this, she immediately thought about the incident with Tony and Myra from the day before and her expression turned dark. She approached Leo and she threw him a displeased look as she said in a low voice, "Mr. Clark, as the director's secretary, are you going to just stand there and do nothing while someone makes a fool out of Director Hart?"

As far as Ivy was concerned, Myra had seduced Tony and turned him into a completely different person. It is ridiculous to think that Myra can marry him in the next two months. She's a divorcée and a hussy—there's no way the Hart Family will let her marry Tony.

"Make a fool out of Director Hart?" Leo repeated her words and there was a hard edge to his voice. He raised his brows at her and he said pointedly, "No one in the world is capable of doing that."

Upon hearing this, Ivy pressed her lips into a grim line, then brushed past him as she marched straight into Tony's office.

Leo, on the other hand, stood rooted to the spot. When he heard the door close behind him, the light in his eyes disappeared too.

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Meanwhile, Eve was bombarding Sean with phone calls.

Following his statement earlier that day, he had switched phone numbers and given Myra several calls but none of them had gone through.

In comparison, his phone was ringing incessantly and it seemed as if Eve would not relent until he picked up her calls.

The vein in his forehead was throbbing as he glanced at the number flashing on his phone screen. Finally, he pursed his lips and answered the call with a tired look on his face.

He had only just put the phone to his ear when he heard the shrill voice shouting on the other line. “Do you even care about your own mother, Sean Chase? What did I tell you yesterday? I told you not to get involved in Myra’s business! Why did you have to make that statement today? Haven’t you been humiliated enough already?”

Eve had nearly passed out from rage after reading her son’s statement earlier that day. What was he thinking? How could he speak up for Myra? Their divorce wasn’t out of mutual agreement—it was because she was having an affair!

She could not hate Myra more than she did at that moment. It was as though she had forgotten that they had thrown the girl under the bus previously. Incensed, she thought, That wretched woman refuses to leave my son alone even after their divorce!

When Sean saw that the comments flooding the online forum were mostly supportive of Myra, he couldn’t help but recall what he had read before this. At the thought that Tony had plans to marry Myra in the next two months, he tightened his grip on his phone but he sounded impassive as he countered, “My statement hardly makes an impact on things. Besides, most of the comments are on Myra’s side, so it’s not as if I would be badly affected in any way.”

“She’s just lucky enough to get away with it this time! If she somehow drags your name through the mud and if the company’s reputation gets tarnished along the way, I won’t just sit by and do nothing!” Eve thundered down the line. “Also, I don’t have to remind you that this will be the last time you pull a stunt like this, Sean. Have you forgotten all the work you’ve put into rebuilding the company? Have you forgotten how hard it was for the both of us when we had nothing? Are you so eager to get punched down by life again?”

For two years, both mother and son had been through countless setbacks in order to keep the Chase Group from crumbling. Now that the company is finally at a turning point, I can’t just let a bunch of scheming women destroy its reputation!

However, it was precisely because of life’s brutality that Sean realized how Myra had been his saving grace all along.

She had tolerated his accusations and cruel indifference for the two years of their marriage but chose to stick by him nonetheless. Little did he know that her quiet strength and kindness had long since been engraved in his heart.

“I know, Mom,” Sean answered stiffly, not wanting to prolong the conversation any longer. “I have a few things to attend to, so I’ll end the call now.”

“Hey—I’m not done speaking yet, Sean! You—” Eve was cut off when she heard the steady beeping on the other line, which indicated that he had hung up.

She clenched her jaw. After taking a brief look at the comments piling in online, she grabbed her handbag and stormed out of the house with a grim expression on her face.

Sean, on the other hand, had also risen from behind his desk after he put down the phone. He reached for his jacket and car keys, then made his way out the door.

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Tony was seated in his office and he seemed irritated as he glowered at the woman standing before him.

However, Ivy didn’t look like she was planning to leave anytime soon. Her lips were pursed into a hard line and there was a steely glint in her eyes as she

said, “Anyway, Tony, I just hope you’d look into everything that has to do with Myra. I don’t trust her at all. The controversy that surrounds her couldn’t have come from nowhere.”

Even if the person Myra had been caught cheating with during her marriage was Tony, it remains a scandalous affair nonetheless. If she could cheat with him, then it would only be a matter of time before she cheats on him. A woman like that doesn’t deserve to be with Tony!

“Get out!” Tony barked icily as his expression darkened.

Ivy clenched her fists and she was obstinate as she stood her ground. “You may not like what I’m doing now but one day you’ll understand that I’m doing this for your own good!”

“Miss Ivy, you know I hate it when those around me put their foot into my personal affairs.” Tony narrowed his eyes, clearly displeased by her stubbornness. There was a look on his face that resembled the calm before a raging storm as he continued, “But if you insist on carrying on with this, then I suggest you drop by human resources.”

Ivy’s eyes widened in disbelief as she heard that. “Tony, are you firing me?”

“I’ll say this one more time—get out!” An icy warning flashed in his eyes as he said this.

She opened her mouth as though to say something, but a chill ran down her spine when she caught his arctic gaze. She bit down on her lip as her eyes grew misty, and rushed out of the office before her tears spilled over.

Barely a moment after she had run out of the office, Leo solemnly knocked on the door.

“Come in,” Tony said as he brusquely loosened his tie. He frowned as he looked up at Leo and demanded, “What is it?”

“Director Walton is on the phone, sir. Would you like to take the call?”

Director Walton—that could only be Gideon.

As though remembering something, Tony’s eyes narrowed dangerously as he answered stoically, “Put him through.”

“Very well, sir.”

Before long, the phone on Tony’s desk rang and he picked it up with his usual icy demeanor.

“It’s been a while, Tony,” Gideon said over the line and he sounded cordial and pleasant. “Seeing as your birthday is right around the corner, I ought to make a trip back and toast to your health.”

Unfazed by this, Tony replied plaintively, “You’re welcome to do so.”

It would be Tony’s first birthday since returning to the country, and Sebastian had insisted on throwing him a banquet, the reason being to introduce the former into the upper-class business industry in Bradford City. However, if Tony had any say in this, he would have gladly forgone the banquet and buried himself in work instead.

Taking no offense at his less-than-friendly tone, Gideon asked casually, “So I hear you’re ready to settle down soon now that you have a fiancée?”

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“Seems like word has reached you,” Tony remarked flatly as he slipped a cigarette between his lips before deftly lit it up with a lighter. Soon, white smoke swathed his features, blurring out the expression on his face.

He knew why Gideon was calling, but he no longer wanted to entertain the Waltons, as Gemma’s antics had exhausted whatever patience he had had for them.

On the other end of the call, Gideon’s face grew grim and there was a menacing gleam in his eyes as he jested, “Does your fiancée happen to be the famous Miss Stark from Bradford City? I’ve heard rumors about the both of you and I didn’t think they were true—unless, of course, you’ve actually fallen for her.”

While Tony’s relationship with Miss Stark had been widely covered by various news outlets, Gideon had remained skeptical. After all, he knew what Tony was like—cold, ruthless, and a workaholic who devoted all his life to his business empire. Tony might settle down with a woman at some point but it would be a solely pragmatic and strategic marriage; he would never develop any true feelings for her. Alas, Gideon had thought wrong.

Judging from the way things had turned out, he was sure that there was more to those rumors, and Tony's alleged romance with the woman was not just for show.

There had initially been plans for the Waltons to position their brand in Paradigm Mall, which happened to be a Hart Group enterprise. However, Tony had struck out their plans after Gemma posted the video about that woman, which meant they would have a much harder time establishing Walton Group in the local business scene.

"Tony, we've been friends for a long time. I know you're unhappy with my sister's thoughtless act, but that doesn't call for you to be so harsh and take it out on the entire Walton Group. You know we can't establish our brand in the Bradford City market without your help, seeing as how your family holds a few of the largest distribution channels for one-stop shopping malls. The loss would be unimaginable if we fail to see our plans through."

Upon hearing this, Tony remained impassive but he sounded rueful as he countered, "I believe there's been a misunderstanding on your part regarding this matter, Gideon."

Gideon frowned. "What do you mean?"

A cold smirk tugged on Tony's lips as he answered flatly, "Grandpa has taken over the matter of the Walton Group's establishment in Paradigm Mall. He was the one who made the decision to hold off the plans to bring in Walton Group. Believe me, I was shocked too, and I was going to talk to him about it."

Gideon's lips were pressed into a hard line and his eyes were narrowed into slits as he asked, "I thought Old Master Hart handed over the reins of the company to you. Why is he in charge of the company matters all of a sudden?"

"I may hold the reins but he's still the chairman of the group," Tony deflected his accusation with ease and he had no qualms about throwing Sebastian under the bus in the process.

A hard look passed over Gideon's face when he heard this.

The truth of what Tony had said remained to be seen, but Gideon understood the subtext to his words—the Hart Family was extremely displeased with the Waltons. Be it Tony or Sebastian, the person who had made the ultimate

decision to leave the Waltons stranded outside Bradford City's market was inevitably furious with them.

The only thing that could have possibly caused this rift between their families appeared to be the most recent controversy that surrounded Miss Stark.

Gideon's expression darkened. He hadn't thought that a woman like her could have so much influence over the Hart Family—or rather, over Tony.

Then, he chuckled warmly and said, "Oh, well; I'll be going back to Bradford City soon. I suppose it's only right for me to make it up to you all for the trouble my sister caused. Old Master Hart would probably only punish her for a bit. Our families go way back, so I don't think a small mishap like this would be worth the tension."

When Tony made no reply to this, Gideon's face grew stormy. "I'm starting to get really curious about Miss Stark."

Indeed, he wanted to know the kind of person who could make Tony go to such extreme lengths, so much so that the latter was willing to disregard their years of friendship just so he could defend her.

However, the friendship that he had thought he shared with Tony was all too fragile in the latter's eyes. He knew what Gideon was like and after they had established the Hartwell Group together, he was certain that they would never be on close terms.

"She's just an ordinary woman," Tony said nonchalantly.

"Which is why she makes for an even more curious case," Gideon countered easily and he chuckled.

Their conversation was treading on the edge of a broken friendship, but Gideon had managed to keep the cracks from widening with his diplomatic chatter.

However, as soon as he hung up the call, the smile slipped from his face and a menacing grimace twisted his features.

Presently, his new secretary was bringing him a mug of coffee. She was smiling brightly as she approached his desk but just as she was about to make friendly conversation, she blanched at the sight of his grim expression.

She had only just regained her composure when he suddenly grabbed the mug of coffee from his desk and flung it at her.

She screamed as the hot coffee splashed onto the delicate skin of her face, but this only made Gideon more irritated as he roared, “Get out of my sight!”

Upon hearing the commotion, an assistant rushed into the office and numbly registered the scene before him, then calmly escorted the secretary out of the door.

Gideon waited for the door to close before he angrily swept all the documents off his desk, and his face was thunderous as he made a call.

“Hello, Gideon.”

In the basement carpark of the hotel in which she was staying, Gemma was seated in the car when she answered her brother’s call, and Sasha was standing outside the vehicle with her palms pressed up against the window. She had wanted to demand an explanation from Tony after seeing the entertainment news today but Sasha had come out of nowhere and barricaded her from leaving.

“Don’t ‘hello, Gideon’ me! I don’t even know why I have an idiot like you for a sister!” he thundered down the line. Truth was, he was lashing out at her after his sour exchange with Tony.

He was also baffled by his sister’s incompetence. Not only had she failed to take down Miss Stark, she had thrown the entire Walton Group under the bus as well.

However, Gemma was oblivious to the tremendous loss that she had caused her family business. Not knowing that Walton Group could no longer establish its in-house brand in Paradigm Mall, she gritted her teeth and snapped, “That woman is despicable—she must have cast a spell or something on the Hart Family! I was so close to getting her out of my way, but now everyone’s talking about how she’s engaged to Tony!”

Gemma didn’t know what had gone wrong. She had an expert verify that the video was unedited and she was certain that after such a scandal, it would take a miracle before the Harts allowed a woman like Myra to be associated with their family, let alone marry into it.

And yet, news of Myra's upcoming engagement to Tony was circulating on the Internet and the animosity toward her was beginning to die down as well, replaced by comments that were demanding justice on her behalf.

Meanwhile, Sasha was angrily slamming her palms against the car window as she cried out in rage, "Get out here this instant, Gemma Walton! You gave me your word that you would help my family and the Hay Group if I gave you the information you asked for! You can't just go back on your word like this now that Tony is unleashing his wrath on our company!"

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Gemma found herself growing more annoyed as the call went on. "I refuse to believe that that woman would ever marry into the Hart Family. She must have been the one to spread the news but once the Harts find out about it, her life in Bradford City will be over."

"Well, don't you have everything figured out?" Gideon snorted sarcastically. "I just got off the phone with Tony and he told me himself that he was going to marry that woman! Do you even know what you've done, Gemma? Because of your recklessness, the Hart Group has decided to set aside our plans to enter the Bradford City consumer market! "

"What?" Gemma screeched incredulously. Having just buckled her seatbelt, she deliberately ignored the irritating figure who was shouting at her from the other side of the car window. Panic-stricken, she went on to say, "Gideon, please tell me you're joking."

"I can assure you I'm not. If you don't believe me, you could always give Dad and Grandpa a call," Gideon bit out witheringly. "You've known since before flying out of the States how important it is for Walton Group to re-establish itself in Bradford City. You know as well as I do the fate that awaits you and our company if the plans to enter the consumer market do not go through—I'm sure you're aware of what will happen if you keep screwing up like this."

His face darkened as he reminded her of all these.

Meanwhile, Gemma clutched her seatbelt tightly when she heard the warning in his voice.

As for Sasha, she was still slamming her palms against the car window as she cried out, "You scheming, lying little witch! If you won't help us, then I don't

mind dropping by the Hart Residence to tell them about what you've done! You were the one who wanted to go after Myra and now you're just going to abandon me after you've taken advantage of me? Don't even think about it!"

The video had been Sasha's to begin with and the only other person who had it was Sean. As far as Tony was concerned, she had deliberately given Gemma the video so that the latter could post it up on the Internet and humiliate Myra. The truth, however, was that she hadn't even wanted to do so in the first place but now she was forced to bear the brunt.

She was aware of how much Tony loved Myra, and she wouldn't want to cross him for fear of suffering his wrath. But Gemma had come along and convinced her that she was the rightful granddaughter-in-law to the Hart Family, claiming that she was engaged to Tony. In an attempt to reconcile with him, she had promised to help the Hay Group in return if Sasha joined her cause in sidelining Myra. Persuaded by this, Sasha had given her the video. I can't believe how stupid I was for believing her!

At first, Sasha had admittedly been thrilled at the sight of all the abusive comments directed toward Myra after the video was posted. However, her glee did not last for long because the next day, Director Wallace had turned down the partnership with the Hay Group. She had sold herself out for the sake of obtaining that partnership but upon protesting, she was told that she might have offended the Hart Family—and Wallace Enterprise feared to do the same.

At the thought of the Hart Group, she had to admit that she did anger Tony and now she, along with the Hay Group, would have to suffer his wrath.

The Hay Group had a chance to turn things around after Director Wallace had promised to help her out, and their partnership would have been the saving grace for the company. Now that Tony had intervened, it would only be a matter of time before the company crumbled. Out of desperation, she had called Gemma with the hope that the woman would make good on her word but none of the calls went through, which was why she had rushed over to the hotel to meet her in person instead.

Now that she was here, she finally saw Gemma's true colors. She's been using me all along! She never planned on helping the Hay Group in the first place!

“Come out right now, Gemma! I have plenty of time on my hands so I can stand here all day!” Sasha yelled. When she saw that the other girl had no intention to get out of the car, she ran to the front of the vehicle and spread her arms wide, making it clear that she would not let Gemma drive away.

“Mark my words, Gideon—I will become Tony’s wife!” Agitated, Gemma’s grip tightened on her phone as she grimaced. “Just because the Hart Group set aside our plans, it doesn’t mean they would keep this up forever! Aren’t you and Grandpa coming back soon? I’m sure that the Hart Family will reinstate the plans if Grandpa speaks up.”

At this point, Gemma was infuriated and jealous. She hadn’t thought that the incident from the day before had left Myra unscathed, and had instead become the stepping stone for her to marry into the Hart Family. Of course a despicable woman like her would have such dirty tricks up her sleeves!

“Grandpa will be the only person who could change their minds. Tony wasn’t even persuaded when I called him, which just goes to show how much trouble you’ve caused!” Gideon snapped, though his sister’s shenanigans were only an excuse. Deep down, he knew that Tony had never given much thought to the Waltons anyway. Nonetheless, he could not discount the fact that Gemma’s incompetence had left a huge mess for Walton Group to clean up. “How has Kris been recently?”

“Kris?” It was only then that Gemma remembered Myra’s sister, and she scoffed indifferently at the thought of her. “She’s the same as she’s always been. She’s at her father’s every beck and call, and she hardly has any control over the Stark Group; even Myra has more authority than she does. On a side note, that woman is despicable enough to go head-to-head with Myra. She could become our next pawn.”

“Then get close to her and see how useful she can be to us. I don’t want you to screw things up again before I go over to Bradford City!” Gideon narrowed his eyes as he said this.

Gemma hummed noncommittally in response.

While this was happening, Sasha was still shouting furiously outside the car. When she saw that Gemma was deliberately ignoring her, she grew even more outraged. Without another thought, she took out her own keys and scratched a silvery-white line across the top of the other girl’s car bonnet.

Upon seeing that, Gemma let out a shriek. "My car!"

"What's going on there?" Gideon demanded. Since the beginning of their phone conversation, he had heard another woman's voice yelling and taunting in the background on his sister's end.

"Nothing. There's a mad woman here, that's all," Gemma muttered as she eyed Sasha, who was still scratching her car. She grimaced but did not move to step out of the vehicle. "Gideon, I have some stuff to attend to so I'll get going now," she added, then hung up the call and started her car. She did not spare Sasha another thought as she stepped on the accelerator and drove the car forward.

Sasha leapt out of the way immediately, shocked that the other woman was ruthless enough to want to knock her down.

When she saw that her path was clear, Gemma floored the accelerator and her tires screeched against the ground as she sped out of the car park.

"You disgusting, despicable woman! I won't let you get away with this!" Sasha roared after the car as she stomped her foot furiously.

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The clock struck noon as Myra stared at the lunchbox that was placed before her, and she blinked at Tilly in confusion.

Presently, Tilly's grin widened, and she chuckled as she said in a singsong voice, "Guess who had this delivered, Myra."

Who indeed? Myra raised her brows and after a moment of thought, she broke into a warm smile. "Is this from the Hart Residence?"

It wasn't too long ago when Sebastian would send her lunch every now and then.

Judging from the size of the lunchbox, she was willing to bet that there would be soup and various side-dishes. Knowing Sebastian, he liked adding little twists and surprises to the contents of her lunchbox, so she never knew what to expect.

“Bingo! Your guess is correct!” Tilly cheered. She had thought that the Hart Family would still be upset with Myra after the video incident, but her worries dissipated when she retrieved the lunchbox from the Harts’ chauffeur earlier on. Looks like the Hart Family aren’t angry with Myra at all!

Myra’s smile grew wider as she looked at the lunchbox. She had been worried that it would take a while for Sebastian to cool down and she certainly hadn’t expected him to have her lunch sent over.

At the thought of this, she grabbed her phone and sent him a text after Tilly had left her office.

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She had sent him an audio message in which she said, “Thank you for the lunch today. I love it.”

For a while, there was no reply. Just as Myra thought Sebastian was ignoring her, he sent an audio message, sounding gruff as he said pointedly, “What are you thanking me for? I’m not the one who asked the kitchen to make lunch for you. You should thank Tony’s grandma for this; it has nothing to do with me whatsoever.”

It was almost as if Sebastian couldn’t wait to deny all insinuations that he had anything to do with Myra’s lunchbox.

Nonetheless, warmth surged through Myra as she smiled at his message, and she said nothing more after that.

While she dug into her lunch, Tony was speaking to her on the phone.

“I just got off the phone with Mr. Engelhard,” he said down the line. Upon hearing that, she couldn’t help the contented smile on her face as his deep and husky voice filled her ears.

She took another bite of food from the lunchbox Sebastian had sent over and hummed in response before asking, “He didn’t even give me a call. What did the both of you talk about?”

In all honesty, Myra didn’t even think that they were that close to begin with.

Upon hearing her grumble, Tony chuckled in a low voice and answered, "We talked about business for a bit."

"Oh." She sounded sullen and skeptical.

Tony smirked. Truth was, he hadn't been surprised when Conan called today. The latter must have had quite a shock when he heard rumors of Tony's engagement to Myra. After all, Tony had promised the older man that he would fulfil the three conditions prior to asking for Myra's hand in marriage.

"Naturally, we talked about the pre-marital conditions that must be met," Tony elaborated lightly and at the thought of his conversation with Conan earlier that day, he smiled.

Myra stiffened at this and blood rushed to her face.

She also found herself drawing comparisons. Where Sean had disliked Conan, Tony was the complete opposite and while she was happy that he seemed to be on such good terms with the old man, she found herself getting just the tiniest bit jealous at their friendship. To add insult to injury, Conan had stopped going to her with all his anecdotes and problems, and had instead turned to Tony.

"And what conditions might those be?" she asked as she raised a quizzical brow, though the person on the other end could not see the cynical expression on her face.

Tony laughed softly before he murmured in a gentle voice, "Well, for starters, you would have to be pregnant with my child."

When Myra heard this, she could imagine him standing next to her and caressing her belly. The flush on her face deepened into a near-crimson shade as she grumbled, "Don't try to be funny, Tony. Why would Mr. Engelhard be discussing something like this with you?"

"If you don't believe me, you can always give him a call and ask if we talked about it," Tony suggested cheekily.

She could feel her face burning up and she thanked the heavens that he couldn't see how sheepish she looked right now. In the end, she scoffed and said nothing else.

“I can’t tell if you’re mad or if you’re reluctant to carry my child,” he teased wickedly. He was doing this on purpose now that his urge to father a child was stronger than before. It turned out that there was some truth and reason to what Lyla had said.

Perhaps what weighed on his mind more than anything else was Sean’s recent erratic behavior. He must have figured out something and now that he was pestering Myra, it would only be a matter of time before he pursued her once more. While Tony was confident that Myra would stay by his side forever, he was also agitated that another man had set his sights on her. With that in mind, Tony was sure that a child was the best buffer.

With a child in tow, he could easily deal a harsh blow on all the other men who had their eyes on Myra. All he would have to do was say, “We have to go back and feed the baby.”

Life would be idyllic with a child and he found that he didn’t mind it at all. Tony’s eyes crinkled slightly in amusement as he pondered on this.

Myra, on the other hand, knew that he had the tendency to be blatant. There was no one else as thick-skinned as he was, and she knew how shameless and roguish he could be when they were together. With that in mind, she sighed in resignation and said, “I’ve finished my lunch. I have to get back to work, so I’ll hang up now.”

Knowing that she was easily embarrassed, he stopped teasing her. “I’ll pick you up after work.”

She hummed in response and she could feel her face heating up. Just as he was about to hang up, she quickly blew him a kiss that was followed by a ‘mwah’ sound, and ended the call right after that.

Then, she reached up to touch her face and found that her skin was hot to the touch.

She cringed at herself. For heavens’ sake, Myra Stark, you’re turning into a complete bimbo!

Meanwhile, on the other end of the line, Tony broke into a grin at the sound of her kiss, the frustration that he had felt since that morning fading away into nothing.

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When Eve arrived at the Stark Group, she was informed that Myra was unavailable to meet her.

Tilly had been the one to relay the front desk's message to Myra, and the latter had looked impassive when she heard it. She now regarded Eve with contempt and disinterest, and she wanted nothing to do with the woman.

"Tell the front desk that I'm in a meeting right now."

Upon hearing this, Tilly nodded and hurried out of the office.

After the front desk relayed the message to Eve, the woman's face grew grim and she snapped, "Give her another call and tell her that there's something important I'd like to discuss. If she refuses to meet me, then I'll just keep waiting here until she does!"

The receptionists swallowed, feeling caught between a rock and a hard place.

Judging from what Tilly had said, it was clear that Myra had no intention of meeting this woman. However, seeing as Eve was the matriarch of the Chase Family, they didn't want to risk offending her, either. As such, they gave Tilly another call, though it was to no avail.

Having been turned down the second time, Eve grew thunderous. She scoffed icily as she marched toward the nearby reception lounge; she sat there waiting, her back stiff and ramrod straight.

As she waited, her phone rang incessantly with incoming calls but she did not pick up any of them. Instead, she merely glanced at the numbers flashing on her screen and left her phone ringing in her bag.

Meanwhile, Myra had a meeting at the nearby Newark Group in the afternoon. She had only just made her way downstairs when she was suddenly accosted by a woman who had dashed out of nowhere. Then, the latter lifted her hand and brought it down to slap Myra across the face.

Fortunately, Myra reacted in time and she held the woman by the wrist in a vise-like grip.

A dark look passed over her face as she appraised the woman in front of her. Then, she flung Eve away from her as she said icily, “A bit inappropriate for you to attack me here in the Stark Group, don’t you think, Madam Chase?”

“How shameless can you be, Myra? Haven’t you already weaseled your way into the Hart Family? Why are you still clinging onto my son?”

Eve was at her boiling point after waiting in the lounge for close to three hours, and seeing Myra only brought to mind Sean’s recent behavior. At this moment, she wanted nothing more than to slap the living daylight out of the girl.

She had once thought that Myra was a gentle and sensible woman but as it turned out, she had been wrong. She’s still clinging onto and taking advantage of my son even after their divorce! A heavy warning is the only way to ward off a woman like her!

“I’m warning you—you’d better stay away from my son!” Eve thundered as she eyed Myra with disgust. “You were the one who said you wanted nothing to do with us after the divorce, and yet here you are pining after my son. Does the Hart Family know about what you’re doing?”

Myra’s face grew stormy as the other woman chastised her. She had refused to meet with Eve, but it was clear that the latter didn’t take no for an answer and had been waiting in the building to attack her at first sight.

“You must be joking, Madam Chase. When have I ever pined after your son? I don’t know what tricks you and Lyla are pulling here, but I’m afraid I don’t have the time for them,” Myra retorted coldly.

It wasn’t too long ago when Lyla had approached her and accused her of pining after Sean in spite of the divorce. Do both these women really think I’m that much of a pushover?

Annoyed, Myra threw a pointed look at the security guards who stood by the side and barked, “Don’t let her in the next time you see her.”

The guards exchanged a nervous look before they hurriedly nodded.

A menacing gleam flashed in Eve’s eyes as she saw this and she spat, “So this is what you’re truly like, Myra—selfish and arrogant. I promise you I won’t be so civil anymore if you keep pestering my son!”

Upon hearing this, Myra let out a mocking laugh. “You should tell your son to stop pestering me on the phone. He and I are nothing more than strangers, so he should stop trying so hard to pretend otherwise.”

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“How dare you?” Eve seethed, her chest rising and falling rapidly. Sean had made it very evident that he was swaying toward Myra, and he disregarded his mother’s warnings along the way.

She grew indignant at the thought. When she stormed into the building earlier, she hadn’t expected Myra to be so unkind and dismiss her like she was nothing. This girl is acting high and mighty now that she has the Hart Family to back her up! “You’d better watch your manners, Myra! Don’t forget that I used to be your mother-in-law!” Eve snapped angrily.

“Thank you for the reminder but as my former mother-in-law, have you forgotten what you did to me at the time of the divorce?” Myra asked and there was a glint of dark amusement in her eyes as she assessed the woman.

She had long since understood how despicable Eve could be, and there was no point in trying to keep up the niceties under such ugly circumstances. With that in mind, she turned around and strode toward the exit, then bit out tersely, “I’m afraid you’re not welcome here in the Stark Group, Madam Chase. Please stay away from our premises and avoid causing a scene; otherwise, I won’t hesitate to look into the Marina Bay Bridge incident once more.”

Eve blanched at the warning, though Myra had brought it up without implication. The Chase Group had, indeed, been involved in the Marina Bay Bridge incident. As much as Eve wanted to retaliate, she thought better of it. She clenched her jaw and did not take another step to barricade Myra, then watched darkly as the latter brushed past her.

“One day, the Hart Family will finally see you for who you really are, Myra! Let’s see if they’ll still want you then!” Eve cursed.

However, Myra didn’t even bother with a response and she walked out of the company building, leaving the furious woman high and dry in the lobby.

...

It didn't take long for Gemma to speed over to the Hart Group but upon her arrival, she was barred from going past the front desk. The receptionist thereafter informed her that Tony was too busy to meet her.

Gemma obstinately lingered around the lobby, but grew frustrated when it became clear that she would not be able to meet Tony today. Fuming, she got into her car and decidedly drove over to the Hart Residence instead.

She refused to believe that Sebastian and Lisa had so easily forgiven Myra. Surely they couldn't have been so persuaded by her lies that they would allow Tony to marry her.

Unbeknown to her, the truth was that Sebastian had been incensed after news of his grandson's alleged plans to marry Myra broke out. He was outraged that Tony had given him no notice, and had instead acted on his own accord.

However, his resentment didn't last long. As soon as he had calmed down, he had the kitchen prepare lunch for Myra. After all, she was going to be married soon and a baby could be well within their plans. He had to make sure that she was building up enough strength to carry a child.

Having arrived at the Hart Residence, Gemma knocked on the door and asked to see the elderly couple, only to be turned away by the housekeeper. "Old Master Hart is resting in his bedroom. He has a terrible headache and he said he won't be meeting any guests today."

"How about Old Madam Hart?" Gemma pressed.

"She's currently taking care of Old Master Hart so she won't be meeting any guests either," the housekeeper answered placidly.

Gemma understood the implication immediately. It's not that they are not seeing guests; rather, they do not want to see me.

She gritted her teeth at the thought and she pleaded, "Could you pass them a message? Tell them that I know I made a mistake and I was too impulsive yesterday. I only posted that video because I was so worried that they would be manipulated by Myra's lies; I never meant to hurt the Hart Family's reputation."

Gemma was well aware that while the video had been posted to expose and humiliate Myra, the Hart Family had undoubtedly been embarrassed in the process.

Knowing that she was presently asking for a favor, she tried her best to come off as pleasant as she kept her temper in check.

Alas, the housekeeper simply offered her an apologetic smile as she kept the girl firmly on the other side of the door. "I'm sorry, miss, but perhaps you should come back next time."

With that, the housekeeper closed the door between them, leaving Gemma standing outside the threshold.

Her face darkened considerably at the exchange that had taken place.

It was clear to see that the Hart Family was still enamored with Myra despite the video, and it made Gemma bewildered by how things had turned out. That video is real so why are they siding her instead of me? Why are they still letting her marry into the family after seeing her true colors?

However, Gideon had warned Gemma to keep away from trouble; hence, she repressed the urge to barge through the front door to demand the elderly couple's attention. Her fists clenched on either side of her and she thought grimly, Fine, then. I'll just wait until Gideon and Grandpa come back to Bradford City.

...

Meanwhile, Eve received yet another phone call from Sasha after she had left the Stark Group, and she was agitated to see that her brother and father had called repeatedly as well.

Grimly, she answered Sasha's call, knowing that the girl would only pester her relentlessly if she didn't.

"Hello, Aunt Eve!" Sasha was panicking on the other end of the line, and she sounded as though she was close to tears as she went on pleadingly, "You have to help me this time—please, you have to help the Hay Group!"

Eve had cut off all ties with her family after the Hay Group's last incident.

She couldn't help recalling how she had begged for her family's help back when the Chase Group was in trouble, but all her father and brother had given her was two million in cash. They had made it clear that the cash was all the help they were willing to give her, and told her that she could return to the family and live a carefree life should the Chase Group collapse.

When Sasha had approached her for help previously, Eve had returned the favor by writing them a check for twice the amount they had given her. Presently, she was beginning to grow tired of her niece as the girl pestered her once more.

With forced patience, she said placatingly, "Sasha, I would love to help you but things are a bit tight for the Chase Group at the moment. You know that Myra has taken away half of Hiliville after the divorce and we had to sell off the remaining half at below market price. There truly is nothing I can do for you."

Eve grimaced at the thought that Myra had taken away half of the company's real estate project.

"Grandpa mentioned that Sean has a couple of worthwhile projects lined up. If you could let the Hay Group collaborate on them, then we could keep things afloat for some time while we figure things out. Please, Aunt Eve, I'm begging you!" Sasha had been left with no choice but to resort to asking her aunt for such a favor, having been left behind by Gemma at the basement carpark.

Before this, she had always thought of herself as better than Eve, though she never showed it. She didn't think that the tables would turn on her, and now she was begging her aunt for a favor just so she could save her family's company.

Upon hearing that the Hays were eyeing her son's recent projects, Eve frowned and her expression darkened as she answered coldly, "I'll talk to Sean but there's no guarantee that he will agree to it. Right, then; it's getting late and I have a few errands to run. Goodbye, Sasha."

Eve didn't wait for a response before she swiftly ended the call.

Now that the Hays were having a hard time surviving in Bradford City, she couldn't risk the Chase Group being associated with them. In fact, it was crucial for her to avoid them at all costs in times like these.

Then, irritated by the recent events that seemed to work against her, she slid into her car and drove away with a sour look on her face.

...

A storm appeared to be brewing in Bradford City following Myra's recent scandal, which mainly revolved around her alleged affair and the subsequent rumors of her marriage into the Hart Family.

While Cameron and Kris had yet to stir up trouble, Myra's guard was still up as she tried to anticipate whatever next move they might make.

In the blink of an eye, Tony's birthday had arrived and the banquet thrown in his honor was to be held at the Ritz Carlton.

It was meant to be an extravagant occasion, given that it was the first birthday banquet held in honor of the heir to the Hart Group.

Even Conan couldn't help but be amused as he told Myra, "Aren't we making a huge loss by throwing him such a grand birthday party? We are family, after all."

Myra had retorted in hushed tones, "I'm not family yet so I can't escape the bill."

Upon hearing this, Tony raised a brow and on that same night, he decided to educate her on a couple of family values in advance.

...

On the afternoon of the day of Tony's banquet, Myra had gotten off work early. She had just walked out of the company building when she saw Leo standing in front of an elegant Mercedes-Benz G500. Upon seeing her, Leo nodded and said, "Miss Stark, Director Hart has asked that I escort you to the atelier."

Myra couldn't help but smile at the sight of the vehicle. When she said that the black Mercedes-Benz G500 was a bold and elegant ride, she had meant it as nothing more than a passing remark. She didn't think that Tony would have Leo pick her up in the same car.

Nodding, she flashed Leo a bright smile and slid into the vehicle.

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Very soon, the car pulled up outside a high-end atelier.

“Miss Stark, Director Hart has a couple of things to attend to but he will be here soon. He asked that you dress however you like.” Then, Leo added, “He also mentioned that he loves it no matter how you dress.”

He repressed a cringe as he said this and he coughed to try to hide his embarrassment.

Director Hart’s been openly affectionate these days, he mused to himself. Gone is the imposing man whose looks could freeze an entire room.

Upon hearing this, Myra flushed and hummed in response, then hastily marched into the atelier. She was getting used to how blatant Tony could be.

As she entered the atelier, she was enthusiastically greeted by the manager and the small team of sales assistants.

They had seen her as soon as she got down from the car, and given that Tony and Sebastian had personally asked them to serve her well, they dared not leave a bad impression.

The young ladies who worked in the atelier couldn’t help but look upon Myra with envy and admiration.

While there had been plenty of discussion that surrounded her before this, the final conclusion was that Myra had divorced an accomplished man, thereafter finding herself an even better catch and having the Hart Family acknowledge her as one of their own. Most women had never seen such luck in their entire lives. Her narrative was made all the more sensational when it was revealed that her new man was a legend in Bradford City—every woman in the city saw him as the man of their dreams.

“Miss Stark, the dresses that Director Hart picked from the latest collections have been flown over from Milan and we have laid them out for you. We will tailor the dress to your size after you’ve chosen one that you like,” the manager informed dutifully with a courteous smile.

“Thank you,” Myra answered with a nod as she proceeded to browse through the dresses.

Tony had chosen dresses that he knew would be to her liking. After assessing each of the dresses, she finally picked out her favorite.

The one-shoulder dress was ankle-length and made of soft cotton, and it had a figure-hugging silhouette. The white bodice featured delicate cloud applique while the rest of the dress was periwinkle. The bodice glimmered where a narrow strip of crushed diamonds ran diagonal from the right shoulder all the way to the waist, adding a feminine and graceful appeal to the design.

In a few hours, she would be attending Tony's birthday banquet in this dress, and he had told her last night that he would officially then announce that he was in a relationship with her.

In a relationship, indeed. The both of them had only known and dated each other for three months, but it felt as though it had been years. What astounded Myra the most was how much they behaved like an old married couple—there were days when one look was all it took for them to understand each other's thoughts.

She was giddy with anticipation and nervous at the thought of what would happen tonight. Her fingers tightened as she clutched the dress and walked into the fitting room.

Before long, she came out of the fitting room and was surprised to find that another woman had entered the premises while she had been trying on the dress.

The woman was dressed in an elegant evening gown that accentuated her slender figure, and she held her head high so that the exquisite pearl necklace she wore was on full display.

She turned, causing Myra's brows to furrow when she saw that the woman was none other than Kris.

Upon seeing the frown on Myra's face, the manager awkwardly explained, "Miss Stark, you were meant to be the only customer in the atelier today, but..." She trailed off, her gaze darting over to where Kris stood in her sophisticated get-up, and cleared her throat uneasily. "Miss Kris said that she is your biological sister and that she's only here to say hello to you."

Everyone in upper-side Bradford City knew about the strife within the Stark Family, and it was no secret that the two Stark sisters did not get along well.

The manager had not wanted to let Kris into the atelier, but the latter had been dismissive of her and insisted on entering the premises. Unable to hold her off, the manager had no choice but to let her through the doors.

However, as the air around them grew thick with tension, she was beginning to regret her decision to allow Kris entry in the first place.

Myra, on the other hand, looked around the boutique and saw that Leo was nowhere in the vicinity, which explained how Kris was able to come in without causing a scene.

With that in mind, she turned to address the manager with a smile. "It's alright." After all, it wasn't as if the woman could do anything about this situation, either.

Then, she turned to look at Kris icily, her smile disappearing as she countered stoically, "But I should clarify that I do not have a biological sister, so please don't refer to yourself as such, Miss Kris."

Meanwhile, a bright and gloating smile had been tugging on Kris' lips ever since she locked eyes with Myra. Her smile grew even more dazzling after she heard the latter's snarky retort and instead of getting angry, she said pleasantly, "There's no need to be so harsh with your words, Sis. It's your boyfriend's birthday, after all. Have I mentioned that I'll be going to the Ritz Carlton to wish my brother-in-law a happy birthday as well?"

Having said that, she burst into giggles and the exquisite dress she was wearing shimmered under the light.

Myra, on the other hand, frowned. Sebastian was very protective of her and ever since he found out about her strained relationship with the rest of the Stark Family, he had cut off all ties with them. She was also certain that her family had not been invited to this evening's celebration, but Kris had made it very clear that she was going to attend Tony's birthday banquet.

As if reading her mind, Kris explained haughtily as a pleased look flashed across her features. "Oh, that reminds me—I must introduce you to my boyfriend. He's the general manager of Walton Group and according to him, he happens to be close friends with Tony. I guess that means I'll see you at the party, Sis."

Coincidentally, just as Kris was done speaking, a man dressed in a meticulous suit and leather shoes walked over. He stood tall and carried himself with an imposing grace; he had such fine and delicate features that he looked almost pretty.

Myra could be wrong, but she felt as though the man had been eyeing her since he stepped through those atelier doors. It was merely a brief look that meant nothing, but she found herself feeling squeamish nonetheless.

She looked up and met the handsome man's gaze. There was an unreadable look in his eyes as he sauntered over to where Kris was, then pulled her slender frame into his arms.

"Kris, have you said hello to your sister yet? We could let her carpool with us over to the Ritz Carlton," he suggested, leaning close as he breathed into Kris' ear. There was a roguish smirk playing on his thin lips and a playful glint in his eyes.

Kris coquettishly hit him on the chest, but she flashed Myra a smug look as she muttered in protest, "We should control ourselves in public, Gideon, before everyone starts laughing at us."

"What's there to laugh about? I'm just admiring how beautiful you look in this dress."

Meanwhile, Myra surveyed the bickering couple in front of her impassively. It had only been a while ago when she suspected that Kris and Gideon were dating, but she hadn't expected to be right about it.

Could they really have fallen for each other? A smirk tugged on her lips as she hadn't forgotten about Kris' previous fling with a certain Mr. Fuller.

While Myra wasn't sure what Kris was trying to achieve by dangling her newfound relationship in front of her, she couldn't care less about it. But just as she was about to turn around, Gideon glanced at her in amusement and said, "You must be Kris' sister—Miss Myra. I hear that you're engaged to Tony. I've heard so much about you, and you are as graceful as they say you are. You make a great match for Tony, even if he does come off as cold and dismissive. I wonder if we—"

However, he was cut off mid-sentence when Myra brushed past him and Kris to make her way out of the atelier.

Gideon's face darkened at her indifference.

Presently, Leo was coming into the atelier after getting off the phone, and his expression grew grim when he saw the scene before him. He hurried over to Myra and asked, "Miss Stark, have you picked out a dress?"

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As though absentmindedly, Leo shifted his body as he addressed Myra, thereby blocking Gideon's line of sight.

No longer in the mood to try on the other dresses after seeing Kris in the atelier, Myra nodded and answered, "I'll be wearing this one."

Just as Leo was about to inform her that Tony was on his way, the stormy-faced man standing off to one side broke into an icy smirk. He then walked up to them with his arm around Kris' waist and asked, "Mr. Clark, are you not going to introduce us?"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, his eyes fell on Myra.

Leo's face was impassive when he heard this, and he was perfunctory as he addressed Gideon and Myra respectively. "This is Miss Stark, Director Hart's fiancée; Miss Stark, this is Director Walton."

Then, he turned to look at Gideon and said stoically, "Now, if you'll excuse us, Director Walton. Director Hart is on his way."

With that, Leo gave Myra a look and indicated for her to head toward the exit. However, just as they were about to leave, Gideon stopped them in their tracks as he said, "Miss Stark, I know my sister has offended you previously due to her own thoughtlessness, but I'm sure you are kind and gracious enough to let it slide. Nevertheless, I apologize on her behalf."

Gideon's voice was a soft and steady baritone and while it sounded pleasant, it lacked the definitive cold edge that was characteristic of Tony's. Instead, he sounded smarmy, as though he was trying to hide something, and Myra couldn't help but feel squeamish whenever she heard him speak.

Presently, she frowned and countered plaintively, "You overestimate me, Director Walton. I'm not quite as kind and gracious as you presume me to be, but your apology is accepted." She knew that Tony had set aside Walton

Group's plans to enter the Bradford City consumer market a while ago, and he had done so to teach the Walton Family a lesson. With that in mind, she decided to let the matter of Gemma's scheming drop, as long as the girl stopped pestering her. After all, she still had social niceties to maintain and Tony had already stood up for her in his own ruthless way.

"Would you still like to carpool with us to the Ritz Carlton, Sis?" Kris chimed in, straightening in Gideon's arms as she stepped forward and flashed Myra a smile. "I'm assuming Director Hart would be rather busy this evening. Besides, there's still space in our car, so it would be no trouble at all for you to ride with us."

Myra gave her a pointed look, then marched out of the atelier without sparing her another glance. When Leo saw that she was leaving, he hastily trailed after her.

Meanwhile, Kris watched as Myra proudly walked away, the smile on her face instantly giving way to a menacing grimace. It had not been easy for her to finally get the chance to gloat in front of Myra. She wanted the latter to know that she, too, had found a man who doted on her just as Tony doted on Myra. But all I got was a cold shoulder from that wretched woman!

"There's nothing to be angry about, Kris. An arrogant woman like her would only suffer a much harder fall," Gideon consoled, chuckling as he wrapped his arm around her slender waist once more. "Besides, smug as she is, she wouldn't last long in the Hart household."

As he said this, his gaze trailed over to where Myra was standing outside. His eyes flashed maliciously at the thought of how his plans were hindered after his own sister had failed to win Tony's heart.

Kris, on the other hand, drew in a deep breath and leaned into his chest as she grumbled resentfully, "Do you see how she treats me now, Gideon? Dad doesn't even want to concern himself with her affairs anymore! But don't worry, Gideon—my father is extremely pleased with you. The Stark Group will be passed on to me and what's mine will naturally be yours."

Of course, you're going to have to help me gain power over the Stark Group before you can share my victory, she added silently as an afterthought, and lowered her eyes as her gaze darkened.

Gideon gave an easy laugh before he abruptly tipped her chin up and leaned down to nibble her lips. "Don't worry, Kris," he murmured. "I'll make sure that anyone who upsets you will be hurt by a hundredfold."

Her eyes lit up at this and she hummed in response, moved by the sincerity in his voice.

...

Myra was still within the vicinity of the atelier when Tony pulled up in his sports car, thereafter stepping down from the vehicle and making his way over to her.

He was dressed in a black suit, beneath which he wore the pale blue shirt that Myra had bought for him. He finished off his look with a navy-colored tie, and he looked more handsome in that moment than he usually did. His features were flawlessly and intricately chiseled, and there was a glint of amusement in his dark, almond-shaped eyes. There was an elegant slope to his nose and his thin lips curved up into a playful smile as he assessed the woman before him.

"Beautiful," he praised generously when he came to a stop in front of Myra.

She let out a small cough, flushing as she peered at Leo, who was clearly standing within earshot.

Tony narrowed his eyes as he cast Leo a meaningful look, his gaze dark and unreadable. Upon seeing this, Leo tapped his nose to show that he understood. He swiftly took the keys from Tony and handed over the keys to the Mercedes-Benz G500, thereafter jogging toward the silver-grey sports car that was parked by the curb.

When Leo drove away from the scene, Myra cast the man next to her a sideways glance. "I thought you would be busy this evening. I was going to ask Mr. Clark to tell you not to pick me up."

"I'm afraid that's not going to work out well for either of us," Tony replied, chuckling lightly as he took her hand and guided her over to the bold Mercedes-Benz G500. "Grandpa made it very clear that I have to personally escort you to the banquet, and we have to make an entrance just on time. He wants us there a couple of minutes before the whole thing starts, and the rest of them will take care of everything else at the Ritz Carlton."

“I’ve never seen a birthday boy not present at his own party before,” Myra mumbled, though she was beaming happily.

Meanwhile, inside the atelier, Gideon and Kris watched as Myra headed toward the car, her hand in Tony’s. After a moment of thought, Gideon turned to look at Kris curiously. “When did your sister start seeing Tony?”

Kris pursed her lips at this and answered flatly, “She claimed that it was after her divorce, but…” She trailed off and cast him a meaningful look, then continued, “You probably already know that she’s been together with Tony since before her divorce with Sean.”

“So it’s definitely before her divorce?” He narrowed his eyes at this information. If he were to look into the timeline of things, it had only been four months ago when Tony returned to the country. He had a hard time believing that the man would fall head-over-heels for Myra within such a short span of time. After all, Tony was a cold person, and he didn’t look like the caring and considerate type.

Then, Gideon pressed on, “Did you say that Lyla was the one who was behind their divorce?”

“That’s what she told me but I wouldn’t believe her if I were you,” Kris answered stiffly.

“True,” he agreed and nodded his head. “I heard that Sean released a statement in Myra’s defense but that’s an odd move on his part, judging from how tense things are between her and the Chase Family. It doesn’t look as if he has gotten over her.”

“I don’t know what she did to have these men drooling over her. What’s more absurd about all this is that they still worship her even though she’s made fools out of them!”

Kris had always been jealous over the fact that she could not win over Tony’s heart, and she blamed Myra entirely for it. But now that the Waltons are helping me, I’m going to have her thrown out of the company and the Stark Family!

When Gideon heard the way she had spat out her words, he narrowed his eyes as he took in the jealous look on her face. Deep down inside, he was

scornful of her but he consoled her gently as he murmured, "We should get going. The banquet is about to start."

...

As they drove over to the Ritz Carlton, Tony couldn't help but glance at Myra every now and then, and his gaze would occasionally dart over to her purse as well. After catching him doing that several times, she could no longer suppress her curiosity as she asked, "What are you looking at?"

He narrowed his eyes. "Don't you know what day it is, Myra?"

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Myra looked at him speechlessly. "Of course I know. Today is your birthday, right?"

Tony pursed his thin lips while a hint of dissatisfaction flashed across his eyes.

She suddenly caught his right hand and lowered her head before planting a kiss on the back of his hand. "Happy Birthday, Tony!"

She then raised her head and looked at the man, who was driving beside her, with sincere eyes.

However, not only did Tony not drop the frown, his expression actually darkened instead and he retracted his hand without replying to her.

She caught a glimpse of his expression with the corner of her eye, which put a smile on her face and made her clutch the phone in her handbag tightly.

And so, Tony, who was most likely sulking, did not try to make any conversation with her throughout the journey. Although Myra tried to talk to him, he either gave her perfunctory replies or he sometimes even ignored her completely.

Soon, the two of them arrived at their destination.

At this moment, all sorts of luxurious cars were gathered outside of the Ritz Carlton and guests, who were dressed to the nines, were entering the

premises. It was dark outside but the streets and bars around were buzzing with people.

Just as Tony was about to open the car door to alight from the car, Myra caught his right hand and stared at his impassive face with a gentle gaze. “Are you mad?”

Her palm was warm and she was so nervous that she did not know what else to say.

Tony’s eyes flicked across her hand that was holding onto his before he looked into her eyes. “No,” he calmly replied.

“You were sulking all the way here, yet you are denying it now? Anyone who didn’t know what happened would think that I bullied you...” she mumbled, which only made his expression become more thunderous. He then moved to get out of the car.

Meanwhile, Aaron, who was welcoming the guests not far away from them, noticed their arrival. He instantly gestured a valet to come with him to greet them.

When Myra glanced at them and found that they were still some distance away, she suddenly approached Tony and placed a kiss on his pursed lips. Her face blushed a little as she tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear while clearing her throat. “Don’t be mad. I have prepared your birthday present, but... can I give it to you after we go back tonight?”

Just now, she had the impulse to tease him, but it had never been her intention to see him unhappy throughout the banquet.

Of course Myra did not forget about his birthday and she had indeed prepared his gift. However, upon recalling Estelle’s suggestive expression when she was preparing the gift, she had the sudden urge to give up on the idea. How about I get him another gift for his birthday?

Her cheeks involuntarily became redder. Upon seeing Myra’s bashful look, which she herself might not even be aware of, Tony narrowed his eyes and curled up his thin lips. He then raised her chin to plant a kiss on her lips. “You will give it to me tonight?” he repeated her words.

“Yes.” She struggled for a while and nodded while squeezing her handbag strap.

“Tell me, what is this mysterious present that can only be given to me later on at night?” he asked teasingly. Truth was, Myra was unable to hide much of her words or actions from him. She seems shy... A playful smile appeared at the corner of Tony’s lips at the thought of that.

“It’s just an ordinary present.” Myra brushed off his hand. Feeling afraid that he would continue to press on, she pretended to glance at time on her phone. “Let’s go; the banquet will be starting soon.” With that, she attempted to get out from the other side.

However, just as she opened the car door, Aaron, who had walked up to her, carefully escorted her out of the car. “You two have finally arrived. If you were to take any longer, Old Master Hart and Young Master Shawn would become fed up with dealing with the guests.”

Since the main character of the banquet—who was also the person that they wanted to please the most—was not around, those people had to temporarily target the other members of the Hart Family.

As Damian had just taken his leave, he could only come to visit them during his younger brother’s wedding, which explained why he was absent today. Therefore, the only member of the Hart Family that they could pester were Sebastian and Shawn.

Upon seeing Aaron had one hand placed above her head, which obviously revealed his protectiveness over her, Myra smiled a gentle smile at him. “I’m fine, Mr. Johnson. I can get down on my own.”

Just as he was about to say something, he suddenly felt a slightly cold gaze on him. Stunned, he turned to look in that direction, only to see a man getting out of the driver’s seat and heading toward their direction.

The man’s gaze was impassive but it made Aaron feel uneasy, especially when his gaze flicked across him and finally landed on his hand—the same hand that was supporting Myra.

Before he could react, Tony had walked up to them and took Myra’s hand from his before taking her into his embrace. “Mr. Johnson, it’s almost time. We shall head in first.”

Understanding dawned and Aaron laughed, but the smile on his face seemed cryptic. “I wish you a happy birthday, Young Master Tony.”

“Thank you” Tony murmured with a raised eyebrow. In a seemingly inadvertent manner, he passed the car keys to Aaron instead of giving it to the valet before heading into the hotel with an arm over Myra’s shoulder.

Standing behind him, Aaron played with the car keys in his hand and helplessly mumbled, “This kid is really territorial.”

...

Today, Myra was quite nervous as she was going to make an appearance in the circle of the wealthy and the rich of Bradford City as Tony’s fiancée. However, due to what happened earlier, she burst into laughter when she was going up the steps of the Ritz Carlton Hotel. She then used her elbow to nudge someone’s chest. “Tony, why did you speak with Mr. Johnson with such a serious tone? He is my grandfather’s subordinate, so we should show him some respect since he is more senior to us.”

Tony raised an eyebrow in response and remained quiet.

Myra suddenly realized that Tony seemed displeased when Aaron supported her earlier. Could it be that... “Are you jealous?”

Her eyes instantly brightened up at that thought.

Upon seeing the laughter in her eyes, Tony pulled her into his arms and answered in a stern manner, “No.”

“You are still denying it.” Her nose bumped into his firm chest, making her feel a little uncomfortable, and she chuckled. “Hey, it’s just Mr. Johnson, yet you are jealous of him? You are being too petty.”

Tony tightened his grip around her waist, causing her to hiss softly due to the pain on her waist. She then shot a glare at him.

As a matter of fact, she did not put in much effort in dressing up today—she merely put on light makeup. Other than the gown, her hair was coiled up into a simple hairdo behind her head, leaving only two loose strands by her cheeks. She looked neat and gentle, which matched her temperament and gown well.

However, the way she looked at him seemed coquettish—at least, it was Tony who felt that way.

Myra glared at him; the black and white in her large eyes were clearly distinguishable, which made his heart involuntarily skip a beat. Suddenly, he lowered his head and his thin lips soon landed on hers.

They had walked up the stairs, arriving at the luxurious and grand entrance of Ritz Carlton.

What greeted them was a red carpet, the buzzy and lively guests, as well as the light-hearted music in the hall.

It was so unexpected that time seemed to stop at this instant.

One of the guests softly exclaimed, which was then followed by the sound of the crowd's sharp inhale. Soon, the initially buzzy hall instantly fell silent, and the only sound was the melodious music slowly playing in the background.

Myra was stunned. When she opened her eyes and saw the slight smile in the eyes of the man before her, her face immediately flushed.

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As they were standing right at the entrance of Ritz Carlton, it was only natural to have countless pairs of eyes watching them at that moment.

Just as Myra almost died of embarrassment, a pair of hands took her into his embrace and led her into the hall. Throughout all this, the man did not forget to glance at the crowd before them with a slight smile. "Thank you all for attending my banquet at the Ritz Carlton. I hope that all of you will enjoy yourselves tonight," Tony announced in a calm voice, as if kissing a woman in front of the crowd was no big deal. He then chivalrously led Myra toward the center of the hall.

The next instant, the crowd suddenly burst into an uproar.

Recently, the fiancée of the Hart Family's successor had caused quite a stir in Bradford City and became the source of gossip and scandal, especially her entanglement with the successor of the Chase Group, Sean Chase, as well as her relationship with the man who was standing before them now. Their relationship—which could be regarded as a love triangle—was known to all,

and it added some flavor to the banquet tonight; other than the regular conversations between the businessmen and celebrities, the guests, especially the female ones, had something interesting to gossip about.

The gossip was born from their jealousy, envy, or even frustration toward her, and some of them were purely enjoying the show from the sidelines. Upon seeing Myra, everyone had different thoughts.

Some time ago, when the media revealed that Tony and Myra were getting married, some were of the opinion that the news might be merely a rumor. However, when Tony kissed Myra in public, his actions made everyone realize that it was indeed the truth and the couple's wedding would most probably be just around the corner.

"Director Hart, this is..." a bold guest casually asked while pretending to strike a conversation.

"Let me introduce her to you—this is Myra Stark, my fiancée." Tony openly introduced her identity to the person who asked about her without any hesitation. Then, he looked at Myra. "Myra, this is Director Jenkins, the director of the Jenkins Group; the Hart Group has a lot of business dealings with his company."

Myra smiled at him politely. "Hello, Director Jenkins."

"Hello." Director Jenkins, who had good social etiquette, concealed the shocked look in his eyes and grinned as he looked at Tony. "Director Hart, your fiancée is really gentle and beautiful, and I heard that Miss Stark is an outstanding designer as well. The both of you are a good match, Director Hart. It seems like I have to congratulate the two of you on your upcoming wedding."

"Thank you. I won't forget to invite you to my wedding when the time comes, Director Jenkins." Although the smile by Tony's lips was light, everyone was able to tell that he was in a pleasant mood today, which made them shoot complex looks at the woman beside him. It was completely out of everyone's expectations that Tony would end up marrying that woman.

The families, who had had the intention to have their daughters marry into the Hart Family, all shook their heads in resignation at that moment.

Tony and Myra greeted the guests one after another while exchanging pleasantries with them. Soon after, they arrived at the center of the hall, where all the members of the Hart Family had gathered; even Elliot, Philip, and Lucas were waiting for them there.

Upon seeing the blushing Myra, Elliot winked at her. “Myra, did you notice how half of the women in the hall looked at you? Their gazes were filled with envy, jealousy and resentment!”

Sure enough, the hearts of the women, who attended the banquet while holding onto the last shred of hope, were filled with envy, jealousy, and resentment upon seeing how affectionate Tony was toward Myra. It was totally beyond their expectations that a cold man like Tony would introduce Myra as his fiancée, his tone all the while filled with his affection toward her.

Myra glared at Tony before she turned to look at the two elders of the Hart Family. “Old Master Hart, Old Madam Hart,” she greeted politely.

Lisa nodded calmly while Sebastian let out a quiet snort. “You guys sure are early.”

Upon hearing that, Myra was speechless. I remember Tony said that it was Sebastian himself who asked us to come at this exact moment.

However, she was used to Sebastian always saying things that he did not mean, so she immediately smiled apologetically. “I apologise for that; we will come earlier next time.”

Sebastian once again appraised her from head to toe before he frowned and pouted. “We have been preparing nutritious meals for you every day lately, but why are you still so skinny? Tell me the truth—did you throw away all the food?”

Myra felt helpless upon hearing that. “No! I made sure to finish everything that had been sent over to me.”

It was only then did Sebastian nod in satisfaction. “You are more obedient than Tony.”

After saying that, he cast a disapproving glance at his grandson. If this grandson of mine is as obedient as his fiancée, I won’t have to worry for him all the time!

However, since Lisa had warned him in advance not to kick up a fuss at his grandson's banquet, he did not say much.

The banquet soon began.

The main character of the birthday banquet, as well as his family members, naturally would have to greet and tend to the guests.

Therefore, the atmosphere in the banquet was rather peaceful for a while.

Elliot and the two others helped to entertain the guests as well.

Although Myra could not hold her drink, she still had to more or less drink a little at an occasion like today. Fortunately, due to the Hart Family's status and position, nobody dared to put her on the spot and Tony also drank a few glasses on her behalf, so she really did not drink much.

After one round of pleasantries, she seemed a little exhausted. Tony held her waist and asked in a whisper, "Are you tired?"

"I'm fine." She shook her head, not wanting to give him trouble on a formal occasion like this.

Nevertheless, she obviously had underestimated his protectiveness over her. With an arm wrapped around her waist, he led her toward the rest area with a domineering attitude that allowed no room for rejection. "Take a rest. We have greeted everyone once, and Grandpa and the others will continue to handle the guests."

And so, Myra had no choice but to follow Tony to the rest area.

What they did not notice was that a group of people entered the hall at that moment.

The Walton Family was late because Old Master Walton and Gideon and Gemma's parents had just arrived at Bradford City. Therefore, they did not know about the incident that happened earlier.

The moment they entered the hall, the group of people naturally spotted the woman, who was sitting next to Tony, at the rest area.

“Gemma, is that the Young Lady of the Stark Family that you mentioned?” Old Master Walton struck his cane on the floor. When he saw Tony hugging a strange woman intimately, his expression instantly fell.

Gemma, who also saw how affectionate Tony and Myra were together, clenched her fists tightly and replied with a long face, “It’s her, Grandpa.”

“Hmph! She is merely a pretentious vixen! I wonder if Tony is blind; otherwise, why is he not interested in Gemma, but instead is cherishing a piece of trash instead? Today, I thought that the Hart Family would at least send someone to pick us up at the airport, but it turned out that they were nowhere to be seen—”

“Mom—” Shelly was interrupted by Gideon before she could finish grumbling. When he noticed the guests around them were eavesdropping on their conversation, he narrowed his eyes and muttered, “Mom, the Hart Family is busy today so it’s only natural for them to miss a thing or two.”

“You are his best friend! Tony’s action shows that he does not hold you in high regard. In fact, he wouldn’t have been able to make his Hartwell Group a success without your help back then!” It was obvious that Shelly had been holding a grudge over that incident. “In the end, he only gave you 10% of the Hartwell Group’s share! Looks like he really doesn’t take the Walton Family seriously!”

“Shut up! We are here at Bradford City to seek the help of the Hart Family.” Samuel quietly admonished her with his brows knitted. That statement finally silenced her but her eyes were filled with dissatisfaction.

“Let’s go over there. Let me see how the Hart Family is going to give us an explanation.” Old Master Walton pulled a long face because Walton Group’s products were not selling well in Bradford City as planned. This time, the entire Walton Family returned to Bradford City in advance solely to deal with this matter.

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As for Kris, she was following them from behind.

When she went to the airport to pick this group of people up, she noticed that the elders of the Walton Family were displeased with her. However, they were not mean to her, but that was probably due to Gemma’s presence.

It was at that moment that she knew that she had to keep a low profile to prevent the Waltons from picking on her faults.

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Tony, who remembered that Myra had not eaten much that night, ordered a waiter to send them a piece of cake. It was a matcha-flavored cake, which was something that she fancied. However, much to his surprise, the taste made her feel nauseous as soon as she took a bite.

When he noticed that she did not look good, Tony furrowed his brows and asked softly, "What's wrong? Is it not to your liking? I will ask the waiter to get you something else."

"It's fine. Maybe I took too much alcohol earlier, so it's making my stomach uncomfortable. I'll be fine after drinking some plain water, though."

There was a glass of warm water right beside her. She then took two sips of water and finally suppressed the nausea, and the uncomfortable feeling subsided considerably.

"Let me get Philip to give you a checkup." Upon seeing her pale face, Tony attempted to rise up to get Philip but Myra tugged at his hand. "I'm fine. I feel better after drinking some water. Don't make a fuss about it; everyone is busy today."

"Promise me you'll tell me if you feel uncomfortable." Tony took the glass from her hands and placed it aside before holding her hands in his.

Although the two of them were in an inconspicuous corner, they still attracted some gazes from the buzzy crowd in front. When Tony embraced her at that moment, Myra was a little bashful but she did not push him away.

She somehow felt a little uncomfortable—perhaps it was because she had drunk too much alcohol or she had been standing for too long.

Just as the two of them were cuddling in a corner of the hall, a group of people suddenly approached them.

Among the group of people, Myra knew three of them—Gemma, Gideon, and his current girlfriend, Kris.

“It’s been a while, Tony.” Samuel took the initiative to greet Tony with a smile.

Upon seeing this group of people, Tony’s expression remained unchanged as he rose to his full height. However, upon seeing that Myra attempted to stand up as well, he stopped her with a gentle move and murmured quietly, “You should remain seated and rest for a moment since you are not feeling well. Old Master Walton, Director Walton, and Mrs. Walton won’t mind it.”

His words revealed to Myra the identities of the group of people who approached them.

His attitude was neither arrogant nor humble, but it was not particularly warm either when he nodded at the few of them. “Welcome Old Master Walton, Director Walton, and Mrs. Walton. Pardon my inhospitality.”

It was obvious that Old Master Walton was dissatisfied with Tony’s attitude. His gaze flicked across him before landing on Myra, who was beside Tony, and he frowned as he calmly said, “It has been a while since we last met. Tony, you sure do things fast—you even have a fiancée now. I heard that we will be able to attend your wedding in two months’ time?” Although he seemed calm, his tone reflected his displeasure.

“That’s right; Tony is getting married in two months. We are very happy with Miss Stark here. Old Master Walton, do attend the wedding when the time comes.”

Before Tony managed to reply, Sebastian’s voice was heard from behind. Soon, Sebastian and Lisa, as well as all the members of the Hart Family, walked up to them.

The young people of both families greeted the elders of the other family. Upon seeing this, Henry, who had just come downstairs after completing his homework, immediately dashed up to Myra and appraised her from head to toe. “Myra, you look gorgeous today,” he praised with a smile.

His childish words manage to slice through the serious air between the two families.

When Gemma noticed the plain outfit on Myra, who was standing opposite her, she proudly puffed out her chest. In fact, the evening gown she was wearing today was very luxurious. Her brother had it personally flown in from Paris with the intention to have her to outshine Myra’s beauty with the

glamorous outfit during the banquet today. Nonetheless, it was obvious to everyone that Tony did not even bother to spare Gemma a glance.

“What do you know about beauty?” Myra ruffled Henry’s hair. Just as she was about to tell him not to interrupt the adults when they were speaking, Sebastian chimed in with an inexplicably proud tone, “She is my future granddaughter-in-law, so of course she is gorgeous.”

Upon hearing that, everyone was rendered speechless.

Even Myra tugged at Tony’s hand out of embarrassment as well.

Tony had a slight smile in his eyes but he did not say anything. Just then, Shawn turned to the Waltons and spoke in a polite yet distant tone. “Please make yourselves comfortable tonight. Old Master Walton, Director Walton, and Mrs. Walton, you all must be exhausted after a long day’s flight. We have prepared a few rooms for you upstairs, so feel free to use them if you wish to rest.”

After having this unforeseen conversation, the Waltons lost the courage to recite the script that they had prepared to angrily question Tony for betraying Gemma’s feelings, as well as to talk about the failure of their plan to promote the Walton Group’s product into Bradford City.

Old Master Walton snorted quietly. “We are not done yet, so we don’t have the mood to rest now.”

Then, he glanced at the two elders of the Hart Family but in the end, he still did not ask those questions. Instead, he glared at his granddaughter with his large eyes and scolded, “Aren’t you going to apologize?”

Gemma’s expression instantly fell. When we were alighting from the plane earlier, Grandpa, Dad, and Mom said that they will stand up for me, but why is Grandpa asking me to apologize in front of Myra now?

“Grandpa!” She stomped her feet in anger.

“Gemma, this isn’t how I’ve raised you! Hurry up and apologize to Old Master Hart and Old Madam Hart for your stupid actions!” Old Master Walton thundered as he glared at his granddaughter with fiery eyes.

In all honesty, Gemma had never been afraid of her parents, yet she had always been terrified of her stern grandfather. Upon hearing his words, she bit her lip but she felt a lot better. I don't need to apologize to Myra, just to Old Master Hart and Old Madam Hart. I knew that Grandpa would always side with me!

As soon as Gemma walked up to Sebastian and Lisa and was about to say something, Sebastian suddenly stepped to the side while pulling Lisa along with him. He then raised his brows and pretended to ask in puzzlement, "Gemma did not offend us, so why is she apologizing to us? If memory serves, the person Gemma should be apologizing to is my future granddaughter-in-law, no?"

Sebastian spoke in a rather calm tone, but the fact that he addressed Myra as his future daughter-in-law had shown his intention to help Myra to get an apology from Gemma.

Upon hearing that, Gemma's expression changed.

Old Master Walton narrowed his eyes. Although there was a strong turbulence surging deep within him, he pretended to be calm and said to his granddaughter, "Gemma, you know what to do."

Gemma's face paled and unconcealable fury appeared in her eyes. She looked at Myra, who was also looking at her while raising her head.

When she noticed the impassive expression on Myra's face, Gemma inwardly accused her of being hypocritical. She is now probably mocking me in her heart!

With her fists tightly clenched by her sides, Gemma apologized to her unwillingly. "I'm sorry."

After that, she immediately returned to her spot behind her grandfather.

Her actions made Old Master Walton drop his dark expression and replace it with a smile. He then commented, "Old Master Hart, my immature granddaughter did something wrong some time ago and I have already taught her a lesson. Therefore, we shouldn't let this insignificant affair destroy the collaboration between our families. The Waltons have always been the Hart Family's most loyal partner, so we shouldn't let outsiders take us as a joke, don't you think so?"

