#### MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

#### Chapter 2231

"No, Mrs. President. This is a misunderstanding," Kevin quickly explained. "There are a few urgent projects at the company that can't proceed without Danrique's seal, so we were just thinking about getting it."

"Yeah. Since Danrique is not around, the two of us have to step up and take charge. We can't just let things turn into a mess. We can't move on with these projects without the seal, so we just wanted to retrieve it, but Ms. Felch—"

"I don't know what's going on in your company," the first lady interrupted coldly, "but Danrique told the president and me before he left that Francesca is his fiancée, and she shall be in full command over the

house when he is away. Since she refuses to hand over the seal, you all should discuss the issue calmly instead of causing a scene here. This is preposterous!"

"We're so sorry, Mrs. President. We were too hasty that we let our emotions get the best of us."

Kevin immediately changed his tone, but Gerard was still disgruntled about the turn of events.

"Why don't you all go home first and talk about this later? For all we know, we might get news about Danrique in the next two days," the first lady added before anyone could say another word.

"We..."

Kevin and Gerard exchanged glances and left with their men.

Everyone in the house breathed a sigh of relief, and Norah quickly got the servants to prepare drinks for the first lady while Francesca expressed her gratitude.

"Thank you, Mrs. President."

"There's no need for that. We're in the same boat," the first lady said gently as she held Francesca's hand. "You look pale, Francesca. It has only been a few days since I last saw you."

"I haven't been sleeping well. Have a seat," Francesca answered, smiling.

When the first lady was seated, she chatted with Francesca for a bit and presented to her the gifts she had brought. "Anyway, Francesca, do you know what the situation is like for Danrique now? Did he contact you?"

"He's been unreachable for a while. I couldn't get to him," Francesca replied lowly.

"What about Gordon?" the first lady asked.

"He called, but he's still looking for Danrique. I will inform you if I find out anything," Francesca assured, feeling tired.

"All right. I did not want to disturb you initially because I knew you would be exhausted, but the president asked me to come over to inquire about the matter, so here I am."

Speaking, she patted Francesca's hand and added, "Don't worry, Francesca. Danrique will be all right."

"Thank you." Francesca nodded at her.

"I will make a move first, then. You must be tired. You have my number, so just call if those people bother you again. I will come over if anything happens," the first lady assured, feeling sorry for Francesca.

"Thank you so much!" Words could not express how grateful Francesca felt.

"You take care. I'll make a move first."

Without further ado, the first lady got up and said goodbye, but she had barely taken a few steps when she suddenly remembered something and turned back to Francesca. "By the way, I heard there was news from Hazel, so I'm planning to ask Gerard out alone to find out more about it. We might be able to find some clues from there."

"Did you say there was an update from Hazel?" Francesca asked anxiously.

"I'm not sure how true that is, but that's what I heard," the first lady replied, frowning. "That's why I want to confirm it with Gerard. Since Hazel went to M Nation with Danrique, and we lost contact with both of them simultaneously, any news from her means we are not far from knowing more about Danrique's disappearance."

"That's true," Francesca noted, nodding. "May I go with you tomorrow?"

"Of course! After arranging a meeting with him, I will let you know the time and venue."

"Sure. Thank you!" Francesca was extremely grateful.

"Don't mention it."

The first lady smiled at her and left.

Seeing that there was finally hope, Francesca could not help but feel emotional.

When Layla went to ask her what happened,
Francesca roughly told her what the first lady said, but
Layla frowned, commenting, "This doesn't feel right. It
makes more sense to bring this matter up right at the
beginning since it's so important. Why did the first
lady suddenly mention it right when she was leaving
and when you were alone at that?"

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MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2232

"Maybe she didn't want the crowd in the hall to overhear her talking earlier," Francesca postulated. "Especially when Monica was around. It seems that the first lady doesn't quite like Monica."

Layla weighed up Francesca's reasoning and instantly acknowledged it, for the former, too, wasn't that fond of Monica herself. From her perspective, Monica had always been acting shady, seemingly shrewd and cunning to the core.

Yet, she knew very well that Monica was merely working for William. Even if William had been harboring any sort of ulterior motive, he would still have to take Francesca's side for the time being.

After all, both Francesca and Danrique could offer him the protection that he needed.

"Danrique has already been missing for so long. I'm

really worried," uttered Francesca with concern. "I'm not going to give up any chance, so even if it were a trap, I'd still go check it out."

"All right, then. I'll go with you," said Layla as she held Francesca's hand.

The latter shook her head. "No. I can handle it alone. You guard the house. Considering that we don't have as many bodyguards with us, I'm afraid those two sc\*mbags might send someone to steal the seal."

"True enough." Layla bobbed her head upon hearing that. "Sloan and the rest won't be able to manage on their own. And if those two were to really come after the seal, it'd be a disaster..."

"But with you around, there's nothing more for me to worry about."

Just when Francesca was speaking, a call came through. It was William, requesting her presence. She then ordered someone to fetch her the medical kit and went on her way.

For the past few days, Francesca had been busy dealing with the horde of her enemies while having all her thoughts fixated on Danrique. She was understandably moody and preoccupied with troubles, thus failing to treat William wholeheartedly.

During the visit on that very night, she gave William a check-up right away. Given that William had been on his medication, his injuries weren't affected, but at the same time, there weren't any improvements either.

Thus, Francesca performed the treatment and even prescribed him a new course of medicine.

Looking at Francesca's haggard appearance, William

knew he had to offer some kind of comfort. "Don't worry, Francesca. L will be fine..."

"Everyone keeps telling me that, but how can I not worry when he has gone completely radio silent, to the point where not even Gordon can locate him?" The worried look on Francesca's face didn't abate.

"Actually, have you ever thought about—"

William's voice trailed off just when words began to leap out of his mouth.

"Thought about what?" questioned Francesca curiously.

"O-Oh, it's nothing," William blurted out, abruptly changing the topic. "Anyway, you shouldn't act alone while L isn't by your side. If you really have to go out there, take Monica with you."

"Yes, that's right! I can tag along any time," Monica hastily chimed in. "By the way, what did the first lady talk to you about a minute ago? I only realized that she was still speaking to you after I left."

"Nothing much."

Truth be told, Francesca detested the way Monica had been behaving toward her. It felt like the latter was spying on her round the clock.

Furthermore, since the first lady found Monica distasteful, Francesca would never disclose to Monica her plan of meeting Gerard together with the first lady.

Needless to say, Monica noticed how Francesca was growing wary of her and immediately tried to explain herself, "Ms. Felch, have I—"

Unfortunately, she had to swallow her words when she saw William shooting her a meaningful glance.

With that, Francesca gave William a few pointers before spinning on her heels and heading home.

"I'm sure something's up with the first lady," Monica grumbled. "She didn't say much when I was around, but when I stepped away to the car, I saw her chatting up a storm with Ms. Felch. And after seeing how Ms. Felch dodged my question earlier—"

"You're right to think that Francesca doesn't want to tell you more, but have you ever wondered why that's the case?" retorted William with a frown. "You ought to act more naturally instead of making her feel like you're spying on her, don't you think?"

Monica straightaway hung her head low in shame. "I suppose."

"Now that Francesca's obviously keeping you at arm's length, you should take this time to reflect on yourself. If this continues, she's not going to bring you anywhere she goes," fumed William.

"Please forgive me, Your Highness..."

"The situation isn't looking good right now. The Lindberg family is short-staffed, and if Francesca does meet up with the first lady tomorrow, there's a possibility that she might end up falling into the other party's trap..."

William's heart was filled with uneasiness as those words escaped from his lips.

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## MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2233

"Then, what should I do now?" asked Monica in a meek voice. "Should I just persuade Ms. Felch to take me with her?"

"Are you out of your mind?" William was bereft of speech. He couldn't even be bothered to continue the meaningless conversation with Monica. "Let me think of something. You may leave."

"Your Highness..."

Monica still had something else to say, yet a peek at William's irritated countenance was sufficient to

compel her into lowering her gaze and backing away.

She felt aggrieved, for she was a senior Interpol detective, after all. All she knew was carrying out investigations and apprehending criminals. She never had a knack for putting on a pretense.

Even so, she had given her all in completing every task that had been assigned to her.

Meanwhile, Francesca was having nightmares the entire night. In her dreams, she could see that Danrique was in danger as he was pinned underneath a vehicle with his legs bathing in a pool of his own blood, seemingly on the verge of death.

Anxious and concerned, she wanted to rush over and rescue him, but it was as though her feet were stuck in the ground, and they wouldn't budge no matter how hard she struggled.

Right at that juncture, the vehicle exploded all of a sudden with a loud boom.

With her eyes widened in disbelief, Francesca gaped at the scene as Danrique was engulfed in the roaring flames.

"No!"

Francesca let out a frantic scream before sitting up in bed, sweating ever so profusely.

Only after seeing the familiar room that she was in did she realize that she had been dreaming. Be that as it may, the sensation was so palpable that she had thought that it was real.

She touched the pillow at the side, reminiscing the time they spent together before Danrique left as a

throbbing pain assailed her.

Subsequently, she checked her phone and was greeted by nothing but a text from Gordon that read: We haven't found him yet, Ms. Felch.

Cradling her forehead, Francesca was utterly disappointed.

Nevertheless, there was nothing she could do at the moment. With her mind abuzz with messy thoughts, she slept through several hours more until she was ultimately awakened by the chimes of her phone.

"Francesca, I've made the appointment. We'll meet at North Hotel at one o'clock in the afternoon."

It turned out to be a call from the first lady.

"Noted. I'll be there on the dot."

A glimmer of hope rose within Francesca as she glanced at the time. There were still another few hours to go. She couldn't wait for the time to arrive sooner so that she could finally gain more information regarding Danrique's whereabouts.

Knowing that Francesca was going to meet the first lady, Layla reminded, "You have been researching poison and drugs, haven't you? How about hidden weapons and booby traps? Bring some with you for self-defense."

"Those things are too conspicuous." Francesca refused to heed Layla's advice as she added, "I can't simply put on a casual attire with a backpack to see the first lady, now, can I?"

"Then, you—"

"Rest assured, Ms. Layla. I'm well-prepared."

As they spoke, Francesca asked Sloan to bring her to Danrique's laboratory. While she was there, she summoned Sam.

Sam still recognized Francesca. It bolted toward her the second it heard her whistling. Coiling itself around her wrist, it resembled a mesmerizing, shiny jade bracelet.

"Look, Ms. Layla! This is my very own little bodyguard!" Holding Sam high up, Francesca went on, "It's the one that had bitten Chrono the last time!"

"This little one must be extremely poisonous." Seeing Sam up close like that, Layla felt a shiver run down her spine.

Then came Sloan's words of caution, "Sam has been

soaking in poison substance for a couple of months already, so it's pretty deadly now, I must say. Ms. Felch, please be careful."

"Don't you worry about a thing." Francesca then checked the time and announced, "I must go now."

Sloan hurriedly trailed behind her. "I'd like to escort you there, Ms. Felch, if I may."

However, Francesca turned him down. "You guys stay here and be on guard. Don't let anyone come and cause trouble. I won't be long."

"But your safety is also our priority." Sloan became a nervous wreck on that note. "What if something bad happened to you? How am I going to explain it to Mr. Lindberg?"

"If something were to really crop up, you people

wouldn't be able to fend it off anyway." Wearing a confident demeanor, Francesca stated, "Besides, I can deal with it myself."

"But-"

Just when Sloan was about to speak further, Francesca hopped into the car and floored the accelerator, vanishing quickly beyond the horizon.

"Ms. Felch, Ms. Felch..."

Sloan continued to call out to her as he tried to chase after her. Sadly, his voice was drowned by the howling wind.

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## MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

#### Chapter 2234

Despite being extremely worried about Francesca as well, Layla comforted Sloan upon noticing how distraught he was. She said, "There's no need to worry. The average person won't be able to harm her."

"But--"

"I noticed there was an animal-training facility behind here. Why don't you bring me there to take a look?"

Layla suddenly changed the subject.

"Okay."

Francesca drove to North Hotel, the place where she

agreed to meet the first lady at.

The first lady's car was already parked outside, and the hotel manager and her bodyguards were standing at the entrance. They walked up and greeted Francesca respectfully as soon as they saw her.

Francesca got out of the car and strode into the hotel in a hurry. "Has Mrs. President arrived?"

"She arrived a while ago."

The bodyguards brought her in, whereas the hotel manager stood at the entrance, waiting for the Atkinson family members to arrive.

When Francesca entered the hotel, she noticed there was no one in the hotel. It was apparent that the first lady had booked the entire place.

The first lady was sipping on her tea when Francesca entered the private room, and when she saw the latter, she beckoned her over. "Oh, you're here. Come and have a taste of this tea."

Francesca was not in the mood to enjoy tea, but she still sat down and waited patiently.

The first lady patted Francesca's hand and reminded her, "Francesca, I'll ask the questions when they arrive later. Don't worry. They will not dare to hide anything from me."

As soon as the first lady finished speaking, the hotel manager brought in the representatives from the Atkinson family.

Francesca was dumbfounded when she turned around and saw who it was.

Hazel, who was severely injured, was wheeled into the room by Gerard.

The first lady was shell-shocked. "Hazel? When did you return?"

That was also the question Francesca wanted to ask.

"I reached home around three in the morning."

Hazel's voice was hoarse and deep as she spoke, and there were bandages wrapped around her head, a cast on her leg, and abrasions on her arms. To make matters worse, she was shot in the chest. It seemed laborious for her to even sit up straight.

"How did you end up like this? What happened? Where's Danrique?" Francesca asked anxiously.

Hazel was still too weak to explain the situation at

length, so she remained silent.

The first lady queried as well, "Yeah. What happened?"

"Mr. Lindberg and I were attacked. He covered me so I could retreat first. While escaping, I got hurt and lost consciousness. When I woke up, I was already in the hospital and had lost contact with Mr. Lindberg and his subordinates. I have already sent people to look for him, but there hasn't been any news. I have no choice but to return to Erihal when I was attacked again yesterday..." Hazel explained with difficulty.

Upon hearing that, Francesca grew even more uneasy. Hazel was still severely injured even though Danrique and his men were covering her. It was evident that the firepower from the attack was highly intensive.

"How is this possible? Who attacked you guys?" the first lady asked anxiously.

Hazel furrowed her brows. "It should be Pastor and Frank. Previously, Pastor's business was affected when Mr. Lindberg expanded his business into the Epean market, so Pastor has been holding a grudge against him. Moreover, the people backing Pastor wanted to rope in Mr. Lindberg, but he did not agree. Therefore, those people let Pastor do whatever he liked. Also, their power had grown exponentially with Frank's and the Nacht family's assistance, coupled with the fact that we were in a disadvantageous position as Mr. Lindberg did not bring enough men along this time…"

Gerard sighed before replying, "Danrique was careless this time. He usually brings a lot of men with him whenever he goes out to work. Why did he only take a dozen people this time?"

Hazel glared at Francesca hatefully upon hearing his remarks. "Apparently, he has to leave some men behind to protect certain people at home. Mr. Lindberg was in a rush this time and did not make proper preparations, allowing them to take advantage of the situation."

"Enough with the nonsense. Where were you when you guys were attacked? Tell me the precise location and situation clearly." Francesca was unfazed by what Hazel said.

"I already explained to Gordon. I care more about Mr. Lindberg's safety than you do!" Hazel replied coldly.

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#### MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2235

Her words were obviously provocative.

Francesca furrowed her brows and was about to say something when the first lady spoke up to smooth things over. "Okay, that's enough. Our main priority is to find Danrique."

Hazel responded, "I hope we could find him as soon as possible, too. My subordinates and I have already informed Gordon about the situation. He has gotten all the information he needs and is investigating the situation now."

The first lady sighed sorrowfully. "That's good to know. I hope Danrique will be able to return safely."

At that moment, Gerard said sarcastically, "We all hope for that. With the absence of Danrique, some urgent projects cannot be initiated, while some important projects have to be postponed as they require approvals. As a result, the company has suffered significant losses. If this continues, the problem will only worsen."

"The president has already sent people over. At the same time, we contacted the government there. We will bring Danrique back safely." The first lady changed the subject.

"It's great that we have the president's help. Danrique would surely return soon," Gerard quickly replied.

The first lady nodded. "Yes. Let's eat first. We can talk while we eat."

Hazel said feebly, "Mrs. President, I'm not feeling well,

so I can't stay outside for long. I won't be able to eat dinner with you."

Gerard chimed in hastily, "That's right. Hazel is badly injured and was carried back home on a hospital bed in the morning. We wouldn't even be here if you didn't summon us."

"Come to think of it, Francesca is a doctor. Why don't you let her have a look at Hazel's injuries?" the first lady suggested enthusiastically.

"There's no need for that. I can't trouble the almighty Dr. Felch with my minor injuries!" Hazel gazed at Francesca coldly.

While Francesca was fuming, the first lady stepped in to defuse the situation yet again. "Francesca has exceptional medical skills. Previously, when Avery had a relapse, the other doctors could not do anything

to save her. Francesca was the one who saved Avery."

"Is Avery okay?" Hazel asked concerned.

"Her situation has already stabilized."

In the midst of their conversation, the first lady's phone suddenly rang. She took a look at the caller ID and said hastily, "The president is calling. I need to take this. You guys can sit here and wait for me to return."

"All right. Go ahead." Gerard and Hazel nodded in response.

After the first lady left to take the call, Gerard, Hazel, Francesca, and a few maids were the only ones left in the private room.

Gerard said with a cynical tone, "Don't think of yourself as the lady of the Lindberg family simply because you're dating Danrique. You need to understand that you guys are still not married, so you're not part of the family yet."

"Daddy—" Hazel furrowed her brows and tried to stop him.

"Hazel, you're too much of a pushover," said Gerard to Hazel before glowering at Francesca with hatred. "I don't understand what Danrique sees in you. You don't have any good qualities, yet you act high and mighty. Let me tell you. You have to give up the seal sooner or later. With Danrique absent, the other directors would still need to ensure that the company continues running. It's not something an outsider like you can have a say in."

Francesca bellowed in annoyance, "Are you done?

How dare you make yourself sound so righteous when you guys are attempting to usurp Danrique's authority while he's away? How hypocritical!"

"You-"

Francesca interrupted him angrily, "What? Don't think I'm a pushover! With me here, no one will be able to take anything from the Lindberg family."

Livid, Gerard gritted his teeth. "How dare you! Who do you think you are? Do you really think you're a big shot? Aren't you just one of Danrique's women? You're going to get kicked out soon..."

"Daddy..."

"The audacity!"

Enraged, Francesca picked up an ashtray and threw it

in his direction.

Gerard hastily ducked to avoid it, and it landed on Hazel instead. The woman yelped in pain as the color drained from her face.

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# MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2236

When Gerard saw her daughter getting hit, he raised his fist to punch Francesca in his rage.

At that moment, the green snake that was hiding in Francesca's sleeve shot out and wrapped itself around Gerard's neck, opening its mouth to attack.

Just as it was about to sink its teeth into Gerard's skin, Francesca yelled, "Sam, come back!"

Sam's tongue had already come in contact with Gerard's skin, but it held back just in time and jumped back to Francesca's wrist before coiling and turning into a jade bangle-like shape.

"You..." As Gerard touched his neck and looked at Francesca's wrist, his face turned pale. "You evil woman! I'm going to kill you!"

Next, he lunged at Francesca.

"Stop it right there!"

The first lady appeared at that juncture and stopped Gerard.

The latter lowered his fist, while Francesca, who was ready to retaliate, retracted her raised leg as well.

If the first lady hadn't appeared, Gerard would have been sent flying by Francesca's kick before he could even land a punch.

"Gerard, what are you doing?" the first lady scolded. "I just went out for a call, and I come back to see you attempting to hit Francesca! You're a man and an elder to her. How could you be so unreasonable?"

"Mrs. President, this is a misunderstanding!" Gerard pointed at Francesca in agitation and continued, "This brat attacked me with an ashtray earlier and missed, but Hazel got hit instead!"

The first lady turned to look at Hazel and found out that the girl's wound was indeed bleeding, and an ashtray lay beside her feet. At that sight, the first lady questioned, "Francesca, what's going on?"

"Gerard offended me with his words first," said Francesca coldly. "I did hurl an ashtray at him, but he dodged. That's why I accidentally hurt Hazel."

Feeling somewhat guilty about Hazel's bleeding wound, Francesca approached the other woman to check her injury. However, Hazel rejected her outright. "I don't need you to check on me!"

Francesca rolled her eyes and produced a small bottle from her pocket. She tossed it to Hazel, saying, "I made this medicinal powder. It's very effective in treating external wounds. Use it if you want.

Otherwise, just throw it away."

Hazel was about to discard it when Gerard stopped her. In a low voice, he told her, "Just keep it first. Although she's problematic, she is actually very skilled in medicine."

"Daddy, are you okay? Were you bitten by that snake?" Hazel asked in concern while examining Gerard's neck.

"I'm not sure." Gerard put his hand over his neck and said to the first lady, "Mrs. President, Hazel isn't feeling well. I'll bring her home first."

"All right. I asked you to come today because I wanted to ask about Danrique, but I didn't expect a conflict like this to take place. It's all because of my negligence. Mr. President already scolded me earlier," the first lady mentioned with her brows scrunched.

"It's not your fault, Mrs. President—"

"Anyway, you should go," interrupted the first lady. "Take good care of Hazel."

"All right." Without saying anything more, Gerard wheeled Hazel toward the exit.

Before leaving, Hazel bowed at the first lady, but she did not even spare a glance at Francesca. Upon turning around, she asked Gerard again, "Daddy, were you bitten by that snake?"

"I don't think so. My neck doesn't hurt, but it feels a bit numb and chilly," Gerard answered softly.

"You should go and see a doctor. The snakes reared by Mr. Lindberg are highly venomous," Hazel said with worry.

"That snake was raised by Mr. Lindberg?" Gerard's face fell. Just as he was about to turn around to lash out at Francesca, Hazel pulled him back. "That's enough. We shouldn't make a scene in front of Mrs.

President. Let's go home first."

Although Francesca couldn't hear the father-daughter duo's conversation clearly, she could guess what was going on. She couldn't help but roll her eyes out of annoyance.

I may despise the two of them, but I wouldn't go so far as to murder them! Considering how venomous Sam is, Gerard would be dead with just one bite.

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MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2237

After Gerard and Hazel left, Francesca did not stay long. She exchanged a few pleasantries with the first lady and took her to leave.

When she walked out of the hotel, she saw Sloan and the others waiting by the road. "Why are you here?" she asked in confusion.

"We're worried about your safety, so we came to fetch you," said Sloan respectfully.

"Let's get in the car first." Francesca opened the car door and got in, and Sloan followed suit. "Ms. Felch, are you okay— Ah!"

Before he could even finish his words, the car sped forward, startling him.

Everything happened so fast that the car escorting them could barely keep up.

"Who will guard the house if you're out?" Francesca demanded unhappily. "Didn't I tell you to stay there? What if those scums send someone to steal the seal?"

Sloan hurriedly explained, "That won't happen. I only brought two men with me. The others stayed behind."

"That's good to hear."

The next second, Sloan's phone rang. He picked up the call, and soon, his eyes widened in panic. "What? Did they succeed? D\*mn it. I'll be back soon."

"What is it?" Francesca questioned immediately.

"You were right," Sloan groaned in exasperation.

"Someone attempted to steal from the house, but Ms.

Layla noticed him."

"Did they catch him?"

"He ran away. There aren't enough people at home; the thief is probably an expert." Sloan peeked at Francesca guiltily.

"Now you know. Remember, your task is to guard the house," Francesca reiterated.

"Yes, I got it," Sloan replied, not daring to make any more excuses.

By the time they rushed home, the bodyguards were waiting at the door. Upon seeing Francesca and Sloan, they gave a detailed report on the incident. In the end, one of them said, "Good thing Ms. Layla was quick to notice. Otherwise..."

Layla walked out the next moment. "I can't take all the

credit. There's a security system in the study room that triggers an alarm when someone enters. I only noticed after seeing the alarm."

"Let me take a look."

Francesca entered the house hastily and went to the study room.

The infrared light inside the room was still flashing, so no one dared to approach it since they would be electrocuted.

Francesca reached out to push the door open, but Sloan stopped her. "Ms. Felch, the alarm has been triggered because of the thief. You'll be electrocuted if you go in now."

"Then when can I enter?"

Sloan looked troubled. "We've never encountered this situation before, so I really don't know. If Mr. Lindberg is here, we could use his fingerprint to turn off the alarm."

Without giving it a thought, Francesca placed her finger on the sensor to try and see if it would work.

Ding!

Surprisingly, the alarm turned off.

Everyone, including Francesca herself, was shocked.

She had no idea when her biometrics was registered in the alarm system of the study room.

"Francesca, take a look inside first," Layla suggested.

Francesca went in immediately and checked the safe.

Fortunately, it was untouched. The study room looked just the same as it was when Danrique left.

Only the window was opened. Although the window was not burglar-proof, the alarm system would be triggered once an outsider sneaked in. Electricity would then flow through the entire study room and electrocute the invader.

After closing the window and double-checking everything, Francesca shut the door and instructed, "In the coming days, I want you all to guard the house properly. Do not go anywhere else. No matter what happens, do not hand over the seal. Is this understood?"

"Yes, Ms. Felch!" the men answered in unison.

"You may leave now."

Then, Francesca sent them away and pulled Layla into her room. "Ms. Layla, did you see the person's face? Who is it?"

"He was in black, and he wore a cap and a mask. I couldn't see his face."

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## MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2238

"But he's obviously someone we know. The Lindberg residence is enormous—this spot is three kilometers away from the sentry post, and there are seven palaces in total. The fact that he could find his way here and even find the study room means that he had

visited before on his own or with other people," Layla pointed out.

Francesca knitted her brows. "If that's the case, he must be from the three great families. They just couldn't wait to get their hands on the seal, huh?"

Following a short pause, she added, "Could he be from the Atkinson family? They probably knew earlier on that I was going to meet Mrs. President, so they sent someone to sneak in while I was out. Or could the three great families be in this together?"

Layla nodded. "You're right. The three great families are in solidarity at this time. As long as they pull Danrique down, they will be able to split the valuable Lindberg Corporation among themselves."

Just then, the maid knocked on the door. "Ms. Felch, Mr. Donald is requesting to see you."

"Tell him to get lost—"

"Wait," Layla cut in. "She said he's requesting to see you."

Francesca understood what Layla meant right away and opened the door. "What did he say?" she asked the maid.

"He didn't come in. He's waiting outside, and he asked the guard to pass the message that he is requesting to see you. He has something important to discuss with you," the maid recounted.

Hearing that, Francesca exchanged glances with Layla. She then consented, "Let him in."

"Okay." The maid went off to relay the message.

"If my guess is correct, he must have come to ask for a reconciliation," Layla remarked in a low voice. "If the three great families take the seal, he will be the first one to get kicked out. Therefore, he has to reconcile with you and join your side. Only then will he have a chance to survive. Besides, I noticed that Donald stayed at the back without a word when Kevin and Gerard came to cause trouble last time. He did not join in their ruckus, and he seemed anxious. This means he's well aware of Lindberg Corporation's fate once the three great families get their hands on the seal. By then..."

"You're right," Francesca agreed. "He doesn't have a powerful status nor many shares in Lindberg Corporation. His last name is the only reason he has a spot in there. If Danrique gets dragged down from his position, Donald will be doomed."

"That's right." Layla then advised, "If he's here for a

reconciliation, you can give him a chance. After all, he's more familiar with the three great families and the company, so he should know how to deal with them."

"Okay."

Francesca nodded before heading downstairs.

When Donald entered the house, he looked nothing like his arrogant self last time. Instead, he was tense and cautious. At the sight of Francesca, he got even more nervous.

"Uncle Donald, what brings you here?" Francesca asked straightforwardly.

"I..." Donald pondered for a while before continuing, "I want to talk to you."

"Sure." Francesca motioned at Norah, who then

served some coffee and snacks before leaving with the other maids.

"What do you need to talk about?"

"I..." Donald hesitated again. Soon, he mustered his courage and began, "I want to apologize for my behavior last time."

With that, he lowered his head and apologized sincerely. "I acted rashly last time, and I also spoke rudely. I hope you will forgive me in consideration of the fact that I'm also a Lindberg."

Francesca glanced at Layla and promptly responded, "Please don't say that, Uncle Donald. We're family. You don't have to be like this."

Donald breathed a sigh of relief at her words. "That's great to hear. I came here this time to tell you that you

should never give them the seal. Otherwise, Lindberg Corporation will fall into their hands."

"I know." Francesca bobbed her head. "They even sent someone today to steal the seal. Thankfully, Layla noticed it in time, so they did not get what they want."

Donald's face turned pale when he heard about the attempted theft. Nevertheless, he managed, "Thank goodness they didn't succeed. Do you have any news on Danrique now?"

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## MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2239

"Not yet." Francesca shook her head and said firmly, "But I'm certain he's all right. He will come home safely."

"I believe so, too. I'm counting on it."

In truth, Donald was saying those words to encourage himself. He was also taking a risk. If Danrique could return unscathed, that would be for the best.

Otherwise, Donald would be digging his own grave by joining Francesca's side now.

However, he had analyzed the situation. If something really happened to Danrique, the three great families would not tolerate his existence even if he did not switch to Francesca's side.

He might as well try his luck.

"Is there anything else you want to talk about?" Francesca asked.

"Let me tell you about the company's current state. The impact of Danrique's issue is quite severe. Without his signature, a few major projects are postponed. Some of the bigger business partners have been calling every day for an update on Danrique's whereabouts. Even the president has been asking about him every day. In short, Danrique's safety will affect the entire corporation, the fate of many business partners, and even the economy of Erihal. This is a very important matter. The thing is, the three great families won't be able to represent Lindberg Corporation even if they have the seal. The business partners will not keep working with Lindberg Corporation just because of the seal. Similarly, Erihal's economy will still be unstable. Lindberg Corporation did not reach its position today solely with that one seal, so the three great families could not possibly handle the company's problems on their own. Those business partners only acknowledge Danrique, and he's the only one who can get the situation under control."

"I understand now. So they're making such a big fuss over the seal to obtain power, not for the company," Francesca concluded.

Donald nodded. "That's right. They will not be able to manage the company properly. And if they get the seal, the company will only meet its downfall quicker. The business partners aren't taking any action now because they believe Danrique will return. Once the three great families lay their hands on the seal, it will be a clear sign that something has happened to Danrique. In that case, the partners will withdraw their investments and cancel the collaborations. Lindberg Corporation will be doomed if that happens."

As Donald finished his sentence, he couldn't help sighing.

He went on, "To be honest, I used to feel that Danrique was too cold-blooded. He never went easy on other people, so I even wished that someone could go against him and tame his terrible temper. But now, I realized that it's impossible to run such a big corporation properly without an iron fist like his. Moreover, no one else can manage to do that aside from him."

Upon hearing those words, Francesca felt somewhat emotional. She never knew that Danrique carried so much responsibility and burden on his shoulders.

Donald continued to say, "That's how things are at the moment. By the way, Harrier went to H City and hasn't returned yet. Kevin and Gerard are the ones

running around right now. Harrier is the youngest among them, but he's the most cunning one. He always hides at the back and waits for the other two to get things done, then he reaps the benefits. You have to be careful of him."

"I got it." Francesca glimpsed at Layla before looking at Donald. "Now, I have a few questions for you."

"Go ahead." Donald straightened his back.

"Aside from you, is there any other elder in the Lindberg family who is powerful enough to overpower the three great families?"

"No. If there was, he or she would have come to you long ago." Once again, Donald sighed. "I'm the only one with some power left in the entire Lindberg family now. The other relatives don't even have a say."

"Then aside from the Lindberg family, who else has enough influence to keep the three great families in check?" Francesca asked again.

"The president," answered Donald. "He's the only one who can control them now."

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## MYSTERIOUS MALE ESCORT IS A MOGUL

Chapter 2240

Francesca pondered for a moment after hearing those words. She seldom came in contact with the president, but she surmised that the first lady's actions were probably at the president's behest.

In other words, it meant that the president supported her.

However, he had yet to offer his support officially. Is it because the three great families have yet to force me to the edge of the cliff? Or is it because he thinks it's not time yet?

Just then, Donald added, "Don't expect too much from the president."

"Why?" Francesca was puzzled.

"Influential people like him often look at the big picture. They don't do things out of sentiment," Donald said grimly. "If Danrique is still alive, the president will do his utmost to hold onto him. But if he's not, the president will likely consider Erihal's economic situation and help a new president ascend to the position."

"I get it." Francesca understood what Donald was trying to say. "So, what you mean is, if Danrique is truly no longer with us, no one will help me."

Donald sighed. "Yes. At the moment, the candidate will likely be someone from the three great families. I reckon the person with the highest chance of obtaining the position is Harrier. Compared to Kevin and Gerard, Harrier is more strategic and composed. Moreover, compared to Danrique, he is easier to control."

Donald's words held a deeper meaning behind them, and Francesca immediately understood what the former was trying to say. "What you're saying is, Harrier is willing to submit to the president and adhere to his arrangements."

Impressed, Donald exclaimed, "Yes, you nailed it. The

situation does not favor us at the moment. What's important right now is to find Danrique. If he is able to return safely, everything will be fine."

"Don't worry. I'm sure he's alive!" Francesca declared resolutely.

"I believe that he's alive, too. He's a strong man who won't be defeated easily, but..." Donald trailed off for a while before continuing, "What I'm afraid of is that someone wants him dead."

Francesca froze when she heard the words, and something in her mind clicked.

Prior to Donald's reminder, she had not considered this issue at all. Even if Danrique was currently alive, there was no guarantee he was going to make it back safely. This means that the people who seem to be concerned about his whereabouts are potentially the ones that want him dead. So, it's a race to see who finds Danrique first...

If Gordon found Danrique first, the latter would be saved. However, if someone else were to beat Gordon to it, the consequences would be unimaginable.

"Truth be told, I don't have better advice for you."

Donald heaved a long sigh. "I can only inform you of the situation as it is, in hopes that you mentally prepare yourself. Since you have two experts who can give you advice, you're in a much better position than I am."

Donald turned to Layla after speaking. "That's all I came to say. I'll be taking my leave. I hope you find Danrique as soon as possible."

"I'll figure something out."

Monica arrived as soon as Francesca saw Donald out. "Ms. Felch, His Highness wishes to meet you."

"All right, give me a moment."

When Francesca was about to head inside to change, Monica hurriedly called out to her and said, "His Highness is in the car. He says that it's inconvenient for you to travel back and forth all the time, hence he came over."

Francesca turned around and stared at the car that was parked nearby.

A subordinate opened the car door and carried a wheelchair out of the car before wheeling William over.

Francesca ushered them all into the study, and they were joined by Layla as well.

William greeted Layla politely before cutting to the chase. "Francesca, I heard that you went to visit the first lady today. Did anything happen?

"I saw Hazel, who had just returned this morning. She was hurt." Francesca began to describe the meeting in detail.

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