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Making coffee was one of the many things Sophia did not know how to do. She usually got her coffee from a local barista or any other cafe. Right now, she tossed Arthur a pleading look, trying to get help.

When he saw the despair in her wide doe eyes, he repressed the urge to sigh in frustration. She can't iron, and she can't make coffee. Is there anything she knows how to do other than talk back to someone?

"We don't have a proper coffee machine here," he lied to Emily after glaring at Sophia. "I'll send someone out to get one for you if you'd like."

Emily was more than aggravated now. "Well, how about tea? Surely, she can

bring me tea." She was trying to gauge how important this so-called maid was to Arthur, and there was no hiding the fact that Emily hated Sophia's guts. Hence, the former was currently thinking of ways to get rid of the latter and eradicate any good impression Sophia might have made on Arthur.

| have to make Artie hate her too. That way, if he decides to keep her, | can order her around as | like. Emily knew she had to nip this in the bud before she ended up losing Arthur to some tramp maid. At once, Sophia bustled off into the kitchen to make tea, which, thankfully, was something she knew how to do.

She had made the tea and brought the tray over to the couch, but just as she was setting down the cups on the coffee table, Emily asked, "You're a maid, aren't you? Where's your uniform?"

Emily was immediately unhappy when she noticed that Sophia was wearing a nice dress, not to mention, looking really good in it.

Sophia's eyes flickered over to Arthur as she said slowly, "I've only started work a month ago, so | don't have a uniform." "Then | shall get one ready for you," Emily declared with a smirk. "There's no need for that," Arthur interjected. "Honestly, | find uniforms to be a stuffy concept."

This made Emily choke on her tea. She began to wonder just who Sophia was to warrant such concern from Arthur, who was famed for being stoic, and why he kept speaking up for her.

“Thank you, Young Master Weiss,” Sophia said, then backed out of the living room. She had a feeling that her life here wasn’t

going to be all rainbows and butterflies now that Emily had moved in. That woman’s a jealous one, she thought grimly. Still, she would not have to suffer

like this if she could find that man’s necklace.

Where could that family heirloom possibly be? She wanted to cry out in exasperation. Of all the people she could have a score to settle with, it just had to be an eccentric jerk like Arthur.

Meanwhile, over at the Presgraves’, Anastasia received a call from Lorelai that morning. Lorelai told Anastasia that she was desperate to design the perfect jewelry for her friend’s engagement and that she was wondering if she could drop by to have Anastasia’s input on the design sketches today.

Naturally, Anastasia did not reject her plea for help and invited her over to the house without hesitation.

At 4.00 pm that day, Lorelai drove into the car porch of Elliot’s villa. She walked through the front door and into the living room, whereupon she was greeted by Anastasia, who looked like a vision dressed in a soft-colored long dress. “Lorelai.”

“Mrs. Presgrave.”

“Please, call me Anastasia. Mrs. Presgrave sounds too formal,” Anastasia said kindly.

“I’ve been wanting to address you by your first name since the first time we met, but I didn’t want to offend you,” Lorelai explained. With a self-mocking smile, she added, “Our family’s really strict about formalities.”

"It's fine. You can call me by my name when it's just the both of us," Anastasia said with a smile. She then proceeded to appraise Lorelai's get-up today. The latter was dressed appropriately in an outfit that included dark academia elements with just an understated, feminine appeal. She was also wearing very light make-up that accentuated her delicate features.

Upon taking the sketch from Lorelai and giving it a cursory look, Anastasia praised, "There's definitely talent here and creativity

too. "Just sudden inspiration, I guess," Lorelai said humbly, laughing. "I don't have much time usually, what with business investments and all."

Anastasia highlighted several parts of the design that needed to be smoothed over and suggested several ways Lorelai could achieve it. The latter nodded delightedly and said. "You really are a professional. Anastasia."

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Having pointed out a few more things and shared a few insider's tricks with Lorelai, Anastasia didn't even notice that an hour had passed until she checked the time and saw that it was already 5.30 pm. She thereafter rose to have the kitchen prepare dinner, but just as she was about to invite Lorelai to stay, the girl shook her head and said she had to leave.

"Thank you for the invitation, Anastasia, but I have something planned for tonight and I should go," Lorelai explained, gathering her things as she got off the couch

"But it's already so late, and Elliot will be home soon. Come on, stay for dinner," Anastasia insisted..

"It's really so nice of you to offer, but I couldn't impose, not tonight at least. Dinner's on me next time, okay?" Lorelai said, politely but firmly turning Anastasia down.

"In that case, I'll see you some other day." Anastasia walked with her out the door and to the car.

Sliding into the driver's seat, Lorelai gave her a small wave and said, "Thanks for today. I'll see you around!" "Drive safe." Returning the wave,

Anastasia watched as the car pulled out of

the porch and out the front gates.

Presently, the vibrant sunset glow was cast over the garden, coating it in a warm golden hue.

There were thoughts behind Anastasia's clear, bright eyes as she stood outside. She did not go back into the living room. Instead, she glanced at the watch on her wrist. Jared should be home by now.

As expected, the fleet of cars escorting the little boy pulled up outside the house but

did not drive in. Jared leaped out of one of the cars and dashed through the gates. He ran up to Anastasia when he saw her and asked happily, 'Mommy, were you waiting for me?'

"Yes, | was," she answered with an affectionate smile.

He beamed and held her hand while exclaiming, "I love you so much.. Mommy!" ' | love you, too.'" She reached out to ruffle

his hair, then led him into the house.

When Jared got into the living room and saw the kitten darting back and forth on the couch, he quickly set his bag aside and began to play with the feline. The little furball had only grown cuter since they first got it.

Allittle later into the evening, a black Bugatti sports car drove and parked on the car porch. The soft purr of the car engine indicated that Elliot had returned.

Anastasia was reading on the grassy lawn right outside the living room while Jared was playing with the cat. When she saw Elliot walking up to her with his silhouette outlined by the twilight glow, she set her book down and ran to meet

him in the middle. She had missed him dearly after not seeing him for the whole day. Upon seeing her running his way, Elliot opened his arms and caught her just as she threw herself into his embrace like a child.

He lifted her up by the waist and twirled her once, then set her back down. "Missed me?" he asked teasingly. There was a warm and gentle gleam in his eyes as he kissed her forehead indulgently.

She nodded, smiling as she said, "I did." "Daddy, I want a kiss too," Jared demanded as he approached the loving couple with the kitten in his arms.

Elliot let go of Anastasia and bent to pick up the little guy, then kissed him on the cheek lovingly. "Did you have fun at school today, Jared?"

"You bet!" Jared replied with a firm nod.

The kitten looked decidedly unhappy when it saw that everyone else had received Elliot's affection. "Meow!"

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Having considered the feline to be part of the family, Elliot reached out to pat its soft, furry head and asked, "You're not angling for a kiss too, are you?"

The kitten meowed once more as if to answer in the affirmative.

Amusement seized Elliot as he continued scratching the cat behind its ears to placate it. There was a serenity in the way the family of three and their cat hung out with each other under the evening sky. For a while, it was as if the world was at peace.

Meanwhile, Lorelai was on her way home when she called her mother and told her what happened with Anastasia. Upon hearing the details, Kendra said on the other line, "You did the right thing, Lorelai. That way, Anastasia won't be suspicious of you or see you as a threat."

Lorelai had deliberately dropped by Anastasia's house during the late afternoon and left before dinner time just so the latter wouldn't think she was trying to butt into her family affairs. The clever planning would help Lorelai make a good impression on Anastasia, who would then put her guard down.

Presently, there was an ambitious glimmer in Lorelai's eyes as she said, "By the way. Mom, I've already sent in my resume to Presgrave Group."

"That's a little too soon, Lorelai. My father said not to rush the plan, remember? After all, Elliot is still in his honeymoon phase with Anastasia. You ought to wait until she's got a second kid on the way before you make a move."

"Mom, don't worry, I'm only doing this to gauge Elliot's feelings for me, that's all," Lorelai explained. It was like playing chess, and every move she made along the way was intentional with a purpose behind it.

"Very well, but make sure that you pace yourself and don't muck up our plans!" "I know, Mom. I'll be careful," Lorelai promised calmly.

It was 10.00 pm when Anastasia got out of the shower that night to get ready for bed, only to see the kitten clambering onto the couch, its claws digging into the fabric as it launched itself onto the padded cushion. It let out a soft mewl as though to insist it could make it on its own.

Anastasia sat down to the side and asked in amusement, "Shouldn't you be with your darling little master instead of hanging out in our room?"

The kitten managed to get onto the couch, and as a reward, it staked out a corner and curled up in it, then dozed off.

Just then, the bedroom door opened and Elliot walked in dressed in his lounge suit. He had only just wrapped up an online conference with international affiliates, and there was an imperial, decisive, and deadly air about him that made him all the more attractive.

Anastasia loved it when he wore suits, and she couldn't help the primal urges that seized her during moments like these. It was an almost feral instinct that made her want to leap over and help him shed the stoic-looking suit.

However, she had seen the hidden side of him, the side that lay on the other end of the spectrum from his aloof state.

As though reading her mind, Elliot kissed the top of her head and murmured as he undid the buttons of his suit, "Give me twenty minutes."

She smiled and asked innocently, "And what will you do after twenty minutes?"

Bemused, he raised a brow and gave her a knowing look. "What do you think?" "I'm afraid the idea will have to be put till a week later," she confessed, not wanting to give him the satisfaction. off

He understood immediately. Flashing her a roguish grin, he teased, "Well, in that case, perhaps I should save up my energy till then."

She pouted and gave him a somewhat distressed look, to which he responded with a laugh as he headed into the shower. When he was done, he came out of the bathroom and saw her curled up in bed. He slid under the covers while she was still reading and pulled her into his arms so that she could lean against him.

"Honey, I don't want to be a housewife anymore," Anastasia grumbled softly

Elliot stroked her hair tenderly and said, "You can do whatever you want."

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"I want to take charge of Bourgeois," Anastasia said as she looked up at Elliot. Francis initially wanted her to continue managing Tillman Constructions, but she had no interest whatsoever in building materials, so he decided that he would hand the business over to Elliot after retirement.

“Alright, then. You'll be the commander in-chief for Bourgeois from tomorrow onward,” Elliot said. He couldn't care less about profit margins and operating costs as long as his wife could amuse herself. He would always be there as a safety net for her.

Warmth surged through Anastasia when she heard this, but before she could thank him, he added, “Go and do whatever you like. Don't you worry about a thing. because I'm always going to be here to catch you when you fall, okay?”

In that quiet room, Elliot's tender love

and indulgence for Anastasia seemed audible in his words. He sounded firm and assuring, making her heart skip a beat. Upon hearing the solemn promise

underlying his bold statement, she felt like she was in the safest harbor, protected by some great, universal force.

She could do whatever she liked, and if she messed things up, he would always be there to help her get through it. She did not need to worry about a thing, because he was the fort that would keep her shielded from the brutal consequences of failure.

That said, Anastasia knew taking over Bourgeois was not just a game she decided to play on a whim. Now that she had voiced out her desire to run it, she would have to make her words count and show him she was not just doing it out of fun.

She had a duty to be a better version of herself, because how else would she live up to the name of being Elliot's wife?

Meanwhile, in Arthur's villa, Sophia was having a hard time falling asleep after binge-watching several episodes of a new hit drama through the night. She got out of bed and padded out of her room to get a glass of water, hoping that sleep would

come after that.

She opened the door softly. She was staying on the third floor while Arthur and Emily were resting on the second. While heading downstairs, she kept her footfalls as quiet as possible, so much so that she was practically tiptoeing.

Much like a wary kitten, she made her way to the first floor and hurried into the kitchen, following the low hum of the refrigerator. She thought a cold drink was suitable in light of the rising temperatures as they welcomed the beginning of summer.

Just then, a cold and crisp voice spoke up behind her. "What are you doing up in the middle of the night?"

Sophia gasped and turned around, but she did so too quickly and ended up bumping her head against the door of the freezer compartment. The loud thud resonated throughout the kitchen like an ominous drum beat.

"Could you not creep up on me like that? For heaven's sake, you had me half scared to death" she snapped, rubbing the sore spot on her head as she shot Arthur a resentful look.

Arthur came up to her. He was a head taller than her, and he was here to get a drink as well. The refrigerator light cast a warm glow on both of their silhouettes as they stood there facing each other.

At that moment, Sophia noticed the carton of milk on the top row of the refrigerator and reached up to grab it. However, her fingertips could barely brush it. She was just about to give up when a large hand easily grabbed it and handed it to her. As she took over the milk, she looked up at the man to thank him, only to be caught off guard.

He seemed to have slept before coming downstairs. His ink-colored hair was currently tousled over his forehead, unlike during the day. He was peering into the fridge for something to drink as well, revealing his side profile, which was all sharp jawline and delicately-chiseled features.

He looked breathtaking.

Presently, Arthur sensed Sophia staring at him, and he looked down with narrowed eyes as he demanded. "What are you looking at?"

“Huh? Oh, uh, nothing.” Sophia muttered lamely, breaking eye contact. Her heart was beating so loud and fast that it was a wonder he didn’t hear it. Swallowing convulsively, she darted around him as she was about to leave.

In the end, he grabbed another bottle of milk off the top row of the refrigerator and closed the door. The hallway grew dim immediately in the absence of the refrigerator light, and Sophia, who was hardly paying any attention while walking, accidentally slipped on one of the steps. There was a thud as she fell, bashing her knee on the steps as she grappled around in the dark to steady herself.

“Ow...” She winced at the pain that tore through her knee. She must be bleeding. by now; the fall had scraped the skin of her knee.. At the sight of this, Arthur came up to her and frowned. How did she even manage to survive all the way into adulthood?

Presently, Sophia had eased herself into a sitting position on the stairs and her face was all scrunched up with pain as she gingerly rolled up her pajama pants. Sure enough, both her knees were bleeding.

What's going on up in that brain of hers? Arthur stared at her wounds in disbelief. then crouched down to examine them as he scolded, “Don’t you watch where you walk?”

Sophia looked up at him incredulously. He was the reason why she had slipped and fallen on the staircase like an idiot with no motor skills; it wasn’t her fault that he looked that good in the refrigerator light and made her rethink how handsome he actually was.

“I’m fine,” she said with a steely edge in her voice, then slowly tried to get up. “Sit down.” Arthur ordered. She was stunned when he straightened up and found his way to the sideboard, then returned with a first-aid kit in hand.

“I can do that myself,” Sophia said anxiously. She was terrified of the stinging, burning pain that came with the menial procedure of cleaning up one’s wounds, and she would much rather do it herself than have him administer first aid on her.

Arthur, however, ignored Sophia and proceeded to clean up her wounds with a sterilized Q-tip. When he went on to apply the antiseptic, she hissed in pain and gasped softly. 'Ow, that hurts!'

The way she yelped was so suggestive that Arthur stopped and shot her a freezing look, as though angry that his testosterone decided to react to her voice.

At present, neither of them noticed the fuming figure that stood on the second floor landing with her hand on the banister. Emily had been awakened by the ruckus downstairs, so she came out of her room and Sophia's soft moans of pain sounded. She then decided to head downstairs only to see Arthur helping the girl clean her bleeding shins.

One could call it first-aid, but to Emily, who was so blinded by jealousy she could hardly think straight, Sophia was a cunning vixen who had resorted to such cheap acts to win over Arthur's attention.

"What happened, Arthur?" Emily asked aloud, pretending as if she had been woken up by the commotion as she continued her way down the rest of the steps.

Sophia hurriedly rolled down the legs of her pajama pants and apologized, "Did we wake you, Miss Jennings? I'm terribly sorry for that."

"Did something happen to you?" Emily asked, meeting the other girl's gaze confrontationally. "I fell and scraped my knees earlier, so Mr. Weiss helped me stop the bleeding," Sophia answered frankly. "Well, if you're not bleeding anymore, then go back to your room," Emily bit out grimly.

Arthur went to keep the first-aid kit while Sophia hurried up the stairs, but when she passed Emily, the latter grabbed her by the wrist and warned through gritted teeth, "Stay away from my man if you don't want to end up in the sorriest circumstances known to man."

Emily had said this so quietly that Sophia was the only one who could hear it, but the icy warning in her tone was not lost.

It was only after Sophia was released from her grip that she hurried up the stairs, baffled by how much untoward hatred Emily had for her. She wanted to tell her that she was a natural klutz and had no intention whatsoever of seducing Arthur.

Letting out an angry huff, Emily met Arthur at the bottom of the staircase and said, "I don't think I can go back to sleep now. Stay up for a chat, Artie."

"I'm tired," Arthur said, handing her the bottle of milk he had taken from the fridge earlier. "Here, you can have this."

He hadn't actually been thirsty at all when he grabbed the milk. He had gotten out of his bedroom when he heard faint footsteps coming down from the third floor, and as for the milk, it was nothing but chilled subterfuge.

Emily was furious. So, Artie would rather rendezvous with the maid than stay up and talk to me. Is that it? Looks like I've severely underestimated how much Sophia means to him.

The next morning, Anastasia woke up as the weak sunlight spilled into the room and over the side of the bed. Elliot had already called Larry, the vice president of Bourgeois, and asked him to drop by the house with a compilation of all the relevant company information. Over the phone, Elliot added that Anastasia would be in charge of running the business starting from today.

Elliot had left for work after that, leaving Anastasia to wait for Larry's arrival at home. When the clock struck 10, Larry and his assistant were escorted into the living room by the maid.

Larry glanced at the woman on the couch. She's blossomed into a whole new person now, one that must not be overlooked under any circumstances, he thought.

He still remembered the days when she had started out in Bourgeois. Elliot had asked him to persuade her to accept the

gift of top-quality real estate and made him bring her the information on the property as well. However, completely unfazed by the otherwise-tempting gift, Anastasia turned him down.

From that moment onward, Larry had a feeling that she could very well become his superior. As it turned out, his gut had been right.

Unlike the first few times they met, Anastasia looked wiser and more focused now, with a confidence that seemed to shine through, polished by years of experience.

“Vice President Young, it’s been a while,”

she greeted with a smile.

“Mrs. Presgrave, I hope you’ve been well,” Larry replied affably, acknowledging the difference in their positions now. “You can always call me Anastasia, you know.”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t. I think Madam President has a nice ring to it, or maybe President Tillman,” he said humorously.

She did not try to dissuade him from addressing her as such. “Could you give me a run-down of the business strategies for Bourgeois and the execution plans for them? I’ve only just taken over, and I’d really appreciate it if you could be my stalwart guide in company matters.”

Larry was more than happy to do so. After all, Anastasia was married to Elliot now, and under her leadership, Bourgeois was sure to reach new heights in the industry.

Anastasia listened to what Larry had to say attentively. He was practically a veteran and a treasure trove of work experience, and she heartily approved of the strategies he had come up with for the business.

“We’ll be holding a press conference for a new product launch soon, Madam President. You must make an appearance; it’ll give the media a field day.”

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“When is the press conference?” Anastasia asked.

“Next Saturday.” Larry replied dutifully.

"I'll be there," she promised with a nod.

He beamed as he added, "I'm sure the Bourgeois team will be happy to have you at the helm of the business."

She smiled. "Well, in that case, I look forward to hearing more of your business strategies and having you show me the ropes, Vice President Young."

While this was happening, Elliot was in his office at Presgrave Group, sifting through the documents piled up on his desk when he came across a resume. He opened the folder and frowned slightly. It was Lorelai's resume, and she was applying not for an important position, but for an analyst job advertised by the finance department in one of his

subsidiaries in the country.

However, as it was against the rules to employ members of the Presgraves' extended family, Elliot had no choice but to reject her job application. He decided that he would personally recommend her to some other company instead.

Seeing the number she had written at the very top of her resume, he grabbed his phone and called her. "Hello?" Lorelai greeted on the other line.

"Hey, Lorelai, it's Elliot here. I just saw your resume and I believe an analyst job is far beneath your capabilities," he said in a gravelly tone.

Lorelai said earnestly, "Elliot, if you've read my resume, you would know that I don't care about the job as much as I do about getting into your company."

"I can recommend you to another company that happens to be hiring, and I think you'd be a good fit for the job," Elliot said firmly. She paused for a few seconds before pressing, "I'm actually in the area right now. Is it okay if I head to your office for a quick chat, Elliot? I don't think I've ever seen it in person before."

Prepared to talk her into taking up the job at the other company, he replied, "Alright then. Come on over." They were family, after all, and he figured there was no harm in letting her up to his office for a brief, friendly conversation.

Meanwhile, Lorelai was checking her reflection in the restroom mirror in one of the nearby cafes. She evaluated her face from all angles underneath the white light. When she was satisfied with the way she looked alongside her delicately applied make-up, she straightened her white blouse and her tight-fitting skirt, then flipped her long hair over her shoulders. For a finishing touch, she gave herself a light spritz of perfume and finally walked out.

Subsequently, she pulled up outside the main entrance of Presgrave Group. She was more than familiar with the company since her father had a friend who worked here as well. When she called the receptionist earlier, she made

no mention of Elliot whatsoever.

She went into the elevator, and the receptionist who escorted her left as soon as they reached the designated floor. Seeing this, Lorelai hurried into another available elevator and made her way up to the presidential office.

Rey was already waiting for her, and when she arrived, he said, "This way please, Miss Presgrave." Lorelai nodded and followed him into the spacious office, which she thought was only charming because of its owner.

"Elliot," she greeted warmly when she saw the man on the couch.

"Oh, good, you're here. Have a seat," Elliot said, gesturing toward the matching couch across from him.

"This place is humungous, and that view outside is absolutely stunning!" She was never one to hold back on compliments, and the words flowed smoothly off her tongue as she flashed him a smile.

Elliot handed her a docket of information and said, "That's the financial company | was telling you about. The president happens to be a friend of mine. | already put in a word for you, and he said you could start working immediately without having to go through an interview."

"You pulled strings for me? Wow, I'm honored!" she exclaimed. Taking the docket, she leafed through the company profile and the position they were offering her, then looked up with bright eyes as she asked, "They're going to make me supervisor?"

He nodded. "You're qualified for it." "That's so nice of you to say," Lorelai said with a sweet smile, admiration glittering in her eyes.

Elliot's gaze fell upon the document on the coffee table as he said, "You can start work next Monday."

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Seeing that you've done me such a huge favor, | don't see how | can turn down the offer, Elliot. It's so nice of you to put in a good word for me. Shall | buy you lunch as thanks for the recommendation?" Lorelai asked, sliding the lunch invitation in as naturally as she could.

Elliot wasted no time in rejecting her politely, "No, thank you. | have something else planned for noon. Maybe next time." "Well, when exactly is next time?" She was not going to give up on spending time alone with him.. "It depends," he answered vaguely. He had no plans on accepting her gratitude. "I'll let you know when | have the time."

"Really? I'll hold you to that," she said cheerily, flirting subtly as she backed off. She knew that pressing him further would only irritate him, or worse, make

him suspicious of her. Nevertheless, she did not leave the office after that and merely fanned herself so that the faint fragrance of her perfume would waft over in his direction. "By the way, I'm at

little parched from rushing over here. Could | have a cup of tea, please?" Realizing this, he turned to address Rey, "Go fetch two cups of tea."

When the assistant left the office, Lorelai rose from the couch and walked insouciantly over to the glass wall, basking herself in the afternoon sunlight that spilled generously into the office. She knew her years of toning her figure in the gym had rendered her completely irresistible to men, especially her cinched waist and her subtle curves which inspired most of their scandalous thoughts.

If Elliot was looking at her, or even daring a glimpse, it would be more than enough for her.

However, when she glanced into the reflection on the sparkling glass wall, she saw that he wasn't even looking in her direction. In fact, he had his head down as he flipped through work documents.

The only thing that she saw on that glass was her own disappointment. She spun and returned to the couch, then picked up her cup of tea. Taking a sip, she asked, "I'm not bothering you, am I, Elliot?" "No," he replied distractedly as he glanced up at her, then signed the document with a flourish. "I'll be taking my tea in a bit."

He was just about to reach for his cup. when his phone rang. He took a look at the caller ID and smiled warmly.. Knowing immediately who was on the other line, Lorelai pointed out hastily, "Is that Anastasia? Don't let her know I'm here; I don't want her getting the wrong idea."

Elliot chuckled. "Anastasia is better than that." Naturally, he did not plan on telling his wife about Lorelai's visit either. He picked up his phone and greeted in a voice like velvet, "Hey, sweetheart."

"So, I just had an informal meeting with Larry, and I told him to get an office ready for me. Guess we'll be going to work together from now on, honey."

His eyes positively glimmered when he heard this, and he chortled as he said, "You know what. I'll get him to set up an office right on my floor so that we can see each other all the time!"

Unfortunately, his suggestion was rejected by his wife, who countered, "No, I don't want to be on the same stuffy floor as you. I want to have my own space on the same floor as Bourgeois."

He was admittedly hurt, but he brushed it off and gave an exasperated laugh, "Alright, we'll do it your way."

Across from him, Lorelai held her teacup to her lips and glanced at the man who was standing by the glass wall. She took in the sharp lines of his silhouette longingly, and her heart twisted with bitter jealousy when she heard the gentle way he spoke to Anastasia.

She had not seen him for close to a dozen years, but his figure was imprinted in the back of her mind, and she never forgot him even though her father had forced her to stay abroad for years. If it weren't for her father, she would have returned to Elliot's side years ago.

Alas, fate had a cruel sense of humor, for her existence got in the way of her father stealing the Presgrave family fortune. She never even got the chance to tell Elliot of her feelings for him, and all this while, she remembered him as the boy-next door who had sent her heart racing since they were children...

She could still remember how they used to run around the Presgrave Residence gardens together, and how he would take her hand to help her to her feet whenever she fell; he would comfort her when she cried, and stand up for her when she broke a vase or two. He was the only religion she ever knew as a child, the one person she wanted to devote herself to on a daily basis.

But the universe clearly hated her, because by the time she saw him again after all her years abroad, he was already married with a kid, and he had become devastatingly handsome, more so than she remembered.

"Yes, I promise I'll take a break when I need to and that I won't be a workaholic," Elliot murmured into the phone with a

lovesick grin on his face. He then went on to ask about her morning, and after reminding her to keep warm during her time of the month as well as exchanging sweet nonsense with her, he hung up reluctantly. He turned around, and he seemed surprised to see that Lorelai was still there. Following, he walked over to the couch and took his seat.

"So, it was Anastasia after all. You're so lucky to have found a wife like her. She's wonderful," Lorelai praised with a smile.

There was a bright gleam in Elliot's eyes as well as he said, "She's the best. I'm telling you, I don't know what I did to deserve someone like her."

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The childhood memories flitted through Lorelai's mind like scenes from some old movie, emboldening her. Hence, she couldn't help bringing them up as she asked, "Elliot, do you still remember the time when I broke the vase in your family home? I think I was about eight at the time, and I was so scared I couldn't stop shaking. You were the one who took the blame for me, and I managed to get off without punishment!"

Elliot was a little taken aback by this as he asked, "I did that? Huh. I totally forgot about it."

Her lips curled up in a smile. "Well, I still remember, because those are the happiest moments of my childhood. They say that a happy childhood is a soothing balm to the pains of growing up, you know. So, I guess I should thank you for giving me some of the best childhood memories." She looked up at him after finishing her sentence and her gaze lingered on the features that she so adored.

Hearing what she said, Elliot gave her a perfunctory smile. "Did you have a good time abroad?" "I suppose I did, though I was a little lonely," she admitted with a sigh.

"If I ever come across someone suitable, I'd be sure to send them your way."

She feigned embarrassment as she mumbled, "You don't even know my type."

"Oh, that's right," he said. "Come on, tell me." He wanted to know what he should

look out for if he wanted to set her up

with someone.

She narrowed her eyes as if in thought. A sweet smile broke over her face as she gazed at him and said, "I'm not asking for much. I want someone as handsome and capable as you."

Elliot's instincts were sharp to begin with, and he could sense that the admiration she had for him was beyond platonic the moment he saw the smoldering gleam in her eyes. If he were any other man, he

might find her love for him a triumph, something to gloat about to his peers. But he was not such a man, and her unsolicited affections only served to push him away.

He eyed her sullenly as he said, "Lorelai, I do not wish to hear such things again.. Anastasia is the only woman for me, and nothing will ever change."

He ended his sentence calmly, but there was no hiding the dangerous warning that belied his words.

At once, Lorelai bristled and quickly explained, "I think you're getting the wrong idea here, Elliot. I'm not trying to come between you and your wife."

"You're like a baby sister to me; always have been, always will be," he continued while his gaze darkened. At some point, it was like staring into the icy depths of some pitch-black abyss.

Achill ran down her spine when she heard this. More than anything, she was surprised to be rejected by him. "I'm sorry if I cracked a joke and it went too

far. Elliot. I guess I thought it was okay for me to say something like that because of how much we used to hang out as children," she apologized lamely, attempting to salvage the situation.

However, Elliot did not bother letting her continue with her explanation, be it true or false. "I have a meeting to get to, so you should go."

With that, he picked up the documents he had signed earlier and walked back to his desk.

Lorelai, on the other hand, rose in a daze and said slowly, "I'll get going now then. Goodbye, Elliot." When she was out of the office, she clutched the front of her shirt and stared into space helplessly. She never imagined him to be so loyal to his marriage, much less so protective over his wife.

This could become a hurdle to her father's plans, but she figured this hiccup was only due to the fact that Elliot was newly married. At some point, he would grow weary of Anastasia and begin to resent her for chaining him to a

miserable marriage. If Kendra's advice was anything to go by, he would start feeling that way around the time Anastasia fell pregnant again, and that would be Lorelai's window of opportunity.

Meanwhile, a fleet of cars was passing through the fields in the countryside, cruising down the road that led into the woods in the distance. Sophia was in the backseat of the second car in the fleet, and after taking a short nap, she woke up only to find that she was surrounded by acres and acres of farmland. As such, she rested her arms on the edge of the car window and peered out of the glass at the idyllic scenery.

Arthur was going to evaluate a place that was famed for its serenity, and he had brought along with him a renowned medium.

It was around noon when they arrived at a restaurant that looked heavily outback inspired. The four cars of the fleet pulled into the parking lot after Arthur decided that they were going to have to settle for lunch here. They had driven close to fifty

miles out of the city, and as things were, it was impossible for them to find a decent restaurant in that area, much less high-end dining establishments.

When the second car rolled to a stop, Sophia happily got down from the vehicle. She was just about to stretch to loosen her joints when suddenly, a large and aggressive dog came rushing out of the doghouse on the premises and began barking ferociously at them.

Being the closest one to the dog, Sophia visibly blanched, and fear made her seek out the person most likely to protect her. Without a word, she instinctively latched herself onto said person and clung to him for dear life.

Just like that, the young, handsome, and muscular bodyguard became Sophia's shield. She clung to him like an octopus as she yowled. "Ahhh! Save me!"

Her bodyguard carried her into his arms while kicking the dog in the snout as the animal reached her. The pain sent it running back to its den and hiding from them.

Getting out of the first car, Arthur narrowed his eyes at the sight. As someone well-attuned with his surroundings, the bodyguard soon noticed Arthur and hurriedly lowered Sophia down. "It's over now, Miss Goodwin."

"Thank you, sir." She grinned at him with gratitude evident in her eyes. "You're welcome," he stiffly replied, looking down at his feet in fear.

She shyly glanced at the bodyguard's face. She had noticed this man for a while now. He was the youngest of Arthur's men, and despite being of a mixed-race descent, he spoke fluent English.

Whenever he was at work with an carpiece on, he looked so very handsome..

When Arthur saw the admiring look in her eyes, he tuned out the fortune teller standing beside him.

Did Sophia have a crush on his bodyguard?

Stepping out of the third car, Emily elegantly sashayed over to Arthur. "Are we having lunch here, Artie?"

It was obvious from her tone that she did not want to dine here since this place was below her station. Furthermore, the ground was so filthy that just standing there had sullied her exquisite shoes.

"I'm so sorry about that. Did it hurt you?" The friendly owner of the shop came rushing over to welcome them. "Are you dining here?"

"Oh, yes!" Sophia answered with a smile.

When she later saw the bodyguards dining outside while Arthur and the

others headed into a private room, she said to him, "I'll be dining outside, Mr. Weiss."

She wanted to dine with the handsome bodyguard, after all.

"We will dine together," Arthur replied.

"Artie, she's just a servant," Emily protested. "Let her dine outside with the bodyguards!" "Miss Jennings is right," Sophia said in agreement. "I'll take my leave now."

She then walked over to the table with the handsome bodyguard and sat down by his side.

Emily linked her arm through Arthur's and led him into the private dining room. As the place was not busy, their food had arrived quickly. Sophia's head spun when she saw just how fast and quietly the men ate. In around ten minutes, everyone was done eating.

"Take your time, Miss Goodwin," said the bodyguard sitting beside her.

"Are you guys done?" "We're all done eating," he replied before heading outside with the rest of his coworkers to keep guard. With a resigned sigh, she pulled out her phone and began eating while scrolling through the news.

Meanwhile, inside the private room, the fortune teller was continuing about the complexities of his field. Arthur solemnly listened to every word being said, but Emily was bored out of her mind as she had no interest at all in fortune telling.

Finally, they returned to the cars. When Sophia saw that the bodyguard she had a crush on was opening the door for her, she felt happy.

However, just as they were about to leave, Sophia's car suddenly halted. The door to the back of the car was opened to allow Arthur to enter.

She was shocked. Arthur was meant to share a car with the fortune teller, right? Why was he here?

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As soon as Arthur entered the car, the bodyguard driving immediately sat up straight and put on a serious face.

Meanwhile, Emily, who had seen Arthur getting into Sophia's car, was seething. It was too bad that the cars had already started moving. Otherwise, she would have demanded he move to her car instead.

After entering the car, Arthur closed his eyes as though he was going to take a nap. The afternoon sun splayed across his face, emphasizing the elegant and refined features of his handsome face.

He did not say a single word, which caused the air inside the car to feel awkward and heavy. Everyone could feel an immense yet silent pressure bearing down on them.

All giddy joy had fled Sophia's mind. Why was he even here?

After half an hour of driving, they finally arrived at a dense forest. The remaining parts of their journey would lead them along dirt paths instead of paved roads.

so the ride turned bumpy. Large trees lined both sides of the road, providing them shade and turning the summer heat into a breezy spring air.

With the fortune teller leading the way, the train of cars successfully navigated through the mountain roads ahead of them. Sophia's heart was pounding the entire time. When the slope reached nearly 60 degrees, her hand flung out to grasp at another arm in panic.

That arm belonged to Arthur. "It's going to be fine," he said when he saw how pale she was.

“Are we still going up?” She was beyond herself with fear. Just then, the SUVs pulled to a stop on a grassy plain that was flat and even.

Emily immediately dashed out of her car and fell to her knees as she began puking. She had been raised in luxury. The ride up the mountains had been extremely hard for her to stomach.

Out of the kindness of her heart, Sophia handed her some tissues. “Are you okay, Miss Jennings?”

Although Emily accepted the offered tissue, she still shot Sophia a glare. Was Sophia laughing at her?

“Young Master Weiss, we will need to walk for a while longer before we arrive at our destination.”

“What? We still have to walk!” Emily loudly protested. Why did she come along? All she got was pain and suffering. “How long do we have to walk?”

“About twenty minutes or so,” replied the fortune teller.

“Rest in the car,” Arthur said to Emily. He then glanced at Sophia. “Can you walk?”

Not wanting to stay behind to be at Emily’s beck and call, she hurriedly nodded. “Yes, I am fine with walking.”

“Do not go. Sophia. Stay with me,” Emily suddenly said. She would not give Sophia

any chance to go on a stroll with Arthur. She had to split them up.

“Alistair,” Arthur said, pointing to the young bodyguard Sophia had a crush on, “you’ll be staying behind to take care of Miss Jennings.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Alistair with a nod.

“In that case, I’m going with you too,” Emily spat out through gritted teeth, filled to the brim with frustration. However, as soon as she said that, she began vomiting once more.

“We have a tough climb ahead of us. You should rest here instead.” Arthur then walked away toward the path that spiraled up the mountain. Disappointment flickered through Sophia’s heart. She was hoping Alistair would be hiking with them.

Four of the bodyguards followed them up the mountain, while the remaining two stayed behind to stand guard. As Arthur was dressed in a black athletic outfit with a pair of silver sunglasses perched on his nose, his image of a refined young man

remained strong, even deep in the mountains.

Sophia was also dressed in a set of athletic clothing with shoes suited for hiking, but the following hike was still hard for her. There was only a tiny path that meandered through the woods. When they arrived at a slope that was slippery due to the rain, Arthur’s long legs carried him safely upward, while Sophia had to attempt the climb with the help of the branches around her. Just then, a fair hand was held out before her.

She looked up only to see that it was Arthur who was offering to pull her up.

There was a moment of hesitation before she accepted the offer. The moment she placed her hand in his, she was dragged up the slope by a strong burst of force.

“Aah!” She wrapped her arms tight around his waist, afraid to fall while she tried to balance herself.

“I’m sorry!” Afraid that she had offended him, she hurriedly stepped back as soon as she regained her balance.