



## A Night of Absurdities

“Anastasia, help! I’ve been molested at the club!”

The desperate and helpless sound of her best friend’s voice was the only thing on Anastasia Tillman’s mind as she rushed over to the clubhouse.

Room 808. Anastasia looked up at the number plaque on the door of the private room. It was the same room number that her best friend, Hayley Seymour, had texted her. Without another thought, she barged through the door to save her friend.

When the door swung open under her hand, she was greeted by the darkness within. Suddenly, a strong hand clasped around her wrist and dragged her into the dark room, followed by a loud thud as the door slammed shut.

“Hey—who are you, and what do you want?!” Anastasia shrieked, her eyes darting around wildly as she tried to make out her surroundings.

“Settle down, and I’ll treat you well.” A man’s deep and husky voice spoke close to her ear.

The next second, Anastasia was unceremoniously tossed onto the couch, and before she could scramble to her feet, a lean and strong body pinned her down.

She let out a muffled cry when a pair of lips that tasted like peppermint captured hers.

The man on top of her felt burning hot to the touch. A sense of hopelessness brought tears to her eyes as she tried to struggle against the man, but in the end, she could do nothing but endure the man’s ferocity.

An hour later, Anastasia staggered out of the room, looking disheveled. She had only just been through a nightmare, but that didn't distract her from worrying about her best friend's safety.

She was just about to call Hayley's number when she saw a group of men and women walking out the side door. Under the lights, she instantly recognized the two of the women in the group.

One happened to be Hayley, her best friend who had cried for help on the phone earlier, and the other was Anastasia's stepsister, Erica Tillman. The two girls walked side by side with their arms linked, as if they were the closest of friends.

Shock and rage colored Anastasia's features when she saw them. "Stop right there, Hayley!" she called out loudly over the distance as her fists clenched tightly at her sides.

Upon hearing this, Hayley and Erica swiveled around to face her. Anastasia glowered at them, ashen-faced as she demanded of Hayley, "Why would you lie to me?!"

Hayley smirked. "It's not my fault that you're always so gullible, Anastasia."

"Did you have a good time with that gigolo back there?" Erica asked in a sing-song voice, smiling wickedly.

It was only then that Anastasia realized that both of them had set her up. The chastity she had held dear for the past nineteen years was now sacrificed for their despicable glee.

Presently, Hayley's eyes were frosty as she seethed, "Did you actually think I was your friend, Anastasia? I've been living in your shadow ever since we met! I hate you, and I want nothing more than to ruin that face of yours!"

Erica, on the other hand, swiftly interjected by mocking, “I have the proof I need to show Dad that you’ve been pimping yourself for money at the club. It won’t be long until you’re thrown out of the house!”

“You two—” Anastasia was so furious that she swayed. Her body was in tatters after the ordeal she had been through, and the collective weight of her friend’s betrayal and her sister’s cruelty nearly knocked her down.

“Let’s go, Hayley! We don’t want to be seen with trash, do we?” With her arm looped through Hayley’s, Erica led her toward the sports car she had parked by the curb.

Three days later, at the Tillman Residence, a low male voice yelled out in rage, “You became an escort for money just because I wouldn’t let you go abroad for your studies? How can I, Francis Tillman, be capable of having such a shameless daughter like you?”

“Dad, I didn’t—”

“You didn’t? But you did, Anastasia! How could you go to such shameless lengths? Did we starve you, or did we deprive you of anything? I can’t believe you would pimp yourself to random strangers in a filthy clubhouse! For your sake, I hope you haven’t brought any disease back to this house. Who knows what my daughter and I could have caught from you,” the woman who was dressed in jewels and fine clothes sneered from where she sat on the couch.

“Dad, I really didn’t do it. I—” Anastasia tried to explain herself.

However, Francis did not want to hear another word from her. He glowered at her maliciously as he snapped, “Still lying to me, I see. Get out of this home right now! I will not stand to have you under my roof. No daughter of mine could be so shameless. From now on, you are not my child!”

Meanwhile, on the staircase landing, Erica watched this scene play out as she leaned against the banister with her chin propped on her hand. Everything was going exactly the way she had planned. In

a matter of minutes, Anastasia was going to be cast out of the house and wander around like some pathetic stray mutt.

Downstairs in the living room, Anastasia fell silent when she saw the thunderous and disappointed look on her father's face. She wordlessly rose from her seat and walked up the stairs to pack up her things.

She had only just rounded the landing when Erica barricaded her. With her arms crossed haughtily in front of her chest, the younger girl sneered, "Get out of here! Don't linger around like an eyesore. This house will never have a place for you ever again!"

Anastasia clenched her fists as she glowered at Erica's pleased expression.

Seeing the hatred and anger in Anastasia's eyes, Erica leaned forward.

"What, do you want to slap me or something?" She turned her cheek toward the fuming girl and said smugly, "Go right ahead, then!"

Without holding back, Anastasia brought her hand down across Erica's face, resulting in a hard slap.

"Ah!" Erica let out a shrill cry. "You just hit me! Mom, Dad—Anastasia just hit me!" She howled as she bolted down the stairs.

Naomi Lowell quickly pulled her daughter into her arms and cried up the stairwell, "How dare you strike my daughter, Anastasia! What the hell are you playing at?!"

Francis glanced at the red imprints on Erica's cheek, and he had never been more disappointed in his life. When did my oldest daughter become so infuriatingly rebellious?

“Dad, it hurts...” Erica sobbed as she burrowed into her father’s arms, taking in exaggerated deep breaths like she was in great pain.

“Get out of here, Anastasia!” Francis roared up the stairs.

Having packed up her things, Anastasia grabbed her passport and went down the stairs. Her heart grew stone-cold when she saw how her own father was holding Erica in his arms like she was something precious.

Anastasia knew then that she indeed had no place in his heart. Francis had only heard Erica’s side of the story instead of asking Anastasia about the horrific incident she had endured last night.

Ever since her mother had passed, she had spent her years in this home living like an outsider, for her father had brought home his mistress and his illegitimate daughter to form a new family.

Anastasia’s poor mother had never known about her husband’s extra-marital affairs, not even in her death.

I will never come back to this place ever again.

Inside the house, Erica watched as Anastasia dragged her suitcase out the front door, and a wicked smile curled on her lips. I finally got rid of that useless eyesore!

...

Five years later, a knock came on the front door of an apartment in Dansbury.

The woman living in the apartment had been poring over her designs when she heard the knock. A little bewildered, she walked up to the door and pulled it open unhappily. When she saw the two Asian men in suits, she asked in Chinese, “Who are you looking for?”

“Are you Miss Anastasia Tillman?” one of the two men asked in English.

"I am. And you are?" Anastasia pressed.

"We were asked to look for you. Your mother, Amelia Chapman, saved our young master's life back in the day. The old madam whom we serve wishes to see you."

She frowned at this. "Who's the old madam you serve?"

"Old Madam Presgrave," the first man answered respectfully.

Upon hearing this, Anastasia understood what had brought these men here. Old Madam Presgrave was the woman behind the Presgrave Group, the foremost conglomerate in the country. Years ago, Anastasia's mother had sacrificed her life to save Old Madam Presgrave's oldest grandson.

It gave Anastasia great pride to have been born to a police officer as capable and righteous as Amelia.

"I'm sorry, but I don't intend to see her," Anastasia said decidedly. She had a feeling that the Presgraves wanted to repay Amelia's great deed, but she had no plans of accepting their gesture whatsoever.

Just then, a childish and curious voice sounded from somewhere inside the apartment, asking, "Mommy, who is it?"

"No one," Anastasia replied hastily. Then, she turned to address the men at the door, "Sorry, but I'm really not in a mood for guests at the moment."

With that, she closed the door.

Meanwhile, back in the country, a man was seated on the couch inside the villa tucked halfway up the hill. "Have you tracked her down?"

"Yes, Young Master Elliot. The girl from the clubhouse five years ago just sold off your watch at the second-hand market."

"Find her," said the man on the couch, his voice deep and authoritative.

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