

Mr. President You Are The Daddy Of My Triplets Chapter 11

Chapter 11 – 11- Hunt

(Three years later)

“Come on girls. We need to be quick. This order needs to leave this kitchen, right after two hours.” Marissa clapped loudly in the large kitchen while taking rounds and checking every chef busy with stoves.

‘Alexander’s Homestyle Catering’ got its boom two years back when Marissa grabbed a big order from a newly developed multinational office.

They even asked her to run an indoor canteen for their employees, but Marissa and the owner could not come up with a mutual cost agreement and Marissa dropped the idea.

Alexander was the name, once chosen by Rafael for his future son. Marissa loved it and thought to use it a long time back.

One thing she had learned in life the hard way was to never settle for anything less and she had been teaching the same to her kids.

In the last three years, Grandpa Flint and Sophia had been her great supporters. Sophia was still busy doing her freelance work for different pharmaceutical companies, but she kept turning down all of the perks they used to offer. Going on an annual trip was one of them.

Why?

Because she knew her friend needed her. Marissa couldn’t raise her babies alone.

“Marissa,” Akari who was one of her employees came to her carrying a bowl, “you need to taste this garlic chicken. Citra wants to pour some more sauce, but I thought to come to you first.”

Marissa took the bowl from her hands and took a spoonful of the sauce, “Umm...” she closed her eyes and moaned a bit, “this needs a little bit more salt...” She then frowned and shook her head, “And no more sauce please.”

Marissa got distracted with her business calls.

Akari nodded and was about to turn around when something bumped into her legs, “Aww ... look at you.”

She got on her knees to come face to face with a beautiful three-year-old girl who had a lollipop in her mouth, "what are you doing here, Ariel? You do know you are not allowed to enter this kitchen."

Marissa was quite strict about this rule. No entry for kids during cooking time.

"Akari! Can you cook me something sweet?"

"Aww. And what do you want Ariel?" Little Ariel shrugged her small shoulders and made a pout.

"Can I have strawberries?" Akari chuckled ruffling the girl's hair with affection.

"Why not, sweetie?" She took out a big bowl of strawberries from the huge commercial refrigerator and picked up the girl on her other arm, "Let's take you to your room before your mom sees you and gets a heart attack."

However, the moment she was about to exit the kitchen, she heard a stern voice behind her, "Ariel Aaron. What are you doing here? Weren't you supposed to take your nap at this hour along with your siblings?"

Akari closed her eyes. Marissa could be a very generous and understanding boss and a doting mom but when she would turn into a Momzilla, nobody could stop her.

"Mommy!" Little Ariel stirred herself a little in Akari's arms and got down to run to Marissa.

"Why are you here, little lady?" Marissa wiped the nonexistent morsel from the child's face before scooping her up.

"I wanted Akari to cook something sweet for me, Mommy... and look what she cooked!" She exclaimed delightedly.

Marissa frowned to have a look at the bowl Akari was holding.

"Strawberries?" And then understanding dawned on her face and she could not help the smile forming on her lips, "You cooked strawberries for them, Akari?"

Akari stifled her laughter and winked at the little girl, "Of course. Anything for these cuties!"

"Come on. Let me carry those. You go and keep an eye on them." Marissa took the bowl from her employee's hands and turned to leave.

She knew Ariel was innocent enough not to plan this all by herself. There was someone else behind this.

She started climbing the stairs balancing her daughter and the strawberry bowl, "Mommy I could carry it myself."

"I know honey," Marissa kissed her cheek, "I am more interested in meeting your crime partners."

She went up and opened the door only to find Grandpa Flint hiding under the blanket along with three-year-old Alexander and Abigail.

"So, you sent your sister for the sweet treats?" She asked sternly. Flint started giggling along with the kids. All this time, he had been like a good friend to all of them.

He was Sophia's grandfather but could become Marissa's father and her mentor. He was also a friend and a crime partner for her kids.

If Sophia and Flint weren't there, she didn't know what she would have done without them.

"Mom! We just asked her to go to Aunt Akari and ask for some homemade dessert." Abigail face palmed and looked sideways at Alexander who was busy reading some book.

"See? That's why I brought these strawberries..." Ariel showed them in excitement making her siblings roll their eyes.

Marissa tried to suppress the smile at their innocent way of communication.

"Young man! What are you reading?"

"Grandpa Flint brought this encyclopedia from his mini library. My MacBook is still not fixed so I'm trying to kill my time." He said in a serious tone and moved his focus back to the book.

Marisa curved down her lips and looked at her kids, "Now who wants to accompany me to the superstore? We need to shop for our catering orders."

As expected, Alexander and Abigail did not show much enthusiasm, but Ariel was ready as always. She started jumping on the bed in excitement when Marissa had to pick her up from there and put her down, "Let's go, young lady. We can't afford to get late, we need to start this order the moment the current one leaves."

Flint got on his feet to dip the strawberries in the chocolate concoction that he was about to prepare with Abigail.

Before leaving the room, Marissa went to her kids to plant a kiss on their foreheads, "Be good to your grandpa. OK?"

Alexander and Abigail both nodded and all Marissa wanted to do was clutch them to her chest. Three years back she was about to lose them.

But they proved to be so strong, that against all odds they made the doctors surprised and were off the machines in a few weeks. Though Abigail was still weak due to her heart problem, but Alexander and Ariel were doing just fine.

Abigail was not only the youngest among three but also the sweetest and most fragile child of her. Due to her heart problem, she was not allowed to run around or to use excessive stairs. Her siblings also knew it and used to keep an eye on her like two strict jailers.

Marissa was walking among the aisles looking for tomato sauce cans.

"I guess they have transferred most of their stuff..." she muttered to herself and looked at the guy wearing the superstore uniform, "Excuse me, Mister ... did you people move some stuff around here? I can't find the tomato cans,"

The man at once got to her for helping her out. Usually, Marissa preferred making her own sauces, but this specific order required a certain company's sauce.

"Ma'am, we have a promotion on it that's why we moved it near the exit gate," his hand waved showing her the exit gate when Ariel requested her to let her down from the cart.

Her kids knew that if they wanted to visit a superstore, they were not allowed to roam around freely.

"No sweetheart. Just sit tight. Mom needs to get her things and can't afford to let it slip off her mind." She patted Ariel's cheek and kept filling her cart.

"I just want lollipops, mom,"

"Let me know and I'll buy it for you," she said busily while choosing the mushroom cans from the aisle.

"But, mommy. I want to choose the flavors too. Alexander likes orange, Abigail likes guava flavor, and I want to try all of them," Marissa inhaled a long breath while listening to her whining.

"Once you see them let me know, you can go and get them." She said with a smile and Ariel was over the clouds.

After half an hour, Marissa, at last, allowed her daughter to go to the desired section that had kids' sweets.

She stayed at some safe distance just to keep an eye. She needed to get to the cash counter as soon as possible. She only allowed Ariel because today it wasn't that crowded.

She smiled when found Ariel hurriedly picking up different flavors of lollipops, trying to nestle all of them in her small hands. The little girl was about to turn around when bumped into someone.

The tall man looked down at the scattered lollipops before his eyes moved to Ariel, "I'm sorry, kid."

He crouched down to help the little girl in picking them up and Marissa left her cart to join them.

"I'm so sorry. She was just too excited," the man looked up and seemed to go still, "Ariel. Please say sorry to the gentleman." Marissa didn't seem to notice his changed body language at all.

The man shook his head with a small smile, "That's ok, ma'am. It was my mistake." After that Marissa didn't give him much attention.

Usually, she stayed away from all the males because their presence used to give her anxiety.

The cash counter was thankfully empty, so she almost dragged the cart along with Ariel to get it charged and leave.

"Ma'am," the same man stood behind her, "If you don't mind me asking, do you live nearby?"

It didn't take much time for Marissa to make a poker face.

"Hmm," she picked up her parcels and headed outside without any response. The man also seemed hasty, and Marissa made it quickly to her car and drove away.

She had seen this man for the first time and felt uncomfortable when he asked about her whereabouts.

Joseph came out of the store and looked around. He punched a nearby wall and hastily pressed some numbers on his phone,

"Rafael! Bro! See? I had been asking you to come to Kanderton and you never listened. Guess who I just met? It was indeed Marissa. She had a little girl with her. Please come as soon as possible. Ok?"

After that, he slipped the phone in his pocket. Rafael once showed him a few pictures of Marissa and at first glance, he knew it was her.

It seemed like the hunt for Marissa was almost over.

12 12- Right That Minute!

“Girl! You are being paranoid!” Flint whispered to Marissa because the kids were sleeping in the nearby room, “Why do you think that man was observing Ariel?”

“Because he found her cute!” Before Marissa could speak, Sophia interrupted them while her eyes were still on the laptop screen.

Flint snapped his fingers and nodded, “Exactly. Rafael is in Sangua. You are here in Kanderton managing your catering business. Why Rafael will even bother to set foot here when his billion-dollar industry is doing just fine back home? There is nothing for him in Kanderton city.”

Marissa was rubbing her hands in anxiety. Her heart was sinking with each passing minute.

“What if someday Rafael comes at my door and demands to meet my kids then what will I do, Flint?”

The sound of the laptop shutting made her sit straight in her seat. Sophia’s eyes were blazing with rage, “If that moron will be standing there then he won’t be meeting that timid Marissa but a successful entrepreneur. Has your brain slipped into your knees, Marissa?” Sophia had a disgusted face. She was not liking the weak side of her friend.

“What if he tries to snatch them?” she asked quietly, and they knew what she was talking about.

“Then just show him your middle finger, girl!” Sophia spat and Marissa closed her eyes. That man in the supermarket seemed

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12 12–Right That Minute!

fishy. **The** way he looked at Ariel and then tried to make conversation at the cash counter, Marissa didn’t know what to do.

She wanted to keep her kids safe and was no longer interested in Rafael. Kids' lives could easily be in danger if Nina or Valerie would come to know about their existence.

"Marissa! My dear..." Flint held her hand, "Have you forgotten a girl who came here three years back with nothing in hand and now see where you are today!" he had a proud grin on his face.

Marissa could only nod her head.

"I know, Flint. Thanks to you both but it's Nina and Valerie I'm scared of."

"You are a mom, Marissa!" Sophia also took a nearby seat, "and no one can bat an eye in your kids' way. I know how you can be when it's about your kids. If the time will come, we'll approach Rafael and ask him to control the women of his family otherwise we can create a scandal against him, and his business shares will go down.

the drain."

Marissa knew Sophia just wanted to make her feel better. She would never do any such thing to anyone but when it was about her babies Aunt Sophia couldn't be expected to spare anyone.

"I think you should go and get some sleep. You have an early order to dispatch." Flint patted her shoulder and stood up.

When Marissa left, he had concern on his face.

"Do you think that man might be dangerous?" Sophia asked him and he just raised his shoulders.

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12 12—Right That Minute!

"You told me Rafael and Marissa shared a soul—worthy relationship. If that's the case, then most likely Rafael might have guessed the truth by now."

"He didn't trust my friend, grandpa" Sophia sank back on the backrest of the couch.

"I know. But look at the situation from his point of view. A blind man who had no one but his wife Valerie beside him. One day he woke up all healthy and a woman was telling him that she was his wife. He just got done with the surgery and this is how he is welcomed to the world where he was unable to decide between true colors and fake patches."

Flint did have a point, "And don't forget, Sophia. Marissa learned a lot of business tactics from Rafael. Whatever she used to discuss with him about business, she applied it. And see the boom of her catering business."

Sophia did remember how Rafael threatened her to bring the police the next day. She shuddered with the thought.

He was indeed extremely handsome and the woman who would spend some time in his company will surely set the bar higher for her future boyfriends.

Maybe that was the reason Marissa could never get involved in any man. Gerald who helped Marissa a lot in bringing orders from big companies was not ready to give up on her, but she always

maintained a safe distance from him.

The thought that Rafael could at least hear, her side of the story couldn't bring any sympathy in Sophia's heart for him.

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12 12-Right That Minute!

"Aunt Fia! Sophia almost jumped up when heard a feeble voice close by.

"Abi!" she quickly picked up the child and made her sit on the lap, "are you alright?" she asked her because just last month they had to rush to the hospital because of her chest pain, "Are you feeling pain, love."

"No!" she hid her face in Sophia's chest and Sophia clutched the little munchkin to her. The triplets were very dear to her, but Abigail had her heart. Maybe due to her weak health, she had gotten closer to her.

Thankfully her other siblings understood Abi's condition and always cooperated with their mom. Marissa was lucky to get such understanding and compassionate kids.

She carried Sophia to her room and made her lie on her bunk. Covering the girl with a quilt, she placed her teddy close to her and was about to turn around when her eyes caught a glimpse of the sleeping figure of Alexander.

Oh, boy! He was a spitting image of his father. She had caught Marissa staring at him with that longing and could understand her

emotions.

Those long black locks that used to fall on his forehead like his father. The way he and Ariel used to guide Marissa about business decisions or a nosy customer. The father's gene was evident and couldn't be ignored.

She couldn't stop herself from kissing his and Ariel's forehead with all the aunt love she could muster.

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12 12-Right That Minuter

"Something good is about to happen, kids!" she whispered softly to their sleeping figures, "I can almost feel it in the air," **she** squeezed her eyes in excitement not knowing that Rafael Sinclair had at last stepped, right that minute, on Kanderton airport.

Comentario

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Posted by **admind**, 0 Views, Released on July 4, 2024

13 13- His Life

"So, what's the catch here?" Rafael asked after hugging his friend who **was** looking after his Kanderton branch office.

He had just gotten down from his private jet and couldn't wait for

positive progress. Joseph shook his head when saw an army of uniformed bodyguards following him closely.

some

All this time Rafael's investigators had been expressing their concerns that Sophia and Marissa didn't bother to go to the airport and left the city by road. That was the reason their records were missing from airport security records.

Now all of them had been active when Joseph told him about the girl he saw in the supermarket.

"I'm one hundred percent sure that she was Marissa. Her hair was longer than the picture you showed me. She was not as slim but the little girl accompanying her,. my God! You should have seen... she was a spitting image of her aunt Valerie."

There was a stark difference between Marissa and Valerie. Valerie was slim, bony, and was through and through a blond while Marissa was a brunette with black eyes with a curvy figure that used to fill her dresses in all the right places.

Rafael's heart skipped a beat. He had a daughter?

Oh, how he wanted to get to Marissa in a jiffy.

"I asked this investigator to meet me in my hotel room." He told Joseph while walking to the car.

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13:13—His Life

"Hotel room?" Joseph looked at his friend as if he had gone crazy,

"**Yeah**, I know." Rafael brushed his fingers through his hair while getting into the car, "I'm already late in reaching here. I remember you, asking me three years back to get her but Valerie had a nervous breakdown, and I couldn't leave her side. **If** I'm wrong about Marissa, then maybe it was Valerie who was with me when I was blind."

Joseph shook his head and chuckled, "Seriously! You still believe her?"

"I believe no one," Rafael remarked sharply, "I just want to hear everything from Marissa's damn mouth."

Instead of engaging in further discussion Rafael went quiet and started looking out the window.

"Hakuna Matata, dear husband..." she had said after kissing him.

"When I'm by your side then you don't need to worry about anything, Rafael. I'll be your eyes. If an eye transplant is the last choice, then I'll present my eyes to the doctors. I won't mind staying blind. For me, your presence is enough..."

And now she was somewhere far away living without him.

Rafael felt a pang of guilt and pain slowly taking over his heart. In all these years he got so engrossed in expanding his business that his rivals were surprised to see the success he was getting.

He even changed his Empire's name from Sinclair to MSin Industries.

Valerie once asked him, "MSin? What's so special about this

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13 13—His Life

name?"

"Miles Sinclair. My grandpa. He is my mentor," he had satisfied her with his answer and got back to work with a smile.

Rafael closed his eyes while thinking about their conversations when somebody shook his shoulder,

"Man. Your hotel is here." Joseph tapped his shoulder and got out of the car. Rafael was walking through the lobby when a bald man approached him,

"Sir. The good news is we have got a list of all Marissa Sinclaires. living in Kanderton," He informed Rafael with a smile and Rafael passed him a chilling look,

"Don't look for Marissa Sinclair. She must be living with the name Aaron. Or maybe some other name. But she won't be a fool to use the name Sinclair." He hoped she hadn't changed her first name.

"Thank you for being there," he hugged Joseph before retiring to his presidential suite.

“Now don’t be a fool. And please don’t make the mistake of staying up late. Come to the office tomorrow early morning so that we can discuss our future strategy.”

Rafael gave him a tight-lipped smile and entered the elevator.

The moment he reached his room, he took a quick shower and placed his laptop on the bed. Ever since he had gotten his eyes back, he started facing difficulty in falling asleep.

However, he got a little irritated when his phone started ringing. Who can call me at this hour?

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13 13- His Life

He received the call muttering to himself.

“Hello, Sir. I’m Dean. Your Kanderton office manager.”

“Yes, Dean?” he said busily typing something on his laptop.

“I hope you had a comfortable trip. **If** you need anything, I’ll be happy to help you.”

“Sure. Thank you, Dean.”

“Pleasure. Will you be coming tomorrow?”

“Of course. Why?”

“Sir. We are arranging a party **in** your honor where the

businessmen’s fraternity will be invited from all over the world. For this purpose, I have shortlisted twenty caterers. You can have a

look at it too.”

“Fine. Email me and then we can discuss it tomorrow.” He disconnected the call and rolled his eyes.

The man seemed quite excited about planning this party. He frowned when his phone pinged. An email from Mr. Dean.

“Gosh! Was he carrying the list all this time in his pocket? A late-night call just to discuss caterers? Seriously?” with a chuckle he opened the list with disinterest.

There were twenty caterers but there was this specific one that caught his eye due to the name.

“Alexander Homestyle Catering?”

He felt knots in his stomach. Once he had told Valerie or Marissa that if he ever got a son, he would name him, Alexander.

13 13 HIS Life

“Interesting! Let’s discuss catering tomorrow...” he said with amusement and closed his laptop.

Where are you, strawberry? My little greene. He closed his eyes and fell back on his pillow. He hoped Marissa was the girl, Joseph

saw.

His life depended on it.

Comentario R

Ver todos

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14 14- List

“Honey. I don’t understand what you are doing in

Kanderton,” Rafael could almost imagine Valerie talking to him with a pout.

“The office needs me, V. I’m here to solve some issues,” he tried explaining to her gently.

“And what will I do without you, my dear husband?” Rafael stopped himself from rolling his eyes and said Valerie’s favorite lines.

“I know, honey. I miss you too. Why don’t you go shopping? left behind my credit card. Or you can use yours. Go for a girls’ date or invite your friends for a stayover,” he had hit the right nerve when

she cried in excitement.

“Really? You are too sweet!” she whooped, and Rafael just couldn’t wait to disconnect the call.

Valerie was fond of inviting over her friends that used to give her a chance to show off her wealth.

“What was your wife saying?” Joseph asked his friend who was looking at Kanderton City through the glass wall.

“I don’t think she is my wife,” Rafael turned around and came back to his seat. Right now, they were in the company’s president’s office and Rafael was in touch with the best investigator, he had

hired.

When his phone started ringing, he cursed under his breath and received the call, “Yes. What’s the update?”

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14 14—List

The man on the other side cleared his throat, “Right now, I’m at the superstore, sir, the one mentioned by Mr. Joseph. The manager of the store here doesn’t seem to cooperate much.”

Rafael leaned back in his seat and started rubbing his thumb on his forehead, “Have you shown them the picture?”

“No, sir.”

“And why is that?” he almost roared on the phone, “the picture is given to **you** so that it can do some good. It had a purpose.”

He covered the mouthpiece and eyed his friend, “He was supposed to be the best investigator but just look at his incompetence.”

“Give this fellow a chance, Rafael!” Joseph mouthed slowly.

With a nod, Rafael turned back his attention to the call, “Have you even seen this picture or are you just shooting arrows in the dark?”,

The man who was doing this task for Rafael, was a middle-aged man and was a pro in the field, “Mr. Sinclair. You said you need to find this girl at any cost. Please just let me do my job. Showing pictures to the superstore manager means to invite trouble. He can issue a warning to Miss Marissa.”

The man had a point. Exhaling a long sigh, Rafael nodded, "What's next?"

"I'm planning to ask my men to keep an eye on the superstore. Once we get the report, we'll sit back and follow her just to see where she resides."

This at least satisfied Rafael. He wanted to find out his wife and get over with the search that started three years ago.

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14 ~~14~~—List

When the call was over, Rafael moved his focus to Joseph.

"I trust this guy, Rafael. A few years back the police of Kanderton involved him in a kid's abduction case and they solved it with his help."

Rafael rested his head on his seat and closed his eyes.

"You make *the best Beef Fajita in the whole wide world.*"

He had once told her while sitting by the kitchen table when she was cooking his favorite dish there.

Before marriage, when he was dating Valerie, once it had slipped her mouth how her younger sister could make the best food in the world.

He opened his eyes when heard a small knock. Joseph who was looking at something on his laptop screen said a crisp, "Yes."

"Sir. Sorry to disturb you I wanted the invitations to be finalized today," Dean placed a dossier in front of Rafael and stepped back.

Rafael ran a quick gaze at the file and then closed it.

"You seem too excited for this party as if it's in your honor, Dean," Rafael teased the manager who for some reason had started blushing.

"Sir. I'm nowadays in the last stages of finalizing the décor and the cutlery. The best event planner is hired to make it all work. In the next few days, we will be making final decisions for catering as

well.”

Rafael closed his eyes again trying to imagine the taste of the food that Marissa used to cook. It was weird because he never planned

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14 14—List

to make his wife stand in the kitchen.

He always had an army of servants to do the job.

No matter what caterer they choose, it would never have the taste of Marissa’s hands.

“Last night I read a Caterer’s name.. by the name of Alexander...”

Rafael trailed off when Dean started nodding his head in excitement.

“Yes, sir. They are planning to change the name to Xander’s.”

“Who is the owner of Alexander’s?” Rafael asked while toying with the paperweight.

“It used to be a small business startup. I’m sorry, sir. I only talked to the owner on call, and they are emerging at a stable pace. I have heard great reviews about them from our competitors.”

“Hmm. So how are you planning to select, out of these twenty caterers?” Joseph chuckled when Rafael asked the question.

Everyone in the office knew how big foodie Dean was. And now Rafael was also getting this idea.

The way he was wholeheartedly participating was quite surprising.

“These twenty caterers will be invited to bring their best food and let us have the taste of it. After that, we can decide who to select.

We might hire multiple caterers too. After all, the business fraternity will be swarming here next month. They should carry a positive image of Kanderton. It’s going to be a huge event.”

Rafael hummed moving forward, to place his hands on the desk.

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14 14–**List**

“Can I have a list of the owners?” Dean seemed a little taken aback
by the absurd request.

“Excuse me, Mr. Sinclair?” he thought he had heard wrong.

“The list of those twenty people who own catering business, Dean.” Dean nodded and stepped back,

“Right in a minute, sir.” He turned on his heels to leave the office.

Comentario

Deja un comentario

Posted by **admind**, ? Views, Released on July 4, 2024

15 15- MSin Industries

“Yayyy!” Marissa’s employees started clapping when a party order was dispatched in a food truck. They all were hugging each other, and Marissa had a proud grin on her face.

Her kitchen was buzzing with excitement as everyone was busy exchanging high fives. Marissa was standing in the center observing her staff members celebrating their hard work and

success.

“We did it, girls!” She called out, her voice full of enthusiasm, “This must be our fifth big order that is sent without a single hitch.”

Her employers gathered around her, their faces glowing with a sense of accomplishment. Small orders were nothing for Alexander’s Homestyle Catering. But this one was huge and they all needed a pat on their backs.

The aroma of pies and Lasagna still lingered in the air.

“Now, now, now!” Marissa clapped again to get the attention of her teammates, “We have covered another milestone in our business, folks. I couldn’t have done it without each and every one of you. You’re all amazing.”

Marissa threw a proud glance towards her employees. She was extremely lucky to have such a dedicated team.

The business that started with her and Akari now had so many people associated with them. The best thing about these women was, that they never questioned her about her kids’ father and always tried to be understanding and empathetic towards her.

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15 15- MSin Industries

“Hello,” their eyes moved when they heard a familiar voice from the doorway. Flint and Sophia were standing along with the kids, “Can we come inside to celebrate?”

Everyone knew about the rule and that was: No kids allowed when the burners were on.

The kids were looking at her with so much innocence that for a moment Marissa wanted to hug them tight and cry.

“Mom, please!” Alexander thought that she was getting furious, so he thought to act like an angel by batting his eyes dramatically.

“Yes, mom. Please.” Abigail also joined them.

Marissa didn’t say anything and spread her arms, kneeling on the floor. The kids came running to them.

“Careful, Abi!” Marissa’s heart skipped a beat when she saw her youngest one running. It was a risk to her health.

She hugged her kids who not only pushed her to the floor on her a*ss but also settled themselves on her lap. Marissa was laughing and crying at the same time.

“All of this was possible because of you, my little ones,” she kissed each of their foreheads and the women standing there had tears in their eyes.

“Now it’s time to kiss, Aunt Sophia...” Sophia teased her and crouched on the floor making everyone around them laugh.

"This was such a big order, Soph," Marissa told her and helped her kids to stand from her lap, "This one is the biggest order I ever got." She stood with the help of Citra, and everyone present there.

15 15- MSin Industries

could feel her face glowing.

Sophia walked up to her and pulled her in her embrace, "This is **all** your hard work, Marissa" She then ran a gaze over other women, "And no doubt you have got an amazing team."

Marissa nodded and then faced her employees, "Alright, let's get this place cleaned up and then we'll celebrate properly!" Marissa announced, her grin widening, "Drinks are on me tonight!"

The room erupted in cheers once more, and Marissa couldn't help but laugh. After every order, it was moments like these that made

all the hard work worthwhile.

They started cleaning the kitchen along with the kids. Only Abigail was the one who was sitting on the kitchen counter and was directing her siblings to pick up the litter.

"Come on, guys! That piece over there. Pick up that wrapper too,"

When Flint started placing the drink bottles and glasses, Sophia quickly asked the kids to go to their room and she would bring them the best shakes ever.

"Come on, my little helpers," Marissa ruffled their hair, "Mom will be back soon to tuck you into bed."

Once the kids left, the drinking party started with everyone chatting in a carefree manner. Bottles were uncorked and the drinks were passed on.

Marissa started tinkling a spoon to her glass, "We all deserve a toast, girls!" she raised her glass, "Cheers!"

"Cheers!" The whole room erupted with excitement and the

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15 15—MSin Industries

clinking of glasses.

Marissa looked at her employees' faces and thought of giving them a bonus for their hard work. Just then the phone that was placed in the far corner of the kitchen started ringing.

It was their official kitchen phone and was usually operated by Akari. She was the one who used to take and confirm orders. She had great client handling skills.

"I don't think we have any other order now," Marissa mumbled and saw Akari struggling to get there.

"Hello," Akari spoke on the phone and then gave a helpless grin to Marissa. Marissa scrunched her nose and then did her signature action which was clapping.

"Guys! We have got a phone call. Can you all please be quiet for a minute?" Akari mouthed a thank you in her direction and then started listening to the call.

All the other employees who had lowered their volume were now talking in hushed tones while Marissa's eyes were on Akari where shock was evident on her face.

Marissa felt her heart sinking. Why was Akari acting in this way?

"Akari," she shouted across the room, "What's the matter? Is there a problem with our order? Did you wrap the aluminum foil around that pasta tray?"

Akari who was standing, glued to her spot like a statue tilted her head to glance her way. The low conversation that was taking place among other women slowly died down.

4/6

15 15-MSin Industries

All of them were now looking at Akari with concern who had a dumb expression on **her** face.

"Akari! Speak up!" Marissa tried to be gentle with her. Another employee whose name was Loxley went to Akari and offered her a glass of water along with a stool.

Akari pushed aside the glass, "Marissa. I think we have got a new order."

"New order?" Marissa frowned, "From whom?"

"Remember? I told you about this new multinational firm in our city? They have shortlisted us among twenty caterers."

“What?”

“What?”

There was light chatter in the room now. Akari slowly nodded, her lips gradually curling up in a beautiful smile,

“They have invited us along with a three—
course meal. However, the CEO wants every one of the caterers to come with Beef Fajita.”

“What?” Sophia chuckled, “Beef Fajita?” everyone around here knew that Marissa made the best Fajita. She could cook it several times for her family and employees.

But she always apologized to her customers and never made it commercially.

“Who are they, by the way?” Flint, sitting by the counter, asked while sipping his drink.

Akari thought for a moment and then said, “It’s a newly developed company and they are throwing a huge party in honor of their

12:30

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15 15—MSm Industries.

CEO. The company’s name is MSin Industries.”

And **then** she looked directly at Marissa, “If we get that order then we might be talking about millions of dollars, Marissa.”

There was a stunned silence in the room after the announcement.

Akari spoke again, “The owners are supposed to present their meals on coming Friday. Marissa, are you ready for it?”

But Marissa’s mind was somewhere else. MSin Industries.

Why did it sound strange to her ears?

Comentario 2

16 16- Alexander Catering

“Who could be MSin Industries? Never heard of them!” Marissa said while folding the laundry and placing it in the kids’ cupboard.

“I know what you are thinking!” Sophia placed the dress in front of her image, standing in front of the mirror, “You think it’s related to Sinclair but come to think of it. The letter M doesn’t make sense. If it was THAT Sinclair, then it would be Rafael Sinclair... RSin. Not MSin.”

Marissa was still confused about accepting this contract. There was something that was not sitting well with her. –

“How do I look in this dress?” Sophia asked for her opinion, still examining herself in the mirror. Now she was holding a red gown.

“Uh. It looks too desperate. Why don’t you wear that royal blue one,” Marissa placed the last laundry piece inside the closet and plopped back on Alexander’s bunk.

“Is Gerald in contact with you?” Sophia eyed her through the mirror, “He was on a business trip, and I need to know if he spared any time for you.”

Marissa closed her eyes and placed the small pillow on her face. She didn’t want to talk about any man. Gerald might be a good friend, but he could never be more than that.

However, she sat straight when heard a tap on the door. Akari’s face appeared in the doorway.

“Chilling?” she tiptoed inside as if she was there for some kind of mischief or robbery.

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< 16 16–Alexander Catering

“Look at her!” Sophia pointed towards her, “She tiptoed because we all think it’s kids’ room and they must be sleeping. While they are

not even here.”

Marissa laughed and slapped the space beside her, “Sit down and relax, Akar. Kids just left for the park with Flint and Citra.”

Marissa had her commercial kitchen in the basement while she used to reside along with kids, Flint and Sophia in the upper portion of the small house. She borrowed a small amount of money from someone to get this space.

“Have you come up with any decision regarding MSin?” Akari asked her, taking the space on the bed.

Marissa turned her head to have a good look at Akari's face, "What's the catch in it for you?"

Sophia chuckled and tilted her head, "I was about to ask the same thing, Akari. You seem a little too interested in this industry order. Care to explain?"

Akari felt nervous when she felt the eyes of both the women on her face, "I... I... it's a million dollar... order so..."

"So?" both the ladies cocked up a brow when they saw Akari blushing profusely, "Their manager... Dean. He is the cutest!"

"What?"

"What?"

Sophia and Marissa screamed at the top of their lungs. Thankfully the kids were not home to witness this craziness.

"When did you meet him?" Sophia placed a hand on her hip and

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16 10—Alexander Catering

poor **Akari** avoided **the eye** contact

"Never. We **just** exchanged numbers and I saw his profile picture. He looked cute in those glasses and chubby cheeks."

Marissa face palmed and laid back on the bed, "Akari is in love!"

This was the best thing about her. She might have had a failed relationship in the past but she always celebrated her employees' happiness. This was the reason her employees not only respected her but felt at home with her.

As a boss, she never imposed her orders but always took suggestions from them. Most of the learning and applying these tricks were due to the company of Rafael. He was the one who used to teach her how to run a good business.

"Every discussion, every happiness, and every sadness remind me of you. I miss you in every celebration and I miss you when I look at Alexander and then I miss you again when I take Abi to hospital. visits without you..."

“Hey! Marissa! Back to earth!” she almost jumped when Akari snapped her fingers before her eyes.

Marissa’s head snapped up and found Sophia looking at her. She had a knowing look on her face.

“I don’t know about this MSin order. This is such a big risk. We don’t have enough staff for such a big party.”

Sophia slapped Akari’s shoulder to make space for her on the small

mattress.

“I need to go down and clean the kitchen, I guess,” Akari said

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16 16- Alexander Catering

good-naturedly to provide them some privacy.

“Take this risk.” Sophia threw her arm over Marissa’s shoulders when Akari left the room, “A small business becomes big when it takes risks, Marissa. What are you scared of? You are blessed with the best team. Think of the mortgage you have to pay to Mr. Amir. Your kids’ future education... their future. There is a lot you can do with this money.” As always, her true friend wanted her to expand her wings.

“I don’t know,” she held Sophia’s hand, “there is some strange feeling in the pit of my stomach... Something deep inside is stopping me from going ahead with it yet it also wants me to push forward and accept the offer.”

Sophia started rubbing her friend’s cold hands to offer some comfort, “You need to be financially stable, Marissa. We can’t hide forever. Rafael is not a threat to these kids. Valerie and Nina are.”

Sophia had a point. She couldn’t hide in a cocoon forever. She needed to face the world at some point.

“Once that TV channel approached you for your business coverage. They are still after your interview as an upcoming businesswoman, but you are not ready to face the cameras. Just because you don’t want those evil women to know about your whereabouts. Let me tell you this, the more popular you’ll be, the more benefits you’ll

get.”

Marissa had even cut ties with her family. She didn't want any kind of relationship from her past but now maybe it was time to show everyone who was Marissa Aaron.

She picked up her phone from the small study table and dialed a

12:40 —)

AD

18 16- Alexander Catering

number, "Akari. Hmm. Please say yes to your cutie Dean. I think we should take this risk and show everyone around, who we are."

Rafael and Joseph were discussing an upcoming meeting when Dean came inside with a flushed face, "Sir, the twenty caterers have agreed to come along with their best dishes."

"Have you got the list of the owners?" Joseph asked him, taking off his reading glasses. He couldn't understand why Dean looked so excited.

"Yes, sir. Here it is!" he fumbled with some papers in his file and took out a sheet that had a printed list.

Rafael was quick to grab it from him and ran his gaze across the paper.

"I have asked the owners to come with their best. By the way, the owner of Alexander's is ... Akari. Yeah. Her name is Akari."

is...

Rafael's eyes remained glued to the paper and then he gestured

Dean to leave.

"What? You don't look convinced!" Joseph said with concern. Rafael offered him a tightlipped smile and started thinking.

Marissa was found in a superstore, shopping for a bulk quantity of cans, she knew Alexander was his favorite name, and she was a pro

chef.

What if Dean is ill-informed about the owner's name?

“Hey,” he spoke on the phone, “Have you seen anyone around that superstore?”

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16 16- Alexander Catering

“No, yet.” The investigator replied in a clipped tone.

“Look for Alexander’s Homestyle Catering. It’s a home-based business. Find each and everything about them. Can you do it till evening? I can pay you double.”

Rafael looked relaxed when he disconnected the call.

“We’ll know by the evening if this business is really owned by this Akari girl or Marissa,” He informed his friend and got back to the file they were discussing.

He could hardly wait for the evening. He was a businessman since a young age and his intuition was telling him there was something more to this Alexander catering business.

Comentario 2

17 17- Hakuna Matata

“I have never prepared Beef Fajita on a commercial scale,” Marissa remarked while making the shopping list with Akari and Citra. She was trying her best not to remember Rafael’s soft moans

whenever he used to eat it. O

“I’m sure, you’ll ace it, Mar!” Akari patted her shoulder and started maintaining the ledger on the laptop provided by Marissa.

For the last two weeks, she had been sending Akari to the

superstore for grocery shopping along with Flint. She didn’t want to take any risks.

Though she wanted to be mentally prepared to face the Sinclair family, but it was better to postpone it as much as possible.

“Akari. I have prepared the list. You can go shopping. And please only pick fresh tomatoes. We’ll be needing them in bulk quantity for our other orders,” Akari nodded and started clicking the laptop keys.

“By the way, who is the president of MSin Industries?” Citra asked while stirring the spatula in the pot. She was preparing strawberry

syrup.

The question made Marissa go still for a moment but then she tried to fake a smile. Obviously, it had nothing to do with Rafael. He owned Sinclair Industries and this MSin was someone else.

However, she also showed interest in the conversation.

They knew Akari was talking to Dean nowadays.

“I don’t know,” Akari shrugged carelessly and then picked up her

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17 17–Hakuna Matata

phone, “Let me ask, Dean.”

Both Marissa and Citra chuckled at that.

“Akari. Let the poor guy work in peace. Stop calling him during working hours,” But Akari just raised her index finger to make them quiet.

“I’m not calling him. I’ll just send a message and see if he can answer it.”

They were teasing Akari when someone knocked on the door. The knock was on the commercial kitchen door not on the entrance door of their home. That meant someone was there for business.

“Hello, Marissa!” Wearing a black suit, Mr. Amir came inside with a dimpled smile on his face, “How are you.”

Marissa who was beaming, the smile vanished from her lips. She didn’t know why he was here yet her sixth sense was telling her it was something bad.

“Mr. Amir?”

“Oh! How many times should I ask you not to call me MISTER Amir? It’s Amir for you, sweetheart,” Marissa felt uneasy in his presence. Three years back, he helped Marissa with the finances, assuring her that the small building would be in her name as soon as she paid off all debt.

She was allowed to take as much time as she wanted. Being a big fool, Marissa trusted him and took the loan instead of going to the

bank.

For the last few months, he had been asking her to go on a date

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17 17–Hakuna Mata

with him. Marissa kept reminding him that she had a steady boyfriend, Gerald. Faking it at that time was the best option but his advances were increasing with each passing day.

“Merissa,” she heard Citra whisper behind her, “this is the reason we need MSin catering contract. Once we will pay him, I hope he will hand us the property file.”

Marissa blinked in understanding though she knew Citra couldn’t see her.

“Please sit down, Mr. Amir. What can I do for you?” Amir who was a fine man in his early thirties smirked and picked the grocery list from the counter.

Marissa passed an annoying look to her girls because everything about their business was meant to be confidential.

“MSin...” he read the heading on the paper and turned a blazing gaze towards Marissa, “You got an order from MSin? How do you know them?”

Before Marissa could answer, Akari spoke without looking up from the laptop, “We don’t know them. They approached us.”

“Hmm...” he took his sweet time in reading all the ingredients and then Marissa and the other two girls gasped when without warning he started tearing the paper into tiny pieces.

“MSin is not suitable to work with. I just completed a furniture order for them and their owner. Oh. He was such a rude man.”

“Owner?” Marissa muttered but he heard her.

“Yeah. Owner, his name is Joseph Maskatiya.” Marissa took a sigh of

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17 17–Hakuna Matata

relief. She was thinking that maybe MSin belonged **to** someone from the Sinclair family. Thankfully she was wrong.

“And you, my girl,” he started walking towards her, “Don’t fall for them. They are scammers. They haven’t paid me for my hard work.”

Marissa who didn’t like it when he called her ‘My Girl’ frowned.

They didn’t pay him?

“So, tell me,” He brushed his index finger on her nose bridge, “Would you accept their order?”

Marissa tilted back her head to avoid his touch, “Let me look into this, Mister Amir. I’ll do my homework first before taking any decision.” She wasn’t going to back out just because he wanted it.

He needed to know that he might be the owner of this place on paper, but it was Marissa’s business, and she would never allow anyone to get her decisions changed.

“I own this business, Mr. Amir. And I know what decisions to make.”

“I know, honeybee.” He tried to tuck her stray hair behind her ear, but she didn’t give him a chance and gently shoved his hand away, “But don’t forget... I own this space. And if I’ll decide to take it from you, someday then you won’t be having any business.”

Marissa didn’t budge from her place and kept looking boldly into

his eyes.

Yes, she might be on the roads if he decided to do that. But she would never go down without a fight.

After throwing a final glance around, he smirked and turned to

17 17- Hakuna Matata

leave, "Don't forget to call me if you decide to change your mind and accept my date invitation."

"Holy cow! **The** audacity of this man," Akari hugged Marissa from behind trying to offer some comfort. But Marissa wasn't scared. Her business had brought enough confidence in her.

Amir was mistaken if he thought she was a weakling.

Rafael was busy typing on his laptop when Joseph came out of the bathroom, "Isn't there any extra toothbrush?"

"Yes. Because the reservation of this presidential suite is in my name. Not yours. Now get out of my room and go home. I need to work."

"Come on, man. Don't be a bummer. I'm here to stay," Rafael shook his head in exasperation. Joseph could stay with him whenever he wanted without an invitation. He had always been like that since

childhood.

The only time he couldn't do that was when Nina Sinclair didn't let him meet Rafael for two years.

"Rafael! Toothbrush! Or I'm going to use yours..." he threatened his

friend.

"Use intercom, man. Ask for room service. For God's sake!" Rafael rolled his eyes and checked his phone for the umpteenth time.

"Any message from the detective?" Joseph asked him in concern.

Rafael shook his head, "I don't think, he can do it. Which means I'll look for another competent person. I asked him specifically to

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17 17–Hakuna Matata

update me this evening.”

Joseph shrugged and went to the bathroom. When he came back, he **was** wearing Rafael's bathing robe.

“Gosh, Joseph. You could have asked room service to bring that for you,” he was getting annoyed with his friend or maybe he was frustrated because he couldn't get anything on Marissa.

Joseph didn't bother to answer and sat down when they both

heard a knock.

“Who it might be?” Rafael muttered **to** himself, “Yes!”

The door opened and the man came inside.

Rafael smirked, “Oh. It's you. I knew you wouldn't be able to find anything on her. It's o.k. You can collect your check tomorrow from my office.”

The man walked up to him and handed over a heavy manila envelope. Rafael took it with a frown and tore it open to empty it

on the mattress.

His gasp was audible when he saw what it was.

Numerous pictures of Marissa and the three babies whose ages seemed like three years old spread on the bed.

“Marissa?” Rafael whispered, “Hakuna Matata.”

12:40

18 18- She Apologized

“Marissa Aaron. Age twenty-two,” The detective informed in a clipped tone like a robot, “Runs her catering business. Tried to get into a business school but failed the entrance exam. Has three kids. Two daughters and one son.

Alexander, Ariel, and Abigail. **Had** to face some complications during the birth of her babies due to which her youngest one has a weak heart. The doctors had advised her to have open heart surgery, but their medical team would decide when to do it as the baby's body was already too weak.

When the robotic man paused momentarily, Rafael took a long breath that he didn't know he was holding back in his chest.

This was not even a fraction of what Marissa could have gone through in his absence. Only if... only if he had trusted her and didn't let her go.

"Rafael," Joseph placed his hand on his friend's shoulder and gestured for the other man to halt it for a moment.

He went quickly to fetch him some water.

"Rafael, my friend. Everything will be alright," Rafael didn't want to express his rage in front of the third person, but he was angry at himself.

"What have I done, Joseph? And why would my mom do that to me?" Rafael muttered under his breath. Joseph turned to look at the man who was looking at the carpeted floor with his hands on his belly in respect..

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18 18–She Apologized

The poor man might want to give privacy to his client but didn't have an option except to act as dumb and deaf.

"You can leave now, mister. Tomorrow you can collect the check, the amount that was promised to you, for your hard work will be paid." The man kept his gaze low and turned on his heels to leave the room.

"What's next?" Joseph asked Rafael when they reached the office the next morning. Rafael was still disturbed with last night's details but now he had to stand tall for his little family that needed him

ahead.

"According to this file, she doesn't own the place, Jo," Rafael tossed the file on the desk. In agitation, he didn't even bother to sit on his revolving seat, "Instead of approaching a bank for the loan, she

asked this man to help her."

Rafael handed over a picture to Joseph, "Amir? He is the man who gave us fake wooden furniture. It had termites all over the wood.

How is he related to Marissa?"

"Not related. He might have taken the benefit of her desperation," He then came to Joseph and held his arm, "My friend. I need to make everything right. Whatever wrong I did, I ... I need to do something... I need to make everything right..."

Joseph looked at the heartbroken face of Rafael who had nothing but agony evident there. Since childhood he watched girls dropping their panties for him. Initially, he used to think, he was nothing but a rake brat who only knew how to spend his father's money.

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18 18- She Apologized

Time and again he was proven wrong. Rafael was not only wealthy but had been an intelligent and empathetic man.

He was equally good in sports and studies and had new ideas to start his own business. Joseph who belonged to a middle-class family felt lucky when Rafael helped him on many instances.

Once he remembered how his mom was admitted to the hospital and Rafael helped him from A to Z. Joseph didn't know how the bills were paid and who used to get those meals ready for him. When he was hell worried for his mom.

At that time Rafael proved to him that he was a true friend.

"What belongs to you, will stay yours, Rafael," Joseph breathed out the words. The building where he used to sit as the branch head

was also Rafael's kindness. He couldn't leave his friend in a time of need.

"Please send Mr. Dean inside," Joseph spoke in the intercom

speaker. When Dean walked in, Joseph eyed the smart man with a keen gaze.

"Your twenty participants. When are they expected to arrive?"

Dean felt a little nervous.

"They are due to arrive in two days."

"Can't you make it early?"

"Sir, I can." Dean tried to smile, "But they run small businesses, and they made commitments to other people."

"Umm hmm," Rafael raised his hand and gave a little shake to his head while looking at Joseph, "It's ok, Dean. You follow the

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<18 18—She Apologized

schedule. Just don't tell anyone about the owner's name."

"I ... I ... just told them about Mr. Joseph's name as our head. Nobody needs to know yours."

"That's a very smart move," Rafael praised his efforts.

When Dean left, Joseph turned to look at Rafael who was engrossed in his thoughts.

"What are you thinking?"

"Nothing!" he sighed, "I need to keep tabs on her and my kids..." he felt a delicious taste on his tongue. The word 'my kids' brought

relief to him.

The idea of tasting those strawberries brought a shudder to his body.

Akari was stuffing the pantry. She had just gotten back from grocery shopping and the next morning they all needed to start preparing trial meal for MSin Industries.

She smiled to herself when she thought of Dean, "What are you smiling at?" Poor Akari jumped in fright when heard a heavy voice

behind her.

Placing her hand on her chest, she turned and found Mr. Amir standing there. She didn't like this

intrusion. Poor Marissa was thankfully not home otherwise his presence might make her upset.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to give you a heart attack. Where is Marissa by the way?” he asked her casually while running down his dirty gaze all over her body. For a minute, Akari felt like he was

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18 18- She Apologized

undressing her with his gaze.

“She is not home, Mr. Amir. You can come later,” she tried to smile.

and then got busy with her job. However, she was very conscious of his presence behind her.

Her body tensed when she felt him heading towards her, “Has Marissa told the Msin Industries that she won’t be working with them?”

Akari felt a little scared when she sensed a little threat in his voice, “Umm. You really should talk to Marissa, Mr. Amir. I’m just her employee.” She stood up and started straightening her skirt.

When she decided to walk past him, he suddenly held her wrist, “Mr. Amir. You better...” She was about to issue a stern warning when he pulled the kitchen phone across the counter,

“Call them, Akari,” he lightly brushed his knuckles across her face. Akari felt a sudden urge to puke, “Call MSin, Akari. If you are sincere with Marissa, you’ll understand why I’m saying that.”

Akari looked down at his hand that was now roaming close to her breasts. Very close.

She gulped her saliva and nodded with a quivering smile, “Fine!”

“That’s like my good girl.”

Rafael and Joseph were going to the conference room for a presentation when Dean came out of his cabin, “Sir. I just got a call from Alexander’s Catering.”

Rafael felt his heartbeat accelerating, "What is it, Dean?" he could

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18 18- She Apologized

see small beads **of sweat** on the assistant's forehead.

"Sir. Their owner... She just apologized and said that she won't be able to work with us."

Comentario

Ver todos

19 19- Rafael! Don't!

Marissa was pacing around in the room. Akari was bawling her

eyes out and Sophia and Citra were sitting on either side trying to

console her.

Marissa looked around her huge kitchen and tried to feel the pride she once felt whenever she looked at it.

This was not only her kitchen but also her biggest achievement. Her first step towards her fight with Sinclair.

"I didn't work so hard all these years so that some jerk would try to snatch it away from me just because I don't have anyone behind me..." she was muttering to herself

"Hey. It's OK. Don't cry, sweetie." Sophia tried to console Akari who was fumbling with her handkerchief.

"I'm sorry, Marissa...." Akari hiccupped wiping her cheeks, "he had so much filth in his eyes and the way he started touching me... it was getting too much... I... I didn't know if ... if... if I hadn't called MSin Industries, he might have done something bad to me.... He was he was..." she started crying again.

Citra squeezed her shaking body and gave a concerned look to

Marissa.

“What will we do now, Mar?” Sophia’s eyes were glued to Akari’s trembling figure. And Marissa was thinking hard.

“How about if one of us goes to the MSin’s office and talks to

them?” Marissa gave the idea and Sophia looked at her friend as if she had gone crazy.
”

12:40

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19 19- Rafael! Don’t!

Usually, Marissa used to take the backseat because she hated the limelight.

“Seriously?” Sophia whispered, “One of us? It’s YOUR business, Mar.

nor

YOU should go and explain to them the problem or just... come up

with some excuse.”

Marissa nodded in agreement. Her heart was going to Akari for whatever Amir did, she was in no mood to spare him.

Her employees were like her family, and she would never forgive a man who would try to abuse them or threaten them.

“Mommy!” she spun around when found Alexander standing there with his tab, “Is everything alright?”

Marissa carefully watched the face of her ten-year-old who was a Xerox of his father. Just then he decided to flip his hair off his forehead just like Rafael used to do.

With a smile on her face, Marissa went to him and crouched down to get to his eye level, “Everything is just fine, sweetheart. Aunt Akari isn’t well.”

She tilted back her head to shoot a gaze at poor Akari.

“She doesn’t look sick to me, Mom,” his intelligent eyes moved to Akari and then back to Marissa’s face, “If someone is harassing her then she can easily report it to the Women’s Protection and support cell in Kanderton.”

For a moment, Akari almost forgot to cry and looked at the three-year-old with an open mouth. The rest of the women's mouths were also hung open in shock.

12:40 –

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19 19- Rafael! Don't!

"How do you know about this protection cell?" Marissa held his shoulders to plant a kiss on his cheek that he immediately wiped with the back of his hand.

"Geez, Mommm... pleaseee..." Marissa had to suppress her laughter when he protested, "I'm not a baby anymore."

"Yes, you are!" Marissa winked and turned to Akari, "Aki. Let's go to meet YOUR Dean ..." she trailed off mischievously.

As expected, Akari quit crying.

"Dean?" she thought she was dreaming.

"Yeah. Don't you want to meet him in person? Let's go and either present this case before him or meet his boss... What was his name?" Marissa started snapping her fingers, "Oh... Mr. Joseph." Her eyes lit in excitement.

Akari got to her feet abruptly, "Let me wash my face first. I also need to apply a good lip color." She was blushing profusely when heard her favorite ladies laughing hard behind her.

"This girl!" Citra's face palmed and then chuckled. On the other hand, Marissa was thinking of ways to tackle Amir who was getting

out of hand now.

"The nerve of this man..."

She wanted to strangle his neck.

“Mr. Rafael. What do you think about our packaging proposal? I assure you, we won’t disappoint you.” The president of another packaging factory was there at MSin’s office to convince Rafael

12.40-

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19 19–Rafael Don’t!

about his job.

He wanted this contract from MSin Industries at any cost because getting this contract meant that he would be popular in the market and that could open new doors for his business.

“We are interested, James,” Rafael revolved his seat a little eyeing the man sitting across him, “But we don’t agree with your quotations.”

“Please, Sir. We can come up with something on common grounds if you agree. We really want this contract. We know what the Crimsons did to you. We might be a small name in the market, but we are known for our honesty. All we need is a chance.”

Rafael kept fiddling with his pen between his fingers. The man seemed quite reasonable with his offer but still, Rafael didn’t want to go for this quotation.

“Why don’t you do some costing and revise your rates? We might think about it then...” he trailed off eyeing the man meaningfully.

He and his team felt excited with the chance, “Sure, sir. I’ll come tomorrow with the revised rates and...”

“No, Mr. James,” Joseph said with amusement, “Take your time and come to us after the weekend.” The man quickly got to his feet and reached out to shake hands with Rafael.

“Sure, sir. Thank you very much,” he couldn’t keep his teeth inside his mouth, the smile seemed to be permanently glued to his lips, “I assure you, you won’t regret your decision.”

When he left, Joseph looked at Rafael whose eyes were already on him. The moment their eyes met, they both started laughing.

12:50 –

19 19—Rafael! Don't!

"He seemed too ambitious," Rafael remarked, and Joseph agreed.

They were still enjoying the moment when a panicked Dean came inside without knocking.

"What?" Joseph frowned looking at him while Rafael leaned back in

his seat.

"The Alexander's Caterers..."

"Yes," Rafael nodded, "I asked you to contact them again. What did they say?"

Dean shook his head wildly, "I was planning to call them in the evening, but they are here."

"They are what?" Rafael was at once on his feet.

"They are here, sir. Mia just informed me and made them sit in the reception area..."

Rafael didn't let him finish, "What are they doing in the reception area, make them sit in the guest room."

Dean halted for a moment and looked at his boss who was usually a calm and cool man but seemed to be on the edge right now.

The guest

room was only reserved for big corporate clients, not for small business owners. With confusion in his eyes, he saw his

boss heading towards the door when Joseph was quick to stop him, "Rafael! No brother! Don't!"

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20 20- Brilliant Wife

MSin people had

got a very impressive building. The reception area where they were seated was classy.

Marissa could almost feel her eyes gliding on the sparkling floor. The receptionist offered them a professional smile and informed them that it was next to impossible to meet Mr. Joseph without an appointment.

Though Marissa was expecting it, she wanted to try her luck. Akari was accompanying her, and she was **as** impressed as Marissa.

“Seems like their building is made of glass and marble...” she told Marissa in a dreamy whisper, “If their offices are so impressive, then how polished their homes must be.”

Marissa gave a small smile to Akari

“I once lived in such a big mansion, Akari. All that glitters is not gold, my friend. People living in massive houses are usually heartless.” She didn’t say it out loud and eyed the glossy floor

beneath her shoes.

“Ms. Aaron? Ms. Akari?” a pleasantly looking young man approached them with a smile on his face. He looked good in the black suit and the golden glass frames suited him a lot.

Marissa and Akari got up from the couch when he stood over them, “Hello. I’m Dean.” He extended his hand for a handshake towards

Marissa.

And then he moved his attention to Akari, “You must be the owner, Ms. Akari. Right?”

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20 **20**—Brilliant Wife

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Marissa and Akari both looked at each other for a moment then Akari cleared her throat and shook her head, “I think there is some misunderstanding, but she is the owner. I just attend the official calls on Xander’s Catering behalf.”

“Oh,” Dean wanted to jump in a river and kill himself for this ill information. Why did he think that the person taking his calls has to be the owner just because it’s a home-based business?

“It’s OK, Dean,” Marissa offered him a kind smile. The issue at hand. wasn’t the ownership of the business but the mess Amir created for them.

“We...” she turned her head to shoot a look at Akari and found her

nodding her head in encouragement. Dean witnessed the silent exchange and gestured for them to walk with him,

“Please let me take you somewhere, where you can talk to me freely,” he said walking a head.

Marissa was not expecting this welcome. Dean hadn’t even heard them but was treating them quite cordially.

Was there still hope?

“Don’t worry,” Akari consoled her in a whisper, “I think they are pretty impressed by our work and that’s why giving us VIP

treatment.”

Marissa showed Akari her wide eyes in a warning and mouthed a silent, “Shut up.”

All Akari was praying for, was to get out of the mess. Though she couldn’t be blamed, but still she felt guilt-ridden.

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20 20- Brilliant Wife

Dean took them to a huge room, where every piece of furniture placed there, seemed to be hand-picked. He made them seated, “Please be comfortable and tell me if you would like tea or coffee.” He said taking a chair, “What is the issue?”

Marissa swallowed hard and a nervous chuckle escaped her lips. What to tell Dean? That at a man who she took some loan from, forced them to quit the contract?

It all seemed quite messy and unprofessional. And childish too.

“Actually...” Akari started speaking slowly, “There was some misunderstanding... we received another order and ...” she shrugged and pasted a forced smile on her face, “I... I mixed up the numbers... I mean contact numbers... his name was... also

Dean... so we thought we should say No to them but...I called you ..by mistake... it’s my mistake... I know and I own it and take full responsibility of it...”

Dean's eyes were wide while observing Akari and though Marissa felt peculiar, she wanted to throw back her head and laugh hard.

Akari was looking too cute while explaining to him with the help of those broken sentences like a kid.

Dean raised his brow and then chuckled, "OK. So, this Dean gave you the same order that we gave? Like a three-course meal?"

For some odd reason, Marissa felt like he was more uncomfortable and more nervous than them.

Why?

His eyes were darting again and again to the corner of the ceiling. With a frown, Marissa followed his gaze and found a small CCTV

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20 20—Brilliant Wife

camera installed in that spot.

Were they under surveillance?

There must not be anything fishy here as they are a big name. She decided to go outside the room.

"Umm. I think I left my purse in the reception area," This was the best excuse she could come up with and then she gave an over-brightened smile to Dean and Akari, "Why don't you two discuss the menu of the trial dishes, I'll go and fetch my purse from

that sofa."

Dean stood up in panic, "Umm. I don't think I should let you go like that... I mean you are our prestigious guest, and I can send someone to bring it up..."

"Oh, please," Marissa raised her hand to stop him, "purse is something very private. I'd rather prefer to bring it myself."

Before Dean could say anything, she was out of that room. It was indeed Dean's attitude that was making it fishy, but she needed to talk to some employees to dig out about this company.

What if they were a mafia clan and were running an underground operational company?

"What is she doing?" Joseph saw Marissa leaving the room on his laptop screen and hissed. He was sitting on Rafael's chair while Rafael was standing behind him in agitation.

He wanted to meet Marissa at that very moment, but Joseph stopped him. He didn't want Rafael to expose himself before time.

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20 20—Brilliant Wife

It was very much necessary to build up the company's name and let her ease into it so that Marissa could trust them.

They couldn't afford to scare her off.

"I think Dean blew it up," Rafael balled his hands into fists and looked for something around him to punch hard, "J... just look at him. Why is he repeatedly looking at the camera? The other girl couldn't sense it. But... Marissa... I know her. She is intelligent. I think she is out to talk to someone... just to know about us."

"To know about what? She can't ask our employees... about our reputation..." Joseph trailed off in confusion and slowly a proud grin made its way to Rafael's lips.

"No. She won't ask our employees... because I taught her something else."

"Right now, it's best if we send them away," Joseph's focus moved to Rafael from the laptop screen, "If by any chance they find out your presence, then Marissa might..."

"This time she won't run away, Joseph," Rafael said with a smile, "She is no more my timid Marissa who used to trust me blindly. Now she is the owner of an upcoming business. She might not know it but the building she is standing in... she owns it as well. And I look..." Rafael pointed out to the screen where they could see Marissa talking to a woman, "She hasn't chosen a corporate woman or the receptionist. She is talking to the cleaning lady. My wife is so

brilliant.”

He could hear his words coming from the past:

“Always remember, Strawberry. If you feel some uneasiness around

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20 20- Brilliant Wife

you or *you* are doubtful about a *business* building, *never talk* to an *employee*. *Nopes*. That's a risk. *Always talk* to their lower staff. *They'll tell you better.*”

All the anxiety in Rafael's body seemed to have evaporated. His wife still remembered the lessons taught by him.

Now he needed to check if she still remembered him or not.

Comentario O

R

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