

156- Keeping Them On Their Toes

"Are you doing alright? Do you need anything?" Marissa heard Joseph's voice when she was resting back on the office couch.

She didn't dare to sit on Rafael's seat but enjoyed the shocked look on those women's faces.

Keeping her eyes closed, she smiled to herself. "What brings you here, Joseph?" "You just said if anyone wants to talk to you, they should approach you in the President's office. I liked your confidence," she could detect amusement in his voice.

"I hope you haven't told any of this to Rafael," she opened one eye to look at him who was taking another couch across from her.

"I did send him messages. Why? He should know what is going on in his office," he folded his arms behind his head to lean back.

"Yeah," Marissa straightened, "But someone told me to pull up my big girl panties and face the inevitable." Joseph clicked his tongue, "And who exactly is that?" "Guess who!" she winked, and Joseph took a sigh of relief. At least she was not as upset as he had thought. The woman was coping well.

He moved his head from side to side with a grin, "Must be a hell of a friend." "Yes. Sophia!" she offered him a faint smile and nodded.

"I see!" he sounded impressed, "your support system is ... commendable. I admire that." He got up lazily and saluted her, "If you want to talk about any of it..." He trailed off when she didn't let him finish, "Oh, I know where to find you. In your office. Right?" He flashed her a gentle smile and shook his head. "No. You don't need to approach me in my office. Just give me a call on the intercom and I'll be here," Marissa appeared taken aback by the offer, "Y- You'll come here?" "Of course," he raised his hands, "I know the story. We couldn't meet when you were living with Rafael. But he used to talk about you a lot when you left him," he hesitated, "Nobody knows here who you are except me. So, yes. I should be here for you. It's not the other way round." Marissa was visibly moved by this unexpected support.

"Oh, Joseph. I owe you a thanks..." she faltered when he gave her a confused look, "For taking care of my kids." "Yeah. Well! They are my nephews and nieces too," he said before turning on his heels to leave the office, "By the way," he looked over his shoulder, "Rafael hasn't received my messages. The place he is having this meeting has poor signals." Marissa remembered how Rafael had to walk out of the meeting to talk to her.

She opened her laptop and got busy with her work. The presentation thankfully went well, and she had seen the shocked faces of Nina and Valerie.

Rafael had told her that the Kanderton website wasn't open to the public. Then why were they here?

What did they want from her?

And then her brain responded to the question.

They wanted Rafael back! Back into their pockets Since childhood, she knew Valerie had been quite possessive about her stuff. She won't let go of Rafael this easily.

She could destroy her possessions, throw them away, or even discard them, but she would die before handing over anything to Marissa.

After hearing the knock, she raised her head from the laptop screen and found Dean standing in the doorway.

"Are you up for visiting a location? The owner just offered us to have a look," he shrugged, "I'll show you the email for approval." "Sure," she closed her laptop and stood up from the couch, "Who else is accompanying us?" She stretched her body to loosen up and tried to suppress a yawn. It was a long day.

"The ones you'll select will be allowed to go. They are waiting for you in the lobby." "Oh," she rubbed her neck tiredly, "Let's go then." She followed him to the lobby and found her teammates standing there, talking in hushed tones.

Delinda started making faces when their eyes met, but Marissa ignored her. Betrayers were not worth her time.

"So," she clasped her hands, "we have offers from multiple locations. What do you all suggest? Should we all visit the locations or divide ourselves into teams and those teams can visit the required place?" And how do you plan to decide about the teams?" Kate asked her.

Marissa thought for a moment, "A mural painter with a caterer and a chef. These three should be together for the visits." She wasn't paying attention to her surroundings but then almost froze when heard Valerie's voice behind her, "And an owner too." Marissa couldn't see her but was aware that there must be that usual cunning smile on her lips.

"Yeah. She is right. As an owner take her too," Marissa told her team with an easygoing smile. Nobody was expecting this from her.

"And what about me?" Nina who was also standing with Valerie walked around Marissa to face her. "She can go, and what about me? I'm also one of the owners." Marissa wanted to laugh at their faces. How to tell them that owners usually don't visit such sites?

They were usually expected to visit just once before the final deal. That too was quite rare if they had smart assistants.

"Sure. Take her too," she asked her colleagues but then stopped and eyed Kate, "Kate. You are supposed to lead them. Can you submit the report before you leave office?" Kate couldn't believe that Marissa was giving her this chance.

"Uh. Sure. I will!" she clapped in excitement and hugged Delinda who was standing there with a poker face.

Marissa walked away busily, winking at Dean.

"You are sending all the eggs together," he whispered while walking beside her, "They won't do their job without a fight." Marissa patted his shoulder, "I know. Don't worry. Our Katie girl will handle them well." Dean had admiration for her in his eyes. He didn't know if Marissa was a home wrecker or not. But there was definitely some backstabbery that he didn't know of.

He was born into a poor family and got this job because Joseph liked his witty answers in the interview.

But today the way Marissa handled these two ladies, he couldn't help but think that she was a born leader and knew how to do her job.

She might not have the perfect qualifications or a perfect degree, but her skills were enough to prove her worth.

He could still remember the way her panicked phone call got to him. She almost pleaded with him to talk to some doctor. Not because of her kids but for Delinda's son.

He wasn't blind and knew Delinda was acting odd around her.

He wasn't blind and could see how Valere and Nina were treating her.

If she was a third woman, they could have handled it more decently. After all, they were elites.

But sadly, the women in Rafael's family didn't seem like a decent lot. Who fights like this for power?

"Are we going in a van?" Delinda's voice pulled him out of his thoughts. She took out a chewing gum pack from her purse and offered it to him, but he declined.

"Ah. No. Office cars will take you all," "See? I'm ready?" Kate walked over to them, and anyone could notice that she had refreshed her makeup, "Should we go, Delinda?" Delinda hesitated and then reached out to hold her hand, "Sure, Kate." "Which cars are you talking about?" Nina Sinclair asked him, "Official cars aren't allowed in MSin for any employee. What? remember is, that MSin follows a certain protocol. Send them in a van. While I can travel by car." She cocked up a brow and ran her fingers through her hair.

"I'd like to go by car too," Valerie commanded Dean. Kate and Delinda didn't seem to like Nina's suggestion, but they didn't say anything.

After all, they were Rafael's mom and wife. They couldn't go against the ladies of the Sinclair family.

"Here is the copy of their email." Nobody saw Marissa joining back the group, "Just show this to the organizer and he will let you in." Valerie reached out to grab the envelope from Marissa's hand, but she was quick to pull her hand away. "Ahan. It's for Kate." Kate's face was radiating. She was at last being acknowledged. She still needed to find that policeman, John Harris though.

Valerie felt embarrassed when she missed it and huffed in frustration, "Isn't it Dean's job to hand over the email verifications?" "Yes, it is," Marissa said with a mocking tone, "But the email needed my signatures. Otherwise, the organizers won't allow you people in that venue hall." She wanted to laugh hard when saw Valerie making faces.

"Dean, next time you need to get the documents signed by me," Nina ordered Dean and then walked to the VIP elevator.

Valerie glared at her mother-in-law. She was feeling like an insect just because she didn't own any shares in her husband's company.

After a few minutes, there was silence on the floor as most of them had left for the location visit.

"What were you even thinking?" Dean asked Marissa. He seemed to be awe.

"What?" Marissa tried to shrug it off, but her eyes had a certain twinkle in them.

"Come on, Marissa. We both know that the email didn't need any signatures!" Marissa tried to chew her lower lip.

Dean was damn right. But why should she miss the opportunity to remind them of the authority, she held in their presence?

After all, it's not every day, one gets to remind people who's really in-charge while keeping them on their toes.^{uWw}

157157- Discussion Stage Kate was more than happy today. She was not only given the charge to decide on the venue for the big event but alsoMSin management sent them in a car despite Nina asking them to arrange a van.

When she entered the hall, her heels were clicking against the slippery floor. Delinda, Shang Chi, and Peter followed her inside.

It was a grand hall, and the décor was just stunning.

"I don't think we can find a better place than this," she told the folks standing behind her, "I need to see if they are ready to change the décor color scheme." She looked up to see the crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling." Gorgeous!" she heard Delinda behind her.

"Isn't it?" Kate looked around at the elegant drapes adding class to the place.

A middle-aged man approached the group with a warm smile, "Good afternoon, Ms. Kate. I'm Jeremiah, the manager here. Please tell me. How can I assist you?" Kate extended her hand for a firm handshake and returned his smile, "Good afternoon, Jeremiah. We are here to inspect the venue and discuss its availability for our special official event." "Oh, yes," Jeremiah clasped his hands in excitement, "We have heard a lot about this event through media news," "Believe me, The media is telling you nothing, Jeremiah," Kate leaned forward and gestured broadly with her hands, "It will be something larger than life and we are quite particular about space and ambiance." James nodded, signaling for them to follow him, "Sure, Ms. Kate. Allow me to give you a detailed tour and I'm here to answer any questions you might have in your mind." As they were walking through the hall, their eyes were busy observing the place. The natural light was streaming through the large windows.

"This is quite impressive," Peter remarked ^W

Kate nodded and turned to Mr. Jeremiah, "What is the maximum capacity of a seated dinner here?" The manager paused considering her question, "For a seated dinner, we can comfortably accommodate up to seven hundred guests. If you're reconsidering a standing event, we can easily handle around a thousand." Kate fished through her purse and took out her phone, maybe to jot down something, "What about the availability? Because we are planning for a nice cozy evening dinner but with a touch of formality." Jeremiah led the group to the corner of the hall where a detailed calendar was displayed on a tablet, "See. Before sending you the invitation, we made sure to keep it empty in the tentative dates." Kate made a note on the memo pad of her phone to talk to Marissa about the confirmation of dates.

"Mr. Jeremiah. Our guests might be a thousand but all of them will be VIPs. They are expected to bring their plus ones too. So, I don't think this hall..." she trailed off with a shrug.

Mr. Jeremiah knew what she was going to say.

"Ms. Kate. We are the only ones in Kanderton who own multiple halls and can accommodate this many guests easily," he said with a smile.

Kate glanced around, her brows furrowing slightly, "B... but you just said that the hall can hold only a thousand..." Jeremiah's smile widened as he motioned to a false wall, "There is another adjoining hall that can be opened for the guests. We can easily remove these false walls and combine the two halls." "Whoa!" she chuckled, "you have solved our problem, I guess." Mr. Jeremiah looked genuinely pleased about it.

Kate turned around and waved at Peter to come forward, "Hey, mural artist. Ask him where they can accommodate your art." She threw her arm around him when he came to stand beside her, "Mr. Jeremiah. Meet our mural artist, Peter. We will be needing false walls where he can display his art." Mr. Jeremiah thought for a moment and then pointed to a large space near the entrance, "He can start there, and then as an artist, if he would suggest some other spots, we can arrange that for him." Peter was planning to start his job on the false walls so that they could be mounted later on the venue, "Once our booking is confirmed, I might drop by to get the measurements." "We'll be honored to help you, Mr. Peter," Mr. Jeremiah placed his palm on his chest.

Kate nodded thoughtfully, scanning the place, "He is right Peter. The entrance will draw the most attention." Just as they were about to move to the next section of the hall, the double doors swung open, and Nina and Valerie stormed in.

Their faces showed irritation and frustration. Thankfully they were without their assistants.

"Kate!" Nina's voice rang out, echoing through the hall. For a minute, Delinda wanted to cover her ears, "Why on earth, didn't you wait for me before making these decisions?" Valerie also decided to chime in, her tone was equally insulting, "You didn't even wait for me and started the discussions!" she then turned to Mr. Jeremiah, "And you, mister. Who asked you to start talking business without our presence?" Poor Mr. Jeremiah didn't know what this was all about.

"I'm sorry ma'am!" he fixed his tie with a nervous smile, "May I know who you are?" Nina frowned and then got closer to the man, "Seriously. When your clients visit you, don't you do some homework on them? I'm Nina. Nina Sinclair. The President of MSin Industries is my son!" The younger woman who was a blonde also got closer to Jeremiah, "And I'm his wife," She said with a smirk.

Jeremiah gave a secret look to Kate who was just digging the tiled floor with the tip of her sandal. Jeremiah wanted to stop her.

He loved being the manager of this place and didn't want a mark on the tiled floor. Especially when it just got polished for his visit.

"Ma'am. The email response, I received.

It had Ms. Kate's name on it. So officially I'll be dealing with her." Kate at last quit harming the floor and moved her focus to Sinclair women, "Come on, Mrs. Sinclair and Mrs. Sinclair," she rolled her eyes, "I didn't finalize anything. Everything is just in the discussion stage. Gosh!" 158158- Let's Focus On Marissa Aaron "Stop rolling your eyes at me!" Nina snarled and this time Kate thought that she might get murdered by this woman.

She had just gotten a chance to prove herself as a leader, but she didn't want to lose her life after this venue decision.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Sinclair," She hurriedly apologized but inside, she was fuming.

Valerie had crossed her arms, "This isn't the point. We just want to be included in every decision. You might be heading it but I'm sure you don't know a thing about class." Mr. Jeremiah raised his brow and then stepped back, "I think it's more like a family feud. Sorry, Ms. Kate. I thought you people were professionals." Kate didn't know what to say, "No, Mr. Jeremiah. I also wanted to discuss the position of food tables as we were planning to serve different culturally induced food by multiple chefs. J- just let me handle this and I'll make sure to get back to you in a minute." Jeremiah bowed his head and left the spot.

She sighed and turned to look at the two women who were trying so hard to become the owner and take charge.

She thought for a minute and then gave them an over-brightened smile, showing them her phone, "Excuse me. I need to take this call. It's on silent mode. Sorry." She then walked away and hurriedly dialed Marissa's number. Thankfully she picked up the phone at the first ring.

"Hey! How did it go?" she asked.

Kate looked behind her, "I... I don't know, man. It was going good until they stepped in the middle of it," She said placing her hand on her forehead.

"Ok, Kate. Now listen to me," she heard Marissa's gentle voice, "Right now. You are the boss. Take the lead. I repeat. Take the lead but no need to fight them. As a head, I need to see how you can handle the situation." As a head?

As a head?

The words were surely calming her nerves. Marissa was really taking her as a head? Then she needed to prove herself to her.

"OK. I'll try, Marissa." "Good. Just don't forget. No matter what they decide. We'll go with your decision," Marissa assured her.

Oh wow! How will it feel when Mr. Sinclair won't agree with Nina or Valerie but will favor me?

"Thanks. I'll keep that in mind," she disconnected the call and returned to the small group where Delinda and Shang Chi were again witnessing the drama.

"Delinda," she called her name loudly and then announced, "Please come here. They are family. Let them talk in peace." The two women were so busy in the arguments that they didn't realize, the staff of MSin had walked away.

"Delinda. Shang chi," Kate whispered to them, "I have decided for my table to be placed near that wall. Decide your place so that we can talk to Mr. Jeremiah." Peter nodded at her, "She is right. Just decide that table place so that we can walk out of here. I'm getting sick of these ladies." Mr. Jeremiah was all sweet about it. He showed them the places where their tables could be arranged and caught the eyes of the guests.

"What about Kate's table?" Shang Chi asked her, but she shrugged, "She can decide later, Shang. Right now, we need to discuss all the points so that I can present a detailed report to Marissa before going home." "Till a few days back you didn't even want to spend any time with my son, Valerie. You weren't ready to even listen about Kanderton and now look at you!" Nina raised her hand to point it to her, "Now due to some fucking reason, you are here and want to rule MSin Industries. What's the catch here? What am I missing?" "Oh, come on, Nina!" Valerie stole a glance at the small group that was now walking out, "He is my husband and spouses do fight. They drift apart too. What I don't understand is... what are you doing here? Don't you have a business to run, back home? If I'm not wrong, you have a fashion week coming up soon. Then what brought you to Kanderton?" "Watch out your tongue, smart mouth! Stop comparing yourself to me. I'm his mom!" Nina hissed.

"And I'm his wife, Nina! For God's sake!" she pursed her lips in annoyance, "I'm sure the doctor must have cut the umbilical cord when he was born. Or is it still attached?" "You petty little thing! How dare you!" Nina got ahead to hit her face but then stopped when she heard hushed sounds nearby.

The group that had left them alone in the name of privacy was whispering something to each other.

The woman Kate was telling something to the other people but then she went still when their eyes met.

"Hi... hello, ma'am. I mean... we thought that maybe we should go home as... we think we can come later..." "Yeah..." the man whose name was Shang Chi gave them a cute, dimpled smile, "We came here this late." They almost raced to the exit door and left. Nina could easily hear their giggling sounds.

"Should I ask someone to bring you coffee, ma'am?" The manager asked them, "As you two are Sinclair women, you both deserve a good coffee." He might be serious, but Nina didn't miss the sarcasm in his tone.

"No, thanks." She started walking away to the exit door.

"Where do you think you are going?" Valerie ran after her, "I'm not done with you, Nina. This is getting too much now." Once outside, Nina didn't approach the car that had brought her there.

"Are you even listening to what I'm trying to say, Nina?" Valerie raised her voice when saw Nina standing there like she was dozing off.

"Did you see them walking out?" Nina asked her and before Valerie could open her mouth, Nina spoke, "They were pretending like they couldn't finish their job but actually, they have already talked to that manager and finalized everything." "B... but... umm..." Valerie didn't know what to say.

"Do you know this manager was just making fun of us when that serious tone, Valerie?" This time Valerie didn't try to speak.

"Valerie. They are doing it because we both are not on the same page." This time Valerie's eyes snapped up to Nina's face, "Excuse me. What?" "Yes," Nina nodded, "For Marissa, we need to be on the same page, Valerie, if we want to defeat her." "Nina... are you suggesting..." Valerie trailed off when saw Nina nodding her head.

"We need to put aside our differences, Valerie. If we need to kick Marissa out of our lives and out of Rafael's life, then we need to work together. Like last time..." After saying that Nina offered her hand to her.

"Whether we accept it or not. We still need each other. Geena and Ethan can wait but before that Marissa needs to go out," Valerie kept observing Nina's face. Maybe she was right.

If she wanted Marissa out, then they needed to plan it together. Because the Marissa she had met earlier was not the same one who left Sangua five years ago. [@]

This woman was someone else.

Valerie sighed and then placed her hand on the outstretched hand of Nina.

"Fine! I am in!" Nina smiled and squeezed her hand, "Let's tell her who we really are, Valerie. Let's focus on Marissa Aaron for now."^{wWw}

"I see"