

## **Pursuing 551**

### **Chapter 551**

"What are you laughing at?" Tristan asked. Did I say something wrong? She's amazing, isn't she?

"All right, all right. You don't have to argue with your father over me. I don't like that. I'll prove to the world that I'm the only one qualified to stand alongside you at the top," Sophie said. No one can do that except me.

"You don't have to prove to anyone!" Tristan responded.

He believed it would be impossible to win certain people over, no matter hard they tried to prove themselves.

"I know, but I want to make you happy," Sophie said, as she believed Tristan would be just as upset if his father disapproved of her.

"Having you by my side is enough to make me happy," Tristan assured her. We don't need to pay attention to how others feel about us as long as we're together.

Upon hearing that, Sophie quipped, "I bet people will be surprised if they find out how easily satisfied Mr. Tristan is."

"Is that so? I beg to differ. Meeting you was a miracle, to begin with. It doesn't mean I'm easily satisfied," he explained. If finding a soulmate was as easy as she thought, she wouldn't have waited for one to appear for so long, right?

"Thank you for doing the things you did for me, Mr. Tristan." Sophie was touched by how serious the man was. He always does things for her without expecting anything in return.

Tristan replied, "You don't have to say this. I'm happy to do them for you."

Sophie hummed in response.

In the blink of an eye, it was time to celebrate William's eightieth birthday.

Many guests would be coming to congratulate him since it was his milestone birthday.

To William, it was a significant occasion.

Early morning, Lincoln and Sarah had started preparing for the celebration in the house.

The birthday celebration would be held in the Lombard residence, and all the wealthy and influential guests were invited.

As the host, the Lombards were committed to making this event a success.

"We're about to celebrate Dad's birthday, but Tristan is still not back. I can turn a blind eye to the commotion he caused, but by hook or by crook, we must get him to come tonight," Lincoln said. I don't want the Lombards to be made a laughingstock in Yaleview.

Sarah felt helpless. "It's not that easy. You should know how stubborn Tristan is."

"You're to be blamed for his stubbornness since you always spoiled him," Lincoln expressed his disdain. He felt Sarah had always pampered Tristan because he was the youngest of them all.

"Lincoln, I don't like how you point the finger at me. What do you mean by I spoiled him? Talk about the pot calling the kettle black," Sarah sneered. Lincoln and Sarah had always pampered Tristan since they grew up without a mother.

"You're right. It's partly my fault, too," Lincoln admitted.

Ysabelle overheard their conversation when she was coming downstairs. "Dad, Aunt Sarah."

"Ysabelle, give your uncle a call and ask him to come over as soon as possible. The guests are arriving soon, yet he's still not here. This is too much," Lincoln ordered.

"I don't dare to call him. Grandpa and Uncle Tristan are at war right now, and I don't want to be caught between a rock and a hard place," Ysabelle said after sticking her tongue out. I'll be dead if I accidentally offend any of them!

"How could you say something like that? You better put a guard on your tongue. All the guests will be watching you." Lincoln did not want the Lombards to make a fool of themselves in front of all the distinguished guests.

Yet, Ysabelle still refused to call Tristan. "Calm down. Uncle Tristan will turn up for sure."

She believed he would even bring Sophie along.

Meanwhile, Jennifer had arrived. "Hey, Sarah! Lincoln! Ysabelle!"

"You're early." Ysabelle was not pleased to see Jennifer.

Upon hearing that, Jennifer responded with a gentle grin.

"I came early to see if you guys need help. I hope to do something for Old Mr. Lombard since he has always treated me well," she said.

Yet, no one knew what was on her mind. Perhaps, she just wanted everyone to know she was the apple of William's eye.

Lincoln said nothing in response and left to attend to other matters.

Sarah was not a big fan of Jennifer either. She thinks she could climb her way up to the top just because she managed to get in Dad's good books? Dream on.

Likewise, Ysabelle decided not to be a people pleaser anymore.

She walked up to Sarah and said, "I'll go out and check if Uncle Tristan is here. Since it's a grand celebration, I bet he'll bring Sophie along."

Sarah hummed in acknowledgment. "All right."

The two ladies then carried on with the preparation, leaving Jennifer alone and feeling sorry for herself.

Soon, Tristan returned home, but he came alone. Ysabelle could not help but feel a tad disappointed. After glancing around for a few seconds, she asked, "Uncle Tristan, why did you come back alone?"

Where's Sophie? Why didn't she come with you?"

Ysabelle could not believe Sophie had missed such an important occasion.

"She has other matters to attend to now, but she'll be here," Tristan responded. Sophie is a public figure now. She can't just do anything on a whim.

He added, "Also, you should mind your own business."

"Okay. Got it." Ysabelle returned to her room when she learned that Sophie would be coming.

She would only come down once Sophie arrived, as she had no intention of entertaining the other guests.

Meanwhile, Jennifer was glad to see Tristan. She was even more excited when she saw him walk in alone.

"Mr. Tristan, I'm alone too. I can be your plus-one if you don't have one." Jennifer was not afraid to speak her mind.

Tristan did not bother to look at her. Is that what she has been thinking of? What a joker.

"No, thank you. I don't need a plus-one!" Tristan outright rejected her.

He had always been harsh with that woman, but somehow, she kept expressing interest in him. What is wrong with her? Is she even in the right mind?

Jennifer froze right there as his response rendered her speechless. She was an articulate speaker, but when she was with Tristan, she always ran out of things to say.

"Mr. Tristan, I've never done anything bad to you. Why do you always give me the cold shoulder?" Jennifer questioned him. Besides coming from a prominent family, I also have an impressive educational background, but why does he still treat me like this?

Tristan stopped in his tracks and turned around to look at her.

"Jennifer, you think you're an all-rounder, right? So what if you're a perfect all-rounder? A trophy wife is the last thing I want in my life!" After saying that, Tristan walked away and went upstairs.

Jennifer did not catch up to him because she dared not intrude on the Lombard family's private area.

It was hard for her to believe that Tristan did not like his partner to be a perfect individual. Does that mean he likes all of Sophie's imperfections? But why Sophie? What is so good about her?

Jennifer stood still, thinking of ways to embarrass Sophie. She better doesn't appear tonight. If she does, I'll teach her a lesson. She needs to know she doesn't belong here.

Meanwhile, William went to look for Tristan when he knew he was back. "Where's Sophie?"

William thought Tristan would bring Sophie home since he was so protective of her.

"Didn't you say you didn't like her? You want me to bring her here so you can humiliate her?" Tristan snickered.

William took offense at his sarcastic tone.

"Today is my birthday, Tristan. Must you drive me mad?" William's temper was about to flare.

Tristan responded with a grin. "Of course not, Dad. I want you to live a long life, and I hope everything you wish will come true."

"Do you mean what you just said? If you do, I want you to break up with Sophie. You can have any woman, but Sophie is not a good match for you. You're way out of her league," William uttered. I'll not allow my son to entertain a woman like Sophie.

"Break up?"

"That's right. You said you hoped everything I wish would come true, right? So far, life has been treating me well, but the only thing that bothers me is you and Sophie. If you want me to live a happy life, break up with her!"

"I'm afraid that you might not get what you want. It took me a while to win her heart. What makes you think I'll give her up so easily?" Tristan said. I'll never let her go.

"You—" William knew convincing Tristan would not be the easiest thing in the world.

Tristan cut in and continued, "You should avoid seeing me since my presence upsets you all the time. By the way, Sophie will be coming later!"

"You—" William was about to explode in rage. He knows I dislike Sophie, yet, he still invited her over. He's just trying to get on my nerves!

"You have a problem with that? She's my girlfriend, so she should be here to celebrate your birthday. Isn't that how things work?" Tristan refused to give in.

"Fine! Do what you want!" William left in a huff.

The celebration was about to start, but Sophie still had not arrived. Her absence had put a smirk on Jennifer's face.

"Why are you smiling, Jennifer?" Jennifer's best friend, who was also one of the guests, could not help but ask upon noticing the grin on her face. "Did you and Tristan make good progress?"

Everyone knew how obsessed Jennifer was with Tristan. Only Tristan could uplift her spirits like that.

"What progress are you talking about? Don't spout nonsense," Jennifer replied. She wished she could take her relationship with Tristan to the next level, but his indifferent attitude had constantly dampened her spirit. At this point, she did not know what else she could do anymore.

"You look pretty today, and Mr. Tristan is here. You must seize the opportunity to win his heart!"

Jennifer flashed a gloating grin. She's right. I have the looks and impressive family background, so I'm the best match for Mr. Tristan. Sophie doesn't deserve him in the first place. She should end the relationship and see herself out!

While Jennifer was absorbed in thought, Sophie arrived in a red dress. The exquisite makeup and braided hair made her look like an elegant woman who had just sashayed out of a painting.

Her presence immediately captured all the guests' attention. They started chattering with themselves when they saw the belle, whom they had met for the first time. "Who is this lady? She's gorgeous!"

"I know, right? No amount of plastic surgery can recreate such beauty! And it's obvious she's a natural beauty!" another guest echoed. She's different from those celebrities who constantly go under the knife to enhance their looks!

"Not forgetting the elegance she exudes! How stunning!" someone else added.

Jennifer's face turned grim when she heard those remarks. Never in a million years did she think Sophie would show up.

To make things worse, the woman had stolen the limelight. All the guests, be they men or women, were captivated by her extraordinary beauty.

Their reactions irritated Jennifer even more.

"What's wrong?" her friend asked when she noticed the disdain on her face. "Are you bothered by that woman?"

She noticed something amiss about Jennifer the moment Sophie entered the building.

"Yes. She annoys me," Jennifer replied.

The friend only understood why Jennifer was upset when Tristan came downstairs to welcome Sophie.

"Isn't she the girl from the charity dinner? I'm surprised how gorgeous she looks after putting on a dress like that." She, too, was in awe of Sophie's beauty.

Jennifer instantly expressed her dismay. "So what if she's born pretty? What's the big deal?"

Sophie's presence had gotten under her skin. I'm supposed to be the center of attention, but she came in and stole my thunder! I bet everyone must be making fun of me now!

Jennifer walked over and stood in front of Tristan and Sophie. "Mr. Tristan, are you sure bringing her here is a good idea? You're going to upset Old Mr. Lombard since we're celebrating his birthday today."



"You should mind your own business, Ms. Whitley." A line formed between Tristan's brows. How dare she question me?

Jennifer responded, "I just don't want you to go against your father because of this woman."

Sophie could not help but chuckle upon hearing that. "Is that really your only concern? I think you want me gone so you can take my place. But what if I refuse? What can you do?"

Sophie tackled her head-on. How can I stand there and do nothing when a woman is trying to steal my man?

After holding Tristan's arm, Sophie continued, "Let me make this clear—stop dreaming of taking my place because I won't budge." No one can steal anything from me!

Jennifer could only clench her teeth, as there was nothing she could do.

Tristan, too, cast a glance at Sophie. Once again, he was so spellbound by her charm that he would even set a house on fire if she told him to.

Anyone would be envious of the love Tristan had for Sophie.

When the celebration was about to begin, William came downstairs.

Upon noticing how eye-catching Sophie and her dress were, he could not help but knit his brows. How dare Tristan bring her here? He doesn't care about my feelings at all.

Sophie's presence might have made Jennifer uncomfortable, but the latter knew it was not the right time and place to make a scene.

Jennifer knew William wanted a meek and obedient daughter-in-law, so all she needed to do was to get in his good books. I'll take one step at a time. The rest can wait.

All the guests noticed how Tristan looked out for Sophie. It was as if she was the most precious thing in the world to him.

On the other hand, Jennifer kept William company while he introduced her to his connections.

Ysabelle finally got a chance to approach Sophie. "Sophie, let's go and grab something to eat. What would you like? This celebration is so boring."

Though everything that was going on was uninviting, they had no choice but to hang in there.

"I'm quite full now since I ate something before I came," Sophie replied.

She felt eating at the event would draw too much unnecessary attention from the crowd. Now that they know I'm Tristan's girlfriend, they'll probably observe my every move. I don't think I can enjoy dinner under their watchful eyes.

"Hey, look." Ysabelle pointed at Jennifer. "Don't you find her annoying? She interacts with the guests like she's one of the Lombards. Argh!"

## Chapter 553

Why are you paying so much attention to someone who has nothing to do with us?"

"You do know she came here because of Uncle Tristan, right? Doesn't that bother you at all?"

"In case you haven't noticed, Tristan hasn't even looked at her. She isn't worthy of my concern."

I'd be upset if Tristan were to choose another woman over me, but I wouldn't shamelessly cling to him either. I'm not that pathetic!

Ysabelle couldn't help but admire Sophie's relationship with Tristan. "Yeah, you're right. Uncle Tristan only has eyes for you, so he would never fall for another woman. Sophie, don't you find your relationship with Uncle Tristan a little boring? I mean, I haven't seen you two fight over anything!"

The two of them trusted each other so much that they never had any issues with each other.

"Isn't that a good thing? Do you want us to keep fighting until we break up instead?" Sophie believed that two people who liked each other should just focus on being together instead of worrying about irrelevant stuff.

Ysabelle nodded in agreement. "Yeah, you're right. If two people like each other, then they should focus on strengthening their relationship instead of fighting over trivial matters."

"Is Felix treating you well?" Sophie had been so busy that she never got the chance to ask her about that.

Ysabelle broke into a sweet smile when she heard that.

"He has been really nice to me."

"Now do you realize how much you like him?"

"Yeah, I do. I think we'll be staying together forever!" Although the two of them had only been dating for a while, she was already thinking about that.

"That's good to hear. Felix is really nice to you, so you mustn't bully him anymore, okay?"

"I don't think I've been bullying him, have I?"

Those words had barely left her mouth when Felix came walking over. He would always be nearby as he wanted to spend as much time around Ysabelle as possible.

If he could, he probably would keep Ysabelle in his pocket so he could bring her along wherever he went.

"Ugh... Aren't you lovebirds being a little too attached to each other?" Charles exclaimed.

"You're just being jealous, Charles! Not having a girlfriend really sucks, huh?" Felix retorted without even looking at him.

I've had enough of this guy! I want to wipe that smug look off his face!

Charles ran up to Sean and grabbed him by the arm as he said, "Look, Sean! He's bullying me! It's just you and me now, so we need to stick together. We need to do something about them!"

Sean pushed him aside and shot him a disdainful glare as he said, "F\*ck off!"

Sean had disgust written all over his face.

"You can't treat me like this, Sean! Are you going to leave me too?" Charles protested. Sean is single, too, so he has no right to criticize me!

Disgusted by Charles' unreasonable behavior, Sean decided to ignore him completely.

Although Sophie rarely took part in their conversations, she never had issues interacting with them.

"Sophie sure is something else, huh? I mean, just look at Sean and Charles. They don't care about anybody else's feelings, but they're always looking out for her!" said one of Jennifer's friends.

Some women were bound to become the center of attraction wherever they went.

Naturally, that would cause many to be jealous of them.

Sophie was a great example of those women.

"They're only looking after her because of Tristan. Sophie would never make it into their circle if it weren't for him."

That's right! Sophie only got this far in life because of Tristan!

"Yeah, you're right. She's nothing without Mr. Tristan! Honestly, I think you should just give up on him, Jennifer. Mr. Tristan won't notice anyone else with Sophie around!" Minerva said.

She believed there was no point in pestering Tristan any further if he wouldn't even look at any other women.

If anything, Jennifer would only get herself hurt in the end.

"What are you saying, Minerva? I won't give up on Tristan! You're my friend, so you should be supporting me instead!" Jennifer exclaimed in displeasure.

"What do you want me to do?" Minerva asked.

Jennifer motioned at Minerva to come closer as she whispered something in the latter's ear.

Minerva gasped in shock after hearing what she said. "I don't know if this is a good idea, Jennifer. Mr. Tristan really likes Sophie, so we might get into a lot of trouble if we do this."

Despite being Jennifer's best friend, Minerva was still very scared of Tristan.

"Are you sure you're my friend? I helped you out when you had a crush on that guy back then, and you won't even lend me a hand now?" Jennifer protested.

How dare she refuse to help me out?

Minerva glanced at Sophie before nodding hesitantly in response.

"All right, I'll help you out."

Jennifer has always helped me with all my problems, so I can't turn her down now! Still, Sophie doesn't seem like an easy target. Is Jennifer's plan really going to work? Will we really be able to humiliate Sophie?

"Trust me; it's going to work. Tristan won't like her anymore once we show him who she truly is!" Jennifer reassured her.

Minerva was still doubtful about the plan, but she knew Jennifer wouldn't listen to her advice at this point.

Sophie was starting to get annoyed at the amount of unwanted attention she was receiving.

Noticing her discomfort, Tristan decided to get her out of there.

"Why don't you go rest in my room for a bit? You haven't seen what it looks like, right?" he suggested.

"Everyone's gathered here, though. Given the occasion, I don't think it'd be appropriate for me to go to your room all by myself."

Sophie figured William would get even angrier if she hid in Tristan's room.

"I told you, you don't need to worry about what others think. Just get some rest if you're feeling tired. If anyone dares speak ill of you, I'll cut their tongues off to silence them forever!" Tristan reassured her. She's my woman, so she can do whatever she wants. I won't let anyone get away with badmouthing her!

"I don't care what others think, but this is your father we're talking about. Besides, it's his birthday celebration, so we should at least show him some respect!" Sophie didn't want to make William mad on his birthday.

Since she was practically stealing Tristan from William, she didn't want to worsen the situation by making William hate her even further.

"In that case, you can rest in Ysabelle's room instead."

"What's the matter, Sophie? Are you feeling unwell?" Ysabelle asked worriedly.

"I'm fine." Sophie wasn't actually feeling unwell. She just didn't like being in crowded places where she would receive a lot of unwanted attention.

Meanwhile, Jennifer continued to take care of things at the party as though she was a member of the Lombard family. As if that wasn't bad enough, William's attitude toward her also gave everyone the wrong impression.

## Chapter 554

William even mentioned Jennifer a lot while delivering his speech.

Anyone who could read between the lines would know that he was very satisfied with Jennifer and wanted her as his daughter-in-law.

Naturally, Jennifer was overjoyed when she heard William declaring his approval of her.

Minerva shook her head when she saw the gleeful smile on Jennifer's face.

"I know you don't like to hear me say this, Jennifer, but winning Old Mr. Lombard's heart over doesn't mean anything unless Mr. Tristan likes you."

However, her advice fell on deaf ears as Jennifer couldn't care less about that.

"I'll be able to keep making progress with Tristan as long as I have Old Mr. Lombard's support."

I'll be sure to show Tristan that Sophie isn't worthy of being with him!

Those who heard William's words understood full well what he meant and were staring at Sophie with mocking looks in their eyes.

When it was time to present the gifts, Jennifer presented William with a very beautiful diamond. It was a one-of-a-kind item that couldn't be purchased anywhere.

Sure enough, William was very pleased with how much effort she had put into the gift.

"Thank you very much for this wonderful gift, Jennifer. I don't think anyone else cares this much about me, so I really hope you will be a part of this family."

Jennifer simply kept quiet and flashed him a gentle smile in response.

"See? Old Mr. Lombard really likes Jennifer! It looks like she has completely won his heart over!"

"Exactly! Given Sophie's reputation, I doubt she'd even qualify to marry into a wealthy family, let alone the Lombard family! Mr. Tristan is probably just fooling around with her or something. There's no way he'll ever marry her!"

"I know, right? Still, she does look quite pretty, though. Maybe I could try to—"

That man was halfway through his sentence when Tristan grabbed him by the throat, shocking everyone else around them.

How dare he talk about Sophie like that?



"What are you doing, Mr. Tristan? I was just making a joke! You—"

Tristan cut him off by increasing the pressure on his throat. The man felt like he was going to have his windpipe crushed at any second.

Jennifer quickly ran up to him and said, "What are you doing, Tristan? We're celebrating Old Mr. Lombard's birthday! You wouldn't want to kill someone at his birthday party, would you?"

However, Tristan ignored her completely as he said, "Who do you think you are, huh? How dare you badmouth my girlfriend in front of me? You are in no position to judge Sophie at all!"

Tristan then turned toward his subordinates and ordered, "Throw him out and terminate all of his business partnerships with the Lombard family!"

Jennifer went pale when she saw his response.

"Mr. Tristan, what are you—"

"You'd better shut your mouth, Ms. Whitley! You should know better than anyone else than to go around acting like you're a part of the Lombard family!" Tristan cut her off angrily.

Jennifer fell silent from shock after hearing what he said.

Wait... What does he mean by that?

"Tristan! There are tons of guests at this party! Are you going to rip all of their tongues out as well?" William yelled furiously at him.

This is exactly why I hate Sophie! As excellent as she may be today, nothing she does will ever change her past!

With that in mind, William shot Sophie a glare.

The latter simply stared back at him without flinching.

Tristan walked up to Sophie and wrapped an arm around her waist as he announced, "I will only say this once. Sophie is the only woman I will ever marry. Those who dare badmouth her shall suffer my wrath!"

He loved Sophie so much that he would do anything to protect her from harm.

I will become her strongest pillar of support! I won't let anyone harm her as long as I'm alive!

"Tristan!" William was fuming, but Tristan ignored him completely.

Jennifer quickly rushed to his side to comfort him, "Please don't get angry, Old Mr. Lombard. It's your birthday celebration, after all."

William shot Sophie yet another disdainful glare.

This woman is nothing but trouble! Tristan has changed completely after dating her! A man cannot have a weakness, or his enemies will exploit it to get at him! Sophie is clearly going to become his weakness, so I cannot allow them to be together! I will not let anyone become my son's weakness!

Sophie held Tristan's hand as she asked, "Why are you getting so worked up? You told me not to worry about what others say, didn't you?"

Well, I bet Jennifer is having a blast right now!

For some reason, Tristan's anger subsided the moment he heard her voice.

"It's true that we shouldn't mind what others say, but I won't allow anyone to badmouth you on such a special occasion!"

I have what it takes to protect Sophie, so I will make sure to do so with everything I've got!

Ysabelle couldn't help but admire the treatment Sophie was receiving as she watched from the side.

"Hey, Felix! Isn't Uncle Tristan just charming?" She liked how Tristan would always take Sophie's side no matter what anyone else said.

"Eh, he's all right! I think I'm a little better than him, though!" As a fellow man, Felix had to admit that Tristan was very charming when he protected Sophie.

Sophie didn't come to William's birthday party empty-handed, but it didn't seem like William would want to receive her gift.

"Are you okay, Sophie?" Ysabelle asked worriedly.

No woman would possibly be okay with having their reputation dragged through the mud! There was nothing Sophie could've done about her past!

"I'm fine!" Sophie replied as the butler presented the gift that she had prepared.

William didn't seem the least bit interested in her gift.

Right as he was about to set it aside, Minerva quickly stepped forward and said out loud, "I wonder what Ms. Tanner got Old Mr. Lombard!"

"Exactly! Old Mr. Lombard has everything money could buy, so I doubt her gift will be able to impress him at all! Well, given the Tanner family's capabilities, we shouldn't expect much out of her gift!" someone in the crowd chimed in as well.

"There's no need to open it. Just put it away!" William ordered.

"Old Mr. Lombard, I think you should at least take a look at her gift. Ms. Tanner would be upset if you let her efforts go to waste like that!" Jennifer said.

"That's right! You should take a look at it, Old Mr. Lombard! Who knows? It might just be something out of this world!" someone said sarcastically.

The look in Tristan's eyes grew icy-cold when he heard that.

I want to tear all these people a new one, but doing so will only make things worse for Sophie...

Ysabelle walked up to Sophie and took her hand as she said, "Ignore them, Sophie! They're clearly just jealous of you!"

Tristan made a mental note of those who made fun of Sophie so he could punish them later on.

Chapter 555

"Fine. Since you're all so interested in Ms. Tanner's gift, I shall open it and have a look."

William wasn't interested in Sophie's gift, but he didn't want to disappoint his guests.

Tristan narrowed his eyes as he observed everyone's reactions.

They're all waiting to laugh at Sophie!

The butler had no choice but to do as told and unwrap the gift.

Everyone burst out laughing when they saw what it was.

What the... Does Sophie not have any common sense? It's fine if she chooses to gift Old Mr. Lombard something cheap, but why would she get him a counterfeit?

"We know that Tanner Group isn't exactly a huge company, but you should at least gift Old Mr. Lombard something authentic! Do you really think we're all so stupid that we can't tell it's a fake?" Minerva taunted her.

"I think you need to go out and see the world so you wouldn't be so ignorant! You have no idea what you're talking about!" Sophie snapped back at her with a frown.

I have no reason to be nice to these people! If they're going to be rude to me, then I shall respond in kind!

"Do you even realize what that is? That's a national treasure, Sophie! There's no way you could possibly afford something like that!"

Sophie's gift was a long-lost national treasure that everyone wanted, but nobody was able to find it.

There were rumors about it being in the possession of an Anglandurn collector, so it didn't make sense for the item to be here.

As ignorant as they may be, they knew Sophie couldn't possibly get her hands on such a gem.

"Oh, but it is the real deal. After all, it would only make sense to gift someone with something they like!" Sophie replied disdainfully. It's funny how she's mocking me when she's the ignorant one here!

Minerva burst out laughing when she heard that.

"Do you really take us all for fools, Ms. Tanner? There's no way Tanner Group could possibly get its hands on something like this!"

Even William was stunned when he saw the gift Sophie got him.

He was not expecting her to get him something like that at all.

Being a patriot, he had tried really hard to acquire that national treasure so he could return it to the country.

However, he wasn't able to obtain any information on it whatsoever.

As such, having it appear at his birthday party was quite a surprise.

"Bring it to me!" Regardless of whether it was a fake, William wanted to get a closer look at it.

It was something that had been troubling him for a very long time, so he needed to confirm it himself.

The butler had assumed it was a worthless counterfeit at first.

However, seeing William's response made him so nervous that his hands trembled as he brought it over.

What if this is the real deal? You can't buy this with all the money in the world!

All the other guests shook their heads in disapproval when they saw William's response.

Just how badly does Old Mr. Lombard want that? It can't possibly be the real thing! Sophie is just a university student! There's no way she could get her hands on something like this!

"This can't be the real deal, Old Mr. Lombard!" Jennifer added.

She refused to believe that a mere university student could possibly obtain a national treasure.

Even so, William ignored her words as he took the gift over and inspected it carefully.

As he had been researching it extensively, he did have some knowledge about it. Even so, William was unable to confirm if it was authentic.

Determined to find out if the gift he received was the real deal, William turned toward his butler and said, "I want you to contact the Chief of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs right away! Have them send some of their appraisers over!"

"It's definitely a fake, Old Mr. Lombard."

"Yeah! There's no way a small company like Tanner Group could get its hands on such a gem!"

"Please don't let this girl fool you, Old Mr. Lombard. We know you value this treasure, but what you have here can't possibly be the real thing."

Those who were close to William tried to talk him out of it, but William stood firm on his decision.

"Only the appraisers can tell if this is a fake." As much as William hated Sophie, he wasn't about to take such matters lightly.

What if this is the real deal? If it is real, then I must hand this over to the country as soon as possible. There are far too many people who have set their sights on it!

"Tristan, get some more bodyguards over here right now!"

Tristan immediately did as he was told.

Unlike everyone else, he believed that the present was authentic because Sophie was the one who prepared it.

Given its unique nature, it would indeed require extra protection from bodyguards.

Still, I didn't expect Sophie to bring such a valuable gift for my father's birthday. After all, it isn't something that one can buy with money. I've been searching for it for many years, but I never managed to find it.

The Chief of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs came rushing over with a few appraisers immediately after receiving word about the national treasure. Their eyes went wide with shock after they saw what it was.

The appraisers then got to work and began appraising the item.

Naturally, Jennifer was extremely displeased with the amount of attention Sophie was receiving.

"Hey, Sophie! You do realize that there's no covering this up now that you got all these appraisers here, right? Are you that eager to embarrass yourself in front of everyone?"

About ninety-nine percent of the people at the scene believed it was a fake and were waiting to laugh at Sophie.

Ha! What a naïve girl! Does she really think she can deceive us with that dumb trick of hers?

Sophie ignored Jennifer completely.

Apart from Tristan, Ysabelle was the only other person who believed in Sophie.

After all, Sophie did gift her a gemstone that turned out to be worth a fortune.

As such, she figured Sophie would put in extra effort in preparing a gift for William.



Ysabelle knew that William had been looking for that national treasure since she was a child, so she was just as surprised as Tristan when she saw Sophie present it as a gift.

"How did you pull this off, Sophie? I can't believe you managed to get your hands on something so valuable!" Ysabelle exclaimed in admiration. Wasn't Sophie in Jipsdale this entire time?

"I have a few friends who specialize in finding this sort of thing," Sophie replied vaguely, without mentioning who her friends were.

Charles' eyes lit up with surprise as well.

"Do you have any more of these treasures, Sophie? If yes, could you give me one?" he asked, as Walter was also into such treasures.

Sean shot him a warning glare and said, "Charles, could you not say such ignorant things? What do you think this is?"

This is a freaking national treasure, for goodness' sake! You can't just ask someone for it!

Charles let out a helpless chuckle and turned toward Tristan as he continued, "You sure are lucky to have such a capable girlfriend, Mr. Tristan! I wish I had one too!"

"I'm sorry, but you don't stand a chance." What? Is he thinking of making a move on Sophie?

## Chapter 556

Charles felt a shiver down his spine when he saw the way Tristan was glaring at him.

"I-I-I was just joking, Mr. Tristan! Even if I did like Sophie, there's no guarantee that she'll like me back!" he explained in an attempt to save himself from Tristan's wrath.

"Correction, I will never like you because you're not my type at all," Sophie said.

Ouch! That hurt! Am I really that bad? Is Sophie always that mean to others?

"My heart is broken again, Sean! Please comfort me!" Charles pleaded.

"No, I don't think so. Your heart seems perfectly fine to me!" Sean replied. That's what he gets for breaking so many girls' hearts!

Ysabelle couldn't help but chuckle as she said, "See, Charles? This is payback for all those girls' hearts you've broken in the past! One day, you'll meet a girl who will counter playboys like you!"

Charles shook his head in response. "No, that day will never come! I would never give up an entire forest for a single tree!"

There are plenty of beautiful women out there, so why should I limit myself to just one? Isn't it better to go around sampling them all?

Ysabelle rolled her eyes at him. "Honestly, I'm really looking forward to seeing you meet your match."

"As I said, there will never be such a person because I won't allow that to happen!" Charles repeated himself.

He didn't believe in retribution for one's actions.

Jennifer's eyes were filled with disdain when she saw the group fawning over Sophie.

What's wrong with them? They're clearly knowledgeable people, so why would they believe that Sophie's present is the real deal? Do they take us all for fools? Sophie does not belong in this circle! The problem is, how can I get rid of her for good? I can't stand the sight of her!

Minerva, who was standing beside her the whole time, could see that she was very upset.

"There's no need to stress yourself out, Jennifer. That thing has got to be a fake. She'll become the laughingstock of Jipsdale once those appraisers confirm that it is fake. On top of that, I think you should just forget about her. You two aren't related at all, and she has always been calm and composed about everything. You'll come off as the loser if you take her too seriously."

Jennifer made it this far because she's excellent in almost every aspect, but she started changing ever since Sophie showed up...

"Shut up, Minerva!" Jennifer snapped at her impatiently.

Minerva pouted and looked away in response.

Being Jennifer's friend, she always had Jennifer's best interests in mind when giving advice or helping her out. However, Jennifer was so stubborn that she refused to listen to any of Minerva's advice, so

there wasn't much Minerva could do.

Meanwhile, the Chief of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs had arrived at a conclusion regarding the item's authenticity.

"Old Mr. Lombard, we have confirmed that this item is indeed the real deal. How did you find it? Could you hand it over to the country?" the chief asked excitedly.

"Really? Are you sure that this is authentic?" Although William was hoping for it to be authentic, he still got excited when he heard the chief say it.

The chief nodded as he replied, "That's right. These men are the best appraisers in the country, and they have all confirmed that it is indeed authentic. There's no way they'd be wrong about this. I know you've spent many years looking for this, but it means a lot to the country. Would you be willing to hand it over?"

Everyone at the scene fell silent after hearing that.

What? Is that really authentic? This isn't a joke or something, right?

Naturally, Jennifer took it the worst out of everyone else. She knew just how badly William wanted to get his hands on that national treasure, but she wasn't able to get it for him.

The diamond she spent a lot of money on was the best she could manage, but it paled in comparison to Sophie's gift.

Just like that, the diamond she presented felt like it had become worthless all of a sudden.

That was probably the worst feeling she had ever experienced.

Minerva had thought about comforting her, but she held her tongue when she recalled Jennifer's stubborn attitude from earlier. She knew it was pointless to say anything if Jennifer wouldn't listen.

Unless Jennifer gives up on this herself, nothing I say will change her mind.

Tristan held Sophie's hand and asked, "How did you pull this off? I didn't know you were capable of something like this!"

"Oh, I just had a few of my friends get it for me!" Sophie replied casually.

Although she made no mention of the price she had to pay, Tristan was able to figure that out on his own.

There's no such thing as a free lunch. Given how valuable this national treasure is, she must've traded something of an equally high value for it. Why did she have to make such a huge sacrifice for me?

"I told you that you don't have to do anything, didn't I? All that matters is my feelings for you. What anyone else feels about you is irrelevant."

Not wanting him to worry about her, Sophie replied, "You're overthinking it, Tristan. Getting this really was a piece of cake. Besides, you're not the only one with awesome friends!"

While some people may find this task impossible, some can easily accomplish it.

Sean, Charles, Felix, and Ysabelle felt speechless when they heard that.

Okay, then... It looks like we're just not capable enough to have such powerful friends...

After giving it some serious thought, William decided to hand the national treasure over to the country.

"As you all know, I have indeed spent many years searching for this treasure with the intention of handing it over to the country. Now that I have found it, at last, it's only natural for me to do so."

The chief was close to tears as he said, "You really are a hero, Old Mr. Lombard. I doubt anyone else would've been willing to hand it over like this. I thank you on behalf of the country. Also, I'll be sure to mention your name when reporting about this. You can rest assured that the country will reward you properly for this!"

I had a chance to be promoted to a much higher rank, but I remained in my current rank in order to look for this treasure. Who would've thought I'd be able to find it someday?

The Chief of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs then stepped aside to make a phone call.

About ten minutes later, a group of soldiers arrived to retrieve the treasure.

Everyone at the scene was so shocked that they would probably lose sleep that night.

Since the military had gotten involved, they had no choice but to believe that the national treasure was authentic.

But how did Sophie pull off such an amazing stunt? Isn't she just a university student with a pretty face? Just how many more secrets does she hold?

## Chapter 557

Then, the national treasure was taken away. After all that had happened that night, everyone had a hard time trying to recollect themselves.

Sophie was probably the calmest among them since she knew beforehand what would happen. To her, everything was within expectations, so there was nothing to be excited about.

At that moment, William finally shifted his attention to Sophie.

"You've fulfilled a long-standing wish of mine, so I want to return the favor. What would you like? You need only ask." The man was nothing but grateful to Sophie because he knew how difficult it was to find the national treasure.

When Jennifer heard that, she could not help but look nervously at Sophie. That woman probably only did what she did because she wanted to impress Old Mr. Lombard, so I don't see why she wouldn't push her luck after hearing him say that! I bet she'll demand to marry into the Lombard family!

Even though Jennifer's fingernails dug deep into her palms because of their length and how hard she clenched her fists, she felt no pain at all.

That was the only way to calm herself down, or she would lose her mind.

Everyone then turned their attention to Sophie, convinced that the young woman only went through the trouble because she wanted to impress William. This is the perfect opportunity to persuade Old Mr. Lombard to allow her and Tristan to be together, so why would she let it go?

"Don't worry about it, Old Mr. Lombard. Today's your eightieth birthday, so it's only natural for me to get

you a gift. That's all there is to it." Sophie was confident that Tristan would be with her no matter what, so she had no reason to buy William off with the gift. Do the others think I'm the kind of person who'd offer presents in exchange for Tristan?

"Are you sure?" William, too, had thought Sophie would request him to agree to her and Tristan being together. Hence, he was surprised when she did not even bring up the matter.

"I wish you a long and happy life, Old Mr. Lombard," voiced Sophie, who seemed as lovable as a doe then.

William quickly forgot about the other gifts after receiving Sophie's. Even those from the Lombard siblings paled in comparison.

Glad that Sophie did not make the request she expected, Jennifer breathed a sigh of relief. As long as Old Mr. Lombard still hasn't agreed to Tristan's relationship with Sophie, I'll have a chance to turn things around.

Since it was getting late, the guests began to leave one after another.

Meanwhile, Sophie stayed beside Tristan, who did not have to see the guests off because Lincoln was around.

William was tired, so he called it a night and went upstairs.

"Come on. I'll send you home. You must be tired too!" Tristan said to Sophie.

"What for? Just let her stay here for the night! There's no need to go out this late," chimed in Sarah.

"Yeah! If you don't want others to gossip, you can sleep with me tonight," uttered Ysabelle. It shouldn't be a problem since Sophie's my friend, right? Even Grandpa can't find fault with that.

"Thank you, but I still think I should go home." Sophie did not accept the offer because she did not want William to think she was pushing her luck.

"Sure. I'll send you home then." Tristan never forced Sophie to do anything. Moreover, he would do his best to support her in everything she wanted to do.

"Okay!"

On the way out, the two passed by Jennifer, who had been waiting patiently for Tristan to offer to send her home.

"Mr. Tristan, could I trouble you with sending me home?" Even though Jennifer hesitated for a long time, she eventually decided to make the request. After all, that was the reason she waited so patiently. Today's plan didn't work because of Sophie's gift. Still, I won't give up no matter what.

Tristan furrowed his eyebrows when he realized how persistent Jennifer was. "Sorry, but I can't help you."

Even though the man apologized, there was nothing friendly about his tone.

"Send Ms. Whitley home!" Tristan ordered his driver before leaving with Sophie.

Stunned, Jennifer could not help wondering if she had humiliated herself once again.

Tristan had never once shown respect to Jennifer, and it made her feel terrible.

"It's getting late, Jennifer. Let's go back and get some rest. There's no point in overthinking it." Minerva had not left either because she wanted to wait for Jennifer.



"Okay." At that point, Jennifer was already exhausted. Even though she had tried her best, she had nothing to show for it.

Supporting Jennifer, Minerva wanted to tell her friend to stop equating hard work with success, but she did not do so because she knew Jennifer would not listen.

"I'm tired; I'm going home. You should go back on your own!" The last thing Jennifer wanted was to let others see how miserable she was then. Suddenly, she had lost all confidence. It seems Sophie isn't as easy to deal with as she appears to be.

"Are you sure you're okay, Jennifer? I really think I should send you home first!" insisted Minerva, worried about her friend.

"Didn't you hear what I said? I'm fine." Jennifer wondered why Minerva could not tell that she needed some time alone.

Although Minerva dared not argue with Jennifer, she asked the driver to take care of her friend because she was still concerned. "Ms. Whitley is in a bad mood, so please ensure she gets home safely."

"Don't worry, Ms. Cook. I'll be sure to get Ms. Whitley back home safe and sound." The driver knew he

was responsible for sending his employer's guest home without a scratch.

Only after watching the driver drive away with Jennifer did Minerva leave in peace.

Meanwhile, Tristan had already sent Sophie back to her condominium in University City.

When Sophie stepped out of the shower, she realized that Tristan was still in her room.

"Aren't you tired? Why are you still here?" Since it was quite late, Sophie did not think it was appropriate for a man to be in her room. Other people might also let their imaginations run wild.

"I can't sleep; I have a lot on my mind."

"What is it?" Sophie approached the man, who towered over her with his height. She had to look up to gaze at him.

As Tristan watched water roll down Sophie's hair and onto her chest, his breathing instinctively intensified.

Making it more difficult for the man to stay calm was discovering that Sophie had stepped out of the bathroom without her underwear. Tristan found it almost impossible to resist Sophie when her perfectly shaped breasts were right in front of his eyes.

Sophie immediately turned red when she lowered her head to see how exposed she was.

Even though it was not her intention, her white pajamas had gotten soaked enough for Tristan to see her ample bosom.

Immediately, Sophie reached out to cover the man's eyes.

## Chapter 558

However, Tristan quickly pulled her into his arms, and the only thing between them was the thin cloth of her pajamas and his clothes. "Tristan, what are you doing?" questioned Sophie, whose body was plastered to the man.

Sophie would never purposely excite Tristan, who had promised he would not lay a finger on her until they got married, because she knew he would suffer for it.

After all, Tristan was a man of his word.

Seeing how aroused Tristan was, Sophie figured he would need another cold shower. I wonder if it's unhealthy for him to always take cold showers like that.

"I'm fine; just let me hold you for a while!" Hugging Sophie was all Tristan wanted, nothing more.

"Okay." Sophie then let Tristan hold her as if she was a gentle rabbit.

However, no matter how much self-control Tristan had, he was still just an ordinary man who could not help but be physically stimulated when embracing the woman he loved.

It was almost impossible for Tristan's excitement to go unnoticed since Sophie's body was pressed against his.

Since Sophie was well-versed in medicine, she knew just how much discomfort Tristan was in.

"Do you need my help?" Even though Sophie was shy to ask the question, she did not want Tristan to suffer because she loved him very much.

"Are you sure?" Tristan never wanted Sophie to do anything like that for him since she was nothing short of an angel to him.

However, he instantly lost the ability to say no after seeing Sophie nod in response.

The fact that he needed her hand to relieve himself did not help with the situation.

Fortunately, the process was so incredible that their relationship ascended to another level even though they did not go all the way.

Sophie went to the bathroom to wash her hands afterward, and when she came out, she saw Tristan lying motionless on the bed.

"Are you okay?" inquired Sophie, knitting her eyebrows and wondering what had happened to the man.

After Tristan beckoned to her, Sophie walked over and joined him on the bed.

"Are you really okay?" asked Sophie again.

"I'm fine!"

"Good," responded Sophie in a low voice, for she was somewhat embarrassed and unsure how to talk to Tristan after what she had done for him.

"Thank you for everything, Sophie." Tristan held the woman's hand.

In response, Sophie buried her head in Tristan's chest and said nothing.

The news of the Lombard family handing the long-lost national treasure over to the country caused a great stir, so much so that national leaders visited the Lombards personally to thank William for his contribution.

The elderly man was even bestowed a special achievement award, which made him so happy that he could not stop smiling no matter who he met.

Because of that, William also stopped picking on Sophie.

Jennifer, on the other hand, was not only displeased to hear the entire Jipsdale singing Sophie's praises but also anxious to see how William's attitude toward the woman had changed. If Old Mr. Lombard doesn't side with me, it'll be even more difficult for me to get Tristan.

For the past few days, the executives of Whitley Group felt as though they were walking on eggshells because they were all afraid of making any mistakes that would invoke Jennifer's wrath.

One of them offended the woman in the morning meeting and was scolded so harshly that he almost broke down.

Afterward, the executives could not help gathering for a discussion.

"What happened to Ms. Whitley in these past two days? She can't be going through menopause early, can she? What's up with her temper?"

"I know, right? Everything seems to annoy her. She definitely held nothing back when she was scolding."

"I bet it's because she hasn't been with a man for a while now. Everybody knows that Mr. Tristan doesn't reciprocate her feelings for him."

Jennifer's face turned as grim as death when she walked out of the conference room and heard what the others had to say about her.

Just when she was about to teach the executives a lesson for talking behind her back, Timothy Whitley quickly stopped her.

"You're getting out of line. How do you expect to run a company when you can't even separate your personal life from your professional one?" questioned Timothy rhetorically with a frown. Although Jennifer had always been his pride and joy, he was disappointed to see how emotional his daughter was then. Is it worth throwing everything away for just a man?

"Dad, I..." Seeing the disappointment in Timothy's eyes, Jennifer was suddenly at a loss for words.

"There are a lot of things that I've never told you because I thought you, as a Whitley, would be sensible enough to refrain from doing anything that would embarrass our family." Timothy had always thought Jennifer was exceptional, but she had let him down that day.

"I'm sorry that I've disappointed you, Dad," apologized Jennifer, who had never felt more terrible because she really wanted to do everything right.

"Do you understand now? You are the pride of our family, so even Tristan isn't worth losing yourself

over," reminded Timothy as he patted Jennifer's shoulder. Unrequited love is nothing to be proud of.

"Okay."

On the other hand, Sophie had found her past few days to be quite trouble-free.

Not only was she done with her dissertation, but TS Entertainment was also back on track after The Wheelers regained popularity.

Even though the band was invited to participate in various events, Sophie had Jonathan turn down the unnecessary ones. The Wheelers is a band that focuses on music, so that's what they'll do. They shouldn't have to worry about anything else.

As for Ysabelle, she was gaining popularity as well because of the sheer number of fans who loved her new album. Although she was not as well-known as The Wheelers, she had a promising future.

Ysabelle's main goal was to help Sophie crush Whitley Group because she intended to keep her promise to the woman.

That was also why Sophie went to the Tanner Group office much more frequently lately.

Whenever Victor saw Sophie, the usually cold and proud man would greet her with a big smile.

Since Victor never greeted anyone else like that, everyone at the office joked about how he was always happy to see Sophie because he had feelings for her.

"Ms. Sophie, your plan was very successful, so everything has returned to normal. You can rest

assured that the company will run as smoothly as a flowing river in my hands."

"Of course, I trust you." Sophie would never have entrusted the company to Victor if she did not believe in him. "Do you remember the task I assigned you last time?"

## Chapter 559

Sophie was definitely not joking about surpassing Whitley Group. Instead, she was seriously planning on doing so.

"Of course, I remember. I take everything you ask me to do to heart." How could I possibly have forgotten about it?

"Has Jennifer been up to any tricks again recently?" She ended up on the losing end back during William's birthday party, so she would undoubtedly sabotage me relentlessly.

"Not at the moment, but even if she does pull any tricks, it's nothing for us to worry about." Victor had great confidence in himself.

While the outside world waxes poetry about Jennifer's capabilities, she's actually not all that impressive. If it weren't for her father, she couldn't have managed the company so well.

He had some interactions with Jennifer in the past, so he was fully aware of her capabilities.

In truth, the rumors out there were overly exaggerated.

That daughter of the Whitley family wasn't all that capable in reality.

"Keep your guard up in everything you do."

Indeed, there isn't much to fear about Jennifer. However, our rival is not the Whitley family alone, and surpassing the latter is merely our short-term goal, mused Sophie.

"Got it, Ms. Sophie! Don't worry, for I've committed everything you said to memory," Victor reassured deferentially.

There aren't many whom I admire in my lifetime, but she's one of the few.

As there wasn't much to do, Sophie scanned through information on the current condition of Tanner Group in the office for the entire afternoon.

Her speed in doing that was incredibly fast.

Even professional finance personnel would likely require quite some time to discern the problems in the reports, but she had already identified several issues in just an afternoon.

When the finance manager was summoned to her office, he broke into a cold sweat.

"May I know what's wrong with the accounts, Ms. Sophie?" he inquired respectfully. Back when Yale was in power, the man was wholly ignorant, so there were some problems he neglected to handle.

Well, I heard she's studying medicine, so she probably doesn't know much about finance!

"You're James Lestrangle, yes? Let me put it in such a way—if I come tomorrow and still see the same reports, you may leave the company."

Sophie's tone was as indifferent as ever.

Upon hearing that, the finance manager—James Lestrangle—started sweating profusely.

"I'm not sure what the problem is, Ms. Sophie. Do you mind telling me directly?" Nonetheless, he was convinced that she knew nothing about finance. If she really perceives the problems, she wouldn't possibly let me off the hook so easily, would she?

At that, Sophie lifted her eyes. What does he mean by that?



"You truly think I don't see the problems, don't you? This is your last chance. If you don't wish to work here, you may leave."

Good Lord! The mistakes are so blatant, yet he thinks others can't tell.

"Ms. Sophie, I—"

Just then, Victor came over, only to be greeted by that scene.

"What exactly is your problem, James? If you don't wish to work here anymore, feel free to leave right now," he snapped unceremoniously.

Ms. Sophie's capabilities are evident to all. If she says there are errors, then that must be the case!

"You can't do this to me, Ms. Sophie! I've been working for the company even when Old Mr. Tanner was here and contributed much in the past ten years and more." James started capitalizing on his seniority.

I worked alongside Old Mr. Tanner, and even he never said such harsh words to me. What right does she have to treat me in such a manner when she's merely a snout-nosed kid?

Following his remark, Sophie couldn't help sneering.

Well, well, well... This is precisely the biggest problem in Tanner Group. There's a group of people thinking that I don't dare do anything to them because they've been working here since my grandfather's time. Thus, they do nothing at work, hampering the company's development.

"Since my grandfather has handed the company over to me, I call the shots in Tanner Group now. If I fire you, then you're fired." I already gave him a chance earlier. Since he doesn't plan on appreciating it, there's no need for me to yak with him.

Hearing that, James was livid. "You're... really... I wonder if Old Mr. Tanner knows that you're so arrogant and high-handed!"

"Naturally, my grandfather knows my temperament full well. Therefore, you don't need to use him to threaten me, for he'll undoubtedly take my side." If I don't have even that much confidence, how am I to manage the company?

James was so infuriated that he stormed off, slamming the door behind him.

"Ms. Sophie, it's indeed true that James has been working here since Old Mr. Tanner's time."

"So what? If he still hasn't redone the reports tomorrow, dismiss him straight away."

"I'm afraid that there'd be the talk among the employees if you were to fire someone who's served the company for so long. At that time, your image will be tarnished. How about this? Push all the blame onto me. I'll shoulder the responsibility."

No matter what, she's a lady, so she shouldn't bear the brunt of gossip. Conversely, it's different for me. I've always been ruthless, so no one would dare say anything were I to do such a thing.

"Don't worry, Mr. White. I'm not that fragile, so just let others say whatever they want."

Meanwhile, James went straight to the Tanner residence after leaving the office. When he arrived, he remained by Josiah's side and reminisced about the past.

Recalling the days when they worked hard together, Josiah was animated beyond words.

"Oh well, if it weren't because I'm really up in years, I truly want to continue striving with all of you. You're probably retiring soon as well, right? At that time, we can go fishing together. That'll also be great."

"I know you don't disdain me, Old Mr. Tanner. But perhaps I'm really getting on in age, for seemingly everything I do isn't to Ms. Sophie's satisfaction!"

At long last, James gave voice to the reason for his visit that day.

"What do you mean by that?" Josiah quirked a brow.

So, he only came here today to complain? Anyway, Sophie is sensible and would never scorn him for no reason.

"I've worked for Tanner Group all these years and have contributed much, Old Mr. Tanner. Since Ms. Sophie doesn't like me, I'll have no choice but to leave."

"Ah, you came here today to tell me this, James? If you really want to leave Tanner Group, I'll speak to Sophie about it!"

No matter what happened, Josiah would choose to side with Sophie, if for no other reason than her being the heir he selected.

Hence, he would support any decision she made.

"Old Mr. Tanner!"

Never had James expected the outcome to be such.

"All right, I'm tired, so let's call it a day." Josiah's enthusiasm just now had all vanished into thin air.

James' blood boiled, but he couldn't say anything since he was at the Tanner residence.

Instead, he could only leave.

At that very moment, sheer hatred toward the Tanner family welled within him.

I've worked for Tanner Group for more than ten years, yet this is what I get at the end of the day! I don't think anyone would be able to accept this!

No sooner had he stepped out of the Tanner residence than a car stopped beside him. Jennifer alighted from the vehicle and walked over to him.

Chapter 560

"You're James Lestrage from Tanner Group, yes?"

Jennifer had a pair of sunglasses perched upon the bridge of her nose, and she whipped it off with a flourish.

Then, she continued, "I know about your situation in Tanner Group. Are you interested in joining Whitley Group? I'm Jennifer Whitley from Whitley Group!"

"Whitley Group?"

It went without saying that James knew about Jennifer and Sophie being at odds. So, she came here today because she wants me to do something?

"As long as you're willing to do something for me, I can guarantee that your pay will be double your current salary when you join Whitley Group!"

James deliberated for a while before he nodded.

Tanner Group betrayed me first, so they can't blame me for doing the same. If I were really dismissed by the company at my age, life wouldn't be easy for me. It's best that I plan for myself ahead of time!

"In that case, go back first. As for what I want you to do, I'll send it to your email. Remember to delete it after reading it!"

After saying that, Jennifer climbed back into the car.

I'm going to destroy Sophie. Only then will I have an opportunity, and Tristan will finally notice me! So what if she's notably capable? I'm still going to ruin her!

The next day, James did as ordered by Jennifer and amended all the financial reports. As Sophie was checking through them, he studied her surreptitiously.

Sophie scanned through the financial reports. This time, they were finally acceptable.

"Mr. Lestrangle, I hope you keep my words in mind and never commit the same mistake again. Otherwise, you'll be fired immediately!"

At once, James nodded.

"Don't worry, Ms. Sophie! There won't be such an issue anymore in the future!" he promptly vowed with a smile. Subsequently, he added, "Old Mr. Tanner is really blessed to have a capable granddaughter like you!"

Sophie paid his compliment no mind.

This is the last chance I'm giving him. If he were to do the same thing again, I wouldn't be showing him any mercy.

Only when James had left did Victor remark, "Honestly speaking, Ms. Sophie, James is really untrustworthy. I'm afraid that he'll do something else in the future."

"That's true. Keep a close eye on him henceforth, lest he has some tricks up his sleeve!"

"Sure!"

"If there are others of a similar nature, hand them over to me to deal with. I won't allow them to stay here and ruin my grandfather's hard work!"

After all, Tanner Group was the fruit of Josiah's blood, sweat, and tears.

Since it had been handed over to her, Sophie wouldn't allow it to be destroyed.

"Got it!" Having obtained her approval, Victor naturally wouldn't hold back either, for it was indeed high time for some people to be kicked out.

It had been a few days since Sophie last saw Nicholas, so she thought he had already given up on her. Unexpectedly, he appeared before her again.

That day, he wore a black windbreaker, rendering him all the more ominous. However, he was handsome, so many daring women still wanted to approach him and strike up a conversation despite his aloof air.

At the sight of Sophie, he got out of his sports car and strode over to her.

"Where are you going? I'll give you a ride!" In front of her, he seemingly turned into an entirely different person altogether.

Alas, Sophie ignored him completely and brushed past him.

A frown marred Nicholas' countenance. Ultimately, he shot his hand out and grabbed her arm.

"I'm talking to you, Sophie. Did you not hear me? What exactly do I need to do for you to spare me a glance?" he growled furiously.

I've already lowered myself to such an extent, yet it's still not enough?

"Didn't I already tell you this? No matter what you do, it'll all be in vain." I simply have no feelings for him, and nothing he does will change that fact!

Verily, Nicholas couldn't fathom why Sophie was so averse to him. "How am I inferior to Tristan? Sophie, I really am not hoping you'll love me to the point of no return right now. I merely want a chance. I'll be content even if I only get to stay by your side and be friends with you."

That isn't too much to ask, is it? Why won't she agree to it?

On the heels of that, he continued, "Or do you lack confidence in yourself, afraid that you'll fall in love with me?"

This is the only reason, no? Otherwise, I really can't think of any other reason.

At his words, Sophie couldn't help bursting into laughter.

In all honesty, he's pretty narcissistic. I've never had any romantic feelings for him. Indeed, I'm somewhat dense when it comes to matters of the heart, but I still know this much—I've never liked him from the very beginning.

"Why can't you get the meaning of rejection? It isn't because I'm afraid I'll fall in love with you that I don't want to have too much interaction with you. Instead, it's because the mere sight of you annoys me."

Must he force me to put things so bluntly? But as long as it'll get him to give up on me, I don't mind being as straightforward as it takes.

"How dare you!" Nicholas' expression changed in a flash.

No one had ever dared to utter such a statement before him. In other words, Sophie was the first person to do so.

Unfortunately, he didn't dare fly into a rage when it came to her.

"I'm not mad. I'm not angry at all," he placated himself continuously, trying his best to suppress his wrath.

"So what if you're mad or otherwise? It has nothing to do with me." Sophie was still as candid as ever.

Why can't he just understand when I've said as much?

Nicholas' looks were truly too striking, especially when complemented by his distinctive attire. That aside, Sophie was stunningly beautiful.

For that reason, some of the onlookers whipped out their phones and snapped pictures of them confronting each other.

The ladies were exceedingly excited to see the couple on the screens of their phones.

Oh my God, this is simply a feast for the eyes! Their looks are on par with those of the celebrities in Koandrian dramas! It's a delight to witness such beauty in reality!

Without warning, Nicholas went down on one knee.

"I love you, Sophie! Marry me! I'll do anything you ask of me as long as you marry me!"

His sudden proposal elicited bursts of cheers.

After all, it was a consummate plot of a romance movie for a handsome man to confess his feelings to an equally beautiful lady.

In response to Nicholas dropping to one knee, Sophie scoffed.

Hah! He really doesn't mind stooping to despicable means to achieve his goals, does he? How did he come up with the idea of proposing marriage to me?



Nicholas fished a small red box out of his windbreaker and opened it, revealing a huge diamond ring.

"Marry me. I don't mind doing anything you ask of me as long as you marry me." Truly, that's the only request I have.

"You must have lost your mind, Nicholas. How could I possibly marry you?" Sophie's expression was grim in the face of such a farce.

He might love grandstanding, but that doesn't mean I like being part of his show for others to watch!

At that, Nicholas grabbed her wrist.

"Why aren't you the least bit touched when I've already gone to such lengths? What exactly is so great about Tristan?" He was on the verge of descending into a manic episode, but he did his utmost best to restrain himself in front of her. Nonetheless, his eyes had started turning scarlet.

Naturally, Sophie noticed something amiss with him. There's a crowd here. If he were to really lose control of himself now, he'd probably murder countless people.