

Pursuing 61

Chapter 61 All Eyes On Her

Sophie froze briefly. The gown had already been designed to cling to her tightly, and with Tristan's hand on her waist now, she felt especially uncomfortable.

"Let's go. Everyone's looking this way."

And is that my fault?

Sophie was certain that Tristan was doing this on purpose.

"What the f*ck?" Danielle desperately wanted to shove Tristan's hand away from that woman. How dare he touch another girl? He's mine!

"Calm down, Danielle. Don't look at them. Ysabelle's about to make her entrance."

Lincoln soon appeared on stage while holding Ysabelle by the arm.

He walked to the microphone and began his speech.

Meanwhile, Tristan led Sophie to the front.

Winter's gaze remained on Tristan. He didn't want to be my date, but now he's got his hand around Sophie's waist!

And now, all eyes are on her!

Those looks of envy were supposed to be on her, but clearly, that wasn't happening now thanks to Sophie.

Winter refused to accept this.

Tristan's hand remained on Sophie's waist, making the latter feel uneasy.

"You can let go now, Mr. Tristan."

Tristan liked having his hand on her and didn't want to let go, but seeing the look on her face, he knew she would probably hit him if he didn't listen to her.

His lips curled as he released his grip on her.

"Last but not least, I'd like to thank everyone for all the love they've shown Ysabelle. Thank you once again."

When Lincoln was done with his speech, he handed the microphone to Ysabelle as he had other guests to attend to.

"I'm so happy today. Thank you for coming to my birthday party. I hope you all have a good time."

Not wasting too much time, Ysabelle ended things quickly and passed the microphone to the host.

She then left the stage and walked toward Sophie.

"Soph! I—" She wanted to take Sophie to check out the cruise ship, but Felix cut her off.

"Come, Ysabelle. I want to show you your gift."

He had spent a great deal of time picking out the young woman's birthday gift.

“Go on,” Tristan chimed in.

With that, Ysabelle was snatched away in a huff.

Tristan had no intention of staying either.

It was too lively there, and he preferred somewhere quieter.

“Let’s go. I’ll get you out of this hellhole.”

Sophie felt the same way he did. She was sick of being stared at by the female socialites there.

“If you’re tired, you can head back and get some rest. I’ll find myself somewhere I can be alone,” she proposed.

Yet, Tristan wasn’t having any of that nonsense, and he left while tugging her by the arm.

“Are you always this disrespectful toward women, Mr. Tristan?”

“My head’s throbbing. So let’s go.”

Sophie was rendered speechless.

Tristan soon brought her to his room, which appeared larger than Ysabelle’s and was located in an even better spot. One could simply take a seat on the rug and have the entire city’s view in front of their very eyes.

The blinding lights of various colors lit up the sky beautifully.

Tristan opened up a bottle of red wine, walked over with two glasses, and sat down.

“You should have a seat too. Your feet must hurt from wearing those heels.”

To him, Sophie was tall enough and didn’t need to wear high heels.

Yet, Sophie believed that an evening gown always had to go with a pair of heels.

It’s either heels or nothing.

Tristan handed her a cushion for her to sit on.

Her dress was rather short, so sitting like this wasn’t the most ideal situation.

Tristan had never considered this. After all, he never really cared about the women around him.

But upon seeing Sophie’s slender thighs, he couldn’t help but gulp.

Then, he began to feel awkward as he realized what he had done.

He got up and brought Sophie a woolen blanket to cover her thighs with.

Sophie didn’t expect him to be this thoughtful.

He’s surprisingly quite a gentleman. Most men would rather have the opportunity to stare.

“You don’t have to thank me. I’m just worried I wouldn’t be able to hold myself back.”

She was struck speechless.

Fine! But did he really have to say it out loud?

Tristan poured them a glass of wine each.

“Have some. This wine’s pretty good.”

He didn’t want her drinking in front of other men, but now that she was with him, it wasn’t a problem.

Sophie raised her glass and took a sip.

The wine tasted exceptionally good.

It’s no surprise, though. Whatever Tristan eats or uses, he always has the best of everything.

Tristan began to sip on his wine, too.

The two savored their drinks while staring at the scenery outside the window.

Despite not saying much, the two seemed to share an inexplicable mutual understanding.

After finishing a glass, Sophie wanted seconds.

“Can I have some more?” She really liked the wine.

Tristan took the bottle and poured her another glass.

“Do you feel uncomfortable being with me?”

“No.”

“That’s good, then.”

He hoped she could slowly get used to his presence.

I’ll give her time. I have enough patience and confidence for this.

This girl will eventually be mine.

Time ticked by, and the two finished the entire bottle of wine without realizing it.

“Let’s go grab some cake.” It was about time for Ysabelle’s cake-cutting ceremony.

“Okay.”

As soon as they stepped out of Tristan’s room, the door across theirs opened, and Winter could be seen walking out.

Seeing Sophie and Tristan leaving the room together only made Winter’s expression sour further.

“Good evening, Mr. Tristan,” she greeted before leaving in a rush.

She didn’t want to look at them for a second longer, nor did she want to think about it.

Tristan returned to the hall with Sophie. This time, he didn’t have his arm around her, so she felt much more at ease.

The workers had already wheeled an eighteen-tier cake into the room.

Ysabelle had been looking for Sophie the whole time, and upon seeing her, she immediately dashed over.

Sophie stood next to her.

As the eighteen candles were lit, everyone began to sing.

Ysabelle made a wish before blowing out the candles and cutting the cake.

She was especially delighted that day.

"I'm so happy I got to see you today, Sophie. Oh, and I really like what you gave me."

As she spoke, she took out her favorite gift.

Upon seeing that Ysabelle's most beloved gift was a rock, Danielle burst into laughter.

"Don't you think you're being way too nice to her, Ms. Ysabelle? It's just a rock! What is there to like about it? I can't believe this so-called friend of yours would do such a thing! What kind of a gift is that?"

"Right? Never in my life would I expect anyone to give a rock as a gift!"

"This is hilarious. She's such a bumpkin."

Ysabelle grew livid. These women are plain disgusting! "You—"

"Excuse me, Ms. Ysabelle, but may I have a look at that rock you're holding?"

That came from a nobleman who had a passion for collectibles.

“Sure, but be sure not to damage it.”

Ysabelle didn’t want to waste her time on those nauseating women.

As the nobleman picked up the rock carefully, astonishment filled his eyes.

“Will you sell me this rock, Ms. Ysabelle? I’ll buy it for any price you name.”

“What? Are you insane? It’s just a rock!”

“I know, right? What on earth has this world become?”

Chapter 62 Amorous Atmosphere

“Like I’d expect people like you to know what this rock actually is! It’s worth at least ten million!”

The man never liked women like them. All they had were looks but no substance.

“You!”

Danielle wanted to retaliate, but her friend held her back.

“Stop talking. His family’s the biggest antique trader in Jipsdale. If he says the rock is worth that much, it’s definitely worth that much. You’ll only look ignorant if you try to argue with him.”

“She’s right. Just keep your mouth shut. You’re embarrassing us!”

With that, Danielle stopped talking.

Never had she expected Sophie to be able to afford to buy Ysabelle a rock worth ten million.

“Sorry, but I can’t sell this no matter how much it costs. It’s my favorite gift. Thank you so much, Soph, but you really didn’t have to go to such lengths for my birthday gift.”

She couldn’t imagine Sophie having forked out ten million on this rock.

“You’re most welcome. It’s just ten million, anyway. Anything is worth it as long as you like it.”

Sophie truly didn’t care about the price. All that mattered was that Ysabelle liked the gift.

“I love it!”

Felix felt a little sheepish now, for his gift no longer seemed as extravagant compared to what Sophie had prepared.

Sophie didn’t like being in crowded places, so she turned and left after the cake-cutting ceremony, heading outside to enjoy the night view of the city.

Yet, no matter how much she tried to avoid trouble, trouble always seemed to follow her.

With her group of friends, Danielle walked toward Sophie.

“Mr. Tristan helped you get that rock, didn’t he, Sophie? It’s not like your family has that much money anyway.”

Danielle refused to believe that Sophie could afford something this expensive.

“Yeah! Even if you don’t admit it, that necklace you’re wearing is more than enough proof. I saw Mr. Tristan buy it at an auction with my own eyes.”

“There’s no way a peasant like you can afford something worth ten million.”

“Well, if thinking that way makes you happy, I won’t stop you,” Sophie replied calmly. “Are you done? Can you buzz off now?”

“Buzz off? Who are you telling to buzz off? Just who do you think you are?” Danielle retorted in an attempt to establish dominance.

“You. I’m talking to you.”

“You!”

In a rage, Danielle charged forward to push Sophie, but the latter swiftly evaded her, causing her to fall to the ground instead.

“Danielle! Are you okay?”

One of her friend helped her up.

“You’d better stay away from me,” Sophie warned them.

Resentment swirled within Danielle.

“Godd*mmit! What are you getting all smug about?”

“Let it go, Danielle. I don’t think we should mess with her. Besides, Mr. Tristan’s got her back. He won’t be happy if he finds out what you’re doing to her.”

“Shut up! Whose side are you even on? There’s no way Mr. Tristan would fall for a b*tch like her!”

“Danielle, we’re saying this for your own good.”

“Then I suppose I’ll have to thank you, huh?” I won’t accept this. I’ve prepared myself all this while and learned so many things just so I could marry Mr. Tristan one day. I’m not going to let anyone else have him!

Sophie headed back in to look for Ysabelle. The cruise ship was still out above the waters, so she had no way of getting off. Then, she thought of going to Ysabelle’s room, only to find it locked.

Left with no other choice, she could only head to Tristan’s room.

Sticking with him is still better than being around those stupid girls.

Standing in front of the door, Sophie only had to knock thrice before it flew open.

“I don’t have anywhere else to go, so I thought I’d hang out here for a while. If it’s not okay with you...”

She trailed off upon noticing a gorgeous woman inside his room.

“It’s no problem at all, but give me a second. I have some trash to take care of.”

After responding, Tristan turned around.

“Get out of my room, or I’ll feed you to the sharks.”

He had returned to his room, only to find a woman waiting inside. Then, a knock came on the door before he could even take a close look at her.

“But Mr. Tristan...” the woman pled in a dainty voice.

“Get out.”

Feeling humiliated, the woman ran out of the room in tears.

Sophie felt awkward standing there.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to bother you.”

Tristan didn’t know how to respond to that.

Sophia continued, “But it looks like you really are a ladies’ man, huh? There’s always a woman waiting to throw herself in your arms wherever you go!”

“Shut your mouth, or I’ll shut you up in my own ways.”

It would probably be easier if he just plugged that infuriating little mouth of hers.

“Ooh, someone’s mad.”

Hearing that, Tristan immediately grabbed her by the waist and planted his lips against hers.

Sophie’s eyes widened in bewilderment.

She didn’t think he meant it, or that he would shut her up this way.

Ugh... Me and my big mouth! Why did I p*ss him off in the first place?

Sophie remained frustrated even after Tristan had let go of her.

I was never such a pushover!

The man gently brushed her swollen lip with his fingers.

“Does it hurt?”

He had used a bit of force then.

Sophie pushed his arm away.

“I’m fine. It’s bearable.”

Tristan gazed at her silently.

“I don’t mean anything by that! Don’t get the wrong idea.”

He continued to stare at her.

“Seriously, that’s not what I meant! Argh! Forget it. You can think whatever you want!”

He smiled.

Sophie grew enraged at that. What’s so funny? He keeps getting on my nerves!

The air inside the room grew slightly amorous, making Sophie feel unsettled.

She sat down at the same spot as before and gazed out the window.

Maybe I shouldn't have come here in the first place, but it's too late to think about all this now.

Tristan handed her a woollen blanket for her legs again.

"You can sleep on the bed if you're tired. I'm going to go say hi to some people."

As soon as he left the room, Sophie heaved a sigh of relief.

Feeling bored on her own, she took out her phone and began to create a mini-game.

It was only when Ysabelle called her that she exited the program.

"Soph! Where are you? Come back! The waltz is about to begin."

The waltz was the main event of the night.

"Okay. I'm on my way."

Sophie wasn't all that interested in dancing, but she didn't want to rain on the birthday girl's parade.

After putting the blanket back onto the couch, she left in search of Ysabelle.

When she arrived, she saw Ysabelle dancing with Felix.

They were the only two on the dance floor. It was Ysabelle's birthday, after all, so she naturally had the first dance.

Anticipation rose within Winter when she noticed that Tristan wasn't with Sophie.

Where did he go? Well, it's fine if I couldn't make him my date for tonight. I'd be more than happy to have one dance with him.

By now, Felix and Ysabelle had ended their first dance.

More couples entered the dance floor as the music played once again.

At that very moment, a dashing-looking man stopped in front of Sophie.

"Good evening, Ms. Tanner. Would you care to dance with me?"

Sophie frowned.

"Sorry. But I don't know how to dance."

"It's fine. I'll guide you." The man had no intention of giving up.

"I'll pass."

"Give me a chance, Ms. Tanner. Aren't you attending Tanner Group's shareholders' meeting this coming Monday? I might just lend you a hand on that day."

"An outsider like you shouldn't interfere with the Tanner family's affairs."

"What's wrong?" Suddenly, Tristan appeared behind her. "Didn't I tell you to wait inside my room? Why did you come out here on your own?"

Chapter 63 A Goodnight Kiss

"Mr. Tristan." The man was immediately petrified when he saw Tristan.

F*ck! She's his woman, and she was even in his room. I'm doomed.

"Get lost," Tristan growled.

"Sure thing. I'll leave right away." With that, the man disappeared without a trace.

Everyone in Jipsdale knew their days would be numbered if they dared to cross Tristan, and the man had no wish to meet a sticky end.

Under the crowd's envious gazes, Tristan extended his hand in a gentlemanly gesture of invitation. "May I have this dance?"

Sophie placed her hand in his, silently agreeing to dance with him.

Tristan held her hand and led her onto the dance floor, then placed one hand on her slender waist while resting the other on her shoulder.

As the other ladies watched Tristan hug Sophie's waist, a thought surfaced in their minds. They wished Sophie would disappear at once and that the person in Tristan's arms was them.

"D*mn it! Why is it Sophie again? How is she so lucky?" one of them whined.

"Yeah! How could she end up with the man of my dreams?"

Another choked out through bitter sobs, "This is going to make me cry myself to death."

"I won't let that little minx get away with this!" Danielle hissed through clenched teeth, her fingers gripping the stem of her wineglass so tightly as if she was going to crush it.

Winter was also still among the crowd. I thought I'd get the opportunity to dance with Tristan, not expecting I'd still lose to Sophie in the end.

"Forget it. There's nothing we can do about her," she said.

"What are you talking about, Winter? What do you mean by there's nothing we can do about her? She's just a member of the Tanner family. What could she possibly be capable of doing?"

"You're no match for her."

Danielle was enraged. "You... Don't look down on me, Winter. Just you wait and see how I'll make her suffer."

Winter knew Danielle would not be able to stir up much trouble. Nonetheless, the latter was capable of causing Sophie some minor upsets, which wouldn't be such a bad thing.

Meanwhile, Tristan and Sophie were twirling away on the dance floor in effortless harmony. It was their first time dancing together, yet they made for a completely compatible pairing. "Mr. Tristan, I didn't think you had what it took to cause a national crisis," Sophie remarked.

"What do you mean?"

"Sir, don't tell me you can't tell that all the ladies here are thinking of sinking their teeth into me and ripping me to pieces," Sophie replied, deliberately emphasizing the word "sir."

"They're just jealous that you're much more beautiful than them. You don't have to worry about a thing."

His response rendered Sophie speechless.

Very well, then. Since you're so handsome, everything you say is correct.

“Mr. Tristan, this dance doesn’t require us to be so close together, does it?”

At that moment, their bodies were pressed so closely together in uncomfortable proximity, and Sophie was sure that Tristan had to be doing it on purpose.

“It does,” he answered simply.

Sophie fell silent while the ladies in the crowd started buzzing with whispers.

“What the heck? Just as I thought, Sophie is a minx! It’s too shameful to witness!” someone exclaimed.

“You’re right! Is she trying to seduce Mr. Tristan?”

“Let go of Mr. Tristan. Let me hold him instead,” another lady wailed.

Unable to bear the sight of them dancing any longer, Winter turned and grabbed a glass of red wine before exiting the hall.

Watching the man she had harbored feelings for since she was little being so close to another woman was too much for her.

Danielle was also so angry that her face turned pale.

When the music stopped, Tristan still did not want to let go of Sophie.

“Mr. Tristan, I think that’s enough,” said Sophie.

I’ve already been in the limelight too much today, and it wouldn’t be wise to go overboard. I certainly have no wish to make myself more enemies. Although I’m not afraid of them, I already have enough trouble on my plate.

Finally, Tristan loosened his grip.

She's right. It wouldn't be appropriate to take things too far. I mustn't act too hastily.

Having also had her fill of dancing, Ysabelle walked over with Felix.

"Soph, this is your keycard." Ysabelle handed a keycard to Sophie.

Taking it from her, Sophie said, "I'm exhausted, Belle. I'll go to my room to rest first. Happy birthday again."

"Sure. Felix, help me see Sophie to her room. There are many people here who've been eyeing her."

Ysabelle did not think anyone present was worthy of Sophie.

However, Felix made no answer and merely looked at Tristan.

How could he possibly give me the chance to do such a thing?

Tristan piped up, "Felix can stay here with you. I'll send Sophie up to her room."

"Goodnight," Sophie murmured to Ysabelle and the others before leaving with Tristan.

When Sophie reached her room and opened the door, she turned toward Tristan and said, "Goodnight, Mr. Tristan."

He leaned forward and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

“A goodnight kiss. Go on in and get some rest.”

Sophie found herself at a loss for words once again.

How did I just get kissed by him again? This man is really... Why does he keep kissing others so casually?

“What’s the matter? Are you hesitating to go into the room because you want to invite me to sleep with you?”

“Get lost,” Sophie uttered curtly, then went into her room and shut the door behind her.

That was the first time anyone had treated Tristan so brusquely, yet he did not appear to mind. Instead, a smile tugged at the corners of his lips.

Sophie’s room was next to Tristan’s, and as Winter returned from drinking her glass of wine, she saw the smile on Tristan’s lips.

Winter was thoroughly agitated by the sight of that smile.

She had never thought she would see him so besotted, and it left her devastated.

“Mr. Tristan...”

She called out his name, hoping he would spare her a glance.

However, the smile on his face faded the moment he saw her.

“Get some rest,” he responded.

The icy manner in which he uttered those three words was worlds apart from how he had said them to Sophie.

“Why her?”

Winter knew she should not have asked that question. After all, Tristan disliked others prying into his private affairs.

I just can't help it. I really, really, really like him. It has nothing to do with his family background. My love for him is pure and simple!

“What does that have anything to do with you? For your brother's sake, I'll let it slide this time. Make sure it doesn't happen again.”

With that, Tristan opened the door to his room and went in.

Winter leaned against the door, and her body slowly slid downward.

She did not even dare to make a sound as she cried.

Sophie was fast asleep when she was rudely awakened by a knock on the door.

She pulled the covers over her head, but it did nothing to block the sound.

Left with no other choice, she got out of bed and opened the door.

Then she began berating the person outside the door without even looking to see who it was. “Are you f*cking crazy?”

“It's me,” Tristan said, unable to resist laughing when he saw her in that state.

“Mr. Tristan, why aren’t you asleep at such a late hour? What on earth do you want?” she demanded.

Sophie would mind her words when she was awake. But at that moment, she could not be bothered to do so at all.

I’m in a bad mood, so he’d better have a good reason for showing up here.

“Come on. I’m taking you to see the sunrise.”

“Can I not go?”

“No.”

Many others were also awake at that time to catch the sunrise. Tristan led Sophie to the uppermost deck of the cruise ship.

No one else was allowed there, and they had the place to themselves.

Because of the low temperature at sea during dawn and the fact that Sophie was still in her evening gown from the night before, she felt rather chilly.

Tristan took out a shawl and draped it over her shoulders.

The view from the topmost deck was breathtaking, and as the pair sat together in silence, the sea breeze swept away Sophie’s drowsiness

Soon, the sun slowly rose above the calm surface of the water.

“It’s gorgeous!” Sophie gasped in awe.

“Indeed. Gorgeous,” Tristan echoed. However, he had his gaze fixed on her instead.

It was not until the sun had fully risen into the sky that Sophie finally turned around.

“I should get back,” she said. She still had the shareholders’ meeting to attend that day.

“Do you have something to do?”

“Yes. There’s something I need to attend to.”

“Okay. I’ll send you back,” Tristan replied. After all, it would probably be noon by the time the cruise ship made its way back.

As Tristan led Sophie down from the deck, the other ladies watching the sunrise appeared upset to see them together.

Chapter 64 The Fate Of Tanner Group

Tristan took Sophie to the dining hall for a simple breakfast, and by the time they finished eating, the yacht that was supposed to pick them up had arrived. After bidding farewell to Ysabelle, Tristan led Sophie onto the waiting yacht.

“What’s this? Mr. Tristan is leaving his niece here and heading back first?”

“Right? Now that Mr. Tristan has left, what’s the point of staying here?”

“I wish I could leave with him. Alas, I dare not tell him that.”

“You? Even if Mr. Tristan wanted to take someone with him, it’d be me. Why would he take you with him?”

“Why you—”

With Tristan gone, all that was left behind were the ladies and their wild imaginations.

Over at Tanner Group, Yale had arrived at the office bright and early that morning.

The annual shareholders’ meeting would be held that day, and he couldn’t make a single mistake.

Charmaine, who held five percent of Tanner Group’s shares, had also gone to the office that day.

Yale’s secretary cautioned, “Mr. Tanner, many shareholders have strong opinions over the strategy you employed the last quarter of the year. Today’s meeting may not be favorable to you.”

“I know that. But as Tanner Group’s largest shareholder, even if they’re displeased with me, there’s nothing they can do to me. Am I right?”

To Yale, Tanner Group was meant to belong to the Tanner family.

The secretary was well aware of Yale’s character. He’s too stubborn, and his abilities are mediocre. If it weren’t for him, Tanner Group wouldn’t have turned into what it was today.

The secretary did not say anything more, thinking it was probably time to start searching for a new job.

“I’ll go and prepare for the meeting, then.”

With that, the secretary left the conference room immediately.

“Are you sure there won’t be any problems?” Charmaine pressed.

Although she did not know what had happened to the company, she did know that the dividends she received had gradually decreased due to the company’s less-than-stellar profits over the past few years.

“What problems could there be? Stop cursing me with bad luck,” Yale snapped irritably, in a foul mood. His eye had been twitching over the past week, and he was worried that it was an omen that something would go wrong.

I’d rather die than let Tanner Group slip through my hands!

“Why are you getting mad at me? Tanner Group’s profits have only plummeted lower and lower in your hands. I honestly have no idea how you did that!” Charmaine’s temper also flared as she thought about how her life was getting increasingly difficult.

“If you can’t say anything good, then shut up. Otherwise, get lost!” Yale yelled, infuriated.

If it hadn’t been for me, Tanner Group would be in a much worse state now!

Meanwhile, Tristan had driven Sophie right up to the lobby of the office building of Tanner Group.

“Do you want me to go in with you?” The car had come to a stop, yet he was reluctant to let her go in and face the criticisms and judgments alone.

“That’s okay. Are you busy? If not, stay here and accompany me for a while.”

I don’t want to head up just yet. I’ll go to the shareholders’ meeting directly later. If I go up now, I’ll only have to listen to a bunch of nonsense.

“I’m not busy,” he replied.

As long as she needs me, I'll make time even if I'm busy.

Taking out his phone, he sent a text message to his assistant, asking the latter to delay his morning meeting by half an hour.

"Sophie, if you really need me to be there, I can attend the shareholders' meeting with you."

"It's all right. I just don't want to go in so early and see the others, that's all."

"Okay."

Thus, they sat in the car for more than ten minutes. Seeing that it was almost time, Sophie got out of the car.

"Thank you so much for today," she said before leaving.

Tristan alighted from the car, grabbed her hand, and pulled her into his embrace.

"Remember this, Sophie. No matter what happens, call me first thing," he reminded her. I believe she can handle these matters by herself. Since she doesn't want me to interfere, I'll respect her decision. It's just that she has to protect herself.

Sophie beamed at him.

"It's only a shareholders' meeting, not a congregation of evil monsters. I'll be fine. Honestly!" she responded. Isn't he thinking too little of me now? Then, she continued, "Okay. I should really get going now."

Tristan murmured an acknowledgment.

I believe in her.

Just before the meeting was about to start, all the shareholders took their seats.

Yale had also arrived at the conference room five minutes earlier. Seeing no sign of Sophie as he settled into his seat, he visibly heaved a sigh of relief.

He did not know why, but he was terribly afraid Sophie would attend the shareholders' meeting that day despite knowing she only held twenty percent of the shares.

Charmaine let out a relieved sigh as well.

As long as Sophie doesn't turn up, there won't be any hiccups at the shareholders' meeting today. After all, we have forty-five percent of the shares in our hands. Together, we're the company's largest shareholders.

"Is everyone here?" asked the secretary behind Yale.

"Except for Ms. Sophie, the other shareholders have arrived."

"Let's begin, then."

"But Ms. Sophie isn't here yet. She has a twenty percent stake in the company."

"I'm her father. I can represent her."

That had been Yale's plan all along. As Sophie's father and guardian, naturally, he would be able to make a statement on her behalf if she did not show up.

"There's no need for that. I can represent myself."

At that moment, Sophie pushed open the door and strode into the conference room.

She had changed her clothes and was dressed simply in blue jeans and a white sweater with her hair tied up.

Yale's face fell slightly.

She could've arrived at any time, but she must've deliberately chosen to show up at this very moment.

After picking a seat at random and sitting down, Sophie said, "Isn't there still one minute left? I'm not late, so you don't have to look at me like that."

The other shareholders exchanged glances, wondering which camp Sophie belonged to.

"You may begin now."

The person presiding over the meeting that day was Lionel Jennings, the general manager of Tanner Group.

He glanced at Yale and waited until the latter nodded before making his opening remarks.

Sophie did not pay the slightest attention to what he said.

Instead, she pulled out her phone and started playing a game. A shareholders' meeting like this is so dull!

The other shareholders could not refrain from frowning when they saw her playing a game on her phone at such a time and place.

As expected, she's just a child. If Old Mr. Tanner hadn't given her twenty percent of the shares out of pity, she'd have nothing. Even though she's here for the shareholders' meeting today, her presence probably won't affect the outcome of today's meeting.

The shareholders kept shaking their heads, thinking that there was no hope left in the Tanner family.

On the contrary, Yale was pleased with Sophie's behavior.

It doesn't matter if she's present for today's shareholders' meeting. As long as she doesn't stir up any trouble, I can put up with her.

Noticing that Sophie did not seem to be listening, Lionel calmed down at once. She's nothing but a silly little girl. Anyway, I've done up all the reports for today flawlessly. Even Yale Tanner didn't suspect a thing, let alone a foolish girl like her.

The other shareholders listened carefully as Lionel continued with his report.

When it came to the portion of the profits, the expressions of several shareholders darkened.

We didn't invest all that money into Tanner Group to get a pittance. If the company goes on as it is, we'll definitely lose everything!

It was then that Sophie finally set aside her phone and raised her head to glance at Lionel.

"Next, I'd like to invite our CEO to say a few words."

Chapter 65 Turning The Tables

Yale cleared his throat before turning on his microphone to address the investors. "After Mr. Jennings' introduction just now, I believe we all now have a better understanding of the profit and loss in the previous phase. I also believe we're all well aware that there are ups and downs in the business world.

That's why I hope we can take some time to remember why we started this in the first place. Let us keep moving forward because I know that Tanner Group will rise again one day."

"I don't appreciate those words, Mr. Tanner. The only reason I invested in Tanner Group is to make more money, and now you're telling me that I'm losing money instead? I can't accept that."

"That's right! Do you think our money grows on trees? Is that why you spent it like it's nothing?"

"If you can't do your job right, then I think it's time we replace you with someone else. That way, we can sleep easier at night," suggested Victor White. The man owned twenty percent of Tanner Group's shares, making him a majority shareholder that was second only to the Tanners.

Yale did not expect Victor to undermine him like that in front of all the other investors. "Mr. White, I'm the biggest shareholder of Tanner Group. Besides, it's Tanner Group, not White Group."

To that, Victor responded with a sneer. "I see. So you're telling us that Tanner Group is a family business and that there's nothing we can do about your incompetence, then? Is that it?"

"Why you little..." Yale got so upset that he was lost for words. He never knew Victor could be so infuriating.

Even though Victor had a devious smile on him, he had a point.

"I agree with Mr. White. If you don't have what it takes, Mr. Tanner, you should let someone more capable take your place."

"That's right! Why tire yourself when you can just sit back and let your dividends take care of you? In case you didn't notice, you're not doing a very good job."

Charmaine looked at Sophie and realized that the young woman was simply sitting there as though what was happening around her mattered not.

“We can keep doing this and waste everybody’s time, or we can raise our hands and vote! Mr. Tanner may have forty percent of the shares, but together, we have sixty,” suggested Victor impatiently.

“Those who do not agree that Yale Tanner should continue to hold his position as CEO of Tanner Group, please raise your hands.” Victor decided to ignore Lionel and proceed with the voting himself.

As soon as Victor finished his sentence, he was the first to raise his hand. The other shareholders thought for a while but eventually followed suit. This is the society we live in now, and family business just doesn’t work anymore. Mr. Tanner should let someone more capable take his place if he can’t produce desirable results.

In the end, Charmaine, Sophie, and Yale were the only ones who did not have their hands raised.

Combined, those who agreed to replace Yale possessed thirty-five percent of the company shares.

“Do you see now? You only have thirty-five percent, which means my family and I are still in charge. None of you have any rights to kick me out.” Yale could not help but gloat over the result.

Disappointed, Victor stood up and was ready to leave the conference room.

“Wait.” Suddenly, Sophie raised her hand. “I agree that Mr. Tanner should be stripped of his position as CEO of Tanner Group.”

The room immediately fell dead silent when everyone heard Sophie.

“Sophie, I’m your father!” exclaimed Yale furiously.

“I’m sorry, but we’re in the office right now. Personal relationships do not apply here.”

“How dare you!”

Victor turned back around, utterly impressed by Sophie.

“In that case, the first decision of today’s shareholders’ meeting is to dismiss Yale Tanner as the CEO of the Tanner Group,” announced Victor, thrilled that Yale was finally knocked off the pedestal. “Since we need to assign someone new as CEO now, I volunteer.”

“This is what it’s all about, isn’t it, Mr. White? You power-hungry b*stard!” cursed Yale with a popped vein.

“Not so fast. I’ll be contending for the position as well.”

Sophie’s voice resounded throughout the room once again. Even though she did not turn on her microphone, her voice was loud enough to catch everyone’s attention.

“What?”

“Isn’t she just eighteen years old?”

“She is! What makes her think this is a good idea anyway?”

“Doesn’t she know who Mr. White is? How dare she oppose the man like that!”

“You?” asked Victor after a moment of silence. Although he preferred not to embarrass the young woman, he did not think it was appropriate for her to treat the company like her playground.

Sophie nodded in response because she had promised her grandfather that she would ensure their family name stayed in the company name. “That’s right. Me.”

Victor snorted. He could not believe that a young woman like Sophie would dare to compete with him. What the heck is this family’s problem? I don’t even know what’s going on anymore.

“Is there a problem?” questioned Sophie as her glance swept across the shareholders.

“Ms. Tanner, this is a workplace, not your personal playground.”

“Do you think we’re fooling around here? A huge amount of money is at stake here!”

“I know. That’s why I think Mr. White and I should each take charge of a loss-making company. Then, we’ll compare the profits we make after a month. The winner gets to be CEO. How does that sound?” Since the shareholders refused to take her seriously, Sophie decided to let her capability do the talking.

“Are you sure about that, Missy?” Victor was confident that he could beat Sophie. After all, he did not go from rags to riches because he was lucky.

“Are you?”

The man could not help chuckling in amusement when Sophie riposted.

“You’ve got guts, Missy; I’ll give you that. Nobody has ever talked to me like that before. Fine! If that’s what you want, I’ll play along. See you in a month?”

“If that’s the case, I’d like to participate as well. I don’t think either of you can do better than me.” Discontented that he was no longer CEO, Yale thought the competition Sophie suggested would be his chance at redemption.

“Sure! I wouldn’t stop you from embarrassing yourself.” Since Victor agreed to let the man join in, the other shareholders had nothing to say about it.

“That’s it for today’s shareholders’ meeting, then! See you all in a month.” Victor was sure that he would become the CEO no matter what.

“Mr. Jennings, would you kindly sort out the three companies with the highest loss and send the information to us?” Sophie asked the general manager.

“Sure, Ms. Tanner,” responded Lionel immediately.

Sophie was ready to walk away after all the shareholders had left, but Yale stopped her.

“Is there anything else?”

“Is this how you treat your own father, Sophie? Do you have any idea how disappointed I was just now?” Yale was upset that his daughter undermined him.

“What’s wrong with how I treated you? Since you can’t do your job right, it’s only normal that we get someone more capable to replace you.”

“Why you little...” Thoroughly infuriated by his daughter, Yale felt as if his head was about to explode.

“Do you see what you’ve given birth to? She can’t even do well in her studies yet thinks running a company is easy. It’s nonsense!”

“We’ll know for sure in a month.” Sophie did not want to listen to the ranting any longer, so she turned around and left.

Chapter 66 Not Going To Do Anything

After walking out of the office building, Sophie was planning to catch a ride back to Wisteria Apartments when a red Porsche Cayenne suddenly stopped in front of her.

When the car window was rolled down, Sophie saw Victor with his flashy sunglasses on.

“Where are you heading, Missy? Let me give you a ride,” offered Victor after propping the eyewear on his head.

“No, thank you.” Sophie could immediately tell how showy the man was and would rather not be in his company.

“Come on. It’s rush hour. You’re not going to get a ride anytime soon. Don’t worry. I won’t do anything to you,” promised Victor with a big smile, showing his pearl-white teeth.

Knowing that Victor was right, Sophie had no choice but to open the car door and get into the Porsche Cayenne.

“Where to?”

“Wisteria Apartments.” Even though it was already afternoon, Sophie still had to go to school.

“What do you say we go for lunch together? Come on. Don’t look at me like that! It’s not like I’m planning to do anything to you; you’re too young for me. I admire what you did just now, so I hope to get to know you better.”

Many who knew Victor professionally regarded him as their big brother because he always looked out for others.

“No, thank you.”

Victor talked a lot on the way, but Sophie simply nodded or gave the briefest response possible.

“You really want to be the CEO of Tanner Group, Missy?”

“We’re here. Thanks for the ride.”

Victor wanted to say something after he parked his car, but Sophie quickly got out and denied him the chance to do so.

“She’s a pretty serious one if nothing else,” commented Victor while scratching his nose awkwardly.

Meanwhile, Yale and Charmaine had just returned to the Tanner residence.

As soon as Yale parked his car, he rushed toward Josiah, who was busy watering the plants. “Dad, do you know what Sophie did today? She sided with outsiders to strip me of my position as CEO! Tanner Group is the result of your hard work, Dad. You can’t just let her ruin it!”

“He’s right. What Sophie did was cold and heartless,” Charmaine chimed in.

“Sophie should’ve done that sooner after what you two did to the company. You’re not fit to be CEO, Yale. Even if Sophie doesn’t get the position, you should let someone more capable than you take your place.”

“Are you looking down on me too, Dad? You’re just like the rest of them!” Yale got emotional since he did not expect his father to agree with Sophie.

“Because it’s true that you don’t have what it takes.” Josiah had already given Yale enough chances, yet all he got was nothing but disappointment.

“Just you wait, Dad! I’m going to prove you wrong.”

Willow clenched her fists when she overheard the conversation. Why did Sophie have to return? Why did she have to take everything away from me?

When Yale entered the living room, Willow followed.

“I’ll always support you, Dad. To me, you’re the best there is.” Willow then hugged her father.

“You’re the only one who trusts me unconditionally, Willow,” stated Yale as he gently touched his daughter’s cheek.

“Don’t be sad, Dad. Sophie won’t get her way because Mason’s coming back from overseas soon. He can help you.”

“Good girl. You have to win Mason’s heart. With the Lairds’ help, there’s no way Sophie can take Tanner Group from me.”

“Got it!” Willow was confident that she could handle Mason.

At two-twenty, Sophie bumped into Willow just when she was about to leave Wisteria Apartments for school. Damn it! She doesn’t know when to give up, does she?

“What were you thinking, Sophie? How can you treat Dad that way?” rebuked Willow the second she saw Sophie.

“Get out of my way.” Sophie would rather not waste her time talking to the woman.

“I’m your sister, Sophie.”

“I don’t have a sister,” uttered Sophie before bumping Willow’s shoulder to walk past the woman. “One more thing. Stop stalking me because it’s disgusting.”

“How dare you!” Willow immediately stepped forward to grab Sophie by the hair.

“D*mn it!” Sophie shut her eyes and tried to control her emotions but to no avail.

With a swift turn, Sophie grasped and twisted Willow’s wrist.

The poor woman was in so much pain that she immediately ordered, “Let go of me! What are you doing?” Her eyes were already red, ready to send tears rolling down her cheeks.

“Do you not understand what I just said to you?”

When the driver saw what the two were doing, he hurriedly got out of the car. "What are you doing? Let go of Ms. Willow now!" demanded the driver while grabbing Sophie's hand.

In response to that, Sophie furrowed her eyebrows. "This doesn't concern you. Get lost."

"What do you think you're doing, Ms. Sophie? Ms. Willow's hands are precious! They cannot be injured!"

The driver thought he could overpower Sophie just because he was bigger in size. However, he realized he could not move when the young woman grabbed him by the hand as well.

"Why? Just because she knows how to use a brush? What she painted was trash anyway, so I might as well save her trouble," mocked Sophie.

"You little..." At that point, Willow wanted nothing more than to rip off Sophie's lips. How dare she say that about my paintings! I've won awards for my talent!

"You're probably just jealous of me, aren't you, Sophie? You're jealous that I get to be with Mason while you—"

"Jealous of you? You have absolutely nothing that I want." Sophie applied more pressure on Willow's wrist, and immediately, the woman fell to the ground. "You'd better stay away from me, or I'll be more

than glad to break that hand of yours."

The driver hurried over to help Willow up. "Are you okay, Ms. Willow?"

"I'm fine, but you can tell my father what just happened."

"I understand."

Sophie stepped into her classroom just as the bell was still ringing.

Ysabelle wanted to walk over to speak with Sophie, but unfortunately, their physics teacher had arrived.

“Students, we have a physics competition next semester. Does anybody care to participate?”

The students exchanged looks, but none raised their hands to volunteer.

“What about you, Sophie?”

When Sophie regained her senses, Aaron was already staring intently at her.

“Mr. Elswick, I’ll be sitting for the university entrance exam next June, so I’d like to concentrate on preparing for that.”

The entire classroom fell dead silent after everyone heard Sophie’s ridiculous excuse, for they all knew that she did anything but pay attention in class every day.

Her classmates were convinced that the university entrance exam was nothing more than a joke to her.

“Sophie, I’m sure you’ll find the competition this time around very interesting because Bailey will be participating too. You can learn a lot from each other.”

“But I—”

“Before you turn me down, just hear me out, okay? Come to my office after class, and we’ll talk.”

Seeing how excited Aaron was, Sophie had no idea how to reject her teacher.

After class, the young woman received information from Lionel informing her that she would be in charge of Transfix Cosmetics, a makeup brand under Tanner Group.

The brand used to rake in the most profit, but after an unfortunate incident, it got boycotted by the public.

The incident, where a university student got disfigured after using the foundation produced by Transfix Cosmetics, had yet to be resolved.

Hence, people avoided the Transfix Cosmetics counters as though they were plagued with diseases.

Reviving the brand would not be an easy job.

The company Victor was assigned had suffered heavy losses as well.

When Sophie saw the one Yale was assigned, she could not help chuckling.

Chapter 67 The Burn

The company Yale got was Tanner Group's most profitable one.

If everything went well for him, he would not even have to do anything, and the company would still make the most profit.

Did he seriously think no one would notice? Is it so hard for him to just admit his incompetence? Sophie was unsure how to feel about her father.

"What are you looking at, Soph? Come on. Let's go eat," Ysabelle urged Sophie to go.

“You probably don’t have much money left after you got me that gift. So from today onward, I’ll pay for all your food.” Ysabelle really liked the rock Sophie got for her. She could not bear the thought of the young woman skipping meals.

“Sure!” Sophie was more than willing to let her friend take care of her meals.

“What do you want to eat?” Ysabelle had always had trouble deciding where to go for food.

“Let’s have spaghetti! It’s been a while.”

“Sure. Let’s go.”

There was a restaurant famous for its spaghetti just less than a mile east of Jipsdale Premier High. Many, including the students of the high school, patronized the establishment regularly.

Naturally, the place was almost full when Sophie and Ysabelle arrived there.

“Hurry, Soph! I just saw two empty seats!” Ysabelle pulled Sophie to an empty table, and the two ordered spaghetti after sitting down.

“Hi there. I’m Bailey Dixon from Senior Class 1,” greeted the boy seated across from the young ladies as soon as they settled down.

Because of how tall Bailey was, he did not seem comfortable with his table and chair.

The young man had a pair of clear but cold eyes that made him seem somewhat distant.

“So you’re Bailey! I’m Ysabelle, and this is my best friend, Sophie,” Ysabelle gladly introduced herself and Sophie to Bailey. Now I know why he’s the campus hunk. What a handsome face!

“What the heck? I’m only here because Bailey is!”

“Me too! We’re in the same class. I don’t understand why he’s talking to those two from Senior Class 8 instead of me.”

“I can’t believe he just introduced himself to them.”

The other female students in the restaurant were upset when they saw what had happened.

They all had a crush on Bailey because not only did the young man come from a wealthy family, but he was also kind and smart. Most importantly, he was exceptionally good-looking.

Bailey’s admirers thought his appearance was as impressive as that of an angel.

“Your spaghetti is on the way.” A waiter was rushing toward Sophie and Ysabelle when somebody bumped into him.

“Soph, look out!” Ysabelle’s heart almost skipped a beat when she saw the plate of hot spaghetti flying toward Sophie.

Fortunately, Bailey was strong and quick enough to pull Sophie out of the way.

Some of the sauce landed on Bailey’s arm, but most of it ended up on the floor.

Had Bailey not rescued Sophie in time, the young woman would have been covered in spaghetti.

“Oh, my goodness! I’m terribly sorry. It was an accident. Are you okay?” The waiter was so shocked that his face was drained of color.

Since the spaghetti came just out of the kitchen, it was piping hot.

“Are you hurt?” Bailey wanted to ensure that Sophie was fine even though his arm was slightly burned.

“I’m fine. We need to get you to the hospital!” Sophie could see a sizeable red patch on Bailey’s fair arm since the young man got the sleeves of his school uniform rolled up.

“That’s not necessary. I’ll just apply some healing balm, and it’ll be as good as new,” said Bailey nonchalantly since he did not think his injury was anything a man like him could not handle.

“I still think you should go to the hospital.” Ysabelle insisted that the young man seek professional help after looking at his injury.

“I’m good. Really.”

“Fine! If you won’t go to the hospital, at least let me get you something from the pharmacy. You guys wait for me at the school gate.”

“Sophie...” Before Bailey could finish his sentence, Sophie had already left.

The young woman went to a pharmacy to buy a bottle of burn relief spray and returned to the school gate, where her schoolmates waited. “Take off your jacket.”

“Let me help you,” offered Ysabelle, but Bailey would not let her.

“It’s fine. I can do it myself.”

Bailey wrapped his jacket around his arm after taking it off.

Then, Sophie approached the young man to lift his arm with one hand while holding the spray with the other.

Even though the process could not be simpler, Sophie gave Bailey her full attention anyway.

Suddenly, it was as if they were the only two people around.

Bailey found himself completely captivated by the young woman treating his arm.

After she was done spraying, Sophie handed the bottle to Bailey.

“Spray again before going to bed and make sure your arm stays dry.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m the one who should be grateful here, Bailey.”

“It’s nothing. That’s what schoolmates do. Hey, you guys haven’t had dinner yet, right? What do you say we go get something to eat?”

“Sure. To show my appreciation, I’ll buy,” offered Sophie generously.

She was the kind of person who knew how to hold a grudge, but at the same time, she was also quick to repay kindness with kindness.

The three then went to a pizza place near Jipsdale Premier High.

Sophie only returned to her seat after placing their orders.

“I heard Mr. Elswick wanted you to participate in the physics competition, Sophie. Let’s do it together!”

“I haven’t decided yet.” Sophie knew she had to keep her promise to Josiah, so she could not afford to be distracted.

“Well, I hope you’ll decide to participate.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Ysabelle could not believe there was no hot sauce on the pizza when it got served. “Who eats pepperoni pizzas without hot sauce?”

“I don’t mind,” responded Bailey before glancing at Sophie unconsciously. Sophie may look cold, but she’s actually a very thoughtful person.

“Let’s dig in!”

During dinner, Ysabelle posted on her Instagram: What should I do? I think Soph is going to abandon me for someone else soon. Still, she was lucky the campus hunk was around to save her today. For Soph’s sake, I’ll keep my thoughts to myself for now.

It had only been a minute since Ysabelle posted on Instagram when Tristan called her.

“What’s going on?” questioned Tristan.

“What are you talking about, Uncle Tristan?” Ysabelle had no idea what the man was referring to.

“Where are you now?”

“At school, of course!” Ysabelle was about to say something else, but Tristan had already hung up.
“Hello?”

“What’s wrong?” inquired Sophie curiously when she saw how baffled her friend was.

“Nothing.” Ysabelle had not the faintest idea what had gotten into her uncle.

Even though she did not say anything about it, Ysabelle thought there was something seriously wrong with Tristan then.

When Tristan finally arrived at the pizza place, he saw the three walk out.

Even though he could not hear the conversation between Sophie and the young man beside her, he could see how attentive she was.

The two were so absorbed in their conversation that they did not even notice Tristan when they passed by his car.

“What are you worried about, Mr. Tristan? It’s just a harmless boy. He’s got nothing on you.”

“Give me a cigarette.”

As instructed, Felix lighted a cigarette before handing it to Tristan, who then took a long drag.

“Are you okay, Mr. Tristan?” Since Felix could not read Tristan’s mind, he could not understand why the man would feel threatened by a boy. So what if he’s the campus hunk? He’s no match for Mr. Tristan when it comes to good looks.

After their self-study session, Sophie only returned to Wisteria Apartments after watching Ysabelle leave in a car.

The young woman only walked for five minutes before she stopped and turned around to look at Tristan behind her.

Chapter 68 She Has Come Of Age

“Mr. Tristan, what are you doing?” Sophie exclaimed. She had noticed Tristan tailing her a while back but decided to wait and see what he had up his sleeve.

To her surprise, they had almost reached the apartment, yet he still hadn't taken the initiative to show himself.

Knowing that he had been exposed, Tristan went to Sophie and walked with her.

"Are you okay? Is the Lombard Group going bankrupt?" the latter asked.

Alas, Tristan said nothing.

Sophie suddenly stopped in her tracks and added, "Then, what's with that expression of yours? Are you feeling down?"

"It's nothing. Come on. I'll send you home. It's getting late."

"Let's grab a bite first! I didn't have a good dinner earlier," Sophie suggested, remembering how she had only ordered non-spicy dishes because of Bailey. The food was not to her taste that she could feel her hunger pangs return.

"What do you want to eat?" Tristan asked as he took her bag.

Women who walked past the couple, regardless of their ages, couldn't help but cast envious glances at them.

What a lucky young lady! Her boyfriend is such a good-looker and so considerate to help carry her bag!

"Oh, let's go get some barbecue! It's been so long since I had that," Sophie chirped as she pulled Tristan along excitedly. If I remember correctly, there's a food truck just up ahead!

True enough, a barbecue food truck came into sight after about ten minutes of walking.

Sophie pored over the menu and ordered several items that caught her attention. She turned around to look for Tristan, only to notice he was staring at her.

Realizing Tristan would stick out like a sore thumb if they ate at the food truck, she quipped, "We'll take these home to eat!"

"It's all right. Don't worry about me."

"Hey, boss, we'd like to do a take-out. A medium spice level will do," Sophie instructed. As much as I love spicy food, I don't think it'd be wise to overdo it this late at night.

"Got it! Please take a seat first!"

"Oh, it's okay. That won't be necessary," Sophie replied before sauntering toward Tristan to stand with him.

After a while, she broke the silence. "Why have you come today?"

It hasn't been that long since we parted, has it?

"I don't know why, but I ended up walking here," Tristan explained. "And since it was almost time for your self-study session to end, I decided to drop by."

"Oh, okay..." Sophie answered and said nothing more. She wasn't particularly curious, so she didn't see the need to probe further.

Unfortunately, there were so many people at the food truck that the waiting time got rather long.

"Are you tired?" Tristan asked concernedly.

Indeed, Sophie was starting to feel the exhaustion setting in. How could she not, when she had attended a shareholders' meeting in the morning, a class in the afternoon, and a self-study session at night?

"I'm all right."

"Why don't you head home first? I'll bring the food back when it's ready," Tristan urged.

"It's fine. We should be getting our orders soon anyway," Sophie replied. I don't want to go home. I don't want to stay there alone.

"All right, miss, your food is ready! Oh, and I must say, your boyfriend's very handsome!" the food truck owner teased as he handed a bag of food to Sophie.

Just as she was about to pay by scanning the QR code with her phone, Tristan handed a hundred in cash to the owner.

"That's right, miss. You guys are dating, so don't be shy to spend your boyfriend's money," the owner said with a chuckle while looking for change.

"Keep the change," Tristan uttered.

Thanks to the owner's words, his gloomy mood had done a complete one-eighty.

Sophie, too, could also sense the drastic change in him.

Wow, he sure has cheered up a lot!

Later, on their way home, Sophie bought a case of beer at the convenience store.

"Let me take that!" Tristan offered.

Sophie didn't reject him either and handed the beers over without hesitation. Now that she didn't have to carry anything, there was a spring in her step as the couple made their way home.

Once they were back in Wisteria Apartments, Sophie quickly laid the food on the coffee table and passed a can of beer to Tristan. "Do you want to drink?"

Tristan instantly accepted it. Knowing that Sophie was in the mood to drink, he was only too happy to join her.

With that, Sophie opened another beer for herself and took a long sip. "Oh, the taste is pretty good."

After sitting on the carpet and leaning against the couch, she began tucking into her spread of barbecued meats.

Tristan, too, picked up a fork and took a few mouthfuls of food.

Worried that Sophie might overeat, he began to eat even faster. "Don't eat so much. It's not good for your health," he advised.

"It's okay. I only eat these occasionally. Besides, many people in Chanaea are fond of barbecued meats, yet they're all fine, aren't they?"

It didn't take long before Sophie finished her can of beer.

After crushing the empty can and tossing it into the bin, she promptly took another.

"You can stop eating if you're not used to the food," Sophie suddenly said.

Tristan did as he was told and joined her on the carpet with his beer.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, I’m good!” Sophie answered. I merely had a craving for beer. That’s all.

Despite having a high alcohol tolerance, she still couldn’t stop her face from getting warm and flushed after downing a few cans of beer at one go.

Just as she was about to open another beer, Tristan grabbed her hand and pulled her into his arms.

Sophie looked up at him in surprise. “What do you want?”

“I think you’ve had enough.”

“Oh. Well, this is the last can,” Sophie insisted as she cracked it open and took a few sips. Then, she set it down on the coffee table and added, “Excuse me, I have to use the bathroom.”

In all honesty, with Tristan sitting so near her, she couldn’t help but feel a little uncomfortable.

Seeing that she was about to leave, Tristan pulled her back into his embrace and planted a kiss on her lips.

Even though Sophie wasn’t drunk, her eyes had glazed over from the alcohol, making her look even dreamier and more alluring.

Breathless from the unexpected kiss and feeling somewhat parched, she hurriedly pushed Tristan away.

“I’m thirsty.”

Without further ado, Tristan fetched a glass of water and fed her.

"Time for bed," he muttered.

If I continue staring at her like this, who knows what else I might do to her?

Sophie nodded obediently and headed back to her room.

For the next few minutes, Tristan finished Sophie's remaining can of beer, tidied up the coffee table, and finally left Wisteria Apartments.

The next day, Felix walked into the CEO's office at Lombard Group and was surprised to see Tristan in a cheery mood.

"Mr. Tristan, how did last night go?" he teased, curious to find out how far his boss had progressed.

"Are you tired of living? What filthy thoughts do you have in your mind?"

"Of course not! But didn't you go straight to her as soon as you heard about the campus hunk? You were jealous, weren't you?" Felix said with a chuckle.

I can't believe I had the chance to see Mr. Tristan being green with envy. For that alone, everything's worth it!

"Mr. Tristan, if you like her, you got to tell her! How else would she know about your feelings?" Felix added. "Also, there has to be some form of physical contact. Catch my drift?"

"She's still young," Tristan replied. There's no need to rush things.

"She has come of age."

"Felix, are you sure you want to carry on this discussion?" Tristan snapped as he signed the documents that the former had brought along.

“Fine. I won’t say anymore.”

Mr. Tristan has always been ruthless and decisive in everything he does. When it came to love and relationships, he never seemed to harbor any desires either. But now that he has found someone he fancies, he’s become so willing to dote on her!

After finishing her second period of the day, Sophie instantly received the information from Butterfly.

Unfortunately, before she could go through it all, she received a call from the latter.

“Are you sure you don’t need our help?”

“It’s just a small matter. I got this,” Sophie replied. If I can’t even find the confidence to handle it, I wouldn’t be Sophie Tanner!

That evening at seven, Sophie skipped her self-study session and went to Nocturnal after changing her clothes.

Since she was alone and a total knockout, her appearance soon caught everyone’s attention.

To her surprise, the young lady she was looking for had three men around her and plying her with alcohol.

“I can’t drink anymore.”

“How can that be? You haven’t drunk a lot at all. Come on. I’ll feed you,” one of the men urged before pouring whiskey into his mouth to feed her.

Seeing how dazed the young lady was, Sophie immediately strode toward her and pulled her up.

“Hey, who the hell are you? How dare you ruin my fun!” the man scolded.

However, when he looked up and saw how pretty Sophie was, his eyes instantly lit up.

“Hey, missy, have you perhaps fallen for me? We’re happy to oblige if you want to join in the fun. You know, I’m a very skilled lover. I guarantee you’ll be satisfied!” he said leeringly.

Chapter 69 You Love A Crowd

The next second, the man tried to make a move on Sophie, only to have her grab his hand.

“I told you to get lost. Did you not hear that?” Sophie snapped. She had never been a patient person, but unfortunately, her appearance always made her look meek and vulnerable.

Alas, the man wasn’t about to give up on his lewd advances. “Come on, missy. I’m really amazing in bed!”

“What are you doing?” Letitia suddenly shouted as she glared at the nosy Sophie. “I had my eyes on him first.”

The latter arched her brows. My goodness. This girl sure is an odd duck!

“Fine. In that case, sorry for bothering you,” Sophie muttered before letting go of the man’s hand and returning to her seat.

As luck would have it, Felix entered the bar at that moment. “Wait a minute. Are my eyes deceiving me? That’s Sophie, isn’t it?”

Upon hearing that, Tristan hurried over to take a look for himself. Ah, he’s right. That is Sophie.

She had worn a sleeveless sequin dress, and her long hair was draped sensually over her shoulders.

As she sat on the swivel chair with her legs crossed, there was no doubt many men would have had the temptation to take her home.

Naturally, Winter had also noticed Sophie. After all, Charles had arranged the party at Nocturnal for her so they could celebrate the success of her new perfume.

“Well, well, well. Who’d have thought that a high school student would take a shine to Nocturnal? Then again, who wouldn’t be dazzled by the resplendence here? I suppose it’s even more exciting for Ms. Tanner since she had spent time in a place like Horington,” Winter scoffed. “That said, don’t you think she’s dressed a little too provocatively?”

In all honesty, Winter hated seeing Sophie near her. No matter where the latter showed up, she’d immediately steal all the limelight, and Winter would no longer be the center of attention.

“Watch your words, Winter,” Charles warned.

What’s the use of making these comments anyway? The more she says, the more she’ll seem rude.

Winter shrugged.

“I’m not suggesting anything. I just don’t think it’s safe for a young lady to come to a place like Nocturnal alone.”

Felix was instantly rendered speechless. I can’t believe she’s shameless enough to say that! It’s wild enough that she’d be worried about something untoward happening to Sophie.

“You guys can go over first,” Tristan ordered, his expression cold and stoic.

Deep down, however, he was fuming.

Sophie’s outfit was way too attractive, and several men in the bar were checking her out.

That, without a doubt, made Tristan very uncomfortable. All he wanted was to gouge out the eyes of anyone who had the gall to look at her.

“Mr. Tristan...” Winter said before her voice trailed off. She was worried that Tristan might leave, but after seeing his expression, she decided to hold her tongue and walk to their private room.

The next second, Tristan marched to Sophie and sat next to her. Like her, his long legs were just as alluring.

Having detected movement behind her, Sophie turned around and immediately came face to face with Tristan.

“Mr. Tristan, have you installed a tracking device on me?” she mused with a raised eyebrow.

“Thanks for reminding me. I really should do that,” Tristan answered. It’s her fault for always playing with danger and making people worry.

Instead of answering him, Sophie decided to change the topic.

“Why are you here?”

“It’s for Winter’s celebration party. We’re in the same private room as last time. Are you alone?”

“Yes, I am,” Sophie replied before glancing at Letitia.

From the looks of it, I guess she has chosen to sink into the depths of depravity. I’ll have to find some other time to negotiate with her. Letitia is the key to saving Transfix Cosmetics, but I know it won’t be easy to get the truth from her.

“Join me then!”

"It's okay. I'm leaving in a bit. Besides, I'm not familiar with Ms. Quigley. I don't think it'd be nice to crash the party," Sophie explained. More importantly, I know Winter's not going to like me.

"It's fine. We'll only stay for a while, and I'll send you home."

"All right, then!"

As soon as Sophie got up, her long, slender legs stood out even more.

Alas, the men with Letitia noticed that and quickly made their way toward her.

After all, how could they let a perfect prey slip away?

The lustful man from before whipped out a wad of cash from his bag and slammed it on the table.
"Well? Is this enough?"

Sophie instinctively glanced at Tristan, but before she could say anything else, the man shouted, "Why are you looking at him? I have all the money in the world, and if you don't think this is enough, I'll give you more!"

With that, he tossed another thick wad of cash onto the table.

"Hey, missy, I really like you. As long as you leave with me tonight, I'll give you any amount of money that you desire."

Winter, who had overheard the conversation, couldn't help snickering.

Oh, my. I wonder how Mr. Tristan would feel after witnessing that. Sophie is such a fool! Doesn't she know she's digging her own grave? Once again, this proves I'm the only one worthy of being with Tristan!

Sophie suddenly burst out laughing. What's wrong with this guy? Doesn't he know he's playing with fire?

"Is it still not enough? Fine. I have more!" the man thundered as he slapped another hundred thousand in cold, hard cash on the table.

"Wait a minute. You are—"

"Yes, I'm Trevor Gardner! You might not have heard of me, but I'm sure you know my father, Brayden Gardner!"

"Brayden Gardner? Oh, so you're his son," Tristan said coldly with a glint in his eyes.

"That's right! Look, missy, even he knows who my father is! Why don't you be my girlfriend? I'm serious about it!" Trevor exclaimed as he grinned from ear to ear.

"You want me to be your girlfriend?"

"Yes. What do you think? Leave with me tonight!"

Alas, Trevor still had no idea who he had just offended.

"Wait a minute," Sophie muttered before taking her phone out to make a call.

As soon as the call got through, she immediately rattled off the address of Nocturnal. "That's the bar I'm in. Bring a few of your kind over here right now."

Then, she hung up the phone.

“Wow, so you love a crowd! That’s no problem. I know many people who would be happy to join us!” Trevor said with a lewd smile. “I see we’re the same kind!”

By then, Sophie could no longer be bothered to answer him.

Tristan, though, couldn’t help but chime in, “You’re courting disaster.”

How dare he perv on my love!

“Why are you so angry? Calm down. If you like, we can rope you in too. You’re quite a looker yourself,” Trevor uttered as he looked Tristan up and down. Honestly, I wouldn’t mind trying it out with a man for once.

Unable to hold it in any longer, Sophie burst out laughing.

“Do you know who he is?” she asked amid guffaws. I got to hand it to him for even thinking about touching Mr. Tristan.

“Does it matter who he is? What’s most important is who I am, isn’t it?”

“Mr. Tristan, he said you’re not important.”

“M-Mr. Tristan? Hey, missy, cut it out. Y-Your joke is not funny...” Trevor stammered. His father had once warned him not to mess with anyone from the four major families of Jipsdale, especially not with the head of the families, Tristan Lombard.

“You’ve got some guts,” Tristan said as he finally got up from his seat. “So you want to play, huh?”

“You guys can’t scare me! Why would the real Mr. Tristan show up in a place like this? I’m not dumb!” Trevor retorted, even though he could feel his legs turning into jelly.

"I'm indeed Tristan Lombard. You can now think about how you should die to appease me."

Upon hearing that, Trevor immediately fell to his knees.

"Is that really you, Mr. Tristan? Oh, my goodness. I'm such a fool. I didn't mean to put you down. I'm so sorry!"

"Is that all?" Tristan snapped, his voice even louder now. "Do you have a warped understanding of who I am? Is that why you think I'm a kind person who'd easily forgive those who insulted me?"

Chapter 70 Keep Him Alive

Terrified, Trevor started groveling at Tristan's feet.

The latter turned to look at Sophie. "Well? What do you think we should do?"

"Miss, I was wrong. I've made a big mistake. Please let me off!" Trevor begged, hoping Sophie would be soft-hearted enough to speak up for him.

At that moment, five strapping men entered the bar and walked up to Sophie. "Ms. Tanner, we're here."

"Mr. Gardner loves having fun with men. You guys like that, don't you? Take him away! You can do whatever you like to him, but make sure to keep him alive."

"Yes, Ms. Tanner!"

"N-No! Ms. Tanner, I was wrong! I won't do it again!" Trevor pleaded.

A cold grin crept across Sophie's face. "Didn't you say you were amazing in bed? Have you forgotten that you wanted to play with Mr. Tristan too?"

"I didn't know he—"

"Enough!" Sophie interrupted. "You said you love having fun, so I got plenty of people to play with you. By the way, they don't need your money, so you can enjoy yourself without spending a dime! Take him away! What an eyesore."

With that, two of the burly men pulled Trevor to his feet.

"Let's go, Mr. Gardner! Stop resisting. Otherwise, don't blame us if you get hurt."

Seeing the scene unfold in front of her, Letitia hurried over.

"What are you guys doing? Let go of Mr. Gardner this instance, or I'll call the police!"

"You'd better mind your own business, Ms. Gatrell! Aren't you ashamed of yourself after all that you've done? What gives you the right to stand here and lecture us?" one of the men said before dragging Trevor away.

Now that Sophie had instructed them, they'd make doubly sure not to kill Trevor from all the fun they were about to have with him.

"Well?" Sophie asked as she turned to Tristan. "Are you pleased with that resolution?"

"Not really, but I can still accept it."

"Y-You... You guys have gone too far! Do you know who his father is? He's none other than—"

Before Letitia could finish her words, Sophie interrupted, "So? Do you want to go with him? If that's what you desire, I can call my men back to take you along. You can all have a wild night together."

Urgh. Letitia is seriously testing my patience. Doesn't she know how tiring it is to teach people a lesson?

Suddenly, Tristan removed his suit jacket and tied it around Sophie's waist.

"What are you doing?" Sophie asked in bewilderment. We're in a bar, for goodness' sake. I'm already dressed very modestly for the occasion.

"It's nothing. Let's go in!"

Still seething with anger, Letitia ran off to inform Brayden.

With Brayden around, Trevor will be fine, won't he? Tristan and Sophie are feeling pretty smug now, but I'm sure the Gardners will never let them off! Just wait and see!

As expected, Brayden immediately sent people to rescue Trevor when he got the call.

However, upon learning who his son had offended, he was rendered speechless.

"That a*shole! Does he know what he has done?"

Brayden was a famous director, so it was natural for him to rub shoulders with high society.

He might have heard of Tristan's name, but he had never met the latter in person before.

Despite that, he had always known that Tristan was someone he should never provoke, so why was his son dumb enough to poke the bear?

"What should we do, then? We can't possibly leave our only son in the lurch!" Brayden's wife, Valerie, muttered.

Brayden flew into a rage. “Why don’t you tell me? We’re up against Mr. Tristan, for goodness’ sake! No one in Jipsdale or even Chanaea dares to aggravate him! It’s all your fault. You’re home every day, yet you’ve failed to educate our child.”

“You can rely on your connections, can’t you?” Valerie pleaded. “After all, you’re a famous director. I’m sure Mr. Tristan would go easy on you.”

Left with no other choice, Brayden continued calling up his friends in a bid to track down Tristan.

Valerie is right. I’m a famous director with legions of fans. The CEO of Lombard Group can’t possibly make me his enemy and risk incurring the wrath of everyone, can he?

Meanwhile, Tristan opened the door to the private room and ushered Sophie in, causing everyone inside to look up at them.

After seeing the suit jacket around Sophie’s waist, Felix roared with laughter. “Sophie, what a unique dress sense you have!”

Winter had initially thought that Tristan would change his mind about Sophie after the earlier episode with Trevor.

To her horror, not only had he brought Sophie to the party, but he had also shown just how much he cared about her.

After all, if she meant nothing to him, why would he mind that others were looking at her legs?

Sophie merely shrugged off Felix’s comment. Unique? So be it. What baffles me more is why Mr. Tristan doesn’t seem too happy.

“Scoot over,” Tristan instructed Felix.

Without hesitation, the latter got up to sit with Sean, leaving the two-seater couch for Tristan and Sophie.

The couple had just taken their seats when Tristan's phone started ringing.

After answering the call and listening for a few seconds, he scoffed, "Well, what do you think? His son pissed me off, so why shouldn't I teach him a lesson to keep him in line? I won't kill him, but if he continues antagonizing me, don't blame me for changing my mind."

As it turned out, Brayden had managed to find someone to intercede with Tristan on his behalf.

"Wow. Who knew Brayden Gardner had that much influence?" Sophie mused, surprised that the director could find people willing to help him.

Tristan hung up the phone, a flicker of annoyance crossing his face.

I don't care who tries to intercede for the Gardners today. No amount of pleading would work.

"Don't be angry, Mr. Tristan. It's not good for your health," Winter said as she poured him a glass of red wine.

Besides, is it worthwhile getting so worked up for Sophie?

Instead of drinking the wine, Tristan opened one of the beers on the coffee table and took a gulp.

Naturally, Winter was shocked. Everything around her was changing so rapidly that she had trouble grasping them. "Mr. Tristan, didn't you use to dislike drinking beer?" she blurted out.

"Winter, there's no need to be so strict," Tristan replied. Does she expect me to report my likes and dislikes? How ridiculous.

Sophie, too, had grabbed a beer to drink.

Winter's trying to show me up, isn't she? Why else would she keep implying how much she knows Tristan? Then again, so what if she knows him well? He doesn't fancy her at all.

Winter tightened her grip around the glass. "That's not what I meant, Mr. Tristan."

"All right, all right. We're here tonight to celebrate Winter's success, so cut her some slack, Tristan," Charles chimed in. He couldn't bear to see his sister being so infatuated with someone who didn't reciprocate her feelings.

Thankfully, Tristan glanced at Charles and said nothing more.

Even though she felt aggrieved, Winter merely sat silently, not daring to say anything else.

However, there was no doubt that she hated Sophie with a vengeance.

I was supposed to have my celebration party tonight, yet Sophie has to show up and ruin everything for me. It hurts so much to hear Tristan criticizing me!

"It's getting late. I should go home now," Sophie muttered as she got up from the couch.

Since Winter and I dislike each other, there's no point in staying here and wasting my time. We should go our separate ways.

"Okay. You guys continue with the party, then. I'll send her home," Tristan said.

Winter looked up in disbelief, but Tristan had already left the couch.

"Mr. Tristan, what's this about?" Felix asked in bafflement. We've barely started drinking, and he's already on his way out?

"I'm not in a good mood. You guys carry on without me!" Tristan answered before following Sophie out of the room.

"Got it!"

Ha! So, Mr. Tristan's also the kind who favors his lover over friends!

After leaving the room, Sophie turned to Tristan.

"Mr. Tristan, I can make my own way home. You don't have to give me a lift."

"Even if I stayed, I'd only be drinking with them. What's so fun about that?"

With so many people jostling about in the bar, Tristan swiftly pulled Sophie into his arms when he saw someone about to bump into her.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Sophie replied. "Are you sure you don't want to stay? I know Ms. Quigley would want you to."

"Sophie, it doesn't matter what Winter thinks. I have nothing to do with her."

Indeed, Tristan wasn't a promiscuous person by any means, and he had never done anything to lead Winter on.