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Chapter 251 Pondering

Nicole could see how Colton's face darkened immediately after she told him that.

He proceeded to place aside the medicine that he had initially brought to the corner of his mouth. He might not have much interest in women, but it didn't mean that he wanted to be a eunuch.

She carefully took a step back when she saw how Colton was holding back. "Uh... President Gardner," she squeaked. "I will stay in the guestroom beside your room. You can call me anytime if you feel unwell somewhere."

Her hand was already holding the doorknob before she finished her sentence.

The man nodded and gave her his thanks in a low voice.

Nicole had a feeling that something was going to happen as she continued to look at his dark expression, so she quickly opened the door and left Colton to himself.

The only things that tickled his senses in the quiet room now were the smell of the medicine wafting through the air and the heat in the lower part of his body.

This was the first time in his life he had ever felt so helpless despite the humiliation; yet, for the sake of his happiness for the remainder of his life, Colton had no choice but to reach for his nether region.

Nicole headed to the bed to lie down as soon as she entered the guest room. Even though he didn't have a servant at home, he always had someone to clean the house. That was why even the unoccupied guest room wasn't dirty.

She didn't know why but she couldn't fall asleep. Memories of the kiss Colton gave her earlier seem to come rushing in whenever she closed her eyes. She reached out to touch her cheeks, only to realize that they felt warm against her palms. It was probably because she was kissed by him earlier.

A frown soon appeared on her face as she stared at the ceiling. She didn't understand why she suddenly felt nostalgic when he kissed her.

Thinking of this, Nicole abruptly shook her head fiercely to remove all the messy thoughts in her head.

Instead, she closed her eyes as she willed herself to stop thinking about it.

Nicole was sure that Queenie was the culprit who drugged Colton's drink in order to force him into doing the deed. What Nicole couldn't figure out was why Queenie would do something like this.

The one thing that Queenie wasn't wrong about was that she was Colton's fiancée. There was absolutely no need for her to pull something like this.

Could it be that nothing had happened between them even though they were engaged?

And on top of that, Queenie must have felt the urgency after Nicole had brought someone from Triton Studio to expose Queenie's deeds. That must have prompted her to seal the deal with Colton.

Nicole was confused again when she thought about this. Why would Colton make Queenie his fiancée if nothing had happened between them?

It seemed to be more confusing the more she thought about it, but then again, neither Queenie nor Colton had anything to do with her.

As Nicole relaxed, she perked up her ears to check if there was any sound coming from Colton's room, only for her to not pick up anything at all. It might be because he drank the medicine or the soundproofing of the house was good, but she didn't hear a sound.

Her body was finally fatigued after she stayed awake thinking about this and that. It wasn't long before she couldn't stay awake any longer and drifted off to sleep.

Nicole was woken up by the knocks on her door the next morning. After she opened her eyes, she rubbed them while her other hand reached for her phone. She glanced at the screen, only to see that it was already 9.30AM.

It surprised her how she had such a deep sleep here. She then quickly rose up and opened the door, only to find Colton standing there.

Lifting her chin to look at him, Nicole noticed that he looked a lot better than he did yesterday. The healthy flush of his cheeks was back. He must have recovered, she thought.

Colton, too, lowered his gaze as he looked at her. Judging from how wrinkly her clothes were, he could guess that she hadn't taken her clothes off when she went to bed last night.

As she had just woken up, Nicole was struggling to keep her eyes open. At the moment, she had what looked like tumbleweed instead of hair on her head.

Still, she was the first one to speak. "Are you alright now, President Gardner?"

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Right Person, Wrong Time Chapter 252 Chapter 252 Unimaginable Consequences

Nicole touched her nose in embarrassment when she thought about what transpired yesterday, and she laughed awkwardly before she said, "That is good, then. I'll have to go home now. Little Hayden is still waiting for me to go back."

"Go back after breakfast. I am done preparing the food anyway." Colton scanned Nicole from head to toe as he spoke. With a tug at the corners of his mouth, he continued, "You don't look like you are ready to head out. Go freshen up. I have already asked someone to bring some clothes over. Why don't you go after you change into some new clothes?"

She didn't reject his suggestion. She was indeed a little uncomfortable now, after going to bed without taking a shower first because both her mind and body were exhausted last night.

"Thank you, President Gardner," she replied with a nod.

As the conversation ended, Nicole went and quickly washed up before going downstairs for dinner.

She did not know that Colton was not only a cook but was, in fact, one that was more skillful than her. The first thing she saw when she headed downstairs was a variety of food that made up an English breakfast.

She started off with a sip of the seafood and mushroom chowder, and her eyes glinted excitedly as she proceeded to dive right in. "Did you really cook this chowder, President Gardner?" she asked in disbelief. "It is so good!"

Seeing her enjoying the food, Colton let out a small smile and answered, "Well, I like living alone, so I naturally learned how to cook. You can have more if you like it."

Nicole then downed the bowl of chowder in one big gulp.

After emptying her bowl, she suddenly remembered something, and she looked up at him. "How do you plan to handle what happened last night, President Gardner?" she asked.

She already had a grudge against Queenie to begin with. The reason why she was bringing up last night to Colton now was to make Queenie's life miserable.

Sure enough, his handsome face fell as soon as she mentioned it. With his thin lips slightly pursed, Colton clenched his fists that he was resting on the table as his dark eyes turned black. "Since she has the guts to do it, she should know the consequences that await her," he jeered.

Nicole quietly snickered to herself after hearing his words. It seemed like Queenie was finally going to reap what she sowed.

Nicole didn't give much of a reply before she fell completely silent with her head down.

Tony came with the clothes right when she was done with her breakfast. He even tried to probe when he was passing the clothes to Colton.

"Are you hiding a lover in your house, President Gardner? Come on and let me have a look at her. I want to know what kind of woman it is that stole your heart."

Unsurprisingly, all he got in return was an icy reply. "Scram."

Now that the clothes were here, Nicole took a shower at Colton's place, and finally left after she changed out of her clothes from yesterday.

. . .

Queenie hadn't slept a wink since she got home last night. She had stared at nothing in particular until the rays of sunlight broke through the darkness of the night.

The area under her eyes was dark by the time she got up.

The Andersons were doomed if Colton decided to get to the bottom of what happened last night.

Lydia could tell from Queenie's disheartened look that last night had been a failure, but she didn't let it bother her as she only thought of it as a failed plan. "Don't worry about it," she encouraged her daughter. "There is always a next chance. You can take the opportunity to do something as long as you stay by Colton's side."

Pressing her lips together, Queenie was hit by a gush of anger when she thought about how Colton knew that she had spiked his drink. She immediately sat up and looked at Lydia. "Colton wouldn't have noticed if only you didn't ask me to drug him!" she complained.

Instead of reacting to her outburst, Lydia was focused on the main point of her daughter's words. "You already drugged him?"

"Not only that, he also knows that I was the one who drugged him!" Queenie nodded and clenched her jaw.

Lydia started to panic at that. "Did he catch you in the act?" she urged.

"He didn't." Queenie then closed her eyes. She would be dead if he had caught her redhanded.

Lydia immediately let out a relieved sigh when she heard that. "That is fine, then. It will all work out as long as you insist it wasn't you."

Queenie looked at Lydia as she listened. Truth was, that wasn't the only reason she couldn't sleep last night. There was Nicole to deal with too!

"I almost succeeded at bringing Colton out with me, but that b*tch Nicole came and took him away from me halfway!"

Worried that he wouldn't lay his hands on her, Queenie had doubled the normal dosage of the drug when she placed it in Colton's drink. With the drug in his system and Nicole by his side... She couldn't even begin to imagine what could have happened after the duo left!

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Chapter 253

Chapter 253 Interrogation

Startled, Lydia opened her eyes wide as she raised her voice. "What did you say?! Nicole?"

"Exactly!" Queenie cried with her hands balled up into fists. If it wasn't for Nicole, she would probably have just woken up in Colton's bed now.

"You are saying that Colton was drugged and taken away by Nicole?"

Lydia couldn't believe her ears. It sent a chill throughout her body to imagine what consequences awaited them if something were to happen between Nicole and Colton.

"Yes! I almost did it, but Nicole popped out of nowhere and forcibly took him away!"

That tenacious little b*tch! Why do I see her everywhere I go?! And she is always sabotaging my plans!

"Queenie, we can't sit back and wait. President Gardner would never let you off the hook if he knew that you were the one who drugged him," Lydia muttered nervously.

Queenie naturally understood her mother's point. That was why she didn't tell the truth when she was questioned by Colton.

"Mom, what is important now is that Colton was drugged and taken away by Nicole!"

Lydia gritted her teeth when she heard that, as she had thought of this as well. She then grumbled, "Let's put this matter aside for now. It is most crucial that you don't admit that you were the one who drugged him!"

Queenie nodded wordlessly in response. She already knew that this was what she had to do.

"President Gardner can't do anything to you so long as you don't admit it," Lydia comforted her.

• •

It was finally Wendy's birthday banquet the next day. Many guests had been invited to the grand celebration of her 18th birthday.

In order to prevent accidents, Anna went ahead and arranged for Todd to stay over at the Gardner Residence.

Just as Nicole stepped into the building when she returned to the company, she saw that Joanna was already waiting for her at the door.

She had a foul expression on her face as she leaned against the door frame. Her eyes had instantly darted at Nicole the second she noticed her.

Knowing what kind of thoughts were going through Joanna's head, Nicole only raised her brows ever so slightly before she headed to her office.

Just as Nicole expected, Joanna immediately followed after her into the room and even locked the door behind her.

Nicole threw a nonchalant glance at the door lock before a smile tugged on the corners of her lips. "What is this?" she asked. "Trying to get rid of both the witness and evidence?"

Joanna was furious. She had suddenly received a call from Anna last night saying that Wendy would not be wearing the dress she designed for her birthday banquet.

She didn't even manage to ask why before Anna abruptly hung up on her.

After that, Joanna became sure that Nicole was the one who pulled the strings.

She had also stayed up the whole night thinking about this.

As Nicole looked at Joanna's face, she could tell from the woman's dark circles that she hadn't slept well last night despite having makeup on.

Smilingly, Nicole walked to her seat and sat down in her chair. She then propped her chin in her palm as she languidly looked at Joanna. "Go ahead," she began in a soft voice. "Tell me what made an important person like you come all the way here, Director Schmidt. You even locked the door!"

Joanna squeezed her hands into fists as her eyes turned red from anger. "Mrs. Gardner said that Wendy will not be wearing my dress to her banquet. Is it because of you?!" she questioned.

Ha! Nicole thought. Just as I guessed. She really came here for this.

Instead of answering her, Nicole continued speaking in an indifferent tone. "You wouldn't be here asking me this if you were confident in your design, Director Schmidt."

Nicole's calm response only further provoked Joanna. "Mrs. Gardner called and told me yesterday that she won't be needing my dress anymore. Who other than you would do something like this?!"

Joanna was on edge now. Unlike her usual dignified appearance, she was starting to act like a hellcat after her emotional explosion.

Nicole snorted as her face lit up, and she asked in return, "Wendy's birthday banquet is just a day away. Don't you think you should reflect on what your problem is for Mrs. Gardner to suddenly decide against your dress?"

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Chapter 254 What the Hell Are You Doing

Nicole's words had completely stopped Joanna from retorting. Still, Joanna would never admit defeat, and neither would she acknowledge that the problem lay with her.

"There's nothing wrong with my design!" she roared.

Nicole let out a light chuckle, and a mocking smile hung from her lips. "Have you thought about why Wendy chose your dress?"

Joanna jolted to a stop when she quietly thought to herself, Because of the jewelry Queenie borrowed?

Even though she had the answer, Joanna couldn't possibly admit that she and Queenie were partners in crime.

"Of course it is because she likes my dress!"

Listening to her confident words, Nicole couldn't help but chuckle. "Why are you here interrogating me if you are so confident about your work? I shouldn't be able to change her mind no matter how many dresses I make if she likes your design, right?"

Even though there was no fault in what Nicole said, Wendy had mentioned before that she would have chosen Nicole's dress if it wasn't for the jewelry Queenie borrowed.

A flash of doubt instantly appeared in Joanna's eyes when she considered the possibility that it was because of Queenie that her dress was replaced.

"What do you mean? Wendy chose my design, but you were secretly making the dress and you even brought it over. Wendy would have chosen my dress if it wasn't because of you!"

Nicole couldn't help laughing again at Joanna's words. "Director Schmidt, if you have the time to question me here, you might as well go to Queenie and ask her what is going on!"

Joanna could feel her heart drop when Nicole said that. Just as I thought! It is because of Queenie that Mrs. Gardner decided against my dress. That useless, unreliable woman!

Despite realizing that Nicole wasn't the one she should be blaming, Joanna continued to stubbornly pester Nicole in order to not be seen as a joke. "The person Queenie got is from Triton Studio! How could anything go wrong with that?!"

"Well, if that is what you believe, I suggest you go find out whether or not the jewelry is really from Triton Studio!"

Joanna immediately started panicking when she heard Nicole's words. She had altered the dress to the point where it didn't even look like her work just to accommodate the jewelry. Even Joanna herself knew that Anna and Wendy wouldn't bother sparing her dress another glance if she didn't have the jewelry.

Joanna stared at Nicole and pressed, "What are you trying to say?"

Nicole had stopped beating around the bush at this point. "Go ask Queenie directly; see what she has to say."

Joanna only felt at a loss as she looked at how firm Nicole was. She was starting to believe that something had indeed happened on Queenie's end.

Joanna had come to Nicole's office to condemn her, but it turned out that it was Queenie who was the possible cause of the last-minute change of plans.

Nicole still sat leisurely in her seat when she continued, "Director Schmidt, please get your head around the matter first before you come over and interrogate me next time. You will only be making a fool out of yourself otherwise."

Hearing Nicole's mockery only turned Joanna's face red, and the latter proceeded to turn around and leave without saying anything.

Nicole, on the other hand, started smiling as she looked at Joanna's retreating back. Dog-eat-dog scenarios like this were her favorite kind to watch.

After Joanna returned to her own office, her body began to turn cold at the thought of Queenie being the reason her dress was switched out.

She swiftly took out her phone and gave Queenie a call, and as soon as the call was picked up, she blurted out, "Did something happen on your side, Queenie?!"

As Queenie listened to Joanna's questioning voice, she suddenly remembered that she had gone home in despair after Kevin was exposed. She had completely forgotten to explain the situation to Joanna.

Now that she had gotten Colton's distrust, the only way she could turn all this around was with Joanna's help. After gathering herself, she suggested, "Director Schmidt, let's meet at Blossoms Steakhouse for lunch if you can make time. We will talk face-to-face then."

Joanna only replied through gritted teeth, "What the hell are you doing, Queenie?!"

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Chapter 255

Chapter 255 Dirty Tricks

Even though Joanna was unwilling to have any sort of relationship with Queenie anymore, the former needed to get to the bottom of the dress incident if she wanted to let it go.

When lunchtime came, Joanna headed over to Blossoms Steakhouse like she promised.

She got straight to the point as soon as she entered the door. "Mrs. Gardner called me yesterday to tell me that they don't need my dress anymore. Just what happened for her to change her mind like that?!'

Queenie remained calm talking to the enraged woman in front of her. "Sit down and have some food first, Director Schmidt. We can have a nice, slow chat after eating."

Joanna couldn't help but wrinkle her forehead as she looked at the other woman's relaxed appearance. She remained standing without any intention to sit down when she suddenly chided, "Just what the hell are you up to, Queenie?!"

Queenie proceeded to take a sip of lemon water. With her eyes on the steak in front of her, she didn't give a direct answer to Joanna's question. "The steak has just been cooked. It tastes amazing. Give it a try, Director Schmidt. We can continue talking about it if it suits your taste."

Joanna couldn't possibly slowly enjoy a steak when she was losing her mind over the matter, but she knew she couldn't panic upon seeing Queenie obviously putting on an act.

Suppressing her anger, she finally sat down. She then took a bite of her steak before prompting, "Go on. Tell me what happened."

It was only then that Queenie slowly put down the knife and fork in her hand. After taking another sip of her drink, she suddenly said, "Nicole took Colton away after he got drunk last night."

Joanna was slightly puzzled as to why Queenie was telling her this. "What are you trying to say?"

"It means that they might have already done the deed."

Joanna was taken aback for a moment, but she soon asked, "What does that have anything to do with me?"

Queenie smiled in satisfaction when she saw how Joanna tried to remain nonchalant even when the news had obviously unnerved her. She then started to talk about what they came here for. "Nothing. I am just telling you. Let's talk business."

Queenie looked at her and started, "As far as I know, Nicole has borrowed the main product this season from Triton Studio."

"Are you talking about the pink gemstone?" A trace of surprise flashed in Joanna's eyes, as she did not expect Nicole to be able to pull off something like that.

"That's right." Queenie nodded.

Joanna finally knew why Anna didn't want her dress anymore. It turned out that Nicole had such a trick up her sleeve! It was no wonder that Nicole had always been unhurried and confident about winning.

That shameless woman!

Joanna could only feel the fire raging in her chest at this moment. She had put in so much effort for the celebration of Wendy's 18th birthday that she didn't even complain about her name being left out of 'Ann'.

However, she had gotten nothing in return. Not only was she not a founder for the brand, she had also lost her chance to showcase her work at Wendy's birthday banquet!

She hated how this turned out. No, she loathed this!

Joanna could feel her whole body shaking out of hatred and anger. At that point, she wanted to tear Nicole apart with her own hands!

Nicole curled the corners of her lips up when she saw Joanna about to blow a gasket, but she didn't bring up how Kevin was a fake.

She continued to fan the flames. "Nicole definitely did not borrow the jewelry overnight, but she is taking it out at the most crucial moment. It is Wendy's birthday tomorrow, and she only went to tell Mrs. Gardner yesterday. Don't you think she is doing it on purpose, Director Schmidt?"

Joanna closed her eyes and growled, "I am sure of it!"

She might not have been as angry as she was now if Nicole had been honest about the jewelry right from the start. Joanna could have even fought for her place as the founder of 'Ann'!

She was the one who was left empty-handed in the end!

Queenie only smiled brighter as she looked at how angry Joanna had gotten. She then swiftly chimed in, "Not only that, Nicole even went home with Colton last night. I will spare you the details of the dirty tricks she must have pulled."

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Chapter 256

Chapter 256 Confirmation of Birth

Joanna wasn't listening to Queenie's words at this point. All she knew was that she and Nicole were definitely irreconcilable!

Seeing that her goal had been achieved, Queenie suddenly started acting all weak and pitiful. She leaned forward slightly and cried, "Director Schmidt, at least we are in the same boat when it comes to dealing with Nicole."

Joanna stared at her for a while before she asked coldly, "Nicole is still your sister. Why do you hate her so much?"

Queenie knew that Joanna wouldn't be convinced if she couldn't give her a plausible reason. Ignoring the pain in her chest, she confessed, "Because she is the reason Colton wants to break off his engagement to me! I hate Nicole!"

Joanna couldn't help being surprised to know that Colton wanted to break up with Queenie. She had never seen Colton with a woman for all the seven years she worked at the company until Queenie's appearance.

As if she came out of thin air, there were no signs prior to Queenie's appearance. Joanna didn't even know what Queenie had done for Colton to directly make her his fiancée.

Just being the holder of such a title itself had immediately increased the Anderson Family's net worth by tenfold.

Queenie had also been living a few blessed years because she was the fiancée.

"Does President Gardner fancy Nicole?" Joanna wondered. She had noticed how differently Colton treated Nicole, but she always thought that his special treatment toward Nicole was only because she was from F&M Apparel.

"Of course! Just think about it—hasn't he taken her side a lot of times?!" Queenie asked through gritted teeth.

Joanna lowered her eyes after hearing that. At the very least, she knew that Queenie wasn't lying about this.

After collecting her thoughts, she said without much expression on her face, "Okay."

Queenie knew that Joanna's hatred for Nicole had deepened after this, and that was all she needed for now. Smiling sweetly, she gave the final push. "Director Schmidt, only by working together can we finally bring down Nicole. You will end up with nothing if you continue letting things go her way!"

Joanna didn't answer, and only stood up to leave.

Nicole Anderson, I will never let this go without taking my revenge!

. . .

When night fell, Richard went to the Gardner Residence to look for Anna.

He had hurried to Anna after the DNA paternity test report came out. He didn't even stop to take a sip of his tea.

Anna was full of smiles as she lowered her gaze to read the test report she held in her hand.

"I knew it! How could that punk Colton hide this from me? I knew there was no way a child as bright as Hayden isn't his!"

The red words on white sheet were confirmation that Hayden was, indeed, Colton's biological son.

Although Richard already had his answer when he saw Hayden, he was still surprised when the results came out.

"I could never expect that emotionless log of a man would end up having such a grown kid!" Richard shook his head and sighed.

Anna was in a good mood now as she looked at the report in her hand cheerfully. She finally had the grandson she longed for.

While she was ecstatic, she suddenly turned to look at Richard when she remembered something. "Have you mentioned this to Colton?" she asked.

Richard shook his head. When the report came out, he had rushed over in the dark of night, thinking that Anna urgently needed it.

A look of relief appeared on her face when she saw him shake his head. "That is good. Don't you say a word if Colton asks about it."

Richard looked confused upon hearing that. He couldn't help asking why as he looked at the smile on Anna's face.

Word by word, Anna slowly explained, "He will definitely find another excuse if he knew. The best way is to confirm this matter! I won't allow anyone from the Gardner Family to live a life astray!"

Richard, who had a rough idea what Anna was up to, only nodded wordlessly.

Anna was still somewhat worried as she looked at him and warned, "I will tell on you to your father if you leak this out. I will make it so that you can't leave the country and have no choice but to take over your family business."

Richard was at a loss of words for a moment. Anna's threat had worked effectively as she poked right where it hurt. "Don't worry, Aunt. I am the best at keeping secrets!" Richard was even about to raise his hand to swear that his lips were sealed.

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Chapter 257

Chapter 257 Slap

The Gardner Corporation terminated all cooperation with Queenie that night.

It was obvious from this piece of news that the Gardners were kicking Queenie out of the game. And as for her position as Colton's fiancée? Everyone already knew where this was going.

Not only that, she didn't even receive the invitation to the celebration banquet of Wendy's 18th birthday.

As soon as William received the news, he hurried home and immediately slapped Queenie across her face when he saw her.

"You ungrateful child! What the hell did you do?! Why is the Gardner Family terminating their relationship with you?"

Queenie was caught off-guard by the slap, and her eyes immediately turned red. She only covered her cheek without giving a reaction for a long minute.

Still in the climax of his exasperation, William didn't register Queenie's pitiful appearance and he roared even louder at her, "Why are you so useless that you can't even hold a man down? I wouldn't have cut off my relationship with Nicole if it wasn't because you and your mother kept inciting me to!"

Queenie never thought that her father would have such thoughts, and she growled through gritted teeth, "Dad, Nicole is the reason Colton wanted to annul the engagement with me! It is her; it is all because of her! You didn't even try to understand things before you hit me!"

Queenie had never been hit by William throughout the years she was raised. Hence, the slap seemed to hurt emotionally as much as it hurt her physically.

Seeing William acting like this, Lydia immediately felt upset as she went to support Queenie. "Have you gone crazy, William Anderson?! Do you think we could have lived such a stable life all these years if it wasn't for Queenie?!"

William finally calmed down as he looked at the mother-daughter duo in front of him. In fact, the reason why he was so angry was because a previous creditor had gone to him and made him lose face in front of everyone else. That was why he had stomped his way home in a fit of fury.

He did feel somewhat guilty looking at his daughter's aggrieved face, but as prideful as he was, William refused to concede.

He only barked, "Just what the hell is going on?!"

Lydia proceeded to explain the whole story about how Nicole was a shameless woman who wanted to steal Colton from Queenie.

William was frowning by the time Lydia had finished her story. With a clench of his fists, he finally managed to swallow his anger. "It is Miss Gardner's birthday banquet tomorrow. Queenie, I want you to explain yourself to President and Mrs. Gardner when you go tomorrow."

Queenie could only nod with tears in her eyes. There was no way she could tell them that she hadn't received an invitation.

. . .

Wendy's grand coming-of-age banquet was held in the Gardner Residence. An endless stream of luxury cars had come to a stop outside the entrance, and almost the whole street was filled with costly, lavish cars.

Nicole had gotten to the Gardner Residence with Todd way before the banquet started to properly doll Wendy up.

Wendy had a pleasant-looking face to begin with, but pairing her natural good looks with Nicole's dress and Triton Studio's jewelry had promptly made her look like a princess that had come straight out of a fairytale.

Even the makeup artists couldn't stop with their shower of praises when they were putting makeup on Wendy.

Wendy was also satisfied with what she saw in the mirror. With this dress she had on, she was sure that she would amaze every guest the moment she made her appearance!

Anna's attitude toward Nicole had now become extremely friendly. The older woman immediately held Nicole's hand the moment she saw her coming, and kept asking her questions that showed that she cared.

"I have to thank you for Wendy's dress, Nicole. Oh—where is Hayden? Why didn't you bring him along?"

"There are too many people at these kinds of events," Nicole replied with a smile. "Hayden is still a child. I didn't want him to cause a commotion here, so I let him stay at home."

Anna started frowning then. "It is normal for children to play around. How about I send someone over to bring Hayden here?"

Nicole still declined her offer. There were all kinds of people that would attend the event, and Hayden was a young child who was too curious to stay still. It would be trouble if he got lost roaming around. It seemed like the better plan to let him stay at home.

"I can bring Hayden over another day if you want to see him, Mrs. Gardner. Hayden doesn't enjoy these events, anyway."

Anna couldn't continue persuading after Nicole had said that.

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Chapter 258

Chapter 258 The Banquet Begins

As soon as the banquet began, Wendy strutted into the hall clad in the dress Nicole designed for her. A series of murmurs could be heard the moment she made her appearance. It only took a second for her to have invoked discussion among the attendees of the banquet.

"Is the jewelry Miss Gardner has around her neck from Triton Studio? It is this season's main product, yes?"

"Right! I saw it during Triton Studio's press release. There is a rumor that it will be lent to the princess of the royal family. I am surprised to see it on one of the Gardners."

"That is the Gardner Family for you. They must have gained a reputation for their big family business that they even got a word in with Triton Studio!"

And it went on and on.

Everyone had noticed the necklace on Wendy's neck at a glance. After all, only the rich and powerful were invited. These people who had been around and had seen their fair share of the world had naturally detected the most important thing of all.

The banquet officially started after Anna went on stage and made a few polite remarks.

As Chief Designer of F&M Apparel, Nicole had shown her face at the company's annual dinner last time. A lot of people who recognized her all scurried to greet her.

Not one who liked things superficial, Nicole exchanged courtesies with them before she found a corner to hide in.

It wasn't long after she sat down when Queenie appeared. When Nicole glanced to the side, she noticed that Joseph was standing beside Queenie.

Now when did they get involved with each other? she wondered.

Still, she ignored them and continued to bow her head, taking sips of her fruit juice.

Joseph was the first who spoke, and rather politely at that. "Long time no see, Miss Lisa."

Not liking the man very much, Nicole only lowered her gaze and hummed in acknowledgement.

When Queenie saw this, she turned to Joseph and suggested, "How about you go ahead and enjoy yourself? I will have a chat with my sister."

The man knew all too well that he wasn't going to gain anything from staying here, so he nodded before he walked away.

Queenie only removed the gentle façade she put on after he left. Her eyes were now glaring at Nicole as she hissed, "How thick-skinned of you to sit here."

Nicole raised her eyebrows at that, but her expression didn't change. After putting her glass of juice down, she asked in return, "I remember Colton terminated his relationship with you. How come you have the face to come here? And with Joseph at that."

Queenie's face immediately turned ashen.

The Andersons had been struggling to keep afloat after Colton had officially broken off their engagement. She didn't get the invitation to the banquet from the Gardners, but since the Manns did, she had no choice but to beg Joseph to bring her along.

Joseph was a casanova. After hearing that Queenie was no longer affiliated to the Gardner Family, he held no reservations whatsoever when he boldly agreed to it on the terms that she had to spend a night with him.

She had refused at first, but after finding many ways that didn't work, she could only bite the bullet and accept his offer.

Like the playboy that he was, Joseph had exceptional skills in bed that left her limp and tingly all over by the time he was done.

Queenie still remembered what he said when he got out of bed. "Sheesh, no wonder you are Colton's woman. You are as tight as a virgin."

Queenie saw red in that instant. She had had many men in the past, but she had remained chaste for five whole years after meeting Colton. Joseph's words were nothing but a joke to her.

"Why do you care who I am here with? You're really shameless, Nicole. We are half-sisters, after all. Don't you feel ashamed about crawling into your sister's fiance's bed?" Queenie bellowed at her. Her eyes were filled with anger as though she was ready to gobble Nicole up.

However, Nicole only provoked her carelessly, "Oh? What are you going to do about it, then? What's wrong? Are you pissed because you are embarrassed? Are you going to kill me?"

Queenie was taken aback when Nicole admitted it without putting up a fight. It made her so angry she was starting to shake. I knew it! Colton only terminated our relationship because of this b*tch!

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Chapter 259

Chapter 259 I Will Take You Somewhere

"You b*tch!" Queenie snapped.

She would have sunk her nails into Nicole and tore her sister to shreds if it wasn't because this place was full of important figures today.

Nicole let out a sigh before she leaned back into the sofa after seeing Queenie enraged.

"I don't want to have this meaningless fight with you. It is not like you are going to win anyway. Queenie, for the sake of your dignity, I suggest you hurry up and leave if you don't want to further embarrass yourself."

Nicole's sharp words instantly silenced her younger sister.

Queenie tried her best to not lose control over her emotions. In order to approach Colton, she had even sold her body to attend the banquet. She had no time to waste here.

"Just you wait and see, Nicole!" Queenie proceeded to stomp away.

Nicole squinted when she noticed Queenie's odd gait as she walked away. It somehow reminded her of herself five years back.

Even though Nicole managed to find a corner to rest in, multiple pairs of sharp eyes still managed to seek her out. After all, she was now the founder of 'Ann' on top of her being the Chief Designer at F&M Apparel. All those who were even slightly involved in the fashion industry wanted to approach her.

She could handle them with no problem as she had attended similar events before, but anyone would get exhausted at the rate that the other guests were coming to her at.

She had to smile and exchange pleasantries with everyone that approached her. At some point, her face started to feel numb from smiling too much.

She had been talking way too long that her mouth and face both didn't even feel like they were hers anymore.

Other than that, Nicole felt like she was going to burst from all the orange juice she drank whenever someone made a toast to her.

It looked as though she was holding an event of sorts when the guests started lining up to greet her. Feeling at a loss for having to witness the bizarre occurrence in front of her, she could only meet every single one of them.

Unlike Nicole's 'full house', Joanna barely had anyone going over to talk to her.

She didn't want to attend the banquet at first, but not coming would mean that she had completely lost. Left with no better choice, she could only come despite her reluctance.

She, the design director of Gardner Apparel, had always attracted tons of people who wanted to say hello to her in the birthday banquets Wendy had before.

But now everyone was targeting their flattery at Nicole because she was the one with higher standing and better reputation.

Nicole reached out to rub her numb cheeks, but she soon closed her eyes when a headache came after she realized how long the line was still.

She wouldn't have come if she had known that it would turn out this way. She was just laying up trouble for herself.

At this exact instant, Colton suddenly appeared like a god as he sauntered toward her.

He looked like he was in high feather in his dark brown, custom-made suit. The fitting suit accentuated his perfect body, enhancing the lines of his broad shoulders, slim waist, perky behind, and mile-long legs.

He had a polite smile on as he helped Nicole reflect their greetings.

"Everyone, you will have to excuse us. I will be taking Miss Lisa with me for now. Please put what you have to say to her on hold until I return her."

Upon hearing his words, no one had the guts to go against him. They only politely acknowledged his words before the crowd dispersed.

Nicole could finally breathe now as she put down her glass to massage her stiff cheeks. She reckoned she had smiled more today than all the banquets before this totalled up.

Colton looked at Nicole touching her cheeks with her head lowered, and he let out a small smile, "You can always say no if you don't like it."

She quietly replied to him, "Everyone who came today are influential figures. I don't want to rub them the wrong way and get my head bitten off if I say no."

In fact, he wasn't wrong. After listening to her speak, he suddenly bent down and held her hand.

Startled, she looked up at Colton, only to hear him say in a low, throaty voice. "Come with me. I will take you somewhere quiet."

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Chapter 260

Chapter 260 How Do You Prefer It

Despite it being involuntary, Nicole actually followed after Colton.

The banquet was held in the front garden of the Gardner Residence. Colton continued to hold her by her hand as they went through the garden and into the main building of the Gardner Residence.

He brought her up to the second floor where there was a big balcony decorated with small, blinking lights. The atmosphere there felt somewhat intimate to her.

The balcony just so happened to be located in a direction that allowed full view of the banquet. It was a nice place.

He only let go of her hand after they had reached the balcony. "You can stay here if you don't like it there. It is easier for you to take care of things as well, in case anything happens."

Nicole took a few steps forward and leaned against the railing of the balcony. Sweeping her eyes across the view downstairs, she couldn't help thinking that this place was indeed just nice for her.

Now that she was more relaxed being surrounded by silence, Nicole turned to look at Colton with a smile on her face and said, "Thank you, President Gardner."

He suddenly stepped forward and stood in front of her.

She was sandwiched between the railing behind and the man in front. As he closed in on her, she could clearly smell the scent of his skin.

Not knowing why he suddenly got close to her, Nicole started to panic and ask, "Is something wrong, President Gardner?"

He lowered his head, and his eyes happened to fall on the small mouth that opened and closed nervously. "Nicky." He sighed with his gaze fixated on her. "I haven't thanked you for last time."

Thank me? I have never received thanks this way before! Nicole thought as she pressed her back into the railing. She wasn't worried about falling as the railing was considerably tall. She could now feel the coldness of the railing seeping through to the back of her torso.

"You're welcome. You have also saved me once before, President Gardner. We don't owe each other anything now."

Colton didn't know what was wrong with him, but he was upset to hear her say that.

Still, the corners of his mouth lifted as he replied, "It is true that we don't owe each other anything anymore, but I have always been someone who repays others for their kindness. You can tell me anything you want, Nicky. I will do my best to satisfy you."

When Nicole noticed that Colton was getting closer to her with every sentence he said, she quickly stopped him. "If that is the case, can you please step back a little, President Gardner?!"

After hearing her babbling her request, he didn't say anything and obediently took a few steps back.

She felt like she could breathe again as soon as the big and tall figure stopped asserting pressure on her.

Brushing out the wrinkles on her dress, Nicole found a spacious spot to stand at in case the man decided to stick to her again.

Colton could tell what she was thinking, and so he stood in the same spot without moving.

Truth was, Nicole couldn't help but think that he was weird today for doing things he wouldn't do usually.

After she put her mind to rest, she feigned calmness and said, "Thank you for bringing me here, President Gardner. You can go get busy if you have something to do."

"I am not busy," he unhurriedly replied with a smile.

She suddenly couldn't find the words to say anything to him.

Is that why he's here having a stare down with me?

Feeling awkward, she tightened the corners of her mouth and only spoke again after some time had passed. "Are you not going to welcome the important guests downstairs?"

She had to speak up because the air only grew more awkward as the two of them stood face to face looking at each other.

"It is not like it is my birthday. It's Wendy's, so of course I don't have to welcome them. Are you trying to get rid of me, Nicky?" Colton asked intentionally.

Knowing that it would be inappropriate to tell him that she felt uncomfortable with him here, she quickly brought the conversation away from the direction it was heading in. "No, that is not it. I was only worried that it would be too tiring for Mrs. Gardner to handle the guests herself."

Even though they knew what was going on, the both of them continued to act clueless.

Colton chuckled at that before he asked in a straightforward manner, "Nicky, how would you prefer for someone who likes you to pursue you?

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