

## Standing before Love Chapter 432

At that moment when Heather was in a state of anxiousness and at a loss on what to do next, Robert continued to ask, "Who drove your car away?" It was highly likely he had realized what happened.

"It was Matthias Locke," she replied as she acted nonchalantly. She needed to feign being apathetic to avoid him overthinking.

"What's exactly going on between you and Matthias?" His expression was quite unpleasant. She claims that he's her enemy, but her actions indicate otherwise! She seems to be quite close to him! Her actions were perplexing to him. Why won't she admit it if she likes Matthias? If she dislikes him, there's really no need for her to be entangled with him!

At this point, Heather was quite torn as to how to respond to Robert's question. However, she knew that she couldn't continue to drag things because he would feel suspicious otherwise. "Grandpa, why are you so concerned about my relationship with Matthias? I don't like him and he has no feelings toward me either." She didn't want her words to be set in stone, so evidently, her attitude had mellowed slightly this time.

Robert could sense Heather's change in attitude and he gave her a long, hard look. It looks like Matthias and Heather's relationship is taking a turn for the better! "You were quite adamant that Matthias was here to seek revenge. So, why are you getting close to him now?" He was close to being confused by what she was thinking in her mind.

"There are no permanent collaborative relationships between two businesspeople and likewise, there are no long lasting feuds too. We have plans to work on a project together. You've always known that I wanted to start my own company, so going against Locke Group would be detrimental to me." Heather smiled as she responded and tried her best to divert Robert's attention. She was slightly troubled by him probing into her relationship matters.

He then looked at her with a thoughtful expression on his face. Obviously, he didn't trust her words at all because there were many discrepancies in her elaboration. "If he has done something bad to you, then undoubtedly, you have the whole Langston Family behind your back to support you. There's really no need to bear with this grievance." He was quite worried that Matthias

had a hold against her and was currently threatening her. After all, the Langston Family still had a strong foundation in Bradford City despite their weaknesses; there was no way they would allow any one of the other families to cross their path.

“It’s just a misunderstanding! I ran into him by chance today and we’ve talked things through.” Her words had a ring of truth to it; in fact, she had previously misunderstood Matthias and developed a bad impression on him as a result.

At that moment, Robert stubbornly refused to let things slide. He was not convinced by her explanation that everything was merely a misunderstanding. However, he knew he shouldn’t continue interrogating her. I shouldn’t interfere much in the affairs of these youngsters. “Ran into him by chance, you say?” There was doubt in his voice. After all, Bradford City wasn’t exactly a small city, so her claims of meeting Matthias by chance sounded too far-fetched.

“Grandpa, it seems that you no longer trust my words! I really did run into him by chance!” Heather pouted petulantly. I can’t believe Grandpa doesn’t trust me even though I’m telling the truth. It feels quite unpleasant to be doubted!

In response, Robert narrowed his eyes into thin slits as he glanced at Heather. Since she’d already said it as such, there was nothing much he could respond with. As such, he responded, “Since it’s a misunderstanding, then it’s good that you’ve resolved it. I’ll need time to consider the collaboration between our company and Locke Group.” Previously, Matthias had also suggested the same thing to Robert. However, Robert was adamant that they shouldn’t rush into things. Furthermore, the collaboration of two large companies was a serious affair and it shouldn’t be taken lightly. After all, there were many aspects to consider. Although he no longer had much say in the matters of the company, as long as he was still alive, there was no doubt that such important decisions were to be made by him!

“Don’t worry, Grandpa! I won’t interfere in the matters of Langston Group! Blake’s in charge of everything. I just want to focus on my own workshop now. After all, I need to prove my worth and I want to build up my own career. I definitely don’t want to bring disrepute to the Langston Family!” Heather placated Robert with her words. It’s my goal to build up a stellar career!

As soon as he heard that, he adopted a tender expression and he voiced out for her to sit next to him. Naturally, she heeded his word and went to his side. He reached out with his hand and stroked her head gently. “Sigh! You’re way too headstrong! You should pay attention to your personal life too and don’t

waste your precious youth.” He had an indulgent look on his face as he said that. Heather’s too engrossed in her career that she has overlooked her personal life all this while.

“Grandpa, are you ashamed that I’m still single at this age? My happiness comes from making you proud of me for all my career achievements! I want to become a modern woman who relies on herself!” Heather replied as she leaned on Robert’s shoulders. I used to think that this shoulder could support me forever and it would always remain strong when I was young. However, I’ve now realized that Grandpa has aged so much!

“I would rather you marry a great guy, though,” he chuckled. It was a great consolation for him to hear her words but undoubtedly, her happiness would always be his top priority.

As soon as Heather heard that, she wrinkled her nose. “What do you mean by marrying a great guy?! I just want to find someone who’s exactly like you! But then, I haven’t met anyone comparable to you, Grandpa!” Her tone was quite endearing; despite her age, she’d always behaved like a little kid in front of Robert.

“You’re such a little brat! Stop your nonsense!” Robert chuckled in laughter and his eyes sparkled brightly.

Back in her own room, Heather flopped onto her bed and remained limp. She didn’t even want to make the effort to take a shower. As she recalled the look Matthias gave her, she felt guilty about it and racked her brains for a way to compensate him.

She knew that he did not lack anything; he had plenty of money, he didn’t lack any authority and women naturally fawned over him. The only thing he needed was true love, but the love of his life, Myra, had finally found her perfect partner. Therefore, it was impossible to fulfill that wish of her since there was no way she would interfere in Myra’s relationship.

It was something that she contemplated for quite some time. Should I really agree to his request of being his fake partner for a short while? In fact, there was reluctance on her end because she had always envisioned her first relationship to be full of passion where both parties were deeply in love with each other. She never expected it to be one mainly focused on personal interests. I had avoided entering into a relationship all this while because I

didn't want the other party to be with me due to materialistic reasons. I guess there's no avoiding it now, huh?

Nonetheless, Heather suddenly had a change of mind and concluded that it actually wasn't such a big deal after all. All she had to do was pretend to be in a relationship with Matthias in front of everyone else. It could be considered as an exchange of interests and a way of compensating him. As for her, she wasn't prepared to sacrifice her personal feelings just yet.

She struggled hard to come to terms with it all night long. On one hand, she felt quite reluctant to throw in the towel easily. However, on the other hand, another voice in her mind begged her to agree to the proposition as it would be beneficial to her to agree to his terms. The two of them being in a relationship would naturally assist in the progression of their careers.

In the morning, upon waking up, Heather still hadn't made up her mind. She felt that it was a much more difficult decision to make than if she had to decide whether to agree to sexual acts in return for a favor. She continued to laze in bed and refused to get up while deducing that everyone was likely to be having breakfast downstairs after noticing the time. Now that she thought about it, she had skipped quite a few family meals lately, so it would be a good idea to wake up earlier and head downstairs for breakfast, lest she trigger Robert's suspicions again.

For the past few days, he had kept a close eye on her and she didn't dare to make a wrong move. It seemed that he was quite concerned about her personal life. From the way he spoke, she realized that he was trying hard to decipher whether she was in a secret relationship with Matthias.

As soon as Heather approached the dining table, everyone focused their eyes on her. Blake was surprisingly present as well today. Normally, he would have already left for work, so it was quite unusual to see him at breakfast. Generally, it was rare for them both to be dining together. Each time they found themselves seated at the dining table at the same time, an unhappy incident would always occur. It was at that moment when he shot her an aggravating look. I wonder what he is going to say now!

"Heather," Blake uttered her name.

Heather immediately looked at him warily. He must be plotting something! It's never a good sign when he acknowledges my presence.

She raised her head and responded politely, “Hey, Blake, what’s wrong?” She hated to argue with him at the dining table but unfortunately, he seemed to perversely enjoy provoking her during meals. As such, she was quite annoyed with such behavior.

“You’ve been back for quite some time now. Don’t you think you should ease some of my burdens? When are you going to report for work at Langston Group?” he asked suddenly with a concerned tone. It sounded like he was quite the caring brother that he tried to portray.

Heather was angered beyond words. He must have realized my actions, which is why he has suddenly brought this up! I don’t want to work at Langston Group! I want to develop my own business and be the director of my own company! I’m not interested in any of the roles at the company!

However, with that being said, it was difficult for her to reject him in front of the entire family. If she had rejected him on the spot, it would seem quite offensive to Robert, especially when it involved not only her and Blake, but Robert too. Robert had always wished for the younger generations in their family to work together and bring the company to further heights.

“Blake, I’m worried that I’m not suitable for the position.” Heather frantically came up with an excuse. I knew he would try and find fault with me! I can’t stand his annoying face! It’s quite obvious he’s trying to coax me to join the company. This would mean working under him. By then, I would be at his mercy! It had always been Blake’s wish to subdue her and it was quite evident to everyone. Obviously, she had no intention of falling into his trap.

“You previously ran the Europe division quite well. Why aren’t you interested in helping me run the company now that you’re back? Grandpa and I both have the same wish of expanding Langston Group into something bigger.” He had purposely brought Robert into the conversation. As such, Heather found herself at a loss for words since she couldn’t quite reject Blake’s suggestion.

Robert maintained his silence all this while. He was aware of her intention to set up her own company. Initially, he couldn’t quite fathom the reason why, but she managed to convince him. He had carefully considered it and realized that Langston Group was originally passed down from several generations. Yet, out of all the younger generations, she was the only one to have the courage to go out and set up her own company.

Heather couldn't quite meet Robert's gaze. She knew that no matter how much he doted on her, it was practically impossible for him to help her to reject Blake in front of everyone.

Meanwhile, everyone kept their silence and watched with bated breath. At that moment, Stephen voiced out and was surprisingly on Blake's side. "Heather, Blake's requested your help. Don't tell me you're going to say no?"

Camille, who was seated next to him, also added, "I'm sure Heather's more than happy to help. She must be just feeling shy."

Heather looked at her parents who had just sabotaged her and she pinched her nose bridge in frustration. Resignedly, she mentioned, "Yes, of course! I would be more than willing to help Blake! It's just that I haven't been back for ages and I'm not too familiar with the happenings in Bradford City. I need a bit more time to get used to everything." I'll try to put this off for as long as possible.

Upon hearing that, Blake revealed a sinister smile. He turned to Heather and responded, "I just won the tender to a new project yesterday. There are quite a few projects running at the same time in the company, so I don't have enough time to deal with this. I think this would be a good start for you." He had purposely said that to prevent her from escaping her fate.

She smiled in response and said, "I'm not familiar with everything here yet, so I'm afraid I might ruin everything. Blake, I must ask though, how can you be confident in my capabilities?" She had purposely emphasized her last sentence and looked at him with an unwilling expression. I'm in the midst of starting up my own company, but he's thrown this at me. He's just wasting my time and delaying my progress! This is so irritating!

Blake replied magnanimously, "It doesn't matter. It's just a mere project, so I would be quite happy with whatever outcome you produce!" His insistence had given Heather no choice—it was either she accepted it or turned against him.

Robert, who had remained reticent all along, suddenly voiced out, "Heather can have a break of three days. Let her find her way around Bradford City to have a look at how things have changed."

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As the date was already set, Heather was aware that there was no way of escaping her fate. She could only bite the bullet. Meanwhile, everyone nodded in agreement to Robert's suggestion.

She gave him a gratified look. Oh well, three days is better than nothing! I have three days to get accustomed to things.

Heather, who was previously quite relaxed and chill, suddenly realized that she no longer had enough time. She had to hurry up and deal with everything, but she was lucky that Leon, her junior who was currently abroad, was due to return in a few days' time. She'd used a lot of effort to persuade him to drop out of university and join her in a business venture. He was quite the genius; he had unique views about business in general, so she was quite confident that he'd be a great help to her. Leon was of mixed blood with thick bushy eyebrows and huge eyes. He was half-French with romance in his bloodline and half-German with an unyielding spirit whereas his mom was a native beauty. Overall, he was an amazing guy.

He had a reputation for being a rebellious young man in university. Not only was he a genius in his studies, he was also great at putting his knowledge into practice despite being only twenty years old. If it wasn't for his identity as an illegitimate child that gave him a bad name, he was definitely the perfect human being. It was also his illegitimacy that made him so anxious to prove his self-worth.

As such, Heather managed to cajole her junior into doing something that disappointed his mom tremendously—quit university. He was raring to prove himself to the world and he felt reluctant to wait for another two years until he graduated. Heather's invitation was the perfect opportunity for him. He was determined to make a name for himself once he was back in his mom's hometown—Bradford City. Although his current role was supposedly her personal assistant, she'd promised that once their company was up and running, then the position of General Manager was his; that was an actual position that held the decision-making power.

Heather planned to keep the bulk of the company shares. Meanwhile, she was more than happy to allow Leon to run the company. She'd rather entice him to work together as a team by granting him all sorts of benefits than to have such a genius as her opponent in the future.

As soon as she realized that, she felt quite pleased with herself for succeeding in gaining a great team member. Within the next three days, she planned to pay a visit to another person—a woman who was one of her friends from high school.

That woman was the only daughter of one of the previously renowned families in Bradford City; their family had eventually fallen onto bad times. Despite that, she was full of aspiration and was quite determined to make a name for herself. If Heather hadn't met her on her Europe trip last year, she could never have imagined that the weak, soft-spoken girl from back then was now a formidable business executive.

She was now a successful career lady with formidable tactics. It was speculated that her dad had spent a lot of time grooming her. Although her family business had fallen onto hard times and even faced bankruptcy since Heather moved abroad, it didn't change the fact that her high school friend's dad was quite an astute man.

As such, Heather decided to visit her. Heather's intention was to offer her high school friend a job and invite her dad to join the team at the same time too.

Then, it dawned upon Heather that she didn't have enough time. She had to sort out everything within the next three days. She was quite sure that the father and daughter would not be content to draw a salary forever. Therefore, the only way to entice them was to offer them shares in the company.

She was quite aware that Leon did not care about the money. He was much more interested in the position offered to him and the possible challenges faced; he needed to have sufficient decision-making power. On the other hand, her classmate, Paige, cared more about the monetary side of things. She knew that the Saffords had harbored the hope of eventually building up their family business again.

After breakfast, Heather immediately left the house and went to the garage to choose her transport for the day. Today, she chose a luxurious sedan since her main intention was to flaunt her affluence. One who cared about the monetary side of things had to be won over by wealth.

She was quite anxious on her way there. As such, she didn't notice her muted cell phone was ringing. As soon as she arrived, she unmuted her cell and realized that there were three missed calls. Immediately, she unlocked the screen to check the details. Initially, she thought it was Myra who'd called, but

unexpectedly it was actually Matthias who did so. Come to think of it, Myra must be so busy right now; surely, she wouldn't be able to call me at this time of the day!

After he was unable to contact Heather via her phone, he then sent her a text message. She took a look at the text and realized that he wanted to confirm a time to return the car to her. She hastily replied to the text message with 'I'm busy. I'll confirm the time with you soon.' I won't have any free time until I sort out the matters with the Saffords.

She straightened her collar and made sure her clothes were tidy before she exited the car to walk toward the house. From the outside, the mansion looked quite ordinary. Based on their current financial status, Paige evidently had to work arduously to afford her family's current lifestyle.

Heather was well aware that all the business partners she sought were quite ambitious, so she had no intention of making this a permanent arrangement. Once the company was on the right track, then the arrangement would cease and their future developments would be of their own responsibility. She was quite confident that her business venture would progress fairly quickly with the help of these two people.

After ringing the doorbell, she patiently waited by the door. It was Paige who came to the door and greeted her.

As soon as she saw Paige, she gave a warm smile and said, "It's been a while since I last saw you. I'm back in town!" She had planned to meet up with Paige to discuss a collaboration for quite some time now. Today's meeting was a last-minute decision, so she hadn't managed to prepare a gift since she had never expected this situation at all. She was quite surprised that Paige had agreed to meet up on such short notice even after a simple phone call. The girl had even taken the day off to wait for her at home.

Heather had initially intended to prepare a gift, but the discussion was much more urgent. Rather than taking the time to choose a gift, it would make much more sense to use the time wisely to discuss their collaboration.

The first thing Heather had to do within these three days was to convince Paige and Josiah to join her team. Of course, there was still plenty of work to do once they joined her, but that would be for later. It would reflect quite badly on her if things were still a mess once Leon arrived. She was convinced that

he could very well leave out of anger if there was nothing ready upon his arrival.

Paige greeted Heather at the door and invited her inside. "I came over in a hurry and didn't have the time to get you something. I'm sorry about that." Heather was generally quite a courteous person, so she felt quite embarrassed to turn up empty-handed this time.

"Look at you! There's no need to be so courteous with me. The most important thing that we're both concerned about right now is the collaboration, so why don't we forget about all these formalities?" Paige was a straightforward person and Heather liked this quality of hers.

"Is Mr. Safford home?" Heather was quite keen to meet him. Previously, she'd heard Paige mention a lot of her dad's experiences and she was very interested to meet him in person.

"Yes, he is. He's already waiting for you in the living room," Paige said that while leading Heather into the living room.

Starkly different from Heather's parents, Paige's dad had a salt-and-pepper hairstyle, which made him look as old as Robert. Heather had heard through the grapevine that Paige was more than just Mr. Safford's only child; in fact, Paige was quite precious to him because he had welcomed her into his life quite late in his age. That seemed to be the reason why he looked quite elderly.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Safford." Heather immediately greeted him as soon as she met his eyes. She was usually quite affable in front of strangers.

"Miss Langston." Josiah stood up to greet her politely.

He was polite yet he maintained his dignified manner that was in-bred, which gave a stately impression to Heather. She realized that this was exactly how he was able to nurture his daughter into such a poised lady and she was satisfied with her first impression of him.

Meanwhile, Paige directed Heather to take a seat on the couch. Then, Paige took a seat next to Heather across the room from Josiah. Heather respectfully mentioned to Josiah, "Please call me Heather." She knew it was important to be humble since her main goal here today was to win over the father and daughter.

At that moment, he decided not to keep up the pretense any longer. He directly addressed her by her name, "Heather, welcome to my house."

Paige hastily continued, "Yeah! Welcome to our home! I hope you don't mind it being slightly worse for the wear."

Heather glanced at the surroundings and smiled in response. "Of course not! It's really cozy and I like the place." There was no sign of opulence like the Langston Residence and it was exactly the simple style that she preferred. Although there was only Paige and Josiah living here, it felt really warm and cozy. They were father and daughter, but they interacted with each other like great friends and she was quite envious of it.

The three of them had straightforward personalities and without further ado, they went straight into the topic. She raised her suggestion to the two of them.

After a short pause, Paige broke the silence first. "I thought you were just joking with me during our encounter in Europe. I didn't expect you to be serious about this!" Her tone was quite casual as she tried to lighten the mood.

"Well, I want to prove my worth and I don't want to keep relying on my family." Heather's words were also directed at Josiah at the same time. Actually, the main person she was after was, in fact, Josiah, who had an astute mind. Although he no longer had the enthusiasm of a young person, there were three youngsters who were full of enthusiasm in the company, so they would obviously need some reminders from a wise older man from time to time.

This task of handling the logistics would obviously fall upon him as he was the perfect candidate for this job. With the logistics sorted, it would mean that their daily routine could run smoothly and also ensure a constant supply for those working on the frontline.

Obviously, Paige was quite keen to work with Heather. However, Josiah seemed to have some concerns despite Heather's generous offer of twenty percent worth of shares in their future company. In fact, she was only willing to offer Leon eight percent of the shares in the company. Moreover, neither of them had to come up with any money and she was the only one solely in charge of raising the capital. Thus, it was quite a generous offer. Besides, once they listed their company on the stock market in the future, the number of shares she held would decrease too and the maximum she could hold on to would be forty percent of the company.

Heather was not a fan of family-oriented corporations that preferred to possess the bulk of their shares. It was clearly evident from how the Langstons had absolute control of Langston Group. The family held eighty percent of the shares in Langston Group and the absolute control meant that their staff lacked the motivation to work hard.

As such, she decided that once they succeeded in listing the company on the stock market, she would only retain thirty percent of the shares for herself. As long as she had Leon and the Saffords on her side, their cooperation would be advantageous because they would always hold the bulk of the company shares.

Of course, Heather had also considered the likelihood that someday if Leon or the Saffords decided to leave the company, she would then have to train someone trustable to take their position or purchase the shares they owned.

She had considered everything that could happen in the future. She was quite confident that she could build up her own empire. After all, since her ancestors were capable of doing so, there was no problem for her to achieve that too!

The three of them remained in discussion for quite some time and she shared all her future plans for the company with them. She was quite intent in her goal to win them over, which was obvious from her attitude.

"I'm too old for this. I don't think I'll be able to help!" A hesitant Josiah voiced his concern. Although he frequently guided Paige, he didn't have too much confidence in himself.

"Mr. Safford, you've managed to cultivate Paige into such a capable person, so I trust you. The company wouldn't be successful with just us youngsters. We need someone like you who has plenty of experience." Heather tried once more to persuade him.

Despite her efforts, he was not convinced at all. He smiled awkwardly and responded, "Excuse me, I actually have something on the stove, so I'll go and take a look at it. Heather, I must insist that you stay for lunch!" He rose from his position as he said those words, making him look like a stay-at-home-dad.

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Since Josiah had already mentioned it, Heather knew there was no point to insist and nodded her head instead. "Thanks for the invitation, Mr. Safford. You're too kind!" She was quite keen to show her amiability, so she naturally didn't reject his invitation for lunch. Besides, it had been quite some time since she last tasted a home-cooked meal prepared by an elder. Ever since she was a young child, her parents had never cooked a single meal for her.

Right after he left the living room, Paige, who was seated next to Heather, fidgeted nervously. She looked as if she had something to say, which piqued Heather's curiosity.

Compared to her father, Paige was much more impulsive. She was the typical business executive; although being frank was a good quality, it was more important to be cryptic when dealing with business affairs. As such, it was evident that she could only succeed in the role of being Heather's deputy.

Even more so, Paige was not as independent as Leon. From the looks of it, she had a lot more room to improve on. Nevertheless, Heather's main intention today was to entice Josiah to join the team. Of course, in order to entice him, Paige was definitely the critical point.

"Heather, my dad still has his concerns," Paige mentioned with hesitance on her face.

Heather pondered, I'm sure there's a story behind this. I must coax this out of Paige.

"That's fine, I understand," she answered with an air of nonchalance. She was quite sure that with Paige by her side, it wouldn't take long for Josiah to agree to join the team.

"In the past, our family corporation had faced bankruptcy due to one of his mistakes. This came as a huge blow to him and he still blames himself for that, even up till now. That's why he's indecisive about re-entering the corporate world. He's just afraid that he'll ruin things." Paige frankly revealed his concerns to Heather as she no longer regarded the latter as a stranger.

As soon as Heather heard that, she looked at Paige solemnly and replied with a regretful tone, "I didn't expect that he had such an unfortunate past. It's my

fault for being too eager to achieve my goal.” Heather didn’t mind returning to persuade him as she had plenty of patience to deal with him.

Originally, she was quite desperate to start the company as soon as possible, but now that everything had come together all at once, she had made up her mind to slow down. She was no longer anxious to gain the Staffords’ support. As long as they didn’t reject her outrightly, she was quite happy to take her time and pursue them slowly.

Surprised by Heather’s easy-going attitude, Paige responded with a smile, “Don’t worry, I’ll definitely convince Dad to join us!” Evidently, Paige wanted to grab this opportunity. She thought of the shares offered by Heather and could practically see their chance of rebuilding their family corporation.

Although Paige currently held a job as a business executive with an annual salary that ran in the millions, she was well aware that the sum was peanuts compared to the annual income of a company and corporation.

“There’s no rush for that. Take your time. I think it’s better if he’s in a relaxed state. My only wish is for everyone to gladly join my team.” Heather made her point clear and she didn’t want to force people to join her since she was only after those who were willing.

During lunch at the Staffords, Josiah maintained his courteous attitude. He chatted with her about all of his interesting experiences and had plenty to share. He was quite knowledgeable too. Both of them had enjoyed their conversation very much. He even felt that she was more in sync with him than Paige was and the former managed to win his favor with her antics. She had always been skillful at winning the hearts of others with her subtle nuances in fact well-practiced on her part.

The three of them enjoyed their time chatting with each other. The taste of the food wasn’t their priority as they enjoyed the company more than anything else. Heather felt quite moved upon seeing the heartfelt affection Josiah and Paige had for each other.

She compared that to what she had experienced since young—she never had an amicable relationship with Stephen since young and because she was unable to defend herself when she was younger, she became his punching bag. As soon as she was old enough to stand up for herself, she became quite rebellious and her relationship with him soured then. As for Camille, she

had always disregarded everything. No one realized how much Heather yearned to have an actual home.

After lunch, Heather left the Staffords' house reluctantly. She turned to Paige and said, "Is it alright for me to come over tomorrow and keep Mr. Stafford company?" Heather knew it was not practical to take up any more of Paige's working hours. Besides, she enjoyed chatting with Josiah, so visiting him as a younger generation should be acceptable.

"You're most welcome here. Dad's always complaining that he's so bored of being home by himself all day long that he's becoming senile as a result," Paige jokingly remarked.

"There's no need to send me off. I'll be on my way now," Heather replied as she looked at Paige.

It seems that Paige is the ambitious one in the family. Josiah seems quite content with what he currently possesses. I guess I can't convince him to join the team even by increasing the number of shares for them. It's all dependent on Paige now. I guess everything is dependent on Paige's skills and Josiah's affections for her. Heather was full of confidence at that moment because she always believed that things would be successful for those who prepared in advance.

Everyone had always assumed that she was extremely lucky, but no one saw the efforts she put in behind their backs. She was always well-prepared in everything she did and that was why she enjoyed success in most of her ventures.

She glanced at her cell phone and thought that it was still fairly early. Then, she dialed Matthias' phone number.

He was at work when he received Heather's phone call. Although he was slightly puzzled, he immediately answered the phone call.

"I'll be there shortly to get my car." On the phone, her voice sounded quite carefree and she seemed to be in good spirits.

"Sure, where should we meet?" Without mincing his words, he went straight to the point and asked for a place to meet..

“How about meeting at the car yard?” she suggested after suddenly recalling that location.

As soon as Heather arrived, Matthias was already patiently waiting there. It was the first time he had seen her drive such an expensive-looking car. He had always assumed that she had a preference for smaller-sized cars. He walked over to her and greeted while she revealed a polite smile in response.

Unbeknownst to them, in the shadows, there were multiple pairs of eyes focused on them both because they had been tailed by reporters after yesterday’s accident. Obviously, Matthias and Heather had never thought that their news had remained unpublished because the reporters were lying in wait to compile more to the story.

The next morning, as soon as they read the newspapers, they were both shocked beyond words. Immediately, she jumped to the conclusion that he had alerted the reporters beforehand. She had originally changed her views toward him, but now she couldn’t control the burst of anger she felt.

Right after she saw the news, she immediately dialed his number. “Matthias Locke, what do you mean by all this?!” she yelled without any restraint because she was trembling with rage and angered beyond words.

At that point, Matthias hadn’t seen the newspaper because he was busy dealing with work. When he realized about the story from Heather, he picked up the newspaper to take a look and was completely shocked too. How on earth was he able to fake a traffic accident?!

Besides, what was the point of all these speculations? It would be best if all the nonsense could be ceased. A frustrated Matthias glanced at the newspaper in his hands. Next, he realized that this was not only in print, but it was also reported on the local television news.

At this point, he knew he should avoid her by all means. On the other hand, she was just about to leave the house and became quite upset as a result.

However, as it was a critical time for Heather and she didn’t want to renege on her words, she had no choice but to head out. She was just one of Bradford City’s socialites and she wasn’t a popular star, so the reporters didn’t cross the line much and kept their distance behind her.

Along the way, she had realized that she was being tailed. In helplessness, she decided she shouldn't cause trouble for the Staffords. As such, she gave Paige a call and briefly explained what was going on. Then, she requested for Paige to convey her apologies to Josiah for not being able to visit for the time being. She didn't want to lead the reporters to them as that would complicate things for everyone.

Since she had seen the news earlier as well, Paige was quite understanding of the situation. It was quite a surprise for her to see that Heather was speculated to be in a relationship with Matthias. Heather's company was recently in the midst of a collaboration with the Locke Group and the impression she had of him was that he was a two-sided person.

Paige thought about it for a while and came to the conclusion that it wasn't possible for Heather to fall for someone like him. Paige felt that everything was exaggerated on the news and couldn't help but feel worried for Heather. She had hoped that Heather's incident would not affect their collaboration.

Heather was quite disappointed that she had to cancel her plans. However, she didn't want to head home just yet. Everyone at home seemed to be looking at her with strange looks on their faces and she became quite enraged as she recalled the situation. Without even realizing it, she had driven all the way to the Locke Group. She looked at the building in front of her and couldn't seem to control the rage in her. In fact, she was quite tempted to rush inside and teach Matthias a lesson.

All of a sudden, her cell phone rang and she saw it was him on the line. After hesitating for quite some time, she decided to answer the call. Although his voice rang out from her phone, she merely responded coldly to his words as he frantically explained himself.

"The press is getting more emboldened. I swear, I must sue The Apple Gazette to show them I mean business!" Heather had previously decided to let The Apple Gazette off the hook, but today's incident reminded her of their past transgressions and she directed her anger toward them once again.

Meanwhile, Matthias was momentarily at a loss for words. Then, he commented, "If you're really affected about this, you should go ahead and sue them. I'll be your witness in court." He tried his best to placate her at the expense of The Apple Gazette.

Her way of handling the matter could be useful to serve as a warning to the other news agencies. On top of that, he didn't wish for the rumors to become widespread all over town too. After all, he wasn't sure whether the elders in the Locke Family would take action if things progressed out of hand. He wasn't ready to offend them as he wasn't fully capable just yet.

He was well aware that his previous actions were not quite appropriate and he hadn't properly thought things through. Unfortunately, his rash decision had implicated himself this time. Undeniably, the power of the press shouldn't be underestimated as they were totally uncontrollable. The reporters would resort to any tactic just to capture any eye-catching news.

After taking quite some time to placate Heather, Matthias then continued to finish off his work. It was at that moment that he heard someone from downstairs mentioning that there was a lady known as Miss Langston here to see him.

That came as a surprise because he didn't expect Heather to personally turn up. Without any delay, he instructed his personal assistant to immediately invite her inside the office. It was also quite fortunate that Nikolai wasn't here today.

I don't want Nikolai and Heather to bump into each other! As soon as Matthias recalled Nikolai's love-struck expression, he felt a sense of insecurity. Nikolai reminded him of his younger self and he clearly knew that someone with such a personality generally had an almost perverse sense of attachment toward their love interest.

If Nikolai continued being deeply attached to Heather, there could be repercussions in the future. Obviously, Nikolai wasn't her type and Matthias didn't wish to see him go down the wrong path.

She angrily made her way into the room and strode up to Matthias before standing in front of him. He could practically feel the hairs on the back of his neck stand as soon as he noticed her glare. From his investigations, he knew that she was quite particular about her image. It seemed that the series of incidents were very upsetting to her to the extent that she would probably lose her life than to experience this.

"You've disrupted all my plans." Without any warning, Heather directed these words at him. I was supposed to visit the Safford House today and win Mr. Safford's favor to persuade him to join our team. My plan's gone out of the

window now. Besides, the news that was published was definitely going to affect her effort in persuading the Staffords. That was because both Josiah and Paige looked quite prim and proper, so they would most likely find such rumors quite revolting. In a way, it was going to affect Heather's image in their minds.

Upon realizing all the possibilities, Heather couldn't control her simmering fury. Blake keeps finding fault with me! Now, I have another one of his trashy friends here creating all sorts of mess for me! Great! Blake and Matthias' joint efforts had ruined everything for her.

## Standing before Love Chapter 435

Upon facing a raging Heather, Matthias knew better than to fight her head-on. Hence, he flashed an apologetic smile to her. She wanted nothing more than to dismember his body because she had no idea about his plans.

"Matthias, aren't you planning to give me an explanation?" Heather wasn't here to see him smile. In fact, now that he was grinning at her, she felt anger bubbling in her chest.

"I have already explained myself as required and I did not deliberately arrange for this." He suddenly felt wronged.

"In that case, you're saying that I am framing you, right?" Heather was extremely angry at that point. She couldn't even analyze the situation rationally; instead, she was convinced that it was Matthias' fault, making her upset with him in general.

Matthias jokingly commented, "Miss Heather, have you considered the possibility that having lots of gossip is not beneficial to me at all? I can't possibly get myself into such shitty situations time and time again."

Heather felt upset when she heard his reply. I can't believe he said 'shitty situations'. Is he implying that having a scandal with me is such a disgusting thing?

She was so angry that she started to speak about their past. Well, from my point of view, I just can't stand Matthias. Ever since I fell into Blake's trap, all my projects have been a mess. I am reduced to a mass of tearless grief now that I am dragged into this scandal.

Matthias felt relieved when he noticed that she had stopped shooting daggers at him. Heather is truly a powerful woman to be reckoned with. She has an unmistakable but scary aura about her.

“So, it turns out that you find being involved in a scandal with me a disgusting thing, Director Locke,” Heather commented calmly. I have the right to hate the scandal between him and myself, but how could he detest it so much? I am not happy about this at all.

He glanced at her incredulously. It is impossible to understand women. She will not be happy, no matter what I answer her. “Please listen to my explanation. You might not understand much about the Lockes, but the elders in the Locke Family hate gossip like this with a vengeance,” he explained hastily. Heather is the current priority, so I have to calm her emotions as much as possible.

She regarded Matthias pointedly. Well, it is true I haven’t heard that before. So far, I honestly have no idea what kind of family the Lockes are. However, I have heard rumors, but I can’t be sure about it being reliable.

After he said those words, Matthias further elaborated while explaining the reasons for his reaction, “If the elders in my family were to learn about the scandal we’re both implicated in, they will drag me back to the family home to teach me a painful lesson.”

This is the first time I’ve seen Matthias looking so gloomy. It seems like he is rather afraid of the elderlies in his family. I did not expect the Lockes to be so strict. “In that case, how dare you fabricate that scandal about you and me?” Heather’s mood improved tremendously after listening to his explanation because she had indirectly learned something useful about the Locke Family.

He looked utterly upset. This is a double-edged sword. In the end, I am still being dragged into it. Judging by the looks of it, I will be disadvantaged if this matter continues. Previously, I had a hold on The Apple Gazette, but I have no idea which media outlet is involved this time. If the Locke Family were to learn about it, I will have to head home to receive my punishment according to the clan law.

“Things are becoming troublesome now. If you disagree to pretend to be my other half, I’m afraid my elders might drag me back.” Matthias hadn’t thought things through at that time, nor did he expect to have such a strong bond with Heather.

This time, I have created so much trouble just from a car crash. I can't help but imagine the suppressed and constipated faces of the elderlies at home. I wonder how they are planning on punishing me. The Locke Family has maintained a low profile all along, so they almost never show up in the media. Now that the reporters have chased after me while snapping pictures of me, I honestly can't even imagine the consequences. Right now, I must have Heather with me—it doesn't matter what my motive is at this point. If she refuses to work with me, I will no doubt suffer in the future. It took me a lot of effort to be in Bradford City, so how could I possibly return to my hometown without any success? I have to prove my capabilities. Be it business or personal matters, I just have to properly compete with Tony.

Heather burst out in laughter. I did not expect the Locke Family to be such a strict bunch. Matthias' horrified look instantly assuaged her anger. Well in that case, I have no choice but to consider the option of pretending to be Matthias' girlfriend. I might be able to gain some benefit from this too. Previously, when he brought this up, I figured it wasn't necessary. However, things have escalated to a state where it might affect him if he continued staying here.

From where I stand, the main reason why Matthias wants to stay in Bradford City is most probably due to Myra. I do not want to cause trouble for Myra and Tony's relationship, but since Myra and Tony are truly in love with each other, having Matthias around wouldn't change anything. After pondering her options and weighing the possibilities, she was tempted. After all, it is not beneficial to have Matthias as an enemy. Besides, if he were to leave Bradford City over this issue, I will miss lots of interesting drama in the future.

The more she thought about it, the more Heather was in favor of Matthias' contract. He could also tell the shift of her attitude from her expression.

"I am open to granting you something as long as you agree to sign this contract." He immediately took out the contract. He just had it drawn up when Heather barged in.

Well, I suppose this is similar to some sort of tacit understanding. Some things are fated in life. Matthias pushed the contract toward her.

She hesitated for a while before taking the contract to carefully read the contents. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary because it looked like an agreement to contract a girlfriend. Their relationship would merely serve as a cover.

“I just don’t think it’ll be an easy feat to explain to the rest of them,” Heather responded hesitantly. “Well, for instance, Myra—how should I inform her about this? It will be tricky with Grandpa too.” She also voiced her concerns. It is easy to pretend in front of outsiders, but I just can’t do that to Grandpa, who loves me to bits, and my best friend, Myra.

“You don’t have to clearly explain certain things. You do not have to explain yourself as long as they don’t bring it up. Besides, when it comes to revealing a relationship, it is customary for women to gradually do that. You can say that you are still in the early stages and you do not want to prematurely announce things publicly,” he suggested convincingly while his words made perfect sense.

Heather read through the contract again. I must ensure that I am being protected in such arrangements because I can’t lose the right to my body again. Nevertheless, judging by how loyal and in love Matthias is toward Myra, I doubt he’d do anything to me. Furthermore, he has never had any scandal in the past. He doesn’t seem like the usual playboys.

“Director Locke, I wonder whether you have any female soulmates or lovers. I am afraid that they might get into a conflict with me,” she had openly asked because she was not interested in dealing with those women.

Matthias grinned triumphantly when he heard that. It looks like Heather has agreed to it.

“Don’t worry, I treasure my innocence. How about yourself, Miss Heather?” he asked mischievously at the end of his sentence with a suggestive grin.

“Director Locke, I believe you have thoroughly investigated my relationships.” Heather grinned brightly and her eyes twinkled maliciously. Well, I remember Matthias addressing me as the ‘old virgin’. After all, women hold grudges.

Matthias chuckled in embarrassment. I went overboard with my actions that night. It is never alright to insult a woman’s morality.

“Miss Heather, you are correct. I apologize terribly for my actions in the past,” he immediately apologized because he needed to coax and soothe her at this point.

“It is not written on the contract that you will grant me a request, Director Locke,” Heather reminded as she pointed at the contract. Since the contract

was previously drawn up, it was only natural that Matthias did not include that clause in writing.

He took the contract from her while reassuring her, “Don’t worry, I will add that in.” He would not fool her when victory was just in sight.

“Well, I will draw up a new contract and we will...” He trailed off after he spoke in a tentative tone.

Heather immediately stopped smiling and her expression turned serious. She cocked a brow at him while responding, “Director Locke, do you remember when I impolitely barged in earlier? I was questioning you whether you’ve messed up my plans.” It is not that simple to get me to sign a contract.

“Yes, I do.” Matthias nodded. “However, that is understandable and I do not blame you at all.” He thought that she was being courteous to him, but he obviously had assumed wrongly.

“I apologize for being rude earlier, but you did mess up my plans, Director Locke. I wonder whether you are planning to rectify that.” Heather was being indirect, but her meaning was clear—she wanted Matthias to bear the responsibility for messing up her plans.

He obviously understood what she was implying since he was someone who did not beat around the bush. “Well, Miss Langston, what would you like me to do?” he asked without missing a beat.

Heather briefed him about her entrepreneurship—it was a critical moment for her to cozy up to the Saffords. Initially, things were all set in stone to win them over, but it all went down the drain due to the scandal.

On the surface, it sounded like Matthias had caused the problem. However, if one were to think deeper, the issue didn’t seem related to him at all. It looks like Heather is using this issue to find fault with me while testing my capabilities.

Upon coming to that conclusion, he agreed to help her. “I am at fault in this matter. I will be more than happy to accompany you, Miss Langston, to visit both daughter and father tomorrow.”

She was shocked by his confident tone. It looks like Matthias has figured out a plan. Well, I can’t wait to see it. I would like a front-row seat to witness the

eloquent Matthias work his charm. It is a great opportunity for me to learn a thing or two.

“Director Locke, it is such a pleasure dealing with you. In that case, I’ll meet you at Safford House at 9 AM.” Heather hastily set the time because she understood the importance of striking while the iron is hot.

Matthias nodded lightly in response. The priority today is to get on Heather’s good books. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect that. It started off with my setting a trap for her, but I have to beg her for help in the end. It is a dangerous move, but after weighing my options, as long as I have her on my side, I am sure that it will help me greatly. The elderlies in the family have always doubted the reliability of my expanding the business in Bradford City. I am sure that I will gain their trust and confidence once I’ve confirmed my relationship with Heather. They value a good and clean family background more than anything else.

I have to admit that the Langston Family has an upper hand with their dominant position. The pain is excruciating each time I recall the past. If my sick brother hadn’t ended up in a vegetative state, how could I possibly be in my current position? The term ‘illegitimate son’ has always been my source of shame and humiliation. It is also a chip on my shoulder hindering me from progressing. I need to turn the tables right now to achieve great things.

## Standing before Love Chapter 436

The thunderstorm had been raging for the better part of the night. Heather tossed and turned in bed, the premonition that something bad would happen creeping beneath her ribcage like an itch that would not go away. She bolted upright in bed as the thunder rumbled overhead and in the violent flicker of lightning, she remembered a specific moment of her childhood in which she had braced the horrors of a storm alone.

She got down from bed and pulled on her robe before shuffling over to the window. Upon drawing back a fraction of the curtain, she saw that the scene she once thought was terrifying no longer scared her, but her heart clenched with her old, inexplicable fear of thunderstorms.

Heather wondered how the weather would look and whether all would go well tomorrow. Gazing out the window absentmindedly, she suddenly felt fatigue

wash over her as she thought about how things had turned sour within the short span of time since her return home.

A hard look passed over her face. She didn't know if fate was challenging or toying with her, but she couldn't recall the last time she had tasted defeat. It was ironic how everyone else around her thought she had it easy.

Alas, who was fortunate enough to say that life was a cabaret? In the past, she had chosen to take the easy way out as long as she had the results she wanted. After all, why should she endure the veritable hardship in order to achieve anything?

It had been a while since she evaluated herself. The phobia that had cast its roots deep within her was her dirty secret that threatened to consume her.

She had been careful to keep it under wraps, terrified that someone else could find out—not even Myra knew, although there was a time when she had asked about it. Heather had been far too proud to show so much as a crack in her perfect facade, so she never told the other girl about the secret that was eating away at her.

There were many memories that Heather hated to recall. No one knew about the bullet holes she bore in her past or how imperfect she truly was. As she burrowed back into bed, she mused at how frequently she had been revisiting her past. Nostalgia marks the aging of the soul.

Indeed, she was no longer the young woman she used to be. Now, she barreled toward one of her many first crises in adult life and along with it came melancholia. Her old self would have been occupied with a schedule that was planned down to the last minute, but things were different now. She was beginning to understand the importance of keeping oneself busy—it was the only way to suppress all unnecessary thoughts.

The next morning, she hurried to Safford House after breakfast and was pleasantly surprised to find Matthias standing outside the entrance. Time management was something that she deemed important and it was clear to see that he had abided by this notion.

Matthias, on the other hand, had been waiting for her by the front door and upon seeing her, he quickly paced over to greet her. It was only then that she began to second-guess her decision to bring him along to this meeting without

first giving a heads-up to the Saffords. She wondered whether they would think poorly of his sudden appearance.

“Shall we go in?” he asked as he gestured toward the humble-looking villa. He had seen the look of hesitation that flickered over her features.

“Remember—to them, you are my business partner,” Heather said sternly. She wasn’t sure how things would turn out if he truly were to assume such an identity.

“Don’t worry. I promise I’ll be invested in my role,” Matthias replied assuringly.

However, unbeknownst to her, he had already prepared for the visit beforehand. Josiah was someone whom Matthias knew extremely well, even more so than Heather. Coincidentally, Josiah had owed the Locke Family a favor and he would have to return it today.

At the thought of this arrangement, Matthias grinned wickedly. Josiah had agreed to collude with him after their phone conversation earlier that morning, although something like this would naturally be kept secret from her.

He would have to put up an act alongside Josiah during the meeting later. There was nothing he would not do and no effort that he would not put in, just to get what he wanted.

Being fresh out of campus, Heather was not as well-versed in such tactics as Matthias was. She was completely oblivious to what he had done behind her back while he had taken every precaution against her and did everything he could to make sure things would work out in his favor.

The both of them then stepped forward and Matthias was the first to ring the doorbell, which was chivalrous of him. He was dressed in a meticulous white suit today, looking like the perfect picture of kindness.

He could easily deceive anyone with that pretty face of his for as long as his wicked smile was kept at bay. Heather was used to seeing his devious, roguish side and now she was taken aback by how innocent he looked.

If she had to draw comparisons, his features were just as handsome as Tony’s, although he carried himself differently from the latter. While the majority preferred Tony’s masculinity, Matthias’ delicate, boyish charm would undoubtedly become irresistible to girls who liked a challenge.

After all, he had a strong chin and a delicately chiseled face that made him look as though he had stepped out from a painting. The longer one took in his features, the better they looked. While she had never appraised him too closely, she couldn't help but sneak a couple more glances now that they were standing side by side.

When he turned to look at her, he flashed a smile that reminded her of warm sunshine, making it hard for her to break her gaze. He had always seemed so menacing and devious, but now he looked every bit the golden boy and she swore she could feel the warmth radiating from him.

The door then creaked open to reveal Paige standing on the other side of the threshold. Heather was mildly surprised to see her, but she shrugged it off when she realized that it was the weekend. Matthias, on the other hand, maintained a courteous smile on his face.

Meanwhile, Paige was surprised to see the both of them standing on the doorstep. She had only just read about their alleged scandal in the paper yesterday, and now they were right before her.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," Heather said politely.

"That's alright. Come on in," Paige replied enthusiastically and beckoned her in. She did not dare to look at Matthias. He was much more handsome in person than she had imagined.

Upon entering the house, he saw Josiah reading the finance column in the paper and went up to greet him. "I'm sorry for being here without notice." He feigned a sense of humility as he said those words.

Josiah's gaze was a meaningful one as he regarded the younger man and after the both of them exchanged a knowing look, they resumed the pretense of a first meeting.

Heather appeared even more perfunctory as she quickly interjected, "He's one of my business partners and he told me he would very much like to meet both of you today. Please excuse me for making such last-minute changes to our arrangement."

The both of them were so courteous with their greeting that the Saffords began to grow flustered. They didn't expect those two important people to be so modest.

Wanting to break the ice in the room, Paige hastily invited them to take their seats, although she couldn't help but mirror their courtesy as she responded, "Please, there's no need to be so formal with us. It would only make us look like complete tyrants."

While they might have seemed polite on the surface, each of them was harboring dark thoughts of their own. Paige and Heather sat on one side of the upholstery while Matthias took the seat across from theirs, smiling as he did so. Josiah's gaze would flicker to him every once in a while and when she noticed it, Heather simply brushed it off as curiosity on the older man's part.

However, Paige had noticed this too and it struck her as odd that her father, who was not a curious man by nature, was constantly appraising Matthias.

It made her take a few more glances at Matthias and she found herself liking him even more. She blushed and chided herself for having such thoughts. She had read about the scandal between him and Heather, after all. He was somebody untouchable and only Heather could match his standards.

After reading the news yesterday, Paige had been sure that Heather would never fall for him, but their presence today had proved her wrong. She grew sullen at her own misjudgment and the abrupt shift in her expression stoked Heather's curiosity.

Once they had settled down, he was the first to break the silence, taking out a folder from his briefcase as he said, "I've brought with me today a rough copy of our business proposal. You may take a look if you're interested."

Heather shot a surprised look at Matthias. She had brought along a detailed proposal as well, but she did not plan on showing it to Paige and Josiah before they agreed to a partnership.

What was more mind-boggling was the fact that Heather had never told Matthias much about her proposal in the first place, so how would he have known to come up with one on his own?

Needless to say, his bold move made her uneasy. Has he always been this audacious? Doesn't he think he's crossing a line here? She bristled and glanced at the proposal. He had only prepared one and he was handing that copy to Josiah.

Trying to remain composed, she shot Matthias a dark look, as though telling him that she was unhappy with how he had failed to consult her beforehand. Next to her, Paige was quietly observing their silent interaction and she found herself getting inexplicably upset.

She never thought she would be drawn to someone at first sight. She was wistful as she peeked at Matthias and lamented over how she could not call a handsome man like him her own; he had belonged to someone else, namely Heather.

As of now, the four of them were quiet. The only sound that filled the space was the rustling of paper as Josiah flipped through the proposal. While the man perused the pages, Matthias subtly gave Heather a placating look, as if telepathically asking her to be patient.

Meanwhile, she was furious with him, but she had kept such a calm, patient front that not even Paige could tell she had lost her temper.

She didn't know whether he was trying to help Heather or muck things up for her and she grew antsy as she watched Josiah turn the pages. Even if they managed to humor the Saffords with the proposal, she wasn't sure whether she would be expected to follow through with everything written on it.

Time ticked by and after what felt like a long moment, he finally handed the proposal back to Matthias.

Much to Paige and Heather's astonishment, Josiah agreed to the offer. "It's an honor for me to be acknowledged by both of you. I won't have much to offer at this old age of mine, but I would be more than willing to help with the back end of the business."

He was a proud man who was set in his ways and persuading him was no easy feat. The business proposal that had brought about such a rare occasion piqued Paige's interest, although she could not summon the courage to ask Matthias for a copy. Little did she know that he had no intention to hand her the proposal. He was only putting on a show, after all, and Josiah happened to be his co-star.

Presently, the hardest part of the meeting was over and everything ended on a pleasant note. Heather was about to leave with Matthias in tow when she turned and asked him for the proposal. He merely chuckled and handed her

the folder. When he proceeded to open her car door, she gave him a quizzical look.

He was forthcoming and thick-skinned as he explained, "I asked the chauffeur to drop me off this morning, and he left after that. I'm afraid I'll have to hitch a ride with you, Miss Langston."

She made no retort and slid into the passenger seat of the car, her head bent as she scanned through the proposal. How cunning of him, she thought as she perused the pages. He had kept the terms vague and the ambiguity allowed her to do whatever she liked in the future.

Matthias was maneuvering the vehicle down the road when Heather placed the proposal down and remarked, "It's amazing how you've managed to persuade Josiah with such a proposal." She was doubtful of him and she couldn't shake the feeling that he was hiding something; she had seen how Josiah's eyes darkened with implication when he looked at Matthias in the Safford House.

"The ends justify the means, don't you think? If you don't mind, we'll be driving back to Locke Group. I believe there's an agreement that awaits both our signatures," Matthias replied smoothly, raising a brow in amusement.

Of course he would bring that up. She heaved a sigh of resignation. She had promised to sign the agreement yesterday and it would be a bad look on her if she were to go back on her word. I wonder if I can come up with an excuse right now, she thought with mute despair. As they rode in silence, the roguish grin on his face broadened.

## Standing before Love Chapter 437

As the Locke Group came into view, Matthias' face brightened with triumph. Meanwhile, Heather had no idea why he looked cheery. Could the agreement be that important to him?

She calmly followed him into the building after they had gotten down from the car. Ever since they assumed the mantle of a couple, she found that she no longer needed to fret about a lot of things. Having said that, the gray areas that existed in their relationship made her re-examine her plans to file a lawsuit against the Apple Gazette, especially when things were not as clear as they once had been.

They were the only two who occupied the elevator. As they went up the building, they were unusually quiet and while she stared at the floor numbers flashing in the elevator as they went up the building, his gaze flickered to her every once in a while.

The first person that Heather saw when she stepped out of the elevator was his assistant, to whom she did not pay any attention during her last visit since she had been in a hurry. Upon proper appraisal, she saw that his assistant was a doll-faced young lady with an endearing, unassuming demeanor—the way Myra had been when she was younger.

Heather noted the resemblance with mild amusement. She wondered where Matthias had managed to look for an assistant who looked so much like Myra. The younger girl had a pleasant look about her and unlike Myra, she had a bubbly edge to her disposition.

Heather looked away from the assistant and gazed at him meaningfully. His lips were curved up in the barest hint of a smile as he pulled the door open for her and said, “After you.”

He had been in a terrific mood since she saw him that morning, which made her uneasy. Her skin prickled as she tried to figure out the tricks he had up his sleeve.

The door clicked shut and she was unruffled as she strode forward to take the seat across from him. He lowered his head as he took the agreement and deftly slid it over to her.

Heather took the contract and as she scanned through it, she saw that the additional terms they discussed the day before had been incorporated into the contract. Basically, she could find no fault with the agreement. When she had consulted Mr. Presgraves yesterday, he did not seem to think the terms were problematic even after she had paraphrased them.

Seeing as there was nothing fishy or peculiar about the agreement, she put down her signature without any complaint. A small smile colored her face as she recalled the days when she had managed the European branch of Langston Group. She had signed her name with the same flourish back then.

Rising from her seat, she reached out to give Matthias a perfunctory handshake. “I look forward to working with you,” she said. The whole process

of signing the contract was simple; it was as though there was nothing more other than the inception of a business partnership.

Matthias couldn't help but admire this particular side of Heather; it was a practical move for them to draw out their partnership and state their terms in black and white. He would be sure to take good care of the special contract which they had just signed.

Each of them kept a copy of the contract and while that should have been the conclusion of this event, he noticed that she had no intention of leaving as she tapped her pen against the stack of paperwork in her hand. As such, he decided to start a casual conversation with her.

"Is there anything else I can help you with, Miss Langston?" he asked politely.

She shook her head at first, but after a while, she nodded. "Actually, yes, there is. What's your assistant's name?" At the thought of the young girl outside, she found herself remembering how Myra had looked back in their schooling days.

"Lara Locke," he answered. Upon hearing that, Heather frowned and began to wonder at her identity. She had not been expecting the assistant to share the same family name as Matthias.

"Is she a member of the Locke Family?" It was aimless to ponder on something like this when she could directly ask him for an answer instead.

Matthias shook his head and chuckled as he answered, "No, she just happens to have the same family name, that's all. She's the only daughter of an ordinary, middle-class family." He had placed emphasis on the term 'only daughter' to sound convincing.

Not wanting to dawdle any longer, Heather decided that it was time for her to leave. She straightened her posture and announced courteously, "It's time for me to get going."

He straightened his back as well and offered with the same air of courtesy, "Please, allow me to see you off." As they were both stiff and formal, it looked like it would take a while before they relaxed around each other.

As she headed out of Matthias' office, Heather deliberately glanced over at Lara. She had to admit that he had a rather acquired taste when it came to

selecting his assistants. Where Nikolai resembled his younger self, Lara was essentially a replica of a young Myra. However, if she had to be honest, Matthias' devotion to such details was perverse, in that it was borderline obsession.

After getting into the car, Heather made her way to the Stark Group to pay Myra a visit. At this point, the woman might as well make a home out of her office, seeing that she cared so little for her pregnancy and relentlessly threw herself into her work.

Heather had not shown up at Stark Group since she argued with Myra, which explained why her sudden visit took the latter by surprise.

Meanwhile, Myra's head was spinning from all the work she had been tied up with all morning, which made her naturally surprised by Heather's unannounced visit. Nonetheless, she was happy to see Heather and pleasantly greeted her.

Empathy flashed across Heather's beautiful features as she appraised the tired look on Myra's face. Pregnant women were supposed to stay away from caffeine and because there was a child in her womb, Myra was constantly fatigued.

Upon the sight of all the documents on Myra's desk, Heather grew displeased and pointed out in irritation, "You do realize that you're pregnant, don't you?" She sounded like a strict parent who was about to lecture her child.

Myra pursed her lips and looked away in guilt. She didn't know how she was supposed to respond to Heather's unexpected chiding.

Assuming the solemn look of an experienced doctor, Heather went on to say, "You can't afford to be a workaholic during your pregnancy. Think about the baby!"

"Heather, there are things in Stark Group that need to be resolved as soon as possible," Myra answered wearily, although she lacked the courage to look at Heather. Myra feared that if she did, she would be met with a sharp look of disapproval.

"Isn't there anyone else who could do the work for you around here?" Heather snapped incredulously.

Myra grew flustered at the sight of her friend's darkened face. Tony told me the same thing yesterday and now I'm getting lectured by Heather. She didn't even know what she had done wrong. As a result, she gazed at Heather with a resentful pout. It was bad enough that she was swamped with work, but to be berated by both her husband and her close friend made her feel worse.

Myra replied helplessly, "There are things that I need to do on my own." Indeed, she would much rather peruse all the paperwork than to let others take up the task. After all, there was sensitive information contained in those.

Upon hearing that, Heather marched up to the desk and swept her gaze over the documents. Then, she said stonily, "I'll take care of the rest." She had always been the more efficient out of the two when it came to sorting through the deskwork.

Appreciative as she was, Myra was adamant that she needed to personally go through those files. With that in mind, she eyed Heather hesitantly before she slowly answered, "These are the company's backlog work. I don't know if..."

Heather was oddly insistent despite the reluctance in the other girl's tone. "I could always ask you for help if I run into problems with the documents, seeing as you'll be here."

There was no way of changing Heather's mind, so Myra vacated her seat and stepped away from the desk as Heather responded, "Go over to the couch and give yourself a break." It was as if she had taken charge of the entire office.

Before long, Heather had her head buried in the paperwork. With a document in hand, she broke the silence in the room by saying, "I'll be officially training under Langston Group from tomorrow onward, so I won't be able to help you out with much for the foreseeable future. Let me do what I can to assist you today." That was the way she had always treated Myra—with infallible altruism and kindness.

Although if she had to be honest, there had been days when she approached Myra with ulterior motives. However, she had made up for it with genuine friendship and affection toward the girl.

Taken aback by what Heather had told her, Myra asked, "What about your plans to start your own business? Why are you training at Langston Group all of a sudden?" Knowing Heather, she could not have voluntarily done so.

“This is all Blake’s doing. You know how he’s trying to set me up all the time and he asked me to train at the company in front of the whole family. It wasn’t as if I could reject this while Grandpa was in the room, so I had to say yes.” There was resentment in Heather’s tone and Myra could tell she was extremely unhappy about being forced into something she didn’t want to do.

Myra was well aware about Blake’s hostility toward Heather, but after hearing what he had done this time, she had to admit that he was an expert saboteur. Then, a sudden thought seized Myra. “I heard that your junior will be flying over soon to help you with your entrepreneurial plans. Won’t the training affect this in any way?” she asked worriedly. What if Heather can’t cope with all of this?

“Don’t worry, I can manage. Besides, I won’t be staying at Langston Group for long. Blake’s leaving me in charge of some major project and once I’m done with that, I’ll leave the company.” He had sent her all the relevant information on the project and at the thought of the same, Heather grew frustrated and quirked her lips in dismay.

Blake had mentioned that it was a straightforward project during dinner the other day, but after glancing through the paperwork, she realized that it was extremely complex by nature. It looked like he was trying to buy himself more time by making her struggle.

She was pulled from her thoughts when Myra pointed out mockingly, “Blake is really going all the way to make you suffer, isn’t he?”

Heather gave a rueful smile. “He’s twisted in his thinking. The way he treats me and Grandpa is borderline psychotic. He hates me, but he wants to defeat me at the same time. He also shares a weird love-hate relationship with Grandpa. I’m worried that he might do something bad to Grandpa one day.” Blake’s hostility toward her had worsened over the past few years, but thankfully, he had only acted out to spite Robert and he had not crossed any lines thus far.

“I don’t think he would. Didn’t you say that he respects Old Master Langston the most? He might be twisted, but I don’t think he would go so far as to hurt somebody he respects.” To a certain extent, Myra was an advocate for the existence of conscience in others like the kind soul that she was.

Heather smiled and said nothing. Indeed, she had been the one who firmly believed that Blake would not dare to hurt Robert. However, now that he held

so much power in his hands and coupled with the worsening of his already unstable temperament, who was to say he would not go berserk and do something crazy?

“Don’t dwell on it and leave things be. You can’t avoid what has already been predestined, you know, but there are always ways to deal with it when it comes,” Myra comforted. After being friends for so long, it was natural for them to worry for each other and this time was no different.

“I know. Maybe Blake isn’t as menacing as I thought.” Heather wondered what it might be like for her to trust in someone—to keep the faith in spite of the disappointment.

Both women spent the rest of the day talking between intervals. Being the multitasker that she was, Heather was not distracted from the work at hand even as she conversed with Myra.

Intermittently, she would ask Myra for clarification, seeing as she was still largely unfamiliar with the various aspects of Stark Group. Nonetheless, given her natural ability to comprehend and absorb new information, her work was not hindered in the process.

Heather was able to make accurate judgments after listening to Myra’s description. Her decisiveness made her more efficient than Myra when it came to managing certain things at work.

“For a person who has just taken over Stark Group, you’re far too soft to command any real respect from your subordinates. There are probably those who don’t recognize you as the head of the company at all,” Heather chided, though not in an unkind way.

As far as she was concerned, Myra was not cut out for the battlefield that was the commercial world. She was far too tolerant with others and gave many second chances to those who did not deserve them. Judging from how morally bankrupt society was these days, it would not benefit her to be generous with others.

Conversely, there were more shameless and greedy folks who would take people like Myra for granted. Heather sometimes wished that Myra could be a little more ruthless, but when she finally saw exactly how brutal the latter could be, she began to wish differently.

## Standing before Love Chapter 438

Heather woke up early during her first day at work. It had been a while since she had done that. Langston Group operated according to regular office hours nine to five, so she wanted to get there early to finish the project. That way, she could leave the company as soon as possible.

Because Heather and Matthias had come into close collaboration, she figured she could secure Matthias's help. Considering his relationship with Blake, the latter might just listen to him.

She never knew Matthias could come in handy at a time like this. Nonetheless, she had her own agenda. As a person who worked in the field of business, she had her own methods. After all, using people, being used by people, as well as using each other, were common phenomena among individuals like them.

With the passage of time, Heather had gradually come to shed her anxiety regarding her methods, as she realized she would inevitably have to step over someone else if she was aiming for the top.

When she got to the company, Blake was still dining at home. As he sat there at the dining table, Robert made a point to give praise to Heather. "She seems pretty earnest on her first day at work. As her brother, you need to put in the effort to lead her." Despite the smile that Robert was wearing, he had a threatening gaze in his eyes when he looked at Blake.

Although Blake was aware that Robert was warning him against giving Heather a hard time, he was going to do as he pleased while in the company, as he would already be out of Robert's reach by then. "Don't you worry, Grandpa. I will make sure to teach her everything I know."

Even though the tension in Blake and Robert's relationship seemed to have subsided, they were the only ones who knew it was actually getting worse. Anything that Heather did was fine with Robert, and that would subsequently irk Blake, once again setting off his hatred toward Robert and Heather.

With Robert siding with Heather, it was impossible for Blake to reconcile with Robert. Nonetheless, it was also Blake who got himself into that situation in the first place. If it weren't for his overeagerness to succeed in his endeavors, he never would've gotten into a deadlock with Robert.

When Blake finally got to the company, Heather was already in her office. Apparently, she didn't feel the need to restrict herself, as if the company was already hers. It wasn't until Blake knocked on the glass door of her office that she lifted her head.

Prior to that, she was focused on going through the documents in front of her. She seemed to radiate a unique charm when she was engrossed in work; a charm that could even cast a spell on Blake in spite of his antagonistic attitude toward her. At the same time, he also got increasingly jealous of her, as he seemed even more dull in contrast to her natural charm.

"You're finally here, Blake." Heather wore a faint smile. Since she was in the company, she was determined to put up a convincing facade. Despite her relationship with Blake in private, he was her superior in the company. Therefore, she had to greet him amicably, which was only appropriate considering their work relationship.

With all eyes on them while they were in a space with optimum transparency, Heather didn't want to step out of line for fear of jeopardizing her own social standing. She made sure to keep up appearances in order to leave a good impression of herself with the other employees.

Blake was also aware of that aspect, so he pretended to care for Heather on the surface. Besides, his direct participation wasn't required to make Heather's life difficult. He could simply delegate the task to his subordinates, which could also effectively shift the blame away from himself.

Therefore, the two of them contended behind everyone else while maintaining an act on the surface as caring siblings. Wearing a smirk, Blake said, "Heather, how are you adapting to your position?" He arched his brow at her. Even though he didn't like her, it wasn't to the point that he would do something to put the company in a crisis.

In order to give Heather a hard time without ruining the project, he would make Heather prove herself in the following days. The thought of being able to teach her a lesson was exhilarating. In fact, he was planning to get in touch with the person who was in charge of the project.

If Heather was able to complete the project without a hitch despite the multiple setbacks, he would take it as proof of her capabilities. If she couldn't, then it would be time for him to prove that he was far more superior than her.

At that time, Heather had yet to see through Blake's intentions. While she was in charge of the project, Blake was also checking in on it behind her back. After spending some time on small talk, Blake left the place, and Heather sniggered while watching his retreating figure. He made himself so obvious. I suppose a rocky road lies ahead of me.

She was fiddling with a felt-tipped pen when she recalled having a fountain pen that she hadn't used for some time, which was probably tucked away in a corner at home. Leon also had a similar pen. He's coming soon. The thought of it soothed her greatly.

She already got into work mode when she was in Stark Group last night, so she wasn't all that stressed when she started working on the project. Having studied about the project beforehand, she was now looking through the details.

Although the whole thing looked alright at first glance, she discovered that there were actually a lot of hidden problems. Suddenly, she let out a yawn. She was already tired even though she had only been working for a short time, which proved just how strenuous the project was.

Spending all day studying the project would be tiring, so she figured it was time to relax. Opening the glass door, she then decided to take a stroll in the premises of the company. After all, she wasn't expecting Blake to give her a tour.

I'm grateful enough that Blake didn't give me more trouble. As usual, Heather wore a smile. Since it was her first day at work, she thought it would be important to showcase her friendliness, which was, regardless of her intent, being recognized by most people as more of a show of her indifference.

The aloof smile she wore was striking enough to indicate to those who were paying attention that nobody should cross her. When Blake, who was working in his office, received a report from his assistant regarding Heather's whereabouts, he smirked. That's just how she is.

After a quick round, Heather already got a grasp of the state that the company was in. She even managed to deduce who was loyal to Blake, as those lackeys would abhor the person whom their master hated as well.

There was a hostile air about them that came from nowhere even though it was her first time meeting those people. Therefore, it signified that these were the people who sided with Blake to treat her as an enemy.

She made sure to glare at them for a tad bit longer so that her gaze could pierce them right into their hearts, all the while maintaining a contemptuous smile. Who do they even think they are to display their hostility in public?

After making her first impression, she decided to call for a meeting. Blake didn't appoint an assistant for her, so there were a lot of tasks that she couldn't handle because she was unfamiliar with the workings of the company. Therefore, she picked out a man whom she deemed as decent to be her temporary assistant.

The man she summoned looked at her shyly. There were only the two of them in the office, but Heather didn't care how the other employees perceived her. He seemed like a bit of a pushover. With my charm, it would be easier to get through to men. A woman might turn me down without hesitation. After all, it is easier for women to turn down other women, whereas men would defer to me more easily.

"Director Heather, don't we need to report this to Director Blake?" The man was blushing already; he was on the verge of being completely persuaded by Heather.

"I will be temporarily taking charge of the project in the northern suburbs. From what I heard, you have been working diligently on that project, so I think you will be a suitable candidate as my assistant." Heather made sure to keep her tone formal. Although that man seemed docile enough, Heather noticed an ambitious streak in his eyes. Thus, she was certain he would take the opportunity that was presented to him.

"I'm afraid—" There was still a shred of hesitancy in him.

She cut him off directly. "Bilbo, you don't have to worry about Director Blake. I will inform him personally about this." Seeing that Bilbo was worried about Blake's opinion of him made it apparent that the entire company was aware that she had beef with Blake.

While staring at Heather's pretty face, Bilbo Lawson agreed to her request unwittingly. As ambitious as he was, he was aware of the feud between Blake and Heather, and that the company ultimately belonged to Blake.

Theoretically speaking, he shouldn't have agreed to work as Heather's assistant, but her eyes were too enchanting. He couldn't even maintain eye contact with her as his heart rate would skyrocket. With Heather's overwhelming charms, a young man like him could hardly turn down her offer.

"I'll summon everyone who is involved in the project for a meeting in the meeting room." Bilbo sounded resolute in his response.

In return, Heather smiled knowingly while giving him a nod. He is smart. I wonder what he is capable of. It might be a good idea to bring him with me to my own company in the future. With that in mind, her smile broadened. Now that Blake got me into his company, I can't work under him just like that. If I find employees with potential, it might be a good idea to hire them for myself.

Having found herself a turning point, Heather was feeling less gloomy, and her mood had lightened up considerably. With an aim in mind, she felt more motivated to work. However, she realized she would be doing Robert a disservice, but she figured she could make it up to him by treating him better in their daily life together in order to rid her of her sense of guilt.

Although the crazy idea of hiring someone from her family's company was exhilarating, she wouldn't mention it to anyone yet, considering that it was her first day at work. After suppressing her excitement, she tidied up the documents on her desk. She had decided to flex a little during the meeting later. Since it was her first day stepping into the position, a lot of people wouldn't trust her, so she figured she should dominate them by showing them her skills.

When Heather entered the meeting room, she garnered everybody's attention. By that point, she wasn't even wearing a smile anymore. Instead, her face had reverted to its usual stoic expression.

As soon as she got in, everyone in the room tensed up. Bilbo came to her aid right away, and she watched him with satisfaction. From the looks of it, Bilbo was the first person whom she had gotten under her wing.

Meanwhile, there were others who were still observing the situation, as well as two of them who were on full alert. When she checked on those who were looking at her carefully, she noticed they were among Blake's loyal subordinates.

Things will surely get interesting in the future. Never a coward, her first response to a challenge was always to face it head on. No matter the difficulties, she was certain she could overcome them.

“I’m not familiar with you all. Although I do have some info on you, I suppose reading whatever that is written on here makes no difference.” Heather had a stern look on her that made her look like a school teacher. “I dislike things that are unnecessarily bombastic, so you’d better offer me a short introduction of yourselves that I will be satisfied with.” Her domineering attitude got everybody strung up, as nobody knew what she would do next. Soon enough, the languid atmosphere was taken over by one that was indescribably tense; Heather’s presence had managed to unnerve everyone.

## Standing before Love Chapter 439

Silence hung heavy in the air of the meeting room. Upon witnessing such a reaction from everybody else, Heather gave them a faint smile that immediately thawed out the chilly look on her face. Lighting up the enclosed space in everybody’s heart, her smile was as bright as the sun. It was so enticing that those people could hardly avert their gaze from her.

“Allow me to start by introducing myself. My name is Heather Langston. Heather, otherwise known as *Calluna vulgaris*, derived its name from the Greek word ‘kallunein’, which means to beautify, or sweep clean. Incidentally, I came with the intention to improve things by purging those that are unnecessary.” As she spoke, she glanced at the two people. All eight of her team members present in the room knew what she meant to imply during her self introduction.

“When I was studying in Italy, I had been managing the Langston Group’s branch company in Europe. Today is my first day in the headquarters of Langston Group. To be frank, the headquarters is no match for the branch company. As you would have already known, Langston Group is currently focused on its operations in Europe.” Heather’s straightforward attitude was almost nerve wracking, especially for Blake’s subordinates.

The flabbergasted look on their faces elicited from her a satisfied smile. “This is also why Director Blake has been travelling to Europe. However, as a family who have our roots in Bradford City, of course the Langstons would like to improve our century-old company.” The ups and downs in Heather’s words left

them hanging. It was as if they were on a roller-coaster ride, and Heather might surprise them with anything at the next instant.

“I have a doctorate in economics in which I achieved outstanding performances in both its theoretical and practical aspects.” The look she wore when she was nonchalantly praising herself was somewhat adorable.

By then, Blake’s subordinates smiled awkwardly when they realized Heather shouldn’t be trifled with. Instead of them giving her a hard time in the future, it was likely that the opposite would be true, as she was obviously not a pushover. Although they already heard of Heather’s various deeds, it wasn’t until they had met her in person that they knew the rumors weren’t, in fact, an exaggeration.

“I dislike it when people give me trouble, and my orders must be carried out with perfection. If I delegate a task to you, it’s because I believe you will be able to accomplish it, so make sure that you do not half-arse it.” Heather swept her eyes across the room. She wasn’t kidding at all, as she had always been exceptionally strict when it came to her employee’s performance.

There was utter silence in the room when everybody was mulling over what Heather just told them. Every line she said hit home, so nobody dared take her lightly. It was apparent that it would be an uphill climb from then on.

“Who’s next?” Heather arched her brow while gazing at Bilbo. Since she was obviously cueing him, Bilbo offered to go next. Following the format which she used, he introduced himself in a straightforward manner to show his support toward her.

Heather was satisfied by his introduction. After that, everybody introduced themselves in their own unique ways. Throughout the process, she was happy that she was able to know more about her team members.

“Next on, let us cut to the chase.” Forty minutes had passed by then. From the looks of it, all eight of them acknowledged that the first meeting would take a long time. However, Heather gave them a task after giving them a brief explanation using the PPT that she had made just now.

“You should come up with your own opinions regarding the project. Tomorrow, each of you will be handing me a proposal about this. Nobody is to discuss this among yourselves.” She had a stoic look on her face that left them feeling all strung up. “It’s just like how lecturers don’t like to receive two similar

theses. When this happens to be the case, my lecturer would have the students rewrite them.” She was smirking when she spoke, and her words sounded threatening.

“By the way, I mean it when I say I want all eight of your proposals tomorrow. Even if your proposal got rejected, you will still be required to hand in another one that would satisfy me by tomorrow.” She gave them an ultimatum, as she was adamant that the team should think hard about the project, and that everybody should contribute to the project instead of constantly relying on other people’s wisdom.

To her, the company had no need for employees who would make no contribution toward the company. In that regard, she was even more merciless than Blake. Although Langston Group was a distinguished company that only accepted elites, it was overstaffed nonetheless.

When she was managing the branch company in Europe, she had laid off quite a number of employees. After all, it wasn’t a good thing to have too many people holding a similar position. Having too many employees would only lead to office politics that would affect their performance. Instead of having that, she would rather offer a higher salary to one person so that he could do his best while on the job. Eight people was a little excessive for the team. From her point of view, four or five would be enough, so she wouldn’t hesitate to kick whoever that didn’t perform well out of the team.

When the meeting was over, everybody felt relieved, as Heather had given them quite a lot of pressure. Bilbo was even feeling fortunate that he had accepted her offer earlier, or else she wouldn’t have let him off the hook that easily.

They had a two hour lunch break after that, so they were actually working for only six hours per day. Langston Group was relaxed in that regard, which was another reason people fought to get into the company. Since the company wasn’t putting a lot of focus on their headquarters, there wasn’t a lot to do while working there.

Nonetheless, as a family that had a reputation to keep up, the Langstons wouldn’t allow the headquarters of their company to look too shoddy, so they made sure to have as many employees as other companies.

That was one of the aspects that annoyed Heather, and she couldn’t understand Blake’s reasons for not changing what happened either. She

acknowledged his capabilities and ambition, but he was a bit of a wild card, for she never knew what he was up to.

Heather didn't have a lot of power over the company, so all she could do at that point was focus on completing the project with outstanding results. She wouldn't be crossing paths with Langston Group in the future anyway, so she decided to focus on her own company instead.

Actually, she had complicated feelings toward Langston Group, which perhaps stemmed from her anger toward its lackadaisical policies. Unfortunately, she would never inherit the company, and Blake would never do as she wished either.

When she got back to her office, she saw one unread message in her phone that she left on the table. When she opened it, she realized it was a message from Matthias. A genuine smile crept onto her face; she never expected to see Matthias behave so childishly, for the message he sent read, 'You never accept my friend requests on social media. I won't do this a fourth time.'

After logging into her Facebook account that didn't have a lot of friends to begin with, she accepted Matthias' friend request in resignation after checking it out. She would be tied to him for a long time in the future after all. Then, she massaged the back of her neck. The hectic work schedule in the morning gave her a stiff neck. Right after she accepted Matthias' friend request, he immediately sent her a few messages.

'Let's have lunch together. I have already arrived at the lobby of your company.' The rest of the message consisted of emojis. Judging from that, he seemed bored. In fact, he might have a lot of time on his hands, which made her wonder if there wasn't a lot of work in Locke Group.

'Why don't you come up to fetch me?' She had signed a contract with Matthias, so it meant that they were—according to the terms—a couple. Thus, she figured doing something couples would do wouldn't seem out of place.

'Alright, my darling.' Matthias even added a smiley emoji at the end of his text.

Why does he sound like a big boy? Heather thought in resignation, but she figured she would get used to the bizarreness of it in no time.

However, there were a lot of coincidences in the world. Right before lunch, Blake came for Heather. "Let me show you to the staff canteen." There was a brilliant smile on his face.

In Langston Group, only the higher-ups and the Langstons themselves were entitled to a private dining room. Therefore, the fact that Blake wanted to bring her to the staff canteen was a humiliation in itself. Not only was he doing it in her face, but he was also effectively showing the staff Heather's status in the company.

When she was thinking of a way to respond to that, there was a knock on the door. Both of the Langstons glanced in the direction of the door to see Matthias standing by it. Heather's eyes lit up as soon as she saw him. He sure got here in time! she thought. "Come on in." She made a deliberate effort to show affection toward Matthias.

"Heather, can we leave now?" Matthias also responded to her endearingly. Although Heather wasn't quite used to it, she didn't let it show. By that point, Blake was dumbfounded as he turned to look at both of them. He had no idea how the two sworn enemies became so close to each other.

"Two more minutes. Just wait for a moment." Heather checked her watch. Then, she explained to Blake, "Matthias came to fetch me, as we will be celebrating my first day at work during lunch." By that, she was implying that she wouldn't be going to the staff canteen with Blake.

When Blake glanced at Matthias, the latter nodded with a smile. "That's right. Her first day at work in Langston Group is an occasion that is worth a celebration. Why don't you come with us, Blake?" Matthias was being all affectionate even toward Blake.

Annoyed by that, Heather glared at Matthias. He went overboard with that. Even though we're a couple, we only started dating for a while. With how he's behaving, he's making it seem like I'm determined to marry him.

"What's going on with you two?" Blake pointed at the both of them in confusion.

"Blake, haven't you been trying to introduce Matthias to me? You should feel happy for us now that we've naturally gotten together." Heather sounded nonchalant as she witnessed the multiple expressions that alternated on Blake's face.

“Yeah. I appreciate that you have put in some good words for me.” Matthias went along with it. Since he was tied together with Heather, he would undoubtedly side with her in public.

“So are you two a couple now?” Blake was still in disbelief. The fact that his wish had come true came as a surprise to him. Yet, something felt decidedly off about it. After all, what he wanted wasn’t for Matthias to be protective over Heather. It would be unfair if the heavens were to give her a boyfriend who loved her. Blake was actually aiming to have them wear each other out.

“Yup! I hope you can keep this a secret. After all the drama that took place between us, we would like to keep our relationship out of public sight.” With how sincere Heather sounded, no one would know that she was only faking it.

On the other hand, Matthias also added, “That’s right. Our relationship should be kept a secret for the time being. When the time comes, we will make it public.” By saying that, he was indirectly telling Blake to keep things to himself.

Irrked that his plan had backfired unexpectedly, Blake wore a discontented expression, but he was still feigning a cheerful attitude as he said, “If that is the case, well... Congratulations! You are a great match for each other. I will not be spreading this, so you have nothing to worry about. Make sure to rejoice in your relationship.”

Blake managed to fake his way through that. Just like that, the three of them were all wearing masks in each other’s presence.

## Standing before Love Chapter 440

Relief washed over Heather when she finally left the company. When she realized there would be plenty of other occasions that would require her to put on a mask, she couldn’t help but feel a little deflated.

On the other hand, Matthias seemed relatively unfazed, as if what happened was nothing at all. When Heather stole glances at him, she noticed he seemed rather cute. She couldn’t help but be reminded of how he looked when he was a teenager, during which he seemed malnourished. After a few years, he had become a man with a sturdy build, and it gave her an odd feeling that she couldn’t explain. It was as if he had become an entirely different person altogether.

“What would you like to eat?” Matthias inquired in a gentlemanly manner.

“Thai cuisine,” Heather replied offhandedly. After a morning’s work, she didn’t have much appetite.

Then, she followed behind Matthias without a care in where they were actually going. He seemed familiar with the place. In fact, he might be even more familiar with the place than her, for he didn’t need a map to find the Thai restaurant that was a ten-minute drive away from the company. While glancing at him curiously, she wanted to ask him about that, but she eventually decided against it because the question sounded a little silly.

Matthias picked out a private room in the restaurant. After pulling out a chair for Heather, he pushed the menu toward her as if they were a real couple. “You seem to be in a bad mood,” he stated cautiously. There seemed to be a major feud between Heather and Blake, as they appeared to be constantly at each other’s throats.

“Is it that obvious?” Heather was checking out the menu while she spoke in a flat tone.

“I can discern it from your voice.” Just like that, Matthias stared at Heather. There was something exceptional about her that day, as he could hardly look away from her. Now that she had kept away her usually sharp attitude at work, she appeared to be rather cute, which made him want to approach her even more.

“What prompted you to come to my office just now?” Ignoring his question, she changed the topic diplomatically in an attempt to act naturally while spending time with Matthias. Aside from her feud with Blake, she wasn’t too worried about her work life. It was just that she had a bad feeling about being targeted as soon as she got into Langston Group.

“Isn’t that just normal between couples?” Matthias chuckled, seemingly content with the role he was playing.

“Aren’t you going to dance around it a little?” Similarly, Heather also let out a chuckle. She only ever did that while in Myra’s presence. It was unusual that Matthias was able to amuse her as well.

Seeing that her mood had lightened up, Matthias went on to say, “I wasn’t expecting things to go so smoothly.” In fact, he was surprised that Heather would sign that contract at all.

“I don’t like to hold a grudge. Instead, I would much rather offer someone an olive branch.” With her head tilted, Heather gazed at Matthias while wearing an innocent look. Ultimately, he didn’t know her well enough.

Nonetheless, he gave her a faint nod. “Why don’t we have some drinks to celebrate the fact that we have come to a truce?” He was suddenly overcome with the urge to drink. Drinking with Heather had always been enjoyable.

“The restaurant might not have quality wine.” Heather was particular when it came to wine. Not only did she enjoy drinking wine, but she enjoyed quality wine. In fact, all the wine she drank was expensive.

“Why don’t I come fetch you tonight? We can drink at my house then,” Matthias suggested.

“Do you need some company because today is a special day?” Heather revealed an understanding smile; she knew that he needed someone to spend time with after being alone for so long.

Upon being exposed by Heather, Matthias revealed a wicked smile. So she knew what I was thinking all along. In recent years, he had been focusing on building his career, so he didn’t spend much time around women. Although a lot of women expressed interest in him, he didn’t reciprocate their feelings.

Besides, his heart belonged to Myra, so he wouldn’t even spare a glance at other women. It was just that he wanted to be close to Heather that day. He didn’t want to spend the occasion alone, and for some reason, he just wanted to be close to Heather.

“Lovers come together during Valentine’s Day,” Matthias muttered to himself. “When everybody is getting together, I also feel like spending the day with someone.”

If it weren’t for the fact that Myra had sent Heather a Valentine’s greeting via text that morning, she wouldn’t have realized it was Valentine’s Day. Compared to Myra, who had her fair share of romance with Tony, Heather was feeling somewhat lonely, especially since it was Valentine’s Day.

Matthias was her nominal boyfriend after all, so she was slightly swayed by the idea of drinking with Matthias; it was nice to drink with him.

“It will depend on your sincerity.” Heather’s reply was ambiguous. Back when she was living abroad, she had gotten a lot of invitations during Valentine’s Day, but she accepted none of them. Since Valentine’s was also considered a traditional festival in Solaria, she wished to take such invitations seriously.

Matthias nodded. “I will do my best to impress you, so I hope you will accept my invitation, my dear lady.” His cheeky tone almost gave her the impression that they were really in love with each other.

There was some more time after lunch, so Heather and Matthias took a stroll before going back to the company. A stroll after a meal could improve one’s health, as well as help with digestion.

“Do you still hate me?” Heather didn’t mince her words with Matthias, as she had a feeling that he still hated her.

“Of course. Such deep-seated hatred won’t dissipate that easily.” He told her the truth. After all, she wasn’t someone who could be deceived by flattery.

“You’re such a weird person. You keep on pestering me despite your hatred toward me. Could it be that you actually fancy me?” Heather cracked a joke. Ever since young, she had a lot of suitors. By comparison, Myra seemed dull in her presence. Perhaps Matthias was the only one who had his eyes on Myra while ignoring Heather instead.

Back then, Heather still had some inexplicable feelings toward Matthias, which probably stemmed from her disappointment over the fact that he didn’t even spare her a glance. She seemed to have no appeal toward him.

“Maybe I do like you.” Perhaps because Matthias wanted so much to get closer to Heather, he was being honest with his words. “You’re a charming woman. As a normal man, I couldn’t possibly be immune to your charms.” Just like a professional sweet-talker, he sounded alluring.

Heather wore a smirk. “Men like to conquer, so they treat me like the mountains that they want to climb and conquer. In fact, there aren’t a lot of people who like me for real. Speaking of which, I sometimes feel like I’m a failure too.” Matthias’s reply didn’t sit well with her.

She was thinking that Matthias was different, but it turned out that he was the same as other men. The only difference was that he only had eyes for Myra. Their honeyed words weren't proof of Heather's attractiveness, but a reflection of their own vanity. They were always on the go to conquer more women, and the best woman would forever be the next woman they were out to conquer.

"This is just how men are. Are you expecting a fairytale romance?" He spoke as if he were engaged in a debate with Heather, with both of them holding opposing views regarding a certain topic.

"No. I don't care for fairytale romances. Princes fall for beautiful princesses, so the only catch is that the people they fall for must be exceptionally beautiful." No longer a young girl, Heather didn't long for that kind of romance. "It's as if beauty and kindness is all there is to women. Yet, those who possess both don't usually find their prince-charming. Instead, they had to deal with all sorts of scoundrels." She hit the nail on the head with that line.

Matthias stopped in his tracks to look at her from behind, then he bid her goodbye. "Langston Group is just in front, so I won't be going there. See you tonight."

Upon hearing that, Heather continued to walk forward without even looking back. "If you manage to charm me." She didn't give him a definitive reply. It was never easy to get to her. She was that close to seeing him in a new light just because they were role-playing as a couple. Although they were supposed to put on a show for the public, Heather also had no intention to settle down for him.

"I still have half a day, which is enough." Matthias was feeling confident in his abilities. Meanwhile, Heather had left him behind. While staring at her retreating figure, he was smiling with much certainty. All of a sudden, he was looking forward to the coming night. He didn't even feel like returning to his company. Instead, he planned to use his time to pick up a few techniques for dating.

I've never felt this eager toward any date prior to this. After that, he went to his car with plans to go to Stark Group. It had been a while since he last saw Myra, so he was very eager to see her.

Tony Hart must have prepared a lot of surprises for her. The thought of it triggered feelings of jealousy. He was jealous that Tony was the one who

could surprise Myra, as well as the fact that he was the one who could be with her.

When Matthias arrived at Stark Group, Myra already left on a date with Tony, so he came for naught. He was planning to use work as an excuse to check on Myra, but alas, he was one step too late.

Meanwhile, Myra was in the northern suburbs. Suddenly, she sneezed, and that made her wonder if someone might be missing her. Tony quickly removed his jacket to hand it to her. In a gentle tone, he reminded, "It's windy here, so be careful that you don't catch a cold."

Tony's warmth lingered on the jacket that he handed her, which warmed both her body and her heart. She was busy with work that day as usual, but she was dragged away by Tony, so both of them ended up skipping work.

"Is there something novel that you would like to show me?" Myra asked expectantly.

"It's just a bit further. We will have to go there on foot." Tony didn't offer her a direct reply. Having spent tremendous effort preparing for the surprise, he didn't want to risk spoiling anything to her.

There was much curiosity on Myra's face when she stared at Tony. Although Myra never looked forward to Valentine's Day, Tony seemed to jump at any opportunity for a celebration. The more time she spent with him, the more she realized he was a romantic man. He was always coming up with ways to entertain her, which was really sweet of him.

As they walked forward, Tony was holding onto Myra's hand tightly. He was planning to show her something different. In order to create that special thing, he had been spending a lot of time working hard on it in secret. After a long wait, he finally found the perfect opportunity to show it to Myra. Although the construction wasn't completed yet, the basic structures were already in place, which he believed was enough to surprise Myra.

"Tony, why don't we travel the world after some time?" Myra had been planning to do so for some time. In fact, it wasn't the first time she mentioned it.

## Standing before Love Chapter 441

Tony stood tall and proud as the breeze blew his bangs. His handsome features were warm and alluring. When he turned slightly to face Myra, he was wearing a refreshing smile that was as stunning as the gods from ancient myths.

“Before we go on our world trip, you have to marry me.” Tony was wearing that look when he stared into Myra’s eyes, which she found irresistible.

They had been engaged for a while, so they had been thinking of marriage. To be more precise, Myra was planning to hold the ceremony after she gave birth to the baby. When she observed her belly, she noticed it was bulging slightly, so she was worried she might not look good in a wedding dress.

Upon noticing her hesitation, Tony arched his brow. Things don’t seem to be progressing as smoothly as expected.

“Tony, I won’t look good in a wedding dress now.” Myra was visibly dejected. If she didn’t get held up by matters pertaining to Stark Group, she wouldn’t mind getting married sooner.

“You definitely will. Myra, you look good in anything.” Tony tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear while soothing her.

It was a breezy day, so their clothes made noises as it flapped in the wind. It cooled them down so much that they had almost forgotten about the heat in Bradford City. In fact, the weather was just nice. Having waited for a long while, it was finally a cloudy day. Without the blazing sun, the breeze that blew nonstop was a pleasant addition to the scenery before them.

A huge plot of land in the northern suburbs belonged to Hart Group. Tony had been building something over the desolate place, but nobody knew what he was up to. Transportation was an important aspect to the project which had yet to be completed. Nonetheless, he was expecting to announce it to the public by the coming year.

Tony made sure to carefully support Myra when they were walking. If it wasn’t for his desire to show her the grand place, he wouldn’t have dragged her along to a place with such uneven ground. From his point of view, Myra could only step on flat and clean surfaces. However, she wasn’t that delicate, so she

didn't find it disagreeable. On the contrary, having the opportunity to let out some sweat felt cathartic.

As they neared their destination, a triumphant smile gradually surfaced on Tony's face. I wonder what expression she will make later on. He was eager to witness what was to come. Throughout the day, Tony seemed somewhat adorable. When Myra checked out his profile, he was giggling like a child.

"Stop putting up airs," Myra said despite her anticipation.

"Do you see that?" Tony pointed at somewhere not far from them. "It's over there."

When Myra cast a glance in the direction where he was pointing at, she could see from afar a structure that resembled an amusement park, which piqued her curiosity. Therefore, she picked up her pace in order to take a closer look at the structure.

"Slow down." Tony was following behind her with a worried expression.

Soon enough, they got to where Tony was talking about. Myra was so surprised by the scenery before her that she could hardly believe her own eyes. It was as if they had entered a dreamland. While grasping Tony's arm, she was elated. "How did you even think of creating such a beautiful dreamland?"

"Because you were the one who gave me the inspiration to do so." Tony held Myra's hand in a tight grip. "Let's check out the place. You might recall something." The knowing smile that Tony wore seemed to be a hint.

A huge manor was erected near a mountain by a river. It was named Tomyrra Wonderland, which was a combination of Tony and Myra's name. It was a dreamy place. While it might not be a literal kingdom, the small amusement park was fully furnished and equipped with the necessary facilities.

Tomyrra Wonderland satisfied Myra's dream of being a princess. It mimicked the setup of a fairytale kingdom where princes and princesses lived. Even the design of the gates looked fantastical.

Although pink was chosen as the base color of the entire amusement park, it wasn't tacky at all. Instead, the combination of pink and a refreshing touch of blue gave the place a dreamy quality. Since the place was set to be an

amusement park, a myriad of other colors were also utilized. Therefore, the place was bursting with colors that went well with each other, not at all looking gaudy.

The deeper they ventured, the more familiar the place felt. Myra began to wonder if she had seen this place somewhere, or perhaps in a dream. While wearing a faint smile, she wondered if Tony had perhaps designed the place himself.

“Do you like it?” When Tony posed the question, even his firm features softened.

“Yeah. I have a feeling that I’ve seen it somewhere before.” Not only was the place familiar, but she might even have doodled it on paper.

Without a word, Tony wore a smile while looking at Myra. All of a sudden, she was seized by a memory, which prompted her to stare at Tony in disbelief. So this is how it is, she thought. “Tony, did you design the place according to my scattered manuscripts?” Agitated, her voice didn’t sound as cool as it usually was.

She used to be a designer, so she would spend her free time working on blueprints. Once, she recalled a dream about a wonderland that she had as a kid, in which she spent a memorable time. Thus, she created a blueprint based on that dream of hers. When Tony found out about the blueprint, she told him about that dream she had as a child, since it wasn’t a big deal.

Tony was very supportive of the idea, and encouraged her to finish the blueprints by filling in all the details. Back then, she didn’t even realize he already made up his mind to build the amusement park.

When she thought about how hard Tony must have tried to hide the construction from her, as well as all the hard work that he must have put in while recreating the stuff of her dreams in the real world, she couldn’t contain herself.

It was the best gift that she had ever received. While looking at Tony, she bit on her bottom lip to stop herself from bursting into tears. Ever since he came into her life, he seemed to be capable of bringing her one surprise after the other. Relishing in the sound of his heartbeat and his scent after embracing him, Myra realized she was smitten by him. “Tony, I will cry if you do this.” Her voice was trembling.

Tony patted her back. "You're such a crybaby. The fact that you like it is the most magnificent reward for my efforts." He held her tightly. For the longest while, he had been thinking of creating something that could commemorate their love.

"You sound so formal. How long have you been working on this?" Myra recalled that he had spent most of his time keeping her company in Bradford City, so she had no idea how he managed to find time to work on the amusement park.

"It has been a while since construction began, and it's not finished yet, but I wanted to show it to you during Valentine's Day." Tony couldn't recall how long he had spent working on the project, but he figured it was all worth it as long as Myra was happy about it.

"Will the park be open to the public by next year?" Myra asked curiously.

"Yeah, but we will play with all of the facilities in it before that." He wore a genuine smile, his every move mesmerizing.

By that point, Myra already left his arms. She had a satisfied smile on her face, content with the surprise. "So, Director Tony Hart built an amusement park from scratch for my sake." She opened her arms casually.

It was a sight for sore eyes. Without a trace, Tony took out his phone to snap a photo of Myra when she was in such a casual state. Upon hearing the noise, she walked up to him with a stern look on her face. "Hey, why did you snap a photo of me?" She was a little embarrassed.

"You looked good, so I figured I should record it." Tony shook the phone in his hand as he spoke. With a witty smile, Myra took out her phone to snap a few shots of him before he could react, so he didn't get to avoid it.

"Myra..." Tony wasn't expecting her to do that. She sure is getting cleverer.

"You look good too." Letting out a chuckle, she opened the photo gallery to check on the photos. She took the photos so quickly that she didn't even get to see how they looked. Tony also scooted closer. It turned out that he was the type who looked good no matter what pose he struck. Even in the photos that Myra took casually, he still was as handsome as ever. "Tony, you sure are an attractive man." Myra seemed lovesick.

“From my point of view, you’re the most attractive of them all.” He said so while staring at her. It was his sincere opinion. No matter how pretty other people looked, they could never compare to Myra.

“Hmph!” Myra huffed, partially because of shyness, before walking forward. After all, there were still a lot of scenic views throughout the journey ahead. It took them a while to go through the entire place. “A lot of girls will come to take photos after it is officially opened to the public.” Myra looked almost like an expert when she made that comment.

Nodding, Tony agreed with her. “You can treat this place as an amusement park.” Even though there were elements that differentiated Tomyrra Wonderland from one, it was still essentially an amusement park, for it had multiple facilities as well, but merely with more buildings. He was also planning to hire performance artists for shows and gigs, so it would be different from an amusement park.

They spent an entire afternoon at the place. When they noticed it was getting late, they left reluctantly. Myra adored the place, as it brought her back to her dreams of when she was a child. It was just that in her dreams, the place was crowded, and now was Tony with her. However, the experience was enough to make her feel like she went on a time travel.

After they got back in their car, Myra’s eyes were glued to Tony. She couldn’t help but stare, as she had a hard time articulating her feelings. All she could think of was to thank the heavens for bequeathing her someone as outstanding as Tony.

“Don’t I look exceptionally handsome today?” Tony joked while starting the car engine.

“Yeah, you are so freaking handsome. Nobody in the whole wide world looks better than you.” Myra didn’t hold back while praising him, which made him practically light up with joy.

“You silly girl.” He wore a content smile. Hearing her praise him like that made him feel happy.

“Yeah. I will forever be your silly girl. I have nothing to worry about as long as you’re with me.” While on their way back, she couldn’t stop saying sweet nothings to him.

“So when will you marry me?” He was serious about it. After all, he couldn’t wait to see her in a wedding dress. He was also looking forward to the moment when Myra and him swore their oaths in front of God amidst the ringing of church bells and the blessings of a crowd.

“Anytime you deem suitable.” Having lost herself in feelings of bliss, Myra wouldn’t mind doing anything that Tony asked of her right now.