

Surprise 271

Chapter 271 Making Fun of Him

What did you say?" Kelly could not comprehend what Alexander meant.

He glanced at Courtney, who understood his meaning. While looking at Kelly, she announced, "Alexander is now the supervisor of the Hunter Group's head of finance."

"What?" Kelly incredulously glared with widened eyes. "How is that possible? He's from the Sunhill Enterprise! How can he be the head of finance here? Apart from that, how can you just appoint someone to take the position like this? Do you still respect the board of directors?"

"I do respect them, but I'm not sure whether they have the same amount of respect for me." Courtney lowered her voice. "Apart from that, I never planned to appoint the replacement without notifying anyone. Is it because someone threw a tantrum during the meeting? If that's the case, I don't think there's any point in having the meeting anyway."

"You..." Kelly was so angry that her face flushed red. She stomped her foot on the ground as she continued with her words. "My mom was right about you all along! You are a jinxer! Whoever keeps in touch with you will be doomed! You killed your parents and your step-sister who's only half-related to you!"

Upon hearing that, Courtney clenched her fists as blood drained from her face.

The words that Kelly spoke were exactly the ones that Courtney had been hearing since young. At that instant, they reappeared like an ancient curse. Even though she knew that she should not believe them, the trauma from her childhood had left her deeply shaken.

"She's someone who brings misfortunes. As soon as she was born, she jinxed her mother until she died. After a few years, her grandfather followed suit."

"Now that she's sent to our place, who else is she going to jinx?"

"Stay away from here!"

Such comments and remarks were common as she was growing up.

"So, you mean to say that if you encounter any accidents now, the cops won't need to investigate it because Courtney has jinxed you?" Alexander's voice suddenly rang as it yanked Courtney out of her traumatic memories. As he spoke in a low voice, he took two steps toward Kelly. "However, jinxing people to death does not seem to constitute a crime in the eyes of the law."

"What do you mean?" She took a step back in trepidation. "We are at the office now. You dare—"

"There's nothing that I won't dare to do." Alexander stood rooted to the ground, but the cold and harsh vibe he radiated had also scared Courtney. "If you say something like this in front of Courtney again, I will ensure that you won't be able to utter another word in the future. Then, you will know how much power a good-for-nothing who has been chased out of the Duncan Family fields."

Kelly was taken aback by his words that her face immediately paled. After almost losing her footing, she ran away after realizing that there was nobody around.

After she left, he walked to Courtney and held her hands as he stood in front of her. "You are usually quick-witted. Why are you suddenly quiet in front of an uneducated swine like her?"

Courtney lowered her head as she answered sullenly, "I just have no words to retaliate because I've heard many similar statements since I was young. Sometimes I even think that they are right after all." If fate really exists in this world, I really suspect that I have the fate of the most unlucky person alive.

Alexander tightened his grip on his hands. As his warmth spread to the back of her hands, his voice rang above her head. "If you are the unluckiest person alive, then what am I? Everyone has their own time in staying alive and dying—no one can force anything like this. If you want to claim the title of the unluckiest person alive, you'll have to wait for me to own it first."

At the age of 13, Alexander's father died and he chased his biological mother out of the family. Then, he spent the next two decades alone; he did not even visit his only grandfather often. Hence, compared to Courtney, he thought that he was more suited for the title.

However, Courtney snorted exasperatedly. "Who would console another person like that? Why don't you just say that both of us are unlucky people who have found each other?"

"If you want to describe it in that way, it's not wrong either."

"Hey!" Courtney pretended to whack him. As she did not exercise much force into her movement, she looked more like she was flirting with him.

At that moment, two employees passed by and one of them opened his mouth. "Hello, President Hunt—"

Before he could finish his greeting, the other person dragged him away. However, Courtney and Alexander could still hear what they said. "Can't you see that President Hunter is flirting with her boyfriend?" the employee asked. "What are you doing by interrupting them?"

In an instant, the atmosphere between them suddenly became awkward.

Even after they walked away, her head was still lowered as she awkwardly touched her face.

"Why are you blushing?"

"Who's blushing?" Courtney glared at Alexander. "I'm furious at Kelly."

"Is that so?"

"Precisely!" Courtney cleared her throat. "Head of finance, why aren't you reporting to HR? You don't call the shots around here. The procedures have to be followed."

"You didn't even adhere to the procedures when you hired me." Alexander looked indignant. "Even if I follow the procedures, everyone else will still think that I'm here because of connections."

"They are not blind, you know." She rolled her eyes at him and pushed his shoulders in the opposite direction. "The entire Melrose City knows that you are the young master of the Duncan Family. For you

to work for our small business as the head of finance is already tough on you. Cut the crap and get going.”

It was only a temporary plan for him to work at Hunter Group as the head of finance. After all, they both knew that he could not possibly stay there for long since he was Scott’s only grandson and the sole inheritor of the Sunhill Enterprise. Once Scott’s anger had abated, he would have to return.

However, it was Alexander’s idea to work for the Hunter Group.

The first reason was that the finances of Hunter Group were in a mess—it was also the reason why the Tax Bureau decided to investigate them. Using the opportunity, he offered to clean the mess and give the company’s finance system a breath of fresh air.

The second reason was that he planned to return to Sunhill Enterprise. He was the young master of the Duncan Family, yet he went to work for his girlfriend’s small enterprise. If Scott heard about that, he probably could not sit still anymore.

At the Duncans’ ancestral home, Scott broke the fountain pen on the table after he learned about it. “This rascal is deliberately making me angry! How dare he become the head of finance at the Hunter Group? He’d rather humiliate me in front of everyone than apologize to me!”

“Sir.” Harry ordered the other maids to clean the house up while he put in some good words for Alexander. “You’ve wrongly blamed Alexander this time. Since you already asked him to get out, surely he has to figure out a way to survive? If he’s lying around all day doing nothing, that would really ruin your reputation. Do you know what others have been saying about Alexander?”

“What?” Scott arched his eyebrows.

“They said that you don’t like him and you’d rather give the family business to an outsider than to let Alexander inherit it. Think about Alexander’s temper in the past—he has offended many people. Now that he’s not as glorious as before, many people are making fun of him.”

Those bunch of scums!” Scott slammed his fist on the table and walked around the room before speaking in a low voice. “Harry, look for Alexander and have a chat with him.”

Chapter 272 The Lost Naivety

It was five in the evening—the usual hour for employees to knock off at the Hunter Group. Courtney would also leave around that timing as well, but Alexander had to work overtime since there were many problems with the finances.

“You really don’t need me to wait for you?” She knocked on the door with a smile on her face.

He raised his head to look at her from behind the computer. Even though he was tired, he immediately felt more energetic the moment he looked at her. “No need. After I’m almost done with looking at the accounts, I’ll head back home.”

“Now, I’m quite embarrassed about this. Do you want me to increase your pay?”

“You don’t look like you’re embarrassed at all. Alexander coldly squinted his eyes at her. Then, he curled his finger before gesturing at her. “Come here.”

“Are you regretting it now?”

Courtney released her grip on the door knob and naturally walked into the office to his table. Then, she slightly bent down to look at him. “If you regret what you’ve just said, it’s not too late—I can accompany you here.”

With that, Alexander raised his huge hand and placed it behind her head. Then, he pressed her down to him and kissed her soft lips before she could react.

Courtney struggled against his hold and anxiously looked behind her while muttering, “Um... The door is still open. What are you doing?”

Initially, it had caused a huge reaction after she hired Alexander to manage the company’s finances. If someone saw them behaving inappropriately in the living room and reported it to the board of directors, it would be difficult for her to explain.

With a calm look on his face, he arched his eyebrows and answered nonchalantly, “That’s it. You can leave now.”

“Why? Are you mad?”

He shot a glance at her and gave a dry smile. “This is enough to replenish my energy. Or... Do you want to do something else?”

She quickly understood what he meant by ‘replenishing his energy’ and she blushed slightly. “Nothing. You are the one who’s thinking too much. I’m leaving now, bye.”

With that, she walked out of the office without another glance at him.

While looking at her leaving figure, the smile in his eyes deepened.

After she exited the elevator, she walked around the basement before she found her car. Just as she unlocked it, a familiar old figure walked to her steadily. “Miss Hunter.”

“Mr. Harry?” Courtney froze after she turned to see Scott’s butler, Harry. “Why are you here? Are you looking for Alexander?”

Harry nodded kindly. “Yes, Mr. Duncan has asked me to discuss some matters with Alexander.”

“He’s upstairs. If you take this elevator and head to the tenth floor, you will be able to find him there.”

Courtney respectfully pointed to an elevator afar.

“Okay, but before that, I have something to discuss with you. Are you free?”

She could not gauge what he wanted from his attitude, but since he worked for Scott, he would not harbor any ill-intentions toward her. Hence, without thinking about it, she replied, “Sure. You probably haven’t had dinner, have you? There’s a nice restaurant nearby.”

Since it was the beginning of November, winter had already arrived in Melrose City. The meteorologist announced that there would be an extremely cold season on its way. Only a few leaves hung on the maple trees on the side of the roads, waiting to completely fall off.

In a restaurant at the city center, they were seated near the windows, so they could enjoy the view of the city as the night fell.

“Mr. Harry, just say what is on your mind.”

Looking at Harry, who was seated opposite her, Courtney started the conversation.

“You are a straightforward person, Miss Hunter.” He nodded. “In that case, I’ll cut to the chase. Actually, this doesn’t have a lot to do with you, but because of your relationship with Alexander, I’m taking the liberty to tell you this. In my opinion, this is the better way out.”

“Go ahead.”

“Because of your relationship with Alexander, his relationship with Mr. Duncan is quite tense. I’m sure you are well aware of this.”

“Are you suggesting that I break up with Alexander?”

“No.” He shook his head. “Once Alexander has made his decision, even Mr. Duncan can’t do anything about it, let alone me. If he didn’t insist on this, based on your character, I’m sure you are not willing to make enemies with the Duncan Family and tolerate the snide comments from other people to be with him.”

Harry was straightforward indeed. Without revealing her stance, Courtney took another sip of the tea.

“So, Mr. Harry, what you are saying is...”

“The biggest problem between Alexander and Mr. Duncan is not you. In fact, after many years of watching Alexander grow up, Mr. Duncan has also thought that Alexander is a cold person by nature. Be it his relatives, friends, and even his own son—he has always been quite indifferent...”

“What are you trying to imply?”

“Miss Hunter, you only saw Alexander pampering Jordan and showering him with love right now. However, you didn’t see the moment when Jordan arrived at the Duncan Family. In the first few years, Alexander did not even enter the ancestral residence—not even once. To him, Jordan’s existence was a mission that he had completed. Since the mission has been completed, he has nothing to do with it anymore.”

Upon hearing that, Courtney immediately frowned.

She knew about the incident that Harry mentioned and she once commented harshly about Alexander’s past actions as well. However, after she heard those words being spoken aloud by someone else, she had no idea why she found them difficult to stomach.

“It’s not like that.” She heard herself defending him. “Alexander is not someone like this. He cares about Jordan a lot and he even treats Tina well. He’s not like what you said.”

“Jordan is probably an accident in Alexander’s life.” Harry patiently explained to Courtney. “Their relationship only started to change for the better three years ago. If it wasn’t for the accident, Jordan probably doesn’t even know who his biological father is.”

“Three years ago?”

Courtney sensed something familiar.

Sure enough, Harry continued to speak. “Three years ago, Jordan almost died from a disease and in the same year, Sunhill Enterprise had also changed their president. An outsider might not see the correlation between these two incidents, but since you are so close to Alexander now, I think you have the right to know about this.”

Tightly holding the tea cup, Courtney pretended to calmly take a sip. As she forgot to add some sugar in her tea, it tasted slightly bitter.

Everything that Harry had told her was the same as the investigative results that Oliver reported. Hence, she was not surprised to hear that. However, she was more surprised that many more people knew about Jordan’s incident back then; it was more than her expectations.

Even Scott himself knew about it, yet he simply allowed Alexander to do whatever he liked to obtain his power and his position. From the beginning until now, no one had spoken up for Jordan.

His love and care for Jordan over the past three years—is he trying to make it up to Jordan? He’s just a five-year-old. To him, how could those materialistic compensations match the loss of his naivety during the internal family fight?

After Courtney finished hearing Harry’s explanation, she could only feel sorrow and disgust sweeping over her like waves. While suppressing her discomfort, she forced herself to ask, “So, Mr. Harry, what are you trying to tell me?”

Chapter 273 I’m Never Wrong In My Profession

Harry looked at Courtney; it was evident in his wise eyes that he had experienced many vicissitudes of life. “Since Mr. Alexander will insist on this, I believe it will only be a matter of time before you’ll marry into the Duncan Family. However, these arguments between Alexander and Mr. Duncan have accumulated for many years. You are a smart person, Miss Hunter. If you are able to resolve their grudge, it shouldn’t be too difficult for Mr. Duncan to accept you.”

Courtney frowned. “Mr. Harry, you’re thinking highly of me. How sure are you that I can resolve their feud?”

“Because I believe that Alexander is not the person who is responsible for the incident three years ago—even though he might seem callous. The problem between him and Mr. Duncan is due to a communication breakdown. If you can advise Alexander to clearly explain that incident, that would be enough to resolve their feud.”

By that point, it looked like she was the only person who could voice out her opinion in front of Alexander.

Harry did not bear any negative intentions, but he did not know that Courtney had already looked into the incident that happened three years ago and that she shared the same thought as Scott. In fact, she did not trust Alexander as much as Harry thought she would.

Humans are always capable of changing. Alexander himself had also changed quite a bit since they first met. His current self would not have done that, but based on his personality in the past, he was completely capable of doing such a thing to protect himself.

“Mr. Harry, how are you so sure that he is unrelated to the incident three years ago?”

“I watched that kid grow up and we spent more time together than anyone else. Everyone knows that he chased his biological mother out of the family when he was 13, but do you know the truth behind this?”

Courtney froze in confusion.

“When Alexander chased his mother out, she was already five months pregnant. Since young, his parents had seldom spent time together. She only returned to attend his father’s funeral after he passed away from a car accident. Hence, how likely do you think that the baby belongs to the Duncan Family?”

Seeing that she was unsure whether she understood his meaning, Harry cut to the chase. “His mother is Mr. Duncan’s favorite adopted daughter. If she had done such a thing, Mr. Duncan would definitely have taken things into his own hands—for the sake of the family’s reputation and his own son. The baby definitely won’t be alive.”

Upon hearing that, her expression froze again. “So, Alexander chased his mother away to protect the child that she was carrying?”

Harry heaved a sigh. “Actually, Alexander isn’t as callous and cold-blooded as people think he is. It’s just that he is not used to expressing himself. I hope you can help to ease the tense relationship that Alexander and Mr. Duncan have.”

Courtney had mixed feelings after hearing that.

True enough, the truth that Harry had revealed changed her perception of Alexander, but that incident three years ago was discovered by Oliver and her. If this is not the truth, then what was?

She did not agree to Harry’s request. Instead, she replied that she would think about it.

When she arrived home, night had completely fallen. Meanwhile, Oliver became a full-time nanny. His head fell lopsidedly on the couch as he was fast asleep with Tina hugging his left arm and Jordan under his right arm. All three were fast asleep; their snores could have shaken the house.

Courtney placed the desserts that she bought on the table. After looking at them for a while, she decided to nudge Oliver to wake him up.

“Courtney.” Oliver yawned and rubbed his eyes before he could see the woman in front of him clearly.

“It’s been hard on you. You can head to your room to rest now.”

“Don’t worry about it.” He forcefully blinked his eyes before he suddenly sniffed the air. “What did you bring back?”

“Some cakes and pastries. Haven’t you eaten?”

Oliver immediately perked up as he furiously shook his head. “Not yet! These two fellows are terribly annoying! After I finally made them eat their dinner, they insisted on watching cartoons. Before you leave, you asked me not to let them watch too much television, didn’t you? No matter how I tried to coax them, they were close to being mad with me.”

“I see. Let’s send both of them to their room first. Then, I’ll cook a bowl of noodles for you.”

“Okay.”

Courtney heated up some oil in the pan and placed some garlic as well as onions in it. She then sauteed it until it was fragrant before she mixed some soy sauce and eggs in a bowl to make mayonnaise. Then, she cooked a bowl of plain noodles and poured the sauce on top of the seasoning before she served it on a plate. The aromatic scent of food permeated the entire kitchen.

Oliver gobbled down the food hungrily to the point where his mouth was stained with the sauce. “Where’s Alexander? Why didn’t he come home with you? If he sees this, he’ll definitely snatch it from me.”

“He would fight for food with you?” Courtney found it hard to imagine it. “It’s impossible.”

“There’s nothing impossible.” After he placed the bowl down and cleaned his mouth, he opened the packaging of the bun before he started eating it. “Alexander is a childish and overly confident person. He definitely has problems with self-expression. Even though he cares about you, he will harshly insult you first. Even though his words are quite sharp, it’s actually not that difficult to get along with him.”

“Is this your impression of him?” She frowned.

Courtney always thought that Alexander was a difficult person to get along with. After all, he only had a loyal friend after so many years—Gale. Other people were frightened away before he could even get closer to them.

“Yeah.” Oliver nodded. “What’s wrong? Why do you suddenly look troubled?”

She thought for a while before seriously asking, “Hey, do you think that we might have overlooked something about the incident that happened three years ago? Perhaps, our search results are not complete?”

He stopped eating immediately and frowned. “For example?”

“Why was Sarah so sure that Alexander was the person who drugged her? We shouldn’t just listen to her side of the story.”

“She’s a cancer patient. I don’t think she is lying.”

As Oliver was quite confident in his professionalism, he could not accept Courtney’s sudden suspicions.

However, Courtney suspiciously frowned. “Is that so?”

Initially, she wholeheartedly believed the results from their investigation. However, after the chat with Harry, she started to doubt them. After all, they did not have any evidence to back their suspicions. Hence, her sixth sense was starting to doubt the facts that she confirmed with Oliver beforehand.

“If you really don’t believe me, I can head over to Elmsbury again.” After wiping his mouth clean, Oliver continued solemnly. “I can film a video with Sarah and Maria confessing about everything that happened back then. But, I can guarantee you with my professionalism that they are not lying. They are telling the truth.”

“Professionalism?” Courtney froze for a moment as she looked at him in confusion.

“The professional opinion of a penultimate year student in Public Security University, who majors in Surveillance and Countersurveillance.”

Oliver looked at her, finally revealing his identity that he hid for a long time to her.

After a while, Courtney still had not processed what he said. “What?”

“Courtney, I’m a penultimate year student majoring in Surveillance and Countersurveillance at Public Security University. My full name is Oliver Ford. Actually, I wanted to let you know about this a while ago, but the timing was never perfect. So, I delayed it until now. Since you are questioning the truth that I have discovered for you, I have no other choice but to reveal my identity. Plus, I have never disclosed any false information throughout my professional life.”

The atmosphere in the room suddenly became tense.

Chapter 274 I Don’t Want to See You Lose Everything

Oliver’s sudden confession had shocked Courtney.

Courtney was stunned to the point where she lowered her head. Then, she bit on her lips as she thought about it. “Actually, you don’t have to tell me about it so soon.”

Oliver froze slightly when he saw her smiling at him after she lifted her head—it was her usual warm smile and she looked as caring as before. “You knew about it?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Not as precise as what you have mentioned, but I only knew your memories have roughly returned.”

“Then, why did you—”

“Pretend that I know nothing?” She sighed. “It’s because I hurt you in the accident. When I sent you to the hospital back then, I suspected that you were a homeless man based on your disheveled look. Apart from that, even if you wanted to leave, you probably would have left sooner, so I guess you had some difficulties.”

Even though he felt touched by her gesture, he was also amused at the same time. After all, it was not a good feeling to be mistaken as a homeless man by another person. “Courtney, I’m really not a homeless person.”

“Got it.” Courtney winked. “You are a student of Public Security University. You should have told me earlier before I decided to bring you up forever!”

Oliver’s heart fluttered as he grabbed her hand after a moment. “You are such a good person, Courtney.”

“Of course I am. You don’t have to remind me about it.”

“Why don’t you break up with Alexander? His family matters are too complicated. Date me instead. I can provide for you and Tina for the rest of your lives.”

“You?” Courtney rolled her eyes and withdrew her hands before she gently slapped the back of his hands. “You are only a penultimate year student at the Public Security University. I bet that you still ask for money from your parents. How can you simply say something like that?”

“Who told you that I’m receiving money from my parents? I’m earning my own money!”

“You are already working? Then, why do you stay at my place, use my things, and eat the food that I prepare?” Her eyebrows slightly arched as she crossed her arms in front of her chest while demanding an explanation from him.

Oliver quickly gave an excuse. “It’s true that I’m poor; it’s just that I am—”

“It’s fine. If you like to stay here, then stay for as long as you like. No one is chasing you away.” She gently laughed. “Do you want more noodles? There are still some left in the pot.”

Oliver finally heaved a sigh of relief and smiled. “Of course.”

After he had finally told Courtney about the secret he was hiding, he felt less burdened than usual. He also could not understand why he felt uncomfortable lying to her, even though he often lied to other people.

After the drama about Courtney’s family background had subsided, Ivory Apparel’s deliberate attempt to suppress Citron Apparel also appeared on the trending pages online. Courtney never arranged for it, but looking at how it trended for more than a week, she immediately knew who was behind it.

After all, even though it was a huge incident, Elijah had never even called her. It did not seem like him not to help her.

When she received the news that they had received the tender from Sakura Group, she called him to personally thank him. “We have gotten the bid from Sakura Group. Thank you, Elijah.”

On the other end of the phone, Elijah’s cheerful voice rang as he teased, “The tender should have been yours in the first place. It’s just that someone popped up midway. I’ve helped you before in many matters, but since when have you called over such a trivial matter to thank me?”

“I don’t have to be thankful for huge favors. However, for small favors like these, I definitely need to convey my thanks.” Courtney sounded that she was entitled for the past favors. “But, I can’t hide from you indeed—I actually have something else to discuss with you in this call.”

“About the lawyer?”

“How did you know about it?” She froze.

“I heard that you have reconciled with Alexander.” She could not hear any emotions in Elijah’s voice. “So, I guess we can temporarily dismiss the lawsuit again.”

Courtney sounded slightly embarrassed. “I really can’t hide anything from you, but I have no other options this time around. I don’t want him to learn about my relationship with Jordan so soon. Let’s just continue with this and see how everything goes in the future.”

“Not this time.” Elijah sounded serious. “You guys have already broken up and reconciled so many times. I don’t think it’s a stable relationship. You need to have a backup plan for yourself. If you can’t be with him in the future, you’re willing to forgo your parental rights for Jordan?”

“Of course I want his parental rights.”

“Then, listen to me. The lawyer is already in Melrose City, as per our plans. Take some time to meet him and briefly discuss Jordan’s matters. As for the lawsuit, you can decide whether you still want to continue with that in the future. There’s no harm in making preparations in advance.”

“But—”

“No buts. This is all that I can do for you. If you are blissful with him and you guys can live happily ever after, that’s great. If not, I don’t want to see you lose everything,” Elijah advised with worries. “If it’s possible, I even wish that you could send Tina over to me, just in case there are any changes in the future. If you can’t make the arrangements in time, I can’t help you because I’m too far away.”

“Let me think about it.”

Courtney knew that Elijah was not being paranoid. After all, he was trying to help her out with the meticulous planning.

After glancing at her wristwatch, she exclaimed, “Oh no! Elijah, it should be evening at your side. I hope you have a good night’s sleep. I’m rushing to sign the contract with the Sakura Group.”

Without waiting for his reply, she hung up after saying ‘goodnight’.

Across the Pacific Ocean, in Manhattan, which had a time difference of 14 hours away, Elijah looked at his dimmed phone screen while he was in the middle of the city’s nightscape. Then, he heaved an exasperated sigh. When you love someone else more than yourself, her happiness and joy is more important than anything else. I can watch her being with another man and I can tolerate being alone for the rest of my life. I just simply can’t accept the man whom she chose because he could give her both short-lived happiness and lifelong threats. I have to arrange a backup plan for her.

Adhering to the time of their appointment, Courtney and Natasha went to the headquarters of Sakura Group to sign the contract with Mr. Vinsmoke, who was the person in charge of the group in the east region.

Even though there were many incidents caused by Ivory Appeal, it actually was a blessing in disguise for Citron Apparel. Everyone now knew that Citron Appeal had a strong background in addition to the invisible support of the Hunter Group’s revival.

The signing of the contract proceeded smoothly.

After that, Courtney shook hands with Mr. Vinsmoke. “I hope we have a good time in our collaboration.”

“Same here.”

It was the first batch of huge orders that she had completed since she founded the company. Even though she was emotional, she remained calm and collected on the surface.

After she gently rejected his invitation for lunch, she went downstairs to wait for Natasha to collect the car from the garage.

At the main hall of the Sakura Group headquarters, the moment she walked out of the elevator, she ran into one of the top three people on her list of ‘people I don’t want to ever meet again’—James Duncan.

“Miss Hunter.” However, James was quite nonchalant and he did not forget to change his salutation. “I should probably call you President Hunter now. Are you here at Sakura Group to sign the contract?”

Courtney maintained her manners on the surface. “Indeed, President Duncan. Citron Apparel won the bid.”

“In that case, congratulations, President Hunter! By the way, I’m having lunch with Mr. Vinsmoke later. Would you like to join us? You can treat it as a celebratory meal for your collaboration.”

Chapter 275 Losing Is Not Part of My Vocabulary

Dressed in a crisp black suit, James bore a strong resemblance to Alexander—be it in his physique or his features. However, the way with which James carried himself was completely different to Alexander.

From a glance, he was far more approachable than Alexander.

However, upon Courtney’s appraisal of him, she had a strong feeling that his affability was merely a show. “There’s no need for that, President Duncan. I must get going if I want to hand over these order sheets to the factory. The sooner I do that, the less chance I have of disappointing Sakura Group.”

“You have a keen sense of duty, Miss Hunter.” James smiled as he spoke in a pleasant voice. “I heard that my cousin is here at the Hunter Group as well. You know, it takes a lot for a proud man like Alexander to accept a job as the head of finance in a medium-sized enterprise. I guess you’re the only person who has the power of persuasion over him.”

Courtney hated it when men spoke with snide implications and she immediately bristled at the tone of his voice. “You won’t get anything out of me,” she snapped irritably. “I suggest that you mind your own business, President Duncan. We wouldn’t want a repeat of what happened the last time, would we? Remember that fateful slip-up? Don’t forget that the higher you are, the harder you will fall.”

Upon hearing that, James narrowed his eyes and remarked pointedly, “It seems that my cousin tells you everything.”

“I would have discovered it anyway even if he didn’t tell me about it. I used to work at Sunhill, so I know a thing or two about the company’s evolution.”

“Is that so?” He scoffed. “Everything that you think you know about Sunhill is just the tip of the iceberg. They don’t publish the truth in the papers, so don’t kid yourself into thinking that you know what’s really going on behind the scenes.”

“I don’t need to know the whole truth to understand that you can always fall a second or third time.”

“What if I say that I have never lost?” James challenged. He lifted his chin as a smug look passed over his face as he retorted. “What if I simply spent the last three years fortifying my foundation—do you really think that constitutes me being the loser? Losing is not part of my vocabulary.”

Courtney frowned. “What do you mean?”

However, he raised a brow in disdain and appeared to have lost interest in their conversation. “I can see that you refuse to extend any form of courtesy toward me, so I won’t force your hand any longer. Until we meet again, Miss Hunter.” With that, he turned on his heels and made his way into the elevator.

Courtney, on the other hand, remained standing in the same spot. She could still hear his voice in her head. ‘Losing is not part of my vocabulary.’ What does he even mean by that?

She could not help but feel that there was something iffy about the way he said those words. Also, what does he mean by ‘fortifying my foundation’?

Even as Courtney left the Sakura Group, the words that James said still echoed in her mind. She had not even realized that a car had pulled in the garage at Hunter Group until Natasha pointed it out. Courtney snapped out of her reverie and looked dazed as she blinked at her assistant.

“Miss Hunter, we’ve arrived. Aren’t you getting down?” Natasha asked.

Courtney finally registered her words. “Here, take these order sheets and documents over to Bill. I have to take care of some things, so I won’t be coming down.”

Natasha hesitated for a moment before she took the paperwork and replied, “Okay.”

After that, Courtney drove out of the garage and sped down the route toward Public Security University.

By the time she arrived, the classes were already ongoing. The university had strict management policies that were different from other institutions and as a result, only bicycles were allowed to enter the campus.

She waited at the campus entrance for close to ten minutes before Oliver cycled out.

“What’s up, Courtney? You sounded anxious over the phone.”

“The incident from three years ago—I think James may have something to do with it.” Courtney did not waste any time as she cut straight to the point. The both of them stood by the entrance while she shared about her encounter with James.

Oliver’s brows were knitted together as he pondered on what James had said. After a while, he lifted his head and patted the backseat of his bicycle. “This isn’t the place to talk,” he said in a low voice. “Get on the bike. You can tell me the details after we find a suitable place on campus.”

“Huh?” Courtney exclaimed as she warily eyed the back of Oliver’s bicycle.

He teased, "What? Is my bicycle not good enough for you? I would have asked you to drive your car, but the school won't allow it. Not even our headmaster can drive on campus."

"No, the bicycle is fine. I'll get on," she reluctantly replied and perched as gracefully as she could behind him.

She was not offended by the idea of riding around on a bicycle, but she was simply not dressed for the occasion. Clad in a beige-colored woollen long coat which was draped over a bodycon vintage teal dress with lace embellishments, she was decidedly uncomfortable and she tried her best to keep the hem of her dress from riding up past her calves.

Along the way, Courtney tightly held her coat to avoid it from being entangled in the wheels. When they arrived outside the milk tea shop on campus, she heard the sound of tearing fabric as she descended the bicycle. She looked down and saw that her dress was caught by the metal wire on the bicycle, causing a huge rip over the hem.

"Oh, no," Oliver groaned as he looked apologetic. "I'm sorry, Courtney. I didn't think this through."

"It's fine," Courtney answered with a resigned smile. "I knew this dress would be ruined when I agreed to get on your bicycle."

"I promise I'll buy you another one."

"Do you know how much the dress cost?"

"It doesn't matter. I'll still get you another one."

They bantered in good humor as she followed him into the only milk tea bar on campus, thereafter staking out a quiet corner. He called out while craning his neck, "Hi, can we get two hot caramel macchiatos here, please?"

Oliver had only just placed his order when a snarky female voice came from the counter, "Do I look stupid to you? No one would drink cold beverages in this kind of weather."

He bristled before he rolled his eyes at the girl manning the counter. "Are you that narrow-minded? There are plenty of people who drink cold beverages throughout the year, regardless of the season. Why would you discriminate against others and their preferences? I'm going to lodge a complaint to your boss!"

"Go ahead! Let's see how you like it when I spit in your drink!"

Oliver clicked his tongue impatiently. "Is this how you talk to your customers, Tessa? At this rate, no one's going to drink anything you make. You better watch your tongue before your mom teaches you a lesson."

Courtney turned to cast a curious glance at the girl he was bantering with; she looked to be around the same age as Oliver. She looked intelligent with clear skin that acted as a canvas for her delicately-chiseled features and her eyes sparkled with wit. The dark green checkered sweater and the burgundy beret she wore accentuated her femininity.

Upon hearing what he said, the girl glared in their direction. She went still after her gaze fell on Courtney. She blinked and quickly turned away without saying another word.

“Ignore her. She’s so grumpy that it’s going to take forever to marry her off.”

Courtney snapped out of her thoughts and smiled at Oliver before she narrated the incident. “I’ve been feeling as though there’s something amiss since my meeting with Harry, the Duncans’ butler. When I bumped into James today, he brought up the incident from three years ago. I started thinking about it on my way here. Then, it clicked.”

“What is it?”

“Well, Harry mentioned that Alexander never made a trip back home during the years when Jordan stayed at the Duncans’ residence—not even for New Year’s. It was only after Jordan’s accident that Alexander returned there, so that he could take the child away from there. If that was the case, how could Sarah be so sure that it was Alexander who asked her to poison the kid when she logically never met him in the first place?

Even if a village woman had the time to watch news on TV, it would be unlikely for her to pay attention to the financial news. Sarah mentioned that she frequently saw Alexander on TV and she was certain that it was him because she had seen him in the Duncans’ residence on several occasions. However, at that point of time, Alexander was not in charge of the entire Sunhill Enterprise, so he could not have appeared in interviews.

Given the timeline of events, Sarah’s narrative simply did not make sense.

“At that point of time, only the Sunhill Enterprise’s director would appear with such frequency on TV interviews.”

Upon hearing that, Oliver was silent and his eyes were fixed on the table as he muttered, “It’s James.”

He lifted his head as his gaze met with Courtney’s. She did not nod, but the look in her eyes told him everything that he needed to know.