

Sweet Wife 281

President's Sweet Wife

Chapter 281 Don't Go Too Far

Charlie frowned. "I'm looking for my son. What's that have to do with the Peck and Stevenson families?"

Victoria paused, her eyes gleaming as she chuckled coldly. "Everybody knows you're the favored child of both families. Didn't the old lady of the Stevenson family just get you back to pamper you? Heh, if anything happened with you, they might resort to killing themselves."

Charlie's expression grew cool. "Is that so? And you're hiding from me knowing that?"

"They treasure you, Charlie. I don't. I'm warning you, don't force my hand, or else..."

"Or else what?"

"I..."

Victoria fumed. How could this man be so hateful?

He knew she couldn't do anything. He knew she had nothing left. Why was he still pressuring her to this point?

Charlie sneered.

"If I decided to come after this child, what can you use against me? Your half-baked techniques? Or are you going to tell your father and have me beaten up like four years ago?"

Victoria jolted.

Endless cold raced down her spine.

She looked at him icily. "You can certainly try."

Charlie paused, then said, "But your father probably won't treat me like this now, will he? After all, four years ago, I was just a poor kid with nothing, no match for his sweet daughter. But things are different now. I'm the heir to the Stevenson family. Think about it. If he knew that his daughter was pregnant with my seed, wouldn't he be so happy he carts you over in a horse-drawn carriage?"

"Don't go too far, Charlie Peck!"

"I'm just telling the truth, aren't I?"

The two stood there as dead silence took over the still atmosphere.

Victoria glared at him with eyes full of hatred.

Chuckling, Charlie released her.

He turned around, lit a cigarette, and took a puff as he turned around to look at the woman on the sofa.

She hugged her arms to her chest, staring warily at him with none of her old softness. Her appearance was that of a spiny hedgehog. Anyone who approached, she stung.

He suddenly felt a bit irritated.

The moment he was sure that the child in her belly was his, he'd been overjoyed.

He'd never thought of separating mother and son.

But the way she looked now, isolating herself, made him feel an abrupt sense of discomfort.

What sort of person did she think he was? An unsightly beast?

She once chased after him with such gentle loving caresses, but now she wanted to run away with his kid? Hide from him for the rest of their lives?

What was this? Revenge?

Thinking of that, Charlie's face sank.

Victoria, meanwhile, calmed down for a while and rearranged her thoughts.

She stood, looked at him calmly, and said lowly, "I've already apologized to you for what happened four years ago. I'll admit that it was my fault that night. But I hadn't meant it. So please, would you just let me go? We're not suited for each other; wasn't that what you said yourself back then? Why are you still tangling with me? I just want a quiet, peaceful life. If you treat this child like you don't know he exists, it wouldn't affect you. If you're still worried, I can leave; run far away, such that you'll never see him again and you won't have to worry about him becoming a threat. Will that do?"

The man's eyes grew completely cold.

He stared at the woman before him as if to freeze her solid.

"No threat to me? Heh! You think I buy that?"

Victoria started.

Charlie continued, "You don't have to try to keep me with so much effort and use him as leverage. I know full well what you Kaurs are thinking. After all, we were together before. If you really want to, it's not that I can't budge."

Victoria's face went red with rage.

"What are you babbling about? Who's trying to leverage you?"

"You're trying your utmost to give birth to this child so you can save something to use against me, aren't you?"

He stood and drew close. "You know how those bastards over at the Stevenson family aren't all right with me, but can't do anything to me. I hear you're close with one of them? When did that start? Before I slept with you? Or after?"

Furious, Victoria raised her hand to hit him, but he held her in place.

She could only glare at him, steam emerging from her eyes.

"You can insult me, Charlie, but don't bring up my father! You don't have the right to speak of him like this!"

"I don't have the right? Ha!"

His eyes grew ever colder as he maintained his bone-shattering grip on her wrist.

"Back then, he did everything he could to force me away because he thought my status was too low to be a match for a Kaur, didn't he? Now that I'm the Stevenson heir, why would I not have the right to speak of him as I please?"

Victoria looked at him, thoroughly chilled.

"Fine, he was wrong on that count alone. But it's been four years. Can't you let it go?"

"I can't!"

As he spoke, he seemed to realize that some deep part of his emotions had been revealed.

He changed his expression and flung her hand away from him, turning his back.

"Don't think too much about it. I'm unwilling to let it go because I'll never let anyone who's humiliated me go. It's got nothing to do with you."

Victoria smiled sadly.

"I don't need you to remind me."

Of course it had nothing to do with her.

He hated her. Ever since she'd taken her father's side and broken up with him back then, it was set in stone.

Looks like they were back where they'd started after the passage of time. She might have been the same person, but the old him was gone now.

Victoria felt a surge of fatigue.

She muttered, "It's getting late. I'm going to rest. If there's nothing else, please leave before I call the police."

Charlie scoffed. "Call the cops? You think that intimidates me?"

As he spoke, his gaze swept subtly over at her belly.

Victoria ground her teeth.

This scum.

Helplessly, she demanded, "Then what do you want? What will it take to get you out of here?"

Charlie thought about it for a while. It wasn't urgent now, so he walked over to the sofa and sat down.

"I'm taking the child. After all, I won't leave my own seed outside. That's why I'll stay here around you for this period without ever leaving your side. Don't even think of running away. With the child born, go

wherever you wish. Oh, right. To show my thanks, I'll give you a sum of money to ensure you live well in the future. Don't worry about that. I never mistreat women when it comes to money."

Victoria went white with anger.

"Get out! I don't need your stinking money!"

She barked, pushing him outside.

She knew that Charlie was provoking her.

After all, everyone knew that money was the only thing Victoria Kaur didn't lack.❏

Chapter 282 You Can't Run

But the moment she applied force, the man grabbed her hands.

Victoria glared a deathly glare at Charlie.

"Just give it a rest! Don't even dream of taking the child from me. I'll die before I let you get your way."

Charlie sneered.

"Then we'll just have to wait and see whose victory it is."

He turned around after that.

Victoria closed her eyes and managed to suppress her rage.

At least she'd managed to shoo him off... not. She opened her eyes and found him walking towards the bedroom.

Victoria's face changed instantly.

"What are you doing, Charlie Peck?"

"It's getting late, right? I'm going to rest, of course."

"This is my house. If you want to rest, go home."

"Ha!"

The man stood in the doorway to the bedroom, looking down at the flushing woman.

He reached out and tilted her chin up.

Victoria jerked her head away, but he didn't get mad. He simply leered.

"Before this child is born, I'll be everywhere you go. I told you. Don't even dream of escaping. I'm a man of my word."

Victoria had no words.

And so Charlie ended up staying at Victoria's rented apartment.

Victoria was fuming, but there was nothing she could do.

It was too late to call the police.

He was the child's father, and if things got heated, it would become even messier.

She'd never thought that this usually calm, collected person could descend to such a level.

Victoria looked at the man lying on her bed and felt the beginnings of an ulcer.

The apartment wasn't small, but because she was living here on her own, she'd rented the sort of large, seventy square meter apartment with a wall separating the middle, a bedroom on the inside, and an open kitchen and living room on the outside.

Now that this man had taken up her bed, she couldn't squeeze in there, so her only option was the sofa.

Victoria hugged her belly, steaming.

She cursed him quietly. Men who bullied pregnant women would die badly.

Still, the moment she muttered the curse, she jolted and took it back.

Spirits above, that was just some nonsense because she was mad, she didn't mean it, no sir.

Forget death. Let's keep the curse at nightmares and diarrhea.

Yeah, a slap on the wrist.

Ever since getting pregnant, Victoria had started somewhat believing in those sorts of superstitions.

After mumbling incantations to herself, she spread out some blankets on the sofa and got ready to sleep.

The sofa wasn't small, and the production quality was high. It was soft and bouncy, so it wasn't uncomfortable to lie on.

But because Victoria was getting big, she wasn't sleeping well to begin with, and it was worse lying on the sofa. She tossed and turned for several hours without managing to fall asleep.

Only until it was the small hours of the morning and she was utterly exhausted did she finally drift off to sleep.

Deep in the night.

After who knows how long, the bedroom door was suddenly pushed open from the inside.

A tall figure walked out and looked calmly down at the woman on the sofa.

Her body was tilted sideways. Because she was sleeping poorly, her delicate features were creased with tiredness. Her brow was slightly furrowed, and there were faint black bags under her eyes.

Charlie stood there expressionlessly for a while, then strode over.

Standing in front of her with the moonlight streaming through the living room window, her face was lit up like porcelain.

He reached out, as if to touch that silky smooth skin.

But his hand only reached halfway before it stopped. Recalling something, he shrank back.

His face grew even colder.

After a while, he scoffed and turned around to leave.

In her daze, Victoria felt an endless cold, and, barely conscious, she seemed to see a dark shadow pass before her and moaned.

“Charlie.”

Charlie’s receding form stiffened.

He turned around and looked at her.

The woman huddled on the sofa had slender limbs and a pale face. She seemed so fragile.

Maybe because the night was too cold, but she had curled up, hands protecting her stomach, half of the blanket falling to the floor, showing her meagre frame.

His tight face changed slightly.

After a while, he still went up and picked her up.

Victoria was still sleeping. She’d felt a bit cold, but a ball of fire had seemingly enveloped her.

She leant towards to the warmth and smiled contentedly.

What a comfortable warmth.

Charlie looked at the woman snuggling into his chest, his face once again darkening.

But he didn’t say anything. He simply picked her up, carried her into the bedroom, and set her down on the bed.

For the rest of the night, Victoria slept soundly.

Maybe it was because she was tired. Or maybe, because that familiar presence had stayed around her, she felt like she’d returned to the past. She might have been dreaming, but she didn’t want to wake.

So she slept deep and only woke at ten or so the next morning.

By the time she woke up, Charlie had long since been awake.

She sat up and looked around, dazed.

As she remembered it, hadn’t she been sleeping on the sofa last night? Why was she back on her bed?

Victoria looked at the blanket laid over her body and recalled the indistinct figure she’d seen last night.

Had it... not been a dream?

Because she’d been drowsy, she didn’t remember too many details about last night.

All she could barely remember was that she’d seen the shape of a person.

She didn't know where that man had gone, but he couldn't have really left. He always meant what he said, and he'd said that he'd never leave on his own until she gave birth.

Besides, they were only half a month away from when she was expected to go into labor.

Victoria sat down on the couch and called her maid.

Ever since she'd left last night, she hadn't come back.

Victoria hadn't noticed then, but thinking about it today, she was quite worried.

The phone rang for a long while, but nobody picked up.

At that moment, the door opened.

She started and saw Charlie walk in. At the same time, she noticed that the door he'd broken down yesterday had been fixed sometime today.

He looked at Victoria, his expression unkind.

Victoria thought about it. Since he was living here, they couldn't very well go on waging their cold war.

After all, last night, it seemed to have been him who carried her to the bed.

Whatever. She should cut him some slack.

So, Victoria spoke herself. "I hired a maid called Eva, but she hasn't come back yet and I can't get in contact with her. If you're hungry in the afternoon, find some way to make your own food."

President's Sweet Wife

Chapter 283 I'll Beat Him Up for You

In other words, even though he was staying here by force, he could forget relying on her for food and drink.

If you didn't work, you wouldn't eat.

She'd thought that he'd be dissatisfied with her words.

Unexpectedly, he simply looked coldly at her and said, "I've already dismissed that maid of yours."

Victoria blinked.

"What?"

Charlie frowned.

"You didn't hear me?"

"No, why did you dismiss my maid?"

Charlie sneered.

"If I didn't, was I supposed to wait for her to help you escape?"

Victoria's temper flared.

"I already told you I'm not going to run. And in my condition, how far can I get?"

Charlie ignored her completely. "I have absolutely no faith in you."

"..."

She clenched her teeth and suppressed her anger.

"All right, then. What am I supposed to eat and drink with the maid gone? You don't expect me to make my own meals while pregnant, do you?"

Charlie shot her a look.

He seemed to think about it.

"If you could, why not?"

"Charlie Peck!!!"

Looking at the woman all puffed up like a kitten, Charlie's mood inexplicably improved.

"Relax. I was just messing with you. You really think I'm as cold and ruthless as you, don't you?"

With that, he clapped his hands, and a woman with blonde hair and blue eyes walked in.

"This is a new maid I hired for you. Oh, and she used to be a matron. So compared to that bumbling housemaid you used to have, she ought to fit you better."

He had the new maid introduce herself.

The new maid's name was Candy. Her looks were average, her personality was enthusiastic, and she babbled on about a lot of things she was good at.

Victoria was angry, but she couldn't throw a tantrum at a time like this. Besides, Candy was innocent, and it wouldn't do to take it out on her, so she could only nod and hold a conversation.

Seeing that she didn't have any opinions on it, Charlie had Candy start making a meal, while he took up a book and sat down on the sofa reading it.

Looking at the way he was taking over the household, Victoria's temper flared, and she turned to go back to her room.

...

In the afternoon, having just finished her break, Natalia was getting ready to put her makeup on and go shoot afternoon scenes when she received a call from Victoria.

She was filming an office drama right now. The female lead was a high-ranking headhunter, maneuvering the twists and turns of business and romance.

She'd never done office dramas before, so it was a challenge for her.

Receiving Victoria's phone call, she lifted her hand and had the makeup artist wait a while. Then she got up, walked over, and picked up the phone.

"What is it, Victoria?"

"Natalia..."

On the other end of the line, Natalia stuttered.

Hearing that her tone was different from before, Natalia frowned and asked worriedly, "What's wrong? Did something happen?"

"No."

Victoria hurriedly clarified. "Nothing's wrong, don't worry. I just wanted to discuss, well..."

She pursed her lips. Any way she cut it, it was a hard thing to talk about it.

Natalia urged, "Anything you need, just say it. With our relationship, do you still need to worry about anything?"

Victoria sighed, then said, "It's nothing, really. Only, if you're too busy, you don't need to rush over when the baby's out."

Even before Victoria could finish, Natalia swiftly realized something was off.

Her eyes worked, and she understood.

"The child's father has appeared?"

"..."

Natalia chuckled. "No need to hide it from me. Don't worry, I won't ask who it is. Only, you're in a foreign country now. Without someone you know by your side, I'll always worry."

Victoria knew how much she worried for her.

She could only admit it. "Yeah."

"When did he arrive?"

"Last night."

Natalia thought about it. Arriving last night – he should be someone who was somewhat appropriate. After all, Victoria wasn't someone who didn't have a good measure of the way things were.

If the man really was unreliable, she wouldn't have told Natalia that she didn't need to come.

Natalia sighed.

"It that's the case, then I won't force the matter. I want to be the first person to lay eyes on my godson, but since the birth father is here... to keep myself from punching my godson's father right in front of him, I'll stay away for now."

Victoria heaved a sigh of relief and chuckled, "Thanks, Natalia."

“Hey, if you really want to thank me, tell me who that man is, and I’ll beat him up for you!”

Victoria paused.

After a while, she said, “I’ll tell you afterwards. If I really get a chance, I will.”

Hearing that, Natalia understood that there was probably still something between them. It wouldn’t do to get too involved in private matters, so she could only agree.

Hanging up, the cast’s temporary assistant had come over to call for her. The director was starting to rush them and was telling the makeup artist to hurry.

She put her phone away hastily and sat back down to let them fix her makeup.

Natalia was a right proper actress now. She acted not for fame and especially not for money, but purely because the last show had completely hooked her on the joys of acting. So she took roles based on how good the script was, never on the numbers or the topic.

Seeing that she liked it that much, Archie let her do it.

Because of her special situation, Natalia didn’t find an agent for herself. After all, she’d been a professional agent herself.

All resources passed through her, so she didn’t need to go through any extra steps.

Still, she did need a secretary. Because she hadn’t considered that before, she was getting really busy after she entered the cast.

Thankfully, she knew Nathan, so he introduced her to a secretary.

But she was a college student and only there for a short winter break. After that, she needed to go back to school.

As she considered things and looked over company selections, Natalia decided to go for someone steady and reliable.

Unexpectedly, just a moment later she’d received a call from Elsa, saying that she’d already emailed her a prepared list of secretary candidates for her to peruse when she had time. She could pick whichever one she wanted and just send her the name.

Only then did Natalia realize that Elsa had it all planned out for her already, and she was immensely grateful.

If Elsa could strike out on her own, she would love to see it. After all, everything in Star Entertainment went through Elsa know. Even though Natalia had control of the bigger picture, it wasn’t convenient for her to show herself a lot of the time, so Elsa still had to step in for her.

When she was done with the afternoon shooting, Natalia tapped open her mailbox on her phone and took a look.

Elsa had sent her the profiles of over a dozen people, each with clearly defined resumes.

She scrolled down and read through each of them carefully, only she reached the last name and froze.

The name on top of the resume read “Rosa”. The girl in the photo had pretty features, with clean and crisp shoulder-length hair, her faint smile emanating a sunny aura.???

Chapter 284 Overjoyed

Rosa?

How could it be?

It had been three months since the Jessica Dawson incident.

Back then, when Natalia had been on Fortuna Island, she’d received an anonymous email with a recording attached. The same recording that she’d taken and played for media and police.

Because it had been anonymous, Natalia hadn’t known who’d sent it, but there was no reason to look a gift horse in the mouth, so she’d used it anyway.

And taken down the Dawson family with it.

Afterwards, Natalia had sent people to trace the origin of the recording. After a few twists and turns, they found out that it was something Rosa had left her.

She’d been shocked back then and had wanted to find Rosa to make it up to her.

But no matter how hard she’d searched, she couldn’t find where Rosa had ended up.

Because there’d been videos of her publicly testifying for Natalia and accusing Jessica of bribing her to drug and frame Natalia, Rosa had been a target of online abuse for quite some time.

Even though there were still plenty of people who believed in her and supported her, most people doubted her.

So, even though she hadn’t found her at the time, Natalia thought of it as her changing environments to quiet down for a bit, so she didn’t keep up the search.

She hadn’t expected to see her resume here today.

Natalia thought about it and sent a text to Rosa.

Then she looked at the phone number on the resume and called it.

It only took a few rings before it was picked up.

A girl’s clear voice rang out from the other end.

“Hello, who is this?”

“It’s me, Rosa.” Natalia said softly.

The receiver went quiet for an instant.

Followed quickly by Rosa’s shocked voice.

“Na...Natalia?”

Natalia smiled. "Yeah. You sound surprised?"

Rosa was caught off-guard as she explained, "N-no, I didn't think you'd call me. How did you get my number?"

Ever since that incident, she couldn't take the online and media harassment and had changed her phone number.

So there were only a handful of people who knew her number.

Hearing her question, Natalia raised an eyebrow.

That was a little surprising.

"I saw the resume you sent towards Star Entertainment so I just called the number on top. Didn't you send the resume yourself?"

"No."

Rosa said, panicking. She paused, then added, "I'm sorry, I didn't think she'd send it to you. I've troubled you."

With that, she made to hang up.

Picking up on it, Natalia hurriedly stopped her. "Wait."

She frowned. "Why do I feel like you're scared of me? I don't recall offending you. Discounting the time that I had Nancy take you to the hotel."

Rosa laughed awkwardly.

"It's not like that, Natalia. You haven't offended me. It's just that I can't face you. I'm looking for a job right now and that resume was sent out by my friend. She must not have been paying attention. I know you must hate me after all I've done to you... I'm really sorry."

Natalia chuckled.

"No need to apologize to me. If it hadn't been for the recordings you left back then, I wouldn't have won so easily."

Hearing her say that, Rosa went silent for a while.

"My own conscience hurt; that was all. I had to follow Jessica because of my mother's disease, and every time I looked at the things she did, I felt like it would come back to bite. I couldn't stop her, and oftentimes even became an accomplice. But I really didn't mean it. That's why I left those recordings in secret. It was also because I was afraid that I'd know too much and she'd want to silence me, so I left something to protect myself with. Afterwards, I heard about your mother, felt like it could be helpful, and gave them to you."

Natalia smiled. "You were right, it did help. Are you still willing to help me going forward?"

Rosa froze, not taking her meaning.

Natalia came out and said it. "I need a secretary. Are you willing to come over?"

Rosa was overjoyed.

"Me? I-is it really okay?"

"Of course."

Natalia always had a good eye for people.

Other than her misjudgment of Shawn's character, she hadn't had any other misses all these years.

Even with Rosa following next to Jessica before, she'd felt that this little lady didn't look like she was as cold and ruthless as she seemed.

So there had to be some other reason she was being Jessica's accomplice.

And the truth had proved her right.

Rosa couldn't believe her ears, but after a while, she held in her laughter and asked nervously, "But I used to..."

"Leave the past in the past. So long as you promise me you won't do it again, we'll have no problems."

Rosa hurriedly agreed. "I promise I'll never do anything like this again."

Smiling, Natalia nodded, then shot a look at the time on her wristwatch.

"All right, it's getting late, so I won't keep you. You should know how to contact Elsa. If you've got the time these few days, go to her and she'll arrange everything for you."

Rosa said yes excitedly and thanked her again.

Natalia hung up.

Knowing that she was getting off work, Nancy drove over. They were shooting near Eqitin, so if she got off early, she usually went right back to Pinewood Manor to spend the night.

And Nancy was her bodyguard and driver.

Even walking over from a distance, Nancy could see her standing there beaming, so she asked curiously, "Did something good happen, Natalia? What's got you so happy?"

Natalia relayed what had happened with Rosa.

Nancy was a little speechless after hearing that.

She shook her head. "You say you're a good judge of character, but I still worry. She... probably won't contact Jessica again, right?"

The Dawson family had been toppled, but Jessica hadn't been locked up.

Natalia was too busy dealing with something else to trouble herself over her, and by the time she sent out people to investigate, they couldn't pick up her trail anymore.

Whichever way you spun it, she was just a toothless mongrel now, and she didn't bother wasting more energy on her, so she'd left it alone.

Hearing Nancy ask her that, Natalia thought about it and shook her head.

"Rosa's a cautious girl, but she'd not a bad person. You can see that from the way she values her own mother. She might be a bit selfish in her love for her, but she can't be that rotten. And considering she helped me by saving that recording, I should return the favor!"

Nancy frowned.

Natalia added, 'After that incident, everyone knows she betrayed her employer. Even if they didn't do anything wrong and never abused their assistants, not many people would be willing to give her a chance. She says her resume reached me because a friend sent it for her, but it might also be her way of testing my attitude by sending it to Star, since she's got no options left. After all, other than me, who else in the entire entertainment industry would be willing to use her?'

Chapter 285 Nitpicking

Nancy's eyes widened with shock.

"You saw all that?"

Natalia nodded.

"Then why'd you agree to let her come? If you know she's digging a pit for you, why are you jumping in?"

Natalia smiled.

"How is she digging a pit for me? She's out of options and needs a job and I need a capable experienced secretary. Isn't it the best of both situations if she comes over? It's a win-win, what kind of pit is this?"

Nancy fell silent.

After a while, she shot Natalia a grudging look.

"Fine, if you think you can trust her again, then we'll trust her again. But don't worry. I'll keep an eye on her from now on and I definitely won't let her stab you in the back."

Looking at the way she was treating it like an enemy was approaching, Natalia wanted to laugh.

Nancy was a typical all-action person.

She felt that if someone betrayed you once, they could never be trusted again.

But she didn't consider that there were plenty of factors in life that forced one's hand.

If Natalia had to put herself in Rosa's shoes, she had a sick mother on one side and a complete stranger on the other. She would have made the same choice.

Natalia didn't linger on the topic. After they got in the car, they headed straight back to Pinewood.

It was just around nine at night when they arrived home.

Archie had called Mrs. Dottie here from Julio, and she too was living in Pinewood Manor and taking care of the place.

Anne, on the other hand, was still in poor health and needed to go to school, plus she had to see a doctor regularly. Both Natalia and Archie had to work, so of course they couldn't stay with her all the time, so she remained at the old home.

When it was the weekends or Natalia and Archie were free, only then did she come over the play.

Natalia and Nancy got out the car and walked over to the doorway, then both sharply realized something wasn't right.

The lights were fully on in the mansion, and the servants were all standing in the living room. Mrs. Dottie stood at the forefront. Seeing Natalia and Nancy come in from the corner of her eye, she motioned towards them.

Understanding, Natalia cocked an eyebrow.

She took a few steps in and heard a harsh, severe female voice.

"This is Egitin, not a backwater countryside like Julio. You need to know who you're working for. We have our own rules in the McCarthy household, so we can't have people thinking we're all bumpkins."

On the sofa at the center, Faye sat there, legs crossed, swirling a cup of tea casually and lecturing from on high.

Hearing her words, Nancy instantly understood who she was mocking. Her face changed, and she was about to speak up.

Natalia stopped her and placed a finger over her lips, signaling her not to make noise.

Seeing that, Nancy tamped down on herself and took a step back.

Faye didn't know that Natalia had come back, so she took a sip of tea and continued, "The McCarthy house has stood for a century. We are a house of nobles, and appearances matter. Like this glass, that tea table, and those decorations over there, it's best to make it natural. Look at this. What are you putting all over the place? Don't speak to me about what the madam likes or what the madam's taste is. Your madam came from a small-time town and doesn't know much, but you're different. You've all worked for different families in Egitin. You must have had plenty of experience in other households before coming to the McCarthy family. You ought to know what's good and what isn't. Even if you haven't experienced some things yourself, you should still have somewhat heard of them, no? Besides, this Pinewood Manor was the work of the most famous international designers. Every plant and blade of grass here was placed with deliberate care. Look at what you've made of the place. This isn't a noble madam's house, this is a peasant's yard. I don't blame you, since I know you couldn't stop her. But now that I'm here, move all these things back to their original position. Just put them where they should be."

With that, she directed the servants to start picking up the house.

Hearing all that, Natalia scoffed.

She couldn't hold it back anymore and strode forward. "Stop!"

Everyone jumped and turned around, only then seeing that she'd come back.

As they greeted her, Natalia nodded and didn't look at them, staring straight at Faye, who stayed sitting on the sofa.

Hearing her voice, Faye jumped too, but she'd reacted quickly enough.

She was Archie's aunt and had raised him from childhood, breaking her back for him.

To put it bluntly, she was basically half his mother already.

Before Natalia had come to Egitin, she'd come and gone as she pleased from Pinewood Manor.

Why could she not do the same now?

Considering that, Faye sat down again.

She looked noncommittally towards Natalia.

Natalia went up and politely called, "Aunt."

Faye hmphed, her tone high pitched. "You're back? You've heard what I told them all, then?"

Natalia nodded. "Yes, I heard."

"Don't blame me for butting in. I brought Archie up as my own, and he's like a son to me. I know he likes you and pampers you. That's your luck, and I can't get involved. But seeing as you're now a McCarthy family woman, there's some things I have to teach you. We're not one of those small-time families out there. The McCarthy family has its own rules and regulations. Those actions and tastes that aren't up to par need to be abandoned as soon as you can. Learn quickly how to be a woman befitting of your own status, such that people don't laugh at you out there."

Natalia scoffed.

"What is it that I've done to have people laugh at me? If you know, Aunt, could you tell me?"

Frowning, Faye harrumphed, "You don't even know what you've done, and you've got the nerve to ask? Take a look yourself."

She said, and pointed at a nearby closet.

"If I remember things correctly, there'd been some expensive antique vases in here. Why are they all switched out for this stuff now? Do you know how much had been spent designing and renovating Pinewood Manor? Everything in here was placed with delicate intention. Did you ever ask for Archie's opinion before you moved them? Did you ask for mine?"

Natalia chuckled coldly.

"I don't get it, Aunt. This is Archie's home and mine. I only switched out some decorations. Why would I ask for your opinion?"

"You!"

Faye blew her top.

“Because I’d gifted those antique vases to Archie to begin with, and I’m Archie’s aunt...”

“I know.”

President’s Sweet Wife

Chapter 286 A Bit Strange

Natalia paused, then said lowly, “Because you’re Archie’s aunt and considering that you took care of him when you were young, I’ve kept up my manners with you. But I’m a relatively strange person and I don’t like people meddling in my private affairs. If you must, please forgive me for disagreeing with your methods. Also, Pinewood Manor is my home. If you must come, please notify me beforehand. As for those antique vases, I didn’t know that they’d been your gifts, but don’t worry. I just had people put them away. If you want them, I can have them send them back, each piece as it was.”

And then she really had people go and collect those vases.

Faye’s face contorted with rage.

“Don’t play dumb with me, Natalia! Do you think I’m talking about the vase? I’m saying you don’t deserve Archie! You’re just an ignorant woman who knows nothing. You really think you’re somebody now that Archie cherishes you. You think he’ll cherish you forever? I’m telling you, there’s only one matriarch of the McCarthy family, and that’s...”

“Faye!”

A clear bark came from the doorway.

Followed quickly by Archie striding in.

Seeing him, Faye swallowed her words and turned her expression one hundred and eighty degrees around. Her original glare turned into a smile as she greeted him.

“You’re back, Archie?”

Archie frowned harshly.

“What are you doing here?”

Seeing his unfriendly face, Faye forced a chuckle.

“Nothing. I just passed by today and stopped to look around.”

Pausing, she added, “I just saw her take down the antique vases I gave you from before and got a little uncomfortable at the idea, so I was a bit heavy with my words. I didn’t mean anything by it, but your wife’s speaking of it like I want to take them all back, it’s just...”

She didn’t finish the sentence, but her meaning was clear.

Basically, she found Jessica petty.

As a senior, they still had to watch their behavior.

Archie shot her a look.

"I had people put those vases away."

Faye started.

Natalia opened her mouth to say something, then shut it.

Reacting, Faye laughed awkwardly.

"Is that so... seems like it was a misunderstanding, then, haha... I thought it was Natalia who put them away! You're probably too young to appreciate this sort of old-fashioned bauble. If you don't like it, I'll bring some other ones another time."

Archie cut her off. "No need for that."

He took up Natalia's hand.

"Was there anything else? If not, you should head back soon. Natalia and I are both tired and want to rest."

Faye's smile stiffened again.

After a while, she nodded.

"Nothing else. If that's the case, I won't interrupt your rest. I'm leaving. Goodbye."

She slunk off.

As Faye left, Natalia looked at her receding back, frowning.

Thinking she was still unhappy about what happened, Archie sighed and explained, "She's just that type of person. Don't take it personally. I'll put people on watch next time so she doesn't barge in."

Natalia shook her head.

"No, I just think it's strange."

"Oh?"

Natalia turned back towards Archie.

"Don't you think it's strange that she'd run over, throw a tantrum, then ask about the vase?"

The moment she said that, Archie felt it was strange too.

With her personality, Faye might have been neurotic, petty, harsh, and nitpicky, always doing inappropriate things.

But when it came to money and property, she was pretty generous.

No matter how much she didn't like Natalia and wanted to find something wrong with her, she couldn't be raising a fuss over things she'd given out on her own.

After all, the items had been given already. People were free to do what they wanted with it, so what did it have to do with her?

But she seemed to have come here deliberately to bring those things up.

Considering that, Archie had to frown too.

Natalia murmured, "I'd had them put the vases away because I thought it was troublesome to have the servants look after them so carefully every day in case they fell and break. That's why I switched them out for something good-looking and practical. I didn't think she'd come over today and lecture me about this of all things. I feel like she's deliberately bringing it up with some other meaning."

Archie nodded, then comforted, "Don't overthink it. I'll send people to investigate this matter. If she comes over again, just ignore her."

Natalia nodded.

The following day, Natalia headed to shoot as usual, and while she rested, she randomly heard a couple of actors discussing a jewel auction in Eqitin three days from now.

She wasn't interested in jewelry, but then she remembered that in another month, it'd be the old lady's seventieth birthday.

The old lady didn't have any particular interests, but she loved to collect pretty jewelry.

Apparently, when she was young, she'd even apprenticed herself to learn jewelry design.

An auction that could be discussed like this had to be pretty large scale, which meant that plenty of rare pieces ought to appear.

Natalia thought it over, asked where the auction was being held from the two actors, and told Archie so he could get two tickets to look around that day.

Three days later, at the auction.

Natalia was in a black lacy one-piece with a red jacket over the top. With a hat on her head, she kept it low-profile.

Archie, on the other hand, was in a black suit and looked as impeccable as ever. The two took their auction tags and sat down at their designated spots.

They weren't seated at the front. Natalia hadn't wanted to draw attention, so she'd asked for the third row down the middle.

Unexpectedly, they sat down and saw a familiar figure walk over.

"Max? What's he doing here?"

As the heir to the Nixon family of the four great families of Eqitin, Max wasn't like the rest of his brothers. He was a flamboyant type who didn't play by the rules, and a year-round playboy. He'd given both his family elders plenty of headaches before.

Max had seen them too. As low-key as Natalia had kept herself, Archie was sitting there, after all.

Other people might not have seen Archie often and probably wouldn't recognize him at first glance, but he'd grown up with him, so he recognized him right away.

“Archie, Natalia!”

Max exclaimed excitedly, about to run over.

Afraid that he’d draw attention with his motions, Natalia put a finger to her lips and shushed him.

Chapter 287 Spewing Nonsense

Max slowed his footsteps and sneaked over when the lights dimmed, and people weren’t aware.

“What are you doing here, Archie, Natalia?”

“If you could come, why can’t we?”

Thinking it was funny, Natalia teased.

Max didn’t mind. He spoke up himself. “To tell you the truth, this auction is hosted by our family. After you stay here a while and take a liking to some pieces, you can tell me, and I’ll have people reserve them for you so nobody takes them instead.”

Natalia was a bit taken aback, while Archie looked at him and said, “If you can do that, why don’t you just give them to us?”

Max lulled.

“That’s... that’s a bit too much, Archie. You know that my Dad holds the financial power in the family. If I really gave it to you, he’d probably break my kneecaps.”

Natalia laughed. At that moment, a young man walked over from a corner of the lobby.

“Archie, Natalia.”

The newcomer was in a deep gray suit. With clearly defined features and a bookish smile, he emanated an aura of quiet elegance.

Natalia had seen him once and knew he was a friend of Archie’s. A genius doctor by the name of Louis Brown. She stood up hurriedly and greeted him.

Louis hadn’t thought he’d meet them here. Curious, he asked, “You’re interested in jewelry too, Natalia?”

He knew that Archie certainly wasn’t.

Natalia smiled. “No, I’m just looking around.”

Hearing that, Louis nodded and didn’t ask on.

Seeing the way things were, Max decided not to go to the front at all and had people switch his seats. He pulled Louis over to the back row and sat down alongside Archie and Natalia.

“I’m telling you, Archie, there’s a few good pieces on sale tonight that all fit Natalia perfectly. When they come out, I’ll point you. Pay attention!”

Natalia hurriedly stopped him.

“Hold it. Don’t egg him on. We’re just here to look around and didn’t think of buying anything.”

Max snickered.

“Come on, Natalia, women can’t skimp on themselves, you know. If you don’t spend this money, someone else will spend it for you. Besides, Archie’s got plenty of money for you to...”

Before he could finish, he received a whack on the head.

Max yelped and covered his skull, looking pitifully over at Archie.

“Come on, Archie, there was no need to hit me out of nowhere.”

Archie’s expression was dark as he muttered, “Will you shut up? Want me to toss you out?”

Max made a motion of sealing his mouth and showed that he wasn’t going to talk anymore.

Archie gripped Natalia’s hand and murmured, “Don’t listen to the nonsense he’s spewing. My money is your money, and it doesn’t have anything to do with other women.”

Natalia couldn’t help but laugh.

Max grumbled about Archie’s slavish devotion internally but didn’t voice it as he waited for the auction to start.

Soon, everyone had arrived, and the event began in earnest.

Natalia still remembered the red coral necklace that Archie had given her last time. She’d felt that that one fit the old lady very well. After all, she was young and didn’t have too many occasions to use a piece like that.

The old lady, though, with her age, liked these crimson and emerald things, even just to look at.

But Archie had given her those, so it wouldn’t do to regift them. She could only hope that something similar would come up tonight so they didn’t attend for nothing.

Knowing how she thought, Archie whispered in her ear, “That necklace is actually a sister set of emeralds. But Faye has that one. Since Grandma’s having her seventieth birthday, she’ll probably give it out.”

Natalia blinked and frowned.

“Then should we switch to something else? It would be a bit awkward if we all gifted her jewelry, right?”

Archie shook his head.

“The old lady just wants to be happy. Everyone has their own ideas. No need to get worked up over it.”

Natalia nodded.

Louis was seated at the side, so he’d naturally heard their conversation.

He leant over and spoke lowly, "I painted a landscape for the old lady's birthday. I've got it at home. It's not worth much, and it's just something from the heart. If you've got the time, Archie, come look it over. If there's anything not right, tell me so I can fix it."

Louis wasn't just a good doctor, he was also an excellent painter. He was particularly good at drawing landscapes. It was said that his work was somewhat reminiscent of the old Brown family patriarch.

Archie nodded.

"Grandma's always liked you. Whatever you draw, she'll be okay with. No need to worry."

Louis smiled.

Max, though, couldn't sit by.

"I'm telling you, Granny McCarthy's biased. Every time Louis goes over, she's fawning over him like he's her own grandson, while she just looks at me and calls me a rascal. Oh, oh, and last year for her birthday, Louis just gave her a can of tea leaves and got her ridiculously happy. But the gold-silk pillowcase I fought so hard to buy outside the country got one glance and nothing else. It was too hurtful."

Louis remarked, "That's because I put my heart into it. Your pillowcase looked interesting, but it wasn't innovative."

"But it was expensive! I spent a lot on it."

"My tea leaves aren't cheap, either."

"One measly jar of leaves can't be as expensive as my pillowcase."

"Even if it isn't, it means more to her than your pillowcase."

"Oho, Louis, you're just trying to pick a fight with me today, aren't you?"

"..."

Seeing the two start to wrestle about, Natalia hurriedly interrupted.

"Hang on. The pillowcase you're talking about – is it the Imperial Phoenix-pattern gold-silk pillowcase they excavated recently?"

Hearing that she knew the pillowcase, Max piped up. "Yes, that's exactly it. Gotta hand it to Natalia to know what she's talking about."

Natalia chuckled awkwardly.

"No, I'm just curious how insensitive you have to be to give someone a pillow that a dead person slept on as a birthday present. Are you trying to curse her?"

"..."

Louis and Archie burst out laughing.

Max tried desperately to retort. "What do you mean a dead person slept on it? In that case, a lot of antiques can't be used, then?"

Natalia smirked.

"Well, I didn't say that, but it was a burial item, you know. I just think it's a bit foreboding to use something that's been entombed as a birthday present, you know..."

"Fine!"

Max blustered. "All right, all three of you are joining forces to bully me today, are you! Well, then I'll stop talking to you, since none of you get it!"

With that, he crossed his arms and turned to the side, sulking.

President's Sweet Wife

Chapter 288 Fighting for Attention

Natalia couldn't hold in her laughter. She'd thought it was fun to tease him and wasn't seriously trying to make him mad.

So she nudged his shoulder.

"Okay, I was just teasing, don't take it seriously!"

At that moment, an astonished voice rang out from her left.

"Natalia? You're here too?"

The group turned to look. It was Laura.

After a year of work, Laura was now a full member of Star Entertainment.

She still couldn't match up with the top rated actors, but she was still a star with twenty or thirty million fans now. The most important thing was that her popularity was stable and her abilities were rising. She had a bright future ahead of her.

Because of that, she was one of the actors being developed full force by Star Entertainment.

If Natalia's memory served, she should have been shooting a period drama recently, with a script that she handed her herself.

Why had she appeared here of all places?

Natalia was a bit taken aback, while compared to her surprise, Laura seemed a bit uncomfortable.

She hadn't come alone. A young man was seated next to her.

The man looked to be in his twenties. He looked well-mannered and handsome. With gold-rimmed glasses, he appeared as an elite of the business world.

Noticing Natalia's gaze falling next to her, Laura pursed her lips.

She didn't hide it in the end.

Taking a look at the people sitting around Natalia, she introduced a little shyly, “This is Edward Beton from the Beton Group. The cast is having a break this afternoon and I’m interested in jewelry, so I came over with him for a look.”

Then she introduced Edward to Natalia’s group.

Max’s expression visibly crumbled.

The other people didn’t notice his state. Archie and Laura were only acquaintances because she was a friend and colleague of Natalie’s.

Forget Louis.

He wasn’t in the entertainment circles, and his family business was about as far away from the media industry as it could get.

Besides, he was entirely devoted to studying medicine all day long. At most, he’d paint in his free time. He didn’t like watching television, and disliked going on the internet even more.

To quote Max, you wouldn’t be able to tell the difference if you threw him into the mountains and had him live as a hermit.

Because of that, as famous as Laura was getting, he didn’t recognize her.

As Natalia introduced her, he simply greeted her with a polite smile and didn’t speak.

Natalia nodded.

She didn’t know who this Edward was, but she’d heard that he was an up-and-coming new star in the financial sector. He’d just come back after studying overseas, and was a stand-up lad.

She greeted him mildly.

Edward returned her greeting with the same politeness, then turned his attention to the relatively silent Archie.

“I’ve heard of you before, Mr. McCarthy, I’d just never had the chance to see you. Since we’ve had the luck to meet here today, would you perhaps accompany me for a midnight snack after the auction is over? I’ve actually studied at the same university in Othua as you have, so we’re technically alumni brothers...”

Before he could finish, Archie cut in.

“Sorry. I don’t do midnight snacks.”

“...”

Anyone clear-eyed could tell that “midnight snack” really just meant looking for an opportunity to make connections.

The Beton Group couldn’t match up to the four great families, but they had some status in Ambario. They were especially close with the Bissel family, with some relationships amongst their families.

The McCarthy and Bissel families might have competed fiercely in recent years, but not to the point of becoming enemies.

Because of that, no matter how much Archie didn't want to associate with a Beton who was in turn close to the Bissels, he still had to show some respect.

But here in front of so many people, Archie had shot Edward down right away, leaving him in an awkward situation.

Laura hurriedly chuckled and came up to smooth things over.

"It's true that Mr. McCarthy doesn't have midnight snacks. It's all right. We can make an appointment for another day. Wouldn't you say, Edward?"

Edward nodded and managed to extricate himself from the situation, even though he didn't look happy about it.

"If that's the case, then I won't press the matter. Anything the two of you want, I'll help you with it."

To the side, Max raised a fuss.

Sourly, he rambled, "Well, well, well. Somebody's a rich tycoon, eh? If you want to cover Natalia and Archie's tab, then why don't you cover mind and Louis' parts as well?"

Edward chuckled.

"That's funny, Mr. Nixon. Everyone knows the Nixon family is hosting this auction. I couldn't steal your thunder!"

Max continued to sneer.

"You couldn't steal my thunder but you could steal Archie's then? You mean to say that he can't afford the things on auction here and needs you to help him out, then?"

Edward's face changed in an instant.

He shot a look at Archie and hurriedly clarified.

"That's not what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

"..."

He'd stayed overseas for years and had heard that these Eqitin boys were hard to deal with. He didn't think they'd be this hard to deal with, though.

Louis was unwilling to let things descend further, so he tugged on Max's sleeve.

"That's quite enough, Max."

Max scoffed.

"I just don't like it when someone pretends to wear big boy pants in front of me!"

Edward's expression was turning downwards. Seeing that, Natalia gestured at Laura with her eyes.

Laura hurriedly dragged Edward away with her.

"The auction's starting, Edward. Let's not talk here and get in other people's way. Let's go over and sit down."

Edward nodded and let Laura take his arm as they left.

Max's face grew even uglier.

Natalia looked at him and sighed.

Since Max had stood up for Laura last time at the charity dinner, Natalia had felt that something wasn't quite right between them.

But she didn't know Max that well, and despite being one of the celebrities under her banner, the two hadn't really been in a relationship and Laura was a girl who knew how far to take things. As an outsider, it wouldn't do to intrude too much.

Looked like someone was tasting sour grapes, though.

Natalia ignored them and concentrated on the pieces onstage.

As Max had said, there were a lot of intricately designed jewelry pieces on sale tonight.

None of them were to Natalia's liking, though.

On the other hand, Max bought up several sets in one go.

All to compete with Edward.

Every time Edward raised his tag, Max raised the stakes.

Edward also seemed like he wanted to impress his partner tonight, so every time a new piece came up on auction, he'd ask Laura's opinion.

Chapter 289 Sabotage

Anything that Laura showed a trace of liking, he raised his tag right away.

The Beton Group was in real estate and construction properties, and was a national forerunner in that industry, so they had a lot of financial power.

As the only son of the Chairman, Edward naturally didn't want for money.

Normally, when it came to chasing girls, Edward didn't care about how much money he spent. So long as the girl was happy, he used as much as he wanted.

Today, though, he'd come across Max.

Everything he wanted, Max upped the ante on.

He could have taken it before, but as things went on, the prices were getting more and more insane.

As if it really was just numbers instead of actual money.

Edward had money, but money wasn't supposed to be spent this way.

A bracelet only worth five hundred thousand was forcefully upped to thirty million by Max.

If he hadn't known that it was Max Nixon, the renowned young punk of Eqitin, he'd have suspected he was getting scammed.

Laura was seeing that something was wrong, too. She glared at Max where he sat above them, then turned back to talk Edward out of it.

"Never mind, Edward, if Mr. Nixon wants it that badly then let him have it! We'll take a look at what comes after."

She didn't understand, though, that there were some moments where a man just had to stand his ground for the woman he loved.

Edward had already started to sense that Max was only raising the stakes with him for Laura, sitting right next to his side.

After all, they weren't seated together, but Edward's seat was directly in front of Max and gang. He couldn't have ignored the burning gaze on his back even if he tried.

Thoroughly provoked, Edward didn't listen to Laura and raised the stakes.

After all, if he gave up now, that would mean admitting that he lost.

No man would give up while he could still compete.

After all, at a time like this, in their eyes they weren't buying a bracelet. They were buying their manly pride.

Then Max gave up right after he raised the price again.

Edward froze to the spot.

What happened to their manly contest?

What's up with the lofty Mr. Nixon stopping at thirty-five million?

He looked over in astonishment and saw Max sneering at him, mouthing two syllables exaggeratedly.

Dumbass!

"..."

Laura saw his mouth move too, her expression changing.

Even a complete moron could tell that Max was just messing with him!

Lowering her voice, she said to Edward, "That bracelet is just too expensive. He's clearly just trying to sabotage you. Let's stop it here!"

Edward forced a smile.

"It's fine. You like it, right? It'll be worth it for your smile. It's just a bit of money. No need to care about that much."

He felt like he was getting ripped off, but he absolutely couldn't say it.

Compared to losing face, these millions were nothing.

Laura bit her lip.

She furrowed her delicate brow, hesitated, and said, "I know Mr. Nixon from before. He must have some misunderstanding of our relationship to go after you like this. Want me to go explain things to him?"

She really didn't want a rift driven between Max and Edward over her.

Edward turned to look at her.

A light smile floated up his handsome face.

"Then there's even less reason to go. I'm glad to have a rare chance to have someone misunderstand our relationship. How could I let you explain things?"

Laura floundered.

Edward hurriedly laughed it off. "Just a joke. Don't mind me."

Laura forced a few chuckles, still a bit irritated at Max's behavior.

Seeing that, Edward patted her hand.

"Don't take it seriously. We're out here for fun. Worst comes to worse, if he tries it again, I'll stop raising."

Laura breathed a sigh of relief and nodded.

Meanwhile, Natalia had seen everything and snickered, "What, Mr. Nixon, you're not jealous, are you?"

Max's face changed and he sputtered, "Nonsense, I'm not jealous; who does she think she is? I don't even know her, why would I be jealous?"

"Tsk tsK tsK, who was it that ran over to save her and clear her name? Now you're trying to sabotage some other man's efforts to court her? If that's not jealousy, I don't know what is."

Max's face took a blow at those words.

Gritting his teeth, he said with a low voice, "That's quite a lot of assumptions you're making, Natalia. I'm just trying to make some extra income for our auction. What's that have to do with jealousy? Besides, I only helped her out seeing as she's one of your people, you know? Some friend you are turning it on me instead of being grateful!"

Natalia looked at the way he had to keep his temper down and found it all really amusing.

"All right, since you're saying that, I'll show my gratefulness by investigating her relationship with Mr. Beton over there. I'll tell you afterwards."

Max had no words.

Next to them, Louis had to chuckle too.

But compared to Max's flamboyancy, he was a lot more mature about it.

"If I remember things correctly, didn't we have an officer in the barracks by the name of Davies? He had a daughter who had a lot of fun with Max back then."

Natalia could hear some gossip forming and leant over to listen.

Max's face changed completely, though, and he turned to glare at Louis, threatening, "Don't say it!"

Louis grinned. "Well, it's not some big secret. Archie knows it too. Even if you don't say it now, Archie will tell her when they get back."

After a brief pause, he added, "Besides, don't you like her? What are you feeling guilty about?"

Max was struck dumb momentarily.

Archie then said slowly, "Oh, right, I remember that officer. His daughter went by Laura too, didn't she? But our family moved out of the barracks the earliest, so I can't remember all the details. Still, I recall that the Nixon family was the last to move out, and the officer was one of old man Nixon's men. It's natural for Max to be closer to them.

The McCarthy, Bissel, Kawn and Nixon families were called the four great families not just because of their immense power and wealth, dominating Ambario, but also because each of their ancestors had been wartime heroes, so many of their descendants also worked within the military.

It wasn't until these two generations that they turned towards the business sector.

Chapter 290 An Awkward Situation

Before they'd turned to business, everyone had lived in a single barracks.

Because of that, Max and Laura had met.

Natalia finally understood.

She'd been wondering why Max and Laura seemed to know each other.

Now that things had gotten this far, there was nothing to hide.

Max pouted discontentedly and muttered, "My grandfather had an incident back then and Officer Davies left the military. Then he left Equin as well, and I lost contact with Laura. I didn't think we'd only meet again now, after all this time."

At that, even Louis seemed a little saddened.

He was about to say something when Natalia patted Max on the shoulder and comforted, "It's all right, you know. It's not too late to meet up now, and you can still win her over. You're both still young, in your twenties. Just right, I'd say!"

Max instantly blushed.

“Don’t say it like that, Natalia! I-I’ve known her since we were both in nappies. Even if we felt anything for each other, it’d just be brotherly affection and nothing else.”

Louis actually agreed with that.

If people started out too close, it made the situation awkward.

Or else he wouldn’t be single up to this point.

Thinking of the faces he saw twenty-four hours a day except for when he ate and slept, he could feel just how slim his chances were of romance.

Seeing Max’s defensive state, Natalia nodded knowingly.

“Oh, I’ve got it. Hmm, that’s okay. Brotherly affection it is. I don’t go out of my way to look at gay relationships, but if you’ve got thoughts like that, I don’t have an opinion on it.”

“Natalia!!!”

Max went berserk, only swiftly calmly down at Archie’s cool stare.

Because there was too much on auction, they’d split the event into two halves with an intermission.

Having been teased too much by Natalia, Max took a phone call and said it was business.

He didn’t linger any longer and left after saying his goodbyes to the group during intermission.

Louis was on break today, and it was rare that he could get a whole day to himself to relax. Naturally, he was unwilling to go back so quickly, so he stayed and continued to attend the auction with them.

When the latter half of the auction began, Natalia’s sharp eye noticed that Laura and Edward were gone too. They must have left as well.

Jokes aside, she wasn’t gossipy enough to pry into people’s private affairs, so she didn’t pay it any mind.

The items on auction for the latter half were even more lavish than the ones in the first half.

Natalia saw a few pieces that she liked, but since they only needed one present, she didn’t rush to raise her tag and continued to wait.

Until a bright emerald set appeared.

With Natalia’s attention to detail, she noticed right away that that set was quite similar to the one Archie had given her.

Archie had noticed too. He frowned, muttering, “That’s the set that Aunt Faye has.”

Natalia was bewildered.

“Then what’s it doing here?”

Archie shook his head to show he didn’t know, either.

Now that Max wasn’t here, they couldn’t go and ask someone else, so they stayed and watched.

This set, like the red coral set, was also passed down from royalty, so they were hotly contested the moment they arrived.

Everyone knew that it was a once-in-a-millennia event to have something like this on auction.

Because of that, they were willing to spend on this one. Besides, the people who could attend this auction weren't pressed for money in the first place.

So the competition intensified even more, reaching the point of three hundred million.

Natalia was a little nervous as she shot a look at Archie, who remained silent with his face dark.

Louis had seen Natalia's set of jewelry before, so he recognized that the set had something to do with the McCarthy family.

Hearing Natalia and Archie say what they just said earlier, it wasn't hard for him to guess that something must have happened.

He muttered, "Want to buy it up, Archie?"

Archie shook his head.

"Don't rush right now."

As expected, someone raised the price again.

This time, they upped it to three hundred and thirty million!

This set of jewelry might have been a sister set with the red coral pieces, but it wasn't this expensive.

So three hundred thirty million was the limit!

Not a peep could be heard inside the auction hall as everyone waited for the final results.

Seeing that, the host banged on the gavel.

"Three hundred thirty million going once!

"Three hundred thirty million going twice!

"Three hundred thirty million..."

"Four hundred million!"

A clear, cool voice rang out. Everyone looked towards its source.

When they saw the man sitting there, they sucked in a shocked breath.

Archie McCarthy?

Why him of all people?

What was he doing here?

No, when had he come in the first place? How had nobody known?

Archie was known for keeping a low profile. Even though people know that, seeing him here all of a sudden was still strange.

Seeing the situation unfold, the host yelled excitedly, "This gentleman has offered four hundred million! Can we get any higher? Does anyone want to go higher than four hundred million?"

Silence. No one spoke.

Four hundred million? That was madness!

However valuable this jewelry set was, it wasn't this valuable.

Besides, if they were talking collector's value, the red coral sister set was worth far more. If it was that set, six hundred million wouldn't be enough.

Seeing that nobody was raising the price, the host banged on the gavel and sold the jewels to Archie.

As the auction continued, several nice pieces followed.

Natalia chose a jade bracelet of emperor green and bought it for the old lady's seventieth birthday.

With the auction over, the trio left together.

Knowing that Archie was here, gossip and activity was unavoidable.

Everyone who had attended were the upper crust wealthy and nobility of Equin.

Archie didn't like scenes like this, but he still had to keep up appearances.

Because of that, they only managed to escape after over half an hour.

Louis had come here in the same car as Max. Since Max had left alone, he'd taken the car too, so Louis had Archie drive him home instead.

As the three got on, Natalia opened the box to the jade bracelet, looked it over to make sure everything was in order, and put it away.

Louis mused, "Archie, what's Aunt Faye's jewels doing in a place like this? The McCarthy family's not pressed for money, right?"

Archie's face was wooden as he murmured, "Grandma and the rest of them probably don't know about this."

In other words, Faye had gone behind the family's back to sell off that set of jewelry.

Hearing that, Louis was even more shocked.

Faye had stayed unmarried. Single at almost forty years of age, she still behaved like a child, often doing things that were completely inappropriate.