

The Kiss 441

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Bartlett smirked, “Don’t worry I won’t say anything to any member of the Blanchet family, including The o.”

Ellinor was a bit taken aback. He had seen through her guard and even gave her assurance, it seemed she had no reason to turn down the invite now.

“Alright, let’s hit a barbecue joint later my treat!”

She thought that with Bartlett dressed so formally, if he took her to a fancy and romantic restaurant and got spotted by acquaintances, it might stir up unnecessary gossip.

The BBQ joint might be crowded and casual, but they wouldn’t bump into people from Bartlett’s circle.

Plus, dining and chatting in such a lively atmosphere wouldn’t come off as too intimate. It would just seem like two friends catching up

She didn’t want any drama with these upper-class gents and wanted to save herself the hassle

Bartlett chuckled, “Sounds good, you’re picking up the tab today!”

After purchasing two paintings of Lady Lotus, Ellinor left an address for the gallery to deliver the artwork directly to Chase.

Then she and Bartlett left the gallery together.

The chosen dining place was a renowned BBQ joint in Hiland City, picked by Ellinor.

Bartlett, being a looker, drew the attention of many.

But his air of nobility, coupled with an approach-with-caution vibe, kept the girls at bay.

In the BBQ joint, a waiter led them to a table for two and handed them the menu

Ellinor ordered a few dishes she liked first, then passed the menu to Bartlett across the table, “Mr. Rex, get whatever you fancy, don’t hold back!”

Bartlett just smirked and didn’t hold back; indeed, he picked quite a lot from the menu.

He seemed quite familiar and comfortable with such a small restaurant, ordering with ease and without any hesitation.

Ellinor was a tad surprised; someone of his stature wouldn’t usually dine at such places, let alone be familiar with the unique dishes.

How could he be so adept?

After Bartlett finished ordering, Ellinor sneakily glanced at his choices.

He had ordered a lot of special dishes, mostly the signature dishes of this place.

Who knew Bartlett was a foodie!

Ellinor couldn't help but recall the first time Theo accompanied her to a BBQ. In stark contrast to Bartlett's seasoned demeanor, Theo, though expressionless, was clearly out of his element in such an environment. He was obviously clueless about the BBQ culture; you could tell he was doing his best to put up with it and play along.

After they finished ordering, they handed the menu back to the waiter.

Bartlett, the gentleman, poured her a glass of mango juice. His casual tone hinted at a probing undertone, "Ellinor, I heard you've been away from the Blanchet family for a month now; does that mean you and Theo have called it quits?"

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In the month that Ellinor left the Blanchet family, barely anyone mentioned that man's name in front of her.

Chase and Ida seemed to have reached an agreement, deliberately avoiding any mention of Theo, even when it came to business dealings between the Crescent Society and the Blanchet Corporation.

But in reality, she didn't give a damn.

A man was not enough to become her tabon.

However, when she actually heard the name Theo, she still felt a bit revolted.

"Mr. Rex can you not talk about that guy during mealtime?"

Bartlett was taken aback, then smiled at her, "Alright, we won't talk about other men while eating"

Although she didn't directly answer, her altitude was clear. She didn't want to be associated with Theo anymore.

Ellinor tried a sip of the signature mango juice from this barbecue restaurant. It was so refreshing that she had another hefty gulp before asking directly. "Mr. Rex, you said you could help me find Lady Lotus at the gallery. How do you plan to do that?"

Barlett also poured himself a glass of mango juice and took a leisurely sip. "Actually, I can't really help you find Lady Lotus."

The hopeful light in Ellinor's eyes suddenly dimmed.

"Are you trying to trick me?"

"If I can't help you find Lady Lotus, you don't want to have dinner with me?"

"Well, I'm here already, so I'm going to finish the barbecue! It's just that I don't appreciate you tricking me into having dinner like this! Ellinor gave him a helpless look.

Bartlett looked at her, his eyes filled with admiration and curiosity

She might be a bit quirky, but she was very polite and handled things properly.

Like now, though she expressed her displeasure directly, she didn't make anyone uncomfortable.

She was a very appealing girl.

Bartlett decided to stop teasing her and get to the point, "Ellinor, I didn't trick you. While I can't help you find Lady Lotus, I can give you an important clue."

Ellinor's eyes lit up again, "What important clue?"

"If you want to find Lady Lotus, you don't need to go through the painter Master Michell, there's someone else who could be a more direct connection."

"Who?" Ellinor asked, her eyes serious.

Bartlett smiled mysteriously, "Balfour Howard"

Balfour? That guy who was full of prejudice against her?

Ellinor felt unhappy and did not understand what Bartlett meant.

"Why Balfour? What was his relationship with Lady Lotus?"

The conversation was briefly interrupted as the waiter served their meal.

After the food was served and the waiter left, Bartlett put some beef and lettuce into Ellinor's bowl before answering.

"From what I know, Lady Lotus was a pen name used by Balfour's mother. His house has many unpublished manuscripts of Lady Lotus. The most well-known works of Lady Lotus are also preserved by Balfour."

Ellinor's face turned complex, and the utensils in her hand seemed to slip and clatter to the floor.

Lady Lotus was a pen name used by Balfour's mother?

Balfour was Lady Lotus's son?

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If Lady Lotus was her mother, then were she and Balfour related?

That arrogant and sarcastic man, Balfour, might be her half brother?

"Ellinor" Bartlett ordered a new set of utensils from the waiter, waving them in front of the dazed Ellinor

Ellinor snapped back to reality; her eyebrows knitted together and she had a serious look in her eyes as she stared at him. "Bartlett, are you sure about what you just said?"

"Absolutely! Ellinor, don't you remember? I told you before that I met Lady Lotus when I was a kid.

She was an old friend of my parents. Those three paintings of Lady Lotus in my gallery were gifts from her to my parents years ago."

Ellinor felt a wave of mixed emotions.

If her mother was also Balfour's mom, then she was tangled up with the Howard family!

Were the persecutions her mother suffered back then connected to the Howard family?

Watching Ellinor's reactions, Bartlett mused, "Ellinor, can I ask why you're so keen on finding Lady Lotus?"

Ellinor didn't respond. The news she just learned shocked her, and she was a bit confused. She didn't want to reveal her background just yet.

After waiting for a bit with no response, Bartlett politely said, "It's okay if you don't want to talk about it. But can I ask you another question?"

Ellinor, her appetite gone due to her emotional turmoil, took another sip of her mango juice. "Mm, go ahead."

"Now, can I pursue you?" Bartlett asked, looking at her intently.

Ellinor froze, then gave a dry laugh. "Mr. Rex, you trekked all the way from Greenhaven to the Hiland City gallery just to ask me that?"

Bartlett's expression became a bit more serious. "Ellinor, let's be serious here. It's not just a fling. I want to genuinely pursue you."

"Oh, there's a difference?"

"Definitely. A fling is just for fun, but pursuit is about wanting a future together."

Ellinor found it amusing. Once, a man had said the same to her, wanting a serious relationship. And the result?

It was nothing more than a man's hunting instinct and desire to conquer women.

Seeing her lack of reaction, Bartlett continued. "Once, you were Theo's wife in name, and Theo was a friend of mine. It's not right to covet a friend's wife, so I couldn't harbor feelings for you beyond friendship."

Now, we're both single. Why can't I express my feelings for you?"

"I'm sorry, I have to decline."

"Why?"

"I'm busy right now; I don't have time for a relationship! Mr. Rex, if you're filled with love and want to do good deeds, go find someone else! You're quite handsome, and I'm sure there are many who like you. You won't lack for female attention."

Bartlett raised an eyebrow, "But what if I'm only interested in you?"

Ellinor was about to retort, but Bartlett cleverly interrupted her.

"Ellinor, I know what you want to say, don't be so quick to reject me, okay? You don't have time for a relationship now, but you might in the future. I'm patient, I can wait here for you. When you're ready for a relationship, come to me first. Does that sound good?"

Ellinor frowned in confusion. "Bartlett, what exactly do you like about me?"

Bartlett laughed. His laugh was charming like a handsome man who knew his charm and was deliberately showing it off. "I can't really explain it, all I know is I really like you!"

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Ellinor and Bartlett locked eyes for a moment before she looked down and started munching on the grilled beef

After finishing, she wiped her mouth and said to Bartlett, "Mr. Rex, thanks for spilling the beans about Lady Lotus Today But I can't be sure if everything you said is legit; I need to do some digging As for your question, I've gotta think about it."

This response caught Bartlett off guard, but at least he wasn't shot down right away

"I won't pressure you I just hope you consider me someone you can lum to when you're in a pickle"

"Mr. Rex you're quite the good Samaritan. If I need help. I'll keep you in mind."

The reason she said she needed to think was mainly because if she straight-up rejected Bartlett, he might keep trying to persuade her.

And she was totally done hearing it.

Bartlett wanted to win her over, "Can we exchange contacts?"

Ellinor thought for a moment, then pulled out her phone and handed it to him.

Bartlett caught her drift right away. He took the phone, punched in his number, and then dialed his own number from her phone, saving hers as well.

Then he handed the phone back to her, grinning, "Ellinor, I'm really chuffed"

"As long as you're happy, Mr. Rex. These eats will be rubbish if they're overcooked"

"I'd be even more chuffed if you called me Bartlett."

'Sure thing. Mr. Rex"

After the meal, they left the restaurant. In the mall, a TV in an electronics store was broadcasting a news piece.

"An heir to a multinational corporation is set to get hitched with the daughter of a Greenhaven bigwig, a high-powered match!"

Ellinor watched the news on the TV in silence.

The news showed silhouettes of a man and a woman, with their identities kept under wraps.

But anyone who knew them could tell who they were at a glance.

Bartlett, standing next to Ellinor, was also watching the news, seeming a bit surprised, "Blimey! Theo and Patri finally made it past their family's hurdles, a real fairy tale ending"

Ellinor smirked sardonically and looked away, "Mr. Rex, that'll do for today. I'm off, see ya."

"Hold on! Ellinor, when can I see you again?"

"If fate wills it, we'll cross paths again" Ellinor gave a wave and walked away, leaving Bartlett behind.

Bartlett didn't chase after her; he stood there, watching her leave for a long time.

Ellinor returned to her place in Hiland City.

Chase was lounging on the couch gaming. Seeing Ellinor's return, he set down his phone and asked, "You're back. Did you see Master Michell?"

Ellinor looked drained, she sat down and stared blankly, "No"

Chase was puzzled, "If you didn't see Master Michell, why are you only getting back now?"

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"I bumped into an acquaintance and we grabbed a bite."

"Who was it?"

Ellinor rubbed her temples, her expression growing serious. "That's not important! Chase, I need you to dig up everything you can about the Howard family, especially Balfour. The more detailed, the better!"

"On it" Chase immediately whipped out his phone to start the search.

Ellinor leaned back on the couch and closed her eyes for a rest.

Being two months pregnant, she was feeling extraordinarily tired, and her energy levels were not what they used to be

She and Chase had been in Hiland City for a month now, while Ida was back in Greenhaven handling company matters, occasionally popping in for a visit.

This past month, she had been investigating her mother's background in Hiland City, but progress was slow

The lead Arnold had given her was a dead end, Hiland College had no record of a student named Marlene.

She had called Arnold to confirm, but he was adamant that he hadn't gotten it wrong. He maintained that her mother was named Marlene and was the belle of Hiland College.

That's where the trail went cold'

The only hope for a new lead was finding her mother's mentor, Master Michell.

But there was a hitch, Master Michell wasn't able to come to the exhibition.

Then she coincidentally bumped into Bartlett in a gallery and got a crucial lead about her mother's identity.

Chase hung up the phone and hurried over with news. "I found something!"

Ellinor quickly opened her eyes. "Spill it!"

Chase relayed the information on his phone. "The Howard family is a big name in Greenhaven because the older generation greatly contributed to society.

Balfour is the child of McNeil Howard from the Howard family and Marlinie Bagley, the daughter of the reputable Bagley family in Hiland City."

Marlinie Bagley? Marlene...

Those two names sounded similar, they must be the same person!

Back then, either Arnold had gotten her mother's name wrong or her mother had changed it on purpose.

"Go on!"

"Later, Marlinie Bagley had a daughter with another man. When the Howard family found out, they threw them out and announced they'd gone missing."

Ellinor frowned. "That's impossible!"

She couldn't believe the gentle, kind mother in her memories would do something like that.

Chase seemed to have caught on to something but didn't continue

Ellinor was silent for a moment before saying, "Chase, look up if the Howard Group has any job openings recently."

Chase blinked, understanding Ellinor's intention and started searching.

"The Howard Group is currently hiring a secretary for Balfour"

Ellinor squinted, making a decision "Chase, prepare yourself. We're heading back to Greenhaven tomorrow."

Chase frowned worriedly "Ellinor, you're not planning to apply for the secretary position at the Howard Group, are you?"

Ellinor nodded. "Yes, that's what I'm going to do."

"Balfour is notoriously hard to please and your previous encounter wasn't pleasant either. You're definitely going to run into problems if you apply to be his secretary!"

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained"

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The Howard family, being such a big shot family, cared a lot about their reputation.

No matter what went down in the family, they could always use their power to keep it under wraps.

Even if some news did slip out, no media organization had the guts to expose the dirt on such a high profile family, so the news only reached a few people and didn't get

much airtime

In this case, if she didn't get up close and personal with the people in the Howard family, she'd have no way of finding out what really happened back in the day

Ellinor thought she had no blood ties with Amold, so she believed the rumor about her mom being a ho mewrecker was squashed

But now she found out she had been labeled a love child, and she was totally bummed out.

She refused to believe her mom was the woman the rumors made her out to be, so she had to dig up the truth to clear her mom's name.

"Ellinor, aren't you worried that if you go back to Greenhaven, the Blanchet family will find you? Theo has never stopped looking for you"

"The most dangerous place is often the safest. I can't let my fear of the Blanchet family finding me stop me from investigating my mom's case"

Speaking of Theo, Ellinor couldn't help but think of the news she just saw on TV at the mall. It really ground her gears. "I don't owe Theo anything. So what if he finds me? | heard he's about to get engaged to Patricia Howard. If he's looking for me, he's probably just trying to send me an invite "

Hearing about Theo's engagement with Patricia, Chase's face showed a hint of surprise, quickly turning into indignation and sarcasm.

He initially thought Mr. Blanchet was a decent guy and someone who could make Ellinor happy.

But now it seemed like he was just like every other guy

Ellinor had only been gone a month, and he had already gotten engaged to another woman?!

Thank god Ellinor was not the lovey-dovey type and not too deep in the rabbit hole.

"Alright, I'll start packing now. Have Ida send a car for us tomorrow morning"

"Sure"

Ellinor responded, then leaned back on the couch to rest a bit.

Having Ida send a car was the best choice, so as to avoid leaving any traces while using public transportation.

Even though she was not afraid of being found by the Blanchet family, she still wanted to avoid running into Theo if she could, cause whenever the Blanchet family was involved, it was always a hot mess

A few days later. At the Howard Group's HR department.

The interviewer was going through the candidates for the position of CEO's secretary one by one.

Since it was the executive secretary for the CEO, the requirements for the candidates were quite demanding.

Candidates need to first pass HR's evaluation on education, communication skills, and appearance, then be reviewed by the CEO's trusted aide, Quinton.

After interviewing more than a dozen candidates screened by HR, Quinton was growing more and more dissatisfied. None of these people met his standards.

He liked those who were concise, straightforward, and simple-minded.

But most of these candidates were women, all dolled up with thick makeup, and obviously not here for work.

Looking at the woman sitting across from him, who was all curves and had nothing but flirtatious behavior, he waved his hand dismissively, "Next!"

A few seconds later, Ellinor walked in and took a seat.

Quinton was already suffering from aesthetic fatigue. He lowered his head to rub his temples, and asked, "Tell me, why do you want this job?"

"Cause it pays well." Ellinor replied

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That answer was way more solid than all those flashy but empty words.

The applicant's voice sounded somewhat familiar like he'd heard it somewhere before

Quinton looked up, his pupils dilating in an instant. Isn't this Ellinor?!

Ellinor smiled at him, relaxed and natural.

Quinton came back to his senses and recalled Ellinor being somewhat disrespectful to the key members of the company, which left a bad taste in his mouth.

"Ms Mendoza, what are you doing here?"

"Applying for a job!"

Quinton frowned even more. "You're applying to be the Executive Secretary to the CEO?"

Ellinor nodded confidently. "Yes!"

Quinton didn't like Ellinor and suspected she had ulterior motives. He said coldly, I'm sorry, but the CEO probably wouldn't want you to be his Executive Secretary. You can

leave now Next!"

Ellinor didn't move and kept smiling. 'How do you know the CEO wouldn't want me as his secretary?

Quinton was about to speak, but Ellinor beat him to the punch, "Are you guessing?"

Quinton was speechless.

“So the company isn’t very strict about recruitment? Can interviewers decide applicants’ fate based on subjective guesses about the boss’s preferences rather than evaluating the applicants’ abilities?”

Quinton found Ellinor quite difficult to deal with, “So what do you suggest?”

Ellinor sat up straight, “I hope you can take a serious look at my CV and evaluate whether I’m qualified to join your company. If not, please give me a valid reason for my rejection.”

Unable to refute, Quinton lowered his head to look at her CV. She was highly educated and had worked for many top-tier companies.

Her education and work experience were impeccable. There was really nothing you could fault her for based on her CV!

So Quinton raised his head and asked her again, “Why did you say you wanted to apply for this position?”

Ellinor didn’t change her answer, “Because the pay is good!”

Quinton sneered, “Your goal is so vulgar. We don’t need people like you in our company!”

Ellinor raised an eyebrow, not backing down, “Then why are you working for this company? Isn’t it for the money? Or are you here for love? You must be deeply in love with the CEO then!”

After being teased like this, Quinton turned green with anger, “What kind of attitude is this? What nonsense are you talking about?”

“Have you ever heard the saying, ‘Life is like a mirror. What you give is what you get. If I have no manners, it shows that you’re no better!’”

“You!” Quinton couldn’t continue arguing with her and was getting impatient. He told her to leave directly. “Your personality isn’t a good fit for this job. You can leave now. Let the next person in!”

Ellinor didn’t care, “I’m the last one. Interviewer, you don’t have another choice; stop picking and choosing. How long are you going to wait to find a suitable secretary for your boss? Just choose me!”

Quinton stared at her speechlessly. He really wanted to call security to escort this shameless woman out, but then he remembered that she used to be Theo’s wife, and he had to consider the Blanchet family.

After some thought, Quinton stood up and left the room to call Balfour.

In the CEO’s office of the Howard Group.

Balfour was checking his emails on the computer. He picked up the phone casually, heard Quinton’s report, and froze, “Ellinor is applying?”

“Yes, she refuses to leave no matter what. It seems like she won’t give up until she gets this job opportunity! Boss, I’ve never seen such a shameless applicant!”

“Bring her to my office.”

“Yes, boss!”

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Quinton hung up the phone

“Ms. Mendoza, come with me. Mr Balfour wants to see you”

Ellinor wasn't surprised. She got up and followed Quinton to the office of the President of the Howard Group.

Balfour's office was decorated in a style that perfectly matched his personality, elegant and aloof.

“Mr. Howard, Ms Mendoza is here” Quinton moved closer and said in a low voice.

There were some unique art pieces on Balfour's desk, with a large office chair facing away from them behind the desk

However, the person in the chair did not turn around to face them at Quinton's introduction.

Quinton brought Ellinor in and then turned and left.

Ellinor stood alone in the office, waiting quietly. Seeing that Balfour still didn't look at her, she took the initiative to speak, politely saying.

“Hello, Mr. Howard, I'm Ellinor Im here for the executive secretary position”

Just as she finished, the office chair slowly turned around.

Balfour had a cup of steaming coffee in his hand. He was poised and indifferent, his smile not reaching his eyes.

“Long time no see, Ms Mendoza What made you decide to apply for my secretary position?”

“Well, I'm strapped for cash Saw your company was hiring, and the pay looked pretty good, so here I am .”

Balfour listened and took a sip of his coffee while smiling, with a hint of contempt in his eyes.

“If I remember correctly, Ms. Mendoza, you weren't the type to bow down for money

You once flat-out returned a check I gave you. You seemed pretty adamant about it.

I thought you never cared about money. Seems I was wrong, huh?”

Ellinor looked at Balfour calmly, undeterred by his sarcasm. She said calmly, “I never said I didn't care about money. On the contrary I need it badly. I just don't like unwarranted handouts and gifts. Mr. Howard , let's leave the past behind us, shall we? I'm here to apply for a job. I want to earn my keep, not beg you for it. How is earning money through a legitimate job considered bowing down to money?”

Balfour squinted at her and smiled, “You really think you can earn money here? Ms. Mendoza, aren't you overestimating yourself?”

Ellinor looked at him firmly, “Whether I'm overestimating myself or not, why don't you find out?”

Balfour averted his gaze, "Never mind. The Howard Group doesn't need an employee like you, Ms. Mendoza. You better find a job elsewhere"

Ellinor looked at

Balfour, feeling a bit uncomfortable at the thought that this arrogant man might be her full-blooded brother.

If it weren't for the investigation into her mother's affairs, she wouldn't want to deal with Balfour at all.

But since she was here already, she wasn't going to leave empty-handed

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Ellinor strode over, pulled out a chair at the desk, and sat down.

"Mr. Howard, I suggest you think this through a little more carefully"

Balfour's brows furrowed. He was not happy about her taking a seat without his permission.

"Think about what?"

Ellinor looked at his handsome and elegant face and said in all seriousness. "While I was queueing for an interview in HR, I was observing every candidate for you, Mr

Howard

Every single girl who's here for an interview is not here for the job. They're here because they're attracted to your good looks and want to get a leg up.

I'm pretty sure you wouldn't want a secretary who's always got you in her sights, right?"

Balfour scoffed. "Thanks for the heads up. But just because I wouldn't choose them doesn't mean I'd pick you! I could totally get a male secretary and dodge the situation you just mentioned"

Ellinor saw this coming and gave a small smile, "There were indeed a few guys who came for the interview. I overheard them talking about your physique and speculating about your sexuality and stuff that has nothing to do with work.

I guess they're probably here because they're attracted to your good looks, too!

Hmm I bet you'd rather not have a male secretary who's got the hots for you, right, Mr. Howard?"

Balfour's nerve was successfully hit, and he suddenly found it hard to swallow his coffee.

"Ms. Mendoza, you make a fair point, but how can I be sure that you're any different from them and that you don't have the hots for me?"

Ellinor looked at him with eyes clear of any distractions, even showing a hint of disdain. "Mr. Howard, you can rest

easy I'm not interested in you at all! Even if I were to get drunk and you tried to seduce me, you wouldn't succeed!"

Balfour nearly choked on his coffee. He cleared his throat and looked at her, "Why?"

Without any hesitation, Ellinor flatly stated, "Because I don't like you."

Balfour could do nothing but blink. This was the first time a girl had told him so directly that she didn't like him..

"Likewise." Balfour gave a calm smile, "If you don't like me, why would you apply to be my secretary? Don't you think this shows some inconsistency?"

Ellinor didn't care, "Mr. Howard, I just don't like you personally. That has nothing to do with your company or the job you're offering.

I'm very good at separating my personal feelings from my work. I won't let personal likes or dislikes affect my work attitude.

If you don't believe me, you can give me a trial period. I can guarantee that I'll meet all your work requirements, and, besides that, I promise you that I'm not interested in you at all and won't have any inappropriate thoughts about you"

Every time he saw Ellinor, Balfour was always surprised by her unique attitude and remarks.

He didn't dislike her. If she hadn't bullied Patri several times, he might actually have had some admiration for Ellinor, who was so young but brave and meticulous.

Ellinor was very pretty. She looked younger than her actual age, but her eyes revealed a maturity and calmness that were beyond her years. Just her fearless aura alone set her apart from the rest

This girl was not a simple character!

Just then, Quinton knocked on the door from outside the office, 'Boss, Miss Patricia and Mr. Theo are here to see you!"

Hearing Quinton's words, Ellinor's face changed instantly. Her previous calm and composure vanished in an instant, and she stood up reflexively, wanting to get out of there

ASAP

What was going on?

It's understandable that Patricia would come to the company to find Balfour, but why was Theo at the Howard Group too?

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If she left the office now, she was bound to bump into Patricia and that guy!

What should she do?

Balfour found Ellinor's flustered reaction way more endearing than her usual bossy demeanor. He raised an eyebrow and teased, "Who'd have thought the normally tough-as-nails Ms. Mendoza could get all flustered like this."

Ellinor fell silent

She was in no mood to deal with Balfour's mockery

She had considered all possibilities before coming here, but she never thought she'd run into Theo!

Aren't the Blanchet family and the Howard family al odds? What was up with the heads of these two families hanging out in private?

She remembered that Theo and Balfour weren't exactly buddies

But it seemed like Theo and Patricia had made some serious progress in the past month; maybe they'd even won over their families.

No wonder they've even put engagement on the agenda

Ellinor nervously gripped her hands.

Balfour narrowed his eyes, utterly indifferent to Ellinor's feelings, and instructed Quinton outside the door. 'Let Patri and Mr. Blanchet in'

"Roger!" Quinton promptly responded.

Ellinor was a bag of nerves. With nowhere to hide, she could only watch as the office door slowly opened.

She didn't want to see that man and didn't want to have anything to do with him anymore.

In the end, without seeking Balfour's opinion, Ellinor dashed behind the large bookshelf in the office to hide.

Only then did she breathe a sigh of relief.

Not a few seconds later, Ellinor heard Patricia's voice echoing in the office.

"Balfour, why were you in such a rush for me to come to the office? What's going on?"

Patricia's voice was as soft and harmless as ever.

*Nothing much, I just noticed
you've been spending all your time with someone else and hardly coming home, I was
worried you might forget about me!"

Balfour's tone with Patricia was noticeably gentler, albeit a bit reproachful, but more affectionate.

Patricia blushed and acted coy. "Balfour! What are you talking about? When have I not been coming home? I come home every day!"

Pretending to be upset, Balfour huffed, "Hmm, right! You leave the house at seven in the morning, even before I get to the office! You come back late at night and have dinner outside; do you call that coming home?"

Patricia, sidestepping the desk, jumped into Balfour's arms and started acting cute. "I've been busy, that's why I've been coming in early and leaving late."

"You! Ever since you found your sweetheart, you've forgotten all about me!"

'Balfour!' Patricia was extremely shy.

Helplessly, Balfour stroked her hair, then looked up and nodded politely at the man who had walked in with Patri.

"Theo, you've helped us out again and even took the trouble to bring Patri over

"Just on my way Theo stood straight and natural with his hands in his pockets, also nodding at Balfour

At this moment, Ellinor, hiding behind the bookcase, felt a bit down and complex. She hadn't heard Theo's voice in a month.

Balfour's gaze swept over the bookshelf behind him, reflected in the computer screen, with a hint of mischief in his warm eyes.

"Theo, about you and Patricia, I'd like to have a detailed chat with you if you have the time now."

Theo glanced at his wristwatch, "Sure thing"