

Too Far 201

Chapter 201 After breakfast, Anastasia grabbed her purse and made her way to the door. As she did so she raised a brow and glanced at the man on the couch before saying, "President Presgrave. I'm going to pick up Jared now. Are you planning to stay here?" Exasperation filled Elliot when he heard this. He wanted to go with her, but the woman clearly had no intention of letting him accompany her. He rose from the couch and said, "I'll drop you off at Nigel's place." He didn't sound like he would take 'no' for an answer. "No, it's fine. I can get a cab." "My car is right downstairs." "I don't-" "I know where Nigel lives!" Elliot shot her a defiant look. It was then that she realized she had indeed forgotten to ask for Nigel's address. She looked at the time, and upon seeing that it was only 7.30AM, she didn't want to call Nigel. "Well, only if you're free. I don't want to impose-" "I am." With that, Elliot turned and walked out the door. Downstairs was Rey, who had already driven the car over. Elliot slid into the backseat while Anastasia followed suit. Then, Anastasia addressed Rey out of concern, "Mr. Osbourne, I hope your father's doing alright!" He replied with ease, "Thank you for asking, Miss Tillman. The surgery went very well." "I'm glad to hear that," she said with a genuinely happy smile. Then, she noticed that the man next to her had put on a change of clothes. He was no longer dressed in the white shirt he had worn yesterday, but a gray one. She frowned slightly. Perhaps Rey brought him a change of clothes. Being the clean freak he is, he would never wear something from the night before. Upon thinking about this, she wondered whether it meant that Elliot had taken a shower in her

bathroom. Perhaps he showered last night, but did he sleep in my bed without any clothes?! It was as if her mind imploded at that moment. She swallowed and while she wanted to ask him about it, she didn't want to do it in front of Rey. Instead, she reached for her phone and texted her question to Elliot. In the silence of the car, Elliot's phone chimed once with a new message. He picked up his phone and looked at the screen, on which was a text from Anastasia that read, 'Did you sleep in my bed without clothes last night?' A smirk curled on his lips as he turned to give her a cryptic look. Anastasia took that as confirmation and glowered at him angrily. Ugh, who said he could sleep naked in my bed?! The man replied to her text with a devilish flair, 'Don't worry. My personal life is as spotless as it is orderly and I won't cause you any trouble.' As she read this, she felt rage well up in her, and she wanted nothing more than to beat him senseless. The fact that he had history with Hayley irked her to no end, and her face was somber as she replied, 'Don't ever do it again. When he saw her stormy expression, he knew that he couldn't afford to aggravate her anymore, so he typed, 'I didn't shower last night, and all I did was put on a change of clothes. Also, I didn't sleep naked in your bed. Anastasia cast Elliot a skeptical look when she saw this. Meanwhile, Rey couldn't help feeling awkward when he realized that the both of them were texting each other in the backseat. Do they want to talk about something that I'm not supposed to be privy to? If that were the case, he wouldn't mind stopping the car somewhere and getting down to give them some privacy. Elliot emphasized with another message, 'It's true. I never lie. With that, he turned to gaze at Anastasia steadily. She blinked, choosing to believe him in the end. Nigel's house was in a very fashionable and prestigious villa neighborhood where all the young scions

of the city made their home. The villas featured state-of-the-art facilities, and they faced the quayside where a neat row of luxurious yachts had been docked. Rey parked the car outside a grand-looking villa. Anastasia looked around and sighed, for she was sure that she would have been lost if she came into the area alone. "Thank you, President Presgrave. Have a safe journey back," she said politely. Then, she opened the car door to get down. However, she had only just stepped out of the vehicle when she saw that Elliot had gotten out as well. She gaped at him as if to silently ask him what he was doing. He saw

the question in her eyes and shrugged. "I haven't been by Nigel's place for a while. I think a cup of tea with an old friend would do nicely!" With that, he strode up to the front door like he owned the place. Anastasia hurried after him and bit out in hushed tones, "President Presgrave, don't you think you should come by for tea some other day?" She was going to have a lot of explaining to do if she were to be seen showing up at Nigel's house with Elliot. "No," Elliot answered imperiously before he reached out to ring the doorbell. Right then, Anastasia wished she could dig a hole in the ground and bury herself in it. She should have known better than to take Elliot up on his offer to drop her here. It was clear to see that he was trying to give Nigel the wrong impression on purpose!

Chapter 202 "I'm coming." Nigel's voice came from the video intercom Anastasia quickly moved to block the camera and crossed her arms as she began to think about how she was going to explain herself to Nigel. It was frustrating that Elliot consistently put her in such sticky situations. There was a beeping sound that came from the door as it unlocked, and Elliot put his hand on the doorknob. He was just about to go in when he glanced at the woman who had her back turned to him.

With a raised brow, he then asked, "Aren't you coming in?" WI "You go ahead. I need to make a phone call," said Anastasia as she took out her phone to dial a number, but he saw through her act and reached out to snatch her phone away. "Come in with me," he said in a commanding tone. "Give me back my phone, Elliot," she demanded incredulously. However, he walked into the house with her phone in hand. She tried to make it look as if they had arrived separately by dawdling on the front step, but seeing as her phone was with him, there was little to no point in putting up pretenses. As such, she stormed after him and made her way into the exquisite glass-walled villa. Nigel had only just put on his clothes, and he was making his way downstairs when he saw the man and woman in his living room. Astonished, he thought, Elliot? Anastasia? Why are they both here at the same time? He recalled only seeing Elliot's figure in the video intercom just now, though he did see the silhouette of a woman whose back had been turned to the camera. Nigel had believed her to be Elliot's assistant or something, but as it turned out, it was Anastasia all along. Confusion dawned upon him as he blinked and asked hesitantly, "D-Did you both come here together?" "Uh... No, we came in separate cars and ran into each other at your front doorstep, so we decided to come in together. This is all pretty coincidental," Anastasia explained anxiously. "Is that it?" Nigel bought it. "Actually, I went to Miss Tillman's father's banquet last night and ended up getting drunk, so I slept over at her place. I'm just tagging along while she picks up Jared." All it took was one sentence for Elliot to reveal the truth, and Anastasia turned a bright shade of red as she quickly shot the man a deadly glare. He didn't even think how this might affect me! Nigel, on the other hand, was stunned for a few seconds. Then, he gaped at Anastasia incredulously. "Why didn't you tell me about your father's banquet? I should have gone and celebrated, too, shouldn't I?"

"Well, it was only a small celebration," she explained as she averted his gaze guiltily. "Jared is still sleeping, so it might be a while before he wakes up," Nigel said. Then, he met Elliot's eyes, and the both of them were suddenly locked in a wordless battle. Elliot's gaze was steady as he said, "Thank you for taking care of Jared last night, Nigel." "Don't sweat it," Nigel said through gritted teeth. He couldn't believe that Elliot had dropped Jared off last night and secretly attended Francis' celebration. He even got drunk and slept over at Anastasia's place. He was starting to look at this cousin of his differently, for only men could understand what other men were thinking. Elliot set this whole thing up right from the beginning! "Anastasia, why don't you go upstairs?" Having said that, Nigel gave Elliot a dark look and said as he turned to walk toward the balcony, "Elliot, there's something I need to talk to you about." Elliot fell in step behind him. Anastasia didn't think too much of this, believing that they really had

something important to discuss. Over on the balcony, there was a confrontational gleam in Nigel's eyes as he looked at Elliot. He had never questioned Elliot quite so seriously as he did at that moment. "Are you serious about Anastasia, or is she just a new notch in your belt?" he asked. Elliot's expression grew somber as he looked at the younger man darkly and said, "Of course, I'm dead serious about her." "Is that so? All of this isn't just stemming from the gratitude you have toward her mother after she sacrificed her life to save yours?" There had been a time when Elliot thought whatever affection and fondness he had for Anastasia was born out of his gratitude, but after spending all this time with her, he realized that he had a special place for her in his heart that had nothing to do with her mother's sacrifice. "Nigel, I really like her. You have to believe me," Elliot said softly, but there was no mistaking the steely edge to his voice. "In that case, would you be able to accept Jared even though he isn't your kid? Will you treat him as your own?" Nigel pressed further as his gaze burned into Elliot's. He knew he didn't stand a chance

with Anastasia, but that wouldn't stop him from being her gatekeeper and evaluating the man who would eventually spend forever with her.

Chapter 203 "I will," Elliot promised solemnly with a nod. He understood where Nigel was coming from, and the reverse was also true. "What if you marry her tonight and she tells you that she doesn't want any more kids? Will you choose to respect her decision?" Nigel went on to ask, wishing desperately that Elliot could do all the things for Anastasia that he couldn't. Once again, Elliot nodded and said, "I will respect every single one of her thoughts and decisions." Nigel's gaze was piercing as he eyed his cousin somberly. "Also, do you promise that you'll protect her, take care of her, and love her forever?" Elliot could tell how much Nigel loved Anastasia. As his heart sank, he clapped a hand on Nigel's shoulder. "Nigel, you've known me since we were kids, and you know what I'm like as a person." An apologetic look flashed in his eyes as he added quietly, "I'm sorry, Nigel." They had been as close as brothers since they were little, and now that they were in love with the same woman, it couldn't be easy for Nigel to let go. Nigel, on the other hand, leaned against the balcony rail behind him as a bitter smile played on his lips. "You don't have to apologize. I know Anastasia has always seen me as nothing more than a friend, and there are far worse things than to see you treat her right and love her in all the ways I can't." Upon hearing this, Elliot reached out to pat his shoulder, but he couldn't find the words to comfort him. At that moment, they fixed their gazes on the woman who was seated on the living room couch. While these two men were talking about their feelings for her, Anastasia was entirely oblivious as she admired the interesting and somewhat whimsical painting on the wall. She looked dazzling and alluring in the morning light, and she looked like she could make anywhere her own space. Nigel was reluctant to give up his feelings for her, but at the same time, he was incredibly relieved. He glanced at Elliot and said, "I'll leave her to you, Elliot."

Elliot's smoldering gaze was still on Anastasia, and there was no mistaking the possessiveness that burned in his obsidian orbs. He acknowledged what Nigel said. She can only be mine, and I won't allow any other man to get close to her. Presently, Anastasia watched as the two men walked up to her, their silhouettes backlit under the morning sun. She found herself staring at them like how one might be captivated by stunning works of art. The Presgraves have such outrageous genes. she mused.

Both cousins were tall and broad-shouldered, and their trimmed waistlines, as well as mile-long legs, made them incredibly fine specimens. In particular, Elliot, who was the taller of the two, looked like a Greek god in the morning light. When she caught herself daydreaming, she quickly retracted her gaze.

She could feel nothing when she stared at Nigel, but her heart would inexplicably start beating wildly whenever she looked at Elliot. What's going on? D She ignored the butterflies in her stomach as she asked aloud, "Hey, Nigel, can I go up and check on Jared?" "Sure thing. He bunked in with me in the master bedroom last night," Nigel replied casually with a smile. When Elliot heard this, he frowned and quickly stopped Anastasia. "Wait here. I'll go and get him." Nigel didn't want to miss an opportunity to aggravate Elliot, so he said, "Ignore him, Anastasia. Just go up and take a look around my room." "What is there to look at in your room?" Elliot shot his cousin a dark look as jealousy seized him. Anastasia had no idea why they were bickering all of a sudden, but before she could say anything, Elliot had already walked up the stairs. She didn't want to go with him, so she turned and said to Nigel instead, "Thanks for babysitting Jared last night." "Don't worry about it. We're family, after all." "Excuse me?"

Nigel's eyes widened as he frantically explained, "Oh! I mean, uh, we're kind of like a family anyway." She smiled when she heard this. "You're right. You're already like an uncle to Jared!" Exasperation welled up in him. All I'll ever get to be is his uncle! It's not like I have a choice now. It wasn't long before Elliot descended the stairs with Jared in his arms. "Mommy!" Jared greeted happily when he saw his mother in the living room. Anastasia beamed at him lovingly, and there was a gentle look in her eyes as she reached out to hold him. However, Elliot seemed intent on keeping the little boy in his arms as he turned to say to Nigel, "We'll get going then." Nigel could only nod as he walked them to the door. Then, he stood on the front step and watched the three of them leave. He found himself thinking that they looked just like a family. I hope things work out between you and Anastasia, Elliot. I can't wait to have her as a cousin-in-law.

Chapter 204 "Good luck, Elliot!" Nigel yelled from across the yard and put up a fist in the air in a show of moral support. Elliot's eyes crinkled as he nodded at the younger man. Anastasia, on the other hand, was helping Jared fasten his seatbelt, so she didn't notice anything strange going on between the two cousins. After that, Elliot took the passenger seat while Anastasia sat in the back with Jared, grateful for the ample leg room in the sedan. They first had lunch at a high-end restaurant, where Jared ate his food in high spirits. When they were done, the little boy suddenly asked to go to the museum, and Elliot agreed to it without a second thought. As such, Anastasia could only go along with them. Rey went as well to keep an eye on Jared, thinking that he could babysit the boy and give Elliot and Anastasia a break to enjoy some quality time together. er Presently, Anastasia had only just stepped into the museum when her phone rang. Upon seeing that it was a call from Francis, she picked it up and greeted, "Hey, Dad." "Is Young Master Elliot alright? I hope he didn't get a hangover this morning," Francis said worriedly on the other line. "My friends shouldn't have forced him to drink all that liquor." "Don't worry, Dad. He's fine," she reassured. "By the way, I was wondering if Bourgeois is still hiring at the moment. Erica is thinking about going to work at your company." Anastasia resisted the urge to

snort at this. Yeah, right, as if Erica wants to work! She just wants to get close to Elliot, and the only way to do that is by working in the company. "Sorry, Dad, but I don't think Erica is a suitable candidate for the company." "I know she's no designer, but she could be a clerk or an assistant or something. It's not every day she claims that she wants to be a working girl, after all. I'd appreciate it if you could help me ask President Presgrave about this; perhaps he can make some arrangements for her." "Dad, I can't just ask him about these things. He's not even the one in charge of recruitment," Anastasia argued. After all, she did not want to see Erica loitering around her workplace. Francis sighed. "Well, I guess I'll just have to call him myself. He gave me his name card last night." She faltered, and it looked like her father was dead set on having Erica work in Bourgeois. Guess he's getting tired of bankrolling for her. "Fine, I'll ask

him about it! Don't go calling him on your own, Dad," she said tiredly, knowing that Francis wouldn't take no for an answer at this point. "Great. Give me a call and tell me how the discussion went. Erica's finally taking life seriously, and we have to help her get a good head start, right?" "Sure," Anastasia replied emotionlessly. After she hung up the call, she looked up at the man who was currently bringing her son from one exhibit to the next. She let out a sigh and brisk-walked up to them. Elliot had brought Jared to his favorite part of the museum, which was the dinosaur exhibit. While Anastasia had brought him here before, Jared was still excited, and he was having a whale of a time. She watched as he trotted alongside Elliot's towering frame, and she thought they looked like father and son. Elliot would occasionally pick him up, and there were moments when he would let Jared pull him around the museum. Jared would also tilt his head to one side curiously while he asked questions about the artifacts. Elliot, on the other hand, played the role of the ever-patient father who elaborated on the history and the scientific evolution of the dinosaurs, and Jared was all ears. "Miss Tillman, isn't it wonderful how President Presgrave and Jared get along so well?" Rey asked as he came over to where Anastasia was standing. She smiled and nodded. "It is! Jared really likes him." "I think President Presgrave would make an excellent father," Rey added meaningfully. The implication behind his words did not escape Anastasia, but she knew that she and Elliot could never work out, and Jared's affections for him were only temporary. When they left the dinosaur exhibit, they ventured into other exhibits that Jared liked. Eventually, they found themselves on the third floor of the museum.

When Rey walked up to her, Anastasia said, "Could you help me look after Jared for a bit? I need to speak with President Presgrave alone." "Very well," Rey said with a polite smile. Anastasia then sauntered over to Elliot. "President Presgrave, there's something I need to talk to you about. Rey can keep an eye on Jared for a while." Elliot glanced over at Rey and instructed coolly, "Don't let him out of your sight." When all was settled, Anastasia led him over to the more quiet end of the gallery where there were hardly any visitors. As Elliot drew closer to her, she pursed her lips and thought about how she was going to phrase things. She didn't want to owe him any more favors, but it seemed unavoidable right now. "What is it?" he asked softly as he fixed his dark gaze on her. "Here's the thing- my dad wants to know if Bourgeois is still hiring. He wants my sister, Erica, to find work there," Anastasia explained and looked up at Elliot. Even in the dim lighting, she could still see the chiseled planes and angles of his handsome features, and for a moment, she thought she could drown in those magnetic, obsidian eyes of his.

Chapter 205 Elliot smiled as he eyed her teasingly. "Are you asking me for a favor?" Anastasia shrugged nonchalantly and said, "I'm only doing this on behalf of my dad." "Well, seeing as he's your dad, I don't think it'd be right of me to refuse him the favor. Get your sister to come into work on Monday," he declared readily. She gaped at him in astonishment and realized that he was granting favors out of his gratitude again. Just then, he tipped his head to the side and glanced at whatever was behind her, drawling, "You've got guts bringing me here, though." Upon hearing this, she turned around, and she nearly jumped out of her skin when she saw the amphibians and reptiles that were preserved in formalin. She shuddered and shrunk against Elliot like she wanted to put as much distance as she could between herself and the morbid exhibit. Elliot seized the chance to wrap an arm around her. She gasped, but before she could react, she found herself in his embrace. She could smell the fresh and pleasant scent of him, and she pushed him away as she snapped, "Contain yourself, Elliot." "Hey, you were the one who pressed up against me first," he pointed out with a grin. When he saw that there was

nobody around this section of the exhibit, he dipped his head and placed a chaste kiss on her lips. Then, he broke into a mischievous smirk as he muttered, "Consider this a repayment

for the favor just now." Blood rushed to Anastasia's face as she shoved him aside, and she thanked the heavens that Jared and Rey weren't nearby. After that, she gave Francis a call to tell him that Erica could start work on Monday. Over at the Tillman Residence, Erica had just gotten off the phone with Francis. Then, she flew down the staircase gleefully and found her mother. "Mom! Mom, I'm going to start working at Bourgeois on Monday! President Presgrave was the one who personally hired me!" Naomi was elated to hear this. Does this mean Erica has a chance to get close to Elliot now? "Dad told me that President Presgrave himself agreed to this. Do you think it's because I made a really good impression last night?" Erica asked happily and somewhat delusionally. Naomi thought the same thing. Erica had sat next to Elliot during the banquet last night, and there was no denying how gorgeous she had looked in her evening dress! "Erica," she began. "Make sure to seize every opportunity there is while you're at Bourgeois." "I'm sure that if I get a chance to run into President Presgrave often enough, I could make him fall for me," Erica said confidently. She vowed to use every last trick in the book to see this plan through. She couldn't care less about making an honest living by working at Bourgeois; instead, she wanted to seduce Elliot so that she could one day marry rich and have a jet-setting lifestyle. At that moment, Naomi clutched her daughter's arm and said, "Erica, there's something I have to tell you." Erica blinked. "What is it, Mom?" "You see, Elliot actually owes our family a huge favor. I've never told you this, but Anastasia's mother only died because she sacrificed herself to save Elliot. Without her, he would have died when he was a toddler!" "What?" Erica's eyes widened in surprise. She knew that Anastasia's mother was a cop who had died while on duty, but she didn't think that the reason for her death was a great sacrifice to save Elliot's life. "Given that the Presgraves owe Anastasia big time, you'll have to watch your back at Bourgeois. It might only be child's play for her to snag Young Master Elliot." A vicious look flashed in Erica's eyes as she seethed, "I ought to tell President Presgrave about the time Anastasia got screwed over at Abyss Club. No man in their right mind would think of her so greatly after they hear about that." Naomi wasn't the least bit worried that Erica would let her down, for she was certain that her daughter had picked up her skills and affinity for schemes. "You just have to remember that we'll be in deep trouble if Anastasia ends up marrying into the Presgraves. Erica, once you get into the company, you have to do everything in your power to stop

her from marrying Elliot, even if it means that you won't be able to marry him yourself." Both mother and daughter were on the same page about this. However, neither of them knew that Erica only got the job at Bourgeois courtesy of Anastasia, seeing as Francis withheld this detail from them.

Meanwhile, following their excursion to the museum, Elliot dropped Anastasia and Jared home. He watched them walk into the apartment building and left to take care of his work. Having had a lazy Sunday, Anastasia started to pour herself into competing for the position of associate director. She heard that Alice had already gone to the shop she had chosen to survey it last Friday night. As things were, Alice seemed intent on beating Anastasia out for the promotion.

Chapter 206 Anastasia dropped Jared off at kindergarten early that morning. As the little guy made his way through the doors, he turned around and blew her a kiss. Empowered by his sweet gesture, she vowed that she would get the promotion and become associate director so that she could finally have better pay. It wasn't until after she had arrived at the company and sat down in her office that she remembered Erica was coming into work today. At the thought of this, she dialed Grace's extension and

asked her to look into this. Not long after, Grace came running into Anastasia's office with the information. "Miss Anastasia, your sister has been arranged to work as a receptionist at the front desk." Well, seeing as she doesn't have any corporate experience whatsoever, I guess manning the front desk suits her, Anastasia thought. Apparently, Erica had come into work early and started her job at the front desk. She had brought lipsticks as gifts for the other receptionists, who were easily won over and got along with her right off the bat. She wasn't short of money, and because of that, she had given them all limited edition lipsticks, thereby collecting brownie points. After she settled down at the front desk, Erica picked up the receiver and found Anastasia's extension before dialing it. "Hello, who's this?" "I'm working at your company now! Are you surprised?" Erica bragged with a smile on her face. Anastasia was rendered speechless. Looks like Dad didn't tell her how she got the job in the first place. "In that case, make sure you do your best and stop making Dad worry about you incessantly." "Like I need you to point that out to me? Don't tell anyone in the company that we're sisters; I don't want them

to think that I only got the job because of you," Erica said snidely. "I should be the one saying that," Anastasia replied dryly. With an indignant scoff, Erica hung up the phone. When the call ended, Anastasia put the receiver down and got up to leave. She had to go into the shop and see how things were going, but just as she was heading out, Felicia told her that the competition was fierce. Both her rivals would soon start rallying support from friends and relatives, and Anastasia was advised to do the same. However, there was no way Anastasia could rally support when she didn't even have that many friends or family to begin with. All she had on her side were luck and innate talent. Meanwhile, in the main conference room at Presgrave Corporation, the man who was chairing the weekly meeting appeared somber as usual. "That's all for the weekly report, President Presgrave. Is there anything else you'd like for us to do?" Elliot scanned the executives in the meeting and loosened up in his seat to assume a more casual stance. Then, he said in a low and grave tone, "I need all your help with something." The audience immediately stiffened at this. All this while, they had only ever heard disparaging remarks from him for their incompetence, but never a request for their help. "What is it, President Presgrave? We'll be sure to help you in whatever ways we can." "I have a friend who works in a jewelry store, and she's running a little low on sales this month. I need each of you to drop by her shop once, and your expenditure must not be less than a million." Upon hearing this, the executives in the room let out a collective sigh of relief. This was the first time they had heard the president make such a strange request, but given their annual income, it was easy enough for them to do as he said. "If you know anyone interested in buying jewelry, it would be great if you could get them to drop by the shop as well," Elliot added. "That's no problem at all, President Presgrave. We'll drop by your friend's store and give her sales a boost." "Don't go all at once, though," Elliot interjected. "Rey, draw up a schedule for Lance; we want those sales to look credible." "Yes, President Presgrave," Rey replied as he tried to keep himself from laughing. There were several moments where he had to clap a hand over his mouth and look down to hide his amusement. President Presgrave is pulling out all the stops just to rally support for Miss Tillman! All she wants to do is compete for the position of associate director, and President Presgrave already has all the executives in the corporation on board to boost her sales. While this was happening, Anastasia dropped by the shop and spoke to the manager about the sales

for the past two days. Due to the less-than-strategic location of the shop, their sales weren't looking so good. "Is there no other way we can gain more sales, Miss Chastain?" she asked the manager. "Miss Tillman, if you're suggesting that we advertise, then we're going to need a much more flexible budget. That said, if your company is willing to fork out the money, you can consider getting one of those

socialites or influencers to market the jewelry, but you'll have to be able to pay them for it." Anastasia fell into deep thought. She knew this would be a gamble since there were plenty of examples where hiring influencers to market the products ended up as a failed venture. Besides, she would have to pay out of her own pocket if she wanted to go along with this, for the company would never approve a budget for something like this. She had always been a mere designer, and right now, she was being confronted by her lack of marketing skills.

Chapter 207 At the end of the day, the competition for the position of associate director was starting to feel like a competition to see who had more friends that were richer. The one who won in both of these categories would already be at an advantage, and this didn't include their actual sales from the store. Anastasia learned the hard way that she was falling behind. She had been abroad for five years, and she hadn't kept in touch with any of her old friends and relatives for a while now. To add salt to injury, even if she was able to get ahold of her friends and relatives, they might not be able to afford the expensive jewelry. She sighed as she sat in the manager's office and browsed through various marketing strategies, only to conclude that most of them would not work out for her. Presently, six cars had pulled up outside the Bourgeois store, and men and women dressed in different styles came walking through the doors. The sales assistants who were chatting among themselves broke apart and sauntered over to greet the customers. What surprised them the most was that these customers had chosen jewelry pieces from high-end collections. Not even ten minutes later, two of these customers left with millions worth of jewelry, and within half an hour, the sales for the store shot up to a staggering eight million. "Miss Tillman, great news! There was a group of customers who came by the shop earlier, and they took an interest in the items from the main collection. Our sales broke through to eight million just now! We'll have to get more inventory from headquarters, pronto." "What?" Anastasia was so

stunned that she stood up. No way. Am I really that lucky? That afternoon, she and the manager worked out two separate strategies in light of the sudden spike in sales. Given that the shop still had gift items in stock, they put up a sign outside the door to promote a giveaway activity. The second plan they came up with was for Anastasia to pay 30,000 out of her own pocket for a one-month advertisement in all the major shopping malls. At 4.00PM, Anastasia left work to pick Jared up from school. The moment she got off the car, she instinctively turned to sweep her gaze across the parking lot next to the kindergarten. She immediately noticed a familiar Rolls-Royce parked at the side, and the license plate was just as unique as the vehicle itself. The only person who could own this car was Elliot. Much to her frustration, the man had come to pick Jared up from school again, and she began to wonder what he was trying to prove. She was still simmering in disgruntlement when she saw Jared skipping out of the school gates in her direction while holding onto Elliot's hand. "Mommy, Mommy!" he greeted as he bounded up to her. Anastasia beamed and put out her arms as if to catch him. "Mommy, Mr. Presgrave said he's going to buy us dinner tonight," Jared informed cheerily. Upon hearing this, she looked up at Elliot and waved her hand as she declined the offer. "No, that won't be necessary. I can manage dinner now that my hand is all better. You should get going if you have important things to attend to, President Presgrave." "I don't. Let's go back to your place for dinner," Elliot suggested. When he saw the tired look on her face, he added empathetically, "We can always go out for dinner if you're tired." "I'm not. Besides, I prefer cooking my own meals anyway," Anastasia replied, not wanting this man to spoil Jared's palate with expensive food. "Very well, then. We'll go pick up groceries together." With that, he carried Jared in his arms and headed for his car. Anastasia was just about to leave with them when a mother rushed up to her and said enviously, "You're so lucky, Anastasia! You have such a rich and handsome husband who

helps you out with your kid! He's nothing like that deadbeat husband of mine; I don't even remember the last time I saw him around the house." Anastasia forced out a smile, rendered speechless by this. The mother went on to say, "I've never seen anyone as good-looking as your husband! I think he's far better-looking than all those celebrities out there. Be careful, though-you have to keep an eye on a handsome man like him. After all, you never know if a woman is lurking in the shadows waiting to pounce on him!" · The smile on Anastasia's face stiffened, but she

nodded and said graciously, "Got it. I'll keep that in mind." Jared was already in his car seat by the time she got into the vehicle. Right now, she was somewhat torn, and she wasn't sure if it was a good thing for her and Elliot to go on like this.

She cooked up a few dishes for dinner that evening, and both Elliot and Jared polished their plates clean. They even devoured the oxtail stew that she was sure she had messed up. Jared liked going down to the communal playground after dinner, and while Anastasia was distracted, Elliot decided to take him there. It was 8.30PM by the time Anastasia was done clearing the dishes and tidying up around the house. She brought a glass of water out to the balcony, but just as she was gulping it down, she suddenly realized, with no small amount of exasperation, that she was drinking out of the same glass Elliot had used earlier.

Chapter 208 Anastasia had been meaning to get disposable cups, but she always forgot about them. To date, she wasn't sure how many times she had drunk out of the same glass as Elliot. She was pulled out of her thoughts when her phone suddenly rang. She reached for it and put the call through after glancing at the caller ID. "Hello, Miss Chastain." "Miss Tillman, I've come bearing good news! We rounded up the sales for today at fifteen million. While the customers didn't come in droves, they each bought more than a million's worth of jewelry. Never have I seen such staggering business since I started working here!" Surprise filled Anastasia's pretty eyes when she heard this. She wondered how these customers came upon her shop in the first place. She was sure that she didn't rally her friends or family for support, and she had yet to advertise the shop and the products. Could these just be customers who happened to drop by the shop? It went without saying that she was elated by how things had turned out. She would like to think that fate was being kind to her. As the night breeze picked up, she suddenly remembered that they were in the depths of autumn now. To think that she had returned to this country in August, and in the blink of

an eye, November was right around the corner. Far too many things had happened in the last few months, the biggest of which was how Elliot had integrated himself into her life. He had shown up without warning like a storm no one could anticipate, and he was so demanding that he would not stand for rejection on her part. The most frustrating thing about him, perhaps, was how he could make her feel like she was being devoured in flames, yet she didn't mind it at all. She wanted him to do all those things to her; she wanted such pleasure to crawl under her skin and consume her. Am I truly so desperate to feel a man's touch? She started to wonder if her loneliness had made her feel such primal urges whenever they were alone, and she also questioned if the same would apply if she was with another man. If that were the case, it would only go to show that she was lonely and that this had nothing to do with Elliot's own charisma. At the thought of this, she suddenly became inspired to find a decent man that she liked and have a fling with him. It could be a platonic fling, and it would be sufficient to distract her from the effects that Elliot had on her. That way, she wouldn't spend every waking moment thinking about that man. She was already terrified that she might become overly

dependent on him one day. When it was around 9.00PM, Elliot returned to the apartment with Jared in tow. The little boy was already drenched in his own sweat, but he was clearly enamored with playtime, for he turned to look at Elliot seriously as he said, "Mr. Presgrave, you have to bring me to the playground again tomorrow. I want to try out the monkey bars!" "I promise I will," Elliot said with a gentle smile. Anastasia walked up to them and pointed out, "Jared, you can't have Mr. Presgrave coming over every day just to play with you. He's a busy man, and it isn't right for us to take up his time, okay?" She had only just said this when she felt a sharp look being thrown her way. Elliot was a sensitive man, and while she had kept her words vague, he could still pick out the implication behind them. She was trying to stop him from getting too close to Jared. "Really? Alright then," Jared replied with an obedient nod.

Anastasia took his hand and said, "Come on, go get your pajamas before I give you a bath." The little boy went into his room to do as he was told. Presently, Anastasia turned around to see that Elliot had taken the full glass of water she had poured out earlier, and he was drinking it thirstily. She blushed and decided that she was going to have to get him a mug if these visits were going to be frequent. "President Presgrave, it's late, and you should be getting home," she reminded firmly but courteously. "Why do you keep calling me President Presgrave? You can just call me by my name when we're alone," he said unhappily, not at all liking how she kept up formalities with him. There was a steely look in her eyes as she insisted and said, "I will not. As far as I'm concerned, you are my superior, and this is the only way I see you." Elliot found her exasperating at times. He couldn't lecture nor argue with her, and he couldn't even be too harsh with his words for fear that she would only retaliate even more passive-aggressively. However, for some reason, he was extraordinarily patient with her even when she was snapping at him or being stubborn. "In that case, I'll be leaving now. Give me a call if you need anything," he said. When he sauntered over to her, she felt her chest tighten, but thankfully, he didn't do anything to her and merely opened the door to leave. When the door fell shut behind him, she let out a sigh of relief. She went on to bathe Jared and tucked him into bed with a bedtime story. At last, he fell into an easy sleep in her arms. It was only during moments like these when her son had fallen asleep that she could stare at his little face and let her mind wander for a bit.

Chapter 209 After all, her son had a handsome face. "Why does he look like him? Can't he look like me?" Anastasia mumbled in dismay. Why would her son take after Elliot's looks?

Meanwhile, the poor child didn't know that his own mother was complaining about him. After sending her son to school the next morning, Anastasia didn't return to the company. Instead, she went to the shop. Just as she got out of the car, she saw a row of luxurious cars parked in front of Bourgeois Jewelry Atelier. The few ateliers next to it had no business, while Bourgeois' flagship store was currently flooded with customers. Not only that, every customer who came out of the shop carried a bag. Anastasia wanted to look for the shop manager, Miss Chastain, but the latter was so occupied that Anastasia couldn't even spot her. In fact, she was busy transferring the products, and they were short of many high-end pieces! Therefore, Anastasia could only return to the company first. When she arrived, Anastasia saw Erica sitting in the lobby, but the latter pulled a cold expression and pretended not to know her. With that, she walked to the elevator. The moment she arrived at the office, Felicia quickly came up to her. "Good job, Anastasia! Your family and friends have been a huge support!" Felicia bent down slightly and praised in a whisper. "Huh?" Anastasia didn't know what she meant by that. "I heard that the shop you selected is doing really well! Although it's only been a few days into the month, our sales have exceeded two million!" Anastasia was a little surprised, so she bit her lip and denied, "They

are not my friends and family, though.” “Alice’s team has only accumulated four to five million sales. I’m sure you’ll be securing the associate director’s position this time!” “I-I’m just doing my best. I’m not trying to aim for the associate director’s position or anything,” replied Anastasia helplessly. She just wanted to get her salary increment! If that position didn’t come with a salary increment, she wouldn’t have even applied. Alice pushed the door open and entered the office with a long face shortly after Felicia left. Once she arrived, she said mockingly, “Anastasia, didn’t we agree not to depend on our family and friends? Why did you do it?”

Anastasia blinked her eyes at her question. Isn’t she using the same method as well? How dare she accuse me? “I’m not depending on my family and friends. They are just normal customers.” “Hah! Who are you trying to fool? Some of the customers who went to your shop are major shareholders of Presgrave Group. There were also some high-ranking managers there. Did you think I wouldn’t find out that you used your connections to bring in President Presgrave’s family and friends!! Anastasia’s mind instantly exploded. As she stared blankly at Alice for a few seconds, she was rendered speechless. Now, she finally understood why there was a large number of customers at her shop spending millions. Did all of them come from Elliot? “You promised a fair competition, Anastasia. Aren’t you afraid of being laughed at for cheating?” “If you call this cheating, why can you do it but I can’t?” Anastasia retorted. “You...” Alice huffed as a shade of crimson crept up her neck and her face. Anastasia didn’t bother arguing with her anymore. Since Alice wasn’t particularly fond of her as well, Anastasia stood up and said, “I have to work now. Please leave.” “You will regret this!” Alice spat before stomping out the door. Once Alice left, Anastasia wrapped her arms around her head in frustration. Why did Elliot help her? She didn’t want to owe him any favors! With that, Anastasia dialed the number to Elliot’s office, but no one picked up. Instead of giving up, Anastasia called Elliot’s personal number. This time, the call was answered. “Hello?” His baritone and husky voice sounded as charming as ever. However, that didn’t affect Anastasia’s impolite tone as she scolded in frustration, “Are you the one helping me pull customers to my shop, Elliot Presgrave?!” “Do you think I have so much free time on my hands?” Elliot tossed the question back at her. “Don’t lie to me. Someone recognized the customers that went to the store and said they were shareholders and managers from your company.” Anastasia exposed him mercilessly. After remaining silent for a while, Elliot uttered indifferently, “That’s their choice. It has nothing to do with me.”

Elliot was obviously lying, for he didn’t want to admit that he had helped her. Once again, Anastasia was speechless.

Chapter 210 Although Anastasia didn’t know what to say, she was honestly moved. “Thank you, but I hope that you won’t ask them to visit my shop anymore. I’ve given up the position of associate director.” She sighed. “Why is that so?” Elliot inquired anxiously. “I just want to focus on designing. I don’t have any management skills, so I don’t want to hold the company back.” “Why aren’t you confident with your skills? Don’t you want to get the salary increment?” “There is a limit to my ability and I only deserve my current salary. Thank you for your concern, Mr. Presgrave. You may ask your family and friends to stop coming by the shop!” Anastasia hung up the call after saying the last sentence. She breathed a sigh of relief before calling Felicia to tell her about her decision, and the latter respected her wish to do so. After spending the past few months with Anastasia, Felicia came to realize that she was a straightforward and honest girl. Hence, Felicia liked the girl a lot. Meanwhile, someone started to spread rumors about this exact topic at the front desk and it instantly became the talk of the entire company. “I heard that Anastasia will become the associate director of the Department of Design this

time,” said a lady at the front desk who had just heard the gossip. “Why is it her?” Erica immediately leaned over and joined the conversation. “I heard that the three designers in the Department of Design are competing for the position this time. They have each selected a store and will be competing based on this month’s sales turnover. I also heard that all of them have received support from their family and friends, but Anastasia went to a whole new level.” Someone else inquired, “Where did her connections come from?”

“Who else could there be? It’s President Presgrave, of course. He has personally asked his upper management to visit Anastasia’s shop!” “Wow!” The other ladies at the front desk were so amazed that they let out surprised gasps, but Erica’s face was pale. If she hadn’t come to the company today, she wouldn’t even have known that Anastasia had been hooking up with Elliot Presgrave. Now that Elliot wanted to help Anastasia get promoted and receive a salary increment, he was willing to suppress his pride and ask his upper management to support her. How close were they that he was willing to do that for her? Erica wasn’t going to believe that Anastasia never slept with Elliot. “What a shameless person Anastasia is. How could she seduce the president?” Erica scoffed. The other ladies at the front desk admired her courage. After all, no one in the company dared to scold Anastasia, let alone offend her. “Hmph! She’s such a filthy woman. Does she even deserve President Presgrave? What a nasty woman,” Erica spat through gritted teeth in desperation to curse the hell out of Anastasia. “Erica, why do you say so? Tell us about it! How do you know that Anastasia is a filthy woman?” “She has an illegitimate child, and that child was born five years ago as a result of sleeping with another man. She has worked at a club, served customers, and slept with them just to study abroad. She was kicked out of her house eventually, though.” “How do you know all these?” “She’s the daughter of my father’s ex-wife!” Erica decided not to hide her identity anymore. “What?!” Everyone at the front desk exclaimed in shock. That was a juicy scoop from Erica! No wonder Anastasia was capable of getting support from President Presgrave—this all came from the practice of seducing men five years ago! When she saw that the front desk ladies were intrigued by her words, Erica vividly recounted Anastasia’s past to them with exaggeration. She mentioned Anastasia being called ‘Princess of Abyss’, ‘Most Popular Hostess’, and whatever terms she could think of at that time.

The ladies at the front desk were serial gossipers and they quietly whispered to every person they encountered about Anastasia’s past. By that evening, Anastasia’s reputation was ruined once again. While everyone was curious about how Anastasia managed to pull Elliot’s connections, most of them assumed that she had slept with him. Now that they heard about her scandal five years ago, everything seemed to make sense. Just like that, Anastasia was known as the woman of easy virtue in the company. However, Anastasia, who was in her office, didn’t know what was going on at all. When Alice heard that Anastasia had withdrawn from the competition, she was even more motivated to secure the position of associate director. Meanwhile, a luxurious car was parked in the garage. Rey followed Elliot as they took the elevator, but when it stopped at the sixth floor of the Department of Design, he turned to Rey and said, “Head up first.” Rey nodded in response. Just as Elliot strode out of the elevator and was about to look for Anastasia, he passed by the pantry and overheard a conversation behind the glass window.