

## Too Far 241

### Chapter 241

Anastasia had turned a bright shade of red, and she could hear her heart beating in her ears. The man who stood in the room with her was so suave that he was basically a walking tower of testosterone.

Just as she tried to recollect her thoughts, Elliot suddenly reached out and drew her close with one arm. She gasped when he suddenly leaned forward and dipped his head, and his lips were but inches away from hers.

She blushed furiously as the air around her grew warm and became engulfed with his scent, which had a familiar tinge of peppermint to it. She blinked and realized that Elliot's skin still looked flawless from up close.

For some reason, this goodbye kiss was becoming too hot-and-heavy for comfort. More importantly, he was gazing down at her with nothing but endearment, which made her heart beat so fast that it could fly out of her chest.

She looked away nervously, and though she tried to back away from him, his arm was so tightly wound around her waist that she could not budge. She could only cling to his muscular arm and his broad shoulder, using them as her pivot as she tried to break free.

"Three!" Elliot started counting in a voice that sounded like a low, dangerous growl.

She gaped at him incredulously. Wait! He said five seconds! How did it become three all of a sudden? This guy's trying to weasel his way out of the deal!

However, she couldn't let her anger settle; when she was about to accuse him of cheating, he parted his lips and said, "Two!"

This sent panic coursing through her. In a fit of desperation, she reached out her delicate hands and cupped his face. Then, she closed her eyes as she leaned forward to kiss him on his perfectly-carved lips. It's just a kiss. What's the big deal—

"Mmph!" Anastasia's eyes widened when she realized that Elliot's ferocity was probed.

He was kissing her back aggressively, seeming as though he wanted to pack all his pent-up feelings into this one kiss. At that moment, he was no longer the cool and reserved president of a company; he was a man who had relinquished all his self-control just to pour his love out for her.

He had abandoned his calm reasoning in favor of heated recklessness. He wanted to show his true self and bare his soul to her.

On the other hand, Anastasia was startled by how hungrily he kissed her that she instinctively tried to push him away. However, he did not release her, and as he demanded more of her, she found herself starting to cave into the kiss. She was losing herself, and the air was thick with electrifying tension.

Just then, the tenant upstairs moved what sounded like a heavy object, and two muffled thuds were all it took for Anastasia to snap out of her reverie. She summoned all the strength she had and pushed

Elliot away before he got the better of her. He was a little confused by her sudden rejection at first, but he quickly broke into a grin as he said, "I'm very much satisfied."

It was by sheer force of will that she managed to keep her heart from leaping out of her ribcage as she said calmly, "You may leave now."

Elliot stared at her. She was so beautiful under the lights that he felt he could stay there and look at her forever.

A bad feeling rose in her when she met his burning gaze. Why is he still looking at me like that when he's supposed to leave? "Are you considering going back on your word?" She was furious now. She

could hardly believe that he would refuse to hold up his end of the deal after what she had just done.

He raised a brow. "Of course not. I'll get going now. Call me if you miss me." Then, he suddenly thought of something and asked in a confrontational tone, "You're not planning to carpool with that programmer punk to work, are you?"

She was at a loss for words. She didn't think it had anything to do with him whether she carpooled with anyone or not.

Before she could say anything, a frosty look flashed in his eyes as he ordered imperiously, "You are not allowed to have any man other than myself in the passenger seat of your car, Anastasia."

She nearly burst out laughing, but she kept a straight face as she drawled sarcastically, "Is that so? I should probably have all the men in the company line up to take a ride in the passenger seat of my car. What are you going to do about that? Fire all of them?"

Elliot was stumped by this for a few seconds, but when he thought about how he had given the programmer a stern warning earlier that evening, he figured that the man would know better than to try his luck with Anastasia.

This was the first time Anastasia had ever encountered anyone so outrageously demanding and controlling. It was as if he wouldn't be happy until he could pick out all the molecules in the air and force her to only breathe in the ones he deemed fit. Perhaps he should try getting global warming under control and do everyone a great service!

"I'm leaving now," he said as he gave her a long, hard look. After that, he grabbed his keys off the table and left without putting up a fight.

Anastasia was skeptical as she watched him leave, and she wondered if this truly marked the end of his constant presence in her and Jared's private life. She began to question if he really would hold up

his end of the deal, and she found herself hoping that that would be the case.

As she lay in bed that night, sleep evaded her once again. She couldn't stop replaying the scene of the kiss from earlier, and there was no shaking it off no matter how many times she had tossed and turned in bed. She was starting to think that Elliot had cast some kind of spell on her.

Anastasia didn't know why she would think of Elliot now and then even though they had already agreed to go back to being strangers. No, stop this, she chided herself. I have to stop thinking about him. I still have work tomorrow. She still had to work for a living, and she couldn't afford to lose sleep right now. In fact, she had to catch up on rest.

However, the more she tried to convince herself to sleep, the harder it was for her to actually drift off into slumber. She gave up in the end, and at some point, sleep came to her without having to be beckoned.

Early the next morning, she woke up and opened her eyes blearily. Then, she reached for her phone and texted Oliver, telling him to meet her at the basement parking lot later.

Her phone rang shortly after, and she answered the call. "Hey there, Oliver. How much longer will you need?"

"Uh, Anastasia, I don't think I can carpool with you anymore. I... I need to make a trip back to my hometown, and I'll probably be there for half a year," Oliver said on the other line.

"That's sudden," she remarked. "Did something happen back home?"

"Oh, no, it's just... I figured I should keep my parents company for a while. Anyway, don't worry about me. Remember to drive safe to work," he replied, adding a gentle reminder at the end.

She nodded and said kindly, "Well, you take care as well and don't overwork yourself."

Oliver's reluctance did not wane even after he had hung up, but he was admittedly relieved. After all, getting too close to Anastasia would only evoke the Presgraves' wrath and put him on their assassination radar.

When Anastasia had dropped Jared off at school, she got a text from Felicia telling her to drive safely to work and that she had already helped her check into work. Upon reading this, Anastasia felt a surge of warmth go through her, and words couldn't describe how grateful she was to have such a considerate person for a superior.

Now that she was no longer anxious to get to work on time, she slowed down and found herself maneuvering through the streets easily. She hardly hit any traffic on the way, and by the time she pulled into the company building's basement parking lot, she deliberately chose not to park in the spot Elliot had reserved for her, but in one of the ordinary spots instead.

She had only just gone up to the office when Grace told her that Felicia wanted to see her. Since she didn't want to dawdle, Anastasia headed straight into Felicia's office.

Felicia was dressed in a rose-red suit today, adding a vibrant edge to her already-professional appearance. Although she was 36 this year, she was still full of life and zest.

Presently, it was only after Anastasia had walked into her office that she looked down at Felicia's fingers as they flew across the keyboard, and she noticed the diamond ring Felicia was wearing. She couldn't help smiling as she leaned forward and asked knowingly, "Felicia, has someone perhaps... proposed to you?"

At once, Felicia grew bashful as she glanced at the ring on her finger. "You're the first one to notice, and yes, I'm seeing someone right now."

"Congratulations! Do I hear wedding bells?"

"No, we're still in our early stages! We just want to take things slow for now." Felicia was known to have strong ideals, and it went without saying that her values and principles in life were carried into her newfound relationship as well.

Having exchanged pleasantries, Felicia opened up a cabinet and produced an intricately-wrapped gift box. Then, she opened it to reveal an ornate jewelry case painted over with floral motifs. In the case were nestled two necklaces that glittered breathtakingly under the natural light.

"I didn't think these would be ready so soon!" Anastasia exclaimed in surprise. The necklaces were designed by her, and she had toiled over them in earnest. To see them brought to life now made her feel like she was on cloud nine, and any other designer would relate to this.

Felicia hummed in response as she gazed at the jewelry proudly. "The workmanship and the design are flawless. If these weren't limited edition pieces, I would have petitioned to have them sold at all of our boutiques."

"What time will the client be coming to collect these?"

Needless to say, Felicia had contacted the customer at the very first instance. "I've already given them a call, and they said they'll be here in the afternoon."

Anastasia nodded. "Let's have lunch together. I'll make reservations."

Felicia agreed to this with a nod.

When Anastasia left the office afterward, she did not notice the malicious gaze fixed on her.

Alice had never expected Anastasia and Felicia to get along so well, much less be on such friendly terms. She couldn't put pressure on Anastasia now even if she wanted to, for Felicia would only nip it in the bud.

Alice knew that the only way for her to climb up the corporate ladder now was to have Felicia and Anastasia kicked out of Bourgeois. Otherwise, her career here would stagnate.

That afternoon, Anastasia and Felicia brought their assistants along with them to lunch. The whole affair was a lighthearted one as they exchanged funny anecdotes and enjoyed the reprieve from work.

Meanwhile, over at the luxurious villa, Hayley had already gotten a call from Bourgeois at 10.00AM telling her that her jewelry was ready to be collected. This was the moment that she had been waiting a whole month for, and now that she could finally gloat in Anastasia's face, she was not going to let the chance go.

## Chapter 243

Harriet had been waiting for days to have a meal together with her grandson, and he finally returned to Presgrave Residence to fulfill her wish.

They were both seated at the dining table when she asked hesitantly, "Elliot, did Anastasia really mean it when she said she would never marry?"

"Relax, Grandma," Elliot consoled. "Things change all the time."

"I've been speaking to Nigel on the phone over the past few days. I was hoping that he could put more effort into pursuing Anastasia romantically, and I told him not to give up just yet."

Elliot's spoon halted mid-way to his mouth as he sighed and said, "Grandma, Nigel and I both like the same girl, and you should be encouraging me now that he's backed off so that I can go on to pursue her."

Harriet's eyes lit up when she heard this. "What? Are you pursuing Anastasia now? Does she reciprocate your feelings?"

"I'm still working on making that happen, but don't worry, Grandma. I promise I'll marry her," Elliot said solemnly. For some reason, he was confident that he would make her his wife.

When Harriet saw how determined her grandson was about this, she chuckled. "Well, I know you'll give it your best shot. Don't let me down, Elliot."

"Got it."

"By the way, do bring that little boy around here sometime soon. I want to take a look at him too," Harriet added expectantly.

"Now isn't the right time, but give me a month and I'll bring him back here to visit you."

"Very well," she conceded. "Talk to Anastasia about this and have her come by house whenever she's free." She nodded slowly. Knowing that her grandson would take care of everything, she could afford to wait patiently.

At 2.30PM, Anastasia was drinking coffee in her office while tweaking some design sketches on the table when her extension line suddenly rang. She picked up the receiver and greeted, "Hello?"

"Anastasia, the customer has arrived. We have to go to Room 302 now."

"Alright, I'm coming," Anastasia said. She set her coffee aside and grabbed the relevant folder off her desk before getting up to leave her office.

Room 302 was the VIP guest lounge. After Anastasia and Felicia met each other in the middle of the hallway, they turned to make their way to the lounge. Felicia knocked on the door before entering, and when she saw the girl seated on the couch, she was stunned.

On the other hand, Anastasia fell in step behind her. When she saw the customer, her eyes widened in surprise as well, for the girl who was seated on the couch was not the same one who had placed orders for the necklaces the other day. Instead, it was Hayley.

"Good day, Miss Seymour," Felicia greeted enthusiastically after a few seconds of hesitation, and she walked up to the girl with a friendly smile in place.

A million questions flooded Anastasia's mind at that moment, but at the same time, she seemed to have unraveled a great mystery. As it turned out, Hayley had asked someone to place the order for two necklaces specifically designed by her. It would be of no surprise now if Hayley were to tell her that the necklaces were for Elliot and herself.

After taking a deep breath, Anastasia sat down next to Felicia and glanced at Hayley, only to meet the girl's triumphant gaze as expected.

"Thank you for putting in such hard work to design these gorgeous his-and-hers necklaces, Anastasia. I'm very pleased with them," Hayley said as she crossed her legs. "I'm sure Elliot would love them once he sets eyes on them too."

Anastasia had nothing to say to her. Next to her on the couch, Felicia interjected politely, "We're glad to hear that, Miss Seymour. You're a really important client of ours, and we know that Anastasia has the impressive ability to create something special for you and your loved one."

Hayley smirked as she eyed Anastasia viciously. "How about you personally give me your blessings, Miss Tillman? Just a few nice words for my boyfriend and me for sentiment's sake."

At that moment, Anastasia felt like all the air had been sucked out from her lungs, and she bit out icily, "I'm never one to give my blessings."

"Oh, don't be so frigid, Miss Tillman! Here, why don't I help you start it off? You can never go wrong with wishing us everlasting happiness, that we would grow old together and have a family of our own—stuff like that!"

Felicia stepped in naturally and said soothingly, "In that case, on behalf of Miss Tillman and all the employees here, I wish you and President Presgrave all the happiness in life, and that the both of you will stick by each other through thick and thin. May you guys find wonderful companionship in one another."

However, Hayley quirked her lips unhappily and pointed out, "I don't want you to give me your blessings, Director Evans. It's Miss Tillman's I want."

Felicia grew stiff in her seat, evidently flustered. Beside her, Anastasia knew how wicked Hayley could get. Since she didn't want to humiliate Felicia, she said begrudgingly, "Hayley, for the sake of getting you to shut up about this, I wish you and Elliot all the happiness. There! Is that what you want to hear?"

Once she heard Anastasia's words, Hayley's smug smile widened. She was pleased to have the upper hand here, and she snorted as she drawled, "Seeing as you've given us your blessings, Miss Tillman, I will be ever so gracious and thank you for it. Elliot isn't in the office now, so I'm going to need you to personally deliver these necklaces to him later and tell him that you designed these for the both of us."

## Chapter 244

Hayley was dangling her relationship with Elliot in front of Anastasia on purpose now. However, the other woman didn't shy away from agreeing to it as she said nonchalantly, "Sure, that won't be a problem at all. I'll personally drop these necklaces off at his office, and I'll be sure to give him my blessings as well."

Hayley was somewhat unsettled after hearing this, so she turned to address Felicia curtly, “Director Evans, could you give me a few moments alone with Miss Tillman?”

“Of course. Excuse me,” Felicia replied courteously and rose to leave, but not before giving Anastasia a worried look.

The door had only just fallen shut when Hayley glowered at Anastasia viciously and snapped, “If you’ve taken my warning to heart, you ought to know better than clinging to Elliot like gum stuck to the bottom of his shoe. You wouldn’t want me to bring a certain gigolo around to see you, right?”

“Looks like you were the one who told that man where I was, and that was how he found me,” Anastasia deduced grimly instead of responding to Hayley’s threat. The man had even arranged for her to sleep with punters just to rake in some extra cash for him, which aggravated her to the point of wanting to throttle him.

Hayley nodded smugly. “Yes, I was the one who told him. Do you know how miserable he is right now? He’s completely broke, and he has neither family nor children of his own. He has nothing in this world to live for, so when he found out about his adorable and precious son, he was elated. I was the one who gave him money to stall him from coming after the both of you. Pretty charitable of me, right?” The smirk on her lips grew even more wicked as she said this.

The gigolo was but a fictional character anyway, and she could give him whatever tragic backstory she liked.

Hatred filled Anastasia’s eyes, and she dug her nails into her palms as she seethed, “Why must you go out of your way to put me through hell all those years ago, Hayley? I saw you as my own sister, but you stabbed me in the back and left me to bleed to death.”

Hayley snorted in disgust, and there was unmistakable resentment in her eyes. “You should have never been my best friend to begin with! You don’t know how invisible I felt next to you. You were beautiful, on the honor roll, and from a well-off family. When I finally summoned enough courage to confess my feelings to a boy I liked, he told me that he had a crush on you the entire time! Back then, my parents wouldn’t stop praising you either. You have no idea what it was like for me!”

Anastasia instantly regretted ever associating herself with Hayley during their school days. Some people in this world simply didn’t deserve kindness and friendship. Needless to say, Hayley was so twisted that her worldview was warped by her own bitterness.

There was only one thing for Anastasia to do when it came to dealing with people like Hayley—she had to stay away from her and hope that they would never run into each other ever again.

“I hate you, Anastasia, and I can’t stand to see you any better off than I am. I’d like to see you writhe in misery and become a shell of the person that you were. I finally got my wish five years ago,” Hayley went on to say. She reached for her tea, but just as she was bringing her cup to her lips, another cup of tea splashed onto her face and ruined her delicately-applied makeup.

She stood up abruptly and shrieked, “How dare you splash tea all over me, Anastasia?!”

"Oh, but I dare," Anastasia drawled defiantly. She rose to her feet and eyed the other girl menacingly. "I could even kill you if I wanted to. If you so much as mess with me again, I'm going to tell Elliot about all the despicable things you've done. He might have slept with you, but that won't be enough to make him put up with someone like you."

Fear rippled through Hayley when she heard this. As droplets of tea rolled down her cheeks, she looked as pathetic as a wet dog.

"I'd watch myself if I were you," Anastasia added coldly. Then, she spun on her heels elegantly and walked out the door.

Behind her, Hayley was so angry she could combust on the spot. However, she could only bottle up her spite and resentment. She was used to it anyway, and all she had to do now was wait for the right time to unleash vengeance on Anastasia in a fit of maniacal rage, just like how all the grudges she had saved up since grade school burst and culminated into a glorious form of revenge against Anastasia back in college.

Ten minutes later, Felicia brought the necklaces into Anastasia's office and offered empathetically, "Anastasia, would you like me to have these delivered to President Presgrave on your behalf instead?"

Hayley had been the one who assigned this task to Anastasia to rile her up, but she would not rise to the bait. She would execute it personally just to show that she was better than that. As such, she said, "No, I can do it. Has President Presgrave come into work yet?"

Felicia called the extension line for the president's office, and after hanging up, she told Anastasia, "He doesn't usually come in until 3.00PM. Mind waiting for him?"

Anastasia shook her head. After all, she wasn't in a rush anyway.

When Felicia left, Anastasia opened up the ornate jewelry case and gazed upon the necklaces she had so painstakingly designed and created. There was even a symbol engraved on the clasp that signified true love.

She had put so much thought and effort into this pair of necklaces. While she designed them, she had hoped that whoever received them would share an eternal love and that nothing would separate the lovers no matter what. However, the necklaces were nothing more than a symbol of irony right now.

## Chapter 245

Anastasia got a call from Felicia at around 3.00PM informing her that Elliot had come into work. From the looks of it, Felicia was more invested and concerned about this matter than the designer herself.

After regaining her composure, Anastasia grabbed the jewelry case from her desk and walked out of her office.

Over at the presidential office, Rey handed over the report he was holding to the man in the white shirt who had just shrugged off his suit jacket. "President Presgrave, according to the investigation, Lawrence will be actively acquiring Tillman Constructions within a week. As of now, he has already bought up a huge number of shares in Tillman Constructions, which is enough to enter into negotiations with the board."



Rey had yet to finish his report when a knock came from the door, and it was followed by a woman's voice. "President Presgrave, it's me, Anastasia. May I come in?"

Upon hearing this, Elliot immediately loosened up and gave Rey a meaningful look. "Keep an eye on Tillman Constructions and let me know if anything happens."

"Yes, sir," Rey replied. Then, he hurried over to open the door and flashed a smile at Anastasia as he greeted, "Good afternoon, Miss Tillman."

"And to you as well, Mr. Osbourne."

"President Presgrave is in," he said before stepping to the side. "This way, please."

Anastasia walked through the door and immediately saw the man at the desk. He was wearing a simple white satin shirt, but for some reason, he looked imposing all the same.

When she thought about what happened last night, her clear and determined gaze suddenly wavered, and she felt flustered just from looking at him.

She lowered her gaze and headed straight for his desk, and she later heard Rey closing the door behind her.

"What can I do for you?" Elliot asked with a smile.

She passed him the jewelry case and said casually, "Here you go. This is for you."

A surprised look flashed across his face when he saw the box in her hand, for it looked like it contained jewelry. He took the box and opened it, and his eyes lit up at the sight of the necklaces nestled within. "This is quite the sudden gift."

Anastasia could tell that he had mistaken this as a gift from her. She crossed her arms and explained pointedly, "It's a gift from a woman, but the woman isn't me. It's Hayley." She ground out the name with no small amount of hatred.

Elliot froze, and he let his hand drop as he asked, "Why are you giving it to me on her behalf?"

"I don't want to either, but seeing as she specifically asked me to design the necklaces, I have no choice but to deliver it for her as well," she answered impassively and turned to leave.

She had only just spun on her heels when a low male voice called out after her, "Wait."

She turned to look at him with narrowed eyes. "What? Do you want me to help you put on the necklace as well, President Presgrave?"

Elliot glared at her incredulously. He couldn't understand why she was not even the slightest bit jealous. He raised a brow and said, "I have no intention of accepting this gift."

"That's not my problem. If you don't want it, just give it back to Hayley yourself," Anastasia countered indifferently, though her heart gave a squeeze. Is he really not going to accept it?

"Well, Anastasia, I would like you to take my order for a necklace. You can come up with any design you think best," he said smoothly as he stood up. His towering height seemed to put pressure on her as

he took a few steps toward her. "Something close to around ten million, and you'll get a handsome commission out of it. What do you think?"

She narrowed her pretty eyes at him. Did he fall out of bed this morning and hit his head? She could come up with no other reason as to why he was making such a random proposition all of a sudden. He was the president of the company, and he could have all the jewelry he wanted. However, he chose to spend ten million on something designed by her. Then again, the commission that could come from this would be a handsome sum. All in all, she had nothing to lose.

It took only a few seconds for her to ponder on this, and a smile curled on her lips as she asked, "Are you serious about this, President Presgrave?"

"Very serious," he answered, and he didn't look like he was joking as he eyed her steadily. "In fact, I can pay up right now."

"Take it easy, President Presgrave. I'm willing to take up any order as long as I get paid for it," she drawled breezily before turning to leave the office.

Elliot smirked. As expected, the woman was highly motivated by money.

Presently, Anastasia opened the door and left. The frustration she had been feeling earlier was gone. She was amused at how the sentiment behind Hayley's gesture was lost on the likes of Elliot, who had not only been uninformed of the gift but also refused it without even giving it a second thought.

## Chapter 246

As things were, Anastasia was rather pleased with how things had turned out in the end.

Ten minutes later, Felicia received a call from a customer who specifically asked Anastasia to design a men's necklace for him, and he was willing to pay ten million for the final product. He also mentioned that she had free rein over the design.

Felicia just about collapsed in her seat when she heard this. The commission that she would get from two consecutive personal orders alone was staggering enough to make anyone's jaw drop. She went to Anastasia's office and said, "Anastasia, make sure you give this project your all. Forget about the other regular designs you've been working on and focus on this order. Don't hesitate to come to me for any input." With that, she left.

Anastasia waited until Felicia had gone out of earshot before picking up the phone to call the man's extension line. A low and husky voice drawled insouciantly on the other line, "Hello?"

"I can't believe you actually placed the order," she said in bewilderment.

"Well, now that I have, I expect you to work hard on it."

"Do you have any specific designs in mind? What about the style of the necklace?" she asked further, treating him like how she would any other customer.

"You have free rein over this," he said. He had to stop himself from adding, I know that I'll like it anyway.

Anastasia considered this for a moment and suggested, "Why don't I come up with a rough sketch and you can tell me what you think about it?"

"Okay," Elliot replied easily. After a pause, he continued, "Just put your heart into it."

Like I've never done that for all my other designs, she thought dryly. "That's sort of like an entry-level requirement for a designer, you know," she pointed out witheringly.

"No, it's different." He chuckled. "You could picture me as your husband or boyfriend and really throw your heart and soul into the design. Think of the necklace as a token of love."

She was rendered speechless by this, but she pretended to be serious as she countered, "Don't worry, President Presgrave, you are the center of my universe, which makes you far more important than my future boyfriend or husband!"

"Don't get cute with me," he warned darkly on the other end and immediately ended the call.

Anastasia was already used to this. She set the phone down and glanced at the time, only to see that she had to head over to pick Jared up from school now. It looked like she was going to have to dig deep for inspiration for the rest of the night if she wanted to come up with the perfect men's necklace for Elliot.

When she picked up Jared from school that afternoon, he asked if Elliot would be dropping by the apartment later. She took the chance to tell him solemnly that the man would no longer be visiting them, and the little boy was so disappointed that he didn't speak throughout the entire car ride home.

Since she had to work through the night, Anastasia waited until Jared had fallen asleep before she started pondering on the design of the necklace. However, she found herself thinking about Elliot's handsome face and his domineering expression from time to time. As night fell, she no longer had to keep all her emotions bottled up, and the lights above brought out the dazed look in her eyes.

The feelings that she had suppressed during the day suddenly welled up in her, reminding her of their presence. She wondered why she had felt so uneasy when Hayley had given Elliot the necklaces and why that feeling disappeared when he declined the woman's gift.

Perhaps Anastasia was only happy to see Elliot turn down the necklaces because she didn't like Hayley. She adamantly believed that her hatred for Hayley was the only reasonable explanation for this.

Presently, Anastasia did not spend too much time thinking up complicated designs for the necklace. Knowing Elliot, he preferred something understated and disliked anything gaudy. With that in mind, she decided that the necklace would have to be simple and sturdy. Moreover, it would have to be something that could complement his masculine charm.

The recent trend for men's necklaces gave Anastasia inspiration for an elegant herringbone-chain necklace that would flatter the man's chiseled and alluring collarbone, which, if left unadorned, would be a great disservice to the jewelry industry.

He had set the budget at ten million, which offered her great flexibility given that she was in charge of picking out the materials for the necklace. As for the design, it was up to her to imbue her personal flair into it. She gave a rough sketch and let inspiration take control. She imagined the way the chain would drape just above his collarbone, and if she added another chain to it, the visuals would be stunning.

The tip of her pencil gently sketched over the paper as she drew the man's broad shoulders and the curve of his neck. She then added the chains, which nestled just slightly above the dip in his collarbone. She paused and leaned back slightly to see how the design looked.

It was only then that she froze in her seat, and her mind went blank for a moment. Why does this drawing look so much like Elliot? Anastasia couldn't believe what she was seeing. At that moment, she realized just how clearly she could picture every part of Elliot in her head.

## Chapter 247

It turned out that giving Elliot too much room in her headspace during the day was a bad idea because Anastasia was having a hard time falling asleep right now without thinking about him. She even had a wet dream that involved him doing several unspeakable, yet sinfully pleasurable things to her, and she woke up the next morning loathing herself for having subconsciously enjoyed it.

On Friday, she got a message from Alex asking her if she would drop by Tillman Constructions. Seeing as all her other work had been set aside while she focused on designing Elliot's necklace, she decided that it would do her some good to go out and get some air. As such, she asked Felicia for the rest of the day off and headed over to Francis' company.

In the last few years, Francis' company had doubled in size, and the land next to the ten-story office building was occupied by warehouse after warehouse where all the inventory for their building materials was kept. While the area was rather remote, the size of the enterprise was more than enough to compensate for its location.

Anastasia's car drove past the warehouse estate for quite a while before she even drew close to the company building. At that moment, she suddenly understood why Francis could not bear to part with the business. He had poured all his blood, sweat, and tears into building up the company from scratch, and he had a trove of employees who depended on him for a living. In other words, this company was a part of his soul.

When she pulled up outside the building entrance, she headed for the doors and was immediately stopped by the security guard. "Is there something I can help you with, miss?"

"Hi. I'm Anastasia, and I'm here to look for my father, Francis."

The security guard was startled by this, and he appraised her in shock as he pressed, "You're President Tillman's daughter? How come I've never seen you before?"

"That's not surprising, seeing as I've been abroad for the last few years." Anastasia smiled. Since she didn't want to put the security guard in a hard place, she added, "How about I give my dad a call and have him send his assistant down to escort me?"

The security guard decided to believe her, and he wasted no time in opening the door for her as he said, "Pardon me, Miss Tillman. I didn't mean to doubt you. Please come in."

She nodded and strode through the door before coming to a stop at the front desk. The company building had only been set up not too long ago, and she wasn't sure which floor Francis' office was on. After asking the receptionist, she made her way up to the third floor.

Francis did not care much about decorum or formalities. One might even say he was laissez-faire. Since Alex had seen Anastasia before at the banquet, he approached her enthusiastically and told her that Francis was in a meeting, informing her that he would be done soon.

She took the chance to survey his office and sat down on the chair behind his desk. She had long since outgrown days where she whined, pestered, and vied for her father's love and attention, but moments like these were reminiscent of those times.

She waited patiently for her father's meeting to come to an end, but just as she was about to take a sip of her tea, the door to the office suddenly swung open, and the female assistant who had escorted her up earlier came rushing in. "Miss Tillman, something terrible has happened! Your father collapsed in the conference room. Quick, go take a look at him!"

Anastasia's hand trembled, and the tea in her cup nearly spilled over as she stood up abruptly. "What?" Then, she hastened out the door after the assistant as the both of them made their way to the conference room.

Meanwhile, in the conference room, an ashen-faced Francis was being carried over to the couch by a few of his employees. Anastasia frantically ran over to him and crouched down next to the couch, urging, "Dad? Dad, what happened?" She was beside herself with panic as she demanded, "Has anyone called 911? What in the world happened here?"

"We've called 911. President Tillman looked fine earlier before he suddenly collapsed."

"He probably heard that the company is getting acquired and he couldn't take the news," one of the managers said gravely.

"What? What do you mean the company is getting acquired? Who said that?"

"The clients just now weren't here to talk about business; they were the representatives for the acquiring party, and they were here to discuss the acquisition."

Even Anastasia was stunned. The news of the acquisition must have been too much for Francis, and he had collapsed out of shock. Is there no way for Tillman Constructions to escape the acquisition at all? Is this just fate?

"Anastasia, President Tillman will be just fine," said a young man. She looked up and saw that Alex was eyeing her worriedly.

Then, she turned to look at her father. He was breathing heavily, and his eyes were tightly shut as though he was in pain, his skin pale and waxy. How can I not worry about him?

20 minutes later, an ambulance sent by the 911 dispatcher arrived to ferry Francis to the hospital. Anastasia and Alex went as well, and upon their arrival, Francis was immediately wheeled into the emergency room.

Only then did Anastasia snap out of her reverie, and she debated on calling Naomi and Erica. After a moment of thought, she decided that she had to call them.

Anastasia got Alex to make the phone call. When he was done, he walked over to her and said, "Mrs. Tillman and Miss Erica are on their way to the hospital."

Anastasia nodded tiredly as a worried look etched upon her face. She wasn't sure what would happen to Francis' company. Elliot had told her before that the acquiring party had their eyes set on the profitable construction industry, and Francis' company had been their target for a while now. It followed

that they would have done plenty of homework and made arrangements well in advance. They were determined to go through with the acquisition no matter what.

Just then, Alex sighed. "Anastasia, the whole acquisition thing has come up out of the blue, and President Tillman likely collapsed from the shock of it all." Frankly speaking, he didn't want to leave the company either. He had toiled hard to get promoted to financial manager, which was a position that came with a handsome paycheck.

Out of everyone, Anastasia was perhaps the first to know about the possibility of Tillman Constructions' acquisition. If such was the fate of the company, it would have been too late regardless of whether she told Francis about it or not.

With a sigh of resignation, she hummed in response and said, "Let's go and see how my dad's doing right now." She could only pray that her father would pull through.

Ten minutes later, the doctor came out of the emergency room and told them that Francis' heart problem was acting up again. Additionally, he would be transferred to the ICU for further observation.

Anastasia let out a breath when she heard this. Age was catching up with Francis, and his body was no longer as tough as it used to be.

Half an hour had passed before Naomi and Erica showed up at the hospital. The former's eyes were red and puffy as she barreled down the hallway. The latter, however, was seething with rage when she saw Anastasia.

"How's my husband? How is he?" Naomi demanded urgently as she marched up to Alex.

"Calm down, Mrs. Tillman," Alex said in a soothing tone. "President Tillman has only just come out of the emergency room. For now, it seems that his old heart problem is acting up again, and he's been transferred to the ICU for further observation."

Just then, Naomi noticed Anastasia standing there and realized that she must have arrived before them. A skeptical look flashed in her eyes as she asked, "How did you get here before us?"

"Miss Tillman was at the company when President Tillman collapsed. She came with me to the hospital," Alex explained.

Naomi sneered icily, "Eyeing your father's company, huh? What, are you here so you can hasten the handover proceedings? That must be the case, or you wouldn't have beaten us to the hospital."

To the side, Erica scoffed. "Dad said nothing about leaving the company to you, so what are you still badgering him for?" she snapped.

Upon hearing this, Alex was stunned. He never thought that there was so much going on in the Tillman Family.

Anastasia couldn't care less about the mother-and-daughter duo, not while she was occupied with her own thoughts. Even if Francis woke up, it wouldn't change the fact that the company was being acquired. Will the ongoing acquisition worsen his condition? Will he be able to pull through this and hand the company over to the other party?

If he couldn't go through with the acquisition, Anastasia could very well be forced to turn to Elliot for help. No, I mustn't. Not in this life. She had only just drawn the line between them and told him not to cross it. As things were, she couldn't bring herself to swallow her pride and ask him for yet another favor.

After a while, Francis woke up and was transferred to the regular ward. Without another word, Naomi rushed over to his bedside and began to sob dramatically, and she was nagging away at him as well. This irritated him to no end.

"Enough," he snapped. "I'm still alive, aren't I? What are you crying for?"

"Dad, you can't just fall sick like this! What will Mom and I do if anything happens to you? How will we live?" Erica wailed as if blaming him for suddenly having a heart attack.

Anastasia wanted nothing more than to chase the crying pair of stooges out of the room. She glared at them and pulled up a seat next to her father's bed as she asked, "Dad, how are you feeling? Are you hurting anywhere?"

When Francis heard her words of concern, his heart felt warm as he answered reassuringly, "I'm fine. There's nothing to worry about."

Alex, on the other hand, could no longer keep his curiosity and anxiousness at bay as he piped up and asked, "President Tillman, is it true that the company is being acquired?"

"What? The company is being acquired?" Naomi shrieked, and even Erica jumped in shock.

Since she knew that her father was having a hard time reconciling with this, Anastasia consoled, "Take it easy, Dad. Nothing else matters as much as your health right now."

At once, Francis' chest rose and fell rapidly as if the mention of the acquisition was like a rock crushing the air out of his lungs. In a labored voice, he said through gritted teeth, "I built that company up from scratch, and I put all my best years into it. I will not stand to let someone else take it away from me, and I won't have those b\*stards buy it out either!"

## Chapter 249

"That's the spirit, honey. You can't just let anyone take the company away from you! You have to pull through this no matter what," said Naomi as she encouraged him with renewed fervor.

Anastasia interjected, "Dad, do you know who the acquiring party is?"

Francis was seething with rage, and his eyes were bloodshot red as he snapped angrily, "He's an old rival of mine. He's despicable and disgustingly ruthless, and I can't believe he'd resort to such underhanded ways to whittle me down!"

Upon hearing this, Anastasia's heart dropped to her stomach. If the acquiring party was Francis' old rival, she couldn't possibly expect her father to go through with the acquisition without putting up a fight. Even if he did, he would resent and grow angry over this for the rest of his life.

Naomi was beside herself with panic as well. Her continued life of luxury depended on her husband's company, and if he were to call it a day and let the acquisition go through, it would be the end of her privileged lifestyle. A look of horror colored her face as she turned to Francis and urged, "In that case, what should we do? Honey, you have to think of a way to save the company, and you must be quick! We can't just let someone snatch the company away!"

"That's right, Dad! You have to do something!" Erica chimed nervously.

"My hands are tied," Francis admitted a little tiredly. "The acquiring party now holds thirty percent of the shares in the company, giving them enough leverage. More to the point, the business hasn't been doing great for the last two years, and I've had to sell ten percent of my own shares to another company to help tide things over. Now, that company has decided to join forces with the acquiring party. As things are, I'm left with a forty-percent share in the company, and if they were to persuade the other shareholders to jump on their bandwagon, my words will not carry any more weight."

Francis was devastated. Never did he think that his company would fall victim to such a hostile takeover.

"Dad, why don't you just buy those shares back?" Erica suggested.

Alex, who had been standing to the side all this while, knew the company's financial troubles well enough. He pointed out emotionlessly, "Buying back those shares isn't as easy as it sounds. Our company hasn't been profiting for the last two years, and we're making just enough to keep the business afloat."

"If you'd known that this would happen, maybe you wouldn't buy that house," Naomi said begrudgingly as she implicitly blamed her husband for buying Anastasia the apartment.

Francis was already annoyed to begin with, so he glared at Naomi and snapped, "Keep quiet, will you?"

"I'm right, aren't I? You should've tightened your belt and stopped spending money so frivolously if you knew the company was struggling," Naomi argued, rubbing salt in his wound.

Anastasia knew that she was accusing her of being a liability to Francis, and she wished she could shove Naomi and Erica out of the room. All they were doing was aggravating Francis instead of helping him come up with feasible solutions.

"Is there no one who can save Dad's company?" Erica whined.

Just then, a lightbulb went off in Naomi's head when she heard this. "Wait, there is! I can't believe we didn't think about this before. Anastasia, you know Elliot, don't you? Why don't you get him to save our company since he's such a bigshot?"



Anastasia had been trying to avoid bringing up Elliot's name, and she was flustered to hear Naomi even suggest this. She maintained her indifference as she retorted, "Why should he help us?"

"Why not? Your mother died protecting him! This is the least he can do for our family," Naomi argued like she was only stating a matter of fact.

Our family? When were we ever a family? Anastasia didn't bother entertaining the woman's crazy idea and fell silent instead.

Erica was supportive of her mother as well. "Mom's right. Elliot is a mogul and a billionaire. If he intervenes, I'm sure Dad's old rival would be so intimidated that he'd back out of the acquisition altogether!"

There was an unreadable look in Francis' eyes. He had stayed quiet throughout this, but he did sneak a glance at Anastasia, and she did not miss the pleading look on his face. Desperate times called for desperate measures, and he was very much desperate.

Suddenly, he said, "Naomi, go home and take Erica with you. Alex, could you drop them off at the house?"

Alex was stunned at first, but he quickly nodded and replied, "Very well. Mrs. Tillman, Miss Erica, I'll be dropping the both of you home now."

"I have to stay and take care of you, Francis!" Naomi insisted, refusing to leave.

"I'll be fine, and I have Anastasia here to take care of me. Besides, having all of you here is aggravating. Go home," he said firmly, his patience for both Naomi and Erica wearing thin.

Upon seeing that her husband was determined to have her leave the room, Naomi said to Erica, "Come on, let's go back."

Meanwhile, Erica was filled with bitter jealousy as she glowered at Anastasia. Why does she get to stay? Is it because Dad likes her more?

## Chapter 250

Naomi brought her daughter along and followed Alex out, leaving the ward in a solemn and quiet atmosphere. Meanwhile, Anastasia poured a glass of water for Francis before sitting down. He then said, "Anastasia, I actually agree with Naomi's suggestion. I hope you can ask Young Master Elliot to save my company."

Upon hearing that, Anastasia looked up at him in surprise. "How can we ask him for help, Dad? This is a family matter."

"I know how difficult it is to ask for help, but I'm truly desperate this time. There is nothing else I can do. If I can't get any assistance, I will have to give up my company to someone else." After saying that, Francis shuddered and started coughing.

"Calm down, Dad. We'll find a way," Anastasia reassured him as she patted his back.

Naomi, who just left the hospital lobby, felt like she had left something behind. When she looked down and realized that her bag wasn't with her, she turned to Erica and Alex. "I left my bag in the ward, so I'm going back to get it. Can you guys wait for me at the entrance?" With that said, she turned around and walked into the elevator.

Erica glanced at Alex and ordered, "I'm thirsty. Get me a bottle of water!"

Naturally, Alex treated every member of the Tillman Family politely since he had his own plans.

When Naomi arrived at the door of the ward, she realized that the door was left ajar. Just as she was about to push the door open and enter the ward, she heard Francis saying, "Anastasia, I have something to tell you. I don't wish to lose this company because I hope that it will be passed down to Jared in the future. He will be my successor."

As Naomi stood outside the ward, her eyes widened in disbelief. It was her first time hearing about Francis' thoughts on the company's successor. However, she never expected that her husband would pass down such a huge company to Anastasia's son, who was barely a few years old!

It was also Anastasia's first time hearing about her father's thoughts, so she was completely dumbfounded. "What are you talking about, Dad? Isn't Jared too young? He's only four years old! How do you expect him to take over your business?!"

Francis then explained with a serious expression, "Don't worry about that. I've already made all the necessary plans. If anything happens to me, you will take over my business. I know you have no idea about the industry, so that's why I trained Alex. He might just be an outsider, but he has all my trust. I will be your matchmaker, and once you guys get married, it will be much more convenient for him to help you manage the company together."

Anastasia was instantly speechless. What was her father thinking about? Why would he push her and Alex to be together?

"That doesn't sound appropriate," said Anastasia as she rejected his idea.

"There's nothing inappropriate about it. I don't have a biological son, but I have you as an excellent daughter. Jared is also part of the family, so he shall be the most qualified successor. You know how much I adore him, after all." Indeed, Francis had always loved this grandson of his.

"You're still young, Dad. Let's not think too far ahead. We should think of a way to save the company first!"

"You're right, but there is only one way to save the company, and that is to seek Elliot's help. I know it might be hard for you to ask him, so let me do it instead. Your mother, who is watching us from heaven, will definitely agree with me." Francis decided to throw his pride away.

Anastasia was surprised to hear that, so she blurted, "Don't beg him, Dad."

"Why not?" Francis looked at her surprised expression and questioned.

Anastasia felt her face heating up all of a sudden before she uttered reluctantly, "Anyhow, we shouldn't beg him. He isn't obliged to help us. Even if Mom saved him back then, he doesn't owe us anything. It was Mom's responsibility to save him."

“That’s right, but your mother sacrificed her own life to save him!” Francis felt that it was unfair. Back then, he was aggrieved that he lost his wife. His daughter had also lost her mother, and it was simply heartbreaking.

“To be honest, Elliot has helped us a lot without your knowledge, Dad. Did you think your company managed to grow to such a scale by mere luck? No, Elliot’s connections have been helping you grow your small company to a listed one.” Anastasia had no choice but to spill the secret.