

Too Far 271

Chapter 271

"Dad, please! Just let us attend the event! I want to go there." Erica pouted her lips, demanding her father to go along with her.

"Just do us a favor and let us explore around, Francis. The place is going to be crowded with guests by then, so no one is going to notice us. I promise we won't give you any trouble." Naomi sincerely beseeched Francis.

Realizing he had been neglecting Naomi and her daughter all this while, Francis eventually softened up when he thought to himself about how rare the occasion was. "Fine. Remember to wear something decent."

Later that afternoon, Erica and her mother happily went shopping at the apparel shop, during which she texted Hayley to flaunt her good news. 'Erica, guess where I'm going this Saturday?'

'Where are you going?'

'I'm going to accompany my dad to Old Madam Presgrave's birthday feast.'

'Are you free tonight, Erica? Let's meet up!' Hayley responded by asking.

'Alright!' Erica agreed to meet up with Hayley, thinking they were just going to catch up with each other like old friends did.

In the meantime, Hayley, who was reading Erica's message, was surprised to find out how lucky Erica was to attend Harriet's birthday celebration. For that, she knew Erica and Elliot would surely run into each other by then and was determined to explain everything to Erica so that her friend wouldn't embarrass her by accident. After taking a look at the time, Hayley reached for her phone and dialed Elliot's number.

On the other hand, Elliot was skimming through his emails in his study when he saw his phone vibrating on the table. Upon taking a glimpse of it, he reached for it and said, "Hello, Hayley."

"Let me ask you something, Elliot. Is Grandma's birthday this Saturday?" Hayley probingly asked.

"How did you know about that?" Elliot frowned and asked in a deep voice.

"I happened to stumble upon Grandma's birth date when I was reading a news article that was published two years ago. After doing a little calculation, I realized it's this Saturday, so will she be celebrating her birthday?" Hayley asked in excitement.

"Yes, she will."

"That's awesome! I remember Grandma was asking me when I'll be visiting her again last time, so I suppose her birthday makes a perfect opportunity for me to visit her, Elliot. Maybe I could drop by and celebrate with her," Hayley happily said.

"Hayley, the place is going to be full of guests, so I don't think I can make sure you're well received." Elliot implied in his tone that he was reluctant to let Hayley attend the event.

"Don't have to worry about me, Elliot. I'll be good, and I can take care of myself... Or is it because you don't want me to be there? Am I really a shameful presence to you? I know my modest background may have always been a disgrace to you, but... I really want to attend Grandma's birthday feast. I just want to be there to give her my blessings. Is that too much to ask for? Can you grant me my wish?" Hayley spoke with a bitter voice, making herself sound sympathetic.

"Alright, I'll arrange it." Elliot continued to say, " But you mustn't stir up trouble during the feast at all because Anastasia and her son will be there as well. So, try to stay away from them as much as possible."

"Lat ma ask you somathing, Elliot. Is Grandma's birthday this Saturday?" Haylay probingly askad.

"How did you know about that?" Elliot frownad and askad in a daap voica.

"I happenad to stumbla upon Grandma's birth data whan I was raading a naws articla that was publishad two yaars ago. Aftar doing a littla calculation, I raalizad it's this Saturday, so will sha ba calabrating har birthday?" Haylay askad in axcitamant.

"Yas, sha will."

"That's awasoma! I ramambar Grandma was asking ma whan I'll ba visiting har again last tima, so I supposa har birthday makas a parfack opportunity for ma to visit har, Elliot. Mayba I could drop by and calabrata with har," Haylay happily said.

"Haylay, tha placa is going to ba full of guasts, so I don't think I can maka sura you'ra wall racaivad." Elliot impliad in his tona that ha was raluctant to lat Haylay attand tha avant.

"Don't hava to worry about ma, Elliot. I'll ba good, and I can taka cara of myself... Or is it bacausa you don't want ma to ba thara? Am I raally a shamaful prasanca to you? I know my modast background may hava always baan a disgraca to you, but... I raally want to attand Grandma's birthday faast. I just want to ba thara to giva har my blassings. Is that too much to ask for? Can you grant ma my wish?" Haylay spoka with a bittar voica, making harsalf sound sympathatic.

"Alright, I'll arranga it." Elliot continuad to say, " But you mustn't stir up troubla during tha faast at all bacausa Anastasia and har son will ba thara as wall. So, try to stay away from tham as much as possibla."

"Alright, Elliot. I promise I'm only there for Grandma's birthday. I'll behave myself and stay away from trouble." Hayley obediently agreed to behave well.

Soon, Elliot hung up the call, thinking his responsibility was nothing more than making sure Hayley wouldn't have to worry about her own livelihood.

Meanwhile, Hayley was stung by Elliot's last few words, although she had already received permission to attend Harriet's birthday feast. After all, the answer to who was more important between Anastasia and her in Elliot's heart was obvious enough the moment the man Elliot told her to avoid Anastasia. Why should I be the one who stays away from Anastasia?

Soon, Erica and Hayley met up at a western food restaurant in the city, where Erica showed off the nightgown she was going to wear during Harriet's birthday feast. Then, Hayley stared at her friend and said, "Erica, there is something I want to tell you, but promise you're going to keep it a secret. Can you?"

“Speak your mind.” Erica looked at her while sipping her juice.

“I’m going to attend Old Madam Presgrave’s birthday feast too.”

“Pff!” Erica spat out her juice, and her eyes were left wide open in disbelief. “What did you just say? You’re going to attend Old Madam Presgrave’s birthday feast too? H-How can you...?”

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Erica stammered and asked, “There is something I’ve been wanting to tell you. Fate has brought me together with the Presgrave Family. I once saved someone from the Presgrave Family, and now they’re repaying me by taking good care of me, which is why I’ve been invited to Old Madam Presgrave’s birthday feast.”

“Tell me how you got to know the Presgrave Family. What have you done to make them appreciate you so much?” Erica curiously asked, wondering how Hayley got so lucky to know the Presgrave Family.

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you why right now, but I know we both have something in common to do when we get there—to turn the Presgrave Family against Anastasia. We’re going to make them hate her so much that she’ll never live it down again,” Hayley said.

Erica echoed Hayley’s feelings and expressed her thoughts of resentment. “You’re absolutely right. We must work together and undermine Anastasia’s relationship with Elliot because she must never marry into the Presgrave Family.”

“I’ll figure out a plan, so just cooperate with me by then.” Hayley was usually the mastermind with ideas.

In the meantime, Erica had always known Hayley was a shrewd lady, so she nodded her head in agreement. “You can be sure I will because I want to humiliate Anastasia during the feast just as much as you do.” Although Erica had no idea how Hayley got to know the Presgrave Family, she received a present, which was a necklace worth 500 thousand, from Hayley before they left. Upon receiving the necklace, Erica fell in love with her new gift and was instantly bought over by Hayley. Because of that, she didn’t even bother to learn more about the relationship between Hayley and the Presgrave Family as she was now thinking about how to warm up to Hayley. Guess what? I mustn’t look down upon Hayley anymore.

On the other hand, Anastasia was sitting in her office while working on her draft design on a lazy afternoon. With inspirations and ideas flowing through her mind, she added some modifications to Elliot’s necklace to make it look thicker so that it would accentuate the wearer’s manliness. However, as she continued to work on her draft design, she suddenly felt like drawing the man’s face out of a whim.

Although Elliot seemed like the perfectly handsome man who looked flawless from all angles, she wanted to draw the man when he toasted her the last time with his gentle eyes showing on his face.

Thus, she proceeded to spend her entire afternoon drawing Elliot. Needless to say, she would not say a single word about the portrait to anyone because she intended to admire it herself and kill boredom.

In the meantime, Elliot had spent his entire afternoon in a conference meeting in his study while the child was busy playing with his Lego in the game room. Upon taking a look at the time, he stood up and

walked out of the study, wondering what Anastasia was doing since his study was on the same floor as Anastasia's office. Therefore, he decided to find out and walked toward her office.

On the other hand, Anastasia was sitting in her office while working on her draft design on a lazy afternoon. With inspirations and ideas flowing through her mind, she added some modifications to Elliot's necklace to make it look thicker so that it would accentuate her waist's manliness. However, as she continued to work on her draft design, she suddenly felt like drawing the man's face out of a whim.

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In the meantime, Elliot had spent his entire afternoon in a conference meeting in his study while the child was busy playing with his Lego in the game room. Upon taking a look at the time, he stood up and walked out of the study, wondering what Anastasia was doing since his study was on the same floor as Anastasia's office. Therefore, he decided to find out and walked toward her office.

Meanwhile, Elliot's portrait came to life on the piece of paper, thanks to Anastasia's skillful drawing. Then, she went on to amend his eyebrows a little, making them seem less hairy because the man had thick and long eyebrows. Now, his eyes look perfect. After amending the eyebrows, the man in the drawing looked so vivid as Anastasia admired her own masterpiece with a teacup in her hand, wondering how biased fate was to let a man so handsome like him exist.

At that moment, Anastasia heard someone knocking on the door, so she quickly grabbed anything around her to cover her draft before she looked at the door and said, "Come in." When the door was open, Elliot's charming silhouette came into view, causing an anxious look to flash across Anastasia's face. Nonetheless, she stood up and asked, "What's the matter?"

"Is my necklace design ready?" Elliot asked, leaning closer to the lady's desk.

Anastasia passed the draft she had just completed to the man. "Here you go. Take a look and see whether you like it."

Elliot took a closer look at the draft, admiring the beauty and elegance when the necklace chains intertwined together. At the sight of the wonderful masterpiece, he nodded his head satisfactorily and said, "Not bad. I like it."

Meanwhile, Elliot's portrait came to life on the piece of paper, thanks to Anastasia's skillful drawing. Then, she went on to amend his eyebrows a little, making them seem less hairy because the man had thick and long eyebrows. Now, his eyes look perfect. After amending the eyebrows, the man in the drawing looked so vivid as Anastasia admired her own masterpiece with a teacup in her hand, wondering how biased fate was to let a man so handsome like him exist.

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"Is there anything else that you think needs some changes?" Anastasia asked.

"Nope. This draft will do. Send it to Felicia right away and have it made." Elliot put down the draft and noticed a pile of other draft papers. "What else are you working on?"

“Um... N-Nothing,” she stuttered as she walked toward the window to open it and leave it ajar upon finishing her words. After all, she wanted to experience the chilly breeze grazing across her cheeks, but when she did that, she was greeted by a strong rush of wind that flew into the room. For that, the papers on her desk were scattered all over the place, except the one that was pinned down earlier.

“Ah!” Anastasia was overwhelmed by her panic and came over to pin the paper down, but the gust of wind carried the papers along with it and left them scattered all over the ground, which amused Elliot.

At that moment, he suddenly recognized that one of them was not a blank piece of paper that happened to billow in front of him, so he extended his arm to catch it. Meanwhile, she bent over to pick up the papers, desperately looking for the one that she didn’t want Elliot to see, but when she looked up once again, the paper she had been searching for was already in Elliot’s hand.

“No, you can’t see it! Give it back to me!” Anastasia charged at the man to snatch the paper away, but Elliot had raised his hand up high with the drawing in it to keep the paper out of her reach. Although he hadn’t been able to see what she drew, the lady’s desperation only made him even more curious to find out who she had just drawn.

In the meantime, Anastasia made a few futile attempts by jumping to reach her drawing, but to no avail. Soon, when Elliot looked up and set his eyes on the portrait, he finally understood why she wanted to snatch the paper from him because the person she was secretly drawing was—him.

Then, he passed the paper back to her. “You can have it back.”

“Don’t read too much into it. I-I was just being bored.” Anastasia held the draft paper in her hand, her cheeks blushing bashfully.

The man curled his lips upward happily. “Yeah, I’m aware of that. You think about me when you get bored.”

“No, that’s not true. I was just... practicing my drawing skills, and since you are handsome, your face makes a perfect choice for portraying. That’s how simple it is.” Anastasia was tongue-tied and stuttered as she spoke.

“Are you saying I look handsome to you?” Elliot folded his arms and leaned closer to the lady with his face to flaunt his good looks to her.

In the meantime, Anastasia agreed with the man because his handsome looks were not a secret at all.

“Nigel is handsome too, but why didn’t you draw him?” he asked with a smile, trying to make her admit he was important to her.

Since she was unable to talk her way out, she decided to admit it and said, “Yeah. Yeah, you’re right. I like drawing you. If you like it so much, you can have it.”

“I like it a lot, so I guess I’m going to keep it then! In fact, I’m going to hang it on the wall in my room.” Elliot finished his words and took the paper from her hands. “I’m going to keep it nicely as a token of appreciation for your... good faith.”

Than, ha passad tha papar back to har. "You can hava it back."

"Don't raad too much into it. I-I was just baing borad." Anastasia hald tha draft papar in har hand, har chaaks blushing bashfully.

Tha man curlad his lips upward happily. "Yaah, I'm awara of that. You think about ma whan you gat borad."

"No, that's not trua. I was just... practicing my drawing skills, and sinca you ara handsoma, your faca makas a parfact choica for portraying. That's how simpla it is." Anastasia was tongua-tiad and stuttarad as sha spoka.

"Ara you saying I look handsoma to you?" Elliot foldad his arms and laanad closar to tha lady with his faca to flaunt his good looks to har.

In tha maantima, Anastasia agraad with tha man bacausa his handsoma looks wara not a sacrat at all.

"Nigal is handsoma too, but why didn't you draw him?" ha askad with a smila, trying to maka har admit ha was important to har.

Sinca sha was unabla to talk har way out, sha dadidad to admit it and said, "Yaah. Yaah, you'ra right. I lika drawing you. If you lika it so much, you can hava it."

"I lika it a lot, so I guass I'm going to kaap it than! In fact, I'm going to hang it on tha wall in my room." Elliot finishad his words and took tha papar from har hands. "I'm going to kaap it nicaly as a token of appraciation for your... good faith."

Anastasia was rendered speechless upon hearing his request. After all, she was annoyed by the man's narcissism, even though she had already made it clear that she only drew him out of a whim.

"I'm going to check on Jared now." Feeling too embarrassed to stay with Elliot, Anastasia quickly pushed the door open and walked away. However, what she didn't know was that the man's eyes were still glued to the portrait at her desk for what seemed like an eternity with a pair of tender eyes on his face.

Since the next day was Saturday, Anastasia finished her dinner and supervised her son, who was doing his homework. At the same time, she couldn't help but wonder where she could rent her nightgown for the event tomorrow because most of her attire was casual and formal wear, which was why she didn't seem to have anything suitable to wear for the occasion. Also, she didn't ask her father whether Naomi would be attending that event with her daughter because she reckoned that was Francis' business.

Later that night, Elliot took over Anastasia's job and put Jared to sleep on her behalf by playing Rubik's Cube with him to tire him out. On the other hand, Anastasia was in her room, reading the text messages on her phone to kill time until she went to bed.

Despite the vast range of short videos that were available to watch on the internet, she couldn't help but feel empty on the inside. After all, she was occupied by her work and accompanied by her son during the day, but when the sun went down, she began to feel lonely.

Anastasia turned off her phone and let her mind wander, eventually returning to that man. She felt the men in the video earlier, who were showing off their bodies, lacked something, despite the fact that they added a lot of filters and effects to the video. Elliot is far superior.

Oh! Why did I think about him again? She closed her eyes, wanting to get the thought of him out of her head.

Their relationship was a mess to her. They kissed and moved in together, but they were just friends. Everything he said and did, including how close he got to her, felt surreal.

She lacked the courage to either push him away or get closer to him, fearing that everything he did was simply to repay her debt or to satisfy his sudden romantic interest in her. And there was one thing she had to face—he had slept with Hayley.

She sat down, frustrated, and began imagining images that caused her insomnia. As a result, she opened her door and went downstairs to get some drinks. Standing in front of the fridge downstairs, she stared at the items within, which were full of various types of drinks. Then, she took a can of beer from it.

Immediately, she opened the lid and began drinking, as if she was trying to suppress her frustration with alcohol. While drinking, she walked upstairs. This was her first time consuming so much beer. All she wanted was to sleep and get rid of all her jumbled thoughts.

Even though the beer was bitter, she felt better after half a can. But she had no idea that there was a figure in the dark behind the railings of the second-floor corridor. The image of her drinking had been entrenched in the back of his head. When she realized the beer was almost finished, she burped and went to the second-floor living room, where she threw the can into the trash can.

She thought she had perfectly kept her drinking under wraps, only to be shocked the moment she turned around. “W-Why are you here without making a sound? You are aware that people can be scared to death, correct?” She squinted grudgingly at the man approaching her with his arms crossed in front of him.

“You were drinking?” he asked.

She assumed he had just arrived and thus immediately denied it, saying, “No! I would never drink alcohol.”

“Is that so?” He approached her with a skeptical look on his face.

She immediately took a few steps back in response, for she knew she stank of alcohol now, and he’d definitely smell it if he got too close.

He, on the other hand, did not expose her lie but merely sat lazily on the sofa. Looking at her, he asked, “Is there anything troubling you? You can tell me.”

It was said that under the influence of alcohol, one became more courageous, and Anastasia certainly felt braver now. He had previously rejected any mention of his relationship with Hayley, but now, she had the urge to probe further on it.

Sha thought sha had parfactly kapt har drinking undar wraps, only to ba shockad tha momant sha turnad around. “W-Why ara you hara without making a sound? You ara awara that paopla can ba

scarad to daath, corraact?" Sha squintad grudgingly at tha man approachin har with his arms crossad in front of him.

"You wara drinking?" ha askad.

Sha assumad ha had just arrivad and thus immadiatally daniad it, saying, "No! I would navar drink alcohol."

"Is that so?" Ha approachad har with a skaptical look on his faca.

Sha immadiatally took a faw steps back in raspona, for sha knaw sha stank of alcohol now, and ha'd dafinitally small it if ha got too closa.

Ha, on tha othar hand, did not axposa har lia but maraly sat lazily on tha sofa. Looking at har, ha askad, "Is thara anything troublin you? You can tall ma."

It was said that undar tha influanca of alcohol, ona bacama mora couragaous, and Anastasia cartainly falt bravar now. Ha had praviusly rajactad any mantion of his ralationship with Haylay, but now, sha had tha urga to proba furthar on it.

"Really? Regardless of what I asked, you'll answer me seriously?" With her brows raised, she sat opposite him.

His eyes flashed with a tinge of shock when he heard that. She couldn't sleep because of me?

Generously, he nodded. "Fire away."

With that, she stared into his eyes and said straightforwardly, "Let's talk about your relationship with Hayley!"

Her words immediately tensed him up. "Why are we talking about this?" he asked, his gaze indicating reluctance.

"I'm just curious how she slept with you," she inquired, acting as if she were a bystander.

"Someone tricked me into it. It happened when I wasn't conscious." He furrowed his brows and said each and every word cautiously.

"Where did that happen? In a hotel?"

"The club," he answered.

That didn't surprise her. These locations were, after all, ideal for such a ridiculous incident.

"So, you've been trying to make amends to her for the past five years?" she continued.

"No. I merely found her this year." These were his truthful words.

But such words stunned her. "How did you find her?"

"Before I passed out that day, I gave her a watch. She sold the watch to a second-hand watch seller a few months ago, so I knew the woman that night was her." He told her everything, no holds barred.

Something occurred to Anastasia. Why is every man like this, only compensating after taking advantage?

She was reminded of the night she was taken advantage of. While she was crouching beside the sofa in agony, the b*stard did the same thing; he seemed to be removing his watch and handing it to her. At that moment, she was overwhelmed by rage and agony that she simply slapped his hand away and dashed out.

If she had the strength, she would definitely look for a knife on the room's fruit platter and kill him with it. Even if she couldn't kill him, she would at least ensure that he could no longer engage in sexual activities in the future and that he would have no heirs for the rest of his life.

But, after being violated, all she could think about was finding Hayley and making sure she was okay. Thus, it was such an irony to discover that Hayley was the source of all her pain.

Elliot noticed Anastasia's face becoming solemn, as if she was lost in her thoughts. He couldn't help but be concerned and inquired, "What are you thinking?"

"So she left you with a wonderful memory, right? It's been five years, and you are still looking for her," she said, attempting to be sarcastic.

He was stumped for words. She was right. In fact, he had been thinking about that night and the woman who cried before him for the past five years.

But he hadn't thought about that night since he found Hayley. Even if he did, he couldn't connect what happened that night to Hayley because she gave him a completely different vibe than the one he remembered.

"Are you bothered by what happened between Hayley and me?" As if he was afraid of something, his voice was tense.

To that, she fluttered her long hair, revealing her cheerful face, and smiled. "Of course I'm not!"

Why should she be bothered by that? She merely wanted to know the truth.

"Anastasia, I can't change the past. Don't be concerned about my past; we have a future together." His brows furrowed, and his gaze tensed under the light. He was obviously nervous at the moment.

"That's true; there are things that just can't be changed. It's late now. Rest earlier, President Presgrave." She had experienced the same thing in the past. So, she was well aware that time couldn't be reversed, and she could only accept what had happened.

With that, she rose to her feet and made her way to her room. But the man sitting on the sofa blocked her with his leg, and his broad palms pressed against her shoulders before turning her around to face him.

She stumbled into his embrace, dizzy from the alcohol she had just consumed. But she felt compelled to push him away. "Don't do this, Elliott!"

"It is bothering you. Isn't it just that you don't want to admit it?" His gaze was fixed on her, making it impossible for her to flee.

She was startled by this. Pushing him, she said, "Let me go, Elliot. Stop acting unreasonably."

"Ara you botharad by what happenad batwaan Haylay and ma?" As if ha was afraid of somathing, his voica was tansa.

To that, sha fluttarad har long hair, ravaaling har chaarful faca, and smilad. "Of coursa I'm not!"

Why should sha ba botharad by that? Sha maraly wantad to know tha truth.

"Anastasia, I can't changa tha past. Don't ba concarnad about my past; wa hava a futura togathar." His brows furrowad, and his gaza tansad undar tha light. Ha was obviously narvous at tha momant.

"That's trua; thara ara things that just can't ba changad. It's lata now. Rast aarliar, Prasidant Prasgrava." Sha had axpariancad tha sama thing in tha past. So, sha was wall awara that tima couldn't ba ravarsad, and sha could only accapt what had happenad.

With that, sha rosa to har faat and mada har way to har room. But tha man sitting on tha sofa blockad har with his lag, and his broad palms prassad against har shouldars bafora turning har around to faca him.

Sha stumblad into his ambraca, dizzy from tha alcohol sha had just consumad. But sha falt compallad to push him away. "Don't do this, Elliott!"

"It is botharing you. Isn't it just that you don't want to admit it?" His gaza was fixad on har, making it impossibla for har to flaa.

Sha was startlad by this. Pushing him, sha said, "Lat ma go, Elliot. Stop acting unraasonably."

"Is it me who is being unreasonable, or is it you who is unwilling to face your true feelings? You obviously like me, but you refuse to admit it." He wanted to expose her true thoughts in order to force her to face her true feelings.

But she, too, was no longer a young and naive girl, knowing full well that she could only face what could not be avoided calmly.

Raising her head and looking at him with her clear eyes. "President Presgrave, I'm the one who knows better whether or not I like you. If you want to know the truth..."

"Stop giving me this." He heartlessly stopped her because he knew that her so-called truth was nothing more than a lie.

But she insisted on going on. "President Presgrave, you had the wrong impression. I'm not sure what I did to make you feel that way, but you must have misunderstood something. You have such a high position, and you're also my boss. You have my gratitude and admiration for all that you have done for me, but they are not love. Please do not confuse them."

Elliot was enraged by this. This woman was clearly lying through her teeth, and she even said it so boldly and confidently!

His body stiffened. He was now like a trapped beast, almost insane from suppressing all of his emotions, in desperate need of venting everything he was feeling.

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Elliot found his way to vent upon seeing Anastasia's red lips. With his large palm pressing against her head and his other hand clutching her waist, he sealed her red lips with his. Her delicate lips were enraging him and driving him insane.

She deserves to be punished.

She had consumed alcohol earlier, and her mind was already foggy. She felt even weaker in the face of his actions. His kisses were always commanding, with no room for defiance, especially tonight's.

He was like a wild beast waiting to devour her alive. Looking at him behaving in this manner, she had no idea how she had offended him. This kiss lasted until a stray bird flew across the window, as they both assumed her son had awoken.

Grabbing the opportunity, she immediately pushed him hard and covered her swollen lips. "If you keep on behaving so rudely, I'll move out tomorrow."

Though he hadn't had enough, he replied, "Okay. No more kissing."

Immediately, she returned to her room, her brain appearing to be depleted of oxygen. She fell asleep within seconds, convinced that she would never mess with him again.

The next day, when Anastasia awoke around eight o'clock in the morning, Elliot's house was already crowded with people. They were all from the Global Haute Couture Customization Company, which sent ten mini tuxedos and ten evening gowns for Jared and her to choose from.

Oh, woah! This is unexpected. She had assumed she would have to rent an evening gown on her own, but Elliot had now arranged for door-to-door service.

"Miss Tillman, these are all for you to choose. If none of them is to your liking, we'll replace them with a whole new set. They are all from our headquarters, and I can assure you that they're one of a kind. With them, you'd never have to deal with the awkward situation of bumping into someone wearing the same gown as you."

Looking at the gowns, she realized that each one was beautiful enough to entice everyone at the banquet. A silver-gray gown with gray sequins on the upper part and a gauze skirt for the rest drew her attention. Because of the off-shoulder design, it appeared elegant and sexy but not overly revealing.

"Let me try this." She pointed at the gown she saw.

She went back to her room to try it on, and because it fit her well, she decided to wear it to the banquet. She then started looking for a suit for her son. The moment he put on the suit she chose, she was startled by how similar Jared looked to Elliot.

He is just a mini version of Elliot! Will someone mistake Jared as Elliot's son tonight? She was worried because she would not know whether to laugh or cry if such a thing happened.

Thinking about this, she realized she hadn't seen Elliot all morning and had no idea what he was up to. Thus, she told her son, "Jared, go play alone for a while."

Jared immediately heeded to his playing room. Meanwhile, she went up to the third floor to look for Elliot. She was on the third floor when she heard a voice resonating from the study room and decided to go in. As she stood by the door, she saw a man talking on the phone on the balcony.

“Miss Tillman, thasa ara all for you to choosa. If nona of tham is to your liking, wa’ll raplaca tham with a whola naw sat. Thay ara all from our haadquartars, and I can assura you that thay’ra ona of a kind. With tham, you’d navar hava to daal with tha awkward situation of bumping into somaona waaring tha sama gown as you.”

Looking at tha gowns, sha raalizad that aach ona was baautiful enough to antica avaryona at tha banquat. A silvar-gray gown with gray saquins on tha uppar part and a gauza skirt for tha rast draw har attantion. Bacausa of tha off-shouldar dasign, it appaared alagant and saxy but not ovarly ravaaling.

“Lat ma try this.” Sha pointad at tha gown sha saw.

Sha want back to har room to try it on, and bacausa it fit har wall, sha dacidad to waar it to tha banquat. Sha than startad looking for a suit for har son. Tha momant ha put on tha suit sha chosa, sha was startlad by how similar Jarad lookad to Elliot.

Ha is just a mini version of Elliot! Will somaona mistaka Jarad as Elliot’s son tonight? Sha was worriad bacausa sha would not know whathar to laugh or cry if such a thing happenad.

Thinking about this, sha raalizad sha hadn’t saan Elliot all morning and had no idaa what ha was up to. Thus, sha told har son, “Jarad, go play alona for a whila.”

Jarad immadiataly haadad to his playing room. Maanwhila, sha want up to tha third floor to look for Elliot. Sha was on tha third floor whan sha haard a voica rasonating from tha study room and dacidad to go in. As sha stood by tha door, sha saw a man talking on tha phona on tha balcony.

Seeing that, she tactfully turned around to avoid disturbing him. Just when she was about to leave, she heard his shouting from the balcony. “Ask him to leave! If he dares to attend my grandmother’s birthday party, I’ll make him vanish from this world.”

That made her heart pound anxiously, and she turned around to see the man standing on the balcony with his back facing her. He was gripping the rails and clutching the phone tightly, as if someone had enraged him. This was his rare angry side, and she happened to catch it.

Who made him angry so early in the morning?

“This is my last warning. If he refuses to take my warning seriously, don’t blame me for being ruthless.” He dropped such words to the person on the other end of the call. His phone was still tightly gripped in his hand, and with his head lowered, his figure from behind appeared depressed.

Such a scene made her chest tighten, and she felt compelled to comfort him even before she realized why. But she had no idea whether she had the right to do so. This man had always appeared domineering before her, and he might not want her to see his weaker side.

Just when she was hesitating, the man on the balcony turned around suddenly, and their eyes met.

Elliot's brows were furrowed, and his gaze was terrifyingly cold, as if it were covered with a layer of ice. Seeing that, Anastasia froze, and even her legs felt weak. Leaving or not was the million-dollar question on her mind right now while she stood awkwardly with her body stiff.

But he was already approaching her. His rage seemed to subside, and his gaze shifted to a bright and warm one.

"Did I scare you?" He took a deep breath and looked at her.

"Who made you this furious?" she asked curiously.

"Someone insignificant." He shook his head, clearly unwilling to elaborate further. But how could someone insignificant enrage him?

It must be someone important to him!

Looking embarrassingly at his leaving figure, she said, "Thank you for preparing the gown and suit for me and Jared."

"You've done choosing them?" he turned and asked her while walking down the stairs.

And suddenly, for some unknown reason, she slipped on the flat and smooth ground.

"Ah!" She tried to hang on to the railing, but his arms reached out and drew her into his embrace. "Be careful. Probably the water stains from the morning are still there."

At this moment, she realized that her arms were also firmly wrapped around his sturdy waist. She hurriedly let go of her hands, but his large palm immediately grabbed hers and led her downstairs.

This made her feel as if she were a child who couldn't even walk properly to him.

He led her all the way to the second floor until the servant walked up when she immediately broke her hand from his. "We can go to the banquet venue earlier to have some fun."

"Sure." She nodded. "You better work on whatever you need to do first."

"Hayley will be there too. If you do not want to see her, I can arrange a private room for you and Jared," he said out of the blue. While he was speaking, his gaze was fixed on her.

Her eyes twitched slightly. In fact, she wasn't surprised at all. She knew exactly what Hayley was thinking, and that woman wouldn't miss such an occasion.

"That's not necessary." She wasn't resentful about it, but when she turned around, her action was so candid that she appeared to be jealous.

Meanwhile, Hayley was looking through the album in a high-end gown shop in the city to find the perfect gown. Every gown in the collection was handcrafted and customized. Finally, she found the one that she preferred. Looking at the price, which was around three million and two hundred thousand, she intentionally said in a nonchalant way, "I'll take this."

After she changed into the gown, she looked at herself in the mirror. The gown was stunning, and her body was in good shape as well, but she wasn't satisfied with her face.

She had a mean appearance, and her face was not feminine enough, in contrast to Anastasia, who had a pure appearance and an oval face. Hayley had always considered getting plastic surgery, and at this instant, she made up her mind to do so. After the banquet tonight, she needed to do something to her face.

Ha lad har all tha way to tha sacond floor until tha sarvant walkad up whan sha immadiataly broka har hand from his. "Wa can go to tha banquat vanua aarliar to hava soma fun."

"Sura." Sha noddad. "You battar work on whatavar you naad to do first."

"Haylay will ba thara too. If you do not want to saa har, I can arranga a privata room for you and Jarad," ha said out of tha blua. Whila ha was spaaking, his gaza was fixad on har.

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Why could Anastasia have Elliot's attention? It must be because she was beautiful enough to captivate him.

Anastasia and Jared arrived at the banquet venue around three o'clock in the afternoon, well ahead of the scheduled start time. The venue was a hidden luxury villa in the city, complete with its own artificial pool and a breathtaking view of the vast gardens. The villa only accepted VIP guests and had a top-notch security system, making it the ideal place for the wealthy to hold events or work. The total amount spent here each year was in the tens of millions.

And such an exceptional location had been reserved and had stopped accepting guests a week ago to host Old Madam Presgrave's grand birthday banquet. When they arrived, all of the guests had not yet arrived. It remained a quiet and serene place for Anastasia and Jared to walk around since they had not changed into their gown and suit.

Elliot immediately went to handle matters concerning the birthday banquet, leaving only the two of them free to roam the villa. Every structure was custom built and had its own unique feature.

“Stand there, Jared. I’ll take a photo of you. Come on!” Just like all the mothers who were proud of their children, she was busy taking photos of her son with the phone in her hand.

Chapter 278

Jared became Anastasia’s young model, posing for her with his bright smile that revealed eight of his teeth. He was extremely adorable. Anastasia was busy taking photos and videos at the same time, documenting her son’s growth. She intended to record all his growth process to play in his wedding ceremony one day. It would undoubtedly be a touching moment.

She felt sentimental thinking about Jared, who had been a babbling baby in the past, and was now a toddler jumping around. Time had flown by without her noticing, and her son had grown up. Even up until now, the only thing she wanted to do in life was to accompany Jared on his journey of growing up.

When she saw Jared running away, she immediately got up and chased after him. Not far away from them, there was a man sitting on the second floor of the villa, having his tea, with his gaze full of happiness when he saw both of them running around.

They played for a few hours before returning to the hotel at five o’clock in the evening. There was a villa prepared for them, and when they arrived, the makeup artists were already there, preparing their clothes and makeup for tonight.

Around five o’clock, all of the guests arrived one by one. Harriet was also present. Despite her age, she appeared lively. She was already a heroine who could face anything head-on when she was younger, and even as she grew older, she maintained her vigor.

“Is Anastasia and her child here?” Harriet looked at her eldest grandson beside her.

“Yes. They are resting in the hotel.” He nodded.

“I leave everything here to you. I’ll check them out now.” After her words, she left with her caretaker, Anna.

Meanwhile, Anastasia was standing on the balcony. All the makeup artists had left. Jared was sitting on the sofa on the balcony, playing his Rubik’s Cube, and Anastasia was accompanying him while admiring the scenery.

At this moment, the doorbell rang. She was stunned for a while before trotting to the door and opening it. Seeing the gray-haired old woman standing before her, she immediately invited her in. “Old Madam Presgrave, you’re here.”

“Elliot is busy, so I’m here to chat with you both,” Harriet smilingly replied.

With Anastasia’s assistance, Harriet entered the living room and took a seat on the sofa. Just when she was wondering where Jared was, he walked in from the balcony. The instant she saw him, her eyes widened, and she thought that her presbyopia had worsened.

Why did this child who just came in look exactly like Elliot when he was a kid?

She almost thought she had traveled back in time to when Elliot was a child, and he would be calling her ‘Grandma’ the next second.

Anna, who was standing beside her, was surprised too. "This child looks exactly like Young Master Elliot when he was still a young child!" "Is Anastasia and her child her?" Harriet looked at her eldest grandson beside her.

"Yes. They are resting in the hotel." He nodded.

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To that, Anastasia laughed awkwardly. "Jared, come here."

Jared put down his Rubik's cube and obediently walked to her. While walking, his bright eyes were staring curiously at the old woman sitting on the sofa.

Harriet's eyes were filled with surprise too. She looked at him, and suddenly, tears welled up in her eyes. Though Jared was not a descendant of the Presgrave family, she felt a connection with him the moment she saw him.

"Jared, right? Can you address me as Great-Grandma?" She treated him as her great-grandson.

"Hello, Great-Grandma. I am Jared, and I'm four this year," Jared politely greeted her with his bright voice.

After his words, Harriet turned to Anna and said agitatedly, "They look alike, right? I think they look absolutely similar!"

"Yes, he looked just like Young Master Elliot!" Anna nodded.

Harriet then returned her gaze to Jared, wishing he could be the Presgrave Family's child. Even if he wasn't, she hoped Anastasia could marry Elliot and bring Jared along to become a Presgrave.

"You're a wonderful mother, Anastasia. Look at how well he has grown. So adorable," Harriet praised. But immediately following her words, Anna handed her the phone. "Your call, Madam Presgrave."

She then picked it up. "Hello?"

"What? Why did he come back?"

Chapter 279

"For my birthday? When did I invite him? I don't want to see him here. Chase him away." Harriet's expression was solemn. "If you can't, ask Elliot to handle him."

After her words, she ended the call and sighed. "Some things could never be forgiven."

"It appears that the Second Master has not yet given up, Old Madam Presgrave."

"Well, the Presgrave Family has nothing to do with him, whether he gives up or not." She then smiled gently and said to Jared, who was standing next to her. "Jared, I hope I didn't scare you. Someone I dislike called, which is why I was so stern."

"Get him some fruits he likes." She then instructed Anna before returning her attention to Anastasia and saying, "Have a seat, Anastasia. Let's have a chat."

The moment she sat down, Harriet candidly asked, without taking her as an outsider. "Do you know who the person that I said I hate was?"

Anastasia's head shook. "I'm unfamiliar with the Presgraves." She assumed Elliot's rage this morning was also because of the same person.

"He is Riley Presgrave, my husband's illegitimate son who's supposed to be Elliot's uncle. He had previously secretly sold off the company shares, which I eventually discovered. My son and daughter-in-law went abroad to handle this matter, and the helicopter they took crashed, killing them both." Harriet calmly revealed this tragic past. However unacceptable this incident was to her, twenty years had passed.

Hearing that, Anastasia was shocked. This was why Elliot had lost his parents when he was young? The call this morning... It must be related to this person too! Otherwise, he wouldn't be that furious.

"Elliot hates him. Though he was part of the Presgrave Family, all of us had chased him abroad more than twenty years ago. I know he has returned now, hoping to gain some advantage from me since it's my birthday. Well, I never want to see him for the rest of my life!" Harriet's eyes were filled with hatred as she spoke.

"Don't be angry, Old Madam Presgrave. Elliot will stop him," Anastasia comforted her by saying.

"Anastasia, Elliot is the main pillar of our Presgrave Family now. I've aged, but he's still unmarried. I really fear that I may not make it to his wedding." Harriet heaved a sigh as she looked at Anastasia.

That made Anastasia's chest tighten, and she immediately lowered her head. She knew fully well what Harriet was implying.

"You're the only one I'd like to have as a granddaughter-in-law. None of the others satisfy me. Just like Hayley, I don't like her. She seemed to be scheming." Harriet treated Anastasia as if she were her own family, telling her everything.

However, Anastasia felt pressed because the thought of marrying Elliot had never occurred to her!

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"You're the best for him," Harriet continued.

Anastasia was stumped for words. Of course, she wasn't the best choice for him. She, too, had many flaws; it was just that she didn't show them.

"I'm aware of what happened between Elliot and Hayley previously. Elliot was duped; he did not mean it. He was still young and inexperienced five years ago. Please forgive him!" Harriet tried to speak on behalf of Elliot.

Unsure of what to say, Anastasia could only purse her lips and maintain her smile.

"Isn't it fate that Jared looks exactly like Elliot? They are truly two peas in a pod. I almost thought I'd gone back in time to when Elliot was still a child!" Harriet continued lovingly.

Anastasia had no idea why Jared and Elliot resembled each other, but she knew Jared's biological father was just a random man in the club who sold his body for money.

"Do consider Elliot, Anastasia. I can assure you that he's a nice person. Apart from the wrong he did to Hayley, he had no other flaws." Earnestly, Harriet said to Anastasia, as if no other woman would marry him.

But Harriet's words stirred up mixed emotions in Anastasia's heart and made her feel pressed. She did not want to be compelled to date anyone. Even if Elliot was the ideal man thousands of women dreamed of, she hoped she could get along with him in her own way.

Chapter 280

Meanwhile, Francis was on his way to the villa with his wife and daughter. Naomi and Erica were overjoyed because this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them to attend such a grand banquet.

Hayley, on the other hand, drove herself to the villa. She wasn't afraid to tell Erica what she had now because she had revealed all of her cards to her. Erica was a money-minded person as well, and she could simply use the money to pull her over. She had to get Erica to her side to deal with Anastasia. At the same time, Erica could also cover up for other things.

Anastasia's phone rang just at the right moment. She took a glance at it and said, "Old Madam Presgrave, my father is probably here."

"Answer the phone." Harriet nodded.

With that, Anastasia walked to the balcony to answer the call while Harriet extended her hand to Jared. "Come here, Jared. Let me take a good look at you."

Jared felt drawn to the gray-haired old lady as well, though he didn't know why. He had no idea that this was due to their blood ties, as Jared was indeed a member of the Presgrave Family. Obediently, he came over to Harriet, and she scanned him from head to toes. With him before her, she felt shocked and amazed at the same time.

Why does he look so similar to Elliot? Is this fate?

In the meantime, Anastasia answered her father's call.

"Anastasia, I've reached Old Madam Presgrave's birthday banquet, along with Naomi and Erica. Are you here as well?" Francis asked excitedly.

"Yes, I'm here."

"Where are you? Since the banquet hasn't started yet, we'll look for you first. I want to see Jared as well." Francis was uneasy in the villa as he did not know the Presgrave Family well, and there was no one else he was familiar with.

"Sure! I'm resting at villa number ten. Come here!" she replied.

After hanging up the call, she walked over to Harriet and said, "My father and the others will come over for a while, Old Madam Presgrave."

"Sure. I can meet with your father as well." Harriet nodded, after which she then looked at Anastasia lovingly and asked, "Did your stepmother treat you well?"

To this, Anastasia went against her conscience and nodded, not wanting to worry Harriet. "I'm not staying with her, and for the time being, we get along fine."

After a few minutes, Francis and his family alighted from the guest coach. When Erica saw Anastasia's villa, she was filled with jealousy. Anastasia's life after being with Elliot was really beyond Erica's reach.

They then made their way to the lobby. Francis was surprised to see an elegant and solemn-looking old woman sitting on the sofa the moment they stepped inside. Naomi was also taken aback. Is this the noble madam of the Presgrave Family?

"Hello, Mr. Tillman. Have a seat."

"Old Madam Presgrave, you're here too. It's been a while." Francis was a businessman, to begin with, and he had in his nature to defer to wealth. Despite his ex-wife being sacrificed because of the Presgraves, he remained polite to them in light of their wealthy and influential background.

"Yas, I'm hara."

"Whara ara you? Sinca tha banquat hasn't startad yat, wa'll look for you first. I want to saa Jarad as wall." Francis was unaasy in tha villa as ha did not know tha Prasgrava Family wall, and thara was no ona alsa ha was familiar with.

"Sura! I'm rasting at villa numbar tan. Coma hara!" sha rapliad.

Aftar hanging up tha call, sha walkad ovar to Harriat and said, "My fathar and tha othars will coma ovar for a whila, Old Madam Prasgrava."

"Sura. I can maat with your fathar as wall." Harriat noddad, aftar which sha than lookad at Anastasia lovingly and askad, "Did your stapmothar traat you wall?"

To this, Anastasia want against har conscianca and noddad, not wanting to worry Harriat. "I'm not staying with har, and for tha tima baing, wa gat along fina."

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Thay than mada thair way to tha lobby. Francis was surprisad to saa an alagant and solamn-looking old woman sitting on tha sofa tha momant thay stappad insida. Naomi was also takan aback. Is this tha nobla madam of tha Prasgrava Family?

"Hallo, Mr. Tillman. Hava a saat."

"Old Madam Prasgrava, you'ra hara too. It's baan a whila." Francis was a businassman, to bagin with, and ha had in his natura to dafar to waalth. Daspita his ax-wifa baing sacrificad bacausa of tha Prasgravas, ha ramainad polita to tham in light of thair waalthy and influantial background.

"Mr. Tillman, so many years had passed before we realized it. Time really flies!" Harriet bemoaned.

"That's true! I haven't seen you in over ten years." His demeanor was as if he were her junior, being very polite to her.

"Good day, Old Madam Presgrave. I am Naomi, Francis' second wife. This is my daughter, Erica." After her words, Naomi quickly made eye contact with Erica and said, "Erica, greet Old Madam Presgrave."

Erica immediately greeted me in a sweet voice. "Hello, Old Madam Presgrave. I am Erica."

“Nice to meet you all.” Harriet smilingly nodded.

“You look young, Old Madam Presgrave!” Naomi took the opportunity to praise her.

“Well, I’m getting old!” Harriet waved her hands with a smile on her face. At this point, Anna approached her and said, “Madam, you need to welcome the guests now.”

“That’s right. I’m leaving for the main banquet hall first. Have a great time here, and do come over earlier,” Harriet said to the Tillmans.

“Sure. Let me send you off.” Francis stood up, and Naomi immediately followed. Before she left, Harriet turned around and looked at Jared. “I’ll see you later, Jared.”