

Too Far 281

Chapter 281

"Okay, Great-Grandma." Jared obediently nodded his head.

Seeing that Francis was sending Harriet off, Anastasia pulled Jared to her. "Jared, return to your room first. I'll call you later."

"Okay." After he ended his words, his bright eyes looked toward Erica. Seeing that, Erica guiltily lowered her head to look at her phone.

After Jared went upstairs, Francis and Naomi returned. "Where's Jared?" Francis asked.

"He went upstairs to play."

"Your gown looks stunning, Anastasia!" Naomi immediately said, as if she was trying to please Anastasia.

Anastasia, on the other hand, only gave her an indifferent reply. "Thanks."

"Naomi and Erica rarely join such an occasion, Anastasia. Do take good care of them later." It was Francis' hope that the entire family could get along well.

"I don't need that. Hayley will be here too; she'll keep me company." Erica spoke arrogantly before picking up the phone to call Hayley.

"I'm going to see Jared." Francis missed his grandson, and he walked upstairs right after his words.

Naomi's eyes welled up with resentment when she saw this. She wouldn't have known Francis' true intentions if she hadn't eavesdropped on him in the hospital; he had already taken Jared as his heir to the company.

"Hello, Hayley, are you here?"

"Oh, you're here! That's great. I'll go over," Erica said eagerly.

With that, she immediately took her handbag and said, "Mom, Hayley is here. I'm going to look for her now."

She left immediately after speaking. Anastasia did not want to be in the same room with Erica, so she went to the balcony with her phone. Naomi, on the other hand, sat on the sofa, munching on a handful of pistachios and contemplating her plans for the evening. First and foremost, she desired to gain Harriet's favor. Next, she hoped to find a good catch for her daughter at the banquet tonight, and last but not least, she would seize any advantage that came her way.

It was six o'clock when all the guests gathered in the main hall. Ten minutes later, Anastasia received a call from Elliot.

"Dinner is beginning soon, Anastasia. Ask your family to come over."

"Okay," she replied.

"I might get busier tonight and won't be able to care for Jared and you. You must both take care of yourselves."

"I know that. Don't worry about us." She did not intend for him to look after them too.

Ten minutes later, Francis, holding Jared, together with Naomi and Anastasia, reached the main hall. That night, the banquet was divided into three different periods: six-thirty to eight for dinner, eight to nine for all guests to offer their birthday congratulations to Harriet, and nine to ten for the guests' free time to walk around and enjoy the fireworks show.

As everyone invited to the banquet was Presgrave Group's close affiliates and Harriet's close friends, the number of guests was limited to around one hundred. Though it wasn't a lot, the entire banquet appeared grand and luxurious.

She left immediately after speaking. Anastasia did not want to be in the same room with Erica, so she went to the balcony with her phone. Naomi, on the other hand, sat on the sofa, munching on a handful of pistachios and contemplating her plans for the evening. First and foremost, she desired to gain Harriet's favor. Next, she hoped to find a good catch for her daughter at the banquet tonight, and last but not least, she would seize any advantage that came her way.

It was six o'clock when all the guests gathered in the main hall. Ten minutes later, Anastasia received a call from Elliot.

"Dinner is beginning soon, Anastasia. Ask your family to come over."

"Okay," she replied.

"I might get busier tonight and won't be able to care for Jared and you. You must both take care of yourselves."

"I know that. Don't worry about us." She did not intend for him to look after them too.

Ten minutes later, Francis, holding Jared, together with Naomi and Anastasia, reached the main hall. That night, the banquet was divided into three different periods: six-thirty to eight for dinner, eight to nine for all guests to offer their birthday congratulations to Harriet, and nine to ten for the guests' free time to walk around and enjoy the fireworks show.

As everyone invited to the banquet was Presgrave Group's close affiliates and Harriet's close friends, the number of guests was limited to around one hundred. Though it wasn't a lot, the entire banquet appeared grand and luxurious.

Anastasia noticed Hayley, dressed to the nines, standing beside the fountain with Erica. They looked at each other, as if they were on opposing sides fighting each other. Anastasia's hatred for them was burning in her heart.

Despite being the ones who committed wrongs, Hayley and Erica showed no remorse. Instead, they stood haughtily.

When Anastasia entered the main hall, all of the seats had names written on a gold plate. When she realized she hadn't been assigned a seat with Francis, she approached an usher. "I'll bring you to your seat, Miss Tillman," the usher said.

Surprised, she followed the usher to the main area, where her name was written on one of the seats on the side. Elliot's name was next to hers. Her heart pounded fast when she saw that. Jared's seat was beside hers, and Nigel was the next. Clearly, Elliot had arranged for this.

But Anastasia did not want to be this high-profiled. There were many noble and reputable guests tonight, and it wasn't appropriate for her to sit here.

She, therefore, called the manager over and informed him of her intention to move to the table where her father was seated. Hearing that her family was at the other table, the manager immediately arranged for her seat to be changed.

With that, she sat together with Francis, with Jared between them. Naomi was on the other side of Francis, whereas Erica wasn't there at all. She had gone to sit with Hayley.

Chapter 282

While sitting quietly in her seat, Anastasia raised her head and noticed a group of guests entering and speaking quietly to the man in front of them. Clearly, that man was Elliot. He looked elegant and charming in a black suit, and his demeanor was a polite one too.

Tonight, he appeared less dominant but more modest and sophisticated. No matter which side of him he revealed, the charm he exuded did not diminish. Her gaze was fixed on him as she was thinking, and as if he felt that, his deep eyes looked at her across all the guests. He furrowed his brows in displeasure when he noticed she had switched seats.

When their eyes met, her heart raced inexplicably. She was unsure what to do at that instant, and she reflexively took her teacup, pretending to be drinking tea.

Hayley, on the other side of the hall, took everything in. When Elliot walked in, her gaze was already fixed on him. As a result, she witnessed everything, including how he welcomed the guests and he flirted with Anastasia.

At the same time, a posh black car came to a halt beside the fountain outside the main hall. A slender leg stepped down as the door opened, followed by a lady dressed in a silver evening gown. The lights highlighted this twenty-five-year-old lady's flawless makeup as well as her bright eyes.

She swayed her waist as she approached an elderly man who had gotten out of the car on the other side and grabbed his elbow. "Let's go in."

The old man gave her his intricate gaze and let her hold his arms as he walked up the stairs. Elliot, who had learned of his arrival, was already waiting for him at the main door.

"Hello, Lucas. I'm glad you've arrived. Please come in!" Elliot greeted the elderly gentleman politely. He was one of Elliot's father's few close friends when he was alive.

"Hello, Elliot! It's been some time since I last saw you!" Lucas gave Elliot a pat on his shoulder. At this moment, a young lady's sweet voice was heard saying, "Dad, do introduce me as well."

Lucas' smile stiffened slightly as he heard that, but he quickly responded, "Elliot, this is my daughter, Aliona."

That took Elliot aback. Although he knew that Lucas had a son, this was his first time hearing Lucas had a daughter.

"Hello, Miss Dora."

"Hi, Young Master Elliot. I'm Aliona," Aliona smilingly replied.

"Aliona, you may enter first. I'll have a few words with Elliot," Lucas faced Aliona and said.

"Sure, Dad," she replied with a smile on her face.

Lucas couldn't help but take Elliot's hand in his with an intricate expression. "Elliot, Aliona is my illegitimate child whom I have just acknowledged. Please look after her in the future."

Elliot understood Lucas' words and nodded. "I will."

As almost all the guests had arrived, dinner was served. Anastasia saw that Elliot was back in his seat, and Nigel was there as well. He even came over and said hello to her earlier. All of the dishes for tonight were already on the table. Every one of them had its own auspicious meaning. The ingredients were also fresh, appetizing, and enjoyable for everyone.

Anastasia was feeding Jared with Francis' assistance, while Erica kept looking at Elliot, as if she was hoping for something.

Hayley saw this too, and she silently mocked Erica in her heart. Is she eyeing Elliot as well?

While Anastasia was busy having her dinner, a man's deep voice suddenly resonated behind her. "Mr. Tillman, let me drink a toast to you."

She didn't turn her head, but she knew exactly who was behind her. Furthermore, his large palm rested on her back, eerily stroking her and exuding a warmth that made her heart race.

But everyone at the table did not notice that, as they were busy responding to Elliot's toast. Anastasia had to stand up with the others as well, but the palm on her back remained. She was too shy to even look at him.

"Hello ladies and gentlemen, please excuse my bad hospitality," he said modestly in his deep and husky voice.

"Not at all."

Everyone at this table was the elders of the Presgrave Family's relatives. Facing this current young pillar of the family, they were filled with courtesy and respect.

Chapter 283

At the same time, Elliot's hand, which was placed on Anastasia's back, moved to Anastasia's shoulder and he softly whispered in her ear, "Take good care of them on my behalf, Anastasia."

Her face immediately flushed red. His words had another meaning: he did not see her as a guest but as a member of his family.

"Mr. Presgrave, you look handsome tonight!" Jared praised him.

"The same goes for you." Elliot leaned down and rubbed Jared's head with his big palm. "I'll play with you later."

"Okay!" Jared nodded considerably.

Then, Elliot moved to the other tables. Anastasia only looked at him when he left and she noticed Rey was actually following Elliot around. Though Elliot had Rey with him, it was clear that he was the only pillar of the Presgrave Family. Thinking of this, she suddenly sensed his loneliness in the midst of the bustling atmosphere.

Her heart ached for him when she realized he was the only one supporting the Presgrave Group. Outsiders only saw his glamorous side, but who could understand how much effort he had exercised and how lonely he was?

Even the food tasted bitter to her now. When she looked at him again, she noticed that he was still dominant despite being alone, as if he had the world behind him.

Meanwhile, Elliot had arrived at Hayley's table. Since everyone at this table was the Presgrave Family's younger generation, he toasted them patronizingly and left after a few unimportant greetings. Hayley didn't even get a chance to brag about how close she was to him.

"Hayley, since you're so close to the Presgrave Family, are you familiar with Elliot then?" Erica asked curiously.

"Everything I have now was given by him. What do you think?" Hayley boastfully answered.

"What? Are you that close to him? Then..." Erica was tongue-tied upon hearing that as envy and jealousy began to fill her heart.

"I'll tell you more about it later." Hayley did not want to explain further at the dining table, but Erica remained shocked and envious of Hayley's words. What is she keeping from me? Is she hiding something?

Hayley wasn't afraid of telling Erica about her relationship with Elliot too since Erica would never have the chance to be in contact with Elliot. Besides, Erica was a simpleton; Hayley could easily come up with something to fool her.

All of the guests had finished their dinner by 8.00PM and it was time to head to the birthday celebration hall to extend their birthday greetings. Nigel came over to take Jared away and Anastasia followed Francis out of the dining hall.

The birthday celebration hall already had lively music playing with lights flashing while all the guests were talking cheerfully. Overall, it was a joyous scene. The elders, who were close relatives of the Presgrave Family, were the first to wish Harriet. While they were doing so, Anastasia had the sudden urge to take a walk outside to relieve her mind.

"Dad, you all should head over first. I'll be there later."

Then, Anastasia chose a less busy road and walked down it. That night, the sky was breathtaking. After being used to the hustle and bustle of the city, it felt great to be there in this vast and spacious villa for a while.

The hustling sound behind her gradually faded. She was surprised to see a firefly by the lake after only a few minutes of walking. She hadn't seen one in more than ten years, so she couldn't help but follow it.

As she approached another villa nearby, she heard a man's voice that sounded familiar to her as he asked someone coldly, "Why are you here? Get out."

Hearing that, Anastasia halted her steps. Is this Elliot? He's here?

She panicked at this moment and subconsciously hid under the window. Outside the opened window, the sound inside the villa could be clearly heard.

"My dear nephew, do you no longer recognize me as your uncle?" This was a middle-aged man's voice.

"I'm not going to let you ruin my grandmother's birthday party. Get out right now." Elliot's voice reflected both his warning and his rage.

"Your grandma is my stepmother as well, and hence, I should show my respect to her. Don't stop me from doing so, will you?" The man's voice sounded as if he was pleading with Elliot.

However, Elliot remained extremely hostile toward the man. "You're not even qualified to see her. The Presgrave Family has no room for you either. Don't blame me for being ruthless if you insist."

Chapter 284

"Elliot, I remember holding you in my arms as a child many years ago. More than two decades had passed, and you had grown up to become the head of the Presgrave Family. Now I'm so proud of you!" Using their family ties, the man attempted to gain Elliot's sympathy. He then continued pleading, "Do this uncle of yours a favor, Elliot. Let me see your grandma; I need just ten minutes."

"Let me say it again. Get out." Elliot's tone was cold and unforgiving.

"You..." The man was suppressing his rage.

Despite hiding under the window outside, Anastasia could feel the tension inside the villa.

"Do you really want to be this heartless, Elliot? I'm still one of the Presgraves and, on top of that, your uncle! How can you be so disrespectful to me?"

"The Presgrave Family has no such person. To me, you're a nobody," Elliot replied flatly.

"Well. What you said today would be etched in my mind. You'll definitely regret it!" Riley yelled, followed by the slamming sound of the door.

The sound startled Anastasia, who was hiding outside, and consequently, she stepped on a dried leaf, making a small rustling sound.

"Come out now, whoever you are." Elliot's uninterested voice rang out from within.

She had wanted to leave, but she was so stupefied by his words that her heart raced again. As a result, she had no choice but to respond, "It's me, Anastasia."

Following her words, a figure appeared by the window. Elliot's voice softened as he looked at her in surprise. "Why are you here?"

"If I said I didn't mean to eavesdrop, would you believe me?" she asked embarrassingly. The situation was just too awkward for her.

To that, he gave her a gentle smile. "Of course I do. Come in!"

She went in through the main door and discovered that he was the only one in the villa. Sitting on the sofa, he lit a cigarette and started smoking. Clearly, he wasn't in a good mood.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have eavesdropped. I promise I won't say a word to anyone else," she said, raising her palm. There was nothing to be said about this anyway.

Seeing that, he put out the cigarette he had just lit and said, "Have a walk with me."

And she acceded. They both walked down a bamboo path that had no one on it toward a bamboo forest with a few dimly lit lights. Looking at his upright body in front of her, she had no idea what to say.

"He's my father's half-brother who was chased out of the family twenty years ago."

She pursed her lips hearing that. "I know. Your grandma told me about him this afternoon. Your parents passed away because of him, right?"

Her words took him by surprise. Turning around, he said, "My grandma really treats you as her family."

That made her face blush, as she knew that Herriot indeed meant so.

"My parents flew abroad to deal with the mess he created, but the helicopter crashed, ending both their lives," he said, raising his head. The light shone on his face, reflecting his sadness.

Her heart ached for him, but she had no idea what to say to console him.

But actions could express those that words couldn't. She extended her hand and held his arm, her gaze revealing her silent concern for him.

With that, he looked at her hand and quickly gripped it, his other hand holding her waist. They were intimately close to each other.

That made her gasp for air, but she did not break herself away from him. He was staring at her with his burning eyes, so alluring that any woman would fall for him just by looking at him.

And that included Anastasia too. She wasn't a clay figurine or a doll, and her heart, like everyone else's, would be moved. Especially now, when he was vulnerable and was desperate for someone's comfort.

He approached her with his head tilted slightly, and she didn't need him to tell her what he was about to do.

Perhaps it was the light, or the moon, or this man himself, who bewitched her. His arms were tight around her waist, and every breath she took was filled with his enticing scent. But she was well aware that what she was doing was wrong.

Anastasia should have pushed Elliot away, but her body froze as if someone had put a stop button on her. A wave of heat rose from her torso and reached her cheek. Her heart pounded in her chest, and all she could do was watch his kiss falling down on her.

“Elliot, don’t do this...” When his lips were about to reach hers, she made some half-hearted efforts to stop him.

But Elliot seemed to know that her resistance didn’t reflect her actual feelings. The corner of his lips curled up, and he sealed his lips over hers. The bamboo forest was peaceful, and muffled sounds from the banquet hall were all that reached their ears, but that didn’t matter.

Anastasia’s head was on his warm, muscular chest, and she could feel his heart hammering against hers. It felt safe yet dangerous.

He provided a sense of security while also emanating a sense of danger.

The stars in the sky sprinkled down on the bamboo forest. And in the forest, a man was pouring his heart and soul into the woman in his arms.

At that moment, Anastasia’s mind was shifting between two different states. One was making her mind go blank and dizzy, but the other was dreamy and mesmerizing; she couldn’t help but sink deeper into this wonderful dream that Elliot had brought her into.

This kiss had put her heart into turmoil; she felt bashful and sweet.

For Elliot, the warmth and elegant fragrance of Anastasia’s body transformed into a comforting therapy, leaving him addicted to it and unwilling to let go of her.

Moreover, this feeling reminded him of that night five years ago, but he quickly shook the thought off. At this moment, he didn’t want to think about another woman’s scent while he was kissing her.

Finally, as Anastasia sensed through the clothes that Elliot was becoming more dangerous, she quickly came back to her senses. Tonight was Old Madam Presgrave’s birthday party, and it was inappropriate to kiss in this setting.

So, she slightly pushed him away. Elliot let go of her and rested his forehead against hers. His black eyes reflected her blushed face as he said in a husky voice, “Don’t fall in love with anyone else but me.”

Anastasia’s lips curved up as she replied, “Does President Presgrave lack self-confidence today?”

As soon as he heard her, his eyes glowed with a strong possessiveness. “You can only be mine,” he claimed as he held her tightly in his arms.

Anastasia looked up and blinked her eyes at Elliot a few times. Her eyes were reflecting the starlights and his face.

She didn’t respond because she wasn’t ready for this. She didn’t refute it because she didn’t dislike his possessiveness in her heart.

Without warning, he suddenly leaned down and nibbled lightly on her ear. “If you don’t answer, I’ll take that as a yes,” he said with a hoarse voice.

Elliot's statement rendered her speechless.

The reason I'm not answering is that I wanted to show you some respect, alright?

Just then, Elliot's cell phone rang. He took his phone out and glimpsed at it. "It's time to go back for my grandmother's birthday celebration," he said.

Rey was looking for him.

After leaving the bamboo forest, Anastasia took a few deep breaths before returning to the party. She was afraid that others would notice there was something between her and Elliot, so she hurried to search for her son.

When Elliot saw her walk away as if to get away from him, a trace of frustration flashed across his eyes.

In the banquet hall, Hayley kept looking for an opportunity to walk up and wish Old Madam Presgrave a happy birthday, but there were too many elders, and Old Madam Presgrave was surrounded by people all the time.

Aside from that, she was also looking for Elliot for the past fifteen minutes. Elliot and Anastasia both went away at the same time, which made her wonder. She imagined Anastasia had taken advantage of the situation to seduce Elliot.

In fact, she wasn't wrong. They were indeed together.

Meanwhile, Hayley looked up to see Elliot had returned to the hall. But when she turned around, Anastasia miraculously appeared beside Francis. She couldn't stop herself from clenching her palm around the glass she was holding.

Were they together just now?

Out of jealousy, Hayley seemed to hatch a plot against Anastasia. She pulled Erica to the side and whispered something in her ear. Then, Erica nodded and assured, "Don't worry. I will carry out your plan."

After Erica left the banquet hall, she walked toward the swimming pool. When she looked up at the main seats, she noticed that Old Madam Presgrave was leaving the hall with the assistance of her maid. Without a second thought, she quickly pulled a waitress to the side. "Please tell Miss Tillman that she is wanted by Old Madam Presgrave at the poolside," she instructed.

Since Erica was a guest and it was just a matter of bringing a message, the waitress smiled and said, "Sure."

Just when Anastasia started to worry as she couldn't find her son, she received a phone call from Nigel. He assured her that he was at the children's play area with her son and that she need not be concerned.

Chapter 286

Nigel was not a big fan of socializing at the party, so he was relieved that he got away by looking after Anastasia's little boy.

“Miss Tillman, Old Madam Presgrave would like to see you by the poolside,” said the waitress as she approached Anastasia.

Anastasia was slightly surprised by the request, but when she glanced around and realized Old Madam Presgrave was not in her seat, she nodded and responded, “Okay. Thank you for informing me.”

As Erica watched Anastasia exit the banquet hall, the corner of her mouth twisted up into a devilish smirk. Hayley’s plan is working.

At the poolside, just when Anastasia wondered why Old Madam Presgrave would choose this place to have a conversation, she noticed Hayley sitting on the pool lounge chair. As soon as Hayley saw Anastasia, she stood up and sneered, “You’re here.”

Only then did Anastasia realize that she had been fooled. She became defensive as she glared at Hayley. “Why did you trick me into coming here?” she asked.

“Were you with Elliot just now, Anastasia? What exactly are you two up to? Are you guys messing around at Old Madam Presgrave’s birthday party?” Hayley provoked her.

Anastasia could feel her cheek heated up. Did Hayley spot us?

Without waiting for Anastasia’s response, Hayley continued, “You really don’t mind that I slept with Elliot? Do you want me to go into details of how we spent the night together?” Viciousness flashed across her eyes as she spoke with a smug face.

“As far as I know, it happened when he was not sober.” Anastasia pretended to be indifferent.

“No matter what state Elliot was in, it didn’t change the fact that he was sweating on me, kissing me, and holding me tight in his arms. I was so happy that I was swooning under him.” Hayley kept her smug face as she recalled that night.

“Stop it.” Anastasia cut Hayley off as her chest heaved with ragged breath.

“His body is well-built, and he has incredible stamina. I still remember his frantic eyes and how he held me tightly afterward; I remember him removing his watch and giving it to me. His pounding heart, his scorching body—” Hayley’s eyes gleamed with shyness and sweetness.

Hearing Hayley’s description, Anastasia could feel a wave of pain washing over her from the bottom of her heart. It wasn’t hard for her to imagine Hayley and Elliot hugging together, because she and Elliot had just shared an intimate moment earlier.

Hayley curled up the corner of her lips and approached Anastasia with a sinister smile. “I also told Elliot how your son came to be, Anastasia. His father is a filthy male escort. Who knows how many women he touches in a month? You should get a medical check-up done because if you die from that kind of disease, there will be no one to take care of your illegitimate son.”

Anastasia was so furious that her whole body was trembling. Although she knew Hayley was trying to provoke her with those offensive statements, she couldn’t take it anymore because Hayley was insulting her son.

Now, Hayley was only two steps away from Anastasia. Her mockery was clearly seen in her eyes. “Your kid, Anastasia, had the filthiest blood flowing through his veins. Perhaps he would follow in his father’s footsteps in the future. Like father, like son!” she snarled.

“Hayley Seymour, you better shut your mouth,” Anastasia warned.

Staring at Hayley’s smug face, Anastasia clenched her fist tightly to refrain from slapping her face.

However, Hayley’s eyes swept across the corridor, and she suddenly grabbed Anastasia’s hand. “You want to slap me, don’t you? Go ahead and slap me!” she yelled at her to provoke her.

Anastasia was taken aback by her actions and tried to break away from her hands.

“So what if I don’t shut up? I want the whole world to know your son’s father. I want him to be despised, and I want your son to live in shame for the rest of his life!” Hayley shouted shrilly.

Hearing what she had said, Anastasia was getting colder. She gritted her teeth and growled, “Keep going if you dare.”

Then, Anastasia started to feel disgusted by Hayley’s hands, which were clasping on her wrists. Therefore, she pushed Hayley away abruptly, attempting to break free from her grip. However, Hayley curved her lips and smirked at Anastasia as she let herself fall behind and into the swimming pool.

Seeing that, Anastasia froze for a few seconds. Before she could react, she heard someone shouting behind her, “Oh my! Someone has fallen into the water! Please help!”

I know this voice. It’s Erica.

Immediately after, she heard another female voice. “Here! We need some help over here!”

Chapter 287

When Anastasia turned her head around, she saw two middle-aged female guests standing by the pool. Their attention was drawn to Hayley, who was struggling in the water and appeared to be drowning.

“H-Help, I can’t swim...” Hayley cried for help in a faint voice.

“Miss, how can you push someone into the water?!” One of the guests glared at Anastasia accusingly. “You should get down there and save her!” she commanded.

At that moment, Anastasia’s heart sank. She realized that she had jumped into a trap set up by Hayley and Erica. Now that Hayley had deliberately fallen into the water while Erica’s two witnesses were there, Anastasia was painted as the bad guy.

The situation became critical as Hayley bobbed up and down in the six-foot-deep pool.

Meanwhile, the two female guests paced along the edge of the swimming pool frantically, for they didn’t know how to swim.

There was no doubt that Anastasia despised Hayley to the core, but she couldn’t ruin someone else’s life at Old Madam Presgrave’s birthday party.

Hence, she removed her heels and dove into the water. She swam toward Hayley and tried to pull her to the surface.

Hayley was surprised to see Anastasia jumping in to save her. As she flailed about in the water, a murderous intent began to develop in her eyes. Just as Anastasia reached out to grab Hayley's arm, the latter yanked Anastasia forcefully and pressed her head deeper into the pool.

There will be no one to blame if Anastasia drowns while trying to save me. In fact, people will only blame her stupidity for trying to save someone's life when she can't even swim herself!

Hayley only dared to jump into the pool because she was confident she wouldn't drown. She had recently taken up swimming for fitness purposes, and she was doing well under the guidance of her private coach.

As Anastasia sank deeper into the pool, she felt the pressure of death.

Hayley is trying to kill me!

Anastasia realized Hayley could swim by how she was treading water, but she couldn't react as the air in her lungs was being exhausted. It went without saying that Hayley was going to take this chance to drown her.

Moreover, she could vaguely hear the sound of the two guests yelling for help. "Help! Somebody needs help over here!"

"Goodness! Why would she get into the water if she can't swim? This will put her life in jeopardy!" the women said frantically.

They couldn't see how Hayley was holding Anastasia down under the water, so they thought she couldn't swim.

On the other hand, Hayley seemed to be struggling as she flapped her hands in the water and even choked, but her hand was firmly pressed on Anastasia's back, burying her beneath the water so that she couldn't catch her breath.

Right then, a tall figure rushed out from the banquet hall. Erica had called Elliot over to help, and he immediately noticed the two women in the water, especially the floating gray evening gown that belonged to Anastasia. "Quick! Go and save them," Elliot instructed Rey as he hurried toward the pool and removed his coat.

By the time both men jumped into the water and swam toward Anastasia and Hayley, Anastasia was already in a semi-conscious state. When Hayley saw that Elliot was coming to save them, she choked a mouthful of water and pretended to be drowning as she sank deeper into the water.

As soon as Hayley sensed a strong arm holding her, she forced her eyes open underwater to find that Rey was the one who had saved her, not Elliot. In the meantime, Elliot had carried Anastasia in his arms and was swimming toward the surface.

With the help of the crowd who came later, Anastasia and Hayley were both brought up to the poolside. Elliot went down on one knee in front of Anastasia and performed rescue breathing as soon as they reached the surface. First, he applied chest compressions before giving the woman CPR.

On the other hand, Rey had also rescued Hayley from the pool, but he did not dare to perform CPR on her. Hayley didn't want it from Rey either, not when she was right in front of Elliot.

As such, she pretended to cough out a mouthful of water and feebly opened her eyes.

"Miss Seymour is awake," Rey reported.

However, Elliot didn't seem to hear Rey's words, and he was busy rescuing Anastasia next to them. He continued to perform CPR on her while frantically calling out her name, "Anastasia... Anastasia, wake up! Please don't scare me."

Hayley's eyes flashed with hatred as she saw that. According to her original plan, she was supposed to be the only one who fell into the pool so that Erica could get Elliot to rescue her. She never anticipated Anastasia to save her, which was why she decided to drown that woman. However, Elliot had arrived too soon.

Chapter 288

At this moment, Hayley had just witnessed the man she loved the most performing CPR on Anastasia and constantly calling her name. The worry and panic in his eyes clearly demonstrated his concern for Anastasia.

Meanwhile, Erica was dumbfounded by this as she stood to the side.

According to Hayley's plan, Elliot is supposed to save her. Why is he saving Anastasia now?

Anastasia eventually regained consciousness, and the first thing that she saw was Elliot's nervous yet gorgeous face.

"You're finally awake." Elliot's fingers trembled as he caressed her cold, pale face. At the same time, his deep eyes filled with ecstasy.

A round of applause erupted from the crowd. The two ladies who had fallen into the water had been rescued, and that was good news in itself.

Meanwhile, someone in the crowd watched the scene unfold with mixed emotions. The noble and handsome man was kneeling on the ground and soaked to the skin, overjoyed that he had managed to save Anastasia.

As Anastasia sat up, Elliot's suit draped over her body. Right then, she raised her head to meet Hayley's resentful eyes.

Anastasia pushed away Elliot's helping hand and stumbled to her feet. Without much strength, she walked toward Hayley step by step persistently. Then, she raised her hand and slapped the other woman forcefully.

The strong slap shifted Hayley's face to the side. Tears streamed down her face as she raised her head and said, "I'm sorry, Anastasia. I know you were kind enough to save me, but you know that I'm afraid of water. I didn't mean to drag you into the water."

After saying that, Hayley gave Erica a signal through her teary eyes. The latter understood Hayley's message right away, so she waddled through the crowd and asked, "Hayley, are you alright? Are you hurt anywhere?"

Then, Erica turned her head toward Anastasia and confronted her. "I saw you pushing her with my own eyes, yet you have the audacity to slap her. Do you even have a heart?" she chided.

"Don't blame Anastasia for this, Erica. I was the one who accidentally fell into the water," Hayley said with tears in her eyes.

"Ladies, would you two come forward and do Hayley justice? Did you see Anastasia push Hayley?" Erica asked the two female guests who had just witnessed the incident, eagerly hoping that they would testify.

At that moment, Anastasia's body swayed slightly. She almost suffocated earlier and had lost all her strength. Just then, a strong arm wrapped around her waist while she leaned against someone's broad chest. Naturally, she knew who it was without having to turn her head around.

Everyone wanted to know what was going on, so more and more guests gathered around the pool. The two female guests who were being questioned by Erica exchanged glances before one of them said, "We saw Miss Tillman pushing Miss Seymour into the water. However, when Miss Seymour called for help, Miss Tillman jumped into the pool to save her."

At this point, Hayley staggered to her feet, shivering as she hugged herself. Then, she looked at Elliot and said, "Don't blame Anastasia, Elliot. I-I fell into the water by accident, and she almost drowned while trying to save me. I deserve this slap because I dragged her down with me. In fact, I deserve to die."

After saying that, Hayley covered her face and started to sob loudly as if she was truly blaming herself.

"Hayley, why are you still speaking up for her? She's obviously taking revenge on you! She wants you to take the blame for that incident where she got raped by a male escort five years ago. She wants you dead!" Erica's voice was shrill, and the words she said were loud and resounding. It seemed as though she was afraid that the crowd couldn't hear her.

In an instant, Anastasia's face turned pale as she trembled with anger, for the duo wasn't done picking on her just yet.

"Keep your mouth shut, Erica," Elliot warned. His eyes darted at her like a cutting blade as he didn't want to hear another word from the woman.

Erica was so frightened by Elliot's threats that she shut her mouth immediately. However, the damage had already been done, for her words dropped like a bomb among the crowd.

What? A male escort raped Miss Tillman?

This information aroused sympathy among the crowd, but it also made people speculate about Anastasia's past.

"What about pushing Miss Seymour into the water and slapping her without an apology?"

"You're right! This kind of behavior is unacceptable."

Chapter 289

"Exactly! If you don't want to apologize, why did you slap her? Look at Miss Seymour—she's such a poor thing."

Anastasia was feeling a lot of pressure deep down as she listened to everyone else criticizing her. After all, only she and Hayley knew how the latter had tried to kill her underwater. However, those who judged her without knowing the truth were equally hurtful.

Meanwhile, Elliot ignored the gazes from the crowd and carried the barely conscious Anastasia into his arms. He then instructed Rey, "Take Miss Seymour inside to get her clothes changed."

"Elliot..." yelled a sobbing Hayley. Her heart ached from a stabbing pain as she watched Anastasia being carried away by the man.

Even after all of that acting and drama, Anastasia still emerged as the final winner. She received all of Elliot's love and care, yet the man did not even spare a word of concern for Hayley.

Anastasia's first thought after being sent inside for a clean change of clothes was her son. As such, she turned to Elliot and said, "Don't tell Jared what just happened."

"Don't worry! I have informed Nigel not to bring him over, and Jared is still in the playroom," Elliot comforted her.

Anastasia clenched the quilt tightly as she came to terms with Hayley's viciousness. She was certain that Hayley had purposely pressed her into the water with the intention of drowning her.

"Why did you jump into the water to save her when you can't swim?" Elliot frowned as he asked. He didn't dare to blame Anastasia, but his chest tightened since he was worried about her.

"Tonight is your grandma's birthday banquet. It'll be a bad omen if someone dies," replied Anastasia, expressing what she felt at the time of the incident.

However, she never expected Hayley, who couldn't swim five years ago, would learn to swim.

"Did you know that you nearly..." Elliot couldn't even finish his sentence as he was completely terrified of what had just happened. She would've been dead if he arrived even a few seconds late.

In other words, the only reason why Anastasia was still alive was that Elliot had acted quickly and executed a successful rescue. Otherwise, she would have not survived at all.

"Thank you," Anastasia said genuinely. She could not imagine what would happen to her son if she were dead.

"I don't want you to thank me; I just want you to cherish your life in the future. Don't let this kind of thing happen again." Elliot's eyes were filled with worry as he stepped forward and took her into his arms. "Since I have saved your life, will you live a good life for me?" he asked.

Anastasia was feeling the aftershock of the incident. Just then, she raised her head to look up at Elliot and blurted, "President Presgrave, can you promise me one thing? If something happens to me in the future, please help me to raise Jared on my behalf."

Her words made his heart tremble. He held her tighter as he glanced into her deep eyes and said, "Nonsense! I am not going to let Jared lose his mother. We will raise him together."

Anastasia batted her eyes at Elliot after she heard him. His gaze was like a black hole, drawing her into his heart.

Just then, she started to feel dizzy. Elliot placed a kiss on her forehead and said, "Stop overthinking. Just get some good rest."

At that very moment, Elliot's cell phone rang. He glanced at the caller ID and answered the call. "What's the matter?"

"President Presgrave, Miss Seymour is attempting to commit suicide," said Rey promptly.

"What?" Elliot scowled.

"She wants to see you," Rey replied anxiously at the other end.

"Okay, I'll come right away." After Elliot hung up the phone, he tucked Anastasia into bed. Then, he added, "Have a good rest. I need to go now."

Elliot was sitting close to her, so Anastasia had overheard the conversation about Hayley wanting to commit suicide.

Hah! Of course she'd play all her tricks to get Elliot to go over.

"Just go ahead!" Since she felt exhausted after the entire ordeal, Anastasia lay on her side and closed her eyes.

When Elliot arrived at Hayley's room, she was standing in front of the third-floor window, refusing to let anyone approach her. She stretched one leg out the window, looking as though she'd fall out at any moment.

"Come back here, Hayley!" Elliot pushed the door open and shouted at her. Meanwhile, his brows were deeply furrowed.

Hayley's tears streamed down her face when she noticed Elliot was there. "You've finally come to see me, Elliot. I-I thought you didn't care about me anymore. I would rather die instead," she said through tears.

After saying that, Hayley leaned her upper body toward the window.

Chapter 290

"I w-won't get down if you don't carry me." The agitated Hayley held back a sob.

Elliot immediately stepped forward to carry her down in his arms, whereas Erica who stood aside kept pointing her phone's camera at them as she recorded the whole thing. Hayley had her arms hanging to Elliot's neck as she intimately leaned against his shoulder.

He then put her down on her bed, and he pried open her grip on him. "Have a good rest. Don't take things too hard."

"Elliot, do you believe me? Do you believe that Anastasia was the one who pushed me into the water?" she asked tearfully. She panickedly explained in order to make him believe her, "I didn't mean to press her head in the water. I was really scared at that time. All I know is I instinctively wanted to live. I didn't know that I held her in the water... I swear I didn't mean to."

"Take a rest first." His eyes held a somber look in them. He knew exactly who to trust.

Between Hayley and Anastasia, he only trusted the latter.

"What is the point of living if you don't believe me?" Emotionally perturbed, she struggled and wanted to continue jumping out of the window.

Seeing that, he had no choice but to hold her down as he sighed, "Enough. You were just shocked."

After saying that, he looked over to Daniel who had been responsible for taking care of Hayley's affairs all this time. He then said, "Danny, stay here and take care of Miss Seymour. The rest of you can leave."

"Understood, President Presgrave," the man replied with a nod.

"Elliot, don't go. Elliot..." Despite how she tried to make him stay, he still unhesitantly left.

As soon as Erica came out of the door, she felt a deadly stare on her, only to find that it was from Elliot. He exuded an overpowering aura as though he was The Devil himself. "Erica," he warningly started, "I won't let you off the hook if you try starting something again."

The short warning instantly turned her face pale as her heart trembled.

Right after Elliot left, Erica's fear turned into resentment. She hated how unfair it was for him to treat Anastasia like a treasure, and yet she had been spoken at in such a cruel tone even though they were both women.

Harriet was in the banquet hall when she heard the startling report about how Hayley and Anastasia were almost hurt in an accident, whereas Francis and Naomi only found out after Erica came back. Francis wanted to go to Anastasia, but he was stopped by Naomi before he did.

"Don't go, Francis. Anastasia should be resting. I am sure the Presgraves are taking care of her!"

"I agree with Mom! Why are you going to her, Dad? Anastasia is fine!" Erica didn't want Francis to see Anastasia when she was so weak in order to prevent her father from over-worrying.

Anastasia had fallen asleep, and in front of her bed, Elliot kept accompanying her without leaving once. Anastasia could finally have a good sleep tonight since Jared will be brought back to Nigel's house.

The birthday banquet ended perfectly. Although there was a false emergency in the middle of it, it was still fortunate that no one was harmed.

In a villa in the city center, Aliona had just returned from outside. She pushed open the door and turned toward the middle-aged man who had been waiting for her on the sofa. "Father," she respectfully greeted.

This man was none other than Elliot's uncle, Riley Presgrave. He looked at her with a serious gaze, and he demanded to know. "I hope Elliot hasn't discovered your identity!"

She shook her head in response. "He didn't discover my identity, but I didn't manage to get his attention either."

"What was the matter? Did you not take the opportunity to get close to him?" He stared at her sharply.

"Something happened tonight. There was another woman on Elliot's mind. However, I have assumed the identity as Lucas' illegitimate daughter. He has no doubts about this. I will have the opportunity to approach him in the future," she calmly told him..

"Tell me everything that happened tonight." His eyes were practically shining with ambition. He came back this time to take back the Presgrave Group by all means possible. At the same time, he raised a fostered daughter and sent her to Lucas, who was already under his control. Lucas was a close friend of Elliot's deceased father when he was alive, and Lucas had always been respectful to him. Aliona's mission from now on was to get close to Elliot, win his favor, and finally marry him. She would then be Riley's ultimate weapon in getting back the property that had been snatched away from him.

"Don't be silly, Hayley. Come back here. " Elliot reached out his hand in a hurry. "Come on."