

Too Far 361

Chapter 361

"Don't tell her that I was the one who recommended her, though. Anastasia and I haven't exactly been on amicable terms lately," Aliona said to fortify her cover.

"Very well. I'm going to need the client's name and the address where you're scheduled to meet her."

Aliona immediately called Riley for the address. When Felicia had the name and address in hand, she called the given contact number for confirmation.

The person who answered the call was a girl who made it clear that she wanted a highly personal arrangement wherein the designer would meet her someplace outside the company building. The various kinds of businesses available on the market were locked in grueling competition at the moment, and with the client's budget being five million, Felicia did not want to let this deal fall through.

As such, she hurried over to Anastasia's office and found the girl daydreaming after losing her drive to work. Having heard about the client and the budget she was given, Anastasia agreed and stood up behind her desk. She then announced, "I'll be going, then."

She figured she could use some fresh air and a change of environment.

Felicia nodded. "I've already made arrangements with the girl regarding the time and location. Why don't you bring Grace with you? Also, be safe on the road!"

"Got it," Anastasia replied. She had always been the most enthusiastic when it came to her work.

Once Anastasia left the office, Aliona turned back to Felicia's office and asked if Anastasia had already gone out.

Upon hearing that Anastasia was about to drive out of the parking lot, Aliona quickly and happily gave Riley a call. Meanwhile, Anastasia was unaware of the danger that lay waiting for her. Aliona was sure that she could get rid of the infuriating girl by the end of the day, thereby making room for herself to slide into Elliot's life to comfort him while he grieved Anastasia's untimely death, winning him over with her kindness.

While this was happening, Anastasia and Grace headed out of the company building. During the drive, Anastasia called up the supposed client and confirmed that they were meeting up at a cafe to puruse the details of the order.

Along the way, she and Grace kept up a humorous repartee to pass time, and indeed, it wasn't long before the navigation satellite told them that they were drawing close to the cafe. Anastasia parked her car in the area next to the cafe.

There was only one lot available, and Anastasia had to back into it. As she did so, she did not notice the men in the black vans on either side of her car.

This was all a ploy by Riley; he had arranged for his men to fill up most of the parking lots, leaving only this particular space.

Anastasia and Grace had only just grabbed their purses and went out of the car when the doors to the backseat of the van opened up. Without warning, the girls were each dragged into the black van closest to them. The men who did this moved so quickly that they did not spare either girl the chance to cry for help.

Soon, the kidnappers pulled out of the parking lot with one van leading the other. Two burly men held Anastasia down in the backseat while they hastily worked to bind her wrists and ankles. Following that, they stuffed a rag into her mouth to keep her from struggling or protesting in any way she could think of.

Fear and shock lit up in her eyes. She was supposed to be meeting a client, and she couldn't understand how she had been ambushed on purpose, thereafter kidnapping her. What about Grace? What will happen to her? At the same time, she thought about her son. If something happens to me, who's going to take care of Jared?

This made her struggle violently, but at that moment, the man next to her took out a syringe and injected something into her arm. The effects of the drug kicked in and washed over her almost immediately, rendering her weak. Eventually, she felt her conscious mind slipping into the darkness.

When the two vans had driven away, a black SUV tailed after them, and inside were Elliot's bodyguards. They had been following one of Riley's subordinates, and never did they think they would come across a kidnapping incident. More to the point, the dashcam in the car had managed to capture a full view of the kidnappers and their victims. Right now, the bodyguard in the passenger seat was reviewing the footage. He paused as he zoomed in on the woman's face.

"It's Miss Tillman!" he exclaimed.

"Quick, get President Presgrave on the line."

Elliot had only just returned to Presgrave Corporation when his phone suddenly rang. He glanced at the caller ID and answered the call before greeting perfunctorily, "Hello?"

"President Presgrave, we were following Riley's subordinates and ran into them kidnapping Miss Tillman and her assistant."

Having just stepped through the doorway of his office, Elliot's gut twisted when he heard this. "What?"

"Yes. We are sure that the kidnappers have taken Miss Tillman and her assistant. We are now following one of the two vans."

"Very well. Keep a close eye on the cars, and if she's in even the slightest bit of danger, then you must do what you can to save her," Elliot ordered as his gaze grew frighteningly calm, though he might go berserk with worry at any given moment.

Why did Riley kidnap Anastasia? Is it because she's the woman I'm in love with?

He didn't have time to dwell on whatever twisted reasoning Riley might have behind such an operation. Without another word, he rallied Rey and eight of his bodyguards before they hurriedly followed the direction in which the kidnappers were moving.

While they were on their way, Elliot and his men would continuously tune into the information and directions given by the bodyguards who were tracking Anastasia and her kidnappers. Right now, all Elliot could do was pray for her safe return. The thought of what those kidnappers might do to her while she lay helpless in the car brought an ominous gleam to his eyes, and he wanted nothing more than to catch up to that van and kill those kidnappers with his bare hands.

Even though they were accelerating at full speed, he still felt like they were going too slow for comfort. If Riley so much as touched a single hair on Anastasia's head, he vowed that he would blast them all to kingdom come.

Presently, Anastasia was slowly coming to her senses as she lay on the ground in an abandoned house somewhere. A sack had been pulled over her head, and she could see nothing but darkness, though she did pick up the sounds of footsteps and people talking around her.

She struggled to break free of her restraints as she let out muffled cries. "Mmph!"

"Stop struggling. Miss Tillman. There's no way you're getting out of here alive," said a weathered male voice.

For some reason, she found the voice extremely familiar, but she couldn't match a face to it.

"You're just like your mother, scrambling to die by my hands," drawled a cold voice close to her ear.

Upon hearing this, Anastasia froze. My mother? Why did this man bring up my mother all of a sudden? Who is he? Judging by his words, he could very well have been my mother's killer all those years ago. Who is he? Who the hell is he?

These thoughts clamored in her headspace, but just as panic and adrenaline filled her, the man spoke up once more. "Would you like to know more about your mother before you die, Miss Tillman? She could have actually escaped death all those years ago." There was mock sympathy in his tone as he added, "Do you know who really killed your mother?"

Anastasia was still trembling with fear, but when she heard this, her fear was intermingled with curiosity. She was desperate, she realized, to learn the truth of her mother's death.

"The actual person who killed your mother is none other than Old Madam Presgrave!" the man said insidiously, his voice loud and clear.

Although she had a sack over her head, she still struggled and moved around after hearing this, indicating that she refused to believe him.

"Skeptical, are we? Hah! Well, let me tell you exactly what she did when she found out that her precious grandson had been kidnapped!" The man elaborated icily and acerbically, "Old Madam Presgrave personally called up the mayor and told him that if he did not save her grandson and left him for dead, she would cripple the entire stock market. Given Presgrave Corporation's power, she could have easily crippled the entire nation's economy if she wanted to. Hence, she threatened the mayor and demanded that he bring her grandson back alive. As expected, the mayor took her threats seriously and quickly called the police headquarters.

“Not daring to dawdle on this, the station dispatched all their available uniformed officers and ordered them to bring Elliot back alive no matter what. Your mother happened to be one of those unfortunate souls who were sent out on the rescue mission. As far as Old Madam Presgrave was concerned, her grandson’s life was the only one that mattered, and she couldn’t care less about what happened to your mother.”

Shock rippled through Anastasia as she listened to the story. She could understand Harriet’s fear of losing her grandson, but she didn’t think that the old lady had so forcefully threatened the mayor.

“As such, your mother got a call from the top brass and went on duty. She could have been spared, but she dashed out to shield the little boy and took the stabbing in his place. She was determined to protect him even though she had taken thirteen stabs to the back and practically bled to death. She sacrificed herself for the little young master, all because of one phone call from the old lady.”

Anastasia felt like her heart might burst from the grief and pain. Hot tears welled up in her eyes and spilled over. Is that truly the reason why Mom died while on duty all those years ago?

“Can you imagine how much pain and reluctance your mother must have been in during her time of death? She was going to leave behind an adorable daughter who was barely even two years of age! I even heard her whisper, “I’m sorry, Anya...” while her life seeped out of her!”

Anastasia shook her head furiously, not wanting to hear any more of this as torrential anguish seized her.

“Yet, here you are now, in love with the boy who had been the reason for your mother’s death all those years ago. Do you think your mother is going to rest in peace in the great beyond?”

The man was crouching right in front of her and rubbing a liberal amount of salt in her wounds. The fear in Anastasia was now gone, and it was replaced by a surge of strong hatred. She knew that the man was her mother’s killer.

Just then, he let out a bark of ominous laughter, and it was such a familiar sound that her mind felt as if it had imploded with the recollection. The man was none other than Elliot’s uncle, Riley. It had to be him.

He was the one who killed my mother all those years ago! The sudden realization filled her with anger as she struggled violently. Although she knew she couldn’t do anything, her instincts were urging her to unleash vengeance on this man.

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“I heard that the Presgraves have been trying to repay your mother’s noble sacrifice all these years. I’m sure Old Madam Presgrave sorely regrets threatening the mayor back then; if she hadn’t done that, your mother would have been spared. The young master’s life is worth more than gold, but that doesn’t mean your mother deserved to have hers taken away. Sadly, this world will never be fair; the rich simply buy their way out of death, and common folk like your mother would simply have to surrender to fate.”

Anastasia wanted to make Riley shut up and get him to stop talking about all these. She didn’t want to hear about them at all.

However, Riley was a twisted man who thought his gloriously wicked deeds demanded an audience, and Anastasia made for an excellent listener. More to the point, the sadistic side of him would never allow him to let slip the chance to torture someone. The sight of Anastasia's obvious anguish and discomfort filled him with satisfaction that he thought he had long forgotten.

"If I were your mother, I would hate that I'd given birth to an ingrate and a traitorous daughter like you. You could have had any man you wished, but you chose to love Young Master Elliot, who lived only because your mother died so gruesomely!"

Stop it! Shut up! Anastasia wanted to scream at him. She knew what Riley was trying to do; he wanted her to hate the Presgraves.

"Boss, we're running out of time. Let's send her on her merry way," one of Riley's subordinates piped up from somewhere.

"I'm sorry, Miss Tillman, but I suppose you share your mother's ill fortune and will have to die by my hands. Don't worry, though. You'll be reunited with her soon!" Riley chuckled.

Fear and rage coursed through Anastasia like a potent cocktail as she realized that he was planning to kill her, though she didn't know why. What good will my death do for him? Is this his way of getting back at the Presgraves and challenging them? Or does this have something to do with my relationship with Elliot? Does he want to take my life so that he can break Elliot's heart and destroy him emotionally?

While this was happening, half a dozen vehicles manned by bodyguards were speeding over to the location, driving through the muddy and mountainous terrain as they appeared like ghouls.

Riley's henchman who was stationed outside the abandoned house as a lookout couldn't respond in time, and he quickly cried out, "Boss!" However, when the leading car drove forward and made to knock him down, he quickly dodged and leaped into the drain that ran along the side of the house. In the next second, a loud bang filled the air as the car rammed into the front door of the house, causing the entire wall to cave and topple down.

The man in the driver's seat was immediately greeted by a scene that made his blood boil.

Anastasia was curled up on the ground with a sack pulled over her head and her wrists bound.

At the sight of the car and the fallen wall, Riley jumped in shock. He knew that Elliot had sent people to keep tabs on him, but he didn't think they would arrive so soon. With lightning speed, he grabbed hold of Anastasia and hauled her up from the ground, pressing a blade to her neck as he sneered. "My darling nephew, have you come for a visit?" he said.

"Let her go," Elliot thundered with the rage of a hellish creature, his gaze obsidian and mutinous.

"Tsk, ts. Do you truly love the girl so much? You've gone soft, Elliot. I didn't think the Presgraves were capable of producing a romantic like you. There goes our family honor," Riley mocked insouciantly. Without warning, he ran the blade along the alabaster skin of Anastasia's neck, drawing a thin line of blood.

"Let her go, Riley!" Elliot yelled, his voice quivering with rage and panic.

Riley found that this situation was turning out very much in his favor. He scoffed and said, "I'll let her go, but on the condition that you immediately transfer fifty percent of the shares in Presgrave Corporation to me. Otherwise, if I'm going down, then I'm taking her with me."

Just then, he pulled the sack off Anastasia's head to reveal her pale and anguished expression. There was a rag stuffed in her mouth to muffle her cries, but her eyes glistened with tears as she stared at the man in front of her—the man who would do anything to save her.

"Fine. I'll give you whatever you want, but let her go first," Elliot announced firmly with a nod of his head.

"Have a copy of the agreement sent to me, and I want it to be legally enforceable," Riley demanded, seizing this chance to take the portion of the company that was rightfully his.

Meanwhile, Anastasia was not afraid of death, even now. She hated her mother's killer with a passion, and she wanted him to pay for Amelia's death in blood. Not only that, she didn't want Elliot to give up half the ownership of Presgrave Corporation to this devil just to save her.

As such, she stared at him unrelentingly and shook her head ever so slightly, indicating for him to refuse the bargain.

"I'll let her go only after I've seen the agreement," replied Riley. With his henchmen surrounding him and Anastasia, there was no way for any of the bodyguards to advance to save the hostage. Worse still was that Riley had a blade pressed against Anastasia's neck, and any movement on her part could mean her certain death by his hand.

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"Do it, Rey!" ordered Elliot.

"President Presgrave..." Rey couldn't help but mutter. Fifty percent of Presgrave Corporation's shares were an enormous amount of assets, after all.

After transferring that exact amount, he was certain how much trouble his president would be in.

Suddenly, Elliot turned around with red eyes while enunciating, "I told you to do it!"

Rey could tell from his gaze that fifty percent of Presgrave Corporation's shares was nothing compared to Anastasia's life.

Since he had to obey Elliot's orders, Rey quickly returned to the car, grabbed the laptop, and started running the procedures.

When Anastasia looked at Elliot, she saw the nervousness and worry in his eyes. He didn't even care about handing over half of Presgrave Corporation's shares to the person he resented most.

Riley had caused his parents' death, but in order to save her, he willingly agreed to Riley's unreasonable request.

As she shut her eyes, Anastasia recalled a self-defense move that she had learned before. Though she hadn't practiced them before, she thought it was worth a try.

After all, she couldn't let Elliot transfer the shares just like that!

Meanwhile, Riley took a glance at the woman he was threatening, and he took in her pale face as she shut her eyes. He let down his guard when he saw how weak and feeble she was.

Then, he shifted his gaze to Rey's laptop. Riley wanted to see the legal document of the transfer of shares immediately since he never expected Anastasia to be worth that much.

In fact, he had underestimated the weight of Anastasia in Elliot's heart.

At this moment, Rey tapped the keyboard and raised his head, announcing, "It's done."

Upon hearing that, Riley got excited. Meanwhile, Anastasia took a deep breath and clutched Riley's hand harshly before hitting his arm with her elbow the moment she sensed the knife on her neck loosening up. Once the knife was shoved about thirty degrees away from her neck, she quickly twisted her head and ducked to escape from his hold. However, the moment she ducked, she felt a sharp cut in her ear.

She didn't know when Elliot had noticed her struggling, but the man felt his heart stop for a few seconds when he saw what she had just done. At lightning speed, he stretched out his arm and engulfed her in his chest.

At the same time, he growled in a low voice, "Are you insane?!"

Due to the pain, Anastasia held her ear with her hand. She was lucky that her ear had only suffered a light cut, and it wasn't too serious.

All of a sudden, the people around them seemed to move at the same time. Elliot's bodyguards and Riley's subordinates broke into a chaotic fight.

"Give me the shares! Give me the contract!" Like a madman, Riley rushed toward Rey. All he cared about was the transfer of shares contract, and he intended to snatch Rey's laptop.

Much to his dismay, Rey was a good fighter. He kicked Riley away and clutched the laptop with both arms. Upon seeing that, Riley screamed like a lunatic, "Give me the laptop! G-Give it to me!"

Meanwhile, Elliot let his bodyguards handle the fight as he brought Anastasia out of the scene. He grabbed a first aid kit from the car and used the medical gauze to stop her ear from bleeding.

At the same time, he couldn't help but utter while trembling, "You are not allowed to do that ever again."

It wasn't a warning; it was an order.

He nearly suffered from a heart attack when he saw what happened earlier.

However, Anastasia seemed to look fragile yet strong as she sat in the backseat of the car.

She looked physically weak, but her gaze and her mentality showed that she was determined and strong.

Anastasia was afraid too, but at that time, a sudden thought entered her mind. She wasn't going to owe him anything anymore.

If she let him transfer fifty percent of Presgrave Corporation's shares, she would never be able to repay such a huge debt in this life.

"Your uncle is the one who kidnapped you, and my mother was also killed in his hands, so you cannot let him escape." Anastasia looked at Elliot and grabbed his arms. Tears were rolling in her eyes as she begged, "Send him to the police station and make him pay for what he has done."

In fact, Elliot had a hunch that it was Riley who kidnapped him back then, but since he was young at that time, he couldn't find the real culprit even after years of investigation.

"Alright, I will send him to the police and reopen the case regarding your mother's death." Elliot nodded. He thought that she would be scared and cry in his arms after he helped her bandage her injured ear

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Contrary to Elliot's expectations, even though Anastasia looked pale, she only held on to his arm for support. At that moment, Elliot desperately wanted to hold her in his embrace.

However, she retreated instinctively, so he retracted his arm mid-air.

"I'll send you home first and let my men handle the rest here," said Elliot in a deep voice.

"Let Rey send me home! You should stay back and catch Riley instead." After saying that, she closed the door. Through the car window, she seemed cold and distant.

When he saw that, Elliot could feel his heart throb in pain. Why did he feel like she was miles away from him though they hadn't seen each other for merely a day?

What did Riley tell her?

After that, Elliot instructed Rey to send Anastasia back home while he stayed back to settle everything here.

Never did Riley expect a simple kidnap case to cause him so much trouble. All of his subordinates had collapsed, and he was being pressed to the ground like a losing warrior surrendering in front of his nephew.

Elliot resembled a young king on the throne, looking down at the man below him in contempt.

"Let go of me, Elliot! I'm your uncle! I'm your senior!" Riley huffed, intending to use his relationship with Elliot to escape.

"What did you tell Anastasia? Are you the culprit who killed her mother and kidnapped me back then?" shouted Elliot.

In response, Riley snickered while saying, "Find the evidence and sue me if you're capable of it! I won't admit a thing."

Elliot's eyes darkened at that. "In that case, be prepared to rot in prison!"

From the looks of it, Riley could be sentenced to a few years of jail for the kidnapping of Anastasia.

However, Riley did not panic as he was being detained in the car. Even if he went to prison, he didn't have to be scared since he had one more trump card.

His goddaughter, Aliona, would certainly give birth to her son. Sooner or later, the entire Presgrave Group would fall under his hands.

While they were on the road, Anastasia tried to call Grace. Fortunately, the latter picked up the phone and told Anastasia that she was found thrown into a ditch by the roadside and was sent to the hospital for treatment. Thankfully, she was awake now.

"Thank goodness you're alright, Anastasia." Grace was so shocked that she nearly cried. She had also called the police.

Anastasia was grateful for what she had done and told her that she would talk to her in detail once she got back.

While sitting in the backseat, Anastasia's mind was filled with Riley's words. She felt conflicted. Was she going to blame the Presgrave Family for her mother's death back then?

Back then, Old Madam Presgrave had called the mayor and pressured the police. Because of that, the police ordered her mother to save a life at the scene. Was her mother forced to save Elliot, or did she do it willingly?

No matter what, her mother sacrificed her life in exchange for an opportunity for Elliot to live.

However, as her daughter, Anastasia developed feelings for him, and that made her even more distressed.

Once Rey dropped her off at her house, he reminded, "Have a good rest, Miss Tillman."

"Thank you, Rey." After thanking him, Anastasia entered the house and shut the door.

Rey didn't leave after that, for he had to protect Anastasia until Elliot came over.

At the police station, Riley was arrested for kidnapping, whereas Elliot's bodyguard handed over all video evidence so that he couldn't escape the punishment.

At the same time, Elliot also applied for a re-investigation of his kidnapping case back then with Riley as the primary suspect. He also called for another investigation into Amelia's case, the policewoman who had died in the same year. Thankfully, the police attached great importance to this matter.

After coming out of the police station, Elliot rushed to Anastasia's housing area immediately. He called Nigel, told him what happened today, and ordered him to protect Jared well.

On the other end of the line, Nigel was taken aback by the information. With that, he hurriedly sent someone to the kindergarten to pick Jared up. He was going to let Jared stay by his side so that he could take care of him for the next few days.

As she sat on the sofa, Anastasia could feel that the fear of being kidnapped had dissipated, but she felt complicated emotions. She stood in Old Madam Presgrave's shoes; if her only grandson had been kidnapped back then, she would also be willing to do anything to save him no matter how crazy it was.

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Therefore, even if Old Madam Presgrave had threatened to crash the stock market in order to save her grandson, it was completely understandable.

Due to such immense pressure, the police force could only do their best to save the young Elliot. After all, it was their responsibility to do so.

If it weren't for the continuous pressure from their superiors, would Anastasia's mother still be alive? Would Anastasia be able to spend her childhood with a mother without having to lose someone she loved dearly?

It had been a long time since Anastasia missed her mother so much, and her mother had been an imaginary figure as far as she could remember. She didn't even have a single memory of her mother, for she had only been one year and eight months old back then.

Back then, Anastasia wasn't aware of anything yet. There were only photos of her mother looking at her tenderly, and that triggered Anastasia's emotions as tears started rolling down her face. She felt heartbroken.

She didn't resent anyone, but she didn't want to see anyone from the Presgrave Family either, including Elliot.

She thought the only thing she could do was to cut her ties with the Presgrave Family and never involve herself in their affairs anymore. Only then could she return justice to her mother.

Just then, there was a knock on the door, and she could guess who it was.

However, she didn't want to get up, let alone open the door.

"Anastasia... It's me. Can you open the door?" It was Elliot's voice.

The knocks on the door stopped for a while, but they quickly resumed. It seemed that Elliot was determined to see her, or else he wouldn't leave.

After wiping off her tears and composing herself, Anastasia washed up and walked toward the door.

Her gaze wasn't fixed on Elliot, who was standing outside. Instead, she uttered indifferently, "You should go. I don't want to see you."

Hearing that, Elliot was flustered. He didn't know what Riley had told her, but it was definitely something that hurt her deeply.

"Why don't you want to see me?" Elliot inquired hoarsely.

Anastasia's eyes instantly turned red as she looked up at him, saying, "I just don't want to see you. Don't come and find me, and don't try to contact us again. You and your family better stay away from mine."

"Anastasia..." Just as Elliot wanted to say something, what came in response was a shut door.

As he stood outside, Elliot was perplexed. Anastasia's words were like needles piercing his heart, making him struggle to breathe.

He could sense the hint of resentment in her eyes. What on earth had Riley told her?

Why did he make her hate the Presgrave Family?

In reality, that wasn't the case. Anastasia didn't hate the Presgrave Family; she just couldn't accept what the Presgraves did back then to save Elliot.

If the Presgraves hadn't done that, would her mother still be alive today?

While closing her eyes, Anastasia realized that Elliot would have been dead at the age of six if her mother were still alive today.

As that thought came into mind, she felt a pain in her chest that suffocated her.

Anastasia was greedy, for she wanted Elliot and her mother to both be alive.

In a while, she was going to bring her son home, draw lines with the Presgrave Family, and live a happy life with her son without the involvement of the Presgraves.

Nigel could hear the determination in her voice through the phone, so he sent Jared back to her house before dinnertime.

"Mommy!" Jared hopped down from the car and ran toward Anastasia.

She carried her son and turned to Nigel, who was getting off the car just then. She said, "Thank you for taking care of Jared."

"It's my responsibility. Are you alright?" Nigel inquired with concern.

"I'm fine."

"Why is your ear hurt, Mommy?" Jared's sharp eyes immediately noticed the injury on her ear and cried out loud.

"I just got a minor scratch. Don't worry," Anastasia reassured her son with a smile.

However, Nigel knew what she had been through. His gaze was laced with concern as he looked at her.

"No matter what, Elliot and I will do our best to help you."

"Thanks. You should go now!" After saying that, Anastasia held her son's hand and went home.

On the way back to their house, they saw two people who looked rather familiar. "Mommy, aren't they Mr. Presgrave's bodyguards?"

In response, Anastasia denied while saying, "No. They aren't."

Though Elliot had already left, his two subordinates were guarding downstairs while Anastasia brought Jared back home.

She wanted to apply for an extended holiday and not return to the office for the time being.

If they did not approve her request, she would simply resign.

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The next morning, Anastasia applied for time off for her son and called Felicia. When Felicia heard that she was going to take three months off, she was shocked.

"Did you tell President Presgrave about this?" Deep down, Felicia felt that it wasn't in her power to approve Anastasia's leave.

"You can discuss it with him, but if he doesn't agree, I will resign from the job."

"Okay. I'll ask him," answered Felicia.

Ten minutes later, Felicia returned the call. "President Presgrave has approved your request and will offer you three months of paid leave, but I'm going to miss you so much."

"Thanks." Anastasia thought she would miss Felicia a lot too.

"Let's keep in touch!"

"Sure. Thanks for taking care of me all this while, Felicia," said Anastasia thankfully.

"Don't say that. I'm aware that the reason President Presgrave acquired QR Group isn't that he sees the growth potential in us; he only did it because of you. Without you, Bourgeois wouldn't have been so lucky." Felicia had seen through everything.

Anastasia's heart twitched at that, so she asked Felicia, "Do you know who negotiated with the client I went to visit yesterday?"

It was because her kidnapper seemed to expect her to be there, and it felt like she had stepped into a trap.

Felicia didn't know about the kidnapping incident, so she didn't think much about it as she answered, "Aliona was the one who negotiated with the client. She was supposed to go and meet them, but the client specified that they wanted to see you, so I sent you there instead."

Aliona?

Is she anyhow related to the kidnapping case? Anastasia furrowed her brows and fell into deep thought.

She couldn't figure out if Aliona was related to Riley or the client, but why was the client assigned to Aliona first and passed on to her eventually?

"Thanks, Felicia. Let's meet again soon."

"Sure!" Felicia replied with a smile.

After hanging up the phone, Anastasia glanced at the time. It was time to prepare lunch for her son.

However, there was nothing in the fridge, so she turned to Jared. "Jared, come grocery shopping with me."

"Okay!" Jared exclaimed in excitement.

With that, Anastasia grabbed a parka and put it on him. The weather outside was already at 50 degrees Fahrenheit, so she had to make sure that he wouldn't catch a cold.

After going downstairs, Anastasia noticed that the bodyguards from yesterday were still standing in the same spot. When she left, they followed her.

Anastasia allowed them to follow her as she and Jared entered a supermarket to get some groceries.

While Anastasia was picking some vegetables, she heard her son's excited voice. "Mr. Presgrave!"

As soon as she raised her head, she saw Elliot in a black trench coat walking toward her among the crowd. His tall and straight figure moved in an imposing manner. He crouched down and picked Jared up as the little boy rushed toward him.

Instantly, Anastasia's mind turned chaotic. She had thought it through for the past two days and made up her mind to stop seeing him.

At this moment, however, he messed up all her plans.

"Mommy, you should buy extra ingredients! Mr. Presgrave will be coming over for lunch!" exclaimed Jared.

Anastasia felt as if there was something stuck in her throat, but she quickly retorted, "He's busy. He can't come over for lunch."

"Mr. Presgrave, are you really not coming over for lunch?" Jared asked Elliot.

Elliot looked at Anastasia, who was picking the vegetables, and asked tentatively, "Are you going to cook for me too?"

"Nope!" Anastasia uttered without raising her head. She was holding two bags of vegetables as if comparing them both, but in reality, she couldn't even focus.

Her attention wasn't on the vegetables at all.

However, her indifferent reply hit Elliot the hard way. With a sullen face, he turned to Jared and said, "Your mom is right. I'm busy, so I can't come over to have lunch with you."

"I really want you to come, though!" Jared pouted.

"I really want to come too!" Elliot offered a helpless chuckle.

Sadly, someone didn't want him there.

At that moment, Anastasia's eyes turned red, so she shifted to another area to pick other ingredients. At the same time, she looked far away, intending to stop her tears from flowing.

Elliot had sharp senses and realized that Anastasia was crying, so he quickly uttered behind her back, "I'll bring Jared home."

Anastasia didn't respond. When she turned around, she saw his tall figure carrying her son out of the supermarket.

Chapter 368

Anastasia took a long time to compose her feelings. She ended up buying a lot of groceries so that she could stay home with her son for a few days without having to leave the house.

As she carried a huge bag of groceries out the door, one of the bodyguards came up to her and inquired politely, “Miss Tillman, do you need help with that?”

“No, thanks.” Anastasia offered a grateful smile. She didn’t have to treat them indifferently, after all.

After struggling to carry her groceries to the lobby of the housing block, she called Elliot and asked him to bring Jared home.

“Hello?” When the call connected, she could hear his deep and raspy voice.

“I’m beside the lift. Bring Jared over!” said Anastasia.

“Can we talk?” There was a hint of a plea in his voice.

“I don’t want to,” replied Anastasia as she rejected him.

“No matter what my uncle said to you, one thing that will never change is my love for you. You’re important to me, Anastasia.” Elliot’s voice was hoarse.

“That’s enough, now give me back my son,” Anastasia ordered before hanging up the phone.

If she were to continue the conversation, the decision she had made with much difficulty might collapse.

There was no longer any possibility between them.

At least, they would never be together in this lifetime.

Soon, Elliot held Jared’s hand as they made a turn at the small avenue surrounded by trees. The two looked identical as if they were father and son.

“Mr. Presgrave, can’t you leave after having a meal with us?” Jared whined.

He sounded as if he had asked this question many times before.

Elliot raised his head and looked at Anastasia pleadingly; it was as if he was silently asking if he could come over to her house to have lunch.

Anastasia looked at her son subconsciously to avoid his gaze. Her tone sounded a little harsh as she uttered, “Jared, don’t be rude. Mr. Presgrave is a busy man, so let’s not disturb him.”

Just as Elliot wanted to open his mouth, Anastasia’s glare left him stunned—it was a cold and warning gaze.

Since he was left with no choice, Elliot heaved a sigh and crouched down to fix Jared’s collar while coaxing him tenderly, “Your mommy’s right. I’m too busy right now, so I can’t come over for lunch. Let’s do it next time!”

“When will that be?” Jared quickly asked.

“When I’m not busy.”

“When will you not be busy?” Jared’s childish voice felt like a bullet hitting his chest.

“I...” When Elliot looked up tentatively at Anastasia, she wore an expressionless face, so he could only turn to Jared and say, “I might be busy for a long time.”

“Alright. It’s time to go home! Mr. Presgrave has to leave.” While holding her son’s hand, Anastasia struggled with the heavy grocery bag.

Just then, an arm stretched out to take her grocery bag. “I’ll carry it up for you.”

“It’s fine,” Anastasia insisted stubbornly.

Elliot, on the other hand, was adamant about helping her carry it up. “I’m not that busy until I don’t have time to take you upstairs,” he muttered bitterly, not caring if she was willing to let him help.

This time, Anastasia couldn’t be bothered to argue with him since she knew that she wouldn’t win. She felt as if something was stuck in her throat, making it difficult for her to talk.

In the elevator, Anastasia had her head hung low. Thankfully, it only took a few seconds to reach her floor. After opening the door to her house, she uttered to Jared, “Go inside.”

Since he was unwilling to give up, Jared asked one more time, “Mommy, can’t we let Mr. Presgrave come in for a while?”

Hearing that, Anastasia scolded strictly, “I’ve already told you, Jared. Mr. Presgrave is busy. Why can’t you listen to me?”

Jared sensed that his mother was upset and reluctantly entered the house. Just as Anastasia was about to enter the house after taking back the grocery bag, Elliot turned to Jared and informed him, “Jared, I need to talk to your mom for a second.”

With that, he shut the door. All of a sudden, his stance changed.

His gaze was burning as he looked at Anastasia.

“Why are you treating me so coldly?” Elliot questioned in a raspy voice. He found it unfair to be ignored.

They had announced their relationship to the public as a happy couple just two days ago, but now, he felt like she had dumped him and brutally pushed him away.

Chapter 369

Throughout his entire life, Elliot had never been treated this way.

A surge of complicated feelings crept up Anastasia’s heart as she suddenly declared, “Let’s not meet again, Elliot. Let’s forget everything that happened before! From now on, we will be strangers.”

The word ‘strangers’ hit him right in the heart.

“Why should we be strangers? I want to marry you and make you my wife. I’ll give you and Jared a complete family,” Elliot retorted through gritted teeth. His words were unquestionable.

“Do you want to know what Riley told me? I’ll tell you now. In order to save you back then, your grandmother called to threaten the mayor, saying that if they didn’t save her grandson, she would cause a nationwide stock market crash and create a financial disaster,” explained Anastasia, her eyes turning red at the same time.

She bit her lips and continued, “That was why the mayor requested the police force to save you no matter what, even if that meant taking the life of his officers. Just like that, I lost my mother.”

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she spoke. However, she didn’t wipe them off and glared at Elliot in resentment instead. “My mother wouldn’t have died if she did not go there to save you back then. Because of you, I lost her.”

As he watched her cry, Elliot felt like there was a fire burning in his heart. It was also his first time hearing that his grandmother had threatened the mayor to do such a thing.

In order to save him, his grandmother had made such a harsh decision. That explained why his grandmother was so determined to make Anastasia her daughter-in-law, for she must have lived in regret for her whole life.

“I’m sorry.” Watching her tears flow, Elliot could only feel sorry for her. He had no right to say anything else, even though he desperately wanted to wrap her in his arms and wipe away her tears.

However, he had lost the right to do so.

After taking a deep breath, Anastasia looked up. Her tears had stopped, and her voice sounded calm now. “I don’t want to see you or your family ever again. Let’s not contact each other anymore.”

All of a sudden, an unbridgeable gully formed between them. No amount of money or feelings could fill it up. Perhaps, it would never be able to disappear in this lifetime.

“I’d like to apologize to you and your family on behalf of mine.” Elliot looked at her, his eyes full of hurt.

As she turned away, Anastasia wiped away her tears and retorted, “It’s fine. Just go!”

As if trying to test the waters, Elliot uttered, “If you hate to see me, I promise to never appear in front of your eyes again.”

Anastasia accepted his test and gave him a firm reply, saying, “You’d better keep your promise.”

Her words hit him like a bullet once again.

“Take care, Anastasia.” The look in Elliot’s eyes currently resembled a severely injured animal that was suffering.

Just like that, Elliot left as she wished.

However, Anastasia felt like she had suddenly lost all of her strength. Crouching on the ground, she let her tears fall on the ground silently. Her heart was aching so bad that she couldn’t breathe.

After staying outside for a while, she entered the house. She quickly pretended to be in a good mood when she saw her son sitting quietly in front of the TV.

"Jared, shall I make fried chicken wings for you today?"

"Okay! Has Mr. Presgrave left?"

"Yup. He's left." After saying that, Anastasia entered the kitchen and started cooking. While chopping the ingredients, she accidentally cut her finger since her mind was distracted.

Fortunately, she was quick to realize this and only caused a scratch. Shaking her head, she freshened herself up so that she could take care of Jared.

The next morning, Anastasia received a call from her dad saying that he would be coming over to see Jared and have dinner with them.

When Francis arrived, he brought a lot of toys for Jared. After all, he adored his grandson very much.

As he sat on the sofa, Francis smiled in contentment. "Jared is finally going to have a complete family."

Anastasia, who was wiping the table, suddenly halted her actions. After she raised her head, she turned to Francis and said, "Dad, I broke up with Elliot."

"What? Why did you break up with him?" Francis couldn't help feeling shocked.

"We're not meant for each other, and I'm not good enough for him." Anastasia made up a random excuse.

Unconvinced, Francis questioned, "What do you mean you're not good enough for him? Does he look down on you because you have a child?"

Chapter 370

Anastasia quickly explained, "No, Dad. It has nothing to do with him. He adores Jared, but I don't like him anymore."

Somehow, she felt bad for Elliot when her father scolded him.

Francis was once again surprised. "Why do you not like him anymore?"

As she raised her head to look at her father, she wondered how her father felt about losing his wife and being forced to live on with his only daughter.

"Dad, have you ever hated the Presgraves?"

After pondering for a few seconds, he responded, "What's the use of hating them? Your mother was responsible for saving them back then, after all."

"Do you think it would've been possible for Mom to live if she hadn't been so devoted to her job?" Anastasia inquired as she sat beside Francis.

"Why do you ask? Did you break up with Young Master Elliot because you can't accept the fact that your mother sacrificed to save him?" Francis was now looking at her with a heartbroken expression.

"Yes." Anastasia nodded.

"However, I know your mother. If a child was going to be killed in front of her, she would've definitely gone out of her way to save him."

"Is it possible that she rescued him under pressure? He was the only heir of the Presgrave Family, after all." Anastasia looked at her father, knowing that he must not have been aware that Old Madam Presgrave had threatened the mayor.

"The situation was very chaotic and critical at that time. The kidnapper grabbed Young Master Elliot by the neck and was about to cut his head off. Who would have the heart to see such a tragedy happen? Your mother was the closest to him, so she knocked the killer down with all her might before pulling Young Master Elliot into her arms. The kidnapper then stabbed her like a madman. Later on, the others rescued Young Master Elliot while the kidnapper was shot dead on the spot. Sadly, your mother passed away."

Anastasia closed her eyes and imagined the scene before her. She began to cry because she was so heartbroken.

"Alright. If you can't accept it, let's cut ties with the Presgraves. As long as it doesn't make you sad," Francis comforted her. He could understand her feelings.

After dinner, Francis offered, "Why don't you work at my company? I should teach you how to manage the company now."

"Are you sure you want to hand the company to me, Dad?" Anastasia looked at him. After all, he had another daughter as well.

"I can only count on you. Do you think I can put my hopes on Erica?" Francis sighed. "She has been spoiled and pampered since young, so she only knows how to spend money lavishly. At least there is some hope if I pass the company to you. I just hope you don't treat your sister badly in the future."

All of a sudden, Anastasia felt burdened. She nodded and answered, "Okay. After I send Jared to school tomorrow, I'll come by the office."

She added, "I also have one more thing to tell you; I've found the main culprit behind Mom's death already. He's Riley Presgrave, Elliot's uncle."

"What? Are you sure?"

"He was the main culprit behind Elliot's kidnapping case, and Elliot will re-investigate his charges. If they require your cooperation in the future, please cooperate with them so that we can arrest this murderer and bring Mom justice as soon as possible."

"Okay, I will give my full cooperation if needed." Of course, Francis wouldn't let the murderer go.

After sending her father off, Anastasia's phone rang. When she glanced at the name on the screen, she quivered slightly.

It was Elliot.

After taking a deep breath, Anastasia picked up the phone. "Hello?"

“The police will summon you tomorrow to make a statement. Does Jared have a place to go?”

“I’ll be sending him to school,” Anastasia replied.

“Okay, do you need me to accompany you tomorrow?”

“No. I’ll be fine,” Anastasia refused and hung up.

After sending her son to school early the next morning, Anastasia rushed to the police station with Grace to make a statement.

They explained the whole process of the kidnapping incident. Anastasia’s subsequent experiences were also recorded, but she did not mention what Riley had told her.

When they came out of the police station, they bumped into Elliot.

Anastasia was aware of when he had arrived, as well as why he was waiting there.

“Hello, President Presgrave,” Grace greeted in surprise.

“You should head back to the company first, Grace!” Anastasia said to Grace.

“Sure. I’ll be taking my leave, then.” Grace didn’t want to interrupt the little couple.