

Too Far 401

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"Will Elliot be attending any events these days where I might run into him?"

The benefit gala tomorrow night came to Daniel's mind, but knowing that Elliot would likely bring Anastasia as his date, he lied, "Not that I'm aware of. President Presgrave has been tied up with work at the company these days."

Hayley could only swallow her bitter resentment. Her eyes were still a little swollen post-surgery, and she could afford to wait before meeting Elliot in person.

The next morning, the news of the Lancaster Group's benefit gala broke out among the upper-crust society. Given Lucas' network, he managed to rally a considerable number of distinguished guests for the benefit, one of whom happened to be Elliot.

For the sake of being able to climb the social ladder and work the elite society to the advantage of her schemes, Aliona had ordered Lucas to announce her identity as his illegitimate daughter at the benefit tonight. She had only one target this evening, and that was Elliot. She had already made all the arrangements and set her plans into motion; all there was left to do now was for him to rise to the bait.

Needless to say, she was going to dress up to the nines in hopes of catching his eye, and it would be even better if he could fall for her charms without any prompting on her end. If he refused to bed her tonight, then she was going to have to resort to other means to make him.

That afternoon, Anastasia had only just finished lunch when Elliot called to tell her he would be picking her up at 2.00PM and bringing her somewhere. He had deliberately kept the details vague, so at this point, she could only sit around and wait for Rey's phone call.

Just then, her phone rang a second time. She thought it might be Rey, but upon glancing at the caller ID, she saw that it was an unfamiliar number. As she frowned, she put the call through and asked, "Hello, who is this?"

"Good afternoon, Anastasia. Have you been taking good care of my son?" The voice on the other line belonged to a man, but it was heavily warped by a voice processor and hearing it sent a chill down Anastasia's spine.

A dark look passed over her face, and her hand shook as she clutched the phone tightly. "I swear, if you show up, I'll kill you with my own hands."

The man chuckled. "You could kill me, Anastasia, but that would leave our son with two criminal parents. It could be rather brutal for the kid, don't you think?"

"Shut up," she demanded through gritted teeth as her thoughts clamored in her head.

"What is your relationship with Elliot?" he asked grimly. "If you dare to even marry another man and have him become the new father to my son, trust me when I say I'll be very, very angry with you."

"My son has nothing to do with you," Anastasia growled.

“He’s my son too, and that means I’m just as involved in his life as you are.”

She clenched her fists as a murderous rage filled her. “What the hell do you want?”

“Listen carefully, Anastasia—you are not allowed to marry someone else while our son is under your care, especially if that someone is Elliot.”

“You know Elliot?” she asked when she sensed unbridled hostility in his tone when he mentioned Elliot.

“I don’t know who he is, but I saw your pictures with him all over the internet. If you so much as even think about marrying him and setting up a new family for our son, you can be sure that I will make you pay,” he threatened in a low and angry voice.

“The kid is mine and mine alone, and you have nothing to do with him! If you show up, I won’t hesitate to call the police and have you locked up,” Anastasia warned, not at all backing down in the face of his threats.

“You were the one who snuck into my room voluntarily five years ago, Anastasia. Whatever happened next was a mere accident, and you can’t press charges against me for that.”

She clenched her jaw and bit out, “In that case, why don’t you try me and see if I could put you in jail for life?”

“I’m sure our son would love to find out more about his biological father,” he said, biting down on her weakness.

“Leave my son alone! Don’t you dare go near him!”

“I know where he goes to school, where you live, and where your father lives.”

“Don’t even think about hurting my family unless you want to pay in blood,” she warned maliciously.

He scoffed. “You don’t scare me at all, Anastasia. I am a man with nothing to lose, and I don’t mind taking our son down to hell with me if you were to kill me.”

“Why don’t you die someplace else and leave my son alone?” Her heart had leaped to her throat, and in the next second, she started to formulate a plan. She took a deep breath and pressed in a more obliging tone, “What do you want? Money? I could give you a sum of money if you promise to leave my family alone.”

“You’re going to give me money?”

“I could give you a million, but you have to stay the hell away from my son,” she bargained icily.

However, he countered, “I don’t want your money. I want you to stay away from Elliot!”

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Anastasia frowned. She found it odd that the man claimed he had nothing to live for on one hand while refusing her money on the other, and odder still was how someone so beaten down insisted she stay away from Elliot. He simply wasn’t making any sense.

In the end, the man’s greed got the better of him as he said, “Fine, wire me the money!”

"I'll hand you the card with the money in it if you come over personally to retrieve it," Anastasia countered stubbornly.

"Trying to lure me out, I see. Hah! I'm no idiot, Anastasia. I know you're trying to set me up to get caught! Save your energy and don't bother trying to catch me; you won't succeed. Stay away from Elliot if you know what's good for you, you hear?"

With that, the man hung up.

Anastasia stared at her phone as she pondered on their conversation. She couldn't help wondering why the man so stubbornly demanded that she stay away from Elliot. Does he bear a grudge against Elliot?

More to the point, the man had figured out that she was, indeed, trying to lure him out into the light by using money as bait.

In the past, she would do all that she could to avoid ever meeting the man who had assaulted her five years ago, but now, he was forcing her to confront him. She was starting to realize that the only way she could move on from her nightmarish past was not by running away, but by facing it head-on

fearlessly. Perhaps it was only after she had personally condemned the sc*mbag to a life of imprisonment that she could finally look back on the incident from five years ago and learn to walk away from it.

Anastasia vowed that she would never let this man escape the rule of law no matter what. She wouldn't let him get away with what he had done to her, even if it meant having to tell Jared the truth about his birth.

Meanwhile, over by the man-made lake near Summit Mansion, Hayley was seething with rage as she clutched her phone in one trembling hand after she realized that Anastasia could no longer be manipulated by her vicious, albeit empty threats.

She had planned on using the identity of the male escort to force Anastasia into staying away from Elliot, but the call had ended with Hayley being the one threatened instead.

It was 3.00PM when Rey pulled up outside Anastasia's apartment. She got into the car and was ferried to a boutique in the heart of the city.

"Miss Tillman, President Presgrave has asked that you pick out a dress for the benefit gala tonight, which you will be attending as his date," Rey informed politely.

Anastasia nodded. If she was going to attend an event with Elliot, it was only par for the course that she had to pick out something elegant and understated to match his refined grace. After all, the last thing she wanted was to humiliate him by wearing some old dress pulled from the back of her wardrobe.

The boutique had a wide collection of designer dresses from Anastasia to choose from, and the owner personally led her to peruse the seasonal items that were on the more exclusive end of the evening-wear spectrum.

However, Anastasia had turned down all of these dresses in favor of a beige one that accentuated her flawless, porcelain skin, which seemed to glow under the lights.

Time ticked by, and before anyone noticed, it was already 5.00PM. Anastasia emerged from the boutique with her make-up done and her dress fitted. The beige evening dress hugged her slender figure and flattered her curves, and her hair was gathered elegantly at her nape with tendrils framing her face. Coupled with the shimmering earrings she was using, she was the perfect picture of poise and grace.

“You look beautiful tonight, Miss Tillman,” Rey praised with a smile.

“Thank you,” she replied graciously. She slid into the backseat of the car as Rey held the door open for her, and the staff at the boutique came out to send her off, enviously watching her leave.

As Anastasia leaned into the seat, she looked like a young lady born out of aristocracy whose every little gesture and expression radiated innate elegance.

Not two minutes after the car had pulled up outside Presgrave Corporation’s headquarters, Anastasia saw a towering figure step out of the revolving doors of the main entrance before he proceeded toward her. He looked ethereal when the twilight rays from the winter sun played over him, giving the illusion that he had a halo around him.

Anastasia’s eyes lit up at the sight of him, and she didn’t even realize that she was gazing upon him with love and endearment. Then again, anyone would look at Elliot the same way if they caught even the slightest glimpse of him!

Elliot opened the door and slid into the backseat next to her. His eyes fell on her appreciatively, and he found himself unable to look away.

He thought she was already gorgeous enough without dressing up, but now that she had, he was surprised by how breathtaking she looked.

Anastasia couldn’t help blushing at the way he was staring at her, and she self-consciously tucked a lock of hair behind her ear as she asked shyly, “How do I look?”

“No words can describe how beautiful you are right now,” Elliot said honestly as he grinned, the corners of his eyes crinkling lovingly.

She gaped at him. “You’re exaggerating, aren’t you? I think I look passably decent, if not slightly better than how I usually look.”

“I think you’re drop-dead gorgeous,” he went on to praise.

A little flustered by how earnest he sounded, she pointed out, “You look really good in a suit as well. In fact, you’re the only man I know who can look this handsome in a suit.”

He was pleased to hear her compliment, and a delighted smile curled on his lips.

Alas, neither of them ever stopped to think about how Rey—the perpetual bachelor who was driving them to the benefit gala at present—might feel as they rubbed their relationship in his face.

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They cruised down the road leading to the hotel where the benefit gala was being held. When it came to charity auctions and benefit galas in the upper-crust society, the charity aspect was often overlooked in

light of the distinguished guest list. More valuable than any of the antiques and items in the auction were the connections one could make during an event like this.

As such, the benefit gala became a hotspot for powerful figures in politics and business to gather and acquaint themselves with those who could launch their careers and social lives into new heights.

It went without saying that Elliot was the main target for the social climbers this evening.

Presently, Aliona was seated in her hotel room, checking her make-up in the mirror. She had seen Elliot's name on the guest list, and she was delighted when she found out that he did not have a plus-one. If things went well, she could seize the chance to become his date for the evening.

Just then, the hotel manager whom she had ordered to keep her informed on the arrival of the guests called and said, "Miss Dora, Mr. Presgrave has arrived."

"Alright," she replied as a smile curled on her lips. After checking herself one last time in the mirror, she grabbed her sequined clutch and rose to leave the room.

She was dressed in a ravishing red dress tonight that gave a subtle view of her cleavage. Any man who saw her would undoubtedly be attracted to her.

When she was in the elevator, she gazed at her reflection and admired her flawless presentation. She wondered if she would catch Elliot's eye as soon as she showed up in front of him, and there was a confident voice in her head that told her she would.

Upon reaching the conference hall downstairs, she descended the stairs that led to the crowd that had gathered below. She was the princess of Dora Group, and she was set to impress those who beheld her.

However, just as she was walking down the steps, she caught sight of something that made her so angry that she nearly tripped on the hem of her skirt. Disbelief colored her face when her gaze fell on the woman who was currently holding onto Elliot's arm. What the hell is Anastasia doing here?

Aliona swallowed her rage and continued her elegant descent, but she was already fuming. Anastasia's name had not been on the guest list, which meant she should have been denied entrance the moment she showed up at the entrance.

Then again, Elliot was powerful and intimidating enough to bring in anyone he pleased without needing further verification.

At the thought of this, Aliona took a deep breath and steeled herself as she walked toward Elliot. She was determined to trample all over Anastasia tonight.

Downstairs, Anastasia could sense hostility being directed at her, and she looked up to meet Aliona's spiteful gaze as the latter made her way down from the landing. When Aliona looked at her, it was with unbridled contempt, but when she looked at Elliot, it was with adoration.

"You're here, Elliot."

"Miss Dora," Elliot greeted perfunctorily as he nodded in acknowledgment.

Aliona's icy gaze flickered over to Anastasia. She smiled as she asked, "I didn't think you'd be here as well, Miss Tillman. If I'm not mistaken, your name wasn't on the guest list."

Anyone who heard this would feel a rush of humiliation, but Anastasia took it in stride as she feigned exasperation and said, "Oh, I wish I didn't have to come, but President Presgrave insisted and dragged me into this. I'm a little embarrassed, honestly."

The smile on Aliona's face turned frigid. "Is that true?"

Elliot took Anastasia by the hand at that moment and interjected, "Come on, let's go say hi to Mr. Dora."

Anastasia nodded and turned to look at Aliona, who was standing in their way. With a delicate raise of her brow, she said flatly, "Excuse us."

Aliona could do nothing but step aside to let them pass, watching as they happily made their way over to Lucas to greet him.

Her fists clenched at her sides as fury burned in her. She hated how Anastasia always cropped up unexpectedly and thwarted her schemes. Frustrated, she fished out her phone and dialed a number before she barked, "All of you, meet me at the lounge on the third floor right now."

She had called one of her henchmen that she had stationed at the event to ensure Elliot would sleep with her tonight.

Aliona looked stormy as she sat on the couch in the third-floor lounge and said to the four bodyguards who had appeared before her, "You guys saw that woman who was clinging onto Elliot just now, right? She's his date for the evening, and I want you to find a way to throw her out."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Better yet, kill her if you get the chance," she added viciously. However, she had only just said this when she decided that laying low for tonight would be the wiser thing to do. She shouldn't make any dramatic moves if she planned on seducing Elliot. After she changed her mind, she said dismissively, "Forget it. Just throw her out of here."

She was belligerent that a woman like Anastasia, who couldn't even begin to compete with her, was lording Elliot over her head like she had already won.

Back at the conference hall, Anastasia was appraising Lucas with concern. He might be the one who had put this charity auction together, but he didn't look to be in high spirits at all. In fact, he seemed exhausted. "Mr. Dora, take it easy and make sure to get enough rest," she pointed out gently.

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Lucas was touched by Anastasia's gentle reminder, and he gave her a grateful smile as he said, "Thank you for your concern, Miss Tillman." He would never have agreed to Riley and Aliona's plans had they not used his son's life as leverage. He could never bring himself to do this to Elliot, but as things were, he had no choice.

There was nothing he could do but watch Aliona succeed in her plot against Elliot. Resigned, he looked at Elliot and said meaningfully, "The young woman on your arm right now is as gorgeous as she is kind. Make sure to keep her."

"We'll invite you to our wedding for sure, Mr. Dora," Elliot replied with a good-natured laugh.

Anastasia, on the other hand, blushed. There he goes with that nonsense again, she thought in exasperation, though there was no denying the fondness she felt for him.

"Very well, and I'll be sure to show up for the occasion. Have fun this evening."

Not long after, the first session of the auction kicked off. Elliot wasted no time in bidding for a diamond bracelet for Harriet, and he was the highest bidder at three million. Next to him, Anastasia pursed her lips as she tried to reign in her shock.

This was closely followed by his bidding for an antique, and it was sold to him at a whopping eight million. A gift for Harriet, he had told Anastasia.

She swallowed. The man was shopping like how she would at a thrift store at this point of the auction. He didn't even blink when he bid millions on the items.

"You're welcome to put up your card when you see something you like," Elliot said quietly as he leaned closer to her. Most of the things he had bid on were more suited to geriatric tastes, so he didn't manage to get anything for Anastasia.

She shook her head and pointed out, "I'd rather not take advantage of your money, Elliot. It's bad behavior."

"You'll be my woman someday anyway; think of it as indulging in advance," he countered with a confident smile.

She didn't know how he could be so confident that they would get married one day, but she had to admit that confidence certainly boosted a man's charms.

At that moment, she glanced over at Aliona, who sat toward the front of the crowd. She had turned around several times to cast admiring looks at Elliot, and it was clear to see that she was trying to seduce him.

Anastasia whispered in amusement, "I think Miss Dora has feelings for you."

"Those are nothing compared to the feelings I have for you," Elliot said matter-of-factly as he turned to look at her with a devilish gleam in his obsidian eyes.

A smile touched Anastasia's lips, and he took the chance to wrap an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close to kiss her on the forehead. She froze at first, and when she glanced at Aliona again, she met the latter's scornful and mutinous gaze.

She hated Aliona for her disgusting two-faced demeanor.

Aliona, on the other hand, sneered when she saw how tenderly Elliot had kissed Anastasia on the forehead. He'll be mine by the end of the night. Mark my words, Anastasia. Just imagining the devastated look on Anastasia's face filled her with satisfaction.

After the first round of the auction was over, Aliona leaned close and whispered to Lucas, "I think it's time you introduce me."

Lucas sighed wearily and rose to go up on stage, whereupon he announced, "Thank you all for being here tonight. Next up, I have an important announcement. I would like to introduce all of you to someone, namely my daughter, Aliona."

When her name was called, Aliona rose in her seat and elegantly made her way up the stage. Then, she hugged Lucas as she said sentimentally, "Thank you, Dad. I love you the most."

Lucas was decidedly uncomfortable in her embrace, but just as he was about to pull away, she whispered in her ear menacingly, "I'll be handing you a glass of wine later, and I want you to give it to Elliot."

"I want no part in this," Lucas rejected in hushed tones.

"Oh, but that won't do. You must be the one to give him the wine," she drawled as she dug her nails into his shoulders, threatening him.

"Fine," he bit out forcefully and unwillingly.

Below the stage, everyone thought that it was a harmless and loving embrace between a father and his daughter. They were all clueless about the truth of their exchange.

Meanwhile, Anastasia was seated as she took in the scene. She had to give it to Aliona for being so dedicated in her pursuit of Elliot.

Now that the first round of the auction was over, the guests resumed their relaxed chatter and glass-clinking, hoping that they could seize every chance to strengthen their social network during the benefit gala. Some of them circled Elliot, who was the main target of these social climbers tonight, while trying to get acquainted with him.

They even tried to hand him the precious goods they had bid for during the auction as gifts, but Elliot turned them all down.

Just then, Lucas walked up to him with two glasses of wine in hand, one of which had been spiked by Aliona.

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The only way to avoid Elliot's suspicion was to have Lucas hand him the wine. Aliona sat on the other end of the room, but her gaze was fixed on Elliot and the glass of wine in his hand. She had to make sure that he finished every last drop.

She had spiked the wine with a powerful dosage of the drug, which was specially made to knock someone out temporarily, only to have them wake up as the effects of the drug hit their peak.

The woman whom Aliona had arranged to get close to Anastasia was swooping into action now. She greeted Anastasia after walking up to her and said politely, "Miss Tillman, I heard through the grapevine that you're a jewelry designer at Bourgeois. I was wondering if I could have a moment with you?"

Anastasia looked at the elegantly dressed woman and nodded, not wanting to turn her down. The woman led her to the side of the room, away from Elliot and Lucas. Then, she explained with a smile, "If you must know, I have taken a liking to your designs, and I'd like to have a jewelry set custom-made. Could you squeeze me in for an appointment so that we can go over the details?"

"I'm no longer working in Bourgeois, I'm afraid, but I can recommend someone whose work is far better than mine if you'd like," Anastasia offered. Naturally, she would love to help bring in business to Bourgeois, and though she had left the atelier, she was still supportive of Felicia's work.

Presently, in the banquet hall, Elliot had taken the glass of wine Lucas offered him.

After making some sentimental remarks, Lucas said to the younger man, "Here's to pulling off this event successfully." He made a toasting gesture and added, "Bottoms up, Elliot."

Being the younger of the two, it was only courtesy for Elliot to finish the wine. He tipped his head back and gulped down every last drop of wine, then looked down again to see that Lucas had already finished his own drink.

The two men held onto their empty glasses as Lucas went on to say, "There's something I'd like to discuss with you, Elliot. Shall we head on to the second-floor lounge?"

Glancing over in Anastasia's direction and seeing that she was in the middle of conversing with a woman, Elliot turned to follow Lucas up the stairs.

Meanwhile, Aliona was so excited to see Elliot finish his glass of wine that her heart beat wildly in her chest. Her plan was finally going to succeed; she was but one step away from making Elliot hers tonight.

She greatly anticipated his performance later on. While he would pass out from the drink at first, the aftermath that followed was something to look forward to. She felt certain that he would please her in all the ways she had dreamed he would.

The mere thought of that sent a pleasurable shiver down her spine as she pulled out her phone and ordered the person on the other line, "You can get rid of her now."

Anastasia was still talking about jewelry with the woman from earlier when two security guards suddenly walked up to her and said, "Sorry, miss, but we noticed that you weren't on the guest list. I'm afraid we have to ask you to leave."

"My apologies. I came here with Young Master Elliot at the very last minute, which is why my name wasn't on the guest list," Anastasia explained.

The interruption provided the woman a chance to slither away, and Anastasia was left alone to deal with the guards. They insisted, "In that case, could you please come with us for verification purposes?"

Upon hearing this, Anastasia looked around the hall to search for Elliot's familiar figure. She didn't want to follow these two strange guards out of the hall, and when she couldn't find Elliot, she said stubbornly, "I'll find someone who can verify my attendance as Young Master Elliot's plus-one."

“Miss, we have reason to believe that you are here with suspicious ulterior motives. Please come with us,” one of the security guards ordered as he reached out to grab her by the wrist.

Just then, she looked up in time to catch the pleased look on Aliona’s gaze from across the room. It was then that she realized these two guards were acting on her orders. Throwing me out, I see, Anastasia mused. She had no reason to stay here anyway, but she didn’t want to give Aliona the satisfaction.

At that moment, however, she saw Aliona turn to head up the stairs to the second floor.

Anastasia swiftly shoved the security guard’s hand away from her wrist and blended into the crowd of guests. Then, she made her way over to the buffet restaurant from the other side of the hall.

She wanted to look for Elliot, but she had made one round through the vicinity and found him nowhere in sight.

In the lounge on the second floor, Elliot was listening to what Lucas had to say when he suddenly felt as if his blood was rushing to his head. He blinked hard, but when that did little to alleviate the dizziness, he glanced at Lucas and said, “Mr. Dora, my head is spinning.”

“Why don’t you get some rest, Elliot? Here, you can take a nap here and return to the party later,” Lucas offered as he went over to help the younger man. As Elliot’s conscious mind slowly slipped into the darkness, he lay down on the couch and dozed off within seconds.

Shortly after, Aliona pushed the door open and walked into the lounge. She looked at Elliot’s unconscious form, and a devious but elated smirk curled on her lips. “Finally, he’s mine.”

Lucas glowered at her in disgust. “Take him upstairs. You’ve finally got what you asked for.”

Aliona smiled as she drawled breezily, “Go down and entertain your guests. I don’t want any of them bothering me tonight.”

Anastasia was trying to shake off the two security guards, but when she saw Aliona walking up the stairs, she wondered if Elliot was on the second floor as well.

After all, Aliona gravitated toward Elliot no matter where he went. Anastasia reckoned that he was on the second floor, so she made her way upstairs. However, even as she arrived in the corridor, she wasn’t sure where to start looking; all the lounges on this floor were identical, and their doors were all firmly shut.

Just then, she caught sight of someone being hauled out of the lounge at the end of the corridor. While she was turning away, she could clearly see that the figure being carried away by two security guards was none other than Elliot.

What’s wrong with him? She grew anxious immediately as her heart leaped to her throat. Elliot looked weak and drained, and he couldn’t walk without the two guards supporting him under the arms.

The next second, she saw Aliona emerge from the lounge before she followed the two guards toward the elevators. At once, Anastasia’s stomach churned. What the hell? Did Aliona drug him?

A fiery rage seized Anastasia as she hurried over to the elevator lobby, where she saw that the elevator Aliona and her henchmen had presumably taken had stopped on the fifteenth floor. The banquet hall

where the auction was being held was on the eighth, which meant there were a good seven floors that got in the way of Anastasia's rescue mission.

She pressed the button on the panel repeatedly, but no elevator came down for her. As of now, the only thing that flooded her mind were thoughts of how Aliona was close to claiming Elliot as her own.

Anastasia couldn't quite understand where her sudden possessiveness was coming from, but she was adamant to keep her man away from other women's clutches. With that in mind, she was even more determined to go up and stop Aliona from doing anything despicable to Elliot. What the hell is wrong with Elliot? Why does he keep getting drugged? Isn't it bad enough that he had slept with Hayley unintentionally five years ago? Now, he's about to fall victim to Aliona!

Finally, an elevator arrived on her floor. She hurried through the open doors and stared anxiously at the floor numbers displayed on the little screen in the elevator, feeling bile rising in her throat. Never had she imagined that an elevator could move so slowly. She couldn't believe that the fifteenth floor felt so far away. Is Aliona getting her hands all over Elliot now?

Meanwhile, Elliot had been carried into a suite and plopped down on the couch. The security guards had left, and right now, Aliona was sitting on the other side of the couch with a smirk on her lips as she appraised the sleeping man.

He was a work of art. She took in the chiseled angles and planes of his handsome face, and when her gaze fell upon the perfect curve of his lips, she swallowed. She wanted nothing more than to kiss him right now and see how he tasted.

However, she wasn't in a hurry to make a move on him, knowing that he wouldn't be able to resist seeking her out and pulling her into his arms the moment he woke up. All she had to do now was wait for him to regain his senses, and she wanted to make sure that the first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was her in a suggestive outfit.

She went into the adjoining bedroom to put on the night-gown that she had prepared for this night. Once she put it on, no man would be able to resist the temptation of bedding her.

When Anastasia arrived on the fifteenth floor after what felt like ages, she stepped out of the elevator doors and surveyed the eerily quiet hallway. She didn't know which room Aliona was in, but she was desperate enough to knock on every door until she found out.

She was going to do everything she could to stop Aliona's hideous acts before she got away with them. I have to save Elliot no matter what!

While the thought of this was amusing, it didn't change the fact that the man needed saving tonight. She was going to be his knight in shining armor for a change.

Anastasia began to knock on every door along the hallway. Seeing as there were several rooms left vacant for the night, she didn't get a response after knocking on a handful of doors. Once in a while, she would come across a room that was occupied, and presently, the woman who opened the door was astonished to see her. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"Sorry, I must have the wrong room. I apologize for disrupting your evening," Anastasia replied courteously.

Then, she went on knocking one door after the next. She couldn't care less about the embarrassment, and every time she knocked, she would dodge to the side of the door, afraid that Aliona would not open up if she saw her through the peephole.

At last, when she came to a stop at the last room, Anastasia took a deep breath and rapped her knuckles against the door several times.

This was Aliona's suite. She frowned when she heard the knock, and she wondered with no small amount of disgruntlement who would bother her at this crucial time. Then, she thought that perhaps one of her henchmen needed to speak with her, so she crossed the room to answer the door.

She looked through the peephole, but when she saw that nobody was on the other side, she turned to walk away. Just then, another series of knocks came, and she impatiently threw open the door without checking this time.

Only one person was standing out in the hallway.

Anastasia let out a breath of relief when she saw Aliona at the door, dressed in nothing but a suggestive nightgown. I've found you.

Aliona flushed as she demanded hotly, "What are you doing here, Anastasia?" As soon as the words left her mouth, she belatedly realized what was happening and quickly reached to close the door.

However, Anastasia was quicker. She slammed her palm against the door before it shut all the way and marched into the room.

"Get out of my room, Anastasia," Aliona thundered.

Anastasia took one look at Elliot's sleeping form on the couch and pointed at him. She said, "Oh, I will leave, and I'm taking him with me!"

"Elliot got drunk and fell asleep in my room. What does any of this have to do with you? Leave on your own!" Aliona barked as she reached out to grab Anastasia by the wrist and tried to drag her out the door. "Get out!"

As she pulled away from her, Anastasia countered angrily, "Did he really get drunk, or did you spike his drink to try and set him up for your own schemes? As a woman, I'm disgusted by you."

Aliona immediately pulled out her phone to call for backup, but when Anastasia saw this, she snatched the phone away and asked snidely, "Oh, trying to call for help to throw me out, are you?"

"Give me back my phone, Anastasia!" Aliona ground out. There was an icy fury in her eyes as she eyed Anastasia murderously. This annoying pest is always trying to foil my plans!

Without another word, Anastasia threw the phone on the ground and stepped on it with her heel, breaking and shattering the screen.

"How dare you destroy my phone?!" Aliona screeched, refusing to believe that Anastasia had such a feral side to her even though she had seen it with her own eyes.

Indeed, Anastasia's rage was sufficiently stoked this evening. Just thinking about the despicable things Aliona had planned to do to Elliot sent unbridled anger rushing through her. With a defiant gaze, she pointed out snarkily, "I can pay for the damages if you'd like." Then, she assessed the nightgown Aliona was wearing and sneered, "Why bother wearing a nightgown when you could save time and wear nothing instead?"

"This is between me and Elliot, Anastasia. Stay out of it! What right do you have to come in here and demand to leave with him?" Aliona shrieked. Now that she couldn't call for backup, she was going to have to chase Anastasia out of here herself.

"Even if I was here as a friend, I still wouldn't let Elliot be taken advantage of by the disgusting likes of you!" Anastasia snapped righteously.

"I'll call security if you don't get out right now."

"Might as well, seeing as I'm going to call the police on you," Anastasia spat as she took out her phone to make a call.

At the sight of this, Aliona faltered and quickly rushed up to her. "I told you to stay out of this!"

Anastasia threw her phone and purse aside, then stormed forward to meet Aliona halfway. Soon, the two women were embroiled in a vicious fight. Aliona got slapped in the face before she could even snatch up Anastasia's phone, and she couldn't believe that she had just been struck.

"Did you just hit me?" she screeched.

"How very astute of you," Anastasia drawled sarcastically. She glanced over at the man lying on the couch. If she hadn't gotten here in time, Aliona would have had her way with him.

Aliona raised her hand to fight back, but Anastasia clutched her wrist. She had grown up fighting with Erica, and her experience put her at an advantage. Aliona, on the other hand, had been raised and coddled like a princess by Riley, which left her helpless in a physical brawl.

Presently, she let out a piercing shriek. She was like a cat with all its fur standing on its back as she hysterically launched herself at Anastasia.

Having not anticipated this, Anastasia toppled backward onto the ground, but when she retaliated, she was like an angered lioness.

She reached up and grabbed a handful of Aliona's hair, pulling it with as much force as she could summon.

A sharp cry escaped Aliona as tears sprang to her eyes, feeling as if her hair was going to be pulled from her scalp. "Let go of me, you b*tch! Let go!"

However, Anastasia did not let go. Instead, she pinned Aliona to the ground while keeping a firm grip on her hair.

Not wanting to lose, Aliona reached up to grab Anastasia's hair as well, thereby clawing off the silver comb that held her hair in place.

As Anastasia's long hair tumbled wildly around her face, both women were locked in a fierce battle, screaming as one tried to push the other to the ground.

Neither of them realized that the man on the couch had been awakened by their shrill cries. Elliot sat up groggily with one hand pressed to his forehead, only to see the commotion taking place in the space next to the couch. The two women were tangled together in a violent fight that was only escalating with every passing second. When he heard a familiar voice amidst the screams and taunts, his eyes widened.

"Stop!" he ordered hoarsely.

The two women stopped immediately as his voice cut above theirs.

Anastasia and Aliona released each other, though she was visibly more bewildered than Anastasia.

If one had to pick a winner, Anastasia would undoubtedly be a victor in this brawl. She had dealt considerable damage to Aliona, whose hair had come close to being pulled out of her scalp. There were even claw marks on her skin, and the delicate straps of her nightgown had been ripped off, barely holding up the only item of clothing she had on.

Presently, Anastasia tried to pull her tangled long hair into submission. She grabbed her purse and went up to Elliot to help him to his feet, saying, "Now that you're awake, let's go!"

The moment her hand touched his, it sent an electric current through Elliot. He narrowed his eyes slightly and suddenly felt heat rising in him, threatening to consume him whole.

It was as if there was a raging fire burning in Elliot, and it didn't feel like it was dying down anytime soon. It was then that he realized he had been set up.

At that moment, Aliona reached out to stop Anastasia while seething, "You can't take him away now. He needs a woman!"

"And he has one—that's me. He has no need for you," Anastasia retorted furiously as she held onto Elliot to keep him upright.

Upon hearing this, Elliot's eyes glimmered happily. She's going to save me, he thought.

"Don't go, Elliot!" Aliona cried out pleadingly, reaching out for him.

However, one baleful look on his part was all it took to make her falter. He glowered at her warningly as he bit out in disgust, "Don't touch me." He didn't need to think to know that she was the one who had drugged him tonight.

"Come on," Anastasia prompted as she opened the door and led him out. Then, she fished out her phone and called Rey, asking him to meet them at the hotel entrance.

Back in the suite, Aliona was close to unraveling with hysteria. She couldn't believe that her plans had once again been thwarted by Anastasia.

Meanwhile, Anastasia hauled Elliot into the elevator and propped him up against one wall. Now that her hands were free, she tried to comb her hair into submission with her fingers and straightened her

slightly crumpled dress. When she tilted her head and saw the imprint on the alabaster skin of her neck, she cursed, "Damn it."

Elliot's heart twisted as he assessed the damage on her. He then asked weakly, "Does it hurt?"

She shook her head and turned to look at him glumly. "You ought to thank me for saving you before you became Aliona's plaything in bed."

He gaped at her speechlessly. With superhuman effort, he pushed through the fire that was threatening to consume him and asked in a strained voice, "You got into a fight with Aliona to defend my honor?"

"Are you implying that I shouldn't have done that to save you? You just want to sleep with Aliona, don't you?" Anastasia countered sharply as she gave him an accusatory look.

"The only person I want is you, Anastasia," Elliot forced out almost breathlessly as he leaned against the elevator wall, too weak to stand properly on his feet. In a show of his genuine desire for her, he added, "Let's switch hotels. I need you."

"Switch hotels? Fat chance! We're going to the hospital." She had only just said this when the elevator doors opened, and she snaked an arm around his waist to haul him out.

He was evidently disgruntled as he muttered, "I thought you were going to sacrifice yourself to save me from distress."

"You've overestimated the extent of my selflessness," she pointed out sarcastically. As if I would ever think about doing that, Elliot!

Just then, Rey hurried up to them, and when he saw how unwell Elliot looked, he urged, "What happened to President Presgrave?"

"He was drugged. Quick, we have to get him to the hospital!" Anastasia said.

Upon hearing this, Rey hastily helped Elliot over to the car.

When Elliot had settled into the backseat, he could feel the heat in him grow relentless. Rey was behind the wheel, and Anastasia was seated close to a man whose smoldering gaze was fixed on her.

She sensed the desire that was pulsating through him, and when she turned to check on him, he lunged forward and kissed her.

"It hurts... Help me, Anastasia," he pleaded in a low and husky voice.

Anastasia quickly pulled down the screen that separated the front and backseat of the car while trying to shove the man away from her. "Just hold on a little bit longer, Elliot. We're almost at the hospital."

However, with the effects of the drug peaking in him, waiting was no longer a viable option for him. He desperately needed relief now.

"Elliot, just hang on a little bit—"

She was cut off when he leaned forward and kissed her hungrily.

In the driver's seat, Rey stepped on the gas and weaved through the lanes on the road as he sped toward the hospital. He didn't want Elliot to make any mistakes out of impulse tonight, or else Anastasia might hold a grudge against him.

Having sought relief in the kiss, Elliot visibly calmed down in the spacious backseat. He managed to recover a sliver of self-control as he murmured in a pained and hoarse voice, "Anastasia... I need you..."

Fortunately, there was a hospital nearby. After Rey pulled up at the entrance, he tapped on the window to indicate that they had arrived. Anastasia shoved Elliot and his restless hands away from her and said, "Come on, Elliot, pull yourself together. We're already here at the hospital."

Rey opened the car door for them, and Elliot obligingly stepped down from the car. Anastasia took her purse and followed suit before she walked with him to the doctor's office.

A series of procedures later, he was put up in a hospital room and hooked to an IV. As the sedative worked through his system, Elliot was like a tamed beast, and he eventually drifted off into a deep slumber.

It was only then that Anastasia finally relaxed. She leaned into the seat next to the bed tiredly and thought with dismay about how she had not unleashed her full force on Aliona during the fight earlier. There was residual adrenaline thrumming in her veins, reminding her that she ought to teach that wretched girl a hard lesson.

She was pulled from her thoughts when Rey, having sorted out the paperwork at the counter, returned to ask, "Miss Tillman, would you like to go home?"

"No, I'm good. I'll stay here and look after him."

"Very well, then. I'll be right outside, so just call me if you need anything."

Anastasia nodded wearily. She gazed at Elliot pensively while he slept soundly under the dim glow of the lights. The sedative had evidently overpowered the effects of the drug from earlier, and the IV solution was being transfused slowly through a tube that was attached to his strong arm by a short needle.

As she watched him, she began to wonder if Aliona had planned on forcing herself onto him before making him take responsibility later.

The plan was a good one, admittedly, but unfortunately for Aliona, Anastasia caught on to it and thwarted it in time.

Anastasia was incredibly relieved that she had attended the benefit gala with him tonight. Had she not been there, he would have fallen into Aliona's evil clutches. She had come upon him lying unconscious in Aliona's hotel suite, and with the effects of the drug snatching away his voice of reason, she couldn't help wondering if he and Aliona would have gone all the way had she not intervened.

Eventually, she fell asleep. She wasn't sure how much time had passed when she felt herself being picked up and pulled into a warm and comforting embrace.

It was already 3.00AM when Elliot woke up to see that the girl had dozed off on the couch with his suit jacket draped over her. He felt his gut wrench, and he rose to carry her over to the bed.

The effects of the drug had worn off by then. When he saw the claw mark that ran along the delicate skin of her neck and her tousled hair, his heart twisted.

As he sighed, he blamed himself for having put her through the tiresome ordeal of saving him.

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, Aliona was fuming in her suite after her plan was ruined. She wasted no time lashing out at the two security guards who had let Anastasia out of their sight. As things were, she did not stand a chance to get close to Elliot, much less claim him as her own. In fact, she wouldn't be surprised if he hated her with a passion.

"Miss, should we bring you to the hospital to get your face treated?" the bodyguard asked out of concern.

Naturally, Aliona had seen the imprint on her cheek where Anastasia had slapped her earlier. The scratch marks all over her body were even more jarring under the light. She couldn't believe how savage and persistent Anastasia had been during the fight. She had only been wearing a thin nightgown when the brawl happened, which exposed most of her skin to Anastasia's vicious attacks.

"That wretched little b*tch!" Aliona bit out as resentment and rage burned in her eyes. "I won't let her get away with this!"

In the hospital, Anastasia stirred from her sleep when it was slightly past dawn. She opened her eyes slowly, only to meet the dark and amused gaze of the man sitting next to the bed.

She instinctively covered her face with her hands. Suddenly, she registered where she was. Wait, how did I even end up in bed? He must have carried me over from the couch!

"I've been staring at you for the past half an hour. It's a little late for you to hide your face now, don't you think?" Elliot teased as a low chuckle escaped him.

She flushed and let her hands drop, then turned to look at him with her clear and unwavering gaze as she asked, "Are you okay now?"

"I am," he reassured with a smile. He reached out to stroke her hair, but when his hand came away with a few broken strands of it, he asked in a pained voice, "Does your scalp still hurt?"

Of course it does! Aliona practically tried to weed my hair out with her possum hands! "Not really," she lied nonetheless as she lifted the covers off her and got out of bed. She was still wearing the dress from last night, though it was a little wrinkled now.

After leaving the hospital, Rey dropped them off at Elliot's villa, whereupon Anastasia hopped into the shower, put on a change of clothes, and went downstairs.

Presently, Elliot was on a call with Lucas. "Mr. Dora, I just called to let you know that your daughter, Aliona, spiked the drink you gave me last night," he said unhappily.

"What? Are you alright, Elliot? I know Aliona can be impulsive, but she never should have gone this far no matter how much she likes you!" Guilt worked its way into Lucas' tone as he added on the other line, "Please don't hold it against her. She's only young, and she didn't think before she acted."

"I'll let this incident go, but only because you and I are on good terms. That said, I don't ever want to see your daughter again," Elliot said icily, the anger in his voice evident.

"I'm sorry, Elliot. I'm truly, truly sorry that she put you through this," Lucas humbled himself and apologized profusely.

Elliot hung up the phone and turned to see that Anastasia had already come down the stairs. He reigned in his anger and resumed his affable and charming disposition as he asked, "Are you hungry? How about I make you something to eat?"

Anastasia gaped at him. "You know how to cook?"

"Nothing fancy, but I can do a mean steak."

"Alright then, I'd very much like to try your cooking."

He went into the kitchen to get started on lunch for her. For a moment, it was as if she had become a distinguished guest, and he was the personal chef who would tend to her palate.

He pulled the dark gray apron over his black shirt and matching trousers. He might be cooking, but it seemed as if elegance did not abandon him even while he was operating the stove.

He kicked off Anastasia's dining experience with a hot cup of coffee. "Enjoy, Miss Tillman," he said teasingly with a playful smile.

She sat on the couch and reached for the coffee, indulging in the personal service that he rendered her. As she nodded, she brought the cup to her lips and took a sip, pleasantly surprised to find that it had the sweet aroma that she preferred in her coffee.

"The coffee's good," Anastasia praised heartily as she set her cup down.

Elliot was in the kitchen slicing up fruits for the salad, and next to the chopping board was the raw steak that he planned on searing for Anastasia.

The villa that was tucked halfway up the hill boasted glass walls that offered a full view of the gorgeous scenery outside. Elliot had put on some lighthearted music, filling the room with an idyllic and romantic air.

The steak he made was aromatic and tender, and coupled with the fruit salad, he managed to pull off an impressive yet simple meal.

"Tell me about how you saved me last night," he said, curiosity getting the better of him.

Anastasia recounted the events of last night briefly. Then, she frowned as she asked, "You're usually bright; how did you get tricked into letting your guard down?"

"Aliona had her father pass me the wine, and I didn't think much of it when I gulped it down," Elliot confessed.

"Looks like you'll have to be careful when you're outside of your home. There are plenty of women who would do despicable things just to make you climb into bed with them," she warned darkly, thinking that even men weren't safe in modern society and thus needed to learn to defend themselves.

Men like Elliot, in particular, with their deadly good looks and insurmountable wealth, ought to have their guards up most times.

Naturally, Elliot would not allow the incident to repeat itself. He didn't want to see Aliona's face ever again.

Presently, he teased as mischief glittered in his eyes, saying, "I wouldn't have minded losing my honor at all if you were the one who had spiked my drink last night and taken me to bed."

A look of disgust flashed across Anastasia's features as she countered, "Underhanded methods like that are not my forte." After all, she would never stoop so low.

He knew that, but he still believed that he would have willingly leaped into the fire if she had been the one who started it.

It was noon when Nigel dropped by the villa with Jared in tow. The little one had taken a strong liking to Elliot's abode, and he wasted no time in going up to his mother as he pleaded, "Mommy, can we please stay in Mr. Presgrave's house for a few days? Just a few days!"

Anastasia thought about the threatening phone call she had received from the male escort the other day and shuddered. She wanted her son to stay someplace safe, and now that winter break was upon them, she decided to give him some time off school.

"Very well," she relented with a nod. "As long as Mr. Presgrave agrees to let us stay, then we will."

At once, Jared ran over to Elliot, who was speaking to Nigel in the drawing room.

It didn't take long before the little guy hurried back to his mother and declared happily, "Mr. Presgrave said we could stay here for as long as we like!"

"Very well then, we'll stay. However, you have to promise to be on your best behavior."

"I promise, Mommy! I'll be on my very best behavior!"

After a while, Elliot and Nigel walked up to them, with the latter saying that he had to leave to attend to some things.

Having seen Nigel off, Elliot brought Jared out to play catch. That was when Anastasia received a call from Francis telling her to drop by the company on Monday.

Anastasia had decided to go into Tillman Constructions to familiarize herself with the management of the company, and she couldn't give up the endeavor halfway through.

Meanwhile, over at Summit Mansion, Hayley looked up at Daniel as he walked in and asked, "Has everything been settled?"

"I don't think you should lie to President Presgrave like this, Miss Seymour," Daniel pointed out sullenly.

"Why not?" She sounded unhappy at being chided by an assistant-type, and she added snarkily, "I'm asking you if the matter has been settled."

"Yes, it has. The private hospital has agreed to cooperate with you," Daniel replied. Then, he handed her the forged medical report for a miscarriage. "Here's what you asked for."

Elated, she took the report and checked through the details. When she saw that the dates and time stamps were all in check, she beamed and said, "I must say, Daniel, you certainly know how to carry out your duties."

"I'll be leaving now if there's nothing else you need," he replied curtly.

"Remember to keep this a secret between us," she emphasized.

"I know." With that, he turned to leave.

A menacing gleam flashed in her eyes. She was sure that if Anastasia had given birth to a child and warranted such lavish favors and affections on Elliot's part, then she would receive the same, if not better treatment too. She wanted him to know that she had gone through an abortion five years ago to add to the guilt that he was already feeling toward her.

Now that she had the sonogram and the report detailing the miscarriage in hand, her lie was iron-clad. There was no way Elliot wouldn't believe her.

She took a deep breath and dialed his number.

"Hello?" Elliot greeted when he picked up the line.

"Elliot, it's me. Do you think you could come to see me for a bit?"

"Why?"

"I... I'm not feeling too well."

"Are you sick?"

Hayley hummed in response. "It's a long-time illness that acts up every winter." She deliberately lowered her voice as she said feebly, "Elliot, there's something that I've been hiding from you all this time, but I think I should tell you the truth now."