

Too Far 451

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“Alright then! Let’s make a trip to a haute couture boutique that sells evening gowns.” Anastasia had no other choice but to dress up according to the dress code.

Alex had been fooling around with Hayley in his bed a couple rounds by the time the clock hit 1 PM. Her having a face like Anastasia’s made it hard for him to keep himself off of her.

After they woke up, Alex went to the bathroom as Hayley stayed in bed to use her phone. She didn’t feel an ounce of guilt for treating Erica the way she did. Alex was merely someone both Erica and Hayley used.

Hayley received a text message at this moment. ‘Hayley, how is your preparation for the annual celebration at Bourgeois coming along?’

She looked at the ID to see who the sender was, and it turned out to be May, someone whom she hadn’t contacted in a long time. She hadn’t had any use for May, after all.

Still, Hayley was surprised to see the message. She had no idea that there was an annual celebration for the company that day.

‘I haven’t received any news about it, May. Who told you that?’ she replied.

May only asked in return, ‘Didn’t President Presgrave tell you? He will be there tonight as well! Could he have forgotten to inform you?’

Hayley immediately replied to her, ‘Elliot must have forgotten to let me know because he has been so busy lately. Can I join the event?’

‘Of course you can! All the customers who purchased haute couture from Bourgeois have received an invitation card. Yours is probably in your email. Remember to get dressed in haute couture tonight,

Hayley. I look forward to seeing how beautiful you will look!’ Just like in the past, May was still trying hard to flatter Hayley.

A strong desire started surging inside after Hayley read the message. She didn’t think she would be seeing Elliot again so soon.

Should I take a chance? An ambitious glint flashed in her eyes then—she simply had to do it.

She could take the opportunity tonight to appear a little more pitiful and miserable. If she managed to arouse Elliot’s sympathy for her and make him look at her one more time, she was sure she would still have a chance to be cared for by him in the future.

I must go, but where do I borrow a dress from? Hayley thought of a boutique she went to before where she happened to have gotten a coupon for free rental. The old her might not have even bothered with it, but with her current situation, she prayed with all her heart that she could still redeem it.

Chapter 452

After Alex came out of the bathroom, Hayley immediately leaned against his chest as she looked up at him. "I have no money for lunch. Alex, can you lend me some, please?" she asked pitifully.

Seeing her looking so small and beautiful in his arms, he unhesitantly took all the cash in his wallet and passed them to her. "I hope this isn't too little for you, Hayley. Here, take it!"

"Thank you, Alex!" She stood on her tiptoe and lovingly kissed him.

Alex was suddenly hit by the thought of how nice it would be if it was Anastasia who was in his arms.

On the other hand, Anastasia was browsing through the gowns available in a boutique while Elliot patiently waited for her. He sat in the middle of the lobby, sipping on his cup of coffee.

In hopes that there was something Anastasia would take fancy to, even the boss of the boutique had personally served and introduced all the one-of-a-kind outfits she had in her store.

It wasn't that there was nothing that caught Anastasia's eye. In order to keep low-profile, she was actually looking for an evening gown that wouldn't attract as much public attention as the more eye-catching gowns would.

She finally found one that was exactly what she was looking for. It was a strapless black dress that was seamlessly tailored, which was also made of thicker material that could keep her warm.

As Anastasia rarely wore this kind of dark-colored evening gown, it surprised even herself how good she looked in the gown. Her long hair was draped over her back, and when paired with her stunning features, it magnified her aura that was as pure as a clear lake.

"Miss Tillman, with elegance such as yours, you would definitely look good in any evening gown. However, I do think that this one suits you particularly well. It gives a touch of cool and noble temperament."

The owner of the store could see at a glance that Anastasia was not a weak and soft woman. On top of her gaze that kept others at bay, she sometimes exuded a domineering aura that didn't make anyone uncomfortable. It was only a cover she put on to protect herself.

Chapter 453

Anastasia was also satisfied with the black dress while she looked at herself in the mirror. As she sat before the dressing table to let the owner do her makeup, the latter couldn't help but marvel at Anastasia's facial features. She then completed Anastasia's look with a light makeup that matched her temperament.

Anastasia walked down the stairs from the second floor after she got dressed. When the man on the sofa heard the footsteps, he immediately raised his head and his deep eyes widened in surprise.

Elliot couldn't help but muse about how this woman whom he called his looked good no matter what she wore.

Anastasia walked to his side, but she was somewhat timid as she asked, "Does it look good?"

"Absolutely gorgeous," he complimented her in a low voice.

She then held up two purses with sequins on them. “Which one do you think looks better?” she asked again.

Elliot looked at the purses with a serious gaze for a few seconds and eventually chose one for her. She, too, didn’t bother agonizing herself over this anymore and proceeded to use the one he chose.

There would be two uninvited guests at the anniversary celebration tonight—Aliona and Hayley.

Hayley and Alex had just arrived at an apartment complex at this moment. This was a small apartment unit that Alex had just bought not long ago for investment purposes. Now, however, it was where Hayley would be living after she had become his woman.

“Hayley, we have no choice but to let you live here in order to not let Erica find out that we are together,” Alex told her rather bluntly.

“Don’t worry!” She apologetically said, “I feel sorry for stealing Erica’s boyfriend.”

Alex somehow felt a sense of accomplishment at that. With his arms around her, he dotingly scolded her, “What nonsense are you saying? You don’t need to apologize. Between you and Erica, of course you are the one that I like. The relationship between Erica and I is purely professional.”

“Alex, you have to help Erica.”

Hearing that, he couldn’t help but ask, “Hayley, do you know Erica’s sister, Anastasia?”

“Of course! I heard from Erica that she is dating the young master of the Presgrave Group!” Hayley then added, “I also heard that she had a child out of wedlock five years ago. ”

His face froze when he heard those words. “Did she have a messy private life?” he probed.

“Didn’t you know? She used to work in a club!” Hayley spat with a contemptuous look on her face. “She worked at one to earn enough money to study abroad!”

Needless to say, Alex was shocked to learn that Anastasia had such a troubled past.

“Alex, let’s not talk about her. I am your woman from now on.” Hayley’s eyes looked glazed as she gazed at him with eyes full of admiration.

Alex was looking at Hayley’s face, and yet Anastasia was the one his heart longed for.

The afternoon soon came. The banquet this time around was held in the big banquet hall of a seven-star hotel. As Bourgeois had shown tremendous improvement in their overall performance this year, the annual celebration was naturally held at a size that corresponded to the employees’ achievements.

Chapter 454

The staff of Bourgeois started arriving one after another at 5 PM. Their haute couture’s customers were amongst the invitees tonight too. The event was both the annual celebration and the time to engage with their customers.

Someone must have spread the word that Elliot was going to attend the celebration, as even the female guests who weren't going to attend had all come, which was why the banquet was bound to be extra lively.

Elliot had undoubtedly become the target of the unmarried women in the crowd. Tonight was finally their chance to approach the man who barely showed his face in public even on a normal day.

Anastasia was sitting in his car when she received a message from Felicia.

'Anastasia, you have to keep a close eye on President Presgrave tonight. Many female guests are here for him.'

Anastasia couldn't help but laugh when she read the text message. Felicia must really care about her for her to remind Anastasia of something like this.

"What are you laughing at?" The man beside her glanced at her, his hands gracefully controlled the steering wheel.

She was held a little flustered as she subconsciously grabbed onto her phone. "Nothing," she mumbled.

Anastasia would be embarrassed to death if the man were to see the message.

However, the more she tried to hide it, the more suspicious the man's gaze became. Could she be chatting privately with some other man? he wondered grumpily.

After they arrived at the hotel, Larry was the one who came down to personally receive them. "There you are, President Presgrave and Anastasia. I have prepared a room for you to rest."

Since it was still early, Anastasia and Elliot made their way to a suite to rest first, and they would only go downstairs when the celebration had started.

Chapter 455

Standing in front of the French windows, Anastasia noticed how the atmosphere outside was feeling a lot more like Christmas. She was staring into the night view in a daze when a pair of arms wrapped her around her waist. The man then propped his chin on her collarbone without a word, and their intimacy happened naturally.

"It is Christmas Eve tomorrow. Are you going to celebrate it at the Presgrave Residence?" Anastasia asked, to which Elliot hummed in response. "I always celebrate it with my grandmother."

Anastasia would be going back to her father's house tomorrow. Although there was no place for her in that house, it was still a place she called 'home' as long as her father was there.

"Would it be okay if I invited both you and Jared to Grandma's place on Christmas?" Elliot asked in a low voice after a slight pause.

She gave it a thought and decided that she wouldn't be home during Christmas if she were to be there on the eve.

"Sure!" She nodded in reply.

The arms around her waist soon tightened as she was pulled even more tightly into the man's chest. The man then made a move to kiss her, but she reached out to cover his thin lips just in time. "No kisses," she squeaked. "Don't mess up the makeup I have on."

Anastasia had to face her rivals in love tonight, so she had to make sure her makeup would put her at an advantage.

The man nibbled on her collarbone unhappily at that. "It should be okay to kiss you here, shouldn't it?" he growled.

It immediately felt like electricity coursed through Anastasia's body as she allowed the man to punish her with a kiss. At this moment, Elliot's phone began to ring. He glanced at it, thereafter going to the sofa and sitting down as he picked up the call. "Hello?"

"Everything has been arranged as per your instruction, President Presgrave," Rey reported from the other end of the call.

Elliot grunted in agreement and his eyes showed a glint of satisfaction.

Without them realizing, it was already 6.30 PM, and all the invited people were present. At this moment, a woman clad in a sensual dress walked in from the entrance. It turned out to be Aliona. All the effort she had put into her appearance tonight was for the sake of catching Elliot's attention.

Felicia, who had seen her walking in, came over to her. "Aliona, why are you here?"

"Why can't I come, Felicia? I am also an employee of Bourgeois." Aliona answered in a prickly tone because she knew that Felicia and Anastasia were on good terms.

Felicia was unperturbed by her rudeness, and she only calmly replied, "I don't think your name is on the invitation list."

"My relationship with President Presgrave allows me to come if I want to." After she said that, Aliona turned to the manager standing at the side. "Go get a seat for me!"

Felicia was at a loss for words after hearing what Aliona said. Even though she was a registered employee at Bourgeois, she had no sense of responsibility for her work. She had never even submitted a usable draft from the time she joined the company.

At the same time, May was welcoming Hayley in the hall downstairs. As soon as the former saw Hayley walking in from outside, she immediately jumped up in joy. "There you are, Hayley!"

The evening gown Hayley rented from the boutique wasn't bad at all. At least, it was worth the price she paid for it.

"Hayley, you look so beautiful!" May noticed at a glance that the other woman had undergone plastic surgery.

"Has the event started? Did you arrange a seat for me?" Hayley asked May.

"It is done." May still wanted to curry favor with her. She was expecting Hayley to one day place an order with her, and she would then get a huge amount as commission.

Hayley walked into the banquet hall and sat in an inconspicuous seat for guests. The only reason she came tonight was just to find her chance to put on a pitiful act in front of Elliot and make him sympathize with her.

As the celebration was about to begin, everyone had started to come over from the buffet table.

Anastasia and Elliot were having their dinner in the hotel suite when Felicia sent the former a message to notify her that the performance was about to start. Felicia also asked Anastasia when she would go down to the banquet hall.

Not wanting to miss the live performance of her favorite singer, Anastasia quickly urged Elliot, "Let's go down now!"

He only nodded in reply before and he accompanied her to the hall.

Even as the lights had deliberately been dimmed, Elliot managed to bask everyone present in his aura the moment he and Anastasia stepped in. With his straight posture and mile-long legs, he had the demeanor of an arrogant king.

"President Presgrave is here."

"Oh, lord! It really is President Presgrave! I thought he wouldn't come!"

"I can't believe I am seeing President Presgrave in the flesh. He is so good-looking!"

"Hey, who is that woman by his side?!"

The sounds of admiration of the female guests below the stage almost overshadowed the music playing in the background.

Hayley's breath seemed to hitch as she looked at the couple. The man that she had been thinking about these days was right in front of her eyes, and he had the woman she hated the most by his side.

Meanwhile, Aliona, who was amongst the guests, was so excited her eyes lit up. Elliot was finally here.

When Larry was planning the seating arrangement, he made sure that Elliot and Anastasia were in the first row. Even the spokesperson Cecilia Acre, who was seated next to him, was so excited she found it hard to breathe as she started busying herself with doing this and that to get Elliot's attention.

Anastasia finally knew how it felt to be Elliot—she had become the focus of all women tonight. She could feel the intensely envious eyes along the way that seemed like they could poke holes in her any moment now.

"Hello, President Presgrave. I am Cecilia Acre, the spokesperson for Bourgeois. It is a pleasure to meet you." Cecilia took the initiative and greeted him.

Elliot nodded slightly at her. "Hello."

Cecilia initially had a waistcoat on, but as she spoke to Elliot, she subconsciously reached out to tug on it slightly, making it slide down to reveal her silken skin exposed by the deep V-neck of her outfit.

Anastasia could tell at a glance what the female artist was plotting to do.

She was slightly speechless when she saw that, but she had to admit that Cecilia had a bold fashion style.

Of course, she only wore it for Elliot to see, and not anyone else.

At this exact moment, the emcee of the event stepped onto the stage. After he gave a passionate introduction, Larry took the emcee's place, and he gave a speech regarding a detailed introduction to the outlook and future development of Bourgeois.

However, other than the performance, what everyone was looking forward to tonight was the lucky draw session. It was said that both the prize money and winning rate tonight were extraordinarily high.

The performance finally began at 7 PM.

The first person to take the stage was Anastasia's favorite singer, Hank O'rion. He was dressed as handsomely as a prince. Among the warm applause from the audience, Anastasia was also very enthusiastic as she clapped in earnest.

Despite the commotion, Elliot didn't look at the singer once, as he was deeply attracted by the woman beside him who was clapping with all her might. His dark eyes were filled with a myriad of emotions as he stared at her.

Anastasia, however, was completely enthralled by Hendrix, who was on the stage. The song he was singing was also coincidentally her favorite song.

Elliot's cold gaze first glanced at the singer who blew kisses to his audience, and then the former turned back to looking at Anastasia's charmed expression.

So this is why she insisted on attending the banquet? he fumed. Is it all because of this singer?

At that point, Anastasia finally felt goosebumps from the intensity of Elliot's stare, so she turned to look at him as she asked, "What is the matter?"

The woman had obviously made his mood sour, and yet she dared to ask him what happened!

"Do you like him a lot?" he suddenly hissed.

Chapter 456

Even though the light was dim, Anastasia could still feel Elliot's overbearing aura. That cold gaze of his was even more piercing than the cold air outside. She couldn't help but gulp in fear as she thought, He would definitely get angry if I were to say that I like Hendrix!

And so, she decided to reply to him with a clever answer. "I like his songs," she announced.

"That means you like him, huh?" There was a trace of displeasure as the man frowned.

She had no other choice but to appease him by reaching under the table and holding his hand in hers. His eyebrows finally relaxed at that, and he domineeringly grabbed her fingers tight.

Anastasia resignedly felt the strength of his grip between his fingers. She was even starting to get distracted even though she was listening to Hendrix singing live. All she could focus on now was the calloused fingertips going back and forth on her palm under the table.

Sitting at a table on the third row, Aliona didn't once watch the performance on stage. She was constantly finding her opportunity to approach Elliot.

But now that there was a performance going on, it would only be embarrassing for her if she rashly approached Elliot and ended up being kicked out on the spot by the man.

She had to find a time when she would be alone with him.

Coincidentally, Hayley had the same idea as Aliona, which was to meet Elliot alone. That would be the only time she could put on a good show.

At the same time, she was a little worried that Anastasia would notice her. Hence, she could only try to hide herself using May as her human shield.

It was finally time for the first round of the lucky draw session after Hendrix sang two songs in a row.

"Next up, we will draw 50 names as the winners of the consolation prize."

The name of those who were picked flashed across the big screen, and those who were drawn automatically knew that the grand prize was out of their reach.

The second round of performances began after 50 names were drawn. This time, it was a sensual female singer who sang. And after she was done, 30 names were drawn for the third prize.

Cecilia also had a performance prepared for the event. She went on stage and sang a love song, and she made sure to keep her eyes on Elliot the entire time. It was as though she was seducing him and him alone.

Elliot's gaze naturally stayed on the stage. As Anastasia looked on, she was hit by a rage that appeared out of nowhere and she began to angrily scratch the back of the man's hand with her nails.

He turned to look at her with a smile, but she didn't even look at him as she pretended like nothing was going on.

She had already put her soul into pinching him a second time whereas he could only quietly accept his fate. What a cruel woman! he thought. She can look at other men, but I am not allowed to look at other women?

There was a faint smile playing by the corners of her eyes and mouth, but the man's hand under the table already had additional scratch marks on the back of it.

She was punishing him with a nonchalant, unsuspecting face.

The next programme after the performance was the lucky draw for the second prize worth 30 thousand.

Then came the first prize and the special prize.

Larry, who was on the stage, couldn't help his excitement as he announced, "Most of you might not be aware of this, but tonight's grand prize is a sports car worth five million!"

As soon as these words came out, the audience immediately fell into a commotion as they gasped aloud, "A sports car worth 5 million?!" Wow! Does this make the winner wealthy overnight? What a motivating prize this is. President Presgrave sure is a generous boss!

Anastasia was also stunned to hear Larry's words. She quickly turned to look at Elliot for answers, but all she could see was a face that revealed nothing for now.

She soon started hearing several voices talking behind her.

"Golly! It would be great if I was the winner!"

"Yeah! It is a sports car worth five million! I don't even need the car. Just give me the 5 million!"

Despite not being an employee of Bourgeois, Hayley was excited like the rest of them were. How she hoped at this moment that she worked for the company so that she stood a chance to win the car.

May had started clenching her fists out of hopes that she was the winner.

Aliona was the only one who glared at Anastasia with envious eyes that seemed to know what was going on.

The next performance that lasted until 8.30 PM was also an entertaining one before it was followed by the lucky draw for first prize. There would be three winners who would take home 128,800 in cash.

Anastasia could feel how overjoyed the three winners were when they went on stage to get their prizes. There was another performance after that, but everyone was nervous now that they were nearing the time for the announcement of the grand prize winner.

Anastasia had released Elliot's hand at this point to pray that she would be the lucky winner. The atmosphere thick with excitement was making her anticipate winning the grand prize.

The elated Larry finally took the stage again before he humorously joked, "It is time to draw the name of the winner for the grand prize. I do wish that it was me. I haven't won anything, after all!"

The crowd laughed out loud after hearing his words. Now that he was done lifting the tension in the air, he pointed to the screen behind him and announced, "Everyone, please look at the screen and see if it is your name that will be appearing in just a moment."

"Let's start counting down now! 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2..."

By the time Larry was done with the countdown, a name had appeared on the screen.

It was none other than Anastasia Tillman.

Seeing these two words immediately set the crowd off into an envious frenzy.

Even the winner herself was surprised as she stared at her name on the screen.

"Miss Anastasia Tillman, please come up to the stage," Larry called for her from the stage.

Then, the woman in question started taking unsteady steps up the stage. She had been hidden within the dark crowd from earlier, but now that her beautiful face was directly under the spotlight for everyone to see, there were only more jealous eyes looking at her.

Chapter 457

Even Elliot was so stunned by her beauty that he couldn't help but think how much she would fit into a girl group.

"I would like to do a short interview with you, Miss Anastasia Tillman. Is your heart aflutter now?"

"I'm alright," Anastasia calmly replied as she had realized something now.

It seemed like the car was intended as a gift for her from the start and the person who wanted to give it to her had planned to do it through this lucky draw session.

If her guess was not wrong, Elliot was the one who bought her the car.

"Geez! You are too calm, Anastasia. If it was me, I would immediately start dancing to a song on stage!" Larry jokingly gushed.

Hearing that, Anastasia couldn't help but let out a giggle, which also made a certain man below the stage smile.

Larry kept on teasing her, "How about you sing us a song, Anastasia? Or you could dance for us!"

Anastasia quickly waved as she rejected Larry's suggestion, "Don't even think about it. I can't sing at all, and I am even worse at dancing."

Larry's eyes were on her before he added with a sigh, "It is true what people say about how a gorgeous car is for a gorgeous woman. Aren't you too beautiful to be true, Miss Anastasia?"

"You are also a very handsome man, Vice-president Young," she smoothly gave him a compliment.

The man immediately broke out in cold sweat when he heard the words. "Oh, no! President Presgrave has got to be the most handsome one here tonight."

He then turned to Elliot and with a laugh, he asked, "President Presgrave, would you like to come up and say a few words to the audience?"

Elliot waved to show that he wasn't going to do it. Anastasia came back to her seat after she took her prize, and she threw a helpless glance at Elliot, only for the man to look everywhere but her.

"Happy times always go by fast. We are nearing the end of our annual celebration, but before that, we have prepared a cocktail party for everyone to have a good time." After saying that, Larry left the stage for the next programme to commence.

Chapter 458

As soon as the lights in the hall were turned on, the attendees began moving to another hall for wine tasting. Elliot's phone began to ring at the same time, so he took his phone and left his seat.

Felicia, who had an envious gaze, came over to greet Anastasia. "Just look at how much effort President Presgrave has put into making you happy!" She sighed.

Anastasia only smiled in silent agreement. Elliot did go out of his way to keep her happy.

Felicia then continued, "Do you know that Aliona is here?"

Anastasia was caught by surprise when she heard that. She looked around the hall, and seemed to have remembered something as she turned to Felicia again. "You will have to excuse me for a moment, Felicia."

Aliona must have taken the chance when Elliot went off to pick up his call to have an alone moment with him.

As Anastasia went into the hallway that Elliot had gone to, she saw Aliona speaking as she stood beside Elliot at the end of the hallway.

Anastasia only picked up her words when she got closer to them.

"Please forgive me, Elliot. I was drunk the other day. I only made such a mistake because I was out of it," the woman explained regretfully.

"Miss Dora." Elliot's cold voice rang out as he stated, "I don't mind letting this matter go, but I don't wish to see you. Please be on your way."

"I'm sorry, Elliot. Can you please forgive me just this one time for my father's sake?" She then held up her hand, and with a pitiful expression on, she swore, "I promise I won't ever do something like that anymore."

Anastasia felt like now was the right time for her to step in.

She pretended like she was looking for someone, and she came running to Elliot when her eyes landed on him. "There you are, Elliot. Vice-president Young was looking for you."

After saying that, she laced her arm through Elliot's before acting as though she had just noticed Aliona's presence. "You are here too, Miss Dora?"

Having squeezed out all the tears she could muster earlier, Aliona quickly turned her face away from Anastasia.

However, Anastasia didn't seem to want to bother herself with Aliona as she proceeded to tug on Elliot's arm. "Let's go," she urged. "Let's return to the banquet hall."

Seeing this, Aliona immediately threw a glare at the other woman. She knew that Anastasia had interrupted her apology on purpose.

"I didn't think you would still have the nerve to see Elliot again, Miss Dora. You are surprisingly thick-skinned!" Anastasia added in a ridiculing tone.

"Anastasia Tillman! You—"

Anastasia cut her off before she could even begin her sentence. "You should thank me for stopping you from causing trouble you can't be responsible for."

"How dare you?" Aliona's face had turned white.

Anastasia smirked in response. "Forget it! There is no need to thank me."

Elliot's eyes fell on Anastasia then, and unlike the cold gaze he had on just moments ago, he was now looking at Anastasia with loving eyes.

You want me to thank you? Aliona thought incredulously. I hate you so much I could kill you! My plan would have worked if it wasn't for you!

She managed to keep those words in as she only said in a calm voice, "Miss Tillman, I have something to say to Elliot. Please give us some privacy."

"Oh—you will have to forgive me, then. I, too, have something important to talk to Elliot about. I will be bringing him with me." Anastasia snaked her arm around his as she spoke. "Let's go!"

The man took it another step further by wrapping his arm around her waist, thereafter humming in response.

After saying that, the two of them started to leave, and all Aliona could do was watch on as her plan to apologize got ruined once more.

You are a dead woman, Anastasia! I will make sure you pay for this!

Aliona's nails were digging into her flesh, the resentment in her eyes threatening to overflow.

Anastasia had only rescued Elliot out of Aliona's clutches out of the kindness of her heart, but before they even got back to the banquet hall, Elliot suddenly dragged her along to an empty private room before he closed the door behind him.

She only looked at him with a confused expression on her face, and she asked, "What are you doing?"

"Didn't you say you have something important to tell me? I'm all ears." He looked excited as he leaned his back against the door.

She couldn't help but laugh when she saw the man fake ignorance.

With her eyebrows raised, Anastasia exclaimed, "I threw out that nonsense to save you! Why would I have anything important to talk to you about?"

Elliot's eyes seemed to dim as he stared at her looking all sensual and seductive in her black evening gown. Anastasia naturally had an alluring quality to her.

"I will do the talking then," he breathed.

Seeing him slowly approaching her, she raised her hands to push him back. "Just talk, then. There is no need for you to get so close."

The corners of his lips raised ever so slightly as he leaned in.

He was so close that she had no choice but to arch her neck. Her nostrils were filled with his unique manly scent then.

"That's close enough!" She blinked a few times. "Just say it. I can hear you."

"You look gorgeous tonight."

"I know," she replied in a humorous yet coquettish tone.

Elliot's breathing started to quicken. "Do you have any idea what I have been thinking about the whole night?"

How would I know?! she quietly exclaimed before the man held her delicate face in one hand, while the other forced her chin up. He then growled in a low and raspy voice, "I have been thinking about kissing you."

His thin lips completely sealed hers off the next second.

Anastasia didn't push him away this time. The man had thoroughly captivated her tonight. From the way that he carefully planned the lucky draw session, to him coldly rejecting Aliona's advances only showing this special side of his to Anastasia alone, she didn't think there would be a woman out there who wouldn't feel touched by it.

Aliona stayed in the hallway without returning to the banquet hall. Now that she had felt Elliot's indifference, it seemed impossible for her to restore her image and be with him.

Her only choice now was to follow Riley's plan to kidnap Elliot, and have the latter killed after she gave birth to their child.

There was no way she would let Anastasia get off easy as well, as she was the reason Aliona had to go through all the humiliation she did.

At the same time in the banquet hall, Hayley was waiting for a chance to strike. As soon as the lights came back on, she hid herself in the bathroom as she told May to notify her as soon as Elliot had left the hall by himself.

Even though May didn't know why Hayley wanted her to do this, she still obediently did as she was told.

The couple who was making out in the private room was starting to lose control as they sucked on and nibbled each other's lips and tongue. When Anastasia realized that Elliot wanted to do more to her, she had to forcibly push him away.

"Enough, Elliot," she gasped, feeling a little annoyed.

He incessantly made light bites on her thin lips, and he finally glanced at the sofa in the room and said, "The room is too small. I can't even unleash my full potential here."

Anastasia was utterly speechless at that as she thought, What an overthinker!

After coming out of the room, she went to the banquet hall to find Felicia, whereas Elliot sat in the room to rest while he waited for Anastasia to be done with her business.

Unbeknownst to the couple, May was hiding behind a pillar when Anastasia left the room. She couldn't help but feel envious as she watched Anastasia brush out the wrinkles on her gown. May had a feeling that Elliot and Anastasia must have been up to no good after staying alone in the private room for more than 10 minutes.

She immediately whipped out her phone and sent a message to Hayley, asking her to go to Room No. 8, where Elliot was in alone.

Anastasia wanted to ask Felicia something when she returned to the banquet hall, but when the former couldn't find her, and seeing as to it was time to go back to pick up her son, she turned back to the direction of the private room.

Hayley, who was still hiding in the bathroom, came out excitedly holding her phone after she received the message from May.

Anastasia saw a figure disappearing into a corner as soon as she stepped out of the door of the banquet hall. She couldn't help being surprised by seeing who she thought was Hayley.

She immediately followed after Hayley with hasty steps. As she hid behind a door, she saw that Hayley and May were together whispering about something.

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Anastasia quietly sneered at the sight. She still remembered vividly how May was the one who helped Hayley hide her phone the last time her son went missing.

Hayley turned to May as the former asked in a low voice, "Are you sure he is in there?"

"I have been keeping my eye on him." May nodded. "I am sure he is in there."

"Good. You can leave now. I will go to him myself."

May lifted her head right at this moment, and she was so surprised she turned pale when she saw that Anastasia, who had left just a while ago, had returned.

Furthermore, she was standing behind Hayley like a ghost.

Hayley must have noticed the odd expression on May's face, only for her to be caught by surprise when she turned her head to look in the same direction. Anastasia had her arms crossed in front of her body as she coldly stared at them with her beautiful pair of eyes.

"A-Anastasia, why are you here?" May stuttered.

Anastasia was sure that Hayley had come to beg Elliot for forgiveness. If possible, Anastasia really didn't want to give Hayley the opportunity to do so.

"Anastasia, you had better not stick your nose into my business!" Hayley warned her.

Instead of answering her, Anastasia turned to ask May, "Hayley was the one who ordered you to steal my phone, right?"

Not expecting Anastasia to notice what had happened so long ago, May's face fell as she quickly looked at Hayley in panic.

Hayley, however, immediately drew a line between herself and May. "Have I instructed you to do anything, May?"

"Then let me tell you the truth, May. Hayley was kicked out by President Presgrave himself for plotting the murder of the Presgrave Family. Are you still going to protect her despite knowing this now?"

Anastasia revealed Hayley's true colors without mercy.

May wasn't blind nor stupid to not have noticed how Hayley was hiding from people tonight. This probably meant that whatever relationship she had with Elliot had ended for some time now.

She swiftly pointed an accusatory finger at Hayley and exclaimed, "Yes! Hayley was the one who ordered me to do it. Anastasia, everything I did was under her instructions!"

"How dare you, May?" Hayley glared at the woman.

May then immediately went and stood beside Anastasia. "Please forgive me, Anastasia!" she pleaded. "Hayley was the one who threatened me and got me to do it. I didn't know that she had planned to kidnap your son with someone else."

Anastasia was still extremely angry when she thought about how frightening that night was for her. Her cold eyes only swept across to throw May a cold glance as she hissed, "Resign on your own accord!"

May was stunned at first, but she quickly realized that this was the most forgiving solution Anastasia was giving her.

"Alright. I will hand in my resignation letter tomorrow."

Upon hearing that, Hayley mocked, "You are putting up a front like you are the lady boss of Bourgeois even though you aren't! Anastasia, you don't have the right to fire employees as you please!"

Anastasia raised her eyebrows slightly. "My affairs are none of your concern."

"You—" Hayley choked, not able to finish her sentence. She hated how bossy Anastasia was acting.

May took the chance to scurry off. Instead of holding a grudge for getting fired, she was grateful to Anastasia, the future owner of the company, for not holding her accountable.

As soon as May left, Hayley gritted her teeth and she angrily spat, "Anastasia, do you think you have the right to act so arrogant if it wasn't because you have Elliot providing you his support?"

Anastasia only stared at her disapprovingly. "What are you doing here?" she asked, to which Hayley scoffed. "Why does what I plan to do have anything to do with you?"

Anastasia was hit by an unexplainable feeling of hatred as she gazed at the woman in front of her.

Hayley, on the other hand, was resentful about the fact that her chance to meet Elliot privately in the room had been ruined by Anastasia.

Knowing exactly where Anastasia's sore spot was, Hayley started walking toward her, and she came to a halt when they were about a meter apart. She then stared at Anastasia as she said with no shame, "There is something that will never change, Anastasia. It is for a fact that Elliot and I had shared a passionate night together. We were holding onto each other so tight when we exchanged heated kisses. His sweat dripped on my body like it was warm honey. I still remember how insatiable he was that we had to do it again and again."

Anastasia's face began to tense up, and she felt as if something was stuck in her chest and making her feel uncomfortable.

"I will never forget that night for the rest of my life!" Hayley added with her eyes narrowed as a nostalgic expression appeared on her face.

"What's there to show off?" Anastasia sneered.

Hayley's lips curled into a smile when she saw that she was getting a reaction out of Anastasia. "It is not like you are an innocent woman to Elliot. He will forever remember how you slept with the man a few years ago. Besides, don't you know that Elliot doesn't touch 'dirty' women?"

"Shut the hell up!" Anastasia's expression was getting increasingly thunderous at that point.

"I can shut up, but does shutting up change anything? Does Elliot really not care that you gave birth to a b*stard child? There is not one man, especially someone with a status like Elliot's, who likes raising someone else's child." Hayley snickered.

Not wanting to hear her speaking for a second longer, Anastasia hissed, "Are you done talking? If you are, you'd do best to leave."

Unfazed by Anastasia's anger, Hayley continued spewing venomous words. "I pity your son. He will never know who his father is, and even worse, he will never know how he was brought to this world."

Anastasia's fists were already clenched, and she had to hold her anger back as she growled, "Don't make me hurt you on this fake face of yours."

Hayley was about to take a step back when she heard the door to the private room Elliot was in making a noise, as though it was being opened. Her quick thinking made her raise her hands to push Anastasia, making Anastasia shove her out of reflex.

"Ah!" Hayley immediately let out a pained howl as she sat on the floor, complaining. "Anastasia!" She wiped away her tears as she mumbled, "How could you hit me? What did I do wrong?"

Anastasia was caught off guard at first, but when she turned her head and saw Elliot coming out of the room, she immediately understood what Hayley was up to.

Seeing Hayley covering one side of her face as she stayed seated on the floor, Anastasia squatted down to her height, and in a cold voice, she threatened, "Since you are accusing me of hitting you, it wouldn't make sense if I don't really give you a slap, right?"

Before Hayley could even react, Anastasia raised her hand in the air, and swung it on the uncovered side of Hayley's face.

Smack!

Five finger marks could be seen on Hayley's face, that was heavily coated in make-up, the next second.

"Anastasia Tillman! You—" Hayley was so infuriated her gaze was murderous. She couldn't believe that Anastasia would lay hands on her.

Hayley couldn't bother with the pain in her cheek when she saw Elliot walking toward them. All she did the next moment was cry out with a wronged expression on her face. "She pushed and hit me, Elliot! You have to side with me!"

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Elliot walked over and stood beside Anastasia as his cold eyes glanced at the teary-eyed Hayley. The next second, he was holding and checking Anastasia's hand with his head lowered.

"Let someone else do the dirty work if you are going to hit someone next time. It will dirty your hands," he said in a caring voice.

Hayley could feel a knife being driven through her heart upon hearing that. Not only did Elliot not pity her, he was more concerned about Anastasia's hand being dirty.

This was what truly insulted her.

Anastasia, too, was surprised by Elliot's words. What Hayley had said earlier still felt like a thorn in Anastasia's wound, but the man's tenderness now was more real than anything else.

"Let's go and get your hand cleaned up." Elliot held Anastasia's hand and started walking away. He didn't spare another glance at Hayley, who still remained on the floor.

All that show Hayley had put on was for naught.

After Anastasia and Elliot had disappeared into a corner, Hayley immediately got back up, the embarrassment on her face becoming more evident.

She knew that it wouldn't hurt the man one bit even if she were to die in front of him.

Everything that she was doing was only her digging another deeper hole for her to fall into.

After Anastasia was done washing her hands in the washroom, she saw Elliot waiting for her as soon as she went back outside.

She let out a small laugh and huffed. "What a stress reliever."

"Don't bother yourself with her," Elliot reminded. "That kind of woman doesn't deserve your time of the day."

Anastasia nodded in response. "I know. Let's go home! It is time to pick up Jared."

Elliot then held her hand and started walking in the direction of the elevator. His group of bodyguards were already waiting and ready to leave with them both.

Now that it was almost Christmas, the view outside was beautifully decorated with the colors of Christmas. It went on along the whole way they drove.

Elliot's warm hand was wrapped around Anastasia's cold one the entire journey.

By the time they were back to the Presgrave Residence, Jared had fallen asleep out of exhaustion, whereas Harriet was still wide awake. She hushed the couple when they came in. "He just fell asleep."

"It is alright. I'll carry him to the car," Anastasia smiled. Her sleepy son would stay asleep if he wanted to even if she were to move him.

"Let me do it." Elliot swiftly took a step forward and picked Jared up in his arms. The young boy dazedly opened his eyes to look, and he soon closed his eyes again when it was a familiar face that was carrying him.

"Be careful on the road," Harriet reminded them before they left.

Anastasia then spoke, her voice slightly apologetic. "Please take a rest, Grandma. Jared will only disturb you if he were here."

"I can't sleep because I am too excited! What a joyful night this is." After saying that, Harriet looked over at her grandson carrying the sleeping child. Jared would always remind her of the wonderful time she took care of a young Elliot.

"We will be leaving now, Grandma. Don't go to bed too late," Elliot said before he carried Jared out the house with Anastasia in tow. After he carried Jared to the car, the young boy leaned against his mother and continued to sleep.

Jared didn't wake up all the way back to the villa, and it was Elliot, again, who carried him back to the bedroom. It was rather inconvenient for Anastasia to hold her son with her high-heels and evening gown on, so she changed into her slippers before she went back to her son's room.

As soon as she went in, her heart seemed to knot with worry at the sight of Elliot half-squatting beside Jared's bed as he took off the boy's shoes and socks with a gentle expression on his face.

Hayley's words earlier had cut her like a knife.

There is not one man, especially someone with a status like Elliot's, who likes raising someone else's child.

Would Elliot still treat Jared like his own if she were to get married to him and not give birth to another child?

As much as Anastasia didn't want to think about it, it was a real issue that had to be addressed.

Just as she was starting to feel suffocated by the unanswered question, Elliot walked out of the boy's room before he closed the door behind him.

He quickly noticed the solemn look on her face as she stood under a wall light, so he asked, "Why are you standing here zoning out?"

“Nothing. Let’s go to bed earlier!” She started to turn around and leave after saying that. Just as Elliot was about to grab onto her, his phone rang, prompting him to pick up the call after taking a glance at the caller ID. “Hello?”

“President Presgrave, there is an urgent online video conference that requires your immediate participation.” Rey’s voice came from the other end of the line.

Elliot took a look at the time that indicated it was already 11 PM, and he said to Anastasia, “I am going to a meeting. You can go ahead and sleep without me.”

With a slightly heartbroken gaze, she threw a glimpse at him and hummed in agreement.

Elliot then went to the study room on the second floor, whereas Anastasia lay in bed awake, her head constantly replaying the painful words Hayley had spat in her face.

Being insomniac was rough and in order to pass the time, Anastasia took a look at her phone, only to unconsciously jump up when she realized that she had been awake for two hours.

Since she couldn’t sleep, she decided to go downstairs for a glass of milk to help her sleep.

Before that, she went to Jared’s room to check on him. The boy didn’t kick his blanket off of him, and was drenched in sweat from staying under the warm blanket.

She was about to go downstairs when she suddenly turned around and headed to the study room instead. She knew the man was still inside when she saw the light on the carpet coming from beneath the door.

She knocked softly a few times before she twisted the doorknob open. Despite the room being brightly lit, Elliot was lying on the sofa with his eyes closed.

She then took light steps to the sofa, and her heart started beating wildly when she gazed upon the perfect face illuminated under the light.

The man had shapely brow bones, deep and misty eyes, a tall nose bridge, and a pair of sensual lips.

He was someone who only looked better as time went by.

Did he fall asleep on the sofa from working overtime? she thought to herself. Seeing this, she couldn’t help but take a blanket from upstairs and put it on him.

Just as she was brushing out the corners of the blanket, he woke up from the noise. He then opened his eyelids that were adorned with long lashes and looked at her. “Why haven’t you slept yet?”

“Why don’t you go back to the bedroom to sleep?”

“I accidentally fell asleep while waiting for a phone call.” After saying that, he sat up, stretched out his hands and pulled her in for a hug. “Why aren’t you asleep?”

“I... I got up to check on Jared.” She couldn’t tell him that she had insomnia.

Elliot just looked at her with an endearing gaze. “Try to sleep early.” He then reassured her, “I will go up to see him from time to time.”

Hearing that, Anastasia, whose head was resting against his steady heartbeat, raised her chin slightly and said, "You are so kind to Jared."

"He really is like my own son, you know? I see a lot of myself in him," Elliot uttered with sincerity as he lowered his head.

She hooked her arms around his neck and took the initiative to kiss him on his cheek, surprising him.

"Thank you for taking care of my son for me."

"There's no need to thank me for that. Isn't this what I am supposed to do?"

Regardless, Anastasia was still grateful to Elliot, for his company was a blessing to Jared.