

## Chapter 10 Flatter Herself

Theodore's demeanor was as icy as a winter storm, a stark contrast to his earlier more amicable demeanor at the Edwards family's house. Ariana felt a flush of embarrassment as she confronted him with a question. "Why did you come to the Edwards family's house and help me so much?" she asked. "Don't use the property as an excuse. I know you don't need it."

Theodore sneered, his eyes cold and distant. "You forget, Ariana," he said, his voice laced with disdain, "that you are my wife, though in name only. I can't allow anyone to mistreat my property."

Ariana felt a pang of hurt and frustration, realizing that Theodore's intentions were far from noble. To Theodore, she was merely a possession, a toy to be used and discarded as he saw fit.

With a sneer on his lips, Theodore's eyes narrowed into dangerous slits. "Let's get one thing straight, Ariana. This is not a love story. It's a business arrangement. You're nothing more than a bargaining chip in a game that I hold all the cards in. I have the final say when the game can end. You only need to play the role of my wife obediently. I don't need your

love or affection, nor do I want it. And you, my dear, will do well to remember that." 3

Ariana's eyes blazed with anger, and she struggled to pull her face away from Theodore's grip. "I'm fully aware of that. I'm not stupid. I know that this marriage is nothing more than a sham. I asked those questions because I was afraid that you would fall in love with me and that would be troublesome. You tricked me and took away my mother's belongings. I will never, ever fall in love with you. I despise you, and I always will!" 6

Her voice rose with every word until it echoed through the car, the tension between the two of them almost palpable.

Theodore's countenance shifted at Ariana's outburst. However, she couldn't care less about his reaction. When the car pulled up to the Anderson family's mansion, she bolted out of the car and dashed to her room, slamming the door shut behind her.

Feeling defeated, she collapsed against the door and sunk to the floor, running her fingers through her disheveled hair. She was mortified that she had let herself entertain the thought that Theodore might have developed feelings for her, simply because he defended her honor in front of the Edwards family.

Theodore was not a man of love or compassion. He



was callous and heartless, and couldn't care less about her. 2

After regaining her composure, Ariana realized that she was too hasty and reckless during their argument. She shouldn't have offended Theodore when her mother's belongings still remained in his grasp.

Later that evening, Ariana decided to extend an olive branch to Theodore by cooking him a midnight snack. She hoped to mend their relationship and seize the chance to clear the air between them regarding the matter with Jasper.

Ariana searched for Theodore in his bedroom, but he was not there.

So she ventured into the study where she saw a faint light shining through the slightly ajar door.

She cautiously knocked on the door, but the silence only grew more profound.

Determined to find him, she gingerly pushed open the door, and as soon as she did, her eyes fell upon the empty room. But the papers and books scattered over the desk suggested he had only just left.

Ariana didn't think it was a good idea to keep waiting with the tray of food in her hands. Her mind resolved to leave it on the desk so that Theodore would notice it when he returned.

Just as Ariana turned to put the food down, the sound of a wheelchair creaked from behind her. She spun around, startled, and was met with a furious voice booming, "Get out of my study!"

Ariana stood frozen like a lost child who had stumbled into a haunted house, her heart pounding in her chest. Her fingers shook as she clutched the tray of food, her eyes trained on the floor, too frightened to look up at Theodore's wrathful face.

In an instant, the commotion had drawn Judy, who rushed over, wringing her hands in panic as she pleaded for forgiveness. "I'm sorry, sir. I forgot to tell Mrs. Anderson that the study is off-limits." <sup>4</sup>

Ignoring her completely, Theodore's piercing gaze locked onto the woman before him, who stood still like a deer in headlights. In a cold, cutting voice, Theodore growled, "Haven't I warned you not to show your face in front of me in this house?"

Ariana's eyelashes trembled ever so slightly; she swallowed hard, but still mustered the courage to speak. "I'm sorry, I just brought you a midnight snack. I didn't know that the study was off-limits..."

But before she could finish her sentence, Theodore had already cut her off with a swift wave of his hand. "Enough. I don't want to hear it," he barked.

His eyes fell on the food tray, and a look of disgust



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His eyes fell on the food tray, and a look of disgust

crossed his features. Without warning, he snatched it away and hurled it out of the study. "Get out right now! If this happens again, I'll kick you out of the Anderson family!"

Bang!

A deafening bang resounded through the hallway as the bowls and dishes shattered into a thousand pieces. The fragrant soup was now staining the once pristine carpet, mirroring the chaos in Ariana's mind.

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