

## Chapter 109

My heart stirred, and for a moment, I forgot to pull away.

"Hurry up and play!"

The guy who'd won earlier called out impatiently.

Hesitantly, I placed down a "South Pawn".

Norman chuckled. "Nice move! Playing the South Pawn — may it bring you smooth sailing."

With a grin, he took another drag from his cigarette, adjusting my chessmen for me again.

Truthfully, I did know a little about chess. Growing up, I often watched my mom play with her friends, though watching was one thing—playing was another.

As I gradually picked up the rules, I found myself getting the hang of it until I looked down at my pieces and realized I had a checkmate.

I glanced at Norman, unsure. He casually flicked his cigarette ash and gave me a nudge. "You've got it! Time to collect!"

He stood up, calling out loudly, "She won! Hand over the cash!"

The other three groaned, reluctantly digging into their pockets.

"No way! Mr. Wood's luck just turned. She's won back everything he lost earlier. We need to go another round!"

The game resumed, with Norman sitting next to me and occasionally guiding my moves. As I grew more comfortable, I began to understand why so many people found the game so thrilling.

Each piece opened up multiple possibilities for different strategies—it was actually pretty fun.

Caught up in the excitement, I lost track of time. Round after round, I kept winning, with triple multipliers, my pile of winnings steadily growing. Even Teri joined in, eagerly counting my winnings.

In the final game, I landed yet another perfect checkmate with a rare, grandmaster-level move. The three other players let out exaggerated groans.

"Ugh! We've lost so much in one night!

"No more, no more. Arianna's luck is unbeatable. We can't keep up!

"Yeah, right! She said she didn't know how to play, but clearly, she's a pro!"

One of them even gave me a mock, resentful look, which made me feel a bit guilty.

Norman, counting stacks of bills with a satisfied smile, glanced at them and smirked, "What are you all whining about? Paying respect to Arianna is worth every penny, isn't it?"

He turned to each of them, giving them a nudge.

"Simon, didn't your dad want to take on that Bailey Hills

maintenance contract ? Tomorrow , go talk to this person . Tell your dad to bring you along, and mention my name."

Then, to another, he said, "Gabriel, what are you whining about? You lost the least tonight . And that Patek Philippe you wanted? I'll get it for your birthday.

"And you, Sebastian. Keep talking like that. I love hearing it, and I'm sure she does, too. Aren't you chasing after that girl, Georgina Kelly? I'll lend you a car to impress her."

Their sour expressions immediately turned to smiles, and they started singing Norman's praises—along with a few compliments for me.

Just then, the door opened, and a server was trying to hold someone back, saying, "Mr. Linden, please! Mr. Linden..."

I looked up, but before I could process what was happening, a strong hand grabbed my arm, yanking me so hard that I almost fell off my chair.

Norman moved quickly, pulling me into his arms and away from Elijah's grasp.

The room fell silent. Elijah glared at me, his eyes filled with anger and resentment. "I didn't expect to find you here!"

I steadied myself, meeting his gaze calmly. "I didn't expect to see you here either, Mr. Linden. Must be fate."

He pointed at Norman, standing protectively in front of me. "How do you know him?"

Norman swatted Elijah's hand away, smirking with a casual disdain. "What's with the temper, Mr. Linden? Something got

under your skin today?"

The room erupted in laughter. The others weren't on Elijah's side and clearly felt no need to show him any respect.

Elijah's glare settled on Norman. "Mr. Wood, what's your game?"

Norman picked his ear with his pinky, feigning confusion. "What's my game? I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Linden."

Elijah sneered, "Posting dirt on me online—seems like you're quite skilled at kicking people when they're down, aren't you?"