Married to the Limped Prince, She Becomes the Billionaire's Sweet Wife

Chapter 41: Isn't This Jealousy

But once the words were out, she clamped her mouth shut and awaited his judgment.

"Kiddo, you've got the wrong number, don't you?" Morgan Sinclair's infuriating voice came through the phone, lazy and grating.

Ashley Bowen quickly hung up.

She stared at the name on her phone screen—it clearly said "Yuri Sinclair"!

She redialed the number.

"Hello?" "Kiddo, what's up?

Hasn't even been a day and you miss me this much already?" This time, Morgan Sinclair's voice was even more saucy.

Ashley Bowen clenched her fists, wishing she could just smack the person on the other end of the line.

"Last night and the night before... were you the one who sent those flirty texts?" Ashley Bowen asked, her brow furrowed.

"What's so flirty about that?

I was just asking if you were asleep.

Why are you getting so worked up?

Don't tell me you've fallen for me, have you?" "Pfft!

Get lost!

You're the death of me!" Ashley Bowen immediately hung up.

'I'm doomed!

So I've had Morgan Sinclair saved as Yuri Sinclair this whole time.

I was even texting him yesterday.

What if Yuri happened to see those messages?' The thought made her shiver, and goosebumps prickled her skin.

"Mr.

Walsh, how many phone numbers does Yuri Sinclair have?" "Huh?" Walsh, who had been focused on driving, glanced back at Ashley Bowen in surprise.

"He only has one personal number.

His assistant has a few work phones, but those are just for clients." "Uh..." Ashley Bowen frowned.

Her eyes darted around before finally landing on her phone.

She found the call from 6:40 PM in her call history.

The number wasn't saved.

This time, when the call connected, Ashley Bowen didn't speak.

The person on the other end didn't speak either.

A long silence stretched between them.

She could even hear Yuri Sinclair's breathing through the phone.

"Realize your mistake now?" his cold voice finally came through.

Ashley Bowen murmured a soft "mm," "Yuri, I was wrong..." 'I never thought Yuri Sinclair would get angry over something so trivial.

He's always been a titan of the business world, practically a god-like figure.

Why would he waste his energy on something so small?' Ashley Bowen scratched her head.

She really couldn't figure it out.

"Sigh, Imperial Concubine." Walsh couldn't help but interject.

"I know it's not my place to say, but I'm only looking out for you.

Since you're already His Highness's wife, you should keep your distance from the Second Highness.

After all, you and he..." Ashley Bowen pressed a hand to her forehead, looking like she was about to go crazy from the frustration of being unable to defend herself.

'How could I possibly have anything to do with a playboy like Morgan Sinclair?' She sighed.

It felt like she'd fallen into the Ochre River and would never be able to wash herself clean.

"Imperial Concubine, this is the first time I've ever seen His Highness get angry over something so trivial," Walsh added after a moment.

"It's clear he cares a great deal about you." "Really?" Ashley Bowen asked doubtfully.

Walsh sighed and continued to focus on driving.

The roads were slick from the rain, and by the time they got back to the mountain villa, it was already ten o'clock at night.

Ashley Bowen hugged her backpack to her chest, shielding it with her umbrella to keep the books inside from getting wet.

In the process, half of her own back was left exposed to the downpour.

Walsh couldn't bear to watch and quickly used his umbrella to shield her from behind.

From the second floor, Yuri Sinclair saw everything.

The moment Ashley Bowen stepped through the door, he immediately wheeled himself back inside.

"Imperial Concubine, have some ginger tea to warm up." Clutching her soggy backpack, Ashley Bowen walked into the villa.

Holly Underwood immediately rushed over with a steaming cup of ginger tea.

"Thank you." Ashley Bowen cradled the cup, feeling warmth spread through her body instantly.

She glanced up toward the second floor and asked in a hushed voice, "When His Highness got back, did he look upset?" "His Highness went upstairs to work as soon as he got back.

He said he has an important meeting tomorrow." "Oh, then I won't bother him." Ashley Bowen pursed her lips, handed the empty teacup to Holly Underwood, and smiled.

“It was delicious.” Carrying her backpack upstairs, Ashley Bowen deliberately tiptoed, taking a small detour to Yuri Sinclair’s study.

The door was ajar, and a faint light shone from within.

Ashley Bowen pressed herself against the door, closing one eye to peek through the crack.

Yuri Sinclair was sitting in his chair, staring intently at his laptop, occasionally typing rapidly on the keyboard.

She turned around, not daring to disturb him, and returned to her room.

After showering, Ashley Bowen sat down at her desk, took out the books she’d borrowed from the library, and started to read intently.

Perhaps from being in the rain earlier, Ashley Bowen’s eyes started to ache after just a little while of reading.

She couldn’t stop herself from sneezing a few times, and a wave of dizziness washed over her.

Finally, she couldn’t hold on any longer and fell asleep, slumped over her desk.

At one in the morning, Holly Underwood woke up and noticed the light was still on in Ashley Bowen’s room.

She threw on a robe and headed upstairs.

The door was ajar.

As soon as Holly Underwood walked in, she saw Ashley Bowen asleep at her desk.

She rushed over to wake her.

If she slept like that all night, she was sure to catch a cold.

But when Holly’s hand brushed against Ashley Bowen’s cheek, she gasped.

‘She’s burning hot!

The Imperial Concubine has a fever!’ Forgetting all etiquette, Holly Underwood rushed out of Ashley Bowen’s room and knocked on Yuri Sinclair’s door.

Since Aaron was responsible for Yuri Sinclair’s daily needs, his room was right next to Yuri’s.

“What is it?” As expected of someone from the military, Aaron was fully dressed and at his door in under two minutes.

“What happened?” he asked Holly Underwood.

“The Imperial Concubine has a fever.

Her forehead is burning up.

We have to inform His Highness quickly...” “Go get my personal doctor.

Have Walsh drive to pick him up personally.

Aaron, come in and help me into my wheelchair.” A man’s calm voice came from inside the room.

Holly Underwood acknowledged and hurried away.

A few minutes later, Aaron helped Yuri Sinclair into his wheelchair and pushed him into Ashley Bowen’s room.

“Go carry her to the bed,” Yuri Sinclair instructed Aaron.

Aaron didn’t dare hesitate.

He strode over, gently lifted Ashley Bowen into his arms, and carefully laid her down on the bed.

「At three in the morning, Yuri Sinclair was still by Ashley Bowen’s side.」 Yuri Sinclair just watched her as she slept.

Her face, normally round, was squashed flat against the pillow as she lay on her side.

She was even talking in her sleep.

Yuri Sinclair moved closer and could finally make out what she was saying.

“Mom, I miss you so much.” Yuri Sinclair reached out, gently brushing the damp strands of hair from her sweaty face.

Her full, round face was revealed, and she looked utterly adorable.

Ashley Bowen slept soundly for the rest of the night, not waking until sunlight streamed into her room.

‘Last night… I vaguely felt someone touching my face, but it felt like I was dreaming.’ Ashley Bowen sat up, quickly washed up, and went downstairs.

‘This home is wealthy and luxurious, but it’s always so cold.

In such a huge villa, I’m often the only one eating breakfast.

It feels so desolate.’ “Imperial Concubine, His Highness went to the palace today.

He won’t be back until tonight.” “Mm-hm, I know,” Ashley Bowen said, munching on a piece of bread, but a plan was already forming in her mind.

After quickly finishing her breakfast, she slung on her backpack and headed out the door.

Walsh was waiting outside as usual.

Ashley Bowen just smiled at him.

“Mr.

Walsh, you should take a good rest at home today.

I’ll just take my ride out.” Her “ride” was the bicycle that Ryan Osborne had gotten for her.

“Hey, Vivian, Elise.

You guys always said you wanted to come over and freeload a meal, right?

Are you free today?

I’ll get my mom to cook a huge feast for you both!” After hanging up, Ashley Bowen happily pedaled her bike away from the villa.

‘It felt so good to be going home.

Being with her best friends and her mom… it was a feeling of complete freedom.’ Shay’s mom made a full table of dishes for her daughter, bustling in and out all morning.

Ashley Bowen walked into the kitchen and wrapped her arms around Mary Preston from behind.

“Mom, you’ve worked so hard,” she said affectionately.

“Hardly.

Cooking is a basic skill for any homemaker," Mary Preston said with a laugh, turning to pat Ashley Bowen's head fondly.

"Got nothing to do?

Go help me snap the beans.

I'm making your favorite today—minced pork with green beans!" "Sir, yes, sir!" Ashley Bowen snapped to attention in a mock salute, then carried a basket of green beans to the sink.

She smiled happily as the cool water ran over her hands.

'Being with Mom makes even the smallest things in life feel blissful.' "Mom, are you lonely when I'm not here?" Although she knew her mom must be lonely, Ashley Bowen couldn't help but ask.

Mary Preston smiled.

"I'm not lonely.

Don't I have Chubby Kitty to keep me company?" 'Chubby Kitty?' The image of a big, lazy, yellow cat striking a dramatic pose immediately popped into Ashley Bowen's head, and she couldn't help but laugh.

Vivian Lee and Elise Tate arrived at Ashley Bowen's house right on time.

"You two are something else.

Arriving late on purpose so you don't have to help, right?" Ashley Bowen huffed, setting the last dish on the table as she glanced at the two late arrivals.

Vivian Lee shamelessly cozied up to Mary Preston.

"Mrs.

Preston, I've missed you so much." As she spoke, she pulled out a box.

"Just a little something for you." "At least you have a conscience.

Come on, let's eat." Ashley Bowen finished setting the table and pulled her mother into the seat beside her.

"Shay, Elise and I have a surprise for you!" Vivian Lee and Elise Tate had just sat down when Vivian looked at Ashley Bowen mysteriously.

Ashley Bowen dutifully placed some food on her mother's plate, asking nonchalantly, "What surprise?" 'Whenever these two say 'surprise', it's never anything good!

I've learned not to get my hopes up!' "Shay, we decided to get part-time jobs as maids at the palace too!

We already passed the interview and we start tomorrow.

So?

Are you excited?" Elise Tate asked, putting on an exaggeratedly dramatic expression.

Hearing this, Ashley Bowen's hand trembled, and her chopsticks fell to the table with a CLATTER.

'What a surprise, indeed!

So surprising I can't even handle it!' "You guys... you're kidding me, right?" Her mouth twitched into a stiff smile as Ashley Bowen looked up at the two of them across the table.

"No way!

I made us keep it a secret specifically to surprise you.

Otherwise, this blabbermouth Vivian would have definitely spoiled it!" Elise Tate said with a completely straight face, then popped a bite of food into her mouth.

"Mmm, delicious!"

Chapter 42: I Dare Not Report to His Highness

Ashley Bowen frowned and asked again, "Really?" "Really!" Vivian Lee and Elise Tate said in unison.

Suddenly deflated like a balloon, Ashley Bowen had no idea what to do.

'The only reason these two goofballs want to enter the palace is to be with me, right?' 'But I've already left the palace.' Besides, for people like them entering the palace, they'd just be doing cleaning work.

There was no future in it at all.

"Vivian, Elise, have you really thought this through?

Let me tell you, working in the palace is a huge hassle.

You need a health certificate, you have to clean at set times every day, and the managers there are super strict.

They dock your pay for the tiniest mistake.

You know, we're paid by the hour—only 30 yuan an hour.

That's not even enough for all the deductions they'll make." Ashley Bowen tried to badmouth the job as much as possible to change her two best friends' minds.

'Are there really that many people fighting for a cleaning job in the palace these days?

I really don't know what's going on in these kids' heads.' "Shay, we're not going in there for the money.

We're not short on cash." "Then what are you going for?" Ashley Bowen swallowed a mouthful of rice to calm her nerves.

"To see the members of the royal family, of course!" Elise Tate raised her voice.

Ashley Bowen almost spat out her mouthful of rice!

'Do they think the palace is a zoo?

And that the princes are some kind of animals they can just go see whenever they want?' If it weren't for that incident, she probably would have gone her whole life without ever meeting a single member of the royal family!

Ashley Bowen was completely distracted for the rest of the meal, not hearing a word of the cheerful chatter between her two best friends and her mother.

In the afternoon, the three friends were reading in the courtyard while Mary Preston made sour plum soup for everyone.

"I don't want to go home tonight.

Why don't we stay here and keep you company?" Vivian Lee said on a whim while sipping her sour plum soup.

"No way!

Finish your soup and get out of here!" Ashley Bowen shot her head up, glaring at a smirking Vivian Lee.

‘I used to think my best friends were so sweet and caring, but now I really think they’re just a couple of troublemakers!’ “We used to have sleepovers all the time.

Why not today?” Elise Tate adjusted her gold-rimmed glasses, looking like she wanted to get to the bottom of it.

Mary Preston took the empty cups to the sink to wash them and said with a smile, “Shay, why don’t you just let them stay tonight?” ‘But…’ ‘If I don’t go back, will Yuri Sinclair get angry?’ Ashley Bowen’s first reaction was to consider his feelings.

After all, she was his wife now.

“Fine.

You two little gluttons can stay tonight then.” “YES!” Vivian Lee and Elise Tate high-fived happily, then each grabbed a few preserved sour plums to eat.

But Ashley Bowen’s brow was furrowed with worry.

“I’m going to the bathroom.” After shutting the bathroom door tightly and peeking through the crack to see the two crazy girls in the courtyard had settled down to read, Ashley Bowen finally took out her phone and called Holly Underwood.

“Hello, Holly?

I’m not coming back tonight.

I’m staying at my mom’s.” “Your Highness, you should probably call the Prince and tell him yourself,” came Holly Underwood’s concerned voice from the other end.

“I don’t dare report this to His Highness.” Ashley Bowen nodded.

“Okay, I’ll call him right now.” After hanging up, she glanced at her watch.

It was five in the afternoon.

She was supposed to be heading back around this time to have dinner with Yuri Sinclair.

‘Starting today, it’s actually nice not having to eat on that rigid schedule.’ As she thought this, Ashley Bowen scrolled through her phone’s contact list.

Her finger paused on the three words “the Third Prince” before she finally pressed down.

“Hello,” Ashley Bowen’s voice was a little weak.

“What is it?” Yuri Sinclair’s voice was ice-cold, as if he was unhappy to receive her call.

“Um, Your Highness...

I’m not coming back for dinner tonight...” Ashley Bowen bit her lower lip, struggling to get the words out.

“You don’t need to call me for trivial matters like this in the future.

Also, don’t call me unless it’s something important.” Yuri Sinclair’s voice was even colder than before.

Ashley Bowen felt a pang of sadness.

Her eyes drifted to the white tiles of the bathroom as her fingers twisted the hem of her clothes in distress.

“I don’t think this is a trivial matter...” In the past, whenever she was out too late to come home, she would always call her mom so she wouldn’t worry.

She was thinking the same way now; she didn’t want Yuri Sinclair to worry.

‘But judging from his tone, would he really worry?

He probably doesn’t care what I do, does he?’ “There’s one more thing.” Ashley Bowen felt her tongue trembling uncontrollably.

What she was about to say was even more important than not coming home for dinner.

“Can I...

not come back to the villa tonight?” “Suit yourself.” After a long wait, so long that Ashley Bowen could almost hear her own frantic heartbeat, she had been worrying about what she would do if he said no.

What if he got angry?

But after all that agonizing, all she got were those two cold words from him.

“Then...

Your Highness, I’m hanging up.

Bye-bye.” Ashley Bowen hung up, dejected.

For some reason, her mood instantly soured.

‘So not good, so not good at all.’ “Leo, you can drive the car back.

I just remembered I have some unfinished business to attend to.” After hanging up, Yuri Sinclair suddenly said this to Leo, who had gotten out of the car to respectfully greet him.

Leo was very surprised.

Wasn’t His Highness in a huge hurry to get home just a moment ago?

Why the sudden change of heart?

“Then you won’t be having dinner with the Imperial Concubine?” Recalling Ashley Bowen’s dazed and adorable appearance, Leo couldn’t help but remind Yuri Sinclair not to give her the cold shoulder.

Yuri Sinclair’s expression darkened.

He signaled for Aaron to help him back into the public administration building, leaving with a parting shot, “Mind your own business and stay out of mine.” “Sigh.” Leo knew he had suddenly overstepped.

He nodded quickly and only breathed a sigh of relief after Aaron had pushed Yuri Sinclair into the administration building.

At ten o’clock that night, the small courtyard house was still filled with laughter.

Ashley Bowen lay in bed, letting a fat, sturdy cat crawl all over her.

“Shay, I heard all three princes of the Sinclair family are incredibly handsome.

Did you ever see them when you were working there?” Vivian Lee suddenly plopped down next to Ashley Bowen, hugging a pillow and asking with an expectant look on her face.

Ashley Bowen looked down at Chubby Kitty’s mottled fur and gave a wry smile.

“I was just a summer temp, the lowest of the low.

How would I ever get to see people of their status?” “I told you!

With Shay’s looks, she’s just another face in the crowd on the street!

Don’t expect her to have any inside scoops for you,” Elise Tate said with a look of disdain, walking in with a toothbrush in her mouth and dry-brushing her teeth by the door.

Vivian Lee sighed, looking a little disappointed.

Ashley Bowen wanted to say, ‘Actually, those princes aren’t as great as you imagine.

The First Prince is married, the Second Prince is a total playboy, and the Third Prince...' The moment she thought of the Third Prince, Ashley Bowen's spirits sank again.

"Let's get to sleep!

We're all going to work together tomorrow!" Suddenly, Vivian Lee turned her head, grinned, and reached out to grab Chubby Kitty.

"Come on, fatty, you're sleeping with me tonight!" "MEOW!" Chubby Kitty dug its front claws desperately into the blanket, refusing to let go no matter how hard Vivian Lee pulled on its hind legs.

"Come on, come on, let's sleep together." Vivian Lee was relentless, putting on a show of motherly affection with a brilliant smile on her face.

Watching the human and the cat struggle back and forth, Ashley Bowen sighed, rolled over, and pretended to be sleepy.

"I'm going to sleep." That night, the three best friends slept together, hugging and cuddling each other.

「The next day」 Vivian Lee and Elise Tate, all dressed up, dragged Ashley Bowen along as they squeezed onto the subway, heading for the most magnificent mansion in the city—the Sinclair Imperial Palace.

The Sinclair Imperial Palace covered an area of one million square meters, equivalent in size to two large residential developments.

Its location was very particular, bordered by the sea on one side and separated from the mainland by a giant stone wall.

The entire style was a magnificent blend of modern and European architecture.

Outside the palace's rear gate was a multi-story office area, which was where the court recruited new talent.

Vivian Lee and Elise Tate stood at the entrance admiring it for a long time, even taking out a DSLR camera from their backpacks to snap all sorts of pictures.

Ashley Bowen stood there speechlessly, watching them without moving.

"Posting a photo of this on Weibo will definitely go viral," Elise Tate said gleefully as she scrolled through the pictures she had just taken.

"Elise, aren't you getting ahead of yourself?

We’re just here for an interview; whether we get in or not is another story.” Vivian Lee tugged on Ashley Bowen’s arm.

“Shay, how did you get in back then?

I heard it’s really hard.

The people who make it in usually have some kind of connections.” ‘Was it really that hard to get a job as a cleaner in the palace?’ Ashley Bowen shook her head.

She had just seen a summer recruitment notice and applied.

“Yeah, it’s super hard.

Maybe we should just go home?

Let’s not embarrass ourselves.” Ashley Bowen suddenly grinned, grabbing Elise Tate’s other hand to turn her around.

“If someone so much worse than us like you could get in, I don’t think it’ll be hard for us.

Haha, let’s go, Shay.” “...” Ashley Bowen was speechless at the jab.

‘Am I really that bad?’ With no way to resist, Ashley Bowen was pinned between Vivian Lee and Elise Tate, one on each side, and dragged toward the lobby.

Just as the three of them were about to ask the front desk where the interviews for new hires were being held, a unified chorus of “Good morning, Your Highness,” came from outside.

Ashley Bowen whipped her head around.

Sure enough, in the midst of a crowd, a man in a sharp suit was being pushed in a wheelchair by another man in an equally sharp suit.

They were flanked by a dozen security guards, including two armed police officers.

Instantly, every staff member in the lobby shot to their feet, standing up perfectly straight.

Ashley Bowen was a little dazed.

‘At this hour, at this time...

why would the Third Prince be here?’ “Shay, didn’t you say that low-level employees like you never get to see the Third Prince?

We saw him on our very first day of interviews!

Did we get ridiculously lucky or what?" Elise Tate pushed her glasses up her nose and tugged on Ashley Bowen's clothes, her eyes glued to Yuri Sinclair.

"So handsome!

I really want to offer myself to him," Vivian Lee said, looking completely smitten.

She closed her eyes and licked her lips.

"He's even more handsome than on TV!" Afraid of being spotted by Yuri Sinclair, Ashley Bowen ducked her head down as low as it would go, took two steps back, and hid behind Elise Tate.

Chapter 43: Yuri Sinclair's Stern Side

At that moment, Yuri Sinclair and his large entourage were heading inside.

He seemed to possess an aura that made everything around him dim in comparison.

His expression was stern.

With every turn of his wheels, the people behind him took firm, deliberate steps, their polished leather shoes CLACKING against the floor.

When his wheelchair reached the front desk, his sharp gaze swept over the two receptionists.

"Good morning, Your Highness." "The second button below the collarbone is undone, and you're showing eight teeth when you smile.

Palace Matron Sullivan, neither of these two meets the standard.

Replace them!" "Your Highness..." The two receptionists, who had been all smiles just a moment ago, looked as if they were about to burst into tears.

They never imagined they would be fired over such a minor mistake in dress code and etiquette.

"The Sinclair Group has always held its employees to the highest standards.

This is a centuries-old tradition of the Royal Family.

You are representatives of our family's honor.

I’m sorry, but you’re both fired!” Grace Sullivan declared from behind Yuri Sinclair, a pointer in her hand, looking as severe and demanding as ever.

The two receptionists covered their faces and rushed out, sobbing.

Ashley Bowen sighed.

‘It was sheer luck that I managed to survive back then,’ she thought.

“Oh, right.

You’re the new recruits reporting for duty today, aren’t you?” Suddenly, Grace Sullivan turned around, her gaze falling upon Vivian Lee and Elise Tate.

“Um, yes...

no...” Vivian Lee had been so intimidated by the harsh spectacle that her voice was weak and faltering.

“Well, which is it?” Grace Sullivan asked, tightening her grip on her pointer and tapping it impatiently.

Elise Tate quickly tugged on Vivian Lee’s hand and answered, “Yes, we’re the new recruits reporting for duty!” “The two receptionists just left.

Go change your clothes and take over their duties now.

After lunch, report to me for training at one o’clock sharp!” “Okay...” This time, Elise Tate and Vivian Lee answered almost in unison.

It all happened so fast they didn’t even have a chance to object.

They were here for an interview, not to start a job.

Ashley Bowen touched her forehead in exasperation.

She shuffled back a little further, terrified of being recognized by that old battle-ax.

She watched Grace Sullivan nod and start to turn away, and the weight on her chest finally lifted.

‘That was close!’ “Hm?

Ashley Bowen?” As if suddenly remembering something, Grace Sullivan belatedly turned her head to look behind Elise Tate.

“Sorry, you’ve got the wrong person,” Ashley Bowen said, placing her hands on Elise Tate’s back and deliberately altering her voice into a strange, mocking tone.

But Grace Sullivan was persistent.

She moved closer, went around Elise Tate, and craned her neck.

The moment she saw Ashley Bowen trying to hide, she burst out laughing.

“Ashley Bowen, it really is you!

Didn’t you resign on your own accord?

What are you doing here?” Grace Sullivan taunted her mercilessly.

Ashley Bowen recalled the boast she’d made to Grace Sullivan when she quit.

‘I left with such a swagger,’ she thought, ‘and even proclaimed that I didn’t need this job and would make it big one day.’ ‘This is beyond embarrassing…’ Ashley Bowen bit her lip, wishing she could find a hole to crawl into and hide.

She covered her face with her hands, trying to hide from Grace Sullivan’s view.

Grace Sullivan’s smile widened.

“What’s wrong?

Didn’t make it big after all?

Is that why you’re so unwilling to face your former supervisor?” “Former supervisor?

Shay, you don’t work at the Palace anymore?” Vivian Lee blurted out.

“Well, you see…

I’ve been busy with grad school applications.” Suddenly, Ashley Bowen jumped out from behind Elise Tate and gave Grace Sullivan a dismissive wave.

“If there’s nothing else, I’ll be off!

Bye!” She turned to make a run for it, but just as she took her first step, a cold, deep voice sounded from behind her.

“Halt!” Ashley Bowen froze.

Forcing a smile, she slowly turned around and gave a deep bow to the approaching Yuri Sinclair.

“Your Highness, long time no see.” She felt incredibly sheepish saying those words.

‘How could I have imagined I’d get caught red-handed by Yuri Sinclair right here?’ Yuri Sinclair advanced on her like a divine being.

The wheels of his chair seemed to weigh a ton, making the ground tremble with every turn.

As he drew closer to Ashley Bowen, she became inexplicably nervous.

“This person, is she an employee of the Royal Family?” Yuri Sinclair asked Grace Sullivan, pointing at Ashley Bowen.

A brilliant smile bloomed on Grace Sullivan’s face.

“Your Highness, she used to be a level-seven custodian for the Royal Family.

She just resigned a few days ago.” “Reason for resignation?” Yuri Sinclair asked, his gaze fixed on Grace Sullivan, not even glancing at Ashley Bowen.

The smile in Grace Sullivan’s eyes grew wider.

She shot a sidelong glance at Ashley Bowen and said, “She claimed that working for the Royal Family was a waste of her talent and that she wanted to find a job where she could make it big.” ‘What the hell!’ Ashley Bowen clutched at her clothes.

When she heard Grace Sullivan’s reply, she had the sudden urge to march right up, take off her own smelly socks, and shove them in her mouth.

‘I must have been Grace Sullivan’s mortal enemy in a past life.

She’s clearly trying everything she can to humiliate me and make me look like a total fool.’ A few nearby employees couldn’t help but snicker.

Ashley Bowen felt utterly mortified.

‘It’s all my fault for being so young and running my mouth.

But I really did have the means to back up my bragging back then!

Who knew those three million would turn out to be completely useless?’ She wanted to cry.

“What were her abilities like?” Yuri Sinclair’s expression remained unchanged.

He simply rested a hand on his wheelchair’s armrest and continued to question Grace Sullivan, his face still stern.

Grace Sullivan froze.

She had assumed that after her mocking remarks, His Highness would leave and lose all interest in Ashley Bowen.

But now, His Highness seemed to be quite interested in this Ashley Bowen.

“She was frequently late and always forgot to clock in.

Her wages were often docked for the entire day because of it, meaning she basically worked for free,” Grace Sullivan said, her eyes filled with derision.

“Our Shay isn’t that bad!

At worst, she’s just a bit forgetful!” Vivian Lee retorted, unconvinced.

“That’s right, I agree,” Elise Tate added.

Grace Sullivan shot a glare at the two who had spoken up, a look that promised they’d be fired on the spot if they dared utter another word.

Listening to them go back and forth, Ashley Bowen lowered her head even further, trying to bury it in her chest.

“Ashley Bowen, I’m giving you one chance.

As of today, you will take over Palace Matron Sullivan’s position.

You’ll be in charge of all personnel and recruitment matters for the Palace.

Do you dare accept?” Suddenly, Yuri Sinclair wheeled himself closer to Ashley Bowen.

His long fingers tilted her chin up, his expression remaining cold and grim.

After speaking, he gave an order to Aaron, then turned and left with a team of security guards.

Grace Sullivan remained frozen in place, not yet having processed Yuri Sinclair’s words.

‘At first, I was just puzzled as to why His Highness wanted to conduct an inspection today.

Now I’m completely baffled.

Why would he let a good-for-nothing like her take my job?’ ‘Then where does that leave me?’ ‘I thought my diligent, conscientious service to the Royal Family would earn me a promotion.’ ‘I never, ever imagined that Yuri Sinclair would just casually toss such an important position to a former employee—and a clumsy, stupid one at that!’ “Hahaha, Shay, I’m not dreaming, am I?

Did His Highness really say you’re our new boss?” Vivian Lee exclaimed, running over to Ashley Bowen, grabbing her hands, and jumping with excitement.

Elise Tate pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose and walked over, patting Vivian Lee on the shoulder.

“Kiddo, you’re not dreaming.

That’s exactly what His Highness said!” “YES!

YES!” The two high-fived excitedly, but Ashley Bowen looked as though she’d just eaten something foul and couldn’t muster any happiness.

“Alright, you two!

Get to work, now!

Before I decide to fire you!” Grace Sullivan snapped.

She couldn’t lose her composure in front of these subordinates.

Later, she would have to go and ask His Highness for clarification herself.

Vivian Lee grabbed Elise Tate, flashed a victory sign at Grace Sullivan, and left to change into their work uniforms.

Ashley Bowen felt her mind go blank.

‘Palace Matron Bowen?

A palace manager?’ ‘Good grief, this has to be some kind of cosmic joke!’ “Um, I’d like to see His Highness.” Having climbed to the top floor of the administration building, a panting Ashley Bowen arrived at the door to His Highness’s office.

There was only one dedicated elevator to this floor, and it required an employee keycard to operate.

Ashley Bowen didn’t have a keycard, so she had to climb all twenty flights of stairs.

“His Highness requests that you, Palace Matron Bowen, report to HR first before seeing him.” A beautiful assistant opened the office door only to quickly close it again.

She offered Ashley Bowen a polite smile and pointed toward the direction of the emergency exit.

‘Go all the way down and come back up again?

No way!

I’ll die of exhaustion!’ “Miss, please, do me a favor.

Help me tell His Highness that I can’t take this Palace Matron position.

I don’t know the first thing about it.

I’ll make a complete mess of the Palace’s affairs!” Ashley Bowen said anxiously, grabbing the assistant’s hand and shaking it pleadingly.

The assistant, Linda, listened to a command coming through her earpiece before relenting.

“Very well.

His Highness will see you now.” The heavy office door swung open to reveal a vast, minimalist room.

It was furnished only with a desk and chair, a sofa and coffee table set far off in the distance, and nothing else.

The room had no solid walls, only floor-to-ceiling glass windows.

Yuri Sinclair’s custom wheelchair was placed in a corner.

As Ashley Bowen entered, Yuri Sinclair had his back to her, looking out the window as if admiring the scenery.

“Your Highness, I really can’t do this…” “Then what are you doing here today?” Yuri Sinclair swiveled his office chair around and looked at Ashley Bowen intently.

“I came with my friends.

They still think I work at the Palace, so they wanted to accompany me…” Ashley Bowen said, biting her lower lip.

“A top student from the People’s University of Serrania’s Faculty of Law, class of ’15, and winner of multiple national debate championships.

I hardly think pursuing a Master's in Medicine at the Norwyn Institute of Technology is the right choice for you." Yuri Sinclair adjusted his executive chair to a more comfortable position, leaned back, and closed his eyes as if he had no intention of speaking further.

Ashley Bowen frowned, unsure how to explain herself.

After a long pause, she finally spoke.

"Fine.

It's a three-month probationary period anyway.

I'll do my best.

Your Highness can use these three months to scout for other talent.

I'll be going now."

Chapter 44: The Gloom in the Heart Disperses

After reluctantly agreeing, Ashley Bowen turned and walked out of the office, her mood instantly growing heavy.

As Yuri Sinclair watched Ashley Bowen drag herself away like a deflated balloon, he suddenly propped his elbows on his desk.

'It's strange.

I never let my emotions guide my actions.

But just now, I definitely did.' The position of Palace Chamberlain had always gone to elite professionals with specialized degrees.

Although Ashley Bowen had graduated from a prestigious university, her major wasn't a good fit.

Furthermore, her dream was to study medicine at the Norwyn Institute of Technology.

'Even I'm not sure why I did it.

Perhaps it's just because the Sinclair family's daughter-in-law has to enter this palace sooner or later.

I’m just having her learn the ropes ahead of time.’ ‘I...

I just wanted to keep her here.

To be able to see her, just occasionally, when I come and go from the administration building.’ Ashley Bowen reported to HR.

She had no heart for work on her first day, and after a quick look at the employee roster in her office, she clocked out and went home.

She didn’t wait for her two best friends, instead walking out of the office building by herself.

Walsh’s car was already waiting outside the building.

Ashley Bowen got in and greeted him, “Mr.

Walsh.” Walsh didn’t start the car right away, looking as if he had something to say.

“His Highness originally planned to come home for dinner yesterday, but he suddenly changed his mind after a phone call.

He worked overtime at the office last night and didn’t come back at all,” Walsh said, looking at Ashley Bowen in the rearview mirror.

Ashley Bowen’s eyes widened as if she’d realized something.

‘Could it be because of me?’ A strange little flutter of happiness stirred in her heart.

“Your Excellency, congratulations on becoming a member of the imperial family.

You must do your best.

Everyone in the Sinclair family knows a thing or two about managing talent.

His Highness surely wants the family to accept you one day.” “Really?” Ashley Bowen was overjoyed.

She jumped up in excitement, accidentally hitting her head on the roof of the car.

‘Ow!’ Rubbing her sore head, she let out a silly giggle, the gloom that had settled in her heart instantly vanishing.

“Yes, I’ll definitely do a good job.

I'll work as hard as I can!" Ashley Bowen raised her right fist in a gesture of encouragement.

Seeing her comical expression, Walsh couldn't help but laugh.

He started the car and added, "Your Excellency, sit tight.

We're heading home!" It had only been a day, but it felt like an eternity.

Holly Underwood was already waiting outside with the entire villa staff.

Ashley Bowen got out of the car and immediately rushed to Holly Underwood, hugging her and planting two big kisses on her cheeks.

"Welcome back, Your Excellency." The staff said in unison.

Ashley Bowen beamed and nodded.

"Did you miss me?

Haha!

I'm in a great mood today, so I'm going to cook.

You all have to try my food!" "Your Excellency, cooking is such rough work.

Please let us handle it," Holly Underwood said, looking troubled, though she still wore a bright smile.

"Why don't you go take a nice hot bath and relax while you wait for His Highness to return?" Walsh, however, stepped forward and gently tugged on Holly Underwood's sleeve.

"Today must be a special day for Her Excellency.

Just let her cook." "Alright." Holly Underwood nodded, finally agreeing.

Ashley Bowen quickly ran upstairs, changed into a casual outfit with cartoons on it, and then slipped into the kitchen.

She had the staff prepare the ingredients but wouldn't let anyone into the kitchen to help.

After a flurry of CLANGING AND BANGING, she finally let the staff come in to carry out the finished dishes.

After she finished cooking, Ashley Bowen sat in the living room waiting for Yuri Sinclair to return.

She looked up at the quartz clock on the wall; it was 7:30 PM, and the evening news had just ended.

For the past few days, Yuri Sinclair had consistently eaten dinner at five.

He'd been home on those days, but today...

"Your Excellency, perhaps you should call His Highness?

You don't think he's working late at the office again today, do you?" Holly Underwood glanced at the clock.

It was already eight-thirty.

They had waited for a full hour, and the food was getting cold.

'Call him?' Ashley Bowen recalled Yuri Sinclair's words.

'Don't call me unless it's important.' "Let's wait a little longer.

If he still doesn't come back, I'll eat by myself." Thinking of the three dishes and a soup she had spent so long making, she felt a pang of disappointment.

Ashley Bowen sighed, propping her chin on her hand and looking out the floor-to-ceiling window at the courtyard.

It was pitch-black outside, without a single sign of movement.

All she could hear was the TICK-TOCK of the second hand, and with every tick, her heart sank a little lower.

"Your Excellency!

Your Excellency!" Suddenly feeling someone nudge her, Ashley Bowen's eyes flew open.

She shot to her feet.

"Your Highness, you're back!" But as she rubbed her drowsy eyes, she saw that only Holly Underwood was in the vast dining room.

There was no sign of Yuri Sinclair anywhere.

"Your Excellency, why don't you eat a little and then go rest?

I’m afraid His Highness isn’t coming back tonight...” Ashley Bowen glanced at the dishes on the table: scrambled eggs with tomato, green beans with minced pork, stir-fried pork with green peppers, and a vegetable and tofu soup.

‘The dishes were simple, but they were all her specialties.

She had really wanted to thank Yuri Sinclair.’ “The food is all cold.

Reheating it won’t be any good.

Just throw it out.

I’ve lost my appetite.” With that, Ashley Bowen turned and limply gripped the banister, dragging herself upstairs.

She took a long, slow bath, wrapped herself up snugly in her blankets, and drifted off to sleep hugging her pillow.

The night was still as a black luxury car pulled up to the villa’s entrance.

Leo opened the car door for Yuri Sinclair.

Yuri Sinclair, with a suit jacket draped over his shoulders, sat in his wheelchair as Aaron helped him into the villa, his face weary.

Holly Underwood was still awake, waiting in the living room with only a floor lamp for light.

When she heard the sound of the car outside, she immediately turned on all the lights in the house and stood at the door with a beaming smile to welcome him.

“Your Highness, you’re back.” Yuri Sinclair gave Holly Underwood a sidelong glance and tossed her the suit jacket.

“Take this to be dry-cleaned tomorrow.” “Yes.” Holly Underwood nodded, clutching the jacket.

As Aaron started to push Yuri toward the second floor, she quickly called out, “Your Highness, wait.” Yuri Sinclair looked back, his expression icy.

“Anything else?” “Your Highness, the Imperial Concubine made a whole table of food.

She waited for you, but when you didn’t come, she didn’t eat a single bite all evening.

She must be very upset,” Holly Underwood said, lowering her head and biting her lip.

Yuri Sinclair's brow knitted tightly.

He turned around and glanced at the dining table.

And indeed, there was food set out on it.

He moved over to the table and took a closer look.

"She made this?

Chopsticks!" Yuri Sinclair said coldly, holding out a hand.

"Your Highness, the food is cold..." Holly Underwood hesitated.

What's more, Yuri Sinclair had a habit of never eating anything after his five o'clock dinner unless it was for a social engagement.

"When I tell you to get something, you get it." Yuri Sinclair turned to face her, his expression grim as he stared at her.

"Yes, of course!" Holly Underwood nodded and hurried to the kitchen to fetch a pair of chopsticks for Yuri Sinclair.

Yuri Sinclair sampled a bite from each dish.

He pursed his lips, placed the chopsticks on the table, and said to Holly Underwood, "From now on, I'll be home for dinner.

If something special comes up and I can't make it, I'll inform you." With that, Aaron pushed him toward the second floor.

Holly Underwood stood frozen on the spot.

But this time, Aaron pushed the wheelchair very quietly, as if Yuri Sinclair had given specific orders not to wake Ashley Bowen.

They arrived on the second floor, at the door to Ashley Bowen's room.

Yuri Sinclair pushed open the door, an odd feeling stirring within him.

'The four dishes I just tasted were simple, but I could sense the joy this girl felt while making them.' 'She must have been so anxious, waiting for me to come home for dinner.' "Aaron, you can wait here," Yuri Sinclair instructed softly.

Aaron folded his hands in front of him and nodded respectfully.

Yuri wheeled himself over to the bed.

Looking at the soundly sleeping woman, he reached out and gently brushed a damp strand of hair from her face.

He sighed, “I won’t make you wait again.” He gazed at Ashley Bowen’s soft, round face for a moment, then went into the bathroom.

He returned with a towel and, coming back to the bedside, carefully dried her damp hair.

Ashley Bowen woke naturally after a deep, comfortable sleep.

She glanced at the bedside and, as usual, saw no sign of Yuri Sinclair.

‘Am I dreaming every night?

Why do I always dream that Yuri is watching over me by my bed?’ Without even washing her face, Ashley Bowen, still in her pajamas, slipped out of the bedroom.

She quietly crept to the study, turned the knob like a thief, and peeked inside.

The study was neat and tidy, the curtains all drawn open, and a cool breeze blew in from the window.

The study was empty.

“Your Excellency, His Highness asks that you wash up and change into this outfit.

He wants to take you somewhere.” Ashley Bowen turned and bumped right into Holly Underwood, jumping in surprise.

Holly Underwood smiled, lifting the items she was holding.

Ashley Bowen saw that it was a beautiful dress.

She was taken aback.

She reached out and touched the dress; the fabric was smooth and supple.

It was clearly of the highest quality.

‘But where did this dress come from?’ “His Highness is already waiting for you outside.

He said you have ten minutes to get ready,” Holly Underwood said urgently, noticing Ashley staring blankly at the dress.

“Oh?

Okay!

I’ll go change right now!” Ten minutes later, when Ashley Bowen came out wearing the dress, she felt uncomfortable in it.

The dress was an A-line design, narrow at the top and flaring out at the bottom.

With her flat chest, she couldn’t possibly fill out this kind of dress.

“It’s so lovely!

When His Highness sees you looking like this, Your Excellency, he’ll be absolutely stunned,” Holly Underwood surveyed Ashley Bowen with delight, then her eyes widened in realization.

She urged, “Your Excellency, you should hurry!

It’s already been nine minutes!” Holly Underwood pointed at the quartz clock on the wall.

Ashley Bowen finally hurried out of the villa’s main door, holding up the hem of her dress.

In the spacious area at the bottom of the stone steps, an extended black Bentley was already parked.

A servant stood by the rear door, waiting respectfully for her.

Ashley Bowen hurried over, taking the steps two at a time.

She saw Yuri Sinclair sitting in the back seat, staring at her.

Before she had a chance to greet him, she was pulled inside by Yuri Sinclair, crashing right into his arms.

Her face instantly flushed red.

Ashley Bowen struggled to sit up straight, primly placing her hands on her knees.

“Your Highness...

where...

where are we going?”

Chapter 45: Shopping with the Third Prince of the Empire

Yuri Sinclair acted as if he hadn't heard Ashley Bowen's question.

He turned around, studied her carefully for a moment, and then stroked his chin in thought before shaking his head.

"Unsuitable.

Leo, take us to the department store nearby." "Yes, sir." At his command, Leo started the car and drove off.

Ashley Bowen clutched her stomach, which was empty from not having had breakfast, wondering what on earth Yuri Sinclair was planning.

'Shopping this early in the morning?' "Your Highness..." Ashley finally couldn't sit still any longer.

She turned to get to the bottom of it, only to find Yuri had already leaned back in his seat, resting with his eyes closed.

It seemed like a bad time to talk, so she shut her mouth and quietly watched the scenery pass by outside the window.

The address of the villa, the name of this road—today, she was finally getting it all straight.

Twenty minutes later, Leo stopped the car in front of the Grandmont.

Aaron, who was in the front passenger seat, got out efficiently, opened the rear door, and unloaded the wheelchair.

Only then did Ashley notice that the seat next to her—the one Yuri had just been sitting in—was actually his usual wheelchair.

Looking closely at it for the first time, she realized how advanced it was.

Not only did the seat resemble that of a luxury car, but it was also equipped with a sensor-based controller.

Ashley snapped back to her senses only when Yuri and his wheelchair were securely on the ground.

“Are you getting out or not?” “Coming, coming!” Ashley scrambled out of the car like an energetic bunny.

She cheekily walked up behind the wheelchair and nudged Aaron aside.

“Let me push.” Aaron’s expression was neutral.

Seeing that Yuri didn’t object, he let go.

Ashley often treated Aaron like he was invisible, or even mute.

She smiled and said, “Thanks,” then started pushing Yuri toward the entrance of the Grandmont.

She had no idea that this was not how the great Third Prince of the Empire was supposed to go shopping.

“Ahem.” The usually taciturn Aaron finally let out a couple of coughs.

Ashley screeched to a halt and glanced behind her.

The long Bentley was parked where they’d left it.

Leo, Aaron, and two other bodyguards stood in front of it, the guards with pistols holstered at their waists.

“Aren’t you guys going to follow us and protect His Highness’s safety?” Ashley asked out of the blue.

“...” Everyone’s expression froze.

“Your Grace, please wait a moment.

We need to have the store cleared first,” Leo finally couldn’t help but say.

Before Ashley could react, Aaron had already entered the Grandmont with the two bodyguards.

About ten minutes later, a large group of people walked out of the Grandmont, lining up on both sides of the main entrance in a welcoming posture.

Aaron and the two bodyguards came back out of the Grandmont and immediately took up positions to Ashley’s left and right.

“You may proceed now,” Leo said.

A beat later, Ashley finally started pushing the wheelchair toward the Grandmont's entrance.

This was the first time she had ever encountered such a situation.

As she passed through the entrance, seeing the group of store employees with their heads bowed low, Ashley held her breath as well.

On the first floor of the Grandmont, there wasn't a single customer in sight—only staff.

"Your Highness, don't tell me Aaron chased all the customers away?" 'That was unbelievably fast!' "Go pick out some clothes for yourself.

I'll wait for you here," Yuri said, ignoring her question and giving a cold command instead.

"Oh." Ashley pouted.

She knew Yuri disdained answering what he considered pointless questions.

'In that case, I won't waste my breath.

Time to pick out some clothes!' Half an hour later, the staff had brought over more than twenty items for Ashley, but Yuri still told her to keep choosing and to pick out everything she liked.

Ashley tried to tell him not to be so extravagant, but it was no use.

"Fine, I'll pick a few more.

This whole rack here—I like all of these," she said cheerfully to the manager.

The manager nodded respectfully and was smiling as he instructed the staff to bag everything up, but Yuri cut him off with a cold voice.

"We don't want anything she just picked out.

Bag up everything else." "..." Ashley's lips trembled.

"Your Highness, I spent so long painstakingly picking those out!

Why won't you let me buy a single one?" "Ugly." Yuri couldn't be bothered to explain.

After saying that one word, he turned his wheelchair and left, using its auto-drive function in the spacious department store.

“You...

you...

you!” Ashley was too angry for words.

She finally understood.

This domineering prince might have said she could pick whatever she wanted, but in the end, he was the one making all the decisions.

‘Fine, she wasn’t buying any clothes!’ Ashley plopped down on a nearby sofa and refused to go anywhere.

“Your Grace, the Prince has gone into the lingerie store.

He’s picking out undergarments for you.

Are you sure you don’t want to go take a look?” the manager leaned over and whispered in her ear.

The moment Ashley heard that, she shot to her feet.

“Where is he?

Take me there, quickly!” “Your Highness, may I ask what size the Imperial Concubine wears?” a salesclerk asked Yuri with a professional tone.

Yuri frowned, unable to answer for a moment.

He made a small gesture with his hands.

“About this big.” When Ashley burst in, her face was completely flushed.

“Who says I’m that small?

I’m a B cup!” Hearing this, the nearby staff covered their mouths to stifle their laughter.

By the time they left the Grandmont, Ashley’s face was still beet-red.

She couldn’t understand how someone of Yuri’s status—the great Third Prince of the Empire, no less—could casually discuss a woman’s bust size with a salesclerk.

Aaron went to pay the bill.

The rest of the clothes were to be delivered directly to the villa; Yuri only kept a few items in the car.

Ashley slowly climbed back into the car, clutching her empty stomach and frowning deeply.

“Hungry?” Yuri asked, ever a man of few words.

Ashley nodded.

“Leo, go to a Western restaurant nearby,” Yuri immediately ordered.

“Don’t,” Ashley quickly raised a hand to stop him.

She wasn’t used to this—having places cleared out, shopping alone, eating alone.

Suddenly, she raised an eyebrow and broke into a wide grin.

“Your Highness, I know there’s a food street behind the Grandmont.

They have amazing fried rice cakes and stuffed lotus root.

I can just go grab a bite there.

Do you want any?

I can get some for you,” Ashley asked, trying to sound accommodating.

But Yuri just frowned.

Ashley shrank back.

‘I forgot, he’s a total neat freak.

How could he possibly approve of something from a roadside stall?

Not only would he not eat it, he probably wouldn’t even let me bring it into the car.’ Seeing Yuri’s silence, Ashley quickly added, “Then...

how about I eat and then come back?” Yuri remained silent, his gaze icy.

“Fine, I won’t eat it.

Let’s just go to the Western restaurant,” Ashley finally conceded, her face a mask of disappointment.

Yuri’s brow twitched, as if he was getting a headache from frustration.

He ordered Leo, “Drive.

To the nearest Western restaurant.” Ashley pouted and turned her head to look out the window.

‘When will I ever be able to stop compromising with Yuri and just be my own boss?’ After a refined Western meal, it was already nine-thirty in the morning.

Once they were back in the car, Yuri directly ordered Leo to return to the palace.

Ashley didn’t think much of it, assuming Yuri was just taking her back to work.

But to her surprise, this time, the car didn’t take the back gate.

Instead, it drove straight through the main entrance of the imperial palace.

Square stone pillars as tall as a ten-story building flanked an entrance wide enough for eight lanes of traffic.

After passing through the magnificent Victory Gate, the car drove onto a massive suspension bridge.

The suspension cables on either side were two or three meters thick.

Looking down from the car, she could see the river surging endlessly below.

Ashley opened the window, and the wind immediately roared in her ears, threatening to blow them clean off.

A large hand pressed down on her mischievous one, closing the window.

Ashley made an apologetic gesture and leaned back obediently in her seat, not moving a muscle.

She was just a little curious, a little excited.

‘To think she’d have the honor of entering the palace through the main gate…’ ‘Wait!’ Suddenly, a realization hit Ashley.

She tilted her head and asked Yuri, “Your Highness, aren’t we going to work?

Shouldn’t we be taking the back gate?” “Who told you we were going to work?” Yuri’s voice was cold as he glanced at her.

“Then what are we doing if not going to work?” Ashley furrowed her brow.

“Noisy,” Yuri said, a hint of impatience in his voice.

The single word was enough to shut Ashley up.

She sat obediently, no longer asking questions.

The car moved slowly, taking about two minutes to cross the bridge and enter the palace grounds.

A cluster of retro, European-style buildings was surrounded by rows of modern skyscrapers.

The car bypassed a massive complex on the central axis and arrived at the rear.

Ashley knew all too well where they were headed: the royal residence.

The luxury car stopped, and someone immediately came to open the door.

Aaron helped Yuri out of the car from the outside, and Ashley hopped out after them.

When she lifted her eyes to the scene before her, she was stunned.

Before her was a magnificent European-style building with a grand staircase of about a hundred steps, all covered in a bright red carpet.

Gold, symbolizing the majesty of the palace, was the dominant color of the entire structure.

Two rows of people in uniform were waiting on either side of the steps, bowing slightly.

“Come here.” Just as Ashley was standing there in a daze, Yuri’s low, cold voice came from ahead.

Ashley walked over and was immediately grabbed by the hand.

He held her hand tightly, and no matter how she tried to pull away, she couldn’t break free.

“Don’t move!” Yuri shot her an impatient glare.

Ashley didn’t dare struggle anymore.

She let Yuri hold her hand as Aaron pushed his wheelchair from behind, and together they proceeded toward the palace.

Ashley's gaze remained fixed on the golden glazed tiles, their retro design filling her with a sense of wonder.

This was the royal residence.

She knew this was where she had gotten drunk and made that mistake last time...

"The Third Prince has arrived." At the sound of the long announcement, Ashley followed Yuri into the grand hall, her heart pounding with trepidation.

The red carpet underfoot stretched all the way to a luxurious sofa at the north end of the hall.

Since society had modernized, the royal family had done away with many of the more cumbersome rituals, so a slight bow was all that was required.

Ashley looked up and saw a middle-aged couple sitting on the central sofa.

The man was wearing a suit, and the woman was in a formal gown.

Chapter 46: Meeting the Parents

There was no doubt that these were the Emperor and Queen of the empire.

Just as Ashley Bowen was about to curtsy, Yuri Sinclair suddenly squeezed her hand, the pain making her frown.

"Yuri, you're finally here.

We've been waiting for you for quite some time," Queen Vance said from the main sofa, her tone tinged with displeasure.

Yuri Sinclair didn't even spare her a glance.

He simply pulled Ashley Bowen along as he turned his wheelchair and positioned himself in front of Adam Sinclair and Claire Sutton.

Only then did Ashley Bowen realize that the First Prince, the Second Prince, and Claire Sutton were also seated in the grand hall.

"Congratulations, Brother, Sister-in-law." Yuri Sinclair's words were ice-cold, and the atmosphere in the hall instantly froze.

Ashley Bowen didn't dare to look around, but she snuck a glance at Morgan Sinclair, only to find him peeking at her as well, a playful smile on his lips.

Startled, she quickly lowered her head.

“Your Majesty, look at Yuri!

He didn’t even greet you.

How utterly improper!” Queen Vance complained once more.

At this, Emperor Sinclair, seated in the place of honor, finally frowned.

He pointed at the person beside Yuri.

“Who is this?” Hearing Emperor Sinclair’s voice, Yuri turned his wheelchair to face the sofa and gave Ashley Bowen’s hand a tug.

“This is my wife!” “What?” Queen Vance covered her mouth, her flawlessly maintained face filled with astonishment.

Royal marriages were never left to the Princes’ discretion.

What’s more, Yuri Sinclair hadn’t breathed a word of this to his parents beforehand.

Standing in the center of it all, Ashley Bowen felt several venomous gazes sizing her up.

It was as if her entire body was being pricked by needles.

“I’ve never seen this young woman before,” Emperor Sinclair said, ignoring Queen Vance.

He stared directly at Yuri Sinclair, expecting to hear the answer from his son’s own lips.

“Of course you haven’t seen her, Father.

She is just a commoner—as ordinary as they come,” Yuri said lightly, deliberately tightening his grip on Ashley Bowen’s hand as he spoke.

The atmosphere in the hall grew even colder.

Ashley Bowen heard a derisive snort from Claire Sutton and the sound of Morgan Sinclair shifting restlessly on the sofa.

She knew her odds of getting through the day unscathed were slim.

“A commoner?

Your Majesty, did you hear that?

Yuri is getting more and more outrageous!

He’s never had any respect for you!

And now he’s even taken his own marriage into his hands!

Does he still have any respect for us, his elders?” Queen Vance’s voice turned shrill as she sat bolt upright on the sofa, pointing an accusing finger at Yuri in his wheelchair.

Ashley Bowen’s palms grew slick with sweat.

She snuck a glance at the man beside her and saw that his stern profile was perfectly composed, showing no sign of nervousness or retreat.

“Mother, I don’t think my third brother finding a woman on his own is the most pressing issue here,” Morgan Sinclair chimed in, throwing a look at Ashley Bowen before continuing with his sardonic remarks.

“What’s most important is that he married before our eldest brother.

As you know, our sister-in-law and eldest brother haven’t even had their official wedding yet.

Our third brother has broken protocol.” Sitting to one side, Claire Sutton merely clenched her fists and said nothing.

“Yuri, I want your explanation!” Emperor Sinclair’s gruff voice cut Morgan Sinclair off.

Yuri looked at his father and, to everyone’s surprise, gave a cold laugh.

‘Explain?

I’m not the one who should be explaining—my dear older brother is, isn’t he?

My brother stole the woman I love for no reason at all, so how can he just sit there so serenely?’ “Father, I’m not the one who needs to explain.

You know perfectly well who does!

I came today simply to inform you and Mother that she and I are officially married.

And I’ll be moving out today.” With that, Yuri turned his wheelchair to leave.

Aaron gave a quick bow and followed him out.

“Your Majesty, look at him!

Just look!

This is what happens when you spoil him!

Is this how a Prince of the Empire should behave?" As Yuri pulled her along, Ashley Bowen could still hear Queen Vance's tirade even after they had left the hall.

She didn't understand why Queen Vance was so harsh toward Yuri.

Her intuition told her that a loving mother should always protect her child.

It was the first time Ashley Bowen had seen such a rebellious side to the Third Prince.

She had once viewed him as the absolute authority in her world, his word being law.

But now, having come to the royal palace and seen an Emperor and Queen who, in their bickering, were not so different from ordinary people, she felt a complex mix of emotions.

Yuri was different from her.

It was clear his relationship with his family was terrible.

"Your Highness...

you didn't have to argue with the Emperor and Queen for my sake..." Ashley Bowen said, her head bowed, her voice trailing off until she nearly swallowed her words.

Yuri was still fuming, but one look at Ashley Bowen's fragile, pitiful expression made his heart soften.

"You're overthinking things.

I didn't do it for you," Yuri said, his expression immediately hardening.

"Aaron, have the staff pack up everything and send it back to the villa." "Oh," Ashley Bowen murmured.

This time, she didn't press the issue.

Disappointment was visible on her face as she stood there without another word.

"Cat got your tongue?

Gone mute?" Yuri asked, glancing back when she remained silent.

"No..." Ashley Bowen stammered.

“Good.

Now push my chair.

Let’s go home.” Hearing the word “home,” a warmth spread through Ashley Bowen’s heart.

She nodded vigorously.

“Mhm.” “Wait!” A woman’s sharp, clear voice called out from behind just as Ashley Bowen started to push Yuri down the steps.

Ashley Bowen’s hands tightened on the wheelchair grips.

‘I hate this woman’s voice!’ “Yuri, are you really going to give up your future for this woman?” Claire Sutton came running after them, holding up the sides of her gown as she navigated in her high heels.

When their eyes met, Ashley Bowen shot her a fierce glare.

“My affairs are none of your concern!” Yuri said coldly.

“I don’t want to meddle, but I can’t just stand by and watch you ruin your reputation by being with someone of such low status!” A trace of melancholy crossed Claire Sutton’s glamorous face.

Ashley Bowen wanted nothing more than to ball up her fist and smash it into that melancholic face.

But just as she was about to move, Yuri’s cold voice cut in.

“Go over there for a minute.

I need to speak with her alone.” ‘What could they possibly need to discuss without me?’ Unhappy, Ashley Bowen walked away with a pout.

She hid behind a large mahogany pillar, leaning against it and cursing Yuri in her mind.

“You’re Ashley Bowen?” Suddenly, a gentle, mellow voice reached her ears, and a startled Ashley Bowen immediately straightened up.

A tall figure blocked her view, and her attention was immediately drawn to the white pocket square peeking out of his suit pocket.

She timidly looked up.

When she saw the handsome, fair-skinned man with sharp features before her, her heart began to race.

“F-F-First...

Your Highness.” “Call me Brother,” Adam Sinclair said gently.

“What?” Ashley Bowen’s eyes widened in surprise.

She took one look into Adam Sinclair’s profound eyes and immediately shied away.

“You’re Yuri’s wife.

Shouldn’t you call me Brother?” Adam said with a smile.

Ashley Bowen watched his handsome face, illuminated by the sunlight, and for a moment, she was completely captivated.

‘How could any man in the world have such a beautiful smile?’ Adam’s smile remained, but his brow furrowed when he glanced toward Yuri and Claire Sutton in the distance.

The captivating smile from a moment ago vanished without a trace, replaced by a look of concern.

Seeing his worried expression made Ashley Bowen’s heart ache.

She quickly forced a smile and said, “B-Brother, please don’t worry.

His Highness...

he loves me very much.” ‘She wanted to explain that Yuri loved her, so there was no need to worry about any lingering feelings between him and Claire Sutton.’ But her lie was so transparent that even Adam saw right through it.

He reached out and gently ruffled her bangs.

“Silly girl, I didn’t say anything.” As soon as he finished speaking, the smile on his face froze, and he quickly retracted his hand.

‘Why had he done something so intimate with this girl?

It felt as if they had known each other for a long, long time.’ Adam’s mind was in turmoil.

He immediately shoved his hands into his pockets and turned to leave.

The sudden shift from intimacy to distance left Ashley Bowen feeling deeply dejected.

Just as Adam reached the corner of the corridor, she clutched the hem of her clothes and called out, “Brother, do you really not remember Shay?” The tall figure went rigid.

He turned back, his brows tightly furrowed as he looked at Ashley Bowen.

Their eyes met.

In that instant, he felt a distinct pang in his heart.

Adam walked back.

He looked down at the petite woman who was a good head shorter than him and reached out, wanting to touch her forehead again.

But his hand was caught in midair.

“Th-Third...

Your Highness...” Yuri’s gaze was venomous as he stared daggers at Adam.

Caught between the two of them, Ashley Bowen watched the standoff.

Finally, Adam gave an awkward smile and lowered his hand.

‘He had overstepped, after all.

He was in the wrong.’ “Adam, let’s go back.

Father and Mother are waiting for us,” Claire Sutton said, seeing her chance.

She quickly emerged from behind Yuri and took Adam’s arm.

Yuri’s gaze remained fixed on their tightly clasped hands until the pair disappeared from view.

Ashley Bowen sighed and walked over to the back of Yuri’s wheelchair.

“Your Highness, shall I push you now?” Just as they were about to leave, a group of five or six people emerged from the hall.

They were led by a middle-aged woman in a sharp suit, followed by several young women, all similarly dressed.

Ashley Bowen recognized her.

It was the palace’s Head Steward, Ms.

Han.

The young attendants stood respectfully on either side of the steps, their heads bowed in silence.

Head Steward Han, however, approached the pair with a beaming smile.

She gave a slight bow.

“Your Highness, I am here to convey His Majesty’s decree.

He requests that you return.

His Majesty says that since your marriage has not yet been made public, you are to reside in the palace for the time being.

As for the Third Princess, His Majesty has asked that she remain as well.” “Your Highness...” Head Steward Han’s words were clearly a sign that the Emperor was compromising.

Seeing Yuri remain silent, Ashley Bowen quickly prompted him.

After a long pause, Yuri finally said coldly, “Push me back.” “Your Highness, it is time for the midday meal.

Would you and the Third Princess please proceed to the Peony Garden?” The Peony Garden was the royal family’s dining hall.

Despite its name, it was simply a dining room decorated in a classical style, as opposed to a Western one.

Chapter 47: A Terrible Lunch

The dining hall was spacious, with a massive, traditional square table in the center.

The lazy Susan in the middle had a diameter of a full two meters.

But despite its immense size, only a few people were seated around it.

Emperor Sinclair sat in the seat of honor, facing south.

He had changed into a tailored, golden Tang suit, while Queen Vance wore a red cheongsam embroidered with crabapple blossoms.

To their left and right sat the First Prince, Adam Sinclair, and Claire Sutton, as well as the Second Prince, Morgan Sinclair.

Only after Ashley Bowen had pushed Yuri Sinclair to the table did Palace Matron Han give the order to serve the meal.

She had always read in books about how extravagant the Empress Dowager Cixi's meals were.

Today's lunch, while not quite a full-blown Manchu-Han Imperial Feast, was just as comprehensive in its variety.

A dozen or so servants filed in one after another, placing nearly sixty different dishes on the table...

Ashley was stunned by the dazzling array of food covering the table.

It was the first time she had ever seen a meal with so many dishes.

Her mouth was already watering, but she was more aware of Claire Sutton's strange, mocking gaze.

It was as if Claire was just waiting for her to make a fool of herself.

'Hmph!

I'm not that stupid!' She knew the house rules that Ryan Osborne had drilled into her by heart.

Just because she didn't always follow them in front of Yuri didn't mean she didn't understand them.

"Are all the dishes here?" Queen Vance asked Palace Matron Han, who was attending to her.

"Replying to Your Majesty, they are all here," Palace Matron Han answered.

"Alright, shall we begin?" Queen Vance slowly picked up her chopsticks and exchanged a look with Claire Sutton.

The two of them shared a smile.

Queen Vance was the first to act, placing a piece of food onto Ashley Bowen's plate.

Ashley, knowing her manners, waited for Emperor Sinclair to begin eating, and then for Yuri to pick up his chopsticks, before thanking the Queen.

Only then did she pick up the black, glossy morsel and carefully put it in her mouth.

She had just bitten halfway through it when Queen Vance's eyes narrowed into a smile.

"Shay, is it?

How does it taste?

It's a famous local dish from Yulara—fried grasshoppers.

Did you know?

They taste best when they're thrown into the hot oil alive." Queen Vance hadn't even finished her sentence before Ashley felt her stomach churn violently.

She was terrified of insects, let alone eating them!

Seeing the rapidly shifting, tormented expression on Ashley's face, the Queen ordered the servant attending to her to serve her more food.

"Have a taste.

They're all regional specialties.

This is steamed snake, and this is braised rabbit..." Queen Vance prattled on, a pleasant smile on her face, while Emperor Sinclair seemed to silently condone her actions, merely continuing to eat elegantly.

Ashley looked at the strange and bizarre dishes before her and felt sick to her stomach.

When Queen Vance, beaming, ordered a servant to place one last dish on Ashley's plate, Ashley could finally take no more and bolted from the dining hall.

"Shay, this is braised cat.

The flavor is exquisite." 'Cat meat!

Ashley, who loved cats more than life itself, couldn't possibly tolerate others eating cat meat, let alone eat it herself!' Clutching her stomach, Ashley ran out.

Yuri put down his chopsticks, intending to follow, but Queen Vance's voice stopped him.

"Yuri, we won't object to you being with this commoner, but only on the condition that she can adapt to the royal family's rules.

Do you dare make a bet with your father?

A bet that the commoner won't last a month in the palace?" Queen Vance raised an eyebrow, speaking with considerable confidence.

Yuri looked at the two haughty figures before him—one his father, the other his mother.

They held the most supreme and noble status, yet today they had resorted to such a low-handed trick at the dinner table to torment a young woman!

'Despicable.

Absolutely despicable!' "And what if she lasts the month?

What if she doesn't?" Yuri asked, his face stern.

"If she lasts, your father and mother will accept her.

If not, then she can get out.

Third Brother, didn't you arrange a post for her in the palace?

Then let her prove herself!" Claire Sutton chimed in, also putting down her chopsticks.

Yuri glanced at Claire Sutton from the corner of his eye and gave a cold smile.

"Fine!" Everyone present was a little surprised.

They hadn't expected Yuri to agree so readily.

After all, the bet was clearly stacked against Ashley.

Anyone with sense could guess that Queen Vance and the others would use every trick in the book to force her to give up.

Yuri didn't stay to finish the meal.

He left the table.

Aaron was waiting outside.

When he saw Yuri come out, he hurried over to push his wheelchair.

From just outside the door, he could see Ashley bent over, clutching a red pillar and dry-heaving.

Framed by the high walls and the palace gate, Ashley's delicate figure looked utterly pitiful.

He shook his head, pulled a white handkerchief from the breast pocket of his suit jacket, and said, “I’ll go over myself.” He waved Aaron off and wheeled himself over to Ashley’s side.

“You really are an idiot.

So you heard a few weird-sounding dishes.

Is that any reason to puke your guts out?” Yuri said, holding out the handkerchief, his words as cutting as ever.

“BLECH.” Ashley gagged a few more times before taking the handkerchief from Yuri and wiping her mouth messily.

She then straightened up and said in all seriousness, “You have no idea how cute cats are!

My Chubby Kitty is so adorable, and the thought of his cute little brothers and sisters being braised and served up in front of me...

I just can’t.” “Which one of your eyes saw a braised cat?” Yuri didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, amused by Ashley’s earnestness.

“It wasn’t a cat?

But the Queen said...” “She was just messing with you.” “How can you joke about something like that?

It’s like you can’t joke about pigs with a Muslim!

Pigs are sacred to them, and cats are sacred to me!” Ashley insisted, still completely serious.

The way her little mouth moved so quickly warmed Yuri’s heart.

‘This girl...

she’s so innocent.

As pure as a sacred, untouched land.

How could he ever bear to defile it?’ “So, are you going to eat or not?” Yuri’s tone softened a little.

Ashley shook her head frantically in protest.

“Then what do you want to eat?” Ashley shook her head.

The things she wanted to eat would never be allowed in this palace.

In the end, Ashley stayed in the palace, unaware of the bet between Yuri, the Emperor, and the Queen.

Palace Matron Han simply told her that the Queen had agreed to let her stay, but for now, she could only do so in the capacity of Palace Matron Bowen.

Meanwhile, Grace Sullivan, who had been inexplicably dismissed before, was back.

The Queen ordered Ashley to serve as Grace's assistant, helping her manage the various trivial affairs of the palace.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Palace Matron Bowen—oh, wait, I should be calling you Her Highness the Imperial Concubine now.

To have you serve as my assistant...

it must be so demeaning for you." In the office, Grace Sullivan spun around in her executive chair, looking at Ashley, who stood before her.

"But you are my assistant now.

I can't help it.

I can't show favoritism, or the Queen will punish me.

Considering Your Highness has no work experience, I won't assign you anything too difficult.

However, there is one matter right now that requires Your Highness to handle personally," Grace said in a strange, snide tone.

"What is it?

Just say it," Ashley replied bluntly.

Grace was not surprised, nor did she seem to expect Ashley to be pleasant to her.

She casually tossed a file onto the desk.

"This is the wedding plan for the First Prince's marriage in one month.

The ceremony will be held in the palace, of course.

The attire and jewelry have all been selected.

The only thing missing is the diamond ring the First Imperial Concubine wants.

Third Imperial Concubine, why don't you take charge of this?" It was just picking out a diamond ring.

Ashley didn't think much of such a simple task.

"Sure." She took the file and saw it contained a clear budget for each item.

The budget for the diamond ring Grace wanted her to find was between five and ten million...

The enormous sum made Ashley's heart pound.

The ring was probably going to be the most watched item of the entire wedding ceremony.

If she picked the wrong one...

"I don't know the first thing about jewelry, I think—" Ashley began to refuse, but Grace cut her off.

"If you don't know, then you should learn.

What woman who marries into the royal family doesn't understand the four arts by age three and wine tasting and antique appraisal by age five?" After speaking, Grace stood up, grabbed a file from the folder, and walked out.

"I have to conduct new employee training today.

The director's job isn't so easy that just anyone can do it." Ashley was so angry her mouth went crooked.

Grace was clearly mocking her, implying she wasn't worthy of entering the royal family.

'Though, to be fair, that's an indisputable fact, ahem.' 'But can those socialites really master the four arts by three?

And understand wine tasting and antique appraisal by five?' Even Ashley herself felt intimidated.

Looking at all those zeros, she considered asking Yuri for help.

'No, how could I ask the Third Prince?

That would just be causing trouble for him.

He loves Claire Sutton so much, so how could he help pick out a diamond ring for her?' 'What about the Second Prince?' Ashley immediately shook her head, rejecting the idea.

'The Second Prince is a dangerous person.

I absolutely cannot have any more contact with him.' After thinking it over and over, Ashley decided she had to handle this herself.

She immediately sat down in Grace's chair and used Baidu to search for a ton of information about jewelry.

She even looked up the nine-carat diamond ring a famous celebrity, Mr.

Wang, used to propose to a Ms.

Zhang.

She spent the whole afternoon researching, not stretching until evening came.

Grace, busy all afternoon, finally returned.

She walked in carrying a pile of files and dropped them in front of Ashley.

"Imperial Concubine, your workstation has been cleared out.

Please go work outside.

Also, this is the information for the new batch of employees.

You need to enter it into the computer archives." Ashley knew Grace might try to make things difficult for her, but she hadn't expected to be working overtime on her very first day.

Her workstation was in a corner to the left of Grace's office door, right next to the break room.

With so many people coming and going, it was impossible for her to focus on her work.

It wasn't until the lamps were lit and most people had left the office area that Ashley was finally able to get into a working state of mind.

In total, there were 500 new employees this year.

Part-time employees accounted for 300 of them, more than half, but they were mostly assigned menial tasks.

When Ashley saw the files for her good friends, Vivian Lee and Elise Tate, she couldn’t help but smile.

‘Those two liars.

They told me they had already passed their interviews, but then they dragged me along to mine.’ ‘But no one could have guessed that Yuri would show up, getting them hired through a bizarre twist of fate.’ Behind the roller blinds in the office, Grace was on her phone, making a call.

Chapter 48: Lying So He Wouldn't Worry

“Yes, I did everything as you instructed.

I moved her desk to the worst spot and assigned her all the menial tasks.

But...

she seems happy about it.” Grace Sullivan’s lips curled in annoyance.

A deep voice rumbled from the other end of the line.

“Yes, don’t worry.

I will make sure she leaves the palace in tears!” After working overtime until eight, Ashley Bowen stretched.

She was finally finished.

She looked up and saw that Grace Sullivan hadn’t left the office either.

She got up and knocked on the door.

A voice from inside answered immediately.

“Come in.” Ashley Bowen pushed the door open, went inside, and reported, “The data entry is finished.

May I leave now?” “Our Imperial Concubine is clever indeed, finishing the data entry so quickly.” Grace Sullivan smiled, her praise dripping with sarcasm.

Ashley Bowen didn’t want to chat with her any longer.

She just smiled, turned, and left.

Only after leaving the office building did she realize she had nowhere to go.

Returning to Yuri Sinclair's quarters seemed to be her only option.

But she had been so busy that she hadn't had a single bite to eat, and she was starving.

She gazed at the vast royal palace, its tranquil halls exuding a solemnity under the night sky.

She had yearned for this place countless times before, but now, all she felt was wistfulness.

The man she loved no longer belonged to her.

COUGH COUGH.

Just as she was lost in thought, the sound of a man's soft cough brought her back to reality.

She looked up and saw Aaron pushing Yuri Sinclair toward her not far away.

Two guards followed behind them.

"Your Highness," Ashley Bowen said softly, her voice listless.

"What's wrong?

Was dinner not to your liking?" Yuri Sinclair asked.

Ashley Bowen remembered the Sinclair family's rule: no meals were to be eaten after five in the evening.

But she hadn't eaten at five o'clock, either.

'I ate just fine,' Ashley Bowen lied, biting her lip.

'I'm in the palace now.

I can't be so willful and make Yuri stand up for me anymore.' 'It's just one meal.

I can handle it.' "They didn't give you a hard time today, did they?

What did they have you do?" Yuri Sinclair asked kindly, signaling for Aaron to turn the wheelchair.

Trudging beside the wheelchair, Ashley Bowen lied, "Just some menial tasks.

Data entry and whatnot.

It’s easier than my old cleaning job.” She made no mention of having to buy a diamond ring for Claire Sutton.

“Aaron, you and Walsh go buy something over there and bring it back,” Yuri Sinclair ordered, glancing at the way Ashley Bowen was clutching her stomach in hunger.

Aaron accepted the order and was about to leave when Yuri Sinclair called him back.

“Wait.

I’ll go myself.” With that, he took Ashley Bowen’s hand.

Ashley Bowen was a little dazed.

Before she knew it, she had followed Yuri Sinclair into a car, which then pulled up to the entrance of the Grandmont.

“Those lotus root fritters you mentioned...

they’re on a street behind this department store, right?” Yuri Sinclair rubbed his nose, trying to act as if he didn’t quite remember.

But Ashley Bowen’s eyes curved as she smiled.

She never thought the ever-aloof Third Prince would actually remember something she’d said.

“That’s right!

There’s a food street back there!

They have crawfish, stinky tofu, fried lotus root fritters...

so, so much delicious food!” Ashley Bowen wiped the corner of her mouth, practically drooling.

Yuri Sinclair’s stern expression faltered.

He had never, in his entire life, found food to be this alluring.

‘This girl is, without a doubt, a complete foodie.’ “Walsh, drive,” Yuri Sinclair said, leaning back against the plush seat.

Seeing his lack of enthusiasm, Ashley Bowen sat up primly, but she couldn't stop her hands from drumming on her knees or her feet from tapping.

She was practically vibrating with anticipation.

The car was too long, the alley was too narrow, and it was crowded with pedestrians, making it impossible to drive in.

"Aaron—" Yuri Sinclair had just begun to speak when Ashley Bowen cut him off.

"Your Highness, you can't clear the street this time!

If you chase everyone away, it won't be bustling anymore.

The reason people like food streets isn't just for the taste, but more importantly, for the lively atmosphere." "Lively?

This is just chaotic and noisy!" Yuri Sinclair said impatiently, a look of disgust on his coolly handsome face.

Ashley Bowen paid him no mind.

She pushed open the car door, hopped out, and turned to get ahold of Yuri Sinclair's wheelchair.

"And don't bring any armed guards, or we won't be able to enjoy our meal.

Your Highness, trust me, it's absolutely delicious!" "Your Highness, you can't," Aaron urged, bowing.

But Yuri Sinclair waved him off.

"Just do as she says.

The rest of you, stay here." With that, he pressed a button inside the car, and a ramp automatically extended to the ground.

Ashley Bowen grabbed the wheelchair handles with a wide grin, bouncing behind Yuri Sinclair like a cheerful little bird.

"Captain, are we following?" one of the guards asked with a frown, not daring to leave the car.

"Follow them discreetly.

Ensure His Highness's safety!" Aaron's face was a stoic mask, his lips barely moving as he spoke.

Soon, Ashley Bowen had pushed Yuri Sinclair into the dense crowd.

The mix of smells wafting from the food stalls made Yuri Sinclair's brow furrow.

"That's the stinky tofu stall!

It smells awful, but it's delicious!

Your Highness, let's go there!" Before he could answer, she was already pushing him toward the stall.

Yuri Sinclair had absolutely no say in the matter.

"Ashley Bowen!

I despise this smell.

If you dare eat that, I'm kicking you out of my room tonight!" Yuri Sinclair said bluntly, trying to turn his wheelchair to leave.

"Oh, come on!

Since you already agreed to come, just give it a try!

If you don't like it, you can kick me out then, big deal," Ashley Bowen begged, hanging her head pitifully.

He'd never met anyone who acted so cutesy and coquettish with him before.

He raised a hand to his forehead.

'I must be insane!

Why else would I agree to come to this filthy place with this girl?

And to try tofu that smells this god-awful?' The owner of the stinky tofu stall was a master at his craft.

He wore an apron and sleeve protectors, scooping tofu from a large clay pot with a mesh ladle in one hand while deftly adding seasonings with the other.

Ashley Bowen tossed a ten into the tin box and accepted two boxes of stinky tofu with a grin.

She lifted the stinky tofu to her nose, took a deep sniff, and closed her eyes in bliss.

“Your High—” Realizing she shouldn’t use that title, Ashley Bowen quickly changed her tune.

“Sinclair, which bowl do you want?” ‘Sinclair?’ Yuri Sinclair nearly choked.

‘Am I that old?’ “What’s this ‘Sinclair’ business?

Call me ‘hubby’!” Yuri Sinclair threatened, raising a fist.

Ashley Bowen quickly shielded herself with her hands.

When she saw he was just bluffing, she giggled and held out one of the bowls of stinky tofu.

“Alright then, hub…by.

You have this one.” When Yuri Sinclair refused to take it, Ashley Bowen deliberately wobbled her hand.

‘If he weren’t a Prince,’ she thought, ‘I’d be yelling, “You idiot!

Just take it!

What are you being so fussy for!”‘ She had pictured him taking it from her like an obedient, docile little bird, but she was forced back to reality when her hand started to ache.

Yuri Sinclair wasn’t taking it— “Sir, can I leave this here for a second?” Ashley Bowen finally gave in, placing Yuri’s portion on the stall counter.

“Young man, we sell a thousand of these a day.

Just give it a try.

Money back if you don’t like it!” Seeing how awkward the couple was, the owner couldn’t help but chime in.

Yuri Sinclair remained unmoved, giving a dismissive wave.

Ashley Bowen sighed and started digging in herself.

The initial pungent smell was mixed with the fragrance of garlic and scallions.

Combined with the spicy sauce drizzled over the top and the pickled radishes in the bowl, the flavor was unbelievably delicious.

Ashley Bowen polished off the stinky tofu in her bowl in a flash.

Yuri Sinclair watched her every move, captivated by her cute, entranced expression as she ate.

He had tasted every delicacy imaginable, but he'd never known that such humble street-side fare could seem so delicious.

"Hub...

by." The word felt awkward on her tongue every time she said it.

"If you're not going to eat it, I'll have yours, too, okay?" "Do as you please," Yuri Sinclair said coldly, averting his gaze.

When he heard Ashley Bowen deliberately slurping and chewing loudly, he felt his own stomach rumble.

But his pride wouldn't let him give in.

"Hub...

by, should we go buy some lotus root fritters?" "Hubby, let's buy some crawfish." Ashley Bowen pushed Yuri Sinclair all over the place.

Whatever she couldn't finish, she had packed to-go and hung the bags directly on the handles of his wheelchair.

By the time they reached a barbecue skewer stall, Yuri Sinclair's face was flushed with exasperation.

'I swear,' he thought, 'I will never, ever indulge this girl again!' 'Give her an inch, and she takes a mile!' "Ma'am, I'll have four tendon skewers, ten lamb skewers, two green pepper, two cartilage..." Ashley Bowen rattled off her order to the owner, completely oblivious to two young women beside her who were staring at Yuri Sinclair.

They were whispering to each other, all secretive and conspiratorial.

The two girls were dressed in an anime-inspired style, with dyed blonde hair, short socks, and short skirts.

"Hubby, are you sure you don't want anything?" Ashley Bowen asked, looking down at Yuri.

Yuri Sinclair shot her a fierce glare.

“Just hurry up and buy your food so we can go!” “So fierce.

Alright, alright,” Ashley Bowen muttered, making an okay sign with her hand as she turned to pay the owner.

“Oh my gosh, are you the Third Prince?” “You *are* the Third Prince!

I’ve seen you on TV!” The two girls suddenly started chattering, clutching their phones and swarming him like star-struck fans.

“Your Highness, can we get a picture with you?” one asked, forcefully shoving Ashley Bowen aside with her hip.

The girls’ actions immediately drew a crowd of onlookers, setting off a chain reaction and causing a commotion.

“Your Highness, you’re even more handsome in person than on TV!” “Get out of the way!

I was here first!” “Don’t push me!” “Ah!

Your Highness, I’m a huge fan!

Can you please give me an autograph?” Pushed out of the circle of fangirls, Ashley Bowen could only crane her neck and stand on her tiptoes to see into the crowd.

Forgetting all about the skewers she had yet to receive, she tried desperately to squeeze through the crowd.

“Excuse me, let me through!” But no matter how hard she pushed, she couldn’t get through.

Only now did she realize just how much charisma Yuri Sinclair had.

An impulsive fan nearby jumped right onto a stall’s table, snapping pictures with her phone.

CLICK!

SNAP!

Chapter 49: Helicopter to the Rescue

“Make way!” Just as the crowd was becoming uncontrollable, a gunshot suddenly thundered through the sky.

Terrified, the fans scattered in an instant.

A group of guards appeared from out of nowhere, all carrying guns.

Led by Aaron, they broke through the impenetrable mob and dispersed the crowd.

At the sight of the guns, the once-frenzied fans all backed away in fear.

Ashley Bowen took the opportunity to dart to Yuri Sinclair’s side.

Yuri Sinclair, on the other hand, was perfectly calm.

As the guards escorted him away, he even gave the crowd a gentlemanly wave.

Ashley Bowen, however, was in a state of utter chaos, her hair a total mess after being pulled by that pack of vicious women.

WHIR-WHIR-WHIR— The roar of rotor blades filled the air.

A powerful gust of wind swept over them, sending Ashley Bowen’s hair flying everywhere.

She looked up to see a helicopter that had appeared from out of nowhere.

Four steel cables descended from it, attaching directly to Yuri Sinclair’s wheelchair.

Just as Ashley Bowen was covering her mouth, gasping at the over-the-top scene before her, she found herself falling into someone’s arms.

“Your Highness...” Ashley Bowen looked down to find herself sitting on Yuri Sinclair’s lap as the two of them were slowly lifted into the air by the cables.

“So cool!” “Oh my god, he’s a literal god!” On the ground below, a crowd of lovestruck fangirls was left drooling, completely lost in the moment.

Two guards aboard the helicopter hoisted Yuri Sinclair’s wheelchair inside.

Ashley Bowen then scrambled off his lap and took the safety harness a guard handed her, strapping herself in.

As the helicopter climbed higher, the wind whistling past her ears grew louder.

Ashley Bowen gazed out of the helicopter, watching as the world below grew smaller and smaller... The terrifying, swarming mob had long since vanished from sight.

“We were late to the rescue, Your Highness.

We have allowed you and the Imperial Concubine to be alarmed,” an officer sitting across from Ashley Bowen and Yuri Sinclair said, bowing his head.

Yuri Sinclair averted his gaze and said coldly, “Dock their pay for one month!” His tone left no room for argument, but Ashley Bowen felt incredibly guilty.

‘This whole mess is my fault,’ she thought.

‘If I hadn’t insisted that Yuri Sinclair come with me…’ But she didn’t dare to plead on their behalf.

She understood Yuri Sinclair’s personality—the more one defied him, the worse the consequences.

「The Grand Imperial Palace」 “Your Majesty, just look!

This is what happens when you spoil Yuri!

Look at the mess he’s made!

They have brought utter shame upon the royal family!” Unable to sit still, Queen Vance knelt up on the luxurious brocade couch and leaned toward Emperor Sinclair.

Emperor Sinclair coughed twice, though it was unclear if it was from anger.

He waved his hand, and a nearby servant immediately brought a teacup to him.

Emperor Sinclair took a sip of tea to compose himself, then looked at Queen Vance.

“Yuri lost his birth mother when he was just a boy.

It’s not wrong for me to treat him a little better.

This isn’t spoiling him; it’s a father’s love, meant to make up for what he lost.” “But you’re spoiling him rotten!

Don’t tell me you intend to make him the Crown Prince, too?

Your Majesty, aren’t you being too biased?

The former queen is dead!

I am the empress of this empire now, and Adam is the one who truly deserves to be Crown Prince!" Queen Vance grew frantic, ignoring Emperor Sinclair's ill health and continuing her tirade.

"Insolence!" Emperor Sinclair roared, sweeping the teacup off the table with a flick of his wrist.

The cup hit the floor with a SMASH and shattered into pieces, instantly filling the room with the fragrance of tea.

But Emperor Sinclair's temper was nothing like the pleasant aroma of the tea.

He stood up, glaring down at Queen Vance on the couch.

"The selection of the Crown Prince is not for you to decide, nor is it for me!

It is for the parliament and the people to decide!

Hmph!" With a final cold snort, Emperor Sinclair stormed out of the room.

"Your Majesty, you were too hasty.

How could you contradict the Emperor?

You have been patient for so many years, why the sudden rush?

Besides, the First Prince is about to be married.

The title of heir will naturally fall to him." Lady Han, the Queen's attendant, knelt behind her and said in a soothing voice.

Queen Vance gritted her teeth, composing herself slightly.

"I'm just so angry!

I know exactly what Yuri Sinclair is plotting!

He heard Adam was getting married, so he immediately went out and married some commoner.

His ambition is as plain as day!" "The First Prince's wife is a governor's daughter, while the Third Prince's is a mere commoner.

When you compare the two, the outcome is obvious," Lady Han continued soothingly.

This analysis finally seemed to soothe Queen Vance's frayed nerves.

“It’s my fault for losing my composure.

What should I do now?

His Majesty is furious.” Queen Vance was filled with regret.

She hated that she had revealed her ambitions so quickly.

“I believe that, far from trying to stop the Third Prince’s marriage, Your Majesty should publicize it.

Make a grand spectacle of it so that the whole world knows.

Once that happens, the situation will be out of His Majesty’s hands.” “You truly are my master strategist!” Queen Vance’s face finally broke into a smile.

She glanced up at the television, where the current news broadcast showed Ashley Bowen falling into Yuri Sinclair’s arms as they boarded a military helicopter... The helicopter flew through the dark sky for some time.

It was Ashley Bowen’s first time in a helicopter, her first time seeing the world from such an altitude, and she was so thrilled that she quickly forgot about the chaos she had just caused.

Within the spacious palace grounds, a large clearing served as a helipad.

Guards helped Yuri Sinclair disembark, and Ashley Bowen followed, reluctantly stepping out of the aircraft.

The moment her feet touched the ground, she saw a woman leading a large retinue of people waiting outside the helicopter.

The woman leading them was clearly of high rank, a Head Court Lady.

“Nanny,” Yuri Sinclair called out softly.

The woman immediately broke into a wide grin, walked over, and began to push his wheelchair.

‘Nanny?’ Ashley Bowen was taken aback by the title.

She followed quietly behind the group, keeping a careful distance.

It wasn’t until they arrived before a palace that Yuri Sinclair seemed to remember something and barked, “Ashley Bowen!” Ashley Bowen immediately scurried forward with a sheepish grin.

“I’m here, Your Highness.” The woman finally seemed to realize her oversight.

She stopped and bowed to Ashley Bowen.

“Forgive my negligence.

Greetings to you, Your Highness, the Imperial Concubine.” “Nanny, please, you’re being too formal.” Ashley Bowen rushed to help the woman up.

‘Even Yuri Sinclair shows this woman such respect,’ she thought, ‘how could I dare let her bow to me?’ For some reason, Ashley Bowen felt that Yuri Sinclair seemed much closer to his nanny than he was to Queen Vance.

The luxurious bedchamber was decorated in a fusion of Eastern and Western styles.

Yuri Sinclair was lifted onto a soft couch in the center of the room, and a servant immediately brought a basin of hot water to wash his feet.

Yuri Sinclair waved a hand, dismissing the servants.

In an instant, only he and Ashley Bowen were left in the bedchamber.

Ashley Bowen stood on a large red carpet embroidered with golden phoenixes, not daring to lift her eyes.

She stared intently at the carpet’s pattern, awaiting Yuri Sinclair’s judgment.

‘Tonight, I didn’t just alarm the public, I got the military involved.

This incident has blown up way bigger than I expected.’ ‘So I guess clearing the area was necessary after all.’ “I was wrong,” Ashley Bowen admitted, taking the initiative this time.

“And what, exactly, were you wrong about?” Yuri Sinclair asked, looking at her with amusement.

“I was wrong about...

everything,” Ashley Bowen mumbled.

Seeing her so readily admit her fault, Yuri Sinclair didn’t lose his temper.

He simply chuckled.

“As long as you realize you were wrong.

You’re not to go to that kind of place again.” “Alright,” Ashley Bowen replied, biting her lip.

‘That kind of place?

It was just a lively food street,’ she thought.

‘Why does he make it sound like some seedy red-light district?’ As the old saying goes, entering the palace is like diving into a deep, vast sea.

She hadn’t realized it then, but from the day she registered her marriage with Yuri Sinclair, she was destined to lose her freedom.

“Forget my feet.

I want to take a bath, and you’re going to help me scrub my back.” Yuri Sinclair had already taken off his shoes.

The basin of petal-infused water was still steaming, filling the room with a pleasant floral scent.

“Huh?” Ashley Bowen was stunned.

‘Shouldn’t His Highness be furious with me?’ she wondered.

‘Why is he asking me to help him bathe…’ ‘NO—’ a lioness roared inside her heart.

“What ‘huh’?

Say it again and you can sleep on the floor outside tonight!” Yuri Sinclair’s brow furrowed.

‘Serving a monarch is like accompanying a tiger,’ she thought.

‘This prince’s moods change faster than the flip of a page.’ “Oh, I get it.” Ashley Bowen slowly wheeled the chair over from the corner, but when she positioned it in front of the couch, she was at a loss.

‘How am I supposed to get Yuri Sinclair into the wheelchair?’ “Your Highness, I’m not very strong… I can’t lift you,” Ashley Bowen said softly, immediately lowering her head like a child who had misbehaved.

“How do you know you can’t if you don’t even try?

You’re my wife.

From now on, taking care of my daily needs is your duty.

Or would you prefer I spend the rest of my life with a man?" His words were ridiculous, but his expression was dead serious.

The man he was referring to was, of course, Aaron.

Hearing this, Ashley Bowen's imagination immediately ran wild.

'So is His Highness the top, or is Aaron the top?' 'Based on their personalities, neither of them seems like the bottom type.' She quickly waved her hands, as if to physically banish the lewd images from her mind.

When she looked up and met Yuri Sinclair's gaze, she instinctively recoiled.

A dangerous glint lurked in the depths of Yuri Sinclair's eyes.

"Ashley Bowen, have you lost your mind?

What in the world goes on in that head of yours all day?" "N-nothing." 'I was just shipping him with Aaron, that's all,' Ashley Bowen muttered to herself as she slowly took off her shoes and climbed onto the couch.

Looking at Yuri Sinclair sitting on the couch, Ashley Bowen cupped her chin, trying to figure out how to move him to the wheelchair.

In the end, she gave up on trying to be clever and just reached out with both hands.

"Ashley Bowen, where do you think you're touching?" Yuri Sinclair roared like a wild beast.

Ashley Bowen snatched her hands back, realizing she had accidentally grabbed his chest.

"Your Highness, could you please put your arms around my neck?

That'll make it easier for me to carry you to the wheelchair," Ashley Bowen said, turning to look at Yuri Sinclair with an aggrieved pout.

'Was it just her imagination, or did she see Yuri Sinclair trying to hide a smile?' Yuri Sinclair's strong arms quickly draped around Ashley Bowen's neck, his palm coming to rest right in front of her chest.

Ashley Bowen strained to support his weight as she moved toward the wheelchair.

Yuri Sinclair's legs seemed completely powerless; even with his feet flat on the ground, he couldn't stand at all.

Panting from the exertion, Ashley Bowen felt the damp heat of Yuri Sinclair's breath on her neck as she guided him, step by laborious step, into the wheelchair.

Chapter 50: I Didn't Expect You to Be This Kind of Person

It was only a distance of two steps, yet the whole ordeal took a full ten minutes.

All of this should have been the guards' job.

But because of Yuri Sinclair's decree that she was to attend to all his daily needs from now on, she had to endure it.

Yuri Sinclair was now in his wheelchair.

Ashley Bowen had been pulling at his arm so desperately that it had turned red.

But when he saw Ashley's own crimson face, flustered from his teasing, he immediately pulled his hand away.

"You're too frail.

You need to get stronger.

We'll have to 'practice' more in the future.

No need for the guards tonight; you'll be handling everything." "Thank you for your grace, Your Highness." Ashley Bowen gave a slight bow, but she pouted so hard her lip could have touched the sky.

Inwardly, she was cursing Yuri Sinclair.

'This isn't grace!

It's torture!' The bathroom was enormous, at least thirty square meters.

As Ashley Bowen pushed Yuri Sinclair inside, she was stunned by the sight before her.

A pool, over ten meters long, took up half of the bathroom.

The walls were adorned with several paintings, all of them rather explicit.

They depicted either fully nude women or indecent scenes of men and women together.

Upon seeing the risqué images, Ashley Bowen hastily averted her eyes.

She had no way of knowing that in a bathroom like this, any random piece of décor was worth hundreds of thousands.

“My, what refined taste you have, Your Highness.

I never took you for this kind of person!” Ashley Bowen muttered, her back turned as she started filling the pool.

Her tone dripped with disdain.

Yuri Sinclair glanced at the paintings on the wall.

“You’re not referring to these paintings, are you?

They’re ‘Liberty,’ ‘David,’ and ‘The Son of God.'” These were all famous works of foreign anatomical art, but to Ashley Bowen, who knew nothing about art, they were just extremely vulgar pornography.

“So, ‘Liberty,’ ‘David,’ and ‘The Son of God’ just don’t like wearing clothes?

Or was it you, Your Highness, who forbade them?” Ashley Bowen stood up and turned to face Yuri Sinclair directly.

Yuri Sinclair didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

He found her logic hilarious.

“Ashley Bowen, are you illiterate?

Take another, closer look at these paintings!” “No!

I’m not looking!

It’ll give me a stye.” “…” Yuri Sinclair was exasperated.

Finally, he just ignored her and started unbuttoning his shirt himself.

“Wait!

Your Highness, what are you doing?” Ashley Bowen immediately threw her hands up defensively.

She took a step back, only to find there was nowhere to go.

Another step and she'd fall into the pool.

Yuri Sinclair continued to unbutton his shirt, his long, slender fingers looking nothing like a man's.

She glanced down at her own short, stubby fingers and swallowed, envious.

'Yuri Sinclair had a perfect body, a perfect face...

even his hands were perfect...' 'A man and a woman, all alone in a room, with risqué pictures hanging on the walls...

Isn't this just tempting fate?' Her mind filled with adult scenarios, and she grew flustered.

Seeing Ashley Bowen's frightened expression, Yuri Sinclair's lips twitched.

'Who knows where that wild imagination of hers has run off to now.' "Help me into the water." Yuri Sinclair's cold, deep voice shattered Ashley Bowen's reverie.

Ashley Bowen snapped back to reality and saw that Yuri Sinclair had already taken off his shirt, revealing a powerful chest.

'So he has a body like this...' His firm pecs, his flat stomach...

the eight distinct blocks of his abs looked as if they were about to leap off his body.

His wheat-colored skin, under the bright lights, radiated an irresistible allure.

Ashley Bowen stared, transfixed.

"Had your fill?" Yuri Sinclair asked coldly.

"I've had my fill," Ashley Bowen answered reflexively.

Realizing what she'd said, she quickly backtracked.

"I wasn't looking at you!

I was looking at a mosquito!

There's a mosquito!" With that, she feigned swatting a mosquito, her palm landing right on Yuri Sinclair's chest.

'So hard—' The muscle was rock-solid, and her hand bounced right off.

"Ashley Bowen!

Where would a mosquito come from in a palace this luxurious?

Are you just using this as an excuse to feel me up?" Yuri Sinclair asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No, really, there was a mosquito!

Heh heh.

Your Highness, let me help you into the pool." Ashley Bowen shamelessly stepped forward and repeated the earlier maneuver.

The maneuver once again took a record-breaking ten minutes before Yuri Sinclair was safely settled in the pool.

Ashley Bowen took a deep breath.

'So exhausting.' Yuri Sinclair had only taken off his shirt earlier.

Now that he was in the pool, he started taking off his pants.

If he hadn't been considerate of Ashley, he wouldn't have subjected himself to the discomfort of letting his pants get soaked just so he could take them off in the water.

Hearing a rustling sound, Ashley Bowen quickly moved closer, wanting to be helpful.

When she saw Yuri Sinclair unbuckling his belt, she instantly covered her eyes.

"Your Highness, perhaps I should leave?" "Leave for what?

Ashley Bowen, don't forget that we're husband and wife!" Yuri Sinclair said nonchalantly.

'Husband and wife?' 'Aside from that one drunken night together, they had absolutely nothing resembling a marital relationship.' 'They weren't like this at the villa.

Why the change since coming to the palace...?' Seeing Ashley Bowen frozen in place, Yuri Sinclair suddenly turned.

His large hand wrapped around the back of her head, pulling her face close to his.

Ashley Bowen's eyes widened in panic.

She and Yuri Sinclair were inches apart, face to face, their breaths mingling.

She didn't dare to breathe.

She stared at his face, so close to hers.

His features were exquisite, his skin so smooth she could hardly see any pores.

‘She’d always thought men were rough, that it was impossible for their skin to be this good.’ For some reason, being this close to him made her feel breathless.

‘From the look of it, he wanted to kiss her.’ ‘Kiss her?’ Her mind screamed, ‘Impossible!’ but Yuri Sinclair’s body moved closer and closer, until his chest was pressed against hers.

She felt like her heart was going to THUMP right out of her chest.

Just as Ashley Bowen squeezed her eyes shut, the anticipated kiss never came.

Yuri Sinclair seemed to be hesitating.

Then, he spoke, his voice low.

“You can go.” ‘Just...

go?’ She glanced at his suddenly uninterested face, murmured, “Oh,” and left.

Standing outside the bathroom door, she heard nothing from inside for a long time.

‘She had never been able to understand this man’s heart.’ Bored of being alone in the vast palace rooms while Yuri Sinclair was in the bathroom, Ashley Bowen decided to walk out of the bedchamber on her own.

She wanted to stroll in the courtyard and look at the stars and the moon.

“Your Grace, where are you going so late?” asked the female steward outside the main hall.

“I’m just going for a little walk.

You don’t need to follow me.” She hated the feeling of having someone shadow her every move, as if countless pairs of eyes were watching her, leaving her with no freedom at all.

“But...” The steward frowned, hesitating.

“Please don’t worry.

I’ll just be wandering around the Palace of Tranquility.” Hearing Ashley Bowen’s promise, the steward reluctantly nodded.

Ashley Bowen stepped out of the palace, and a warm breeze immediately caressed her face.

She looked up.

The sky was full of stars, unchanged by her new surroundings.

But just as she took a couple more steps, she suddenly spotted a figure darting away, trying to escape the Palace of Tranquility.

“Stop!

Who’s sneaking around over there?

Hey!

If you don’t stop, I’ll scream for the guards!” Seeing that the figure had no intention of stopping, Ashley Bowen raised her voice.

But before she could get the word “guards” out, the figure suddenly froze.

“What’s all the shouting about?” the figure at the gate snapped, her tone impatient.

Ashley Bowen walked over quickly and finally got a clear look at the person’s face.

A smile spread across her lips.

“Well, well.

I was wondering who it could be.

If it isn’t the future First Imperial Concubine.

What are you doing in your younger brother-in-law’s residence in the middle of the night?” “You!” Hearing Ashley Bowen’s sharp, biting words, Claire Sutton was so angry her face twitched.

She pointed a finger at her.

“Ashley Bowen, don’t you get arrogant!

Let me tell you, Yuri only loves me!

Who do you think you are?

You’re just a tool he’s using to spite me!” Claire Sutton’s words infuriated Ashley Bowen.

‘She was nobody’s tool.’ “That’s bullshit!” she blurted out, glaring at the detestable woman before her.

“Just as I thought, an uncivilized little brat.” Seeing Ashley get flustered, Claire Sutton smiled smugly.

She wrapped her arms around herself and circled Ashley Bowen, looking her up and down before speaking in a passive-aggressive tone, “You wild little thing.

You’re still a virgin, aren’t you?” ‘A virgin?’ ‘What a joke!’ ‘She gave her first time to Yuri Sinclair, hello?’ Ashley Bowen took two steps back, her face instantly burning.

Thankfully, a gentle breeze on her cheeks cooled the flush.

Seeing Ashley’s silence, Claire Sutton grew even more smug.

“Hmph!

I knew it.

If Yuri actually liked you, do you really think he wouldn’t have even touched you?” “Sister-in-law.” The previously silent Ashley Bowen suddenly spoke, startling Claire Sutton.

“How can you be so shameless?

Do you claim to know whether the Third Prince and I have slept together?

Are you asking because you want to know if he’s any good in bed?

Or are you more interested in his size?” Ashley Bowen declared loudly.

Now it was Claire Sutton’s turn to blush furiously.

“You’re the shameless one!” “I’m just giving you a taste of your own medicine.

And I’m quite blissful, Sister-in-law.” Ashley Bowen put heavy emphasis on the word “blissful.” “But I mean carnal bliss, not marital bliss.

You understand.” At the end, she didn’t forget to add a sly smile.

Claire Sutton was furious.

She had intended to humiliate Ashley, but instead, she was the one left seething with anger and frustration.

“You bitch!

You’re lying!

With Yuri’s physical condition, you can be ‘blissful’?

Heh.” At the end, Claire Sutton let out a mocking laugh.

“You left the Third Prince because you couldn’t stand his physical condition, didn’t you, Sister-in-law?

I’m sorry, but you’re mistaken.

The Third Prince is very strong.

I feel so happy I could just die.” As she spoke, Ashley Bowen stepped forward and gave Claire Sutton a little push.

“And another thing, Sister-in-law.

You’re our elder brother’s wife now, so you should stop running over here to eavesdrop and peek through keyholes.

Isn’t that the job of nosy old palace matrons?

On a precious night like this, you should hurry back to your First Prince.” In truth, saying those words made Ashley’s own heart ache.