

Chapter 15

“By the way, Uncle James, you guys can’t take this table!” Charlie said suddenly.

“Why not?” James asked.

“This table is reserved for the employees of our company who perform well. If you guys take this table, they won’t have a place to sit then!”

“W-Well... We will take that table at the front then...” James said.

“You guys better don’t get too close to Grandpa, in case he gets angry when he sees all of you.”

James asked anxiously, “Where should we sit then?”

“Over there!” Charlie pointed at a table situated near the exit which looked extremely shabby. It was specially reserved for the hotel staff.

James and his family were dumbfounded when they heard Charlie. After all, they were still the immediate family members of the Cunninghams but now, they were asked to sit at the same table with the workers of the hotel. Were they actually less important than even the employees of the company?

“W-What have we actually done wrong to suffer something like this...” Helen couldn’t help but cover her face and started sobbing.

At that juncture, Eric Cunningham was heading their way. “James, you guys are here,” Eric greeted them in a cold tone.

“Dad!” James and Helen immediately rose to their feet and greeted Eric in an apprehensive tone that came with a slight trace of excitement.

Eric had been giving them a cold shoulder over the years and this was his first time taking the initiative to talk to them. Nodding at them, Eric said, “Since you all are here, do come over and take a seat. I have something to discuss with y’all!”

James and Helen glanced at each other with excitement written all over their faces. Was Old Master Cunningham finally going to assign some important tasks to them? They followed Eric to the main table where several other guests were sitting. One of them was a fat man with a huge belly who constantly wore a lascivious expression. His eyes were brimming with lewdness when he caught sight of Sasha.

Sasha looked shaken to see the man. Her pace came to a halt and she nearly wanted to walk away from the table immediately. Eric walked toward the chubby man and took a seat next to him before he said with a smile, “James, let me introduce Mr. Clayton Sampson from Carlson Group; he’s the person-in-charge of the purchasing department of the company.”

The eyes of James and Helen lit up with hope immediately at the mention of Carlson Group, which was a large corporation in the healthcare industry in Eastcliff. It was also a major business partner of the company owned by the Cunninghams. In other words, the Cunninghams had the fate of their venture held in the hands of Clayton.

“Mr. Sampson, it’s my honor to meet you!” James greeted him with a bow.

“Likewise!” While Clayton was taking a puff off a cigar with an arrogant demeanor, his eyes were glued on Sasha.

“The progress of the project we’re having with Carlson Group this time hasn’t been satisfactory.” In a slightly frigid voice, Eric continued, “Sasha has been the one in charge of the plan which is worth over 50 million. According to Mr. Sampson, Sasha hasn’t been taking the program very seriously. What’s wrong with it?”

James immediately turned to look at Sasha, who held her head low and kept mum with her face red while she gritted her teeth. “What’s going on?” James confronted his daughter in a hushed tone.

“H-He asked me to go on a holiday trip with him...” Sasha muttered.

An icy glint shone in Matthew’s eyes immediately. This Mr. Sampson clearly deserves some punishment!

James couldn’t help but be stunned after he heard Sasha. As an experienced man, there was no doubt he understood what that meant.

“Miss Cunningham, I’m afraid you might have gotten the wrong idea of it. I merely asked you to go on a business trip with me.” In a leisurely tone, he continued, “This project is a significant one because it will bring in 50 million in revenue for your company this year and at least 30 million for the subsequent years. Once we’re able to strike a deal, the project will take us at least five years, which will then be worth nearly a total of 200 million. Needless to say, I have to handle it with extra care. Since I’m in charge of the purchasing department of Carlson Group, I have to carry out my work responsibly. So, I have to do an inspection on the raw materials used and the manufacturing process of your company before making a decision. Isn’t that the right thing to do?”

Sasha, whose face had turned crimson, said in an undertone, “I-I suggested to send one of my subordinates to do the inspection with you but y-you rejected it...”

“Miss Cunningham, from your approach, I can’t see your sincerity in getting this project offered by my company!” In an irritated tone, Clayton continued, “While I carried out the inspection personally, you merely sent over a lower rank staff to assist me. Are you looking down on me or Carlson Group?”

Sasha was left stumped by his words. Eric then urged in a cold tone, “Sasha, Mr. Sampson is right that we have to handle such a significant program with extra care. As the person-in-charge of the program, assisting Mr. Sampson personally is your obligation!”

“Grandpa, I-I can’t go with him...” Sasha stuttered in a fit of panic, “H-He...”

“Why can’t you go with him?!” James walked over and criticized, “Sasha, is this how you handle a project you’re in charge of in the company? How are you going to gain the trust of our customers by dealing them with such an attitude?”

Sasha explained anxiously, “But, h-he is trying to do something evil...”

“Shut up!” Charlie walked over here and snapped furiously at her, “Sasha Cunningham, how dare you say something like that about Mr. Sampson? What gives you the right to adopt such an attitude? Is it because Grandpa has been too lenient toward you and your family?”

“Hey, Mr. Cunningham, please calm down.” Clayton suddenly chuckled and said, “Miss Cunningham is still young and it’s reasonable for her to have a temper. I have a private room here which is a lot quieter. Miss Cunningham, why don’t we head over there and discuss the project in private?”

Sasha looked rattled in an instant. Was Clayton audacious enough to bring her to a room in front of everyone else? However, instead of getting angry by his suggestion, Eric immediately nodded his head and complimented Clayton, “Mr. Sampson, you’re indeed a very generous man who is so forgiving toward the younger generation. Sasha, come on and say thanks to Mr. Sampson. Also, remember to give him the best deal we can offer and kickstart the project!”

“Grandpa...” Sasha was panic-stricken. Her grandfather was clearly trying to throw her under the bus.

“That’s enough. Since Grandpa has asked you to do so, you’d better oblige.” With a chuckle, Charlie said sarcastically, “Sasha, do make sure you do your best! Everyone in the company will be counting on you to seize the deal!”

The Cunninghams placed great importance to the business agreement because if they managed to clinch it, it would surely double the wealth of the family. Therefore, they did not feel offended at all despite knowing the ulterior motives that Clayton was harboring. In their perception, sacrificing Sasha was not a big deal because it was a great bargain that could bring them a business contract worth nearly 200 million.

“Miss Cunningham, let’s go!” Clayton snickered.

With her face reddened, Sasha gritted her teeth and exclaimed, “I’m not going!”

“You’re not going?!” Looking affronted at once, Clayton said crossly, “In this case, it seems like Miss Cunningham doesn’t take the project with our company seriously at all. Why don’t we just forget about the deal?!”

Just as Clayton rose to his feet and was ready to storm off, Eric quickly stopped him. “Mr. Sampson, please don’t get angry. As a generous man, you shouldn’t be bothered by the little mistakes made by immature ones. I’ll go and talk some sense into her!”

“Sasha, what are you doing?” Eric glared at Sasha balefully and threatened, “Let me tell you, if you fail to get this agreement going, you’ll be in a greater mess than just being fired. I’m talking at least three million that you have to fork out for the money you misappropriated from the company. Right now, you are left with two options—either you pay up or you go and accompany Mr. Sampson now. You choose for yourself!”

Sasha was dumbfounded, realizing that Eric was leaving her with no choice at all! She turned to look at her parents; James’s face was reddened with rage while Helen was clenching her fists in fury. They had no means to help her.

“President Cunningham...” All of a sudden, Matthew spoke, “Sasha is after all your granddaughter. Do you think it’s appropriate of you to compel her into doing such a thing?”

It was only then did Eric notice Matthew’s presence. His face turned icy at once as he challenged him furiously, “How did you get in here? This is the family gathering of the Cunninghams. Who are you and what gives you the right to be here?”

“I’m Sasha’s husband...” Matthew answered.

“You’re just a kept man. If it wasn’t for you, Sasha wouldn’t have misappropriated the company’s assets! You! Get out of here right now! Otherwise, I’ll get someone to break your legs and throw you out of here!”

“Grandpa, you shouldn’t offend Mr. Larson here!” At that juncture, Charlie edged closer to Eric and said contemptuously, “After all, Mr. Larson has booked the ninth floor to hold a birthday celebration for Sasha! We can’t really afford such a big shot now, can we?”

“Say what?!” While Eric was stupefied by shock, Clayton burst out laughing. “Ha ha ha, that’s the best joke I’ve ever heard in my whole life. He has booked the ninth floor? Mr. Cunningham, even our President Carlson isn’t too sure whether he is able to book the ninth floor of this hotel. It seems like your grandson-in-law is indeed quite a capable person!”

Looking embarrassed, Eric exclaimed furiously, “James, is he your son-in-law? Did you deliberately bring him here to humiliate me?”

James looked awkward in response to his father’s question. Suddenly, Helen flung her arm and slapped Matthew before she yelled angrily at the top of her lungs, “Matthew, get out of this place!”

Matthew, whose face went swollen and reddened, felt slightly frustrated deep down inside.

“Matthew, just go back home first.” Sasha urged with her eyes reddened, “Don’t add anymore trouble to the mess!”

At the sight of Sasha, Matthew’s anger dissipated all at once. “Sasha, today is your birthday. I will keep you company and I won’t go anywhere else!”

A surge of warmth coursed through Sasha’s heart when she heard him. However, she muttered, “I appreciate it, but you really should just go now...”

“Sasha, you shouldn’t ask Matthew to leave!” Lily said with a laugh, “We’re still waiting to have a look at your birthday celebration held on the ninth floor! Just the thought of it made me envious!”

All the guests around her burst out laughing. At that juncture, a commotion ensued as a group of waiters made a dash into the ballroom from outside.

“What’s going on?” Eric asked curiously.

The hotel manager made his way over in large strides and apologized, “Excuse me, Mr. Cunningham, I’m afraid you guys have to move your celebration to somewhere else.”

“Move? Why is that so?” Eric confronted the hotel manager angrily, “I’ve booked this place in advance. What’s more, I’m having my birthday celebration here tonight. Where else can I go?”

“You may move to the second floor,” the hotel manager suggested.

“You must be joking!” Eric said crossly, “I booked this ballroom on the third floor and I don’t see why I have to move to the second floor!” Eric looked toward Clayton, expecting him to back him up.

In a cold voice, Clayton said to the hotel manager, “Hi, I’m Clayton Sampson from Carlson Group. I was the one who booked this place for Mr. Cunningham. So, have you guys decided not to pay any more respect to the Carlson Group?”

Clayton was trying to intimidate the hotel manager with the mention of Carlson Group, which was a sizable enterprise in Eastcliff. To his dismay, the hotel manager was unmoved by what he said. Instead, he added in a frosty tone, “Mr. Sampson, if you are not satisfied with our arrangement, you may voice your complaint to the owner of the hotel. However, you guys still have to move to the second floor!”

Clayton looked shaken. Of course he was not bold enough to offend the owner of Times Hotel. “Why do we have to?” he asked indignantly.

The hotel manager clarified in a nonchalant face, “The guests who previously booked the ninth floor have to move to the eight floor, and those at the eight floor have to move to the seventh floor, and so on. Therefore, you guys have to move to the second floor too!”

“Huh?” Both Eric and Clayton looked puzzled as they asked in unison, “Why is that so?”

Starting to lose his patience, the hotel manager replied coldly, “Because a big shot, who has to be respected by everyone in the city, has booked the ninth floor. Tonight, all of us at the hotel have to serve him well, even though it means we might have to turn down other businesses!”

“Say what?” All the guests at the ballroom exclaimed in surprises. Anyone who could book the ninth floor of the hotel was considered among the most respectable figures in the city. Who else was capable of making the influential ones to make way for him? Since the big shots at the ninth floor had obliged, they had no excuse not to.

At that juncture came an exclamation from outside, “Goodness gracious, everyone, come and take a look outside! All the cars at the parking lot are being moved away!”

“What?!” One after another, the guests made a dash out and looked down at the parking lot. Indeed, all the cars parked there were being moved away at a rapid rate. The Cunninghams cried out in surprise as most of them had driven themselves to the hotel.

“What’s going on?” Eric was panic-stricken because his Maybach was parked outside and it was being moved away without his permission.

The hotel manager said matter-of-factly, “I’m very sorry about that because we have to clear out the space to make way for the motorcade of our VIP!”

“Who’s that VIP? How cocky he is!” Clayton commented begrudgingly.

The hotel manager shot him a derisive glance. “Mr. Sampson, your boss, Stanley Carlson, is showing the way for the motorcade of our VIP downstairs. Do you want to go there and take a look?”

Clayton was startled by those words that he nearly wet his pants. “What? M-My boss is here? D-Don’t you try to bluff me...” he went in a quivering voice. Immediately, he scurried to the window and looked down at the parking lot. Indeed, Stanley was seen standing at the entrance, holding a walkie-talkie in his hand while he appeared solemn, as if waiting for someone.

Shivering in fear, Clayton waved at Eric and said, “Mr. Cunningham, I’ll have to head downstairs first.”

“What about our project?” Eric asked anxiously.

Clayton glanced at Sasha before he gulped down a mouthful of saliva and said through gritted teeth, “I’ll give her half an hour to think about it. I’ll be back later to discuss after I am done with my boss!” With that, he jogged away in a flash.

Everyone at the ballroom was looking at each other, unsure what to do. What kind of VIP would require Stanley Carlson, who was quite a big shot himself, to help direct his convoy personally?

“Move, everyone, move quickly!” Eric’s mind was pulled back to reality before he flashed the hotel manager a simpering smile. “Don’t worry, we’ll move to the second floor within 10 minutes!”

The hotel manager nodded at him with an impassive look. Then, Eric turned to Sasha and said menacingly through clenched teeth, “Sasha, I’ll give you half an hour to think about it. Either you accompany Mr. Sampson later, or you fork our three million. Otherwise, I’ll call the police and you’ll have to get ready to be sent to jail!”

“Dad!” In a trembling voice, James implored, “Please give Sasha a chance. She is after all your granddaughter...”

“Shut up!” Eric snapped vehemently, “Granddaughter? Since she’s one of the Cunninghams, she has to contribute to the family. Not only did she get herself a useless husband, she even misappropriated the company’s assets for him. Yes, she is born with a pretty face but she has no idea how to utilize it. So, what’s the point of keeping her in the family?” With that, Eric placed both hands at his back and left, without casting a glance at Sasha.

Sasha stood rooted to the spot with tears of despair streaming down her face. At that moment, she felt like killing herself!