

What makes a power couple

Chapter 31:

Nicole's eyes swept over the four young maids standing before her, her gaze unyielding. "What is your shoe size?" she asked, her tone precise and unfeeling.

The maids exchanged puzzled glances, clearly unsure of the purpose behind the question. Despite their confusion, they answered, their voices tinged with uncertainty.

"Seven," one of them answered, her voice quiet.

"Eight," another maid responded, her tone steady but wary.

"I can wear either a seven or an eight," the third maid said hesitantly.

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"I'm an eight as well," the fourth maid added, her voice barely above a whisper.

Lilah, completely perplexed, blinked in confusion. “Nicole, how does shoe size relate to identifying the thief?”

Nicole’s response was calm yet filled with purpose. “Everything,” she said simply before rising from her seat.

Without another word, Nicole moved toward a cabinet, opened a drawer, and carefully retrieved a plush rug. With measured steps, she unrolled it on the floor, her movements deliberate. The room fell into a breathless silence as everyone leaned in, curious to see what Nicole was about to reveal.

At the center of the rug, a clear footprint stood out—so distinct that even the intricate pattern of the sole was visible, marking the surface with undeniable clarity.

Lilah’s breath hitched as her gaze dropped once more, a heavy silence falling over the room as the significance of what they were seeing began to sink in. Nicole, settling back into her seat with ease, crossed her legs and snapped her fingers with casual authority. “Ladies, try it on,” she commanded, her voice firm yet composed.

One of the maids, clearly perplexed, stepped forward. “What is this supposed to prove?”

Nicole’s lips curled into a subtle, almost imperceptible smile. “I stepped out of the room for about thirty minutes. When I returned, I found this footprint. I wear a size six, and Aidan’s feet are definitely larger than the footprint. So, aside from me, someone else must have been in here.”

She turned her attention to Duran. “There are no cameras inside the house, but the garden is under surveillance. You can check the footage. I spent about twenty-five minutes there after I left. I had no opportunity to do anything else.”

As Nicole’s words settled in, realization swept through the room. It became evident why she had asked for maids taller than five-foot-five—most of them would wear shoes in that size range.

Aidan’s room was restricted to those without permission, and since Nicole had no opportunity to commit the theft, it was clear that the person whose shoe size matched the footprint in the carpet was the one who had stolen Lilah’s necklace. Nicole’s calm and reasoned explanation, combined with the evidence she presented, effectively cleared her name.

Satisfied that she had made her point, Nicole stopped trying to explain further. Her gaze swept over the four maids with cold precision. “Take off your shoes. Let’s see if we can match the print.”

The maids, eager to prove their innocence, quickly complied, slipping off their shoes.

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Chapter 32:

Duran knelt down with methodical precision, carefully comparing the soles of each shoe. After a brief moment of silence, he rose and addressed the group. “None of these shoes match the print.”

The four maids exhaled in unison, their tense shoulders relaxing as the weight of suspicion was finally lifted from them.

Nicole didn’t even flinch at their reactions, her expression calm and composed. With a nonchalant gesture, she waved them off. “Thank you. You may return to your work now.”

The four maids, relieved to escape the scrutiny, didn’t wait a moment longer. They turned on their heels and practically rushed out of the room.

Lilah, still trying to make sense of everything, pressed her lips together in thought. “If it wasn’t someone from the household, could it have been an outsider?”

Nicole's laughter was light, but there was an edge to it. "An outsider? How could someone just stroll through the gates of the Moore estate, know exactly where to go, steal your necklace, and slip it into my suitcase without leaving a trace? Whoever did this must have been someone inside Riverside Haven." Her gaze then shifted lazily, landing on Zoe and Avalynn. The glint in her eyes sharpened, turning calculating. "That leaves two people who haven't been checked yet. What about you two?"

The color drained from both women's faces instantly, their earlier bravado fading in an instant.

"I-I would never," Avalynn began, her voice trembling as she stammered.

"I wouldn't either!" Zoe interjected quickly, her words hurried and defensive.

Nicole's smile was chilling, a cold gleam in her eyes as she arched an eyebrow in amusement. "But weren't you both just swearing you saw me steal it?"

"I must have been mistaken..." Avalynn faltered, her words losing their conviction.

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Turning her attention to Duran, Nicole's voice remained calm, yet it carried an undeniable command. "Duran, please."

At Nicole's instruction, Duran signaled for two men to step forward. Without hesitation, they grabbed Zoe and Avalynn, disregarding their struggles, and swiftly removed their shoes.

After a meticulous inspection, Duran turned back, his expression serious. "The footprint matches Zoe's shoe."

Analia's fury exploded as her hand slammed onto the table with force, the sound echoing sharply through the room. Nicole raised an eyebrow, her tone cold and incisive. "You've played a nice drama, haven't you? Now, tell me who's behind this?"

Zoe's face drained of all color, her body shaking as she crumpled to the floor, her knees hitting the ground. She stammered, unable to form a coherent thought.

Before Zoe could say anything further, Lilah's shocked gasp filled the room, her voice breaking with disbelief. "How could it be you, Zoe? You've always been the one looking after your elderly mother and younger brother, always been so careful, so thoughtful. Why would you do something like this?"

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Chapter 33:

Zoe froze, her body stiffening. After a moment of silence, her jaw clenched, and her face contorted with raw emotion. “Because I loathe her!” she spat, pointing accusingly at Nicole. “I spent seven years taking care of Aidan, and I should have been the one to marry him. But Nicole... she waltzed in and took him without a second thought. I can’t bear it!”

Analia’s hand slammed down once more, this time with such intensity that the coffee cups rattled. The room fell silent under the weight of her fury.

Lilah, her voice laced with concern, asked, “Nicole, what do you intend to do with her?”

Nicole’s response was chillingly devoid of mercy, her tone firm and unwavering.

“Throw her out. And Avalynn, too. Fire them both immediately.”

Avalynn's composure crumbled; desperation laced her trembling plea. "Please... I was also set up! I truly didn't know. Please, just listen..."

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"Enough!" Analia's voice thundered, cutting off Avalynn's plea. Her fury hadn't dissipated. She pointed sharply at the people gathered outside the door, her words firm and commanding. "And as for all those gossipers, get rid of them, too. No one is allowed to talk about Nicole behind my back!"

Avalynn, with her head hanging in shame, bit back her words, swallowing any further protests. She dared not speak again.

Duran wasted no time, efficiently ushering each person out of the room. Regardless of their desperate pleas or tearful protests, he remained unfazed, moving forward without hesitation.

Sensing the strain in the room, Lilah approached Analia with quiet empathy.

"Analia, you're still recovering. Let me help you back to your room so you can rest," she urged, her hand gently resting on Analia's arm.

"Wait a moment," Nicole's voice interrupted, sharp and commanding, halting Lilah in her tracks.

Lilah turned back, her expression a mix of curiosity and caution. “Nicole, is there something else?”

Nicole’s lips curled into a faint, knowing smile, her voice cold and deliberate. “Just a moment ago, didn’t you also conclude that I was a thief?”

Analia’s gaze flickered toward Lilah, her initial surprise giving way to a look of increasing suspicion.

Lilah, taken completely off guard, felt her heart race. Nicole had carefully chosen the word “decide,” and it hit her with force.

There was a vast chasm between assuming something and actually making a conscious decision about it. The distinction, though subtle, was profound, and it settled in Lilah’s mind like a heavy stone. Her expression shifted slightly, her uncertainty now apparent.

Nicole didn’t allow Lilah to finish, cutting in with chilling clarity. “Had that door truly been closed, no matter what evidence I presented, my name would never have been cleared.”

Lilah’s heart plummeted, the sharpness of Nicole’s words cutting deeper than she had anticipated.

Analia's sharp eyes narrowed, her brow furrowing as she seemed to finally piece everything together. Her gaze hardened as she turned to Lilah. "Lilah, how could you have been so reckless?"

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Chapter 34:

Lilah felt a wave of unease wash over her, her chest tightening. For a moment, she hesitated, the weight of her actions pressing on her. Then, with sincerity in her eyes, she lowered her head, her voice soft but filled with genuine remorse. "I truly am sorry, Nicole. Zoe has been a part of our family for almost eight years, and I trusted her more than I should have. I acted impulsively and misjudged you."

Lilah's reference to their long familiarity seemed like a feeble excuse, an attempt to justify her hasty actions.

Nicole, however, couldn't help but notice how skillfully Lilah played the innocent, but she wasn't deceived. Where others might have been swayed by the apparent kindness in Lilah's words, Nicole saw the underlying manipulation. Every word Lilah spoke now seemed kind and caring, but earlier, her words had been carefully crafted—all meant to corner.

If Nicole hadn't noticed the footprint on the carpet, she would have been left without a defense, her innocence unproven. This kind of delicate manipulation was a far cry from anything Marissa had ever attempted.

A faint, almost imperceptible smile tugged at Nicole's lips, her voice now dripping with sarcastic sweetness. "Why apologize, Miss Buckley? If you hadn't insisted on searching my room for the necklace, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to clear my name. In fact, I should be thanking you."

Nicole had turned the tables with surgical precision, outplaying Lilah at her own game and leaving her completely boxed in by her own choices.

Lilah's eyes flickered with a moment of uncertainty, her mind scrambling for a response. But at that moment, she was utterly at a loss for words.

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Analia listened carefully to Nicole's words, her mind revisiting the events of the night. She furrowed her brows, her gaze narrowing as she thought deeply. Yet, instead of scolding Lilah, she stood up slowly, her face softening as she approached Nicole. A warm smile touched her lips. "Nicole, get some rest. If there's anything you need, don't hesitate to ask."

Nicole responded with a calm nod. “Alright.”

As Analia turned to leave, her gaze flicked toward Lilah, and in that instant, her face hardened.

Lilah, sensing the shift, quickly followed Analia, her heart pounding in her chest.

Once they were back in the room, Lilah’s eyes were puffy, tears lingering. She hurriedly tried to explain herself, her voice rushing with emotion. “Analia, I was just so anxious. I couldn’t think clearly.”

Analia, her eyes narrowing, regarded Lilah with a stern look. “What on earth happened to you tonight? You’ve always been sharp, never reckless. Did you lose your mind this evening?”

Lilah’s throat tightened as she struggled to find the words. Her voice quivered as she spoke, her eyes desperate for understanding. “I was just terrified that Nicole might be wrongly accused. And that necklace... it’s all I have left from my mother. I panicked because I care so much, and I lost my judgment. I’m so sorry for letting you down.”

Analia’s gaze softened as she saw the raw sincerity in Lilah’s eyes. She remembered Lilah’s mother—how that woman had died saving her life. The weight of that memory caused Analia’s heart to ache.

She sighed deeply, her voice gentle but firm. “I know you didn’t mean it. But please, don’t act so recklessly again.”

Lilah nodded, a soft sob escaping her lips. “Thank you,” she whispered, her relief palpable.

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Chapter 35:

Suddenly, a thought crossed Analia’s mind. Her expression turned serious again. “By the way, I noticed there was a blanket on the sofa earlier. What’s going on? Are Aidan and Nicole sleeping separately? That can’t be. They need to share a bed tonight.”

Lilah hesitated for a moment, her hand trembling ever so slightly as she tried to explain. “Maybe Aidan just... doesn’t feel comfortable with Nicole yet.”

Analia’s eyes flashed with irritation, her voice firm. “Nicole is a wonderful person, and Aidan has no right to push her away. I’m going to have a serious talk with that stubborn boy. If he dares refuse my request, he’ll regret it.”

Analia spun toward the door, clearly ready to march out and unleash hell. But a gentle tug on Lilah’s sleeve stopped her.

“Aidan’s not home,” Lilah persuaded.

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That gave Analia pause. Realization flashed in her eyes as she snatched up her phone and punched in Aidan’s number. “Grandma.”

Analia’s voice exploded down the line, thick with irritation. “You brat! How dare you make Nicole sleep on the sofa? Do you have any idea how inappropriate that is? I don’t care how busy you are, you’d better show your face tonight.” Before Aidan could even answer, she ended the call and muttered to herself with a sharp scoff, “Unbelievable. He’s got a wife like that and doesn’t even know what a blessing she is.”

Beside her, Lilah stayed silent, her head dipped low. Her teeth pressed into her lower lip, eyes distant with thought.

Later that night, the city lights bled across the sky, casting a soft red glow that blurred the line between dream and reality.

Inside the bedroom, fresh from her bath, Nicole finished organizing her books, gave a slow stretch, and headed to the couch, ready to rest.

But the door creaked open before she could lie down. Her head turned instinctively. Aidan's eyes—dark, magnetic, unreadable—met hers. He loosened his tie as he stepped into the room, each stride measured, like he knew exactly what he wanted.

The tension in the air pulled tight, and without thinking, Nicole flinched. Aidan reached for her waist, his grip firm, and guided her down onto the couch without a word.

Breath catching in her throat, Nicole stared at him. “Aidan, what are you—” Aidan silenced her without a word. He clamped a hand over her mouth, eyes locked on hers—dark, unreadable, and wild. His voice rasped like wind through broken glass. “Know how to groan?”

Confusion clouded Nicole's expression as she blinked up at him, stunned.

Without loosening Aidan's grip, his cold palm remained sealed over her lips. Nicole stared back, wide-eyed, heart thudding as panic and disbelief tangled in her chest.

For the briefest second, his thumb slid across her mouth, slow and deliberate, before pressing down harder.

Pain flickered through Nicole's expression as a muffled cry escaped her throat. Aidan's gaze narrowed, sharp and assessing. "That's more like it."

A soft whimper broke from her lips. She fought back, shoving at him with weak, trembling hands. The moment her palm touched his chest, she froze. Heat pulsed through the fabric, his strength startling her. Her breath caught, and she yanked her hand back like she'd touched fire.

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Chapter 36:

Aidan's eyes lingered, drinking in every detail—her trembling lips, flushed cheeks, and the fury in her eyes that refused to break contact.

His throat moved with a subtle swallow as he looked down at her, his voice low and cutting. "You're not very good at it."

"Good at what?"

Aidan's hand tightened around her waist as he leaned in, closing the space until she felt every breath between them.

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A jolt of panic surged through Nicole. "Aidan, what are you—"

Before she could get another word out, his hand clamped over her mouth once again.

Frustration sparked behind her eyes as she thought fast. Without hesitation, she reached for her silver needles.

Aidan saw it coming. He caught her wrist and pinned it above her head with smooth precision. His eyes gleamed with amusement. “Didn’t know those needles of yours weren’t just for saving lives... they’re deadly too.”

“You—” Nicole began, but she stopped short, her attention snapping to the faint voices drifting in from the hallway.

“Shhh! Don’t shove me. I’m trying to hear. Did it work or not?”

The moment she heard the voice, she knew. It was Analia. And suddenly, the pieces slid into place. This was all a performance.

Only once the soft shuffle of footsteps faded and Analia’s presence disappeared did Aidan finally move off Nicole.

Desire had no place in his expression. He leaned back with practiced nonchalance, legs crossed, his movements deliberate as he adjusted his cufflinks and struck a match to light his cigarette.

Nicole turned her face away, her breathing uneven, pulse still racing from the act.

Without warning, his voice sliced through the silence. “So, you enjoy sharing everything that happened in this room, huh?”

The words came smooth and slow, his tone rich and unreadable, like velvet laced with iron. It was impossible to tell if he was just amused or truly angry.

Nicole caught the implication in his tone, but she wasn't in the mood to clarify. Tired and irritated, she tossed him a glance laced with dry humor. "Mr. Moore, you're old enough to know that if you didn't hear it yourself or see it with your own eyes, then maybe you should avoid making false accusations."

Without waiting for a reply, she reached for the blanket draped over the couch and began settling in for the night.

Nicole didn't bother softening her tone. "If you've got nothing useful to add, I suggest you turn in early. Staying up doesn't suit your health."

Aidan tapped the edge of his cigarette, letting ash fall as smoke curled around his face like a veil. His features gave little away, but the silence between them grew heavier by the second.

The cold in his stare didn't faze Nicole in the slightest. If anything, she leaned into it—testing him deliberately.

After holding back for just a moment longer, she decided to lay her cards on the table. "Let's be honest, Mr. Moore. You can't stand the sight of me, and I'm not exactly thrilled about dealing with you either, so here's an idea—how about we sign a contract?"

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Chapter 37:

His gaze sharpened, his voice low and smooth as he echoed her words back. “You don’t want to deal with me?”

The implication wasn’t lost on either of them. She didn’t like him any more than he liked her.

Clearing her throat softly, Nicole masked the awkward pause. She rose from the couch, walked over to her suitcase, and pulled out a folder. A smile played at her lips as she held it out to him. “Take a look.”

Aidan didn't reach for it right away. His eyes stayed fixed on her face, quietly examining, weighing something only he understood. After a beat of silence, he finally asked, "You planned this from the beginning, didn't you?"

This wasn't a sudden decision. She had the agreement ready the day she entered the Moore household.

Without missing a beat, Nicole returned his gaze and smiled. "You don't like me, and I'm not trying to make things worse for either of us. Just read it. It might help us survive under the same roof without driving each other crazy."

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He said nothing as he opened the contract.

Flipping through the pages in silence, Aidan finally closed the contract and set it down on the coffee table, unreadable as ever.

Eyes bright with anticipation, Nicole leaned in slightly. "So? What's your verdict?"

Snuffing out the cigarette, Aidan narrowed his gaze, his tone laced with dry sarcasm. "A one-year contract? Just playing house for show?"

Nicole responded without missing a beat. “Exactly. You do your thing, I’ll do mine. We put on a convincing front, keep your grandmother happy, and neither of us has to interfere in the other’s life.”

He didn’t speak right away. His stare lingered on her, unreadable, before he slowly reached for the contract once more.

Quick to capitalize on the moment, Nicole offered him a pen, her smile sweetened just enough to seem earnest. “I knew you’d be the logical type. This makes everything simpler.”

But instead of reaching for the pen, Aidan’s fingers tightened around the pages. In one fluid motion, he tore the contract straight down the center.

Nicole’s expression faltered. She froze, stunned by what she’d just seen. That wasn’t supposed to happen.

In her head, he’d flash that cocky smirk, say something like, “You’re a stubborn one. Fine. I’ll play along—but don’t come crawling back when your time’s up,” and then sign his name with flair before walking off like he owned the room.

But this? She hadn’t seen it coming at all.

Aidan rose to his feet, tossed the shredded contract into the trash, and cast a chilling glance her way. His eyes were sharp with disdain, as though her suggestion had been an insult to both of them.

“Don’t bring that up again. Just do what’s expected of you, as my wife.”

Nicole’s lips pressed into a thin line. “Why?”

Aidan’s voice dropped into something quiet and steady. “I’ll let you go... when the time comes.”

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Chapter 38:

His mind had already drawn the link. If Marissa had ties to the woman from five years ago, then Nicole, as her sister, might hold a missing piece of the puzzle. That possibility alone was enough to keep Nicole exactly where she was.

A flicker in his gaze caught her attention—something shadowed, controlled, but simmering with danger.

Her breath caught for a beat before she shifted course. “My sister’s asking... any idea when the person who owns that ring will return?”

Unknotting his tie with one hand, Aidan strolled toward the bathroom. His voice remained casual and even. “He’s got a project in Newton. Once he finishes up, he’ll be back.”

“Understood,” Nicole replied.

Right as he reached for the bathroom door, he stopped and turned his head, casting a look over his shoulder at Nicole. His eyes narrowed, and the air around him seemed to shift. “You sure are digging into this more than usual.”

Nicole’s chest gave a quiet jolt, but her expression stayed pleasant. “She’s my sister. It makes sense I’d be worried.”

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His eyes turned cold—the kind of cold that made silence feel heavier.

“Interesting, because I never saw you caring much in the past.”

“The mere sight of her makes me sick. Isn’t that explanation enough?” The message behind her words was loud and clear—she wanted Marissa gone from the Moore residence.

Aidan considered her carefully, his expression unreadable, then stepped into the bathroom.

Only then did Nicole exhale, tension finally sliding off her shoulders.

Whatever had happened five years ago was still shrouded in fog, and until she uncovered the truth, she had no choice but to lay low and play it smart.

Right then, her phone vibrated urgently with a text alert.

“Big payout if you’re interested in a special task.” Nicole swiftly responded, “How much are we talking?”

“One billion.”

Excitement surged through Nicole’s veins. “Okay. What’s the target?”

The reply came fast and clear. “Find out the truth behind why Nicole Wilson from the Wilson family ended up in a mental facility five years ago. Also, get every piece of information you can on her sister, Marissa Wilson.”

Her eyes shot toward the bathroom, brows drawing tight.

“Is this Aidan’s doing, or that friend he mentioned from out of town? Offering a billion isn’t child’s play. They’re serious about uncovering my past, which gives me leverage—I can spin this situation however I like. Easy money, whoever they are,” Nicole thought.

With a confident smirk, she responded, “Agreed. He’ll have all the information by tomorrow.”

“Alright then.”

After wiping the chat, Nicole locked her phone and exhaled. It was time to sleep.

The following morning.

Once she'd freshened up, Nicole headed toward the dining room, where her eyes quickly landed on Analia mid-lecture, throwing pointed words at Aidan. "For someone who acts like a gentleman, you sure forget how to treat your wife properly. Just because you're a virgin doesn't mean you have to be that wild!"

Aidan didn't bother offering a word. He just let her vent.

Nicole felt her cheeks go warm. There was no mystery behind Analia's complaints—last night's not-so-quiet episode had clearly been heard. The moment Analia noticed Nicole, her face lit up. "Come over here, sweetheart. Sit with us."

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Chapter 39:

“Good morning, Analia,” said Nicole, approaching with an easy smile.

Across the table, Aidan seemed miles away. His mind wasn’t in the room until a message pulled his attention back. He glanced at it, then stood up abruptly. “I’ll be in the study.”

“Aidan, wait—”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m starving. What’s for breakfast?” Nicole cut in, her voice a little too cheerful.

With that, Analia pulled her down to a seat and began showing off each dish like she was hosting a banquet.

Meanwhile, upstairs in the study.

Leonel slid a thick folder across the desk. “Every scrap we could find on your wife and her sister. It’s all in here.”

The report revealed Nicole had been sent to the countryside as a child and hadn't returned until she was eighteen. She'd excelled at Ariosa's best school, was known as a top student, and had fallen in love with a guy named Squall Bates. But five years ago, something snapped. Nicole had attacked a lady named Lily Tanner—one of Squall's admirers—and left her severely injured. Afterward, Nicole was institutionalized. Now, she was Aidan's wife.

Marissa, on the other hand, had been the family's star. Doted on, pampered. She and Nicole had never shared anything close to a bond. What no one knew was that Marissa had been the one who pushed Lily to provoke Nicole, resulting in Lily's disfigurement. The tragedy? All part of her plan.

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Something shifted in Aidan's face as he placed the documents on the desk. His eyes narrowed, and his voice came out low and thick. "Squall Bates."

Leonel gave a short nod.

"That guy K we hired, he's the real deal. Worked alongside Interpol. He even unearthed details about the Lily incident. If anyone could untangle what happened back then, it's him. But the problem is, we've reached out before. I offered him two billion. Still said no. We'd need a personal connection to even have a shot."

Just then, the study door eased open.

Nicole stepped inside with a gentle smile, a glass of milk in hand. “Am I stepping into something important?”

Aidan methodically gathered the documents and placed them in the drawer, his movements deliberate. As his gaze shifted to Nicole, he noted the perfect calmness of her exterior, a picture of sweetness and poise.

Yet beneath her serene facade, her eyes gleamed with a cold, calculating intensity. It reminded him of the time she had faced down Fang—her fierce determination unmistakable. She wasn’t just bold; she was utterly fearless, unflinching even in the face of danger.

If Nicole had the courage to go after someone with a knife, confronting a wolf was hardly a challenge for her.

Nicole hadn’t overheard their earlier conversation. She entered the study with quiet confidence, placing a glass of milk on his desk as she smiled warmly. “Analia mentioned you left without eating. Here, drink some milk.”

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Chapter 40:

Her casual gesture was a ruse—an innocent offering designed to mask her true intention. Nicole wasn't here to offer hospitality; she was fishing for answers. She needed to know if Aidan had been the one who hired her for that high-stakes investigation job the previous night. It wouldn't take much—just a few simple words—and she would have the confirmation she was looking for.

Aidan raised an eyebrow, noticing that Nicole hadn't yet moved to leave. His voice was smooth, laced with curiosity. "Is there something else you want to say?"

Nicole met his gaze, her tone casual but deliberate. "Just thought I'd mention that I'm heading over to campus later."

Aidan's expression sharpened, his eyes narrowing as his voice dropped to a low, almost cold tone. "That's odd. If I remember correctly, you dropped out of college five years ago. Which campus are you referring to?"

Nicole allowed a small, purposeful smile to play at the corner of her lips. "Yes, I dropped out, but the school still exists. I made a promise to someone a long time ago that once I was out of the asylum, I'd come and see him."

She said it with purpose, knowing the implications it would carry. A man's pride was paramount, and if Aidan was the one investigating her, the first thought that would cross his mind would be that she was meeting Squall. If that were the case, it meant Aidan wasn't as...

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Innocent as he appeared, Aidan and his friend could both be wrapped up in what had happened five years ago.

But Aidan remained as composed as ever. His features stayed calm, unreadable, as he reached for another file from the shelf and spoke with cool detachment. "Should I have Duran arrange a car for you?"

"Okay," Nicole replied, her voice steady. Without another word, she turned to leave.

Aidan didn't even look up, his indifference wrapping around him like a shield. The cool, effortless dismissal made Nicole wonder if he truly wasn't the one behind the investigation. Perhaps she had been wrong all along.

As the door clicked shut behind her, Leonel, his unease palpable, cleared his throat and spoke softly, his voice tinged with apprehension. "You don't think she's really going to meet Squall Bates, do you? From everything we've uncovered, it looks like she went through hell for him."

Aidan placed his file down, his gaze suddenly lifting to meet Leonel's. His eyes were sharp, piercing. "What does that have to do with you?" he asked, his voice cutting through the air with a chilling edge.

Leonel, caught off guard by the sharpness of Aidan's tone, rubbed the back of his neck, feeling beads of sweat form. His throat went dry, and he hesitated, unwilling to speak further.

Aidan, unmoved, continued without a pause, his tone hardening further. "The crew at Lakeshore Heights is buried in that tile work. They're swamped. Go help them out."

Leonel's heart skipped a beat. Lakeshore Heights was one of Moore Group's high-end luxury developments—a project on a massive scale. The work there wasn't just demanding; it was relentless, exhausting labor. He forced a strained laugh, trying to mask his dread. "Boss, please..."

Aidan's interruption was swift, cutting through the air like a blade. "You can also clean the bathrooms at Riverside Haven."

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