

Chapter 129 Competing Interests

"Okay," Kimberly replied, nodding as she took out her phone to scan the QR code. Suddenly, a hand shot out from the side, pressing her phone down.

She blinked in surprise, turning to the man beside her. Chris wore a frosty expression, his gaze locked onto Levi with an intensity that made the air feel charged. "Send me your bank account number. I'll take care of the billion for her."

Levi's face darkened at this, his eyes turning steely.

He understood Chris's intention to cut off their connection.

With determination, Levi stepped forward, meeting Chris's cool demeanor with a mocking smile.

"You'll pay for her? What right do you have? What's your relationship with Ms. Holden?"

A thick tension enveloped the two men, hanging in the air like an electric charge, waiting to spark.

Feeling overwhelmed, Kimberly rushed to intervene. "Um, Mr. Hoffman, please don't be upset! Mr. Howard is just joking with you. I haven't even added you to my contacts yet..."

With that, she lifted her phone again, as she glanced at Levi, clearly impatient to add him as a friend.

She was hoping to shift the focus away from the brewing conflict.

Amused, Levi nodded and took out his phone to accept her request.

"I'm not joking," Chris interjected, his frown deepening as he shot a disapproving look at Levi. "The Howard Group and the Holden Group are



partners. I'm an investor in Holden Group. What's wrong with me paying a billion for her?"

His implication was unmistakable: as an investor, this expenditure was merely a part of the business arrangement. In the grand scheme, debt was just a number.

Kimberly silently accepted Levi's friend request, hesitant to speak up.

Chris had a point, but she still felt a strong desire to handle her own affairs.

He had already done so much for her; taking on more felt like an unpayable debt looming over her.

Favors were the hardest debts to repay!

Levi's frown deepened as he looked down at Kimberly. "Is what he said true?"

Kimberly tucked her phone away, feigning calmness as she nodded. "It's true. Our families have partnered, but I believe business and personal matters shouldn't intertwine."

"We don't need to draw such sharp lines, especially since—"

Chris was about to assure her she didn't owe him anything, but Levi cut him off, his gaze locking onto Kimberly with intensity. "How much did he invest in the Holden Group?"

Although Kimberly was slightly bewildered, she answered honestly, trusting Levi's good intentions and feeling no need to conceal the truth.

"Ten billion."

Levi's expression darkened, the weight of her words sinking in.

Levi had initially planned to offer double whatever Chris had invested, hoping to provoke a breach of contract between the Holden Group and the Howard Group.

However, hearing that staggering figure left him momentarily speechless.

Ten billion was far beyond his authority, and the Hoffman Group didn't

have that kind of cash readily available.

For the first time, the usually arrogant Levi found himself feeling powerless in a financial situation.

Frustration simmered within him as he shot an irritated glance at the calm and collected Chris. "No wonder you're the heir of the Howard family. Ten billion just like that—are you really that wealthy?"

In the world of business, cash was often tied up in various projects. The ability to produce ten billion in cash on demand highlighted the Howard family's impressive financial resources.

Yet, compared to Chris's financial prowess, Levi felt overshadowed.

Chris lifted an eyebrow, maintaining his indifferent demeanor. "It's fine. Just remember to send me your bank account number later."

With that, Chris grabbed Kimberly's wrist, pulling her away before she could voice any objections. He disliked the thought of her being too close to Levi; it made him uncomfortable.

"Hey..."

Once outside the banquet hall, Chris finally released her wrist. Noticing her hesitant expression, he asked, "What do you want to say?"

After a moment of contemplation, Kimberly resolved to speak her mind. "Mr. Howard, I'll repay Levi the one billion. This is my personal matter, and I don't want to owe you."

"You don't want to owe me?"

Chris narrowed his eyes dangerously, stepping closer and cornering her against the wall. He lifted her chin, forcing her to meet his intense gaze. "But you're willing to owe Levi? One billion—how do you plan to repay that?"

Kimberly's breath hitched as she turned her head, avoiding his penetrating stare.

"My grandfather left me two companies, along with my savings and the monthly dividends from the Holden Group... I can repay it all within three months!"

She mentioned the three-month deadline because Declan's IOU specified that timeframe. Gathering one billion in such a short period seemed impossible unless she resumed making perfumes.

Seeing her determination to repay Levi without asking for his help, Chris felt a wave of frustration wash over him.

To him, it seemed like Kimberly was deliberately trying to create distance.

"Think it over. I won't demand repayment for what you owe me," Chris said, his gaze heavy with implication. "But as for what you owe others, that's not something I can control."

His meaning was unmistakable—he wouldn't allow Kimberly to repay this debt.

Surprised, Kimberly looked up at Chris, her expression resolute. She felt more certain than ever that her decision was correct.

"There's no need to discuss this further, Mr. Howard. I've made up my mind."

Chris's expression darkened at her words. "As long as you're sure."

With that, he turned and walked toward the elevator, tension radiating from him.

He had intended to leave, but the memory of that dream lingered in his mind, prompting him to stay.

He couldn't stand the thought of leaving Kimberly to face Declan alone, especially with Levi around.

Still, his anger simmered beneath the surface, leading him to ignore Kimberly as he sought a place to cool off.

Confused by Chris's sudden shift in mood, Kimberly watched him enter the elevator and disappear from view. Just as she was about to turn away, Levi's voice called out to her.

"Ms. Holden?"

Startled, Kimberly paused and turned to see Levi approaching from the



banquet hall. She raised an eyebrow at him. "Mr. Hoffman."

Feeling a little down just moments before, Levi's spirits lifted at the sight of Kimberly alone in the hotel lobby, free from Chris's presence. A smile spread across his face as he hurried over.

He said, "Weren't we supposed to have dinner on the rooftop? Where are you headed?"

"I... I think I'll pass." Kimberly offered a polite smile, gently declining the invitation. Chris had headed upstairs, likely to the rooftop, and she wanted to avoid any awkwardness by following him there.