

Mistaking the CEO for a Gigolo

Chapter 726

“Mommy!”

Hearing their persistent cries, Nicole sighed. The word “Mommy” was particularly irritating today, as if reminding her that she was just a substitute.

They’re thinking of me as a substitute—Evan too!

But as she thought it over, she decided that was unfair. The children just wanted a mother’s love. There was nothing wrong with that.

Perhaps it was fate that she and the kids met each other.

I’m going to be leaving in a few days anyway. I might as well act as their mother’s replacement for now.

With this thought in mind, she curled her lips up in a happy smile and got out of bed.

Opening the door, she was greeted by four excited faces staring up at her.

“Mommy, hurry! We have to eat breakfast! We’re going to Rose Garden today.”

“I got it.”

Breakfast was all of Nicole’s favorite foods. Evan had left specific instructions for the maids about what the old Nicole used to love to eat. Since everything was suited to her tastes, she did not hesitate in eating more.

Maya stared at her mother with a pout on her lips. “Mommy, you passed on your shameless genes to Nina and gave me your gluttonous genes!”

Nicole blinked, staring at the small mountain of shrimp shells and empty plates in front of her. She stopped eating and shot the girl a sheepish smile. “The food here is just too good.”

“Then you should stay here forever! That way you’ll be able to eat all this delicious food every day!”

Nicole was rendered speechless.

This chubby little girl has the most interesting ideas! Does she seriously think I’ll be won over by some tasty food—that I’ll be willing to be their substitute mother just like that? No way! I still plan on having a few adorable babies of my own!

“So will you?”

Seeing that Nicole was lost in her thoughts, Maya reached out to tug on her mother’s sleeve. A pair of earnest and bright eyes gazed up at her.

Pulling her lips up into a smile, Nicole’s eyes glinted as she replied, “We’ll see. I’ll think about it.”

Maya pouted and declared, “I’ll go wherever you go!”

Nicole sighed. She’s really become dependent on me as her mother!

“Daddy’s here!”

The words had barely left Juan’s mouth when Evan strode over.

Upon noticing the empty plates before Nicole, a small, amused smile curved his lips.

Nicole ducked her head in embarrassment. He doesn’t think I’m as gluttonous as Maya, does he?

He did not bring the topic up. Instead, he said, “If you’re done, go get ready. We’re going to Rose Garden.”

She stood up and rushed to her room.

Evan watched her retreating back, adoration shining in his eyes.

Turning his head to look at the maid who came to clear away the table, he ordered, "Take note of what she likes to eat. Prepare the same for her tonight."

"Yes, Mr. Seet!"

The maid glanced at the table, mentally taking note of the empty plates. After that, she continued cleaning up the table.

Nicole changed into some casual clothing before exiting her room. The four kids instantly surrounded her, complimenting her attire and saying how pretty she looked.

Delighted, she smiled down at them. Sensing a gaze on her, she lifted her head to lock eyes with Evan. His eyes were filled with affection.

Her heart skipped a beat. He's thinking of me as her replacement again, isn't he? Jerk! I'm no substitute!

She mentally rolled her eyes at him. Taking the two little girls' hands, she led them toward the living room and out the house.

Evan held the boys hands and followed them.

The Maybach exited Imperial Garden and headed in the direction of Rose Garden.

The entire way there, the four children chattered happily and the atmosphere in the car was cheerful.

At Hillside Villa.

Susan's frail form stood in the yard, staring at the vegetation glumly.

The first thing Evan did after waking up today was to hurry over to meet with Nicole and the children. He had not even eaten breakfast before he left!

It's obvious they all hold important places in his heart!

“Ms. Susan, breakfast is ready. You should come in and eat while the food’s hot.”

Susan smiled and answered, “Have the butler prepare some children’s toys. I’ll be visiting the children later.”

“Understood. You’re really nice to them, Ms. Susan.”

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“It’s nothing. I should be doing this anyway.”

Susan’s lips twitched upward slightly.

At Rose Garden.

A myriad of colorful roses bloomed across the entire place. The scene was absolutely stunning.

Pointing at the rose trellises, the kids asked, “Mommy, do you remember this?”

“Mommy, we used to live here.”

“We stayed at the rear house while Daddy stayed in the main house!”

Nicole took in the beautifully designed courtyard. However, she did not feel a single speck of recognition. No memories came rushing at her.

As they continued to pester her, she smiled and shook her head wordlessly.

They sighed miserably at her response.

Evan had been following them at a distance. His emotions churned inside him chaotically. At that moment, he thought that Nicole not remembering anything might be for the best.

He hoped that she would be able to live out the rest of her life happily and without worry—free from her past.

That way, she would not need to remember him nor deal with his current marriage to Susan.

Maya twisted her head around to look back at Evan. “Daddy, could you make a flower wreath for me?”

Evan stared at his daughter’s chubby face and innocent eyes. Grinning slightly, he nodded.

Since her sister was getting a flower wreath, Nina piped up saying she wanted one too. Evan readily agreed to weave two—one for each of them.

Something occurred to Nina and she said, “Daddy, how could you be so petty? Why don’t you make another one for Mommy?”

Evan turned to look at Nicole, the adoration and affection practically overflowing from his gaze. She stiffened uncomfortably.

That jerk has that look in his eyes again! He’s thinking of me as his ex-girlfriend again, isn’t he? The flower wreath he’ll make is probably for her and not truly for me! If that’s the case...

She stared him straight in the eyes as she refused sharply, “I don’t want one!”

The disdain was clear in those words.

Evan’s heart clenched in his chest. If this had been the old Nicole, she would have pestered him relentlessly until he made one for her.

The Nicole before him now was not the same Nicole he knew. She did not care for him and did not want nor like anything from him.

This is all normal. I shouldn't treat her the same as the old Nicole. She has her own path to walk now. A path that will never cross with mine again...

At this thought, desolation and grief swelled in him.

Bowing his head, he focused his attention on making flower wreaths for his daughter.

A short while later, he abruptly questioned, "Ms. Lane, are you married?"

There was a slight tremble in his deep voice.

He wanted to know the answer, but at the same time, he was afraid.

Nicole's chest felt tight at the question as she suddenly remembered that Levant was waiting for her back at K Nation.

Her heart stuttered while her emotions were all over the place.

Deep down inside, she was well aware that her rejection to Levant's proposal had something to do with Evan.

However, she could not bring herself to face the reason why. She was in denial herself.

She would always fantasize about Evan returning to the estate someday. He would become her bodyguard again and accompany her on strolls through the garden. He would help her do so many things...

Even though she knew he was already married, and that she had witnessed it herself, she still...

She did not know why she still hoped that he would suddenly appear by her side one day—that he would stay with her.

I really must be crazy!

She pushed such dangerous notions aside, burying them deep within her subconscious. She did not dare tell anyone of these thoughts. How could she? Every time such thoughts haunted her in the middle of the night, even she could not help mocking herself.

Since Nicole was being quiet, Nina answered for her, “Daddy, Mommy hasn’t married yet. That Levant keeps bugging Mommy though! Mommy found him too annoying, which is why she’s trying to avoid him...”

“Nina!” Nicole cut the little girl off.

Anxiety had her heart beating a little faster. She was worried Evan would be able to tell her reluctance in marrying Levant was because of him—that she was having impure thoughts and feelings for him.

With his head still lowered, Evan allowed his delight to flash through his eyes.

The news that Nicole had not yet married Levant made him immensely happy.

But in the next second, he began to feel conflicted. She was still so young! She should not be alone all the time.

He did not want her to marry Levant, but he did not want to see her alone either.

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Star-crossed lovers really have it the worst! All these outside forces are forcing us apart but yet I can’t bear to let her go!

Pushing aside his heartbreak, Evan squeezed out through gritted teeth, “Levant seems to love you very much. You should consider accepting him.”

Nicole was incredibly uncomfortable hearing those words coming from his mouth.

She snapped, "Whether I marry him or not is my business! What does that have to do with you?"

With that, she shot him one last glare before stalking toward the rear house.

Evan watched her storm off, his eyes reddening.

She said it was none of his business, yet her happiness was the most important thing to him right then. For the rest of his life, he would worry about whether she was happy or not.

How did we become like this? How...

"Daddy, have you finished the flower wreaths?"

Evan nodded and handed them to his daughters. They eagerly placed the wreaths on their heads, making them look like fairy princesses.

"Let's show Mommy!"

"Yeah! We have to show her how pretty we are!"

The two girls skipped to the rear house to look for Nicole.

"Mommy, look! Aren't our wreaths pretty?"

"Mommy, how do we look?"

As Nicole spotted the flower wreaths on their heads, several images flashed through her mind.

A young girl who was a little older than Nina and Maya was skipping along happily. On her head was a flower wreath similar to the one the girls were wearing now. The flower wreath had been given to her by a boy.

The images refused to leave her mind, making her believe it was real.

She suspected the little girl was her, but who was that boy?

Whoever it was, she was certain it was not Evan!

Perhaps it's one of my relatives' kids at the estate!

"Yes, they're really beautiful."

"Mommy, why won't you let Daddy make you one?"

Nicole sighed and replied, "It's not like he truly wants to make it for me!" I couldn't care less about it anyway!

Evan, who had been standing nearby, heard her words and frowned.

What does she mean? If I'm not truly making it for her then who does she think I am making it for?

Feeling envious, Nicole plucked Nina's wreath and placed it on her own head. However, it was too small so she returned it to the young girl.

Noting the crestfallen look on her face, Evan turned and headed for the front again.

It did not take him much effort to weave another flower wreath. He handed it to Nicole.

Nicole was stunned at the wreath being offered to her. It was obvious a lot more care had been put into making it compared to the ones Nina and Maya had.

"For you!"

She shot him a suspicious look. "You're really giving this to me?"

"Of course!"

She stared at the beautiful flower wreath. Although she suspected he was still treating her as his ex-girlfriend's replacement, her hand reached out to take it like she had been possessed.

Watching the delight that crossed her features, Evan smiled too.

Susan arrived just in time to see this touching scene. At first, she was surprised. When she realized what she was seeing, her fingers tightened into fists. She called out in an infinitely sweet voice, "Evan!"

Her shout effectively broke the intimate moment.

Nicole's heart thumped harder as she wondered what she was doing.

Evan's smile seemed to have some sort of a devilish power, drawing her in. She also found it incredibly familiar, like she had seen it a long time ago.

Ugh, what happened to keeping your distance from him!

Susan made her way over to them, her curvaceous hips swaying alluringly as she walked. There was a warm smile on her face when she spoke, "I came to see the kids. I went to Imperial Garden but nobody was there. The maids told me you guys came here, so here I am! I even prepared some gifts for them. I wonder if they'll like them?"

"That's very thoughtful of you, Susan."

"Evan, we're husband and wife. There's no need to be so courteous with me."

The mention of their marriage made Evan extremely uncomfortable.

Susan glanced over at Nicole before walking toward the rockery, a clear invitation for Nicole to follow her.

Susan's eyes glimmered with tears as she surveyed the garden. Sighing mournfully, she stated, "Evan's ex used to live here. He's probably back here to relive his memories."

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He's here to relive his memories? With his ex? I should've known...

Nicole's initial joyful expression slipped away, and it was replaced with a dull look as she stared down at the wreath in her hands.

Wiping the tears from the corner of her eyes, Susan suggested, "Ms. Lane, let's go see the children."

"Yeah." Nicole nodded and followed the other woman toward the rockery.

There was a pond beside the rockery. Susan watched the children playing gleefully with an intent expression on her face.

After a moment, Nina suddenly tripped on a pebble that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. She staggered a few steps before falling into the pond with a loud splash.

"Nina!" Susan screamed.

In the next instant, she leaped into the pond.

Evan came running over at the shout. When he saw the two struggling figures in the pond, he immediately jumped in to save them.

"Evan, save Nina first!"

The words had barely left Susan's lips when Evan scooped Nina into his arms. He quickly swam toward the shoreline and placed his daughter down.

By the time he turned back to rescue Susan, she had already fallen unconscious from ingesting too much water.

He swiftly put her on the ground and started to perform CPR on her. Nicole and the children watched on worriedly from the sidelines. After several tries, water dribbled from Susan's lips as she coughed violently.

Her eyelids fluttered open. The first thing out of her mouth was, "Evan, is Nina okay?" Her voice was very weak and her words were barely audible.

Evan's expression was serious while confusion swirled in his gaze.

"Nina's fine. Susan, why did you jump in when you don't know how to swim?"

A wan smile curved her lips. "I was so worried I didn't think about that. Nina is your child, which means she's mine as well. When I saw her in danger, the only thing I could think of was rescuing her immediately!"

"Susan..."

Evan took off his own jacket and draped it across her drenched form. Then, he made a call to have someone bring over some clothes.

Susan leaned against his chest, a blissful smile on her face.

Standing off to the side, a bitter feeling encompassed Nicole.

The children are so lucky to have a stepmother who loves them so much. Evan is fortunate to have such a loving wife as well. They're a true family in all the ways that matter; I'm just an outsider looking in. It's about time I go my own way. Evan belongs to Susan so I shouldn't be having such feelings for him... Nicole Lane, it's time for you to wake up and accept reality. Go back and get married to Levant. You have your own life to live now.

Tears pricked at her eyes and she quickly lowered her face to hide them.

From where she was lying on the ground in Evan's embrace, Susan saw all the emotions that flickered across Nicole's face. A victorious grin bloomed on her pale face.

...

When they returned to Imperial Garden, Nicole began to plan her departure.

The children seemed incredibly reliant and attached to her, so outright bidding them goodbye would not work. She would have to leave stealthily.

After some thought, she decided the best time would be in the middle of the night while they were in deep slumber.

By the time they woke up in the morning, she would have been back in K Nation already.

“Mommy, what are you thinking about?”

Nina’s childish voice dragged Nicole out of her somber thoughts. She shook her head at the girl in response.

“Nothing much. Nina, your miniature mannequins are very pretty. Can I have one?” She wanted to keep it as a souvenir.

Nina thought about it for a few seconds before saying, “Those are all old ones. I’ll make a new one for you!”

“Okay!”

Nicole watched as Nina focused her attention on putting makeup on a new mannequin. Her lips turned upward in a small smile.

What a talented child. I wonder if she inherited it from Evan or her poor departed Mommy.

Noting how Nicole was staring off into space, Maya made up her mind. She would bring out some of her secret stash of snacks and share them with her mother.

“Thank you, Maya, but it’s okay. You should leave them for yourself to enjoy.”

Maya giggled and opened up her coat, revealing a huge hidden pocket sewn inside.

“I have a lot more snacks in here! You should have some!”

Nicole stared at the hidden pocket, dumbfounded. “Maya, when did you sew this hidden pocket?”

“When I was about to turn six years old. You sew it for me, Mommy! Now I’m seven!”

As she spoke, Maya lifted six of her chubby fingers before adding one more to make it seven.

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Nicole was bewildered at Maya’s words.

Maya stayed with me for a year at the estate. Since she’s seven now, that means she was six when she was with me. She said their mother sewn it for her when she was about to turn six years old, which was about a year before she stayed with me. But didn’t Susan tell me their mother died several years ago in a car crash?

Mulling over that question, she concluded that someone must have deliberately told a white lie to Maya. They must have someone else sew it and tricked Maya into thinking her mother had done it.

Poor, poor child. It really must suck to lose their mother at such a young age. I’m sure Susan will treat them as her own.

Nicole pulled out a small packet of cheese from the hidden pocket. Tearing it open, she popped the snack into her mouth. Maya beamed at her brightly.

She reached out to pinch Maya's plump cheeks playfully, her heart clenching in her chest.

Will she be very sad when she discovers I've left without saying goodbye? Well, might as well rip off the Band-Aid now instead of dragging things out. I am bound to leave anyway.

From the room next door came the sounds of Juan and Kyle playing games together.

She entered their room curiously and Juan stuck his tongue out at her. "Mommy, I'll practice my Taekwondo after this round!"

Kyle smirked and added, "I'll try to improve on my hacking skills after this round!"

"Sure."

Once again, Nicole lamented the fact that their mother passed away so young. It was such a pity.

Evan had said that the woman in the photo was his only wife.

Maybe it's because of these outstanding children that he can't seem to forget about her. That woman must be absolutely irreplaceable in his heart.

"Mommy, could you bring us to the amusement park tomorrow? It's a Sunday tomorrow and we'll have to go back to class on Monday!"

"That's right, Mommy! You used to bring us to the amusement park all the time."

Nicole mulled over the idea for a moment, finally agreeing. She would just think of it as fulfilling one last wish for the children before she left.

"Alright."

“Should we ask Daddy to come with us?”

Honestly, she was getting tired of being treated as a substitute by Evan. Besides, he was a married man. She should be keeping her distance from him.

She shook her head, replying, “No need. I can take all of you myself. Actually, there are maids here, aren’t there? We can just bring one of them along with us.”

The kids glanced at each other, remembering all the times their mother used to bring them to the amusement park alone. Their father was probably too busy with work to come with them anyway.

The next day.

The children woke up very early due to their excitement. After breakfast, they changed into their favorite clothes and stood outside Nicole’s bedroom door, waiting.

Their father was displeased with how they shouted and banged on Nicole’s door to wake her up the day before. He told them that she was very tired and that they should let her rest. They were not allowed to make a commotion.

Heeding his instructions, they stood outside her door and waited in silence obediently.

By the time Nicole woke up, it was well into the day.

Checking the time, she bolted upright in bed. Were the children too tired from their outing yesterday? It was strange that they were not knocking her door down to wake her up.

She took her time changing into a clean set of clothing before she opened the door. To her surprise, the four kids were lined in a neat row in front of her door.

“Mommy!”

“Good morning, Mommy!”

“Mommy, time to eat breakfast!”

“Mommy, we’ve already eaten!”

She frowned when she took in how they were already dressed and ready to go.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?”

They looked at each other, grinning but not replying. At last, one of them spoke up, “Maya, you tell her!”

Maya was the most straightforward and honest of them all.

Giggling, Maya explained, “Daddy said he would give us a spanking if we woke you up by banging on your door!”

Evan threatened them? Is it because he wants to let me sleep in? That’s very thoughtful of him. Too bad he’s about to disappear from my life forever. We’re just not fated to be together.

At the thought, her heart trembled and ached terribly. Curling her fingers into fists, she mentally berated herself.

Nicole Lane! Such is your life! Accept it and move on. Stop thinking about him and focus on enjoying your last day with the kids!

“Mommy, is there something wrong?”