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Returning from the Dead: His Secret Lover

Chapter 411

"Ms. Wand?"

Sasha jerked out of her musings at the impatience in Karl's voice. "Huh?"

He tossed her a set of business attire and makeup. "Change into these and put on some makeup. Mr. Hayes is waiting for you in the next cabin. Make sure that you look professional," he instructed curtly and turned to leave without waiting for a reply.

What's his problem? Begrudgingly, Sasha went to change into the provided outfit and applied some makeup.

Ten minutes later, she walked into the cabin where Sebastian was waiting, looking perfectly like a white-collar executive.

She looks great in any outfit. The sight of her stole his breath away. With dainty makeup on, she appeared even prettier than before. The stylish blouse highlighted her petite and slender frame, while the pencil skirt hugged her sensual hips snugly, showing off a pair of fair and shapely legs.

Sasha's lips thinned the moment she saw Sebastian. "What's all this about?" She gestured at her outfit. "Why are you making me dress like this?"

The subject of her displeasure remained unfazed by her glower. "You said you wanted to help with the Wand family business. I'm taking you to a business summit today," he said matter-of-factly before leaving without waiting to see if she would follow.

Business summit? His reply took her by surprise. So he's not holding me captive. He brought me here to help me with my business?

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A smile bloomed on her face at the thought. She grabbed a nearby notebook and hastened to catch up with Sebastian. "Wait up!"

Karl shook his head inwardly as he followed them.

An hour later, Sasha found herself standing in the busiest part of the world's most bustling city. She stared, slack-jawed, at the majestic skyscraper that was the iconic landmark of the city. "Isn't this the Empire State Tower? This is the venue for the business summit?"

"It's the Global Commerce Summit," Karl said unfeelingly. "Ms. Wand, I must remind you to carry out your duties properly as a secretary later at the summit. You represent Hayes Corporation. Please watch your conduct."

Eyes wide, Sasha closed her jaw with an audible click. Whoa, a global summit? That's huge. She fidgeted with her clothes and hair, feeling her hands turn clammy. Why didn't Sebastian give me a heads up? I'm totally unprepared.

She followed the man inside. Once they went into the lobby, the huge LED screen lit up to showcase Sebastian's profile. A man with a staff pass around his neck came over to greet them.

"Welcome, Mr. Hayes." He extended a hand enthusiastically. "It's a pleasure to have you at our event again."

Sebastian shook his hand. "The pleasure's mine."

Too nervous to do or say anything, Sasha stayed silent, practically holding her breath all the way until she and Sebastian were in the elevator. With no others present, she finally allowed herself to breathe normally. "What do I need to do later?" she asked in an anxious tone.

"What do you mean?" The other tucked his hands into his pockets casually, appearing calm and collected as always.

Sasha gnashed her teeth in exasperation. She was about to speak up when the elevator doors pinged open. A man and woman stepped in.

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The former recognized Sebastian at once. "Hayes," he called, grinning widely. "Didn't expect to bump into you here."

"Long time no see. How have you been?"

Seeing that Sebastian was engaged in the conversation, Sasha reluctantly shuffled aside, casting a smile at the woman as she did so.

The lady returned the smile. "Hi there."

"Hey."

Taking it as an opening cue for small talk, the woman asked pleasantly, "Are you Mr. Hayes' secretary?"

"I am... What about you?"

"I'm a secretary myself. It's my first time here, actually," the woman whispered. "I'm pretty nervous."

Sasha perked up, happy to find a fellow newbie at the summit. When the elevator reached the designated floor, the four of them exited together, with Sebastian and the businessman still engrossed in discussion. The two secretaries followed behind, chatting amicably.

"Do you know what we have to do later?" Sasha took the opportunity to ask her companion. "It's my first time here, too. I'm quite lost, to be honest."

"Hey, no worries. When we enter the conference hall later, we just need to find our seats and get our bosses' laptops and documents ready. Have you gotten the info deck with the documents already?"

Sasha panicked inwardly at the mention of the previously unheard-of info deck. "No... Where can I get it?"

Her companion immediately offered to take her to the organizers to collect the info deck.

They were about to leave when Sebastian abruptly halted talking. He stopped in his tracks and turned around. "Sasha, where do you think you're going?"

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His ex-wife froze. "I'm going to get the... info deck?" She glanced at the other secretary. "She said she can take me."

"What do you need that for? Just come here and stay close," he said with unmasked impatience. The command for her to go over to him was clear in his eyes.

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Sasha did not have it in her to disobey. She muttered a quick apology to the other secretary and went to Sebastian's side.

The two of them parted ways with their acquaintances. "Why did you stop me? Don't you need some documents for the summit?" she asked uncomprehendingly.

Sebastian scoffed like she just asked something stupid but deigned to explain. "Use your brain for a second. If the documents are so important, the organizers would've emailed us in advance already." He spared a glance at the girl beside him. "Which they have, by the way."

Oh. Sasha clamped her mouth shut and meekly followed him into the conference hall.

The grandeur of the hall and its setup immediately awed her. Despite having a background in finance and experiencing her fair share of formal business events, the summit was certainly something else.

"Are you sure this is a summit for business leaders?" she muttered incredulously.

"What else would it be?"

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She shrugged and found her seat behind Sebastian. “The way it’s arranged... It’s like a summit for the heads of governments.”

The latter’s eye twitched, but he said nothing.

Soon after they took their seats, other business leaders started filing in. As Sasha took out her notebook, the man in front passed her the program booklet.

“You just need to focus on what these few people are saying later on,” Sebastian told her, pointing at several profiles who were due to give talks during the summit.

“Why them?”

“They are in manufacturing,” he said by way of explanation. “If you want to get into the business of plastics, you should know that the market has already reached saturation. The only way to stand out from the competition is to innovate and absorb new knowledge. Otherwise, you’ll get flushed out even if you revamp the business.”

Sasha stared at him, moved to the point of speechlessness. Internally, she was awash in a turmoil of emotions.

She might be gifted in financial acumen, but she lacked the hands-on experience and understanding of conducting an actual business. Though she wanted to rebuild the Wand family business, she had been undecided about the best approach to take beyond following in her father’s footsteps.

I didn’t tell anyone about my dilemma, and yet, he knows somehow. That’s why he brought me here to this top-level summit to learn the strategic vision and business wisdom from those who are at the top in their fields... Sasha could feel her throat tighten. Tears were forming, but she struggled not to let them fall.

Dipping her head to avoid being seen by Sebastian, she pretended to scrutinize the programme booklet and busied herself with getting the notebook ready.

The last to arrive at the conference hall, just a few minutes before the start of the conference, was a business representative from Terrandya.

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Sasha let out an involuntary gasp the moment she saw who it was. "Solomon! What's he doing here?"

As if hearing her gasp of surprise, Solomon cast a glance in her direction. Their eyes met. There was a warm smile lurking in the depths of the man's hazel orbs.

Sasha, on the other hand, was dumbfounded. It was not until she felt the chilly aura emanating from the person in front of her that she jolted out of her stupor. In the next instant, her vision was obstructed by Sebastian, who had deliberately shifted so that his back occupied her entire line of sight.

"Hey..." Sasha hastily tried to appease the man. "Don't be mad. I was just surprised to see him."

She knew he must be angry, judging by the cold shoulder he was giving her.

Sebastian did not turn around, nor did he say a word.

Sasha had no choice but to put her thoughts aside as the summit began. Over the next few hours, she listened attentively to the talks, especially those by the manufacturing tycoons as highlighted by Sebastian, and took down notes in the process.

When the summit ended, Sebastian stood up at once. His mood had been soured ever since Solomon made an unexpected appearance, and he was eager to drag Sasha away from the conference hall as soon as possible.

"Give me a while more, please," she said without looking up, never pausing for a second in her furious scribbling. "I just need to finish my train of thought."

It was then that Sebastian saw the pages of her notebook filled with notes. The sight assured him that her attention had been solely on the summit, rather than Solomon.

Relaxing slightly, he sat back down and grabbed a trade publication to pass the time as he waited for her.

Sasha continued to jot down her thoughts in the notebook.

However, such a rare moment of peace between the two was soon disrupted by an intruder.

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“Nancy. It’s really you. Fancy meeting you here,” Solomon called as he approached the pair. The affection in his voice was as blatant as the tenderness in his eyes.

Sasha sighed inwardly in resignation. Here he comes.

Putting down the pen, she peered at Sebastian. As expected, the man’s expression had darkened significantly, which curdled her mood as well.

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Her brows furrowed. “I can say the same to you, Solomon. What are you doing here?”

The other smiled placatingly. “Sinch Enterprise recently hired me and they sent me here as a representative.”

Sasha eyed him dubiously. Ever since she came to realize that he had lied to her time and again, she took his words with a grain of salt. Knowing that he took down Prime Cloud Corporation just so he could get close to her, she felt she could no longer trust him as before.

“I see. Well, we’re leaving now. Have a good day,” she said simply and turned to her companion with a beseeching expression. “Shall we go, Sebastian?” If we don’t, I’m afraid you’ll explode.

The business tycoon remained seated in the chair as if Sasha had not spoken. He thumbed the pages of the publication leisurely, but the air around him was frosty enough to make alarms ring in her mind.

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“As far as I know, Sinch Enterprise in Jetrouina is a family business leaning quite heavily toward nepotism. The senior management, including their legal team, is run by an oligarchy.” He drilled Solomon with a penetrating gaze. “So pray tell, Mr. George, how did you manage this impressive feat of getting into the company?”

Solomon’s expression chilled considerably as he levelled the other man with a meaningful look. “You think too highly of me, Mr. Hayes. I’m only an ordinary employee in the company.”

“Oh, yeah?” Sebastian returned smoothly, a seemingly genuine smile of civility curling his lips. “For someone who was, and I quote, recently hired by Sinch Enterprise, you must be quite competent for them to send an ordinary employee to this summit.”

His remarks were loaded with insinuation. The air between the two men tensed while Sasha gulped imperceptibly.

Solomon scowled, his pleasant countenance long gone. There was a moment when he appeared ready to toss out a retort. In the end, however, he merely glowered at Sebastian and turned to leave after giving Sasha a parting nod.

“What did you mean by that?” she asked. “Is Solomon somehow related to Sinch Enterprise?”

The cordial smile dropped off his face like it had never been there. “Who knows? Maybe he owns the company.”

He narrowed his eyes at her darkly. “Why? Did that strike your fancy?” The tone of his voice was almost petulant, like a temperamental child who refused to be reasoned with.

“No way,” Sasha was quick to deny. “Your Hayes Corporation didn’t even strike my fancy back then. Why would Sinch Enterprise be any different?”

Oddly, that somehow seemed to have appeased him.

The two of them made their way out of the conference hall. It was not long before Sebastian probed again. “So you didn’t fancy me back then?”

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"I didn't!"

"Why did you marry me if that was the case?"

Sasha searched her brain for an answer but could only supply with, "I wonder that myself, sometimes."

As soon as those words left her lips, she found herself pressed against the wall of the elevator as Sebastian towered over her. "Say that again?"

The man's large hand gripped her shoulder as he leaned in close. His breath was so hot it was almost scorching.

What's he doing? Sasha blushed crimson, pulse pounding in her ears. "W-What are you doing? Let go. We're in public," she hissed and tried to push him away. It was like trying to push a brick wall.

"No. Tell me what made you marry me first," Sebastian demanded stubbornly.

His childishness was driving her crazy. She glanced at the display panel and was dismayed to see that they were almost at the lobby. "Okay! All right. It's because I love you, happy?" she said, closing her eyes in surrender.

Satisfied with the answer, Sebastian pushed away from the wall but did not release his grip on Sasha. Taking in the sight of her adorably pouty expression, he bent down instead and placed a quick peck on her lips.

Her eyes snapped open at the same time the elevator doors reached the ground floor.

The doors opened and a straight-faced Sebastian sauntered out like nothing had happened, leaving her behind to stare at his retreating figure disbelievingly. Ugh, that jerk!

As the summit would be held over three days, Sebastian made arrangements for them to stay in a hotel.

"Erm... Should I book a room for myself?" Sasha asked carefully when she followed him to the hotel and realized that he had booked the presidential suite.

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The latter did not even dignify that with a response and headed straight inside.

He removed his tie, grabbed a bathrobe, and disappeared into the shower.

Not knowing what else to do, Sasha stepped in reluctantly.

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Once inside, she could tell why Sebastian had not replied to her. The presidential suite had multiple rooms, including several bedrooms, living room, study, mini indoor gym, and even direct access to the rooftop pool. Hence, it would be redundant for her to book another room.

Sasha claimed one bedroom as her own and changed into a set of comfy lounge wear. Phew, finally able to relax a little.

Meanwhile, Karl arrived at the suite to fetch his boss. "Mr. Hayes, the organizers called. Tonight's ball is starting at seven. Would you like to leave now?"

"What time is it?"

"It's six-thirty now, sir."

The ball was an age-old tradition of the summit, to welcome the business elites and to act as a platform for networking.

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Sebastian nodded and headed to his room to change, emerging shortly after in a different business suit. Clasp the watch on his wrist, he glanced sideways at the door to Sasha's room. "Go get her too," he told Karl.

The latter tried to hide his surprise. Does that woman have to go too? She's so green and inexperienced... What if she makes a fool of herself at the ball and ruins Hayes Corporation's reputation?

Since his boss had given him the order, however, Karl had to set his qualms aside. He went to knock on Sasha's door.

A muffled voice came from within. "Who is it?"

"Ms. Wand, Mr. Hayes sent me to ask if you would like to attend the ball tonight."

The door clicked open, revealing Sasha sprouting a messy hair bun and wearing a pair of nerdy, black-rimmed glasses that appeared to be too big for her face.

"Do I have to go?" She waved the notebook in her hand. "I want to go over the notes I've taken earlier today."

Karl cocked a brow in condescension. She wants to give the ball a miss? This woman really can't tell chalk from cheese, can she?

"Forget it, then," Sebastian said coolly. "Karl, we're leaving." He pocketed his phone and made for the door with his bodyguard in tow.

Happy to have some peace to herself, Sasha retreated to her room where she continued to pour over the notebook. The knowledge contained within was more important to her than anything else, much less the ball.

However, her train of thought was once again interrupted when the phone rang.

"Hello. Who's this?"

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"Nancy, will you come down to the hotel lobby? I'd like to talk to you," Solomon said on the other end.

A frown marred her pretty features at the sound of his voice. "No, sorry, I'm busy."

Despite her outright rejection, Solomon was persistent. "I'll wait for you. You can take as long as you like."

Why can't he take no for an answer? Annoyed, she put aside the notebook. "Solomon George, what is it that you want? I've already told you we shouldn't meet again."

"But why? I don't understand. It isn't fair to me if you're breaking off relations with me just because I've lied to you."

"How is this not fair to you?" Sasha raised her voice incredulously.

"Sure, I did lie to you, but everything I've done is for your good. I helped and took care of you. What has Sebastian done? He treated you like trash and trampled all over your heart, yet you've forgiven him over and over again. This isn't fair!"

Self-absorbed, much? A frosty anger settled over her face. If there was one thing she hated, it was to have others butting their noses into her personal affairs. Whatever transpired between her and Sebastian, it was their problem and no one else's. Solomon had clearly crossed a line when he compared himself with Sebastian.

"You're wrong, Solomon," she replied bluntly, no longer caring if it would hurt his feelings. "Sebastian is my children's father. He's family. You, on the other hand, are nothing to me. Can you see the difference now?"

There was nothing except deathly silence from the phone after she finished speaking.

She was about to hang up when Solomon spoke up again. "Okay, so that's how it is. I'll get out of your hair for good once I return you your mom's stuff."

His words caused her heart to skip a beat. Sasha tightened her grip on the phone. "What do you mean? Why are you bringing up my mom all of a sudden? What does she have to do with anything!"

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Solomon laughed coldly. "Because Yancy Young is my mother. I'm the orphan your mom sponsored for a decade!"

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The phone disconnected after his proclamation.

Sasha was in a state of shock. Yancy's son? Solomon is Yancy's son? Impossible!

Meanwhile, the ball was in full swing at the Empire State Tower. To accentuate the summit, the organizers had spared no expense in making the ball into an extravagant affair, including inviting various prominent stars and socialites to attend as guests.

The sound of mingling murmurs and clinking of champagne flutes filled the ballroom. Inhibition lowered under the effect of alcohol as several of Sebastian's acquaintances were beginning to eye the socialites suggestively.

One of them nudged him. "Hayes, want to try your luck with any of the girls over there?"

The latter gave a perfunctory smile in response. "I'll pass," he said with an air of indifference.

Sensing his disinterest, the others left him alone and went to chat up the socialites.

There were two women in the ball who stood out among the rest. However, even the most brazen tycoons present were loath to hit on them.

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One of them was an award-winning actress, while the other was the heiress of the Benson family that was practically royalty.

Almost every one of the business magnates had set their sights on the two women, but none of them had the guts to approach them, fearing rejection.

The two ladies cruised their gaze upon the crowd before settling on the lone figure lounging on the ballroom couch.

The said individual was browsing lazily on his phone, mile-long legs crossing over each other indolently. He seemed molded from a different cast as he appeared completely detached from the ball. However, the bored look on his face did nothing to hide his gorgeous features. With dark eyes and angular cheekbones carving downward to a flinty jaw, he was easily the best-looking man in the whole room.

“Who is that?” the heiress asked, her gaze glued on the figure.

One of the organizers caught the question and stepped forth. “Ms. Benson, he’s Mr. Sebastian Hayes, one of the top business elites in Astoria.”

She hummed by way of acknowledgement. Without further ado, she headed straight to where Sebastian was sitting.

“Hi, I’m Millie Benson.” She smiled sweetly, extending a perfectly manicured hand at him. “May I invite you to a dance?”

The rest of the magnates were green with envy. They knew that having the Benson heiress’ affection could only mean good things for one’s business.

However, they were shocked to see that Sebastian continued looking at his phone as if she was invisible. It was a long moment later that he looked up, apparently finally realizing her presence. “You may not,” he said with a hint of annoyance. “Invite someone else, please.”

Millie’s face fell. “Excuse me?” Her voice was sharp with disbelief. “Don’t you know who I am?”

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"I don't care," he said tersely. His patience with this woman was quickly running thin.

The organizer from earlier hurried over and tried to salvage the situation. "Mr. Hayes, Millie is the heiress to the famous Benson family."

"And?"

"A-And... It's a good opportunity...?" The man was flabbergasted. Doesn't he realize it's a golden opportunity for him to get the backing of the Bensons and have his business expand internationally?

Sebastian appeared enlightened. He took a leisure sip of champagne from the glass. "I see. You can have the opportunity then."

The crowd was in an uproar. From the way they were looking at Sebastian, one would think he was crazy.

Enraged at being belittled, Millie was ready to teach the Astorian man a lesson.

Before she could do so, however, Karl walked up to Sebastian with a message. "Mr. Hayes, Ms. Wand left the hotel."

"Where's she going?"

"Unclear, but she got into Solomon's car."

The stem of the champagne flute in Sebastian's hand cracked cleanly into half, spilling the liquid all over the luxurious carpet.

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