Chapter 2019 She Ran Off

"What?" Everyone inside the house was stumped as they simply could not wrap their heads around the situation. Why is Ms. Felch suddenly making an announcement that they're breaking up? Weren't they getting along just fine earlier on?

Francesca ignored them and started to make her way out. Sloan hastened to intercept her. "Don't be so rash, Ms. Felch. Surely, things can be talked over amicably. Have we done something wrong? Kindly berate us if we did, but please do not get mad."

"This has nothing to do with you guys." Francesca's brow creased up. "It's that b*stard Danrique. He's been unfaithful to me, and that is why I'm done with him. Just tell him that I said that if he asks."

Considering her personality, she was not the type who would bother to explain too much. She, however, did not want to cause Sloan and Kerrie to get into trouble.

"There has to be some kind of misunderstanding here. Mr. Lindberg isn't that sort of man," Sloan protested. "Did you hear about that from some news report you have seen? You can't trust those as they are mostly sensationalistic..."

"I went to ask him directly because I did not trust the news, but there was a woman's voice coming from his end of the phone..." Francesca was positively livid. "Forget it. It's too embarrassing, so I don't want to talk about it anymore. Regardless, do not try to stop me, or else don't blame me for being uncivil."

"Ms. Felch..."

"Out of my way!" Francesca roared.

"You've yet to recover from your injuries, so it's dangerous for you to go out at this time... M-Ms. Felch..."

There was no chance that Sloan would be able to impede Francesca.

Kerrie got so worked up that she was stamping her feet. "What now? What should we do? Mr. Lindberg is going to be so upset with us if Ms. Felch were to leave!"

"Where's Gordon?" Sloan anxiously asked.

"He left a couple of minutes ago," a jittery Kerrie explained. "He seems to be quite busy. After Ms. Felch called him inside to ask some questions, he left in a hurry."

Bereft of options, Sloan could only call on Gordon. He was, however, unable to get through to the latter over the phone.

As an alternative, he called Sean instead but had no luck there either.

As such, Sloan had no choice but to go after Francesca himself first. By then, she had already reached the parking lot where two bodyguards were fervently trying to talk her around.

From a distance, Sloan came running. He thought that they would be able to stop her, but a sudden kick from Francesca sent one of the bodyguards flying.

With the other one in a state of shock and unable to react in time, Francesca hopped right into a red Lamborghini, started it up, and sped away.

"Close the gates!" Sloan yelled.

The bodyguards manning the iron gates immediately moved to shut it, but that was not going to deter Francesca.

Performing a drift, she directed her vehicle over to another car and drove right onto the roof. With the momentum created, she went soaring over the walls of the compound.

"Jesus Christ!"

Leading some men out in pursuit on wheels, a panicky Sloan found that both Francesca and her car had already vanished from sight by the time he got beyond the gates.

Without a clue as to where Francesca could have gone, he could only split the search party into two groups. One would head into the city, while he himself would lead another handful of people in the direction of the airport.

At the same time, he instructed Kerrie to continue to try to get in touch with Gordon or Sean.

Over at Summerbank, Danrique had just finished off the ambushing team of assassins and was about to guide Hazel and the others away from the banquet hall.

It was evening time in Summerbank, and the light of the crimson sun had illuminated the horizon in a gorgeous hue.

Recalling Danrique's dashing ways earlier when engaging his foes despite being outnumbered ten to one had Hazel's heart pounding wildly. Her big, doe eyes regarded Danrique with deep affection and were on the verge of tearing up.

"The market here hasn't stabilized yet, and I'm being besieged from all sides. Why would your father send you here for an inspection tour despite knowing how dangerous it is?"

Danrique had his hands on the steering wheel and his eyes focused to the fore. He did not even cast a glance in Hazel's way.

"Initially, Harrier was supposed to be here, but he got held back at the last minute. After conferring with each other, Father and Mr. Yarrow decided to allow me to come here instead."

Hazel's voice was filled with the same adoration as it always had, and her body language unreservedly revealed her admiration and reverence for Danrique.

"Your sense of timing is simply impeccable." Danrique shot her a look. "Fancy arriving and running into me at the airport at the exact same time the way you did."

Chapter 2020 A Scheme Within A Scheme

Hazel fell silent briefly before she replied softly. "Actually, it was my father who tracked down your whereabouts and purposefully scheduled my arrival to coincide with yours. His goal was to create an opportunity for me to spend more time with you. According to them, it'd be easier for two individuals to develop feelings for each other when alone with each other in a foreign setting."

Once she got those words off her chest, Hazel bit down on her lip, an expression of unease and nervousness on her face. "I've already forgone demanding accountability for the fabrication of those scandalous reports from before..."

Though Danrique only said it halfway, his message was already apparent.

"I know that this has all been extremely troubling for you, but I feel quite helpless too since this was what my father and Mr. Yarrow insisted. They are both quite stubborn and won't quit until they get what they want, so it's not really a bad thing that I'm playing along. This would make them give up sooner, no?"

Hazel's tone reflected her own feelings about the lack of control over her circumstances. She paused and added, "Having grown up alongside you, I know what you're like. Once you've decided on something, nobody can ever hope to change your mind. That holds true both in your professional as well as your love life. That is why I've never believed that you may ever develop feelings for me. I just want to continue to quietly support you and always be there for you whenever you need me."

Her words were so touching and conveyed in such a heartfelt manner that Danrique was unable to bring himself to find fault with her.

Even though they ran into each other at the airport, they had both kept to their own schedules those past couple of days, and she had not gotten in his way at all.

Making that visit to Summerbank so high-profile was also a deliberate act on Danrique's part.

It was he who had instructed the three great families to fly a representative over for an inspection, and it was also he who wanted the media to be all over that representative. The purpose of that was to send a message to those who were backing Pastor that he, Danrique Lindberg, had his mind set on taking over that city.

What came unexpectedly to him was that, of all the people, the three great families had decided that they would nominate Hazel.

Considering that she was currently in the process of taking over Gerard's position, Hazel's presence was justifiable. However, it had also led to some scandals that profoundly angered Francesca.

The latter had behaved like a raging mastiff when they conversed over the phone. As the assassins were charging at him when he was about to explain himself, he had no choice but to hang up to deal with them first.

Alone after being separated from the group, unarmed, and confronted with an overwhelming number of hostiles during that time, he and Hazel sought refuge in the shadows. Francesca's incessant calls, however, kept giving his position away, time and again.

As he needed to be on standby for Sean's incoming call, he was unable to switch off his phone. Hence, he could only temporarily block her number.

I suppose that Francesca must be throwing a fit at home, but it can't be helped. I can only offer her a proper explanation after the situation at hand has been sorted out.

"It was fortunate that you were around tonight, or things might have gotten really ugly for me."

Hazel did her best to try to ease the mood.

At the banquet earlier that night, she had been harassed by several wealthy businessmen from M Nation. They even knocked a glass of champagne over onto her, drenching her gown and causing her to get cut by fragments of shattered glass.

Just as she was in a most wretched state and at a loss for what to do, Danrique showed up and took her to the lounge to get changed and have her wounds cleaned up.

His gentlemanly mannerisms and considerate care throughout had left her profoundly moved.

"It was nothing, so don't mention it," said Danrique nonchalantly. "I'll gladly help even if you're just an ordinary friend. Besides, you're here as a representative of Lindberg Corporation. If you don't look good, we don't look good."

The sense of distance those words projected left Hazel a little disconcerted, but not daring to voice that out, she could only softly reply with, "Yes. I understand."

"My participation at the banquet was also prearranged," Danrique further explained. "I wasn't there expressly to help you!"

"Yeah. I know that." Hazel bowed her head meekly.

"This place is fraught with danger. There could be hordes of assassins after me every single day and all manner of local tycoons looking to make things difficult for Lindberg Corporation. You should not have come here in the first place!"

Danrique had originally wanted Harrier with him. Firstly, it was to declare his own position to those behind Pastor, and secondly, to humble Harrier.

Harrier, however, was extremely cunning. Not only had he fashioned himself an excuse to get away, but he had also successfully managed to cajole Gerard into sending Hazel in his place.

In his eagerness to hook his daughter up with Danrique, Gerard had unexpectedly fallen for Harrier's scheming.

Chapter 2021 Reinvestigate

"Actually, I know what Harrier is up to." Hazel smiled wryly. "My dad can't see it, but I can. On the surface, he makes it seem like he's working together with the Yarrow and the Atkinson families. Behind the scenes, however, he has been coming up with his own schemes. When the three families work together, he will do his best to get benefits out of it.

However, he will let the other two families take all the risks. He always comes up with glorious excuses and makes it seem like he's sacrificing himself to help others. This time was a perfect example. My dad is so grateful to him and was thanking Harrier for giving me the chance to come on this inspection."

"If you knew all that, why did you still want to come?" Danrique questioned. "Is it okay if I speak my mind?" Hazel asked cautiously. "Go on." Danrique was rather impressed by her honesty.

"The main reason is that I want to spend more alone time with you," Hazel answered directly. "Besides, among our generation, I think you're the most capable person among the three great families. Mr. Yarrow's son is a spoiled brat and is not interested in running the family business. Although Harrier is slightly more capable, he's too greedy and ambitious.

He's always trying to take advantage of the people close to him. However, he doesn't have what it takes to fight against outsiders. A person like him won't achieve great things. I don't want to be like him and focus on schemes and plots. Instead, I want to see the outside world and broaden my horizon.

If the three great families continue to prosper, I believe in my capability of carrying the Atkinson family forward. Even if something were to go wrong with the three great families in the future, I could still uphold the Atkinson family on my own!"

Danrique was stunned when he heard that. At the same time, his opinion of Hazel changed slightly. Compared to the others in the three great families, she seems to have a clearer mind and the required fighting spirit! In fact, she knows there's a possibility I might destroy the three great families in the future.

I don't sense a hint of resentment in her tone. Instead, she was just brutally honest. I think she knows that it's only natural in the business arena for the strong to dominate the weak.

Although nothing was certain, Hazel was willing to work hard in enriching her relationships and strengthening her family. "Therefore, please don't hate me, Mr. Lindberg." Then, she added, "I'm working hard, but I won't force anything upon you. Also, I'm not going to come up with schemes behind your back. I just hope that I can be there whenever you need me!"

"You sound very sincere," Danrique replied indifferently. "For now, I don't think you were involved in helping your dad kidnap Cece and drugging her in the banquet hall."

"What?" Hazel was taken aback, and she quickly answered, "No way! Although my dad wants me to get close to you, he's not capable of doing such a thing."

Danrique glanced at her coldly and kept mum.

"Please trust me. My dad never did such a thing. He has always been the most cowardly in the three great families. How could he possibly have the courage to kidnap someone close to you?"

Danrique narrowed his eyes when he heard that. She has a point.

Danrique sent her home and went back to his villa. Sean and the others rushed back at once, and they were relieved to see him unharmed.

Right before any of them could say a word, Danrique ordered, "Re-investigate Cece's kidnapping case."

"Noted, Mr. Lindberg." Sean glanced at him sheepishly and said, "There's something else I need to report to you. Please don't get angry, okay?"

"Speak!" Danrique had just had a long night, and he was drinking his tea gracefully.

"Ms. Felch has run off!"

Spurt!

Chapter 2022 Men Are Scary

Danrique spat out his mouthful of hot tea and began to cough badly. Sean patted his back and comforted him, "Don't worry, okay? I think she's fine and—"

"What happened? Why did she run away so suddenly?" While talking, Danrique picked up his phone and rang Francesca. "Well, you would know, wouldn't you?" Sean replied weakly. "Kerrie told me you had an argument with her, and she left because of that."

"What?" Danrique was rendered speechless. We had an argument, all right. All I need to do is just explain myself, no? Why did she need to run away? What's with this woman?

While he was still angry, he heard the automated reply through the phone, "The number you have dialed is unavailable." He then furrowed his brows and questioned, "Where did she go? When did she leave?"

"Exactly four hours and ten minutes ago," Sean answered. "Sloan said she kicked a bodyguard away and took a Lamborghini. After that, she went sailing over the walls and sped off. Sloan thought she could be going to the airport, so he sent people there. However, she had driven to a nearby city to catch a flight. Sloan is sure of it because he found the Lamborghini there. She's now on a flight toward S Nation."

Danrique was utterly baffled. What she has done is even more courageous than any of the men here! I love it! Still, did she really need to do that? It's not like I've done something unforgivable, right? I hung up on her, and that's all I did! Did she need to kick my bodyguard, steal a car, drive to another city, and board a flight to S Nation? What is she going to do next time when we're married? Is she going to leave every time we have an argument? I have enough bodyguards for her to kick

down all she wants, and I also have a lot of cars for her to use. However, I doubt my heart can take it!

"Mr. Lindberg, would you like to send Gordon and Sloan to S Nation to look for her?" Sean asked tentatively. "I doubt Ms. Felch would want to come back, though."

"Let Gordon continue with his mission. After all, that matter is rather important," Danrique ordered firmly. "Send Sloan to S Nation to keep an eye on her from afar. Don't disturb her or let her realize his presence."

"Okay. I got it." Sean then left to relay the message.

Danrique tried to call Francesca again, but he was still getting the same response. Could she still be on the plane now?

After thinking it through, he texted: Call me back when you see this!

Danrique never liked explaining himself. A couple should just trust each other. Furthermore, I've never wronged her or done anything to betray her trust. Why must she always get jealous and doubt me? She must change that attitude of hers.

Achoo!

Francesca sneezed a couple of times on the flight. I bet Danrique is talking bad about me right now.

When she recalled his actions, she gritted her teeth in anger.

While Francesca was fuming, she suddenly noticed the young woman next to her crying. The woman had finished all her tissues but was still sobbing inconsolably.

"Are you all right?" Francesca gave her some tissues and comforted her. "Bad things are bound to happen in life. Cheer up, okay?"

"That scumbag! He tricked my feelings and ran away with my money. He left me with nothing except for his child..." The young woman held her stomach and cried even more fiercely.

"What?" Francesca reacted dramatically. "He ran away with your money? How much money are you talking about?"

"Around three hundred thousand. My parents gave me the money to pay for my school fees and living expenses. I gave everything to him. My parents still think I'm in school. I don't even know what I'm supposed to say to them when I get back..." The young woman was crying her heart out. With a hand over her stomach, she added, "When I first got pregnant, he told me he was going to marry me. However, he kept stalling. Now that my pregnancy is showing, he ran off. What am I supposed to do now?"

Francesca was taken aback when she heard that. Men and relationships are scary. They'll trick our feelings and steal our money!

Chapter 2023 Cheated On

While crying, the young woman said, "Don't be like me, okay? Don't trust men, so you won't get tricked by them. Men are all cheaters. At first, they'll say all the nice things. But once they get you, they won't cherish you."

"That sounds like..." Danrique popped up in Francesca's mind right away. At first, he was nice to me. After I agreed to marry him, however, he changed.

"Also, don't ever spend money on a man. Otherwise, they'll start taking you for granted."

"No. That won't happen." Francesca held her backpack tightly and declared, "He can cheat my feelings, but I'll never let him take my money!"

The jewelry Danrique had given to her was in the bag, and she had been keeping it close to her.

When she was going through the security check earlier, the authorities had asked her to show her proof of purchase and a certificate for the jewelry. She didn't have the receipt, but she had the certificate with her. They had detained her for quite a while before agreeing to let her through. I've already wasted so much time and energy on Danrique, but at least I got jewelry in return. Otherwise, I would suffer such a great loss.

"Yes. That's right. You have to keep your money safe." The young woman then looked around and leaned toward Francesca to whisper, "You have to safeguard your purity too!"

"Oh..." Francesca froze momentarily. Danrique has already hugged, touched, and kissed me. Does that count as losing my purity?

"You seem quite young. You haven't done that with him yet, have you?" the other woman asked.

"I'm not sure." In a nervous tone, Francesca said, "I've slept with him..."

"You've lost your virginity, then!" With an angry expression, the young woman sighed and continued, "It seems like you've already been tricked by a man! However, it's good that you still have your money with you. Trust me, okay? Men are trash. Once you've given them your attention, they'll start mentally abusing you by ignoring you, your phone calls, and your texts!"

"You're right!" The more Francesca thought about it, the angrier she got. Every man is the same!

"If they don't have a use for you, they'll dump you as soon as possible. If they still see value in you, they'll soon come apologizing to you and asking for forgiveness. Besides that, they'll find a way to get you back..." The young woman kept telling Francesca about the various ways trashy men acted and all their tricks.

Francesca was listening intently to her theories.

"When he seeks you out, just ignore him. Otherwise, once you've forgiven him once, you'll have to forgive him for the rest of your life! No matter what you guys are arguing about now, I'm sure you will argue about the same thing over and over again in the future." The young woman was so focused on giving advice that she had forgotten about how sad she was.

She thought she had met a person in as much distress as she was, so she felt less sad. Besides, she was even feeling a sense of accomplishment from being able to pass on her knowledge and experience.

"What should I do, then?" Francesca believed her so much that she was treating the other female as her mentor in relationships.

"Don't cave in," the young woman answered. "No matter how much he explains himself and how he begs, ignore him. He's just lying to you."

After pausing for a while, she went on to ask, "By the way, why did you break up with him?"

"H-He was on a business trip and the woman he has a scandal with had also gone to the same place for a business trip. When I called him, I could hear her voice in the background."

"That's it, then!" The other woman smacked her own thigh and uttered agitatedly, "You've been betrayed! You've definitely been cheated on! There's something going on between him and that woman, for sure. He must have gone behind your back to meet up with her."

Upon hearing that, Francesca became infuriated again. I'm so tempted to go to M Nation and kill Danrique right now! How dare he cheat on me?

"Once a cheater, always a cheater. You'll see. If you forgive him once, you'll have to keep forgiving him for the same mistake for the rest of your life," the woman said knowingly. "I've dated eight men before! I know them like the back of my hand!"