

Always Been Yours Chapter 451

Chapter 451 Examination Result (3)

Nicholas waved his hand as indication for the maids to leave with only Ian being allowed in the living room. He did not hide Ashton's examination report from Ian as he trusted the latter.

“Ian, Grandpa's examination result indicates that his heart failure was drug-induced. I want you to give me the specifics on what Grandpa has eaten lately.”

Though Ian was shocked by the results, he immediately brought out Remus' diet menu and reported what his master had recently eaten. Among them were the supplements given by the Stone Family.

When Ashton heard two specific herbal ingredients in Ian's report, he frowned before interrupting, “Stop, using these two ingredients together brings up all sorts of medical issues when taken together for extended periods of time. Why did you still include these two into Old Master Sawyer's diet?”

“These two ingredients?” Shocked, Ian replied in anger, “These supplements were all taken to the nutritionist and physician for scrutiny, and yet they said that there were no problems with them.”

Nicholas' expression grew dark as he listened to Ian. At this moment, his mind was filled with countless schemes and conspiracies.

Ashton, on the other hand, calmly asked, “I assume the nutritionist was hired from abroad, correct?”

Ian nodded. “Yes, they are well known to be an expert nutritionist.”

“That makes sense. Since traditional medicines in our country are vast and sophisticated, it would be impossible for a foreign nutritionist to understand its ways and nature. As for the physician, I’m assuming that it’s because the herbal ingredients—which by the way are indeed valuable and good for health—were packed separately that he did not expect for you to serve them together for Old Master Sawyer.”

It was only after Ashton offered his explanation that Ian relaxed his expression slightly, though clearly still in anger.

Nicholas’ expression wasn’t any better either.

With his eyes narrowed, Nicholas uttered with hints of suspicion, “So these two herbal ingredients were deliberately bought by the Stone Family?”

“I’m assuming that they didn’t know about this. Excluding these two ingredients, the other herbal ingredients reported by Ian are all extremely good for one’s health.” Ashton voiced his opinion. “Naturally, this does not clear the suspicion on them, which is why I suggest for us to not act rashly and see how things play out.”

Nicholas nodded after pondering for a moment. “Thank you for your help. I’ll treat you to dinner one day.”

“Come on, what are friends for?”

With his fist, Ashton lightly bumped Nicholas’ chest before he stood up and took his leave. “I still have something to do with my team back in the hospital, so I’ll have to take my leave here. Feel free to contact me if you still need my help whenever there’s an update in this matter.”

Nicholas nodded as he watched his friend leave.

Now, there was only silence in the living room.

Looking at Nicholas' chilling expression, Ian said uneasily, "Master Nicholas, I'll instruct the maids to dispose of those supplements sent by the Stone Family right now."

Nicholas showed no opposition and only said, "Leave some of them as evidence and throw out the rest."

Ian nodded and immediately called for the maid to bring some samples to Nicholas.

Nicholas took the samples and continued, "Have Grandpa's nutritionist changed to someone local that understands traditional medicine. As for the physician, warn him that he's fired if he fails his duty one more time."

Ian nodded.

In truth, there was no need for Nicholas to say anything to Ian as Ian had planned to do the same.

After some time passed, Nicholas left the Sawyer Residence. He entered the car with a sullen look on his face. "Edward, I need you to investigate where Hayley bought these." Saying that, he handed a gift bag to Edward.

Though Edward was puzzled by it, he nodded and took the gift bag.

Nicholas continued, "After finding out where she bought it from, I want you to meet the person who sold them to Hayley. Ask that person if Hayley knew that there were some herbs that were not meant to be taken together when she bought these supplements."

Edward was shocked by Nicholas' orders. Did Hayley have something to do with Old Master Sawyer's incident?

After dropping Nicholas off back at the company, Edward went and investigated the origins of the herbs.

Since the herbs were from a well-known brand, it took him no time at all to find which herbal store Hayley had bought them from.

Edward immediately went inside the store and was greeted by one of the staff.
“Welcome, may I know what are you looking for today?”

“I’m here to see your manager.”

With a serious expression, Edward stared at the staff.

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Chapter 452 Investigation on the Herbs (1)

Perhaps the time he spent with Nicholas might have rubbed off on Edward, as he imitated Nicholas by giving off an imposing aura in a serious expression that caused others to instinctively submit to said person.

Soon after his “Nicholas” performance, the manager—a chubby middle-aged man—came over.

Looking at the imposing Edward, the manager took the initiative and made an invitation to Edward, as he did not want to interrupt the store’s business. “Sir, I heard you’re looking for me? How about we discuss this in my office?”

Edward did not reject the invitation and followed the manager into his office.

After entering the office, the manager served Edward a cup of tea before asking, “May I know your name and the purpose of your visit?”

“The name’s Jackson. I am an assistant to President Sawyer, the president of the Sawyer Group.” Edward revealed his identity since it would be easier to get things done this way.

Which was proven true just moments later.

The manager stood up in fear and trepidation the moment he heard that the man before him was from the Sawyer Group. “May I know what President Sawyer wishes to request from us?”

“Our president wishes to know who bought these herbal medicines. If possible, I would like to check on the situation during the time of purchase with my own

eyes.” Edward took the herbal medicines out from the gift bag and gave a description of Hayley.

Naturally, the manager dared not go against the request. He immediately asked for someone to check on the herbal medicines and personally brought Edward into the surveillance room.

In no time at all, the technician had found and displayed the moment when Hayley made the purchase.

Edward stared closely at the screen and realized that Sonia had also accompanied Hayley that day. Furthermore, the two of them specifically asked for the two herbal medicines that Edward was investigating.

Wearing a serious expression, Edward narrowed his eyes after viewing the footage.

He pointed at the staff within the footage before uttering in a cold tone, “Is this staff working today? I would like to meet him.”

The manager rubbed his hands together nervously in response. “Mr. Jackson, the staff in question had suddenly quit a few days ago. He’s no longer part of our staff.”

Edward’s suspicion turned into certainty that there was something foul at play here. He asked, “If that’s the case, could you contact him?”

“It should be possible. There are a few of our staff that have his phone number.” Saying that, the manager asked for someone to get the staff’s contact information.

Unfortunately, the manager was met with a pre-recorded message stating that the number was no longer in use when he called the staff’s number.

The manager’s smile immediately stiffened, and he realized in hindsight that something was wrong regarding the matter.

He hung up the phone before explaining anxiously, “Mr. Jackson, although I don’t know what exactly happened, I assure you that whatever this staff did had nothing to do with our store.”

With a chilling gaze on the manager, Edward warned, “I hope that word doesn’t spread that I was here to investigate this matter today.”

The manager was relieved as Edward showed no indication of wanting to pursue the matter any further. He nodded repeatedly while answering, “Don’t worry. I will definitely not let anyone breathe a word of this.”

Edward nodded in return and left the store. Back in the car, he took his phone out and reported his findings to Nicholas.

“President Sawyer, I’ve found the place. According to the surveillance footage, Hayley and Sonia had specifically asked for those two herbal ingredients. Moreover, the staff that made the sale has already quit with his phone number changed. I suspect that the purchase of the herbal medicines by the Stones was deliberate.”

In a mildly luxurious office, a shroud of cold air was emanating from Nicholas’ body. His expression darkened as he listened to the report on the phone.

“Hayley Stone, and the Stone Family.” He spoke in anger while gritting his teeth.

On the other end of the phone call, Edward said in a cautious tone, “President Sawyer, should we do something about this?”

Nicholas narrowed his eyes that were laced with ruthlessness. “Although there is no clear evidence that points to the involvement of the Stone Family, they should still be kept in check.”

Edward grunted in agreement.

After pondering for a few seconds, Nicholas ordered, “Go to the hospital now and transfer Old Master Sawyer into a VIP ward. At the same time, inform the hospital that no one from the Stone Family has visitation rights.”

“Wouldn’t they be aware that we’re onto them after this arrangement?” Edward was slightly doubtful of his president’s decision.

Nicholas sneered, “That’s all the better! I want to see just what the Stone Family will do next!”

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Chapter 453 Investigation on the Herbs (2)

Edward understood his president's wishes. He then ended the call and went to the hospital. Per Nicholas' instructions, he transferred Remus into a VIP ward and informed the hospital of his president's instructions.

The arrangement soon reached the ears of Tobias and Stefania.

Later that night, Nicholas went back to the main house for dinner.

During dinner, Tobias questioned the matter. "This evening, you asked Edward to transfer the old man into a VIP ward and banned the Stone Family from visiting. Is there something going on here?"

As Tobias posed his question, Stefania had also turned her attention to Nicholas.

Nicholas replied in an indifferent tone, "Nothing is going on. I just think that Grandpa needs to be in a quiet environment to recuperate."

He did not intend to divulge what the Stone Family had done before having clear evidence on hand.

Since both Tobias and Stefania were unaware of Stone Family's actions, they had no reason to doubt Nicholas' explanation.

Stefania then continued feeding Gregory. "Greg, you'll have to eat more," she said while placing food in Gregory's bowl.

Gregory thanked her in a cute and soft manner. He then followed Stefania's example in placing food in her bowl as well and said softly, "Grandma should eat more as well."

Stefania was over the moon and immediately ate the food Gregory gave her while showing off to Tobias.

Tobias was slightly provoked by his wife's bragging, which prompted him to stare intently at Gregory.

Naturally, Gregory understood what his grandpa wanted, to which he complied by placing some food in his grandpa's bowl. "You too, Grandpa."

As a result, a faint smile crept onto Tobias' serious face.

Laughter continued to spread from the grandparents and grandchild.

Kieran was watching them enjoying themselves before turning his attention to his quiet brother. He felt that Nicholas was hiding something in regard to Remus' incident.

After finishing dinner, Tobias and Stefania brought Gregory to the garden for a walk.

Nicholas, on the other hand, went to the study room on the second floor to handle company documents.

However, Kieran came in soon after Nicholas took his seat.

"Nicholas, tell me the truth. Did you ban the Stone Family from visiting Grandpa because they did something?" With both his palms on the table, Kieran stared at his brother with curiosity in his eyes.

Nicholas looked up from the file he was reading and, with no intention of hiding the truth, answered in an indifferent tone, "Grandpa's sudden heart failure was not from a natural cause, but was triggered by something he shouldn't have eaten."

"And this 'something' was a gift from the Stone Family." As though a lightbulb went off in his head, Kieran instantly connected the dots as he recalled his

brother's arrangement at the hospital. Subsequently, he looked at Nicholas in shock.

Nicholas did not deny his brother's deduction. "I've asked Edward to investigate it this afternoon. It seems that some time ago, Hayley and her mother had gone to a herbal store and had specifically asked for two herbs that are not meant to be taken together. Furthermore, the staff that made the sale that day had quit a few days later and vanished without a trace."

The next morning, Hayley came to the hospital again to visit Remus.

"I'm sorry, Miss Stone. But President Sawyer has instructed us that you are not allowed to visit the patient." The bodyguards outside the VIP ward stopped Hayley from entering.

Hayley was bewildered and asked in a panic, "Why am I not allowed to visit? Does Old Master Sawyer know about this?"

One of the bodyguards answered in an indifferent tone, "This is an order from President Sawyer. If you have any problems with it, you'll have to take it up to the president."

After that, he said nothing further as he continued to stand guard in front of the door.

Hayley had no other choice but to leave. Naturally, she couldn't ask Nicholas about the arrangement made. After all, she felt guilt lurking in her heart.

After she returned to Stone Enterprise, she immediately went to the chairman's office and apprehensively told her father about what had happened at the hospital. "Dad, do you think that Nicholas banned us from visiting Old Master Sawyer because he had figured out what we did?"

Nero fell into deep thoughts. Seconds later, he shook his head and explained, "I'm afraid you're overthinking this. If Nicholas really did figure us out, he would have

definitely come at us considering his temper. However, since nothing is happening right now, I assume that he's just doing this to protect Old Master Sawyer."

Though Hayley felt that her father's words made sense, she still felt a little uneasy about it.

Needless to say, Nero noticed Hayley's unease, which was why he continued, "Don't think too hard about it. There will always be appropriate measures for the actual situation. Nevertheless, we have already achieved our objective. Right now, you should be seizing the opportunity to get closer to Nicholas."

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Chapter 454 Tessa's Surprise (1)

Nero easily calmed Hayley down just when she was at a loss.

It was indeed true that her ultimate goal was to get closer to Nicholas.

However, she also knew that approaching Nicholas head-on would only cause him to view her in a negative light, which was why she decided to use a different tactic—visiting Stefania in the Sawyer Residence.

Coincidentally, Gregory had been spending his time in the residence as well. Hayley could show off the maternity side of her as a method to become close with Stefania. Moreover, it would serve as a demonstration that she could perfectly take care of Gregory. This was truly what one would call a ‘two birds with one stone’ maneuver.

However, the reality was often a cruel mistress.

“This is the latest AI robot that has its own voice. I know that Greg here likes these kinds of things, which was why I’ve asked a friend to get one for me. Greg, do you like it?”

After a brief greeting, Hayley gave the gift she prepared to Gregory.

Stefania’s impression of Hayley grew several levels higher as she watched how attentive Hayley was toward Gregory. With a slight turn of her head toward Gregory, she said softly, “What should you say to Miss Hayley when receiving your gift?”

“Thank you, Miss Hayley,” Gregory obediently thanked Hayley. However, if one looked closely, they would find that the boy had no interest in the gift he received.

After all, the boy already had the world's most advanced AI robot by his side. In comparison to Shadow, a robot of this kind that only had a voice function was just too low of a standard for him.

Regrettably, neither Stefania nor Hayley was aware of his inner thoughts.

With the intention for the two people to spend time together, Stefania conjured an excuse. "Hayley, I have an appointment for my beauty treatment soon. Can I trouble you to take care of Greg for me?"

"Of course." Naturally, Hayley would not reject an opportunity falling into her lap.

With that, Stefania left the two alone in the living room.

Watching how obedient Gregory was sitting by the sofa, she took the initiative to walk over to him and said in a gentle tone, "Greg, what do you want to do next? Can Miss Hayley play with you too?"

Gregory pursed his lips in response and showed no interest in Hayley. He didn't like the woman in the least, and was already missing the kind Tessa.

Thinking that, he huffed while jumping off the couch, then politely said a few words to Hayley before running toward the music room on the second floor. "Miss Hayley, I'm going to go practice."

Whenever he missed Tessa, he would play the violin as a method to relieve himself of such thoughts.

Hayley's eyes turned dull as she looked at Gregory—who was playing the violin so seriously—in the music room.

It was only at this moment did she realize the reason why this little bend sinister loved playing the violin. It was definitely by the influence of that woman—Tessa Reinhart.

At that moment, her loathing for Tessa grew sharply with her feelings of loathing spilling over to Gregory as well.

Tessa had been missing the two ever since Nicholas and Gregory left Vienna. She wouldn't have felt this way if she hadn't tasted what it was like to live together. However, she did, and because she did, she couldn't resist missing the wonderful times she had with them.

The good thing was that the orchestra was all ready and would leave for Xerthania soon.

However, on the day of her flight, Tessa had not informed anyone of her return yet and followed the orchestra to board the plane back to Xerthania.

Thus, Nicholas was unaware that Tessa was on the way back to the country.

In the evening, the feelings of longing for Tessa grew too much for Nicholas to bear, as it had been a few days since he last contacted her. He gently touched the picture on his phone before finally deciding to give Tessa a call.

“Sorry, the number you've dialed is unavailable.”

Frowning, he thought that Tessa had fallen asleep without charging her phone, and decided to contact her a little later.

Later that night, Nicholas had tried contacting Tessa again when he reached home, but he was still greeted by the same mechanical voice message he got during the evening. He immediately felt uneasy about the current situation.

Logically speaking, Tessa should be awake by now at this time. Then why isn't the call going through?

Nicholas waited for a little longer—namely sweating in anxiety—to call but still could not contact Tessa.

Panic came over him in an instant.

Especially since a night had passed and he still could not contact Tessa. He was beside himself with anxiety at this point.

It was during the first light of the day when he called Timothy in a haste.

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Chapter 455 Tessa's Surprise (2)

“Nicholas, what’s wrong?” Timothy’s puzzled voice came through the phone; his raspy voice indicated that he had just woken up.

With urgency in his tone, Nicholas asked, “Tim, can you contact your sister? I’ve called her all night but the calls wouldn’t get through.”

“My sister’s missing?” Timothy was startled.

Nicholas murmured, “I’m not sure. Try contacting your sister first. If you can’t, then we’ll cross the bridge when we get there.”

Saying that, Nicholas hung up the phone.

Timothy immediately jumped out of his bed and dialed his sister’s number.

“Sorry, the number you’ve dialed is unavailable.”

It was when he dialed the number several times consecutively only to find the same mechanical voice answering him that he started panicking.

Perhaps it was due to him being beside himself with worry, for his hand that was holding the phone started to tremble lightly.

Soon after, he called Nicholas and said in a panic, “Nicholas, I can’t reach my sister either. Do you think something has happened to her?”

Nicholas’ heart sank as a result of Timothy’s call.

Too anxious to know what to do, Timothy started to blame himself. “Damn it. If I had known this would happen, I would’ve never agreed for her to stay abroad alone in the first place.”

Hearing Timothy’s rant, Nicholas also regretted his decision not to bring Tessa along with him when he was coming back to the country earlier.

“It’s pointless for all these now. The important thing we should focus on is to find a way to reach your sister.”

Nicholas forced himself to stay calm. However, anyone would have caught the slight shaking of his voice should they have listened to him carefully. “Tim, I have nothing on me right now. Instead, you take a trip to Vienna and see if you can find your sister there. Contact me again when you have information on the situation there.”

“Alright, I’ll book the flight immediately.”

Timothy agreed. He then hung up and proceeded to book the flight online.

He understood why Nicholas couldn’t personally make the trip to search for his sister, for Remus was in a bad condition and had to be hospitalized recently.

Later that day, he had managed to book his flight to Vienna and was packing his bag for the trip while calling his sister’s phone number at the same time.

Naturally, he still couldn’t reach Tessa.

Soon after, Timothy was done packing his things and was ready to leave for the airport. However, the calls that had not been able to reach his sister finally got through the moment he left the house.

“Tim, what’s wrong?”

Tessa’s puzzled voice came through the phone, yet one could hear the suppressed joy in her voice should one listen to her closely.

Unfortunately, Timothy did not, for he was surprised that his call to his sister finally got through.

“Tess! What have you been doing? Your phone has been unreachable for a while now. Do you know how worried Nicholas and I were? I’ve even booked a flight to Vienna to look for you!” He burst out and rambled on like a machine gun.

When Tessa processed what her brother told her, she asked in a panic, “You’re in Vienna now?”

“No, but I was just leaving for the airport.”

Timothy responded in irritation.

However, Tessa was not bothered by it and sighed in relief instead. “Thank god. Good thing you didn’t leave for Vienna. You don’t have to go to Vienna, so hurry up and refund the ticket.”

“Why?”

“Hehe. That’s because I’ve followed the orchestra back to Xerthania,” Tessa announced cheerfully over the phone.

Timothy was taken aback and asked in surprise, “You’ve returned to the country? Where are you now? I’ll come over and pick you up.”

“I’ve only just left the airport. You can pick me up at the Hanson Hotel. I’ll be following the orchestra until they check in there.”

“Alright, I’ll leave for the hotel now.”

Timothy hung up and returned his suitcase back to his room before immediately leaving for the hotel.

When he arrived at the hotel, he called Tessa again. “Tess, I’m downstairs right now.”

“Wait for me. I’ll come down immediately.” Tessa hung up the phone after saying that.

After a little while, Tessa, dressed in a long-sleeved dress, walked out of the hotel.

“Tim.”

She looked at her dashing brother, who was standing by his sedan, and immediately went over to him with the biggest smile on her face.

“Tess!”

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“Kathleen, I just told you that I’m not used to being physically close with people outside my family. I don’t have anything against you, and I’ve left the past in the past. If you wish to make that argument, then would it be right for me to think that you’re the one who has been bothered by it all along?” Tessa asked.

Kathleen was stunned as she hadn’t expected Tessa to escape so easily. “It seems like I must have misunderstood you, Tessa.” Kathleen narrowed her eyes a little as she let out a laugh. In contrast, Tessa frowned when she heard those words. “Do you have anything else to say? I would like to head off to practice if there’s nothing else...?” Tessa was all out of patience when it came to Kathleen.

“I just heard about the orchestra competition’s rules, and I think you’ll do a great job. Good luck!” Kathleen pretended not to hear the impatience in Tessa’s voice, and she cheered on Tessa instead. Tessa felt goosebumps forming on her skin when she saw the sincere look on Kathleen’s face. Is she really the Kathleen that I used to know?

Although Tessa felt really uneasy, she didn’t show those emotions on her face as she replied graciously, “Thank you. I’ll work hard.” Then, she turned around after nodding goodbye.

The smile remained on Kathleen’s face even as she watched Tessa leave. However, there was a cold and sinister look in Kathleen’s eyes. She gritted her teeth as she thought, Do you think you’re going to get the role as the concertmaster, Tessa? In your dreams! I’ll never let you have it your way!

The very next morning, the orchestra’s management team released the competition’s rundown to everyone. All of the orchestra members gathered at the announcement board. “The orchestra will hire five of the most outstanding

musicians in the industry as judges of the competition. These people will be the ones picking the concertmaster in order to ensure that everything is fair and square. As of now, the judges are Guntram Muller, Boris Smirnoff, Edgar Traynor, and Elijah Efron,” Hathaway announced.

“Oh gosh, I can’t believe you managed to hire Mr. Muller as one of the judges, Miss Hathaway.” Guntram was one of the most widely recognized musicians—he was an all-rounded musician.

“Hold on. There are only four judges here. Where’s the fifth?” a member piped up.

“Could the fifth one be Scott?” someone asked.

“I think it’s possible. Scott is really close to Miss

Hathaway, and he’s a skilled musician as well. So, I bet that there’s a high chance of him being the last judge.”

Many of the orchestra members noted agreeably. After that, they continued to look at the announcement. They realized that the date of the competition was set at the start of the following month. Everyone felt extra pressured by the thought of it. It was only a few weeks until the competition day. Soon enough, all of the members who had been surrounding the announcement board returned to their practice rooms. They didn’t have much time, after all—they had to cherish every moment that they had to practice. Tessa could sense the tension in the air, making her train even harder than before.

When afternoon came, Scott showed up and jogged over to the rest of the orchestra team. He was tall and lanky—every part of his appearance screamed elegance. All the members hurried over to welcome him when they saw him arrive. “There you are, Mr. Brooks. It’s been a while.”

“Can you tell us if you’ve agreed to be one of the judges for our competition?” someone asked out of curiosity.

However, Scott only smiled without making any comments. The few members decided to stop asking about the competition since they didn't have an answer to it. A while after that, Scott followed Tessa to her practice room. However, she wasn't aware of his presence as she was extremely focused on her violin.

Scott didn't bother to disturb her, either—he simply stood by the front door quietly. Tessa was dressed in a simple dress, and the smooth skin on her face made her look good even though she didn't apply any foundation. Scott was utterly mesmerized by her looks, and a mixture of emotions seemed to fill his gaze as he stared at her. Finally, after a while, Tessa finished playing an entire song, and he raised his hands to applaud her.

Tessa turned to eye the man puzzledly when she heard his voice. “When did you come over, Mr. Brooks?” she asked.

“I just arrived a while ago. I saw you practicing, so I didn't want to bother you,” he explained. Then, with a smile on his face, he walked over to Tessa. “I realized that you're really serious during your recent practices. Have you been stressed out over this matter?”

“I guess so.” Tessa couldn't deny it.

“You'll have to work hard, then. I'm not going to give you an easy way out,” Scott teased.

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Til work hard and won't need you to go easy on me." Tessa was confident in herself. Nevertheless, she had to rely on her own efforts to obtain the role of the concertmaster. When Scott saw the assured look on the girl's face, his gaze darkened as a hint of bitterness surfaced in it. However, he quickly looked away before responding to her words. "I'm not going to make it easy for you, but as a friend, I can do you a favor," he offered.

"Forget it. I'm not facing any issues recently, anyway." Tessa rejected him once more. Since she had decided to rely on her own abilities, she decided that she wouldn't accept anyone's help. Moreover, she didn't want others to spread nasty rumors about her when she actually won the competition fair and square. Perhaps Scott could tell what was going on in Tessa's mind as he no longer insisted on doing her a favor after that. Instead, he changed the topic to talk about the fun stuff he had encountered in other countries recently.

Both Tessa and Scott chatted happily in the studio. The atmosphere inside was harmonious, but a dark aura came from outside the room as Kathleen glared at them resentfully. She had received the news the moment Scott arrived at the orchestra's practice location. However, after her previous experience at the detention center, she felt too embarrassed to meet him, so she hid away from him. Yet, she felt extremely jealous when he saw her chatting with Tessa.

Perhaps Kathleen's glare had given off a rather noticeable aura for Tessa and Scott both turned around to look in her direction simultaneously. "Kathleen?" they both said synchronously; there was even the same note of confusion in their voices. A flustered look surfaced on Kathleen's face as she instinctively thought of hiding away. But before she could do anything, Scott's pleasant voice traveled into her ear.

“It’s been a while, Kathleen.” He pressed his lips into a smile as he walked toward her. Kathleen’s feet wouldn’t seem to budge when she saw the handsome man strolling in her direction. In the end, she had no choice but to put on a smile. “It has been a while.”

Scott didn’t seem to realize anything odd about Kathleen. “How have you been?”

“I’ve been well,” she replied with a smile.

Scott nodded. Right then, he recalled the things that Kathleen had done in the past. “I heard about what happened previously. You didn’t have to go against Miss Reinhart. She’s a nice person—you’ll recognize her good trails after getting to know her a little better,” he suggested. Kathleen couldn’t help but clench her fists in response to his words. She lowered her gaze in order for her eyelashes to conceal the vicious look in her eyes.

Scott didn’t realize anything at all as he continued talking about Tessa. “You shouldn’t make things hard for Miss Hathaway either. Right now, she’s caught between her daughter and her protege.”

When she heard his words, Kathleen felt like she was about to erupt with jealousy and rage as she thought Scott was just trying to protect Tessa.

Kathleen balled her fists and dug her fingernails into her palms, but she couldn’t feel the pain. Even though she desperately wanted to kill Tessa at that moment, she still forced a smile onto her face. “Don’t worry. I’ve already learned from my mistakes, and I’ve already apologized to her. She has forgiven me as well.”

Scott wasn’t suspicious of her words at all. Instead, he let out a smile of relief. “That’s what I’m talking about!”

Kathleen's heart ached when she saw how he responded to her lie. "I bet you didn't know this, but Tessa and I are good friends now," she continued. Scott was somewhat surprised at this point. But before he could say anything else, Kathleen's soft voice sounded in his ears.

"I was a little too stubborn in the past, Scott. You're not going to hate me for that, are you?"

He curled his lips into a smile when he saw the concern on Kathleen's face. "Since you've learned from your mistakes, why should I hate you?" he asked.

Kathleen could tell that the man wasn't just trying to brush her off, so she spread her lips into a bright smile. "I'm glad that you don't hate me," she said merrily. Then, they chatted for a while more before she left for practice.

That evening, after Tessa was done practicing, Scott walked over to her. "Would you allow me the honor of buying you dinner tonight, Miss Reinhart?"

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“I wouldn’t want to have a meal with you during this period. I am afraid of being misunderstood—others might say that I bribed the judge.” Tessa declined his offer. Scott’s eyes dimmed for a moment. “Well, it’s okay, then.”

Tessa didn’t hear the change in his tone. Instead, she smiled as she made another suggestion. “I can invite you out for dinner after the competition ends.” Scott was taken aback for a moment, and the dim look in his eyes lit up again. “I’ll wait for your good news, then,” he said, smiling.

After she left the orchestra, she went directly back to the villa. It was rare for her to return home this early. So, after she washed up, she took the initiative to video call Nicholas. Soon enough, Nicholas’s handsome and charming facial features appeared on the screen.

“What are you up to?” Tessa gazed at him affectionately as if she intended to make up for the lack of love that she had given him in the past two days.

Nicholas returned the affectionate gaze. “I just arrived at the company,” he remarked. Tessa nodded as she held her mobile phone and turned to find a comfortable posture. Then, in a soft voice, she told him that the competition rules had been released by the orchestra that day. “Everyone in the orchestra seems really stressed out now.”

“What about you? Do you feel stressed?” Nicholas took this opportunity to question her.

Tessa responded honestly. “It’s a little stressful. The judges that Miss Hathaway invited this time are well- renowned musicians in the industry, but I believe I will win in the end.”

The corners of his lips tugged into a genuine smile when he saw confidence blooming in the girl’s eyes. Then, he nodded slightly before speaking in a soothing tone. “There will always be hurdles in life. Going abroad is your first step toward your dreams, and this upcoming competition is your second step. I’m sure everyone recognizes the effort you’ve put into this, and I’m sure you will succeed in the end.”

Tessa felt like the tension in her heart seemed to have dissipated after hearing the man’s words. Then, just before she could say anything, Nicholas suddenly changed his tone. “But I am very dissatisfied with one thing now,” he stated.

“What’s the matter?” Tessa felt her heart rate increase when she looked at the man’s serious expression. I didn’t do anything to make him angry, did I?

Nicholas looked deeply into Tessa’s eyes while speaking in a tender and concerned tone. “You’re getting skinny.”

Tessa was startled for a moment before feeling a gush of sweetness pouring out of her heart. “I’m fine.” She coaxed him gently. However, he vehemently disagreed, “You don’t look like you’re fine. Although I support your dreams, you shouldn’t make me worry about you, okay?”

“Okay, I promise I’ll take good care of myself!” Tessa promised him wholeheartedly.

Early the following day, Tessa went downstairs after washing up, where she found a strange woman who wasn’t the housekeeper. “Please enjoy your meal, Miss Reinhart.” After the woman gave Tessa her breakfast, she respectfully retreated from the room.

Tessa eyed the housekeeper suspiciously. Then, without waiting for her to ask, the housekeeper took the initiative to explain the situation. “Miss Reinhart, this is the nutritionist that the young master hired. She mainly takes care of your diet and daily life.” After she heard this piece of information, Tessa felt like her chest was stuffed with marshmallows. It was all warm and sweet inside. All of this caused her to feel as though she was bursting with motivation to do her best today.

At the same time, in Dynasty Gardens, Gregory’s mind was running all over the place as he hadn’t seen nor spoken with Tessa for several days. So, when he saw his father coming home, he couldn’t help but pester him. “Daddy, I want to see Miss Tessa. I really miss her. Can we visit her, please?”

Gregory was holding Nicholas’s thighs, and his eyes, which were like black gems, already had tears. As though he would immediately start crying if Nicholas didn’t agree to his suggestion. Unfortunately, Nicholas pressed his thin lips together as he furrowed his brows. He, too, wanted to see Tessa, but now simply wasn’t the right time to do it. So, although he couldn’t bear to do it, he still stuck firmly on his decision to reject Gregory. “No, Aunt Tessa is very busy now. We’d only disturb her if we went there now.”

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When Gregory heard his father rejecting him again, he could no longer hold back the tears in his eyes.

“No crying.” Nicholas didn’t have the habit of comforting anyone apart from Tessa, and he didn’t even do it to his own son. All he could do was order Gregory not to cry. However, when those words slipped out of his mouth, Gregory cried even harder than before. “I want Miss Tessa. I want Miss Tessa!” The young boy sobbed as he stared at Nicholas, looking especially pitiful with his swollen and red eyes.

Both father and son glared at one another for a while before Nicholas let out a sigh and bent down to carry Gregory over to the couch. He sat the young boy down before speaking in the gentlest tone he could manage. “Aunt Tessa has been preparing for a really important competition recently, and she’s really busy now. We’d be making things harder for her if we visited her now.”

Gregory was disappointed to hear this and stuck his lower lip out in a pout. However, he was also sensible enough to stop crying. He pouted for a long while before he finally spoke with a shaky voice. “Since Miss Tessa is studying music there, I want to go there to study too. I want to work hard with Miss Tessa.”

Nicholas was shocked to hear this. He would have never expected his son to utter such words. However, he quickly made sense of it when he thought of Tessa and Gregory’s tight relationship. “You’ll have to work really hard, then. Your Aunt Tessa is a really impressive woman,” he said.

“I will!” Gregory gave his father an exaggerated nod. The young boy wore a serious look on his face.

Nicholas tugged his lips into a smile when he saw how serious his son looked. “If that’s what you want, then perhaps I can bring you over to meet her after she’s done with this competition of hers,” Nicholas promised with a smile on his face.

Gregory’s eyes lit up immediately. “I always knew you were the best, Daddy!”

The next morning, Nicholas had breakfast with Gregory before he rushed to the company. He had only sat in his office for a while when Edward knocked on the door and walked in. “President Sawyer, I have sorted out the follow-up data needed to terminate our partnership with Stone Enterprise. Since we were the ones who called for termination, we were required to compensate for their losses. I’ve already proceeded with that.”

Nicholas didn’t express much of an opinion as he listened to Edward’s reports. Instead, he sat on his executive chair, dressed in a handmade black suit over a white shirt that he buttoned all the way up. His outfit, along with his flawless features, made him seem both dangerous and mesmerizing. The sunlight from the floor-to-ceiling window in his office scattered all over his figure, enhancing his aura as a powerful man who couldn’t go unnoticed.

“Go on,” he urged Edward to continue with the report. Nicholas didn’t seem to care about the little amount of money he had spent on compensating the Stones. “Also, the shareholders seem to be protesting the loss we’ve faced while compensating the Stones. They’re throwing a fuss over this issue,” Edward stated.

Nicholas’s gaze darkened when he heard this. A threatening look flashed across his eyes. “You can just ignore them. The shareholder meeting is tomorrow, and I’ll make all of them shut up by then.”

Edward gazed at the domineering president before him while he secretly muttered a prayer for all the shareholders who were attending the meeting the next day. After that, Edward continued to provide reports about other tasks. Once he was

done, he turned around to leave the room. However, he hesitated for a moment as he recalled something that he wasn't sure if he wanted to report.

Nicholas quickly noticed the uncertain look on Edward's face. "What is it?" Nicholas asked with a frown. Edward immediately explained himself when he saw the impatient look on his boss's face. "Well, I happened to hear that Hayley has left the country. Should I get someone to investigate this?"

"No." Nicholas rejected the idea without thinking twice. He had made things clear that day, so he was sure that no one in the Stone Family would have the guts to get on his bad side again. Furthermore, he wasn't interested in knowing about Hayley's whereabouts.

Even though Hayley hadn't done anything to Tessa, she had been eyeing Tessa's every move. She knew that Tessa was planning to join the orchestra's competition in order to get herself the role of the lead violinist. When Hayley first heard about this, she nearly fell to the ground from laughing too hard.

"She wants to chase after her dreams, huh? Well, let me be the one to ruin her dreams! I'll destroy her! I'd like to see how she can snatch my man away from me after this!" Hayley hissed.

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Hayley scoffed to herself with an evil and determined look on her face. After all, she was someone who had been pampered as a child—if she ever wanted anything, someone would make sure that she got what she wanted. Unfortunately, as she grew up in an environment that encouraged her twisted behavior, it shaped her into someone rash and extreme—she would choose to destroy the things that came in the way of what she wanted.

She hated Tessa the most as Tessa was the reason she had been shamed so severely. Tessa was the reason Nicholas hated her so much! How could she not despise Tessa?!

Tessa didn't know about any of this as she was too focused on her training, especially after Miss Hathaway announced the competition date. She lost even more weight during this period, and Mona was worried about seeing her friend like that. But no matter how much Mona tried to convince her, she would only nod along to whatever Mona said before returning to her own training methods. It drove Mona absolutely nuts as she didn't know what to do with her.

One day, even Hathaway decided that she had had enough of this. She ordered Tessa to pay a visit to her office. "Is anything the matter, Miss Hathaway?" Tessa sat on the couch while eyeing Hathaway puzzledly. "It's the weekend tomorrow. I want to give you a day off," Hathaway offered.

But Tessa only shook her head. "Thank you for your offer, but I don't feel like resting now." In fact, she couldn't bring herself to rest when the competition was around the corner. To Tessa's surprise, Hathaway responded in an unyielding tone.

“No. You need to rest. I’m not having a discussion with you—I’m giving you orders. You need to rest tomorrow.”

Tessa froze. “Why?” she asked instinctively.

“Did you ask me why? Look at how you’ve neglected your well-being in the past few days! If this continues, you’re going to collapse before the competition,” Hathaway said in exasperation. “I know you want to obtain good results during the competition, but you need to have good health and a good mindset to be in your best condition, right? Do you think you’re in good condition now?”

Tessa was speechless in the face of Hathaway’s questions, and a bashful look spread across her face. Tessa was aware that she had been pushing herself a little too hard, so she finally decided to take Hathaway’s advice to get some rest and recalibrate her mindset.

Tessa didn’t go to practice the next day as it was her day off. Instead, after she had her breakfast, she gave Gregory a call. The young boy was extremely excited when he received a call from her. “You finally called me, Miss Tessa! I missed you so, so much!” the boy cried in joy.

“I missed you too, Gregory,” she replied while gazing at him with a smile that reached all the way to her eyes. They chatted for a while more before he had to go to bed. After the call was over, she held onto her phone and proceeded to call Nicholas instead. When Nicholas heard that Hathaway had forced her to take a day off, he thought that Hathaway was a pretty reliable teacher.

Both of them exchanged sweet nothings for a while more before Tessa urged Nicholas to get some rest. During the afternoon, Tessa headed directly to the restaurant where she performed.

Wilbur felt the urge to speak up when he saw how skinny the girl had become. “It’s good to work hard, but you shouldn’t overdo it. It’s not worth it.” Tessa knew that Wilbur cared for her, so she nodded with a smile. “You’re right. That’s why I got a day off today.” They chatted for a while more before she started her performance.

She played a light-hearted melody that received a huge round of applause. “Thank you!” She bowed and brought her violin back to the dressing room after that. She was on the way back to the dressing room when she heard someone calling for her. “Miss Reinhart.”

Tessa turned around to find Angus walking over. “Mr. Angus,” she greeted with a slight smile. Angus nodded before making an unexpected comment. “Did you have something on your mind while you were playing just now? The way you played the violin today sounded forced.”

“Forced?” Tessa frowned in confusion. “Why would you say that, Mr. Angus?”

“You used to play more naturally and emotionally that sounded mesmerizing to the ears. But this time, it seems like your violin-playing sounds rather stiff” and mechanical,” he said.