

Always Been Yours Chapter 521 - 530

Always Been Yours Chapter 521

Hayley nodded in agreement with Nero's plan.

That night after work, she bought a bouquet of carnations from the flower shop by the roadside and sped off to the hospital.

However, she was barred from entering the ward at the doorway as soon as she walked toward the ward.

"I'm sorry, Miss Stone, but you're not allowed to enter the room." There were two tall, strapping bodyguards standing guard by the door.

She secretly clenched her teeth, but the smile on her face remained as she put on a dutiful and gentle front. "I'm here to visit Old Master Sawyer. Could you please let him know that I'm here?"

"Old Master Sawyer has given instructions, and he doesn't want to see anyone from the Stone family."

The bodyguards did not relent.

Meanwhile, Hayley was distraught by that, and she did not believe that Old Master Sawyer would refuse to see her. So she reckoned that this must be Nicholas' instructions.

So, she no longer kept up the pretense, and she yelled loudly in the direction of the room. "Old Master Sawyer, it's me. I'm Hayley! I'm here to see you, but the two bodyguards outside refuse to let me in."

Inside the room, Remus naturally heard Hayley's voice too.

However, he felt highly disappointed when he recalled how this woman spiked his medication.

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So, Remus pretended not to hear a word as he had no intention of allowing her into his private ward.

Outside the ward, despite her yells, Remus steadfastly refused her entry.

Hayley was very annoyed by that, but there was nothing she could do about it.

Just as she was at a loss for what to do, she suddenly saw a familiar tall and imposing figure from the corner of her eyes and instantly revealed a coy smile.

It was Nicholas, and he'd just finished work, so he'd come over to visit Remus.

"Nicholas." Hayley kept her eyes on the man who walked elegantly in this direction, and her heart soared as she stepped forward to greet him.

However, Nicholas treated her as if she was invisible as he completely ignored her. He didn't even bother to cast his eyes on her as he headed straight toward the room.

When she noticed this, she was stunned in place as the smile on her face froze.

She abruptly turned around and watched as the man's figure disappeared near the ward's entrance. There was a significant reluctance to accept her situation in her gaze.

"Nicholas," She yelled out again as she raced after him.

The end result was that she was once again stopped at the door by the bodyguards.
"Miss Stone, you're not allowed to enter the room."

Her expression turned ugly upon seeing the bodyguards doing their duty with an air of indifference.

She had no choice but to retreat. Nonetheless, she focused intently on the tightly shut door while her mind was a rambled mess.

Even more so, she was much more affected upon recalling Nicholas's indifference and cold behavior toward her earlier on. She then realized that she could not allow the situation to persist and had to talk things through with Nicholas.

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However, Nicholas was completely oblivious to all of her schemes.

Right now, he was seated in the room, and he was speaking with Tobias.

"I've contacted Ashton, so he'll be here to run some checks on you tomorrow. Once everything is fine, then you can get discharged."

Remus nodded. "Okay, I'll let you deal with all this accordingly."

Nicholas hummed in response, and then the two of them remained silent.

The entire room descended into silence, and there seemed to be a strange vibe in the air.

Meanwhile, Ian silently heaved a sigh as he looked at the duo, who were silent around each other. I wonder when Master Nicholas and Old Master Remus will be able to reconcile with each other?

Unfortunately, Nicholas was unaware of Ian's laments. So, he sat there for a while before taking his leave.

As soon as Remus saw that, he seemed to have something to say, but he kept the words to himself and

ended up not saying a word. Instead, he merely waved and dismissed Nicholas.

He instantly saw Hayley standing outside when he walked out of the hospital.

He had intended to continue ignoring her and walk off, but she stopped him in his tracks.

"Nicholas, I would like to have a chat with you."

She lifted her head and stared at him with a stubborn expression.

Instantly, Nicholas' expression darkened. "I don't think that I have anything to discuss with you, Miss Stone. Besides, we're not close, so please address me as President Sawyer."

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At this point, his cold words made her grit her teeth, and she felt extremely aggrieved and upset.

She looked at the distant man in front of her as she took a deep breath. Then, she insisted, "We have things to discuss. For starters, I want to know why you've been ignoring me each time you see me."

"Perhaps you're too insignificant then. That's why I couldn't see you." Nicholas responded coldly, shifting his sight from her to look ahead.

Not too far from them, Tessa was dressed in a beige trench coat, a formal shirt, and a pair of tailored, straight-leg trousers. She looked elegant as she stood there.

Her dainty little face was devoid of makeup, yet she still looked stunning.

Always Been Yours Chapter 522

Always Been Yours Chapter 522

Meanwhile, Gregory stood beside her, dressed quite smartly, and looked cherubic and cool.

The cold aura surrounding Nicholas dissipated significantly as soon as he laid eyes on the two of them.

Hayley sensed the change in him, too, and she instinctively turned around to look in the same direction. Instantly, her expression twisted into a nasty scowl as she did not expect to see Tessa at the hospital.

At that point, Gregory saw Hayley, too, and immediately pouted.

He disliked Hayley tremendously as she was always bothering his daddy.

As soon as Gregory thought of that, he immediately waved at Nicholas, yelling, "Daddy! Come here!"

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Nicholas smiled and nodded upon hearing Gregory call out to him.

As for Hayley, she panicked upon seeing that he was about to leave.

She stretched out both of her arms and blocked

Nicholas's path. "You can't leave! You haven't answered my question."

As soon as he saw that this woman blocked his road yet again, his expression turned thunderous as he exuded a menacing aura that was frankly rather terrifying.

"Step aside." His thin lips parted, and he spoke with an oppressive aura that made one unable to reject him.

Hayley sensed an indiscernible stifling aura that hit her like a brick wall, and her heart suddenly shuddered.

Nonetheless, she clenched her teeth and stood her stance. "I'm not going to step aside unless you tell me, in what way am I incomparable to Tessa!"

At this point, his already icy expression turned glacial, and Hayley felt as if hailstones were hitting her face.

"How dare you compare yourself to Tessa?" His words instantly caused her expression to turn significantly uglier than before.

She clenched both fists tightly, and her rage threatened to spill over.

However, Nicholas disregarded the ugly expression on her face as he continued to speak mercilessly, "Don't

challenge me! My patience is limited, and neither you nor your family would be able to face the consequences of my wrath!"

After he had said that, he no longer bothered with her as he strode past her to head toward Tessa's direction.

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Tessa kept her eyes on the tall, handsome man walking purposefully toward her, with a faint smile on her face.

Actually, she had arrived earlier to wait for him here as they had already agreed to meet for dinner.

However, she didn't expect Hayley to be at the hospital either.

As soon as Tessa thought of this, she shot a look at Hayley.

Unexpectedly, their eyes met, and they looked at each other squarely.

Tessa could sense the burning hatred in Hayley's eyes, and she couldn't help frowning in response.

However, Nicholas' tall figure soon blocked her line of sight.

"Don't look at her. She's just an insignificant nobody, so you don't have to pay heed to her."

While he said that, he wrapped his arms around her as he escorted her into the car parked by the roadside.

She merely nodded and left alongside him.

However, she could still sense a gaze full of hostility behind her, which was quite an uncomfortable sensation. She didn't even have to look back to tell who was the owner of that gaze full of hatred.

Besides, she was well aware that Hayley wouldn't let things slide just like that despite Nicholas' claim that she was just an insignificant nobody.

Of course, Tessa wouldn't back down either.

Since Tessa had already decided to remain together with Nicholas, she would stand up for her own right to do so.

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Once they entered the car, he held onto her hand as he instructed Edward to be the driver.

Gregory sat by the side and acted like an adult as he chided Nicholas, "Daddy, you're not allowed to meet any other woman besides Miss Tessa from now onward, especially that woman from earlier! Miss Tessa will get jealous."

As soon as Tessa heard Gregory stand up for her, she found herself smiling sweetly, and a warm fuzzy feeling rose within her.

"Greg, you're so adorable! What should I do, huh? I love you so much!" Tessa couldn't help herself as she reached out to take him into her arms. Then, she started kissing and caressing his face tenderly.

Gregory burst into laughter, and he was gleeful as she repeatedly kissed him. Finally, he yelled out, "I love you the most too, Miss Tessa!"

As for Nicholas, he watched the interaction between the two, and his well-sculpted features were full of tenderness.

On the other end, Hayley saw them left together, and she had a menacing look in her eyes that was quite terrifying.

She finally realized that she no longer stood a chance at that moment. She was pretty indignant as she felt that Tessa was incomparable to her in every single aspect, so how could Tessa possibly win Nicholas's affections.

She stared in the direction where Nicholas and the rest had disappeared, and she spoke through gritted teeth and a poisonous expression, "Tessa, if I can't have him, then neither can you!"

Meanwhile, Remus looked through the upstairs window and heaved a sigh upon seeing Hayley leave with an extremely resentful look.

Always Been Yours Chapter 523

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Always Been Yours Chapter 523

Nicholas, Gregory, and Tessa were all eating together in a high-class private room of an Italian restaurant.

During the meal, Tessa kept taking care of Gregory.

"Miss Tessa, you should eat too. Don't just take care of me.

Gregory then blinked while looking at her expectantly, giving her something that he thought was delicious.

Understanding what he was hinting at, Tessa ate what he gave her.

After she chewed the dish a few times, she praised it by saying, "It's so good."

"I also thought that it was good. That's why I gave some to you."

Gregory beamed, and his eyes turned to crescents at the praise.

Tessa smiled even more, when she heard this. "But, I only thought that it was delicious because it was given to me by you, Greg."

Her words made him overjoyed.

Nicholas looked at their interactions dotingly as he sat quietly by the side.

Later, Gregory, after finishing his meal, sat on his chair and entertained himself.

While she ate, Tessa inquired about Old Master Sawyer's condition.

"How's your grandfather's condition?"

"He can be discharged tomorrow. Then, he just needs to recuperate at home. It's not a big deal," Nicholas told her truthfully.

Nodding, Tessa replied, "It's good that he's finally being discharged."

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"Let's change the subject."

Nicholas smiled and said as he didn't want to continue this conversation.

So she nodded, and they then talked about the matter of her going abroad.

"I'll be going abroad in a few days. I don't suppose you two can come with me?"

Nicholas didn't deny it and only said, "With the current situation, I can't really live abroad for too long anymore."

Gregory immediately retorted when he heard this, "Daddy, you not being able to do so doesn't mean that I can't. Let me go live abroad with Miss Tessa. That way, I'll be able to have her all to myself."

Toward the end, he suddenly became giggly and bubbly at the thought.

Unfortunately, he was met with instant rejection the moment he finished saying those words. "No way."

"Why?" Gregory pouted unhappily.

"First off, your grandparents would never agree to this. Besides, Miss Tessa will need to take care of you if you go with her on top of needing to manage a whole orchestra. Are you trying to work her to death?"

After Gregory heard Nicholas' logical deduction, it made him hang his head in dismay.

Then, Tessa, who felt sorry for Gregory, hugged him and said comfortingly, "It's fine. Whenever I have the time, I can come back to visit you. Besides, your daddy can also bring you to visit me whenever he's free."

Her words made Nicholas nod in agreement. "Whenever we have time, I will visit you."

She looked up and saw his determined gaze causing her to smile sweetly while nodding in response.

However, her emotions still got affected, as she started to feel reluctant to leave.

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Even if they hadn't been separated just yet.

Although she kept up her facade, Nicholas still noticed something, but he chose not to say anything at the moment.

After they were finished with dinner, the trio returned home.

Tessa, with Gregory in tow, went to bathe.

After the bath, she coaxed him to sleep before tiptoeing out of his room.

Suddenly, she got carried by the waist from behind just as soon as she exited.

"Oh! Nicholas, what are you doing?"

Then, she smiled at the handsome man before her and added, "We should put a bell on you."

"I was worried that Greg wasn't letting you leave after waiting for you for so long."

Nicholas then carried her back to their bedroom without hiding his want for her.

After tussling about, Tessa laid relaxingly in his embrace.

The moment she started thinking that they were about to be separated, it made her feel sad and reluctant to go.

"I really wish that time could pass by slower."

Nicholas lowered his gaze when he heard this, and saw that the woman in his arms had a very mournful expression.

He kissed her forehead, then spoke in a sincere yet husky voice, "Rest assured. I will keep my promise and visit you often."

In the coming days, maybe it was due to Tessa leaving soon; Nicholas tried his best to make time to spend it with her.

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Timothy also did the same thing.

And, of course, it was Gregory that was the most clingy.

Always Been Yours Chapter 524

Always Been Yours Chapter 524

Apart from heading to the toilet and sleeping, Gregory was like a part of Tessa in that he followed her wherever she went.

"Miss Tessa, I don't want you to leave."

He was reluctant to let her go while he had his arms wrapped around her neck like a koala.

Although she had the same feelings, Tessa still consoled him by replying, "It's no big deal. When I leave, we can still video call every day just like before."

Gregory pouted but still accepted her promise.

As she looked at the sad boy, she quickly played some games with him to divert his attention.

After a short while, a smile finally appeared on his face.

On this day, just as Nero arrived at the office, he was interrupted by his assistant, who knocked before coming in with a somewhat awful expression.

"Mr. Stone, our revised proposal was rejected by the Sawyer Group again."

"Rejected again?!" Nero then asked with an awful expression, "What does the Sawyer Group expect from us?"

"Mr. Stone, how about you personally make a trip to their company?"

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His assistant carefully suggested while looking at a livid Nero.

In reality, even without the advice of his assistant, he was already planning to make a visit there.

As the Sawyer Group had been repeatedly rejecting the proposal, it caused Nero to reach his tipping point as he thought that Nicholas was intentionally taunting him.

"Prepare the car. We'll be going to the Sawyer Group now!"

Since he was unable to hold himself back any longer, Nero wanted to talk this over with Nicholas immediately. If there were any dissatisfaction, both parties could just express their honest thoughts in person.

Later in the day, at the Sawyer Group in President Sawyer's office.

Edward respectfully reported after knocking on the door, "President Sawyer, President Stone has requested to meet you."

"Reject him." Nicholas didn't even think twice before replying.

At this point, he held the utmost disdain for the Stones, so he did not want to waste even a second on them.

Even though Edward knew the thoughts of his president, it was only that...

"President Sawyer, President Stone is here due to the issues surrounding the proposal."

Nicholas looked up from behind the documents when he heard this. "I'll leave this to your discretion. Tell him that if he has any issues, we can forgo this collaboration and we won't work on any future project together from now on."

"Yes, sir."

Edward nodded and left after receiving his orders.

He boarded the elevator and went down to the main hall at the entrance.

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the moment Nero saw Edward, Nero's face immediately brightened.

He thought that Edward had received an order from Nicholas to lead the way, so Nero stood at his spot without moving as he was waiting for Edward to come and invite him up.

Unfortunately, reality was much cruder than dreams.

"I'm sorry, President Stone. Our president is currently swamped and does not have the time to meet you."

Edward relayed Nicholas' words with a polite and professional smile.

The expression on Nero's face froze as he could feel the rage surge within him.

He did not think that Nicholas was unwilling to meet with him even after he came personally!

However, he still managed to restrain his anger in the end. On the way here, he had thought about why these things were happening and concluded that Nicholas was most likely taking out his anger on them as they were the reason why his grandfather was hospitalized in the first place.

"Mr. Jackson, could you please help me to relay the message that I'm not only here to talk about the project but to straighten everything out with your president?"

Nero felt a bit humiliated as he spoke politely to Edward.

This was because it made it seem like he was begging Edward just for a chance to meet with Nicholas.

Even though Edward noticed this, he didn't mind it very much.

After all, as Nicholas' right-hand man, loads of people would ask him for favors on a daily basis.

"President Stone, our president is really busy. As for the project, our president has said that if the Stones have any problems with us rejecting your proposal and would not like

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to cooperate, you can choose to give up. If you do that, we will never collaborate on another project with you again.”

After Nero heard his words, it caused his expression to be dark as charcoal. Nicholas really is taking this to the extreme.

Unfortunately, all he could do was inhale deeply to suppress his rage. Finally, he said in a low tone, “If so, then I won’t trouble you anymore, Mr. Jackson.”

Edward nodded politely before leaving once he heard those words.

While taking note of this, Nero clenched his teeth and would ask his people to contact Tobias directly.

He decided that since Nicholas did not want to see him, he would just resort to seeing his elders to solve this problem.

Always Been Yours Chapter 525

Always Been Yours Chapter 525

Tobias, sitting on his sofa in his luxurious office, looked through the documentation of the project brought by Nero.

“I don’t think there are any glaring issues on my part of the investment, so I’m not sure why Nicholas kept on rejecting my proposals. Originally, I wanted to have a talk with him, but he was too busy.”

Nero sat at the side as he indirectly hinted to Tobias that Nicholas was just purposefully making things hard on him.

After a while, Tobias closed the document, saying perfunctorily, “It’s true the proposal seems fine. I’ll talk to him about him later.”

Even though he did say that, he still didn’t immediately give the green light for the project.

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Nero was very dissatisfied with how this was all playing out.

His aim in finding Tobias was to secure the project's approval from him after all.

"Mr. Sawyer, since you said the proposal is fine, how about we proceed to the next stage today?"

When he heard Nero's words, Tobias glanced at Nero as a strange gleam flashed in his eyes.

Then, he avoided the question after putting the document aside by replying, "Now, I'm already in a half-retired state, so most of the decision-making for the company is left in Nicholas' hands."

In other words, he would not interfere in company matters.

Nero felt an anger pool in his chest when he understood what Tobias was hinting at. It got so much that even his face reflected his leaking rage.

Yet, he soon regained his composure as he continued to persuade Tobias. "Since I've already brought the proposal here, and Nicholas is such a busy man, we can just confirm our collaboration first. As for the others, I will let my company make more adjustments to suit your needs."

Nero, who had conceded to such a degree, thought that Tobias would show some respect for him and show him some leniency.

Yet, Tobias still stood his ground.

"Since I'm already ready to retire, there are some rules that I cannot break."

After this, Tobias changed the subject altogether, as he did not leave any chance for Nero to continue discussing this issue.

Later, when he finally returned to Stone Enterprise, Nero's mood was terrible.

Hayley rushed to the president's office once she discovered that her father had returned from the Sawyer Group.

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"Dad, did you manage to get his approval? What did Nicholas say?"

She asked the moment she opened the door.

But, all that greeted her was her father's awful expression, making her heart fall as she started thinking of the worst-case scenario.

"Dad, did Nicholas still not approve of the proposal?"

"Not only did he not agree to it, but I also did not even get to see him! On top of that, I even got humiliated!"

The rage within Nero finally overflowed at this point, as he bellowed, "Look at what your idiocy caused! Did you know that Nicholas only sent his men to talk to me?"

Hayley became a bit afraid when she faced her father's wrath.

But, she still bit her lips and continued asking, "What did he say?"

"He said that if we were unwilling, we could give up the collaboration, and they would never work with us again!"

Nero said this through gritted teeth.

His words shocked Hayley. It would be the worst-case scenario if they did not want to collaborate anymore.

"Then, did you go to find Mr. Sawyer, Dad? There's no way he would agree to Nicholas' ridiculous decision."

Yet, her father's anger only grew just as she finished speaking.

"I did! It was useless!"

Hayley bit down on her lip harshly and knew that they were in big trouble now.

On the other end, not long after Nero had left, Edward knocked before entering the president's office.

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"President Sawyer, the person from the Stone Family had left already. Also, even though the chairman has agreed to meet him, he did not agree to the

collaboration either."

"Noted. You can leave if there's nothing else."

Nicholas nodded nonchalantly, then dismissed Edward, motioning him to leave.

On this day, after fulfilling fifteen days of imprisonment, Kathleen was finally released from jail.

Hathaway had been waiting at the exit bright and early as she knew her daughter was being released today.

Kathleen was still not used to the sun's bright light when she stepped out of the compound.

As she raised her hand to block out the piercing rays, she looked a lot thinner.

When Hathaway saw her daughter in such a state, it made her heart pang with pain.

She immediately went up to her and held her daughter's hand, saying, "Oh, look at you. Come, let's go back."

Kathleen grunted then got into Hathaway's car.

Back at the hotel, Hathaway gave Kathleen some time alone to bathe before ordering room service.

Kathleen did not say much during this period, seeming to be at peace.

But, for some unknown reason, Hathaway had a nagging feeling that something was not quite right the more she looked at her quiet daughter...

Always Been Yours Chapter 526

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Always Been Yours Chapter 526

After the meal, Hathaway and Kathleen sat on the couch when she asked her daughter about her days in prison.

"How are you these days when you were held in detention? Did anyone bully you?"

Kathleen looked at her caring mother; an unfathomable emotion flashed across her clear, blue eyes. "I don't want to talk about this," she nonchalantly responded.

Hathaway was stunned to hear that, but she cooperatively nodded. "Alright. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Kathleen pursed her lips and said nothing more. She darted a glance at the door, puzzled that nobody from the orchestra had greeted her although she had returned for quite a while, so she asked, "Where are others from the orchestra?"

"They have gone back; I'm the only one waiting for you here." Hathaway briefly explained what had happened in the past few days.

Kathleen, uninterested in understanding those trivial matters, interrupted, "What happened to the performance after that incident?"

"The performance—" Hathaway seemed hesitant.

"Was the performance cancelled?" Kathleen frowned.

"No, that didn't happen." Hathaway shook her head and denied it. Then, when she saw her daughter's intent gaze, she confessed, "The performance went on as usual, but I had Tessa replace your role."

Sure enough, as soon as she said that, Kathleen could no longer maintain her calm expression.

"You had Tessa replace me?" She viciously glared at Hathaway as though the latter was not her mother but her enemy.

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Hathaway was startled by the viciousness of Kathleen's glare and tried to explain, "At that time, the performance was imminent, and it was too late to arrange for someone else to replace you. Besides, Tessa is capable—"

Kathleen, who could not continue to listen to her explanation, indignantly roared, "Enough!"

At that instant, she erupted like a volcano and started throwing and smashing anything she could grab around her as if everything before her was offensive to her eyes.

Hathaway was staggered by her rage; it was only when she heard the sound of glass breaking did she return to her senses.

The living room that quickly became a mess made her expression fall into a stern one, and she reprimanded, "Kathleen, have you lost your mind? Stop that!"

However, her words unexpectedly pissed Kathleen even more. "Me? Lost my mind? Let me ask you this— are you even my mother?!"

She stared at Hathaway angrily with wide eyes as though she was going to swallow the latter whole. "Ever since the woman named Reinhart showed up in our lives, you have been siding with her. Just be honest —you want that b*tch, Tessa, to replace me as your daughter, don't you? That is why you didn't even visit me when I was in detention!"

Hathaway felt furious and distressed in the face of her daughter's accusation, but she still suppressed her anger and tried to explain, "I didn't mean it that way. I told you that the time was light and there wasn't any other suitable candidate in the orchestra to take your place. Tessa just happened to possess the skills for that role, so I requested her to replace you.

"Hah, she possesses the skills?! You're just being impartial." Kathleen refused to accept her mother's explanation and laughed mockingly. "My assistant

concertmaster is also qualified to replace my role, so why didn't you ask her to replace me instead?"

"No, she couldn't. She is still lacking in many aspects." Hathaway unhesitatingly dismissed the suggestion before she said, "Kathleen, calm down. Let's talk things out."

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"Calm down? I'm sorry for being unable to calm down. Besides, there's nothing for us to talk about!" Then, after she screamed at Hathaway, she turned around and left.

Hathaway went after her worriedly, only to find that Kathleen had merely returned to her room. She felt relieved but couldn't help but feel disappointed in her daughter as well.

Hathaway had initially thought that Kathleen would change into a better person after that incident, but judging from the current situation, Kathleen seemed to even resent Hathaway after this.

Hathaway felt dejected at that thought.

Meanwhile, Tessa, who was at the Dynasty Gardens, was aware that this was the day when Kathleen was released from detention.

However, she was conflicted if she should pay Kathleen a visit at the hotel.

Always Been Yours Chapter 527

Always Been Yours Chapter 527

Although Tessa disliked Kathleen, she could not deny the fact that Kathleen was Miss Hathaway's daughter.

Fine, I'll just think of it as visiting Miss Hathaway. Tessa finally decided, after a brief hesitation, so she asked Andrew to help her to arrange for her transport.

"Miss Tessa, where are you going? I want to tag along too." Gregory ran over to Tessa when he found out that she was heading out.

However, Tessa rejected his request this time as she squatted down and explained, "I'm going to meet Miss Hathaway. It will be inconvenient to bring you along."

"Why? I'll be a good boy, and I won't disturb you," he pleaded at her with a pout.

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Unfortunately, Tessa had made up her mind this time. After all, she had no idea what Kathleen would do when they met.

After some time, Tessa, who had arrived at the hotel, knocked on Hathaway's door.

When Hathaway opened the door, she was shocked to see her. "Tessa, what brings you here?"

Tessa smiled and explained, "Kathleen is released from detention today, so I came to visit her. Is she inside?" She glanced into the room as she spoke.

A mixture of complex emotions appeared on Hathaway's face when she heard that. "Kathleen has returned to her room. Thank you for coming all the way here. Please come in."

Tessa nodded and entered the room, closing the door behind her. After she took a seat, she asked with concern, "How is she?"

"She's still the same," Hathaway sighed in disappointment.

Tessa could guess that Kathleen and Hathaway might have had some disagreement before she came when she saw Hathaway's dejected expression.

She suddenly didn't know what to say; the air felt heavy at that instant.

Fortunately, Hathaway soon managed to compose herself.

As she looked at the silent Tessa, she forced a smile on her face as she comforted, "Don't worry. Kathleen will come to her senses sooner or later."

Although Tessa didn't buy it in the slightest, she still nodded so as to not cause her teacher to feel unnecessary worries.

Hathaway continued. "Since you are here, I have something to tell you."

"What's the matter?"

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"You may have to return to Vienna on your own this time. I'm worried that Kathleen may do something to you, so I think that it'd be better if both of you don't meet for the time being. I'll try to talk some sense into her first."

"It's fine. I'm sorry that you have to deal with this." Tessa was unfazed by it. Instead, she was touched by Hathaway's concern for her.

After that, the two ladies talked about their subsequent arrangements before Tessa made a move to excuse herself.

That night, Tessa played with Gregory in the living room. One could hear a bubbly, childish voice accompanied by a girl's delicate voice from the living room from time to time.

When Nicholas returned home, he was greeted by the heartwarming scene, which instantly put a warm glow on his cold, chiselled expression.

Just then, Gregory, who noticed Nicholas standing in the foyer, ran up to him excitedly.

"Daddy." He threw himself at Nicholas' leg and raised his little head; his dark pupils, which seemed to contain stars, were sparkling.

Nicholas took him into his arms affectionately while striding toward Tessa.

Tessa curled her lips and flashed him a sweet smile when she saw the tall man slowly walking up to her. "Welcome home."

Nicholas nodded, then took a seat on the couch with Gregory in his arms.

Andrew, who was standing not far away from them, took in the scene and felt warm inside. They are just like a family. I wonder when Master Nicholas is going to marry Reinhart.

Meanwhile, Nicholas, who was utterly clueless about Andrew's thoughts, played with Tessa's well-defined hands as he casually chatted with her. "You said that you would visit Kathleen earlier today. I low did it go?"

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"Miss Hathaway said that Kathleen didn't change at all; she's still the same." Tessa sighed, then briefly explained what she had learned from Hathaway.

Nicholas frowned upon hearing that; his expression became colder. It seems like Kathleen still hasn't learned her lesson, which indicates that the punishment was not heavy enough. However, he was careful not to let Tessa notice his thoughts.

He stretched his arms and embraced her before lowering his head and gently murmured, "Have you considered not leaving? I have a feeling that you may be bullied if you go."

Always Been Yours Chapter 528

Always Been Yours Chapter 528

"I am not an easy target for bullies." Tessa chuckled, raising her eyes to meet Nicholas before continuing, "Don't worry. It will only be tough for me to get along with Kathleen, but Miss Hathaway is still a sensible person. Besides, we are not on the same team."

Hathaway Philharmonic will have many performances coming up, so I don't have to deal with her much. I'll be fine."

Nicholas smiled and gave in to her when he saw the girl's confidence in the matter. As a matter of fact, he hadn't been entirely serious when he brought up the topic as this was Tessa's dream after all.

Nonetheless, he still urged, "Still, you must tell me if you are bullied after you return."

"Sure. I'll definitely tell you," Tessa promised, wrapping her arms around his waist with a bright grin on her face.

Just then, Gregory nudged himself over to them. Then, he patted himself on the chest as he declared, "Miss Tessa, it's okay! I'll protect you too!"

His 'manly' act instantly melted Tessa's heart with the sheer adorableness of his actions.

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"Greg, how could you be so cute!" She hugged the boy affectionately, kissing and cuddling him tightly, and the boy happily giggled in her arms.

Nicholas affectionately gazed at the interaction between the two figures as he sat beside them. At that moment, he felt that his life was a fulfilled one.

When the two stopped playing around after a while, Nicholas took Tessa's hand and asked, "When are you planning to leave?"

Gregory turned to Tessa as well when he heard the question.

Although Tessa was reluctant to leave, she still told them their plan. "I should be leaving the day after tomorrow. Miss Hathaway and the others will be leaving tomorrow."

Nicholas nodded and didn't make any comments, but Gregory, who had not expected her to leave so soon, pouted and tried to make her stay. "Miss Tessa, can't you stay for a few more days?"

Despite knowing that the little guy was reluctant to see her leave so soon, Tessa shook her head. "I can't. It will affect my studies if I continue to stay after my teacher leaves."

That night, Gregory pestered Tessa even more.

Perhaps it was because he now knew that Tessa would be leaving soon.

After she finally managed to put the child to sleep, she was then pestered by the father. Their intimacy began in the bathroom, and then it continued all the way to the bed; it was so intense that it was tough for her to keep up with Nicholas.

After another round of 'battle' was over, Tessa felt as though her body was falling apart.

As she lay weakly in his arms, she protested weakly, "What's wrong with you tonight? You were insatiable!"

He felt slightly sorry for her when he saw how exhausted she was.

"You're leaving. I miss you already." He embraced her tightly, his voice deep and sonorous like a cello.

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His reason made her feel speechless. "It was still too much." She gave a light smack on his chest as she grumbled.

He held her hand and chuckled with his lowered eyes. "Yeah, you are right. I promise to be gentle next time."

"Next—" Her words were drowned in his gentle kisses.

The next morning when Tessa woke up, her whole body felt so sore as though it had been run over by a car. On the other hand, Nicholas seemed energetic; even his expression revealed his satiated desire.

As he looked at the girl struggling to get out of the bed, he smiled lightly and said, "Get some more rest since you don't have any plans today. I'll come back and bring you out for dinner in the evening."

Tessa, who thought that it was a sensible suggestion, decided to save herself the trouble of getting out of bed when her body was in such a state.

"Let's invite Tim too," she suggested while lying on the bed, to which he rejected. "No, just the two of us will do."

His response enlightened her of his thoughts, which made her feel both happy and resigned at the same time.

In the end, she could not change his mind, so she agreed to his plans.

However, since she would not be having dinner with Timothy at night, she decided to have lunch with him instead.

When it was almost noon, Tessa brought Gregory out and went directly to Reinhart Group.

Timothy was surprised to see both of them at the office.

"Tess, Greg, why are both of you here?"

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"I won't be able to have dinner with you tonight, so I thought to have lunch with you instead," she explained while leading Gregory over to the couch.

Always Been Yours Chapter 529

Always Been Yours Chapter 529

Timothy was stunned at first, but he then understood what she had implied. "Nicholas is so overbearing."

Although he grumbled, he still agreed to Tessa's suggestion in the end.

As it was her farewell meal, Henry joined them as well.

"Time sure flies. It doesn't feel like much time has passed, and Tess is going to leave again. My parents said that I should invite you to our house again when you're available," Henry exclaimed at the table.

"Let's do that when I come back again next time." Tessa agreed as she had a good impression of the Tompkins Family. "Please say hi to your parents on my behalf when you get home tonight."

Henry nodded agreeably.

Timothy gave her a piece of fish and said, "After you go back, you have to take care of yourself when I'm not by your side. You have to tell me if anyone bullies you."

"Don't worry. I'm never an easy target, so I won't allow anyone to bully me." She felt warm inside as she ate the fish that her brother gave her.

However, Timothy did not think the same, especially when he remembered the existence of Kathleen in the orchestra.

"Tess, please come back if you aren't happy in the orchestra. I can take good care of you now." He looked at her with an earnest expression.

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Tessa understood what he implied, which moved her. "Sure, if I can't stay in the orchestra, I'll come back, and you'll be responsible for me from then on."

Although Gregory did not fully understand what they were talking about, it did not stop him from expressing his thoughts. "Me too. I can take care of Miss Tessa too. I can give all my pocket money to her."

After lunch, Tessa decided to take Gregory back as Timothy had work in the afternoon.

However, as soon as the group left the restaurant, Timothy's phone rang.

"Is this Timothy?"

"Yes, I am. Who is on the line?"

"I'm calling from the General Hospital. Your grandmother is ill, and she is receiving treatment in the hospital. We need her family members here, so I hope that you can come over as soon as possible."

Unfortunately, the nurse on the other end of the line ended the call immediately after that.

Timothy furrowed his brows tightly in annoyance due to the call.

Tessa asked curiously when she saw his gloomy face, "Did something happen?"

Gregory and Henry looked at him in concern too.

Timothy immediately explained the situation after seeing their concerned looks, "Amber is ill, and the hospital couldn't get in touch with anyone else, so they called me and asked me to go over."

Although he resented the Reinharts, he could not just ignore the situation. "Tess, take Greg home first. I'll head over to the hospital."

Tessa was stunned by the turn of events, but she suddenly realized that Timothy was talking about their so-called grandmother.

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"Will you be fine going there alone?" She looked at her brother worriedly; she could still remember clearly how overbearing and intractable the Reinharts were as they had left a profound impression on her, and none of it was good.

He comforted her as he knew that Tessa was worried

about him, "Don't worry. Just leave it to me. Don't forget that I'm not the same as how I used to be in the past, and the Reinhart Family is not the old Reinhart Family anymore."

However, Tessa was still worried. So, she insisted on tagging along, worried that that old lady might bully Timothy.

He had no choice but to give in to her persevere request.

Both of them soon arrived at the hospital. Under the nurse's lead, they finally saw Amber in a ward.

Amber was genuinely ill. Her face was as pale as paper, and she had lost a lot of weight.

The nurse advised them. "Don't leave such an old person at home alone next time. It was fortunate that the neighbors found out about her condition in time and sent her to the hospital."

Timothy and Tessa wore complicated expressions upon seeing Amber.

The nurse, who seemed to notice the strange air, switched the topic. "One of you needs to come with me to complete the hospital admission procedure and settle the hospital bills."

"I'll go." Timothy volunteered. "Tess, wait for me here with Greg."

Tessa nodded and led Gregory to a chair to take a seat.

Gregory looked curiously at the old lady on the bed, then raised his head to look at Tessa, who was wearing a solemn look.

"Miss Tessa, don't you worry. Your granny will be fine." He thought that Tessa was worried about Amber, so he caressed her forehead like how she used to comfort him.

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Always Been Yours Chapter 530

Always Been Yours Chapter 530

Tessa froze before she smiled and held onto the child's chubby hand. "I'm not worried." She may be worried about others, but she would never worry about the Reinharts. Then, after a few minutes, Timothy returned to them. She immediately stood up when she saw him. "Have you handed the money over?" she asked.

He nodded as he glanced at the old lady on the hospital bed. He didn't feel like staying there any longer. "Let's go, Tessa." Tessa knew what was going on in her brother's mind, so she nodded in agreement. However, she didn't want to stay there either.

Gregory, on the other hand, seemed confused by the situation. He didn't understand why Tessa and Timothy didn't wait for the old lady to wake up, but he was a good boy, so he didn't ask any questions. Then, right when Tessa was about to leave the room, the old lady woke up from her coma.

She instantly recognized Tessa and Timothy and pointed a finger at both of them before shouting at them. "Have you two brats finally decided to come and visit me?"

Both Tessa and Timothy's faces fell upon hearing her voice. Even Gregory was shocked at her loud voice and

quickly held onto Tessa's hand.

Amber continued cursing and scolding them from where she lay on the hospital bed. Her words were increasingly harsh, and Tessa had to cover Gregory's ears before she shot Amber a cold glare. "That's enough. Do you think we want to be here? We aren't obligated to come over to visit you, you know? We've already paid for your medical fees. So, you shouldn't look for us ever again." Tessa turned to leave after finishing her words.

Amber returned to her senses after realizing that she had been shocked by Tessa for a moment. "Stand right there! Did I say you guys could leave?!" Amber was furious. She grabbed a cup that was placed by the side of her bed before throwing it in Tessa's direction.

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The cup flew toward Tessa from a sideways angle, so she didn't see it coming. Meanwhile, Timothy had keen eyes and quick reflexes as he immediately pulled his sister away. Clang! The cup fell to the ground and shattered into pieces.

Tessa was too shocked to react for a moment, but she felt anger gushing through her body when she realized what had happened. Although she was angry at how Amber threw the cup at her, she was more worried that the cup would injure Gregory. So, she instantly pulled him behind her to protect him.

Timothy was just as angry, and his eyes burned with rage as he glared at Amber. "What do you think you're doing?!" he shouted.

"What am I doing? I'm teaching you guys a lesson on behalf of your father. Both of you are traitors. You guys don't even care whether your grandma's alive! I might as well just beat you guys to death now!" the old lady screamed.

"Aunt Tessa is not a traitor! You can't call her that!" Although Gregory was afraid of the old lady, he still ran in front of Tessa before spreading his arms out to protect her. Tessa felt extremely touched when she saw the tiny boy standing in front of her.

Amber froze when she saw the young boy running out. She had been paying too much attention to Timothy and Tessa, so she hadn't realized the child's presence at all. "Where did this brat come from? Step aside! Who gave you the right to speak up? Children should only speak when spoken to!" Amber hissed.

Tessa's face darkened when she heard what the old lady said. She quickly pressed her palms over Gregory's ears before speaking in an icy tone. So, she didn't bother to conceal her rage at all. "Watch your mouth. He's not someone you can afford to insult.

Also, we've cut all familial ties with the Reinharts since you chased Timothy and me out!"

"Do you think we've cut all ties just because you claimed that we're not related? Let me tell you this—as long as you guys still have the Reinharts' blood in you, you will always be part of our family!" Amber immediately refuted Tessa's point when she heard Tessa trying to cut ties with her.

Timothy let out an angry scoff as he glared at the old lady. "It's like you're the only one who gets to make the decisions. Who do you think we are? It seems like we were foolish

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to care about your survival. We'll just let you die on your own if this happens again. Don't ever look for us in the future!" he yelled.

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