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Timothy dragged Tessa and Gregory toward the door upon finishing his words. Amber was shocked by Timothy's determined glare, and she began to panic. After all, there was really no one else apart from Timothy and Tessa who could care for her. At that thought, she quickly called for them to come back. "Hold on. I'm not done talking! You guys can't leave just yet!"

Timothy didn't intend to turn back at first, but he still stopped in his tracks in the end. "What else do you have to say?" he asked with a blank look on his face, causing Tessa to turn around as well.

Amber's eyes glistened as she spoke. "As a child of the Reinhart Family, it's your duty to ensure the family's livelihood. I won't scold you again in the future, but I want you to come back. You should remain filial to

VI me.

He sneered as he stared at the old lady while speaking in a firm tone. "It's impossible for me to return to the Reinhart Family. However, since you insist that we're related by blood, I guess the most I can do is to give you some allowance every month. That's all I'd be willing to do for you."

Amber disagreed with his suggestion, as the allowance

Timothy offered her was a pittance in comparison to the value he could bring to the family if he were to stay with the Reinharts. "You're a child of the Reinhart Family, so you should take responsibility for the family's duties. You can't expect to get rid of me by offering some allowance. Do you think I need that money from you?"

Timothy noticed the greedy look on her face, and he could tell what she was trying to do. "You need to get rid of those nasty ideas in your head. If you push me any further, I might just decide not to give you any money at all! Tessa and I aren't obligated to give you anything!" he warned.

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“How dare you?! I’m still your biological grandmother!” Amber’s expression was sour, and she gritted her teeth as she reminded them of her role in their lives.

Tessa let out a sarcastic laugh. “You never once claimed that you were our grandmother in the past,” she said in disdain.

“I don’t care. Now, you have to return to the Reinhart Family and take care of me!” Amber decided to just throw a tantrum when she realized that she didn’t have any good arguments against their points. However, Timothy didn’t seem to care about her. “Stop testing my patience. Otherwise, I’ll do what I threatened to do earlier. I won’t hesitate at all! So, I’m giving you a final warning, don’t bother us ever again.” He took large strides out of the room after finishing his words.

When Tessa saw him leaving, she hastily went after him while bringing Gregory along with her.

Amber was furious as she watched them turning their backs on her. “Don’t you dare leave! Don’t leave! I’m your biological grandmother! I’ll sue you guys if you guys ignore me!” She wailed and cried and threatened them while lying on the hospital bed, but Timothy didn’t care about her at all.

He was no longer the person who would allow others to tell him what to do. Now, he had enough power to protect himself and his sister. But, on the other hand, Tessa had never been afraid of the Reinharts, and she would remain unafraid of them in the future...

Just like that, both of them brought Gregory out of the hospital. Gregory could sense that they were in a bad mood, so he tagged along quietly without making a fuss at all. After they walked out of the hospital entrance, Timothy’s footsteps came to a halt.

He glanced at the blue skies above him. Finally, all the negative emotions he had suppressed within him seemed to have found an outlet to be released. He let out a long sigh as he felt himself calming down.

Tessa’s footsteps came to a halt as well. However, she didn’t feel as calm as he did because she had just thought of something that made her feel worse than before. She turned around and stared at her own brother before questioning him in a rather harsh tone. “I want you to be honest with me, Timothy. When I wasn’t in the country, did the Reinharts come over to cause you trouble?”

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"They didn't," he replied.

"Are you sure?" She eyed him suspiciously.

He responded in a firm tone. "I'm sure. They stopped causing me trouble after coming to my company once." She still didn't fully believe him after hearing his words. "But why did they look for you when Grandma was hospitalized this time?" she asked.

"I guess they called me because they couldn't find anyone else," Timothy answered after thinking about her question. "The rest of them are either in prison or hiding somewhere far away. You changed your number before leaving the country. So, who else can they look for if not me?"

Tessa figured that his explanation made sense. When Timothy saw that he had convinced his sister by his narrative, he continued speaking. "You don't have to worry about me. I can deal with something as trivial as this."

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Despite what he said, Tessa still insisted on reminding him to watch out for himself. "You need to remember to protect yourself first," she said gently. He nodded quietly. After leaving the hospital, Timothy returned to the office while Tessa brought Gregory home. While they were on the way back, Gregory clung to Tessa while mumbling to her. "Your grandmother is a fierce and bad person, Aunt Tessa. I don't like her," he mumbled.

When she saw the young boy standing up for her, she recalled how he had tried to protect her while they were in the hospital ward. A warm feeling spread across her chest. She tapped Gregory on his nose while giggling. "I know, right? She used to bully me so badly."

Gregory felt sorry for her when he heard what she said. "Don't worry, Aunt Tessa. Daddy and I will always protect you from now on." He raised his tiny head up while staring at her with a sincere look in his eyes. When she saw the young boy looking at her so earnestly, she felt tears welling up in her eyes for some reason. She had to blink back the tears in order to stop herself from crying.

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“Okay. You can protect me once you’re all grown up, Gregory.” She lowered her head to plant a kiss on the young boy’s forehead. He ran his fingers across the spot she had kissed before spreading his lips into a wide grin. Later that night, Nicholas got off work and returned home just a while after Gregory and Tessa reached home. However, he wasn’t alone—Kieran was following closely behind him. Both of them walked over with their backs turned against the light, which sharpened their features and made them look especially attractive.

“Daddy! Uncle Kieran!” Gregory let out an excited cry when he saw them. Nicholas nodded before he laid his gentle gaze on Tessa. “You’re back,” she said with a sweet smile. She didn’t forget to greet Kieran as well. “It’s been a while, Young Master Kieran.”

To her surprise, Kieran shot her a rather annoyed gaze when he heard her words. “You can just call me by my name. Only outsiders call me Young Master Kieran.”

She froze for a moment as she hadn’t expected him to make a comment about her being a part of the family, and her face turned slightly warm. Then, she nodded in acknowledgment of his words.

The few of them chatted for a while more before Nicholas let out a light cough. He shot a glance in his brother’s direction. Kieran immediately understood what Nicholas meant, so he stood up and excused himself. “It’s getting late, Tessa. I’ll have to bring Gregory back to his grandmother’s.”

Tessa eyed Nicholas puzzledly. “Isn’t Gregory joining us for dinner tonight?” Even Gregory pouted to show his dissatisfaction. “You’re evil, Daddy. You’re taking me away again! You’re going to have Aunt Tessa all to yourself. I’m not leaving!” The young boy clung to Tessa’s arm as he spoke.

Nicholas wasn’t surprised by the boy’s reaction—he had already expected the boy to make a fuss. So, he shot Kieran another glance, and he responded with an okay’ signal before edging closer to the young boy. “Don’t come near me, Uncle Kieran. I’m not going to go with you.” Gregory edged closer to Tessa as he spoke.

Kieran began to address the boy in a soft tone. “I’m not bringing you anywhere, Gregory. I just want to talk to you for a while.” He bent down and whispered something into Gregory’s ear after that. When Kieran stood up again, Gregory’s face had a conflicted look. Soon enough, the young boy came to a shocking decision.

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“Fine. I’ll have dinner with Uncle Kieran tonight. I won’t stay with Aunt Tessa anymore,” Gregory mumbled. Then, he let go of Tessa before obediently shifting and standing next to Kieran.

Tessa was surprised to see what had just happened— she wanted to know what Kieran had told the young boy. However, she didn’t ask anything in the end.

Instead, she and Nicholas sent the other two off before they headed out for dinner.

Nicholas and Tessa sat opposite one another in a Western, posh-looking restaurant. They were the only two people in the restaurant, and a pleasant and lighthearted tune played from the speakers. Tessa looked at her surroundings with a sense of déjà vu. She thought about it for a while before realizing this was exactly what he would do before throwing her a surprise.

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“You didn’t plan some sort of surprise for me, did you?” she asked playfully while grinning at the man opposite her. Nicholas quickly knew what she was thinking, and he laughed before responding to her. ‘There’s no surprise this time. I just wanted to have a dinner date with you.’”

“Is that so?” She clearly didn’t believe what he was saying. Nicholas simply smiled without commenting any further. Right then, the restaurant waiters served their meals, all of which were Tessa’s favorite dishes. Nicholas urged her to taste the dishes. He thoughtfully picked out the bones from her fish and peeled her prawns. There was no surprise during their meal.

After they were done with dinner, Nicholas led her out of the restaurant. However, Tessa quickly realized that they weren’t heading back in the direction of Dynasty Gardens. “Aren’t we going home?” she turned to look at the man who seemed focused on driving.

The man’s gorgeous features seemed especially perfect under the dim, yellow street lights—she felt her heart fluttering at the sight of him. She wouldn’t seem to get bored of the man’s looks even though she saw him every day. Nicholas quickly realized how she

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was staring at him, and he curled his lips into a smile before speaking. “We’re not going home tonight. I’m bringing you to another place.”

His words evoked her sense of curiosity. “Where are we going?” she asked.

“You’ll find out later,” he replied. “Didn’t you say that there wasn’t going to be a surprise? You’re acting all mysterious now.” She gazed at him amusedly, but she was clearly pleased on the inside. Nicholas raised an eyebrow before speaking up for himself. “Well, you were asking me if there was a surprise during dinner, and it was true that there wasn’t any surprise then. So, I wasn’t lying to you.”

“Excuses!” she scoffed. However, the smile on her face gave it all away—she was obviously pleased that there was a surprise. About ten minutes later, the black car slopped at a villa by the mountains. Nicholas slipped his hand into Tessa’s and walked over while explaining himself. “This is one of the properties I bought in the past. Most of the time, the maids are the only ones who drop by to clean the place.” Both of them walked into the living room as they spoke.

The hall, which had been dark to begin with, seemed to have noticed their presence, for it turned bright as day once they entered the room. The villa’s design was just like its owner’s personality—minimalistic.

Nicholas didn’t stop in the hall—he led Tessa to the elevator that brought them up to the highest floor.

When she walked out of the elevator, she was shocked by the view before her eyes. He had turned the top floor into some sort of glass house and filled it with all kinds of expensive plants. The whole place looked like a paradise under the surrounding lighting. The air around them was filled with the scent of flora, and there was even an observatory in the middle of the garden. An expensive-looking telescope was placed on the platform, where they could look into it to see the night skies and observe the stars.

Nicholas wrapped his arms around her when he saw the dumbfounded look on her face. “Do you like this place?” he asked as he lowered his head to gaze at her.

“I do,” she said with a nod. “This place is gorgeous.”

Nicholas edged closer to the girl’s ear when he saw the happy look on her face. “I bought a star and named it after you,” he said. His deep, magnetic voice made her ears tingle,

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but she was more surprised by what he had just said. “Did you just say that you bought a star?!” she stared at him with a look of shock on her face.

He nodded before leading her to the telescope. “Do you want to take a look at it?” he asked.

When she finally regained her senses, she gave him a firm nod. “Yes!” She leaned closer to the telescope and looked into it to find a gleaming, maroon-colored planet looking back at her. A faint, blue light

surrounded it—this was a sight that she had never seen in her whole life. “It’s gorgeous...” she let out a soft sigh. She couldn’t stop herself from smiling.

Nicholas’ love for Tessa seemed to overflow out of his gaze as he looked at the girl’s mesmerized expression. After a while, his eyes glinted before he reached into his pocket to pull a gift box out of his pocket. He did so while Tessa was still mesmerized by the view.

Finally, he opened the box to reveal a diamond ring. The diamond ring adopted the most classic solitaire design seen in engagement rings. The five-carat pink diamond seemed brighter and sharper from where it lay in the ring holder. The exquisite ring holder had metal claws wrapped around the central stone, like a flower’s petals wrapped around its stamens. It wasn’t too different from the all-rounded protection given from one lover to another.

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If one looked closely, one would be able to see words carved on the inner curve of the ring. Nicholas walked over to Tessa before holding onto her right hand. He slipped the ring directly onto her ring finger. She noticed a cold sensation on her finger and instinctively looked down. She was stunned by what she saw. She gazed at her slender fingers to find a simple yet elegant ring on her fourth finger. “This is...”

Her head shot up to give Nicholas a puzzled gaze. A surge of anxiousness and eagerness filled her chest. He lowered his head and gazed at her before speaking in a

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relatively hoarse voice, "It's a wedding ring. Do you like it?" She froze for a moment before she ran her fingers across the ring. Her heart pounded like crazy— this entire thing caught her by surprise.

Nicholas took a long look at her expression before lifting his hand to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear. "I didn't want to let you go, but I knew I couldn't force you to stay by my side. This was the only way I could think of to keep you by my side when you're far away." The man's deep voice and his sweet words made her feel extremely touched.

She parted her lips as if she were about to say something, but before she could utter a single word, he pressed his finger against her lips. "Shush. Let me

finish my words," he spoke gently.

She took a look at the man before her eyes. In the end, she could only nod as she swallowed the words she had wanted to say.

Nicholas curled his lips into a smile before speaking in his warm and soft voice. "I know you might think of this as a really simplified form of a proposal, but I just thought that this would make you feel a little more secure. As long as this ring is with you, you will always feel like I'm by your side. I know you've always felt insecure since we started dating, but I just wanted you to know that we'll always be together. No matter where you are, I'll always be one call away. I'll always be there when you need me, no matter how far apart we are from one another."

After hearing his sweet words, Tessa pressed her lips together while staring at the handsome man in front of her. She felt like she was close to tears because she had never expected him to arrange such a surprise for her. Then, her vision started to grow blurry as tears filled her eyes.

"What am I supposed to do? I don't even feel like leaving now." She suddenly lowered her arms before taking a large step forward to hug him tightly. Her voice made her sound like she was smiling through her tears, and he smiled while hugging her back just as tightly.

"Don't leave, then. Stay with me." He rubbed his chin against her forehead while speaking in a tender voice. She pressed her face against his chest to hear his steady and strong heartbeat and remained silent for a long while afterward. How am I supposed to stay here? If I don't leave now, how will I ever be a good match for someone as outstanding as him? She kept quiet for a moment to contain her emotions.

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When she lifted her face from his chest, her watery eyes were filled with love for the man. "Although I'm going to miss you really badly, I believe that we'll have to be separated temporarily for the sake of a better future," she said. He naturally understood her intentions—he knew that she wanted to leave in order to prove that she was a woman who could match his standards. However, his emotions were a complete mess.

"I'll support you no matter what you do," he muttered as he tightened his arms around her body.

Tessa was too touched to speak, so she hugged him tightly and pressed her face against her chest again. Both of their bodies pressed against each other under the dim glow of the moon. Their surroundings—the lights, the fresh flowers, and the gorgeous decorations made them look like a scene from a painting.

Silence filled the air around them, and all they could hear was each other's heartbeats at that moment. After

a while, Nicholas finally released her before pointing at the telescope. "Why don't you look at it for a while more?"

"I don't need to look at it anymore. It's already imprinted in my mind forever." She shook her head before holding onto his arm and looking up at him. "I just want to be with you right now," she smiled sweetly.

He looked down to see the girl's longing and wistful gaze. So, he no longer made her do anything after that and simply wrapped his arms around her before leading her to a bench by the side.

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Tessa wrapped her arm around Nicholas's neck before gently pressing her other hand against his cheek. Her gentle touch and her unique, pleasant scent mesmerized him. To begin with, Nicholas, who couldn't resist her touch, felt like he was on fire when she did this to him. He held onto her hand before lowering his head and spoke in a low tone. "I can't promise I won't take action if you continue acting like that," he warned.

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Of course, Tessa understood what the man wanted when she heard his strained voice. “You can do whatever you want tonight. You can do anything you want to me.” She gave him a seductive gaze as she ran her hands all over him. She was like a goddess that could catch anyone’s eye. Nicholas couldn’t stand the way she was running her fingers through his hair, and it caused the muscles in his throat to tighten. His grip around her arms was unyielding—it was almost as if he was trying to sink his skin into hers.

“Don’t go against your word later!” he declared before grabbing onto the back of Tessa’s hair in one swift motion. Then, he lowered his head to press his lips against hers. Their limbs were all tangled up as they kissed one another passionately, and neither party could seem to stop. The temperature in the garden felt like it was increasing. Even the moon had shyly hidden behind the clouds due to their passionate embrace.

Tessa didn’t know how much time had passed when she felt like she was running out of breath. Nicholas finally let go of her then. She felt as if all the air had been sucked out of her body, and she rested her body limply against Nicholas’ chest. Her lips were slightly parted as she was panting due to exertion. There was a hint of redness in her fair cheeks, and her gaze was captivating and dazed at the same time.

When Nicholas saw the girl, he felt as if she had awakened something within him. However, his expression was one of restraint as he carried Tessa over to the elevator.

She clung to his neck as she fixed her dark brown eyes on him, and her gaze was filled with love and adoration for this man. Soon enough, they got to the bedroom, and he lowered her onto the bed before laying himself down as well.

Even though Tessa had a tiring night the day before, she was still willing to satisfy the man’s needs that night. After a whole night’s worth of action, Tessa had lost her voice, and she could barely open her eyes. All she wanted to do then was to lie in his embrace. It didn’t take her long for her to fall asleep. When he saw her sleeping form, Nicholas snuggled up against her with a complacent look on his face.

The next morning, Tessa woke up to feel her entire body aching from the night before. However, it was nothing compared to the heartache she felt. Finally, it was time for her to leave the country. She had breakfast with Nicholas and had to rush off to the airport after that. When they arrived, she saw that Timothy and Gregory had come over to send her off at the airport.

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"Why don't you stay here, Miss Tessa? I don't want to be away from you." Gregory wailed and bawled for a long while, and he flung his whole body onto Tessa and refused to let go of her. She could practically hear the sound of her heart breaking when she listened to the young boy's sobs. She knelt down and gave Gregory a tight hug to comfort him, but his tiny body continued to twitch and tremble along with his tearful cries.

"Be a good boy, Gregory. I'll miss you too, but I have to chase after my dreams for now," she murmured softly.

"Can't you chase after your dreams here?" Gregory asked sorrowfully as he stared at a blurry version of her as all the tears in his eyes clouded his vision. Tessa wiped the tears off the young boy's face as she tried her best to keep her eyes dry. "Stop crying, okay? You can get Daddy to bring you over to visit me when you miss me, okay?"

"Not okay! I don't want you to go," Gregory pouted and continued crying before clinging onto her hand. Tessa had no choice but to continue coaxing the young boy. It took a while for him to stop crying. He finally realized that he couldn't change anything about the fact that Tessa was leaving. So, he brushed his tears off his cheeks before speaking between hiccups. "You have to take care of yourself, Miss Tessa." He leaned in and gave her a kiss on her cheek after speaking.

Tessa felt her heart melting in response to the gentle and warm kiss on her cheek. "I promise that I'll come home to see you whenever I have the time, Gregory."

Gregory sniffled as he nodded. "You have to keep your promise, okay?"

"Don't worry. I will." She promised. Timothy stepped forward to speak to Tessa then. "You must take care of yourself when you're there, Tessa. You're going to be all alone. You shouldn't hold back if you ever feel like others are bullying you. Remember, I'll always be on your side."

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"Also, don't worry about me. I know how to take care of myself," Timothy stated seriously. When Tessa realized how much her brother had grown, she had to blink her

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eyes hard to force her tears back. “You have to take care of your health while I’m not around. You always forget to eat whenever you start working. I’ll get Nicholas to keep an eye on you. If I ever hear of you neglecting your health, I’m going to teach you a lesson once I’m back.” She faked a stern voice. This amused Timothy, but he nodded and promised her anyway.

Tessa then turned her attention to Nicholas. The moment she looked at him, she met his deep, dark gaze, and the world around them seemed to disappear at that moment. All they could see was each other. However, Nicholas stepped forward, breaking the eye contact they had just moments ago.

He lowered his head to plant a kiss on her forehead. “Call me when you’ve arrived, okay?” Although he didn’t say much else, Tessa could hear the sadness in his voice. As time went on, she eventually had to board her flight. No matter how much she didn’t want to leave, she still had to bid her goodbyes.

It took more than ten hours before her flight landed in Vienna, where it was still daytime. Finally, Tessa dragged her luggage out of the airport, and she received Hathaway’s call when she just stepped out of the building. “Have you arrived, Tessa?” Hathaway asked.

“Yes. I just got off the plane.”

“That’s great. You shouldn’t come for practice today— you need to rest and adapt to the time zone difference here,” Hathaway ordered.

“Okay. Thank you, Miss Hathaway.” Tessa ended the call after thanking her. While on the way to where she would be staying, she texted Timothy and Nicholas.

Meanwhile, thousands of miles away in Dynasty Gardens, Nicholas heaved a sigh of relief when he received Tessa’s text.

The next day, she felt much more awake and alert after a whole day of rest. So, she headed out for orchestra practice in high spirits. All of the orchestra members grinned and greeted her when they saw her. “You’re back, Tessa!”

“I am,” she replied. The smile was plastered on her face the moment she arrived for practice. She was just about to head off to the studio when she bumped into Kathleen and Hathaway, who were walking in her direction. “Miss Hathaway.” Tessa gave Hathaway a nod, but she completely ignored Kathleen’s presence.

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Tessa wasn't a saint—she couldn't bring herself to act nice and kind in front of someone who had wronged her.

Hathaway knew what was going on in Tessa's mind, so she didn't comment much on it. The rest of the members, on the other hand, shifted their gazes between Tessa and Kathleen. They had figured that Kathleen would immediately lash out at Tessa after what Tessa had done. But to their surprise, Kathleen stepped forward to be the first to greet Tessa. "You're here, Tessa."

Tessa was just as shocked to see the smiling woman standing before her eyes. The other members were dumbfounded. Is this really the Kathleen we know?

Kathleen didn't seem to care about how shocking her actions were. Instead, she fixed a sincere gaze on Tessa before she started apologizing for her actions. "I'm sorry. I would like to apologize for the previous incident. I was too emotional and stubborn, and I made a lot of mistakes. I hope you can forgive me for everything I've done," Kathleen vocalized her apology.

The more sincere Kathleen sounded, the more puzzled and suspicious Tessa felt. The rest of the orchestra members were discussing among themselves as well. "What's up with Kathleen? Why is she apologizing?" someone asked.

"Could she have changed her ways after being in the detention center for 15 days?" another asked.

"Perhaps."

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"If that's the case, then maybe Kathleen's not that bad of a person," someone commented.

"Yeah. I was worried that Kathleen would continue attacking Tessa, but I guess my worries were for nothing," another member said. Hathaway's smile grew wider when she heard the member's comments. She quickly stepped forward to speak up. "Tessa,

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Kathleen has been reflecting on her actions after coming home this time. She has really learned from her mistakes, and her apology is sincere.”

Tessa still felt somewhat puzzled, but she didn't want to make the atmosphere too tense since Hathaway was there. So, she shifted her gaze toward Kathleen before addressing her sternly. “I'll forgive you this time, but there will be no next time.”

“Don't worry. I promise there won't be the next time,” Kathleen replied.

Hathaway looked relieved upon hearing their words. “I feel like I can finally have a good night's sleep after watching you guys reconcile.” Tessa simply smiled without making any comments as she still felt like something was off.

Kathleen didn't seem to understand the look on Tessa's

face, for she jogged over to Tessa excitedly. “That's great. You'll be my good friend from now on, and we'll get along well with each other!” She hooked her arm around Tessa's as she spoke.

Tessa could only stare at the other woman dumbfoundedly. She could feel goosebumps forming on her skin, and before she knew it, she found herself trying to pull away from Kathleen. Tessa took a step sideways to create some distance between her and Kathleen. “I'll head off to practice if that's all you have to say,” she said flatly.

“Go on!” Kathleen didn't seem bothered by Tessa's tone —she merely beamed and nodded at Tessa. Tessa responded coldly and walked off after bidding goodbye to Hathaway. Hathaway sent the rest of the people off to practice after that. A while later, Kathleen was the only one who remained in her spot after everyone had left. She stared at the direction in which Tessa had gone as her gaze darkened a little. The look in her eyes was terrifying—she looked like a poisonous snake prepared to catch its prey.

However, Tessa didn't know any of this. She merely thought that Kathleen was acting strangely, and her gut feeling told her to stay away from Kathleen.

After a whole day of practice, Tessa bid goodbye to everyone before turning and heading home to her villa. But, unfortunately, the villa no longer held the cheerful laughs and noises as it did before, and she wasn't used to the silence. So, she let out a soft sigh as she tried her best to suppress her negative thoughts, and headed to the kitchen to prepare a meal instead.

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Later that night, while lying in bed and preparing to rest, she received a video call from Nicholas. The man was dressed in his black suit, and he was sitting on his office table with the sun shining from behind his back. The bright light surrounded the man's figure and made him look like an Adonis surrounded by a halo of light.

"How was practice today? Did anyone cause you trouble?" His voice showed a hint of care as he gazed at her lovingly.

She knew what he was worried about, so she smiled and reassured him. "Don't worry. No one caused me trouble at all." That surprised him as he raised an eyebrow upon hearing her words.

"Are you surprised?" Tessa let out a laugh when she saw the look on his face. He couldn't cover up the change in his expression, so he simply nodded. She flipped around in bed to find a comfortable spot before she continued to explain herself. "I was pretty surprised myself. Did you know that Kathleen actually apologized to me when I went to the orchestra practice today? She seemed really different as well." She gave him a brief summary of what happened at practice earlier.

He frowned upon hearing her story. "I think you should be more alert. It's possible that she's truly changing for the better, but it could also be that she's up to something far more sinister," he warned.

"I think so too." She nodded in agreement.

However, he still felt worried, so he gave her another reminder. "You shouldn't get too close with Kathleen until you're sure what's going on."

"Don't worry. I know what to do. Let's not talk about her anymore." She changed the topic. "How's Gregory after I left? Was he really sad?"

"He has been gloomy ever since you left, and he was still the same even when I left for work this morning," he told her about Gregory's condition in a calm tone, and she couldn't help but feel her heart aching at the thought.

"I'll give him a call later," she decided.

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“Why don’t we talk tomorrow? It’s getting late there.” Nicholas checked the time on his phone, so he knew that it was past midnight in Vienna. He didn’t want Tessa to be too tired the next day. Tessa couldn’t argue against his words, so she had no choice but to agree with him.

However, when she lay alone on the large and empty bed, she didn’t feel sleepy at all. On the contrary, her surroundings were silent, making her feel incredibly lonely. “Now that I’m staying alone in this villa without you and Gregory around, the whole place feels so empty. I’m not used to it.”

Nicholas wasn’t used to her absence either. Things had been going too well previously, and he was used to having her by his side. Now, he didn’t know how to feel about going back to sleeping on his own. However, he didn’t reveal this to Tessa as he didn’t want to make her feel any sadder. “Don’t worry. I’m here now, aren’t I?” He comforted her through the call.

“But I miss you guys so much. It’s only the first day, and I already miss you guys so badly. What am I supposed to do for the rest of my time here?” she whined. Nicholas could feel his heart melting into a puddle of water when he saw the longing gaze in the girl’s eyes.

“I’ll find some time to visit you in a few days,” he offered.

“Forget it. I don’t want you to overwork yourself.” She shook her head and rejected his idea. Relationships were a two-way thing—Nicholas cared about her, and she cared just as much about him. He simply chuckled without continuing this topic after that. Instead, he tried to coax Tessa to go to sleep.

Perhaps Nicholas’ voice has some magic to it as Tessa soon felt her eyelids turning heavy after a while. When he saw the sweet, innocent look on her face as she slept, he couldn’t help but beam as he continued staring at her. “Goodnight, my girl,” he whispered before ending the call with a longing expression on his face.

Throughout the next few days, Tessa practiced, practiced, and practiced. However, she no longer spoke to Kathleen after her encounter on the first day. One of the reasons was that Kathleen was also busy with her practices. Both of them didn’t mess with one another, but everyone in the orchestra could still sense a shift in their dynamics.

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One day, while they were all on break, Kathleen sat alone on one of the benches while a few orchestra members chit-chatted beside her. Kathleen knew that

most of the members had a wall up against her after what happened with Tessa previously.

So, she held her hands up and clapped a few times to attract everyone's attention. "Let's all go for drinks tonight. It's all on me! We have been working too hard; it's time to relax." In the past, all the members would immediately cheer once they heard her words.

However, all of them rejected her offer now. "I'm sorry. I have work tonight," someone said.

"My boyfriend asked me to go home and spend time with him," another one said.

"I promised my dog that I'd walk it around tonight." Kathleen could barely keep the smile on her face when she heard everyone's half-hearted excuses.

Fortunately, she managed to maintain a neutral expression as she spoke in a nonchalant tone. "Next time, then."

The members nodded before they began chatting among themselves once more. Kathleen returned to her seat and felt her heart sinking as she listened to the loud noises around her.

Although she hadn't heard anyone talking behind her back in the past few days, she could still sense that the members' attitude toward her had changed after the incident. They no longer respected or feared her like they used to.

This was no big deal—what troubled her the most was that the members were actually starting to get closer to Tessa. "Let's have dinner tonight, Tessa. Then, we can go shopping to relax a little," one of the members suggested.

"Sure." She agreed with a smile. She was the only one in the villa, so she didn't want to head home too early. However, before she and the other members could head off, she received a call from Louis. "Your violin is fixed. You can come and collect it."

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This news came as a pleasant surprise to Tessa. "Thank you, Mr. Louis. I'll come over to get it now." After she ended the call, she looked at her colleagues. "I'm sorry. I might not be able to join you guys for dinner." When her colleagues saw the wide grin on her face, they couldn't help but tease her.

"Why do you look so happy? Is your boyfriend coming?" someone asked.

"We wouldn't mind if you brought him out with us," another one suggested.

"Your boyfriend is handsome and rich—it'd be no trouble to have him around!" Tessa chuckled at all of their comments. "That's not it. I just have to pick up the violin that I sent to be fixed a while ago," she explained. Her colleagues no longer teased her after that. They all knew the violin in question was the one her boyfriend had gifted her, so they quickly urged her to collect it. "Well, you should hurry up and get it back."

By the time Tessa rushed over to Louis's place, he was already waiting in the hall. However, another man was in the lobby with him—a young, foreign man dressed in a gunmetal grey suit. The young man had extremely sharp features—his eyes, in particular, had their corners pointed slightly upward and pupils that seemed to twinkle as he looked around. In addition, the wild look and somewhat messy brown hair made him seem both delicate and elegant.

If one did not take a good look at him, one might assume that the man was actually a girl dressed up as a boy. He's even more good-looking than some girls, Tessa thought to herself. Soon enough, she returned to her senses before greeting them. "Mr. Louis," she spoke before nodding to the other man. The man nodded before stealing a few glances in Tessa's direction.

Tessa was dressed in a knitted sweater and jeans as it was a rainy day. She had a thin layer of makeup on her petite face, and she pulled up her long, black hair into a simple and youthful ponytail. All she did was stand tall in the middle of the hall, yet she seemed to exude an aura that made the atmosphere around her calm and soothing.

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Tessa was already talking to Louis by the time the foreign male returned to his senses. Louis pointed at the violin casing on the table. "It's in there. You should try it out," he suggested. She nodded before opening the case. The poor violin that only had a single G string attached to it at one point now looked better than it ever did.

The violin seemed to glow under the light, and its strings looked fresh and new. The whole violin was gorgeous. Tessa slowly reached out for the violin before carefully lifting it out of its casing and placing it below her chin. She wanted to test its sound. Soon, a light but piercing sound filled the air moments later, and a look of pure shock formed in her eyes after she played a few notes. She couldn't help but play a slightly longer melody after that. Since Tessa had perfect pitch, she could always notice even the tiniest changes in the instrument's sound quality.

However, this violin that he had just fixed... It sounded exactly like it did before it was ruined. After playing the melody, Tessa had to calm herself down for a moment before speaking. "How did you do it, Mr. Louis? How does this violin sound exactly the same as before?"

Every violin made its own unique sound—once a violin was spoiled, its sound would certainly change after one fixed it. So, it was tough for one to be able to return a violin to its exact original sound. But Louis somehow managed to do it.

Louis felt proud of himself when he noticed the look on Tessa's face. "What do you think, Miss Reinhart? Are you happy with it?"

"Yes! I'm very, very happy!" Tessa nodded her head excitedly. "I thought the sound of the instrument would change after I sent it to be fixed, but I hadn't expected you to be able to surprise me like this. You're so good! No wonder you're so widely recognized as a master." Her eyes were filled with gratitude as she spoke.

"What's the big deal? As I said, turning the violin back to its original state is possible as long as we have the materials." Even though Louis tried to make it sound easy, the proud look on his face gave him away. So, she could only express her genuine gratitude to him once more.

Right then, the foreign, young man who had remained silent let out a soft cough and fixed his gaze on Louis. It was clear that Louis seemed rather conflicted for a moment, but he quickly covered this up with a cough. "Well, this was possible mainly because of my nephew, Angus. If there's anyone you should be thanking, it's him."

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Louis introduced Angus to Tessa. "Previously, I told you that your violin was made of special materials that were seldom available in the market. I wouldn't have been able to maintain the original sound of this violin if Angus hadn't found the materials for me."

Only then did Tessa learn that the pretty-looking boy was actually Louis's nephew. She thanked the boy sincerely after hearing what Louis said. "Thank you for your help, Mr. Angus."

"It's no problem at all." A smooth, attractive voice came from the side of the room where Angus was standing.

Tessa froze for a moment—she hadn't expected him to sound so pleasant. "Are you a luthier as well, Angus?" she asked.

"No." He shook his head. Tessa was somewhat puzzled by his response, so he further explained himself. "I only do this as a hobby, and my uncle often asks me for help since he's a luthier. I have an actual job as a doctor, and I am also involved in some businesses that are related to instruments."

Tessa nodded to show that she understood. After they were done talking, Louis spoke up once more. "Miss Reinhart, your violin is an extremely rare and high-performing violin, so you really have to take good care of it. We might not be able to find the same materials in the future," he uttered.

"I'll take care of it, and I won't break it again." She nodded firmly as she held onto the violin with both hands. She wouldn't allow the same thing to happen twice. This violin was no longer just an expensive violin to her—it was proof of her and Nicholas's love for one another.

Of course, Louis didn't know what was going on in her mind. However, when he saw her serious expression, he let out a satisfied nod. "Don't forget what you just said! I put in a lot of effort just to fix your violin, you know."

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"I got it. Thank you, Mr. Louis." She thanked him once more. Louis finally waved his hand and chuckled at her. "Stop thanking me. If you insist on showing your appreciation, why don't you play a song for us?" Tessa had no reason to reject his request, and Louis was a violin fanatic who would love to watch a good performance, especially when the violin was one as unique as Tessa's. "It'd be my honor," Tessa uttered as she lifted her violin once more.

Soon enough, the song "Rondo Capriccioso" filled the hall. This extremely melodious tune involved a lot of siring crossing on the violin. The overall theme gave off a grand and powerful feeling, although the introduction came with a hint of sorrow in it. The starting tune felt like autumn leaves floating in the sky, while the middle part of the song sounded like dancers leaping around. Toward the end of the piece, there was a section filled with chords, building up for the fastest part, where Tessa's bow moved up and down at a crazy speed. The whole song was highly entertaining and captivating.

Both Louis and Angus were mesmerized by her performance, and they couldn't help but shut their eyes and move their heads along with the melody. Once the song was over, Tessa let out a long exhale before lowering her violin. She curled her lips into a smile when she saw the two men, who looked like they were still caught up in the music. She was glad—every musician wanted their audience to be able to fall deep into the music that they played.

Angus and Louis finally returned to their senses a few moments later. They slapped their palms together to give her a series of loud claps before showering her with compliments. "I thought I was at a concert at one point. You're amazing, Miss Reinhart. For someone at your age to be able to play in such a manner is really crazy..." Louis commented. She was pleased to hear his words but remained humble with her response. "I still have much to improve."

"The pursuit of improving never ends, but that doesn't change the fact that you're an outstanding performer,

Miss Reinhart." Angus gazed at Tessa, and something seemed to flicker across his gaze for a brief moment.

Tessa still felt like they were exaggerating their words when she heard their praises, and she responded in a humble tone. The three of them chatted for a while more after that. However, as they grew more familiar with one another, they began to branch out to talk about different things. In the end, they somehow ended up expounding on music.

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