

Always Been Yours Chapter 540

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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."

"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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Being the violin fanatic that Louis was, he had quite some violin-related knowledge. Tessa learned a lot from their discussion, and she eventually ended the conversation by thanking him. "I learned a lot today. I'll have to buy you guys a meal to thank you, guys."

"That's fine. I don't like eating out." Louis waved his hand to reject her before making a playful comment.

"I think you can buy Angus a meal instead."

Although Tessa was disappointed with Louis's rejection, she didn't show it on her face. Instead, she turned to look at Angus. "That would be my honor," Angus said with a faint smile. He pulled out a black- and-gold name card before handing it to Tessa. She saw his name and phone number embossed in gold when she took it.

"You can contact me whenever you're free," Angus spoke in his soothing and pleasant voice. She nodded and kept his name card away. Then, after she sat for a while more, she excused herself politely.

Angus had initially offered to send her home, but she declined his offer. Once she was back at the villa, the skies outside had already turned dark. Tessa prepared a simple dinner for herself before heading upstairs to shower and brush her teeth. After she finally cleaned everything up, she hastily gave Nicholas a video call.

"The violin has been fixed. It sounds just like it did before!" She told him the good news about the violin. He watched her attentively while smiling into the camera. "Are you happy?"

"Of course. I'm so happy!" She grinned. Then, she recalled how Nicholas was the one who had introduced her to Louis. "Coming to think of it, the person I'll have to thank the most is you. If you hadn't introduced Mr. Louis to me, my violin wouldn't have been able to return to its original state," she professed excitedly.

Nicholas didn't comment on her words. Instead, he teased her when he saw the bright smile on her face. "I told you I don't like it when you just say thank you to me. You should show your appreciation with your actions as well."

"Action?" She froze for a moment before smiling. "I'll buy you some good food once I'm back, then."

"I don't know how long it'll take until you're back. I don't want to wait for that long," he muttered while shaking his head. "If you really want to thank me, you should do it now."

"Now? What can I do now?" She stared at him confusedly as he eyed her playfully. "There's a lot that

you can do." For some reason, certain images popped up in Tessa's mind when she saw the look on the guy's face, and her cheeks turned into the color of a tomato.

"I never expected you to be this sort of person. It feels like I've never known you at all." She eyed him angrily.

Nicholas could tell that she was thinking about dirty stuff, and his eyes lit up in amusement, although he tried his best to maintain a straight face. "What did I do? I was just hinting at you to see if you would perform for me."

"Perform? So, are you asking me to perform for you?" She stared at him awkwardly, utterly embarrassed by all the dirty thoughts in her mind.

He pretended as if he didn't know what she was thinking about. "Yeah. Would you do that for me?"

"Of course." She let out a slight cough before placing the phone by the table and standing in the middle of the hall. As she began to perform, a soothing and romantic melody sounded in the room. When Nicholas saw the girl, who was full of confidence, a tender look surfaced in his eyes. Then, after the song ended, he applauded and praised her performance. "You're getting better and better. I really look forward to the day you get the recognition you deserve."

Tessa beamed happily upon hearing his words.

Although his praise made her feel warm on the inside, it also reminded her of the reality she had been avoiding. She had no choice but to contemplate that matter right then.

"What is it?" Nicholas asked when he saw the gloomy look on the girl's face. She held her phone and rested her head on the table before telling him about what she had been thinking. "I realized that I've been practicing almost every day, but I don't have much of a chance to perform," she uttered dejectedly.

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Nicholas frowned upon hearing his words. However, before he could say anything, Tessa spoke up hesitantly. "Actually, I would like to seek other opportunities out there. I want to meet more people if possible." Her sentences gradually sounded more confident, and her eyes lit up as she spoke. "I think music is really diverse; if it's incorporated into my life, perhaps I would gain more experience and a better perspective on it."

His expression softened when he saw the girl lifting her own spirits up without his help. "That's a good idea. Do you know what to do already?"

"Well... I haven't thought of that." She sounded dejected again. So, he chuckled before giving her some advice. "It's fine. We can take it slow."

"We don't have a choice but to take it slow, I guess."

The next day, Tessa got herself ready and brought her violin case out to head to the orchestra practice. When the other members saw her, they all headed over to ask about her.

"Hey, Tessa! I heard that your violin had been fixed!" someone said.

"Yeah," she replied with a smile. Someone saw Tessa canying the violin case around, so they asked her to take it out to let them take a look. She didn't reject them as she opened the case and showed it to them. "This looks just like it had been before it was broken," they commented.

"Who did you ask to fix it for you, Tessa?" the members exclaimed in surprise. They were all curious. After all, no matter how much you took care of your instruments, there were bound to be problems if you used them every day. It was rare to hear of masters who could work such wonders.

"It was Mr. Louis," Tessa replied honestly. Everyone was shocked. When they returned to her senses, they all stared at Tessa enviously. "You're impressive, Tessa.

I can't believe you managed to meet Mr. Louis."

Louis was a well-known luthier, and many others hoped for him to fix their instruments. That was why he had to devise some rules that made it harder for others to make an

appointment with him. Tessa smiled upon hearing their words. "I wasn't the one who contacted him. My boyfriend was the one who helped me to make an appointment."

"Tessa, I suspect you're just trying to show off your boyfriend right now," one of the members said

enviously.

"Yeah, yeah. You make us feel like perhaps all we need is a boyfriend for us to get an appointment with Mr. Louis," another one commented.

"Oh no, the more you talk about your boyfriend, the more I feel like getting one myself, Tessa." All the members began to chat and laugh among themselves. Tessa felt her face turning red. Right then, Hathaway's voice came from the back of them. "What are you guys talking about? Why are you guys laughing so hard?" The members told her about what they were talking about earlier.

Hathaway gave Tessa a concerned look. "How is your violin after it was fixed? How does it sound now?"

"It's good as new," Tessa said confidently.

Hathaway seemed rather suspicious. "Why don't you try to play something?" Tessa nodded and lifted her violin. Everyone else kept quiet while a well-defined and clear tune flowed out of her violin. When the song ended, everyone applauded her, and Hathaway sighed in awe. "Mr. Louis is a skilled man indeed. This violin sounds just like it once was."

Tessa nodded upon hearing Hathaway's words, and all of them chatted for a while before they parted ways. However, when Hathaway was heading back to her office, Tessa hurried after her. "Is anything the matter, Tessa?" Hathaway eyed Tessa curiously when she saw the girl following her.

"There's something I'd like to talk to you about," Tessa responded honestly.

"Let's talk about it in the office, then." Hathaway led Tessa to the office and sat down before questioning her. "What would you like to talk about?"

Tessa told Hathaway about her thoughts without any hesitation. "Can I go elsewhere to experience the music scene when I'm not at the orchestra practice? I'd like to experience a different scene when it comes to music so I can broaden my horizons."

Hathaway understood what Tessa meant, but she frowned upon hearing Tessa's words. "Why would you think of doing that?"

"I just thought that music should be a little more diverse. If I incorporated it into my daily life, I figured that it would give me more experience, which I lack. Apart from coming for training, I don't have many other opportunities to perform. So, I just wanted to search for more opportunities to better myself," she said.

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Tessa explained herself honestly before she shot a nervous glance in Hathaway's direction. Hathaway raised an eyebrow when she noticed the uneasy look on Tessa's face. "Are you blaming me for not giving you the opportunity to perform?"

"No, that's not what I meant. Please don't misunderstand me, Miss Hathaway." Tessa hastily waved her arms to deny the other woman's words. "I know you're not arranging performances for me because I am not skilled enough."

Hathaway laughed when she saw the flustered look on Tessa's face. "Alright, I was just kidding." Hathaway's expression turned serious after that. "Other orchestras might not agree with your way of thinking, but I don't mind allowing you to go out there just to get some experience."

"Really?" She gazed at Hathaway excitedly.

Hathaway nodded and smiled. "I agree with what you said, music is all around us, and there are so many ways it relates to our life experiences."

"Thank you, Miss Hathaway." Tessa was extremely grateful for Hathaway's choice to keep an open mind. However, Hathaway beamed at her student before she continued suggesting. "If you want to experience the outside world, I suggest you look for performing opportunities in high-end restaurants. You can treat it as an internship."

"That's what I thought as well." Tessa hadn't expected Hathaway to share the same thoughts as her, so she continued to share some of her other opinions. Hathaway quietly listened to

Tessa's words while adding a few comments to correct her thought process when needed. Eventually, their conversation shifted to the orchestra's upcoming arrangements. "The timing is just right. Once you're done with your internship, I'm planning to form a second orchestra. You'll have to give them a solo performance then."

"Did you say you're planning to form a second orchestra?" Tessa was shocked.

Hathaway nodded. "The first team is already familiar with one another, so I don't need to worry about them. Furthermore, the musicians in the first team are pretty well trained, so I figured that it's time to form a second team." She gazed at Tessa hopefully as she spoke. "I'm planning to let you handle the second team, so you'll have to work hard. I'm sure you won't let me down."

Tessa was shocked to hear this good news, and it took her a while to digest it before nodding happily. "I'll definitely work hard to deserve that position, Miss Hathaway."

Hathaway gave Tessa a satisfied look when she saw how driven Tessa was. At the start, when she first agreed to take Tessa as a student, it wasn't just because she was talented but also because she was a very driven person who knew exactly what she wanted and how she could achieve her goals. "I believe you'll be able to do it," Hathaway responded resolutely.

That night, after their practice, Tessa went over to a few colleagues she was closer to in terms of friendship. "Let's have dinner tonight. It's on me," she offered.

The colleagues all agreed and headed out with Tessa happily. They went to a western restaurant that had a rather pleasant ambiance. The group of them sat by the window and chit-chatted with one another about music, fashion, and other things.

"Do you guys know any places that require performers?" Tessa asked during dinner.

"Why are you asking about this, Tessa?" The few of them were stunned as they gazed at her in bewilderment.

She didn't bother to conceal her intentions as she said, "Miss Hathaway has already agreed to let me find a chance to train myself outside, but I am unfamiliar with the place, so I wanted to ask you guys about it."

All her colleagues were extremely envious of her when they heard her words. "Hathaway's too nice to you, Tessa. I can't believe she allowed you to venture out for other opportunities," someone said, and the others nodded in agreement.

Tessa beamed without commenting any further. "So, do you guys know of any such places?"

"There are way too many of such places in Vienna. It depends on what you're looking for."

A few colleagues exchanged glances before they began to brainstorm for Tessa. "I don't have any specific requests, but I guess I would prefer more high-end locations. I would prefer my guests to hold me to some standard so that I can also train myself." "That's true. The more high-end places would definitely have higher standards." Her colleagues nodded in affirmation.

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Right then, a baby-faced girl smiled as she made a suggestion. "I know a place we can go. I can bring you there after we're done with dinner," she said.

"Really?" Tessa was elated. "Thank you so much, Mona."

"You don't have to be so polite. We're friends, aren't we?" Mona feigned an angry look to tease Tessa. Mona and Tessa got along well during their orchestra practices and had been friends for a while.

"Once I get the job, I'll buy you a feast. How docs that sound?" Tessa said with a chuckle.

Mona didn't have many other hobbies as she only enjoyed the violin and having delicious food. So, when she heard that she would get to enjoy a feast, the fake angry persona she had on melted from her face instantly. "Don't forget what you said. I'm going to note this down," Mona announced with a gleam in her eyes.

"Yes, yes. I mean what I said. Everyone else can bear witness to my words," Tessa replied.

The other colleagues giggled. "We'll all keep this in mind for you, Mona. We'll help you out if Tessa tries to change her mind."

Mona chuckled. "It seems like I just got myself a free meal," she announced excitedly.

All of them were amused by how happy she seemed over food as they enjoyed their meal. After that, the rest of the colleagues bid goodbye to Tessa and Mona while they both hopped on a cab to travel to some high-end restaurant in town.

Once they arrived, Mona dragged Tessa out of the car to present the restaurant as if it were some limited edition product. "Ta-dah! How does it look? This place is pretty high-classed, isn't it?" Tessa eyed the restaurant before her eyes. She had to agree that the restaurant looked pretty exclusive. When she looked through the windows, she could tell that the place was packed. The staff members were spread out all over each corner of the restaurant and dressed in the same uniform.

"Come on. Let's go in." Before Tessa could finish observing the restaurant, Mona excitedly dragged her into the building.

"Hello! Is your manager here? I'm his cousin. Can you tell him to come out?" Mona immediately introduced herself to one of the waiters when she entered.

Tessa was somewhat surprised to hear this—she hadn't expected Mona to be related to the manager of that restaurant. Due to Mona's close relationship with the manager, the staff invited them directly to the office.

When they walked in, Tessa saw a young and smart-looking man. He was dressed in a suit and had a rather large-built. His hair was blonde, and he looked pretty handsome and outgoing. "This is my colleague, Tessa Reinhart." Mona introduced them to each other.

"Tessa, this is my cousin, Wilbur."

"Hello, Miss Reinhart." A charming grin spread across Wilbur's face as he stepped forward to greet Tessa, and his brown eyes seemed to size her up as he approached her.

Tessa was dressed in a pastel purple dress along with a beige-colored windbreaker that day. She had let down her black hair and put on some light makeup—this made her seem casual but elegant at the same time. She gave off a somewhat sophisticated aura that made it hard for others to take their eyes off her.

She could sense the man observing her, but she merely nodded before greeting him. "It's nice to meet you."

Wilbur had a pretty good first impression of Tessa as he invited the girls to sit on the couch.

After they chatted about this and that for a bit, Wilbur finally decided to stop beating around the bush as he said, "I don't think you came here just to visit me, right, Mona?"

"Of course," Mona replied. "I'm here because of Tessa. You said that your restaurant needed a musician, right? Tessa is looking for places to perform, so I suggested she come here."

Wilbur turned his gaze to Tessa before speaking in a formal tone. "May I know what instruments you're able to play, Miss Reinhart?"

"My main instrument is the violin, but I can play some piano as well," she replied honestly.

Mona added to her statement. "You shouldn't look down on Tessa, Wilbur. She's one of Miss Hathaway's private students."

A mixture of shock and curiousness surfaced in his expression. "If you're one of the famous Miss Hathaway's students, what made you decide to come out here to perform?" he asked.

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"Because I want to train and improve myself." Tessa gave him a brief explanation of her intentions. After Wilbur understood her plans, he contemplated for a moment before giving her an answer. "I can keep you under probation for now, but whether or not you get to stay depends on how good you are," he said.

"That sounds about right." Tessa agreed with his way of working; plus, she was confident with her own skills. Wilbur could see that she had faith in herself, so he suggested that she put on a performance right now. "It's the restaurant's peak hour now. Why don't you perform to show me your skills?"

Tessa didn't hesitate to walk up on the stage with her violin in one hand. She wasn't nervous once she got on stage as she simply lifted her violin to her chin before performing confidently. At the start, there weren't many guests who paid any attention to her. However, they slowly became hooked on the music as it continued. When the song was over, the guests clapped for the girl on stage. Tessa bowed to the guests in all directions before getting off the stage and walking to Wilbur.

"Tessa's good, isn't she? Everyone was so mesmerized by her music." Tessa could hear Mona talking to Wilbur even before she made her way to them. He didn't respond to her words, but he had to agree that Tessa was a skilled musician. Furthermore, Tessa was of oriental

descent and was a gorgeous lady to boot. He was sure that she would be able to attract customers once she got famous. So, when Tessa walked over to them, he immediately decided to hire her.

"I agree with our previous suggestion. Let's head to my office to discuss the performance schedule," he said. Tessa was overjoyed to hear the good news. After they were done arranging the schedule, Mona and Tessa headed out. However, the skies were dark by the time they parted ways and headed home.

When Tessa got home, she checked the time to see where Nicholas was. She knew he was probably in the office at that hour, so she quickly called him. "I found a place that allows me to perform, Nicholas." Then, she proceeded to tell him all that had happened that day with a cheerful tone.

Nicholas felt just as joyful when he saw the bright smile on her face. "Congratulations! You got what you wanted." She beamed happily in response as she held onto her phone and sat on the couch while checking up on him. "How have you and Gregory been?"

"I'm doing fine; nothing much has changed. I'm still busy with work as usual. But Gregory doesn't seem to be doing well."

"What's up with Gregory?" The smile disappeared from Tessa's face as she looked at Nicholas anxiously.

Nicholas chuckled when he saw her change in expression. "He misses you really badly. He doesn't seem to have an appetite, and he isn't interested in doing anything." Nicholas couldn't help but sigh when he finished his sentence. I guess this is what they mean when they say that people can be deeply attached to one another even without being blood-related. They care so much for each other.

Tessa froze for a moment before she responded with an awkward grin. She hadn't expected that to be the reason. After all, she figured that Gregory would have gotten used to her absence after a few days. However, he was a bundle of joy that she loved. "Why don't I give him a call later?" she suggested.

"You can call him in the afternoon tomorrow. It's getting late now, and you should get some rest." Nicholas felt sorry for the girl when he saw the bags under her eyes.

Their calls often went on until it was past midnight for Tessa, but there was nothing much they could do due to the time zone difference between both countries. Finally, Tessa agreed

to Nicholas's suggestion. After they ended the call, Tessa brushed her teeth and prepared for bed. She was about to sleep when she heard someone ringing the doorbell.

"Who would come at this hour?" she mumbled to herself as she put on a jacket and headed downstairs. When she got to the villa's entrance, she found a young girl standing outside with a bouquet of white roses in her hand.

Tessa could recognize the girl who was standing under the streetlamp. "You're one of the workers from the florist by the end of the road, right? Is anything the matter?" Tessa had been to the florist once, so she could remember their staff members' uniforms.

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The girl put on a courteous smile when she saw Tessa. "We had a guest who told us to send these flowers to you." she explained. Then, she handed the bouquet to Tessa. Tessa was more confused than ever-who would order her a bouquet of flowers at this time of the night?

She felt dazed for a moment before noticing a card stuck in the bouquet. The sender was Nicholas. She felt both touched and slightly puzzled at the same time. Why is he buying flowers for me out of nowhere? She couldn't understand what was happening, so she brought the bouquet of flowers up to her room before video-calling Nicholas.

"What is it?" he asked when he picked up the call.

"Why did you tell the florist to send me flowers, Nicholas?" Tessa held the bouquet in front of her while she stared at the attractive man on her phone screen. He smirked as he explained himself. "I asked for their contact as I figured that it would come in handy someday. These flowers... Well..." He paused for a moment and gazed at her before speaking in his deep, attractive voice. "I bought you that to congratulate you for getting an internship," he said.

"Why are you so nice to me, Nicholas?" Tessa's lips spread into a huge grin-she felt as if her insides were filled with cotton candy at that moment. There was a sweet and warm sensation rushing through her blood. Even though they were thousands of miles away, she could still feel his love despite the distance, and she was genuinely thankful to have him around.

"Do you like it?" he asked with a gentle smile.

"Yeah. I love it," she replied. Tears welled up in her eyes as she lowered her head to smell the flowers. I swear I have to work hard and succeed in what I'm doing now. My perfect boyfriend is waiting for me to go back to him, she thought. After ending the call, he went back to his work. Soon enough, Edward knocked on his door. "We just heard the news, President Sawyer. Stone Enterprise has decided to partner with Callen Incorporated for the project we were previously discussing. It seems like they've given up," Edward said.

"I hope they've actually given up," Nicholas replied with a cold look in his eyes. He had lost all patience with the Stone Family.

"Also, I followed your orders to make an announcement regarding the cancellation of your marriage with the woman from the Stone Family. There are a lot of companies that are now terminating their contracts with Stone Enterprise. It seems like they've suffered quite a huge loss," Edward added. Nicholas simply nodded without responding as he had predicted this outcome, after all.

Back then, Stone Enterprise had used their marriage with the Sawyers to fool many other companies into partnering with them. Now, Stone Enterprise was just getting what they deserved after he exposed all the lies.

Nicholas's secretary knocked on the door and came in while Nicholas and Edward were talking. "Miss Stone is downstairs, President Sawyer. She insists on meeting you."

"Didn't I tell you that I don't want to meet anyone from that family at all?" Nicholas shot his secretary an icy glare. "Stop reporting such things to me!" he hissed.

"Yes, President Sawyer." The secretary left the room with her back soaked in cold sweat. She returned to the office and sent his orders to the front desk. Hayley was furious when she heard the front desk telling her that he didn't want to see her. She felt extremely dissatisfied with this outcome. So, she decided to barge into the office without asking for anyone's permission.

One of the staff members immediately stepped forward to stop her. "I'm sorry, Miss Stone. You're not allowed in there."

"Step aside! F*ck off!" Hayley's eyes were burning with rage as she shoved the staff member to the ground. "I'm the young heiress of the Stone Family. How dare you guys come in my way! I'll make sure all of you suffer!" Her threats seemed to work for some reason, as the other staff members no longer stopped her after that.

That was how Hayley made her way to Nicholas's office. "I-I'm sorry, President Sawyer. We failed to stop her from coming up," one of the staff members apologized while standing behind her.

Nicholas's face twisted into a nasty look when he saw the woman before him. "Where do you think this is, Hayley? Do you think you can barge in just like that?"

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He barked sternly as an ominous aura surrounded his figure and was spread across the office. Edward could sense the rage from his boss's figure, making his teeth chatter with fear. He glared at the staff members who failed to complete their duties and felt the urge to scold them as well. Did they forget how scary the president can be when he's mad? Things must have been too peaceful at the company for a while.

The other staff members who had chased after Hayley looked like they were about to piss

their pants. Hayley didn't look as brave as before either. When she exchanged gazes with Nicholas's sharp and cold glare, goosebumps began to form all over her body. She felt as if some demonic entity was glaring at her. However, her fear was soon replaced by her anger.

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She straightened her figure and clenched her fists as she looked directly into Nicholas's eyes. "I didn't want to barge in, but I had no choice since you refused to see me," she announced haughtily. Nicholas's face darkened upon hearing her words. Although she was terrified at that moment, she gritted her teeth and forced herself to stare back at him. Since things had ended up like this, she decided she would give it her all and question him directly.

With that thought, she strode forward and slammed her hands on the table while glaring at him. "I just want to know-what is it you don't like about me? Why do you have to go against me and Stone Enterprise?!"

A sinister aura surrounded Nicholas's figure as he directed his cold glare at Hayley. The atmosphere in the office was extremely tense. When Edward sensed the air around them turning cold, he decided to usher the rest of the staff members out of the room so that they wouldn't get dragged into this matter. But, on the other hand, he remained in the room out of a sense of responsibility. After all, he knew that Nicholas would call him back in even if he left the room then.

Meanwhile, Nicholas had already turned his gaze away from Hayley. "What? Don't you know the reason?" he asked in an icy tone. Then, he stood up from his desk before giving her a side glare. "Do you think I don't know about all the nasty tricks you've been using?"

Fear surfaced in Hayley's eyes when she heard what he said. Did Nicholas find out about something?

"After what you've done, I don't think you'd be able to repent for your sins even if you died a thousand times. I've never taken action against you because I value the relationship between our families. But, you should know your limits!" he hissed in a glacial tone. Hayley felt like an invisible blow struck her after hearing what he said. She stumbled backward as terror spread across her pretty face. I see... It seems like he has found out about what I've done... That explains why he's treating the Stone Family like that. However, the more she thought about it, the more resentful she felt.

"Isn't this all about one woman? Will you ruin the relationship between the Sawyers and the Stones over one woman?" She clenched her jaw as she glared at Nicholas. She clenched her fists so tightly that her knuckles had turned white.

It felt like a layer of ice was covering Nicholas's face as he shot her a threatening glare. "A woman? Did you forget what else you've done? Do you want me to tell you the reason? Hayley couldn't stop herself from shuddering as she felt chills slither up her spine when she heard his words. "What else did I do?" she asked in an uneasy tone. Her teeth were chattering as she spoke.

"What? Did you forget how you poisoned my grandfather?" Nicholas's voice was icy. Nothing could conceal the rage in him. Her face turned pale when she heard his words. He fixed his vicious glare on her as he spoke in a dangerous tone. "You should have considered what would happen to your family the moment you poisoned my grandfather!" Hayley's lips were trembling. She felt as if a pair of invisible hands were choking her, and she couldn't seem to speak at all. She only managed a few words in the end. "I didn't harm your grandfather intentionally... I just wanted to get you back... You were—" "That's enough! I don't care about your reasoning! What's done is done!" He interrupted her words heartlessly. "After what you have done, you should be grateful that I've allowed the Stone Family a chance to survive."

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Hayley bit her bottom lip while glaring at Nicholas resentfully. However, he only responded with a cold and threatening glare. "This is your last chance. If you ever do anything again, it will be the end of the Stone Family!"

The moment Hayley heard his sentence, she lifted her head to give him a look of disbelief. "Do you really have to be so heartless?"

"I mean what I say. Don't you dare test my limits!" He didn't allow any space for further discussion, and there was a grave look on his face. Hayley felt like she was being thrown into an abyss when she realized he wasn't messing around. At that moment, she truly realized that the relationship between the Stones and the Sawyers no longer existed.

After Nicholas finished his words, he no longer looked at Hayley—he simply turned to give his orders to Edward. "Please send Miss Stone out of my office." Edward didn't dare to dawdle as he immediately took action to usher her out of the building.

Hayley found herself being chased out of Sawyer Group. From outside the building, she glanced up at the window where Nicholas's room was located. Her face was filled with hatred, and she eventually stormed off and headed home.

Once she got home, she locked herself into the room. The more she thought about the situation, the more she felt angry. How could Nicholas treat me like that? I only did those things because I wanted to marry him! "D*mn it! D*mn it!" She was fuming, and everything around her seemed to annoy her right then. She flung her limbs around and smashed everything that she could lay her hands on in her room. Soon enough, several things in her room were broken and shattered on the ground.

The loud noises immediately caught Nero and Sonia's attention. "What are you doing, Hayley?" Sonia pushed Hayley's door open to find the room in a mess and looked at her daughter with worry. In contrast, Nero frowned when he saw the state of the room.

When Hayley saw her parents, she suddenly felt extremely sorry for herself. "Nicholas was too much, Mom and Dad!" Her parents exchanged glances before questioning her. "What did he do

to you?"

"Nicholas knew about everything all along. Nevertheless, he has been attacking us in an attempt to teach us a lesson." She told her parents about what happened during her visit to Nicholas's office that afternoon. "He gave us a warning-he said that we'd be dead meat if we tried any tricks again," Hayley cried.

Both Nero and Sonia's faces darkened upon hearing her words. Nero's face, in particular, turned into a sickly green color. He could tell that he was being trampled upon, yet there was nothing they could do!

At that moment in time, the most the Stone Family could manage to do was to survive and pull through. However, their daughter had just ruined their last sliver of hope. Nero shut his eyes briefly, and he hunched his shoulders in disappointment. However, when he opened his eyes again, there was a firm determination in his eyes. "You need to stop meeting Nicholas from now on, Hayley," he announced resolutely.

"But I can't just let things be!" Hayley cried as she stared at her father with bloodshot eyes.

Nero shot her a displeased look. "Well, are you going to risk the Stone Family's well-being for the sake of your happiness?" Hayley bit her bottom lip furiously. Sonia could tell that their conflict was about to escalate, so she quickly stepped forward. "Hayley's really hurt by this matter too, Nero. Stop reprimanding her."

"Would she understand how serious this matter is if I didn't scold her for her behavior?!" Nero disagreed with Sonia's point of view. "If she can't let go of him now, the Stones will just end up like the Ginghams!

"There's no way that will happen. Our relationship with the Sawyers is much stronger than the Ginghams and the Sawyers." Sonia figured that Nero was just exaggerating the matter. However, Nero then shot his wife a cold glare. "Do you know Nicholas well enough to say that?"

Sonia was rendered speechless, so Nero scoffed before he continued. "Judging from what happened to the Gingham Family, I believe that Nicholas has the capacity to do anything he wants to do once he puts his mind to it."

Nero turned to look at Hayley before speaking in a threatening tone. "I want you to remember not to ever look for Nicholas again. Otherwise, you can't blame me for being a heartless father. I'll send you out of the country."

Hayley froze in her spot. Her chest felt heavy with hatred and self-pity. However, her father's words gave her another idea. Since I can't do much with Nicholas here, perhaps I can go overseas to ruin Tessa's life instead.

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That b*tch. It's all because of that b*tch... Hayley repeatedly cursed Tessa in her mind. How can that b*tch be a good fit for Nicholas? She's no match for me at all! If I can't get the guy, then I won't let her get him either!

Hayley put on a regretful look at breakfast in the Stone Family the next day. "I thought about what you said last night, and I think that you're right. If I don't let go of this, our family might really turn into the second Gingham Family. So, I've decided to let go of this matter."

"Have you truly come to terms with that?" Nero and Sonia eyed Hayley with looks of

surprise on their faces. They had been thinking about how to change Hayley's mind-they hadn't expected her to think it through on her own. "Yeah," Hayley muttered with a nod. She had no idea what was going on in her parents' minds.

When they saw the serious expression on their daughter's face, they figured that she wasn't lying to them. So, they heaved a sigh of relief while grinning at their daughter. "That's great. That's great!" They uttered together.

Hayley's eyes glinted for a moment as she lowered her gaze. Then, after a while, she took the opportunity to speak her mind. "Mom, Dad, even though I've come to terms with it, I still feel really sad. So, I've decided to go overseas on a trip."

"Do you want to go on a trip? That's fine. Where would you like to go? I'll get the secretary to book tickets for you." Both Hayley's parents were supportive of this idea. Sonia even suggested a few lovely places that her daughter could visit.

"I guess New Zealand sounds good." Hayley randomly picked a place-she couldn't let others know where she was going, anyway. So, she left Xerthania that night itself.

On the other side of the globe, Tessa spent all of her time practicing in the orchestra and performing at the restaurant. A good number of customers gave her tips throughout her time there, and she managed to collect quite a fortune from their generosity. Of course, Mona was highly envious when she saw Tessa's earnings, but Tessa also remembered to show her appreciation by buying her all sorts of good food.

Soon enough, Tessa became the most popular performer in the restaurant. Some of the guests had even visited the restaurant just to see her. For this reason, Wilbur often celebrated the excellent choice that he had made to hire Tessa as his performer.

One night, Tessa hurried to the back door of the restaurant while carrying her violin case on her back. "I'm sorry. My practice ended late today, so I'm a little late." She was panting as she gave him a sincere apology. She was the one who had failed to arrive at the agreed time, after all.

Wilbur knew how stressful their practice could be, so he simply responded with a casual smile. "It's fine. I've already arranged for your performance to be at the last one." However, now that more guests were coming over to watch Tessa, business was improving for the shop. That was why Wilbur had to make some changes.

Tessa didn't know about Wilbur's plans, but she was pleased to hear that she was the last performer, It told her that Wilbur recognized her skills. That night, when it was her turn to perform, she felt like her performance was one of her best ones yet, perhaps because she was in a good mood.

The song, 'Por Una Cabeza', got the customers mesmerized by its beautiful melody, and the whole room erupted into applause, Tessa beamed and bowed before she turned to leave the stage. However, she had only taken a few steps when she heard a familiar and deep voice coming from behind her. "Miss Reinhart."

"Mr. Angus." Tessa was somewhat surprised to see the man behind her. Angus was dressed

in a formal suit, and his long, wavy hair fell on his shoulders. His gentle features seemed like God had carved them, giving him an elegant and exquisite look, and he looked like someone who walked out of an animated film.

"I heard my friends say that a really impressive violinist is performing at this restaurant, but I hadn't expected it to be you, Miss Reinhart. It seems like I can't tip you now." Angus curled his lips into a faint smile as he stared at Tessa. His slightly upturned eyes twinkled as he gazed at her.

Tessa's eyes landed on the cash in the man's hand when she heard his words. "Thank you for your generosity, but I don't think I'll take your tip, Mr. Angus," she replied with a smile.