

## Chapter 1221

Naomi did not reply. She pushed the door open and chased Francisco. When Francisco arrived at the car park, he saw something through the reflection of the window, and his hand froze. He turned his head around to look at Naomi. "Is there anything I can help you with, Ms. Topaz?"

Naomi was panting heavily. She took a deep breath to calm herself down and straightened her back, "I'm sorry, Mr. Boucher. We didn't mean to pry into your private matters. I hope you won't take it to heart."

Francisco looked at her and replied, "I'm not a petty-minded person. What's more, these rumors may not be just rumors. What if they're true?"

Naomi was stunned.

Francisco smiled at her faintly and continued. "You're too gullible, Ms. Topaz. You think I'm not that kind of person, but what if I really am that kind of person? What would you do when you find out, Ms. Topaz?"

Naomi lowered her head and clenched her hands together tightly. "My instinct tells me that you're not."

He looked at her fixedly and chuckled. "Really? Honestly, I don't know if you're naive or just ignorant."

Naomi pressed her lips tightly and did not say anything.

He placed his hand on the door and fixed his gaze on the person in front of him. "Is it because of my looks?"

"What?" she asked.

Francisco combed his hair to the back and grinned, resuming his goofing attitude. "Is it because I'm your type, so you think I'm not that kind of person? If I were another person, would you still think the same?"

Naomi looked at him. She could vaguely sense the sarcasm in his words, "You think it's because you're my type?"

"Is it not?" Francisco shrugged. "Everyone in this world loves beautiful things. You're so naive and innocent. You've been well-protected by Mr. Topaz, so I suppose you haven't had much contact with other men. Once you've seen more. I'm sure you won't think that way anymore."

"Mr. Boucher," Naomi took a deep breath, "I think I haven't done anything wrong. You think I have a thing for you because you're my type? Yes, I admit that I do have a thing for you, but you don't have to go so far with your words. If you think I'm causing you trouble, then you can rest assured. I promise I won't show up in front of you again." When she finished talking, Naomi nodded at him and ran away, leaving Francisco to stand frozen stiff on the spot for a long while. At the Topaz mansion...

Naomi was playing with her food on the table. She did not understand why Francisco would think of her that way.

It was true that she had a thing for him, but she did not force him to like her back, so she was unable to fathom his hostility.

“Nelly, what’s wrong?” Anthony asked, pulling her back from her thoughts.

“Huh? I’m fine,” Naomi replied and lowered her head. Anthony then continued, “I need you to attend a cocktail party with me in two days. I haven’t introduced you to my friends. I know you don’t like to attend occasions like that, but this is a formality we need to go through. After all, my networks will be yours in the future, so I think you should meet them first.”

Naomi lifted her head to look at him. “But... I don’t want to embarrass you...”

Anthony chuckled and said, “Don’t worry. You’re my daughter. Just be yourself. You don’t need to care about other people.”

She nodded. “Alright. I’ll go with you.”

Even though she did not like to attend big events like that, she would have to face them alone in the future and could not

always rely on her father. Her goal was to make her own brand, so she would have to be exposed to those occasions in the future

At night, at the hospital...

Sandy sat blankly on the bed. She had sent a few messages to Tanner, but the latter had only replied to her once and disappeared

## Chapter 1222

Sandy knew the rift between them was about her having had abortions before, and he couldn’t accept that fact.

She bit her fingernail as she thought, ‘He can “accept” a woman like Pearl, so why can’t he accept me? Besides, he should suspect Pearl for today’s incident, right? After all. Pearl has done something like this to frame other people before. So, it makes sense to pin the blame on her.’

Meanwhile...

Tanner asked the security to pull out the surveillance footage on the corridor to investigate the incident about Sandy. The footage was fixed on the appearance of the three men after they left, and he asked his bodyguard to check their identities.

When Tanner came out of the monitoring room, he pulled his phone and saw there were a few unread messages. He frowned deeply and deleted all of them without checking on them.

Then, another message came through. Pearl did not dare to go home because of the marks around her neck. She stayed temporarily in a hotel and asked her assistant to buy her clothes for her to change. After taking her shower, the doorbell rang. She became alert and asked, “Who is it?”

“Miss, I’m sorry to disturb you, but our hotel has a complimentary champagne event for all single luxury suites.”

It was the voice of a female attendant.

Thank you, but I don't need it," Pearl said. The female attendant persisted and continued. "But the champagne is already here. It's free of charge, so you should take it."

Pearl opened the door and saw the female attendant holding a bottle of champagne in her hand. Just when she was about to take the champagne from her, a hand appeared out of nowhere and grabbed her wrist.

Her shoulders trembled, and then Tanner appeared in front of her. Her heart skipped a beat as Tanner said to the female attendant, "You're dismissed."

The female attendant nodded and left. Pearl tried to pull her hand out of his grip but to no avail. Tanner went closer to her and asked, "Passion is a hotel under the Hannigans. I'm sure you know about that, right?"

Pearl was so angry that she did not want to say anything and glared at him coldly. Tanner pushed the door and brought her into the room. She broke herself free from him when he closed the door and asked, 'What do you want from me? Do you want to sleep with me? Didn't you hate me? Why? Are you not afraid of catching a disease?'

Tanner pinned her in the wall corner and set his jaw tightly. He went even closer to her and hissed. "If I catch a disease, then you're stuck with me for the rest of your life."

Pearl grinned sarcastically and said, "What's wrong? Can't Sandy satisfy you anymore?"

He gripped her chin and said through gritted teeth, "You have a lot of nerves to mention Sandy before me. If it weren't for you, she wouldn't have lost her baby."

"What does her miscarriage have to do with me?" Pearl struggled, but Tanner locked her tightly in between his arms.

He clamped on her chin and forced her to meet his gaze. "Who knows? Maybe you're jealous of her, so you found someone to make her lose her baby. After all, it isn't the first time you've done this."

Pearl suddenly froze, and her blood ran cold. "So, you think it's me?"

Tanner did not say anything.

She laughed, and her eyes turned red around the rims. "So, what now? Are you going to kill me to avenge your unborn baby?"

"No. I'm not going to kill you." Tanner grabbed her cheek and went closer to her ear. "I want you to make up to us by delivering me a son.

"Never!" she shouted.

"I'm afraid that's not your decision."

Tanner turned her face over and kissed her. He forced himself into her despite her struggle, and it was truly addictive to force her to do something that she did not want to do.

The next day, Tanner woke up and looked at the woman sleeping next to him. He pushed the hair that was covering her face away with his hand. Even though she was a domineering and arrogant woman, she was nothing more than a disobedient cat when he removed her claws. Even if she was a rose with thorns, he just needed to remove the thorns.

## Chapter 1223

Pearl rolled over and opened her eyes when her back was facing him, her lips pressing into a fine line.

Tanner hugged her from the back, and when he noticed that she was trembling, he turned her around. Her eyes were tightly shut, but a drop of tear flowed down from the corner of her eyes. He wiped it off with his finger and said, "I'm sorry. Let's take a step back each, shall we?"

She opened her eyes and said in a hoarse voice, "It wasn't me."

Tanner looked at her. Honestly, he did not suspect Pearl at all. He was just taking advantage of that to give himself a reason not to let her go. "No matter if it's you or not, I'm not letting you leave my side." He released her and rose up to get himself changed. It was only when he left the room and closed the door with a slam that Pearl closed her eyes. When Tanner exited the hotel, he received a call from his bodyguard. "Mr. Hannigan, we've found the identities of those people. They're loan sharks."

He stood beside his car. "Loan sharks?" "Yes," the bodyguard replied.

Tanner frowned. He hung up the call and fell into deep thought.

'Loan sharks, huh?'

It seemed to him that he needed to look into what had happened during the years Sandy left him.

Tanner came to the hospital in the afternoon. Sandy had been waiting for him. When he appeared, a smile broke across her pale face. "Tan, you're here."

Tanner pulled the seat and sat beside the bed. He asked, "How do you feel today?"

She lowered her head and replied, "The nurse said I can be discharged from the hospital in another few days."

She darted a few glances at him carefully and pressed her lips. "Tan, are you still mad at me?"

"Why should I be mad at you?"

"Because I didn't tell you the truth." Sandy lowered her head. "I was just worried about what you would think of me. I was afraid you would abandon me."

Tanner took a deep breath and looked outside at the sky through the window. "Sandy, tell me honestly. Is this the only thing you didn't tell me the truth about? Are you sure you didn't tell me any more lies?" Sandy grabbed the cup tighter, and her expression changed. "What do you mean?"

He looked at her silently.

Sandy had a bad feeling about it, and she said, "Tan, do you still suspect me?"

Something crossed her head, and she continued. "Is it because I told you those people were sent by Ms. Santiago, so you."

"Sandy!" Tanner shouted, cutting her off. He had never talked to her in such a

serious tone before. "If it were Pearl who did it, why would she look for loan sharks? To get money from you? Do you think she would do that for money?"

Sandy's face turned pale. "Tan..." He placed his hand on his forehead and said, "This is all my fault. You were so perfect in my memory, and I kept thinking that it was my fault when you left me for a few years. I had been thinking about you in those few years until you returned. Do you know how happy I was when you said you couldn't get over me either?" Tanner laughed at himself. "It's only now that I realize what I can't let go of is the good memory we once had."

"Tan, I... I didn't mean it..."

"You didn't mean to lie to me, but if I didn't ask or look into it, you would still not tell me the truth!" Tanner shouted to interrupt her, his eyes turning bloodshot.

"Since when did you become like this, Sandy?" Sandy did not expect that Tanner would go to look into it, and she became nervous. She threw herself at him and hugged him tightly. "Tan, those loan sharks came to look for me, but I don't owe them money. It was that man. He used my identity and-"

Before she could finish her sentence, Tanner pushed her away. She fell to the bed and was stunned.

"I gave you a chance, and I believed you when you said that man cheated you until I went to check it out" Tanner looked at her coldly.

Sandy shuddered and cried, "Tan, I'm sorry.

I really didn't mean it..."

## Chapter 1224

"Sandy, if you told me the truth just now, I would believe that you had your own reasons, but you chose to lie to me again. How am I supposed to know that you're not lying to me now as well?"

Tanner lifted his head and forced himself to calm down. "You even made Pearl your scapegoat. Sandy, you've changed."

Sandy's chest began heaving up and down heavily. She clenched her fists tightly, and tears were falling down from her cheeks like broken beads. "I've changed..."

She lifted her head to look at Tanner and asked, "Is it me, or is it you who have changed?"

Tanner did not reply.

Crying, Sandy shouted, "Ever since I got pregnant, you've been giving me the cold shoulder. You are the one who made me feel like I might lose you. I don't want that to happen, so do you think I'd dare to tell you the truth?"

She gradually broke down emotionally and shouted. "Tanner, I'm a woman, and a woman's intuition is always right. Since when did you change your attitude when facing Pearl?"

Tanner was stunned, but he still kept silent.

Since when did his attitude change when facing Pearl? He had no idea either. He always thought he loved Sandy because she was his first love and also his current girlfriend. The times when they had been together used to be so wonderful and despite the breakup, he still couldn't bring himself to forget her.

Then Pearl, a woman with a bad reputation, became his fiancée and would become his wife in the future.

Could she become Sandy's replacement? Of course not. In his heart, Sandy was the purest and the most perfect.

However, he did not know why, but he came to care about Pearl. For him, Sandy was like something he loved very much that he had lost. He wanted to cherish her, but at the same time, he felt guilty. As for the current Sandy, he resented her and hated himself for being influenced by her.

Looking at him, Sandy sobbed. "You don't care about her past, but you care about the fact that I had an abortion and lied to you. In the end, it's your feelings for me that have changed. The truth that I had an abortion is just a mere opening for you to voice out your dissatisfaction with me. I can sense it. After finding out about that, I'm not that perfect Sandy in your mind anymore.

"Tanner, I didn't lie to you this time. I owe \$ 450,000 to the loan shark. I was forced by that man who was ruined by gambling to get a loan from the loan shark. I have never once laid my finger on that \$450,000. I ran away from him, and I kept avoiding them after I returned to you. The only chance I have to get rid of them is that I marry you, and I thought that as long as I became your wife, they wouldn't dare to come after me anymore.

"I haven't asked for a single cent from you after I've returned. I didn't even think about asking you to help me settle the debt.

When they found me and forced me to pay back the money, I had to lie to them to save my life, and they gave me a three-day grace period. I'm not afraid that they will come back for me. I'm just afraid that you won't be there and that I'll die where no one knows."

Sandy couldn't stop crying. She covered her face and continued. "I left you back then because my family is poor. I don't deserve you. It's only when I met you again that I realized I've been unable to forget about you. I want to be your wife, not because I want to share your wealth. I just want to shake off my past. I admit that I'm jealous of Ms. Santiago. I was afraid that you'd fall in love with her, so I lied to you."

Tanner looked at her and said in a solemn voice, "You should have told me earlier."

Sandy stopped crying.

Tanner stretched his hand to help her wipe the tears off her face, but his hand stopped midway. He clenched his hand into a fist and withdrew his arm. "Sandy, if you had told me everything when you returned, even if I'd be disappointed, I'd still accept you because I love you."

Chapter 1225

"Maybe you're right. You were perfect in my memories. It's exactly because Pearl is the exact opposite of you that I still chose you after you returned. I thought I still loved you. Even now, I can't tell how I feel about you. Do I still love you? Do I feel guilty about you? Is the person I love the perfect Sandy from the past or the woman before me?"

Sandy sat silently on the bed. After a long while, she said in a hoarse voice, "So you don't love me anymore."

Tanner parted his mouth and replied, "What if this is the bitter truth?"

Sandy did not say anything anymore.

Neither of them spoke for a long while. In the end, she laughed and wept. "I get it now. We can never go back to what we once were.

"I'll help you to settle your debt." Tanner turned around and walked away. Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks and said, "Sandy, this is what I owe you."

He left the ward afterward.

Sandy broke into tears as Tanner slowly disappeared from her vision. If she could go back in time, she wouldn't have lied to him. Unfortunately, she couldn't turn back time.

The cold wind blew the curtain open, and she looked outside through the window. When Tanner emerged from the hospital, a loud thud wafted into his ears from not far away. Then, someone shouted in panic, "Someone has jumped off the building!"

He froze and looked in the direction of the hospital building. He did not know why, but there was a bad feeling stirring in his heart, and he went toward the spot where the noise came.

Tanner wedged his way through the crowd, and when he saw the person before him, his pupils constricted as he shouted, "Sandy

Sandy had humped and crushed the car below her. There was a smile tugging at the corner of her lips. She looked like she was sleeping peacefully while blood was dripping down the roof of the car.

Two days later...

Anthony brought Naomi to the cocktail party. Naomi had put on a pink dress with a white pearl-buttoned fur coat. She followed Anthony to greet his friends along the way. Since this was the first time Anthony brought his daughter out for an event like this, other people finally had the chance to take a glimpse at the daughter of the Eastwood Company's owner.

"I didn't expect you would bring your daughter over, Mr. Topaz" an elegant lady said as she approached them with her husband.

Offering her a smile, Anthony replied, "Well, it's time for my daughter to get herself familiar with my friends." The lady looked at Naomi gently and said, "You're so pretty Ms. Topaz. I'm sure you must have inherited your looks from your mother."

Anthony's smile froze for a moment when the elegant lady mentioned Naomi's mother. However, he soon came around to his senses and replied, "Yeah. It's better for a girl to look more like her mother." At that moment, a commotion broke out in the crowd. They looked in the direction and saw Alexander had shown up with his son and wife. The elegant lady was startled, "Isn't she Patricia Emerson? She used to be a famous actress in the entertainment industry. I didn't expect to see her in person for the first time after she retired from the entertainment industry for so many years

Anthony remained calm even though they were walking toward them. Alexander brought his son, Zephir, and greeted them with a genial smile. "Mr. Topaz, I haven't been able to properly thank you and your daughter for saving my son's life."

The crowds turned their heads to look at them.

Anthony nodded and smiled. "Don't mention it, Mr. Gosling.

"No, if it were not for your daughter, my son's surgery would not have been successful," Alexander said sincerely.

Zephir, standing beside his father, nodded at them politely and greeted, "Mr. Topaz, Ms. Topaz, I'm happy to see you two here."

Anthony rubbed his head and smiled. "You need to study harder and be more successful than your father in the future, understand?"

Zephir nodded. "Understood, Mr. Topaz."

Patricia laughed and turned her head to look at Naomi. However, Naomi averted her gaze and looked at Anthony. "Dad, I need to use the restroom."

Chapter 1226

Anthony responded, "Okay."

Naomi put the wine glass down, turned around, and left. She carried her dress walked to the promenade, looked around, and finally walked toward the garden, where the fountain that was located in the middle of the courtyard reflected the colorful lights.

She walked to a bench, sat down, tightly wrapped herself in her coat, rubbed her freezing hands, and exhaled warm breaths onto them.

Hearing the sound of a piano coming from not far away, Naomi looked around, got up, and followed the sound of the music. Only to see a lot of people gathered at a spot as if they were looking at something.

She fought through the crowd and saw an elegant-looking man with gold-rimmed glasses who was sitting in front of the piano and playing it.

When the music ended, everyone around gave the man a round of applause.



Someone in the crowd asked, "What's the name of the song that you just played?" Before the man could answer the question, Naomi had already uttered the name of the song. "Moonlight". The man's gaze landed on Naomi's face, and he gave off a smile. "You've heard it."

Naomi nodded, "I heard it when I was studying music."

"You studied music?"

She replied with a smile, "I used to be a member of the orchestra department and I took piano lessons while I was younger too." Is that so? The man stood up instantly and offered Naomi the seat in front of the piano. "I really want to hear you play a song."

She was startled and waved her hands hastily. "I... I'm not very good at playing,"

The man smiled. "It doesn't matter. Just take it as a casual game. I only tried to play because I was bored."

Everyone around joined the man and asked her to try it out. Seeing that they were so enthusiastic, Naomi became too embarrassed to reject their request. Thus, she walked over to the piano, sat down, and placed her fingertips on the keys. Soon after that the piano sounded, and crisp melodies permeated the whole courtyard. After she finished playing a song, the applause around her brought her back to her senses. She stood up and said, "I hope you've enjoyed the song."

"No, you've played well. The man looked at her. 'This song is filled with sadness. It seems that you're a person who's full of stories too.'

She paused for a split second, and that was when someone came over and summoned the man, "Jackie, it's time to go."

Jackie nodded, and he looked back at Naomi. 'I'll take my leave first. I'll see you when I see you.'

He left with two other people while Naomi stood by the piano and watched them leave the scene. As the crowd gradually dispersed, a figure that was still standing in the crowd became clearer gradually. Naomi was momentarily astounded. Francisco stood there with his arms crossed and glanced at her. "It looks like I'm right." He walked toward Naomi, and his gaze landed on the piano. "Ms. Topaz, did the man who shares the same hobby with you manage to charm you?"

Naomi pursed her lower lip. "There's no need for you to be so harsh. Mr. Boucher.

Even if I've fallen for someone else, it's none of your business." 'Even if I were to take a fancy to that man, it has nothing to do with him.'

the opening was from the song that she

She passed by him and was about to leave, but the piano behind her suddenly sounded had just played.

She froze in place and turned to look at him.

Francisco stood beside the piano and played a few notes with one hand before stopping and lifting his head. "You've changed your mind rather quickly, Ms. Topaz."

"Nonsense!" Naomi frowned as she almost lost her head.

Francisco looked at her and did not say a thing.

Naomi took a deep breath. "Mr. Boucher, I don't understand why you're coming at me when I've done nothing wrong!"

She stepped back subconsciously, worrying that she would be seen crying because of the grievance. "All I've done is let you

know that I like you. Is having a thing for you an incorrect thing to do? Moreover, I didn't fall for you because of your appearance"

"Don't take another step back!" Francisco yelled abruptly, but it was already too late. After stepping on the edge of a staircase, Naomi lost her balance and fell down the steps.

In embarrassment, she fell to the ground, her cold palms rubbed against the ground, and she grazed her skin. The lacerations felt scorching hot.

Francisco ran to help her up, but she smacked his hand away. "I don't need your help."

Chapter 1227

Naomi got up on her own, but her ankle hurt badly after taking two steps forward.

Francisco walked over and grabbed her arm. "There's no need for you to force yourself to walk if it hurts." Just as she was about to withdraw her arm, Francisco suddenly picked her up in a bridal carry.

Naomi was shocked. "You-"

"I've never seen a woman as dumb as you." He gnashed his teeth and left the scene with her in his arms

The sudden plot twist made Naomi feel extremely flustered, and she did not know where she should keep her eyes fixed on. All she could do was stay in his arms

obediently and quietly, listening to her heart beat at an unreasonably fast rate.

They came to a lounge that was located next to the banquet hall. Francisco put her on the couch and frowned when he saw that she had been holding her palm. "Open your hand."

She spread her palm obediently, and a few drops of blood oozed out of the wound on her palm.

Francisco went out and asked the waiter to get him a first-aid kit. After a while, he came in with a first-aid kit and sat down right next to Naomi.

Naomi looked up at him. "I'll do it myself."

"Is it convenient for you to apply ointment with your left hand?" Francisco grabbed her hand, pulled it closer to him, and started applying the ointment on her wounds without even lifting his head.

She hissed and wanted to withdraw her hand, but he tightened his grasp. "Don't move."

Naomi stopped moving and looked scrupulously at how he was applying 'medicine to herself. The distance between the two of them was obviously not close, but she felt that it was their first time coming so close.

She was so close to him that she could count each and every strand of his eyelashes, and the scent of his shampoo seemed to smell nice. She gulped, but that was when Francisco lifted his head too.

She was startled, so she lowered her head hurriedly, looked away, and withdrew her hand. "Okay."

She then thought of something and pouted.

"Thank you."

"What do you like about me?" He stared at her.

Naomi paused for a bit, lowered her head, brushed the gauze that was covering the palm of her hand, and said casually, "Whatever I like about you, will you change it?" Francisco burst into laughter abruptly but quickly restrained himself and put on his ordinary look. "Why would you trust me so easily? Are you not afraid that I'll deceive your feelings?"

"Usually, men that say this are definitely not cheaters or players." Naomi murmured. "Because a cheater or a player won't reject others."

Francisco squinted slightly. "Ms. Topaz, do you know anything about playing hard to get?"

She wondered. "Then are you playing hard to get?"

He smiled. "Do you think that I'm doing so?"

She shook her head in a daze. "You... I don't think so." Francisco pinched her chin all of a sudden, and she was stunned as his gradually approaching face filled up her pupils.

She stopped breathing. It was so nerve-racking that she closed her eyes, but all she heard was his laughter after a while.

Naomi opened her eyes and saw him leaning against the back of the couch and smiling with his palms covering his face. It was a joy that she had never seen before in her life. She felt like she had been played again, which made her feel so exasperated that her cheeks started to warm up.

'That was so embarrassing!

He opened his fingers and looked at her through the gaps. "Did you expect me to kiss you just now?"

13:18

LIUPILI ILLI

"No." She turned her head away, but her pounding heart had already betrayed her. The atmosphere of them getting along like this felt very subtle, and it seemed to be a rather scarce scenario.

"It's time for you to get back to the banquet hall." Francisco reminded her while supporting his forehead with one hand.

Naomi remembered instantly that her father was still waiting in the banquet hall. She grabbed her evening dress and stood up. Her ankle did not hurt as much after a short rest.

She was already at the door when Francisco stopped her. "Naomi." Naomi stopped and turned her head in doubt, and the approaching figure stretched out his hands and held her cheeks in his palms. Not long after that, a warm kiss landed on her forehead.

Naomi was astonished. The facial features that were approaching her eyes became blurred under the dazzling lights-it was as surreal as a dream.

She still could not return to her senses after Francisco had left. The only sensation that she could feel at this moment was the warmth on her forehead.

She raised her hand and rubbed the spot." What... What does that mean?"

Chapter 1228

"Nelly." Anthony came out to find her because he was worried about her. Seeing her standing at the door of the lounge, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Here you are."

"Dad," Naomi hid her hands behind her, "... I met a friend just now, so I chatted with her for a bit."

Anthony felt helpless. "Remember to at least inform me in the future. Otherwise, I'll be worried."

"I'm sorry, Dad, I'll pay more attention to that in the future." She lowered her head. It was indeed her fault for making her father worried.

Anthony did not ask her anything, and they did not return home until the banquet was over.

Naomi walked back to her room, closed the door, and leaned behind the door. She opened her hand to expose her palm, which was covered with a tiny piece of gauze. Her heart started pounding again upon recalling that scene.

'I seem to have fallen!'

"I heard that Mr. Hannigan's lover jumped off the hospital room. How terrible is that.!"

"Are you talking about the Mr. Hannigan who ran away from his own wedding ceremony with his lover?"

"Yes, there are rumors on the Internet saying that Ms. Santiago is the one who forced the woman into jumping off the building. Tsk tsk, the daughter of the Santiagos is actually quite pitiful. Her fiance despises her so much that he ran away with his mistress in public. And now, she's been made the primary suspect after the death of her fiance's mistress. Why doesn't anyone actually remember that she's the real deal? That she's Mr. Hannigan's actual fiancée?"

Two to three female staff members walked past Naomi, and she stopped when she heard the topic they were discussing. She looked surprised.

At that moment Lucy just happened to come out of the elevator. Seeing that Naomi was standing there, pondering about something, she walked up to her and asked, "Naomi, why are you in a daze?"

Naomi returned to her senses and smiled." It's nothing. I was just thinking about something."

Lucy looked at her and patted her on her shoulder, "Then stop thinking about it already. Ms. Vanderbilt is coming back to the company today. We'll have to work hard."

She smiled and nodded.

Maisie arrived at Soul at noon, and Lucy handed her all the previous week's reports when she returned to the office. She took the reports from her and put them on the desk to go through them. "Did something huge happen when I was not around

Lucy smiled. "It's really nothing major." Maisie nodded as if she had thought of something. "I asked you to bring Naomi around the company so she could learn a thing or two from you. How is it?"

Lucy frowned. "Ms. Vanderbilt, Naomi actually doesn't suffer from any social anxiety disorder. She's just a little introverted and shy, and she's also a rich lady in hiding!"

Maisie lifted her head to look at her, only to see her continue laughingly. "Not to mention that she's still a good-tempered and gentle rich lady."

Maisie narrowed her eyes. "What in the world happened to the relationship between the two of you during my absence from the company?"

Before taking some time off, Maisie had asked Lucy to take care of Naomi for a while because she was worried the other employees would shun Naomi because of her temperament.

'It seems that Lucy was the right choice. Compared with this girl, she talks a lot more and can hold a conversation with anyone. So as long as she's there for Naomi, the latter will never feel lonely. In general, the effect has been great.'

Lucy scratched her cheeks and smiled. "Anyway, we both have gone to the movies, eaten dinner, and gone shopping together. I think Naomi gets along with others very well. It's just that the others in the company who don't know her might misunderstand

her."

Maisie smiled. "She is not a difficult person to get along with, to begin with. It's just that she doesn't know how to integrate herself into a big group of people."

1/2

13:19

Cilapiei izzo

Lucy wondered. "She doesn't know how to integrate herself into a group of people?"

"Yeah." Maisie nodded. "After all, she's been isolated from society for such a long time, so she's not used to it. Everything will be fine when she gets used to how things work in the future." Lucy was even more confused after hearing that. She recalled in a trance that Naomi had once told her that she no longer had the contact information of all her friends.

'Could that be what she meant?'

## Chapter 1229

Lucy suddenly felt a little sympathetic toward Naomi.

'Her family's upbringing shouldn't be this strict, right? 'She's not allowed to be in contact with others, so has she always been staying at home just like those Victorian ladies in ancient times?

'No wonder Naomi doesn't even have a Twitter or Instagram account. I even had to teach her how to create one. How can I not feel sympathetic toward someone who can't even have access to the Internet?'

She remembered something all of a sudden. "Oh cr\*p! Then did I just put harm in her way?"

Maisie frowned. "What harm did you put in her way?"

"I-I thought that Naomi is so good-looking, but it's a pity that she doesn't have a boyfriend. So, I thought about making a match out of Mr. Boucher and her.

Moreover, I thought that Naomi has a thing for Mr. Boucher too, but what if..."

Maisie paused for a split second. "Which Mr. Boucher are you referring to?"

Lucy lowered her head and murmured, "It's the second heir of the Bouchers."

Lucy could not help but tell Maisie about what had happened when she was not around. She even reminded Naomi after she found out that the man was the second heir of the Bouchers. Although what she had tried to tell Naomi got into the ears of the actual person, Naomi did not seem to care about that at all that day.

'She's such a pure and innocent fair lady. Would she still stay by a man's side even if she were to be deceived?' Maisie laughed out loud abruptly when she heard this. "Why didn't I know that you've been playing cupid?"

"I didn't do it on purpose." Lucy pouted. "I didn't know he's the second heir of the Bouchers at the time."

"Actually, Francisco is not as wicked as you think he is. The rumors that you hear from the public may not always be true." Maisie could not help but keep on laughing. "If you've played your role well, perhaps she might need to thank you in the future."

Lucy was in the middle of pondering about something and whispered, "I think it's very unlikely for it to turn out as a success."

At the Santiagos' manor...

"That woman committed suicide by jumping off the building. What does it have to do with Pearl? This is just pure bullsh\*t!" Mrs. Santiago slammed the newspaper on the table.

'That wh\*re embarrassed the Santiagos so much before this, and now they're going to point all their fingers at Pearl and say that it's all her fault that the wh\*re committed suicide!?'

The more she thought about it, the more she could not let it go. She turned her head to look at Antonio. "We should've rejected the marriage proposal in the first place! It's so unlucky!" "That's enough. Is the gossip on the

Internet something that we can stop even if we want to?" Antonio finished his tea and put the teacup down. "Now that the marriage has been annulled let's just allow the past to pass us by." The butler entered the room through the door at this time. "Master, Madam, Mr.

Hannigan is here."

Mrs. Santiago's expression changed instantly. "That b\*stard is shameless enough to pay us a visit after all that?"

Antonio opened his mouth at this time. "Let him in. I want to listen to what he has to say." Mrs. Santiago snorted and sat down with an upset expression. After a while, Tanner came in through the main doorway. He nodded at the patriarch and matriarch of the Santiagos.

Mrs. Santiago did not appreciate his politeness at all and looked away from beginning to end.

Antonio lifted his head to look at him. "The union through marriage between the two families has been annulled. The Santiagos don't plan to point fingers for the things that have happened in the past, so what the hell are you doing here?"

Tanner smiled. "Mr. Santiago, I was at fault for what happened back then, and that's something that I won't be able to make up for Pearl. I hereby apologize to both of you."

Mrs. Santiago scoffed. "You want to apologize to us only after that woman jumped off a building? Isn't this a little too late already

Whatever emotion that was left in Tanner's gaze sank to the bottom of his eyes, but it was not noticeable as there was still a smile on his face. He asked the assistant behind him to place all the items that he had brought on the table, which were all very precious gifts. "I have no other intentions. I just want to express my apology to both of you."

Antonio frowned and did not even utter a single word.

Mrs. Santiago only took a glance at the gifts on the table, unmoved. "We've got your apology. As for these unnecessary gifts, let's just forget about that."

### **Chapter 1230**

Tanner gave off a faint smile. "I can clarify for Pearl about the gossip that's spreading like wildfire on the Internet."

Mrs. Santiago's expression turned slightly restrained, and she said in a stern voice. "Even if you don't take any action, our daughter is still innocent."

"But will anyone believe it?"

Tanner managed to choke Mrs. Santiago with only one question.

Mrs. Santiago's face paled. "What do you mean by that?"

Tanner replied calmly, "Sandy died after all, but her death is thought to have something to do with Pearl. Sandy once told me that she had a miscarriage because of Pearl- 'Bullsh\*t!' Mrs. Santiago smacked the table, stood up, and refuted furiously." Tanner Hannigan, I don't care what's your purpose for coming here, but my daughter has never done anything to that woman. Don't you ever think you can put any of the blame related to that damn woman on my daughter's shoulders."

"Will the public care about what the truth looks like? They only want the result." Tanner slowed down. "You wouldn't want to see your daughter suffer because of all those rumors, would you?"

Mrs. Santiago's face gradually dimmed.

He continued calmly. "In the end, if it weren't for the marriage arrangement that you negotiated with my father, I would have nothing to do with Pearl now, and perhaps Sandy wouldn't have made that decision that day."

His eyes looked gloomy. "Since we've come this far, we can only keep on moving forward. I think all men in Bassburgh would take offense to her history with Pearl's reputation, don't you think so?"

Mrs. Santiago was trembling with wrath. Antonio, who had not spoken a word, took a glance at Tanner. "Are you threatening

US?"

"Do you think so, Mr. Santiago?" He put on another smile again. "I'm just trying to hold a negotiation with both of you. After all, I also want both of you to give me a chance to treat her well."

Antonio's masseter moved. "That depends on whether Pearl will agree to your proposal or not."

Tanner smirked. "What if she agrees to it?"

Antonio did not utter another word.

When Tanner left the Santiagos manor, Mrs. Santiago pushed Antonio. "Have you lost your mind!? Can't you see that that b\* stard has already made it clear that he wants to take revenge on our daughter for that woman?"

Antonio stared at her with an unusually calm expression. "If you hadn't spoiled Pearl and turned her into that mischievous and rebellious young lady that she used to be, would she have fallen to the extent of being manipulated now?"

"It's useless for you to protect her. You can help our daughter for now, but not for the rest of her life. Will Tanner let her go when we're both gone? She still has to deal with her affairs after all."

Mrs. Santiago seemed to have been choked

by her throat, and her eyes turned bloodshot instantly.

Antonio slowly got up and left the room, and Mrs. Santiago fell back into the couch and cried while covering her face with both hands

At the apartment..



When Pearl woke up, the only thing she felt was a sore neck. She remembered that she seemed to have been knocked unconscious in the parking lot.

When she saw Tanner sitting on a chair fiddling with a camera, she sat up in a panic. She then immediately realized that she was not wearing any clothes, so she pulled the blanket, wrapped herself in it, and asked with a pale face, "Tanner Hannigan, what have you done to me!?"

Tanner did not even lift his gaze. "It hasn't even been a week since Sandy's death, so don't worry, I won't touch you"

Pearl was about to rummage for clothes, but Tanner's voice sounded. "There's no need for you to look for them now. I've thrown them away."

She froze on the bed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean every single word that I just said, literally." Tanner raised his head, and his eyes looked dimmed and enigmatic. "I went to your house today."

Pearl's face turned pale, and her lips trembled slightly.

Tanner got up, walked toward her, and showed her the camera. "If I were to show these photos to Mr. and Mrs. Hannigan, please enlighten me about what they would think of you."

Looking at the photos in the camera, Pearl's pupils constricted, her hands and feet turned cold, and blood was drained from her cheeks. "What the h\*ll are you trying to accomplish?"