

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother Chapter 41

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother

Chapter 41

Chapter 41: Ex-wife It's like a bucket of ice water being poured down my head. My whole body goes cold. I finally realize this: Eason was waiting for this chance all along. He never supported me of getting this job. But he also perfectly well that if he asks me to turn it down, I'd never agree. So he waits for everyone to be present and then spill it out. That way mom and Mr. Ramirez can be the bad guy for him.

That manipulative, cold blooded bastard!

I'm so damn mad. I feel like I've been played.

"Nat?" mom urges me, waiting anxiously for my answer. I take in a deep breath, "yeah that's true." The scar has been ripped open already. No need to cover it further.

"What? Why!" mom tightens her grip on the napkin till her knuckles go white. "What made you believe that you need to get a part-time job? Do you need money?"

Yes I need money! I want to scream at her. I need the money to go to college and start my own damn life, so that I don't need to become some trophy wives who live on allowance like she does!

But those thoughts are just too harsh. And our family lawyer is here, and I can't embarrass mom in front of him. So after a long pause, I simply spit out a few words, "Yeah I need money. And I want to make them myself." Mom sucks in a sharp inhale as if she has heard something absurd. "Natalia," Mr. Ramirez joins our awkward conversation. "If you want a job, you are welcome to do a paid internship at my company. It'll also help your resume." "Thank you sir, but I'm fine with my current job," I say dryly, trying to sound as respectful as possible.

Eason, who's sitting right across me, suddenly leans forward his upper body. His eyes gleam with a very familiar light that I now recognize it as evil. He gives me a cold smile before saying, "Nat, and who set you up with this coffee house job again?" My heart literally stops. I want to pick up the knife and stab it into his smug face.

"I found it myself," I snap. "Oh I don't think that's the case at all," Eason says icily. "It was Alex, right? He gave you the interview and put you in danger."

“What? Are you fucking out of your mind? How dare you accuse Alex— ” I yell.

“Alex?” mom gasps. “Your boyfriend?”

Eason snorts, “Yes her boyfriend, who by the way seems to have zero concern about Nat’s safety.”

I smack my hand down on to the table before jumping up to my feet. That’s it. I’ve had it enough. All the accusation, manipulation and betrayal.

“So you wonder who gives me this job? Yes it’s Alex. Because he actually cares about my circumstances and wants to provide a solution, unlike someone who says he’s proud of me being a strong woman but acts the complete opposite! You are a fucking hypocrite Eason Ramirez!”

The room goes dead silent as everyone wears the same mask of shock. Eason’s face falls, his green eyes burning with fury. There’s one second that I thought he was going to jump up and slap me, but he just sits there and eyes me coldly in a very condescending way.

“Sorry, now if you will excuse me.” I grit out and leave the table. I storm out of the dining room, head upstairs and go into my room directly. It’s hard to believe that we were kissing and having sex just a few hours ago. But this is our relationship-bumpy, hard and toxic. The good moment is always fleeting, and we spend most of the time cursing and hating each other.

I sit on my bed absent-minded.

Maybe, I thought, maybe he’d come upstairs and apologize? I’m not sure if I’ll forgive him but I definitely want him to explain everything to me.

But no.

I wait anxiously for a long time. No one showed up at my door.

Maybe he’s done with me. Or maybe he simply doesn’t give a fuck of how I feel. Sadness and angry surge up in me as I take out my phone and text him. (Maybe we should take a break.)

(This is too much.)

I click “send” spur of the moment and immediately regret it. It’s stupid to break up over something like this since we’ve overcome so much together.

Yet I'm also curious of how he'd react to this. So I sit there holding my phone, waiting for his reply.

And another hour passes. Nothing.

Eventually, I'm forced to realize that he won't text me back ever. The phone slips through my fingers and drops to the ground as I bury my face into my palms.

The next few days have been hell for me because I haven't heard back from him since. No texts, no calls, and he doesn't even show up at the townhouse again. My self-esteem prevents me from contacting him first, but I sure spend a lot of time staring at my phone screen hoping magic can happen and he can call me.

I'm pathetic.

He's the evil asshole but why I'm the one suffering?

The only fortunate thing is that mom and Mr. Ramirez weren't affected by my drama. One day later, they are back to being sweet and loving again. I'm a little envy of how great they are

together

With their anniversary approaching, mom goes crazy shopping again. On the next Saturday morning, she drags me to a fitting. I'm not interested in such things at all, but since my so

called "boyfriend" is ignoring me, I have nothing else to do.

"...so for the color palette of the party I'm thinking white and beige. I wanted to go with rosily pink, but I was also afraid that people would call it cheesy. So basically I want to stay on the safe side. So do you have anything appropriate to wear sweetie?...Nat are you listening? Natalia!"

I'm whipped back to reality, realizing that I'm staring at my phone again. Mom is standing on a platform in her newly made evening gown with three designers measuring her at the same time. She pouts staring at me, apparently upset by my distraction. "You look very beautiful, mom." It's a compliment but also the truth. She's the most attractive woman I've ever seen.

She smiles and turns to those designers, "can you bring over the collection again? I think my daughter needs something as well."

"No mom I'm fine!" I immediately decline. Those tailored clothes are shockingly expensive.

But those designers simply smile and nod, then leave the VIP lounge.

Mom walks down the platform and comes to sit with me. She studies my face and then asks, "everything fine sweetie?"

"Yeah of course."

"But something is on your mind, right?" her almond-shaped eyes fix on my face. "I think it has something to do with your boyfriend? With Alex?"

It does have something to do with my boyfriend. But not Alex.

"Listen, I don't want to tell you whom you should date. But do you really think Alex is a good choice? I mean I liked that boy before, but this part-time job thing really changed my mind about him."

"Mom! That's enough!" I snap, "How come you all blame him for this? He's only doing me a favor! He did nothing wrong!"

"I'm not blaming him. But your top priority is college application and school. You need a boyfriend who understands that. If he's from one of those families that need him to do part time jobs to afford college, then I don't think he's the right choice for you..."

Gosh. How can she say that? She was a smalltown girl herself! Did she totally forget that after

she married a billionaire?

"One more word. Then I'm out of here," I mumble grumpily.

"OK fine," mom spreads her hands. "Well since you won't share your worries with me, I'll share one myself."

I wait in silence, not sure if I want to hear it.

She sighs again as unease flashes through her eyes, "Shawn's ex will come to our anniversary

party."

I hold my breath involuntarily, "Wait, do you mean-" "Yes. Shawn's ex-wife. Eason's mother."

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother Chapter 42

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother

Chapter 42

Chapter 42: Silver Dress

If she weren't my mom, I'd throw the F bomb

"Are you out of your mind?" I ask sharply, "Why on earth did you invite her!" "I never invited her, OK? You think I like this arrangement?" mom says urgently. "Even though they were separated, she's still Shawn's business partner. What can I do?" "Millions of things! Have you tried talking to Mr. Ramirez about this? I think he will be equally awkward if his ex-wife comes to his anniversary party that he's having with his new wife!"

Mom sighs deeply, "I tried. But he said they ended on good terms so no one should feel weird about this. And recently he is negotiating a new partnership with her company, so he couldn't really uninvite her. And I don't want to jeopardize his work with our personal life."

I want to tell her that this is bullshit. No normal person would invite his Ex to the anniversary.

But this is how high society works actually, full of fuck-ups and dramas. Since mom has absolutely no say in the Ramirez's family, the only thing she can do is to put up with all the humiliation and absurdity. I bite my nails in anxiety, thinking of Eason's mother, Caroline Griswold.

I've met her once, three years ago, when my mom just got married with Mr. Ramirez. She totally intimidated me with her tailored Chanel suit, impeccable make-up, and the whole upper-class aura. That day she came to drop off a wedding gift for them. She hugged and kissed Mr. Ramirez goodbye right in front of my mom, like mom didn't even exist. When I murmured a "nice to meet you" to her, she didn't even look at me and just walked right pass by me in her high heels as if I was dirt.

Later I heard that she's an Old Money. Her family is filthy rich and has some kind of royal lineage, seems like that Eason's grandfather is a British Duke. Funny story, he really is a "

So power plus money, Caroline Griswold is definitely a tough person to deal with. I've always had the feeling that even though mom won over Mr. Ramirez's heart, Caroline

Griswold never took us seriously. And she has a special connection with Mr. Ramirez that mom will never be able to get. "Mom, seriously, I don't know what to say," I say dryly. "You knew what you married into. So suck it up."

Plus, I have my own problem to deal with.

If Caroline Griswold finds out that not only did mom steal Mr. Ramirez from her, but I'm also dating her son right now, she's going to rip my face right off. "I know," mom places her hand on my arm and pleads. "But that's why I need you to be your best self at the anniversary. I know you hate all the dressing up and mingling, but can you just do this for me?"

I really want to her that it's pathetic and that woman won't give a damn about how I look. But

I know mom needs my support desperately.

So I nod my head with a heavy heart.

Mom forces out a faint smile, "thank you sweetie. Why don't you go get those designers? See what's taking them so long?"

I rise up from my seat and walk outside. No one is around so I travel down the hall trying to find someone. Just when I walk pass by another VIP lounge, I hear a familiar voice coming from inside of the door.

"...Eason, what do you think?"

I freeze right on the spot, can't believe my ears. And the next second, without second thought, I push open the door and barge in.

Valerie snaps her head back and screams out loudly when she sees me. She's wearing a beautiful evening gown that greatly highlights her curvy figure. But all I can see right now is the man sitting on the couch-Eason.

I grip my fists so tight that my palms hurt. Burning fury clouds my mind.

back together already? What the fuck is his deal?!

Eason's eyes widen immediately as shock takes over his face. He stares at me in a daze, as if he couldn't trust his own eyes.

Valerie stomps her feet and barks, "What the hell are you doing here?" "Shut up Valerie," I snarl. "Eason, you have anything to say?" He slightly squints his eyes. Then he gradually leans back in his seat, his face going back to being arrogant and indifferent. A cold smile appears on his lips as if he's enjoying my raging face.

“What do you want to hear?” he snorts.

I glare at him in silence with red eyes. So he doesn't even care to explain, not now, not ever. Thinking back to all those “good times” we had, I feel so stupid and played.

I bite my lower lip as shame washes over me. Whatever I do now won't change the fact that I'm a fucking idiot. So I turn around in silence and storm out of their room.

When I go back to our room, those designers are already back with a rack of sample clothes for us to pick. Mom totally enjoys herself while flipping through those dresses and discussing it with designers, while I sit there quietly staring blankly at the air.

Eason is back with Valerie.

Or maybe. He never actually leaves Valerie. He has been playing me the whole time.

Or all women are like trash to him. I should have known, since he's such a huge fuckboy. “Nat sweetie?” I hear mom calling me. Look up, and I find her showing a silver gown to me. “Don't you think it's absolutely gorgeous?” she admires the gown in a dreamy tone. “I think it really matches your eye color. Why don't you go and try it on?” I'm not in the mood to be mom's barbie doll. Yet before I can say no, the door to the VIP

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lounge flies opens again and someone marches in the room.

It's Eason, followed by Valerie. I jump up to my feet immediately. Fuck. Why can't they just leave me alone! “Eason,” mom blinks in surprise. “I didn't expect to see you here.” “I ran into Nat earlier. Figured I would come and say hi,” he answers mom, but his eyes find me directly. Why does he keep staring at me??? Valerie emerges from Eason's back and walks up to mom with a fake smile, “nice to meet you Mrs. Ramirez. I'm Eason's girlfriend Valerie.” Girlfriend my ass. That piece of shit doesn't take any of us as his girlfriend. Eason takes his seat beside me, giving no comment on Valerie's declaration. I instantly move away from him.

“And that is a killer dress!” Valerie gasps and takes over the dress from my mom without even asking her first. She turns to Eason and asks in a cheerful tone, “Eason, I think I've found the one. It really suits me, doesn't it?”

I let out a loud snort, rolling my eyes. Mom frowns, “I'm glad you like it. But I've picked it for my daughter. There're plenty of others for you to choose.”

“I understand, Mrs. Ramirez. But I just love it so much. Or—” Valerie looks at me giving me a vicious smile, “—Natalia, maybe we can both try it on. And let Eason say which one deserves the dress. What do you think?”

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother Chapter 43

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother

Chapter 43

Chapter 43: Arranged Marriage

Oh. My. God.

I almost don't know if I should laugh or spit in her face. But there's one thing I'm sure of: she has absolutely no self-respect. She can reduce herself to Eason's play toy all she wants. I'm not following her example.

Yet before I can voice out my thought, Eason speaks up before me, "Val just cut it off."

Valerie widens her eyes in surprise, as if she didn't expect Eason to go against her. But Eason has already risen up from his seat and walked up to her with one hand in his pocket. He takes the dress from Valerie's hand and hands it back to mom with a faint smile, "Mrs. Ramirez, you have really a good taste. I'm sure everyone would fall for this dress. But we shouldn't step in like this. Sorry about that."

Mom's face remains cold even in front of his compliment. I'm sure she's just as offended as I

am.

"Don't worry about it dear," mom gives him a polite yet frosty smile. "If your girlfriend likes it, it's totally fine she can keep it. Like I said, there are plenty of other choices for us to choose from."

She ignores Eason's hand and turns to me, "Nat sweetheart. Are you ready to leave?" I immediately stand up, "Yeah totally."

I follow mom and march outside without even looking back. I didn't change my mind about Eason simply because he stopped Valerie's madness. He's still an asshole. I guess he was just embarrassed by Valerie's behavior.

When we left the store, mom lets out a long sigh, "Dear lord-what was that? That girl has absolutely no courtesy." "Yeah...that's Valerie." I respond with a bitter tone. Guess Eason really likes the bitch type. "And she's in the same school as you right? Has she ever treated you badly?" "A bit. But I don't care much about what her."

"You are doing the right thing, sweetie. Just ignore her," Mom gently pats my shoulder. "Because soon enough there'll be someone else to take care of her."

I can guess whom my mom is referring to, "You are talking about Eason's mom, right?"

"Yes. Shawn mentioned it to me once...Caroline has picked Eason's marriage partner a long time ago. He can date whoever he wants when he's still young. But you guys are going to college next year, so I guess Caroline will introduce the girl to Eason very soon. She will definitely get rid of any cheap chicks around Eason before that girl comes into the picture."

My mouth parts in shock hearing this.

What the fuck...arranged marriage? And this is already the 21st centuries? "Are you serious?" I gasp in a rather shrill voice, "A marriage partner? Is Eason aware? Is he

OK with this?"

Mom gives me a suspicious look and I quickly hide away the panic on my face, "I- I was just curious, nothing else."

"Well, Eason doesn't have much choice, isn't he? Caroline Griswold is a very strong woman. If she has picked the right daughter-in-law, I'm positive that she'll force Eason down the aisle if she has to. And this is how upper society works."

"But you and Mr. Ramirez married out of love," I point out urgently. "Shawn is the head of the family, so he doesn't have to listen to anyone. But there's a long way ahead of Eason before he can officially take control of his own life," mom pauses and looks at me again. "Since when do you care so much about Eason?" My lips twist with bitterness, "I don't...just a little curious."

How naïve of me to actually believe that there's a future ahead of us.

Eason already has his life all planned out. He will probably go to Harvard and take over the company after graduation. Then he will marry the girl that his mother has chosen for him and have beautiful children with her.

What we have is nothing more than a short summer fling.

When we get home, I go straight up to my room and lock myself in. Mom calls me for dinner once, but I simply tell her that I'm not hungry. I've lost all my appetite because of what happened this afternoon.

I lie on my bed staring at the ceiling spacing out, till someone knocks on my door. "Mom, I told you. I'm not hungry!" I raise my voice. Then the doorknob turns, and

someone just open the door open and walks in. I jerk around and gaze in terror on him, "How did you I locked the door!"

Eason shows me the key in his hand and then shoves it back into his pocket. He closes the door behind him, walks over and sits down on the bed, like he's the owner of this room.

"Excuse me? Hello?" I sit up and snap. "Did I invite you in?"

"I invited myself," he raises his brow with a wicked grin on his lips. "And you didn't ask for my permission the first time, remember?"

I exhale a long breathe in frustration. I don't have the energy to deal with him today.

"Just say what you want. OK?"

He shrugs and places a nicely wrapped box on my bed. I instantly recognize the label.

I'm speechless. "Please tell me it's not that silver dress."

"Well, no surprise this time," he smiles. "You like it?"

"You fucking kidding me?" I kick away the box with my feet. "You really think I still want it? It's already tainted by your dear girlfriend. Give it to her. I'm sure she'll keep it somewhere nice and high and probably worship it three times a day."

Eason sneers. He folds his arms in front of his chest and says indifferently, "Valerie is not my girlfriend."

"Then you are just a fucking fuckboy who deserves to fuck yourself in hell!" I say sternly. "Leave me alone."

He laughs out loud, "that's a lot of fwords."

I bite my lower lip in anger. I've always wanted to hear him explain his relationship with Valerie. But now I've realized that even if it's not Valerie, there will be someone else. He is simply too much for me. "You've given me the dress. Mission completed. Now can you leave?" I ask in an irritated tone.

He sits there in silence, his beautiful green eyes trailing across my face. Tension gradually builds up at this moment and I feel my cheek getting hotter under his intense gaze.

No girls can last more than ten seconds under that gaze. I have to pinch myself to remain sane.

Eventually he speaks up in a gentle tone, “Hey. Are you done being mad at me? Are we still on that break?”

“Let me give you a dating language 101. ‘On-a-break’ means breaking up. Get it?” I say that quickly and feel pretty proud of myself.

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother Chapter 44

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother

Chapter 44

Chapter 44: Pain in the ass His face remains calm and cold. Yet I still catch a fleeting glimpse of panic and disbelief passing through his eyes. “Surprised?” I sneer and take a moment to enjoy the look on his face. “I thought you knew... since you already brought your new girlfriend shopping today.” His face drops. “For the second time, Valerie is not my girlfriend.” “Just stop lying, OK? If she’s not your girlfriend, then what are you really? Why on earth are you guys together all the time?? No forget it... I don’t want to know.” I wave my hand dismissively.

He suddenly stands up. Taken aback, I raise my head to look at him and find his face dark and sullen.

“Are you asking me to cut connections with all my female friends?” he questions me in a strained tone. “Is this what you want? Because I can do that. If only you could stop talking to Alex!”

Even though I was mad at him, I was able to talk to him in a calm manner. But these words enrage me instantly. Anger explodes in my head and the next thing I know I’m kneeling on my bed, pointing a finger at him and yelling. “Are you kidding me?! You know perfectly well that Valerie is not just a normal female friend! She likes you and you’ve been fucking her for god know how long! Is it really too much to ask you to stay away from her now that we are dating? And why do you keep dragging Alex into this conversation? We are just friends, unlike you and Valerie!”

“But he’s the reason you decided to break up with me, isn’t it?” he raises his voice and starts yelling back at me too. “If you don’t care for him at all, why do you keep getting mad at me for an outsider?”

“Oh my god... Eason! I-“I’m too pissed to say a full sentence. “I’m not mad at you because of him! I’m mad at you because you try to manipulate my life! You didn’t respect me at all! Don’t you get it?”

His lips part slightly, and a strangely un-focused look appears on his face. He looks at me, brows furrowed, and after a short pause he says in a low voice, "No I don't get it."

"Bullshit." I snort. "You've dated like a thousand girls. Stop fucking play dumb."

"Yes, I've dated a few girls...but you are not like them," he murmurs. "All these...are very new to me."

My heart skips a beat. Is he telling me that I'm special?

No. This must be another trick. He's just trying to get me to go soft on him. I'm not falling for that.

"Oh well. I'm very flattered." I say in a dry and sarcastic tone. "But this is it. We are breaking up. I'm not wasting my time on you anymore."

He's trying to say something else but a gentle knock on the door interrupts us.

"Eason? Nat?" mom's worried voice comes from outside of the door. "Is everything OK?"

Shit. I forgot we are at home, and we need to keep our voice down.

"Everything is fine! Eason is just leaving!" I say. I jump off bed and start pushing him towards the door. But he grabs my elbow and whispers beside my ear, "Nat, I don't want to break up with you." "Well, life is tough, and you can't get everything you want. Suck it up," I hiss. I grab the doorknob and shove him outside. I keep telling myself that I'm doing the right thing, even though my heart hurts every time I think of his words and the pleading look on his face.

For the following week, I fully immerse myself in schoolwork and my part-time job at the coffee house. This way I have no time to think about Eason.

Luckily, Lola has been an excellent mentor. She taught me everything I need to know about work, including how to deal with tough customers.

"So basically, you smile, you play cute, and you say, 'yes madam' and 'of course sir.' You listen to their ridiculous requirements and take down those freaking long orders. Then you can go spit in their mugs when they're not looking. Get it?" I laugh, "Thanks for imparting your wisdom." "No problem. Now, are you ready for your first serving?" she hands me a tray of food and whisper, "This is for the woman at table 27, the meeting room upstairs. I can tell she's a pain in the ass. She summoned me into the room to hear her order. I mean... how hard it is to place your order at the counter? This is a coffee house, not three-star restaurant!"

I giggle and give her a comforting look, heading upstairs. When I reach the meeting room, I take a hand to knock first. A few seconds later, I hear a woman's voice asking me to come in.

I enter the room and keep my head down the entire time. From a peripheral look, I can see a middle-aged woman sitting by the table, dressed in a sharp black suit. "Is there anything else you need, madam?" I ask after setting down her coffee and pastries. "Yes," she says. "Bring me two glasses of sparkling water, with fresh lemons on the side." She is a pain in the ass.

I nod and look up casually, then instantly freeze up when I see her face. "Ms. Griswold?" I blurt out, astonished.

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother Chapter 45

In Love With My Evil Stepbrother

Chapter 45

Chapter 45: Heroic Behavior Her sharp green eyes fix on my face. Those eyes are just like Eason's, but they glint with an icy shine that makes the hair on my arms to stand up. "Do I know you?" she asks in a sharp tone, as if I've already offended her. I instantly regretted calling her. Hell, why can't I just keep my mouth shut and quietly walk away?

"Umm..." under her perching gaze, I gulp nervously before saying, "I'm Natalia. Natalia Moore. Maybe you didn't remember but-"

"Oh," she raises her brow. "Right, Natalia." She studies me, from head to toe, as if she's examining a livestock. The way she looks at me is so arrogant and condescending that I can't say I'm not embarrassed at all. "I'll bring over your water Ms. Griswold," I say hastily trying to get her to stop looking. "Wait," she raises a hand. "Do you work here?"

"Yes."

"But why?" she leans back squinting at me. "You and your mom don't really need the money, right? Since...you have Shawn now."

I instantly understand the implication behind her words. She's implying that my mom stole Mr. Ramirez from her and that makes mom a shameless gold-digger.

But I know that isn't the case at all. When mom met Mr. Ramirez, his first marriage was already on the verge of falling apart. Ms. Griswold stayed abroad most of the year and the only reason they were still married was because of some legal issues. As soon as

they sorted out the division of assets, they filed for divorce instantly. And that's when mom started dating Mr. Ramirez for the first time.

Sure, mom picked up the bad, upper-class mindset after she married to Mr. Ramirez, but I know she didn't marry him solely because of his money.

So how can Caroline Griswold accuse mom of her own failed marriage.

I grip on the tray, trying to sound as calm as I can manage, "I'm saving up for college on my own." I emphasize the last few words. "By working in a coffee shop?" a faint smile appears on her lips. "You need to take a few extra shifts to cover the tuition."

I puff my chest and look straight into her eyes, "Thanks for the advice. Now if there's nothing else, I'll leave you to it."

"Actually there is," she says in a forceful tone. "You are not busy, are you? Sit down and tell me more about the anniversary party."

"There are other customers waiting for me. So if you'll excuse me—"

"Oh dear," she smiles looking at me with an almost pitying expression on her face. "You are a waitress at a coffee house. How busy can you be?"

I grind my teeth and scowl at her. And right at this moment, the door opens behind me and Eason walks into the meeting room. I've suspected that she's meeting someone here, but I didn't know it was him.

Now it makes me want to escape this room even more. "Where have you been?" Ms. Griswold turns to him. "You were gone for a long time." "I had to take a call," Eason pulls a chair and sits down. "Hey Nat. Didn't know you are on call today."

Didn't know my ass. It's obvious that he asked his mom to meet him here.

"So as I was saying, when do you think is a good time to—"

"Mom, I'll stop you right here," Eason interrupts her without hesitation. "I'm not meeting the girl you set me up with. End of discussion."

What? I'm startled by the information I just received. Ms. Griswold is asking him to meet a girl? His marriage partner perhaps? I knew this day would eventually come...but so soon? I instantly feel a surge of mixed emotions. It's really none of my business since we've already broken up. But I just can't stop myself from picturing the girl in my head. What's she like? I bet she must be elegant and beautiful, and she must come from a well-off family. She and Eason will make a lovely couple for sure. I blink and try to fight back those jealous dark feelings.

Ms. Griswold's voice turns cold immediately, "End of discussion? Eason, where's your manner? You better give me a very good reason for this. I'm not asking you to marry her tomorrow, only for you to take her to the anniversary party."

"I have no interest in being your puppy," Eason sneers. I almost admire him for standing up to Ms. Griswold like this.

"Plus, I already have a date for the party," he announces calmly. "And may I ask whom that is?" his mom narrows her eyes dangerously. A bad feeling crosses my mind and I instantly want to escape the scene. But before I can do that, Eason points a finger at me and says, "I'm going to the party with Nat." I feel hard to breathe, as the way Ms. Griswold looking at me is absolutely terrifying. "You are out of your mind, young man," Ms. Griswold snap. "What are you thinking? Going to the party with her? She is nothing more than a—"

"She is dad's stepdaughter. She's my sister. And most importantly, she is my friend. I bet I'll have a much better time with her at the party than with some strange girls that I've never met before."

With that said, he stands up from his seat and casts his eyes down on his mom's angry face." And don't insult her in front of me. She doesn't need to tolerate your bad temper."

What he did was crazy...but so cool. I am still processing everything that just happened and the next second he walks over to me

and takes my hand, "let's go."

Then he simply drags me out of the room and leaves his mom alone in the room.

I follow him all the way downstairs. He's going to take me out of the coffee house, but I stop abruptly

"Wait," I frown. "What was that?"

"What was what?" he turns back to face me.

"Are you using me again to irritate your mom?" I ask, a little suspicious.

His face drops instantly, "No. Why do you always assume the worst of me?"

"Umm...because you have a history?" I cross my arms in front of my chest. "Otherwise, why do you have to meet her here? You know I work here." He sighs deeply, "I wanted to see you, OK? You were avoiding me all the time. And" "And?" I hold my breath involuntarily. His green eyes lock with mine, "And I want you to be my date to the anniversary party."

