

Happiness 258-267

The Promise of Happiness

Chapter 258

Natalie wanted to teach Andre a lesson—he would suffer after cutting off his relationship with Cecilia.

After a while, Cecilia hastily parted way with Natalie, for she was worried that she would lose her composure at the Leister family's party

"Are you sure you don't need my company?" Natalie asked.

"I look ugly when I cry." Cecilia forced a smile and said, "Please don't let me look ugly before you. Rest assured that I'll accept the reality after having a good cry at home."

"Okay."

Natalie nodded in response.

"Natalie, has Samuel seen your true face?"

"No," Natalie responded, "I never took off my mask before him."

"What? You never did it?" Cecilia looked at her in disbelief. "I must say that Samuel is indeed discerning. When you've finally taken revenge and can take off your mask, he'll surely think he has stumbled upon a treasure."

"Perhaps."

Deep down, Natalie wasn't sure how Samuel would treat her when she finally took off the mask.

*We'll see! Take it one step at a time. After all, no one can tell that I'm not Yara except Clayton and Xavian*

Natalie was alone again after Cecilia left.

Not far from Natalie, Susan and Phoebe seemed to be whispering:

Although Phoebe's last name was Leister, she wasn't considered the core family member. Her mother was as a member of the Leister family, while her father was merely her mother's bodyguard. After the two of them fell in love, her mother kicked up a huge fuss and begged until her father was accepted into the family.

However, the fiasco had brought shame to the Leister family,

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Chapter 258

Although Phoebe was indeed part of the Leister family, her status was far too low compared with Susan. Even though Phoebe was three years older than Susan, she became Susan's lackey and had to act according to her wishes.

Susan gritted her teeth ferociously and said, "Phoebe, look! I was talking about that woman just now. Isn't she ugly? Besides, we haven't seen her before, have we? How can she have the cheek to let Samuel court her? Humph! The filthy woman doesn't know her place at all."

"Rumor has it that Samuel's not interested in women. Could it be that she's Mr. Bowers' secretary?"

"No." Susan got angrier as she spoke. "Samuel admitted himself that he's courting her!"

"What?"

Before listening to Susan, Phoebe shared the thought of other ladies at the party Natalie probably was Samuel's secretary. Hence, she couldn't believe her ears upon hearing that Natalie was Samuel's lover.

*If Samuel can love an ordinary-looking lady, will he fancy me one day? After all, I'm a lot more beautiful than that lady.*

At that moment, a hint of jealousy flashed in Susan's eyes. "You're shocked as well, aren't you? I was stunned once I was told about it. I believe that woman must have done something to seduce Samuel! Humph! I swear to humiliate her at my party today!"

Whenever Susan asked Phoebe to do something, Phoebe always felt that Susan treated her like a maid. Surprisingly, Phoebe didn't feel repulsed at that moment but rather excited to do it.

After all, Phoebe thought she probably had a chance to be with Samuel after they cooperated to get rid of the woman.

As such, Phoebe chimed in once Susan finished. "Yes, since it's your birthday, we shouldn't let anyone steal the limelight from you."

"Phoebe, I have an idea."

Susan rolled her eyes and leaned toward Phoebe to secretly discuss their plot.

While Natalie enjoyed her wine, she was suddenly surrounded by a few ladies led by

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Chapter 258

Susan.

*Well, more and more are emerging.*

Although Natalie put on a smile, she secretly scolded the hell out of Samuel.

*Not only that he has a lot of admirers, but they are also obsessed with him!*

Susan blinked her big eyes and said in a sweet voice, "Hi. I'm sorry that I didn't have time to talk to you properly. By the way, you don't look familiar. It appears that we have never seen you before."

Deep down, Natalie knew that they intended to dig out her personal information.

To avoid being harassed by them all day, Natalie immediately responded, "I'm Natalie Nichols."

"Nichols is a rather rare last name, isn't it?" The woman from Dellmoor flashed through Susan's mind when she heard the name. Nonetheless, Susan soon thought it was impossible, for Natalie looked extremely ugly compared to that woman from Dellmoor.

Knowing that Susan was hinting at something, Natalie responded, "I've become an orphan after my grandpa and mother passed away."

## Chapter 259

"An orphan?" A woman in a cream-colored dress snorted.

Those who could attend Susan Leister's birthday celebration were influential figures in Chanaca. An orphan with no background and no one to support was at the bottom of the social pyramid there—Natalie was an outlier.

"Ugly and an orphan! How can she be with Mr. Bowers?"

"What's the matter with Mr. Bowers? Even if he's only picking a secretary, he should pick someone with a better look!"

"And here I thought she had some kind of mysterious family background!"

The women were chattering away, completely ignoring the fact that Natalie was there.

Susan was doing it on purpose; she was deliberately not telling anyone about Natalie's relationship with Samuel. She wanted her to be laughed and mocked at by the other socialites. It would delight her most if Natalie were to lose her temper and began fighting with them.

That way, she did not have to do anything as Natalie embarrass herself. Susan was sure that Samuel would be extremely disappointed in her if he were to witness the

scene.

However...

While it was a good plan, Natalie's reaction was completely different from what Susan thought it would be.

Natalie continued to sip on her red wine, her eyes half-lidded and maintaining her **composure**.

At the end, when the other women saw how calm Natalie was, they lost interest in gossiping about her.

The calmer Natalie was, the more it seemed like the socialites were cruel, noisy beings. Although they still looked at Natalie with disdain in their eyes, they had all quietly decided to clamp their mouths shut.

Once she realized that Natalie had not fallen into her trap, the glee disappeared from

Phoebe's eyes flicked between Natalie and Susan. With just a glance, she knew that Susan was annoyed again.

"You girls," Phoebe started, "Not everyone is born equal, so don't laugh at Ms. Natalie for being an orphan. If she's capable of being by Mr. Bowers' side, it must mean that she has terrific work capabilities and is a great judge of the aesthetics."

After finishing the last bit of her wine, Natalie turned to look at Phoebe, who looked a lot like Susan.

*This woman's... a lot better than those who only know how to mock others. So, she knows how to be subtle and how to dig a grave for me to fall in after putting me on a pedestal.*

Natalie did not speak. She only smiled and continued watching, waiting to see how they were going to set her up.

When Phoebe looked at the empty glass beside Natalie, she smiled and said, "It seems like you like wine a lot, Ms. Natalie. You must be well-versed in it, then. It's Susan's birthday celebration today, and everyone's a little bored of the music and dancing by now. Why don't we do something interesting?"

At that, the other women around Phoebe turned to look at her, interested.

"Why don't we play a guessing game where we blindfold the players and guess the type of wine based on its scent?" Phoebe continued. "Not only will we have to say the type of wine and its location of production, but we also have to specify the wine's vintage. You'll have to be right in all three answers to win the round."

At the start, when the socialites heard that it was a guessing game based on the wine scent, they were thrilled. However, when they realized that their answers had to be so accurate, they were not as excited anymore.

"It's one thing to be able to specify the type of wine but another to specify the location and the year!"

"Only the Leister family can play this game in Livingstonsville! The Leisters' winery has tons of premium wine, so this is going to be a tough game."

"It's not fun if it's not tough. Isn't it thrilling to have to guess the year as well?"

"Do we get any prizes if we win? Otherwise, losing and winning is nothing but a word!"

Phoebe and Susan shared a look before one replied, "The one who wins will get to dance with Mr. Bowers tonight, and the one who loses will have to refrain from dancing with Mr. Bowers."

*She's obviously targeting me. Why do these two daughters of the Leister family have to beat around the bush?*

## Chapter 260

Of course, some were tempted when they heard that they could have a dance with Mr. Bowers..

After all, the socialites knew that they would never be able to have a man like Samuel, who had both the looks and the background. Therefore, it would be an honor for them to be able to even have a dance with him.

"I'm in."

"I know a little about wine. I'd like to try too!"

When Susan and Phoebe realized that Natalie had yet to voice her desire to join, their hearts began racing. After exchanging a glance, Phoebe asked her, "Ms. Natalie, you seem to like wine a lot, so I'm sure you know wine well. You're going to join in with this guessing game, aren't you?"

Before

Natalie could answer her, Phoebe added, "I'm sure you'll be able to differentiate between the good and the bad wine after drinking that much of the Leister family's wine, right?"

Hearing that, Natalie pursed her lips and turned to look at the beaming Phoebe.

Unsurprisingly, the daughter of a prestigious family like the Leister family would be smarter than the ordinary person.

Evidently, Phoebe was forcing her to join.

If

she did not, it would mean she was admitting that she had no sense of aesthetics, it would mean that the Leister family's wine was wasted on her. On the other hand, if she joined and failed to give the correct answers, she would become the laughingstock of the day.

It was a trap

Natalie knew it was a trap, but still, she stepped right into it.

As she looked into Phoebe's gleeful eyes, Natalie replied, "Count me in."

That surprised Phoebe and Susan, for they thought that she would have admitted defeat instead of agreeing to the invitation. *Hmph. If she refuses to bow to us now, she's going to embarrass herself later.*

Phoebe then said with a smile, "Susan and I will be joining as well."

Susan nodded. "This is a wine-

tasting session, so we should get a connoisseur to be our referee, or else it might be unfair. Mr. Hector knows wine best. He even has an IWA Advanced Level Award In Wines And Spirits from International Win

e Association. He's the best candidate to be the referee of this game. I'll invite him over. I'm sure he'll say yes."

Natalie did not know who Hector was, but she did not care.

Soon, Susan came back with their referee, Hector Lightwood.

The way Susan talked about Hector made him sound like an old man; however, he was at most a man in his mid-thirties.

The man was wearing a wine red suit with a black dress shirt underneath. Of course, he did not have a beautiful face like Samuel did, but he did not look bad at all. Furthermore, he was a man with a well-built body. In other words, Hector seemed reliable and stylish.

The moment the women saw Hector, they became a bunch of lovestruck idiots.

On the other hand, Natalie put a hand on her forehead and sighed. *It's as if women's nature is to be a lovestruck idiot.*

As men like Samuel, Yandel, and Ross were always around her, Hector's good looks did not faze her. Therefore, she was the calmest among the women.

However, her calmness was what attracted Hector's attention to her.

Hector then went to

the Leister family's winery and grabbed ten bottles of wine. Before he came back with them, he put them all in decanters. Thus, when he returned with the wine, all they could see were the ten filled decanters; they could not see any labels of the bottles he had picked.

It was a rather grand sight when those ten decanters were placed on the liquor trolley.

Many guests turned to look at it.

As Susan was the star of the night, and as the socialites were playing a wine guessing game, many of the guests had paused in their conversations and gathered around them to find out what they were doing.

Hector then said, "There are ten types of wines here. We'll take turns guessing, and only those who make the right guesses can continue trying the next type of wine. Those who make the wrong guess will be immediately disqualified. The ones with the most correct answers will be the winner of this game."

## Chapter 261

Just from appearances, the red wines in the ten decanters did not look much different from each other.

Under the light of the crystal chandelier, they all looked pretty similar in color.

As soon as Hector finished his introduction, several of the socialites with half-baked knowledge of wine had the urge to back out.

They had thought that it would just be a casual game, and never expected Susan to take it so seriously.

Now that their families had gathered to watch, they felt caught in between a rock and a hard place. They did not have much choice but to do their best to get through it and hope that they made it to the second or third round at the very least.

Natalie swept her gaze over the ladies, who were looking rather out of place, and sighed inwardly. *They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Phoebe and Susan deliberately dug a hole for me, and there was nothing I could do to avoid falling into it. But these ladies jumped in without knowing what they were really getting themselves into.*

As she thought about how the prize for the winner was the chance to dance the opening dance with Samuel, she could not help but roll her eyes.

*What's that saying*

*again? Men are nothing but trouble? Well, I've truly experienced it today. I can't believe how many ladies are willing to go through with this just for the chance to be Samuel's partner for the opening dance. If it were a chance to spend the night with him, they'd probably even be willing to go through hell and high water.*

Meanwhile, Susan and Phoebe were feeling relaxed and confident.

*It may be something that runs in our blood, but every generation of the Leister family loves wine. All of us would run around the winery and plan when we were kids, so we grew up surrounded by the aromas of wine. There's nothing we know better than wine. We even asked Hector to set the rules to show that it's a fair game and that we're not cheating.*

Although each of them secretly hoped that they would be the one to win and get the chance to dance with Samuel during the opening dance, they were united by a common goal—to humiliate Natalie in front of everyone and put her in her place.

*An ugly orphan like her doesn't*

*deserve Samuel. In fact, she isn't even worthy to stand among the Leister family at a banquet like this.*

Soon, the game began.

The waiters tied a strip of red silk over each of the seven ladies' eyes, blindfolding them to heighten their sense of smell.

Then, the waiters poured out the first wine from its decanter into seven glasses and let the ladies sniff it. Once they had gotten a good sniff, they were to write down their **answers**.

The first bottle of wine was a 1983 Lafite, which was not too difficult to identify, Although some of them took longer than others to write their answer, all of them got it right.

Phoebe and Susan were slightly surprised that Natalie had answered correctly, but they were not too perturbed yet. *It's just the first round. According to Hector's rules, the difficulty level will gradually increase with each round.*

However, things took a turn over the next three rounds.

One of the ladies had the wrong type of wine for the third bottle, while another put down the wrong vintage for the fourth wine.

Meanwhile, Natalie was still going strong, having answered all of them correctly.

The blindfolds prevented Susan and Phoebe from observing the crowd's reaction, but even so, they felt their dismay increasing. *The first guess may have just been luck, but what about the others? Don't tell me she really does know a thing or two about wines.*

However, they dismissed that thought just as quickly as it popped up in their mind, suppressing the worry in their hearts.

*So what if she does? The other wines will be much harder to guess. She may be better at this than the other ladies, but there's no way she can beat us! Hmph! Just wait and see!*

Susan and Phoebe were oblivious to how the game was panning out due to their blindfolds, but those who watched the game closely had a good grasp of each of the seven ladies' capabilities.

## Chapter 262

After catching up with Alfred, Samuel entered the hall with Wyatt.

Since they had not been in the hall earlier, they were unaware that a wine guessing game was underway. When they passed through the crowd, they saw the ladies with red silk blindfolds over their eyes, smelling glasses of wine.

While Samuel only had eyes for Natalie, Wyatt was staring at Susan and Phoebe.

"What has Sue dragged her cousin into this time?" Wyatt muttered. Frowning, he turned to a waiter standing nearby and asked, "What's going on? What are they doing?"

The waiter answered, "They're playing a wine-guessing game. They have to guess the wine by its aroma."

"Guess the wine by its aroma?" Samuel murmured, staring at Natalie with an unwavering gaze.

She was sitting up straight with a piece of red silk over her eyes. Her black, lace trimmed gown contrasted sharply against her skin. The red and the black together made a striking visual impact.

A waiter held a wine glass up to Natalie's nose. After taking a sniff, the corners of her lips curved upward slightly, and she picked up her pen to write her answer.

Then, all the answer sheets were displayed. Compared to the others, Natalie's handwriting was the clearest and neatest, showcasing her excellent penmanship.



Suddenly, he recalled what Natalie had said earlier with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. *She said she wouldn't pick on others, yet she wouldn't allow others to pick on her either. Susan teants to humiliate Natalie in front of everyone, but her plan appears to have backfired.*

*I'm being honest, open I dont know just what Natalie is capable of. However, Susan dared to challenge Natalie. Well, all I can say is that Susan has dug her own grave.*

Mesmerized by Natalie, Samuel's thoughts began to drift.

*I wonder what it'll feel like to have her lying on top of mewith that red silk over her eyes...*

As the thought crossed his mind, his gaze deepened.

The game continued, and eventually, two of the five ladies made wrong guesses. The

Chapter 262

last three people that remained were Natalie, Phoebe, and Susan.

The Leister family had long been known for being a connoisseur of wines, so the other guests were not surprised that Phoebe and Susan were still in the game.

However, the fact that Natalie was also among them was beyond their expectations.

Phoebe and Susan felt their confidence waning as the game proceeded to the ninth bottle of wine.

Finally, they realized that they had underestimated Natalie. *Natalie didn't drink all that wine because she was a glutton and trying to take advantage of all the good wines w e put out. It's because she knows the wines. There's no turning back at this point. Whatever it is, we can't lose the next two rounds to that orphan.*

Soon, the waiters poured the ninth wine into glasses and held it up to the ladies' noses.

Natalie took one whiff and was the first to write down her answer.

It was not a deliberate attempt at stealing the limelight since she was blindfolded and had no way of knowing whether the others had already written their answer or not. She had merely written her answer as soon as she identified the wine by its aroma.

Susan and Phoebe took a long time to answer. Their hesitation was not only because it was getting harder to identify the wine, but also because their confidence had suffered a blow.

Phoebe wrote down her answer first, closely followed by Susan.

After checking their answers, Hector announced, "Phoebe and Natalie have answered correctly. Susan got the vintage incorrect. This bottle is a 1988 La Romanee Conti, not 1991."

Susan could not believe her ears.

*Did I lose? How can this be possible? What's more, I lost to a good-for-nothing orphan! This was supposed to be a trap to humiliate her, but why has it backfired?*

## Chapter 263

Susan pulled off the red silk covering her eyes and glanced at Natalie and Phoebe with a bitter expression.

Spotting Wyatt standing next to Samuel, the color drained from her face.

*When did he get here? What should I do? He must've seen how I have lost!*

As she gazed at Samuel worriedly, she realized that he was not looking in her direction. His eyes were fixed on Natalie instead!

*I meant to humiliate her and take her down a peg, but look at what has happened... I've actually created the perfect opportunity for her to show off!*

Susan bit her lip angrily, her eyes reddening as fury raged within her.

With that turn of events, only Natalie and Phoebe remained to identify the tenth wine.

The guests gathered around them were abuzz, split into two camps by their differing speculations on the result.

"The Leister family was the one who provided all these wines. Susan just came of age, so she can't have had much exposure to wines. It was only natural that she lost. However, Phoebe is slightly older than Susan, so she should have better knowledge and experience of wines. I think Phoebe will be the winner," a man remarked, giving his two cents.

Another guest countered, "I beg to differ. That other lady has been answering every round without hesitation. They've been using a pen to write their answers, and you can see that she has written her answers clearly without crossing anything out. She may be young, but she seems much more knowledgeable about wine than the two Leister ladies."

Natalie and Phoebe could vaguely make out what the guests were saying.

The former's expression remained as calm and composed as before, radiating an intimidating aura.

On the contrary, Phoebe's nervousness was causing her palms to sweat. *Even if Natalie loses now, it won't be embarrassing for her. But if I lose, I won't just be embarrassing myself. I'll also be humiliating the entire Leister family! I have to win the next round. I just have to do*

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## Chapter 263

Hector motioned for the waiters to pour the wine into two glasses and hold them up in front of the ladies.

Their reaction that time was nothing like the other nine times. As soon as Natalie and Phoebe smelled the aroma, their brows drew together sharply.

Phoebe felt that it smelt familiar but try as she might, she could not recall what type of red wine it was, let alone the location of production and vintage.

Meanwhile, Natalie only pondered briefly before writing her answer.

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As she wrote, she could not help chiding Hector inwardly for doing something so brazen.

Even after Natalie finished writing, Phoebe still had not picked up her pen yet.

Hector asked, "Phoebe, do you have your answer?"

Not daring to admit that she did not have a clue, Phoebe had no choice but to say, "Just a minute."

Phoebe picked up her pen and wrote something, then crossed it out and wrote something else. She repeated the process a few times, unsure about her answer. In the end, she decided to go with her instinct and wrote her final answer, then passed it to the waiter standing next to her. *It's up to fate now.*

The guests in the hall started chattering among themselves.

"Hector must've given them a tricky one. Did you see how both of them hesitated?"

"Yes! What wine could've confused them both?"

"I wonder who got the right answer."

Susan stared at Phoebe with her hands balled into tight fists. She had completely forgotten all about her embarrassing defeat. *I pray to God that Phoebe doesn't lose to that b\*tch!*

The air was thick with anticipation as everyone waited for the results.

Standing not too far away, Wyatt was also getting nervous.

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### Chapter 263

Meanwhile, Samuel stood with one hand in his pocket. There was a hint of a smile in his eyes as he gazed at a calm and composed figure.

*She probably knows the correct answer, yet she still manages to put on a calm and unfazed expression. How intriguing. She's good at concealing her thoughts and emotions.*

However, it was for that very reason that Hector felt an overwhelming desire surge within him—the urge to strip her of her defense.

### Chapter 264

Hector was the first to see the answers, and a look of disbelief flashed across his eyes.

*This tenth round was more of a prank than a test. Whoever managed to pinpoint at least one of its contents correctly would be named the winner. But I never imagined that one of them would be able to list out the contents of the glass perfectly!*

"I announce that the winner is Ms. Natalie!" Hector declared, turning toward Natalie with unbridled awe and admiration in his eyes.

The waiters displayed the answers for everyone to see. Natalie had listed three types of red wines with their corresponding location of production and vintage. After changing her answers a few times, Phoebe had only written one type of red wine.

Seeing the puzzled looks on the guests' faces, Hector explained, "The tenth wine was a mixture of Pétrus, La Mondotte, and Valandraud. Not only did Ms. Natalie get the types of wine correct, but she also identified their location of production and vintage to a tee."

Shocked, a collective gasp rose from the crowd.

*A mixture of three wines! What an unpredictable thing to do!*

Phoebe's answer was not even remotely accurate, but that just showed how difficult the last round had been.

"I have to compliment Ms. Natalie's knowledge of wine," said Hector, clapping his hand.

That led the other guests to burst into applause as well.

"The two ladies from the Leister family failed to figure it out, but that lady got it right! That's incredible!"

"She came with Samuel, didn't she? Well, well... It's always the quiet ones that surprise you."

"I'm more interested in that lady's penmanship. It's simply amazing!"

"She's just good at everything!"

Just like that, the scornful gazes the guests once directed toward Natalie turned into  
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Chapter 264

looks of admiration,

Phoebe pulled off the blindfold and scurried over to Susan. "I... I never thought it... it would end up like this..."

"You were the one who came up with the brilliant idea! Look at what happened! This is supposed to be my coming-of-age party, but she's the one hogging all the limelight!" Susan hissed. Having nowhere to vent her pent-up rage, she could only unleash a verbal tirade at Phoebe.

Although Phoebe was also devastated that she had humiliated herself in front of everyone, she dared not say anything for fear of offending Susan. Hence, she could only grit her teeth and put up with Susan's rebukes.

When Natalie took off the blindfold, she realized that everyone was looking at her.

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Natalie was satisfied that she had succeeded in getting back at Susan and Phoebe in her own way.

However, the eyes on her made her feel uncomfortable. After giving the crown a slight nod, she walked to a less conspicuous corner.

"Ms. Natalie," a voice said.

She turned and saw Hector beaming at her.

Hector hurried over to Natalie and said with a smile, "I'm curious to know how you managed to guess that the last wine was a mixture of a few different wines?"

Natalie's eyes flashed as she explained, "It wasn't a guess. I really could smell the aroma of three different wines. Your rules only mentioned that we were to identify the wines through smell, but there was no mention that it would only be one wine per round. I merely wrote down what I smelled, that's all. Actually, the other lady also realized it too. However, she was too focused on winning that she didn't even consider that you would come up with something so... unusual."

Hector could not help laughing heartily after hearing her reply.

*This has nothing to do with her appearance, but I can sense something special about her. In fact, I've realized that she's just like fine wine. There's more to her than meets the eye.*

His eyes sparkled as he looked at her. "It's rare for me to meet a like-minded person, and I certainly didn't expect that I'd meet someone like you here tonight. It truly is a blessing!"

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Chapter 264

However...

Before Natalie could respond, she felt a man's arm circle her waist possessively.

Chapter 265

Turning around, Natalie saw Samuel.

Even with a layer of lace in between, his fingers were still gently rubbing her waist, seemingly filled with rage but carrying a tinge of flirting to it.

“It’s only a few bottles of wine, and you’re treating her as your bosom friend. Aren’t you a little too hasty, Mr. Lightwood?” Samuel’s grim tone revealed the immense fury in him.

At once, Hector’s body stiffened for a brief moment. Even the bright smile on his face froze.

He could not figure out why Samuel acted that way as he could clearly sense his animosity toward him.

Being extremely sure that he had never offended Samuel, Hector figured that the only possible reason was how he treated Natalie as his bosom friend.

Of course, he could not deny his admiration for her.

But after having a taste of Samuel’s excessive domination toward Natalie, he dared not express his feelings.

“I didn’t mean that, Mr. Bowers.” Hector cleared his throat before he continued, “I see Ms. Natalie as a friend. I wanted to treat her and let her have a taste of a bottle of wine that I’ve treasured for years since I know she loves wine so much.”

As soon as Natalie heard that there was good wine, her almond-shaped eyes lit up at once.

“Great! I’m sure Mr. Lightwood’s wine is a precious and rare one.”

“If you like it, I’ll...

Before Hector could finish his sentence, Samuel grimly interrupted, “There’s no need.”

“Says who?” Natalie’s eyes were as wide as saucers as she threw Samuel a pouting look. *I’ve already agreed to the gift. Why is this man rejecting it in my place?*

“You don’t want it,” Samuel suddenly uttered.

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Chapter 265

“I want it,” Natalie argued.

Samuel tightened his grip on her waist as he called her name out with his deep voice.

“Nat.”

“I do want it...”

Standing awkwardly in front of the two, Hector felt sidelined while watching Samuel display his affection for Natalie.

*Ahem! Ahem!* Hector deliberately cleared his throat again before he interjected, “I guess I’ll have to take my leave first. My friend seems to be looking for me.”

After coming up with an excuse, he grabbed the chance to slip away from the awkward situation.

“Don’t go, Hector! He doesn’t want the wine, but I want it!” At the thought of how the chance to receive a good wine was going down the drain, Natalie felt her heart wrenched.

“How dare you still call his name?”

Samuel’s eyes darkened as he grabbed Natalie’s face in an attempt to shift her sight away from Hector.

“It’s all your fault!

He wanted to gift me his treasured wine. But thanks to you, I ended up getting nothing!” Natalie rolled her eyes at him.

“If he purely wants to give you the wine without harboring any ulterior motives, why would my few simple words scare him away?” Samuel furrowed his brows. “I’m pretty sure he’s up to no good.”

“He can

plot whatever schemes he wants; it’ll be fine as long as I don’t let him get his way. But he’s gifting good wine. Why would anybody not want it?” Natalie retorted as she could not get over it.

“Why are you so stubborn? And you’re even trying to twist the facts unreasonably?” Samuel bit her earlobe.

Her heart was thumping erratically as his warm breath stirred her emotions. “S Samuel Bowers! There are so many people around! What are you doing?”

“I’m marking my territory. You are mine.”

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Chapter 265

“Y–You... hmm...”

Before she could continue any further, Samuel’s lips came crashing on hers.

Since Samuel’s existence had perpetually been the center of attention, everyone had their eyes on the two of them as soon as he kissed Natalie.

*Does this man not feel shameful at all?*

While she tried to struggle free, the man pressed his lips against hers even more firmly. There was simply no way she could refuse his passionate kiss. Ultimately, she allowed him to do whatever he wanted, except that her slender body was extremely stiff the whole time while in his embrace.

Some distance away, Susan and Phoebe saw that steamy kiss scene too.

*Why would someone like Samuel swallow his pride and kiss a woman like her?*

The eyes of the two women were burning with jealousy in unison.

Chapter 266

Phoebe was someone who would never let her emotions show on her face. Hence, regardless of how envious she was of Natalie, she did not express it openly.

However, Susan was the exact opposite. She had been the apple of the eye among the Leister family and had been well adored since young.

Her love for Samuel had bloomed since her prime of youth. She had given up previously as she thought s he had lost to the twins' mother. But now that she saw Samuel kissing someone whom she had never seen before, she could no longer suppress the burning rage within her.

"Why is it her? Why can't it be me? I'm better than her in every way. Why did Samuel choose her instead of me? Susan was seething with anger.

"Perhaps she made use of peculiar tactics to seduce Mr. Bowers?"

"I'm sure that is it!" Even though Susan's voice sounded sweet, her eyes were full of vicious intent. "If I can't get Samuel, I won't let that woman get him either! I'll make sure her reputation is ruined at my party to night!"

"Susan, you..."

"You have to help me, Phoebe."

Meanwhile, Samuel reluctantly let go of Natalie's lips and rested his forehead against hers while adjusting his heavy breathing. The kiss did not last too long despite it being a passionate one.

Natalie was not faring any better either. She was panting heavily, trying to catch her breath.

"H-How can you do that? Y-You're being unreasonable."

"You're so attractive that other men are covering you. If I don't assert dominance, you'll be taken away by other men sooner or later." Samuel leaned close to her ear and whispered.

Natalie could not wrap her head around Samuel's behavior.

All she knew was Hector's wine, which she supposedly would receive as a gift, had disappeared for good because of him.

10:01 OO.

Chapter 266

"My wine..."

Among the vast number of interests, one of Natalie's favorite was savoring good **wine**.

Knowing that she had such an interest, Yandel had searched many good wines for her throughout the years. But of course, no one would complain about having too much wine! At the thought of how she had missed a bottle of precious wine by a hair's breadth, she felt crushed by disappointment that even her gazes dimmed.



"You love wine that much?"

"Mmm." Natalie nodded. "Of course, we should enjoy it while we can. Savoring a good wine is like savoring merriment in life."

"Not only do the Leister family have a winery in Livingsfill. I have a private one too," Samuel uttered.

"Oh!" Natalie was startled for a tad moment before she could react.

"Do you own a lot of good wine in your winery too?" Her eyes lit up at the mention of good wines.

Seeing her expression, Samuel unknowingly curled his lips up into a smile. "From this moment on, the winery is yours."

*A bottle of wine? And the whole winery?*

Immediately, her sorrow, as well as the embarrassment from Samuel's sudden kiss earlier, had vanished into the air.

"Are you sure?"

"No." Samuel deliberately said the opposite.

"Stop lying to me. I've heard you clearly earlier. You said the winery is mine." Natalie smiled so brightly her eyes narrowed. "Hehe! All of the wine in that winery belongs to me now!"

"It's all yours, on one condition."

"What is it?" Natalie stared at him curiously

"From now on, you can only get drunk while you are with me." Samuel gently tucked

10:01 00.

Chapter 266

Natalie's messy hair behind her ear while fixing his gaze intently on her. "I'm the only one allowed to see your drunk look, but no one else. I don't care if they are men or women."

Natalie's heart was pounding wildly.

She could feel Samuel's possessiveness toward her.

*Isn't this man acting way too aggressive?*

But even so, she did not feel suffocated by his overwhelming affection. On the contrary, she appreciated the man's tender love, care, and protection for her.

"Samuel, thank you."

Chapter 267

In truth, Natalie was not only showing her appreciation for Samuel's generosity in gifting her a winery, but she was also thankful for his love toward her.

"Stay by my side and repay me slowly." Holding Natalie tightly by her waist, Samuel pressed against her body and leaned close to her ears. "As long as it's you, I don't mind."

Natalie felt even her cheeks burning as emotions surged within her.

"I—I'm a little thirsty. Let me go get a drink."

She quickly walked away and started fanning trying to cool herself down.

She was so flustered that she could even vividly feel her cheeks blushing red.

*Oh gosh. This isn't good. Why am I getting more and more easily affected by Samuel?*

Seeing a server walking past her, she quickly grabbed a drink from the tray and took two sips.

"Look! That's the woman whom Samuel kissed!"

"She must be a talented lady to be able to beat Susan and Phoebe. But it's a pity she doesn't look as pretty."

"Perhaps that's the secret of successful people, unlike you and I who're only after looks."

Unable to hold her embarrassment in, Natalie almost spat out the beverage in her mouth.

The evaluation from head-to-toe made her feel so embarrassed it was as though she went through the walk of shame.

After several sips of the iced beverage, she finally cooled herself down. Just as she wanted to look for Samuel, a familiar figure bumped onto her violently.

Burgundy-colored wine spilled straight onto her.

The familiar figure that bumped her turned out to be none other than Phoebe.

1001 TOO.

Chapter 267

"Oh, I'm sorry." Phoebe had a look of apology written all over her face. "I don't mean it. I'm so sorry that I got your gown dirty."

"It's fine." Natalie held her hand out to steady Phoebe. "Be more careful when you walk."

"Got it." Phoebe stole a glance at Natalie's gown and added, "I've dirtied your gown. Let me take you to change into a clean gown. Otherwise, it's going to be uncomfortable for you."

"There's no need." Natalie kindly rejected it since it was no big deal to her.

"What do you mean?" Phoebe was a little stunned initially. "Ms. Natalie, you're set for the opening dance with Mr. Bowers later. Perhaps it doesn't affect you, but Mr. Bowers is, after all, representative of the

Bowers family. Your appearance not only reflects your image. If you look bad, it'll reflect badly on him to o."

Staring at the scheming lady before her, Natalie lifted the corners of her lips into a faint smile.

She thought Susan and Phoebe had learned their lesson earlier during the wine tasting contest. Nonetheless, it turned out that these two envious women had yet to have enough of such petty games.

*She wants to play such tricks? Game on then!*

Her motto in life was to give in to others even if they tried picking on her. However, she would not sit still if they continuously picked on her time and again.

"Sure. I'll have to trouble you then."

Phoebe smiled, thinking that she had succeeded with her plan. "You're welcome."

On the other side, Justin walked over to Samuel while holding his glass of wine in his hand.

"Samuel, she's gone. What are you still staring at?" Justin sized Samuel up and teased, "Everyone has always said that you're not interested in women and that Franklin and Sophia are surrogate children to carry on the Bowers family's family line. It seems like those people have to take back their words now."

"She's mine. Of course, I have to pay more attention to her." Samuel's eyes were radiating warmth and tenderness as he took a sip of wine.

10:02 Koo:

Chapter 267

"Are you bragging?"

"No." Samuel shifted his gaze to Justin. "I'm only speaking the facts."

Justin was at a loss for words.

The dejected

Justin, who had been snubbed by Jane earlier, could only feel a crushing blow to his pride and ego after hearing Samuel's words.

"Don't you sense the intense rivalry the two ladies from the Leicester family have toward Natalie?" Justin decided to give Samuel a piece of mind. "She's after all, your woman. You should be the knight in shining armor and save the damsel in distress!"

Samuel's eyes glinted with an inscrutable emotion as he looked intently at Natalie's face. "She doesn't need my protection. She's far more powerful than everyone assumes her to be."