

Happiness 469-479

The Promise of Happiness

### **Chapter 469 Pliant In Every Way Imaginable**

Early the next day.

When Natalie awoke and wanted to arch her back, she only managed to do so halfway before she felt an ache rip through the length of her body.

To make matters worse, she bore the marks Samuel had left all over her. Raised and reddened, they were packed so closely that it was a horrific sight to lay one's eyes upon.

"Up already?"

Bathed in the golden sheen of the morning glow, the man was casually working at the black obsidian cuffs below his wrists.

With the corner of his lips lifted a third of the way in an ambiguous smirk, he exuded an elegant detachment akin to a dominant monarch.

His comfortable and relaxed demeanor stood in stark contrast to her own physical distress.

"Samuel Bowers, you—" Deeply wrathful, Natalie picked up a pillow and hurled it in Samuel's direction. "I was literally begging you for mercy last night so why didn't you stop?"

Her plush-based missile attack posed no threat whatsoever to Samuel who reached out and seized the projectile firmly inside his mitts with ease.

Approaching from the side, he set one knee upon the side and cusped Natalie's chin lightly with his slender fingers.

"Because you've been very disobedient." Samuel's gaze fixated upon Natalie from within their unfathomable depths.

Since when have I been disobedient?

When she saw that he was not in a good mood, she came upstairs to comfort him and also allowed him to kiss her the way he did in the showers. If nothing else, she had been extremely pliant in every way imaginable. So how could he still accuse her of being disobedient?

The sight of Natalie's puzzlement prompted Samuel to expound upon his own assertion, "Next time, you are to keep your distance from Yandel and Ross. Even though they're trusted friends of yours, they are still men..." After a brief pause, he continued, "I don't want you getting too close to them. I... don't like it..."

Natalie was positively taken aback when she heard that.

This came across to her as less Samuel Bowers, the overlord of Dellmoor, and more like the mad jealousy of puppy love.

“Are you jealous?” Natalie regarded Samuel’s face. “Is that why you decided to torment me last night? To punish me?”

Samuel’s aloof, chiseled face evoked a subtle flush.

“No.”

“What no? Seems to me that that’s exactly what this is about!” Natalie broke into a laugh. “Just look at you. You’re practically blushing! To think that the mighty Samuel Bowers is also capable of feeling self-conscious!”

Samuel swallowed hard at the gleeful Natalie, and the fire within his phoenix eyes died as he did.

“Still got the energy to mock me, do you?”

Samuel raised a wanton brow. He cupped Natalie’s chin with his fingers and leaned his lips in close.

“Looks like your pleading last night was all mere pretenses. Wasn’t it, Nat?”

“It was real, for sure. More genuine than silver or gold!” Natalie was in a panic. It was so real that her back was still feeling its effects in real-time!

A pity then that the man’s desire had already been aroused. He had complete disregard for her remonstrations while he melded her delectable little lips with his own.

Only after a considerable amount of time did Samuel withdraw from this extended kiss, and headed downstairs to make his way to work.

Natalie’s breath was still in a disarray from the passion the man left upon her lips.

Suddenly, a question struck her.

Why was Samuel being jealous of her proximity to Yandel and Ross out of the blue?

When she revisited the scene from the stone-gambling involving Yandel that played out before Samuel yesterday, the two of them did indeed behave intimately as part of their cover. However, she had a different mask on. Samuel was not around and could not possibly have known about that!

Impossible! It cannot be!

Natalie was in denial of that notion inside.

After she washed up, Natalie went downstairs and found Xavian. She wanted him to find a way into the stone-gambling market’s surveillance systems so that she may rid herself of the footage from yesterday outright.

“This black market’s server is very secure, Mommy,” Xavian said as his tiny fingers tapped away upon the keyboard.

“There’s no rush. You can take your time with it. Just make sure that you get that done these couple of days.”

“Roger that.”

After she gobbled up two slices of toast and downed a glass of milk, Natalie grabbed her bag and made her way out.

Today was the wrapping-up shoot for “Stay”. Since this was the very first series to be produced by Dream Entertainment, she thought that she ought to make an appearance, being the producer working behind the scenes and all!

### **Chapter 470 Fiction Into Reality**

At the set, the crew had just commenced work on the rain sequence where the downpour was to batter furiously upon the extravagantly dressed Wendy and Lucas.

With eight cameras trained on the male and female leads, everyone had been looking forward to this as it was the finale.

“Why did you lie to me? Why?” Drenched by the rain till her face turned pallid, the look in her eyes reflected the equivocal feelings she felt for the emperor. “You were the one who destroyed my country, yet I did everything to help you ascend to the throne. I’ve even managed your harem as well as bore you children!”

“Return to my side.” The dazed emperor spread his arms as he looked at the woman.

The woman removed the hairpin from her crown and regarded the man with tears of hatred while the guards held their positions with arrows loaded and bowstrings drawn. Then, the woman did the most unexpected.

She plunged the hairpin into her left breast, dyeing her own robes a fresh shade of crimson.

“No!”

The emperor clutched the woman in his arms and broke down in anguish, yet he was unable to rouse any sort of response from his beloved.

All those present at the location watched as their eyes welled. As soon as the director yelled for a “cut”, the masses broke into rapturous applause.

So deeply immersed in his role was Lucas that he was unable to recover from his crying immediately.

When she roused within Lucas’ embrace, the slightly self-conscious Wendy tried to coax him, “Come on now, Lucas. Look, I’m not dead yet!”

Seeing Wendy’s smile did somewhat help him recover a little better from that state of grief he was in.

Not too far away from them, Natalie looked on at the interaction between Wendy and Lucas with a contented and matronly smile.

Less than two or three months in without seeing them, these two seemed to have gotten into it for real. The affection within their eyes was definitely not part of the act.

As an award-winning thespian, Lucas had always conducted himself impeccably, impressing others with his acting chops, and seldom, if ever, counted on controversy to draw attention to himself.

Although a newcomer, Wendy was gifted at her craft and extremely hardworking. She had held her own as the female lead and carried this production in a way that far exceeded anyone's expectations.

If the two of them were to come together, it'd be a match made in heaven.

Wendy and Lucas only noticed Natalie after they got back onto their feet. Then, they shrugged off the down jackets their assistants brought them before they hurried over.

"Ms. Nichols..." Wendy's initial impulse was to hail Natalie as Chairman, but it did not seem appropriate to do so in front of the others. Hence, she switched up her approach. "Natalie, you've here! Why didn't you tell us that you were coming by today?"

"Better late than never. I got here just in time to catch that last closing sequence." Natalie presented bouquets to both Wendy and Lucas. "It was wonderful. Congratulations on completing the filming!"

Wendy and Lucas were all smiles when they received the flowers. "Thank you."

Being the show's leads, Wendy and Lucas were expected to be the busiest ones when wrapping up the filming. Hence they took the effort to have their assistants prepare a bountiful pile of snacks and treats, in case they became too occupied to attend to Natalie.

While Natalie ate the macaron and chewed on the sweets sponsored by the gorgeous pair, she was buzzing inside and did not feel at all neglected.

At nightfall, a celebratory dinner was held together with the film crew and Natalie followed up by throwing another after-party for Wendy and Lucas.

The setting would be a private room, a secluded space where the latter two would be able to let loose from their public persona.

"Mr. Becker could not be here with me because he had to accompany his wife to a prenatal," said Natalie while she produced two sets of monetary gifts. "He got me to bring this to you though, and wishes to convey his congratulations on a job well done."

Wendy and Lucas smiled appreciatively when they received the gifts.

When the former needed to use the restroom, Natalie was left alone inside the suite with Lucas.

Natalie shuffled closer to Lucas as she wanted to lean into his ear.

But when she recalled what Samuel said to her just earlier in the morning, she repeated them to herself as a reminder and chose to maintain a healthy distance instead.

Then, she withdrew her hand sheepishly and coughed.

"I assume that you wanted to ask whether I had any feelings for Wendy, isn't that right, Ms. Nichols?"

Natalie affirmed that with a smile and a nod.

“I like her, but I’ve no plans to confess my feelings for her at the moment. Having been in the business for so many years, I know my own emotional boundaries. But that may not be the case for her.”

Lucas took a sip of alcohol before he continued, “This is her first production, so I’m concerned whether her fondness for me could be an extension of the feelings she developed whilst in her role. That’s why I’m thinking about waiting for another half a year before I approach her.”

Lucas’ thoughtfulness toward Wendy set Natalie’s mind at ease.

“I was right about you, Lucas.”

“You’ve always had a good eye for people, Ms. Nichols.” Lucas set down his glass and shifted his gaze onto her. “Wendy’s a very talented actress, making it only a matter of time before she establishes herself in the industry.”

“Hopefully so.”

After Natalie finished the glass she had on hand, she, too, got up to go to the restroom.

As she was passing by another private room, she heard a man’s lascivious words emanating from the inside. That, and Wendy’s resistant voice.

“I can’t drink anymore! Drinking too much will cause me to develop rashes!”

“Really? You’d think starring in the first production in your career makes you too good for everybody else, Wendy Xander? You should be flattered that Mr. Zygmunt here thought enough of your looks to invite you over for a few drinks, so don’t try to push your luck!”

“I can’t! Let go of me! I want to leave!”

“What’s this now? Acting all pure and innocent? Who’d believe that a newbie like you could snag a starring role all without having attended a single lesson in acting, and has managed to do so while also keeping her nose clean? I bet you must have slept with more than your fair number of wealthy investors along the way, haven’t you? Keep us company tonight, and we’ll guarantee that you’ll be the lead actress in your next production as well!”

“I don’t want to! Let me go!”

These people.. How dare they bully Wendy? They’re really asking for it!

Worried about causing collateral damage, Natalie smiled apologetically at a man in a white sweater who was passing by. “Sorry, mister. Please steer clear.”

This was met by Bastien Scholl’s frown, but he duly stepped back as requested.

“Thanks.”

With her lips lifted into a snarl, Natalie aimed a devastating kick right for the private room’s door which crashed onto the floor with a resounding thump.

The three men inside turned in the direction of the doorway and regarded Natalie in sheer disbelief.

Natalie stepped inside with her right foot smarting but apart from a little unnaturalness about her gait, there was nothing on her face that might give her away.

When she walked inside, she saw that Wendy's attire had been left disheveled by those louts, and there were even visible stains left behind by the alcohol that was spilled on it.

Natalie's eyes screamed murder at the sight before her.

The man at their lead was Gerik Zygmont. With his grizzled-maned and gold-rimmed spectacles, he was the archetype of the respectable hypocrite.

"Run along, missy. This lady is with us! If you're wise enough, you'd know to mind your own business!" As nervous as Gerik was, he tried to project otherwise through his mannerisms.

"I'm not with them!" Wendy shook her head in fervent protest.

"Don't assume that she isn't just because she says so, because inwardly, she's a real hussy! She wants to be a star so badly that she's trying to work us to win a part!" The boys beside Gerik echoed his sentiments. "All female celebrities are like this. They're dirty as heck!"

Natalie's frigid gaze just went from cold to sub-zero.

Though her skills might be seriously challenged being up against three grown men, she was not going to back down from anyone who tries to push her around.

The corner of her lips lifted into a wonderful smirk while she pulled a bottle off the wine rack and smashed it to bits. Then, she held the remnant of the broken bottle by the neck against Gerik's throat.

"Now tell me, who's the dirtier one?"

Blood started to creep down steadily with the icy cold edge pressed up against his neck.

Gerik was completely shaken by this woman's unexpected aggression, so much so that his knees went jelly. "That's dangerous, missy. Y-You should calm down!"

"Let me repeat that for you. Who's the dirtier one?" A cold glint flashed across Natalie's eyes.

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"It's me. I-I'm the dirtier one!"

Gerik felt the glass cut even deeper when his response was not prompt enough.

"Stop pushing it. B-Blood. My neck is already bleeding badly."

Natalie snorted when the foulness of his mouth was entirely displaced by the stench of cowardice. "On your knees. I want you lot to apologize to her. Otherwise, I'd bleed him like a pig."

Gerik could feel the searing pain upon his wound and immediately hollered at his subordinates, "Did you not hear her? Kneel!"

The other two men exchanged glances before they lowered themselves before Wendy.

"We're sorry that we've been inappropriate and rude!"

"We shouldn't have forced you to drink. We're worse than beasts."

The tearful Wendy tidied up her clothes when she got off the couch. Then, she made her way over to Natalie's side.

Natalie looked askance at Gerik. "Not just them. You too!"

Fearful for his own life, Gerik immediately got down to apologize. "I'm sorry, Ms. Xander. I've been drunk out of my senses today! This is all on me and I swear that it'll never happen again!"

Having drawn blood from Gerik's neck, Natalie felt that the desired deterrent effect had been attained.

Against three grown men, the stunt she had managed to pull off should already be considered a miraculous victory in itself, so it would be inadvisable for her to continue to force the issue.

I should leave with Wendy and return to deal with this Zygmunt guy later!

Natalie relinquished her grip on the bloodied glass in her hand and took Wendy's hand in anticipation of making their way out.

Unexpectedly, the unrepentant Gerik, once alleviated from the threat against him, went on to cast a look the way of his two subordinates.

"Grab the wine bottles and smash in that wench's head! Damn the gall of her to threaten me! I'd kill her where she stands right here today!"

The two subordinates were quite aggrieved about being sent onto their knees. Given the green light from Gerik, they unhesitantly snatched up the few bottles on the table and lunged themselves at Natalie's noggin.

Natalie raised her right foot to swat them away but having already injured it earlier when she busted through the door, kicking people only served to exacerbate her condition.

"Ouch—" hissed Natalie as she winced.

"Are you all right?" Wendy quickly lent Natalie her support.

"I'm fine... I'm just faking it," replied Natalie while she gently shoved Wendy off. "I've endured much worse. Get out of here first so you don't become a liability."

"You—"

"Be good and listen to your boss!"

Propping herself up only on her left foot, Natalie was clearly in pain. However, her unshakable resolve remained palpable within those pristine almond-shaped eyes of hers.

Though Wendy knew Natalie was in a bad way, she understood that her own presence there would only add to the latter's burden. Hence, she sought the only solution, which was to step away first and come back with reinforcements.

Thus, Wendy departed swiftly from the private room.

The situation was not looking optimistic for Natalie whose right foot was in too much agony to muster up any strength.

Touching the blood on his neck, Gerik evoked an obnoxious look. "Aren't you like the goddess of war herself just a minute ago? Why are you looking like a cripple right now! A freckle-faced fugly trying to play heroics. I spit on it! Today, I'm going to teach you a lesson so you'd understand what fates befall busybodies!"

"That'll depend on whether you have what it takes." Despite her circumstances, Natalie was not backing down from anyone.

"Well damn, now aren't you a mouthy one?" Gerik began to snigger revoltingly. "Get her!"

Natalie gnashed her teeth and defended herself against the men's three-pronged assault.

Even though Gerik was a little ham-fisted, his two subordinates were clearly trained.

On the several occasions that they tried to mar her face with the smashed bottles, they came inches close every single time.

The fight was becoming increasingly more fraught for Natalie as her opponents only grew more vicious with each unsuccessful attempt.

She had only narrowly evaded one of the men's attacks when another stabbed at her eye with a broken bottle.

Oh no!

She would not be able to dodge that in time!

Could her sight be ruined here this day?

At this moment of imminent peril, a hand, delightful to the point of being sensuous, cut in front of her and snapped her assailant's wrist.

"So many men picking on a little lady. Not a good look for you guys, I'm afraid!"

### **Chapter 473 A Hundred Bottles of Wine To Empty**

The man's inflection had the warmth of jade, yet it had the coolness of the thawing snow in spring.

Natalie's taut heartstrings were given a reprieve. She glared at the man who had shielded her behind him, bewildered.

If not for his timely appearance, her right eye would have probably been laid to waste there and then.

When one of Gerik's subordinates went down with a broken wrist, the fearfulness of the other was apparent when he regarded Bastien.

"What are you standing there for! Get him!" Gerik yelled. "Pull a knife on them and show them what's what!"

The subordinate spat and brought out a switchblade which he unsheathed before he charged in Bastien's direction.

"Die!"

With a kick, the blade was sent scuttling across the floor by Bastien's deft foot before it even got anywhere close.

Though disarmed, the man sprawled on the floor remained obviously undeterred. He reached across for that switchblade in anticipation of using it against Bastien and Natalie afterward but Bastien was quicker and beat him to the punch.

He got to that blade first and then stabbed it cleanly into the back of that man's hand.

"Argh—" Accompanying that man's bloodcurdling scream was a blinding spurt of crimson that splashed across the floor.

Like a god amongst men, Bastien's movements were swift and decisive, and he transited from one motion to another without pause.

This was sufficient to send Gerik staggering back in horror.

"It's... This is all a big misunderstanding. We don't have to get violent. Let's talk this out, like proper gentlemen."

"Okay." Bastien nodded.

Thinking that the worst was over, the blandishing Gerik began to quietly rejoice in the belief that his counterpart had agreed to a truce and would not be pushing things any further.

That was, until Bastien's men arrived.

Looking at the two writhing on the floor and the third stricken upon the couch, Joseph asked, "What shall we do with these lot, Mr. Nine?"

"Bring in a hundred bottles of wine."

Bastien's men were highly efficient and managed to lug in a hundred bottles of expensive wine which they laid neatly before Gerik.

"T-This is?"

"A gentleman would use his mouth before he lifts his hand. Here are a hundred bottles of wine. Finish them all without leaving a single bottle unemptied and without spilling a single drop, and you'll be free

to walk away.” There was not a single billow between his brows when he spoke. “My men will supervise this personally, and you shall be penalized, another bottle for every drop you fail to clean off!”

Gerik’s eyeballs almost popped.

This is wine, not water! Drinking a hundred bottles of water is already no joke, never mind a hundred bottles of wine. This is way crueler than getting stabbed in the gut!

“This... This is sheer torture! I was in the wrong and I see that now, so would you not show some mercy and let me off?” Gerik’s legs went limp beneath him and brought him onto his knees. “I’d never do anything like this again!”

Bastien showed no interest whatsoever in the man’s remonstrations.

“Put someone on him, Joseph.”

“Will do, Mr. Nine.”

Natalie was a little lost in thought as she regarded this man addressed as Mr. Nine.

She did not pay him too much attention before, but now that she had, she found that this man was quite on par with Samuel in the looks department.

Regal and elegant, and with an aura of airy sensualism about him, he was somewhat pretty in an inexplicable way.

As an expression of her gratitude for taking care of that dastardly trio, Natalie extended a bow toward Bastien.

“Thank you, Mr. Nine.”

“Do you know me?” Bastien asked, smilingly.

“I don’t.” She shook her head. “But since your subordinates address you that way, I suppose that it would be fine for me to do likewise.”

Then, Natalie was reminded of Wendy. She was about to drag her bum leg with her in search of the latter when she turned and saw Wendy with her face awash with tears.

“I was so scared for you, Boss!”

Traumatized by her ordeal, Wendy clung to Natalie while her tears flowed ceaselessly.

I suppose that she must have been terrified from her ordeal with these b\*st\*rds.

“Hush. Hush now!” Subtly smiling, Natalie returned Wendy’s embrace while she patted the latter lightly upon her back. “Everything’s all right now. It’s already been taken care of. I won’t allow anyone to force you to do anything you don’t want to so long as I’m around.”

If not for Natalie's timely intervention, Wendy dared not fathom how she might be sullied by Gerik and his bunch of hoodlums.

Seeing Natalie comfort her in spite of her injuries, Wendy simultaneously felt awful and warm inside. Her eyes puffed up red like a rabbit's.

Not knowing how she might be able to repay Natalie, she bawled on for some time more before she eked out, "I'd continue to work earnestly so I'd make you lots and lots of money, Boss."

"Good to hear. Good to hear." Natalie could not help but chuckle at that. "Looking forward to it already."

Bastien looked on glowingly at the pair.

This woman isn't very well built, but she showed no fear whatsoever in spite of the odds that were stacked against her. Her diminutive figure belies an indomitable will no lesser than most men.

Though he was positive that he had not met this little woman prior, her silhouette felt somehow familiar, as though he had seen it somewhere before.

It was only after Lucas came out to investigate on account of Natalie and Wendy's prolonged absence did he realize what they had gone through.

"Are you okay, Wendy?" Lucas looked upon Wendy with such concern that his eyes were oozing with anguish. "I'm sorry for being so negligent. I should have come looking when you failed to return, and shouldn't have taken this long to realize that something was amiss."

With her own hands firmly in Lucas' grasp, Wendy averted her gaze, seemingly at a loss as to how to react.

"Wendy's quite shaken, but is otherwise unharmed," Natalie said. "See her back to the hotel and help me take good care of her, Lucas Monroe. Otherwise, you'll be answering to me!"

"Understood." Lucas nodded vigorously.

The frowning Wendy was still worried for Natalie. "What about you, Boss? You seem to be hurt too!"

There was no way Natalie was going to allow herself to intrude upon Wendy's and Lucas' rare alone time, so she patted Bastien on the shoulder. "Don't worry about me, for Mr. Nine and I are really tight! Aren't we, Mr. Nine?"

Joseph glared at Natalie and was about to berate her for being presumptive when Bastien replied amicably, "Rest assured that I'll look after her."

Secure in the belief that Natalie would be in the care of friends, Lucas and Wendy departed.

When the pair disappeared from sight, Natalie turned to regard Bastien. "Sincerely, thank you for everything tonight, Mr. Nine. I guess that I, too, should be taking my leave."

With that, Natalie turned around. She meant to exit when a subtle shift of weight onto her right foot sent shockwaves up her nervous system.

This foot...

She needed to seek medical attention and it did not appear that it might be something that she would be able to manage on her own.

Natalie had not gone too many steps before she heard an astonished “Mr. Nine” from Joseph. Then she felt a pair of sinewy arms slide around her calves and lift her up into a princess carry.

Stunned, she turned her gaze sharply into the man who had just put her in his cradle.

“You... This...”

“Your leg’s hurt,” Bastien lowered his eyes and said.

“I know that,” Natalie murmured, “but I don’t need you to carry me. I can go to a doctor myself.”

“You don’t want me to?”

“No, I don’t,” Natalie replied without the slightest hesitation.

Bastien was a little surprised that Natalie would refuse him, as was Joseph. How many a young lady in Loang clamors for Mr. Nine’s touch, so is this fugly woman nuts? To think she doesn’t appreciate that Mr. Nine’s degrading himself by carrying her, she’s also refusing him as well.

“You ought to tone it down a little since your leg is hurt,” Bastien replied staidly. “Don’t overthink this either. Considering that I’ve chosen to help you, take it that I’m just following through on a good deed to the end by taking you to a doctor.”

Having heard Bastien put it that way, Natalie offered up no more protestations and allowed for him to continue on all the way with her inside his arms.

As he held her and took in the herbaceous scent that emanated off her body, Bastien only found that sense of familiarity grow and become increasingly apparent.

## Chapter 475 To Run Into Her Once More

Inside the hospital.

The doctor examined Natalie’s foot and determined that there were no fractures. However, she had sustained severe soft tissue damage that may require proper rest over the next couple of days.

After the nurse had dressed Natalie’s foot and was preparing to leave, she found herself stopped by Bastien.

“Wait, you should take a look at her hand as well.”

While he spoke, Bastien held Natalie’s slender hand and opened it up to reveal her badly cut and bloodied palm.

Natalie regarded Bastien with astonishment.

This man’s very perceptive, able to notice things that even the doctor and nurse managed to overlook.

Once she got that patched up as well, the nurse exited, leaving only Natalie and Bastien inside the vastness of the ward.

"Doesn't it hurt?" Bastien asked.

"But of course, it hurts! How could it possibly not? I suppose that you must be curious as to why I didn't act as though it did," Natalie replied with a broad smile. "I've been used to getting knocked around a bit in the past so that made me better at enduring it compared to other girls."

It impressed upon Bastien that this young lady before him was simply different in every conceivable way, for he had yet to hear her elicit as much as a whimper in spite of her sustaining as many injuries as she did.

She's a real toughie!

"Do you mind if I ask you something, Mr. Nine?" Natalie regarded Bastien in earnest.

"Ask away."

"Obviously, you were right there beside me, so why didn't you act to help sooner?"

"I thought that you could handle it."

"Huh?"

Looking at Natalie, Bastien replied candidly, "You didn't look like the type who needed any help, sticking that broken bottle to that man's throat the way you did. Though your foot was already hurt, not only have you managed to fool them, you had me fooled as well."

"Oh, I see! But regardless, I'm really grateful for today." Natalie extended a hand. "Name's Natalie Nichols. Natalie with an "i" and "e", and Nichols with an "o", "l" and "s."

Bastien returned her handshake and introduced himself quite simply. "Scholl. Bastien Scholl."

Their eyes met before Bastien shifted his attention to a wound on Natalie's right cheek.

"Your face looks like it's been dinged as well," Bastien helpfully reminded.

Bringing her fingers to her face, Natalie realized that it was not a wound but a fissure in her hyper-realistic mask, sliced open by glass fragments.

"I'll get the nurse back in to look at it."

"It's not necessary."

"You must have it attended to." Bastien's brow tightened into a taut furrow, and there was a domineering quality to his otherwise genial tone. "Does it not bother you that you might become disfigured?"

"I'm not disfigured. This face is a fake."

A fake?

Amidst Bastien's skeptical gaze, Natalie gently peeled off the hyper-realistic mask just to show him what he assumed to be a wound. "This isn't my face, so it's not going to cause my appearance to be marred even if it's damaged. It could become quite troubling for me if you were to get the nurse in here, though."

After examining the mask more closely, Bastien concluded that it was as Natalie described.

However, when he lifted his eyes and took a better look at Natalie's face, his heart skipped a beat.

It's her?

It was no wonder he found her familiar, as she was the one who had been constantly on his mind.

After the quake in Loang, there was a woman who scurried around the disaster zone in her white coat and subdued smile, curing the wounded villagers with her assortment of medicinal brews.

In spite of only having taken one glance at her, he was determined to seek her out after the situation stabilized, only to discover that she had vanished from Loang since.

So this is where she came afterward!

When Natalie noticed how the wordless Bastien's eyes fixated upon her, she raised her hand and waved it in front of him. "Don't tell me that you're that shocked?"

"No."

With his gaze tinged with increased warmth, Bastien was merely quietly pleased that he had managed to run into her once more.

Bastien stood up and left the ward.

Joseph thought Bastien had settled it and intended to leave the hospital.

"Mr. Nine, let me send you home."

"I will stay here at the hospital tonight." Bastien's face seemed gentle. "Joseph, please arrange for someone to make some soup for her."

"Mr. Nine, you..."

Joseph could not believe what he heard.

Bastien might seem like a gentleman, but he was hard to get close to.

Many women used to fall in love with him because he was gentle. Yet, in the end, they got hurt deeply.

Joseph had been working for Bastien for over seven years. It was the first time he saw the latter care so much for a woman.

"Are my words so hard to understand?" Bastien narrowed his eyes. "Do you need me to repeat it?"

“No. No need.” Joseph choked on his word. “I am just curious why Mr. Nine treats this woman so differently? What’s so special about her?”

“Hmm...”

Seeing Joseph’s curious look, Bastien uttered faintly, “She will be the future Mrs. Nine.”

Upon hearing that, Joseph’s heart skipped a beat.

“So remember. From now on, all her orders are like my order to you. You must do as she says!”

Joseph recollected himself and nodded.

Meanwhile, inside the ward.

Natalie thought she would not be able to go home that night. She took out her phone and texted Samuel.

She typed a line of text.

I am injured...

She hesitated for a while and eventually deleted those words.

Judging from Samuel’s attentiveness toward her, she could not imagine his reaction if he knew she was injured.

Natalie would rather not let those close to her know about the bad news.

Just like how Samuel would worry if she got hurt, she would worry if the former kept worrying about her.

After pondering for a long while, she eventually sent a text.

I will be busy these two days so I can’t go home. Don’t worry about me. Love you.

A few seconds after she sent out the text, Samuel called her.

“You’re busy, right? Do you want me to send supper over?”

If he sends supper here, everything will be exposed.

“No need. I’ve eaten already,” Natalie replied with guilt. “You must be tired of work. There’s no need to take care of me like a little child. I know how to take care of myself.”

“You? Sometimes even Sophia is more mature than you.”

“Samuel, can you stop provoking me?” Natalie reminded, “I am nineteen years older than Sophia!”

“Am I wrong? At least Sophia knows to express herself when she is hungry or in pain. Unlike you, you keep everything to yourself. You even ask me not to worry about you.”

His magnetic voice was deep and attractive.

Natalie’s eyes started beaming with tears as she heard those words.

“Samuel, I can have a good life under your protection. But I don’t want to become a pet,” Natalie expressed her thoughts. “I want to be able to support myself. I want to stand by you with dignity rather than living my life thinking of how to please you every day.”

“No matter how hard you work, please remember that I am always there for you.” Samuel’s tone was filled with affection. “My net worth should be enough to support you and the four kids.”

“I got it. Goodnight.”

Hanging up the phone, Natalie grabbed her pillow. Her mind was filled with mixed emotions.

He had his way around women. He must have guessed that something was wrong. Yet, he did not force me to say it and respected me instead. How can I not be attracted to him?

Thinking about how Samuel would not be by her side for the following nights, a trace of disappointment rose in her heart.

How could I be so dependent on him? I should hold my ground!

#### Chapter 477 Do You Know Him

The next morning, Natalie opened her eyes and saw Bastien sitting by her bed. His chin rested on his hand, and his eyes were closed. It seemed like he had stayed by her side the entire night.

The morning light fell on his perfect face, making him even more attractive.

It was not usual to describe a man as pretty. However, Natalie felt that it was the perfect word for him.

When Natalie was engrossed in staring at Bastien, the latter opened his eyes.

Natalie was slightly startled. She immediately started a conversation. “Mr. Nine, why are you here?”

Bastien did not reply, but he took the thermos on the table and opened it. The fragrance of chicken soup filled the entire room.

“Have some soup. It will help in recovery.”

Natalie indeed felt a little hungry after a long night. Without hesitation, she drank the soup.

“How’s the taste?”

“It’s delicious.”

In the blink of an eye, Natalie finished the soup.

“Mr. Nine, thank you.” Natalie leaned forward and put the bowl on the headboard.

Bastien furrowed his brows. Why does she keep calling me Mr. Nine?

“Don’t call me Mr. Nine.”

“Then what should I call you?” Natalie asked.

“Bastien.” Bastien grabbed an apple and started peeling it. “Only my subordinates call me Mr. Nine. You are not one. So there is no need to address me like that.”

“Okay. I will call you by your name then.”

Natalie looked utterly attractive when she smiled.

“Bastien, you’ve helped me. We are friends now. If you need my help in the future, I will try my best to help you!”

Bastien displayed a complicated smile. “Okay. I will ask you if I need help.”

A short while later, there was some noise at the door.

“Get out of my way! My boss is inside!”

It was Yandel’s voice. Natalie told Bastien, “He is my subordinate. Can you ask your men to let him in?”

Bastien opened the door and made a gesture to Joseph. With that, Joseph did not block the visitor anymore.

Yandel’s heart skipped a beat as his eyes locked on Bastien.

He had never expected that he would run into the latter in Chanaea after he left Loang.

In fact, he had to bow down to the latter in Loang even though he was the son of a warlord. Never did he expect he would see the latter taking care of Natalie.

Yandel was dumbstruck for a long while.

“Yandel!”

He regained his senses only after Natalie called his name.

“Boss, are you all right?” Yandel stepped anxiously toward the bed and stared at Natalie.

“It’s just some minor injuries. I will recover after two days.”

“That’s good then.”

Yandel was worried when he heard from Wendy and Lucas saying that Natalie was injured. He had to come check on her personally.

Since Yandel had arrived, Natalie turned to Bastien. “My man is here. You don’t have to accompany me anymore. You’ve helped me too much. If you continue to stay, I wouldn’t know how to repay you!”

Natalie did not like to owe anyone a favor.

It would be a burden for her if she could not pay it back.

Bastien’s smile faded after hearing Natalie’s rejection.

Even though she sounded like she did not want to trouble him, he knew she was trying to draw the lines.

If he tried to get close at this point, she would put her guards up against him.

Plus, the current situation in Loang was unstable. If she stayed close to him, it might create unnecessary troubles for her. He figured he should settle everything on his hands first and then find other ways to approach her.

With that, he did not insist anymore. "Okay. Call me if there is anything."

"Sure."

Bastien left the ward with Joseph.

Yandel still stood by the bed, staring at Bastien's retreating figure.

"Yandel, do you know Mr. Nine?" Natalie put a slice of apple into her mouth and glanced at Yandel.

Chapter 478 Special Treatment From Him

"No," Yandel lied.

Yandel turned around and spotted the rabbit-shaped apple slices on the plate. "This hospital has such good service. Do they even cut the apples like this now?"

"It wasn't the hospital." Natalie rolled her eyes. "Mr. Nine was the one who cut it. His cutting skill is not bad at all. All the rabbits looked lively."

"Did he cut it himself?"

Holy sh\*t. Bastien was the ninth prince in line of succession in Loang, after all. How could he do such a thing for Natalie? It's unbelievable! What kind of special treatment is this?

Yandel's jaw dropped in awe. He could not wrap his head around it.

"Do you want to eat too?" Natalie passed a slice of apple to him. "Here."

"He cut it for you. You should eat it." Yandel did not dare to eat it.

Natalie ate it without hesitation. "Yandel, you look strange today. What's going on with you?"

"I..." Yandel choked on his words. "I just felt that this man is dangerous. Boss, maybe you should keep your distance from him."

Yandel was worried Bastien had other intentions for treating Natalie so nicely.

Even though he did not reveal Bastien's identity, he wanted to prevent Natalie from getting involved in the dispute over the succession of Loang.

Natalie somehow understood Yandel's concerns. "Don't worry. I know what to do."

After finishing the apple, Natalie enquired about Dexmed Pharmaceutical.

"The last time, Thomas lost over a billion in the black market. Even though it was not a big deal for Dexmed Pharmaceutical, it should take Thomas a lot of effort to cover it. He must be busy now."

“No, he isn’t really.”

Natalie was taken aback, thinking that she might have heard it wrong. “What did you say?”

“Boss, I thought the same previously, that Thomas would use Dexmed Pharmaceutical’s money to pay his debt, and he would have a hard time with the cash flows problem. But it turns out it is the exact opposite.” Yandel’s expression seemed stern. “Not only did Dexmed Pharmaceutical’s capital not shrink, but they also have a better cash flow than usual.”

That shouldn’t be the case! Did I underestimate Thomas? Is one billion nothing to him?

“The men we planted in Dexmed Pharmaceutical did not notice any irregularities either,” Yandel continued to elaborate. “Thomas is more cunning than we thought. Maybe he deliberately held back his capabilities during the encounter with Dream. He wanted us to underestimate the true power of Dexmed Pharmaceutical.”

“There is a possibility to that.” Natalie bit her lip tightly, frustrated. “It seems like I have underestimated him. Back then, he was able to snatch all the Bayer family’s assets from my grandfather. Besides the reason that my grandfather trusted him, he must have some pretty good tricks up his sleeves.”

Both of them stared at each other for a long while. They could not wrap their heads around it.

Natalie stayed in the hospital for two more days.

She obeyed everything the doctor said. She even used the crystal needle on herself to boost her recovery.

By the time she came out of the hospital, her leg had mostly recovered. Only the scabbed part of her palm had not fallen off. It looked a little ugly.

As she reached home, the four kids surrounded her instantly.

To prevent them from feeling jealous, she hugged and kissed each of them.

As she walked upstairs to her room, she noticed someone following her.

“Xavian?”

“Mommy, there’s something I want to tell you.” Xavian furrowed his brows. “It is about the footage of the black market...”

## Chapter 479 Examine Your Injury

Natalie knelt down and frowned. “What about the surveillance footage?”

“Mommy, the server of the black market is well hidden, and it is complicated to hack into. I spent a long time and successfully hacked into their surveillance system. I discovered that something was missing from the surveillance that day. That was the part you asked me to delete.”

Xavian’s fists clenched tightly as he mentioned it.

He had put in his blood and sweat to hack into it. Yet, his effort turned out to be in vain.

“Did you mean they didn’t record it? Or someone else had deleted it?” Natalie pressed on the issue.

“I am not sure.” Xavian shook his head. “I tried to recover it, but I failed. And the other party seems to have added anti-directional tracking. I was afraid they would find me, so I immediately backed out. Mommy, I’m sorry, I screwed up the task you gave me!”

Seeing Xavian’s darkened expression, Natalie rubbed his head.

“Silly boy! There’s no need to apologize. You are brilliant.”

“Really?”

“Of course!” Natalie smiled. “You are my most precious Sweetheart.”

Five years ago, if it were not for them, she would not even have the courage to live on.

At night, Samuel reached home.

The second he opened the bedroom door, he saw Natalie wearing her white robe and reading a book in bed.

The dim light illuminated her tiny face softly, and her hair was scattered around her. Even though she was wearing a mask, beauty was her nature. Her elegance and gentleness grasped Samuel’s heart instantly.

Samuel had seen countless beauties throughout his life.

Nonetheless, no one could compare to Natalie, not even close.

He leaned on the door, staring silently at her.

Natalie’s eyes got tired from reading. She lifted her head and rubbed her eyes. Only then did she realize Samuel was at the door.

“When did you come back? Why didn’t you come in?” Natalie gazed at him with a confused look.

“I just got back not too long ago.”

Samuel unbuttoned his shirt and strolled into the bedroom.

“Are you done with work?”

“Yes.”

Natalie secretly hid her hand under the blanket.

The wound was not evident if one did not observe closely. She figured it would disappear entirely after a few more days.

Samuel approached Natalie. He stretched his arms and hugged her tightly.

He had unbuttoned three or two buttons on his shirt, revealing his Adam’s apple and sexy collarbone. His hair was messy as his masculine scent lingered closely around her.

“Samuel, you’ve been working for the whole day. Why don’t you take a shower first?” Natalie deliberately sent him away as she did not want him to notice her burning face.

“I can shower later. There is no hurry.”

Samuel narrowed his eyes as his hand reached for Natalie’s robe.

Natalie was stunned momentarily. She did not expect Samuel to be so eager.

Natalie thought he would land kisses on her. She closed her eyes. Yet, she did not feel a thing after a long while.

She opened her eyes and realized Samuel was not kissing her. Instead, he scanned her body with a deep gaze.

Natalie was overwhelmed with embarrassment as her body was under his scrutiny.

“What... what are you doing?”

Natalie bit her lip. She wanted to use her hand to block Samuel’s eyes from staring at her.

However, as she recalled the scab on her palms, she did not do so.

“I am examining you for any injury,” Samuel uttered casually.

“How could you do this?” Natalie sounded somehow pissed. “Even criminals would not be examined like this!”