

My Unexpected Marriage to the CEO by Pumpkin Witch Chapter 451

Chapter 451

Chapter 451 Injured

“Honey, you never listen to me. Didn’t I tell you not to run around?”

When I heard the familiar voice and smelled the familiar scent, my eyes turned red.

I had been wearing a mask this whole time. I had no idea how he found me and when he did, but the moment I heard him call me “honey”, I felt a lump in my throat.

“Are you okay?” I asked, cupping his face with concern.

He gazed into my eyes and replied, “I’m fine. Listen to me and get off the ship at once. It’s dangerous on the cruise ship right now.”

I threw myself into his arms and embraced him tightly.

“No. Let’s go together. You’re also in danger, remember? We should stick together!”

All of a sudden, I heard a gunshot. Derek held me up and rolled to the floor with me.

A vase a few meters behind us was shattered into pieces.

I lay prone on top of Derek, gasping for air. I could feel my heart almost jumping from my chest. Mere seconds ago, I felt a bullet brush past my ear. It was so close and its sound was as harrowing as death.

If my guess was correct, Doug must've been the one who fired that shot.

This meant that he had found Derek. And the fact that he fired that gunshot meant that he was ready to risk it all.

By now, he must be walking towards our hiding spot.

Suddenly, I remembered something. I quickly took out the pistol from my purse.

I had never used a gun before, but in this drastic situation, it would be wise to use it.

Derek seemed to be wondering why I had a gun, but he didn't dwell on it too much. Instead, he grabbed it from my hand, released the safety catch, and kicked the back of the sofa. Then, he slid backwards along the floor because of the counterforce.

He then raised the pistol in midair, shooting at the ceiling.

After I heard the sound of the gunshot and glass breaking, the hall fell into darkness.

With my own eyes, I saw the crystal chandelier fall down after Derek shot earlier. The chandelier happened to hit Doug's head.

It was then that the undercover policemen rushed in.

Amidst the darkness, Derek pulled me into his arms. I could feel his racing heartbeat from his chest.

After a while, he helped me up and we walked out of the cabin.

Timmy appeared out of the blue, approached us, and asked us about the situation.

I had taken off my mask, so he immediately recognized me. He appeared to be surprised to see me.

The scary part was that the policemen didn't find Doug anywhere inside the cabin, nor the perimeter around the cabin.

Thus, they divided into several squads and searched the cabin inwards and outwards. Suddenly, Derek looked up and threw himself onto the floor along with me.

At the same time, we heard a gunshot coming from above, creating a hole on the deck.

"He's on the top floor!" someone shouted.

As soon as I looked up, I saw someone racing across the top floor.

A group of policemen rushed upstairs, and everyone's attention was focused on the top floor of the cabin.

"Doug Moran, stop trying to flee! You've been running away for a decade, but you'll never escape the law! Lay down your weapon and admit to your crimes," a policeman announced at the top of the cabin using a megaphone.

But I knew that Doug wasn't alone. Though his men had been drugged by sleeping pills, I wasn't sure how long the effects would last.

I held Derek's hand, restlessly looking around.

All of a sudden, I saw a head pop out from the stern. He had his pistol aimed directly at us.

To be precise, he was aiming at Derek.

Bang!

Without hesitation, I used my body to block the bullet and prevent it from hitting Derek.

“Eek!”

I felt a sharp pain swelling up in my chest. “Eveline!”

Derek embraced me, crying in desperation.

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Chapter 452 Shot

I saw a policeman shoot at Doug, and then several others ran over to pursue him.

Cornered, Doug cradled his injured arm with the other and jumped into the water.

I heard a loud splash down below, followed by more gunshots.

I didn't know whether Doug was going to survive the winter sea in his condition, or if the authorities would prevail and apprehend him eventually.

I didn't care anymore.

As long as Derek was safe and sound, I didn't care about anything else.

Slowly, I felt myself slipping down until I slumped onto the deck. Derek immediately knelt down, holding my limp body. His eyes were wide with panic.

“Just hold on a little longer, honey. You'll be just fine.”

I was hurting like hell, to be honest, but I was also relieved.

So much so that I still managed a smile.

I hadn't come to the party in vain, after all.

I reached out to touch his face, feeling pleased with myself. “It's good that you're fine...”

“Eveline, honey, everything is going to be okay. Somebody call an ambulance!”

Derek looked around frantically, and then he was calling my name over and over. Gradually, my vision darkened. His voice was sounding distant.

I looked up at the night sky and for a moment, it seemed like it was stretching forward to engulf me in its embrace.

Soon, I could no longer see or hear anything.

My last thought was that I was definitely dying from the gunshot.

Even so, I didn't regret taking the bullet that was meant for Derek. My only regret was that my children were going to lose their mother before they could even call me Mom.

I woke up to the pungent scent of disinfectant. I slowly opened my eyes and recognized a figure in white looming over me.

Aaron had an anguished expression, but it quickly changed into excitement. 1

"Eve! You're finally awake."

In the next second, Derek was on the other side of the bed, crouching over me and clasping my hand. "Honey..."

Tears welled up in his bloodshot eyes.

He looked exactly like the way he had when I had just woken up after giving birth to the twins.

A mix of joy, distress, and gratitude were all over his face.

I took stock of my surroundings as Derek squeezed my hand between his, his hot tears falling on my dry fingers. I turned to him then, and noticed how haggard he looked.

It took me a while to realize that everything felt and appeared so real.

"Am I still alive?" I murmured in wonder.

"Don't be silly," Derek rasped. "It was just a flesh wound. Of course, you're alive."

A flesh wound?

But he was acting as if I had actually returned from the dead.

I could even feel the pain of being shot. I was sure my soul had begun seeping out of my body along with my blood.

It hurt even just thinking about it.

“I want to go home,” I said in a weak voice.

Derek glanced at Aaron, who considered my request for a brief moment before nodding.

“Okay.” Derek lifted my hand and pressed a kiss in the middle of my palm. “I’ll take you home as soon as possible.”

Derek and Aaron handled the discharge process and all had to do was wait.

At last, I was back home, lying on my own bed. I took in the familiar room, the familiar scenery outside my window. Before I knew it, my eyes had grown misty.

Derek sat on the edge of the bed beside me and gently stroked my hair. Then, he pulled off something from around his neck. It was a red string that had been fashioned into a necklace, and from it hung a single bullet.

He handed it to me and showed my name engraved on the metal.

“Honey, I’m begging you. Please stop doing something so stupid in the future. A bullet won’t kill me. I can handle the pain better than you.”

I giggled between my tears.

“I honestly didn’t have time to think about my actions in that situation. How could I? All I wanted was for you not to get hurt. Your pain is my

pain.” Without warning, Derek leaned close and kissed me hungrily. When he finally pulled back, his eyes were glittering with emotion.

“Honey, my life is yours,” he declared, his voice low and hoarse.

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Chapter 453

Chapter 453 A Woman Unafraid Of Guns

A day later, Alvaro came.

When he appeared at the door carrying my kids in his arms, I thought I was hallucinating.

I had missed my little angels so much. God seemed to have heard my wish, and he had delivered my children right in front of me.

No, it wasn't God who heard my wish; it was Alvaro.

As he held my babies in his arms, he walked to the bedside.

He was staring at me with a sullen expression, silent and visibly impressed.

“You are really something, Eveline! You're a woman unafraid of guns.”

It took him a while before he finally broke his silence.

Right now, I felt sad and uncertain of what to say. Moments later, I told him, “Thanks for bringing my babies over.”

Alvaro put Dexter and Edith beside me.

My children began to cry. It seemed that they were hungry, but I didn't have any breast milk to feed them at the moment.

I had an injury on the upper side of my breast. Derek told me that because of the breast engorgement, I was now suffering from acute mastitis. The doctor had injected me some medicine to terminate lactation, so my body was no longer able to produce breast milk.

Seeing my little angels cry, I felt really guilty. I had left them back in Chinston and came to Sousen alone. And it broke my heart to know that I was unable to breastfeed them. Their cries tore my heart apart.

At this time, Derek walked in with two cans of powdered milk and new feeding bottles in his hands.

"No need to worry. We can feed them powdered milk. Besides, they've already been nursing from a bottle. You're not in good health, honey. How will you be able to provide nutrition for the babies?" As soon as Derek put down the cans of powdered milk, Alvaro rushed towards him, grabbing his collar.

In spite of that, Derek remained calm. He didn't fight back, nor was he surprised by Alvaro's violent reaction.

"Derek, are you even a man? Are you so weak that you need a woman to take the bullet for you?" Alvaro was about to punch Derek, but the latter stopped him.

"If you want to yell at me or fight me, let's wait until my kids are full," Derek said indifferently.

At this moment, Dexter and Edith were bawling. And no matter how hard I tried to appease them, it didn't work. Perhaps they were really starving. Upon hearing Derek's response, and the cries of my children, Alvaro gathered his composure. He loosened his grip on Derek's collar, staring into the latter's cold eyes. It was as if Alvaro was saying "I can wait".

Derek tidied up his clothes, and then he took out two nursing bottles.

"I've already finished sterilizing them," he said. No matter how hard I tried to comfort the kids, it didn't help. They just kept on crying.

Even though Alvaro was intending to fight with Derek a few seconds ago, he cast his anger aside and went to Derek's side to help him.

Alvaro opened a can of powdered milk, ready to pour some into the bottle using a spoon.

"Add water into the bottle first before you put in the powdered milk," Derek remarked.

Alvaro paused, still holding the spoon. He didn't want to listen to Derek.

"What difference does it make if I put the water first before the powdered milk?" he asked through gritted teeth.

"Like it or not, there's a difference," Derek retorted. Alvaro scoffed at him. "You seem _ quite experienced. How much time have you spent with the twins, huh? And for how long have you taken care of them?"

Derek didn't say anything this time. Perhaps he thought it was pointless to argue with Alvaro about it.

Alvaro didn't insist on putting the powdered milk before water anymore. However, he didn't know how much water he should pour into the bottle. I could tell that he wanted to help, but he just didn't know what to do. Thus, he put the bottle down.

After Derek finished making a bottle of milk, Alvaro took it and handed the other empty bottle to him. Then, he walked to the bedside, carrying the bottle of milk.

When Alvaro saw that both babies were crying, he hesitated on who to feed first.

"Since Dexter is the elder brother, he should let his younger sister drink milk first."

Having said that, Alvaro frowned again, staring at the kids awkwardly.

"Uh... which one is Dexter and which one is Edith?" He probably remembered the last time that Derek dressed his son in pink in the hospital.

"This is Edith," | replied.

They were twins, so even though one was a boy and one was a girl, they looked exactly alike. I had been taking care of them for several months, so I could tell the subtle differences between them. Alvaro held the bottle to Edith's lips. And as soon as she started nursing from the bottle, she stopped crying. She just held the bottle in her hands and focused on drinking. From what I could see, she must be starving.

After a while, Derek finished the other bottle and put the bottle to Dexter's lips.

At long last, the kids quieted down now that they had their milk.

Now, the men were standing by the bed, staring at the kids. For a moment, they seemed to have forgotten their altercation.

As a matter of fact, I couldn't understand Alvaro. Even though he didn't like Derek, his eyes were filled with love every time he looked at Derek's kids.

While suckling from the nursing bottles, the twins drifted into sleep. And soon, I did too.

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Chapter 454 I'm A Doctor And She's The Patient

By the time I woke up again, Derek and Alvaro weren't in the room anymore.

Moments later, Aaron came in.

He was carrying a medicine kit, and he told me that he came here to change the dressing for my wound.

I was a little nervous when he said that he'd personally change the dressing.

After all, the wound was on my breast. If he were to do that, I would feel embarrassed.

Derek followed him in. And judging by the look on his face, he must've already considered what I was thinking.

Seemingly having read through Derek's mind, Aaron smiled and asked, "What's the matter, Derek? I'm a doctor, and she's my patient. If you prefer another doctor to do the work, I'm okay with that."

Derek shrugged, smiling bitterly.

"Do you need any help?" he asked.

Aaron smirked and replied, "Actually, I do. Do you mind decocting the stuff I brought in just now? Once I'm done changing the dressing on Eveline's wound, you can give it to her."

Derek nodded in response. "Got it. Thanks, Aaron." Once Derek had left, only Aaron and I remained in the room. And because of that, I felt even more embarrassed.

Not long after, Aaron walked to my bedside, put down his medicine kit, and sat on the chair beside the bed.

I was so nervous that my body felt stiff.

Aaron remained motionless for quite some time, just staring at me and seemingly observing my reaction. Moments later, he chuckled and said, "Are you trembling, Eveline?"

Embarrassed, I closed my eyes. "Not at all," I replied.

Aaron laughed, knowing why I was reacting this way. "Look, Eveline, it's true that I love you, but there are many other ways to express love. Right now, you are my patient, and I am your doctor. Aside from feeling sorry for you and wanting you to get better, I bear no ill intention towards you. I swear to God, my intentions are pure."

He sounded so sincere that my tensed body gradually eased up.

I flashed him a smile and said, “Thanks, Aaron.” Aaron smiled back. “So, can we start now?”

After taking a deep breath, I nodded.

It was then that he took out a pair of sterilized gloves from the medicine kit and put them on. Afterwards, he unbuttoned the two topmost buttons of my shirt, and opened my clothes; revealing my wound.

I wasn't wearing a bra right now because of my injury.

It made me glad that he didn't open up my clothes too wide. Only the wound on the upper part of my left breast was exposed, and the other parts were still concealed.

Seconds later, he began disinfecting my wound and applied medicine to it.

I would be lying if I said that I wasn't nervous anymore, but soon, he finished applying the cool medicine on my wound. His gentleness and professionalism helped to make me feel at ease. “Eveline, your decision to leave Sousen might've been the right one. So, why did you return?” Aaron asked all of a sudden while he was tending to my wound.

Perhaps he was chatting me up because he wanted me to feel relaxed.

He was right. Why did I come back? After thinking about it carefully, I realized the answer. It was because I yearned for Derek.

“It's hard for me to explain why I do things at times, but I'm sure you can relate to that. Most of the time, decisions like the one I made are driven by impulse. I left on the spur of the moment, and I came back on impulse as well.”

Having said that, I chuckled. “I don’t think taking a bullet is a big deal. I remember how he got shot in the arm before. He even drove out in the middle of the night to buy some pumpkin pies for me.” “Derek got shot in the arm?” exclaimed Aaron. It seemed that he didn’t know about that.

Oh, that was right. When Derek got injured at the time, he didn’t go to the hospital. Instead, he asked a doctor and a nurse to come to the villa and deal with the wound. Nobody else knew about it aside from me and Timmy.

Truthfully, I didn’t know how to explain this to Aaron. And honestly, I wasn’t sure if I should explain it to him or not.

Fortunately, he didn’t ask any more questions. Instead, he sighed and said, “You are something else, Eveline. Did you know that the bullet almost reached your heart?”

It turned out that it was a miracle that I survived. The bullet hit the upper part of my left breast. Derek was taller than me, so if I didn’t block that bullet for him, it could’ve hit his heart.

When that thought crossed my mind, I felt both scared and lucky.

It was our good fortune that I came back on impulse and heard about Doug’s plan. And Derek was fortunate that I took the bullet for him.

And thanks to God’s mercy, I survived.

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Chapter 455

Chapter 455 Feeling Sorry

Based on the look on my face, Aaron could tell that I felt lucky. He shook his head, letting out a sigh. He then tidied up my clothes and buttoned them back up.

“Eveline, you’re a woman. Don’t compare your body to a man’s, and don’t force yourself to endure things that you shouldn’t, okay?”

I was so grateful to Aaron, and at the same time, I felt sorry for him.

I felt sorry, because I couldn’t requite his kindness. In order to take better care of me and the babies, Derek hired two nannies.

One afternoon, the children had drifted into slumber.

Afraid that I was dying of boredom in the room, Derek carried me downstairs.

There was an armchair placed under the eaves outside the living room, and he placed me on it.

A pile of snow lay thick on the ground, and the air felt cold.

Derek brought me a hand warmer and a thick blanket, wrapping me up like a silkworm pupa. “Do you feel cold?” he asked.

I couldn’t help but laugh at the question. “Look at me! I’m almost sweating.”

Derek smiled, visibly relieved. He then went to the yard, picked up a shovel and used it to shovel up some snow. Then, he made a snowman out of the snow he had gathered.

After making a snowman, he sat next to me, holding my shoulder.

I noticed that his hands had become red because of the cold, and it made me want to hold them. However, he didn't hold my hand. Instead, he held onto my arm and nestled in my chest.

“My hands are freezing. Don't touch them,” he remarked.

Ever since I got hurt, he had been keeping me company. He was at home almost every single day. Although there wasn't much for him to do in the company during holidays, he probably had a lot of social gatherings to attend, considering how prominent he was. On occasion, I would hear him answering phone calls about dinner parties. But even then, he declined all of them.

The two nannies he hired were in their thirties. Both went to a university and received formal training. They were very experienced.

Their division of labor was clear and well-proportioned. One would take care of the kids, and the other would do housework. They did this method in rotation.

And once the children had fallen asleep, they would chat with me about how Derek loved me so much. They said that they had served many rich families, but they'd never seen a master doting on his wife so much. In all honesty, it was so sweet that it warmed my heart.

While I was staring at the snowfall, I asked Derek about what happened on the cruise ship the other day.

“Have they captured Doug?”

When I mentioned the man, Derek's face became serious.

“No, but his cohorts have been caught. The police went into the sea in search of him, but they couldn’t find him. Doug was injured as well, and the sea water was freezing. Chances are, he’s already dead.”

To be honest, I couldn’t understand what sort of grudge Doug had against Derek.

“Doug was targeting you. But I remember that the police said that he’s a wanted criminal who had escaped for a decade. Ten years ago, you were only twenty years old. It would’ve been impossible for him to develop a grudge against you at the time. So, what sort of feud do you have with him?” When I finished my question, he suddenly kissed me, sealing my lips and arresting my doubts.

We weren’t the only ones at home right now. The nannies were here too, but it didn’t seem like he cared about their presence. He still acted how he always used to. He would kiss me and hug me whenever he wanted.

Derek put a small bed beside ours, and insisted that the babies should sleep in the same room as us.

Each time that the twins cried at midnight, he would wake up before me and plant a kiss on my forehead before making the bottles of milk himself. “The kids are hungry. Go back to sleep, honey. I’ll take care of them.”

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Chapter 456

Chapter 456 Love

Our life seemed to have returned to how it used to be. Back then, Derek was so good to me. He looked after me, protected me, and I basked in his attention.

The only difference now was that we had two kids. In the past, I was hesitant to claim that he loved me, because I was too afraid to assume that there was indeed love between us. And although I loved him, I thought that it was an unrequited love. But now, he expressed his love for me in both words and deeds. Moreover, the restored recording also showed that he truly loved me.

I guessed now, I could claim that our kids were the fruits of our love, huh?

As time passed by, my wound began to heal, and it was scabbing now. Every night since we got back, Derek would hold me to sleep. He would kiss and make out with me, but he wouldn't do anything more than that.

I could feel how much he wanted to do it with me, and I could also feel that he was restraining his desires. I thought that he was resisting his desires because he loved me so much and he didn't want me to get hurt.

One day, in February, I put the two kids on the sofa and played with them.

All of a sudden, someone rang the doorbell. The nanny hurried to the door and opened it.

The person who visited me was an acquaintance, and she brought me bad news.

She was Lavinia's assistant. After hearing from her about Lavinia's situation, I left the children in the nannies' care. I changed my clothes and went to the hospital along with the assistant.

At the gate of the hospital, there was a group of journalists waiting. It seemed that they had already heard about the news. As soon as we got out of the car, they surrounded us.

"Ma'am, can you tell us something about Mrs. Mayer?"

"They say she's in an unstable condition. What happened to Mrs. Mayer?"

Lavinia's assistant didn't respond, and just quickly walked towards the hospital wearing a stern expression. Meanwhile, I followed her closely. Eventually, the security guards came to stop the reporters from going in.

In a VIP ward, there were lots of doctors and nurses, along with Lavinia's students. But even with all the people, it was very quiet.

The smell of disinfectant pervaded in the air, and everyone could smell it.

Lavinia was lying in bed, wearing a hospital gown and an oxygen mask. Her face was deathly pale, and she looked haggard.

But even so, her eyes were open. The moment she saw me, she smiled at me with difficulty.

The nearest doctor to her was probably her attending doctor. Realizing that she wanted to speak, he helped her take off the oxygen mask.

"Eveline."

Lavinia reached her hand out to me.

I immediately walked to her bedside and held her hand.

“Mrs. Mayer, I’m here.”

I had always known that she had a heart problem, but she paid special attention to her health care, so I never expected this would happen to her so soon. Judging by the look on Lavinia’s face and the heavy atmosphere in the ward, I feared that she might not have long to live.

Lavinia) was my mentor, and she was instrumental on my road to starting a business.

She not only taught me knowledge on the industry, but also how to build up self-confidence. She guided me through the path of self-improvement, and taught me to be a strong, independent woman. Aside from that, she told me that I should pay attention to both my mental and physical health. Even though she was on the brink of death, Lavinia was still smiling.

It was as if she wasn’t about to die. It was like she was about to be free from the burdens of this world, and she was going off to a better world.

2 “Eveline, promise me one thing.”

“Mrs. Mayer, I promise to do it if I can,” I replied. Lavinia smiled with relief. “You can do it. I’m sure of it.”

She then turned to her assistant next to her. The assistant took out a document from her bag and handed it to me.

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Chapter 457 Legacy

After taking a look at the document, I understood what Lavinia meant. I immediately shook my head. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Mayer, but I cannot accept that.” Lavinia held my hand and said, “Didn’t you promise me that you’d do it. I honestly believe that you can handle it.”

The contract indicated that I could purchase her company for a dollar.

In all honesty, I was flattered by how much faith Lavinia had in me, but at the same time, I felt uneasy about this whole thing.

Now, I finally understood why Lavinia gave me all those U-disks at the start of the previous year. It was a summary of her life’s work. She probably knew that she didn’t have long left to live, and she needed someone to inherit her legacy.

And it seemed as though she had been trying to do this one thing her entire life. It was her lifelong achievement to make more women become more confident and beautiful.

Lavinia held my hand tightly, staring at me with her usual gentle eyes. At this moment, her gaze displayed how hopeful she was for me.

I didn’t want her to leave this world with regret, and I didn’t want to betray her trust. Thus, in the end, I decided to accept the contract.

Lavinia was relieved to know that I accepted it. And it looked like she was relieved that she had finally accomplished her penultimate goal in life. “Eveline, put on my makeup for me,” she said. Her words almost drove me to tears, but I composed myself, for I didn’t want to weep in front of her.

Contrary to my sadness, Lavinia was smiling as though she was about to attend a banquet, and she still wanted to be one of the most beautiful women to show up.

I knew that she had been a stunning woman all her life, and I could tell that she hoped she could leave this world as beautiful as she once was in her prime.

Her assistant took out Lavinia's large makeup kit, and soon, I put on her makeup myself.

Once I was done, Lavinia looked absolutely divine. The blush on her face made her cheeks look ruddy. Somehow, she looked like a healthy person; mainly because her eyes were still brimming with life, and she had no fear of death.

Once more, Lavinia held my hand. "Eveline, the harder you work, the luckier you will be. I'm sure of it."

It was as if an invisible force transmitted from her palm to mine. This was a spiritual wealth that could never be bought with money.

The meaning of a person's life wasn't based on how long they had lived, but on how many lives they had touched, and the depth of their life. Even though Lavinia's life was short-lived, she had lived her life to the fullest, and made countless people beautiful.

And so, she departed to the afterlife with a bright smile on her face; unburdened by pain or regret. Later on, I heard from her assistant that Lavinia had already known about the progress of my company in Chinston.

Lavinia proudly declared that she indeed had a keen eye for talent, and that she had expected that I'd be where I was today. This proved the fact that she had already made up her mind to hand over her company to me after she found out that I was interested in the beauty industry, and accepted me as her apprentice.

Lavinia not only gave me her company, but also a massive amount of trust.

As a matter of fact, I also wanted to shift the focus of my business operations to Sousen. I didn't have a branch of Jolly Beauty Salon in the city. I even wanted to move the headquarters here, because I didn't want to be away from Derek. And now, I had taken over Lavinia's company. It had a very strong foothold in Sousen and the rest of the country.

I held a press conference to replace the name of Jolly Beauty Salon to Jolly & Mayer Company, which would take root in Sousen. I also set up the headquarters here.

Jolly & Mayer Company wasn't just a cosmetics brand. It also conducted business in different industries.

Lavinia had passed away, and I took over her company. This was the biggest news in Sousen this year. Media from all over the country reported it one after another, and by extension, they made my newly established company prestigious.

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Chapter 458

Chapter 458 The Opening Ceremony

The main store of Jolly & Mayer Company opened in the middle of February. People from the media crowded the entrance of the building, and the ceremony was lively and successful.

Dere International sent over a congratulatory flower arrangement, which was probably the most extravagant the city had ever seen. It stood as tall as two whole floors, certainly difficult to miss even in the middle of the bustling street.

Once the opening ceremony ended, we commenced with the first morning meeting.

We had already begun when a young woman who looked to be in her early twenties burst through the door of the conference room. She was still tidying up her messy hair even as she rushed to a vacant seat.

“I’m so sorry for being late.”

Needless to say, her sudden appearance interrupted our ongoing discussion.

I walked over to her, effectively stopping her from plopping down on the empty chair. Slowly, I looked at my watch, then back at her.

“Do you have any explanation for your tardiness?” I asked in a casual tone.

The girl was visibly nervous and rambled on with a paltry excuse.

“Yes, I’m really sorry. That—I was stuck... in a traffic jam, I mean. When I was on my way here. So...”

She drifted off into silence, likely intimidated when I looked deep into her eyes.

“Traffic jam?” I repeated before nodding my head.

“I see. Of course, every city has its own rush hours in the mornings and

evenings. Why, if there had been a traffic jam, I'm quite surprised that my other employees managed to make it to work on time."

The rest of the team, who had been whispering among themselves behind me, suddenly grew quiet.

I crossed my arms over my chest and spoke my words with emphasis.

"Is it really because of the traffic jam, or did you simply wake up late this morning?"

The girl bit her lower lip and hung her head. She said nothing, but I saw her ears redden in embarrassment.

I turned on my heel and walked back to the head of the table. I swept a glance over the staff in attendance before returning my gaze to the young woman.

"You made two grave mistakes today. One, you were late. Two, you lied to my face. Our company has no use for people who have no sense of time, much less a sense of accountability and, overall, integrity."

The girl snapped to attention at that. Regret was written all over her face.

"Boss, I..."

"Resume with the meeting!" I barked, looking away from her.

Everybody else took their cue from me and went back to our discussion as if nothing had happened. In the end, the young woman had no choice but to walk out of the room.

When we were done, I asked the manager of the Human Resources Department to bring the files of all the newly-hired employees to my office.

I went through the resumes and finally found that of the girl from earlier. Apparently, she had graduated from a junior college and hadn't pursued further studies. She didn't have much experience in the field, either.

One line from her profile caught my attention: "I may not have a remarkable educational background, but I am a fast and willing learner. I will strive hard to keep up with my peers and achieve the standard that the company demands." Despite myself, I was quite impressed by her mettle.

I called Ady to my office and gave her the girl's contact details.

"This is the number of that young woman who came in late. Give her a call and make arrangements for her in the Training Department. If she passes probation, bump her salary by 20 percent."

Before Ady could even respond, the sound of clapping came from the door.

I craned my neck to see who it was, and almost froze in shock.

It was Gifford.

Ady glanced at him and stared at me, silently asking if she should stay.

I gave her a small nod and waved.

After a moment's hesitation, Ady sighed and excused herself.

Gifford invited himself to the chair opposite my desk, crossing his legs and lighting a cigarette. "It's exhilarating, isn't it? Punishing others and making an example out of them."

"What would you like to drink?" I asked with a faint smile, making a point to ignore his remark. "Coffee or water?"

My calm seemed to surprise him. He scoffed once and said nothing more.

I pressed the intercom and instructed one of the secretaries to prepare a cup of coffee for him.

I had no idea what he was doing here. I would have to mask my emotions until he revealed his intentions.

Gifford leaned back on his seat and flashed me a smile.

It was sinister, just like all the other smiles he had given me whenever we met. It was full of contempt and somehow taunting, as if he wanted me to think that he knew my dirty little secrets, even though I had none.

"I must say, Miss Stone, you've managed to become a successful CEO in just two years. It's rather extraordinary."

"Thank you for your praise."

I knew it wasn't sincere, of course, but I wasn't about to take his bait.

Gifford chuckled. "I doubt anyone would believe that the head of the Jolly & Mayer Company was a meek nurse who was struggling at rock bottom just a couple of years ago."

“What is it that you want to say, exactly?” I asked, matching his snide smile.

He took a long drag from his cigarette and took his time puffing out smoke. “I’m saying that I really underestimated you,” he said lightly. “Seeing how far you’ve gone, you’re obviously much more ambitious than I initially thought.”

My jaw clenched as I tried to restrain my outrage, but I maintained a calm expression, my eyes clear and unwavering.

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Chapter 459

Chapter 459 I’m Very Busy

Just as the tension rose in the air, the nanny called me.

Dexter was burning up and needed to be sent to the hospital.

After hanging up the phone, I shot Gifford a cold glare.

“No matter what you say, Derek and I already have two kids together.”

Upon hearing me mention the kids, Gifford chuckled with disdain.

It appeared as though he already knew about the existence of the kids.

“Oh, the kids, huh? I’m not even sure if they’re really Derek’s or not,” he responded,

This time, I looked at him in disbelief.

I wanted to chastise him for his rude remark, but right now, my kids were more important and I didn't want to waste my time on this damned fool who'd never be satisfied with me.

“Got anything else to say? Hurry up. I'm very busy.” Gifford stubbed out his cigarette on the ashtray before walking with his hands behind his back. Later on, after Dexter's infusion, his fever went down. I didn't go to the company for two days and just stayed at home with my kids.

I didn't want to neglect my motherly duties just because of my career. And even though I had two perfectly good nannies, they could never replace the motherly love that I could provide.

After that, I spent most of my time working in the administrative headquarters.

I had already consulted an architect to design a blueprint of the garden in the headquarters, and prepared to build a statue of Lavinia in an eye-catching position.

Later in the day, I opened my email and found that the sculpture company had sent me some sketches of their designs.

While I concentrated on observing the sketches and chatting with the designer, I heard a knock on the door.

“Come in, please,” I said, staring at the computer screen.

Soon, a cup of coffee was placed on my desk. When I raised my head, I saw Elaine Jarvis—the girl who was late for the meeting that day. I had transferred her to the administrative headquarters since then.

Today, her long hair was braided, she was wearing light makeup, and she was dressed decently. Upon noticing that I was eyeing her up and down, she flashed me a meek smile.

“Ms. Stone, thank you for giving me this chance. At the time, I really thought that you didn’t want me, and I! regretted being late. And I was so pleasantly surprised that you gave me an even better opportunity. I really appreciate this,” she said.

I smiled back at her and replied, “I assume the incident has been engraved into your memory. Thus, I believe that you’ll never be late again.” Elaine blushed, nodding earnestly.

“Yes, ma’am! I’ve already set several alarms to ensure that I wake up on time. I won’t ever be late again.”

I really appreciated her desire to improve upon her failings, and nodded with satisfaction. “Elaine, your attitude towards the job will determine everything. And I firmly believe that you’ll do well here.”

With great confidence, Elaine replied, “I’ll do my best, Ms. Stone!”

During lunch break, I went to the coffee shop across my company’s building and made a phone call.

After a while, Megan entered the coffee shop, saw me at my table, and immediately approached. She pulled out the chair across mine, sat down, and cleared her throat.

“Shall I call you Eveline, or do you prefer Ms. Stone now?”

I looked her in the eye and asked, “What do you think?”

“Well, Ms. Stone, what can I do for you?” She grinned at me.

I rolled my eyes at her and remarked, “Mind your words.”

Megan stuck out her tongue and replied, “Do you think it’s still appropriate for me to call you by your first name?”

After taking a sip of coffee, I put down the mug. “So, is that why you’ve been avoiding me lately?” As Megan held her cup of coffee, she chuckled awkwardly.

“If I hold your arm and pester you like before, what will others think of me? They’ll think I’m kissing up to you or something!”

“So, to prove your innocence, you just decided to dissociate yourself from me?” I asked.

Megan almost choked on her coffee and began to cough repeatedly.

She looked around before whispering, “What are you talking about? People might think that we have a shameful secret relationship. We need to be more careful, okay? Especially because I’m not married yet!”

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Chapter 460

Chapter 460 In A Dilemma

I couldn’t help but laugh. Megan leaned back, smiling at me while looking at me with admiration. “Eveline, you are one lucky girl. Mrs. Mayer thought highly of you. And now, you have such a successful career! And most of all, you’re married to such a handsome husband. But me, I wonder if there’ll be a Mr. Right in my life.”

“Do you want me to set you up with someone? What kind of guy do you like?” I bantered. Megan sighed. “Well, you’re in a completely different social class now. I’m sure all the rich, handsome guys you know won’t even look at me.” I smiled at her and replied, “You should have more confidence in yourself, Megan. You don’t look bad. All you need to do is to improve yourself.” “But how?” Megan stirred her coffee, visibly frustrated.

“If you promise you won’t chase after stars like a paparazzo again, I’ll give you a chance to improve yourself,” I said.

Her eyes lit up as she nodded eagerly.

“I’ve already stopped chasing after stars. I only did that because I was dying of boredom. But now, I think chasing after stars is boring!”

In fact, Megan could be silly at times, but she was a hard worker and she was dedicated to her job. Moreover, she had been working for Lavinia for a long time, and she knew a lot about the company. That was why I intended to promote her.

I asked Megan to be the new head of the human resources department.

Her first task was to arrange part-time jobs for college students, so that they could work for Jolly & Mayer Company.

As the new head of the human _ resources department, Megan was quite efficient. The very day the recruitment advertisement was released, many college students submitted their applications.

On the first day of the recruitment, a long line had formed at the gate of the company.

I sat in the car, looking through the window at the group of beautiful young college students. All of a sudden, I caught sight of a particular person.

As soon as I got back to my office, I called Megan. Moments later, she brought a college girl into my office.

“This is our boss, Ms. Stone,” Megan said to the girl.

The college girl was visibly surprised to see me. “You can leave now and go on with your work,” I said to Megan.

Once she had left, I smiled at the college girl. “It’s been a while,” I said.

The college girl smiled back at me. “I didn’t expect it would be you!”

The college girl standing right in front of me was Gina, Layne’s adopted daughter.

I asked my secretary to make two cups of coffee. I sat on the sofa with her, itching to ask her about Layne and Louise.

The moment I mentioned Layne, Gina lowered her head, visibly dejected.

“All people are equal before the law. If one does something wrong, he or she must be punished. And if one does something good, it will be acknowledged. However, all the good deeds one has done can never completely offset the wrong ones.”

Gina told me that Layne was originally sentenced to life imprisonment. Later on, his lawyer gathered all kinds of favorable evidence that Louise used to make an appeal. Through this, Layne’s sentence was reduced to fifteen years.

As a matter of fact, I had a hunch that this would happen to Layne. I believed Louise knew just as much. She must've been mentally prepared for it. And the only reason she fought for a lesser sentence was for a tiny glimmer of hope.

Fifteen years was long, but it was much better than life imprisonment. Sadly, that kind of time could waste a woman's best years.

I wondered if Louise would be willing to wait for that long. In fifteen years, Louise would be in her forties. How many fifteen years did a woman have? "How are Louise and her child?" I felt really bad for my best friend.

When I mentioned them, Gina nodded and smiled. "They're doing fine. She gave birth to a boy, and he's beautiful."

It seemed that she didn't want to talk more about Louise.

When I asked her for Louise's phone number, she lowered her head in silence.

"Is something wrong?" I saw how conflicted and embarrassed she was.