

A new message showed up on the screen: *It seems like you dislike my present for you. That's strange. I thought you hated Shandie.*

Arielle balled her hands into fists, then replied, "Who are you? What are you trying to do?"

There came another message shortly after the previous one: *I think you've misunderstood me, Ms. Moore. I was simply trying to help you, but it appears I caused you some problems instead. I'm truly sorry about that.*

Without waiting for Arielle's reply, a new sentence popped up: *Ms. Moore, why don't you consider joining our team? I commend your skillfulness in hacking.*

As soon as Arielle came across the word "hacking," all she could think of was the recent explosion of the building. She narrowed her eyes and answered, "You're the one who's trying to kill Vinson."

Another line of text appeared: *Aren't you a clever one, Ms. Moore? How about joining us? I'm sure you'll become one of the world's highest-ranking hackers in no time,*

a normal computer with no cybersecurity software to protect her from malicious attacks. Thus, it had been a piece of cake for the experienced hacker to infiltrate her computer.

She rebooted her computer and coded an intermediate firewall to prevent the hacker from invading the system again.

The firewall she programmed was not only strong, but it could also immediately lock on to the attacker's IP address if he attempted to hijack her computer again.

If that happened, she could finally uncover the mastermind behind these malicious acts!

After setting up the firewall, Arielle dialed Vinson's phone number. A few seconds flew by before Vinson answered the call. "Hello? Arielle?"

Vinson had just woken up. His deep and husky morning voice was sensually magnetic. Arielle was distracted by his alluring voice for a short while before she managed to clear her thoughts and mutter, "The person who was attempting to assassinate you tracked me down."

especially under my guidance. However, if you choose to refuse, then you become our enemy.

Arielle turned down the offer without the slightest bit of hesitation. "I'll never work with some underground hacker who doesn't even dare reveal their identity to their recruits. If you have the capability, you'll challenge me openly!"

Promptly, a different message emerged on the screen: *Don't reject us so soon, Ms. Moore. You have three days to consider this carefully. See you again in three days.*

Arielle was boiling with rage while she spat out icily, "Don't you worry about looking for me because I'll come for you, you cold-blooded murderer!"

Yet, the computer shut down automatically before she could finish her sentence.

"Dang it!" Arielle cursed, irritated by the unknown hacker's influx of uncertainty into her life.

She had not expected the hacker to find her here. It would seem like he had tracked her down so easily because she was using

ates'
Nove

Chapter 262


"I'll wait for you at the entrance."


Arielle washed up and got changed hurriedly as soon as she ended the phone call with Vinson.

The housekeepers were still cleaning up Shandie's room, and Henrick wasn't home as he was purchasing the necessary items to prepare for Shandie's funeral.

Therefore, Arielle went to Maplelake Manor without announcing her departure from home.

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"What?" Vinson was put in utter shock by Arielle's words and instantly sobered up. He asked frantically, "Where are you now? Are you all right?"

Arielle gripped the phone tighter in her hand and replied, "I'm doing fine at home. He only hacked my computer this time and didn't harm me."

"I'm glad to know you're okay." Vinson let out a relieved sigh and asked, "So, why did he hack your computer?"

Fearing the hacker was listening in on the phone call as well, Arielle did not answer him immediately. She paused for a moment before saying, "When are you free to meet up? I'll tell you when we see each other in person."

"I'm going to your place right now."

"Don't. Our house is quite messy today. How about I visit you instead? Where are you now?"

"I'm at Maplelake Manor. You were here yesterday, remember?"

"All right. I'll meet you there."

as she stepped into the mansion.

Vinson led Arielle toward the dining hall and suggested, "Let's have our meal before we discuss what happened. Health is the most important after all."

Arielle was moved and wanted to thank him for his thoughtfulness, but before she could show her appreciation, Vinson continued, "I'm just concerned about falling sick myself. I didn't cook this for you on purpose, got it?"

After hearing Vinson's forced explanation, Arielle swallowed her words instantaneously and kept quiet. She realized he was simply too embarrassed to admit his concern for others, so she didn't say much as she slowly finished the ravioli he had prepared.

Arielle was a fast eater and finished her plate of food quickly. She then diverted her attention to Vinson, who was still eating his food.

This was the first time she had observed Vinson's eating style with no distractions, and she was pleasantly surprised by how gracefully he exhibited his proper table

Maplelake Manor was even more beautiful during the day than it had been when Arielle first visited last night. Lush maple trees surrounded the compound, creating a splendid city jungle.

Yet, Arielle was too engaged in her thoughts to admire the scenery and entered the mansion as soon as she saw Vinson.

Vinson greeted Arielle while still in his pajamas, his hair unkempt.

He had stayed up late working the night before, so he had planned to sleep in the next day. However, Arielle's call that informed him she had become the mysterious man's target jolted Vinson awake. Not only did his drowsiness vanish in the blink of an eye, but he was also too worried about Arielle's wellbeing to take care of his appearance.

Although Vinson wasn't in the mood to tidy up, he still got a hold of himself and cooked Arielle some ravioli before her arrival.

Hence, Arielle was welcomed by two warm plates of ravioli on the dining table as soon

Arielle nodded and elaborated on the security measures she had put in place to prevent the hackers from hijacking her system again.

"Good job, Arielle!" Vinson praised her quick-wittedness and continued, "This time, I will surely find this man and punish him for what he did!"

"I hope so too." Honestly, she was more worried that the man would track her down in real life rather than try to hack into her computer again.

Apparently, Vinson shared the same concern as her as he offered, "I'll hire a bodyguard to protect you. I won't let that man hurt you."

"I've found myself a bodyguard. You don't have to worry about my safety." Arielle paused briefly before continuing, "There's something else I have to tell you."

Vinson recalled Arielle's reason for not meeting at her house and soon realized there might be another truth behind it, so he asked, "What happened back home?"

With her lips pursed, Arielle mumbled

manners. It was as if Arielle was watching a duke enjoying a delectable full-course meal.

Vinson sensed Arielle's gaze and lifted his eyes to glance at her, which caused the latter to look away awkwardly.

Luckily, Vinson didn't tease her like how he did last night. He merely increased his speed of eating, then began the discussion with Arielle about the serious matters on his mind.

"So, what happened to your family? Also, what did that man do after hacking into your computer?" Vinson inquired.

Arielle answered truthfully, "That man wants me to join his team and promised to contact me in three days."

Somewhat startled by the response, Vinson lifted one brow and commented, "He appears to be interested in your hacking abilities."

"I've set up a customized firewall on my computer. It can perform reverse tracking on the attackers' IP addresses if they try to invade my computer system in the future."

ates
Nove

Chapter 263

softly, "Shandie is dead."

"What?" Vinson's eyes widened in surprise, then he frowned. "Is this case related to that man?"

Arielle was momentarily stunned by his response and chuckled. "I assumed you'd immediately suspect me in causing Shandie's death."

Vinson shook his head in disagreement and instinctively replied, "I know you're not that kind of person."

At that moment, Arielle's heart was filled with a warm and fuzzy feeling.



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Surprisingly, Arielle's irritation the entire morning was soothed by a single remark from Vinson.

Sure enough, I don't need to explain myself to someone who understands me!

She stared at him intently. Suppressing the odd feelings within her, she answered with a nod. "It wasn't me who killed Shandie, but the man who hacked into my computer. He said he wanted to give me a hand. However, I think this is actually a warning instead. He has investigated everything that happened while I was in Jadeborough, so he knows that Cindy will definitely push the blame on me when something happens to Shandie..."

Casting her gaze into the distance, Arielle looked out the window at the drizzle that had started without her knowing. Then, her eyes narrowed while she continued, "A car has probably been sent to pick Cindy up by now."

And she'll certainly kick up a fuss of epic proportions when she comes back! I've imagined a myriad of reasons that might bring her back, but this reason never once crossed my mind. But then, even she herself

probably never expected that she'd be returning to the Southall residence to attend her biological daughter's funeral. Speaking of that, it's truly ironic. She must have been hankering to come back, but coming back to attend her daughter's funeral was definitely not something she had hoped for.

Visualizing Cindy's expression when she flew into a rage upon her return, a faint shiver ran down Arielle's back.

At that precise moment, Vinson, who was sitting across from her, declared out of the blue, "Let's get married."

"What?" Arielle lifted her eyes in utter surprise, only to meet the man's profound black ones.

As the two of them locked gazes, she seemingly smelled the fragrance of roses.

Nonetheless, she snapped back to her senses in no time. Bursting into laughter, she teased, "Are you still joking with me at such a time?"

Conversely, Vinson's expression was exceedingly serious.

"I'm not joking with you. I'm serious."

Hearing that, Arielle couldn't quite laugh anymore. Her chortles ceased, and she inquired, "In that case, what did you mean by that?"

"If you marry me, you can live here. No matter how great Cindy's wrath, she can't possibly get into this place. Besides, with me here, she has to consider twice before doing anything to you. Furthermore, despite the sparse interior of this mansion, it's surrounded by bodyguards who have masked their presence. And if you live with me, you don't need to worry about the threat of the man who hacked into your computer."

Admittedly, Arielle was enticed.

After contemplating for two seconds, she admitted, "It's indeed a brilliant idea, but... will it be a hardship to you?"

Vinson was taken aback for a moment before he gave a cough and replied, "No, not at all. Don't forget that my mother has arranged a blind date for me. I'm not interested in the woman, so you'll be helping to shield me from that delusional

woman if you marry me.”

For some inexplicable reason, Arielle's mood lifted when she heard him calling Wendy “delusional.”

“So, what do you think?” Vinson looked at her intently, asking, “Shall we get married?”

“I-”

“Don't be so hasty to decline.” Vinson then added, “This is something that will only benefit you. If we both find someone whom we love in the future, you'll be getting half of my assets after we divorce. Perhaps you'll even be listed on Forbes' Billionaires List.”

Inwardly, Arielle muttered, I've already been on Forbes' Billionaires List long ago with my identity abroad. But undeniably, I rank a little lower than him. However, that's only one of my identities. Summing up all my identities, my assets aren't necessarily lesser than his. As such, it's uncertain yet who'll be benefitting from the divorce.

Of course, she wouldn't say that outright since she knew that he wasn't the kind of person to care about such a thing.

Chapter 264

Arielle lowered her head and turned the matter over in her mind. Vinson didn't pressure her either, so the two of them merely sat there quietly.

Unbeknownst to her, the man who was usually calm and collected in everything actually had a thin layer of sweat on his palms right that moment.

Truth be told, he was afraid that she would decline his offer.



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serious? You're truly giving your agreement to marry me?"

Arielle nodded and replied, "As you said, getting married now will be beneficial to us both. However..."

The moment Vinson heard the contradicting word, his heart lodged in his throat again, and he promptly questioned, "However?"

"However, I've got to lay down a ground-rule with you. Although we're only getting married on paper, you can't hook up with another woman before we divorce. Likewise, I'll be keeping my distance from the opposite sex. We must keep each other's dignity and reputation intact. If either of us falls in love with someone else, it's best if we inform the other at once and get a divorce."

Arielle's expression was extremely solemn.

While this is only a sham marriage, I don't want to be cheated on. Cindy and Henrick's matter is already nauseating enough to me, so I really don't want to experience the same thing my mother went through.

Despite his nervousness, Vinson himself had no idea why he was feeling a tad fearful.

As time ticked by, he felt that time had never gone so slowly in his entire life, nor had he ever experienced such torment.

At long last, Arielle jerked her head up and looked at him. Nodding, she replied, "Okay. We'll get married, then."

It's just a sham marriage, so I don't have to think too much about it. As long as we both benefit from it, I don't have to turn his suggestion down. As he said, this will only be beneficial to me. Even if I've got to give him half my assets after we divorce, I don't mind sharing some of my money with a kind person like him.

Naturally, Vinson had no inkling that he had been again labeled as "kind" by her. He only felt that he had never been as euphoric as he was at that moment.

He even wondered if it was real or whether he was dreaming.

Thus, he couldn't help seeking confirmation, asking once more, "Are you

Upon hearing her stipulation, Vinson's heart finally settled back in his chest.

"Don't worry." He stared straight at her and promised, "There won't be any other woman for me besides you throughout the duration of our marriage. I'll keep your dignity intact and make you the most enviable Mrs. Nightshire."

Having said that, he queried, "Do we need a black and white contract? If I breach our agreement, I'll leave the marriage without taking anything with me, and Nightshire Group will be yours."

At that, Arielle was completely dumbfounded. "Don't you think you're taking this too far?"

"Nope." Composing himself, Vinson languidly commented, "I'm confident that I'll never do such a thing. What about you? Will you hook up with another man?"

"Absolutely not!" Arielle answered resolutely.

"All right, it's a deal, then. When should we get married?"

Arielle pondered for a moment before replying, "Anytime works for me, but since we've decided on the matter, it'll be best to seal the deal as soon as possible."

"Okay." Vinson got to his feet. "Let's go, then."

For a moment, Arielle was still rather lost. "Where to?" she inquired in bewilderment.

"To City Hall to get married!" Vinson answered matter-of-factly.

Arielle was instantly stunned and only found her voice after two seconds. "R-Right now?"

Vinson nodded in affirmation. "Of course. Didn't you say it's best to seal the deal as soon as possible?"

All at once, Arielle was rendered speechless. *I never thought that it'd be this soon!*

A few seconds later, she remarked, "Don't you need to discuss with your mother when it's a crucial matter such as marriage? She might not necessarily agree..."

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Chapter 265

In response, Vinson sneered as a gleam of coldness glinted in his eyes.

"Getting married is my personal affair. No one can sway my decision, not even her."

"Then... What about your household registry and the like?"

Turning to her, Vinson replied, "I've mentioned this suggestion to you back then, no? After that, I've been carrying my household registry with me everywhere. It's in the car."



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Upon hearing that, Arielle suddenly felt that Vinson seemed to have been plotting the marriage for a long time.

But... he doesn't have romantic feelings toward me, so there's no reason for him to do so, no? I must be reading too much into things.

Vinson continued, "You, however, lack the necessary documents. I'll go to your place with you to retrieve your household registry. I don't think your father will object."

Chuckling bitterly, Arielle scoffed, "How could he possibly object when he has gone as far as handing me to you on a silver platter?"

"Let's go, then." As Vinson said that, he started heading out.

He was taking huge strides as though he couldn't wait to arrive at City Hall.

Seeing that, Arielle hastily put down her cutlery and followed after him.

Well, this is indeed the best time to go to City Hall. When Cindy comes back, she'll

definitely be downright astonished!

At the visualization of Cindy's possible expression then, anticipation inundated Arielle.

While Arielle went back to the Southall residence to retrieve her household registry, Cindy finally managed to escape Louisa's monitoring and met up with Matthias under the locust tree beside the wall in the monastery.

Matthias had been waiting under the locust tree for a very long time. When he first caught sight of Cindy, he couldn't quite believe his eyes.

In just a few days, Cindy had turned as thin as a stick, and her skin had lost its fairness since she had been working under the sun for an extended period.

Besides that, her skin was no longer as taut or supple as before now that she wasn't doing any facial treatments. On the whole, she looked as though she had aged ten years in the blink of an eye.

Matthias, who was five years younger than her, was wholly stunned.

Is this really my goddess, Cindy Moore?

Afraid that Louisa would abruptly wake up, Cindy was in a hurry and didn't notice the peculiar expression on Matthias' face. The moment she opened her mouth, she demanded, "How is it? Has Arielle's reputation been ruined now?"

Only then did Matthias snap back to his senses. Shaking his head, he muttered, "No."

"What?" Cindy's voice went up several decibels at once. With her brows deeply creased, she snapped, "What do you mean by that? Didn't you tell me that the plan was foolproof?"

Heaving a sigh, Matthias replied, "The plan was foolproof, but Yvette made a mistake. For some unknown reason, the person in bed with Mason wasn't Arielle but Yvette herself. Now, her father is forcing her to marry Mason."

At once, Cindy's knees went weak. If Matthias hadn't supported her in time, she would have collapsed onto the ground.

A long while passed before she finally

found her voice. She immediately snarled, "How useless! She couldn't even accomplish her task when it was such a perfect plan! How dumb! She's no more than a stupid pig!"

"Calm down." Matthias then mollified her, saying, "We might have lost the opportunity this time, but there's always another time. I don't believe I can't handle a mere slip of a girl. If worse comes to worst, I'll just hire an assassin and have her dealt with somewhere."

Despite his words, regret swamped Cindy that she chose the wrong person to collaborate with.

Argh! I really shouldn't have chosen to work with that foolish woman Yvette!

Recalling what happened with Shandie, Matthias spoke again. "There's something else I forgot to tell you. Yvette arbitrarily got Arielle a black evening gown, but the evening gown ended up on Shandie instead for some inexplicable reason. Russell was so incensed that he almost kicked the bucket. Fortunately, Arielle saved him. However, Shandie's reputation might suffer for quite some time."

Chapter 266

Henrick had been keeping Shandie's death a secret from the outside world, so Matthias didn't yet know that the latter had already passed away.



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Despite that, Cindy's blood was already boiling when she heard that Shandie wore the evening gown Arielle should have worn instead.

"There's no need to wait. If all else fails..." Cindy's voice was as cold as ice. Gritting her teeth, she hissed, "You know what? I can't wait anymore. I want you to find an assassin and have Arielle eliminated at once!"

Matthias was taken aback for a moment. While he had indeed done a lot of dirty work for her, he had never done something of that magnitude.

Seeing that he wasn't saying anything, Cindy put on a pitiful expression and questioned, "What's wrong? Are you not willing to do so? Do you not love me anymore? You said that you'd do anything at all for my sake."

In the face of her weathered countenance, Matthias truly couldn't bring himself to say that he loved her.

Nonetheless, his love for her throughout the years remained, so he inhaled deeply and relented, "Okay."

Chapter 267

In the next moment, a smile bloomed on Cindy's face. But little did she know that she now looked even more unsightly when she smiled since wrinkles creased the corners of her eyes.

As Matthias beheld her in her current condition, he had mixed feelings.

Nevertheless, his love for her had persisted for so many years that it couldn't possibly fade so easily just because of her appearance. After accepting the change in her, he sorrowfully remarked, "You've suffered so much. I brought the medicine you want, and you'll be able to leave this place soon."

While saying that, he took out a bottle of medicine concocted from herbs from his backpack and handed it to her. "This is the medicine you requested. However, it doesn't work with a single consumption. You've got to boil and drink the herbs every day to maintain the efficacy you desire. The conditions here don't lend to you being able to boil the herbs every day, so I'll bring you readymade medicine every day."

Cindy's eyes lit up, and she quickly took the sealed bottle of traditional medicine

Southall Group. We'll travel the globe, visiting every nook and cranny."

"No way!" Cindy countered staunchly. "It's almost time, and we're just a step away from stealing Southall Group for ourselves. We've plotted for many years, so how could we possibly give up at this critical juncture? Furthermore, I've still got Shannie. What is going to become of her if I leave?"

After becoming a mother, she couldn't snuff out her motherly instincts despite being a vicious woman.

No matter how horrible Shandie was toward her, she was still her precious daughter who was born of her, after all.

Knowing that he wouldn't be able to persuade her otherwise, Matthias sighed helplessly and relented, "All right, then. No matter what, I'll help you. Starting tomorrow, I'll bring the medicine over every day at this time."

No sooner had he finished speaking did Louisa's bellow ring out from a near distance away. "Cindy! Cindy!"

from him. After opening it, she guzzled it down at a single go.

The medicine was extremely bitter, but she drank it all without even batting an eyelash.

I want to leave the monastery! I must leave this awful place as soon as possible! Even if it's dog poop, I'll eat it without the slightest hesitation as long as I can get out of this place, not to mention traditional medicine!

After drinking it, she impatiently demanded, "How long before it takes effect?"

"If you drink it every day, you'll see the results within a week," Matthias replied.

"Okay, I'll wait for a week."

A week later, I'll be getting out of here!


At that moment, Cindy finally saw a ray of hope in her life.


Noticing her expression, Matthias reluctantly uttered, "Actually, you don't have to do this at all. You can just leave with me and forget about Henrick and

Chapter 267

As soon as Cindy heard her voice, her eyelid twitched, and she felt as though she was going to pass out anytime.

Only God knows what I've experienced in the past few days! She's simply the devil!

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