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However, knowing full well that he did not have the authority over his own love life, he decided to ignore all of Rosalie's attempts to woo him at first.

Unfortunately, Rosalie had an iron resolve, and her efforts merely intensified.

Two months later, she finally decided that she had had enough, and she confronted him directly. "Stephen Musgrave! Just tell me if you're interested in me or not!"

His truthful answer would have been 'yes', since all he could think about all day was how determined she was and how much he admired her for it.

Even so, he had no choice but to reject her, since he knew that there was no way his parents would approve of their marriage.

Devastated by his rejection, she spent the next few days cooped up in her own room before returning home.

It was only after her departure that Stephen finally realized just how deeply in love he had been with Rosalie.

He decided that he no longer wanted to live under such restrictions anymore, and he set out to look for Rosalie.

When they finally met, their emotions got the better of them, and Rosalie ended up getting pregnant.

When Stephen heard of her pregnancy, he decided to marry her.

However, Rosalie could tell that something was bothering him, but he refused to tell her the truth no matter how many times she tried to ask him about it.

The last thing he wanted was for Rosalie to find out that his parents had forbidden him from marrying her.

In the meantime, he started to make plans to elope with Rosalie should his parents try to intervene. He figured that starting a small clinic of his own would be more than enough to support his family once the child was born.

However, Rosalie suddenly suggested that they break up one day, much to his dismay.

"Are you serious, Stephen Musgrave? Can't you tell that I was just messing around with you? The kid's gone, and I'm marrying the man I love. Stay away from me from now on," she told him.

Stephen was shocked, for he had not seen that coming.

He was sure that he had convinced her to stay.

In order to find out if she had been lying, he followed her around until he ran into the man she had been talking about.

The man loved her and treated her like a princess.

Rosalie had pointed her finger at him and yelled, "I'll only love the ones who'll love me back! You don't have the right to force me to be responsible for your life! You're so shameless, Stephen Musgrave!"

He took in the disappointment in her eyes as she spoke, and it reminded him of how he had naively believed her when she told him that she was different from all the other girls out there.

As he gawked at her, the man beside her stood up and put on his coat before dropping yet another bombshell on him. "Did you actually think that the child was yours? How stupid! The child was mine, not yours!"

Stephen did not know what to say in return.

Dejected, he returned to the estate after witnessing how happy Rosalie seemed in the man's embrace.

Soon, news of her marriage got to him, and it smothered the very last spark of hope he had.

Just a few months later, his parents forced him into an arranged marriage with his current wife.

A few more years passed before his mentor Wesley informed him that Rosalie had given birth to his daughter, which finally revealed the truth to him.

His parents had tried to break them up, but he had adamantly refused. As a last resort, they sought out Rosalie and told her to leave him.

The truth about his family background came as a massive shock to Rosalie, as she had thought that he was just the son of one of those rich businessmen. She began to feel inferior to him.

She figured that culling the relationship as soon as possible would be the best option for both of them, and therefore she decided to put up an act before him when he went to find her that fateful day.

...

When he was done with the story, Stephen looked at Nicole apologetically. "It's all my fault! If I hadn't believed her, we would have lived happily ever after..."

Nicole merely stared at her mother's painting in silence.

"I'm sure my mother didn't make the decision on a whim," she said after a long moment of silence. "She felt inferior to you, and she didn't want you to get into trouble because of her."

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"Nonetheless, she suffered so much because of our forbidden relationship," Stephen said with a sigh. "She didn't want to do it, but she ended the relationship somehow."

Nicole noticed the sadness in his eyes and pursed her lips.

What if Mom had known that he was from the Musgrave family? Would she still be so madly in love with him?

I'll never know the answer to that question.

Besides, the one who ended the relationship with a white lie had been Mom, not Sir Musgrave or his family...I don't think it'll be fair to say that he abandoned her.

Nicole continued to stare at her mother's painting, thinking about just how much Rosalie had loved Stephen.

Her marriage to Zane Lane was probably just the final movement of her act, since it was the nail in the coffin to make Stephen lose all hope.

Rosalie's love for Stephen had hurt her deeply.

She had wanted to sacrifice her happiness to give Stephen what he deserved as the son of a duke, but the truth turned out to be very different.

Stephen and Portia did not have any kids together, and he spent his days staring at Rosalie's painting in this corner of the estate.

Nicole found their love almost suffocating.

Even though she did not know if her parents had done the right thing or not, she knew for a fact that she could never make such a huge sacrifice for the person she loved.

Nonetheless, she no longer hated Stephen.

However, she still found it difficult to call him 'Dad', for he had a part to play in her mother's suffering.

"I'll visit your mother, Nicole," Stephen promised.

Nicole remained silent, though she no longer tried to force him into apologizing at her mother's grave.

She turned to face Evan. "Shall we go home now, Mr. Seet?"

Wait...she' wants to leave now?

Why is she so eager to leave?

"Nicole, can you stay here for a few days? You could keep...keep your mother company," Stephen pleaded.

He had wanted her to keep him company, but he decided at the last second that he did not have the right to tell her such a thing.

She doesn't think that I'm her father anyway..

Evan glanced at Nicole. She doesn't hate Sir Musgrave anymore, so she'll regret it if she didn't get to spend some time with him.

But...how am I going to convince her to stay without aggravating her?

He came up with a plan.

Time to mobilize the kids!

He whipped out his phone and sent a message to John.

Twenty minutes later, the four kids appeared at the estate just as Nicole was trying to take her leave.

Jeremy and John had told them what to do on the way there. "Kids, help us make Mommy stay at the estate for three days. Daddy said that he'll buy all of you gifts if you succeeded!"

The four kids thought about it for a moment before concluding that it was worth it.

"Deal!" they chorused.

As for Nicole, the kids' arrival shocked her. "Why are the kids here?"

Kyle stared at her with a grin on his face. "Mommy, I like this place! I want to stay here just for a few days more."

Juan smirked. "I want to investigate the architecture here and build a castle just like this when we get back!"

Nicole stared at them in disbelief. Didn't you ask me for money to buy a tablet just a few days ago? Who gave you the idea to build a castle this time around?

Who taught you to be so arrogant and boastful?

Nina crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Mommy, the only way for me to get new makeup is to stay here! Do you understand?"

Nicole was confused.

What has staying here got to do with makeup? Is someone going to give it to you?

Evan grimaced. They're going to expose my plan at this rate...

To his horror, Maya did exactly what he had feared all along. "Mommy, Daddy totally didn't get us to stay, and those two uncles totally didn't bribe us with gifts on the way here. We want to stay, and that's that!"

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Evan, John and Jeremy were speechless.

John brought a hand to his head and sighed. Oh, Maya...how much more specific can you get?

Jeremy coughed. No wonder they're Mr. Seet's kids!

"Told you Mr. Seet's kids are strange little ones!" John whispered to Jeremy, who nodded in agreement.

Meanwhile, Nicole glowered at Evan when she found out that he had been the one behind all this.

However, she agreed to stay for the kids' sake.

"Fine then, we'll stay here for a few more days. Make sure to pester whoever's giving you gifts to keep their promise!" she said, stressing the last part.

She stared at Evan after that, but he was as calm as ever.

John and Jeremy looked at Evan in awe before lowering their heads to avoid Nicole's questioning gaze.

Stephen was overjoyed to hear that Nicole would be staying over for the next few days, and he felt grateful towards his son-in-law, Evan, for helping him out.

I'm sure he'll treat my daughter well, considering how jealous he was when she was around me!

How lucky of you to meet Evan, Nicole!

He's much better than Levant in every aspect possible!

Suddenly, he turned to Evan and warned, "Be careful of Levant, boy."

Evan nodded, knowing full well that he was Levant's target, not Nicole.

Nicole and the kids should be safe.

Unfortunately for him, things did not turn out the way he expected.

As the sunlight poured into the estate through the giant windows, the kids spent their playtime running around the estate.

Stephen ordered his maids to buy some new toys for the kids to play with.

"Wow...is this a frog?" Maya asked as she stared at a toy frog with wide eyes.

"That's right!" Stephen answered, picking one of the toy frogs up. "It'll hop around just like a real one. Look!"

Maya watched as Stephen dropped the frog into the water. Her mouth formed an 'O' shape as the frog hopped away.

Meanwhile, Stephen noticed just how chubby Maya was. What did Nicole even feed her?

He reached out and pinched the rolls of fat on Maya's arm and face before asking her, "Do you eat meat all the time?"

Maya shook her head. "I won't lose weight even if I stopped eating meat...even water makes me fat!"

Nina heard their conversation and pouted in protest. "Those are all lies! She's a hopeless glutton! Don't you know how much dessert and meat she eats in a day?"

Maya turned around to glare at Nina while jabbing a finger at her pot belly. "Hey! That's not true! I've lost weight!"

Seeing that the situation was about to escalate, Juan decided to intervene. "That's right! Maya has lost weight, Sir Musgrave! She's not fat anymore!"

Maya grinned. "Thanks, Juan! I lost a whole kilo!"

Stephen smiled at the adorable kids before him, but the fact that Juan addressed him as 'Sir Musgrave' rather than 'Grandpa' still hurt a little.

I wonder when they'll start calling me 'Grandpa'...

I wonder when Nicole will accept me as her father...

"There's more stuff over there to play with! Let's go!"

"Alright!"

Juan held Maya's hand to lead her away, but when Nina tried to hold Maya's free hand, Maya swatted her hand away and punched her. Serves you right for calling me fat!

Nina glared at Maya and huffed before walking away from her.

Kyle, on the other hand, had been fiddling with a toy robot the whole time, and Stephen decided to go over and help him. He noticed how cold the little boy was and tried his best to make Kyle smile.

Nicole stood before the window and looked at her kids having the time of their lives with Stephen, and that brought a smile to her lips.

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Evan could feel a grin tugging at his lips as well when he noticed Nicole's smile.

However, not everyone in the household was feeling that way.

Levant stood on the roof and watched Stephen play with the kids with a grim expression.

If only Evan Seet died in that air crash...if only Nicole chose me over him...I would be the one playing with them now!

Isn't that the best ending to this drama?

Why did the gods have to be so cruel? They took everything from me!

No...no! Everything belongs to me! No one can take it away from me!

Levant looked on while shivering in anger.

His bodyguard stepped forward and looked into his eyes. "Looks like Sir Musgrave is dead set on establishing a good relationship with Nicole and her kids. He would do anything to make them happy!"

Levant grimaced. He's right...

He's never been so nice to me or his wife before?

It's over for me if he passed his title to Nicole...

He decided not to delay things any further.

"Hey, you! Go and..."

"Yes, Mr. Levant."

As night fell and the sun dipped below the horizon, the lights in the estate flickered on, making it bright as day.

Stephen told the butler to cook up a feast for dinner, and he made sure to order a few of Nicole's favorite dishes.

The kids cheered when they saw the array of dishes on the table as the family sat down for dinner.

Stephen glanced at the kids and smiled. "Help yourselves! Just tell the kitchen staff if there's anything you don't like."

"Thank you, Sir Musgrave!"

"Thank you, Grandpa!"

Stephen's smile faltered for a moment before breaking into an even larger grin.

Evan picked up a piece of beef and put it into Nicole's bowl. "Try this. You like this, don't you?"

Nicole took a bite out of it and found it delicious. She proceeded to eat a few more pieces of beef, which made Stephen chuckle.

Thank you for giving birth to our daughter, Rosalie!

I'll make sure to take care of her and make up for the lost time...

The kids seemed to enjoy the meal very much, and Maya spent the entire dinner covering her mouth to hide the fact that she had been stuffing her face with food like a hamster.

Halfway through dinner, Juan excused himself from the table to go to the bathroom, only to notice a complex-looking robot standing outside the door.

Is this a surprise from Sir Musgrave?

He scurried back to the dining room to inform Kyle about it, who perked up upon hearing that he could interact with it.

"I'm full. I'm going out to play," Kyle declared, sliding off his seat and running out of the dining room.

"I'm full too!" Nina said, curious to find out what her brothers were up to.

Maya stared at them in confusion. Why are they running off without me?

She hopped off her seat and waddled out on her chubby legs.

"Wow! It's a cool robot!" she yelled upon noticing the robot.

Nina, Juan and Kyle started to interact with the robot, and they enjoyed it very much.

As they played with the robot, a pair of eyes watched them from afar. "Mr. Levant, I've managed to lure the kids out with the robot."

"Get someone to supervise them and find a chance to get it done."

"Yes, Mr. Levant."

Levant glanced at the four kids and walked into the dining room.

"Good evening, Dad," he said before taking a seat next to his father.

"That took you long," Stephen said, visibly annoyed.

He had tried to invite Levant to dinner, only for the latter to tell him that he had been busy. How insulting!

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Levant simply grinned. "Apologies, Dad. I came here as soon as I finished what I needed to do."

He nodded at Nicole after that. "Are you full, Nicole? How's the food?"

"I'm full. The food was great," she answered.

Levant smiled and glanced at Evan, and the tension in the air mounted almost immediately.

Levant decided to stop beating around the bush. "Dad, I heard that rumors going around of you passing the title of Duke to Nicole instead of me. Is that true?"

Nicole was mildly surprised at his statement.

Me? A duke?

Since when could women become Dukes?

It'll be the end of the world if he made me the new Duke!

She opened her mouth to protest, but Stephen beat her to it. "It doesn't matter. Just do what you need to do, Levant."

"Dad! You have to put a stop to those rumors! No one's going to trust me if you don't do anything about them!" Levant said desperately.

Nicole stared at him in confusion.

Is he trying to fight for the title of Duke?

Stephen glanced at Levant disapprovingly.

He had considered handing down the title of Duke to Nicole, but he had been reluctant to do so precisely because of Levant's contributions.

However, Levant's jealousy had made Stephen lose hope in him.

"Levant, Nicole's my biological daughter, but I've never fulfilled my duty as a father. I'll be bestowing the title of Duke upon her to make up for the lost time and honor her mother Rosalie," Stephen said.

Levant fell silent, his smile still frozen on his face. His gaze turned colder than ice as he clenched his fists in anger.

Making up for lost time? Honoring her mother? What kind of reasons are those?

I've been your son for twenty years and done all I could to become the next Duke!

Why are you taking everything from me? I have absolutely nothing left to call my own! Aren't you making a huge mistake here?

He glared at his father. "That's an amazing decision, Dad!"

He got up to leave after that with a strained grin on his face.

That's it? He's leaving?

Evan could tell that Levant was not going to let go of this so easily.

He definitely has a few tricks up his sleeve.

Nicole felt that something was amiss as well. "It's fine, Sir Musgrave. I don't want to become the Duke anyway."

"Nicole, you're my daughter, so you're the best candidate! The family will be in big trouble if I gave the title to Levant!" Stephen pleaded.

Nicole pouted. Are you doing this just to protect the Musgrave family?

She scoffed. "Things will only get worse if you gave the title to me!"

"That's not true!" Evan said suddenly.

"Huh? Why?"

Evan looked at her sternly. "Levant is a greedy person who'll lose all rationality in the face of rewards and profits. He'll stir up a lot of trouble if he became the Duke!"

"Wait, I don't think he'll-"

Nicole was about to stand up for Levant, but Evan dropped a huge bombshell on her before she could finish her sentence. "Who do you think orchestrated the air accident I was in? Why do you think Grandpa got a letter detailing Grandma's accident? Also, don't you find the whole impersonation incident involving Sylphiette really puzzling?"

Nicole was speechless.

Levant was behind all these?

"N-No way! Why would he do such a thing?" she asked softly as she thought back to every incident that had happened so far.

He had been trying to mess up my life the whole time.

"He had wanted to marry you because he found out about your true identity over a year ago! Marrying you would guarantee him the title of Duke!"