

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me

Chapter 301

/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me
Chapter 301

“Aaargh!” she screamed, using the clothes to block her line of sight. “Vinson! Are you an exhibitionist?”

“Hah...” A playful chuckle escaped his lips. “See for yourself if I’m one.”

Half doubtful, Arielle lowered her hands slightly, catching a glimpse of his chiseled chest. The fog did nothing to dampen those alluring abs plastered on his body, a masterpiece produced from years of working out. Each line seemed to be crafted to perfection.

It took her about two seconds to realize she had been ogling his chest. Flustered, she shut her eyes tight. “You clearly are! You’re not even wearing anything.” A mottled pink flush covered her cheeks.

Argh... Why did I look when he told me to!

“Don’t just stare at my chest. Look down. I am wearing something,” he replied softly.

Vinson was speaking the truth. He had on a pair of boxers, but Arielle refused to look lest she got tricked by him again.

Even though Vinson had helped her a lot, but he made the worst first impression on her. He had acted like a douchebag, watching her struggle to start a fire, only to take out his lighter after she had successfully started

one.

She learned best not to take words from a man like him too seriously.

In a swift motion, she threw his clothing and toiletries above the cabinet and strode off.

Vinson was thoroughly amused by her flustered behavior. Never had he expected that beneath the steely cold facade was an endearing maiden’s heart.

After closing the bathroom door, his smile disappeared. At the back of his mind, he knew that even though this marriage did not result from love, he would still act his part, treating her as if she was his real wife.

And as her husband, Vinson believed it was his duty to let Arielle live a carefree life, free from any worries.

Back in the bedroom, Arielle was busy laying the mattress on the floor. I can't possibly sleep with him!

Just as she finished preparing the mattress, the sound of the shower faucet stopped. The brief silence amplified the churning noises coming from her stomach. Unbeknownst to herself, she had been swallowing nervously.

About two seconds later, the bathroom door opened.

She turned toward him, coincidentally meeting his eyes. Vinson was already effortlessly good-looking, but that after-shower look completely blew her mind away. The leftover water droplets clung to his disheveled, wet hair like a scene from a movie.

Out of embarrassment, she averted her gaze, the sheets tautening under her nervous grip. Then, she pointed to

the mattress laid out. "You take the floor. If you're not okay with that, you may leave."

Instead of answering her, he asked, "Where's the blow dryer?" Of which, Arielle took that as a yes.

Deep down, she felt puzzled as to why Vinson cared about this husband-wife act more than she did. But, one thing for sure, she was tired of guessing whether he had real feelings for her. This time around, she would be nothing but professional.

She handed him the blow dryer, grabbed one of her most conservative nightgowns, and headed to the bathroom.

Soon after, she came out of the bath hearing Vinson in the middle of a call about the foreign exchange market. It was not surprising that he knew this topic well. She took a seat on the bed, listening in on the conversation.

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me Chapter 302

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)
Chapter 302

Through his responses, she could tell that he was well versed in this area. His remarks were straight to the point and insightful.

The call lasted for around ten minutes. During that time, Arielle gained quite a bit of knowledge. "Vinson, you really are quite good at running a business!" she blurted.

He lay languidly on the mattress. "I'm good at other things as well."

Despite the obvious insinuation, Arielle was not getting it. "That's true. You're good at chess, coding... Ah! But not cooking."

He pouted in displeasure upon hearing her oblivious statement. She always seemed to be on a different wavelength from him.

Feeling frustrated, he turned away abruptly. "It's getting late. Switch off the lights and sleep," he said flatly.

Despite sensing a hint of displeasure from his voice, Arielle brushed it off as just part of his unpredictable temperament. She was pretty used to it by now.

The night got deeper. With the lights off, the room was pitch black except for the streaks of moonlight pouring in through the sheer curtains.

Tomorrow will be a good day... As her thoughts wandered, her eyelids got heavier. Just as she was about to fall asleep, she was alerted by the sound of Vinson

tossing and turning on the floor.

Being a light sleeper, his every movement made it almost impossible for her to fall asleep. Annoyed, she shifted her position in an attempt to sleep.

And just as she was about to fall asleep for the second time that night, Vinson turned again.

"Vinson, what exactly are you doing instead of sleeping?" she asked frustratedly.

"The floor's too hard. I can't fall asleep," he replied sullenly, followed by another turn.

"That's why you should've listened to me when I told you to go home and sleep..."

"Am I not doing all this for you? We need to keep up with appearances." He paused for a second before suggesting, "Can I..."

"No!" she interrupted.

Vinson sighed heavily. "I'm not even done speaking."

"Fine. What?"

Receiving her permission, his voice perked up. "Can I sleep together with you?"

And he received the same old answer. "No."

Approximately half an hour later, Arielle could not bear the sounds any longer, so she sat up on her bed.

Cluck. She switched on the lights.

Confused by her abruptness, he asked, "What's wrong?"

"Get in bed!"

"What are you saying! I'm not going to..." Then her words caught up to him. "You're allowing me in bed?" His eyes lit up.

"Stop asking. If you continue moving in bed, you're going home immediately."

"Roger that!" With two fingers, he tapped on his non-existent earpiece, re-enacting a spy movie. Then, he bunched up his sheets and got onto the bed.

Arielle shifted further to one side, leaving a pillow in between them before switching off the lights.

By then, it was one in the morning. Fortunately for her, his tossing stopped, allowing her to fall into a deep slumber.

However, the man himself was wide awake. This was the first time in his life that he was sleeping with a woman on the same bed.

Despite the two-person wide gap between them, it felt surprisingly pleasant.

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me Chapter 303

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)
Chapter 303

The next morning, Arielle's first instinct was to look for Vinson, but she was greeted with an empty bed.

Hmm? Where did he go?

She got out of bed, beginning her search for him. Later, she found out from Alfred that he had left for work thirty minutes prior. For some reason, she felt her heart sink a little at that piece of news. Then, she walked back to her bedroom dispiritedly.

It was then that she discovered a posh black box placed on the coffee table in the living room with a note beside it: Wedding gift for you.

His handwriting was cursive and rushed.

This gift came as a surprise for her. She opened the box, revealing an exquisitely crafted diamond ring that almost blinded her eyes. The shine sucked her in like a black hole.

Receiving a ring was beyond anything she could have imagined from a fake marriage. Even giving her Maureen's Kitchen seemed over the top, especially since they were not truly a couple.

A rush of warmth enveloped her body as she took out the ring with trembling hands and placed it on her right ring finger. She was pleased to realize that the ring fitted her to a tee.

As she grazed against the diamonds on the ring, the corners of her lips turned up slightly. It was only after

some time that she snapped out of her trance.

After long deliberation, she finally picked up the courage to craft Vinson a short and sweet message: The ring's beautiful

But her fingers hovered above the send button, not daring to click on it.

For some reason, she felt trepidation.

What's wrong with me?

The logical side of her knew this was a fake marriage and that they would break up eventually. Yet, the emotional side of her was saying otherwise. The ring churned out happy emotions within her, making her feel contented.

Arielle had always seen herself as a dandelion, floating to wherever the wind took her, but this ring seemed to have a grounding effect on her.

She hated to admit it, but his gift gave her a feeling of reassurance. Arghhh... Stop it. This isn't real!

Just as her conflicting thoughts wrestled, she received a text from him: Awake?

Her hands froze momentarily before she rewrote her text: Just did. Then she sent it out.

The next moment, she received a call from Vinson.

Seeing his name appear on her phone screen made her face burn. She picked up the phone as she cleared her throat and took a deep breath. "Hello?"

His deep voice fell on her ears like a stroke of velvet. "Morning. Had your breakfast?"

The grip on her phone tightened. "Not yet."

"Mmm. Something cropped up at work. Once I'm done, I'll have to make a trip down to Epea. I will be back in a week's time."

661

"What time's your flight?"

"I will be leaving for the airport in around half an hour."

Her expression darkened as she knew that she would not make it in time to send him off at the airport.

"Don't worry. I've prepared everything. Your school and... the bodyguards. They'll protect you from any danger. I'll come back earlier if work permits."

Idiot! You should worry more about yourself!

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me

Chapter 304

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)

Chapter 304

She could not contain herself and advised, "Be careful of your safety when you go outside. You're not on your own territory. You must exercise caution."

Vinson was quiet for two seconds before he asked, "Are you worried about me?"

Arielle's expression stiffened. Although she did not mean it, she replied, "I was worried about myself. Who's gonna help me with my mess if something bad happens to you?"

"Oh." Sounding a little dejected, Vinson comforted, "Rest assured. A fortune teller once told my mom that I can live up to a hundred years old. I'm invincible! All right, time's almost up. I have a meeting to attend, and I'll have to leave right after that. I'll let you know before the plane takes off."

"Okay." She twisted the ring on her finger and took a deep breath. "The ring is stunning. I really like it. Thank you!"

She then hung up the phone as soon as she finished speaking. It was as if she was trying to avoid something.

On the other end of the line, Vinson's mood went from gloomy to joyful in an instant.

His lips tilted upward into a smile, chuckling as he stared at the ground.

Who would've known, deep down, that she's still a shy

little girl?

At that precise moment, a senior executive entered the room and reminded Vinson of the meeting.

Vinson's bright smile caught the executive's eyes at first sight. He was stunned instantly, and his eyes widened in disbelief.

Oh my god. What did I just witness?

Is the ever-so-cool Mr. Nightshire actually smiling?

The executive hastily rubbed his eyes to be sure he wasn't hallucinating. When he lifted his face to Vinson, all he saw was the cold expression of Vinson, who was staring back at him.

The executive immediately became flustered on the inside.

He stuttered, "M-Mr. Nightshire, it's time for the meeting."

"Got it," Vinson responded without emotion. He stood up and brushed across the executive's shoulder as he walked out.

The executive let out a long sigh and followed suit to the conference room.

At that moment, every seat in the conference room had long been fully occupied. Vinson proceeded to his own seat and sat down.

Someone immediately got up and stated in an instant, "Mr. Nightshire, we've just learned that a couple more employees from our Epea branches have resigned. This is the third time this month that a large number of key technicians have resigned."

The branches in Epea mainly manufactured advanced technological products. Managers could be quickly replaced if they quit the company. However, finding replacements for the main technicians would be pretty difficult in a short period of time.

Without a doubt, this had to be the work of the culprit hiding in the dark.

Since that person couldn't get his hands on the employees from within the country, he began to poach the staff in the international branches.

He truly went to great lengths in order to stir trouble for Vinson.

Vinson nodded, indicating that he understood the problem. Another executive then stood up and gave his report.

The reports were pretty similar. Either the main technicians resigned as well, or the collaborating companies abroad had canceled their partnership.

Vinson listened patiently until the end. He concluded by saying, "I am aware of the situation. Take no action on those who wish to resign. I'll be going to Epea in a short while to have a personal discussion with them."

After the meeting ended, Vinson promptly boarded the car to the airport.

While on his way, he called Carter and inquired, "Have you gotten any findings from your investigation?"

Carter replied, "They left a bunch of insignificant things in their hideout. A majority of them are produced in Epea. Thus, we followed that lead and came to Epea today. I was just about to inform you when you called."

"What a coincidence." As he looked outside the car window, Vinson said, "I'm heading to Epea now. I'm currently on the way to the airport."

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me

Chapter 305

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)
Chapter 305

On the other end of the line, Carter was surprised. He asked, "Why are you coming to Epea? Aren't you busy with your company's new big projects?"

Vinson explained the situation on his side to Carter. The latter remained silent for two seconds before responding, "Don't come to Epea. I believe that the culprit is setting up a trap for you. If you're here, it could end up like the last time. We don't have many connections abroad. We don't know how this will end in the event of an emergency."

"I understand." Holding his phone, Vinson said, "I've long guessed that he's going to dupe me into going to Epea. That is why it is important for me to be there. If I don't, we'll never find out who this person is."

"F*ck!" Carter exploded. "You're dicing with death, and you're going to get yourself killed! It's too dangerous! You can't take this risk!"

"I know what I'm doing."

After hearing what Vinson said, Carter knew he couldn't stop the man. With a sigh, he responded, "Okay, fine. Bring along your bodyguards from The Crew discreetly. With them around, we won't have to go through what we went through last time."

Vinson's finest bodyguards were known as The Crew, and they had all been rigorously trained from a young age. Antoni, Anders, Sasha, and Blake were the four members of The Crew.

The next second, Vinson stated, "I left them in the country."

"What?" Carter's voice rose in pitch. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Why did you leave them there?"

"To protect Arielle," Vinson replied concisely.

Carter fell silent for some time before he went on to say, "I'm aware that Chief is in a chaotic state. But even so, it's not necessary to appoint The Crew to protect her. A few ordinary bodyguards would work just fine."

Vinson responded stoically, "If it were only her own problems, she'd likely be able to handle them just fine.

However, she has caught their attention, and they even hacked her computer."

Initially, he didn't want to leave Arielle within three days. Thus, he had gone to bed with her last night.

However, he had no idea how long he could continue to defend himself against the other party.

Instead of having to be constantly cautious, it would be best to take the initiative to put an end to it.

A trip to Epea would allow the culprit's attention to shift from Arielle, making it less likely for her to be the target. This was also one of the main reasons he had to travel to Epea.

Carter sighed after hearing what Vinson had to say. "Well, we did drag her into this mess. I suppose leaving

The Crew with her isn't such a bad idea. Let me know when you arrive, and I'll come to get you."

"All right." Vinson hung up the phone and rested his eyes.

He was definitely exhausted after staying up for the entire night.

Meanwhile, Arielle was checking her computer's firewall when she heard a knock on her door. She immediately switched her computer screen to play a romantic drama series.

In the next second, Henrick pushed open the door and entered the room.

"Dad." Arielle pretended not to have heard someone coming in and asked in confusion, "What's the matter?"

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Henrick took a look at her computer screen, which was displaying the romantic drama. "Are you watching a show?" he asked, smiling.

She nodded. "Yeah. I'm just chilling and watching some series. Everything all right, Dad?"

"We have to fetch your grandma from her place," he replied after nodding.

"Grandma?" Arielle had no memories of her paternal grandmother.

Her memories were already incomplete, to begin with. She didn't even have many memories of her mother, let alone her grandmother, who lived in the countryside.

Rate the Translation to Get 2 Petal.

... Wait! I Have Something to Say!

Send a Gift to the Writer!

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me Chapter 306

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)
Chapter 306

"I hadn't intended to tell her the news either. I knew it would only break her heart. However, she'd caught wind about it somehow, and she's now insisting that I go and get her. Since you're not occupied with anything here and haven't seen your grandmother for years, I suggest you come along with me," stated Henrick firmly.

Knowing she did not really have the option of saying no, Arielle readily agreed, "Sure! Just give me a moment to get dressed."

"All right. I'll wait for you downstairs. You might want to pack another set of clothes to bring along. The place is rather far away, and we're most likely staying overnight there."

"Got it." Arielle nodded and watched as Henrick left her room.

Once she was certain he had gone far enough, she reopened the firewall's page.

It indicated that nobody had hacked into her computer throughout that day.

Looks like whoever it is seems to have no problem keeping his cool, or... has he forgotten about me?

After some thought, she figured the former possibility was more likely.

Following that, she added another layer of security to the firewall and connected the settings to her phone before starting to pack her things.

By the time she arrived downstairs, Henrick was already quite fed up with waiting. He frowned at her, asking snappishly, "What took you so long?"

Arielle unzipped her backpack and smiled as she showed him the contents. "I packed more stuff since we're spending the night there."

With a glance, Henrick saw a messy assortment of girlish objects in the bag. It really did look like a bag packed by a young girl to bring for a vacation.

If it had been Shandie, he would definitely have reprimanded her, but it was Arielle.

His expression softened the instant he saw the chaotic jumble of stuff in her bag. In a way, the more childish and girlish she acted, the more relieved he felt, as it would mean she was easier to control as well.

For a moment, he seriously wondered if his wariness toward the girl was completely unfounded.

After all, no matter how smart she was, it did not change the fact that she was only a girl who had grown up in the countryside and lost her memory.

Averting his gaze, he stated, "Let's go, then. We have to arrive before it gets dark or it'll be too hard to drive."

"Yes, Dad." Arielle did not waste another minute but entered the car at once.

The car was filled with an unusual silence as they drove

toward their destination.

Ding! Arielle's cell phone chimed suddenly.

Tapping into the notification, she saw a brief message from Vinson: Taking off soon.

After a moment's thought, she replied just as briefly: Have a safe journey.

Right after she sent it, Henrick asked from her left, "Who was that?"

"Vinson. He's traveling to Epea for a business trip," she answered honestly.

Upon hearing that, Henrick immediately furrowed his brows. "Vinson's going on a business trip? Why didn't he bring you along, then? Did he even invite you?"

Arielle shook her head. "No. Something urgent popped up, so he left in a hurry."

"In the future, always follow your husband if he's going away for business trips," Henrick gritted out disapprovingly. "He's young, rich, and important. Do you have any idea how many women are trying to climb their way into his bed? And the myriad of methods they would use to succeed in doing that? Besides, he's just an ordinary man. There's no way he would be able to resist that sort of temptation. You've got to watch out for yourself, okay?"

Despite feeling rather uncomfortable at his words,

Arielle suppressed her displeasure and smiled at him. "Sure, Dad."

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me Chapter 307

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)
Chapter 307

Seeing Arielle's innocent smile, Henrick shook his head in exasperation. "I don't think you understood a word of what I just said! Anyway, after this, just think of a way to hire someone who will stay around him at all times, like a bodyguard or an assistant. You need to watch him closely, Arielle, and bear his child as soon as possible to consolidate your position."

Arielle's sweet smile remained on her lips. "Okay,

Dad."

Mumbling something inaudible in response, Henrick shut his eyes and pretended to sleep.

He had not realized that although Arielle was smiling, it never reached her eyes, which had been cold as ice throughout their entire exchange.

Even so, as she gazed through the car window at the scenery they were passing by, she could not help but think about what her father had just said.

Would Vinson really be surrounded by lots of women out there? Would those women be fighting to climb their way into his bed? Why wouldn't they, though? After all, besides his unpredictable temper, he really doesn't seem to have any other flaws.

However, she quickly shook off the thought. Why would he sign the contract with me if he was that sort of man?

Thus, she simply massaged her forehead and tried not to overthink the matter.

The sky soon darkened.

After an entire day journeying through highways and then mountainous roads, they finally arrived at Henrick's hometown, the village of Bellridge.

The village was rich with coal mines. As proprietors of the coal mining business, it was exactly this reason that the Southalls had managed to make their fortune.

However, as Arielle gazed at her surroundings, she observed something strange about the village.

By right, given the nature of this area, every family should be loaded with wealth. Yet, every house they passed by was badly damaged.

Not only that, but there was not a single decent-looking house in sight. Instead, the houses throughout the village were all old and dilapidated.

How could this be?

Just as Arielle was puzzling over the question...

Boom! A loud rumbling reverberated through the air, and she could feel the earth shaking even though she was in the car.

Is that... an earthquake?

Instinctively glancing out of the car window, she

watched as tiles fell off the roof of a house, shattering into pieces as they hit the ground.

"Was that an earthquake, Dad?" Arielle turned to Henrick anxiously.

Looking as if he was still groggy with sleep, Henrick rubbed his bleary eyes as he assured, “No, it isn’t. Don’t worry, that’s just the sound of them using explosives in the coal mines.”

Arielle instantly felt relieved.

He’s right. It can’t be an earthquake since there aren’t any cracks on the ground. It must indeed just be the effects of the explosives going off.

However, the next thought that popped into her mind was how drastically these occurrences must be affecting the villagers.

In certain countries, once the authorities were alerted of such happenings, they would inevitably shut down the relevant coal mines or otherwise prohibit them from carrying on with their operations.

Before she could ponder more about it, however, the car stopped before a house of which the main structures were built with steel.

“We’re here. Let’s get off!” stated Henrick.

Hearing that, Arielle opened the door and exited the car at once.

As she observed the house, she noticed it was still rather poorly constructed despite being built with much stronger materials. In fact, it looked completely ordinary and did not bear the image of Henrick’s ancestral home at all.

What’s wrong with this man? Is he so stingy he could not be bothered to build a nicer home for his mother?

However, she dispelled the thought almost at once. After all, she could not deny the fact that the pocket money he had given her was seven figures and above when she first returned home.

Her confusion was soon cleared up when she stepped into the compound and the cynical voice of an old woman rang out from within the house.

“I’ve said this numerous times before – I don’t have money to pay any of you to fix your homes! Aren’t your houses still standing? What’s there to fix? Besides, look at the state of my house. I can’t afford to fix it either! Why then would I have any money for any of you! Look, the coal mine isn’t making any profits at the moment. You should be grateful that you’re even given a paycheck at all!”

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me Chapter 308

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)
Chapter 308

Peering through the windows, Arielle saw Malorie Thisdale's wrinkled face illuminated by a single yellow lightbulb. Her expression was exceedingly pitiful as she pleaded, "Please, I'm just an old woman. I'm begging you to please let me go. I swear if I had any money at all, I would have given some to you all!"

A shabbily dressed man stood before her. Arielle caught sight of multiple patches on his trousers with her sharp vision.

Beside him stood a little boy who looked about ten years old. Clad in similarly ragged and filthy clothes, he gazed at the adults with big, bright eyes.

The man sighed wearily. "I don't mean to force you either, Mrs. Southall, but we're really at our wits' end! It's the rainy season now, and once the rain pours, my house turns into a lake! It's completely uninhabitable!"

Hearing that, Malorie fished around in her pocket and retrieved some cash. She handed it to him, stating, "Here's two hundred. It's all I have on me now. Take it and fix your roof. Now, please leave. At least let me have a moment's peace before I attend my granddaughter's funeral tomorrow!"

A blush quickly spread across the man's cheeks when he heard those words. Embarrassed, he quickly tugged at the boy's hand and left the house.

They walked out of the front door only to see Henrick and Arielle standing outside.

"Henrick?" The man's eyes lit up at once as if he had just found a glimmer of hope.

Inwardly cursing himself for his untimely appearance, Henrick cleared his throat and put on a sorrowful expression.

"Hello, Dileon. It's been a while," he greeted the man, deliberately dabbing at the corner of his eye as though he was drying his tears.

Seeing him so devastated, the man, Dileon Lowe, could only swallow the rest of his words.

Patting Henrick on the shoulder, he said instead, "My condolences, Henrick."

1

Henrick gave him a slight nod. "Give me some time. Once Shandie's burial is over and the coal mine's business picks up, I'll definitely look into renovating your houses. You've all been working with me for years. I promise I won't let you suffer like this for long."

"Don't worry about this for the moment. Just carry on with the funeral first. I'll pass on your words to the others."

"Thanks, Dileon." Henrick stretched out his arms and gave the man a hug. Then he bent down toward the little boy. "Hey, it's Teddy, isn't it? Do you remember who I am??"

The little boy, Teddy Lowe, gazed at him innocently with his large round eyes. "Old Mrs. Southall just said

she doesn't have any money. Aren't you living in Jadeborough, Mr. Southall? Do you not have any money as well? I haven't been to school for two years now...

An awkward expression immediately spread across Henrick's face. He was just about to answer the child when Dileon hurriedly slapped his hand over Teddy's mouth and apologized, "I'm terribly sorry, Henrick. He didn't mean it. We'll make a move first. You go ahead and catch up with your mother."

With that, he hastily turned and left, holding Teddy's hand in his.

Arielle's gaze happened to fall upon Teddy's hands that were entirely covered with coal ash. Even his fingernails had been stained black. Clearly, he had been spending his days working in the coal mines with Dileon.

In that instant, everything became clear to her.

Henrick was brutally exploiting the villagers.

Not only had they ended up so poor that they were forced to live in broken-down homes, but they could not even afford to send their children to school.

She could not believe this level of poverty still existed in this day and age.

Suddenly, it also made sense to her why Henrick had chosen to drive the cheapest Volkswagen in his garage

to this place. That car barely cost one hundred thousand, and he hardly ever drove it in Jadeborough.

As this thought crossed her mind, Arielle instantly felt rage firing up in her heart.

This man never ceases to surprise me with how disgusting human nature can possibly get!

Seething with rage, she was suddenly struck with an idea – one that was enough to take down the Southalls.

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me Chapter 309

/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me
Chapter 309

The moment Dileon and Teddy left, Henrick's face resumed its normal expression. He smiled at Malorie, asking, "How have you been, Mom? Have you been taking the supplements I bought you?"

Malorie nodded at him. "I've been well. And this must be... Sannie?"

Arielle immediately felt Malorie's sharp gaze piercing her face as the latter openly scrutinized her.

She knew at once that this woman before her eyes was not going to be easy to get along with.

Nevertheless, she quickly flashed a radiant smile at her and answered in a sweet voice, "Yes, Grandma, I'm Sannie."

"Mmm." Malorie nodded curtly as she walked around Arielle in a circle, scanning her from head to toe, at the same time muttering, "Your looks indeed resemble that dead mother of yours. Hopefully, your fate and temper are nothing like hers."

Arielle's hands immediately balled into fists under the sleeves of her coat as she struggled to suppress her rising fury.

Taking in a deep breath, she forced herself to maintain the same pleasant smile as she responded, "Thanks for your concern, Grandma, but I've always been in good health."

"It's good that you're healthy." Malorie narrowed her

eyes and shot her a disdainful look before going on, "But you're way too skinny! That isn't ideal for childbirth. You need to put on some weight. Look at you, barely having any flesh on your bum! The rich folks don't like your sort, you know, as you're unlikely to give birth to sons!"

At that, the smile on Arielle's face was beginning to falter.

Are women merely birthing machines in this old woman's eyes?

Arielle finally understood the reason for Henrick's personality. Like mother, like son!

Timing her reaction perfectly, she turned toward him with a helpless and aggrieved look in her eyes.

It seemed to work well on Henrick, who immediately stepped forward.

"Mom, Sannie's still young. Let's not terrify her just yet. Anyway, we've been traveling all day. Have you prepared any food?"

Furrowing her brows, Malorie reprimanded him at once, "Look at me and think of how old I am! Were you really expecting me to cook for you? Guess what! I've been waiting here all day for you to arrive and cook for me,

too!"

At this, Henrick cleared his throat and retorted, "Well, I suggested hiring a live-in cook for you, but it was you

who turned the idea down."

"Didn't you see what happened just now?" Malorie snapped back at him without missing a beat. "How can we hire a live-in cook under these circumstances? Those bastards would come banging on our doors, begging us for money every day!"

Her words instantly caused Henrick to silence himself.

Then Malorie glanced at Arielle and asked, "Didn't you grow up in the countryside? Can you cook? Or are you like that dead mother of yours, thinking you're too good for that?"

Forcing herself to keep smiling, Arielle did not even bother to answer her question but asked instead, "Sure,

I'll cook. Where's the kitchen, Grandma?"

Malorie pointed toward its direction haughtily. "Right there. There's nothing in there, by the way. You'll need to dig for some vegetables yourself. The patch is opposite the front door, on the other side of the fence."

Arielle froze on her spot, taken aback by the extent of Malorie's meanness.

She was just about to nod when Henrick stepped in. "I'll send the chauffeur to get it. She's just a girl. Let's not be too hard on her."

"Chauffeur? What chauffeur?" Malorie scoffed, raising her eyebrows at him. "I've been telling people that the chauffeur is a friend of yours, and the car belongs to

him as well. Who on Earth asks their guest to dig for vegetables? Besides, it's just digging for vegetables! Are you afraid she'll break her fingers at it?"

Henrick felt a little awkward. He was simply worried that Arielle would later tell Vinson about this.

However, on second thought, it did not seem like a bad idea. After all, Arielle had been enjoying the easiest life ever since he brought her home. This would not be a bad opportunity for her to toughen up.

Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me

Chapter 310

[/ Obsessed CEO Throws Himself at Me](#)
Chapter 310

With that thought, he quit arguing with Malorie and simply reminded Arielle, "Just be careful." Then he turned back to Malorie and began chatting with her about Shandie.

Without a word, Arielle picked up the basket beside the door and headed out.

She had barely taken a few steps before she remembered she would need a few tools for digging and turned back to obtain them.

However, as she approached the front door, she overheard the conversation between Malorie and Henrick coming from within the house.

"Mom, you never used to treat Shandie this way. What's up with you now?" came Henrick's puzzled voice.

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Hearing that, Arielle stopped in her tracks unwittingly and quietly shifted to a blind spot where no one would notice her.

Malorie let out a long sigh. "I hated that high and mighty mother of hers, and I hate her as well! You're my precious son, whom I had worked so hard to raise and send to university in Jadeborough. You'd finally made it! Yet, that woman forced you into a matrilocal marriage, and you were silly enough to go behind my back and agree to it! Even though you've now gained full control of the Moore family, I still can't stomach this humiliation! If that b*tch hadn't died, I would still be a joke in everyone's eyes till this day!"

"Mom, this is all in the past. What's the point of bringing it up now? Besides, Arielle is nothing like her mother. She's a very sweet and obedient girl."

"What do you mean, sweet and obedient? Didn't you see her clenching her fists just now? That girl may look docile on the surface, but her heart must be spilling with hatred for me! She's nothing but a hypocrite! You better watch out."

"Mom, you're overthinking this. With the way you spoke to her just now, it's only natural that she felt a little sensitive."

"We can only hope so! It's either you're right, or you've really brought a beast home!" Malorie barked.

Eavesdropping on their conversation from the front porch, Arielle could not help being secretly surprised.

Who would have thought this old woman possesses such sharp observational skills? She's practically seen through me! I must be more careful from now on!

Gripping the basket tightly in her hands, she changed her mind about going in to grab the tools and went straight to the vegetable patch instead.

Arriving at the patch, she realized despite being barely an acre wide, there seemed to be almost every type of vegetable planted there.

After some thought, she figured she could whip up some ravioli.

Once she'd gathered the vegetables that she needed, she turned and headed back to the house.

On her way back, she happened to spot the little boy she had encountered earlier, Teddy.

Stopping in her tracks, she called him over.

After a moment's hesitation, the boy remained rooted in his spot as he stared at her unwaveringly.

Thus, she went toward him. Bending down before him, she greeted him in a friendly manner, "Hello! Is your name Teddy?"

Giving her a small nod, he asked timidly, "What about yours?"

"My name is... Sannie." Sensing his apprehension toward her, she assured him, "You don't have to be afraid of me. Just think of me like your elder sister, okay?"

Teddy shook his head. "No. I don't need you. I already have a sister."

With raised eyebrows, Arielle laughed in amusement. "Is that so? Then you must be very close to her. What's your sister's name? How old is she? Is she still going to school?"

Again, Teddy shook his head. "She's passed away."

Stunned, Arielle stammered as she asked, "W-What happened..."

Lowering his head, Teddy explained, "She had a high fever last year. Our family couldn't afford a doctor for her, so we only treated her with herbal remedies. However, she was gone the next day. Daddy said she's gone to a nice place where no one suffers. I wish to go to that nice place as well, but I'm scared..."

Hearing that, Arielle could not help but feel terribly shocked and upset at the same time.

Coal mining was supposedly a profitable field. If it were not for the Southalls' greed and exploitation of their workers, the villagers should not be so poor that they could not even afford medical care when it was necessary.

Above all, things should not have been so unbearable that a ten-year-old child had to wish he could go to "the nice place."

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