

## **The Divorce 171**

### Chapter 171 The Birthday Gift

When we entered the Starlight International penthouse, a dinner for two and a chilled bottle of wine were

waiting for us.

Atlas pulled me into his arms and said, "Happy birthday! This was the best I could do because I've been swamped. But I'm glad I didn't miss it."

I leaned into him and said, "I prefer simple celebrations. Just being with you makes me happy."

With a magician's flair, he produced a gift box seemingly out of nowhere. I looked at him, and he gestured

at me to open it.

I lifted the lid, revealing a stunning pen. It was adorned with diamonds and featured my initials inlaid with

rubies.

"It's gorgeous!" How did he know that I had a thing for pens?

Back then, I used to collect various pens and had a sizable collection at my parents' house. However,

when life grew busier, I set my collection aside.

The pen was not just a luxury item. It was a genuine work of art—an Aurora Diamante fountain pen. It was

a pen I had once mentioned to Matthew that I would buy when I became rich.

I

Matthew responded by poking my forehead and saying, “Get real. Who buys a pen when they get rich?”

I remembered telling Atlas, saying, “You wouldn’t understand.” I didn’t tell him that Matthew’s response disappointed me.

“No, I can’t accept this. This is too expensive!” I closed the lid and handed the box back to him.

“I want you to use it to sign all the contracts you pursue. This pen symbolizes your new life, and I’ll help you achieve all your wishes because you deserve it.”

“But..it’s too expensive!” I knew this custom-made Aurora must’ve cost a fortune.

I had it made just for you. It exists because of you. You won’t disappoint me, will you?”

He sounded so sweet that I couldn’t say no. What did I do to deserve him?

“We don’t have much time left. Do you really want to spend it debating something made just for you?” He sounded like he would leave soon. I leaned into him, unsure when I would see him again.

He kissed me and said, “Now close your eyes and make another wish.”

I put my hands together and wished. Maybe it was impossible, but I wanted it. Didn't I get the pen

dreamed of? Everything was possible!

I opened my eyes and looked at his well-defined face. He always seemed strong in my presence, and I

knew I could count on him.

"We'll work together to fulfill that wish you made. You must make a new wish each year, and we'll make it

happen." He handed me a glass of wine. "Go easy on this."

I took it and murmured. "So you have to return to Quillbrooke?"

Atlas nodded. "The meeting is crucial."

His voice turned serious as he said, "When I'm not around, you can always talk to Nick, especially

regarding project matters. You only need to answer to him."

"Anything?" I remembered the woman who requested the design drawings

Chapter 172 Up in the Air

His eyes narrowed. "What's the matter?"

"It's nothing. Design Division asked for the drawings," I said. "I met Nick the other day and told him about

it, so he's aware."

"Design Division?" Then he said, "They could always get them from Nick's project department. You don't have to resend them."

I almost criticized that mean woman, but I refrained. After all, she was his employee. I said nothing, and he didn't ask further questions about it.

Time went by fast, and we were only together for four hours. It was late at night when he sent me home. I felt terrible when I saw how tired he looked. He had hurried back just for my birthday and would have to

leave for Quillbrooke early tomorrow.

At the door, he pulled me into his arms and held me for a moment. "Good night."

I looked at him. Try to get some sleep

I will."

okay?"

He watched me go in. I didn't want to close the door, but he'd never leave if I didn't. He needed to rest.

I shut the door with a heavy heart, and then ran upstairs to my room. Looking out the window, I saw Atlas

staring up at me.

He turned, got into his car, and drove off. It left me feeling alone.

I felt like a teenage girl with her first love. He was all I could think about. I tossed and turned in bed but couldn't fall asleep.

The following day, I drove to Starlight International, hoping to see him again. However, the receptionist said he hadn't returned to the hotel.

I returned to the office listlessly and called him. He told me he had gone straight to Quillbrooke last night.

Ryan was surprised to see my under-eye bags when he entered my office. He sat down and handed me a document. "The materials for the Echelon Group project have been approved, and it'll start next week. So

far, so good."

Carol came in to give me a report, and I asked for some coffee.

Then Melanie called. Assuming she was upset that I got the lucrative project, I chuckled and didn't pick

I wanted to use her to fish for information, but I wasn't in the mood. She could go fuck herself for all I cared.

Also, I knew Melanie was oblivious to what Matthew was doing. How did they end up together in the first place? I guess it must have been their shared interest in money, huh?

I left the office early to pick up Ava, and Stella called while I was on my way.

She asked, "Are you in your office?"

"No, I left." I wasn't in high spirits after a sleepless night. All I wanted was to go home and sleep.

"Not again!" She laughed and said, "I'm almost there. I wanted to spend some time with you." 1

Being from a wealthy family sure had its perks, didn't it? She had plenty of free time!

"I might not be able to do this again after today," she sighed. "I've got no other plans. Would you like to meet up?"

"Why is that?" I stopped at a red light, hesitant to agree because I didn't have time for this.

"My mom's coming to Foswood tomorrow," she grumbled. "Even though she gave her job to Atlas, she just won't let go. It's driving Atlas mad." 1

I tensed, and my focus sharpened. What she said seemed important.

"Why does that trouble you?" I asked lightly.

"Me? She'll make everything about her, Chloe! I'm just one of her pawns." Stella sighed. "I wonder how

things are going in Quillbrooke. Everything's up in the air now."

I was intrigued.

Chapter 173 Who Dares?

ATL Empire still seemed in trouble, and I wondered what was happening. The traffic light turned green,

and I continued driving. "I'm almost home."

Stella's voice sounded a bit moody as she said, "Come on. I have no friends here, and I need someone to talk to."

"Then wait for me at the coffeehouse across the office building." I glanced at the kindergarten, turned the

car around, and headed back.

At the coffeehouse, Stella was nowhere to be found. I was about to call her when she entered with a smile, looking pretty as ever. She set a small paper bag in front of me. "It's for you."

I gave her and the bag a puzzled look. "What is it?"

"It's from the latest YSL collection. I just got it," she said.

I knew the lipstick was quite expensive. "I rarely wear makeup. You should keep it for yourself."

“I ordered it just for you.” She glanced at me. “And you gave me a treat, didn’t you? Consider it my way of

saying thanks. Just take it.”

“Well, thank you then,” I replied, not wanting to make a fuss over it.

As she sat down, Stella suddenly said, “You had a rough night, huh? What’s with the dark circles?”

I rubbed my eyes and smiled sheepishly. “I had a drink with friends last night and got home late. Do I look

that bad?”

“Of course you do!” She seemed concerned. “Staying up late is a big no–no. It ages the skin quickly!”

“I’m a single mom. I don’t care about that.”

Despite what I said, I felt self–conscious seeing Stella’s beautiful face. Even Ivanna had reminded me several times to take care of my looks.

We ordered drinks and chatted until Stella shifted the conversation to her family.

“I miss the Nocturnia sunshine,” she sighed, looking out the window and reclining on the sofa. “I wonder when I can go back.

over b



been forced to do thing

your will? Sitting up, she looked at me. That's what I'm

"Who would dare pressure you into it?" I sipped my coffee, though I already had more than enough

caffeine that day.

She shook her head helplessly. "I suppose you've never experienced it, have you? Even Atlas couldn't do

anything about it, let alone me."

"What do you mean?" I knew she was trying to tell me something.

Sometimes, it felt like she enjoyed keeping me in suspense.

I pretended to be aloof and added, "ATL Empire is a

kelompany and

financially strong. Who'd dare.

push you guys around? It's not like small business owners like me who struggle just to survive."

As if testing my indifference, she examined my face. She admitted, "Things are more complicated than you think. I and Atlas have little control over many family matters. Especially marriage."

I was stunned as I stared at her.

She giggled at my reaction and continued, "Didn't see that one coming, did you? Well, my mother needed.

to ensure our assets stayed within the family. She's not just going to give ATL Empire away."

My heart raced. Did she just say what I think she did?

"Do you mean... you and Mr. Atlas are expected to marry each other? Are you engaged?" I quickly set.

down the cup as my hand shook slightly.

She shrugged and smiled. "It's no secret in my family. I guess that's why my mom adopted me back then."

She kept her gaze on me, wearing a radiant smile. It seemed she wanted me to know this.

Chapter 174 A Battle of Wits

Despite feeling completely helpless, I tried to appear unconcerned. It was clear what Stella was trying to tell me.

I

However, I couldn't let on how I felt. I realized she had been probing me ever since we first met.

She seemed surprised by my indifference. "You don't seriously think this is normal, do you?"

I sipped my coffee, but it tasted bitter. "I wasn't born rich, so I don't understand your world. Though I'm a

businesswoman, I'd never force anyone against their will, especially not my family."

Stella was somewhat taken aback.

"Does your mom need to force you into it? You can just marry if you love each other. After all, you're not

related." I stared at her, my words taunting

She wanted to tell me that Atlas was hers and find out if there was anything between us. I wanted to know why they weren't married if he loved her. I doubted she could answer me!

"Let's change the subject. We're getting off track," Stella chuckled. "Do you know why I've been so interested in you from the start?"

"Hmm?"

"You look just like a woman Atlas deeply loved before. I was shocked when I first saw you, thinking she had come to Foswood." Stella let out a gloating laugh.

"The woman he was in love with?" I couldn't help repeating it.

"Yeah, one he'd never forget." Stella said, "Although I've had a crush on Atlas since I was a kid, when he disappeared for six years, he... Ah, forget it. Let's not discuss that."

She was good at keeping me in suspense.

“Anyway, Atlas has a secret—he never stopped searching for that woman. That’s why I have reservations about our marriage. Of course, it’s not up to us to decide.” Stella implied once again that Atlas was hers.

That made me feel terrible. I loved him and couldn’t bear the thought of being just a substitute.

“Why did he disappear for six years?” I couldn’t imagine him doing something like that.

Who knows, Stella answered. I couldn’t tell if she truly meant it or not.

With her, B

Even though she was smiling at me, her eyes weren’t.

+15 BONUS

B offered an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry, all the talk got me sleepy. I need to hit the sack.”

It was challenging to play this mind game with her while feeling hazy.

“You should. You don’t look too well.” Stella walked outside with me and said, “My mom will be shocked to see you.”

I was taken aback. “I won’t get to meet her, will I?”

“I bet you will since you have a project with ATL Empire. Not to mention the striking resemblance to that woman,” Stella remarked. “Miracles can happen, you know.”

I waved her goodbye before getting into my car. Her words left me unsettled.

Chapter 175 Waiting for Him to Speak

It seemed I had underestimated Stella, and she wasn't as innocent as I thought. Those from ATL Empire were never what they seemed. I once again realized the inexplicable force that had sucked me in.

I pinched my thigh to wake myself up.

My mom had picked up Ava from kindergarten, who ran over to me “ou're so early today, Mommy!

Uncle Ryan bought me a new doll.”

“Uncle Ryan?” I was puzzled.

Ryan came out of the kitchen wearing an apron. “I was at the bank earlier and bumped into your mom. So,

I accompanied her to the kindergarten.

My mom joined him from the kitchen and said, “He also took us to Parkside Plaza, and we went shopping

at the supermarket.”

I could tell she liked Ryan from how happy she looked.

"I saw you leaving the office early. Why are you only back now?" Ryan asked.

"Well, I was almost at the kindergarten, but Stella wanted to meet me," I said, tired.

Ava showed me a new Barbie doll from the latest release. I had a soft spot for Barbies, too. When I was a freshman, Ryan had given me one, though I wasn't sure where it had ended up.

Seeing Ryan in an apron made me feel embarrassed. "Mom, why are you making Ryan cook?"

I reached out to take the apron off of him. "Allow me."

"Just take a nap, and I'll call you when I'm done. I'm not a bad cook, you know," Ryan said, stepping out of

my reach. "Look at how tired you look. Go sleep."

"Uncle Ryan, I'll nap with my Barbie with my mommy," Ava said, looking adorable.

I was indeed disoriented as countless images raced through my mind. My limbs were also weak.

"Go take a nap," my mother said, seeing my glum expression. "We'll call you when dinner's ready."

Fearing I might pass out, I didn't insist on helping them. When I eventually woke up, it was already eight in

the morning.

ched lazily and didn't feel like getting up, but I was confused when I saw daylight through the

Why wasn't it dark yet? How long had I been asleep? I rested a while longer and wondered why dinner

wasn't ready. I was starving.

I

I rolled over and found that my phone was off. When I turned it on, it kept going off with multiple alerts.

Picking it up, I was shocked to see it was already 8.25 a.m. What the hell?

Then I checked the date. It was the 16th!

I scrambled out of bed and quickly washed up. How long had I been asleep? It was the first time I've slept

that much since discovering Matthew's infidelity. After some mental math, I realized I'd been out for a

whopping 17 hours!

It seemed my mom had already taken Ava to kindergarten, and the house was quiet. My dad was the only

one in the living room, reading the newspaper. I greeted him and went to the dining room, where

breakfast was served.

I was starving, so I devoured my meal. My dad walked over and sat across from me. I sensed that he had

something to say, which made me feel a bit guilty for some reason.

“Why are you so hungry?” he asked, gazing at me kindly.

Well, I had only eaten a little yesterday afternoon. Of course I was hungry.

However, I sensed that my dad was leading up to something. I started to feel anxious and waited for him

to speak.

Chapter 176 Someone Who Protects You

My heart pounded because I knew my dad wanted to discuss last night’s events. Sure enough, he looked at me and asked about Atlas, “I don’t want to meddle in your relationships, but you just got out of a failed

marriage.

“I don’t want to see you get hurt again. I’ve researched Atlas—his family background doesn’t quite match.

ours. I’m worried about how your relationship will turn out.”

I choked on my food, knowing my dad wasn’t entirely convinced about Atlas. “Dad, I’m sorry for making you worry,” I swallowed my food and continued, “You don’t need to be overly concerned. I know what I’m

doing and what I want.

“Atlas and I are just friends. Even though he’s been good to me, I haven’t considered anything else. I want to work on my company first and worry about other things later. I’m just going with the flow.”

I pushed around the food on my plate, unsure how to reassure my dad.



“Mr. Atlas has been a great help to me. I can fully break free from Matthew and suppress that asshole when I become strong. I lost ten years of my life because of him, and I won’t forgive him for that. Don’t worry too much, Dad.”

My dad nodded. Indeed, he also held a profound grudge against Matthew..

“Once I’m stable, I’ll consider my future. After all, I can’t let Ava suffer. I just got divorced and don’t want

to think about this now. Still, I didn’t expect Mr. Atlas to come back to celebrate my birthday last night.”

I rambled on, not even sure what I was saying

“Yeah, I just hope you have a healthy and happy life. Other things don’t matter to your mother and me.

We’ll be at ease if that person cares for you. In case we’re not around anymore, there will be someone to

protect you.

My dad’s words touched me deeply. It reminded me of when Atlas told me he would protect me from

harm.

I felt a lump in my throat, saying, “Dad, I won’t need anyone to protect me when I become strong enough.”

I forced a smile, my eyes a bit teary. “Give me some freedom, Dad. That way, I’ll feel more relaxed.”

“I understand. I was only offering advice and not interfering with your affairs. You’re the only one who can

tell if you’re happy. Your mom and I only want that for you. That’s our biggest wish.”

My dad didn’t delve deeper. He was democratic and didn’t push his views. He didn’t mention that they preferred Ryan either, and I knew he didn’t want to stress me out.

+15 BONUS

“Dad, regardless of who I choose, if I am ever making that choice. I will make it clear to you. The person I choose should not only be capable of protecting me but also my family. Things won’t be like they used to

1. be. You can rest assured.”

I said these words to ease my dad’s mind because those were my goals.

Since my dad didn’t say much more, I got up and told him, “I need to get to work. The new project is about to start, and I’m pretty busy with it.”

“Go ahead! Drive safe, and make sure to have lunch on time. Don’t skip meals! My dad stood up, walked

me to the door, and watched me enter the car.

I saw my dad standing on the steps through the rearview mirror, watching my car leave. I knew he still

had a lot he wanted to say.

When I arrived at Galar Tower and entered the lobby, I saw a group gathered around the front desk.

Someone with a shrill voice was berating the staff.

“Don’t you dare look down on others just because things have changed! Have you forgotten how you used to treat us? Tanum Corporation will be mine sooner or later. Don’t push it, or things won’t look good for

anyone when I return one day!”

As soon as I heard this voice, I knew Melanie was the one causing the scene.

Chapter 177 Delivering Information on a Silver Platter

I raised an eyebrow and strolled over. Melanie stood there, arms akimbo.

It had only been a few days since we last met, but her baby bump had grown noticeably. It protruded confidently, just like her. I thought it was an impressive sight, chuckling to myself. It seemed she come to deliver information to me on a silver platter.

“Oh, Mrs. Melanie, you’re here! Don’t get so worked up. Be mindful of the little prince in your belly.”

I said “prince” because the Murphys believed Melanie would have a boy.

She turned to glare at me. When she saw me approaching, she fired back, “Hah! Don’t act all high and mighty with your sarcasm!”

“That’s so rude of you, Melanie. You should consider prenatal care. Your words and actions aren’t good for the baby,” I taunted, pretending to be unconcerned, “You’re someone’s ‘wife’ now, so you should. consider how you act in public. Your brother would be distressed if anything terrible happened to you.”

The initially angry receptionists chuckled and looked at me with gratitude.

“What brings you to Tanum Corporation?” I asked. “Come with me to the office. You might not know yet, but we’re full on staff now. I thank you and your brother for taking those old guys with you. My team is

much younger now.”

“Don’t get cocky, Chloe. Stop thinking you’re all that just because you secured two contracts. You better watch yourself. Do you think you got the Echelon Group contract out of thin air?” Melanie’s eyes reddened with anger. “You only got it because Matt pitied you.”

“Oh my, your brother is so attentive. Well, I’ll send you two a big gift when you get married. Don’t worry, I’ll be nice to you and your brother.” I exaggerated my sarcasm, hitting every nerve by referring to Matthew

as her brother.

The employees in the room would laugh whenever I said “brother.”

Everyone knew Melanie had seduced her brother. Sure enough, many also knew the two were not blood-

related. Still, they grew up as siblings.

“You shut up!” Melanie caught my sarcasm and stomped toward me.

“What are you here just to argue with me? Are you upset that your brother got me the project? Don’t be so

petty. I heard you’re cozying up to Echelon Group. Is that single contract worth all this fuss?

your brothers

hard I to arrange this. So, aren't you afraid I might refuse to telse on the

I stared into Melanie's eyes. Indeed, she widened them as she stared back at me. "How did you know?"

Her response confirmed my suspicion that Matthew had conspired with Echelon Group to trap me. Melanie looked as if she was trying to analyze the truth in my words. I knew she wasn't as educated and

sharp as me.

Most of her intelligence was toward pleasing men. With Matthew's pampering, she didn't need to develop

her intellect further.

I

My mind raced as I added, "Isn't that common in business? Do you two think I'm that person's weakness? Fifty thousand square meters isn't enough. Tell Matthew to put in more effort if he wants to make a deal

with me.

"Humans do have endless greed regarding wealth. I was with him for many years, so I know how his

rotten mind thinks."

"C-Chloe, how do you know all this? You better tell me now! Eche-"Melanie stopped, looked around, and

swallowed whatever she wanted to say.

It seemed I had hit the mark. Indeed, they were trying to use me to test Atlas, wanting to see if I was hist

I

weakness. Still, I wondered why they would suspect me. It couldn't be because of Matthew's baseless

speculation.

As I had told Melanie earlier, I would look down on Echelon Group if things were this simple. There had to

be something fishy going on here.

Chapter 178 The Determining Meal

I figured someone like Melanie wouldn't understand the situation's deeper layers. It would be pointless,

even if I asked her.

"All right, who told me doesn't matter, Mrs. Melanie. That's not something you would know

anyway.

If you

rant to keep s

something a secret, you shouldn't tell anyone else about it. Leave and tell your brother!

appreciate his efforts. He should focus on securing his alliances better."

I didn't want to waste any more time and turned to leave. After some much-needed sleep, my mind felt

sharper.

"Stop right there, Chloe! If you dare seduce Matthew again, you'll get it from me!" she shouted at my back,

unwilling to let it go.

"Don't worry! I have no interest in your crap!" I replied loudly, waving without looking back while walking

into the elevator.

Melanie was still cursing at me from a distance as the elevator doors closed.

Meanwhile, I felt foolish and ashamed for even liking someone like Matthew. He was just a rat in the

gutter who had some good days but now thought he was the king of the jungle. It seemed I couldn't

ignore that cunning scumbag.

I thought Lauren was right in saying Matthew was disgusting.

I understood Melanie entirely. She wasn't just angry about me getting the contract but was more upset

that Matthew had “helped” me. I was a thorn in her side.

I held the pen Atlas had gifted me as I sat in my office. I casually wrote his name on a piece of paper as I wondered how he was doing. Stella had told me he would return today, but I didn’t know whether or not

he had arrived yet.

I felt tempted to call him as I held my phone. However, I resisted the urge and was about to put down my phone when it rang. To my surprise, it was Damian on the other end. After some thought, I answered,”

Hello, Mr. Damian.”

“Ms. Chloe!” Damian sounded genuinely delighted. “We’re finally starting the project! I hope this is the beginning of a successful partnership.”

omiled faintly, knowing that was indeed the case. So, I replied, “Yes! It’s all thanks to your hard work, Mr Damian! I must treat you to a celebratory meal soon!”

my mind! What about tonight? Let’s celebrate at The Cerulean, I’ll see you at &

I hesitated for a moment, somewhat caught off guard. He seemed well-prepared and had taken the

initiative to invite me to dinner. He added, “Ms. Chloe, please do us the honor! We’ll be waiting for you!

Although I wasn’t too keen on it, I couldn’t refuse. Initially, I was supposed to treat Damian to dinner, but he had taken the lead. I reluctantly agreed, “All right.”



After hanging up, I thought of a way to balance the situation. I decided to have Carol accompany me to dinner instead of Ryan. Before leaving the office, I informed Ryan about the dinner, and he told me to call him if I needed anything later.

I glanced at him and said, “Do you think I’m a child? It’s just a dinner. Is it that big of a deal?”

Carol and I left the office together. She had offered to drive, so I sat in the backseat to relax. I was surprised she was pretty good at driving

Is

When we arrived at the restaurant’s private room, I saw three other men besides Damian. He introduced us to each other. One was Jett Emerson, the head of Echelon Group’s development department.

The second was Beckett Grand, the head of Echelon’s project department, and finally, someone from the city’s Building Department.

Fortunately, I had brought Carol along. Otherwise, it would have been quite awkward with me, a woman, among a group of men. After exchanging pleasantries with them, we took our seats. However, Damian hadn’t started the dinner yet, seemingly waiting for someone.

Chapter 179 The CEO’s Brother-In-Law

Suddenly, the door swung open. Damian smiled widely and greeted the newcomers, “Mr. Matthew, Mr.

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even if I asked her.

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Keegan! You're finally here!"

I couldn't help but clench my fists. I didn't expect Matthew to show up, too. I must've jinxed it when I said

I hoped to never see him again after our divorce. On the contrary, his presence had haunted me since

then.

The two approached, and everyone exchanged greetings. Carol and I exchanged disdainful looks, and I kept my composure.

“Ms. Chloe, let me introduce you to Mr. Keegan Thompson. He’s our CEO’s brother-in-law,” Damian tactfully introduced me to Keegan. He did it with such flattery as if that guy were some kind of VIP.

Although he was in his thirt

I looked at the so-called VIP and noticed he was tall and skinny. his

hairstyle was the most eye-catching thing about him. He had a pompadour gelled to keep its shape.

He wore a royal blue suit with a white pocket square at the front. The suit might have looked good on

someone else, but it was far from flattering on him. Keegan looked at me with his unpleasant eyes and

extended his hand, saying, “Ms. Chloe, I’ve heard so much about you!”

I shook his hand out of courtesy. I intended for a brief handshake, but he grasped my hand firmly and

didn’t let go. Then, he turned to Matthew and grinned, “Dude, you had such a beautiful wife. Why’d you-

Um, Haha!”

His laugh sent shivers down my spine.

Matthew stood beside Keegan and smiled knowingly. “Thanks, man! Just call her Mrs. Chloe.”

“Mrs. Chloe? She’s not even your wife anymore!” Keegan still held onto my hand as he spoke. He turned to look at me again and said, “Ms. Chloe, it’s a pleasure and such a delight to meet you. It seems fate has brought us together!”

Everyone at the table watched us like spectators at a show, their eyes fixed on our intertwined hands. My

blood boiled, and I couldn’t help but speak indifferently, “Pleasure’s all mine.”

Afterward, I pulled my hand back. Damian quickly stepped in to defuse the awkwardness. “All right, please take your seats. We’ve been waiting for you!”

I couldn’t believe Matthew pushed Keegan to sit beside me.

rolled his wine glass and proposed a toast, steering the conversation back to the meal. Finally,

seemed uninterested in the food and kept looking at me. He said, “Me:

Howeve

“You’re truly remarkable. You don’t have to work so hard in the future. If you ever want to undertake a project, just say the word. Since you’ve met me, I’ll ensure you’re well-protected and cared for.”

I discreetly rolled my eyes at his remark. I couldn’t believe what he said at the end. It seemed these words had different undertones depending on who said them. I suppressed my irritation and replied with a forced smile. “You’re too kind, Mr. Keegan. I’m just making a living.”

“What do you mean by that? That won’t do, especially since Echelon Group has plenty of projects. I’ll ensure you’re cared for as long as you say the word. You don’t need to negotiate with those people.”

Keegan spoke confidently.

He thought he could do anything because his brother-in-law was Echelon Group’s CEO.

The others at the table smiled awkwardly and listened as he continued, “Jett, give Ms. Chloe some big projects, and don’t be so stingy. Working women have it tough enough. Beckett, why are you smiling like

that? You have so many contracts. Why would you just keep them?”

Beckett smiled embarrassedly, saying, “Mr. Keegan, I’ll deal with them as you wish. Just tell me what to do.”

Keegan looked displeased. “Do you think we’re celebrating just for the 50,000 square meters project? Oh please! Ms. Chloe, we didn’t know each other before, but now that we’re all here today, it’s destiny. If you

want to work on a project, it’s yours!”

He pounded the table with his ring-adorned hand, full of confidence.

Matthew glanced at me with concern and gestured for me to thank Keegan. "Chlo, you should thank Mr.

Keegan.

Chapter 180 The True Purpose of the Dinner

I ignored Matthew and looked at Keegan, saying, "Mr. Keegan, I appreciate your kindness. However, Tanum Corporation must be cautious when taking on projects, especially since we're a small company. We can't just take on any projects out of our capabilities."

My words made Keegan laugh as he placed his arm on my shoulder. He lightly patted me and said,

Hahaha! This lady is simply adorable!"

The others at the table joined in the laughter. Matthew wore an embarrassed expression and said, "My sweetheart has never been one to keep a low profile. Please don't mind her."

His tone suggested I was being stubborn.

Keegan's hand remained on my shoulder, and he continued, "A woman with character! Most women would be ecstatic in this situation. Instead, Ms. Chloe remains dignified! I love experienced people like

her, especially women! Ms. Chloe, I feel I've made a friend today!"

Carol looked uncomfortable as she patted my leg quietly, trying to comfort me. I faintly smiled at her and raised my glass to say, "I'd like to thank everyone for your efforts in this project. I'm pleased to see it start

so smoothly.



“First and foremost, I want to thank Mr. Damian for considering Tanum Corporation and giving us this opportunity. The company will complete the project with high standards. I’ll drink this first glass as a toast

to thank you all.”

I then drank the contents of my glass. With Carol’s help, I freed myself from Keegan’s hand on my shoulder. However, Keegan showed no sign of restraint. His hand remained on my chair as he

commented, “Very well!”

Matthew smiled and raised his glass for a second toast, seemingly following my lead. “As my sweetheart said, Tanum Corporation greatly benefited from your support. We’re all here to celebrate the start of this

project and the successful partnership with Echelon Group. It’s all thanks to you.”

His words annoyed Carol.

Suddenly, Keegan said, “Stop calling her your sweetheart on such occasions. Does she even want to be called that?”

The others just sat back and watched the show.

Matthew shifted his gaze to me. “Chlo, raise your glass to thank Mr. Keegan, We’re going to need his help

et soon. He has great authority in the company, and I invited him over today. Look at what he has

I figured out what was happening and realized this charade would continue if I didn't leave. None of these people were sincere. They were here for a performance while the others watched, treating me like a

circus monkey.

Matthew was still trying to sell me, even after our divorce. Finally, I turned and revealed a charming smile. Keegan stared at me as if my smile had enchanted him. He would have pounced on me if the others

weren't around.

Meanwhile, Matthew behaved like an eager pimp, trying to push me into Keegan's arms. My heart ached. when I recalled how blind I had been. I wondered how I spent a decade with someone like him.

"Matthew, I appreciate your arrangement. I may have underestimated you. You've been doing well since you've invited such a prominent figure. So, do you think I should go with your plan?" My tone remained.

calm and composed..

After all, this contract had just begun, and I couldn't afford to be too aggressive. Since Matthew had

caused this situation, I would make my point through him.

He seized the opportunity, raised his glass, and spoke with a hint of pride, "Chlo, my plan doesn't matter. It's most important to please Mr. Keegan. You don't have to be shy since we're all friends here."

Matthew refilled my glass as he continued, "We'll need the support of our fellow friends for Tanum Corporation to thrive and stand tall. Not everyone can rely on such a strong backbone like Echelon Group, and not just anyone can invite these people to a meal."

The others at the table nodded, waiting to see how I would respond.

“Oh?” I asked in an alluring tone as I stood gracefully. Immediately after, I took the glass Matthew had filled.