

That Can Be Arranged chapter 66

Chapter 66 The Great Escape

Edward glanced over at the neighbor and answered readily, "We're here to see Miss Tessa Reinhart."

"Oh, you're here to see Tessie!" The neighbor's eyes widened in understanding and she asked affably, "Well, why don't you knock on the door? I'm sure I saw her coming home not too long ago."

"We did knock," Edward said. "No one's home, though."

The next-door lady nodded, and suddenly, she let out a sentimental sigh. "She must have gone back to work again. Tessie has it tough; she needs to take care of her brother while balancing her job, but she's always been so kind to her neighbors. She's such a compassionate young lady, and it breaks my heart to see her shouldering all that burden.

There was a time when I accidentally fell and hurt my leg, and I couldn't get home on my own. It was Tessie who helped carry my heavy load of groceries up the stairs, and it was no easy feat! However, that young lady said not a word of complaint, and she even helps me to buy groceries every now and then. If she sees any discounts in the supermarket, she'll get my share, too.

She's a darling girl, and Timothy is an absolute angel as well. He helps his sister with the chores because he knows how busy she is, and he would even pop into my place every so often just to learn a cooking skill or two, hoping that he could whip up a feast for his hard-working sister. Oh, these two siblings just break my heart, I'm telling you..."

The neighbor was an elderly woman, and perhaps it was her old age that prompted all her sentiments. She didn't sound like she would stop talking about Tessa and Timothy any time soon, and one story only led to another.

When she was finally done, she flashed the gentlemen an embarrassed smile and said, "I'm sorry for droning on like this. Age is catching up with me, and I can't help being long-winded sometimes. If the three of you don't mind, you can always come in and have a cup of tea while you wait for Tessie to come home. I'm sure it won't make a difference."

She sounded warm and enthusiastic while her smile belied her kind intentions.

Nicholas parted his lips and said courteously, "Thank you for the invitation, ma'am, but we don't want to impose. We'll just wait here; maybe she'll be home before we know it."

The old lady had met enough people in her lifetime to know that he was the prim and proper sort, the kind of man who wouldn't want to trouble others. As such, she nodded and left, but not before taking out a piece of candy and giving it to Gregory, crooning, "Well, aren't you just an adorable little fella? You'll grow up to be a handsome man, mark my words. Actually, you look a little bit like Tessie. Here, have some candy, little one. It's Tessie's favorite!"

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"Thank you, ma'am!" Gregory took the candy and stared at it in awe.

Soon, the old lady disappeared into her own apartment, leading to the hallway being quiet once more.

Then, Edward leaned closer to Nicholas and asked, "Do we keep waiting, President Sawyer?"

Nicholas checked the time again and his dark orbs were clear and devoid of emotion as he answered, "Just for another half an hour."

Edward nodded. "Very well, sir."

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At that exact moment, Tessa had finished cutting through the bedsheets and tied the pieces together to form a long rope.

She tied one end of the makeshift rope to railing on the window ledge, and the other end around her waist. Hoisting herself up onto the ledge, she took a deep breath and summoned every bit of courage she had, ready to take the leap.

However, by some twist of fate, the doorknob turned just as Tessa was about to jump into what would have been a glorious escape, and in strolled a haughty Sophia.

The day had finally come for Tessa to be taught a hard lesson and Sophia didn't want to miss out on sweet revenge, so she decided to come in and rub salt into Tessa's wound.

However, when she pushed the door open, she could hardly believe that she was seeing the moment that Tessa was about to escape!

Shock and anger colored Sophia's features as she screamed, "Hey! She's running away! Tessa is running away! Somebody catch her!"

Panic rushed through Tessa when she heard this, and knowing that she had not another minute to spare, she leapt down from the ledge hastily.

However, she did not grab hold of the rope in time to hamper her momentum and she found herself free-falling through thin air.

She landed on the ground with a thump, twisting her ankle as she slipped and scraping her arm badly. She turned pale, but she knew this was not the time for her to cry out in pain.

Gritting her teeth, she scrambled onto her feet and suppressed the pain as she ran maniacally for the gates.

While she was making her escape, the bodyguards rushed out of the house and chased after her. She frantically ran to the middle of the road, only to be nearly run down by an approaching vehicle whose headlights momentarily blinded her.

Thankfully, the driver had slammed on the brakes in time for the car to screech to a halt inches away from Tessa.

She had barely recovered from the shock of the almost-collision when she heard a harsh voice shout, "You there! Stop!" She turned around, and her eyes widened when she saw that the bodyguards were fast closing in on her like hungry wolves locking down on their prey.

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Chapter 67 Self-Treatment

Tessa thought her heart would fly out of her chest, but without stopping to think, she opened the door and hurtled into the car to shout at the driver, "Sir, there are some bad guys chasing after me right now, so could you please drop me off somewhere crowded in the city? Please! I'll pay you double!"

Startled by how quickly things had escalated, the driver was shocked when he finally noticed the approaching burly bodyguards, all of whom looked like vicious brutes.

Adrenaline rushed through him as he slammed on the accelerators, whizzing Tessa away in record time.

Tried as they might, there was no way the bodyguards could catch up now. They stalked back to the house, looking guilty as they reported to Lauren, "She escaped, ma'am."

Lauren's blood boiled when she heard this and she barked, "You fools! You had one job! How could you allow one person to outrun all of you?"

Sophia, too, was seething with rage.

She had wanted to teach Tessa a hard lesson, and yet, the woman had gotten away. "We can't let her get away that easily, Mom!" she cried, her fists clenching at her sides.

Lauren looked as wicked and ferocious as a scorned witch. "Of course I won't let her get away!" Then, she snapped at the bodyguards, "Go over to Pinnacle Community now and drag that wench back here!"

"Yes, ma'am!" The bodyguards immediately rushed out the door after receiving their orders, not one of them daring to dawdle.

Meanwhile, after her narrow escape, Tessa let out a huge sigh of relief when she peered out the window and saw that none of the bodyguards was pursuing her.

The driver who had aided her escape was an honest man, and presently, he couldn't help worrying as he registered how rattled Tessa was. "Say, young lady, do you need me to call the police or something? You look like you got yourself into trouble with the wrong folks."

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"No, thanks," she replied with a shake of her head.

He let the matter drop although he added, "Then, how about if I drop you off at the hospital? You're hurt, and if you don't see to those wounds, they'll get infected."

She nodded and didn't turn down his offer.

Not long after, they pulled up at the hospital.

As she stepped out of the car, Tessa insisted on paying the driver double as promised. "Take the money, sir. Thank you for going through the trouble so save me."

However, the driver refused to take the money, and he was sympathetic as he responded, "I can't take the money, young lady. I can tell you look like you have it rough in life. Now, go and get those wounds treated; I can only do so much to help you for now."

With that, he drove away before she could press the money into his hand.

Tessa felt a surge of warmth as she watched the car disappear into the distance before she muttered under her breath, "Thank you."

She turned around and stared at the hospital building, then looked down at the abrasion on her arm. After hesitating for a second, she walked away from the hospital entrance.

Going in there meant she had to spend money and she just couldn't bring herself to do it.

Besides, her wounds weren't serious enough to warrant an overreaction; she could easily purchase ointments and such from any nearby pharmacies without tearing a hole through her wallet.

There happened to be a pharmacy not too far away and it was still open for business.

The pain made her grit her teeth as she braced through each step. When she finally limped through the doors of the pharmacy, she bought antiseptic and pain relief ointment before she staked out a bench near the roadside greenery. She stretched out her leg on the bench to proceed to tend to her wounds.

As she did so, she thought about where she was going to stay for the night.

She most definitely couldn't go home; knowing Lauren and Sophia, they would never allow to escape that easily, and going home would be the same as digging her own grave.

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Meanwhile, Nicholas and Gregory were still waiting outside Tessa's apartment, but when she never showed up, they decided to leave in disappointment.

On the way back, Gregory pressed against the car window and stared out at the scenery dejectedly, the light in his eyes completely gone.

Their car drove past the bench where Tessa was seated a second later.

He was the first one to notice her sitting on the roadside bench. His eyes immediately sparkled as he shouted cheerily, "It's Miss Pretty Lady! She's there! I saw her! Daddy, she's over there!"

Nicholas raised a brow in surprise and looked in the direction Gregory was pointing, then realized that it really was Tessa! At once, he ordered, "Stop the car."

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Chapter 68 A Lady's Stubbornness

The car screeched to an abrupt halt.

Nicholas immediately led Gregory out of the car and they headed toward Tessa, who seemed oblivious to their arrival as she focused on tending to her injuries.

The cotton bud in her hand had been dipped in antiseptic solution. As she brushed it over her abrasion, a low hiss of pain escaped her and she frowned to brace through the sting.

Nicholas happened to see this as he drew nearer to her and a worried frown etched itself on his chiseled face as he asked grimly, "What's going on?"

Gregory, on the other hand, was a little bundle of panic. He ran to Tessa and pressed urgently, "Miss Pretty Lady, why are you hurt?"

Upon hearing their approaching voices, she looked up in a daze and finally noticed that, at some point, both father and son had materialized next to her. "What are you two doing here?" she asked in disbelief.

At last, he grinned and his eyes were bright as he explained, "I wanted to see you, so Daddy brought me over to your place. We waited and waited, but you never came home. We were on our way back when we ran into you here!" Then, his elation was quickly replaced with worry. "Why are you injured, Miss Pretty Lady, though? Does it hurt?"

Tessa blinked slowly, then cast a brief look of askance at Nicholas. Didn't I make myself clear the last time? she thought in bewilderment. Why is Nicholas still letting Gregory keep in touch with me?

Nonetheless, she maintained a gentle voice as she told the little one, "I'm fine. These wounds won't hurt me. Thank you for asking, Sweetheart."

Next to them was Nicholas, who suddenly frowned, and his eyes darkened as he demanded icily, "Who did this?"

She looked at him, stunned that he was trying to get to the bottom of her injuries. Sparing him the details, she said vaguely, "No one. I accidentally fell from the second floor, that's all. It's nothing big."

Nicholas' eyes looked like ominous dark pools. How is it not a big deal that she fell from the second floor? That said, he could tell she wasn't in the mood to divulge more on this, so he allowed the matter to slide and coldly ask, "There's a hospital right over there. Why don't you head in there for a proper check-up instead of sitting here tending to your wounds?"

"It's just an abrasion; nothing's going to happen to me," Tessa drawled nonchalantly.

"Just an abrasion?" His voice turned somber as he pointed out, "You're a violinist by profession. You of all people should know how important your hands are. If you're just going to decide that your wounds are 'no big deal', doctors would lose their jobs then!"

She gaped at him, startled by his sudden concern. Also, why is he shouting at me? Then, the thought of all the things she had endured tonight, and coupled with her frustration of not having saved her brother from captivity, she couldn't very well be pleasant at the moment. As such, she retorted frigidly, "I don't think you get a say in what I choose to do with myself, President Sawyer."

Nicholas bridled at this, but thankfully, Gregory was clever enough to sense the tension brewing. He immediately rushed to mediate, saying, "Miss Pretty Lady, Daddy's just worried about you. Please don't be mad."

Tessa retracted her hostile gaze, and it was only after she registered the pleading look on Gregory's face that she realized she had overreacted. With a deep breath, she quickly resumed her gentle demeanor and replied, "I'm not mad, Sweetheart. I'm just... feeling a little down at the moment."

Nicholas scoffed when he heard this and said acerbically, "Feeling down or not, you should at least have a medical professional tend to those wounds before you decide to snap at everyone!"

With that, he marched up to her and grabbed her by the wrist so he could yank her off the bench.

Tessa's ankle was already sprained as it was, and when he pulled her to her feet, she felt an acute stab of pain course through her.

She inhaled a sharp breath as hot tears swam in her eyes. It took a while before she recovered from the mind-numbing pain, but just as she was about to snap at him for being

so rough with her, she staggered. The next second, she fell forward, stiff and straight like a domino piece, onto him.

Possessing lightning reflexes, Nicholas reached out to catch her just in time and she found herself falling into his arms. She was so terrified that she would hit the ground face-first that she instinctively clutched the front of his shirt to steady herself.

The both of them stood so closely together that they could hear each other's breathing, and in that moment, it was as if time stood still.

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Chapter 69 Putting His Foot In

Nicholas' breath hitched, the softness he was gripping firmly onto rendering him into a stupor.

Meanwhile, it didn't take long for Tessa to burrow out of his arms. She straightened up, but that made the pain unbearable, so much so that it brought fresh tears to her eyes. She crouched down in hopes of soothing her protesting ankle, and as she breathed through the pain, she grumbled, "Can't you just be a little less aggressive?"

Nicholas was about to retort when he suddenly looked down and noticed that her ankle was as swollen as fully-proofed bread dough. Seized with an inexplicable anger, he snapped irritably, "Why are you being so stubborn when you're already this badly hurt? Are you planning on waiting for paralysis to set in before you're willing to go to the hospital?"

She glared at him and snapped mutinously, "Be quiet if you don't want to be the first one to get paralyzed!"

"You—" Stumped by her sharp tongue, he found himself at a sudden loss for words.

To the side, Edward watched the both of them bickering with wide eyes. He was sick of seeing women fawn over and throw themselves at Nicholas and it was refreshing to see a woman argue with him for once. Not to mention, President Sawyer's anger seemed to have been borne out of worry. Could it be that he actually cares about Miss Reinhart? No, that can't be!

Edward shook his head slightly to dismiss the thought, but the next moment, he watched with shock as Nicholas carried Tessa into an embrace.

As she was suddenly weightless, she gasped and began to struggle, shrieking, "Let me go, Nicholas! What do you think you're doing?!"

He ignored her and there was a hard set to his jaw as he turned to say to Edward, "Keep an eye on Greg."

Edward nodded hastily, and with Gregory's hand firmly clasped in his own, he fell in step behind Nicholas and the shrieking Tessa.

The few of them filed into the hospital, whereupon Nicholas arranged for a doctor to tend to Tessa's wounds and run several tests on her.

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When all that was done, the doctor said dutifully, "The young lady here will be just fine, President Sawyer. She landed on the wrong note and sprained her ankle when she jumped from a high spot, but a couple of days' rest will have her looking as good as new. As for the abrasions on her arm, they'll fully heal if she regularly changes the dressing."

Tessa let out a sigh of relief when she heard this, then glowered at Nicholas as she grumbled, "See, I told you I'd be fine, but you just had to put your big foot in!"

Nicholas snorted. "I don't actually want to put my foot anywhere. I'm only doing this to stop Gregory from fussing over you."

She quirked her lips and pointed out sourly, "And I wouldn't even spare you a thought if it weren't for Gregory."

Then, she glanced over at the little boy, who had been holding her hand throughout the check-up and blowing on her wounds to soothe the pain.

His compassion was heartwarming, and whatever frustration she had been feeling earlier dissipated because of the little guy. She indulgently reached out and ruffled his hair before saying gently, "I'm fine now, Sweetheart. Don't worry about me."

Gregory, however, was obviously unhappy that she was hurt. There was sympathy in his doe-eyes as he said, "You don't have to comfort me, Miss Pretty Lady. I fell down before and it really hurt, so I know how much it hurts for you too. I'm going to blow your wounds for you each time you apply the ointment. That way, it won't hurt so badly anymore."

She thought her heart might melt at that moment. Almost instinctively, she cupped his little face and kissed him lovingly on the forehead, murmuring, "You're such a little angel, Sweetheart. I'm so lucky to have met you."

Gregory pursed his lips and turned bright red from the unexpected kiss, although he was secretly happy about it. Then, he asked carefully, "Does this mean you'll continue to teach me the violin, Miss Pretty Lady? I really like you, and I like playing the violin as well..."

Tessa faltered, unsure how she should go about answering this. A part of her wanted to turn him down, and indeed, she had done just that not too long ago in no unclear words. However, for some reason, she couldn't bring herself to say no to him now that he was looking up at her with wide, pleading eyes.

As such, she was forced to look to Nicholas for help, hoping he could interject and save her from having to break the little boy's heart. However, much to her dismay, the man chose now of all times to stop butting into her business. He had turned to face the other way, looking impassive as he pointedly ignored her silent plea for help.

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Chapter 70 Stay Over at My Place Tonight

Exasperation seized Tessa. Anytime now, Nicholas! You like butting in so much, so why don't you say something now and articulate your thoughts on this?

Seeing as he wouldn't come to her help, she had no choice but to make up an excuse. She looked at Gregory and apologized, "I'm sorry, Sweetheart, but I still have a ton of things to do back home, not to mention work's been piling up over at the orchestra. I won't be able to give you violin lessons anymore, but if you're still keen, there are plenty of other teachers out there who can do a much better job than me."

However, she had only just said this when his little head drooped low in disappointment, and with tears streaming down his little face, he mumbled sadly, "I don't want anyone else to teach me, though; I want you..."

It was heartbreaking to hear how hurt he sounded.

At that moment, even Edward couldn't bear to see the child cry and he hurriedly interjected, "Miss Reinhart, I have to inform you that Young Master Gregory refused to eat a single morsel of food today, and when he finally ate a few mouthfuls, he threw up thereafter. He can't even function without seeing you." He paused and eyed Tessa imploringly. "I'm asking that you continue teaching him the violin out of your own kindness, Miss Reinhart. He's always kept his distance from strangers until he met you, and I've never seen him being so insistent before. Can't you compromise for his sake? What else can he do to change your mind?"

Tessa was shocked by this revelation. She could hardly believe that Gregory would go on a hunger strike because of her, and the thought of this caused her heart to twist. She was touched, and at the same time, heartbroken.

She didn't think there was anyone else in this world who would care about her other than Timothy, but that was until this little one came into her life. She had never expected for someone as young as Gregory to be at his wits' end when he found out he wouldn't see her anymore to the point where he would go on a hunger strike because of it.

Tessa realized that her heart could be made of the hardest stone and she would still cave in to the little one at that moment, but, even so, she gritted her teeth and fought against every fiber of her being. Then, she said, "No."

Nicholas' face turned grim.

Edward, on the other hand, swallowed convulsively, and he wondered what could have prompted a woman to be so heartless in the face of a crying child.

However, the men were caught off guard when Tessa suddenly added, "Not right now, at least. How about if we start next week, Sweetheart? I still have a couple of things to work through these few days."

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Gregory's glistening eyes brightened once more and he stared at her in disbelief as he asked softly, "A-Are you saying yes to teaching me again, Miss Pretty Lady?"

She smiled and nodded gently. "Yes, I am. How could I say no after seeing you cry so much, Sweetheart?"

In all honesty, Tessa had been close to rejecting him earlier, but she just couldn't bring herself to say those words aloud.

She wasn't a heartless monster; it wasn't like she could say no after all the agony the little one had gone through.

Presently, Gregory finally smiled through his tears after hearing her reply. He threw himself into her arms and hugged her around the waist. Then, in a voice as sweet and velvety as honey, he said, "You're the best, Miss Pretty Lady! You're my favorite person in the whole world!"

She smiled down at him, her gaze indulgent as she said, "Well, I like you, too, Sweetheart."

That being said, she was more than prepared to take on the rest of the Sawyers if they were to stop her from teaching Gregory. She didn't want to let him down anymore.

It was already late by the time they came out of the hospital.

Nicholas was indifferent as he asked casually, "Where are you headed, Miss Reinhart? Home?"

Tessa felt her heart skip a beat. Shaking her head vehemently, she said, "No, I can't go back!"

"Why?" He immediately sensed that something was off, and with a raised brow, he asked coolly, "Did something happen?"

She hesitated, then shook her head once. "N-Not at all, but would you mind dropping me off at a motel? I'll be staying there for the night."

This prompted Gregory to chime in protest, "No, motels aren't proper places for you to stay, Miss Pretty Lady! Why don't you stay at my place tonight?"

"Huh?" Tessa blinked at this and she grew even more hesitant.

Meanwhile, it took Nicholas only one look to know that she was torn by a dilemma. Coupled with her injuries earlier, he wagered that things were serious at her end, if not complicated.

With that in mind, he announced with an air of finality, "Stay at my place tonight. You're injured and you can't do much on your own, but luckily for you, our household staff could take care of you."