

My Dreamy Old Husband Chapter 1421

Sophia then pecked Carmen on the cheek before consoling the children who had just been terminated. Then, she suggested, "We're going to celebrate tonight. Bailey, do stay with us for dinner!"

Meanwhile, Michael had already brought out his treasured champagne from the cellar just to celebrate Carmen's achievement.

The family was clearly over the moon.

On the other hand, Bailey watched the warm and harmonious scene before him and gazed at Carmen who was being showered with love like a little princess. At that moment, he felt something hot and wet in his eyes as memories of his past flooded his mind. He used to have a family too—he had parents and two elder brothers.

That year, he received his first ever prize in his whole life. Even though it was only a small competition, his parents and brothers threw him a celebration with great enthusiasm. His mother even cooked specially for him that day.

When he felt this atmosphere and joy, it was déjà vu.

Because he was also someone who was loved dearly by his family. They placed great importance on everything he did.

Tragically, a fire took away everything.

On that fateful day, the family of five were in the family car. His parents and brothers all put their own lives at risk to save him, yet none of them managed to survive...

Everything he had was destroyed by that fire. In the end, he was the only one left in what used to be a happy household.

At such a young age, he had been through so much. All the pain he experienced had piled on top of each other, which resulted in who he was today. After all that he had gone through, he became numb to everything.

Still, Bailey stayed for dinner. Even Tiffany joined them and sat next to Cooper's usual spot.

After Cooper left, his spot had been empty and everyone was sensible enough to leave the spot alone.

When he called to check on Carmen earlier, he hung up as soon as he heard Tiffany's voice.

Meanwhile, Tiffany remained as thick-skinned as ever. Now, she considered herself a member of the family. She even spoke to Bailey as if she was the owner of the house. "You should come more often. We're all family here, so you don't have to be shy."

Upon hearing this, Bailey looked up at her without any emotions.

At that moment, he was probably thinking the same thought as everyone else in the room. You don't even belong here!

Admittedly, Tiffany made a smart move by using her child to draw the Michel Family closer to her. As a result, the Adams Family also favored her and instantly turned things around, considering that she was the mother of Cooper's son and the future matron of the Michel Family.

Although Cooper escaped, he couldn't run forever. Sooner or later, he would have to return to deal with this matter.

Despite that, Bailey believed that a person like Cooper would never settle with being tied down by Tiffany just like that.

What would Cooper do?

Bailey was looking forward to his next move.

"Carmen, come sit next to Bailey."

Under Michael's blazing gaze, Sophia ushered Carmen to the seat next to Bailey. Obediently, Carmen sat down and ate next to him.

As an elementary school student, Carmen was about to face even tougher challenges. As such, she had to eat more and grow taller. This way, she would be able to overcome the obstacles in the future.

"You should learn more from Bailey. He's older than you by ten years, and he's already a powerful president. You should ask him for advice!" Sophia encouraged Carmen while gazing at Bailey with fondness.

Just then, Carmen chirped sweetly, "We're partners from now on, Bailey. I look forward to your guidance."

At once, Bailey's hair stood as he avoided making any eye contact with Michael, whose murderous glare was boring into him.

"I'll try my best—" quavered Bailey.

Terrified, he glanced at Quinton, who was on duty as his bodyguard at that moment. Quinton took the hint and bravely stood between Michael and Bailey to shield him from Michael's glare, fulfilling his duties as a bodyguard.

After dinner, Bailey went home under the protection of Quinton with mixed feelings.

As a matter of fact, this was the strangest deal he had taken since he took over the family business.

However, since he had promised to provide insurance for Carmen's online store, they would naturally need an official contract. Swiftly, he drew up a contract and notified Michael to sign it since he was the legal person. Since Carmen was the actual person-in-charge and they were only using Michael's name for legal purposes, Michael brought Carmen along to sign the contract. That way, she could observe and familiarize herself with the procedures.

After signing the contract, Carmen's illegal workshop was officially insured. Although the insurance package wasn't expensive, she was very satisfied. After all, she did fight for it herself. Besides, she also knew that it would be impossible to get insurance from other companies. Clearly, no insurance company would be willing to provide insurance for her illegal workshop.

After successfully obtaining insurance, Carmen rehired the children and started working overtime every day after coming home from school and completing her homework.

Right before the 'Double Eleven' shopping festival, she doubled the price of the keychain charms in her store, and on the day of the shopping festival, she lowered it back to the previous price. Even after discounts, it still cost more than before. Despite this, she still

made a lot of money from this shopping festival. There were deliveries coming in and out every day, which proved how well her business was doing.

Later on, Michael brought her to meet with the courier companies so that she could learn to deal with them. All in all, Michael was working hard to train Carmen to be strong and independent. Even though she was just a five-year-old, he didn't have the time to wait for her to grow up, nor could he watch her grow into an adult.

As a matter of fact, he wasn't that worried about Sophia. Instead, he was worried for Carmen the most.

As Carmen gradually became more exposed, she began having a feel for the market. For example, she had cut down the production of her father's autographed posters, considering that the supply should not exceed the demand. This way, the value of the posters would not depreciate.

On top of that, she would also often learn from Cooper. Although he had fled to god-knew-where, nothing stopped him from making video calls. Of course, Carmen would only call Cooper after Tiffany had gone to bed.

In the video call, Cooper would listen intently to Carmen's report on the progress of her recent work, and he would affirm her and also give her relevant feedback. In addition, Linus would also give more thorough explanations while Michael occasionally interjected. At the same time, Sophia would be responsible for taking minutes of the meeting.

Amusingly, the presidents of Dragon Technology Corporation and JNS Group, the vice president of the Michel Group, and the boss behind Asco International were all on edge over the survival of a tiny store that sold dog pillows.

To Cooper, whether it was Sophia's dog collar store or Carmen's dog pillow store, those were their careers they were fighting for. In fact, they were as important as his career in nuclear bombs, and they must be held in high regard.

"Sweetie, you did the right thing. Selling your father's autographed posters can only earn you quick money, and it isn't a good long-term plan. You need to come up with another plan. Grandpa has a few humble suggestions, and you must listen carefully—"

Hastily, Carmen leaned closer and listened attentively. In the video call, Cooper was stern and serious. As soon as he was about to speak, they heard a little cough from Maria who was on the lookout by the door.

Tiffany is coming.

At once, everyone frantically ended the video call and pretended that they were helping Carmen with her homework.

Just then, Tiffany came in with her baby in her arms to take a look before leaving again. She must have sensed Cooper's 'presence' through the phone.

After she left, the video call resumed immediately. Cooper appeared on the screen once again and he continued giving Carmen lessons.

On the other end of the call, Cooper wasn't alone. Anna was bare-faced and clad in lounge wear, yet she still looked sophisticated. With a pair of glasses sitting on the bridge of her nose, she paid close attention.

Meanwhile, Callum and Cade were seated behind Cooper as well.

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When Fass Michel offered lessons, it would only be a loss for those who didn't pay attention. Every now and then, there would be discussions between both sides of the call.

It was only midday on Cooper's side. Likely, it was a lazy afternoon where the sun was shining brightly, which made him look sluggish as well.

Ever since Tiffany came with the baby in her arms, he fled.

Where did he go?

To the woman he loved, of course.

When Jordan gave Cooper's genes to Tiffany, he certainly didn't do that for Cooper's name to be carried on. Rather, he was plotting to split Cooper and Anna up using Tiffany's child. He was going to take advantage of the split and take Cooper out at his lowest.

But to his surprise, Cooper actually came prancing to Ronney City and stayed with Anna.

At that moment, everyone on either side was having a heated discussion through the screen. They were all getting worked up about Carmen's little store.

On another note, Cooper's lectures were endless, and he was itching to get on the next plane home to take Carmen by the hand to guide her. He went on and on until she could barely keep her eyes open before letting her rest.

However, the adults were still going at it. Everyone on each side of the screen was enthusiastically chattering away.

"Dad, when are you coming back to kick that old hag out? She's getting more and more arrogant, and she even thinks so highly of herself now!" Sophia criticized Tiffany as usual.

On the other end, Cooper assured, "I'll be back in a few more days, so bear with me a little longer."

Upon hearing this, Sophia mumbled to herself, He probably loves Ronney City and can't bring himself to leave! He never even came back to check on us at all.

Granted, she would only mutter under her breath. After all, Anna was still there.

They appeared to be getting ready for lunch soon. Cooper seemed to be getting along with Callum and Cade, and they all looked like a family now.

After hanging up, while Sophia went to bed, Cooper had just started having his lunch.

He had been at Ronney City for a while and was secretly staying with Anna.

The days they spent together were so wonderful that it seemed like they were in a dream. However, it was too bad that their relationship was a secret and they could not be seen together.

Despite that, it wouldn't be long until they could openly admit their relationship.

By that time, no one would ever be able to stop them from being together.

“Mom, Mr. Cooper, it’s time to eat,” Cade called out.

Hand in hand, Cooper and Anna went to the dining hall, where the dishes had already been served. Among the dishes were Cooper and Anna’s favorites. Their preferences seemed to be stuck in time and remained the same even after decades.

He preferred savory food, while she loved sweet food.

At the dining table, they would make small talk about their family, but rarely about work. They would eat together like a normal family. Lately, their topics were mostly about the progress of Carmen’s business.

Meanwhile, Callum and Cade idolized Cooper. Ever since they were young, they had a tough life, and their biggest dream was to take control and change their lives with their own efforts. They particularly admired powerful and influential people, and Fass Michel was one of the figures that they worshipped the most.

Now that this person was sitting right across them, the brothers were overjoyed and they took the opportunity to seek advice from Cooper on various issues.

In contrast, Cooper was actually disgusted by their existence because their father was Jordan after all. However, after spending time with them, he realized they weren’t as bad as he thought.

In fact, this pair of sons were completely different from the other pair of sons. They were raised by Anna, and they were extremely intelligent, courteous, and observed proper restraint in everything they did. At a young age, they already worked alongside Anna and had achieved their own success. Together, they were the Yard Power Trio. Without the hard work and contribution from her sons, Anna would not be where she was now.

In addition, the brothers’ relationship was also harmonious, and they never seemed to have any disagreements. Since they had managed to climb up to their current status, they must have had blood on their hands. However, they were not as crazed as their father.

Either way, Cooper was close to accepting them.

Although he told himself that he would not be treating them as his own and give them everything he had, he certainly would not treat them poorly since he would be with Anna in the future.

At the very least, he would include them in his inheritance.

Overall, the family was getting along with each other very well.

While eating, Roger suddenly came over and whispered to Cooper, who then nodded and revealed a knowing expression.

As he expected, Tiffany's child was not his. Instead, it was Jordan's.

Considering the fact that he wanted Cooper to be the last of his line, Jordan surely would not easily hand over Cooper's genes and carry on his bloodline for no reason!

Soon, everything would be over.

While Cooper was living well, Sophia's life, on the other hand, was a living hell. Every day, she would be bickering with Tiffany, who had thick skin and enough patience. She really didn't intend to leave at all. Every day, everyone would see a pair of big breasts swinging from one end to the other.

Not only did she touch Sophia's cat, but her son was also sleeping on Carmen's bed, wearing Carmen's clothes, and drinking Carmen's baby formula.

Still, Cooper did not return, nor did he answer his phone. While the Mitchell's were managing Dragon Technology, the Michel Group had Linus and Alice. Cooper had trained his successors well that even when he wasn't around, the businesses would still run smoothly.

In the blink of an eye, New Year's was around the corner. Carmen's store was already starting to put up the cured meat on sale, but there was still no sign of Cooper's return.

As a matter of fact, Cethosian New Year's was an obstruction.

Every year, there would be a week where Cethosian factories would shut down and stores would close. The streets would be empty, and even the subway that was usually packed during rush hour would be empty. No one would be working, and children would be seen

going from door to door to beg for money to survive. The economy would collapse and the GDP would drop significantly.

But at this time of year, the people who had gone far to work would return to their homes and reunite with their families.

In the past, Cooper would make sure to come home to be with his little sweetheart every New Year's. But this year, he didn't.

During New Year's Eve, Michael brought everyone to the Fletcher Residence and even intentionally gave the nannies, drivers, chefs and other workers the week off. Instantly, the Imperial's Villa No. 8 turned from lively to quiet in no time. No one was home, and Tiffany could only eat takeout every day.

It was New Year's Eve, yet she was sitting alone in front of the TV watching the New Year Dinner Gala. Day by day, Tiffany's demeanor grew colder.

Meanwhile, Cooper was still in hiding. He didn't even care about the company, nor did he answer his phone. She simply had no idea where he had gone.

How much longer are you going to hide, Cooper?

Meanwhile, Michael, who should have gone to the Fletcher Residence for New Year's Eve, had gone to the farmhouse outside of town instead. In fact, the entire family was staying in the villa on the farm for the New Year's.

There, a thick blanket of snow had covered the ground. Happily, Carmen ran around with Nathan and a bunch of children. The kids were playing with fireworks and firecrackers, and they were all enjoying themselves.

In the kitchen, Michael and Harry, both clad in aprons, were busy preparing the chicken and fish, while Linus and Justin were helping them. Stanley had just brought in chopped up firewood, whereas Sean plucked the feathers of the chicken and sent it to the kitchen to make firewood roast chicken. Everyone was as busy as a bee.

On the other hand, Sophia, Sarah, Celine and the other women were enjoying the heater and eating snacks in the living room while urging the men in the kitchen to hurry up and finish preparing the meal.

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"Gwennie, look at my baby face's not-so-teenie weenie. How about an arranged marriage?" Sarah held her second-born son and began her daily routine of promoting her infant son to potential in-laws. Now that Hope was a lost cause, she was trying hard to set her second child up for marriage.

With no hesitation, Gwen refused.

Then, Sarah approached Celine and started to aggressively push 'sales'.

Meanwhile, Sophia was busy playing mahjong. Without stopping to rest, she managed to win several thousand from Nicole in no time.

"Come on, Sophia. You can't be winning every time! If this goes on, I'll be starving before the Lantern Festival!" Derek muttered bitterly with a pout on his baby face, while Lucy calmly paid up.

At the same time, Theo was being dragged into a fortune-telling session by Daniel.

"Daddy!" Casper darted into Daniel's arms cheerfully. Just then, Sam took a look at him and huffed, "Tsk. Your kid is too young to be dyeing his hair. This is too much."

On the other side of the room, Dana, who was drinking beer alone, stood up and stretched. "Anyone want to use the bathroom? Come on, let's go together."

As he spoke, he scanned the room with a certain unmistakable pride on his face.

At once, every male being in the building became deathly quiet. No one dared to respond, nor was anyone brave enough to make eye contact with him. Meanwhile, the female beings had no idea what was going on except Lucy, who became flustered in an instant.

On the other hand, Michael was hard at work in the kitchen.

To be frank, this might be the last New Year's of his life, which was why he invited every one of his friends. He wanted to spend his remaining time with his friends, family, ex-girlfriends, and even his pets.

He had already visited the Fletcher Family this morning, and now he was spending New Year's Eve with this group of people. At this moment, he was content.

At that point, he was in the middle of slaughtering ducks by the entrance when he saw a car that belonged to Adams Group. At first, he thought Tiffany had caught their 'scent' and followed them here, but to his surprise, when the car stopped, it was Bailey who got out.

Since school holidays started, Quinton had been on duty as Bailey's bodyguard every day. Even now, he was following closely behind him.

Michael was slaughtering ducks, and he was covered in blood and holding a butcher's knife. With a disdainful gaze, he watched as Bailey approached them.

Sensing the murderous aura, Bailey stopped in his tracks as he observed Michael cautiously.

Just as Michael was about to ask what he was doing here, Sophia dashed out to greet him warmly.

"Bailey, you're here! Come in, everyone's waiting!" Sophia enthusiastically welcomed him. Under her protection, Bailey managed to successfully move past Michael and entered the holiday villa.

As soon as he was inside, Sophia complained to Michael, "Bailey must be exhausted. I heard that the foreign employees of their company aren't given any holidays for the New Year's. How miserable! So, I invited him for dinner and to discuss a long-term partnership between JNS Group and him."

Without saying a word, Michael then swung the knife and ruthlessly cut off the duck's head as he pretended that it was Bailey's.

He looked disheveled from slaughtering the livestock and cooking, while Sophia was squeaky clean. She was wearing a sophisticated red cotton sweater with Ragdoll in her arms. She then went into the living room with the cat to enjoy the heater.

Ever since Bailey partnered up with Sophia, a Bayside City mafia, he had successfully taken on several major deals. He was outperforming Tiffany to a large extent and when Sophia invited him over for dinner today, he arranged his schedule and came on time.

It'll be like a business meal.

However, as soon as poor Bailey walked in, he was surrounded by a bunch of women. They all went up to him and started pinching his cheek, rubbing his head, and even stroking his eyelashes.

"Oh, my! You're so young, and your skin is so soft!"

"Look at these eyelashes, they're so long and pretty!"

"How cute!"

Do it for the business. Bailey unwillingly endured it.

Still, Bailey felt completely out of place. He realized everyone was divided into several cliques of their own.

The children's group, which was led by Nathan and Carmen, were outside having snowball fights, playing with dogs and fireworks, and making snowmen. Bailey thought he had long passed that age and he was not going to fit in.

Then, there was a gambling group which was led by Sophia. They were playing mahjong, poker, and blackjack, and they were willingly burning holes in their pockets. Bailey thought it was too wasteful, and he was too afraid to join them.

Next, there was a middle-aged group led by Theo and Sam. The men gathered for tea and fortune-telling, which Bailey thought was too superstitious and scoffed.

The last group consisted of Michael, Harry, Linus and Justin, who were the cooks. Bailey felt even more out of place there, considering that he knew nothing about Cethosian food.

As such, he ended up in the clutches of the women and was tormented there. Unfortunately, no one came to his rescue.

Finally, he saw Dana, who had been drinking alone, stand up lazily and announced, "Bathroom! Anyone?"

In fact, this was the third time he had asked this today. He knew no one wanted to go with him, but he still insisted on asking anyway. On top of that, he would ask loudly as well like he had something to show off. He wanted the feeling of being worshipped by everyone.

To everyone's surprise, someone responded right away this time.

"Me."

Bailey shot up and walked to Dana. However, he was oblivious to the sudden draws of breath from every man in the room, who were watching him in amusement and smugness.

Surprised, Dana looked this fifteen-year-old teenager up and down.

Huh, he must be new here and doesn't know about my nickname in the group, much less my 'length'!

With evil intentions in his mind, Dana brought Bailey with him and went to the bathroom. Because Bailey was anxious to be away from the women, he hurriedly followed Dana to the bathroom and failed to notice the eyes that were all focused on him.

Not long after, under everyone's amused gazes, Dana came back with his arm around Bailey. Out of everyone's expectation, Dana came back with a look of triumph that seemed like he had met his match, while Bailey wasn't as embarrassed, shocked or self-abased as everyone imagined. Rather, he was calm and collected, as if he had not seen anything earlier.

Everyone was trying to connect the dots in their heads as they stared back and forth between the two. Then, everyone drew a sharp breath in unison... You really can't judge a book by its cover!

But he's only fifteen!

Since then, Bailey seemed to have found his own group. He sat with Dana, who tried to pour him a drink. Bailey waved his hand to refuse, but Dana wouldn't take no for an answer. At that point, Carmen ran over and protested, "Bailey isn't eighteen yet, so he's not allowed to drink. I'll tell Goddaddy if Mr. Dana forces Bailey to drink again!"

Afraid of Harry's fist, Dana sheepishly retrieved his glass and gave Bailey a can of soda before they drank together.

Just like that, they formed a small group of two. Other than them, no one was brave enough to join this little clique. After all, no one was confident about their lengths to be sitting with them.

Meanwhile, Carmen, who was worried that Dana would force Bailey to drink again, sat next to them vigilantly. With her big doe-eyes, she watched closely as Bailey drank his soda. Initially, Dana wanted to discuss men's philosophical issues with Bailey, but he was too embarrassed by the living and breathing surveillance camera sitting there and decided to change the subject. At the same time, he noticed the three apricot seeds that Bailey was wearing on his wrist.

"What an interesting bracelet! Where did you get them?"

Bailey held his drink in one hand, and the other subconsciously stroked the apricot seeds. He replied indifferently, "A friend gave it to me."

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Bailey stared at the three apricot kernels that adorned his bracelet; there was more to those kernels than met the eye. The bracelet was a valuable gift, and it meant a lot to Bailey, which explained why he wore it all the time.

Dana, on the other hand, reached out and ruffled Carmen's hair. What a delightful little girl, he thought affectionately. He couldn't help but think about what could have been if he and Lucy had a child of their own; the child might have even been older than Carmen was right now. But it's all too late now, he lamented. Dana knew he couldn't turn back time.

When all this ended, he would be ready to start a family with Lucy, and seeing as they could have no children of their own, they would have to adopt. They'd made arrangements with Nicole's orphanage, and once everything was set, they would head over to adopt a child. While gently rubbing Carmen's head, Dana turned to look around, and his gaze softened when he saw Lucy playing mahjong with Sophia not too far away.

Just then, Michael emerged from the kitchen wearing an apron, and he sauntered over to the mahjong table to check up on Sophia, who was engrossed in the game. Upon seeing Michael, Sophia shoved a handful of snacks into his mouth despite being busy with her mahjong tiles.

Michael chewed happily and placed an appreciative kiss on Sophia's cheek, leaving crumbs on her face. Unfazed, Sophia merely wiped those away with a piece of tissue, and when she found a larger crumb, she popped it into her mouth.

At this, everyone cringed in disgust, rendered speechless by Sophia's gesture. She remained oblivious to the apprehension of others; after all, how else was a married couple supposed to behave?

Now that everyone had arrived, save for Cooper, who had escaped—or rather, strategically retreated—Michael began making a headcount. When he was done, he announced, “Everyone please stop what you're doing and get ready to take a group photo!”

Hearing this, the crowd made their way out, chattering along the way. It was bright, seeing as the lights had been switched on. Once everyone had gathered before the camera and a photo had been taken, reunion dinner commenced.

The reunion dinner featured a homemade feast, which consisted of food that were either grown on the farm or shipped over from the south. Even though it was the men in the family who had been in charge of the cooking, everyone enjoyed the dishes nonetheless. It was probably because no one here had ever celebrated New Year's Day with a reunion dinner like this one.

When dinner was finished, everyone decided to head outdoors for fireworks, which had been brought over by Lucy. Jordan had commissioned tens of thousands of crates of them for his proposal to Anna, but Jordaine had interfered along the way, and the fireworks had somehow ended up as a surprise feature during Lucy's engagement party instead. They hadn't used up all the fireworks, however, and more than half of the supply had been leftover from the party.

Given Lucy's thriftiness, she had kept the remaining fireworks into storage and had them delivered today to celebrate the new year. After she'd gotten engaged to her former pig-headed fiancé, she'd worked on a project with him, but she'd called off the engagement as soon as the project had fallen apart. After all, the project had been the only reason why she'd gotten engaged to that boorish man in the first place.

As of right now, Dana was all Lucy could think about. All along, the only person she had only ever truly loved was Dana. She would be with Dana when the time was right. Regardless of what others might say, and even if the whole world was against them, Lucy was determined that they would be together.

Presently, the fireworks were set off, brightening up the countryside. The fireworks seemed to dwarf those that were being set off in the nearby city. Everyone watched with awe as the fireworks lit up the night sky with festive, brilliant colors. The look on everyone's face was that of pure and unadulterated joy. It was a new year, and all grievances were meant to be cast aside in these couple of days as everyone happily celebrated new beginnings.

Dana and Lucy were standing hand-in-hand, looking effortlessly compatible, where one was dark and charismatic, the other was sharp and capable. They couldn't be more different, but as they stood together, they looked as if they were made for each other. They watched as the children scampered about, remarking on each of the little ones.

"We could adopt a kid that's as cute as Carmen, or a kid that's as sour-faced as Hope."

"And maybe we could get a dog, too!"

The both of them discussed fervently, picturing their future together. Like fireworks, all that had happened in the past would dissipate into thin air and leave nothing behind. There was no point in reminiscing on the fireworks that had already been set off when one could look forward to the next round. After all, life was all about moving forward.

Meanwhile, Harry held Sarah close to him. They'd never had to go through any hardship together as a couple, and because of this, Harry cherished her even more. As he watched Dana and Lucy, the pair of star-crossed lovers who seemed to have the world against them, Harry knew he had to count his blessings. He had to stand guard over the happiness he had with Sarah, for there seemed little else in the world that could come close to the perfection that was their relationship.

Sean glanced over at Stanley. They weren't a couple, but at least they were staying together, and it was more than enough for him to be able to see the latter every day.

The perpetually-single Linus remained indifferent despite being surrounded by couples. The eventuality of marriage, or the non-existence thereof, was a card that could only be dealt by fate and fate alone—Linus knew full well that there was nothing he could do about it.

Sophia, on the other hand, was staring up at the night sky, her eyes lighting up as the fireworks blossomed over the countryside. The beauty of the fireworks was short-lived, but breathtaking all the same.

While everyone was admiring the fireworks, Michael kept his eyes on Sophia. He thought of all the hardship they'd been through to get to where they were. He thought of all the times he'd been determined to leave her—to pack up all the love he had for her so that he could spare her the agony of being with him—in order for Sophia and Carmen to live their lives in peace. But by the end of it all, he realized that he couldn't do it. It was as though there was a layer of industrial glue between Sophia and himself, making it impossible for them to be detached from one another.

Michael stared at her, as if he was memorizing everything about her face, from the way her lips tipped up in the smallest of smiles, to the way her eyes sparkled in wonder. He thought there was nothing in this world that could be more beautiful than Sophia. He could spend his whole life staring at her like this and never tire of it. He felt as though he was the happiest man on Earth. When the time would come for him to leave this world, Michael knew that his heart and soul would forever stay with her.

Everyone stayed on the farm for a week after New Year's Day, and on the last day, everyone stuffed themselves before leaving for home. The festivities had meant that the chefs, chauffeurs, and assistants would not return to work until the next morning. Nonetheless, Sophia and the others only left the farm after dinner on the last day, determined that they would not dine with Tiffany upon their return.

When they arrived home, Tiffany greeted them with a sour expression, leaving no room for even the slightest niceties. She was infuriated because they had left her all alone for a whole week! It was bad enough that they weren't home on Christmas night, and now, they'd practically abandoned her during the new year festivities!

They were obviously trying to make her feel like an outcast so that she'd leave on her own accord. The joke was on them, though, because Tiffany had only grown more resolute on staying—she would not budge under pressure!

Sophia and Michael had come home empty-handed. Usually, a trip to the farm would warrant bags of souvenirs—most of which would comprise local produce—but this time, they hadn't even made the effort to bring back a single morsel of food.

Carmen, on the other hand, remained her generous self. She had picked strawberries from the farm and had carefully packed them into a box, along with a couple of eggs she'd taken

from the chicken coup. She tied a ribbon over the box and had tucked it into her suitcase, hoping to give Tiffany a New Year's Day present in light of their partnership.

Receiving the gift from Carmen appeased Tiffany, who returned the favor by giving Carmen a red envelope that contained no small amount of money. Carmen was overjoyed, but alas, she was also the one who devoured all the strawberries and eggs. However, it was clear now that Tiffany's patience had run thin.

The Adams and the Michels had expected Cooper to come home for the new year, and had, over the course of the week, dropped by everyday with the hope of seeing him. Unfortunately, Cooper hadn't been home at all. In Cethos, it was considered groundbreaking for anyone to not be home to celebrate the new year.

Michel Group resumed business on the eighth day following the week-long festivities; they might be a foreign conglomerate, but all their employees, whether Cethosian or not, were entitled to a break over the new year.

On this same day, however, Tiffany showed up at Michel Group without prior notice, and she'd brought her son along as well.

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The receptionist at the front desk of the office building was taken aback when she saw the arrival of the entourage before her, but she maintained a perfunctory smile as she greeted them, "Hi, how may I help you today?"

"I'm here to see Fass," Tiffany replied in her thick Bayside accent.

"Do you have an appointment?" the receptionist asked.

Tiffany scoffed, then said primly, "An appointment? I'm Fass' wife, and I'm here with my son to see my husband. Why would I need to make an appointment?"

Those in the lobby who were within earshot now turned to look at Tiffany curiously, and their gazes fell upon the child, as well as the nanny who was carrying him.

Fass' son... Since when did he have another son?

It seemed as if the rumors that had been going around the company were true—Fass must be getting married soon with Tiffany, director of the Adams Group, since they already have a child together!

This meant that the woman standing at the front desk right now was the soon-to-be Mrs. Michel!

Upon making the connection, the receptionist's expression shifted, and—not wanting to offend the woman—she immediately allowed Tiffany to pass through, then said, "Mr. Fass isn't in right now—"

"I know." Tiffany cut her off as she strode into the lobby. She took the elevator, which was meant for executives, and began to make her rounds in the company. Those who saw her whispered to each other excitedly as she passed by.

It had been a while since the rumor of Fass' engagement to Tiffany had first started, but seeing Tiffany here in the company today was a different kind of validation altogether.

Furthermore, Cooper was a renowned figure all over Cethos upon having skyrocketed to fame after appearing on 'My Grandpa in Shining Armor'.

He was well-versed in firearms, and he had single-handedly built an armament empire.

He displayed a prowess for computers, and half of the world's supply for computer parts was manufactured by the subsidiaries under his company.

He was also the first person who had come up with the programming algorithm for video games, and it was in his name that all esports players gathered in collective prayer before the start of each gaming competition.

With his dashing looks and ageless mixed-race features, coupled with the gentleness that lay beneath his cold facade, Cooper had successfully won over the hearts of viewers as 'The Nation's Grandpa'. The ratings for 'My Grandpa in Shining Armor' had gone through the roof, surpassing the records of similar shows that had been filmed in the past. In fact, in terms of reality shows, the popularity of Cooper was only second to that of Taylor Murray carrying a piglet.

Many had grown curious as to the marital and family life of Cooper, a grandpa whose armor shone brighter than others. From the looks of it now, he was likely engaged to Tiffany. One could only imagine the heartbreak that would seize the nation's many hopeful damsels who were pining over Cooper.

When Linus found out that Tiffany was here in the company, he was frustrated, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Cooper was still being evasive with his so-called 'strategic retreat', thus leaving Linus and Sophia to clear up the mess he'd left behind, which was the size of Bayside City.

"Let her be," was all Linus could say, resigned.

As such, Tiffany spent the better half of the day surveying each and every part of Michel Group, making her presence known to everyone in the building. She wanted them to know that she was Mrs. Michel—stepmother to Sophia, mother-in-law to Taylor, and grandmother to Carmen.

Once she was done making waves in Michel Group, she headed over to Dragon Technology Corporation, which was another one of Cooper's old nests. Cooper had plans to consolidate Mitchell Energy and Technology with Dragon Technology this year, which meant the business development would surely progress on a much larger scale.

Tiffany saw her child as ammunition; in order for her to wield authority, she needed to declare to the world that she and Cooper were soon to be married, and that they had a son together.

Other than that, she'd also set up her own Twitter account, on which featured the many details of her life in Sophia's home. She'd even tweeted about the strawberries that Carmen had given her for New Year's, eager to show off in cyberspace that she'd been well-integrated into the Mitchell family.

Linus might be tolerant enough to turn a blind eye on all of Tiffany's antics, but Sophia was not—to say she was furious at Tiffany would be an understatement.

That piece of trash! Sophia cursed inwardly. Tiffany, that sly, old b*tch!

“Hey, Sophia, what’s going on between your dad and Tiffany? The head of our department had me rush over to Dragon Technology for the scoop!” Maddie exclaimed over the phone presently.

That was when Sophia found out that Tiffany had tipped off the journalists and reporters in advance.

When Tiffany was done making her rounds in Dragon Technology and was heading out of the building with her child on her hip, it came as no surprise that she was surrounded by a horde of reporters, who had been waiting for her outside.

The moment the reporters caught sight of her, they swarmed forward and began drowning her in a flurry of questions.

“Miss Tiffany, is it true that Cooper Mitchell is the father of your child?”

Tiffany gloated, “Yes. This is our child, Asher Mitchell, named after the blessing that he’s been since he came into our lives.”

Meanwhile, Sophia was typing away furiously on her keyboard as she penned a rather scandalous article on Tiffany.

Tiffany was intent on dropping by JNS Group, but Sophia had given prior notice to the security team to keep the doors closed to anyone who was affiliated with the Adams.

There was no way Sophia was going to allow that old b*tch to take advantage of her the way she had with Cooper.

Over the next few days, Tiffany was oddly high-profile as she brought her child around the city and gave interviews to reporters who asked for them. Sophia, on the other hand, was busy working on the article that would expose Tiffany for the wretched woman that she truly was.

Upon completing the article, Sophia handed it to Maddie for proofreading, and when that was done, she put it up on the internet under an anonymous handle, thereafter calling up a marketing agency to publicize the piece.

After all, Sophia was a top student in Bayside University who had had books published under her name, in addition to her years of experience as a groupie. There had been a time

when she was in charge of publishing articles for the Taylor Murray fanclub, and she'd spent years warring with Taylor's anti-fans in cyberspace. Indeed, with Sophia's skills in writing exposés as well as apology statements, coming up with a piece on Tiffany was something she could do in her sleep.

In order for Sophia's article to achieve a high click-through rate, she'd turned the article over to Maddie—who had majored in journalism—for it to be touched up before it was published.

It had only taken a couple of days after Tiffany made rounds in the Mitchell's companies when the exposé started circulating around the internet.

Michael was at home, watching Sophia type away on her computer, when he noticed the article that was trending on his social media, which was titled: 'How These Celebrity Women Bagged Their Men'.

He clicked into the article, which started off with brief introductions on the man-catching tactics which had been employed by socialites and celebrity women, but the biggest scandal to have been revealed by this piece was none other than Tiffany's. The readers were left shocked by the level of manipulation that had led to her engagement to Cooper.

After all, it wasn't ordinarily expected for a woman to steal a man's genetic sample from the cryobank to conceive his child, albeit through surrogacy, in order to force her way into a marriage with him.

It turned out that one really could buy their way into marriage as long as one had money.

A sci-fi trope like this could only be pulled off by Tiffany, the director of Adams Group—a company that was otherwise known as the King of Insurance in the industry.

The sperm might have been stolen, and the child might have been conceived via surrogacy, but Tiffany had managed to reap the full benefit of her ploy anyway.

The element of scandal that had been injected into this exposé was twofold: one, it concerned two well-known figures, namely Cooper and Tiffany; two, it raised the controversial question as to whether men whose sperm had been stolen would need to assume responsibility if a child was conceived through the insemination of said stolen sperm.

By extension, would that child therefore be entitled to the estate of his or her biological father?

As humanist arguments clashed against the effects of technological advancement, the controversy which resulted therein had spread like wildfire as everyone grew eager to put forth their thoughts on the matter.

This was also likely the reason why Cethos had yet to legalize surrogacy—situations like these were bound to arise once the floodgates were opened.

Sophia continued to compose more articles pertaining to the matter that was Tiffany's scandalous engagement to Cooper; she was giving an insider scoop on the sequence of events that had culminated in this moment, including the fact that Cooper's genetic sample had been swiped from the cryobank a decade ago and had been illegally sold off as someone else's.

This had all been done in order to take advantage of Sophia and her family.

She knew that Cooper had hidden away with bigger plans in mind; she needed to create a diversion while he executed the plans, and what better way to do that than to create controversy?

While others might have chosen to keep quiet about things as scandalous as these, Sophia couldn't do the same—not while things were already going out of hand.

It wasn't even a scandal to begin with; it was a deliberate scheme to ruin the Mitchells!

As such, she'd make sure that Tiffany's sperm-stealing ruse was broadcasted all over Bayside City.

That said, Sophia did not intend to spare Marks Real Estate from her wrath.

She would not sit by and do nothing while her family was being ripped off!