

Heiress 271

Chapter 271

Bella pondered to herself, 'Is my inner beauty so striking that it can't be hidden by this disguise? Or are these guys just overly eager to become Wyatt's son-in-law?' She felt nauseated as she gazed upon her own reflection.

The allure of power sure was incredible. It could make people willingly turn themselves blind. Well, fortunately, Bella had a backup plan.

During lunch with the first date, Bella suggested taking his pulse to show off her talent. She diagnosed him as being physically aged like a 70-year-old man, despite him only being 30 years old. This infuriated the man, who promptly ended the lunch by storming out.

On the second date, Bella kept her gaze fixed behind the man throughout the date, making the man visibly uncomfortable.

He felt confused and asked, "Ms. Thompson, what are you looking at?"

Bella replied, "Mr. Walter, there's a child standing behind you, watching you. Are you certain you don't want to invite him over for tea?"

Bella's tone gradually turned eerie. "He looks so... Pitiful."

That man did not even finish his cup of tea before he fled in terror.

For the third date, there was minimal interaction as they were watching a musical. This created an illusion of tranquility. As they finally reached the end, Mr. Lee politely extended an invitation. "Ms. Thompson, I had a pleasant time today. Would you join me for dinner?"

With a smile, Bella said, "Sure, I'd love to!"

She casually picked up her tote bag and slung it over her shoulder.

Mr. Lee had not noticed her bag earlier. After taking a closer look, he saw a row of large letters glaringly written on the bag. "Memento of Hatchbay Psychiatric Treatment Center."

Bella blinked innocently and asked, "Mr. Lee, why aren't you walking?"

Mr. Lee's face turned pale, and he slowly backed away. "Actually, I just remembered I have another appointment. Let's reschedule for another day!"

At this moment, Bella and Steven found themselves at the final venue for today's appointments.

It was an elegant and tranquil teahouse. The air was filled with the pure fragrance of tea, creating a serene atmosphere reminiscent of Yara Park. The fourth date seemed to have unexpectedly aligned with her taste.

Bella considered toying with him later for some fun.

She had spent the whole day manipulating these wealthy and privileged young men, while Steven stood on the sidelines, watching with a sense of apprehension.

"Ms. Bella, today you successfully cut off their romantic intentions towards you. But what should we do if these individuals go back and spread rumors? It might affect your reputation

in Savrow." Steven expressed his concern.

Bella snorted, "It would be better if these rumors spread. I'd love for those ordinary folks to think that Wyatt Thompson's daughter is a lunatic!"

Bella remained calm and composed. She picked up an eyeliner pencil, looked into a small mirror, and added a few more freckles to her face. "This way, it will completely cut off Wyatt's idea of finding a man for me. Hmph! Attempting to outdo me? He's losing his touch in this game!"

Amused, Steven could not help but comment, "Well, honestly, at a time like this, it wouldn't be bad if Mr. Right were to appear."

Bella let out a soft sigh as she stowed away her makeup and said, "I also want to meet the one and stop with the hassle of blind dates."

Hearing these words, Steven felt a surge of emotion. He looked at her intensely and wished the same for her, but the only difference was that he wished to be "the one" for her.

Bella wondered out loud, "Wyatt is a sly old fox. I wonder what sneaky tactics he'll use against me next time."

"Chairman Thompson holds you in the highest regard, Ms. Bella. During your absence, he often confided that among all his children, your personality and demeanor are the most similar to his." Steven spoke with a smile.

Bella smirked and said, "Hah! Wyatt's just insulting me. Can't you
you tell?"

Steven could not help but smile. At that moment, his phone vibrated.

He took it out, glanced at it, and hurriedly said, "Ms. Bella, your last date for the day has arrived."

Bella blurted, "Alright, let's do this."

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Steven turned around and left, walking into a room next door.

While waiting, Bella rested her chin on her hand and took in the beautiful and serene view outside the window. She gently closed her eyes, taking in the crisp floral scent and the melodious sound of birdsong filling the air.

Suddenly, she heard the sound of the door to the private room opening.

Bella heard the steady, unwavering footsteps of leather shoes getting closer. She could vaguely smell a subtle, refreshing scent as the person got closer. It was like a gentle midnight breeze that rustled through window curtains and tugged at her heartstrings.

It was an unusual fragrance that was rarely used by men—the rich scent of violet leaves blended with a light floral scent.

Although Bella was sensitive to smoke, she had an excellent sense of smell. She slowly opened her eyes and finally scanned the man from top to bottom.

Bella's lips parted slightly, and her eyes widened in shock.

Christopher said, "Please accept my sincere apologies for being late, Ms. Thompson.

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Chapter 272

"Why is it you?" Bella exclaimed with a look of surprise on her face.

Despite the small freckles on her face and her tangled hair resembling a bird's nest, she still exuded a touch of innocence. Christopher asked with a wide smile, "Can't I be your blind date?"

Bella pressed her lips together, unsure of how to respond. His question was direct, but his gentle smile eased the awkward atmosphere, making Bella think that it was merely a harmless. joke.

Christopher asked politely, "Mind if I take a seat?"

"Please do," Bella responded gracefully.

Christopher looked no different from their initial meeting. He presented a cultured image by donning a navy blue pinstripe suit and matching gold-rimmed glasses.

"Bella, your look today is cute and distinctive," Christopher remarked as his eyes squinted in a smile. "But you don't have to pretend in front of me. Just be yourself."

Bella awkwardly cleared her throat and said, "I recall my blind date isn't with you. Why are you here?"

“Because I figured you must be eager to see me again. Fortunately, I had the same intention,” Christopher adjusted his glasses, smiling calmly. The words seemed innocent but carried a hidden meaning.

“That’s interesting. Since our last encounter, I’ve been curious about your identity, so I did hope to see you again.” Bella widened her eyes, staring directly at him. “Thank you for your help, Christopher. You’re the fourth son of the Iverson family, right?”

Christopher’s deep gaze contracted slightly, and his hand on his knee trembled imperceptibly. Suppressing his joy, he calmly responded, “Bella, it’s been a while since we’ve met.”

Bella paused for a moment, politely replying, “It’s nice to see you again.” Despite sharing a pleasant childhood, over a decade had passed. Seeing him again, this man felt like a stranger

to Bella.

She had vaguely remembered that the young Christopher from their early years was short and thin, with delicate features. Because of his reserved personality, he was frequently teased and bullied by other kids.

Bella was a popular student in elementary school, earning the nickname “The Little Devil” for her fiery personality.

She acted without hesitation when she saw Christopher being bullied and single-handedly took down three older boys, who were a head taller than her. No one dared to bully Christopher again after that, as Bella was always watching out for him.

Bella had lost much of her recollection of these old stories. Unbeknownst to her, the man sitting across from her held onto every memory of their childhood. Through the years spent abroad, enduring the highs and lows of life, Bella remained the bright spot in Christopher’s otherwise gloomy existence.

She was more than just moonlight—a term that would have been too humble for her. In his eyes, she was the sun, radiant and dazzling, her brilliance unrivaled.

Bella wondered, "So that night at the karaoke bar, did you recognize me the night we bumped into each other while I was drunk?"

With a faint smile on his face, Christopher responded, "Yes."

Bella continued, "I was in danger that night. You didn't accidentally save me along the way, but you followed me the whole time?"

Christopher nodded in response.

"But why?" Bella frowned and added, "If you recognized me, why keep your identity a secret?"

"It's because I was waiting." Christopher took a deep breath. His voice was slightly hoarse as he continued, "I stayed quiet, hoping you'd remember me on your own."

Bella felt a subtle sense of guilt inexplicably rising within her. It felt as if she had let him down and betrayed him. She continued, "This place-did you choose it as well?"

He responded, "Yes, I thought you might like it because it has the atmosphere of Yara Park."

Christopher's eyes sparkled as he said, "Do you still remember? When we were kids, we used to play hide-and-seek in your garden. Every time, you loved hiding in the fake mountains."

When they were kids, hide-and-seek was a game they both loved. Whenever he closed his eyes, he could always guess where she was hiding, but he always pretended to be clueless. He would spin around anxiously and intentionally avoid her hiding spot. He did not mind giving in to her, satisfying her simple desire for victory. However, this concession was exclusively reserved for Bella.

Bella felt surprised and said, "Wow, you still remember such things."

She scratched her messy wig, feeling embarrassed.

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Christopher's lips curled into a graceful smile as he savored his tea. He exuded the air of a sophisticated young aristocrat in the modern world. The two of them chatted as they caught up with each other.

Bella learned that Christopher had dedicated himself to looking after his mother during her recovery in Sentania. His mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, which led to a gradual decline in her ability to take care of herself. Despite having numerous opportunities to return to Savrow, he remained in Sentania to care for his mother and develop his career.

She remembered that the Iverson family dynamics were quite intricate. The Iverson family included four children, among them Christopher, who had two older brothers and one older sister. The trio shared the same mother. On the other hand, Christopher was the child of the second wife, introducing an additional layer of complexity to the family structure.

Bella had limited knowledge about Mrs. Iverson. Even though their families were once close when she was a child and she had visited the Iverson estate, she still had no impression of that lady.

Bella asked again, "Why did you suddenly come back this year?"

"Home is where the heart is. After all, I am a son of the Iverson family. I wanted to come back and reclaim a part of what belongs to me," Christopher said, lowering his eyes. He played with the delicate teacup with his slender fingertips.

Bella nodded slightly, understanding his meaning.

Children born into wealthy and prestigious families were often caught in a power struggle. Those who did not navigate the power struggle were exploited and ultimately ended up with little to show for their

privileged backgrounds. After all, a close-knit and happy prestigious family, like the Thompsons, were rare.

Christopher suddenly asked with a smile, "There's still some time before dinner. What would you like to do?"

"Huh?" Caught off guard by the sudden suggestion, Bella was momentarily stunned.

Christopher continued, "I can take you to see the roses under the sunset." He leaned towards her slowly, sincerity evident in his eyes. "I have a private rose garden, and we are having a public exhibition today. Let's go enjoy the flowers together."

'Roses?' Bella's heart fluttered, and her eyes sparkled. Roses were her favorite flowers. She personally maintained a small rose garden in Yara Park's backyard. She had not taken care of it herself in the past few years. Mila and the others had taken turns looking after it.

She readily agreed, without hesitation. "Sure! Let's go for a stroll."

On the way to the Rose Manor, Bella sat in Christopher's luxurious Bentley. Given their parents private friendship and longstanding acquaintance, going in separate cars and meeting at the destination felt superfluous.

The Bentley glided smoothly ahead, closely trailed by Steven. Steven gripped the steering wheel tightly.

Bella had just gotten rid of Ryan. Now, Christopher popped out of nowhere. It was evident that Christopher radiated a higher level of sophistication than the flirtatious Ryan.

In the past, Christopher had discreetly followed Bella to her neighborhood. This time, he had somehow replaced Bella's blind date to meet her.

It showed how scheming this man was.

Steven took a deep breath, his gaze unwavering on the Bentley ahead. Having witnessed how much Jerkface Justin had hurt Bella, Steven swore not to let any man harm her again. He was determined to do everything within his means to protect her.

The Bentley's atmosphere was pleasant.

Bella had removed her disguise and had not bothered to wear makeup. Instead, she showcased her natural beauty. Her long, flowing hair was loosely tied into a simple bun with a hairpin, dismissing any concerns about maintaining the image of a wealthy young lady.

Christopher remained composed while stealing a glance at her from the corner of his eye. Her radiant, flawless face exuded natural beauty and calmness.

He steadied his tumultuous thoughts and asked softly, "Do you remember what you called me the first time you saw me that night?"

"Huh?" Bella blinked, feeling a bit dazed. "I... Really don't remember."

Christopher whispered, "You called me

'Critter'."

This man either left Bella embarrassed or at a loss for words.

Christopher explained, "My dad used to scold me that way when he disciplined me. You overheard it one day and started teasing me like that."

"We all said the dumbest things when we were kids... I apologize for my childish and rude behavior back then," Bella muttered, feeling embarrassed. A hint of blush appeared on her

cheeks.

Christopher said with a playful smile, "It's okay. If you want to call me that now, you can."

"Oh

my... What am I? Twelve?" Bella muttered under her breath, feeling a bit awkward. She waved and said, "Let's just stick to calling you Christopher. We're not kids anymore. Besides, you're a man of status and have a reputation to uphold. I can't be disrespectful."

Christopher smiled gently as he leaned slightly closer to her. His gentle voice was infused with tenderness as he said, "Sure, whatever makes you happy."

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If Christopher had not brought her here, Bella would have never known about the vast rose garden on the southern outskirts of Savrow. The Iverson family did not own this place. This was Christopher's private property, where only Damascus roses were cultivated in this hundred-acre field.

Under the vividly colored sunset, the lush greenery and vibrant pink roses seemed to drip with charm. The fully blooming garden captured Bella's gaze, providing a moment of relaxation. Couples leisurely strolled and took photos, while even some internet celebrities conducted live broadcasts. This beautiful scene relieved Bella, whose mind and body had been tense from work for many days.

The remarkable sight of the outstanding couple attracted envious looks from onlookers. It was evident that they appeared to be a perfectly matched couple, almost as if a higher power had blessed them.

Bella bent down. Her slender and graceful hands gently lifted a rose as if caressing a lover's cheek. She playfully crinkled her small, dainty nose closer to inhale the fragrance with an intoxicated expression.

Christopher's eyes deepened, and the corners of his lips lifted slightly. "Bella-a name that befits its owner. Charming and graceful, even more so than these flowers."

Bella giggled. "I know I'm beautiful, but thanks for your compliment, Mr. Iverson."

Christopher approached her, his eyes sparkling with eager anticipation. "If I were to call you Bella like when we were young, would you call me Chris, just like before?"

Bella's eyelashes fluttered. Her back was turned to him. She felt awkward that he still held onto the same feelings from their childhood, while she had distanced herself entirely from that past. To her, Christopher Iverson was practically a stranger now.

After contemplating, she said politely, "It's possible, once we get to know each other better."

"I believe we will get close to each other again, just like when we were kids. I'll be waiting for you." Christopher's eyes blazed with determination as he enunciated each word.

Bella sensed that the conversation was awkward and decided to shift it. With a serious tone, she inquired, "Mr. Iverson, what is the annual rose production in this field? What are the costs of cultivating these roses? Do you currently have any exclusive contracts with corporate groups?"

With a light laugh, Christopher adjusted his glasses and asked, "Ms. Thompson, are you interested in discussing a partnership with me?"

"Honestly, I do have that idea," Bella admitted. As soon as she entered, golden business opportunities flooded her thoughts. Since her return to KS Group, she has planned to expand into the cosmetics market, developing makeup and skincare products with a rose theme. However, Wyatt had instructed her to strengthen and grow KS World Hotel first, limiting her time and energy for this venture.

Bella's determination flared up again the moment she entered the rose garden.

"The Damask Rose, scientifically known as *Rosa Damascena*, has deep roots in ancient Greek

mythology. It symbolizes the beauty of the love goddess, Aphrodite, and the vegetation deity, Adonis. It's a profound emblem of love and beauty, exuding an exceptionally romantic essence."

Bella shared, her eyes bright with enthusiasm. "The essential oil of Damask Rose is precious, with effects that can simultaneously impact both the body and the soul. The price of air-flown roses is high, and very few estates cultivate this type of rose domestically."

Christopher gazed at her deeply, his handsome face adorned with a gentle smile.

He had focused little on the business insights she was sharing. Over the past two years, many have coveted his rose field, yet he has never given it serious consideration. This sea of flowers, akin to a lively Gatsby party, was arranged solely for Bella.

Noticing that Christopher looked at her silently without an immediate response, Bella mistakenly believed he was in deep contemplation. She laughed heartily and said, "I understand my proposal is abrupt. Moreover, my project is not a small one. Mr. Iverson, please take your time to consider. I'm not in a hurry."

Outside the Rose Manor, Steven stood in the fading sunlight. His thoughts were in disarray as he gazed at the vast sea of roses. He was well aware of the close relationship between the Iversons and the Thompsons, especially the strong bond between Chairman Iverson and Chairman Thompson.

He thought, 'While Christopher was clear about his intentions towards Ms. Bella, she had always been distant from the opposite sex. For example, she cut Ryan off mercilessly. However, with Mr. Iverson, she seemed less resistant and willing to entertain him.'

Of course, the fact that he had intervened and saved her from the knife attack played a role. However, Steven could not shake the feeling that Bella was particularly accepting of Christopher.

Chapter 275

'Could it be... True love...?' As those words echoed in Steven's mind, his heart tightened, and he sighed helplessly.

At that moment, three black sedans appeared in the distance and approached the Rose Manor.

Looking at the license plate on the leading sedan made Steven's eyes turn cold.

The license plate on the leading sedan made Steven's eyes turn cold. Those cars belonged to the Salvador family, Justin's car being among them.

As the car came to a stop, Ian swiftly exited from the front passenger seat and respectfully opened the car door. Wearing bespoke leather shoes, Justin stepped out composedly, fastening his suit jacket as he descended the steps.

“Damn, such bad luck!” Steven cursed under his breath, his frustration evident at the sight of Justin’s handsome face.

A few seconds later, a slender, pale hand slowly emerged from the car.

“Justin... Can you help me down?”

Standing by the car, Justin looked at the hand with a slight frown. After a moment’s hesitation, he extended his hand toward Rosalind.

Quickly seizing his palm, Rosalind clung as if afraid Justin might change his mind. A delighted smile played on her face.

Even though Justin’s gaze remained as cold as ever, she was confident she could make him fall for her once again!

Seeing Justin and Rosalind walking hand in hand towards the estate entrance, Steven’s eyes were full of contempt. He could not be bothered to curse at them.

He thought to himself, ‘What terrible luck today!’

“Justin, I followed you here to appreciate the flowers... You don’t mind, right?” Rosalind’s eyes were teary as she portrayed a pitiful appearance. However, she held the man’s hand tightly and said, “Otherwise... I’ll just go back. I don’t want to be a burden for you...”

However, Justin had not come to the Rose Manor today to appreciate the flowers but to inspect a potential project. The Rose Manor boasted the largest Damascus rose field in the entire Savrow or even the whole province. He intended to personally assess the quality of these roses and inspect the

condition of the soil. For this purpose, he even invited two botanists to join him for a thorough evaluation.

If all the conditions met his high standards, Justin planned to negotiate cooperation with the owner of Rose Manor. He aimed to secure the raw material supply for the upcoming women's skincare brand under Salvador Corporation.

Somehow, this matter gained too much attention and reached Rosalind's ears. She even proposed to accompany him. Considering she had just attempted suicide and was suffering from severe depression, Justin had no choice but to agree reluctantly.

"It doesn't matter," Justin said with a low voice, his eyes still deep and sad. "The doctor said that being in nature is beneficial for your condition."

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"Justin... Thank you for still caring about me like this..." Rosalind cried quietly, and she leaned on his shoulder.

In that instance, Justin's face contorted as he felt a strong aversion towards the woman. His entire body responded with a visceral reaction of disgust.

"Mr. Salvador, look! Isn't that Ms. Bella's secretary?!" Ian widened his eyes and whispered behind him.

Justin suddenly raised his gaze, then was momentarily stunned. Unexplainedly, a mysterious feeling surged through his chest, making his heart beat violently within his tensed chest.

'Why is she here?' Justin wondered. 'If Steven and Bella were always together, it meant that Bella must also be here in the Rose Manor. Why would she be here? Was she here to appreciate the flowers?'

In the next moment, Justin gritted his teeth and shook his head.

No, it was not like her to come here just to appreciate the flowers. Justin concluded, 'She must be here to interfere in my project!'

Chapter 276

Tension filled the air as the two parties stared at each other.

"Mr. Salvador, I don't know if this is a coincidence or just sheer bad luck," Steven said with a wry smile, his words lacking courtesy.

Justin's brows furrowed as he asked in a deep voice, "Is Bella inside?"

At the mention of Bella, Rosalind felt her scalp tingling, and her heart suddenly tightened.

"Why? Is it not allowed?" Steven sneered, every word carrying a sting. "Does Mr. Salvador wish to monopolize this place, too?"

Ian could not take it anymore and retorted, "Damn... Mr. Salvador didn't even do anything? We're just asking! Did you not eat your medicine before leaving the house?"

"Hasn't done anything? Can you even say that with a straight face? I can barely listen to such nonsense," Steven said with disdain, his thick eyebrows pressing down.

Ian retorted, "You...!"

"Ian, that's enough," Justin interjected and coldly asked, "What is Bella doing here?"

Steven coldly swept his gaze over the seemingly delicate Rosalind and sneered, "Whatever Mr. Salvador is here for, our young lady is here for the same reason."

Justin's brows furrowed deeper. It seemed that Bella had developed an interest in the Rose Manor, but he would not let her succeed this time!

At this moment, Bella had already lifted the hem of her dress and ventured into the sea of roses. The vibrant sunset cast a magical glow as she moved around with a lively and elf-like grace, resembling a

floral goddess.

Unperturbed, she squatted in the muddy flowerbed, delicately kneading the soil. She examined the rose stems and petals with nimble hands, diligently taking notes on her phone while capturing the beauty through snapshots.

While other girls came to enjoy the scenery and snap some pictures, Bella appeared to be on a treasure hunt, a modern-day gold prospector. Who would have thought such a stunning woman would break from romantic ideals, boldly showcasing the traits of being "practical – minded" and "business-oriented"? Her focus was clear. She was determined to build her

career and make money.

Christopher thought, 'Ambitious women are quite charming, aren't they?'

Christopher stood with his hands behind his back, patiently waiting for her. He slightly bent his gaze, an indulgent and tender smile revealing itself between his refined brows. He murmured, 'Oh, Bella, you are still the same as when you were a child. It's wonderful.'

At this moment, a call from his secretary interrupted his thoughts. Christopher's brows furrowed as he answered, "What is it?"

"Mr. Iverson, Mr. Salvador has arrived." The secretary lowered his voice and said, "Earlier, the Salvador team contacted me regarding the cooperation project for the Rose Manor. However

did not give them a clear answer, following your instructions."

“I didn’t anticipate them moving so swiftly; they’ve even brought the inspection team today. It looks like they’re dead set on partnering with us,” Christopher said, his gaze fixed on the bustling Bella. In a deep voice, he asked, “Besides Justin’s team, who else is here?”

“There’s also Justin’s rumored fiancée. Even in situations like these, he insists on bringing that woman along. It’s like they’re deeply in love.” The secretary’s words carried a tinge of

sarcasm.

Surrounded by roses, Bella remained blissfully unaware of all this.

Christopher pondered, ‘Bella, is this the man you once loved? The one for whom you changed your name and endured three years of marriage, even if you were miserable? Bella, you are truly naive.’

A surge of resentment flared within Christopher, and he spoke, “Are the things I asked prepare ready?”

The secretary hurriedly replied, “Everything is ready, Mr. Iverson!”

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“Bring them over and send someone to lead Justin Salvador’s team this way.” Christopher adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses, a faint smirk playing on his lips.

After crouching for too long, Bella’s back was a bit sore. She slowly stood up from the flower bed, wiping the sweat from her forehead.

Chapter 277

Bella was the kind who completely immersed herself in her work when she encountered something she liked, to the extent of forgetting about space and time.

At this moment, Bella suddenly remembered that Christopher was still waiting for her. She hurriedly turned around and was surprised to see him still patiently standing in his original

spot.

There was now an intricately woven flower basket on his arm, adorned with beautiful, understated pink flowers.

Bella thought, 'Those flowers are lovely, which inevitably makes me think of the quote-a rose does not answer its enemies with words but with beauty.'

"Ms. Thompson," Christopher called out to her, approaching with the flower basket.

Seeing him dressed so cleanly, Bella hurriedly tried to stop him with concern. "Ah! Don't come over! It's muddy here!"

However, Christopher paid her warnings no attention. He walked straight through the thorny bushes, single-mindedly wanting to reach her side. Bella pursed her red lips, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Ms. Bella, this is for you." Christopher, his deep eyes filled with the soft glow of the evening sun, presented the flower basket to her.

Bella smiled gently and declined. "Mr. Iverson, thank you for your kind gesture. But these flowers... I can't accept them."

Although it was just a basket of flowers, they were roses with ambiguous implications. Accepting them would be inappropriate.

Christopher anticipated her refusal and changed his approach. Smiling, he said, "Flowers complement the beauty of a lady; that's just one aspect. More importantly, I've noticed Miss Thompson's interest in the roses I planted, so I wanted to give you a basket to take back and study. Underneath the flowers, there's soil from here that you can take back, transplant into your garden, and carefully nurture. They will bloom perennially."

With this explanation, Bella had no reason to refuse any further. She hesitated momentarily, then reached out to accept the flower basket, saying, "Thank you, Mr. Iverson, for your gift."

Suddenly, Christopher frowned slightly, standing with his hands behind him as he leaned towards her.

A handsome, chiseled face gradually enlarged in Bella's astonished pupils. She held her breath, and her long eyelashes fluttered.

Bella asked, "Mr. Iverson, what's wrong? Is there something on my face?"

Christopher nodded earnestly, "Mmhm."

"Where?" Bella was bewildered, raising her hand to wipe her face, and another streak of mud smeared across her cheek. This time, she indeed became muddy.

Christopher was full of indulgence. He took out a pure white silk handkerchief from his pocket and naturally wiped away the dirt on her cheeks and forehead.

He moved too quickly, and Bella only snapped back to reality, hastily saying, "I can do it myself."

"It's okay. It's already clean." Christopher gazed deeply at her, smoothly retracting his hand.

He was always like this, stopping at the right moment when she felt their interaction was getting too intimate. Somehow, Bella's mind came up with a provocative thought.

However, she quickly dismissed this thought. Perhaps Christopher's considerate actions were due to his gentle nature, and there might also be some childhood friendship between them.

At this moment, a series of footsteps approached them.

Bella suddenly lifted her eyes and then froze.

Just a few steps away, Justin's imposing figure stood like a mountain before them. He displayed neither excitement nor anger. Only his eyes had a faint reddish glow.

It was like the calm before a storm.

Just moments ago, Justin observed every interaction between Bella and the man before him. His fists clenched fiercely beneath his refined sleeves, and veins bulged on his forehead. He watched her accept the roses from Christopher, witnessed her radiant smile, and observed him gently wiping away the dirt from her cheek.

Their tacit understanding and intimacy were like a pair of harmonious musical instruments. Justin's back tensed, teeth grinding audibly, and a roaring pain echoed in his mind.

He witnessed her interactions as if they were a couple, the silent agreement and closeness akin to a pair of perfectly matched partners.

Justin's back was taut, his teeth grinding with a creaking sound, and a buzzing pain resonated in his mind.

It turned out that Bella wasn't here to compete for the project but to appreciate the blooming flowers with a new lover. However, he preferred that she come here to snatch his project and torment him. He was willing to yield everything to her. Yet he was unwilling to see that everything that once belonged to him, she would willingly hand over to this man...

Chapter 278

A storm of emotions was brewing behind Justin's gloomy face. Bella, on the other hand, did not have such complicated thoughts. In her mind, she was cursing her bad luck.

Bella thought, 'Meeting this scumbag in such a romantic and beautiful place is like stepping on dog shit.'

As for Rosalind, who was clinging onto Justin, she was nothing more than an eyesore. Bella's eyes hurt just from the sight of the woman.

At that moment, Christopher's tall figure leaned towards her. His lips gently brushed against her ear, and he chuckled softly, "Don't panic, I'm here."

Bella's ear twitched, and she cursed in confusion. She thought, 'What's the fuss about? Just deal with it when it comes. If they behave like dogs, let's beat them like dogs.'

"Ms. Thompson, I didn't expect to meet you here," Rosalind said sweetly, hiding her previous confrontational attitude. She continued, "Is this gentleman your new boyfriend? You two look so perfect together."

Bella's gaze remained indifferent, showing no interest in interacting with the scheming woman. Despite Bella's lack of reaction, Christopher smirked, "Thank you for your praise. However, I am not Bella's boyfriend at the moment."

Bella seemed oblivious to his statement, but when Justin heard it, his expression froze, and he clenched his fist. He thought, 'Not at the moment? Will it be sooner or later? Is this guy trying to provoke me by implying they're dating, or has she moved on so fast?'

With her hands wrapped around Justin's arm, Rosalind sensed his body tense with anger. She realized he hadn't let go of Bella despite everything.

It appeared that Bella had discovered a new love interest, bringing a sense of relief to Rosalind. 'At least one of them has fully moved on from their three-year marriage,' she thought, finding solace in the idea.

Rosalind couldn't help but wonder about Bella's seemingly charmed romantic life. Pondering to herself, she mused, 'Which family does this young master belong to? He's not only handsome but also possesses a good temperament.'

Breaking the silence, Christopher asked, "Is Mr. Salvador here to accompany his fiancée to enjoy the flowers?" He added, with a slight smirk, "You should hurry. Rose Manor will be closing soon."

"I can't afford to waste time on that," Justin retorted, shooting Christopher a hostile look and deliberately ignoring Bella. "Secretary Harris, get in touch with the Rose Manor contact. We need to hash out the details of our collaboration."

Ian promptly responded, "Yes, Mr. Salvador." swiftly pulling out his phone to dial the number. Within moments, the phone rang loudly.

It was audible to everyone and was seemingly approaching them!

"Strange... Sounds like that person is nearby," Ian remarked, scanning the area in confusion.

The distinctive ringtone echoed nearby, and a man sprinted over, announcing, "Mr. Iverson

Justin was taken aback, his attention fixed on the approaching man holding a ringing cell phone.

"Mr. Iverson, you've got a call," the secretary said, offering the phone to Christopher. He did not forget to shoot a disdainful glance at the Salvador team.

Christopher, seemingly unfazed, smiled and effortlessly ended the call with a casual sweep of his cold, pale fingertips across the screen.

At that very moment, the calls on Ian's end abruptly ceased. Ian stood there, phone in hand, mouth slightly agape, clearly taken aback.

Meanwhile, Justin, in a state of disbelief, squinted his eyes and turned visibly pale.

"The owner of Rose Manor you're trying to reach, Mr. Salvador, is me. Unfortunately, I've already secured an exclusive partnership. It appears Mr. Salvador will be leaving empty-handed," Christopher stated, directing his gaze toward Bella.

"Ms. Thompson, I've accepted your proposal for collaboration," Christopher continued.

Bella's beautiful eyes widened as she observed the man extending his right hand towards her.

Christopher added, "Here's to a fruitful collaboration in the future."

She casually glanced at Justin, whose expression was darkening, his eyes bloodshot.

Seeing Justin's defeated face, she felt a genuine sense of satisfaction. However, winning without a fight felt like bullying.

Oh well, savor the victory for now!

Bella's lips curled into a smile, two playful dimples appearing on her cheeks. She gracefully extended her hand and shook hands firmly with Christopher, saying, "Looking forward to a successful partnership, Mr. Iverson."

Chapter 279

The members of the Salvador team looked at each other in astonishment. Ian suddenly felt his vision go dark, as if a thunderbolt had struck him from above.

Seeing Justin's expression turn stormy, Rosalind, thinking she was offering helpful advice, quickly said, "Justin, you don't need to worry. It's just a garden. There are plenty of places like this in the country. We can contact other places..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Justin abruptly pulled his arm out of her embrace. The force was too much, causing her to stagger backward, feeling embarrassed.

"Let's go, Mr. Iverson," Bella didn't bother giving them another glance. She smiled politely at Christopher.

Christopher replied, "Sure, I've already booked a restaurant. We can go there anytime."

The two shared a smile, leaving Justin feeling as if an invisible hand was strangling his throat, his brows tightly furrowed.

He quickly stepped forward, blocking Christopher.

“Mr. Iverson, let’s talk privately,” he said, his tone still strong, showing no sign of weakness due to the failed project negotiation.

“If it’s about the Rose Manor project, I don’t think there’s anything left to discuss with Mr. Salvador,” Christopher replied, unwilling to waste time with him.

Justin interjected, “What if it’s about something else?”

As he spoke, Justin’s dark gaze landed on Bella’s face.

Christopher led Justin to a European-style pavilion in Rose Manor. They took their seats, facing each other amidst vibrant flowers, yet the room exuded a chilly and oppressive atmosphere.

Looking impatiently at his watch, Christopher urged, “Mr. Salvador, let’s get to the point. I have a date with Ms. Thompson that I need to return to.”

“A date? Weren’t we here to discuss cooperation?” Justin, unwilling to concede, especially when it came to Bella, instinctively resisted letting Christopher gain the upper hand. “Maybe that’s just wishful thinking on your part. After all, Bella was my wife for three years. I know her much better than you do.”

“Is that so?” Christopher shrugged dismissively, a hint of mockery in his tone. “It’s only been three years, and it was only a marriage in name... Mr. Salvador, where does your confidence stem from? Do you really believe you understand Bella better than I do?”

“You investigated me?” Justin questioned as he clenched his fist in anger. His eyes were chilly.

Christopher smiled and shook his head. "Everything I've done is for Bella, and it has nothing to do with you from the beginning till the end. My collaboration with her this time wasn't about snatching her from you. She's the one I've been waiting for, and besides her, I won't let anyone else intervene here."

Christopher added, "I know your subordinate contacted someone from my company. I just didn't have the chance to tell you in person. From the beginning, I never intended to cooperate with Salvador Corporation."

He emphasized the name "Bella" so warmly!

Justin quietly exhaled, his deep gaze flickering like a night fire. "Christopher, even though you've recently returned to the country, I'm not completely ignorant about you. Like Bella, people who don't

know you well might be deceived by the façade you present. However, I won't be fooled. I've heard enough about what you did in Sentania."

In Sentania, Christopher was indeed the embodiment of wealth and desire—a beautiful yet infamous figure. However, he could completely conceal his true nature before Bella, presenting a gentle and humble image. It was evident how deep and cunning this man's scheming was.

Indeed, they are divorced, and everything about Bella is no longer his concern. But seeing her getting closer to Christopher, Justin could not help but feel a mix of anger, hatred, and fear.

Christopher's lips curled into a faint smile, and he casually adjusted his glasses. He didn't bother to refute Justin's words.

"You never lack women by your side. But Bella is not a woman you can play with, not someone you can casually provoke, engage in a bit of romance, and captivate with a few bouquets of roses." Justin's handsome face carried a deep and frosty demeanor.

A few seconds later, Christopher couldn't help but sneer, "It's strange. Since you are so reluctant to part with Bella and care about her, why did you divorce her and marry someone else in the first place?"

This question hit the nail on the head, leaving Justin stunned and speechless. Pain and regret flashed through his heart, shaking his entire soul.

Christopher continued, "I am very clear about what kind of person I am. Even if I am irredeemable, my sincere heart for Bella will always remain pure and loyal. I can't say the same for you, Mr. Salvador, who married Bella but still harbors thoughts for others, hurting her to the core. Anyone else in this world has the right to say these words to me, but not you."

Christopher's brows furrowed, his tone becoming colder as he added, "Regardless of whether you regret it now or not, you are already divorced. Whoever she is with, likes, or loves in the future has nothing to do with you."

He then stood up and walked towards the exit of the pavilion. Stopping abruptly, he turned back, observing Justin, who seemed frozen like a sculpture.

He said, "My feelings for her existed long ago. In my eyes, those three years are not worth mentioning."

Left alone in the pavilion, Justin, reflecting on Christopher's words, had a face as pale as paper, his broad shoulders trembling ever so slightly.

Chapter 280

As the visitors gradually left Rose Manor, only Bella and Rosalind remained in the vast flower gardens.

The surrounding light dimmed, yet Bella's bare face retained a pure, bright allure, like a clear and radiant moon. This scene sparked a mix of envy and jealousy in Rosalind.

Setting aside all grievances, she must admit that Bella was an exceptional beauty, a diamond among rhinestones. What woman wouldn't feel jealous when such a stunning woman lived under the same roof as her man for three years, even if it was all for show?

Rosalind gritted her teeth and approached Bella. She toyed with her long black hair, discarding her delicate appearance in front of Justin. Instead, she revealed a triumphant smile, as if she were the victor.

Rosalind asked, "So, you've found a new prospect so quickly? Your methods are truly

astonishing. But wouldn't it have been better to do this sooner? No matter how you entangle Justin, he won't spare you another glance."

Bella glanced at her as if dealing with a lunatic and scoffed, "Why would I want him to look at me? I'm not a peacock in the park, and I don't need to flaunt my feathers."

Rosalind choked on her words for a moment, cursing inwardly. She decided to pull out her trump card.

"Now that we've bumped into each other, I might as well tell you the good news. Justin and I are about to get engaged. The engagement ceremony will be on the same day as my birthday celebration."

"Is that so? Congratulations are in order, then... But I won't be giving you a gift." Bella spoke with a lazy tone, showing little interest.

Seeing Bella's complete indifference, Rosalind couldn't help but feel infuriated. She felt offended and retorted, "Huh, even if you act tough, deep down, you must be furious and hateful. But what's the use?"

"In the end, I got Justin, while you've become the laughingstock of the entire Savrow!"

"Ah, Rosalind, every time I see you, either you're clamoring that you want Justin or flaunting your relationship with him. Is your life so dull and uninteresting? Other than a divorced man, do you have anything else noteworthy?" Bella sighed in boredom, feeling that even talking to her lowered her standards.

Bella pondered, "When dealing with such a self-righteous woman, it leaves you with a bad taste if you don't confront her"

Rosalind glared at Bella and shouted furiously, "What did you say?!"

Bella continued, "I can understand that you want to show off that you have climbed up the social ladder and married into a rich family, but you should find a suitable confidant. What you regard as a treasure is garbage that I don't want to look at again. How mundane...."

Rosalind screamed, "Garbage?!"

Rosalind was so angry that her face alternated between red and white as she exclaimed, "Bella!

You're just jealous! The more you curse now, the more it shows how much you care about me being with Justin! You're calling Justin garbage just to vent your frustration. After all, you spent three years in vain, and it was you who got kicked out by Justin!"

Bella's eyes suddenly turned ice-cold. Her cold glare made Rosalind shiver secretly in her heart.

Bella replied, "Excuse me, but you need to know when to stop when things are going well. Just because I am giving you concessions does not mean you can use my kindness to blabber nonsense in front of me. Let me remind you for the last time: don't use my tolerance as an excuse to push your luck. Otherwise, Ms. Ashley, your days ahead might not be so good."

The name "Ashley" was like a thunderbolt on a clear day, shaking Rosalind's soul. Her face turned ashen, like the bottom of a burnt pot. Her whole body felt a rush of blood. Her breath caught, and she staggered back a tiny step in panic.

"What's wrong? Why the sudden change in expression?" Seeing Rosalind turn pale, Bella asked with a smile. "Isn't Ashley your name from studying abroad in Meridan? I've never seen someone react like they've heard an exorcism spell just by hearing their name."

"I don't know who Ashley is... I've never heard that name. I don't know what nonsense you're talking about!" Rosalind's breathing became more rapid as she attempted to distance herself. After all, the former Ashley was a lustful, money-hungry woman, far from the pure and virtuous image she portrayed for Justin now.

Bella squinted her dangerously beautiful, almond-shaped eyes. She approached Rosalind with her hands behind her back. Taking two steps closer, she leaned forward, revealing a prophetic and cold smile.