

Heiress 311

Chapter 311

Back in the president's office of the Salvador Corporation, Justin leaned back in his leather chair after wrapping up a high-level meeting, weariness evident in his eyes.

The buzz surrounding the matter between Rosalind and him had spread like wildfire within the company. Surprisingly, within the vast expanse of the Salvador Corporation's skyscraper, not a single soul dared to utter a word of gossip about Justin.

Unless, of course, they were willing to face the consequences, which could potentially lead to their demise.

Having earned the promotion to deputy chairman of the board, Justin transformed into a true powerhouse, commanding unparalleled authority. However, despite his prestigious status, a profound sense of heaviness weighed on Justin, devoid of any satisfaction.

"I never expected Shannon to resolve the financial issues with Gold Corporation. It seems she's been pocketing a significant amount of money. At least now, she'll have to spit it back out." Ian felt immensely satisfied to see Shannon take a loss.

Still contemplating the situation, Justin responded, "Shannon built her wealth with Zephyr's help. Even with Zephyr in prison, she still manages to accumulate a substantial sum. It implies there's another source for her income."

Ian's skepticism grew evident as he leaned forward, questioning, "Could the EV boutique be one of them? Could that mediocre boutique have such massive money-attracting power? It's just bags and clothes. How can it generate such significant profits?"

"After all these years working for me, how can you be so naive?" Justin's eyebrows furrowed.

With a casual flick of his hand, Justin tossed a neatly folded paper airplane accurately toward Ian's chest. "That boutique is just a facade for the extensive underground network in Savrow that Shannon has

meticulously built over the years. While openly dealing in luxury goods, behind the scenes, she's involved in bribery and shady dealings."

Ian shivered. "We really underestimated this old witch!"

"I have never underestimated her. We should never underestimate our enemies."

Justin rubbed the bridge of his nose, his lips curling into a cold expression. "Dealing with Shannon is no overnight task. She has deep roots in Savrow, and with Gregory protecting her, it's not the right time to make a move. We still lack sufficient evidence and the right opportunity. If you play with fire, you're bound to get burned. The time will come."

Ian nodded with resentment. "Exactly! Sooner or later, we'll spill that old witch's blood as an offering to the heavens!"

Justin changed the subject with indifference. "How's the progress on Ada Wang's project?"

"The wedding planning proposal from our team has been revised, and we're ready to meet with Ada Wang's team at any time," Ian reported.

Ian hesitated briefly before cautiously suggesting, "Mr. Salvador, didn't you mention compensating the young madam? This might be an opportunity to make amends. What if we hand over the wedding planning rights to the KS World Hotel? I think she would appreciate it

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Justin interrupted, "Why should I give it to KS World Hotel?"

Justin's face was composed as he looked at Ian. "I owe Bella, not KS Group. Why would I give the opportunity to the Thompson family?"

Ian was left speechless. "Truly, what kind of logic is this?"

“She once mentioned that in business, we must give our absolute best to compete with her. If I slack off now, wouldn’t that be looking down on her?”

Justin lowered his gaze again, maintaining a cool demeanor as he added, “Just prepare as you should. In the business world, I won’t compromise my standards or principles for anyone or anything. I’m not Christopher Iverson.”

Ian was puzzled. He felt like there was a subtle hint of jealousy in his boss’s words.

At that moment, the phone on the table vibrated. Ryan’s call came through.

“What is it?” Justin answered the call with a neutral expression.

Ryan’s voice on the other end was full of excitement. “Justin, I’ve got VIP tickets for the concert of the renowned pianist Christian. Let’s go together!”

“You’re going to a piano recital? When did a donkey like you start appreciating music?” Justin teased without holding back.

“Tsk, if I can understand what you say, why wouldn’t I appreciate a piano recital?” Ryan, used to Justin’s banter over the years, took it in stride and added a touch of self-mockery. “Come on, I’ll swing by your office to pick you up in a while.”

“I’m not interested.”

“Why? Are you still sulking over Rosalind? After being cheated on for so many years, you can’t get used to not having her around, huh?” Ryan seized the opportunity to tease him back.

Justin, looking disdainful, furrowed his brows. “Don’t associate Rosalind with me anymore. It disgusts me! I’m hanging up.”

“Wait, just a minute!”

Ryan struggled with the task of dealing with this stubborn mule, forcing him to reveal the truth. “Zoe has returned from studying in Inalia. She is Christian’s proud protege and will be performing as a guest at her concert tonight. I wanted to surprise you, but you just had to spoil it. I thought it’d be more romantic that way, but I guess you’re allergic to romance!”

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Zoe Hoffman was Ryan’s younger sister. She had been part of Justin’s life since her early years, practically growing up before his eyes.

Ryan was an elder brother who took on a fatherly role. He was exceptionally doting toward his only sister and showered her with attention that even rivaled the Thompson brothers’ affection for Bella.

After a moment of contemplation, Justin gave in and said, “Alright, come pick me up.”

Not long after, night fell upon the Savrow National Music Hall.

Ryan had secured a VIP box on the second floor well in advance, ensuring the best view to witness his sister’s brilliance. Beyond that, he had arranged for a camera setup and was fervently manipulating the video equipment, eager to capture his sister’s entire performance.

On the sidelines, Justin sat with his legs crossed. He cast a disdainful glance at Ryan, who appeared more professional than the paparazzi, deeply engrossed in his camera.

Unimpressed, Justin said, “The organizers will document the entire performance and even engrave it onto commemorative discs for the performers. Don’t embarrass yourself with your half-baked efforts.”

Ryan retorted, “A heartless person like you wouldn’t understand! The footage captured by a beloved brother is filled with brotherly love. How can it compare to the official recording?”

Just as Ryan adjusted the camera angle, his eyes widened, and an exclamation escaped his lips. "Damn! Bella is here too. Did I miss something? And who the hell is that guy next to her? Why is his face so pale? Is he sick?!"

Justin's heart skipped a beat as he hurried to the railing. In a VIP box across the hall, Bella and Christopher were both seated, exchanging glances while fully engrossed in their cheerful conversation.

On the other side, Bella was completely unaware of the green-eyed observers. With fewer people on the second floor and the air conditioning running, the hall was colder than usual. Thus, Bella, wearing only a thin emerald green evening gown, had small goosebumps forming on her arms.

Christopher noticed her shivering and, without a word, took off his suit jacket and kneeled in

front of her.

"Christopher, what are you doing...?" Bella's eyes widened in surprise.

He covered her slender legs with his suit jacket and said, "If your legs are warm, won't feel so cold anymore."

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With a charming smile, he continued, "Initially, I thought about suggesting you wear this jacket, but your dress is just too stunning. You're like a siren from ancient Greek mythology. I wouldn't want to hide your beauty."

Bella, feeling a bit flustered, shifted her

toes uncomfortably in her high heels. The direct and bold gesture from Christopher was a stark contrast to what she was used to. 'Perhaps men in

Sentania are always this bold. Maybe this is why Camilla fell for her husband!'

Meanwhile, Justin, who was watching from afar, could not hide his growing frustration. Watching Christopher kneel in front of Bella heightened Justin's emotions. He held on tightly to the railing until his knuckles turned white.

The prominent blue veins on his hands revealed the tension building up within him.

In the midst of all this, Justin could not help but wonder about the true nature of Bella's relationship with Christopher. The question lingered in his mind. 'Were they really just friends, or was there something more?'

In an instant, Justin's chest tightened as he held his breath, wary of the subtle ache intensifying.

"Who the hell is that guy?!"

Ryan, who once had his eye on Bella, felt a twinge of dissatisfaction seeing another suitor by his goddess's side, despite the fact that she had completely rejected him.

He complained, "He must be a wolf in sheep's clothing. Also, look at how pale he is! Is he a vampire?"

Justin's gaze was still fixated on Bella. His voice was as cold as ice. "He's Chairman Iverson's youngest son, Christopher."

Ryan was momentarily stunned. "The Iversons? Why do I have no memory of him?!"

Justin explained, "He has been in Sentania for over a decade and has just recently returned to Savrow."

"The Iversons are indeed a tough nut to crack. Why is everyone so eager for Bella's attention? The rivalry sure is heating up!" Ryan squinted his eyes as he spoke, his eyes fixated on Justin's tense expression.

“Justin, you know the saying, even the sturdiest tree can sway in strong winds. You’ve got two options—either retreat gracefully or face the challenge head-on. It’s your choice.”

Justin took a deep breath and clenched his teeth. “Just keep your mouth shut!”

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The concert officially began.

The renowned pianist, Christian, gracefully ascended the stage. She was adorned in an elegant deep blue velvet gown. Seated at the entirely black grand piano, she began to perform her renowned composition, ‘Seasons in the Wind’, captivating the audience.

The audience was immersed in the enchanting melody, and a tranquil hush filled the auditorium.

Even though the piano piece was lovely, Bella’s attention was fixated on Christian’s dark blue gown. This unique haute couture dress was the only one of its kind in the world. It was personally designed by the internationally acclaimed fashion designer Sharon-Bella herself. Individuals of such international high-end talent, celebrity status, and virtuous character, with a distinguished reputation, were the only ones deemed worthy to wear a gown designed by Sharon.

Justin sat through the performance, but it did not capture his interest at all. His fists were clenched so tight that his arms subtly trembled.

Throughout the concert, he tried hard to hide his frustration, but his eyes stayed fixed on Bella. She looked stunning, and every move she made seemed to bother him.

Occasionally, Christopher and Bella leaned in, exchanging soft, whispered words. Bella nodded with a playful glint in her eyes, seeming like she was genuinely entertained by whatever Christopher was saying.

Justin pressed his lips together, and he gripped his fists so hard that his veins popped out. His face turned pale, like it was covered in a layer of frost.

He could not look away.

'What could they possibly be talking about? Bella was married to me for three years and spent every day living with me, so why does she have more to say to him?'

As the concert progressed, Ryan was baffled by the sudden cold. "Damn, why is it suddenly so cold? The air conditioning is too strong..."

Christian played a few more pieces before the spotlight shifted to Zoe, Christian's talented protege. Zoe graced the stage in a stunning green chiffon gown, embellished with silk flowers. This accentuated her ethereal charm, making her appear like a forest fairy.

Ryan, excited to see his sister on stage, enthusiastically waved at her. "Zoe! Zoe, look over here! It's your brother!"

Justin was irritated by Ryan's behavior and had the urge to kick him down from the balcony. Meanwhile, Zoe, who was on stage, remained blissfully unaware of her brother's disruptive antics on the second floor. Her face, as radiant as a full moon, beamed with a confident smile as she elegantly bowed to the audience below.

Soon after, she gracefully positioned herself in front of the piano, resembling a swan's elegance. Her ten fingers delicately touched the black and white keys, producing a seamless flow of smooth notes,

The classical composition was Mozart's "Turkish March".

Bella gazed at Zoe's captivating performance. Her eyes were gleaming with admiration. However, a subtle hint of envy lingered beneath the surface.

Her left hand rested on her lap, and with the precision of well-trained muscle memory, her fingers effortlessly followed the lively melody. Surprisingly, the once-crippled little finger seemed to regain vitality.

Christopher, captivated by Bella's graceful movements, spoke with affection. "I remember how well you played the piano as a child." He leaned in, whispering in her ear, "If you had chosen to pursue music back then, your skill would undoubtedly surpass hers by now."

However, Bella brushed aside the idea, her trembling fingers clenching tightly. "It's impossible," she declared, her certainty evident in her voice. "Those days are long gone."

During the battle in Kridor, she carried the heavily injured Justin back to the army camp. The ligaments in her left hand suffered severe damage, leaving her little finger completely paralyzed and powerless. Countless rehabilitation sessions and hours of effort and sweat were poured into restoring the remaining fingers to a semblance of normalcy.

However, Bella harbored no regrets about saving Justin.

Despite the hurt he deeply inflicted upon her, they once fought side by side for world peace. It was not Justin the scumbag she saved, but a soldier in the peacekeeping force. Her wounds were not a reminder of her mistakes but rather a badge of personal, supreme honor.

As the concert concluded successfully, Christian, accompanied by her talented protégé, Zoe, took a bow as they received flowers and applause.

"Bella, would you mind joining me backstage?" Christopher smiled and extended an invitation to Bella.

"Is there something you need, Christopher?" Bella inquired.

"I have a personal matter. My mother is a big fan of Ms. Christian, so I'd like to request a signed album from her."

Bella responded, "Christian is quite proud, so it might be challenging."

Christopher's eyes softened with a gentle smile. "It's okay. Sincerity can move mountains. As long as I have the chance to meet her and genuinely express my request, there's a chance she will agree."

Ryan beamed with pride, laughing all the way while carrying a large bouquet of flowers backstage with Justin.

Unexpectedly, from the other end of the corridor, Bella and Christopher walked side by side toward them. The vast and open corridor suddenly felt narrow and cramped.

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The atmosphere instantly became tense. Bella was caught off guard as her eyes unexpectedly locked with Justin's intense gaze. Her delicate eyebrows furrowed with annoyance.

Christopher also seemed to be taken aback. He adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses with his fingertips. After a brief moment, his gaze turned somewhat awkward.

"Sorry, Bella, I didn't know he would be here before bringing you. Let's forget about the autograph. We should leave first."

"It's okay. I don't mind."

Bella smiled nonchalantly, unfazed by Justin's unexpected appearance. "There's no law in our country that says we have to take a detour when we encounter an ex-husband, right? Besides, I really hope you can get the autograph and fulfill Mrs. Iverson's small wish."

Christopher's sharp eyes widened. He gazed deeply at Bella, profoundly moved. However, the expression on Justin's face turned increasingly gloomy.

The distance between them was not too far, so Bella's voice was distinctly audible to him. Despite the fact that Justin and Bella had already divorced, Justin found himself unable to resist the pull of conflicting emotions during the concert. When he heard Bella express concern for Christopher's mother,

he could no longer contain himself. He urgently wanted to approach Bella and ask how far she had progressed in her relationship with Christopher.

He battled an internal struggle, fearing potential embarrassment if he approached Bella. These were futile thoughts. After all, they had already parted ways. But against his better judgment, his heart seemed to steer him toward her uncontrollably.

Suddenly, the door to the dressing room swung open.

“Justin!”

A crisp, doll-like voice broke the tense atmosphere. Before Justin could fully grasp the situation, a soft, green mass immediately engulfed his tall figure.

Zoe, Ryan’s younger sister, clung to Justin like a koala. Her rosy face nestled against his chest as she coquettishly asked, “Justin, did you come just to watch my performance? Were you planning to surprise me?”

Justin’s demeanor shifted abruptly. His entire body tensed up. His eyes darted toward Bella discreetly, but Ryan remained blissfully unaware of his sister’s behavior. In his

eyes, the interaction between Justin and Zoe appeared ordinary, reminiscent of their playful childhood days. It seemed perfectly normal to him.

But he forgot that they were no longer children.

Zoe, already 22 years old, had blossomed into a graceful young woman. Moreover, she and Justin were not blood relatives, making her current behavior rather inappropriate.

Especially considering it was happening right in front of Bella.

“Come on, Justin! Give me a hug!”

Zoe's arms tightened around Justin's waist. She raised her face, making enthusiastic requests,

completely disregarding the presence of others. Perhaps it was because there were others that she became even more uninhibited. She wished everyone could envy her and Justin's intimate relationship.

However, Justin remained stiff as a rock. He refused to respond to Zoe.

His gaze was fixed on Bella ever since she appeared. Zoe, sensitive to the nuances, quickly realized that Justin's attention was not on her at all.

Following the direction of his gaze, Zoe instantly spotted Bella standing not far away, radiating beauty as if a goddess had descended to earth. Jealousy ignited within her, and her eyes darkened with envy.

Ryan was completely oblivious to the situation and said, "Zoe, now that you have Justin, have you forgotten about your real brother?" He pouted and teased, "I want some hugs, too! Come give your brother a hug!"

"You have so many admirers. You can go get hugs from them," Zoe retorted, lifting her hand with a mischievous smile, ready to touch Justin's chiseled jaw.

She continued, "Ryan is so sleazy. I prefer Justin-cool and broody-totally my type!"

Justin furrowed his brows. He turned away from Zoe's touch.

At that moment, he abruptly noticed something. Bella's gaze was calm, and her graceful figure was striding towards him with an air of elegance.

Justin's breath caught in his throat, and his heartbeat raced as if it might burst out of his chest.

Bella gracefully tilted her head up, maintaining eye contact with Justin as she walked closer. At that moment, it felt like every drop of blood in his body seemed to converge at the tip of his heart. His throat tightened, and the muscles in his body tensed even further. It was as if every part of him was urging him to be with Bella, longing to reach out to her right then.

Zoe, noticing Justin's reaction, furrowed her brows slightly. She held onto him tightly, as if guarding a precious treasure. Her overwhelming sense of possessiveness was triggered. She could sense that Justin not only knew this beautiful woman but also cared deeply for her!

Just when Justin thought Bella was approaching him, she unexpectedly turned like a gentle breeze, gliding past him.

"Christian!" Bella called out, leaving the bewildered Justin behind her.

"Oh! My sweetheart!" Christian, walking from the other end of the corridor, saw Bella as if encountering a long-lost friend. She waved at Bella with immense excitement and greeted her with kisses on the cheek. It was evident how close the two of them were.

Everyone, including the three men and Zoe, was left speechless.

Having been Christian's protege for three years, Zoe knew Christian as a solitary and somewhat arrogant person. Christian rarely shared compliments and often had a sour expression.

'How did this woman effortlessly earn the rare sight of a smile from her mentor?'

"My dear, I never expected to see you in Savrow! OMG... If only I had known, I would have cleared my schedule to have dinner with you!" Christian joyfully embraced Bella.

"You still have rehearsals to prepare for. I wouldn't want to disturb you." Bella spoke fluent French, her tone soft and intimate as if it were her native language.

Bella used her identity as Sharon in her interactions with Christian, who had not only ordered more than one custom dress from her but had also developed a close personal relationship with her. It could be said that Bella had a magical charm. Anyone who collaborated with her would eventually become her friend.

As Justin watched Bella chat happily with the internationally renowned pianist Christian, memories of the past flooded his mind. His shoulders shuddered slightly, and suddenly, everything he thought about the world turned upside down.

He remembered the early days of his marriage, when Bella's eyes used to light up with joy, much like Zoe's. Bella would come across interesting things, chatting away like those young girls.

However, he often neglected her, not sparing her a single glance. Gradually, Bella became quieter, transforming into a silent presence at Tideview Manor, standing by his side.

In those three years, Bella had no social life, and the arts and scholarly pursuits gave way to the mundane daily chores. Justin found her uninteresting, thinking she fell short in every aspect compared to Rosalind. He believed marrying Bella was a regrettable mistake.

Little did he realize, he nearly destroyed Bella with his own hands.

His emotional abuse had turned Bella into a docile and submissive woman, someone who walked on eggshells and settled for compromises. The deep affection Bella once had for him, was like the Titanic colliding with an iceberg. Even the flame-like fervor of their romance ultimately became a heartbreaking disaster.

"Mr. Iverson, come over!" Bella's eyes sparkled as she looked beyond Justin towards Christopher. She waved at him with a cheerful smile.

Christopher hastily adjusted his tie and the corners of his clothes and said, "I'm coming!"

A hint of nervousness appeared in his usually composed features as he strode toward Bella with determined steps.

Justin clenched his fingers tightly, bitterness piercing through his chest, while Ryan was seething with jealousy.

Just as Christopher and Justin brushed past each other, Christopher suddenly halted. He smirked and adjusted his glasses as he glanced sideways, directed at Justin, who exuded the triumphant mockery of a victor.

Christopher's contemptuous gaze was like a sharp blade, cutting into Justin's heart and leaving it in a blurry mess. Justin watched helplessly as the man walked to Bella's side and stood shoulder-to-shoulder with her.

Justin witnessed everything unfold and yet felt powerless. 'Is this all I can do? Can I only be a useless bystander? Is there no way to stop their relationship from developing further?'

In the midst of this tension, Bella introduced Christopher to Christian, the renowned pianist.

Bella grinned. "Christian, this is my friend, Christopher. His mother is a big fan of yours, so he's hoping to get a signed album from you as a memento for her."

"Of course! I would be happy to!" Christian graciously complied, displaying an unexpected warmth.

Not only did Christian provide a signed album, but she also asked her manager to capture the moment. As the trio posed for a photo, a bitter taste filled Justin's heart. The scene was a mix of complex emotions, rivalry, and an underlying sense of powerlessness for Justin.

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Exiting the concert hall, Zoe, reminiscent of her childhood self, clung to Justin's arm throughout, sharing her overseas adventures with him while expressing her yearning for Justin.

The only difference from her childhood habits was that she used to hold Justin's hand with her left and her elder brother, Ryan, with her right. But now, her elder brother had been reduced to a mere bag carrier, completely forgotten. Her entire heart was dedicated to Justin.

Ryan trailed behind them, his lips downturned, wearing a discontented expression. With Bella absent and his sister paying him no mind, Savrow's most renowned playboy was beginning to question his worth.

Upon reaching the parking lot, Justin abruptly halted. He took a deep breath and decisively withdrew his hand from Zoe's grasp.

"Justin? What's wrong?" Zoe blinked innocently. Her small hand froze in mid-air.

"Zoe."

Justin turned to look at her with a stern face. His gaze was no longer as gentle as it used to be during her childhood. It carried a sense of distance, sending her a chill that made her uneasy.

"You're a young lady now and no longer a little girl, so certain behavior with me is inappropriate."

"Why is it inappropriate? You are like my second brother!" Zoe, feeling a bit anxious, insisted, "Is there something wrong with a younger sister holding her big brother's hand?"

"Ryan is your real brother, and I'm not, so I won't condone such behavior." Justin stopped his words there, refraining from expressing anything further.

Zoe pouted, looking all innocent but holding a trace of anger in her heart. She couldn't help but think that Justin's sudden change of attitude was because of that beautiful woman. Finally, with Rosalind striking out, Zoe hurriedly returned to Savrow when Justin was at his loneliest and in need of companionship. She planned to captivate his heart and claim victory.

She could not allow another woman to appear out of nowhere and disrupt her plans to win over this man she had a crush on for so many years.

"Justin, your words are too hurtful."

Ryan, being a caring brother, could not bear to see his sister suffer even a bit. He swiftly approached and enveloped Zoe in his arms. "You've seen Zoe grow up. You used to carry her all the time, so holding hands now shouldn't be a big deal. Besides, you're not in a relationship now. If you get a wife, it's right to maintain a distance from the opposite sex. But we're both bachelors, so we shouldn't be concerned about such things."

"Zoe will have a boyfriend in the future. Her hands should be reserved for her future boyfriend to hold."

Justin took a deep breath. He inexplicably pictured Bella's face when he said, "My hands should be reserved for my woman to hold."

After parting ways with Christopher, Bella got into her own Rolls-Royce.

"Achoo-!"

Not sure if it was due to the cold air in the concert hall, Bella sneezed continuously.

"Ms. Bella, are you catching a cold? When we get back, I'll prepare some medicine and make ginger tea for you." Steven hurriedly handed her a tissue.

Bella wiped her nose. The tip of her small nose turned red. "It's nothing. I think someone is badmouthing me behind my back."

"I never imagined that we would encounter Jerkface Justin even at a concert!" Steven grumbled in annoyance. He took the tissue from his boss without minding the snot.

A shadow crossed Bella's beautiful eyes when she thought about how Zoe had hugged, snuggled, and touched Justin.

'That contemptible man indulged the little girl's flirtatious antics. Deep down, he probably enjoys it.'

In reality, she had long been aware that Zoe was Ryan's sister, but she remained oblivious to Justin's connection with Zoe, especially the level of intimacy between them. Bella sneered and shook her head. She felt her three years of marriage to Justin had indeed been futile. She knew too little about that man.

"This scoundrel isn't content with having two sisters and wants to recruit more. How vulgar." "Ms. Bella, what are you talking about?" Steven asked in confusion as he saw her muttering to herself.

"It's nothing, just casting a spell to dispel the bad luck of encountering that bastard," Bella said, crossing her arms and closing her eyes to relax.

In just a few seconds, her phone rang. It was Asher on the line.

"Ash?"

"Bella, the day after tomorrow, when you finish work, don't leave right away. I'll come to the hotel to pick you up, and we'll head back to Hatchbay."

"Go back to Hatchbay? Did something happen to Dad?" Bella's heart suddenly tightened.

"Don't worry, Dad is fine."

Asher's voice softened. "Uncle Lance is bringing his two sons to our house for dinner, so Dad wants all of his children who can make it to attend. They've been friends for over 20 years, and Dad doesn't want to neglect the guests."

Bella's tense heart relaxed, and she took a breath. "Alright."

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The moon was bright in the night sky, with no stars in sight.

The Maybach halted at Tideview Manor. Mr. Salvador stepped out alone, instructing the driver, "Take Mr. Harris back. I'll go in by myself. No need to follow."

"But, Mr. Salvador, it's going to rain. I heard thunder on our way back." Ian was concerned. There is still some distance from the main gate to the manor. It might be better to escort you in."

"No need."

Justin's features were cold and deep. He lightly tugged at his Windsor knot tie and said, "I feel a bit stuffy, so I want to take a walk. You may leave."

"Yes, sir."

Ian leaned against the car window like a loyal guard dog and watched Justin until the car completely disappeared into the night.

Justin took a deep breath and turned to walk toward the manor. However, before he could take more than a few steps, a loud clap of thunder echoed, and it began to pour.

By the time Justin entered the house, he was completely drenched from head to toe. The harsh rain and fall winds were chilly and unyielding, and the stuffiness in his chest was particularly bothersome.

Wilma rushed over in a panic. "Oh my goodness! Young Master! How did you get soaked like this?! Where's the driver? And where's Ian?!"

His face was pale. His jet-black hair that covered his twinkling eyes was soaked, and his lips trembled. Water dripped from his arms that were hanging at his sides. He looked like a stunning sea god that had just emerged from the sea and transformed into his human form.

"Wilma..."

His throat tightened, and he asked in a hoarse tone, "Is there any wine? I want a drink." "You're soaked, and you still want to drink alcohol? Are you out of your mind? I'll go make some ginger tea for you. Hurry upstairs and get changed!" Wilma was deeply concerned. She turned to leave, but Justin grabbed her.

"I just want to drink wine. Let me drink."

"Young Master, what's going on with you?" Wilma had a sense that something was not right. Unable to bear it any longer, Justin said, "I ran into Bella tonight."

"Young Madam? You saw the young madam?" Wilma was initially pleased, but Justin's next words made her furrow her brows.

"Someone is with her."

"Who?"

"She has a boyfriend." The words came abruptly from Justin's lips, his voice husky and broken.

Wilma gasped, inhaling a cold breath and staring in astonishment. "So soon?! Well, I guess that's expected. Young Madam is outstanding, beautiful, kind-hearted, and has a prestigious background. Even after a divorce, she will surely have plenty of suitors. She won't have trouble remarrying."

'Remarry?'

Justin's eyes turned bloodshot, and his heart pounded heavily.

"So, is it because Young Madam has a boyfriend that you're like this? You drenched yourself in the rain and want to drink away your sorrows?" Wilma looked at him with a serious

expression.

"I don't know..." Justin shook his head absentmindedly.

"Young Master, if you're feeling uneasy because Young Madam's love, which was originally meant for you, has been given to someone else, I advise you to quickly adjust your mindset and let it go. It will be good for both you and Young Madam. But if you genuinely desire Young Madam as a person, even though you two are separated now and it may feel like it's too late, I still hope you can figure out your own heart and try to chase Young Madam back."

Wilma placed her warm hands on Justin's damp shoulders. Her gaze was intense. "Young Master, even if it turns out to be in vain in the end, at least you won't regret trying. Besides, Young Madam deserves it."

'Figure out my own heart?' Justin kept shaking his head, continually denying something in his aching heart. But with each denial, his heart would ache even more.

After graduating from the Royal Music Academy in Inalia, Zoe was selected to join the Royal Symphony Orchestra. However, she ultimately gave up the position and chose to return to

Savrow.

Despite being an economic center, Savrow lacked the cultural richness of Inalia. It was permeated with the scent of money and materialism, making it an unwise decision to come back for someone seeking an artistic atmosphere.

However, she had her own secret plans-plans even Ryan, her elder brother, was unaware of.

Upon learning from her elder brother that Justin had definitively broken up with Rosalind and that there was no possibility of reconciliation, Zoe was reignited with hope. In a hurry, she returned to Savrow, ready to embark on her mission to conquer the man.

With nothing else to do that day, Zoe invited Bethany to her home.

Accustomed to being pampered, Zoe was haughty, arrogant, and self-assured in her beauty. As a result, she generally looked down upon women in Savrow's elite circles.

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Yet, Zoe was exceptionally close to Bethany, driven solely by a simple reason-Bethany was from the Salvador family.

In Zoe's eyes, only individuals with such prestigious family backgrounds were worthy of her friendship.

"Oh, Bethany, you look so beautiful today! Oh, you brought a gift. That's incredibly

thoughtful of you." Zoe greeted Bethany at the door with a radiant smile. The two appeared as affectionate best friends, holding hands.

"Zoe! I've missed you so much! You look even prettier than the last time we met!" Bethany showered her with compliments, all while harboring her own ulterior motives.

Given Ryan's affection for his younger sister, establishing a good relationship with Zoe would provide Bethany with a reason to frequently visit the Hoffmans.

Bethany intended to take a subtle approach to win Zoe's favor. If Zoe were to speak highly of her to Ryan, she could swiftly ascend to the position of the young madam of the Hoffman family.

Bethany was truly quite cunning.

"A few days ago, I traveled around Europe and bought some souvenirs. I bought something for you and for Mrs. Hoffman. They're not very valuable, so please don't be disappointed."

Zoe gazed at the mountain of luxurious gift boxes, a sly smile playing on her lips. "Is there a gift for my big brother in there?"

"Yes, there is... I was worried your big brother might not like it and wouldn't accept it..." Bethany blushed, shyly lowering her head.

“Oh, look at you! How deep is your affection for him, blushing like a peach at the mere mention of him?”

Zoe playfully beckoned with her finger toward Bethany. “Leave it to me. He’ll accept it as long as I give it to him.”

“Thank you so much, Zoe! You’re the best!” Bethany felt elated and promptly retrieved the gift intended for Ryan.

Zoe took the exquisite box, opened it, and discovered a platinum tie pin with sapphires embedded at both ends—a clearly valuable item.

At that moment, Ryan descended the vintage-style spiral staircase in a YSL purple haute couture suit. He wore a rose-patterned black silk shirt underneath, maintaining an ethereal and noble air about him.

Bethany stared in admiration at her idol, her mouth slightly agape, almost on the verge of drooling.

Zoe called out sweetly to her elder brother. “Ryan!”

Ryan, who had been smiling indulgently at his sister, turned cold and distant at the sight of Bethany.

“Ms. Bethany, what brings you here?”

“I... I...” Bethany stammered, nervously swallowing.

“Ryan, I invited Bethany to visit our home,” Zoe said as she embraced Bethany, leaning intimately on her shoulder. “We have always had a great relationship, didn’t you know? She’s

best friend in Savrow.”

my

“Is that so? I really didn’t know.”

Ryan squinted, offering mock advice. “Zoe, I don’t oppose you making friends, but be discerning in your choice of friends. Some friends guide you, while others lead you astray.”

Zoe discreetly glanced at Bethany, who was now pale with embarrassment.

“I understand, Ryan. I’m already 22! Don’t you think I can distinguish between good and bad people?” Zoe replied calmly.

“I know you haven’t been in Savrow much in these years, and you don’t have many friends here. If you really want to make friends, I can introduce you to Ms. Bella Thompson. She’s the beautiful lady you saw last night.” Ryan suggested. His tone softened when he mentioned Bella. “Coincidentally, she’s acquainted with your mentor, Christian. You’ll surely have a lot in common.”

Zoe sneered inwardly at the suggestion. What a joke! How could she be friends with her love rival?

Ryan walked over to his sister, gently pinching her cheek. As he was about to leave, Zoe took the opportunity to place the gift in his hand.

“Ryan, this is a gift Bethany specially selected for you. She put a lot of thought into it, so you must accept it with care,” Zoe said, blinking her innocent, charming eyes at him.

Ryan took the box without saying anything, striding away with effortless grace.

“You see,

I told you. As long as it’s from me, he will definitely accept it,” Zoe boasted, hands on her hips.

Bethany was so moved and excited that tears welled up in her eyes as she looked gratefully at

Zoe.

Ryan walked calmly to the doorway, his composed face revealing nothing.

He coldly glared at the delicate box, not even desiring to open it. He raised his arm, seemingly prepared to toss it far away.

Then, recalling his sister's words, he spotted his female secretary by the car. He licked the tip of his tongue against his upper palate and flung the box towards her.

The secretary hurriedly caught it, looking puzzled. "Mr. Hoffman, what is this...?"

"A gift for you."

She opened it and stared in confusion. "But Mr. Hoffman, this is a men's tie clip. I don't even have a boyfriend. I have no use for it."

Ryan glared irritably. "Don't you have a father? If not, use it to clip some documents. I don't

care what you do with it."

Chapter 319

Since Ryan was not around and Mrs. Hoffman was still convalescing abroad, Bethany's scheme to earn some brownie points faced a temporary setback. However, the thrill of Ryan accepting her gift made her heart race. She might not be able to fall asleep tonight.

In the afternoon, the two of them enjoyed the fall scenery beneath the enormous parasol tree in the Hoffman family's backyard, sipping afternoon tea.

“Zoe, when did you meet Bella?” Bethany’s internal alarms blared, carrying a mix of hatred and jealousy directed at Bella.

“I bumped into her backstage the day before yesterday during my master’s music performance,” Zoe replied nonchalantly.

With a relaxed posture, legs crossed, Zoe took a sip of black tea and glanced at Bethany, inquiring, “From the tone of your voice, it seems like you have a grudge against Bella.”

“Grudge? More like an irreconcilable feud!”

“Is it that serious?”

“Zoe, you’ve been abroad for a long time, so there are many things you don’t know.” Bethany gritted her teeth, her voice dripping with disdain.

“Bella is like a puppet master pulling the strings, manipulating Justin’s and Ryan’s every move, and causing complete chaos!”

“The Salvador family is in utter chaos because of this woman!”

“What? My elder brother likes her too?” Zoe’s eyes darkened.

“Ryan was seduced by that bitch! Bella is quite skilled at captivating men. She’s a natural-born temptress!” Bethany was on the verge of exploding. Her cheeks flushed in anger. “But luckily, they are not as close now. I suppose that vixen has found a new target.”

“Ryan doesn’t get seduced by just anyone. He’s usually the one who fools around with women, not the other way around. Bella has probably already been with Ryan. He just never sleeps with the same woman twice. She’s just a plaything for him. He won’t get serious. I know him too well.”

Shifting her focus to Bethany's troubled expression, Zoe quickly reassured her with a comforting smile. "But Bethany, you're different. Our families have a good relationship. With me around, I'll ensure you win Ryan's favor."

Bethany was moved to tears. "Aww, Zoe! You're such a good friend!" She felt like she had embarked on a journey toward happiness.

"By the way,

Zoe the most.

what's going on between Bella and Justin?" This was the matter that concerned

"Heh, talking about this makes me even angrier!" Bethany clenched her fists tightly, expressing her hatred. "She is Justin's ex-wife!"

"What did you say?!" Zoe suddenly stood up, and the precious tea cup in her hand fell onto the lawn. "Ex-wife?! How is that possible? Didn't Justin just break up with Rosalind? He hasn't even gotten married! How can there be an ex-wife?!"

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"Ah, you don't know. They had a secret marriage, and they just divorced recently. Additionally, my grandfather was the one who set them up.

Noticing Zoe's interest in Justin, Bethany added fuel to the fire. "Even after their divorce, Justin and Bella remained close. Rosalind tried to cling to him and make a scene twice, but Justin hadn't completely moved on from Bella! Rosalind brought it upon herself by annoying Justin with her silly tricks, but can he deny his decision to break up with her had no connection with that vixen, Bella?"

This time, it was Zoe's turn to be furious.

“No wonder! That night, Justin’s gaze toward that woman seemed like he was entranced.” Zoe, with a tinge of bitterness, clenched her jaw.

Zoe continued, “Rosalind struggled for more than ten years to win his heart. How did that woman become his wife? On what grounds?!”

Zoe’s words left a sour taste in her mouth. “Bethany, if you don’t mind, let me be your sister- in-law!”

Upon hearing this, Bethany was left speechless. She thought to herself, ‘This girl really doesn’t see herself as an outsider!’

“I certainly don’t mind! Compared to that ruthless and scheming Rosalind, of course, I would hope you become part of our family!” Bethany quickly expressed her loyalty.

“Since we both have clear goals, why don’t we form an alliance and work together? What do you think?” Zoe approached Bethany, bent down, and placed her hands firmly on her shoulders. “I’ll help you win my brother’s heart, and you can help me with Justin. How does that sound?”

“Zoe, you’re aware of my family dynamics. I have a half-sibling relationship with Justin and am not as close to him as you are to Ryan... I’m afraid I won’t be of much help to you!” Bethany’s words were

genuinely heartfelt, and in her eyes, this was almost as difficult as reaching for the heavens.

Chapter 320

“Mr. and Mrs. Salvador deeply cherish you! You can assist me in gathering information, serving as my inside source. By combining our efforts, the advantages will outweigh the drawbacks, especially when confronting Bella. I think it’s definitely more advantageous if we work together!” Zoe’s eyes flickered with desire.

Upon learning Zoe’s plan to deal with Bella, Bethany immediately lit up, full of enthusiasm.” Alright, let’s form an alliance! We’ll see how that despicable Bella dares to act arrogantly in Savrow in the future!”

Zoe crossed her arms, and her boldly painted lips exuded an air of arrogance and confidence.

Zoe had enjoyed a life of luxury, endlessly pampered by her parents and brother since childhood. She attended school alongside members of the royal family and won international awards. Her entire life had unfolded under the spotlight and applause.

She had never tasted defeat. Whatever she desired, she never failed to obtain it.

—‘My hand is reserved for the woman I love.’

Zoe thought to herself, ‘I won’t let you slip away again, Justin. I am determined to marry you. I am the only one destined to hold your hand!’

In the blink of an eye, the day arrived for the return to Hatchbay.

To make it back in time for the evening banquet, Bella dedicated the entire day to a whirlwind of activities—approving documents, attending meetings, and delving into wedding plans. Her schedule was relentless.

Fortunately, the efforts yielded gratifying results.

Guided by Bella’s leadership, Ada Wang’s wedding plan saw successful completion after days of collaborative teamwork.

As Bella declared the words “approved”, cheers erupted from the crowd, creating a joyous atmosphere no less exhilarating than the celebration of a successful Olympic bid.

Collaborating with Bella demanded both robust mental and physical endurance. Otherwise, someone might succumb midway. Yet, during this period, not a single complaint was voiced, and there was no hint of retreat.

Despite her elevated status, Bella personally immersed herself in the tasks at hand, showing no pretense as the heiress of KS Group. She worked just as hard as they did, providing a continuous supply of meals, coffee, and snacks, never shortchanging anyone.

Although Bella upheld high standards and pursued perfection, her words flowed with grace, revealing a blend of creativity and ingenuity. When others faced challenges, she effortlessly provided timely solutions, earning admiration and appreciation from all.

“Everyone, thanks for the tremendous effort during this period. Take a well-deserved three- day break to rest and recharge. Then, head to the dining director’s office to pick up two deluxe buffet vouchers and treat yourselves. I have an appointment later, so unfortunately, I won’t be hosting a meal for us.”

Bella stood at the head of the oval-shaped conference table. Her fair and slender arms rested on the table’s edge as she smiled at the crowd. “Once we secure Ada Wang, you won’t just get bonuses and paid time off. You’ll also get those trips to the Maldives or Iceland that you guys talk about! I’ll pay for it out of my own pocket, so you can have fun. I’m a woman of my word!”

“All hail, Ms. Thompson!” The crowd cheered, raising their arms in excitement.

Although the bid had not yet succeeded, Bella’s encouraging words infused everyone with a glimmer of hope.

It was already 5:00 p.m. by the time Bella left the conference room.

“Ms. Bella, I’ve prepared your attire for the dinner. It’s in the dressing room. Would you like to change now?” Steven followed behind her and asked gently.

“I’m too lazy to bother. Uncle Lance has seen me grow up, and he’s like a brother to Wyatt. He’s witnessed all kinds of moments from my childhood.”

Observing that time was running out, Bella and Steven entered the executive elevator.

As the elevator descended, she adjusted her hair in the reflective doors and meticulously applied lipstick to her delicate lips. Like the final stroke on a canvas, her complexion immediately improved.

Witnessing her discreet grooming, Steven smiled adoringly.

Indeed, beneath the assertive and sassy exterior, there was still a soft and adorable young lady.

Engrossed in their thoughts, neither of them noticed that the elevator had already reached the first floor.

Ding-

The doors opened.

Once again, the enchanting scent of violet leaves filled the air, lingering and tantalizing the senses. It was warm, profound, and elegantly elusive.

If this fragrance had a name, Christopher would likely be its creator.

As expected, Bella suddenly raised her gaze and unexpectedly met Christopher's deep, mysterious eyes. In an instant, her pupils slightly contracted. Her hand trembled, and her

carefully applied lipstick deviated from its course, leaving a playful red smudge.

Christopher smiled as he locked his gaze on her surprised expression.

"Ms. Thompson, I've come to take you home."