

Heiress 331

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During this period, although the Salvador Hotel and KS World Hotel appeared to be at peace on the surface, they were quietly competing against each other behind the scenes.

As an international superstar, Ada Wang held a prestigious position in the entertainment industry and always conducted herself in an extremely high-profile manner. She would spare no expense for her wedding. Thus, she would not look at wedding planning proposals unless several top-tier brands sponsored the event.

It was widely known that Ada Wang was a jewelry connoisseur, having privately held small-scale exhibitions of her extensive personal collection, where each piece was valued at no less than a million dollars.

For this grand wedding, Ada Wang presented a demanding requirement to both the Salvador Hotel and the KS World Hotel. The jewelry she would wear must be globally top-notch, made by master craftsmen, and exclusively for her.

“Ms. Ada insisted that only something unique would be fitting for her superstar status.”

Ian faithfully conveyed the agent’s words to Justin and the executives present. “She also mentioned that Ms. Ada won’t make any demands or impose restrictions on the style of the jewelry or the selected designers. She leaves it entirely to the hotel’s wedding planning team to figure it out. Whoever can present jewelry that satisfies her will be chosen to organize her wedding. She means what she says.”

Justin listened with a furrowed brow. His signing pen tapped the table intermittently, and his eyes gradually clouded.

The executives were all in awe, sparking lively discussions.

“She’s clearly taking advantage of the situation! Does she think that the Salvador Hotel and the KS World Hotel are her treasure chest?!”

“What international superstar? A hundred years ago, she would’ve been a jesting performer. Now she thinks she’s some kind of hot cake?”

“She’s practically proposing a half-baked question. Ms. Ada is wasting her talent as a star. Why doesn’t she come up with exam questions?”

Justin suddenly raised his eyes, exuding a strong sense of oppression. “This is a meeting room, not a supermarket. Speak if you have solutions. Otherwise, keep your mouths shut.”

Seeing the big boss angered, everyone dared not babble this time. They racked their brains, each busy offering suggestions.

The director of the Product Design Department listed the names of renowned domestic and international jewelry designers. Not only that, she had prepared a PowerPoint presentation, meticulously introducing the background information and notable works of each designer to Justin.

Justin listened expressionlessly, then suddenly asked, “Why isn’t Alexa mentioned in this list?”

The moment Alexa’s name was uttered, the entire room fell silent.

“What’s going on? Why are you all making those faces?” Justin raised an eyebrow, not understanding why they were as silent as corpses.

“Ahem... Well, Mr. Salvador, forgive me for being straightforward. But it’s absolutely impossible for us to hire Alexa...” The director of the design department spoke cautiously.

“Why? Did she pass away?”

Everyone was speechless.

Justin asked seriously, genuinely not harboring any ill intent.

As the president of Salvador Corporation, Justin was a master in business negotiations and management, but when it came to the intricacies of the jewelry and fashion world, he truly was an outsider.

“It’s not that. Alexa is hailed as a god in the jewelry design world. All of the craftsmen I presented to you just now have praised Alexa endlessly. Some even openly admit that when they lack inspiration, they turn to Alexa’s works to find it. Alexa is simply a titan in the design world, an almost god-like figure. Anyone who can purchase her jewelry considers themselves blessed with a family heirloom. How could we possibly invite her to come out of retirement to design unique jewelry for a superstar like Ada Wang? It’s simply a fantasy.”

The director of the design department was a big fan of Alexa. She even felt that having Alexa design jewelry for a celebrity like Ada was somewhat diminishing the value of the goddess Alexa.

“No matter how legendary she is, she’s human as long as she lives in this world,” Justin said with a strong resolve. He would not consider anything less than the optimal solution. Thus, he proclaimed, “Let’s get Alexa as Ada Wang’s wedding jewelry designer.”

Everyone thought, ‘What the hell?!’

The design department director was anxiously sweating. “Mr. Salvador... The designers I introduced you to are all exceptionally talented. Their works have won numerous international awards and are absolutely commendable.”

Justin shook his head lightly. “I’m not rejecting your choices because they’re not good. On the contrary, you did well. You just overlooked one thing-our competitor.”

The crowd exchanged puzzled glances.

“Our opponent this time is KS World Hotel, Ms. Bella Thompson.”

In the past, whenever this name was mentioned, Justin felt an intense headache. However, this time, his eyes sparkled with admiration and respect for her. “I know Bella very well. Like me, she strives for

excellence in everything she does, always aiming for perfection. We know the requirements Ada Wang has put forth. With the financial strength of KS Group and Bella's decisive approach, do you think she'll settle for anything less than the best?"

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Justin's eyes darkened. "Bella won't do it at all, or she'll aim for the absolute best, leaving no room for her opponents and rendering them powerless to counter. Therefore, we must outdo her and take down Alexa first."

The crowd remained somewhat skeptical. After all, if even Salvador Corporation could not hire someone, was Bella Thompson really capable of being able to secure them?

"I want information on Alexa by the end of the day-not about her work, but about her as a person."

After issuing the command, Justin was about to adjourn the meeting. However, the director of the design department spoke up bravely. "Mr. Salvador, regarding Alexa's works, I can provide you with a wealth of information, but about her as a person, I can only give you one thing."

Justin frowned and turned back. "What is it?"

"She's a woman."

The next day, after the meeting with her team, Bella returned to the general manager's office.

"Steve, I'm a bit hungry. I want some take-out-fried chicken with beer. Hurry and order for me." Bella sat in front of the computer and entered a game while giving instructions to Steven.

"Ms. Bella, how can you be so relaxed?" Steven looked at her, amused. "It's already this late, and you still have the mood for fried chicken. I'm so anxious that I'm about to turn into fried chicken here. Ada Wang's team is seeking a top-notch jewelry designer for her, and Salvador Corporation must have taken some action by now. Why aren't you worried at all? You also rejected the jewelry designer proposals

from the team members, saying you wanted to hire Alexa. Even I know who Alexa is. Hiring Alexa is like inviting a deity to earth! Our time is limited! How can we possibly secure Alexa?"

"If we can't get Alexa, then Salvador Corporation won't get her either. We have nothing to worry about!" Bella spoke nonchalantly and even started to hum a tune.

"But..."

Right at that moment, a video call popped up on the computer screen.

Steven was about to excuse himself, but Bella squinted and stopped him. "It's a call from my friend. You're not an outsider, so you can stay."

Bella accepted the video request.

The next second, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty appeared on the screen.

"It's been a while, Sliva."

"Just a moment ago, Justin, the president of Salvador Corporation in Savrow, contacted me. He hopes that Alexa can come out of retirement to design jewelry for them." Sliva reported to Bella in fluent French.

"Oh? Justin personally contacted you? That's quite a blow to his pride." Bella sighed.

"It doesn't matter who contacts me. The result would be the same. I can't agree to their request."

"If I were the one to ask Alexa to come out of retirement, as Alexa's chief assistant, could you help me out, sliva?" Bella rested her head on her hand, her almond eyes sparkling.

Steven, listening on the side, was in shock. He now understood why Bella seemed so confident during the meeting. It turned out she had a close relationship with Alexa's assistant, so she had a backdoor!

However, the next second, what Sliva said left Steven dumbfounded and utterly astonished.

Sliva leaned closer to the screen and looked at Bella, half-chiding and half-complaining as she smiled. "It's been so hard to reach you, so stop joking with me, Ms. Alexa."

Steven thought, 'Ms. Alexa? Bella was the top international jewelry designer and a legend in the jewelry world-Alexa?!'

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Steve stood there with his mouth wide open in sheer astonishment. However, Bella was calm and even let out a casual yawn.

"Why reveal my identity at this moment? Look, you've scared poor Steve," Bella said.

"Alexa, why haven't we heard from you since you returned to Savrow? Everyone in the studio has been eagerly awaiting your return!" Sliva said as her eyes turned red.

"Sigh, sorry, my dear. For a considerable amount of time, I need to support my family, so I can't get away. You'll have to handle things at the studio in Inalia for now."

Bringing up this matter, Bella sighed guiltily. "But you don't have to worry about the studio closing down. The jewelry pieces I designed in the early years are all invaluable, and the funds are absolutely sufficient to sustain the studio's operation. However, you must tell everyone not to delay their own futures for the sake of following me. If anyone wants to leave my studio, I will offer my blessings without any complaints, including you, Sliva. If you want to leave, you can tell me. There's no need to hold on like this."

Sliva rubbed her eyes. "Alexa, I owe you a debt of gratitude. I will never leave you."

“You’ve supported me so much, and the favor has long been repaid. I don’t want to be your burden. It’s an honor that you want to work for me, but you have the right to choose any life you want.”

Bella’s eyes shimmered with gentle light as she softly laughed. “The reason Alexa has become a legend is because of all of you by my side.”

Listening to Bella, Steven could not help but have tears welling up in his eyes.

At this moment, Steven realized he had been too presumptuous. He had never truly understood Bella. He thought she was a perfect person, but she was practically a deity! He had utterly underestimated her.

“Alexa, if Salvador Corporation contacts me again, I’ll clearly reject them. Moreover, I’ll tell them that Alexa is preparing to collaborate with KS Group to give them a bigger blow.”

Bella lifted her red lips in a smile and said, “Don’t refuse Salvador Corporation outright. If you don’t give them hope, how can you disappoint them?”

Sliva, wide-eyed in surprise, nodded. “I understand what you mean.

“The game hasn’t even started, and Justin hasn’t played his trump card yet. If we win effortlessly and leave them in the dust, won’t it be boring?”

Bella revealed her flawless teeth with a bright smile, and that cunning little fox-like grin reappeared. “I’ve been planning for so long. How can I not give Justin a chance to showcase his talents? When he exerts all his efforts to reach the finish line, only to find his opponent waiting for him, that feeling is far more frustrating than failure, isn’t it?”

As the video call ended, Steven was still in shock from the intense impact of Bella revealing her true identity. Although Bella possessed various talents, the moment he learned she was the real Alexa, he couldn’t help but feel the urge to bow to her and pay his respects.

This was definitely the closest he had ever been to a deity.

“Hello! Earth to Steve!” Bella curved her enchanting eyes and snapped her fingers in front of Steven.

As if breaking out of a trance, Steven returned from his thoughts.

“Steve, do you think what I did was a bit unfair?” Bella leisurely placed both arms on the armrests and spun her chair around.

“Considering how ruthless Justin was to you in the past, I’d say what you did was quite subtle,” Steven said with frustration, gritting his teeth.

“Hmm. With you saying that, I feel reassured.”

Bella closed her beautiful eyes in a relaxed manner, slowly turning the chair half-circle, facing the bright floor-to-ceiling windows.

“I spent three years by Justin’s side. The most agonizing part wasn’t that he didn’t love me; it was that he neglected me and treated me as if I were nothing. What hurt the most was his shameless love for Rosalind while we were married.”

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Bella continued, “I watched him buy solo plane tickets to Meridan repeatedly. I watched as he, the man who feared inconvenience, tirelessly flew to Feranco to have a top-notch craftsman design a unique birthday gift for Rosalind. You can say he has preferences, but back then, I was still his wife. Even if he had no feelings for me, he should have given me a basic level of respect.”

Bella had her back turned to Steven, her tone devoid of any emotion.

It was as if she were a storyteller, narrating a love tragedy with all the drama of a romantic tale.

Steven felt a lump in his chest, kneeling beside Bella like a loyal dog, lifting his face to gaze deeply at his boss.

“For the sake of such a stinking pile of garbage, Justin would heartlessly hurt you. He deserves to die a thousand deaths for his cruelty!”

Bella smiled and waved nonchalantly. “In the past, I would have been full of resentment and unwillingness. But now, I feel calm, almost amused. If Rosalind is a pile of garbage, then Justin is the trash bin. Rosalind has transformed from recyclable waste to non-recyclable waste, but Justin has always been a trash bin. I am affectionate, but not indiscriminate. There’s no need to dwell on a trash bin. However, I am quite entertained by watching Justin tirelessly run around for Alexa. I’d love to see him struggle hard for me, only to end up with nothing in the

end.

She thought to herself, ‘Justin, you’ve always been an unfeeling person. It’s quite a coincidence that I’ve become one too.’

To be in the presence of Alexa, Justin took a chartered flight to Inalia. High in the sky, memories flooded back to him, reminding him of the first year of his marriage to Bella. In that year, amid his busy schedule, he had flown to Feranco to craft “The Flaming Heart” for Rosalind. He had gone to great lengths, even persuading the designer who had crafted jewelry for the royal family.

Never before had he humbled himself to such an extent for anyone. The designer had been moved by his sincerity and reluctantly created the necklace for him. Today, “The Flaming Heart” remained permanently locked away in its box, never to be looked upon again.

The necklace no longer carried his sincere love. Instead, it bore regret and shame.

Justin’s deep gaze was fixed on the opaque layer of clouds. In a trance, above the ethereal clouds, Bella’s radiant face appeared as vivid as spring sunshine.

The illusion felt too real, causing a tremor in his heart. Involuntarily, he reached his hand toward the window.

Yet, it was cold and empty/

He took a deep breath as memories flooded his mind.

“Do you know how much Young Madam loves that necklace? When she heard you were going to give it to Rosalind, she was so envious that tears streamed down her face!”

-“If it were Young Madam, she would never treat a gift from you lightly. She’s the kind of person who even carefully keeps the ties you discard, never willing to let go. She would never do anything to trample on your feelings.”

A sudden spasm of pain gripped Justin’s chest, tearing at him, and his vision blurred. The woman he thought would cherish his sincere feelings had trampled upon them until his heart shattered.

Even in this wreckage, it was something that bled in Bella’s heart, something she cried over and yearned for in her dreams. Justin’s pale lips twisted into a silent, bitter smile.

He thought, ‘What kind of drive compelled Bella to endure three years of suffering by my side? Why was she so infatuated with me?’

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At this moment, Ian walked over with a cup of coffee and placed it on the table.

“Mr. Salvador, I’ve already contacted Ms. Sliva, the person in charge of Alexa’s studio. She said she’s willing to meet you.”

“Really?” Justin’s dim eyes finally lit up.

“Yes, but she only agreed to a meeting, and her attitude seemed quite cold and reluctant.”

Ian sighed with concern. "I'm afraid we might hit a snag in this matter."

"No need to worry. As long as someone from Alexa's team is willing to meet me, we shouldn't give up any hope."

After arriving in Inalia, Justin anxiously waited for three days before finally meeting Sliva, the person in charge, at a café near Alexa's studio. He did not even get to step inside the studio.

"Mr. Salvador, if you don't mind me being straightforward..." Sliva crossed her arms. Her gaze toward Justin was somewhat arrogant. "Up until now, Alexa has only designed and crafted jewelry for the First Lady, royal members, and individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the country, society, and charity. Despite Ada Wang being an international superstar, she still doesn't meet the criteria to summon Alexa for her services."

Ian inwardly rolled his eyes. 'Alexa is so discriminatory. It's just jewelry, not a military medal!'

"Although saying this might make you think I'm showing off, I genuinely don't intend to. In my early years at the Salvador Corporation, I established a charity foundation in my mother's name. Over the years, I've been dedicated to charitable activities, supporting nursing homes, impoverished students,

and orphans in welfare institutions. I hope that Ms. Alexa can take a broader perspective on this matter and not view it as a simple task of creating jewelry for a celebrity. As long as Alexa agrees to collaborate with us, we are open to negotiations regarding compensation."

"Not only that, but all the additional income generated from Ada Wang's wedding at our hotel will be donated to the charity foundation," Justin said firmly.

"Heh, Mr. Salvador, are you insinuating that Ms. Alexa is narrow-minded?" Sliva sneered.

"I have no such intention..." Justin's throat tightened.

“In recent years, there have been plenty of unscrupulous capitalists who claim to be charitable and approach Alexa for jewelry design. Who’s to say that you’re not one of them, Mr. Salvador? Who’s to say that the money flowing into your family’s charity foundation isn’t a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul?” Sliva’s words hit a nerve, and Justin’s expression darkened. His large hand on his knee was clenched into a fist.

Unable to tolerate it any longer, Ian, with his unorthodox yet fluent French, exclaimed, “Ms. Sliva, we came here sincerely for collaboration. Isn’t your choice of words a bit too much?”

Justin maintained his composure, gesturing to Ian to quiet down. “The Salvador Foundation has always been managed by me personally. Every penny raised for charity has transparent and publicly accessible records. I can provide the accounts for your scrutiny.”

Sliva disdainfully curled her red lips and coolly remarked, “I will truthfully convey Mr. Salvador’s sentiments to Alexa, but whether we can collaborate is ultimately up to Alexa herself. After all, there’s been more than just you lately vying for a design opportunity.”

With that, Sliva stood up and left without taking a sip of the coffee on the table. “Is this a case of a little burst of temper, or do women in Inalia hit menopause this early?!” Ian blurted out, his face turning red.

“Let’s not dwell on that for now and prepare the backup plan,” Justin said. His Adam’s apple ‘rolled with difficulty as he loosened his meticulously tied Windsor knot. “The attitude from Alexa’s side is quite tough, and I assume it’ll be the same with Bella. Besides, I don’t believe Bella can offer more favorable conditions than I can.”

“What’s your next move?” Ian asked anxiously.

“Start with Ada Wang, but we can’t slack off on Alexa’s side either,” Justin said, tightly clenching his fist. His starry eyes darkened. “Keep a close eye on Bella’s movements. If she and Alexa take any further action, report it to me promptly.”

After Ian returned to Savrow from Inalia, he closely monitored Bella's activities. However, Justin received an unexpected answer. There were no changes in Bella's routine. Day in and day out, she remained occupied with various tasks at the hotel, not venturing outside Savrow.

Sitting in his office, Justin stared out of the floor-to-ceiling window at the cityscape with a cloud of doubt hanging over his head. With Ada Wang's wedding approaching, was Bella genuinely unruffled? Or had she forsaken the Alexa-related path and chosen a different strategy instead?

The incidents at Rose Manor and the noteworthy event involving Shannon's arrest and Baxim's intervention seemed to make Justin subtly cautious of Bella, this petite woman.

Honestly, who becomes afraid of their ex-wife after a divorce? At that moment, the internal office phone rang, and Justin pressed the speaker button.

The secretary respectfully informed him. "Sir, Mr. Hoffman is here to see you."

"Let him in."

Ryan entered the president's office as if he were entering his own home, casually lounging on the sofa. He seemed almost ready to take off his shoes and climb into bed.

"How many times do I have to say this? You can't just barge in here without an invitation. Do you think I have as much free time as you do?" Justin did not even lift his gaze and focused on signing his documents.

Ryan sneered and mocked him as he spoke. "What invitation? Who do you think you are? The King? Or the Pope? But I do think you resemble a king in the dramas my mother watches. You're both heartless hogs."

Justin snapped the pen shut and sat up straight. "Spit it out if you have something to say. If not, just get lost."

Ryan ignored his remark and continued, "It has been a few days since Zoe has returned to Savrow. My mom invited you to have dinner at our house."

Justin responded, "I've been busy lately. With the Ada Wang situation unresolved, I don't have the mood for social gatherings."

Ryan sneered. "Come on, it's been ages since you saw your godmother. My mom just returned from overseas and insisted on cooking for you. You're not giving her any respect!"

He continued, "My mom remembers your favorite dishes and prepared all the ingredients. If you don't come, she'll be really disappointed."

Justin pursed his lips and answered, "Alright, I'll come."

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"That's more like it! Zoe will be overjoyed when she hears you're coming. Although you popularity in your own family, you're definitely a crowd favorite in my family!" Ryan's spirits lifted immediately upon Justin's agreement.

Suddenly, Justin recalled the incident at the music hall that night. He remembered Zoe's overly intimate actions and felt uncomfortable.

Back then, when he held Zoe's hand to stroll in the park, it was because she was only ten years

old. She was still a cute little girl then, and she was his best friend's sister, so he treated her like a younger sister. Now that she was a grown woman, Justin did not want to be overly intimate with her.

After contemplating for a moment, he muttered, "Zoe..."

At that moment, a knock on the door interrupted his words.

“Come in.”

“Mr. Salvador, I’ve completed the investigation on Young Madam’s relationship with Christopher Iverson, as well as the connection between the Iverson and Thompson families.” Ian barged in with documents, pulling off his trademark loud voice.

Ryan blinked his eyes.

Justin almost broke his pen. His temples throbbed.

“Oh... You have a guest. I’ll take my leave then. Please continue your discussion...” Ian awkwardly chuckled and retreated.

“Tsk, just report it since you’re here. It’s not like I’m a stranger.”

Ryan scoffed wickedly and casually picked up an orange. As he peeled it, he glanced sideways at Justin, observing his somewhat uncomfortable expression. “What’s wrong? You’re still unwilling, so you’ve chosen to confront that man?”

“Eat your orange. It’s none of your business, so don’t ask.” Justin lowered his gaze, but his heart inexplicably skipped a beat.

“Why shouldn’t I ask? Back then, I pursued Bella first. You and that guy should step aside!” Ryan tossed a piece of orange into his mouth, chewing fiercely.

“So what if you pursued her first?” Justin’s dark eyes shimmered with a hidden

possessiveness. He clenched his jaw and said, “She ended up marrying me, and she will never belong to you.”

“Damn it, what’s the use of showing off in front of me when you’re divorced and all?” Ryan wanted to throw the orange in his hand at Justin’s face. His eyes widened. “Go on and chase her back if you’re so great! Why are you snooping around behind her back?”

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“By the time you make up your fickle mind, Bella will probably have a whole bunch of kids with Christopher!” Ryan provoked Justin.

Justin felt a stab in his heart, but he kept his cool and responded with a nonchalant tone. “Who said I’m after Bella? I was just checking up on their collaboration because Bella stole one of my projects. It might mess with some of Salvador Corporation’s plans.”

Ryan laughed and playfully tossed an orange peel at him. “Sure... Say what you want. You’re as stubborn as they come.”

Justin caught the peel. His face turned red with anger as he crushed the orange peel in his hand.

Ian struggled to keep a straight face and put on a serious expression. “Mr. Salvador, it looks like there’s nothing special going on between Young Madam and Christopher. For the past three years, she’s been right by your side. No one else caught her eye. In the last ten years, I’ve found no link between Young Madam and the Iverson family.”

Justin’s expression relaxed a bit upon hearing this.

It seemed Christopher had not quite won over Bella. It was probably just wishful thinking on Christopher’s part. “But a few days ago, I found out that Chairman Iverson took his two unmarried sons, Charles and Christopher, to Hatchbay, presumably to visit Chairman Thompson. Considering the long-standing relationship between the Thompson and Iverson families, Chairman Iverson might be intentionally setting up a union between his two sons and the Thompson family!”

‘A union?!’

Justin and Ryan were both dumbfounded. Bella and Christopher were childhood friends around the same age, and both their families had close ties.

No matter how Justin looked at it, they seemed like a match made in heaven.

A profound sense of crisis swept over Justin and Ryan simultaneously. It was overwhelming and unavoidable.

“Well, I guess it’s game over.”

Ryan shot a meaningful glance at Justin’s flushed face and chuckled. “It seems like even the Iversons are eager to win over my goddess! You know what they say. Good women fear persistent suitors. If Chairman Iverson personally proposes a marriage alliance and Chairman Thompson adds pressure on Bella, it wouldn’t be surprising if Bella agrees in the end.”

Justin’s face turned cold as ice./

Ryan laughed. “Oh boy, it looks like you might be attending your ex-wife’s wedding soon! Considering your history, you should definitely be more generous with the gifts, don’t you think?” Ryan teased and munched on another orange slice.

A strange surge of heat rose within Justin. His voice was noticeably hoarse as he retorted, Impossible! Bella would never agree to a business marriage arranged by her family. She’s not interested in Christopher. A woman who has faced a lion would never dance with a wolf.”

Ryan chuckled. “Whoa, how sour!”

Justin furrowed his brow and shot back. “Ryan!”

“I meant the orange is sour. Why are you so sensitive?” Ryan teased and enjoyed the orange slices.

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In the evening, Justin arrived at the Hoffman residence as planned, accompanied by Ryan. Despite his long-standing familiarity with the Hoffman family and his consideration of Mrs. Hoffman as a godmother since childhood, Justin still observed the necessary etiquette.

He came bearing thoughtful gifts-high-quality supplements known for their health benefits.

Mrs. Hoffman, who held a special place for Justin in her heart, had laid out a table full of delectable dishes. 80% of the spread consisted of Justin's favorite dishes, with the remaining 20% tailored to Zoe's preferences.

Ryan, playfully wielding his fork, complained, "Mom, your favoritism is reaching new heights! I asked for a few specific dishes before I left, but it seems you've completely ignored my requests. They say that after marriage, you forget your mother. It looks like you've forgotten your biological son now that you have your godson, Justin. It's truly heartbreaking!" Ryan quipped.

"You've been enjoying my cooking for over 20 years. Since Justin doesn't come around as often, I naturally have to treat him properly. Don't even try to compare yourself to him in this matter." Mrs. Hoffman playfully shot back at Ryan's complaint.

Upon seeing Justin, Mrs. Hoffman was elated. Her gaze was filled with affection. "Justin, these are all your favorite dishes. Make sure to dig in."

"Thank you, Godmom," Justin responded with a smile and picked up his fork.

"Justin, you've got to try more!" Zoe strategically took a seat next to Justin and used her fork to offer him a taste. "I made this dish just for you. Give it a try!"

However, before her fork could even reach Justin's plate, Justin intercepted it mid-air, causing her smile to freeze.

"Thanks, but I'll help myself to the food."

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The young embarrassed.

and beautiful Zoe blushed instantly upon hearing Justin's remarks, feeling quite

Ryan frowned. "Justin, are you mad at Zoe for trying to serve you with her own fork? She hasn't used it yet, and she offered you the first bite." Being a protective brother, Ryan immediately stepped forward to defend his younger sister.

Quickly, Zoe apologized. "Sorry, Justin. I didn't think it through."

Zoe promptly switched to another fork and attempted to place a piece of fish on Justin's plate, but he stopped her once again.

"I can handle it myself."

Zoe pouted. "I haven't been back in years. Justin, are you trying to distance yourself from me? We used to share ice cream when we were kids!"

"That was back when we were kids. You're not a child anymore." Justin calmly responded as he looked at the food. He picked up a small piece of crab meat and chewed it slowly..

Zoe's heart tightened. Her face darkened as she dejectedly stuffed the fish into her mouth, chewing with force.

Meanwhile, Justin surveyed the exquisite dishes on the table, reminiscing about the times Bella used to cook for him. He understood the time and effort these dishes required. He knew Bella used to spend the entire afternoon in the kitchen, enduring the smoke that made her face oily while holding back her coughs. Yet he had never praised her, not even once.

Even if the dishes reached the level of a state banquet chef, Justin refused to acknowledge her. Each time he ate her food, he found himself craving an extra serving.

An inexplicable pang hit his heart as he thought of the pitiful look in Bella's eyes, eagerly awaiting his praise with starry eyes, only to be disappointed every time.

But after a brief moment of disappointment, Bella always regained her composure and smiled at him cheerfully.

-“Next time, I'll do even better!”

‘Next time... Will there be a next time?’

With these thoughts, Justin lost his appetite. Even swallowing became difficult.

“Justin, Bethany mentioned you've been busy with Ada Wang's wedding. Are you competing with KS World Hotel for the hosting rights?”

Not long after, Zoe chimed in, Sensing Justin might be interested in business matters, she propped her chin on her hand and blinked her grape-sized eyes. She asked with an innocent look on her face, “I heard that Ada Wang will be coming to Savrow in a few days. Justin, are you planning to host a welcome banquet? Taking advantage of the situation can also promote the hotel. After all, Ada is an international superstar!”

Justin's charming eyes turned slightly cold, but his expression remained calm. What he disliked the most was discussing business during family meals, especially when unrelated people inquired about the internal affairs of his company.

“Mm.”

“Can I help with anything?” Zoe blinked her eyes eagerly.

Justin declined Zoe's offer. "There's no need."

Zoe tried to showcase herself to Justin. "I can play piano pieces for Ada Wang and other guests! It's my specialty!"

To Zoe's dismay, Justin once again rejected her. "There's no need for that."

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Justin frowned slightly and decisively declined. "You are the heiress of the Hoffman family. It's not appropriate for you to entertain guests like that. Professionals will be hired to perform live."

Zoe's expression instantly fell. "So, do you think that I'm not professional enough?"

At this point, Justin had completely lost his appetite.

He initially attended the dinner reluctantly, not wanting to offend Mrs. Hoffman and Ryan, but he found it increasingly annoying.

"Justin, Zoe is the top protege of a renowned pianist. She's more than qualified to play at your welcoming banquet. Just let her go." Ryan chewed and spoke on behalf of his sister.

"Yes, Justin. Zoe regards you as a brother, so let her help you this time." Mrs. Hoffman, who doted on her daughter, also advised him.

Zoe continued to plead with a pitiful expression. "Justin, I promise I'll play exceptionally well. I won't let you down!"

Justin frowned and reluctantly nodded.

After the dinner, Justin bid farewell to the Hoffmans and left. Outside Hoffmans' residence, Ian received an important message and hurriedly conveyed it to Justin.

"Mr. Salvador, there's a bit of an issue. Your plan has clashed with KS World Hotel on the same day!"

Justin's face turned cold as he asked, "Did Bella prepare a welcoming banquet for Ada Wang on the same day too?"

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"Mr. Salvador, your wisdom knows no bounds!"

Ian could not help but break into a nervous sweat as he cautiously asked, "Given Young Madam's unpredictable nature and her relentless tactics, do you think she might actually steal Ada away? Maybe we should..."

"What?" Justin interrupted, his eyebrow furrowing in response.

Ian grinned, revealing a set of gleaming white teeth. "Why not let Young Madam have her way this time? Anyway, it's not the ultimate showdown. It's just a welcoming banquet. A real man shouldn't compete with a woman, especially considering you two used to be married..."

"No way!"

Justin cut him off decisively and frowned. "Since the plan with Alexa is not feasible right now, we have to start with Ada Wang. If Bella can think of it, it means her situation is similar to ours. At this critical moment, any small progress could change the situation dramatically. I won't let her have the upper hand. By any means necessary, Ada Wang must attend our welcoming banquet!"

Having declared this, the imposing boss entered the luxurious car with a grave expression.

Ian stood frozen in place. His expression gradually turned mournful. 'Oh my, Mr. Salvador seems to be made of reinforced concrete. How can someone so utterly stubborn win back the young madam's heart?'

At this moment, Justin leaned back in the car seat and took a deep breath. 'Should I do as Ian proposed and let Bella have her way?'

From the divorce to now, Justin has never defeated Bella once. She had always been riding high, overwhelming and crushing him completely.

Justin was astonished to realize that Bella was no longer the calm, gentle, and simple woman he once knew during their marriage. She had become intelligent, outstanding, and shrewd. She seemed increasingly unattainable.

Justin genuinely yearned to defeat her, as if winning just once could bridge the distance between them.

Late at night, Ryan headed out to ACE for some entertainment. With only Mrs. Hoffman and Zoe left at home, Zoe entered her mother's room, climbed onto the bed, and acted coquettishly.

Reflecting on the dinner table scene earlier, Mrs. Hoffman couldn't help but comment, "Zoe, why did your attitude toward Justin become so affectionate tonight? You made him feel awkward."

Mrs. Hoffman sighed with a hint of frustration. "You're not a child anymore, and Justin is not the big brother who used to play with you. He's now the president of the Salvador Corporation and a person of stature. Every move he makes is scrutinized by many, so you must watch your actions. It might not be appropriate for you to act coquettishly toward him in the future. I think you should still..."

"Mom." Zoe suddenly sat up and looked her mother in the eye. "I'm not acting like a spoiled brat, and I never regarded Justin as my brother."

"What are you saying?" Mrs. Hoffman looked confused.

“Why do you think I turned down the Royal Symphony Orchestra of Inalia and gave up my great future to return to Savrow? It’s all for Justin. I want to marry him and be his wife!”

“What?!”

Mrs. Hoffman sat up abruptly, staring at her daughter with astonishment. “Are you out of your mind? He’s your brother!”

“He’s not my biological brother anyway!” Zoe retorted. Her eyes sparkled at the thought of Justin. “I’ve waited for so long, and Justin has finally broken up with Rosalind. Now, no one can stop me.”

Faced with her daughter’s wishful thinking, Mrs. Hoffman became particularly conflicted.

“Mom, what’s wrong? Why do you look like that? Don’t you want me and Justin to be together?” Zoe furrowed her brow and shook her mother’s hand.

“No, it’s just...” Mrs. Hoffman hesitated for a moment and expressed her concern. “Justin is indeed an outstanding person, but he’s not a suitable match for you. It’s not just about Rosalind. As your eldest brother mentioned, Justin was married before. Oh, Zoe, you’re so kind and innocent. The situation in the Salvador family is complicated. I’m afraid you’ll be treated unfairly or even bullied if you marry Justin.”

Zoe chuckled in her heart. ‘I’m innocent? I think Bethany Salvador is the real simpleton! If I marry Justin, I will definitely play around with the women in the Salvador family. Mom is underestimating me!’

“Mom! I am the heiress of the Hoffman family. We are no less than the Salvadors, and with your and Ryan’s support, anyone from the Salvador family who dares to mistreat me won’t get away with it!”

“But feelings have to be mutual. Even if you want to marry, Justin has to be willing!” Mrs. Hoffman felt a sense of helplessness with her wayward daughter.

Zoe smiled confidently. “With you and Ryan’s backing, I already have an added advantage over others. As long as I can prove to Justin that I’m no longer the child I used to be, that I hold value to him, and that I can stand by his side, he will surely notice me!”

“But...”

“Oh, no buts, Mom. In any case, I won’t marry anyone but Justin in this lifetime!”

Chapter 340

Three days later, Ada Wang and her team were about to arrive in Savrow. However, Steven received shocking news from the agent today-Ada had ultimately chosen to attend Salvador Corporation’s welcoming banquet.

In the entertainment room of the KS World Hotel, Steven brought this infuriating news to Bella. Bella was leisurely engaged in a game of billiards with Ralph, her seventh brother, demonstrating a professional level of skill with each shot and effortlessly sinking one ball after another.

“Ms. Bella! Something bad has happened!” Steven anxiously called out.

“Hush... It’s match point!” Bella delicately placed her slender finger to her lips, signaling him to keep quiet. This shot was crucial for tonight’s dinner and could not be taken lightly!

However, Steven found himself truly at his wit’s end. He desperately wanted to rush her, yet he did not dare to! Even if the sky was falling, he could not interrupt Bella from having fun.

Clack! Clack!

Bella skillfully took her shot and concluded the game, winning in a spectacular manner.

She screamed with satisfaction, “Yes!”

Bella joyfully raised a victorious gesture, and Ralph, seated on the pool table’s edge, grinned at his sister, completely indifferent to whether he had lost to her.

“Bella, your billiards skills are improving,” Ralph said.

Leaning gracefully on the cue, Bella playfully stuck out her tongue in response. “It’s all thanks to your excellent teaching.”

Adorned in a red satin spaghetti strap dress, Bella had only played two shots when her red strap slowly slid down, revealing her porcelain-like bare shoulders, which was particularly alluring.

Steven’s eyes involuntarily wandered over, and he gulped.

Ralph astutely noticed Steven’s not-so-innocent gaze. His eyes darkened abruptly.

He casually approached Bella and nonchalantly hooked up the strap that had nearly slipped off her arm. He cleared his throat and said, “Even when you’re out having fun, you still need to be careful. This is acceptable in front of your brothers, but in the presence of other men, you can’t be so bold.”

After saying this, Ralph subtly glanced at Steven.

Being a seasoned detective, Ralph had such sharpness in his eyes. Under the scrutiny of Ralph’s eagle-like eyes, Steven felt a chill running down his spine and sensed that his innermost thoughts were on the verge of being exposed. He hastily redirected his burning gaze elsewhere.

“Yes, big brother! Steve isn’t a stranger. Besides, I haven’t revealed anything. You’re such a prude.” Bella’s voice was as sweet as honey.

Ralph raised an eyebrow. He experienced a tingling sensation in his heart from Bella

addressing him as “big brother”. He hesitated but could not bring himself to scold her.

“Steve, what’s the matter?” Bella turned her head, picked up a glass of red wine, leaned against the pool table, and took a sip. Her charming eyes were carefree.

“Ms. Bella, Ada Wang has finally confirmed her attendance at the welcoming banquet hosted by Salvador Corporation! She stood us up!” Steven nervously conveyed.

“Good.” Bella took another sip of red wine.

“Good?! Justin intercepted our distinguished guest, and you say it’s good?” Steven’s clear eyes widened in astonishment.

“Let me guess. In the next three days, Salvador Corporation will definitely send invitations to various celebrities. Moreover, they will publicize the banquet extensively. After all, the international superstar’s first stay in Savrow is at the Salvador Hotel. This will attract a lot of attention, like free publicity.”

Bella continued, “This move indirectly certifies the supreme status of the Salvador Hotel in Savrow and even the entire country. Whether it’s the president or a superstar, anyone coming to Savrow will only stay there.” Bella’s bright eyes sparkled as she swirled the red wine in her glass with satisfaction.

“So, Ada Wang chose the Salvador Hotel. This is a huge loss for our group, isn’t it?”

“Smooth sailing is boring.” Bella smiled. To Steven, her smile was more intoxicating than the red wine in her glass. “I like challenges that bring you to life, turning the tide against the wind. That’s what makes it thrilling.”

Steven’s heart fluttered. His boss’s smile at this moment carried a mischievous charm that was breathtakingly beautiful.

“Bella, it seems you already have a plan for this, huh?” Ralph asked with a smile.

Bella nodded. “Steve, prepare the banquet as usual.”

“Huh? Should we continue preparations when the distinguished guest is not attending? What’s the point of organizing the banquet?” Steven felt somewhat disheartened, thinking they had already lost to

Justin.

Bella's eyes held a mysterious and unpredictable smile. "Who says it's pointless? The victor is still undetermined, and the prize may still fall into our hands."

*

On the roadside outside the KS World Hotel, Ian concealed himself in a black Porsche. He was assigned to monitor Bella's every move. When he almost dozed off from the wait, he finally spotted Steven, Bella's loyal secretary, walking out of the hotel with a gloomy expression. During these past few days, Ian has suffered a lot following Justin. Now, seeing the poor fellow beside Bella also wearing a gloomy expression like him, Ian suddenly felt a sense of satisfaction, as if the fortunes were turning in his favor. Thinking that they must have learned that Justin had taken the lead in securing Ada Wang, Ian could not help but feel triumphant!

'Hehe! It sure feels good to win!' Ian thought.

madam. A few seconds later, Bella emerged from the main entrance. 'Steven and the young Huh? Why is there another man?!' Ian picked up the binoculars, rubbed his eyes, and

scrutinized the trio again with great intensity.

"Oh, damn! It really is another man!"

"Let's go for a barbecue!" Ralph casually draped his arm over Bella's shoulder.

"Then I want pork ribs, beef brisket, corn on the cob, baked beans, and mac and cheese!" Bella licked her crimson lips.

"Wow, Bella. That's a lot of food just for the two of us."

“Well, those are classic barbecue must-haves! Ooh, I want extra sauce too!”

“We might as well chug some beer while we’re at it!”

The siblings laughed in harmony and got into the car.

Ian nervously gulped, not knowing how he managed to put down the binoculars. All he could think was, ‘Oh crap! It’s over!’

He trembled as he sneakily took pictures and shakily sent a message to his boss. [Mr. Salvador! SOS! Ms. Thompson has a new love interest again!]