

Heiress 471

Chapter 471

Just two days ago, Bella's trip from Hatchbay to Savrow was filled with delight. Now, a dark scowl had settled on her face, and her lips were pressed tightly together.

Back at the hotel, Bella locked herself in the office without any disruption from Steven. She looked up anything related to Celeste's incident.

Mila's words echoed in her mind. "The network's special was Celeste's darkest hours, but it was also when she grew closer to Wyatt. Back then, the internet wasn't the behemoth it is today. To keep tabs on the entertainment world, people relied on magazines and newspapers. When news of the incident broke, Wyatt went to extreme lengths to contain it. He reportedly bought and destroyed every magazine subscription in the country that mentioned it. Any journalist who dared report on the matter faced harsh consequences. But apparently, the foreign press was present during the incident. Someone captured the entire ordeal on camera and uploaded it to a foreign website. Even though Wyatt managed to get the video taken down, traces of the video still linger online."

Bella drew a deep breath. With her eyes fixated on the computer screen, she typed furiously on the keyboard.

She quickly located a grainy video of the network's special that had been sealed away for twenty years.

The video captured Celeste at her most vulnerable, hunched over, and convulsed with silent tremors. Her face was drained of color.

She was at a breaking point.

The harsh beam above her head put her despair under the spotlight. The jeers and laughter from the audience washed over her, threatening to shatter her fragile resolve.

A tall and strong figure rushed onto the stage, approaching Celeste without hesitation.

From the man's back, Bella could tell that it was Wyatt.

Without a word, Wyatt took off his jacket and got down on one knee before Celeste to cover her modesty.

A hush fell over the stage.

The video came to an end.

Bella stared blankly at the screen, her shoulders drooping as she sank her back against the chair.

Did the incident lead Wyatt to win Celeste's heart?

"My father probably wrote the playbook for getting the girls."

Her phone rang.

Snapping out of her thoughts, Bella picked up the phone. "What's up, Steve?"

"Ms. Bella, Ryan Hoffman has brought his sister to see you."

"

The weight of Celeste's past pressed down on Bella, and the last thing she wanted was to meet the Hoffman siblings. Despite her reservations, Bella agreed to meet the Hoffmans, swayed by Steven's mention of Ryan's sister coming to apologize.

Maybe Bella would feel better if she witnessed Zoe with an egg on her face.

It would be like watching a slapstick comedy.

When Bella arrived outside the reception room, Steven came over with a frown.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Bella. I didn't know that Justin was with them. He's inside too."

Bella looked up and met Steven's gaze with indifference. "Why didn't you throw him out?"

"I'm sorry, Ms. Bella." Steven expressed his apologies, knowing that it was his negligence.

For the main part, Justin was elusive. He was not around when Steven led Ryan and Zoe into the reception room. When he returned, Justin had the nerve to relax on the sofa with a cup of coffee.

"Never mind. You can't beat him anyway."

Bella poked her chin out, gesturing for Steven to open the door.

As the door opened, Bella sashayed into the room, her stilettos clicking sharply against the floor. Her straight black suit jacket draped effortlessly over her shoulders and accentuated her confident stride and commanding presence.

"Bella." Ryan got up from the sofa, his throat dry.

Bella was a sight to behold, as always. Her look today was a bold statement, conveying both competence and unwavering determination.

Once again, Bella took Ryan's breath away.

Justin looked up at Bella, his nerves tensing.

His heart pounded out of his chest.

Hiding behind Ryan, Zoe fixated on Bella's haughty face and clenched her shaking fists.

"Oh, you are all here."

Bella pulled her shoulders back, letting the black jacket slide down, and Steven caught it for her.

She then turned to Justin with a smirk. "Well, aren't you an exemplary boyfriend to Ms. Hoffman, Justin? Are you here as a show of support for her?"

'Boyfriend?' Justin locked eyes on Bella's sneaky smile and cleared his throat.

He was fuming.

The woman was harsh to him as usual, hitting his sore point.

That was Bella to him, though. Bella was no longer Anna Brown. He was glad to accept her as she was, critical side and all.

Zoe was so filled with glee that Bella mistook the reason Justin was there.

Playing along, she took quick steps toward Justin with a sad face.

"Bella, I admit I was blind before, but you should get your eyes fixed too."

Justin remained aloof, but his eyes betrayed his obscure feelings for Bella. "No boyfriend here, only your ex-husband. It's exhausting enough to be a certain somebody's husband. I don't have the time or energy to be someone else's boyfriend."

Zoe froze.

Justin had made things clear with her before, but Zoe refused to move on and remained delusional about Justin.

Yet now, Justin threw her under the bus by ditching her in front of Bella.

“I am here to back someone up, but I’m not talking about Ms. Hoffman. ”

Feeling the burn in his cheeks, Justin grabbed his coffee mug and pretended to sip composedly. Despite burning his tongue, he forced himself to swallow the hot liquid.

Sure, Justin often had these thoughts.

However, he was embarrassed to say them out loud.

Bella furrowed her brows, surprised by his implication.

Who was he supporting, if not Zoe?

Was it Ryan?

Well, it was just a roundabout way to support Zoe.

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Bella smirked. Her emotionless face started to reflect annoyance.

She felt a rush of blood in her head.

Justin's obvious bias toward his ex-wife was a death sentence for Zoe.

Zoe thought, 'Why? Justin could have a talented and beautiful woman like me, but he still went back to the slut he dumped.'

Besides, Bella was surrounded by men. She was involved with Ryan, a nobody like Christopher, and other men. Justin should at least be irked by that fact.

"I only made time out of my busy schedule to see you because I heard that Mr. Hoffman had brought Ms. Hoffman to apologize. You should know that I'm not just the heiress of KS Group but also the renowned jewelry designer, Alexa. My secretary is bombarded with phone calls for a chance to meet with me. I don't have time to waste on unnecessary things and people."

Bella flicked her hair back and crossed her arms while sitting with poise on the sofa. "If I had known that Mr. Salvador would be here, I wouldn't even show up.'

"Why?"

With his heart sinking, Justin asked gloomily, "Why do you rather meet Ryan than see me?"

Raising his brow, Ryan thought to himself, 'Fuck me.'

Even though Bella favored Ryan, Justin targeted him for ridicule.

"I'm only willing to meet under two conditions: it must be for personal or business purposes."

Bella put two fingers up and wiggled them in front of Justin. "Mr. Salvador, you and I have no personal or business relationship. I have no reason to meet someone who isn't even a stranger to me."

Justin was not even considered a stranger.

The glum on Justin's face was the tip of the iceberg of what he was really feeling inside.

Ryan pursed his lips while thinking to himself, 'At least I'm more than a stranger, I suppose.'

"Now, out with it, Mr. Hoffman. I have a meeting later. I don't have time to waste here." Narrowing her eyes, Bella appeared haughty with her legs crossed. The red bottoms of her stilettos added to her flair.

She looked like an elegant and beautiful villainess out of a comic book.

Justin's eyes fell on Bella's slender ankles under her pants.

His jaw clenched as his throat went dry. He was tempted to swallow.

He was too blind to dump this woman.

Now, everything about her drove him wild.

Zoe played the victim, her face pale, and her lips trembling as if Bella were the bully.

"Ahem. Bella... I mean, Ms. Thompson."

Picking up on Bella's facial cues, Ryan addressed her differently and said, "My sister and I are here to offer our apologies.

"The necklace Bethany, had given to Ada at the auction was supplied by my sister. She asked an individual in Inalia to forge the necklace..."

Ryan's words trailed off as he continued to observe Bella's expression.

"Oh, I already knew that." Bella remained indifferent.

Ryan and Zoe were shocked.

Justin merely pulled a frown. He was not too surprised

Zoe's cunning plan would not stand a chance against B resources.

"W-When did you find out?" Freaked out, Zoe asked.

Bella grinned cheekily. "I knew the day you reached out to Tyler paid him handsomely to forge my necklace. "

"What?" Zoe burst out, breaking her character.

"I get why you sought Tyler to make the necklace, Ms. Hoffman. I did teach him everything I knew. You probably assume Tyler started his own business because we had a fallout. You're narrow-minded to think that. Divorced couples can't be friends, but that doesn't mean mentors and apprentices going their separate ways can't." Bella lifted her chin.

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Justin gasped to himself.

Bella's words cut through him like a knife.

"Despite being from another country, Tyler takes pride in respecting his mentor and the trade. He won't compromise his principles for personal gain."

Bella added with a smirk, "So you barked up the wrong tree, Ms. Hoffman. Your first mistake was to think that everybody is as petty as you.

It was clear who was the petty one in the room.

Justin curled his lips subtly. His eyes were calm.

Feeling humiliated, Ryan scowled.

Although Ryan had braced himself for the worst before meeting Bella, she was merciless when she bit.

He did not expect her words to hurt so much.

“You’re evil, Bella!”

Fuming, Zoe pointed at Bella’s smiling face. “You feigned ignorance when I went to Tyler. You knew Bethany would give the necklace to Ada, and yet you waited until the charity auction to spill the beans. It was all for Bethany’s fall from grace. How can you be so wicked, Bella? Must you ruin everybody who gets in your way?”

Zoe wailed out loud as if she were the victim.

“What else am I supposed to do-keep you and Bethany around?” Annoyed by her crying, Bella rolled her eyes.

“You!” Zoe was lost for words.

The woman was cocky,

Despite Ryan’s and Justin’s presence in the room, Bella carried on talking smack. Did she not care about any man in the world?

“You’re here to apologize, Ms. Hoffman, not point fingers. Is it so hard to own up to your mistake?”

Justin kept his head down for a moment before fixating on Bella. Even if Ms. Thompson doesn't deal with Bethany, I will sort her out. I'll make you come here even if your brother doesn't. The outcome remains the same. What else do you have to say for yourself?"

Bella met the man's gaze with mixed emotions.

Justin did not seem to hold back on Zoe.

Tsk. Bella decided that his actions did not concern her.

"Justin..." Zoe let tears fall down her cheeks as a wave of heartache and anger washed over her.

The man who once held Zoe's hand with a sunlit smile in the park was now a stranger, his warmth replaced by a chilling distance.

Bewitched by Bella, Justin faded into a ghost of his former self.

"Hello? Are you apologizing or not?" With her patience running thin, Bella was ready to leave.

"Apologize to Ms. Thompson now, Zoe," Ryan urged.

"I'm sorry," Zoe hissed through clenched teeth, her voice barely audible.

"Speak up. I can't hear you." Bella furrowed her brows commandingly.

"I'm sorry!"

Ryan took strides toward Zoe, pressing her back down so that she would take a humble stance before Bella.

Unable to fight against her brother's strength, Zoe bowed down before Bella. The humiliation was tearing her up inside.

Zoe thought, 'Bella, I will make you pay! This is not over!'

"Steve." Bella rose to her feet.

"Yes, Ms. Bella," Steven responded right away.

"As mentioned by Mr. Hoffman, the Hoffman Group will address the consequences of Ms. Hoffman's actions. Compile a comprehensive report of all damages, including emotional trauma, for Mr. Hoffman's immediate attention."

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Bella walked out without hesitation. "Donate the money received to Savrow's Hope Foundation. I don't want a cent of it."

Stunned, Ryan let out a wry smile.

Her beauty, icy and perfect, mirrored her ruthlessness. Bella was an ice queen in every sense.

Bella returned to her office to work while Steven took Ryan to discuss the settlement of compensation.

As Bella's attorney and secretary, Steven had the list of damages ready. The total was an eye-watering amount.

However, that was the price to pay for forging Alexa's design.

Ryan looked at the compensation agreement and sighed, his throat dry.

He could afford the money, but it was a hefty bruise to his ego.

Ryan had feelings for Bella before. Even though they were not meant to be together, he would love for them to be friends. He never wanted to hurt her.

Alas, they drifted further and further away from the possibility of ever becoming friends.

Zoe cried all the way to the parking lot, as if the world had done her wrong.

“The victim didn’t even shed a tear. Why are you the one crying when you caused all this?”

Ryan walked ahead with a sour face, and Zoe could not keep up with him.

“Is Bella’s heart made of stone, Ryan? I can’t believe she expects you to pay \$100 million. She’s better off robbing a bank.”

Zoe could not stand the thought of losing \$100 million to Bella. “You have never been in this frustrating position before, Ryan. Had I known this would be the case, I would never apologize to her.”

“Ms. Thompson was easy on you.”

Ryan stopped in his tracks, having had enough of Zoe. “If I didn’t set things right for you, do you think you would be saying sorry in that room? You would be issuing a formal apology in front of the press.”

Zoe shuddered at that thought.

“When you get back home, you are not allowed out without my permission. Just stay at home and reflect on your behavior.”

Ryan spoke coldly with a heavy heave before getting into the car.

“You can’t ground me, Ryan!”

Unbothered by Zoe’s window-rattling tantrum, Ryan sat stoically in the car.

He could not go soft on Zoe anymore. His indulgence would do nothing good for his only sister.

As the fancy car drove away, Zoe stomped her foot and burst into tears, hunched over.

“Please get in, Ms. Zoe.”

Two female bodyguards lugged Zoe into the car and closed the door.

Zoe watched miserably, as the car took her to the Hoffmans’ residence.

Her phone suddenly rang.

She dried her tears and took out her phone for a look. A concealed private number was calling.

“Who is it?” Zoe asked angrily.

“Ms. Hoffman.”

A man’s digitally altered voice was heard on the other end of the line,

“Who are you?” Zoe asked, choking out sobs.

“You must feel hurt and upset after what happened today. Your crush wouldn’t even look at you.”

Her eyes widened, and her heart raced.

Who was spying on her? The man seemed to have detailed knowledge about her circumstances.

“What if I tell you that I can help you get what you want? Are you willing to hear me out and collaborate with me?”

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Steven returned to Bella’s side after finishing his duties.

“Are you planning to let Ms. Hoffman off the hook, Ms. Bella? That’s too nice of you.”

Steven watched with a dotting and helpless smile as Bella knocked things over with her stilettos. He went and tucked her heels under the table.

Bella was gaming to take her mind off things, slaughtering many in the virtual world.

Her character, Lucifer, had reached god-level in the eyes of players. Thousands tuned in to watch every time she streamed her gaming live.

“What are you thinking? Let her off the hook? I’m a charitable entrepreneur, not Mother Theresa. I’m not going after Zoe now because I don’t have solid evidence to put her away. She made Bethany a scapegoat, so all suspicions about Zoe are circumstantial. My hands are tied for now.

“I don’t think that’s the last we’ll hear of Ms. Hoffman.” Steven added angrily, “Instead of showing remorse, she glared at you before storming out.

“She better come at me with everything she has or just back off. I won’t want to be her if the whole thing blows up in her face.

Her phone vibrated, channeling a call from Asher.

“Hey, Ash!” Bella answered the call with a sweet voice.

“Are you at the hotel, Bella?” Asher asked.

“Yes. I’m in the office.”

“So you’re with Steve?” Asher spoke in hushed tones.

Bella was witty enough to read between the lines. She got up and walked out as if she were heading to the bathroom.

If she were to dismiss Steven, he would pick up that she was shying away from him.

She stepped into her personal bathroom and shut the door behind her “What happened, Ash? Does it have something to do with Steve?”

“You can say that, but not directly. I can’t be straight with you if he’s around.”

Asher paused before carrying on in a steady tone. “Gregory sought help from Steven’s brother, Hunter, to get his daughter out. Hunter is heading to the police station to release Bethany on bail as we speak.”

Bella narrowed her eyes dangerously. “Hunter is Bethany’s get-out-of- jail-free pass.”

“Hunter is cutthroat, contributing to his success as a defense attorney for over a decade. He won’t allow himself to fail. He will give Bethany a clean state by any means necessary.”

Asher gave Bella the heads-up. "If I were Hunter, I would start with the journalist, Bella. She is the top witness to testify against Bethany.

"I get what you're trying to say, Ash, but Xena Gordon is not with me. Justin is holding her captive."

Bella took a deep breath to pull herself together. "I'll handle it. You, and especially Axel, should stay out of it. He works for the government. He can't be caught engaging in misconduct while helping me. That will just play into the hands of those wishing us harm."

The mood was heavy at the end of the phone call.

Bella never took a small fry like Bethany seriously because Shannon was the big fish she was after.

She was worried that the news would upset Steven. The silly boy w highly sensitive and heavily bound by a sense of duty. He might ju come to her in tears again.

Lost in her thoughts, Bella made her way to her office.

"Bella."

The husky voice caused her to halt her footsteps. Feeling a pit in her stomach, she looked back.

There was no one behind her.

Bella shook her head and kneaded her temples, attributing the sound to her sleep deprivation.

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"Ah!"

A powerful grip seized Bella's arm and yanked her into the darkness.

Bella stumbled into a tough chest. The man's ragged breaths stirred the strands on top of her head, his touch drawing warmth across her skin.

The long, lingering embrace was strange yet familiar to her.

It was Justin.

The man ensured a firm grip around her waist in case she might twist her ankle from wearing those high stilettos.

His grip was awfully firm, bearing conflicting emotions. He wanted to protect her, but he feared she might slip away from him.

"Justin! How did you get in here?" Bella put up a fight, her cheeks flushed with rage.

"Ryan said I might have trouble getting past the tight security here." Justin narrowed his eyes. His voice was raspy and flat.

Justin graduated at the top of his class from the military. It was a piece of cake to elude the hotel's security.

When he later became the president of Salvador Corporation, all his basic needs-and more were met. His military training proved less relevant in the business world.

Yet he faced a multitude of hurdles when trying to see Bella, forcing him to be creative and persistent.

"It's vile of you to sneak around like this.

Bella gritted her teeth and tried to stomp on his foot, but Justin twirled and pinned her against the wall.

Their eyes met, and sparks flew.

Now that he had snagged on an encounter, Justin's gaze lingered on her face, absorbing every detail of her.

"What are you looking at, bastard?" Bella cursed, and her ears turned red.

"You've put on some weight." Justin fixated on her.

His lips curled at the roundness of her once-highly-contoured cheekbones.

She put some meat on her bones.

Bella could not believe Justin just said that. "

"Are you mad at me? There's nothing wrong with putting on some weight. You were skin and bones before. You should eat more. Justin spoke like a gentleman.

Red in the face, Bella slapped him.

Feeling the burn on his cheek, Justin grabbed her hand. The handprint on his face was a mark of humiliation. "Is this how you repay someone who has helped you, Bella? I don't count on getting a thank- you, but you should stop getting physical with me every time I see you."

"Thank you? Why should I? Should I thank you for restraining Xena Gordon and getting her to testify against Bethany?"

With her chest heaving, Bella mocked Justin. "Have you no shame, Justin? You should thank me, not the other way around. You're just trying to gain leverage through me by holding Xena against Bethany. If I hadn't played along, you would have been out of the game a long time ago."

"Bella!"

Justin's eyes turned bloodshot as rage consumed him. "I just wanted to see you."

"But you're the last person on earth I want to see!"

Bella could not break free from Justin. It was not as if she could beat someone from the special force.

She reached into her pocket to fish out her phone to call Steven.

Justin saw through her and nimbly seized her other hand.

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Restrained, Bella yelled, "Somebody help-Mgh!"

Justin lost his cool for once. Feeling a rush to his head, he sealed her cries with a kiss.

Their lips met, and her voice faded into murmurs.

Bella's mind went blank.

Justin's scorching breath brushed against Bella's trembling lips. His palms were clammy from holding her wrists, and his forehead broke out in a sweat.

The last time he kissed her, the alcohol got to his head.

Justin had no excuse to kiss her now.

'You're divorced, Justin. This isn't right,' Justin thought to himself.

Nevertheless, he could not help himself. He knew that it was not right, but his heart overruled his head.

With that in mind, Justin's heart thumped out of his chest. The self-restraint he always took pride in was about to crumble.

He lost himself in his emotions. At first, Justin was only trying to stop Bella from screaming, but his kiss was purely out of affection.

Bella tried to resist him, but her body was weak against his advances. Her lips and tongue were caught in his spell, and her breath was stolen away.

She was angry with herself.

A tear slipped across her cheek.

She was just a poor woman who had been obsessed with the man for 13 years, but her love was never responded to. She wondered what she had done to deserve such humiliation.

"You're an asshole, Justin!"

An angry bellow echoed across the corridor. Seeing red, Steven rushed over and pried Justin away from Bella with all his might. He then punched Justin in the face.

However, Steven moved too slowly in Justin's eyes.

The man shot back, evading the punch at the speed of light.

“Steve!”

Bella cried out for Steven in a hoarse voice, but Steven was in a different head space now.

His mind was filled with the image of the bastard ravishing Bella’s lips. All he could see was the smudged lipstick on Justin’s lips.

“I’m going to kill you, Justin!”

Justin scowled.

Steven was a sixth-degree black belt in Taekwondo, and the strength of his kicks once rocked the community of Savrow. He spun high with his leg lifted, aiming a kick straight at Justin’s chest.

Despite Steven throwing everything he had at Justin, the latter effortlessly neutralized his attack.

The man dodged the moment Steven lifted his leg. Before Steven knew it, Justin re-emerged behind him and gripped his shoulder blade.

Steven felt a crippling sensation under his skin as he went limp.

What sort of sorcery was that?

That maneuver was like a page out of a comic book.

Bella recognized that move as a close combat tactic taught in the military. Drew could execute that technique too.

It would take at least five years of intense training to pull off a move that demanded both speed and precision.

“Enough, Justin!”

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Bella held Steven, who went limp, tightly. Without her support, the 188- cm-tall man would have sunken to his knees before Justin.

“I’m fine, Ms. Bella.” Steven consoled Bella while catching his breath. He was too weak to hold himself up.

“You can’t even stand. How can you say that you’re fine?”

Her eyes welled up. It was a sign that Bella was worried for Steven’s safety. She glared at Justin, whose hair was not ruffled in the slightest. “How can you attack my secretary so viciously before me? Are you a man or a heartless brute, Justin?”

Her words stung. Feeling defeated, Justin choked up.

“He started it. Didn’t you see that? Besides, I didn’t hurt him in any way. The paralysis should go away by nightfall. He’ll be able to regain his mobility.”

“Spare me your excuses. You’re just confirming to me the creep that you are.”

The tears in Bella’s eyes hurt Justin. He watched as she lifted her arm and wiped her lips with the back of her hand, as if he were diseased.

“Admit it, Justin. Are you having second thoughts about the divorce?”

Justin's heart bled.

As they locked eyes, the weight of her gaze pinned him down. Her silent accusation sent chills down his spine.

Time passed, but he gave no response. He could not even deny the question.

Justin clung to his last shred of decency.

"I take your silence for your admission."

Despite her shaking voice, Bella grinned broadly. "But I should let you know that even if you change your mind, you can keep your thoughts to yourself and shove them up where the sun doesn't shine. Your feelings for me are the biggest insult to my being."

Justin was brought back to the day he served her divorce papers.

"I've had enough of this, Anna. Every second I spend in this loveless marriage is torture to me.

- "Since Rose is coming back, it's time for you to step down from your position as Mrs. Salvador."

Every hurtful word he ever said to her had come back to haunt him.

Justin walked across the basement parking lot in a daze.

He had no idea how he got there. Pain throbbed in his head, and his limbs felt wooden, as if he had wrestled with shadows.

All his strength left him the moment he saw Ian.

“Mr. Salvador!”

Noticing Justin’s glum face, Ian went up to hold him and asked nervously, “Is your headache back? Get in the car. I’ll grab your medicine.

Medicine could take his headache away.

However, nothing could treat a heartache.

“I don’t get it, Ian.”

With his hands over his head, Justin breathed heavily and asked, “I never paid her any attention when we got married. I was mean to her, but she stayed by my side anyway. Why? Why is she brutal to me now that I want to give her the world?”

Ian furrowed his brows in shock. It upset him to see his boss anguished with emotion.

A while later, he sighed and murmured, “Mr. Salvador, it’s because th

young madam once loved you very, very much.’

However, she did not love him anymore.

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Once Justin was gone, Bella helped Steven, who went numb all over, to the office.

After laying Steven flat on the sofa, Bella pursed her lips and examined his limbs without bothering to wipe the sweat off her forehead.

She could pass as a physician.

“I’m fine, Ms. Bella.”

Even though Steven went limp, he still had some limited mobility. He felt a lump in his throat, seeing how Bella was so concerned about him. “I’m sorry to trouble you.”

“Don’t say that. You were only trying to help me. Don’t act so recklessly next time.” Bella leaned over to give his legs a massage.

“I wasn’t acting recklessly.”

Steven tried his best to sit up on the sofa. His intense gaze was proof of his stubbornness. “Even if the same thing happens a thousand times over, I will dive in to rescue you every chance I get.”

“Don’t be overconfident because you can fight and put yourself in danger, Steven. You’re no match for Justin. His four years in military service should mean something to you.

Bella panicked. “He went easy on you today. If you weren’t-my secretary, he might have broken your arm.

“He can break my arm for all I care! It doesn’t matter if I die!”

Gritting his teeth, Steven wobbled to his feet. His tall build towered over Bella. “Even if I die, I won’t allow that animal to abuse you!”

“Steve...” Bella’s bulging eyes stared straight into his tearful gaze.

Tears rolled down Steven’s cheeks.

As his nervous system was numb, he did not realize that he was covered in tears and snot.

“Why are you crying, Steve? You’re supposed to be older than me, and yet you’re a crybaby.”

Feeling a catch in her throat, Bella teased him and reached out his tears.

Steven somehow found the courage to hook his arm around her waist and pull her closer to him.

His other hand pressed down on her spine as he tried to hug his beloved employer.

Bella could take a hint. She could sense a complex blend of emotions swirling within Steven’s embrace.

“Let go, Steve. Let’s not complicate things.” She pushed him away.

“Ms. Bella, I’ll accept any punishment for my behavior.” The tear stains on Steven’s face softened his facial features.

He exposed his vulnerability, fishing for Bella’s sympathy.

It was shameless, but the misery and fury were on the verge of driving him to insanity..

Bella was not the easiest person to get through to.

Bearing somber in her eyes, she jabbed Steven’s chest with two fingers.

Steven, still regaining strength, fell back onto the sofa.

“I know you mean no harm, Steve. I won’t punish you for this.”

Bella glanced at him with a mix of emotions, but her voice was chilling. "You are on a week-long leave starting tomorrow. You should get some rest.

"Ms. Bella..." Steven was shocked as his heart sank to the pit of stomach.

"You have been on edge and emotional lately. Take the week's breather to relax and sort yourself out. Then, you can reflect on how you intend to carry on working with me.

Chapter 480

A day had passed since Bethany was brought in for questioning in the middle of the night.

The past 24 hours have been torture for a privileged heiress like Bethany. Although she was well-fed, her eye bags were heavy, and her face was haggard from the barrage of questions. She had not been out of her seat for hours.

The intense glare of the spotlight could roast her carefully maintained hair.

It was just pure anguish.

"I didn't. I didn't send Xena to be a corporate espionage. I have nothing to do with it. Bella set me up! I'm innocent!"

Bethany was worn out. Despite feeling tired and sleepy, she continued to deny ever getting involved.

The door to the interrogation room opened.

A man in a sleek suit, carrying a black briefcase, entered the room with confidence.

"Officers, I am Ms. Bethany Salvador's defense attorney. My name is Hunter Lovett."

Hunter Lovett?

Bethany's dead eyes lit up.

Hunter looked at her with a smile. His gaze was rather consoling. "I need a word with my client."

Bethany followed Hunter to another room. She was only allowed visitation with her lawyer.

"Did my dad send you, Mr. Lovett?"

Bethany grabbed Hunter's hand as tears rained down her face. "Save me. I can't go on like this."

"Don't worry, Ms. Salvador. I took your case because I am confident about clearing you of the charges."

Hunter's voice was soothing, but his eyes were sharp. "But before that can happen, I need your full cooperation. I need to know the full story, and I expect no lies."

"Sure thing!"

Bethany nodded incessantly. Since Hunter was able to get her mother out of trouble before, he must be able to help her. Hence, Bethany gave the full account.

Hunter listened to the whole thing with a blank face.

"Mr. Lovett, can you figure out a way to deal with Bella? She's evil."

Bethany pounded the desk in rage. "If it were not for that bitch, I wouldn't even be in this situation."

“Ms. Thompson is the plaintiff, Ms. Salvador. She’s the victim. I don’t have to remind you that she’s the daughter of Wyatt Thompson.

Hunter’s eyes were dark. “We are facing a huge challenge. Ms.

Thompson is relentless. You would be lucky to get away with it, so you shouldn’t ask for more.

Bethany was annoyed to be told off.

However, she needed to curb her temper as she needed Hunter’s help.

“The witness is the journalist, Xena Gordon. The fact that she had an affair with the director of Headlines could come in handy. We can use this information to question the reliability of her account.

Hiding his emotions behind his eyes, Hunter twirled his pen. “We have a suspect called Henry Yates. He went out with Xena Gordon before the whole thing went down. That’s our best chance to get the charges dropped.”

“A-Are you saying that we can put the blame on Henry?” Bethany whispered in surprise.

Hunter let out a thought-provoking smile.

Bethany asked, “But would he take the fall? As far as I know, he broke up with Xena.”