

Illusions 41

Chapter 41

Lizette cracked a chilly smile, strutted over, and swung her arm.

Ouch!"

The feather duster whacked Evelina's arm hard, prompting a yelp as she dropped everything she was holding.

The feather duster kept coming for her, and Evelina, in agony, darted around the room in chaos. She hadn't expected Lizette to lay into her without so much as a word, and now she felt as if she was swelling up from hits to her hands, back, shoulders, and legs.

Cradling her head and shielding her face, she cursed furiously, "Lizetta, have you lost your damn mind? Back off, what gives you the right to hit me?"

Lizetta scoffed, "What happened to calling me 'Sis'? Should I just let the filth in the house fester and stink up the place? That reek coming off you, it's strong enough to be smelled from miles away."

Two more sharp lashed from Lizetta, putting her back into it. Evelina couldn't take it anymore, she bolted from the dressing room with her head in her arms.

Lizetta's chest heaved as she looked at the things Evelina had touched, feeling like last night's dinner was about to come spewing up her throat.

She yanked out everything Evelina had touched from the drawer and tossed it into the trash. She came out of the dressing room, and found Evelina hadn't left; she was by the bed, leaning over to tend to Remington.

"Remi, you're sweating buckets. You'll catch a cold. Let me help you out of these damp clothes."

Lizetta felt a chill run down her spine, her voice sharp as ice.

“Get your filthy hands off!”

She approached, and a frightened Evelina let go, but at that moment, the groggy man in bed reached out and grabbed her, “Don’t go.”

His husky voice broke the silence, and Lizetta felt as if her feet had been nailed to the floor. The room turned dark before her eyes, yet Evelina’s face lit up with glee.

“Remington, you’re awake?”

Evelina leaned in closer, not forgetting to shoot Lizetta a provocative look.

This was her and Remington’s bedroom, her home, her sanctuary. How could Lizetta stand for this?

She charged over, shoving Evelina aside, and fought the urge to slap Remington as she

were Remington, can you even see who’s human and who’s a ghost here?”

The pills Remington had taken were soporific, and he hadn’t been resting well these days. He was comforted in Lizetta’s embrace and had dozed off.

Pulled and prodded, he finally stirred, vaguely aware of a woman’s voice and movement. Assuming it was Lizetta, he instinctively reached out.

Now, seeing Lizetta’s pale, angry face, red eyes staring back at him, Remington began to wake up.

The man frowned, still confused about the situation.

Over at the sofa, Evelina clutched her belly and dropped to her knees, “Ah! My stomach, the baby. Remington, Lizetta pushed me and I hit my belly; it hurts so much!”

Remington’s expression shifted, he quickly got out of bed and helped Evelina sit on the sofa.

Evelina’s face was ghostly white, covered in cold sweat, her hand clutching her belly. Her sleeve slid up, revealing red welts, as she looked up at Remington with trembling hope.

“Lizetta hit me with the feather duster a couple of times, Remington; what if something happens to the baby? I’m so scared.”

Remington’s handsome face turned icy, and he glared coldly at Lizetta, his voice filled with anger, “Who told you to hit her? Lizetta, what’s gotten into you to become so crude?”

Ridiculous. His mistress was brazen enough to invade her space and sicken her, and she wasn’t allowed to get angry?

“I’m crude? That’s nothing compared to you two shameless, disgusting lovebirds! You asked her to be here and then called me over for what? To be humiliated? Should I just watch you two getting it on and clap along to be considered graceful and proper?”

“Shut up! What are you ranting about!” Original from NôvelDrama.Org.

Remington’s face darkened, veins throbbing at his temples. How could he and Evelina have that kind of relationship?

In her eyes, was he really the kind of man who’d bring any random woman home?

Seeing Remington’s reaction only seemed to Lizetta like his rage was still shielding Evelina.

Evelina could do as she pleased, but Lizetta was not to speak up. Coldness was filled with Lizetta’s heart.

“Remington, don’t be angry, it’s my fault for coming and causing a misunderstanding.”

Evelina, one hand on her belly, tugged anxiously at Remington’s arm, trying to stand up. Lizetta watched them tug and pull at each other, her eyes and body aching. She couldn’t

tand another moment.

“Fine, I’ll give you two space!”

She turned and walked away, tears welling up in her eyes. As they glistened under the lamplight by the bed, they seemed to shake Remington’s heart, snapping him out of his feverish haze Into sudden alarm.

He stepped forward to follow, but Evelina suddenly clung to his arm, “It hurts, Remington.”

Remington yanked his arm free, leaving her on the sofa, and hurried out the door, his figure quickly vanishing.

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Evelina clambered off the couch, green with envy, and took a few swings at it with her clenched fists.

Lizetta had rolled up in Yolanda’s second-hand Chevy, and when Remington dashed out of the villa, all he caught was the tall lights cutting a swath through the yard as the car sped off.

He was sweating buckets from the fever, and a shiver ran through him as the cold wind hit.

“Boss! What the heck’s going on? Let me help you inside.”

Cedric came running over; his car was parked in the shadows outside the villa. Seeing Lizetta arrive, he was put at ease.

He set an alarm to remind him in an hour – if Lizetta was still there by then, he could call it a night with mission accomplished.

But who would've thought, just by snoozing a bit, it seemed like he missed the main event? Seeing the boss, in pajamas, one slipper missing and a thunderous look on his face, Cedric was shook.

He'd been with Remington for eight years and had never seen him in such a sorry state. Cedric used to think that if the sky fell, Mr. Dashiell would hold it up with his mouth, never losing his cool.

Remington's eyes were icy as he glared at Cedric, "How did Evelina get here?"

"Uh? Ms. Hawthorne came?" Before Cedric could finish, he was sliced by Remington's glare. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead, "I've been negligent."

Remington shrugged off Cedric's helping hand and turned to go inside, slipping on his missing shoe with a poker face a few steps away, his silhouette stern as he entered the villa and instructed Cedric.

"Call an ambulance; get her out of here."

Back in the bedroom, Evelina was still pale and listless on the couch. Upon seeing Remington enter without Lizetta behind him, Evelina breathed a sigh of relief, her voice laced with concern.

"Remington, did you explain everything to her? Do I need to help with anything?"

Her unfinished words faded under his icy stare, and she felt a knot in her stomach. Remington's handsome face was back to its usual calm and cool, hardly betraying any emotion.

"No need!" He cut Evelina off sharply; this mess was only getting messier.

Rubbing his throbbing temples, he asked, "Who let you in, and how did you get here?"

No one sent me. Remington, you got hurt because of me. I was worried and wanted to check on you. The door was open when I got here. I'm sorry, Remington. I had no idea Lizetta was here. If I had known, I definitely wouldn't have come! I'll call her right now and explain everything."

Evelina reached for her phone, but in doing so, she revealed more of the scratch marks on her arms and under her clothes – a shocking array of blues and purples.

Her face twisted in pain, her hands trembling as she searched for her phone.

She looked pitiful. Still, Remington didn't want any trouble for the kid she was carrying, so he softened his voice and said firmly, "Don't bother! And the injury on my arm wasn't from defending you. Don't come here again; it's not some place you can come to!"

Evelina's face turned even paler, wounded as she looked at Remington, who detachedly averted his gaze and ordered, "Cedric, help Ms. Hawthorne downstairs to wait for the ambulance; don't let anything happen to the kid in her belly."

Cedric hurried over, not minding Evelina's reaction, and dragged her off the couch and out. Remington picked up his phone and headed to the study. When he called Lizetta, she had already driven two streets away, not wanting to pick up.

But Remington kept calling, relentless. Lizetta swiped to answer, not letting Remington get a word in, she said with a sneer, "Remington, when the hell are you going to sign the divorce papers? I can't wait another day! This clingy, dragging-it-out act isn't like you. If it weren't for Evelina jumping around in front of me all the time, I'd think you were head over heels for me."

Silence reigned on the other end of the phone. If it weren't for the sound like knuckles cracking, Lizetta would've thought the line had cut off..

"You're that eager to get divorced?"

Just as Lizetta was about to hang up, not being able to stand the silence any longer, Remington's voice finally came, dark and sinister.

“Yes! We didn’t get married for love in the first place. Isn’t it better to just split cleanly now and each go our own way?”

Lizetta didn’t hesitate with her answer; she had already made up her mind before, especially now with Evelina in the picture.

With the other woman showing up at her doorstep, if she didn’t get a divorce, was she waiting to be kicked out by these two?

“Go our own way? Hmph.”

After a pause, Remington replied through gritted teeth. Just as Lizetta thought he was still angry and unwilling to agree, his voice returned to calm; he coolly said, “Fine, as you wish. Tomorrow at nine, see you at City Hall.”

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The call ended, and Lizetta slammed on the brakes, gasping for air as she leaned over the steering wheel

It was the outcome she had desperately wanted, but at this moment, she felt anything but relieved or happy.

She suddenly threw her head back, forcing the tears back into her eyes, and only when she looked down did she notice the small camera still hanging around her neck.

It was the gift from Remington. She hadn’t bothered to grab anything else when she left the house, but the camera had ended up dangling from her neck.

She had been excited to wake him up and ask how he managed to get in touch with Cash, but who would know.

Lizetta yanked off the camera, flung open the car door with all her might, and tossed the camera into a nearby trash can.

She got back in the car, and drove off. But she hadn't gone far before she abruptly stopped, reversed, and, ultimately, couldn't resist picking the camera back up.

Why should the idol take the fall for a jerk? It was not the idol who was at fault, the jerk didn't

deserve it!

Oakridge Heights.

The ambulance arrived quickly. Evelina was loaded on, and it sped away with its siren wailing.

In the mountains, a Bentley was parked in a secluded spot, watching the ambulance disappear into the distance. Elara in the back seat looked anything but pleased,

"How could this happen!?"

"This time didn't work out: I'll plan for the next. Lizetta doesn't have much clout but she's too proud and fragile, no rush."

The person beside her patted her reassuringly.

Meanwhile, after Cedric had gotten Evelina out of there, he returned to the villa, feeling weak in the knees as he climbed the stairs.

He had screwed up big time at work today, failing to keep the door and letting Evelina sneak in. He had no idea what kind of punishment was awaiting him.

Cedric felt like punching himself for greedily snagging that one hour of sleep. His phone rang, and he answered. After listening for a moment, his expression turned serious.

“Okay, I got it. I’ll report to the president right away.”

He hurried upstairs and headed towards the study. The door wide open, the janitors were

dragging the sofa and carpet out. Cedric stepped away, walked to the door, and knocked before entering.

Remington stood by the floor-to-ceiling window, his tall silhouette against the dense night outside, as immovable as a mountain, silent and solitary, except for the intermittent glow of a cigarette between his fingers.

A few butts were already stubbed out in the ashtray beside him. Cedric’s eyelids twitched violently; he sensed trouble.

He took the initiative, “Boss, there’s been a problem with the project at Solstice Kingdom; it’s tricky. I request to go there immediately to redeem myself; please give me a chance.”

The next day dawned clear and refreshing.

Lizetta was up early, or more accurately, she hadn’t slept at all. She blamed her insomnia on excitement, about to get divorced, about to free herself and become single again. She was over

the moon.

Looking at her pale, haggard reflection in the mirror, Lizetta morosely ruffled her messy hair, “Lizetta, beauty comes too easily for you; that’s why you don’t cherish it. That just won’t do!”

Muttering to herself, she quickly washed up, did her hair, and put on a stunning makeup. She then picked out a gorgeous outfit and stepped out of her bedroom.

Yolanda was practicing boxing in the living room and whistled when she turned and saw Lizetta.

“Gorgeous! Are you aiming to be a heartless black widow?”

Lizetta was in a black figure-hugging dress, with a black leather jacket and black boots to match. She looked ready to attend a funeral with a bouquet of chrysanthemums.

With her fiery red lips, she was the epitome of deadly allure.

“Sending off the ex-husband, wishing him to be dead to me.”

Today was indeed the funeral for her marriage, which was fine by her. Lizetta grabbed her bag at the door; she had prepared all her documents the night before. Yolanda came over.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to come with you?”

Lizetta pinched her face. “It’s just a divorce, not that big a deal.”

She arrived at City Hall by eight, and though Lizetta got in line early, there was still no sign of Remington by nine.

Lizetta couldn’t help but remember the day they got their marriage certificate. She had thought Remington was forced to marry her and wouldn’t come early, so she dawdled to look prettier for the photos, arriving only after ten.

To her surprise, Remington had been waiting for quite a while, and Cedric said if she hadn’t been late, they could have been the first couple to get married that day.

Lizetta felt a mix of annoyance and joy, thinking maybe Remington wasn’t entirely devoid of love for her. Unfortunately, Remington left the country right after they left the office, shattering her delusions.

Maybe Remington was getting back at her for being late to their wedding. With that thought. Lizetta patiently waited.

But she waited until closing time, and Remington never showed up, the worst part being he didn't even call.

Lizetta was livid, tried calling that jerk, but the call didn't go through. She tried calling Cedric, but no one picked up his phone.

On her way back, Lizetta saw a video posted in the Starlight Group chat. The reclamation project that Starlight Group was cooperating on with Solstice Kingdom had an accident; two

sea, and the scene was chaotic. massive bulldozers had fallen into the deep

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Remington must have hightailed it out of there in the dead of night. In the video, the guy's trench coat was flapping in the sea breeze as he weaved through the bustling crowd, looking all frosty and serious.

Lizetta let out a sigh. No clue when he'd be back, but it was crystal clear this divorce wasn't happening today.

Right then, she got a message from Yolanda.

[Don't come back yet.]

Half an hour later, Lizetta got another message from Yolanda, and she rushed home, bursting through the door with urgent questions.

"What's gone down?"

“People from the Dashiell Group showed up. Look at this.”

Yolanda nodded toward the coffee table, where a business card and a few printed contracts were laid out. It was all about that gig for Evelina, where Lizetta had used Yolanda’s info online.

Lizetta wasn’t surprised they’d come knocking. “Did they give you a hard time?”

Yolanda shrugged, “Just the usual stick-and-carrot tactics. Pfft, as if I’m buying it. They think they can ruin my future and get me kicked out of school? The Dashiell family ain’t exactly mobsters.”

Lizetta’s expression turned somber. The Dashiell family might not be mobsters, but they sure had their ways.

If they decided to cut off someone’s air supply, squashing little fish like them wouldn’t even cause a ripple.

She was kicking herself for not busting Evelina’s hand yesterday, making it impossible for her to ever play the violin again. That’d show her for stealing tunes.

“Let her play, then,” Lizetta tossed the contract back on the table.

Yolanda blinked, annoyed, “Why should she get to play? Who’s scared of a little showdown?”

Lizetta cracked a smile instead, “Tell them the tune’s not for sale, but Evelina can have a one-time performance license for 200 grand.”

She was itching to see what kind of hot mess Evelina would make of it.

Yolanda’s eyes bulged, “Haha. 200 grand for a one-time gig? That’s a real bargain for Bitch Evelina! I’m on it.”

After shooting off an email, she reached out to Lizetta, “Where’s the divorce paper, c’mon, hand

it over. Gotta Taunt it on Facebook and find some new prospects while I’m at it

Lizetta plopped down on the sofa. “Didn’t go through: Remington’s left the country.)

Yolanda beld back, but couldn’t help cursing.

“Figures, jerks like him never play it straight! Off on a trip, laving the groundwork for his side chick while dragging his feet on the divorce, You could make a bulletproof vest out of his thick skin and it’d stop a nuke! What a fricking showott!”

Evelina sported when she heard about the 200–grand for a one–time license,

“Poor composer, what a money grab! But at least she’s sensible,”

It wasn’t her money anyway, she just cared about the outcome, and she was in a pretty good mood.

April joked, “Probably got greedy once they saw Mi. Dashiell’s people. These so–called composers act all high and mighty, but throw enough cash and they fold faster than anyone.”

*200 grand for a one–time performance right? Later, we can spin it as Mr. Dashiell’s favoritism toward you. Won’t that just kill people

Evelina’s eyes lit up, “You better get a good putt piece written, and let everyone know just how greedy that composer is.”

April was a pro at this game of stepping on one and touting another. She nodded, “Got it. You practice with the violin; it’s been a while,”

Evelina hadn't touched the violin since returning home; her mind was no longer on playing.

April handed her the violin, and Evelina reluctantly struck a pose. The violin screeched, and she tossed it aside, her face contorted with pain and irritation.

"What's going on?"

"It's all Lizetta, that bitch's fault; my arm and hand are killing me. I'm done practicing!"

The bruises from the beating hadn't faded, and Evelina's face twisted with hatred. She remembered Elara sneaking a peek at Lizetta's childhood dance competition videos the other night after meeting her, and her jealousy burned even hotter, venom in her eyes,

If only Lizetta's legs were ruined!

Remington had vanished without a trace, and only after a day did he send Lizella a message,

[Major project accident, left the country, return date uncertain.]

Lizetta, fuming, promptly blocked him.

A week flew by, autumn rains unceasing. The air in Zion City had turned decidedly chilly.

Lizetta left without taking any designer clothes from the wardrobe; they were meant for Mrs. Dashiell, not for her.

So, Yolanda took advantage of the weekend to drag Lizetta out shopping. They entered the mall, and Yolanda, arm in arm with Lizetta, made a beeline for a familiar shoe store.

"You've gotta wear soft, flat shoes now, ditch the old ones. We'll buy a couple of pairs today."

Lizetta nodded, “Sure, sure, I’ll follow your lead.”

She tried on a pair of ballet flats while Yolanda spotted another unique pair and dashed off.

Lizetta stood up, taking a few steps to see if they pinched, not noticing a wet spot on the floor that had been missed by the mop.

She stepped on it, her feet slipped out from under her, and she crashed backward.

“Liz!”

Yolanda caught it out of the corner of her eye and nearly had a heart attack. Lizetta was pregnant, and this fall could very well mean the end for the baby.

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Lizetta only freaked out for a sec she’d taken so many tumbles while dancing that her muscles have a mind of their own now.

She was about to pull a mid-air twist and flip when a big hand clamped down on her side. Before Lizetta could even process what was happening, she was scooped up off the ground into a full-on bear hug.

Her heart pounding, Lizetta looked up and locked eyes with the man who’d been MIA for a week. The mall’s overhead lights were blinding, but there he was, holding her, his perfectly combed hair catching the starlight, looking like some sort of god with his handsome face.

He was dressed to kill today in a black shirt and a silver-gray checkered tie. His suit wasn’t the run-of-the-mill kind – it had a bold peak lapel design, and with that silver brooch and matching watch gleaming, he was the epitome of posh arrogance.

Lizetta was so stunned being in his arms that she was totally spaced out. Then he whispered in her ear, “What, I’ve been away that long and you couldn’t recognize your own hubby?”

Hubby? That was a new one for Lizetta – she couldn’t help but blush to her roots, all discombobulated.

It wasn’t until she caught the scoffing, not teasing, look in Remington’s eyes that she snapped back to reality.

She pushed him away and hopped down, quipping, “Yep, didn’t recognize you. After all, even a mutt can look like a gentleman for a day.”

Remington almost burst out laughing in fury. He’d saved her and this was his thanks – a dig at his humanity?

“Can’t walk upright anymore? All you got left is a sharp tongue, huh? If I’m a mutt, then you’re mutt’s mate.”

Remington steadied her and then let go.

Mutt and the mate? What the heck – Lizetta was not amused.

“Boss, everyone’s still waiting.” Cedric stepped up, a respectful reminder in his voice.

Only then did Lizetta notice that Remington showing up had been strictly business. A lineup of suited and booted elites stood at the shoe store’s entrance, all eyes on them, waiting for him.

Even among these older folks, Remington’s regal aura was undeniable. His status was clear as day.

Lizetta wasn’t sure if they’d caught her snarky comments, and she blushed, looking down.

Remington addressed the store manager, who looked like they were scared to breathe, “Clean this floor up, get some proper mats for the try-on area, and don’t leave safety hazards lying

around.”

The manager nodded like their life depended on it, even scribbling notes.

Remington glanced at Lizetta and then walked away without another word.

The elites swarmed him, and he was back in business mode in no time, sharp as ever, “What’s with the leasing strategy here? The advertising’s not cutting it. Who’s still backing this outdated setup?”

As the group moved off, Yolanda rushed over, grabbing Lizetta’s hand and whispering with a squeal, “Gotta admit, Badass Remington’s got the hardware and software down pat. That aura of his – I didn’t even dare to come over. If only he didn’t have any crap to deal with, he’d be perfect.”

Lizetta was helpless, “Why do I feel like you’re trash-talking me?”

Yolanda’s eyes popped, “No way, he’s been eating you up recently? Where have you two been rolling in the hay? You’re staying with me – how come I don’t know squat?”

“Speaking of which, this mall belongs to the Dashiell Group?”

Lizetta went back to trying on shoes, ignoring Yolanda, but it seemed like she wasn’t destined for a peaceful shoe shopping experience today.

A snarky voice came from behind, “Hilarious, some people would do anything to marry into wealth and yet they’re stuck browsing at a plebeian shoe store, not minding the shame they bring to the Dashiell family.”

Lizetta turned around and saw Evelina and Shirley, looking like two peas in a pod.

was Shirley who'd been making the snide remarks. She was the sixth child in Remington's generation and was the daughter of Remington's uncle.

Before Lizetta was taken in, Shirley relished being the one and only girl, but when the former was adopted, without changing her last name, she stepped into the family hierarchy and had Remington's backing.

Whatever Shirley had, Remington made sure Lizetta had too – and often, what he gave Lizetta was even better than what was planned for Shirley.

High and mighty Ms. Shirley Dashiell couldn't stand it. So, to Shirley, Lizetta had always been a thorn in her side. It was no surprise that Shirley and Evelina were thick as thieves..

"Do you like the shoes here, Sis? Pick any pair, I'll buy them for you. After all, they're not expensive."

Evelina came over, sounding all generous, as if she'd completely forgotten the slap she'd received.

Lizetta motioned to a shopping guide, "Bring me one of each size from these two rows; she's footing the bill."

She pointed at Evelina, whose smile instantly stiffened, "Sis."

Yolanda rolled her eyes. "If you can't afford it, shut it. Seriously. I'm so done with people who flaunt what they lack!"

"It's not that I can't afford it, or that I'm stingy with you, but buying so many shoes is just

wasteful when you can't wear them all."

“So, you told me to pick whatever I wanted, right? I made my choice. Why do you care if I’m buying them to wear or to slap some cheap witch across the face with? What’s the matter, didn’t get enough last time and already forgot the sting?”

Evelina suddenly remembered the marks that Lizetta left on her body with a feather duster last time, which took a whole week to fade. She stepped back, her face turning sour.

Yolanda immediately grabbed a shoe and swung it fiercely through the air, “Can’t lie, these shoes have some real bounce–back. Bet they’d pack a punch on a skank’s face.”

Evelina shrunk back, and Shirley, fuming with anger, stepped forward, “Who are you calling a skank!?”

“Whoever takes it personally, that’s who! Why bother asking?” Yolanda rolled her eyes.

Shirley was so mad she was practically steaming, about to swing her purse. and go at it, but Evelina held her back.

“Chill out, Shirley. If Lizetta here doesn’t appreciate my good intentions, let’s just head across and continue our bag shopping spree. You pick a few your

kaf

like; they’re on me.”

She pulled Shirley away, but Yolanda couldn’t help but whisper to Lizetta, “Is she some kind of philanthropist or just a rich fool looking to shed her cash, like she gets nastily itchy if she doesn’t give stuff away?”

Lizetta shrugged. But when Shirley heard this, she spun around, chin up.

“You have no clue! Remi’s patrolling the mall today, and it was clear from the get-go. Anything Evelina fancies, it’s on his tab. Not just a few purses, even if she picked out a whole cartload, she could afford to gift it.”

Damn! That Remington, that douchebag, didn’t even mention footing the bill. when he saw Lizetta earlier.

Nice move, spending money on a mistress to slap his own wife’s face, huh?

“Liz.” Yolanda was filled with regret, wishing she hadn’t spoken so rashly, and now she had upset Lizetta.

But Lizetta’s face was stoic. She looked at Shirley and said, “Thanks for the reminder, Shirley. I’m about to run to the supermarket and grab some big scissors. Since I own half of everything that’s Remi’s, whatever you buy, I’ll just cut it in half.”

“You! Just admit you’re jealous of Evelina, quit the passive-aggressive crap.”

“Jealousy’s for creatures of the same species. My Liz is fairy-level; why would she be jealous of you getting uglier or doing facial surgery more often?”

Shirley was so infuriated by Yolanda she almost hopped on one foot. Evelina, worried the fight would become too embarrassing and alert Remington, dragged Shirley away.

Yolanda grabbed Lizetta, “Take back every word I said about that jerk having any guts. Let Remington, that scumbag, softie with ED, loser, go get rotten with that bitch!”

Lizetta patted her hand, “Forget them, bad vibes.”

Having lost her mood, Lizetta said to the shopping guide, “I’ll take the pair I tried on; just wrap them up for me.”

She handed the shoes over, and the shopping guide smiled, "Sure thing, Miss. I'll get you a fresh pair to wrap up; these are just the display model."

Lizetta nodded, not really caring.

As they left, the salesperson took the shoes off the shelf again and hurried to the back. Her phone rang, and she answered.

"Take care of those shoes."

Evelina ordered, her eyes full of annoyance, wanting to teach Lizetta a lesson, maybe even break her leg. How lucky could that woman get, just when Remington decided to show up!

"Ms. Hawthorne, rest assured," the shopping guide flipped the shoes over,

revealing greasy stains on the soles.

Lizetta and Yolanda left the shoe store and headed to a restaurant upstairs.

They ordered some spicy dishes, the scent already sending tantalizing.. aromas their way before they even started to dig in.

Lizetta actually loved spicy food because Rachel had it frequently, and she'd grown up influenced by that. But the Dashiell family's palate was more on the bland side.

Living under the Dashiell roof, Lizetta had to go with the flow; even in Oakridge Heights, she always prepared mild food, just in case Remington came home. Meal after meal eaten alone piled up to her disappointment.

"Oh, no! Baby, are you okay? Let me check!"

At the next table, a young mother accidentally knocked over a cup while pouring water, splashing hot water. She burned her arm but immediately checked on her daughter sitting in a high chair at a distance.

Lizetta was lost in thought until Yolanda put a couple of slices of cooked fish into her bowl.

“This place’s fish is top-notch. Eat up; the little one needs nourishment. I’m looking forward being the baby’s godmother.”

Lizetta snapped back to reality, “I haven’t decided yet.” NôveIDrama.Org is the owner.

Yolanda didn’t respond, and just pushed her phone over with a photo on the screen of Lizetta daydreaming.

“Look at that smile, you’re glowing with motherly love. You’d be surprised if you could actually let go. If you want it, go for it. I’ll even shave my head and play dad if needed; it’s no big deal.”

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Lizetta had her palm pressed against her belly under the table, eyeing that photo. So that was the kind of smile she had on her face just a moment ago.

Warm and yearning. Yeah, as the days rolled by, she found herself becoming more and more attached.

Aside from Thaddeus, this kid was her only flesh and blood left in the world. And hey, this was her and Remington’s child.

“We gotta figure out a way to get a prenatal checkup at the hospital.”

Yolanda was really stepping up like a worried dad, but Lizetta frowned and shook her head. She didn’t dare go. If she did, she feared that with the Dashiell family’s clout in Zion City, it wouldn’t stay hidden from Remington.

She still wanted to divorce Remington and skip the country ASAP, without any more complications.

Once abroad, it would be easy-peasy when the baby was born. Even if the Dashiell family caught wind of it, by then Remington would probably have tied the knot with Evelina and had their own kiddo, and wouldn't give two hoots about her baby.

Her phone vibrated on the table. Lizetta glanced at it – Shirley was calling. Lizetta declined without a second thought, and just as she put the phone down, it rang again.

Yolanda grumbled, "What a pain in the neck, she's not gonna rest until we run after her with scissors, is she?"

"Ignore her. Aren't you a sucker for pork? Give it a try."

Lizetta silenced her phone and set it aside. But peace was short-lived. The screen lit up once again; this time with a call from Hanna.

"Don't pick up, it's your mother-in-law, and it can't be good news," Yolanda pursed her lips.

Lizetta thought it over but decided to answer, sensing trouble brewing. And from what she knew about Hanna, dodging her call now would just mean

more hassle later.

"Lizetta, are you at the mall? Get down to the jewelry section on the first floor and sort things out. I'll be there shortly!"

Hanna's voice was stern, and she hung up before Lizetta could get a word in. Confused, Lizetta settled the bill with Yolanda and they headed downstairs.

The jewelry area was packed like sardines, especially around the jade

counter.

Yolanda plowed ahead, making way for Lizetta to follow. Before she could get a clear view, Lizetta caught a familiar wailing.

“Joseph, let me go!” It was Evelina.

“Holy smokes! Why’s it sound like a pig slaughter in the mall!”

Yolanda broke through to the front and gasped at the scene. Lizetta saw it too. Inside the jade counter, Joseph had two bodyguards pinning Evelina down, hammer in hand, ready to smash her wrist.

Evelina, her arms forced onto a small table, was panic-stricken, tears streaming down her face. She screamed at the bodyguards, “Let go! I’ll call the cops if you don’t. They won’t touch Joseph, but you won’t get away with it in front of all these people!”

The bodyguards hesitated, while Joseph, with one foot on a stool, looked every bit the thug kingpin junior.

“Whose side are you on, the Dashiell family or hers? Hold her tight, or I will have you pack your bags and hit the road!”

He waved the hammer and warned Evelina again. “That bracelet belongs to my Liz; you think you’re worthy? Just keep them paws still, and I won’t hit you! But if you squirm, and I cripple you, don’t blame anyone but yourself!”

As Joseph raised the hammer again, Evelina turned ghostly pale, screaming for help, “Shirley! Shirley, save me!”

Shirley stepped forward to grab the hammer from Joseph, scolding furiously.

“Joseph, let her go! Did you hear me?”

“Shirley, back off, or I’ll smash you too! You’re not the sharpest tool in the

shed to begin with; one hit from me and you’ll be a total idiot in the Dashiell family’s pocket!”

Shirley was livid. She was all delicate and ladylike, no match for a

rambunctious brat, hopping mad.

When she turned, she spotted Lizetta, who had just made her way through the crowd, and her rage boiled over. She let go of Joseph and charged at Lizetta, “Lizetta! This has got to be your doing! Joseph listens to you the most; make him let Evelina go!”

“Ah! My hand, my hand is broken!”

Shirley hadn’t even grabbed Lizetta when Evelina let out a blood–curdling scream. Joseph had brought down the hammer!

And at that moment, Cedric’s voice rang out from behind the crowd, “Clear the area; no photos allowed!”

Chapter 48

Lizetta whipped her head around and saw two rows of security in black swiftly part the rubbernecks.

A tall and imposing man strode over briskly, his sharp gaze piercing through. Lizetta, who was standing off to the side, like an arrow.

Before Lizetta could even gather her wits, Remington’s towering figure had breezed past her like a whirlwind, heading straight for the counter.

“Joseph!”

His voice was deep and icy cold. Joseph, who was startled by his arrival, dropped the hammer he was holding and was about to dive under the chair.

Remington took two quick steps forward, grabbed the boy by the back of his collar, and hoisted the now tall and skinny kid up.

“Remi! I’m sorry! Ugh, I can’t breathe! Liz, save me!”

Joseph was flailing, his tiptoes nowhere near the ground, crying out for mercy. When Lizetta saw Joseph getting the short end of the stick, she rushed over, wrapped her arms around Joseph, and confronted Remington.

“Remi, Joseph’s still sick! Let go of him! He’s already said he’s sorry!”

While she spoke, she tried to pry Remington’s hand off Joseph’s collar with one hand, but the man’s grip was surprisingly strong, his palm and fingers. like iron bars, and Lizetta couldn’t budge it.

Joseph’s neck and face were turning red, his eyes brimming with tears, looking pitifully at Lizetta for help.

I mean, even if the kid wasn’t sticking up for her, Lizetta wouldn’t stand for anyone messing with her little brother, not even Remington.

In a panic, Lizetta grabbed Remington’s hand and bit down hard on the man’s wrist. She was really putting her back into it because she was steamed..

Just because Evelina got a little roughed up, Remington got all fired up and protective? He didn’t even think twice about laying a hand on sick Joseph!

She was fuming and heartbroken, wishing she could take a chunk out of Remington, tasting the metallic tang of blood almost instantly.

Finally, Remington let go, and Lizetta, stumbling, managed to steady Joseph. When she looked up again, Evelina was already in Remington's arms, crying her eyes out.

She clung to him, her pale face showing off a huge bruise on her arm.

*Joseph, it hurts so bad. I'm scared. Boo-hoo. I think my hand's broken. What if I can't ever play the violin again? It really hurts so much."

She was on the verge of collapse, and Remington, with a slight furrow in his brows and a chill in his deep eyes, wrapped an arm around Evelina's shoulder, his icy gaze fixed on Lizetta and Joseph leaning on her.

"What a fine mess you two have made!"

Watching this unfold, Lizetta felt like her blood had turned to ice. She was his wife, but there he went, naturally siding with his mistress.

The two of them, her and Joseph, didn't even weigh as much as one Evelina in his eyes. Lizetta felt humiliated, tugged at her lip, but before she could say anything, Joseph, leaning on her, slid to the ground, eyes shut.

"Joseph!"

Lizetta shrieked, collapsing to the ground with him in her arms. She frantically caressed Joseph's face, "Joseph? What's wrong with you?"

Joseph's face was red and sweaty, and Lizetta, thinking of his illness, was filled with worry and panic.

Seeing that calling his name was useless, she instinctively looked to Remington for help. But Remington just stood there emotionless, picking up the sobbing Evelina.

The world went dark for Lizetta, as if she had fallen into an ice cave, her eyes. bloodshot as she stared at Remington's retreating figure.

"She's fine, but Joseph's passed out. Can't you see who needs saving?"

Her voice trembled, and she shook slightly.

Remington looked down at her, his expression cold and unfeeling, "He should face the consequences for his actions. Who taught him to be so arrogant and violent at such a young age?!"

Lizetta felt like Remington was scolding her – everyone knew Joseph clung to his sister Lizetta, who raised him. She was both his sister and sister-in-law.

Was Remington implying she was the one who egged Joseph on? Lizetta was disappointed to the core, her expression calming down, and she cracked a smile, "I taught him! You got a problem with that? Come at me!"

Chapter 49

Remington was so mad his veins were popping.

Evelina raised her hand and gently patted Remington's chest, speaking in a soft and frail voice, "Remington, don't be mad. I'm okay; just got whacked on the arm by a hammer. I'm not that delicate."

Remington didn't say another word, took his gaze back, and briskly walked out with Evelina in his arms.

Evelina, nestled in the man's embrace, secretly flashed a triumphant smile at Lizetta without making a scene. Lizetta felt her blood turn to ice, her face losing its last bit of color.

"Remington, do you even count as a man?! Your wife and your brother are over there, and you're just gonna walk out holding that damn thing?"

Yolanda, fuming with rage, charged forward trying to stop them. If Remington. walked out with Evelina, wouldn't Lizetta become the laughingstock?

But the man didn't stop his stride and ordered the bodyguards, "Clear the way!"

Two bodyguards immediately stepped up to pull Yolanda away, but she was too fierce for them, knocking them down in the blink of an eye.

However, that delay was enough for Remington to walk away with Evelina. Yolanda wanted to chase after them, but Lizetta spoke up.

"Yolanda, don't chase them; let them go."

She had already become the joke of Zion City four years ago. Only then did Yolanda run to Lizetta, who furiously glared at the remaining bodyguards.

"Joseph has fainted; aren't you going to come over and help?!"

Her voice was urgent, genuinely worried something might happen to Joseph. Then, she felt a tickle in her palm, and Lizetta was startled, looking down:

Joseph sneakily opened one eye and made faces at her.

This little rascal, he must have been holding his breath just now, his face all

red and sweaty, and she fell for it, nearly scared to death!

She pinched him discreetly, and the bodyguards quickly stepped forward, picking up Joseph and hurrying outside.

Meanwhile, Remington, holding Evelina, exited the mall, and Cedric had the car ready and came over.

Meeting Remington's impatient gaze, Cedric hurried over, "Boss, let me."

Evelina immediately looked up sadly, clinging to Remington's collar with her uninjured right hand, "Remi."

But her little act didn't make Remington hesitate for a second, as he handed her over to Cedric's arms.

Evelina held on, not wanting to let go, and Cedric said, "Ms. Hawthorne, the boss' arm hasn't had the stitches removed yet from his previous injury."

Evelina immediately let go, her eyes filled with concern, "It's been a week; how come your wound hasn't healed? Later at the hospital, have the doctor take a look too; I'm really worried."

Remington nodded slightly, catching a glimpse of the bodyguards carrying out Joseph, and then stepped into the car. This little brat, always such a good

actor!

Lizetta followed the bodyguards, holding Joseph's hand, and once they left the mall, she saw Remington bend over to get into the car, and the vehicle sped away.

"Pfft! In such a hurry, probably rushing to Evelina's funeral!"

Joseph couldn't hold back his laughter, shaking all over, which made the bodyguard stop in his tracks to look down.

Lizetta pinched the little guy's hand, worriedly saying, "He's in shock, quick! Get him in the car."

Once in the car, Lizetta let Joseph lean on her shoulder and asked him in a low voice, "What happened?"

Joseph, resting his head on Lizetta's shoulder, whispered the story to her.

A couple of days ago, Joseph saw Evelina at the hospital and noticed the bracelet on her wrist, immediately recognizing it as the heirloom jade bracelet of the Dashiell family.

Today, he heard that Shirley and Evelina were meeting up to go shopping, so he immediately followed them with his bodyguards.

He wanted Evelina to take off the bracelet, but she wouldn't cooperate, and the bracelet was too small; even the sales lady couldn't get it off after trying with foam and all.

Evelina also made some snide remarks about Lizetta, and Joseph, unable to hold back, had someone fetch a hammer.

"Too bad my brother arrived too quickly; I didn't hit the mark. Otherwise, I would've smashed it even if I had to break it, just not let her wear it! Who does she think she is? Liz, you're the only one I acknowledge!"

Lizetta was touched inside, gently patting the kid's head.

Yolanda leaned in and whispered to Joseph, "Joseph, that's where you went wrong; how could you just lash out like that? You should have brought me along!"

"Yeah, I'll call you next time."

"Let me tell you, I'm good with a hammer. I'll teach you, and once you've practiced, aim right for that witch's head, blow her brains out, see if it's white or black, ouch!"

Lizetta tapped Yolanda's head with her finger, "Don't lead the kid astray!"

Chapter 50

Yolanda realized it wasn't cool to talk to kids like that and quickly backpedaled, "Hey, I was just messing with you; don't take it to heart."

Joseph gave her an eye roll, sporting an "as if I'm as gullible as you" smug look.

At the sight of them bickering, Lizetta's lips curled slightly, her spirits lifted a bit.

At the hospital, Yolanda got a call to head back to set, leaving Lizetta waiting alone outside the ER. The doc checked things out and soon had Joseph moved to a room for observation.

Hanna rushed in and immediately lit into Lizetta, "I told you to handle things; how the heck did you let Joseph end up fainting and hospitalized? Can you do anything right?"

Seeing Lizetta catch heat, Joseph hopped off the bed in a jiffy, "I'm fine, Mom; lay off Liz. It's my bad; come at me."

Hanna, freaked out, hurried to the bedside, clutching Joseph, panicked, "What are you standing up for? Lie down this instant. Tell me, where does it hurt? How did you just pass out? Nosebleed? Fever?"

Lizetta turned and slipped quietly out of the room, saving herself the hassle of Hanna's wrath later.

—

She closed the door behind her, and as she turned around a slap came flying. Her ear was ringing before she realized what happened.

Her eyes went cold as she stared at the person in front of her. It was Elara, with Kevin hurrying over too, holding back a fuming Elara who looked ready to slap Lizetta again.

"What's this about? Let's talk it out." Then, he looked at Lizetta, "Liz, you okay? Your mom, I mean, Elara's just freaked out because of Eve's injury. Don't hold it against her."

Lizetta's cheek stung, her hands clenching at her sides.

"So, I get slapped for no reason and I'm not supposed to care? How's that fair?"

"You talking back now! Are you saying you didn't put Joseph up to smashing Eve's hand? Last time, it was you who slapped Eve, leaving her all bruised. Why are you so vicious?"

Elara was seething, as if she couldn't wait to land a couple more on Lizetta.

Kevin frowned too, "Liz, you used to be such a kind and generous kid, not like this. This isn't how Elara and I raised you."

He looked disappointed and confused.

Lizetta felt like she'd been stripped bare and thrown into a blizzard, then blamed by the very people who once gave her warmth, as if she should be grateful.

A frosty sarcasm sealed in her eyes, "Sure, you raised me till I was six, but you raised your daughter, not me. By your logic, should I charge you with abandonment?"

After I turned six, you didn't hesitate to dump me, knowing full well what Hans was like, and still, you shipped me off to the Gardenia family. When you chose your own daughter over me, any debt of upbringing was severed. You can't have it both ways!"

"You ungrateful brat!" Elara's face burned as she raised her hand again.

Lizetta grabbed her arm firmly, "Enough! If you want to play the elder card, go lecture your own kid. We're not related; I don't owe you my attention! I'll let this slide, but if there's a next time, I'll hit back twice as hard!" This content provided by NôvelDrama.Org.

She brushed off Elara with a look that was just shy of cursing them out, thinking they should have the sense not to overstep, not to play the age card. Elara trembled with rage; Kevin's expression complex,

he pulled at Elara, who was not ready to give up squabbling, "Let it go. Let's check on Eve." He led Elara away.

Down the hall in Evelina's room, her hand had been treated. It looked bad, but

it was just tendon and flesh wounds, no broken bones. Yet Evelina winced in pain, sobbing against the headboard.

"I'm not one to hold grudges, but I've only seen my sister four times since I got back, and been hit three of those. Why can't she stand me? Just because I came back to the Hawthorne family, she got sent away. But I've suffered six years in her place; I wanted to be with our parents too."

Evelina's tears fell faster, leaning into Remington's arms. After such injustice, she hoped Remington would hold her, comfort her, dry her tears, or even just pat her head.