

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted by Eleven Jewell

Chapter 404-435

Chapter 404

Keegan disapproved of the speech because it contained personal content, and Sophia seemed more focused on promoting herself than the company or project. Being a popular influencer, she knew how to leverage her strengths. Following the first two recruitment talks, Sophia's personal social media account experienced a surge of tens of thousands of followers. The news and popular topics also started to revolve around her more frequently.

However, this was not a good thing. It could make Sophia's image entangled with the Vinci Rivera Group. Over time, people would start to associate her personal image with the Vinci Rivera Group's reputation.

If she could maintain this "perfect" image, that would be fine. But, humans were prone to making mistakes, and it was impossible to always maintain an immaculate reputation. Any slip-up or wrong move could tarnish her reputation and make people jump to conclusions.

Keegan pursed his lips and picked up a pen to strike out the long paragraphs of Sophia's personal growth story and emotionally charged content. He only kept the parts that were relevant to the theme.

After he had finished reviewing the speech, Keegan handed the document to Sophia and said, "This will do."

Sophia glanced at it and her expression changed slightly. "Mr. Kane, don't you feel that you've removed too much of the content?" she asked.

Keegan looked at her but did not say anything.

Sophia explained, "The speech for the two previous recruitment talks was similar to this one, and it was very effective. Jackson was very satisfied, and he even asked me to add more content to it. If we remove all this, the speech won't meet the minimum duration."

Keegan's indifferent response was, "If you've already made up your mind about it, then why bother asking me to review it?"

Sophia was taken aback. She had come to see if Keegan remembered what had happened the previous night, and she also wanted to seek his approval for her skill. She was confident about her speech, given the success of the previous two recruitment talks. However, Keegan's complete rejection of her speech draft caught her off guard. Moreover, Stella was there, and Keegan seemed to have no memory of what had happened the previous night.

"Is there anything else?" Keegan asked in a cold tone.

Sophia regained her composure and said, "No. That's all from me."

"The recruitment talk this afternoon is crucial," Keegan continued. "You should be careful with what you say. The way you present yourself during the presentation reflects the company's image. Look at your face now, how much bigger is it compared to the last session?"

"Pfft!" Stella spat out the tea she was drinking.

Sophia's face turned pale and red in the same instant as she struggled to maintain her composure. She cursed inwardly, 'Did I get my face swollen from overeating? No. It's that bitch who did this to me!'

Stella put down her cup and walked over, carefully examining Sophia's face.

In fact, Sophia's face looked much better than yesterday. Sophia already had a round face, and Stella's slap had turned her round face into a flat one. So, even though the swelling had somewhat subsided, Sophia's face still looked one size larger than usual.

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Stella gloated, "Honey, the food at the cafeteria in your company must be really good. Sophia just joined the company, and she has already put on some weight."

Keegan glanced at her and said, "Even if the food is good, it should be eaten in moderation."

Sophia looked embarrassed and could not stand to stay another second. She muttered, 'Okay' and stormed out with her speech draft. Her anger quickened her footsteps.

Stella turned her gaze away nonchalantly and silently thought to herself, 'Sophia, you better not disappoint me, or this show won't be worth watching.'

The recruitment talk at Trinity University was a highly anticipated and grand event, not only for the Vinci Rivera Group but also for the university itself.

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Trinity University not only value this project, but they also welcomed Keegan, one of its esteemed alumni.

Year after year, the Vinci Rivera Group recruited a multitude of talented individuals, with many of them being Trinity University graduates. The company not only provided job opportunities but also sponsored promising students to study abroad, ensuring that exceptional talents remain in Hustuabourg. This had been vital in elevating the reputation of Trinity University.

Around one in the afternoon, Stella and Keegan left the company in a car and arrived at Trinity University within a mere twenty minutes.

A huge banner hung at the campus entrance read 'Welcome back, our shining star, Keegan – let's make the 'Rising Star' project shine". Even the plants at the entrance were trimmed into a bear shape, bowing in a welcoming gesture. The campus gate was wide open, and many students were holding their phones to take pictures of the passing cars.

Despite having graduated years ago, Keegan remained an iconic figure at Trinity University. Every year, during the opening convocation, the university's top officials would mention Keegan's name for publicity, making him an annual sensation among new students.

Stella was once a devoted fan of Keegan, and a post she had seen on the campus forum years ago came back to her. [What would you do if you could marry your college idol?]

Her answer was simple. [If he would marry me, I'd forsake all meat for ten long years.] Stella glanced at Keegan beside her and realized that after marrying him, she had lost the interest she once had in him. However, Stella felt a bit jealous of Keegan. Despite both of them being Trinity University alumni, she could not bring herself to contact her

lecturers when she compared her lackluster accomplishments to Keegan's impressive ones. She feared that her own lack of success would tarnish the reputation of their esteemed alma mater.

The best thing about returning to campus for Stella was regaining her lost competitive spirit. She silently challenged herself. She was determined to improve her credentials so that the next time she came to the university, she would not be overshadowed by Keegan.

The Vinci Rivera Group had sent a sizable delegation to the event, with five cars arriving at the campus entrance. However, vehicles were not permitted on campus except in designated parking areas, so the group parked their cars and made their way on foot. Alongside those directly involved in the recruitment talk, there was also personnel responsible for registering recruit info and promoting the company on-site. The recruitment talk was Jackson's responsibility. But, one of the university's top officials was acquainted with Keegan, so he went straight to Keegan upon their arrival. "Keegan, long time no see."

Keegan shook hands with him and replied, "Good to see you, Mr. Jackman."

Mr. Jackman was Keegan's former lecturer and had risen to the position of Vice President at the university. Keegan was his favorite student. The two had plenty to catch up on when they finally reunited. He chatted with Keegan for a long time, completely ignoring Jackson and Sophia who had arrived in a separate car. Jackson wore a serious and gloomy expression, feeling left out.

After Mr. Jackman had finished his pleasantries, only then did he recall the presence of another Mr. Kane and the speaker, Sophia. He turned to welcome them. However, compared to the warmth he showed Keegan, his welcome to them was more for formality's sake.

The recruitment talk was held in the university's Culture Square. The students had just finished their lunch break and were grouped to come over. There was media personnel fiddling with their equipment on the scene. And, judging by the number of cameras and smartphones filming, there were at least twenty media outlets present. It had been a few years since Keegan had visited there, and the campus had undergone quite a few changes. The most noticeable change was the giant screen on Culture Square.

The material for the recruitment talk was going to be displayed on this screen later. All the cameras below were also focused on the stage. Whatever was displayed on the screen would be instantly recorded by the media present.

Stella stared at the screen for a while until Keegan called her. Then, she snapped out of her thoughts. Following Keegan, Stella was led by Mr.

Jackman to the lounge. Mr. Jackman was very happy and said as they walked, "Keegan, do you know who else is here today?"

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Keegan did not like to play riddles. But, he had great respect for Mr. Jackman, so when he heard Mr. Jackman say that, he went along and asked, "Who is it?"

Mr. Jackman smiled and said, "You'll find out when we go inside."

Soon they arrived at the lounge. When the assistant opened the door, Stella immediately saw Marshall sitting cross-legged on the sofa in the lounge. He wore a

gray suit and a pair of silver-metal-framed glasses, and he was flipping through some documents in his hands.

“Marshall, guess who’s here?” Mr. Jackman said.

Marshall looked up at the sound of Mr. Jackman’s voice, took off his glasses, and revealed a pair of warm, light brown eyes. “Keegan.”

Stella was a little surprised, but then she remembered that when she asked Marshall to help her with her lawsuit, he told her that he was from Trinity University’s School of Political Science and Law. It was just unexpected to see him here on this occasion. However, Mr. Jackman quickly cleared things up for everyone. Marshall had given two public lectures this morning under a personal invitation from the dean.

Mr. Jackman and the dean of the School of Political Science and Law were good friends. They were also very familiar with Marshall, and they knew about his relationship with Keegan. So, when Marshall finished his public lectures, Mr. Jackman invited him to stay and attend today’s recruitment talk. Mr. Jackman also said that they would all have dinner together after the event. Marshall could not refuse such a warm invitation.

In places where the higher-ups gather, there were networking chatters, and Stella could not get a word in edgewise. Marshall, on the other hand, was very talkative and skilled in this kind of situation, unlike Keegan who was quieter and more reserved. After all, Marshall was from a social studies background and studied law. He was always better at maintaining interpersonal relationships than others.

As the conversation heated up, Mr. Jackman asked Keegan, “Where does your wife work?”

Stella felt a little embarrassed. Being a full-time housewife was not a big deal, but in front of the vice president of her alma mater, she did know how to respond.

Sophia gloated, “Mr. Jackman, my sister also graduated from your university.”

Mr. Jackman was very surprised and said with a smile, “Really? Which school did you attend, and what was your major? Keegan is so outstanding, so you must be no slouch either. Do you remember who your dean was? Maybe I even know them. Let’s all have dinner together later.”

Each question struck a nerve with Stella. She felt embarrassed. But, when she was just about to speak, Keegan said, “She’s not working right now. She’s at home preparing for conception.”

Stella was speechless. She thought, ‘Even if you’re trying to help me out, isn’t this excuse a bit too lame?’

However, the answer worked for Mr. Jackman. He asked Keegan to let him know when there was good news. He had already missed Keegan’s wedding, so he did not want to miss the baby shower of Keegan’s future child.

Hence, the little episode ended just like that. Sophia was frustrated because her attempt to embarrass Stella had failed.

Just then, the staff called Sophia to copy the data from the USB drive onto the computer and prepare the content for the talk. So, Sophia left to take care of it.

The multimedia control room was where they coordinated the display on the large outdoor screen. The content to be displayed on the screen had to be projected from there.

After about twenty minutes, with the help of the staff, Sophia had finished copying

everything she needed.

It was almost two-thirty now, and the recruitment talk was starting in half an hour. After thanking the staff, Sophia went out to familiarize herself with the script.

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After Sophia had left, the staff checked the equipment at the scene once again. In just a few minutes, the door to the multimedia control room was knocked on.

“Come in,” the staff said.

“Hello,” a clear female voice rang out. The staff turned his head. The woman said in a friendly tone, “The screen outside doesn’t display the image properly. Could you come out and take a look to see what’s going on?”

“How could it not display the image properly?” the staff said, getting up and walking to the screen.

“I have no idea either. Please come and take a look to find out the problem.

Their voices faded away as they walked away.

The door to the multimedia control room was slightly ajar, and the monitor screen inside flickered slightly.

When the staff arrived to look at the outdoor screen, he realized that it was not that it failed to display the image properly but there was no signal at all. He quickly asked his colleague in the multimedia control room to find out why. After going into the room, the colleague told him that the outdoor screen was not turned on.

The staff breathed a sigh of relief but was also puzzled. He remembered that when the Vinci Rivera Group’s speaker came to copy the information, he had turned on the outdoor screen himself. He wondered how it was turned off.

Stella came out of the restroom and happened to bump into Sophia who was on her way in.

Stella ignored her and was about to leave. When they brushed past each other, Sophia stopped her and said, “Stella, how does it feel to watch me give a speech at your alma mater?”

Stella paused for a moment, glanced at her, and said, “You can only make an appearance at Trinity University this way. After all, if you were to take the exam, even if you repeated it for ten years, you wouldn’t be able to enroll in Trinity University.”

Sophia’s eyes darkened. “Yeah, I can’t enroll in this university, but what about you?

What do you have to be proud of? Living in a cage and having to rely on your husband’s money? What do you have to be proud of?”

Stella thought, ‘This is exactly what Xianna said to me before. Sophia doesn’t even bother to hide her hostility anymore.’

Stella wondered, ‘All this time, she’s only been scheming behind my back. But yesterday, she made a move on Keegan, which caught me off guard. And now, she has the nerve to confront me face-to-face. I wonder what gives her the courage.’

She looked at Sophia for a few seconds then chuckled lightly all of a sudden. “You still have the nerve to act insolent in front of me. I guess I didn’t hit you hard enough yesterday.”

Sophia’s face darkened and the pain on her cheek began to throb. She clenched her fists and said through her gritted teeth, “I dare you to hit me in this event!” The Trinity University’s recruitment talk was the most important event, which was why Keegan

attended in person. Sophia did not believe that Stella would dare to lay a finger on her in such occasion.

Stella gave her a cold look. "Sophia, the Vinci Rivera Group only needs a speaker, and it's not like you're the only one who can do it. I think Keegan would prefer me, his wife, who also graduated from Trinity University. Do you want to find out?"

Sophia's expression changed. She gritted her teeth and left with a cold face.

It was two-fifty in the afternoon. Keegan looked at his watch and thought, 'It's been twenty minutes. Did Stella fall in the toilet or what?!

Just as he was about to ask Aldor to check the hallway, he saw Stella walking toward the stage.

Stella, who was wearing sunglasses, looked stunning as she walked up the stage with her lips slightly pursed and her long wavy hair. The years of postural training had made her very poised. She had a tall and curvaceous figure, which was accentuated by her confident stride. As she made her way to the stage like a model, the students below were captivated by her presence. They even thought she was a celebrity that the Vinci Rivera Group had invited and took out their phones to snap pictures of her.

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As Stella approached Keegan, he immediately reached out to remove her sunglasses. She frowned and was clearly unhappy with the gesture. So, she asked, "Why did you take off my sunglasses?"

Keegan responded, "You're wearing sunglasses on stage. It distracts the audience's attention away from the recruitment talk."

Stella snorted. "Yeah, you can control me. But, can you also control the audience's attention?"

"Pfft," Aldor could not help but laugh. "Madam is truly a performer. She has a bit of comedic talent."

But, as soon as Keegan shot Aldor a glance, Aldor cleared his throat, trying to act natural.

Keegan folded the sunglasses and put them in his pocket. "Stella, sit next to me and behave yourself. Don't talk nonsense."

"Okay," Surprisingly, Stella did not argue with Keegan this time.

At three in the afternoon, the recruitment talk had officially begun.

Mr. Jackman started by giving a brief introduction to the collaboration between the Vinci Rivera Group and the university. Then, he introduced each member of the team who came from the Vinci Rivera Group. The atmosphere at the scene quickly became engaged.

Jackson and Keegan made brief speeches about the collaboration and then handed the stage over to Sophia.

Sophia lowered the microphone and spoke gently. "Hello, Trinity University officials and fellow students. My name is Sophia and I am the speaker for the Vinci Rivera Group's 'Rising Star' project. I'm 22 years old and currently working in the operations department at the Vinci Rivera Group. Are there any students here around my age? Raise your hand. Let's see how many of you are there..."

Sophia's voice was very sweet, and her pace was neither fast nor slow. There was no cadence or exaggerated intonation when she was speaking. She sounded like she

was chatting with a good friend. Such an interactive presentation could engage people easily.

Stella lightly tapped her water glass as if she was marking time, or maybe she was showing a bored gesture.

“I’m talented? No, I’m not talented,” Sophia chuckled and said, “I was pretty lucky. When I was really young, I was abandoned at the doorstep of a welfare home. I don’t remember much, but I think it was in the middle of winter, and it was freezing outside with snow on the ground. They had taken me for a bike ride. I remember the wind was really loud in my ears. I kept complaining about being cold, and they promised to get me new clothes and gave me a roasted sweet potato. They told me to wait there, but I waited all day and night. And, they never came back to get me...”

Keegan’s face darkened. Stella glanced at Keegan and then looked away. ‘Sophia really can’t bring herself to delete the content that Keegan crossed out,’ she thought. Sophia talked about being abandoned, brought in by the welfare home, and the bullying she had experienced there. She concluded, “I love the saying, ‘What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.’ The way I see it, life doesn’t always give you a good hand, but it’s up to you to play it well. I owe a lot to my foster parents for their love and support. They gave me the opportunity to get an education and showed me how to make the most out of what I had. Looking back now, the tough times I went through seem like a distant memory. I still talk to friends about my experiences in the welfare home, but I’ve learned to let go.”

After taking twenty minutes to share her “tragic past”, only then did Sophia finally get to the point and began to talk about the “Rising Star” project. When she got to the second half of her presentation, the atmosphere in the audience was full of motivation. Sophia became more and more at ease as things were going exactly how she had wanted. “Everyone, please wait for a moment. Let me show you the relevant disciplines and content about our ‘Rising Star’ project on the big screen. You can compare the information shown here. If you have relevant majors and are interested in joining, feel free to fill out your information with our staff. They’ll be available to answer any questions you might have.”

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As Sophia was speaking, the large screen behind her switched to a presentation slide interface. However, what appeared on it was not what she had mentioned about the “Rising Star” project but a paternity test report. Scrolling down, it revealed Sophia’s birth certificate and her parents’ information.

The presentation slides detailed Sophia’s parents – Albert and Hylde – having an extramarital affair and giving birth to her, putting her in a welfare home, and then arranging for Albert’s wife – Rainee – to adopt her.

The sudden revelation left the audience bewildered, and the media quickly realized that something was amiss. They were frantically filming the scene.

“Holy shit. Sophia is Albert’s illegitimate daughter!”

“Who’s Albert?”

“He’s the husband of the couple who adopted Sophia. Isn’t he her adoptive father? How could he be her biological father?”

“It’s written on the slide that Albert had an affair with his secretary, resulting in the birth of Sophia. To cover it up, they put her in a welfare home. Albert’s wife has been devoted to charity work, so he used the accident to arrange for his wife to adopt Sophia...”

“Putting his own illegitimate daughter under his wife’s nose and having her help raise her? This is crazy even for a drama series. What did his wife do to offend him? Did she desecrate the Jewell family’s ancestral grave or something?”

“Wow, this is disgusting. I’ve been following Sophia for years. She even said on Facebook that she was bullied by the daughter of her adoptive family, and many people spoke up for her online. After all the fuss she had made, she was actually the false accuser. She’s an illegitimate daughter trying to take someone else’s place, and she even wanted to publicly shame the real daughter of that family? She’s not human.”

“How dare she speak so boldly at the recruitment talk, claiming that she achieved everything through her own efforts? How dare she!”

“She must have also made up the story about her being bullied in the welfare home. Although her biological parents sent her to the welfare home, there was no way they would let her suffer. I don’t buy it.”

“How can this person be so full of lies? It’s really disgusting! Why did the Vinci Rivera Group hire such a bad person to be a speaker?”

“I instantly lost interest in this ‘Rising Star’ project. Don’t they run a background check on the speakers before hiring them? This makes me doubt the hiring standards of the Vinci Rivera Group.”

The audience below was discussing this in a flurry. Sophia thought that her speech was a great success, and she could not help but smile smugly as she turned to look at Stella. However, Stella looked at her expression with a smirk.

The staff distributing information forms finally noticed that something was wrong. One of them hurried to the multimedia control room, wanting to turn off the screen, while the other rushed to the stage.

Aldor immediately sensed that something was wrong and stood up to look behind him. With one look, his heart sank to the bottom of the valley.

“Mr. Kane, we have a problem!”

Keegan also saw it. He then ordered sternly, “Take control of the situation immediately!”

As soon as he finished speaking, a water bottle filled with water was thrown onto the stage, splashing water on Sophia’s face.

Then, someone from the audience shouted, “Get out of Trinity University!”

The crowd’s reaction turned hostile in an instant with people throwing objects in Sophia’s direction and yelling, “Get out of Trinity University!”

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Sophia turned around with a confused look on her face. As soon as she saw the content on the presentation slide, her face went pale.

The information displayed on the presentation slide was beyond belief. The perpetrators mentioned in it did not have any morality or decency. Worse still, everything on the screen was true and had happened to Sophia herself.

Sophia had been upholding her image for so long, deceiving so many with her fabricated stories. How could her fans ever forgive this kind of deception? In the ivory tower of academia, the students' experiences were relatively simple, and the way they expressed their emotions were straightforward. They shouted and demanded Sophia be kicked out of their campus. Some threw water bottles; some threw fruits; one even threw a shoe, which landed right on Sophia's face, causing her nose to bleed profusely.

The university's top officials quickly instructed teaching and non-teaching staff to maintain order. As for the Vinci Rivera Group's staff, they hurriedly took the disgruntled Sophia backstage.

Jackson hastily contacted the PR department to handle the situation. "Rising Star" was a project managed by him, so he would be held accountable when there was a problem.

With the coordinated efforts of all parties, the screen was turned off in just a minute or two. However, the students below remained extremely agitated and refused to leave. They even became more violent.

Stella stood on the side, watching the drama unfold coldly. Keegan turned to look at her, and she gave him a nonchalant glance.

"Keegan." Marshall suddenly appeared on stage and whispered, "Let Stella ride in my car. Some of the students are blocking your company's cars. It'll be difficult to leave if we wait any longer."

Keegan pursed his lips. After a long pause, he said, "Aldor, take her and go with Marshall."

Aldor replied, "I'll come back with another car to pick you up."

Keegan did not say anything. He took out Stella's expensive sunglasses from his pocket and returned them to her before turning to take the microphone from Mr. Jackman.

"Everyone, please calm down and listen to me..."

When he began to speak, a bottle of paint was thrown toward him, splattering bright red paint all over his expensive suit. Some of the paint even got on his face. He pursed his lips and continued, "Please listen to me."

Stella watched Keegan's disheveled appearance and felt her heart tighten. She took a step forward, wanting to follow him. But, Marshall blocked her path. "Keegan can handle it. If you stay here, he'll worry about you and get distracted."

Marshall was right. The person who threw the object might not even be a student. The media were snapping photos at lightning speed. The anger of the students toward the Vinci Rivera Group had now turned into a reputation crisis. Stella staying there would not help him and could even become a burden.

Stella took a deep breath and spoke softly, "Alright, Mr. Moore."

Aldor and Stella left together in Marshall's car. As they passed by the entrance, they saw a lot of people, including students and reporters, gathered around the cars of the Vinci Rivera Group.

Stella turned her gaze away and said after a long while, "Aldor, please bring a new set of clothes for Keegan when you pick him up later."

Aldor agreed, and they rode in silence.

Marshall dropped off Stella at the Royalpark Villa and quickly left.

Meanwhile, Aldor took a set of clothes from Stella and hurriedly drove another car from the garage to the scene.
Stella, on the other hand, stood in the yard for a while before going back to the house.

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Within just half an hour, topics such as “Sophia is A Bastard” and “The Vinci Rivera Group’s Recruitment Talk at Trinity University Failed Miserably” made it into the trending list.

Sophia had set a perfect image beforehand. Those hashtags, including “# orphan”, “#inspiring”, and “#rising against all odds”, which had meant to be her labels, became sharp weapons against her after her image collapsed. Since she was in high school, she had used her “orphan” status to gain attention from the public and become a wellknown “inspirational internet celebrity”. Almost all of her fans followed her due to her “miserable” childhood and “never give up” attitude toward life.

Therefore, when her image collapsed, her former supporters turned on her instantly. Every time her social media page was refreshed, she would lose hundreds or even thousands of subscribers. In just ten minutes, she could lose tens of thousands of fans.

Sophia had often said on her social media that, [I’ve been through the stormy rains, so I want to hold an umbrella for others]. Whenever there was a disaster or mishap, she would immediately call on her fans to donate and even opened a reward function on her social media posts. She claimed that all the rewards would be donated to charitable organizations.

However, now, some netizens discovered that the donation receipt numbers Sophia had provided were not found in the respective charitable organizations. This aroused suspicions of fraud. As soon as the news came out, the public immediately condemned Sophia. Fraud was a despicable act, especially when it was done by exploiting the sympathy of netizens to raise donations.

The netizens stated, [What Sophia has been doing is certainly not “holding an umbrella for others’ after she had been through “the stormy rain”. On the contrary, she is inflicting more pain on others despite being through the adversity herself!]

Meanwhile, Albert’s side was also in chaos. As soon as Sophia’s identity as his illegitimate daughter was exposed, the media swarmed in like flies that smelled rotting flesh. They instantly surrounded Albert’s company.

Albert was trapped in the company and could not leave.

While anxiously holding her phone, Hylda paced back and forth in the company’s office. “Why isn’t Sophia answering her phone? I wonder how she’s doing right now,” she muttered, and her worry was palpable. The news of Sophia’s nosebleed from being hit by a shoe had left Hylda almost going nuts with concern, and she was unable to sit still.

Albert’s phone was already turned off. Whenever he turned it on, countless people he knew from the media would call him to ask about his relationship with Sophia. Sweat beads formed on his forehead. He was obviously caught off guard by this sudden turn of events.

He said through his gritted teeth, “Who the hell put up those information?”

“It must be Stella!” Hylda snapped, “I warned you about her before. She must have

known something a long time ago, which is why she's been going against you. Why didn't you believe me?! She's trying to ruin Sophia by bringing this to the surface!" Albert regretted not realizing the signs earlier. Stella's repeated use of the word "bastard child" during their phone call that morning should have tipped him off that something was wrong. His anger had clouded his judgment, causing him to overlook it. He also did not expect Stella to make her move this quickly and ruthlessly. 'She must have learned it from Rainee!' Albert cursed inwardly. He frowned and said, "How much information does she have against us?"

Hylda's heart tightened. "Albert, do you think she might know—"

"No!" Albert interrupted her. He glanced in the direction of the door and said, "Stop talking nonsense. Let's figure out how to get out of here."

Keegan did not come back all night, and his phone was turned off. Stella could reach Aldor's phone, but he only answered twice. Each time he said, 'Mr. Kane is busy.'

Felicity called Stella after seeing the news online and said, "I knew there was something fishy going on between Sophia and your dad. I told you that your dad was too good to her, and now it's all over the news. I was right!"

Chapter 412

'You grew up with Sophia in the same house, yet you didn't see the signs. But, now that I think about it, Sophia's round face and bulbous nose are obviously inherited from Albert, aren't they? And Albert, that shameless man, not only cheated on your mother but also had her help him raise his bastard child. He's not even worthy of being called a human!'

Felicity kept talking like a hindsight expert, feeling that many things had already foreshadowed Albert's despicable behavior. After she finished speaking, she noticed that Stella was silent. So, she spoke softly, "Stella, you're not mad at me for cursing Albert, are you?"

Stella came back to her senses and calmly said, 'I don't care.' Albert no longer deserved to be called "father" by Stella for what he had done.

"Felicity, do you know how the Vinci Rivera Group is doing now?" Stella asked.

'They're being roasted on social media. Many reporters are waiting outside their office building for interviews. The Vinci Rivera Group has been trending on social media for the past few days with many topics related to Sophia. So, when this scandal came out, it definitely had an impact on the company's image. Sophia's social media page even disabled the comments. People can't vent their anger there, so they went to the Vinci Rivera Group's business page to rant about it.'

Not only that, but several netizens claiming to be former employees of the Vinci Rivera Group also came forward with allegations. They said that there were shady dealings in the Vinci Rivera Group's hiring process and that their external job postings were just a cover for internal referrals. Even if a candidate was hired through external recruitment, they could still be replaced by someone with connections to the company during their probation period. With so many hidden rules, they also said that the Vinci Rivera Group was no longer the fair and competitive environment it used to be.

Given Sophia's qualifications and experience, she would never have met the Vinci Rivera Group's standards. Yet, she managed to join the company and take on such an important position, all because the Jewell family and the Kane family were related by

marriage and the Vinci Rivera Group gave her special treatment. Some even went so far as to bring up a lawsuit that the Vinci Rivera Group had with an intern last year to question the company's hiring standards. Clearly, the information was deliberately used to smear the Vinci Rivera Group during this wave of attention. While the Vinci Rivera Group did have some internal referrals, they were very rare. Even if that person was a shareholder, if they were not capable enough, they only had the right to dividends and could not hold important positions in the Vinci Rivera Group. Stella could not claim that all the employees of Vinci Rivera Group were external hires. At least, those recruited by Keegan had been selected based on their skills and abilities.

Back in the spring and fall recruiting seasons, it was Keegan's busiest time. With so many people submitting their resumes, screening candidates was a very stressful task. In addition to the candidates' education, their own professional abilities were also very important. Therefore, the hiring standards set by the Vinci Rivera Group were particularly high. Candidates had to go through four rounds of interviews. Even if the candidates had passed all the interviews and entered the internship period, they still had to pass the internship evaluation. If they failed, they could not be formally hired. However, this situation was very rare. After all, those who could safely make it through those four rounds of interviews would not be too bad.

Stella knew the lawsuit that netizens had dug up very well. Because of this incident, the intern even splashed paint on Keegan's car.

The intern who was dismissed from the Vinci Rivera Group was not let go due to a lack of professional abilities. It was discovered that he had been arrested for soliciting sexual services, prompting the company to terminate his internship and settle his salary before ultimately firing him. Despite this, the intern felt that his personal conduct was not related to his work and believed that the company had no grounds to expel him. As a result, he decided to sue the company.

Initially, Keegan had hoped to handle the situation discreetly. He understood that the reason for the intern's dismissal could harm the intern's reputation. So, he kept it confidential, and only the company staff were aware of it. While Keegan disapproved of such behavior, he did not want to completely destroy the intern's future.

However, the intern's demand for compensation and his attempts to use the incident to threaten the company angered Keegan. In response, Keegan decided to publicly disclose the reason for the intern's dismissal. This move resulted in the intern losing the lawsuit and earning a negative reputation within the industry. Regardless of his previous accomplishments, top companies like the Vinci Rivera Group were unlikely to consider hiring him again.

The intern was furious about the outcome and retaliated by vandalizing Keegan's car with paint. This led to his arrest for violating public security regulations.

Now, the netizens were using this case, which had been ruled on, to smear the Vinci Rivera Group.

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Some netizens started to make up stories using a picture. They claimed that after they had sent their CVs, the Vinci Rivera Group's HR staff discriminated them based on their education and region and even verbally harassed them.

The collapse of Sophia's image resulted in the fall of the Vinci Rivera Group into a corporate reputation crisis. People began to question its corporate image. After all, before Sophia's scandal, there was another incident caused by Jackson six months ago.

Behind the incident, it seemed that someone was deliberately fanning the flames and directing the blame toward the Vinci Rivera Group. The discussion on corporate image and employee quality was more heated than that of Sophia's scandal. This outcome deviated from Stella's initial expectations.

Meanwhile, after the incident, Keegan and others were able to keep the situation under control with the help of the university's top officials and police who arrived later. They did not leave Trinity University until evening.

Aldor drove a stretch Lincoln limousine, which could carry all the Vinci Rivera Group staff. Sophia was sobbing all the way and annoying everyone on the ride.

Due to the unexpected turn of events, the Vinci Rivera Group staff who was present in the recruitment talk were disheveled. Sophia, in particular, had taken the hardest hit, with half of her face now swollen and blood still visible on her skin. She looked extremely miserable.

However, there was not a single person in the limousine who could muster any sympathy. Everyone was cursing inwardly, 'She's the one who caused this mess, and now she has the nerve to cry?'

Keegan shouted with a cold face, "Shut up! Stop crying or get out!"

Among the people in the car, Jackson was the most furious. He had just returned from the West of Hustuabourg, and the first project Cordelia had entrusted to him was ruined just like that. He felt like he really wanted to kill Sophia!

Sophia was so scared that she stopped crying out loud, biting her lips in terror.

Jackson said with a gloomy face, "If I find out who's behind this today, I won't rest until I make them pay!"

Keegan glanced at him and said, "You didn't run a background check when selecting your team members. What's the point of saying this now?"

Jackson was not happy. "Keegan, weren't you the one who brought in Sophia? Why didn't you run a background check on her? Isn't she the daughter of your father-in-law's family? Didn't you know anything about their family affairs?"

Keegan's face darkened, as he replied, "Are you seriously suggesting that I went out of my way to bring in someone just to set a trap for you?"

Jackson looked gloomy and said, "Even if you had no idea, your wife should've known about it, right? Why did this news break during the recruitment talk today? Isn't the timing a bit too coincidental?"

As Sophia listened, she suddenly remembered Stella's meaningful smile when she gave Stella a smug look once she ended the speech. She thought to herself, 'Stella didn't seem surprised at all when the news broke out today.'

After looking back at Stella's attitude in recent days, Sophia suddenly exclaimed, "I know who did it! It's Stella! It must be her who swapped my USB data!"

Keegan's expression darkened, and his tone was cold as he said, "Think before you speak, Sophia."

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Sophia, on the other hand, got agitated. "Mr. Kane, it must be Stella. She had the motive. When we were discussing the process of the recruitment talk, she was absent for a long time. That must have been the time she swapped the files in my USB drive! We should check the surveillance footage-"

'Enough!' Keegan's voice was cold. "Do you think that at this point, anyone cares who's the culprit? Can this salvage the damage that has been done to the company's reputation?"

Sophia turned pale. Her lips were trembling, and she could not say another word.

Jackson glanced at Keegan. "Keegan, isn't it possible to investigate the root cause while also salvaging the company's image? If someone hadn't intentionally caused this incident during the recruitment talk, how could we have ended up in this mess?"

Keegan looked at Jackson and said, "I've always said that we should focus on promoting the project instead of putting in personal agendas. Look at what you did. You relied on Sophia's image to build up hype for publicity. You should have seen this mess coming when you did so. As for what I want to do, you can question my decision when you're holding my position."

Jackson looked extremely unhappy, and it took him a while to say, "I'll take responsibility for my role. But, I will also not let the culprit get away with it."

Keegan's face grew colder.

The tension between them became palpable in an instant.

"Mr. Kane." Aldor interrupted them. He then continued in a low voice, "Old Madam is on the phone."

Keegan's demeanor softened slightly when he took the phone. "Hello? Yes, we're on our way. We'll be there soon. Understood. Okay, got it," Keegan said. Cordelia ended the call after exchanging a few more words.

"What did Grandma say?" Jackson frowned.

"She's coming to the company," Keegan replied flatly. He then turned to Aldor and said, "Drive faster."

The stock price of the Vinci Rivera Group had been performing well, thanks to the success of the "Rising Star" project. However, this afternoon, the stock value plummeted due to the incident. The shareholders were extremely dissatisfied with the situation and had already gathered at the company. They demanded immediate public relation crisis response and accountability from the responsible parties.

The shareholders were all gathered in the conference room of the Vinci Rivera Group building, discussing the matter in heated tones.

"This is absurd! How could such a thing happen during the live broadcast? Who was responsible for selecting the speaker?"

"Jackson was in charge of the project, so he was the one who appointed the speaker.

"Why didn't he run a background check on her thoroughly? What did he learn during his time in the west?"

Chandler's supporters raised their eyebrows. "Jordan, that speaker was personally recruited by Keegan into the company. Jackson only chose her out of his trust in Keegan's judgment. How can you blame Jackson for this? If the first line of defense had been properly checked, we wouldn't have to deal with this mess."

Keegan's supporters were not to be outdone. "Peter, let's not forget that Sophia was

originally hired by Keegan to manage accounts in the operations department, not to be a speaker. It was Jackson who pushed for her to take the stage, hoping to leverage her internet celebrity status for our project. But, we're not here to cultivate internet celebrities, we're here to promote our project. And, let's not forget that Jackson is a specialist in news media operations. He should have considered the risks before putting Sophia in this position."

"Sophia is Keegan's sister-in-law, and Keegan has been married for so many years. I refuse to believe that he knows nothing about the Jewell family's affairs."

One person sneered, "Keegan has always claimed that the recruitment should be fair and impartial and that there should be no favoritism. So, why is he playing favorites now?"

Someone teased, "Hey, Robert. Still bitter about Keegan turning down your son's resume?"

"It's not about me. Keegan made a promise, and he should have followed through. He can't just talk the talk and not walk the walk. Otherwise, he won't be able to convince people." "Come on, guys. Let's not talk about this. Cordelia doesn't like to hear this. Keegan is her beloved eldest grandson, after all."

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Cordelia stood outside the door, listening to the discussion. She pursed her lips for a long while before she finally said, "Keegan really lacks interpersonal skills. Only a handful of the old guard really supported him."

Baldwin was speechless. He thought, 'I was under the impression that you were worried about how you should handle this matter while you were standing at the door. I never expected you to be so nonchalant about it and only concerned about your grandson's personal connections. They said that you were biased, and you didn't deny it at all.' Baldwin then said, "The young master's expertise lies in research and development, not handling these sorts of situations."

Cordelia commented, "When Keegan was growing up, I put all my effort into training him to excel. But, I neglected to teach him the art of eloquence. He really needs to learn it from Stella. Look at her. She's strong when she needs to be, and soft when appropriate. And, she never backs down from what she wants. Plus, she acts swiftly and decisively."

Baldwin said, "Weren't you just complaining about her causing trouble when you were on the way here?"

Cordelia glanced at him and said, "I'm not saying what she did was wrong. She needs to take care of the Jewell family herself. If she keeps letting people choke her, she'll never be able to fight back. She'll always be at their mercy. It's just that I didn't expect her to blow things up so much. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I'll just get my losses back from Keegan."

Baldwin was speechless. He thought, 'How optimistic of you.'

"Let's go," Cordelia said. "I need to play the role of the serious, responsible leader. Otherwise, someone might not be happy."

When Keegan and the group arrived at the company, the conference room was already filled with people.

Cordelia sat at the head of the table with Chandler to her left.

Everyone looked serious, and the room was silent.

As soon as Sophia entered, she felt weak in her legs and had trouble standing. She had never seen such a grand assembly, and just thinking about today's events and the impact on the Vinci Rivera Group made her face pale. She did not know what kind of trial awaited her.

After being exposed as Albert's bastard child, her hard-earned inspirational image collapsed in an instant. She did not even have the courage to view her social media page now. Her career and status were destroyed.

"Please, have a seat," Cordelia said coolly. Someone at the door helped Sophia get a chair.

After everyone was seated, Chandler spoke up. "Jackson, as the person in charge of this project, you bear an inescapable responsibility for the losses to the shareholders and the impact on the company, regardless of the reasons for what happened. So, let's start with a sincere apology to everyone here."

The incident had already caused a significant impact. Chandler knew that to appease the shareholders, they needed to show sincerity. This was something he had always been clear about.

Jackson was cooperative and understood the gravity of the situation. He stood up and offered a sincere apology to everyone present. It was a stark contrast to the rebellious and misbehaving person he had been six months ago.

Someone among the shareholders said, "It's not all Jackson's fault. This is his first time handling this kind of project, and there may have been oversights on his part. Plus, the speaker wasn't someone he hired. It's not fair to blame him alone for this."

"Right now, it's pointless to hold others accountable. We should think of a way to handle this PR crisis."

"But, the evidence is clearly laid out. How can we handle this? No matter what, in the end, it's our fault for not properly vetting the people we hire."

"Well, there is a way," the PR manager suddenly interjected. "Sophia is Keegan's wife's sister. If we spin it as her decision to hire Sophia, it could potentially salvage our company's image."

Keegan's face darkened when he heard that.

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The PR manager did not notice Keegan's darkened expression and continued, "In the wake of this incident, we've seen a lot of netizens sympathizing with Stella. If it's revealed that Stella was the one who brought Sophia into the company, the focus will shift to her being deceived and her mother bringing Sophia into their home. It will potentially divert attention away from Vinci Rivera Group."

Sophia's face turned pale. She thought, 'He's planning to abandon me completely!' Everyone looked at Keegan.

The fastest way to calm things down was to shift the public's attention.

If this incident had happened at any other time, it might have been manageable. The Vinci Rivera Group's PR team was known for their expertise, and they could have easily mitigated any damage. They did not care much about Sophia's reputation, but they could not let her involvement harm the company's image. Unfortunately, it happened today, and the incident was captured by numerous media cameras and

broadcasted live on the internet. The news spread like wildfire and could not be contained, even with attempts to manipulate the search trends.

Although Sophia's image collapse was the main issue at hand, the public's anger was more directed toward her deception. And more specifically, Albert raised Sophia, his illegitimate daughter, right under his wife's nose, allowing her to take what rightfully belonged to his legitimate daughter.

Stella and Rainee were the biggest victims. If it was revealed that Stella had convinced Keegan to hire Sophia, it would generate great sympathy for Stella and Rainee who had been deceived. The focus would then be on the Jewell family's scandal, and the attention on the Vinci Rivera Group would fade away.

At that time, the Vinci Rivera Group could have released an ambiguous statement and easily distanced themselves from the incident.

It was clear that everyone agreed with this solution.

Chandler looked up at Keegan and asked, "Keegan, what do you think?"

Keegan looked over before he calmly responded, "Do you honestly believe it's acceptable for a company of our caliber, one of the top 500, to simply shift the blame onto a woman when things don't go according to plan?"

Everyone looked at each other upon hearing his response.

Chandler responded, "This matter concerns the interests of all shareholders. Do you have a better solution?"

Keegan pursed his lips and replied, "The Vinci Rivera Group has faced countless crises of all kinds over the past few decades. We've always relied on our products to speak for themselves, and we've never heard of a crisis being solved by pushing a woman to the forefront and leaving her to deal with it alone."

"Keegan, you better not say that. We're in the digital age now. The spread of information on the internet is lightning-fast. Bad news travels fast. It took the Vinci Rivera Group decades to establish its brand reputation, but this incident could instantly damage it."

"People are already discussing this matter everywhere. If we don't handle it promptly, the losses could be even more severe."

"Back when Mr. Kane Sr. was alive, the company also faced a similar incident, and Mrs. Kane Sr. even resigned from her position in the company because of it. She only returned after several years. As her eldest granddaughter-in-law, Mrs. Kane should also follow her example and make sacrifices for the company," the PR manager advised.

The shareholders all expressed their agreement, and it was evident that they were in favor of the PR manager's proposal.

Sophia thought, 'These people really don't care about me at all.' As Keegan had mentioned earlier, the situation had escalated too far and the damage to the Vinci Rivera Group had already been done. No one seemed to be interested in figuring out who was responsible for the matter. Sophia realized that she was nothing more than a pawn that had been used and then discarded.

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As Sophia thought about that, her expression changed. She thought to herself, 'Even if I fall into hell, I will drag Stella down with me!'

Just as Keegan and the major shareholders were at a standoff, Sophia suddenly spoke up loudly. "Everyone, I know who did this today! I know who wanted to smear the image of the Vinci Rivera Group!"

Keegan's expression darkened. He pursed his lips before he said, "Aldor, get her out of here."

Sophia had already made up her mind to burn her bridges. "It's Stella! She's the culprit. She put those contents on the USB drive," said Sophia while struggling.

Everyone's expression changed at Sophia's revelation. Aldor had already dragged her to the door, but Chandler intervened. "Let her go. We have the right to know what's going on," Chandler said.

Sophia immediately broke free from Aider's grasp and stepped forward. Stella and Keegan's marriage has been on the rocks for a while. She was unhappy about his affair with a celebrity. She knew my identity, so she used me to create this scandal to get back at him. The Vinci Rivera Group's reputation was just collateral damage. She did this to get revenge on Keegan."

As Sophia spoke, Keegan grew angrier. When she finished speaking, Keegan snarled, "This is utter nonsense!"

"Why are you so anxious to deny it, Keegan? Let's find out whether this is true from the surveillance footage! If it's really done by your wife..." The man paused and looked at Cordelia. "Cordelia, you need to give everyone a satisfactory explanation."

Cordelia raised her eyebrows slightly and said, "If the culprit is really someone from the Kane family, I will not condone it."

Keegan pursed his lips tight and clenched his hands slightly.

The surveillance footage from the university had already been retrieved, and it was now being copied. Soon, the video was sent over. Baldwin projected it onto the conference room's big screen.

The video showed the multimedia control room staff coming and going before the recruitment talk. After Sophia had left, a woman in a university uniform appeared at the door and called a staff member out of the room.

No one entered or left the multimedia control room until that staff member had returned, which was already two-thirty in the afternoon.

The surveillance footage showed many people passing by. It was not until a man in a suit knocked on the multimedia control room's door that someone entered. He left after three or five minutes, and the man in a suit was none other than Marshall.

Sophia looked at the video in disbelief and shook her head. "That's impossible. She must have been there. It was that man in a suit who helped. He was the one who pulled me at the hotel that night!" she exclaimed.

Keegan looked at her coldly as he asked, "And, when was that?"

Sophia shuddered and fell silent instantly.

Cordelia said, "There's a staff member in the room when Marshall went in. Would he have tampered with anything in front of the staff? That would be ridiculous."

Cordelia sat up straight and continued, "At this point, it doesn't matter who did it. The damage to the company has been done. Everyone involved in this project today is implicated. Why didn't you guys keep an eye on the multimedia control room? It's a negligence on your part." Her voice was calm but commanding.

She added, "Although Jackson is the project leader, he's young and inexperienced.

So, he can be forgiven for his mistake. But Keegan, you have the most working experience here. Hence, you shouldn't have let this happen. You bear the primary responsibility for this."

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Keegan lowered his eyes and gave an affirmative response before Cordelia continued, "Hand over the 'Opulentus' project to Mr. Walford for the time being. Apologize and issue any necessary statements. We have to clean up the aftermath of this situation thoroughly.

"Understood," Keegan said.

However, a shareholder questioned the severity of the punishment.' Cordelia, isn't this punishment too lenient?" he asked.

Although the punishment may have seemed severe, it did very little to harm Keegan. Everyone in the Vinci Rivera Group knew that Keegan's biggest asset was Semiconductor Technology, a company he had aggressively acquired and invested a significant amount of research funds into. At the time of the acquisition, many shareholders opposed the proposal, leaving the Vinci Rivera Group with only ten percent of the shares, while the remaining fifty percent were Keegan's personal investment. However, Semiconductor Technology made a breakthrough in research this year.

Who would have thought that a cottage-scale company would turn the tables in a few years and become the most promising chip semiconductor company in the industry today?

When Semiconductor Technology was struggling to generate profits, the shareholders did not want to invest in it. But, when it began to make money, they started to feel envious. Many shareholders now felt that Vinci Rivera Group's investment in it was too meager and made multiple attempts to acquire shares in Semiconductor Technology. However, Keegan rejected their offers each time.

The potential for Semiconductor Technology to soar once it became publicly listed was undeniable. With Keegan holding over fifty percent of the company's shares, the financial gains would be enormous, multiplying several times over like a snowball rolling down a hill. It was enough to make anyone envious.

Cordelia glanced at the person and asked, "What do you suggest then, Derrick?"

'Well, this incident has caused significant losses to us shareholders. Since Keegan has expressed his intention to compensate us, why not have him sell twenty percent of the shares in Semiconductor Technology to Vinci Rivera Group?"

Cordelia could not help but chuckle at Derrick's proposal. "Derrick, correct me if I'm wrong, but weren't you the one who vehemently opposed Keegan's acquisition proposal for Semiconductor Technology back then? You argued that the research and development team wasn't mature enough, the investment was too large, and the results were uncertain.

That's why you persisted on reducing Keegan's suggested forty percent stake to just ten percent," Cordelia pointed out. "Keegan personally funded the research and development. After all the hard work, now that it has finally paid off, everyone is scrambling for the shares. Semiconductor Technology is Keegan's personal investment, so it's not my place to make decisions on his behalf."

Derrick's face immediately turned red. He did not expect Cordelia to be so straightforward.

Cordelia continued, "Vinci Rivera Group has been through a lot of tough times, but we've always managed to get through them as a team. We used to be able to sit down and calmly discuss how to handle a crisis. But now, we're just trying to figure out who to blame and how to limit our own losses. If we can't stick together through the good times and the bad, then there's no point in having these meetings. If anyone has a problem with that, they can just sell their shares and leave."

With those words, the room fell silent.

The sudden threat from Cordelia to have the shareholders withdraw their shares had caught everyone off guard. Although it was clear that this temporary crisis would not lead to the downfall of the Vinci Rivera Group, the scene was created more likely for the sake of salvaging their own losses rather than for the company's welfare.

However, the notion of relinquishing their shares was simply out of the question. They had reaped significant profits over the years, all thanks to the success of the Vinci Rivera Group. How could they easily give up their shares?

"We will conclude today's meeting unless there are any objections. However, I want to make it clear that if anyone chooses to take any covert actions instead of addressing their objections here, I will not tolerate it."

The meeting finally came to a temporary end after Keegan had surrendered the "Opulentus", a chip semiconductor project. On the other hand, the Vinci Rivera Group still had to deal with the online criticisms that followed. Regardless, they had to give the public an explanation.

When they left the meeting, Jackson stopped and looked at Keegan. He suddenly said with a mockery tone, "I didn't expect you to be so devoted to love. What a pity."

Keegan frowned. But, Jackson just walked away after he said that.

Cordelia had been in the meeting until late at night and was feeling a little tired. So, she did not stay long after the meeting ended.

While Keegan was in the car, he watched the video repeatedly with a frown on his face. "Aldor, did you tamper with this video?" he asked.

"I didn't. This is exactly how it was when I retrieved it from the university. There was no sign of madam in it," Aldor replied.

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Keegan pursed his lips. 'She said she went to the washroom at two-thirty. While standing at the end of the corridor, I saw her pass by the multimedia room when she went to the washroom. And yet, none of this is shown in the footage.

'It's obviously altered.

'How could she do this in such a short time? Is she working with somebody else?'

Keegan shut his eyes. Then, he thought about the time that he met bumped into Marshall during the event and how he appeared in the video. 'It can't be a coincidence, right?'

In the western suburbs, Trevor was scrolling through the online news on his tablet while lying on the recliner as he flatly said, "What's happening with the Jewell family now could be made into a TV series."

Xavier replied, "I'm pretty surprised too. I never thought that Sophia could actually be

Albert's biological daughter."

'Why would Stella choose to let everybody know about this at this time? She probably knows it'll affect Keegan too, right?'

Xavier replied, "Rumor has it that Keegan Kane got very close with an actress recently, and they're getting a divorce because of that."

"Impossible."

Trevor put his tablet aside. "Keegan hates showbiz, and he would never mess around with an actress. I don't think the rumor can be trusted."

Xavier continued, "I don't think so. She's the same person that Keegan left with when he got married, and there were a lot of witnesses too. Besides, Ms. Stella is somewhat a part of showbiz too. I guess you're the not trustworthy one, boss."

Trevor paused for a while before he said, "There are plenty of other reasons she could use to divorce Keegan, and she didn't have to do something which serves no one's interests. Judging by the way things are going now, there are more people criticizing Vinci Rivera, and not Sophia. I think there's most probably somebody behind this that's pulling the strings."

"I doubt that. I can't think of any other company that can compete with the Vinci Rivera Group. Nobody would want a piece of the pie that they're not interested in anyway.

Their reputation getting tarnished does no good to other companies."

Trevor stroked his chin. "What if, the pie is not what that person wants?"

"What else could it possibly be if it's not the pie then?"

Trevor kept quiet.

'Keegan will be in big trouble now that things keep going on like this. There's a chance that he'll divorce Stella if he found out that she did this.

'Who would want them to divorce?'

'And, everything is happening so quickly,' Trevor thought.

After a while, he said, "Xavier, would you do me a favor and get rid of all the false rumors about Vinci Rivera online?"

Xavier paused. "Do you want to help them?"

"I'm helping Mrs. Kane. There's something else that I'd like to know from her."

Then, he continued flatly, "Get it done now. Be sure to leave no trace behind and don't get exposed."

"Yes, boss.1'

Sophia only arrived home at one o'clock in the morning.

The entire Jewell Residence was lit up, and Albert was working furiously to make things right.

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However, there was just nobody who would want to get involved in this mess.

Albert became arrogant, and he upset a lot of his old friends after becoming in-laws with the Kane family. He was no longer in touch with those true friends he had back then.

However, the new friends he got were either tied by interests or just some profligate acquaintances that could never be depended on during hardships.

Some of them even ignored his call directly.

Even though he changed his number, they would hang up right after hearing his voice.

A few of them picked up, but they pretended as if they wanted to help while none of them really did.

He was just like a cat on a hot tin roof.

Sophia was crying when Hylda tried to cheer her up. "Albert, stop hitting her. It's not going to change anything now. We should come up with a solution instead." Hylda said.

'Solution? What do you suggest?'

The look on Albert's face was awful.

His company was greatly affected when after Sophia's real identity was exposed as many people on the internet set off a wave of boycotting his company's products.

Plenty of his big orders got canceled that evening.

He just invested eighty million in Semiconductor Technology, and he did not have enough money to return the deposit of the canceled orders anymore.

His company would not hold together for long if things kept going on like that.

Albert was devastated.

Suddenly, his phone rang.

He picked up his phone and saw an incoming call from Stella.

He called her countless times before this, and she did not pick up at all. However, she only gave him a call back after things fell out.

Albert kept his anger in check as he took a deep breath and accepted the call.

He was still wondering to himself how he should deal with this incident with her before he accepted the call.

However, Stella crushed his last straw of hope as soon as she spoke.

'Albert Jewell, are you enjoying this?' She asked.

Rainee said the exact same thing when she sent an accountant who worked for him and took advantage of the company policy's loophole to jail while holding all the evidence back then.

Once again, Albert felt extremely uncomfortable.

He felt as though he could see Rainee smiling and staring at him with her cold eyes.

Albert gritted his teeth and said in a deep voice, "What can you gain from doing this?"

Do you think you can keep yourself out of this now that Vinci Rivera is involved too?"

"I've never thought of doing that anyway." Stella said calmly, "I've decided to do everything I can to bring you down ever since I found out that you wanted to give up on my mom, stop funding the welfare center, and did all those disgusting things that you did.'

Albert got so angry that his body shook. "What do you want from me?!"

'I'll give you two choices. One, pay my mom what she deserves, and I'll keep my mouth shut so that your precious daughter can live her life in peace from now on.

Two, clarify publicly that Sophia's mother forced you to drink, and Sophia Jewell was just a drunken mistake. That way, I won't expose you for evading taxes. Also, I'll testify for you in court when you divorce my mom, and you can keep half of your wealth. Pick one. I wonder if you'd put your daughter or yourself first?"

Stella was not very loud, but Albert could hear every single word she said clearly.

"Keep in mind, you can be sent to prison for charity fraud and tax evasion."

Albert's heart skipped a beat.

Stella's words reminded him of what happened seven years ago.

Raine said something similar when she came to his office with those huge sets of evidence before throwing them at him.

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“Two choices. One, give up on your wealth, and I’ll give you some of the company shares. That way, you won’t starve to death. However, you can completely forget about the company and your daughter. Two, I’ll send all these to court, and you’ll spend the rest of your life reflecting on your mistakes in jail,” Albert recalled.

Rainee let him choose between his freedom and his wealth. Albert’s forehead began sweating. Then, he looked at Sophia and Hylda subconsciously after Stella said that. Hylda got scared, and she heard Albert speaking before she could say anything.

“You’re lying. You have nothing on me!” “You think so?”

Stella replied flatly. Then, Albert received hard evidence of Sophia committing charity fraud on his phone.

“Do you want more?” Stella added calmly, “I have more.”

The look on Albert’s face changed. He then said after pausing for some time, “Stella, your mom and I are legally married. You’re my first child, and I know what I did is unforgivable to you. But, it was just a mistake that every man on Earth would commit at some point in his life. I’m still your father, after all. My love for you has never changed. You’ll have no one to depend on if anything bad ever happens to you in the Kane family after I lost everything. Think about it.”

“Dad…” Stella said softly.

Albert thought that she was going to change her mind as he continued, “Stella, just let me know if you’re very bothered by the fact that I stopped funding the welfare center. We can talk this out. After all, it’s something that your mom has always been doing. I feel very bad for doing that too.”

“Are you saying that you didn’t cheat on my mom on purpose?”

“Your mom and I love each other very much. I’d never make a mistake like that if I wasn’t seduced.”

Hylda’s face turned pale, and Sophia was very surprised to hear what Albert said too. She did not expect that Albert would choose himself over her.

“Heh-”

Stella’s chuckled on the phone, and it sounded a little sarcastic.

“Albert Jewell, you did not disappoint at all. You will really do anything just to protect yourself.”

Albert froze and the look on his face turned awful. “Did you lie to me?”

Stella said coldly, “Albert Jewell, do you remember the divorce paper you signed with my mom seven years ago?”

Her expression changed slightly.

She added, “Either you do as the agreement said, or just wait for the court to summon you.”

Stella hung up after saying that.

Albert’s expression looked dreadful.

The look on Hylda’s face did not very pleasant either.

She was not expecting that the man she tolerated and had been with for more than twenty years would say something like that right in front of her.

Hylde was one of the many university students Rainee used to sponsor back then. Albert flirted with her, and he would give her new clothes and take her out. She was just an inexperienced young girl, and she just could not resist the temptation of a mature man. So, she succumbed to him very soon after that. She was just a freshman in university when she had Sophia. She wanted to get an abortion after knowing that Albert was a married man. However, Albert stopped her from doing so. He told her that he only married Rainee because of his personal interests, and he did not love her at all. He also claimed that he would divorce Rainee sooner or later. So, he convinced her to wait for him and keep the baby. Hylde was moved by his sweet words, and she believed him. After that, she withdrew from her course and gave birth to Sophia. Albert treated her very well and did everything she wanted during the year she was pregnant. However, Albert turned around and left the hospital directly after seeing that the baby turned out to be a girl.

Chapter 422

Albert told his assistant to take care of her after he had left. Hylde stayed in the hospital for about two weeks after the c-section, and Albert never visited her once. She called him a few times, but he would always tell her that he was busy with work. He would also tell her to get some rest and wait for him to visit her when he was free. She had never doubted him. Albert made some arrangements and sent her to live in an apartment after she was discharged. He even hired a babysitter just to take care of her. Albert only visited her after a month when her health started to become better. However, there was only one reason that he visited her, and it was to do the deed. Hylde was still very weak after giving birth, so she bled and got sent back into the hospital again. The doctor scolded them, and he was infuriated by what they did. He just could not understand why they would have unprotected sexual intercourse before Hylde's wound was completely healed. The doctor also told them that it would be very dangerous for the woman once she got pregnant again. Albert got very unhappy. He frowned and asked the doctor, "How long do I have to wait before she can get pregnant again?" "At least two years after the c-section. It'd be best for both the mother and the child," the doctor said. Albert's face darkened after hearing that, and he kept quiet. Hylde did not realize that Albert only acted that way because her child turned out to be a girl. She only noticed that something was wrong after how Albert started to call her fewer and became indifferent to whatever had happened to her. Hylde was a very smart woman. She talked to the people around Albert and found out that he would always argue with Rainee not only because of how assertive Rainee was but also because of their child. Albert took the matter of extending his bloodline very seriously, and it had always been his top priority in life. However, Rainee's health deteriorated after giving birth to their first child. And, the fact that she wanted to put her career first made her give up the idea of having another child.

Albert did not get together with Hylda because of how excellent she was, but he wanted her to bear his child. It would be difficult for him to be with a working woman, and he was just not interested in women who did not look very good or had low academic qualifications. So, an inexperienced university student who did not come from a very wealthy family, and who also happened to be rather pretty like Hylda automatically became a perfect candidate for him.

Hylda felt as though it was the end of the world when she found out about that.

She was not even twenty years old, yet she had already given birth to Albert's child before she could complete her studies. She knew very well that she would never be able to raise the child on her own if Albert were to abandon her.

Hylda knew that there was no turning back after she believed in what Albert said, so she braced herself and lived with her decision.

Very soon, Hylda recollected herself after going through a short period of pain in her life.

She had to live and raise her daughter. Even though Albert was a scum, she could turn a blind eye as soon as he could satisfy her needs and wants.

So, she began to please Albert and do anything he asked.

Albert could never be the big man he wanted to be when he was around Rainee, but it was completely different when he was around Hylda.

After that, Albert began paying more attention to Hylda. But, he had never talked about divorcing Rainee ever since.

Until Hylda got pregnant again. She gave up on her studies because of Albert and lived her life in shame for more than twenty years. She just could not believe that Albert would put all the blame on her just to protect himself

Chapter 423

Hylda was not only disheartened, but she also felt very angry and disgusted.

It took Albert some time for him to realize what had happened. He turned around and saw the disappointment in Hylda's eyes as he quickly went to her and said, "Don't take my words seriously. I said those things on purpose just to probe how much she really knows. Don't worry. I'll do everything I can to keep Sophia safe."

Hylda tried to stay calm and said while gazing downward, "I've been with you for so many years. I'm not going to doubt you just because of that.

Albert, you can't have hope for Stella anymore. She won't do you any good now that she found out about everything. You have to withdraw all the money you invested in Keegan's company as soon as possible."

However, Albert spoke as if he was not worried at all. 'Not only that we're affected by this, but Vinci Rivera has it worse than us. She made Keegan lose so much money, and I'm sure that he's going to want an explanation from her. He won't have the time to deal with us. Semiconductor Technology will go public in less than a month, and we'll receive the money before he could realize what happened.'

Hylda was still a little doubtful. However, Albert interrupted her before she could say anything. "Leave yourself out of this. I'll take care of it."

Hylda's face darkened.

'Albert has always been very bossy. No wonder Rainee said not to let Albert take over the company no matter what back then. He's just too arrogant and stubborn.

'He thinks that Stella will help him as long as she is still Keegan's wife just because he's her father.

'He doesn't know his own daughter at all. How can he expect Stella to treat him like a father if he has never treated her as his daughter?

'Stella would try to get rid of us before anybody else if she had more power in the Jewell family.

I've got to make a move...' Hylda thought.

Two days after the incident, the Vinci Rivera Group published a handwritten apology statement on their official Facebook page.

Stella tapped on it as soon as it was posted.

She could recognize that it was written by Keegan almost instantly.

Keegan's handwriting looked very good as if he was a poet. It was very tidy and unobtrusive.

The apology statement addressed what happened the day before briefly without evading responsibility and admitted that they made a mistake during recruitment. And, the Vinci Rivera Group had listened to the public's criticism with an open mind and decided to dismiss Sophia and banned her from working under the group forever.

Moreover, it clarified the false rumors about its recruitment scandal while establishing a new company regulation. It claimed that the Vinci Rivera Group would send every interview process after each session to the shared email account to be as transparent as possible. Everyone would be able to monitor each interview so that the system could be open, fair, and unbiased.

Additionally, it updated its new requirement standards for future recruitment.

Fresh graduates were still required to have a recognized degree because they did not have any working experience, and that was the only way to determine their vocational ability.

However, it became easier for former year's graduates to apply.

Academic qualifications would stop being the only criterion for securing a position in the Vinci Rivera Group. Anyone that had achieved anything prominent in their career or published any influential thesis in relevant magazines would be given an opportunity for an interview. And, they also extended the maximum age of applicants to forty years old.

Anyone who was employed under this new policy would also receive the same pay as the other applicants with higher academic qualifications who worked in the same position.

That was because everyone learned at a different phase. Some people could absorb a lot of knowledge in school, but some people would only start showcasing super high learning abilities once they started working.

This new policy undoubtedly gave a chance to people who were very competent in their field but graduated from a mediocre university. It was an opportunity that they never had because, back then, their academic qualifications prevented them from working in a leading enterprise.

By right, the statement should appear very sincere since Keegan wrote it by hand. It was supposed to relieve the netizens' anger, yet the comment section was filled with skeptical and resentful remarks instead.

Chapter 424

Some of the netizens said that the Vinci Rivera Group shifted the blame to the recruiting department and fired its staff to avoid responsibility.

Then, they also said it was a breach of privacy by sending the interview progress to a shared email account.

Some of them even questioned the new policy by asking what they would do if the interviewer discriminated against candidates with lower academic qualifications.

There was just too much being said. Those people could just find fault with the apology statement no matter how sincere it was.

However, the comments were mainly made by newly registered accounts or fake accounts. Other than that, the commenters were either high school students, diploma graduates, or people who specialized in fields that had nothing to do with the industry that Vinci Rivera Group was in.

Moreover, the apology statement failed to stop the netizens from attacking them online. At noontime, Soarer Technology posted a new recruitment policy, and its new criteria were exactly the same as the one Vinci Rivera posted earlier.

At one o'clock, The Wings Group followed along.

After that, the netizens began to change their opinions.

Soarer Technology was owned by the Lowe family, and it was the leading enterprise in the internet industry. Meanwhile, The Wings Group was founded by the Saun family, and it specialized in high-end manufacturing.

The two companies were just as hard to get into as the Vinci Rivera Group. So, the fact that they implemented this new policy said a lot about their stance toward the incident.

It was great news to job seekers, so a lot of them voiced out to show their support.

At the same time, in the western suburbs, Trevor was very unhappy that somebody else beat him to it.

He frowned and said, "I wanted Keegan to owe me a favor, yet somebody else had the same idea as me. Why is the old madman in the Lowe family so obsessed with taking other people's credit?"

Xavier replied, "Carter Lowe is in charge of Soarer Technology now because Zane has passed away."

Trevor paused for a while before he said, "They look so alike."

Stella still could not reach Keegan after trying for some time. However, she was relieved that the netizens stopped targeting Vinci Rivera for now.

Marshall called her not long after.

He noticed the change in netizens' attitude too, so he purposely called Stella to ask about Keegan.

Stella pursed her lips and said in a low voice, "I'm not sure either. He isn't picking up my call."

Keegan did not answer her call even though that incident was sorted out temporarily because he was still mad at her.

It was just too obvious, and Keegan could easily know that she was the one who caused everything without even thinking.

So, it was impossible for Keegan not to be mad after Stella had gotten him into so much trouble.

Marshall paused after he heard what Stella said. Then, he consoled her, "I think he's just busy."

Stella kept quiet.

Marshall then said, "Are you okay?"

"What?" Stella was stunned. Then, she came around and realized that Marshall was probably asking about how the incident had affected her.

She actually could not care less. Instead, she would gladly want things to become worse.

"I'm fine." Stella thought for a moment before she said, "Mr. Moore, can I hire you to handle a divorce case for me?"

Chapter 425

Marshall paused. "Are you going to divorce Keegan?"

Stella did not know what to say.

'I wouldn't want you to be my lawyer if I was really going to do that? She thought to herself.

"Not for me, but for my mom."

Stella briefly told Marshall about what had happened between Rainee and Albert before she brought up the divorce settlement from seven years ago.

She said, "Mr. Moore, is it possible for my mom to get back the allocated property to her seven years ago if she divorces my father now?"

"It's very difficult," Marshal replied.

Suddenly, Stella's heart sank.

"The divorce papers were signed, yet none of the relevant procedures was executed. Besides, you told me that your father holds the majority shares of the Jewell Group, and he had been paying for your mom's medical expenses ever since she was admitted to the hospital. Legally speaking, he fulfilled his duty as a husband as he took care of his wife. So, it's going to be very difficult if you want him to give up all his possessions."

"What about the evidence of him cheating?"

Marshall replied, "It could be proof of their marriage breaking down, and the judge will act accordingly in the favor of your mother while dividing the property. However, it's not going to be enough for your father to give up on everything. As I said, he has been paying your mother's medical bills, and there's no way that you can win this lawsuit if his lawyer holds on to this."

Stella frowned and said in a slightly angry manner, "Isn't the marriage law supposed to protect both husband and wife? Why is it protecting the interests of the wrongdoer now?"

Marshall gazed downward and said after a while, "Sometimes, even the law can't be absolutely fair."

Stella shut her eyes and held her finger against the corner of her eye. Then, she said after keeping quiet for a while, "I'm sorry, Mr. Moore. I wasn't angry at you."

"It's fine. I've engaged in a lot of divorce lawsuits, and I've seen worse than what your mother is going through." Then, Marshall continued, "The only way to work this out is to make Albert Jewell withdraw himself from the property settlement willingly."

"A person like him would never do that."

“So, what your mother did was actually very impressive. You can do the same thing too.”

Stella shook her head. “My mom collected those evidence and forced him to sign the papers. There’s just no way that he wouldn’t destroy the evidence after my mom got into that accident. And, I’m pretty sure that he has already patched up his mistakes long ago.”

“Not necessarily.” Marshall said, “According to what you said, Albert Jewell is a greedy and unscrupulous man who would always put his personal interest first. Even though he tried to rectify the mistakes he made back then out of fear, it doesn’t necessarily mean that he wouldn’t commit the same mistake again. A person’s nature is very hard to change.”

“I’ve thought about that too, but I don’t work in the Jewell Group. So, there’s no way I can look through the company’s account book.”

Rainee had full control over the company back then, so she was very familiar with its accounts. It was nothing but a piece of cake for her to expose what he did. But, it was different for Stella as she did not even know where the account of the company was, let alone find the evidence of Albert committing a crime.”

Marshall thought for a while and said, “Do you have the numbers of the Jewell Group’s ex-employees?”

Stella thought of the notebook in Rainee’s safe and said, “Yeah, I do.”

“Send them to me, and I’ll try talking to them. Maybe they’ll tell me something you don’t know if they are on your mother’s side.”

His words woke Stella up, and she said, “Why didn’t I think of that?”

‘Albert fired many senior employees in the company after what happened to my mom, and at least one or two of them would know some secrets, right?’ Stella thought.

She then added, “Please give me a moment. I’ll look for the numbers and send them to you.”

Marshall replied, “It’s fine. Let’s meet up in a while. Didn’t you say that you still have the evidence that your mother collected seven years ago? Bring them along, so I can see if any of them can still be useful.”

Chapter 426

“Sure.” Stella asked while unlocking the safe, “Where should we meet?”

‘I’ll meet you at the same cafe where you asked me to be your lawyer for the first time.’ Marshall said gently, “Be careful on the road. Everybody’s getting off work now, and there’ll be a lot of cars. It’s fine if you come a little late.”

Indeed, the traffic jam was as terrible as Marshall said.

It took Stella more than thirty minutes to reach her destination when it was only supposed to take her twenty minutes.

Marshall had already been waiting for some time when Stella arrived at the cafe. He sat at the same place near the window, and he could see everything that was happening on the road clearly.

Stella pulled the chair and softly said, “Sorry to keep you waiting.”

Marshall replied in a gentle voice, “It’s fine. I just got off work.” Then, he asked, “Would you like anything to drink?”

“I’ll have some milk.”

Marshall nodded before he said to the waiter, "Please get us a cup of warm milk and a cup of latte with half sugar and no milk."

"You should have some milk too. You'll have a hard time sleeping tonight after drinking coffee."

Stella blurted out and instantly regretted it.

Her relationship with Marshall was not close enough for her to comment on his personal lifestyle.

Keegan would have a cup of coffee in the evening too. Even though he would work more efficiently after that, he would also have a hard time falling asleep at night.

She was too used to controlling Keegan's diet, so she automatically stopped Marshall from ordering coffee without any hesitation.

Marshall looked at her, and he was surprised.

Stella realized what she had just said and added, "Didn't you tell me that you got addicted to caffeine, and you can't sleep at night?" You should try some chewing gums if you want to get rid of the addiction."

Then, she took out a packet of chewing gum from her bag and handed it to him.

A cosmetician from work gave it to her two days ago at the set.

Marshall chuckled. "I didn't expect you'd remember that."

At that time, there was a Maserati parked beside the road. Keegan sat inside while looking at Marshall and Stella through the window with a face that could not be any gloomier.

Stella took the documents out of her bag and pushed them toward Marshall. 'This notebook has the numbers of the former employees of Jewell Group. The documents here are the evidence my mother collected to prove that Albert and his relatives took bribes and embezzled public funds. And, this is the divorce settlement they signed seven years ago.'

Marshall took them and started going through the documents in a serious manner.

He asked while he was reading, "Do you have a copy of these documents?"

"I took pictures."

"Photocopy everything," Marshall said without lifting his head. "It's better to have another set of backup."

"Sure. I'll do that when I get back later."

"What's this?" Marshall pushed the notebook toward Stella and asked, "Is it Johnson? I can't really read it."

Stella went closer to him. "It looks like... Johnston, right? Or, is it Johson?"

Then, the waiter said as if another patron had entered the cafe, "Welcome, sir." "Let's take a picture of it first. We'll know what it is after we call the number."

Chapter 427

Stella spoke, and she felt like somebody was staring at her intensely.

She paused and lifted her gaze. Then, she saw Keegan striding toward her with an unpleasant look on his face.

Stella noticed that Keegan did not look very good after not meeting him for a day. The dark circles under his eye looked very bad as if he had not slept for a while. He was wearing a new set of clothes, but it was different from what she gave to Aldor previously. He also had stubble on his chin that he did not have time to shave.

“Keegan...”

Keegan approached her and grabbed her wrist before dragging her away from the chair as soon as Stella said his name.

He was very rough. He grabbed her wrist so hard that she felt like her wrist was about to break.

Stella frowned in pain. She did not want to start a fight with him in public, so she said softly, “Keegan, let go of me.”

Keegan ignored her and was about to drag her out of the cafe with an angry look on his face.

Stella got very upset with his attitude, so she started struggling.

Keegan was very mad at her for doing that, and he yanked her aggressively.

Stella’s face turned pale.

She knocked her knee against the edge of the chair, and the sharp pain made her groan.

Marshall frowned. Then, he got up and stood in front of Keegan. “Keegan, let’s talk this out. There’s no need to be so rough.”

Keegan’s rage was close to exploding as he said deeply with a cold face, ‘Get out of my face!’”

Marshall did not step aside. Instead, he took another step toward Keegan.

“Calm down, and let’s talk this out if there’s a problem. If you’re going to be violent, there’s no way I’ll allow you to take Stella away from here, whether as your friend or her lawyer.”

Keegan tightened his grip. “I’ll say this again for the last time. Get lost!”

Marshall stared into his eyes without moving an inch.

Stella noticed that Keegan was going to lose his temper any time, so she ignored the pain and softly said, “Mr. Moore, that will be all for today. You can go now.”

“He’s not going to hit me.” Stella pursed her lips. “I’ll call you again soon.”

“Stella, physical abuse isn’t the only form of violence.” Marshall frowned as he looked at Stella’s wrist. Then, he said in a deep voice, “Keegan, you’re hurting her.”

Keegan’s anger sparked. He grabbed Marshall’s collar and pushed him aside aggressively.

“Bang.”

Marshall lost his balance and knocked himself against the table. Then, he fell awkwardly on the floor.

The cafe turned into a mess. A few patrons that came in to buy coffee quickly left the shop in fear. Even the staff stood from afar because they were too scared to break them up.

“Mr. Moore!” Stella did not expect that Keegan would actually get physical. Her expression turned angry as she struggled to break free. “Let go of me! Keegan Kane! You’re out of your mind!”

Keegan did not look at Marshall, who fell on the floor. He forcefully dragged Stella out of the cafe and shoved her into the car.

Stella leaned against the window, wanting to check on Marshall. However, Keegan grabbed both of her arms, pinned her down on the seat, and started kissing her madly.

Stella fought hard to dodge him, and it made Keegan very angry. He locked both of

her arms above her head with one hand and held her chin with another before he started insanely kissing her again.

“Let go... Ugh...”

Keegan ignored Stella no matter how hard she tried to break free. He even got more aggressive because of Stella’s resistance.

Stella did not plan to give in at all. She was ready to bite his tongue if he put it into her mouth. However, Keegan moved his hand and squeezed both sides of her cheeks, leaving her no chance to bite him at all as he went even crazier on her

Chapter 428

Rather than kissing her, Keegan acted more like he was just taking his anger out on her.

Stella stopped fighting after a while.

There was just no way she could push Keegan away, and struggling would only make him angrier.

Aldor drove quietly while looking straight ahead. He ignored whatever was happening in the backseat and tried to drive as fast as possible.

The car stopped after some time. It was then Keegan finally stopped taking his anger out on Stella.

He got off the car and wanted to drag Stella out too.

However, Stella grabbed the handle tightly.

Keegan did not say a word and directly put her on his shoulder.

“Keegan Kane, let me go!”

Stella almost vomited after how Keegan’s shoulder pressed against her stomach. She fought hard to get down while hammering Keegan’s shoulder.

However, Keegan walked directly into the house without saying a single thing as if he could not feel Stella hitting him at all.

Maria was on the phone when she heard some noise coming in from outside. “Please hold on. I think Mr. Kane is back. I need to get the door for him.”

Then, she put the phone on the table and quickly went to the door.

She saw Keegan carrying Stella on his shoulder as soon as she opened the door. The looks on both of their faces were not looking very good.

Maria was about to ask something, but Keegan said coldly before she could open her mouth, “Go back to your room.”

Maria did not dare to speak anymore. So, she took out a pair of slippers and hurriedly went back to her room.

“Keegan Kane, you jerk! Let go of me!” Stella shouted.

Keegan threw her on the couch the next second.

She was about to sit up, but Keegan went on top of her and pinned her down.

They got into the same position as they were in the car. However, Keegan could do more things now that he had more space on the couch. He crossed his leg over her knees to stop her from moving. Then, he grabbed her wrists and put them above her head with one hand and pinched her chin with another before kissing her again.

He was even more aggressive this time, and Stella just could not find the strength to fight back.

Keegan let go of her hands as he was kissing her and pulled her pants down.

Stella's hands were finally free. She pushed Keegan away violently and slapped him in the face.

She was on the verge of tears. Her lips looked reddish, but her gaze was extremely unyielding.

Keegan held himself up on top of her, and he looked at her strangely as if he could not believe what just happened.

Stella did not slap him very hard. She did not use her full force, so it did not hurt Keegan at all. However, Keegan just could not accept the fact that she actually slapped him.

Chapter 429

Keegan clenched his hands tightly, and his face soon darkened. "I can't believe you just hit me because of him," he uttered.

Stella pushed him away and sat up. She wiped her bright red lips with the back of her hand and said with red eyes, "If you ever try to push yourself against me like that again, I'm going to make you regret it!"

What happened during the night of her marriage still haunted her. Stella could not stand being restrained and forced to make out. It made her feel disgusted. It reminded her of how powerless she was when Jackson was on top of her.

'Why don't you ever listen?' Keegan's face was extremely cold. 'Didn't I tell you to stay away from Marshall? Why didn't you obey my words?'

Stella gritted her teeth and replied, "What's wrong with meeting up with him when we're just working together?"

"Just working together?" Keegan asked angrily. "Who helped you when you changed the data in the flash drive and walked away yesterday? Why didn't you tell me? You never tell me about what's going on with you. Do you even see me as your husband?"

Before Stella could fully process the first part of his question, she was occupied by the second half of his sentence. "Why didn't I tell you? Would you let me do it if I had told you? Would you have helped me? No. You've never been there for me! Where were you when I was hospitalized after a car accident? No family members came to sign my forms. Where were you when my great-grandpa fell because of Aurora? You weren't there. You always muddled through everything. So tell me, how am I supposed to tell you about my plans? Clearly, you would have stopped me."

"So, you went to Marshall for help?" Keegan's face looked extremely gloomy. "Did you forget that I am your husband? Do you know how much this matter has affected the company? You always do things without considering the consequences and let others clean up after you!"

Stella's face was pale. She clenched her fingers and said hoarsely, "I didn't ask you to clean up after me. I will bear the consequences of my actions. I will go to the company tomorrow and tell everyone I did it. They can do whatever they want after that. But, I'm telling you, I would do it all again if I was given a chance!"

Stella understood the impact of her actions and regretted it after the incident.

However, if she was asked to choose again, she would still do it since it was the best opportunity to unveil everything.

Sophia had only been in Vinci Rivera for less than a month and was still an intern.

She had yet to reach a deep bond with the people in the company. When Stella

revealed the truth about her, the impact on the company was minimal. However, she did not expect people to twist the situation online.

Stella was willing to apologize and bear the repercussions. After all, she had thought about all the possibilities before taking action. She had never once assumed that she would be able to altogether remove herself from the matter.

But, she was not happy with how Keegan was scolding her.

'Forget that he was my husband? I asked Marshall to help Mom with the divorce lawsuit, which has nothing to do with him. Did he forget that I'm his wife when I got into a car accident, and he stayed by Bella's side?'

"You'll bear the consequences? Did you forget that you had nothing when you married into the Kane family? You are what you are right now only because of me! How are you going to deal with the outcome?"

Stella's heart shuddered. Keegan knew her so well that he knew what would hurt her the most. Her face turned pale as she said, "There's still the divorce settlement. Did you forget that I will get one billion dollars after the divorce, Mr. Kane? I'm sure I can face the repercussions."

Keegan's face suddenly sank. "Do you think I don't dare to leave you?"

The corners of Stella's lips twitched when she heard that. "I never said that, Mr. Kane. I know I'm just a plaything you married at a high price. You tease me whenever you're in the mood, and you can kill or leave me after you get bored, no?"

Keegan was annoyed by her words. He stood up from the couch, looked down at her, and said, "That's right. You're just a plaything I bought with money. I shouldn't care so much about you. However, other playthings listen to their masters whenever money is involved. So, why should I spend my money on an ungrateful toy?" "I'm glad you think that way, Mr. Kane. I hope you'd divorce me right away and let me go as soon as possible," Stella clenched her hands tightly and said firmly.

Chapter 430

Keegan's face could not only be described as gloomy; it looked like it was shrouded in darkness. His true feelings were hard to unravel, but his expression did not go unnoticed.

"Alright, Stella. You're the one who asked for the divorce, so don't regret it when the time comes." Keegan then grabbed his coat and said, "We'll proceed with it after I return from my business trip."

After he said that, he stopped looking at her, turned away, and went upstairs.

Stella sat on the couch with her back tensed. She did not slump her shoulders until she heard the door slam. She knew she had pissed off Keegan this time because no matter how mad he was, he still sounded as if he could be coaxed. But, once he spoke calmly when he was angered, it was too late.

'Are we finally going through with this divorce?' Stella sat on the couch and thought, 'Why aren't I as happy as I thought I'd be?' She then hugged her knees and buried her face in them.

On a table not far away, a landline phone had been picked up and was left on the table. Dahlia listened to the voice on the other end of the phone with a gloomy expression and only hung up when no sound was heard from the other side.

That night, Dahlia did not go upstairs to her room. Instead, she stayed in the guest

room where Arthur had stayed in before. The servant had already cleaned the room and washed the bedding, which made it smell like sunshine after being hung dried. The bed was fluffy and comfortable, but Dahlia could not fall asleep. She tossed and turned, thinking about Keegan's glance when he first came upstairs and what he said about her. In the end, she only managed to get a few hours of shut-eye. Then, at the crack of dawn, Dahlia heard someone moving around outside.' That must be Keegan,' she thought. She heard Maria running up and down, helping Keegan pack his luggage. 'He's going to Alodale for probably more than a week.' Maria was new, so she was unfamiliar with Keegan's habits and preferences. She asked for his opinion about each and every item before putting them into the luggage. After answering her questions a few times, Keegan got impatient and told her to figure it out herself.

The living room became quiet about an hour later, and a car engine started outside after a while.

Keegan had left.

Stella laid back on the bed and looked at the ceiling. After a long time, she took out her phone and called Daniel.

"Can we shoot my scenes today, Mr. Wood?"

Aldor had asked one of his trusted friends to drive today because he was going on the business trip with Keegan to Alodale.

Keegan returned home earlier than usual last night, but he looked tired. The dark circles under his eyes seemed worse than it was yesterday.

'I guess he didn't sleep well. Maybe he had a fight with Mrs. Kane,' Aldor thought. From Aider's perspective, Keegan had gone to the extreme to protect Stella this time. When the incident happened, he immediately knew who the instigator was, but he did not rat his wife out.

Keegan even stayed the night at a hotel near the company because he was afraid of losing his temper when he saw Stella. He tried to calm down and waited for the matter to be resolved before returning home. On the way back, Keegan saw Stella and Marshall having a "date" at a coffee shop. He then saw her handing him a piece of gum through the glass window.

'Mr. Kane realized that his wife asked his friend for help rather than himself and later found out that they were behaving intimately. No man could turn a blind eye at that,' thought Aldor. 'It's clear that Mrs. Kane is in the wrong here, but...'

Aldor paused. "Mr. Kane, are you still angry with your wife?" he asked.

Keegan frowned. "Don't mention her to me right now!"

"Alright, sir," he replied and shut his mouth. After a while, he said, "Mr. Jewell really is something, huh? It's unbelievable that he kept his illegitimate daughter a secret and even hid it under the nose of his own wife. Poor Ms. Spade and her daughter." "Didn't I tell you not to talk about her?" Keegan shot him a sideways look and said.

Chapter 431

"I wasn't talking about Mrs. Kane," Aldor said with an innocent face. "I just have mixed feelings about what happened to Ms. Spade and her daughter. I mean, who could bear that kind of news? If I were Ms. Spade's daughter, I would have peeled the other party's skin off."

Keegan was speechless. "How much ecstasy did Stella give you for you to stand up for her?" he asked. Aldor laughed, "Oh, Mrs. Kane never talked to me about her personal life. She usually comes to ask me about your likes and dislikes."

Keegan then thought about what the woman had said yesterday and snorted coldly, "Well, she is a plaything, after all. I guess the only way to please her master is to learn more about him."

"No owner would buy expensive accessories for his doll or let his plaything play him," Aldor replied. Keegan did not know what to say but refused to admit it, "Is there anything wrong with me wanting my doll to dress up a little?"

"No, no. That's completely fine," Aldor could not help but chuckle.

Keegan felt slightly uncomfortable hearing that laughter and added, "My money would be wasted if that doll doesn't look presentable."

"You like playing with dolls, Mr. Kane?" The confused driver interrupted.

Keegan was at a loss for words when he heard that. The car quickly arrived at the hospital parking lot. Aldor exited the car, took the elevator, and went upstairs. In about twenty minutes, he exited the elevator with a little girl in his arms.

The pure little girl had her head on Aldor's shoulder with her eyes closed. She rubbed her eyes when she was in the car and asked, "Uncle Kane, where are we going?"

Keegan helped her put on her seat belt and said, "We're going to go play."

Coco frowned, "Why didn't you tell me earlier? I could've dressed up."

"You look good," replied Keegan.

"Liar. You said that I look like a burned matchstick." Coco pouted.

Keegan had purchased her the black hat she was wearing today.

"Matchsticks have a lot of personalities," Keegan said flatly. "Not everyone can be matchsticks, you know."

"Nobody wants to be matchsticks," Coco muttered.

Then, the car left the hospital and went straight to the airport.

"Cut-" Daniel yelled at the end of the last scene, looking at the screen. "Come look," he beckoned, and Stella walked over wearing a heavy costume.

The screen showed the scene between the beauty and the Queen in the imperial garden. Stella's acting was great as always, even better than before. Daniel liked her interpretation of the role more and more.

Daniel was slightly surprised when he noticed Stella's lack of spirits after watching the master tape. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Ah, nothing," Stella said. "I'm just a little overwhelmed by your words of praise."

Daniel was speechless. "You think you're good enough to fool me now, huh?"

"That's not it," Stella said absentmindedly. "There's just stuff going on at home."

As soon as she said that, her phone rang. Stella looked at the caller ID and saw that it was her mother's caretaker. She quickly answered the call and heard, "Stella. come quick. A group of people just came in and took your mom off the ventilator. Now they're asking us to discharge her. Come quick."

Chapter 432

Stella's face changed. "Stall them, Zayla. Don't let them touch my mother. I'll go over right away."

"I have to go, Mr. Wood," she said after hanging up the phone. Daniel had already

heard what was going on through the phone call. He more or less knew about the situation in Stella's family. He knew she had a mother who was in a coma in the hospital and needed long-term medication.

Although Stella's life was rather messy, she was never late for shoots. She was the best at taking criticism and the sharpest actor.

Daniel liked her a lot. So when he heard that, he said, "Go ahead. We've done a lot of filming today. We need to change the background for our next scene; we can continue the shoot next time."

Stella said goodbye and changed her costume. Then, without taking her makeup off, she rushed to Rotona Pinnacle Hospital. Several people in very different attires stood at the door of Rainee's ward. The leader of the group held a black leather bag under his armpit. He was dressed relatively ordinarily, but he was rather tall and big. He had a chubby face and a scar at the corner of his left eye up to his scalp, where hair stopped growing. His appearance gave off a sense of cruelty and ruthlessness.

Three other people stood behind him, dressed in gang wear. They had tattoos all over their arm and piercings all over their face. No one dared to pass by the ward when they saw them.

Zayla was afraid they would do something. She stood in front of the hospital bed, wary that they would come in and touch Rainee's equipment just like before.

Most of the medical staff also stood far away. The nurse in charge tried negotiating with the men as their presence affected the hospital and its patients.

The leader smiled and said, "We don't want to do this either, Ms. Nurse, but they owe us money. It's been several years since they last paid us back. My men here have families to care for, too, you know. There are laws to follow. We won't do anything to harm her; we just want an explanation."

The man's smile, paired with his scar, made him seem even more intimidating than before.

"Even so, you can't take off her ventilator. It'll kill her!" The nurse anxiously said.

"What can I do? They have the money to get medical treatment, yet they don't have the money to pay us back. I have to do something to warn them, right?" the man said, glancing at the equipment. "Isn't her heartbeat fairly normal?"

"Go find the person who borrowed money from you if you want it back. Don't come to the hospital and cause trouble. We'll have no choice but to call the police if you affect the patients."

The man's eyes darkened, sneering, "Call them and tell them why I'm here. I'm sure they'd agree that you should repay the money you owe."

The nurse realized that there was no use negotiating, so she took out her phone to dial 911.

The man did not speak. Instead, he gave the tattooed man next to him a look, and the man immediately understood. He stepped forward to grab the nurse, pulled the phone out of her hand, and smashed it against the wall.

The phone instantly fell apart, and the nurse crouched, covering her head in fright.

"Let's see who dares to call the police!"

"I dare!" A cold female voice came from the crowd. Everyone stepped aside. and Stella walked out with a tense look. Then, she walked up to the head of the pack.

Chapter 433

Stella had just removed her wig, so her hair was tied up behind her head. Her makeup from the shoot was not heavy but added a chilling aura to her look.

'Who are you, and who sent you here to cause trouble?' she asked.

The man withdrew his scrutiny, raised his eyes, and asked, "Who are YOU?"

"Rainee Spade is my mother,' Stella said in a deep voice.

The man glanced at Stella's attire and the designer bag she was carrying, and the corners of his lips curled upward. "Then we found the right person," the man said while he opened the leather bag under his arm and took out a stack of IOUs, "This is the amount of money your mother borrowed from us. Since you are her daughter, you must repay this debt."

Stella frowned and took the IOUs from the man. There were at least a dozen in the stack, with different amounts of money on each sheet, ranging from tens of thousands to millions. Each of them had Rainee's signature and fingerprint that Dahlia forged.

The earliest was more than ten years ago, and the latest was eight years ago.

'There are 17 IOUs in total. So, plus interest, the total is 43 million dollars. I thought of letting you pay us back in installments, but seeing you with all these fancy designer items; I'm sure you have the money. So, let's settle it all at once.'

But Stella just tore those IOUs to shreds.

"My mother did not sign these IOUs. Go find the one who signed them." After that, Stella flatly said, "Get out of the way!"

The man's face changed, "How could you say that? It's all there in black and white."

Stella looked at the other party and said in a different tone, "Bro, I don't know who you're working for or if those bills are even real. The interest rate on them has exceeded four times the bank's rate. This is clearly usury, and it is not protected by law. Even if you get the police involved, you can only get about 30% interest on these IOUs at most."

The leader had been collecting debt for years, yet she was the first to talk about the law. "Little miss girl here thinks she can talk to me about the law after two years of study? Hah. Listen up, girl. You weren't even in your mother's womb yet when I studied the law." he laughed.

His words sounded harassing. The men beside him laughed lowly, looking at Stella maliciously.

"If you pay back the money today, we will immediately go and leave everything untouched; if you don't, we'd have to talk. Since we don't have any money, and you're clearly bathed in gold and silver, we'll just stay here. We'll leave when you pay everything off. But let me remind you, girl, my patience doesn't reflect my boys. If you take too long, I can't guarantee your mother's well-being."

Stella's expression darkened when she heard that. 'Seems like there's no negotiating with these people,' she thought.

Seeing that she didn't speak, the man said again, "You look like you have the money, kid. Look at this ward. I'm guessing it costs more than ten thousand for a day. Others will go bankrupt if they live here for one or two months. Yet, she has lived here for seven years. It would be unreasonable if you told me you don't have the money."

Stella frowned, "Why didn't you come all those years before if you knew she was here?"

The man glanced at her, 'I didn't come because someone had been paying the interest, so I didn't have to worry about it. But they haven't been paying me back for the last few months. So I had to ask for the money somehow, right?'

"Who paid the previous interest?" Stella asked.

"Albert Jewell."

"Go find him then!" "He and your mother are divorced. There's no way he'd continue paying your mother's debt."

Chapter 434

Stella was taken aback. "What?"

The man noticed her expression and said, "You don't know yet, do you?"

"Know what?" Stella asked as she had a bad feeling in her heart.

"Albert Jewell and Rainee Spade divorced a long time ago. We only came to the hospital because Albert did not want to pay us anymore. We're earning a living, girl. We wouldn't intentionally cause you trouble if we had a choice."

Stella's expression changed suddenly. "What did you say?"

'I said your parents divorced long ago, and your father has no reason to pay your mother's debts.' The man frowned and said impatiently, "Why am I telling you all this nonsense? Quickly give me the money. Otherwise, no one is going to leave this ward!"

Stella was confused. 'They didn't go through with the divorce procedures when Mom's incident happened. So why is this person saying they divorced? If they did get divorced, when did it happen, and how did they agree to the property settlement?'

Stella's mind was all over the place. She pursed her lips and said, "Let me make a call first." She then dialed Albert's number, but no one answered.

She lowered her eyes and was about to call Marshall when she suddenly remembered Keegan's words. So, she clenched her fist and called Felicity and Vermont instead.

Vermont received the call from Stella during a meeting. He had been paying attention to the news about the speech at Trinity University on the Internet the past two days, so he knew about the Jewell family's scandal. If Keegan had not been so angry, he would have been unable to hold himself back from gossiping with the couple, which was why his eyes lit up when he saw Stella's call.

He left the meeting before it ended and answered the call. His assistant even thought that he had a new girlfriend.

'Hey, Stella, what's up?'

"Hi, Mr. Snyder. Are you free now?"

Vermont immediately passed the work to his assistant and said, "Yeah, what's the matter?"

"Can you come to the hospital? I want to ask you for a favor."

'Which hospital are we talking about?'

"I'll text you the address."

"Sure. I'll be there in a moment."

Stella glanced at the few people behind her and said in a low voice, "Can you bring a few of your men too? I'm afraid things won't be pretty."

'She wants me to bring men? Is there going to be a fight?'

“Okay,” Vermont said and hung up the phone. He thought about it for a while and called Marshall.

“Hey, Marshall, are you free right now?”

Marshall was busy calling a list of people at the office. When he received the call from Vermont, he took off his glasses and said as he pinched his eyebrow, “If you need something, just say it.”

‘Keegan’s wife is in trouble, and he’s away on a business trip. We need to go and help her.’

Marshall paused, “How would you know if she’s in trouble?” “She called me,” Vermont said triumphantly. “I guess I’m too outstanding. I can’t help if everyone likes coming to me for help.”

Chapter 435

Marshall pursed his lips and remained silent for a long time.

‘Are you coming or not?’ Vermont asked.

‘Where are we going exactly?’

‘I’ll pick you up at your office.’

“Okay. See you later,” Marshall responded.

Seeing that Stella was still holding the phone to her ear, the man with the scar got impatient. “Are you done?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

Stella lowered her arms, pursed her lips, and said, “Wait here. My friend will come over soon, and we’ll discuss the IOU when he’s here. Also, ask your men to get out of the way so the nurse can plug in the ventilator.”

The man hesitated, but he didn’t budge. “We will get out of the way when we get our money,” he said. Stella’s face turned ugly. “I assure you I won’t run from the debt. But don’t think you can escape if anything happens to my mom!”

The man with the scar sneered, stepped forward, and grabbed her chin, ‘Are you threatening me, little girl?’ Stella suddenly felt a dense layer of goosebumps on her skin and hit the man in reflex. Slap! The sound was loud and clear.

The tattooed man pulled Stella’s hair and slapped her, “Bitch! My boss was just talking to you. Why the hell did you do that? Apologize!”

Stella did not hear what the other party said at all. Their strength was incomparable.

Stella’s head buzzed after the slap; half her face was painful and numb. As if she went deaf; she could not hear anything.

Seeing that she did not speak, the tattooed man became even angrier. “Are you fucking deaf? I told you to apologize to my boss!”

As he said that, he raised his hand again, but the man was violently kicked from behind before he could strike a blow. The force of the kick was so great that it sent the tattooed man flying, hitting the radiotherapy machine on the bed. Everything fell to the ground with a loud crash.

Several people there were momentarily stunned as they turned their heads to look behind them.

It was Vermont. He shook his legs, let out a “tsk,” and looked at the man coldly. “You should be thankful I’ve been behind at my boxing practices recently. Otherwise, I’m not sure if you’d get out of here alive.”

The tattooed man's head hit the machine, and a swollen lump appeared. His lumbar spine had in sharp pain as if it had been broken. It was so painful that he couldn't get up for some time.

Marshall stepped forward and helped Stella up. Her hair was a mess after the slap, so he brushed it away. A big red handprint was visible on the left side of her cheek. Blood seeped through the corners of her lips due to her teeth crashing into the insides of her mouth.

Marshall's eyes instantly became cold. Stella gently pushed his hand away. She did not care why Marshall was there; all that mattered was the group of men there. "I'm fine. They have a stack of IOUs, saying my mother owes them money. But their signatures are not in my mother's handwriting," she whispered to Marshall.

"Got it," Marshall said softly, pulling her behind him. "Leave it to me."

The man with the scar looked at the two men dressed in expensive suits and said, "Surely, attacking my friend the minute you arrive isn't appropriate, right, gentlemen?" "Is it appropriate for you to attack a woman whose strength is incomparable to yours?" Vermont laughed angrily.

"My friend's emotions got the better of him, and I couldn't stop him in time." The man with the scar paused and said, "Are the two of you here to pay back the money her mother owed us?"

When Vermont heard that, he stepped back and said to Marshall, "You go."

Stella was speechless. "Why does it seem like Vermont is trying to get out of this because he is afraid of paying back the money?"

Marshall glanced around the crowd and said calmly, "Where's the IOUs?"

The man with the scar thought that Marshall looked friendly and negotiable. He liked his vibe, so he took copies of the IOUs from his bag and handed them to Marshall.

"We're not here to cause trouble, bro. We're just making a living. Suppose you can pay it back, then good. But don't stand in our way if you can't."