

## Chapter 33 Dane Was Back

Kristine's friends whispered into her ear, and Kristine's face brightened at the sight of the bracelet.

She had mentioned the bracelet to Dane just days before, and was amazed he had actually purchased it!

A grin spread across Kristine's face, and she stood a bit straighter.

What did it matter if their parents preferred Madisyn? The affection of her brothers was enough for her.

"Dane," Kristine greeted with a beaming smile.

Dane gave her a quick look, nodded briefly, and then headed straight for Madisyn.

Madisyn was in the midst of guests when she caught sight of a somewhat familiar man approaching. His polite smile shifted to one that was genuinely warm, his eyes shining with happiness and kindness. "Madisyn," he called out.

Glenn looked on, startled. "Dane, you're back?"

"Of course, I had to return for Madisyn's welcome banquet," Dane answered, presenting Madisyn with the gift. "Here's something for you. Hope you like it."

Madisyn was surprised that Dane had brought such a lavish gift to their first meeting—a Pauliac bracelet worth a fortune.

"Thank you, Dane. I absolutely love it," Madisyn exclaimed, slipping on the bracelet there and then.

Dane's smile grew wider.

Upon seeing Madisyn, he knew instantly she was his sister, a perfect reflection of their parents' finest traits, both in her beauty and grace.

He wished to continue talking with her, but the guests needed their attention. They decided to resume their conversation later.

Meanwhile, Kristine was in shock.

She hadn't anticipated that Dane would give the gift she coveted to Madisyn.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she bowed her head.

"Kristine, don't be upset," one of her friends consoled her, understanding her feelings. "It's her welcome party, so it's natural she'd receive gifts. Maybe Dane has something different for you. He's always looked out for you."

"Yes, but it bothers me that Madisyn is getting all the attention. It seems our parents, and perhaps soon our brothers, will only notice her," Kristine murmured, her voice filled with worry.

Her statement hinted that Madisyn might be courting everyone's favor.

Her friends felt outraged on her behalf, and one of them reassured her, "This will pass. Once everyone sees what's really going on, they'll know you're the one who truly stands out! That woman from the countryside is just full of tricks."

"Exactly. And don't forget, you're set to marry into the Klein family, right? Surely, being Mrs. Klein is better than any position in the Johns family."

Spotting Andrew's arrival, one friend nudged Kristine, saying, "Look, Andrew's here. Why don't you greet him?"

Kristine noticed Andrew too, a figure of radiance and distinction even in a crowded place.

Her eyes shone with admiration as she started towards him.

However, before she could reach him, Andrew approached Madisyn and presented her with a gift.

Their conversation flowed easily, warm and harmonious.

Kristine watched them, feeling a tightness in her chest that made it hard to breathe.

She heard snippets of conversation from the guests at the banquet.

"The real Miss Johns is quite the sight. Her elegance and appearance easily surpass Kristine's."

"True, and she's held in high regard by everyone. Even Mr. Klein made a point to bring her a gift. It appears the real thing is always superior to a fake."

Kristine's complexion went ashen.

She had always known she wasn't a biological member of the Johns family. She had strived harder than anyone to earn everyone's admiration, yet Madisyn effortlessly became the center of attention upon her return.

Next to Madisyn, who was basking in the glowing spotlight, Kristine felt like a mouse lurking in the shadows. She gripped her clothes tightly.

Madisyn, meanwhile, was too busy mingling to notice much else.

After mingling, she felt the alcohol's influence and made her way to the restroom.

While washing her hands, Madisyn heard a sharp, scornful voice next to her. "Hmm, despite being a country girl, you sure know how to charm an audience. Looks like everyone's buying into your charade now!"

At that, Madisyn looked up and saw a woman glaring at her. She arched an eyebrow and asked, "Are you talking to me?"

"Who else would it be?" the woman retorted with a sneer.

The woman was Josie Reed, a member of the Reed family and Kristine's friend.

Madisyn had noticed her earlier with Kristine.

She replied coolly, "You shouldn't judge a situation from just one perspective."

"And who are you to give me advice?" Josie looked at her scornfully. "Just so you're aware, even if Kristine isn't a genuine Johns, she has friends like us. We won't stand by if you mistreat her."

Madisyn chose not to engage further.

Josie seemed like a kind girl, albeit somewhat misguided.

Kristine was lucky to have such a loyal friend.

Madisyn walked away, seizing the chance to catch up with Susan.

Susan was by herself in a corner, enjoying some food. Seeing Madisyn, she lit up. "Madisyn, your real parents are Mr. and Mrs. Johns! You're part of the wealthiest family!"

"I suppose that's true," Madisyn responded, smiling. "Don't you find it a little boring here?"

"It's alright, though I feel a bit out of place," Susan confessed, eyeing her simple attire, the most understated in the hall.

Madisyn had offered to buy her a dress, but Susan had declined, not anticipating such a lavish gathering.

"Here, everyone is treated the same," Madisyn assured her, gently patting her head. "Is there anything else you'd like to eat?"

"Yes! Would you like some food as well?"

"Actually, I could use a snack after all that socializing," Madisyn admitted, enjoying the relaxed moment with her friend.

As they went to serve themselves some food, someone accidentally bumped into Susan.

