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The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride - Chapter 111

The partner then spoke, his tone bland. "I heard that you once arranged your biological daughter's marriage, only to make your adopted daughter marry in her stead. You still owe the girl a sum of money, don't you? Yet you refuse to give her proper compensation. Your adopted daughter has made this matter public, and she certainly wasn't subtle about it. Clearly, you are not a trustworthy person. In our recent meeting with the shareholders, we have reached a consensus to no longer engage in any cooperation with your dubious enterprises."

Although the man's voice was relatively calm, Bernie felt it rumble in his core.

"Mr. Walton, these allegations aren't true at all! We have our fair share of difficulties. Can't you please reconsider the matter?" Bernie was so frightened that he could barely think properly before speaking.

He was still honest, to a degree. He wanted to acknowledge the Lind family's fault in the issue with the marriage, but he didn't know how to even begin his explanation.

"Why should I? How dare you insist on a collaboration when you and your family have already been exposed for your deceit?"

Bernie felt his face burn with shame. He had nothing to say to that.

Fiona was seated beside him, and she had been pressing her ear to the other side of the phone the whole time to listen in on the conversation.

She was just as shaken to learn that their business partner intended to terminate their cooperation. Unlike Bernie, however, she was quite adept with words.

"Let me talk to him," she said impatiently as she grabbed the phone from his hands.

"Please, Mr. Walton," Fiona said in a singsong voice. "You must allow us to explain our side of the matter. You can't just listen to what other people are saying. It is true that we have an adopted daughter. However, this so-called expose of hers is nothing but a ploy to extort us of money. Such an ungrateful girl, really. We raised her like our own, and here she is now, maligning us for profit. I'm afraid that she won't stop until she has taken every single penny to our name. We would have gladly given her what she needed, but we know her well enough to know that she's only going to squander any cash she gets her hands on. This is a family matter, Mr. Walton. We are trying to handle it as best as we can, but I hope you understand that personal affairs have no place in business transactions."

Fiona had fully expected to convince the man with her persuasive ways, but she only received more disdainful remarks.

"I disagree. As a matter of fact, I had this issue investigated exactly because of our existing collaboration. I must say, I'm quite appalled that you persist in slandering your adopted daughter. I already know that Janet asked you for money in order to finance the surgery of a maid that used to serve the Lind family. She wasn't going to spend it on herself. It seems that you and your husband are incapable of truth. Only an idiot would be willing to enter a business deal with you, and I assure you, I am no idiot. Furthermore, the Lind family has been on the decline in recent years. The only reason why we kept giving you

contracts is to honor the friendship between the previous generations of our two families. Now that you have broken that trust, I believe I have no other choice but to sever our ties for good.”

Fiona’s lips twitched, until her face contorted into a hideous expression.

They shouldn’t have adopted Janet in the first place! Even as a child, she had always stolen the limelight from Jocelyn. As an adult, all she did was to go against the Lind family. If Fiona had known that things would turn out like this, she would have just left Janet to die in the cold.

“No, please don’t hang up, Mr. Walton!” she cried out in a hurry. “Let’s continue with this discussion. Please tell me what we need to do so that you’ll continue working with us.”

The man snorted derisively. “Do honestly need me to spell it out for you? Don’t you have any idea what you’ve done wrong at all? Our cooperation was built upon integrity, something that the Lind family is painfully lacking.”

Then he hung up the phone before Fiona could say anything else.

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Fiona’s blood boiled after she hung up the phone. She gritted her teeth for a while before bursting into tears.

“Ah! Janet is out to destroy us! Bernie, you’d better man up and do something before it’s too late. Mark my words. I will divorce you and leave with Jocelyn if the Lind family goes bankrupt. Don’t expect me to languish in poverty with you!”

The events that led to Janet’s adoption replayed in her head at this moment.

“I told you not to adopt a child, but you refused to listen to me. Your parents accused me of being infertile and made my life a living hell because we were childless. I was forced to adopt that child. She turned out to be a jinx who has made it her point of duty to destroy us. It’s all your fault. I didn’t do anything wrong, so I won’t suffer with you here!”

The bankruptcy news took Jocelyn by surprise. She sprang to her feet and asked anxiously, “Mom, what did you just say? We are on the verge of bankruptcy? How come? I thought we are extremely wealthy.”

She had been busy living a carefree life, so she knew very little about her family’s current financial situation.

The death of Bernie’s father had dealt a huge blow to the Lind Group. Bernie was a pushover, so he couldn’t run the company like his father. It was harder for him because all the senior executives left with their loyal subordinates one after another.

Even now, he didn’t know what to do. He just curled up in the corner of the sofa like a child. After a while, he said, “Let bygones be bygones. We can’t undo what has already happened. Let’s focus on the issue on the ground. What should we do now?”

This question added fuel to Fiona’s anger. As her hand which was holding the teacup shook, she shot him a cold glare. “What else can we do? We need to give Janet the money in public, so everyone would know that we are honest people.”

“Mom, do we really need to give her the money? Don’t you think that bitch has gotten enough from us? I am not in support of it!” Jocelyn angrily stamped her feet and added, “She’s always winning against us!”

“If we don’t give her the money, what else can we do? I honestly don’t know if Janet is winning because she has a powerful person backing her up or that we just have ill luck. How come Mr. Walton find out?”

Fiona sighed and rubbed the corners of her eyes. She was so stressed that more wrinkles appeared on her face. When she was done with the massage, she looked at Jocelyn and said, “My dear daughter, you must marry a good and wealthy man. Janet is so arrogant now, and this is really driving us crazy. Fortunately, we still have you. You are our only hope. Don’t let us down. By the way, your relationship with Jason is going well, right?”

“Yes, Mom. Our relationship is blissful. Trust me, I won’t let you down.”

Jocelyn quickly took a sip of her coffee to hide the guilt on her face after lying.

She was yet to tell her mother that Jason had dumped her.

The same person who put her family in this mess was also the reason why he broke up with her.

“Oh, you are a good child. Keep up the good work.” Fiona heaved a long sigh and slammed the cup on the table. Sheer resentment filled her up as she thought about her adopted daughter. She wiped her tears and spewed, “Janet is such an ungrateful bitch! After everything we did for her, she wants to repay us with wickedness. Why did she open our family affairs to the public? Does she want me to commit suicide or die of a heart attack before she would be satisfied?”

Bernie was still in that fetal position. “I’ll give Janet the money tomorrow and then talk to Mr. Walton about the cooperation. Let’s wait and see if things would pan out,” he said sheepishly.

Fiona glared at him unwillingly.

Losing the family’s fortune was one thing she could never accept. The thought of being poor scared her out of her wits.

‘Aargh! We are about to lose everything because of that jinx, but we still have to give her the money. She must be very happy now!’

It began to rain heavily outside. The downpour was accompanied by thunder and lightning. Fiona wiped her tears and clenched her fists tightly. A murderous expression replaced the sadness on her face in a trice.

‘Janet, you will not go scot-free!’ She made up her mind to teach her adopted daughter an unforgettable lesson.

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In the design department of the Larson Group

Considering it wasn’t working hours yet, most employees were having breakfast.

“Why did you take the day off yesterday?” Gerda munched on her sandwich and inadvertently glanced at Janet.

“Well, I had something private to deal with,” Janet mumbled.

She recalled the passionate kiss she shared with Ethan on the sofa last night. They had been kissing for quite a while. Her lips had become numb after it. Janet quickly brushed the thought away as her cheeks became hot.

Gerda arched an eyebrow and studied her face. Seeing Janet giggle like a teenage girl, she understood what had happened. “Oh, you went on a date? Lind, please control yourself. We are in the company now. Don’t laugh like a crazy, lovesick woman.”

Janet immediately pursed her lips to suppress her smile. “Oh, come on. Stop talking nonsense.”

Gerda didn’t want to argue with her. The sudden commotion downstairs caught her attention. She looked out of the window and asked curiously, “What’s going on? Why have so many people gathered downstairs?”

Many workers were standing by the window, staring downstairs. Janet also joined them to see what was going on.

Her eyes widened; she was taken aback for a moment.

In the middle of the curious crowd stood Bernie and Fiona.

Janet quickly ran downstairs.

Seeing her come out of the building, Fiona quickly rushed to her, carrying a kraft paper bag. She looked depressed and indignant.

Janet frowned at her. “What are you doing here?”

Strangely enough, both Bernie and Fiona were wearing ordinary, wrinkly clothes, unlike their usual expensive ones. They didn’t look wealthy and extravagant like they usually did but looked like two peasants who had just come out of their farm after work.

Fiona looked much older than usual. She looked like she was in her fifties or sixties, probably because she deliberately wore haggard makeup. The dark circles under her eyes and her wrinkly face made her look pitiful.

“You kept pestering us to give you money. Why else do you think we are doing here?” Fiona wiped her eyes, took out a stack of cash from the kraft paper bag, and purposefully handed it to Janet as all the employees watched them.

Then, she sniffed and began to cry out loud. “Don’t come to our house asking for money again. We’ve sold all our possessions to give you money. We don’t have anything else to give you. Please don’t force us again. We can’t afford an adopted daughter like you. We have raised you all these years without expecting anything in return. But you can’t treat us this way. We are getting old.”

It looked like the two had come to the Larson Group just to ruin Janet’s reputation.

Janet checked the money and realized at least three or four hundred thousand dollars were in the paper bag. Besides, she had also saved up after selling the things she had got from them in the past. The money would be sufficient enough to meet Hannah's medical expenses.

Janet was thrilled. Now that she had the money, she didn't have to worry about Hannah's medical expenses anymore.

The fake pitiful looks on Bernie and Fiona's faces disgusted her. Janet wasn't in the mood to talk to them anymore. "Thank you. If you don't have anything else to say, I'd better return to work."

Seeing that she was about to leave, Fiona hurriedly stopped her.

Janet tried wriggling out of her hold. But even before Janet pulled her hand back, Fiona screamed and fell to the ground.

"How can you do this to us, Janet? You didn't bother calling us your parents when I gave you the money. Now, you've pushed your mom to the ground. You're an ungrateful daughter! God will punish you. If you have a conscience, tell everyone how we've raised you all these years. But you've forgotten all that. Money is all you need. But we have nothing left to give you. Do you want to take our lives? Would that satiate your greed?"

Janet crossed her arms over her chest and looked at Fiona. "You have never been nice to me. Now, you owe me money. What are you up to now? All right, go ahead. Bring it on. I'll see what you can do."

"You ungrateful bitch!" Fiona waved her hands in exasperation. She continued to pound the ground and cry, which seemed to garner everyone's attention.

It was working hours now. Several employees were walking in and out of the Larson Group. Hearing Fiona's accusations, they cast a disgusted look at Janet.

"Gosh, could she be more greedy?"

"Look at their clothes! Her parents look like they're struggling to make ends meet. How could their daughter ask them for money instead of supporting them?"

"It's said that she is an adopted daughter. How could an adopted daughter ask for money from her parents with such arrogance when she should be grateful for them?"

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Janet turned a blind eye to Fiona's performance.

Since Fiona didn't allow her to leave, she used the chance to count the money.

After carefully counting and recounting it, she put the money back and neatly tucked away the bag.

"Well, the sum is correct. But your performance was pathetic. Don't you feel ashamed to stay here?" she asked, looking into Fiona's eyes.

Her lips curled up into a smile. Janet was glad that she got the money and didn't care about what anyone thought of her.

“If you’re not tired yet, you can sit down and cry a little longer. I have to give the money to the hospital for Hannah’s treatment right away, so I won’t be able to watch your performance.”

“What? You’re going to leave with the money? That’s your sister’s tuition fee! Your father and I struggle to make ends meet. Do you want us to sell our kidneys to support our family now?”

Seeing that Janet was about to leave with the money, Fiona raised her voice a decibel higher and shouted, “Your father and I lead miserable lives. We have raised an ungrateful daughter. You are sucking the life and money out of us!”

Just then, Tiffany arrived and was about to enter the company. A frown lined her forehead when she saw Janet and the crowd around her. “What’s going on, Lind? What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be at work?”

“Everything is okay, Ms. Fisher. Don’t worry. I can handle it. I want permission to take off from work for an hour or two. I have to pay the medical fee for my family member in hospital. I’ll be back in the afternoon.” Janet smiled at Tiffany. Fiona’s tricks didn’t affect her the slightest.

“Okay, come back soon,” Tiffany readily agreed. Then, she saw Fiona lying on the ground and frowned.

“What are these two homeless people doing in there? Security! Get them out of here. We don’t want them to affect our work.”

With that, she turned around and strutted into the building.

Considering she got Tiffany’s permission, Janet left. She didn’t want to talk to Bernie and Fiona anymore. She was already running out of time and had to pay for the surgery as soon as possible.

Fiona looked around in embarrassment. Janet had left the place, leaving her all alone.

However, she didn’t want to give up easily. Fiona waved her hands dramatically and began to cry again. “Janet treats us like filth. Although we are her adoptive parents, we have always treated her as our own. But she is an ungrateful girl!

Janet turned a deaf ear to Fiona’s words. She already hailed a taxi and rushed to the hospital.

She didn’t want to waste her time dealing with Bernie and Fiona.

After Janet left, Fiona slowly got up and left with Bernie.

Once they got far away from the Larson Group, Bernie scolded Fiona. No one had ever humiliated him this way. “We could have just given her the money without playing any tricks. God, it was humiliating!”

However, Fiona didn’t seem to care. “Oh, come on, Bernie. You should be happy. I’m sure our drama would have ruined Janet’s reputation. Didn’t you see the look on the faces of the people there? They all hate Janet now. Sooner or later, Janet will get fired.”

Meanwhile, In the hospital.

Janet paid the fees and confirmed the date of Hannah’s surgery. She slumped on the chair and breathed a sigh of relief.

All the worries and quandaries in her mind were cleared, and Janet finally began to wonder why Bernie and Fiona had returned the money all of a sudden.

She leaned against the railing outside the corridor and called Ethan.

The heavy rain had awoken the entire city. The trees and greeneries looked lush and vibrant. The cool breeze seemed to refresh everyone. Autumn had finally arrived.

“I want to ask you something. My adoptive parents suddenly returned the money. Did you do anything?” Janet asked. A smile tugged at the corners of her lips when she heard his resonant voice.

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Ethan sat in his office, a beam of light streaming through his floor-to-ceiling windows and falling on his voice. His eyes softened as he listened to Janet’s voice through the phone.

“Yes, I did have a hand in exposing your sister’s substitution matter and your parents’ debt. The Lind family does business with a lot of notable partners, so it’s only a matter of course that they try to save their reputation as soon as possible. That’s probably why they decided to finally pay you what they owe. They have no other choice at this point.”

Garrett rarely heard Ethan speak this much in one breath.

With raised eyebrows, he pricked his ears and leaned forward slightly, trying to hear more of the couple’s conversation.

On the other side of the line, Janet frowned. Ethan sounded calm and casual about his explanation, but she knew it couldn’t have been so simple.

“Tell me the truth. Did you spend a lot of money to make this happen?”

“Of course not. It cost nothing just to spread a bit of news. You’re thinking too much.” Ethan’s tone remained patient. He swiveled his chair and looked out of his massive office windows.

Garrett struggled to contain his laughter and ended up snorting. The CEO of the Larson Group was so powerful that people were willing to bend over as soon as he gave the word. He didn’t even need to lift a finger to have them do his bidding.

Janet sighed. “I know, I know. Stop patronizing me.”

Her life was already a mess to begin with, and now she even got Ethan involved in her troublesome affairs.

He had neither the money nor the power to stand up against people like her adoptive family. He must have gone to great lengths in order to bring their selfish deeds to light.

A small smile tugged at the corners of Ethan’s lips.

He threw a pointed glance at Garrett, who was now openly and shamelessly eavesdropping.

The man immediately straightened and nodded.

He understood the message—Ethan was about to say things that weren’t meant for anybody else’s ears.

Garrett strode to the door and left the office.

When he was gone, Ethan leaned back against his chair and tapped his nose with his forefinger. "Hmm?" he said on the phone, his voice quiet and lazy. "What is it that you know?"

"I know that you're awfully good to me." Janet's voice had also fallen into a whisper. She covered her phone's receiver and looked around to make sure no one could hear her.

"Is your husband reliable?"

"Yes, yes."

"Come to my room tonight."

"Why?"

"I'm going to fuck you senseless until morning," Ethan rasped.

A delicious shiver ran down Janet's spine. She looked around again as she felt her ears burn. "Stop it! It's still the middle of the day."

"Why are you being shy all of a sudden?" Ethan chuckled.

"Ethan Lester!" Janet snapped. "Cut it out. I'll cook something delicious for you when I get home." Despite her protests, she already felt hot all over her body.

She hung up the phone and covered her face with her hands, as if that could stop the desire and temptation from coursing through her veins.

It was well into the afternoon when she returned to her office desk.

Gerda saw Janet approach and gave her a wink. "Hey, I heard that the old couple downstairs earlier were your adoptive parents, is that right? The whole company is talking about it."

Of course, they were. They were probably badmouthing her, too.

Janet looked around, and sure enough, her colleagues were staring at her with morbid curiosity.

She instantly lowered her eyes. "They came for some family matters."

Gerda could tell that there was something else Janet didn't want to talk about, something that wasn't particularly pleasant, like a secret. She decided to offer the new girl some advice. "You had better make things clear as soon as possible. Everybody loves to gossip, and they tend to exaggerate every little detail. You never know what those silly rumors would eventually become."

Janet said nothing and just sat at her desk.

She had been expecting this much.

After all, Fiona had raised quite a ruckus in front of so many people this morning. It didn't help that Janet made no response and just walked out on Fiona and Bernie.

Without any explanation from Janet, the onlookers were naturally led to believe that she was an ungrateful daughter, just as Fiona had so publicly claimed.

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Seeing that Janet was absentminded, Gerda nudged her with concern. "Why don't you take the rest of the day off and go back home? It's big news now. Everyone's been discussing it from the morning. I heard that people are complaining and reporting your misconduct to your superiors because they feel what you did was unfair to your adoptive parents."

"I'm fine. In fact, I already anticipated this result." Janet shook her head and smiled bitterly.

She had thought that everything would come to an end once her adoptive parents gave her the money. Regardless of what Fiona and Bernie did, they took Janet in and gave her a home after all.

But Fiona couldn't just let go and let Janet have the money. The woman wanted to make trouble for Janet.

Gerda knew every family had a skeleton in its closet. But she didn't expect such a reserved, calm person like Janet would encounter such unfortunate things.

"How about you explain it to Ms. Fisher? You should at least fight for it. You still have to build a good rapport with your colleagues in the future. A bad reputation would only ruin your career.

Janet smiled but didn't say anything, for she knew that was precisely what Fiona wanted.

She wanted to ruin Janet's reputation once and for all.

But Janet made up her mind not to let that happen. Although she was a little grateful to her adoptive parents for giving her a home, she couldn't allow Fiona to slander her like that.

"Don't worry about me." Janet patted Gerda's shoulder. "Thank you for rooting for me."

"It's no big deal." Gerda smiled and went on with her work.

Just as Janet wracked her brains, thinking about how to explain herself to her superior, she received a message from Brandon.

"The company has been receiving complaints about you. What happened?" Brandon cut to the chase.

Janet swallowed as her face flushed with embarrassment.

She was a little afraid of Brandon. After all, he was the boss of the company; Janet didn't dare to neglect him. She quickly briefed him about the conflict she had with her adoptive parents.

She didn't know whether he would believe her or not.

Brandon didn't question her morals and character. Instead, he asked, "What are you going to do?"

"I want to clarify everything but haven't figured out how to do it yet." Janet read and reread her message for a long while before sending it.

After all, she felt so stupid for not coming up with an idea yet.

Instead of condemning her for being stupid, Brandon sent a message that surprised her. "Don't let this matter affect your work. I'll handle it for you."

Janet was terrified that she dropped her phone.

How could she bother her boss by asking him to help with her personal issues?

“Thank you, Mr. Larson. But I can handle it myself. This is my private affair,” she quickly replied.

However, Brandon’s profile picture turned gray, and her message was read, but she didn’t receive a reply.

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The temperature had dropped after the heavy rain. The air became cool.

As soon as Janet took out the key to open the door, she heard footsteps and the rustling of plastic behind her. Just as she was about to turn around, a black shadow engulfed her.

Her body stiffened, and her heart began to race in her chest.

‘Oh, God! I hope Ethan has returned home.’

She waved her purse to attack, but the tall figure quickly dodged.

The man’s strong body pressed her against the door. His steady breath blew against her air. She could feel his rising body temperature. The man tucked Janet’s long hair behind her ear and gently kissed the back of her neck.

“My husband is inside. If you dare to even lay a finger on me, he will beat you to death!” Janet’s voice quivered with fear.

“You have another husband?” Hearing the familiar voice, Janet finally breathed a sigh of relief.

She turned around and pinched his arm. “That wasn’t funny. I was so scared that my heart was in my throat the entire time.”

“I’m sorry. Let’s go inside.” Ethan smiled and ruffled her hair. Then, he leaned forward and opened the door.

As soon as they entered the apartment, Ethan grabbed her waist, and the two fell onto the sofa.

Janet moaned as he peppered kisses on her ear and collarbone. Ethan was strong and aggressive. “I miss you so much. We agreed to sleep in my room tonight,” he said breathlessly.

Janet didn’t remember agreeing to it.

“No. I have something important to tell you. Please listen to me. Brandon texted me again,” Janet said, turning her head aside. Her ears turned red, and she felt itchy.

She told Ethan about what happened in the company today. After listening to everything, Ethan buried his head in the crook of her neck. “It’s good that your boss is willing to help you. I’m sure he can solve the problem,” he said in a muffled voice.

“I still don’t understand why Brandon wants to help me. In fact, I’m kind of afraid of him,” Janet said, shaking her head quizzically.

“You’re just overthinking this. As the CEO of the company, he must protect the company’s interests first. Perhaps he doesn’t want your personal issues to come in the way of your work. Solving such a trivial problem would be a piece of cake for him.”

Janet cast a skeptical look at him as her heart sank with dejection.

Ethan was always calm whenever she mentioned Brandon. He was a possessive husband. However, he seemed tolerant of Brandon. She just couldn’t understand why.

Ethan looked up at her. His unfathomable eyes bore into hers. He smiled and bit her earlobe, wrapping his arms around her. “Didn’t you say that you would cook a delicious meal for me? Or do you want to go to my room first?”

He wondered if she’d be able to come out after they went in.

Janet’s eyelashes fluttered. She blinked and shyly pushed him away. “We have nothing in the fridge. Wait for me at home. I’ll go and buy some groceries right away.”

Ethan pressed himself against her. With Janet’s slender legs wrapped around his waist, he grabbed her fingers resting on his chest and kissed them. “Don’t buy anything. I just want to eat you. Will you allow me?”

Janet’s face turned red as she felt something hard poke her hip. “No, no. I’m still on my period...”

Ethan shook his head and chuckled. He gently bit her lip and finally got up. The plain white T-shirt clinging onto his body revealed his pert, chiseled abs.

Janet quickly got up and hurriedly smoothed her dress. ‘Gosh, he is like a dog who is constantly biting me.’

Ethan sat up and looked at her. “How about I come with you?”

“No, no. I can go on my own.”

Janet’s mind went blank, and her body was burning. She quickly smoothed her coat and darted out of the house.

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Fiona didn’t let go of Janet even after giving the money to her. Whenever she thought about it, she would curse Janet, saying she was the bane of her life and that she wanted to kill her.

The next day, a maid gingerly knocked on the door and handed an envelope to Fiona.

“What’s this?” Fiona looked at the envelope and quickly removed the face mask whilst rubbing the sticky essence onto her cheeks.

“A gentleman just gave it to me. He said it was an invitation to a party.”

Fiona sat up straight and snatched the envelope. It was an invitation to a party held by the Larson Group.

“Bernie! Bernie! Come out and see what I received!” Fiona shouted and ran to Bernie, waving the invitation. The man was happily playing with birds he raised outside the balcony.

Bernie was submissive, but he was not a fool. He took the invitation and carefully read it. “The Larson Group? What’s going on? Don’t you think it’s strange? They would never invite the Lind family to such an occasion.”

It was precisely why Fiona was excited. She gently massaged the residual essence on her face, thinking it would make her look young forever.

“Are you out of your mind? It just proves that our drama in the Larson Group has worked. Maybe they are holding a party, just to apologize to us.”

Fiona grinned dreamily as she thought about attending such a momentous party.

Bernie wasn’t as blindly confident as she was.

He still couldn’t bring himself to believe they got invited to the party.

The party was held at Waterside Manor. It was a private place exclusively offered to influential celebrities for conducting social events.

Before leaving, Fiona carefully dressed up and applied two thick coats of foundation on her face, hiding her fine wrinkles and freckles.

Jocelyn was also dressed in an extravagant outfit.

Only wealthy, influential people attended the parties held by the Larson Group. Fiona felt the occasion was perfect to find her a good son-in-law.

All three arrived at Waterside Manor with great expectations.

“Mom, this place is huge!” Jocelyn squealed with excitement as she looked at the splendid building in awe.

“Shush!” Fiona grabbed her arm and leaned closer. “Stop looking like an ignorant woman and degrading yourself, Jocelyn. After all, you are a wealthy diva. Straighten your back and look like a dignified woman.”

Jocelyn took a deep breath, held her head high, and tried to look like a majestic queen.

However, the next moment, the smile on her face vanished. “Janet is also here!”

All eyes turned to her.

The dark green satin dress clung to Janet’s slim waist, accentuating her perfect features. Her chestnut curly hair was coiled up with a wooden hairpin. Her bangs elegantly swayed as a gust of cool breeze brushed against her. The light makeup and pink lips seemed to brighten her face. She looked breathtaking tonight.

Janet stood out among the women dolled up with copious amounts of makeup and dressed in extravagant clothes.

Even Fiona was shocked.

She always knew Janet was beautiful. However, the woman somehow looked prettier with every passing day. She was an effortless beauty who exuded a natural charm.

“What the hell is she doing here? I’m going to slap her. You don’t know how she humiliated me in the banquet last time.” Jocelyn was seething with rage as she remembered what happened to her at another party last time. She grabbed her dress and almost rushed toward Janet.

However, Fiona quickly grabbed her wrist and stopped her. “Don’t be impulsive. If you fight with her on this occasion, it will only ruin your reputation.”

Jocelyn gritted her teeth and suppressed her anger.

Fiona used to be a social butterfly when she was young. She enjoyed dancing at balls and parties. Many people knew her. Soon, she began to chat with the other guests.

“Things aren’t going well.”

“What’s wrong?” the lady beside her asked concernedly.

Fiona let out a weary sigh, feigning pity. “It’s kind of embarrassing. You probably know my adopted daughter, Janet. She is a heartless, ungrateful child. She has taken away all our money from our family. Now, she is leading a carefree life outside, neglecting me and her adoptive father.”

Many guests at the party were employees of the Larson Group. “You mean Janet Lind? We know her. She works in the design department. She seems sweet and well-mannered. I didn’t expect her to be such an evil person.”

As they got into an animated discussion, Janet walked toward them, grinning broadly with a glass of champagne.

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Janet walked past the crowd of guests in fancy clothes and strutted toward Fiona with an indifferent look on her face.

Janet’s beautiful eyes turned cold, revealing all the disappointment and anger accumulated in her heart over the years. Every time Fiona looked at Janet, she wanted to pluck Janet’s beautiful eyes out of their sockets.

“Have you ever shown kindness and warmth to me? You have humiliated and tormented me all my life, and now you call me ungrateful? That’s absurd!” Janet said calmly as if impervious to Fiona’s ruthless comments.

Fiona was an extraordinary actress. Tears welled up in her eyes. “We adopted you and raised you with great efforts, but you’ve always milked us for money. How does that make you a good daughter?” Fiona said, waving her hands dramatically.

Her dramatic performance in the Larson Group a few days ago had already attracted everyone's attention. Moreover, Janet hadn't explained herself to anyone. Many people regarded her as an ungrateful daughter, and some even took videos on their phones.

However, Janet didn't care about what people thought of her. "You abandoned me after Jocelyn was born. You sent me to the countryside to live with Hannah. You never cared about me. Hannah was the one who took care of me. She is all I have. I came to you because she was ill, and you promised to give me the money in exchange for a favor. I kept my end of the bargain, but you've been cheating me. Why are you creating a scene in front of everyone?"

Fiona wiped the tears from the corner of her eyes and sniffed loudly. "What nonsense! You're just blabbering."

Janet laughed, shaking her head. "Your neighbors don't know me, and my neighbors in the countryside haven't seen you. I don't even have a picture with you. You better think twice before lying. Do you have any evidence to prove that you raised me? Look, I don't want to talk about the past. I'm grateful to you for giving me a shelter even though you all have loathed me."

If Fiona hadn't slandered Janet in front of everyone, she wouldn't have uttered a word about the past.

Janet didn't have a home that she could call hers. It was just another place she didn't belong, where she was abandoned by her "family" again.

Fiona looked around helplessly.

Janet took out her passbook that had a record of the money Bernie and Fiona had sent Hannah over the past twenty years. She sneered at Fiona and threw it on her face. "You were bragging about raising me and accused me of milking you all for money. But this proves how much you've really spent on me. You two have been giving only 200 dollars a month for the past twenty years — not a penny more. Is that what you call 'raising me with every penny you have'? You always take Jocelyn to fancy restaurants. One dinner of yours are at least twice or thrice my monthly expenses. Can't you see the irony here?"

The crowd burst into an uproar.

Most of the women attending the parties offered generous tips. They didn't think 200 dollars was a good tip, let alone be a good monthly allowance.

"You are lying! We gave you more than that." Fiona was rendered speechless. She hugged her handbag to avoid the surprised gazes of the people staring at her. "We have always been generous with you!"

Janet rolled her eyes. Fiona's response didn't surprise her. She still couldn't figure out why Fiona hated her so much. The woman despised her with a vengeance. When she still stayed with them in their house, Fiona would scold Janet for even the smallest things.

"I didn't ask you to adopt me, did I?" Janet sounded calm and composed. "Since you adopted me, you are obligated to raise me. Considering your wealth and income, the money you've given me every month does not even cover the standard child custody. I can't even meet my monthly expenses. I owe what I am today only to Hannah. She struggled to raise me, with her own savings. You've done nothing I should be grateful of."

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The onlookers started discussing heatedly.

“How could you do such a thing? A manicure like yours costs more than two hundred dollars!”

“Since you chose to adopt a child, you should’ve been responsible for her. The Lind family is rich, yet you gave your adopted daughter so little. Shame on you.”

All the color drained from Fiona’s face.

Little did these people know that the Lind family was actually poor—something Fiona would never dare to admit.

After a while, Fiona said weakly, “We were worried we’d hurt our biological daughter. If Jocelyn saw that we treated her adopted sister better, she would’ve accused us of being unfair. And Janet, even if we didn’t give you that much money, you shouldn’t have forced us to give you more. We adopted you and you should be grateful!”

Janet set her glass on the table. Her eyes flashed with sheer rage. Even now, Fiona chose to lie through her teeth.

“The money wasn’t for me. I just wanted to save Hannah’s life. I didn’t force you to give me more. You were the one who promised me that you’d give me the money if I married Ethan instead of Jocelyn. But even after that, you kept refusing to pay me. I was just asking for what was rightfully mine.”

The audience burst into an uproar. Everyone began to criticize Fiona harshly.

“How dare she!”

“So, she adopted a child but left her in the countryside and didn’t give her any money. Such a criminal should be sued!”

“How the hell could she ask her adopted daughter to marry someone as a substitute for her biological daughter? The poor girl!”

Ethan was sitting on a black sofa nearby with his legs crossed. He took a sip from his glass of wine as he watched this scene unfold before him. He had witnessed the whole thing.

“I didn’t know that your wife could be so fierce. You must be beaten up a lot at home, hmm?” Garrett joked, poking fun at Ethan.

Ethan’s eyes had been fixed on Janet the entire night. To him, the woman before him now was a stark contrast to the woman she saw at home.

“She’s a submissive sweet girl at home.” Ethan took another sip from his wine, his eyes darkening slightly.

Seeing that his friend looked a little worried, Garrett smiled at him reassuringly. “Don’t tell me that you want to interfere. From what I can see, your wife can handle this.”

“I suppose we shall wait and see,” Ethan said gloomily.

At this point, Fiona couldn't stand the humiliation anymore and dropped her gentle facade. Her expression changed and she started coughing so violently, one might've wondered if she was terminally ill.

"What're you doing here anyway? We took you in and raised you. Otherwise, who's to say you wouldn't be homeless right now? Isn't it only right that you married someone for our sake? Just take it as a payment for our kindness."

When she saw that her mother had changed tactics, Jocelyn immediately echoed Fiona's sentiments, adding fuel to the flames.

"How could you have the nerve to talk back? If it weren't for you, our family wouldn't have ended up like this. You've pissed my mother off. You always think of that old maid but don't give a damn about your foster mother. Don't you have a conscience?"