

# **The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride**

## **Read Free – chapter 26**

The expression on Ethan's face frightened Janet. Her heart leaped to her throat.

She took a piece of tissue and wiped her lips, pretending to be calm. "Why are you stopping me?" I'm in urgent need of money now; I have no other choice."

Ethan's eyes smoldered with anger. "How much money do you want? I'm your husband. If you're going through any problems, why can't you tell me? Why would you do something like that?"

Janet had been short of money ever since she was a child.

Tears welled up in her eyes. She took a deep breath and looked at him. "We are husband and wife only to the outside world. You have already said that we shouldn't interfere in each other's business. What makes you think I'd share my problems with you and even ask for money?"

Her words silenced Ethan.

He rubbed his brows, and his chest tightened with unease. He stood up and looked at her. "Let's calm down first and then solve this problem."

Ethan closed the door and went out. The cold summer breeze and the chirping of cicadas filled the air.

Ethan took a deep breath, and the sweet scent of roses filled his nostrils. Janet had planted them on the balcony.

Ethan leaned against the door as the moonlight kissed his soft features.

Ethan realized that he had crossed the line tonight.

Before they got married, he never liked his bride-to-be and didn't intend to be her husband.

However, his impression of her changed. He seemed to like her more with every passing day.

Ethan ran a hand through his hair and let out a weary sigh.

He couldn't understand when he had started caring about her so much.

He rubbed his temples and closed his eyes, trying to suppress his incomprehensible emotions.

Janet stood at the table and picked up the tableware. Just then, the door flew open, and Ethan walked toward her and took the tableware from her hand. "I'm going to wash them."

“Why did you come back?” Janet thought he wouldn’t come back, so she grabbed the plates and held them tightly in her arms in a fit of pique. The oil from the vessels had stained her clothes. “You don’t need to wash them. I’m afraid you will only break them,” she said.

“Why did I come back? You want me to let you cry here alone?” Seeing her bloodshot eyes, Ethan’s eyes darkened. He raised his hand to touch her cheek.

“Don’t touch me! I’m not crying!” Shocked, Janet stepped back. Her eyes were red and puffy. She stared at Ethan fearlessly.

Ethan felt dejected. Janet was like a delicate flower that would wither if he forced her.

Ethan put his arms on the table, trapping her in place. He leaned closer and stared into her eyes. “Don’t do the drug trial. Maybe you will get other income soon. Please listen to me,” he said softly.

“What will you do if I don’t listen to you?” Janet sneered at him.

Ethan’s brows furrowed, and his eyes looked frightening. “There are several ways to deal with women,” he hissed through his teeth. “Anyway, I’m a gangster. I’m not afraid of anything.”

He inched toward her and reached out his hand to unzip her dress.

“I know. I won’t do the trial.” Janet hugged herself as her voice trembled.

Ethan let go of her and stood aside.

Biting her lower lip, Janet ignored him and walked to the sink with the plates. She turned on the tap and began to wash the dishes.

She didn’t want to disagree with him. Anyway, Ethan was busy with his business every day and didn’t have time to care about her. She could still do the trial next week without letting him know.

The next day, as soon as Janet went to the company, several messages popped up on her computer.

She opened the e-mail and found that a client had contacted her about a design gig for a high payment.

“Twenty thousand dollars?” Janet stared at her laptop screen, her mouth wide open. She quickly typed a message to the client, her fingers flying over the keyboard.

This was going to be her first big client ever since her graduation. Given the amount of the offer they had made, she was expecting a heap of strict instructions she would have to abide by.

“Excuse me. May I know whether you are a gentleman or a lady?”

This website played as a bridge between clients and freelance designers. The clients had the option to use their real names or remain anonymous, but most of them didn’t really bother setting up a profile. Most of the profiles in the listings were nothing more than the default gray icon, with no way to tell the client’s gender.

“Male,”

came the client’s reply.

“I see. Do you have specific requirements regarding the design, sir?” Janet leaned forward and propped her chin on one hand, bracing herself for a long list of demands.

It didn’t take long for the client to write back. “I have seen the designs you posted on the website. They are very good. You may have free rein in designing my suit. I will provide you with the necessary feedback once you have given me your first draft.”

Janet wasted no time and began drawing a prototype according to the client’s measurements. Meanwhile, the company had recently asked them for tentative designs meant for a regular, pre-selection process. That meant that none of her work would go to waste in the end. Apart for a few hours’ sleep, Janet spent all of her time poring over her digital panels.

Three days later, she was finally able to send a final design to the client. The bespoke ensemble comprised of a double-breasted, gray jacket with matching trousers, an immaculate white dress shirt, and a skinny black tie. A silver tie clip completed the outfit. Over the course of her work, Janet had presumed that this client must be young, probably around her age or so. After all, her designs did not appeal to the more mature demographics, but young professionals who liked to look smart and fashionable at the same time.

She was also expecting a complete overhaul. In this field, the first drafts almost always needed revisions. If the client was willing to pay such an exorbitant amount of money, and for a rookie’s design, no less, then the preliminary rejection was inevitable.

And so, Janet was utterly surprised when the client instantly approved of her design.

“This is brilliant!”

“Do you need me to polish anything?” Janet typed with some trepidation. Despite her good fortune, she was feeling a little guilty about how smooth the transaction was going. It shouldn’t be this easy to earn twenty thousand dollars, should it?

“Not for the time being. I will contact you if there’s anything I want to change in the future. Don’t worry; this price is reasonable enough. I’m paying for the uniqueness and originality of your design.” It seemed that the client had seen through Janet’s nervousness, hence his words of reassurance.

She was about to type her thanks when a payment notification popped up on her screen. The client had confirmed their business deal on the website and paid the bill, and the platform had instantly transferred the money to her account.

Janet clutched her laptop in both hands and stared at the figure displayed on her screen. She felt immensely proud and gratified, and it showed in the twinkle of her eyes.

Another message popped up from the client. “If you’re interested, we can talk about a long-term collaboration.”

Really?!

Janet pictured fireworks going off in the background. “Of course!” she typed hurriedly. “I am. I have plenty of time!”

The man then gave her several more orders, all with some minor instructions. He seemed to be very fond of suits, though he wasn’t in any hurry to have them made. He advised Janet to take her time with her designs, and even reminded her to take a break every now and then.

“Oh, my God, Janet! You just made a fortune!” Overjoyed, Janet got to her feet and bounced on her bed like a little kid.

All at once, there was an urgent knocking at her bedroom door.

Ethan had probably heard her squeal just now. He entered the room without waiting for her to ask what he wanted. “Did something happen?” he asked, frowning.

“Ethan! We finally have money!” Janet exclaimed as she resumed her festive bouncing.

Her long hair danced around her flushed cheeks, and her eyes were clear and bright.

The next thing they knew, she had jumped off the bed and was throwing herself in Ethan’s arms.

He instinctively reached out to catch her. After making sure that she was all right, he promptly froze on the spot.

Janet was still so engrossed in her recent milestone to notice anything amiss. She pulled back and grinned at him. “Do you know what it means?”

“What?” Ethan’s smile was tender, not that he was aware of it.

His smile caught her attention, and this time, she was the one who froze.

Only then did she realize what she had done. Janet abruptly pushed against Ethan’s chest and took a couple of steps back. Her face turned red with embarrassment even as she averted her eyes and tidied her messy hair.

“I didn’t mean anything by... Well, I was just so happy that I lost sense of what I was doing. I’m sorry.”

After saying that, Janet cleared her throat and changed the subject as if nothing significant had happened. “Why did you come, by the way?”

“Ah, I heard you yelling and thought something bad happened.” Ethan bit his lower lip and put his hands into his trouser pockets.

Traces of their brief embrace still lingered in his person—the warmth of her chest, the scent of her hair...

If he could, he would have held Janet in his arms and laid in bed all day.

“Did I disturb you? I’ll try to keep my voice down.” Startled, Janet clamped her mouth with her hand and looked at him apologetically.

Ethan shook his head and walked to her bed. Then, he slumped onto it and inhaled her sweet fragrance.

Propping his head on his arm, Ethan closed his eyes. “What happened? Why are you so happy?” he asked casually.

“Don’t lie on my bed, Ethan.” Janet’s cheeks puffed as she tried to pull his arm.

He was tall and heavy. Finally, she gave up and sat on the chair beside the desk.

“I met a wealthy and generous client who asked me to design for him. I just submitted my draft and got paid.”

Ethan opened his eyes and saw Janet grinning with joy. “Then, you don’t have to go for the drug trial. That’s good.”

Janet smiled. She rested her chin on the palm of her hand and poked the lamp on the desk with one finger. “Why don’t you ask me how much I’ve earned?”

“It’s all your money and is none of my business. I only wish for you not to go for the drug trial.” Ethan smiled at her.

Janet didn’t expect him to care so much about her.

A smile tugged at the corners of her lips as she leaned on the desk.

The next day, after work, Janet went to the hospital to pay Hannah’s medical fee. She still had three thousand dollars left in her bank account even after that.

When she got home, Janet wondered if she could take Ethan out for dinner. She would still earn in the future. Moreover, she would get her salary in two weeks.

“Ethan, let’s go out for dinner tonight. It’s my treat! I’m going to buy you a big sumptuous meal,” Janet said, raising her wallet. She looked like she had just won the lottery.

Ethan was lying on the sofa. He looked at her tattered wallet and stood up. “Okay, I know a nice place.”

When they arrived at the door of a magnificent restaurant, Janet stiffened. She pursed her lips and pulled Ethan’s arm, who was just about to enter the restaurant. Her eyes widened in horror. “Ethan, this is the best restaurant in the city.”

The restaurant belonged to the Larson Group and was one of the most famous restaurants in the city. It would cost all her savings to eat here.

“Didn’t you want to treat me to a big dinner?” Ethan arched his brows, pretending to be confused.

Janet gritted her teeth and forced a smile. “Yeah. Nothing. Let’s go inside.”

When Janet checked the menu, she felt she couldn’t afford any of the dishes here. Her heart sank as she skimmed through the menu card

Not even one dish was affordable here. Biting her lower lip, Janet continued to look at the menu.

“Miss, could you please hurry up? We still have to serve other guests,” one of the waiters said impatiently, casting a disdainful look at her.

Two waitresses nearby cast a scornful look at Janet. “They shouldn’t have come here if they can’t afford it,” one of them whispered to the other.

“I haven’t seen them before. They don’t look like regular customers. They’ve been looking at the menu for ten minutes. Don’t they feel ashamed?”

