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In Seacisco, the Larson Group building.

Ethan had just finished his video conference. He glanced at the clock on his desk and dialed Janet's number.

When the call connected, however, his face instantly darkened. "Honey, can you tell me why I'm greeted by your palm instead of your pretty face? What's going on? I've been dying to see you."

"I'm right here, Honey, just a little busy. I'll call you back in a while, okay? Mr. Wesley sent back my designs for further modifications." Janet pulled back and glanced at her phone once before focusing back on her computer screen.

Ethan's tone grew somber. "Honey, don't you realize that you've been working on these designs for more than a week? You're working every single time I called you."

As a matter of fact, Janet had only been having four to five hours of sleep each day the past week.

And it showed. Even the beauty filter of her camera couldn't hide the dark circles under her eyes. She looked exhausted.

Janet nodded lightly to acknowledge Ethan's words, but her hand didn't stop moving, and her eyes never strayed from her computer, either. If he didn't know any better, he would have thought she had gone mad over her passion project.

Ethan sighed heavily. "Well, since you're so busy, I won't be keeping you. Sorry to disturb you."

That seemed to jolt her back to her senses. Janet dropped her digital pen and snatched her phone in a hurry. "Oh, Honey. I'm so grateful you called. I wouldn't have realized I was overworked if you hadn't pointed it out. But you know what? I'm always amazed by Mr. Wesley's criticisms. They are surprisingly constructive, and he spots a lot of problematic details that I wouldn't even have thought about. I feel like a new world has opened up before me, and that I'm welcome to learn new things without fear of judgment."

Ethan stared at her and saw how her eyes lit up with excitement as she talked. He could tell that she was having the time of her life at work. "I would never stop you from pursuing your dreams," he said sincerely. "You know that, right? I just can't help thinking that your boss is being too hard on you, and I say that objectively. Even the busiest department here at Larson Group wouldn't force their staff to work overtime for seven days straight."

Janet gave him a sweet smile. "I'm all right. I'm willing to put in extra hours for my dreams."

Ethan sighed again. He could only shake his head and smile bitterly. What else could he say at this point? Janet was her own person, with her own free will. He had known the moment he let her go to Barnes that it wouldn't be easy getting her back home.

Johanna had just got home from her morning run and was making breakfast in the kitchen. After hearing some rustling noises in the living room, she poked her head out of the kitchen and saw Janet. Johanna quickly wiped her hands and dashed over.

“Where are you going? You haven’t even had breakfast yet.”

Janet was already in the entryway, putting her shoes on. “I spent last night revising my all design drafts. Mr. Wesley is going to look them over today, and hopefully approve them.”

Johanna huffed worriedly. “I can see that you are busy, but you still need to eat something!”

Her heart ached at the memory of her daughter dragging her feet home so late at night, and as if that wasn’t enough, Janet left so early in the morning, too.

“Don’t worry, Mom. I’ll grab a bite on my way there.” All of Janet’s attention was focused on her designs. Even now, she was only thinking about what Draco Wesley would say about her revisions.

In the end, Johanna had no choice but to watch her daughter go.

It shouldn’t be surprising that Draco was a strict and demanding boss—he wouldn’t be standing at the pinnacle of success otherwise. Perhaps, with him as her mentor, Janet would make rapid progress in the fashion industry.

As soon as Janet arrived at the studio, she made a beeline for Draco’s office and handed him her portfolio.

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Draco’s face was calm and unreadable as he took the folder and went over the drafts. Only when he turned to the last few pages did a faint smile appear on his lips.

“I see that you’ve applied every piece of advice I gave you.” Draco found Janet to be very modest despite her impressive talent.

He had indicated several problems in her first draft, and she had managed to correct them all.

“There’s one thing I’m curious about.” Draco closed the folder, his brows furrowed. “How could you have remembered everything? You may have a good memory, but surely...”

Janet whipped out a small voice recorder from her pocket and waved it in front of him. “Secret weapon,” she quipped. “Much more useful than the human brain.”

Draco’s smile deepened, his eyes gleaming with interest.

Not only was this gifted young designer modest, but she was also hardworking. She was certainly tougher than he had initially thought, nothing like a spoiled rich lady at all.

During the meeting later that day, Draco reviewed everyone’s portfolio and made some comments. He made a point of praising Janet’s designs in front of everyone, if only to give her credit for exceeding his expectations.

Janet's hands were clenched on her lap. It was all she could do not to jump up in joy. Instead, she settled for a sigh of relief. At last, the overtime Ethan had been grumbling about had paid off.

When she raised her head, her gaze accidentally fell on Elizabeth, who was sitting across the table from her. The other woman had a cold expression on her face, as usual.

Janet mustered an awkward smile and shifted her eyes to Rosa.

To her surprise, Rosa looked rather glum. But when she noticed Janet's gaze, she immediately forced a friendly smile.

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Janet got to leave work on time today for her first design case was finally approved by her boss.

She seldom came home early these days, so Johanna was thrilled and turned to Beal. "You go and buy something that Janet likes. We'll have a big dinner tonight!"

Then, she smiled and held Janet's hand. "My dear, you've gone to work for only a week. Why have you lost so much weight?"

However, Janet felt the opposite. "You're exaggerating, Mom. I feel I've gained a lot of weight."

After getting to know Johanna and getting along with her, Janet felt she liked exaggerating everything.

Johanna smiled and chose not to say anything.

Beal patted his legs and stood up from the sofa. "All right. I'll go to the grocery store right away. Janet, you grew up in Seacisco, right? So I presume you'd like spicy food."

"Actually, I can't eat spicy food." Janet licked her lips sheepishly. Her taste had always been different from that of the people in Seacisco.

Johanna and Beal exchanged glances and burst out laughing.

Janet frowned in confusion. "Why are you two laughing?"

Beal shook his head, sighing. "Your mother and I don't like spicy food either. But Lila likes it. We occasionally make something spicy just for her."

Beal soon returned from the grocery store and cooked a storm for dinner.

"Your father is an exceptional cook. I've learned a lot from him." Johanna laughed and kept filling Janet's plate with food.

All the dishes were out of the world. Janet felt she must have inherited her cooking skills from her father.

Beal smiled at his wife's compliment. Then, he turned to look at Janet. "How are you doing in the new company? Do you like working there?"

Janet's face lit up when her dad brought up her new job. "It has been great so far, Dad. Everyone in the studio seems nice."

They laughed and chatted happily.

Lila ate in silence. The warm scene made her stomach churn with unease.

It seemed like only the three were a family and that she was a mere outsider.

Besides, Beal and Johanna had been lauding Janet to everyone all day long while Lila sat in a corner like a failure.

But despite the resentment, Lila knew she wasn't as capable as Janet. She was lazy and could never endure hardships and responsibilities like Janet.

Lila lost her appetite as she thought about it.

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She despised Janet. Now that Janet had become the daughter of a wealthy family, she could have enjoyed the privilege of leading a luxurious life without doing anything. But she insisted on going to work. Lila felt like a loser; it was stressful.

"I'm full. Enjoy yourselves." She wiped her mouth with a napkin and stood up. Lila couldn't watch the sweet interaction anymore. It upset her. Therefore, she decided to leave.

Seeing that, Johanna served some more food to Janet's plate and said, "You two eat first. I need to talk to Lila about something."

Beal and Johanna looked at each other and nodded in silent gesture.

Lila returned to her room, depressed. Johanna quickly followed upstairs.

"What's the matter, Mom?" Lila's face softened.

She couldn't help but wonder if her mother had noticed her displeasure. Was Johanna here to comfort her?

Johanna entered Lila's room and closed the door behind her.

"Lila, I have chosen a guy for you."

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Lila was feeling a bit disappointed.

Johanna didn't even bother saying anything nice to comfort her.

Feeling frustrated, Lila sat on the edge of the bed, fiddling with the hem of her lace dress.

Johanna went over and sat next to Lila. She said in a friendly tone, "I think that even though you're still young, you can consider seeing somebody seriously. What do you think about that, Lila?"

Lila had no idea what to say to that.

Because of Janet, she was beginning to feel more and more uncomfortable living in the White family's house. If she could get married to a good man, it would be good to have her own family.

Lila bit her bottom lip and asked, "Who is this guy you're talking about?"

Seeing that Lila didn't turn her down, Johanna immediately pulled out her phone, clicked on the album, and began to introduce a suitor in detail. "He's the son of the Gray family. They export fruit and they have been running chain stores for many years now."

Lila had already heard of the Gray family. She even made fun of them once with her best friends that they were simply a bunch of bumpkins who sold fruits.

Seeing that Lila was not answering, Johanna went on to say, "They're not a big family. Even though they're not a powerful family, they're still a rich one. The family members are simple folks, so they won't be fighting for wealth as the rich and powerful families usually do. This guy we're talking about is the second child in the family, and he's an excellent engineer. He's good-looking and gentle, and he won't flirt with other women like many men in rich families do."

Johanna had watched Lila growing up. She knew full well that sometimes Lila could be domineering, so a tolerant husband would be the most suitable to her.

Lila had been spoiled by her and Beal since she was young. She knew that Lila didn't have any people's smarts. If she married into a rich family who had internal conflict, she would only be bullied again and again. Johanna also knew Lila was unwilling to say sorry even though she was wrong. What worried Johanna most was that Lila's personality would be the reason people mistreated her.

When she heard this, Lila felt a little disappointed in her heart.

The Gray family in Barnes happened to be a family selling fruits.

If she married into this family, she would become a laughing stock.

This family happened to be very different from Lila's ideal husband's family background. She thought even if she would marry into a less rich family, it wouldn't be a small family like the Grays.

As expected, Johanna found her biological daughter, so she wasn't taking Lila seriously and arranged such a shabby marriage for her.

At the same time, Lila couldn't say it out loud directly.

"Is this something you want? Do you really want me to get married, Mom?" Lila's eyes reddened.

Johanna initially thought that Lila was afraid of getting married because she didn't want to leave them so soon. "He's also in Barnes. If you want to head home to see us, you can ask the driver to take you back at any time. I carefully selected this suitor for you. Your father also thinks that the second child of the Gray family is a very good man."

Johanna happened to think that the Gray family was very suitable for Lila. After all, everyone now knew Lila wasn't their biological daughter. If Lila married into a rich and powerful family that was equal to the White family, she might be looked down upon by others and even get bullied.

It was true that the Gray family was not as good as the White family in terms of family background. But they were honest, good people. Besides, the Gray family and the White family were cooperating with

each other. If Lila married this man, she wouldn't be bullied by her husband's family at all, for they were counting on the Whites to look after their fruit business.

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Lila was only good at having fun and she didn't have much ability or talents. She wasn't good nor capable enough to become a wife of a rich and powerful family. It was better for her to marry into a simple family and live a stable life for the rest of her life.

Johanna caressed Lila's hair and said, "It's only natural that girls get married. Look at Janet. She's so happy after she got married. Now, Dad and Mom are worried about you the most. You're not a little girl anymore. You can't live with us for the rest of your life like this. If you go through with this marriage, you can become a full-time wife for the Gray family. Also, your life will be as good as your current life now."

Lila pinched her hands and a touch of frostiness danced through her eyes.

She never expected Johanna to be so cruel.

Janet happened to marry Brandon Larson, a legend of Seacisco.

No woman who could marry a better man than Janet.

Lila felt enraged and couldn't get rid of her anger. Seeing Johanna pretending to act considerate toward her, Lila felt even angrier and more dissatisfied in her heart.

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"What do you think? If it's not to your liking, I can refuse the Gray family." Noticing that Lila was being hesitant, Johanna let out a long sigh. "Aren't you satisfied with the family I chose for you?"

Lila indeed wasn't satisfied with this arrangement, but she didn't dare to voice her thoughts.

She wanted to leave a good impression on both Johanna and Beal.

If Johanna had arranged for her to marry into a well-known rich family in Barnes to enjoy the rest of her life, Lila wouldn't be so angry.

Janet had married Brandon, a billionaire, nonetheless. As her elder sister, Lila was arranged to marry a man from a medium family. How could Lila accept this?

Lila's face immediately turned pale and tears were building up behind her eyes.

"I didn't mean that, Mom. The Gray family sounds like a good family. You're right. Janet already got married. It's my turn now to tie the knot." Lila couldn't directly say that she didn't like the marriage her mother had arranged, so she hesitated and said, "I haven't seen the man yet and I have no idea what kind of person he is. I'm afraid it won't be appropriate to agree right away."

Johanna studied Lila quietly. She had been in the business world for so many years and dealt with all kinds of people, so she could easily see right through Lila.

If Lila liked something, she would never have such a reluctant expression on her face.

When the Gray family offered this proposal, Beal hesitated for a good while. After all, there was a huge gap between these two families in regard to social status and wealth. It was understandable that Lila didn't want to marry beneath herself.

Of course, Johanna had mulled it over in her head.

However, other than that she was the daughter of the White family, Lila had no other advantages.

She had an ordinary education background and her beauty wasn't too outstanding among the rich ladies. Those who could marry into the top rich and powerful families could never be simple women. Lila was simple-minded and wasn't outstanding in any degree. Furthermore, she was spoiled and pampered at the same time. Even if she married into one of the rich and powerful families in Barnes and became a wealthy housewife, she would most likely have a difficult time surviving.

Johanna knew that Lila wasn't happy with this marriage arrangement. However, she also knew clearly that those who had grandiose aims but puny abilities wouldn't have a good ending.

But she couldn't say straight to her face that those families with high social rank were beyond Lila's reach. Johanna could only sigh that Lila was too blind to see her situation clearly.

Johanna smiled and said, "In that case, how about I create a chance for the two of you to meet? You can get to know him and then make your decision afterward. What do you think about that?"

Now, Johanna could only hope that Lila would be satisfied with the man after meeting him. If that was the case, everyone would be happy and her efforts wouldn't be for nothing.

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In fact, Lila wasn't happy about this at all, but she had no reason to turn her mother down. She could only force out a smile and said, "Well, I'll listen to you, Mom."

Over the weekend, Johanna organized a simple party at their house.

Johanna liked gardening. It was now early spring. The garden was filled with blooming peonies and roses, altogether looking very beautiful.

Lila picked out a dress for the party rather casually. Johanna straightened out her dress and reminded her in a gentle voice, "Remember to greet the Grays when they come and make sure to be polite. Their whole family's coming tonight. You should make a good impression with these people."

Lila nodded stiffly at her mother. She was the daughter of the White family and from an early age, others had always taken care to fawn over her. Since when was she reduced to humbling herself in front of others?

Just then, the doorbell sounded out.

As the door was opened, several people walked into their home. A man in his late twenties was among them.

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Seeing that everyone was turning their attention to the door, Lila lazily glanced at the man.

The man was dressed in a white suit, both simple and clean at the same time. His features were not very outstanding, but overall, he looked not too bad.

In all honesty, David Gray looked fairly agreeable, at least several times better than that of an ordinary man.

However, Lila had seen just how good-looking Brandon was. Compared with Brandon's breath-taking appearance, David appeared pretty mediocre. After all, Brandon's mature and steady temperament and unique sexual attraction happened to be more attractive to most women.

At that thought, Lila was even unhappier with her blind date.

Why could Janet marry such an excellent man while Lila was reduced to marrying a man who sold fruits for a living?

The more Lila mulled it over in her head, the more unwilling she got. Thus, she did not welcome David like she was supposed to.

Johanna tried to get the two of them to get along, so she took the initiative to make conversation. "David, I heard that you studied in London previously. When Lila graduated from university, she also traveled to London. You two can revisit the place together when you guys have some free time."

"Yes, my schedule is pretty flexible and I'm available at any time. If only I can have the pleasure of traveling with Miss White." David acted very sensibly. He was arranged by his family to go on a blind date here that very day. At first glance, he wasn't really interested in Lila. She appeared ordinary on the surface and there was even contempt evident in her eyes.

However, this happened to be a marriage of interests. The White family was both rich and powerful in Barnes. If the Gray family could increase their social rank through this marriage, why should he turn it down?

Johanna turned to look at Lila, waiting for an answer from her.

The last thing Lila wanted to do was travel to London with David. She smiled perfunctorily and said, "I don't think that's a good idea at all. I disagree with the weather in London."

Both Johanna and David appeared embarrassed at this point.

As soon as the party was over, Lila said to Johanna straight to her face, "I don't think David and I are suitable for each other."

Of course, Johanna wouldn't force Lila to get married to David. She could only smile helplessly and tell her words of comfort, "It's all right. Don't worry about it. I'll keep looking for other nice young men for you."

Janet had no idea that Johanna held a party at home until the second morning came around.

"How was it? Did Lila like the guy?" Janet was busy making the bed in her bedroom.

Speaking about this, it was hard for Johanna not to let out a long sigh. She sat on the edge of the bed and said to her, "She doesn't like him at all. I'm afraid that Lila's marriage will be a tricky matter."

Seeing the worried expression in Johanna's eyes, Janet tried to comfort her at once. "That's pretty normal. After all, they're not of the same social rank. It's reasonable for Lila to not accept him."

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Johanna gently tapped Janet's nose with her finger and smiled dotingly at her. "She just thinks that he's not good enough for her. It's all our fault, though. Your father and I thought she was the only daughter of the White family at the time and we spoiled her too much. So she's picky now."

With a heavy heart, Johanna went on to say, "But she never asks herself whether she deserves to be so picky in the first place."

Janet consoled her with a smile of her own. "It doesn't really matter in the end. Anyway, Lila is still very young. There's absolutely no hurry. Maybe she'll understand your painstaking efforts in the future, or maybe she'll go on to meet someone she likes."

The two of them were chatting in the room rather casually. They had no idea that Lila was right there outside the door listening to them at the moment.

Just now, when Lila saw Johanna walk into Janet's room, she thought there was something fishy going on. Why did they choose to close the door? What things were they saying behind her back?

Lila pretended to pass by the door and proceeded to quietly eavesdrop on their conversation

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Lila could hear Johanna's voice clearly.

Even though her relationship with Johanna wasn't as good as before, she never expected that Johanna wouldn't say such things about her in front of Janet.

It was true that Lila thought David wasn't good enough for her. The man Johanna chose was not a good suitor. If this was in the past, Lila would never even bother wasting her time on such a person.

"More often than I like, Lila makes grandiose aims but has puny abilities to back her up." Johanna let out a melancholy sigh in the room. "You know what she's like. I'm really concerned that she will end up being bullied by her husband's family after she gets married. Your father and I have brought her up very carefully. At the same time, we don't want her to suffer."

Janet's gentle voice could be heard at that moment. "None of this matters. People are really open-minded now. Even if a woman doesn't get married, it's no big deal. Maybe she already has someone she likes. Why don't you give her the freedom to let her choose who she wants to marry?"

Johanna was still feeling worried. "No, I should keep an eye out on the young men in the White Group. Maybe I can find a diamond in the rough there. At this time, I'll try to persuade Lila again."

Lila's heart sank in her chest. She bit her bottom lip and appeared very sad.

According to what Johanna said, even if Lila turned down David Gray, Johanna didn't intend to find her a husband of higher social rank. What hurt Lila the most was that Johanna implied she didn't deserve a wealthy husband.

It was not that Lila didn't want to get married, but the man selected by Johanna happened to be too shabby. If she really married this kind of person, the other rich girls would all take turns laughing at her.

Furthermore, she had just met Brandon, Janet's husband. If the husband Johanna chose for Lila was as powerful as Brandon, Lila would definitely not object.

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What made Lila angrier happened to be Janet's words. Judging from what Janet said just now, she was persuading Johanna not to get herself involved in Lila's marriage.

However, how could Lila marry a good man without the help of the White family?

Angry and aggrieved, Lila ran down the stairs unhappily.

"Miss White, where are you going? It's almost lunchtime." Seeing that Lila was wiping the tears from her eyes, the servant hurried to stop her.

Lila was in a fit of rage. She pushed the servant roughly aside, opened the door, and slammed it behind her. "Go away! I don't want to eat!"

She walked down the streets by herself. The street was filled with people. Everyone seemed to have a destination in mind, only Lila had no idea where she was going.

She was now known as the adopted daughter of the White family. The girls who used to flatter her gradually stopped calling her. She didn't even have a friend to listen to her grieve.

After walking alone on the street for a very long time, Lila finally walked into a bar.

This was the very first time she went to a bar to drink by herself. In the past, she always had several companions to drink with her.

She cried while drinking at the same time. She never felt so alone before. The noisy popular music was so deafening that it covered her pitiful sobs perfectly.

With her legs crossed, Lila proceeded to sit in the booth and drink wine directly from the bottle.

Once she was finally drunk, several men suddenly walked up to her, their bulky figures blocking the bright light.

"Hey girl, are you here alone to drown your sorrows with wine?" one of the men asked her roguishly. He constantly scanned her body up and down as if he was measuring the size of her breasts. He even reached out his hand, trying to grab hold of her wrist.

Lila knitted her brows and shook off his hand. "Fuck off!"

"Hey, it looks like you're good at playing cat and mouse." The man burst into raucous laughter and directly sat down at Lila's booth.

Lila gave him a closer look. He was both fat and bulky. His face was oily and he was wearing a gold chain around his neck.

What Lila really wanted to do was throw up, but she was too drunk to do anything. Several men surrounded her, which made her feel panicked.

She looked around and wanted to ask for help, however, other people ignored her and her troubles.

Just as those men were about to yank on Lila's wrist again, a woman with an imposing manner came over to their booth.

"How dare you push my sister around?! If you don't leave now, don't blame me if I call the police!" The woman's voice was full of aggression and her cold, sharp eyes made those men leave at once.

After those men were gone, the woman gently helped Lila to her feet. She took a few tissues from her bag to wipe off the tears on Lila's face and said in a gentle voice, "I've driven those bad guys away, so stop your tears."

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After things fell through with Charis and Ethan, Charis left the Larson Group.

Afterward, many companies offered her job opportunities but she was interested in none of them.

She used to think that she liked financial management a great deal. But after leaving the Larson Group, it dawned on her that she wasn't interested in finance at all. She only did it because she wanted to help Brandon out and be closer to him.

During this time, she had been staying at her family's home. She had been gardening with her mother, watching TV, and attending charity auctions. In a nutshell, she finally got to enjoy her life.

At the same time, she was very clear that she was not happy just going about these things.

It wasn't until the Turner family got an invitation from the Larson Group that Charis had a rude awakening.

It happened to be the invitation to Brandon and Janet's wedding. Staring down at it, Charis lost the only hope she had been grasping on to.

For a very long time, she was depressed. She didn't feel like eating and had been feeling agitated.

She appeared to have changed into a whole other person overnight.

The only thing she could do was to keep telling herself that at least Janet's family background was not as good as hers and she would not be able to hold onto her Mrs. Larson position for long. She would appear in Brandon's life again when his love for Janet was gone.

She didn't pay much attention to the fact that Beal and Johanna had arrived at Seacisco. However, when she later found out that Janet was, in fact, the daughter of the White family, there was finally nothing left for her now.

Her parents could see how devastated she had gotten.

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The Turner family had always supported her to do whatever she liked. They had never stood between her and her love for Brandon.

But now, her love for him had vastly changed.

Once love became obsession, many things were bound to be different.

Now, she would do anything in her power to get what she wanted and this was called obsession.

She wouldn't give up until Brandon was hers and hers alone.

She did everything possible to cheer herself up and make plans to get the love of her life.

She wasn't a senior executive in the Larson Group now, so she didn't need to care about how others saw her. Furthermore, Brandon had known by now how scheming she could be.

If she wanted to get Brandon, she had to get Janet out of the picture first.

She stayed in Barnes for a while and learned some more about the White family. That was when she found out about Lila.

Back then, Lila's real parents secretly swapped the babies in the hospital. And now that the Whites had found out about it and Janet was back, Lila was no longer the glorified noble lady she used to be.

Charis stared at the woman at the newspaper article.

She appeared so pitiful and helpless right then. Charis thought that Lila must think everything was just very unfair right now.

As far as she knew about human nature, Lila would definitely have something against Janet, which made her a perfect pawn.

Charis then decided to stay in Barnes longer and even hired a private detective to keep tabs on Lila.

One night, the private detective gave her a call, saying that Lila was drinking by herself in a bar.

After changing her clothes, Charis soon got to the bar.

She had to initiate her plan step by step. The first step she had to make was to leave a good impression on Lila.

As soon as she walked into the bar, she saw with her own eyes that Lila was surrounded by several men. Seeing that this was her chance, she stood up for Lila and won over her trust.

Tears started to well up in Lila's eyes as she had never been so helpless before.

Charis had just rescued her and she appeared very kind, which made Lila trust in her entirely.

She embraced Charis tightly and displayed her most vulnerable side to her. With tears in her eyes, she said, "It's all because of that horrible bitch! It's because of her that my parents don't want me anymore!"

"If you don't mind, you can tell me all about your troubles. You have to talk about it with someone instead of keeping it all bottled up inside," Charis said gently.

Hearing her say that, Lila felt even worse. Even a stranger happened to treat her so well, but her mother only spoke bad things about her in front of Janet.

Lila curled her lips and cried even more woefully as she began to fill Charis in on everything.

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"Can you believe it? I've been my mother's favorite. She has spoiled me all my life. But she doesn't give a damn about me anymore. It looks like I never cross her mind. Now she is always thinking and talking about Janet." Lila poured her heart out to Charis, making sure not to miss a single detail.

She didn't bother withholding herself. After all, Charis was a stranger to her — a stranger whom she could share anything with without any burden.

Charis patiently sat beside Lila, listening to her laments. "Calm down. I know how you feel," she comforted her. "I have a sister myself."

Hearing that, Lila's eyes lit up. The new piece of information seemed to bring her closer to Charis. She had found a confidant. "Then, I'm sure you'll understand my feelings. But Janet was never a part of our life before. She just barged in and now she's like a barrier between me and my parents. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't have ended up like this."

"Well, it seems like your sister couldn't stand sharing her mother with you. Don't get angry and lose your mental peace because of her. She will be punished for it someday," Charis comforted Lila.

"I know she will be punished sooner or later. But I can't stand another day with her! She has become a total bitch!" Tears welled up in Lila's eyes. She hugged Charis and sobbed uncontrollably. "She is a bumpkin. How could she do this to me?"

"I don't like people like that either. They are ill-bred. You must have been too tolerant toward her. That's why she is treating you like this." Charis sounded kind and empathetic.

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She hated herself for yielding to Janet for everything.

"But what can I do now?" Lila felt cornered.

"You've got to calm down first. Don't let your emotions control you. You have to think with a clear mind. Only then can we figure out a way together." Charis could tell that Lila was on the verge of breaking down.

Lila wiped her tears, took a deep breath, and eventually calmed down.

Charis thought for a while and said, "From what you've told me, I feel Janet hates you because she thinks you've been living the life that belonged to her. That's why she is trying to portray herself as a good person. She wants to get in their good books. You've got to be careful."

Lila pursed her lips and nodded in agreement.

Janet pretended to be a talented designer, which made Johanna think she was dedicated and hard-working. But who would enjoy working in this world?

She used to think Janet seemed like a nice person even though she didn't really like her. But after listening to Charis, Lila concluded it was all a facade.

None of it was her fault. After all, she was just a newborn baby when she "stole" Janet's life. To be fair, she was also a victim here!

Seeing Lila gnashing her teeth, Charis understood she couldn't instigate her to harm Janet right away. All she could do now was pretend to offer advice. "Well, you've got to try and have a good relationship with her so that your parents don't alienate you. And don't try separating her from your parents. After all, they are related by blood."

Although Lila was still treated as a daughter of the White family, everyone knew she was a mere outsider now.

Charis had wanted to say something more to stir things up but gave up the idea after seeing how fragile and vulnerable Lila was. "They are bonded by blood. Moreover, your parents must be feeling guilty for Janet now. No matter how hard you try, you'll never be able to separate them."

Lila sighed helplessly. "So do I have to live all my life this way as the second important person in the family?"

Charis pursed her lips and fell silent.

Her job was done. She had planted a seed of hatred in Lila's heart. It would soon sprout in the future.

"All right. You better go back and think about it. It's getting late. I'll drive you home." Then, Charis drove Lila home.

When Lila was about to get out of the car, she turned to Charis and said, "Hey, sorry I've never got to ask. What's your name? Can I have your phone number? It was nice chatting with you. Well, if I get upset or feel like talking to someone, can I call you?"

Almost all of Lila's rich friends cut her loose now. She needed a friend like Charis who understood her well.

“My name is Zoe Brooks. You can just call me Zoe. I will be staying in Barnes for a few days. Call me whenever you feel like talking to someone.” Charis handed Lila a business card with a smile.

Chapter 489

Ethan got off the private plane.

Of late, he had been working on expanding the Larson Group’s business to Barnes, so he would be staying there for a long while, handling the company’s affairs.

But before that, he wanted to take Janet to his villa in Barnes.

Johanna was sitting on the sofa, enjoying her tea. Seeing Ethan come with several bags of gifts, she immediately stood up and welcomed him.

“We have enough of everything at home. You didn’t have to buy us all these.” She then called Beal, who was playing with the birds in the yard, “Beal, Ethan is here. Stop playing with the parrot. Come and join us.”

Ethan respectfully placed the gifts on the table. “This is just a token of my respect and sincerity. Please accept them, Mrs. White.”

Johanna pursed her lips and studied his face. She felt Ethan was a good man, both in terms of appearance and character.

She felt happy for Janet.

“What brings you here this time?” Considering he had come to meet them with bags of gifts, Johanna sensed there must be a good reason.

“I’m here to pick up Janet,” Ethan replied honestly. “My villa in Barnes is ready. All the decoration works and arrangements are done. It’s in Seaview Bay — not far from here.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you.” Beal walked in with his hands behind his back. His brows furrowed as he sized Ethan up.

Johanna didn’t mind. Her impression of Ethan had changed. Besides, he and Janet had just gotten married. She didn’t want to keep Janet away from her husband forever.

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“Of course. But we have missed out a lot in her life and want to bond with her. You should bring Janet here at least twice a week.”

“Of course, Mrs. White.”

After getting Johanna’s permission, Ethan packed Janet’s things, ready to take her home.

After work, Janet received a call from Ethan that evening saying he had shifted all her things to their new house.

After moving out of the Whites' house, Janet was surprised by the frequent messages and calls from Lila.

"I feel lonely after you moved out. It's boring here without you. Why don't we go out for lunch tomorrow?" Lila texted her.

After the constant messages and persuasion, Janet finally agreed to go out for lunch with her.

However, it wasn't as awkward as before. Lila didn't come with her cocky friends this time. She seemed kinder now. "Janet, I'm really sorry for all the things I have said and done. Will you forgive me? Those were my friends' ideas. I don't hang out with them anymore. Now that I think about it, I feel ashamed of myself. They were all bad influences."

Lila sounded sincere.

"I'm glad you've changed. Mom has always been worried about you. I'm sure she will be happy to see you like this," Janet said flatly.

She wasn't a big fan of Lila. But considering they were family now, Janet put an effort to be nice to her.

The relationship between Johanna and Lila also got better since Lila started playing a loving sister to Janet. They bonded well.

"Have you been hanging out with Janet?" Johanna asked as she brought soup from the kitchen. "I kept the soup warm for you."

Lila nodded.

She had blindly followed Charis's instructions. As expected, Johanna seemed to like her better now.

However, it didn't make Lila happy. Instead, it only broke her heart to know that she had to play nice with Janet to get the love and care from her parents.

That weekend, Charis called Lila.

"Are you free tomorrow? I have two tickets for skydiving. I had planned to go with my friend, but something came up. I have to go back and meet my family. I will give the tickets to you. You can have fun there."

Lila had been thinking about what to do during the weekend, and she loved skydiving.

"But I don't have any friends now," she finally said. Her best friends didn't hang out with her anymore.

"Don't you have a sister?" Charis smiled, slyly indicating her to do something. "It would be a great opportunity to bond with her."

[Chapter 490](#)

After washing up and getting dressed, Ethan went back to the bedside and stroked Janet's hair. Then, he leaned forward and kissed her.

Janet squeezed her legs together as the growing sensation made her uncomfortable. She was half naked, revealing her slender back.

"I'm going to the company now." Ethan smiled, his eyes gleaming with tenderness. He touched Janet's quivering lashes and trailed down her flushed cheeks.

Not long after Ethan left, Janet's phone rang.

She was still sleepy. Ethan hadn't let her rest last night. Janet was exhausted; her body felt like jelly. She didn't feel like moving out of bed. But her phone kept ringing and she had no choice but to pick up.

"Hello, who's this?" Janet mumbled, her eyes still closed.

"Janet, it's me, Lila. Are you free this afternoon?" Lila asked, coming straight to the point. "Do you want to go skydiving with me? I have an extra ticket."

Janet pursed her lips and thought about it. Ethan had to work overtime today. It would be boring to stay at home all alone.

Besides, Janet had never gone skydiving before. She was thrilled to try it. "Okay. Send me the address. I'll directly go there in the afternoon."

Janet hung up the phone and slept until noon.

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But Ethan was busy; he hadn't read the message.

Janet and Lila soon arrived at the club and took a helicopter to the spot.

"Janet, have you tried skydiving before?" Lila asked when she saw the excitement in Janet's eyes.

"No, but I've always wanted to try." Janet's stomach flipped with excitement and fear as she looked down at the surrounding mountains. Everything looked tiny from where she was standing. She had never tried skydiving before and couldn't wait to experience it.

Hearing it was Janet's first time, the coach once again enlisted the dos and don'ts.

Lila had tried skydiving several times. It was no big deal to her. Thus, she felt relaxed.

"Is this your parachute? Gosh, it's so beautiful." Lila sighed as she looked at the heavy parachute equipment in awe.

The female coach pointed at the backpack in front of Lila. "This is your parachute, and that's your friend's."

Lila nodded noncommittally and glanced at it.

Just then, she discovered a problem with the string in Janet's parachute. It looked like the string was severed before and was tied again in place.

Lila had tried skydiving before, so she had experience in the sport. Considering the faulty string, the switch of the parachute was likely to get stuck in the knot that would prevent the parachute from opening in mid-air. On the off chance the parachute opened, it wouldn't function normally, let alone withstand the weight of two adults.

Janet and the coach would plunge to death.

Lila pointed at the parachute, wanting to remind the coach about the severed string but subconsciously shut up.

Somehow, Charis's words rang in her ears.

Janet and her parents had an unshakable relationship. Lila believed her mother and father would ignore her as long as Janet was around.

However, if Janet died in an accident, Lila would continue to be the only daughter of the White family. Her life would be back on track again.

Thinking of this, Lila chose to remain silent. She adjusted Janet's parachute so that no one would notice the knot.