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The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride Chapter 51

Trying to seem casual, Janet asked calmly, "How much?"

Glancing at the other people in the shop, the shop manager leaned closer and whispered in Janet's ear, "One million. What do you think?"

This amount was more than enough to cover Hannah's medical bills.

Janet was stunned. She looked carefully at the ring on her finger. The emerald nestled in the middle was like a pea that was just freed from its pod. The little gem was round and slightly cold, but its deep green color was dazzling.

She couldn't believe that the ring Ethan had given her was that valuable.

"Sorry, this is my wedding ring. I can't sell it."

Despite the tempting offer, Janet couldn't give in. It was a gift from Ethan after all, and it was left by his mother. Perhaps it was a family heirloom.

Whatever the case, she couldn't sell the ring.

After refusing the shop manager, she turned around to leave.

But the shop manager stopped her again. With a big smile plastered on her face, she said, "No rush, Miss. It's okay if you don't want to sell it. But it's clear to me that the ring is a little too big for your finger. We offer free ring sizing. We can alter it to fit you within the day. Do you want to avail of this service? It'll look even better if it fits you properly."

"No, thanks. I don't want to bother you." Janet could see that the shop manager was still staring at the ring on her finger greedily, so she politely refused.

The shop manager seemed to understand what Janet was thinking. She smiled knowingly and pointed at the corner of the store. "Miss, I know that your ring is valuable. Are you worried that we'll lose or damage it? Look. We have surveillance cameras here. We won't let anything bad happen to your ring. Besides, it's too big and most likely will slip off your finger. It'll be inconvenient for you if you keep wearing it like this."

After glancing at all the cameras in the shop, Janet hesitantly pulled the ring off of her finger and handed it to the shop manager. "Thank you," she said with a smile.

The shop manager then pulled out a string from her pocket to measure the size of Janet's finger and said with a friendly smile, "All right. You can come back and get it tomorrow."

As instructed, Janet went back to the shop the morning of the next day.

The shop manager warmly received her. "Miss, you're early! Hang on a moment. I'll fetch the ring."

"Okay, thank you."

The shop manager pulled out a blue velvet jewelry box from a wooden chest behind her and opened it. "Have a look, Miss. You can check if there's anything wrong."

Janet picked up the ring and held it up in front of her, studying it carefully. Finally, she put it on. "It fits nicely, but why does it look brand new?"

The shop manager rolled her eyes with a chuckle and waved her hand dismissively. "Oh, here's the thing. When our staff saw how old your ring looked last night, they had it cleaned. Don't worry. The cleaning was also free."

Janet nodded and didn't think much of it. It just looked shiny and new now. Otherwise, there was nothing else unusual.

When she was done at the second-hand store, Janet went to the supermarket to buy some groceries.

When she got home, Ethan walked out of his room in flip flops and disheveled hair.

"Where've you been? I didn't see you all morning." Yawning lazily, he strode over to help Janet with her groceries. As he opened the bags and checked the food, he asked, "What's for lunch?"

After thinking for a while, Janet opened the fridge and took a bottle of cold water. "I bought a lot of tomatoes. How about we have scrambled eggs with tomatoes? Or spaghetti? What do you think—"

Before she could finish her sentence, Ethan suddenly grabbed her hand fiercely.

The man stared at the shiny ring on her finger and asked coldly, "Did you sell the ring I gave you?"

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Janet was startled and confused. With the bottle of water in her other hand, she took a sip nonchalantly and shook her head. "No. It's right there on my finger! Or are you blind?"

She looked at him playfully.

Ethan, on the other hand, was in no mood to joke. His expression darkened and his voice lowered. "Let me see."

Unlike Janet, he was very familiar with the ring. He knew something was wrong with it at just a glance.

As she took off the ring, Janet muttered to herself, "Weird."

Ethan pressed his fingers against his temple and picked up the ring to have a closer look. His expression grew even more serious. "The back of the ring I gave you is engraved with my mother's initials, but this ring has no such engravings."

Ethan knew she was short on money, but he didn't expect her to sell the ring just like that.

He wouldn't have minded if it were any other ring, but this ring in particular was left by his mother.

"Is this a fake?!" Janet's eyes went wide in shock.

She took the ring back from him and inspected it. Sure enough, its inner wall was very smooth. There wasn't a sign of any engraving on it.

Ethan shook his head and frowned deeply. “It’s not a fake—at least, not exactly. The gem and the platinum are real, and the style is similar to the ring I gave you. It’s difficult for ordinary people to distinguish the difference between the two. But this is just a counterfeit, and it was made to copy the original one. The one I gave you is a quite famous antique. It was passed down from my mother’s ancestors. Its value is worth ten times more than this one.

Ethan didn’t know much about jewelry before, but he had made a few friends in the industry. They told him that some people sold fakes and played tricks like this.

Janet felt all the color drain from her face. Her hands and feet went cold, as though someone had stabbed her with an ice pick.

The manager of the second-hand shop must’ve realized instantly that her ring was a priceless antique. She was so greedy that she lied to Janet through her teeth about changing the ring size. In fact, she had replaced the real ring with a measly imitation.

Seeing that Janet was at a loss for words, Ethan closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Why’re you wearing a fake? Did you sell the real ring and find a cheap replacement so I wouldn’t notice?”

Ethan looked incredibly disappointed.

Only then did Janet realize he was actually accusing her.

She felt wronged. Her heart felt tied up in knots. “Are you accusing me of exchanging your mother’s valuables for money?”

Ethan closed his eyes, feeling a little annoyed.

What else should he think?

His wife seemed to always need more money. According to his investigation of her, she used to like luxuries.

Ethan had been in the business world for so many years, and he had been exposed to all kinds of people.

No one could keep up with this sort of lifestyle forever. Moreover, “Jocelyn” used to live such a luxurious life, and it was only a matter of time for her to show her true colors.

When Ethan didn’t say anything, Janet’s heart sank.

“You didn’t even ask me what happened. You just assumed that I sold the ring!” Clenching the water bottle in her hand, Janet sneered unhappily.

He probably thought she was crazy. Yet she held onto a small hope that Ethan would believe her.

But now that she thought about it, she recalled that they were just a nominal couple, no different from strangers. How could they really trust each other?

“Ethan, no matter how much money I need, I would never do such a thing. That ring was an heirloom from your mother. I promise I’ll get the real one back.”

Taking the counterfeit from Ethan's hand, Janet turned around and was about to leave. Suddenly, something occurred to her. She pursed her lips and turned to look at the man behind her.

"And even if I can't find it, I'll find a way to pay you back, no matter how much it costs."

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Without waiting for a response, Janet strode out.

As he watched her leave, Ethan frowned. He felt very depressed.

Sighing heavily, he quickly picked up his jacket and rushed out to follow her.

It was late June now, and it was extremely hot in the afternoon. As he followed Janet from a distance, Ethan stared at her long hair fluttering in the wind.

Where on earth was she headed? Ethan had no clue. Judging from the woman's hurt tone just now, he could tell that there was more to the story. Moreover, he would've been able to tell if she was lying.

Ethan quickened his pace and followed the woman closely. As they walked, he couldn't help but feel bad. Did he wrongfully accuse Janet?

After passing two streets and a traffic light, Janet finally veered off the sidewalk and entered a second-hand shop.

Ethan followed her in silently.

"I want to see your shop manager!" Janet slapped the ring hard on the counter. Her beautiful face was ice cold and sullen. When she wasn't smiling, she always looked so aloof and unapproachable.

"Miss, what brings you here so soon? Did you forget anything?" The shop manager glanced up from a conversation with a customer. When she saw Janet's glowering face, she quickly walked over with a smile.

Crossing her arms over her chest, Janet said coldly, "I did leave something here. Give me my ring back."

"Are you joking, miss? Isn't the ring right on your finger?" The smile on the shop manager's face didn't even falter, which made her look even more hypocritical.

"You lied to my face and replaced my ring, yet you still have the audacity to deny it?" Janet was furious. It looked like she was going to pounce on the shop manager the next second.

The shop manager's smiling face stiffened slightly. "I don't know what you're talking about. Are you trying to blackmail us with a fake ring? This isn't the first time someone's tried to play tricks on our honest store."

Janet's eye twitched. It was obvious she was really pissed off. "Why don't we check the surveillance camera footage? This isn't the ring I left here yesterday."

The shop manager looked calm and fearless. She looked at the shop assistant at the checkout counter and said, "Do as she says."

Seeing how calm the shop staff were, Janet realized she had been fooled ever since the beginning. This whole ruse was premeditated.

The video definition was terrible. The footage was so pixelated that it couldn't capture the ring clearly.

Janet had initially wondered why the shop manager was still so calm and arrogant after doing such an evil thing. It turned out that it was because she was confident that the video could not prove that she had the ring changed.

"Miss, can you leave now? You've checked the surveillance video and it shows no foul play. If you keep making trouble for us, we'll call the police." The shop manager threw the fake ring to Janet confidently and smiled smugly, as if she was going to call the police the next second.

Several shop assistants also came out, trying to intimidate Janet.

Janet pursed her lips as she racked her brains for a solution. Suddenly, a thought occurred to her. With a faint smile, she sauntered over to the shop manager and placed the fake ring on the counter. "Didn't you offer me an extremely high price for the ring yesterday? I'm willing to sell it now. Here you go. Will you pay by check or cash?"

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Janet's words completely wiped the smug smile off of the shop manager's face. She quickly tried to calm down and said feebly, "I offered you that price yesterday. I don't want to buy it anymore."

After all, the counterfeit wasn't worth much. If she bought it at such an extravagant price, she'd be crazy.

Smiling sardonically, Janet continued, "You wanted it so bad yesterday. The surveillance footage can prove it. Why don't you want it now? Is it because you know that this one's a fake and isn't worth a million?"

The shop manager faltered, "Uhm, well... I thought the ring was an antique. I had seen something similar in a jewelry magazine before. But when you left the ring here for resizing, I looked at it carefully, and I realized that it wasn't the same one as on the magazine. It just looked similar. So I don't want it anymore."

After saying that, she took a deep breath and regained her composure. "Miss, please go now. We have a business to run. Please escort this lady out."

But her anxiety had exposed her guilt.

Several shop assistants closed in on Janet, ready to kick her out of the store.

"How dare you be so arrogant after you stole my wife's ring?" A cold, harsh voice sounded from near the door.

Janet whirled around in surprise.

She found the man standing behind her, wearing a dark gray shirt and black suit pants, jacket in hand.

Ethan stood a head taller than her. The atmosphere around him was ominous and oppressive, especially with his dark expression. He looked like someone one didn't want to mess with.

Janet rolled her eyes. She was still mad at him for accusing her earlier. Without another word, she walked past him and left the shop.

Ethan had overheard her conversation with the shop manager just now and knew perfectly well that the latter was lying.

"Sir, please don't stir up any more trouble. This is the ring your wife left with us yesterday. If you two insist on blackmailing us, we'll be forced to call the police." Since the surveillance video couldn't prove otherwise, the shop manager resumed her arrogant disposition.

Ethan gave her a bone-chilling look and his smile sent shivers down her spine. "Then call the police. I'll deal with them and make sure you're put behind bars."

After saying that, he turned around abruptly and strode out of the shop. He quickly caught up to Janet, who was briskly walking away, and reached for her hand.

"Are you still mad at me?"

he asked even though he already knew the answer.

Janet looked at him stubbornly. "I heard what you said back there. How do you plan on putting her behind bars? We don't have any evidence!"

Ethan said calmly, "Don't worry. I'll take care of everything and get my mother's ring back."

Then, he lowered his gaze shamefacedly. "I misunderstood you earlier. I'm sorry."

As he apologized, he realized he couldn't remember the last time he had ever said the word "sorry" to anyone. He wasn't used to it, so he sounded stiff and emotionless.

Janet narrowed her eyes at him and said sarcastically, "Oh, is that so, Mr. Lester? Thank you for your humble apology."

After saying that, she turned around and left Ethan in the dust.

Ethan watched as she walked away, pressing his fingers against his aching temple.

It seemed that she was truly angry with him this time.

Standing under a streetlamp and facing a busy street, Ethan looked up at the tall buildings that seemed to pierce the sky.

Then he took out his phone and called Sean. His voice was brisk and cold as ice. "Find out if there's an antique platinum emerald ring that was put on the market recently."

Sean, having worked for his boss for a long time, could tell from Ethan's voice that he was seething with rage. He quickly tasked someone to investigate the matter.

An hour later, some clues were found.

“Apparently, there was a platinum emerald ring put up at an antique auction today. I’ve already asked our people to intercept it.”

Ethan listened to the report as a steady breeze ruffled his hair slightly. He quietly stared at the tall building across the street and asked, “Who sent it there?”

“A woman from a second-hand luxury shop sent it there just this noon. She said she got it from a customer. I’ve got all the information on the ring and the woman. I’ll send them to you right now.”

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The three sides of the interrogation room were made of dark gray glass. People outside would have a clear view of everything inside.

Ethan was standing outside the glass door. His shiny leather shoes looked spotless, and his dark eyes narrowed at the dazzling emerald ring he held between his slender fingers. His fingertips rubbed against the initials carved on the inner wall of the ring. He looked dangerous.

The coffee in Sean’s hands had turned cold. He cautiously handed it to Ethan again. “Boss, we found the woman. We’ll bring her in for interrogation right away. I’ll make sure she confesses everything.”

Ethan nodded and looked at the interrogation room.

The shop manager was brought in. She was no longer arrogant and domineering as before. She looked around and found men clad in suits staring down at her.

“Where did you get this ring?” Sean pounded the table. He sounded just like a fierce detective.

The shop manager rubbed her hands nervously. Judging from their clothes and domineering aura, she understood they were powerful people she couldn’t mess with. She had played several dirty tricks lately and didn’t know who had brought her here to settle the accounts.

“I... I have heard about this ring on TV and in magazines before. I knew it was a famous antique, so I bought it from a customer for a high price.”

“Are you sure you bought it at a high price?” Sean took out the evidence, along with the videos and photos that Ethan had just taken at the door of the second-hand shop. “This woman is the owner of the ring. She said that you had stolen her ring. Could you explain that?”

The shop manager’s eyes widened as she realized it was the same woman who had come to the shop earlier. She still tried to defend herself, but the tall men walked toward her, their eyes gleaming with malice.

“Tell the truth, or you will have to bear the consequences,” Sean snapped viciously.

The shop manager was just an ordinary woman. She had never encountered such a situation before and had no clue how powerful and dangerous these people were. The woman trembled with fear. She did not dare to lie anymore and ended up admitting the truth.

"I offered a high price, but that lady didn't want to sell it, so I got greedy and came up with this idea. I have sold fake jewelry before, and I happened to have a similar one in my hand, so I replaced the ring with the counterfeit."

Ethan's jaw tightened; anger blazed in his eyes. He turned to a man next to him and ordered, "I don't care what you do. Send this woman to jail and make sure she never comes out."

That evening, Janet was sitting on the sofa, examining her design. Just then, she heard the sound of the key twisting in the lock.

Ethan opened the door and came in. As soon as he closed the door, he saw Janet walking toward her room with her drawing.

He strode forward and stopped her. "The ring is back. Take it," he said, slipping the ring into her finger.

Janet pursed her lips and put the ring back in his palm. "I'm glad you've found it. Just keep it with yourself. Don't give such a valuable thing to me again," she said flatly, looking into the distance.

"Are you still mad at me about what happened in the morning?" Ethan's face darkened.

"No. It's just that I'm not good at keeping things. If anything goes wrong, I'm afraid others might think I secretly sold it for money," Janet said. Her face bore no expression.

Hearing that, Ethan knew that Janet was still furious.

"What do you want me to do?" Ethan felt helpless. He didn't know what would make her feel better.

Janet arched an eyebrow and looked at him. "You don't have to do anything."

Then, she walked into her room and slammed the door shut behind her, leaving Ethan all alone.

Ethan ran a hand through his hair, feeling helpless.

He didn't know who would give him the right advice now.

Ethan knew he had to somehow coax Janet. However, he had no experience coaxing girls before, so he didn't know how to make Janet feel better.

Ethan racked his brains but couldn't come up with a solution. Finally, he left the house to look for Garrett.

Garrett was an experienced man in love. Ethan felt he would be able to give him the right solution.

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The bar looked dim except for the occasional neon lights that flashed from time to time. The loud music vibrated through the floor.

Seeing Ethan walking into the bar, Garrett quickly drove away the beautiful women clinging to him and straightened his clothes.

After hearing why Ethan was here today, Garrett burst out laughing. "I can't believe you'd come to me one day for such a thing."

Ethan slowly picked up the glass. The dim lights softened his features, making him look more handsome. He leaned against the sofa, stretching out his long legs. "Mind your tongue. Unless you don't want to have weekends this month."

Garrett cleared his throat and swallowed the rest of his words.

He picked a glass of wine and sat beside Ethan. "Do you want me to be single all my life? My eighteenth girlfriend is waiting for me to take her on a date this weekend."

"Didn't you say that your seventeenth girlfriend was pregnant? Don't you want to get married?" Ethan frowned and took a sip of the wine.

"How could I marry a woman pregnant with another man's child?" Garrett sneered but quickly rearranged his expression and smiled at Ethan. "Coaxing women is easy," he said, scratching his chin. "If you knowingly or unknowingly piss her off, just apologize to her. Hug her and say something sweet. Her anger will quickly subside."

Ethan rolled his eyes impatiently. "What's the matter with you? If I knew what to say, I wouldn't be asking you for help."

"Are you serious?" Garrett downed the remaining contents of his drink and pushed his glass up. After a moment's thought, he asked, "Do you know what she likes? Buy her something she likes: branded bags, jewelry, clothes. Buy a lot of the most expensive things she likes, and just shower her with gifts. I promise she will calm down the next day."

Ethan's face was hidden in the dark; only his high nose was revealed. His fingertips drew circles on the rim of the glass. "She likes those things, but that's only because she can sell them for money. I'd rather give her the money directly."

"Hmm... Your wife is quite interesting," Garrett said, smiling.

Ethan glared at him. Garrett immediately waved his hand and explained, "I didn't mean that. Don't get me wrong. Since she likes money, it will be easier to solve the problem. You're a wealthy man, after all."

Ethan stood up and patted Garrett's shoulder. His eyes darkened. "That's enough for today. Don't drink too much. I'll give your idea a try."

Janet didn't sleep well last night.

She looked listless when she woke up in the morning.

As soon as she walked out of her room, she saw Ethan standing at the door. He slid a bank card into her bag and said, "This is my payment card. You can use it as you like."

Janet looked at him. Then, she took the card from her bag and placed it on the table. "No, thanks. You keep the card for yourself. We're just a nominal couple that doesn't get along well with each other. How can I use your money?"

Judging from her tone, it was obvious that her anger hadn't subsided one bit.

Ethan's towering frame blocked her path. Ethan picked up the card from the table and forcefully pressed it on Janet's palm. "Take it," he said, closing her fingers against it.

Janet was startled. "Why are you standing here, blocking my way? Won't you let me go if I don't take it?"

Looking at her cold face, Ethan felt she was distant and aloof. He didn't know what to do.

"I didn't mean that." He frowned.

"Such being the case, get out of my way. Or I will be late for work." Janet threw the card back to the table, pushed him away with her elbow, and walked out, closing the door behind her.

His face darkened as he slumped on the sofa. Pleasing a woman didn't seem as simple as Garrett had claimed it to be. Therefore, he called the man right away.

"She refused my money. Think of another solution for me."

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There was a woman nestled in Garrett's arms. He squinted sleepily and spoke in a voice that didn't sound completely sober. "You can't do this to me. It's seven o'clock in the morning. Even servants should have time to rest."

"I'm not joking. Hurry up and find a way to help me. I can't sleep until this problem is solved." As he spoke, Ethan sullenly stared at the scenery framed by the window.

"Okay, okay. Just give me a minute, will you?" Garret struggled to climb out of bed and lumbered to the bathroom to splash his face with cold water. Then, when he was fully awake, he returned and said, "Buddy, I can tell from just a glance that your wife's a little tricky. I've seen her a couple of times. She looked gentle and easy-going, but I could never tell what was on her mind."

Ethan sneered with disdain. "Don't talk about her like that. Do you want to die, Garret?"

Garrett smiled sheepishly. "Well, anyway, my point is since money doesn't work, then you need to change tactics. Try wooing her romantically. Girls like flowers, especially roses, lilies, and tulips. A popular trend before was to surprise a girl by leaving flowers in the fridge for her to find when she least expects it. Oh, I know! What if you fill your house to the brim with flowers? She'll be so touched!"

Garret puffed out his chest confidently, despite Ethan's dubious silence. Ethan shook his head and walked out to the balcony, leaning on the railing pensively. "Have you tried something like that before?"

"Trust me, I'm a pro at this," Garrett solemnly swore. Although, truth be told, he never put in that much effort for a woman. He usually just took them to his bed.

But he could tell that Janet was a conservative woman.

It'd take a lot of effort to get her in bed.

Later that evening, Janet finally came home from work. When she pushed the door open, the strong and sweet fragrance of flowers wafted over to her nose.

To her surprise, she found the apartment crowded with countless beautiful red roses illuminated by candlelight. Even the floor was covered with rose petals. There was no place for her to step.

Gripping the doorknob tightly, Janet's gaze swept over the apartment, too stunned to speak.

Ethan was standing in the living room. His handsome features were perfectly highlighted by the candlelight.

He slowly strode towards Janet. Judging from her blank stare, at first, he thought she was too pleasantly surprised to say anything. But then, upon a closer look, he realized he was wrong.

Janet leaned against the door as though her soul had left her body. She asked weakly, "How much did you spend on all of these flowers?"

But she already had a rough estimate in mind. There were at least one thousand flowers here. If one flower cost ten dollars...

She felt as though she wasn't looking at flowers, but lost money.

"F... five thousand," Ethan answered falteringly.

The truth was, he had spent twice as much as that, but he didn't dare say so. He could see that Janet's face had gone pale as a ghost.

"How could you spend that much?!" Janet gasped in shock.

But on second thought, she realized she had no right to scold Ethan for his spending habits. After all, she was just his nominal wife. In the end, she could only throw her arms in the air helplessly and say, "You don't earn that much, Ethan. You should be wise with your money."

As Janet spoke, she walked into the room and began to survey the damage. "Some of these flowers still look good. Maybe we can return them to the flower shop to get some money back!"

Seeing that Ethan was stuck in a trance, Janet tugged at the hem of his shirt. "What're you doing? Am I supposed to put them away by myself? Go and get some bags. I wonder if we can still make it to the flower shop at this rate. Please don't do something so meaningless yet expensive again. I can't stand wastage."

Ethan scratched his head embarrassedly. He felt as though he had been struck by lightning.

Finally, he managed to say, "I'll put them away. Go to your room and get some rest."

"We're kind of housemates. I can't let you do all of this alone," Janet protested.

Ethan's expression darkened as mixed emotions surged within him. He squatted on the floor and began to clear the flowers, silently cursing Garrett and vowing he'd tear that useless guy into pieces the next time he saw him.

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"Do you have the flower shop's phone number? Ask if the flowers can be returned." After clearing the petals on the floor, Janet laid a pile of flowers on the dining table.

Ethan painstakingly removed all the candles from the floor and made a call to have his men take the flowers away.

It was already midnight by the time they finished cleaning.

Exhausted, Janet leaned against the sofa.

"I was able to get this much back from the flower shop." With one hand in his pocket, Ethan walked over to Janet and put a wad of cash next to her.

"Why are you giving it to me? It's your money."

Janet looked tired, but her tone was as cold as it was that morning.

As she spoke, she dumped the money on the coffee table and then got up to walk to her room. Before closing the door behind her, she stole one last glance at the man.

Truth be told, she was delighted to have received flowers from Ethan. She had never seen so many flowers before, let alone the fact that they were from Ethan.

But the most important thing for two people to get along was to trust each other. Ethan didn't trust her enough, and that was what made her mad. She couldn't let go of it so soon.

Breathing a long sigh, Janet threw herself to the bed dejectedly.

Just outside her door, Ethan was seething with rage. He gritted his teeth and walked to the balcony to call Garrett.

"So how did it go? Have you won her heart yet?" Garrett asked bluntly, his voice riddled with amusement.

Ethan sneered. His eyes clouded over, even darker than the night sky. "Thanks to you, I haven't rested since sundown," he hissed.

"Oh, my God! You're amazing! It's been almost four hours! Good job, buddy!" Unfortunately, Garrett didn't seem to sense anything wrong. He continued excitedly, "I told you it'd work! Since I've helped you with something so important, would you consider giving me some time off?"

Ethan was so angry that he almost burst into laughter. Glancing at Janet's door, he cursed in a low voice, "You're *** useless! Your shitty idea didn't work at all. She called me a big spender and asked me to return the flowers. I even had to get rid of all the petals on the floor. I just finished cleaning! And you say you deserve a vacation? Garrett, you're working in the office this month—with no weekends off."

If Ethan was in a bad mood, it meant that not only Garrett was in trouble. The entire Larson Group was about to face a storm.

"Wait! Don't hang up!" Garrett shouted in a hurry. Pressing his phone against his ear tightly, he quickly lifted the quilt and got out of bed.

His girlfriend was in the bathroom, taking a shower. But Garrett was in no mood to peak at her beautiful naked body. He went straight to the balcony, wine bottle in tow, and said, "Mr. Lester, calm down. Flowers worked every time for me. But I already told you that your wife's different. How about I give

you a few of my girlfriend's books? They're all manuals on love. You might find some good ideas in there."

Ethan snorted coldly and hung up the phone without another word.

It was rare for him to be so emotional. Such an uncontrollable mood couldn't be good.

The next morning, in the Larson Group, Garrett slapped a paper bag of books onto Ethan's desk. Smiling brightly, he declared, "These are all good. I guarantee that by tonight, you'll get to cuddle with your wife."

Ethan glanced at him emotionlessly but decided to finish up his work before opening the bag. Finally, he put down the document in his hand and picked up the paper bag.

"My Bossy CEO Boyfriend"...

"Pregnant Wife Runs Away"...

"Mysterious CEO, Gentle Lover"...

What the hell was all of this bullshit?!

Ethan's nose wrinkled with disgust. He had half a mind to throw the books into the garbage can, but after a moment of hesitation, he picked one up and read it. His knitted brows didn't loosen until he put it down.

The content of the books were even more shocking than their titles. Ethan felt the need to wash his eyes after reading it.

But perhaps the books weren't completely useless. There was common theme in all these books. Whenever the hero and the heroine quarreled, they would solve the problem by making passionate love. The hero would always push the heroine down forcefully and kiss her, and things would escalate until they had made it to their bed. Then all their problems would be solved.

Ethan frowned slightly, wondering if he should also give it a try.

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At night, Janet wore her headphones and sat on the chair, with one leg under her bum, and began working on her design.

Her elegant fingers had a way of their own with the pen. She painted at ease, drawing bold, confident strokes. The window was open, and the summer breeze rustled her long, silky locks.

Ethan knocked on the door. His heart flipped when he witnessed the beautiful scene.

Janet glanced at him and looked away, focusing on the painting.

Ethan took her gesture as approval to get into the room. He shamelessly walked in and closed the door.

"Let's talk." Ethan's eyes were dark. He placed a steaming glass of milk on the table and looked at her.

The sweet scent of milk wafted in the air.

Janet pursed her lips. Her mind was a mess. "I don't have time."

Ethan took a step back and sat on the edge of the bed, trailing his fingers across the soft bedsheet. "I'll wait for you to finish your work."

Janet's unique scent filled the room as the wind swept across her. Ethan's mouth dried, and his body turned hot in an instant. He felt a surge of desire within him.

At eleven at night, Janet finally stopped drawing. She stole a glance at Ethan, who was staring at her.

Janet stood up and picked up her graphic tablet on the table. The next moment, darkness engulfed her. Ethan's muscular frame pressed against hers. He placed his hands on either side, trapping Janet against the table. His hot breath blew against her ear.

"You're done with work. Let's talk now."

Janet's ears turned red, and her heart took a sprint in her chest as if she were on a rollercoaster. "What do you want to talk about?"

Ethan wrapped his arms around Janet and pulled her into a tight embrace. His hair rested on her shoulder, exuding a faint peppermint scent. "What on earth do you want me to do to calm you down?"

Janet trembled, shifting her weight from one foot to another, as his hot breath made her skin prickle with goosebumps. "Let go of me, Ethan! I have to clean the desk," she whined, shrinking back.

Ethan got reminded of the domineering heroes he had read in books, who wouldn't let go of their love interests during such situations. The more their female counterparts struggled, the more aggressive they would get.

He held her tighter and pressed his body against Janet's, trapping her against the desk. With his free hand, he helped her put the tablet into the bag and asked, "Why are you shaking? I'll help you clean up the desk."

"Let go of me first. We'll sit down comfortably and talk." Janet tried wriggling out of his hold. She was both shy and scared.

"If I let you go, you will run away and won't talk to me," Ethan grunted.

He hooked his fingers under her chin and lifted her head to make her look at him. "You naughty girl!"

Janet's eyes widened.

Ethan snorted and gently stroked her pink lips with his fingers. "Why are you still glaring at me?"

He leaned forward and bit her bottom lip. An involuntary squeal left Janet's lips. Before she could react, Ethan picked her up and threw her on the bed.

Before she could sit up, Ethan grabbed her slender ankles, pulled her under him, and pressed himself against her. Janet whimpered as he forcefully kissed her. The stubble on his chin scratched her face. Ethan gripped her skirt and pushed it to her waist.

"Ethan!"

Ethan jerked up in shock when he heard Janet's voice. She waved her hand against his face, leaving three scratch marks on his skin.

Ethan rubbed his stinging forehead and let go of her. She retreated to the head of the bed and draped her body with a quilt, revealing nothing but her angry eyes.

Ethan cleared his throat and leaned against the bed. "I just..."

Janet pointed at the door and growled, "Shut up! I don't want to see you! Get out now!"

Seeing that what he did had only ignited her anger, Ethan didn't dare to provoke her anymore. He took a deep breath and left, closing the door behind him.

Janet covered her face with the quilt. She could feel the blush flaming her cheeks.

After returning to his room, Ethan immediately threw the books into the trash can with a murderous look on his face.

"Garrett! You're gonna pay for this!"

The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride Chapter 60

The next day, Janet went to the company early in the morning.

Ethan couldn't sleep well that night. When he went to brush his teeth the next morning, he looked at himself in the mirror and found three red marks on his forehead.

He could neither cover it with a mask nor did he have long enough hair to hide it. He had no choice but to go out this way.

There was a meeting for the senior executives in the Larson Group today.

Everyone was well prepared for the meeting with a solemn look on their faces. Garrett sat on the left, idly rotating a pen with his fingers.

Just then, the room of the meeting room flew open. Ethan walked in, wearing a dark blue suit, followed by his assistant Sean, who was carrying a laptop and the necessary documents for the meeting. He exuded his usual majestic aura. However, the red marks on his cold face seemed to catch everyone's attention.

Everyone stared at Ethan with bated breath as if they had seen a ghost.

They wondered who had scratched the CEO of the Larson Group this way.

Garrett's mouth widened in shock. He leaned closer to Ethan and asked, "Boss, what's wrong with your face?"

The corner of Ethan's mouth twitched, and his hand flipping through the documents stilled. He looked up and glared at Garrett. "Well, my cat scratched me."

Ethan's coldness frightened the people. Everyone fell silent and dared not to utter a word.

After the meeting, everyone left with a sigh of relief.

"Well, you haven't managed to get around her yet, have you?" Garrett asked Ethan as he closed the laptop and pushed the glasses up the bridge of his nose.

Ethan rubbed his temples impatiently. "Get out of here! It was all because of your stupid books."

Garrett burst out laughing, tears welling up in her eyes.

Ethan leaned back on his chair and smiled coldly. "Laugh all you want. I am going to deduct your bonus this quarter and buy coffee and desserts for all the staff of our company."

"I'm sorry, boss!"

Garrett immediately stopped laughing and coughed. "I think you should stop playing such tricks. Your wife clearly doesn't buy it. If you do something wrong, apologize to her like you mean it. And I'm sure she'll forgive you. She doesn't look like an unreasonable person."

Ethan stared into the distance, recalling how Janet had protectively covered herself with a quilt last night. "Well, judging from her reaction last night, I could tell she was angry. She refused to talk to me even when I asked her what she wanted."

"Well, it looks like she is still angry. When a woman says it doesn't matter, it certainly matters. When a woman says she isn't angry, it means she is seething inside. It's not about what she says. You have to study hard and try to figure out what she is thinking," Garrett explained patiently like an experienced mentor.

Ethan's expression was unpredictable.

Garrett read his mind. "Don't feel ashamed. Think about what is more important."

He glanced at the red marks on Ethan's forehead. "Don't tell me that you actually slept with her last night. I have dated quiet and meek girls like her before. They don't like aggressive men."

Garrett knew Ethan better than anyone else. Ethan was quick, decisive, and resolute in business. He would never let go of anything he liked. But women were different. They might not like his tough nature.

Ethan scowled at Garrett and recalled the quarrel between Janet and her sister. "She is not meek." He smiled, shaking her head.

"Well, just apologize sincerely," Garrett said smugly. "I promise it will work. If it fails, you can deduct my next month's salary. Think about how I have managed to date so many girls in the past. That's because I'm shamelessly persistent."

"I'm not as shameless as you. Bye." Ethan rolled his eyes, turned around, and left the conference room.