

## Chapter 132 Loose Change

But Rachel still deeply feared Caden, a weight that she couldn't easily shake off.

Joshua was an asshole, but Caden—he was another breed of ruthless. Should she and Randolph find themselves ensnared in one of his schemes, the path ahead of them would be nothing short of treacherous.

"Randolph, can't we find another way?" she pleaded, gripping his arm tightly, her voice trembling with desperation. "This deal... it's not worth the risk for us."

Randolph's expression darkened, his patience wearing thin. Her tearful pleas grated on his nerves, he couldn't help but lash out. "You have no say in this matter!"

The next second, he suddenly smacked Rachel, sending her tumbling from her chair.

She hit the floor with a soft thud, a muffled groan escaping her lips.

Pain shot through her side, but she bit back any further sound, knowing better than to cry out.

Shame burned her cheeks as she slowly picked herself up, grateful there was no one in the private room to witness her humiliation.

She slowly climbed back into the chair, lowering her gaze, her spirit broken. She had grown accustomed to submission a long time ago, and with such a serious matter looming over them, she didn't dare provoke Randolph any further.

Yet, even as she sat silently, he continued to berate her. "This is all your fault!" he barked.

Rachel's chest tightened. How could he pin this on her? "My fault?" she repeated incredulously, her voice a mix of hurt and disbelief. "I didn't do anything!"

Randolph's sneer cut through her like a knife. "If you hadn't picked that fight with Alicia, none of this would've spiraled out of control."

"Randolph!" Rachel's voice rose with a spark of defiance, her frustration boiling over. "You were the one who said you couldn't stand Alicia and wanted to teach her a lesson! I tried to stop you, but you wouldn't listen. Now that things have blown up, you're putting the blame on me?"

"I told you to teach her a lesson, yes," Randolph growled, his eyes narrowing. "But why did you have to involve Joshua?"

Rachel's gaze faltered, flickering with guilt.

She had told Joshua, thinking it would humiliate Alicia further. Given Alicia's and Joshua's bitter divorce, she thought he would revel in her suffering.

But instead, Joshua still harbored feelings for Alicia, and his anger had turned on Randolph, avenging his ex-wife.

Her plan had backfired spectacularly.

Yet she couldn't help but feel wronged. "I did it for your sake," she whispered, her voice trembling with emotion. "I never wanted things to turn out this way. I'm upset too, Randolph. Why can't you see that?"

Randolph's snort was filled with disdain. "You're useless. All these other men—at least they have wives who stand by them. And what do I have? A fucking liability for a wife!"

Rachel felt utterly humiliated, her cheeks burning as if they'd been slapped by invisible hands.

Her family was by no means poor, but in recent years, their fortunes had dwindled. The stability they once enjoyed crumbled beneath them like loose stones. Without the safety net of a powerful alliance, she lived in constant fear of being belittled by the imposing Gray family. She had managed to keep her composure for so long, swallowing every insult, every patronizing glance.

But tonight, something inside her snapped; she couldn't bear being trampled on any longer.

Bolting from the room, she covered her face with trembling hands. But her burst of impulsive courage faded almost as quickly as it had come.

Once outside the hotel, the biting cold of the wind cut through her, sobering her up completely.

The thought of the Gray family's downfall filled her with dread. The judgment of those high-society women—those well-manicured vultures—would be swift and merciless.

For years, she had basked in the glow of attention, smiling through the pain of their snide remarks.

To lose her dignity now would be unbearable, like stripping her of the very fabric that held her together. Without it, she felt she might as well end her miserable existence on this earth.

Tears welled in her eyes, but she swallowed them down, burying her grievances deep within her chest. Her mind raced, already formulating a plan to help Randolph claw his way back from the edge.

Joshua's relentless attacks were because of Alicia.

Perhaps, if she could make amends with her, it would open another path forward.

As she hailed a taxi, she failed to notice Caden's black car pulling into the hotel entrance.

He caught a glimpse of her departure but felt no sympathy—Rachel was little more than a fleeting inconvenience in his world. With a dismissive glance, he continued on his way.

Inside the dimly lit private room, Randolph's frustration filled the air like thick smoke.

He raised his glass to Caden twice in quick succession, his shaky hands betraying his desperation.

This was more than a toast—it was a plea for help, a grasp at any remaining shred of dignity.

Then, with bitter venom in his voice, Randolph cursed Joshua's name.

"I helped him so much back then," Randolph spat, his eyes gleaming with indignation. "And now I've fallen right into his trap! I never thought he'd turn on me like this."

Caden took a slow, measured sip of his wine, remaining unmoved.

Joshua had struck the first blow, triggering the start of Randolph's slow collapse.

But Caden knew the truth—Joshua's damage was only a crack in the foundation. It had been Caden himself who'd delivered the fatal blow to Randolph's finances, silently dismantling his empire from within.

Randolph had no idea who the real mastermind behind his downfall was, assuming Joshua was to blame for everything.

"Three hundred million dollars?" Caden mused, setting his glass down casually. "That's loose change for me. But tell me, Mr. Gray, what will you offer to prove you're serious about this deal?"

Randolph's eyes flashed with desperation, bloodshot from sleepless nights and endless scheming. With trembling hands, he reached into his coat pocket and produced a worn document, the edges slightly frayed.

He slid it across the table to Caden.

"This... this is Joshua's secret," Randolph said, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. He leaned closer, eager to fan the flames of Caden's well-known grudge against Joshua. "Mr. Ward, use it however you see fit."

Caden took the document, rubbing his thumb across its surface.

With a smirk, he then tucked the document away.

Randolph, knowing this was a done deal, exhaled deeply, a weight finally lifting off his chest.

For the first time in days, he could eat with ease, savoring each bite as though it were the first proper meal he'd had in an eternity.

His eyes drifted across the table and landed on Caden, who sat there motionless, barely touching his plate. A flicker of curiosity crossed



Randolph's mind. "Mr. Ward," he asked, his brow furrowing slightly, "Do you not like the food?"

Caden chuckled softly, his lips curling into a mischievous grin.

"I'm saving my appetite for something a bit more... special later."

Meanwhile, Rachel was growing increasingly frustrated as she repeatedly dialed Alicia's number, only for her calls to go ignored.

Determined, she set her jaw and took a cab straight to the Yates Mansion.

With the Yates family involved, she was certain Alicia wouldn't ignore her in person.

As luck would have it, Joshua was home that day.

Rachel's presence in high society had always preceded her, so Shelia greeted her with the usual formality. But Rachel brushed off the offered tea, her eyes betraying her impatience. She wanted to speak privately with Joshua—there was no time for idle chatter.

They moved out to the terrace, away from prying ears.

Inside, Shelia watched them from behind the large, soundproof windows, unease curling in her stomach. Something felt off.

What could they possibly be discussing that she, as Joshua's mother, wasn't privy to?

Georgia, another onlooker, sidled up beside her, eyes alight with curiosity. "What could she want with Mr. Yates?" she whispered.

Shelia, worried, replied, "I don't know, but it can't be good."

Georgia's gaze narrowed in on Rachel, noticing the telltale signs of distress. "Her eyes are all red and puffy from crying. Do you think... she and Mr. Yates...?"

Georgia's voice trailed off, her face scrunching in disbelief. "But she's married—and not exactly young anymore. Is she really Mr. Yates's type?"

Shelia shot her a sharp look. "Don't be ridiculous!" she snapped. "Enough with the nonsense."

Outside on the terrace, the tension was palpable. Rachel stood across from Joshua, her expression tight with resentment.

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't muster even a hint of a smile in the presence of the man who caused her so much pain and suffering. Taking a deep breath, she said tersely, "I want to see Alicia and apologize to her."

Joshua's lips twisted into a sneer, a coldness flashing in his eyes. "Apologize?" he echoed, his tone mocking. "Funny. Did it never cross your mind that this might happen when you were busy tormenting her?"