

Your Guise 1021

Chapter 1021

James didn't say anything, quietly looking at Summer.

"Also, you can ignore her, but bringing someone new to purposely upset her is too much... I don't even know how to describe you anymore," Summer continued, her anger palpable as if she were the victim in the situation.

James couldn't help but laugh. "Are you implying that I'm a bad person?"

Even though Summer thought James was the worst, she knew it wasn't worth losing her job over expressing it. "I wouldn't go that far, but you should definitely think about it," she replied firmly.

Summer imagined herself being furious if she were in Esther's shoes. Esther was so kind-hearted. If it were her, she would have caused a scene to embarrass them both.

James glanced at the uneaten food on the table, remembering how Esther always reminded him not to waste food. A pang of sadness washed over him. How unhappy must Esther be if she couldn't even enjoy the food she loved?

Determined, Summer removed her name tag. "If you feel I've offended the lady or you, you can fire me, and I'll accept it. But I still think you should just leave her alone if you don't have feelings for her, okay?"

James nodded. "Okay."

Although she sounded cool saying that, Summer's heart still ached. She was about to join the ranks of the unemployed. "I'll pack my things then," she said, turning to collect her belongings.

"You don't need to resign. I think our firm needs someone who values justice as much as you," James remarked.

Summer paused and turned around in disbelief. "Really? You think I value justice?"

"I won't fire you," James stated simply, not elaborating further.

As he turned away, Summer interjected, "In that case, I should mention that Esther saw the woman who came over and was very upset. She said she'll never come over again."

Never come over again? That must have been quite an impact.

James couldn't find the right words to express his feelings. It felt like a tangled mess, but he managed a nod. "Okay."

Summer could only sigh, knowing she had done all she could. The rest was up to fate.

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Esther went to a bar by herself for the first time. She chose Dark Bar because Pearl owned it, and she knew she wouldn't be bothered there.

However, there were always people who didn't understand boundaries. One of them saw her sitting alone and approached her with two glasses of beer.

"Drinking alone, sweetheart?" the man leered, placing the beers in front of Esther before taking a seat beside her.

Esther looked up, her voice filled with sadness. "Please leave me alone. I'm feeling down."

The man's smile faltered, his lips twitching. Was this a new tactic to turn people away?

Chapter 1022

The man who had initially approached Esther with different intentions now found himself sharing his own heartache with her.

A few minutes later...

"Listen, I've been through hell. The person I love went on a blind date with someone else. I don't understand what he sees in her. He even showed her to me..."

The man tapped Esther's shoulder, a serious expression on his face. "Men are scum. Don't fall for their tricks!"

Esther nodded, feeling a strange camaraderie with this stranger. "Great minds think alike. Let's drink!"

"We women need to stand up for ourselves. There are plenty of good men out there, sis. Don't waste your time on someone like that!" the man declared, and they both raised their glasses.

As the drinks flowed, they became increasingly intoxicated, even calling each other "sister" in their drunken state.

Their conversation eventually came to an end as Esther couldn't handle any more alcohol. She leaned over the table, feeling nauseous, and the man suddenly questioned his actions. What was he doing, confiding in a stranger?

Despite some internal struggle, he couldn't leave her like that. Before leaving, he even draped his coat over her shoulders.

Esther, with her petite frame, nearly disappeared under the man's coat. James almost missed her.

He heard Esther say she was going to Dark Bar and still wasn't back after an hour. Recalling her low alcohol tolerance, he decided to check on her.

Finding her asleep at the table, even the blaring music failing to rouse her, James removed the coat and gently woke her up.

"Whose coat is this?" he questioned, noting the scent of men's cologne lingering on it. He was blinded by anger.

Esther, still groggy from sleep and intoxication, could only mumble incoherently. "I... I think it's my bestie's coat..."

James helped her to her feet and guided her outside, where she protested about the cold pavement.

"It's cold. My butt is freezing!" Esther complained, but James paid no heed. He firmly held her down, demanding answers about the coat.

"Tell me where you got this coat."

Struggling to recall, Esther placed her hands on his to steady herself. "I really can't remember. I'm sure someone in the bar lent it to me."

"Why are you here?" James sounded angry and was quite scary.

Esther suddenly had a moment of clarity, and she looked into his face and murmured, "Weren't you on a blind date? Why does it matter to you? I thought you didn't want to see me anymore..."

Her voice grew increasingly somber before she turned her face away, not wanting him to witness her pitiful state. She thought to herself, 'Keep it together, Esther! How could you break down after just a few words?'

Chapter 1023

She was berating herself inwardly, feeling small and lost.

James sensed her distress and softened his tone, urging her, "Don't come to places like this alone anymore."

Esther found his tone oddly familiar, reminiscent of the James she used to know. Why was he suddenly being so gentle?

In that moment, something changed for Esther. It felt like they were transported back to a time when they were together, when James still loved her.

"Don't tell me what to do," she retorted, pushing him away as she attempted to rise. But her footing faltered, and she nearly fell if James hadn't caught her in time.

"Don't touch me, James. We're nothing to each other now. I don't need your kindness. I hate you. I hate you with every fiber of my being..." Esther squatted on the floor and burst out crying.

Her cries were so loud that James felt bad. He awkwardly patted her head. "Alright, stop crying."

"Do you even realize how awful your actions were? Do you think I'm some kind of fool? Who else would let you toy with their feelings like this? If I hadn't been blinded by love, I would've ditched you a long time ago..."

Though her words were slurred from intoxication, James understood her sentiment all too well.

He couldn't help but ask, "Were you like this when you chased after Mobius for two years?"

He recalled their conversation before. His irritation resurfaced as he remembered the girl he had a crush on chased a man around for so long.

"So, you're doing this deliberately, hoping I'll chase after you, aren't you?" It was a rare moment of insight from Esther, and she wanted to get up and punch him.

James knew she would feel that way, but he had to admit it was indeed what he wanted...

He froze, watching Esther squatting on the floor, and took a deep breath. "Alright, I was wrong. I'm sorry."

"I don't accept your apology," Esther declared as she struggled to stand, using the nearby decor for support. Nausea threatened to overwhelm her, her vision blurred by tears. "I told you I won't forgive you. I hate you."

Why was this man so annoying? She was ready to move on, but now he was suddenly nice to her.

James wanted to explain himself, but seeing someone familiar approaching, he frowned. "Whatever."

Esther remained impassive at his icy expression. "Am I really that unimportant to you?"

Her eyes were filled with immense pain. She wasn't weak. Any other person would have walked away after enduring such torment.

But she couldn't bring herself to leave. She loved James, and she didn't even want to remove their couple ring.

Looking at his face, the fleeting warmth vanished, leaving Esther with the unsettling thought that something was wrong with this man.

She touched her hand, feeling the cold ring that snapped her back to reality. Her gaze shifted to James, noticing his ring finger was still bare.

As if throwing a tantrum, Esther removed her ring and pushed it into his hand. "Fine. I'm cutting ties with you. I hope you'll respect that and leave me alone!"

She intended to walk away and pretend she didn't care, yet as she turned and saw Sabrina waving at James from a short distance, her tears still started falling.

He could love whoever he wanted. She just needed to stop caring.

Chapter 1024

Pearl noticed that ever since they crossed their final barrier, Richard had become somewhat unhinged.

Even during meals, he would be unusually talkative, as if he was worried he wasn't doing enough. He took care of everything himself, even feeding her.

When she asked why he was acting that way, he said because he enjoyed it, then he took a piece of fruit and stuffed it in her mouth.

Pearl wasn't used to this, but she was starting to enjoy it. If he wanted to do these things, she wasn't going to stop him.

However, she suddenly noticed Richard fixating on her belly as if expecting a child to pop out of it.

"Are you pregnant?" Richard patted her belly as he seated himself beside her. His touch was gentle, as if there was a child in there.

Pearl slapped his hand away and frowned. "What? It wouldn't happen so quickly."

Richard smiled, his tone serious. "I thought you were going to say I'm not putting in enough effort."

Pearl fell silent, shooting him a sideways glance. "I think we should take our time with this."

As if he didn't hear it, Richard leaned down to her belly. "Do you want a boy or a girl?"

Pearl sighed. "That's not something I get to decide."

Indeed, the father often plays a significant role in this aspect, while the mother contributes the egg and carries the fetus. Richard knew this, having learned the details of having a healthy baby.

But Pearl was reluctant to discuss this matter, feeling it wasn't something they should rush—sometimes, it's left to fate. Their current priority should be focusing on Silas.

"I never expected him to work with Hugo."

Richard absentmindedly played with her hair. "He's just a kid playing around. It won't cause any real trouble."

"Are you going to..." Pearl didn't complete her sentence, but Richard understood.

Silas might not have been the sharpest tool in the shed, but he almost got Richard detained at the police station. Likely, Richard would seek retribution. However, it's worth noting that Silas is only twenty years old—a young man who might have simply made a mistake and could even have been manipulated by Hugo.

Richard shook his head. "I know he wasn't very much involved in this, so we'll just find an excuse and get him away. If Mister Elijah finds out about this, he would probably not let him hurt anyone."

"You know he's young, yet he has a lot of bad ideas." Pearl pinched her nose bridge. "I really don't understand why he won't leave me alone. I'm so much older than him. Why can't he just find someone his own age?"

She suddenly remembered Estrella.

Pearl had been abroad, and upon her return, she hadn't focused much on their influencer company, inadvertently neglecting Estrella.

"I wonder how Silas's first love, Estrella, is doing now?"

"Estrella? She resigned." Richard didn't have all the details, but he knew Estrella had resigned from her position.

"What?" Pearl's eyes widened with surprise. "Why did she suddenly resign?"

Chapter 1025

To Estrella, resigning wasn't ideal. She was an influencer who shot into fame and was loved by many, with potential opportunities in the entertainment industry looming on the horizon. Why would she suddenly quit now?

But after pondering it, Pearl had a hunch. "Do you think Silas said something to her?"

Richard's expression darkened, and he seemed uninterested. "Why do you care so much about that? Let them be."

As long as Silas doesn't come after Pearl, he would be willing to let him off.

"Fine, I was just curious." It was obvious Richard was jealous again. She'd investigate on her own.

Observing his cold expression, Pearl attempted to lighten the mood. "Okay, I'll stop prying. I was just curious. Can't I gossip a bit?"

"Why don't you find out how to keep a man's heart?" Richard retorted, his mood improving.

"Do I need to worry about keeping yours, Mister Richard?" Pearl teased, placing her hand behind his neck and drawing close. "You're the manliest man I know. I trust my judgment when it comes to men."

Richard realized Pearl had a unique way of addressing him. Whenever she addressed him as "mister," her voice became softer, lingering at the last syllable, carrying an allure that inevitably captivated him.

She also had a knack for words, subtly praising Richard while boosting her own confidence. It was a skill Richard found not just flattering, but useful.

Eyeing her delicate neck, Richard's gaze smoldered. "Shouldn't I be rewarded then?"

Caught off guard, Pearl's smile faltered. "I think..." But before she could finish, she was swept away in the moment.

Outside, the wind stirred, rattling the windows. Their moans echoed and mingled with the winds of spring, tugging at heartstrings.

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Mobius's funeral was a modest affair.

Dustan and Susan wept as their son was laid to rest. Susan's distress led to her fainting, causing a commotion.

After most of the mourners left, Pearl and Richard lingered to finalize arrangements.

"Pearl."

Esther emerged from the crowd, dressed in mourning attire. Her usual vibrancy was overshadowed by melancholy.

"You look exhausted." As her best friend, Pearl felt sorry for her. She grabbed her cold hands and noticed she lost quite a lot of weight.

"I'm managing," Esther replied, attempting a smile that faltered. "Just haven't been getting much rest."

"Is James still ignoring you?"

At the mention of his name, Esther's face paled. "Pearl, James and I... are no longer together."

Chapter 1026

No longer together? James must have been really angry.

Pearl gave a long sigh. She knew Esther was going through a rough patch, so she didn't bring this up. Instead, she tried to comfort her. "I know it's hard to handle right now, but from what I've seen, James truly cares about you. It's not something that fades away easily..."

Esther shook her head, cutting her off. "He went on a blind date with someone else, so I'm guessing it won't be long before he gets engaged and then married."

Pearl wasn't expecting that, sensing there must be more to the situation.

James's feelings for Esther seemed genuine. If they weren't, he'd be quite the actor. But if his feelings were real, then what could be the reason behind his actions?

Seeing the anxiety in Pearl's eyes broke Esther's resolve. She collapsed into Pearl's embrace, tears streaming down her face. "He doesn't want to be with me anymore. The other day, he brought that woman to his firm and treated her so kindly, just like he used to treat me..."

Pearl frowned, but all she could do was pat Esther's back. "Don't cry. We can talk about this. Don't be too upset about it."

Esther's sobs attracted the attention of the media. One reporter recognized her immediately. "Isn't that Esther Sanders, the A-lister? Wasn't she engaged to Mobius? Now she's here at the funeral, crying so sadly. Is she still in love with him? What loyalty!"

The reporter wasted no time snapping pictures of Pearl and Esther in their vulnerable state. Pearl shot him a glare that almost made him drop his camera. Before she could reprimand him, he scurried off with his photos.

"I'm fine, Pearl."

After crying for a long time, Esther finally calmed down enough to speak. "I think he doesn't love me anymore. I'm not going to keep chasing after him."

With James getting cozy with that other woman, Esther felt she'd be demeaning herself by continuing to pursue him. She refused to stoop to the level of becoming the other woman.

"He ignored you when you went to see him a few days ago, right?" Pearl asked.

Esther remembered how stupid she was, and her tears started falling again. "Yes."

"And then he brought the woman to the firm, knowing you'd see them?"

Esther nodded through her tears.

Pearl felt something was off. "Do you think he did that intentionally?"

"Why would he want me to see that?" Esther sobbed, looking utterly dejected.

"So you would know when to quit. You kept bugging him, so he wanted you to leave." Pearl suggested matter-of-factly, but it only seemed to deepen Esther's sorrow.

"Stop crying. I'm not saying he doesn't love you anymore. I'm saying he's trying to push you away." Seeing how Esther was still crying her heart out, Pearl slapped her forehead. "Did anything else happen after that?"

"No... Wait, I went to the bar alone and had a great conversation with someone..."

Chapter 1027

"He's just a jerk. You wouldn't expect to meet a decent person at a bar." Pearl chuckled. Why would Esther think otherwise?

"Alright, so I met a jerk at the bar, but we ended up having a good conversation. Then I fell asleep, and I think he put his coat over me. When I woke up, James was there. He pulled me outside and demanded to know whose coat it was."

"Seems pretty straightforward," Pearl remarked, her expression softening. "What happened next?"

"I didn't tell him, and he got angry. Then he tried to cheer me up, like how he used to do, but..." Esther's expression soured as she remembered Sabrina. "Then that woman showed up, and he turned cold again."

Pearl touched her head with a smile. "You're good at summarizing, but can't you see?"

Esther shook her head, feeling disheartened. "I know he likes her, so he ignored me when he saw her."

Pearl was distraught. Had Esther never learned comprehension?

"I'm saying he must have had other reasons for pushing you away," Pearl clarified.

Esther looked up in disbelief. "If he had reasons, he would have told me. Why keep it a secret?"

Pearl shook her head. "I don't know, but it's probably not as simple as you think, at least not like what you imagined."

If James wanted to push her away, he would have done it a long time ago. Why would he keep her hanging, letting her go to the firm but still giving her the cold shoulder?

James didn't seem like that kind of person. That was something someone with issues would do.

"Okay, so what should I do? Keep going to see him?" Esther asked, feeling lost.

Pearl's expression turned serious. "No. If he's giving you the cold shoulder, stop going to see him. If he's trying to push you away, go along with it. Leave."

"But..."

"Have some self-respect. Why are you letting him order you around? Find something else to distract yourself. Act like you don't even know him for now."

Pearl suggested this partly because it seemed like a sensible approach, but also because she had her own plans. James had been leading Esther in circles for too long. She couldn't just let him continue.

If her suspicions were correct, and James was only acting this way because of some undisclosed reason, leaving him would surely rattle him. It was payback for hurting her best friend.

Esther, always trusting Pearl's judgment, nodded, tears still lingering on her cheeks. "Okay, I'll stop seeing him." She refused to be his doormat anymore!

"Don't worry. You'll bounce back," Pearl reassured her with a smile. It was time for her to pay James a visit.

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Pearl arranged to meet James on the weekend.

When James heard it was Pearl, he attempted to decline, but Pearl mentioned Sabrina, forcing his hand.

Descending the stairs, James found Pearl lounging on the couch, sipping coffee. "What can I do for you, Missus Pearl?"

Chapter 1028

Seeing how he initially ignored her, Pearl found herself intrigued. "I guess Esther was right. You're not even pretending anymore." She sighed and shook her head.

"I'm sure you have other reasons for coming here. Why don't you just get to the point instead of focusing on something pointless like this?" James elegantly took a seat on the opposite couch, crossing his legs.

"Alright, let's get straight to it then. I wonder if the rumors about your marriage discussion with Miss Sabrina are true."

She had done her research. His new girlfriend, Sabrina Watson, was the only daughter of the influential Watson family. They adored her, and her impeccable family background made her an ideal match for James.

But whether she was James's choice remained unclear.

James met her gaze and didn't beat around the bush. "The rumors are true."

"Don't play word games with me." Pearl glared at him coldly. Such tactics might work on Esther, but she wasn't so easily swayed.

James casually picked up a cup of coffee from the table, taking a sip. "I've said what I needed to say. No further comments."

With James being so tight-lipped, Pearl saw no point in continuing the conversation. She grabbed her bag and stood up, pretending to leave. "In that case, I won't disturb you any longer. I'm going to have a chat with Miss Sabrina."

James's expression seemed forced. "Leave her alone."

"Hah, you're quite protective of her. I haven't even said anything yet, and you're already on edge. It's impressive how quickly you've moved on to your next relationship. Barely took you a few days." Despite knowing James wasn't that type of person, Pearl couldn't resist needling him after his admission.

James didn't seem fazed by her sarcasm. His lips parted, as if to speak, but he quickly resumed his serious expression. "I suggest you stay out of this. I have my own plans."

"Of course, but I have a question for you."

"Go ahead," James said, sensing what was coming.

"Do you know doing all this would hurt Esther?"

James replied without hesitation, "It wouldn't."

"Not even her feelings?" Pearl shot back at him.

"...I can't promise that." If Esther ended up devastated, there was little he could do.

Pearl's temper seemed about to explode. She wasn't sure why she was becoming so emotional— maybe her period was near.

Wait, her period?

After a mental calculation, she realized she was a month late.

"Missus Pearl," James's voice brought her back to the present. "There's one thing you don't need to worry about. Nothing I do will truly harm Esther."

Pearl replied coldly, "That's not convincing. Esther is heartbroken right now. She might just decide to let you go."

Observing his reaction, she noticed his clenched fist and felt a surge of relief. Just as she suspected, this man hadn't let go of Esther yet.

"Why do you look so troubled? Isn't this what you want?" Pearl teased him, nonchalantly tracing her finger across the table. "Esther called me, sobbing about her relationship issues. You should be pleased—you'll be left alone from now on."

Pearl deliberately tried to make it sound worse than it was to make James feel guiltier.

James's expression remained unchanged, but his emotions were in turmoil. For the first time, he felt like he was losing control.

Chapter 1029

"Alright, since you've got your own stuff going on, I won't bother you. I didn't come here to fix things for Esther. I just want to understand your perspective. So, I'll advise her to move on," Pearl said, trying to be understanding.

She appeared empathetic, but James wasn't happy with her words.

Pearl prepared to leave after her declaration, silently counting down in her head.

3, 2, 1...

"Hold on, Missus Pearl."

Just as she expected.

Pearl slowly turned around, smiling. "Yes? You have something more to say?"

"Tell Esther it's not what she thinks."

"What's she thinking? And what did you tell her? Why all the secrets?" Pearl asked, playing dumb.

James looked more troubled. "Just tell her that, please."

Pearl shrugged, acting indifferent. "In that case, why won't you tell her yourself?"

James's expression changed. "I can't for now."

"Tell her when you can then," Pearl said, chuckling, before leaving the office without a second glance.

On her way home, something nagged at Pearl. Her period had been late for a while now.

Should she take a pregnancy test, just in case?

At the pharmacy, she spotted someone familiar.

Silas?

Her expression changed drastically, but he noticed her before she could pretend otherwise.

"What a coincidence, Pearl." Silas, holding a bag of medication, approached slowly, making her step back involuntarily.

"Why so jumpy? I'm not out to get you," he teased, eyeing her up and down. "What brings you to the pharmacy? Are you sick?"

Pearl shook her head. "No." She pulled out her phone, pretending to be busy. "I'm leaving."

Silas didn't push it. If she wasn't up for a chat, he wasn't going to force one. "See you soon."

But Pearl, against her better judgment, blurted out, "Wait, I've got a question for you."

Chapter 1030

They were in the pharmacy, surrounded by people. It wasn't exactly the ideal moment to bring up the question, but Pearl had already let it slip, and there was no taking it back now.

"What's wrong? Don't want me to leave?" Silas paused and turned around, his smile sinister and his voice casual.

Pearl sensed something familiar from his expression. He used to be tough and stubborn, but now it felt like they were back in the old days when they first met. He seemed simple and clingy. It wasn't exactly annoying, but Pearl wasn't sure how to handle it.

"No," she replied.

Although Silas probably expected that answer, he still didn't seem pleased. "Then why stop me?"

"Why are you colluding with him?"

Silas looked around, realizing they were being watched, so he lowered his voice. "Huh? Who am I colluding up with? Don't go accusing me like that."

"No point in playing dumb now," Pearl said, disappointed that he didn't have the courage to own up to his actions.

"Playing dumb?" Silas moved closer, cornering her. "What do you think I did?"

"Set up Richard."

His smile disappeared.

"Why? Does it hurt you? Are you scared I'll do something to him?" Silas's tone turned menacing.

Pearl frowned. "Why should I be scared? I'm worried you're being used by Hugo. You won't be able to undo your mistakes or have any regrets."

"How can you claim you don't care about me if you're so concerned?" He sounded narcissistic.

Pearl realized how delusional he was and decided not to engage further. "Got what you came for?" She was obviously trying to kick him out.

Silas raised an eyebrow and waved the bag of medicine he was holding. "I guess that's my cue to leave."

Pearl nodded and watched him leave. Relieved, she approached the pharmacist. "I'd like some pregnancy tests."

The pharmacist's expression seemed off, and Pearl noticed.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," the pharmacist stammered, handing over what she requested and giving instructions on how to use them.

Pearl squinted. "Do you know who I am?"

The pharmacist started sweating. "No, I don't. Why would I know you?"

"Don't tell anyone I bought these pregnancy tests," Pearl said, feeling anxious. If news got out about her pregnancy, Hugo could use it against her, and things could get messy.

It didn't matter if the pharmacist recognized her. The warning was just a precaution.

The pharmacist nodded, then shook his head. "I'll keep your privacy safe, but honestly, I don't know who you are, so don't worry."