

Your Guise 1031

Chapter 1031

Pearl even wore a mask, trusting the pharmacist's honesty, and left with the pregnancy tests.

After she left, the doctor took out a phone from his pocket, hands trembling, and replied, "I'm sure you've heard what you wanted to..."

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Back home, Pearl took the test.

When two red lines appeared, her heart sank. She was pregnant.

She wasn't ready to be a mom, so this caught her by surprise. Her first reaction was to call Richard, but then Richard came back.

Watching him quickly walk into the living room, Pearl's heart raced.

"Richard, I'm..." She couldn't bring herself to say the word 'pregnant.'

But seeing Richard's troubled expression, Pearl decided not to burden him and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Just some issues with the company," Richard said, massaging his temples to ease his headache. "It's nothing. Don't worry about it."

Knowing Richard's usual calm demeanor, his reaction indicated a serious problem. Pearl asked, "What happened? Maybe I can help you."

"Silas. He leaked all our company's information to Lawson Enterprises. They beat us to developing our concepts and designs."

Pearl was enraged. "Silas needs to be put in his place!"

Taking a deep breath to calm herself, she realized she never expected Silas to stoop so low. She had hoped he had some conscience, but she was wrong!

"I'll go speak to him."

Silas had been with the company for a long time, so if this continued, Waldorf Enterprises would be in big trouble.

Richard shook his head. "No, don't. It might make things worse."

Everyone knew Silas and Hugo had feelings for Pearl. However, Hugo was more cunning than Silas, allowing the latter to do the unsavory tasks while Hugo manipulated him, ensuring his own hands remained clean.

"How do we deal with this then?"

"Let's observe and prepare. We need to see his next move."

Pearl didn't like it. Silas didn't care about consequences, and things could escalate dangerously.

"Why don't I just talk to him?"

Richard understood what she meant. "Are you still trying to save him?"

Pearl could only smile. "Not exactly save him. I just believe he's not inherently bad, just manipulated."

"Are you doing this because you like him?" Richard's frustration with the situation led him to question Pearl's intentions.

Pearl felt hurt by Richard's suspicion. "That's who I am to you?"

Realizing his mistake, Richard tried to clarify, "That's not what I mean."

Pearl scoffed. "Do you really think I have feelings for him?"

Chapter 1032

Richard didn't feel like explaining and just coldly responded, "Isn't that it? What do you mean then?"

"I don't want to talk to you anymore," Pearl snapped, storming off upstairs in anger. She completely forgot she was about to share the news of their pregnancy with him.

Hearing the door slam, Richard felt even more irritated. He didn't have the energy to try and comfort her, so after lingering for a while, he left the house.

As Pearl stewed in her anger, she glanced outside to see Richard driving away, which only fueled her fury.

"You're an *sshole, Richard. You don't even appreciate what you have!"

Her emotions were all over the place, perhaps amplified by her pregnancy.

"I don't see the point in having this child. Your dad doesn't even care about me, so why would he care about you?"

The idea of aborting the child crossed her mind. She wasn't ready to be a mother, and Richard's attitude disappointed her. But she quickly pushed the thought away, recognizing it as irresponsible.

Sighing, she buried her head under the covers, wallowing in her frustration, when her phone rang.

Answering it, she heard Esther's anxious voice on the other end.

"Pearl, something happened."

Pearl sat up. "What?"

"The news is saying I was so sad during Mobius's funeral because I still can't let him go."

Pearl hadn't considered this angle, realizing it could paint Esther as a devoted partner. However, she only cared what James would think. If he found out, he would be even more disappointed.

"Are you getting negative comments about it?"

Esther hesitated before shaking her head. "Not many. They're mostly saying I'm loyal."

Pearl sighed in relief. "That's not so bad then."

"But James—"

Understanding her worry, Pearl interjected with a reassuring tone, "Did he explain to you when he brought the woman to his firm?"

Esther admitted he hadn't.

"He didn't bother explaining. If he's okay with you getting the wrong idea, why should you stress about it?"

Esther calmed down when she realized that. "You're right, Pearl. If he didn't do it, why should I worry?" Her anger started to rise. "I should show him I can do better and make him jealous. Hmph. That'll teach him for treating me like this."

"Okay, but don't overdo it," Pearl advised.

She decided not to mention her visit to James. If Esther knew and understood James's reasons, she might run back to him without a second thought.

Chapter 1033

"But don't stress about it. It might turn out for the best. Maybe he'll come back to you in a few days." Pearl could see James breaking character and rushing to see Esther.

"Who? James?" Esther was elated at the thought. "If he shows up, I'll set him straight."

Before she could say more, someone called for her to start her scene, abruptly ending their conversation. "Oh, Pearl, the director needs me. Gotta go. Talk to you later, okay?"

Pearl agreed and hung up.

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Esther anticipated his arrival but didn't expect it to happen so quickly. Within an hour after her phone call, a familiar face showed up at the door.

Engaged in an emotional scene with the male lead, Esther was pleased to see the familiar face filled with anger.

So, he was capable of feeling anger.

Diving deeper into her character, Esther acted with intensified emotions.

Esther had always been good-looking. Dressed in a beautiful gown with her hair elegantly styled, she embodied the charming daughter of a lord from the past. With her captivating gaze, even the male lead found himself smitten, nearly forgetting his lines.

"Theo, you promised you'd marry me after returning from war. You have to keep your promise," Esther pleaded, clutching his sleeve as tears filled her eyes. Any man would lose control.

Theo gazed into her eyes and reassured, "Fear not, I won't let you down."

As he leaned in for a kiss, Esther closed her eyes, anticipating the moment. But instead, chaos ensued.

Opening her eyes, Esther saw James suddenly beside her, pushing the male lead aside.

The male lead, flustered and unfriendly, confronted James. "Excuse me, why are you interrupting our shoot?"

Finally having the chance to get close to Esther, the male lead felt thwarted by James's intrusion. No one would be pleased about it.

James wore a smile, but his words lacked joy. "I'm an investor. Please get a new actor for the lead role."

The male lead, unaware of James's identity, paled in shock. "I had no idea. I'm terribly sorry. Please don't replace me..." he pleaded, regretting his actions.

This period piece was his big break, and he had put in a lot of effort. Losing this opportunity would be devastating for him.

Now realizing his shot at fame was slipping away, he cared less about the chance to kiss Esther. Sensing there was something going on between James and her, he tried to play it smart. "I can skip the kissing scene. Please don't replace me..."

Observing his desperation, Esther lost interest in working with him. She glanced at him coldly. "There's no point continuing when you look so pathetic. You should go back to farming."

The male lead forced a smile, realizing arguing with her at this moment wouldn't help. He decided to play dumb, hoping James might give him another chance.

"You showed up before I decided what to do with you?" James stared at Esther, making her feel uncomfortable.

Chapter 1034

"I thought we're done? I told you not to come see me anymore." Esther remembered what he said to her, her tone filled with anger.

James paid little heed to her words, his gaze piercing as if he was trying to see through her. "Can you explain what happened online?"

Esther immediately understood what Pearl meant. She scoffed and tidied up her dress. "That's just publicity. What does it have to do with me?"

"Are you saying you weren't crying over him?" James's sharp mind saw through her facade. "You were crying over me, weren't you?" His smirk was subtle but knowing.

Esther felt uneasy at being found out but attempted to deny it. "How could it be about you?"

James raised his eyebrows. "Then give me a logical explanation."

"It has nothing to do with you," Esther admitted defeat. "Fine, the publicity team was right. I was crying over Mobius. He was my ex, and he meant a lot to me... Obviously, I was upset about his passing."

She didn't anticipate how this confession would affect James. Without a word, he turned to the director. "Pause the shoot. I need to talk to her."

Esther panicked. "I'm fine. There's nothing to discuss."

"If you want to stay on the show, you'll come with me," James threatened, leveraging her job against her, a tactic Esther hadn't anticipated. Reluctantly, she followed him out.

Outside, the wind made Esther shiver. Her thin dress offered little protection, and in the cold, she sneezed. "Achoo!"

Seeing her discomfort, James took off his coat and wrapped it around her.

"I don't want your coat," Esther protested, removing it, but immediately regretted it as the cold air hit her.

She awkwardly put the coat back on, and James looked amused.

Rubbing her hands together, Esther glared. "Why did you come here? Is it just because of that?"

"Yes," James replied, causing her discomfort with his quick admission.

Esther was at a loss for words. "I already told you it's because of him."

James forced her next to the railing, his gaze intense. "Are you sure you didn't say that to annoy me?"

In the past, Esther might have broken down and apologized, but not today. Summoning her courage, she pushed him away.

Chapter 1035

"What the hell is wrong with you? You're the one who went on dates, and you're the one who was giving me the cold shoulder. Why do you think it's okay to treat me like this?" Esther felt aggrieved.

This man was manipulating her and trying to shut her out. Why was he suddenly interrogating her as if she was the one at fault?

She thought James was a selfish man.

"I have my reasons."

Esther burst into laughter. "If you truly had reasons, you could just tell me. I'm genuinely curious. Let's see how much of a burden you're carrying and how unreasonable I am." She placed her hands on her hips, expecting his explanation to fall short.

James rubbed his forehead, feeling helpless at her reaction. It was a serious matter, but somehow Esther's response made it seem comical, even though she wasn't trying to be funny.

"I'm doing this to protect you," he finally explained.

Esther's eyes grew wide. "Protect me?"

"My parents arranged a marriage for me when I was a child, with a girl named Sabrina."

Esther noted the name, Sabrina. She was a renowned diplomat, highly accomplished at a young age. Esther didn't display any emotions upon hearing the name, but the revelation of a marriage arrangement since childhood surprised her.

"A marriage agreement since you were a child?"

"Yes, it was just a joke to my parents back then. They didn't take it seriously, but Sabrina's parents were determined for her to marry me, so..."

Esther felt sympathy. "So your parents couldn't handle the pressure and hoped you two would get to know each other. Is that why you went on the blind date?"

James didn't confirm explicitly, but his silence was telling.

"Well, if that's what your parents want, then you should spend time with her," Esther said sadly. "I'm just an actress. Your family wouldn't approve of someone like me."

Sabrina was a diplomat—young, accomplished, and outstanding. Any family would be proud to have her. Who would want their son to marry a mere actress?

James felt a surge of anger at her words. "So you're just giving me up?" He had been putting effort into their relationship, yet she seemed ready to give up.

"But I think—" Esther began, tears welling up. If James had a great choice for a fiancée, why would he want her?

"I know you'd feel inferior after hearing about Sabrina. I get it," James said with a hint of amusement at her expression. "But do you know we've grown up together and know everything about each other? There's no romantic feelings between us..."

Esther realized she was feeling sad for no reason. "Does that mean she's interested in someone else?"

She couldn't believe it. Was Sabrina's high standards the reason?

James looked angry. "No, we're just not interested in each other!"

Chapter 1036

Not interested in each other...

Esther looked at James from head to toe and couldn't hold in her laughter. "She didn't think you were good enough..."

"You're right. Sabrina's lover is abroad and has yet to return. She went on a date without her parents knowing. We both decided to sabotage this to show our parents we can't be together."

Esther never imagined this turn of events.

"My parents are looking into my relationship, and they'll eventually find out about you. I've been keeping my distance from you intentionally to protect you. I couldn't tell you because I needed it to seem genuine. If you knew, it might've messed things up."

James truly had her best interests at heart.

Esther suddenly felt guilty when she realized that, but her pride prevented her from admitting fault. "Fine. But aren't you worried things might go wrong now that you've told me?"

James was both irritated and amused. "If I didn't tell you, I might lose my future wife."

Hiding this from Esther was his biggest mistake. If he had foreseen this, he would've told her from the start to prevent her from overthinking.

"Um... I guess I was a bit stupid, but did you have to rub it in?" Esther scratched her face, embarrassed.

"Can you tell me why you were crying so sadly at Mobius's funeral now? You were even caught on camera." James couldn't shake off that image.

"I... Okay, I'll admit it. I suddenly missed you, and that's why I was so upset. It wasn't planned. You were so cold to me, and when I saw Pearl, I couldn't hold back the tears..."

James couldn't blame her when he saw how genuinely sorrowful she looked. He was at fault for not disclosing the truth to her.

"Okay, I forgive you."

Esther rolled her eyes. "What do you mean you forgive me? If you'd told me, none of this would've happened." She felt blindsided by how quickly his feelings had changed.

"Who wanted a breakup in the first place, huh?" James couldn't forget what she said during her recovery. Admittedly, what he did was a risky move, but she was the one who started it.

His glance was enough to make Esther feel guilty. "I..." She ran out of excuses and simply hung her head. "Okay, I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

"Are you going to break up with me again?"

Esther shook her head. "I won't just break up with you again."

James wasn't happy with that reply. "Just?"

"No, I will never break up with you again," Esther vowed, having learned her lesson and determined not to cross that line again.

James finally smiled and gently patted her head. "Do you know another mistake you made?"

"What?" Esther had no idea.

Chapter 1037

James looked at Esther's attire, a dress adorned with gold trimmings that made her look stunning. He grew a bit impatient. "Don't you think that actor has any intentions toward you?"

The way he looked at Esther wasn't just admiration for her pretty face. It was more like the desire a man would have for a woman.

"No. We've known each other for years. Why would he suddenly develop feelings for me? You're overthinking this. We've worked together, so of course, we'd interact..." Esther thought he was exaggerating and because of the scene where they were supposed to kiss.

But James grew even more upset after hearing her response. "Men understand other men better." He shook his head. "So I've decided to get you a different male lead."

He had watched parts of the show and found it promising. It could boost Esther's popularity, but the male lead wasn't great. He had to go.

"You're really an investor?"

James took a deep breath, unsure of how to respond. How stupid was the woman he loved?

Esther didn't believe he was an investor. She thought he just made it up to scare her.

"I've invested in all the shows you've been in since your first one," James revealed.

Esther was stunned, her jaw dropping. "What... what did you say?"

"I pay much more attention to you than you realize," he admitted, his actions far more significant than she could have imagined.

Unfortunately, this silly girl would never fully grasp it. She did as she pleased, disregarding his feelings and saying things that hurt him.

But what could he do? He dug his own grave, so now he had to lie in it.

"I was surprised by how quickly you fell for me. This is amazing. It wasn't love at first sight at all..."
Esther murmured as she tried to process the information.

It was unexpected and unnerving.

"So, stop doubting my feelings for you, okay?"

Esther suddenly asked, "How long have you had feelings for me?"

James grabbed her shoulders, locking eyes with her. "Since you were sixteen. Four years. Not a single day went by without me liking you."

Sixteen was the year she had fallen for Mobius. She had been smitten, wanting to spend every second with him.

"What do you like about me then?" Esther asked, feeling a bit bashful. She had a secret crush herself, and she wanted to know how it felt for someone to crush on her too.

Countless men secretly admired her, but she thought none of them compared to James.

Also...

"Do you think knowing all this would help you control me?" James suddenly realized what Esther was trying to do.

Chapter 1038

"Oh, you caught me..." Esther felt James's breath on her ear, causing a ticklish sensation. "If you don't want to tell, I'll stop asking."

It wouldn't be good if James got angry over this.

"The first time we met was in Yole City."

Esther tried to recall her time in Yole City when she was sixteen. Yes, before turning sixteen, she had lived there.

The Sanders family had business in Yole City at the time. Situated in the south, it was a bustling city with a hint of tranquility. Their ancestors owned grand historical mansions, and Esther resided in one of them during her time in Yole City.

"But I can't remember..."

James glanced at her, looking sad. "So you don't remember me, huh?"

Esther blushed. No, she had no memory of James and suspected he might be making it up.

"You were about fourteen and still attending school. One day, on your way there, you bumped into a boy. Do you recall?"

A boy? Esther shook her head.

"I was out with my parents, and when we arrived in Yole City, I lost sight of them in the crowd. As I searched for them, I encountered two human-traffickers. One of them noticed my nice clothes and, after some hesitation, he grabbed me and took off."

James didn't seem worried; rather, he looked like he was reminiscing.

"Then, there was a girl on the bridge. I'm not sure why, but I suddenly felt brave and shouted, 'Fatty, help me.'"

Fatty...

Esther's awkwardness disappeared, replaced by anger. She remembered. She remembered everything!

During puberty, Esther had gained quite a bit of weight, resembling a ball at one point. Despite being teased by classmates, she remained confident. So, when someone called her "fatty," she exploded.

Though only fourteen, she stood at five feet two, nearly the same height as the traffickers. She grabbed the woman by her shirt, exuding an air of authority.

"Hold on, miss," Esther cleared her throat and said coldly, "I need to have a word with this fellow."

She then shot daggers at him.

The trafficker wasn't about to stop, so she waved Esther away.

"Miss, your child is very rude. He called me fatty. I know I'm a little overweight, but I don't think that's how he should talk to a lady. I need to educate him."

That made sense. James was hoping the girl would stall them, buying some time, so he watched eagerly as events unfolded.

The trafficker, realizing the situation was escalating, attempted to diffuse it. "It's just a misunderstanding. He's just a silly kid. I apologize on his behalf..."

With more people gathering to watch, the trafficker grew increasingly anxious. If the boy's parents appeared, they could end up in serious trouble.

"No." Esther declared firmly, standing her ground like a tiny hill.

Chapter 1039

"Haha!" James suddenly remembered something and burst out laughing.

Esther was puzzled. "Why are you laughing? Haven't you realized your mistake?"

James pointed at the two women beside him. "They're human traffickers."

The traffickers panicked and ran without bothering to take James with them.

"If you knew they were traffickers, why didn't you run?" Although Esther was young, she knew that when encountering traffickers, she should alert the police or call for help.

"Yelling wouldn't work because people would just think it's a family issue and wouldn't want to get involved. Calling you fatty would make you help me."

When Esther heard she was used, she felt annoyed. "What do you mean? You said that intentionally then?"

"Yes. But anyway, thank you, ma'am."

Ma'am...?

Esther was about to explode; her entire body shook. "Who are you talking to? Why can't you just respect me?"

She couldn't understand why she could shrug off others' teasing so easily, yet James seemed to get under her skin. Despite her plump figure, she possessed delicate features and fair skin, like high-quality white jade.

But when she faced James, with his handsome appearance, she felt at a loss for words. Unlike the boys who typically mocked her, she couldn't simply retort, "I look better than you even when I'm

chubby."

Even if she shed weight, she doubted she'd match his good looks.

Feeling a sense of inferiority she couldn't put into words, Esther looked at him with a mix of emotions before turning to leave.

"Wait. You saved my life, so at least tell me your name," James said, sensing her sadness and awkwardly attempting to ease the tension.

"My name is none of your business," Esther retorted sharply.

"Although I don't have a thing for fat girls, I owe you. I can grant you one wish."

Angered by his sarcasm, Esther wiped away her tears. "I never want to see you again." With that, she ran away, tears streaming down her face.

James was later found by his parents, and after a discussion, they decided Yole City wasn't a good place for a vacation and prepared to pack their bags.

That night, James scolded himself for his callousness. When he woke up the next morning, he asked his parents to find Esther. Armed with the knowledge of her school's emblem and a glimpse of her name in one of her books, he resolved to find her.

After his parents asked around and found she was the person who had saved their son, they wanted to express their gratitude. However, James stopped them.

Fifteen-year-old James had a plan. He stood outside the principal's office, looking toward the field where he saw Esther picking up another ball.

For some unknown reason, he wasn't disgusted. Despite her being somewhat chubby, he found her adorable.

"It's alright," he smirked. "I'll find a way to thank her properly someday."

Chapter 1040

After hearing James's revelation, Esther couldn't hide the awkwardness in her eyes. "So, after that..."

"I spent two years finishing all my university classes, then took over my dad's business," James explained. "I wanted to help you lose weight, but when I found out you already had and had become an actress, I bought all the magazines featuring you in your debut year. I played a big part in your rise to fame, about 80% of it."

Esther was dumbfounded by the unexpected confession. The more she thought about it, the more ridiculous it seemed.

"Why didn't you ever make yourself known?" she asked, intrigued by the presence of such a big financier supporting her without ever having heard of him.

"I wasn't planning to, especially after I found out you had fallen for Mobius," James admitted.

Esther's mind wandered back to memories of Mobius, who had been a significant presence in her past. She was young, and it would be difficult for her to forget him, who had stood up for her and occupied a huge part of her youth. So much so, that James, who had been secretly supporting her, never once appeared before her.

"Why didn't you give up on me once you knew I liked someone else?" she asked.

Knowing she was leading a good life, why wouldn't he drop everything and cut ties with her?

"I considered it. I planned to stop once you became an A-lister. But even then, I couldn't shake that chubby girl carrying a ball from my mind..."

Esther's face flushed with anger, and she impulsively punched James. "What? You're the one who was chubby!"

James chuckled, noticing how different Esther looked now. "I meant I accidentally fell for you and wanted to support you secretly, even until now."

"Don't underestimate my intelligence. I'm not falling for that."

James playfully pinched her nose. "I told you I would never lie to you anymore."

"Fine, then what do you plan to do after this?"

James shook his head and sighed. "You might not understand, but just trust me. I'll sort it out with Sabrina, so don't worry."

Esther's curiosity piqued. Although she didn't know Sabrina well, she had a good feeling about her. Sometimes it was just that easy for a girl to like someone. They could be beautiful, outstanding, nice, and not threatening, and that was good enough.

"Okay, if that's the case, I should go back to work?"

"If I had known about a kissing scene, I wouldn't have allowed it," James remarked, pinching the bridge of his nose. "I'll find you a new male lead and keep a close eye on the storyline."

"What..."

Esther was at a loss for words, so she just stuck out her tongue in response. Arguing with James was going to take too much effort.

"What should I do now then?" If she couldn't continue the shoot, her job might be at stake.