

Your Guise 1041

Chapter 1041

Esther's excitement vanished instantly.

"Take this time to rest. Try not to contact me unless necessary. Let's make it seem like we've ended our relationship, got it?" James instructed.

Esther's eyes lit up. "Well, isn't that my forte?"

Pretending they were strangers was just another acting gig, and Esther was confident in her acting skills.

Esther nodded, smiling brightly.

*

However, Esther didn't expect the drama to start so soon.

She was sleeping at home when a knock on the door jolted her awake. Opening it with sleepy eyes, she found herself face-to-face with a noble and beautiful woman.

The woman's eyes were slightly slanted, with few wrinkles, and she carried an air of sophistication.

"Are you Esther?" the woman inquired.

Esther was startled. She widened her eyes and nodded. "Yes, I'm Esther. What can I do for you?" Her voice trembled slightly, betraying her anxiety.

The woman frowned. "I'm James's mother, Agnes, and I came here to ask you something. Do you have time?"

Hearing she was James's mother, almost her future mother-in-law, Esther perked up, smiling. "Of course. However, I'm no longer with James, so if you want to know what's going on, I may not be able to help."

Esther didn't act like she would never see James again, in case they might pretend to get back together later. So, she needed to make sure James's mother wouldn't dislike her.

Politeness and keeping a distance were her strategies.

"That's quite alright." Agnes fixed her hair with a graceful flick of her hand. "I just wanted to know about your past with James. I only found out recently that he had a relationship."

Esther politely invited her in.

Looking around, Agnes frowned. "Uh... your family doesn't seem to be very well-off."

"Yeah. Please have a seat, ma'am." Esther warmly welcomed her and made her some tea. "My family may not be affluent, but rest assured, I hold no interest in James's wealth. My intentions are sincere."

Agnes chuckled at Esther's assurance. "Don't worry, James is smart. I'm sure he wouldn't be so foolish as to give away his family's wealth," she remarked with a knowing smile.

Were you sure about that? Your son had spent quite a lot of money on me.

Esther bit her tongue to stifle a retort, choosing to keep her thoughts private.

Clearing her throat, Agnes asked, "I'm curious, how did you two meet?"

Esther blinked. "Do you want to hear the truth or a lie? The truth might be surprising, like something from a novel. It even took me quite some time to accept it myself."

Agnes laughed heartily. "Of course, I want to hear the truth. I do enjoy hearing interesting stories."

Seeing that Agnes was open-minded and not arrogant, Esther candidly recounted everything from their childhood to their encounters, noticing that Agnes's eyes were brightening with interest.

Chapter 1042

"So, this is like a developmental plan, huh?"

Agnes looked surprised. She never expected Esther to be the one helping her son. Even more surprising was that her son's early inheritance and support for Esther's career were all to repay this small favor.

She had to admit it was quite interesting.

"Ma'am, are you mad?" Esther was brave to bring this up, but she still felt nervous. James had spent a lot of money on her over the years. Shouldn't his mother be mad when she heard about it?

"Why would I be mad?" Agnes chuckled, somewhat speechless. "Isn't it nice that you two are helping each other?"

Helping each other... Esther couldn't figure out what she had done to help James.

"Ma'am, I think you might have misunderstood. We've broken up, and I..."

Esther suddenly felt lost. If Agnes didn't mind them being together, why did they have to plan this breakup?

"I know... and I think it's a shame." Agnes sighed deeply, sipped tea, and added, "I think he really likes you, but I don't know why you two broke up. Why don't you talk to me about it?"

Esther swallowed nervously. "The reason we broke up is that he had to go on a blind date."

Agnes almost spat out her tea. But being well-educated, she didn't overreact. Instead, she calmly asked, "So, you're saying James, this jerk, mistreated you?"

James, a jerk...

Esther's mind was spinning. She didn't know why, but hearing these words from Agnes felt strange.

As Esther began to explain, there was a sudden knock on the door.

"I'll get it," Esther said apologetically, walking to the door and opening it to find herself enveloped in a warm hug from James, who had rushed over, relieved to see her unharmed.

"I'm glad you're okay," he said.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Esther was puzzled until she noticed Agnes behind her, and everything clicked. It seemed James knew about the situation and had come to support her. However...

"There's someone here," Agnes calmly noted.

Esther turned back and awkwardly pushed him away. "Your mom is still here, so please be mindful."

"Mom, I don't know why you came today, but we've broken up, so please don't bother her." James's voice turned cold. He seemed convinced that Agnes had come to threaten Esther, asking her to stay away.

Esther shook her head anxiously. "It's not what you think. You've misunderstood."

"You don't have to be afraid. I know you've been wronged. If she threatens you, you have to tell me."

"Oh, I thought you two had broken up? Is it that hard to let go?" Agnes chuckled, finding the situation amusing.

Chapter 1043

"Come on. I'm not as evil as you think." Agnes grabbed her bag and stood up. "But you two really shouldn't be together, and you already know why."

James gave her a cold look.

Esther was overwhelmed. How did the situation change so suddenly? Just moments ago, she was getting along well with Agnes.

"I believe I should be the one to decide about my relationships, so you don't need to worry about it."

Both mother and son stood their ground, neither willing to back down.

"No, you've misunderstood me," Agnes said, lifting her chin. "I don't want you two together because you're not good enough for her."

Esther couldn't help but gasp.

"You were in a good relationship with her, but you broke up just for a blind date. Esther is a nice girl, and she even saved your life. Is this how you treat someone who saved you?" Agnes clicked her tongue, her eyes full of disdain.

She never expected her son, whom she had raised, to have such bad morals, causing an innocent and kind girl like Esther to suffer.

Indeed, Esther looked so innocent and sincere. No wonder she was taken advantage of. Even now, she was still kept in the dark.

Agnes walked up to Esther and took her hand, her eyes full of kindness. "Esther, I can tell you're a nice girl from our conversation just now. You shouldn't hold onto him since he's treated you like this.

I know a lot of people, and I can share their contacts with you later. You can talk to them and let me know if you meet anyone you like. I'll help you out."

Was her future mother-in-law trying to set her up with someone else in front of her boyfriend? Esther couldn't quite believe what was happening.

But James caught on quickly, his face turning dark instantly. "What are you doing, mom?"

"I'm not doing anything. Since you don't want to cherish her, I'll find someone who will." At this point, Agnes had whipped out her phone. "Save my number, and I'll introduce you to someone."

Esther didn't know how to refuse her, so she reluctantly took out her phone and saved Agnes's number.

Seeing Esther saving Agnes's number, James grabbed her hand, looking displeased. "Esther, are you planning to cheat on me?"

Esther realized what was going on and shook her head. "No, it's fine, ma'am. I don't need it."

Agnes briskly withdrew her hands, crossing them over her chest. "See that? If I don't give you a push, you won't even tell me the truth, will you? You two were obviously getting along just fine. Why lie to me?"

Esther was afraid that James would be scolded, so she hurriedly explained, "That's not the case, ma'am. He's just worried about disappointing you and wants to let you gradually accept this matter."

Agnes snorted coldly. "Disappointing me? When his dad chased me back then, it was a big deal. He was so persistent that he even gave up his family business. Why is our son such a coward that he couldn't even protect the woman he likes?"

How frustrating!

Esther was embarrassed to say anything more and stood aside, staring at James with wide, round eyes as if saying she was helpless.

"I have my plans," James said calmly, looking at her.

Agnes instantly became unhappy. "What plans? You two just need to talk things out, and I'll take care of the rest."

Her son was unreliable. She was losing her future daughter-in-law, so she had to step in.

Chapter 1044

Richard and Pearl had given each other the silent treatment for three days.

At first, Richard didn't realize his mistake. He tried to hug her from behind, but she remained cold and distant, making him realize that something was off.

"Are you mad?"

Pearl turned away, sounding tired. "I'm going to bed."

Richard looked at her briefly, grabbed a blanket, and went to the guest room. They started sleeping in separate rooms without any clear reason.

Usually, during the day, it was just Richard and Pearl at home, and Richard would wake up early to make breakfast for Pearl. However, he didn't do anything today. Pearl sighed when she woke up and saw the empty, cold dining table.

Their relationship seemed to be facing some serious issues.

However, she was determined not to back down this time, especially being pregnant. She hoped that Richard would apologize to her.

After three days of waiting without any sign of him giving in, Pearl didn't get what she hoped for. Instead, she received a phone call.

"Long time no see, Pearl," Hugo's voice was clear and warm. "I have something to tell you. Is Richard with you?"

"No," Pearl responded curtly, annoyed at the mention of Richard.

"Good. I want to ask you out for dinner. Is that alright?"

"I'm busy."

"I know you're pregnant now, so maybe you're not in the best mood, but others might not be so understanding."

Pregnant?

Pearl clenched her fist. "How did you find out about this?"

"You don't have to worry about how I know. But if others find out, you might need to be more careful."

That was a blatant threat. Although Pearl didn't know how he learned about her pregnancy, it was certainly a leverage he could use against her. The Jordans would surely come after her if someone found out she was pregnant.

Anyone who had a grudge against her would also seize this opportunity.

Pearl was confident she could protect her child, but if this matter involved Hugo, she wasn't so sure anymore.

Hugo knew she was Saule's daughter. He would get in the way and use their misunderstandings to his advantage. So, if she was pregnant with Richard's child and Hugo manipulated the situation, it would be like she was carrying her cousin's child.

She could withstand all of this except her child facing criticism. It was truly frustrating to be at Hugo's mercy all the time.

Pearl wanted to reject his invitation, but she couldn't be too harsh for this reason.

"I'm not free."

"You don't seem worried at all," Hugo said, swirling his wine glass and grinning. "But that's okay. Since you're unwilling to come over, I'll come to you now."

Pearl frowned. "Are you crazy? I'm at Waldorf Residence right now."

"Not only do I know you're at home, but I also know that Richard isn't there."

After a flurry of activity on Hugo's end, Pearl heard the sound of a car engine starting.

Chapter 1045

"Fine. Don't come here." Pearl took a deep breath, trying to keep her emotions in check. "Tell me where, and I'll meet you there."

"I knew you'd agree," Hugo said confidently with a smirk. "Let's go to Casa del Sur. That place is nice, and I remember you love their exotic dishes."

Pearl felt a headache coming on. Dealing with Hugo always made her feel disgusted. "I don't like them. You got it wrong."

"Take your time since you're pregnant now. No rush. I'll see you in an hour," he said before hanging up.

Pearl quickly got ready and didn't bother with makeup. She headed straight to the place they had agreed to.

Hugo was already waiting at the restaurant. When he saw her, his eyes briefly showed infatuation before quickly disappearing.

Remembering that Pearl was pregnant, he put out his cigarette and opened the window.

Pearl sat down, keeping her distance. "What do you want from me this time, Hugo? You won't drug me like you did last time, will you?"

Hugo shook his head, chuckled, and shamelessly admitted to the incident. "Last time was indeed impulsive, but I really miss you this time. I want to talk to you."

"I've told you countless times. I have nothing to discuss with you."

Hugo shook his head. "No, I came here today because of your pregnancy."

Pearl immediately became alert. She clutched her stomach and looked wary. "You're not planning to harm my child, are you?"

Hugo sighed. "I know I'm not a good person, but I've never wanted to hurt you. There's no need for you to be so defensive."

Although Hugo's character was questionable, he had never directly harmed her.

Pearl nodded. "What do you want to know?"

"I found out about your pregnancy from Silas."

Pearl's memory of her meeting with Silas at the pharmacy suddenly clicked, and she understood everything. After pondering it for a moment, her fondness for Silas decreased somewhat.

"But I suggest that you don't keep this child." Hugo's tone was firm, as if Pearl giving birth to this child would be the end of the world.

"It's none of your business whether I keep this child or not, right?" Pearl almost admitted she had considered giving up the child, but she didn't want others involved.

"You're a smart woman, Pearl. I've always known that," Hugo said, pausing to look at her bare face with regret, then continued slowly, "But do you know how much this child will affect you?"

Pearl's expression hardened. "I know."

"No, you don't. If you did, you wouldn't argue with me." Hugo knew she was stubborn. He then softened his tone, making it easier for Pearl to accept what he said.

"First off, having this baby couldn't have come at a worse time. You and Richard are both at the peak of your careers. Are you really going to give up your career to raise a child? Can you do that?"

"Second, your biological dad has gone missing. Even if you prove you're not related to Richard, people will gossip. If your child is born, they'll have to deal with rumors of inbreeding. Is that what's best for them?"

"Third, and most importantly, your body isn't ready for childbirth."

Pearl's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

Chapter 1046

Pearl was aware of her poor health. That was one of the reasons she was carefully considering whether to keep the child.

However, from Hugo's tone, it seemed he believed her body couldn't handle the childbirth.

Pearl clenched her fists, maintaining her composure. "What else do you know?"

"I know more than you think. I'm here to remind you because I don't want anything to happen to you," Hugo said with genuine concern.

Pearl was skeptical, and she wasn't about to be swayed by his empty promises. "Well, you better give me a good reason for that."

"Do you believe what I've said?"

"I'll try."

Pearl suddenly realized Hugo expected her to doubt him, which is why he hadn't shared this information earlier.

Hugo smiled wryly. "I knew you wouldn't believe me, but for your health's sake, I have to tell you. When Mister Howard treated you, he was cautious because, even though you look fine, your body couldn't handle the stress of childbirth."

"So you're saying he orchestrated this to prevent me from getting back with Richard?" Pearl felt her heart sink, as the thought had never crossed her mind. She hadn't realized Howard was so cunning.

"You could interpret it that way," Hugo replied, his expression turning serious. "No matter what, you can't keep this child."

"Hugo." Pearl looked up, her eyes betraying a hint of suspicion. "I believe your motives run deeper than that."

Hugo looked embarrassed. "What do you mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean. You know what I'm talking about." Pearl took a deep breath, feeling irritated. "I know what's best for me. I don't need you interfering."

With that, she stood up, slammed the door, and left.

After leaving the restaurant, Pearl's mood calmed slightly. She touched her belly, appearing calm but panicked inside.

Hugo's words were a mix of truth and lies. She knew her body couldn't handle this child, especially considering her recent discomfort.

As for his intentions, he probably didn't want her to have the baby out of selfishness.

Pearl's thoughts were in turmoil. Then, a person came to mind, and her eyes slowly lit up with realization.

Three hours later, Pearl arrived at a villa's doorstep on the city's outskirts. She handed the driver a few bills and said softly, "Keep the change."

The driver was overjoyed, thanking her profusely before driving off.

Pearl straightened her clothes, took a few steps forward, and gently knocked on the door. After three knocks, no one answered.

Frowning, Pearl pushed the door open. It wasn't locked, indicating someone was home.

After thinking for a moment, Pearl went to the backyard, where she found an older man bent over, tending to the flowerbed. Standing on the steps, she called out casually, "Hey, old man."

Chapter 1047

Simon hadn't seen Pearl in a long time, so when he heard her familiar voice from behind, it startled him, almost causing him to drop his shovel on his foot.

"What's up? What brings you here today? Have you finally decided to be a full-time doctor?" Simon wiped the sweat from his forehead, put away his tools, and grabbed a bottle of water, taking a sip.

"I'm pregnant." Pearl blurted out, causing Simon to choke on his water.

"Pfft..."

Simon was so shocked he couldn't speak, just pointing at her with a trembling hand. "How did that —"

"I'm just thinking if I should keep this baby or not," Pearl said, looking lost.

Simon stared at her flat belly, speaking seriously, "Your health doesn't seem all that great. Maybe you should consider giving up."

"Is there a chance or any way to keep the baby?" Pearl asked, staring at him, feeling he must have a solution.

Simon picked a clover and played with it gently. "I think it's best not to have the child for now." He had treated Pearl like his own daughter over the years. How could he stand by and watch her sacrifice herself for the baby?

"Why?" Pearl asked knowingly, leaving Simon speechless.

"Don't you know the reasons? Your health has never been great. If you force yourself to give birth to this child, I'm afraid it might be fatal for both of you."

As his apprentice, Pearl has never been in good health. Before this, he could prescribe some remedies for her, but now that she was pregnant and the baby needed nutrients, Pearl had visibly lost weight.

"Look at you now. Have you lost more weight...? Seriously, how does Richard take care of you to make you this thin?"

Simon empathized with Pearl, but his attempt at comfort was somewhat clumsy. "If you ask me, you'd be better off marrying that young man from the Scotts. At least he genuinely cares about you. I've seen the way he looked after you during those years abroad..."

Bringing up Damian made Pearl uncomfortable. "I'm married now. Besides, it's all in the past. Let's not bring it up again. Just tell me, can I keep this child?"

Simon frowned and sighed. "It's going to be difficult."

"What are the odds?"

"Below eighty percent." Simon noticed her distraught expression and couldn't help but console her. "It's okay. You're still young, which means there's plenty of time for children. There's no need to hurry for a baby right now. Once your health is alright, you'll be able to have as many as you wish."

Pearl nodded, still feeling heavy-hearted. "I got it."

"Don't worry too much. You're just not ready to have a baby now. It doesn't mean you'll never have one." Simon thought she was being too pessimistic.

Pearl looked at her belly, where the baby was barely a month old, and felt a spark of life that she could sense in her soul.

This was her and Richard's first child, yet to be born, but already facing the possibility of being snuffed out. It was heartbreaking to think about that.

Pearl stroked her belly, feeling a pang of sadness.

"For your health, it's best to end it sooner than later." Simon patted her shoulder gently. "I'll go get you some medicine for your recovery. Once you've had the abortion, come back to me. I'll make sure to take care of your health."

Chapter 1048

Pearl hesitated at the hospital entrance. The baby in her belly seemed to sense its fate and suddenly twitched.

She couldn't help but chuckle. The baby was barely a month old, not even fully formed. It was just her imagination.

"There you are, Pearl," a familiar voice came from behind.

Pearl turned to see Hugo. This guy wouldn't give up!

Hugo saw the papers in her hand, and his expression softened. "Are you here for an abortion?"

"It's none of your business," Pearl said, trying to avoid his gaze on her belly.

"Pearl, you should have listened to me and gotten rid of this baby... but it's not too late today. I'll get the best doctor for you, so you don't have to worry about it..." Hugo said, his expression disturbingly obsessive.

Pearl frowned in disgust. "I don't need your help!"

"It's okay, just leave it to me," Hugo said smugly before leaving.

Pearl's resolve to do the procedure here completely vanished. As she turned to leave, she encountered someone standing at the hospital entrance, towering with an inscrutable expression.

She couldn't describe the feeling. Perhaps it was guilt, or maybe it was helplessness. Nonetheless, she involuntarily moved toward him.

Standing before him, Pearl took a deep breath and tentatively asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I should be the one asking you that." Richard's voice was icy, devoid of emotion.

"Did you hear everything?" Pearl forced a bitter smile. "Have you heard all my conversations with him?"

"What's the matter? Are you planning to hide something from me and do something with him?"
Richard's fingertips turned white with anger.

"I never meant to keep anything from you. I just couldn't find the right moment to tell you," Pearl said, staring intensely at the man before her, the father of her child, as a surge of panic overtook her.

Richard glanced in the direction Hugo had left, his expression turning angry. "You couldn't find the right moment to tell me, but you had the opportunity to tell him, huh? When did you two get so close?"

"It's not what you think. You know I've never liked him..."

Pearl tried to explain, but Richard cut her off. "There's no need for explanations. You know what's best."

He looked at her flat belly and asked, "You're pregnant with my child, but you don't want to keep him, right?"

Pearl opened her mouth but couldn't speak. She didn't know how to explain it to him at that moment. Looking at his indifferent attitude, she lost all desire to explain. Their trust was so thin that it made her feel helpless.

"Okay, I get what you mean." Richard frowned. "Don't worry. If you don't want to keep my child, you don't have to."

Pearl's face turned pale. "Richard!"

"If you find our marriage difficult, then we should—"

"Do you have to say such things?" Pearl felt her breathing was becoming difficult. She leaned against the wall for support. "I know you can't understand me right now, but can you please just trust me?"

"I don't know how I can do that," Richard replied, his hand in his pockets, stepping back. "I won't stop you from having an abortion. I'm leaving."

He turned around, his steps stumbling unintentionally.

Chapter 1049

Richard was experiencing just as much pain as Pearl was. She was pregnant with their child, but she wanted to get an abortion without any explanation.

Richard's mind was a mess. To avoid saying something hurtful, he decided to leave. Having figured this out, he quickened his pace.

When he reached the corner, he glanced back and saw Pearl crouched, hands covering her face and curled up into a tiny ball. He knew she must be crying.

He took a deep breath and made a phone call. "Hey."

"What's up? What can I do for you?"

"Could you come to the hospital to be with Pearl? She's here."

"Hospital?!" The voice on the other end grew louder. "Why is she alone in the hospital?"

"She's having an abortion. Can you come and keep her company for a while?"

"Abortion?! Is Pearl pregnant? Why does she want to abort the child?"

"I don't know, but she must have her reasons."

"Why do you sound so angry?" Esther was furious, her tone rising. "Are you her husband, or am I? Shouldn't you be the one there with her?"

How could he avoid taking responsibility at this point?! Esther found Richard utterly despicable. Despite her thoughts, she quickly got up to pack her things, preparing to go to the hospital.

"We had a little disagreement, and she might not want to see me for now."

"You're a grown man. Why are you being so dramatic?" Esther scolded him as she put on her coat.

Richard gave her the hospital's address and hung up. When he looked back again, Pearl was nowhere to be seen.

*

Esther couldn't reach Pearl's phone as she had moved to another hospital. Pearl wasn't confident she could undergo the abortion calmly under Hugo's watchful eyes.

Lying on the operating table, Pearl stared at the bright light above, her eyelids heavy. She had just been injected with anesthesia, and as the needle pricked her skin, she felt a gentle sting, which reminded her of Richard. He was probably still angry with her right now.

He must be thinking that she was heartlessly aborting the child they had been hoping for so long. She was the cruelest person in the world.

A bitter and intolerable sensation weighed on her heart, but she couldn't resist the drowsiness. The anesthesia was starting to take effect.

She felt her body slowly floating, and there was a sense of emptiness in her lower abdomen, as if something had been taken out. Her body felt much lighter. It felt like she was dreaming.

About half an hour later, she slowly opened her eyes. The surgery was over. She got up, feeling only some discomfort.

"The procedure was a success, ma'am. Have a good rest when you go back," the nurse comforted her softly.

Her child was gone. That realization struck Pearl with stark clarity.

Chapter 1050

But right now, Pearl wasn't in the mood to mourn her child. Her mind was so chaotic that she didn't even know what she was thinking.

The nurse gave her instructions, but she didn't listen to them.

When she left the ward, Pearl saw someone standing at the door, and tears immediately welled up in her eyes.

"Pearl..." Esther asked, opening her arms for Pearl to hug her.

It was the first time Esther had seen Pearl look so weak. Usually, Pearl was the protector, but today, she seemed like a broken doll.

"Does it hurt, Pearl?" Although Esther hadn't had a child, she knew that Pearl would feel uncomfortable after the abortion. She could only comfort her softly, tears streaming down her face like Pearl's.

Pearl smiled and touched her face. "Why are you crying? It's not like you had the surgery."

"I'm just worried about you," Esther said, realizing her voice was choked up. She gritted her teeth.

"Richard has really gone out of line. Today was your surgery day, and he caused all of this. I'm starting to wonder if you married the wrong man."

"Did Richard ask you to come over?" Pearl picked up on the crucial detail.

"Yeah, he said he dared not come to see you because you hated him. But from what I can tell, he's just a coward!" Esther took off her coat and draped it over Pearl. "Let's go. You can stay at my place for a few days."

Before her marriage, Pearl had never stayed at Esther's place, and there seemed no reason for her to do so, especially after getting married. But today, after hearing Esther's invitation, Pearl found herself inexplicably nodding in agreement. "I need to make a call first."

Esther sighed, feeling frustrated. "After all he's done to you, you're still worried about his feelings."

Pearl lowered her head and dialed a number on her phone. After three rings, a voice came from the other end. "Hello."

"I'm not going home tonight. I'm staying at Esther's place."

"Okay, stay safe."

After hearing this, Pearl responded with an 'okay' and hung up the phone.

*

Listening to the busy tone, Richard's eyelids felt heavy. He picked up his glass and downed the rest of the drink, the alcohol staining his lips and dripping down his chin.

The room was filled with empty bottles, and he had drunk quite a bit, seeming to be drowsy. He instinctively wanted to say no when he received that call earlier.

But what right did he have to demand anything from her?

To Pearl, he must be a heartless jerk now, always thinking he knew best without considering her feelings. He didn't deserve to be her husband if he couldn't even agree to such a simple request.

So, Richard's words took a turn at the last moment, saying, "Okay, stay safe."

The long silence on the other end made him think he had done something wrong, but all he got was a simple 'okay' and then silence.

Richard felt panicked. He was about to speak when the other end hung up. He stared at his phone screen, wanting to call back, but couldn't press the button.

So he set his phone aside and started drinking on his own.

He downed one bottle, then another, drinking until he was completely wasted. He sat by the floor-to-ceiling window on the ground floor, gazing at the moonlight below, and it was only then that he realized it was already evening.

Feeling the alcohol hit him hard and in pain, he fumbled for his phone and managed to see the time displayed on it: eight in the evening. Unknowingly, he had been drinking for four hours.

Richard staggered to his feet, his vision blurry. Although he was drunk, he was still conscious. He was going crazy thinking about Pearl.

He leaned against the couch, took out his phone, and dialed Pearl's number. She didn't answer the first call, so Richard tried again.