

## **YOUR GUISE 151**

### Chapter 151

Esther's face turned red with embarrassment. With her thoughts and feelings now exposed, things

became

awkward.

"Alright, time to go. Pearl, would you like to join us?" Tyler seemed to have forgotten his recent

behavior and appeared comfortable around Pearl.

"No, you go ahead."

Tyler pouted, then turned and left.

Esther looked at Pearl's calm expression and patted her shoulder. "I know you must feel bad after what

happened. Don't worry, the truth will come out and you'll be vindicated."

"I know."

'Anyway, since I snuck in here and can't sit with them, why don't you sit with me so we can talk?'

Esther looked at her excitedly.

Pearl was about to decline when her phone started ringing. Wayne called to inform her that an urgent

matter required his attention at the office, so he wouldn't be able to drink with her.

"See, even your friend can't hang out with you now. You might as well keep me company!"

Esther then dragged Pearl to a table not too far away and took a seat. She sat there with her chin

resting on her hands, gazing at Mobius, who was in a dark corner.

"Este, what do you see in Mobius?" Pearl was curious how a proud woman like Esther could be

attracted to a hothead like Mobius. The first time she met him, she almost felt like strangling him.

"Oh, me?" Esther had to go far back into the past. "The first time I met him wasn't when he saved me.

I've actually known him earlier than that."

Pearl paused, surprised to learn of their longer relationship.

"I first met him two years ago when I was fifteen and hadn't debuted yet. I was just a trainee in my

agency, and I wasn't a good dancer, so the trainer scolded me a lot. I even got beaten up and had

bruises all over. I was very upset, so I went to cry by a lake behind the office."

There was a touch of bittersweetness in her voice as she reminisced.

"That was when I met him. He was sixteen and attended a high school near my agency. One day, while

I was crying by the lake, I bumped into him."

As Esther recounted the story, an image began to form in Pearl's mind. "So, he comforted you, and that's when you developed feelings for him?"

Esther thought about it and chuckled. "No, not really. He thought I was trying to drown myself in the lake, so he pulled me out. In reality, I had just slipped because it was slippery there. After he saved me, he gave me a good scolding, but I found it endearing."

Pearl couldn't help but twitch her lips. Their story was certainly unique.

"What happened after that?"

Esther propped her chin on her hand. "He left after that, but he told me not to give up on life and to live it to the fullest, I didn't know his name until he saved me again. That's when I felt it was destiny. He's not getting away from me."

Pearl was surprised. "He doesn't remember you?"

"He doesn't." Esther looked sad. "He had no idea who I was, so when I grabbed him, he thought I was some crazy person and told me to stay away from him."

"Your brother knows the Waldorfs, but you don't know Mobius?"

Esther rolled her eyes. "Tsk. All he does with the Waldorfs is party and get drunk. I'm not into that. This is my first time drinking, and it's actually quite fun."

She looked around, then winked discreetly. "Pearl, I want to drink. Can you keep it a secret from my brother?"

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"You can't if you're underage."

Chapter 152

Pearl turned her down immediately.

Esther lounged back in her chair. "Alright then."

Suddenly, she sat up straight. "Look, Pearl, who's that girl?"

Pearl followed her gaze to the girl sitting next to Mobius. The girl appeared quiet, and her makeup was simple.

"That girl looks like a student. That's Mobius's type?" Esther fumed and seemed ready to confront the girl.

"A student..." Pearl observed as the girl sat timidly, and a pang of sadness gripped her heart. Memories

of Renee, the girl whose entire family had perished when Pearl tried to save her, flashed in her mind.

This time, she didn't dare go over.

"Pearl, do you think she's as pretty as me? As adorable as I am? Is her figure as good as mine?"

Pearl glanced at the girl and then back at Esther, who had heavy makeup on, before offering a reassuring smile. "Certainly, our celebrity here is prettier. Not everyone can become a star or even be called a Barbie."

"Hmm, I know that. Mobius just doesn't know a good girl when he sees one."

Pearl tried to console her. "Alright, stop overthinking. She's probably just here to have a drink with them. I doubt Mobius is interested in her."

"I'm not overthinking. Look, he's helping her by drinking her drinks. He's never that caring!"

Esther was seething with anger as she watched that. Her emotions reached a boiling point, and she couldn't contain herself any longer.

She rushed over to confront them but then abruptly remembered that she had come uninvited. This would only make her seem like a stalker.

The anger in her b\*dy dissipated, and her expression froze.

“What are you doing here?”

Mobius cast a puzzled and slightly annoyed look at Esther, who appeared embarrassed.

The girl beside him, who had a great figure but seemed mature for her age, was pretty but her makeup made her look alluring rather than innocent. With her excessive makeup and provocative attire for a bar, Esther wondered why she wasn't concerned about her safety.

“Are you worried about me?” Esther beamed with delight.

Mobius looked away. “Of course not.”

Esther's mood swung from happiness to disappointment. “Alright then. Why are you sitting with her?”

“Who?” Mobius was confused and responded coldly.

“That girl sitting next to you. Why are you with her?”

Mobius glanced at the trembling girl and sighed irritably. “Why do you care?”

Chapter 153

“Fine, it's none of my business. You should enjoy your time together. I'm leaving.”

Esther struggled to hold back her tears when she spoke, but as soon as she turned to leave, the tears began to

flow.

Pearl watched from afar and frowned. She was about to chase after Esther when someone grabbed her wrist.

“Pearl.”

Startled, Pearl turned to see Richard, his gaze icy.

“What are you doing here?”

Pearl was taken aback. Since Richard and Tyler were close, she assumed he would be at Tyler’s birthday celebration. It turned out he had just come from the restroom.

“Oh, it’s Tyler’s birthday, so it makes sense that you’re here, considering birds of a feather flock together.”

Her words carried a hint of sarcasm, but Richard didn’t appear fazed. He simply stared at her.

“What do you want?” Pearl sounded impatient. “I need to leave. Don’t waste my time.”

Richard paused, surprised by her reaction. It was the first time she was so annoyed to see someone.

“Well, now that we’ve bumped into each other, I just wanted to talk.” He had been searching for her, but

she had been avoiding him. Finally, they had crossed paths today.

“I don’t have time.”

“Just five minutes.”

Pearl noticed his insistence, and since he was still gripping her wrist tightly, she reluctantly agreed.

They found a place to sit down, and Pearl got straight to the point. “Are you asking about your mother?”

“I want to know how she fell down the stairs.”

Pearl scoffed. “You thought I did it, didn’t you?”

Richard paused, then responded in a neutral tone, “No.”

“Would you believe me if I said it was Abby?”

Richard’s breathing slowed. “I wouldn’t.”

A bitter taste filled Pearl’s mouth as she realized the inevitable outcome. “If you don’t believe me, there’s no point talking. I need to go now.”

She stood up to leave, but Richard called out to her.



“I’m not suspecting you, but... Abby wouldn’t hurt my mom.”

Even if Richard didn’t believe his mother had fallen, he couldn’t imagine Abby causing her harm. Susan had been like a mother to Abby, and the idea seemed inconceivable.

“So you think I’m trying to frame her? Yes, it’s all my fault.” Pearl scoffed. She was not only disappointed in

him, she had given up hope.

“That’s not what I mean.”

“Stop coming to see me. I’ll find evidence, but before that happens, please stay out of my life.”

She wanted to cut him off,

“Do you have to do this, Pearl?”

Pearl forced a smile. “What’s the point of saying this now? You should go check how Abby is feeling because when the truth comes out, she won’t just be spending time in jail.”

Richard frowned. “Pearl...”

“Enough, I’m leaving.”

Richard, typically a smart man, was making a foolish mistake. Pearl didn’t want to waste any more time

talking to someone so blinded, so she left.

As Pearl walked away, Richard watched her with irritation. He sent a text to Tyler and then left the bar to visit Susan in the hospital.

#### Chapter 154

Right after Pearl left, her phone began to ring with an incoming message. Her heart sank as she read

the

“Help me, Pearl!”

Pearl froze for a moment. Esther’s impulsive nature made it unlikely that she would send such a text.

There were two possibilities: either someone was controlling her and forcing her to send the message, or she was hiding and unable to make a call.

Pearl hesitated to call or text back because doing so might reveal Esther’s location if her phone wasn’t on silent mode, potentially alerting her attackers.

So, Pearl decided to use her hacking skills to locate Esther’s phone. After some quick work, she pinpointed Esther’s whereabouts. It was the same place where she had spoken to Richard just moments ago.

Suspicion gnawed at Pearl as she hurried back to that location. Esther had many connections there, and as an A-list celebrity, her disappearance would surely cause a media frenzy.

When Pearl got back there, Richard was gone. She looked around and even checked under the seats, but found no sign of Esther. Where was she?

She stopped in her tracks, realizing there was a faint knocking sound coming from beneath her. Knock, knock, knock...

Pearl instantly knew where Esther was. She rushed to the entrance of the basement.

The basement contained a wine cellar, secured by a passcode-locked door. An incorrect passcode entry would trigger an alert to the police, potentially putting Esther's life in danger.

Pearl examined the keypad, knowing that passcodes often had limited variations. Her senior had taught her how to crack these codes. A few lines of code on her tablet, and the passcode to the basement was revealed.

With the door open, Pearl descended into the dark basement. She avoided turning on the lights and moved cautiously, guided only by the faint wall lights.

The knocking grew louder as she approached a door. It was clear that Esther was just behind it, struggling to get her attention.

Pearl had expected this, but she sensed something amiss when the knocking suddenly sped up and then returned to its original pace. It was a signal, and Pearl understood it.

She reached into her sleeve and retrieved a concealed knife, holding it ready in her left hand. With her right, she slowly opened the door.

Inside, Esther was bound to a chair, her hair disheveled. When she saw Pearl, her eyes widened, and she began shaking her head.

Pearl understood that Esther was trying to communicate without alerting her captor. However, Pearl couldn't pick up the signal immediately. Esther made muffled groans and attempted to rise from the chair, hitting her head on the ceiling in the process.

"Don't worry, I'm here to save you." Pearl reassured her with a smile and took a step closer when the door suddenly swung open.

"I knew you would fall into my trap!"

Pearl turned to see an unfamiliar masked man standing in the doorway. "Who are you?"

"Not only do I know you, but I have a bone to pick with you!" The man sounded menacing.

"Tell me about it."

"If you hadn't chosen Esther, the Waldorfs would have collaborated with an artist from my agency. But now, not only has she rejected me as her manager, the entire industry has blacklisted me. I can't even feed my family. Don't you think you deserve to die?"

Pearl couldn't fathom the severity of such consequences. Unemployment was one thing, but to wish death upon someone for it was beyond comprehension.

Chapter 155

"Who's the artist you're talking about?" Pearl pretty much understood who he was referring to and felt

sorry

for him.

"Hah, that's not important. What's important is all of this... only happened because of you!"

The man had lost all sense of reason, consumed by his desire to capture Pearl and exact his revenge.

"You and Esther Sanders are both the root of evil and deserve to die!" He drew a knife and lunged at

Pearl, but she quickly grabbed his wrist, using her strength to push him aside and send him sprawling to the floor.

“You b\*tch!” The man wasn’t expecting Pearl to be so agile, so he was taken by surprise and forgot to pick up his knife.

“I understand, Clem Gutor. You might be angry that you were let go and that’s why you’re taking it out on us, but do you think killing us would make you feel better? People would come after you upon my death, and your wife and children would be bullied. Is that what you want?”

Pearl’s rational words seemed to bring Clem back to his senses. “How do you know my name?”

Pearl held back a chuckle. “All I know is that the only star who rivaled Esther’s fame was Yvonne Fuller.

She gained her fame because of you. Unfortunately, she failed to appreciate you and terminated your employment. I’m sure she’ll regret that decision.”

Clem was taken aback by Pearl’s unexpected revelation. Just moments ago, he had been attempting to take her life.

“Clem, if you don’t mind, I can refer you to a better company.”

Clem sounded defeated as he replied, “But Yvonne made sure I was blacklisted everywhere and left me with no options. How could you change that?”

“What if I tell you I can introduce you to a decent managerial role for a talent agency under the Cerubleu group?”

Clem’s eyes went wide. “You’re talking about... Brilliance Entertainment?”

Brilliance Entertainment was renowned in the entertainment industry, vastly superior to Polaris Entertainment, which was under Lawson Enterprise. He had faced numerous challenges at Polaris, failing to advance to a true managerial role due to his aversion to bootlicking.

However, Brilliance Entertainment was on a completely different level, and everyone recognized their supremacy, even overshadowing Polaris.

“Yes, a lot of award-winning actors are signed with Brilliance. I will personally vouch for you, and you can expect to join them by tomorrow.”

As Cerubleu’s president, Pearl had the influence to make such arrangements.

“R-Really?” Clem’s voice started shaking, astounded that this young woman possessed such power.

“Absolutely. I am Cerubleu’s vice president,” Pearl affirmed with a playful wink.

Clemn gave in. Would this really be the chance for him to start anew?

He almost thanked her, but he started looking cautious. “What if you’re just lying to me?”

“I never lie. Besides, I’ve set my phone to alert the police if I don’t find Esther within half an hour. You have two choices: embrace a promising future as a manager at Brilliance and shine in the career you love, or...’ Pearl trailed off, leaving the alternative unspoken.

It was a simple decision. Given their circumstances, he had only one path to choose.

“Your children need their father, don’t they, Mister Gutor?”

Pearl smiled, her straightforward question dismantling his remaining defenses.

Chapter 156

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“Alright, I... I’ll let Esther go.” Clem untied Esther with shaky hands and removed the black tape covering her mouth.

“Pearl, why would you help him?” Esther asked as she ran to hide behind Pearl once she was free, staring daggers at Clem.



Pearl shook her head. "I'm not helping him. I'm just helping myself."

"What do you mean?" From Esther's perspective, Clem was a bad person who had kidnapped her, and he deserved to be thrown in jail. There was no reason to help him.

"Clem is actually very good at what he does."

Pearl had heard Wayne speak highly of Clem from Brilliance. He had a great work ethic and was good at what he did. He had been treated unfairly, particularly after working with Yvonne, which had led him to this situation.

"Thank you, Miss Pearl." Clem's eyes welled up with gratitude. He never expected the person he despised so much to suddenly turn around and do so much for him, even acknowledging his capabilities.

"Don't mention it, Mister Gutor. I know you're a brilliant man, but you should never take the wrong path in life and avoid making impulsive decisions you'll regret."

Pearl's advice was sincere, and Clem didn't feel any resentment even when she was admonishing him.

"I know, Miss Pearl."

“Also, do your best when you start working at Brilliance. As long as you work hard, you’ll have a lot of chances to be promoted.

”

Clem fell to his knees. “I’m forever indebted to you, Miss Pearl.”

Pearl helped him to his feet and smiled. “Alright, get up. You should go home. I’ll send over the agreement tomorrow so you can just report to work at Brilliance Entertainment.”

Clem nodded and suddenly remembered the police report automation. “But Miss Pearl, your phone...”

Pearl chuckled. “I may have lied about that.”

Clem was speechless.

“You just said you never lie a minute ago,” Esther mumbled, and Pearl playfully tapped her head.

“Shush.”

Clem couldn’t help but laugh. Miss Pearl was rather adorable when she wasn’t being serious. He knew he had made the right choice.

“Well, we should be going now. You’ll receive an update soon.” Pearl handed him a business card with

her contact information. "Send your address to me tomorrow."

Clem nodded and carefully put the card away.

Pearl and Esther went back to the first floor.

"What happened? How did you get caught?" Pearl scolded Esther.

Esther scratched her face and smiled awkwardly. "Well, I was upset."

Her expression then darkened as she remembered the reason.

Chapter 157

"It's all because of that stupid Mobius. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have run off and bumped into that stupid man," Esther grumbled, recalling how close Mobius had been with that other girl.

"It's because you have feelings for him. If you didn't, you wouldn't feel this way. How is that his fault?"

Pearl pointed out.

Esther knew she was in the wrong, so she changed the subject. "I remember you came after me right away, but why did it take you so long to find me?" She wasn't blaming Pearl but was genuinely curious.

"Because... a dog blocked my path," Pearl said through gritted teeth, while Richard sneezed

somewhere in the hospital.

“A dog?” Esther was confused because no dogs were allowed in the bar. That was weird.

“Anyway, it’s time for you to go back to your brother.”

Esther asked, “Where are you headed?”

Pearl took a deep breath. “I’m going for a walk”

After saying goodbye to Esther, Pearl strolled along the lakeside. The night was illuminated with scattered lights, and couples were enjoying their dates.

Suddenly, she overheard two people quarreling.

“It’s all your fault. I wouldn’t have lost that trivia contest if it weren’t for you.” The man’s voice sounded angry.

“It’s because you don’t trust me. You wouldn’t have lost if you trusted me!” the woman retorted, raising her voice to make her point.

“Trust you? Why would I trust you? You can’t even think clearly. I know better than you. You don’t know anything about this, and I do!”

“Fine, you know me well. Do you know how much effort I put into this trivia contest? You never noticed the changes and still think of me as the same dumb person from before!”

The woman turned angrily, almost tumbling into the lake, but the man quickly caught her.

“Why did you save me? Just let me die!”

The man hugged her tightly, his eyes welling up as he lowered his voice. “Just because we argue doesn’t mean I don’t love you anymore.”

Realizing her mistake, the woman apologized, “I’m sorry for yelling.”

Pearl, who had been eavesdropping, was deeply moved. Quarreling didn’t mean they stopped loving each other. Harsh words didn’t benefit anyone.

Richard had grown up with Abby, and to him, Abby was like a daughter to Susan. Why would a child hurt her own mother?

Pearl, on the other hand, had always had a bad relationship with Susan. Richard had never reprimanded her, and that meant he didn’t blame her. Yet here she was, throwing a tantrum.

It was natural for him to be suspicious, but he was willing to talk to her, which indicated he still had feelings for her.

With her thoughts clarified, Pearl realized her next move. She needed to find evidence that would clear her name rather than falling into this relationship trap.

She immediately called Wayne to ask about Susan's recovery.

"I rushed back to the office because of this." Wayne's voice sounded like he was smiling. "It was quite a coincidence because I

had someone guarding the room for three days, and finally, Abby showed up. She tried to pull Susan's IV tube but was caught. I took pictures as evidence. She was probably afraid Susan would wake up and expose her."

Pearl was overjoyed to hear that, and her mood brightened.

Chapter 158

"You seem so happy, Pea? Something good happened?"

Wayne was relieved to hear Pearl sounding happy. He had expected her to be down for a while because of Richard, but it seemed like she was back to her usual self.

"I'm fine. By the way, how's the investigation about Renee going?"

Wayne was eager to share the update. "The blood traces found at Renee's home match those of a convict who served time in Enswood. He was sentenced to ten years and was released just two months ago, but he's already committed another murder. I've dispatched someone to track him down.

Additionally, there's evidence that twenty hours before Renee's death, Abby had a cash transaction with this man, and she transferred 100 thousand dollars to his account."

"This confirms that Abby was involved in the murder!" Pearl exclaimed, realizing she had wrongly pinned this on Hugo...

Having made up her mind after receiving this critical information, Pearl continued, "Alright, gather all the information tonight. Tomorrow morning, I'll go to the hospital to meet Abby."

She was going to show Richard how much of a snake Abby was.

Wayne worked quickly and sent over all the gathered information not long after their call ended.

The next morning, Pearl went to the hospital where Susan was admitted.

Abby had spent three days and nights without sleep, waiting for the opportunity to kill Susan. She wasn't thrilled about it, but she had maintained a facade of concern and had even lied to Richard.

“Rick, do you think she’ll wake up?” Abby asked, but deep down, she was worried.

“Hugo said Mom is recovering well, so she might wake up in two days,” Richard replied with hope in his voice.

Unbeknownst to him, Abby broke into a cold sweat. If Susan woke up after two days, her secret act of pushing her down the stairs would be revealed.

Just then, Pearl walked in, and Abby gasped.

“What’s wrong? Afraid to see me? Are you feeling guilty?”

Pearl’s words made Abby feel awkward. The latter looked away and said in a rude tone, “Stop accusing me. Everyone knows you did this. Why would I hurt Aunt Susan? She loves me, and I’m very thankful for that!”

She sounded so convincing that even Richard was fooled.

However, Pearl remained resolute. “Well, if you’re going to keep that narrative, we should let the evidence speak for itself.” She then slammed a thick stack of documents onto the table. “Do you want to go through these on your own, or do you want me to help you?”



Abby was visibly distressed when she saw the documents. "You're fabricating evidence. This is character assassination!"

"We'll know if this was fabricated when we look at it." Pearl opened the folder and carefully placed each piece of paper on the table.

"This is your connection to a convicted felon, along with evidence of your transferring 100 thousand dollars to him. I won't delve into the details, but this implicates you in the murder of Renee's family. I never suspected it was you."

She continued, "This one shows you trying to pull out Susan's IV tube, and someone took a picture of it. Isn't it obvious what you were trying to do?"

As Abby looked at the papers spread out before her, she began to feel light-headed.

Chapter 159

Abby never expected Pearl to uncover all this damning evidence. Fear coursed through her, causing her legs to give way, and she fell to the ground.

"Why aren't you saying anything? Weren't you so confident earlier? Why are you suddenly so quiet?"

Pearl scoffed and watched as Abby shook because she knew all the evidence was real

“I didn’t do any of that. You fabricated all of them!” Abby’s voice trembled uncontrollably. Confronted by

Pearl’s smug expression, the world seemed to spin around her.

Pearl pressed on, “Explain how I fabricated these. If you doubt the photos, I can get the video authenticated.”

Richard, who had been silently observing, was shocked to his core. He never imagined that Abby, who had grown up with his family and was like a sister to him, would attempt to harm someone, especially his mother.

“Explain yourself, Abby!” He wanted to give her a chance to deny it.

“I... Rick, you know how well Aunt Susan treats me. Why would I hurt her?”

Richard took a deep breath. “Why should I believe you?”

“I...” Abby had more to say, but the door swung open, and Hugo entered with a nurse for his rounds.

He glanced at the tense atmosphere in the room and chuckled. “What’s going on here? This looks pretty intense.”

“Hughie... “Abby bit her l\*p and pleaded to Hugo, “Hughie, how could I possibly be responsible for

trying to harm Renee and Aunt Susan? I don't even know Renee, and I have a great relationship with Aunt Susan. Why would I want to hurt her?"

Hugo looked down and smiled. "Well, I believe you. Let me take a look at the evidence."

He picked up the photos from the table, examined them, then shook his head and placed them back down. "These pictures don't prove anything. Transferring money? That doesn't prove it's for harming Renee. The one with Mom is just a blur. You were simply checking the tube. How did that turn into pulling it out?"

Hugo effortlessly turned the situation in Abby's favor.

Abby breathed a sigh of relief as she gazed at Hugo and managed to force a smile. "Yes, you've always understood me, just like when we were kids."

Richard, though still doubtful, couldn't fully trust his judgment.

"Well, Mom is still unconscious. How can we be sure Abby really did all this?"

Abby nodded vigorously. "Yes, she'll vouch for me and say I've been wrongly accused once she wakes up!"

She didn't know when Susan would regain consciousness, but she realized this was her chance to

clear her name. Thankfully, Hugo was there or she wouldn't be able to talk her way out of this.

"If that's the case, Abby might not be the mastermind behind all this." Richard raised his brows. "Could you please step out for a moment? I need to speak with Pearl."

Hugo and Abby left the room.

Once outside, Hugo dropped his cheerful expression. "You're so careful. Pearl would have destroyed you if I didn't show up."

Abby expressed her gratitude to him, "Thank you, Hughie. I would have been in serious trouble without your help. I might even have ended up in jail."

Chapter 160

Hugo scoffed. "That's why you need to prepare for your next move. As long as my mother never wakes up, Pearl won't be able to touch you, no matter how powerful she is."

Abby was surprised. "But... that's your mother. How could you..."

Hugo found her surprise amusing. "My mom? She's Richard's mom. I have no blood relation to her whatsoever."

He had undergone a DNA test after his previous suspicion, which confirmed that he had no familial ties

to the Waldorfs. This revelation explained why their parents had always treated him with leniency and kept their distance—he wasn't their biological child.

"You're not a Waldorf?" Abby almost shouted but quickly lowered her voice when she remembered they

were in a public place. "What do you plan to do then?"

Hugo scoffed again. "I couldn't care less about the death of a Waldorf. I, like you, am just a poor soul the family took care of."

"So Aunt Susan..."

"Leave her to me. I'll make sure she never wakes up. All you have to do is before Richard and Pearl find evidence..." He made a subtle gesture, and Abby immediately understood.

"Alright, I'll figure something out. I need to leave now."

Hugo smiled after Abby left. This woman was so dumb there was no way things would go wrong for him if he worked with her.

However, before something happened to her, he would have to find a way to distance himself from her.

Meanwhile, Richard and Pearl stood awkwardly in the room. Before Richard could say anything, Pearl

spoke. "I'm sorry."

Richard was surprised because he didn't expect an apology from her. She had always been a proud person and would never back down.

"I know my attitude toward this has been terrible, so I'm apologizing. As for what happened today, whether you think I'm framing Abby or just speaking without thinking clearly, I'll respect your decision."

Pearl looked at him, acknowledging that the events of the day had taken a toll on him.

"I believe you." Those three words conveyed Richard's position clearly.

"You believe me? Why? Didn't you say you would never suspect Abby?" Pearl was surprised at his words.

"That's not what I meant." Richard pinched the bridge of his nose. "I didn't suspect Abby before because of our long-standing relationship from childhood. I'm suspecting her now because I've noticed something."

Pearl looked directly into his eyes. "What is it?"