

Your Guise 831

Chapter 831

Pearl felt her consciousness drifting away, her energy draining rapidly. Before succumbing to unconsciousness, one thought dominated her mind: 'I've been tricked again.'

*

Unaware of Pearl's predicament, Esther grappled with guilt over lying to her earlier that morning. She was prepared to come clean and apologize.

James, realizing his mistake as well, offered to drive her to the office.

"Are you ready to tell her everything that happened?" James's voice broke the silence in the car.

"No way!" Esther exclaimed, realizing James had deceived her, her cheeks flushing with embarrassment. "Fine, let's talk when we see Pearl."

Arriving at the office, Esther was greeted by the receptionist, who recognized her. "Miss Esther, here to see the president again," the receptionist remarked.

Esther sheepishly scratched her head. "Yes, is she here?"

After a moment's thought, the receptionist shook her head. "She left with Miss Winona a while ago."

"Winona Jesselton?" Esther asked.

The receptionist didn't know her full name but offered a description. "She's tall, slender like a model, classy-looking with blond hair..."

Realizing Pearl had indeed left with Winona, Esther's worry intensified. Where could Winona have taken her?

Concerned, Esther attempted to call Pearl several times, but there was no answer. Pearl never ignored her calls. Even if she was busy, she would text her after rejecting the call.

"Stop calling." James's voice was low.

"What do you mean?" Esther had a bad feeling.

"Stop calling because something must have happened to her," James explained gravely.

Esther couldn't believe it. What could have happened to Pearl, given her agility and resourcefulness?

"Are you thinking how could anything happen when she's a good fighter?"

Esther nodded.

"Even if she's skilled, she's still vulnerable," James continued in a hushed tone. "What if she was caught off guard?"

Esther felt tears welling up from the anxiety. "Where should we start looking for her?"

Seeing Esther's distress, James pulled her into a comforting embrace, trying to calm her down. "Don't worry, I'll help you find her."

Esther allowed herself to believe him, feeling a sense of solace in his arms.

James, recognizing Pearl's role in improving Esther's perception of him, decided to help her in whatever way possible.

Chapter 832

Pearl was kidnapped so stealthily that no one was aware of her disappearance.

As the car jostled along the road, Pearl stirred from her slumber, unnoticed by the man at the wheel. Seizing the opportunity, she began plotting her escape.

Her hands were tied behind her, but her ring remained on her finger. Using its hidden mechanism, she retrieved a knife. With careful precision, she maneuvered the blade while the man was distracted by the music blaring in the car.

When the man finally noticed her movement, he grew tense. "Why are you suddenly awake?"

Pearl didn't answer him and pressed the knife against his throat.

"What are you planning to do?" he stammered, his hands trembling on the steering wheel. "I'm driving so if you want us both to be safe, let go of me."

Pearl scoffed. "You think I won't be able to drive if you die?"

"Oh god, please don't kill me. I'll tell you anything." The man, unaccustomed to such situations, quickly divulged Winona's instructions. "She wants you taken to the Jesselton ancestral home."

"Their ancestral home?" Surprised by Winona's plan, Pearl's anxiety shifted to curiosity.

It was weird. She thought Winona hated her and wanted her to die, but why was she taking her to their ancestral home? If she didn't want her dead, what was her motive then?

"Alright, do as you were told then," she instructed calmly, stowing away the knife.

"Why aren't you trying to escape?" the man asked incredulously, then immediately regretted his question. Why did he care? He was just supposed to deliver her to the destination.

Pearl, unfazed, simply replied, "It's none of your concern. Just make sure to tie me loosely when we arrive."

The man nodded in compliance, sensing there was no use pressing further.

After half an hour, the car arrived at Jesselton Manor. Following Pearl's instructions, the man tied her up loosely before presenting her to the people at the gate.

"Good job. I'll wire the money to you."

The man, eager to be done with the ordeal, accepted the praise and left with a grin.

Chapter 833

The person behind Pearl prodded her to move forward. Irritated by the kick, she mentally noted to settle the score later.

They proceeded deeper into the manor, with the inhabitants regarding them casually as they passed by, which struck Pearl as odd.

As they ventured further, the aroma of herbs intensified, permeating the air. The entire house seemed infused with the scent of herbs.

Impatiently, the man instructed Pearl, "You can go the rest of the way alone," before removing her bindings and departing, grumbling about her lack of resistance. "Why did they make it so loose? Why didn't you fight back?"

Pearl smirked and retorted, "Mind your own business," earning an annoyed glare from the man before he left.

Rubbing her sore wrists, Pearl passed through a door and entered a courtyard adorned with antiques, where a pot emitting steam caught her attention.

Drawing closer, she discerned the scent of medicinal herbs and deduced, "Medicine for colds."

"You seem knowledgeable about herbs. Few young people share your interest," remarked an elderly voice from behind.

Turning, Pearl saw an old man in white robes, exuding vitality despite his age. Although he looked like he was in his sixties or seventies, he looked more alert than some young men in their prime.

"Who are you?" Pearl inquired respectfully.

"I'm Winona's grandpa, Howard Jesselton," he revealed.

Pearl recalled the Jesseltons' reputation as herbal medicine practitioners, noting the contrast between Winona and her esteemed grandfather. The latter was a famous doctor in that industry, but why was his granddaughter so different?

She wasn't able to link the two together, so Pearl smiled and greeted politely, "Hello, Mister Howard."

"I heard Winona mentioned your health isn't the best," observed Howard, noticing Pearl's pale complexion. "You do look a little weak."

Feeling uneasy, Pearl speculated on how Winona knew of her health issues. Did... Richard tell her?

Lost in thought, Pearl was jolted by Howard's next words. "Winona asked me to help treat you. It's been ten years since I've practiced medicine. You're one lucky woman."

Pearl was incredulous. Winona, who had always regarded her as an enemy, now asked her grandfather to save her?

Reflecting on it, she noticed many small details she had overlooked before. All the clues pointed to one person—Richard! Had he orchestrated all of this?

Pearl balled her fist, resolved. "Thank you for your offer, but I have more important things to do."

Pearl had to confront Richard and uncover the truth.

However, Howard's expression suddenly changed. "You can't leave."

"Why not?" Pearl demanded.

"If you do, you might disrupt the wedding between Winona and the Waldorf boy," Howard explained, his tone ominous.

"What if I insist?"

"There are two outcomes: You'll either be turned away and brought back, or you'll meet your demise out there, young lady. I can see your time is running short," Howard warned solemnly.

Pearl, plagued by chest pain and breathing difficulties recently, was aware of her deteriorating health. She wanted to seize whatever time she had left to pursue her happiness, not be confined here.

"Even if he comes to resent me, I must know the truth." Pearl made up her mind. Even if Richard kicked her out, she wouldn't regret her decision.

"The Waldorf boy went to great lengths to get me to help you. Your stubbornness would waste his efforts. Can't you see how sad he would be?" Howard's smile held a hint of cruelty. "Although this arrangement isn't very ethical, Winona loves Richard too much."

Howard sensed he had discerned Pearl's thoughts and approached her, patting her shoulder. "Miss, I'm sorry I have to do this, but I have a granddaughter, and I wish for her happiness. Even if you have to suffer a little, I'll do my best to help you fully recover."

Pearl felt conflicted. Unable to articulate her emotions, she realized the extent of Richard's sacrifices for her, and her heart ached.

His coldness and actions now made sense. He orchestrated this scheme to ensure her recovery, deceiving her in the process.

Consumed by guilt for her hurtful words to him, Pearl faced the reality of the situation.

"Don't worry, you won't be detained here forever. After their wedding, you'll be healed. Then, as a healthy woman, you can find a better match," Howard assured her.

Better match... Who could be better than Richard?

Although she wanted to get through to Richard, she recognized his efforts to ensure she received treatment. To stubbornly walk away now would disregard all he had done.

"But you needn't feel remorseful. Marrying my granddaughter is a stroke of luck for him. As they spend time together, he'll realize her worth..." Howard attempted to console her.

Pearl slowly accepted the harsh truth. She had to fully recover before anything else. With a resigned sigh, she settled into a chair.

Seeing her compliance, Howard was overjoyed. "Have you resolved to stay?"

"Yes, Mister Howard. Please help me recover," Pearl replied, her smile genuine.

Howard felt a pang of sympathy at her smile. "You're a good person, but alas, things don't always turn out the way you want."

Pearl shook her head. "Not at all. Thank you for your help. I'll be sure to repay you after I get out of here."

Chapter 835

Even though Howard's intentions were driven by his concern for his granddaughter, Pearl was grateful for his help in her recovery.

Howard settled beside her, eyeing the bubbling pot of medicine before recalling something. "By the way, judging from what you said, you seem well-versed in medicine?"

Pearl listed off the ingredients fluently, "Draccae, uragano, viseo, esearo, vizeltro, tiforlic, and kelper. With the weather cooling, it's easier to catch a cold. It's best to bundle up." She glanced at Howard's thin shirt, a hint of concern in her expression.

Howard's eyes gleamed with interest. "Draccae herbal soup is just the basic. It's rare that you're familiar with the ingredients at your age. Tell me, were you trained in this?"

Pearl saw no reason to conceal the truth. "Yes, I underwent medical training for two years abroad."

Howard stroked his chin, his curiosity piqued. "Can you tell me who your mentor was?"

"Simon Freeman."

Howard was shocked. "That old man took on a student?"

Given their shared profession, it wasn't surprising they knew each other. Pearl had anticipated this before mentioning Simon's name.

"Yes, I don't know why he insisted on doing that," she replied.

Howard's eyes grew wide. "He voluntarily took you under his wing?"

"He forced me by threatening to kill himself."

Howard almost choked on his saliva. Simon typically shunned people, let alone took on students. His abrasive demeanor made him unpopular in their circle. Yet, he had threatened to end his life to mentor her...

"Young lady, I've underestimated you. You're more remarkable than I anticipated," Howard admitted.

Preferring not to dwell on the distressing ordeal, Pearl laughed it off. "Oh, it was nothing. That was a while ago."

An audacious idea struck Howard. "Would you consider becoming my apprentice?"

He had two compelling reasons for inviting Pearl to be his student. Firstly, knowing Simon's fondness for her, he could ruffle the old man's feathers by poaching her. If he could easily sway her, it would undoubtedly irk Simon.

Secondly, he recognized Pearl's talent and desired to impart his knowledge to someone capable.

Perplexed by the recurring offers to mentor her, Pearl hesitated. "I don't think—"

Howard immediately presented an enticing offer. "If you accept, I'll pass all my medical expertise to you."

Pearl started thinking. The Jesselton family was renowned for treating complex ailments. Perhaps she could even heal her mother...

"Okay, I'll do it."

Chapter 836

Howard was surprised that Pearl agreed so easily.

"Are you trying to trick me?" Howard gulped, incredulous.

"Why would I?" Pearl's smile concealed her ulterior motive. "But you must fulfill your promise to teach me. You can't go back on your word now."

Howard realized he had fallen into her scheme. "You're quite the cunning one." He sighed and said, "I'll keep my word, but you must promise not to leave or disrupt the wedding."

Pearl nodded, her expression now neutral. "Of course."

Howard's smile returned. "That's wise of you. I've arranged this house for your stay."

*

Tension filled Richard's office.

Esther stood before Richard, her anger palpable. She obviously wanted to grab him by his collar and yell at him. "Tell me where you're hiding Pearl," she demanded, her eyes seemingly ablaze.

Meanwhile, James watched Richard closely, his expression unreadable.

"Why do you think I'm involved in her disappearance?" Richard's lack of concern was evident; he appeared more impatient than worried.

Esther was utterly disappointed. "I never thought you could be so heartless. Even if you're not responsible, shouldn't you be concerned? She loved you so much. You're worse than an animal, a heartless jerk!"

Richard remained unfazed by Esther's harsh words. "If you're done, please leave. I have work to do." He showed no interest in hearing their accusations and hoped they would leave so he could regain his peace.

"I'm asking you again. Did you have a hand in this?" Esther's tears flowed as she slammed her hand on the table, startling James.

Richard's eyes went cold. "I'm warning you for the last time. Stop causing a scene here." He then turned to James. "Take her away."

James couldn't bear to see Esther being dismissed and spoke up on her behalf. "Why are you kicking her out? Are you feeling guilty?"

Richard hadn't anticipated James joining in. Before he could respond, the office door swung open.

Winona entered, looking excited, but her enthusiasm faded upon seeing the scene.

Esther's annoyance flared upon seeing Winona. Marching over, she grabbed the latter's collar. "Tell me, are you behind Pearl's disappearance?"

Winona, feeling unsettled after her recent actions, found newfound confidence with Richard by her side.

Chapter 837

She met Esther's accusatory gaze fearlessly. "Why would I do such a thing? I'm here to see Richard. I have no idea where Pearl is."

Esther squinted with anger. "Bullsh*t. The receptionist saw you leading Pearl away!"

Winona paused, considering her response before firing back, "We happened to leave at the same time. You're making baseless accusations."

Esther, unable to counter Winona's argument, released her and turned to James with teary eyes.

James's heart melted at the sight of her distress. "Miss Winona, the company's surveillance has recorded everything. Let's leave this matter to the police. You should consult a lawyer." He then wrapped his arms around Esther protectively, noting Winona's pale complexion with a hint of irony.

Clearly, Winona was feeling guilty.

Winona couldn't bear the thought of a police investigation, knowing she was behind Pearl's disappearance. James was clever; he might uncover the truth. Moreover, with James's legal expertise,

finding a lawyer to challenge him would be near impossible. It was obvious he was trying to test her when he said that.

Her mind raced, but she quickly dismissed the idea. She believed Richard would protect her because he needed her help with Pearl. "Absolutely not. I haven't done anything wrong, so there's no need to involve the police."

Richard erupted in anger. "You're slandering my fiancée. If you continue with this, I won't go easy on you."

Esther felt dejected. "Even with evidence, you still protect her. I knew it. None of you Waldorfs are decent. Pearl must have been blind to fall for you!" With that, she grabbed James's arm and

stormed out, slamming the door behind her.

Winona breathed a sigh of relief as Esther left. "I've handled it, Rick."

Richard raised an eyebrow, uncertain. "She's at Jesselton Manor now?"

"Yes, I brought her to Grandpa, and he said she's cooperating well. Maybe she's genuinely happier there."

Richard's expression softened at the thought of Pearl's imminent recovery. He could finally stop suppressing his feelings for her, which he had concealed for so long.

"When do you want to get married, Rick?" Winona deduced that Pearl had likely realized Richard's efforts to help her. If she chose to fight for Richard after that, Winona would lose everything. She needed to secure Richard's commitment before Pearl recovered.

Richard honored his promise without hesitation. "The wedding will proceed as planned."

Winona smiled, taking a step closer and placing her hand on his shoulder, gently massaging it. "Do you still have feelings for her?"

Richard took a deep breath and gently held her hand. "As I've said, once all of this is done, I'll cut all ties with her."

Chapter 838

The news of Richard Waldorf, the president of Waldorf Enterprises, marrying Winona from the Jesselton family caused quite a commotion in Enswood.

As word spread, jealousy brewed towards Winona for snagging such a catch. Yet, some pitied Richard, knowing his former fiancée Pearl outshone Winona in every aspect imaginable-family background, appearance, personality, and talent.

Winona seethed upon hearing these whispers. She was about to become Richard's lawful wife, yet people still looked down on her.

Determined to rid herself of Pearl once and for all when she returned, Winona refused to sit idly by. She attempted to show off Richard's affection for her through staged photos, but the netizens found them cringeworthy. They doubted Richard's sincerity, deeming him too stiff and suggesting he might not really be in love.

Frustrated, Winona threw a tantrum, shattering a few pieces of glassware in the process.

Pearl remained oblivious to the outside world's chatter. Cut off from any means of communication, she could only assure Esther of her safety through a brief phone call. "Este, I-"

Esther's relief upon hearing Pearl's voice quickly turned into tearful reproach. "Pearl, do you realize how worried I was? I thought something terrible had happened to you! Your phone wasn't even working!" Pearl suppressed a twitch at Esther's dramatic reaction. "It was just a day, Esther. I'm fine."

"Winona kidnapped you, didn't she? When I confronted her, she denied it! And Richard... You need to let go of any feelings you have for him. He's a total *sshole! He only protected Winona and kicked us out...' Listening to Esther's grievances against Richard, Pearl could only nod in agreement. "I have something to tell you," she interjected.

Esther, sensing the gravity of Pearl's tone, immediately composed herself. After looking around to confirm that no one's around, she lowered her voice. "Go ahead. I won't breathe a word to anyone."

Pearl hesitated, realizing Esther's eagerness might inadvertently complicate matters. Opting for caution, she decided to keep her revelation to herself for the time being. "I wasn't kidnapped by Winona, and I'm totally safe. Anyway, I have something I need to do. I'll fill you in when I'm back, okay?"

Relieved by Pearl's nonchalance, Esther eased up. "Okay, just promise to call me every day. I have to make sure you're really safe." If anything happened to Pearl, she would surely confront Winona about it! "Deal," Pearl agreed.

Esther chuckled, a bubble escaping her nose in her mirth. "When I grabbed Winona's collar, she nearly wet herself! James helped too, and she went pale as a ghost!"

Chapter 839

Pearl felt a little guilty knowing Esther and James were helping her. Even though she had her reasons, Esther's impulsiveness could potentially cause trouble. Still, Pearl couldn't blame her friend, who was unaware of the full situation.

After giving Esther some reassurance, Pearl mentioned dinner and ended the call. As she turned, she was startled by a bright smile in the doorway amidst the dim lighting.

It was Howard Jesselton.

Though familiar, his sudden appearance made her jump. After composing herself, Pearl frowned at him. "Mister Howard, you might give me a heart attack standing at the door without knocking.

Howard casually walked over. "I didn't expect you to be so tight-lipped, not even with your best friend."

Pearl shrugged. "She's too naive. If I told her, she might cause issues. You wouldn't want your granddaughter dragged to the police station by her collar, would you?"

Howard winced at the mental image, quickly changing the subject. "Anyway, about the issue you mentioned yesterday, I found something in my ancient books. You mentioned your mother's bone problems, right?"

Pearl recalled her mother's condition, which Hugo had previously treated. She remembered seeing bone-related issues in her medical chart and Hugo's notes about it.

"From what you described, it's not a simple case of osteonecrosis," Howard remarked after hearing her description.

Pearl agreed, "Exactly. If it were, it would have been treated already."

Howard pondered, stroking his beard. "Why not call your mom and bring her here? Now that you're my student, I can help with her treatment."

Pearl felt a pang of guilt at the mention of her mother. If only she hadn't argued with Hugo, perhaps her mother would still be here, receiving treatment. It was a missed opportunity, and Pearl regretted not discussing it with her mother sooner.

Observing Pearl's hesitation, Howard felt sympathy for her. "You're a remarkable person. If that Waldorf boy treats you well, you're worth much more than my good-for-nothing granddaughter..."

Pearl suddenly remembered something and a shadow flashed across her eyes. "I hope you can cure me soon."

"Why?"

"Because my mother doesn't have much time left. I need to find her as soon as possible."

Chapter 840

"But if you're cured early, are you going to—" Howard stopped short of saying 'crash the wedding,' as he didn't believe Pearl would stoop to such actions, but he couldn't dismiss the possibility entirely.

Naturally, he had his doubts, considering Pearl's unpredictable nature.

"Don't worry. I've made a promise to you, and I won't break it," Pearl asserted firmly. She always kept her word.

Seeing the determination in her eyes, Howard felt ashamed for doubting her. "I'll do it because you love your mom. I'll cure you soon so you can leave."

Pearl's face lit up with gratitude. "That's good to know. Thank you."

"But before that, focus on learning medicine from me. It'll help you treat your mom when you see her."

Pearl was touched by Howard's concern for her mother.

*

Richard stood before Martin Jesselton with a firm look.

"I won't agree with your marriage arrangement."

Winona, anxious, grabbed her father's arm and shook it. "Dad, what are you saying? You agreed to let me marry Richard."

Martin sighed, exasperated by his daughter's stubbornness. "You know he's only marrying you to help another woman, yet you still want to marry him. How stupid are you?"

Winona hesitated, considering her father's words. She knew Richard's true intentions, but he was the best catch she could hope for. If she didn't hold onto him now, who knew how long it would take to find another like him?

Since she already had him, they could slowly develop feelings. She believed if she treated him well enough, he would eventually give in.

"Don't overthink this, Dad. Richard truly cares for me. You should ask him for yourself."

Martin observed Richard's serious demeanor and felt increasingly annoyed. "How can a future son-in-law look at me like that? I fail to see what you see in him."

Richard met Martin's gaze evenly. "Don't worry, Uncle Martin. I'll treat her well."

"How can you do that when you're still thinking about another woman?" Martin retorted, growing more agitated by Richard's response.

Richard remained silent, unable to offer a satisfactory answer.

Martin's frustration grew. "I suggest you seriously reconsider marrying Winona."