

Your Guise 931

Chapter 931

"Tell me if you're willing to talk terms then," Howard replied.

Howard seemed very sure of himself, and this made Pearl think he knew a lot more than they expected.

"Mister Howard, out of respect for you, I'd like to ask if you think Winona will be happy if I end up with her?" Richard asked.

"Do you think she's happy now?" Howard seemed upset at the mention of Winona. With his long life experience, how could he not know what had happened? "I watched Winona grow up, so how could she do something like that with a man on her wedding day? And you just happen to be there to catch her. Don't you think it's too much of a coincidence?"

Thinking that these two people before him worked together to hurt his granddaughter, all he wanted to do was tear them into pieces.

"So, you think I planned all this?" Richard replied calmly, as if he had nothing to do with it.

Howard was momentarily thrown off by Richard's calm demeanor. "There's no point in pretending now. Winona's name is ruined, and you should own up to it."

Richard, unfazed, responded, "That's her problem. Why am I to blame?"

"You have no choice, Richard Waldorf," Howard said, leaning back, his presence dominating. "It seems you'd do anything for Pearl. Why not now?"

Pearl couldn't stay silent anymore. "Why are you threatening Richard? This is about me." She was cold yet calm. "That person just gave birth to me and nothing more. Do you really think I'd trade something for her life?"

Pearl was clear that if it was someone she truly cared about, she might consider it, but not for someone who had no role in her life.

"I didn't think you'd be so heartless," Howard said, his chuckle lacking any warmth. "This is a trade. I can tell you more if you're interested, but I want something in return. If you don't care about your mother's life or death, then it doesn't concern you."

At the mention of life or death, Pearl felt uneasy. "What do you mean by that?"

"Remember the new experiment I mentioned?" Howard brought up a topic he had discussed with Pearl during her time at Jesselton Manor.

"You mean the human trial?" Pearl was shocked. Howard had talked about this experiment that required a person with unique biological characteristics. He had initially said it was too cruel to proceed with and mentioned the rarity of finding a suitable subject.

"It turns out your mother was a perfect match for my experiment." Howard shook his head slightly, still looking confident.

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Pearl was a little uncertain at this point. She understood how cruel the experiment would be, so she wouldn't be able to accept it if her biological mother was used as a test subject.

Howard could see the hesitation in her eyes and walked over, then tapped her shoulder as he usually would. He even sounded friendlier now. "Pearl, you're my student, so I won't want to do anything to make you sad. However, you should know that my granddaughter has been wronged, and if something happens to her, I would be a shame to the family."

This sounded like advice, but it was all for his own benefit. Pearl knew that, but she couldn't say anything when all he said were facts.

"I know you might not be able to accept this immediately, and I might be lying to you, but I can't do anything if you don't believe me."

Pearl's eyes flickered. "I believe you."

"Good, good."

Richard's face looked cold as ice, shooting a glare at him. "Anything else you want to bring up?"

"Not for now. I only have one condition, and it's for you to split up with Pearl and marry Winona."

There wasn't room for negotiation. Pearl lowered her head and didn't say anything.

"I know you won't be able to deal with this now, so I'll give you three days. Show me that you've gotten a divorce after that." Howard then checked his watch. "It's getting late. I should send you home if you have nothing else to add."

"It's fine, we'll get home by ourselves." Richard couldn't hold his anger anymore. But he didn't want to make a mistake, so he just grabbed Pearl's hand and left.

Howard wasn't offended, but the butler thought the two young people were rude.

"There's nothing rude about it. You might not be as calm as they are in this situation."

The butler was annoyed. "I don't understand. You saved Pearl, yet her way of thanking you was to work with that man to frame your granddaughter." In his eyes, Pearl was an ungrateful woman.

"Indeed, they did something wrong. But did you know Winona tried to break their relationship apart?" Howard hadn't spoken to anyone else in a long time, so he was tired. "Unfortunately, I'm Winona's grandpa, so I have to be on her side."

"Richard is right. If you force him to marry Miss Winona, she might not be happy either."

Howard rubbed his temples, feeling a headache coming on. "If Winona missed her chance with the person she loved, she wouldn't be happy either. Sometimes, the things we miss in the past would haunt us for life. If that's the case, why not let her figure things out for herself?"

"You've thought about everything." The butler understood what he meant.

"Alright, it's getting late. Let's head home."

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After leaving, Pearl and Richard remained silent, with neither of them bringing up the incident.

They went back to Waldorf Residence, hand in hand as if they just finished work. However, they saw someone standing in front of their gate looking around, as if she was waiting for someone.

When Pearl walked over, Esther lept into her arms.

"Pearl! I have something to tell you!"

Looking at her expression, Pearl smiled and patted her head. "What's the rush? Just tell me anything. Why did you have to come all the way here?"

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Esther lowered her head and sounded reluctant. "I have some things going on, and I might need to leave the country for a while."

"For how long?"

"About half a year."

"That's quite long." Pearl felt a little sad about that. "Take good care of yourself out there and call me if you need any help. I'll come and see you."

Esther couldn't deal with leaving, and since she went through so much, she felt uncomfortable. "Call me often."

"Of course. Where are you headed?"

"Wyncrest."

Pearl thought it sounded familiar, then remembered. "What a coincidence."

Curious, Esther asked, "What is it?"

Pearl realized she was thinking out loud, but seeing how curious Esther looked, she had to tell her. "Mobius is going to train there for his racing."

"Well, that is a coincidence." Esther's expression was awkward.

"Don't worry about it. It's a big country, so you might not bump into each other."

Esther shook her head. "I don't feel like I have to avoid him anymore. Even if he stood in front of me, I don't think I'd feel anything..."

Suddenly, a voice interrupted their conversation. "Pea, Rick, why are you standing here?"

It was Mobius.

Esther had a small frame, so Richard blocked her completely from Mobius's view. He didn't see her and walked over to greet them, but when he saw Esther, his smile faded. Esther awkwardly looked away too.

Pearl didn't think it was an awkward situation, but from the difference in what Esther said and how she reacted just now, she wanted to tease her. "That's not what someone said just a while ago."

Esther gently punched her. "Stop that."

Mobius spoke first. "It's been a while, Esther."

"Yes, how have you been?" Esther realized it wasn't a good question. How would he have been?

"Quite good. I ate, slept, everything as usual." He didn't want to stress her out, so he just casually replied to her, seeing how careful and anxious she was.

"Good to know. I need to go now." Esther wanted to get out of the awkward situation as soon as possible.

Mobius gathered some courage and blurted out, "Why don't you stay for dinner?"

Esther paused, as if she wanted to accept the invitation, but a cold voice came from behind her.

"She doesn't need food from you."

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When Esther heard that voice, she felt a cold shiver. She hadn't told anyone she was visiting the Waldorfs, especially not James.

She knew mentioning the Waldorfs made James upset, so she hoped to make her visit quick. Yet, she still ran into him.

"Why didn't you pick up my calls?" James confronted her.

Confused, Esther checked her phone and saw five missed calls and several messages. "Why are you calling me so much all of a sudden?" she asked.

James, sounding annoyed, replied, "Shouldn't I be asking you why you're ignoring my calls?" His tone grew colder when he glanced at Mobius. "You ignored my calls on purpose to come see him, didn't you?"

Esther was at a loss for words. "No, I didn't come for him. I came to see Pearl." She showed James her phone, explaining, "Look, my phone was on 'Do Not Disturb.' I didn't ignore your calls on purpose."

James's tone softened a bit after seeing her sad face. He decided it wasn't the right moment to argue.

Mobius, observing their exchange, felt a mix of emotions. There was a time when he was the only one who could affect Esther like this, but things were different now. She had someone else in her life, leaving him just to watch, heart aching.

"Alright, let's go home," James said, taking Esther's hand.

But then, Mobius chimed in, "Esther, would you like to stay for dinner?"

Everyone, especially Esther, was surprised. Pearl wondered what Mobius was thinking.

Esther glanced at James, then shook her head. "No, I don't think it's a good idea. I should go."

James smirked, looking pleased with her decision.

"It's just a dinner. You're leaving anyway, right? Even if we're just friends now, there's nothing wrong with having a meal together."

James narrowed his eyes. "You know she's leaving?" What was this man trying to do? Steal Esther from him?

Esther also looked curiously at Mobius. She hadn't told anyone about her plans except Pearl. How did he find out?

Realizing his mistake, Mobius went silent, hoping Esther would accept.

Though she wanted to refuse, seeing Mobius's hopeful look made it hard for her. "Why don't we—"

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James cut her off, "After breaking up, is it really okay to stay friends? And why would Esther want to say goodbye over dinner with you? The Waldorfs have nothing to do with her."

His words were harsh, yet nobody could argue against them.

Mobius looked down, realizing he had stepped over a line, and chose to remain silent. However, Esther felt bad for him.

"Why not have dinner together? It's just one meal," she suggested.

James could tell Esther was sympathetic. "Fine, but I'm joining too," he said. He wasn't about to let them have time alone, fearing they might rekindle their feelings. His years of waiting would have been wasted.

"Is that okay?" Esther looked at Mobius, seeking his consent, knowing this was James's final compromise.

Mobius, feeling a sharp pang of heartache at the sight of Esther pleading on behalf of another man, regretted his invitation. "Of course. He's your friend, so I don't see why not," he said, emphasizing 'friend'.

James caught the jab but let it slide. He took Esther's hand and led her inside, leaving Mobius to watch them go.

Pearl sensed Mobius's pain and patted his shoulder. "You need to let go and move on."

"I did let go, Pea, but I don't know why I'm still sad," Mobius admitted, his eyes reflecting his pain.

"It's okay to feel the pain. It's part of moving on. Be proud you loved someone as kind as her. She still wants to be friends, even after everything," Pearl encouraged him.

That brought Mobius some comfort. "I understand," he sighed.

"Come on, you're the host. Why are you still out here?" Richard's voice broke in, sounding slightly annoyed.

Mobius guessed his brother was probably upset about Pearl comforting him and was thus hurrying him inside. "Alright, alright," he sighed again.

Inside, they found Esther and James on the couch, with Susan chatting with them.

Susan greeted them with a smile, not showing any sign of annoyance. Having mingled with Enswood's high society for years, she was unfazed by such situations.

"It's been a while, Esther. I thought you'd forgotten about us," Susan said warmly.

Esther responded with a shy scratch of her head, recalling the awkwardness of their last meeting, which ended with her breaking up with Mobius. She couldn't imagine having the audacity to visit again.

"I've just been really busy," Esther explained.

"Then make sure to visit more often. I've missed you," Susan said.

It was hard to tell if Susan meant it, but seeing the regret in her eyes, Esther felt ashamed.

"I will," Esther promised, feeling guilty.

Susan then turned her attention to James.

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"You must be the lawyer Richard keeps mentioning. You do look like a promising, handsome, young man," Susan greeted him warmly.

It was the usual thing people would say, but Susan made it sound sincere. Her compliments felt genuine, despite being a common form of flattery in Enswood.

No one in Enswood had come close to the success James had. He was only twenty-three, but he became the top lawyer recommended by everyone. However, no one knew his secret identity.

"Thank you, Madam. I'm far from the legend you describe," James responded, downplaying his accomplishments. His tone was gentle, but it felt aloof.

"Not at all. Everyone could see your achievements..."

As dinner commenced, the mood turned somber, with everyone quietly focusing on their meal.

After dinner, as James and Esther were about to leave, Mobius sought a moment with Esther. "Can I have a word with you, Esther?" he called out.

Esther, uneasy about the request and mindful of the late hour, replied in a shaky voice, "I don't think it's a good idea. It's getting late. You can just call me if you want to talk."

"It'll just be a quick chat. It won't take up too much of your time."

Susan, busy with other guests, and James, offering a cold stare, did not intervene.

"It's fine, Este. Let him talk. This will be your final goodbye," James said.

"Um... okay then."

They moved to the secluded back garden for privacy. Mobius, aware of Esther's discomfort with dirt, prepared a clean spot for her to sit by wiping the stairs with a napkin.

"Take a seat. I know you don't like dirt. After our argument the last time, I made it a point to bring a stack of napkins along," he said, trying to ease the tension.

Esther, with a heavy heart, asked, "What do you want to tell me?"

"I'm sorry for what happened." Mobius turned to her, looking regretful. "I didn't realize that crossing the line with her would upset you so much. I didn't do anything with her. I know you won't believe me when I'm explaining this to you, but—"

"Enough," Esther interrupted, her eyes welling up with tears. "I know you're not that kind of person."

Confused, Mobius asked, "Then why did you break up with me?" He couldn't understand why she'd end things if she believed in his innocence.

Esther explained, "I know you're not that kind of person, but you crossed a line. I won't be able to forgive you for everything just because I love you. So Mobius, we're not compatible."

Their relationship had been filled with issues. Mobius often disregarded Esther's feelings, mocking her happiness and neglecting her when she needed support.

A particularly hurtful memory for Esther was when she excitedly offered Mobius ice cream, only for him to accidentally knock it from her hands, distracted by a racing poster. As she watched the ice cream melt, the sadness she felt was about more than just spilled dessert.

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Not only was Mobius not sorry, he asked her why she had to bring the ice cream to her. His hands had gotten dirty, and it made him feel disgusted.

Esther felt her heart break, especially since she had chosen matcha flavor, knowing it was his favorite.

Mobius remembered the silent treatment Esther gave him for two days following the incident. At first, he thought she was just throwing a tantrum, but he soon realized she was genuinely angry, and it took him a while to make amends.

"I'm sorry for saying all that," Mobius eventually apologized.

Esther replied, "No need to apologize. We just see things differently."

"I know I've lost my chance with you." Mobius shrugged and gave a relaxed smile. "How's your relationship with him? Are you officially together now?"

When James was mentioned, Esther blushed.

"You're smiling so much. You weren't this shy around me," Mobius observed her blush, recalling how she had pursued him for two years, a pursuit he largely ignored until it was too late.

Now, he felt a sting of regret realizing another now cherished someone he took for granted.

"No, I'm not with him yet," Esther admitted.

"Did he not confess his feelings?" Mobius probed further.

Esther thought about it, then shook her head. "He didn't."

"Do you like him?"

Esther paused. "Why do you ask?"

"You didn't deny it, so I guess you do."

Esther was even more confused as to why Mobius decided that.

"I see that you're very comfortable with each other, and you're very happy." Mobius sighed. "That was something you didn't have when we were together."

He remembered their previous tension, with Esther always feeling on edge due to his temper. In contrast, she felt relaxed and true to herself around James, not afraid to be who she was.

"Really?"

"Yes. I've been with you for so long. Do you think I don't know you?" Mobius said, reflecting on their past. Unfortunately, he was too arrogant and thought he had everything under control. He never really made her happy.

Esther suddenly looked serious and said, "No, you were great too."

She remembered how Mobius stood up for her when she was bullied, which made her see him in a heroic light at the time.

"Do you know that I was so touched when you showed up before me like a ray of hope? You were so brilliant, so how could you be bad?"

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Esther met a special young man when she was around seventeen, during a challenging time in her life. He was like a ray of sunlight, unforgettable and always on her mind.

Under the moonlight, Mobius saw the sparkle in Esther's eyes and felt a surge of emotion, wondering if she had ever disliked him. But her smile reassured him, and he expressed his heartfelt sentiment, "Thank you. You'll always be the best girl I know." He thought of her as his girl.

Thinking their conversation was over, Esther stood up to leave. Mobius offered one last piece of advice, "I hope you shine even brighter after this."

"You too," Esther replied, feeling a sense of relief as she walked away.

Mobius added, "One more thing. If he ever bullies you, come back to me. I'll always welcome you back."

"He wouldn't dare," Esther responded confidently, her tone strong yet innocent.

"That would be great. I was just joking."

Back inside, Esther found James waiting for her. He noticed her and smiled. "Done chatting?"

"We said everything we wanted to," Esther assured him, choosing not to share details she knew James wouldn't want to hear.

"Let's go home then." James took her hand gently. As they were about to get into the car, he leaned closer to her.

"What?" Esther asked.

"Nothing. I just thought you look really beautiful today." If any other man said this to her, Esther would have felt disgusted, but coming from James, the compliment made her heart flutter.

Esther, sensing where the conversation could lead and drawing from her dating experience, tried to keep things light, "Alright, it's getting late. Let's go home."

"Why are you trying to get away?" James sensed her attempt to distance herself. Why was she so afraid that he was going to do anything? Did she think he was the devil?

"No, I just think something is off."

"Tell me what's off then," James playfully challenged her to explain, hoping to make her say something embarrassing.

Esther, realizing his intent, glared at him, but James remained unfazed.

"Go ahead, or we're not leaving."

"Why are you doing this, James?" Esther asked, her courage surprising even herself.

"I don't know what you're talking about." James, noticing her discomfort and blush, decided not to tease her further. "Alright, I'll let you off this time. Get in. I'll drive you home."

Esther didn't think he would let her get away so easily, so she just got into the car.

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But Esther felt a touch of sadness inside her, wondering if it was because nothing had happened. Shaking her head at the thought, she caught James's attention.

"What are you doing?" James asked, finding her behavior amusing.

Caught in her thoughts and embarrassed, Esther blurted out, "Why don't I just get a taxi?"

James's smile vanished, and he abruptly stopped the car, causing Esther to nearly hit the windshield.

"Why did you stop all of a sudden?"

"Are you uncomfortable around me? Why do you want to get away?" James's mood darkened, thinking Esther's reaction was due to her conversation with Mobius. "What did he say to make you act this way?"

"Nothing. We just talked about hoping each other would have a good life," Esther explained, seeing his concern.

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all. Nothing more."

"Then why do you seem to be avoiding me?" James noticed Esther's body language, signaling she wanted distance, which upset him.

Esther looked out the window. "I'm not avoiding you. I just feel uncomfortable."

James saw her blushing and felt reassured it might not be as bad as he feared. "Why do you feel uneasy?" he asked softly, encouraging her to open up.

"I don't know..."

"Do you like me?" he asked in a teasing tone.

Esther's face flushed even more. "No, I... It's not... I..."

As James leaned closer, bringing with him a fresh scent, Esther didn't pull away, even as he came within inches of her face. "Why won't you admit you like me? Why so silent? Are you shy?"

Esther gulped. "I don't know what to say."

"Well, just answer my questions," James said, his own nervousness showing as he gently touched her face. "Do you like spending time with me?"

Esther wasn't going to lie about her feelings. "Yes."

"Do you like that I spend so much time with you?"

"Yes." She felt incredibly safe with James, as if he could solve any problem she faced.

"And what if I spent time with another girl?" James asked, watching as Esther frowned at the thought.

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"I don't like that idea," she confessed.

"You have feelings for me then," James said, relieved. Knowing the girl liked him was all he needed to hear.

"I guess... maybe." Esther couldn't understand why she could talk so freely with Mobius but struggled now. It was strange.

"Do you want to be my girlfriend then?"

Esther was taken aback by the sudden question. Sitting in the car, it was still chilly outside, making her nose and eyes red. She felt like a bunny, inviting teasing.

"Do you have feelings for me then?" Esther finally blurted out. Although it was a pointless question, she couldn't think of a better rhetorical question. Anything she said would have felt awkward.

"If I don't, why would I ask you all these questions?"

Normally quick-witted, Esther felt slow today. "Oh, right..."

"So, what do you say?" James tried to sway her. Seeing there was hesitation in her eyes, he tried to tempt her. "If you're my girlfriend, I'll help you with anything you need."

Esther, not one for hassle or decisions, found this tempting. "Really? You'll help me with anything?"

"Absolutely. I keep my promises. It's up to you now," James said confidently, crossing his arms.

"I just got out of a relationship not too long ago. I don't think it's a good idea to jump into another one so soon." Although she moved on, it wasn't fair to either James or Mobius.

"It's been three months, not three days. You've given him enough time," James argued. "Also, didn't you have a chat with him? He looked like he moved on too, right?"

"It does seem that way." Esther thought it made sense.

"If that's the case, don't overthink this. Be with me."

No one had pursued Esther so directly before. She couldn't help but think of her previous efforts with Mobius.

"O-Okay..." Esther agreed, surprised by how quickly she became someone's girlfriend. "Why did you suddenly confess your feelings to me?"

James raised his brows. "I didn't confess my feelings. You did."

Esther realized he was right. James hadn't directly confessed his feelings.

"So... you're saying I started it?" She was cornered into this situation, but now it seemed like she was being portrayed as the one who made the first move.