

Your Guise 941

Chapter 941

Esther found the situation weird, unable to quite process it, while James enjoyed every moment.

It had always bothered him that Esther pursued Mobius so actively. Why was she all in with him but reserved with James? So, even if he wanted to confess today, he aimed to make her confess first with a clever move.

"Okay, okay. We're a thing now. Let's not make a big fuss about it." Esther decided to move past the awkwardness.

"So, tell me about your plans for going abroad," James asked, shifting the conversation. Bringing this matter up made him uneasy. Pearl and Mobius knew about it, but not him.

"Well, you see..." Esther began, noting his change in expression. "The company wants me to shoot a movie in Wyncrest, so I'll be abroad for about six months."

"When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, at three-thirty."

No wonder Mobius seemed eager. He must've been waiting for this opportunity. It wasn't a secret that Mobius was going to Wyncrest for training. The enrollment list was public knowledge.

Since they were both going to the same place, Mobius had deliberately kept Esther for dinner tonight, hoping to reignite their relationship. Thankfully, Esther remained steadfast. Otherwise, she might've been deceived.

It seemed James had made the right choice to confess tonight. For the first time, he felt like he had some psychic ability and felt relieved.

"I have some work to take care of here, so I might not be able to accompany you. But if anything happens while you're abroad, call me. I'll drop everything and come to you," James offered.

Esther felt touched. "Thanks, but I doubt anything will happen. Still, I'll call you if I need to." After spending so much time together, relying on him had become second nature to her.

"Good girl. Let me give you a gift," James said, accelerating towards downtown.

"It's pretty late. Where are we going?"

James smirked. "You'll find out when we get there."

He drove to a commercial building in the city center. Despite the late hour, the 24-hour commercial building was brightly lit.

Familiar with the route, James led her into a jewelry store and asked the sales assistant to bring out a limited edition design.

"Bring out the rings I was looking at the other day," James requested.

The sales assistant smiled. "The Fluttering Bonds?"

"Yup."

Watching his smoothness, Esther couldn't help but wonder, "Did you often bring women here?"

How did he know the store and jewelries so well? It was hard not to be suspicious.

Chapter 942

James rolled his eyes at Esther's comment.

"Here are the rings you asked for, boss," the sales assistant said, addressing James.

Boss?

Esther choked, realizing her mistake. James owned the store, so of course, he'd be familiar with it.

The sales assistant presented the ring box, unveiling a stunning pair of diamond rings with butterfly wings.

"Do you like them?" James asked.

Esther was practically mesmerized. This design was ingenious, even more appealing than Pearl's latest design.

At Waldorf Residence, Pearl sneezed after Esther casually tossed aside their friendship with those words.

"Yeah, I like them," Esther replied.

James picked up a ring and slid it onto her right ring finger. "Wear this ring if you like it. Let everyone know you're taken."

Esther blushed. Wearing a ring on that finger felt more like an engagement announcement. "Isn't this inappropriate?"

"What's wrong? You're my girlfriend," James responded, slipping the other ring onto his own finger.

"You can't take it off. I want to see it every time we video call," he added.

Esther couldn't believe her boyfriend wasn't just a lawyer but a control freak. She couldn't help teasing, "Why are you so bossy?"

"Only with you." James gazed at her affectionately, leaving the sales assistant dumbfounded.

Their usually composed boss seemed smitten. Had she heard correctly? Feeling awkward, the sales assistant changed the subject. "Mister James, is there anything else you need?"

Only then did Esther realize their surroundings, feeling embarrassed.

"No, you've done a great job. You'll receive a bonus," James said, making the sales assistant beam.

"You have great taste, Mister James. Missus Crawford is lovely, and the ring suits her perfectly," the sales assistant commented.

Feeling even more embarrassed, Esther urged James to leave quickly.

James felt he'd done enough for the day and escorted her home, giving her some space.

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The next day, Esther tearfully called Pearl, informing her of her departure and urging her to take care.

Pearl sighed, offering comfort before hanging up.

With Esther gone, Pearl felt the absence of her chatter and companionship. She's missing her best friend already.

But now, a more difficult issue arose: Mister Howard's proposed conditions. Would they need to divorce?

Chapter 943

Pearl couldn't shake the thought of why she should believe her relatively unknown biological mother was doing well. It weighed heavily on her mind, causing her to feel overwhelmed.

When she showed up for work, her thoughts distracted her so much that she zoned out during the meeting.

"What do you think about this report, Miss Pearl?" a colleague asked after their presentation.

Pearl, lost in her thoughts, didn't catch what was said. "What was that about? I didn't catch it," she admitted, surprising her coworker.

"Miss Pearl, were you distracted?" the colleague asked, concerned. Pearl's lack of focus was unusual, and it worried the company's employees.

After the meeting, people expressed their concern, asking if she was feeling unwell. Pearl thanked them but didn't tell the truth.

Wayne knocked on her office door, pretending to deliver documents.

"You're a workaholic, Pea. You never mess up at work. What happened today?" He asked, sitting down after placing the documents on her desk.

Pearl rubbed her forehead, "Maybe I haven't been getting enough rest lately, so my mind's a bit off." Her absent-mindedness was unexpected even for her.

"Why aren't you resting after moving to Waldorf Residence? Is Richard bothering you?" Wayne inquired.

"Don't be ridiculous. Richard isn't giving me a hard time. I've just been having trouble sleeping," Pearl clarified, feeling awkward. The term 'hard time' carried a less innocent connotation.

Wayne sighed and shook his head, "You weren't like this before, Pea. You used to tell me everything. Why are you keeping things to yourself now?"

"I'm not keeping things from you. It's just that I don't know how to put it into words right now."

Wayne said, "I'm all ears. Just tell me what's going on."

Pearl, seeing his genuine concern, decided to share the whole story.

"So, you're telling me that after all this time searching for your mother, it turns out she might not be the one?" Wayne's disbelief was apparent. It all seemed too surreal.

"Yeah, I had my doubts too. But a couple of days ago, I tested my DNA with hers and found that..."

"Found what?"

Pearl's expression turned bitter. "We're related, but not directly."

Wayne almost choked. "So, your mom could be your aunt?"

"But I only had one aunt, and she tragically committed suicide years ago," Pearl explained.

Wayne was aware of this heartbreaking incident. Pearl's aunt had been a victim of assault, leading to her depression and eventual suicide. Richard's uncle was responsible for the assault and was also imprisoned.

"Could your grandfather have had more than two daughters?" Wayne speculated. "It's possible. Master Jordan had a reputation as a playboy in Bodgow. He might have had an illegitimate child."

Pearl pondered. "My grandpa has always been devoted. He hasn't remarried since my grandma passed away."

"No wonder you were distracted. If I were you, I'd take a leave and think it through at home." Wayne sighed deeply. "How about this? I'll help you dig deeper and see if we can find some leads."

"Okay, please keep me updated," Pearl requested as Wayne left her office.

Alone, Pearl leaned back in her chair and contemplated the possibility of an illegitimate daughter. It seemed to be the most plausible explanation at the moment.

Chapter 944

The three-day deadline quickly passed, and on the morning of the third day, Pearl received an anonymous text.

[How's it going? If you've made up your mind, let's meet at the usual spot at 5:30 this afternoon.]

It was clear that this was Mister Howard's final request.

Since it was the weekend, Pearl decided to sleep in. She tossed her phone aside and slept until the afternoon.

At two o'clock, she got up, ready to meet Mister Howard, but Richard was waiting at her doorstep.

"It's time, isn't it?" he asked.

Pearl knew Richard must also be deeply troubled by this situation.

"Have you figured out what to do?" Richard gazed at her, his dark eyes unfathomable.

"I'm still figuring it out. Do you have any brilliant suggestions?" For Pearl, dealing with this situation was like walking on eggshells. She must be careful with her next move, knowing it involved her mother.

"I won't agree to a divorce, that's for sure," Richard declared firmly. He had fought hard to bring his wife back and wouldn't give up easily due to someone else's threats. If he gave in, he wouldn't be much of a man.

"So, what's our plan?" Pearl was genuinely puzzled. She had planned to meet Mister Howard in person today. Without Richard around, she hoped he might reconsider and give her more time to find her biological mother.

Once she figured out her whereabouts, everything would be much easier.

"Kidnap Winona," Richard suggested bluntly, catching Pearl off guard.

"Kidnap Winona? Are you serious?"

"I am. He targeted the person closest to you, so we'll do the same to him," Richard explained straightforwardly.

Though Pearl hesitated, it seemed like the best course of action for now. She wasn't one to initiate such actions, usually only retaliating when provoked.

"I know what you're concerned about. Despite your tough exterior, you're kind-hearted," Richard said, gently ruffling her hair. "As your husband, I'll handle this for you."

His gentle and indulgent tone touched Pearl, and tears welled up in her eyes. "Richard, why are you so good to me?" She hadn't done anything likable, so why would someone go to such lengths for her?

"Isn't this what love is about? To do anything for someone?" Richard pinched her cheek affectionately and sighed. "Don't worry. Leave everything to me."

Feeling reassured, Pearl and Richard had lunch together before heading to meet Howard.

Chapter 945

Pearl watched Richard finish a call at the entrance. After that, he confidently took her hand, leading her inside.

Howard was already inside, waiting for their arrival. He stood out in his navy blue suit, his silver hair combed to perfection, exuding a mix of amiability and elegance.

"Have you two made up your minds?" he inquired, his voice carrying a hint of anticipation.

Richard stepped forward, effectively becoming the spokesperson for both of them. "Indeed, we have. However, we're here to discuss certain terms with you," he declared, his tone firm yet open for negotiation.

Howard's initial smile wavered at this unexpected stance. "Terms? What sort of terms are you proposing?"

Richard locked eyes with him, his expression serious. "Firstly, how can we trust your word? You claim to have Pearl's mother in your custody, but where's the proof?"

"Proof?" Howard's patience seemed to thin, his hand slamming down on the table with force. "The evidence is the reality of the situation, whether you choose to accept it or not. If you're here to waste time or deceive me, then we have nothing further to discuss."

Richard shook his head, a playful smirk appearing on his face. "What if we have something that you're interested in?"

This statement caught Howard off guard, his expression changing as he processed the implication. "And what might that be?" he asked suspiciously.

"Something you consider precious," Richard replied, cryptically yet with a clear intention.

At that, Howard's composure visibly faltered, and he quickly ordered the butler, "Call Miss Jesselton, now."

The butler, sensing the urgency, questioned, "Right now, sir?"

"Now!"

However, the call to Winona went unanswered despite several attempts, leading to a palpable sense of panic.

"Sir, Miss Jesselton is missing. I can't reach her," the butler reported, a note of alarm in his voice. Seeing his employer's grave face, he suggested, "Why don't I send someone to find her now? You shouldn't worry too much for now."

Howard took a handkerchief from his pocket, wiped away his sweat, and said, "Find her now. If anything happens to my granddaughter, none of you will get away with it!"

Pearl couldn't help but be amused by this unforeseen side of Howard, contrasting sharply with his usual demeanor.

Richard, meanwhile, remained unfazed. He idly played with the cups on the table, then casually stated, "Actually, there's no need for a search."

Howard, agitated, confronted Richard, grabbing him by the shoulder. "Is it you? Have you taken my Winnie? Return her immediately, or you will pay with your lives!" he threatened, his voice laced with desperation.

Stronger than Howard, Richard gently pushed him back several steps. "Why the panic, Mister Howard?" he asked, his voice low and teasing. "You don't seem uninterested in our proposal, right?"

Howard was taken aback by their audacity. He only thought they would find ways to locate Pearl's mother and rescue her, not anticipating they would dare to turn the tables in such a manner. He had underestimated them.

"So, you propose a trade?" Howard took a deep breath, trying to steady himself.

"Isn't this offer attractive enough?"

Indeed, the stakes were high. Winona represented not only the family's future, as the only heiress, but also held a special place in Howard's heart, having raised her since childhood. The bond they shared was undeniable, and the thought of anything happening to her was intolerable.

"Alright, I'll let her mother go, and you'll release Winnie," Howard conceded. He had to save Winona, no matter the cost.

It was clear he was already considering alternative strategies, as holding Pearl's mother captive no longer held the advantage it once did.

Pearl was about to agree, seeing it as a reasonable exchange. However, Richard's firm grip on her hand stopped her mid-nod, signaling her not to agree so quickly.

"No, what we want isn't as simple as that," he said.

Howard, taken aback by this sudden shift, pressed for clarification. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing much. We've considered it, and it seems you would gain more than we would."

By now, Howard knew where Winona was and was slightly relieved. The tone of the conversation was a lot calmer.

"And how do you think I'd gain more?"

"Winona is your granddaughter, and you two share a deep bond. So you'll benefit more after the exchange."

Listening to Richard's serious explanation, Pearl couldn't help but stifle a laugh. Although it made sense, it felt off. The negotiation seemed more like choosing goods at a flea market.

Howard, however, failed to see the logic. "But Pearl's mother is her family. How could I possibly stand to gain more from this exchange?"

Richard countered, "To Pearl, her mother is someone she barely knows, lacking any deep emotional connection. Her decision to save her is based more on obligation than affection. You, on the other hand, have shown just how important Winona is to you."

Howard took a sharp breath, caught off guard by Richard's insight. He was now forced to acknowledge the emotional leverage they held over him.

If Richard couldn't become his grandson-in-law, it would be a significant threat to the Jesseltons. With him around and the two families at odds, the Jesseltons would face a strategic disadvantage with Richard opposing them.

"So, what are your terms?" Howard asked.

"I don't ask for much. Simply ensure Pearl's mother's safe return and agree to sever all future collaborations with Hugo. Of course, the second condition is that you must sign a contract to make sure you won't go back on your words."

Pearl was taken aback by Richard's foresight, not having anticipated his real objective was to safeguard against any collusion with Hugo. This was a move she didn't see coming.

She glanced at Richard, impressed by his confidence and composure. Somehow, she found him oddly attractive. This must be the reason why she liked him. He always had a plan, strategic thinking, and unwavering calmness, embodying the charm that made him so irresistible to her.

"What's the reason for this condition?" Howard challenged, his frustration mounting.

Richard replied casually, "It's just a personal preference. You're free to refuse, but doing so means you won't get what you want."

"How dare you!"

Chapter 947

This was nothing short of a blatant threat. "If you're not willing to accept these terms, then I'm afraid your granddaughter will remain with us," Richard stated.

Howard couldn't help but laugh, struck by the audacity of the young man before him. "You've outdone yourself, young man. Your cunning surpasses even mine."

"Thank you, but I'd say I'm just being thorough."

Howard, assessing the situation, realized the strategic disadvantage of siding with Hugo over Richard. Hugo, though intelligent, lacked Richard's foresight and cunning.

Besides, Richard stated that there can be no collaboration, not limiting any communication. There were still plenty of opportunities to exploit this loophole.

After a moment of deliberation, Howard agreed. "Very well, we have a deal."

Richard, prepared as ever, pulled a contract from his bag with a flourish. "Let's formalize our agreement. Please review and sign this document."

Howard, feeling his blood pressure surge, saw no immediate escape. He had anticipated leveraging his agreement to secure his granddaughter's release, finding a loophole later. Richard's readiness, however, with a contract in hand, caught him off guard.

"I don't have a pen..." Howard said, stalling for time.

Richard, unfazed, offered him a pen. "No problem, I've got one right here."

The moment felt like a trap snapping shut for Howard, who, with a resigned sigh, accepted the pen and signed the document.

"Thank you for your cooperation, Mister Howard. I'll hold onto this contract. I trust you'll honor our agreement," Richard said, checking the contract and making sure everything was fine before putting it away.

He then suggested, "It would be best if you could pick up Winona from Waldorf Residence. And, of course, please bring Pearl's mother with you."

Feeling disgruntled, Howard spoke impatiently, "When should I come to pick her up?"

"That depends on how soon you wish to see your granddaughter. If it's urgent, you're welcome to come by today. Otherwise, we can ensure she's well cared for until you're ready."

Pearl couldn't help but giggle as Richard shamelessly said these things, which left Howard at a loss for words.

"Then I'll be there tonight." With that, Howard angrily stood up and left the room.

The butler obediently followed, shooting a fierce glare at Pearl and Richard as he passed.

Once the door closed behind them, Pearl burst into laughter.

Chapter 948

"That was hilarious! Did you see Howard's face? It was as if the ground had swallowed him!" Pearl laughed until she was almost out of breath.

"Feeling better now?" Richard's voice softened as he talked to Pearl.

"Absolutely, I feel fantastic." Pearl got up, stretching leisurely. "And all I did today was enjoy the spectacle and come out on top without lifting a finger." If only every day could be as relaxing as today.

Richard, catching her mood, allowed a smile to break through his usually serious demeanor. "You won't have to worry about a thing from here on out. I've got you covered for all your lazy days ahead."

Pearl raised an eyebrow teasingly. "Is this what married life feels like?"

"I can make you happy like this every day."

Pearl, caught off guard by his directness, felt a rush of warmth reminiscent of her first love, her cheeks tinged with a blush. "Don't say things like that. We're still in public," she protested, though they were alone.

"It's fine. It's just us here," Richard reassured, noting the shift from Pearl's public bravado to her private shyness, a contrast that he found very captivating.

"Alright, you mentioned Howard will be coming by later, right? Let's head back now," Pearl suggested, tugging at his sleeve, eager to leave.

Richard felt disappointed at missing the chance to tease her further, but seeing her blush, he couldn't help but push a little more.

However, deciding she was too delicate for such jests at the moment, he opted for a gentler approach, affectionately pinching her nose. "Okay, let's go home."

As Howard made his way to fetch Pearl's mother, Pearl and Richard returned to Waldorf Residence.

Pearl half-expected Richard to have stashed Winona in some dank, dark cellar. Instead, she found Winona comfortably confined to a room, apparently having been told simply to stay put.

Upon entering, Pearl caught Winona in the midst of a lock-picking attempt, her surprise evident as the door unexpectedly swung open.

"What are you doing here? Did you kidnap me?" Winona refused to accuse Richard of abduction.

Pearl, momentarily speechless, wondered at Winona's dramatic leap to conclusions. "Do you really think I'd kidnap you?"

Winona, unaware of the details concerning Pearl's mother and the lack of information from Howard, was visibly taken aback. She realized there was no reason for Pearl to kidnap her.

"Then why am I here?" Having been brought blindfolded, Winona was unfamiliar with her surroundings, and the sight of Pearl only fueled her mistaken belief that Pearl had kidnapped her.

"I'm the one who brought you here," Richard interjected, having just arrived after attending to other matters.

Chapter 949

Looking into Richard's calm, expressionless eyes, Winona felt a chill. Before, his gaze never carried deep affection, but it always held a semblance of warmth. Now, it seemed filled with disgust.

Feeling uneasy, Winona stammered, "R-Rick, why have you brought me here?"

At this point, she wondered if Richard had suddenly recalled her past actions, choosing to punish her. Yet, with Pearl at his side, this theory seemed less plausible.

What was going on? Richard's feelings for Pearl was a well-known fact across Enswood. Winona bowed her head, concealing her deep-seated loneliness.

"I brought you here because your grandfather took our people."

"Grandpa? How is he? Is he okay?" Winona panicked and asked anxiously.

Although Winona usually appeared proud and arrogant, she genuinely cared about her grandfather. Having grown up with him since childhood, their bond was the strongest in the family. He was her staunchest supporter, eager to lavish her with the best.

"Your grandpa is perfectly fine. On the contrary, you're the one in trouble," Richard informed her.

Winona shook her head firmly. "Impossible. You wouldn't harm me. After all, we have a history."

"And who said I had any affection for you during that time?"

Richard's indifference cut through Winona, her eyes widening in disbelief. "What do you mean? You felt nothing for me?"

Not even a bit? No way! She couldn't accept it. She would never believe this!

"If you're talking about feelings, it's mostly pity and disgust."

Disgust... That word shattered her already fragile defenses.

Tears welled up in Winona's eyes as she struggled to speak, "Richard, you can't be so cruel. I've devoted myself to you. You must feel something."

"Why should I? Was this not how you treated Pearl? Did you ever consider her feelings after all your dirty tricks?"

Pearl watched the exchange, devoid of sympathy for Winona. Richard was right. Why show compassion to someone who once hurt you?

Winona's actions were now coming back to haunt her.

Winona insisted, "But you came looking for me in the first place..."

"Yes, I approached you," Richard confirmed, his gaze chilling. "But remember, I proposed a trade: 30% of Waldorf Enterprises' shares for Pearl's safety. You refused and even threatened me."

Pearl took a sharp breath, her emotions swirling. Thirty percent of the shares? Was Richard planning to sell Waldorf Enterprises?!

Meanwhile, Winona was forced to confront the truth, recalling their agreement. Indeed, she had gambled on growing affections over time, using the situation to her advantage.

"So, we were just using each other. There's no need for any affection."

Those final words left Winona enveloped in a cold, desolate loneliness.

Chapter 950

Richard was basically saying that Winona chose not to leave on her own, so it had nothing to do with him.

Winona couldn't find any words to refute him anymore. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Alright, stop crying. Your grandfather will be here soon to take you home," Pearl interjected, noticing Winona's distress and offering her tissues.

Winona, however, slapped Pearl's hand aside. "I don't need your fake sympathy."

Seeing her stubbornness, Richard said coldly, "I should've knocked you out earlier."

Winona was filled with conflicting emotions upon hearing his heartless comment.

Richard felt she was becoming a nuisance, so he took Pearl away. He left the room unlocked since Winona would leave soon.

After about half an hour, Howard sent someone to bring Winona home.

Richard demanded an exchange be made simultaneously, and so, a disheveled woman was presented. Her appearance was harrowing, marked by neglect and filth, and she emitted the stench of someone who hadn't taken a bath in months.

The sight of her made everyone recoil in disgust and cover their noses.

"Could Mister Howard have tricked us?" Richard pondered aloud, maintaining a cautious distance from the woman.

The butler, standing by, reassured, "Mister Howard wouldn't dare."

Richard sternly warned, "Inform Mister Howard, if this woman is not Pearl's mother, I'm capable of kidnapping Winona again by any means necessary."

Hearing Richard's bold words, the butler felt a shiver down his spine. He sensed the gravity of his threat.

"Don't worry. If this woman is the one I'm looking for, Winona will be safe," Richard said, trying to ease the butler's tension.

"If that's true, where's Miss Jesselton?"

At that, Richard signaled his assistant, who promptly went to Winona's room and said, "Miss Jesselton, your family is here to take you home."

"You don't have to tell me. I know."

After hesitating for a while, Winona finally stepped out. Her eyes were swollen, yet she kept her composure.

The butler felt distressed seeing Miss Jesselton in such a miserable state. He scrutinized her from head to toe, found nothing wrong, and felt relieved. "I'm glad you're fine, Miss Jesselton. Please don't make things hard for yourself anymore because of this man."

Winona glared at Pearl, then turned around and adjusted her skirt. "Let's go."

The butler nodded and followed, bowing respectfully.

After Winona and the others left, Pearl approached the disheveled woman and gently asked, "Madam, why don't you have a seat?"

After waiting a long time, the woman made no move to respond or sit.

"Madam, can you hear me?"