A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 281

d.

That made the next part even more satisfying.

Grandfather opened a folder.

“The following companies have demonstrated exceptional independence, transparency, and ethical governance.”

He began reading names.

None of them belonged to the investors involved in the emails.

Every single exception belonged to people who had stayed away from Alexander Vincent’s proposals.

I watched the room carefully.

Confusion spread first.

Then concern.

Then panic.

One investor interrupted.

“Our company isn’t listed.”

Grandfather looked at him.

“No.”

Another stood.

“We’ve partnered with Asher Corporation for twenty years.

“I know.”

“Then why are we excluded?”

Grandfather folded his hands.

“Our new policy requires us to invest only in businesses whose long-term values align with our own.”

Silence. 1

The investor looked offended.

“What exactly does that mean?”

Grandfather smiled politely.

“It means exactly what it says.”

He offered nothing more.

No explanation.

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No accusations.

No emails.

Nothing.

Because he didn’t need to.

The guilty men already knew.

One by one they exchanged nervous glances.

Trying to determine whether someone had talked.

Whether someone had betrayed them.

Whether Alexander Vincent had abandoned them.

I almost felt sorry for them.

Almost.

The meeting ended twenty minutes later.

By the time everyone left the conference room, My phone was already buzzing.

Three investors had requested emergency meetings.

Five had called Adrian.

Two wanted to speak with me personally.

Grandfather simply chuckled.

“They’re realizing they need us more than we need them.”

I looked at the financial projections.

Without Asher Corporation’s investments, several of those companies would begin experiencing cash-flow problems within six months.

Some…

Much sooner.

Jason leaned close enough that only I could hear him.

“First domino.”

I nodded.

The first domino had fallen.

And unlike before…

This time we weren’t defending ourselves.

We were making sure every person who had tried to bargain with our children’s futures learned exactly how expensive that decision would become.

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PAR

a general observation

Amber POV

I had been teaching coding at the academy for almost three weeks.

It had quickly become one of my favorite parts of the weck.

The children surprised me constantly.

Some solved problems in ways I would never have considered.

Others simply enjoyed breaking my programs to see if I could fix them.

Alice was especially proud every time one of her classmates found a shortcut I hadn't anticipated.

That afternoon, as I walked across the school gardens toward the main building, I noticed Iris sitting beneath one of the old oak trees.

She wasn't alone.

A boy around her age sat beside her.

The two of them were talking quietly.

Iris laughed.

Actually laughed.

I slowed my steps.

Jason would have immediately started investigating.

I simply smiled to myself.

Good for her.

She deserved to have friends.

Maybe even her first crush.

I quietly continued toward my classroom without interrupting them,

That night, long after dinner, I was reviewing contracts in my office when someone knocked softly on the door.

Three careful knocks.

Not Alice.

She never knocked.

“Come in.”

The door opened slowly.

Iris peeked inside.

“Mom…”

The word still warmed my heart every single time.

“Can we talk?”

mmediately closed my laptop.

“Of course.”

She stepped inside and quietly shut the door behind her.

Instead of sitting on the sofa, she remained standing.

Nervous.

That immediately caught my attention.

“What’s wrong?”

She hesitated.

Then took a deep breath.

“I need a favor.”

“Anything.”

She looked down at her hands.

“I… I’ve been seeing someone.”

I blinked.

“You have?”

She nodded.

“I didn’t tell anyone.”

I smiled softly.

“You don’t have to tell me everything.”

“I know.”

Another pause.

“But…”

She looked genuinely conflicted.

“I need you to investigate him.”

That wasn’t the direction I had expected.

I frowned.

“What happened?”

She sat down across from me.

“At first everything was normal.”

+15 8çnus

“We talked.”

We studied together.”

“We went for walks after school.”

I nodded.

“So what changed?”

“He keeps asking questions.”

“What kind of questions?”

“The same ones.”

She counted them on her fingers.

“Where did I live before coming here?”

“Who is my real family?”

“What happened before the Ashers adopted me?”

“Was there ever a marriage proposal for me?”

“What am I planning to do after graduation?”

She looked uncomfortable.

“And he doesn’t stop.” “And

I leaned back in my chair.

“Iris...”

I smiled reassuringly.

“Sometimes when someone likes you, they simply want to know everything about you.”

She shook her head immediately.

“No.”

“It feels...”

She searched for the right word.

“Specific.”

I understood.

Given everything she had survived...

Those questions would naturally make her uncomfortable.

I reached across the desk and squeezed her hand.

“Okay.”

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’ll check.”

Relief immediately crossed her face.

Together we walked into my office next door.

Within minutes my computer screens came to life.

“What’s his name?”

She took a deep breath.

“Francis.”

She smiled faintly despite everything.

“Francis Owens.”

I typed the name into my system.

School records.

Family history.

Business connections.

Nothing unusual appeared at first.

“Heir to the Owens family.”

Iris nodded.

“I knew that.”

I kept reading.

Respected family.

Old money.

Several companies.

Strong reputation.

Still nothing.

Then…

One document appeared.

I opened it.

My smile disappeared.

“What?”

Iris asked quietly.

I turned the monitor toward her.

He’s engaged.”

Silence.

“What?”

“There.”

I pointed at the legal registry.

“Francis Owens has a standing engagement.”

She stared at the screen.

“…to a Vinny.”

Neither of us spoke.

That alone was enough to raise every alarm bell in my head.

I opened another window.

Then another. 1

Finally…

Jackpot.

Private text messages.

Not with the girl.

With his parents.

I frowned as I began reading aloud.

“Have you asked Amber yet?”

Another message.

“The life lessons are your best opportunity.”

Another.

“See if she’ll explain how someone escapes an arranged engagement.”

Another.

“We accepted because we had no choice.”

“The Vinny family threatened to destroy us.”

I stopped reading.

The room became very quiet.

Iris looked devastated.

“So…”

Her voice was bafely above a whisper.

“Francis wasn’t interested in me.”

I reached for her hand.

“No.”

“He probably was.”

She looked unconvinced. 1

“But…”

I sighed.

“He was also desperate.”

She lowered her head.

“I feel used.”

“You weren’t.”

“He still lied.”

I couldn’t argue with that.

Before I could answer, the office door opened.

Jason walked in carrying two cups of tea.

He immediately stopped.

His eyes moved between Iris’s expression…

My computer screen…

The engagement record…

Then the messages.

His expression hardened instantly.

“What happened?”

Neither of us answered quickly enough.

Jason walked closer.

Read the messages himself.

His jaw tightened.

Very slowly.

Dangerously slowly.

“So.”

voice was catín.

Too calm.

“Where does Francis Owens live?”

I immediately stood.

“No.”

Jason looked at me.

“He lied to our daughter.”

“He’s seventeen.”

“He manipulated her.”

“He was manipulated first.”

Jason opened his mouth.

I stepped in front of him.

“He was engaged without his consent.”

“He was told to approach me because his parents are desperate.”

“He isn’t Alexander Vincent.”

“He

Jason remained silent.

I continued.

“He’s another victim.”

Iris nodded weakly.

“I think…”

She looked toward Jason.

“…he actually likes me.”

Another pause.

“But he also wanted help.”

Jason sighed deeply.

The anger slowly left his shoulders.

“I still don’t like him.”

“I know.”

“I’d still like to scare Francis.”

+15 Borius

I couldn’t help smiling.

know.”

Another long silence followed.

Finally Jason looked toward Iris.

“If Francis hurts you…”

He folded his arms.

“…his parents won’t need to worry about breaking the engagement.”

Iris blinked.

“Why?”

Jason smiled politely.

“Because he’ll have much bigger problems.”

I buried my face in my hands.

“Jason.”

“What?”

“You can’t threaten teenagers.”

“I wasn’t.”

He looked completely innocent.

“I was making a general observation.”

For the first time that evening…

Iris laughed.

A small laugh.

But a genuine one.

And I silently promised myself something.

Alexander Vincent had stolen enough childhoods.

He wasn’t taking another.

+15 Bahus

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e next phase of our plan began quietly.

Neither Jason nor I believed in making loud announcements.

If we were going to dismantle the investors who had tried to bargain with our children’s futures, we would do it the same way they had tried to manipulate ours.

Silently.

One company at a time.

The first week was dedicated entirely to research.

Jason focused on financial transactions while I analyzed ownership structures.

At first, everything looked ordinary.

Each investor owned one or two successful companies.

Some had hotels.

Others had logistics firms, manufacturing plants, or construction businesses.

Individually, nothing stood out.

Together...

A pattern emerged.

“Jason.”

He looked up from his laptop.

“You need to see this.”

He walked over, coffee in hand, and leaned over my shoulder.

I enlarged the ownership chart.

“What am I looking at?”

“The surnames.”

He frowned.

“The companies are registered under different family names.”

“They are.”

I highlighted several names.

“The Browns.”

“The Harrisons.”

“The Clarks.”

“The Millers.”

The Owens.”

“They’re all different.”

“They were.”

Jason immediately understood.

His expression became serious.

“They’re not anymore.”

I nodded.

I continued opening company after company.

Hidden behind layers of shell corporations and investment funds, every path eventually led to the same destination.

The Vincent Group.

Not Vincent Corporation.

Not Vincent Holdings.

The Vincent Group.

A massive network that had quietly absorbed dozens of influential families over several generations.

Some through mergers.

Others through debt.

Some through marriage.

Others through blackmail.

“They’re not one family,” I whispered.

“They’re a conglomerate.”

Jason slowly sat down beside me.

“They’ve been building this for decades.”

“No.”

I corrected.

“For centuries.”

Every family that disappeared from public influence hadn’t vanished.

They had simply become part of the Vincents..

Their names remained on paper.

Their companies continued operating.

But the decisions...

The money...

The power...

Always flowed upward.

Toward Alexander Vincent.

I leaned back in my chair.

“This isn’t a family.”

Jason nodded.

“It’s an empire.”

For the first time, I truly understood what Governor Henry had meant.

The Vincents weren’t trying to conquer countries anymore.

They already had.

Just differently.

Not with armies.

With contracts.

Three days later...

They struck back.

Jason walked into my office carrying his tablet.

“We have a problem.”

I immediately stood.

“What happened?”

“Our construction division.”

He handed me the reports.

One shipment delayed.

Then another.

Steel.

Concrete.

Copper wiring.

Industrial glass.

Heavy machinery.

+158gnus

Everything needed to continue our projects had suddenly become unavailable.

first glance, every supplier blamed transportation issues.

Weather.

Fuel shortages.

Mechanical failures.

Labor strikes.

Different excuses.

Same result.

Nothing arrived.

Jason didn’t need to explain.

“They’re blocking us.”

I nodded.

“The supply routes.”

Within hours our logistics team confirmed it.

Entire transport corridors had become mysteriously unavailable.

Warehouses suddenly refused deliveries.

Trucking companies canceled contracts.

Ports delayed inspections.

Every obstacle looked legal.

Every delay looked accidental.

Together…

It was coordinated.

Sun Corporation had become the target.

Jason smiled.

Not happily.

“They finally decided to stop hiding.”

Most companies would have panicked.

We investigated instead.

Every supplier.

Every transportation company.

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distributor.

The deeper we dug…

The more familiar the pattern became. “They’re connected.”

Jason enlarged another ownership chart.

Every supplier eventually traced back to…

The Vincent Group.

I couldn’t help laughing.

Jason looked at me.

“You’re laughing?”

“They’re making our decision easier.”

He understood immediately.

I opened a new document.

“Terminate every contract.”

Jason nodded.

“All of them.”

“No negotiations.”

“No warnings.”

“No second chances.”

He smiled.

“I was hoping you’d say

that.”

Within twenty-four hours, Sun Corporation officially ended every agreement with Vincent-controlled suppliers.

The business world exploded.

News outlets called it reckless.

Financial analysts predicted disaster.

Competitors celebrated.

Alexander Vincent undoubtedly smiled.

For exactly one day.

Because while everyone watched us cancel contracts...

They failed to notice what we were doing next.

Instead of searching for new multinational suppliers...

We visited local businesses.

Small family-owned factories.

Independent steel manufacturers.

Regional lumber mills.

Concrete producers.

Stone quarries.

Glass workshops.

Transportation cooperatives.

Businesses that had never received opportunities from corporations our size.

Jason and I personally visited many of them.

The owners looked stunned.

One elderly couple thought we had entered the wrong building.

“You want…”

The owner blinked repeatedly.

“…to buy from us?”

I smiled.

“If you’re willing.”

“But we’re tiny.”

“Not for long.”

Instead of simply signing purchase agreements…

We invested.

Modern equipment.

Training.

New production lines.

Expanded facilities.

Employment programs.

Within weeks, local businesses that had struggled for years suddenly found themselves growing faster than they had ever imagined.

The city celebrated. Workers celebrated.

Families celebrated.

Only one group didn’t.

The Vincents.

Because every local business we strengthened became one less company dependent on them.

Every investment weakened their monopoly.

Every new supplier reduced their leverage.

Jason looked at the newest reports and smiled for the first time in days.

“Our construction costs dropped.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“They did?”

He turned the monitor toward me.

“By eleven percent.”

I blinked.

“We’re paying less?”

“The local suppliers don’t have five layers of middlemen.”

I laughed.

“So…”

“We accidentally improved the economy.”

Jason chuckled.

“And made more profit.”

Sometimes the best revenge wasn’t destroying an enemy.

Sometimes…

It was making sure nobody needed them anymore.

As I looked across the growing list of local businesses joining our network, I realized something.

Alexander Vincent thought he had blocked our future.

Instead…

He had forced us to build something much stronger.

A system that no longer depended on him at all.

15 Berus

A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 285

Amber POV

Alexander Vincent made a move none of us expected.

He didn’t attack our companies.

He didn’t target our investors.

He didn’t spread another rumor about Jason or me.

He went after Iris.

The news broke just before noon.

Every major media outlet carried the same headline.

“The Lost Stanley Heiress Finally Identified.” 1

I froze as I read the article.

They had publicly exposed Iris.

Not only her name.

Not only her face.

They had published her family history, her inheritance, and her connection to the Stanley family.

Within minutes my phone began ringing nonstop.

The school called first.

Then Mrs. Sun.

Then the security team.

Then Governor Henry.

I didn’t hesitate.

“Jason!”

He was already running toward me, his own phone pressed against his ear.

“I know.”

“We’re getting the children.”

We arrived at the academy less than twenty minutes later.

Security had already locked down the campus.

Mrs. Sun was waiting at the entrance.

“I’ve moved Iris to my office,” she said immediately. “No reporters have gotten inside.”

I nodded gratefully.

The

“Thank you.”

hurried through the halls.

When Iris saw us, she immediately stood.

“I’m sorry.”

The apology caught me off guard.

“For what?”

“They’re doing this because of me.”

I crossed the room and hugged her before she could say another word.

“They’re doing this because they’re afraid.”

She buried her face against my shoulder.

“They don’t get to decide who you are.”

Jason quietly spoke with the security team while I stayed beside Iris.

Just then another voice interrupted us.

“Please… wait.”

We all turned.

Standing in the doorway was Francis Owens.

He looked as though he had run all the way across campus.

His tie was crooked, his hair a mess, and he was breathing heavily.

“I need to come with you.”

Jason immediately stepped in front of us.

“No.”

Francis looked directly at Iris.

“I have to explain.”

Iris looked confused.

“What?”

He swallowed hard.

“I knew there was a Stanley heir.”

The room became silent.

“I didn’t know…”

His eyes met hers.

“…it was you.”

Jason’s expression darkened.

“What exactly are you talking about?”

Francis took a shaky breath.

“My engagement.”

Iris frowned.

“I thought you were engaged to someone from the Vinny family.”

“I was told I was.”

He laughed bitterly.

“I wasn’t.”

“The documents only said the Stanley heir.”

He looked at Iris again.

“The Vincents arranged it years ago.

“They never told me your name.”

“They never showed me your picture.”

“They only told me I would eventually marry the Stanley heir.”

I felt my stomach twist.

“So when you started asking Iris questions…”

He nodded miserably.

“I was trying to figure out if she was the Stanley heir.”

Another pause.

“And…”

He looked ashamed.

“I was trying to find a way out of the engagement.”

Jason crossed his arms.

“So you used my daughter.”

Francis didn’t argue.

“I know how it looks.”

“It isn’t fair.”

“I liked Iris.”

+15 Bgnus

The Myra

“I still do.”

But I needed answers.”

He lowered his head.

“My family doesn’t own anything anymore.” Jason frowned.

“What do you mean?”

Francis laughed without humor.

“The Owens family exists only on paper.”

“The companies belong to the Vincents.”

“The money belongs to the Vincents.”

“The decisions belong to the Vincents.”

“My father still has the title of head of the Owens family.”

He looked exhausted.

“But we’re heirs to nothing.”

“The Vincents own everything.”

Silence settled over the room.

The reality was worse than we imagined.

Alexander Vincent wasn’t creating alliances.

He was assigning people.

Moving families around like pieces on a chessboard.

Iris suddenly spoke.

“I think…”

She looked at me..

“I think someone has been following me.”

Jason immediately turned toward her.

“What?”

“The last few days.”

She looked uncomfortable.

“I kept seeing the same man.”

“I thought I was imagining it.”

The sty

“I thought I was just paranoid because of everything that’s happened.”

wrapped her arms around herself.

“But every time I left class…”

“…he was there.”

My heart sank.

Jason immediately called security.

Within minutes every camera around the school was being reviewed.

Before anyone could say another word, my phone rang.

The caller ID made me pause.

Mr. Stanley.

I answered immediately.

“Mr. Stanley.”

His voice was calm.

Far calmer than I expected.

“Amber.”

“I’ve seen the news.”

“So have I.”

A long silence followed.

Then he sighed.

“I’ve booked the first flight to Sum.”

I closed my eyes.

“I understand.”

“No.”

His voice became firm.

“I’ve spent too many years hiding.”

Another pause.

“It ends now.”

I glanced toward Iris.

She was watching me anxiously.

Mr. Stanley continued.

The Day

Chapter 286

want you to arrange a press conference.”

rowned.

“Á

“A press conference?”

“Yes.”

“The world deserves the truth.”

Another pause.

“And more importantly…”

“My granddaughter deserves the truth.”

He took a slow breath.

“It is time everyone knows that Iris Stanley is my heir.”

I looked at Iris again.

She had spent so much of her life believing she belonged nowhere.

Now the entire world was about to learn exactly where she belonged.

And somehow…

I had the feeling Alexander Vincent had just made another mistake.

Because instead of isolating Iris…

He had given her family a reason to stand beside her publicly.

And this time…

None of us intended to hide.

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Stanley succession

Amber POV

Mr. Stanley arrived in Sum that very same night.

Despite his age, despite the long flight, despite everything that had happened over the last twenty-four hours he. refused to rest.

The moment his car stopped in front of Ember Castle, Iris was already running down the front steps.

“Grandpa!”

She practically threw herself into his arms.

Mr. Stanley caught her effortlessly, holding her as tightly as he could.

“My little girl…”

His voice broke.

For several long moments neither of them spoke.

I simply stood beside Jason, watching.

Iris buried her face against his shoulder while Mr. Stanley stroked her hair just as any grandfather would.

Both of them were crying.

Not loud sobs.

Just silent tears born from years of separation.

Jason quietly slipped his hand into mine.

“They deserve this,” he whispered.

I nodded.

“They do.”

Eventually the emotions settled enough for everyone to move inside.

The reunion was over.

Now came the difficult part.

The strategy.

Within half an hour, the adults had gathered around the conference table in the castle library.

Mr. and Mrs. Sun.

Grandfather Asher.

Mr. Stanley.

Jason.

And me.

Maps, tablets, legal documents, and media reports covered the table.

Grandfather Asher broke the silence.

“We have one opportunity to control the narrative.”

Mr. Stanley nodded.

“If we hesitate, Alexander Vincent will write the story for us.”

None of us wanted that.

We spent hours discussing every possibility.

Every question the media might ask.

Every weakness the Vincents might exploit.

By midnight we finally agreed on the official version.

The truth...

Or at least the part of it the world needed to know.

According to our statement, Iris had been found years earlier living in the countryside of Sum.

A kind elderly woman had discovered her wandering alone with no memory of who she was.

The woman had taken her in, cared for her as her own granddaughter, and repeatedly reported the little girl to the local authorities.

Unfortunately, because everyone believed Iris Stanley had died in the same accident that claimed her parents' lives, no one ever connected the missing child in another country to the Stanley heiress.

Years passed.

The elderly woman eventually became ill.

Knowing she would not survive much longer, she asked Jason and me to adopt Iris and give her the future she could no longer provide.

After her passing, routine medical examinations and DNA testing unexpectedly revealed Iris's true identity.

The moment the results were confirmed, we contacted Mr. Stanley.

He had immediately recognized his granddaughter.

However, considering Iris was still a minor and had already endured enough trauma, he asked us to continue raising her while he remained a constant presence in her life.

He would visit often.

She would inherit the Stanley family.

And when the time came, she would choose her own future.

One point was never debated.

Mr. Stanley looked directly at us.

"She keeps her name."

miled.

"Of course."

"She will always be Iris Stanley."

Jason nodded.

"Being our daughter doesn't erase where she came from."

Mr. Stanley smiled gratefully.

“No.”

“It doesn’t.”

The meeting continued until nearly four in the morning.

Mrs. Sun handled media logistics.

Grandfather Asher coordinated security.

Jason prepared cyber security in case the Vincents attempted another attack during the conference.

I prepared the official statement.

By sunrise, every detail had been finalized.

The press conference took place in the castle gardens the following morning

News vans stretched far beyond the entrance gates.

Satellite trucks lined the road.

Journalists from across the continent crowded behind the barriers.

The atmosphere changed completely the moment Mr. Stanley stepped onto the stage beside Jason and me.

A wave of murmurs swept through the crowd.

Then chaos.

“Cameras this way!”

“It’s really Mr. Stanley!”

“When did he arrive in Sum?”

“Is Iris really alive?”

Flashes illuminated the entire garden.

Mr. Stanley calmly stepped toward the podium.

His posture remained straight despite his age.

When the questions began, they came all at once.

“Mr. Stanley!”

Why wasn’t Iris’s return announced sooner?”

“Why was she hidden?”

“Were you trying to keep the Stanley succession secret?”

He patiently waited for the reporters to quiet down....

Then he spoke.

“I had intended to introduce my granddaughter to the world.”

He paused.

“In approximately two years.”

The reporters immediately erupted into whispers.

He continued calmly.

“Iris is still underage.”

“I wanted her to finish growing up before placing the weight of the Stanley family upon her shoulders.”

His eyes briefly found Iris, who stood beside Mrs. Sun.

“I wanted to protect my granddaughter.”

Silence settled across the crowd.

“I failed to protect her once.”

His voice softened.

“I had no intention of failing her again.”

Not a single reporter interrupted.

Mr. Stanley looked directly into the cameras.

“Today I can proudly confirm that Iris Stanley is alive.”

“She is my granddaughter.”

“She is my only heir.”

“And one day…” 1

A warm smile appeared on his face.

“…the Stanley family will belong to her.”

The cameras flashed continuously.

For the first time since Alexander Vincent had exposed Iris’s identity…

The world wasn’t looking at her as a victim.

They were looking at her exactly as she deserved to be seen.

A the future head of one of the continent’s oldest families.

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A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 287

Amber POV

Everything was going smoothly.

Better than any of us had dared to hope.

Mr. Stanley had answered every question with honesty and dignity. The reporters had remained surprisingly respectful, and Iris had slowly begun to relax beside me.

Then one reporter stood up.

“Mr. Stanley!”

The room quieted.

“What about Iris Stanley’s engagement to the Owens family?”

The atmosphere changed instantly.

I saw Iris stiffen beside me.

Mr. Stanley glanced toward me.

I gave him a small nod before stepping forward and taking the microphone..

“That is a fair question.”

The cameras immediately turned toward me.

“Yes, the Owens family approached us after discovering Iris’s identity.”

I chose my words carefully.

“The engagement in question was arranged when Iris was still a baby.”

A wave of murmurs spread through the audience.

“It was originally intended to strengthen the relationship between the Stanley and Owens families.”

I paused.

“However, circumstances have changed.”

I looked toward Iris before continuing.

“We are not rejecting the idea completely.”

Another wave of whispers.

“But whether that engagement ever becomes a marriage...”

I smiled warmly at Iris.

“...will depend entirely on Iris.”

She looked at me with wide eyes.

“No one-not me, not Jason, not Mr. Stanley, and not the Owens family-will decide her future for her.”

The reporters hurriedly wrote down every word.

There is something else I'd like everyone to remember."

I turned back toward the cameras.

"Iris is the last remaining heir of the Stanley family."

Silence filled the courtyard.

"If she chooses to marry one day, whoever marries Iris will marry into the Stanley family."

I let that sentence settle before continuing.

"The Stanley family line will continue through Iris."

"Not the other way around."

The reporters exchanged surprised looks.

It wasn't the answer they had expected.

Then, from somewhere near the back of the crowd, a young voice called out.

"I don't have a problem with that!"

Every head turned.

Including mine.

Francis Owens stood among the spectators, looking slightly embarrassed but refusing to back down.

He shrugged.

"I have brothers."

The silence somehow became even louder.

"They can continue the Owens family."

He smiled sheepishly.

"I really don't mind joining the Stanley family."

For a moment no one spoke.

Then Iris's face turned the brightest shade of red I had ever seen.

Even her ears turned pink.

Soft laughter spread through the crowd.

One elderly reporter chuckled and called out,

"Easy there, young man."

Another laughed.

"Down, boy."

tany

"You're both far too young for wedding plans."

e entire audience laughed good-naturedly.

Francis blinked, looking genuinely confused.

"But..."

He scratched the back of his head.

"If we're both too young..."

He looked toward the reporters.

"...then why expose Iris now?"

The laughter slowly faded.

He continued.

"Why not let her enjoy the last two years of freedom she has before everyone starts treating her like an heir?"

The question caught everyone off guard.

Even me.

He sounded completely sincere.

I looked at him carefully.

There it was.

That tiny spark in his eyes.

He knew exactly what he was doing.

He wasn't only defending Iris.

He was quietly criticizing whoever had forced her into the public eye.

Without accusing anyone directly.

Smart kid.

Very smart.

I found myself smiling.

Maybe I had judged Francis too quickly.

He wasn't trying to manipulate Iris.

He was trying to protect her in the only way he could.

And judging by the thoughtful expressions spreading across the reporters' faces...

His words had reached them.

One journalist slowly raised her hand.

"Mr. Stanley..."

She looked between Francis and Iris.

"Have you discovered who leaked Iris's identity to the media?"

Mr. Stanley stepped back to the microphone.

His expression became serious once more.

"Not yet."

He spoke calmly.

“But we are actively investigating.”

He folded his hands.

“And we intend to continue that investigation until we have our answer.”

Another pause.

“Until then...”

He looked lovingly toward Iris.

“I ask all of you to remember that before she is the Stanley heir...”

“...she is still a young girl.”

“My granddaughter deserves the opportunity to grow.”

“To finish school.”

“To make mistakes.”

“To discover who she wishes to become.”

He smiled gently.

“So I ask each of you...”

“Please give Iris the time to simply be Iris.”

For several long seconds, the reporters remained completely silent.

Then, one after another, cameras slowly lowered.

Not because the story had become less important.

But because, for the first time that morning, they had stopped looking at a headline.

And started seeing the seventeen-year-old girl standing quietly beside her grandfather.

Mr. Stanley then looked away from the cameras and searched the crowd until his eyes landed on Francis Owens.

The old man’s serious expression softened into one of quiet amusement.

“And you, young man...”

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expect you for dinner tonight.”

A’pause.

“Don’t be late.”

Francis froze.

His eyes widened in complete disbelief.

“Y-yes, sir!”

The reporters burst into laughter.

Even the photographers couldn’t hide their smiles as camera shutters clicked nonstop.

Someone from the press section called out with a grin,

“I guess that’s one way to survive meeting your future grandfather!”

The laughter grew even louder.

Iris covered her bright red face with both hands, looking as though she wanted the ground to swallow her whole.

Francis looked equally embarrassed, scratching the back of his neck while trying-and failing-not to smile.

I couldn’t help laughing myself.

Leave it to Mr. Stanley.

With a single sentence, he had managed to calm the reporters, reassure Iris, test Francis’s character, and embarrass two teenagers at the exact same time.

As the conference came to an end, I found myself looking at Francis with entirely new eyes.

Maybe...

Just maybe...

Helping the Owens family break free from the Vincents wouldn’t just save another family.

It might also give two teenagers the chance to decide their own future.

P

+15 8çnus

Redirected

Amber POV

Mr. Stanley had truly frightened the poor boy.

The moment the press conference ended, Francis looked like he was reconsidering every decision he had ever

made.

I almost felt sorry for him.

Almost.

Mrs. Sun certainly didn’t.

“Oh, this will never do,” she declared the moment we returned to the castle.

She immediately took Mr. Stanley by the arm.

“If you’re inviting the Owens family to dinner, we’re doing if properly.”

Mr. Stanley nodded with complete seriousness.

“I agree.”

Mrs. Sun smiled.

“I’ll have the invitations prepared.”

“And the menu.”

“And the seating arrangements.”

“And…”

She paused thoughtfully. 1

‘…we should probably warn the poor parents before their son arrives believing he’s about to be interrogated.”

For the first time all day, Mr. Stanley laughed.

“I suppose that would be the polite thing to do.”

The two of them disappeared toward the dining hall, already discussing guest lists, formal invitations, and whether seventeen-year-olds should be served wine.

I smiled.

“They’re going to terrify the entire Owens family.”

Jason chuckled.

“They probably already have.”

As entertaining as the situation was…

We had more important matters to deal with.

Without saying another word, Jason and I headed toward his office.

The moment the heavy wooden door closed behind us, our smiles disappeared.

Jason activated the encrypted network.

Several monitors lit up at once.

“So.”

He sat down.

“Let’s figure out who leaked Iris.”

I nodded.

The timing bothered me.

Alexander Vincent hadn’t simply learned Iris was alive.

He had learned she was the Stanley heir.

Those were two very different pieces of information.

I began reviewing every digital record connected to the Stanley family.

Jason searched communication logs.

Government databases.

School records.

Hospital files.

Property registrations.

Nothing.

Everything surrounding Iris had remained sealed.

Almost suspiciously so.

“I don’t like this.” 1

Jason glanced toward me.

“Neither do I.” 1

He enlarged another screen.

“If someone obtained that information…”

“…they either hacked extremely secure records…”

“…or someone told them.”

Neither option was comforting.

Hours passed.

We traced access logs.

Compared timestamps.

Reviewed every person who had legally accessed Iris’s DNA results.

Every trail ended cleanly.

Too cleanly.

Jason leaned back in his chair.

“Someone covered their tracks.”

I nodded.

“Professionally.” 1

Not even I could find a mistake.

Whoever had leaked Iris’s identity knew exactly what they were doing.

Which meant…

It probably wasn’t an ordinary hacker.

Another possibility slowly formed in my mind.

“Jason.”

He looked up.

“What if…” 1

I hesitated.

“…this wasn’t only about exposing Iris?”

He frowned.

“What do you mean?”

I opened the timeline we’d presented during the press conference.

Our official story.

The elderly woman.

The countryside.

The hospital.

The adoption.

Everything.

Then I highlighted one specific detail.

“The house.”

Jason stared at the screen.

C

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Realization slowly appeared on his face.

The location.”

I nodded.

“The story we told the media.”

“We described the countryside house.”

“The area.”

“The circumstances.” 1

Jason became very still.

Because we both recognized them.

They weren’t random.

They matched the place where Jason had been found as a child.

The isolated property where the Vincents had hidden him.

We had changed names.

Adjusted dates.

Modified circumstances.

But the location…

Remained essentially the same.

I slowly folded my arms.

“What if Alexander believes it?”

Jason didn’t answer immediately.

I continued thinking aloud.

“If Alexander truly believes Iris appeared in that countryside house…”

“…then he’d naturally assume someone else lost her.”

“The Vinny family.”

Jason nodded slowly.

“They were the ones controlling several of the safe houses.”

“If they lost track of Iris…”

“…they might never have admitted it.”

I finished the thought.

“They’d be afraid Alexander would punish them.”

Silence settled over the room.

e theory wasn’t impossible.

The Vinny family had already hidden information before.

They had acted independently more than once.

Fear inside organizations like the Vincents often created secrets.

Secrets created mistakes.

Jason stood and walked toward the window overlooking the academy.

“If Alexander believes the Vinnys lost Iris…”

“…he’ll start looking inside his own organization.”

I smiled.

“And while he’s busy questioning his allies…”

“…he won’t be looking at us.”

Jason returned the smile.

“For once…”

“We might have managed to redirect his attention.”

I leaned back in my chair.

“It isn’t enough.”

“No.”

“But it’s a start.”

Jason looked thoughtfully at one of the monitors.

“I’ll make sure he keeps believing it.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“How?”

He smiled.

“The internet.”

I immediately understood.

Small anonymous posts.

Old property records.

Rumors.

Forgotten newspaper clippings.

+15 8çnus

Enough breadcrumbs to reinforce the story.

Not enough to expose ourselves.

Just enough to send Alexander Vincent chasing ghosts. 1

As Jason began typing, I realized something.

For months...

We had been reacting.

Responding.

Defending ourselves.

Now...

For the first time...

We were manipulating Alexander Vincent into making decisions based on information we wanted him to believe.

And if our theory was correct...

The next battle wouldn't be between us and the Vincents.

It would be between Alexander Vincent...

....and the people inside his own organization.

Another

Another secret

Amber POV

Hours passed as Jason and I searched through report after report. Financial records, security logs, communication histories, access reports-everything blurred together until I couldn't remember what I had already read.

Nothing.

There wasn't a single clue pointing toward whoever had exposed Iris as the Stanley heiress.

I leaned back in my chair, rubbing my aching temples.

"There has to be something we're missing."

Jason didn't look away from his monitors.

"We're assuming the leak came from the Stanley family."

His words made me stop.

Then, like a flash of lightning, I remembered something.

"Iris."

Jason looked at me.

"What about her?"

I sat up straighter.

"She told us someone had been following her."

The room fell silent.

Without another word, I opened the academy's security archive.

Mrs. Sun had insisted on installing cameras throughout the school, something the parents had happily accepted after everything that had happened in River City. Every hallway, every entrance, every garden, every common area was recorded twenty-four hours a day.

If someone had been following Iris...

They had made a mistake.

We began reviewing footage from the previous weeks.

Hour after hour passed as we fast-forwarded through endless recordings.

Students.

Teachers.

Parents.

Delivery drivers.

Nothing.

Until...

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Chapter 290

roze the image.

A man walked calmly across one of the academy's courtyards.

He wasn't wearing a visitor's badge.

He wasn't accompanied by a teacher.

Yet he walked just beside two security guards as if he belonged there.

Jason leaned closer.

"I know him."

"So do I."

I zoomed in.

The image sharpened.

The same reporter.

The one who had continuously interrupted Mrs. Sun during the inauguration ceremony.

The one who had asked strangely specific questions about our family.

The one I had thought was simply an overly persistent journalist.

Only...

Journalists weren't supposed to wander around a private school after an event had ended.

I followed him through the different cameras.

He wasn't interviewing anyone.

He wasn't taking photographs.

He wasn't even pretending to work.

He was watching.

More specifically...

He was watching Iris.

Jason immediately started a facial recognition search.

Within seconds, the system returned a result.

Santiago Stiles.

Occupation: Investigative Reporter.

Employer...

I wasn't surprised.

"He works for the Vinny family."

Jason let out a slow breath.

"So they sent him."

"We need everything."

Jason nodded.

Within minutes we were combing through every communication connected to Santiago Stiles, the Vinny family the Vincents, and even the Becker family.

Eventually...

We found encrypted emails.

Jason broke the encryption while I read over his shoulder.

The first email came directly from the Vinny family.

Investigate the two new girls living with the Ashers. Find out where they came from.

A few days later Santiago replied. 1

Rose told another student that she is Amber’s cousin but that Amber legally adopted her into the main Asher family.

That wasn’t particularly surprising.

Røse had never hidden it.

Then I reached the paragraph about Iris.

I have not been able to identify Iris. She appears to have arrived recently. I overheard her telling a teacher she had to learn everything from scratch in less than six months because she never had access to formal education before. The teacher had asked how it was possible that she had never read the classical middle and high school books required by the curriculum.

I remembered that conversation.

Iris had answered honestly.

She had no reason to suspect someone nearby was listening to every word she said.

The next email made my stomach twist.

Proceed with a DNA test.

The Vincents are demanding the whereabouts of a missing heir.

The Beckers have no recent record of her.

She does not appear on the rescued children’s registry.

Jason and I stared at the screen in complete silence. 1

Finally, I whispered,

“They thought the Beckers lost her.”

Jason nodded slowly.

“Which means they believed the Beckers were responsible for keeping track of the missing heir.”

“But…”

I frowned.

“How did they compare Iris’s DNA?”

Jason immediately searched for the laboratory request.

There it was.

A DNA comparison had been requested. 1

But…

There was no indication of the comparison sample.

No listed relative.

No family reference.

Nothing.

I looked at Jason.

“The Beckers didn’t have any recent records.”

“No.”

“They didn’t have Iris.”

“No.”

“So…”

I folded my arms.

“Who did they compare her DNA against?”

Jason remained silent.

The question lingered between us.

One possibility slowly formed in my mind.

“What if…”

I hesitated.

“...there’s another Stanley family member still under the Vinny family’s control?”

Jason slowly looked at me.

“Another survivor.”

Another heir.

thought sent chills down my spine.

If there really was another member of the Stanley family alive....

Then Iris wasn’t the only person Alexander Vincent had been searching for.

Another possibility came just as quickly.

“What if they didn’t have another Stanley?”

Jason frowned.

“They could have hacked the DNA reports.”

“The hospital.”

“The fertility clinic.”

“The adoption records.”

“The DNA sample I ordered for Iris.”

Jason immediately checked the access logs.

Minutes passed.

Then he shook his head.

“No unauthorized access.”

I stared back at the emails.

Something wasn’t right.

If they hadn’t hacked the reports...

And they didn’t officially have Stanley DNA…

Then how had they confirmed Iris’s identity?

I read the message one last time.

The Beckers have no recent record of her.

Not…

No record.

Just…

No recent record.

Meaning there had once been records.

Meaning someone, somewhere, had Stanley DNA in their possession.

I slowly closed the laptop.

+15 8cm

A

oldy Stanly survivor.”

ately

at the iscrechestozen before finally saying,

the Stanley Smiley familyhas another secret.”

Alexander Vinccor inconever had.

A woman

Amber POV

The following weeks d

Jason and I had spent intentionally steppo

The executives were

The departments were

The systems practicall

At least...

That had been the pla

Reality, as always had

Problems still found u

Every single day.

Some were small.

Others...

Not so much.

One afternoon, while! phone rang.

Pamela.

I smiled before answe

“Please tell me you’re

Silence.

That wasn’t encourag

“Pam?”

She let out a long sigh

“We have a problem.”

I immediately straight

“What happened?”

“It’s the media depart

I frowned.

“Phoenix Ashes?”

A woman

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he following weeks disappeared in a blur of meetings, reports, and endless video conferences.

Jason and I had spent months building our companies in Sum, and for the first time since relocating, we had intentionally stepped back from the day-to-day operations.

The executives were capable.

The departments were organized.

The systems practically ran themselves.

At least...

That had been the plan.

Reality, as always, had other ideas.

Problems still found us.

Every single day.

Some were small.

Others...

Not so much.

One afternoon, while I was reviewing the latest construction updates from the castle restoration project, my phone rang.

Pamela.

I smiled before answering.

“Please tell me you’re calling with good news.”

Silence.

That wasn’t encouraging.

“Pam?”

She let out a long sigh.

“We have a problem.”

I immediately straightened in my chair.

“What happened?”

“It’s the media departments.’

I frowned.

“Phoenix Ashes?”

“And Asher Corporation.”

ubbed my forehead.

“They’re refusing to cooperate.”

“Why?”

Pamela laughed bitterly.

“I wish I knew.”

She paused.

“Actually…”

“I do know.”

Her voice hardened.

“Some of the senior managers from the old Asher Corporation media division don’t like taking orders from me.”

I blinked.

“…Why?”

Another silence.

Then she answered.

“Because I’m a woman.”

For a moment, I honestly thought I had misheard her.

“What?”

“They don’t say it directly.”

“They’re careful.”

“But every meeting somehow ends with someone asking whether a more ‘experienced gentleman’ should lead the integration.”

I closed my laptop.

Experienced gentleman.

Of course.

Pamela continued. 1

“It became worse after the pregnancy announcement.”

I already knew I wasn’t going to like the next sentence.

“The media has started asking whether Adrian will become acting head of Asher Corporation while you’re pregnant.”

I stared at the wall.

“…What?”

They’re asking whether the family should temporarily transfer authority to a man.”

I laughed.

Not because it was funny.

Because it was so utterly ridiculous that my brain refused to process it.

“If I were a man…”

Pamela finished my thought.

“…they’d probably ask how many days of paternity leave you planned to take.”

Exactly.

+15 cr

No one would question whether Jason remained capable of running Sun Corporation because I was pregnant. i

No one.

Yet somehow my pregnancy had become a corporate governance issue.

I stood.

“I’m coming.”

Pamela went completely silent.

“…Really?”

“I’ll handle it personally.”

The silence lasted several more seconds.

Then…

To my complete surprise…

I heard her crying.

Not loudly.

Just quiet, relieved tears.

“Oh…”

She quickly wiped them away.

“I’m sorry.”

“No.”

My heart tightened.

“Don’t apologize.”

“I didn’t realize…”

A woman

Her voice trembled.

how much I needed to hear someone say that.”

The conversation ended shortly afterward.

I remained standing in my office. 1

If Pamela…

One of the strongest women I had ever met…

Had reached the point of crying because of workplace discrimination…

Then the situation inside Asher Corporation had become much worse than the reports suggested.

I walked straight to Jason’s office.

He looked up immediately.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m going back to River City.”

His expression changed instantly.

“No.”

I blinked.

“No?”

“No.”

He stood.

“Absolutely not.”

I folded my arms.

“I wasn’t asking permission.”

“I know.” 1

“That’s what worries me.”

Despite everything, I smiled.

“I’m serious.”

“So am I.”

He walked around his desk.

“It’s dangerous.”

“The Vincents.”

“The Vinnys.”

“The media.”

He looked pointedly at my stomach.

“And our babies.”

I sighed.

“Jason.”

“Pregnancy isn’t a disease.”

“I know.” 1

“I’m not even showing yet.”

“I know.” 1

“I’ll be careful.”

“I know.” 1

Every answer sounded exactly the same.

“I still don’t like it.”

I stepped closer.

“I’m the CEO of two corporations.”

“I can’t manage this from another country forever.”

“They need to see me.”

“They need to know I haven’t disappeared.”

Jason looked exhausted.

“I know.” 1

His voice was quieter now.

“I just…”

He stopped speaking.

I reached for his hand.

“What?”

He looked directly into my eyes.

“I’m scared.”

The honesty caught me completely off guard.

Jason almost never admitted fear.

Not for himself.

Not out loud.

“I almost lost you.”

His voice barely rose above a whisper.

“The attack at the mine.”

“The poisoning.”

“The Vincents.”

“The pregnancy.”

“I know you’re strong.”

He squeezed my hand.

“But strength doesn’t make you bulletproof.”

My heart softened immediately.

This wasn’t control.

This wasn’t possessiveness.

This was fear.

Real fear.

He had been carrying it quietly all this time.

I rested my forehead against his.

“I’ll be careful.”

“I know.”

“I’ll have security.”

“I know.” 1

“I’ll keep you updated.”

“I know.”

I smiled gently.

“So…”

He took a deep breath.

“Then I’m coming with you.”

I laughed softly.

“Jason…”

+15 8gr

“I’ll stay outside.”

spoke before T could protest.

“I won’t interfere.”

“I won’t attend the meeting.”

“I won’t even enter the building.”

“I’ll wait in the car.”

His expression remained serious.

“But I’ll be there.”

I looked at him for several long moments.

He really was terrified.

Not because he doubted me.

Because he loved me.

And after everything we’d survived together…

I couldn’t blame him.

Finally…

I smiled.

“Okay.”

Relief visibly washed over his face.

“You’ll wait outside.”

“I promise.”

I kissed his cheek.

“You’re impossible.”

He smiled for the first time that day.

“I’ve been told that before.”

As we began preparing for our return to River City, I couldn’t shake the feeling that this trip wasn’t only about Pamela.

Somehow…

I knew someone was already waiting for us.

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Chapter 292

Amber POV

The trip back to River City was surprisingly quiet.

Jason and I spent most of the flight working, reviewing reports and answering emails while trying to pretend everything was normal.

Neither of us truly believed it.

Something always happened when we returned home.

By the time the plane landed, a car was already waiting for us.

The meeting had been scheduled at one of Asher Corporation’s corporate restaurants, a location frequently used for executive lunches and internal negotiations.

Perfect.

Nobody would expect me to arrive disguised.

I glanced at myself one last time in the car’s mirror.

A short blonde bob wig framed my face.

Large designer sunglasses hid my eyes.

A wide-brimmed cream-colored hat completed the look.

Instead of my usual business attire, I wore an elegant champagne-colored dress paired with high heels and an expensive-looking handbag.

I looked less like the CEO of two corporations and more like a spoiled heiress spending her father's money.

Exactly what I wanted.

Jason looked me over and smiled.

"I almost didn't recognize you."

"Good."

I reached for the car door.

Before I could touch the handle, Jason's hand covered mine.

I looked at him.

His jaw was tight.

"Jason..."

He didn't move.

"I don't like this."

"I know."

His fingers remained firmly wrapped around the handle.

"I have a bad feeling."

Nighed.

"You've had a bad feeling since we left Sum."

"I know."

I smiled helplessly before gently peeling each one of his fingers away from the door handle.

One.

Two.

Three.

He still looked unconvinced.

I leaned forward and kissed him softly.

“I’ll be fine.”

“You have your earpiece?”

I nodded.

“Panic button?”

“Yes.”

“Security outside?”

“Waiting.”

He exhaled slowly.

“I’ll be right here.”

“I know.”

“I mean it.”

“I know.”

I smiled one last time before stepping out of the car.

As I walked toward the restaurant entrance, I could feel Jason’s eyes following every step.

Earlier that morning I had called Pamela.

“I need you to tell them something.”

“What?”

“Tell the Asher media department that your boss is taking over the meeting.”

Pamela laughed nervously.

“They’re going to love that.”

“They’ll hate it.”

Even better.”-

I smiled.

“And make sure you’re the one introducing your buss.”

She understood immediately.

“Oh…”

A pause.

“I like this plan.”

The hostess greeted me politely the moment I entered.

“Good afternoon, miss.”

“Good afternoon.”

I gave her the reservation name Pamela had arranged.

The young woman’s expression changed almost imperceptibly.

She looked toward the private dining rooms.

Then back at me.

For just a second…

I saw sympathy.

Real sympathy.

“Your meeting is this way.”

She began walking.

Halfway down the corridor she slowed her pace.

Quietly enough that no one else could hear, she whispered,

“If you need anything…”

She subtly pointed toward the small service button mounted beside each private dining room.

“…press the server assistance button.”

I looked at her curiously.

“It sends an emergency alert to security.”

Our eyes met.

She gave me the smallest nod.

Then continued walking as though nothing had happened.

Interesting.

interesting

As we approached the meeting room, voices became audible.

Loud voices.

Male voices.

Then shouting.

The hostess hesitated outside the door before quietly stepping away.

I remained where I was.

Listening.

Pamela.

They were yelling at Pamela.

“You lied!”

A fist slammed against the table.

“You said you were the manager!”

Another voice laughed cruelly.

“Looks like your real boss finally got tired of hiding behind a woman.”

More laughter followed.

Someone else spoke.

“I knew it.”

“Women like you never reach positions like this on merit.”

Another man added,

“You’ve wasted enough of our time.”

A chair scraped loudly across the floor.

“I think you owe us compensation.”

More laughter.

My expression hardened.

Then came the sentence that made my blood run cold.

“Why don’t you stay behind after the meeting?”

His voice was slow.

Mocking.

“We can have a little one-on-one time.”

Another voice laughed. 1

“I’m sure she’ll be much more cooperative without witnesses.”

The room erupted in laughter.

Something inside me snapped.

There were many things I could tolerate.

Disrespect.

Arrogance.

Even personal insults.

But threatening one of my people?

Never.

I didn’t bother knocking.

I didn’t bother opening the door.

I stepped back once...

Raised my foot...

And kicked.

The heavy wooden door slammed inward with a deafening crack, crashing against the wall hard enough to shake the entire room.

The laughter stopped instantly.

Every head turned toward me.

The room fell completely silent.

Slowly, I removed my sunglasses.

Then my hat.

Finally, I reached up and pulled off the blonde wig.

Pamela’s eyes widened.

Every color drained from the men’s faces.

I smiled pleasantly.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen.”

A long pause.

“I believe...”

I looked around the room.

“...someone wanted to

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Chapter 293

+15 8cnus

housecleaning

Amber POV

So much for my disguise.

The moment I kicked the door open, the plan had officially ended.

I was simply too angry to keep pretending to be someone else.

Without saying a word, I removed my sunglasses first.

Then the wide-brimmed hat.

Finally, I pulled off the blonde bob wig and dropped it onto the table.

The room fell completely silent.

Every pair of eyes widened.

“Oh...”

Í smiled coldly.

“You do know who I am.”

Of course they did.

I was their new CEO.

The reason this merger was even taking place.

If Phoenix Ashes hadn’t grown as much as it had over the past year, Asher Corporation would have simply absorbed my company, just as they had expected from the beginning.

Unfortunately for them...

Phoenix Ashes had become far too successful for that to happen.

Now we were merging as equals.

I slowly looked around the room, matching each face to the personnel files I had studied on the flight.

Oscar Hale.

Manager of Asher Corporation's Media Division.

Lucas Thinly.

Vice President of the Marketing Department.

Simon Veil.

Senior Manager of the Design Division.

And Malcolm Parry.

Director of Communications.

Every single one of them had participated in making Pamela's life miserable.

+15 8chus

The moment they realized who I was, they hurriedly stood.

SEO Asher!"

"What an unexpected surprise!"

"We weren't informed you would be attending.

"It's an honor to finally meet you."

One after another, they bowed politely.

The performance was almost impressive.

Almost.

I walked calmly to the head of the table and took the seat that had been left empty for Pamela's mysterious boss.

Pamela remained completely silent.

She knew better than to interrupt.

“So…”

I folded my hands on the table.

“Would anyone like to continue explaining why my Media Director is apparently unqualified because she’s a woman?”

No one answered.

“What about the part where she supposedly lied about managing Phoenix Ashes?”

Still silence.

“And perhaps…”

I tilted my head slightly.

“…one of you would like to repeat your suggestion about spending some private one-on-one time with her.”

Oscar’s face lost all color.

“CEO Asher, you’ve misunderstood-”

“I have?”

“Yes.”

“You arrived at the wrong moment.”

“I see.”

Lucas immediately joined in.

“We were simply joking.”

Simon nodded vigorously.

“Office humor.”

Malcolm added,

Pamela misunderstood our intentions.”

Πlooked at Pamela.

“Did you misunderstand?”

She met my eyes.

“No.”

I smiled.

“I didn’t think so.”

The room became painfully quiet.

After allowing the silence to stretch for several seconds, I spoke only four words.

“Pick up your things.”

They all nodded.

Oscar looked toward Pamela.

“You heard the CEO.”

I sighed.

“No.”

Four confused faces turned back toward me.

“I wasn’t talking to Pamela.”

Another pause.

“I was talking to all four of you.”

For several seconds no one moved.

Lucas laughed nervously.

“I’m sorry…”

“…you’re firing us?”

“I’m terminating your employment effective immediately.”

Oscar slammed both hands onto the table.

“You can’t do that!”

“I already did.”

“You haven’t even investigated!”

I calmly picked up my phone.

“I have.”

Toressed play.

The room instantly filled with their own voices.

Every insult.

Every sexist remark.

Every threat.

Every disgusting suggestion directed at Pamela.

The color drained from their faces.

The recording continued playing while I dialed Human Resources.

The call connected almost immediately.

“This is Amber Asher.”

“I need the immediate termination of four senior executives.”

I listed every name.

“I’ve just sent the audio recording, security footage, and meeting transcript

I pressed send.

“I’ve also copied Chairman Asher.”

The HR director didn’t even hesitate.

“It will be handled immediately, CEO.” 1

“Thank you.”

I ended the call.

The silence that followed was deafening.

Oscar suddenly laughed.

A bitter, angry laugh.

“You’ve ruined our careers.”

“No.”

I stood.

“You did.”

The four men exchanged glances.

Something changed.

I noticed it immediately.

+158chus

Desperation.

Malcolm quietly inuttered,

“We’ve got nothing left to lose.”

Oscar slowly looked toward the two bodyguards standing near the entrance.

“Get her.”

The bodyguards hesitated.

“Now!”

Oscar’s face twisted with rage.

“Show her what a real man looks like.”

I sighed.

“That…”

I slipped off my heels.

“…was the wrong decision.”

My skirt wasn’t exactly designed for fighting.

Neither was the elegant blouse.

Still…

It would have to do.

The first bodyguard reached me.

He never managed to grab my arm.

I pivoted, struck his shoulder, and used his momentum to throw him across the conference table.

The second charged immediately afterward.

I ducked beneath his punch and swept his legs from under him.

The first stood again.

The second joined him.

Then both attacked together.

The fight lasted longer than I would have liked.

Six minutes.

Six very annoying minutes.

My skirt limited my kicks.

My bare feet protested against the polished floor.

But eventually…

Both bodyguards lay on the ground groaning.

I calmly picked up my shoes.

Brushed invisible dust from my skirt.

Then looked toward the four executives.

“So…”

I smiled pleasantly.

“Are any of you next?”

None of them answered.

Instead…

The conference room door burst open.

Jason entered first.

The hostess hurried in behind him.

Several police officers followed immediately afterward.

Jason looked around the destroyed room.

The unconscious bodyguards.

The overturned chairs.

Me.

Standing barefoot while holding my high heels.

He closed his eyes.

Just for a second.

Then he looked at me.

“Amber.”

I smiled weakly.

“Hi.”

The police quickly arrested the four executives and escorted the bodyguards away.

Once the room had finally emptied, Jason turned back toward me.

“You fought again.”

I looked down.

“...Maybe.”

He raised an eyebrow.

Maybe?”

“They started it.”

“I know.”

“You handled yourself.”

“I know.”

He took a deep breath before gently placing both hands on my shoulders.

“I need you to promise me something.”

I already knew what it was.

“No more fighting.”

He glanced meaningfully toward my still-flat stomach.

“Not until after the babies are born.”

I looked into his worried eyes.

This wasn’t about doubting me.

It was about protecting our family.

I nodded.

“I promise.”

Then I smiled mischievously.

“But only because I knew neither of those bodyguards posed a real risk.”

“If I had thought otherwise…”

“I would have called you.”

Jason let out a long sigh somewhere between relief and exasperation before pulling me into a careful hug.

“You’re going to give me gray hair.”

I laughed against his shoulder.

“Probably.”

As we left the restaurant together, I couldn’t help smiling.

Today hadn’t just been about defending Pamela.

It had been about sending a message to everyone inside Asher Corporation.

The old rules were gone.

And if anyone else believed intimidation, sexism, or threats had a place in my company…

Well…

ooked like I still had quite a bit of housecleaning left to do.

P

A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 294

Unofficially

Amber POV

Grandfather was furious.

I had expected him to be upset after receiving the recordings and the HR reports.

I had not expected him to storm into my office less than an hour after I returned to Asher Corporation. 2

“They did what?”

His voice echoed through the hallway.

“They threatened you?”

“And Pamela?”

I quietly slid the recording toward him.

“I thought you should hear it for yourself.”

He didn’t interrupt the audio once.

He listened to every insult.

Every sexist remark.

Every threat.

Every disgusting comment directed at Pamela.

By the end, his face had turned frighteningly calm.

He slowly removed his glasses and placed them on my desk. 1

“They’re lucky the police arrived first.”

I couldn’t help smiling.

“I think Jason would agree.”

“Oh, Jason isn’t the one I’m talking about.”

That made me laugh.

Grandfather had always looked like the picture of a dignified businessman.

People tended to forget he hadn’t reached the top of the corporate world by being gentle.

Before I could reply, another familiar voice spoke from the doorway.

“If they’re looking for lawyers…”

Marcus leaned casually against the doorframe with his hands in his pockets.

“…I’d be happy to bury those four men in legal paperwork for the next decade.”

I laughed.

+15 8chus

“That sounds oddly specific.”

Marcus grinned.

“I’m a lawyer.”

“It’s what I do.”

He looked genuinely pleased.

“They threatened two women in executive positions.”

“I can think of at least fifteen different lawsuits.”

He paused.

“Without trying.”

I shook my head.

“They’ve already lost their jobs.”

Marcus shrugged.

“Then I’ll help make sure they never manage another company again.”

I looked at him appreciatively.

“Thank you.”

“No problem.”

He smiled.

“I have extra motivation.”

That caught my attention.

Before I could ask, I noticed Pamela quietly avoiding everyone’s eyes.

She had turned an impressive shade of red.

I slowly looked between the two of them.

Then back again.

A smile spread across my face.

“Pamela…”

She immediately looked anywhere except at me.

I folded my arms.

“Why am I hearing this from Marcus…”

“…and not from you?”

She groaned softly.

mottery

“Oh no.”

Marcus looked completely amused.

Pamela covered her face with both hands.

“We’re…”

She sighed dramatically.

“…dating.”

The room instantly became much more interesting.

Grandfather smiled.

Marcus looked entirely unapologetic.

Pamela looked as though she wanted to disappear into the floor.

I couldn’t stop smiling.

“Really?”

She nodded.

“It’s still new.”

“I didn’t want to tell anyone yet.”

“Why not?”

She lowered her hands.

“Because…”

Her smile became a little sad.

“My last relationships didn’t exactly end well.”

“I didn’t want to get excited too soon.”

I walked over and hugged her.

“I understand.”

She hugged me back.

“But…”

I smiled.

“I’m still very happy for you.”

Marcus looked suspiciously proud of himself.

“I intend to keep her.”

Pamela elbowed him immediately.

“I’m standing right here.”

Nknow.”

He smiled.

“I’m making sure everyone else knows too.”

Grandfather chuckled.

“I approve.”

Pamela looked absolutely horrified.

“Please stop helping.”

The room erupted into laughter.

The following morning, I began reviewing applications for the four vacant executive positions.

Normally, promotions at Asher Corporation required several rounds of interviews.

This time, I wanted results.

Not titles.

I spent hours reading performance reports.

Project histories.

Leadership evaluations.

Employee feedback.

By lunchtime I had narrowed each department to a single candidate.

I was about to approve the promotions when Pamela knocked on my office door.

“Wait.”

I looked up.

“What?” 1

She closed the door behind her.

“I don’t think you should choose based only on the files.”

I frowned.

“Why?”

She hesitated.

“Because that’s exactly how the previous department heads stayed in power.”

My attention sharpened immediately.

“What do you mean?”

+15 Bchus

“They took credit for other people’s work.”

Sence.

“They presented their employees’ ideas as their own.”

“They claimed successful campaigns.”

“They manipulated reports.”

She sighed.

“On paper…”

“They looked brilliant.”

“In reality…”

“They barely worked.”

I slowly closed the files.

“So the wrong people may still be getting promoted.”

Pamela nodded.

“I think so.”

Jason, who had been quietly reading nearby, finally spoke.

“Then we verify.”

That afternoon, Jason and I met with Asher Corporation’s HR Director.

Together we reviewed months of internal security footage.

Meeting recordings.

Presentation videos.

Project histories.

One pattern became obvious very quickly.

The people giving the presentations weren’t always the ones doing the work.

Several younger employees appeared repeatedly.

Preparing campaigns.

Designing materials.

Leading brainstorming sessions.

Only for someone else to walk into the boardroom and present everything as their own.

Jason leaned back in his chair.

“It’s cultural.”

The HR Director nodded.

became normal.”

I frowned.

“Then changing four department heads won’t solve the problem.”

Pamela smiled.

“I have an idea.”

We all looked at her.

“Let’s send someone undercover.”

The room became quiet.

“Someone no one would suspect.”

Jason smiled.

“I might know the perfect person.”

The next afternoon, a young woman entered my office.

She stood confidently despite being only seventeen years old.

“CEO Asher.”

She offered a firm handshake.

“My name is Emilia Goodrich.”

Jason introduced her.

“She’s been interning in my office.”

“Mrs. Sun’s closest friend is her mother.”

Emilia rolled her eyes.

“My family wants me in corporate.”

She smiled sheepishly.

“I actually want to become a police officer.”

That surprised me.

“Really?”

She nodded enthusiastically.

“I like investigations.”

“And catching bad people.”

Jason chuckled.

“I told you she’d enjoy this.”

till wasn’t convinced.

“Emilia…”

“You’re seventeen.”

“This could become dangerous.”

She didn’t hesitate for even a second.

“I know.”

“I still want to help.”

Her confidence reminded me of myself at that age.

Determined.

A little reckless.

Very stubborn.

I glanced at Jason.

Then at the HR Director.

Finally back at Emilia.

“If you ever feel uncomfortable…”

“You leave immediately.”

“No questions asked.”

She nodded seriously.

“I promise.”

“And HR will know exactly why you’re there.”

The HR Director agreed.

“No one will leave her unprotected.”

Only then did I finally smile.

“Welcome to the Media Department, Emilia Goodrich.”

She practically beamed.

She had no idea she had just accepted one of the strangest internships in corporate history.

Officially, she would be filing documents and organizing campaigns.

Unofficially...

She was about to expose everything that had been hidden inside Asher Corporation's media department.

+15 Bo

A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 295

POV

Amber and Jason had gone back to River City to deal with problems at their companies.

I knew they hadn't wanted to leave.

For months, they had practically put their businesses on hold to protect us, move everyone to Sum, build the school, restore the castle, and somehow still make time for every family dinner.

Now reality had finally caught up with them.

Someone had to keep their companies running.

That someone was them.

The castle felt... quieter without them.

Not empty.

Just different.

Rose and Alice, however, had reached a completely different conclusion.

"We should go get them," Alice declared for what had to be the tenth time that morning.

Rose nodded enthusiastically.

"They probably miss us."

I looked up from my book.

“No.”

“They’re working.”

“They’re adults.”

Alice folded her arms.

“They’re bored.”

I blinked.

“I’m pretty sure they’re not.”

“They are.”

She nodded with complete confidence.

“They just don’t know it yet.”

I couldn’t help laughing.

The truth was…

They weren’t worried.

They were bored.

‘

Very, very bored.

Apparently living in a centuries-old castle wasn’t exciting anymore.

Imagine that.

I looked around the enormous sitting room.

Stone walls.

Massive fireplaces.

Hidden passages.

Ancient paintings.

A library larger than my old school.

We literally lived in a castle.

I mentally added a generous amount of sarcasm to that thought.

Apparently castles became boring too.

Alice dramatically threw herself across one of the sofas.

“We need a mission.”

Rose immediately agreed.

“Amber always gives us missions.”

I smiled softly.

Rose had changed so much.

When we first rescued her from the Beckers, she barely spoke above a whisper.

Now…

She laughed.

She played.

She argued with Alice.

She smiled almost every day.

Jason had encouraged it.

“They’re children,” he had told us one evening.

“They deserve to act like children.”

He’d said it so quietly that I almost hadn’t heard him.

Later, when Amber asked why it mattered so much, he’d simply answered,

“Because I know what it’s like when you don’t get to be one.”

“Y

No one had asked any more questions after that.

eyes wandered across the room.

Alex sat in his favorite armchair, completely focused on his tablet.

His fingers moved rapidly across the screen while he muttered to himself.

He was probably the safest person to interrupt.

Unlike Alice and Rose, Alex always had a plan.

Usually several.

I walked over and leaned against the chair.

“What are you doing?”

He didn’t even look up.

“Research.”

I smiled.

“Military?”

“No.”

“Cameras?”

“No.”

“Another one of those online missions with your friends?”

“No.”

Now he finally looked up.

“I’m shopping.”

I blinked.

“…Shopping?”

He turned the tablet toward me.

Instead of maps...

Or security systems...

Or strategy games...

The screen was filled with baby cribs.

Tiny clothes.

Strollers.

Blankets.

+15 Bgus

Baby bottles.

Ntared at him.

“Alex?”

He looked completely serious.

“I’m trying to buy things for the babies.”

“Oh.”

I sat beside him.

“How’s it going?”

He sighed dramatically.

“Terrible.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know what they’ll look like.”

I frowned.

“...Why does that matter?”

He looked at me as though the answer should have been obvious.

“What if they have Jason’s hair?”

He scrolled down. 1

“Then maybe blue blankets.”

“What if they have Amber’s eyes?”

He sighed again.

“What if one is a boy and the other is a girl?”

“I don’t know what to buy.”

I couldn’t help laughing.

“You know…”

I pointed toward the tablet.

“…babies don’t usually care what color their blankets are.”

Alex looked unconvinced.

“I still want to get it right.”

That was so incredibly Alex.

He wanted everything to be perfect.

An idea suddenly crossed my mind.

WWhy don’t we ask Grandma Sun?”

He looked up immediately.

Mrs. Sun adored shopping.

Especially if it involved the family.

“She’d love that.”

I smiled.

“Exactly.”

Alex stood so quickly he almost dropped the tablet.

“We should invite everyone.”

Within minutes we had gathered in the living room.

“Shopping?” Mrs. Sun repeated.

Her eyes lit up.

“For my future great-grandbabies?”

Alex nodded.

“I need help.”

Mrs. Sun smiled so widely I thought her face might actually hurt.

“Oh, sweetheart.”

She hugged him immediately.

“You’ve come to exactly the right person.”

I laughed.

This was going to be dangerous.

For the credit cards.

“Where are Alice and Rose?” Mrs. Sun asked.

I turned toward the sofa.

Empty.

The window seat.

Empty.

The game room.

Empty.

I frowned.

They were just here.”

Alex looked around.

“Alice?”

No answer.

“Rose?”

Silence.

Mrs. Sun’s smile slowly faded.

I walked toward the hallway.

“Alice?”

Still nothing.

A strange feeling settled in my stomach.

The castle was enormous.

It wasn’t unusual for someone to wander into another room.

But…

Those two usually wandered together.

And they usually answered.

Alex lowered his tablet.

“I don’t like this.”

Neither did I.

I looked toward the staircase leading deeper into the castle.

For the first time all morning…

The silence felt wrong.

Alice and Rose had disappeared.

D

A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 296

mission: shopping.

INS POV

The first thing I did was look at Alex.

“Can you check the security cameras?”

He didn’t even answer.

His fingers were already flying across his tablet.

A few seconds later, the castle’s camera system appeared on the screen.

“I found them.”

Mrs. Sun and I hurried to his side.

The footage showed Alice and Rose happily skipping down one of the hallways.

“They’re heading toward the kitchen,” Alex murmured.

The next camera picked them up entering the enormous castle kitchen.

Then…

Nothing.

Alex frowned.

“That’s impossible.”

“What?”

“They never came out.”

He replayed the footage.

Again.

And again.

The girls clearly entered the kitchen.

Not a single camera showed them leaving.

Mrs. Sun’s smile disappeared.

“Let’s go.”

The three of us hurried toward the kitchen.

It was empty.

Completely empty.

I searched behind the pantry doors while Alex checked every window.

Mrs. Sun even looked inside the walk-in refrigerator.

No Alice.

Rose.

“This doesn’t make any sense,” I whispered.

“They have to be here somewhere.”

Alex compared the camera angles again.

“They never left.”

“So unless they climbed through the ceiling…”

Before he could finish, a loud grinding sound echoed through the room.

We all froze.

One of the stone walls slowly began to slide open.

I stared in disbelief.

“…What?”

A hidden passage.

Before any of us could react, two familiar little figures came sprinting out.

“We found it!”

Alice shouted excitedly.

Rose nodded so enthusiastically I thought her head might fall off.

“We found a secret door!”

Alice grabbed my hand.

“It has numbers!”

“And a code!” Rose added.

“We know what our mission is now!”

Mrs. Sun blinked.

“There was a secret passage in my kitchen?”

Apparently, that was news to her too.

Alice tugged harder.

“Come on!”

“You have to see it!”

Without waiting for permission, the two girls disappeared back into the hidden passage.

Mrs. Sun sighed.

+15 8çnus

“We’d better follow them.”

The tunnel seemed endless.

Stone walls surrounded us.

The air became cooler the deeper we walked.

Our footsteps echoed through the darkness while Alex used the flashlight on his tablet and I used my phone.

After what felt like forever, the passage finally opened into a circular chamber.

At the center stood a massive steel door.

Unlike the ancient stone around it, the door looked surprisingly modern.

Its surface was smooth.

Almost untouched.

Mounted beside it was an electronic keypad.

Alice pointed dramatically.

“There!”

Rose nodded.

“That’s the treasure door!”

Alex slowly walked around it.

“No hinges on the outside.”

“No visible lock.” 1

“No handle.”

I stepped closer.

Someone had clearly reinforced the original entrance long ago.

This wasn’t just an old castle door anymore.

Someone wanted whatever was behind it to stay hidden.

“I should call Amber.”

I pulled out my phone.

No signal.

I frowned.

“Nothing.”

Alex checked his tablet.

“No internet either.”

The tunnel was simply too deep.

Alice had already started pressing buttons.

“Maybe it’s 1234.”

The keypad flashed red.

Rose tried next.

“No…”

“Maybe it’s the castle’s birthday!”

Red again.

Alex joined them.

For the next fifteen minutes, the three of them proposed increasingly creative combinations.

Every single one failed.

Eventually all three children sat on the floor.

Defeated.

“I don’t like this mission anymore,” Alice declared dramatically.

Rose crossed her arms.

“The treasure should be easier.”

Alex sighed.

“We need more information.”

An idea came to me.

I quietly raised my phone.

Instead of photographing the keypad, I took a picture of the three of them sitting in front of the mysterious steel door.

I deliberately blurred the keypad in the background.

No point giving away possible clues if the picture ever leaked.

I smiled.

“I think we need a break.”

Three disappointed faces looked up at me.

“What if...”

I continued.

“...we go shopping for the babies?”

Alice blinked.

“And cookies?”

Definitely cookies.”

Rose itnmediately stood.

“I like this mission better.”

Alex looked thoughtful.

“More energy could improve our problem-solving.”

Mrs. Sun laughed.

“I completely agree.”

We made our way back through the tunnel. 1

The hidden wall slid shut behind us as though nothing had happened.

Once we reached the surface again, my phone immediately buzzed with missed notifications.

I called Amber.

She answered almost instantly.

“Iris?”

I quickly explained everything.

The missing girls.

The secret passage.

The steel door.

The keypad.

The lack of signal.

Amber laughed.

“So they finally found it.”

“You knew?”

“Jason and I discovered it weeks ago.”

She sounded almost relieved.

“We just haven’t had time to investigate it properly.”

Then I heard her call someone.

“Rose?”

The little girl nearly grabbed the phone from me.

“I’m here!”

Amber’s voice became playful.

ou are officially in charge of that mission.”

Rose gasped dramatically.

“Really?”

“There should be a treasure behind that door.”

“I haven’t figured out how to open it yet.”

“So…”

She paused.

“…that’s your mission for the week.”

Rose practically bounced.

“I accept!”

“I knew you would.”

Amber’s voice softened.

“I miss all of you.”

“I’ll be home in three days.”

“But promise me something.”

Rose nodded even though Amber couldn’t see her.

“We promise!”

“Be careful.”

“And don’t leave the castle grounds.”

Rose looked at Mrs. Sun.

“Well…”

“We were actually going to the mall.”

Silence.

Then Amber answered immediately.

“Absolutely not.”

I couldn’t help laughing.

A second later another voice came through the phone.

Jason.

“Iris?”

“Yes?”

Take them to the mall.”

Amber protested loudly somewhere in the background.

“Jason!”

He chuckled.

“They can’t stay inside the castle forever.”

Then he lowered his voice.

“Just be careful.”

“You have security.”

“Stay together.”

“And have fun.”

“I will.”

“Good.”

The call ended.

I looked at the three children already discussing baby clothes and cookies.

Then back toward the kitchen.

Toward the hidden passage concealed once more behind the stone wall.

The treasure could wait another day.

Today…

Apparently our mission involved shopping.

A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 297

Pamela's stepsister.

Amber POV

Jason and I looked at each other after the call with Iris ended.

Neither of us spoke for a few seconds.

"The kids found it," I finally said.

Jason nodded.

"The hidden entrance."

"And the steel door."

A smile tugged at the corner of my lips.

"We spent weeks trying to find time to investigate it."

"And they found it because they got bored."

Jason laughed.

"That sounds about right."

I leaned back in my chair.

"Maybe they'll solve the treasure before we do."

"I honestly wouldn't be surprised."

Neither would I.

Between Alice's creativity, Rose's curiosity, Alex's logical mind, and Iris keeping the three of them alive....

They actually made a surprisingly effective team.

“I just hope they don’t blow up the castle.”

Jason raised an eyebrow.

“Again?” 1

I looked at him.

“...It happened once.”

“It happened twice.”

“Those were experiments.”

“They were explosions.”

I sighed dramatically. 1

“Details.”

Jason chuckled before glancing at his watch.

+158chus

“I have to go.”

Construction meeting?”

He nodded.

“The new logistics center.”

I stood and straightened his tie.

“Don’t work too hard.”

“I was going to tell you the same thing.”

We shared a quick kiss before leaving together.

He headed toward Sun Corporation.

I met Pamela outside Phoenix Ashes’ temporary offices.

She looked far more relaxed than she had the day before.

“I’m glad you came.”

“I told you I would.”

We had barely started walking when her phone rang.

Pamela glanced at the screen.

Her smile disappeared.

“My stepmother.”

“You don’t have to answer.”

She shook her head.

“If I don’t, she’ll just keep calling.”

Pamela answered.

“Hello.”

I politely stepped a few feet away, pretending to admire one of the storefronts.

It lasted less than thirty seconds before the shouting became loud enough for me to hear anyway.

“You are being unreasonable!”

Pamela remained calm.

“I’m not marrying him.”

“You don’t have a choice!”

“I do.”

“If you refuse, we’ll cut you off completely.”

“I don’t depend on you.”

ou’ll regret this!”

The call ended abruptly.

Pamela slowly lowered the phone.

I walked back over.

“...Want to tell me what that was?”

She rolled her eyes.

“My stepmother.”

“I guessed that part.’

Pamela sighed.

“She’s trying to marry me off.”

“To whom?”

“A businessman.”

She paused.

“Well...”

“A creepy old businessman.”

I blinked.

“How old?”

“Sixty-two.”

I nearly choked.

“...You’re joking.”

“I wish.”

We continued walking.

“They’re threatening to cut me off financially if I don’t marry him.”

I looked at her.

“But...”

She suddenly smiled.

“They don’t know something.”

“What?”

“The house they’re living in.’

I frowned.

What about it?”

“It isn’t theirs.”

She couldn’t stop smiling now.

“It belonged to my mother.”

“My mother left it to me.”

I stared.

“They’re living…”

“…in your house.”

She nodded happily.

“They’ve spent years acting as though they own it.”

“They don’t.”

“And they have absolutely no idea.”

I burst into laughter.

“So they think they can pressure you financially…”

“…while living in your property.”

“Exactly.”

I shook my head.

“That’s almost poetic.”

She grinned.

“I don’t rely on them.”

“I haven’t for years.”

“I’ll be fine.”

Even so…

An idea crossed my mind.

“Pam.”

She looked at me.

“Move to Sum.”

She blinked.

“…What?”

“The castle.”

ou already have a room.”

“I miss you.”

She smiled softly.

“You could keep working remotely.”

“The media department is stabilizing.”

“And…”

I nudged her shoulder.

“…I’d like my best friend nearby.”

She looked genuinely touched.

“I’ll think about it.”

“I mean it.”

“We have more than enough room.”

“And Emilia starts tomorrow.”

Pamela nodded.

“The intern.”

“She’ll let us know if anything strange happens.”

“Exactly.”

A mischievous smile slowly spread across Pamela’s face.

“Speaking of strange…”

She grabbed my arm.

“We’re shopping.”

I laughed.

“Now?”

“We haven’t gone shopping in forever.”

She wasn’t wrong.

I pulled out my phone and sent Jason a quick text.

Going shopping with Pamela. See you later.

Three seconds later…

My phone vibrated.

Pure opto-

Wait for me. I’ll be there in twenty minutes.

Nooked at the message.

Then quietly locked my phone.

“What did he say?”

Pamela asked.

I smiled innocently.

“Nothing important.”

The truth?

I was still slightly annoyed.

He had told Iris and the kids they could go to the mall.

But somehow I needed an escort.

No.

Today I was shopping. 1

Jason could survive the surprise.

Three hours later...

Our arms were full of shopping bags.

we found Alice some new books.

for Alex another programming kit.

for Rose an enormous plush dragon.

for Iris several novels.

The twins already had three tiny outfits despite not even being born yet.

Pamela looked at our mountain of bags.

“I think we’re done.”

“I hope so.”

“I’m starving.”

“Food?”

“Definitely food.”

We headed toward one of the nicer restaurants inside the mall.

The hostess smiled.

“Table for two?”

+15 8çnus

Before either of us answered, Pamela suddenly stopped walking.

Her expression changed.

“What?”

She quietly pointed toward a table near the window.

I followed her gaze.

Marcus.

He was sitting across from a young woman.

Beautiful.

Elegant.

Blonde.

They were laughing together.

The woman reached across the table and touched his hand.

Pamela’s smile disappeared.

“...Who’s that?”

Before I could answer, the woman turned slightly.

I recognized her immediately.

Marta Simons.

Pamela’s stepsister.

And judging by the surprised expression on Marcus’s face...

He hadn’t noticed us standing there.

Yet.

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+15 Brus

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A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 298

Bye bye house

Amber POV

Pamela didn’t stop.

She didn’t hesitate.

She didn’t even glance in Marcus’s direction.

It was as if neither he nor Marta existed.

She simply smiled politely at the hostess and followed her toward our table.

Unfortunately, our table happened to be directly behind theirs.

I looked at Pamela carefully as we sat down.

She was calm.

Too calm.

She picked up the menu and started talking about work as if her boyfriend wasn’t having dinner just a few feet away with the stepsister who had spent years making her life miserable.

I decided to follow her lead.

We ordered drinks and chatted about the merger, the new media department, and Emilia's first day as an undercover intern.

Then Marta's voice drifted across the restaurant.

Loudly.

Almost as if she wanted someone else to hear.

"Marcus, you're incredible."

She laughed sweetly.

"Honestly, you're such a catch."

I saw Marcus shift uncomfortably in his seat.

Marta continued without noticing.

"Any woman would be absolutely stupid to let a man like you go."

My patience snapped.

I pushed my chair back.

"I'll be right back."

Before I could stand, Pamela gently placed her hand over mine.

"No."

Her voice was soft.

Almost pleading.

ust let it go, Am."

I looked at her.

She wasn't angry.

She wasn't crying.

She simply looked... tired.

I slowly sat back down.

“Okay.”

She smiled gratefully.

For a full minute, neither of us spoke.

Then, to my surprise, Pamela calmly unlocked her phone and dialed a number.

The call connected almost immediately.

“Hi, Josh.”

She smiled pleasantly.

“It’s Pamela.”

A pause.

“I think we’re well past the time to reclaim my mother’s house.”

I blinked.

Across the room, Marcus subtly looked in our direction.

He had obviously recognized Pamela by now.

Marta hadn’t.

Pamela continued speaking as if nothing around her existed.

“Oh?”

She nodded while listening.

“So everything my mother left belongs to me?”

Another pause.

“The money too?”

She smiled.

“Perfect.”

I couldn’t help staring at her.

She sounded remarkably cheerful.

Actually…”

She leaned back comfortably in her chair.

“The house doesn’t really have sentimental value anymore.”

She glanced briefly toward Marta before looking back out the restaurant window.

“Too many bad memories.”

She listened for another moment.

“You think selling it would be the best option?”

She smiled again.

“I agree.”

“Please start the paperwork.”

“I’d appreciate it.”

A final pause.

“Thank you, Josh.”

She ended the call.

I slowly lowered my glass.

“…Well.”

Pamela looked at me innocently.

“What?”

I laughed.

“So…”

“You’re selling the house?”

She snorted.

“Of course I am.”

I blinked.

“That was fast.”

Pamela shrugged.

“Marcus mentioned this morning that he had a client coming in.”

“He said she claimed her sister was trying to steal her inheritance.”

My eyes widened.

te by houve

“...Marta?”

Pamela nodded.

“If that client was Marta...”

She smiled humorlessly.

“...then she already knows the house belongs to me.”

The realization settled over me.

“So...”

Pamela stirred her drink calmly.

“She’s trying to take two things that aren’t hers.”

“The house...”

She looked toward Marcus’s table for the first time.

“...and Marcus.”

I frowned.

“You don’t actually think Marcus-”

She interrupted me with a small smile.

“No.”

“I trust Marcus.”

She paused.

“I don’t trust Marta.”

That…

Those were two very different things.

I followed her gaze.

Marcus was now looking between his phone and our table, clearly uncomfortable.

Marta, meanwhile, continued smiling as though she had already won.

Poor woman.

She had absolutely no idea that the house she thought she was protecting…

Was about to be sold out from under her.

Nor did she realize that Pamela wasn’t about to fight her with jealousy.

She was about to beat her with paperwork.

And somehow…

+15 8cnus

The oye house

Knowing Pamela…

Mat was far more terrifying.

-XII

+15 Bchus

iris POV one of each

INS POV

I never imagined shopping could turn into a full-scale debate.

“Pink!” Alice declared, proudly holding up a tiny baby blanket covered in little stars.

Rose immediately shook her head.

“What if they’re both boys?”

Alice gasped dramatically.

“They can still use pink!”

“But blue is prettier.”

“No, purple is prettier!”

Mrs. Sun laughed so hard she had to lean against the shopping cart.

“I’ve raised children, grandchildren, and now all of you, and I still don’t understand how baby shopping becomes a competition.”

Alex looked up from the list on his tablet.

“We don’t even know what the babies are yet.”

Alice crossed her arms.

“That doesn’t matter.”

Rose pointed toward a display of stuffed animals.

“We need dragons.”

Alex sighed.

“Babies don’t need dragons.”

“They absolutely need dragons.”

I couldn’t stop smiling.

For the first time in weeks, everyone seemed… normal.

No meetings.

No reporters.

No Vincents.

Just a family shopping for two babies who hadn't even been born yet.

Mrs. Sun finally settled the argument by placing one pink blanket, one blue blanket, and one soft purple blanket into the cart.

"There."

15 Bohus

"Problem solved."

Alice grinned triumphantly.

"I won."

"No," Alex replied without looking up.

"Grandma won."

We continued wandering through the mall, stopping every few stores because one of the girls found something absolutely necessary."

By the time we reached the toy section, the shopping cart was overflowing.

Mrs. Sun looked completely delighted.

"This is dangerous."

I laughed.

"For your wallet?"

"For everyone's wallet."

Before anyone could answer...

A loud alarm echoed throughout the shopping center.

BEEEEEP!

Everyone froze.

Another alarm followed.

Then another.

A calm voice came over the speakers.

“Attention, shoppers. Please proceed calmly to the nearest exit.”

The fire alarm.

Almost instantly, people began moving.

Some walked quickly.

Others started running.

Store employees opened emergency exits.

Bodyguards immediately surrounded us.

“Stay together.”

One reached for Alice.

Another moved beside Mrs. Sun.

I grabbed Rose’s hand while Alex stayed beside me.

“Nobody lets go.”

Everyone nodded.

The crowd grew thicker by the second.

Parents picked up children.

People pushed shopping carts toward the exits.

Someone bumped into me from behind.

I stumbled forward.

When I looked back...

Mrs. Sun was gone.

“Grandma?”

No answer.

One of the bodyguards disappeared into the sea of people.

Another was pushed in the opposite direction.

“Stay together!” someone shouted.

“I can’t see them!” Rose cried.

I tightened my grip on her hand.

“We keep moving.”

Alex looked around rapidly.

“The emergency exits are overloaded.”

Another wave of people surged between us.

For one terrifying second, I couldn’t even see Alice.

Then she reappeared, clutching Rose’s other hand.

“I’ve got her!”

“Good!”

We continued moving.

The alarms were almost deafening now.

Smoke…

No.

Not smoke.

Something felt wrong.

A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 299

There wasn’t any smell of fire.

No sprinklers.

No panic from the mall employees.

Only confusion.

Alex suddenly stopped walking.

“Iris.”

“What?”

“Look.”

I followed his gaze.

Standing several meters away, almost hidden by the moving crowd, was a man wearing a black hoodie and a baseball cap pulled low over his face.

He wasn’t running.

He wasn’t trying to leave.

He was watching us.

A cold chill ran down my spine.

“I’ve seen him before.”

Alex whispered.

Before I could answer, the man calmly stepped closer.

People continued rushing past him without noticing anything unusual.

Then...

He lifted one side of his hoodie just enough for us to see.

A handgun.

Perfectly hidden from everyone else.

Only visible to us.

My entire body went cold.

His voice was barely louder than a whisper.

“Don’t scream.”

He looked directly at Alex.

“You.”

The gun shifted slightly toward him.

“Walk.”

Ch PO ooo of nach

Alice gasped.

ose instinctively moved closer to me.

The man’s expression never changed.

“All of you.” 1

He glanced toward one of the service corridors leading away from the crowd.

“Follow me.”

Around us, hundreds of people continued evacuating the mall, completely unaware that only a few feet away...

Four children stood staring down the barrel of a gun.

X

get it

e doot the Amy-

Iris POV Please don’t tell Amber

INS POV

We didn’t have a choice.

The man kept the gun pointed directly at Alex.

Every instinct screamed at me to run, but one look at Alex's calm face was enough to stop me.

We followed.

Alice held Rose's hand so tightly their knuckles had turned white.

I stayed beside Alex, trying to think of something, anything, that could get us out of this.

Don't panic.

Amber had taught us that.

Think first.

Act second.

As we walked through the nearly empty service corridor, I reached into my pocket for my phone.

Nothing.

My stomach dropped.

I checked my other pocket.

Still nothing.

"My phone..."

I whispered.

Alex glanced at me.

He checked his own pockets.

Then shook his head almost imperceptibly.

Alice did the same.

"So did mine..."

Rose looked close to tears.

“They took mine too.”

Someone had stolen every one of our phones while we were trapped in the crowd during the fire alarm.

This wasn’t random.

It had been planned. 1

Every second of it.

The man led us through an emergency exit and into the underground parking garage.

Ablack van waited with its engine running.

It’s side door slid open.

Another masked man stood beside it.

“Get in.”

Nobody moved.

The gun shifted toward Alex again.

“I said…” 1

“Get in.”

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed Alex moving his thumb against the side of his watch.

At first I didn’t understand.

Then I remembered.

Our watches.

Amber had given every one of us smart watches.

They weren’t just watches.

They had emergency communicators.

Alex wasn’t checking the time.

He was pressing the emergency signal.

My heartbeat steadied just a little.

Good.

Someone would know.

Hopefully.

Just then Alice raised her hand.

“I have to go to the bathroom.”

She said it loudly.

Very loudly.

The masked man frowned.

“No.”

“I really have to go!”

Rose immediately joined in.

+15 8chus

“Me too!”

The masked man sighed impatiently.

“You’ll wait.”

Alice stamped her foot.

“I can’t!”

“If I have an accident in your car…”

She crossed her arms dramatically.

“…it’s going to smell.”

Even now…

She sounded completely serious.

Alex looked at the men.

“I have to go too.”

I finally understood what they were doing.

I stepped forward.

“We were heading to the restroom when the fire alarm started.”

“The little ones really need to go.”

The two kidnappers exchanged a look.

The masked man muttered something under his breath before waving dismissively.

“Take them.”

He pointed toward the nearby restroom entrance.

“But don’t take long.”

The man in the hoodie motioned with the gun.

“Move.”

We walked toward the public restrooms located beside the underground parking elevators.

The moment we stepped inside...

Everything happened at once.

Two large figures burst out from behind the restroom doors.

Before the kidnapper could even react, one bodyguard grabbed his gun hand while the other slammed him against

the wall.

The weapon clattered onto the floor.

I immediately pointed.

“He has a gun!”

ve got it.”

One of the bodyguards kicked the pistol away before securing it.

The second bodyguard twisted the man’s arms behind his back and snapped handcuffs around his wrists.

The entire fight lasted less than five seconds.

The kidnapper never managed to fire a single shot.

Alice blinked.

“...That was fast.”

One of the bodyguards smiled at Alex.

“Nice thinking.”

Alex looked confused.

“My watch?”

The bodyguard nodded.

“Your emergency signal reached us.”

“And we heard everything.”

He smiled.

“When your sister started insisting she needed the bathroom...”

“...we figured that wasn’t really about the bathroom.”

“So we divided our team.”

“Half searched the women’s restroom.”

“The other half waited in the men’s.”

“Just in case.”

Relief washed over me.

It had worked.

The bodyguard lifted the unconscious kidnapper over one shoulder.

“We’re moving.”

We hurried back into the corridor.

The restroom entrance couldn’t be seen directly from the parking garage because of the stairwell separating the

two areas.

That would buy us a little time before the second kidnapper realized something had gone wrong.

The elevator doors opened almost immediately. 1

We rushed inside.

As soon as the doors closed, I finally allowed myself to breathe.

When we reached the main floor...

Mrs. Sun came running toward us.

The moment she saw us, tears filled her eyes.

She hugged Alice first.

Then Rose.

Then Alex.

Finally me.

“I’ve been so worried.”

She was still holding her phone.

“Jason’s on the line.”

She handed it to me.

I could hear Jason’s calm but unmistakably tense voice.

“Is everyone safe?”

“Yes.”

“We’re all here.”

“Good.”

“I’m sending a military helicopter.”

Mrs. Sun looked surprised.

“The military?”

“They must really appreciate you if they’re sending a helicopter.”

Jason actually laughed.

“It’s not for me.”

There was a brief pause.

“The Sum military is trying very hard to avoid making Amber angry.”

Despite everything that had happened…

I couldn’t help smiling.

That sounded exactly like Amber.

Jason’s voice became serious again.

A Woman Worth Billions, Dated the Wrong Brother

Chapter 300

addressed Mrs. Sun directly.

“Please don’t tell Amber yet.”

“I’ll tell her myself.”

Mrs. Sun nodded slowly.

“I understand.”

I looked around at everyone.

We were safe.

For now.

But one thing had become painfully clear.

Someone hadn’t just planned to kidnap us.

They had planned every single step… right down to stealing our phones before the alarm ever sounded.

+15 Bgnus

“I’ve got you.”

Amber POV

Pamela and her stepsister were engaged in a silent standoff.

Neither of them spoke.

Neither of them looked away.

Marta wore the confident smile of someone who believed she had already won.

Pamela simply stared back, calm and unreadable.

I was about to break the silence when my phone rang.

No.

Not just any ringtone.

A very specific tone echoed through the restaurant.

My heart stopped.

Alex’s emergency signal.

Every one of the children wore a smartwatch that I had personally modified. I had designed them to look like ordinary smartwatches, but hidden beneath the interface was an encrypted emergency system connected directly to my phone.

There was only one reason that alarm would activate.

Something was wrong. 1

Very wrong.

Without a word, I opened the secure application.

Alex’s location appeared almost instantly.

An underground parking garage.

My blood ran cold.

I immediately activated the watch’s live audio feed.

Voices filled my ears.

“...Get in.”

A man’s voice.

Cold.

Demanding.

Then another.

“I said, get in.”

N

I didn’t hesitate.

While listening through the watch, I grabbed my second phone and called one of my military contacts in Sum.

“Colonel, I need immediate assistance.”

As I spoke, I kept listening to the live transmission.

Alice’s voice suddenly rang out.

“I have to go to the bathroom!”

For a brief second, I frowned.

Then I heard Rose.

“Me too!”

Alex.

“I have to go as well.”

I closed my eyes.

The bathroom.

Of course.

It wasn’t about the bathroom.

It was a distraction.

A way to buy time.

A small smile appeared despite the terror threatening to overwhelm me.

Good.

Very good.

I knew exactly what they were doing.

I continued listening.

Footsteps echoed.

A door opened.

Then-

A loud crash.

Someone shouted.

Another scream.

The unmistakable sounds of a fight.

I held my breath.

Then I heard one of the bodyguards.

He’s armed!”

Another voice answered immediately.

“We’ve got him!”

Relief flooded through me so suddenly my knees nearly gave out.

The bodyguards had understood Alex’s signal.

The watches had done exactly what I had built them to do.

As I continued listening, I heard Mrs. Sun’s familiar voice.

Then…

Jason.

“I’ve already sent a military helicopter.”

Mrs. Sun sounded surprised.

“The military must really appreciate you.”

Jason actually laughed.

“It’s not for me.”

A pause.

“They’re trying very hard to avoid making Amber angry.”

Then….

The sentence that made my eye twitch.

“Please don’t tell Amber.”

“I’ll tell her myself.”

I stared at my phone.

“…Excuse me?”

Something inside me snapped.

Without realizing it, I tightened my grip around the water glass in my hand.

Crack.

The crystal shattered.

Water spilled across the table.

Tiny cuts appeared across my palm.

I hadn’t even noticed how tightly I had been holding it.

Pamela immediately stood.

umber!”

She grabbed a napkin.

“You’re bleeding!”

Only then did I look down.

Small drops of blood mixed with the water on the table.

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

She gently wrapped my hand while watching my face.

“What happened?”

I took a slow breath.

“The kids.”

My voice came out quieter than I expected.

“Someone tried to kidnap them.”

Pamela froze.

“What?”

“They’re safe.”

I answered before she could panic.

“The bodyguards got to them.”

“They’re safe.”

I repeated it more for myself than for her.

Even as we spoke, my fingers were flying across my tablet.

The parking garage’s security network wasn’t particularly secure.

Within seconds I had accessed the surveillance system.

Camera one.

Camera two.

Camera three.

There.

The black van.

The masked men.

+15 8çnus

The children.

Everything.

I immediately began downloading every available recording.

“Come on…”

“Ninety percent…”

“Ninety-five…”

“Done.”

I finally breathed again.

Then...

One by one...

The camera feeds began disappearing.

I frowned.

“No...”

A message flashed across the screen.

Video unavailable.

Another.

Recording deleted.

Someone was erasing the evidence.

Right now.

I immediately copied every file I had already downloaded onto three separate encrypted drives.

“Too late.”

I whispered.

“I’ve got you.”

Just then, a familiar shadow stopped beside our table.

Marcus.

He had clearly just left his own dinner.

Behind him, I caught a glimpse of Marta looking thoroughly confused as he walked away without another word.

Marcus didn’t even ask permission before sitting down.

His eyes moved between my bleeding hand...

The tablet...

The phone still playing Alex's emergency transmission...

Men back to me.

He sighed.

"Of course."

I looked up.

He gave me a tired smile.

"You already know."

I nodded once.

"They tried to take the kids."

His expression darkened instantly.

He looked at the security footage still paused on the black van.

Then at the files I had rescued before they disappeared.

"They're deleting the cameras."

"I noticed."

Marcus slowly leaned back in his chair.

"They're professionals."

"So are we."

For the first time since the emergency signal had sounded...

I allowed myself to smile.

Very slightly.

Because whoever had tried to erase those recordings had made one very expensive mistake.

They had underestimated just how quickly I could steal the evidence before they managed to destroy it.

15 Behus

get it

first real clue

Amber POV

Marcus looked from my tablet to my bleeding hand before letting out a long sigh.

He didn’t need an explanation.

He already knew.

Without another word, he pulled out his phone and dialed Jason.

The call connected almost immediately.

Marcus didn’t even bother greeting him.

“Of course she knows.”

A pause.

“What exactly did you think was going to happen?”

Another pause.

Marcus glanced at me, then smiled sympathetically.

“You should probably expect a very angry wife in about an hour.”

I couldn’t hear Jason’s reply, but judging by Marcus’s expression, he was wisely choosing not to argue.

“I’ll make sure she gets there in one piece.”

Marcus ended the call before Jason could say anything else.

I raised an eyebrow.

“You make it sound like I’m planning a murder.”

Marcus shrugged.

“I’ve known you long enough.”

“That’s not exactly a reassuring answer.”

“It wasn’t meant to be.”

Despite everything that had happened over the last half hour, I laughed.

Then I remembered why Pamela and I had been at the mall in the first place.

“Marcus.”

He looked at me.

“Pamela told me about her stepmother.”

His expression immediately became serious.

“And the house.”

Tested oo

“And the inheritance.”

Pamela sighed.

“It really isn’t that dramatic.”

Marcus turned toward her.

“I disagree.”

She crossed her arms.

“My stepmother is trying to force me into marrying a man older than my father.”

Marcus’s eyebrows shot up.

“…Excuse me?”

“And when I refused, she threatened to cut me off financially.”

Marcus looked genuinely confused.

“But…”

He glanced between us.

“I thought you owned the house.”

“I do.”

Pamela nodded.

“My mother left it to me.”

Marcus blinked.

“I didn’t know Marta was your sister.”

Pamela corrected him immediately.

“Stepsister.”

“At most.”

Marcus nodded once.

“That explains a lot.”

“It certainly does,” Pamela muttered.

Marcus leaned back in his chair.

“Actually…”

“There is something you should know.”

Both of us looked at him.

“Marta and her mother contacted me.”

Pamela’s eyes narrowed.

They did what?”

“They wanted to offer me a business opportunity.”

Pamela laughed.

Not because it was funny.

Because she couldn’t believe it.

“They’re trying to scam you.”

Marcus smiled.

“I suspected as much.”

“They’re professional scammers,” Pamela continued.

“They’ll promise investments.”

“Properties.”

“Partnerships.”

“Whatever they think you’ll believe.”

“Don’t sign anything.”

Marcus nodded calmly.

“I wasn’t planning to.”

He paused before looking directly at Pamela.

“If you’ll allow me…”

“I’d like to represent you.”

She blinked.

“What?”

“Legally.”

“I’ll handle recovering your inheritance.”

“The house.”1

“The money.”

“Everything.”

Pamela looked genuinely surprised.

“You’d do that?”

Marcus smiled warmly.

+15 8çnus

“I’ve done it before.”

looked at me.

“When Jason recovered his parents’ legacy…”

“I handled a good portion of the legal work.”

I smiled.

“I remember.”

“It wasn’t exactly simple.”

Marcus laughed.

“Nothing involving your family ever is.”

For the first time since we’d arrived at the restaurant, Pamela looked relieved.

“Thank you.”

Marcus simply nodded.

“We’ll get everything back.”

Then his phone vibrated.

He glanced at the screen and groaned.

“Jason.”

Again.

“He has called me six times.”

Marcus looked at me with obvious amusement.

“Please.”

“For everyone’s peace of mind.”

“Tell your husband you’re alive.”

I smiled sheepishly.

“I suppose I should.”

“You probably should.”

“I don’t think he’s stopped worrying since the emergency signal.”

I finally picked up my phone and sent Jason a short message.

I’m okay. No new explosions. I’ll explain everything when I get there.

Less than five seconds later…

My phone buzzed.

+15 Bçnus

Good. Hurry home.

Short.

Simple.

FYI

+15 8çnus

Very Jason.

While Marcus and Pamela continued discussing the legal paperwork, I returned my attention to the surveillance footage I’d managed to save.

I replayed the parking garage recording frame by frame.

The black van.

The driver.

The man in the hoodie.

Then…

I paused the video.

“Wait.”

Marcus immediately leaned closer.

“What?”

I zoomed in on the masked man standing beside the van.

His face was hidden.

But not completely.

The mask itself caught my attention.

It wasn’t an ordinary disguise.

Dark wood.

Hand-painted details.

Long curved horns.

Traditional craftsmanship.

I enlarged the image again.

Then again.

Until the carving became unmistakable.

My pulse quickened.

“I know that mask.”

Marcus frowned.

“You do?”

I nodded slowly.

isn’t mass-produced.”

“It comes from a small artisan boutique in Sum.”

Pamela looked at the screen.

“So…”

“So either someone bought it there…”

“…or someone wanted us to know it came from Sum.”

Marcus folded his arms.

“Either way…”

“It’s a lead.”

I smiled.

“And whoever wore that mask…”

“…just gave us the first real clue to finding them.”

+15 8cnus

+15 8cnus

Emotionless

Amber POV

Marcus insisted on escorting Pamela and me back to the Fairy House.

“You’ve had enough excitement for one day,” he said as he opened the car door.

For once, I didn’t argue.

When we arrived, Jason was already waiting.

The moment he saw me, relief flashed across his face.

It lasted only a second.

Then it disappeared.

“We have work to do,” he said quietly.

I frowned.

Something about him felt… different.

We gathered around the conference table, laptops open, security footage spread across multiple screens.

Marcus handled the legal angle.

Pamela organized the corporate information.

I continued analyzing the recordings from the parking garage.

Jason...

Jason became Chronos.

That was the only way I knew how to describe it.

His entire personality seemed to freeze.

His posture straightened.

His face became completely unreadable.

Every answer was short.

Precise.

Emotionless.

He switched between English, Mandarin, German, Spanish and two other languages I couldn't even recognize, contacting source after source without missing a beat.

He wasn't rude.

He wasn't angry.

He simply became... someone else.

The brilliant strategist everyone feared.

+15 8chus

Chronos.

Hours passed.

Finally, Jason stopped typing.

“I found them.”

All of us looked up.

“The order didn’t come directly from the Vincents.”

He projected several files onto the screen.

“It came from the former Asher investors.”

I stared at the names.

Every single one belonged to the investors Grandfather had forced to sell their shares after we discovered they were negotiating marriage alliances involving our children.

“They wanted revenge,” Marcus said quietly.

Jason nodded once.

“They hired intermediaries.”

“The intermediaries hired professionals.”

“They never expected the operation to fail.”

Silence settled over the room.

I closed the file.

“We’re going back to Sum.”

No one objected.

Before leaving River City, I made one final stop at Asher Corporation.

Jasper Wilson, one of my newest executive aides, was already waiting outside the media department.

He couldn’t have been older than twenty-four.

Competent.

Quiet.

Observant.

Exactly the kind of person I trusted.

“Jasper.”

“CEO.”

“I need a favor.”

He straightened immediately.

“Of course.”

Introduced him to Emilia Goodrich.

“Our new intern.”

Emilia smiled politely.

Jasper returned the smile.

“I need you to keep an eye on her.”

His expression became serious.

“Discreetly?”

“Very.”

“If anything unusual happens…”

“I’ll know.”

He nodded once.

“It’ll be done.”

Satisfied, I left the company behind.

The flight back to Sum should have been peaceful.

Instead…

The silence between Jason and me grew heavier with every passing hour.

Whenever I asked him something, he answered.

Briefly.

Politely.

Then returned to work.

No teasing.

No small smiles.

No reaching for my hand.

Nothing.

It hurt more than I wanted to admit.

Even Pamela noticed.

She leaned toward me while Jason reviewed another report.

“...Amber.”

I looked at her.

“Did something happen?”

Norced a smile.

“I don’t know.”

And that was the truth.

I genuinely didn’t know.

Had I done something wrong?

Was he angry?

Was he blaming himself?

I had no answers.

By the time we landed in Sum, exhaustion had settled into every bone in my body.

Grandfather was waiting for us at the airport alongside an impressive security detail. 1

The moment I saw him, relief washed over me.

He hugged me tightly.

“My little phoenix.”

“I’m alright.”

He looked me over carefully before nodding.

Only then did he greet Jason.

To my surprise, Jason spoke to him normally.

Discussing security.

The investigation.

The attempted kidnapping.

His voice sounded almost like usual.

But…

He still barely looked at me.

The drive to the castle felt endless.

As soon as we arrived, I hugged Grandfather again.

“I’m going to see the kids.”

“And then…”

I smiled tiredly.

“I’m going to bed.”

+15 8çnus

He gently squeezed my shoulder.

The children were already waiting in the main living room.

The moment they saw me…

Alice ran first.

Then Rose.

Alex followed close behind.

Even Iris couldn't hold back.

Before I realized what was happening, all four of them had wrapped themselves around me.

Then...

They started crying.

Real crying.

The kind they had been holding back ever since the kidnapping.

I knelt on the floor and hugged them as tightly as I could.

"You did so well."

Alice buried her face against my shoulder.

"I was scared."

"I know."

Rose nodded through her tears.

"We almost got in the van."

"But you didn't."

I smiled proudly.

"You remembered your training."

"You stayed together."

"You bought time."

"You trusted each other."

I looked at each one of them.

“I couldn’t be more proud.”

Alex lowered his head.

“My watch worked.”

I smiled.

“It worked exactly the way I designed it.”

“You saved all of you.”

His ears turned slightly red.

“I only pressed the button.”

“And that was enough.”

Eventually, the tears stopped.

One by one, I tucked them into bed.

Within minutes, all four children were asleep.

The castle finally became quiet.

I stood outside my bedroom.

Our bedroom.

My hand rested on the doorknob.

I stared at it for several long seconds.

Then…

I let go.

No.

Not tonight.

Not after the way he had ignored me.

Not after one of the most terrifying days of my life.

I wasn’t asking for grand gestures.

I wasn’t asking him to fix everything.

I had simply wanted my husband to hug me.

To tell me we were all safe.

Instead...

I had received silence.

So I turned away.

Instead of walking toward our room, I climbed the narrow staircase leading into one of the oldest towers of the castle.

My tower.

Hidden behind another secret door was a small room only I could access.

My sanctuary.

My safe place.

Before turning off tny phone, I opened the family group chat.

Good night, everyone. I’m exhausted. Going to sleep..

I pressed send.

Then switched the phone off completely.

Silence filled the room.

For the first time that day...

I allowed myself to cry.

Not because I had been scared.

Not because someone had tried to kidnap our children.

But because today, of all days...

The person whose embrace I had wanted most...

Had given me nothing but a cold shoulder.

I wiped my tears away.

One Year ago, I had made a promise to myself.

No matter what happened...

I would never abandon myself again.

And I intended to keep that promise.

␣