

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 21[563 words]

"Then there's Haynes," Rachel drawled, her voice as smooth as silk but with a bite that could cut glass. "Whenever I call, no matter what he's doing-whether he's at work or, you know, otherwise engaged he drops everything and comes running. Even if..."

Rachel's smile was like a snake, poised and ready to strike, venom dripping from the corners of her lips.

"Even if you two are having sex, he'll leave you high and dry to answer my call."

Stella's fists clenched, her nails digging into her palms, though she felt no pain. The sting of Rachel's words cut deeper.

Yes, that was true. More than once, Haynes had left her during their intimate moments to rush to Rachel's side.

She had pleaded with him not to go. But Haynes would just shoot her a look and say, "Stop being childish," before calmly walking out the door, leaving behind the warmth they'd shared as if it were nothing but a mirage, leaving her alone and humiliated.

Stella forced a smile as she met Rachel's gaze. "So, after he ditched me, did he jump into bed with you?"

Rachel's expression faltered for a second before she regained her composure. "Haynes and I... it's not how you think."

Rachel could lie about many things, but not this. Despite being Haynes' first love, who lingered in his memory like a haunting melody, she had no legitimate claim, not while Stella was still his wife.

Besides, she knew well enough what the internet would say about her: a homewrecker, a bitch without morals.

"Not how I think?" Stella echoed, her voice calm and steady. "If there's nothing between you, what are you proud of? Proud that you're just friends, haven't given him a family, or never got to marry him?"

Rachel's smile vanished, replaced by a flicker of pain that flashed across her face. "So, what if I didn't marry him or have his children? If I wanted the moon, Haynes would find a way to bring it down for me."

Rachel's smile returned as if she had remembered something that pleased her. "Oh, and by the way, that wedding you had with Haynes? It was supposed to be mine. The gown? Exactly my style. After all these years, Haynes still remembers what I like..."

Stella raised an eyebrow, unfazed. "A mock wedding is enough to make you so gleeful, Ms. Pearce? If you're so capable, why not have Haynes divorce me and marry you?"

Her gaze was steady, her words deliberate. "Or is it that you don't want that?"

A flash of bitterness crossed Rachel's eyes. Her smile turned icy. "No wonder Haynes' family can't stand you. His friends dislike you. And even Haynes and your son keep their distance. Ms. Cameron, maybe it's time you did some soul- searching."

Stella chuckled softly. "Ms. Pearce, I can't compare to your charm. Haynes' sister adores you. His friends are smitten. And even Haynes and Keen can't resist you. Heck, even God seems to favor your type. Ms. Pearce, should I congratulate you on being so... well-loved?"

Rachel caught the sarcasm dripping from Stella's words. Stella was mocking her, hinting at her impending downfall.

Both women were skilled at striking where it hurt most.

Stella might have held her tongue before, but now, she understood. Why should

she suffer in silence while her adversary enjoyed the upper hand?

She'd fight fire with fire. Why exhaust herself trying to keep the peace when others had no qualms about disturbing it?

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 22[503 words]

Suddenly, Rachel's eyes welled up with tears, her voice trembling, "Ms. Cameron, you don't need to remind me. I know I don't have much time left."

"Ms. Cameron, you're right. What Haynes gave me is all a sham. I'm sorry. That wedding should have been yours..."

Before she could finish, a furious shout echoed from behind Stella. "What do you mean God favors Rachel? Stella, who are you cursing?"

Stella turned around to see three figures standing not far away.

Jasper surged forward, his features contorted by a rage that seemed to ripple the air between them. "Stella," he spat, each syllable a dagger, "how dare you drag Rachel's name through the mud? Have you lost your mind?"

Beside him, Foreman Richards arched a brow, his calm a deliberate counterpoint to Jasper's storm. "Easy, Jasper," he interjected, his voice a steadying hand. "Condemnation without evidence is its own kind of madness."

But Jasper, clearly still furious, cut him off. "What misunderstanding could there be? You and Haynie heard her loud and clear! She's jealous of Rachel's popularity and says God favors Rachel as if wishing her dead!"

"This two-faced woman puts on an innocent act before everyone and bullies Rachel behind their backs. If we hadn't overheard, who knows how long she'd have fooled us!"

Jasper sneered, "Caught you red-handed this time, didn't I?"

Stella stood her ground, looking calm and unyielding, showing no guilt or panic. She had suspected from the moment Rachel's demeanor changed that they might not be alone.

And there it was, Rachel played her usual trick again.

Acknowledging Stella's glance, Foreman nodded, a gesture of greeting. "Jasper," he warned, his tone a blade sheathed in velvet, "Stella remains Haynes' wife. Her missteps - if any — are not yours to correct."

Jasper hesitated, his steps faltering. He turned to Haynes, "Haynie, you heard it, too. You can't let her get away with treating Rachel like this, can you?"

Haynes' face was a mask of tension, his lips pressed into a thin line, an icy aura surrounding him. "Stella, apologize."

Jasper smirked with glee, "Haynie's pissed, and that's bad news for you. You're in big trouble, Stella."

Ignoring Jasper's taunting, Stella remained silent, her gaze unwavering.

Foreman raised an eyebrow, a bit stunned. Was it his feeling, or was Stella different today?

Usually, she would have been quick to justify herself. But today, she hadn't even tried. Her demeanor was surprisingly detached.

Haynes felt his frustration mounting as he looked at Stella's indifferent face. He couldn't shake off the anger.

Jasper had told him that Stella had come there for fun.

She was married. Shouldn't she act like a responsible adult instead of hanging out in places like this?

"Stella," Haynes' voice dripped with frost. "Apologize to Rachel right now!"

Jasper egged on, "Yeah, and make it a sincere apology. A bow should do!"

Stella's lips curled dismissively, unwilling to waste any words on them. Without a sideways glance, she walked past Haynes.

But as she brushed past him, her wrist was suddenly seized in a firm grip.

"Stella," his voice was cold and harsh above her, "Did you hear me? I said apologize."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 23[532 words]

Haynes had a grip like a vice, and Stella felt a sharp, piercing pain in her wrist.

She gritted her teeth against the pain and looked up at the man, her voice cold and steady. "I heard you. So, what now?"

Missing the underlying meaning in Stella's words, Jasper exclaimed, "What now? You apologize to Rachel, of course!"

Foreman sighed silently to himself. If Stella had intended to apologize to Rachel, she wouldn't have asked, "What now." She meant she heard Haynes but didn't

want to say sorry.

Haynes fixed his cold, piercing eyes on Stella's face. "I'll say it one last time. Apologize to Rachel."

Stella lifted her gaze, meeting his with defiance. "Haynes, how often have you told me to apologize to Rachel? If you're not tired of saying it, I'm tired of hearing it."

She smirked, "You and Rachel enjoy apologies so much. Maybe I should hire some folks to apologize to you round the clock."

Jasper was fuming. "Stella, you messed up and don't even want to apologize? Have some decency!"

Stella shrugged, her tone a masterclass in indifference. "If you're so convinced of my crimes, Jasper, dial the police yourself. I'll wait."

Jasper's finger jabbed toward her, trembling with the force of his fury. "You" The word choked off, strangled by his own rage.

Then it came—a searing pain that lanced through her wrist, as though the bones themselves were splintering under some invisible vise. She flinched, a faint pallor stealing over her features. Yet Haynes' gaze remained locked on her, unyielding. "Mr. O'Brien." Stella wasn't about to play tough in a situation like this. It would only end badly for her. "You're about to crush my wrist."

Haynes didn't let go. "So, you're still not going to apologize?"

Jasper egged him on, "Good on you, Haynie! Show this woman she can't do whatever she pleases!"

Stella's forehead was in cold sweat, her face as white as a sheet. Her eyelashes fluttered with pain. "If you break my wrist, Mr. O'Brien, I'll call the police and charge you with assault. Or perhaps..."

She managed a sardonic smile. "This might even be domestic violence. Imagine the headlines, 'President of The O'Brien Group, a domestic abuser.' That's sure to grab the media's attention."

The pressure on her wrist abruptly disappeared. Stella lifted her hand to inspect the damage, finding bruises on her delicate skin.

Haynes' eyes flickered slightly.

Seeing that, Jasper was not satisfied. "Haynie, did you hear her? She's threatening you! You can't let his woman off easy. Maybe this is all a ploy to get your attention..."

Jasper was about to say more, but Foreman clamped a hand over his mouth. "Jasper, stay out of it. They're a couple. It's not our place to interfere."

Foreman glanced at Rachel. "Ms. Pearce, perhaps we should give them some space."

Rachel looked at Haynes with concern, her voice soft, "Haynie, maybe Ms. Cameron is just overwhelmed from being at home all day. Let's not take her words to heart. She might need some space to unwind."

Jasper let out a derisive laugh. "She's a housewife living in comfort. What does

she need to unwind from? Bad mood? Sure, maybe sneaking around with another guy will cheer her up."

Foreman tugged at Jasper. "Come on, Jasper, let's wait for Haynie back in the room."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 24[550 words]

Jasper shot Stella a piercing glare. "Lay a finger on Rachel," he hissed, "and you're over. Just wait till Haynie gets a hold of you!"

Stella finally looked up at him with a hint of amusement. "Jasper," she said earnestly, "have you outgrown being just a simp? Are you now aspiring to be a full-blown lapdog?"

Jasper's face turned crimson with fury.

He pointed an accusatory finger at Stella. "Haynie, Foreman, did you hear that? She called me a lapdog! And earlier, she said I was a simp!"

Foreman cleared his throat gently. "Jasper, maybe it's best to leave this to Haynie."

"No!" Jasper raised his voice, "I'm not leaving until Haynie gives me a fair explanation!"

Stella shrugged nonchalantly. "Then stay here all you want. I've got things to do." She tried to brush past them, rubbing her sore wrist.

Haynes' expression darkened as he caught her wrist again, though this time with a gentler grip. Stella still couldn't shake free.

Jasper opened his mouth to speak further, but Haynes' icy demeanor silenced him. Seeing this, Rachel remained silent as well.

Haynes roughly pushed Stella into an empty room, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Stella, is this your new game of playing hard to get?"

Stella frowned. "What nonsense are you talking about?"

Haynes' eyes gleamed with mockery. "Last time, you faked being in danger to lure me in, and it turned out to be nothing. Stella, when did you start resorting to such low tactics?"

Stella's heart sank like a stone. An invisible blade twisted in her chest, each breath a struggle against the weight of his words.

She clenched her fists so tightly that her nails broke against her palms. The sting was a welcome distraction from the ache spreading through her chest.

'Low tactics?' The accusation echoed in her mind, a taunt she couldn't silence. 'Is that what Haynes thinks of me? That I'd stoop so low?'

The last time when she stepped out to buy some groceries, she got kidnapped.

That morning, Keen had thrown a fit over the vegetables, barely touching them. Stella suspected Rachel had ensured to mention Maisie was in charge of the groceries, stirring the pot. So, Stella decided to go herself that day.

Her kidnapper was a desperate man who had been swindled out of a fortune, leaving him with nothing but a shattered life. Filled with rage against the world, he chose to kidnap someone at random.

Unfortunately, that someone was Stella while she was carefully picking out fresh produce.

He held a knife to her throat, demanding ransom from the police, his agitation leaving a shallow cut on her neck. Stella told him her husband was wealthy and could pay off his debts to calm the situation.

The kidnapper seemed surprised by the idea of someone willing to pay off his debts, unsure whether to believe her. Stella promised him over the phone that she'd settle his debts, offering him a chance at an ordinary life.

He hesitated but eventually let her make the call. The line connected, and Stella barely whispered, "I've got kidnapped," when she was interrupted by urgent news. Rachel needed emergency surgery, and they requested Haynes' signature. Haynes' response was curt. "Rachel's critical. I'll call you back," then he hung up. Perhaps sensing she was his last hope, the kidnapper refused to let her go. So, they, Stella and the kidnapper, waited for two hours.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 25[566 words]

As Stella waited, she chatted with her captor about family, kids, and marriage.

Surprisingly, the kidnapper had a happy family—a loving wife and a bright daughter. He had invested in a project to provide a better life for them but ended up losing everything.

He confided in Stella, admitting even if he managed to pay off his debts, he would still end up behind bars. But he wanted to ensure his wife and daughter wouldn't be harassed by debt collectors, hoping to give them a peaceful future.

Stella listened, her emotions a whirlwind of sympathy and confusion.

Outside, negotiators and police officers' voices echoed without pause. The kidnapper's initial frenzy gradually gave way to a calmer demeanor.

"You know," he said, "the lives of wealthy folks aren't that happy, either. If it weren't for me, you'd be dead today. What I lost was just money, but you, you could have lost your life."

He glanced at the clock, realizing how much time had passed. His gaze softened with a hint of pity. "Miss, thanks for talking with me. Compared to you, my situation doesn't seem as bad. You can go..."

The police watching must have misunderstood his gesture to let her go. A sudden, terrifying gunshot rang out, and the kidnapper collapsed to the ground.

Warm blood splattered on Stella's face, and her mind went blank. It was the first time she had seen someone die before her eyes.

After the kidnapper was down, police and medics rushed in to rescue her. Yet, Haynes never returned her call.

At the hospital, as she underwent a series of check-ups, she ran into Rachel, who had just come out of surgery.

Haynes finally remembered her call. "Did you call earlier saying you got kidnapped?"

Jasper, by his side, scoffed, "Oh please, if she got kidnapped, how is she here? Trying to pull a sympathy stunt to get Haynie's attention, huh? Haynie, look at her, not a scratch on her. Kidnapped, yeah, right! She can't even put on a convincing act!"

Rachel woke up and said, "Ms. Cameron, if you found it too troublesome to bring my meals, please say it. Please don't joke about something like this!"

Jasper and Rachel's dismissive banter pegged her kidnapping as a ploy to gain Haynes' attention.

Haynes could have easily looked into it to see if her kidnap was true. But he didn't. His focus was solely on Rachel, oblivious to Stella's ordeal. From that moment, Stella felt her heart slowly die. Even now, he still believed that call was just a ploy.

Stella said expressionlessly, "If you think I'm playing games, I'll see you at the city hall tomorrow at nine for the divorce papers."

Stella's repeated mentions of divorce had worn Haynes' patience thin.

His voice was a winter gale, sharp and unrelenting. "Stella, I have no patience for your theatrics. And women who wield divorce like a weapon?" He paused, his disdain palpable. "They disgust me."

"Despite your repeated attempts to harass Rachel," he continued, each word a hammer strike, "I've chosen to overlook it-until now. But even my tolerance has its limits. Know when to quit."

Stella gazed at his chiseled face and let out a soft laugh. "If you don't want me to trouble your sweetheart, sign the divorce papers. Otherwise..."

Her lips curled slightly, "If you refuse to sign, I'll ensure Rachel's days are anything but pleasant."

His brows furrowed with a trace of irritation, looking at her as though she were nothing more than a troublesome nuisance.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 26[492 words]

"Stella, for the hundredth time, I've explained it. Rachel and I aren't what you're imagining. Can we drop this constant suspicion?"

Stella responded with a cold detachment, "Whatever your relationship with Rachel is doesn't concern me anymore. I've signed the divorce papers. When can we finalize this?"

"Divorce?" Haynes let out a dry, sardonic chuckle. "Stella, you've been a stay-at-home mom for five years. Without our marriage, what will you do? You might not even make ends meet on your own."

"And as for Keen, you're not getting custody. Even if it goes to court, you stand no chance with no job or income. A clever woman knows when to quit while she's ahead. Push too hard, and it'll backfire."

Stella felt a chill settle in her bones. All her years of dedication had become her Achilles' heel, a bargaining chip for others to manipulate.

Even Keen, whom she had raised since he was a baby, seemed resentful toward her.

What a failure she had been.

Looking Haynes straight in the eye, Stella said, "No job, no income? Before Keen was born, I had a respectable job with a decent salary."

"You all insisted I quit, saying you couldn't trust strangers to care for Keen."

Haynes frowned. "And what did that salary amount to? Better to focus on Keen at home."

Stella clenched her fists. "True. I might not have Mr. O'Brien's knack for making a fortune. But I can earn enough to support myself!"

"At least then, I wouldn't have to endure your family's jabs about being a parasite. Or your friends mocking me for being a housewife living off you!"

How pitiful it was! She had sacrificed so much for her family and child, only to be looked down upon.

Haynes' brow furrowed deeper. "Stella, why do you care so much about what people think? Besides, Jasper meant no harm."

No harm? Rachel's malice was a serpent coiled beneath silk, subtle and venomous. Jasper's, on the other hand, was a blade unsheathed, glinting in the open. Yet Haynes dared to call him harmless. Was he blind-or willfully so?

Stella suddenly smiled. "If you're so noble, why do you care what I say to Rachel? Besides, I meant no harm to Ms. Pearce, Mr. O'Brien. I was joking with her."

The expression on Haynes' face slowly faded. "Stella, do you have to keep pushing things this far?"

When pain hits a certain threshold, maybe one would go numb. Words that once cut to the core now seemed less piercing.

Stella's eyes were unwavering. "Haynes, this divorce is happening. I'm sure of it!"

Haynes seemed momentarily stunned but soon regained his composure. "Remember what you've said today. Don't come back begging."

Stella let out a cold laugh. "Rest assured, Mr. O'Brien. That day will never come."

Haynes looked at her, his voice calm yet icy. "Mrs. O'Brien, you should know better than to burn bridges. It's always wise to leave a path open."

Stella met his gaze, a small smile on her lips. "You're right, but you'll never be that path for me."

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 27[610 words]

In the cozy private room of the bar, Jasper waved his hands animatedly while chatting with Foreman and Rachel.

"I mean, come on! She ditched making you that special meal tonight to hang out with some stranger! Rachel, mark my words. Haynes won't let that housewife get away with it!"

Rachel was about to reply when the door swung open. Haynes entered, his face looking as neutral as ever. Haynes was known for his poker face, revealing nothing of his emotions. Yet somehow, Rachel sensed he was in a bad mood.

In a gentle tone, she asked, "Haynes, is Ms. Cameron calm now? She's probably gone back to look after little Keen, right?"

Haynes pressed his lips into a thin line. "No, she hasn't."

Rachel's eyes widened in disbelief. "Ms. Cameron's ignoring Keen, too?"

She bit her lip, seemingly resolving something. "Haynes, maybe I should go apologize to Ms. Cameron? Keen's still so young. He can't be without his mom."

"No matter how upset adults get, it's our issue. We should never let it affect the kids. Keen's innocent in all this."

Jasper rolled his eyes at this. "Oh, come on," he scoffed. "We all see through her little charade—using Keen as a pawn to manipulate Haynes. That woman's a master of ruthlessness, exploiting her own child. It's despicable."

Foreman interrupted, "Jasper, give it a rest."

"But am I wrong?" Jasper retorted without restraint. "Look at what Stella's been doing! She's married, has a kid, and she's still out at bars meeting random guys. That's cheating!"

"No wonder Keen's getting more distant from her. What kind of mother does that? Haynes has been way too nice to Stella, spoiling her!"

"Living the high life at home, spending Haynes' money like nothing, and still unsatisfied! Now, she wants to spend his money on some other guy!"

Jasper turned toward Haynes, an idea sparking in his eyes. "Haynes, you ought to teach her a lesson! Freeze her card and see if she can keep up the attitude. I bet she'll come crawling back to apologize in no time!"

...

Meanwhile, Stella's mood was gone after meeting Haynes and Rachel. Her phone buzzed in her pocket as she was about to head back, her phone buzzed in her pocket. Pulling it out, she saw a notification telling her credit card was frozen.

It took Stella just a second to realize what had happened. Haynes had frozen her card.

She'd been at home for years, caring for Keen, with no personal income. She'd been using Haynes' card for all her expenses. Of course, Stella had her savings before the marriage—a

nest egg that, by any ordinary measure, was substantial. But in the gilded world of the O'Briens, it was a mere droplet swallowed by an endless sea.

She didn't see any issue spending Haynes' money. After all, he was the breadwinner while she ran the household, and spending his earnings was fair game.

Looking at the screen, Stella let out a bitter laugh. So, Haynes was starting to play hardball.

As she pondered this, heading back to the room, someone suddenly bumped into her leg.

Startled, Stella looked down to find a little boy, not more than five or six, staring up at her. The kid was adorable, with delicate features and eyes like glistening stars, but his face was ghastly pale.

With her background in holistic medicine, Stella could tell immediately that the boy was frail and likely prone to illness.

The little boy said, "You bumped into me. You owe me."

Stella blinked, then crouched down to his level, meeting his eyes. "Hey there, little guy. Are you feeling okay?"

The boy looked down, saying nothing. Stella glanced around but saw no sign of his parents. She asked softly, "What's your name, sweetheart? Where are your folks?"

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 28[565 words]

Now, the boy looked up at her, his eyes wide pools of innocence, and declared with childish voice, "You bumped into me, so you have to take responsibility."

Stella examined the little boy with concern. "Do you want me to take you to the hospital?"

He hesitated for a moment, then nodded slightly.

"Should we call your parents first?" Stella asked gently.

This time, the boy shook his head vigorously with an unmistakable look of defiance.

Stella's brow furrowed. Was this child avoiding his parents because of something troubling at home? Perhaps he was being mistreated.

Either way, a hospital visit seemed wise. She would have to alert the authorities if there were any serious injuries.

With these thoughts in mind, Stella spoke softly, "Alright, let me have a quick word with my friend, and then we'll head to the hospital."

She took the boy's hand in hers, noting how cold it felt, much like her son Keen's hands when he was unwell.

The doctors had said Keen's condition was congenital, which couldn't be cured overnight but required ongoing care. Stella remembered the nights spent at his bedside, her heart fracturing with each labored breath he took, each cry that medicine couldn't soothe.

So, she did everything she could to help, like learning holistic health, different therapies, and concocting homemade remedies.

Maybe it was her maternal instincts, but despite the disappointments with Keen, her heart ached for this little boy.

The boy looked surprised when Stella took his hand. Her touch was gentle and warm, and he instinctively tightened his grip, following her lead.

Stella noticed the boy didn't resist and gave him a reassuring smile. But then, he suddenly looked down as if shy.

Stella didn't mind, leading him back to Abby's room.

Abby was catching her breath with a drink, having finished singing. When Stella returned, she waved, "Hey, Star! Back so soon? Come on, let's toast. Wait, is that Keen with you?"

The light at the entrance was dim, and Abby could only see the outline of a child with Stella, mistaking him for her son.

"No, it's not Keen," Stella corrected. "I accidentally bumped into him in the hallway. He seems off, so I'm taking him to the hospital."

As they stepped in, Abby got a better look at the boy. "Wow! What a cute little guy! He's as adorable as your Keen."

Abby approached, reaching out as if to pinch the boy's cheek. But he dodged, stepping behind Stella with a sullen expression.

Abby paused, then chuckled, "He's quite the personality, huh?"

Stella said, "Abby, let it go. I don't think he likes being touched by strangers."

Abby shrugged. "What about his parents? Are you sure it's okay to take him? Wouldn't want anyone thinking we're up to no good, like, kidnapping or something."

Stella turned to the boy again. "Are you sure you don't want to call your family..."

Before she could finish, the boy clung to her hand, his grip surprisingly firm, causing Stella discomfort. "No, I don't want them!"

Stella exchanged a glance with Abby, who sighed, "Alright then, let's get him checked out."

They took the boy to the hospital, running a few check-ups. Thankfully, there were no signs of injury or abuse.

Stella felt relieved, though questions lingered in her mind. Why was he so adamant about not contacting his family if there were no mistreatment?

As the thought crossed her mind, she heard footsteps echoing down the hallway. Suddenly, the door burst open, and a tall, imposing figure entered the room urgently.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 29[543 words]

The man stood tall and lean, his features chiseled like a statue, and his mesmerizing blue eyes sparkled with a mischievous glint. His aura was one of devil-may-care charm.

"Marvin, you're being naughty again," the man said, his voice a deep, rich melody that was oddly soothing.

But the little boy, Marvin Connolly, shivered slightly and nestled closer into Stella's embrace.

Seeing that, Stella protectively placed the boy behind her and asked, "Excuse me, sir, but who are you to this little boy?"

The man seemed to notice Stella then, his strong eyebrows arching slightly in surprise.

He answered, "And who am I to him? Well, I'm his father, of course."

Stella eyed him skeptically. "Are you sure?"

The man's lips curled into a lazy, almost teasing smile. "Shall we call the police and have them confirm?"

"Fine," Stella replied, pulling out her phone, ready to dial.

The little boy gently tugged at her sleeve. "There's no need to call the police. He, he is my dad."

Stella glanced from the boy to the striking man before her, sensing an unusual tension between them. However, since the boy had admitted it, she couldn't argue. She softly told the boy, "Well, if your dad's here, you should go home with him."

The boy suddenly protested, "I don't want to go with him!"

Stella's mind raced, piecing together the fragments of the boy's distress. A family quarrel, perhaps? Something sharp enough to send him fleeing into the night. She opened her mouth, ready to coax him toward reconciliation, but the man's voice cut through her thoughts like a blade.

"Well," he drawled, his tone dripping with nonchalance, "if home's not where you want to be, then don't go back. Simple as that."

Both Stella and Abby, standing nearby, were stunned and looked at the man.

"I'm Neville Connolly," the man introduced himself, "Marvin's father."

Stella regarded him, unsure of his intentions.

Neville continued, "It's rare for Marvin to take a liking to someone. So, I'd like to ask you, miss, to look after him occasionally during his breaks. I'll pay you a hundred thousand dollars monthly and cover all Marvin's expenses. What do you say?"

Abby couldn't help but give Neville a second glance.

Taking care of Marvin during his breaks for that much money and with expenses covered was like hitting the jackpot. After all, earning ten thousand a month was already a great deal for someone like her.

But judging by Marvin's attire and demeanor, he must be one of those outrageously wealthy capitalists.

Stella instinctively refused, "I'm sorry. I can't..."

Neville interrupted her, "Two hundred thousand."

"Mr. Connolly, it's not about the money..."

"Five hundred thousand."

Stella started to feel exasperated. "Mr. Connolly, it's not about the money..."

"One million."

Stella fell silent. Alright, she admitted it. Money does indeed talk.

Though she was married to Haynes and had seen her share of the world, her monthly expenses were relatively modest.

She wasn't one for designer bags or jewelry, preferring to stay home and care for Keen, which didn't require much spending.

She never considered using Haynes' card for personal gain. Over the years, she hadn't spent even close to one hundred thousand dollars on herself.

At that moment, Haynes had frozen her card, and her plans to start a studio with Antony required a significant investment. She couldn't rely solely on Antony to fund it while she contributed nothing but her presence.

The Ex-Wife's Burning Elegance - Chapter 30[521 words]

As Stella pondered this, she asked, "Mr. Connolly, what do I need to do for this job?"

Neville gave a satisfied smile. "I'm usually busy with work, so I don't have much time to be with him. Miss..."

He paused, asking, "What's your name?"

"Stella Cameron."

"Ms. Cameron, your job is quite simple. If he's staying with you, you'll need to drop him off and pick him up from school, prepare meals, and keep him company during his downtime." Neville explained in a calm tone. He continued, "Of course,

if

you want to take him to the amusement park, summer camp, or on other trips,

that's fine. You can arrange it as you see fit. I'll cover all those expenses."

Abby looked on enviously, her eyes practically glowing with envy. Paid vacations? What a stroke of luck!

Stella's eyes flickered with curiosity. "He... will be staying at my place?"

Neville raised an eyebrow, studying her. "Why? Were you hoping to move into mine? Not that I'd mind, Ms. Cameron, but you're young, and I wouldn't want your husband or boyfriend to get the wrong idea."

Neville's comment made her realize something she hadn't considered. They seemed to be around the same age, and moving in with Neville could invite gossip. Besides, Neville's wife might not be thrilled about her husband spending so much time with another woman.

Stella thought for a moment before asking another question. "Does Marvin's mother agree with this?"

Neville was silent for a few seconds. "His mother passed away some years ago."

Stella quickly apologized, "I'm sorry."

Neville waved it off. "No worries. It was long ago."

Stella lowered her head, looking at Marvin with a newfound sympathy.

She nodded and asked, "Aren't you worried I might mistreat him?"

Neville's voice was smooth yet carried an undeniable confidence and authority. "Abuse my son, Marvin? Who would dare?"

That was true. Neville didn't seem like an ordinary person. Anyone who mistreated his child would be asking for trouble. Besides, if he let her take Marvin home, he would undoubtedly have someone watch her.

While Neville's offer was tempting, it was clear that earning this money wouldn't be easy. She had nothing to hide, so Neville's surveillance didn't bother her.

Stella asked, "When do I start?"

"You can start right now," Neville checked his watch. "I have to go on a business trip shortly and will be back around the weekend. Until then, you'll take care of Marvin."

"Ms. Cameron, any other questions? If not, I'll be on my way."

"Just one more question." Stella looked down at the quiet Marvin, "He doesn't seem to be in the best of health. Are there any dietary restrictions or things I should be aware of?"

Neville raised his eyebrows in surprise. "You know medicine?"

"I've studied traditional medicine for a few years, so I know a bit about children's health issues."

Stella paused, then added, "Since I'm still getting to know Marvin, could you have the nanny who usually takes care of him send me a document detailing his daily preferences?"

Neville's gaze sharpened, his previously casual demeanor becoming more focused as he looked at Stella as if seeing her in a new light.

Stunned by his intense gaze, Stella instinctively asked, "Mr. Connolly, did I say something wrong?"