

# **Lost Me, Gained Regret (Jane and Bryant Ferguson)**

## **Chapter 231**

I replied firmly, "Yeah, I want to try it."

"You got this." His gaze held mine, unwavering as he spoke.

A genuine happiness bubbled inside me, and I sincerely said, "Thank you so much!"

Even though he downplayed it, I could still imagine the great effort he had put in to recover Janedream.

Mark let out a resigned laugh. "What are you thanking me for? I also wanted your parents' company back, but they wouldn't budge."

"This is more than enough," I insisted earnestly. "Having Janedream back is all that matters."

"Glad I could help," he sighed, walking over to the entrance to look outside before turning back to me with a slight frown. "Jane, do you have a rag?"

I asked, "What's wrong?"

"The cleaners missed a spot. I'll clean it up. It's blood. I don't want it to freak you out."

"It's okay," I said as I gathered the documents into a folder and placed it on the coffee table. "Don't worry about it. I'll probably be moving out in a few days anyway."

The house in Riverview Estate was mine, according to the divorce settlement. But dealing with Bryant meant endless trouble. Today, it was Dorothy. The next day, it could be Margaret or Teresa. Any would question why I was living there and maybe even barge in to create a scene. Staying there was asking for trouble.

"You found a place?" Mark's tone was gentle.

"Not yet. I just decided on moving." I shook my head. "I'll start looking for apartments and plan to sell this place tomorrow."

Selling the house would provide the initial funds needed to rebuild Janedream.

"I know a place, actually," Mark hesitated before adding. "It's vacant, and I've been looking to rent it out. It's not far from here, convenient for moving or setting up your company."

I was overjoyed. "Really?"

"Absolutely." Mark smiled. "How about I show you the place tomorrow?"

"No need to see it." I declined with a grin. "I trust your judgment. It must be a cool spot if you say so. But to be clear, I'll pay you the rent as usual. How much were you asking for it?" "Okay, then. I'll take advantage of the opportunity to rip you off," Mark extended his hand. "Five thousand a month."

Deciding to move sooner rather than later, especially with Dorothy's attitude, I began packing my belongings.

When I first moved into the house in Riverview Estate, it was with a few suitcases, and it was the same by then. My life hadn't accumulated much else.

These days, I felt like a spinning top, constantly whirling around due to various issues, never having a moment to live well.

The next day, Mark came over early to help me move. After we arrived at the place and opened the door, I realized Mark wasn't ripping me off, and I was getting the better end of the deal.

The apartment was comparable to the one in Riverview Estate. Located in a similarly desirable area, the rent of the place should have been at least twenty thousand a month for its size and layout. Moreover, the place looked brand new, as if no one had ever lived there.

"Hey," Suddenly, a sound came from the other apartment at the end of the hallway. It was Gregory, leaning lazily against his door frame with a smirk. "Looks like I'm getting a new neighbor, huh?"

## Chapter 232

'When it rains, it pours.' That was the first thing that popped into my head when I turned around and saw Gregory's bright, handsome face. Mark glanced at Gregory, too, a slight frown creasing his brow. "Mr. Ford, you live here?"

It was the same question I had. Given Gregory's wealth, he could pick any mansion, so why would he stay in such a homey place?

Gregory flashed an easy smile. "Tagging along for school."

'Tagging along? Isn't he supposed to be on the prowl for a young fiancée? And now he has a kid? Wealthy families are all too messy, secret children included.' I sighed secretly. Mark chuckled, exchanged a few pleasantries, and wheeled in the luggage from the hallway into the house.

Seeing Mark was ready to keep helping, I quickly waved him off. "You don't have to do this, Mark. Christine will be here soon. She'll help me out. You can get back to your work now." Mark had just returned to the Larson family. And with Violet stirring trouble, he must have got his hands full.

"Okay." Mark checked the time, didn't insist further, but still asked with concern, "So, how do you like the place?"

I smiled. "Couldn't be better."

The appliances were all set. I just needed to pick up some everyday items.

"That's good. I'll send you the door code on WhatsApp, and you can change it anytime." His gaze was soft. "I'll head out then, but call me if you need anything."

"Will do." I saw Mark to the elevator and watched the doors close before returning to my new place.

"Avoiding trouble, huh?" Gregory seemed to have just woken up. After wandering into his place and returning with a glass of water, he leaned against the doorway and lazily asked.

I shot him a look. "You know exactly why. Keep Dorothy in check and stop her from causing trouble for others."

Given the ties between the Ford and Myers families, he and Dorothy were supposedly close.

But that was to be expected. Once Gregory found the missing Myers heiress and completed the marriage deal, he'd officially become Dorothy's brother-in-law. It was hard not to see them as a family. And a part of me couldn't help but feel bitter towards him.

Gregory's eyes twinkled with mischief, and he clicked his tongue. "Don't lump me in with family obligations, pushing those ties on me. I'm not into getting close to people without blood relation."

I nodded, feigning surprise. "Didn't see that coming. You do have principles."

That was so fake.

That day at the Larson family, he and Dorothy were quite cozy. Their banter reminded me of the old days, like Bryant and Margaret.

"Jane," Gregory suddenly smirked roguishly, "Are we still on for that thing you promised the other day?"

I frowned. "What thing?"

He pressed, "Forgot?"

When our eyes met, with his teasing gaze, it hit me. It was back when I got caught spying in the Larson Mansion by him, and I had carelessly agreed to whatever he suggested.

I didn't want any entanglement with him. Besides, verbal agreements meant nothing, so I played dumb. "I can't remember. You got any proof?"

Gregory smirked. "Need proof?"

"What else, Mr. Ford? You know the saying, 'no proof, no deal,' right?" I said righteously.

He looked at me with interest, beckoning me with his finger. "Come here."

"For what?" I eyed him warily, knowing from past encounters that it likely wouldn't end well.

Gregory pulled out his phone, tapped it a few times, and handed it to me. The sunlight streamed through the window, highlighting his carefree arrogance, a smirk on his lips, "Take a look at this."

## Chapter 233

As I walked over, I glimpsed the sight on his phone screen was scandalous. I turned to leave immediately! Gregory was showing me a video of Margaret and Albert from that night. "What's the rush?" he asked, his long legs blocking my path as he dragged the progress bar back.

The screen went dark, but the voices were unmistakable and dreadfully familiar.

"Could you keep it to yourself for now?"

"Sure. What's in it for me?"

"What do you want?"

"Haven't decided yet. How about you owe me one? I'll let you know once I've decided."

"Fine."

After hearing this exchange, I looked up at him, dumbfounded. "You recorded it?"

He seemed careless, but his actions were meticulously calculated.

"Got lucky," he said with a chuckle, his arrogance unmistakable. "Does it count as evidence?"

"You're ruthless." I was at a loss for words and not in the best of moods. "Fine, out with it. What do you want?"

Could it be he was suggesting I hurry up and divorce Bryant? I'd welcome that with open arms.

Gregory said casually, "There's a birthday party the day after tomorrow. I need a date."

I had zero interest in social gatherings of any kind. "Can I not go?"

He asked me back, "What do you think?"

I was helpless. "Got it."

It was just this once, so why not?

As I turned to head home, the elevator dinged open. Christine strode out, caught sight of Gregory, and her eyes sparkled with intrigue. "Oh, hanging out with a friend?" She tried to link arms with me to enter Gregory's place.

"This is his place. Mine's across the hall." I grabbed her, steering her toward my place instead.

Christine whispered, "So, he's..."

"The reason I'm still married," I said loudly enough for Gregory to hear.

Gregory had the nerve to ask me for favors after ruining my plans. Only someone from his lofty position could be so audacious.

Christine laughed. "So, he's the one I've wanted to invite for dinner?"

"He doesn't need a free dinner from you." From what I've heard about the Ford family, they could have whatever they wanted. Inviting him out was likely beyond Christine and me.

"Who says?" Surprisingly, Gregory was less than gracious. "I want the free dinner a lot. When are you inviting me?"

Christine turned with a bright smile. "Whenever you're free, hit up Jane!"

"Deal," Gregory responded casually yet firmly.

Once we were inside and shut the door behind us, I turned to Christine, about to question her motives, when she shot me a suggestive look. "He's quite something, huh? That bold and carefree attitude is a magnet for young girls!"

"Did he attract you then?" I asked, smiling.

Christine shrugged. "Nope. After Steven, I've turned over a new leaf. I prefer the mature and stable type. He's not my cup of tea, too wild to handle."

I was relieved. "That's good."

Considering Gregory's background, if Christine fell for him, it'd just be another heartbreak.

The divide between his world and ours was just too big to cross. To them, dealing with us was as easy as squashing ants.

Driven by curiosity, Christine pressed, "So, who exactly is he?"

## **Chapter 234**

I was scratching my head, trying to simplify a whole mess of relationships for Christine, but I failed. Too lazy to keep trying, I just started tidying up while unraveling the whole narrative for Christine.

At last, she got it. "So, that guy is Bryant's future brother-in-law?" she summarized.

Caught between laughter and tears, I paused, "Who else could jump to that conclusion faster than you?"

Mark seemed to have had the housekeeper come by earlier. The place was spotless.

After we put away our stuff, we just collapsed on the couch.

Christine glanced at me. "Didn't you say you had something serious to discuss with me? What's up?"

I handed her the documents Mark gave me. "I'm thinking about starting my own business. You fancy getting in on it?"

"Absolutely!" Her eyes lit up with excitement.

I couldn't help but chuckle. "So, that whole spiel about quitting your job at the hospital, saying you had plans. Was that a fib?"

"It's just that your plan sounds more appealing," Christine said with a mischievous grin as she looked through the documents. After I explained the origins of Janedream, she seemed even more intrigued. "So, when do we start?"

I smiled. "Right now."

Once we'd decided to do something, we couldn't put it off even for a day.

Ever the firecracker, Christine clapped her hands in agreement.

After lunch, we started planning various aspects of the business. Christine took charge of selecting the office and deciding on the location while I handled the initial preparations.

A quick calculation showed that selling the Riverview Estate property would be more than to cover our initial investment. The next day, I contacted a real estate agent to list the Riverview Estate property. Late at night, Bryant called, his tone unfriendly, "You're selling the house?"

I admitted, "Yes."

"Don't sell it." His voice was imperiously uncompromising.

I looked up from my work, stretching my neck. "Why? If I remember correctly, that house is in my name. The divorce agreement made it clear it belongs to me."

He scoffed coldly, "Where have you moved to?"

I remained silent before responding softly, "That's none of your business."

"Is Mark's place more comfortable than the one I gave you?" His voice was indifferent but somehow intimidating.

I frowned deeply, asking, "You're still having me followed?"

One could be a coincidence. Twice, that was beyond excuse.

On the other end, it seemed he sighed, his tone softening as he half-coaxed, "Come out. Let me in."

It was what I used to long for. Like any regular couple, Bryant would occasionally indulge me, speaking kindly. That would have been enough to make me happy for a long time, soothing all my moods.

But right then, my heart settled as still water. Peering through the peephole, I indeed saw Bryant's flawless features. He lowered his head slightly, looking a bit weary. Probably, he had bogged down with work and issues with Teresa, playing the business tycoon while being the dutiful son.

I pursed my lips. "Go back, Bryant. Since you gave me the house, I should have the right to decide."

From outside, the crisp click of a lighter sounded. "Do you need money?" he asked.

I replied without hesitation, "Yes."

He asked, "How much?"

"Hard to say, but selling the house should cover it for now."

Bryant's voice was husky, "Don't sell the house. I'll transfer the money to you now."

I suddenly flung the door open, all my pent-up words stuck in my throat at the sight of his bloodshot eyes. He seemed even more drained than usual.

Knowing I disliked the smell of smoke, he extinguished his cigarette, his deep eyes fixed on me, "May I come in?"

## **Chapter 235**



The scent wasn't just of cigarettes but mixed with the unmistakable tang of alcohol.

"Have you been drinking?"

"Yeah." His eyes drooped. "Had a few too many with Steven."

"Oh." I nodded slightly, "Then you should... go home and get some rest!"

As for him and me, it was probably best if we kept our distance.

"I just want to be here." He was as stubborn as a child who'd set his heart on a new toy, stepping forward as if to enter.

Instinctively, I blocked him, stepping back, causing him to stagger backward dramatically. I gasped, rushing to steady him.

'Did he only have a few too many? With his tolerance, a few drinks shouldn't have done this.

Besides, if he had time to drink with Steven, Bryant must have mostly solved the Ferguson Group's issues. Perhaps they are indeed moving forward with the merger with the Myers family. Everything seems to be going smoothly. What could drive him to drink like that?'

But before I could ponder any further, he leaned against me, his head buried in the crook of my neck, mumbling, "Babe, I feel awful."

My palms clenched as I tried to push Bryant away without causing him to fall, feeling a headache coming on. "I'll call Kevin to come pick you up."

"I don't want to leave." As he said this, he suddenly wrapped his arms around my waist, causing my whole body to tense up.

It was a gesture familiar from our moments of passion, yet it just made my skin crawl. Every ounce of reason was screaming that it was wrong.

I took a deep breath. "Bryant, let go!"

"Hmm."

He seemed to fall asleep right on me, his weight noticeably heavier. Fortunately, he wasn't out cold. He managed to muster some strength as I moved him inside, dropping him onto the couch with a long exhale of relief.

I tapped his face. "Bryant?"

But there was no response from him. He was sleeping peacefully.

I grabbed my phone and stepped out onto the balcony, dialing Kevin's number, hoping he could come to take his boss away. After several attempts, all went unanswered. In the dead of night, Gary would be resting, too.

I turned back, looking at the man in a suit who, even in sleep, exuded an air of aloof elegance, feeling utterly overwhelmed.

[Happy birthday, Jane, wishing you all the best.]

[Jane! Happy birthday! Love you, you'll always be my girl!]

As I fretted, two texts, consistent as the years, popped up on schedule in the middle of the night. Only then did I hazily realize that today was my birthday.

As I was about to reply, Christine's call came through. "So, am I the first one?"

"Eternal second place." I felt slightly better.

Pretending to be offended, Christine said, "Mark beat me to it again, didn't he?"

"Yeah." I nodded.

Over the years, only she and Mark have made it a point to message me on my birthday.

I glanced at the man on the couch, feeling a chill. He never remembered my birthday, not even a wish, unless I asked for it myself. What a pathetic and laughable marriage.

"Fine, I won't hold it against him. No one can beat the speed of a perpetually single man."

After a cheeky bit of wordplay, Christine chuckled. "So, how do you plan to celebrate? You've waited for your ex-husband to make it special in the past few years, but it always ended in disappointment. Now that you're getting a divorce, I bet he's even less likely to show up. How about we go out for dinner, or I come over and celebrate together?"

My eyes drifted to Bryant, the corners of my mouth twitching.

Ironically, his presence this year was more pronounced than in previous years.

But I didn't want to drag Christine into my mess late at night, so I said, "I have a dinner I promised Gregory I'd attend tomorrow. It slipped my mind it's my birthday."

I had completely forgotten my birthday when Gregory asked me the day before.

## Chapter 236

Hearing the news, Christine wasn't disappointed. Instead, she turned into a gossip queen. "So, going out with the Gregory guy living across your hallway?"

I was surprised. "How did you know?"

Christine explained, "Who around you could I possibly not know about? Besides me, there's Mark and Bryant. You wouldn't bother with Bryant. If it were Mark, you'd have told me right away. By process of elimination, that leaves Gregory."

My gaze drifted to the distant skyscrapers, their neon lights flickering in the night. I chuckled, "Nothing gets past you, huh?"

After exchanging a few more pleasantries, I hung up, only to find Bryant had woken up.

I put away my phone and dropped the smile, speaking steadily, "You're awake. You should go home then."

His deep eyes fixed on me. "Trying to avoid me now?"

"Not at all." I shook my head and walked into the living room. "I'm just trying to keep my life simple."

As everyone thought, I had no parents and barely anything to rely on. How could I possibly stand up to them?

Whether the Ferguson family or the Myers family, it made no difference. If I couldn't confront them, I could at least avoid them.

Bryant frowned. "Did Margaret come to you again?"

"It was Dorothy this time." I stated plainly, my voice tinged with fatigue, "Bryant, let's not make this harder for each other. Let's get the divorce papers sorted." Then, we could go our separate ways.

Yet, he seemed to ignore my point, steering the conversation elsewhere. "Why the sudden need to sell the house? Did something happen?"

I snapped. "That's none of your business."

The more we talked, the deeper the entanglement. Why bother?

Bryant massaged his temples, shifting the topic once more. "How much money do you need? Is the sale of the house enough?"

That was an even more direct question.

I frowned, reluctant to answer. "We don't need to discuss this..."

"Jane," He sighed, cutting me off, "Does divorce mean we have to become strangers? Can't I offer you some help?"

Throughout the conversation, his gaze remained on me. The deep color of his eyes, intensified by alcohol, seemed to pull me in.

Suddenly, I was stunned, and when I regained my composure, I lowered my gaze. "At the very least, we should be clear about financial matters. Apart from what's in the divorce agreement, I don't want anything else, including the shares. Once we finalize the divorce, I'll return everything to you."

I sighed, trying to keep my tone as light as possible. "The best way you can help me is to just... not get involved. Leave me be."

That was the only way to keep the troubles at bay. That way, I could live my life in peace. I never thought that the person I once cherished so much, the one I chased after with all my heart, the only thing I hoped for was a clean break. Nothing more. I couldn't, and wouldn't, expect anything else.

After hearing my words, Bryant's expression turned melancholy. After a moment, he spoke gloomily, "Do you think I'm a complete disaster in family matters?"

I was shocked, a pang of sorrow touching my heart. "What do you mean?"

His thick and curly eyelashes drooped slightly, his laugh tinged with self-mockery. "In trying to repay Teresa for her kindness, I kept indulging Margaret, ruining my marriage. Now, coming home to an empty house, I no longer find the joy of seeing you there. I don't look forward to going home anymore."

Flashes of what had been a harmonious three years suddenly invaded my thoughts. Yes, during the first three years, when I was unaware of Bryant's facade, I had felt happiness in our marriage.

## Chapter 237

I would be waiting for him to come home, waking up to find him sleeping beside me in the morning. That feeling of bliss had me hooked, so deep and true. But once the illusion shattered, there was no going

back. I even found my past self laughably naive.

He was going through the motions while I felt genuine happiness. A sourness surged from my heart to my nose. I turned away, sniffed, and didn't pick up the conversation. I didn't know what else to say. Should I play the victim, or should I curse him out? None of it made any sense.

He exhaled deeply. "I'm starting to realize... Teresa isn't exactly who I thought she was."

I pursed my lips. "How old were you again when Teresa got into that accident trying to save you?"

"Twelve," Bryant remembered clearly, answering without hesitation.

I couldn't help but mutter, "No wonder she could fool you so easily."

A grade-schooler could not tell good from evil. And a grown person, who, in trying to save him, ended up in a hospital bed, not to mention Albert's constant coaching.

Knowing Teresa, I bet she was all sweet and caring to Bryant after marrying into the Fergusons, all to get a fancier lifestyle and maybe bring Margaret on board too.

"What did you say?" Not catching my mutter, Bryant asked with confusion.

I brushed it off. "Nothing much. So, what made you think Teresa wasn't quite the person you thought she was?"

"She knew all about Albert and Margaret's affairs but still wanted me to marry Margaret." Bryant's tone was cold, filled with an indescribable emotion.

I was surprised. The fact that this mother-daughter duo could reconcile was beyond me.

Just the other day, they were at the town hall, fighting like cats and dogs, and then, they were on the same page again.

I laughed, joking, "What about Dorothy then? One as the wife, the other as the mistress?"

"Jane," He looked at me helplessly, yet there was a softness in his eyes as if making a promise, "I'm not going to marry anyone. Don't listen to or believe what other people say."

I was stunned, unconsciously clenching my fist, "Who you marry has nothing to do with me anymore. You don't have to explain it."

After saying that, I checked the time, hinting at him to leave. "It's late. I have things to do tomorrow. You should go."

It's better to maintain a distance, given the circumstances.

Bryant fell silent for a long while. Being accustomed to superiority, he couldn't handle being brushed off. He got up, a bit shaky. "I'll transfer the money to you, and you're not selling the house." Perhaps it was the alcohol, his eyes were moist, and his voice hoarse.

I refused again, running out of patience. "I told you, I don't need it. What I do with the house is my business, not yours."

"I won't allow it." He gave me a meaningful look, leaving those words behind before turning to leave.

The next day, waking up to see my bank account surged with a string of numbers, I felt nothing but irritation.

Christine picked me up to scout for office spaces, dropped off lunch she brought especially for me, and started counting the digits on my phone.

The more she counted, the brighter her eyes got. "One, thousand, million, ten million... Oh shit, he's damn loaded!"

## Chapter 238

I was sipping on my juice when her final words made me choke hard.

After catching my breath, I finished my meal and poked her cheek, "Can't you shoot for something a bit classier?"

"Eight figures, though. You might handle it, but I sure can't." Christine's head spun with dollar signs, "Actually, bending a little for money isn't such a bad idea. And that Margaret, she's just his dad's lady. Nothing ever happened between them."

"Better drop that thought right now." As I grabbed my jacket to head out with her, I couldn't help but add, "And that Teresa, still dreaming of getting Bryant to marry Margaret."

"What?" Christine slipped into her heels, blown away by my words, "Has she lost her mind after being in a coma for so long? And wasn't she falling out with Margaret just the other day? Now they're back on the same team?"

"Who knows." I picked up my bag and opened the door.

With her imagination running wild, Christine speculated, "What if they're into some crazy stuff?"

I asked, "Like what?"

"Maybe a threesome?" Her shocking theories continued as she analyzed, "They're already sharing a man. What else could reconcile them so quickly?"

"A threesome?" My eyes widened in disbelief at Christine. "No way."

"Mrs. Ferguson does have a taste for the unconventional."

Just as we stepped out, the door at the end of the hallway swung open, and Gregory looked over with a smirk that wasn't quite a smile.

I closed my eyes. I couldn't understand why Gregory caught me every time I said or did something sketchy.

I looked at him, helpless, "Do you get a kick out of eavesdropping?"

"I'm in my own house." Gregory appeared as if he had just woken up, his hair slightly tousled, adding to his laid-back charm. "This is legitimate eavesdropping."

I couldn't out-talk him, so I let it go. "Fine, we've got stuff to do. We're off."

He stopped me, "Where to?"

I said, "Running errands."

"Wait up." He turned inside and came out with a dress box, handing it over lazily, "Wear this tonight."

"Alright." Being his plus-one and him providing the dress wasn't too odd, so I didn't refuse and took it. He glanced at the time. "Meet here at five."

It was already past two, and with evening traffic, I'd barely make it back in time.

Showing up at a dinner party required some basic prep and makeup. It would take a decent chunk of time. Gregory raised an eyebrow. "Any problem?"

"No problem." Thinking about the recording he had on me, I resignedly accepted.

The office hunt with Christine would have to wait until tomorrow. She patted my shoulder and took off.

Once I resignedly returned home with the dress box, Christine's text was waiting. [I'm off to check the office. Call me if you finish early tonight, and we'll celebrate your birthday.] [Okay.] After replying to her message, I got a call from Mark, asking if I was free for dinner tonight.

I had to decline. The dinner party would likely run late, and I wouldn't make it.

Later, I transferred Bryant's money back to him and went to get ready, stepping into the shower to wash my hair. As I slipped into the dress, there was a knock on the door. Opening it, I saw Gregory still in casual wear. "Let's go."

His eyes lingered on me, a hint of admiration flashing, and his lips curved slightly, "Nice collarbones."

I replied, "Thanks."

His specific compliment was so like him. Oddly enough, though such words might sound sleazy to anyone else, coming from him, it felt as sincere as a simple "you look nice." It didn't provoke any resistance but made him seem genuinely appreciative.

## Chapter 239

His ride was as wild as his personality, a gleaming Pagani sports car that turned heads wherever it went.

As we pulled up to the hotel, the doorman's eyes lit up, as Christine did earlier that day when she saw the unexpected bonus in my bank account.

Ever the gentleman with a sharp tongue, Gregory tossed the car keys to the doorman and came around to open my door, quipping, "Easy does it. You can take a tumble, but that dress costs a pretty penny." When I laid eyes on that dress at home, I recognized it as a high-end designer piece, the kind celebrities would sell their souls to borrow for an event.

Despite his snarky comment, Gregory wasn't wrong. Our company was in the midst of financial planning. Money was tight, and I couldn't afford to pay back a dress like that.



I gingerly lifted the hem, careful not to step on it with my heels. "Got it, loud and clear."

He seemed stunned. "Why so meek all of a sudden?"

"Just stark broke," I shrugged.

He asked, "Mr. Ferguson doesn't cover your expenses?"

"He does." I pursed my lips, "He's always been generous with money but not with his emotions."

And now that I was officially the ex-wife, his generosity was none of my business.

Gregory raised an eyebrow but said no more, leading me inside.

Suddenly, something clicked. "Hey, weren't you solo at the Larson Mansion the other day? What's with needing a date today?"

"It's different," he replied casually, "No one at the Larson family was pressuring me to settle down."

The birthday girl today was close with the Ford family and high society through and through.

Soon enough, I found out the occasion. It was Dorothy's birthday party.

I was surprised to realize we shared the same birthday. Quite the coincidence, but the gap between us was as wide as the Grand Canyon. She was the star of the lavish soiree that had booked an entire floor of a six-star hotel, while I was just a backdrop.

The ballroom was dazzling, with a sea of high-profile guests milling about, an even more illustrious crowd than at the Larson family's dinner.

Many guests rushed to greet Gregory when spotting him, indicating the Myers family's significant influence, especially since many had traveled from Vista Town for this occasion.

Two young men seemed particularly familiar with him. "Greg, we were wondering where you'd disappeared to. Turns out you've come to RiverCity!"

"Yeah, Greg, hitting up the town without us? We wouldn't even know you were here if it wasn't for Dorothy's party. Thought you'd vanished on us." "Beat it," Gregory chuckled, the ease in his demeanor unmistakable as he turned to introduce them, "Childhood friends."

I offered a polite smile. "Nice to meet you."

They were momentarily stunned, their surprise quickly shifting to playful grins. "Hey there, Gregory's girlfriend, right? Nice to meet you."

I was momentarily stunned, glancing at Gregory for an explanation. I had only agreed to attend the party, not to play his girlfriend.

Gregory shot them a look. "Just play along before the Myers family. Privately, you can call her Jane."

I wondered since when I had agreed to be his shield.

Before I could protest, Bryant and Dorothy entered, accompanied by a couple I didn't recognize. The man was noble, the woman exuding elegance, her ageless grace undeniable. Something about her felt eerily familiar, her tender gaze on Dorothy reminding me painfully of my mother. It was that look in her eyes.

I felt a lump in my throat, my attention drifting as they approached us.

Bryant's icy stare felt like it could freeze us in place, while Dorothy, all smiles moments ago, dropped her facade upon seeing me. "Jane, what are you doing here? I don't recall sending you an invite!"

## Chapter 240

I suddenly felt like a deer in headlights when caught in the spotlight with that question. After all, Dorothy wasn't wrong. It was her birthday bash. She had every right to decide who got an invite. Before I could utter a word, Gregory casually glanced her way and improvised, "It was me. I practically begged her to come with me, and you want to kick her out already?"

With a few words, he dissolved my awkwardness.

Dorothy pouted, displeased. "Since when are you two so chummy..."

Gregory's gaze hardened. "Do I need to report every friendship to you?"

Dorothy added, "Didn't you know Bryant would be here? Are you trying to embarrass me by inviting her?"

"Enough!" A middle-aged woman interrupted with a gentle smile, "You two have always been at each other's throats since you were kids. Haven't you had enough?" Her tone and expression were soothing.

She turned to Dorothy. "You're all grown up, dreaming of marrying Bryant, and still acting childish?"

At that moment, my eyes accidentally met Bryant's dark gaze. I had thought I might feel sad or something. But there was nothing.

It hit me calmly, like, right, so that was why. The reason Bryant was with them was this.

Dorothy affectionately wrapped her arm around the woman's, whining, "Mom!"

So, the middle-aged couple were her parents.

Mrs. Myers gave me a once-over and looked at Gregory as if addressing a younger family member. "And who might this young lady be?"

"Jane, a friend. Weren't you and Richard urging me to get married? Can you have a look for me?" Gregory said with a devil-may-care attitude, pretending we were on the verge of marriage.

"Are you just pulling this poor girl into your act to fool me and Susan?" Richard laughed, pointing at Gregory in mock frustration.

Susan also said with heartfelt concern, "Greg, you've insisted on waiting for Lily to return. It's been years. Don't delay any longer. Your parents will start bothering us. It's time to let go."

"Let go?" A laugh tinged with ambiguity escaped Gregory, "How can someone just vanish into thin air? At least we should see her, alive or dead."

Mark's words were indeed true.

Dorothy's expression darkened upon hearing them mention that, but she quickly masked it when others looked her way.

Susan sighed, her eyes brimming with unshed tears. "Why do you insist, dear? Richard and I are almost ready to give up..."

My heart felt a tug, empathizing with the unseen Ms. Myers.

Richard put an arm around her, comforting her, "Come, no tears. Today's Dorothy's day."

"Richard." Gregory spoke casually, "You do remember, today's also Lily's birthday, right?"

Both Richard and Susan stiffened, Susan quickly bowing her head to hide her tears, while Dorothy looked as if she'd been greatly wronged.

I was surprised that Gregory would stand up for his missing fiancée at such a moment, hitting where it hurt most. But that was his style. Fearless.

Richard exasperated, scolded, "Greg! Must you upset Susan and Dorothy?"

"They have you to care for them. I wonder if Lily were here, would she be happy?"