

Lost Me, Gained Regret (Jane and Bryant Ferguson)

Chapter 431

"

Gregory was being his usual stubborn self.

I glanced at him and sighed, "Cut it out."

As Mark had pointed out, whether it was university or the hurdles of two years ago, he had been there to pull me through. If it hadn't been for him rescuing me, tirelessly seeking out doctors, and introducing me

to mentors that propelled my career forward, I doubt I'd have climbed out of the pit of depression so swiftly. I owed him a debt of gratitude I couldn't repay, but I'd never forget the favor. Besides, Mark had come over today especially to bring Snowy to me.

Gregory, acting as if he heard nothing, didn't ease up, leaving me somewhat helpless. That's when Mark said, "It's fine, you stay and have dinner with them."

With those words, he changed his shoes and left.

The moment the door closed behind him, a wave of guilt washed over me, and I abruptly shook off Gregory's grip, "Happy now?"

"Somewhat."

Gregory eyed me, his tone ambiguous, "Mad at me?"

Considering Ike was still around, and his health condition, I shook my head and replied softly, "No, let's just eat."

Returning to my meal, I ate in silence.

After dinner, he glanced at me, "Angry I didn't let you see him off?"

"I told you, I'm not angry."

"You're not angry, yet you won't speak?"

"What's there to say? It's not like I have to talk non-stop."

He chuckled, "He insulted you to your face, and you're not mad at him, but you're mad at me for not letting you see him off?"

"I'm not..." I pursed my lips, "It's just that Mark truly has helped me a lot, and I didn't want to lack even the basic courtesy of hospitality."

"And what about me?"

"Greg..." Ike, who had been lounging on the beanbag rubbing his belly after dinner, piped up in a small voice, "Don't be jealous, Greg. Jane said the other guy was a guest, and you're family." Gregory frowned at me, "Is that true?"

I couldn't be bothered to respond.

"Really, the uncle heard it too."

Ike crisply answered, then tugged at his shirt, adopting a mature tone, "Uncle, do you know why my dad got divorced?"

Gregory replied, "Wasn't it because he was too old-fashioned?"

"Nope."

"Then why?"

"Because he was like you, bad at talking."

Ike added with a hint of frustration, "That's normal for girls not to like you. Girls like boys who can make them happy."

I couldn't help but laugh, seeing Gregory pinch his cheek, "Who's been filling your head with this stuff?"

"Nobody told me." Ike looked up, "Every time dad was mean, mom would get upset. Ike has eyes and ears; I can see for myself!"

"Little devil." Gregory laughed.

Ike, seizing the moment of Gregory's good mood, ventured, "Uncle, can I sleep over at Jane's tonight? I want to sleep with her and listen to her bedtime stories."

Gregory glanced at me, "That's up to Jane."

"But she said it's up to you." [search the website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Is that so," Gregory's lips curled into a smile, gesturing towards the bathroom, "If you can wash up by yourself, you can stay over."

"Yay!" Ike dashed into the bathroom, excited, even singing a bath song.

Soon after, the sound of running water filled the air.

As I bent down to pick up my sketchpad, planning to work on the balcony, Gregory's index finger hooked around my little finger from behind. He gently swayed my finger, his voice low, "Am I really family?"

My heart skipped irregularly, still upset, I said, "You and he are both friends."

"Friends?" He scoffed, "Just friends, huh?"

I remained silent, lowering my gaze to his sharply defined face, "Then what are we?"

Fiancés, perhaps. That engagement from years ago, remembered by him alone. As Mark said, the Ford family wouldn't welcome me. Otherwise, the drama of two years ago wouldn't have occurred. Yet, in this moment, looking at him, I felt an unexpected surge of hope.

His eyes, under the flutter of long lashes, held mine, "That depends on you, Jane. You owe me an explanation for two years ago."

"Your father came to see me." I took a deep breath, explaining only half of the story, "I didn't have much choice."

Back then, I was even more ordinary than now, with no power to resist. Especially not at the cost of dragging Gregory down with me.

Gregory frowned, then scoffed, "So, you stayed silent and remained Mrs. Ferguson by Bryant's side for two more years? If I remember correctly, not even a month after you returned, I was in trouble."

I had anticipated his skepticism; such a feeble reason wouldn't convince him easily.

Taking another deep breath, I said, "Actually, I wasn't with the Ferguson family. When I left, I just forgot to take my phone."

"Then where were you? What were you doing?"

His ability to pinpoint the heart of the matter was unsurprising. I shouldn't have thought I could easily deceive him.

Suddenly, Gregory let go of my finger, his voice cool, "You were with Mark those two years, weren't you?"

I was momentarily stunned, surprised by his quick deduction.

He laughed bitterly, his voice rough as gravel, "So, I'm not even a backup?"

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My eyes grew slightly moist, a peculiar sensation scratching at the bottom of my heart.

For a fleeting moment, I contemplated coming clean. What if this revelation impacted his health? I was ready to face it alongside him. Better that than having him spend nights agonizing, deeming me a heartbreaker.

Shaking my head, I began, "It's not like that, Gregory. These past two years, I've been..."

"Never mind."

Gregory's smile was thin, laced with unmistakable mockery, though his eyes betrayed a redness. "Jane, I guess I should've never harbored any expectations." His words stabbed deep.

I struggled to keep my eyes wide, pinching the inner corners to hold back tears, feigning acceptance. "If that's what you believe, you might not be wrong."

After all, my efforts over the past two years to track him down had led nowhere. Like a traceless bird in flight, equivalent to having never tried. I didn't need to confess my actions to him. In his eyes, I was just that callous. He had barely been mourned before I was supposedly cozying up with someone else.

So, if that's how it was to be, further words were futile.

"Really?"

Gregory chuckled lowly, a sound filled with bitterness, and in the next moment, stretched out an arm, pulling me down to him. Then, his hand found the back of my head, and he bit down.

Yes. Not a kiss, but a bite.

The taste of iron bloomed across my lips, seeping into my mouth. The pain was sharp, and I gasped, cautious of his fragile legs, hardly daring to push him away, merely distancing myself slightly. Gregory's gaze was dark, his voice carrying a warning. "This time, it doesn't matter if you're Jane or Lilliana, getting close to anyone but me is a big mistake!"

With that, he wheeled away.

Touching my lips, my fingers came away bloodied, a stark reminder. "Ike's still showering."

"I've been busy lately. Take care of him for me."

He didn't look back as he spoke.

Gregory returned to the ground floor where darkness engulfed everything but the faint starlight beyond the windows. In the shadows, pondering her attitude, his irritation surged from within. He had spent over two decades searching for her, only for her to not seek him out immediately upon leaving Bryant, but to mix up with someone else.

Was he so undeserving? The thought of how he had struggled through treatment for her sake now seemed laughable, utterly worthless. Yet, he had survived. The Ford family, father and son, would pay a price. Whether it was for driving Jane away or orchestrating that explosion. Either way, they would face consequences.

His grip on the wheelchair tightened, veins bulging before uncontrollably trembling. He had hoped, with Jane moving back, that his sleep, just a wall away from her bedroom, would improve, perhaps even without medication.

It seems he was mistaken.

Without turning on the lights, he relied on the faint glow from outside to find a bottle of lithium carbonate, swallowing a few pills. The bitterness mingled with the taste of blood, an odd combination that oddly comforted him.

Suddenly, his phone buzzed. Irritably, he glanced at the caller ID- Edith. At this hour, she should be boarding her flight. Yet, she had time to call him.

Gregory answered lazily, "What is it?" His voice carried an unmasked frustration.

"Bad mood?" Edith, knowing him well, instantly recognized someone had upset him. "Who's the unlucky soul this time?"

Gregory's tongue flicked across his teeth, tasting the lingering iron. "Who else could it be?"

Edith realized at once. He had been in meetings all day, from home. None of his company's staff dared upset him. Besides, his temper had been volatile for years, but he always vented it immediately. Whoever crossed him would not escape easily.

Only Jane could make him stew in silence.

After speaking with Jane that afternoon, Edith couldn't help but sympathize with her. Supposed to be a cherished rose, she had become a wildflower in a storm, surviving on her own against the harshness of the Myers family. Her marriage was a disaster, struggling with depression for years before finally overcoming it alone.

While Gregory had her, Molly Ford, and friends to rely on, Jane had only herself during her two years abroad.

Gregory frowned, "Why the silence? Aren't you usually eager to mock me?"

"I'm not in the mood today."

Both of them were pitiable, even to someone as carefree as Edith. Clearing her throat, she continued, "I've got some news about the matter you asked me to look into. Thought I'd let you know."

"About Bella?"

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"Yep."

Edith nodded, her gaze fixed on the screen in front of her. "My friend bumped into Bella at a party a while back, got lucky, and snagged her on Instagram. She mentioned that Bella posted something last year, something about a blessing from above?"

"What kind of post?"

Gregory furrowed his brows, sending a picture over, "Ask your friend if the girl in this picture is the one with Bella."

"Will do."

Edith quickly forwarded the picture to her friend, feeling somewhat puzzled herself. "What's so surprising about a daughter in her twenties anyway? Was she living with her dad all this time?" "Dig around for more info."

Gregory's fingers tapped rhythmically on his desk, a sense of intuition nagging at him.

This had something to do with him or Jane, somehow.

Two years ago, she was impersonating someone in the Myers family, and now she's Bella's daughter?

Something was off.

Maybe it was time to have a chat with Bella.

Soon enough, Edith's friend, fresh off her latest stage gig, replied, confirming the girl in the photo was indeed the one from Bella's Instagram.

"Jane!"

Lost in thought on the couch, I was brought back to reality by Ike's soft voice, his head peeking around the corner, a bashful look on his face. "Uh, I forgot I don't have any clothes on." "Don't worry, I'll get them for you."

Used to his way of addressing me, I lazily went to find a shirt for him. "Wear this for now, and we'll shop for more clothes soon, okay?"

Gregory looked as if he'd swallowed a lemon when I went down to fetch the clothes.

Now, with online shopping, everything was a breeze.

"Okay!"

Ike nodded eagerly, his action revealing the soap suds still clinging to his hair.

I couldn't help but laugh, halting his attempt to dress. "Hold on, let's rinse off those suds first."

After a bit more fussing, I wrapped him in a clean towel and carried him back to the living room, placing him on the sofa.

As I dried him off, he cooperated fully with putting on his clothes, suddenly tiptoeing to plant a gentle kiss on my cheek. "Jane, why are you hurt?"

He touched the spot gently, concern in his eyes.

My heart melted a bit, but I shook my head, reassuring him, "It's just a small accident, it doesn't hurt anymore."

It hurt like hell.

Gregory, when he loved, he loved for real. But when he decided to teach you a lesson, he didn't hold back.

This injury wouldn't heal in a few days.

Looks like I won't be seeing anyone for a while.

Ike, not quite buying it, teared up, "Liar! It looks very painful, boo hoo, Uncle's a meanie!"

"?"

I was taken aback. He was supposed to be bathing; how did he know Gregory caused this? "Why would you call Uncle a meanie?"

Then I saw him wiping away his tears, indignantly saying, "Mommy said, if a girl is hurt, it's always a boy's fault!"

I couldn't help but burst into laughter.

What on earth had Edith taught this kid?

But, these lessons were all aimed at molding Ike into a gentleman.

It was clear she had her share of grievances in her last marriage.

"It's not always the case."

I smiled, grabbing my phone, and squeezed Ike's cheeks affectionately, pulling him into a hug. "Let's pick out some clothes now! And if there's anything else you want, we'll get that too."

"Yay!"

Kids bounce back fast. The moment his attention shifted, he was up and dancing again, even including Snowy, "Snowy too!"

"Arf!"

Snowy barked softly in agreement.

Two days later, Christine stormed into Vista Town, knocking on my door with three suitcases in tow. "Look at that, made it here in record time, didn't I?" "Super fast."

I grinned, helping her with the suitcases. "Got everything?"

The dress for Bella was already designed.

It was time to start cutting.

Christine was coming over to discuss a pop-up store in Vista Town, so I had her bring over the fabrics too.

"All set."

Dropping her suitcases, Christine kicked off her heels. "I'm dying in this heat, fetch me an iced coconut water, will ya?" "Right away!"

Before I could even move, Ike scurried to the fridge, standing on tiptoes to reach.

He couldn't quite make it.

Christine raised an eyebrow, "This the nephew Greg's been talking about?"

I talked to her every day; she was in the loop.

"Isn't he adorable?"

I fetched the coconut water, handing it to Ike, who then ran it over to Christine with the biggest smile. "For you, my lady!"

Christine was charmed, "How sweet. You sure know how to make someone's day."

"Hehe, Aunt Jane says I'm a charmer!"

Ike had quickly become everyone's favorite, with his sweet, polite, and lively demeanor.

Christine, amused, glanced at me, teasing, "Aunt Jane, huh? When did you sneakily become Gregory's wife?"

"He's joking," I chuckled, eager to check the fabrics in the largest suitcase. Confirming their quality, I moved them to my workspace.

Then Christine called out from the living room, "Jane, your phone's ringing. It's Ms. Taylor."

"On it."

I hurried back, picking up the call. "Hey, Ms. Taylor, made it to Vista Town?"

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Bella chuckled in surprise, "Huh? How did you already know? So much for the surprise."

"I saw Ivy's post on Instagram before she boarded the plane."

"Alright then." Bella smiled, "I'm here on some business, plus, as you've heard from Crystal, Summer is quite fond of Vista Town. I'm planning to check out a few properties here, thinking about settling down."

Her tone grew complex towards the end. It seemed like a reluctant decision after a long struggle. As if she wasn't fond of Vista Town herself, but wanted to fulfill Summer Taylor's wish.

I nodded, "It's clear you adore your daughter."

"Of course, she's my only girl." Mentioning this softened Bella's voice, "For her, I'm willing to do anything."

I smiled warmly, "A mother's strength, you're truly a wonderful mom. So, you'll be staying in Vista Town for a while then?"

"If all goes as planned, yes. Why do you ask?"

"The gown is being tailored as we speak. It should be ready for fitting in about a week. If there's anything you're not satisfied with, we'll still have time to make adjustments."

If I remember correctly, Bella is attending a red carpet event for a prestigious film award this month. She's attending as a judge.

"Sounds good." Bella agreed with a smile, then added, "I called you today for another reason."

I was slightly puzzled, "What is it?"

Bella cut straight to the chase, "There's a gala tomorrow night, attended by many big names, both on-screen and behind the scenes. Interested?"

"This..." I hesitated for a moment, then quickly caught on, "Are you offering to help me break into the domestic market?"

My reputation abroad is solid, with many international celebrities seeking my designs, all turned away by my mentor. He argued that allowing me to continue designing for Janedream was a concession on his part. Saying it was time to focus on my studies

rather than business. Once my studies were complete, the choice would be mine. Like now. Hence, my fame within the country is known only among industry designers, virtually nonexistent to the public.

Bella played coy, "What do you say, join me at the gala?"

Of course, yes. But, I hesitated, "Wouldn't that trouble you?"

"Not at all." Bella dismissed with a smile, "Jane, I'll be in Vista Town often. If you need help with anything, don't hesitate."

"Ms. Taylor..." I was touched, responding with a bright smile, "Thank you!"

"Silly girl, it's nothing. No need to thank me." Bella chuckled, "I've sent the gala details to your phone. Meet at the hotel?"

"Sure!"

After hanging up, Bella held her phone, looking somewhat melancholic. In earlier years, Bella often appeared this way. But lately, Ivy rarely saw her like this, "What's wrong? You seem to like Jane, why the long face after talking to her?"

"It's not that." Bella massaged her temples, "I'm just too happy, I guess. I find myself wanting to talk more with her, or help her out."

"It's not easy." Ivy laughed, "You once said she struck a chord with you. By my account, it's more than just that."

Bella was known to be approachable but guarded at heart. Seemingly easy-going with everyone, yet very few genuinely mattered to her over the past decades. And yet, with Jane, it was peculiarly different. Having met only a few times.

Bella raised an eyebrow, "More than striking a chord? Then what?"

"Almost like you could adopt her as a goddaughter." Ivy had been with her from obscurity to stardom, officially her agent but in truth, a confidant.

Bella glanced towards the suite's bedroom, hesitated for a moment, then shook her head. "Summer would feel left out."

Ever since reconnecting with her daughter, who had endured so much hardship, Bella was determined to give her the best the world had to offer. Having only been back for a bit over a year, adopting another goddaughter so soon would surely upset Summer.

Ivy lit a cigarette, "I feel there's always been something off between you and Summer."

"What do you mean?"

"You're so relaxed with Jane, even unconsciously considering things for her." Ivy exhaled a thin ring of smoke, "But with Summer, you're always worried about not doing enough, including Summer herself..." At this point, Ivy sighed, "Don't take this the wrong way, but it seems like Summer sees you more as an ATM."

"Summer..." Bella drifted off, then guiltily added, "But it's my fault. Think about it, Crystal. The hardships she faced are due to my failings as a mother. Her lack of affection for me now, I understand. We'll take it slow, no rush."

"Still owing her?" Ivy sounded helpless, "In this past year, how much have you spent on her? One day it's a house in the capital, the next she's uncomfortable on commercial flights and wants a private jet. Not to mention the endless stream of bags and jewelry... What haven't you provided?"

For the average family, these were lifetime unattainable luxuries. Summer simply had to ask, and it was hers. It wasn't about the spending. Ivy also felt for Bella, knowing the sacrifices and struggles behind her rise from an unnoticed actress to a significant figure in the entertainment industry. Starting out, she was a nobody in the industry. Signed by a company for her looks, and it was those same looks that got her kicked out of a job one cold winter night, all because the lead actor pointed her out for wearing short sleeves in the snow.

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When Bella got home, she was burning up with a fever that hit 104 degrees Fahrenheit. Being strapped for cash, she hesitated to go to the hospital, fearing the bills more than the illness. Reflecting on this, Ivy sighed and said, "You're always worrying about her, but does she ever worry about you? You can't even mention setting Jane up without her worrying it'll be a bother to you..." "Jane? Setting up what now?"

Before she could finish, the bedroom door swung open, and Summer stepped in, clad in a limited edition dress, her curiosity piqued.

Bella hadn't mentioned anything to Summer yet. And there was no real need to. But now that the cat was out of the bag, Bella shot Ivy a warning look to keep quiet, then beckoned Summer over with a smile. "We were just talking about tomorrow's dinner. I suggested inviting Jane to join us, maybe set her up with someone."

At the mention of Jane, Summer's fists clenched tightly, her teeth practically grinding together. Jane, that thorn in her side, had been a constant nuisance for the past two

years. And to think, Jane and Bella barely knew each other, having met only twice, yet Bella seemed to have taken a liking to her.

The more Summer thought about it, the more it irked her. Yet, she masked her displeasure with a practiced smile, sitting beside Bella and asking softly, "Set her up? Mom, has Ms. Webster ever been part of our social circles? Won't she feel out of place at the dinner?"

Her concern seemed genuine, but inside, she wished Jane would disappear. For some reason, Summer felt like Jane was her bad luck charm, always causing her plans to go awry.

Bella, feeling guilty for not spending enough time with Summer, reassured her without a second thought, "Not at all, dear. Jane's been to plenty of international film festivals with Dave. A dinner party will be a breeze for her."

"I suppose you're right."

Summer forced a smile, her frustration brewing beneath the surface. If Jane didn't take the hint and kept hovering around Bella, she'd have to take matters into her own hands. She had missed out on the Myers family's connection, but she wouldn't let Bella, a much bigger opportunity, slip through her fingers.

As soon as I hung up the phone, Christine leaned in, her curiosity piqued by my smile. "What's the good news?"

"Ms. Taylor wants to help me network."

I put my phone down. "She's invited me to join her at a dinner party tomorrow."

"That's fantastic!"

Christine shared my excitement. "I've been worrying about how to launch your career here. Sure, we can flaunt our awards, but it always feels like we're missing something."

"Those who spend big on custom pieces are looking for prestige, and approaching them directly might not always work in our favor."

Christine was analytical about our strategy. "Being seen with Bella could be the break we need. You won't even need to introduce yourself; people will naturally want to know more about you."

I agreed. "That's what I was thinking."

I had assumed it might take until the end of the month's award ceremony to make a mark here. But now, it seemed I wouldn't have to wait that long.

...

The next afternoon, I got ready early, applying makeup to cover a small cut near my lip, and slipped into a one-shoulder mermaid dress designed by Dave. It looked simple at first glance, but the intricate details demanded attention.

Then, Christine, Ike, and I headed downstairs. I had arranged with Ike the night before to take him to a newly opened superhero-themed restaurant while I attended the dinner.

Outside, a familiar car caught my eye, along with a very familiar figure leaning against it. Bryant stood there, looking effortlessly elegant in a tailor-made suit, a lit cigarette between his fingers. His presence commanded attention.

"Auntie! Ike will miss you!" Ike had cheekily decided to call me "auntie" again.

I ruffled his hair, gently saying, "Be good and listen to Christine, okay?"

Bryant glanced over, his deep voice breaking the silence. "I'm here to take you to the dinner."

"How did you know about the dinner?" I asked, though it dawned on me quickly. The guest list for such a high-profile event would be closely guarded, but for Bryant, obtaining it would be trivial. In the world of showbiz, it all boiled down to who had the capital to speak loudest.

Realizing my car tire was flat, Christine offered her keys, but I declined, knowing the traffic would be a nightmare.

Bryant insisted, "Let me take you."

"Auntie!" Ike tugged at my dress, giving Bryant a wary glance before declaring boldly, "When uncle gets back from work, he'll come pick you up!"

In that moment, the lines between our worlds blurred, a mix of family, ambition, and the unpredictable dance of fate weaving us together in the vibrant tapestry of life.

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On the way to the hotel, the driver was at the wheel. We sat in the back, with Bryant mostly silent. Every so often, he glanced my way but said nothing. His silence suited me just fine—there wasn't much I wanted to talk about either, so we just sat there in quiet. The hotel wasn't far off. And in that silence, we soon arrived.

"That boy who called you Aunt earlier, is he Gregory's nephew?" After a long while, in the quiet of the car, Bryant's deep, husky voice finally broke the silence. I looked up at him, meeting his complex gaze, "Yeah, his cousin's son."

Bryant seemed restless, impulsively pulling out a pack of cigarettes and drawing one to his lips, then catching my eye and stopping himself from lighting it. He tossed the cigarette into the ashtray with irritation, fixing his gaze on me, hesitating before finally voicing his question, his voice trembling ever so slightly.

"You and Gregory, are you together now?" I faced him squarely, feeling not a shred of guilt. It was as if everything had changed over time. As if I had anticipated this moment between us. Either he would be with someone else or I would. It was nothing out of the ordinary. There was nothing to lie about, nothing to hide, I simply smiled, "Not yet."

"Not yet?" His eyes narrowed, catching the nuance in my tone. I nodded, openly, "Right. There's a misunderstanding between us that hasn't been cleared up yet." Bryant's Adam's apple bobbed, his voice coming out rough and dry, "And after it's cleared?" "Then, we'll likely be together." I looked at him earnestly, "Then what? Get married? Have kids? I don't know. There are too many unknowns, but that's the plan for now."

As I finished speaking, the atmosphere thickened further. Bryant seemed frozen, barely breathing, shrouded in the shadow of the setting sun, looking particularly dejected. After a long moment, he took a deep breath, as if suppressing some emotion. Suddenly, his voice was soft, "And what about me? Jane, you've moved on so far, but it feels like I'm still stuck in the same place."

"Bryant, be fair." I licked my lips, letting out a sigh, "It's been ten years, you have no right to expect me to stay put. Back then, the one who couldn't even get a glance from her husband was me; the one entangled with Margaret Ferguson was you; but the one who never gave up on me was Gregory." I asked him, with a smile, "If you were me, who would you choose?"

Bryant fell silent, his hand clenched into a fist, the veins on his wrist bulging. When he spoke again, there was a hint of self-mockery, "You're right." "But you talked about being fair. Don't I even get a fair chance to compete?" he asked.

"Bryant," I took off the jade bracelet from my wrist and held it out to him, "I know you're influential now, with the Ferguson family, RF, or even all of RiverCity under your sway. But please, I'm begging you, let me go." On my pale wrist was a startling scar. It had not healed well, the keloid scar was quite severe. But it was evident how deep the wound had been to leave such a mark.

Bryant grasped my wrist, his fingertips gently brushing over it, his jaw clenched, "Gary told me, for Gregory, you... you slit your wrists to make him let you go..."

"That's not it." I interrupted him, "It was this scar." I pointed to a faint mark above the more visible scar, barely noticeable unless you looked closely. After all, when I did it, I wasn't aiming to die. Just to scare them.

Bryant's pupils contracted, his voice trembling, "You... you have suicidal tendencies?" "Depression." I smiled wryly, drawing my hand back, slipping the jade bracelet back over my wrist to cover the scar, my voice light, "Bryant, we were married for three years. You gave me plenty-properties, cars, shares, jewelry, nothing was missing. But all of it, I paid for with my life."

Bringing up these things, I harbored no resentment. It was as if I was talking about someone else's life. Bryant watched me, "When did this happen?" I glanced at the bustling streets outside, "I was diagnosed the month you brought me back from Vista Town."

"Was it me..." His voice shook, disbelief in his eyes as he reached out, then hesitated, "Did I... drive you to depression?" "It was also my choice." I didn't want to put all the blame on him. After all, not loving me wasn't his fault, "By the time I was diagnosed, the doctor said I must have been depressed for a long time. Bryant, I'm telling you this not because I want you to feel guilty. I've moved on now. I just want to live a good life."

"What does a good life look like?" "A life without you." I took a deep breath, speaking with release, "The past was my choice. As for the future, let's just go our separate ways and wish each other well."

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For a long while, Bryant didn't respond.

I wasn't sure what he was pondering over; after a lengthy pause, he finally spoke in a low voice, "Does it hurt?"

I shook my head, replying, "It hasn't hurt for a while now."

He also shook his head. "No, I mean, did it hurt at the time?"

"It was bearable."

Licking my lips, I added, "That wasn't the worst pain for me."

"I remember..." Bryant's voice was nasal, "You used to be scared of even a needle prick when getting blood drawn."

I chuckled lightly, "I was afraid of pain back then, not so much anymore."

Everything that happened thereafter made me realize that pain was the simplest, most straightforward thing. Nothing to be afraid of.

Especially after sinking into depression, during my initial days in France, I secretly stopped my medication and couldn't control my emotions. At that time, I couldn't even bother thinking about pain. Before my mind could even process it, the cut was already made.

As I was talking, the car had already stopped under the porte-cochere, and the driver came around to open the door for me. I grabbed my clutch and lifted the hem of my dress as I stepped out, took a few steps, and looked back at Bryant, who had also exited the car, "Thanks for the ride, I'm off to find Ms. Taylor now."

Without waiting for his reply, I walked away in my high heels.

It was only as I turned around that I suddenly realized, I was different from before. Couldn't quite pinpoint how.

I entered the gala, my gaze sweeping over the crowd, recognizing most of the celebrities and directors present. Only a few fresh faces, probably newbies brought along by some big shot to get acquainted. They looked unfamiliar.

Bella, with a champagne flute in hand, stood casually in a less conspicuous spot, yet still drew a crowd.

"Jane." Bella, seemingly keeping an eye on the entrance of the hall, spotted me quickly and waved, "Come over here!"

"Ms. Taylor." I approached her with a smile, only then noticing the dress she wore was one I designed for the fashion week, "That dress..."

"Yes!" Bella beamed casually, "It's your creation, arrived from overseas just the other day. How do I look? Fits well, doesn't it?"

I sincerely exclaimed, "It fits perfectly!"

"Ms. Johnson." Someone I didn't recognize spoke up, looking at me. "This lady is a fashion designer?"

"What do you think?" Bella chuckled, skillfully pulling me closer and wrapping an arm around my shoulder, before introducing me, "This is Elena, the prodigious designer I

managed to snag from abroad, a close disciple of Dave, also known by her Chinese name, Jane."

She subtly initiated the conversation, waiting for others to inquire before making introductions. This approach was entirely different from a direct introduction. Moreover, her words were aimed at setting the stage for me.

"Becky! I was wondering why your dress today seemed so different from your usual style. You met such an incredible designer and didn't think to introduce me?" Actress Becky playfully scolded Bella, half-joking, "Don't tell me you're planning to outshine us all at the end-of-month red carpet event?"

It was clear she and Bella were close. After all, with Bella's status, only flattery was expected from casual acquaintances, not jokes.

"Outshining you guys just this once isn't too much." Bella raised an eyebrow, "But I don't keep secrets. She's available for work, but just a heads up, she doesn't come cheap."

An A-list actress like Becky wouldn't fret over the cost. Bella's comments were meant to smooth the path for me.

Becky immediately added me on social media. Gratefully glancing at Bella, before I could speak, Becky patted my shoulder, "Girl, I rarely see Bella speak so highly of someone. Tell me, are you her secret daughter or something?"

Chapter 438

"Becky!"

Bella tapped her on the head, "I have a sneaking suspicion that all those nasty rumors about me on the internet were your doing."

Suddenly, Bryant came over with a glass of wine, clinking his glass in the air towards her, "Long time no see, Ms. Hamilton."

His gaze, however, kept drifting over to me.

"Mr. Ferguson, I must say, I didn't expect to see you here tonight."

Bella was somewhat taken aback, quickly seeing through his intentions but chose not to call him out directly. Instead, she asked, "Since when did our entertainment world pique your interest?" "Just looking to get a slice of the pie."

Bryant smiled smoothly, "The question is, is Ms. Hamilton willing to share?"

His underlying message was clear: RF was looking to dip its toes into the entertainment industry.

Out of respect for Bella, a seasoned player in the field, he wanted to give her a heads-up.

To avoid any unpleasantness in the future.

Bella chuckled, "Mr. Ferguson, you jest. In any industry, it's all about the skill."

...

In the distance, Summer watched the scene unfold, seething with frustration.

Her mother was bending over backward to pave the way for Jane.

And the renowned Bryant was completely fixated on that woman. Why her??

Ivy, just coming out of the restroom, passed by her, "Summer, why don't you join them? Your mom was just looking for you."

Summer rubbed her stomach, "Ivy, I... I suddenly feel a bit sick to my stomach. I think I need the restroom."

"Okay."

Ivy nodded, concerned. She added, "Call me if you need anything."

"Got it!" Summer nodded vigorously, making a beeline for the restroom.

Leaning against the door, she opened her palm to reveal a packet of white powder, her phone suddenly rang.

Seeing the caller ID, she couldn't help but smile, "Hey, you made it?"

"I've been held up, can't make it."

The voice on the other line was a man's, chilly, "Is Gregory accompanying her today?"

Gregory again. He was so bothered by Gregory!

He was jealous, no doubt.

Summer knew all too well how she got her status today, and she masked her irritation well, half-truthfully saying, "No, it's Bryant." "Bryant?!"

"Yes."

"Okay."

Summer couldn't help but probe, "Don't you want me to do something?"

A dangerous tone crept into his voice, "What do you want to do?"

Summer replied, "She's with Gregory today, with Bryant tomorrow, doesn't that upset you?"

"Mind your own business."

The man's cold warning sent shivers down her spine, "Remember your place. If you lay a finger on her, I swear I'll make you regret it." Even after knowing him for years, Summer felt a chill run down her back.

"I... I didn't mean that, sorry... I'll remember!"

Summer meekly responded, hanging up the phone.

Three minutes later, having calmed herself, she flushed the toilet and left, striding towards the banquet hall.

Passing by a drinks station, she paused briefly, casually calling over a waiter, then pointed at one of the fruit juices.

"Take this juice to the lady in the mermaid dress standing next to Ms. Taylor."

"Sure thing."

Summer watched the waiter walk over, a satisfied smile on her face.

That packet of substance she went through so much trouble to get hadn't been wasted in the slightest.

Bryant wants to chase Jane?

She didn't mind giving him a nudge.

Someday, Bryant would be grateful to her!

Chapter 439

Bryant had been whisked away by a famous director to discuss potential investments.

I was deeply engaged in conversation with Bella when a waiter approached us.

"Ma'am, your juice."

"Thank you."

Such service was typical at these kinds of gala dinners.

I didn't think much of it and reached out to take the glass just as Summer walked over. Bella immediately reached out to touch her forehead with concern. "Sweetie, Ivy mentioned you were feeling a bit under the weather. How are you feeling now? Better?"

"Much better, Mom."

Summer stood obediently by her side, her eyes filled with longing as she looked at Becky. "Becky, I saw online that next month you're going to be on that slow living reality show. Can I come with you and experience it too?"

I had a pretty good idea of what she was after-the idea of breaking into showbiz hadn't left her mind.

The show Becky was joining involved selecting a quaint village and inviting several seasoned actors along with a few fresh faces to live a leisurely life of dining and farming together. It was hugely popular and eagerly anticipated each season. While ordinary folks rarely got the chance to appear as guests, it wasn't impossible for Summer. After all, being born into such an exceptional family, could anyone deny her excellence?

However, Bella furrowed her brows and exchanged a glance with Ivy, clearly not expecting Summer to bypass her and go straight to Becky. Becky was a bit taken aback too. But they were all seasoned in handling delicate situations, and she deftly tossed the topic back to Bella. "Well, that's really up to your mom. Showbiz can be a tough world, and she loves you too much to want you to endure that hardship." I wasn't surprised at her response. After all, Becky was showing respect not to Summer, but to Bella. And given Bella's stature, it indeed wouldn't make sense for her daughter to enter the entertainment industry, where the cons often outweigh the pros. She had suffered enough and wouldn't want her daughter to go through the same.

Yet Summer didn't get it, pouting. "Everyone says showbiz is tough, but I just want to experience it." She tugged at Bella's arm. "Please, Mom? You know the producers..."

"Alright, alright," Bella sounded exasperated but finally gave in. Summer's eyes lit up. "You're the best, Mom!"

Breaking into showbiz was a dream for many. But for Summer to have this dream baffled everyone present. Becky glanced over at me and suddenly offered, "Jane, what about you? A spot on the show could really boost your profile."

"No, thanks. I appreciate it, but I'd rather focus on my design work."

The fame from appearing on a reality show was a double-edged sword. Not everyone could handle their every move being scrutinized under the public eye, praised or criticized. Becky seemed impressed. "It's rare to see someone your age so grounded."

Summer immediately retorted, "Are you saying I'm impulsive?" Since returning to the Myers family two years ago, Summer had changed a lot. Back then, she was timid, as if afraid of making a mistake. But now, she was full of confidence. Was this the difference between a knockoff and the genuine article? I wasn't sure.

Becky, always straightforward, found herself in an awkward spot. "I didn't mean that..."

"Alright," Bella cut off Summer's impending argument and pointed in a direction. "Didn't you want a photo with Felix? Go on, then."

I glanced over. It was Felix, a leading young actor known for his good looks.

"Okay!" Summer didn't dare to push too far and, taking the hint, she turned to leave but not before raising her glass to me. "Ms. Webster, the success of my mom's gown at the end of the month is completely in your hands."

After taking a sip, I nodded. "Don't worry, leave it to me."

"Ms. Taylor!" A glamorous actress came over to greet Bella. I took the opportunity to excuse myself. "Ms. Taylor, I'll leave you to it. I need to use the restroom."

For some reason, despite the cool air filling the banquet hall, I felt unbearably restless. Once inside the restroom, I stood in front of the sink, repeatedly washing my hands and splashing cold water on my arms. But it brought no relief, only intensifying the feeling. A wave of dizziness hit me as I turned off the tap, and I had to steady myself against the sink. A thought crossed my mind I've been drugged.

The only thing I'd ingested since arriving was the juice provided by the waiter. If someone at this gala intentionally drugged me, the priority was to get out of there. Otherwise, I couldn't predict what else they might have planned...

"Mr. Ferguson!" After getting her photo with her idol, Summer made a beeline for Bryant. Bryant frowned slightly upon recognizing her, his demeanor turning cold. "How

did you get in here?" He hadn't forgotten their last encounter two years ago when he warned her to stay away from Jane, only to have it blow up in his face.

"Let me introduce myself," Summer extended her hand with a slight smile. "I'm now known as Summer, Bella's daughter. I was supposed to join you and my mom for that business meeting last time, but something came up."

Bryant scoffed. "And how did you manage to con your way into that identity?" Summer was completely taken aback by his directness! Even knowing she was Bella's daughter, he was still this unforgiving.

Chapter 440

"Mr. Ferguson, there's no need for harsh words," she began, her tone remarkably calm despite the tension buzzing in the air. "Two years ago, I admit I was bewitched by folly. But now, I am undeniably my mother's daughter."

Her composure didn't waver as she continued, "I just wanted to let you know, someone saw Ms. Webster in the restroom looking quite unwell. Isn't she your ex-wife? Maybe you should check on her?" Before the echo of her words faded, the man in front of her stormed off towards the restroom with a dark expression clouding his face.

That woman always seemed to have luck on her side. It was one thing for her to be the lost heiress of the Myers dynasty. And now, one by one, everyone seemed overly concerned about that wretched woman Summer's thoughts darkened, a cold glint in her eyes.

Bella approached from a nearby table, "Summer, why are you standing here all by yourself?"

"Mom!" Suddenly, Summer's expression softened as she turned to Bella, putting on a show of fake innocence. "I was just feeling out of place. I didn't want to cause you any trouble."

"That's nonsense. You're my daughter; no one would dare say a thing," Bella reassured her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and leading her towards the elevator. "If you're uncomfortable, let's head back to our room. You'll get used to these events in time."

"Mom, you're so good to me!"

Summer wondered, though, if her mother would remain this kind if the day came when all secrets were revealed. Who knew who had the luck to be born to Bella? Unfortunately, luck without longevity to enjoy it. If nothing went wrong, from this day forward, Bella's daughter would only be her.

Once back in their suite, Bella finally noticed something, "Why don't I see you wearing your jade pendant anymore?"

"Ah?" Summer paused, then responded with a hint of regret, "I didn't want to risk losing or damaging it. It holds all my memories of you, Mom."

In truth, Mark had forbidden her from wearing it. Could it be he feared the true daughter of Bella, lost to the world, might one day stumble upon this elite circle and recognize it? But even if that happened, with the pendant in her possession and the DNA test done, no argument could stand against her. Especially with the tactics of that man, whom she knew too well. Handling a lone girl would be effortless for him. His fear was unfounded.

Hearing this, Bella's guilt towards her daughter deepened, "Don't worry, now that I'm with you, if it's lost or damaged, I'll get you a new one!"

"Thank you, Mom!" Summer's smile was radiant. "But let's not. It's irreplaceable to me, the first gift from you. A new one wouldn't hold the same meaning. I want to keep it safe."

That man had warned her, wearing it openly would have consequences she wasn't yet prepared to face. He had placed her in this position, but his support was a double-edged sword; without his approval, she could lose everything.

"Sweetheart," Bella said affectionately, pinching her cheek. "Go freshen up then. You shouldn't sleep with makeup on."

"Alright."

Summer took this as her cue to retreat. Continuing the conversation carried the risk of revealing more than she intended.

Once alone, Bella decided. "Let's purchase that villa we liked."

Ivy hesitated. "Are you sure?"

It wasn't about the money but whether Bella was truly ready to settle in Vista Town. Despite owning properties nationwide, they always stayed in hotels when visiting Vista Town. Bella harbored a deep-seated aversion, if not outright hatred, for this place.

Yet, looking towards the bedroom where Summer had disappeared, Bella's expression softened, "I've made up my mind. As long as Summer is happy, that's all that matters."

...

Staggering out of the restroom, the banquet hall's glamour seemed to blur before my eyes. I couldn't fathom who might have drugged me.

"Jane!"

Bryant's voice was a steadying force as he rushed over, catching me before I could falter, "Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm... not sure..." Under the influence, my voice was weak, barely my own.

Bryant's concern deepened, a storm brewing in his eyes. "Did someone drug you?"

"It seems like it," I confessed, finding solace in his presence amidst the chaos.

Struggling to maintain composure, I looked up at him, "Could you... take me home?"

"I wouldn't leave you alone like this," he assured me, his protective stance a comforting barrier against the night's shadows.

As we headed towards the exit, Bryant made arrangements for our departure. The sleek black Maybach waiting outside was a silent testament to his foresight.

Just as he was helping me into the car, a Bentley Mulsanne sped towards us, halting just inches away. The window rolled down to reveal Gregory's scornful gaze, his words laced with mockery, "Heard you needed a ride. Seems like you've found one already."