

Heiress 341

Chapter 341

Back at the Salvador Corporation, Justin sat quietly in his office, lost in thought as he stared at the computer screen. With each click of the mouse, a new photo appeared, featuring a single protagonist-a beautiful woman with a radiant smile and an elegant demeanor-Bella.

These photos were the result of Ian's surveillance of Bella over the past few days. Originally, he intended to gather intelligence from the KS Group, but Bella's side proved to be exceptionally secretive. Ian only managed to capture these everyday scenes.

As Justin repeatedly browsed through the photos, his gaze deepened. It was as if, by looking at them multiple times, the figures in the pictures would come to life. If they were on paper, they would probably have developed a vintage charm.

Suddenly, his phone on the table vibrated consecutively. Justin finally snapped back to reality, picked up the phone, and focused on the screen.

Seeing the messages, Justin felt his heart drop. He abruptly stood up from his leather chair, grabbing his suit jacket before rushing out the door.

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Ralph and Bella arrived at the barbecue restaurant.

It had been a long time since Bella had met with Ralph, and the siblings had plenty to catch up on along with drinks.

After three rounds of drinks, Bella's eyes were slightly glazed. She suddenly leaned in and asked, "Ralph, spill it. When are you going to bring back a sister-in-law for me?"

"Ugh, not you too! My mom is already nagging me about this. Besides, my job is so tiring and dangerous. Why would I want to find someone in the same line of work? We both need to live a good life, right?"

Ralph looked nonchalant, quietly pouring out the leftover alcohol in front of Bella and replacing it with mineral water.

Bella pouted in frustration. "What's with the men in our family? None of you are settling down. It's annoying! I don't even have a sister-in-law to care for or a nephew to play with. It's so frustrating!"

Hearing this, Ralph teased Bella. "With so many brothers doting on you, aren't you content? Aren't you afraid that if your brothers get married, we won't have as much energy to pamper you?"

"Stop pampering me so much! It's because of you guys that I didn't have a boyfriend until after I graduated from college! During school, you knew I liked chocolate, so you bought all the chocolates in the campus supermarket every day and waited for me at the school gates after class. Every boy in our school thought you guys were my boyfriend! Because of you guys, I still haven't had a proper first love!" Bella's cheeks turned red. When she drank too much, she tended to bring up old times. It was a Thompson family trait.

"Because of the chocolates I got for you, my mom thought I was dating someone in school. She sent people to stop me at the school gates and claimed that she caught me red-handed. Then she gave me a good beating when I got home!" Ralph winced at the memory.

Bella blinked in surprise. "Did that happen? I have no memory of it."

She continued, "Why didn't you explain to your mom? You could have told her that those snacks were for me!"

"That was right before the college entrance exam. She even went to the school to meet with the principal and my homeroom teacher, asking them to keep a close eye on me so that I wouldn't get distracted during my exams."

Ralph smirked. "I'm clearly innocent, but my mom thinks that I'm a playboy. Don't you think it's unfair?"

Bella teased him. "Well, you don't exactly look innocent."

“Around that time, the school did a poll on the best-looking students. I don’t know who put my picture up, but I ended up winning first place. Suddenly, I was surrounded by those infatuated girls everywhere I went, and my locker was either filled with gifts or love letters. It was so damn annoying!” Ralph complained.

He smiled and continued, “So, I just went with the flow. With my mom’s controlling nature, she cleared the path for me.”

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huh?”

“So, you used me as a shield to ward off your love troubles? You’ve got some nerve, Bella furrowed her eyebrows and lightly flicked his forehead with her fingertip.

Ralph playfully stuck out his tongue. “Anyway, I don’t want to get married. With my current career, anyone marrying me would basically be a widow. That’ll be a miserable life for them.”

Bella nodded in agreement. “Yeah, same here.”

“You should get married, though. The last time Christopher came to our house, he seemed quite interested in you. That night, his eyes were practically glued to you. Why not consider him?”

Suddenly, Ralph leaned close to her ear and said mysteriously, “But I noticed how pale his complexion is. Do you think he’s sick?”

Bella was left speechless upon hearing this.

“To be honest, money isn’t something we lack in our family, but you must find a healthy partner with excellent genetics, someone who can carry on the legacy of the Thompson family,” Ralph said with utmost seriousness.

“I don’t care if he’s sick, as long as he’s not sick in the head.

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Bella smiled. Whether it was embarrassment or the effects of drinking too much, her rosy cheeks flushed even more.

As Ralph and Bella exited the restaurant, Steven had already parked the car at the entrance.

Seeing Bella leaning on Ralph with a flushed face, Steven hurriedly came over to assist her.

“Don’t touch her.”

Ralph’s right arm tightened around Bella’s shoulders as his left arm forcefully kept Steven at bay. He spoke coldly, “I’ve got this. You don’t have to touch her.” Steven stood frozen and pressed his lips together in embarrassment.

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Steven was deeply aware of Ralph’s harbored prejudices against him. Ralph thought that every man who showed excessive attention to his sister had bad intentions.

“Ralph, you’re too cautious. Steve is not a stranger,” Bella said helplessly with a smile.

“He may not be a stranger, but he’s still a man,” Ralph retorted. His eyebrows furrowed slightly. He cast a cold glance at Steven and added, “You should find a female secretary tomorrow. I don’t like the idea of you having a male secretary.”

Bella waved her hand dismissively and squinted her eyes. “Come on, you’re such a suspicious cop. You see everyone as a potential criminal.”

“It won’t hurt to stay vigilant and alert,” Ralph replied.

Ralph assisted Bella into the car and closed the door. As Steven bowed to him before leaving, Ralph stopped him.

“Wait.”

“Is there anything else, Mr. Ralph?” Steven asked with a calm expression.

“As Bella’s secretary, you’re with her 24/7. While supporting her, remember to maintain your boundaries,” Ralph instructed.

Ralph’s gaze carried a chilling fierceness. “What doesn’t belong to you won’t ever be yours. Don’t harbor any inappropriate intentions or cross the line. Unlike my older brothers, I won’t tolerate your presence around Bella. I was born with a suspicious mind, and I’ve witnessed too much evil in this world. So, I never assume the best in people.”

Steven took a deep breath and clenched his fists.

“In short, don’t entertain any improper thoughts you have about Bella. Don’t you dare take a single step beyond the boundaries, or else I won’t go easy on you.”

“Mr. Ralph, I understand the rules. While the rules can control actions, they can’t control one’s feelings.” Steven asserted, forcefully suppressing his inner grievances.

Steven’s eyes got a little teary as he bluntly revealed the emotions that had been suppressed for too long. “I won’t do anything to Ms. Bella because I genuinely admire and respect her. But

you can’t ask me to stop loving her. Loving someone is not a crime.”

Ralph’s eyebrows furrowed slightly. Although he did not like Steven, he found his words surprisingly straightforward.

“You’d better remember what you said today.”

“Hey, what are you guys talking about? Are we leaving or not? I’m exhausted!” Bella lowered the car window, squinting her eyes.

“I’m coming, Ms. Bella.” Steven turned back and smiled warmly at her.

“Bella, give me a call when you get home.” Ralph seemed a bit concerned and made a gesture mimicking a phone call.

Bella made an “OK” gesture, waved to him, and left with Steven.

Ralph smiled as he watched his sister leave but did not immediately follow. His eyes lost their playfulness and scanned the opposite side of the road. He turned and walked away.

Across the road, Ian’s black Porsche was discreetly parked. He had just sent a location to Justin, and within seconds of Bella leaving, both she and the “gigolo” had disappeared.

“Strange... Where did they go?” Ian muttered to himself.

Ian was puzzled. He muttered to himself when suddenly the car door was violently yanked open. In an instant, he felt his breath hitch as a rough and powerful hand firmly seized his collar. He was effortlessly pulled out of the car as if he weighed like a feather.

“Hey, hey, hey! What are you doing?!”

Ian, shocked to see Ralph appear out of nowhere like a ghost, panicked and shouted, “Don’t mess around! We have laws in this country! I’ll report you to the police!”

“No need for all that trouble.”

As the words fell, Ralph's expression turned cold. He pulled out an ID from his pocket and flashed it in front of Ian. "The police are here to catch people like you who have slipped through the cracks of this law-driven society."

Ian involuntarily gasped, his head buzzing.

Bella sat in the car, yawning several times and feeling drowsy.

At that moment, her phone rang.

"Ralph, what's up? I haven't reached home yet. You're..."

"Bella, do

you know who Ian Harris is?" Ralph's hoarse voice came through.

Bella's drunkenness disappeared immediately, and she sat up straight.

"What's going on, Ralph? Why did you suddenly mention this person?"

"Bella, where did you meet this creep? His phone is full of photos he secretly took of you! I caught him red-handed!"

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By the time Justin rushed to the barbecue restaurant, Bella and Steven were long gone. Gritting his teeth, he replayed the images of Bella and the man from the photos in his mind. His face was frozen and stern, but his composure was on the verge of collapsing.

Amid the lively atmosphere, he could not help but feel like he was humiliating himself. Alongside this self-inflicted humiliation, he was worried about Bella.

He thought, 'Bella was having dinner with a seemingly unreliable man in such a chaotic environment at such a late hour. Does she even understand what fear means?'

Suddenly, his phone vibrated, displaying an unknown number. Justin sighed and answered, " Who is this?"

"Is this Mr. Justin Salvador?" A robotic female voice came from the other end.

Justin responded, "Yes."

"This is the Savrow West District Police Station. May I ask, what is your relationship with Mr. Ian Harris?"

Justin's eyebrows furrowed deeply. "He's my secretary. What's going on?"

"Please come to the police station now. We'll discuss it when you arrive."

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The events of this night could only be described as illusionary.

The Lamborghini raced down the road, and Justin's mind was in a whirlwind. He could not comprehend how Ian, who would not harm a single soul, had ended up in the police station.

As Justin briskly entered the station, he collided with a handsome man in a black leather jacket. The man was tall and strong. He was the same man who was being intimate with Bella in those photos that Ian sent!

Ralph also noticed Justin. His eagle-like eyes scanned him as if piercing through light.

A cold glint flashed in Ralph's eyes, and he asked with a mocking smile, "Are you Justin Salvador? Here to defend Ian Harris?"

Justin's eyebrows furrowed as he looked at Ralph with hostility. "How does this concern you?"

Ralph laughed. "Interesting choice of words."

He continued to mock with a cold sneer. "Ian Harris is here because of me. How does it not concern me?"

Justin frowned, breaking his composure. "Are you doing this for revenge?"

"Revenge?"

"My secretary exposed your illicit relationship with Bella. Is this your way of retaliating against me?"

Blinded by anger, Justin failed to recognize that the young man before him was actually an experienced detective. Justin naturally assumed the man was merely standing up for Bella.

Ralph, upon hearing Justin's assumption, chuckled instead of getting angry. "It's truly a miracle that you can become the president of a major conglomerate with that level of intelligence."

Justin gritted his teeth and retorted, "You're a gigolo who dares to appear so boldly in a police station. You even try to frame Ian for exposing you. I must say, I'm quite impressed by your courage."

Ralph was shocked by what he heard and thought to himself, 'What the hell is this guy blabbering about? Gigolo?! Do I look that promiscuous to him?'

Ralph sized Justin up. 'So, this is the pretty boy who hurt my Bella. Look at his thick eyebrows and big eyes. He has quite a sturdy figure hidden beneath his suit. He looks like he could fight.'

At that moment, two police officers happened to pass by and salute Ralph.

"Hello, Captain Thompson!"

Ralph smiled and nodded at them.

Justin's breath hitched as he stared at Ralph in disbelief. "This guy isn't a gigolo, but a police officer?! Captain Thompson... He's a Thompson, too?"

Upon closer inspection, Justin noticed that Ralph's bright and sharp eyes, steep nose, and chiseled jawline looked familiar.

"Ralph!"

Justin abruptly froze. A pleasant yet familiar female voice pierced through his heart.

This was yet another surprise revelation.

Justin thought, 'Just how many sons does that old playboy, Wyatt Thompson, have?! Isn't Wyatt afraid that there will be disputes over inheritance when he's older?'

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Justin turned slowly, only to find Bella standing a few steps behind him. Her gaze was cold and piercing.

"Bella, why did you come over?" Ralph no longer paid attention to Justin and swiftly approached his sister. "I told you that I'd handle this. You should just go home and rest.'

“No, I must handle this matter in person.”

As Bella spoke, she looked at Justin. The coldness and unfamiliarity in her eyes cut deep into his heart.

After the divorce, she treated him with a cold demeanor. He had resented it before, but now he was afraid. Deep down, he dreaded the thought of Bella treating him as a complete stranger.

He would prefer to be hated, cursed, or even physically assaulted by her. The chill of her indifference was something he could not bear.

“Bella...” Justin hesitated, trying to call out to her.

“Justin, let’s talk outside.”

Bella shot him an icy glare before turning away and walking ahead. Justin’s gaze trailed her graceful figure. He was eager to catch up to her, but Ralph pulled him back.

“Hey! You clueless idiot, you’d better behave yourself. This is a police station. If you dare do anything to my sister, I’ll put you in handcuffs!”

Justin responded, “As Bella’s brother, you should be aware of my history with her.”

Taking a deep breath, Justin quelled the turmoil within and replied coldly, “When she was my wife, we treated each other with respect. You have no reason to be concerned now.”

Ralph sneered, a chilly laugh escaping his throat. “Well, that’s not necessarily true. From my experience dealing with criminal cases, a man who hires someone to stalk his ex-wife is either mentally unsound or a murderer. None of those husbands were ever deemed normal.”

Justin was speechless.

Bella and Justin found themselves in a secluded area behind the police station, a spot ideal for a private conversation. Given their prominent positions in society, discretion was crucial in this sensitive setting. The two of them faced each other, silhouetted by the dim light.

“Justin...”

Justin asked, “Have you been drinking?”

Without waiting for Bella to finish, Justin stepped closer. His broad frame cast a shadow over her, blocking the remaining light. Bella, secretly surprised, watched as he tilted his head and gently sniffed her hair.

In a deep voice, he remarked, “This liquor has a high alcohol content. Do you think you have a good alcohol tolerance? Remember how drunk you were at the karaoke bar last time? During the three years of our marriage, you never touched a drop of alcohol.”

Bella responded with a cold tone, “I’ve always had a high tolerance for alcohol, and I’ve always enjoyed drinking. You just never knew.” Bella’s gaze was cold. She took a step back with her back against the wall.

“That’s because you never showed me your true self. You have never been honest with me.” Justin approached her. His heart was filled with bitter emotions.

Bella scoffed. “Justin, you’re pretty good at dodging responsibility.”

She tilted her head. Her seductive red lips captivated him, making his throat tighten involuntarily. He struggled to keep his emotions in check.

Bella continued, “Remember the kind of person you used to be, the husband you were? Even when I opened up to you in the past, you never bothered to care. And let’s not forget how you found me annoying back then. Why would I want to show you the real me and risk even more turned off by me?” Bella spoke these words with indifference.

Every word she said had the power to stir up tumultuous waves in Justin's heart.

As it turned out, she hid her true self back then to please him. you being

After all, which woman did not wish to present her best self in front of the man she loved? Just like how Rosalind once acted all innocent around him, feigning ignorance of the world. Rosalind even resorted to despicable tactics like pretending to have depression, all just to win his heart.

Justin finally realized that, at that time, Bella had really gone all out to please him.

Rosalind's fake love and carefully calculated moves were all about controlling him and getting what she wanted. On the other hand, the old Bella had only pretended to be someone else to avoid being disliked by him.

Justin felt like his heart was crushed.

His eyes turned red. Just as he was about to speak, Bella said coldly, "Justin, I get why you had Ian spy on me. Ada Wang's wedding is coming up, and I'm your biggest competition. I get that you want Ian to keep an eye on your business rival. But hasn't Salvador Corporation done pretty well so far? Didn't Ada Wang choose to attend your welcoming banquet? Why would you still want Ian to follow me and even secretly take pictures of Ralph? Don't you think that it's a bit too much?"

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"You are so despicable." Bella uttered those words through gritted teeth.

Wyatt Thompson and his wives had protected their children well. It was because of this protection that they had the freedom to pursue their dreams.

In the past, Bella was blinded by love. For Justin, she made sacrifices, abandoned her family, and repeatedly compromised her dignity, all for the sake of a laughable notion of true love.

Now that she has sobered up and returned to the Thompson family, Bella intends to shoulder the responsibility as the heiress of KS Group. This was not just a way to make amends, but also to ensure her siblings could pursue their own careers without any hindrance.

Bella did not want her family's peaceful life to be disturbed.

At this moment, Justin's shameless and reckless probing of her boundaries struck a nerve with Bella. He had pushed her patience to its limit.

'Despicable?' Hearing her ruthless words, Justin felt a piercing ache in his heart. His eyes turned even redder.

Suddenly, he extended his arms and pulled Bella to his chest. His warm breath brushed against her nose as he implored, "Bella, if you think I'm despicable, then come at me. Why arrest Ian? Is this your way of taking revenge on me?"

Bella's eyes also reddened at the mention of revenge. She was infuriated by the man's

apparent lack of reason. He was the one who instructed Ian to secretly photograph her. Ralph caught Ian in the act, and there was irrefutable evidence. Not only did Justin not apologize to her, but he tried

to turn the blame on her.

"If it weren't for your orders, why would Ralph randomly arrest Ian and detain him?" Justin narrowed his eyes with a hint of resentment. Complex emotions weighed on his chest that were difficult to relieve.

"Bella, did I earn your hatred just by winning against you once? Prompting you to conspire with your brothers against me and my company?"

"What's the matter? Are you jealous?" Bella's lips curled up in a provocative smile. "My brothers care about me. What can I do if they want to stand up for me?"

“Bella!” Justin’s temples throbbed intensely.

“You have so many great sisters, so why can’t I have a few good brothers? If you can’t stand it, you can retaliate. You can ask your little sisters to fight me!”

Bella was not one to typically utter such words. But tonight, she was intoxicated, so she did not hold herself back.

“Little sisters? What do you mean?” Justin appeared puzzled, still not grasping the situation.

Bella disdainfully mocked him, pressing both hands firmly on his chest. “Are you playing dumb? I really can’t be bothered by a disgusting man like you.”

Justin’s dark, long lashes fluttered, and his obsidian eyes rippled.

Memories flooded back to the time when Bella had vomited on him outside the karaoke bar

and accused him of being a hooligan, which had nearly landed him in jail. After he returned home that day, he stripped off his soiled clothes and stood bare-chested in front of the

mirror. He was astonished to find red scratches all over his chest, like he had been clawed by a kitten. Those were marks left by her.

A gentle caress left a warm, lingering sensation.

When Bella touched him once more at this moment, the vibrant feeling and his heart that had melted by her presence now quivered uncontrollably within his chest.

The man’s deep eyes held unclear emotions, stirring restlessly and quietly growing more

intense.

“I’ve said everything that needs to be said. From now on, stop sending people to stalk me. Or else it won’t be as simple as ending up in jail!”

“Bella, you can’t just walk away.” Justin’s voice was rough.

“This is a police station! If you act like a hooligan, I’ll call Ralph to come over and arrest you!” Bella’s eyes widened in anger. Her cheeks were tinted red.

“Even so, you’re not allowed to leave.” Justin stubbornly persisted.

“Why?!”

“Explain to me, which sister are you talking about?”

Justin’s brow furrowed as he urgently questioned her. “I only have two sisters, Bethany and Carrie. Who are you referring to?”

Bella was so angry that she bit her lip. She was tempted to slap this scumbag.

At that moment, Justin’s pupils contracted. He suddenly turned and used his left arm to block

a fierce attack from behind. Years of military experience and intense training had kept his reflexes sharp.

Bella widened her eyes.

Before she could comprehend the situation, Justin was already engaged in a fight with Ralph. The two exchanged punches and kicks, making her heart pound with fear.

Justin moved like lightning, and his attacks were fierce.

In this fight between the ex-military ace and the impulsive detective, Ralph was clearly at a disadvantage. After all, among Bella's brothers, the only ones who could contend with Justin were Drew and Asher.

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Seeing that Justin's fist was about to land on Ralph's face, Bella panicked and shouted, "Don't hit my brother!"

Justin's heart skipped a beat, and his fist instantly froze in mid-air. Seizing Justin's

momentary distraction, Ralph took the opportunity to land a heavy punch on the corner of Justin's mouth.

"Ugh-!"

Justin felt the pain in his lips and teeth as the taste of blood filled his mouth. Despite the powerful blow, he only staggered a step backward.

Bella clenched her fists tightly. Her eyes were filled with disbelief.

She did not expect this man to be so obedient as to actually listen to her words. Justin just stood there and let Ralph hit him.

Ralph quickly rushed over, embracing Bella's shoulder and glaring at Justin, whose lips were now bruised. "Motherfucking scumbag! If you dare touch my sister again, I'll make sure I beat you to a pulp till your mother can't even recognize you, even if it means being stripped of my police badge."

However, Bella felt a subtle sense of fear in her heart. That scumbag had already shown mercy. Otherwise, Ralph would probably be the one beaten until his mother could not recognize him.

In the end, Bella chose not to dwell on the matter of Ian spying on her. After all, she was well aware of Ian's character after three years of interaction with him.

Justin brought Ian back to the car. Ian's head hung low, and if he had a tail, it would be tucked between his legs.

"Sorry, Mr. Salvador... I'm useless. I got caught by that stupid cop and caused you trouble..."

"Forget it." Justin spared a few words. His mouth was still aching from the punch.

"Mr. Salvador! Are you hurt?!" It was only now that Ian noticed the bloodstains at the corner of Justin's lips. He was so distressed that he was about to cry. "Did that stupid cop hit you?! As a police officer, how dare he lay hands on an innocent citizen?! I'll file a complaint against him!"

'Innocent citizen?' Justin recalled the scene when he trapped Bella with his own body. No matter how he thought about it, it did not seem like something an innocent citizen would do.

"This matter is over. Don't stir up trouble again."

"But..."

"That so-called stupid cop is Bella's seventh brother. He's one of Wyatt Thompson's many sons," Justin said, recalling the face that resembled Wyatt Thompson's and feeling a bit slow in realizing the connection.

"Wow, the seventh brother?!" Ian exclaimed. "Why does the young madam have so many brothers? There will be no end to it if they come at you one after the other!"

Justin tilted his head back, closed his eyes, and lifted his hand to gently wipe away the bloodstains from the corner of his lips with his thumb. He sighed deeply. He was also curious about how many brothers Bella actually had. They might as well come at him in one go because he was losing his patience with them popping out of nowhere one by one.

While he was wallowing in frustration, his phone rang.

Justin took out his phone from his pocket and saw Zoe's name on the caller ID. He felt even more irritated.

"Zoe, do you need something?" Justin answered the call in a cold and indifferent tone.

"Justin!" Zoe's cloying voice entered his ear.

In an instant, Justin opened his eyes abruptly. He suddenly recalled Bella's words earlier.

- "You have so many great sisters. Why can't I have a few good brothers?"

So, that was what she was referring to.

Justin felt enlightened as his heart filled with adrenaline, causing him to sit upright.

On the other end, Zoe continued babbling, "I've prepared the repertoire for the performance at Ada Wang's welcoming banquet three days from now. Would you like to see it in advance?"

However, Justin did not hear a word she said. His mind was filled with the hidden meaning behind Bella's statement.

Bella cared about his interactions with other women.

'Was she jealous?'

"Justin? Are you even listening to what I'm saying?" Zoe asked in a sweet voice.

“Stop that.” The man spoke in a low voice.

“Huh?”

“I’m not your brother, so don’t call me at random.”

Zoe was startled. She asked in confusion, “Justin... What do you mean by that? Do you not like it when I call you?”

“I don’t like it. Be more careful next time.”

With that, Justin hung up the phone.

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Three days went by in the blink of an eye.

Ada Wang finally arrived in Savrow as scheduled, attracting attention both domestically and internationally.

On the evening of the banquet, Bethany had picked out a splendid purple haute couture gown for herself. She had meticulously curled her hair and done herself up from head to toe. She radiated the same elegance as always.

Naturally, Shannon also attended in her finest attire. She styled her hair in an elaborate updo, revealing a pair of generously sized emerald earrings and an almost 2-inch-diameter imperial green jade pendant. It was as if she was wearing the value of a mansion around her neck.

“Mom, I remember you have a better piece of jade than this one, right? Why don’t you wear that one?” Bethany asked curiously.

“Don’t mention it. Just thinking about it gives me heartache!”

Shannon gritted her teeth and held onto her pendant tightly. “It’s all because of that bitch, Rosalind! I don’t know what the Gold family has been doing to have millions of dollars in debt!”

“I didn’t have any cash on hand, and the authorities were watching me like a hawk. The boutique has also been without customers for two months now, so I had to reluctantly part with that piece of jade and sell it to help pay off some of the Gold family’s debt!”

“My goodness! You’re generous. If I were you, I’d be in tears. That was a birthday gift from Dad!”

Bethany felt the pain for her mother. She asked in confusion, “But I really don’t understand, Mom. Why are you helping the Gold family? It would be better to let those rotten relatives fend for themselves!”

“Hmph! I wish I could...”

Shannon muttered with a sinister tone. However, when she was grooming Rosalind to cozy up to Justin, Shannon was overambitious and put all her eggs in one basket. It never occurred to her that her own actions would backfire, leaving her with nothing but failure.

Now, not only did she fail to achieve her goal of controlling Justin, but the pawn she groomed ended up threatening her.

Recently, Rosalind had tasted the sweetness of extorting her aunt for money. Just the day before yesterday, Rosalind called Shannon from Meridan to ask for more money. Shannon was so furious that she almost considered hiring a hitman to take Rosalind out.

However, killing Rosalind was definitely a last resort. She would not consider it unless it was absolutely necessary. Thus, she promised Rosalind that she would soon find an opportunity to work with Rosalind again and let her return to Savrow. That was how she managed to keep that despicable girl in check.

“Mom, how do I look in this outfit?”

Bethany happily twirled in place, wearing the purple evening gown she chose after seeing how

handsome Ryan looked in a purple shirt. It was as if, by wearing this, she and Ryan would be in matching outfits. "Tonight, I must be stunning, and I absolutely can't let down our family's reputation!"

"The undisputed star tonight is Ada Wang, a renowned international celebrity. Your chances of impressing anyone are minimal. You should focus more on Ryan. Your attention should be on him

rather than competing with those girls. Even if you look more beautiful than them, what's the point if Ryan doesn't take another look at you? The doors of the Hoffman family won't open for you!"

To Shannon, Rosalind was done for, and Carrie had always been a disappointment. Shannon was glad that Bethany did not disgrace their family. She pinned all her hopes on Bethany and used all means to ensure Bethany would marry into a prominent family. A daughter who married well would only make her journey to seize control of Salvador Corporation smoother. "Mom, you can rest assured. This time, I will definitely become Ryan's wife!" Bethany puffed out her chest, full of confidence.

Shannon raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Do you have a plan?"

"Mom, Ryan's younger sister, Zoe, has returned from Inalia. She said she would help me! You should know how much Ryan dotes on his sister. With her assistance, I'm confident I can become her sister-in-law!" Bethany became more excited as she spoke, as if she already had one foot in the Hoffman family.

"Zoe?" Shannon's slender eyebrows tightened as she recalled the times when Ryan used to bring a little doll to Tideview Manor to meet Justin. That little girl was quite clingy. She seemed to like Justin as well.

"Well, there's no free lunch in this world. Aren't you afraid of being used?" Shannon sat on the sofa, lazily flicking her red nails. "Zoe wouldn't help you in vain. She must have exchanged some conditions with you, right?"

"Mom! No wonder Dad loves you so much. You're really smart!" Bethany sat down beside her mother, holding the heavy dress. "Zoe is interested in Justin, so her condition is to marry Justin."

“What? This won’t do!” Shannon’s voice suddenly became sharp. “Zoe is the daughter of the Hoffman family. If she marries Justin, that bastard will become even more powerful within Salvador Corporation. If that happens, I won’t have any foothold anymore!”

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“But Mom, I can also marry into the Hoffman family. It will be equally beneficial for you!” Bethany’s face turned pale as she was startled by her mother’s intense reaction.

Shannon maintained her silence. She pursed her lips and had a sinister glint in her a moment, she said, “What is the progress between Zoe and Justin?”

eyes. After

“It’s not like there’s any significant progress. From what Zoe hinted, Justin seems to be lingering over that little harlot, Bella. She doesn’t stand a chance at all,” Bethany replied with a disgruntled expression.

“Heh, that’s even better,” Shannon remarked. “Dear, don’t you understand? This is a great opportunity to sow discord between Justin and Ryan!”

“Mom, what do you mean?”

Frustrated, Shannon flicked Bethany’s forehead. “Ryan is the sole heir of the Hoffman Group. Despite Chairman Hoffman’s current control, Ryan has inherited a substantial amount of shares from his father. In the future, the Hoffman Group belongs to him!”

Shannon continued, “If we use Zoe to create a rift between Ryan and Justin, it’s much more meaningful than becoming in-laws. I understand Justin’s stubborn nature. It’s futile to force anything he doesn’t want on him. So, even if Zoe doesn’t marry him, this will become a thorn in their friendship. They can never go back to the way they were!”

Realizing this, Bethany looked at Shannon with admiration.

Just then, there was a soft knock on the door.

“Come in!” Shannon composed herself, hiding her menacing gaze.

The door creaked open, and Carrie entered clutching a teddy bear.

Upon seeing her sister, Bethany immediately thought of the grudge between them. She wished she could destroy both Carrie and her ugly teddy bear.

“Carrie? What are you here for?” Shannon asked indifferently.

“M-Mommy...”

Carrie lowered her head and held the teddy bear tightly. She asked in a barely audible voice, “C-Can I attend the banquet tonight?”

Both Shannon and Bethany were taken aback. They could not recall a time when Carrie had ever asked for something on her own. This was a first.

“My dear sister, your innocent facade is finally on the verge of collapse, huh?” Bethany sneered with a devious grin. “Did you hear that Ryan would be there? You just couldn’t resist the temptation to meet your crush, right? After what happened with Ryan last time, are you unable to resist the urge to throw yourself at him again? Why are you so shameless?”

“I-I didn’t!” Carrie quickly denied any lingering feelings for Ryan and pushed aside the awkward encounter in the bushes.

“Carrie, luck won’t always be on your side. And don’t forget, you’ve got some mental illness. Aren’t you afraid of scaring Ryan with your crazy behavior?” Bethany expressed disgust with a

roll of her eyes.

Carrie's face instantly turned pale.

"Carrie, it's probably best if you skip tonight's event. Just stay at home. Also.." Shannon's expression darkened. "About what happened between you and Ryan before, I won't hold it against you. But from now on, don't cause any more trouble for your sister, or there will be consequences. Understand?"

"Mommy! I-I just want to meet Ada Wang... I really like her movies!" Carrie pleaded as tears welled up in her eyes.

"Who would believe such a lame excuse? Mom, don't fall for her lie. She may look innocent, but deep down, she's scheming after Ryan!" Bethany gritted her teeth, seething with

resentment.

"Carrie, don't get in your sister's way. You've caused enough trouble. No more, understand?" Shannon commanded with an authoritative tone, as if Carrie was not part of the family.

Carrie stood there in confusion with her head hung low. She sniffled pitifully. The neglect from her mother and the hostility from her sister left her feeling like an outcast in her own family.

She was the daughter with a mental illness who brought shame to the family.

She was an unwelcome existence and an unnecessary burden.

Chapter 349

Ada Wang's first visit to Savrow immediately became a big deal in the media. Coupled with the high-profile image of the Salvador family, the headlines in the past three days have been centered around the international superstar and the hotel where she stayed.

During this period, the Salvador family's reputation took a hit in the public eye. Any publicity was good publicity, but the Salvador Hotel was in a particularly tricky situation and could not withstand such negativity.

For decades, the Salvador Hotel had maintained a stellar reputation as a top-tier brand in Savrow and even across the country. It had been the choice for distinguished guests from various fields like politics, business, the arts, and sports. Even the former President of Orealm always chose to stay at the Salvador Hotel during his visits to Savrow.

However, over the past six months, a series of events have dealt a severe blow to the Salvador Hotel's once-pristine reputation. Now, whenever netizens mentioned the Salvador Hotel, the immediate association was with Justin's marital scandal and Rosalind's infamy.

Reputation was something that took time to build but could crumble in an instant. Recognizing the urgency, Justin dedicated considerable effort and resources to win over Ada Wang, aiming to salvage the Salvador Hotel's tarnished image. In this battle, he desired victory even more than Bella.

At precisely 6:00 p.m., the hotel's reception area was bustling with journalists and eager fans, all hoping to catch a glimpse of Ada Wang. A luxurious red carpet was laid out, adding a touch of grandeur.

"I'm Ada Wang's biggest fan! I've watched all seven of her movies! After a whole decade, I'm finally going to meet the goddess in person!"

"In the entire Savrow, the only hotel that suits Ada is the Salvador Hotel! KS World Hotel doesn't compare. Their reputation, facilities, and conditions can't compete with the Salvador Hotel!"

"But recently, the Salvador Hotel's series of actions have been confusing and unclear..."

"Nevertheless, it doesn't change the fact that the Salvador Hotel is a pioneer in the hotel industry of Savrow!"

"Ada Wang's decision to stay here is a recognition of Salvador Hotel's capabilities!"

The bodyguard opened the door of the luxurious car.

The star of the night, Ada Wang, emerged amidst the cheers of her fans.

With a blend of Asian, French, and Italian heritage, Ada possessed curly, dark brown hair, and almond-shaped eyes. Her facial features were prominent and stunning. Standing at 1.76 meters, she could easily stand out in a crowd of women.

As it was her first time in Savrow, Ada underestimated the enthusiasm of her fans. Nevertheless, in good spirits, the usually proud superstar smiled and waved at the cheering

crowd.

“Ada! I’ve grown up watching your movies!”

“OMG, why doesn’t she age?! She’s unbelievably beautiful!”

Shielded by her manager and personal bodyguard, Ada made her way into the Salvador Hotel, opting to take a dedicated elevator to the banquet hall.

Outside the hall, Justin and Ian awaited her arrival. Upon Ada’s appearance, Justin calmly stepped forward and extended a polite handshake.

“Ms. Ada, welcome to Savrow.”

Tonight, Justin was impeccably dressed in a four-piece suit, radiating elegance and charm. His powerful presence matched that of the superstar.

“Hello, Mr. Salvador.” Ada greeted him and returned the handshake.

“It’s your first time in Savrow. Are you adapting well?”

Ada shared, “My mother is from here, so you could say that Savrow is where my roots are. Although it’s my first time visiting this city, I fell in love with it the moment I smelled the air here.”

Justin’s impeccable image and refined demeanor eased the initial awkwardness, and the two of them walked into the banquet hall engaged in conversation and laughter.

Inside the hall, the air buzzed with the presence of celebrities, emanating a delightful fragrance. Ada Wang’s entrance triggered excitement, prompting even some A-list celebrities to consider rushing up for a photo with the superstar.

After all, Ada was a celebrity who was usually seen only at grand events like the Oscars.

Nearly all the female celebrities could not resist sending admiring glances Justin’s way. Now that the annoying “gatekeeper” Rosalind had fallen, numerous elite ladies and heiresses in Savrow were eyeing the coveted position of being the lady boss of Salvador Corporation. Justin was undeniably an eligible bachelor.

Holding a glass of champagne in hand, Shannon and Bethany found themselves with gloomy expressions. Despite their position in the Salvador family, they had become mere figures in the background.

“Mom, we’re also part of the Salvador family. Why should we play second fiddle to Justin?”

Bethany grumbled indignantly, and Shannon’s face grew tense.

As the wife of the chairman of Salvador Corporation and a former movie star, Shannon had grown accustomed to a glamorous life. She could not tolerate being overlooked.

Shannon quickly put on a fake smile, swaying her figure as she approached Justin and Ada.

“Ms. Ada, I’ve heard so much about you. You truly live up to your reputation.”

“This is...” Ada took a quick glance at Justin.

Chapter 350

“I am Shannon Quarry, wife of Chairman Gregory Salvador.” Shannon introduced herself with a hint of arrogance, keeping her head high.

“Justin, I don’t understand what she’s saying, but there’s no need to translate it for me. because I’m not interested in knowing who she is,” Ada replied, not bothering to look at Shannon, and continued chatting with Justin in French.

Shannon only understood about a third of the conversation due to her limited proficiency in French. Just as she was about to introduce herself again in French, Justin smiled faintly and said to Ada, “That’s just my intention. There’s no need to introduce irrelevant people to you.”

This statement completely baffled Shannon. However, at this moment, laughter erupted around them, and the surrounding conversations were crystal clear to her.

“Wow... Ada dared to confront the wife of Chairman Salvador so directly! She’s really brave and bold! I thought she was just acting, but now I see that she’s genuinely being herself!”

“Oh, this is hilarious! Ada Wang is from Meridan. She doesn’t care about the business politics in Savrow at all. How could she possibly care about the wife of Salvador Corporation’s chairman?”

“Exactly! Shannon’s big talk won’t impress Ada!”

Hearing the mocking comments, Shannon’s face turned red and then pale. The wrinkles around her eyes deepened. However, she was extremely concerned about her reputation and unwilling to swallow her pride. She put on a forced smile and said, “Ms. Ada, as you may know, our hotel and KS World Hotel have always been competitors. Your choice to attend our banquet tonight is a recognition of the Salvador Hotel. As the lady boss of Salvador Corporation, I feel extremely honored.’

Justin's expression remained cool and distant. 'The lady boss of Salvador Corporation? She certainly knew how to flatter herself.'

The atmosphere suddenly became awkward. Ian quickly translated Shannon's words for Ada, hoping to stir up some trouble.

"No, I think there's a misunderstanding." Ada shook her head after listening. "KS World Hotel and Salvador Hotel are both excellent establishments. I chose to attend this banquet tonight not because the Salvador Hotel is superior to the KS World Hotel, but because Justin has impressed me through his actions and charisma."

As these words were spoken, Shannon's cheeks burned as if she had been slapped in the face. Ada Wang might have appeared haughty, but in reality, she was quite shrewd. If she had agreed with Shannon, it would mean that she admitted the Salvador Hotel's superiority over the KS World Hotel. This would not only belittle KS World Hotel but also offend KS Group, one of the global Fortune 500 companies.

This would leave Ada with no way out and force her to continue letting the Salvador Hotel host her wedding. Ada was not that foolish to easily fall into this woman's trap.

In the slightly tense atmosphere, the doors of the banquet hall swung open. Zoe, dressed in a million-dollar Swarovski crystal-studded pink evening gown, walked in gracefully, resembling a floral fairy.

"Is she Christian's apprentice?"

"She's not just a pianist. She's also the younger sister of Ryan Hoffman, heir of the Hoffman Group!"

"Ryan's younger sister?! Doesn't that make her my future sister-in-law?!"

"Then who's my future sister-in-law? Bethany? Ugh... I don't really like that woman. She looks annoying."

On the other side, Bethany sneezed.

Upon Zoe's arrival, Bethany's eyes scanned the scene like radar, eagerly searching for Ryan. However, her hopes were dashed. She felt that her relationship with Zoe was truly shallow.

Zoe noticed that the attention of the crowd shifted from Ada Wang to her, and she couldn't help but feel a surge of pride. In fact, she had worked hard to persuade Justin to let her play the piano, aiming to quickly gain fame in Savrow's upper class and carve her own identity in the Hoffman family.

She did not want people to associate the Hoffman family solely with her brother, Ryan. She aimed to be an undeniable presence. With a sweet smile, she walked toward Justin, lifting the hem of her dress.

However, Justin's indifferent gaze left her feeling uneasy. Suddenly, a sharp and steady click of high heels echoed from outside the door.

It sounded so familiar to Justin.

Justin's heart tightened abruptly as his gaze fixed on the door without blinking. His breathing instantly became chaotic.