

Honey, You're a Billionaire?

Chapter 581 I Only Like What She Likes

[1,297 words]

Alan York was Regalia's most renowned calligrapher. His achievements in the field were unparalleled, and the few works he left behind before his passing were invaluable masterpieces. Nobody had expected Lizzie, the lady of the Finch family, to be Alan's student. After all, Alan never just took on any student. Only those with true talent could earn his mentorship.

Upon hearing this revelation, the guests regarded Lizzie with newfound admiration. After all, she was still the lady of the Finch family, and despite the buzz around Rose, who was the daughter of the Lerain Group's Xanth family, Lizzie's importance couldn't be entirely overlooked.

The Finch family still held significant weight, and everyone present knew when to show the appropriate deference.

It was evident that Eleanor had intentionally brought up Lizzie's calligraphy skills, and the guests looked forward to witnessing them.

"Who could have guessed that Mrs. Finch was Alan's student? Her calligraphy must be exquisite!" one guest exclaimed.

"Indeed. Who knows? We might even be fortunate enough to witness a masterpiece tonight," another added eagerly.

All eyes turned toward Lizzie, eager to see her demonstrate her skills. Eleanor was particularly pleased with how her plans were coming together perfectly.

Naturally, Lizzie knew exactly what Eleanor was doing, and she couldn't afford to let Eleanor's intentions fall flat in front of so many people.

"Mom, should I give a demonstration?" Lizzie asked, adopting an air of modesty.

"Yes, of course! Let's see your skills," Eleanor replied, her face glowing with satisfaction.

Upon hearing Eleanor's subtle cue, the helpers swiftly brought out some top-quality brushes, ink, paper, and an expansive desk. Their efficiency was a testament to the Finch family's influence.

The orchestrated nature of this calligraphy display was evident, and the guests couldn't help but wonder who Eleanor intended to impress.

Their gazes shifted toward one figure in unison. Eleanor's focus on currying favor with the distinguished figure from the Lerain Group couldn't have been more obvious.

The gathering crowd who harbored similar intentions took mental notes, while others discreetly messaged their assistants to acquire calligraphy masterpieces as potential gifts.

Rose also noted Eleanor's favoritism toward Elijah. Standing beside him, she commented, "You like calligraphy? What a coincidence. My mother does too."

In Rose's childhood memories, her mother's study was always filled with the scent of ink, brushes, and paper.

Her mother's calligraphy was breathtaking. It was an elegant, artistic expression that left a lasting impression on anyone who saw it.

Elijah seemed lost in his own thoughts too, perhaps recalling the woman he had loved so deeply. His eyes softened with a rare tenderness.

"She loved it, so I learned to love it too."

Back then, Elijah's life had been marked by bloodshed and violence, and his constant companions were the weapons of war. It was Celeste's influence that had drawn him to the gentle arts. Rose was taken aback by his response, turning to look at her father in awe. A smile slowly spread across her face.

"How wonderful."

For so long, she had been ignored and emotionally neglected by Jamie. He had never shown any affection for her mother, and because of that, she had never questioned whether she was truly his daughter. Rose had simply accepted that she wasn't the product of a loving union between her parents.

But now, standing beside Elijah, she could feel the depth of his love for her mother. It erased any doubts she had ever harbored about her place in their lives.

"I am a product of love," she thought.

Elijah gazed at her, his eyes filled with affection. "What's wonderful?"

"Finding my father," Rose answered with a radiant smile. However, a crease formed on her brow as her expression turned pensive. "But I fear I may have caused you trouble."

She was referring to Eleanor and why she had been invited to the manor that day under the guise of viewing an evening gown. Rose would have to be blind if she hadn't realized the true motive behind this invitation by now.

Lately, both Elijah and Clover had

been spoiling her, cherishing every moment they could spend together. If they had known she would be

at

the Finch Manor that day, they certainly would have come along.

And that was precisely what Eleanor wanted.

Rose couldn't help but feel a pang of guilt. Eleanor now had the perfect opportunity to curry favor with Elijah, and the stakes for what she sought in return would only grow larger.

Elijah understood exactly what Rose was thinking. As for Eleanor's ambitions, he didn't mind. His priority was simply spending time with his daughter. Gently patting Rose's hand, he reassured her, "Don't worry, it's no trouble at all." Meanwhile, Eleanor wasn't pleased with the father and daughter's private conversation. "This won't do," she thought. She needed Elijah's attention to shift to Lizzie's calligraphy demonstration.

"Lizz, are you ready? Do give it your best!" Eleanor's voice rose, drawing Rose and Elijah's attention. They exchanged glances before turning to look at Lizzie, who was poised at the writing desk, brush in hand.

Lizzie's artistic upbringing was evident in her graceful posture, making her the embodiment of elegance and poise. Her slender form and focused expression evoked an ethereal, otherworldly beauty as she leaned over the inkstone. She briefly glanced up, acknowledging Eleanor with a nod, but as she lowered her gaze back to the paper, her eyes caught sight of someone at the crowd's edge. Their eyes met for a fleeting moment. Carl quickly masked the momentary yearning in his gaze before vanishing into the sea of people.

Everyone's attention was now focused on Lizzie. This was the perfect moment. Within the crowd, Lizzie's brushstrokes danced, leaving an elegant trail of ink on the paper. Her calligraphy was both graceful and powerful. As she wrote, someone recited the words emerging on the page.

"In the year 353 AD, during the early days of spring... We convened at the Blooming Pavilion, nestled in the tranquil shadows of Mount Havenridge..."

"Wait... This is from the Lindisfarne Gospels! How remarkable!"

"Mrs. Finch is writing from the Lindisfarne Gospels!"

As soon as Elijah heard the first line, a glint of recognition flashed in his eyes. Standing beside Rose, Clover's expression shifted visibly, a frown creasing his features.

He couldn't help but wonder how they knew Elijah was searching for the Lindisfarne Gospels.

He turned his gaze back to Lizzie's calligraphy, and a hint of disdain flashed in his eyes. Her writing may have seemed remarkable to the untrained eye, but compared to the piece Elijah had treasured for years, it fell far short. Even against Elijah's own calligraphy, it was like comparing an amateur's scribbles to a masterpiece.

"How laughable," he thought, watching in silence as Lizzie continued her performance.

Lizzie was fully immersed in her work. She took pride in her skills, and even though she knew that Eleanor was using her talent as stepping stone for something, bigger, her pride and vanity

velhet

compelled her to deliver a flawless

performance.

She longed for the admiration of everyone in the room, but most importantly, she yearned for the acknowledgment of the Xanth family's legendary figure.

As she poured her heart into her work, the murmurs of admiration from the crowd grew louder.

"Mrs. Finch's calligraphy is exquisite. It's no wonder she was Alan's student!"

"Indeed, her writing possesses the grace and elegance of a true master."

"The Finch family has so many hidden talents. I wonder if this piece could be purchased. I'd gladly pay a handsome sum to add it to my collection!"

Lizzie's heart swelled with pride as

the comments reached her ears.

Despite being accustomed to constant flattery and admiration as Mrs. Finch, the compliments still gave her a small thrill, and that day,

it was particularly satisfying.

She felt that perhaps it was because of Rose. Finally, at her own birthday banquet, Lizzie had become the center of attention, successfully diverting everyone's gaze away from Rose.

To Lizzie, this seemed to signify that she had emerged as the victor in the silent battle she had been waging.

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Chapter 582 Nothing Special

[1,306 words]

Lizzie shot a fleeting glance at Rose, her eyes glinting with the satisfaction of someone who believed they had won. It was brief, but Rose caught it, leaving her puzzled. "What was that about?" she wondered.

Before Rose could make sense of Lizzie's strange look, Lizzie straightened up, having just finished her calligraphy piece.

The room buzzed with a chorus of praises, the admiration reaching a crescendo as though the work had been crafted by a grand calligraphy master.

"Thank you! My daughter-in-law is so fortunate to receive such generous praise." Eleanor beamed, basking in the glow of everyone's compliments.

Although she appreciated fine calligraphy, she lacked the expertise to truly evaluate Lizzie's work. However, having seen the real Lindisfarne Gospels, Eleanor couldn't discern much difference between Lizzie's rendition and the original. With the chorus of admiration filling the room, Eleanor felt confident. But it wasn't the approval of the crowd that she sought.

What she truly longed for was Elijah's recognition. If he were to offer even a nod of acknowledgment, Eleanor would seize the opportunity to present the gift she had meticulously prepared.

Amidst the lively chatter, one of the guests chimed in, eager to ingratiate themselves with the Finch family.

"Mrs. Finch, would you consider selling this exquisite piece? I would be honored to add it to my collection!"

"I'll pay you more for the piece!"

"Me too!"

Others joined in, eager to outbid one another in their quest to curry favor with the Finch family.

Basking in the attention, Lizzie graced the scene with a demure smile. The elegance of her attire and the poised manner in which she carried herself further accentuated her air of sophistication. Her eyes met Eleanor's, who simply responded with a hearty laugh. "My apologies, everyone," Eleanor said, addressing the room. "This piece isn't meant for sale, and it would be crass to discuss money at such a gathering. Lizzie, what do you think about gifting this calligraphy to someone?"

The crowd fell silent, contemplating Eleanor's intentions.

It didn't take long for the sharpest minds in the room to connect the dots. Throughout the evening, Eleanor had been diligent in her efforts to ingratiate herself with the father and daughter of the Xanth family. Her attempts at flattery were anything but subtle. Now, it was clear that this calligraphy piece was part of a strategic plan to further curry favor with Elijah, the powerful leader of the Xanth family.

As realization spread among the guests, a few faces that had initially brimmed with eagerness lost their enthusiasm.

With purposeful strides, Eleanor made her way toward Elijah and Rose, her face exuding warmth and kindness.

"Mr. Xanth, what do you think of this calligraphy?" she asked, her question direct and brimming with confidence.

Lizzie's quiet confidence was evident as she momentarily glanced toward Elijah. With all eyes in the room fixated on her, she anticipated a shower of praises.

After all, this was the Finch family's event. Even if her calligraphy wasn't flawless, she believed that the worst comment she would receive would be a polite "not bad". This was their territory, and maintaining appearances was paramount. However, not everyone was concerned with such superficialities.

Elijah scrutinized the calligraphy piece, his gaze dissecting every brushstroke with precision. Eager to accommodate him, Eleanor had the piece lifted and presented directly before him, ensuring that no detail would escape his discerning eye. A heavy silence settled over the room, the air charged with anticipation as they awaited Elijah's verdict. His face remained impassive, offering no hints of approval or disappointment. Finally, a subtle smile tugged at the corner of Elijah's mouth. "Here it comes! The praise they had been waiting for!" Not only did the other guests think so, but Lizzie and Eleanor believed it as well. Eleanor had even mentally prepared to accept the compliments with humility. Elijah's deep voice broke the silence. "The content of this piece is indeed commendable, however—"

Eleanor interjected, "Oh no, her calligraphy isn't that good. Mr. Xanth, you're too kind..." Her words trailed off as she began to sense that something was amiss.

"Did he just say 'however?' If it's good, why is there a 'however'?" Her mind raced as she fought to maintain her smile. Glancing up, she noticed a frown now marred Elijah's once-smiling face.

Her forced grin grew even more strained as Elijah continued, "Mrs. Finch Senior as someone

knowledgeable in calligraphy, it seems you already know her skills are indeed lacking. It's truly unfortunate for such an exquisite piece of text like the Lindisfarne Gospels to be presented this way."

With that, Elijah turned away from the calligraphy piece, his expression filled with disdain as if he couldn't bear to look at it any longer. A collective gasp rippled through the crowd.

Their gazes darted between Elijah and the calligraphy piece. It dawned on them that their earlier praises were merely a nod to the Finch family's status and not a genuine appreciation for the art.

They had merely played their part in a world driven by social graces and appearances. Only the audacious leader of the Xanth family dared to speak his mind.

Clover seized the moment, adding, "Indeed, this calligraphy isn't up to par. All that praise just now was really quite unnecessary."

Those who had showered Lizzie with compliments found themselves at a loss for words. Their faces flushed with shame and embarrassment. Some even took a few steps back to lessen their presence and escape the discomfort. Eleanor's forced smile was frozen on her face, making her appear more unsettling than if she were crying. Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined that her carefully laid-out plan would receive such a critique.

Even she, a seasoned member of high society, was momentarily at a loss, only managing a stuttered, "M-Mr. Xanth..."

However, her quick wit soon

prevailed, and she found a way to

respond. "Please accept my

apologies for the inadequate display. Her calligraphy skills are merely surface-level, far from refined. However, I do have another piece that might be of interest

Since Eleanor could not use Lizzie as a pawn, she was ready to use her as a stepping stone instead. Aware that Clover had been searching

an authentic piece from The

Lindisfarne Gospels for Elijah's life

Eleanor was certain that presenting the genuine article would undoubtedly delight him.

She was confident in her new plan.

However, a voice echoed throughout the room before she could finish her sentence.

"It appears Mr. Xanth has quite the prowess in calligraphy. I wonder just how impressive it really is?"

The voice belonged to Cyrus. His tone was tinged with challenge and dissatisfaction, making it obvious that he was trying to defend his wife.

"Cyrus!" Eleanor was taken aback and shot a fierce glare at her son. She couldn't understand why he was stirring up more trouble.

She noticed Lizzie standing beside him, her face a mixture of embarrassment and pain, prompting Eleanor to curse "Damn that vixen!" in her mind.

After so many years, she knew all too well how Lizzie managed to keep Cyrus wrapped around her finger. However, she had always chosen to turn a blind eye. Yet that day, Lizzie threatened to disrupt her carefully laid plans. Eleanor was fuming inside, but Cyrus showed no signs of backing down. In his eyes, Elijah and Clover were deliberately targeting Lizzie.

This was her birthday, and as her husband, Cyrus couldn't simply stand by and watch them treat her this way.

He had made up his mind to defend Lizzie no matter who he was up against, even if it meant standing against the Xanth family, whose influence could rival the Finch family and help them expand into overseas markets. However, before Cyrus could say another word, another voice cut in.

"Why don't we have Mr. Xanth demonstrate his calligraphy skills?" The voice carried a blend of amusement and anticipation.

All eyes turned toward the source, and they were surprised to find that it was Jonathan, the usually quiet and reserved new head of the Finch family, who had spoken.

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Chapter 583 Compared To Yours

[1,099 words]

Jonathan's enigmatic smile left everyone uncertain of his intentions. Yet, upon reflection, it became evident that loyalty to the Finch family would naturally take precedence.

The atmosphere grew tense as all held their breath, sensing the escalating conflict between the two powerful families of Finch and Xanth. No one had anticipated witnessing such a showdown at what was meant to be a simple birthday celebration. With Jonathan voicing the Finch family's stance, Eleanor's attempts to curry favor with the Xanth family were swiftly forgotten.

However, that same smile sent a chill down Cyrus and Lizzie's spines, making their hearts skip a beat.

Jonathan may have been a Finch, but he had never considered Lizzie one of his own, nor had he ever acknowledged her, so Cyrus couldn't understand why he would defend her now.

"Jonathan..." Cyrus began to speak.

However, before he could say more, Elijah's deep voice boomed over his. "I see no harm in writing a few words. Bring the brush, ink, paper, and inkstone!"

Clover sprang into action, his excitement palpable. A spectacle was about to unfold, and he couldn't be more thrilled.

Under the astonished gazes of the crowd, Elijah stepped forward as Cyrus and Lizzie quickly made way for him. He picked up the brush, dipped it in ink, and began to write. Even from the first stroke, it was clear that his skill was far superior to Lizzie's. Silence fell over the room.

Elijah was writing from the same Lindisfarne Gospels as before, but even the opening strokes far surpassed Lizzie's attempt. Even Eleanor, with her limited knowledge of calligraphy, could discern the stark contrast in ability.

The very crowd that had showered Lizzie with insincere praise earlier now regarded Elijah's extraordinary calligraphy with awe, admiring it in respectful silence.

Eleanor could barely keep her composure and instinctively glanced at Lizzie. The latter was initially surprised but soon felt a sense of shame and inadequacy.

The room remained quiet even after Elijah completed his rendition of the Lindisfarne Gospels.

Clover's chuckle broke the silence like a stone tossed into a tranquil lake. "So, Mrs. Finch, how does my uncle's calligraphy compare to yours?"

Feeling the heat rise to her face, Lizzie responded, "Mr. Xanth's skill in calligraphy is truly unparalleled. I humbly admit defeat."

"Oh? You're giving up so soon?" Clover teased, his laughter unrestrained as he turned to Cyrus, who had fiercely defended Lizzie earlier. "What about you, Mr. Cyrus? Are you convinced now?"

There was no way Cyrus would remain unconvinced when the difference was so stark. His face darkened as he glanced at Jonathan, realizing that the latter must have known about Elijah's calligraphy skills and deliberately set Lizzie up for embarrassment. The more Cyrus dwelled on it, the grimmer his expression became. But it also firmed his resolve. With Jonathan's attitude toward Lizzie, it was time to clear up the misunderstandings that night, especially since Ezra was returning for the celebration. Cyrus couldn't allow Jonathan to hold such hostility toward Lizzie any longer.

After he begrudgingly admitted defeat, the rest of the room burst into unanimous praise for Elijah's work, and the hall became a lively cacophony.

Rose too was astonished by Elijah's calligraphy. Her eyes sparkled with amazement, a glow that Elijah immediately noticed, filling him with pride. "You..." Rose began, but Elijah couldn't hold back.

"Whenever I missed your mother, I'd practice my calligraphy and imagine her writing..." he said with a smile playing on his lips.

Rose's heart swelled with warmth at his words. She pictured a young couple the woman quietly practicing calligraphy while the man watched her lovingly. Without thinking, she murmured, "If only Mom were still here." If her mother were alive, surely their reunion would be filled with happiness.

A hint of sorrow flickered in Elijah's eyes, his gaze momentarily distant.

The father and daughter's quiet exchange was drowned out by the surrounding praise. Meanwhile, Eleanor's forced smile was already starting to falter.

Elijah's stunning display of

calligraphy left her at a loss. She had

prepared an original calligraphy piece as a gift, but now she had no idea how to present it. Still, a prepared gift couldn't just be left unrepresented.

Drawing a deep breath, she addressed Elijah with a flattering tone, "Mr. Xanth, I had no idea you were so skilled in calligraphy. I have a humble request, though I'm not sure if you'd be willing to grant it." Elijah responded politely, "Please, do ask."

"Would it be possible for you to gift me this piece of calligraphy?" Eleanor asked sincerely.

Seeing no reason to refuse, Elijah replied, "Do with it as you wish, Mrs. Finch Senior."

His words implied that the piece was nothing special to him. The calligraphy was done on the spot, so if Eleanor wanted it, she was welcome to take it.

Seizing the opportunity, Eleanor quickly expressed her gratitude, "Thank you so much! I must think of a proper way to show my appreciation..."

Before Elijah could wave off her thanks, Eleanor turned to Jonathan, calling out, "Jonathan, please fetch that long box from my study. It'll serve as my token of gratitude for Mr. Xanth's beautiful calligraphy."

Being a shrewd woman, she knew that, of all the Finches, Jonathan was the most acquainted with Elijah. With the gift passing from Jonathan to Elijah, she was certain the latter wouldn't refuse it.

Moreover, Eleanor planned to bring up the subject of Jonathan and Rose when Jonathan presented the gift, hoping that if Elijah approved, things would proceed smoothly.

Jonathan glanced at Eleanor and obediently responded, "Alright."

With that, he made his way upstairs. A hint of coldness glinted in his dark eyes as he entered the elevator.

"Has he made his move?" he asked.

Following closely behind Jonathan, Finley reported in a low voice, "Yes, Mr. Finch. He's already started. Should we apprehend him on the spot? The evidence is solid..."

"No need. Let him continue. I want to see what he's up to and how she reacts." Jonathan's tone was icy.

The "he" in question was Carl, while the "she" undoubtedly referred to Lizzie.

As the elevator doors opened on the third floor, Jonathan stepped out and peered over the railing, surveying the bustling hall below. Amidst the crowd, Rose's radiant smile drew his attention like a beacon.

She was standing next to Elijah, her face alight with genuine happiness. Jonathan paused, and Finley, following his gaze, noticed Rose as well.

"Ever since Mrs. Finch found her biological father, she seems to have become more radiant," Finley remarked.

A small, satisfied smile tugged at

the corner of Jonathan's lips. He knew Rose had always yearned for a father's love and the comfort of family ties. That was why he had endured being apart from her during this time. However, he could feel his patience wearing thin.

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Chapter 584 Offended The Xanth Family

[1,213 words]

Jonathan was lost in thought as he gazed at Rose.

Finley noticed his mesmerized expression and raised an eyebrow. However, some matters needed to be addressed, and he reluctantly had to snap Jonathan out of it.

"Should we take additional measures to ensure Mrs. Finch's safety tonight?" he asked, carefully choosing his words.

While Carl had made his move, seemingly targeting Ezra, Lizzie's true target had always been Rose.

"What is Lizzie planning to do to Mrs. Finch?" he wondered.

Connecting the dots between Ezra and Lizzie, Finley began to suspect something sinister. His face darkened at the thought. If his guess were correct, Lizzie's intentions would be truly evil.

He glanced at Jonathan, only to be startled by the icy expression on his face. Jonathan said nothing, but the cold and menacing aura he radiated spoke volumes.

In Eleanor's study, Jonathan retrieved the box containing the Lindisfarne Gospels. When he returned to the hall, everyone's attention shifted toward him and the box he carried. It was clear that whatever was inside held immense value.

As everyone recalled Eleanor's mention of a "token of gratitude," the purpose of this item finally clicked. The gift had been meticulously prepared in advance, and even the display of Lizzie's calligraphy served as a prelude to its presentation. "What could be inside the box?" they wondered.

"Jonathan, hurry. Show the gift to Mr. Xanth," Eleanor urged enthusiastically.

Jonathan approached Elijah and carefully opened the box. As the scroll was unveiled, Eleanor eagerly introduced it.

"Mr. Xanth, this is the original Lindisfarne Gospels manuscript. I've heard you appreciate calligraphy, and since this rare piece has been in the Finch family's collection. I thought it would be the perfect gift for your generous gesture. I hope you won't find it lacking." No one could refuse a masterpiece like this.

The crowd couldn't help but marvel at the Finch family's wealth and influence. The calligraphy was worth billions, and they were willing to offer it as a token of gratitude. Surely, this was a gift that would resonate with Elijah.

All eyes were fixed on Elijah.

Although a man of his stature might have appreciated the gift, he maintained a stoic demeanor. Standing beside him, Clover stepped forward and took the scroll from the box.

However, as he unfurled it, his brow furrowed, and the light in his eyes seemed to dim.

Elijah glanced at the scroll before casually diverting his gaze. This was not the reaction Eleanor had expected at all.

Her expression stiffened slightly as she asked, "Mr. Xanth, what do you think of the gift?"

Elijah politely responded, "It's a wonderful gift, Mrs. Finch Senior. Thank you. However, it's far too valuable. I insist that you take it back."

Eleanor felt a wave of relief wash over her as she realized his hesitation stemmed from the gift's significant worth.

She quickly assured him, saying, "It's not too valuable, not at all. A gift is just a way to express one's feelings, so please accept it, Mr. Xanth." "This..." Elijah hesitated, looking conflicted.

The onlookers assumed he was simply too polite to accept such an extravagant gift. Eleanor thought the same.

Encouraging him further, she added, "It's really nothing extraordinary. It's just a token of my sincerity. Please, don't refuse it any longer."

Eleanor was quite satisfied with Elijah's reaction. His reluctance and modesty reassured her that he would feel obligated to repay the Finch family in the future. The more he declined, the more he would remember to offer favors to them. With this, their path to expanding into overseas markets would become smoother. As Eleanor was indulging in these thoughts, Clover's voice suddenly cut through the air.

"It really isn't anything extraordinary," he said with a cold chuckle, making his distaste for the Finch family evident.

After all, Lizzie had plotted against

Rose's life, and now Eleanor was using Lizzie's birthday as a pretense to draw, Elijah into their web of flattery and manipulation. Besides, there was another reason why he disapproved of this so-called gift.

Clover's laugh was filled with disdain, causing Eleanor to stiffen.

"Hold on! I only said it wasn't anything extraordinary out of humility. It wasn't supposed to be taken literally! This gift is worth billions!" she thought.

"Ha... ha ha ha..." She forced a smile, her discomfort evident. She was accustomed to criticizing others but now found herself desperately seeking ways to showcase the gift's

value. Just then, Clover's following statement struck like a clap of thunder. "It's a counterfeit..."

"Clover!" Elijah snapped, his face darkening as he chided his nephew. "Where are your manners?"

"But Uncle Elijah, I'm not wrong. It is a counterfeit!" Clover protested, clearly frustrated.

"A counterfeit? This piece of Lindisfarne Gospels is a fake?" the crowd thought as the room was enveloped in stunned silence, tension hanging heavy in the air.

It took Eleanor a moment to process Clover's claim. Visibly shaken, she forced a tight smile. "Mr. Clover, how could this possibly be a counterfeit?" she questioned. After all, she belonged to the prestigious Finch family. Their collection wouldn't include a forgery. If the piece were indeed fake, their reputation would be tarnished. "You didn't know?" Clover responded, raising an eyebrow before smirking again. "Seems like even you've been tricked, Mrs. Finch Senior.

"The real Lindisfarne Gospels have been hanging in my uncle's study for as long as I can remember. So, if this isn't a fake, what is it?"

He cast another glance at the alleged forgery and offered an unexpected compliment. "It's a remarkably good imitation though. It's almost indistinguishable from the real thing."

"Almost like the real thing... That just means it's still a fake. But why is he so certain the one in Elijah's study is the real one? No, something's not adding up..." Eleanor's mind raced. Suddenly, her eyes widened as a thought struck her. She began, "If Mr. Xanth already possesses the real Lindisfarne Gospels, then why has he been searching for it all this time?" "You're actually aware of my uncle's search for the Lindisfarne Gospels?" Clover asked with a look of genuine surprise as if to say, "Your information network is truly impressive." He then shook his head before continuing, "But, Mr. Finch Senior, there appears to be a misunderstanding."

He paused. "Well, it's not exactly a misunderstanding. My uncle has indeed been searching for the Lindisfarne Gospels. You might not be aware, but the calligraphy is divided into two volumes. My uncle possesses the first volume and is searching for the second one."

He cast a glance at the gifted scroll, and an awkward chuckle escaped his lips. "But this..."

The implication was evident, even as his words trailed off.

Unaware of the Lindisfarne Gospels having two volumes, Eleanor found herself momentarily speechless. She could no longer muster a defense for her meticulously prepared gift.

The guests around them began to regain their senses as well. Their shock gradually gave way to realization.

"Good heavens! A counterfeit! The Finch family's treasured 'authentic masterpiece' is fake! And Eleanor has presented this forgery to the esteemed Elijah.

"This isn't just a minor embarrassment. It's a major offense! The Finch family has offended the Xanth family," they thought.

An air of nervous tension and excitement filled the hall, though no one dared express their sentiments openly.

The atmosphere grew unnervingly

quiet, the silence heavy and fraught

with anticipation. Gradually, all eyes turned toward Elijah as they observed him intently, hoping for a hint of his reaction. FindNovel

However, much to their dismay, Elijah's expression remained inscrutable.

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Chapter 585 Breaking Through Her Stubbornness

[1,275 words]

Eleanor's carefully maintained composure was slipping fast, but she still managed a strained smile as she apologized.

"Mr. Xanth, I'm sorry. I don't understand how this happened. My age seems to have caught up with me, and my eyes aren't as sharp as they once were..."

Ever the gentleman, Elijah responded with grace and tact. "There's no need to blame yourself, Mrs. Finch Senior. Considering the Finch family's reputation and your discerning nature, it appears you were misled. "Nevertheless, your thoughtfulness in

choosing the Lindisfarne Gospels is greatly appreciated as I genuinely admire the work."

His carefully chosen words, particularly the phrase "misled", masterfully preserved the dignity of both the Finch family and Eleanor.

Eleanor felt a wave of relief and gratitude, yet the word "misled" echoed in her mind, even as she kept her composure.

After offering more apologies and exchanging a few more pleasantries with Elijah, she excused herself, pleading fatigue, and retired to her room.

Before leaving, she called out to Lizzie, "Lizz, help me upstairs, would you?"

Although Eleanor smiled as she addressed Lizzie, the latter couldn't help but sense an impending storm. Sure enough, as soon as they entered the room, Eleanor's smile vanished entirely. Without warning, she raised her cane and struck Lizzie sharply.

"Ah!" Lizzie cried out in pain, startled by the unexpected blow. She looked up, meeting Eleanor's frigid gaze, and instinctively dropped to her knees.

"Mom, I'm sorry. It was my fault. I didn't handle things well earlier, I..."

Lizzie's voice cracked, and her tears threatened to spill. Her vulnerable demeanor might have elicited sympathy from others, but her "sincere" apology only served to fuel Eleanor's anger. Instead of calming down, Eleanor's expression grew harsher still. "Spare me the act. Stop playing the victim. Your husband isn't here to shield you-"

"Lizz!"

Eleanor's words were cut short by the sound of the door opening.

It was none other than Cyrus, Lizzie's husband.

He had suspected Eleanor might take out her frustrations on Lizzie the moment she singled her out for assistance. Worried about Lizzie, he had followed discreetly. His fears, it seemed, were not unfounded. Upon seeing the telltale bruise forming on Lizzie's arm, Cyrus' heart ached. Without hesitation, he rushed to her side and helped her to her feet, paying no heed to Eleanor's stony expression.

Cyrus immediately pleaded with Eleanor, "Mom, it's not Lizzie's fault. She didn't know Elijah knew calligraphy. She put in her best effort, and honestly, her writing wasn't bad."

He stood protectively in front of Lizzie, shielding her from Eleanor's wrath. The latter's brows furrowed deeply in response.

Suddenly, a mocking smile crept onto her face. "You think I hit her because her calligraphy wasn't good enough?"

"Wasn't that the reason?" Cyrus thought, remaining silent. However, his expression conveyed everything Eleanor needed to know.

Her eyes filled with disdain, and she let out a cold laugh. "Cyrus, you were once the head of the Finch family. I used to think that, while you weren't quite up to your father's level, you were at least competent. "But now... it seems the only reason the family didn't collapse under your leadership is thanks to the blessings of our ancestors."

"Mom..." Cyrus muttered, his frustration palpable as Eleanor's words effectively belittled his capabilities.

"You're blinded by a woman this easily, so what are you if not incompetent?" Eleanor snapped, her anger rising again. She repeated, "Do you really think I hit her because her calligraphy wasn't good enough?" Cyrus lowered his gaze, the fire of defiance in his eyes dimming.

Eleanor's piercing gaze shifted toward Lizzie, who remained partially concealed behind Cyrus. "And what about you? Do you think it's because of that?" Feeling guilty and cornered, Lizzie continued apologizing, "Mom, I was wrong..."

"Wrong about what, precisely?" Eleanor pressed, her tone growing harsher with each word. Her eyes blazed furiously as if they could burn through Lizzie. "Mom, I..." Lizzie bit her lip, knowing she couldn't admit to anything beyond her calligraphy skills.

After all, there was no way she would dare to acknowledge any deeper fault. She could only persevere in her pleas for forgiveness. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry..." However, what Eleanor wanted to hear was not empty apologies.

Lizzie's persistent refusal to admit

her actual transgressions only served to enrage Eleanor further. And since Lizzie insisted on hiding behind Cyrus, Eleanor decided that she would dismantle Lizzie's obstinate resolve right before his eyes.

Amidst Lizzie's repeated apologies, Eleanor's tone became sharper as she stated, "Then how do you explain the Lindisfarne Gospels? You attempted to deceive me with a counterfeit. "Were it not for Elijah's grace, our family would have faced grave repercussions. Lizzie, what exactly were you thinking?"

With Eleanor's blunt accusation, Lizzie had no choice but to face the truth. Her heart raced frantically as she tried to explain, "I... I had no idea. I didn't know it was a fake. It's..." Panicked, she looked toward Cyrus for help.

The original Lindisfarne Gospels had been a gift from Cyrus that he had acquired at an exorbitant price. It seemed inconceivable that an artifact procured by the Finch family could be a forgery. Moreover, Cyrus had taken the additional step of authenticating the artwork at the time, confirming its legitimacy.

So, when Clover had declared it a

fake earlier, Cyrus had been just as

perplexed as Lizzie. He couldn't understand how something once authenticated as genuine would suddenly transform into a forgery. The situation defied all logic.

Despite his own confusion, when Lizzie sought his support, Cyrus instinctively sprang to her defense. "Lizzie didn't know..." he began, only to be silenced by Eleanor's fierce glare.

"She didn't know? Then who does? Lizzie, will you explain yourself, or should I have someone investigate?"

Eleanor's gaze was as sharp as a predator's, making it clear that she wasn't asking for an excuse. She was demanding the truth.

The prospect of confession filled

Lizzie with terror. There was no way she could admit that when she had learned Eleanor planned to use the Lindisfarne Gospels to curry favor with the Xanth family and Rose, she decided not to let Eleanor succeed in her scheme.

So, she had Carl swapped the original with a counterfeit. However, she had been too careless. She never imagined that Elijah would possess the original upper volume, nor did she anticipate that Carl might have mishandled things. When Carl delivered the forgery to her, she trusted him completely and didn't even bother to check it before replacing the real one.

Never in her wildest dreams did she imagine that the first and second volumes were completely different. Now, a nagging suspicion lingered in her mind.

"Was the scroll Carl had provided the first volume, or had someone tampered with it along the way? If someone had interfered..."

A wave of unease washed over Lizzie. At this moment, she could not verify anything with Carl, and she had Eleanor's seething anger to deal with.

"Mom, I swear I didn't know. When I handed you the Lindisfarne Gospels, it was indeed the real one..." Lizzie pleaded.

Eleanor's eyes widened with fury. "Are you suggesting that the error occurred while it was in my possession?"

"No, Mom! That's not what I meant!" Lizzie was on the verge of tears.

However, Eleanor had already reached her conclusion. Lizzie was the one who had tampered with the scroll. Recalling how they had nearly offended the Xanth family due to this, Eleanor itched to give her another slap.

The sight of Lizzie's tearful, pitiful display only fueled her irritation. "Enough! Who are you trying to fool with that pitiful act? Since you won't confess, I'll investigate it myself.

"Cyrus, take your woman and leave. Her presence here is an eyesore and a source of headache for me!"

Eleanor's disdain was tangible, her tone thick with contempt.

"If I find out you were behind this..." she left the threat hanging.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 586 Not Worth It

[1,277 words]

"If this really is her doing, there would be hell to pay!" Eleanor thought as she snapped, "What are you waiting for? Get her out of here!"

Under her fierce gaze, Cyrus escorted Lizzie out of the room. Once outside the door, Lizzie crumpled to the floor, biting her lip and holding back her sobs. Seeing her like this only deepened Cyrus' heartache. "Everything's fine now, Lizz. Mom was just furious. She didn't mean those harsh words," he said softly as he crouched beside her before pulling her into his arms.

A sense of frustration and guilt washed over him. Even during his time as the Finch family head, he had never mustered the courage to confront Eleanor.

His futile attempts to console Lizzie only made her feel more bitter, but there was nothing she could do. Despite her disillusionment with Cyrus, she had no choice but to rely on him and amplify her vulnerability to garner his sympathy. "Lizz, it's your birthday

today, so cheer up. I've got a huge cake ready for you, and I've got another big surprise planned," Cyrus said, holding her hand and trying to lift her spirits with something positive.

With her goal achieved, Lizzie abandoned her helpless charade. If Cyrus had a surprise for her, she had an even greater one prepared for the entire Finch family. The prospect reignited her excitement.

When Cyrus led Lizzie back to the hall downstairs, Rose was nowhere to be seen. Lizzie caught sight of Jonathan among the crowd, and a quick, knowing smile graced her lips before vanishing almost instantly. She knew that the show was about to begin. Meanwhile, Rose had left the scene due to a wine spill on her clothes. Growing weary of the party, she had been preparing to leave when a server carrying drinks was accidentally bumped, causing a tray of wine glasses to topple.

The liquid splattered across Rose's pants, soaking the fabric. Left with no choice, she needed a change of attire.

"Ms. Shaffer, why don't you wear something of mine? It's brand new, so you probably won't mind, right?" Yara, now one of the members of the Finch family, suggested. She and Rose were about the same age and size, making it a seemingly fitting offer. Since there had been past tension between the two of them, Yara added with a slight smirk, "What? Are you afraid I might harm you?"

"Not at all!" Rose responded with amusement.

After all, there was no reason she should be afraid. Whatever schemes Yara might be concocting, she was confident in her ability to handle them. Even if Yara attempted to cause her harm, Rose was more than ready to repay her in kind. So, with no hesitation, she followed Yara.

Yara's room was located on the second floor. As Rose trailed behind her, Yara continued to chatter, "You really are a lucky girl, huh?"

Rose remained silent but reflected on the statement, and the more she thought about it, the more she agreed.

She really had been lucky. Meeting Jonathan, Miles, Clover, Ezra, Emily, and even Elijah had all been blessings in her life.

"But I wonder when your luck will run out," Yara added, her tone not overtly malicious but with an unmistakable undercurrent of anticipation as if she were waiting for Rose's luck to finally turn.

Rose didn't mind. Even if her luck did run out, she had already met the people she was destined to meet. Fate had already bestowed upon her the greatest gifts, so if her good fortune were to end, it wouldn't faze her much.

Yara led Rose into her expansive walk-in closet and gestured toward a row of brand-new clothes. "Pick whichever you like," she offered.

She cast a quick glance at Rose, confident that any outfit from her wardrobe would be more glamorous than the simple blouse and jeans Rose had on.

She assumed Rose would select an outfit that would make her stand out-perhaps the haute couture piece she had recently acquired, or maybe the latest design from another top-notch brand's current season.

Just when she was thinking which lavish piece Rose would choose, the woman in question glanced around and swiftly selected a dress.

"Is it okay if I wear this one?" Rose asked.

Yara's brows furrowed as she took

in Rose's choice. The dress was a simple slip gown in plain emerald satin, unadorned and rather

mundane-looking, almost as if net

were mass-produced. Even Yara herself wasn't sure how such a dress had found its way into her closet.

She eyed Rose once more. "Sure. If that's what you want."

"Perhaps this is the extent of Rose's taste," Yara thought, raising an eyebrow. The gown was so understated that even Rose's striking emerald necklace wouldn't be able to elevate its appearance.

She felt a twinge of satisfaction as she pictured Rose being overshadowed by her own elegance later in the evening.

However, when Rose stepped out of the dressing room in the gown, Yara was momentarily struck with awe. Her eyes fixated on Rose, and for a moment, she forgot to blink.

"Is something the matter, Mrs. Finch?" Rose asked, noticing the odd look in Yara's eyes.

Yara snapped out of her daze. Realizing her momentary lapse in composure, she rolled her eyes and snapped, "Don't call me Mrs. Finch. Call me Ms. Maize."

"Well, thank you, Ms. Maize, for the dress," Rose responded with a genuine smile.

The sincerity in Rose's smile only deepened the frown on Yara's face. "Damn it!" she cursed inwardly. She couldn't fathom how a dress she deemed so unremarkable could look even remotely flattering on Rose. Feeling a sense of dissatisfaction, Yara glanced at Rose. "No need for thanks." With that, she turned and walked toward the door.

Rose watched her retreating figure, realizing that the international movie star wasn't entirely unpleasant, at least not that day. She understood Yara's state of mind well.

As they made their way down the stairs, Rose suddenly said, "Jonathan isn't right for you."

Yara paused in her tracks as Rose's voice continued from behind her.

"Liam, on the other hand, is a capable man. He's free from any scandals and has good character. He's someone worth getting to know better."

Yara frowned, surprised by the sincerity in Rose's tone. However, the recollection of that mortifying wedding flashed through her mind, fueling her anger.

She turned to face Rose. "My life is none of your concern."

Rose raised an eyebrow. She was in no way trying to interfere in Yara's life. She had merely meant to offer a friendly suggestion as a small gesture of gratitude for the dress.

With a slight smile playing on her

lips, she met Yara's gaze and replied, "Your life is certainly not my concern. 'Simply feel that someone with your acting talent deserves better than to be weighed down by such trivial matters."

"Deserves better? What gives her the right to say that?" Yara bristled, fuming inwardly.

"If you'll excuse me, Ms. Maize," Rose said, maintaining her polite smile.

Yara was tempted to block her path out of sheer defiance, but to her surprise, she found herself stepping aside to let Rose pass. It wasn't until Rose was well ahead that Yara managed to shake off her

confusion.

"Wait... why did I let her through? No, something else is bothering me. What had she said? She said I have talent in acting... What did she mean by that?" she wondered. After mulling it over, Yara let out a slight huff and muttered, "At least she has good taste."

As an international actress, Yara's acting prowess was undeniable. Yet, for some reason, hearing the compliment from Rose stirred an unfamiliar feeling within her.

She watched as Rose reached the bottom of the stairs. Just then, a man dressed as a bodyguard approached Rose and said something. Rose then followed the bodyguard and left.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 587 He Is Expendable But Rose Is Not

[1,279 words]

The bodyguard had told Rose that Jonathan was waiting for her in the greenhouse.

She scanned the grand hall, unable to find Jonathan among the crowd. After a moment's hesitation, she decided to follow the bodyguard.

Despite this being her third visit to the Finch Manor, she had never visited the greenhouse in the backyard.

"Ms. Shaffer, Mr. Jonathan is inside. You can go right in," the sunglasses-clad bodyguard informed her with a respectful nod.

Rose found it odd that he addressed her as "Ms. Shaffer" rather than "Mrs. Finch."

Both Finley and Leonard had always referred to her as "Mrs. Finch", leading her to wonder if this bodyguard was not among Jonathan's inner circle. But then again, not everyone around Jonathan was necessarily privy to her relationship with him. "Why am I even fixating on the title 'Mrs. Finch'?" she thought, feeling her cheeks warm. It made her seem as though she was eager to be acknowledged as Jonathan's wife.

"Alright," Rose replied softly, casting one last glance at the bodyguard before he disappeared from view.

Once he was out of sight, Rose resumed her path toward the greenhouse, where Eleanor nurtured her fresh flowers.

The moment she stepped inside, she was enveloped by a powerful natural scent, a mixture of various floral fragrances that appeared to change with each step she took. Immersed in the myriad of aromas, Rose searched for Jonathan's figure.

"Jonathan?" she called out.

The greenhouse was far more expansive than she had anticipated. After a fruitless search, Rose called his name again, but her words were met with silence.

Just as she began to sense something was amiss, a sudden, loud bang reverberated from the far end of the greenhouse.

Startled, she turned toward the source of the sound, but everything fell quiet again. Curiosity mingled with caution as she made her way toward the place where the sound had originated.

Upon reaching the greenhouse's farthest corner, Rose found the source of the noise. A man was curled up on the ground, his body hunched in on itself. When he lifted his head to meet her gaze, Rose froze. A mask concealed his face. "Go... leave this place," the man urged, his voice strained as though he were struggling with an internal battle.

Despite the strain in his voice, Rose instantly recognized him. "Ezra?"

It was Ezra. But why was he here? And what had happened to him?

Before she could pose the questions, Ezra's voice grew urgent. "Go! You must leave here, now!"

This time, he practically shouted, his tone desperate. However, now that Rose had seen Ezra's condition, she couldn't possibly turn a blind eye.

"Are you alright? What's wrong? Ezra, don't be afraid. Look at me; I'm Rose. I won't hurt you. Let's get you to the hospital," she said. Memories of the art exhibit incident flooded her mind.

Assuming Ezra was experiencing another episode, she refused to abandon him now. However, as she drew closer, Ezra pushed her away.

This time, his expression lacked the ferocity she had witnessed at the art exhibit. His restrained gaze conveyed a determination not to cause harm, even at the cost of himself, to protect Rose. "Leave!" Ezra gritted out, trying to push her away again, thinking that she might leave if he were forceful enough.

Yet, he underestimated Rose's determination. Even though she stumbled and fell, she immediately got back up, ignoring his demand to leave. Without missing a beat, she grabbed his hand. "Can you walk? If not, I'll carry you!"

Despite her petite frame and Ezra's imposing stature, Rose's voice brimmed with determination.

Ezra clenched his teeth, his senses overwhelmed by the mix of floral scents. The intense fragrance made him frown. Then, with a sudden jolt of realization, he reached up and covered Rose's mouth with his hand. "There's something off about the scent in here," he murmured.

Rose froze for a moment, confusion evident in her eyes. "Something off with the scent? What does he mean?" she thought.

"We've been set up," Ezra explained, his voice low and certain. From the moment he had felt something off within his body, he had already drawn this unnerving conclusion.

At first, he thought the trap was meant for him alone. It was clear that someone had orchestrated this situation to ruin him.

He could easily envision what would

transpire next. People would "stumble upon" him in his vulnerable state, and undoubtedly, the media would be present, eager to capture and broadcast his humiliation.

QUMS

The inevitable outcome would be nothing short of a destruction of his reputation.

Ezra could even guess who was behind this plot to destroy him. But strangely, he hadn't felt fear in the face of his imminent downfall. He had been prepared to face it all with calm acceptance.

However, the moment he saw Rose, fear surged within him. It was then he realized the actual target of the scheme wasn't just him but Rose as well.

"They're trying to ruin both of us," he thought as his heart pounded in his chest. Ezra could accept his own downfall but not Rose's. He simply couldn't let that happen.

He looked at Rose, and she seemed to understand his thoughts.

"Leave. Go find my brother," Ezra urged.

Rose had been drugged before, so she was able to connect the dots quickly. It was clear to her that Ezra was under the influence of a drug hidden within the floral fragrance. "Find my brother," Ezra repeated, his tone firm and resolute.

Rose swallowed nervously. "But you..."

"I'll be fine. Just find my brother and bring him here to help me." Ezra forced a weak smile, doing his best to suppress the heat coursing through him.

Rose understood that this wasn't the time to hesitate. She nodded. "Okay, I'll go find him. Just hang in there."

Perhaps she stood up too quickly, or maybe her heart was pounding too hard, but as she rose to her feet, she suddenly felt dizzy. Her body felt light, and her legs weakened.

Rose knew then that she had also been drugged.

She knew what would happen if she

were to collapse. Even if both she and Ezra had strong willpower didn't want anything to happen. between them, the drug could unleash unpredictable

consequences.

She had to leave. Protecting Ezra meant protecting herself and, more importantly...

An image of Jonathan flashed through Rose's mind as she silently cursed the mastermind behind this vile plot.

Mustering all her strength, she stumbled forward, covering a distance of more than ten meters before her body finally betrayed her.

Her feet grew weak, and the ground seemed to give way beneath her. Losing her balance, Rose began to fall.

A wave of dread washed over her.

Falling now could mean total

vel

disaster, a situation from which there might be no return. Panic surged, and in her fear, she

instinctively called out, "Jonathan..."

BUMS

A tall figure rushed toward her, catching her in his strong arms before she hit the ground. Under the dim light in the greenhouse, she could faintly make out his face.

"Jonathan..." A deep sense of relief washed over Rose. At that moment, she felt like a ship battered by storms that had finally found a safe harbor.

Remembering her own predicament and Ezra's condition, she tightly gripped Jonathan's collar. "I think I've been drugged... Ezra's still in there. Jonathan, you have to get him to a hospital." Jonathan glanced at the woman in his arms, her face flushed with a feverish glow. His expression darkened.

"So this is Lizzie's plan? She wanted to ruin both Rose and Ezra," he thought.

Clenching his jaw, Jonathan's eyes blazed with a dangerous glint. But when he looked down at Rose, his gaze softened. "Don't worry, everything will be alright."

Rose would be alright, and Ezra would be fine. The only person who would be in trouble was Lizzie.

Jonathan called out, "Finley, take Ezra out through the back. Make sure you remain unnoticed."

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 588 He Is A Good Husband

[1,224 words]

"Understood," Finley replied before following Jonathan's order and making his way to the far end of the greenhouse. He soon found Ezra in a secluded corner.

The drug had taken complete control of Ezra's body, leaving him disoriented, but he could still faintly hear Jonathan's voice.

"Is Jonathan here?" Ezra asked weakly.

"Yes, Mr. Ezra, he's here," Finley confirmed.

"Tell my brother... Rose and I... we were set up. There's nothing between us. Let him know..." Ezra's words came out hurried and strained.

Finley clearly remembered how Ezra had gone to great lengths to get close to Rose in Aquastead, deliberately trying to mislead Jonathan. But now, his words were the complete opposite of what he was trying to achieve back then. "Don't worry, Mr. Ezra. Mr. Jonathan will take care of her. But I need to get you out of here," Finley reassured him.

The Finch Manor had a medical wing, and the greenhouse had a small side door. Finley helped Ezra to his feet and guided him through the side door, quietly slipping into the darkness without alerting anyone.

Back in the greenhouse, Jonathan had located the source of the strange scent and discarded all the tainted flowers. As he re-entered the room, a warm, delicate figure stumbled into his arms.

"Hubby..." Rose's sweet, seductive voice was a whisper in his ear, causing Jonathan's heart to skip a beat.

Feeling the heat and urgency emanating from Rose's body, Jonathan grabbed her hands, which were insistently tearing at his clothes.

"Do you know what you're doing?" he asked.

"What I'm doing?" Rose mused as she gazed up at him, her mind clouded by the drug's influence. The face in front of her was a sight to behold.

"Do you know what you're doing?" Jonathan repeated, his grip tightening slightly as he restrained himself and his voice growing harsher with control.

He was aware that Rose was not fully conscious due to the drug. He didn't want to take advantage of her vulnerable state, but as he thought back to how she had been deliberately keeping her distance from him for so long, he realized he might have waited long enough. A voice inside his head told him that if she said she didn't know what she was doing, he would continue to restrain himself. But if she said she did...

"Know what?" Rose asked innocently, her gaze never leaving his face. All she knew was that his inviting lips were irresistible.

Taking the invitation, Rose freed her hands from his grasp, hooked them around his neck, and stood on her tiptoes.

She brushed her lips against his and they were softer than she had imagined and just as delicious as she had expected. Because of that, Rose couldn't resist giving them a little lick too.

Her sudden action snapped the last thread of Jonathan's self-restraint as a loud bang echoed in his mind.

What did it matter if she knew or not? She was his wife, and he was her husband. Their relationship was legally recognized. Besides, she had just called him "hubby".

She had needs, and he was there to fulfill them. Only by doing so could he truly be called a good husband.

The kiss initiated by Rose quickly spiraled out of control. Soon, the only thing left in the greenhouse was the sound of their heavy, entangled breaths.

Meanwhile, back at the banquet, Cyrus had just come down the stairs and was organizing the waitstaff to bring out a massive cake.

Lizzie stood gracefully by his side. The guests attending the birthday banquet knew the focus had long shifted away from her, but when it came to the cake-cutting ceremony, they still had to play along. Cyrus gave a moving speech, and Lizzie smiled happily. However, she couldn't help but think of Rose.

She had noticed Rose's absence when she came downstairs. Elijah, Clover, Miles, and Jonathan were all present initially, but now she couldn't find Jonathan either.

Lizzie's gaze swept the room, her smile faltering slightly.

"Lizz, is something wrong?" Cyrus noticed her unease and asked with concern.

Lizzie snapped out of her thoughts. She almost blurted out, "Where's Jonathan?" but quickly regained her composure and offered an excuse. "I'm just...really happy." Cyrus couldn't help but think her elation was because of his earlier declaration of love.

Brimming with excitement, he handed Lizzie the cake knife. "Let's cut the cake. Afterward, there's a special surprise waiting for you."

Lizzie wasn't interested in the surprise, for her thoughts remained on Jonathan and Rose.

Just then, a voice suddenly

interrupted the scene, breaking the silence. "Where's Rosie? She went to change clothes earlier. Why hasn't she returned?" It was Harriette, standing beside Miles.

This birthday banquet had made her feel invisible as everyone's attention was focused on Rose. That didn't surprise her, but Rose had been gone for a while now. Even if it was just to change her clothes, she should have returned by now.

Yara, who had taken Rose to change, was already back, but Rose was still nowhere to be seen.

"Did something happen?" Harriette mused.

Noticing the odd look on Lizzie's face, a suspicion formed in her mind, making her wonder if Lizzie had something planned for that night.

The more she thought about it, the more intrigued she became. She was curious to see what Lizzie's intentions were.

Sensing Lizzie's hesitation to cut the cake, Harriette seized the moment and spoke up. Though her voice was quiet, several people overheard her inquiry. Lizzie paused, her hand hovering over the cake as she looked around, frowning. "Now that you mention it, where is Ms. Shaffer?"

Everyone in the room exchanged glances, each with the same question in their mind.

"Where is Ms. Shaffer?"

Instinctively, all eyes turned toward Yara. She had been the one to take Rose away after her dress was soaked. Now, Yara had returned, but Rose had not.

Under the weight of the crowd's questioning gazes, Yara's brow furrowed in confusion. "I have no idea where she is. She changed her clothes and left with someone right after."

Yara had recognized the bodyguard who had led Rose away. He was from the Finch family's Azure Clan. Those serving in the clan were loyal to the family's leader.

She surmised that Jonathan might have summoned Rose through the bodyguard. Perhaps the two were enjoying a moment of solitude together.

Rose and Jonathan were missing from the banquet, so her theory seemed plausible.

Lizzie's face creased with concern, and she set down the cake knife she had been holding. "We must search for her. Ms. Shaffer isn't familiar with the manor, and if something were to happen..." FindNovel

"But..." Cyrus hesitated, reluctant to disrupt the birthday festivities.

Before he could finish, Elijah, Clover, and Miles hurriedly exited the hall. Others followed suit, leaving Cyrus struggling to maintain his composure.

Lizzie comforted him, "Cyrus, Ms. Shaffer's background is unique. If anything happens, the Finch family will be held responsible. We should join the search."

Despite her reassurances, Lizzie couldn't help but smirk inwardly. If Carl had arranged things according to her plan, the Finch family would undoubtedly be held accountable.

Yet, this could prove to be a blessing in disguise for the Finch family. And for Eleanor, it would be a dream come true.

As thoughts of Eleanor crossed Lizzie's mind, her eyes darkened. Such a significant event was about to unfold, and it would be unthinkable not to inform Eleanor.

As they made their way out of the hall, Lizzie discreetly instructed a nearby helper, "Inform Mrs. Finch Senior that Ms. Shaffer has gone missing."

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Chapter 589 Is It You Rose

[1,172 words]

Within the expansive grounds of the Finch Manor, the banquet's attendees diligently joined the search for Rose.

As Cyrus emerged from the grand hall, a helper hastily approached, breathlessly exclaiming, "Mr. Cyrus, Mr. Finch has vanished!"

Before Cyrus could react, Lizzie, who stood beside him, voiced her concerns. "Cyrus, do you think Ezra might have..."

She was hinting at the possibility of Ezra's illness acting up again.

Ezra's condition was a well-guarded secret within the Finch family. The situation would undoubtedly escalate if he had an episode during the event and Rose was caught in the midst of it.

Intentionally planting seeds of doubt in Cyrus's mind, Lizzie was well aware that the forthcoming "show" would be far more severe and dramatic than Ezra's illness flaring up and accidentally hurting Rose.

The mention of "Ezra" pricked the ears of nearby guests, some of whom questioned if this could be the world-renowned Ezra, a celebrity with a fervent fanbase. Had he

graced the birthday banquet with his presence? And what of this mysterious "Mr. Finch"? "Any news? Have you found her?"

"Nothing on this end. Any luck over there?"

"All clear here, too."

"Where could she have gone?"

A curious guest attempted to delve into the connection between "Mr. Finch" and "Ezra", only to be drowned out by the clamor of the ongoing search. Suddenly, a voice called out, "It sounds like there's something over there..."

All heads turned toward the direction of the sound, and people quickly hurried over. Sure enough, the closer they got, the more distinct the noise became.

A greenhouse loomed ahead, its impressive scale revealing a lavish botanical sanctuary. Even before entering, an intoxicating floral scent wafted through the air, mingling with peculiar noises echoing within.

A crash echoed, signaling the sound of something falling and shattering. Then, an unmistakably feminine gasp of surprise followed, drifting in the breeze.

"Ah..."

Bewilderment filled the crowd as imaginations ran wild, attempting to decipher the scene unfolding within the greenhouse. However, one thing was clear-someone was inside, and it was a woman.

The crowd couldn't help but wonder if the woman was Rose.

Uncertain of what was happening inside, no one dared to be the first to enter. Instead, they looked expectantly at Elijah, Clover, and Miles.

The three men stood with furrowed brows, clearly hesitating. After all, whatever was happening inside likely involved more than just Rose, and as her father and cousin, Elijah and Clover naturally didn't want any private matters exposed in front of so many people. The trio shared a look of concern, and just as everyone thought they might dismiss the crowd, a voice cut through the silence.

"Miles, Rosie's inside..." The voice was raspy, filled with concern and urgency.

No sooner had the words left her lips than the speaker hurried into the greenhouse. Miles frowned briefly but followed her in, with Elijah and Clover close behind.

The others hesitated, but seeing Cyrus and Lizzie also stepping into the greenhouse, curiosity got the better of them, and one by one, they followed.

An unsettling silence blanketed the greenhouse. It seemed everyone deliberately softened their steps as though wary of startling the occupants.

The further they advanced, the clearer the faint sounds became. They could now discern the rushed breaths of two individuals. Merely hearing them was enough to spark imaginations, conjuring scandalous scenes in the listeners' minds.

As they drew closer to the source of the sound, the scene in the corner of the greenhouse came into view.

A man and a woman stood together.

The man's jacket was carelessly

tossed over a cluster of blooming flowers, and the woman was leaning into him. Her cascading hair obscured half her face, while the

man's tall, broad frame shielded the

other half from view.

As for the man himself, all they saw was his silhouette-tall, straight, and exuding an aura of nobility. His black silk shirt appeared somewhat disheveled, as though it had endured a fierce struggle.

Sensing the crowd's presence, the man turned slightly, just enough for them to catch a glimpse of his face. Even so, no one could quite make out who he was, for he was wearing a mask.

The mask concealed most of his face, and given the greenhouse's dim lighting, identifying him was nearly impossible. However, someone in the crowd recognized that mask.

"Ezra! You..." Cyrus exclaimed, the name slipping out before he could stop himself.

Realizing his mistake, he tried to rectify the situation, but it was too late.

Everyone present had heard it. Even though many attendees were from the business world, they were well aware of Ezra, the top celebrity. Some had met him in person, while

others had seen him in the media.

The silhouette did indeed resemble Ezra's. If the man was Ezra, then the woman...

"Rosie." The raspy voice spoke again, this time with certainty. Though the woman was well-hidden, Harriette recognized her.

Miles frowned deeply, and a hint of anger flashed in his eyes as he glanced at Harriette beside him. Harriette felt the intensity of his gaze and turned to meet Miles' furious expression. However, she didn't believe his anger was directed at her. Miles cared about Rose, so he would naturally be furious upon finding her in a secret rendezvous with a male celebrity.

It wasn't just Miles either. Harriette observed that both Elijah and Clover looked particularly upset. Their fists were clenched, and they were glaring fiercely at the man's silhouette.

She thought it was a pity Jonathan wasn't here. If he saw his wife in such a compromising situation, he would likely be furious enough to kill someone. Jonathan...

The excitement Harriette initially felt was abruptly interrupted when she realized that Jonathan had vanished. He had been present earlier, so his disappearance at such a pivotal moment was unsettling. Before she could dwell further on this thought, a commotion came from outside.

"How could she be missing? We must make sure nothing happens. Ms. Shaffer came to the greenhouse to admire the flowers... If it's only that, she should be fine."

Eleanor's rare display of unease was evident.

Upon hearing that Rose had gone

missing, Eleanor, who had been about to retire for the night, grabbed her walking stick and rushed out of her room, silently praying that nothing had happened to Rose. Even if something did happen, it couldn't happen at the Finch Manor.

Upon entering the dimly lit greenhouse, she was met by Lizzie, who, having heard her arrival, offered support.

She reassured her, "Mom, we found Ms. Shaffer. She's with Ezra..." Lizzie trailed off, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"We found her? Thank goodness," Eleanor breathed a sigh of relief, thankful nothing bad happened at the Finch Manor.

Just as this thought crossed her mind, she caught sight of the scene in the corner. In a single glance, she knew what had transpired.

Although the dim lighting made it difficult to discern details, Lizzie's words echoed in her mind. "We found Ms. Shaffer. She's with Ezra..."

Eleanor felt as if she had been struck by lightning.

"Rose and Ezra... How could this have happened?" she thought.

Perhaps it was the sheer shock of such an unexpected pairing that momentarily left Eleanor speechless. Her eyes widened in disbelief before she finally found her voice to ask, "Ms. Shaffer, is that you?"

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Chapter 590 A Member Of The Finch Family

[1,192 words]

Eleanor's question echoed the thoughts of everyone present in the room. Their attention was glued to the corner as they awaited a response. The silence in the air was eerily palpable. Rose's body felt weak, and had it not been for Jonathan supporting her, she would have collapsed. Even without the drug's influence, the shock of the situation was enough to make her legs buckle. Earlier, her mind had been consumed with the desire to taste those tempting lips before her. However, the intrusion of the others had snapped her back to reality.

She heard Harriette's concerned voice calling out, "Rosie," and someone else's unfinished accusation.

"Ezra, you..."

"Ezra? That's right! Ezra was also affected by the drug," Rose thought.

However, the person supporting her right now, the one with an arm around her waist, shielding her weakened body and disheveled appearance, wasn't Ezra.

It was Jonathan. And it was Jonathan who had been on the receiving end of her unintended advances.

Realizing her previous impropriety, Rose felt her face grow hot with embarrassment. She couldn't even bring herself to respond to Eleanor's question. Instead, she felt an

overwhelming need to explain herself to Jonathan, whose body was still pressed against hers. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to... I..." she stammered, her guilt-laden words tumbling out hastily.

It wasn't intentional. She had been drugged and unable to control her actions.

A tender look crossed Jonathan's eyes. Seeing her trying to move away, he frowned and tightened his hold around her.

"Don't move," he whispered, their proximity allowing for little more than a murmur.

Though the others couldn't hear the exchange, they could sense the intimate atmosphere surrounding the couple.

As the silence stretched on, impatience grew among the onlookers. Was the woman really Rose?

"Ezra?" Eleanor called again, hoping for some response from the other party.

Still, no one replied.

The figures in the corner remained frozen in their positions. It was clear that the man was doing everything he could to shield the woman from the prying eyes of the crowd.

Eleanor's understanding of the situation finally clicked. Exposure was not an option, but perhaps an opportunity was disguised within this delicate predicament.

Things hadn't turned out the way she had initially planned. She had been thinking that since Jonathan clearly liked Rose, she would continue encouraging her grandson to pursue her. Eleanor was even willing to create opportunities to bring them together if needed. However, the current situation was different. It was not Jonathan, but rather Ezra, who was entangled in an intimate moment with Rose in the corner.

Ezra was her grandson as well, and though this development was unexpected, a connection between Ezra and Rose would still secure the Finch family's alliance with both the Young family and the Xanth family of the Lerain Group.

With a deep sigh, Eleanor knew she couldn't prioritize Jonathan at this moment despite believing that Rose would have been a better match for him. Eleanor needed to set aside her regrets and act.

"Mom, what should we do?" Lizzie's voice suddenly sounded from behind, pulling Eleanor out of her thoughts.

Wasting no time, Eleanor immediately strategized her next move. She had considered dispersing everyone, but she knew some events required witnesses. So, she walked straight over to Elijah.

"Mr. Xanth, it seems those youngsters have developed feelings for each other. Perhaps we should consider making their relationship official," she said softly, her tone kind and gentle.

Her intentions were clear. Eleanor aimed to formalize the relationship between Rose and Ezra, even pushing for marriage.

However, the onlookers couldn't help

but wonder who this Ezra was. What was his relationship with the Finch family that could compel someone like Eleanor to make such a decisive move? Weren't these matters usually handled by the elders of the families involved?

It didn't take long for the gathered crowd to get their answer.

Noticing the deepening furrows on Elijah's forehead, Eleanor realized he might not know who Ezra was. She quickly clarified, "Mr. Xanth, there are some things you are not aware of. Ezra is part of the Finch family. He is Jonathan's younger brother and

shares the same mother

"Due to certain circumstances back then, Ezra took his mother's surname and never changed it. Ezra is a simple and considerate young man.

"When he reached adulthood, he

wanted to make it in the

entertainment industry on his own without relying on the Finch family name. That's why the public doesn't know about his connection to the Finch family. But in reality, he's a member of the Finch family."

A member of the Finch family? The revelation took everyone by surprise.

They had all heard whispers of a mysterious member of the Finch family, yet no one could have expected that Ezra was that very person. It turned out that he and Jonathan were indeed brothers, sharing the same mother.

As this new information circulated amongst the crowd, the similarities between the two became increasingly apparent. Many were overcome with a profound sense of realization, swiftly followed by tinges of regret.

If they had figured it out sooner, they could have seized the opportunity to invest in Ezra's burgeoning career. Alas, the chance was now lost, leaving only a chorus of wistful sighs.

Eleanor continued, "Mr. Xanth, rest assured. I can vouch for Ezra's character. He has kept his reputation clean despite the complexities of the entertainment industry for all these years. He's never been involved in any scandals." However, as Elijah's frown deepened further, Eleanor felt a growing sense of unease.

"Mr. Xanth, I assure you that Ezra will make an excellent husband and provide Rose with a lifetime of happiness.

"And if you don't want Ezra to stay in the entertainment industry, I can arrange for him to join the Finch Group," she earnestly expressed, eager to lay all her sincerity before Elijah to secure his agreement for the marriage between Rose and Ezra.

Everything seemed to be progressing in the direction Lizzie desired. She observed Eleanor's passionate efforts with deep satisfaction, a subtle smile gracing her lips as she eyed the couple in the corner.

"How would Jonathan react if Rose were to marry Ezra?" she wondered.

She was brimming with anticipation for Jonathan's reaction, anticipating that the Finch family would be thrown into disarray, with at least a rift forming between the brothers.

Lizzie wasn't the only one thinking of Jonathan at that moment. Harriette's sense of unease grew as she wondered where Jonathan was.

"Something feels off. This is too important a moment for him to be conveniently absent..." she thought.

"Miles, where is Mr. Jonathan?" Harriette asked, using her concern for Rose to ask about Jonathan's whereabouts.

Miles furrowed his brow. "Jonathan..."

His gaze drifted toward the figure protecting Rose, and a fleeting smile played at the corners of his lips before disappearing as quickly as it had appeared.

Before he had a chance to answer where Jonathan had gone, a voice suddenly cut through the crowd from behind.

"I will not be joining Finch Group."

The voice was cool, steady, and surprisingly captivating.

A hush fell over the crowd for a brief moment before they collectively turned their heads. The people on the outer edge of the crowd were the first to set eyes on the speaker. Their minds went momentarily blank upon seeing him, and unconsciously, they stepped aside, creating a path for him to pass through.

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Chapter 591 Not Ezra But Jonathan

[1,180 words]

As the newcomer gradually drew closer, everyone caught sight of him.

Upon recognizing him, nearly everyone froze in place. It wasn't until he was right in front of them that they realized they were blocking his way. They quickly stepped back to let him pass. The newcomer was none other than Ezra.

His presence prompted a long, perplexed stare from those gathered. Everyone needed a moment to absorb and confirm that it was indeed Ezra standing before them.

But if Ezra was here, then who was the man in the corner with Rose?

Confusion swept through the room, leaving everyone, especially Lizzie, completely dumbfounded.

The second she saw Ezra, the smug look in her eyes vanished, replaced by a single question that kept echoing in her mind.

"What is Ezra doing here? This is not where he was supposed to be! Shouldn't he have been with Rose? If Ezra stood here now, then who is with Rose?"

Before Lizzie could process it further, Ezra's voice cut through the eerie silence of the greenhouse, his words like a haunting echo in her ears.

"Grandma, I do believe I'll be a good husband someday, but..." Ezra paused, his features etched with a mix of puzzlement and defiance. When he spoke again, his tone was resolute and clear. "What does that have to do with Ms Shaffer's happiness?" His innocent expression made him seem like a child wrongly accused of some misdeed.

Eleanor finally snapped out of her daze and looked at the towering figure before her. It really was Ezra!

"Ezra..." His question echoed in her mind. "What does that have to do with Ms Shaffer's happiness?"

Indeed, with Ezra standing right here, he couldn't possibly be the man with Rose. So, Rose's happiness was entirely unrelated to him. But if not Ezra, then who?

A sense of unease crept over Eleanor for the first time.

"Could the opportunity that's almost within the Finch family's grasp really be slipping away just like that?" she mused.

Eleanor couldn't help but fear what the truth in the corner might reveal. She dreaded that unveiling the mystery would lead to bitter disappointment. Nevertheless, the truth inevitably had to surface.

"Mr. Xanth, Grandma..." Just then, a deep and resonant voice cut through the tense atmosphere, laced with impatience and displeasure.

Eleanor jolted, as did everyone else. All eyes immediately turned to the man in the corner who had spoken. The voice had come from the man shielding Rose.

That voice...

"M-Mr. Jonathan!" A gasp then rang out.

Recognition dawned on everyone familiar with Jonathan's voice.

It was unmistakably Jonathan, for only his voice held such an authoritative weight that mere words filled the space with suffocating pressure.

But how could the person with Rose be Jonathan? The suggestion alone sent shockwaves through the crowd.

Meanwhile, Lizzie's heart had already plummeted the moment Jonathan spoke. She stared at the figure in the corner. If it wasn't Ezra, then it could only be Jonathan.

"But how could it be Jonathan? Where had it all gone wrong?" she thought.

Lizzie's mind was in turmoil, her heart pounding with a mix of frustration and disbelief. Her frantic gaze swept across the room, desperately hoping to find Carl and demand an explanation from him. Alas, Carl was nowhere to be found. Just then, Eleanor's voice snapped Lizzie back to reality. "Jonathan? It's you... it's really you..."

The initial surprise in her voice gave way to undisguised delight. She took a few excited steps toward the corner, her eyes confirming what her ears had already told her.

"It really is Jonathan!" she thought. Relief washed over her, and a visible sigh escaped her lips as a smile spread across her face.

The whole situation was turning out far better than she had dared to hope.

"You've interrupted us," Jonathan said, turning his head slightly, his displeasure clearly visible in his gaze.

The crowd froze. It seemed they had indeed interrupted something, making them wonder if they should leave the greenhouse to Jonathan and Rose.

"My wife isn't feeling well, so we'll be taking our leave now. The rest of you can do as you please."

As Jonathan spoke, he grabbed his jacket from the nearby flowers and draped it over Rose, covering her up completely, even her face.

Rose felt weak, but Jonathan easily lifted her into his arms. Responding instinctively to his touch, she wrapped her arms around his neck.

Carrying Rose, Jonathan began walking through the crowd. When he passed Ezra, Jonathan hesitated for a moment, their eyes meeting. In just a fleeting moment, they exchanged countless unspoken words.

Even as Jonathan and Rose disappeared through the greenhouse doorway, the assembled group remained in shock.

His parting words reverberated in their minds. "My wife isn't feeling well, so we'll be taking our leave now. The rest of you can do as you please."

Not feeling well? Those words

immediately brought back

memories of the earlier, passionate sounds, fueling the crowd's lurid imaginings, intensifying their

blushes and the quickened toel

their hearts. Some couldn't even

of

hide their reaction, coughing lightly.

"Wait, what had Jonathan just called Rose? His wife? Could they have already tied the knot?" The idea flashed through many minds, yet some were hesitant to entertain the possibility.

After all, it seemed unlikely that someone of Jonathan's stature would marry without making a public declaration.

It was possible that the term "wife" was simply an affectionate pet name shared between lovers rather than an indication that they had actually tied the knot.

Even so, the mere suggestion of a relationship between Jonathan and Rose was enough to shock those around them.

For a moment, people couldn't decide whether to think Rose had landed herself a great catch or if they should be envious of the Finch family for establishing such a valuable connection first.

Meanwhile, Eleanor was still immersed in the revelation that the man in the corner had been Jonathan, and the woman with him was Rose. She had not even noticed Jonathan referring to Rose as his wife. At that moment, her mind was bursting with excitement.

"This is simply wonderful!" Her inner delight bubbled over, prompting her to seize the moment.

"Mr. Xanth," Eleanor began, her voice brimming with joy, "don't you think Jonathan and Rosie make a perfect match?"

She continued, "Jonathan's

capabilities are well-known to

everyone, and he's never been

interested in any woman before. But

with Rosie, it's clear that she's truly

special to him. Since their feelings

for each other are mutual,

Eleanor could hardly contain her elation, her face brightened by a broad smile. She longed to arrange the wedding immediately but knew she must first secure the approval

of the Xanth family. However, her enthusiasm was swiftly dampened by a cold response.

"And just what makes you think their feelings are mutual?"

The icy voice belonged to Elijah, his tone unmistakably cold.

Eleanor froze. She wanted to say, given the situation just now, what else could it be if not mutual affection?

However, considering the Xanth

family's stance, she kept her words

in check and maintained her smile "Regardless of the circumstances, Jonathan will assume responsibility. The Finch family will also do what is necessary."

She was resolved to see Jonathan take full responsibility. However, Elijah wasn't in any rush. He fixed his gaze on Eleanor, his words pointed.

"Handle the matters within your Finch family first. We can discuss everything else later."

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Chapter 592 Like A Proposal

[1,162 words]

"Handle the matters within the family... What matters was Elijah referring to?" Eleanor mused.

Eleanor, who had been so focused on securing the marriage between the Finch and Xanth families, suddenly realized that she might have missed something important. Prompted by Elijah's words, she began to analyze the situation more closely.

Eleanor knew Jonathan was deeply devoted to Rose. Regardless of the intensity of his feelings, his character would never allow him to act inappropriately in the greenhouse, particularly not in front of so many people. The way Jonathan had protectively shielded Rose only reinforced her belief that something was amiss.

Eleanor's face darkened as she carefully pondered the unusual events that had unfolded. Abruptly, she spoke up.

"Everyone, we have some family matters to attend to tonight. So, the birthday celebration will come to an early end. I apologize for any inconvenience, and the Finch family will send a generous apology gift." The implication was clear-the guests were being asked to leave. Disappointment and frustration spread across their faces.

Despite Eleanor's promise of an apology gift, what they truly desired was to uncover the family matters she had alluded to, sensing that something significant was occurring behind the scenes.

The allure of witnessing the Finch family's drama was undeniable, but alas, watching the Finch family matters wasn't something they could indulge in just because they wanted to.

With reluctant sighs and disappointed expressions, the guests slowly exited the greenhouse, resigning to leaving the Finch Manor.

Inside the medical building, the effects of the drug still lingered in her system, and she hadn't fully recovered. Earlier, before the others had arrived, she had only gotten a taste of the temptation she had felt. Frustrated, she had inwardly complained about Jonathan's unyielding nature. However, as her mind gradually cleared, she came to a realization.

Jonathan had been protecting her. She couldn't even imagine the chaos that would have ensued if all those people had witnessed them in such an intimate position.

Thankfully, despite being caught, the situation wasn't overly explicit. It was still relatively reserved.

"Jonathan..." Rose gripped his shirt tightly. She wanted to say that although he had shielded her earlier, their tryst had been exposed, and its reality would be difficult to deny.

She wanted to know Jonathan's perspective on their relationship. Rose's mind was a bit muddled. She tried hard to compose the right words, but Jonathan's voice came first. "We are husband and wife."

His tone was unwavering and resolute, and Rose froze.

"We got our marriage certificate a long time ago. We are legally recognized with a proper and official status," he explained, his deep voice carrying a subtle vibration that she could feel against his chest. Rose's face flushed with heat. Her mind grew increasingly chaotic, and despite her usually agile thoughts, it felt as if her brain had hit

a slow-motion button. All she could focus on was the sound of his voice. "It's time for everyone to know that I'm your husband, and you're my wife. What do you think, Rose?"

As Jonathan posed this question, he experienced a newfound sense of nervousness, as if he were proposing.

He had long wanted to disclose their relationship publicly. He yearned to stand proudly by Rose's side, to call her "wifey" without hesitation affectionately, and to shower her with love and adoration. He could take charge in any other matter, but in this, he needed Rose's consent.

Jonathan awaited Rose's response, and although it was only a few seconds, it felt like centuries had passed. Her breathing was the only sound he could hear.

Finally, nestled in his embrace, Rose said softly, "Alright."

"She said alright! She agreed!"

Jonathan thought as a radiant smile

graced his face. His excitement was barely restrained as his voice

dropped to a husky whisper. "Do you know what your answer means?"

Rose blinked. "What does it mean?" she mused.

Her mind was slow at the moment, unable to process such complex thoughts. She looked up at him, finding his face breathtaking from every angle, and asked sincerely, "What does it mean?" Jonathan lowered his gaze to meet her eyes, speaking slowly and firmly, "It means that you can never escape from me again."

Never escape... The words sank into Rose's consciousness, and a sudden realization blossomed within her, making her face flush with warmth.

So he knew all along. He knew she wanted to escape him, to leave Regalia and disentangle herself from their complex affairs.

But when he threw himself into harm's way at Aurora Crest to protect her, she had already made up her mind to stop running. "Yeah, I won't run away anymore." Rose nodded in agreement.

This man cherished her life more than his own. What else could she possibly need to escape from?

Looking up at him, she said in an equally firm tone, "From now on, we'll face everything together."

To Jonathan, those were the sweetest words anyone could ever say. His soul swelled with joy as he held the woman he loved so dearly in his arms and listened to her tender words.

He felt that now, more than ever, they deserved a romantic moment, a private world of just the two of them.

Alas... A slight frown marred Jonathan's brow as he inwardly cursed their predicament.

In the medical room, Leonard and a female doctor had been waiting. Jonathan carefully placed Rose on the bed, his movements and voice as gentle as a flowing stream. "Wait for me."

"Okay," Rose replied.

Jonathan gave Rose one last reluctant glance before finally turning and leaving the room.

Outside, as the guests prepared to leave after the abruptly ended birthday banquet, Jonathan reappeared.

He was still wearing the same shirt, which had been slightly disheveled before but was now straightened out. Even from a distance, his imposing presence was undeniable. Questions arose amongst the crowd. Hadn't Jonathan left with Rose earlier? What was he doing back? The crowd's curiosity rose, but they didn't have to wonder for long.

Jonathan stood before them and spoke with a clear, amused tone. "My apologies for what happened earlier, but there's no harm in a private rendezvous between a married couple, is there?" His words rendered the crowd momentarily speechless, making them wonder if they had heard correctly.

Before they could process the

shock, Jonathan continued, "It's my

fault, really. I just can't resist my

wife. She's already given me an

earful about it, and I promise I'll be more careful in the future."

That "be more careful" sounded anything but sincere, as if he was playfully complaining about being told off.

His expression suggested he was

thoroughly enjoying his wife's management of his actions. It was an emotion that no one had ever imagined seeing on Jonathan's face.

It felt strange yet oddly natural.

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As the crowd observed the joy on his face, they began to realize the true meaning behind Jonathan calling Rose his wife earlier. It wasn't just a cute pet name. They were actually married.

"Good heavens! They're married! When did this happen?" the crowd wondered.

Even as they exited the Finch Manor, the shock of this revelation lingered heavily in their minds. Those who remained at the manor were equally stunned by the news.

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Chapter 593 Who Will Take Responsibility

[1,189 words]

After the guests left, the remaining Xanth, Young, and Finch family members gathered in the grand hall.

What had been a vibrant celebration mere moments ago was now engulfed in a heavy silence. No one uttered a word, their expressions an array of indifference, contemplation, and pensiveness.

The atmosphere was tense, and the large, untouched birthday cake in the center of the room only served as a stark, ironic reminder of the evening's abrupt end.

Many in the room were still reeling from what Jonathan had said outside. "Married couple..."

Jonathan and Rose were married? Those who had known about it earlier, like Clover and Elijah, remained indifferent, while others, like Miles and Ezra, stayed calm. However, Harriette felt uneasy, for she hadn't told Lizzie about Rose and Jonathan's marriage.

Glancing discreetly at Lizzie, Harriette saw that her expression remained neutral. But the more composed Lizzie seemed the more unsettled Harriette became. Amid this anxiety, Anna led Jonathan into the hall.

"Mrs. Finch Senior..."

Anna had rushed to relay the message after Eleanor had ordered her to bring Jonathan back from the medical building. Fortunately, she managed to catch up with him just in time.

Yet, when Jonathan appeared in the doorway, Eleanor didn't allow Anna to finish speaking. Overcome with excitement, she hurried toward Jonathan, eager to ask the question on everyone's mind-whether what he said about being married to Rose was true.

She wasn't the only one who sought clarification. Those who hadn't known of the marriage-Yara, Lizzie, Cyrus, and even Anna-fixed their gazes on Jonathan, yearning for confirmation.

However, as Eleanor approached Jonathan, she suddenly changed her question, asking, "How's Rosie? Is she all right?"

She had wanted to address Rose as her granddaughter-in-law, but she managed to restrain her excitement.

Eleanor was visibly shaken, longing to affirm what Jonathan had declared outside. But for the sake of appearances, showing concern for Rose's well-being was the more appropriate thing to do, especially with the Xanth and Young families present. She knew she would have another opportunity to ask about the marriage.

Jonathan's brows furrowed as he cast a piercing glance at Cyrus, his gaze sending a chill down Cyrus' spine.

Taken aback, Cyrus wondered what Jonathan was staring at him for.

Just as he was about to voice his displeasure, Jonathan's cold, commanding voice rang out, filled with authority. "Perhaps someone here should explain exactly what kind of despicable act they were involved in." Eleanor followed his gaze, her face darkening when she saw he was looking at Cyrus.

Before she could react further, Jonathan abruptly turned to leave. However, Eleanor swiftly grabbed his arm before he could depart.

"Jonathan, be truthful with me. Are you and Rosie truly married?"

Jonathan had publicly acknowledged his marital status to dispel any misunderstandings and safeguard Rose from potential gossip. Whether Eleanor was pleased or not was not a primary concern for him. He frowned slightly and was about to respond when a cold voice cut through the room.

"So what if they're married? They might have a marriage certificate, but that doesn't mean they can't just as easily obtain a divorce certificate."

The speaker was Clover.

Miles added swiftly, "Rosie just took over Young Group. She's got too much on her plate for an early marriage."

Elijah added his own biting remark. "Even if my daughter marries, it should be to a reputable family that isn't continuously entangled in chaos and scandal."

The sequence of pointed remarks was a coordinated effort to convey their dissatisfaction with the marriage-or, more precisely, their disapproval of the Finch family.

Eleanor felt a surge of frustration as she listened to the Finch family being disparaged. "Chaos and scandal? Who are they calling chaotic? What scandals are they insinuating?" she mused. Despite her inclination to argue, she held her tongue. The earlier incident in the greenhouse had left her wary.

"Dear in-laws..." she began.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Hold on, don't call us that!" Clover interrupted rudely.

A wave of embarrassment washed over Eleanor, but thankfully, Elijah swiftly rebuked Clover. "Clover, have I not instructed you on the importance of respect when speaking with your elders?" He then turned to Eleanor. "Please accept my apologies, Mrs. Finch Senior. Clover's remark was out of line."

"It's no trouble at all..." Eleanor tried to brush it off, but Elijah cut her off again.

"However, it's too early to be calling us 'in-laws' just yet."

Eleanor was rendered speechless instantly. "That last part really wasn't necessary!" she thought.

Forcing a smile, Eleanor regretted not pushing harder for Jonathan and Rose to have a proper wedding ceremony when Rose first came to Regalia. If she had, they wouldn't be in such an awkward position now, with so much opposition from the others.

"Yes, yes, of course..." Eleanor managed a stiff smile as she made a solemn pledge to the Xanth family members and Miles.

"I will get to the bottom of what happened today. If there are any unsavory incidents involved, I will make sure Rosie and the three of you get a proper explanation."

Eleanor was decisive when it came to handling such situations.

Seeing that Jonathan had already

walked out, she made her way back to her original seat, her face set in a stern expression as she sat on the couch. Her natural authority was palpable, even without a need for raised words.

Unfazed by the presence of the Xanth family members and Miles, Eleanor's piercing gaze swept over the members of the Finch family.

"Speak up. Who is responsible for today's fiasco, and what exactly happened?" Although her words bore no explicit threat, her tone was foreboding.

Even though Lizzie had mentally prepared herself, she couldn't help but feel a pang of nervousness.

However, the apprehension quickly faded as she reminded herself that she had no involvement in that day's events and thus couldn't be held responsible.

The hall grew uncomfortably quiet, and no one dared to speak for a long time.

With no one stepping forward, Eleanor's scrutinizing gaze swept over each of them, pausing momentarily on each person.

Faced with silence, she chose to confront someone directly.

"Cyrus! Explain yourself!"

Taken aback, Cyrus had no idea how to reply to her.

"Mom, I'm not even aware of what happened today. Jonathan and Rose had a private rendezvous... I hardly see the harm in that," he echoed Jonathan's earlier statement to the guests outside. Despite his nonchalant words, a sense of panic welled up within him. His mind raced back to the scene he had witnessed through the security footage at the Xanth family's banquet.

"A private rendezvous?" Eleanor snapped, her expression darkening.

Would the Xanth family have made such a fuss if it were merely a private meeting?

Eleanor's gaze shifted toward Lizzie, her eyes brimming with palpable displeasure. "And what about you, Lizzie?"

At this point, not just Eleanor but nearly everyone in the room turned their attention to Lizzie.

Even Elijah, who had remained impassive throughout Eleanor's questioning of Cyrus, lifted his eyes to scrutinize her. That piercing gaze made her feel an unsettling sense of panic. What did that look mean?

Unable to decipher it, Lizzie quickly composed herself and adopted a look of innocence. "I was with Cyrus the entire time. We were about to cut the cake when we overheard the commotion regarding Ms. Shaffer's disappearance."

Her meaning was clear—she hadn't had the opportunity to do anything questionable.

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Chapter 594 Do You Want Proof

[1,159 words]

No one in the room seemed to believe Lizzie's words. Even Cyrus, who stood by her side, felt a growing sense of unease gnawing at him. Despite this, he quickly regained his composure and spoke up for Lizzie before anyone else could respond. "Mom, Lizz was with me the entire time—" "Hah..." A soft chuckle interrupted him before he could finish.

Cyrus turned to Ezra, only to meet his cold, icy gaze. Anger flared within him. "Ezra—"

"Ezra, tell us. What happened?" Eleanor cut in, completely ignoring Cyrus' anger.

After being interrupted again, Cyrus' face darkened, but no one cared about his frustration at this point.

Although Jonathan had been with Rose in the greenhouse, everyone's initial assumption had involved Ezra.

"I was brought back to the Finch Manor for what I thought would be a grand reunion, only to discover it was a trap." Ezra's tone was thick with sarcasm.

"Who brought him back?" Eleanor thought as her gaze swiftly turned to Cyrus, but before she could speak, Cyrus interjected, his face a picture of innocence.

"I... Ezra, what do you mean? What trap are you talking about? I asked you to come back because it's Lizzie's birthday, and I wanted the whole family to gather. That's why I came to pick you up-" "Trap? What trap are you talking about?" Eleanor's voice rose, cutting through Cyrus' protest.

She wasn't interested in excuses. Not even from her own son.

Ezra lowered his gaze and vaguely recounted the day's events. He had been upstairs watching the banquet unfold when a server approached him, saying Jonathan had asked him to come to the greenhouse. Upon arriving, he discovered something amiss with his body, and instead of Jonathan, he encountered Rose.

Although Ezra's description was cryptic, everyone present could guess what he meant. Clearly, someone had orchestrated a plan to entangle Ezra and Rose together.

Considering Jonathan's devotion to Rose, even if they weren't married yet, one could only imagine what Jonathan would have done if something had truly happened between Ezra and Rose.

"Despicable! Absolutely despicable!" Eleanor thumped her walking stick against the floor, her fury evident.

Fortunately, the scheme had been thwarted. Otherwise...

Eleanor's face darkened as she imagined the potential fallout. If the plan had succeeded, it would have driven more than just a wedge between the brothers. The Xanth and Young families would never have allowed Rose to suffer such humiliation. The Finch family might reign supreme in Regalia, but the Xanth family's overseas power and wealth rivaled their own. Adding the Young family to the equation, the potential backlash would be immeasurable.

"Who did this? Who is responsible for this despicable act? Show yourself!" Eleanor roared, hoping the culprit would confess voluntarily.

But the culprit wasn't likely to reveal themselves so willingly.

Ezra's lips curled into a cold smile as he turned his gaze toward Lizzie. "Mrs. Finch, don't you have anything to say?"

Lizzie tensed at being called out again, despite her best efforts to remain calm. "Ezra, what exactly are you implying? I know you've never liked me, but to accuse me falsely is a step too far.

"You're trying to pin something on me that I had no part in. There are other things I can take responsibility for to keep the peace, but this..."

Her face showed a perfect blend of helplessness and innocence. "This is too serious. I can't take the blame for something I didn't do."

Her performance, rife with feigned helplessness and humility, left a bitter taste in the mouths of those who saw through her charade.

Ezra thought back to many years ago. Even knowing Lizzie's true character, he hadn't dared to voice a single opinion. Instead, he let his brother stand alone, fighting on his behalf.

Looking back, he felt ashamed of his own weakness.

However, this time, things would be different. He couldn't let Jonathan carry the burden alone anymore. He had spent too many years living recklessly, shirking his responsibilities. It was time for him to step up and take action. "Do you want proof?" Ezra abruptly interjected.

Lizzie's face paled slightly. The thought of evidence terrified her, but did Ezra really possess any? She couldn't afford to be intimidated by him.

"I'm innocent..." Her voice quivered with feigned vulnerability, her eyes downcast. Suddenly, she seemed to change her mind and dropped to her knees.

"Lizz, what are you doing?" Cyrus tried to help her up, his voice filled with concern.

However, Lizzie resisted. "Cyrus, I know you care for me, but if the Finch family needs someone to take the blame... then I'll take it."

She bit her lip, as though preparing herself for a grand sacrifice. "I haven't done much for the Finch family, so if this is what's needed, I'll bear the burden."

Her words implied her innocence while emphasizing her willingness to bear the burden for the Finch family's sake. It was a well-crafted performance.

Ezra, Elijah, Clover, and Miles shared

a cold, disdainful look. This display of self-sacrifice appeared to affect only Cyrus. Even Eleanor wasn't buying her theatrics.

"Enough with the pitiful act. You won't be wrongfully accused if you didn't do it. But if you did..." Eleanor couldn't hide the loathing in her voice.

"Mrs. Finch, you seemed to have reacted quite intensely to my previous question," Ezra said coldly as he stared at Lizzie.

He then repeated his question once more. "Do you want proof?"

"Ezra, do you have proof?" Eleanor asked urgently. She had wanted to ask earlier but had been interrupted by Lizzie's dramatic display.

If Ezra held concrete evidence, the matter could be resolved swiftly.

Ezra hesitated briefly, as though considering his next move. In that moment of hesitation, Lizzie convinced herself that Ezra was merely bluffing.

"He's just trying to scare me!" Lizzie

thought. She couldn't help but smirk inwardly. Gradually, she felt her confidence growing, even allowing a hint of triumph to spark in her lowered eyes.

Ezra noticed the glint of smugness in Lizzie's eyes.

"Bring them in!" he commanded.

All eyes turned toward the entrance, where Finley appeared, escorting a hooded figure. The person's face was concealed under a black cloth, but their uniform resembled that of an Azure Clan bodyguard.

Lizzie's expression stiffened slightly.

Finley reached out and yanked off the cloth, revealing a battered and bloodied face, swollen beyond recognition.

The man's body was smeared with blood, its metallic scent quickly filling the room and causing a wave of nausea among those present.

"Who is this?" Eleanor asked, her tone cold and sharp.

It was difficult to recognize the man in his current state.

Ezra's gaze remained fixed on Lizzie. "Mrs. Finch, you should know who this is."

Naturally, Lizzie recognized him. She had guessed who it was when Finley brought him in.

"That's Carl!" she had thought.

Now that his hood was removed, there was no doubt. It was Carl.

Panic rose within Lizzie. She hadn't anticipated Carl falling into Finley's hands, and she knew Finley worked for Jonathan.

She feared neither Ezra, Eleanor, nor anyone else present, but she was terrified of Jonathan.

"Did Carl betray me?" she wondered.

Taking a deep breath, Lizzie quickly composed herself just as Ezra's question came. Everyone was now staring at her, including Cyrus.

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Chapter 595 By Her Order

[1,272 words]

Lizzie only spared Carl a fleeting glance before quickly averting her gaze.

"I don't know him," she said. She then turned to Cyrus with an innocent expression and reached out to hold his arm. "Cyrus, I have no idea who he is."

Even with Carl standing right in front of her, she still tried to deny it.

Ezra chuckled lightly. This woman was always good at feigning innocence, but no matter how much she denied it now, the truth would eventually come out. He exchanged a knowing look with Finley.

Before entering, Finley had managed to extract some information from Carl.

"Mrs. Finch, although you claim not to recognize him, it appears he is quite familiar with you," Finley declared, emphasizing the words "quite familiar."

Lizzie's heart skipped a beat, and a look of displeasure washed over her face. "Judging by his attire, he appears to be a bodyguard from the Azure Clan, which serves the Finch family. It's not surprising he recognizes me," she countered. Indeed, it wasn't surprising at all.

Before Finley could respond, Lizzie continued, "The Azure Clan is loyal only to the head of the family, and Jonathan has never liked me."

"If you wish to hold me accountable for tonight's events for the sake of the Finch family, I will bear the consequences, even if I am not at fault. But..."

Her voice trailed off as she bit her lip, and a mixture of frustration, righteousness, and a hint of despair crossed her face before she continued, "Why must you drag someone else into this to tarnish my reputation?"

Ezra couldn't help but laugh, his voice laced with sarcasm. "Your reputation? Really?"

"Ezra!" Cyrus barked, his voice filled with anger.

However, Ezra paid no heed to Cyrus, not even sparing him a glance. Instead, he turned his attention to Carl.

"Well then, let's see just how innocent you are. So, Carl..." Ezra's gaze bore into Carl.

Ezra was usually carefree and detached, his striking features more beautiful than intimidating. Even with his status as a member of the Finch family, the members of the Azure Clan saw him as nothing more than just that. However, with that single look, Carl felt as if he were standing before the imposing Jonathan. As Ezra uttered Carl's name, a shiver ran down Carl's spine, his scalp tingling in apprehension.

"Speak up," Ezra commanded coldly. "Start with everything you did tonight, and don't leave out a single detail, not even the slightest bit. Otherwise, I won't hesitate to make you go through the same treatment Finley gave you earlier." It was a blatant threat. Ezra didn't bother to sugarcoat it, and no one questioned his authority.

Lizzie didn't dare to challenge him. She was terrified that the more she said, the more she would slip up and get herself in trouble. At this moment, all she could do was stay silent and wait for an opportunity to present itself. Though she avoided Carl's gaze, her attention was locked on him, not daring to relax even for a second.

Cyrus wanted to speak up, but a single sharp glance from Eleanor silenced him.

Finally, Carl's shaky voice echoed in the hall. "... I put some drugs in the greenhouse and used Mr. Jonathan's name to lure Mr. Ezra there. Then, using the same trick, I brought Ms. Shaffer to the greenhouse..."

His face was swollen from the beating, and his speech was slurred. But even through his muddled words, everyone understood what he was confessing to.

He had confirmed Ezra's suspicions. Someone had indeed set up Ezra and Rose.

Eleanor's anger flared. "Why did you do it? Who ordered you?"

She knew an Azure Clan bodyguard would never do something like this without a motive or orders. Someone had to be pulling the strings from behind. Carl stole a glance in a particular direction. "I..."

Memories of what Finley had shown him during his punishment flashed in his mind, the pain and fear still fresh. A flicker of determination began to settle in his eyes.

Lizzie noticed the shift in his gaze and felt a surge of panic. She knew what was coming next, and her first instinct was to stop him from revealing her involvement. But how? With a pitiful expression, she gently touched the scarf around her neck.

Hidden beneath it was a scar that everyone assumed was from a tree branch, but she and Carl knew better. It was a mark he had left on her.

Her brow furrowed slightly, and she cast a vulnerable, pitiable look in Carl's direction, hoping to stir his feelings for her, to remind him of his love and loyalty.

If this was before Carl had seen what Finley showed him, Lizzie wouldn't have needed to remind him. He would've willingly taken all the blame, driven by his desire to shield the woman he loved and protect her at any cost.

But he had seen it. It wasn't Finley who had shattered his resolve-it was Jonathan. Jonathan had known about his and Lizzie's relationship all along, and that realization filled Carl with fear.

Overwhelmed by the fear instilled in him by Jonathan, Carl lowered his gaze, succumbing to his defeat.

To Lizzie, this seemed like a victory.

She believed she had succeeded in

manipulating Carl yet again. She knew he loved her, but after this, he would be a pawn she could no

longer use. For now, it was enough if he didn't expose her.

As for the future... She could always find another pawn.

Lizzie tightened her grip on Cyrus' arm, knowing full well that Cyrus was the most important pawn she had in this game.

She was already plotting how to use this incident to strengthen her hold on Cyrus when Carl's voice echoed through the hall once more. "I... was acting under Mrs. Finch's orders." Despite his slurred speech, his words were distinct enough for everyone present to comprehend.

The Finch family had once consisted of two "Mrs. Finch"-Lizzie and Bella. However, following Bella's demise, only Lizzie remained.

Carl had just admitted to following Lizzie's commands.

This revelation came as no shock to many within the room. Ironically, the accused turned out to be the most astonished person in the room.

For a moment, Lizzie's mind went completely blank. It was as if time had stopped, and the world had fallen silent. She couldn't hear a single sound. But it lasted only a moment.

Quickly regaining her composure,

Lizzie concealed the panic that

surged within her. A succession of

emotions flitted across her

face-first, disbelief at the

accusation, then shock at the

implications, and ultimately

resigned acceptance of her apparent

"wrongful accusation."

"I said I would take responsibility for this. Was it really necessary to go this far?" she sighed, maintaining her aura of sacrificial innocence as though she were the victim once again.

While her outward appearance

remained the same, her heart was in

turmoil. If there weren't so many

people present, she would have loved nothing more than to march up to Carl and slap him, questioning his supposed love for her.

But with so many eyes on her, she couldn't say a word.

Nevertheless, when her eyes locked with Carl's, the unspoken question blazed in her gaze. "Is this the love you spoke of?"

Her gaze conveyed her reproach, pity, and admonishment—a blend of emotions capable of stirring up a primal protective instinct in most people. Sharp-witted and observant, Clover caught a glimpse of Lizzie's repulsive attempt at manipulation and couldn't help but laugh mockingly.

"Seems like there's something going on between you two, huh?"

His words had a profound impact on everyone present.

A hint of a smile tugged at the corner of Ezra's lips as he almost applauded Clover's audacity.

Meanwhile, Cyrus' face darkened. A sudden realization sparked in his mind as he glanced between Lizzie and Carl, his gaze turning suspicious. Realizing the damage that had been done, Lizzie hastily looked away in a panic.

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Chapter 596 The Birthmark On The Back Of Her Waist

[1,178 words]

In that fleeting moment of panic, many noticed Lizzie's reaction, including Cyrus.

"Lizz, you and him..." Cyrus tried to resist the influence of Clover's words but couldn't help wanting a clear answer.

"Cyrus—" Lizzie had already prepared her explanation, but Clover didn't give her the chance to voice it.

With a faint, mocking smile, Clover said, "If I were her, even if there was something shady going on, I'd still say there wasn't."

He was obviously implying that Lizzie's words couldn't be trusted.

Cyrus' brow furrowed deeply, an unmistakable crease forming as he felt an unsettling agreement with Clover's suspicion. He looked down at Carl, who was kneeling on the floor.

In his mind, Carl was just a bodyguard from the Azure Clan, yet the man seemed to be everywhere.

Suddenly, a feeling of dread welled up in Cyrus' chest, and he didn't dare to ask further. Just as he wavered, Carl broke the silence. "I'm sorry, Mr. Finch."

Cyrus stiffened. "What is Carl apologizing for? What could he possibly feel sorry about?" he wondered.

With a darkened expression, he listened as Carl continued, "I like Lizzie... no, I love her. I love her even more than you do, but why..."

Carl's tone dripped with bitterness as if he had suffered a great, irreparable blow.

"Carl!" Lizzie could no longer contain herself. She glared viciously at Carl. "What nonsense are you spouting?"

This was utter madness! If he exposed their relationship now, the consequences would be disastrous.

Before she could even process the possible fallout, Carl let out a bitter laugh. "Nonsense? Lizz, you know how much I love you. I've done everything for you, and anything you asked..." But what was he in her eyes?

"Carl!" Lizzie gritted her teeth and clenched her fists as her facade of composure crumbled.

Her greatest worry now was Cyrus' reaction. She instinctively turned to look at him, only to see his face his face darken with anger. Panic seized her. "Cyrus, don't listen to him! There's nothing between us, nothing at all!" Carl cut in. "Hah... Lizzie, it seems like you do care about Mr. Finch, after all. But you told me you didn't love him... that you were just forced into this..."

A cold shiver ran through Lizzie's entire body. She felt like Carl was about to reveal something even more humiliating at any moment.

Sure enough, driven by his unwillingness, Carl wanted to drag Lizzie down with him. "There's a red birthmark on Lizzie's lower back..."

"Enough!" Cyrus interrupted him.

The revelation of a red birthmark that nestled right on Lizzie's lower back was an intimate detail that spoke volumes of an undeniable connection between Carl and Lizzie.

"Cyrus..." Lizzie began, but Cyrus coldly brushed off her hand. His emotions were in turmoil at the moment.

The shame of being so publicly wronged, of having his love and trust betrayed without even realizing when the facade began, burned hot within him.

Though he wanted to get to the bottom of their affair, the presence of others held him back.

Cyrus forced himself to look at Elijah and the others. "Mr. Xanth, I apologize for the unpleasantness tonight. I'll be sure to address this matter with Rose. However, some things... are better kept private." Being cuckolded was a family scandal. How could he make it public?

Elijah understood what he was getting at. "It's getting late, and I trust the Finch family will handle this well. We'll wait for the outcome. We'll take our leave now."

He shot a look at Clover. Though Clover yearned to watch the drama unfold, he knew better than to disobey his uncle's unspoken command. Reluctantly, he followed suit.

Miles also took his leave, guiding Harriette out of the hall.

As they stepped outside, they crossed paths with Jonathan and Rose, who were heading inside. The sight of Jonathan and Rose's clasped hands caught everyone's attention. Clover couldn't help but feel a twinge of jealousy. Despite his best efforts, he had failed to steal Rose away from Jonathan's side.

In a smooth yet assertive tone, he stated, "I'm just a phone call away if you need anything. I can be here within half an hour."

The sway of his confident silhouette was the last they saw as he became the first to depart through the manor's gate. Miles glanced at Rose before giving Jonathan a simple instruction. "Take care of her." He then left without another word. Elijah looked at Rose with a dotting gaze. "I'll pick you up for work first thing in the morning." With that, he left too.

Rose blinked, watching as they each left with such nonchalance, leaving her behind without a second thought. She couldn't help but think that was a bit inconsiderate of them. Just as she was about to speak up, intending to go with them, the hand holding hers tightened slightly. Jonathan pulled her closer, his arm wrapping protectively around her shoulders.

A hint of jealousy underscored his words as he murmured, "The Finch family has an important matter to attend to tonight, and you must be present. His tone left no room for argument. Rose looked up and was slightly dazed by his handsome profile. "Why?"

She had a rough idea of what the important matter entailed, but the notion that she must be present sounded somewhat strange.

A glimmer of amusement danced in Jonathan's eyes. Bending down slightly, his lips met hers in a brief, gentle kiss.

Caught off guard, Rose froze.

His deep voice resonated in her ear. "You're my wife. Whatever happens in this family, you should be here by my side, never absent... unless..."

His breath brushed against her ear, sending a tingling sensation through her.

Rose swallowed. "Unless what?"

"Unless we're both absent together."

...

As Rose and Jonathan entered the hall hand in hand, an unsettling silence enveloped the room. The atmosphere was thick with tension as though even the air itself had taken on a stifling weight.

Rose quickly took in the scene. Apart from Ezra and Finley, whose expressions appeared unperturbed, Eleanor, Cyrus, Lizzie, and even Yara, who was seated quietly in a corner, all looked tense. A man knelt on the floor, his face bruised and swollen...

"Rosie, are you alright? Come, sit next to me," Eleanor greeted her warmly, her previous cold demeanor replaced with a smile full of affection.

Unused to this sudden display of affection, Rose found herself speechless. Before she could respond, Jonathan gently pulled her closer.

"She'll sit with me." With that, he declined Eleanor's invitation.

Eleanor's smile faltered briefly. But, gracious as ever, she replied, "Very well, you can sit by Jonathan's side too."

In truth, Eleanor was pleased to

witness the growing bond between

Rose and Jonathan, knowing it

would strengthen the alliance between the Finch and Xanth families. However, there was still pressing business to attend to.

Her icy gaze turned to Lizzie, but her words were directed at Cyrus "See this? This is the woman you insisted on marrying, Cyrus. She's brought quite a surprise upon the Finch family, hasn't she?" A shameful affair with a bodyguard. Eleanor's eyes were laden with contempt.

Lizzie's face flushed, but not from

Eleanor's seathing remarks or the humiliation of her affair being exposed. No, what truly stung was the glint of mockery that flickered in

over

Jonathan's gaze as it sin

her.

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Chapter 597 A Taste Of Success

[1,131 words]

The mockery in Jonathan's gaze felt like a hard slap on Lizzie's face. It felt like she had been brought back to that one night many years ago. It hit her hard.

Jonathan's gaze merely swept past her. He didn't even bother to take a proper look as all his attention focused solely on the woman beside him.

Jonathan held onto Rose's hand, guiding her to sit next to him. He couldn't even stand the gap between them, prompting him to wrap his arms around her waist and pull her closer.

He was only satisfied once she was pressed closely against him. Jonathan didn't care about the other people at all.

Rose's face was already flushed, but her cheeks grew even hotter after Jonathan did all that. She was baffled by how inappropriate he could be in public.

She frowned at him in disapproval. He, however, was unfazed.

For a long time, she preferred to keep their relationship low-profile. She didn't even let him hold her hand in front of others, treating him almost like a secret lover. But now that everyone knew they were married, he could publicly show her affection. Lizzie quietly observed their interaction, but inside, her emotions were in turmoil.

"Cyrus, what are you going to do about this?" Eleanor wanted to gauge Cyrus's stance on the matter.

Cyrus was already humiliated by the fact that he had been cheated on. He wanted to hear what Lizzie had to say about it.

"Lizz"

"Ha ha ha ha ha..." Cyrus was interrupted as Lizzie suddenly laughed. Her laughter lacked her usual grace, and it made Cyrus uncomfortable.

"Carl and I are together." Surprisingly, Lizzie stopped defending herself and simply admitted it.

Cyrus looked shocked at first, but his expression quickly darkened.

Carl was stunned for a moment. He never expected her to just admit it. He thought she would deny everything between them.

"Why? All these years..."

Cyrus was heartbroken. He knew he had always shown her love and fulfilled all her needs. He considered himself a good husband, but...

Before Cyrus could finish his sentence, Lizzie let out a mocking laugh as if she already knew what he wanted to say.

She scoffed and asked, "All these years, who was it that you truly held dear in your heart?"

The question left him speechless. Who was the person in Cyrus's heart? Both of them knew very well who it was-Nancy, his ex-wife the birth mother of Jonathan and Ezra. "But I..."

Not long ago, Cyrus had told Lizzie that he had decided to let go of the past and love her wholeheartedly.

Cyrus felt a tightness in his chest. He couldn't finish his sentence as it pained him too much to think about Nancy. That pain in his heart was stronger than the disappointment and anger he felt toward Lizzie.

Lizzie always knew that Cyrus didn't love her. Luckily, she didn't love him either, so she didn't mind. She knew Cyrus still loved Nancy, so she didn't even need to mention her name explicitly.

In the eyes of Jonathan and Ezra, Cyrus was the heartless one. They hated him for betraying their moment and indirectly causing Nancy's death.

Lizzie simply let them keep on hating Cyrus. She looked down at Carl, who was tied up on the ground. In his eyes, there was shock, but there was also regret.

"Carl really loved me!" Lizzie said with certainty.

Carl's anger disappeared after seeing Lizzie's certainty and trust in him. Instead, it was replaced by a wave of guilt.

"I'm sorry... I'm really sorry..." Carl muttered, looking extremely remorseful.

He regretted everything he said about Lizzie. Lizzie loved him, and he loved Lizzie. How could he have treated her like that? He ruined her life. It was all his fault! "I'm sorry... I'm sorry..."

Carl lowered his head and didn't dare to look at Lizzie. Little did he know that his reaction was exactly what she wanted.

Cheating was a breach of morals, so

she wouldn't be able to stay in the Finch family anymore. But if her past deeds came to light, it would cost her more than just her place in the Finch family.

Carl was the only other person who knew what happened. She hoped that Carl hadn't revealed too much in such a short time.

Sounds of "I'm sorry" echoed in the lobby. Lizzie sighed, seemingly relieved. "There's nothing to be sorry about. I didn't want to stay in this prison any longer anyway. Cyrus..." Lizzie said firmly, "Let's get a divorce. From now on, I want to pursue my true love..."

True love-was that Carl?

Cyrus looked extremely distressed. Carl felt as if his soul had been struck hard by something. Now he realized that Lizzie's "true love" was actually him!

It was him! But what had he done?

Carl recalled all the evidence that Finley had shown him. Each one of them revealed how Lizzie was faking her affection toward him and merely using him. Finley even told him that Lizzie plotted an accident to kill him. She wanted to discard him after using him. She wanted him dead.

Naturally, he was furious to hear that. So, in a moment of anger and under the pressure of threats, he impulsively decided to expose Lizzie's true nature.

But he was wrong. Completely and utterly wrong. Lizzie actually loved him.

"Ha ha ha ha..." Carl suddenly started laughing.

Jonathan frowned at Carl's laughter, as he realized that Carl had most likely changed his mind. But Jonathan didn't do anything about it. He simply observed silently. The night was a drama, and he just needed to watch how it unfolded. But in the end...

Jonathan held Rose's hand, drawing

circles in her palms with his fingertips. The tickling sensation made Rose pull her hand back multiple times, but each time, Jonathan only gripped her hand tighter.

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She felt helpless. He was getting in the way of her enjoyment of the drama. Rose steadied herself, looked at Carl, and continued to enjoy the show.

Just as Jonathan expected, Carl changed his mind. This time, he straightened himself up and knelt upright.

"Mrs. Finch, you and I were just

playing along with each other. None of it was real. I apologize for coming in between you and Mr. Cyrus. But even if he decides to leave you there's no way I would want to be with you!" Carl exclaimed.

Rose's expression froze, appearing stunned. However, she felt pleased on the inside.

She knew that the moment she showed affection toward Carl, he would act in the direction she wanted. He wouldn't say anything that would work against her anymore.

His claim that he would never want to be with her was just an attempt to draw a line between them. He would protect her, even at the expense of sacrificing himself.

"I don't care who wants to be with whom. Tonight's incident was orchestrated by Lizzie. Is there anything else besides this?" Eleanor asked sternly.

Just as she finished her sentence, Carl burst into hysterical laughter.

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Chapter 598 She Was Just a Pawn

[1,152 words]

"What are you laughing at?" Eleanor frowned in displeasure.

After a moment, Carl stopped laughing, and silence filled the air. His gaze turned wild. "I'm laughing at how foolish the Finches are, being played by me!"

Everyone's expression darkened at his words. Then, they glared at Carl. He was merely a bodyguard. How dare he mock the Finch family?

The madness in Carl's eyes only grew stronger, a smug expression spreading across his puffy, beaten-up face.

"I hate the Finch family! Remember? I'm a Larson..."

Larson? Even Eleanor couldn't understand what he was trying to imply.

But Jonathan said in a low voice, "Michael Larson..."

The sound of the name stunned Carl. He looked at the man he truly feared, never expecting that out of the whole Finch family, Jonathan would be the only one who remembered that name. Michael Larson... After a moment, Eleanor seemed to recall him too. "Michael Larson. Is he your father?"

Carl answered with a cold smile, "Yes. Michael Larson is my father. So, Mrs. Finch Senior, by now you should understand why I hate the Finch family, right?"

Michael Larson was part of the previous generation of the Azure Clan. A big family like the Finches would always end up being involved in a power struggle, no matter which generation.

In the generation of Mr. Finch Senior, Michael was one of his trusted confidants. Unfortunately, Michael died during a mission to protect Mr. Finch Senior. He died protecting Mr. Finch Senior. Eleanor stared at Carl as if trying to recall memories about him. "You're his son. I've seen you. That time, you were but a child..."

"Yes. When my father died, I was seven. You took me in out of pity and let me stay with the Finch family for some time. Eleanor remembered that, but she was confused.

"If you remember me taking you in, why do you hate the Finch family? Is it because your father died while on duty?"

"The Finch family gave your mother a large amount of compensation, and both you and your mother accepted it calmly, even if you were heartbroken because of your father's death." "Accepted it calmly?" Carl scoffed.

"Did you know how I spent my life without my father? I was bullied constantly, with everyone thinking they could walk all over me..."

Carl lowered his head, trying to hide his sense of guilt. He didn't dare to talk about how Eleanor always protected him after his father's death, giving him something close to fatherly love.

He quickly dismissed the thought, fearing that it would shake his stance. He was willing to risk it all to protect Lizzie.

"You hated the Finch family because of this?" Eleanor's brows furrowed deeper.

Carl suddenly became agitated. "Exactly! How am I supposed to let go of my hatred when the Finch family only gets better and better? Luckily, Mr. Cyrus married a young wife. It took me so long to finally be able to seduce her. "Ha ha ha... Mrs. Finch, being with you was merely an act of revenge toward the Finch family. If you actually got a divorce and left the Finch family, you would serve no purpose to me anymore."

Lizzie was merely a pawn for Carl's revenge against the Finch family!

Lizzie was shocked and heartbroken as if she had finally woken up from a sweet dream. Her emotions were sent into turmoil, to the point that she almost fell to the ground. "Superb acting!" Jonathan thought to himself, silently watching.

Lizzie looked extremely shocked, but she quickly calmed down. She never expected Carl to be so quick-witted and be able to find a justification for his actions in such a short time.

He was giving her a way out, so of course she would play along with it. "It's not what you think it is, Carl..."

Just as she called his name, Cyrus couldn't stand it anymore. A slap landed on Lizzie's face. The loud slap echoed in the air.

Lizzie was stunned. Since she had been with Cyrus, he had never laid a hand on her. Even after realizing that she cheated on him with Carl, he didn't even get physical.

Cyrus's expression grew more furious than ever. Lizzie was confused, but Cyrus knew very well how he felt.

He had someone else in his heart, so

it would be reasonable if Lizzie

cheated on him with Carl to get revenge on him. Even if she had said that she wanted to pursue her true

love, he wouldn't have been as mad.

But when Carl told Lizzie how she was merely a pawn for his revenge against the Finch family, the expression on her face made him feel that she actually loved Carl that much. So, he couldn't stand it anymore. Everyone's attention was drawn to the loud slap, and nobody noticed Carl's heartache. The heartache flashed across his face, and Rose noticed it.

She quickly realized that Carl's claim that Lizzie was merely a pawn was false. Carl loved Lizzie... Even if it wasn't love, he cared deeply for her. Amidst her thoughts, Carl's voice was heard.

"Ha ha ha.. Very well. Deceiving a woman was already enough to stir up the Finch family. But there was more than one woman involved..." "Mrs. Finch Senior, do you know what else I did?"

Everyone's attention was on him again. Carl showed no signs of hesitation. There was even excitement in his eyes.

"I heard that Mr. Finch was very fond of Ms. Shaffer. All those years in Azure Clan, I have never seen Mr. Finch take an interest in any woman. I assume that he loves Ms. Shaffer very much.

"So, I was thinking, if Ms. Shaffer ended up with Mr. Turner, wouldn't that cause chaos in the Finch family?"

"Too bad..."

Carl sounded disappointed, but only for a moment. His gaze soon turned wild again.

"And not just that, there's also something about Mr. Jack..."

"In fact, I didn't realize that Mr.

Jack's wife hated Ms. Shaffer so much that she followed her to Aurora Crest and plotted a car accident. I only knew that Mr. Jack was detained at the police station, so found a way to contact him.

"I knew he wanted revenge after getting beaten up by Ms. Shaffer, so I orchestrated the car accident and helped him escape. Luckily, he didn't disappoint me. He hurt Mr. Finch, and got taken away by the Azure Clan..."

"Ha ha ha... and there's more."

Without reservation, Carl revealed everything he had done in front of everyone. He spoke so truthfully, yet cleverly omitted Lizzie's involvement in everything. Carl knew that he was already exposed. With Jonathan's power, he could easily trace everything he had done, so he might as well just tell them. Only then he could take all the responsibility upon himself and clear Lizzie of all blame.

The more he revealed, the darker everyone's expressions became. It was as if a fire of rage was burning in the air. But it was only Carl's voice that spoke. Suddenly, he seemed to remember something. "Oh, right. There were two more people involved-Ms. Young, and..."

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- Chapter 599 So It Was You

Chapter 599 So It Was You

[1,131 words]

"And also, the late Mrs. Finch, Nancy Turner..."

Hearing those names shocked everyone present.

The late Mrs. Finch, Nancy... It was as if her name was a taboo that they refused to discuss.

And Harriette...

Yara quietly watched from the side. She had heard about Nancy, but now she was more curious about the relationship between Harriette and the Finch family, to the point that Carl had to act against her.

Rose was shocked at first. Then, a suspicion began to form in her mind. Her suspicion was soon confirmed by Carl's hysterical laughter.

"Ms. Young... I almost forgot about her. Just now, I said that Mr. Finch had never taken interest in any woman. I take back my word.

"At that time, Mr. Finch and Ms. Young were close. Perhaps, if the incident hadn't occurred, they would've been married, and Ms. Shaffer wouldn't be in the picture. Too bad..."

A trace of ruthlessness flashed across Carl's eyes.

Harriette appeared cheerful and obedient. But in reality, she was arrogant and enjoyed bullying others. She bullied Lizzie and said disrespectful things to her, making her cry.

Of course, Carl wouldn't mention any of that, so he put himself in Lizzie's shoes.

"She looked down on me and insulted me. That day when she wanted me to pass the message to Mr. Finch to invite him to the reservoir, I didn't. The only people who went were her and of course, me. "When I pushed her into the reservoir, she was so afraid..."

Silence filled the air. Carl sounded more and more deranged.

Rose had always suspected that Carl had something to do with Harriette's disappearance. But when she actually heard him describe it, she still felt a chill run down her spine.

He murdered someone just because of a few insults... That was absurd!

Thinking about his words, a chill shot through Rose's palm. The large hand holding hers tightened. Rose looked up and met Jonathan's concerned gaze.

It was as if his eyes were saying, "Don't be afraid, no one can hurt you anymore!"

At that moment, Rose felt a sense of reassurance in her heart.

Suddenly, a voice shouted, "What about Nancy? What did you do to her?"

It was Cyrus. The moment he heard Carl mention Nancy's name, he was stunned for so long before finally coming back to his senses.

He wasn't even concerned about what Carl had done to Harriette. He only cared about Nancy.

He was so agitated that he rushed toward Carl and grabbed him off the floor. "What did you do to Nancy?"

His face was twisted in anger. At that moment, Carl only felt pity for Lizzie and what she had endured all those years.

As expected, Cyrus still held Nancy in his heart. The person by his side was Lizzie, but he was stuck in the past. It's not hard to imagine how painful it had been for her all those years.

Carl wanted to protect her. He wanted to be her hero. He took a brief glimpse at Lizzie, then met Cyrus's murderous gaze without fear.

"I didn't do much. I simply kept her company while you had her locked up. I added a little something into her food, but it wasn't lethal-just enough to make her lose control of her emotions." "Mr. Cyrus, did you know? When the late Mrs. Finch was locked up, she really missed her children!

"So, I helped her. I arranged for Mr.

Turner to be brought to her. It was a very sweet reunion between mother and son-it was touching. But never expected her to lose control so easily..." en FindNovel

As he continued to speak, Jonathan and Ezra's fists tightened. They both recalled what happened during that rainy night. Jonathan was carrying Ezra on his back while leaving Nancy's residence. FindNovel

Not long after that, Nancy died there. She took her own life by cutting her wrist. Jonathan saw her lying in a pool of blood. Nobody knew that Ezra had witnessed that too. "So it was you..."

Cyrus seemed drained of all his energy. He felt like his heart had been cut by a knife.

At that time, he was solely focused on fighting against her. He wanted her to give in to him, but he never realized that her life was in danger. And that night, she hurt Ezra.

She loved her children so much, so hurting Ezra must have been devastating for her.

But Cyrus thought that she wanted to leave him so badly that she was willing to hurt their child to threaten him. That night, he cursed at her.

Lunatic? Maniac? He might have said many other hurtful things as well.

The next time he saw her, she cut her wrist. She lay in a pool of blood, pale, as if all of her blood had drained away...

The image flashed across Cyrus's mind, and he felt suffocated as if a hand were gripping his throat. He let go of Carl and turned around to support himself on the sofa, looking distressed.

But no one was concerned about him. Everyone merely glanced at him. Lizzie's gaze was filled with sarcasm, Jonathan's was cold, and Ezra's was filled with hatred.

But Ezra didn't let the hatred linger for too long. Cyrus wasn't worth taking revenge on.

But Carl... Ezra looked at Jonathan. "Just leave him to me."

"Okay," Jonathan answered calmly.

Carl faltered slightly. He feared Jonathan. Not only had he nearly had an affair with Rose, but he also indirectly caused the death of Jonathan's mother, Nancy. He

thought that Jonathan would not

let

him off easily.

He was mentally prepared for the retaliation.

But he never expected that Ezra would take it upon himself to handle this issue for Jonathan. He also never expected that Jonathan would agree. What was even more unexpected was that, when he looked up at Ezra's calm face, he felt a sense of fear much stronger than that toward Jonathan. Leaving him to Ezra... What was Ezra going to do with him?

As the fear in his heart grew, Lizzie spoke with a tremble in her voice. "Please... Let go of Carl. If you let go of Carl, I'll do whatever you want."

Just as she finished her sentence, Cyrus glared at her sternly. Those words seeped into Carl's heart like a gentle stream.

The Finch family didn't let Carl off easily. As he was brought away by Finley, he sneakily glanced at Lizzie.

The certainty in his eyes was a way of telling her that he would never expose her, even if it meant sacrificing himself. And that was exactly what she wanted.

Carl took the blame for everything. Among those present, only she knew that in all the half-truths he told, she was involved with everything. In fact, she was in charge of everything.

Great! Carl took on everything for her. But too bad, she couldn't stay in the Finch family anymore.

On the bright side, the reason she had to leave wasn't too serious. It was just a betrayal to Cyrus.

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Chapter 600 Sister-In-Law Still Cares for Me

[1,128 words]

Lizzie looked at Cyrus, eager to wrap things up for the night. "Cyrus, I wronged you. I'll handle the divorce agreement. If you don't want to see me anymore, we can let the lawyers deal with everything." Then, Lizzie turned and walked away.

The moment she turned, Ezra anxiously looked at Jonathan, as if urging him to not let her leave.

Carl had taken all the blame. While Ezra wasn't sure about everything, he was certain that a lot of things Carl claimed about what happened to his mother weren't true.

Lizzie was the one... Jonathan met Ezra's gaze, trying to ease his concern.

Once Lizzie had disappeared, Jonathan stood up and took Rose's hand. "What a shame. The birthday banquet is now ruined..."

In the lobby, there was a huge cake that they didn't get to cut. Jonathan glanced at the cake. He was saying it was "a shame", but his face showed no hint of disappointment. Instead, he smirked mockingly. Cyrus noticed Jonathan's gaze and looked over as well. He had personally selected the cake because it featured elements of the art Lizzie liked.

He even brought Ezra over, hoping for a family gathering to clear up the misunderstandings that Jonathan and Ezra had about Lizzie.

He even planned on announcing that he would be moving abroad with Lizzie. But... Infidelity... Betrayal...

The surprise he intended for Lizzie was totally reserved. He ended up being the one receiving a "surprise" from her.

And Jonathan... Cyrus frowned, staring at Jonathan. "You knew all along?"

Jonathan's brows furrowed. Knew what? That Lizzie and Carl betrayed him? Or Lizzie's true nature? Or other secrets about Lizzie?

Jonathan met Cyrus's gaze without hesitation. "Yes. I knew all along. Shouldn't you have realized it too?"

Cyrus's expression froze. Jonathan was reminding him of what Lizzie had revealed on the rooftop in the surveillance footage from the Xanth family's banquet.

Right. He should've known too. But he chose to ignore everything and trust Lizzie, only to have reality slap him in the face.

"Let's go home." Jonathan's gaze shifted to Rose; the coldness disappeared instantly, replaced by immense love and affection.

Home? Rose was taken aback. Before she could make sense of what she heard, Jonathan had taken her hand and guided her out. Eleanor stood up behind them. She wanted to say a few words to Rose but dismissed the thought.

At the exit, Rose and Jonathan's conversation echoed.

"Whose home?"

"Our home, of course."

"Since when did we have a home?"

"I'll show you tonight..."

Their voices faded as they walked further away. The warmth of the conversation contrasted with the eerie silence in the lobby.

It was silent in the lobby for a while. Finally, Eleanor spoke up.

"Cyrus, I don't care what happened between you and Lizzie, but that woman cannot stay in the Finch family any longer. Take care of it soon. As for what happened tonight, you..." Eleanor paused as she changed her mind. "Never mind. I'll inform the Xanth and Young families myself."

After that, she muttered, "So embarrassing", while using her cane to head upstairs.

The people in the lobby eventually dispersed.

Rose and Jonathan walked out of Finch Manor and got into the car, ready to leave. Suddenly, the backseat door opened, and someone came in. Through the rearview mirror, the three looked at each other. Jonathan's expression darkened.

"What are you doing here?"

Jonathan didn't even let Leonard drive them back. He wanted to be alone with Rose and enjoy their time together on the way home. But Ezra...

"I don't have a car. Cyrus picked me up, so now I have no one to drive me back." Ezra lowered his gaze, clearly determined to cling to Jonathan. Ezra had no choice but to ask Jonathan for a favor.

However, Jonathan didn't want to. "Get out."

The Finch family had plenty of cars and drivers. It was just a matter of giving the order. Ezra furrowed his brows, looking rather pitiful.

Upon seeing this, Rose's heart softened. "Don't ask him to leave. There's plenty of space. Let's drop off Ezzy first."

Ezzy... Hearing that nickname gave Ezra a flutter in his heart. Suddenly, he leaned in close to Rose and said, "So, my dear sister-in-law does care for me after all." Sister-in-law? Rose's face was instantly flushed. Through the rearview mirror, she could see that Ezra's face was very close to hers.

Ezra's smile was radiant, completely different from the serious expression he had in the lobby moments ago. That smile of his really made people want to...

"Sit tight!" Jonathan's cold voice sounded like a warning.

Ezra was way too close to Rose. And Rose... What was with that expression of hers?

Jonathan told Ezra to "sit tight", but he didn't even wait for him to get settled before starting the car and speeding away like an arrow.

Due to the sudden force, Ezra was jolted back into the seat, separating him from Rose.

Rose remained silent. Only after a while did she realize Jonathan's jealousy.

Ezra was taken aback. He wanted to complain but dismissed the thought after seeing Jonathan's annoyed face in the rearview mirror. He just silently rubbed his nose and shifted to the seat farthest from Rose, looking rather pitiful.

Ezra stayed quiet for a while, and only then Jonathan's expression started to relax.

Rose let out a quiet sigh of relief. Suddenly, a large hand grabbed hers and held on tightly the entire journey.

Jonathan would occasionally give

Rose a loving glance. They had finally announced their relationship. He had so much to say to Rose, but with Ezra in the backseat, his gaze turned as sharp as blades every time he looked at him.

Ezra regretted asking for the ride. He would have chosen another way if he had known. He closed his eyes, trying to pretend he didn't exist, hoping Jonathan would ignore him too. Jonathan was speeding the entire way. He wanted to drop off Ezra as soon as possible so he could spend some alone time with Rose.

Finally, they arrived at Ezra's house.

"Get out."

Jonathan wasted no time in chasing Ezra away, but there wasn't any response from the back seat. Rose and Jonathan turned around, surprised to see Ezra sitting there with his eyes closed. "Get out of the car!" Jonathan repeated.

His voice seemed to have startled Ezra, but Ezra only frowned and shifted into a more comfortable position, still not opening his eyes.

It seemed... he had fallen asleep. He shifted again and continued sleeping.

Jonathan's face darkened. He unbuckled his seatbelt, ready to get Ezra out of the car himself. He didn't care if Ezra had to sleep on the floor. He was annoyed that Ezra was delaying him and Rose from going home.

But before he could do anything, Rose held him back.

Rose could tell what he was planning to do, but she thought it wasn't a good idea to simply throw Ezra out of the car.

She looked at Jonathan and suggested, "How about..."

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