

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted (Stella and Keegan)

Chapter 2441

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted Chapter 2441 - Mrs. Keller said, "Tatiana has a good personality. I like her very much."

Vermont smiled and asked, "So, would you consider her as a potential daughter-in-law for the Keller family? Do you think she's suitable?"

The Keller couple exchanged glances. Mrs. Keller gave Mr. Keller a nod. Mr. Keller spoke up, "We have a good impression of Tatiana. She's polite, tactful, and well-mannered. You've already provided us with her personal information and family background, which we've verified ourselves. We have a clear idea of her situation. If the two of them can get along, and if her family's expectations aren't too high, the betrothal gift and wedding ceremony can be easily arranged. We're flexible with the dowry and have no specific demands.

Since Aaron is our only son, we won't be stingy or make things difficult for the girl when it comes to the marriage. You don't need to worry about that. Our main concern is Aaron's willingness. You saw his attitude at dinner; I'm afraid he might find an excuse to send Tatiana away now that they've stepped out."

Vermont reassured him, "Mr. Keller, as long as you and Mrs. Keller are happy with Tatiana, I'll make sure they get along well. Let them take their time, without any pressure. Just wait for good news."

Mr. and Mrs. Keller looked at each other again. Mrs. Keller sighed and said seriously, "Vermont, we trust you. But our Keller family values integrity. We expect a proper and respectable marriage." Vermont raised his wine glass and promised, "Don't worry, Mrs. Keller. Tatiana's family also values integrity. They wouldn't resort to underhanded tactics. If she ever did, her own family would disown her before you even had to."

After sending the Kellers off, Vermont explained that the young couple should have some time alone. He and Felicity would stay nearby and handle the ride home.

As Felicity emerged from the restroom, drying her hands, she asked, "What did Mrs. Keller mean by an 'open and aboveboard' marriage?"

Vermont replied, "She meant they won't accept a woman who tries to marry their son by getting pregnant before marriage. Wealthy families often deal with unmarried pregnancies. Even if they don't care about family background, they won't let a woman with a child control them. Take Keegan's father, for example. Dahlia was lucky he took responsibility. But in most wealthy families, having a few illegitimate children outside

doesn't matter. They'll pay child support, but there's no chance at the family inheritance."

Vermont tossed the tissue Felicity had used into a nearby trash can and held her hand, saying, "Unmarried pregnancy, whether for money or love, is a gamble on a man's conscience. And men have very little conscience."

Felicity gave him a sharp look. "Aren't you a man?"

Vermont chuckled, "I am, and I admit I don't have much conscience either. That's why you should always keep a backup plan. Even if love fades, you should still have your own money."

Felicity frowned, "Are you warning me in advance? If you plan to change your mind, we might as well not be together!"

She pulled her hand away, refusing to let him touch her.

Vermont sighed and gently apologized, "Don't be mad. I was just speaking my mind. If it upset you, I won't say it again."

Felicity kept a stern face. "I may not be as clever as you, but I'm not dumb. If you do change your mind, I'll make sure you leave with nothing!"

Vermont grinned and teased, "You're so ruthless, baby."

Felicity snorted, "There's more. When you die, I'll dig up your ashes and hide them where no one can find them. No one will burn offerings for you during the Qingming Festival, and you'll be a poor ghost in the afterlife!"

Vermont laughed harder. "You'd keep my ashes just for yourself? That's pretty disgusting!"

Felicity didn't respond.

"You really know how to find sweetness in the bitterest places."

A few days later, the preliminary results of the perfume competition were announced. Seventeen perfumers entered the competition at Caline, but two withdrew, leaving fifteen who advanced. Darcie praised everyone at the meeting and generously contributed six million to the prize pool. The champion would receive five million, and the remaining top ten finalists would each get 200,000. This news excited everyone. After all, cash rewards are more motivating than just praise.

Noticing Stella's silence, Darcie called on her to say a few encouraging words.

Stella raised her eyes and smiled. "Mrs. Saun, since you've added six million to the prize pool, I'll add four million to make it an even ten million. The champion will now get eight million, and those in the top ten will still receive 200,000 each. The 11th to 20th place winners will get 100,000 each. However, if the champion is not from our company, the eight million prize pool will roll over to the next competition, and we'll set new rules."

With the increased prize pool and easier conditions, everyone was thrilled. The atmosphere buzzed with excitement. Stella continued, "But I have one suggestion."

Everyone quieted down, eager to hear her out. Stella smiled and said, "I suggest that, regardless of Team Leader Jaylene's results, he should be excluded from the prize pool." Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Jaylene's expression darkened. "Why should I be excluded? Stella, are you holding a grudge?"

Stella replied calmly, "Team Leader

Jaylene, you're mistaken. We're all part of the same company, and there's no personal grudge. I simply believe that Mrs. Saun's prize is meant to encourage everyone to strive for top rankings. If you win the championship and take the eight million, people might think the competition was rigged. That's why I propose excluding you from the prize to avoid any suspicion."

Jaylene was furious. "Avoid suspicion? You're clearly targeting me!"

Stella sighed, "I'm only making this suggestion for the sake of fairness. How about this? Since this prize is for the competition participants, let the fifteen who advanced to the preliminaries vote. If more than half agree with my proposal, we'll go with it. Mrs. Saun, what do you think?"

Stella left the decision to Darcie.

Jaylene, still angry, protested, "You're trying to stir up trouble!"

Stella smiled. "The group will decide what's fair."

Jaylene, who had lost significant

money to Dahlia, was not in a good

financial situation and desperately

ve

wanted the eight million. She

probably thought Darcie would give it to her under the guise of the competition.

Darcie had always treated Jaylene fairly in front of Wenham, giving her as much as she gave Stella. If people thought the eight million was meant for Jaylene, it would damage Darcie's reputation. Stella set down her teacup and looked at Darcie. "Mrs. Saun, should we vote?"

Chapter 2442

Everyone could see what was happening. At the crucial moment of the competition, Darcie teamed up with Mallory and Jaylene. The reason was obvious. The prize pool was 10 million, with 80% going to the winner. To get a reward, you had to make it to the top ten, which was no easy feat. In reality, it was more about appearances than a fair competition.

Stella suggested expanding the prize to the top 20 and excluding Jaylene, making it easier for everyone to win something.

The 8 million championship prize was still up for grabs, and with Jaylene out of the picture, who wouldn't want to give it a shot?

People in the room exchanged looks, each considering their chances.

Darcie didn't need a vote to know the outcome. She looked at Stella and smiled. "No need to vote. I think your idea is good. Let's go with it. I hope everyone does their best. I'll personally host a banquet to celebrate." Stella met her gaze and smiled back. "Then I wish you all success in advance."

She started clapping, and everyone followed. As their eyes met, they silently acknowledged the tension between them.

Jaylene was furious. She stormed out as soon as the meeting ended and collided with a secretary carrying documents. Papers scattered everywhere. "Are you blind?" Jaylene snapped, her anger flaring. The secretary turned pale and quickly apologized.

Darcie frowned and called Jaylene's name, but Jaylene ignored her, shoved the secretary aside, and slammed the door on her way out, making a loud noise.

Everyone in the room felt awkward, especially Stella. She looked at Darcie with a helpless expression and quietly asked, "Aunt, is Jaylene upset? I didn't mean to target

her. My suggestion was for the company's benefit. If she's really upset about the bonus, we can forget I ever mentioned it."

This comment made Darcie's blood pressure rise.

She forced a smile, holding back her anger. "Jaylene is just a kid. She wouldn't care about such a small bonus. She suggested the prize pool to me in the first place. She probably feels embarrassed that it seems like this award was set up for her. Please be patient with her."

Stella replied gently, "Jaylene has a big heart; it's me who was thoughtless. Aunt, please tell her that after the competition, I'll treat her to a meal and apologize."

Darcie nodded, said nothing more, and quickly left with her things.

Stella watched her go, then stood up to return to her office.

She reviewed the competition results. The perfume competition used a points system, with both individual and group rounds. Points accumulated with each round, and the lowest scores were eliminated. The highest score at the end would win.

This meant every round was critical. A mistake could take several rounds to recover from, making a comeback in the final round almost impossible. It tested not only a perfumer's talent but also their consistency and professionalism.

Among the 15 people who advanced, Mallory and Sonia ranked in the top ten overall. Mallory even took third place, Sonia was sixth, followed by Kiara at thirteenth, and Jaylene at nineteenth. Additionally, six others made it into the top fifty, so the results were quite impressive.

Because the preliminary round was the first to accumulate points, the rankings were somewhat random. Otherwise, how could someone like Jaylene make it into the top 20?

The next two rounds were group matches, testing teamwork skills. Teams could either be formed freely or assigned randomly by the system. Jaylene would definitely team up with Mallory, securing her spot in the next round without much effort. Stella was more concerned about Sonia.

Before the meeting, Stella had asked Sonia about her plans for choosing teammates. Sonia had said that random pairing would be fine. Stella, however, felt that random pairings were too risky. If paired with someone incompatible, it could drag them down, leading to possible elimination.

Stella scanned the list and thought that only Kiara might be a good partner for Sonia. But Kiara was on good terms with several other competitors from the company. Asking

her directly might be awkward-if she already had a partner, refusing her would be uncomfortable, and agreeing would risk offending others.

She considered a few more people and marked two with calm personalities. She planned to ask them later. Just then, there was a knock on her office door. Kiara came in, holding two grapefruits. "Boss Jewell, are you busy?"

Stella closed the file. "No, what's up?"

Kiara stepped in, closed the door, and placed the grapefruits on her desk. "Boss Jewell, I'd like you to talk to Sonia for me and see if she'd be willing to team up."

Stella was surprised. "No one asked you to team up?"

Kiara looked a bit embarrassed. "They did, but I didn't agree. I want to team up with Sonia. When she created that S essential oil, it really impressed me. She made it into the top ten in the preliminary round too. We both did well. I want to team up and go for the win."

Stella asked, "Going for the championship?"

Kiara nodded. "You made the prize search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

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worth fighting for."

Stella laughed. "Is the prize pool really that tempting?"

Kiara laughed too, joking, "Isn't that why we work so hard? We finally have a chance to earn some real money, so we've got to go for it."

Stella had originally wanted Sonia to partner with Kiara but didn't want to ask first. Now that Kiara had brought it up, she felt relieved and agreed.

Kiara left just as Wren came in with the expense report.

While Stella reviewed the documents, Wren noticed the grapefruits on her desk.

Stella signed the report and handed it to Wren, who didn't take it right away, lost in thought until Stella called her name.

Wren took the report, glanced at it, then asked, "Boss Jewell, did you buy this grapefruit?"

Stella said, "Kiara gave it to me. If you like it, feel free to take one."

Wren thanked her, picked up one, looked at the label, and suddenly said, "This brand of grapefruit is only available at the fruit supermarket e across from our company. Their fruit is very expensive-all imported and very fresh. The grapefruit costs 68 each, with a minimum purchase of six. Boss Darcie loves grapefruit and often orders from that supermarket. I've seen a lot of invoices from them."

Chapter 2443

Stella paused, looked at Wren, and asked, "Is there anything else?"

Wren shook her head and left with the documents.

Stella stared at the grapefruit on her desk for a while, then called Sonia.

Julia entered Jaylene's office, carefully avoiding the scattered papers on the floor. She handed Jaylene a cup of coffee. "Ms. Saun, here's your coffee." Jaylene didn't respond, focused on her phone with a cold expression.

Her friends were buzzing about one thing-Aaron had a girlfriend. He had always kept a low profile, but now he'd posted a picture of them together.

In the group chat, they were discussing the news:

"Who is she? She doesn't look familiar. Is she from our circle?"

"I don't think so. But she's pretty."

"She must be from a lower-status family. I heard the Kellers are avoiding a powerful marriage to keep control."

"That makes sense. Jaylene, you were classmates with Aaron, right? Do you know who she is?" Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Jaylene checked Aaron's social media and found the picture. It showed a girl holding milk tea, smiling, with a hand (presumably Aaron's) holding hers from the side. The caption was intentionally vague. Anger flashed across Jaylene's face, and she called Aaron immediately.

The first call went unanswered, which was unusual. Even after she distanced herself from Aaron, he'd always answer her calls.

She called again, and this time a woman's voice answered, "Hello."

Jaylene's grip tightened on her phone. "Who are you? Where's Aaron?"

"He's in the bathroom. I'm his girlfriend, Tatiana. Who's calling? I'll let him know you called."

The polite response only fueled Jaylene's anger. She snapped, "I didn't know Aaron had a girlfriend. He's been keeping it quiet."

Tatiana didn't seem to catch the sarcasm and cheerfully replied, "We only just started dating. Aaron's shy and doesn't talk much about personal things. You must be close to him, though I haven't heard him mention you. Are you his classmate?"

Jaylene was speechless for a moment, then finally said, "Ask Aaron yourself what our relationship is!"

Tatiana responded sweetly, "You must be close to Aaron. Can I add you on WhatsApp? Aaron's birthday is coming up, and I want to surprise him with a gift. Could you help me with ideas?"

Jaylene seethed inside but agreed, thinking she couldn't let this new girl think she'd won so easily. "Fine, add me."

Tatiana was delighted. "Thank you, sister!"

Jaylene's eye twitched at being called "sister," and she ended the call angrily.

Soon, Tatiana's friend request appeared, using the same picture Jaylene had seen earlier. Jaylene accepted and immediately checked Tatiana's profile. The latest post was a close-up of the couple, captioned, "Finally, my turn for a sweet love."

Fury boiled over in Jaylene. When Julia brought the coffee again, Jaylene knocked it over, spilling it on Julia.

Julia cried out, "Ms. Saun?"

Jaylene, enraged, threw everything on her desk and shouted, "Get out! Now!"

Darcie walked in just then and frowned, "Why are you angry again?"

Jaylene's anger cooled slightly, but she still looked away, saying nothing.

Darcie told Julia, "Go take care of yourself."

Julia quickly left, and Darcie gathered

the scattered documents. "How many times have I told you to watch your behavior? People are always watching. You're not powerful enough to treat others this way. Be more careful."

Jaylene muttered, "Stella's targeting me, and you want me to just take it? She's constantly coming for me. Should I keep enduring it?"

Darcie replied, "It's only eight million. If you can't win, no one else will. The money isn't going anywhere, so why are you upset?"

Jaylene clenched her fists. "I'm tired of being targeted by her in everything! I've put up with so much since she came back. When will it end? I've had enough!"

Darcie smirked. "Then stop enduring

it. Face her directly. Remember,

you're a Saun, and she's a Jewell!

and

You've been raised by the Saun

family for twenty years. What are you

afraid of? Let's see who gets kicked out first."

Jaylene paused and then said, "I'm sorry, Mom. I was wrong."

Darcie looked at her for a moment

before saying, "Focus on winning the Perfume Competition. You win, your place in the company will be

secure. Stella will think twice before trying to push you out."

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Jaylene nodded, "But Sonia's doing well too. She managed to mix that S-grade essential oil so quickly. I'm a bit worried."

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Chapter 2445

"Did you hear me?" Darcie asked firmly when Jaylene didn't respond.

Jaylene quickly replied, "Yes, I heard and remember."

As she looked at Darcie's pale face, a thought crossed her mind. Before she could stop herself, she softly asked, "Mom, was Stella taken away by mistake, or was it on purpose?"

Darcie paused and looked at her. "Do you think there are so many accidents in this world?"

Jaylene's eyes widened in shock, and she was speechless for a long time.

Darcie placed the documents neatly on her desk, stood up, and walked over to Jaylene, gently straightening her dress. "Some people are born into their fate, while others have to fight for it. I work hard so that you won't have to struggle like I did, but you can't be too satisfied with things as they are. Do you understand?"

Jaylene's fingers trembled, and after a long pause, she whispered hoarsely, "I understand."

She had always thought Stella's arrival took away everything that should have been hers, but now she realized the love and resources she enjoyed were actually taken from Stella.

If Stella hadn't been taken away by mistake, would her mother have married her father? Would she have grown up in the Saun family?

The answers to these questions were the ones Jaylene feared the most.

Meanwhile, Tatiana hung up the phone. Aaron, unable to hold back, said, "Give me the phone. I want to call her back."

Tatiana moved the phone out of his reach. "No, you can't call her back now." Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Aaron grew anxious. "But didn't you say to call her later? Why not now?"

"Of course you need to call her back, but not right away. She just called you. If you call her back now, what do you think she'll assume?"

Aaron was confused. "What would she think?"

Tatiana explained, "She didn't contact you before, but now that you posted my picture on WhatsApp Moments, she called immediately and even asked who I was, sounding a bit hostile. This shows she cares about you, but she doesn't realize how important you are to her. If you rush to call her back, she'll figure out your relationship with me is fake and that you're still waiting for her. She'll feel safe to go back to treating you the same way as before. Do you really want to stay stuck, waiting for her mixed signals?"

Aaron paused, thinking it over. No, he didn't want that.

Despite what others said about Jaylene, she had treated him well when he was studying abroad. They were close—they kissed, hugged, and did almost everything lovers do except take the final step. He had even persuaded his mother and godmother to ask the Saun family for her hand. He still didn't understand why Jaylene had rejected him so harshly that day.

He had been heartbroken, but when his family arranged a blind date, Jaylene suddenly said that if he had a girlfriend, he shouldn't contact her anymore. That had reignited his hope.

She didn't want him to go on a blind date. Did that mean she still cared?

But Jaylene didn't reply to his calls or texts. He was the only one stuck in this, with no way out.

He had no real interest in Tatiana. He only went on the blind date to appease his parents. After meeting Tatiana, he told her straight up that he liked someone else but had to go on this date because of his parents. He even planned to tell his parents later that their personalities didn't match, and he wanted Tatiana to do the same.

Tatiana didn't agree right away. Instead, she asked, "What if I can help you be with the one you really love?"

Aaron thought she was joking, but she seemed serious. She asked him to tell her everything that had happened, promising to help him find a solution.

He wasn't one to open up to strangers, but Tatiana was easy to talk to. She was friendly and understanding, and before he knew it, he had shared his whole story with her.

For several days, Tatiana invited Aaron out-sometimes to the park, sometimes to a coffee shop-and the topic was always Jaylene.

He told her everything about his relationship with Jaylene, and Tatiana was there for him, whether he was happy, sad, or trying to figure things out.

Pretending to be his girlfriend was Tatiana's idea to push Jaylene into making a move, and now Jaylene had actually contacted him, just as Tatiana predicted. It showed that her plan was working.

"Should I call her back? Or should I post more pictures of us on WhatsApp Moments to make her jealous?"

Tatiana shook her head. "Aaron, she just called, and you didn't answer. If you keep posting pictures, she'll know you're doing it on purpose and won't believe it."

Aaron asked, "If I shouldn't call back or post pictures, what should I do?"

Tatiana smiled. "It's not about not replying; it's about not replying too quickly. Think about it-when you messaged her before, did she take a long time to reply? Did you get worried while waiting for her?"

Aaron was surprised. "How do you know?"

Tatiana continued, "Of course I know.

That's a little trick some girls use. If

om

we reply right away, it shows we care allot. But when we're unsure of the other person's feelings, we hold back our true emotions."

Aaron was silent for a moment, then asked quietly, "If you really like someone, would you still not reply, even knowing they're waiting?"

Tatiana thought to herself that if a

girl really likes you, she wouldn't

make you wait. But instead, she said, "Love is sometimes like a game to ometimes like see who will break first. You can use

this trick on her now. When she calls or texts, don't respond as quickly as before. Wait a few hours, or even a day. Don't always do what she wants.

Make her realize if she cares about you, she needs to show it." The

Aaron nodded. "I get it."

Tatiana smiled, her dimples showing. "Now, can we go eat? I haven't eaten since my night shift yesterday. I'm starving."

Aaron suddenly realized he had been.

dragging her around to solve his problems since she got off work. Not oply had she not eaten, but she also hadn't rested. He noticed the faint dark circles under her eyes and felt guilty.

"What do you want to eat? I'll take you," Aaron asked softly.

Tatiana thought for a moment. "I haven't had noodles in a while. I really want some."

Aaron was surprised. "You like noodles too?"

Tatiana blinked. "You like them too?"

Aaron laughed. "I've loved them since I was a kid. When I was studying abroad, it's what I missed the most."

Chapter 2446

Tatiana smiled and said, "Then let's go eat noodles together."

Aaron drove off with Tatiana. Maybe because things were going well, Aaron talked more with her. He was surprised to find how much they had in common-similar tastes and interests. She could discuss anything with him without just agreeing for the sake of it.

As they chatted more, they both felt like they had met too late. Aaron remarked, "If we'd met a few years earlier, we could have been great friends."

Tatiana smiled, "It's not too late now."

Aaron wanted to continue, but seeing her yawn, he said, "You should rest. It'll be a while before we get there. I'll wake you up when we arrive."

Tatiana murmured "Okay" and closed her eyes.

When they reached their destination, Tatiana was still asleep. Aaron noticed how peacefully she was sleeping and hesitated before deciding not to wake her. He quietly got out of the car, leaving the engine and air conditioner running, and went to order food.

As soon as he left, Tatiana's eyes snapped open, clear and alert. She grabbed her phone and messaged Vermont, "Everything's going well. We're ready for the next step."

Vermont quickly replied, "So soon?"

Tatiana responded, "I thought it would be more challenging, but he caved as soon as he saw my photo."

Vermont sent an "awesome" emoji and asked, "Where are you now?"

Tatiana: "Having dinner with my future husband, bonding." [search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.](#)

Vermont: "Confident, huh?"

Tatiana: "Honestly, aside from his poor taste in women, he meets all my standards. He's rich, kind, looks good, and while he's a bit chubby, he's not off-putting. It's like he's made for me."

Vermont: "If this works out, I expect a seat at the head table at your wedding."

Tatiana: "You can have my parents' seats-as long as your gift is generous."

Vermont was momentarily stunned.

Tatiana: "Now, tell me more about Jaylene. I need to be prepared."

Vermont called her, saying, "Jaylene's talented-she writes well, plays the piano, draws, she's pretty much good at everything. But she's also spoiled, dependent on her mom, and has never faced any real hardships." Tatiana sighed, "So, compared to her, my strengths aren't as obvious."

Vermont replied, "They are. You're tougher, sharper, and more determined than she is. She can't compete with you in those areas."

Tatiana's eyes narrowed as she smirked, "Vermont, my marriage hasn't even started yet. I have my sister-in-law's WhatsApp. You might want to think before you speak."

Vermont coughed and reassured her, "Anyway, if it comes down to it, you can definitely outmaneuver her. Go all in, and our cousin will back you up to win over Aaron."

Tatiana smiled as she noticed Aaron returning to the car. "I could use a chance to meet her now."

Vermont said, "There's an opportunity soon. My friend Keegan's sister is getting engaged, and Jaylene is likely to be there since she likes Keegan. Aaron will want to see her, so she'll find a way to attend. I'll set it up so you both can go."

"Perfect," Tatiana agreed just as Aaron opened the car door. Seeing she was on the phone, he asked softly, "Are you awake?"

Tatiana ended the call, rubbed her eyes, and said, "The call woke me up. Sorry to keep you waiting, Aaron. Why didn't you wake me?"

Aaron replied, "I didn't wait long. I was about to call you when you woke up."

He turned off the engine and gently said, "Let's go, it's time to eat."

Tatiana unbuckled her seatbelt and followed him out of the car.

It was drizzling outside, and the air was foggy. Just as Tatiana was about to use her bag to shield herself, Aaron came over with an umbrella and held it over her head.

Aaron was truly a gentleman. Even though they didn't know each other well, he made sure the umbrella covered her more, letting his shoulders get wet. "Stay close and watch out for puddles," he said. Tatiana looked up at him and asked softly, "Aaron, are you always this kind to girls?"

Aaron was taken aback and instinctively stepped back. When he realized she got wet because of it, he quickly moved the umbrella back over her. He fumbled to apologize, "I'm sorry..."

Tatiana took hold of the umbrella and moved closer to him. Aaron stepped back again but was stopped by a car behind him. Tatiana cornered him between her and the car, raising the umbrella to cover them both. She looked up at him and said softly, "Aaron, you should hold the umbrella. I can't reach, and it's hurting my hand."

Aaron snapped out of his daze, took the umbrella, and said, "Oh, right."

Tatiana smiled and moved even closer, "Aaron, I'll do my best to help you. I don't know if it will work, but even if it doesn't, I hope you won't doubt yourself. You're a good guy-smart, caring, and talented. If she doesn't see that, it's her loss, not yours."

Aaron was stunned. He wasn't used to receiving compliments, especially from someone other than family. Even Jaylene never praised him like this.

He gripped the umbrella tightly, suddenly feeling shy, and said awkwardly, "Let's go eat first."

Tatiana noticed his red ears and smiled, "Okay."

Meanwhile, Keegan was reading a story to Stella's belly.

Stella picked off the stem of a strawberry, took a bite, and found it too sweet. She handed the rest to Keegan.

After he ate it, he said, "You eat yours, don't worry about me. I'm not done yet."

Stella rested her cheek on her hand. "Are you sure they can understand?"

Keegan replied, "I don't know if they understand, but they're definitely listening." "How do you know?"

Keegan pulled her closer, placed her hands on her belly, and whispered, "Baby, do you want to hear Daddy tell you a story?"

It was quiet for about a minute. Just as Stella was about to laugh, there was a sudden movement under her hand.

Her eyes widened in surprise, "It moved?!"

Keegan looked proud, "I told you they could hear it."

Stella quickly said, "Baby, baby, Mommy will tell you a story too."

But three minutes later, there was no movement at all.

Keegan grinned, "See? My storytelling

is paying off. Even

en though they're in

your belly, they're more familiar with me."

Chapter 2447

Stella gritted her teeth and said, "It doesn't count! That must have been a fluke. Let's do it again-whoever gets the babies to move first this time won't have to pay for Aurora's engagement party." Keegan smirked confidently, "Alright, who's going first?"

"Me!" Stella set down the plate of strawberries, sat up straight, cleared her throat, and began, "My babies, I'm your mother. Do you want to hear a story?"

As soon as she spoke, her belly moved, though not as strongly as when Keegan had spoken earlier. It was a hesitant, light movement, but enough to make Stella excited. "Look! See that?" Keegan's confidence wavered, and with a frown, he said, "Are you mimicking my voice? Isn't that cheating?"

Indeed, after clearing her throat, Stella had spoken in a voice that sounded just like Keegan's.

Stella blinked innocently, "How is that cheating? You never said I had to use my own voice. I'm just using my strengths."

Keegan frowned, "You're taking shortcuts!"

Stella simply replied, "I won."

Keegan protested, "You're stealing the fruits of my labor."

Stella repeated, "I won."

Keegan gritted his teeth, "You also tricked them and made them experience the deceitfulness of human nature before they're even born!"

Stella only smiled, "I won."

Keegan was still resisting, "But I haven't had my turn yet! I haven't lost!"

Stella smirked, "Sweetheart, didn't you listen to the rules? I said the first one to speak wins. It's not about who shouts first. Since I've already spoken, it doesn't matter if you shout now-you'll never be first." Keegan was silent, his mouth twitching. "Are you playing word games with me?"

Stella smiled, "The rules were clear before we started. You just didn't pay attention."

Keegan, determined to win as a parent, said, "We can't settle this in one round. Let's do best two out of three. Just now was a draw, so for the next round, you have to use your own voice. Whoever shouts first wins!" Stella's eyes glinted as she suddenly said, "If you don't want to pay for your sister's engagement party, I'll do it. Why are you getting so worked up?"

"This isn't about paying-" Keegan began, but before he could finish, he noticed Aurora.

Aurora was wearing a dress, and Keegan's smile vanished. She scoffed, "Grandma's paying for the party, not you!"

Keegan paused, realizing he had fallen for Stella's playful trap. Aurora shrugged innocently, "Are you still competing?" Keegan laughed in disbelief.

Two nights ago, Stella had a nightmare and woke up crying. When she didn't find Keegan in bed, she tearfully accused him of avoiding her because he no longer found her attractive during her pregnancy. Keegan had to reassure her that he had only slept in the study because he was working late and didn't want to disturb her.

After much comforting, she finally calmed down and became clingy, hugging him tightly for the rest of the night.

Despite Stella's emotional swings during pregnancy, Keegan secretly enjoyed her clinginess. The prenatal education expert had said that pregnant women could feel insecure due to hormonal changes, causing mood swings that were often directed at the people they cared about most.

Keegan was less concerned with her temper and more focused on how much she cared about him. This realization made him happy, but he also understood that Stella would cry for him when upset and tease him when in a good mood.

Now, he was less worried about her emotional ups and downs, knowing she found ways to stay entertained without overexerting herself.

Aurora approached, holding the hem of her skirt. "How about this dress?" she asked.

Keegan glanced at the long hem and remarked, "It's very eco-friendly." Search The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Aurora was puzzled.

Keegan added, "The skirt will clean the floor as you walk."

Aurora was speechless.

"You know nothing!" Stella lightly slapped Keegan and said kindly to Aurora, "It's beautiful, but not ideal for an engagement party. You'll be moving around a lot, greeting guests, and a shorter dress would be more practical."

Aurora suddenly realized how wrong she had been to think Stella was unworthy of her brother. She should be thankful that Stella was willing to put up with him-otherwise, with his sharp tongue, it would be impossible for him to find a wife!

"Should I go for something shorter?" Aurora asked, ignoring Keegan and seeking Stella's advice.

"It doesn't need to be too short, just above the knee. Keep the style simple and elegant, and choose colors like white, beige, or red."

Aurora tried on a few dresses from the collection the old lady had sent over, and finally, both Stella and Keegan agreed on a beige one.

As Keegan put it, "As long as you don't talk, you still look like a lady from a noble family."

Aurora wasn't too thrilled with his comment.

A bit later, Aldor arrived.

Hearing the engine, Aurora rushed to open the door without waiting for Keegan's instruction.

Keegan grumbled to Stella, "She never opens the door so eagerly when I come home!"

Stella glanced at him, "You're proud of forgetting your keys and having to ask someone to let you in?" Keegan had no response.

Aldor, always considerate, had brought skewers and even thought about everyone's preferences.

Stella noticed that while Aldor and Keegan were deep in conversation, the skewers Aldor casually handed to Aurora had their sharp ends cut off.

Traditionally, engagement parties are hosted by the bride's family. The Hart family matriarch had already coordinated with Aldor's mother regarding the guest list. Keegan was focused on Aldor's friends.

Aldor was quite popular, and many

friends wanted to attend the

engagement party..

party. Additionally, news

of his engagement to a Kane family member had prompted long-lost acquaintances to reach out, eager to attend. Keegan reserved eight tables, anticipating a larger turnout

As they discussed the details of the engagement, Aurora suddenly asked, "Should Mom come to the party?"

The room fell silent.

It wouldn't be right for Dahlia to miss such an important event in Aurora's life, but her presence could cause

complications. Since the.Com

engagement was announced, everyone had avoided mentioning Dahlia, but that didn't mean she was out of the picture. In fact, Dahlia had been reaching out ever since Aurora's engagement was publicized.

When Aurora answered, Dahlia launched into a tirade, accusing Stella of plotting to marry Aurora off so she could take over the Kane family's wealth. She belittled Aldor and even suggested a more "suitable" match for Aurora from a wealthier

family.

Aurora had hung up halfway through.

She couldn't stand hearing Dahlia insult Aldor. She had once looked down on Aldor herself, but after experiencing life from the ground up, she truly appreciated how hard it was for someone like him to reach his current position.

Aurora believed that Aldor was just as good as anyone from a prominent family. Starting from a low point and climbing high is a real achievement.

She didn't want Dahlia at her engagement party, fearing she might humiliate Aldor in front of everyone.

Chapter 2448

Keegan paused his writing and asked in a calm voice, "Do you want her to come?"

Aurora hesitated before softly replying, "I don't want her to, but if she insists, we can't really stop her."

Keegan looked up, "If you don't want her there, she won't be. Just focus on your engagement with Aldor. I'll handle her calls and anything else."

Aurora wanted to ask how he planned to handle it but decided to stay quiet and just nodded in agreement.

After Aldor left, Stella washed up, lay on the bed, and browsed her phone. Bored, she moved over to Keegan's side to look at the books he had been reading lately.

Since Stella got pregnant, Keegan's bedside reading had shifted from his usual professional materials to popular science books about motherhood and babies.

Keegan was the type who, when he committed to something, did it thoroughly. He read books, researched online, and even took notes. He often shared what he learned with Stella, who appreciated his dedication. She knew the bond between a mother and child is natural, but a father's connection takes time to develop. Keegan, however, was already proving to be more involved than she had expected, which made her happy. She reached into the drawer to grab a pen to correct a note Keegan had made.

Inside, she found a notepad with a pen clipped to it. As she took the pen, she glanced at the notebook and paused when she read the entries.

[131 days: Same as yesterday. No vomiting. Morning sickness has eased, but she cried after dreaming the baby was ugly. Luckily, it wasn't a nightmare about me being unfaithful or violent, or I'd be kicked out of the bedroom again. Frequent bathroom trips; blood sugar normal. The doctor said it's likely due to the uterus pressing on the bladder, and it'll get worse later.]

The comma was dark, as if Keegan had paused there before writing the next sentence: [It's tough-need to get her more exercise.]

Stella bit her lip and turned back a few pages.

[126 days: Waist has increased by two centimeters. She spent a long time in front of the mirror with her favorite clothes. I told her she still looks good even if she's gained weight. She ignored me all night and spent hours watching videos of pregnancy transformations. She's anxious, and that makes me anxious too-I don't want her to worry.]

[117 days: First fetal movement-note it down.]

[109 days: She had a fever but refused to take medicine, worried about the baby. The doctor advised cooling down physically first. She sweated through the night and

muttered in her sleep. The fever broke at dawn. She was weak and pale but proudly said she's tough. If it were me, I'd be sick for days. Idiot... I wish I could take her place.]

[100 days: Good appetite but still vomiting.]

[97 days: Still vomiting heavily.]

[94 days: After the prenatal checkup, she secretly asked if I wanted a boy or a girl. How could I choose? I just want her to suffer less. Her belly's growing, but her face looks thinner.]

[87 days: Big changes in appetite; still dizzy and vomiting.]

[81 days: Vomiting heavily.]

[78 days: Baby's the size of a soybean and growing well.]

[77 days: Hahahahahaha, twins!]

Stella couldn't help but laugh. It was rare for Keegan to express his emotions so openly, and his joy was clear in the way he wrote it down.

She read on, noticing that some lines were written in different ink, likely added later: [What happiness? It's so tough!]

It seemed Keegan had intended to document the baby's progress during each prenatal checkup but ended up recording more about Stella's experiences. As her pregnancy symptoms worsened, his concern deepened Stella's earlier worries now seemed unnecessary-Keegan was far more attentive and involved than she had realized.

The bathroom door handle turned, and Stella quickly closed the notebook and put it back in the drawer.

Keegan came out, drying his hair. Seeing her leaning against the headboard, he walked over and sat beside her. "Aren't you going to sleep?"

"I was waiting for you," Stella smiled.

Keegan patted her hand, "I'll be right back after drying my hair."

"Okay."

A few minutes later, Keegan returned to bed. Stella leaned into his arms, "Are you really not going to let your mother come to Aurora's engagement?"

"If she comes, it'll only cause trouble," Keegan said, gently stroking her shoulder. "She's always tried to control Aurora. Even though Aurora seems spoiled, she's actually quite timid and indecisive. If my mother shows up, she might say something that could push Aurora to do something she'd regret."

Stella asked, "But what if Aurora says she wants her there?"

Keegan replied, "Then I'll find a way to keep her away. I don't want to see her."

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The incidents at Wendy's daughter's wedding and Dahlia's online behavior at Rivera's product launch had deeply hurt Keegan. He didn't want Dahlia anywhere near him or Stella, so he was determined to keep her away from the engagement party.

Stella didn't say anything more and just hugged Keegan tightly.

Keegan's engagement party was planned to be held at Wendy's hotel, and Stella had gone to finalize the arrangements with her.

After going over all the details, Wendy poured Stella a cup of tea, "Try this-it's the first crop of Longjing tea my friend grew."

Stella took a sip. It was light, sweet, fresh, and elegant. "It's good. Are you planning to sell it?"

Wendy asked, "Do you want to buy some?"

Stella put down her cup. "With the holidays coming up, I'm thinking of getting some small gifts for friends."

Wendy smiled, "So it's for Keegan to

give to his friends? Don't you usually give out VIR cards for your jewelry store as gifts? Never miss a chance to promote your business, do you?" search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Stella smiled too, "It's just a bit of advertising on the side."

Wendy suddenly said, "I've been

friends with Dahlia for years. She's taken a lot of tea from me, but she's

never used my connections for her

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husband or son. I think she wasn't just upset about your background when she thought you weren't good enough for Keegan. She also wasn't happy that you were so good to him."

Stella was puzzled, "Why would it be wrong to be good to him?"

Chapter 2449

Wendy didn't answer directly but instead shared a story about Keegan's childhood. "When Keegan was about eleven or twelve, she signed him up for a wilderness survival course. The class wasn't well-organized, and the staff was unprofessional. They only realized some students had fallen behind when they were coming down the mountain.

The Kane family was very worried when they got the call. I hadn't known him for long, but I wanted to get closer to him, so I joined the search. The mountain wasn't tall, but it was dense with vegetation, and it was getting dark, which made the search difficult. But we were lucky. We found Keegan soon after we started. His foot was injured, so he couldn't walk. Can you believe it? The first thing Dahlia did when she found him wasn't to comfort him but to pull me aside and tell me not to approach him so she could teach him a lesson.

We were so close to him, watching him scared and helpless. It wasn't until more than half an hour later that someone arrived, and Dahlia finally went to Keegan. At the time, I didn't understand why she treated him that way. Later, I realized she was training him. She appeared when he was most vulnerable to reinforce his dependence on her. I don't know if Mrs. Kane noticed this, but after Quentin passed away, she took Keegan to raise herself. Otherwise, with all of Dahlia's scheming, how could she raise such an outstanding son?"

She then looked at Stella and said, "If you show Keegan what it's like to be truly cared for, he'll eventually wake up from Dahlia's influence. Don't you think Dahlia fears losing control over him?"

Dahlia is insincere to everyone. She only cares about herself, whether it's her son or daughter. If Mrs. Kane hadn't lived so long, the Kane family would have been in chaos. You know, ever since Dahlia stopped attending the family gatherings, everyone's been getting along better. I wonder how she feels when she sees everyone's photos without her. It must be frustrating."

The more you learn about Dahlia, the more you realize she didn't get off easy.

"Has she been in touch with anyone recently?" Stella asked.

"The top-tier families have distanced themselves from her. I heard she's getting close to some people in the second and third tiers now. After all, she's the biological mother of the head of the Kane family. If people don't know the truth, they might still fall for her act."

Wendy categorized their social circles herself. The first tier includes aristocratic families like the Kane, Saun, Moore, and Graham families. The second tier includes rising newcomers like Kayla's father's family. The third tier includes families like the former Jewell family.

Dahlia used to dominate the first tier, but now she's dealing with people she once looked down on. It shows how adaptable she is.

"How much tea do you want? I can have my friends help pack it for you." Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Stella came back to the conversation. "Please calculate the total, and I'll transfer the money to you."

"Don't worry about it. We can settle it at the engagement party, and I'll give you a discount."

Stella smiled. "Thank you, Mrs. Musk."

Wendy replied, "Mrs. Musk sounds so much nicer than Mrs. Chapman. Why didn't I notice it before?"

As they were talking, a young man walked in and served some desserts. Stella noticed that after serving the food, he also poured tea for Wendy. His eyes lingered on Wendy until she waved him away. After he left, Stella teased, "Your new assistant is very handsome."

Wendy gave her a look. "After over 20 years of settling, don't I deserve something nice?"

Stella gave a thumbs up. "How are things with you and Erick?"

"He did something behind my back and now he's in jail. There are people who can deal with him without my involvement. He and his mother still want to divide the family property with me. It's absurd. He's not dead, and we're not divorced, yet they want to use the illegitimate child's inheritance rights to pressure me. What are they thinking?"

She sneered. "Luckily, that bastard is an adult now. Otherwise, I'd have to pay child support. When I can visit him, I'll share this good news with him right away."

"That's harsh," Stella said, then added, "If Erick gets the maximum sentence, he won't be out before he's 70. The Chapman family line can't be cut off. Who will inherit his parents' property?"

Wendy instantly understood what Stella was suggesting.

Erick's parents and relatives all knew about his illegitimate son but hid it from Wendy. They even used her inability to have a son against her. Now that Erick's in prison, they're desperate, trying to get her to pay for his release.

Since they like their grandson so much, it's only fair they raise him, right?

Wendy immediately called someone. "Rent them a better place, assign a driver, and give them whatever they need."

The woman had been in contact with Erick's parents, urging them to ask Wendy for money. Stella's words made Wendy realize-why not let them deal with it themselves? Let them fight among themselves without getting her hands dirty.

After hanging up, Wendy looked at Stella. "Jaylene got scammed when she lent money to Dahlia. That was your idea, wasn't it?"

Stella replied seriously, "I felt bad for her too. After all, it was our Saun family's money."

Wendy showed a hint of approval. "They're no match for you, but your stepmother isn't easy to deal with either."

Stella raised her eyes. "How much do you know about her?"

Wendy poured tea and said, "Not

much. I just know that to marry your

father, she took care of your

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grandmother for years, even when she was sick and difficult to deal

with. It takes a lot of patience to stick

it out with someone so hard to

please and make them like you more over time. But..."

Wendy paused. "There's someone who might know more about her."

Stella asked quickly, "Who?"

Wendy replied, "Romina Aspen."

"Romina Aspen?" Stella looked puzzled.

"You know Nicole Aspen, the popular actress? Romina is her aunt."

Stella was surprised. "Mrs. Clint?"

Wendy was also surprised. "You know Mrs. Clint?"

Although the Clint family is also a noble family, Mrs. Clint runs a section in the company so she doesn't often attend social gatherings. Wendy thought Stella didn't know her.

"We've crossed paths before. Is she familiar with Darcie?"

Chapter 2450

"They didn't know each other well, but they had some interactions in their early years. Romina, now Mrs. Clint, was an illustrator before she got married. She had an older brother who was somewhat famous in the calligraphy and painting circles back then. His name was Alijah, and he was Darcie's ex-husband. Mrs. Clint and Darcie's ex-husband knew each other, so she might know something about Darcie's past." "Alijah..." Stella repeated the name and then asked, "Jaylene is her ex-husband's child, right? Hasn't her ex-husband's family ever taken care of him?"

Wendy replied, "Even if someone wanted to take care of him, they'd need someone capable to do it. I heard her ex-husband drowned not long after they got married. His parents died early, leaving behind a younger brother and sister. The brother wasn't very bright, and after his brother died, he ran away and never came back. The sister got married, but I only know bits and pieces. You should ask Mrs. Clint for the full story." Stella said, "I didn't expect her ex-husband to be an artist."

Wendy sipped her tea and said, "Artists usually have money. Who would send their kids to study art if they didn't? Maybe Darcie was drawn to his talent? Don't be ridiculous."

If he was wealthy, why did Darcie invest so little in Caline? And why did she serve Mrs. Saun for so many years? Maybe she was attracted to his talent and looks?

But Darcie wasn't like Jaylene. Everything she did had a purpose. While all clues point to Darcie, there's no direct evidence. Darcie is careful and hasn't revealed herself openly. The identity of her accomplice is still a mystery. Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Whoever helped Darcie with such serious crimes must be someone she trusts and shares a common goal with.

What was Darcie's goal?

Was it to become Mrs. Saun or control Caline?

Maybe, but there's more to it.

It likely involves securing Jaylene's future.

If that's the case, this person must be close to Jaylene, possibly even related by blood.

Darcie's parents died a long time ago, and she has only one sister, who is married and lives far away. They aren't close. There are some distant cousins who get along with her, but that's it. Would someone take such a big risk for a distant relative? What if this person is from Darcie's ex-husband's family?

Stella's thoughts suddenly became clear.

If this person shares Darcie's goals and wants Jaylene to replace her and become part of the Saun family, then it's likely someone from Jaylene's biological father's side.

Could it be her missing uncle?

Wendy's voice interrupted Stella's thoughts. "You're almost pregnant, and you're still not planning the wedding?"

Stella snapped back to reality and smiled, teasing, "Why, are you so eager to earn my money when business is already good?"

Wendy replied, "We're friends; I wouldn't make money off you. I can even give you the venue for free if you like it here. I've noticed you're getting bigger this month, and it's getting hard to hide. Before Keegan lost his memory, people thought the marriage between the Saun and Kane families was a failure, but now that you're pregnant, things have changed. Even if you don't get married, having a child ties the Saun family to Keegan. He's competing with Chandler for power, and they might target you to weaken the Saun family. It's better to be open about it. If they have bad intentions, it'll be harder for them to act openly."

Stella asked carefully, "Mrs. Musk, have you heard something?"

Wendy said, "Recently, Cyrene has been mingling with the wives' circle, trying to find a match for her son. She's targeting daughters from aristocratic families. But Chandler has a bad reputation, and everyone knows he's a loser. Plus, with a cousin like Keegan to compete with, anyone who marries him will likely just end up as a minor branch of the Kane family. Without strong allies, Chandler will eventually lose power. He's been in Rivera for over 30 years. Do you think he's willing to hand it over to someone else? If it were me, I wouldn't make strong friends and wouldn't let others use allies to push me out."

The child is at the center of everything. Losing the child under Keegan's watch has strained the alliance, perhaps even turning them into enemies.

Stella pressed her lips together. Even without the Saun family's support, Keegan might not lose this power struggle. However, Wendy's warning made sense. The other side might act out of desperation. Rivera is valuable, and Chandler might not give it up easily. He could resort to kidnapping.

Stella took Wendy's advice to heart, discussed some details about the engagement party, and then left.

After getting in the car, she called Mrs. Clint to see if she was free. Recently, Caline had released some new products, and Stella wanted her to try them out.

Mrs. Clint had enjoyed working with Stella lately. Although Stella was young, she was just as thoughtful as Darcie. They got along well, so Mrs. Clint accepted her invitation.

Mrs. Clint came the next day. As Stella was greeting her, Darcie happened to be passing by.

Darcie seemed to have forgotten their past disagreements and warmly greeted Mrs. Clint. Knowing she was there to try out the new products, Darcie even arranged for Aubrey to assist.

"Mrs. Clint, if you have any feedback or suggestions, please share them with Aubrey. We'll make improvements promptly."

Mrs. Clint gave her a brief glance and replied lightly, "I'll tell Miss Jewell."

Darcie smiled as she watched Mrs. Clint get on the elevator.

Mrs. Clint tried out the new products

one by one and had a pleasant experience. The new line wasom e

focused on fragrances, which Mrs. Clint liked. She gave a lot of feedback, and Stella made sure her team took note of everything.

When Aubrey went to fetch the trial package gift box, Stella asked, "Mrs. Clint, do you have time later? I'd like to treat you to a meal."

Mrs. Clint sipped her tea and replied casually, "If it's just a meal, that's fine."

Her response left Stella at a loss.

Wendy had mentioned that Mrs. Clint

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co-ran the company with her husband and had a sharp mind.

Stella realized it was better to be direct with her.

She set aside her prepared excuses and spoke frankly, "I wanted to ask you about something."

Mrs. Clint lowered her eyes and continued sipping her tea, her tone still indifferent, "What is it?"

Stella leaned in and whispered, "A painter named Alijah."

Mrs. Clint paused, her hand still as she stirred her tea, then looked up at Stella.

Chapter 2451

Mrs. Clint averted her gaze, set down her cup, and said, "I don't know any painter named Alijah. Miss Jewell, you may have asked the wrong person."

She then stood up and added, "I won't be taking the trial package. I don't accept gifts without earning them. Thank you for the invitation, but I have other matters to attend to. Goodbye." With that, she grabbed her bag and turned to leave.

Stella followed to see her off, but Mrs. Clint stopped her by the elevator. "Miss Jewell, don't waste your time on me. I don't know the person you're asking about, and I have nothing more to say. Please stay here." Mrs. Clint's tone was icy, so Stella didn't push further. When Aubrey returned, she saw Mrs. Clint leaving.

In Darcie's office, Aubrey reported, "It seemed like there was some tension between them, but since Stella sent Mrs. Clint out, I don't know what they discussed. Mrs. Clint

looked upset-she even refused to take the trial items. Stella didn't let me catch up to give them to her; she sent them to the Clint family company instead."

Darcie watched the tea leaves swirl in the boiling water and said calmly, "Romina is proud and difficult to please. Even her own sister struggles to get along with her. Despite working with her for so long, our relationship remains distant. Stella thinks what she took from me is valuable, but it's not easy to deal with Romina."

"Mrs. Saun, since their relationship is still shaky, should we try to win back Mrs. Clint as a client?"

Darcie set down the teapot and looked up. "Romina's precious son is studying electronic information at A University, right? I recall you have a cousin who works in the School of Information there."

Aubrey understood and said, "I'll arrange a meeting."

Darcie nodded, "Go ahead."

Stella felt frustrated that she couldn't get any information out of Romina, and it spoiled her appetite.

She usually approached Darcie with confidence, but today she seemed deflated, which caught Keegan's attention.

"Have you given up already?" he asked.

"Who said I gave up? I just haven't figured out a solution yet!" Stella snapped, "Do you think dealing with Mrs. Clint is easy?" Keegan, as he put some food on her plate, said, "Everyone has weaknesses, and that's where you find your opening." Stella paused and looked at him suspiciously, "Do you have a plan?"

Keegan sighed, "No one's asked for my help."

Stella immediately perked up, eager to learn. "What's your idea? Tell me."

Keegan looked at her, "Call me 'hubby.'"

Stella, trying to be charming, said, "Husband, hubby, hubby~"

Keegan was taken aback. "Can't you play along a bit, so I can feel like I've conquered something?"

Stella played along, "Okay, let's do it again."

Keegan cleared his throat, "Call me hubby."

Stella pretended to hesitate, "Isn't that a bit much? Honey, you'd be mad if you knew I was calling someone else 'hubby.'"" Keegan was startled.

Stella blinked, "Do you feel like you've conquered something now?"

"What?" Keegan asked.

"The thrill of winning someone else's wife," Stella teased.

Keegan's eyes twitched as he gritted his teeth, "It's definitely a different experience!"

Stella laughed and joked with him for a bit before getting back to business. "So, what's your plan?"

Keegan replied, "The solution involves your boyfriend outside the circle."

"What boyfriend outside the circle?" Stella was confused.

Keegan smiled and said, "Let's eat first. You'll find out tomorrow."

Joe was playing video games with his friends when he got a call from Keegan.

It was a crucial moment in the game, and the phone kept buzzing. Annoyed, Joe asked his friend to check who was calling. His friend looked at the phone and saw the name "Big Liar." He asked, "It's 'Big Liar' calling-do you want to answer?"

Joe was so startled he messed up in the game and got killed by the opponent.

Frustrated, he grabbed the phone and stepped out to answer it. "What do you want? It's the middle of the night, and you're bothering me!"

Keegan calmly replied, "Didn't you say you don't stay up late, so you're not young anymore? I'm guessing you can't sleep at this hour, right? Already out of your prime?"

Joe snorted, "I'm still younger than you, big liar!"

Keegan didn't get mad but asked, "Have you finished your makeup exams? Did the results come out?"

Joe's mood lightened, and he sounded proud. "Yeah, they're over. Results aren't out yet, but I feel good about them. I should score around eighty or ninety."

Keegan said, "I heard you've been racing again recently?"

Joe responded, "The exams are over-don't I deserve some fun? This race has high stakes, and I'm aiming for the championship!"

Keegan pressed his lips together. "You wasted time on racing and failed courses you should've passed. Even if you ace the makeup exams, your GPA will only reflect the passing score of 60. Doesn't that put you at a disadvantage?"

Joe was silent for a moment before replying, "What's the point of saying that now? I already failed the courses."

Keegan shot back, "What about the

courses for the new semester? Are m

you planning to keep failing and retaking exams? If you fail too many, you won't graduate. When everyone else is going home with diplomas, will you still be stuck with nothing?"

Joe's face darkened. "Why are you nagging like my parents? I didn't do well last semester, but that doesn't mean I can't improve. College isn't high school-I can get a 60 easily." Keegan replied coolly, "If 60 is so easy, why did you fail?"

Joe gritted his teeth. "I was competing! Otherwise, I wouldn't have failed!"

Keegan asked, "Did you win the competition?"

Joe was speechless.

Keegan continued, "No, right?"

Joe insisted, "I'll win this time!" Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Keegan asked, "And then what? Will you become a professional racer?"

Joe, feeling provoked, replied, "Can't I just race because I enjoy it? What's wrong with that?"

Keegan was silent for a moment, then said, "I remember you said you liked running."

Joe frowned, "Yeah, so?"

"Let's make a bet," Keegan

suggested. "We'll run a half marathon

tomorrow. If you win, I'll help you join

the

Xp

Xingang Racing Team and

convince your parents not to stop

you from racing. But if you lose,

promise me you'll focus on your studies and stay away from street racing until you graduate. Deal?" The

Joe's eyes lit up. Joining the Xingang Racing Team had always been his dream, but his applications to the youth training team had been rejected. Keegan's offer reignited his hope.

"The Xingang Racing Team has strict standards. Can you really get me in?" Joe asked.

Keegan didn't respond immediately.

A few seconds later, Joe's phone buzzed. Someone had added him on WhatsApp. When Joe checked, he saw it was Alexis, the chairman of Anxing Automobile Trading Group and the founder of the Xingang Racing Team—someone with absolute authority over the team.

Chapter 2452

Keegan said, "I already told Alexis that if you can beat me tomorrow, he'll let you join the team."

Joe got Alexis's WhatsApp number, and the "Come on" message he received confirmed Keegan's words.

Excited, Joe immediately asked, "What time and where tomorrow?"

Keegan gave him the time and address, adding, "Make sure to load up on carbs. Twenty kilometers isn't a joke."

Joe, full of confidence, replied, "You should exercise more, old man. I'm ten years younger, so I'll definitely win this half marathon. Get ready to introduce me to the team!" Keegan chuckled, "Alright, I'll wait."

After hanging up, Joe quickly packed his things. "I'm leaving now. I've got something important tomorrow. We'll hang out another day!"

His friend's voice trailed off behind him, "Seriously? We were supposed to stay out all night, and you're ditching me?"

The next morning, Keegan got up early, took Stella to breakfast, and drove to the race location.

He wore a sporty outfit, his hair loose and casual instead of his usual slicked-back work style. Stella, initially drowsy, was struck by how handsome he looked. "Handsome, how old are you?" she teased.

Keegan smirked as he turned the steering wheel, "Sorry, I'm married with kids."

Stella smiled, "Clothes really do make the man. You change outfits, and suddenly it feels like I have a new husband."

Keegan asked, "Do you like the old one or the new one?"

Stella sweetly replied, "I like both, as long as it's you."

Looking out the window, she asked, "Where are we going, honey?"

Keegan said, "We're going to show off to your boyfriend outside the circle."

Stella was puzzled, "What boyfriend outside the circle?"

Just then, Keegan's phone rang, and Stella saw the caller ID: "Stella's boyfriend outside the circle."

Keegan calmly answered, "I'm heading out. Don't be late, Joe. Don't chicken out if you're afraid of losing."

Stella's eyes widened-Joe was the one calling?

Keegan remained unfazed, "Just don't cry if you lose."

"Tsk, wait till I'm on the team!" Joe replied.

After hanging up, Stella asked Keegan what was going on.

"Mrs. Clint's biggest headache is that her youngest son is obsessed with racing and neglects his responsibilities. If we can help him get back on track, she'll definitely be grateful."

Stella frowned, "Why race? A half marathon? He's so young, and you're... not. Are you trying to kill yourself running 20 kilometers?"

Keegan was calm, "Stella, long-distance running isn't about how fast you start. It's about consistent and steady persistence. It's not just a physical challenge, but also a test of mental strength and willpower. I might not lose."

Stella bit her lip, "You've only recovered for a few months. I'm really worried about such intense exercise."

Keegan smiled, "It's okay. I have a strong foundation. If I reach my limit, I'll stop. Don't worry."

Stella felt a little better.

The largest lakeside park in Rivera is six kilometers around, and a half marathon is three and a half laps.

Keegan had the park cleared in advance, and when Stella arrived, she saw supply stations set up every kilometer.

A casually dressed man wearing sunglasses was lounging in the sun at one of the stations. When he saw Keegan, he waved. [search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.](#)

Keegan took Stella over and introduced her, "This is Alexis Currie, President of Anxing Automobile Trading Group and founder of the Xingang Racing Team," then added, "This is my wife, Stella."

Alexis took off his sunglasses, revealing a shrewd face, and smiled, "You used to call me brother in school, and now I'm Mr. Currie?"

Keegan replied, "I had to grow up."

Stella greeted, "Hello, Brother Currie."

Alexis grinned, "My sister-in-law is sweet," then turned to Keegan, "Why are you racing young guys?"

Keegan said, "Not as old as you. My wife thinks I look like a college student."

Alexis studied him for a moment and finally said, "Your wife sure knows how to flatter."

Stella was speechless.

Joe soon arrived with two friends. He brought them to ensure Keegan wouldn't back out if he won.

Though Joe came in with high energy, he got nervous seeing Stella, and then even more so when he spotted Alexis, stumbling over his words.

Finally, Joe was convinced Keegan wasn't joking-he really had a shot at joining the Xingang Racing Team!

Alexis joked, "Kid, if you can beat him, I'll make you captain."

Stella added, "Good luck! I'll be waiting for you at the finish line!"

Joe was pumped up and ready to go.

With two idols cheering him on, how could he not give it his all? He had to win or risk losing face in front of them!

After warming up, when the starting gun went off, Joe shot out like an arrow. Being young and strong, he quickly left Keegan behind.

But Keegan kept his pace steady. He didn't speed up just because Joe did; he followed his own rhythm.

Stella watched closely with binoculars.

Alexis patted the seat next to him, "Have a seat, sister-in-law. They'll be running for at least two hours. No need to stand."

Stella sat down but kept her binoculars up.

"How far along are you?" Alexis suddenly asked, surprising Stella.

Alexis said, "Keegan already bragged about having twins."

He clicked his tongue, a bit envious, "Keegan was top of our class, and now he's top of the world for fathering twins. He's really something."

Stella stayed quiet.

Was that how you use the word "excellent"?

Stella said, "The due date is mid to late September."

Alexis sighed, "Time flies. Keegan's going to be a father, and we're getting old."

He looked at Stella again, "Why do you look so familiar?"

Stella was good at chatting with people she knew but felt awkward with strangers, especially with someone as talkative as Alexis. She

became even more socially anxious.

"I saw you at the wedding," she said, though she didn't really remember Alexis.

"No, I missed his wedding. We

haven't had many reunions lately. I

shouldn't have seen you with him. Tisk where have I seen you before?" Alexis frowned, then suddenly asked, "Were you ever a hostess at a car show?"

Stella was taken aback, "How did you know?"

Alexis slapped his thigh, "I knew it! I knew Keegan had a thing for you!"

Alexis laughed and then told Stella about an incident at an auto show.

Turns out, Keegan had spoken to the event organizer to help Stella recover most of the money she was supposed to lose. It wasn't anyone else's kindness.

Alexis said, "I remember you crying

on those steps. I was just coming down from upstairs, and Keegan was standing nearby watching you for a long time.

Later, when we went inside, he mentioned it. On the way back, I asked him if he liked you, and he said no. But now look-he helped you get your wages and ended up marrying you!"

Chapter 2453

Stella was shocked. She had talked to Keegan about this before, but he never mentioned his role in helping her. She always thought her salary was recovered because the organizers were reasonable and knew it wasn't her fault. Now, looking back, she realized how naive that was.

For such a big event, why would the organizers care about a small etiquette girl like her? They wouldn't care about right or wrong; they'd just choose the easiest way to handle the situation.

It turned out Keegan had helped her... It was him all along...

"Keegan is really smart. He had his eye on you even back then," Alexis said with a sigh, but Stella smiled, "Brother, I'm sure Keegan had no selfish motives when he helped me. He would've helped anyone in that situation."

Keegan never called her or mentioned it, and even years later, when she brought it up, he didn't take credit for it. She was confident his help was purely out of kindness.

Alexis laughed, "Selfish or not, it doesn't matter. The red string of fate between you two is as strong as steel. You're destined to be together."

Stella couldn't agree more.

If they hadn't been separated by mistake, they would've been childhood sweethearts. But even after all the twists and turns, fate still brought them together.

Meanwhile, Joe started his run strong, with Keegan nearly two kilometers behind. But in the second lap, Joe slowed down while Keegan kept a steady pace. By the end of the second lap, the gap had shrunk to less than a kilometer.

As Stella handed Keegan an energy bar, she felt a pang of concern seeing his sweaty face.

Keegan took the bar, tapped it on his palm, and bit into it as he continued running.

It wasn't even 10 a.m., but the sun was already scorching. Alexis, always one to enjoy life, had someone set up a sunshade over their heads and was lounging under it, sipping watermelon juice.

By the third lap, the distance between Joe and Keegan was just a few hundred meters.

Alexis suddenly sat up, removing his sunglasses, "Keegan is going to overtake him."

With two kilometers left, Joe's energy was almost gone. Though he loved running, he had never run 20 kilometers before, usually stopping at 10.

After passing 10 kilometers, he could barely maintain his pace. At 15 kilometers, his lungs burned with every breath, and his legs felt like they were weighed down with lead, too heavy to lift. But with Keegan still close behind, Joe pushed himself to keep going. He thought if he just kept this pace, he could win.

But he never imagined Keegan could speed up in the last two kilometers.

When Joe saw Keegan pass him, he was stunned.

He wanted to speed up too, but at this point, he could barely move forward, and he felt like giving up.

Sweat dripped from his hair, stinging his eyes, and he felt on the verge of tears.

Just then, he heard Stella's voice.

She called his name, encouraging him. He turned his head and saw Alexis driving her in a trolley, keeping pace with him. Alexis also cheered him on, "It's just the last stretch, keep going!"

Joe was surprised, and his mindset shifted. Instead of feeling like he'd already lost and should give up, he didn't want to embarrass himself in front of his idols. At the very least, he had to finish the race.

He gritted his teeth and kept running, even though his legs felt like lead.

Joe lost to Keegan by six minutes. [Search the website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

When he crossed the finish line, Keegan had already recovered a bit.

As Joe stumbled to the finish, his legs gave out, and he wanted to collapse on the ground. But Keegan helped him up, "Stand and rest. Sit down after a while."

He handed Joe a bottle of room temperature water, "Drink it slowly, in small sips."

Joe felt embarrassed. He had been upset about losing and underestimating Keegan, but now, with Keegan showing concern, he felt foolish.

He took the water from Keegan, panting, and drank quietly.

Stella handed Keegan another bottle of water and asked softly, "How are you?"

Keegan shook his head, "I'm fine."

He was tired, for sure. He hadn't run a half marathon in a long time.

He glanced at Joe, who looked defeated, like he was about to cry.

Joe had been so excited to meet his idol before, but now he was too downcast to even talk to Alexis.

"Let's go take a break and then have dinner together later."

Joe looked up, "Are you going to humiliate me just because you won?"

Keegan smiled, "I'll introduce you to Alexis."

Joe was surprised, "But I lost."

Keegan nodded, "So you can't join the team, but you can still meet him." He paused, "Or do you not want to?"

"Of course I do!" Joe quickly agreed, then, feeling a bit embarrassed, added, "I didn't expect you to be so strong at your age. I admit, you're amazing." Keegan paused, "What age?"

Joe was about to say Keegan was in

his 40s, but when he saw Stella behind Keegan frantically signaling him, he quickly changed his tune, "Brother, you look as young as me today. My friend even thought you were born in the 2000s like us."

Keegan looked pleased, "Let's go."

Even though he didn't get into the team, Joe was thrilled to meet Alexis. After dinner, they took a group photo together on the way back to school, Keegan noticed Joe smiling at the photo and asked, "Do you remember what you promised me?"

"Yes, I remember. No more of these competitions, study hard, and make progress every day." Joe hesitated, "My mom didn't ask you to talk to me like this, did she?" Keegan didn't answer but asked, "How did it feel to run a half marathon?"

Joe said, "It was tough. The further I went, the more it felt like I was dying. I wanted to give up every second, but finishing felt like an accomplishment."

Keegan smiled, "It's easy to enjoy

something, but what matters is

sticking with it for the long term!!!

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Think about whether you just like the excitement of racing, or if you truly want to succeed in it and make it a lifelong career."

Joe was taken aback. A lifelong career... He had never thought about it that way. The excitement was one thing, but it wasn't just that. He genuinely loved cars and the roar of the engines. Joe sighed, "Honestly, my parents chose my major for me. I don't like it; it's boring."

Because he didn't like it, he didn't care.

Keegan was silent for a moment, then delivered the blow, "How long does it take to change majors at your school? Or how long to get a double degree?"

Chapter 2454

Joe was at a loss for words.

Keegan looked at him, "So you don't like it, but you don't want to change it?"

Joe remained silent.

Why did it feel like he was getting a lecture from the top student back in high school? Serious, but to the point.

He opened his mouth, wanting to argue, but no words came out. After a while, he finally said, "I didn't think that far." He had only been focused on defying his family.

Keegan said, "Your life is your own. Whether you take it seriously or just go through the motions, it's still your life. Ignoring what you don't like won't make it go away. Just getting by won't solve the problem; it'll still be there."

"You go through school half-heartedly, graduate half-heartedly, then maybe you get a job or stay at home. And then what? Is that the life you want?"

Joe stared at Keegan for a long time before admitting, "No."

He didn't enjoy his major, so he didn't put in much effort, just wanting to graduate quickly. But as Keegan pointed out, what happens after graduation? Should he find a job in his field or just work at his family's company? Neither option appealed to him. He'd spent four years just getting by and gained nothing.

"I'm almost a junior now, and it feels too late to change my major," Joe said, feeling a bit defeated.

Stella chimed in, "You're only 20, you're still young. It's not too late to do anything. Don't limit yourself. Remember that student who retook the college entrance exams this year and scored high enough to pick a new school? He's two years older than you, and he wasn't afraid to start over. So why should you be?"

"I..." Joe hesitated, then sighed, "Why don't you two start a class for lost causes? The way you talk makes me feel like if I don't study hard, there's no hope in life."

Keegan smiled, "Some people can succeed without a great education, but that's rare. Most successful people didn't do poorly in school. Even ordinary people can secure a stable job through hard work in their studies. But what's really important is something you might not have heard before."

"What?" Joe and Stella were both curious.

Keegan explained, "The effort you put into your education affects the level of school you attend and the social circles you'll enter later. Once you're in society, your network is your social circle. When you need help or information, people will respond based on the value you bring, not just how well you get along with them. After all, no one does favors for free."

Joe was taken aback by Keegan's bluntness. "Do you have to be useful to make friends? Isn't that kind of relationship not genuine from the start? How can you have a real connection or shared understanding?" Keegan replied, "Life is a marathon. At each stage, you'll have different people running alongside you. Whether you keep going, stop, or change direction, you're choosing your companions. If your goals align, you'll have shared experiences, and that's where the connection comes from."

"I'm not telling you to pick friends based on their usefulness. I'm saying it's like running a marathon. It doesn't matter how fast or slow you go, the goal is the same. People with the same goals will reach the destination, even if they take different paths."

Joe was silent, impressed by how sharp Keegan's reasoning was. His family always told him to study hard and not waste time, but Keegan broke it down and explained why it was important. His major might have been chosen by others, but his life was his own. As long as he wasn't at the finish line, he could still make changes.

Keegan had a knack for dealing with young people. First Julian, now Joe Keegan easily earned their respect.

The boy who had angrily called Keegan "Uncle" before, now called him "my brother and sister-in-law" when he was dropped off at school.

He said to Keegan, "Even though I know you must have a reason for convincing me to study, I agree with what you said, so I'll follow your advice. Do you need me to help with anything?"

Keegan smiled, "Let's talk after you pass your exams this week."

Joe waved and ran into the crowd.

On the way back, Stella kept glancing at Keegan. He noticed and asked, "Is there something you want to say?"

Stella nodded and whispered, "You won't use this approach when teaching your own kids, will you?"

Keegan asked, "You don't think it's good?"

Stella said, "I know you're right, but teaching kids like this seems a bit too focused on personal gain." The

Keegan smiled, "I won't teach kids like that. Their worldview, values, and outlook on life develop as they grow. I'll have time to guide them and let them make mistakes. But Joe is already an adult. Instead of

persuading him gently, it's better to

be direct and motivate him. His

values and way of thinking are already formed. If he wants to improve, my words will help. If he doesn't want to change, then nothing

I say will make a difference." The

Stella said, "Joe was right about one thing."

Keegan: "What?"

Stella smiled, "You really should start a class for lost causes. You have a way of getting through to people." Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Keegan smiled. Back in high school, the leaders often asked him to give motivational speeches. He did it a few times but later got too busy.

He enjoyed those intense days of studying and hoped every student could make the most of their youth.

Chapter 2455

Joe's transformation was so evident that even Grace found it unbelievable.

He attended a college nearby, so he didn't live on campus. However, he rarely stayed at home either, as his parents constantly nagged him whenever they saw him playing games or driving around. Instead, he often hid out at his eldest brother's apartment.

His eldest brother, being nine years older and busy with work, spoiled him even more than their parents did, often covering for him. Grace had repeatedly urged Joe to move back to the family home, reasoning that his brother had a fiancée and that Joe, as an obvious third wheel, should show some consideration. But in truth, she wanted him close so she could keep an eye on him.

Joe was well aware of this, so whenever Grace brought it up, he pretended not to hear. But this time, without any prompting, Joe voluntarily moved back home.

Grace initially thought he must have quarreled with his brother, but a quick phone call dispelled that notion. Suspicious, she wondered if Joe had done something wrong-maybe he had damaged someone's car, or perhaps wrecked his own racing car and needed money to replace it. Could it be that he had injured someone?

The more Joe buried himself in his studies at home, the more convinced Grace became that something was amiss. Each night, she would find some excuse to walk past his room, hoping he would come clean so she wouldn't have to be too harsh on him. But three days passed, and Joe still hadn't confessed anything.

How strange! Was this about something even more serious than a car accident? How much would it cost them?

After a week, Grace couldn't take it any longer and barged into Joe's room. She found him staring at his college's academic system with a bittersweet expression on his face.

Joe had just received the results of his make-up exams. He had scored 89 in linear algebra and 83 in college physics. Although both were high marks, because they were make-up exams, his GPA would only reflect a pass. For the first time, Joe regretted not having studied harder-he could have aced those exams.

When Grace entered, she saw her son's conflicted expression. Steeling herself, she knocked on the door, though she was already inside. Joe snapped out of his thoughts, greeted her, and then dejectedly moved his

mouse.

Grace sat down on the bed, folded her hands, and asked cautiously, "Son, is there something you need to tell me?"

Joe, still downcast, replied, "Mom, my make-up exam results are out."

Grace acknowledged this absentmindedly. "How did you do?"

"Eighty-nine and eighty-three. Both passed," Joe said.

Grace nodded but couldn't shake the feeling that something was seriously wrong. Could it be that he had caused some disaster? Was he preparing to confess to a financial burden so great that it would drain their savings?

"Anything else?" Grace asked, bracing herself. "Just tell me. I can handle it, even if it means spending all our savings! If it's just money, we can earn it back. If your father objects, I'll make him leave with nothing!" For the first time, Joe felt guilty looking at his mother. Despite Grace's well-maintained appearance, her graying temples betrayed her age. Unlike his well-behaved elder brother, Joe had always been the troublemaker, the one who worried Grace from the moment he could walk.

His college entrance exam scores hadn't been great, and his parents had spent a lot of money to get him into a good school with a suitable major. But because he hadn't chosen his preferred field of study, he slacked off as a form of rebellion.

He often felt that his parents were too controlling. But compared to his friends, who had to report every detail of their lives to their families, Joe realized how indulgent his parents actually were. They disapproved of his racing but never went so far as to destroy his equipment. Even when they threatened to stop funding his hobby, a few well-placed "Mom"s and some playful begging always softened their stance.

He couldn't keep disappointing her, could he? Could he finally make her proud?

"Mom," Joe began, "I want to pursue a double degree. I still love racing, and I know I'm not that great at it, but I want to study something related to cars. I promise I won't fail in my current major anymore. Can you let me pursue it?"

Grace was taken aback. "That's it? Nothing more?"

Joe blinked. "Uh, yes? What did you think it was?" [search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.](#)

"Didn't hit anyone? Or crash a car?" Grace asked, still skeptical.

Joe shook his head, bewildered.

After confirming that Joe hadn't caused any trouble, Grace felt relieved but then studied him closely. "Son, are you feeling okay?"

Why was he suddenly so serious about studying? This was completely out of character. She reached out to feel his forehead.

Joe, clearly annoyed, pushed her

hand away and said earnestly, "Mom, I'm serious. I know you and Dad

chose this major for me because it's good for my future. future. Xwas immature

before and always rebelled against you. But someone recently told me that the skills I learn are for myself, not just to please you. If I don't like something, I can change it or add to it. No one's stopping me. I was being childish, but now I realize how foolish I was."

For the first time, Grace seriously reconsidered Joe. Although the family had indulged him, Joe was not a bad person. Apart from his love for ehad

cars, he had never been a source of major concern. At most, he spent a little too much money, but the family could afford it. Her real worry was that Joe would never grow up, that he would remain a child forever.

Now, Joe was speaking about his future with a maturity she hadn't expected. Grace's eyes filled with

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tears. After years of praying to the gods for Joe to find his way, it

seemed her prayers had finally been answered.

Chapter 2456

Grace said, "Son, as long as you want to study, I will support you, whether it's for a double degree or even ten degrees! I'm so happy right now. If you're joking, please tell me, or else I'll take you seriously!" Joe smiled and hugged Grace's arm. "Mom, can't I truly want to be like my brother and make you proud?"

Grace rubbed his yellow hair affectionately. "I used to be proud of you, but after you dyed your hair yellow, not so much."

Joe was speechless. "Then I'll dye it back."

Grace immediately handed him a card from the hair salon. "Go quickly. It closes at midnight, so there's still time today."

Joe was delighted, realizing his mother had been unhappy with his yellow hair for a long time. "Alright, alright, I'll go now."

As she handed him his coat and sent him out, Grace asked, "Sweetheart, earlier you mentioned that someone talked to you, and that's what made you change your mind. Was it your teacher?"

"Not my teacher, but he does like to teach others," Joe replied. Though, in reality, he was just a crafty liar-an extremely capable one.

Grace was curious. "He just said a few words, and you suddenly saw the light? I've talked to you countless times, and nothing changed."

Joe explained, "He challenged me to run 20 kilometers, saying if I won, he'd let me join his team. He's ten years older than me, and at that moment, I thought, 'How could I lose to an old-timer?' But I did lose."

Joe scratched his head, embarrassed. "He wasn't much faster than me, but I underestimated him. He's incredibly strong-no, terrifyingly strong! I feel like there's nothing he can't do. He wasn't really trying to recruit me; he just wanted to preach to me, to get me to focus on my studies. At first, I thought you'd hired him to talk to me, but then I realized he's wealthier than our family, so that couldn't be it."

Grace was silent. Joe's words unintentionally hurt her, but she had to admit, there weren't many people in Rivera who could out-earn the Esper family. She thought hard and suddenly remembered Trevor. Stella had just visited, and right afterward, Joe was persuaded to return to school. Connecting the dots, Grace felt it was likely Trevor who'd intervened.

Grace adjusted her coat and didn't respond directly. She only told Joe to come home quickly and not stay out too late.

Joe, young and carefree, didn't notice Grace's shift in mood. He cheerfully agreed and drove off.

Not long after, his racing friend called. "Where are you? It's late, and the race starts in a few hours. Why aren't you here for a final test run?"

Joe felt a pang of nostalgia, but when he remembered his promise to Keegan and the hope he'd given his mother, he resisted. "I'm not going tonight. You guys have fun."

His friend was shocked. "Are you serious? We've been planning this for ages, and now you're backing out? What's going on? Did your family shut you down? Where are you? I can get you out if needed." "No," Joe replied softly, "I just don't see the point anymore. I've wasted a lot of time and want to catch up on my studies."

His friend laughed. "You? Studying hard? You failed three courses last semester, and now you want to buckle down? Your family's loaded-what's the point? Quit joking and get over here. There's a million-dollar prize. We've got it all planned out. Don't let me down now."

Joe frowned, feeling uneasy. This race wasn't an official event-it was a high-stakes, illegal race designed for adrenaline junkies. The prize money was tempting, but it was never about the money for Joe. His family had plenty. He joined the race for the thrill, hoping to meet a former F1 driver rumored to be the organizer.

But his friend's dismissive words struck a nerve. Joe had thought they shared a passion for racing, but now he saw some of them were in it solely for the money.

Joe realized their motivations differed from his own. For some, racing was a dangerous shortcut to wealth. He'd heard stories about illegal races where drivers risked their lives, betting everything for a big payout. He was shocked at first, but his teammates spoke of it casually, as if it were normal.

Suddenly, Joe understood what Keegan meant about goals and motivations. He'd chosen the wrong path and the wrong friends. Their dreams weren't the same.

With newfound clarity, Joe said, "I'm serious. I won't be participating in these races anymore. You should avoid them too-one wrong move, and it's all over."

His friend was stunned. "What? Who got into your head?"

Joe calmly replied, "I've made up my mind."

His friend cursed under his breath. "You're unbelievable. Who brainwashed you to pull this at the last minute?"

Joe cut him off. "If there's nothing else, I'm hanging up." Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Hang up? Hell no! If you don't race, at least come to cheer us on. After all the practice we've done together, don't just ditch us now."

Joe hesitated. The race started at 2 AM, and he had promised his mom he'd come home after dyeing his hair.

"Fine," his friend snapped. "If you don't show up tonight, don't expect me to know you anymore. What a waste of time it was knowing you!"

The harsh words stung Joe, and he sighed, reluctantly giving in "Alright, I'll come overVater, but only to celebrate if we win."

Chapter 2457

It took Joe over an hour to dye his hair. After finishing, he snapped a few selfies in front of the mirror and sent one to Keegan with the caption, "Starting fresh."

Keegan looked at the photo of Joe with his new black hair, who looked both obedient and adorable, and couldn't help but laugh.

Stella heard him laugh, put down her book, and asked, "What's so funny?"

Keegan showed her Joe's selfie. [SEAR*ch the website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Stella laughed, "I always wondered why he dyed his hair yellow, shaved his eyebrows, and wore an eyebrow stud. Turns out, he has a baby face! He looks even younger than Julian."

Keegan chuckled, "His father looks just like this. He's in his fifties but looks like he's in his thirties. When Vermont first met him, he called him 'brother' and got scolded for being disrespectful. Then, a hotel supervisor- only in her early twenties-also called him 'brother,' and he stayed silent."

Stella couldn't stop laughing as she imagined the scene. She concluded, "People with baby faces are really lucky. Even in their fifties, they can still charm the young. Why didn't I get a face like that?"

Keegan paused and looked at her, "Whose heart are you planning to steal?"

Stella smiled mischievously, "Mr. Kane, will you still get jealous after all these years?"

Keegan calmly replied, "Not at all."

Stella was curious, "Really? Not even a little?"

Keegan confidently answered, "No."

Stella pressed on, "Is that because love turns into family affection over time, so you don't care anymore?"

Keegan responded, "I'm not sure about that, but I know one thing for certain."

Stella asked, "What's that?"

Keegan said seriously, "As long as this kingdom stands, you will always be my concubine."

Stella was momentarily stunned but burst out laughing the next second. She hugged Keegan and kissed him repeatedly, "You're so adorable when you're serious but a little bit cheeky." Keegan gave her a calm look, "That's the confidence of a main wife."

Stella gave him a thumbs up, "Exactly, how else could I be the main wife?"

She then nestled in his arms and whispered, "I've come up with a nickname for our kids."

Keegan was curious, "What is it?"

Stella's eyes lit up as she whispered, "Bring in wealth and treasure."

Keegan was speechless. He covered her eyes with his hand, "Be good and go to sleep. Naming is too complicated for you."

Stella playfully kicked him.

The next morning, Stella woke up to find Keegan already gone.

She yawned and asked Maria, their housekeeper, "Maria, when did Keegan leave?"

Maria replied while serving soup, "Around six in the morning. Sir woke up shortly after you did. He didn't go for his usual run, just changed quickly and left. It seemed urgent."

Stella paused, then quickly took out her phone to call Keegan, but his line was busy. She tried calling Aldor next.

Aldor was preparing for his engagement, and Keegan had given him some time off, so he didn't know where Keegan had gone.

"Maria said he left in a hurry at six in the morning. I'm worried something happened," Stella sighed. "I'll ask someone else."

"Wait a minute, ma'am," Aldor suddenly stopped her and asked in a low voice, "Did you watch the news this morning?"

Stella replied, "Not yet. What happened?"

Aldor explained, "Last night, a group of young people were racing on City New Road, and it resulted in a major traffic accident-three dead, fifteen injured. There's a construction project from our branch company on that road. The news broke early this morning, around five or six. I wonder if Mr. Kane left in a hurry because of this?"

"City New Road?" Stella was initially stunned, then suddenly alarmed. Wasn't that the race Joe had mentioned wanting to join? Could he have participated after all?

Stella immediately tried to contact Joe, but he didn't answer.

Though Stella wasn't close to the Esper family and had only contacted Joe to ask about Grace, she felt genuinely upset at the possibility of something bad happening to him. That reckless kid! He had promised Keegan he wouldn't participate in dangerous races, so why didn't he listen?

With no answer from Joe, Stella decided to call Leighton to ask Nicole, since she was Leighton's cousin and might know more than they did.

Leighton informed her, "Joe was injured and is still unconscious. Nicole just boarded a plane to rush back, so she hasn't seen him yet and probably doesn't know much either."

The worst-case scenario had come true-Joe was really involved.

Keegan likely left in such a rush because of this incident.

Just as Stella left a message for Keegan asking him to call back when he could, a hot topic exploded on social media.

A marketing account posted that

among the injured was Joe Esper, the

second son of a local entrepreneur.

The account detailed how Joe's

family had started in the printing

business, later transitioned to

toiletries, and became quite wealthy.

Rather than focusing on the accident itself, the account highlighted Joe's identity, essentially naming the Esper family.

If Joe were just an ordinary person, this wouldn't have caused much of a stir. But he was a wealthy second-generation heir.

Words like "rich," "racing," and "accident" combined to paint a picture of spoiled rich kids recklessly racing at night, hitting innocent passersby, and causing a devastating accident.

In these tough economic times, with hostility running high online, the marketing account's exposure of Joe's identity quickly pushed him into the public spotlight.

"He had money to burn, so he deserves it!"

"Why wasn't he one of the three who died?"

"Investigate this thoroughly! If he's into illegal racing, he's probably into gambling and drugs too!"

"Joe was a classmate of my friend. I

heard he was a slacker who often

m

skipped classes. He only got into

university because of his family's money and connections, and he failed three courses in one semester."

"True, I can confirm that. He was in

my department. He failed three

courses but somehow passed the

make-up

com

-up exams with top scores! It's known that the make-up exams at S University are tougher than the originals. If he had the ability to score

so well, why did he fail in the first

place? We all think his grades were bought."

"It's good to be rich. While we're struggling to make it, these rich kids are cruising down easy street, using money to clear their path and shoving us off the bridge."

Chapter 2458

"I think the priority should be finding out what caused the accident, not digging up people's information. Are the marketing accounts just following a trend?"

"I agree. Such a major accident can't be the fault of just one person. Shouldn't we focus on the event organizers?"

"Illegal racing on a road where speeding is banned caused this accident. What more is there to say? Those in charge aren't just the water army hired by Esper's family, right?"

"Didn't Joe participate? Is he innocent? The real victim here is the passerby who was killed. It's ridiculous that some people are feeling sorry for these scumbags instead of seeking justice for the innocent victim." Joe's personal information was exposed and widely shared online. Some even dug up his college entrance exam scores, questioning how he got into S University when his scores didn't meet the admission requirements.

This major traffic accident has turned into an attack on one person, with public opinion being manipulated. Something feels off here. The focus shouldn't be on Joe. Either someone is trying to shift the blame onto him, or they're using this to go after the Esper family.

Stella contacted Vermont to investigate. He responded, "This accident isn't as simple as it seems. Illegal racing is just part of it. The real issue is that someone was driving under the influence of drugs, causing the tragedy. The internet is blaming Joe to cover for that person. You and Aurora should stay out of it."

Stella was shocked, "Who is that person?"

Vermont replied, "Don't ask."

Stella thought for a moment and guessed, "Ricky?"

Vermont was speechless, thinking, "You really can't hide anything from someone this sharp."

Stella was outraged, "People died in this accident! And now they're trying to frame Joe to divert attention? Is there no justice?"

Vermont sighed, "When the accident happened, Ricky was taken away immediately. His name isn't even on the list of those involved. What's worse, Joe is unconscious, and his teammates told the police he was the one driving. They also found alcohol in Joe's blood, so now the police think he caused the accident by drunk driving."

If the drunk driving claim sticks, Joe is doomed, no matter the real cause of the accident.

Stella then asked, "Have you contacted Marshall recently?"

Vermont's guard went up, "What are you planning?"

"Nothing serious," Stella replied casually. "But the Graham and Esper families don't get along, right? With this dirt on Ricky, I'm sure attorney Moore would be interested."

Vermont sighed, "Why do you always make me do the dirty work?"

Stella teased, "I could do it, but Keegan would get jealous. He still minds that I went skydiving with Marshall when he disappeared. How about this: I'll tell him, and when Keegan finds out, you can say it was your idea, and that I, being pregnant and all, was just looking for help."

Vermont rolled his eyes, "He gets jealous, and I take the blame. You're the queen of blame-shifting."

Stella laughed, "It's for family harmony. You don't want your parents fighting before their grandchild is born, do you?"

Vermont grumbled, "You're heartless. Don't you feel guilty using Marshall like this, even if he does have feelings for you?"

Stella's tone turned cold, "He manipulated me to look like Willow just to annoy Keegan. That's not love. At most, we're even now. Are you going to do it or not?"

Vermont realized he had struck a nerve and quickly agreed, "Fine, I'll do it. But I can't guarantee Marshall will take action."

Stella replied confidently, "He will."

Marshall, who had taken on the investigation into Luanna's case, would not let an opportunity like this slip by.

Vermont called Marshall, starting with small talk before bringing up the drag racing accident. "It's tragic. Three dead, fifteen injured-all young people in their twenties. Joe could've done anything else at his age, but he chose racing."

Marshall, busy flipping through documents, replied, "Since when do you care so much about social news?"

"I just saw it on the news. It hit close to home since Joe was involved."

Marshall brushed it off, "I skimmed the news but didn't look closely."

Vermont pressed on, "Well, there's more to the story than meets the eye. Let me tell you the content is on

Marshall cut him off, "I'm busy right now. We'll talk later."

Vermont insisted, "But it's really urgent, just give me two minutes."

Marshall was about to refuse when Vermont added, "Stella told me about this, I was shocked and thought you'd want to know."

Marshall paused, "Stella told you?"

"Yes, she said Joe is being framed to cover for Ricky, who's a drug addict. The Graham family putted Ricky out, and now they want Joe to take the blame."

Marshall was silent for a long time before finally replying, "I know."

"Well, it's good you're aware. Pretty shady, right?"

Marshall responded faintly, with a hint of sadness, "Tell Stella I said hi."

Vermont was taken aback, but before he could reply, Marshall had already hung up. Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.