

Love Me Or Leave Me

#Chapter 131 - Read Love Me Or Leave Me Chapter 131

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The Edwards family found themselves in a very awkward situation.

Michael had always felt that Rebecca belonged to the Edwards family, believing that a few bunches of flowers from Theodore could easily bring her back, so he never paid much attention to Rebecca and Theodore's divorce.

Over the past few months, Michael had been boasting to his friends that Becky, whose real name was Rebecca, was his daughter-in-law and had given birth to a pair of twins.

Many people believed Michael, and they sought to please him, actively cooperating with the Edwards family, leading to the signing of several contracts and the Edwards family gaining numerous benefits.

However, only a few keen observers noticed that after Charlie publicly acknowledged Becky online, the Carter family did not become closer to the Edwards family. In fact, the head of the Carter family, Patrick, was discreetly taking actions against the Edwards family. Thus, they remained aloof from Michael's boasts about Becky being his daughter-in-law.

Of course, Michael was dismissive of those who maintained a cautious attitude. He firmly believed that Theodore and Rebecca were only temporarily separated. After all, not long ago, it was through special means that he had pressured Theodore into agreeing to the divorce. Theodore and Rebecca were originally a loving couple.

Now he strongly supported their reunion. He thought that with no impediments between Theodore and Rebecca; it was only natural for them to be together. Currently, Rebecca might harbor some

resentment due to the divorce. However, Michael was certain that once some time passed and Rebecca's heart softened, Theodore would quickly win her back.

Most importantly, Rebecca had already had two children with Theodore. Michael believed that, considering the kids, Rebecca would definitely return.

Understanding Rebecca's character, he was convinced that she wouldn't be so cruel as to deprive her children of their father.

After reuniting with their precious daughter, the Carter family prepared a reunion banquet.

Many families received invitations from the Carter family, including some smaller

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clans who usually only had business dealings with them. However, the Mitchell family and the Edwards family did not receive anything. They even learned about the Carter family's reunion banquet from other business acquaintances, which seemed absurd, even embarrassing.

The Mitchell family didn't dare to let others know that the Carter family hadn't sent them an invitation.

Michael's expression soured as he pondered his son and his daughter-in-law's petty disagreements. He was dissatisfied that they let emotions cloud such a crucial matter. With such an important banquet approaching, the Edwards family didn't receive an invitation, leading Michael to worry that people might look down on the Edwards family in the future.

Michael, feeling unsettled, quickly called Theodore upon returning home, inquiring about the invitation. Though Theodore was irritated seeing Michael's call, he managed to compose himself and answer the phone.

"Dad," Theodore said, restraining his temper.

Hearing his son's voice, Michael didn't soften his tone. Annoyed, he said, "Theodore, I've heard that the Carter family is preparing a reunion banquet for Rebecca. Why haven't they sent us an invitation?"

"You two quarreling at home occasionally is okay, but you must distinguish between major issues. If the Carter family doesn't send us an invitation, others are sure to suspect discord between our families, Michael complained, his tone even carrying a hint of blame on Rebecca for being immature.

Theodore, taken aback, learned about the Carter family's plans to host a reunion banquet for Rebecca through this conversation. The Edwards family had to attend this event. Theodore, contemplating, simply replied, "Okay."

Impatiently, Michael urged, "Remind her. Women can be a bit temperamental, but she mustn't push the boundaries too far, Maintain some dignity..."

His reprimands flowed out naturally, and midway, Michael realized that the Mitchell family was no longer Rebecca's sole support. Her true family was the Carter family, a more influential one than the Edwards family.

Quick to correct himself, Michael added, "Forget it. Don't upset her. Remember, women tend to be more assertive if they are from powerful families: Come up with a plan, appease her, and make sure that invitation arrives promptly. We can't

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have any misconceptions between our families."

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Theodore felt a sense of dismay about Rebecca completely ignoring him recently. However, he understood the importance of the invitation and agreed, "Alright."

"By the way, have you sorted things out with Jenny? Keep her happy, and don't offend the Smith family," Michael, at the end of the call, couldn't help but give his son some advice.

Theodore nodded in response. "Don't worry; it's settled."

Having explained everything to Jenny, even though she was disappointed, she behaved herself and acted very considerate, saying that she could understand Theodore's feelings.

Thinking of Jenny, Theodore suddenly thought of Rebecca. He found himself comparing Rebecca and Jenny, and then he smiled bitterly.

He couldn't help but wonder why Rebecca couldn't be as understanding and considerate as Jenny. After all, he had already clarified things, addressing past misunderstandings. Theodore was puzzled as to why Rebecca still harbored grudges, even after his apologies.

The sound of knocking came from behind. Theodore turned to look at the door, pondered for a moment, and then opened it.

Jenny stood in the doorway, looking at him happily. "Theodore, are you free tonight? I want to go outside for sightseeing!"

"It's my first time in Aotori, and I haven't seen Aotori at night. I've only seen it on TV before, and it looks so beautiful at night!" Jenny expressed her excitement, her eyes sparkling.

"I..." Theodore hesitated.

Jenny grabbed his hand and started walking towards the door. She said, "Let's go. Let's go outside and unwind. Maybe you'll feel better after a walk."

In the end, Theodore didn't refuse her. He closed the door and left the hotel with Jenny.

Meanwhile, after much deliberation, Gary finally picked up his phone and dialed Rebecca's number.

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Gary was well aware of the strained relationship between Rebecca and him, but this time, he couldn't resist trying his luck. The allure of the Carter family was too strong. If the Mitchell family could establish a connection with them, even if they were just slightly supported by the Carter family, it could elevate their future prospects.

At the Aotori shooting base, Stacey's phone suddenly rang. Looking at the caller ID, she was surprised to see it was Gary. After much hesitation, Stacey finally swiped the screen gently and answered the call.

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"Rebecca?" Gary hesitantly asked as the call connected.

Stacey paused before inquiring. "Why are you calling?"

Hearing her voice, Gary also paused. After a silence, Gary spoke up, "Rebecca, I heard that you are a daughter of the Carter family. Are they planning a reunion banquet for you?"

Stacey opened her mouth to respond, but no words came out in the end.

Gary also felt awkward. But thinking of his company, he eventually revealed his purpose. "Rebecca, no matter what, it was the Mitchell family that raised you. Could you provide us with an invitation to the Carter family's banquet?"

Upon hearing that the Mitchell family wanted an invitation to the Carter family's banquet, Stacey felt a sharp pang in her heart, almost as if ants were biting at her.

"Will you call me if I'm not the Carter family's daughter?" Stacey asked, masking her pain.

This question left Gary speechless,,

"Rebecca, even if you don't care about us, could you please, for the sake of your aunt, give the Mitchell family a chance?" Gary cautiously asked.

Stacey opened her mouth. The refusal at the tip of her tongue, but she didn't know how to say it.

"I need to consult my mom about this. I can't decide on my own," Stacey cautiously stated after much deliberation. She didn't want to agree, but she didn't know how to refuse either. She feared

rejecting the request would upset Cynthia.

Gary breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing her response and quickly agreed, "Okay."

The call wasn't lengthy, but after it ended, Stacey was left feeling uneasy. She never expected her foster father to call her, especially in such a subservient and cautious manner.

Through her upbringing, Stacey had limited communication with her foster father, Gary. Most of the time, Janet always found ways to bully her, while her foster mother, Karen, often criticized and belittled her to protect Janet. Gary

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mostly remained silent in the face of these situations. Stacey knew that his silence was a form of complicity, allowing Janet and Karen to mistreat her.

Now, seeing Gary's submissive demeanor, along with his mention of Cynthia, Stacey found it difficult to refuse his request directly.

Carrying on with her filming, Stacey eventually called Cynthia in the evening.

In truth, she had already sent an invitation for the reunion banquet to Cynthia, along with her new husband Xavier, but had omitted inviting other members of the Mitchell family. Stacey had no desire to maintain any connection with the Mitchell family anymore.

Cynthia was delighted to receive Stacey's call, but after a brief chat, she understood the purpose behind Rebecca, or rather Stacey, making the call.

A few days ago, when Stacey sent the invitation to Cynthia, she had shared her story of acknowledging her connection to the Carter family and changing her name with Cynthia's support and joy in learning about it.

During their video call, Cynthia, looking at her non-biological niece, tenderly said, "I'm fine, Rebecca. Let's forget about it. I'll call you Becky from now on. The past is in the past. Just focus on being Stagey, or being Becky in the future. You have no obligation to the Mitchell family. If you don't want to deal with them anymore, then don't."

Stacey hesitated. "Cynthia, will this make you uncomfortable?"

Cynthia smiled. "Don't overthink it. I don't represent the Mitchell family. Your relationship with them, good or bad, has nothing to do with me, and certainly doesn't affect our bond."

If Cynthia were only in her twenties, she might have defended the Mitchell family. But now, being older and having lived most of her life, she deeply understood that since the day she got married, she was no longer a part of the Mitchell family.

Her ex-husband Flynn cheated on her, and even abused her, yet the Mitchell family never protected her. Instead, they advised her to endure it because Flynn's company had significant business ties with the Mitchell Group, bringing immense benefits to the family. If she divorced Flynn, the Mitchell Group would incur significant losses.

The Mitchell family asked her to endure for the sake of the Mitchell Group and

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their interests. Trusting them naively at that time, she didn't want to burden her birth family or affect the Mitchell Group, so she endured silently. Subsequently, she suffered from depression, fell ill, and at no point did the Mitchell family. comfort or care for her.

She remembered the medical bills of forty thousand dollars. Janet could easily. spend tens of thousands on a dress or a bag, and the sofa in the Mitchell family's living room was valued at 120 thousand dollars each. Yet, Cynthia's surgery required only forty thousand dollars, and not a single person from the Mitchell family voluntarily stepped up to offer her that amount. They didn't even tell her to do the surgery.

Only the seemingly clueless Rebecca, who had no blood ties to the Mitchell family, used her marriage to cover the forty thousand-dollar expense for her surgery, urging her to live well, because only by staying alive, there is hope.

Since that time, she understood. In reality, she had lost her birth family long ago, leaving her all alone.

Sacrificing herself for the benefit of the Mitchell family and enduring Flynn all along was just plain foolish. She came to her senses, deciding not to consult with the Mitchell family, and instead divorcing Flynn directly before seeking medical treatment abroad.

During her treatment overseas, Rebecca frequently called to check on her. When others from the Mitchell family called, they only questioned her about Flynn's divorce. They accused her of playing the victim, saying that Flynn suddenly terminated many partnerships without warning, causing significant losses to the Mitchell family. They even persuaded her to return and remarry Flynn for the sake of the Mitchell family.

Stacey attentively observed Cynthia's expressions. Noticing the genuine concern in Cynthia's eyes, Stacey knew that she cared about her and didn't care if the Mitchell family would be affected. However, Stacey was still somewhat uncertain. "I..."

"Becky, I'm pleased that you rediscovered your biological parents and realized how much your family truly loves you," Cynthia interrupted Stacey, speaking earnestly.

As Cynthia spoke, her eyes welled up with tears. She briefly lowered her head, took out a tissue to wipe them away. When she raised her head again, a smile graced her face. "Becky, in the past, you reminded me to live well, because only by staying alive is there hope. Now, I have some advice for you."

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"You must cherish everything you have, treasure those who genuinely love you, and not waste a single moment on those who do not. It's not worth it," she said.

Cynthia's words seemed to strike a chord within Stacey, dispelling her doubts, worries, and unease. She knew that Cynthia spoke from the heart.

"Alright, I understand. Thank you, Cynthia!" Stacey beamed, looking at Cynthia with happiness. She felt incredibly fortunate to have such a wonderful aunt like Cynthia.

"Silly girl." Cynthia gazed at Stacey with a mixture of envy and happiness.

She envied Stacey for having a good fate and being able to reunite with her families, who loved her deeply. But she was also happy to see Rebecca, after enduring so many hardships, being loved by

so many families once again and living a happy life..

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After talking to Cynthia, the heavy burden that was weighing on Stacey's heart finally lifted. She felt a sense of relief and also deep sympathy for Cynthia's past struggles.

Witnessing Cynthia's experiences, Stacey learned that a girl's home isn't determined by marriage alone. What truly matters are the family members who genuinely care for her—her parents and siblings. With loved ones who treasure her, she'll always have a home.

If a girl's parents and siblings don't show genuine love, she might indeed feel like she lacks a home after getting married, and a family like that won't mean anything to her. But Stacey also understood that it's not worth sacrificing oneself for family members who don't appreciate her, similar to how Cynthia was constantly manipulated for her natal family's benefit.

With that in mind, Stacey left her room, a smile gently playing on her lips. She felt lucky to have such loving parents and three protective brothers.

"Dad, mom," Stacey called out to her parents. Patrick had come to the Aotori Shooting Base a few days ago because he missed his daughter and wife dearly,

"What's up?" Patrick and Debra turned to her simultaneously, their gazes affectionate.

Stacey approached, taking a seat on the sofa opposite Debra, and said, "This morning, my foster father, Gary called me. He wants us to send an invitation to the Mitchell family."

The expressions on Patrick and Debra's faces changed almost simultaneously, both looking angry

After a moment of hesitation, Patrick asked, "Becky, did you agree?"

Shaking her head, Stacey replied, "No, I said I needed to discuss it with mom first."

Debra breathed a sigh of relief, proud of her daughter for not being manipulated by the Mitchell family.

"We don't need to bother with them," Debra immediately spoke up.

'I hadn't even settled the score for all the years the Mitchell family had mistreated my daughter, and now they dare to try to use the Carter family? They don't have an ounce of self-awareness Debra thought.

Stacey nodded with a smile, "Gary mentioned Cynthia and asked me to give the Mitchell family a chance for Cynthia's sake." Patrick and Debra's faces changed once again. They exchanged silent glances, both thinking. This is not good.

Stacey continued, "But I just spoke with Cynthia on the phone, she told me not to bother about them. Cynthia said she and the Mitchell family are different and that I could do as I please."

Patrick and Debra looked at each other once more, their expressions turning cheerful.

“Cynthia is really kind.” Patrick said with a smile.

“Absolutely. Do you have her number? Can I befriend her?” Debra asked eagerly, wanting to know more.

Stacey was surprised. “You want to befriend Cynthia?”

Debra nodded. “Yes. Cynthia is amazing. We should thank her properly.”

Stacey smiled. “Sure”

“I’ll let Cynthia know,” Stacey said as she checked her phone.

Debra nodded.

Stacey quickly opened WhatsApp, found Cynthia’s chat box, and messaged her, sharing that Debra wanted to be her friend.

Meanwhile, Cynthia suddenly received a message from Stacey, Her eyes gleaming as she quickly replied.

After getting approval from Cynthia, Stacey shared Cynthia’s number with Debra. Upon receiving the number, Debra immediately added Cynthia on WhatsApp.

Stacey didn’t know what Debra and Cynthia said after becoming friends. She was busy teaching Lillian and Kevin, helping

the two kids learn to talk.

Lillian and Kevin both loved playing with Stacey. They eagerly listened to her every word, mimicking her speech. As they became more eloquent, Stacey felt proud.

At nine in the evening. Stacey put down her parenting book and took the two little ones for a bath. She didn’t leave everything to the nanny. Occasionally, she found time to personally care for the children, who both enjoyed bathing with her.

After giving both kids a pleasant bath, Stacey took her own shower and then cuddled with the children to sleep. Before they dozed off, just like before, she brought out a storybook to read to them. Lillian and Kevin adored listening to stories, their eyes sparkling with interest as they paid close attention.

They’d always been lulled to sleep by stories. No matter how captivating the tale was, they eventually succumbed to drowsiness. Their adorable little eyes slowly closed as they drifted off to sleep.

Seeing the babies fast asleep, Stacey's voice trailed off softly. She carefully placed the storybook on the bedside table and then turned to tenderly tuck both kids in. Gently kissing their foreheads, she softly whispered. "Goodnight, my darlings."

Stacey switched off the light, closed her eyes, and drifted off to sleep. When she woke up again, a new day had begun. After getting ready, she was all set to head to the set for filming.

Lillian and Kevin were also up, but Stacey was in a rush and had to leave the caretaking to the nanny.

Hastily finishing breakfast, she set off for the set. Rushing into the filming location, Stacey was taken aback to find Theodore there. She furrowed her brows and simply walked past him towards the set.

"Rebecca!" Theodore rushed over and grabbed her arm.

Stacey turned to look at him.

Taking a deep breath, Theodore earnestly said, "I heard that the Carter family is throwing a reunion banquet for you?"

Stacey hadn't expected him to bring this up. She nodded. "Yes, but that's none of your concern."

Seeing her cold demeanor, Theodore felt a pang in his heart,

"What should I do to make you forgive me?" he asked earnestly

Stacey chuckled, gazed up at the sky for a moment, then turned to Theodore and said. "That's never going to happen. The past Rebecca is dead. Standing in front of you now is Stacey Carter

"Rebecca used to be your wife, the foolish woman who loved you dearly. But Stacey Carter isn't her. Stacey hasn't met you, hasn't loved you, and has no connection to you." Staring into Theodore's eyes, Stacey said those words.

Theodore took a step forward anxiously. Reacting instinctively, Stacey performed a sweeping move, her fighting skills kicking in. Caught off guard, Theodore was tripped, and he stumbled forward.

"Be careful!" A passerby suddenly appeared, catching Theodore before he fell

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Theodore regained his balance, his face changing color, his heart beating rapidly. He looked up at Rebecca, or rather, Stacey Carter, feeling uncertain and shocked.

Stacey was also startled. Recently, Debra had enrolled her and Charlie in a boxing class. Apart from acting, she and Charlie had been learning boxing. The move just now was instinctive when she saw Theodore running towards her. She didn't expect that it would actually manage to knock Theodore down.

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After Rebecca had reconciled with the Carter family, she gradually assimilated into their ways, becoming virtually indistinguishable from them in demeanor and action. During this time, Theodore reflected on the numerous ordeals he had endured recently, like being subjected to spitting and physical assaults – behaviors typically associated with the Carter family, which Rebecca had now adopted. Deep inside, Theodore harbored resentment. Despite his past missteps, he had repeatedly sought Rebecca's forgiveness with genuine humility, yet, he couldn't help but wonder, what more could Rebecca possibly want from him?

The strain was evident on Theodore's visage, his expression growing increasingly troubled as if a tempest was about to erupt around him. Stacey sensed the ominous shift in Theodore's presence, her heartbeat quickening. She clenched her fists, her body tensing up as she prepared for whatever was to come.

In a moment of resolve, Theodore directed. "Send a copy of the Carter family's invitation letter to the Edwards family!" His voice carried a deep, resonant tone. If Rebecca truly intended to reconcile, she would understand the significance of this gesture. In their private moments, anything was permissible, but publicly, he could not afford to become the subject of ridicule. Upon hearing this, Stacey turned and departed without a word.

"Rebecca Theodore exclaimed in frustration, "What in the world do you want from me?"

"We're divorced, remember?" Stacey replied succinctly.

Theodore's response was tinged with sarcasm as he replied, "There's a limit to your playing hard to get, Rebecca. Don't overdo it."

A smile played on Stacey's lips as she queried, "Playing hard to get?" She locked eyes with Theodore, her gaze piercing as she challenged, "Mr. Edwards, don't you think you're being overconfident?"

Their eyes met, and Theodore attempted to decipher Rebecca's thoughts, but all he found was an unwavering resolve that he couldn't penetrate. After a prolonged silence, he wearily conceded, "Rebecca, I'll give you three more days. If you reconsider within

that time, bring the invitation to the. You know how chaotic things are with the Edwards family right now, and remember, it was the Carter family who threw everything into disarray. Surely, any grievances from the past should be settled by now, right?”

“I can’t waste any more time on this. I need to keep a close watch on the Edwards family, or Gifford might seize control of the Edwards Group at any moment,” he continued, venting his frustrations in one long outburst. Exhaustion was evident in his voice; he found the situation increasingly vexing and time-consuming. Looking at Rebecca earnestly, he added,

Kardless, I am truly sorry for everything that happened before. I’ve apologized to you, Rebecca. Just remember, I’ll be waiting for you at home.”

Stacey, hearing this, felt a bitter irony wash over her. She had waited for him countless times, only to be met with derision and ultimately, a divorce. “Don’t bother waiting. It’s over between us,” she stated flatly before turning to leave. But the only thing she got was ridicule and humiliation. What she got was his divorce agreement. “Don’t wait. We can’t do it anymore.” Stacey Carter said directly and then turned around to leave.

Theodore, desperate to say more, opened his mouth but ultimately restrained himself. As Stacey returned to her film set, she readjusted her focus to her work. Unnoticed by Theodore, Jenny approached him, her tone laced with envy, “I really envy the attention you give her.”

Theodore offered Jenny a rueful smile. “What are you doing here?”

Jenny responded, “I’m concerned about you. Theodore, if she won’t forgive you, perhaps you should consider moving on with me. The Smith family’s resources combined with our capabilities could surely outmaneuver Gifford and restore your control over the Edwards family.”

To this, Theodore merely shook his head, offering no reply.

Meanwhile, at Mitchell Villa, Gary had been waiting expectantly for a response from Rebecca regarding the invitation, holding onto a 60% certainty that she would comply and extend an invitation to the Mitchell family. But as dawn broke

without any news, there was still no communication from her. Although Gary typically remained silent regarding family matters, it wasn’t an indication of his lack of intelligence. He generally abstained from involvement because his wife had already handled the necessary actions, negating any need for him to step into the role of the villain.

Understanding the personalities of both his daughter Janet and wife Karen, Gary was well aware that it would be futile for them to request an invitation from Rebecca. Hence, he found himself in a position where he had to act directly. He had approached

Rebecca with a gentle strategy, entreating her carneilly, yet his efforts had been unsuccessful. Since Rebecca had become affiliated with the Carter family, she seemed increasingly beyond his influence. Nevertheless, Gary was not one to rush; he picked up his phone and dialed his sister Cynthia.

While Rebecca had become resistant to providing favors directly to them, Gary knew she would not decline a request from Cynthia. Rebecca and Cynthia shared a strong bond, forged over years of closeness since Cynthia had taken great care of Rebecca during her early childhood. Confident in

this relationship, Gary believed that if Cynthia made the request, Rebecca would surely grant the invitation.

At Cynthia's Boutique, Cynthia was absorbed in her work, sitting behind the counter while she sketched out new clothing designs on her computer. The sudden ring of her phone interrupted her focus. Glancing at the display and recognizing Gary's name, she hesitated, her hand pausing mid-reach. Over the past few years, Cynthia had come to a realization that had eased her mind significantly, allowing her thoughts to flow more freely. Almost instinctively understanding why her brother might be calling now, she opted not to engage and ignored the call. The phone continued to ring persistently beside her until it finally ceased.

Back at Mitchell Villa, Gary felt a mixture of confusion and concern wash over him as the phone call went unanswered. What's Cynthia up to? Why didn't she answer the phone?' he pondered. Despite this setback, he didn't relinquish his efforts: he dialed her number once more.

As Cynthia's phone rang again, she had just resumed her artistic endeavor, picking up a brush to add a few strokes to her drawing. The repeated disruption caused by the ringing phone began to grate on her nerves. Despite confirming it was Gary calling again, Cynthia decided to leave the phone undisturbed, choosing instead to continue her work.

At that moment, Xavier emerged from the lounge, having heard the phone. "Cynthia, your phone's ringing," he noted.

Cynthia glanced back at him and shook her head slightly. Just ignore it.

Xavier observed the caller ID, recognizing it was Gary. "Okay. The phone ceased ringing only to start again several times. "Is there something wrong with him?" Xavier inquired, a hint of concern in his voice.

Cynthia simply nodded. "Yeah, but it's none of our business."

"If your brother asks, just say your phone was broken accidentally I'll get you a new one, Xavier suggested earnestly.

Cynthia looked at her husband with a mixture of appreciation and relief. Smiling, she agreed, "Okay."

Xavier then affectionately kissed her on the cheek, his actions reflecting his deep affection for her.

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An hour later, Cynthia and Xavier departed together, towing their suitcases behind them. They had planned a short getaway, intending to celebrate it as their delayed honeymoon. By the afternoon, when Gary arrived at Cynthia's Boutique, he found the store securely locked and shuttered. Undeterred, Gary then proceeded to Cynthia and Xavier's new residence, only to discover that this location was also closed

Intent on reaching Xavier, Gary pulled out his phone, only to realize in a flash of dismay that he had never obtained Xavier's contact details during their last Christmas gathering. Now, with no way to contact him and the Carter family's banquet looming, Gary felt the pressure mounting. Unable to contain his frustration any longer, Gary took matters into his own hands; he secretly purchased a plane ticket and headed to the filming studio to confront Rebecca directly. The urgency to secure an invitation to the Carter family banquet had become paramount.

Similarly, Michael was grappling with his own concerns. He reached out to Theodore, bewildered and anxious, and asked why they hadn't received the invitation yet. Contrarily, Helen understood the underlying dynamics of why the Carter family might not extend an invitation to the Edwards family. Now that she's reunited with her prominent biological family, she's gone for rags to riches and is now refusing to acknowledge Theodore!' she thought

Frustrated, Helen called her son, urging him to return home. She believed that Theodore could not get Rebecca back, he shouldn't relentlessly pursue her just to be humiliated. Rather than fixating on Rebecca, Helen suggested Theodore focus his attention on Jenny. Though the Smith family was slightly less influential than the Carter family, aligning with them still held promising prospects for the Edwards family. With Jenny by his side, there might be significant opportunities for both the Edwards and Smith families to flourish, possibly even overtaking the Carter family in the future.

Receiving this call from his mother and hearing her analysis prompted a mix of reactions from Theodore. 'Rebecca wouldn't refuse to get back together with me. I'm sure she's just throwing a tantrum, he thought. However, as he formulated a response, he found himself speechless, realizing that Rebecca's recent actions might indicate a genuine desire to sever ties completely. Resigned, Theodore agreed, "Okay, I'll be back in a few days."

I can't keep staying here and playing along with Rebecca's tantrums, especially with pressing matters awaiting my attention at the company. I can't afford to have Gifford

mess round in my absence. Perhaps giving Rebecca some space might be beneficial. Besides, I need to strategize on managing the Edwards Group and ensuring Michael relinquishes his shares. I'm sick and tired of being manipulated by those fools! he reasoned.

Meanwhile, Stacey found herself disconnected from the concerns of the Mitchell and Edwards families. She had been exceedingly busy; each day after filming, her mother would eagerly style her in various outfits and experiment with different makeup looks, transforming her appearance dramatically. Stacey couldn't help but wonder if her mother viewed her as a mere doll, dressing and making her up incessantly, often more elaborately than her roles required. "What do you think? Isn't it beautiful?" Debra, inquired after completing another transformation, her smile reflecting her satisfaction.

Looking at her reflection, Stacey thought, 'It's really pretty, but this is probably the last outfit, right?' "It's beautiful. Mom, I think this look is very good. How about we use this look at the banquet?" she ventured cautiously as she watched her mother's reaction, worried that any hint of dissatisfaction might prompt yet another makeover. Debra paused, seeming to contemplate another change, which made Stacey's heart sink. Quietly, she moved away, subtly lifting the hem of her dress and running out of the room.

Rushing into the living room, she turned to her father, twirling and asking, "Dad, isn't my outfit the most beautiful in the world?"

As she spun around, she noticed her mother following her. Completing a full 360-degree turn, she swiftly winked at Patrick, silently pleading for his support—Patrick, catching on to his beloved daughter's cues, chuckled heartily.

Just then, a little voice exclaimed with admiration, "Mommy, you look so beautiful!

Mommy, you're the most beautiful in the world!" another chimed in.

Lillian and Kevin ran to their mother with wide-eyed admiration. As they spoke, they reached out to touch Stacey's skirt, dazzled by their mother's beauty. Upon hearing the little ones' voices, Debra was delighted and scooped up her grandchildren, asking. "Really? Do you both think your mom is particularly beautiful today?"

An hour later, Cynth

An hour later, Cynth

"Yes!" Lillian declared, her excitement palpable. "Grandma, I... want to be dressed up too!" she then pleaded eagerly.

"Me too!" Kevin echoed his sister's sentiment, afraid that his grama might not dress him up otherwise.

“Okay!” Laughing, Debra assured them. “On the day of the banquet, not only your mother but you two little ones will also be dressed up.”

“We’ll be the prettiest in the world Lillian chimed in.

Debra laughed as she enveloped the two little ones in an embrace, planting kisses on their cheeks. “Of course, my dear!”

Stacey, meanwhile, discreetly covered her face, finding the scend slightly overwhelming yet endearing. “Mom, my brothers and Dad will also be in attendance, right? Should we prepare an outfit for everyone?” she suggested, hoping to involve the whole family.

Just then, Charlie entered, overhearing the conversation. A sense of foreboding washed over him as he eyed the scene warily. Debra, catching sight of her youngest son, pondered for a moment before nodding affirmatively, “We’ll have to design our looks carefully. Everyone needs to dress up so the whole world knows our baby princess is back and the Carter family is super happy!”

Even Patrick, sitting on the couch, froze when he heard his daughter’s words. Although it hasn’t been that long since she came back, Becky is fitting right into our family. She’s adopting our mannerisms and our cunningness... This must be her revenge! Becky’s taking revenge on me for not being the first to speak up for her! he mused.

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CHAPTER 136

A week had passed, and the cast of “The Empress found themselves on a well-deserved vacation. In a grand gesture, the Carter family had chartered a plane and whisked all the staff from the series to Alagua City for a lavish homecoming banquet in honor of Stacey. Alongside the film crew, the plane was filled with a host of Charlie’s acquaintances including Lynn, Courtney, and a slew of prominent directors and actors from the entertainment industry. It was quite the gathering. with the Carter family extending invites far and wide, welcoming anyone who was available to partake in the festivities

Sierra, the stylist, found herself marveling at her second visit to Alagua City in just a few months, each occasion memorable and unique. Her first visit had been marked by a helicopter ride her first ever, and now, she found herself aboard a Carter- family-chartered plane surrounded by A-listers of the entertainment industry.

The journey took a full day, and upon arrival, everyone disembarked in an orderly fashion. Joshua, the Carter family’s butler, greeted them at the airport gate, flanked by a bevy of attendants. Outside, a lineup of luxury cars awaited ready to

the transport everyone to their hotel. The guests filed into the vehicles, departing one by one as

filled.

At the back of the line, Sierra couldn't resist capturing the opulent scene on her phone. However, as their turn approached, she quickly tucked her phone away. Stacey, having noticed Sierra's sneaky snapshot, couldn't help but chuckle. "Sierra, Malcolm, thank you for going through the trouble of traveling to join us here. she invited warmly.

"It's okay, Becky. Congratulations on your return to the Carter family!" Sierra responded quickly, offering her genuine congratulations,

"Thank you," Stacey replied with a smile.

Malcolm added, "Becky, Sierra and I will head to the hotel first. See you tomorrow."

Stacey's smile widened. "Okay, see you tomorrow."

After ensuring all guests were attended to and had left for the hotel under Nick's guidance, the Carter family themselves, finally got into their luxury car and drove home. Nik made sure that the hotel staff was well-prepared to look after the guests, ensuring they felt nothing short of welcomed. Now, it was time for the hosts themselves to rest and rejuvenate for the

festivities tomorrow.

Today's arrivals weren't just from the Aotori shooting base. The Carter family had also organized for guests from Hivalis to be flown in, and those from Maeloria posed more of a logistical challenge. Proactive as ever, they had driven to Hivalis a few hours earlier to connect with the flight to Alagua City. Curiously, the Mitchell and Edwards families were notably absent, sparking whispers among some who suspected a separate arrangement might have been made for them. Many speculated that perhaps the Carter family hadt another plane or even a helicopter for them, given their distinct standing.

As these musings circulated, the very helicopter presumed to fetch them returned from Maeloria. It landed with a resounding thud, but to everyone's surprise, it wasn't the Mitchell or Edwards family members who disembarked. Instead, Bryce, the Carter family's second son, exited with his colleagues. The return of their long-lost sister after 23 years had sparked immense joy within the Carter family. Previously, Bryce had introduced his colleagues to his sister at the Civil Registry Office, and now he had invited them to join the family banquet.

iven the distance from Maeloria to Alagua City, the convenience of helicopter transport made attendance at the banquet a elightful prospect for Bryce's colleagues. They gladly accepted the invitation, eager to partake in the family's celebrations. Upon landing at

the Carter Manor, Bryce led his colleagues on a brief tour before Nick ushered them to the hotel to rest and prepare for the upcoming festivities.

Among Bryce's colleagues was his female colleague, whom Debra and Stacey had previously met at the Civil Registry Office. This time around, only the female colleague returned with Bryce from the hotel. Overjoyed, Debra exchanged knowing glances with her husband, Patrick, eagerly awaiting their son's explanation of the unfolding events. The conclusion was as expected and pleasantly satisfying. Stacey had learned the name of the girl, Ramona Quigley, a 28-year-old whose parents were simple, honest civil servants. She was merely a year older than Stacey

The Carter family was thoroughly pleased with this potential union. Debra was especially eager to welcome Ramona as her daughter-in-law, seeing a bright future ahead. However, the looming concern was still Adrian. After his mother's worried

gaze became too much, he excused himself, saying, "I'm going back to my room," his discomfort

Debra watched him retreat, her gaze lingering on his departing figure until he vanished around the corner. Turning to Patrick with a worried expression, she voiced her fears, "What should we do about Adrian?"

Patrick tried to reassure her, saying, "Don't worry too much. They are old enough to make their own decisions."

"But he's already 35 years old... Debra fretted, her brow furrowing as a new worry struck her, "Patrick, do you think there's something wrong with his health? Is that why he hasn't shown interest in anyone for so many years?"

Stacey was taken aback by her mother's suggestion. 'Is Adriai... sick?' she wondered.

This news startled not only Stacey but also Bryce and Charlie. Seeing their mother and sister's serious expressions sent a chill down their spines. 'If we don't find ourselves a partner soon will Mom there's something wrong with us too? they pondered.

This sentiment also shocked Patrick, who hesitated before saying, "That... can't be, right?"

In the midst of her musings. Debra turned to look at Bryce. Bryce, seeing everyone's eyes on him, quickly asserted, "There's nothing wrong with my health! Nothing at allf

This elicited laughter from Ramona, who could no longer hold back her emotions as she found the entire exchange all too amusing Hahahaha!"

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Ramona's smile ignited a wave of laughter that rippled through the entire family. Lillian and Kevin joined in, their giggles echoing around the room. They may not have understood the joke, but their joy in the shared family moment was

infectious.

Meanwhile, in Macloria, the atmosphere at the Mitchell family Home was starkly different, weighed down by tension and disappointment, Gary had recently made a trip to the Aotori shooting base in a determined effort to see Rebecca, but his attempts were thwarted. He had even tried to approach the gated community where the Carter family resided, hoping to find her there, but strict security barred his entry, allowing only residents through. Frustrated, he then aimed to connect with her at the film crew's location, only to discover from the staff that Rebecca hadn't yet arrived.

With no other option, Gary settled in to wait. However, his patience was cut short when he received an urgent message from a Mitchell Group assistant, demanding his immediate return to dress a pressing company matter, so he had no choice but to temporarily leave the Aotori shooting base. This unexpected detour ultimately cost him several days, and by the time he was able to refocus on his original mission, the Carter family had already arranged transportation for all attendees of the banquet.

Worried about the optics of the Mitchell family's absence, Gary fretted over the potential gossip that might swirl around their non-attendance. What should I do? Are we about to be the butt of the joke? Will people find out that we've mistreated Rebecca in the past, and that's why our relationship with the Carter family is strained? These thoughts plagued Gary, robbing him of sleep. In a desperate move, he decided to reach out to Cynthia, hoping her close bond with Rebecca could sway her to secure an invitation for their family, thus sparing them any embarrassment.

Yet, try as he might, Gary couldn't reach Cynthia. He started to suspect she was avoiding his calls. Frustrated and running out of options, he reluctantly dialed Janet's number. Janet, who had interacted the most with Rebecca since childhood, was his last hope. 'Maybe she has a plan to secure us an invitation?' he mused, though he didn't hold much optimism.

At that point, Janet was at the Aotori shooting base, deeply immersed in her latest project, "Her Majesty," a script adapted from her role in "The Empress" but heavily modified to suit the new narrative. The project was behind schedule, and they were still writing the script while shooting, necessitating frequent late nights and continuous revisions to perfect the storyline. Despite the exhaustion, Janet was fueled by the ambition of outshining "The Empress" and stepping on Rebecca while earning praises for her work.

That evening, while rehearsing her lines for the next day in her hotel room, Janet was interrupted by a call from her father. Initially surprised, she soon felt irritation wash over

her as she realized the reason for his call. 'Dad wants me to secure an invitation for him to Rebecca's homecoming banquet? she thought.

"Dad, what are you doing at her house! Can't you see? Rebecca has nothing to do with our family now. She's just an ungrateful woman who doesn't want to acknowledge us after finding her biological parents" Janet exclaimed in frustration.

Gary sighed on the other end. Janie, I know what you mean. But think about it, the Carter family didn't invite us. What will people say? That we mistreated Rebecca and that's why we weren't invited?"

"How did we mistreat her? If it weren't for our family, she would have been in dire straits!" Janet retorted fiercely.

"I'm well aware of that, but not everyone sees things our way. The Carter family holds sway, and people tend to side with them. It's all about who you please these days," Gary responded, his voice

laced with worry. "Janie, you usually have a lot of contact with Rebecca. Can't you find a way to get us an invitation" he asked cautiously.

"What? Dad, just don't go. It doesn't matter if they didn't invite us- you shouldn't go either! Who is Rebecca? She doesn't want to acknowledge us, and we don't need to acknowledge her either. For more than 20 years, even a dog knows to show gratitude, but Rebecca only bites the hand that fed her! She should just fuck off!" Janet exclaimed, her anger palpable. After her outburst, she hung up abruptly and tossed her phone onto the bed.

Over at the Mitchell Villa, Gary couldn't help but sigh when the call disconnected. Although he had anticipated his daughter's reaction, he still felt a mixture of emotions. After taking a brief moment to cool down, Janet picked up her phone

and called her father back, Gary, seeing the caller ID, answered anxiously, "Janie?"

"Dad, stay out of Rebecca's business. She's with the Carter family now and won't care about us. But don't worry – how high she climbs now, just means the fall will be harder. I'll make sure the falls hard" Janet spoke with a chilling resolve.

Gary felt a sudden dread. "Janie? What are you planning to do?" He couldn't help but recall the fact that Janet had bullied Rebecca since their childhood. Now that Rebecca had the support of the Carter family, she became a figure they simply couldn't afford to offend. Despite being a selfish man, Gary felt a pang of concern for his only daughter. He worried about the repercussions from the Carter family if Janet acted on her threats.

Janie, don't do anything rash. Let me handle it. Just focus on your life, and don't go against Rebecca again," he urged, trying to diffuse her anger.

Janet's impatience was palpable. Buried in her workload, she needed to quickly memorize her script to avoid any holdups during tomorrow's shoot. "Okay, Dad. I'll hang up if there's nothing else. I'm busy and need to get back to the script," Janet stated briskly.

Hearing her commitment to her work reassured Gary that she was too occupied to stir any trouble with Rebecca. He responded, "Okay, then you should concentrate on your work, and I won't keep you any longer

After ending the call, Janet immediately picked up her script to continue memorizing her lines. In the adjacent room, Tina Morgan, the screenwriter for "Her Majesty," was also deeply engrossed in her task, typing away feverishly to finalize the

script without delay.

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Meanwhile, Gary was left to wrestle with the reality that securing an invitation from the Carter family might be an impossible task. Despite his disappointment and growing anxiety over the familial and public perception, he felt powerless to change the situation.

On the other hand, Michael had been confidently expecting an invitation and had even prepared a gift in anticipation of attending the event. However, to his dismay, Theodore informed him that despite his efforts, he had failed to secure an invitation. This news exacerbated Michael's concern about the bifting dynamics within his family, particularly the unstable relationship between his son and daughter-in-law. "Are they going to break up? They can't! This is the Carter family we're talking about! he thought.

Frustration took hold of Michael, and he found himself on the verge of losing his temper. Reflecting on old sayings, he mused, 'Indeed, dumb dogs are often the most dangerous. He had always regarded his daughter-in-law as obedient and sensible, yet now it appeared she had orchestrated a clever scheme against him. It was a testament to her Carter bloodline -cunning was apparently ingrained in her, regardless of her upbringing in the more modest Mitchell family.

"I don't think the Carter family is indispensable," Theodore declared in the office to his father. "If our family aligns with the Smith family and gains their full backing, we can still venture into overseas markets.

Intrigued by this strategic shift, Michael eyed Theodore and inquired, "Do you plan to be with Jenny?" Internally, Michael considered, 'Indeed, aligning my son with Jenny from the Smith family might not be such a bad idea. Although the Smith family isn't as prominent as the Carter family, they hold their own merit.

Theodore, after a brief hesitation, shook his head and replied, “No, but I’ve made things clear to Jenny. She understands my position. Even if we don’t marry, we can maintain our friendship and foster cooperation between the Edwards and Smith

families.”

Pleased with his son’s diplomatic approach, Michael clapped Theodore on the shoulder, beaming with pride. Theodore, I didn’t expect you to be the most like me among your siblings. Let’s collaborate to take the Edwards family business global!” Michael exclaimed, his spirits lifted by the discussion. He then fantasized about the Edwards Group expanding globally, feeling a surge of happiness. However, Theodore, more reserved merely lowered his eyes without response. Theodore lowered his eyes and didn’t answer Michael,

Michael, undeterred, continued optimistically, “Since Jenny is so understanding, there’s no rush to sever ties with the Carter family. After all, you and Rebecca share two children. If the opportunity arises, try to regain your control over them. Should we manage to align with both the Carter and Smith families, our family’s prospects will only improve.”

The following day marked the anticipated banquet. Stacey rose early and sat for makeup, a process that on this particular morning filled her with a joy akin to a child receiving candy. It took two hours just to perfect her makeup, and then it was time to prepare Lillian and Kevin. The two little ones were her precious children, and they naturally had to be dressed to the nines alongside their mother.

However, a minor hiccup occurred when Kevin, usually calm and collected, realized he was the only one in a black suit while his mother and sister donned beautiful dresses. Feeling out of place and somewhat less adorned, he became overwhelmed and started crying. The family quickly rallied around him, soothing him with turns of comfort and playful balloons, which eventually calmed him down.

Once everyone was ready, the family proceeded to the hotel where the banquet was being held. The guests, having stayed overnight, were already congregating in the lively banquet hall. Stacey, along with her parents and children, greeted the guests, many of whom brought gifts for both the adults and the children. Thankfully, waiters were on hand to manage the influx of presents, holding them at either side.

Noteworthy among the attendees were Charlie’s friends, Ernest and Jarvis, whose long-awaited reunion with Stacey was marked by joy and generous gifts. The guests from Alagua City, though arriving a tad later, filled the room by eleven in the morning.

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At this pivotal moment-Patrick and Debra, with a sense of ceremony and gravity, approached the microphone. The couple, with a touch of grace, escorted Stacey to the forefront of the stage. Lillian and Kevin, brimming with youthful enthusiasm, trailed behind their mother, closely watched over by their three attentive uncles.

The air grew thick with emotion as Patrick and Debra commenced a heartfelt speech that journeyed back through the decades to a time when their daughter was not yet lost to them those carefree days more than 20 years ago before the agony of separation had touched their lives. The banquet hall's large screen flickered to life, displaying numerous photographs of Stacey as a child. These images captured her innocent visage -sometimes in the embrace of her parents, sometimes

frolicking with her brothers, and at times, captured In a solo portrait, her expression pensive yet endearing.

As Stacey gazed at these snapshots of her past, and then at her parents standing resolutely on the stage, the emotional weight of the occasion overwhelmed her. Though not overtaken by sadness, the poignant atmosphere moved her deeply, and she found herself unable to hold back tears. Despite the rollercoaster of emotions and the convoluted path that had led her back, this was a moment of triumph she was home at last, reunited with her family, her parents, and her brothers.

As her parents concluded their recounting of these memories, applause cascaded through the hall, each clap seeming to infuse the space with warmth and joy.

With solemnity, Patrick and Debra then introduced Stacey to all in attendance, making a particular note of her official name. Stacey Carter, and her beloved children, Lillian and Kevin. It was then that the Carter family made a groundbreaking announcement that would forever alter the fabric of their legacy Stacey was to have the same rights of inheritance as the three sons of the Carter family. Moreover, her children, Lillian and Kevin, would also share these rights, equating them with any future offspring of the Carter brothers.

The revelation sent a wave of astonishment throughout the room. It was indeed a joyous occasion to celebrate the return of the Carter daughter, but the declaration that she and her children would hold equal standing in the inheritance was profoundly unexpected. Th

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At the banquet, many guests from Macloria had come knowing that Rebecca – now formally known as Stacey Carter – and her two young children were part of the Edwards family. As they mingled and enjoyed the festivities, a realization dawned upon them – they had not seen any members of the Edwards family. Curious and somewhat concerned, they scanned the room, searching for familiar faces associated with the Edwards family.

Pondering over their activities for the past two days, which included flying and staying at hotels, they wondered, "Why haven't we seen the Edwards family at all during this event? Why would the Edwards family not attend, especially when their daughter-in-law is from a distinguished family like the Caster family?"

Among those unaware of the underlying tensions, confusion reigned. Meanwhile, those in the know couldn't help but chuckle at the situation. One of the guests couldn't contain his amusement and laughed out loud, drawing curious glances.

"Yohannes, what are you laughing at? It's kind of creepy," remarked one of his friends, puzzled by his reaction.

With a smirk, Yohannes Larson raised his glass, took a sip, and teased, "Do you want to know why neither the Edwards family nor the Mitchell family showed up?"

"Come to think of it, we haven't seen the Edwards or Mitchell families ever since we got here. Where are they?" Darren Wilkins mused. Now intrigued by the mystery of their absence, he pressed, "Why didn't they come?"

Yohannes exchanged a knowing look with Darren and chuckled softly. He leaned in and whispered conspiratorially, "It's because they've practically sabotaged themselves with their antics."

Darren's eyes widened with curiosity, prompting her to ask eagerly, "How did they manage that?"

Yohannes, ensuring they were not overheard, pulled Darren aside and after ensuring his loyalty with potential benefits from a cooperation project, divulged the juicy details. Darren was astounded by the revelations, his eyes widening with each word. "So Rebecca- sorry, I mean Stacey is no longer tied to the Edwards family, correct?" he confirmed with Yohannes, his eyes sparkling with intrigue.

Yohannes nodded, his expression one of mischief as he revealed "Exactly. Why else would her children carry the Carter family name exclusively? Haven't you heard? Lillian and Kevin are officially registered under the Carter family, and they have nothing to do with the Edwards family now."

Darren, intrigued, pondered the implications. "They're divorced. So, does that mean Ms. Carter is single now? There won't be a problem if I ask my son to pursue her now, will there?"

Yohannes was taken aback by Darren's forwardness. "Wait, we can do that?" he pondered, bewildered by the latter's matchmaking plans. As he looked at Darren, Yohannes thought about his married son and then glanced back at Stacey on the stage, feeling like his family had missed out on a fortune.

However, the thought struck him that though his son was married, he had a nephew who was eligible. Perhaps, if my nephew pursued Ms. Carter and succeeded, our families could still be united in some way! Yohannes mused. Mulling over this idea, he felt as if a clear path had been laid out before him. He raised his glass to Darren, proposing, "That's a great idea!" though Darren remained skeptical.

Darren stared at Yohannes, musing, "Why do I feel like there's something off about his smile? Is he plotting something?"

Yohannes and Darren were merely representatives of a broader sentiment that spread through the crowd at the banquet Upon hearing the Carter family's declaration that not only their daughter but

also her children were granted inheritance rights, many attendees began to entertain similar notions.

The banquet was set to be an all-day affair, offering everyone the opportunity to indulge in an array of foods and beverages to their heart's content. Additionally, a special lounge had been prepared upstairs, featuring various entertainment options for those desiring a break from the main festivities. In the main hall, professional performances were scheduled throughout the day to enhance the celebratory atmosphere. Lillian and Kevin, particularly fond of such displays, positioned themselves up front. Their young faces lit up with wonder, and they were so captivated by the performances that they seemed glued to

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the spot. reluctant to misvegen a moment.

Meanwhile, the Carter family's official Twitter account, manage.. by a reporter who had been strategically hired beforehand began disseminating joyous updates about Stacey's formal return to the family fold. The announcements made it clear that Stacey was to enjoy the same inheritance rights as her brothers, a policy that extended to her children as well, ensuring they would be treated on par with their cousins in the future. This groundbreaking news quickly spread as Charlie enthusiastically liked and retweeted the post. The internet buzzed with activity as more and more people engaged with the news.

The hashtags, "BeckyHasOfficiallyReturned ToTheCarter Family" and

“Becky And Her kids Have The Right To Inherit The Carter Family Fortune” surged in popularity, becoming trending topics within hours

The online community overflowed with messages expressing a mix of congratulations and envy.

[Congratulations, Becky, on your return to the Carter family!]

[Congratulations to Chuck on reuniting with his long-lost sister]

[I’m so envious that Becky is Chuck’s little sister.]

[Well. I’m envious that Becky has such a powerful family backing her!]

Others envied Becky for her newfound standing within such a prestigious family, and admiration for the Carter family’s progressive stance on gender equality in inheritance a rarity that many found aspirational.

Amidst this online fervor, Gary felt increasingly isolated and distracted at work. Unable to participate in the celebrations, he found himself frequently checking his phone for updates from old friends and business associates, many of whom had been lucky enough to attend the grand event. His business group chat initially quiet, burst into life around midday as discussions about the banquet’s lavishness and the Carter family’s bold declarations picked up. Gary’s heart sank as he read message after message detailing the festivities and the family’s progressive announcement on inheritance rights.

When Gary encountered the news, he was absolutely dumbfounded. It felt as though he was sitting on a scorching seat, his disbelief igniting a fiery discomfort. His first instinct was to reject the reality before him, for it just seemed so implausible. ‘It’s impossible!’ he thought. “The Carter family, with its

three sons, is now extending equal inheritance rights to a daughter? Such a notion was almost unheard of in our circle!”

Yet, as he scrolled through his phone, the Carter family’s official Twitter feed along with numerous media reports confirmed the groundbreaking news about Rebecca, now known as Stacey Carter. The internet was ablaze with articles and discussions about her, it seemed every news outlet had something to say about the Carter family’s unprecedented decision. Gary meticulously went through each piece of news, his initial shock slowly turning into a deep-seated annoyance and regret. The more he read, the more he ruminated on the past – if only he had recognized the full extent of Rebecca’s potential and treated her with the respect she deserved..

Regret gnawed at him as he considered the missed opportunities. If only the Mitchell family had nurtured Rebecca properly, if only he hadn’t allowed his wife and daughter to mistreat her, perhaps their family could have been riding on the coattails of her success

now. Gary found himself lamenting internally, Why weren't Janet and Karen more accommodating? We had the means. There was absolutely no reason why we couldn't have supported Rebecca more. We could have easily afforded to provide her with everything she needed to excel

These thoughts tormented Gary momentarily, but he soon managed to gather his composure. After all, Janie was his biological daughter, and he felt it wasn't right to harbor resentment toward her over someone who was, at the end of the day, an outsider to their immediate family.

Meanwhile, at Mitchell Villa, Karen also stumbled upon the trending news. She had been aware for some time that the Carter family would publicly acknowledge Rebecca as their long-lost daughter. However, their intention to grant Rebecca and her children the same rights as their sons was entirely unexpected, and the reality of it happening struck her with force. She stood up, overwhelmed by a mix of shock and indignation. How could the Carter family extend such generosity to that bitch? she thought.

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Karen felt a surge of hatred as she thought, Had I known about this earlier, I would've thrown that bitch into some remote, obscure mountain village! That way, the Carter family would never have found her, and she wouldn't be basking in glory right now. Now, everyone's morking me and Janie because of her! The longer Karen dwelled on this, the more her anger festered, ultimately causing her to ruin her freshly done manicure.

Simultaneously, at Edwards Villa, Michael also caught the news. He swiftly verified the Carter family's formal statement on Twitter. When he learned it was authentic, Michael's joy soared, and he mused, 'Since the Carter family decided to grant inheritance rights to those two kids, their fortune would eventually enrich the Edwards family, which they're part of. With each thought, Michael's grin widened, unable to mask his glee.

Without delay, Michael shared the jubilant news with Theodore. Reconciliation failed, he must vie for the kids' custody. Gaining would ultimately flow into the Edwards' coffers.

urging him to strive to reconcile with Rebecca. Even if custody would ensure that the substantial Carter inheritance

Theodore, already aware of the Carter family's declaration, was genuinely astonished. Like many, he pondered, 'The Carter family has multiple sons; why grant their daughter equal inheritance rights?'

While Rebecca celebrated, Theodore felt perturbed about the Edwards family's familial strife. Gifford watched him keenly, and neither Oscar nor Tiffany were ready to forfeit their inheritance claims. Crucially, though Michael seemed detached from corporate dealings, he maintained a firm

grip on the Edwards Group's shares. As long as Michael held those shares, Theodore couldn't fully relax. After some reflection, Theodore's lips curled into a smile. He was determined not to let this status quo linger; those shares would soon be his. After mulling over the situation, Theodore picked up his phone and composed a congratulatory message to Rebecca.

Meanwhile, in Alagua City, Stacey's phone chimed. She discovered a message from an unknown sender:[Rebecca, Congratulations on rejoining the Carter family with the children Wishing you all happiness – Theodore.]

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Disgust washed over Stacey as she read. She instantly deleted the message and blocked Theodore's number. After managing the situation, Stacey briefly toyed with the idea of changing her number. Theodore's relentless attempts to contact her using various numbers had been exceedingly bothersome. Yet, she quickly dismissed the notion. Changing her number was easy. but keeping it from Theodore would prove more difficult.

Phone numbers were essential for maintaining connections. She'd have to give her new number to new acquaintances, and if Theodore was determined, he could easily obtain it. Deciding to set aside her concerns about Theodore, Stacey returned her phone to her purse.

She rejoined the festivities on stage, enjoying the performance with her children. The banquet wrapped up quickly, and everyone departed the next day. Stacey traveled back to the Aotori shooting base with her children and the film crew. However, their stay at the shooting base was brief this time around. They soon departed as the film crew had finished the indoor scenes and were moving to outdoor locations. Unfazed by the inconvenience, Debra decided it was a perfect opportunity for the nanny and children to accompany the film crew, dubbing it a holiday.

However, Stacey hadn't expected the "chance" encounter that awaited them at their new location. As Stacey entered the accommodation arranged by the film crew, a young man hurried out and

bumped into her. She fell before she could react. With his swift reflexes, the man lay down, attempting to cushion her fall. Having been trained in combat arts at her mother's assistance, Stacey adeptly twisted her body, landing next to the man instead of on him.

"I'm sorry. Are you all right?" he said, quickly standing and offering a hand to help her up. Stacey brushed off his hand and stood independently.

Hello, I'm Russel Hampton, and I sincerely apologize for the mishap earlier. Perhaps I could make it up to you by inviting you to dinner sometime as a gesture of apology?"

Russel suggested with a warm smile, extending his hand in a friendly manner toward Stacey.

“No, thanks,” Stacey responded briskly, her tone firm.

Russel, taken aback by her swift rejection, quickly attempted another approach, “Maybe we could exchange WhatsApp contacts instead? Since I was the one who bumped into you, calling you to fall, it might be best for you to get a medical check-up. Should any issues arise later, you’d be able to contact me immediately. I’ll accept full responsibility for the accident?”

However, Stacey, clearly unimpressed by his efforts, countered suspiciously, “You did that on purpose, didn’t you?”

Stunned by her accusation, Russel could only stare blankly at her, his phone in hand. Meanwhile, Debra, who had been leading the way, noticed her daughter lagging behind and rushed back to assess the situation. Seeing her mother approaching, Stacey quickly moved toward her.

Debra eyed Russel with a mix of curiosity and confusion, but she continued to guide her daughter toward their accommodation without further interaction. Once inside their room, Debra inquired with

concern, “Who was that man earlier?”

“No idea, but it feels like he did that on purpose, Stacey admitted, her instincts tingling with suspicion.

As they settled in, a sudden noise from outside their door caught Stacey’s attention. She opened it to find Russel standing there, a grin spread across his face as he waved casually. “Hi there, it was actually me who bumped into you deliberately. I need to ask you for a favor. Would that be okay?”

Stacey, puzzled by his audacity, queried, “What do you need?”

Russel glanced back cautiously at the two bodyguards stationed nearby, Stacey recognized them; the Carter family had employed them for her protection and to ward off any intrusive paparazzi.

With a resigned sigh, Russel stepped into her room and began his tale. “Your family hosted a banquet a few days ago, right? My dad attended, and when he returned, he ordered me to pursue you romantically. If I didn’t comply, he threatened to break my legs!”

Russel's voice carried a note of desperation as he continued, "I had no choice but to create this scenario to meet you." Pulling out his phone, he added, "I meant no harm; I just wanted to be friends. Ms. Carter, I don't expect to succeed. I just want to record this incident to show my dad that I've tried and you weren't interested in me. That way, he would stop pressuring

1. me.

After his explanation, Russel pulled out his phone, played the video he had just recorded, and handed it to Stacey. "Ms. Carter, please review this video yourself. It captures a regular encounter between us. There is absolutely nothing amiss with

dad my this video! I just need this small favor. Please allow me to use this video as evidence to show

Initially at a loss for words, Stacey took the phone and scrutinized the video that Russel had covertly made. Debra also peered over her shoulder, watching the footage. After viewing it she confirmed that it indeed depicted just a simple, harmless encounter.