

Chapter 45 She's A Fraud

Lily stood in the distance, embarrassed as she watched their harmonious interaction. She looked up at Lucian. She noticed his gaze was fixed on Calista. Bitterness gnawed at her as he watched them.

But she quickly suppressed her emotions. She smiled as she interrupted them, trying to catch Selena's attention.

"Happy Birthday! This is a small token of my regards. I hope you like it."

Selena glanced at Lily and nodded. "Thank you. You're very thoughtful."

After receiving the gift, Selena placed it on the nearby table. She had no intention of opening it. "The dining area is over there. Help yourself. Don't be shy."

That was her telling Lily to move aside and stop being a nuisance.

Lily could detect the underlying tone. Yet, she acted like she hadn't noticed.

She worked hard to prepare the gift and couldn't let it be dismissed. If Selena didn't open it now, its fate after the event would be

uncertain.

"How about you open it now? I'm unfamiliar with this stuff. If there's an issue, we can fix it promptly," Lily suggested.

At this point, if Selena continued to brush it off, the situation would become a joke.

Though Selena was annoyed with Lily, she maintained a polite smile. She reluctantly opened the gift box. Inside was a wooden box. Selena subtly took a breath. She was thinking of kicking Lily out if there was another box inside.

She opened the wooden box, revealing a painting.

Selena unrolled the painting. She wasn't a fan of paintings. Yet, there was a glimmer in her eyes upon seeing it. Even Henry raised an eyebrow. "Is this the old painting from before?"

Lily replied, "Yes."

Henry nodded in satisfaction. "Good job. Let me know how much it costs. I'll have Lucian transfer the money to you."

"Money isn't the issue. It was tough to find the conservator. This person is known for being elusive in the industry, rarely taking jobs. That's why the restoration took so long."

"Restoration artists with skill tend to be quite peculiar. It's normal. It must have been difficult for you," Henry remarked.

Calista noticed that Selena was still staring at the painting. From Henry's remarks, she inferred that the painting belonged to the Northwood family. But Lily had taken it for restoration.

"Do you like these things?"

"Not really, but Lucian's grandfather does. He acquired this painting at an auction years ago. However, things got heated after a quarrel between your dad and me.

"As a result, the painting was accidentally damaged. Ms. Scott said she could find someone to help restore it. So, I entrusted it to her," Selena explained as she revealed the painting fully.

Henry interjected with a teasing tone, "It was more than heated. Grandfather's study was nearly destroyed. My bruises took half a month to heal."

"You deserved it," Selena retorted. Her tone turned serious as she continued to ask, "Ms. Scott, how much did you spend to restore this painting?"

Lily felt confused by Selena's change in demeanor. She answered her question and asked, "What's the matter?"

"You must have been cheated. This person isn't really an expert, is she?"

Calista frowned. It wasn't because of Selena's words, but there was a smudge in the corner of the painting. It wasn't large, but it was quite noticeable.

Lily also noticed it, and her immediate reaction was to look at Calista.

"Isn't Claude an expert in the field? How did this happen? How could the restoration turn out like this?"

Calista frowned, displeased by Selena's accusatory tone. She, too, was curious about the situation. It was disheartening to see it damaged again. After all, she had put in a lot of effort to restore it.

"The painting was fine when I handed it over to you. You confirmed that as well. Shouldn't you bring that up?"

Seeing this, Selena asked in confusion, "What's going on? Calista, did you restore this painting?"

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Before Calista could respond, Lily interjected, "I found someone in the industry who was reputed for exceptional restoration skills. Calista was her assistant. She helped deliver the painting." Lily continued remorsefully, "I'm at fault for trusting the rumors. This so-called expert, Claude, was just a fraud with an overblown reputation!"

She seemed to criticize Claude for being all show and no game. But in reality, she was talking about Calista too. The person who restored the painting was Claude, but Calista was the one who delivered it. It was unclear who made the mistake in between.

Calista was certain that news of how Mrs. Northwood set up Lucian's former girlfriend out of jealousy would spread within half an hour.

"Aunt Selena, I'm sorry to have disappointed you. I'll find someone else to restore the painting."

Calista couldn't let Lily do that.

The rich folks and affluent collectors enjoyed collecting cultural artifacts. It was mainly because they really liked them or wanted to seem important.

This incident would ruin her reputation and

Claude's carefully crafted identity if it got out. Everyone would think that Claude was a fraud!

She immediately objected. "No need for that trouble. It's just a minor issue. I've learned quite a bit while assisting Claude these past few months. I'll handle the restoration."

Hearing this, Lily frowned. As if appeasing an unreasonable child, she said, "Calista, I wasn't trying to accuse you of anything. I felt Claude's skills were lacking and wanted to warn everyone. How much can you learn from her?"

What she meant was, what could a fraud teach her?

Lily continued, "I apologize if my words made you uncomfortable. It's Aunt Selena's birthday today. Many eyes are watching. It's unnecessary to cause a commotion over someone insignificant and ruin a painting worth millions."
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Calista didn't want to waste another breath on her. She turned to Selena. She was very confident in her ability to restore the painting. But Lily had a point. This painting was worth billions. If even Selena didn't trust her, then so be it. After all, the painting belonged to the Northwood family.

Selena glanced at Lily and patted Calista's hand affectionately. "Do what you want with it. You're Mrs. Northwood. This painting belongs to you. Even if it gets damaged during restoration, outsiders have no right to interfere."

Henry always indulged his wife. Whatever she said, goes. However, he felt slightly reluctant inside.

His father would be furious if he was alive and learned that his antique painting had been damaged out of spite.

The entire hall fell silent at that moment.

Lily bit her lip, standing silently on the side.

It was clear to anyone what Selena meant when she mentioned the outsider.

Meanwhile, Calista instructed someone to prepare the tools. The living room returned to its bustling and lively state while they waited.

"That painting was sold for two million back then. And its value has increased over the years. It's such a shame that it ended up like this!"

"But what if Mrs. Northwood succeeds in restoring it?"

"Do you think it's that simple to restore antiques? Many of the well-known experts in the industry are up in years. It's all about skills acquired from experience over the years.

"Look at Mrs. Northwood. She's at most an apprentice. And what's more, the apprentice of a fraud. What a waste." The person speaking sounded fond of antiques.

Lucian had remained silent the entire time. His expression had darkened. He grabbed Calista's hand and, right in front of everyone, led her upstairs without any explanation.

Calista pulled her hand out of his grip as soon as they were out of everyone's sight. "Let's keep things professional. No physical contact."

Lucian raised his hand to rub his forehead, looking quite agitated. "Just say you feel unwell later. I'll send you off early."

Unwell? Calista was puzzled. But she soon understood. "You don't want me to touch that painting, do you?"