

The Unshackled Queen: Never Say Never Online Free - Chapter: 601

Bryson's even-tempered voice responded, "Even if real estate isn't your thing, the land is prime for building malls or commercial properties."

"Intriguing," Hannah agreed.

"When should we check it out?"

"There's an auction soon, along with a banquet. You should come."

"Consider it done."

After hanging up, Hannah drummed her fingers on her desk and massaged her temples, sensing a looming headache.

Knock, knock, knock.

Hannah glanced up to see Jalen entering her office.

"What brings you here?"

"Hannah, Grandpa's feeling better these days. He wants you to join us for dinner tonight."

"Tonight?"

Hannah peeked at her phone, her eyebrows knitting together slightly.

Sensing her hesitation, Jalen queried, "Do you have other commitments?"

Edwin's been eager to catch up with you. Should I ask Grandpa to reschedule dinner for tomorrow?"

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"No, what's the time for tonight?" Hannah inquired.

"Six o'clock this evening. I'll meet you at the company entrance and escort you to the ancestral home," Jalen responded.

Hannah gave a nonchalant nod.

“Let’s go with your plan.”

Once Jalen had departed, Hannah shot a text to Bryson, letting him know she’d return to the villa later due to a visit to the White family estate.

That evening, Jalen sat in his parked car at the company’s front gate, a bit ahead of schedule. As he spotted Hannah emerging, he quickly lowered the window.

“Get in.”

“Alright.” Hannah slid into the passenger seat and fastened her seatbelt.

As they made their way to the ancestral home, Jalen couldn’t help but talk on and on.

“If anyone says anything off-putting, just let it slide!”

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Leaning against the window, Hannah’s composed face revealed her detachment.

“We’re all family here. They were in the dark about the real situation before. Grandpa’s briefed them. No need for concern.”

“I’m not concerned,” Hannah replied calmly, resting her head against the window.

“It’s them who ought to be concerned.”

Jalen looked a touch perplexed but tried to reassure Hannah.

“Tonight, let’s focus on keeping the peace. Even if it’s an act, let’s make it convincing.”

Hannah turned her gaze to Jalen, studying him for a moment before shaking her head.

“You’re admirable in many respects, but you have one flaw. You’re overly concerned with family dynamics.”

Though Jalen might appear unflappable, those who knew him well recognized his underlying naivety.

“Isn’t it a virtue to care about family?” Jalen queried, genuinely confused.

Staring out the window, her eyes icy and far-off, Hannah responded, “Yes, such a virtue that when they betray you, you won’t even see it coming.”

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“We’re all one family. Even if tensions run high at home, we’d never conspire against each other,” Jalen declared.

Despite being groomed as the White family’s successor, he exhibited a surprising innocence.

It was Jalen who had first welcomed her when she came to Hoijery.

Hannah regarded him with a newfound sense of pity. Her grandmother had been correct. He wasn’t cut out for the cutthroat world of business.

Sensing Hannah’s prolonged silence, Jalen shifted topics.

“With the environmental project taken care of, I’ve been considering some time abroad.”

“I’ve heard from Grandpa,” Hannah said, locking eyes with Jalen.

“Once you’re overseas, I have a favor to ask. Could you investigate something for me? Also, look into potential business ventures. There are openings in the international market that could benefit the White Group.”

Shaking his head and smiling wistfully, Jalen responded, “You really do take after Grandpa. What you just said mirrors his thoughts after his

recent return. When I'm abroad, I plan to host an art exhibition, and I'll also scope out business expansion prospects for the White Group."

As they conversed, the car pulled up to the ancestral home.

"Miss, welcome home," the butler exclaimed, visibly delighted. He promptly instructed the household staff to bring slippers.

Once inside the living room, Hannah observed that even Bryan had shown up.

ALL were seated on the living room sofas. Only Edwin rose to greet Hannah, exclaiming, "Hannah!"

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Upon seeing Hannah, Johanna dismissively diverted her attention to Christy, initiating a chatty conversation while snubbing Hannah.

"You are back."

Byrum's voice came from the staircase as he descended with Tinsley.

The room stood to welcome them. Johanna eagerly latched onto Byrum's arm, saying, "Grandpa, we've all been waiting for you."

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Casting a glance at Hannah, who was visibly aloof, Byrum declared, "Let's all take a seat and have dinner."

Edwin chose to sit next to Hannah, and they settled into seats towards the rear of the room.

Johanna took a seat next to Byrum and announced, "Grandpa, in honor of your recovery, I've prepared a special gift!"

She revealed an intricate box from her bag, opening it to display a white charm inscribed with wishes for Longevity.

“It’s the finest charm I could locate in all of Hoijery, etched with heartfelt blessings. I hope you like it.”

Byrum cast a neutral gaze at the trinket, remarking, “Nice. You’ve put some thought into this.”

Johanna beamed, sharing a knowing look with Christy, who was seated not far away.

Christy, previously beside Jalen, stood and offered her own gift.

“Byrum, this is a piece by your favorite artist. I tracked it down for you.”

Byrum studied the artwork, his expression unchanging, acknowledged it briefly, and then motioned for Christy to sit.

Jalen looked perplexed and queried in a low voice, “When did you acquire this painting? Why didn’t you inform me?”

“It was a joint decision between Johanna and me. Byrum just got out of the hospital. It’s only fitting to get him a celebratory gift.”

Christy faced Jalen and continued, “If you overlook giving Byrum a present, it’s on me to remember.”

Byrum had been out of the hospital for a few days, choosing this moment for the gift exchange. Anyone paying attention would know the gesture was intended for Hannah.

Yet, Hannah remained impassive, quietly focusing on her meal, avoiding the White family drama.

Bainbridge also chimed in with a gift. Bryan, perched near the head of the table, quipped, “Since when did your forgetful mind remember to get your grandpa a celebratory gift?”

“Dad, after Grandpa’s ordeal, I realized I can’t keep being a child, forever sheltered by you,” Bainbridge earnestly replied.

“I’d also like to contribute to the family business.”

Byrum, however, offered no reaction, leaving the room wrapped in momentary awkwardness.

Tinsley remained upbeat, suggesting to Bryan, “Great, let Bainbridge join your department. He can start as a junior employee under your guidance.”

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Hearing the term ‘employee’, Bainbridge’s brow twitched, showing a trace of discontent with Tinsley’s proposition.

Before he could object, a subtle kick from Bryan silenced him.

Tinsley noticed the interaction but her smile remained undiminished.

“Bryan, go ahead and eat.”

“Alright, Mom.”

Johanna, sensing Hannah’s omission was being overlooked, couldn’t hold back.

“Hannah, Grandpa is out of the hospital and invited you to dinner. Shouldn’t you have brought a gift? Do we really need to spell out the etiquette?”

Feeling the spotlight shift to her, Hannah was about to put down her utensils when Edwin preemptively slammed down his fork.

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He shot Johanna an icy stare, retorting, “I didn’t bring a gift either, does that mean I’m ignorant of the so-called rules? Since when did family gatherings become a rule book? Does a gift signify understanding or its absence reflect a lack of consideration? You just graduated this year, right? How much did your gift cost? Did you earn the money yourself?”

Johanna blanched under Edwin’s mocking tone.

“I was merely stating an observation, why are you defending her so vehemently?”

“Am I really defending her, or are you needlessly stirring the pot?

Ruining dinner on purpose?” Edwin retorted.

Hannah intervened, fixing her gaze on Johanna.

“If you can’t dine in peace, then leave.

Johanna’s eyes grew wide, incredulous that Hannah would actually tell her to leave.

“You believe you have the authority to dismiss me?” She couldn’t contain her outrage as she shouted at Hannah, “This is the White family’s estate, not the Moore family’s!”

Bryan interjected, aiming to diffuse the tension, “We’re all part of the White family. No need for squabbles.”

He grinned as he added, “Hannah has been instrumental in resolving both the company and hospital issues this time.”

“She’s only interested in the stocks. She has no altruistic motives!”

Johanna retorted, her voice filled with disdain.

“I had her background checked a long time ago. She left the Edwards family only to take 20% of the shares! And then she swiftly moved on to the more affluent Mitchell family! Later she targeted us, the White family!

ALL because we have deeper pockets!”

Johanna, now agitated, turned toward Tinsley.

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“She’s only returned to stake a claim on the family fortune. Don’t be deceived by her act, Grandma!”

“Shut up!”

Byrum’s fork clanged onto the table, startling everyone into putting down their own utensils.

Johanna opened her mouth to speak, but Byrum’s abrupt and thunderous tone silenced her.

“Grandpa...”

Byrum gave her a frosty stare.

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“You believe I’m ignorant of your actions? While I was unconscious in the hospital, you withdrew a hefty five million from our bank. Care to explain?”

Johanna felt as if she’d been struck by a bolt from the blue. She sat next to Byrum, uncomfortably aware of her predicament.

“I... I was...”

“Hmph! Can’t find your tongue now?” Byrum grunted deeply.

“Feeling a bit ashamed, are we?”

Aware that her disgraceful behavior was on the brink of being revealed, Johanna turned a desperate gaze to Tinsley.

“Grandma, I...”

Ignoring Johanna’s desperate gaze, Tinsley sipped her coffee and said nothing.

“Five million?”

Christy looked puzzled. While the sum was not earth-shattering for them, it was still an unexpected expense.

“Johanna, what on earth did you do with that money?”

Johanna’s complexion fluctuated between shades of green and red.

Byrum commented icily, “Not only could she not manage a minor celebrity, but she also got swindled out of five million by him.”

“hat ?”

Gasps filled the room.

Other than Hannah, who kept her focus on her meal, everyone stared at Johanna, disbelief written on their faces.

“What kind of trouble have you stepped into?” Jalen, scowling at Johanna, said, “How many times have I suggested you join the family business after college? What have you been up to?”

Feeling the weight of all eyes on her, Johanna burst out, “I wanted a career in showbiz, but you all wouldn’t let me! It wasn’t just about sponsoring some star... I was genuinely in love!”

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Hannah chuckled softly, “In love, you say? If you were truly in love, why would there be a video of him blackmailing you sent to my phone?”

Johanna stared at Hannah in disbelief.

“What are you even talking about?”

Setting her utensils down elegantly, Hannah wiped her lips and looked directly at Johanna.

“The video’s still on my phone. Would you like to watch it and see?”

“AhITE”

Johanna let out a piercing scream, lunging toward Hannah.

“How did you get that video? Did you set me up? Hannah Moore, I knew you were out to get me!”

Edwin rose swiftly to intervene.

“Johanna, have you lost your senses?”

Calm yourself!”

“So you’re taking this bitch’s side now? Are you a White or a Moore?”

Upon hearing about the video, Johanna seemed to snap. She tried to lunge at Hannah again, ignoring Edwin’s attempts to hold her back.

“You bitch! You bought my video! You had me pay five million just to embarrass me in front of our grandfather, didn’t you?”

Johanna lunged at Hannah, missing her target. She thrashed wildly against Edwin’s grasp, shouting, “Release me! I need to get rid of this bitch!”

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Hannah calmly rose to her feet, sidestepping Edwin. As Johanna charged toward her, Hannah’s hand shot up. It was a resounding slap.

Smack! !

Johanna’s head whipped to the side from the impact. Before she could react, another slap followed, leaving her momentarily speechless.

With a casual flick of her wrist, Hannah locked eyes with her, saying, “I don’t have the luxury to set you up. Someone else does, though. You’re naive if you think video footage can’t be restored.”

You gave him 5 million, and he tried to squeeze another 10 million out of me. Were you aware?”

Johanna’s eyes narrowed, her hand clutching her stinging cheek, and her body teetering.

“How... how is this possible?”

“Because you’re naive,” Hannah retorted icily.

“So naive that you’ve been played and didn’t even realize it. So naive that your little protege was already planning to leave you and move on, and you were oblivious.”

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Johanna felt herself nearing collapse. She had intended to resolve this situation quickly; she never anticipated such a twist.

Byrum coughed in irritation, visibly annoyed.

“We’re fortunate this information came to Hannah. Otherwise, the White family would again be under fire!”

“Grandpa.”

Ignoring her, Byrum continued, “We’re lucky all the videos have been deleted and the individual responsible is behind bars. Media has been dealt with. Otherwise, we’d have no choice but to disown you!”

Hearing this, Johanna’s eyes widened in horror. She dashed to Byrum and fell to her knees, pleading, “Grandpa, the fault is all mine! I understand now!”

Growing tired of the spectacle, Hannah glanced away, grabbed her bag from behind the chair, and made to exit.

“Hannah, hold on. Come upstairs. We need to talk further,” Byrum interjected.

“Of course, Grandpa,” Hannah replied, stopping in her tracks.

Johanna, seeing her grandfather rise and pay her no mind, frantically grasped at the hem of his pants.

“Grandpa, I swear I’ve learned my lesson! It won’t happen again!”

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“Get her off me!”

Edwin, standing close by, immediately complied.

Byrum’s icy stare met Johanna’s face.

“If you’ve truly learned your lesson, then remain in the villa and stop wreaking havoc!”

“Understood, Grandpa,” Johanna said, nodding frantically.

Tapping his cane, Byrum shifted his gaze to Bryan and said, “Bryan, you and Hannah come upstairs with me.”

Hannah and Bryan went upstairs, eventually reaching Byrum’s study.

“Review this six-month financial summary, both of you,” Byrum said, handing them a report.

Hannah skimmed through the document. She had already gone over the White Group’s current financial situation. Though they weren’t in the red, their performance paled in comparison to rival companies.

Upon examining the report, Bryan’s expression tightened.

“Dad, even if we account for Jalen’s poor project choices, the numbers here are more than just troubling. Something doesn’t add up.”

Byrum turned to Hannah.

“Your thoughts, Hannah?”

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“The economic model that the White family relies on is showing signs of weakening. I believe it’s time to diversify and explore partnerships. Additionally, we need to scrutinize the company’s stakeholders. Misusing company funds is a grave concern.”

Bryan, who seldom participated in the company’s daily affairs, wasn’t shocked by Hannah’s insight.

“I have a hunch that some of the old- timers, especially those loyal to Dexter, have been funneling money overseas. Their tracks are too well-covered for it to be anything else.”

Byrum nodded in agreement.

“Given both of your suspicions about the board and stakeholders, I’m delegating this investigation to you.”

“Since Hannah is already preoccupied with the company’s ongoing projects,” with a contemplative demeanor, Bryan said, “I’ll handle the shareholder investigation.”

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Hannah offered no objections, which Byrum took as a silent agreement.

Once they wrapped up their discussion, Byrum turned to Hannah.

“I’d like you to stay at the family estate for now. You’ll be representing the Whites at an upcoming Hoijery banquet alongside our younger members.”

Hannah was about to decline when Byrum cut in, “Rest assured, I’ve instructed the staff here. They’ll follow your lead unless I say otherwise.”

Bryan was inwardly surprised that Byrum was willing to transfer such authority to Hannah but kept his emotions in check.

Grinning at Hannah, he said, “Seems like it’s time for us old folks to step aside and make room for fresh blood.”

Upon hearing that Hannah would be taking charge at the family estate, Johanna went on a rampage in her room, throwing and breaking anything she could get her hands on.

“Stop this at once! If Byrum sees you behaving like this, who knows how severely he’ll reprimand you!” Christy attempted to calm Johanna down.

“You’re picking fights with her, even though you know Byrum’s favoring her these days. Why are you still locking horns with her?”

In a burst of emotion, Johanna hurled her laptop to the floor, her face twisted in hatred.

“Why did everything shift the moment Hannah showed up? She’s taken all of Grandpa’s love for me! Why would Grandma hand over her entire share to her? She’s nothing but a stranger! Has Grandma lost her mind?”

Hearing this, Christy quickly clamped her hand over Johanna’s mouth.

“Are you out of your mind? If Tinsley overhears you, it’s not just you who’ll be kicked out of the White family; your parents will be dragged into it too!”

Gritting her teeth, Johanna took a deep breath to contain her anger.

She gazed at Christy, her eyes filled with hurt.

“Christy, don’t you see? I’m the victim here. And it’s not just unfair to me. It’s unfair to Jalen, too! Before she arrived, Grandpa himself had designated Jalen as the chairman. Then she swoops in and steals his spot! How shameless!”

Johanna’s eyes narrowed as she continued, “You know I like you the most in this household, Christy. I can’t sit back and watch her seize control of the White family’s assets and companies. And you’ve put in your fair share, too. Why should she reap all the benefits?”

Jalen was simply too soft-hearted, and she took advantage of him!”

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Christy’s face showed a glimmer of doubt.

“Well, actually... Hannah did help the company pull through a tough spot.”

“Christy! Why put all our hopes on her? She’s nothing more than Bryson Mitchell’s girlfriend. I could also prosper by marrying into affluence!”

Johanna squeezed Christy’s hand firmly.

“Christy, you mustn’t fall for her tricks. She deliberately distanced herself from the Moore family as soon as she came back to Hoijery, targeting our White family from the start!”

Christy listened, and a wave of doubt clouded her mind. She was already predisposed to dislike Hannah, and now her brows knitted even more.

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“But at the end of the day, she’s Byrum’s favorite. Our hands are tied.”

“I know how to expose her, but right now, I’m not in a position to make a move. I need your help, Christy.”

The pair whispered in hushed tones for a while. Christy’s grip tightened, and her complexion turned a shade paler. Hesitation clouded her eyes.

Seeing her like this, Johanna grasped her hand.

“Christy, you’re the only one who can pull this off. If we let this opportunity slip, we won’t get another one!”

“No, it’s not possible.”

Christy abruptly rose to her feet, shaking her head vehemently.

“This is completely impossible! What if things go south?”

Inwardly, Johanna labeled Christy as timid, but her outward voice remained soothing.

“We’ve got your back, Christy. What could possibly go wrong? Our goal is just to make her leave, not to harm anyone.”

“But.”

Pretending to exhale in disappointment, Johanna chimed in, “If you’re not on board, we’ll drop it. But know this. We’ll be letting her seize the White family’s legacy.”

“Wait. Christy paused.

“Fine, let’s go with your plan.”

The butler had set up a room for Hannah on the second floor. Once she was back in her room, she called Bryson first.

“I’ll be staying at the White residence for a bit. Let Lydia and Grace know. I’ll be back after the banquet.”

Bryson’s lips curled ever so slightly upon hearing Hannah.

“Mr. Byrum White is already leaning on you, huh?”

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From her end, Hannah held her forehead and chuckled, “I wish he’d just take back those shares. You have no idea how messy it’s been here today.”

“When I returned to the Mitchell clan, it was even crazier. Just give it your all.” Bryson reassured her while adjusting his gold- framed glasses.

“I’ll send you some documents about overseas partnerships later. There are some promising options. Take a look when you get a chance.”

“Will do. See you at the banquet.”

“sure.”

After hanging up, the twinkle in Bryson’s eyes vanished.

His computer screen still displayed an active call. The voice at the other end piped up once he’d disconnected.

“So, what’s your next move now that Ruby’s gone? Going to keep it a secret forever?”

A frigid, dispassionate smile graced Bryson’s lips.

“I never planned to hide it. I couldn’t care less. She won’t find a shred of evidence, even if it does come out.”

The voice on the other line chuckled, “If you genuinely didn’t care, you’d have been upfront with her. Why go through the trouble of hiding it for him? Or we could take care of her for you.”

Bryson’s expression hardened, and his voice tinged with warning.

“This is my business. Stay out of it!”

Angela’s Library

A playful tone resonated from the other end of the line.

“You didn’t exactly show mercy to women before, did you? Ah, Ruby.

“Shut up, or I’ll arrange for someone to remove your tongue,” Bryson retorted coldly.

Unfazed, the man chuckled, “Fine, fine. It benefits you to keep me alive anyway. I’ll be in Newfort, waiting for you. Oh, another thing.

You wanted intel on what’s happening in Muvrand. Let’s just say the big guy backing Enchantment Casino isn’t too happy with you. He’s out for

blood because you let a woman break the deal. Despite living in a law-abiding society, Enchantment Casino is itching to make you pay.”

Resting a finger on his forehead, Bryson responded icily, “I know.”

“So, are you going to clean up his mess?”

“Enough talk,” Bryson shot back.

“Alright, got to go. Other matters to attend to.” With that, the man hung up.

Bryson glanced at his phone, which displayed a goodnight text and a string of emojis from Hannah. His expression remained enigmatic.

For the past two days, Johanna had been unusually docile, avoiding causing any problems for Hannah, all thanks to Byrum’s influence.