

Chapter 103 Rigged Card Game

At the card table, Alicia found herself outmatched by Mrs. Reyes.

As if that wasn't bad enough, Mrs. Reyes wasn't her only opponent; the others had formed a subtle yet unmistakable alliance against her.

The tension mounted as round after round slipped through her fingers, her losses climbing into the hundreds of thousands.

Alicia clutched her cards tightly, knowing she couldn't rely on skill alone to beat them.

Eyes narrowing, she shifted her focus from the cards to Mrs. Reyes herself.

It was absurd how Mrs. Reyes seemed to win every single hand.

Even the luckiest person in the world couldn't have won this many times in a row.

Alicia's sharp eyes soon caught a pattern—each time Mrs. Reyes played her card, she would casually lift her hand to support her head, twisting her jade bracelet in a practiced, almost mechanical motion.

Once or twice might have been coincidence, but it happened every time without fail.

What was more telling, the other ladies would only play their cards after Mrs. Reyes performed this peculiar gesture.

Before long, Mrs. Reyes swept the table again, a smug smile playing on her lips as she raked in the winnings.

It was a setup, plain and simple.

Alicia's gaze dropped to her dwindling chips, frustration simmering

If this continued, she'd be drained of every last cent.

"Mrs. Reyes." Alicia spoke, her tone cool but resolute.

Mrs. Reyes's eyes gleamed, as if she had been expecting this. She offered Alicia a saccharine smile. "Ms. Bennett, are you calling it quits already?"

Alicia didn't respond right away.

Mrs. Reyes, feigning a look of understanding, leaned forward with a hint of mock sympathy. "You've lost quite a bit already. If you're short on funds, we could stop."

One of the ladies even ventured, "Walking away over such a small loss, Ms. Bennett? Oh, please—don't spoil the fun! Why not ring up your ex-husband to bail you out?"

The jibe struck like a well-aimed arrow, but Alicia wasn't planning to surrender that easily.

They might have ganged up to rob her blind, but she wasn't about to let them have the satisfaction of seeing her defeated.

"Let's take a break," she said, rising gracefully from her seat. "I need to freshen up. We can continue when I get back."

She needed a moment to collect herself and strategize. There had to be a way to turn the tables on them.

Just as she prepared to step away, the murmurs in the room grew louder.

"Mr. Ward?"

Rachel's voice cut through the din, startled and excited. She darted towards the door. "Randolph said he was treating you to dinner! He knew you'd be coming and reserved the most exclusive private restaurant. In fact, he's still busy arranging the whole thing."

All eyes turned toward the gate as Caden entered.

Clad in a sleek black suit that highlighted his broad shoulders and long legs, he carried himself with an effortless elegance that spoke of quiet authority.

His healthy complexion, set against the dark fabric, only heightened his striking masculinity. His deep-set eyes were sharp and discerning, as though he could see things no one else could.

"No need," Caden replied smoothly, his voice calm but commanding. He stepped forward, his gaze locked solely on Alicia. "I can eat anywhere," he added casually.

Alicia, who had just begun to rise from her seat, found herself instinctively sitting back down, her pulse quickening unexpectedly.

With her back to him, she could still feel the weight of his presence, every beat of her heart growing louder in her chest.

She thought he'd be a no-show.

The other women exchanged glances, excitement flickering in their eyes.

After all, who wouldn't be captivated by such a man? Caden was one of the most handsome men in Warrington, his allure drawing admiration from women of all ages.

They toyed with the idea of flirting with him, a thousand thoughts sparking, though none dared voice them aloud.

Rachel, in particular, was eager to greet him, but Caden paid her no mind.

He walked straight past her, his long stride purposeful, and took the seat beside Alicia without hesitation.

Alicia sensed his presence immediately, though she kept her face impassive, shifting her chair a fraction away from him.

Caden's eyebrow quirked at her subtle movement.

Mrs. Reyes's curiosity got the better of her. "Mr. Ward, do you know Alicia?"

Without so much as a glance in Mrs. Reyes's direction, Caden replied coolly, "She's my former sister-in-law."



A stunned silence followed.

Everyone knew Joshua was Caden's half-brother.

As for Alicia... Well, she was indeed Caden's former sister-in-law.

Yet there they were, sitting together so naturally, their proximity comfortable yet somehow unsettling.

The tension was palpable, though no one could put their finger on why.

Unspoken questions lingered in the air, but Caden's imposing demeanor warned them to keep quiet.

Without warning, Caden extended his leg, hooking it around the leg of Alicia's chair and pulling it firmly back toward him.

Alicia blinked in surprise, momentarily speechless.

Caden remained utterly unbothered, his tone dry as he said, "Still as stubborn as ever. How much have you won?"

Instinctively, Alicia moved her hand to shield the drawer, a reflexive gesture that only deepened the amusement in Caden's eyes.

Alas, she was too slow. With a swift movement, Caden reached the drawer first, opening it to peer inside.

His eyes skimmed over the scattered chips, a smug grin forming on his lips as he let out a low chuckle.

"Did someone break into the drawer?" he teased, raising an eyebrow. "Where are all your chips?"

Alicia huffed in annoyance, her arms crossed defensively. "No one broke in. I lost them!"

Caden's smirk deepened. "With your level of brilliance, even tic-tac-toe seems like a challenge. Why bother with cards?"

Alicia clenched her fists under the table, biting back a retort.

She fumed silently, "You jerk! I kissed you because I needed your help,

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The tension in the room thickened, but a laugh from one of the women cut through the air. "Mr. Ward, you really came at the perfect time. Looks like Ms. Bennett's luck has run dry. Care to spot her some chips?"

As soon as she said this, Mrs. Reyes delivered a swift kick under the table, shooting the woman a pointed glare.

Teasing Alicia was one thing, but provoking Caden? That was dangerous territory.

Sure enough, Caden's sharp gaze flicked to the woman, causing her to freeze momentarily.

After an awkward pause, she forced a tight smile and quickly excused herself, mumbling, "I... I'll go grab some water."

As soon as she left, Caden casually took her vacant seat.

Mrs. Reyes, clearly taken aback, asked tentatively, "Mr. Ward, do you play cards as well?"

He shrugged nonchalantly. "Not really, but if someone's desperate enough to throw money at me, why not take it?"

His gaze slid to Alicia, eyes gleaming with amusement. "Wouldn't you agree?"

Alicia narrowed her eyes at him, her mouth pressing into a thin line before silently mouthing, "Idiot!"

Their obvious discord reassured Mrs. Reyes.

It seemed Caden wasn't planning on bailing Alicia out after all.

She allowed herself to relax slightly—her advantage was intact.

However, Caden's unexpected involvement had shaken up the dynamics. She was now short of an ally and forced to play her cards more cautiously.

Despite this, the round still ended in her favor, leaving her with a sizable win.

Alicia watched closely, her brow furrowing in frustration. Caden, for all his nonchalance, was unnervingly calm. Was he really just here to take her money?

Something about it felt off.

Unable to resist, Alicia discreetly kicked him under the table.

Caden shot her a quizzical glance. "Why did you kick me?"

