


Chapter 369 A Win-win Solution

"Why did Sierra run away if it had nothing to do with her?" Horace snorted, casting a glance at Rita. "The weather's taken a turn lately. Take good care of Nicol. The rest? You needn't lose sleep over it."

"But Sierra's my cousin," Rita said, eyes welling up. "Back in my hometown, my brother was my savior. He handed me the good stuff and shielded me from my ex-husband's abuse. If it weren't for him, escaping that disastrous marriage would've been impossible. If something happens to Sierra, I'll bear the guilt." 

"I get it. You value family ties. You're afraid you fail to take good care of Sierra for your big brother. But, darling, if you're looking out for Sierra, you shouldn't have always covered her up like this. I wouldn't have known she swiped someone else's work if Fulton hadn't told me."

Horace glanced at Rita's delicate face, reminiscing about their first encounter. Recalling Rita had been through some tough times, his tone remained firm, but there was a noticeable softening.

With tears in her eyes, Rita played the coquette. "She did do something wrong. I have already taught her a lesson. If you can help her sort this mess, I'll lay down the law and ask her to behave herself in the coming days. Horace, can you help her out this time?"

Horace's demeanor softened, and he gently patted Rita's shoulder. "I can lend a hand this time, but she better heed my advice moving forward."

Rita, taken aback, cautiously asked, "What do you mean?"

Horace met her gaze and explained, "I haven't made up my mind yet."

Test assured I won't harm her. I just won't let her loaf around at my place causing trouble."

Before Rita could respond, he added, "If you're not on board, I'll hand her over to the Garretts."

"I'm not refusing," Rita hastened to reply. "I trust you'll do what's best for her. I'll make it crystal clear to her."

Horace directed the housekeeper, "Call Blayze and tell him to return!"

The housekeeper reported, "He just called a moment ago. He's at the airport and will be here shortly."

"Have him meet me in the study when he gets in."

"Yes, sir!"

Twenty minutes later, Blayze made his way to the Fowler residence.

As he reached the study door, he pushed it open and greeted, "Hey, dad."

"Welcome back." Horace lifted his head, reclining lazily in his chair, signaling for Blayze to take a seat. He gestured for tea to be served.

"Have you heard about Brady's situation?"

Sipping his tea, Blayze replied, "I'm aware. Heard Fulton paid a visit?"

"Indeed. According to him, Sierra stirred Brady up, hinting that I should hand Sierra over."

Blayze, unsympathetic toward Sierra, saw Fulton's move as precisely what he desired. "Then do as he says."

A shadow crossed Horace's face at his words. Blayze smirked, knowing Rita had surely influenced his father's decision. He inquired, "What's the hold-up? You disagree?"

Horace cleared his throat, pondering for a moment. "Fulton favors Brady, so his words may not be true. Perhaps he's looking for a scapegoat. Sierra is your uncle's only child, and Rita fears Sierra will be unjustly treated."

Blayze had anticipated Horace would be moved by Rita's words. Look at the lame excuse Horace crafted.

Blayze sarcastically smiled and said, "But Fulton must be confident in Sierra's involvement if he came and brought it up to you. If you don't show your distance by complying with their wishes, the Garretts will undoubtedly complain. Our families have been friends for generations. As you've drilled into me, you've urged me not to act impulsively in my role as a family leader. So why jeopardize our relations with the Garretts for Sierra?"

Horace's expression shifted slightly. "When did I suggest jeopardizing relations with the Garrett family for her? I'm exploring a win-win scenario. The Garretts surely dread the idea of Brady landing behind bars. If he's safe, they won't stir up trouble for Sierra."

"Care to elaborate on your plan?" With a subtle smile, Blayze feigned ignorance of Horace's self-interest.

"Is it true that the victims are your friends? Pay them a visit. Once they forgive Brady, I can grant their terms."

"Is that your grand plan, then?"

Hearing the sarcastic tone in Blayze's voice, Horace was embarrassed. Adjusting himself, he spoke in a deep voice. "Isn't Sabrina your student? If you ask for her forgiveness over Brady, she'll consider it."

In the photography competition, Sierra had appropriated Sabrina's work. Resolving that issue wasn't a piece of cake. Moreover, the offensive comments Brady made about Sabrina that day, coupled with this very drug incident, left Blayze hesitant to seek Sabrina's forgiveness over Brady.

Noticing Blayze's momentary hesitation, Horace fixed his gaze on Blayze and pressed on, "Is it true what Brady said? Are you entangled with Sabrina? Would you rather see Brady behind bars than help Sierra?"

As Blayze prepared to respond, a thought struck him. He lowered his head and sneered, "I do have feelings for her, but it's her right whether she forgives Brady or not. Can I force her if she's not willing? I've caused her enough trouble. I'm in no position to approach her for this.

Plus, do you think the Garrett family hasn't tried to reach her? They can't coerce or entice her into forgiving Brady. How can I make it?

More importantly, it's Sierra's and Brady's fault. You've instilled in me the importance of responsibility since I was a child. It's only fair they face the consequences, isn't it?"

"Brady grew up with you. Do you really want to see him in jail?"

"Absolutely not. That's precisely why I've chosen to hand Sierra over to the Garrett family," declared Blayze.

Horace was left stunned.

"I figured she'd try to dodge the drama and skip town, so I dispatched someone to tail her the moment I landed. We might get some news soon," Blayze added.

"You..." Horace seethed, shooting a glare at Blayze. He begrudgingly softened his tone and asked, "What are your terms for letting her go?"

At this moment, Horace regretted hastily giving in to Rita's wishes. Yet, a promise was a promise, and he couldn't break it now.

Blayze smiled and said, "Dad, aren't you the one who said that as long as Brady is in the clear, the Garrett family won't hassle Sierra? Well, I can't sway Sabrina's decision. If you're adamant about not handing over Sierra, you better go there yourself and show some sincerity. Once you get Sabrina's forgiveness over Brady, everything should smooth out."

After a brief hesitation, Horace nodded. "Fine, I'll handle it personally."

"But even if Sabrina agrees to forgive Brady, I won't let Sierra off the hook. She would only stir up more trouble here," Blayze declared.

"What's your plan, then?"

"After this mess, I'm sending her abroad for studies. She won't set foot back here without my say-so," Blayze asserted sternly.

Horace shared the same strategy, nodding and stating, "Alright, I'll inform Rita."

Once Blayze left, Rita entered the study with a tray in hand. Placing the tray on the table, she served Horace a bowl of chicken soup and inquired, "What did Blayze say?"

"I asked Blayze to talk to Sabrina and get her to forgive Brady, but he wasn't up for it. Claimed he was too embarrassed to say so. If I want to help Sierra, I have to approach Sabrina and ask for her forgiveness by myself," Horace explained.

Rita was taken aback. "Must you do that?"

Horace clarified, "The Garretts and the Fowlers go way back. The Garrett family just wants to save Brady. If Brady's safe, so is Sierra. But sorting Brady's mess will require some effort. A letter of understanding from the victims is needed."

"In that case, I'll go," Rita declared.

With a gentle smile, she added, "For Sierra's sake, I'll personally go to Mathias, apologize to the victims, and try to convince them to forgive Brady."

