

Lady Jae

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"So, This is Family?"

by Lady Jae & Sharon Perry

The sun streaked through the windowed walls. It danced across the white marble floors and gleamed against the crystals in the chandeliers of the Wellington grand hall. Gold, purple, and white draperies hung from the ceilings, matching the large, engraved, gold W, that sparkled in the middle of the floor.

Small circle tables—with hors d'oeuvres of every color and shape— were scattered around the room. Servers dressed in tuxes passed flutes of champagne to each guest as they entered. Guests paid their respects to the late matriarch, Demetria Wellington. Multi-generational family members, associated amongst the visitors, thanking them for their respect, gifts, and loyalty.

Marcus entered the hall and adjusted the glasses on his nose. He frowned as he looked around at the crowd of people, exchanging fake hugs and fake smiles.

A smiling server appeared before Marcus, pushing a tray with a single flute in his face. Marcus shook his head at the server as his eyes jumped around the room. His hands trembled as he wiped his sweaty palms on his pants.

A hard hand slapped his frail back.

Marcus gasped. His eyes bulged as he stumbled forward.

His older cousin pushed past him into the hall, laughing as Marcus gathered himself.

"Grandma D, can't save you anymore, Little Mar-Mar," he taunted and shot him a bird.

The laughter faded as Marcus adjusted his clothes.

A gentle hand touched his shoulder and Marcus jumped. He spun around and pouted at the regal, dark-skinned woman, smiling at him.

He blew out a breath and leaned towards her curvy frame.

"Ma, you have to stop making me come to these events."

"Hush, our attendance is important."

Marcus scowled at her.

She picked a piece of lint off his blazer and glanced around the room.

"You think I like showing up to be picked on? Nobody in this family likes me."

"Whether they like you or not, they have to respect you. You are my child."

"Yeah, but that's not good enough for this family."

Marcus bit his lip and looked down at the floor.

A guest walked by, and Patricia forced a smile as she pulled Marcus to the side. She gently grasped Marcus' chin and looked him in the eyes.

"I don't care what they think. We are family," she said, pointing between them, "and we are all that matters."

Marcus pulled away. He studied her stern expression with a furrowed brow.

"I guess you're right, now that Grandma is gone."

She squeezed his hand. "But you were her favorite and she trusted you more than everyone in this room."

Marcus gave her a weak smile.

"Being her favorite means nothing now that she is gone." Marcus looked at the floor again as tears swelled in his eyes. He shook his head and let out a deep breath.

"You don't know that."

Patricia smiled at Marcus and walked away.

Marcus watched with a puzzled expression. He started to follow her but stopped when his cousin looked his way.

Marcus turned on his heels and scurried out one of the side doors, in search of a quiet place.

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Marcus released a deep breath as he walked out onto the wood-finished patio. A large lion statue stood in the corner, overlooking the massive back yard.

He looked down at his phone, checking his stocks and smiled as the green arrow on his screen went up.

Angered voices echoed through the air. Marcus looked back as the patio doors swung open.

His mother stormed out with his aunt close on her heels. Their high heels vibrating against the floor with each step.

Marcus ran and hid behind the statue, moving out of view.

"Patricia, do not walk away from me while I'm talking!" His aunt shouted, as she pointed her manicured finger in Patricia's face.

Patricia slapped it away. "Victoria, you better watch yourself."

"Or what? You're too soft to do anything," Victoria sneered.

They glared at each other as Victoria crossed her arms and pursed her lips.

"Keep believing that," Patricia rolled her eyes as she adjusted the gold-bracelets on her wrists.

"We need to discuss the estate."

"For what?" Patricia laughed.

Victoria sucked her teeth and stepped closer.

"We need to come together in agreeance on the direction of the company. That weak worm you call a son, can't even manage himself without you coddling him. So, how will he manage a million-dollar business?"

Marcus' gasped and covered his mouth as he crouched lower to the floor.

Patricia tilted her head and glanced towards the statue. She shook her head then turned slowly back to Victoria with a bored look.

"That's not your concern nor was it your decision."

"Well, it was a stupid decision if you ask me." Victoria gritted her teeth and looked away.

"Nobody asked you."

Victoria scoffed and tapped her shoe against the floor.

"Patricia, you know damn well Marcus is too soft to run anything. You need to tell him to sign it over to me and let me keep running things. I know what is best."

Patricia chuckled and let out a deep breath.

"I will never do that."

"Ugh! You know mom only chose him because she pacified him all his life."

Patricia shook her head and rubbed the wrinkles on her forehead.

"Victoria, listen and hear me clear. I will never let Marcus sign anything that gives you power over this family. You're just mad because your greedy reign of terror is about to be over, and my so-called soft son will have it all."

"He has to get it first."

Victoria's eyes lowered.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Patricia stepped towards Victoria, clenching her fist at her sides.

"It means that I'll destroy the Wellington name and rebuild a new one before I let that weak worm of a man that you call a son run anything." Victoria stabbed her finger into Patricia's chest before she stormed away.

Anger burned in Patricia's eyes.

Marcus stepped out of his hiding place with his hand still covering his mouth.

"Mom," he whispered as he crept to her.

Patricia jumped and grabbed her chest as she spun around.

Marcus held her by her shoulders and peered into her frustrated face.

"You weren't supposed to hear that," whispered Patricia.

"Did she really leave it all to me?" Marcus asked, in a low tone.

Patricia nodded.

Marcus let her go and looked up into the sky with a deep sigh.

"Why me?"

"You were the only one she trusted to respect her wishes and run the company right."

Marcus held his head as he paced back and forth, chewing his lip.

"But I'm only twenty-three. I can't run a company. Aunt Vic was right—"

"No, she is not! She is greedy and conniving. Stay away from her!"

"But mom—" Marcus stopped pacing and looked at his mother with worry in his brow.

"Marcus! Listen don't worry about her. We got this."

Patricia reached for his hand.

Marcus looked at it, then reached his hand out to meet hers. He gripped it tightly and nodded at the smile on her face.

###

Marcus sat in his office at Wellington Corp. He stared at some paperwork, but his thoughts were somewhere else.

The thick-manilla envelope from his grandmother sat on the edge of his desk, still unopened. It had been a week since his mother gave it to him, but he couldn't find the courage to open it. He couldn't believe that his grandmother left him such a great responsibility.

He picked up the folder and read the inscription printed on the outside.

"You're the only one I trust to keep my legacy true. Just do what is right and ALWAYS STICK TO MY RULES."

He rubbed his fingers across each letter, hearing her voice in his head.

A knock resonated against the office door and Victoria stormed in dropping a stack of files on his desk.

Marcus covered the envelope with other paperwork.

"Marcus."

"Aunt Vic," Marcus responded, in a low tone.

He looked at the files, then directed his attention to her.

"I just need you to file these. No need to look through, I've already crunched the numbers, and everything is legit."

"You know that's my job, right?" Marcus opened the top envelope, but Victoria closed it.

"Just file them, Marcus. Do what the hell you're told and file them. Stop being difficult like your mother."

"My mother is not difficult. She is—"

"Just file the damn paperwork!" Victoria storms out.

Marcus glared at the door as it closed and then moved the files she left out of his way. Ripping open his grandmother's envelope, he pulled out the papers and scanned through the first couple of pages.

He froze at a paper with large letters reading: Wellington Estate, printed across the top. His eyes bulged as he scanned and read the declaration aloud.

"I, Demetria Wellington, sole owner of Wellington Corp and all things Wellington, regarding property and estates, declare that Marcus Demetrius Wellington as the sole beneficiary. Upon his twenty-fifth birthday the company, estate and all things Wellington will be given to him to uphold, protect, and change according to the rules he has been given by me."

Marcus dropped the paper on the desk and looked up at the ceiling. A weak smile crossed his face as he looked back down at the document.

He organized the papers, and a small card fell in his lap. He picked up the card and flipped it over, revealing small handwriting.

"Marcus, please look deeper into the financials of the company. Something is not right, but I'm just too sick to find out."

Marcus grabbed the folders Victoria gave him.

He read through the first file and frowned at the numbers.

He grabbed a calculator, crunched the numbers, and grimaced. He pulled up the file on the computer and compared the numbers.

Marcus gathered the files, his favorite pen, and headed to Victoria's office.

###

Marcus stormed into Victoria's office and dropped the files on her desk. He stood like a drill sergeant commanding his troops.

A mischievous grin crossed Victoria's face. She leaned back in her chair and motioned for Marcus to sit.

Marcus rolled his eyes and maintained his stance.

"What do you want, Mar-Mar?" Victoria asked.

"Why are you stealing from the company?" Marcus asked.

Victoria scoffed and laughed as she pushed the files to the side. She walked with confidence and stood in front of Marcus, with her arms crossed.

"Tell me, Nephew. What makes you think I'm stealing?"

"The numbers are not adding up correctly," Marcus stated.

"Oh, how cute. The little worm can add and subtract."

"Mock me all you want, but Grandma D, knew what you were doing—"

"My mother was senile, nerd boy."

"She wasn't senile, and the fact remains you still stole from your family."

"Oh, and let me guess, you're gonna save the day, huh?" Victoria pinched his cheek as she laughed.

Marcus swatted her hand and stepped back.

"I don't care how much my mother adored you. You can't play in the big league, little boy. My plans are beyond this company, and I'm building a better future."

Victoria took her seat and glared up at Marcus.

"Is that a threat?" Marcus raised his brow as sweat filled his palms.

"Take it how you want, nephew."

Victoria pushed the files into the trash and pointed at the door.

Marcus hesitated.



He reached down and grabbed the files out of the garbage and rushed toward the door.

Victoria gave a loud laugh as she leaned back in her chair and sat her red bottoms on the desk.

"Oh, Mar-Mar, you've been warned, please don't try me. I'll destroy your whole life before you could even blink."

Marcus slammed the door.

###

Later that night, Marcus pulled up a folder on his home computer. He realized all traces had vanished. He hacked into the mainframe, retrieved all the deleted files, and noticed that the time stamp was linked to Patricia's IP address.

*I can't believe Aunt Vic, would try and blame this on my mother.*

Marcus reviewed all the files on his laptop, searching for a loophole.

A suspicious IP address loaded on his computer. He gasped as an offshore account popped up with over a hundred million dollars ordered to a 'VP Boutique.'

"Well, Aunt Vic, didn't think I'd find this, huh," Marcus thought, "trying to blame my mother for your theft."

He sulked for a moment, realizing the Wellington company was in the red and nearly bankrupt. He groaned when a loud bang hit his door.

He rushed over, opened it, and his mother barged in.

"Marcus, what the hell happened with Victoria?" Patricia asked.

"I called her out, Mom, that's all."

"About what?"

"Your sister is stealing money."

Marcus sat back down at his desk as his mother followed standing behind his chair.

"Wait, h-how do you know this?"

Patricia eyes squinted as she focused on the illuminated computer screen in front of Marcus.

"The numbers Ma, they don't add up."

"Let me help. You look stressed."

Patricia leaned forward, but Marcus closed the laptop and spun around to face her.

"Mom, I'm good, and I don't want to sound rude, but I got this."

"Ok, but are you sure you don't—"

"Bye, Mom."

Patricia twisted her lip and watched him for a moment.

She blew out a loud breath and walked out the door.

Marcus stared at an old picture of his Grandma D, in a white summer hat with a long black gown.

*Grandma, I wish you were here to help me figure this out.*

He bit his lip to stop the water that started to form in his eyes. He couldn't let her down.

With the declaration in hand, he had to do something.

*How I'm I going to stop Victoria if I don't have control of the company until I'm twenty-five?*

Marcus looked at the declaration, then re-read it, this time a little slower.

He found a clause at the bottom.

"If in the event that the company or estate became under seize, the direction and the future of the company should be decided by my beneficiary Marcus D. Wellington."

Marcus gasped and gripped the paper.

*Wow, perfect because if Victoria makes one more transfer, the company and legacy would be no more. Thanks, Grandma.*

Marcus got to work and devised a plan to save Wellington Corp.

###

Morning's lights peaked through Marcus's condo window. He jumped out of bed, ready to face the day.

He emailed a contractor and made a deal to save the company.

He pulled out his favorite pen and pulled a small SD drive out of the spine.

He plugged it into his computer and smiled as Victoria's voice poured through the speakers.

*Oh, yeah, auntie, I can play in the big leagues now.*

He glanced at his watch, gathered his things, and headed to the Wellington main building.

Marcus walked into the empty board room and connected his laptop to the projector. He laid a folder of paperwork in front of every seat.

Patricia was the first to step in.

Marcus kissed her cheek and pulled out a chair for her.

The board members filed into the room, acknowledging them, as they took their seats.

Like a drill sergeant graduated to captain, Marcus stood at the front.

Just as he cleared his throat, Victoria stormed in.

"What is going on here? Who called this meeting?"

"I did. Now, if you sit down, I'll be able to start." Marcus said.

"You don't have authority—"

"I have more power than you think. Take your seat." Marcus pointed at an empty chair. Victoria scoffed and slammed her purse on the table.

Marcus motioned for everyone to relax as he discussed the future of Wellington Corp. He instructed everyone to look through the folder in front of them.

Every board member turned to Victoria with confused expressions.

Victoria glared at Marcus as a video played behind him, and her devious remarks echoed from the projector's audio.

Murmurs filled the room.

Patricia smiled at Marcus.

"Based on the evidence provided, I think it would be in the best interest of the company that Victoria be terminated."

"You can't do that! You're not old enough."

"Vic, just stop," Patricia sneered.

"Oh, but I am. See, Grandma put a clause in her declaration that—"

"I don't care about a damn clause. You can't fire me!"

Victoria picked up one of the files and looked at it.

"I didn't do this!"

"So, VP boutique, that's not you?" Marcus glared at her.

"No! I have no idea what that is. Now, I moved some money, but never that much."

"You're lying because you even tried to frame my mother. Your own sister!"

"Frame? I'm not the only one with access to this family's funds. Patricia has—"

"Never touched anything that wasn't already mine. You're a thief, Vic, and my son just proved it."

Patricia grabbed the phone and called security, as the board members watched the interaction in shock.

Victoria growled and charged toward Marcus.

Patricia stepped in the way and socked her across the face. Like a stunt gone wrong, Victoria hit the floor.

"Well, Auntie, I guess this weak worm proved to be smarter than a slimy snake. You can keep the money you stole. This company is about to make billions on my collaborated efforts."

"Marcus, nephew, please you have to believe me!"

Victoria stood and fixed her clothes as security walked in the room.

"Why should I? You don't even like me. I heard what you said about me. My mother was always right about you, and she would never do something like this. Take her away."

He leaned back in his chair and smirked as security drug a combative Victoria out the door.

The board members left out one by one until Marcus and his mother were alone.

"I can't believe anyone in this family would do something like that to Grandma."

Marcus shook his head.

Patricia walked over to Marcus with a sly smirk.

She leaned in close to his ear, "I did it all for you."