

Mute Bride 131

Chapter 131

After hesitating for a moment, Julian said, "Nothing. I just wanted to say that the weather's good today. I'll bring you and those two out to have a walk. The air here in Southwind is quite clean."

"Don't you have to go back to work?"

"I'm on leave today."

Hearing that, she gave him a nod as a smile crept up her eyes.

The moment Gloria heard that they were going out, she quickly got off the piano and ran to the kitchen to discuss with Mary what food to pack. "Sandwiches, juice, milk... Oh, most importantly, the barbecue stand and the hammock!"

Victor then sighed with exasperation. "Do you think you're going on a preschool field trip?"

The two continued to banter.

As Julian helped Rachel up, they gave each other a helpless smile.

Before leaving the house, a few bodyguards that Justin had assigned blocked Rachel from going out.

At once, Gloria said with annoyance, "What are you doing?"

"Miss Hochmann, Mr. Burton ordered that Mrs. Burton must not leave the premises."

"We'll be back at night. Just let it slide this time."

"We can't do that. Miss Hochmann, please don't make things difficult for us."

Turning back to take a look at Rachel, Gloria saw her face slowly darken.

'It's alright, Gloria. We don't have to go!

"No way!"

With a dark face, Gloria said, "Rae, give me a moment."

After saying that, she immediately walked away to make a phone call.

"Hello? It's me."

The one who picked up the call was Frankie. "Miss Hochmann? What can I help you with?"

After hearing what Gloria said, Frankie quickly headed to the ballroom to find Justin. "Mr. Burton, Miss Hochmann has called."

Today, Justin donned a white suit which he rarely did. Compared to a black suit, the white suit toned down his angsty evil aura of his. He seemed much more peaceful in white.

At this moment, a lot of people were crowding the ballroom as they were all here to attend the engagement party of him and Amber.

"What is it?"

"Miss Hochmann said that Dr. Peters is with them today. They wanted to bring Mrs. Burton out, but they were stopped by Winston and the others."

As Justin frowned, he noticed someone making their way toward him as they held their dress. He then said with a deep tone, "Just have them tag along."

"Okay."

Immediately, Frankie left with the phone.

The person who came to Justin was none other than Amber. She was wearing a long gown in light pink, "Why is Frankie in such a hurry? Did something happen?"

"Nothing. It's just work. Let's go."

unenthusiastic. Hence, she decided to follow him with a frown.

As she walked, she asked the person by her side sotto voce, "How's the plan going?"

"Don't worry, the people are already prepared."

Southwind Villa was close to several scenic areas that were less crowded in Riverdale. They were surrounded by forests and a big lake.

Julian led Rachel and the others to the side of the lake to lay out the picnic mat while Victor was in charge of the barbecue. Though Gloria still had a cast on one of her legs and had to rely on a crutch to support her, she still managed to set up the hammock between two trees.

Seeing that, Victor couldn't help but comment, "You're still very active despite being disabled."

At once, she rolled her eyes at him. "Do you have nothing else to say?"

As Rachel was sitting on the foldable chair, Julian brought a woolen blanket over to cover her. "Are you cold?"

She shook her head in response. At this moment, she was facing the lake that had small ripples on its surface.

As it was autumn, there were fallen leaves all over the hill. The scenery was really magnificent.

“Drink some water.”

Thank you.

Standing by her side, he asked, “When the child is born, what are your plans?”

Taking a glance at Gloria and Victor, she hummed before she made a hand sign saying, ‘Probably leave Riverdale

Her reply caught him off guard. Then, his gaze transferred to the few bodyguards who were standing nearby. and he understood.

“I understand.”

Riverdale was a place that brought her too much pain. If she could leave, it would be good for her.

Undeniably, Gloria and Victor’s presence had added joy to the one-day trip. After a relaxing day outside, they returned home by night time.

After dinner, Julian left only after seeing Rachel rest.

“Dr. Peters,” Gloria called out as she limped out of the house with a crutch. “Thank you for today.”

“What are you thanking me for?”

"You chose to come today for a reason, right?"

Looking back at the well-lit bedroom, Gloria continued, "I didn't know what to do today. I was afraid that I'd say the wrong things and upset Rachel. Thankfully, you came."

Hearing that, he replied, "She's much stronger than we think."

The news of Justin and Amber's engagement today was far-spread across Riverdale. There was no chance that Rachel was oblivious of it.

Despite that, she went along with them to have fun outside today. They went out and came back in a happy mood, and Rachel didn't act anything out of normal.

"Go back. I'll take my leave first. You can call me anytime if anything comes up."

"Sure. Drive safe, Dr. Peters."

After seeing his car leave the compound, she headed back into the house.

At this moment, Victor was making a gesture facing the tea table. A sign language book was on the table.

"You got it wrong." Gloria rolled her eyes as she limped her way to the seat opposite Victor. "At the speed you're going, you'll never learn sign language in this life."

"You know this?" He got angry because of her insults. "Show me then if you know it."

"Why would I want to learn this? I just have to understand it."

At once, he was stunned as realization dawned upon him.

That's true. I just have to understand it. I don't have to learn how to do it myself.

"Silly. You can have fun learning. I'll go find Rachel."

"Don't keep her up too long. Let her rest early today."

"Okay!"

Looking at Gloria's figure walking away, he felt that he no longer felt as repulsed as he initially did with her.

The night was getting darker.

Victor was reading a book alone in the living room. From time to time, he'd take a glance at the bedroom. It's been so long since Gloria has gone in. Why do women have so much to talk about?

After some time, a sharp scream came from the bedroom.

"Who are you?"

"Help!"

Immediately, Victor tossed the book and rushed inside.

In the bedroom, Gloria was held captive by two men in black, while Rachel had fallen off the bed. At this moment, a black shadow holding a shiny metal stick was closing in on her.

Without hesitation, Victor rushed forward.

Nevertheless, the opponent seemed to be very well-trained. It didn't take long before Victor was defeated.

"No!"

Holding onto the heels of the opponent's leg, Victor gave his all so that the opponent wouldn't be able to reach Rachel.

"Rachel, run!"

"You don't know when to stop, huh?!" With a hard stomp, the man in black stepped on Victor's finger, and a crisp sound of bone cracking was exceptionally loud and clear to the ears.

At once, Rachel's pupils contracted in fear. As much as she wanted to scream, she couldn't. Backing up to the corner of the room, she looked at the black shadow who stood before her in fear. At this moment, her face turned completely pale.

The bodyguard who should be guarding the house was nowhere to be seen. The three men in black must have entered from the window on the first floor. The moment they breached in, they apprehended Gloria who started yelling

At this moment, Gloria's mouth was covered, and her eyes were red as she was anxious.

Rachel didn't have the ability to even yell.

The metal stick that was swung at her flashed a gleam of cold light. Keeping her eyes shut, she felt the pain that followed the next moment.

Chapter 132

Julian was driving back to the city from the suburbs. Not long after he exited the compound, he saw a malicious-looking man on the passenger's seat of a van that passed him by.

At first, he didn't pay heed to it, but he started feeling uneasy after he went on for some distance.

All the people in the van wore black. What could their business in the suburbs be at midnight?

"Pardon, the number that you have dialed cannot be reached. Please call..."

Both Victor and Gloria couldn't be reached by their phones.

At once, he made a U-turn and headed back toward the villa.

By the time he arrived, the villa was in a mess.

The bodyguards were on the ground, defeated and in pain. Rushing into the bedroom, he was met with a sight of Gloria and Victor passed out on the floor, and Rachel sitting in a pool of blood at the corner of the room.

"Rachel!"

The lights on the operating table were bright and blinding.

The sound of machines colliding rang in her ears, yet she was still too weak to open her eyes. She could only hear the sound of the doctor and nurses speaking by her side.

The moment her body was cut open, the pain that she initially felt numb to suddenly soared once again. The stimulation to her pain-receptor nerves was so unbearable she was about to pass out.

At this moment, she felt like she was diving into an abyss. Every time she felt like she was about to drown and die, she would get a breath of air only to drown again.

It went on and on.

By the time Justin rushed to the hospital, it was already the wee hours of the next day.

“How is she?”

He held onto Julian hastily.

With an expressionless face, Julian told him, “This child is gone.”

The four words were like a hammer that was slammed down on Justin’s heart.

The look in his eyes wavered as he staggered a few steps back. Leaning against the wall, he was in utter disbelief.

“Who did this?”

After Julian heard that, his face turned dark. “You should ask yourself!”

After all, it was clear whose position was threatened by the very existence of the child.

The next day, when Rachel regained consciousness, it was already noon.

When she opened her eyes, she could see Justin by her bedside. With that, she was surprised. Out of instinct, she wanted to move her hand, but she realized that he was holding onto it. He must’ve held it for some time because it felt a little numb.

It didn’t take long before he woke up. As their eyes met the atmosphere felt stoic and stagnate.

“You’re awake? How do you feel? Do you feel discomfort anywhere?”

Leaning on the pillow, she couldn't reply with her hand held.

It was only then that he let go of her hand.

A red mark could be seen from where he held onto her.

Why are you here?

After asking that, she realized that the surrounding wasn't the villa in the suburbs. Why am I here?

The hospital?

At this moment, the immense pain from her lower body surged through her body, making her pupils contract. She looked toward him and signed, What happened to me?

His cold face seemed tense. Needless to say, he didn't know how to break it to her.

After a moment, he looked into her eyes and took a deep breath before saying, "Rae, we can still have kids in the future."

Her face turned pale in a split second.

Her memory of the previous night gushed into her head at once.

Those men in black who appeared suddenly, Victor and Gloria who were on the ground, the stick that was

"Ah!"

Pushing him away with the strength she could muster, she hugged her head as she retreated to the corner of her bed in fear.

“Rae!” He had never seen her like this.

Her head was filled with dreadful memories from last night, and she couldn’t seem to shut them off.

The child is gone.

The baby must be mad because she once had the thoughts of letting him go, so the baby left...

Mommy is sorry...

“Rae!”

“Ah!”

As Justin attempted to go closer, she kept on yelling in a hoarse voice. Throwing all the pillows off the bed, she was yelling with all her might.

It didn’t take long before Julian came. Looking at the situation in the ward, he quickly pulled Justin away. “Head outside for now.”

At this moment, she was sitting in a corner with her knees hugged to her chest. Her shoulders were trembling a lot, and her eyes were already swollen from how hard she cried.

Justin stood afar while watching Julian walk toward her before holding her hand.

At first, she retracted her hand, but she no longer resisted when she saw that it was Julian. She then let him pull herself into his embrace as she cried her heart out in his chest.

His heart broke for her as he gave her consoling pats on her back. "It's alright, it will pass. It has already passed."

This scene was exceptionally uncomfortable for Justin to see.

After a moment, he clenched his fists before exiting the room with a dark face.

"Mr. Burton." Frankie was waiting outside the ward.

"Have you gotten anything from the investigation of what happened last night? Who did it?"

"No. The bunch of people had their faces covered. Their tactics were cruel. All cameras nearby were destroyed, so there was very limited footage of them. Winston and the others had also suffered bad injuries."

"How's Gloria?"

"Miss Hochmann is alright. They seem to have gone easy on her. Other than being frightened, she only had a very mild abrasion. However, Victor was hurt pretty badly. His left arm was fractured."

Gloria wasn't hurt?

A bunch of cruel men unexpectedly let someone off... If it wasn't for very specific instructions, they would definitely not leave anyone out.

He already had an idea of the mastermind behind this.

With a frown, he said, "Arrange the best doctor for her treatment."

“Yes, I understand.”

“Oh yes, Mr. Burton, Miss Hudson called multiple times this morning asking where you were.”

After he heard that, the frowns on his forehead deepened as his eyes gleamed with a cold light.

After getting knocked out from crying a very long time, Julian helped Rachel up to get back to bed and rest.

“Don’t think too much. Take your time to let your body heal. Everything will get better.”

Pulling the blanket over her, he patted her shoulder to get her to sleep.

Rachel’s eyes were red and swollen at this point. You said this many times already.

He kept saying that everything will get better, but her life kept going downhill. Every time she felt that she was at her lowest, it only got worse. It felt like an abyss that had no end to it.

After falling so deep, did she even have the chance to rise back again?

Julian kept quiet for a moment. After some time, he asked, “If there’s a chance, will you go overseas with me and live there?”

Rachel was stunned to hear that.

After a brief pause, she shook her head.

She still had to take care of her grandma. After all, her grandma was getting older, and she might not get used to living overseas. She couldn’t possibly leave Nancy here alone and escape overseas.

Knowing that it was difficult for her, he felt bad, but he couldn't do anything to help. He then pulled the corner of the blanket as he said, "Rest well."

The moment she closed her eyes, she could see the scene of the nightmare that happened last night.

Although no one told her what exactly happened, she could take a smart guess on the person who instructed the killing of her unborn child.

It's Amber Hudson. It must be her.

She was the only one who dreaded Rachel's unborn child. Only Amber would be glad that the child was gone.

Chapter 133

Back in the Burton Residence, Sue specially prepared a scrumptious meal and waited with Amber for Justin to be back for dinner.

"Amber, we're a family from now on. Although you guys are just engaged, the marriage date has already been decided. So, you'll marry into our family very soon."

"Madam Parham, this matter is not finalized yet." Amber blushed.

Just then, she heard the sound of the door opening from the outside and quickly laid down her cutlery.
"Justin."

Sue walked up too. "Justin, see how virtuous Amber is. It's only the second day of your engagement and she came over to arrange a meal which consists of all your favorite dishes."

Justin wore a cold and nonchalant expression. "I've eaten already. You guys go ahead."

At once, the smile on Amber's face froze.

Sue comforted her, "It's okay. Maybe Justin had dinner with his clients earlier. Don't bother about him, Amber. Let's eat on our own."

Sue invited Amber to the dining table, but the latter had completely lost her appetite because she was well aware of where Justin came back from.

Julian placed his keys on the table. "No one will be staying here for a while. So, you can stay here first and let me know if you need anything."

Rachel nodded. Thank you.

Initially, Julian rented this place for Nancy to live in. At that time, Nancy turned it down lest Justin would be unhappy about it. Who knew after the efforts of trying to find the place a new owner, Julian would be staying in it himself.

"Do you still have no intention of telling Madam Tiller about this matter? If you tell her now, you can directly move in to stay with her."

Rachel shook her head. Grandma is already old. Too many things have happened recently, and I don't want her to be worried about me.

Julian nodded reflectively.

"Settle down here and stop worrying too much then. This place is close to both the hospital and Madam

Tiller's residence."

Sure. Thank you, Julian.

"The Burton Family has done you wrong. I'm also doing this so that I'll feel less guilty."

Suddenly, Julian recalled something. "But I don't understand why Justin insists on marrying the Hudsons' daughters. Is he not satisfied after marrying you? Why does he want to marry Amber all of a sudden? What on earth is he thinking?"

There are grudges between him and Jefferey.

"Grudges?"

Julian frowned. "Do you know what the grudges are exactly?"

I'm not too sure either. He has not told me before.

Rachel's palm reddened as she held the hot mug. Amber is the one whom he wants to marry since the beginning, so he's just returning to his original plan now.

Now that they had lost their child, the final connection between her and Justin had ceased too. Regardless of the reason behind Justin's plan to marry Amber, his wish could finally be fulfilled now; it was time for Rachel to let go of herself too.

It was already midnight, but the light in Burton Group's CEO office was still on.

"President Burton, these are the documents about Hudson Pharmaceuticals' overseas transactions in the past three years which you've requested. Besides that, here is the information about Miss Hudson's immigration record."

"Alright. Is there any news about Jefferey recently?"

"He has been reducing domestic investments but is rather diplomatic with the overseas party. Do you think he's planning to expand the business abroad?"

“Things might not be so simple.” Justin’s eyes turned cold. “I reckon he’s rushing to transfer the assets to a secret account abroad because he knows the investigation bureau is investigating Hudson Pharmaceuticals and he won’t be able to conceal the truth for much longer, so he’s finding a way out for himself now.”

“It seems like Jefferey is going abroad for some business engagement at the end of this month.”

“He’s going there personally?”

“Yeah. I got this news from our spy in Hudson Pharmaceuticals, so it should be reliable.”

Justin pondered about it. “The officers in the investigation bureau would be happy to receive this news.”

“Find a chance to inform the deputy chief, but leave no trace.”

“Janice Hawkins?”

“Yes.”

Justin’s plan was to leverage Janice’s power to attack Jefferey. Since Janice was currently investigating Hudson Pharmaceuticals, she would definitely want to detain Jefferey in the country, or even Riverdale, at all cost and not give him any chance to escape.

Frankie took a look at the time. “It’s getting late, President Burton. Aren’t you going home to rest yet?”

“You go ahead. I’ll stay on for a while more.”

Frankie still wanted to say something, but seeing that Justin had already started reading the documents, he bit his tongue.

Recently, Justin had always been working overtime in the office and rarely returned home.

If this continued, his health would deteriorate.

After Frankie left, Justin received a call.

“Hello?”

Julian’s voice came forth from the other end. “Rest assured. She has already settled down. My place is rather safe and the security guards won’t easily allow strangers to enter, and it’s close to the police station.”

“Thanks.”

“Hey, Justin.” Julian knew Justin was about to hang up the call, so he quickly called out to him. “Since you

care about her so much, why don’t you go and accompany her? You know she has not been in a good state recently, both mentally and physically.”

Justin furrowed his brows and kept quiet for a moment before hanging up the call.

A week later, the news of Hudson Pharmaceuticals producing counterfeit drugs was exposed again. A few of the subsidiaries had been seized by the investigation bureau, and even Jefferey was ‘invited to the police station for interrogation.

Given this situation, Amber actually didn’t seek help from Justin but secretly went abroad.

“Have you sent someone to tail her?”

“Yes, everything has been arranged accordingly. Our man is on the same flight as her and will track her at all times.”

“Keep me updated if there’s any news.”

“Yes, President Burton. Where would you like to go now?”

Justin’s eyes were filled with coldness as he sat in the backseat. “To the hospital.”

Autumn was an extraordinarily sentimental season. In Riverdale, the leaves of the phoenix trees along the streets had turned yellow and were gradually blown off the tree by the wind as the cars passed by.

In Tran-Q, after sorting out the garbage, Rachel was spraying disinfectant in the corridor.

Suddenly, a tall man who was wearing black, shiny leather shoes, appeared in front of her.

“Who asked you to do all these?”

A gloomy voice emerged from above Rachel. At this moment, anger spread across Justin’s face.

Rachel was wearing a mask and dressed in the hospital’s cleaner uniform with a volunteer vest. She had taken the initiative to become a volunteer in the hospital and this was her second day at work.

Seeing Justin, Rachel frowned. This is none of your business. Please step aside.

Blood-boiled, Justin grabbed Rachel’s wrist and dragged her to the stairway, disregarding her struggles. “Why do you have to embarrass yourself while you can live a comfortable life? Is this the kind of life that you want?”

Rachel furrowed her brows as she felt pain being seized by Justin, but she merely endured with it.

I like this kind of life.

“What kind of life? Life as a cleaner who is servile and has to grovel to the rogues who came to visit doctors?”

Rachel remained silent and avoided Justin’s gaze.

“Would you stop this already?!”

Justin’s voice deepened. “Recently, I allowed you to move out and have not interfered with any of your matters so that you can adjust your emotions, but that doesn’t mean that you can do as you please.”

Rachel lifted her head slowly. Behind the mask, she felt a lump rise in her throat. Her eyes soon became red rimmed as tears welled up in them. Have you forgotten that the child is already gone? I’m not related to you anymore.

Chapter 134

Justin was stunned while Rachel’s eyes were brimmed with agonized tears.

No one knew exactly how much pain Rachel had to endure after suffering from the loss of a child, but Justin still refused to let go of her.

“We’ll still have kids in the future.”

Justin’s hoarse voice that echoed in the stairway could make one feel surreal.

Startled, Rachel stared at him and shook her head while stepping backward in disbelief.

How can he say this?

She was fuming. You still refuse to let go of me! What on earth have I done wrong?

Rachel didn't want to have anything to do with the man in front of her at all.

Please let go of me! I'm begging you! If you hate the Hudson Family and Jefferey, go after them!

All of a sudden, Justin's eyes were filled with intense anger as Rachel's words had irritated him.

Rachel felt a sudden, immense pain in her wrist. Wailing in pain, she stood fixedly at the spot as she wasn't able to retreat anymore.

It seemed as if the fire was going to blast out from Justin's eyes, but his voice was as cold as ice. "Since you know I hate the Hudsons, then you should stop your wishful thinking."

Jefferey was responsible for the fire that happened 20 years ago, and none of the Hudsons could be exempted.

"Don't you always want to know why I hate the Hudson Family? I'll tell you right now!"

"20 years ago, Jefferey forcefully burned down a huge piece of the forest to drive out the residents in order to develop the area. A person died in the fire, and this person has saved my life before!"

Rachel's pupils dilated all of a sudden as she was astounded.

Someone... died in the fire?

"A father's debt should be borne by his children. Do I still need to explain this theory to you?"

A fierce voice buzzed at Rachel's ear.

Perhaps it was because of the appearance of the human trafficker, or because Jefferey's intention of leaving Riverdale was getting too obvious recently, the hatred that had been buried deep down in Justin exploded all of a sudden in these few days.

Seizing Rachel's wrist, he snarled, "Don't you ever dare think of leaving Riverdale in this lifetime. I will make you stay beside me forever and pay for the Hudsons' sin."

Rachel was frightened by the brutality in Justin's eyes. She was engulfed by his coldness as it traveled rapidly from her eyes to her entire body.

From the very beginning, this man's intention was to take revenge on the Hudson Family. Both Rachel and Amber were just a tool for him to get revenge on the family. He wanted to destroy each and everyone from the family!

Rachel was overwhelmed by intense fear. At that moment, her face turned ashen as she started struggling in terror.

Let go of me! Let go of me!

A voice screamed incessantly in her, which made her start struggling crazily.

Annoyed, Justin seized her and pushed her against the wall all of a sudden. "That's enough!" he roared.

Rachel could feel her head buzz as the back of it knocked against the wall.

Just then, the sound of a phone vibrating emerged.

Justin's eyes turned clear slightly.

After glancing at the incoming caller ID, he shot a cold glare at Rachel. "You better remember carefully everything I've said to you today. Otherwise, don't forget that Irwin and your grandma are not as fit as you. I'll take you back to live in Burton Residence once I finish settling my stuff."

The cold voice echoed in the stairway.

Click! The light in the stairway went off.

Rachel inhaled deeply and started coughing intensely.

When Julian arrived, Justin had already left.

Rachel stood numbly against the wall.

“What happened, Rachel?”

Julian swiftly supported Rachel just as she was about to slump to the ground. However, when he grabbed her hand, he noticed the red finger marks and obvious bruise on her wrist.

“Where’s Justin? What did he say to you?”

Rachel shook her head helplessly as there was only one thought in her mind now-Justin would not let go of her and anyone who was related to the Hudson Family. Not a single one!

All the wishes she was having before this turned into ashes at once.

Justin hated her as much as he hated Jefferey, yet she actually thought he once loved and pitied her-even if it was just the slightest bit. She even thought that he had anticipated their child to be born.

How absurd!

When Justin walked out of the hospital, the phone rang in his hand.

The call was from Amber.

"Hello?"

"Hey Justin, guess where I am now."

"Now?" Justin took a look at the time on his watch. "I'm guessing you're at the airport."

"You're right, but not entirely."

Amber continued gleefully. "My dad told me that the matters abroad are not that urgent to be attended anymore and just so happened that I have a conference to attend. So, I'm coming back from the airport now."

Justin furrowed his brows while his cold eyes deepened.

"What's the silence about? What a surprise, right? Let's have dinner together tonight."

A moment later, Justin hummed, "Okay."

After hanging up the call, he got into the car.

Frankie said, "I've just received news that Amber has turned back from the airport."

"I'm aware of it. It seems like Jefferey the old fox has noticed something."

"You think we've alerted him?"

"Not necessarily, but Jefferey has always been prudent, especially when it comes to matters that would affect his life-like capital transfer, so it's expected that he would take a make-believe move."

“President Burton, what should we do next then?”

“Get someone to keep an eye on Jefferey and Amber. Although they didn’t go abroad this time, they might go any other time.”

“Yes, sir.”

Frankie took a look at his phone. “By the way, President Burton, I have another issue to report. Mr. Jason has privately drawn some funds under his own name.”

“And the amount?”

“5 million.”

Justin frowned. “Did you find out what he used the money for?”

“I’m not too sure yet, but it seems like Madam Lilian has caused quite some trouble this year. If my guess is correct, he has taken the money to cover her ats.”

Lilian was addicted to gambling, and Jason would often fork out money to clean up the mess. This was already a norm in the Burton Family.

“Should we notify Old Master Burton?”

“It’s such a big amount of money-Grandpa would eventually find out even if we didn’t tip him off.”

Frankie nodded.

What Justin meant was that they would not meddle with Jason's family affair and would leave them to stew in their own juice. If Jason failed to return the money before the annual general meeting this year's end, he would naturally suffer the consequences.

In a private clubhouse at the outskirts of Riverdale, elegant music could be heard from inside a private room, accompanied by a strong aroma of tea.

It was getting late into the night.

Sitting at one end of the tea table, Jason slowly pushed a document toward the other party. "This is the agreement of patent transfer as requested. We're quits now, but you must not let Justin know that I did this."

The other party pursed her lips and took a sip of tea calmly. "Fret not. Our families have been friends for so many years; I won't put you in a difficult position. I'm just taking this opportunity to check up on Burton Group."

The woman's voice wasn't loud. The wind blew through her grey-brown fringe and exposed her exquisite facial features while her almond-shaped eyes were filled with subtle coldness.

At that moment, a chill ran down Jason's spine.

Chapter 135

By the time Rachel jolted awake from her nightmare, it was already morning. Like a shadow, the nightmares clung to her every night since Justin told her about the grudge between him and Jefferey that day in the hospital stairwell. The fire, the forest...

She had a strange and inexplicable feeling that they were familiar to her in some way. In the dream, there was a loud banging noise that kept on rattling loudly against her temples. Presently, she violently opened her eyes, and it was only after being jolted awake for a moment that she realized someone was knocking at her door.

"Rachel? Rachel!"

Victor? Pulling the covers off her, she got out of bed and opened the door to see Victor standing there holding bags of all sizes. The wound on his face had yet to heal and one of his arms was still in a sling, but his uninjured one was carrying a large number of items. "I thought you weren't home, Rachel. You took so long to open the door."

Quickly, she ushered him in and picked up the kettle to pour him a glass of water. Why are you here?

"Oh-there's no need to busy yourself, Rachel. I'll be leaving now; I'm simply here to deliver the goods that Madam Tiller said you could use."

What goods? Subconsciously, she lifted her eyes to look into the bags. However, her hand trembled and she nearly scalded herself. Many of the packages inside the bags were marked with the logos of baby and maternity brands. Instantly, the light in her eyes dimmed.

It was likely that Nancy was looking forward to the birth of this child. Rachel had no idea how she was going to tell her grandmother there would no longer be a child, just like she hadn't known how to tell her that she was pregnant. Suddenly, she burst into a fit of coughing.

"Are you feeling okay, Rachel?" Victor asked.

I'm fine. I just have a bit of a cold.

Taking in the cold medicine on the table, Victor felt a bit vexed. If he had known Rachel had a cold, he would have come to visit her sooner.

After a moment of silence, he remembered something important and searched through the bags at his feet to pull out a white canvas bag. "By the way, Madam Tiller said I had to deliver this to you. The rest aren't as important."

Coming back to her senses, Rachel took the canvas bag from his hands.

Before she even looked inside, she already knew what it was.

It was the 'wooden box'-the item that her mother left behind.

Having no opposition to Victor's presence, she pulled out the box in front of him and studied it closely.

"What's that?"

Something my mother left behind. I have no idea what it is.

"There's writing carved on top."

"That cough is pretty bad, Rachel. Maybe you should take some medicine right now. I'll go get you a spoon!" He stood up immediately.

Very soon, the syrupy smell of medicine wafted throughout the room. After taking it, Rachel sat at the table and stared absent-mindedly at the packaging that the medicine came in, happening to face the side with the medicine's ingredients listed on it.

Perhaps due to her cold, her brain was hazy, and the writing on the packaging and the wooden box started to drift together. Almost of their own accord, the numbers on the wooden box scrambled atop the formula.

With sudden inspiration, her mind linked them together. The herbs, the dosages... They fit! It was then that

she knew

As Rachel stared down at the six-sided wooden box in front of her, she realized that each side had a different combination of numbers. All of a sudden, she felt like she was enlightened. Six traditional Hudson medicine formulas, all corresponding with the numbers on the box.

"Rachel..." Victor's voice brought her out of her thoughts.

Startled back to her senses, she stared at him.

“Are you okay, Rachel? Your phone has been ringing for a long time.”

Distractedly, she looked down, only to discover an incoming call on her cell phone from her grandmother.

“Has Victor delivered you the items, Rae?”

Pressing the hands-free mode, Rachel gave him a slight smile.

Understanding her meaning, he immediately said, “I have, Madam Tiller. Don’t you trust me?”

Upon hearing that, Nancy grumbled, “It would be strange if I did, considering you broke your arm in the few days since I last saw you.”

“That was an accident,” he lied flawlessly before continuing with a jovial smile, “-and I have delivered the items.”

“Well, did you inform her what I told you to?”

“Uh...”

“I knew you’d forget!” Nancy crowed before emphasizing, “Pizza. You must eat pizza today, Rae.”

Confused, Victor asked, “What pizza?”

As she realized what her grandmother meant, Rachel felt her nose itch all of a sudden. Today was her birthday and Nancy had remembered when Rachel herself had not.

Meanwhile, Nancy continued, "There's a pizza in a ziplock bag. If you have a servant, have the servant heat it

up for you. It's very convenient. You always liked eating pizza on your birthday."

Upon hearing that, Rachel felt her eyes reddened and tears nearly rolled down her cheeks.

Scratching his head, Victor mumbled, "I didn't know it was your birthday today, Rachel." And then, to the phone, he added, "Don't worry, Madam Tiller. I'll heat the pizza up for her."

As she listened to her grandmother instruct him, she swallowed back the thickness in her throat but her tears kept falling

Upon finally hanging up, he was at a loss. "Don't cry, Rachel! It's my fault. I didn't know it was your birthday."

Nonetheless, she shook her head. She, too, had forgotten.

As Victor hustled away to the kitchen to heat up the pizza, he insisted on ordering a birthday cake as well. However, he was talking to thin air and did not realize that Rachel was looking strange and spacing out. For her part, she continued to stare at the 'wooden box' on the table, clenching her fists.

The box might be her last resort for getting rid of Justin. Even if she didn't do it for herself, she had to find a

way out of this cycle for her grandmother's sake.

Meanwhile, far away, a black business car was speeding down the highway. Justin was on his way back to Riverdale from Brookville.

“Alright. As long as it’s there before nightfall.” From the passenger seat, Frankie hung up the phone before saying over his shoulder, “Someone is on their way to deliver the things you arranged for, President Burton.”

Justin inclined his head slightly. “How long until we get back to Riverdale?”

Looking at his watch, Frankie gave an estimate. “About five hours.”

Meanwhile, the driver, Ramsey, couldn’t help interjecting, “Riverdale is very far from Brookville, President Burton. What is so urgent that you had to hurry back to Riverdale today and then back to Brookville for a meeting tonight? That’s such a long journey.”

Chuckling, Frankie interrupted, “Well, here’s what you don’t know, Ramsey. It’s Mrs. Burton’s birthday today, so of course President Burton has to hurry back.”

“Mrs. Burton?” Ramsey repeated before he paused.

Isn’t President Burton already divorced? he thought. What does Frankie mean by ‘Mrs. Burton’? Of course, he didn’t dare voice such thoughts out loud.

Feeling Justin’s cold glare on him, Frankie shuddered and decided to shut his mouth. He stopped smiling, thereafter sinking back into his seat meekly and quietly.

Just like that, the interior of the car was silent apart from the sound of the wind whistling outside. Absent mindedly, Justin looked out of the window.

These few days, he had been regretting scaring Rachel by speaking to her in an overly harsh manner at the hospital. It was just that he couldn’t think of another way to make her stay in Riverdale.

Her attitude that day had incensed him and if she ran away again, the consequences could be unimaginable. After all, the conference in Brookeville required a lot of time-time he wouldn’t necessarily have for her if anything happened to her. Moreover, the worst consequence wouldn’t be her escape but someone secretly taking advantage of it.

Chapter 136

Not long after Victor left, Rachel heard the doorbell ring.

Originally thinking he left something behind, she opened the door, only to see a courier.

“Ms. Rachel Hudson?”

Upon hearing that, Rachel nodded.

“There are two intracity express parcels for you. Please sign here.”

Startled, she signed for the parcels, thereafter receiving a cake and a paper bag.

Right now on the table, there was still half an uneaten cake that Victor had rushed out to buy at noon upon finding out it was her birthday.

So, who bought the cake that the courier delivered?

Setting it aside on the table for now, she pulled a rectangular suede box out of the paper bag.

With a click, she opened it and discovered a silver-colored necklace in the box that glimmered underneath the light

The pendant was in the simple design of a small sun with a hollow center.

Putting down the box, she found a card on top of the cake box that simply read ‘Happy Birthday’ without any signature.

Dumbfounded, she stared at the items until her phone started vibrating.

It was a text message from Julian reading, 'Did you receive what I sent?'

Immediately, she understood. 'I did. I was wondering who would remember my birthday.'

'Don't forget that you're a patient of mine. It's not strange that I would remember your birthday.'

'Thank you.'

'You're welcome. Are you free? I just finished work; come down for a walk with me!

Looking at the time, she agreed, 'Okay.'

At this hour after dinner, the community was lively. All of the houses were lit up, and the sound of children laughing could be heard around the neighborhood as they ran around playing.

Downstairs, Rachel set the cake box down on a stone table and opened it. Before she could even offer some to anyone, a group of children was surrounding her and staring eagerly at the cake with wide eyes.

"Your cake is so pretty, miss!"

After making a 'wait' motion with her hand, she lifted a knife and a paper plate, preparing to cut into the cake for the children.

"Hold on, Rae." Julian stopped her and pulled some candles out of a box to the side. "Today is Miss Rachel's birthday. Before she treats you all to some cake, what should we do?"

Upon hearing that, the head of the group, which happened to be a little girl in pigtails, immediately said, "Wish Miss Rachel a Happy Birthday!"

“We must sing the ‘Happy Birthday’ song!”

“Miss Rachel must close her eyes and make a wish!”

“Miss Rachel must blow out the candles!”

Shyly, Rachel shook her head to indicate to Julian that there was no need to go to such lengths.

Nonetheless, he still lit the candles and had the children sing ‘Happy Birthday’ in unison. The delicate chorus of young voices would have a healing effect on any of its listeners.

“Make a wish.”

There’s no need.

“You must make a wish on your birthday, Miss Rachel. My mommy says you have to say it in your heart and not out loud, or the wish won’t come true,” a very young voice piped up beside Rachel.

When she lowered her head to look, she found a little girl who wasn’t even at table height yet looking up at her with pretty, sparkling eyes.

Immediately, Rachel gentled and, under the gazes of the children, clasped her hands and made a wish. After that, she blew out the candles and began to give the cake out to the children.

“Remember to say thank you!” their parents instructed, standing nearby.

Carrying their paper plates, the children raced off, dabbing icing on each other’s faces. Just like that, the strangers in the community suddenly seemed closer and the whole scene was heartwarming indeed.

Underneath the light of the streetlamp, Rachel finally smiled for the first time in days. Thank you, Julian.

“You don’t need to be so courteous with me.” Walking her back to her apartment building, Julian continued, “The most important thing right now is to take care of your body and your mood. You don’t need to worry about anything else. As for the child”

I know. Don’t worry about me. I never wanted it, anyway, so I might as well pretend it never existed for now. At that point, Rachel’s expression was dull and lifeless.

Somewhat regretting bringing up the child, he changed the topic and told her, “Go on upstairs, then. It’s been getting colder lately, so make sure to keep warm since you have a cold.”

Nodding, she turned and headed toward the elevator.

Soon, she was inside her apartment and about to close the door.

With a loud slam, the door was propped open by a large hand from outside.

Jerking her head up, Rachel saw Justin glowering at her, his darkened face made all the more grotesque by the centipede-like scar on it. Suddenly, she shivered.

Wasn’t he out on business? she thought.

Without explaining himself, he slid sideways into the house and shut the door before surveying the house

coldly. “I see you’ve been getting along fine without me.”

Paling, she took two steps back. Why are you here?

Glaring at her resentfully, he stalked toward her as he pulled off his necktie and threw it onto the couch. His

eyes were like unmelting icebergs as he sneered, "I suppose you wouldn't want me to ruin your blissful days, would you?"

Step by step he approached her, forcing her back inch by inch.

Meanwhile, Rachel had no idea what she did wrong.

When he caught hold of her arm and pulled, she staggered after him and was dragged all the way to the

couch, whereupon he threw her down and caused her to let out a muffled groan as he pressed down on top of

her.

When she realized what was about to happen, she started struggling.

Yet, he lay more heavily atop her and asked coldly in her ear, "You never wanted this child from the very beginning, did you?"

She shivered in response.

Does that mean he followed me and witnessed my conversation during the stroll with Julian?

At this moment, there was a monstrous fire raging in Justin's eyes. "I told you to take care of yourself while you waited for me, and this is how you did so?"

After all, he had spent seven or eight hours rushing back from Brookville partly to spend her birthday with her, and partly to ease their tense relationship and let her know that they still had a long future ahead of them.

Never did Justin expect that he would see her and Julian surrounded by a group of singing children the moment he entered the neighborhood.

The scene had looked so heartwarming that it practically hurt his eyes.

Yet, if he thought that scene hurt his eyes, her later conversation with Julian about the child hurt his heart even more.

Looks like she never intended to keep the child!

At this thought, Justin slowly tightened his grip around her.

Rachel's shoulders were crushed and as a shattering ache pulsed through them, the features of her face screwed up in pain.

Let go of me! Let go of me!

She struggled desperately, but that only brought more force upon her.

A voice from hell asked above her head, "Were you thrilled when those people broke into the villa and caused your miscarriage?"

Horried, Rachel gaped at him, unable to believe what she just heard.

Yet, he was glowering at her with rage. "I suppose you think you will no longer need to be associated with me now that the child is gone. I'll have you know, Rachel Hudson, that that will never happen!"

Suddenly, there was a loud tearing sound and Rachel screamed as the cloth on her shoulder fell away.

Catching hold of her struggling hands and pinning them above her head, Justin said coldly, "I told you we would have another child!"

Ashen-faced, she stared up at him.

No... No!

Chapter 137

Early the next morning, the sound of running water could be heard coming from inside the bathroom.

After doing up his necktie and fastening on golden cufflinks, Justin threw open the wardrobe door and pulled out a set of clothing. Tossing them on the bed, he ordered, "Get dressed and pack your things. You're coming with me."

The redness on Rachel's face was slowly fading away, making her look pale and weakened. Where are you taking me?

"Why so many questions? Are you intending to tell Julian or someone else?"

Hearing that, she clutched the blankets tighter to herself and fell silent again.

The car sped the entire way.

Inside the car, Frankie looked in the rearview mirror for a moment at the two people in the backseat. The interior of the car was very strange and quiet.

Once they reached the hotel and the driver went to park, Frankie mumbled, "They were so quiet the whole way. I didn't even dare breathe too loud. Are they fighting?"

Unimpressed, Ramsey side-eyed him. "President Burton was never especially chatty and Mrs. Burton can't

speak. Why wouldn't they be quiet? Did you expect President Burton to speak up first?"

With a pause, Frankie conceded that Ramsey had a point and that he was probably reading into things too much.

After all, if the couple were truly quarreling, Rachel wouldn't have come on this business trip with Justin.

By the time they reached Brookville, it was already late in the morning.

Since Justin had to rush off to the meeting, he left Frankie behind to handle Rachel's check-in.

"I'll leave your luggage here, Mrs. Burton. If there's anything you would like to eat or drink, the hotel menu is over there and you can eat downstairs or call for room service."

The moment she entered the room, Rachel sunk down on the couch, looking listless.

Seeing that she wasn't responding, Frankie added, "You must be tired. The car ride was very long. We were all quite surprised that President Burton was willing to do so much traveling just to celebrate your birthday."

Celebrate my birthday?

Astonished, she jerked her head up and gaped at Frankie.

"Why don't you get some rest? President Burton might be a bit busy these two days and might not make it back during the daytime to see you. If there's anything you need, just come to me."

With a click, Frankie shut the door and the room descended into silence once more.

However, his words were still ringing in Rachel's mind.

It turned out that Justin rushed back to Riverdale from Brookville just to celebrate her birthday with her.

That meant he must have been waiting at the bottom of her apartment building when he saw her and Julian handing cake out to the children, as well as her telling Julian that she never wanted the child.

Is that why he was so angry?

Is he angry because I was with Julian or because I said I never wanted the child?

The thoughts in her mind were jumbled.

Right then, out of the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of the floor-length mirror opposite her.

The woman in the mirror had her hair tangled around her shoulders. Her face was gaunt and her eyes were dull and lifeless. Startled, Rachel felt her own face.

Since when did / start looking like that? She looked neither alive nor dead.

Why on earth would I assume Justin was starting to fall in love with me?

How can that be possible?

With a 'ding, Rachel's phone chimed as a notification popped up.

'I have a new development on Hans' case.'

Rachel's eyebrows jerked skyward at the message from Janice.

'You've found the killer? Who killed him?'

'Not yet, but I have a new lead. Let me show you a picture. See if you recognize this person.

After that message, Rachel received a picture.

The man in the photograph was young. Unshaven and dressed in a black jacket, he had the eyes of a hawk that were cold and unapproachable.

Suddenly, her heart clenched.

She had met this person before.

It was the person who kidnapped her from the highway and brought her back to Southwind Villa. It was also the person who watched over her with his men after that.

Meanwhile, Janice continued, 'His name is Winston. He's one of Justin's hired thugs. He met up with a few

other people at Tran-Q that day, carrying an aluminum box. If I had to guess, they were carrying out a transaction

Rachel's hand started to shake as she could guess what Janice was about to say.

'If I had to guess, I'd say Hans likely witnessed their transaction and he was killed to prevent him from spilling the beans. Be on your guard, Rachel. Hans' death might be related to Justin and you mustn't be tricked by Justin's words. Those businessmen prioritize profit above all else!

As Rachel stared silently at the words on the screen, she couldn't keep herself from starting to shake.

Frantically, her chest rose and fell, and she was unable to catch any breath. She felt like she was drowning or crushed beneath a large boulder. No matter how she tried, she couldn't breathe normally.

After an interminable length of time, Rachel finally sucked in a deep breath.

Accompanied by a violent bout of coughing, tears rolled down her cheeks and a silent roar echoed in her chest.

It turned out that after going around in a huge circle, Hans' death was ultimately found to very likely still be related to Justin.

It took her a long time to force herself to calm down and reply to Janice, 'Is there anything I can do?'

'Eavesdrop. I need to know who Justin's men are transacting with and what the contents of their transactions

are.

Tightening her grip around her cell phone, she deleted the evidence of her conversation with Janice before rising from the couch and heading into the bathroom for a shower.

After her shower, she stared at herself in the mirror while wrapped in a towel for a long time. Now no longer messy, her hair ran silky and flowed down her shoulder. Though gaunt, her face was still pretty and pleasant.

She was prettier than Amber-that was something other people would say since she was young.

If Justin was truly Hans' killer, she would avenge Hans and send Justin into prison herself.

Meanwhile on the top floor of Brookville's highest hotel, the meeting was paused for an intermission.

Holding onto a document, Frankie rushed into the breakroom in a hurry. "There's been a turnaround to the project, President Burton. The other party is willing to share the patent that was stolen from us at market price."

Justin received the document and read it through, the crease in between his eyebrows flattening out. "Draw up a contract and have it signed at once, then draft another contract for our next negotiation. Improve on the original basis by five points."

"Of course."

"Wait." He stopped Frankie suddenly. "Why are they finally allowing the right to share?"

"I heard President Sanders received a call and said your friend got in contact."

Friend? Justin pondered thoughtfully.

"By the way, President Burton, when are we reporting the theft of the patent to the board of directors?"

"There's no rush. Let's finish talking about this project first."

"But Jason..."

"Well, let's not alert the enemy yet. The fact that he was able to steal a company patent from under our noses means we have a spy in our midst. Don't bring this up to anyone for now."

"Of course."

"Go on, then. Get the contracts handled."

After Frankie left, the breakroom fell into silence once more.

Leaning back against the couch, Justin closed his eyes and rested. His usually calm face was uncharacteristically weary.

Truly, a lot had happened lately. While they weren't as intense as the struggles he had faced all these years, for the first time in his life, he felt powerless no matter what he did.

Chapter 138

It was extremely late into the night by the time Justin returned to the hotel.

Inside the bedroom was Rachel and she was already fast asleep.

As a cold wind entered the sheets, she was jolted awake. However, before she could even turn around, he was already wrapping his hands around her shoulders and leisurely pulling her into his embrace from behind.

The faint smell of tobacco and his citrus-scented shampoo had mingled together to tickle her nostrils. It wasn't until she was certain he would not make any further move that she gradually relaxed.

When he felt the stiffness and the wariness of the woman in his arms, Justin was unable to fall asleep.

It took an interminable length of time for her breathing to calm down enough for him to close his eyes.

The hour was late and it happened to be the season when fall changed to winter.

A car was speeding down a road in Riverdale and just as it passed a controlled intersection, a truck suddenly dashed out from the vehicle's right.

The car driver immediately slammed their brakes before the sound of the car screeching to a halt echoed around the intersection.

Alas, it slammed into the bottom of the truck with a loud crash followed by nothing but thick smoke billowing out.

When Justin woke the next day, his arms were empty. All of a sudden, his heart sank.

Then, he heard the sound of clinking items outside.

Upon opening the door, he found Rachel setting the table.

When she heard movement behind her, she turned around and looked at him in surprise.

After all, he hadn't even worn his shoes and he was standing on the carpet barefoot.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

As she returned to her senses, Rachel lifted the jug of fruit juice in her hand. I had the hotel send up breakfast.

An astonished Justin stared at her.

After his shower, he sat down at the table. She handed him a glass of milk before she minded her own business while eating her own breakfast, seemingly having forgotten the unhappy events of the previous day.

Upon taking two sips, he set down his glass. "When I'm done with my work, I'll send you back to Riverdale and bring Nancy over to live with you."

A startled Rachel looked at Justin before she quickly shook her head. There's no need, she signaled. Grandma's not doing too well and I intend to send her to a nursing home after this.

"I'll have Frankie contact Riverdale's best nursing home then."

to return to Riverdale right now.

“Not convenient?”

Aren't you investigating the Hudson Family's overseas account? Amber likely doesn't want to see me right now.

As Justin frowned slightly, he glanced at Rachel.

For some reason, he had the vague impression that something about her had changed yet he couldn't tell how.

In the past, she wouldn't have willingly brought the topic of Amber, let alone accompanied the mention with such a provocative attitude.

However, Justin felt a little elated. “You needn't be wary of her. She wouldn't dare to harm you. We're only engaged-nothing concrete has been settled. Since you know I'm investigating the overseas account, just wait patiently for me to finish my work. Understood?” he carelessly said all of this, as if Amber was merely a pawn to him.

With a quirk of her lips, Rachel nodded, but her heart felt as cold as ice.

She wondered whether it was how he evaluated her in front of Amber as well-a pawn to investigate the Hudson Family's ancestral formula, and nothing else.

It was midway through breakfast when Frankie suddenly knocked on the door. “Something has happened in Riverdale, President Burton.”

“What happened?”

“Madam Lilian was in a car crash last night where she died on the spot. It's already on the news.”

Justin's expression immediately changed as he rose from the dinner table to walk into the study.

After preparing a plate of sliced fruit, Rachel stood outside the study to listen to his conversation with Frankie.

“The truck driver was drunk and ran a red light perpendicular to the road that Madam Lilian was traveling on. Madam Lilian’s driver couldn’t brake in time and ran into the truck, crashing the car and killing everyone.”

“When did this happen?”

“About one in the morning.”

“She left the house at one in the morning?”

“She was headed to the airport.”

There was total silence before it was followed with, “Was Jason sending her abroad to lie low as he gave up his fight domestically?”

“It seems likely.”

Rachel’s hand that was holding onto the fruit platter clenched slightly.

The fact was that Justin and Jason had been at loggerheads all along, which was exacerbated by the incident involving Tina. While Jason wasn’t much of a businessman, he extremely loved his wife and daughter.

Hence, if Lilian’s car crash and eventual death were caused by someone else, Justin would be the prime suspect-even if, based on what she was currently hearing, the incident was unrelated.

As she spaced out, the door suddenly opened.

Without any warning, Justin appeared in the doorway and stared coldly at her. "What are you doing here?"

For a moment, she froze before holding up the fruit platter for him to see.

As the caution in his eyes ebbed, he told her, "There's no need. I have some business to take care of right now. Stay in the hotel and don't go anywhere."

Rachel then obediently nodded her head.

Justin left together with Frankie.

Once he left, she put down the fruit platter and sat on the couch while she clutched at her chest as her heart raced.

"I'm sorry, Jason."

Amber was the first to arrive and comfort Jason at the hospital morgue.

"I wish to be alone with her. Please leave."

His face was unfriendly, especially when he talked to Amber. Then, he chased everyone out of the room before he stood alone by his late wife's side.

As she clutched her cell phone, she headed to the stairwell to make a call.

"We're sorry, but the number you have dialed cannot be reached at this time."

Justin's phone had been unreachable ever since she heard the news.

It was odd because there was no way for him to be completely unaware of something so serious happening to the Burton Family. Even if he was in Brookville on a business trip, there was no way he indifferent and not rush home as soon as he could.

as no

Amber's phone suddenly received an image file.

When she opened the image and enlarged it, her face sank.

It was evidence that Justin had brought Rachel to Brookville!

"This can't be an accident. There's no way for it to be a coincidence that right as President Burton was about to leave Riverdale, someone blocked his escape route by accidentally killing his wife in a car crash. Who would believe that?"

"Who could have done it? The Hindenburg Family?"

From outside the stairwell, the voices of Jason's assistant and his bodyguard could be heard. Amber regained her senses and leaned in to eavesdrop on the conversation.

"Hindenburg Family may have had a falling out with President Burton, but they wouldn't go to such lengths just yet."

"Who else could it be then? You're always by President Burton's side. What does President Burton think?"

"He suspects... it's Young Master Justin who did it."

The people by Jason's side had always referred to him as 'President Burton' and Justin as 'Young Master Justin'. It wasn't just as a way of distinguishing them, but rather a method of making Jason happy.

“President Burton’s decision to sell the patent and siphon the project funds might not have been reported to the board of directors just yet, but Young Master Justin must have known about it. There’s no way Madam Lilian’s death is unrelated to him.”

Upon hearing these words, Amber’s heart thudded.

Could Justin really have sent someone to kill Lilian?

As Amber shuddered, she turned to head far away from the hospital and this mess.

However, she only took two steps before she thought of something.

If a hired killer had been relied upon, targeting Jason was a lot easier than Tina.

Chapter 139

By the time Jason exited the morgue, his weather-beaten face was covered in wrinkles. His eyes were so bloodshot that their vessels looked like they were about to rupture in the next second.

As they both stood at the door, the assistant and the bodyguard fell silent, not daring to take a peep.

“Where is Justin?” Jason’s voice echoed down the hallway.

The assistant replied, “Young Master Justin should still be in Brookville discussing the project. The news | receive from there indicates that he has a high chance of winning this bid. It’s more or less already in the bag.”

“In the bag?” Jason clenched his fists so hard that the veins on the back of his hands bulged. “An eye for an

eye, I say. We shouldn't have kept this scourge alive in the first place. Any problem that wasn't completely eliminated is bound to arise again."

"You mean—"

Suddenly, there was a clatter from the stairwell as if something had fallen.

Jason's face tensed up.

The assistant and the bodyguard were already yanking the stairwell door open before it immediately revealed a panicked Amber.

"You haven't left?" Jason questioned.

She was ashen-faced as she clutched the banister while taking two steps back. "I didn't hear anything, Jason. I'm leaving now."

"Didn't hear anything'? Do you think I'll believe that?"

"I really didn't hear anything."

"Stand there!"

As the cold words rang out, the bodyguard immediately understood what Jason meant and caught hold of her.

A frightened Amber screamed, but she was knocked out before she could call for help.

"Take her as a hostage." Jason gave her a careless, disdainful glance.

If she hadn't manipulated Tina, Tina wouldn't have been so careless as to do many foolish things that resulted in the falling out with the Hindenburg Family. Not to mention, Tina's psychiatric state wouldn't be in such disarray.

When Amber regained consciousness some time later, she was in an old, abandoned warehouse. "What are you guys going to do to me?"

"President Burton simply wants you to stay here for a while, Miss Hudson. He has no other intention."

"Jason?" She suddenly recalled the events from the hospital morgue. "Why is he holding me captive? I don't know anything! It has nothing to do with me!"

"Nothing to do with you?" Jason sneered coldly in the dark, "How many of the people by Justin's side are clean? I don't care what you did or didn't do. As long as you're in my hands, he'll be forced to listen to me."

He had to find a way to cause Justin to lose the bid in Brookville or he'd be in hot water once Justin reported his theft of the patent to the board of directors.

Amber asked with a pale face, "What's the point of taking me if you wish to threaten him?"

"You're his fiancée. The entire Riverdale knows that and he'll listen to you. Who would we have taken if not

you?"

"All of that is fake! The person he cares about the most is that mute woman, not me!"

Mute woman? Jason frowned.

"They might be divorced, but did you know that he took her to Brookville? He's so worried about her safety in Riverdale lest I or someone else hurt her. The person he cares most about is Rachel!"

“What’s the point of telling me this? Do you think I can send someone to take her from Brookville now?”

“You don’t need to take her. She has a soft spot in Riverdale.”

Amber’s cold and sinister voice echoed around the warehouse.

When Justin concluded his meeting and returned to the hotel at noon, he found Rachel asleep on the couch with a magazine propped open on her knee. It was close to sliding off and landing on the floor.

He reflexively reached down to catch it, but perhaps due to him being rough with his actions, she stirred awake.

She looked up at him in a daze before violently coming to her senses and tensing up.

“Did I wake you?” Justin dropped the magazine on the coffee table.

Rachel straightened her posture. When did you get back? she asked.

“I only just finished my work. Did you stay in for the entire day?”

She nodded.

Despite being a grown woman, she had never left Riverdale before and it was her first time in Brookville.

As Justin raised his wrist to look at the time, he responded, “Get changed and have an outdoor lunch with me.”

A startled Rachel dumbly looked at him.

A short while later, someone was greeting him the moment they entered a room in the hotel restaurant, "President Burton! You're finally here! Come over and sit."

Never in her wildest dreams would Rachel have imagined Justin bringing her along for a lunch meeting.

Around the circular table were businessmen, who each had a beautiful young woman by his side. It was obvious from first glance that these women weren't the men's wives, but rather hired escorts.

The moment she sat down, the woman next to Rachel pointed at her purse and asked, "Did President Burton buy this for you? It's a limited edition."

Rachel subconsciously looked down at the purse in her hand while feeling conflicted.

As her trip to Brookville had been rushed, she didn't bring much luggage. Thus, Justin had sent someone to purchase a fresh set of her entire wardrobe, purses, and accessories in Brookville. Despite the items being limited edition, she never paid much attention to it.

However, the woman next to Rachel hooked an arm around her own male companion and grumbled, "Look at that. The lady has such a nice purse that I look positively inferior next to her."

Although the man was white-haired, he still placated the young woman. "I'll buy you one that's exactly the same as soon as we're done with lunch."

"Promise me?"

"Of course! However, you must drink a few more glasses on my behalf in a bit."

"That's not a problem."

As the conversation fell on Rachel's ears, she frowned.

The men around the table continued to discuss business while the woman minded their own matters. They only lifted their glasses and made toasts whenever the atmosphere had cooled enough to lighten things up.

Justin had to leave the area for a while in the midst of the lunch, leaving Rachel alone at the table.

A man opposite her asked, "Why is the beautiful woman whom President Burton brought along reticent?"

Upon hearing that, she was startled.

"I never knew he liked such quiet, reserved women" someone else piped up. "He has good taste."

The woman next to the man immediately became unhappy and lifted her wine glass. Then, she spoke in a strange tone, "Since you don't like to talk, let me make a toast to you. That way, we can also be friends."

Before Rachel could even react to the fact that she was being spoken to, her wine glass was being filled.

She kept shooting glances toward the outside of the room with a frown, but Justin was nowhere to be seen.

The thing was that she couldn't drink because Julian was trying to cure her mutism. She had to watch her diet as many items could irritate her throat that she couldn't eat or drink.

However, the woman opposite Rachel was dangerously eyeing her. "Won't you humor me now?"

"Why are you putting her in such a difficult spot, Rose? If you really want to drink that badly, I'll drink with you." The woman next to Rachel suddenly rose to her feet to raise her glass. Then, she smiled at the woman opposite them. "Surely, it wouldn't be good for President Burton to have left for a while only to return and notice that someone had caused his female companion to become drunk." With that, she gulped all of the wine in her glass. "Are you satisfied now, Rose?"

Rose was the woman who sat opposite them, but as Justin happened to return at that moment, she could only suppress her anger and returned to her seat.

“What’s wrong?” Upon noticing the strange atmosphere in the room, he asked the moment he took his seat.

“Nothing. Come, President Burton, let us continue our business discussion.”

An unconvinced Justin glanced at Rachel, but since she didn’t seem to be acting in an unusual manner, he allowed the topic to leave his mind.

Meanwhile, she was staring at the woman next to her.

After all, they didn’t know each other, so why had this woman helped her?

Chapter 140

Everyone left the room when the lunch meeting ended.

While Justin spoke to some other people, Rachel waited for him by the door.

At this moment, the woman who drank on her behalf stepped out of the restroom and upon seeing Rachel there, she smiled. “Oh, you’re still here. I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Coraline Harper.”

Rachel gratefully bobbed her head before signing, Thank you for standing up for me earlier.

“Oh, it was a small matter. It’s no problem, really.”

It wasn’t until Coraline was a distance away that Rachel suddenly realized something.

It seemed that not only was Coraline not surprised about Rachel's inability to speak, Coraline could also read sign language.

"What are you looking at?" Justin asked behind Rachel, his voice pulling her back to the present.

As she returned to her senses, she answered, Nothing. Can we leave now?

"I have some things to do. So, you should return to your room first."

Remembering what Janice had told her, Rachel asked carefully, Can't I go with you?

"It's business-related. You'll be bored, so you might as well head back to rest. I'll return soon." As Justin said those words, he stroked the back of her head. "Be good and do as I say."

Rachel's expression remained unchanged as she nodded. However, as soon as she turned away from Justin, her expression morphed into one of disgust.

Once she returned to her room, her first order of business was to yank her hair until her scalp ached, as if that was the only way to remove the loath that came with the intimate actions.

As she stood at the entryway, she carefully thought about the people at the lunch meeting.

Although Justin's current visit to Brookville was ostensibly about Burton Group's bid, she suspected he was actually here for other matters. After all, she hadn't heard of a single person at the lunch meeting.

The thing was that she had worked at Burton Group for a while and with the excuse of managing the corporation's finances, she investigated all the clients who had financial dealings with Burton Group.

Not a single one of those present at the lunch meeting was among them.

There had to be a problem somewhere.

Now that she thought about that, Rachel stepped out of the room again.

Even if she couldn't overhear the contents of their conversation, it would perhaps be enough to snap a few photographs and send them to Janice to have her look into them.

At the entrance to the second floor conference room, two bodyguards were standing watch.

Rachel hid at a corner of the corridor and waited until those people in the room exited. Then, she rapidly clicked the shutter of her cell phone camera to take several photographs in a row.

Crash!

The sound of glass shattering suddenly rang out from the restroom at the other end of the corridor.

"Who's there?"

The two bodyguards immediately rushed over as Rachel's heart clenched. As she lacked the courage to stay even for a moment longer, she departed in a hurry.

When she rode the elevator back to her floor, she was careful to stop two floors below where her actual room was. After doing so, she headed into the stairwell to ascend the stairs,

Yet, the moment Rachel entered the stairwell, she heard the sound of coughing coming from below.

A startled Rachel paused and she peered through the gaps between the railing to see blood trail down the stairs.

Her own blood immediately rushed to her head, leaving her hands and her feet freezing cold.

Cough cough...

Judging by the sound of the unsuppressed coughing, there was a woman at the floor below Rachel.

As Rachel returned to her senses, she carefully crept down half a flight of stairs before looking over the banister to see a silhouette leaning against a door in the stairwell. Coraline?

She froze.

It seemed Coraline had noticed Rachel as well, for she looked up warily before sighing with relief when she recognized Rachel. Then, she held a finger to her lips to indicate for Rachel to remain silent.

Rachel cautiously approached Coraline and spotted the blood all over Coraline's white suit sleeve. Blood was still flowing down from her arm and dripping all over the place, staining the banisters below them.

Are you injured? Rachel asked.

"I'm fine. Don't worry about me. You must leave right now."

How could I do that?

"This matter is too complicated for you to handle. You better leave now!" It was right after Coraline said these words that her legs gave way, causing her to slide down the surface of the door. She looked lifeless and about to lose consciousness from blood loss.

"There's blood here!"

"It's going upstairs!"

There were men's voices echoing up the stairway.

Since Rachel did not have time to care about anything else, she glanced at Coraline's bleeding arm before quickly acting to tear off a corner of her skirt to bandage Coraline's wound. With the bleeding temporarily stemmed, she proceeded to help Coraline upstairs.

"Why does the trail stop here?"

"She must be on this floor."

"Let's go, quick! Don't let her escape!"

Upon hearing the door open and close in the stairway below them, Rachel took a deep breath of cold air. It was a long while before she calmed down and hastily escorted Coraline back to her own room instead.

After taking Coraline into the bathroom, she attempted to undo Coraline's coat to check on her injuries, only to have Coraline stop her instead.

She tried to explain as she looked at Coraline's wary face. However, Coraline replied, "Go... Go and look for

Janice."

A terrified Rachel froze.

Then, there was a clamor of footsteps running down the hallway.

"This is the only room that the surveillance monitors don't cover, President Shaw. She must be inside."

"Nonsense. This is President Burton's hotel room."

“That’s not a problem. If you’re suspicious, you can head inside to have a look.”

When she heard Justin’s words, Rachel’s heart loudly raced as she looked down at the bloodstains on herself before she immediately locked the bathroom door.

“Rae...” His voice was heard from outside.

Although the bodyguards had ransacked the cabinets as well as the other rooms in the suite, they could not locate the person of interest.

“Where’s that female companion of yours, President Burton?”

The sound of rushing water came from the bathroom located in the second bedroom.

It was the only room in the suite that was left unchecked.

As Justin slowly approached it step by step, he tried to twist the doorknob to find it locked. “Rae? Are you inside?”

Since Rachel couldn’t speak, there was no way for her to give a speedy reply, regardless of whether or not she was inside.

So, he forcefully wrenched the doorknob open and with a loud click, the bathroom door swung open while its hinges shook. Rachel was inside the bathroom getting dressed and she yelped loudly as she covered her chest.

It was clear that she had only just finished showering as she was barefoot and only half-clad in her bathrobe. A large portion of the snowy fair skin on her shoulder was exposed toward the bathroom door.

A mortified Justin immediately slammed the bathroom door shut and he stopped the people behind him. “The spy’s not in here. You can leave now.”

When the bodyguard opened his mouth to say something, President Shaw interrupted and insisted, "Alright. Since she's not inside, we should look elsewhere. Let's not disturb President Burton anymore."

With that, the group of people left the suite.

Now that Rachel was properly dressed in her bathrobe and with her hair still wet, she stepped out of the bathroom as she cautiously peeked into the living room. Have they left? she asked.

"They have." Justin frowned. "Did I scare you?"

She nodded.

He then explained, "Someone eavesdropped on them while they were discussing business, so they've been looking for her. You didn't see anyone strange, did you?"

No, Rachel signed.

While Justin caught hold of her hands, he added, "That's good. Stay inside here for the next few days and

ignore everything else. When I'm done with my business, I'll take you back to Riverdale."

Her inexplicably sweet fragrance was wafting through the air.

Since she was only dressed in a bathrobe, the water droplets at the ends of her hair continued to drip onto her clavicle before it traveled down her fair skin, only to disappear into the grey fabric.

Justin swallowed hard.

The moment when Rachel exclaimed, she was already being carried toward the master bedroom.

Although she had hooked her arms around his neck, her gaze fell on the doorway of the bathroom in the second bedroom. Through the gap of the door, she could vaguely see a bloody arm behind the shower curtain.