

Mute Bride 181

Chapter 181

Rachel wanted to scatter the powder that Nancy had given her onto the buttons of the keypad. With a mini-flashlight that she brought around everywhere, Rachel ensured that every number on the keypad had been covered with some powder before she shut the wardrobe and left the room.

It began to rain in the evening, and the skies were dark by the time Justin got home. He saw a figure sitting in his living hall the moment he entered the house. "What are you doing here?"

Rachel looked up from the magazine she was reading and replied in a matter-of-factly tone, "Did you forget that I sent Charlotte back earlier?"

Justin seemed rather displeased. "What I meant was, what are you still doing here?" Charlotte got home hours ago. What time is it now? Justin thought.

"Well, I did you a favor, right? Why can't you offer me dinner or something?" Rachel said.

"Don't you have food at home? Do you need to eat here?" Justin was obviously annoyed. "You'd better not think that you'll be able to gain control over me just because you managed to win Charlotte's heart. What happened in the past is in the past. I'm not someone who likes looking back."

"You're thinking too much." Rachel shot a glance at the room upstairs. "Charlotte has a slight fever, and I stayed back because I was rather worried."

Justin's pupils shrank a little after he heard what Rachel said. When Rachel tucked Charlotte into bed earlier, she had already realized how the young girl seemed rather unwell. After taking Charlotte's temperature, Rachel found that Charlotte had a slight fever. It was probably because Charlotte had dressed too thinly for a windy day out.

g to the room, Justin took the young girl's temperature once more. His fatherly gaze was filled with tenderness as he gently placed his large palm against Charlotte's tiny face. Charlotte was half awake

as she let out a soft mumble. "Mommy..."

Justin's face fell a little. Rachel was too far to hear what Charlotte had said, but she assumed that Justin was worried because of the grim look on his face. "Don't worry, it's only normal for kids to have mild fevers and headaches. She'll be a lot better after she gets some rest," Rachel said.

He simply responded with a slight nod. The rain only got heavier by the time they left Charlotte's room and went downstairs. "I'll leave now," Rachel said.

Justin glanced out the window before he replied, "You didn't leave when the weather was good earlier, and you're telling me that you're leaving now when it's raining. Are you expecting me to make you stay?"

"Honestly, no. I would've left if Charlotte didn't have a fever, and I don't need to worry now since you're home," Rachel uttered. "I have food waiting for me at home," she added to prove her point.

Just then, the sound of a car's engine rumbled by the front entrance. Rachel took an umbrella from the porch as she walked out. "Can I borrow one of your umbrellas? I'll return it to you someday. My ride is here, so I'll make a move now."

As Justin saw her walking out with the umbrella, he couldn't help but follow her to the living hall, where he glanced out the full-length window by the side. He could clearly see the woman's back as she walked out and got into a car. Someone's actually here to pick her up, huh? Justin frowned. Could I be overthinking this?

At the same time, Rachel got into the passenger's seat of the car. Nancy drove her home at an extremely slow speed as the wipers could barely wipe off the heavy droplets of rain on the windshield. "The rain is so heavy tonight. This could've been your perfect excuse to spend a night there. You might've even managed to get some evidence by tonight, right? Why did you insist on getting me to

pick you up?" Nancy asked.

"Even you can tell that this weather is the perfect excuse for me to stay, so don't you think Justin might've considered that too?" Rachel asked in return.

“Were you afraid that he’d get suspicious of you?” the driver asked.

“Yeah.” Even if Rachel had managed to find a way to stay the night, Justin would’ve been eyeing her the whole time. Furthermore, he might not have gone to his safebox on the same night, and she wouldn’t have had a chance to do much even if he did. That was how Rachel concluded that there was no need for her to stay

Nancy sighed. “What a shame. This was a perfect chance. What are you going to do now? You can’t say that you’re going over to visit your daughter, right? Doesn’t Justin hate it when you get close to Charlotte?”

Rachel tightened her grip on the umbrella handle. “There’ll be a lot of other chances in the future.”

The next day, Rachel paid a visit to Justin’s office after they got out of a meeting in the afternoon.

Knock-knock. “Come in,” Justin uttered from inside.

“President Burton.” He lifted his head when he heard Rachel’s voice.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

She shook the umbrella she was holding in her hand. “I’m here to return your umbrella.”

“I thought you would’ve used the umbrella as an excuse to visit my place again. What’s this? What’s the rush?” he asked as he pushed his signed documents to one side of his desk.

“Do I seem to you as someone who’s that desperate to achieve something?” Rachel asked as she placed the umbrella into the holder beside the door. “I’ll leave now that I’ve returned the umbrella.”

“Wait,” he muttered.

"Is there anything else?" Rachel asked.

"Are you busy after work today?" She froze after she heard what he said. "Charlotte mentioned that you haven't finished teaching her how to bake cookies, so she told me to invite you over after work," he continued. An exasperated look surfaced on his face when he saw how quiet Rachel seemed. "You can forget about it if you're busy," he said.

"I'm free," she hastily replied.

"Well, it's set then. I'll see you in the garage after work." Justin continued to look at his documents after he finished his sentence. He only lifted his head again after he heard his door being shut. Confusion gathered between his thick eyebrows as he gazed at the door.

Justin never had a good impression of Rachel. The main reason for this was because she had completely abandoned Charlotte five years ago, so he had always thought of Rachel as an irresponsible mother. But Charlotte seems to like her a lot, and she does take good care of Charlotte whenever they're together. Was my previous impression of her formed due to my personal biases?

Both Justin and Rachel headed home in one car after work. A tiny figure dressed in red was waiting by the front entrance, and they could see the young girl before they even arrived at the house. "Mommy!"

Charlotte flung herself into Rachel's arms the moment Rachel stepped out of the car.

Rachel nearly fell backward. "Ah! Charlotte, why are you out in this cold weather when your fever hasn't gone down?"

"I'm all better now. You can feel my forehead if you don't believe me." Charlotte held her head up toward Rachel, who beamed and went along with the young girl's orders. She pressed one hand against Charlotte's forehead while pressing the other against her own. "You're right. It does seem like your fever has gone down."

"I wasn't lying, was I, Mommy?"

“Well, you should still be a little more careful. You should stay home just for these few days.”

“Ahem!” The sound of someone coughing came from behind them while they talked. Rachel didn’t need to turn around to picture the grumpy look on Justin’s face. Instead of looking back immediately, she gave Charlotte a wink before shifting her gaze to Justin.

Charlotte immediately got what Rachel meant. “Daddy!” The young girl held her arms wide as she ran toward Justin. “I want you to carry me!”

“Isn’t Mommy the only person you care about? Isn’t she the only one you want?” he asked in a flat tone.

“No way! Daddy and Mommy are supposed to be a pair. I like both of you. I like you two equally.”

“Equally?” Justin was clearly displeased at her answer. Rachel hadn’t been around in the past five years, and he had taken care of Charlotte all by himself. How could Charlotte show equal love toward both of them?

Charlotte was an extremely observant child, so she clung onto Justin’s thigh the moment she realized the darkening look on Justin’s face. “Carry me, Daddy! Carry me!” she cried as she looked up at the man.

He couldn’t help but give in when he glanced at his adorable daughter, who looked almost like a porcelain doll. Then, he lifted her into his arms, and she moved toward him immediately. Smooch! Once Charlotte kissed him on the cheek, all traces of anger melted off his face immediately. “Daddy you’re the best! My dad is the best dad in the whole wide world!”

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Justin flicked her on the forehead. “Your sweet-talking isn’t going to work. I’ll send you off to some summer camp in the mountains if you don’t obey me.”

“You’d miss me too much to do that,” Charlotte muttered as she pouted and held onto her forehead.

"Let's see if I'd miss you." Justin wore an emotionless expression as he spoke. Charlotte could sense that something was up-she knew that Justin was about to tickle her. "Mommy! Save me, Mommy! Hurry!" Charlotte shouted as she wriggled away from Justin.

"No one's going to save you!" Justin had already got Charlotte at her ticklish spot before Rachel could even get closer to Charlotte. The young girl laughed so hard that she could barely breathe. "Hahahaha... I was.... Hahahaha... I was wrong, Daddy... Hahahaha! Mommy... Hahahaha!" The young

girl giggled.

Even Rachel couldn't help but laugh as she watched the father and daughter fooling around. The night breeze made Rachel's hair messy, so she tucked some hair behind her ear, revealing her defined jawline. Justin's hands stopped mid-air, and he no longer tickled Charlotte when he saw Rachel's warm and gentle smile.

Rachel had been laughing, but she froze the moment she met gazes with Justin. The sun was setting, and the breeze was cooling. Charlotte's giggles filled the air as Justin and Rachel looked at one another. The atmosphere around them seemed too warm and loving to be real-their actions felt natural enough to seem like a daily thing, yet it felt rather unfamiliar for them to have such a relationship.

The maid's voice came from inside the kitchen then. "Mr. Burton, Miss Hudson, dinner's ready! You guys can eat now." Only then did the couple snap back to reality. They hastily looked away from one

another. Justin lowered Charlotte onto the ground, and the young girl stomped her feet as she walked toward Rachel while panting. "Daddy's a big monster!" Charlotte cried as she held onto Rachel's hand.

"Fine; I'm a big monster. You shouldn't come home with this big monster from now on," Justin muttered as he walked into the house. Rachel glanced at his back figure before she held onto

Charlotte's hand. "Come on, little monster."

Charlotte blinked puzzledly. "How am I the little monster?"

The woman blinked back at the young girl. "Shouldn't the big monster's daughter be a little monster?"

Charlotte chuckled for a while. "You should be a big monster too then, Mommy. In that case, we're a family of monsters!"

Justin turned around when he heard what Charlotte said, and he gave Rachel a thoughtful gaze for a moment. Rachel couldn't handle the awkwardness-she looked away and avoided his gaze.

Dinner wasn't anything fancy-they had a few homemade dishes. Charlotte couldn't seem to sit still at the dinner table. "Are we making cookies together later, Daddy?"

"I'm not," Justin uttered.

"Why?"

"You're the one who's supposed to prepare a gift for your aunt, not me," he replied.

"Fine." Charlotte pouted before she turned to Rachel. "Please don't mind him, Mommy. Daddy's just this sort of person. I can't imagine how he managed to win over the heart of a woman like you in the past."

Rachel stiffened while Justin nearly choked on his water. "What are you talking about, Charlotte?! How

could I possibly go after her?" Why would I go after her? he thought.

"Well, what happened between you two, then?" Charlotte opened her arms as she asked. "Could Mommy have been the one who went after you? She'd never have left if she was the one who went after you. You must've made her angry. I can't believe you're not admitting to your faults yet!"

Justin found himself completely speechless. He had no memory of his past with Rachel, so he couldn't even dispute Charlotte's claims. He had never wondered about his past, but he was starting to get rather curious about it.

Rachel and Charlotte headed into the kitchen to prepare for their cookie-baking session after dinner. Justin was busy working in his study, but he couldn't seem to process any of the documents he was reading. Eventually, he fished out his phone and dialed a number. "How did I meet Rachel in the past?" he asked in the call.

The person on the other end paused for a moment. "Why are you wondering about this all of a sudden?" the person asked in a surprised manner.

"No reason. I'd just like to hear some details about the things that happened between us," he uttered.

"Old Mr. Burton specifically warned me not to talk about this, President Burton. Please don't make things hard for me. Why don't you just ask her if you really want to know?" Frankie was one of the few people Justin actually trusted, so Justin couldn't bring himself to fault Frankie for following orders.

"Well, just tell me this-who was the one who chased after the other party in the past?" Justin asked.

"What?" Frankie was so puzzled-Justin could hear the confusion in his voice. After a while, Frankie finally gave a rather uncertain response. "There wasn't exactly one party who went after the other... I guess it was a mutual liking. But after that..."

"What happened after that?" Justin asked.

"You went after her," Frankie replied.

"No way!" Justin leaped out of his chair. "Did you remember this wrongly?"

Frankie sounded rather irritated as he spoke. "Of course not. It has only been five years." Apart from Rachel and Justin themselves, Frankie was the one who knew the most about their relationship during then. "President Burton, you..."

Before Frankie could finish his sentence, Justin ended the call on his end of the line. He then slumped into his chair with a grim look on his face.

Meanwhile, Rachel was busy showing Charlotte how to bake cookies in the kitchen. "Let's use some molds to shape the dough-every cookie will be about the same size that way." Rachel patiently guided her daughter in a step-by-step manner as they removed the molds from the dough. "Is this right?" Charlotte asked.

"Yeah. You need to press on it firmly before knocking it out. You're such a smart girl, Charlotte," Rachel uttered. In fact, Charlotte's motor skills weren't that great. It was evident that the young girl had been spoiled from a young age-she hadn't had to use her hands for much work in the past.

"Have some tea, Miss Hudson," the maid offered.

"Okay. Thank you. You can leave it there."

"You can take a break. I'll be here with Charlotte." The maid placed the tea in the living hall before ushering Rachel to go over. "You shouldn't strain yourself too much," the maid reminded her.

Rachel stole a glance at the room upstairs before she nodded half-heartedly. "Sure. You can look after Charlotte. Make sure that she doesn't hurt herself. I'll use the washroom for a bit."

"Ah, okay."

After washing her hands, Rachel stepped out of the kitchen and took a few sips of her tea in the living room. She then headed upstairs to the washroom on the first floor. Once she was in front of the washroom, she shut the door from the outside and turned to make sure that the maid wasn't watching her. Once she made sure that the coast was clear, she hurried up the stairs.

The skies had turned dark by then. There weren't any lights in the master bedroom-the whole place was pitch black. Rachel had to find her way to the wardrobe door based on her memory of how the room looked. She then pulled her mini-flashlight out from her coat before shining it at the keypad of the safebox. Once the light rays stuck against the surface of the keypad, there were neon-colored powder stains that indicated the buttons with fingerprints on it.

Rachel hastily noted down all the numbers that had fingerprints on them. "Mary..." Justin's voice came from outside the room. "Bring some tea up, please."

"Ah, alright. Please hold on, Mr. Burton. Miss Hudson is in the washroom, and I need to take care of Charlotte. I'll send some tea up once Miss Hudson is back to look after Charlotte," the maid explained.

"Come down and take a look at the cookies that Mommy and I made, Daddy!" A child's sweet and innocent voice came from downstairs.

Rachel felt as if her heart was about to leap out of her throat. One would attract what one feared the most-Rachel could hear faint footsteps walking in her direction. One step, two steps, three steps... The sound faded off at the stairway. If Rachel's estimations were right, Justin had gone downstairs.

Her expression altered as she hastily shut the wardrobe door.

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Once Justin got downstairs, he saw Mary and Charlotte baking cookies together. When he turned to look at the washroom on the first floor, the door was shut, and the lights were turned on inside. However, there wasn't any noise coming from the inside. Suspicion gathered in his eyes as he walked toward the washroom. "Are you in there?"

There wasn't any reply. Justin knocked on the door twice. "Rachel?" There was still no reply. Justin's gaze darkened. He seemed to recall something as he hastily reached for the door handle. Right as he pushed the door open, the flushing sound came from inside the washroom.

"Are you a pervert or something?" Rachel screamed as she hurriedly pulled her skirt down.

Justin froze for a moment before he turned to face his back against her. "Why didn't you say anything if you were in there?"

"Would you talk to someone outside while you're in the toilet? I don't have weird habits like you! Aren't you going to leave yet? Are you done looking?" she barked. Justin's face turned pale as he reached his hand to shut the washroom door.

Rachel finally heaved a sigh of relief once the door was shut. She held onto the wall and slowly lowered herself to sit onto the toilet bowl. She looked down to remove her high heels before she gently touched her feet. A sharp pain shot through her legs immediately-it hurt so much that cold sweat began to form on her skin. She inhaled sharply in response to the pain. Not everyone could manage to climb down from the second floor, after all.

After washing her hands, Rachel glanced at the mirror and calmed herself down a little before she walked out of the washroom. Justin was nowhere to be seen when she passed by the living room, so she assumed that he had gone upstairs.

"Hurry up and come here, Mommy. I made a little duck cookie!" Charlotte's voice came from the kitchen. Rachel came back to her senses. "I'm coming!" she replied.

Rachel had only been gone for a while, but Charlotte had already managed to fill the baking tray with cookie doughs that had been removed from their molds. There were all sorts of odd shapes that filled the tray. Rachel pointed helplessly at an oddly shaped pulp. "Miss Charlotte, can you tell me which mold you made this piece from?"

The young kid spread her lips into a wide grin as she held her fingers out to Rachel. "With this mold!! wanted to make a duck, but we don't have any molds for ducks. That's why I had to use my own hands."

"You little rascal." Rachel pinched Charlotte's nose playfully. "Please get her to wash her hands, Mary. I think these biscuits can be baked soon. The previous batch should be done by now."

"I need to make tea for Mr. Burton. Can you bring Charlotte to wash her hands instead?" Mary asked.

"It's fine. I'll make the tea," Rachel offered. Mary hesitated for a moment as she seemed like she was about to say something. Charlotte spoke up before Mary did. "You can go ahead and make tea for Daddy, Mommy. I'll go wash my hands."

The young kid never missed out on an opportunity to bring both of her parents together. Justin had just returned to his study a while ago, and he was back to flipping through documents at his desk. Knock knock. Rachel came in with tea.

“Why are you the one sending me tea?” Justin looked at her. “Where’s Mary?”

“Charlotte dragged Mary over to wash her hands and change her clothes. You wanted tea, didn’t you? sent it over since I had nothing else to do.” Rachel lowered the tray onto the side of the desk while she spoke. She lifted the pot and poured him a cup of tea.

The fragrant scent of chamomile tea filled the room immediately. Justin’s eyes widened after he took a sip of the drink. “Were you the one who made this?”

“What is it? Is there any issue?” she asked.

“It’s nothing.” A series of complicated emotions filled his face as he lowered the cup. The taste of the tea was really familiar, and it seemed to remind him of something. It tasted even better than the tea that Mary made him-it felt almost as if this was the tea that he used to drink regularly. Could I have loved her before she left me? He was starting to doubt himself.

Rachel spoke up then. “You might think that I’m crossing your boundaries when I say this, but I’d like to say it anyway.”

“What is it?” He returned to his senses.

“It’s about Charlotte. I heard Mary telling me that Charlotte hasn’t been to school all this while,” she uttered.

Justin frowned immediately. “Why are you asking about this?”

“I’d like to know the reason for that,” Rachel said.

“The environment in the school is a little too complicated, and Charlotte doesn’t like it. I figured that she doesn’t have to go if she doesn’t want to,” he explained.

“Did you agree to her just because she doesn’t want to go? Are you going to make her stay at home forever? Is she not going to interact with the rest of the outside world? The only people around her now are the maids, the security guards, and people from the Burton Family,” Rachel protested.

He frowned. “Are you questioning my way of parenting now?”

“Don’t you feel like it’s an issue?” Rachel asked in return.

“No,” he muttered.

“You can’t be like this, Justin. Charlotte should have her own-aged peers, but the only people she interacts with now are adults. Don’t you feel like the way she talks and acts is a little too mature for her age?” Rachel had already realized this since the first time she saw Charlotte at the airport.

It wasn’t wrong to spoil a child, especially one like Charlotte, who grew up without a mother. However, Justin was too lenient with his love for his daughter-it wouldn’t be good if his pampering turned the child into a rude and arrogant individual. Children were never at fault-the blame would always fall upon the parents.

“If you truly cared for Charlotte, you would’ve come back to visit in the past five years.” Justin’s words felt like an arrow shooting through Rachel’s heart. His icy glare was like two sharp knives-it was just as stern as it had been five years ago. “You might have had a few meals with Charlotte, and she might like you, but that doesn’t give you the right to tell me what to do.”

Rachel stiffened a little. “That’s not what I meant.”

“I’m not interested in what you mean. You can leave if you don’t like what you see; you don’t have to disrupt Charlotte’s life from now on,” he uttered.

Before Rachel could continue explaining herself, a loud cry came from outside the room. “What’s the matter, Charlotte?” Charlotte was lying in Mary’s arms in the dining hall on the first floor, and her face was flushed and pink. The young child was gasping for breath, but she couldn’t seem to breathe at all. Her facial features were squeezed together.

“Charlotte!” Justin ran toward her. “What happened?”

Mary was nearly in tears because of how anxious she was. “I don’t know. I was with her the whole time, and we had just washed our hands. She became like this right after she ate a piece of cookie.”

“A cookie?” Justin glanced at the dining table. There was nothing else apart from the freshly-baked cookies placed on the table.

Rachel had rushed down the stairs by then. “What happened to Charlotte?”

“Daddy...” Charlotte clung to Justin’s neck. Her little hands were trembling, and she could barely speak. Justin didn’t have the time to think-he immediately lifted her into his arms. “Get the car!”

Rachel responded to his words immediately-she ran to the front door to start the car. Once they got in, they sped all the way to the hospital.

Both Justin and Rachel stayed with Charlotte after they arrived at the emergency room. The doctor lifted Charlotte’s eyelids and checked her pupils with a flashlight. “Does the young girl have any allergies?”

“Honey. She can’t eat honey,” Justin said.

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“It’s fortunate that you brought her here so soon. Based on her current condition, it seems like she’s having an asthma attack after a serious case of allergies. You guys are her parents, and you know about her allergies, so why didn’t you guys watch out? She must have accidentally had some,” the doctor said.

Justin’s face darkened as he glanced at Rachel. “Come out for a while.” Rachel didn’t know what was going on. Justin tugged her toward the stairway once they walked out of the emergency room. He shoved her against the wall angrily. “What did you do?”

“Ow!” Rachel cried out as she felt a sharp pain shooting through her back. “What are you talking about?” she cried as she tried to hold back her cries.

"Didn't you hear what the doctor said earlier? You fed Charlotte some honey, didn't you?" he asked.

"I didn't."

"Why would Charlotte become like this after just taking a bite out of the cookie otherwise? Do you know that it's life-threatening for her even to have a little bit of honey? Honey triggers her asthma instantly!" he cried.

The cookies? Rachel was stunned for a moment. "That's impossible. I didn't put any honey in the cookies," she muttered. Could there have been something in the ingredients of the baking materials that contained honey?

Justin was even more furious when he saw the doubtful look on her face. "Did you think that criticizing the way I teach my daughter would make you a qualified mother? You don't care about your daughter at all; you're just putting on a fake show of being a loving mother."

"I'm sorry. I really didn't know that those cookies."

"That's enough!" Justin raised his voice as he howled at her. "I'm warning you now, Rachel. I don't want you anywhere near Charlotte from now on."

Bang! The sound of the door closing echoed in the stairway, and Rachel felt her ears ringing. The look in Justin's eyes before he left made him seem like he was ready to kill someone. Rachel had no doubt that he might have murdered her if something actually happened to Charlotte,

Her phone had already been vibrating in her pocket for a while before she reacted to it. "Hello? Something came up here; I'm in the hospital. It's nothing. I'll tell you about it when I get back."

After she got off the call, Rachel returned to the emergency room and peeked at Charlotte through the curtains for a while. The young girl was lying on the bed, and she looked much better after she received an IV drip. Rachel only left after she heard the doctor telling Justin that Charlotte's condition was stable.

Jolly appeared with a mask on her face once Rachel got home. "What's going on? Didn't you say that you were going to Justin's house for dinner? I thought you were planning to bake cookies with Charlotte before checking the passcode on the safebox. How did you guys end up in the hospital?"

"Charlotte ingested some honey by accident, and it triggered her asthma attack because she's allergic to it," Rachel explained.

"Ah? How did it happen? How is she now?" Jolly asked.

"Fortunately, we were quick to respond, so her condition is stable now. She should be fine soon," Rachel said. She still felt rather uneasy and worried as she explained the situation.

Jolly heaved a sigh of relief. "That's good. As long as she's fine."

"There's something odd about it, though," Rachel uttered.

"Ah?" Jolly was surprised. "What is it?"

"I'm not sure for now. I might need your help with something, Jolly." Rachel's pupils shrank as she spoke. "I think someone got rather impatient to have plotted such a fishy incident. I'm afraid she might make things worse if I don't do anything about it."

The next day, Rachel went to the office as usual. There was a meeting in the morning at Burton Group's headquarters, and the management team of the headquarters had to take part in the meeting. Although Rachel was only the sales director of Burton Pharmaceuticals, there weren't any formal managers in Burton Pharmaceuticals as it was considered a franchise of the company that was managed by Justin himself. In other words, Rachel's role in the company was equivalent to that of the CEO of a company.

Her position wasn't too far below Justin's. When it was her turn to give an update on her work, she briefly explained the recent condition of the company. "There aren't many issues with the pharmaceutical side of things. We'll be welcoming our foreign clients this afternoon. If the partnership works out, then our international markets will be a little more stable."

Justin was the one who questioned her. "Have you chosen who to greet the foreign clients?"

Rachel froze for a moment. Justin had responded with a simple 'okay' when the other people gave their reports. "What? Have you not planned it out?" Justin's tone was sharp and cold. "It's 9.30AM now, and you have less than three hours until lunchtime. Why haven't you chosen the person in charge for this?"

Rachel frowned. "I'll send Lisa to do it." Lisa was her secretary.

"Lisa? It seems like you don't really care about this international partnership. Do you think your skills with the international market are too good for you to handle a tiny project like this?" he asked.

"That's not what I meant. I just thought that Lisa has the ability to close this deal," Rachel explained.

"It's fine," Justin uttered flatly. "I think you should handle the welcome meeting this afternoon, Chris."

Rachel froze for a moment. All of the people in the meeting room exchanged glances upon hearing his

that the foreign clients they were dealing with that day were just minor projects that didn't matter much to them. It wasn't important enough for Rachel to meet up with them personally, let alone for her to go and welcome them.

"Do you not want to do it?" Justin asked.

Rachel knitted her well-trimmed eyebrows in response to Justin's cold glare.

"No. I'll do it," she replied.

"Great. The meeting's over, then." Everyone in the meeting room scattered off after he uttered his words-Rachel was the only one who stayed back. She stepped forward to stop Justin before he left. "I might have been too sensitive, President Burton. However, why do I feel like your guidance during the meeting earlier sounded a little like you were taking revenge against me for personal matters?"

“Do we have any personal matters between us?” he asked in return.

“No, I guess not. I don’t think it’s like you to jump to conclusions before clarifying the situation. However, this rule doesn’t seem to apply to me-you really haven’t changed at all in the past five years.”

Justin frowned at Rachel’s words as he couldn’t understand what she meant. “What are you talking about?” he asked.

“I’ll give you an explanation for Charlotte’s allergy incident. You should prepare yourself to apologize to me.” Rachel left the meeting after finishing her words. Her 5-inch heels made a clear, clicking sound

against the floorboard, and she walked with elegance and confidence as if she weren’t affected by what happened at the meeting at all.

Justin straightened his tie a little. She’s just faking it!

That evening, Justin went to spend time with Charlotte at the hospital. Amber was there as well. “Look what I brought you, Charlotte. I made some of your favorite porridge.”

Charlotte felt moody the moment she saw Amber, but she didn’t have the energy to go against Amber as she wasn’t fully recovered yet. The young girl simply rolled her eyes lazily. “I don’t like porridge at all.”

Amber didn’t lose her temper at Charlotte. “You look so weak. You must have suffered a lot,” she said.

Justin took the bowl of porridge from Amber before he began to blow on a spoonful of porridge. “Come on, be a good girl and have some of this.” He moved the spoon closer to Charlotte’s lips.

Charlotte turned away from him. “I don’t want it,” she said weakly.

“Charlotte,” Justin uttered.

“Forget it, Justin. We shouldn’t force her to eat it if she doesn’t want to. The porridge is still hot, anyway. I’ll feed her later once it gets cooler,” Amber offered.

“I don’t want you to feed me anything,” Charlotte hissed at Amber. “Daddy, I want Mommy to be here. Where is she?”

“She’s busy with work, so she won’t be able to visit you for a while,” Justin replied in a rather cold tone, He felt furious whenever someone spoke of Rachel. Charlotte wouldn’t have been in the hospital if it weren’t for her.

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Amber said, “Charlotte, your mother doesn’t even know you’re allergic to honey. You were almost killed. Of course your daddy can’t let her take you.”

Charlotte was paling from anger, and she clenched her fists.

But then, someone said, “Ah, talking behind my back the moment I turn around, huh? Looks like you’ve been polishing your skills, my dear Amber.”

Amber froze up. A moment later, Rachel came in proudly.

“Mommy!” Charlotte was excited to see her.

“Hi, Charlotte.” Rachel ignored Justin and Amber. “Brought you some soup.” She put the thermos on the table. “Make sure you finish it.”

“Yeah, I will!”

“Here, I’ll help you,” Rachel said.

Just then, Justin could smell a faint stench of alcohol coming off from her, and he frowned. Before she could open the thermos, he dragged her out of the ward. "Are you drunk? Who told you you can come here?"

Rachel staggered backward, almost falling down. "Hey, you asked me to meet up with the foreigners." She broke free of his grasp. Rachel looked drunk, but she could answer calmly, "And I did. Been two hours since I sobered up. I know I'm fine, so I came to see my daughter. Any problem with that?"

"You're obviously drunk. You think you can see her in that state?" Amber mocked. "Or did you forget that Charlotte's in the hospital because of the honey cookies you gave her?"

That only served to anger Justin further.

Amber continued, "Rachel, you abandoned your child years ago. But now you just swoop in and try to take Charlotte away like nobody's business. What are you trying to do?"

"She's my daughter. I can take her with me if I want to, and you can do nothing about it."

"Is that so? I'm Justin's fiancée." Amber huddled closer to Justin. "I've been doing my best to take care of Charlotte. At least I know she's allergic to honey, unlike you."

Suddenly, someone blurted behind them, "And how are you so sure Rachel doesn't know about Charlotte's allergy?" The voice was soft, but it echoed throughout the corridor.

Amber was petrified, and even Justin froze up.

It had been five years, but Julian was still as calm as ever. "It's been a while, Justin, Miss Hudson." He looked at Justin and Amber coldly.

Amber looked stiff, but she managed to ask, "Dr. Peters. What a surprise. When did you come back?"

Rachel wanted to know as well.

Julian answered with a question, "Hm? You don't seem to welcome me, Miss Hudson."

Amber forced a smile. "Who? Me? That's a misunderstanding. You're Justin's cousin and Madam Parham's only son. She's been looking forward to your return for a while now."

"Is that so? And here I thought you're worried I might say something that'll ruin your plans."

"You're such a joker, Dr. Peters. I don't have any plans at all." Amber was starting to get nervous. Julian knew everything about the events that happened five years ago. Justin might not believe Rachel, but

Julian was his own cousin. Justin had lost his memories, so Amber was worried Julian might come back and expose her.

Justin frowned. "Why'd you come back all of a sudden?"

Julian answered, "If I don't, you'd accuse Rachel without any proof just like you did five years ago." He handed a file to Justin. "See for yourself."

Justin opened the file, but after he skimmed through a few pages, he looked at Rachel in surprise. "You knew Charlotte's allergy all along?"

"Is that so surprising? She's my daughter after all," Rachel answered calmly. She was still Charlotte's mother. Even though she couldn't get a lot of information over the last few years, she at least knew everything about her daughter's health.

Amber shot, "So what? Doesn't mean you wouldn't forget about it."

Julian looked at Amber coldly. "Rachel's memorized Charlotte's medical history. Do you really think she'd forget something as important as her honey allergy?"

"Hey, everything's possible." Amber held Justin's arm. "You can't trust them, Justin. They might be lying."

Justin tensed up. "She has a point. How do I know you're not lying?"

Julian was understandably annoyed by his cousin's stupid question.

"Julian," Rachel called out to him calmly. "Thanks for your help, but I think I'll have to settle this myself." Justin was paranoid to a fault. If Rachel didn't tell him the pieces of the truth and piece it together for

him-even though it was as easy as a ten-piece puzzle-he wouldn't believe in this ex-wife of his, who just came out of nowhere.

"You'll settle this?" Justin looked at her. "How?"

"Allergies only act up at least ten minutes after the food is taken. It wouldn't have acted up that quickly if it was because of the cookies. I personally looked through the cookies' ingredients, and there's no honey in it. That's why the cookies didn't cause it."

Justin and Julian were surprised to hear that.

Rachel continued, "Aside from the cookies, all Charlotte had that day was dinner. She had it right before we made the cookies, so the time matches." In other words, the honey probably was in the dinner Charlotte had that day.

Amber sneered. "You're just shifting the blame now. Who can prove it?"

To that, Rachel responded by taking out a report. "As it turns out, I asked my friend to take some samples of the dinner leftovers for analysis that day."

She handed the report to Justin. All the ingredients used in the dinner that day were listed there, and there was honey in it.

Amber was starting to panic. "And how can you prove that this report is true? Even if it is, how can you convince us that you actually took the dinner leftovers instead of something else?"

"Now, calm down." Rachel looked at Justin. "Keep reading."

Justin flipped the page as she asked, and his face fell when he saw what was written on there.

"Don't trust her, Justin. She's just trying to shift the blame."

Amber was still trying to mock Rachel, but Justin was already giving her a death stare. With a thwack, he hurled the report at Amber. "See for yourself!"

Amber gasped in surprise, but she was choked when she saw the transaction and purchase history on the report

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Rachel crossed her arms. "Mary bought some honey right after you wired her a hundred thousand, and Charlotte's allergy acted up right after that. Yet you're trying to... shift the blame."

"No. I didn't do this." Amber tried to explain herself. "Justin, I didn't do this."

"I'll get someone to look into this." Justin looked at her icily.

"Daddy!" Charlotte called out to Justin. He quickly wiped off his fury and went into the ward.

"Justin!" Amber wanted to go inside too, but Rachel stopped her. "What do you think you're doing?" Amber looked irritated.

"I know what you were trying to do. You did this to Charlotte so you can put the blame on me, right?"

“Nonsense! What proof do you have?”

“Oh, I have a lot of it. I can show it to you if you want. It’s a one-way ticket to prison, and I don’t mind giving it to you early.”

Amber was getting mad. “Why did you come back? What do you want?”

“What rightfully belongs to me. Justin and Charlotte.”

Amber stared at her in disbelief. So she’s here for Justin! Fury overwhelmed her, and she raised her hand against Rachel, but Rachel caught it before she could even move.

“I’m not the old Rachel from five years ago anymore. You can’t do as you please to me now.”

“Let me go, Rachel!”

“Listen up, Amber. Lay a finger on Charlotte again and I’ll make sure you’re ruined.” Rachel shot her a terrifying glare. “I wonder if Old Mr. Burton will let you marry Justin if I were to, oh I don’t know, upload the video where you’re having sex with Noah?”

Amber stopped moving all of a sudden and stared at Rachel in disbelief. There wasn’t anyone in the staircase. Julian was pacing outside, leaving only Rachel and a terrified Amber inside.

Rachel was playing Amber and Noah’s sex video from five years ago on her phone. There was no sound, but judging from the clear resolution, she knew it’d be loud enough for everyone to hear. “E Enough...” Amber’s voice was shaking. She tried to snatch Rachel’s phone, but Rachel dodged her.

Rachel looked at her icily. “Stand right there. You don’t want Justin to see this, right?”

“What do you want?”

“That doesn’t sound like begging to me.”

Amber bit her lip, almost drawing blood. A long while later, she finally said, “Please. I beg you.”

“Kneel before me,” Rachel answered calmly.

All the color drained from Amber’s face, but she knelt before Rachel in the end. “I beg you, don’t upload the video. We’re sisters, right?”

“Hold on a second.” Rachel turned on her phone’s camera and aimed it at Amber. “Alright. Repeat what you said earlier.”

Amber froze up, and an awkward silence fell between them. A long, long while later, Amber finally said,

“I beg you, delete the video. Don’t upload it, Rachel. We’re sisters, right?”

“And what about Charlotte?”

“I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

With a beep, Rachel stopped recording and kept her phone. But before she left, she said coldly, “Amber,

I don’t want any trouble, but that doesn’t mean I’m scared of you. Do anything funny again and I will wreck you.”

The door slowly creaked shut after Rachel left. When she was gone, Amber gritted her teeth and glared at the door darkly. Rachel!

When Julian saw her coming out, he gave Rachel a bottle of water. “You’re letting her off just like that?”

Rachel answered, "She's not a threat. Obviously the Burtons don't like her either. She's been dating Justin for five years now, but she's still not married to him."

"I've heard about that. My mom doesn't really want her either. Old Mr. Burton only mentioned it in passing, though he never did anything for her."

Rachel was surprised, but then she realized something. "Oh right. You're also a Burton, technically speaking. Almost forgot about it."

"You should have forgotten about it." Julian smiled. "Only then you'll see me as your friend."

"Am I that merciless to you?" Rachel winked. "You saved me and cured me of my condition. Not to mention you took care of me over the years. I'd be heartless if I didn't see you as my friend."

"When did you come back anyway? Jolly didn't tell me about it."

"Two days ago. Had a seminar so I couldn't tell you in time. But I heard you're in trouble, so here I am." Julian worked overseas after he was done studying, but he kept in touch with the doctors back home,

so he came back a lot.

Rachel then remembered something. "Oh, I never heard you talking about Justin's amnesia."

Julian stopped. "To be honest, I don't know a lot about that. I didn't tell you because you were still shocked after going overseas. It wasn't the best time to bring it up."

"Has this been going on for a long time?"

Julian nodded. "Not long after you went overseas, he got into a car crash. He has a clot in his brain that won't go away. Stayed in the hospital for three months and woke up without memories."

“All his memories?”

“Aside from you, he forgot about Amber, the grudge between him and the Hudsons, and even the time he was abducted as a child.”

Rachel stared ahead in disbelief. “Impossible.”

“Post-traumatic amnesia. PTA for short. The human brain will delete some memories if it recognizes the body can’t take the shock that comes from it.”

They finally came back to Charlotte’s ward while Julian was explaining everything that happened.

Julian knew Rachel was shocked, so he reminded her, “He’s not the same man you saw five years ago. That’s why I wasn’t worried when you wanted to come back alone.”

Rachel clenched her fists, her nails digging into her palms. “So he forgot everything and lives like nothing happened for five years?”

“Technically, yes.”

“How dare he?” Her eyes red, Rachel teared up. He ruined my life and nearly killed me! Why’d he have a second chance at life? Why?

“You have to look ahead, Rachel.”

Rachel said, “Yes, but I have to make sure the people who died can rest in peace before I can do that.”

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Julian nodded pensively. “I’ll stand with you no matter what.”

At the same time, Charlotte kept asking Justin to feed her the soup Rachel brought. "Why isn't Mommy back yet?" Charlotte started throwing a tantrum, apparently running out of patience.

Justin said, "She'll be back once you finish this."

"You're lying, Daddy. She left me because you and Amber made her mad. I don't wanna see you."

Justin was still thinking about the report. Mary has taken care of Charlotte for three years, but she betrayed my trust anyway. I can't let any stranger take care of Charlotte from now on.

The sound of a door opening broke his train of thoughts, and in came Rachel.

"You're finally back, Mommy!" Charlotte extended her arms. "Hug."

"Sure, honey." Rachel went to her daughter and held the girl in her arms. "How's the soup?"

"Tasty. Did you make it, Mommy?"

"Yes."

"I want you to feed me, Mommy."

"Okay." Rachel looked at Justin, but he was still immersed in his thoughts, so she coughed. "Give me the bowl."

Justin snapped out of it and gave her the bowl and ladle. "Where's Julian?"

Rachel didn't even look up. "He left. He's a busy man."

A frown creased Justin's forehead. "You seem close to him."

"Relatively speaking. Compared to you, I am closer to Julian."

"I'm your husband. But you're saying you're on better terms with my cousin than you are with me?"

"Ex-husband," Rachel corrected him calmly.

Charlotte was in Rachel's arms, drinking her soup. When she saw her father looking lost, she quickly tried to come up with something to help him out. "Mommy, Daddy is obviously jealous of Julian."

Justin stiffened up. "Nonsense, Charlotte."

Charlotte answered seriously, "I am not talking nonsense. You saw it too, right, Mommy?"

Rachel was surprised, and she looked Justin in the eye, but an awkward silence fell between them. Jealous? No. He's just being possessive.

After finishing her soup, Charlotte finally went to bed.

Rachel patted the blanket and got up after the girl was sound asleep.

"Don't leave me, Mommy..." Charlotte mumbled in her sleep, and Rachel sat back down. She couldn't leave Charlotte alone.

Justin had been working outside all this time. After he was done with his emails, he looked at the time and realized it was late at night. Rachel hasn't left yet? He opened the door silently and saw Rachel

leaned over on the bed, apparently asleep. She was holding Charlotte's hand, and a warm light illuminated them. It was a heartwarming sight.

Justin stood at the doorstep, not knowing what to feel. Regarding Charlotte's honey allergy, he knew he'd accused Rachel wrongly, but that couldn't prove that she was a responsible mother. She still hadn't explained why she was gone for five years.

It was late at night, but business was booming for Riverdale's bars.

"You can't go inside, miss." A pimp stopped Amber, but she went past the disgustingly lit dance floor, pushed the pimp away, and barged into the room.

A couple was making out in the room, but the woman screamed when she heard someone coming in. "Who are you? Who let you in?"

"I'm not here for you." Amber looked dark. "Noah, we need to talk."

The man making out with the woman was none other than Noah. He was a prodigal son to begin with, and he veered off rails after he was humiliated at his engagement banquet six years ago. Ever since then, he changed his girlfriends faster than anyone could say 'phwoar'

"Who is she, Noah?"

Noah waved the woman down. After she was gone, only Amber and Noah were left. "So what brings you here?" He lit up a cigarette and shot a sidelong look at Amber. "First time you made the first move. Finally giving in?"

Amber looked at him coldly. "Someone found out about our affair."

"So? I'm not afraid."

"I know. But do you know who found out about that?"

"Who?"

“Rachel.”

Noah kept on puffing his cigarette, but when he realized that Amber brought Rachel up, he looked at her. “Rachel? Your sister? I thought she was dead.”

The Burtons didn’t tell anyone about Rachel’s condition, including Justin and the public.

“No. She’s back, and she’s threatening me with our sex video. The one at the staircase.” Amber gritted her teeth. “Do you know what that means? I can never say no to her terms now.”

“What does that have to do with me?”

“Did you forget why you turned out this way?”

After the incident at the banquet six years ago, Noah was in the gutters for a while. When he finally mustered enough motivation to work again, the company was already taken over by his sister’s husband, and he lost his parents’ trust.

He used to be a famous president in Riverdale, but since then, he lost everything but his name under his belt. After losing everything, he went off the straight and narrow.

Amber continued, “If it weren’t for Rachel telling you about Tina’s affair, you wouldn’t have insulted her on a whim. If you hadn’t done that, none of this would have happened.”

Sure enough, Noah’s face fell. Back then, Rachel told him about Tina’s affair and embarrassed him. He couldn’t swallow his pride, so he insulted Tina without even thinking. Because of that, his parents thought he was an emotional, impulsive man who’d ruin the company.

“You want me to kill her, don’t you?” Noah looked at her darkly, and the smoke made him look dangerous. “It’s a simple task for me, but what can I get from this?”

Amber clenched her fists. "Come here."

A short while later, Noah's moans could be heard from the room, and his belt clanged as his pants fell on the floor.

Rachel woke up early the next morning, and her arms felt numb. There was a blanket on her, though she wondered who draped it over her. She remembered someone doing it vaguely last night, but she thought it was the nurse.

It was nearly time for work. Since Charlotte was sound asleep, Rachel could leave her. She carefully let the girl's hand go and tucked her in before she left. After she went home, she changed into her work attire before heading to her company for a meeting.

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Over the next three days, she only went to the hospital, work, and home. Rachel made different soups and different dishes for Charlotte every day too.

Frankie placed three files on Justin's desk. "President Burton, these are the candidates for Charlotte's nanny. Please take a look."

Justin skimmed through the files. "They're the best you got?"

"They're professionals in the industry. Experienced and responsible."

"Denied." Justin pushed the file back.

"Denied?" Frankie took the files from him. "This one has been working in the industry for fifteen years, and she has never received a single negative review. She's experienced, and she's a good cook. Why not?"

"Not educated enough," Justin answered.

Not educated enough? Frankie couldn't believe what he was hearing. "President Burton, we're not looking for a tutor. We're looking for a nanny. What does education have to do with this?"

"You're the average of the five people you spend time with the most, get it?"

"What about this one, then? She's a graduate from an overseas home economics university. And one of the best ones at that. They specialize in this field, so maybe she can change Charlotte for the better."

"She doesn't have a kid of her own. How can she even take care of someone else's?"

"What about this one? She has her own children, plus she's experienced and well educated. The best of both worlds. And she has the best reviews out of the three." Frankie looked at Justin, expecting him

to agree.

A while later, Justin said, "She doesn't have the looks."

What in the world? That's a criterion too? Frankie was about to break down. "Tell me what you want then, President Burton. I'll look for the one you want."

Justin answered, "I want her to be about five feet five, not older than thirty years old, and a graduate from the top five institutions in Riverdale. Aside from being a nanny, I want her to have her own job, preferably the best in the industry. Also, she needs to be a Riverdale local."

Frankie scratched his head and answered carefully, "Uhm, isn't that the madam you're talking about?"

Justin frowned in surprise.

Rachel went back to her office after the morning meeting was done, and she saw Frankie standing up.

"Frankie? What brings you here?"

“Madam.”

Rachel paused. “Don’t call me that anymore. The divorce happened six years ago.” She lamented her past whenever she met someone who used to be in it, though it was the first time she met Frankie alone after she started working. “Do you need anything?”

“President Burton asked me to see you,” Frankie answered politely. “He’s going on a business trip, but he hasn’t found any replacement for the last nanny. He wants to ask you if you can take care of

Charlotte for a few days.”

“Me?” Rachel thought she heard it wrongly. “He told you that? He wants me to take care of Charlotte?”

Frankie nodded. “I won’t joke about this. President Burton knows he’s wronged you, so please don’t refuse. For the sake of Charlotte, at least.”

Rachel thought about it. Even if Charlotte wasn’t there, she wouldn’t let this perfect opportunity slide. After all, it wasn’t everyday he’d go on a business trip. “I’m fine with it.”

Frankie broke into a smile. “Alright. I’ll tell him about the good news, then.”

After Frankie was gone, Rachel dropped her smile, though it was replaced by a look of hurry. Jolly told her the phosphor wouldn’t last long, so Rachel had to crack the code ASAP and take what she needed from the safe box.

Charlotte was discharged that afternoon, so Rachel went to the hospital to take her home. But before she entered the room, she heard Charlotte shouting, “No! I don’t want to go with you! Let me go!”

“Charlotte, be a good girl and come with me, alright?”

“No! I don’t wanna.”

“Charlotte, your father’s going on a business trip, and you don’t have a nanny to take care of you. Who’s going to look after you if you aren’t coming with me?”

“My mommy will!”

“Your mommy? You shouldn’t go with her, Charlotte. If you keep talking about her, your father’s going to get annoyed and leave you behind.”

Rachel would never forget that voice no matter where she went. Her heart sank, and she went inside without any hesitation. “Threatening a child, huh, Sue? Guess that’s how adults work around here,” she mocked Sue the very moment she entered, her voice clear and firm.

Charlotte wobbled over to her mother right after Rachel came in. “Mommy! Great-aunt Sue and the bad guys want to take me away.” She sobbed.

“Don’t cry, Charlotte. I won’t let anyone take you away.”

Sue’s face fell. “What makes you think you can say that? Just because you ran away for a few years and changed your name? That doesn’t change the fact that you’re just a lowly peasant.”

“Sue, it’s been five years, but that doesn’t change the fact that you’re still as unkind as you were.”

“That’s just the truth. I know why you’re back, but you can forget about it. Justin and Amber are engaged. You’re just going to be a homewrecker if you get between them.”

“Hm, if I recall, I was married to Justin back then, but still you specifically asked Amber to be the homewrecker. Didn’t see you defending me back then.”

“Why you little...” Sue snapped. “You’d better know your place, Rachel. Just because you can talk now doesn’t mean you can disrespect me. Guards!” Sue shouted, and two bodyguards quickly came in. “Toss her out! Charlotte, you’re coming with me.”

“Mommy!” Charlotte hugged Rachel’s neck, her pretty little face pale from the shock.

Rachel hugged the girl tightly. “Touch me and you’re getting it.”

She was holding Justin’s daughter and the only heir to Burton Group, so nobody dared to make a move.

“What are you scared of? She’s just one girl!” Sue was furious. “If none of you are doing it, I will!” She went to take Charlotte away.

But before she could, Rachel shoved her back, and she fell down. “Ouch! You b*tch!” She gasped painfully

“What are you doing, Mom?” Julian stood at the doorstep, asking in disbelief.

Sue was stunned, and she looked up just to see her son glaring at her. “Mom. I told you to never harass Rachel anymore. What are you doing?”

“Julian, ... I didn’t do anything. Didn’t you see? This damn woman pushed me! You can’t date her! She’ll kill me one of these days.”

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Julian didn’t even look at his mother. Instead, he asked Rachel, “Are you alright? Is Charlotte fine?”

Rachel shook her head.

“You guys go on ahead. I’ll deal with this.” Julian held Rachel’s shoulders and pushed her out of the ward.

If it weren't for the fact that Sue was Julian's mother, Rachel would have doubled down on the insults and violence. The moment she got out of the ward, she ran into someone familiar. "I thought you're on a business trip." Rachel was surprised.

"Not until tomorrow morning." Justin answered.

"So everything Sue said earlier..."

"I heard it."

Since he was acting calm, Rachel thought he was on Sue's side, and she sneered silently. Guess they're birds of a feather, huh?

Julian came out a short while later.

Before he could say anything, Sue went past him, looking furious. Apparently, Julian told her something, so she only glared at Rachel and left without a word.

Julian said, "My mother can be annoying sometimes, Rachel. Just ignore her."

"It's fine. I don't mind." Rachel smiled at Julian. "Thanks for helping me out. I mean it."

At the side, however, Justin's face fell.

Julian lifted his wrist and looked at the time. "Why don't I treat you to a meal? As an apology for my mother's behavior."

"No need for that."

"Sure!"

Justin was the one who said no, but Rachel took the offer.

Justin asked, "Why'd you say yes? Charlotte just got out of hospital. She needs to heal up. What if she gets herself sick again from this?"

Charlotte tugged on his suit pants and blinked at Justin. "But I wanna go, Daddy."

"I love democracy. It's decided, then. Come on, Charlotte, let's go."

Julian picked Charlotte up and left. "Chop chop, you two." After he was gone, only Rachel and Justin were left.

Justin looked furious, but Rachel only felt like laughing. "You can't be jealous, can you, Justin?"

"Are you mad?" Justin stared at her like she was insane.

"So why are you worried? We're just gonna go have a simple, ordinary meal."

Veins started popping on Justin's forehead.

Suddenly, Rachel stood on tiptoe and inched closer to him, their noses almost touching. "You're nervous, Justin." She put her hand on his shoulder, and his heart skipped a beat. "And your heart's beating pretty loudly." A smile curled her lips, sucking him in. Just as he was immersed in her smile, she patted his shoulder. "I'll be going, then."

The sound of her heels bellowed into the corridor, and Justin's face fell. As he saw her off, he started clenching his fists. She's playing me like a fiddle.

Charlotte and Rachel were sitting together in the restaurant, while Julian and Justin took up the other side.

Rachel was about to get her drink after it was served, but Julian stopped her. "Hold it." He tested the temperature and handed it back to the waiter right in front of Rachel. "We don't want this. Please get us a cup of hot black tea."

"But I don't want black tea!" Rachel protested.

However, Julian's decision was final. "You know you have a bad stomach. Iced coffee is off limits."

Rachel pouted.

Justin thought that the overly friendly conversation was hurting his ears.

Suddenly, Charlotte looked up. "Mommy, do you have a bad stomach?"

Rachel patted her head. "No, I don't. Julian is just overreacting."

Julian answered, "I'm not overreacting. You just don't care about your body. Charlotte, do you want your mommy to be healthy, or do you want her to suffer from stomach ache all the time?"

Charlotte's eyes widened. "I want her to be healthy, of course." She quickly pushed Rachel's salad away. "This one is cold as well, so you shouldn't eat this, Mommy. Have some soup. Great-grandpa told me it's perfect for people with a bad stomach."

Julian's advice apparently worked, since Charlotte spent the whole time keeping an eye on Rachel. She kept asking her mother to have more veggies and soup.

That slightly annoyed Rachel, but she felt touched as well. For so many years, she'd thought Charlotte would be angry at her because of her absence, but instead, the girl cared a lot for her.

Julian said, "Looks like you can listen. Though only to Charlotte, I guess. Not me."

Rachel shrugged. "Yes, Dr. Peters. This is for all the time I went against the doctor's orders."

Justin frowned, and anger flared in his pitch-black eyes.

After they paid the bill, Julian went to the restroom to wash his hands, then Justin came in. "You came back all of a sudden. Should have given us a heads up."

Julian looked at him. "I have work at the hospital. And my mother's going to hold a big party if I tell her. Everyone's going to be dragged into it, so I figured I'd come back in secret."

"You said you're busy, but you seem to care about Rachel a lot. Do you have the time for that?"

"It's been years. I'm used to it."

Justin couldn't believe Julian could say that so easily. "...Years?"

"Didn't Rachel tell you? She's been living with me overseas all these years. I was the one who cured her condition as well."

Justin frowned fiercely.

Julian continued, "Oh, and I'll be working in Riverdale until she leaves." He wiped his hands dry. "I'll be going out now."

Justin clenched his fists. She stayed with Julian when she was overseas? But she never told me about that? What is she trying to do?

Rachel and Charlotte were waiting for the men, but only Julian showed up. "Where's Justin?"

"He has work to do. Told me to send you two home first."

Rachel looked at the restroom pensively.

Charlotte complained, "What's up with Daddy? He's going on a trip tomorrow, and god knows when he'll be back. Now you're telling me he's working overtime? No wonder he's still not married at this age."

"He's busy, so it's understandable." Julian patted her head. "Let's go. I'll take you home."

"Sure."

Since Charlotte was still recuperating, she fell asleep in Rachel's arms on the way home.

Julian looked at them through the rear-view mirror. "Rachel, are you sure you're going to stay at Justin's place?"

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Rachel answered, "Don't worry. It's only temporary."

"I'm not. He lost his memories, so he doesn't remember you." Julian looked at Charlotte. "I'm just worried you might stick around for Charlotte in the end."

Rachel stopped patting Charlotte's back for a moment and hugged her tighter. Back then, she couldn't even bring herself to look at the child after she was born, but now that Charlotte was in her arms again, it would be hard for Rachel to leave her behind again. "We'll see how this goes." Rachel tensed up. "Let's finish what we started out first for now." People died because of him. They need justice to be served.

Julian said, "Don't just shoulder everything on your own. I'm always here."

“Yeah, I know.”

Once she came to Justin’s place, Rachel sent Charlotte to her room before she went to crack the code of the safe box. There were too many possible combinations, since it was a six-number passcode. She stared at it for the longest time and tried two different ones, but they were incorrect. I only have one chance left. What will it be?

All of a sudden, she heard someone coming, and she panicked. She immediately closed the cabinet, but she couldn’t get out in time.

Justin came in a moment later. He went to the company just to take some documents, and he came back right afterward. As per his orders, Frankie looked into Rachel’s life overseas. He found everything he could, though Justin didn’t read it until now.

Before that night, he thought he was uninterested in his ex-wife, whom he was unfamiliar with. But when he heard Julian talking like he was Rachel’s boyfriend, Justin changed his mind, albeit

inexplicably.

The next moment, the bathroom door slid open, and Justin was taken aback. “Why are you here?”

Rachel was drying her hair. When she met his gaze, she explained, “My bedroom’s bathroom is busted, so I used yours. You’re back early.”

“You’re using my clothes as well, I see.” Justin looked at her from top to bottom.

Rachel was wearing his white shirt. It was oversized, so it was enough to cover her thighs. Water droplets were still dripping from her hair, and it drenched her shirt.

Rachel answered calmly, “I’m just borrowing it. You aren’t that stingy, are you? I can just give it back to you.” She started unbuttoning the shirt.

Justin shot her a look and held her wrist. "No need for that!"

The pain on her wrist made Rachel frown.

"Are you always this bold in front of any man?" Justin asked coldly, as if something had triggered him.

Rachel paused and looked at him in surprise. "What are you talking about?"

"You left Charlotte five years ago. Who did you go overseas with?"

Justin's question made her frown.

"Julian. You went with him." It wasn't a question. Justin was just making a statement, and he looked at her coldly. "A casual woman like you can't be Charlotte's mother. I can't believe you seduced my cousin."

Rachel's face fell. "You didn't lose your memories. You lost your mind."

"You're denying it?"

"I know you lost your memories, but use your sorry excuse for a brain and think about it. We were divorced before I went overseas with Julian. There was a one-year gap between that. Nothing happened between us. Even if I did date Julian, who gave you the right to judge us? The queen? The Almighty Lord himself?"

Rachel had a point, but Justin-like the child he was-was furious. "So you are dating him."

“God, I’m so sorry for saying he has a brain. Apparently he has none.” Rachel had nothing further to say, so she tried to break free of his grasp.

“Hey, answer me! I didn’t say you can leave!” Justin barked at her and tried to pull her back.

She gasped and slipped, falling down to the bed. “Ah!!”

Justin fell down on her, and a frown creased his forehead.

His face was inches away from her, and she could smell the faint scent of cologne on him. His pheromones were tingling her senses. Since it was late at night, she could also hear his breathing. The sound of his heartbeats suddenly made her calm down, and she said, “You got so worked up because you thought I was dating Julian? I swear we’re just friends, and we’ll always be-”

Before she could finish her sentence, Justin pinned her down and made his advances, pressing a kiss on her lips, cutting her explanation short. As their tongues entwined with each other, she could feel his heartbeat, warmth, and the palpable greed coming off him. It felt alien to her, yet oh so familiar. Everything was just like it was five years ago.

As Justin went deeper with the kiss, he slowly lost control over his lust. He seemed to know how Rachel’s body worked, but when he tried to remember it, there was nothing there. Shards of memories swirled around, and pain stabbed his mind, just like how it did every time he tried to recall something.

But it was different this time. The more painful it was, the more he didn’t want to stop. He wanted to go deeper, so he slid his hand down to the shirt’s hem and moved up her thigh.

Rachel gripped the sheets tightly, and she felt herself heating up. The flames of lust burned her nerves, and she closed her eyes.

Bzzt... Bzzt...

Suddenly, her phone started vibrating, and she opened her eyes, snapping out of her trance. A surge of strength welled within her out of nowhere, and she pushed Justin away. "Hello? What? I'll be right there." She held her phone. "I need to go. Something came up."

"What is it?"

"It's personal." She picked her clothes up and left right away. Justin looked furious, but she didn't notice it.

That was the first time a woman ever rejected him. How dare you, Rachel!

Rachel went straight from the villa to Jolly's place.

When Jolly saw Rachel, she started crying. "You're finally back. What should I do? The cops said I can't

file a report unless it has been twenty-four hours since his disappearance. And Samuel's nationality is going to be a problem. Should I just get my folks to handle this?"

"Now calm down and talk this over slowly." Rachel calmed her friend down. "Samuel's teacher called you, right?"

"Yes. His teacher said the summer camp's just in the neighboring city, but Samuel's gone from his room when they went to wake him up this morning. Where could a five-year-old boy like him have gone? He might have been abducted!"