

## **Mute Bride 351**

### Chapter 351 The Calm Before the Storm

Justin would be flying directly to Jublen in the afternoon the next day. Before leaving Riverdale, he decided to see Charlotte. Due to their previous misunderstanding, Charlotte had been refusing to see him or answer his phone calls. Having no other choice, he could only call Samuel on the latter's cell phone.

The phone call got through, and Samuel's voice rang on the other end of the line. "Hello?" "Samuel, is Charlotte with you?" "Yeah, she is."

Justin was somewhat reluctant to part with Charlotte, but he couldn't care much about anything else when he recalled the situation Rachel was in. "I'll be going out for a few days, and I don't know when I'll come back for the time being. Are you two at home?"

"Nope, we're in Godmother's car on our way to the airport."

"The airport?" Justin's heart skipped a beat. "Why are you going to the airport?"

"To pick Mommy up, of course."

Upon hearing this, Justin immediately straightened up in disbelief. "Your mom is back?"

"Yeah!"

At this moment, the roar of an airplane's engine reverberated through the skies above Riverdale Airport. After gliding for a long time, the plane finally made a smooth landing.

Having done her job in Jublen, Rachel hurried back to Riverdale on the morning flight. The instant her flight touched down, her nerves, which had been tense with fear over the past few days, relaxed at last. At least things are gonna stay peaceful for a while, she thought.

As soon as she got off the plane, she made a phone call. "Hello? I'm at the airport now."

Janice's voice rang on the other end of the line. "Glad to hear that you arrived safely. Our joint operation with Interpol this time was a success. Although Dillon ran away, we managed to arrest a few of S's leaders and confiscated a large batch of smuggled goods, inflicting heavy losses on them. Well done, Rachel."

"So they won't be coming to Riverdale again for the time being, huh?"

"That's right. Also, we managed to get some evidence on Jason, and the Investigation Bureau has been investigating him lately. It won't be long before he gets punished by the law."

"That's great." Rachel breathed a sigh of relief. "I can have a peaceful sleep at last."

Ever since the moment she decided to assist Janice in investigating Jason, everything around her had suddenly begun to get out of hand, and her mind had been occupied with all kinds of hair-raising stuff every single day. Now that Jason was going to be convicted of his crimes, she could finally unload her burden.

After hanging up the phone, she looked at the clear blue sky outside the airport. Grandma, I'm finally gonna avenge your death.

She waited for a while before Jolly's car arrived. "You're back at last! I nearly worried myself to death over the past few days. Are you alright?" asked Jolly.

Rachel nodded. "Yeah, everything went quite smoothly."

"I saw the news." Jolly hesitated to speak much since there were kids in the car. "I'm not gonna ask anything. It's fine as long as you come back safe and sound. Do you still have to get in touch with those people after this?"

"No, not anymore."

“Really? That’d be great!” Jolly heaved a deep sigh of relief. “That Dillon guy didn’t seem like a nice guy at first glance, and I was afraid whenever you came into contact with him. My dad said that none of those related to the Jockey Club are nice, after all. By the way, it’s great that you’re back. You know what? Justin had been pestering me over the last few days, which was damn annoying...”

“What business does he have with you?”

“He was asking me questions about you, of course. I wonder where he heard it from, but he kept saying that your present situation is dangerous.”

As the two women were conversing, Samuel chimed in, “He called just now, saying that he’s going abroad for a few days and wants to see Charlotte.”

“I don’t want to see him!” Charlotte was nestling in Rachel’s arm at first, but her face tautened the instant she heard this. “He’s a bad daddy!”

“Charlotte.” Rachel frowned. “You can’t say that. He’s your dad.”

“He’s not my daddy! He’s gonna marry another woman and have new kids with her.”

The furrows in Rachel’s brow deepened, and she looked at the driver’s seat in front of her.

Jolly’s innocent expression was reflected in the rearview mirror. She hastily denied, “I didn’t say anything! I never mentioned the photos again after the lawsuit ended, nor did I say bad things about him.” Previously, Jolly had said a lot of bad things about Justin in secret in order for Charlotte to be willing to live with Rachel. It was for the same purpose that she and Hernandez had released the photos at the hearing without Rachel’s knowledge.

Upon recalling the photos, Rachel felt guilty toward Charlotte. “Charlotte, the photos were staged. Your dad has never abandoned you.”

However, Charlotte replied, “I don’t believe it. Daddy promised me to get back together with you, only to date another woman in secret. He was lying to me. I don’t want to see him anymore.”

“Be a good girl, Charlotte.” Rachel did some mental calculations. “Your dad will come pick you up in a few days, so you can’t behave like this anymore.” Even though Rachel had obtained Charlotte’s custody, the court didn’t deprive Justin of his visitation rights, so he could come visit Charlotte every month.

Jolly drove Rachel and the kids home.

“Aren’t you going back?”

“Leroy’s gonna shoot the commercial for our health beverage this afternoon, so I’ve got to keep an eye on it.”

“How are things going on between you and Leroy now?” Rachel sized Jolly up. “Could you two be dating for real?”

“What do you mean by ‘for real’?” Jolly’s face blushed all of a sudden. “That’s not true.”

“Why are you blushing, then?”

“I’m not blushing! I-I’m not gonna talk to you about it anymore!” Jolly was just being stubborn; despite the blush spreading from her face to the nape of her neck, she still refused to acknowledge her feelings. Instead, she stamped her foot down on the accelerator and left the neighborhood as if she was fleeing from it.

Samuel took Rachel’s hand beside her and looked up, asking curiously, “Mommy, is Godmother in a relationship?”

Rachel laughed. “Almost.” How could Jolly still be pretending when even the kids can tell there’s something going on between her and Leroy? she thought. “Come on, let’s go home.” With Samuel in one hand and Charlotte in the other, she entered the elevator while joking and chatting with them.

“Mommy, I want to eat egg noodles with tomatoes.”

“Alright, I’ll make it for you when we get back.”

“I want to eat chicken wings in Coke sauce!”

“No problem.”

The elevator door opened after the elevator reached the floor with a ‘ding’!

As soon as the three stepped out of the elevator, Rachel saw the tall figure standing at the door to her apartment. Joking and chatting with the two kids at first, she was startled for a moment all of a sudden.

“Daddy?” Charlotte’s eyes lit up in an instant, and she let go of Rachel’s hand. However, just as she was about to step forward, she recalled something and clammed up, taking half a step back with her little leather shoes on.

Rachel was surprised as well. “Why are you h—”

Before she could finish her sentence, she was greeted by a gust of wind. The next instant, she was embraced. Her back stiffened up, and she subconsciously began to struggle, only for the man to tighten his arms around her. His breathing sounded heavy in her ear, and the stubble on his unshaven chin prickled her neck, making her feel uncomfortable.

“Let go of me, Justin! What are you doing?”

“Just a minute. Let me hold you tight for just a minute...” a deep, hoarse voice whispered weakly in her ear, like a person who had just recovered from a serious illness.

Through the two layers of clothes between them, Rachel could clearly hear the heartbeat in the man’s chest. Thump! Thump! Thump! His heart was beating so irregularly as though it was going to jump out of his chest onto her.

For some reason, Rachel's flailing arms slowly fell to her sides.

## Chapter 352 It Was Me Who Wronged You First

Rachel took a bottle of drinking water from the fridge. From across the breakfast bar in the kitchen, she saw Justin waiting in the living room.

Charlotte seemed unwilling to talk to the man as she played with her Lego pieces on her own. "This piece is supposed to be here."

Charlotte knocked Justin's hand off before it could touch the Lego pieces. "I like to put it here!" She looked high and mighty. "I'll put it wherever I like! What does that have to do with you?"

Rachel immediately came out with the bottle of water. "Charlotte! You're not supposed to speak like that!"

"These are my Lego pieces!"

"These are the Lego pieces that your dad bought for you."

Charlotte was instantly stumped by Rachel's words.

The atmosphere turned awkward all at once. Most of the toys in the apartment had been sent by Justin. Even though the lawsuit had gotten very ugly, Justin didn't seem to take it to heart, and he had the toys delivered every now and then.

Seeing Rachel knitting her brows as though she was going to give Charlotte a lecture, Justin immediately tried to ease the situation, saying, "It's alright. They're Charlotte's."

Suddenly, Charlotte pushed over the half-finished Lego model with a crash and got up from the carpet. She said angrily, "I'm giving them back to you! This is my home! Who let you in?"

Justin was stunned.

“Charlotte!” Rachel scowled at once. “Who taught you to speak like that? Apologize to your dad!”

“Why should I apologize? I didn’t do anything wrong!”

“You...” Rachel was speechless with anger. That’s why I’d say this girl inherited Justin’s temperament. She’s damn stubborn and doesn’t easily change her beliefs. To think that she had never mentioned a word about Justin since the lawsuit ended!

Charlotte then slammed her room door shut with a loud bang that shook the entire house.

Samuel was playing games on the couch at first. At this moment, he hurriedly tossed his games console aside and ran over to Charlotte’s room. “Don’t worry, Mommy. I’ll go take a look.”

Rachel felt deeply embarrassed as she and Justin were the only ones left in the living room. “Sorry. Charlotte’s been emotionally unstable lately.”

“It’s understandable. I didn’t do what I promised her.” Justin took a deep breath before slowly letting it out, looking somewhat dejected as he massaged his temples.

Seeing how dejected the man looked, Rachel felt somewhat uncomfortable all of a sudden. It would be a lie if she said she didn’t feel guilty at all about setting him up previously. However, she was bent on getting Charlotte’s custody under the circumstances at the time. “I’ll try my best to explain the photos to Charlotte. I’m sorry about what happened earlier, but I don’t regret it.”

Justin replied, “There’s no need to apologize. If I were you, I would’ve gone even further.”

“Don’t you hate me?” blurted Rachel, only to regret it the instant the question escaped her lips. To ask him something like that makes it sound like I care about what he thinks of me.

As she had expected, Justin seemed dumbfounded by her question. “Why would I hate you?”

Startled, Rachel was stumped by the man's words at once.

Justin continued, "It was me who wronged you first. You've never wronged me; you only fought me for Charlotte's custody out of a mother's instincts. Even if you've resorted to some means, it's just a part of being human. You've never done anything wrong."

Rachel's feelings became increasingly mixed.

"Anyway, let's not talk about this. I have something to give you." Justin took out a document and handed it to Rachel.

"What is this?"

"The list of Burton Pharmaceuticals' technical personnel and clients."

Rachel paused for a moment as she flipped through the document. "Why are you giving this to me?"

"I know it's hard for Hudson Pharmaceuticals to start all over again, but I hope that you won't resort to desperate measures no matter what the difficulty is. Half of the clients here were around while you were still at Burton Pharmaceuticals. As for the technical personnel, you also know a lot of them personally."

"You don't have to do this." Rachel closed the document while pretending to give it back to Justin. He stopped her, though, saying, "I only have a request. Stop dealing with those from the Jockey Club, including my uncle. It's only a matter of time before he gets investigated by the Riverdale Investigation Bureau."

Rachel was stunned. He'd always thought that I had dealings with Jason and the others for Hudson Pharmaceuticals.

"Alright, I've said everything I have to say." Justin got up from the couch. "I'll get going. I won't keep you any longer."



“Aren’t you gonna say goodbye to Charlotte?”

“No, I’ll come pick her up in a few days.” Justin threw a glance in the direction of Charlotte’s bedroom. Despite his reluctance, he left.

Rachel saw the man out of the apartment. As she saw him to the door, she suddenly said, “Justin, since Charlotte has come back to me, just forget whatever happened in the past. Don’t dwell too much on it.”

Justin was startled. Just then, the elevator door slowly opened before him.

Rachel reminded him. “The elevator’s here.”

When Rachel closed the door and heard her cell phone ringing in the living room, she immediately hurried over and answered the phone. “Hello?”

“I just learned a piece of shocking news.” Jolly’s voice sounded through the phone; she sounded so delighted as if she wished she could jump out of the phone’s screen.

“What is it?”

“Check out the trending topics on the internet right now, and you’ll see it.”

“Stop keeping me in suspense. Just spill it. I have to cook for the kids after this.”

“Alright, alright.” Jolly was someone who could hardly contain her emotions. She said immediately, “Justin’s been removed from his position as president of the Burton Group.”

Rachel’s eyes widened. “What did you say?”

“It’s true. The Burton Group announced that the board of directors had passed a motion to restructure the company’s shares. At the same time, Justin, the former president of the company, has been removed and replaced by a new president.”

“When did it happen?” Rachel asked while opening her laptop to search for information about it. And sure enough, the instant she googled the term “the Burton Group,” news of Justin being removed as president immediately popped up with all kinds of descriptions.

Jolly replied, “It was just announced this morning, but their board of directors must have held their meeting and passed the resolution a few days ago. I heard that not only was he removed from his position, but he also had most of his shares diluted, so now he doesn’t have much say in the company. Oh, right, I also heard that he’s now been demoted to vice president and is having a hard time at the company.”

Jolly also said something else, but Rachel was no longer listening to her words.

Compared to what Jolly had said, the comments on the internet were much harsher. Because of the previous scandal, Justin’s reputation suffered a drastic decline. The furor over that matter hadn’t died down yet, and now, his removal as the Burton Group’s president was undoubtedly making a huge splash.

Rachel felt suffocated when she saw the different kinds of vicious remarks about the man on the internet. How did this happen? Isn’t Justin Old Mr. Burton’s favorite grandson? However displeased the board of directors was with him, Old Mr. Burton wouldn’t have allowed such a situation to happen. This was far from what she had expected.

“Chris?” Jolly’s voice sounded through the phone and snapped Rachel out of her thoughts. “Why aren’t you speaking? Are you dumbstruck or something?”

“Why was he removed as president? Was it because of the previous public outcry?”

“That was probably part of it. And besides, what happened to the Northlane development project caused him to lose the board of directors’ support. But I heard that it was Old Mr. Burton himself who proposed removing Justin.”

Upon hearing that, Rachel was startled.

### Chapter 353 He Wasn't Drunk at the Time

Old Mr. Burton proposed that himself? How is that possible? Rachel tightened her grip on her cell phone at once. "Jolly, come back as soon as possible. I need to go out."

Rachel hung up before Jolly could finish her sentence. Then, she picked up her car keys and left home without having the time to tell Samuel and Charlotte about it. Because of what had happened to Hans and Nancy, she had been unable to get along calmly with Justin, for she couldn't help feeling that doing so would be a betrayal to them.

But at the end of the day, she was the actual root of what had happened five years ago. If only the fire didn't break out over 20 years ago; if only I didn't save the abducted Justin back then; if only Justin didn't get abducted; if only... Unfortunately, there's no way to turn back time.

Hearing the sound of the door being closed outside, Samuel turned to look at Charlotte in the bedroom, saying, "Mommy's gone as well. What happened to Justin is so terrible. He's been removed from his position in the company. From now on, he's no longer the Burton Group's president. He's penniless, and he lost both his daughter and his wife." He threw up his hands and shook his head. "That's too bad."

Charlotte was startled at first before her eyes lit up the next instant. "That's great!"

"What's so great about it?" Samuel was in disbelief. "Do you hate him that much? He's your dad, after all! Don't you feel sorry for him now that he's in such misery?"

"I believe that Daddy's gonna be fine. I'm happy because Mommy must have gone to him. There's still hope!"

"There's still hope?" Samuel stared at Charlotte with a look of confusion. "What are you talking about?"

"You dummy! Mommy will care about Daddy, of course, so they'll have a chance to make up, which means we still have a chance to not be the kids of a single parent."

“Don’t you hate your dad? You weren’t friendly to him just now.”

“That was just a ploy!” Charlotte folded her arms across her chest. “Didn’t you notice that Mommy’s attitude toward Daddy improved visibly after I did so?”

Samuel was startled before he realized what had actually happened. “So you’ve been playacting these days?”

“Not entirely. I was quite angry at first.” When Charlotte saw the photos, she had nearly believed that Justin was dating another woman, but on second thoughts, she realized that Justin couldn’t possibly have done that. “Amber stayed around my dad for so long, but he rarely paid attention to her. The woman in the photos looked vulgar at first glance, so there’s no way my dad would take a fancy to her!”

“In that case, why have you been downcast over the last few days?”

“I was worried! The two of them are simply too worrying!” Charlotte shook her head helplessly like an adult in the body of a child.

Samuel was stunned. He had thought it strange that Charlotte had turned against Justin so quickly. After all, Justin had brought Charlotte up ever since she was little. For a time, though, he had thought this was just what Charlotte’s temper was like. “Even I was fooled by your acting.”

“Well, I didn’t mean it. I’m sorry.” Having inherited Rachel’s virtues perfectly, Charlotte blinked her pretty and innocent eyes at Samuel, making him reluctant to criticize her.

Samuel hemmed. “Well, I’ll forgive you. What are you gonna do now, then?”

“One step at a time. We mustn’t be hasty now,” Charlotte said with a thoughtful expression. This time, I’ve got to come up with a good idea. I can’t keep coming up with lousy ideas again like I used to.

Meanwhile, Rachel drove to the Burton Residence alone.

Justin had just arrived home when the doorbell rang outside. When he opened the door and saw Rachel, he was very surprised; he even thought he was hallucinating. "What brings you here?"

Rachel looked at the man, but all of a sudden, she found herself unable to ask the question she had originally wanted to ask. After being silent for a long time, she replied, "I left something in your guest room previously, so I came here to look for it."

Justin was startled before his eyes flickered with suspicion. "Is that so?"

"Uh-huh. I'll go look for it," Rachel said while going upstairs.

Rachel had basically taken all her stuff away with her from the guest room, leaving only a few toys on the table.

"Did you find it?" Justin came upstairs after her. "What is it that you're looking for? Do you need help?"

Rachel picked up something without thinking. "No, it's not necessary. I found it. This is it."

"You mean this?" Justin looked at the pink ribbon hair clip in her hand with surprise in his eyes. "You came here just to look for this?" Charlotte must have a drawer full of such hair clips, he thought.

Rachel put on a bold front and replied, "Charlotte suddenly asked for this one specifically, but I couldn't find it at home. That's why I'm here to take it."

Justin folded his arms across his chest while studying Rachel's expression. "Actually, you're not very good at lying."

Rachel was startled.

"Since you're here, why not have a cup of tea?" Justin turned around and went downstairs, leaving Rachel alone in the room in embarrassment.

Rachel went out after him with the hair clip in her hand. “I’m really here for this. I gotta go.”

“I didn’t say that you didn’t come here to look for this. Just have a cup of tea before leaving.”

Five minutes later, the water boiled. Justin poured hot water into the glass teapot and brewed tea with adept movements. “You used to make tea for me, but you’ve never drunk the tea I made, right? Come on, try it.”

Rachel wasn’t in the mood for tea, though, so she didn’t taste anything despite drinking the cup of tea.

“How does it taste?”

“Pretty good.” Rachel hesitated for a moment. “I’m here to tell you that Hudson Pharmaceuticals has a development site near Westhill Golf Club. We don’t have enough funds to develop that piece of land, so I’d like to ask you if you’re interested in buying it.”

Justin paused for a moment while pouring tea. “How much money do you need? I have a friend who—”

“I’m not here to ask for investment. I’d like to transfer the land’s ownership to the Burton Group. Well, that piece of land isn’t comparable to the development site at Northlane, but it’s got good potential. It’s suitable for building a holiday resort. In particular, it can be integrated with Westhill Golf Club to create an all-in-one facility for recreation and entertainment...” Rachel elaborated on the development project on her own.

Justin put down his tea cup. “Rachel, since you could talk about the project in such detail, you must have made a development plan, right? And perhaps the development plan has passed the risk assessment?”

Rachel was startled.

Justin hit the nail on the head, saying, “Hudson Pharmaceuticals isn’t short of capital now; it lacks resources. If you give this to me, you’re gonna have a hard time answering to the company’s board of directors.”

No matter what Rachel said, he didn't give in to her persuasion.

Rachel decided to stop beating around the bush with him. She said with a frown, "I saw the news. You've been removed as president."

Justin looked impassive without the slightest change in countenance.

Rachel continued, "I don't like to owe anyone favors. I got the land in Northlane by setting you up, so I'm giving another piece of land to you in return."

"It's pointless even if you give the land back to me. The motion to remove me as president has been passed."

"That's because your grandpa is displeased with me; he is being mad at you because he thinks you've been deceived by me. If you go back to him now with a piece of land, once his anger cools, you'll still be able—"

"Rachel." Justin suddenly looked at her. "It's not necessary."

His words brought Rachel up short all at once.

Justin said in an impassive voice, "I signed the document willingly. I wasn't drunk at the time."

"Impossible!" Rachel's pupils shrank slightly. How was that possible? I even laced his drink with a psychedelic drug in addition to the alcohol that day!

Justin replied, "If you don't believe me, I can recite the contents of that document right now." He had always had a photographic memory for documents since he was little, so he remembered every word written on the contract. He had read and understood every clause before signing his name with a clear mind.

All of a sudden, Rachel's mind went blank.

#### Chapter 354 He Wasn't Drugged at All

"If you knew everything, then why did you sign it?" Rachel's voice reverberated around the large mansion as she didn't understand why. Justin replied, "Like I said, I'll give you whatever I can if you want."

"You don't have to!" Rachel stood up all of a sudden. "Justin, do you know that there's no way I'll forget what happened back then even if you do this?"

"I know, but what was wrong was wrong. You're under no obligation to forgive me, and whatever I've done for you, it's not for the purpose of begging for forgiveness."

"What the hell are you doing, then?"

"Just trying to ease my conscience as much as I could."

Upon hearing this, Rachel felt her temples throbbing, and she got emotional all at once. The fact that Justin wasn't drunk when he signed the document had thrown her off balance. A moment later, she clenched her fists and got into a temper all of a sudden.

"Rachel!"

Justin stood up as Rachel stormed out of the house and slammed the door behind her. After the sound of the car engine faded into the distance, he withdrew his gaze and sat down again. I told her I'm doing all this to ease my conscience, but how can I do so when she's never gonna be able to forgive me?

When Rachel got home, it was totally dark outside. The living room smelled of pizza, which Charlotte and Samuel were eating voraciously.



Rachel walked past them and went straight back into her bedroom as though she hadn't seen them. Then, she slammed the door shut with a loud bang that shook the entire house.

Samuel shuddered before whispering, "Don't you think Mommy's in a bad mood right now?"

Charlotte nodded. "Obviously."

Just then, Jolly heard the loud bang and came out of the bathroom. "Why close the door so loudly, Chris? You startled me." However, it wasn't until she came out that she realized Rachel wasn't in the living room. "Where's your mom?"

Charlotte and Samuel pouted their lips toward Rachel's bedroom in unison.

Samuel said, "She seems very angry."

Charlotte nodded in agreement.

Jolly was startled. "What for? She was fine when I left. I'll go take a look."

At this moment, Rachel was lying face down motionlessly on the bed in her bedroom.

Jolly knocked on the door. "Chris, I'm coming in."

Only then did Rachel get up sluggishly and weakly as if she was lethargic.

"What's wrong with you? You look so pale." When Jolly entered the room and saw how Rachel looked, she thought the latter was sick. Immediately, she touched her forehead, saying, "You don't have a fever. What's wrong?"

"Can we return the land in Northlane back to the Burton Group?"

“Return the land to the Burton Group? What are you thinking?” Jolly’s eyes widened in disbelief. “It took us a lot of effort to get our hands on that piece of land. Construction has started on that site, and even the groundbreaking ceremony has ended. And now you want to return the land back to the Burton Group and bring all our efforts to naught?”

Rachel also knew that it was impossible. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have offered to give Justin another piece of land at his place just now.

“Fess up to me. Who did you go to meet?”

“Justin. I wanted to transfer another piece of Hudson Pharmaceuticals’ land to him as a little compensation.”

“I just knew it!” Jolly said sullenly. “What did that \*sshole say to you? Did he play the victim to gain your sympathy or something? I’m telling you, I’m not gonna believe every single word he says! This guy’s mind is too hard to read.”

Rachel had a complicated look on her face. “He refused.”

Jolly was startled. “He refused?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Well, it seems like he still has some conscience in him. Chris, how could you be so softhearted? Have you forgotten how he hurt you five years ago? You were almost dead when I met you. Someone like him doesn’t deserve sympathy.”

“I know that, but he was actually sober when we tricked him into signing the document at the hotel that day.” At the thought of this, Rachel felt so suffocated as though there was a large boulder on her chest.

It was fine if Justin really was as shrewd and scheming as Jolly said, but he had willingly walked into the trap knowing that she was setting him up.

“Who told you that?” Jolly raised her voice upon hearing this. “Did he tell you that?”

“He remembers all the clauses of the contract.”

“Chris, are you dumb? The construction on the Northlane development site has started, and the transfer agreement has been approved by all the departments, so it’s no longer a secret. Would it be difficult for him to get his hands on it?”

Rachel was startled.

“And besides, the drug I gave you acted fast, and it’d definitely take effect within ten minutes. He couldn’t possibly be sober at the time.”

“Really?”

“Yes, of course! Why would I lie to you? I have plenty of such drugs.”

“Then why would he say that?”

“Why else? To get your sympathy, that’s why! Didn’t you just nearly give him a piece of land? I reckon he’d turn up his nose at other pieces of land, though. Pester you for a few more days, and you’ll give the Northlane development site back to him, along with the construction team! We’ll be making idiots of ourselves by then!”

The furrows in Rachel’s brow deepened as she listened to Jolly’s analysis. Indeed, this is more like Justin’s style of doing things. What’s the use of giving him something else as compensation? Only by

getting the Northlane development site back would he stand his best chance of turning the tables now! “You’re right.” She clenched her fists. To think that he’s still scheming even now!

Jolly patted her on the shoulder. “Don’t think about it anymore. Come on, let’s go out and eat. I ordered some pizza.”

Rachel came to her senses. “Don’t eat this. I’ll make dinner for you guys.”

“You just have to make dinner for them.”

“Hmm?”

“Since you’re back, I’ll be going out. I’ve got something to do.”

Rachel looked Jolly up and down. “Something to do? What is it?”

“Oh, don’t ask about it! I gotta go.”

Jolly went straight out and got back into her room to change her clothes with apparent joy. After changing her clothes, she looked at herself in the mirror. Feeling that the handbag she was carrying didn’t really match her dress, she got herself another handbag and was satisfied, so she emptied out the contents of the handbag she usually carried, scattering her compact foundation, lipsticks, keys, and card holder all over the bed. After picking a few items and shoving them into the new handbag, she suddenly spotted a transparent pillbox among the miscellaneous items out of the corner of her eye.

Seeing the pillbox, Jolly was startled for a moment. Why is this pillbox here? I personally handed this to Chris and had her lace Justin’s drink with it when they met up for the Northlane development project earlier!

Suddenly, she realized something and rummaged through the pile of miscellaneous items. And sure enough, the white box that she used to keep her vitamin pills in was gone.

Oh, my God! Placing her hand on the bed for support, Jolly sat down with incredibly mixed feelings. So Justin was really sober that day—well, at least he was sober while signing the document. He wasn’t drugged at all, and I only managed to get him into the hotel room for that “encounter” because he passed out after Rachel made him drunk!

She clutched the pillbox in her hand. After hesitating for a while, she got up and threw the pillbox into the trash can. No, I can't let Rachel know this. She's easily moved to pity. If she knows that Justin was telling the truth, she'll definitely feel sorry for him. It's better to just live with the slipup and make the best of it.

## Chapter 355 Prickly Hedgehog

Half a month went by. One morning, Rachel brought the two children downstairs, preparing to send them to school. "Charlotte, hurry up. You're going to be late."

"Wait for me, Mommy, I want to braid my hair." "There's not enough time." Rachel was exasperated. "You're definitely going to be late if you braid it."

Charlotte immediately became unhappy upon hearing that.

"Pouting won't work. I asked you to wake up earlier this morning, but you had to insist on sleeping in. Whose fault is that? Anyway, it's time to go. Now." Rachel glanced at her watch. "I still have a meeting to attend later. We're really out of time."

Samuel also looked like he still wasn't awake yet as he held Rachel's hand and followed her to the elevator. They were immediately greeted by a black car the moment they exited their apartment complex—it was Justin's car.

Justin was looking at his watch as he leaned against his car. When he saw Rachel, he stepped toward her. "I thought that I was late and already missed you three."

Rachel was a little stunned. "Didn't you say that you were going to pick Charlotte up later tonight after school?"

According to the court's verdict, Justin could take Charlotte every Friday night to spend the weekend with him. However, Charlotte didn't accept the olive branch Justin offered her. Even now, she was still upset with him. Although more than a month had passed, the only thing she would agree to was dinner with Justin every Friday night.

"I didn't have anything on my schedule today, and I just so happened to be in the area. Let me send you to your destination."

Before Rachel could answer, Samuel was already squinting in concentration while scrambling into the back of Justin's car. He even put his safety belt on before his head tilted to the side as he fell asleep again. All his actions seemed like he was sleepwalking.

Rachel couldn't possibly get Samuel to get out of the car at this point. With no other choice, she agreed. "Charlotte, get in the car."

Charlotte looked unwilling and decided to kick up a fuss. "I don't like black cars. I like red ones better."

Rachel's car was red.

Charlotte was typically a reasonable girl, but the moment she saw Justin, she was like a prickly little cactus, repeatedly pricking him. The saying that daughters were daddy's girls was completely untrue here. This "daddy's girl" was more like a hedgehog.

Justin frowned. "Charlotte."

Charlotte folded her arms, disgust on her face.

In the end, Rachel couldn't take the sight anymore and unkindly put a stop to Charlotte's antic. "Red cars? Stop being so unreasonable. You've been taking the taxi to school this entire week. Were any of them red?"

Charlotte had no comeback for this. Her little face was tense, her cheeks puffed out.

Rachel's voice then softened. "Alright now, get in. I'll braid your hair for you in the car."

"Really?"

“Really. I’ll count to three. If you still haven’t gotten into the car and put on your safety belt by then, then I won’t braid your hair.” With that, Rachel began to stick her fingers up and count. “One, two…”

Before she could finish saying ‘three,’ Charlotte had already smoothly climbed into the back seat and put on her safety belt. “Mommy, I’m done!”

Rachel nodded, satisfied, before looking at Justin apologetically. “Let’s go.”

The car left the residential district and trundled onto the main street. Since Rachel and the children were in the back, they were visible in the rearview mirror. Rachel was in the middle of braiding Charlotte’s hair.

Justin’s hands loosely gripped the steering wheel, his fingers long and slender, and his knuckles prominent. He glanced at the mirror before asking, “Why have you been taking taxis recently? Where’s your car?”

“Sent to the workshop for maintenance,” Rachel answered.

“It’s not exactly easy for you to pick up the kids then.”

“It’s definitely inconvenient during the morning and evening traffic jams, especially when both kids have finished school for the day. Fortunately, Victor would sometimes pick them up and bring them back by subway.”

“The subway?” Justin was taken aback. “Did Charlotte agree to take the subway?”

This pampered girl had been raised like a princess since she was little. She had never once taken public transport. Whenever she went out of the house, she would be escorted by a horde of attendants. She would wish for nothing more than for the cars to make way for her.

“Quit looking down on me.” Charlotte’s brows furrowed. “I like taking the subway. It’s amazing! It just goes ‘whoosh whoosh whoosh,’ and then I’m home. It’s way faster than a car.”

"I know what you're thinking," Rachel explained patiently. "But this is how normal people live. You've never experienced it before, so maybe you find it unthinkable, but this isn't a big deal."

"But it's really inconvenient when you have the children with you."

Justin might not take public transport himself, but he did know about the crowds at least. Just watching the news was enough to make him aware of how crowded the subway could be during the morning and evening rush hours. Coincidentally, Justin drove by a subway station. There were scores of bicycles and motorcycles parked by the entrance to the station. The volume of people there was truly frightening.

Rachel didn't think much of it. "It's fine. Everything will be okay once the workshop tells me that my car is ready."

The car came to a stop by the school's entrance. Justin and Rachel then walked with the children past the school gates.

Upon seeing Samuel's sleepy face, Rachel rubbed his cheeks. "Wake up, it's time for school!"

It was then that Samuel reluctantly opened his eyes. Out of habit, he took Charlotte's hand. "Let's go."

After watching the children walk further inside the school, Rachel eyed her watch and frowned. "I need to go. I still have a meeting to attend."

"I'll take you there," Justin offered.

"No need. I'll just get a taxi."

"It's not too far from here. I'm already here now anyway. It's not worth avoiding me just to be late for your meeting now, is it?"



"I'm not avoiding you." Rachel glanced at him. After hesitating a moment, she caved. "Sorry to bother you for that car ride then."

"Hop in."

The school was only a few kilometers away from Hudson Pharmaceuticals, so the trip was only a mere ten minutes. Just as Rachel was about to alight from the car after they arrived, she heard loud noises from outside. She could see through the window that a group of people were holding banners above their heads outside of the company building while yelling about something. Hudson Pharmaceuticals' security guards had shown up.

"Thanks for the ride." Rachel hastily got out of the car and dashed over in her high heels.

Justin thought that something was off, so he quickly followed her out of the car as well.

The crowd outside of the company entrance was composed of young girls and women, all of them bearing banners and LED signs. The words 'Get Out of Riverdale, Jolly Carter' on those signs were especially noticeable.

"Where's Jolly Carter? Get her here. We want to see her for ourselves!"

"That woman has the guts to do what she did but not the guts to own up to her actions. Does she think that we Leroy fans are toothless things?"

The few security guards by the entrance did their best to hold off the crowd of women while yelling into their megaphones. "If you keep this up, we're going to call the police!"

"Call them, then. You think we're scared?"

"Yeah, that's right. I'm telling you guys now—we've hired the best lawyer we could get. If you don't hand that shameless woman over, we're going to sue Hudson Pharmaceuticals too!"

Rachel saw all of this when she ran over. She immediately grabbed the closest girl to her and asked, "What happened here?"

"You must be one of the employees here. You should resign and stop working at this place. Their CEO's assistant is absolutely outrageous. She attempted to trap celebrities in a casting couch deal through the guise of work!" the girl exclaimed.

"CEO's assistant? Casting couch? Wait, who did you say was conducting casting couch deals again?" Rachel was completely lost.

"This woman." The girl pointed at her LED board. "Jolly Carter. Her own personal life's a mess, and she still wanted to drag our Leroy into a casting couch deal!"

"How's that possible?"

"How is it not? Someone in our fan community saw it with their own eyes. The photos were even posted!"

"That's not possible either. Jolly's not that kind of person."

"How do you know what kind of person she is?"

Rachel frowned. "Because she's my assistant!"

The moment those words were said, the girl froze. All of a sudden, she grabbed hold of Rachel. "Everyone, look! It's the CEO of Hudson Pharmaceuticals! Jolly Carter is her assistant!"

## Chapter 356 Mistake Born of Drunkenness

The moment the girl yelled, the rabble immediately all turned around, their gazes landing squarely upon Rachel. That's Hudson Pharmaceuticals' CEO."

“She even defended her subordinate and twisted the facts just now.” “Grab her and take her to the police.”

The baffling words kept pouring in. Rachel’s expression shifted. By the time she realized her gaffe, it was already too late. This mob of insane fans would not listen to any explanation as they surged toward Rachel in fury. She immediately took a few steps back, but the heel of her shoe got stuck in a crack in the ground. She gave a surprised yell as she toppled backward.

Justin’s arrival was timely, as he managed to catch her just in time.

Rachel was stunned. She could see Justin’s gaze the moment she looked up from his arms. Before she could respond, Justin pulled her behind himself, shielding her. He blocked the rest of the mob by himself as he rebuked them. “Who here dares to take another step forward?”

His full height of over six feet was especially noticeable among the crowd of girls. The chilliness emanating from his gaze was enough to make some of the girls shudder. However, they had the advantage of numbers, after all. A girl with an LED board in the center of the mob immediately answered angrily, “She was willing to defend her own assistant when that assistant was ensnaring male celebrities into casting couch deals. She’s ruining the name of the entertainment industry. Shouldn’t people like her be shunned and shamed? Who are you anyway? Why are you still protecting her? Are you in league with her?”

“Yeah, you must be working with her!”

Justin’s expression did not change when he was faced with the mob’s fury. “The details of the situation still aren’t clear yet. Even if it’s exactly as you said, does that give you any right to attack and hit others? Then what are the police and court for?” he asked coldly.

“Don’t think that we don’t know they have been colluding with Hudson Pharmaceuticals. You’ve already bribed them!”

“Girls, don’t be tricked by their words. None of these capitalist pigs are good people!”

“We want Hudson Pharmaceuticals to put out a statement!”

“Don’t you dare think of leaving without putting out that statement!”

“Hand Jolly Carter over!”

The mob’s rage grew intense by the second. The security could not stop these insane fans who were seeing red. The only thing Justin could do to ensure Rachel’s safety was to take her and run.

“They’re escaping!”

“Stop running!”

“Get Jolly Carter out here!”

As the mob yelled, Justin bundled himself and Rachel into his car and quickly left the scene by driving back out onto the street.

Rachel clapped a hand over the safety belt crossing her chest. Her breaths were quick, shallow. “No, I have to go back.”

“You’ll just get in more trouble if you go back now. I just got the security to call the police. We’ll figure out our next move once the situation is under control for now.”

“Can we even get it under control? What if someone gets hurt?”

“The police will be here soon. Don’t overthink it. In fact, you should get in touch with Jolly and ask her what’s going on.”

It was only then that Rachel’s wits returned to her. She had been so frustrated and angry earlier by the crowd. She hastily pulled out her phone and dialed Jolly’s number.

The call took a long time to go through. A lazy, languid voice could be heard over the speakers at last; Jolly clearly still wasn't fully awake yet. "Hello?"

"Were you still asleep? Where are you now?"

"Me?" Jolly pressed a hand to her head, which was throbbing painfully. The hotel room's crystal chandelier greeted her when she opened her eyes. "A hotel."

"You're alone?"

"What kind of weird question is that? Of course I'm alone." Jolly yawned. "I had too much to drink last night, and I was worried that I would wake you guys if I went back, so I ended up staying at a hotel. I asked for the morning off, so I won't be going to work. My head hurts... I'm about 80% f\*cking sure that I drank some fake swill—my head's about to burst." She rambled on and on, but she was still drowsy.

Rachel was well and completely at a loss for words. "You asked for time off? Go take a look at the news online, then tell me if you still want that morning off."

"What news?"

"Take a look yourself. I just sent you the link."

Jolly was reluctant to do so, but she forced herself to open one eye fully and look at her phone. She shot right out of bed the next moment.

"I forced Leroy Bennett to sleep with me using my position as brand manager?" Jolly instantly woke up fully when she read the content of the article. She began cursing as she stood on her bed. "Which media outlet wrote this? Dig up their name—I'm going to make them shut down right now!"

"Calm down a little."

"How can I calm down? This is an insult to me as a person!"

“Let me ask you then: where is Leroy now?”

“How would I know?”

The moment Jolly said that, the door to the bathroom slid open. Someone emerged from the bathroom. He had just finished showering, so a towel hung from his hips, and his hair was still damp. The man was in the middle of towel-drying his hair when he suddenly froze on the spot and looked up in shock.

Right now, Jolly was in her birthday suit as she stood on the bed.

Their gazes met for a moment.

“Aaaahh—!” Jolly suddenly let out a piercing shriek. As she chucked a pillow at the man, she grabbed the blanket on the bed to cover herself.

Since he hadn’t been prepared for that, the pillow hit Leroy. However, the beautiful, titillating scene from earlier remained in his mind. His mind buzzed as red instantly colored his handsome face.

“Why are you in my room!” Jolly pointed at his nose. “How did you get in here?”

“You had too much to drink last night, so I brought you back here. Don’t you remember?”

“You brought me here?” Jolly pressed a hand to her forehead, but she couldn’t remember any of this happening. “So why didn’t you leave after you brought me back to my room?”

“You wouldn’t let me leave?”

“How? You just said that I drank too much!”

"It's true." Leroy shrugged. His eyes were clear and bright under his damp hair as he looked at her, an innocent look on his face. "You kept clinging to me the entire night. I couldn't pull you off no matter what I did."

"No way? You took advantage of me, and now you're trying to paint me as the one at fault, aren't you? I was so blind. I've completely misjudged you! And here I thought you were a good person!"

Leroy immediately took out his phone to explain. "I was worried that you wouldn't believe me, so I took a video."

"You even took a video?" Jolly snatched Leroy's phone over at lightning speed. "Password!" she barked irritably.

"Your birthday."

Jolly's expression changed when she heard that, but she still entered her birthday, albeit doubtfully. The next second, the phone unlocked, just as Leroy had said.

Typically, hardly anyone would willingly allow someone else to check something as private as their phone. Leroy, however, looked like he didn't mind as he let Jolly go through everything.

Jolly navigated her way to last night's video roll. The moment she opened the aforementioned video, she saw her face.

"I didn't have too much to drink. I'm telling you, we can still go for another round. Come on, I told you before that you got to live life to the fullest. Don't just film movies all the time. That's so boring. Live a little! Urk—"

"Hold it in for a bit. I'll get a bin for you."

Unfortunately, a drunk would not listen to others.

For some reason, the video after that inexplicably became “tense.” Jolly felt like she couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Are you a pervert? Are you trying to blackmail me by recording this?”

“No, I swear I wasn’t trying to blackmail you.” Leroy put his arms in the air. “I was just worried that you would think that I did something to you, so I recorded that video to prove my innocence. Nothing happened between us at all last night.”

Jolly reflexively looked down. Then, how did my clothes get removed?

#### Chapter 357 Proof That Can’t Get More Iron-Clad Than This

“One of the hotel staff helped you to change your clothes,” Leroy immediately explained, having instantly figured out Jolly’s thoughts. “You threw up over yourself. Your clothes weren’t in a wearable condition.”

Jolly gradually calmed down then. In truth, she had known Leroy for some time now. Although she had initially gotten in touch with him out of ulterior motives, as she spent more time with him, she realized that he was actually a pretty straightforward person, to the point where he was a little bland. He was largely different from other celebrities in showbiz.

Just as he was speaking, Leroy’s phone buzzed.

“Hello? What?” Leroy suddenly glanced at Jolly, a complicated look in his eyes. “My phone was on silent, so I didn’t hear it earlier.”

Jolly had no idea what the caller said, but Leroy walked straight to the window, pulling aside part of the curtain to look down before he quickly pulled the curtain back in place.

“What is it?” Still with the blanket wrapped around her, Jolly could sense that something was not right.



“Someone snapped photos of us last night. Right now, reporters and fans are swarming the hotel’s lower floors. We can’t leave for now.”

“What?” Jolly promptly got out of bed with the blanket still wrapped around her and dashed over to the window to take a look. The hotel itself was rather tall, so the crowd gathered below looked like a dark swarm of ants. But even with the sheer height, Jolly could still see that it was a sizable crowd. “What should we do?”

“My manager’s rushing over this instant. Let’s wait first.”

“Wait? For how long? When are we going to get out?” Jolly clenched the blanket. “I’ve got a reputation to uphold. I don’t want to go down in flames with all this slander hurled at me. Where’s my phone?” She only thought of her phone at that moment.

“On the bed,” Leroy answered. When Jolly saw Leroy emerge from the bathroom earlier, she had tossed her phone aside as she shrieked.

That phone... Jolly rushed over and picked her phone up. Sure enough, the call was still ongoing.

“Hello?” Jolly coughed awkwardly. “Chris, are you still there?”

“Yeah.”

“So then, everything earlier...”

“I heard it all.” Rachel didn’t hide anything. “Jolly, if I were one of Leroy’s fans, I’d charge over to the hotel and rip the door right off its hinges before pulling out all your hair. Nothing happened at all between a single man and a single woman? Who’s going to buy that?”

Even though Jolly’s phone had been on the whole time and she heard their conversation, Rachel still had her doubts. She didn’t doubt Leroy’s character; she doubted Jolly’s ability to hold her alcohol.

Jolly knew her shortcomings. “That—Chris, relax, I’ll be sure to handle this properly. Don’t worry. I’ll take care of it myself.”

“How are you going to take care of it? Are you going to go out butt naked to do so?”

At that, Jolly awkwardly lowered her head to look at herself before pulling the blanket higher up her chest.

“Stay at the hotel. Don’t go anywhere. I’ll bring you a change of clothes,” Rachel said.

Jolly let out a breath of relief. “You’re a good friend. I shall come to your aid one day; I guarantee that!”

“How are you still in the mood to crack jokes?” Rachel was practically speechless. After she hung up, she spoke to Justin. “Please send me home.”

“That’s in a completely different direction from the hotel,” Justin pointed out.

“I know, but I need to go back home and grab some clothes for Jolly.”

“Such a pain. Do you have a nanny waiting at home?”

“Yes.”

“The Burton Group is fairly close to your home. I’ll get Frankie to get the clothes and meet us at the hotel.”

Rachel paused before nodding. Right now, that was the most efficient way to deliver the clothes.

Half an hour later, Rachel and Justin arrived at the hotel. The crowd of reporters and fans by the entrance was a huge, dark mass. There weren’t any less of them here than at Hudson Pharmaceuticals.

Justin drove the car straight to the underground parking lot. The hotel's security was tight, for there were guards posted by the parking lot's elevators. Without a key card from the hotel, no one was allowed to go up. Despite that, there were still plenty of people gathered in the parking lot. Even when she got out of the car and walked to the elevator, Rachel could see there were reporters in cars with cameras of various sizes. All of them were camping for a potential shot.

If they were to snap a photo of Leroy and Jolly right now, the traffic to the media outlets they worked for would skyrocket.

Rachel had explained her reasons to be here, so the hotel manager personally came over and brought her and Justin upstairs. Inside the elevator, Justin's gaze darkened. "Even if they're here just to drive clicks, they didn't have to cause such a huge mess."

"You noticed it too?" Rachel frowned slightly. "I could tell at a glance that they were all organized. I think things aren't as simple as they seem."

Fans had gathered at Hudson Pharmaceuticals, and at the same time, reporters were also camping out at Jolly's hotel. Why did these two incidents coincidentally happen at the same time? Obviously, there was someone deliberately stirring the pot in the dark, attempting to fan the flames.

"I just don't know who the target behind this campaign is," Rachel said.

Was it Leroy? Or Jolly?

Or could it be Hudson Pharmaceuticals?

Before she could ponder more on it, the elevator doors drew back with a 'ding.' The moment the door to Jolly's room opened, Rachel was dragged in by the hand that emerged from within. The door then slammed shut. Justin ended up getting some dust on his nose from the resulting slam without being able to get in.

Jolly clutched Rachel. "Why is he here with you? Here to see me make a fool of myself?"

“Do you think he’s bored enough to come laugh at you? He sent Charlotte and Samuel to school earlier, so he came along.” Rachel looked up to regard Leroy and nodded in greeting. “The parking lot is teeming with reporters. You can’t leave through the basement later.”

“Why should I be scared? I didn’t do anything. So what if I leave?”

“Right now, Leroy’s fans are also camping outside of Hudson Pharmaceuticals. They’re holding these banners while threatening to sue you because of a casting couch deal.”

“Where the hell did those accusations come from? I’m going to f\*cking...” Jolly straight up cursed from anger.

Rachel shoved the bag of clothes into her hands. “Put some clothes on first.”

After Jolly huffily went off to change her clothes, Rachel finally opened the door. “Come in.”

Justin looked straight ahead. “Is it a good time? I can always get out.”

“It’s fine. She just went to change her clothes.”

After the door closed, the atmosphere in the hotel room turned awkward. Although Leroy was currently a spokesperson for Hudson Pharmaceuticals’ latest product, he and Rachel had only hastily met once. All communication between them had been handled by Jolly.

Leroy brought over a glass of water each for Rachel and Justin. “Miss Hudson, who might this be?”

“He’s Burton Group’s...” Just as Rachel was about to introduce Justin, she suddenly trailed off.

Justin was no longer the president of the Burton Group.

Justin didn't seem to mind as he offered his hand. "Justin Burton."

Leroy nodded. "Leroy Bennett."

Rachel let out a breath. She then asked, "What happened last night? The internet's been up in arms."

"Last night, Jolly brought me out to have some fun. She drank a lot, so I brought her to the hotel. I don't know who leaked the footage from the hotel corridor's security cameras and triggered the media over

the out-of-context clip."

"Let me take a look." Rachel hadn't had the time to check the aforementioned video, so she had no idea how severe the current situation was.

"Here." Leroy handed his own phone over.

The moment Rachel tapped play, she saw the doors of the elevator open to show Jolly with her arms wrapped around Leroy's shoulders. They had just emerged from the elevator when she pressed him against the wall.

How is this 'taken out of context by the media'?! This is practically iron-clad proof! It can't get more iron-clad than this! The corners of Rachel's mouth twitched hard.

## Chapter 358 Two Body Doubles

Rachel didn't have it in her to watch the rest of the video on Leroy's phone. Justin had already knowingly turned his head to the side, pretending that he didn't know anything.

Meanwhile, Jolly finished changing into her fresh set of clothes and emerged from the bedroom. When she saw Leroy was showing Rachel and Justin the contents of the video being circulated on media websites, she charged over and snatched the phone over.

“What are you looking at? What’s so fun about it?” She even blew a gasket.

“It’s not something fun to watch, but that video’s already been shared over a million times online. There’s at least a million people who saw that video. Snatching the phone from me won’t do anything.”

“Since they’ve already watched it, fine, but you’re not allowed to!”

“What kind of reasoning is that? I’m helping you to find a way out of this.” Rachel was exasperated. She hadn’t watched the video out of curiosity. The only way she would be able to know why the fans were angry and find a way to resolve this uproar was to watch it.

“So, have you figured out something?”

Rachel threw her hands up in helplessness. “Nope.”

Right then, Leroy’s phone rang. Jolly reflexively took a look at the screen and handed the phone back to him. “Your manager.”

Leroy answered the phone in front of everyone. “Hello, Emmett? ...Yeah, I’m still at the hotel. ...No, Jolly and I aren’t the only ones here. Two of her friends are here too. One of them is Miss Hudson, the president of Hudson Pharmaceuticals.”

No one had any idea what Leroy’s manager said, but Leroy looked panicked as he glanced at Rachel and Justin. “That’s not exactly a good idea, right?” he asked, a complicated emotion in his tone.

Leroy’s manager talked to him for a bit longer. After he hung up, Jolly asked Leroy, “Is your manager here already? Where is he?”

Leroy nodded. “In the parking lot. Right now, he can’t come up; his car’s been surrounded by the reporters.”

“He should stay there. If he comes up now, it’ll just prove even further that you and Jolly are currently in this hotel. I’m worried that your fans will demolish the hotel today,” Rachel said.

She wasn’t saying this just to frighten him; with just a single, blurry video clip, Leroy’s fans were already holding banners and kicking up a fuss outside of Hudson Pharmaceuticals. If they were to see Leroy and Jolly sharing a room with their own eyes, they might just murder Jolly and burn the evidence.

Leroy looked apologetic. “Sorry for causing trouble for you all.”

Rachel finally had the time to scrutinize him. His features were clear-cut, and he had large eyes. His skin was clear, and those large eyes of his were especially beautiful. He was also gentle and polite when he spoke, but it wasn’t the same bookish softness that Julian had. His soft-spoken nature gave Rachel a different feeling.

Although society had by-and-large decided that someone with no ulterior motives would not exist, that was the feeling that Leroy gave off—someone who was carefree and simple.

Jolly huffily rolled her eyes at Leroy when he apologized. “Is now the time for apologies? Are apologies useful now?”

Rachel couldn’t stand it anymore. “Enough already, alright? Isn’t this caused by your drinking last night? If anyone should be apologizing, it should be you. Once this matter is over and done with, you will have to swear off alcohol.”

Jolly really couldn’t hold her alcohol.

“Now’s also not the time to talk about that.” Jolly shrugged and plopped onto the couch. “I was thinking—why not stay here for two weeks or so and wait for the outrage to die down?”

“You can stay here, but what about Leroy?” Rachel shot a look at Jolly. What kind of terrible idea was this?

“Did Leroy’s manager mention a plan when he called earlier?” Justin suddenly asked from the side.

Rachel and Jolly both froze. They first looked at Justin before shifting their gazes over to Leroy. Rachel's wits then returned to her. "Oh, right, what did your manager say?"

To ordinary civilians like them, a situation like this was something they would pretty much never encounter. To a seasoned manager who had been in the entertainment industry for years though, this would be something they would be used to. Celebrities being discovered after booking a room for "personal" business happened frequently enough that there would be trending articles about them every two days or so, so managers had to move quickly for damage control.

Leroy hesitated for a moment. "He did say he has a plan, but I don't think it's all that appropriate."

"It might just work. Go on, tell us," Rachel said.

"Yeah, how would we know whether it's appropriate if you don't tell us?" Jolly asked.

A few seconds of silence later, Leroy glanced at Justin. "Emmett said to get two people to wear our clothes and draw the fans' attention away so that we can leave."

"Body doubles? Where are we supposed to find body doubles at this time?" Jolly frowned. "That's an idealistic solution. What kind of crappy plan is that?" The moment she said that, though, she changed her mind when her gaze rested on Rachel and Justin. Didn't they have two people who could act as doubles here? Justin's build was close to Leroy's. As for Rachel, although she was a little skinnier than Jolly, Leroy's fans weren't familiar with her. It was likely that no one would realize she wasn't Jolly if she had a pair of sunglasses on.

The look in Jolly's eyes instantly changed. Justin and Rachel exchanged glances. They knew very well what was coming next.

Ten minutes later, the door to the underground parking lot's elevator opened with a 'ding.' Justin and Rachel emerged from the elevator, both of them sporting sunglasses and masks. Justin even had a cap on his head, the very same one that Leroy wore in the video from last night.



The parking lot was quiet. This was a complete surprise from what they had been expecting, but the silence wasn't a serene one; it was the eerie kind of silence that sent shivers through one's heart.

Rachel stumbled, but a large hand caught her arm in time.

"Be careful," Justin said in a low voice.

Right then, they heard the sound of a camera shutter. A bright light flashed suddenly. Both of them froze. The next moment, the parking lot burst into activity. Reporters holding cameras with giant lenses swarmed out from the corners.

"It's Leroy," someone yelled.

"There's no mistaking him. It's Leroy, alright."

Rachel was startled by the crowd. For a moment, she forgot how to move. Justin took her hand and swiftly moved to his car.

The reporters had been camping out there since earlier. From the moment Rachel and Justin took the elevator, the reporters had already been filming them. The secret filming had been like a hornet's nest, and the sudden flash of light had been the rock to disturb it.

What was the importance of those photographs? If they could be the first one to break the news with photos of Jolly and Leroy with their faces clearly shown, then that would be solid proof of last night's incident. It would be a huge scoop.

Rachel's breaths came out in quick, shallow pants as Justin dragged her on a mad dash through the parking lot. Her eyes remained on his back and his hand on hers as they ran. Soon, they had put plenty of distance between themselves and the reporters, but they were still a good distance away from their car.

Soft footsteps sounded in front of them. Justin immediately pulled Rachel over to hide behind a car.

“Shh—”

Rachel tensed. With Justin’s gaze guiding her, she noticed the person in the car’s side mirror—a reporter was currently searching for them where they had been.

Instantly, Rachel didn’t even dare to pant anymore. Her heart nervously hammered away in her chest.

The space by the car was narrow. Both of them had their chests practically pressed together. Even their breaths intermingled.

## Chapter 359 Ruining Hook-up Plans

As the footsteps got closer and closer, Rachel held her breath. She wished that her heart would stop beating. Fortunately, the car was close to a wall. It didn’t look like a spot one could hide in if one looked, so the reporter just glanced at the car before leaving quickly.

After the sound of the reporter’s footsteps disappeared, Rachel sucked in a deep breath. She nearly suffocated there. Her chest heaved, now that air instantly filled her lungs, especially after she had been gasping for air from all that running earlier.

As she panted, Rachel looked around her. “I think he’s gone,” Rachel said, her voice as soft as a mosquito. She then made to move. “Let’s go.”

“Don’t move!” Justin suddenly pressed her shoulders down with his back pressed against the wall. He wanted to put some space between them. His usually cold face was now an abnormal shade of red.

Rachel initially didn’t understand, but when she felt something poke her in the thigh, she realized what was going on. Instantly, her eyes widened in disbelief. She shook Justin’s hands off herself the next moment. “What the heck are you thinking?” she chided.

Justin felt awkward and exasperated. He didn’t want this to happen right now either, but a man’s physiology was vastly different from a woman’s. It was easy for his mind to wander off when he was

trapped in such a cramped space and when he could clearly smell the perfume lingering by Rachel's neck.

"Sorry, I..."

Before Justin could finish his apology, Rachel extracted herself and put a safe distance between themselves.

What is up with him? How is he still like this even in such a time?

Just as she was thinking this, a yell came from somewhere. "They're over there!"

Rachel's expression changed. Crap! I forgot we're still dodging the reporters!

The reporters came surging over. This time, they really had no place to hide.

Beep—beep— The sound of a horn blared throughout the parking lot. Two blinding lights lit up in front of them. Rachel and Justin were still frozen by the time the MPV stopped in front of them. The door to the back of the MPV opened.

"Get in," came a man's voice from inside. It was Leroy's manager, the one called Emmett.

Rachel and Justin immediately got into the MPV.

The MPV zoomed out of the parking lot and merged with the rest of the traffic on the road. Since the MPV was such a huge target, the reporters soon chased after them in their own cars.

"Will they catch up?" Rachel glanced back, but she could tell that two of those cars were quick in following them.

"You best believe that this horde of reporters are like hounds. We still need to make a few circles and wait a little longer. Once all of them are on our tails, Leroy and Jolly would be able to leave."

"Will that work though?" Rachel was worried. "Can they weather this?"

She and Justin were only treating the symptoms by diverting the reporters away. If Leroy couldn't come up with a reasonable explanation to sooth his fans and let the situation continue to fester, things would only get worse.

Emmett frowned. "That's a problem."

"We need to immediately hold an emergency press conference and clarify things." Justin's voice rang throughout the MPV.

"No!" Emmett shot him down immediately. "Leroy's career is currently on the rise. Rather than holding a press con that won't convince the reporters, it's better to just leave the situation alone and let it die down by itself. The press con won't work."

"Whether the press conference works or not, both Leroy and Jolly will have to put out a clarification. The mob currently at Hudson Pharmaceuticals is the most important problem here."

"So, Hudson Pharmaceuticals is important, but not Leroy?" Emmett grumbled. "Speak for yourself. Leroy shed a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to get to where he is now. His career is about to be destroyed because of all the speculation around this incident."

Casting couch deals were indeed something that happened frequently in the entertainment industry. Once one was rumored to be involved in one, they would never be able to shake the rumors off. It would become a stain on their career in showbiz forever.

Justin wanted to say something, but Rachel cut him off. "Let's not argue about this for now. The press conference must be held. Both Leroy and Jolly shouldn't have to be scapegoats. This incident must be investigated from its source."

There was absolutely no doubt that someone else was behind everything in the dark. But just who planned this?

Emmett dropped Rachel and Justin off at Hudson Pharmaceuticals. Shortly after, Leroy and Jolly arrived as well.

The crowd around the company building's entrance had already dissipated. There were a few policemen patrolling the perimeter in order to prevent any unexpected encounters.

"What should we do about this?" Jolly immediately poured herself a large glass of iced water once she was inside Rachel's office. Clearly, she had been rattled. She shot a look at a certain person at the side of the room. "Why haven't you left yet?"

"Mr. Burton just helped us," Leroy reminded. "Jolly..."

"So? I didn't ask him to help me."

Justin wasn't angry at this at all as he handed Rachel a glass of water good-naturedly. However, Rachel felt awkward, and she was also worried that Justin felt uncomfortable. "Why don't you call my secretary over and ask her to have some snacks delivered here."

"Okay." Justin nodded and headed for the door.

Jolly continued to be all high and mighty as she rolled her eyes, completely ungrateful.

Rachel didn't say anything about Jolly's attitude. Instead, she simply looked at Jolly carefully with a solemn gaze. "Jolly, have you offended anyone recently?"

It wasn't very likely that the orchestrator had a grudge against Hudson Pharmaceuticals, for the entire campaign had targeted Jolly. The fans had been yelling for her head.

"How would I know?" Jolly threw her hands up. "I've stepped on far too many toes."

“What about you, Leroy?”

Leroy shook his head as well and glanced at Jolly. “I don’t interact with others much during my personal time. It’s mostly brand managers. But if you’re asking about my rivals in the industry, then there are far too many to count... Still, I find it very strange, since I’m not the one being targeted.”

“What’s so strange about it?” A familiar man’s voice came from the door.

Everyone froze. Rachel looked up, a dumbstruck look on her face.

Justin had opened the door. The person who had just strolled in probably did so because Justin had opened the door, and the secretary hadn’t stopped the man either. He was dressed in a black suit, weary-looking as he stood there. He hadn’t brought an assistant with him.

“Mr. Sutton?”

It was Ryan Sutton.

Jolly’s forehead creased into a frown when she saw him. “Weren’t you on a business trip?”

“Did you think I would be able to concentrate on my business trip when I saw the news?” Ryan strode right in, his gaze sweeping coldly over Leroy when he saw him.

Instantly, Leroy clenched his fists. He looked awful.

Rachel’s heart stopped for a moment as realization hit her. Ryan’s ex-wife, Estelle, had been Leroy’s girlfriend back in the day when he was still a university student. Back then, just as they were about to discuss marriage, Estelle suddenly got married to Ryan...

And now, Ryan had divorced Estelle and began to pursue Jolly. Yet Jolly and Leroy ended up getting into a messy rumor with each other...

Did these four people ruin each other's plans for hooking up? What was going on?

Rachel suddenly felt her temples twitch. What a headache, a huge one!

Jolly had always been slow on the uptake when it came to her own feelings. Right now, she wasn't aware of anything as she asked directly, "You're saying that you know who the mastermind is?"

Rachel looked at Ryan as well. Right! That's the important part.

Chapter 360 Best Friend Is a Derogatory Term

"You don't have to deal with this matter any longer. I'll take care of it." Ryan threw a glance at Jolly before his gaze fell on Rachel. "Miss Hudson, Jolly is only being criticized by the public because of her endorsement deal with Hudson Pharmaceuticals. I hope you won't begrudge her a few days of rest."

Rachel agreed. "It's not a problem. I plan on letting her go on a break for half a month while public interest dies down." "Half a month is too short. Give her a month."

Ryan demanded staunchly, which startled everyone else.

Jolly frowned and retorted, "Who are you to decide on my behalf? What could I possibly do with a month's break?"

"Go on a holiday. You can follow me to Switzerland for a month."

"No way!"

As soon as Ryan said that, Leroy, who had been quiet the entire time, immediately disagreed. He glared at Ryan as he firmly denounced the suggestion.

Rachel and Jolly were taken aback by his sudden interruption. But soon enough, Jolly remembered the feud between Leroy and Ryan. In the end, it was all because of a woman!

Ryan commented icily, "You have no say in what we do. Who do you think you are?"

Leroy snapped back. "Who do I think I am? Maybe I'm nothing to the great Mr. Sutton, but how can you treat Jolly this way? Is she just an object to you? Is she just a thing that you can bring around with you wherever you go?"

"She's my fiancée!" Ryan's answer echoed around them as he declared it resolutely.

Jolly would usually stir up a storm if she heard Ryan saying that, but this time, she shrunk behind Rachel as she muttered, "Oh no... Chris, the endorsement deal might go sour!"

When Jolly reached out to Leroy about the endorsement deal, she never even mentioned that she was acquainted with Ryan, let alone the fact that she used to be his fiancée. Leroy only agreed to the endorsement deal after Jolly had spent all her time and effort into developing a "friendship" with him.

At a time like this, how can you still be thinking about the endorsement deal with Leroy? Rachel was speechless.

Ryan was still talking. "Both of our families agreed to the marriage, and even the Carter Family elders also approved of the marriage. She, Jolly Carter, is my fiancée. Apart from her parents, there is no one else in this world who is more qualified to deal with this on her behalf than me."

After an awkward silence, Leroy snorted.

Jolly anxiously murmured by Rachel's ear. "What is he laughing about? Has he been driven mad by anger?"

Rachel rolled her eyes before hushing Jolly. "Can't you keep quiet for a bit?"



Leroy gave Jolly a look, but she quickly avoided his gaze. She looked up toward the ceiling with feigned innocence, saying, "Oh wow, the weather today really is quite nice."

Rachel's lips twitched. There must be something wrong with this woman's brain!

Leroy continued, "I think Jolly doesn't agree with what you just said. Unfortunately for you, Mr. Sutton, it seems like your feelings are unrequited."

Ryan's expression immediately changed.

As for Rachel, she was rather astonished by Leroy.

Leroy was only a minor celebrity, but he dared to defy a powerful and influential man like Ryan. With such principles, Leroy was undeniably a respectable man!

"Jolly, leave with me at once." Ryan did not respond to Leroy. Instead, he turned to Jolly and came to grab her by the arm.

However, Jolly instinctively avoided his hand, and she huffed, "Why should I leave with you? Tell me who's scheming behind my back."

"I already told you that I'll deal with it!" Ryan refused.

"This is my business, and I don't need you to butt in!" Jolly insisted.

"Jolly Carter!" Ryan barked out.

"Why are you raising your voice at me? Do you think I'll be scared of you?" Jolly was beside herself with anger by now, but suddenly, a thought flitted across her mind and she glared at Ryan. "Don't tell me that it's you who did it!"

Rachel was flabbergasted by Jolly's reaction. How did she even jump to that conclusion?

Jolly wagged her finger at Ryan as she continued her accusation. "Ryan Sutton, is there something wrong with you?! Are you trying to ensure that I'll never be able to make it in Riverdale? Is that why you did such a deplorable thing?!"

"I did it?" Ryan's face was red with fury. "In your eyes, I am someone who'd do such a thing?"

"Are you not? What won't you do for the sake of getting what you want?" Jolly snapped back.

"I don't have the time to argue over this nonsense with you. Leave with me right now. I'm taking you back to the Carter home. Let's see how you're going to explain this to your parents." Ryan suppressed his anger and grabbed Jolly once again. "Come with me!"

"You even tricked my parents?" Jolly felt even more furious now.

"She's not leaving with you!"

Leroy jumped out and quickly held onto Jolly's other hand. It was like a tug-of-war, with each man pulling Jolly from either side. No one could keep a straight face at such a sight.

Rachel felt like her presence was very unnecessary, but the three of them were blocking the door and she had no means of leaving.

Was this going to turn into a battlefield?

"Let go!"

Ryan stared at Leroy with an icy expression. "If you don't let go, then I promise you that your name will not appear on screen anymore. You will never work in the entertainment industry ever again."

"You're threatening me? Sorry to disappoint you, but I detest being threatened by someone else the most!"

Jolly looked back and forth between her left and her right. Her mind was a puddled mess.

Right at this moment, Justin opened the door and walked in. When he saw the tussle between Jolly, Ryan, and Leroy, he frowned and stood there at the doorway looking at the three of them. "Ryan, I'm afraid I can't let you take Miss Carter with you."

"What are you trying to do, Justin?"

Justin replied, "Why don't you tell Miss Carter who the mastermind behind all this is?"

Everyone was taken aback by Justin's words.

Rachel was the first to react. "You're right. Mr. Sutton, you should know who it is, right?"

Ryan's brows were tightly knitted, and his handsome face now wore a frigid expression.

Jolly despised it the most whenever he acted this way. "Say something! Who is the one who's scheming against me? I'll make them pay!"

"I will deal with it."

Again, this was all Ryan would say.

Jolly had always been hotheaded, and she no longer had any patience for this. She swung off both their hands and hissed at Ryan, "So you don't want to say who it is? Do you think no one else would know if you don't say it?"

After saying that, she turned to Justin and asked, "You've figured out who it is, right?"

Judging by what Justin said when he entered, it was obvious that he knew all the details by now.

Rachel also looked toward Justin as she waited for his answer.

Justin nodded lightly before glancing at Ryan. "I think it's better that you tell Miss Carter yourself. If you still plan on hiding the truth from her, then it'll just backfire on you, and you won't get your way with either one of them."

However, Ryan still did not speak.

But it seemed to have dawned on Jolly, as she calmly asked, "Is Estelle Dolton the one who did this?"

Ryan's eyes shook a little.

When Rachel heard that name, the lightbulb in her mind instantly lit up! Estelle Dolton? That's Jolly's ex-best friend, Ryan's ex-wife, and Leroy's ex-girlfriend. That woman has an awkward relationship with all three people here. There's no one else in Riverdale who hated Jolly as much as Estelle did, even though she had no right to hate Jolly at all!

It has to be her. There is no other possible answer.

Ryan now felt a little alarmed. "Jolly, I'll make sure everything is resolved properly. You..."

But with a resounding clap, a stinging slap fell on Ryan's right cheek. As for Jolly, her eyes were still and emotionless, which was all the more frightening for everyone.

"This slap is meant for Estelle, but since you're so willing to help her clean up her messes, then you can take it for her. This way, I don't have to bother looking for her, since you're willing to suffer on her behalf."

Rachel was also shocked.

To Jolly, “best friend” was a derogatory term.