

My mute bride

Chapter 491

Fearing that something bad might happen to Jolly, Rachel hastily instructed the children, "Charlotte, look after Samuel and keep the car doors locked. Do not get out of the car without my permission." She got out of the car after that.

By that time, Jolly was standing in front of the older woman but was held back by two bodyguards. Rachel immediately went up to them and tugged onto Jolly's arm.

"Let go of me!" Jolly was struggling as she chided the older lady. "You old hag, why are you constantly on my back? What are you trying to do now?"

"I'm not here for you. I'm here for my grandson." The older woman looked at her coldly without the intention to argue.

"Bullcr*p! Stop sputtering nonsense!"

"Old Madam Sutton, I believe that we have talked things out during our last meeting. If you still have any questions, you can ask Ryan. I don't understand what you're coming at us with." Rachel pulled Jolly to the side and looked at Mariam.

The woman standing in front of them was Mariam Sutton, Ryan's mother. Mariam merely dismissed Rachel's words and said, "Miss Hudson, I'm here to take care of our family's matters which do not concern you. You should stay out of it if you don't want to get hurt."

"What are you trying to do?" Jolly was provoked by the threat. "Don't tell me you want to start a fight? Let me remind you that you are in Riverdale, the Carters' turf!"

"Hmph." Mariam scoffed. "I'm here to fetch my grandson home, and there's nothing wrong with that. I don't care whether the Carter Family or the president of the country is here. No one can stop me!"

"I don't understand why you have your eyes on my son. I'm sure that your son is so great that plenty of women would want to be with him. Why not get one of them to bear a child for him?" The more Jolly said, the angrier she got. "Or is there something wrong with Ryan that he couldn't give you a grandchild and that my son is the only bloodline of the Sutton Family?"

Hearing that, Mariam was so furious that she pointed the walking stick at Jolly and scolded, "You impudent woman! Stop sputtering nonsense!"

“Did I say something wrong? Where’s Ryan? Get him to come if he wants custody of my son and not get an old woman who has one foot in the grave to pester me about it.”

“You!”

As Rachel grabbed onto Jolly’s arm, she looked at Mariam and asked calmly, “Old Madam Sutton, is Ryan aware that you’re here for Samuel? If he does, I’m afraid he wouldn’t appreciate your intention.”

In fact, Rachel’s blood was boiling as their holiday mood was ruined by the old hag. Still, she tried to hold in her anger as she spoke.

Their words had fallen on deaf ears. “I don’t care what all of you say, but I’ll be bringing Samuel with me today, no matter what! Get the child! Mariam snarled impatiently.

The next moment, she tapped her walking stick on the ground, and four bodyguards immediately walked up and surrounded them. Ten more of them got down from five of the cars and proceeded to surround Jolly and the car behind them.

“What are you guys doing?” Jolly growled at the men. “Don’t you dare hurt me or my son! I will tear every one of you into shreds!”

Mariam, who was standing at the side, had had enough of Jolly’s protest and waved her hand, signaling the bodyguards to grab onto her. They got the cue and immediately went up to grab both of her arms as she screamed.

“Jolly!”

Rachel furrowed her brows. “Old Madam Sutton, if Ryan found out about what you’ve done today, he will never forgive you for it. Aren’t you afraid that it would affect your relationship with him?”

“Miss Hudson, you better mind your own business. Mariam glanced at her coldly.

“Chris!” Jolly suddenly screamed.

Rachel followed Jolly’s gaze and saw the bodyguards approaching her car with batons in their hands when she turned around. There was a fearful look on her face as the men were about to smash the window since it was already too late for her to stop them. Following that, a hand appeared from above the head of the bodyguard who was holding the baton, and it clasped onto the bodyguard’s wrist tightly. The bodyguard yelled as he fell onto the ground after being kicked and had his baton removed from his grip.

“Ahh-“The bodyguard howled in pain as he fell onto the ground.

“Justin!” Jolly called out joyfully. When Rachel finally made sense of the situation, she was bewildered to see him there.

Given the situation, Justin didn’t have the time. to greet the girls and immediately kicked one of the bodyguards charging at him. He then picked up a baton and bashed another bodyguard attacking him from his right side.

“Justin! Behind you!” Gloria yelled. Justin managed to avoid the ambush from behind him due to her warning.

Victor joined in the fight after removing his coat. Two of the men managed to defeat half of the bodyguards in no time. The other half of the bodyguards were accessing the situation. and didn’t dare to go near them.

“Young Master Justin, why are you meddling in this matter? Mariam seemed displeased as she tightened her grip on the walking stick. “This is the Sutton Family’s matter and you shouldn’t get yourself involved!”

Hearing that, he glanced at her and responded, “Rachel’s friend is my friend too. Do you think I should turn a blind eye when my friend is in trouble? Moreover, Samuel is like a son to me.” He had promised Rachel that he would treat Samuel as his own son.

While everyone was distracted, Jolly took the chance and broke free from the bodyguards’ grip. She then grabbed Rachel’s arm before. running over to the back of Justin and Victor. “Great job, guys! Your timing is perfect.”

“Young Master Justin, you sound so noble but don’t you think you are being too nosy?” Mariam chided.

“Do I look like someone who’d make a move without having control? I’ve already informed the bureau of investigation on matters regarding organized crimes in this area. I believe Officer Hawkins is interested in such matters, and they should be on their way here.”

“What are you talking about?” Mariam looked worried.

“Since you brought a huge group of men over here, it’s reasonable to assume that the Sutton Family is involved in organized crime, Justin responded calmly.

“You’re bending the truth!”

“We shall find out whether that’s the case when Officer Hawkins is here.”

Just like that, both parties got into a stalemate. Based on the situation, Rachel’s side was indeed at a disadvantage, even though Justin and Victor were capable of fighting since Mariam brought a dozen men over. It would be a tall order for two of them to fight

off all of the bodyguards. It was apparent that Mariam wanted to make sure that she took Samuel with her today.

“Did you really alert the cops about this?” Rachel whispered behind Justin.

Justin continued his conversation with Mariam as if he hadn’t heard Rachel’s question. “Old Madam Sutton, I’d suggest you go to the hospital and ask for Ryan’s opinion on this rather than wasting your time here with us. If something happens to Ryan, I’m afraid you might not be able to even catch his last words.”

“You’re cursing my son?!” Mariam’s face contorted with anger. “Young Master Justin, do you have any animosity toward me?”

“What you did today is unforgivable.”

“Y-You.”

Justin then glanced down at the watch around his wrist and looked at the time. “The officers from the investigation bureau should be here soon. Old Madam Sutton, are you sure you want to stay here till they arrive?”

Even if Mariam was unwilling to leave, it was out of her expectation for Justin to turn up and ruin her plan.

“Let’s go! All of you better watch out!” Mariam had no choice but to leave.

“I’ll be waiting for you!” Jolly stomped her feet and pointed at Mariam as she barked at the top of her lungs.

“Did you just say that Ryan is hospitalized?” Rachel recalled Justin’s words and asked.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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Justin frowned. “Some time ago, Ryan suddenly passed out during a conference. It turns out that he’s suffering from heart disease, and he has to undergo heart bypass surgery. Now, he’s still in the hospital.”

All of them were dumbfounded. Jolly was stunned as well, for she wasn’t aware that Ryan had heart disease.

They then headed to Cardinal Hospital, which had the best privacy protection for patients among all the private hospitals in Riverdale. Like the best general hospitals in the city, it was just as difficult to get a place here. In fact, their patients were all important politicians and the wealthiest people.

The hospital was located in West Magnolia, which was about six miles away from the place where Rachel's car was previously blocked. It took them twenty minutes to drive to the hospital.

While Jolly brought Samuel into the hospital, the others waited in the car park outside the building. Rachel was spacing out in the car when she heard someone knocking on her car window. She turned her head and saw Gloria, who was wearing a fluffy pink beanie. Presently, Gloria was beckoning to her like a Lucky Cat.

Rachel rolled down the car window and asked, "What's wrong?"

'It's sultry inside the car. Come out and get some fresh air, Rachel.'

Rachel turned to look at her daughter. "Do you want to get out of the car, Charlotte?"

After a yawn, Charlotte rested her chin on the window frame and looked in the direction Samuel had stepped into the hospital. She said longingly, "When is Samuel coming back? I feel bored."

A helpless Rachel glanced at Gloria, who then said, "Charlotte, there's an ice cream shop nearby. Do you want Victor to bring you there?"

Charlotte hesitated for a moment as though she was struggling internally. Eventually, she made a concession and replied, "Fine, I'll buy one for Samuel."

Gloria and Rachel exchanged smiles. Victor brought Charlotte to the ice cream shop once she got out of the car, leaving only Gloria, Rachel, and Justin inside the vehicle. As they leaned against the doors, they looked at the entrance of the inpatient department.

"Ryan going through a heart operation is a major incident. Why didn't we get wind of it?" Gloria was puzzled. "He's the president of Sutton Corporation, after all."

Rachel said, 'It's exactly because he's the president of Sutton Corporation that we didn't get wind of it. That's the reason he's been admitted to Cardinal Hospital.'

After she finished her words, she took a glance at Justin to seek his acknowledgment.

Justin nodded. "She has a point. If too many people know that he's undergoing an operation, his company will descend into chaos. It's best to keep it a secret."

It was then Gloria understood the reason behind it as she fell into her thoughts for a moment. "When will the operation be carried out? What's the success rate?"

"I have no idea, but I suppose the success rate is high. We do have some cutting-edge technology when it comes to heart surgery. Am I right, Rachel?"

Rachel dipped her head. "Yes, but that depends on the patient's condition. Some people can recover pretty well, and they can live like everyone else after the heart bypass surgery. However, some people aren't able to do that. I suppose that's why Old Madam Sutton insisted. on bringing Samuel away."

Gloria's eyes brightened as she finally heard something she was interested in. "Now I know the reason behind it! I've always been curious about this, and I thought that Ryan was suffering from some kind of reproductive disorder. It's no wonder that he doesn't have more kids."

Rachel was speechless as she pursed her lips. Gloria went on to say, "In that case, the old bat will definitely not let Samuel go. He's so unlucky to have come across someone like her."

"We won't give Samuel to her."

They could tell what Ryan's mother was like after seeing his temperament. He had a terrible childhood, which was why he grew up to be an unfeeling and greedy man. He would do whatever it took to achieve his goals.

If they passed Samuel to the old woman, he would be molded into the next Ryan. Rachel asked, "Ryan's heart disease is congenital, but when did it become so serious? He was still fine some time ago."

Justin replied, "Apparently, his condition was exacerbated six years ago."

He happened to be present during the public charity conference, so he tagged along when Ryan was sent to the hospital. It was then he heard the doctor mention Ryan's medical history.

In fact, Ryan didn't have a long history of heart disease. Although he discovered that he was suffering from heart disease a while back, it wasn't until six years ago that he was struck by it for the first time.

"Six years ago?" Rachel made some calculations and frowned. "That was before Samuel was born."

At that time, Ryan married Jolly's best friend, Estelle. On the other hand, Jolly left Riverdale alone while she was pregnant as she headed to a foreign country to give birth to her child.

Gloria realized that something was off. "What? Ryan was struck by heart disease six years ago. After that, he called off the wedding with Jolly and married another woman. Why does it sound like..."

It sounded like a story one would see in a typical melodrama, "Could it be true?' Gloria gazed at the two of them. "Is it just like what I think it is?"

Rachel shook her head. "I have no idea. We'll find out when Jolly comes out of the hospital." For some reason, her eyelid suddenly twitched as she had a feeling that something terrible was about to happen.

Meanwhile, Jolly led Samuel into a VIP ward at the inpatient department.

Natural sunlight was completely blocked out by the curtains as the only light source came from the table lamp. Presently, Ryan was leaning against the bedframe and reading a book. His beige, silk pajamas made him look rather sickly.

The sound of the door opening shocked him as he looked up and saw Jolly with the young boy beside her. He was startled for a moment before asking, "Why are you here?"

Jolly stared at him with a frown. 'I'm here to find out why you're still alive.'

After coming to his senses, Ryan put on a bitter smile. 'Don't you have some good wishes for me?'

He then flashed a smile at Samuel and patted the spot beside him. "Come over here, Samuel."

Samuel wasn't fond of him, but he reckoned that he still had to be polite to a patient. Hence, despite his unwillingness, he still walked over. However, he stood beside the bed instead of taking a seat as he was told.

When he saw that Ryan was on an intravenous infusion, he batted his eyes. "Are you dying?"

The way he spoke was the same as his mother. The corners of Ryan's mouth twitched for a moment before he replied, "Not so soon."

After hearing that, Samuel let out a sigh of relief. "Alright."

He then took a glance at Jolly. "Can I leave now, Godmother?"

"Alright, but don't go anywhere else. Look for your mommy in the car park, got it?"

After getting her permission, Samuel seemed to be relieved as he carried his game console and dashed out of the ward. It was apparent that Ryan wasn't willing to see the young kid leave so soon.

When Jolly turned her head and saw him with that expression, she explained, "I didn't make him leave. He's not fond of you, so he can't stay here even for a minute. There's nothing I can do. In fact, I already did the best I could by bringing him here to see you."

A helpless Ryan pleaded, "Can't you say something nice to me since I'm ill?"

"Aren't I being nice enough already? I've been holding all the mean words in. If not for you looking half-dead-

"How did I offend you this time?"

Jolly furrowed her brows. "Don't you even know how you offended me? While you were lying here, the old bat from your family did not give us a break. Why do you think I'm furious?"

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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Ryan's expression changed as he sat straight up, causing the infusion stand to sway.

"Hey!" An agile Jolly quickly extended her hands and stabilized the stand. "What are you doing? Are you sick of living?"

Ignoring the pain he felt on the back of his hand, Ryan pulled the infusion needle out and asked with difficulty, "What did my mother do? Did she look for you?"

Although Jolly didn't have the heart to see him suffer, she still felt her blood boiling when she recalled what she had gone through. "She didn't just look for me; she brought more than ten burly bodyguards with rods in their hands to stop our car. She threatened that she would bring Samuel away regardless of whether I was willing to let him go! If Justin and the others hadn't come to my rescue in time, Chris and I would've been badly injured by your mother."

Ryan searched for his phone on the bed with shaking hands, his expression livid. Then, he made a call right in front of Jolly. When the call connected, he roared in a voice so loud that the entire ward seemed to be trembling, saying, "What did all of you do today?! My mother is senile due to her old age, but are all of you dumb as well? What's the

point of me paying your salaries? If any of you dare to touch Jolly and the others again, I'll cut off your hands!"

He then started coughing violently since he was speaking too quickly.

Unable to take it anymore, Jolly said, "That's enough. What's the point of you saying all this to them? Who cares if you can discipline them? Won't your mother look for other thugs?"

"I'm sorry." Ryan was coughing while clenching his phone.

"If you're really sorry, get well soon and let the old bat know that it's not the end of the world for your family without my son. You can just look for a woman and get the old bat more kids."

When he heard that, Ryan coughed even more intensely. "Did you come all the way here to make me mad, Jolly?"

"I'm just speaking the truth. I've never been a kind-hearted person, so I won't treat you differently just because you're ill. We have nothing to do with each other anymore, and I hope that today's incident won't happen again."

"I'm sorry for what happened today. I'll handle it."

"That's great. I have nothing else to say."

Jolly was supposed to be leaving at this hour, but her feet seemed to have gotten stuck to the ground against her will; she was unable to drag her feet away. She secretly chastised herself as she eventually conceded to her kindness. "When is the operation?"

Ryan was startled for a moment when he heard that. "It hasn't been decided yet. The doctor said the sooner the better, but I want to wait a while longer."

"What are you waiting for? Are you going to undergo the operation only when your disease strikes again?"

"I'm waiting for Samuel to grow up a bit more."

Jolly was startled as she fell silent for a while. Then, she snapped, "What's wrong with you? It has nothing to do with you. Listen up, Ryan- Samuel and I can live a good life without you, so you just have to mind your own business. It would be best if you can survive. Even if you pass away, it has nothing to do with us. Whatever decision you make, it's for yourself."

"I know."

“Get prepared for the operation sooner, then.”

“I...” Ryan drew a deep breath. “Alright.”

“I’ll take my leave if there’s nothing else.” Although Jolly was furious, she couldn’t vent her anger on a patient. Left with no choice, she strode out of the place while suppressing her fury.

After closing the door, she let her hands hang loose. The next moment, she randomly caught a nurse and asked, “Where’s his attending physician?”

Rachel and the others waited in the car park for a long time. What surprised them was that Samuel had come back while Jolly was nowhere in sight. With his favorite game console in his arms, he sauntered toward them like an old gentleman.

“Where’s your godmother, Samuel?” Rachel asked. Samuel pouted at the building behind him. “She’s still inside.”

Rachel and the others exchanged glances. Gloria spread her palms and said, “Well, it seems that she’s not coming out any time soon. Why don’t we go back and have lunch first? She can get a taxi later.”

Victor reminded her by saying, “It’s not easy to get a taxi at this hour.”

“It’s easy.” Gloria pointed at her car. “My car is small, so I’ll leave it to her. We can go back in this car. What do you think, Rachel?”

“I think it’s a terrible idea.” Rachel took a glance at her watch. “All of you should go back first with the kids. I’ll wait for her here.”

Just when Gloria wanted to say something, Victor gently pulled her and motioned for her to look at Justin. She instantly got the hint..

“Well, I suppose you’re right. We can’t starve the kids, can we? Victor and I will leave with the kids now. Rachel, we’ll drive your car while you wait for Jolly here. By the way, there are safety seats in Rachel’s car, so it can’t accommodate a lot of people. Please stay here as well, Justin.”

Upon finishing her words, Gloria urged Victor to get the kids into the car. As the sound of the car engine faded, only Gloria’s yellow car was left in the car park. In front of the vehicle stood Rachel and Justin.

Presently, Rachel was apprehensive since Jolly hadn’t come out of the hospital by now. Just then, Justin was heard asking, “What are you worried about?”

Rachel came to her senses and took a deep breath to pull herself together. After letting out a breath, she replied, "I'm worried that a misunderstanding really caused Ryan and Jolly to break up. If it's indeed because of his heart disease, Ryan would've done Jolly a favor by breaking up with her. However, I'm worried that this misunderstanding would make her feel apologetic."

"Maybe Ryan won't tell her about it."

Justin reckoned that Ryan wouldn't break it to Jolly at this point since he had decided to keep it a secret six years ago.

On the other hand, Rachel shook her head. "You don't understand Jolly. It wouldn't have mattered if she hadn't found out about it. Now that she's aware of Ryan's heart disease, she'll look for his attending physician and ask questions such as his family's medical history, the first time he was struck by the disease, and a detailed account of his current condition."

At the thought of this, she knitted her brows.

In fact, Jolly wasn't as carefree as she appeared to be. It took her a long time to get over Ryan. If she hadn't come across Leroy, it would've been an eternal trauma in her heart.

"Let's not forget about Leroy." Rachel lifted her head and gazed at him. "Why isn't there a single thing that's going well for her?"

"Stop worrying about it. Things will eventually work out for the best. Perhaps it's not as terrible as you think. Let's have some snacks." Justin fished out a packet of chocolates from his pocket. Rachel asked with surprise, "Where did you get it from?"

"It belongs to Charlotte."

"If she finds out that you've taken her strawberry chocolate, she'll get mad at you."

"If she finds out that her strawberry chocolate helped her mommy to cheer up, she'd be happy."

It seemed that Justin knew his daughter well. Charlotte was very protective of her food, and no one else could touch her things without her permission. Otherwise, she would throw a tantrum. Certainly, the people she loved were an exception.

Rachel took a piece of chocolate and tore the wrapper apart before putting it into her mouth. As the bitterness of chocolate dissolved on her tongue, the sweetness of strawberry then lingered in her mouth.

“Do you have more?” Rachel asked. “I suppose that lady over there will need some chocolate as well.”

At this moment, Jolly stepped out of the inpatient department.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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As soon as Jolly stepped out of the hospital, she saw Rachel and Justin, who had been leaning against the car doors and waiting for her. From afar, she could see that they were a perfect match for one another when it came to their heights and appearances. It was no wonder that Gloria had been rooting for them over the years, and it was her biggest wish that they would get back together.

Nevertheless, Jolly wasn't in the mood to think about whether they would get back together. The moment she saw Rachel, she sported a dejected expression and said, “Ryan is probably dying.”

Rachel almost had the urge to spit blood when she heard that. She exchanged glances with Justin, then said helplessly, “Ryan... totally deserves it to have an ex-girlfriend like you to visit him at the hospital.”

She initially wanted to say that he was extremely unlucky, but when she realized that he finally got his retribution, she found it more appropriate to say that he deserved it. Seeing how Jolly appeared crestfallen, she reckoned that she still had to placate her. “Well, I don't think he's dying. The technology is advanced when it comes to heart bypass surgery. Aren't you aware of it since you work in the medical equipment industry?”

“You have a point, but he'll really die if the operation fails.”

“Haven't you always prayed that he'll die?”

“Now, I don't.”

“What's wrong? Have you rekindled your love for him?”

“Pfft, do I look like someone who'd get back together with her ex-boyfriend?” Jolly rolled her eyes. “I'm just worried that the old bat from his family will never let me off after he passes away.”

"Apart from this reason, I suppose you're a little worried about him."

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"No means no. I'm not even slightly worried about him. You're annoying, Chris. Can't you do something to stop her, Justin?" Jolly was frustrated by her questions. "I'm starving. Let's get some food!"

After she finished speaking, she immediately got into the car. Rachel put on a smile and shook her head helplessly. In fact, it was expected that Jolly would be concerned about Ryan's health. Regardless of what happened in the past, they had been in love before. Despite the grudges between them, she wouldn't want to see him die. Moreover, he was Samuel's father.

It was already afternoon when they returned to the summer resort. They had practically wasted the entire morning despite the lovely weather.

After hanging her coat, Rachel was ready to get into the kitchen. Before that, she comforted Jolly by saying, "Alright, stop thinking about it. What do you want for lunch?"

Jolly had been sitting still on the couch for a while since she entered the house. Upon hearing Rachel's words, she turned her head and revealed the pack of potato chips in her hand. She batted her eyes and said, "I'd like to have some caramel pudding."

Rachel glanced at the pack of potato chips in her hand that was practically empty as she suppressed her urge to roll her eyes and uttered slowly, "Sure."

She had underestimated Jolly's mental strength. Some people could bring her down, but no one in the world could make her lose her appetite. While she was joyous, she had to have an ample meal to celebrate the occasion. Even when she was depressed, she had to wolf down even more food to comfort herself-that was the Jolly they knew.

While Victor helped out in the kitchen, he commented on Jolly's temperament by saying. "To her, food can solve all the problems in the world."

"What's wrong? Isn't Gloria like that?"

"She's not." Victor shook his head. "Gloria isn't willing to eat anything when she's in a terrible mood, so I have to hide all the food in the house."

"That's because she wants you to comfort her and persuade her to have some food." Rachel rolled her eyes. "Can you stop being so insensitive? Will you only be happy when she gets mad?"

Victor replied calmly, "Well, I usually put the food in the highest cupboard where she can't reach, so she can only ask me to help her get the food."

There was a look of surprise on Justin's face as he gazed at Victor. Despite his usually calm demeanor, he looked at the other man with admiration as though he had learned something new. Love could indeed make people more mature; even a typical, insensitive man like Victor had learned some tricks.

With that said, the main reason was that they were in love. Even though they could easily see through each other's tricks, they were willing to make some concessions and reconcile.

While Rachel was busy in the kitchen, she suddenly recalled that she hadn't seen the kids yet. "Where are Charlotte and Samuel?"

Victor replied, "They're picking strawberries in the garden."

"There's a strawberry garden here?"

"Well, I just discovered it."

Victor and Rachel turned to look at Justin at the same time.

Justin stopped washing the ingredients and explained helplessly, "I started growing some strawberries in the garden when I had some free time back then. I didn't expect them to be growing so well. The plants started bearing fruits in the winter for the first time. Although there isn't a lot, they've grown well."

Victor was shocked. "That's incredible. You can even be a farmer if you quit being a president. At the very least, you won't starve yourself to death."

"I won't starve myself to death even if I don't grow any fruits."

Rachel said with a smile, "He's just complimenting you. Not everyone can be a farmer, you know. It's difficult to learn how to grow and harvest crops. It's a good idea that you're growing something in your spare time. Anyway, isn't it a little extravagant for you to be using this resort that's worth hundreds of millions to grow fruits?"

"Indeed, it is a little extravagant," Justin replied. "Why don't I put up a sign at the entrance of the garden so that people can pay a fee to pick the fruits?"

Rachel arched her brow. "That's a wonderful idea."

Victor uttered disdainfully, "I'm not going to take part in that. I thought we were only going to participate in that kind of activity where we take the school students out to experience life on a farm. That's a really odd thing to do in your garden, though."

It was supposed to be a joke, so no one expected there'd be a specific place in this summer resort worth hundreds of millions that was divided into a greenhouse and an open-air area. There would be a wooden sign in front of every piece of land that stated who the farmer was and what kind of fruit or vegetable they had grown. More and more people would take part in it, and the land would expand continuously.

Presently, two petite figures were walking in tandem inside a greenhouse in the strawberry garden. There was a basket made from rattan in Samuel's hand. Every time he picked a strawberry, he would put it inside the basket. The moment he did that, the young kid behind him would extend her hand, pick up the strawberry, and stuff it into her mouth.

Every time Samuel picked a strawberry, Charlotte would immediately eat it. The speed at which they picked and ate the strawberries was in sync, so there would always be zero or one strawberry in the basket. After they were done walking around the garden, they finished picking the strawberries that were not abundant to begin with.

Samuel looked down and realized that there wasn't even a single strawberry in the basket. It wasn't until this moment that he discovered Charlotte had been stealing the strawberries. "Why isn't there even a single strawberry in the basket?"

"You're wrong. There's still one strawberry left." Charlotte flashed a smile at him. "Here it is. Do you want to eat it?"

A helpless Samuel replied, "You've eaten all the strawberries I've picked. What can we bring home? Aunt Gloria said that she's going to make a strawberry mille crepe cake."

"Don't eat strawberry cake, then. We can have mango cake. I love mangoes."

"Godmother is allergic to mangoes."

"Huh?" Charlotte was startled. "I didn't know that."

"It's fine. I've known Godmother for a longer time compared to you. That's why I know."

Since there were no strawberries left, a dejected Samuel took a seat on the steps at the entrance of the strawberry garden. Charlotte initially thought that the ground was dirty, but seeing that Samuel had taken a seat, she hesitated for a moment and did the same.

From afar, the petite figures looked like two fluffy snowballs..

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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“Samuel, you don’t look happy. Is something bothering you?” Charlotte’s sweet baby voice sounded.

“Godmother took me to see someone today,” said Samuel, behaving precociously.

“Was it Mr. Ryan?” Charlotte had met and knew of Ryan.

“Yeah. He’s sick.”

“Oh, so you and Godmother went to the hospital to visit him earlier, huh?”

“Yeah.”

Charlotte propped her elbows on her knees and cupped her cheeks, leading half of her face to be covered. “Is Mr. Ryan going to die?” she asked while blinking.

“He said he won’t die just yet.”

“In that case, that means he’s okay. Daddy said everybody would die eventually. Not dying just yet means he’s all okay.”

If someone passed by at this time, they would definitely be rendered at a loss for words by the conversation. These two children didn’t even care that it was the first day of Springfest to talk about life and death so casually.

However, Samuel wasn’t bothered if Ryan would live. After long deliberation, he turned to Charlotte. “Do you think Godmother will be with Mr. Leroy?”

“Why?” Charlotte sat upright at that. “Leroy’s so handsome!”

“However, Ryan is-”

“He’s what?”

Samuel left his words hanging at that.

He was half a year younger than Charlotte; despite being far more intelligent than their peers, she was still a league below him maturity-wise. It probably had to do with Justin shielding her too well.

“Nothing. Are you cold? Let’s head home.”

Charlotte sniffled and nodded sweetly. It did feel somewhat chilly. At that, Samuel stood up and extended his hand toward the little girl. Their icy little hands slowly warmed as they walked hand in hand.

Charlotte followed behind Samuel. Though she hadn't a clue what was troubling him, she still couldn't help wanting to comfort him. "Samuel, no matter what happens, you have me, Mommy, Daddy, Godmother, Aunt Gloria, and Mr. Victor.

That will never change."

Samuel was taken aback for a moment and suddenly seemed enlightened. Moments later, he tightened his grip on Charlotte. "Come on, Aunt Gloria's still waiting for us to make her crepe cake."

"Godmother's allergic to mangoes, though."

"She can make a matcha-flavored one."

"I don't like matcha. It tastes bitter."

"In that case, we'll ask Aunt Gloria to make a banana crepe cake."

"Hey, I've never had that before!"

With that, the two walked out of the strawberry garden. Gloria stood with her arms akimbo in the kitchen doorway as she looked at the basket the little munchkins brought back. "Are these all the strawberries you guys spent half an hour picking?"

Charlotte blinked her big, round eyes. "There are no strawberries anymore, so we picked bananas instead."

Gloria thought the little girl was humiliating her intelligence. "And in which part of this garden is there a banana tree?"

Forget about this part of the land, there was not a spot in Riverdale where a banana tree could grow as if a tropical fruit could grow in this part of the world.

Samuel, on the other hand, was helpless. He had already told Charlotte this plan wouldn't work, but the little girl insisted otherwise.

Gloria had just learned how to make crepe cakes, so she thought about making a strawberry-flavored one. But now, with the key ingredient missing, her only dish on the first day of Springfest ended with a failure. As such, she couldn't help feeling irritated.

"How am I supposed to make a strawberry crepe cake without strawberries?"

“Well, you can make a banana crepe cake.”

“There’s no way I’m going to eat that! Don’t give me that, you little glutton!” “Bananas aren’t too different from strawberries, though.”

“Oh, but they are very different.”

However, Charlotte still had her way with Gloria. She rolled her eyes around and asked, “Can I ask you a question, Aunt Gloria?”

“What is it?”

“How do bananas grow on trees if they don’t have stones? How do you plant them?”

“Who says bananas don’t have stones? Well, they don’t, but they have seeds.”

“Where?”

“Do you think I’m lying to you?” Gloria peeled the skin off a banana and took a bite before pointing to the ring of black bits in the middle, speaking with a chunk of banana still in her mouth. “Here, see this? They’re small, edible seeds like strawberries,” she explained.

Charlotte giggled in response. “You said it yourself, Aunt Gloria. Strawberries and bananas aren’t too different.”

Stumped, Gloria didn’t know if she should swallow the chunk of banana in her mouth, amused and frustrated. She pinched the little girl’s nose. “Why, you cheeky little thing!”

In the kitchen, Rachel and the others heard their conversation and couldn’t help bursting into laughter.

“She may be little, but her logic’s impeccable. I bet whoever tries to woo her will have a hard time doing so. Rachel, I don’t think you guys have to worry about her,” Victor commented.

“Nah, I’m not worried at all,” said Rachel with a smile. “The one sitting outside has already set her eyes on making Charlotte her daughter-in-law. Under her watchful eyes, I doubt anyone will be able to steal my girl away.”

“Daughter-in-law?” Gloria happened to be returning to the kitchen, and her eyes widened upon hearing Rachel’s words. “No way! I object.”

“Why? Are you not pleased with Samuel?” Rachel asked.

"I'm pleased with Samuel, of course; it's the mother-in-law I have a problem with. Imagine what Jolly will do in the future when she can even steal Charlotte's candies now. It's none of my business if she bullies anyone. However, I will not allow anyone to bully our baby Charlotte."

"She stole Charlotte's candies?"

"See for yourself."

With that, Gloria stepped aside to let everyone see what was happening in the living room.

While Samuel and Charlotte were gone, a certain someone's 'sinful' hands reached for the bag of chocolate strawberries on the coffee table. She quickly grabbed one, unwrapped it, and popped it into her mouth, not forgetting to dispose of the wrapping.

With how fluid her actions were, it was clear that this wasn't her first time.

"Charlotte treats these chocolates like treasures. How would you have the heart to reach for them?! No wonder they were gone so fast when I knew I bought plenty."

Rachel scratched her head after hearing so and looked over her shoulder awkwardly at Justin, who was actually unfazed as if he knew nothing of this. In actuality, Jolly wasn't the only reason the chocolates had depleted so fast...

However, Rachel had no intention of explaining. Since Jolly was caught red-handed, why not let her take all the blame? She and Justin exchanged a glance, tacitly coming into an agreement.

"Jolly, how can you continue taking more when you've already taken a couple?!" Gloria roared toward the living room, having had enough of it.

Startled, Jolly jolted and nearly spat the chocolate in her mouth. Right then, Charlotte noticed it as well, so she immediately put her building blocks down and stood up.

"Godmother, you ate my chocolate!"

"What? N-No, I didn't. Are these your chocolates?"

"They're mine!" Charlotte jogged over and tipped the bag on the coffee table. "They're all gone!"

Her little face instantly fell, and she made a moue, glaring at Jolly with incredulity.

"Godmother, you ate all of my chocolate!"

Jolly panicked in an instant. "I'll buy you a new bag of chocolates! I'll get you more!"

“You can’t buy them!” Charlotte widened her eyes and began wailing. “Ugh... You can’t buy them! They’re all gone!”

“I can, I can. I’ll look for them now. Please don’t cry, Charlotte, please. Ahhh! Help me out, Chris!”

Despite having a son herself, Samuel barely ever cried. As such, it was only natural that she was all over the place when she experienced this for the first time.

Meanwhile, the others were having a ball watching in the kitchen, having no intention of saving Jolly.

“Ahhh, please don’t cry anymore. Help! Chris! Please help me, I beg of you!”

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 496

I will do it, Rachel. You just take a rest. Victor stopped Rachel from clearing the table after lunch and took it upon himself to clear the warzone’.

In actuality, the dining table was still fine, it was the kitchen that looked like one. It was all thanks to Gloria and her determination to make a crepe cake. Alas, the result was inevitable since the culinary newbie suddenly had a rare interest in whipping up something.

Then again, because she was the bride-to-be, no one berated her. Meanwhile, Rachel and Jolly were helping Gloria into her wedding dress in the guest bedroom on the second floor.

“Gosh, this dress is pretty,” Jolly gushed as she fixed Gloria’s dress. “As expected from a master to hand-sew this dress together. This texture looks even better than what we see in magazines. Imagine all the amazing photos we’ll be seeing on the wedding day.”

However, Gloria was running out of patience. “Alright, are we done yet?”

“What’s the rush?” Jolly slapped Gloria’s busy. hand. ‘Don’t move. What a waste to put such a lovely wedding dress on you.”

"If you want to wear it so badly, why don't you and Leroy get married? What are you doing ordering me around?"

"Order you around? What do you think you are, a steak or knuckle?"

"You're the knuckle!"

"Cut it out, you two. How is it that you guys can start arguing after a couple of words?!" Rachel put down Gloria's bustle after she secured the ribbon on the back. "Turn around and let me see."

The two finally stopped bickering, and Gloria turned around obediently.

As Gloria toured the country all year round, she commonly wore gowns; though they looked pretty, most of them were rather hefty. Wedding dresses were not too different, so she felt somewhat frustrated as soon as she put hers on, thinking that she was about to go on stage.

"It fits like a glove. Take a look at yourself in the mirror and see if you like it."

After hearing Rachel's words, Gloria turned to her side and looked into the mirror. Initially, she hadn't given it too much thought, nor was she expecting anything. However, as soon as her eyes landed on the woman in the mirror, she was still stunned for a moment.

The beauty of a wedding dress was the sense of ritual love vested in it. Nobody knew when the sacred meaning had been bestowed upon it, but even if humans were the ones who defined it, it was still what made it different.

Gloria was lost in thought for a long time as she looked at herself in the mirror.

The dress was an off-shoulder design, and a layer of soft tulle was bow-tied onto her left shoulder, spanning from her shoulder to the waistline. The skirt was a simple tulle skirt with a bustle. At that moment, Gloria looked like a medieval princess, elegant and noble.

"It's so pretty," Jolly couldn't help exclaiming aside. After returning to her senses, Gloria lowered her head and cleared her throat. "It's alright."

"What do you mean it's alright? You look stunning." Rachel grabbed Gloria's shoulders and brought her closer to the full-length mirror for her to scrutinize herself. "Look at how pretty you are. You're the most beautiful bride I've ever seen."

Gloria suddenly felt a lump in her throat, and her eyes began turning misty as well.

She lost her parents when she was very little, and there was a time when her childhood was bleak. It only got slightly better when Justin took her away, but there would forever be a hole in her life that was supposed to be filled by family.

Then again, Rachel's arrival seemed to have filled up some of that gap. She didn't know how to put the feeling into words; she was just truly touched.

"What about me?" Jolly suddenly popped her head over, breaking the touching atmosphere in an instant. "If she's the most beautiful bride, what does that make me? I'll eventually get married too, and I won't believe you if you say the same thing to me at that point."

Rachel took a gander at her. "Alright, I won't say it then."

Jolly cupped her mouth instantly and pulled a dramatically aggrieved look. "You can't do this to me, Chris! Does our six-year friendship mean nothing in front of Gloria?! What a biased woman you are!"

"Immature!" Gloria rolled her eyes at Jolly. "Your mental age is not even older than Samuel's."

"I dare you to say that again. Don't think I won't beat you up just because you're wearing a wedding dress."

"Come at me, then!"

Seeing that the two were about to butt heads again, Rachel stepped in. "They're probably getting impatient. Come on, let's go down."

Meanwhile, in the living room downstairs, Samuel yawned and asked, "What's taking them so long?"

He and Charlotte had long changed into their page boy and flower girl outfits. One wore a dashing suit, and the other was in a white dress fit for a little princess. They looked absolutely cute together.

Samuel furrowed his brows like a little adult when they still hadn't emerged from the guest room upstairs. Women really are troublesome. Just how long do they need to take to put on a dress?!

Victor and Justin were also done cleaning up the kitchen at this point. "Are they not ready yet?" asked Justin as he wiped his hands dry while coming out.

"No, they aren't." Samuel shook his head and yawned. Victor had come out too, and upon seeing Samuel nodding off, he couldn't help ridiculing the child. "This boy looks

like he hadn't slept a wink in his past life. He's the same in school as well, always looking to take a nap."

Samuel was innately sleep deprived, and he always felt drowsy during the afternoon. Likewise, Justin couldn't help smiling when he saw it.

"Godmother!" Charlotte suddenly cried out while pointing upstairs, so excited that she jumped onto the couch. "Godmother, your dress looks so pretty!"

Her voice successfully pulled Victor and Justin's attention back.

Upstairs, Rachel walked in front. "Get ready. Don't blink."

With that, she turned to her side to make way. Behind her, Gloria, with rare bashfulness, slowly walked down the stairs while lifting her skirt, keeping her attention on her feet in case she tripped.

As the maid of honor, Jolly held Gloria's train at the back with rare seriousness, not joking with the bride-to-be.

Victor, on the other hand, gawked at Gloria as she walked down the stairs, speechless.

At that, Rachel nudged him. "What are you doing standing there for? Come over and help her out!"

"Mr. Victor's stupefied!" Charlotte covered her mouth and snickered aside.

Victor's face flushed crimson from being ridiculed, and he hurriedly went up to Gloria. It seemed that he had forgotten how to walk as he stumbled and nearly fell by Gloria's dress.

Fortunately, Justin was quick to react and managed to save him.

At that, Jolly teased, "Well, I never heard anyone kneeling to their wives first on the first day of Springfest!"

However, Victor wasn't upset by Jolly's teasing. After standing straight, he looked at the woman before his eyes-the woman he had known since he was at the worst point in his life. She was so assertive and overbearing back then that he saw nothing good in her. But now, she was the brightest star on stage, yet she was still willing to stay by his side.

Fate sure worked in strange ways. Those destined to be together would eventually meet again and stay together even after running around in circles.

Everyone's eyes were on Victor and Gloria. Samuel, who had been yawning moments ago, latched his gaze on the stunning wedding dress as well.

Only Justin looked toward the woman next to Gloria. She smiled while leaning against the stairs, and beneath the locks of errant hair was her gentle and demure side profile. Her smile was ingrained in Justin's indifferent gaze, slowly expanding into a serene future like it was just in front of him.

Fate might've brought others together, but to Justin, his encounter with Rachel was redemption.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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Chapter 497

Gloria and Victor's wedding was set to be held on the eighth day of Springfest at the summer villa, but Hernandez had already arrived to join the fun on the second day of Springfest.

Rachel and Jolly were happy to see him. Hernandez taught Victor oral language for free, so the two were pretty close as well. Of course, nothing needed to be said about Samuel's relationship with him.

However, the other three were not so pleased to see the man, and Charlotte's behavior said it all. With Hernandez's arrival, they decided to have stew.

Hence, Victor drove Rachel and Jolly to buy some groceries, leaving three not-so-welcoming hosts and a voiceless Samuel.

Once Rachel left, Charlotte flipped as she looked at Hernandez, spreading her arms apart like a baby eagle blocking the entryway. "Don't you have a home, Curly Weirdo?! Why have you come to stay at my place?!"

Hernandez smiled in response. "Aren't all the wedding guests staying here? Why can't I stay?"

"That's because no guest would arrive a week in advance," commented Justin. The father and daughter challenged the outsider unanimously. However, it was useless as Hernandez's shamelessness was as deep as the Mariana Trench. "That's perfect. I get to take my time and choose the room I like."

"No, no, no, no, no!" Charlotte snapped as she pushed Hernandez's legs, so angry that her cheeks puffed up like a blowfish.

“Okay, okay!” Hernandez took a couple of steps back while putting his hands up.

“Hmph!” Charlotte stood with arms akimbo like a gamecock. “Leave!”

Hernandez looked toward Justin with this little gamecock standing in between them. “Justin, this isn’t the Burton hospitality I know.”

Justin shrugged at that, remaining nonchalantly on the couch with no intention of moving. “I’m not the one telling you to leave. It’s her wish, so there’s nothing I can do about it.”

Gloria nodded in agreement. “There are so many hotels out there, Hernandez. Why don’t I book you a room, and you can stay there instead?”

All the hotels were located in the town area, outrageously far from where they were currently at. One round trip would take three hours, and it was obvious that they didn’t want to give him the convenience of pestering Rachel by suggesting he stay in the town area.

Hernandez had already backed up to the doorway at this point. With one hand on the door frame, he said calmly, “Alright, since you guys won’t let me stay here, I’ll go and find Chris. I’m sure she definitely has an empty room available.”

Justin stood up at once, agitated. “Now, where’s my suitcase...” While speaking, Hernandez reached for his suitcase.

“Wait.” Justin called out to him, then paused for a second before continuing, “The rooms on the second floor are all taken. You can pick any room on the third floor.”

“Thanks!” Hernandez beamed upon getting his way.

“Ugh, unbelievable! I knew I shouldn’t have invited him!” Gloria caterwauled as she watched Hernandez go upstairs with his suitcase.

Charlotte wasn’t any happier. “I hate that Curly Weirdo.”

Only Samuel remained collected. “Hernandez is a nice guy. He’s just a bit of a playboy.”

Seeing that none responded to him, Samuel looked up and commented, “He has trouble walking away when he sees a beautiful woman.”

His words struck Justin, and he turned to Gloria. “Gloria, when are your orchestra friends arriving?”

“On the sixth or seventh day of Springfest, I think. That’s about a day or two before the wedding.”

“Change their tickets. Have them come early. The sooner, the better.” With that, Justin turned to the servants. “Get the rooms in the two blocks at the back ready as soon as possible.”

There would be a solution to every problem. Hernandez’s arrival livened up the atmosphere in the summer villa even more.

Alas, typical Murphy’s law, the preparations for the wedding had been running smoothly until the fifth day of Springfest.

“These flowers have all gone bad. We can’t use any of them! Who do you think you’re fooling?!” Jolly argued with the wedding flower purveyor with her arms akimbo. “See for yourself. Look at how withered they look. We’re only on the fifth day of Springfest, and they’ll be completely unusable by the eighth!”

While Jolly argued with the purveyor, Rachel stood behind the truck and looked at the flowers they had delivered, feeling distressed.

Jolly really wasn’t nitpicking, for these flowers really weren’t even passable. Even if they could barely be used right now, they wouldn’t be able to last until the eighth day of Springfest.

“What’s going on?” Justin came over when he heard the noise. “Why are you guys arguing?”

“Take a look.” Rachel pulled a rose out from the truck. She didn’t even need to touch the petals; they would fall as soon as the wind blew on them.

“These flowers most certainly can’t be used,” Rachel continued. Justin understood at one glance, and he comforted her by saying, ‘Don’t worry, I’ll talk to them.’

Jolly was already about to fight the guys at this point. Fortunately, Justin came in time and stopped the woman, telling her to take a break aside.

“Cheating profiteers. Is this what I get for using your service?! Well, I’ll make sure you guys won’t be able to survive in Riverdale!” Livid, Jolly cursed as she walked.

“Alright, chill. Accidents happen.” Rachel stopped her. “The snow has been so heavy that the airports were forced to shut down, and tons of flowers rotted in the distribution center when they couldn’t ship any of them by air. A few days ago, there were reports about how strained the flower market has been, right?”

“That doesn’t mean they can use these flowers to fool us, though. This is a wedding we’re talking about!”

Though Jolly and Gloria constantly bickered, Jolly still wished Gloria all the happiness deep down and hoped that Gloria's wedding was perfect. Even Rachel had to admit she couldn't even compare to Jolly when it came to such details.

"Relax, we still have two days. Let's figure something out."

"It'll be hard to order flowers when there are barely any florists open during Springfest. I knew things would go wrong if we let the wedding planner do everything. Look at how they cheated us!"

"Come on, don't paint everything with the same brush."

While speaking, Justin had returned from the negotiation.

"What did they say?"

"They can deliver another batch from Glensworth."

"Will they arrive in time?" Rachel calculated the days with her fingers. "It's possible if they ship them out by tonight and arrive in Riverdale by tomorrow. We'll have to make sure the venue is ready by the following day."

"It'll definitely be too late." Jolly frowned. "They still have to gather the flowers, pack, and load them up. If another accident happens, we would've waited for nothing. The risk is too high."

Rachel sighed silently as she looked at the truckload of withered flowers.

Funnily enough, Gloria, the bride-to-be, comforted them after learning of the situation. "Don't worry, guys. This is not a big deal at all. If anything, we'll just forget about the flowers and decorate the venue with some balloons here and there. Less is more, right?" she said.

"Less is more can mean minimal or simple, but it cannot be basic," said Jolly as she corrected her.

"Isn't this my wedding, though? Shouldn't it be my call?"

"I'm the maid of honor. I don't want to embarrass myself!"

"Well, I'm the bride here!"

"Well, I'm not going to argue with you. No means no. I'm going to make a few phone calls to my friends. With that, Jolly headed outside with her phone, leaving everyone to look at each other. Is this a backseat driver situation they're in?"

Right as Jolly went out, a ringtone came from the living room. It was Justin's phone. Rachel happened to be standing next to him, and her gaze landed on the caller ID when she took a subconscious glance.

She frowned in response as surprise laced her expression, for the call was from Ryan..

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 498

"Yeah."

"Alright, I'll let them know."

After hanging up, Justin looked at the people in front of him. Rachel, Gloria, Victor, Hernandez, and the kids were present. Only Jolly was still contacting her friends on the balcony about the flowers for the wedding.

"Ryan said he'll be coming over tomorrow."

"Isn't he hospitalized?" The news stumped Rachel. "Yeah." Gloria was surprised as well. "Why does he want to come?"

"He happened to have learned of our flower crisis and managed to get a guy. The flowers will be delivered tomorrow. He said to consider it as his wedding gift to Gloria."

Gloria and Victor exchanged glances with each other, unsure what to say. Rachel, on the other hand, felt that something didn't add up. "How did Ryan learn of this?"

Justin glanced toward the balcony where Jolly was still making her calls.

Clearly, Jolly had called many of her friends, and Ryan knew almost all her friends in Riverdale. As such, it wasn't surprising if he got word of it. Rachel furrowed her brows, also unsure of what to say for a moment.

After returning from making her calls, Jolly slumped onto the couch and sat next to Gloria. "I can't believe it! Does no one operate during Springfest?! I've already offered triple the price, yet I still can't find anyone!"

“Actually, it’s not all hopeless.” Rachel hesitated for quite some time. “Ryan called and said he managed to get a guy.”

“He did what?” Jolly was stumped.

“It’s okay, we don’t need his help.” Gloria stepped in at once. ‘It’s just a wedding, and it’s no big deal if we don’t have any flowers. We’ll just use something else to decorate the place.”

While speaking, she gave Victor a nudge with her elbow, and he got her instantly. “Yeah, we’re not finicky about this.”

“Why should we turn him down?” Jolly glanced at the soon-to-be-married couple. “We can’t find any on our side, so why say no when it’s being delivered right to our doorstep?! Why are your guys looking at me like that? It’s his wedding gift to Gloria, so what does it have to do with me? He saved us the trouble by managing to get the flowers, didn’t he?”

Everyone was surprised by Jolly’s indifference except Rachel, who was smiling with her head lowered. Jolly had never been perfunctory when it came to her friends. Yes, she wanted nothing to do with Ryan, but they were in a moment of crisis, weren’t they?

The flowers arrived the next morning along with Ryan, who had lost much weight—probably due to his illness. He even looked somewhat frail under his black coat. After getting down from his car, he greeted Justin and the gang.

Meanwhile, the wedding planning team had arrived as well and were setting up the wedding venue. More than that, most of Gloria’s orchestra friends from abroad had also arrived and were all staying in the summer villa. It sure was a lively morning.

“Just because you’re gifting Gloria flowers doesn’t mean you have to come yourself.” Jolly treated Ryan in an ungracious manner as soon as she saw him. “Do you think you’re invincible?”

To that, Ryan said, “I’ve come out for some fresh air since it’s a little stuffy in the hospital. Don’t worry, I won’t stay for long.”

“Sure as hell you won’t. Were you planning to only leave after lunch?”

Justin had thought about being polite and asking Ryan to stay for lunch. But now that Jolly had put it that way, he said nothing about it anymore.

Meanwhile, Rachel smoothed things over. “Jolly’s just joking. You have to stay for lunch when you’ve done us a huge favor.”

Jolly didn't refute, and just as Ryan was about to say yes, the sound of a roaring engine came from the front of the villa. The next second, a white sports car pulled over in front of everyone.

The man who came out of the car was wearing a white sweater, and he removed his sunglasses to reveal a handsome face.

Jolly's eyes lit up in response. "Leroy!" she exclaimed as she dashed to the man.

The way Leroy spread his arms to catch Jolly was so tenderly affectionate that the girls from the orchestra all watched with envy-even Hernandez got jealous. On the other hand, Ryan's gaze sharpened.

"Well, that's basically all the guests for today. Dinner will surely be quite a party," said Rachel. "If you don't have any other plans, President Sutton, you should just stay. We're having a bachelor-bachelorette barbecue party tonight. Who knows, you might meet that someone."

It probably wouldn't be easy to convince Ryan to put his feelings for Jolly down, so why not take a different approach? If they were lucky, he might take a fancy to someone else. Most importantly, he probably wouldn't continue to be so dead-set when he was witnessing Jolly and Leroy's affections up close.

Just like that, Ryan stayed justifiably. As night fell, the string lights were put up. The barbecue grill was also brought out, lacing the air in the yard with barbecue smoke.

While Leroy was manning the grill, Jolly stood next to him, helping him with the seasoning.

Very quickly, a bunch of girls from the orchestra came to ask for pictures and autographs. "Leroy, we're fans of yours. Can we get a picture?"

"Sure," Leroy answered with a smile.

"Jolly, help us take the picture, will you?"

A camera had been shoved into Jolly's arms before she could even register what was happening. "Hey-"

Meanwhile, the girls lined up to take pictures with Leroy.

It was fine in the beginning, but as Jolly took the pictures, more and more people stood in line-basically all the girls from the orchestra. Thus, the barbecue area became Leroy's private meet and greet while Jolly became the photographer.

By the time Jolly took about a dozen pictures, she had already cussed Gloria hundreds of times.

Meanwhile, Rachel sat close to the villa as she watched all that was happening. Next to her, the kids were running around and playing with the balloons the wedding planner had given them.

“Why aren’t you joining them?” A crisp voice came from her side, leading her to turn around only to see a warm, thick throw being draped over her shoulder.

“Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.” Justin pulled the chair aside and sat down. “From what I remember, you can play the piano.”

Rachel followed his line of sight and took a glance afar.

The guys in the orchestra were professionals, so it wasn’t a surprise for them to bring their instruments. Someone started playing their violin, and more of them pulled out their instruments one after another. Just like that, the ordinary bachelor-bachelorette barbecue party turned into an outdoor recital and audio- visual feast.

Rachel chuckled bashfully. “These guys are: professionals while I’m just an amateur. I’ll skip the embarrassment.”

“It’s all just for fun.”

“Have you taken a liking to crowds as well? I remember you used to prefer silence.” “No one wouldn’t want to be in a crowd. It just

feels lonely when the excitement has nothing to do with you.”

The liveliness could always amplify the loneliness. Rachel nodded musingly. She could understand him since she had nothing to do with all the exciting banquets the Hudson Family threw when she was little.

Just then, she spotted a figure far away from the corner of her eyes, and a hint of complication laced them. “Well, someone is pretty lonely tonight.”

Afar, Ryan looked pretty lonely as he stood leaning against the wall with a glass of wine in his hand.

He had been standing there as long as Rachel had been sitting here, fixing his gaze in Leroy and Jolly’s direction. He was practically a statue at this point. Every now and then, girls from the orchestra would approach him, but he would turn all of them down.

“He has too much he wants to hold on to,” Justin commented plainly.

Before Rachel could make out what Justin was implying, Samuel suddenly came running to them and pulled on Rachel.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 499

“What is it, Samuel?”

“I’ve lost something, Mommy. Please help me find it.” Samuel’s eyes were filled with childish innocence when he blinked, and no one would doubt his words.

At that, Rachel could only abandon Justin and follow Samuel.

“Samuel, where are you taking me?”

“You’ll know when we get there.”

Rachel followed after Samuel as he jogged. It was already late at night at this point, but the summer villa yard was still brightly lit, and the sound of music blanketed all noise. The exceptionally lively atmosphere set off the silence and darkness around it.

Samuel jogged all the way to the villa’s deserted rockery on the northeast corner. The summer villa was massive, but this was a spot not even the gardeners would come.

“Samuel.” Just as Rachel called out to him for fear that he would trip from being unable to see his surroundings, she found a familiar figure standing in the dark.

“Janice? Rachel was stumped. She reflexively checked her surroundings to make sure no one else was around before moving closer. “What brings you here?”

“Don’t worry, no one knows I’m here.” Janice ruffled Samuel’s hair. “I have to say, Samuel’s really smart. He can even think to distract your daughter before getting you.”

At that, Rachel shifted her gaze to the boy. “Samuel, you should head back to the yard.”

“Has something come up? Why have you suddenly come to me?” Rachel asked after Samuel left.

To avoid suspicion, the two hadn't openly contacted each other for a long time. Even if something did come up, they would reach out via a feature phone.

Since the Porter Family behind the smuggling ring hadn't been caught, the smuggling case remained open. Thus, Rachel's job as the informant had to continue.

"There's nothing at the moment, for the Porters haven't done anything significant yet. The update we got from Coraline is that they want to lay low in Enistan for the time being. Of course, they aren't actually laying low. They're relying on the casino to launder their money."

"Has Dillion gone there?"

"Not just Dillon, but Sabrina as well. It seems that what happened last time got them losing some of their trust in Dillon, so they had Sabrina tag along to keep an eye."

"Is Coraline doing okay?"

"She's alright. Sabrina even suspected her at one point, but because the higher-ups value her and that they don't have any solid proof, no one dares to lay a finger on her."

"That's good to hear." Rachel heaved a sigh of relief.

"After things have quieted down, they will probably reach their hands toward Riverdale, and you'll be their first target by then, I'm afraid."

"I know."

Surely no one would believe there was nothing suspicious when Rachel returned to Riverdale unscathed from the smuggling incident. Alas, it'd be troublesome when she had to explain things.

"Oh, one more thing." Janice handed Rachel a bag. "This is my wedding gift to Gloria."

After recovering from her momentary stump, Rachel smiled. "You've actually come to give her this, haven't you?"

Janice beat around the bush and talked about work, but in actuality, there was nothing they could do at the moment. The only thing they could actually talk about was the gift Janice handed to Rachel.

Janice didn't deny it, and she was rather embarrassed as well. "No doubt many will attend Gloria's wedding. I can't show myself. Hand this to her for me and tell her I give her my blessings."

Together, they had helped Rachel flee six years ago. Janice had comrades, partners, and loyal subordinates, but she barely had any friends. To her, Rachel and Gloria were among the scarce few she had.

Rachel's eyes suddenly got misty. "Don't worry, I'll definitely hand it to her."

"I'll take my leave, then."

"Wait, Janice!" Rachel called out to her. "We should have a good drinking session once those smugglers have been dealt with and when everything's over."

"Sure."

"That day will come, right?"

"It will."

After watching Janice blend into the rockery, Rachel drew a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

She could still hear the songs and laughter coming from the yard behind her. The melodious music was divinely romantic, and it merged with the mortal world, imprinting on everyone's smiles and bones.

Most people would never realize the peaceful world they were living in was hard-earned from the crossfires some had to endure.

Rachel pulled the contents out of the bag to reveal two kitten rag dolls. One wore a wedding dress while the other was in a suit. The one in the dress smiled with crescent eyes while the one in the suit stuck his tongue out and made a face. They looked absolutely adorable..

If Janice hadn't entered the investigation bureau, she could probably become a tailor; she had fully inherited her grandfather's amazing craftsmanship.

After returning to the villa, Rachel bypassed the crowd and placed Janice's present among the pile of wedding gifts in the living room. She believed Gloria would discover its uniqueness when she unwrapped the presents later.

"Mommy!" A sweet, childish voice came from behind just then. Charlotte's face had been tinted red from having to run in the cold wind. She threw herself into her mother's arms as soon as she came in. "Samuel said he wanted to play hide-and-seek, but I can't find him anywhere!"

"Is that so?" Rachel fought back her laughter. As hard as it was to trick this little one, she could be quite gullible sometimes. Of course, only Samuel could trick her.

“Why don’t you take a look outside?”

Charlotte looked out to the yard and found Samuel at first glance. The boy was chowing down on some lamb skewers, in no way looking like he was playing hide-and-seek.

The little girl instantly abandoned her mother, dashing toward Samuel with excitement. “I’ve found you!”

“Awesome, you win. Here’s your prize.” Samuel handed her a lamb skewer nonchalantly.

Meanwhile, Jolly was seething with rage from all the pictures she had to take, yet people were still constantly coming up to take pictures.

“Hey, I remember you.” Jolly pointed toward the blond girl with blue eyes standing next to Leroy. “Haven’t you already taken your picture? Why are you taking it again?”

“That one wasn’t nice. I want to take another one.”

At that, Jolly looked toward the line and found that they were practically familiar faces now. “Lily, Bertha, Victoria... you guys too?”

Everyone nodded in response. “Who do you guys think you’re fooling?! I didn’t even show you guys your pictures!”

Knowing she was pissed, Leroy turned to everyone and said, “Why don’t we take a group picture?”

“Sure, okay!”

No doubt, only the hottest celebrities could convene the masses apart from the military. Jolly felt even more depressed when Leroy spoiled them instead of turning them down.

Thus, she sulked and refused to cooperate now that everyone had gathered to take a group picture. In the end, Rachel was the one who forced her to join. “Come on, do it for the party. Are you going to let all these women surround your Leroy?”

“Go ahead, then. Who cares?!”

“Yeah, right.” With that, Rachel shoved Jolly next to Leroy,

“Alright, guys-look over here. Three... Two...”

“Jolly.”

Jolly turned her head to Leroy indignantly upon hearing his voice, only to find his face approaching hers. Before she could register what was happening, his lips had already pressed onto hers.

“One.” Snap! The moment was forever frozen in frame.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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Charlotte happened to look up when the two kissed and caught sight of it. “Ah!” she exclaimed as she covered her eyes. “How shameful!”

Everyone hadn’t noticed as their eyes were all on the camera. Upon hearing the little girl’s cry, everyone immediately shifted their gaze to Jolly. and Leroy and started chanting, “Kiss, kiss, kiss...”

Rachel didn’t want to join in on the fun, so after teasing the couple along with the others, she grilled up some skewers while everyone else was still focusing on Jolly and Leroy, then returned to her little table.

Justin was coming out of the villa with a bottle of red wine just then, and as though he had foreseen her returning to her table, he even came out with two red wine glasses in his other hand. “Wine?”

“Sure.” Rachel wrapped herself with the throw, smiling as her baby hairs danced to the breeze. However, upon landing her gaze on Leroy, she froze for a moment while her gaze turned complicated.

Justin handed her a glass, which she swirled while asking, “When are you planning on telling him?”

“Sometime later when everyone has left, I guess.”

“Why don’t I join you then?”

“Are you planning on outnumbering him?”

“Who do you think you’re kidding?” Rachel rolled her eyes at him. “You know his background better than I do. Do you think we can even lay a finger on him?”

Leroy’s issue had been lingering in Rachel’s mind for a long while.

If they missed this chance, who knew when they would be able to open up about this to him the next time? He was a busy man, after all; he had all sorts of projects, shows, and events to attend all year round.

“Honestly, I don’t get it,” said Rachel. “Why would he choose to enter showbiz when he has that kind of identity? If I remember correctly, he has been in the industry since he was young. The first time Jolly met him was when she was still in college. She said he was still gigging in bars, right?”

Justin furrowed his brows at that. “Someone wiped his profile clean in the past. It’s untraceable, so we can only ask him.”

“To be honest, his identity is no big deal, right?! mean, they’re just dating.”

“In Riverdale, maybe. However, if he decides to return to Enistan in the future, I’m afraid...”

Justin left his words hanging.

Rachel had a good hunch as to what he wanted to say. “I get that.”

With that, she lifted her chin and sipped on some red wine. With cold wine streaming down her throat and into her belly, coupled with the cold wind blowing against her, she couldn’t help shivering.

Meanwhile, Gloria and Victor were stargazing on the balcony. “Say, do you suppose the stars up in the hills are brighter?”

“Probably.”

“In that case, what do you think about having our honeymoon up in the hills?”

“There are wild boars in the hills.”

“Buzzkill.” Gloria rolled her eyes at her soon-to-be husband. “Are you allergic to romance? I bet you’d never find a wife if you hadn’t met me.”

“I wouldn’t marry at all if I hadn’t met you.”

Gloria blushed, taken aback by his words.

Nonetheless, Victor was still hopeful of being cured of his ‘allergy’ to romance, for she actually couldn’t catch his every-now-and-then affectionate blurts.

"I feel kind of sad for President Sutton." At that, she gestured downstairs with her lips. "See, his eyes are practically glued to Jolly. Why does he want to torture himself like this?"

"Ryan's a deeply artful guy."

"Huh?" Gloria looked at Victor with bewilderment. "How do you know?"

Victor never had much contact with Ryan, and knowing Victor, he would rarely judge someone, let alone one with such negativity.

"He donated some stuff to our school."

"When? How come I've never heard you talk about this?"

"That's because the school turned him down later,"

Gloria turned grave. "Tell me the details."

Victor hadn't intended to say it since it was already in the past. But since Gloria asked, it wouldn't hurt to tell.

It actually happened quite a few months back, a little after Ryan found out Samuel was his son. Seeing that he was going nowhere with Jolly, he turned his attention to the school.

"He made a request at that time. He wanted to select a batch of students and take them on a cruise."

"A cruise?" Gloria's eyes sharpened a little. "Was Samuel on the list?"

"He was."

Forget about a cruise; the potential of an accident happening could arrive on any trip, not to mention when there were so many children involved. If his plan actually came to fruition, Samuel might actually disappear without reason.

A chill ran down Gloria's spine as the thought crossed her mind. "How was it settled, then?"

At that, Victor grew hesitant to speak. "It was Justin. He donated a block unconditionally. His only request was that the school could not have any ties with Ryan."

"Why didn't you tell me this?"

“Well...” Victor scratched his head, at a crossroads. “Justin forbade me from talking about it.”

“Are you saying that Jolly and Rachel don’t know about this either?”

“They don’t.”

“You really are a blockhead.”

“I’m sorry, but the thing is, I couldn’t figure out what Justin was trying to do at that time either.”

“What else can he do other than wanting to protect Rachel and the kids? Ask yourself this- ever since he regained his memories, he has been making his best efforts, hasn’t he?”

He was the great Justin Burton, the former CEO of Burton Group in Riverdale. As a young and promising man, he took over Burton Group while others were still in high school and was a notable name in Forbes’ The World’s Billionaires ranking for several consecutive years.

But now, all he had left was a shell of the Burton Group and this increasingly bleak summer villa. At the young age of forty, the man was now living like a widowed elderly, growing produce, cooking up meals, and taking care of the kids apart from doing occasional charity.

“Don’t get upset. I can tell as well.” Victor wrapped his arms around Gloria’s shoulders to comfort her. “You can’t rush everything. Things have gotten a lot better between them now, hasn’t it?”

Gloria finally cooled off when she saw Rachel and Justin drinking and chatting away in a corner on the second floor.

“Anyhow, back to President Sutton. I don’t know why, but I’ve always found him odd.” Gloria frowned, unsure why she kept thinking the man was rather odd. “Victor, I just remembered something!”

“What is it?”

“Remember the time we went to Triburg Valley?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

“I caught sight of Julian when I got separated from you guys, but he didn’t see me. I overheard his conversation on the phone, and I think he was talking to President Sutton.”

“Well, if I remember correctly, Rachel previously mentioned that Julian and Ryan have business dealings with each other.”

“Not that.” Gloria shook her head, looking somewhat hesitant. “I heard Julian mentioning Leroy.”

Leroy? Victor’s heart skipped a beat. “What did he say?”

“He said Leroy won’t be able to make it to Triburg Valley.”

Victor’s countenance changed in an instant. “Are you sure you heard it correctly?”

“I-I’m not sure. I wanted to ask him back then. I thought Julian got word that an issue would prevent Leroy from coming, but later on...”

Later on, Leroy had gotten into an accident on the mountain roads and nearly lost his life. there. The veins on Victor’s temples throbbed as he looked toward the man in question with absolute incredulity.

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