

Chapter 165 Set Him Up

The sound of Isabel's voice was clear, like a strike across Colin's pride.

His face went red, then purple, as he struggled to keep his anger in check.

"What is that supposed to mean?" he snapped.

Isabel tossed the torn check into the trash with a shrug. "Nothing, really. Just figured garbage belongs in the trash can."

"Isabel! Are you calling me garbage?" Colin wasn't a fool; he caught the insult behind her words.

"I didn't say that," she replied, picking up her coffee, crossing one leg over the other as she took a sip. "But you seem eager to call yourself that." She glanced up, her lips curling in a slight, teasing smile. "This coffee is amazing today. Maybe I'm just in a good mood."

Colin's face flushed deeper with fury, his anger flickering across his face in colors like a storm.

"How did I end up with a child like you!" His rage burst out, and his hand shot up, aiming for her face.

But before his hand could land, it stopped midair—Reggie had caught his wrist.

Colin's chest heaved as he glared at Reggie with a burning intensity. "You're both disgraceful! I raised a pair of ungrateful children!"

Isabel met his glare calmly. "If we're both so disgraceful, what does that make you, as our father?"

"You—you dare speak to me that way!" Colin's voice rose, barely able to contain his fury.

Isabel didn't let him finish. "I'm only saying what you've been implying. You're the one who started it."

She set her coffee down, paying no attention to his seething look. She turned to Reggie. "Come on. Let's go." With a smirk, she leaned in close, whispering to him with a glint of mischief in her eye. "Let's get out before the old man has another chance to yell."

Reggie looked at her, surprised, but nodded.

"We're leaving."

"Stop! You both stop right now!" Colin's shouts followed them, but Isabel and Reggie kept walking, leaving the café without a backward glance.

Colin sank into his chair, his fingers pressed hard against his temples as if trying to force the tension out. His face was clouded over, frustration rolling off him in waves.

Across town, Isabel couldn't hold back a laugh, light and full of mischief. She looked like someone who had just gotten away with something.

Reggie gave her a curious look. "Isa, what did you do back there?"

A sly grin spread across her face. "Oh, nothing much. Just gave someone a little surprise."

Meanwhile, back at the café, Colin's headache had only gotten worse. He sat there, rubbing his temples, wondering how he could have ended up with two kids who seemed determined to drive him up the wall.

He wondered what he did to deserve this.

At least there was Lillian—his only source of pride and sanity. The thought of her brought him some comfort, but even that faded as he remembered the trouble with Vinnie's family.

If he couldn't fix things, who knew how long Lillian would be caught in the crossfire?

With a heavy sigh, Colin muttered, "Time to get to the hospital," and grabbed his phone, ready to leave.

But before he could make it out the door, a server hurried up to him. "Sir, your order of a thousand cups of coffee is almost ready!"

Colin froze, his eyes widening in disbelief. "A thousand? I didn't order any coffee!"

"The young lady with you placed the order. She mentioned it was for your company staff."

Realization hit him like a slap. Isabel.

"Then take it up with her!" he barked, turning to leave, but the server wasn't about to let him escape.

"Sir! You haven't settled the bill! That's a thousand cups of coffee ... plus a thousand mousses, a thousand tiramisus, a thousand toasts, a thousand tarts, and a thousand puddings!"

With each item the server rattled off, Colin felt his temper flare higher.

Around him, patrons began to stare, their expressions a mix of pity and amusement.

The manager stepped in, blocking his exit with a polite but firm smile. "Sir, we run a business here. We'll need you to settle the bill before leaving," he said, gesturing to the staff closing in by the door.

Colin's patience snapped. "I told you, I didn't order it!" he shouted. "Go find the one who did!"

The manager's smile stayed fixed and professional as he faced Colin. "Sir, you came in together. They left, so the bill is now yours."

Colin's voice shot up. "I barely know them!" But the murmurs around him grew, and the eyes of the crowd pressed closer.

"I heard the waiter say this guy's some big boss with a thousand employees under him," one man whispered. "And here he is, trying to skip out on a tab."

"Yeah," another agreed, "he probably wanted to look generous, then changed his mind and pretended it wasn't him."

"And I heard the young guy call him 'Dad' earlier. Now he's pretending he doesn't even know his own son? Really low."

Colin's blood boiled. Each whisper stung, each pointed look fueled his fury. He felt ready to strangle Isabel for putting him in this spot.

"I'm not paying," he growled, grinding his teeth. "She ordered it—give her the bill!"

The manager pulled out his phone without a blink. "Hello, officer? Yes, this is SY Coffee Shop. We have a customer here refusing to pay for his order. Could you send someone over?"

Colin's shoulders slumped. He could see there was no escape. "Fine ... I'll pay," he spat, forcing the words out like they tasted bitter.

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Reggie listened to Isabel recount it all with a long sigh, a hint of a smile softening his face. He reached out, tousling her hair.

"You're getting brave, Isa."

Her grin was quick and sharp. "He had it coming. No way was I letting him get off that easy."

Reggie's smile faded as he glanced back, as if he could see the café from there. A shadow passed over his face.

Isabel tilted her head, watching him. "Reg, don't tell me you're still holding out hope for him."

He shook his head, slow and sure. "I've finally seen him for what he is, Isa. He's no father. He just wants us to be tools he can use."

The understanding in his eyes gave Isabel a bit of peace, but the knot of worry in her stomach stayed tight.

"Reg, can I ask you something?"

"Go ahead."

Isabel's gaze dropped, and she was silent for a moment. Then, lifting her eyes, she looked at Reggie, her face serious.

"One day, if Colin finds out you're the one behind I.Z. Corporation, that you've made something of yourself ... if he asks you to come back, would you?"

Reggie met her eyes, his expression unreadable. He was quiet for a moment before glancing up at the sky, a soft smile crossing his face.

"If Mom's watching us from above, I think she wouldn't want us to go back."

Isabel looked up too, nodding in agreement. "Yeah."

After Reggie left, something suddenly crossed Isabel's mind.

Max was supposed to play Yvette's boyfriend tonight at her family's dinner. It had probably wrapped up by now.

She wondered how that whole thing had gone.

Just as she was about to dial Yvette, her phone rang.

It was Yvette, and the second Isabel answered, her friend's voice came through, dripping with frustration.

"Isabel! I'm furious! If I'd known, I'd have found a pig to play my boyfriend before asking Max!"

"What happened?" Isabel asked, surprised. "Did your parents figure it out?"