

# **The Double ( or More ?) Life of The Fake Heiress**

## **#Chapter 31 - Read The Double ( or More ?) Life of The Fake Heiress Chapter 31**

### **Chapter 31**

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Mirabella had to admit that her knowledge of James was rather thin, even after nearly a year of acquaintance. Their interactions were sparse, and she'd only just learned his name when he offered it up in conversation.

James cocked his head to the side, his eyebrow arching playfully at Mirabella. "Do | look the part to you?"

She gave him a once-over, a frank shake of her head her only reply. "Not really." No school would dare hire a teacher who gave off such a creepy vibe. It'd be like they didn't want their students to focus on their studies at all.

A faint smile played at the corners of James' lips as he admitted, "I'm definitely not a teacher." Figures.

Mirabella arched an eyebrow and glanced out the car window, her interest in prying further evidently waning. "Please, Just drop me off here. | can make it the rest of the way on my own."

Wyatt, who was in the driver's seat, slowed the car down at her request but didn't come to a stop until he caught James' nod in the rearview mirror.

"Sure thing." James murmured. Only then did Wyatt gently press the brake pedal. Mirabella swept a thoughtful gaze forward, muttered a brief thanks, and stepped out of the car.

It was a few moments before Wyatt quietly started up the car again, stealing another glance at Mirabella's retreating figure through the window. He leaned in, his voice low with curiosity. "James, is that Mirabella, the same girl you had us look into?"

"Mhm," James replied, his voice detached. His usual cool demeanor returned as he casually tapped his long fingers against his knee.

Wyatt appeared puzzled as he mused. "She's pretty, sure, but I don't see what's so special about her." He couldn't understand why his boss was so interested in an average high school girl. If the family got wind of it, it'd surely cause

a stir.

He was intense. He spoke with a hint of amusement in his voice. "Being attractive is a specialty in its own James' gaze

right."

Wyatt couldn't help but mutter. "There are plenty of beauties in Riverdale. High society ladies, no less, and I haven't seen you giving them a second glance."

"Superficial" James scoffed softly, his handsome face etched with disdain.. Wyatt sighed internally. Such double standards...

Shaking his head, Wyatt decided to steer the conversation away from Mirabella, his expression turning serious. "By the way, James, our contacts in the shadows say they can't find any trace of Clan. Could it be... that this person doesn't actually exist?"

After all, even their global information network, The Mirror, had come up empty. James' lips pursed slightly. "Do you think those drugs concocted from ancient secrets are also fake?"

A look of frustration crossed Wyatt's face. "But we've been searching for over a year..

"Then we'll search for another year," James replied, his tone light but unmistakably impatient. Wyatt glanced at the rearview mirror before giving a quiet acknowledgment, dropping the subject.

After her ride. Mirabella quickly found someone to point her to the guidance counselor's office. It didn't take her long to arrive at the doorway. She knocked and waited for a response before casually strolling in.

The office housed a solitary figure, a teacher in his forties hunched over some paperwork at his desk. Mirabella approached and succinctly explained her presence.

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Morgan, the guidance counselor, set down his pen, a look of surprise on his face. "You're the Mirabella from Elm Creek who aced the online exam?"

Mirabella adjusted her backpack strap with a nonchalant lift of her brows. "Unless someone's been taking exams in my name, that's me."

Morgan appraised the confident girl before him, thinking how kids from small towns were always so full of themselves. never knowing when to dial it back. He shook his head and said, "Hand over your acceptance letter, then."

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Arabela's eyes flickered with a hint of amusement as she replied, "The security guard just took my acceptance letter he front gate. He said he was bringing it to the guidance counselor's office to check the details. Didn't you get it,

Morgan furrowed his brow. "No, I've been in the office all morning and haven't seen any guard come by. But why on earth would you hand over something as important as your transfer notice to a security guard?"

Mobela's Matures darkened slightly, recalling how the guard by the gates had a strange look in his eyes when he

w her letter. She hadn't thought much of it at the time, but now it seemed like he had been walling for her, poised to snatch her nothication away.

be I Aber a brief pause, Mirabella asked point-blank, "What happens if | don't have the acceptance letter?"

"Wout that letter, you can't enroll at Parkside High School. If you don't have It, I'm afraid you'll have to look for another school Morgan replied, stating the school's policy.

Not even if the school has a record of it?" Morgan shook his head Aright then, | get it" Mirabella said, and without another word, she turned on her heel and left.

Morgan watched her quick departure, momentarily stunned. By the time he gathered his thoughts, she was already out the door. His mouth opened as if

to speak, but no words came out. 'Students too proud for their own good,' he thought.

The school is better off without them."

Minutes later. Anthony burst into the room, "Morgan, did a girl named Mirabella come in to report today?" He paused, men added. "She's a senior transfer student."

Seeing the urgency in the principal's demeanor, Morgan didn't conceal the truth. "She did come, but she just left."

Anthony relaxed slightly, assuming she had already been directed to her classroom. "As long as she's reported in, thats fine. Ive got other things to handle, so I'll be off."

Confused by Anthony's hasty entrance and exit. Morgan caught the tail end of his assumption and quickly corrected him. "No. Sir, Mirabella did come but left because she didn't have her acceptance letter."

At this. Anthony wheeled around. "What did you say? She left? How could you let her go?"

Morgan, unsure why Anthony was so concerned about a transfer student, hesitated but recounted the earlier conversation, including the incident with the security guard. Anthony stamped his foot, frustrated, "Morgan, sometimes you're too by-the—book. Do you have any idea who she is to the principal... Never mind. | need to go find her."

As Morgan watched Anthony rush off again, the unfinished sentence echoed in his ears. What relation did she have to the principal? Was she a relative, perhaps? Was this so-called transfer student, not a top scorer but rather the principal's kin?

The more Morgan thought about it, the more convinced he became that he was right-no wonder the girl was so haughty and Anthony so anxious.

Morgan's opinion of Mirabella plummeted. He despised these backdoor enrollees!

Leaving the guidance counselor's office, Mirabella didn't bother heading to the school entrance to confront the security guard. He had deliberately taken her

transfer letter. Even if she had found him now, the document might've already been destroyed, and he could have denied everything, leaving her with no recourse.

Hence, Mirabella decided to head straight to the principal's office.

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When Mirabella arrived at the principal's office, she found the door closed, and knocking yielded no response. It seemed no one was inside.

With a sigh of frustration, Mirabella muttered to herself, "High school sure is a hassle." The nostalgia of her carefree days before school suddenly hit her.

As she turned to leave, a bit downcast, she was intercepted by a female teacher whose face darkened at the sight of her. The teacher's voice was sharp as she asked, "Young lady, classes are about to start. Why are you still wandering around here?"

Mirabella stopped in her tracks, batting her eyes innocently. "Ma'am, I'm new here. I just transferred. I'm not sure which class I'm in, so I thought I'd ask."

The teacher's expression softened slightly. "You should head to the guidance counselor's office, not here. The principal is very busy and doesn't handle these matters."

With that, the teacher hurried into the principal's office without even knocking, just swiping her ID badge to get in.

A moment later, she emerged, clutching a manila folder, and looked surprised to see Mirabella still there. "Why are you still standing around? Didn't I tell you to go to the guidance counselor's office?"

"I..." Mirabella began. "Never mind, follow me. I'll take you there on my way," the teacher said with a shake of her head, striding ahead.

And so, Mirabella was escorted back to the guidance counselor's office.

"Morgan, look up which class this transfer student is assigned to. She needs to get to class soon. Don't keep her waiting." the teacher told the counselor before rushing off without waiting for a response.

Morgan and Mirabella remained in the office, staring wide-eyed at one another. Morgan was not thrilled to see this student who seemingly had an inside track, but recalling Anthony's attitude earlier, he managed to suppress his annoyance. He picked up the phone with a stony face and dialed a number.

Mirabella

la watched Morgan, who seemed to radiate an "I really don't like you' vibe, and was puzzled. He seemed alright when she first came in, so what changed so quickly?

Did Parkside High School teachers specialize in quick attitude changes?

After Morgan hung up the phone, he sat down and said icily, "Just stand over there and wait." He didn't even glance at Mirabella. It wasn't long before Anthony hurried back, his gaze landing firmly on Mirabella as if he had finally exhaled in relief. "Welcome to Parkside High School Mirabella," Anthony greeted her warmly.

Mirabella nodded politely, the picture of good manners, but after a brief pause, she appeared troubled. "A security officer took my acceptance letter. Can I still enroll?"

Anthony quickly reassured her, "No problem at all. The acceptance letter is just a formality. It won't affect your enrollment. I'll have someone inquire with security about it."

Catching Morgan's eye. Mirabella sighed and responded obediently, "That's good to hear." Feeling as if Mirabella's glance had metaphorically slapped him, Morgan didn't know what to say.

Anthony, oblivious to the tension between Morgan and Mirabella, turned to Morgan and said, "I'm placing Mirabella in your class. Make sure you take good care of her for me, okay?"

Morgan's face went through a series of expressions!

## **Chapter 34**

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Anthony was at his wit's end. To think that he had to shoehorn this haughty new student into Morgan's Prodigy Class Was he out of his mind?

The Prodigy Class was the *crème de la crème* of Parkside High School and the senior year was the most critical # word got out that someone had pulled strings to get in, there would be an uproar among the pareres

Faced with this dilemma, Morgan didn't care about sparing Anthony's feelings. He fan—out refused on the spot. "Look why don't you place Mirabella in another class? The Prodigy Class is at full capacity, we can't squeeze in another without affecting the current students." Morgan said with a tone of finality.

Anthony glanced at Mirabella, feeling the awkwardness of the situation. This transfer student was someone the principal had personally persuaded to come over.

Clearing his throat, Anthony asked Mirabella, "Could you please wait here for a moment?" He then shot Morgan a meaningful look and stepped outside the office.

Morgan, frowning, followed him out. "Morgan, you—"

Before Anthony could finish his plea, Morgan cut him off. "Sir, I get what you're trying to say. The Prodigy Class is tull of top-tier students, the pride and joy of our school. We don't need someone else dragging us down."

Anthony paused, taken aback. "No, Morgan, you don't understand—"

"Enough. Don't bother. I won't accept the transfer student."

Anthony's patience was wearing thin. "For the last time, are you sure you won't take her?"

"No way!"

Anthony chuckled out of frustration. "Well, don't come crying to me later!"

Morgan's brow twitched at the remark, but he scoffed in return, "I won't!"

"Fine then." Anthony took a deep breath, resigning himself to the situation.

At that moment, Annette, the teacher who had escorted Mirabella to the office, noticed the tension and asked with a hint of

suspicion, "What's going on here?"

With his irritation peaking. Anthony turned to Annette. "How about it? I've got a transfer student for you. Interested?" Annette, caught off-guard by Anthony's sudden offer, blinked in confusion before collecting her thoughts. "A transfer student? Could it be the one you mentioned at the meeting the other day, the one who aced the online exam?" "That's the one!" Anthony's eyes gleamed with determination. Without waiting for Annette's opinion, he made the decision. "That settles it. Mirabella is now part of your experimental class. She's in the office right now. Miss Annette. please take her to your class."

Parkside High, like other prestigious schools, had a hierarchy of classes. The Prodigy Class was the elite of the elite, followed by The Advanced Class, and finally, the regular classes, which still boasted above-average grades compared to other schools' top classes.

The principal had initially intended for Mirabella to join the Prodigy Class. However, with Morgan's staunch refusal Anthony had no choice but to place her in The Advanced Class. It wasn't the best class but was still better than the regular ones.

Annette, now saddled with the unexpected responsibility of a new student, was still a bit dazed. She felt a twinge of apprehension when she saw Morgan visibly relax next to her.

No data found.

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Was there something off about the new kid?

Annette mulled over this as she opened her mouth to say, "Sir, I'lls..

Anthony raised his hand with a flicker of impatience, "I have VIP guests inday, | need to head over there With that Anthony was gone.

Annette watched Anthony's retreating figure before turning back to Morgan. "Morgan, was the director planning of putting the new kid in your Prodigy Class?"



There was a bit of a rivalry between Morgan and Annette, with one running the Prodigy Class and the other overseeing The Advanced Class. Although there was a clear gap in their performance, Morgan still worried about a dark horse from the experimental group outshining his Prodigy Class,

Clearing his throat, Morgan replied, “Yes, but I refused. After all, the Prodigy Class isn't just for anyone,

Annette detected a hint of mockery in Morgan’s victorious tone but kept her cool, smiling as she asked, “What do you mean by that, Morgan? Didn’t the new kid ace her entrance exams with perfect scores?”

Morgan merely shrugged, “I don’t know, don’t ask me. Whether she had full marks or is top notch, she’s in your class

now.’

Annette’s expression shifted as she caught on to the subtext. This ‘perfect scoring’ new kid might not be so perfect after all. The perfect scores were likely just a smokescreen. No wonder Morgan looked like he was enjoying someone else’s misfortune.

There was no turning back now. Taking a deep breath, Annette turned and entered the office.

Seeing Mirabella, Annette paused. The new kid was the same one she had brought here after collecting some documents from the principal's office. She had been so preoccupied at the time that she didn’t realize... the new student would end up in her class.

Mixed emotions swirled within Annette. She coughed lightly and said, “Mirabella, you’re in Class 3 now. I’m your homeroom teacher, Annette. Come with me. Let’s get to the class.” Her tone was neither bad nor particularly friendly. Unfortunately, Mirabella, who had been waiting in the office, had overheard the entire conversation outside. Anyone being forced into a class as the ‘problematic’ new kid would feel unwelcome. Mirabella understood Annette’s lukewarm attitude and simply responded obediently, “Okay.”

Annette couldn't help but take another look at Mirabella. The girl was pretty, humble, and docile. Humans are visual creatures. Even in a bad mood, beauty could lift the spirits. Annette was no exception.

She remembered that Mirabella hailed from a small, somewhat remote town. They say kids from the countryside mature faster and are more sensible, which explained Mirabella’s docility. Well, for the sake of her obedience, Annette was willing to overlook even the worst grades.

Before long. Annette led Mirabella into the classroom. The normally buzzing room fell silent at Annette's entrance. Annette was strict and often wore a stern expression, earning her the nickname "The Iron Lady" among the students. Many of whom feared her.

Pleased with the discipline of her students, Annette cleared her throat and gestured to Mirabella, announcing. "This is a new student who has transferred from another school. Let's all make sure to help her settle in."

She tactfully omitted the fact that Mirabella was from a small town.

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Chapter 36 Then, Annette asked Mirabella to introduce herself to the class.

Standing before dozens of pairs of eyes, Mirabella was the picture of cool composure, not a hint of panic in her stance. She turned around, grabbed a marker from the tray, and began to scribe her name 'Mirabella' on the whiteboard in swift, confident strokes,

Her handwriting was beautiful, a rarity of the perfect script that seemed to carry an air of elegance, reflecting the cool aura that surrounded her,

"Wow, the new girl is drop—dead gorgeous and has stunning penmanship. Talk about a double whammy." "My heart's racing all of a sudden." "With those looks and that vibe, I've made up my mind—she's my new crush!"

Annette heard the students' murmurs and her face darkened in an instant. She let out a pointed cough, and just like that the buzzing classroom fell silent,

Quickly, she directed Mirabella to take a seat by the window on the far right, at the last empty desk. After a few words about the importance of diligence in studies, she let the students start on some quiet reading before leaving the classroom.

As soon as Annette exited, the room, once silent as church mice, erupted once again with chatter, mostly centered around the newcomer, Mirabella.

"Hey, new kid. I'm Jenna. We're desk buddies now. If you've got any questions, just shoot!" Jenna said with a friendly smile, her cute face and delicate features making her look like a kind-hearted pixie.

Mirabella turned her head to look at Jenna and coolly raised an eyebrow. "Mind if I take a look at your chemistry textbook, cutie?"

Jenna stared at Mirabella, her cheeks blushing a deep crimson at that pet name 'cutie.' Realizing her own fluster, she quickly covered her face with her

hands, thinking. “Oh my gosh, the new girl is such a flirt—my poor little heart can’t handle it.”

Mirabella, who just wanted to borrow a textbook, was puzzled.

Finally calming her racing heart, Jenna remembered Mirabella had asked for her book and hurriedly handed over her chemistry textbook. “Here you go.”

“Thanks,” Mirabella responded with a light smile.

Once again, Jenna felt her heartstrings tugged, and after a moment, she managed to stammer out a shy. “You’re welcome.” Mirabella offered Jenna another semi-smile and then returned to the textbook in her hands.

Jenna swallowed hard, thinking how lucky she was to share a desk with someone so beautiful and cool. Yet, seeing how

studious the new girl appeared made Jenna feel ashamed of her casual approach to learning. With that thought, Jenna subconsciously reached for a book of her own.

Rumors traveled fast, and by the end of the morning, nearly the entire senior class knew about the stunningly attractive girl who had transferred into The Advanced Class Three. Curiosity had led many students to sneak peeks at Mirabella during their breaks. After laying eyes on her, students returned to their classrooms, buzzing with talk about the beautiful transfer student. So, before long, word reached Summer in the Prodigy Class.

Summer, with her above—average grades and upper—middle ranking in the Prodigy Class, was unsettled by the stir Mirabella had caused in just one morning across the senior year.

Before Mirabella’s arrival, Summer had enjoyed the status of the undisputed campus queen, especially after her surge in popularity from the Superstar Camp.

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“Hey, Summer, check out this pic. Summer’s desk—mate and self-appointed sidekick, Madeline, thrust her phone into Summer’s line of sight. The girl on the screen was the talk of the town, Mirabella.

“This is the new girl in The Advanced Class. Pretty hot, huh?” Madeline couldn’t help but add a bit of gossip to her observation.

Summer's gaze landed on the phone. Even though it was only a profile shot of Mirabella and the picture was a tad blurry, it was clear that she shone like a lone star in the sky of the ordinary.

Ashadow flickered across Summer's eyes for a moment. From the first day she laid eyes on Mirabella, she knew that face would turn heads-it was just happening sooner than she'd expected.

She couldn't wrap her head around why Mirabella was nothing like she'd anticipated. She was supposed to be shy, insecure, and a bit of a drama queen!

Summer let her eyes drop, tucking away her questions. Lifting her head, she kept any sign of unhappiness from her face and replied in her usual soft voice, "Yeah, she's pretty."

Upon hearing this, Madeline suddenly realized her faux pas. How could she praise another girl in front of their own queen, Summer? Wasn't that like an insult?

With that thought, Madeline hastily pocketed her phone, face down on the desk, and chuckled, "I mean, come on, no one's got anything on you, Summer. You're the undisputed queen bee of this school. Some country bumpkin transfer doesn't stand a chance."

Summer's eyes flickered down, and she gently chided, "Madeline, don't talk like that. Even if Mirabella comes from some small town, she's truly got the looks."

"Mirabella? You know the new girl?" Madeline perked up like she'd stumbled upon a major scoop.

Summer covered her mouth, seeming annoyed at her slip of the tongue. After a moment, she murmured, "Sort of. She's, uh, the foster daughter of the Gilbert family."

Madeline's eyes widened. "So she's the one who's been living it up with your identity all these years?" The tale of the school's beauty with a bizarre background was well-known around campus.

"Shh, Madeline, keep it down. It wouldn't be good if others overheard," Summer said, irritated.

Madeline pouted, "There's nothing wrong with people knowing the truth. She's been living the high life as a fake heiress for years while you've been stuck in some poor household... | take back my compliment!"

Summer's gaze softened, her lips curving into a sardonic smile, but she quickly patted Madeline on the shoulder and said, "You absolutely can't tell anyone about this. I mean, Mirabella is Innocent in this, too."

"Innocent? What about you?" Madeline scoffed, dismissing Summer's earlier plea. "You're just too kind-hearted, Summer. Just don't let yourself get walked all over and not even realize it!"

"That won't happen. Mirabella's not like that," Summer continued to defend her.

"Well if I catch her slipping up, I won't let her off easy." Madeline said icily.

Summer just smiled and let the conversation drop.

Before Mirabella left school in the afternoon, Annette called her into the office to complete her enrollment papers and handed her a temporary student ID. As she gave Mirabella the ID, Annette remembered Anthony's notice.

## Chapter 38

### Chapter 38

"Hey, Mirabella, the director asked me to let you know that they've retrieved your acceptance letter from the security guard. Poor guy had a stomach upset and left his phone behind, so that's why the morning was such a mess. Don't sweat it okay?"

Annette relayed Anthony's message straight to the point. Mirabella pondered for a moment before responding softly, "Got It, Ms. Annette."

Noticing how well-behaved Mirabella was, Annette couldn't help but give her some advice, "I know you're new around here, and Parkside High School's teaching methods might be different from what you're used to back in your hometown. Senior year is crucial so if there's anything you don't understand, you must ask your teachers. Alright?"

Mirabella, facing Annette's "I-know-you're-struggling—but-I-want-to-help" expression, just curled her lips into a confident smile and gave a playful wink. "Ms. Annette, you could stand to have a little more faith in me."

Annette was momentarily bemused by Mirabella's smile, and by the time she snapped back to reality, Mirabella had already walked away.

This student... maybe she isn't as hopeless as Morgan made her out to be.

As soon as Mirabella stepped out of the school gates, her phone buzzed in her pocket. She pulled it out to see an unknown number calling. At that

moment, a series of car horns sounded nearby. She looked up to see a familiar black sedan. Raising an eyebrow. Mirabella chose not to answer the call. Instead, she walked slowly toward the car.

The car window rolled down to reveal the face she had seen that morning. “Need a lift?” “Are you offering to buy me dinner?” Mirabella teased, not moving an inch or asking if he had been waiting for her.

James sat inside the car, a soft smile playing across his lips, softening his usually stern features. “I don’t see why not.” After a moment’s thought, Mirabella opened the rear door and said, “Sure, but I have to head home after. Don’t want to worry the folks.” Once settled in the car, she quickly texted Delilah.

“Playing the good girl now?” James started the engine and glanced at Mirabella with disbelief, as if the rebellious girl-next-door he remembered was just an illusion.

Turning to face him, Mirabella’s response was coy, “When have I ever been anything but?”

James chuckled and shook his head, deciding against mentioning her past midnight escapades. Bringing that up might just earn him an accusation of snooping.

Before long, they pulled up in front of a quaint bistro in the city. The place had a certain charm to it. They entered the private dining room. Mirabella tossed her backpack onto a chair and, without ceremony, grabbed the menu. She quickly picked out a few of her favorites before remembering her host was also waiting to order.

James added a couple of dishes and then dismissed the waiter, leaving them alone in the room.

Mirabella fiddled with her phone, casually asking. “How’d you get my number, anyway?” She was sure she hadn’t given it to him.

Pouring himself a cup of coffee with deliberate slowness, James watched the steam rise and vanish into the air before answering, “Your grandma asked me to look out for you.”

At this, Mirabella looked up, her expression a mix of surprise and curiosity, clearly not expecting such a revelation from him.

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Chapter 39 James cradled the coffee mug in his hands, taking a sip with a refined air. "After you left, your grandmother had quite a bit to share with me."

Mirabella thought of Catherine, who rose at the crack of dawn to cook breakfast and silently waited at the doorstep each evening with a warm smile playing at the edges of her lips. "How is Granny doing?"

"She's managing, I guess. Though she's not quite as spirited as she used to be. Probably misses you and needs someone to brighten her mood." James spoke gently.

Mirabella's eyes tell slightly, a momentary silence enveloping her. On the day Mirabella left Elm Creek, she hadn't aited for her grandmother's return from the hospital because she feared the parting would be too sorrowful.

Catching her expression, James added. "But your foster mother brought her over here. If you want to see her, you can do so anytime."

With a soft hum, Mirabella acknowledged the information. She was aware that Mandy had brought her granny over, so it wasn't a surprise. However, Mirabella looked at James with a complicated gaze and asked, "How come you know so much?"

Back in Elm Creek, when James lived next door, he rarely mingled with them, and Mirabella didn't recall her granny mentioning him.

James arched an eyebrow and deflected, "I also know where your grandmother is staying now."

At his words, Mirabella's response was tinged with mock amusement, "With all this knowledge, you wouldn't happen to be a bodyguard my foster mother hired, would you?"

The smirk on James lips twitched at the idea. A bodyguard? Him? It took him a moment to coolly reply. "You certainly have an active imagination."

"Thanks for the compliment," Mirabella replied airily, pausing before adding with a hint of disdain, "But honestly, I can't imagine my foster mother being generous enough to hire a bodyguard."

James snorted softly.

Just then, the waiter arrived with their meals. Once the dishes were served and they were alone again, James seemed to recall something and inquired. "Were you stopped outside Parkside High School this morning because the security took your acceptance letter?"

“You know about that too?” Mirabella shot him another glance. James smiled. “Overheard by chance.” Mirabella rolled her eyes and speared a piece of steak, murmuring. “You've got some sharp ears then.”

Languidly leaning back in his seat, James forwent his utensils and remarked cryptically. “Seems like your school switch isn't going as smoothly as you'd hoped.”

Her hand paused, and the memory of Mandy's call the previous evening caused a scoff to skim across her lips, “Just a bit of skullduggery.”

“Need a hand?” James offered with a hint of mischief. Without looking up. Mirabella mumbled through a mouthful “No, thanks.”

After dinner, with the bill settled, James asked. “Want me to drop you off to see your grandmother?”

Mirabella considered it briefly before shaking her head. “Not tonight, it's late. Maybe some other time.” James didn't press, simply saying. “I'll send you the address later.” Chapter 39

When Mirabella returned to the Davis household around eight, she immediately sensed an odd tension in the air. Shawn and Delilah were sitting in the living room in solemn silence, the TV off, their expressions unusually grave.

Mirabella was puzzled for a moment, then called out, “Dad, Mom, I'm home.”

Delilah rose from the couch, approaching Mirabella. There was a strained smile on her face, betraying an underlying concern, “How was your first day back at school? Is everything okay? Will you have any issues getting used to it?”

“It was fine,” Mirabella responded casually, pausing before she probed further, “Is there something on your mind your wanted to talk about?”

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Delilah cleared her throat, a hint of awkwardness in her voice. “Oh, it's nothing much, honey. I was just curious about who you had dinner with tonight. Was it a classmate of yours?”

So that was it. Mirabella shook her head. “Nope, not a classmate.” “Boy or girl?” Delilah prodded gently, her curiosity getting the better of her.



Looking straight into her mother's eyes with disarming clarity, Mirabella responded calmly and patiently. "A guy. He used to be my neighbor. I helped him out a while back, and we bumped into each other today, so he treated me to dinner."

Meeting her daughter's honest gaze, Delilah felt a twinge of shame for the unsavory suspicions that had flitted through her mind. She touched the tip of her nose self-consciously, and decided not to pry further, her tone softening as she spoke, "I see, sweetheart. I'm sorry for being a nag. I just worry about you being out late, you know. It's not always safe for a young woman."

Mirabella wasn't entirely sure what Delilah meant, but she had an inkling and replied obediently, "I understand."

Hearing the obedient tone, Delilah felt a new wave of guilt and quickly changed the subject. "You must be tired after a long day of classes. Go on up to your room, take a nice shower, and get some rest."

"Oh, and I warmed up some milk for you. Be sure to take it up and drink it before bed." Saying this, Delilah hurried into the kitchen, fetched the warm milk from the stove, and handed it to Mirabella.

"Thanks, Mom," Mirabella said, taking the milk and heading upstairs. Delilah let out a heavy sigh only after her daughter's silhouette had disappeared at the top of the stairs.

Upon returning to the living room and settling beside her husband, Delilah confessed with guilt, "I'm just not cut out for this mothering thing, am I? How could I doubt my own daughter's character?"

Shawn patted her hand reassuringly. "I've told you before that we need to trust our girl more and not jump to conclusions at the drop of a hat."

Delilah shot him an irritated glance. "It's all Emmitt's fault! He called today, stirring the pot about Mira's friends. It got me all worked up... Never mind, I'm going to give Emmitt a piece of my mind and ask why he's being so critical of his sister!"

Seeing his wife fired up, Shawn shook his head in resignation and gently stopped her before she could dial the number. "Emmitt and Mira have had a rocky relationship since they've met. Do you really want to make things worse with an accusatory call?"

Delilah paused, reconsidering, and tossed her phone aside, her frustration evident. "This is a tough nut to crack."

"I don't think it's that serious. Mira's only been back a few days. They need time to get to know each other. Let's just take it slow," Shawn offered, the voice of reason contrasting Delilah's anxious musings.

Delilah sighed deeply and slumped back on the couch. After a moment of silence, she perked up again, "I almost forgot! Summer gets along well with Emmitt. Maybe she can help bridge the gap between them."

Shawn glanced at her skeptically. "Aren't you forgetting that Summer is the very reason Emmitt and Mira had that misunderstanding in the first place?"

"Of course, I haven't forgotten." Delilah shot back, "but Summer's got a sweet disposition, and she's studying at Parkside High, too. If she spends more time with Mira, wouldn't that naturally smooth things over?"

As a seasoned mother, Delilah felt her heart was in a constant state of worry."