

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted Chapter 2466 – Ricky's father held a significant position, and many branches of the Graham family were deeply entrenched in politics. Once such a family was exposed, the fallout would be uncontrollable.

Ricky's past transgressions, including fighting, drunk driving, gambling, and mistreatment of women, were unveiled one by one. The victims began to emerge online, accusing the Graham family. Ultimately, the Graham family could no longer contain the scandal, and it erupted into public view.

Grace also played a crucial role. She swiftly released a statement through the company's account, clarifying that Joe was not driving on the night of the accident. She attached a series of evidence, including an official report stating that Joe had no criminal record.

"So Joe was made the scapegoat for this gentleman?" someone speculated online.

"I knew we should let the truth emerge slowly," another replied.

"It's strange how the car accident solely targeted Joe. It seems there are people stirring the pot behind the scenes."

"Don't try to absolve him. Even if Ricky is the main culprit, Joe isn't necessarily innocent. If they're involved together, who's really more righteous? And hasn't Joe's school confirmed his cheating in the exams?"

"Joe's school hasn't officially announced anything, right?"

"The rumors are rampant in their school. If it doesn't come out today, it will tomorrow. It's just a matter of time. Ricky and Joe are cut from the same cloth."

"Let's not confuse the issues. One involves a crime, the other is a moral failing. How can they be the same? Hurry up and find out the truth to deliver justice to the victim!"

...

Darcie set her phone aside, frowning slightly as she muttered, "So it's the Graham family. No wonder..."

Aubrey handed her a cup of water and asked softly, "Ma'am, now that Joe's situation has been clarified, will our plan fail?"

"It won't fail," Darcie replied calmly, flipping the tea leaves in her cup. "Grace loves Joe deeply and would never let him carry such a stain. Just wait; she will reach out to me."

As Darcie predicted, Grace contacted her that afternoon and invited her out for a meal with Dean Lavoie to discuss the situation.

The dinner was scheduled for the next day, and Grace picked Darcie up to attend.

During the drive, Grace appeared anxious, her brow furrowed. Darcie tried to reassure her, "The school only took action against Joe because of the intense public pressure. Now that the truth is coming out and it's clear he was caught in someone else's crossfire, the school will handle this carefully. Don't worry too much."

Grace seemed slightly relieved. After a moment, she added, "Thank goodness you know Dean Lavoie. Otherwise, I wouldn't know who to turn to for help. Mrs. Saun, about that previous matter..."

Darcie interrupted her, "That issue was due to my own mismanagement. Grace, you were willing to set aside the past and collaborate with Caline, which was a great honor for me. Who assists you doesn't matter as much as the end result and Caline's performance."

Grace, moved by Darcie's words, took her hand and said quietly, "If we can resolve this matter smoothly, I'll be forever grateful. If you ever need help in the future, just ask, and I'll do my utmost."

Darcie smiled and patted her hand. "You're too kind, Grace. I'm just glad to be of assistance."

During the dinner, the conversation flowed smoothly, especially with Darcie's involvement. Dean Lavoie assured them he would contact the invigilator from Joe's exam and the student who sat next to him to verify that Joe hadn't cheated. If no evidence of cheating was found, Joe would be exonerated.

Grace handed a thick brown envelope to Dean Lavoie. "I must trouble you to handle this, Dean Lavoie. This is just a small token, please accept it."

Dean Lavoie smiled and replied, "You're too polite, Grace. Mrs. Saun and I have a friendly relationship. Since she brought you to me, it's only natural for friends to help each other." He then pushed the envelope back to her, "No need for such formalities."

Grace looked at Darcie, who softly remarked, "There's no need for this between family, Dean Lavoie."

Grace retrieved the envelope and thanked him once more.

After dinner, as Darcie was sending Grace off, Dean Lavoie approached her quietly, "Mrs. Saun, I followed your instructions. About our previous arrangement..."

"Don't worry," Darcie reassured him with a smile, "I won't go back on my word."

"Then I'll handle it quickly to avoid any complications."

"Thank you for your effort." Darcie nodded and signaled Aubrey with her eyes. Aubrey understood and escorted Dean Lavoie out.

In truth, the investigation into Joe's alleged cheating hadn't reached a conclusive result due to the overwhelming public opinion. The school was cautious not to let the investigation be swayed by the court of public opinion, knowing that an incorrect conclusion could lead to a severe backlash.

Under pressure from higher-ups, Dean Lavoie had avoided Grace for several days. He was eager to resolve the issue quickly, especially since there was no concrete evidence against Joe.

Just as Dean Lavoie was about to declare Joe's innocence, the police unexpectedly arrived at the school.

The Esper family had reported Joe's "cheating" to the authorities.

When Dean Lavoie received the call from his superior, he panicked. He initially thought of contacting Darcie but then remembered her previous assurances. Steeling himself, he called Grace instead.

As soon as she answered, Dean Lavoie asked, "Mrs. Esper, didn't I inform you yesterday that Joe's situation was being handled? Why involve the police?"

Grace was surprised, "The police? I didn't call the police."

"You didn't?" Dean Lavoie was puzzled.

"No, Dean Lavoie. You said evidence was found to clear Joe of cheating, right? Can you proceed? I've been waiting for your update."

Dean Lavoie was confused, "So your family didn't call the police?"

"I need to check on that," Grace hesitated. "But involving the police shouldn't affect your handling of the matter, right?"

"Not directly, but it complicates things. Schools are particularly sensitive about their reputation. They worry that the official findings won't be publicized quickly, and rumors could spread, causing harm."

Grace countered, “Dean Lavoie, if the police conduct a thorough investigation, it could not only clear Joe’s name but also enhance the school’s reputation for its vigilance. Why would that have a negative impact?”

Dean Lavoie coughed lightly, “I was just considering the worst-case scenario.”

“Dean Lavoie,” Grace said firmly, “I think you should focus on the investigation. Clearing my son’s name will make you and Mrs. Saun heroes to our family.”

“You’re too kind, Mrs. Esper. Rest assured, since I promised Mrs. Saun I would help, I won’t break my word. My concern is that I told her this could be resolved in one day. With the police involved, it might take longer, perhaps two days. Mrs. Saun rarely asks for favors, and I assured her. If there’s a delay, she might worry I’m not sincere in helping her friend.”

“That’s unlikely,” Grace reassured him. “As long as my son is exonerated, the timing doesn’t matter.”

Dean Lavoie sighed, “Even so, I fear Mrs. Saun might overthink it and come to you with concerns.”

“In that case, I’ll assure her you’re handling everything and keep it brief.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Dean Lavoie agreed, “That sounds reasonable. I’ll provide you with results as soon as possible.”

“Thank you, Dean Lavoie.”

After ending the call, Joe, who had been listening, gave his mother a thumbs up. “Mom, you really know how to smooth things over.”

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted Chapter 2467 – Grace’s eyelids twitched as she slapped Joe’s hand away, “Stop it! Don’t tease your mother like that.”

Joe smiled and tried to massage Grace’s shoulders, but she pushed him back. “Sit down and stay still! You’re restless even when you’re hurt!”

After a moment, she asked, “Joe, why didn’t you tell me you called the police? And why didn’t you let me inform Dean Lavoie? What are you planning?”

Joe replied, “Mom, if the school wants to handle this quickly without causing a fuss, they won’t give us time to use our connections. And even if they did, who would risk taking responsibility for something that could damage the school’s reputation?”

Grace was taken aback, “What are you getting at? Are you saying the school isn’t serious about dealing with this?”

Joe said, “Mom, you and Dad worked hard and spent a lot to get me into this school because of its great reputation and strong school spirit. They’ve dealt with all sorts of challenges over the years. Do you think the school would panic and rush to deal with this situation just because of a little public pressure?”

Grace responded, “Times have changed. News spreads quickly now, and if they don’t handle this properly, it could hurt their reputation. So, they’ll be careful. They won’t just blame me without solid proof. They need to investigate thoroughly to protect the school’s reputation.”

Joe paused and then asked, “Mom, if you were in charge of the school, what would be more damaging—me not cheating or me actually cheating?”

Grace frowned, “Of course, if I had cheated, it would reflect poorly on the students and the school. It would suggest that the school doesn’t maintain a good examination environment, has poor supervision, and offers mediocre teaching. I wouldn’t want you to go to a school like that.”

Joe gently patted her arm, “Exactly! Even if I did cheat, the school would want to cover it up to protect its image. Why are they so quick to push me out? If they were serious about saving their reputation, they wouldn’t rush to blame me.”

Grace suddenly realized, “You’re making sense.”

Joe continued, “It’s not just making sense—it’s the truth! The school could easily clear this up with a simple post on Facebook, but they haven’t. That means they’re still investigating and figuring out how to handle it. They wouldn’t tell us they’re invalidating my grades before making a decision.”

Grace’s expression turned serious as she looked at Joe. “You didn’t come up with this plan on your own. Who put this idea in your head?”

Joe was a bit irritated, “Why can’t I think of this myself?”

Grace replied, “Come on, I know you too well. No one taught you to be this crafty.”

Joe was speechless for a moment.

“Just treat me like your own child!” Joe muttered, then admitted, “My mentor gave me the idea. He said that trying to prove myself would only trap me. No matter what evidence I present, people will always question it. Instead, I should let those accusing me prove their case. If they can’t, I could sue them for defamation.”

Grace asked, “Who is this mentor?”

Joe replied, “He doesn’t want me mentioning his name, especially in situations like this.”

Grace snorted, “I can guess even if you don’t tell me. It’s that guy from the Kane family, isn’t it?”

Joe nodded quickly, “Yes, Mom, he’s really sharp. He talks the talk, but he backs it up with action. I used to think my brother was impressive, but next to him, my brother seems like a beginner.”

Grace wanted to smack Joe on the head but, noticing the bandage, opted to kick him lightly instead. “You ungrateful brat! Your brother has done so much for you!”

Joe brushed off his pants and said, “My brother’s the closest to me, but my mentor is still the most amazing.” Joe had deep admiration for Keegan. Grace felt a pang of jealousy but relaxed when she remembered it was Keegan.

Keegan, raised by the old lady of the Kane family, was indeed exceptional. The two families didn’t interact much, mainly because their businesses didn’t overlap, but Joe’s major was closely related to Rivera’s industry, and Keegan was a top expert in that field. It was naturally beneficial for Joe to be in contact with him.

However, Grace doubted Keegan would help their family without a reason. She suspected he was trying to get information about Darcie for his girlfriend. Grace didn’t want to get involved in that mess, but she felt obliged to return the favor. Keegan hadn’t asked for anything yet, which made Grace uneasy.

Grace asked, “So when you asked me to hint to Dean Lavoie not to tell Darcie about our call to the police, was that also your mentor’s idea?”

Joe nodded, “Yes, he said that since someone else came forward to help us, we shouldn’t make it seem like we don’t trust her. Let her believe we acted because of her help, so she doesn’t feel embarrassed.”

Grace’s eyes twitched.

Embarrassed? Darcie wouldn’t be embarrassed.

Was Joe’s mentor trying to make Darcie think she helped a lot, making her feel like we owe her a favor? What kind of strategy is this?

“Mom, we should keep our distance from Darcie in the future. Her smile always seems fake. When you had dinner with her, a childhood friend of mine saw you and asked why you were dining with her. I didn’t get it at the time, but later I found out that Aubrey, Darcie’s assistant, is related to Dean Lavoie—either his sister or cousin is Dean Lavoie’s wife. Darcie must be very close to Dean Lavoie. If she wanted to, she could easily ask him for help. But when she talked about all the connections she supposedly used, it didn’t feel sincere. Even if we knew Dean Lavoie was her relative, would we be ungrateful and ignore her efforts? Darcie is too fake. I don’t like her.”

After Joe finished speaking, Grace remained silent for a long time. When Joe turned to look at her, he noticed her face had darkened.

Joe's smile faded, and he quietly asked, "Mom, what's wrong?"

Grace pursed her lips, "You said Aubrey, her assistant, is related to Dean Lavoie?"

"My childhood friend mentioned it. His girlfriend is in the same courtyard as me. He visits her often, so I've run into him a few times. If he hadn't told me yesterday, I wouldn't have known."

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted Chapter 2468 – Grace's face turned pale as she thought everything over again. The more she considered it, the more she realized how perfectly timed Darcie's appearance was. If she had doubted things even a day earlier or later, she would have missed the opportunity to "help" at just the right moment. When she was feeling lost, her judgment wasn't clear, and she'd naturally accept any help offered.

But who is Darcie, really?

Darcie is the type who can treat a beggar like her own father if it benefits her, but she'll deny her real father if it doesn't. There's no way someone like her would act without a plan.

Unless... Darcie had been scheming from the start.

But why? Suddenly, Grace remembered the vote in the finals. Could Darcie have been after that all along?

Realizing this, Grace was furious. How dare this two-faced hypocrite use her like that!

Joe noticed Grace deep in thought, frowning and clenching her teeth. Worried, he asked, "Mom, are you okay?"

Grace suppressed her anger and replied, "It's nothing. Just thinking about something disgusting."

Joe, still young and innocent, didn't dwell on it. "Don't worry, Mom. I didn't cheat. The police are on our side now, so we don't have to beg for help. Just go to work as usual and don't worry about me."

Grace's expression softened. "As long as you're okay, I'm not afraid of anything. Your dad and brother handle the company. My job is to protect you."

Joe thought about something his dad had told him. "I have great parents. They're my armor and courage. I just need to keep moving forward."

Before, he hadn't really understood those words, but after all this, Joe realized how lucky he was to have parents who always believed in him.

He hugged Grace tightly. "Mom, when I get better, I'll cook your favorite boiled fish. I learned from a great chef. You'll love it. Come home and taste my cooking."

Grace smiled, her eyes crinkling with joy. She took out her phone and started recording a video. "Say that to the camera, so my friends can see it. They say raising a son isn't as good as raising a daughter? Go learn to crochet and make me a scarf, then let's see if your aunt will still show off!"

Joe was speechless. Well, that sweet moment was over, and he wanted to take back what he said.

The police worked quickly. In just one day, they cleared up the matter and even retrieved the missing surveillance footage from the exam room.

The make-up exams were properly handled. Teachers highlighted key points without revealing the questions. There was no evidence of cheating.

The school, which had been slow to act before, swiftly issued a notice after the police intervened. They clarified that the rumors about Joe cheating were completely false, and his make-up test results were valid. They warned that they might take legal action against anyone who damaged the school's reputation.

Soon after, the graduate student who had tutored Joe spoke out, posting proof of payment for the lessons, along with Joe's practice notes, to support Joe.

However, some netizens refused to accept the truth and complained on Facebook.

"Wow, as soon as the school said something, you suddenly have all this evidence? Why didn't you show it earlier?"

"Yeah, why didn't you speak up when the rumors first started? Now that things are turning around, you just want attention."

"What can a school investigation reveal? Of course, they'd say no one cheated. It's embarrassing for them."

"Raise your hand if you believe Joe cheated!"

The debate got heated, and the tutor responded to the top comment.

"Since the day Joe was accused, I posted on Facebook to defend him, but my posts didn't show up. Customer service told me my account was flagged for abnormal activity, so I couldn't post. It wasn't until today that I could finally use my account again."

I'm in my second year of grad school. Many students ask me for tutoring, but Joe is the only one who asked for help with a university make-up exam. He paid well and was easy to work with, so I focused on helping him. If he didn't pass, it would've hurt my reputation too. That's all I'm saying."

She attached screenshots showing her blocked posts, financial transactions with Joe, and notes from their lessons. These confirmed her statements.

The post quickly gained popularity, and others who claimed to be Joe's classmates and friends started speaking out in his defense. The critical comment was deleted, but the tutor's posts stayed popular.

Then a law firm's letter of indictment caused a stir. The Esper family had sued all the bloggers who had spread the rumor that Joe cheated, accusing them of slander. This wasn't just a celebrity's warning—it was a serious legal case, and it meant Joe didn't cheat. The bloggers quickly deleted their posts.

Joe had been framed in the traffic accident scandal, and now that the truth was out, the situation calmed down. But speculation about Joe only grew.

Dean Lavoie called Darcie, pleased with how the situation was resolved. He then brought up the favor she'd mentioned before.

Darcie replied, "It's done. Dean Lavoie, you can expect good news."

He thanked her and hung up, feeling satisfied.

Right after, Darcie called Grace. Grace and her family were playing cards with Joe when the call came. Excited, Grace accidentally played the wrong card, losing the round.

Joe played his winning card, cheering as he collected the money. Grace, annoyed, threw the money at him and answered the phone with a scowl. "Hello?"

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted Chapter 2469 – Darcie could immediately sense from Grace's tone that she was in a bad mood. She paused, choosing not to boast about her efforts. Instead, she gently asked, "Grace, I heard Joe's been discharged from the hospital. Is he recovering well? Post-surgery recovery is just as important. Since he's still young, you should pay extra attention. I know someone at a top rehab center. Let me know if you need help."

Grace took a deep breath, pushing down her anger. "We've hired a therapist at home, so we're good for now. But thank you for your concern, Mrs. Saun," she paused briefly. "By the way, Joe's situation has been resolved, and I have you to thank for connecting me with Dean Lavoie. I wouldn't have known who to turn to without your help. You really came through for me."

Darcie relaxed and replied, "Oh, Grace, you're too kind. You've always taken care of my business, so helping you out was the least I could do. I'm just glad I could be there for you."

After a bit more polite conversation, Grace shifted the topic abruptly, catching Darcie off guard. "I heard Miss Jaylene's competing in a perfume contest?"

Darcie was momentarily stunned but quickly regained her composure. "Yes, she's really dedicated to it. With the finals coming up soon, she's been quite anxious about doing well."

Grace replied smoothly, "It's great to see young people motivated. I'm sure she'll do her best. I'll be attending the finals, and I believe she'll shine."

Darcie immediately understood the underlying message. "Thank you, Grace. I'll take your kind words to heart. See you at the finals."

After the call, Darcie's demeanor changed. She called for her assistant, Aubrey. "Get Jaylene in my office after her meeting. I need to talk to her."

Aubrey soon returned, looking uneasy. "Madam, Jaylene left the meeting early, and we can't reach her."

Darcie's face darkened. "Left? Where did she go?"

Aubrey hesitated before admitting, "Her phone is off."

Visibly irritated, Darcie muttered, "With the finals around the corner, and she's out shopping?"

Aubrey, trying to ease the situation, suggested, "Her assistant is your niece, Julia, right? Maybe she can help explain."

Darcie nodded slightly, and Aubrey quickly called Julia. Soon after, the call connected, and Julia's voice echoed over the speaker.

"Aunt? What's up?"

"Where are you? Is Miss Saun with you?"

"I'm with her, helping her shop. We'll be back soon."

Darcie, overhearing the entire exchange, felt her anger rising. Aubrey, sensing the tension, pressed Julia, "What are you two doing during work hours? You know Stella's waiting for a chance to catch us off guard."

Julia immediately caught the seriousness of the situation and stammered, "I know, but Miss Saun insisted. She's picking an engagement gift for Miss Kane."

Darcie's eyes narrowed. "Miss Kane? Which one?"

Julia hesitated before answering softly, "It's for Aurora Kane from Rivera."

Darcie slammed a folder onto her desk, her face darkening further.

Aubrey, sensing her fury, commanded Julia to bring Jaylene back immediately, but Darcie cut in, "No need! Let her buy whatever she wants. She doesn't need to return."

Julia quickly hung up, and Aubrey looked uneasy as she stepped forward with a glass of water for Darcie.

"Madam, Jaylene has been working hard lately. She and Aurora are close, and it's normal for her to pick a gift."

Darcie sneered. "Do you think this is about friendship?"

Aubrey hesitated before replying carefully, "Miss Saun is still young."

Darcie's tone was cold. "Youth isn't an excuse. It doesn't matter."

Aubrey didn't dare respond. She knew Darcie's anger stemmed from frustration with Jaylene's lack of focus.

After a few moments, Darcie sighed. "Help me pick a proper engagement gift for the Kane family. Even though the son-in-law isn't from a noble family, we still need to maintain appearances."

Aubrey nodded but paused when Darcie reconsidered. "Never mind. I'll handle it myself. You can go."

Once alone, Darcie dialed Wenham's number. He had been in Salcator for a week, visiting some elderly friends after their surgeries.

Wenham answered, his voice hoarse. "What's going on?"

Darcie, concerned, asked, "Your voice sounds off. Did you catch a cold in the rain?"

Wenham cleared his throat. "No, just woke up. My throat's a bit dry."

Darcie softened. "Did you bring the throat lozenges? And don't forget to use the salt bag for your knee, or it'll act up with this weather."

Wenham acknowledged her concern. "I'll be back the day after tomorrow for Aurora Kane's engagement. We should pick a gift together."

Darcie smiled. "I was just about to mention that. We can't be careless about this."

After some more small talk about health and family, Darcie asked, "How's Mr. Hall doing? Was it serious?"

Wenham replied, "He's doing better. He talked about you a lot, actually."

Surprised, Darcie asked, "Oh? What did he say?"

Wenham flipped through a photo album. "He remembered how close you were to Jessica during school. Said you used to love the pork rib soup her mother made..."

Mr. Kane Got Blacklisted Chapter 2470 – Darcie stiffened at the mention of "pork rib soup."

Back when she was in school, her family struggled financially. They could barely afford her tuition, let alone extra living expenses. To get by, she worked various jobs—handing out flyers, selling clothes, serving in restaurants—anything that could earn her some money. But even then, the cost of her studies often outweighed what she made.

Jessica, one of the few students from a wealthy family in Salcator, was in the same dormitory. The eight girls in the dorm usually ate at the cafeteria, but Darcie and Jessica would often stay behind. Darcie stayed because she couldn't afford much, making do with pickled vegetables and steamed buns to avoid being seen and to maintain her dignity. Jessica, on the other hand, avoided the cafeteria because it was too noisy and disrupted her thoughts. Her family would deliver food to her, so she ate in the dormitory.

They shared the only table in the dorm, sitting across from each other. At that time, Darcie's idea of wealth was having decent clothes and enough money to add more meat to her meals. But the dishes in front of Jessica that day were far more luxurious than anything she could imagine. Jessica noticed Darcie's longing gaze and invited her to join in. Hunger made Darcie accept the offer without hesitation.

As Darcie ate, savoring meat she rarely had, Jessica kept urging her to eat more vegetables, talking about the importance of a balanced diet. That was when Darcie first felt the sting of inequality. While she struggled to eat enough, someone was lecturing her on healthy eating. She felt humiliated, not just because of her circumstances, but because Jessica's actions felt like a display of charity.

Darcie didn't actually like pork rib soup. She just wanted to eat more meat but felt too ashamed to take too much, so she drank more of the broth instead. Jessica's talk of table manners—like not taking the same dish three times in a row—only added to her

discomfort. To Darcie, it felt like a way to show off her superiority under the guise of kindness. That's why Darcie grew to despise pork rib soup later on.

So when Wenham mentioned it, Darcie quickly corrected him, "Mr. Hall's memory isn't what it used to be. I don't like pork rib soup. I prefer Tremella porridge. Auntie's Tremella porridge is something I've remembered for years."

Wenham, still staring at the old photo in his hand, replied calmly, "Maybe memories just get mixed up as we age."

Darcie softened, "As long as you're healthy, it's okay to be a little forgetful."

Wenham didn't dwell on it and simply said, "Let's talk more when I get back the day after tomorrow."

After hanging up, Darcie felt a growing unease. This feeling had started when Stella returned, and it had only intensified recently. Could it be the "final step" that man had warned her about? No, she had covered her tracks well. If she left now, it would be a confession, and she'd lose everything—including her life in Hustuabourg. She had to stay and secure Jaylene's future first.

Jaylene returned home around 11 PM, trying to be as quiet as possible. But as soon as she reached the entrance, all the lights in the living room flicked on.

Darcie, in silk pajamas, sat on the sofa with an empty wine glass beside her. Her hair was slightly tousled, and she looked tipsy.

Jaylene, feeling guilty, whispered, "Mom, you're still up?"

Darcie replied lightly, "I was waiting for you."

Jaylene stammered, "I... I came back late. You didn't have to wait up. The doctor told you not to stay up late and to worry less, remember?"

Darcie smiled, "I'd love to worry less, but how can I when I'm always on edge?"

Jaylene fell silent, then hesitantly added, "Mom, I'm not trying to please Aurora because of Keegan. I just can't let this go."

Darcie looked at her, saying nothing.

Jaylene clenched her hands, "Stella's pregnant. Aurora must know, yet she pretends to be at odds with Stella in front of me, clearly to deceive me! I've been so good to her, but she lied to me like this. I can't let her get away with it!"

Darcie continued to watch her, unreadable.

Jaylene wasn't entirely lying. She was upset with Aurora's deceit, but she also cared about Keegan, so she couldn't push too hard. Still, she had a plan for the engagement party.

Darcie finally spoke, "Don't act out. Choose a gift carefully, and don't embarrass yourself—or me and your father—in front of everyone."

"I understand. I won't."

Darcie, looking tired, didn't say much more than usual, only asking, "How did you get home?"

"Mr. Bard drove me," Jaylene complained, "Mom, how much do you pay this driver, Larry Bard? He follows me everywhere when I go out. It's embarrassing. My friends laugh at me, saying I've got some old..."

She trailed off under Darcie's gaze.

"Following closely means he's responsible. By the way, who's the male assistant with you? I don't recognize him."

"He's Julia's friend. I thought he was smart and capable, so I kept him around. I wanted him to be my driver, but you insisted on Mr. Bard, so I couldn't send him away. For now, he's just a temporary assistant."

Darcie frowned, "Get rid of him soon. He seems slick and unreliable."

"I will."

Jaylene paused, "By the way, I ran into a crazy woman at the mall today. She grabbed my hand and kept shouting something about 'Alijah.' She looked like a complete psycho. I was terrified. Mr. Bard and the security guards had to drag her away. They nearly tore her clothes off."

Darcie froze, "Alijah?"