

Mute Bride 171

Chapter 171

In the summer villa, the Burtons were seated at the dining table for a meal, and Justin came back holding Charlotte in his arms. Seeing his return, Sue stood up and greeted, "Justin, you must be exhausted after the long trip. Here, let me hold you, Charlotte. Don't cling on to Daddy."

"No!" Charlotte said, jerking her face away as she tightened her arms around Justin's neck.

"Take a seat, Aunt Sue. I'll hold her," Justin said calmly.

"Forget it, Madam Parham," Amber said. "This girl wants nobody but Justin."

"What a spoiled little girl. You're still so clingy to your daddy. Looks like we'll need to get you a mommy soon," Sue said thoughtfully. Then, she held Amber's hand and added, "It's about time we fix the date for your wedding with Justin."

Amber blushed, and Arthur nodded in agreement. "That's true. We should pick a date for the wedding. After all, Amber has been by your side for so many years. What do you think, Justin?"

Justin was expressionless. "Whatever you say, Grandpa."

"Me too," Amber added.

"Then, we'll ask Amber's father out for a meal one day and speak about the details of the wedding."

Right after the words left Arthur's lips, a scream of surprise echoed from Justin's arms. "Ah!"

"What happened?" Justin asked, concerned.

"Daddy, my leg hurts! It's so painful!" Charlotte cried, her face crumpling in pain.

“Why is your leg hurting all of a sudden?” Sue asked and wanted to take a look at her leg, but she covered it firmly and refused to show it to her.

Crying loudly, Charlotte forced out two drops of tears from the corners of her eyes. “Oww! It hurts so much!”

Heartbroken, Justin asked, “Did you fall in the airport earlier? I’m bringing her to the hospital for a checkup.”

“But we haven’t even discussed the wedding yet,” Sue pointed out anxiously, but she quickly changed the topic. “I mean, Justin, you just came back and haven’t even had a bite yet.”

“I can eat anytime,” he answered unhappily as he sprang up from his seat holding Charlotte. “Grandpa, I’m going now.”

As Arthur loved his great-granddaughter to bits, he immediately nodded and urged, “Hurry up and go. Her health is more important.”

After Amber sent him out the door, she stood there watching with an ashen face as the car drove off into the distance and left a trail of smoke behind.

Behind her, Sue came up and said, “This girl is full of ideas. She has used the same trick so many times, and it works every single time.”

“She’s his daughter, after all. It’s only natural that he dotes on her.”

“It’s one thing that he dotes on her, but if even the both of us can see through her trick, what do you think about Justin and the old master?”

The sarcastic tone she was using made Amber’s face freeze. “Madam Parham, what do you mean by that?”

"I don't have to spell out everything, but it's been five years, Amber. You have to put in some effort yourself and not just depend on our help. Everything I say is nothing compared to that girl's cries."

Patting her shoulder gently, Sue said softly, "It's cold outside. Let's go in and eat."

However, Amber continued to stand at the door with a crestfallen look. It had been five years since their engagement, but Justin didn't seem interested in marrying her at all, which had turned her into the biggest joke amongst the socialites of Riverdale. And now, even Sue was mocking her!

The MPV rolled out of the compound of the summer villa, and Justin instructed the driver, "Go back home."

Startled, the driver asked, "Aren't we going to the hospital?"

Peering at Charlotte in his arms, he asked, "Do you want to go to the hospital?"

Immediately, she shook her head and giggled. "No."

"Why did you lie?"

"If I don't, Great-grandpa and Great-aunt Sue will make you marry Miss Amber."

"Is it not a good thing if I marry her?"

"No, it's not. I don't like her."

"Is she mean to you?"

Shaking her head, she answered, "That's not the reason. There are too many women who want to marry you, and actually, all of them treat me quite well. But are you going to marry all of them because of that?"

The look in Justin's eyes fell as he hadn't thought about this before. "But Charlotte, you need a mommy as you grow up, and I can't be by your side all the time because of my busy schedule."

As though she hadn't heard a thing he said, Charlotte burrowed into his embrace, curled up into a comfortable position, and snuggled in it. "I have a mommy, and I want to wait for her return," she mumbled.

Lowering his head, Justin saw that she had already fallen asleep with her tightly shut eyes. After they reached home, the servant carried her back to the room to rest for the night. Her bedroom was massive with all sorts of dolls in a corner, and even the ceiling was painted pink. The servant carried Charlotte into the canopy bed and put her to sleep.

Before closing the door, Justin couldn't help but linger to look at her, a warm glow glimmering in his cold eyes. Suddenly, the phone in his pocket vibrated.

"Hello?"

"I heard that you're back from your business trip. Wanna have a drink? My friend's club is open tonight."

As he descended the staircase, Justin asked, "As my family doctor, do you think it's appropriate to invite your client out for a drink?"

"Dear Mr. Burton, it's after work now."

"Send me the address."

"Sure thing!"

The night was young, and it happened to be the busiest time of the club right now. When Justin arrived, a voice echoed from a booth on the second floor, shouting, "Over here!"

With his charming eyes, Rudy winked, and the girls on the dance floor gushed out loudly.

"Can you please keep it down?" Justin shot him a look of disgust as he took a seat across from him.

After waving at the girls downstairs, Rudy turned back and faced him. "Keep it down? Why? The point of coming to a club is to have fun. So, what do you wanna drink?"

"Anything will do."

"You don't seem to be in a good mood today. What's up?"

"How could you tell?"

Shrugging, Rudy said, "Well, it's written all over your face. I've known you for five years, and there's only one reason you come out for a drink every time. Your fiancée is rushing you to tie the knot again, isn't she?"

"You sure talk a lot."

Rudy sighed. "It's difficult to be caught between your daughter and fiancée." Clinking his drink on his glass, he added, "My heart goes out to you, my brother."

With a frown, Justin replied, "That's not the reason."

"What else could it be, then?"

"I can't put it into words." The more Justin thought about it, the more frustrated he became. Then, he picked up his glass and took a gulp to suppress his thoughts.

“There you go again. Even though I don’t really like that fiancée of yours, I have to admit that she’s rather unlucky to be stuck with you. I wouldn’t marry you if I were in her shoes. Also, research shows that ninety percent of sexless marriages are miserable.” Judging him with a thoughtful look, Rudy asked, “Are you sure you don’t have any problems in that area?”

Casting him a warning glare, he asked, “Would you like to give it a try?”

Waving his palm in terror, he answered, “Forget it. I’m doing fine in that aspect. But I’m serious, though.

Just annul the engagement if you really don’t like her and try it with another woman. How about if I arrange a little something for you tonight?”

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At the mention of this, Rudy got all worked up. “Look, you’ve been amnesiac for so long. Maybe you’ll remember everything if a woman comes and jolts your senses awake.”

In reply, Justin looked at him coldly and said, “No thanks.”

His gaze was so cold that Rudy decided to shut it. “Fine, I don’t want to be bothered about it, either.”

Meanwhile, in a booth on the first floor, Jolly pushed a bottle of beer into Rachel’s hand and said loudly, “Everyone, a round of drinks for my good friend! From now on, Chris will be an official member of our drinking group!”

“A round of drinks, everyone!”

“Welcome, Chris!”

The beer foam splashed out of the bottle from the clinking of bottles, and Rachel’s face remained unchanged from chugging down a bottle of beer.

“Hey, Jolly, your friend seems to hold her liquor pretty well.”

“Of course! She’s my bestie!”

“Must you beat about the bush, Timmy? You just wanted to say she looks gorgeous, right?”

“Oh, shut it. So, is Chris single?”

Giving that guy a kick, Jolly then said, “She’s not for your taking even if she’s single. Take a good look at yourself in the mirror. Do you really think you’re good enough for Chris?”

The group laughed as they joked around, and Rachel was smiling the entire time without turning down anyone, whether they were offering a drink or a guessing game. After all, she had known Jolly for five

years, and she had lost count of the times she had been to a club with her.

On the other side, the DJ was blasting the music, and Jolly bobbed her head to the beat as she sat in the booth. A place like this was her natural habitat. “I’m going to the dance floor. You guys enjoy yourselves. And take care of Chris for me.”

With that said, she picked up a bottle of beer and disappeared onto the dance floor. Amidst the lights and alcohol, the movement of the crowd made Rachel’s eyes giddy.

While she took another sip of the beer, she suddenly saw a familiar figure coming down from the second floor and walking toward the direction of the washroom. Immediately, her eyes narrowed.

Although Riverdale was not a large city, she wasn’t expecting it to be such a small place, either. Less than a day after her return, she had run into Justin twice. What a small world it was, especially for enemies.

“What’s wrong, Chris?” Jolly’s sidekick, Timothy Hertz, asked in concern.

Placing the beer on the table, she answered, "Nothing. I'm going to the washroom."

Would you like me to come along?"

"It's okay. I'll be right back."

Along the corridor on the first floor, Rachel walked away from the music and people as she followed Justin deeper and deeper inside the building until less people passed by her. Just at the corner of the corridor, she lost sight of him.

Where did he go? she wondered and scanned around.

Behind her, a man walked out of the stairwell and asked coldly, "Who sent you?"

She froze, and the man shouted, "I'm asking you a question!"

A split second before the man's hand landed on her shoulder, Rachel turned around, grabbed his hand, and staggered toward him.

Unable to dodge in time, Justin realized that she was already in his arms the next second with her arms around his neck. With a tipsy look, she mumbled, "Where did you go? I've been looking for you all day..."

The scent of alcohol rushed up into his nostrils, and he knitted his brows tightly together. "Hey, let me go. You got the wrong person."

From the corners of her eyes, Rachel saw Timothy coming over, and before Justin could push her away, she acted first and pushed him into the stairwell.

"You,"

On tiptoes, Rachel lifted her head and kissed him on the lips.

Shocked, Justin's eyes widened in disbelief, and his first thought was to shove her aside. However, she held him tightly around his neck, and he couldn't exert any force for a short while.

This was the first time in his life when he felt he was being taken advantage of. This woman must be crazy! he thought, giddy from the strong taste of alcohol in her mouth.

As the kiss deepened, the anger he felt evaporated without a reason, and he actually felt a sense of familiarity-the light scent of this woman, despite the smell of alcohol on her, gave him a déjà vu.

Could Rudy's words be true? he wondered as he placed his hands on her waist naturally and kissed her deeper.

"Mmhm!" Rachel grunted when she was suddenly pulled into a tight embrace against Justin's chest. Instantly, her body temperature rose, and she wondered if she was really confused and acting so passionately because of all the alcohol she consumed.

"Chris?" Suddenly, Timothy's voice came from outside, and Rachel was jolted back to her senses. With all her might, she pushed Justin away and left the spot in a hurry as he groaned in pain.

In a second, she was out of sight, leaving Justin leaning against the wall after hitting the back of his head. His head was ringing with pain, and when he regained himself again, he saw that there was no one else at the stairwell except himself. Everything that happened earlier felt like a dream. What on earth just happened?

Rachel didn't return to the booth after that. Instead, she took a cab home after sending Jolly a text.

"To Springwill Estate," she instructed the driver.

It looks like Justin has really forgotten about me. What happened in the last five years? she wondered, and her brows furrowed together tightly when she recalled the kiss from earlier.

Even after five years had passed, she had to admit that she would still be emotionally affected and even be thrown into confusion because of this man. She hated him, but how could hate exist without love?

Three days later, the major pharmaceutical companies of Riverdale held a joint exhibition of new drugs, gathering the journalists from the biggest media in the city as well.

As the representative of the R&D team from Burton Group, Amber showed up at the exhibition dressed in a Chanel suit. Before the exhibition began, there was a red-carpet ceremony, and she stood in front of the signed poster as the journalists asked her questions about the new drug with a microphone.

“Miss Hudson, it’s said that the new pill developed by Burton Group this time has the effect of delaying nerve failure and shows great results in the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease. Is that true?”

“We’ve done many clinical trials and the new drug has also been tested by the Food and Drug Administration,” Amber replied.

“We heard that this drug was proposed by you. Does that have anything to do with Old Mr. Burton’s physical condition?”

“Well, that can be part of the reason,” she answered with a smile. “I studied medicine, after all, and one of the driving forces for R&D comes from my consideration for my family.”

Family?

Regardless how many new drugs were on the exhibition, it couldn’t be as attention-grabbing as a piece of juicy gossip. With a keen nose for news, the journalists immediately picked up the meaning behind her words.

“Does that mean the wedding is drawing close, Miss Hudson?”

“I’ll announce it once there’s good news.”

“Will President Burton be here at the exhibition today?”

“He’ll come a little later.”

All of a sudden, the journalists were all discussing their wedding news.

In fact, this was part of Amber’s plan. The entire town knew that she had been Justin’s fiancée for five years, and she believed that with so many people urging the wedding, there was no way that Justin could just sit on it and not do anything.

At this moment, a woman’s voice echoed from the outside, saying, “Is this an exhibition for new drugs or the press conference for a wedding? Anyone walking in here ignorantly might think that the Burton Group is doing this on purpose to divert the attention from the publicity of the new drugs.”

Surprised, the journalists stopped clicking on their cameras and whispered, “Who’s that?”

“Yeah, who’s that?” Everyone was asking the same question with a hesitant look in their eyes.

Only Amber recognized the person when she saw her, and her eyes widened in shock. It’s her? She’s back?!

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As everyone stared in wonder at Rachel, cutting through the crowd dressed in a white suit, looking very smart and capable, she stopped next to Amber and whispered, “It’s been a while, my dear sister.”

Clutching her fists tightly, Amber thought in disbelief, She actually came back and can even speak now? Everything was so shocking to her that she couldn’t find the words to say and was simply dumbstruck.

In front of the journalists, Rachel faced them with ease. “Allow me to introduce myself. I’m Chris, the new sales director of Burton Pharmaceuticals, as well as the medical representative of the company for the exhibition this time.”

Her introduction almost made Amber's eyes fall out of their sockets. She's the new sales director of Burton Pharmaceuticals?

"Since this is an exhibition jointly organized by the pharmas in Riverdale, I hope everyone will focus on the new drugs. After all, the new drugs are the results of painstaking efforts by our researchers for the benefit of society, and I don't think it's fair if the focus of the day is overshadowed by some meaningless topic."

At her words, the journalists in the venue all nodded their heads in agreement, while Amber was livid. Just when she had finally found the chance to make herself public and be interviewed as Justin's fiancée so that the Burtons could push the wedding bells forward, unexpectedly, Rachel came out of nowhere and foiled her plans!

"Hold it right there, Rachel Hudson!" Amber called out and chased after Rachel when they were away from the journalists.

Stopping in her steps, Rachel asked, "How may I help you?"

Giving her a once-over, Amber said, "I never thought that a mute would be able to speak one day. I thought I was imagining things!"

Rachel snorted, "Didn't Jefferey tell you that I wasn't born a mute?"

Amber's fists tightened warily. "You should have just left for good. Why did you return? And you even became the sales director of Burton Pharmaceuticals?"

Five years ago after Rachel disappeared, she had used five years' time to be by Justin's side. With only one step away from her marriage to Justin, Rachel suddenly returned at this point. Just what is she planning? Amber pondered.

Casting her a glance, Rachel crossed her arms. "Why can't I return? I have my own legs. I'm free to go wherever I want."

“What are you planning to do?”

“What do you think?”

Gritting her teeth, Amber hissed, “I’m telling you, no matter what you’re planning, Justin is now my fiancé, and we’ll be getting married soon. It just goes to show how shameless you are if you try to get between us right now!”

“Fiancé?” Rachel snorted. “You didn’t seem to find it shameless back then when he was my husband and were clinging on to him more than myself. Look, you’re still on the same spot even after five years have passed. Did you think with me out of the picture, you could claim the title of Mrs. Burton?”

“You,”

The elevator doors opened slowly, and Rachel stepped in before saying nonchalantly, “I don’t plan to hook up with my exes. If you do, that’s your choice. I’m not the least bit interested. Now then, you better pull yourself together. I’ll see you at the exhibition.”

The colors on Amber’s face shifted from pale to red and back again to colorless. She was gritting her teeth so hard that she could have gritted them to pieces. Rachel Hudson. She’s like a changed person now, she noted. She definitely has her reasons for coming back.

At the exhibition, the pharmaceutical companies gathered at their own booths as they explained and presented their new drugs to the journalists.

“Miss Hudson, could you please introduce the new drug from Burton Pharmaceuticals this time?”

“Sure.” Amber said and glanced at her assistant. Catching her hint, her assistant played the video behind her.

However, Amber's expression shifted the moment it played, and she gawked at her assistant next to her with a look of confusion. "What's going on?"

That's not the introduction video of the new drug! she thought.

"Miss Hudson, isn't this a capsule based on eastern herbs? But the information we received prior to this stated that Burton Pharmaceuticals is working on a western prescription this time."

"I'm sorry. This isn't right. She must have played the wrong video."

"That's not the wrong video." Rachel started explaining to the journalists right after Amber finished speaking. "In the beginning, it's true that the new drug started as a western prescription, but after some market and clinical research, we think that the supplement will be better off with an eastern prescription. The result is the new drug from Burton Pharmaceuticals this time, the E-Vital Pill." Then, she gestured for the assistant to distribute the samples and introduction brochures to the journalists.

Next to her, Amber sulked and questioned the assistant, "Who allowed you to let her change my prescription?"

Hurriedly, the assistant explained, "Amber, she's the sales director that the company poached from SG Pharma with a high salary, and the legendary figure in pharma sales for three consecutive years. She's just like an influencer in the world of pharmaceutical and medical equipment. Nobody dares to disobey her!"

With that explanation, Amber was mad and tongue-tied. After five years of absence, Rachel actually managed to climb to this position. All of a sudden, a clamor started some distance away. Amber

stared in the direction of the clamor. With a sparkle in her eyes, she rushed over and cried out, "Justin!"

Surrounded by his assistant and others, Justin strode toward the booth of his company.

Amber immediately hugged his arm at the sight of him, saying, "You're finally here, Justin."

“How are things going?” he asked.

“You won’t believe this, Justin. Things would’ve gotten out of hand if you hadn’t shown up in time.”

“What happened?”

“Somebody changed the new drug that the company is releasing by herself and replaced it with a drug that hasn’t been tested by the FDA. The journalists have been through the interview, and there will be a huge problem if we don’t resolve this before they publish their articles.”

Before Justin could say a thing, a woman’s voice sounded. “Who said that the new drug I introduced isn’t registered with the FDA?”

Seeing the woman approaching them, Justin immediately narrowed his eyes. It’s her? All at once, everything that happened in the club that day resurfaced in his mind.

In her five-inch heels, Rachel walked over steadily, her straight bob hair that reached right above her shoulders tucked neatly behind her ears. The white on her white suit brought out the boldness and precision of her red lipstick as she said, “Do you think I’d have the guts to show this to the journalists if I hadn’t registered the new drug with the FDA before this?”

“Still, you shouldn’t have rejected my drug by yourself. My drug has been approved by higher management and has passed the clinical trials for a long time. They’re even ready for mass production and sale.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m afraid it won’t be mass produced anymore.”

“What did you say?”

“Amber,” Justin interjected in a cold tone.

The muscles on Amber’s face froze, and she became nervous when she saw that Justin never once took his eyes off Rachel.

However, after Justin glanced at the name tag on Rachel’s chest, he asked, “You’re Chris?”

The representative from SG Pharma who was well-known in the industry as well as the sales director he had spent a lot of effort on trying to poach for the past six months turned out to be her.

Composedly, Rachel answered, “That’s right. I’m Chris. Are you surprised? I’ve always been contacting your HR department through emails, and this is the first time we’re meeting since I took up the position.”

They held each other’s eyes. This was the scene that greeted them when they met each other again after five years. From his eyes, Rachel could tell that he thought of her as a stranger. He really doesn’t remember me anymore.

Out of the blue, Amber blurted, “She’s not professional at all, Justin. It’s risky to have her in the company as the sales director.”

Nonchalantly, Rachel said, “Are you worried that I’ll put the company at risk, or I’ll put you at risk instead because of the fact that I’m his ex-wife?”

Ex-wife? With furrowed brows, Justin asked, “What did you say?”

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Blinking, Rachel spread her hands and sighed. “We were once married, after all. I’ve only been gone for five years, and you’ve wiped me out of your mind completely. How heartless of you, Justin Burton.”

Looking at his shocked expression, Amber couldn’t help but turn stiff.

When the exhibition ended, Justin left Amber at the venue and left by himself. “What the hell is going on?” he shouted at Frankie the moment he got back to his office in Burton Group. “Isn’t she dead already? So what’s this now? A zombie?”

With his forehead covered in cold sweat, Frankie explained tentatively, “Back then, the doctor said that you couldn’t deal with another blow, so the old master ordered everyone not to mention a word about Mrs. Burton and to just say that she’s dead...”

“So none of you ever told me about any details of her, and there isn’t even a picture?”

“It’s true that there were no pictures.”

“What?”

Sighing helplessly, Frankie said, “You should ask Old Mr. Burton about Mrs. Burton. Please don’t put me in a tight spot.”

He was just an employee, and Arthur had already made his orders very clear. So, since five years ago, nobody dared to mention the name ‘Rachel in front of Justin. But, who would dare to?

Seeing how furious he was, Frankie asked cautiously, “Um, President Burton, should I tell the HR department to prepare for her dismissal?”

“Her dismissal?” Justin shot him an angry glare. “We poached her from SG Pharma, and it took us six months to find someone as outstanding as her. Who will replace her if she’s dismissed?”

While Frankie was displaying a sheepish expression, Justin added, “Keep her for now. And tell the HR department to keep looking for a suitable candidate.”

“Yes, President Burton. But, aren’t you the least curious about what happened in the past?”

For the past five years, nobody dared to mention Rachel, and neither did Justin ask anyone about her.

“Not at all,” he answered curtly. “I’m just concerned about the results she can bring to Burton Pharmaceuticals.”

Silently, Frankie gushed, He’s indeed fit to be the boss! Even if he has lost his memories, he isn’t a tiny bit interested to know anything about his ex-wife even though she showed up right in front of him now. Hats off to his level of indifference!

At the same time, Rachel had just returned to her office in Burton Pharmaceuticals. She was on the phone with Jolly while flipping through some documents.

“So, he really doesn’t remember anything about you at all?”

“Yeah,” Rachel answered. “It really seems like he remembers nothing at all.” She was the one who first brought up the term ‘ex-wife, and the shock he showed didn’t seem staged at all.

“During the past few days, I’ve been checking up on his situation over the years. Everything seemed pretty normal except for one thing.” Jolly said.

“What is it?”

“It’s my dad who told me this. Five years ago, Burton Group was openly and secretly suppressing Hudson Pharmaceuticals. It was obvious to everyone that they were in a rush to acquire it. However, at that time, the Burton Group suddenly put an end to their acquisition and left it unchecked.”

Rachel frowned. There were too many points that baffled her, and she couldn’t figure anything out for the moment. “Let’s leave this for now. Regardless whether he really lost his memories or how much he forgot, I’ll still go ahead with the things I want to do without a change of plans.”

“So, what do you plan to do now?”

“I think the surveillance evidence might be in his house, so I’m planning to make a trip there.”

The next afternoon, Rachel appeared at Justin's mansion with some documents, and she pressed on the doorbell.

Ding dong, ding dong.

"Coming!" the servant said from the inside. "Hello, may I know who you are?"

"I have something here for President Burton," Rachel began and showed the servant her business card. "He told me to wait for him at his home."

After the servant took a look at the business card, her expression remained unchanged. "I'm sorry, but you should look for Mr. Burton at the company. He has instructed us not to allow anyone into the house if it's regarding work."

Then, the servant shut the door with a loud bang in her face.

"Huh?" Rachel gasped after she was snubbed. What's wrong with Justin? He's not working at home anymore? He was never this way before!

Just when she was about to leave, a girl's voice sounded from above. "Hey, why are you at my place?"

Jerking her head to look up, Rachel saw a little girl hanging over the railing on the second floor balcony, blinking her grape-like, shiny dark eyes at her.

That was her daughter whom she had to leave behind in Riverdale after she gave birth to her. For five whole years, she had never seen her once.

"Hey, I'm asking you a question! Why are you here to look for my daddy? Do you like him and want to marry him as well?"

"No, ... I'm here to discuss something with your father."

“That’s what every woman who comes looking for him says.”

Not sure what she should say, Rachel simply answered, “I’m really not here to marry him. Since he’s not around, I’m leaving now.”

“Hey!” Charlotte yelled and stomped her feet on the balcony. “I didn’t say you can leave yet! Hold on!”

Just one look and Rachel could tell that she was a pampered child, but her spoiled ways were not annoying at all.

“Do you know how to bake cookies?”

Nodding, Rachel asked hesitantly, “Why?”

The little girl’s eyes sparkled, and she said, “Don’t go. I’ll open the door for you.”

Without waiting for Rachel’s reply, the little girl ran back into the house. And soon, the servant from

earlier opened the door again. Running out of the house in her teddy bear indoor slippers, she ran up to Rachel in her tiny steps and said, “Come with me.”

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Her hands were warm as she grabbed Rachel’s hand and pulled her into the house.

Helplessly, the servant said, “Miss Charlotte, Mr. Burton has said many times that you’re not supposed to bring a stranger into the house.”

“She’s not a stranger because both Daddy and I have met her before.”

“Huh?”

“Just go and do your work, Mary. We’re gonna go bake cookies now.”

After that, she dragged Rachel into the kitchen and released her as she pointed at the ingredients on the kitchen counter. “Can you make me a gingerbread man with all these?”

Rachel glanced at the ingredients and nodded. “Yes.”

“Make it, then,” Charlotte said and crossed her arms as she stood aside. At such a small age, she already had a domineering expression, exhibiting a justified look when she instructed people around.

However, Rachel was not mad at all, and she rolled up her sleeves to start working without another word.

After filling the pastry bag with batter and brushing a layer of butter on the baking tray, she squeezed the batter in the pastry bag onto the tray and made flower shapes.

“You really know how to do it?” Charlotte uttered while looking from the side with her head tilted. “All the women who came before this said they knew how to do it, but they were just humoring me and wanted me to put in a good word for them in front of Daddy.”

All of a sudden, Rachel felt her heart drop, and it wrenched. It was not surprising that many women threw themselves at Justin because of his status. While it didn’t matter to the adults, it was a torture for

the child because she had to deal with this sort of issues at such a young age.

“Why do you want to bake cookies?”

“My aunt’s birthday is coming soon, and I want to prepare a gift for her.”

Seeing how she was looking at the baking tray in anticipation, Rachel held out the pastry bag to her and asked gently, "Would you like to give it a try?"

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Charlotte's expression changed and she frowned when she said, "I'm not doing it."

"Charlotte, since it's going to be a gift for your aunt, then you should be making it yourself. That's how you show your sincerity," Rachel said patiently.

"If I do it myself, then what would I need you for? Aren't all of you here to work for me?"

All of you? When Rachel heard that, she placed the pastry bag down. "I'm done."

Charlotte's eyes widened as she stared at Rachel. "What are you doing?"

While taking off her gloves, Rachel said calmly, "I don't care how accommodating the women who came before were toward your temper, but when it comes to me, you have to prepare your own gift for another person. You can learn if you don't know how to do it, but if you refuse to participate, I won't help you with the cookies."

"You're not doing it? Then I'll tell Daddy that you're mean to me!"

Rachel froze, for she never expected that Charlotte would use this as her weapon. Judging from how confident she sounded, she was sure that this trick had worked wonders everytime.

Just how has Justin been educating her all these years?

After taking off her apron, Rachel said in a huff, "Fine. Tell him just that."

Charlotte was obviously stunned.

"I'm busy, so I'm leaving now," Rachel said curtly and walked toward the door.

"I didn't say you can leave yet!" Charlotte shouted, and Rachel heard her stomping her feet behind her.

As though she hadn't heard anything, Rachel continued walking without turning back, and just when she was about to reach the door, Charlotte yelled loudly from behind, "I can give it a try!"

Immediately, Rachel stopped in her tracks and turned to look toward the kitchen, only to see Charlotte's tiny face flushing red with reluctance. It was as if this was the first time she had yielded, and she was highly unwilling to do it.

"I mean, I can give it a try, but I won't make a lot of it!"

Despite that, Rachel was already relieved. Looks like she can still be corrected.

Then, she passed the pastry bag to Charlotte and stood behind her as she held her hand to teach her. "It's very simple, actually. Just like how you usually draw, the cookies can be any shape you want it to be."

In a mechanical and indifferent manner, Charlotte allowed her to move her hand as she pleased.

"Let's try to draw a baby tortoise. Here, we'll start with the shell, and then the head..."

After the shape of a tortoise appeared on the baking tray, Charlotte straightened her back and her eyes sparkled. "It's really a baby tortoise!" she exclaimed in her baby voice that was full of surprise.

"We can even draw a piglet."

"Okay! My aunt loves piglets!"

This time, Charlotte was very focused, and she followed the movement of her hands with her eyes carefully.

“Did you learn it? Would you like to try it by yourself?”

“Okay! I’ll give it a try.”

When Charlotte had successfully drawn out a piglet by herself, Rachel stroked her head and complimented her. “You’re great. It looks amazing!”

Charlotte actually appeared a little shy while she was scratching her head. “But why do I think that it looks a little ugly? It’s not as pretty as yours.”

“Just make a few more. You’re so smart. You’ve done so well at the first try, so I’m sure you’ll get better after a few more tries.”

That was encouraging to Charlotte, so she suddenly became pumped up. When Justin returned home, he immediately smelled the scent of cookies in the house.

“Where’s Charlotte?” he asked.

A servant replied, “Miss Charlotte is upstairs. She’s probably tired after baking the whole afternoon.”

Baking? Justin wondered. When he thought of Charlotte’s impatient personality, he had no expectations of the cookies she made, so he directly went upstairs after handing the servant his jacket.

Something suddenly came into the servant’s mind, and she said, “Sir, someone by the name of Miss Hudson is here, and Miss Charlotte seems to like her a lot. She’s upstairs now after playing with Miss Charlotte the whole afternoon.”

In an instant, that woman came into his mind, which made him frown and quicken his steps to the second floor.

The child's bedroom was quiet on the second floor, and when he was about to push the door open to take a look, the person inside happened to open the door. They both almost walked right into each

other. Rachel gasped in surprise and staggered, but Justin held her by the waist quickly with his lightning reflexes.

The fall she was expecting didn't happen, and she felt a tight grip on her waist. After lifting her head, she saw that Justin's face was just inches away from hers, and she couldn't avoid looking at it even if she wanted to do so.

"Why are you here?"

"I should be the one asking you that!" Justin said as his eyes gradually turned cold. "What did you tell Charlotte?"

"Don't worry. I didn't tell her anything." Rachel regained her balance and looked at the door from the corner of her eyes. The look in them was one of gentleness. "She thought I'm just a woman who's here to look for you."

Only then did Justin's face relax a little, but his tone remained aloof. "You're not the first woman to show up here. Don't think I have no idea what's on your mind."

"I'm just here to ask you about something. What could possibly be on my mind?" While looking at his sullen face, she took a step closer and whispered in such a low voice that her breath tickled his ears as she spoke. "Did you think that I'm here to reconcile with you?"

The woman's face that was so close to his was beautiful and confident, but her eyes were innocent. As Justin looked into those eyes, he let his guard down for a few seconds, and some fragmented images flashed through his mind.

All of a sudden, he felt a sharp pain in his temples.

“Justin?” Rachel called upon seeing the weird look on his face.

Jolted back to his senses, he abruptly grabbed her hand and said, “No matter what you’re planning, I’m telling you now that it’s impossible.”

From their “chance encounter” at the club to her sudden appearance at the exhibition and her showing up at his house on this day, these three encounters were enough to show that nothing was a coincidence. What is this woman planning to do?

She gasped in pain and cried, “Let go! You’re hurting me!” However, his hand remained on hers tightly. “You’ve gotten it wrong. I’m really here to look for you because of work.”

“Why didn’t you look for me at my office if it’s about work? Instead, you came here and even baked cookies with my daughter?”

“She’s also my daughter.”

Justin’s eyes darkened. “For five years, you didn’t show up even once and never fulfilled your most basic responsibility of a mother. Yet, you still have the cheek to say she’s your daughter?”

With her brows furrowed together, she asked, “You really don’t remember anything at all?”

If she could have brought her daughter with her back then, she would have definitely done it, but she couldn’t because Justin had forced her to a corner. Despite that, his current attitude made it seem like she was the one in the wrong.

How amazing it is to be amnesiac. He deleted his past and accepted everything that had happened in the past while I’m the only one suffering all the pain for five years, she thought. After this man in front of her

d hurt her completely, he could actually forget all about it and lead a happy, blissful life with their daughter.

"It can't be anything good if I can forget those memories so easily," Justin said nonchalantly. Every word was so sharp that it pierced Rachel's ears.

"That may not be true. Maybe the days you forgot were the happy days." Instead of getting mad, she ran her fingers through her hair. The way she did that made her appear young and innocent in spite of the womanly charm she carried; any other man who saw her like this would have stared at her. "If you weren't waiting for my return, then why didn't you get married to Amber after five years of engagement?"

Her words caught him by surprise.

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"Did you recall something?"

The inquisitiveness in her tone pissed him off. "What does the person I'm getting married to have to do with you? Don't forget that we've divorced and we have been living apart for five years."

"Of course it has something to do with me. I don't care who you wish to marry, but this woman will be Charlotte's stepmom in the future. I should have the right to question it if she's evil and mean to her, right?"

"You don't have to worry about that because Charlotte has nothing to do with you anymore," he said icily. "Also, I'm warning you. Don't get close to her. Or else, I won't even care about the fact that we were once married. Are you still not leaving?"

Even though there was a crack in their married life back then, or they were separated for whatever reason, Rachel shouldn't have left her newborn daughter alone and never visited her even once in the past five years.

The coldness in his eyes thickened, and he growled, "I'll call the security if you're still not leaving."

Rachel secretly rolled her eyes in her mind. He's already amnesiac, but he's still the same arrogant prick. "I'm leaving now. Do you really think I want to be here?"

"Another reminder for you; you're not allowed to tell Charlotte that you're her mother," he added emotionlessly.

Before Rachel could say anything, the door behind them opened suddenly, and Charlotte stood at the door in her pajamas while holding a long-eared bunny soft toy. "You're my mommy?" she asked in shock

Rachel's face froze, and Justin's expression darkened as well. As the little girl stared at Justin in a daze, she asked for confirmation once more. "Daddy, did you just say that she's my mommy?"

"Go back to your room, Charlotte," Justin said, frowning heavily. "You heard it wrongly."

"No, I didn't!" Instantly, Charlotte was wide awake, and she ran toward Rachel before hugging her around her thighs. "Mommy! I missed you so much!" she cried loudly.

Rachel was at a loss for what to do at this scene, but when she heard Charlotte's cries, her eyes burned and turned red suddenly. She lowered herself and held Charlotte in her arms before apologizing to her. "It was my fault. I should have returned earlier to look for you."

"Mommy, don't leave me again!" Charlotte sobbed.

"No, I'm not leaving. Be good, Charlotte."

As Justin watched everything happening before him, he knitted his brows tightly. While coaxing Charlotte, Rachel lifted her gaze and met a pair of cold eyes staring at her. She smirked and cast him a look that showed that she wasn't the one who mentioned anything about being Charlotte's mother, but

him.

However, Justin wasn't about to take this at all. In his opinion, all these wouldn't have happened if she hadn't shown up at his place.

In the living room, Charlotte refused to let go of Rachel's hand, and her eyes were red and swollen as she choked out the words, "Mommy, you're not leaving again this time, are you?"

Rachel's eyes drifted across the room at the man who was reading the newspaper, but his attention wasn't on the paper. Instead, he was giving her a warning look.

After clearing her throat, she tried to ignore the enormous pressure and replied, "I'm not leaving anymore."

"Will you always be with me, Mommy?"

"Yes. We'll bake cookies together."

At the mention of the cookies, Charlotte broke into a smile in spite of her face still being tear-streaked. She then turned to Justin. "Daddy, Mommy taught me how to bake cookies today. Do you want to try it?"

Without hesitation, he answered curtly, "No."

Nevertheless, Charlotte wriggled away from Rachel's arms and scurried into the kitchen as though she hadn't heard him. A minute later, she returned with a plate of cookies in her hands and offered it to Justin. "Try it, Daddy. Mommy taught me how to make these." Then, she picked a piece from the plate and stuffed it into his mouth.

Justin couldn't say no, so he took a bite and was amazed with the taste. It's fragrant and neither too sweet nor too buttery. Just perfect. Does she even have this talent?

Charlotte blinked and watched him in anticipation. "It's delicious, isn't it?"

"It's okay," he answered after returning to his senses.

"What do you mean by that? Don't you know how to compliment a person, Daddy? No wonder Mommy left! It's because you drove her away!"

"I drove her away? Who told you that?"

"Miss Hochmann said so," she answered while rolling her eyes at him. Then, she climbed back into Rachel's arms using her hands and feet, clinging onto her mother tightly. "She said you were a baddie, and that was why Mommy left. When Mommy's not angry anymore, she will return. Are you still angry, Mommy?"

At first, Rachel was surprised, but she looked at the person opposite of her with a thoughtful look. "Not anymore."

"Then you won't leave anymore, for sure! Daddy, you're not allowed to make Mommy mad again!"

Anger rushed through Justin, and he tossed the half-eaten cookie back onto the plate in irritation. How could Gloria tell a kid nonsense like this? Also, this woman didn't even care to explain things! She's acting as though I'm the one who made a mistake!

Right before he could say a thing, Mary came forward and told him, "Sir, dinner will be ready soon. Should I prepare anything else?" While speaking, she cast a glance at Rachel's direction, making her meaning known.

Placing down the newspaper, he then asked Rachel, "What time do you plan to leave?"

Charlotte glared at him and interjected, "What's wrong with you, Daddy? Mommy just came back! Where do you want her to go?"

"She has her own place. She can't keep staying at somebody else's house!"

“This is not somebody else’s house! This is my house, so it’s also her house!”

Justin’s expression was stern when he asked, “Are you going to let her live here?”

“Every kid has their daddy and mommy living together with them. Why not me?” she asked, her eyes turning red again. Tightening her arms around Rachel’s neck, she shouted at him, “You’re evil, Daddy! I’m not staying here if you don’t let Mommy stay here!”

Justin was so mad that he bounced up from his seat, and Rachel quickly tried to pacify the situation by saying, “It’s okay. Aren’t you having dinner soon? Charlotte, have dinner with Daddy. I’ll be here again another day, okay?”

“You don’t want me as well, Mommy?” Charlotte cried, tears flowing down her cheeks. “You don’t want me because I’m not a good girl?”

At a loss for what to do, Rachel hurriedly wiped away her tears. “That’s not true. Don’t cry, Charlotte.”

However, the little bawled loudly, and her cries echoed throughout the huge living room. “Mommy doesn’t want me anymore! I’m so sad. I’ve never had a mommy since I was young, and now that she’s back, she doesn’t even want me! Am I a bad child?”

Justin’s heart wrenched when he heard that. Thus, he instructed, “Mary, set the table for another person.”

Surprised by his words, Rachel paused with her hand mid-air as she wiped away Charlotte’s tears, and she looked at him in shock.

However, his eyes were stone cold. Even though Charlotte was his Achilles’ heel and he could agree to anything she wanted, it didn’t mean that anyone should use her to threaten him.

“Come to Daddy, Charlotte,” he said.

Charlotte shook her head in reply, all the while still sniffing.

Hence, Rachel had to hold her in her arms and stroke her back until she calmed down. "Alright now. Hush-hush. I'll eat with you, okay?"

"Okay." Charlotte answered, her babyish voice ringing in the living room.

Chapter 177

During dinner time, Charlotte wanted to sit next to Rachel. "Mommy, I want to eat that!"

"This?"

"Yes!"

"All right. Eat more and grow tall, Rachel said. Then, she dropped the food the little girl liked onto her plate.

With an unreadable look in his eyes, Justin watched as Charlotte chomped down on the food happily. This girl is usually a picky eater and would always complain at the dinner table. No matter how we coaxed her, she wouldn't even take an extra bite. With this woman around, she just eats anything she gives her and even eats a lot of it. More importantly, everyone knew how Charlotte usually treated other women. She would usually be stubborn, rude, and mean toward them. In contrast, she was very obedient toward Rachel. Is it because they're related by blood?

Night fell, and after Rachel tucked Charlotte into bed, she sneaked out of the room quietly.

At the top of the staircase, she saw that the light in the study on the first floor was still turned on. If her guess was right, Justin was probably still working there. Therefore, the master bedroom would surely be empty now.

If the surveillance record containing the evidence that could prove that Hans was murdered was in this house, the most probably place it would be was either the master bedroom or the study.

After she slipped into the bedroom, she started searching from the head of the bed, opening and checking every drawer. Finally, in the corner of the closet, she found a black-colored safe.

Password... What's the password? she asked silently while looking at the number pad.

Beep, beep, beep.

She punched in Justin's birth date.

It's not right. What about Charlotte's birthday?

Beep, beep, beep.

That's not it, either. I still have one more try left, she thought. At that moment though, the sound of footsteps came from outside the room, so she quickly closed the closet doors.

"What are you doing here?"

Holding her chest, Rachel turned around and said in surprise, "You gave me a scare! You don't make a sound at all when you walk!"

"Why are you sneaking around in my room?" he asked while standing at the door, his expression deadpan.

"Sneaking around? I just put Charlotte to bed and wanted to tell you that I'm going to leave now. In the end, you came behind me right after I came in and scared the daylights out of me!"

"Really? You're looking for me?" he asked suspiciously as he inched in closer to her.

Staring at him, she said, "You don't believe me? What else could I possibly be doing except to look for you?"

"You put in so much effort to make a trip here. You baked cookies with Charlotte and refused to leave.

At this time now, you even came into my room where we're alone. So tell me, what do you plan to do?"

After hearing his conclusion, Rachel couldn't stop herself from bursting into laughter.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I'm not interested in you," she answered. "At all."

"What did you say?"

She shrugged and told him honestly, "I don't care whether you believe it or not, but I'm simply here to say goodbye. I have to go now."

"Hold it right there," he said. Then, he grabbed her arm and stopped her from leaving. In an icy tone, he asked, "If you're not interested, why did you show up at the club that night and did that?"

Even though he was holding her wrist, she didn't struggle and asked in return, "What did I do?"

"You tell me."

Rachel made a show of thinking about it before suddenly lifting her head and saying, "Are you speaking about that kiss? I had too much to drink that night, so I was a little tipsy. But then, I really didn't expect that you're still thinking about it."

Justin's expression darkened. He was furious as he tightened his jaw and said, "You had too much to drink?"

"Yeah," she replied before jerking her hand away from his grip. She smirked as she added, "Actually, you don't have to take it so seriously. We're adults now. You know we're capable of anything with a little liquid courage. Don't take it for real. It's getting late, so I'm leaving now." After that, she left the house without looking back.

When he heard the sound of the car engine starting outside the house, Justin was so furious that his face was red. Such a flirtatious woman can't possibly be a responsible mother. No wonder I divorced her back then.

Meanwhile, it was already past eleven at night when Rachel reached home. After Jolly learned that Charlotte had found out that Rachel was her mother, she appeared as though she was expecting it when she said, "I've told you before your return that you should think carefully about acknowledging your daughter. It's impossible for you to avoid your daughter if you want to get close to Justin."

At the end of the day, it was not a secret that Rachel was Justin's ex-wife, so how could she hide the fact that she was Charlotte's biological mother?

Rachel opened the fridge and grabbed a bottle of beer, feeling frustrated. "I know it's unavoidable. I just feel... guilty."

The guilt she had was for her daughter. Back then, she left Riverdale alone to save herself and left her daughter behind. Earlier, her heart was broken into pieces when she heard Charlotte's cries.

Calmly, Jolly said, "There's nothing to be guilty about. You had no other choice as well." She sighed and continued, "But look how great things are now. You can use your daughter as an excuse to visit Justin's place often. That'll make it easier for you to look for evidence."

"I found the safe."

"Really?"

"Yeah," Rachel answered while nodding. "It's in Justin's closet, but I don't know the password."

"That's easy. Wait a minute." Jolly returned to her room and ransacked her drawers before coming out again with a thumb-sized glass bottle. "Here's some fluorescent powder. Just scatter this on the

number pad and Justin will leave his prints behind when he opens the safe. Then, you'll find out the numbers he's using for the password."

"It's not easy to arrange and combine a six-digit password."

"It's still easier than making random guesses. Maybe there's a pattern to it."

Nodding thoughtfully, Rachel decided that she agreed with that. "Yeah." I'll have to look for another chance to visit his place again then.

The next day, Charlotte woke up in the morning and rubbed her eyes while looking for her mother. In her sheep bedroom slippers, she stood at the top of the staircase and asked, "Madam Mary, where's my mommy?"

"Miss Hudson left after you fell asleep last night," she explained.

Suddenly, her eyes popped wide open and she asked, "She left last night?"

"Yes."

"Then, did she say when she's coming again? Will she come again today?"

"I'm not sure about that, but Mr. Justin doesn't seem to welcome her that much."

"That's so mean of Daddy!" Charlotte cried out angrily while stomping her foot. "Mommy finally returned, and he'll definitely drive her away again if he acts like this!"

This is bad, if Mommy doesn't return, Amber will marry Daddy! At that thought, she said anxiously, "Quick, help me get dressed. I want to go out."

"You didn't even have your breakfast yet. Where do you want to go?"

"I'm going to look for Daddy and Mommy at their office," she answered, her hands clenched tightly to show her determination. "I'll assert Mommy's dominance for her."

At the same time, after her morning meeting, the secretary knocked on Rachel's door and entered her office. "Chris, the head office wants you to make a trip to the president's office after your meeting."

"Right now?" Rachel asked while glancing at her watch.

"Yes. They called when your meeting just started."

"Did they mention what it is about?"

"No, they didn't."

"All right. I got it," she answered. She was puzzled about why Justin would look for her at this time all of a sudden.

Burton Pharmaceuticals was located on the twelfth floor of the Burton Group headquarters building. It went to show just how important this subsidiary company was to the Group, and the president's office which belonged to Justin was on the twentieth floor.

As she pressed the button on the elevator, Rachel analyzed in her mind the possible reasons that

Justin was looking for her. Is he thinking of dismissing me?

Chapter 178

The elevator doors opened with a 'ding', and the secretary outside of Justin's office greeted Amber politely when she saw her. "Hello, Miss Amber. President Burton is still in a meeting. What brought you here today?"

"I made some chicken soup and brought some for him. It has been very busy in the company recently, and all of you have worked hard. So, I ordered some pastries and they will be delivered soon."

At this, the people at the reception table looked happy and started thanking her.

"You're always so sweet, Miss Amber."

"Thank you, Miss Amber."

"You're welcome. I'll be waiting for Justin in his office then."

The secretary at the reception quickly stood up and said, "Miss Amber, why don't you wait in the lounge? There's already somebody waiting in his office."

"Somebody?" she repeated, her eyes narrowed. "Who is it?"

"It's Charlotte," the secretary replied.

Amber was relieved when she heard that. She had initially thought that it was another C-list celebrity who had come to throw herself at Justin. "Why did Charlotte suddenly come over today?"

"No idea, but she arrived in the early morning."

"It's fine," Amber said with a smile. "I'm bored anyway, so I can chat with her since Justin will be finished with the meeting soon."

Everyone at the reception exchanged glances as they watched Amber disappear into Justin's office. It was an open secret that Charlotte had a dislike for Amber.

Most of them reckoned that Justin was still not marrying Amber because of Charlotte's disapproval. Besides this reason, they couldn't think of another logical explanation.

Someone sighed and said, "The door's unlocked. Let's check it out."

"I hope nothing happens."

"Yeah, that's our boss' precious daughter. We won't be able to answer him if anything happens to her."

"But Miss Amber is his fiancée, so we can't afford to offend either side." They discussed among themselves as they gathered in front of Justin's office and stuck their ears to the door.

In the office, Charlotte was seated on Justin's chair, dressed in her black and white-colored skirt with suspenders. Her legs were dangling in the air, and the red rubies embedded in her tiny white leather shoes sparkled in the sunlight.

She was in a really good mood, for she was even humming a nursery rhyme as she sucked on a lollipop. Upon hearing the sound of the door behind her, she turned around quickly and exclaimed in delight, "Mom--"

But the moment she saw the person who came in, she swallowed her words and her expression became indifferent. "Why is it you?"

With a thermos in her hand, Amber flashed her a smile and said, "I'm here to bring lunch for your daddy. What did you call me earlier, Charlotte?"

"No, no, no!" Charlotte looked disgusted. "What do you think I was calling you? You must be imagining things because you want to be my mommy so bad!"

Despite her answer, Amber was not the least bit angry. "It's okay. It doesn't matter whether you call me 'Mommy' or not. We'll be mother and daughter by name after I marry your father. This is a fact that can't be changed with just a form of address."

All along, she had never regarded Charlotte highly. Once she had a boy with Justin, he would be the sole heir to the Burton Family's fortune, and this girl would be nothing by then.

Charlotte rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. "My daddy won't ever marry you."

"That's not up to you to say. Even if Justin lets you get your way, he won't let a child decide his marriage. In the end, your influence is limited." As she spoke, she placed the thermos on the desk and

stared at Charlotte silently, the huge desk between them. With the usual friendly pretense she had in her eyes, she added, "You'd better be a good girl, or your life won't be so easy anymore after I marry your father. Do you understand me?"

Charlotte's pupils contracted, and she nodded cautiously.

"You're pretty smart."

Tentatively, Charlotte pointed a finger at the thermos and asked, "Miss Amber, what did you bring for Daddy?"

"It's chicken soup. Why?"

"I haven't had breakfast, so I'm a little hungry now. May I have a little?"

Since she was rarely this obedient, and she didn't go against her on this day, Amber was rather pleased. Thus, she said, "Sure. I brought quite a lot anyway. I'll pour some out for you. If you're a good girl, I'll treat you as I would my own daughter. Here, try it."

Then, she passed her the bowl of soup that she had just poured out in front of Charlotte. Suddenly, the look in Charlotte's eyes changed and she raised her hand.

With a loud thud, the bowl and thermos flipped over. The soup scattered from the desk to the floor as Amber shrieked. Quite a lot of the soup had spilled onto her dress as well.

"You wretched girl! Are you crazy?"

Charlotte jumped off the chair. There was a sly and proud look on her face as she said, "I'm sorry, Aunt Amber. I didn't hold it properly because the soup is too hot."

"You did it on purpose, didn't you?" Amber shouted, looking at the spilled soup on the floor furiously.

She raised her hand and was about to grab the little girl when the anxious voice of a woman came from behind her, which made her stop suddenly. "What are you doing?"

Amber's expression darkened, but Charlotte had already dashed over while shouting, "Mommy!"

After lowering herself to pick Charlotte up, Rachel asked, "Are you okay?"

Charlotte batted her eyelids, and something glinted in her eyes. Then, her eyes misted over with tears when she thought of something. "Mommy, why did you only come now? Somebody almost killed me!"

Shocked, Amber asked, "Charlotte, what did you call her? Say it again!"

For five whole years, she had painstakingly taken care of this brat. From the time she could only babble to the point now when she would talk back to her and make fun of her, Amber had tolerated her. However, not only did she gain nothing, but she immediately called Rachel 'Mommy' the moment she returned after five years of disappearance. Rachel doesn't deserve this! she thought angrily.

Charlotte's cries became louder, and she snuggled in Rachel's arms as though she was terrified. "Look at her, Mommy!"

As Rachel wiped away the little girl's tears, she cooed, "Hush now. Don't cry anymore." Then, she placed Charlotte behind herself and gaze at Amber with stony eyes. "You don't have to hear the same thing twice if you're not deaf. Of course, I won't mind telling Charlotte to call me Mommy again just for you to hear."

The color drained from Amber's face as she shouted, "Rachel Husdon, do you have any idea what you're talking about? What gives you the right to be her mother?"

"Are you qualified if not me?" she snapped. After scanning behind Amber, she added, "You almost scalded her. If I didn't arrive in time, would you have hit her as well? Is this how Justin allowed you to take care of her?"

"What nonsense are you speaking about?"

"Then explain to me what happened!"

Amber was so furious that she was on the verge of pulling her hair. "I can't explain this to you, but when I see how capable both of you are at framing people, I have to admit that you two are really mother and daughter!"

Mother and daughter? Outside the door, everyone started whispering among themselves at the shocking news.

Earlier, when Charlotte called out 'Mommy', the employees gathered outside already had their jaws hanging, but now, even Amber had confirmed it to be true. So this woman is Charlotte's real mother and our boss' ex-wife?

Chapter 179

"Didn't they say that the boss' ex-wife passed away?" someone muttered.

"Well, she's well and alive, isn't she? I heard she's the new sales director in the company," someone else said.

“You mean Chris, the person that our boss hired at a high rate from another country?” another person asked.

“Gosh, are they rekindling old flames?” A series of voices came from the office. For some reason, the words ‘rekindling old flames’ rang loud in Amber’s ears. She dug her fingernails into her palms as she clenched her fists, and her gaze dimmed as she thought about Rachel. So, this is the reason you’re back. You keep saying that you aren’t interested in Justin, that you don’t want anything, but the truth is that you’ve been carefully scheming this all along. You planted your seeds five years ago, and you got that brat to take care of it for you.

The surroundings seemed to turn silent as everyone stiffened up and greeted the person who arrived. “President Burton.”

“Why are you guys huddled at the front entrance? Don’t you guys have work?” Frankie barked. Everyone scurried away and scattered off after that.

“What are you doing here?” Justin asked. He saw Rachel the moment he stepped in.

“Daddy!” Before Rachel could say anything, Justin felt someone clinging onto his leg. Charlotte began to wail at him. “Mommy’s here to save me. I would’ve gotten hit if Mommy hadn’t come to my rescue!”

“You got hit?” Justin immediately knelt down and held onto Charlotte to look for any injuries. “What happened?”

Rachel knitted her brows as her gaze turned cold. “It was all thanks to your fiancée, of course.”

“Don’t you dare accuse me!” The look on Amber’s face was one that was twisted with indignance. “Ignore her nonsense, Justin. I didn’t do anything. I just came here to bring you soup, and Charlotte said that she wanted some, but she was the one who intentionally overturned the bowl of soup!! would’ve been burnt if I hadn’t dodged the hot liquid.”

Rachel felt her heart sinking as she looked toward the office table from the corner of her eyes-the soupy mess was still there. Justin heaved a sigh of relief once he checked and ensured that Charlotte wasn't injured. "What happened, Charlotte?" he asked.

The young girl rubbed her eyes as she snuggled into Justin's arms. "The soup was really hot, and I couldn't hold onto it when Aunt Amber handed it to me. That's why I dropped it. I didn't do it on purpose."

"How dare you say that it wasn't on purpose? Would you have spilled the whole flask of soup if you hadn't done it intentionally?" Amber hissed.

"I really didn't do it on purpose. Daddy, Aunt Amber tried to hit me," Charlotte wailed.

"How dare you complain when you were the one who was at fault!" Amber cried.

Rachel couldn't stand it any longer. "Let's not talk about how the soup was spilled for now. I witnessed you attempting to hit her with my own eyes, so how are you going to deny that?"

Justin frowned as he shot Amber a cold glare. She felt herself growing anxious. "I didn't lay a finger on the girl at all! You can't just listen to her side of the story, Justin. She's obviously back to get revenge on me!"

"Why does she need to get revenge?" Justin held onto Charlotte's hand, his lanky shadow extending across the ground.

Amber gritted her teeth. "Well, because she's Charlotte's birth mother! She's jealous of me because I took the spot that was supposed to belong to her. Can't you tell, Justin? She's using her child to gain your sympathy!"

"My mommy isn't using me at all!" Charlotte clung onto Justin's arm. "I came alone today, Daddy. Mommy didn't know anything. Aunt Amber is lying! She told me that she would treat me worse once she gets married to you, and she warned me to stay in line!"

"I never said that, Justin. Trust me!" Amber cried.

"That's enough." A look of annoyance flashed across Justin's face. "You don't need to send food to the company in the future. My assistant can handle that."

Amber's face turned pale. "Justin, I..."

"I have other work to do. You should leave now," Justin muttered. Amber couldn't say much else to his heartless words. Just as Amber was about to walk out of the building, Charlotte rolled her eyes at the woman.

"Speak up. What happened?" Justin let go of Charlotte's hand and sat down behind the coffee table as he stared at the woman and girl before his eyes. The two females couldn't help but feel rather frightened-it was almost as if they were being questioned in court.

"What do you want us to say, Daddy?" Charlotte was starting to feel rather self-conscious.

"What else? Tell me about your lie earlier. Was the spillage really an accident?" he uttered.

Rachel's heart sank as she looked at Charlotte confusedly. "Were you actually lying, Charlotte?"

"I didn't lie, Mommy!" Charlotte shook her head frantically. Rachel then lowered herself and held the young girl's hand. "I'll trust you no matter what you say, Charlotte. But I also want you to know that it's

bad for kids to lie to others."

"Mommy... Hug me." Charlotte sobbed and waddled forward for a hug, but Rachel gently stopped the girl as she spoke in a soft but firm voice. "Let's clear things up first, Charlotte. Crying and whining isn't going to solve all your problems."

After a moment of silence, Charlotte finally spoke up meekly. "She was the one who said that she'd get married to Daddy. She warned me to be obedient and said that she would be bad to me otherwise."

"Was that why you spilled the soup on purpose?" Rachel narrowed her brows. Charlotte hung her head low, and her silence had provided the adults with an answer. Rachel sighed; she didn't blame the young girl. "Charlotte's still a child. It's normal for her to act in a more immature manner. I think it's good that she's willing to admit her faults, and this incident wasn't entirely her fault anyway. Please don't blame her for this," she said as she turned to the man behind the coffee table.

"Since when did I say I was blaming her?" Justin shot her a stern expression. Rachel froze as she looked at him dumbfoundedly. At the same time, Charlotte lifted her head to look at her as well. "Why would Daddy blame me, Mommy?"

"If I were to criticize her for such matters, I wouldn't have the time to do anything else in my day," Justin muttered. Ever since Charlotte learned how to speak, she had been especially hostile toward all the women around Justin. She had practically used all the possible ways of throwing tantrums and kicking up fusses with other women, and Justin had witnessed them all. The incident with Amber earlier was a common occurrence; it was no big deal.

Right then, Rachel tugged her lips to form an awkward smile as she glanced at both father and daughter. "... I guess I was overreacting then, huh?" So, the two of them were merely putting on a show earlier? It looks like Amber's the one who was fooled by this.

"However, you're the first one that got her to admit her faults," Justin added. Charlotte had been a mischievous girl since she was younger, and she got into a lot of trouble. On top of that, she often refused to admit her mistakes, and she was incredibly stubborn. Yet, she turned into an obedient little kitten in front of Rachel, and she spat the truth out after Rachel told her to do so. "That's because what Mommy said made a lot of sense." Charlotte giggled as she wrapped her arms around Rachel's neck. Smooch! She planted a huge kiss on her mother's cheek.

Justin seemed rather displeased to see the both of them being so close to each other. "What are you doing here, anyway? You haven't told me anything."

His words came as a surprise to Rachel. "Weren't you the one who told me to come?"

"I told you to come?" he asked.

“Didn’t you?” she asked.

The both of them shifted their gazes to Charlotte at the same time. Charlotte immediately grabbed Rachel’s arm as she changed the topic. “I’m starving, Mommy, Daddy. What are we having for lunch?” The young girl’s attitude cleared things up for them they all knew who the culprit was.

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“I don’t have time. I’ll get Frankie to bring you out for lunch,” Justin replied.

“No, Daddy! You need to eat with Mommy and me!” Charlotte wailed. Justin was about to reject the young girl when Rachel spoke up. “Let’s treat this as my welcome meal, boss. We can eat with Charlotte; I’ll buy you guys a meal. It’s just one meal with your child, so it’s not going to take up that much time.”

Justin was captivated by her calm demeanor, and he found it hard to reject her request. For the first time, a sense of confusion flooded him as he considered the one question that popped up in his mind. Why did I divorce this woman in the first place?

“I want to eat with both Daddy and Mommy! Let’s go!” Charlotte gave Justin’s arm a powerful tug. Both the girls were asking him to go along, and it’d seem like he had something to hide if he didn’t just agree with them.

Therefore, Justin pulled his car keys out as he led the way to the car. “I’m heading out. Call me if there’s anything.” He left Frankie some orders.

“Got it, President Burton,” Frankie replied.

With one hand holding onto Rachel’s arm, Charlotte waved her other hand toward Frankie. “I’ll bring some good food back for you, Mr. Beckham!”

Frankie ruffled her hair. “Thanks, Charlotte.” The assistant turned to Rachel and gave her a nod after that. Rachel looked completely different from how she used to look five years ago. Frankie wouldn’t even have recognized her if they had bumped into each other on the streets.

Once they got to the garage, Justin threw his keys to Rachel, who froze. "Why are you handing me this?"

"Are you expecting me to drive?" he asked her in return.

"But... It's your car. Why won't you drive it?" she uttered. Right when Justin was bending down to put on Charlotte's seatbelt for her, the young girl stuck her head out and winked at Rachel. "Daddy doesn't know how to drive, Mommy."

"How is that possible?" Rachel asked.

"Why are you talking so much?" Justin straightened himself as he shot Rachel an annoyed glare. "Are we going for lunch or not? I don't have that much free time." He got into the car immediately after that.

Rachel knitted her brows as she held the handle on the car door. Does Justin not know how to drive? Charlotte must have been kidding, right?

They arrived at a restaurant that Charlotte picked. It was a quiet place with elegant surroundings. "The fish and chips here taste really good, Mommy. Their pasta is really tasty too," Charlotte said.

"Do you often come out for meals with Daddy?" Rachel asked when she realized how Charlotte seemed familiar with the dishes.

"No. My aunt is the one who brings me out for food," Charlotte muttered.

Justin was midway pouring them glasses of water, but he shot the young girl a stare after hearing what she said. "Have you forgotten about all the times I brought you out for meals, you ungrateful

kid?"

Food was served soon after that. "Is it good?" Rachel asked as she peeled a prawn for Charlotte.

“Amazing!” the young girl exclaimed. They were halfway through their meal when the waiter came over with a trolley. “Hello, sir, madam. Today is our restaurant’s family day, so any married couple who

brings their child out is eligible to get our free fruit platter or a bouquet of flowers.” Married couple? Justin froze while Rachel frowned a little. “So, would you guys prefer the fruit platter or some flowers?”

“The flowers, of course!” Before Justin could say much, Charlotte pointed toward the trolley excitedly. “Those red roses, please!”

The young man immediately handed a red rose to Justin. “It seems like the both of you must have a really loving relationship. I hope that you guys grow old together.”

Since the flowers were right in their faces, Justin couldn’t do anything else but take it into his hands. A series of emotions flooded his face as he did so. However, the waiter didn’t leave just yet; he continued to put on a professional smile as he lifted a camera to snap a picture. “Smile! Look at the camera!”

“You need a picture too?” Justin’s face fell even more.

“Let’s take one! Let’s...” Charlotte urged Justin. “Give the flower to Mommy, and we’ll take a picture.” Everyone was watching him, so Justin didn’t have any choice but to hand the rose to Rachel.

The waiter pressed the shutter the moment Rachel took the flower from Justin’s hand. Click! The heartwarming moment shared by the family of three was captured and frozen in time. “Thank you, sir, madam. Have a great meal!”

Justin and Rachel exchanged rather awkward gazes after the waiter left. Charlotte, on the other hand, held onto the empty polaroid and shook it in the air. “It’s coming out! Look at it, Daddy!” Only then did the both of them return to their senses.

Rachel placed the rose aside to look at the picture in Charlotte’s hand. The outline of their figures was beginning to surface, and Charlotte was grinning so much that her gums were showing. Her eyes were the shape of half-moons as she exclaimed in joy, “This is my first ever family portrait, Mommy, Daddy!”

Initially, Justin hadn't wanted to keep the photo, but he felt his insides melting after he heard what Charlotte said. The young girl was brought up by a single parent. Although she appeared bold and stubborn on the outside, she certainly recognized that she was lacking something as a growing child. Justin tried his best to be lenient and understanding toward her, but no amount of leniency had ever made her as happy as she was in the past two days.

"Can we take more pictures in the future, Mommy, Daddy?" Charlotte looked up at her parents, her gaze filled with anticipation.

Rachel gave Justin a look before she stroked Charlotte's hair. "Mommy and Daddy can take tons of pictures with you if that's what makes you happy, Charlotte." Justin frowned a little.

None of them noticed a dark figure seated in the corner of the restaurant. Amber had followed them over to the store. At that moment, her face was a sickly pale shade as she watched the family of three getting along happily. The more I think about it, the more certain I am that Rachel had left this child here in the past just to achieve what she's doing now. I hadn't expected her to play this move. It was too well calculated.

er pulled her phone out to make a call. "How's it going with the things I told you to do earlier?" She continued after a short pause, "Okay. I want to see results." An icy expression surfaced in her eyes after she ended the call.

Meanwhile, Justin had to rush back to the company after they finished their meal. Rachel parked the car in the garage, and she turned back to find Charlotte fast asleep on the child's car seat.

"Can you wait here for a while? I'll get someone to bring her home," Justin said.

"It's fine. You go ahead with your work; I'll send her back," Rachel replied. "I don't have much to do in

the afternoon anyway."

After taking a look at his daughter, who was fast asleep, he agreed with Rachel's idea. "Sure."

While Rachel refastened her seatbelt, she looked into the rearview mirror to see Justin's figure leaving the garage. She then drove Justin's car out of the garage and sent Charlotte home into her room. The maid came over to thank Rachel while she was tucking Charlotte into bed. "It's a little windy today, and Charlotte isn't dressed in really thick clothes. You should prepare some warm soup so that she can have it once she's awake."

"I got it," the maid replied.

"I'll be here with her for a while. You can go on with your work," Rachel told her.

"Ah, okay." After the maid left, Rachel glanced at the bedroom door and listened as the maid's footsteps grew farther and farther away. Once there was no longer any sound from the hallway, Rachel got to her feet and left Charlotte's bedroom.

She was familiar with the way to Justin's bedroom, and she opened the wardrobe to reveal the safebox inside.