

Mute Bride 331

Chapter 331 It's Too Late for Regrets

Irwin trembled as he continued, "I treated Rae like my own granddaughter. She wept so hard and insisted that I release you. I thought... I was thinking that it wouldn't be easy to deal with a ten-year-old child, anyway. If you were released, then so be it. Besides, it's impossible for you to escape far in the forest located so deep in the mountains. You could never go home—"

Before he could finish speaking, Justin suddenly lifted him up by his neck. "What the hell are you talking about!? The person who rescued me was a little girl named Katie! How could it have been Rae?!"

The man was shaken so badly that he could barely breathe. "Rae... is Katie..."

Those words were undoubtedly a huge shock that exploded violently in Justin's mind. Rae is Katie?! That's impossible! "Explain clearly!"

"President Burton, he has already passed out!" Frankie saw what had happened from the side and quickly stepped forward to stop Justin. He was afraid that if things were to continue, it would only lead to the man's death. "Hurry up and send him to the hospital."

Irwin was an old man. Moreover, he was bleeding non-stop from where his finger had been chopped. If they did not send him to the hospital soon, there was a high possibility that he could die from extreme loss of blood.

Justin snapped back to his senses. "Send him to the hospital! Contact the hospital!"

This old man is the only person who knows the truth of what happened back then. I can't let him die. His hands were covered in blood and his thoughts were a chaotic mess while they were on the way to the hospital. How could Rachel be Katie?

All the clues from the past suddenly surfaced in his mind. Rachel had been kidnapped and sold when she was a little girl. Her grandmother had a good relationship with Irwin as the two of them were neighbors. Jefferey brought back an illegitimate daughter twenty years ago and claimed that she was a congenital mute...

Along the corridor in the hospital, Frankie hurried over with a document in his hand. “President Burton, this is the hospital’s medical records.”

Justin took the documents. His complexion immediately turned pale at the sight of Rachel’s name on the document. After pursuing the medical records written inside, he stumbled without any warning and had to lean against the wall just to barely maintain his balance.

Rachel’s muteness was not congenital. The cause for her condition was clearly written on the medical record—she had sustained damage to her vocal cords in a fire twenty years ago. The record also contained the signature of her attending doctor, Julian Peters.

Rachel is Katie from back then. She is the Katie who saved my life in the past. I thought she was dead. Justin went through a lot just to succeed the Burton Group on his own for the sake of avenging Katie. He later discovered the financial loophole in Hudson Pharmaceuticals, suppressed them, got hold of Jefferey’s weakness, and tried to bring Jefferey down.

However, as it turned out, the person he took revenge on was the same person who rescued him in the first place.

“If she is Katie, then why did Jefferey set the fire? He set his own daughter on fire!” Justin leaned against the wall and muttered to himself. All of a sudden, he recalled the scene that he witnessed during the fire.

The burning thatched cottage had revealed a woman’s figure on the ground while the man who emerged from the house wore a vicious expression. Even across the hill, the two children had clearly

witnessed the scene. Justin could still remember the coldness in that man’s eyes even though so many years had passed. So, that was the person whom Jefferey sent to kill Rachel’s mother, Selena Hudson. He then set fire to erase the evidence and disguised the murder as an accident instead.

The secret room hidden inside Jefferey’s study in Hudson Vineyard flashed through his mind. The innocent woman who died in vain...

An influx of images filled his mind, which all pointed to Rachel's real identity. There was no doubt that she was Katie from back then.

"Blaargh." Justin abruptly coughed up a mouthful of blood.

"President Burton!" Frankie exclaimed in shock and hurried forward. "Are you alright, President Burton!? Doctor! Doctor, come and take a look!"

However, Justin pushed Frankie aside and staggered away before he suddenly burst into hysterical laughter. "I was wrong! I was wrong! Rachel, I was wrong!"

I found the wrong person. I took revenge on the wrong person. All the evil consequences should have fallen on me, but, why!? Katie has never done anything wrong! Why does she have to be unfairly victimized just because she met me? I was wrong! I was very wrong!

The scenes from five years ago flashed through his mind once more. When he recalled everything, he felt as though he was suffocating. He leaned against the tables and chairs while trying to head toward the exit with great difficulty.

Thud. He collapsed on the ground again. Before he lost consciousness, he saw Frankie entering the room and running toward him.

...

It was afternoon by the time Rachel had finished her phone call with the person in charge of the pharmaceutical factory.

A delighted Jolly said, "This is great! The land around here now belongs to us. We can build a warehouse or even expand the factory if we want to!"

"You must be dreaming." Rachel laughed. "We don't need to build a warehouse since we already have one. As for the factory, I don't need to tell you how complicated the approval process is for industrial land, right? How can it be that simple?"

It was something that Jolly didn't take seriously. "At least we don't need to lower our heads to that despicable villain, Justin Burton. That's enough to make me delirious with joy. He thought he had our weakness. Hmph! In his dreams!"

"The Burton Family has deep roots in Riverdale after all. We will have a lot of business dealings with them, so he will have many opportunities to make things difficult for us in the future."

"What are you afraid of!? You have me!"

"Hmm?" Rachel raised her eyebrow at Jolly.

Jolly immediately changed her stance. "Even if I'm powerless, I still have my parents. Hehe."

While they were conversing with each other, Rachel's phone rang. "Hello?"

"President Hudson, please come to the hospital."

"What's wrong?"

"President Burton suddenly passed out and is receiving emergency treatment in the hospital right now."

Rachel frowned slightly at those words.

Jolly was standing next to Rachel at the time. When she noticed that Rachel's expression seemed strange, she clarified, "Who is it?"

Immediately after that, Rachel activated the loudspeaker function on her phone and placed it on the table.

Frankie's anxious voice came from the other side of the phone. "President Burton has been frequently suffering from headaches and dizziness for the past two days. He fainted not long after the call with you earlier today. The doctor said that he has a blood clot in his brain that has impacted his cranial nerves and requires brain surgery. He has been on the operating table for about half an hour now.

Without waiting for Rachel to speak, Jolly grabbed the phone and said angrily, "So, he has a blood clot in his brain. What does that have to do with us!? How dare you even mention that phone call! That phone call was something Justin himself made. What's this? Are you trying to deceive us?"

"Miss Carter, I really didn't mean it that way. President Burton is in critical condition right now, but he doesn't even have a single family member around him—"

"So what? How is Chris a part of his family?"

Frankie was on the verge of crying. Even so, he had no way of winning against Jolly in an argument. "President Hudson, please come. If something were to go wrong, I am sure President Burton will wish to see you."

Rachel glanced at the phone. A moment later, she responded indifferently, "I'm sorry. I don't have the time. Once I'm done dealing with the matters on hand and have the time, I will visit him at the hospital."

He was desperate. "President Hudson! What if the surgery goes wrong!?"

She replied, "In that case, I will take the time to attend his funeral."

Chapter 332 He Wants to Notarize a Will?

Rachel's voice was not loud. On the other end of the phone, Frankie was completely stunned after she finished her sentence. He knew that she had changed greatly following her return. However, he never imagined that she hated Justin to this extent—she didn't even show any concern for Justin's life or death.

Before Frankie could react, she ended the call. Jolly suppressed her accusatory expression and looked at Rachel in worry. "Chris, are you okay?"

"Look at me. Do I look like I'm not okay?"

"Are you really not going to the hospital?"

"Many people will be fighting to visit him now that he has been admitted to the hospital. I am neither his family nor friend. Why should I visit him?" Rachel's expression was cold. "Besides, it's not the first time that he used this method of harming himself to trick me."

Jolly hesitated for a long time. In the end, she swallowed the words that she wanted to say: What if he isn't pretending this time?

Then, she found herself thinking, Even if he isn't pretending, it serves him right. It's his fault for making Rachel's life so difficult in the first place. "Do we continue with the lawsuit?"

"Yes." Rachel's tone was firm. "Why not? It's a good thing for us if he is not in good health. Hernandez can use Justin's poor health to justify that he is not fit to take care of Charlotte."

"You've thought that far?"

To that, Rachel said nothing, but her slightly clenched fist explained everything. Over the past few years, she had learned to seize all the opportunities in her best interests at any given time. After all, time did not repeat itself while opportunities did not wait for others. We've already severed all ties with each other; why bother pretending otherwise?

...

At the hospital the next day, it was already noon by the time Justin woke up.

“President Burton.” Frankie had stayed by Justin’s side all night long. He didn’t get a wink of sleep during that time and his eyes were red as a result. “You’re finally awake. Please don’t move about. I’ll go and get the doctor.”

Justin stared at the ceiling boards without moving and the back of his head felt slightly swollen.

He felt as though he had been dreaming all this time. It was a delusional dream where he had spent five years trying to escape his mistakes and live for the sake of living. Unfortunately, he should never have forgotten that what was bound to come would eventually come.

“The critical period has passed. You will need to remain in the hospital for half a month for observations. If your recovery is going well after half a month, you can go through the discharge procedures and return home for further recuperation.”

“Thank you, doctor.”

“No problem.”

After seeing the doctor off, Frankie breathed a sigh of relief. “How do you feel right now, President Burton? Are you feeling uncomfortable anywhere?”

Justin looked incredibly lost and depressed.

“President Burton?”

It took a long while for him to regain his senses, after which he spoke in a hoarse voice, “Frankie, please do something for me.”

“Please say.”

“Organize all the assets under my name and contact a lawyer. I want to make a notarization.”

As he was slightly startled by those words, Frankie glanced at Justin in surprise. Is he planning to write a will after his close brush with death?

After issuing the instructions regarding the lawyer, Justin continued to stare at the ceiling boards with a hazy vision.

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A letter from the attorney arrived at the hospital later that afternoon.

"President Burton..." Frankie had originally planned to suppress the lawsuit, but he did not expect Justin to yank the attorney's correspondence from the stack of documents. By the time he entered the room, Justin was already reading the letter.

"President Hudson's attitude had gone overboard. You're still in the hospital. It's hard to say whether you can even attend the court hearing on the day of the trial..."

Justin lifted a hand and stopped Frankie from continuing before he asked, "Isn't there the option of an out-of-court settlement before the court hearing?"

Frankie was surprised. "Are you thinking of resolving this issue out of court? Judging by President Hudson's current attitude, she will not be willing to agree to an out-of-court settlement. Not unless you

refuse to continue the lawsuit and hand over Charlotte's custodial rights."

"That's impossible." Justin's voice might be weak, but it remained as firm as ever. Charlotte was his one and only connection left with Rachel, as well as his only hope.

"Then, what do you plan to discuss with President Hudson?"

"Just to get in touch with her. Hand me the phone."

He did not explain much and only weakly uttered that sentence. One look at his pale complexion was enough to stop Frankie from saying anything else, for fear of agitating him. Therefore, Frankie could only hand the phone over to him.

Glancing at Rachel's name on the phone screen, Justin dialed the number.

The call connected after ringing for a long time.

"Hello?" On the other end of the phone, Rachel was sitting in her office and reading the documents that Hernandez had organized for her. When she received the phone call from Justin, she didn't even need to think that he had received the attorney's letter. "What is it?"

"Are you free? I want to discuss Charlotte's custodial rights with you in private."

"If you're planning to persuade me into giving up, then I don't think that there's anything to discuss. We might as well discuss it directly in court."

"Rachel, do it for Charlotte. I wish to have a peaceful discussion with you. Do you think Charlotte will be happy when she learns that we are on such bad terms with each other?"

She frowned at those words. If not for the fact that she was worried about Charlotte's feelings, she would not have taken so long to deal with him. She lifted her wrist and glanced at the time. "I have an

appointment for dinner tonight, so I only have half an hour's time to talk to you. If you don't mind, I can give you the location. You can come over to talk."

"Okay, no problem." Justin agreed immediately.

Listening to his tone, Rachel frowned in suspicion. Why does it sound different from his usual manner of speech?

...

It was evening and the lights had just been turned on. He had already been there for some time by the time she arrived at the restaurant. As he was wearing a baseball cap with the brim pulled low over his eyes, she failed to recognize him at first glance.

Considering that he was a semi-public figure, she realized that he probably did not want to be recognized and did not ask any questions. "Have you been waiting long?"

"No, I just arrived." When he saw her, he immediately rose to his feet and seemed a little embarrassed. "What do you want to drink? Is latte alright?"

"Anything is fine. I can't stay for long." Rachel casually hung her jacket over the back of the chair and explained, "I have an appointment with somebody else at this place tonight, so I only have half an hour. What did you want to discuss?"

Justin stared at the woman in front of him for some time, seeming a little entranced by her voice.

Under the warm lights of the restaurant, the little girl who secretly threw some bread into the dungeon more than twenty years ago gradually overlapped with the person in front of him before it merged into one.

A thin layer of mist surfaced in his eyes. Emotions such as self-blame, regret, and pain flooded him like a rising tide to crush every nerve in his body. For a long time, he could not make a sound.

"Justin?" Rachel repeatedly called his name with a slight frown. "Are you alright?"

Only then did Justin return to his senses and avoid her gaze. "I'm fine. I apologize. I've been a little distracted recently. What did you say?"

"I asked you what you wanted to discuss with me. I have to leave soon."

"I wanted to apologize."

“Huh?” The frown on her face deepened at those words. What’s the reason for this apology that came out of nowhere? “What are you talking about?”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry for everything I did in the past.”

Rachel became a little impatient. “You called me here just for this? Did you think that an apology would end this lawsuit?”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Justin, I will only accept your apology if you hand over Charlotte’s custodial rights.”

Chapter 333 Secret Meeting

Rachel’s words stunned Justin. A long time had passed before he said, “Rachel, as long as you are willing, you can come and visit Charlotte any time you want. You can even bring her home with you when you’re free. I only have one request. Please don’t take her away from me. No matter what you say, Charlotte is also my daughter. Can we please end this lawsuit?”

She looked astonished. That’s not something Justin will ever say.

Despite her perplexity, she was not so easily swayed. “Justin, it’s true that Charlotte is your only daughter at the moment. Can you guarantee that you will never get married and have other children in the future, though? You know better than I do what kind of environment surrounds the Burton Family. Do you want Charlotte to grow up in the middle of all those conflicts?”

Just based on this point alone, I can never allow Charlotte to remain by his side.

“It doesn’t matter whether you believe me or not, but I will never remarry or have other children.”

“Nobody can say for sure what will happen in the future. You don’t need to say such words.”

The indifference in her eyes made Justin smile bitterly.

“This is an asset transfer agreement.” He pushed a document over to her. “I understand your worries. These are all the assets under my name. I’ve already notarized these assets through an attorney. If I die one day, Charlotte will inherit all of my assets.”

Rachel was taken aback by those words for a moment. Then, she flipped through the document. The number of assets under his name was absolutely staggering; from residential properties to commercial properties to cash to antiques, the list of assets made up an entire book. Is he really willing to notarize all of his assets as an inheritance for Charlotte?

She was so shocked that she became a little hesitant.

“I’m not rushing you to make a decision. There’s still some time before the court hearing and the out-of-court settlement has yet to begin. You can take your time to think things through.”

“I’ll consider it.” Rachel placed the document on the table.

At this moment, she could not figure out the reason behind his behavior. Is he taking a step back for the sake of advancement and stabilizing his position for the time being? Or, does he have something else hidden up his sleeve? In any case, I can’t trust him so easily.

She glanced at the time. “I have to go now. My client is waiting for me.”

“Rachel.” Justin suddenly called out to her. “I’m very sorry for what I did in the past. It truly was not intentional.”

Not intentional? Rachel sneered in her heart, but her expression remained unchanged on the surface. “The past is in the past. We should go our separate ways in the future.”

After saying that, she walked straight toward the elevator in the lobby.

It so happened that Jason and Dillon arrived at the same time. When they came face-to-face with her, Dillon immediately stepped forward with a smile on his effeminate face. "Are we late? I can't believe Chris arrived first."

"I happened to be meeting a friend."

"Meeting a friend?" Following her gaze, he glanced into the cafe next to the lobby and immediately spotted Justin. Justin was dressed in all black and had a matching cap pulled low over his face to avoid being recognized.

Dillon then teased, "Is that your boyfriend?"

She smiled faintly. "Young Master Porter, you sure are good at cracking jokes. I'm afraid I have more interest in my career."

He was only joking around and didn't take the matter seriously.

On the other hand, Jason recognized Justin at a glance. In the instant where their gazes met, Justin's posture abruptly straightened and the look in his eyes immediately became icy cold.

Jason quickly commented, "Young Master Porter, let's talk inside a private room. There are too many eyes here."

"Sure. Let's go, Chris."

Rachel nodded at Dillon in acknowledgment and entered the elevator first. Nevertheless, she couldn't help glancing at the person behind him. And just like how they had met last time, Lila had remained silent all this time and stayed close beside Dillon with a cold expression.

The doors of the elevator slowly closed, but Justin's gaze had been fixed on the man standing next to Rachel all along. I remember seeing that man briefly on the Golden Cruise before. Why is Rachel in contact with a person like that?

Inside the private room, Dillon had his men open the briefcase to reveal the dazzling gold in it before elaborating, "This is the deposit. Once we receive the goods, we will pay the balance. Please check the quantity."

"No need." Rachel nodded lightly. "The price you offered me is basically unattainable in Riverdale's market, Young Master Porter. I believe a person as generous as you will not underpay me, but..."

"But, what?"

"You asked to meet but did not allow me to bring my subordinates with me. Young Master Porter, I can't carry this briefcase of gold alone."

When Dillon heard those words, he laughed. "That's not an issue. I'll have Lila bring this to your car later."

Those words were exactly what she wanted to hear. Even so, she pretended to look at Lila in surprise. "Can she carry that? Why don't we get one of the hotel employees to help?"

"You're underestimating Lila." He glanced at the woman standing beside him as he drank, a look of admiration appearing in his gloomy eyes. "Forget carrying this briefcase. It's not a problem even if you add a few more briefcases to the equation."

"You found yourself a great assistant, Young Master Porter. Where did you look for her? I want one too. It'll be more convenient to travel if my bodyguards are women like myself."

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. I daresay you will not find many like Lila in this world. Hahaha!"

Jason added, "Miss Hart is one in a million indeed. Rachel, you're troubling Young Master Porter."

"It's no trouble at all. If you really need one, I'll ask my men to look around. After all, we'll be working together for a long time. Isn't that right?"

Rachel smiled and nodded in response.

After a few rounds of drinks, she went to the restroom. Just as she was about to leave the room, she ran into Lila about to enter the room. She was about to greet Lila when she felt something warm touching her fingers that were hanging by the side of her body.

In the next moment, Rachel felt something being stuffed into the palm of her hand. Her pupils contracted abruptly, but Lila brushed past her without the slightest change in expression.

“Chris, we’ve only had a few rounds of drinks. Where are you going?” Dillon’s voice came from behind her.

She returned to her senses and replied, “Please continue drinking, Young Master Porter. I’m just going to the restroom for a bit.”

Dillon was an alcoholic maniac who could barely even remember his own name after several bottles of alcohol. At this moment, he was fooling around with Jason like they were brothers.

Meanwhile, Rachel nonchalantly went to the restroom. After confirming that there was nobody else inside the restroom, she sat on the toilet and unfolded the slip of paper in her palm. The ink had gotten a little blurry and only an address was written on the paper.

‘11 o’clock. No.11, Millstone Street. Public phone booth.’

She gripped the slip of paper with slightly trembling hands. There’s something strange about Lila after all. She is definitely Coraline Harper.

At the same time, Dillon had gotten so drunk that he passed out inside the private room.

“Miss Hart, Young Master Porter is so drunk. Will he be okay?”

"It's fine. I'll just let him rest in a room for a while. We will leave later tonight."

"Sigh. Alright. That's what I thought too. He's so drunk; it's best to sober up slightly before you leave." Jason immediately summoned a waiter from outside and informed, "Get a vacant suite and help Young Master Porter there."

"Yes."

Several waiters immediately entered from the outside. Supporting Dillon on both sides, they walked in the direction of the hotel's suite with Lila following closely behind.

"I'm not drunk! I can continue drinking!" Dillon continued to shout about drinking even after he was placed on the bed. "Where's Chris?! Ask her to drink with me!"

"Young Master Porter, everybody has left." Lila called out.

The drunken Dillon slowly opened his eyes to reveal not even the slightest hint of drunkenness in his eyes. He sat up on the bed, his gloomy eyes looking rather frosty. Only one word broke the silence in the room. "Go."

Chapter 334 Life on the Line

By the time Rachel returned to the private room, only Jason was left alone inside the room and he also had quite a lot to drink earlier. "Where is Young Master Porter?"

"He drank too much. Miss Hart has brought him back to a room to rest. I think we'll end things here today." She nodded. "Thank you for pulling the strings on my behalf, Jason."

He waved his hand dismissively. "Young Master Porter likes you very much, so you better not have any other strange ideas. Also, it's best if you draw a clear line with my nephew so that your future will remain bright and promising."

Rachel did not comment much on Jason's words and merely drove out of the hotel alone after he departed. Following the instructions on the note that Lila handed to her, she drove around and circled back to the hotel since Millstone Street was just one street away from the hotel. It was an old alleyway that did not permit entry to cars.

She parked her car by the curb and walked into the alleyway. At this time, the sky was completely dark with no trace of anyone else. The only sounds that she heard were that of her own footsteps.

It didn't take long before she found a public phone booth behind an abandoned bungalow. The phone booth looked like it had been abandoned for a long time and did not look like it could be used, which left her with a slight frown. Turning on the flashlight on her phone, she shone the light at the phone booth and walked around but did not find anything.

It was going to be 11:00PM soon.

Ring... A crisp ringing sound pierced through the night air. The sound that suddenly came from the abandoned phone booth seemed extremely strange in the quiet night and caused Rachel to slightly

shiver. Thinking about the relationship between Lila and Coraline, she quickly stepped forward and hesitated for several seconds before she picked up the receiver.

"Hello?"

"It's me?"

"Miss Hart?"

"Perhaps, you should call me by another name."

Rachel seemed stunned for a moment before a joyous light appeared in her eyes.

...

Dillon, who should have passed out from being drunk, was currently sitting in the living room of Hotel Platinum's suite and had a pair of extremely bright, clear eyes. There was a pot of tea on the coffee table in front of him with Lila sitting opposite him. In front of her was a mobile phone with the speakerphone turned on. Rachel's voice came from the other side of the phone.

There was a cold smile on his face as he looked at the phone with extremely contemptuous eyes. Nobody has ever managed to fool me with petty tricks before.

He had sent somebody to investigate Rachel a long time ago. She apparently had a close relationship with the Investigation Bureau Deputy Chief, Janice Hawkins. How could Jason dare to place somebody with that kind of relationship beside him? Has his greed for money left him insane?

"Where are you right now?" Rachel's questioning voice came from the phone.

Lila glanced at Dillon, asking for an answer with her eyes.

Dillon raised his chin in the direction of the bedroom.

She answered, "I'm still at the hotel, but I have to return to the ship in a short while. I have something to pass to you. Please deliver it to Officer Hawkins as soon as possible."

"What is it?"

"The route map for the next shipment."

"The route map? Where is it?"

"Return to the hotel. It's just behind the toilet of the private room where we were in earlier."

After that last sentence, Dillon reached out a finger and ended the call with a tap.

Lila's complexion paled slightly. "Young Master Porter."

Before she could finish her sentence, he waved to the side and coldly said, "Tie her up."

The two bodyguards by the side immediately stepped forward. When they met her threatening gaze, they subconsciously took a step back.

It was enough to immediately make Dillion unhappy. "Are you my subordinates or her subordinates?"

When the two bodyguards heard that question, they stepped forward again. "Sorry, Lila."

Lila raised a hand to stop them as her cold aura left them losing the courage to act rashly. She expressionlessly said, "Young Master Porter, you only need to inform Master Porter if you don't want me by your side anymore. There's no need to use such methods to falsely accuse me. Even if there's something wrong with me, don't forget that I work for Master Porter. You will have to answer for your actions to Master Porter."

"Don't use my father to threaten me." Dillon snorted coldly. "You have private dealings with people in the Riverdale Investigation Bureau. If my father learns about this matter, I'll be able to kill you right now

without bringing you back."

"Young Master Porter, I'm saying this again: I didn't do anything."

"If you didn't do anything, then why did Rachel listen to you? Why did she run off to answer your phone call in the middle of the night?"

"I can only say that curiosity exists in everybody. How did you know that she went there to answer my phone call because she has private dealings with me? Isn't this matter still undecided?"

He sneered. "Fine. It doesn't matter whether there's anything wrong with you. In any case, there's definitely something wrong with Rachel." After that, he placed a gun on the coffee table. "Kill her, and I will believe you."

The pistol was small and compact. Moreover, it was equipped with a silencer—perfect for killing people silently in a place like this.

Lila frowned slightly.

"What's wrong? Are you unwilling? Didn't you use to kill others without batting an eyelid? Why are you feeling reluctant now?"

"It's not that I'm not willing. It's just that killing somebody here will alert the authorities. I'm afraid we won't be able to remain in Riverdale for long. If Rachel dies, a lot of people will surely be involved in the investigation. Jason's nephew is quite concerned about her." Those words clearly could not convince him. Therefore, she simply took the gun and loaded the chamber in front of him. "If you really want to see me kill somebody, Young Master Porter, then I don't mind taking action. When Master Porter and Miss Porter scolds us for messing up this business deal, I will just have to suffer the blame together with you."

"Hmph! I'll be waiting for your good news." Dillon was unmoved by those words as he picked up his tea cup and took a sip.

When she heard his response, Lila left the room.

As soon as Lila departed, one of the subordinates standing nearby walked forward to refill Dillon's cup with tea. That subordinate asked in worry, "Young Master Porter, are we really going to watch Lila make her move here? This is the heart of Riverdale. We might not be able to come here for some time if something happens. Likewise, the business deal with Miss Rachel will fall through."

"This business deal is bound to fail. There's something fishy about Rachel. It would have been nothing if she did not come today. Our business deal would have ended there and then and I would have spared her life. If she came then... Well then, I'm sorry."

“Does that mean there’s something wrong with Lila too?”

“Lila?” The look in Dillon’s eyes darkened slightly. “Rachel claimed that she looked familiar the moment they met. Don’t you think that’s strange? I knew something was fishy when our goods were intercepted by the customs department for smuggling the other day.”

“Lila works for Master Porter, though.”

“The old man is blind from age. Who is to say he did not make a mistake? He would rather kill a thousand than let one go free. The information from the higher-ups claims that there’s a traitor among us. It could very well be somebody beside me.”

While he was speaking, another one of his subordinates turned on the projector in the living room to show the real-time surveillance footage of the hotel’s private room.

“Young Master Porter, she’s here.”

The projection screen illustrated Rachel talking to one of the serving staff where she seemed to have made up an excuse that she had left something behind to enter the private room once more. The serving staff had already unlocked the doors for her to enter.

Dillon’s grip tightened around his cup. When he saw the woman in the surveillance footage, his eyes darkened immensely as he coldly questioned, “She came rather quickly. Where is Lila?”

“She has just gotten out of the elevator and will probably arrive at the private room soon.”

“Tell her to kill that woman in the private room.”

“What if... Lila refuses to take action?”

Chapter 335 Love Over Gold

“Refuse to take action?” Dillon’s gloomy gaze darkened even more. “In that case, there’s no reason for her to return with us today.”

At this moment, Lila’s figure was hidden behind the door of the stairwell in the hotel. She was used to taking the stairs whenever she was ‘working’. After all, many things could go wrong when taking the elevator.

The sound of light footsteps did not escape her ears and she glanced upstairs from the corner of her eyes. A layer of dust settled on the shoulder of her black jacket before she tightened her fingers around the gun and her palms began to perspire.

She had killed many people over the years and it was not easy for her to finally attain her current position. Nevertheless, she never imagined that the first person whom Dillon wanted her to kill when she returned to Riverdale again was her old friend.

“Miss Hudson, have you found what you were looking for?”

The stairwell was not far from the private room. It was only separated by a door, so Lila could clearly hear the conversation between the serving staff and Rachel.

Rachel’s voice came from within the private room. “Not yet. You can go back to your work. I will search for it myself.”

“Alright. Just let us know if you need anything.”

“Sure.”

The serving staff’s footsteps disappeared along the corridor. At this moment, Rachel was the only person left inside the private room.

Lila stood behind the door of the stairwell, but she attentively listened to the commotion behind her. She knew that if she did not take action now, the people whom Dillon sent would kill her without hesitation and Rachel would not survive either.

On the other hand, Rachel stood at the door to the restroom. She was just about to enter the restroom after confirming that the serving staff outside had left when she suddenly heard the sound of the door opening behind her.

“Who is it?” She spun around and saw Justin. “Why are you here?”

She quickly closed the door to the restroom.

Justin glared at her with a look of dense rage on his cold, handsome face. “Come with me.”

“Go where? What are you doing!? Let go of me!” As she was unable to win against him, he forcefully dragged her out of the private room. “Justin Burton, I’m going to report you to the police if you don’t let me go now!”

“You’re going to file a police report? Sure! Go ahead and do it!” Justin released his grip on her with a furious expression. “Who did you meet today? What did you talk about? Do you dare to tell the police about it?”

“Why would I need to tell the police about that? I only need to say that you’re stalking me! I thought you had changed! I can’t believe that you’re just the same as usual!”

He did not wish to argue with her. “Come with me right now.”

“Don’t touch me!”

He refused to be reasoned with and dragged her directly to the underground parking garage.

“I don’t care what you want to do. It doesn’t even matter whether it is for Hudson Pharmaceuticals or for yourself. In any case, you’re not allowed to interfere in matters involving Jason anymore!”

After dragging her all the way over, Justin yanked her toward the spot where he had parked his car. She was unable to break free of his grip and continued to struggle, but accidentally knocked off his hat before her expression immediately changed. "Justin, you..."

All of his hair had been shaved off while his head was wrapped in bandages and gauze. He looked exactly like a patient who was undergoing chemotherapy in the hospital. Despite the dim lights in the garage, Rachel could still see how vulnerable he was. She suddenly recalled the phone call she received from Frankie earlier, telling her that Justin was on the operating table.

Before she had time for further thoughts, the sound of someone clapping slowly came from behind her. "What is this little show? Miss Hudson, will you explain this to me?"

It was Dillon with two bodyguards behind him and they suddenly appeared behind them at some point in time.

Her expression froze for a moment. "Young Master Porter, weren't you drunk?"

"If I had not gotten drunk, how would I have the chance to witness this strange and twisted play? Miss Hudson, I'm becoming more curious about you."

Justin tugged at Rachel's hand. "Come with me."

"She's not going anywhere anymore." Dillon glanced at Justin coldly. "You can barely protect yourself. Do you think you can take her away?"

"This is Riverdale, not the Golden Cruise." Justin stood protectively in front of Rachel with a grim expression. "I don't care who you are, but I can guarantee that you will not walk out of Riverdale alive if you touch a single hair on my head or Rachel's head."

"How arrogant. You are Jason's nephew, right? I've heard of you." Dillon snorted with laughter. "Do you know how your uncle grovels before my feet?"

Justin's expression remained unchanged. "I am not him."

“Hah!” Dillon glanced at him. “In my opinion, there’s no difference.”

Lila arrived at this time. As soon as Rachel saw Lila, her eyes narrowed considerably and she subconsciously stepped forward.

“Rael!” Justin stopped her. “Get in the car.”

However, Dillon gave a wave of his hand. “Lila, what are you waiting for?”

Lila walked straight toward Justin and Rachel with a dark expression.

Justin pulled Rachel behind him, lifted his hand, and blocked Lila’s flying kick. In the blink of an eye, the two of them exchanged a series of blows in the garage. Fists slammed against flesh as the cold wind rustled.

Although his martial arts skills were not bad, Lila was a person who survived numerous grave situations. Not to mention, he had just undergone surgery. It didn’t take them to fight for long before she kicked him to the ground and a gun was pressed against his forehead in the time that he took to stand up.

“Run, Rae!” His first reaction was to ask Rachel to escape.

On the contrary, Rachel did not listen to Justin and instead stood motionlessly in place. It was not the first time that she saw Lila holding a gun because that item had been pointed at her head last time.

Dillon clapped his hands and said in amazement, “This is rare! It is said that the President of the Burton Group is cold, ruthless, and disinterested in women, but I have learned something new today. Love is stronger than gold! He doesn’t even care for his own life! Miss Hudson, I feel so touched on your behalf.”

Rachel’s expression was grim. “Young Master Porter, I don’t understand. Why are you doing this? We have yet to complete our business deal, so isn’t it too early to burn your bridges?”

“Burn my bridges? Based on your relationship with the Chief of the Riverdale Investigation Bureau, I don’t think I’d be able to cross the bridge anyway. Right?”

After saying that, his expression immediately became frosty. “Miss Hudson, I warned you when we first started working together. I hate traitors. I also hate the Riverdale Investigation Bureau. You’ve stepped on the two things I despise the most.”

“Traitor?” She was puzzled. “What do you mean by that?”

“If not for Mr. Burton appearing out of nowhere, wouldn’t you have gotten hold of the route map for our latest shipment of goods? What are you pretending for?”

As Dillon looked around, he pointed at Justin, then at Rachel, and finally at Lila. “You, you, and you. None of you will live past today.”

Justin’s eyes narrowed upon hearing those words. He struggled to stand, but the gun pointing at his head had pressed him firmly to the ground.

Rachel stared at Dillon intently. “It turns out that you didn’t come here for the banquet tonight, Young Master Porter. It looks like it was a trap set up for me. You wanted me to jump right into your trap.”

“It’s too late to realize that now.”

“Asking you to believe me or release me seems to be impossible now, Young Master Porter. Nevertheless, I want to die with the understanding of why. There’s something I need to warn you about.”

“What is it?”

Her eyes darkened as she quietly spilled the beans. “That woman by your side, Lila Hart... She’s not a simple person.”

He was slightly taken aback by those words.

Chapter 336 Well Prepared

“Oh?” A slight interest appeared in Dillon’s eyes. “I’m curious to know what you mean by that. What is not simple about Lila?”

“If my guess is correct, the route map in the restroom is fake. Isn’t that right?” Rachel glanced at Lila standing by the side and holding a gun to Justin’s head. “However, I didn’t just receive one message tonight telling me about the route map in the restroom. I had also received another text.”

The pupils in his eyes contracted abruptly.

She took out a mobile device. “This phone is something that I found in the public phone booth at Millstone Street. If I guessed correctly, this text message was sent by Miss Hart, right?”

He glanced at his bodyguard, who understood the gesture and stepped forward to take the phone for him. “Young Master Porter, this...”

Dillon had also seen the contents of the text message. It was the current route for the shipment of goods clearly described in words, making it a genuine map.

Rachel then said, “I am very curious as to why Miss Hart would hand this route map to me.”

His expression immediately changed.

Lila hurriedly explained, “Young Master Dillon.”

Before she could finish her sentence, Dillon took out his gun and pointed the muzzle at her head without another word in fury. “You are really a spy after all!”

At that moment, the sound of a phone vibrating sounded out of nowhere.

One of Dillon's subordinates quickly answered the phone. "Hello? Master Porter."

Nobody knew what was being said on the other end of the phone, but the subordinate's expression immediately changed. "Yes. I understand. Young Master Porter, Master Porter asks that you answer the phone."

A furious Dillon glared at Lila and issued a command to the people around him. "Hold her down. Bring all of them back to my room."

Justin hurriedly tried to stand up, but he was stopped by the gun pointing at him by the bodyguard nearby.

Inside the hotel suite, Dillon talked to Sean Porter on the phone for a long time inside the bedroom. When he came out, his expression was incredibly furious and it looked worse than the time he learned that Lila was a spy.

Lila was standing by the side. When she saw him coming out of the bedroom, she respectfully lowered her head. "Young Master Porter."

However, he sneered and raised a hand to slap her soundly across the face.

Her head tilted to the side from the force of impact before a trickle of blood flowed out from the corner of her mouth. Yet, she did not make a single sound and remained as cold and indifferent as ever. "Young Master Porter, have you vented some of your anger?"

"No!" Dillon raised his arm again. Unexpectedly, she raised her head and waited for him to hit her. His hand hung in mid-air for ages before his clenched fist finally dropped to his sides and he gnashed his teeth furiously. "You sure are amazing. You're no longer by my father's side, but you can still cooperate with him and even keep me in the dark. Aren't you scared that I might shoot you?"

"If it were Miss Porter, I would have lost my life a long time ago. However, you are merciful and soft-hearted, Young Master Porter." Lila's indifferent words were not a compliment, but a direct statement that pointed out his character flaws. In this line of work, the last thing they wanted was to be merciful.

Needless to say, he was not a compassionate person. It was just that he could never be cruel toward the people around him. Even if he discovered that somebody had betrayed him, he still could not bring himself to kill them immediately. That was also the reason why Lila and Sean dared to set this trap tonight.

Dillon glared at her fiercely. "You can handle the rest. I'm not in the mood. I'm leaving!"

After saying that, he turned and strode out whereby his two bodyguards hurriedly chased after him. Only Lila and the others remained inside the suite.

Lila's cold and sharp gaze landed on the sofa where Rachel and Justin had been restrained for some time now. "Release them."

"Yes."

As soon as the ropes around Justin were released, he immediately chased the person standing beside Rachel away and personally freed her from the ropes. "Rachel, are you okay?"

Rachel pushed his hands away. Standing up while rubbing her wrists, she created some distance between them. "Miss Hart, what is the meaning of this?"

"Do you still not understand? All of this was a trap that Master Porter set to test you. If you had not brought up the route map in that phone, I would have killed you even if Young Master Porter had not."

Rachel's heart skipped a beat. "I don't understand. What do you mean?"

Lila replied, "You don't need to understand too much. In short, the business deals would continue to come your way in the future. If the incident tonight has scared you, Miss Hudson, then I will apologize on Master Porter's behalf. Do you need me to send you home, Miss Hudson?"

"No need!" Justin suddenly spoke up, staring at Lila with cold eyes. "I will send her home."

Lila glanced at him. "Mr. Burton, I'm sure you don't wish to see misfortune to befall on the Burton Group. That's why it's for the best if you keep your mouth shut about what you saw and heard in this place today. Otherwise, nobody can guarantee whether the Burton Family will still have a successor in the future."

Not only did he hold an important position in Riverdale, but he was also related to Jason. That was why Dillon would not do anything to him without any reason, no matter what happened. Nevertheless, her warning was not a joke.

"In that case, I won't see you off. We're leaving. Miss Hudson, I hope we can patch things up the next time we meet."

Rachel forced a corner of her mouth into a smile. As she watched Lila and the others depart, she couldn't help feeling a sense of fear lingering in her heart.

Inside the underground garage.

"I'll send you back."

Rachel had just pulled open the car door when she was stopped by Justin.

"No need." She rejected his offer without any hesitation. "I can drive myself."

"Rae!" He held the car door and prevented her from getting into the car. "Stop causing trouble. Listen to me. I'll send you back."

She frowned. "I'm not that close to you."

He looked like he wanted to say something. All of a sudden, he felt dizzy and abruptly held the car door for support while his complexion paled.

Rachel subconsciously wanted to reach out to support him, but she suddenly remembered something, which caused her eyebrows to furrow deeply. Withdrawing her hand, she coldly asked, "Can you even send me back in that condition?"

Justin was taken aback by those words.

"Do you think that what I've encountered tonight is not dangerous enough or stimulating enough?"

"Rae."

"Mr. Burton, let me remind you about something." She took a deep breath and forced herself to seem both calm and polite before she slowly spat out the words. "Please don't call me that. It feels... disgusting."

His expression froze for a moment; his fingers that were holding the car door curled slightly and his knuckles turned white.

"Excuse me." Rachel pushed him aside.

Bang. She slammed the door shut behind her.

Justin recovered from his shock and knocked on the car window. "Open the door. I have something to say to you."

She refused to bother to look at him and buckled the safety belt before she started the car. In the next moment, the headlights turned on while the engine roared to life inside the garage. He nearly lost his balance when the car pulled out of the parking spot.

The red car disappeared into the distance.

He took a few steps after the car, but he was much too dizzy to continue. His temples were throbbing painfully and his stomach was turning nauseously. Staggering on his feet, he had to support himself against a nearby pillar just to remain standing.

No. I must figure out what kind of business Rachel is involved in and who she is dealing with. He had heard a lot about the kind of underground business that Jason was involved in. It was just that Arthur had asked him to turn a blind eye to Jason's activities, so he had not bothered to care. I can't allow Jason to drag Rachel down with him, though.

Chapter 337 I Won't Die, but She Will

Rachel drove home in the night without taking any detours. The moment she closed the door behind her, her hands holding the car keys trembled slightly.

"Why are you only back at this hour?" Jolly had been waiting for Rachel inside the house. "I was so worried. I was about to contact Janice if you still have not returned. What's wrong? Are you okay?" She immediately noticed that Rachel's complexion was terrible. "What happened?"

Rachel tossed the car keys aside and sat down. Afterward, she briefly recounted everything that happened tonight to Jolly.

Jolly was petrified. "I can't believe that they set up a trap within a trap! Wouldn't you have died if you had believed that Lila is Coraline and accepted the phone together with the route map!?"

"You're wrong." Rachel shook her head. "If I had kept the phone and the route map, I would not have died, but Coraline would have died instead."

"Coraline? Didn't you say that Lila is not Coraline?"

"No. She is Coraline."

Everything that happened tonight from the time she received the note Coraline stuffed in her hand at the entrance of the private room to the blurry address written on the note to the instructions to head to the public phone booth to receive the call—all of these were part of Dillon's trap.

On the other hand, the route map in the phone hidden at the public phone booth was the trap set up by that 'Master Porter'.

The trap that Dillon set was insignificant as it was just a foolish one that his father had used as a diversion.

"In the underground garage, Lila made a gesture with her hand before she pointed her gun at Justin."

"What gesture?"

Rachel imitated the hand gesture for Jolly to see. "The meaning of this hand gesture is 'hit me'."

"She asked you to hit her?"

"Of course not. She didn't actually mean for me to lay a blow on her. Rather, she wanted me to reveal the phone and the route map she gave me to Dillon. She wanted me to turn around and betray her."

Jolly was confused. "I still don't understand. What does that mean? She'll be fine if you expose the fact that she gave you the route map?"

Rachel explained, "I believe that she is being suspected by the higher-ups. Combined with the fact that this 'Master Porter' wanted to confirm my position, they decided to set up the events of tonight. If I had handed the route map to the Riverdale Investigation Bureau, it proves that I knew 'Lila' from the beginning, which would have exposed her as a result."

"I get it. Assessing your sincerity and intent to cooperate is secondary because the main point was to confirm whether 'Lila' is a spy."

“That’s right. I’m just a new cooperation partner. If I’m not suitable, they can just cut off all contact with me. There’s no need for them to do anything to me. That’s because I don’t understand anything about their organization. However, that’s not the case with ‘Lila’ as it’s obvious that she knows too much.”

“Oh, my God.” Jolly suddenly felt a belated sense of fear washing over her. “If you had not seen that hand gesture...”

Rachel was also filled with the same lingering fear.

If anything went wrong tonight, Coraline would have disappeared from the face of the Earth forever and the Riverdale Investigation Bureau would never be able to locate her again.

Luckily Rachel was able to confirm one thing when Coraline made that hand gesture. Lila Hart was indeed Coraline Harper. Not only was she still alive, but she was also continuing with her duties as a spy. I have to tell Janice about this.

It took Jolly a while to recover from her shock. As she walked barefooted to the fridge, she took out a beer and muttered, “No, no. This is too stimulating. I need a drink to calm my nerves.”

Rachel craned her neck. “Get me a bottle too.”

They each held a bottle in one hand, sat on the carpet, and toasted each other.

“What are we celebrating?” Jolly was at a loss for words.

Rachel replied, “Let’s celebrate surviving today instead!” After some consideration, she added, “And celebrate the fact that Coraline is still alive.”

Her eyes reddened slightly when she said those words. It was precisely because she learned that Coraline was still alive that she didn’t have the patience to say anything to Justin even though he was blocking her car. She was impatient to return home and share this good news with Jolly.

As the two of them drank, they gradually relaxed.

All of a sudden, Jolly burst out laughing.

“What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing. I just suddenly thought about that Burton scum. He suffered a beating for no reason today. That’s karma!”

At the mention of Justin, Rachel frowned slightly.

“What’s wrong? Don’t tell me you are feeling sorry for him.” Jolly furrowed her eyebrows. “You’re not allowed to be soft-hearted.”

“No. I was just thinking about what he said to me today.” Rachel turned to the side and took out a document from her bag. “This is the list of assets that he gave me.”

“What?!”

“He hopes I will withdraw the lawsuit and surrender the custodial rights over Charlotte to him. I can meet her anytime. Moreover, he will transfer all the assets under his name to Charlotte in the form of a will.”

Jolly was stunned. “All of his assets?” How many billions is that worth?! There’s no denying that Justin really is the perfect father when it comes to his daughter. “Did you agree?”

“I said I will consider it.” Rachel glanced at Jolly, her gaze suddenly becoming firm. “Do you think I can give up on Charlotte’s custodial rights, though?”

Jolly immediately felt relieved. Picking up the beer bottle from the table, she tapped her bottle against the bottle in Rachel’s hand. The bottles knocked against each other and made a muffled sound, which

caused the beer head to splash slightly and scatter bubbles. It was as though they were celebrating their victory in advance or to kick off this grand carnival.

...

Three days later, the Riverdale Courthouse sent out mediators to formally oversee the out-of-court settlement only to be rejected by Rachel.

Justin had called Rachel multiple times on her phone, but nobody answered. It was not until two days before the court hearing that the phone call was finally connected.

He sounded extremely anxious over the phone call. "Why didn't you answer my calls?"

She sat in her office with a calm expression and watched the steam rising from her cup. "I'm sorry. I was very busy recently, so I had no time to answer your calls."

"Are you avoiding me?"

"You're over thinking things. I am not."

Her cold and indifferent attitude had become the norm. He had no choice but to accept the reality and dropped the topic. "Didn't you say you will consider my offer? Why did you reject the out-of-court settlement?"

"I have yet to make up my mind, so I can only allow the necessary court procedures to flow naturally. I don't believe there's anything wrong with that."

"I really do not wish to meet you in court. As you know, the attorneys will do anything to expose the other party's shortcomings. Do you really wish for us to be like this? How will Charlotte blame herself when she grows up and learns about this?"

Rachel picked up her cup, blew on the foam at the top, and took a sip. "Regarding your document, I believe there are certain areas that can be revised. If you agree to it, then I can withdraw the lawsuit."

Justin didn't even stop to think and immediately agreed. "No problem. I'll do it."

"You haven't even heard my request."

"I will agree to any of your requests, as long as you withdraw the lawsuit."

Those words left her feeling stunned. Nevertheless, she quickly recovered and glanced at the calendar on her desk. The court hearing was on the day after tomorrow. "Alright, then. I have some time tonight. Why don't we meet up for dinner together and have a good talk?"

The voice on the other end of the phone could almost be described as 'overwhelmed by feelings of love'. "No problem."

Chapter 338 A Rare Moment of Peace

Night fell. By the time Justin arrived, Rachel had already been waiting inside one of the private rooms of Hotel Platinum for a while.

"Didn't you say eight o'clock?" Justin glanced at the time. It was only 7:30 PM, so he thought he had remembered their appointment time wrongly.

She explained, "Yes, I did say eight o'clock. It's just that I didn't have many things to handle at the company today, so I came here directly after I finished my work."

Those words stunned him as he couldn't help feeling rather astonished. I even mentally prepared myself that she might renege on the meeting today. I can't believe she came early.

“Have some tea.” She took the initiative to pour him a cup of tea. “I recall that you liked drinking the Earl Grey tea I brewed when I first entered the Hudson Family. Only by relying on this would you be nicer to me.”

Her words stunned him once more. Looking at his tea cup, he finally realized the reason for that inexplicable feeling of familiarity he experienced upon entering this room.

It has been a long time since I had this tea. He took a sip with a rather complicated expression. “It still tastes the same as before.”

He did not know whether it was because tea had a calming scent or whether it had been ages since they last met each other. Be that as it might be, both of them had calmed down considerably and it was a rare moment of peace.

“Rachel, I’m very happy that you are willing to call me out to discuss matters, but, why did you choose to meet here?” Justin looked around at the furnishings of the private room. The look in his eyes was

slightly tense.

Hotel Platinum was where Rachel had met up with Dillon and his men the other day and where an accident had nearly occurred as a result.

“The incident occurred here the other day,” she elaborated. “I nearly dragged you down with me. Regardless of the circumstances, I owe you a favor. I decided to meet up here so that I can formally thank you.”

“You don’t need to worry about that. I just hope that you don’t act too aggressively. It’s best if you don’t interact much with people like Jason or Dillon.”

“I will consider your suggestion now that Hudson Pharmaceuticals has stabilized.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.”

Compared to her usual tough outward appearance but timid demeanor, Rachel looked much more at ease today.

Justin was overjoyed. “It’s great that you think that way. If anything happens to Hudson Pharmaceuticals, I will do my best to help you as Jason and the others are not walking on the right track.”

“I understand what you mean.” She acknowledged his words with a smile.

The serving staff knocked on the door. While serving the dishes, he brought out a bottle of red wine. “Miss Hudson, this is the wine you wanted. It has been prepped. Would you like to drink it now?”

Rachel raised her hand. “Serve it.”

“Okay.” The serving staff left after he finished serving the wine.

“Why did you suddenly want to drink wine?” Justin looked at the glass of red wine in front of him, his eyebrows furrowing slightly into a fine line.

She answered, “This wine was given to me by my client. I’ve been safekeeping it all this while. Today, I had the rare urge to drink with you. The first reason is to thank you for your help previously and the second is to thank you for all the care you’ve shown Charlotte over the years.”

“What happened the other day was an accident. You don’t need to be so hung up about it. There’s even less need for you to thank me for taking care of Charlotte. She is my daughter. It’s a given that I take good care of her.”

“So, are you going to drink this glass of wine?” The smile on her face greatly reduced and her voice became colder. “In the end, you still have your guard up against me. There’s actually no need for that.”

After saying that, she lifted her glass and downed its content in one go.

Justin could not stop her in time.

She turned the wine glass upside down, placed it on the table, and stood up abruptly. "I've finished drinking. If there's nothing else, then I'll be leaving."

"Rae!" He stood up. "I have no intention of being on guard against you. Please let me finish talking."

Her expression was sullen, cold, and indifferent.

Thus, Justin gulped the red wine down without another word. After he finished drinking, he started saying, "I simply wanted to discuss our daughter with you. I will accompany you as much as you want once we've finished discussing serious matters."

Only then did Rachel sit back down. "I'm sorry. I forgot that you just had surgery and can't take alcohol."

"It's nothing." He was more concerned about the lawsuit. "The court hearing is the day after tomorrow. No matter what the outcome of the lawsuit, the victim will always be the children. I know you will never forgive me, but Charlotte is innocent. Can you bear to deal with the effect on her?"

"She is my daughter. You should be able to understand. I wish for her to grow up by my side."

"I understand. That's why I can send her to you any time you want to meet her."

His words were exceptionally sincere, which resulted in the slight relaxation of her gaze.

Looking at the red wine on the table, he poured himself another glass. "You are angry with me. I know that. It's my fault. I can use my entire life to repay you and our daughter. Please believe me just this once."

Justin was not good with alcohol. After two glasses of wine, a red flush appeared on his face.

“We can skip the lawsuit, but I have a request. I hope you can help me with it.”

“What is your request? Please say.”

“This is a piece of land in Northlane that Hudson Pharmaceuticals bid for half a year ago. Unfortunately, the Burton Group obtained it before we could. If you are willing to transfer this piece of land to me, then I will drop the lawsuit.”

Justin was a little surprised. In his judgment, Rachel was not somebody who would give up Charlotte’s custodial rights for financial gain. Something was fishy. Even so, whether it was due to the effects of the alcohol or his guilty conscience, he couldn’t help agreeing to her request. “No problem. I can transfer that land to you. As long as you want it, I can even do it now.”

“Good. Then, sign here.” While speaking, Rachel took out a contract that she had prepared in advance and handed him a pen.

He held the pen in his hand. However, the words on the contract made no sense to him. “Where?”

She flipped the pages of the document all the way to the last page. “Here.”

Swish. Swish. With two strokes of his pen, he signed his name on the document.

As soon as he finished signing the last stroke, the last shred of patience in her eyes vanished. She put the contract away and whispered, “Don’t worry, you will surely be satisfied with the final outcome.”

“Rae, I think I had too much to drink.”

“You only had two glasses. Are you drunk?”

“A little. What was that wine?”

“It’s not wine. It’s tea.”

Before Justin lost consciousness, he vaguely heard the words ‘It’s tea’. In his dazed state, he realized that the originally demure and gentle woman now looked extremely distant and cold. Moreover, the expression of the woman separated by a long table between them was filled with indifference mixed with disgust.

The scene changed to reveal his surroundings turning into a forest.

“Run, Justin!”

“Katie, come back!”

Large licks of flames swept through the entire thatched cottage and gradually spread to the surroundings. The fire first spread to the bamboo forest, but it didn’t take long before the mountain forest caught fire after not seeing a drop of rain in a very long time. The dry and dead leaves blazed into flames. The fire soon became so hot that it scorched the very air itself.

Crackle. Pop. Crackle. The sounds of the bamboo exploding in his ears sounded like the screams of death, which made him panic.

“Katie!” Justin shouted and opened his eyes abruptly whereby his blurry vision gradually became clearer. What he was looking at turned out to be ceiling boards. The patterns were complicated, symbolizing the meaning of blooming flowers.

“What’s wrong? Did you have a nightmare?” A soft female voice suddenly came from next to him. A fair arm in the shade of snow was pressed against his chest.

The pupils in his eyes contracted abruptly before he shoved aside the unfamiliar woman in front of him and shouted coldly, “Who are you!?”

Chapter 339 He Was the Only One Who Got Drunk

The woman was shoved so hard that she fell off the bed and cried out in pain, “Don’t you remember anything from last night?”

Justin clutched at his pounding head while his head buzzed loudly. I was clearly discussing our daughter with Rachel last night, but I don’t remember what happened next.

When she saw his reaction, the woman angrily rose to her feet. “What do you mean by that?! Are you refusing to take responsibility after you’ve slept with me?!”

“Last night, you had too much to drink in the lobby of this hotel. I kindly tried to send you home, but you refused to tell me where you lived. As a last resort, I could only get you a room in the hotel. Who could have known that you would hold on to me all night and refuse to let me leave...”

“I held on to you?” He could not recall anything. “That’s impossible!”

“Impossible? Who are you trying to insult?!” The woman was furious beyond belief. “Are you refusing to take responsibility?! I will report you to the police immediately! I will sue you for rape!”

The moment he heard the word ‘police’, Justin immediately came back to his senses. “Wait.”

“Why? Are you scared now?”

He coldly glared at the woman. “Words like ‘a man indulging in lust after getting drunk’ are only to deceive others. Even if most of your words are true, you know best as to whether anything had happened between us last night.”

The woman panicked slightly while holding her phone.

“Do you plan to name your price and forever keep what happened last night a secret? Or, would you prefer to report this to the police and have them investigate whether or not something had happened last night? It’s your choice.”

She clearly seemed guilty. A short while later, she reached out her hand toward him. “500 thousand.”

“It’s a deal.”

The woman was slightly speechless.

...

When Frankie received a sudden phone call from Justin, he hurriedly delivered a change of clothes to the hotel.

As soon as he walked into the room, he saw Justin in a bathrobe after finishing a bath. Thus, he became a little anxious. “President Burton, why didn’t you answer the phone last night?! Why did you come to the hotel?! The doctor has specified that you need to be hospitalized!”

“Did you bring the clothes?”

“I did.”

Justin took the clothes and went straight to change while completely ignoring Frankie’s nagging.

For some reason, Frankie vaguely felt that his superior was no longer the same after undergoing surgery. It was still a familiar feeling, but it was strangely distant.

They left the hotel with Frankie at the steering wheel.

“President Burton, weren’t you having dinner with President Hudson last night? Why did you end up staying in the hotel? You—”

Justin glanced at Frankie. The chill in those eyes had frightened Frankie so much that he shuddered. What happened?

Justin held his phone and hesitated for a long while, but dialed Rachel’s number in the end.

“Hello?” However, the person who answered the phone was not Rachel.

He was stunned. “Miss Carter?”

“Why is it you?” Jolly’s voice sounded furious. “I can’t believe I’m meeting a ghost so early in the morning. Justin, why are you always everywhere?! Why are you calling Chris?”

As he knew that she was prejudiced against him, he didn’t argue with her. “Where is Rae?”

“How dare you mention that! Didn’t she go for dinner with you last night? Why did she come back completely drunk!? If I had not found her in the middle of the night, she would have fallen asleep in the doorway!”

“Is she alright?”

“She is still asleep. You, on the other hand, sure are spirited. You were drinking together, so couldn’t you have sent her safely back home before you left? What kind of man are you? Can you take responsibility if something happened to her?”

“It’s good that she’s fine.” When he recalled what had happened this morning, Justin couldn’t help feeling annoyed and hung up.

On the other side of the phone, Jolly placed the phone down and raised an eyebrow. “How was it? Is my performance worthy of an Academy Award?”

"I can build you a golden palace with the gold from those Academy Awards." Rachel looked up and raised her glass of fruit juice from where she sat on the opposite side of the dining table. "Come and have breakfast."

The only person who had gotten drunk last night was Justin and she had arrived home earlier last night.

Jolly pulled out a chair and sat down. Looking at the photos spread out across the table, she randomly picked up several of them. "Are these photos enough?"

"This one is enough. Let's pack up the rest."

"This one?" She scrutinized the photo for a while. "This one doesn't seem like much. You can even claim that it was just a simple helping hand. It's not shocking enough."

"You have to see who you are showing this photo to know whether it's shocking enough or not." Rachel tapped on the photo. "This one is enough. Hand the rest to Hernandez; he will take care of them."

"Fine. It's enough if you think it's enough."

"Jolly, do you think I'm being too cruel?"

"You? Cruel?" Jolly's eyes widened. "Can you be more cruel than that Burton scum? Don't forget how he treated you back then. It's not too much even if you turned him into ashes! You're only doing this for the sake of Charlotte's custodial rights. He's asking for it!"

Rachel nodded and stopped thinking about it. She did not care for what other people might think because in her opinion, it was not suitable for a child to grow up in an environment like the Burton Family. The child would only turn into somebody like Justin in the future.

...

It was night time the next day.

“President Burton, the courthouse claims that the plaintiff did not withdraw the lawsuit.” Frankie made several calls to confirm this fact.

Justin immediately tried to call Rachel upon hearing that news. “The number you have called is unreachable at the moment.”

Looking at Justin’s furious expression, Frankie added, “President Burton, it looks like we have no choice but to proceed with the lawsuit. Everything that President Hudson did previously was just a means to an end.”

“Impossible. She is not that kind of person.”

“President Burton, with all due respect, a mother is capable of becoming a person like that for the sake of her child.”

Frankie’s words shattered Justin’s delusions.

Then, Justin questioned, “Do you also think I don’t deserve to be a father?”

“That was not what I meant.”

“Then, what did you mean?”

His expression was cold, but he was practically spitting flames of rage from his eyes.

Frankie shuddered at the sight and didn’t know what to say. “President Burton, please calm down. The most important thing right now is not what President Hudson thinks, but how we should fight the lawsuit tomorrow. The lawyers are waiting for your answer.”

It took a long while for Justin to return to his senses as his arms that were hanging by his sides trembled slightly. He was against the idea of going to court against Rachel. Unfortunately, what he feared the most had happened anyway.

“President Burton, where are you going?”

Justin did not explain. Grabbing his phone and his car keys, he left the house and drove to the hotel alone even though it was very late at night.

In order to avoid suspicion, Gloria had moved back to the hotel after Rachel and the others left the Burton Residence.

“Gloria.”

“It’s so late. Why are you here?” She was surprised to see Justin when she opened the door.

His breath was ragged because he had been walking too fast. “Can you call Rachel? Please help me. I have something to say to her.”

She was taken aback by his words and subconsciously clenched her fingers, feeling a little lost on what to do. “I don’t want to lie to you. Yesterday, Jolly told me about the court hearing for the lawsuit. She also told me to keep out of this mess, especially if you ask me to contact Miss Rachel for you. This is between the two of you. I was asked to stay out of this matter.”

“Gloria, this is probably the first time I’ve ever asked for your help.”

She was extremely troubled. “I really can’t. I promised them.”

“Gloria, Rachel is Katie.”

When she heard those words, Gloria was shocked and looked incredulous. “What did you say?”

Chapter 340 Respecting My Daughter's Wishes

"I remembered everything from the past." Justin confessed to Gloria. "Rachel is Katie. It's just that she has lost her childhood memories."

His words left Gloria absolutely shocked. How can that be!? Rachel is Katie!? "But, five years ago, you..."

His gaze dimmed at those words and a regretful expression lingered on his face. "It's all my fault. I couldn't recognize her and even hurt her so badly. If I had known that she was Katie... How could I... How could I have..."

Suddenly, his eyes reddened.

On the other hand, it took a long time for her swirling emotions to settle down.

Gloria had remained by his side for more than twenty years. For that reason, nobody knew what Katie meant to Justin better than her. Katie was practically his one and only belief throughout his earlier years.

He maintained the scar on his face, inherited the Burton Group earlier on, and spent several years plotting to force Hudson Pharmaceuticals into a critical situation. Everything he did was to avenge the 'dead' child. Who could have expected that Katie was still alive, much less that she became one of the sacrifices in his quest for revenge?

Fate sure plays cruel tricks. "Do you plan to tell Miss Rachel?"

"Yes."

She gradually calmed down and shook her head. "Do you think that Miss Rachel will understand the reason for your past actions just because she learns that she is Katie?"

"I only want her to know that I never meant to harm her!"

"You've already hurt her."

Her words were like a basin of cold water that poured on Justin's heart.

Gloria added, "Five years ago, she was so badly injured that she practically left Riverdale on the verge of death. What does it change even if she learns that she is Katie or that you ruthlessly caused that tragedy for Katie's sake?"

Those injuries were undeniably real.

Justin was at a loss for what to say and looked depressed. "I know. I know..."

How could he not have considered everything she mentioned earlier?

"Look; I can help you to pass the message, but it will be completely up to Miss Rachel to decide whether those actions are useful."

On the contrary, he suddenly shook his head and bitterly said, "Forget it. You don't need to tell her."

Everything Justin did since obtaining his memories had been a waste of his efforts. If he could turn back time, he wished that he would be burned to death in the forest back then. That way, Rachel would never have met a man like him.

"Gloria, just pretend you didn't hear anything from me. Please keep this a secret; don't let Rae find out."

"Why?"

"If she learns that the person she rescued all those years ago is me, she will most likely hate herself." He looked around before his gaze landed in the direction of the bedroom. "Is Charlotte asleep?"

He had been recently too busy to take care of Charlotte, so he left everything to Gloria.

“Yeah, she’s asleep.”

“I’m going to see her.”

Looking at Justin’s back, Gloria suddenly felt sad.

Five years ago, she had watched helplessly as everything progressed in an irreversible direction. The only time she had rejoiced over something was when she helped Rachel to leave Riverdale. At the time, she thought that everything would end there. However, Rachel had returned. I should have expected this outcome. A mother will never leave her children behind.

...

The court hearing for the custody rights lawsuit officially began at the Riverdale Courthouse the next day. Both Rachel and Justin were present for the hearing.

Rachel’s representative lawyer was Hernandez, who was a battle-hardened man. He presented his evidence one after another and stated why Justin was not suitable to be a father.

“Just from this recording alone, you can tell that he is a domineering man prone to extreme violence. How can a man like him raise a young girl to grow up in a healthy environment? Also, take a look at this medical report. As far as I know, Mr. Burton, the defendant, has been actively cooperating with a psychiatrist for treatment. Does he have psychological problems? How can he raise his daughter with such problems?”

Justin’s lawyers had tried to intercept on numerous occasions, but they were always stopped by Hernandez. They couldn’t hold back any longer this time around. “Your Honor, I have a question for the opposing counsel. Where did your medical records come from? If they are fake, then you are fabricating evidence. If they are genuine, then this is an invasion of privacy. Besides, all the so-called crimes that you mentioned are nonsense. Mr. Burton raised his daughter alone for five years. He even gave up the idea of remarrying for his daughter’s sake. Is that not a sacrifice? Besides, where was the mother during these five years?!”

Hernandez was filled with righteous indignation. "I told you; Miss Hudson fled Riverdale back then. If she had not left, was she supposed to wait until she was tortured to death instead?!"

"Where is the evidence?! You are spouting nonsense!"

"If we had the evidence, this would have been a criminal case instead! He would be sentenced to jail for his crimes!"

"You're confounding the public! This is an insult to Mr. Button's character."

The lawyers' debate did not take any form of the so-called affection into account. Their language might be perfectly clean, but every single word they uttered had gouged at the other party's deepest wounds and exposed the most cruel truth.

On the other hand, Rachel was the calmest person around as she had long mentally prepared herself for the past to be brought up once more, so she was not afraid of these proceedings.

Meanwhile, Justin was unable to look her straight in the eye as he could not bear listening to his lawyers as they slandered her. Thus, he stopped his attorneys and asked, "I would like to say something. May I?"

The judge nodded in acquiescence.

Justin's tall figure stood up from the defendant's seat. His face was haggard and unshaven. It had only been two days since they last met each other, but he looked like he had aged ten years during that time. He seemed to have lost his spirit.

His voice was also rather hoarse. "I'm not saying this as the defendant. I just want to speak as a father. I was a terrible husband. I cannot deny that. However, as Charlotte's father, I wish that she can grow up happy and carefree. Charlotte's greatest wish is for her parents to remarry each other so that she can have a normal and loving family. I am unable to fulfill this wish of hers, so I feel very guilty."

His eyes were bloodshot while the pupils were extremely red.

“However, ever since I became Charlotte’s father... From the day I saw that tiny child... She was so small that she could fit in the palm of my hand. So weak, yet so strong. I remember every moment of the past five years clearly. If I win this lawsuit, I will not stop Charlotte from meeting her mother. I will do my best to tell her that both her parents love her very much, but that is all I can do...”

Justin’s voice was choked with sobs at this point.

A man’s tears indicated extreme pain. Not to mention, his words were so sincere that all the jury on the scene were a little moved.

On the contrary, Rachel was completely unmoved.

The judge turned to look at the plaintiff’s seat. “Plaintiff, you may speak.”

She nodded slightly. “Your Honor, I can also portray a sad performance. However, I do not wish for anybody, especially my daughter, to view me as a weak mother. There is no doubt that I love my daughter, so there’s no need for more words. I will respect my daughter’s wishes.”

Her daughter’s wishes? As soon as that statement rang out, the entire courtroom buzzed with discussion.

A figure had entered through the side door at some point in time. It was Jolly and Charlotte.

Justin was shocked. I can’t believe Rachel is so cruel that she doesn’t hesitate to let our daughter witness this lawsuit!