

Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 36

Rachel clutched the phone and sighed quietly. She had to admit that Francis made a fair point; after disappearing for four years, she ought to go back and visit Vivian and offer the old woman an explanation for all that had happened. That said, there was no telling that Vivian would still be on her side.

"Mommy, the veggies are getting all mushy in the pan," Casper suddenly pointed out, scrunching up his nose.

Rachel quickly hung up the phone and resumed cooking.

Dinner was ready about half an hour later. Upon sniffing the delicious scent of food, Olivia walked into the kitchen without any prompting and hoisted herself onto her usual seat by the dining table, then eyed the dishes with anticipation.

Even Casper couldn't resist laughing as he said, "Mommy, look at how cute Olive is."

Smiling, Rachel served the little girl a bowl of soup and said, "Dig in, Olive, there's a good girl. You'll need to eat a healthy diet if you want to grow up and be a pretty princess."

Olivia ate in silence, shoveling large spoonfuls of food into her mouth in earnest. It didn't take long for the two kids to polish off the hearty spread on the table.

Meanwhile, over at the Ford Residence, a lavish dinner had been laid out on the long dining table.

There were two figures who sat across from one another at the expansive dining table – Jordan and Damian. Both father and son manned either side of the table, and they each looked distinctly grim. At present, the air in the dining room was cold and heavy.

Damian threw his utensils aside and pursed his lips unhappily, then snapped, "I'm not hungry anymore!" He shoved his chair backward, then made to get down from his seat.

"No one said you could leave," Jordan said coldly. "There are no picky eaters in the Ford Family, and you won't be the first one, so sit down and finish your meal."

Damian sat stiff and straight as he argued, "So you won't even let me have the freedom to choose to have or not to have my meals?"

He had been kept in the Ford Residence for a whole day ever since he was withdrawn from kindergarten. Seven or eight tutors had shown up thus far just to impart upon him the knowledge of various subjects, and at some point, he believed he might be going insane.

He had been looking forward to dinner all my long, but now that he was seated here at the table, he saw that there was nothing he liked to eat, even though there was a feast decked out before him.

He would rather starve than have anything on the table.

Growing impatient, Jordan got out of his seat and strode over to Damian, then said icily, "Freedom is not the absence of principles. You will finish your dinner, and you are free to snack on whatever you like afterward without my input."

He considered this to be a sufficient compromise, but Damian clearly did not register it as such, for he lifted his little chin and sneered at his father with red-rimmed eyes, roaring, "You're crossing the line, Daddy! I don't like you at all, and I won't ever have dinner with you again!"

With that, the little boy stormed up the stairs and locked himself in his bedroom.

Jordan sighed and pinched the space between his brows. He had been rebellious back in the day, not to mention hard-headed, but he had never talked back to his parents the way Damian did. He wondered if he found Damian's behavior particularly aggravating because he was used to Dmitri's compliant nature.

He could feel the onset of a migraine assaulting him as he sat down on the couch. I've had fewer problems dealing with projects worth billions, he thought darkly.

"Master," Joe said as he walked over to the douch. "The dishes today are a little sweeter than usual, and Young Master Damian has never preferred such flavors. How about if I ask a few other chefs to whip up something different for him? I'm sure there's something that he'll like."

Jordan's voice was crisp and cold as he said, "The Ford Family has seen about a hundred chefs come and leave since Damian was born, and not one of them could appeal to that kid's palate."

It was clearer than ever that Damian was aggravating Jordan on purpose and trying to push his limits.

Joe sighed, "Master, Young Master Damian is still growing. He will need food."

Jordan's face was gloomy, and he took a deep breath before saying, "If the local chefs are inadequate, then look for the ones abroad. I don't care how much money it takes as long as the chef we hire is the one who can ultimately make something Damian likes."

"Yes, Master," Joe agreed hastily.

As cold and distant as Jordan was on most days, Joe knew that the man loved the two young masters unconditionally. There were some who said that a father's love was as mighty as a mountain, but if it were up to Joe, he would think a father's love was as wide and depthless as the sea.

Up on the second floor, Damian was misty-eyed as he sat by the balcony. He was starving, but as he munched on the cookies he had taken out from his backpack, he choked on the crumbs. The tears that threatened to overwhelm him finally did, and in a broken voice, the little boy mumbled, "I hate Daddy..."

He was crying while mumbling angry words about his father. Daddy's evil. He's always so mean to me, and he won't let me leave the house. He keeps me locked up in my room and forces me to learn all that boring stuff.

Damian wanted to run out of the house and look for Rachel. He wanted to touch Olivia's face and marvel at how adorable she was, but the more he thought about this, the more upset he was.

Just then, his smartwatch buzzed with an incoming call. He glanced at it and saw that it was a call from Dmitri. Hastily wiping away his tears, he clicked to put the call through

"What gives, Damian? Why are you crying alone?"

Damian jumped. "How do you know I'm crying, Dmitri?"

"Did you forget that we're twins? I feel as you do," Dmitri pointed out coldly. "I know when you're crying, but you seem rather upset this time. Come on, tell me what happened."

Damian flushed, embarrassed to have been caught crying by his own brother. "I tripped and scraped my knee. It hurt so much that I cried."

"Really? Then I'll get Joe to help you bandage it up."

"No!" Damian cried, then rubbed the back of his head in frustration. "Could you just stop being so clever and keep your nose out of my business, Dmitri? So I cried because I was upset. Is that such a crime? Don't I have the freedom to hide in my room and cry in secret?"

"You can cry all you want, but I just want to know who you are crying for," Dmitri said unaffectedly, "Of course, you don't have to say anything if you don't want to. Right, then, bye"

"Hey, wait!" Damian yelled. He huddled into the corner of the wall and sighed. He would turn to his friends if he had any, but right now, Dmitri was his only confidante. "I met a woman, Dmitri. She's pretty and kind, and I really like her, but Daddy pulled me out of school and grounded me for good. I can't even go and see her. I feel absolutely miserable, and Daddy's got me learning all kinds of boring stuff every day from 7.00AM until dinnertime. I'm going crazy..."

Dmitri cut off his brother's senseless whining and asked, "Who's the woman?"

"Just a woman I like. She has really pretty eyes, like a full moon in the night sky, and her voice is so pleasing. I would fall asleep in no time if she were to read me a bedtime story every night-"

"I'm not asking you to sing praises of that woman; I'm asking you who she is and what her name is."

"Oh, her name's Rachel Yates.."

Upon hearing this, Dmitri narrowed his eyes. Rachel Yates! That's Mom's sister from another father! She's the woman who supposedly died four years ago, but out of the blue, she showed up again just a couple of days before this. How did Damian meet her? Is she trying to get close to him on purpose?

At the thought of that, he warned coldly, "If you're smart, you will stay away from her, Damian. She's not the saint you make her out to be."

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Damian was infuriated to hear his brother's advice. "Do you really think it's appropriate for you to put me down like that after I poured my heart out to you, Dmitri? I won't speak to you ever again. Hmph!"

Dmitri, who was presently abroad, turned to look at the assistant next to him coldly and said, "I would like to return to Seaview City tomorrow. Book me a homebound flight ticket."

"Young Master Dmitri, we will be dropping by the subsidiary for an evaluation tomorrow, and then there's the shareholders' banquet the day after. These are all tasks assigned to you by President Ford himself."

"Then get me a ticket for a flight three days from now," Dmitri said indifferently. He had to go back home and make sure Rachel, the scheming woman who popped up out of nowhere, stayed far away from his defenseless mother. More importantly, he needed to keep an eye on Damian, who was gullible enough to be swayed by Rachel and fall into her trap like the shortsighted fool he was.

Vivian's birthday banquet was held this Friday.

After Rachel had dropped her kids off at school, she drove over to the Yates Residence.

Given how the Yates had borne the brunt of harsh rumors over the past few days, they were keeping things low and went with an understated theme for Vivian's birthday banquet. The only guests who were here were mostly close family relatives.

When Rachel showed up at the door, she instantly became the center of attention.

"Oh, my, it really is Rae! She's alive!"

"Is it me, or have you gotten even more gorgeous over the last four years, Rae? Come here and let me take a look."

Soon, the aunts swarmed around Rachel and tugged on her arm, thereafter patted the back of her hand affably as they asked how she had been coping all this while.

The aunts were far more enthusiastic and exuded a warmth that Francis lacked. It put Rachel at ease as she smiled and said, "Aunt Portia, Aunt Greta, the both of you are aging backward! I could hardly recognize you at all."

She kept up her demure and angelic front as the other relatives from the Yates Family crowded around her and made small talk with her.

Meanwhile, Shirley was standing at the doorway with barely concealed malice shining in her eyes. She was seething with rage as she watched Rachel greet and smile at each guest. Five years have passed, and this wench is still the center of attention wherever she goes. It's like nothing has changed! I'm the one the guests are supposed to fawn over, not her! I'm the one who stands to inherit the Yates' family fortune!

Shirley was so angry that she nearly ground her teeth to dust. She didn't swallow her fury until Miranda walked over and tugged her arm to remind her to maintain composure.

“Shirley, you are about to become the young mistress of the Ford Family, so you’ll have to learn to take things in stride and hold your head up high. You have to be elegant at all times, especially during a banquet like this. Don’t mess this up,” Miranda whispered, then walked over to Rachel.

She had looked cold and impassive at first, but her face quickly lit up with a warm smile when she came to a stop in front of Rachel. Fat teardrops began to spill from her eyes as she said, “Rae, you’re home at last.” She stretched out her arms and pulled Rachel into her embrace, sobbing, “It was my fault that I allowed you to be locked in the storehouse and left you to fend for yourself. Rae, you don’t know how much I’ve regretted doing that; these past five years have been more than enough to remind me of my mistake. I haven’t been able to sleep since you left. I’ve missed you so much, and now that you’re back, we can be a family again!”

Miranda cried relentlessly, and anyone who didn’t know better would look at her and think she was Rachel’s biological mother.

Rachel, however, had an imperceptible smile playing on her lips as she assessed the crying woman before her. If she wants to put on a show about a happy mother–daughter reunion, then I’d be more than happy to play along with her.

As such, she stayed in Miranda’s embrace for a while, then gently pushed the woman aside as she asked piteously, “I’ve missed you, too, Mother. I was all alone out in the world for the past four or five years. I had no place to call home, and I missed having you to protect me. Now that I’m back, will you still love me like before?”

A pleased look flashed in Miranda’s eyes. This stupid wench is still as naive as she was five years ago! I only need to show her a bit of kindness, and I’ll have her eating right out of my hand. How could a simpleton like her ever dream of getting revenge on us? Hah! Dream on, Rachel!

Even as she thought that, her smile grew even more compassionate as she clasped Rachel’s hand in hers and crooned lovingly, “Of course, I will, my darling. I never stopped seeing you as my very own daughter, and no matter what you’ve done, I’ll always love you.” With that, she led Rachel further into the house.

Presently, a number of guests had already taken their seats at the dining table. There was Rachel’s Uncle George and Uncle Bernard, both of whom sat together with

Francis as the three of them surrounded Vivian. Miranda, on the other hand, brought Rachel to the other side of the dining table and pulled out a chair for her.

When Rachel saw the gray-haired Vivian, she felt tears spring to her eyes. She tried to keep her voice steady as she said softly, “Grandma, it’s me. I’m home.”

Vivian’s hand was shaking as she gently patted the back of Rachel’s hand, then sighed. “As long as you’re home, I won’t ask for much else.” After that, she didn’t say anything more.

It was like a cold breeze had drifted through Rachel’s heart, though she didn’t blame Vivian for being so distant. After all, she had disappeared for four years, and she had left the family home under rather extreme circumstances. Besides, there was no telling just how many lies Miranda and Shirley had fed Vivian over the last few years.

Vivian might even be convinced that Rachel was the one who started that horrific fire all those years ago, and that she had had children outside of marriage, thus bringing shame on the family. If Grandma has made up her mind to believe in those lies but does not ignore me entirely, that would mean she still cares about me, right?

“Rae, look at how much weight you’ve lost. Here, have some meat,” Miranda said as she heaped a generous amount of food onto Rachel’s plate, playing the role of a loving mother.

Despite the mess that had happened five years ago and the family scandal that had broken out over the internet just a few days before this, there appeared to be some kind of an unspoken rule for everyone to keep hush about these two topics.

Portia and Greta, in particular, were eager to make small talk with Rachel like she was their favorite niece.

But Rachel knew that the main family in the Yates had taken sole charge over Yates Corporation, which put pressure on the relatives who were already angling to inherit a share of the fortune. However, she intended to use both her aunts as pawns against the main family. Surely there would be nothing to lose for each of them to work together for a common goal.

However, Rachel had yet to sow the seed for her grand revenge scheme when Shirley spoke up. Shirley had been all smiles since the start of the dinner and putting on the most elegant front a proper dinner host should have, but when she saw how swimmingly Rachel was getting along with everyone else in the Yates Family, she could sit still no longer,

“Rachel, whatever happened the last time was a misunderstanding,” she began softly. “I’m now the heir to the Yates Family, and it only made sense that I traveled everywhere with my bodyguards. They were hired to protect me and not to ambush you on the day of the incident. . . After all was said and done, we couldn’t locate the graves of both your children. Should we go and look for them again today?”

When Rachel heard this, she snorted. She knew what Shirley was implying, and it certainly wasn’t to clarify the incident where the bodyguards ambushed her; she was trying to tell everyone that Rachel had given birth to two kids of dubious backgrounds.

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Unsurprisingly, the atmosphere in the dining room shifted as soon as Shirley was done speaking. The guests all turned grim at the reminder of the fire that had burned down the entire Yates Residence four or five years ago, destroying close to billions worth of properties.

It took the Yates two years to get back on track, and everyone in the family was badly affected by the incident.

Sure, everyone had treated Rachel as dead and gone after the fire, but on the days when her name was mentioned, it was almost always through gritted teeth.

Presently, Rachel took in the dark looks on everyone’s faces and smirked as she said, “I’ve been wanting to ask what was in that drink you gave me on the day of my eighteenth

birthday, Mother. I remembered drinking it during the coming-of-age party and blacking out right after. When I came to, I was lying in a hotel bed with no recollection of what had transpired..."

Miranda faltered when she heard this, and she narrowed her eyes as she asked, "What are you talking about, Rae?"

"Grandma, you know I would never fool around regardless of how opinionated and stubborn I am," Rachel continued, biting her lip as she addressed Vivian with a misty eyed look. "Dad locked me up in the storehouse for eight months, and in all that time, I tried to figure out what went wrong, and it always came back to that glass of wine Mother had given me. Because of that glass of wine, I became victim to things I had no control over. Grandma, I didn't mean to bring shame on our family."

Miranda clenched her jaw. She thought she had covered her tracks well after plotting Rachel's downfall all those years ago. *But if this wretched girl brings this up a few more times, then the old lady will definitely grow suspicious of me!* As things were, she was in a precarious position, what with her being the mistress of the Yates Family and the future mother-in-law to Jordan. She could not afford to have a speck of dirt on her reputation.

At the thought of that, she drew in a deep breath and cajoled pleasantly, "Rae, you know I love you the most, so how could I ever do such things to hurt you? The incident was from five years ago, and it's high time we let bygones be bygones, yes? The future is what we should be looking forward to now that you're back; let us move forward together as a family."

"Yes, we should be moving forward," Rachel agreed with an odd smile on her lips. "Shirley, what was that you said about being the heir to the Yates family fortune?"

For some reason, Shirley's heart dropped to her stomach. She forced out a weak smile as she explained, "Well, you see, Rachel, everyone thought you were dead five

years ago, and that made me the only child in the Yates Family, Naturally, I would become the successor, so..."

"So now that I'm back, it would only be right if I resume my *role* as the successor, don't you think?" Rachel asked. She had a gentle smile on her face, but her eyes were devoid of warmth.

No one at the table expected Rachel to bring up the matter of the family's successor on the first day of her return. Most of the Yates Family had been in the business industry for long enough to remain largely indifferent toward sudden twists and crises, but not even Francis had anticipated Rachel to be quite so forthright in demanding her birthright, which was the succession of the family name and fortune.

Sounding even more wounded than earlier, Rachel glanced at Miranda and asked, "Mother, didn't you say you'd love me all the same despite all that happened? I would like to reclaim my right as the successor to the family. You'll help me, won't you?"

Miranda was at a loss for words, but she maintained her smile, though not without effort, as she placated, "Now, Rae, it's your grandmother's birthday today. Why don't we talk about the successor thing tomorrow?" *I'll get rid of her by tomorrow, and this whole thing would never be mentioned ever again.*

However, Portia suddenly interjected, "Rae has a point, Miranda. Shirley only stepped up to become the successor-in-line when we all thought Rachel was dead, but now that she's back, it wouldn't be appropriate for Shirley to hold on to the mantle any longer."

Greta chimed, "I think you're just unwilling to return the shares, Miranda. I mean, in any case, a one-half share in the company is no small sum. I don't think I'd want to give that up either if I were in your shoes, to be honest."

Miranda blanched at this. *These two hags just want to bring me down!*

"The matter of succeeding the family fortune isn't something to be discussed over dinner. *We can't just change successors on a whim!*" Francis finally snapped. "Don't try to start a disagreement right after you get home, Rae. Stop talking nonsense and eat your food!"

An ominous look came into Rachel's eyes. Where Miranda would at the very least pretend to be nice, Francis was never one to keep up the act, and it hadn't taken long for him to show his true nature,

Rachel was no idiot; she knew that she couldn't get back the shares in Yates Corporation by the end of the banquet, and judging by how shameless the rest of her family was, she thought it would be a difficult feat indeed to even get her hands on the company shares,

But that did not dissuade her from bringing the topic up during the meal. It gave her satisfaction to see how uncomfortable her family was after she put them on the spot.

She bit down on her lip and mumbled piteously, "Father, I don't mind giving up on succeeding the family fortune, but could I at least have the shares in Yates Corporation back? I'm talking about the shares my mom left for me before she died; I think it's time I reclaim what is rightfully mine."

Francis' face was stormy. He couldn't believe that he had been so reluctant to give up on Rachel, but now he wished for nothing more than to be rid of her. She should have perished in the fire after bringing shame to the family four or five years ago. Now that she had returned, she was only unsettling the peace within the household. *She's a troublemaker, and we certainly have no need for the likes of her!*

"Rae has a point." Suddenly, Vivian, who had been silent throughout the meal, said, "Those shares belong to Rae, and as long as she is alive, they will continue to belong to her, and she has a right over them."

"Mom!" Miranda panicked, and she could no longer keep up her act as she argued, "Shirley has contributed tirelessly to the company, and is she chopped liver now that Rae is back? I'm not trying to take sides here, but I think there has to be fairness in all things. Rae and Shirley are both daughters of the Yates Family, and one should not be favored over the other."

Rachel never expected Vivian to come to her defense. In fact, she wasn't hoping to get back any of the company shares at all, not even the ones her mother had left for her. She knew better than to give her family the benefit of the doubt; the chances of them handing back what they took from her were slim to none.

But now that Vivian had spoken up for her, she decided that she would try to get Miranda to cough up some of the shares, so she went on to say, "Mother is right;

fairness ought to prevail. How about if I give up a quarter of the shares my mom left for me to Shirley, Father? Would that seem fair then?"

Shirley wanted to sputter. *She made it sound like she was giving away the shares out of a good will, but in a ctual fact, I'd be the one to carve out a quarter of the family fortune for her! What a little b*tch!* She would rather die than agree to the proposition.

Vivian, on the other hand, stared at Rachel seriously. "Are you really going to give away a quarter of the shares to your sister?"

"I am more than willing, Grandma," Rachel said quietly. "Shirley has dutifully taken over the role of successor to the Yates Family for the last four years, and I'm sure she has contributed more than I would ever know. She deserves these shares."

Nodding in warm approval, Vivian turned to look at Shirley stonily. "Go on and thank your sister, Shirl."

Shirley could have collapsed on the spot. *Why should I be the one to thank her when she's asking me to hand over my shares?! Miranda was fuming as well. Ever since she married into the family, Vivian had been getting in her way and standing on Rachel's side. The old hag is still thinking about Rachel even though the wretched thing has been gone for five years! Why couldn't this old lady have died in her sleep back in the hospital?*

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A light smile touched upon Rachel's lips. If she could get back half the shares that were rightfully hers, then she wouldn't have dropped by the house for nothing. As for the remaining half, she was sure it would only be a matter of time before she got them back as well. Laughing, she said, "Well, Shirl and I are sisters, so there's no need for her to thank me."

Vivian was in a delicate state as it was, and for her to sit through the banquet was no easy feat. Now that she had seen her oldest granddaughter, who had gone missing for over four years, the old woman could feel the knot in her stomach loosen. For a moment, it was as if the tension and unease that had seized her over the years went out of her at once, and she felt the urge to collapse in her seat.

She coughed, then said in clear tones, "Butler, have them execute the agreement for the transfer of shares right now." These days, she could barely hold herself together, and she could go into the light at any given moment. As such, Vivian vowed to clean up the mess and straighten things out in the Yates Family before she left this world for good.

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"Grandma, surely there's no need to rush through this," Shirley exclaimed, displeased with how things were turning out. "It wouldn't make a difference if we were to sign the agreement tomorrow."

Miranda agreed anxiously, "That's right, Mom. The formalities can wait until some other day. It's your birthday today, and we can talk about the shares tomorrow."

Vivian frowned, and she was about to say something in objection when a cold and crisp voice sounded from the dining room entryway. "What are we talking about here? Something interesting happened?"

The tall and straight silhouette of a man brushed into the dining room. He wore a black tailored suit, and when he approached the table, he carried himself the same – way a king would-imperious and intimidating. He also had a face that looked like it had been carved by the heavens, and there was no flaw in his features, no matter the angle,

Shirley's eyes lit up when she saw him walk in, and disbelief colored her face. Jordan actually came..

It was Vivian's birthday today, and Shirley had invited him over the phone out of courtesy. He never showed up to any of the Yates' events in the last four years, even if she invited him, so she didn't have high hopes that this birthday banquet would be any different. But much to her surprise, he showed up. Jordan actually showed up!

She could barely hide her excitement as she skittered over in her stilettos to greet him. "Jordan, you should have called before you dropped by! We would have waited for you."

Jordan was unfazed as he said sardonically, "I was just passing by the area, and I decided to drop by to wish Old Madam Yates a happy birthday. I brought a selection of fine tea leaves for you, Old Madam Yates; I hope you like them." With that, he placed the delicately wrapped gift box he was holding in front of Vivian.

Vivian knew that the Fords were of a different elite class, so she didn't mind his standoffish demeanor at all. She turned to the maids and asked that they set a place for Jordan at the table.

Jordan sat down without further prompting, much to Francis and Miranda's elation. In the four years since he became affiliated with the Yates, he had never stepped foot into the Yates Residence, much less had a meal here.

Now that he was here at the dining table, everyone wondered if it meant he was ready to pop the question and make an honest woman out of Shirley. The Yates were naturally ecstatic by the prospect of their marriage. If Shirley were to successfully marry into Jordan's family, then the rest of the Yates would benefit from their alliance as well.

"Jordan, try this dish. It's authentic, and the flavors are amazing," Shirley said eagerly as she scooped some of the vegetables onto Jordan's plate.

The man was indifferent as he eyed her and asked, "Clearly, you missed out on the memo that said I was a germaphobe."

She froze, then blood rushed to her face as she stammered, "I... I'm sorry, Jordan. I was so happy that I forgot you would not share utensils." She quickly scooped out the vegetables she had heaped onto his plate.

The strange conversation between the two made the air grow still and heavy, and everyone couldn't help noticing their awkward behavior around one another.

As though realizing this, Jordan turned to look at Rachel and asked, "So, what were you two talking about earlier? Don't stop on my account."

"N-Nothing," Shirley stammered in her denial, then shot Rachel a warning look as though to say, "Leave if you know what's good for you."

Alas, Shirley had been hoping for too much, for Rachel merely responded with a breezy laugh.

Rachel could tell that the Yates had, as expected, somehow managed to associate themselves with the Ford Family, though Jordan did not seem to like Shirley much. His outward rejection of Shirley only made his presence here among the Yates all the more confusing.

But none of this mattered to Rachel. All she needed to know was that the Yates could not risk losing face in front of Jordan, so she said cheerily, "We were just talking about the shares in the Yates Corporation. You made it just in time to be our witness."

Jordan seemed interested. "Oh, and what will I be witnessing?"

"Rae!" Miranda interrupted before Rachel could say anything, sounding belligerent. "This is a private family matter, and there is no need for you to make us the laughingstock by telling others the details of it."

Just then, Vivian spoke up. "Jordan is technically part of our family, so it won't matter if he finds out about this."

Rachel was visibly taken aback by this statement. Part of our family? What does that mean? She looked up and saw how Shirley's eyes were practically glued to Jordan, and she wondered if there was an engagement between the two that would lead to an alliance between the Yates and the Fords.

That would explain why the Ford Family had so graciously helped the Yates when their stocks crashed on the market the other day. As it turned out, there was a much deeper relationship that ran between the two families than Rachel had expected.

Quietly, Rachel lowered her gaze and pointed out placidly, "Well, seeing as Mr. Ford is part of the family, he would make a poor witness." If he truly was engaged to Shirley, then it went without saying that he would be on her side, and Rachel certainly didn't want to gain an enemy by the end of the banquet.

And yet, Jordan still seemed really interested in this matter. He tapped his long and slender fingers against the table and corrected, "Actually, Old Madam Yates, that's an inaccurate statement. I have never been part of the family, and I believe Miss Shirley would know better than to assume otherwise."

Shirley faltered. In all the time she had been with Jordan, he always referred to her as Miss Yates. Now that he was addressing her by name, she realized with a start that Rachel had indeed returned for good and that it was Rachel who actually had that one-night stand with him.

There would come a day when Jordan would call Shirley's bluff and reject her in a fit of repulsion. No! I can't let that happen! Pursing her lips, she forced a smile and said, "Grandma, I think you have the wrong idea about Jordan and I. You don't have to say such things from now on."

Vivian pursed her withered lips. As far as she was concerned, if her granddaughter had given birth to a man's children, then that man ought to take her for a wife. However, the Fords were incredibly powerful, and Vivian had no way of forcing Jordan to be responsible for Shirley,

More importantly, Vivian had tried to dissuade Shirley from clinging onto Jordan

and any hopes of marrying him, but to no avail. In the end, the old woman decided to wash her hands off the matter.

Right now, Jordan was leaning into his seat as he said courteously, "Well, then, Miss Rachel, you may proceed to regale me with the details."

Rachel had no idea what this man was implying, nor could she figure out what he was doing here. His possible friendly relations with the Yates were the only reasonable explanation for his presence here at the family's private banquet, but if that were the case, then it wouldn't make sense for him to humiliate Shirley several times in a row.

Maybe this is their way of getting along with each other, Rachel allowed. But whatever. It's not as if dwelling on this would do me any good, seeing as their love life is none of my concern.

With that in mind, she pursed her lips and began, "Mr. Ford, I believe that you've heard my story. You see, I supposedly died four years ago..."

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Just like that, Rachel told Jordan everything about the fifty percent shares in Yates Corporation her mother had left for her. When she was done with her side of the story, she eyed him steadily and asked, "Do you think it's reasonable for the shares that are rightfully mine, Mr. Ford?"

"Not at all," Jordan said unaffectedly.

Shirley's face lit up when she heard this. She was overjoyed that Jordan had considered the situation from her point of view. Now that he had spoken up for her cause, she had every reason to turn down Rachel's proposition; not even Vivian could fault her for not signing the agreement to have those shares transfer

Rachel, on the other hand, grew grim. She had been right to think that Jordan couldn't be trusted, and she hated herself for wasting her breath.

She was just about to raise her argument when Jordan suddenly said, "If I were in your position, Miss Rachel, I would do whatever it takes to get back every last share." There was a cold edge to his voice that belied his seriousness. "Why should you have to give up half of your inheritance to benefit somebody else?"

This left Rachel stumped. So that was what he meant when he said I was not at all reasonable? I completely misunderstood him!

"J-Jordan..." Shirley's lips were trembling as she stammered, "You—1—" She opened and closed her mouth like a fish out of water, but she could not form the words to express how she felt. Everyone else knew her as the woman who bore two of Jordan's children, and yet, here he was humiliating her in front of Rachel and the rest of the Yates. He didn't care at all that he was turning her into a laughingstock.

"Hah!" Miranda let out a dry and awkward laugh in hopes of breaking the tension in the room. "Jordan, I don't think you understand just how close Rae and Shirl are; the pair of them are thick as thieves, which is why Rae is so willing to relinquish half of the shares to Shirl. We shan't pry into the dynamics of their sisterhood, so let us carry on with the meal, shall we, Jordan? You barely ate!"

She couldn't risk having this conversation go on, or Jordan would see to it that the other half of Shirley's shares end up back in Rachel's possession.

On the other side of the table, Vivian was eyeing Jordan with admiration. After a pause, the old woman said, "Butler, do you have the agreement ready?"

Having already prepared the necessary documents after Vivian told him to, the butler was now standing in the dining room entryway with the agreement in hand.

At the sight of this, Shirley and Miranda exchanged a brief and unhappy look.

Neither of them wanted this to happen. The company shares, albeit only half of the full inheritance, were worth up to billions, and signing them over to Rachel would be a huge loss to the scheming mother-and-daughter duo.

However, with Jordan here, Shirley would look bad if she did not sign the agreement, and she dared not imagine how he might think of her if she went through with her stubborn rejection.

It's fine. These shares are nothing compared to the fortune I will have once I marry into the Ford Family. Besides, Rachel might not even live to see the sun tomorrow, and the shares will come back to me anyway once we dispose of her

At the thought of this, Shirley's smile took on a more genuine edge as she walked up to the butler and took the agreement, thereafter signing it with a flourish. With one stroke of the pen, twenty-five percent of the company shares were officially signed over to Rachel, who kept the agreement nonchalantly like the transaction did not affect her in the slightest.

When the signing had concluded, Vivian felt as if she would collapse at any moment. She gripped the butler's hand and helped herself to her feet, then announced, "I need to lie down for a bit. The rest of you carry on with the meal."

Rachel stood up as well and held Vivian's right hand, saying, "Here, Grandma, I'll help you into the room."

Vivian nodded feebly, and both grandmother and granddaughter walked slowly toward the lounge further into the house.

Meanwhile, the dining hall was still as lively as ever. This was the first time Jordan had stepped foot into the Yates Residence, and everyone in the family felt certain that the marital alliance with the Fords would take place anytime soon.

"Jordan, there's a new movie released in cinemas recently, and I think you should go on a movie date with Shirley," Miranda prompted with a grin. "The both of you could go shopping afterward and have a candlelight dinner. That would be most romantic!"

Shirley lowered her head shyly as she mumbled wistfully, "Jordan might be busy in the afternoon. He won't have time for movies."

"Regardless of how busy he is, he'll still need to spend some quality time with his girlfriend, won't he?" Portia pointed out. "The both of you have been seeing each other for four years now, and it's high time you settle down as husband and wife. Jordan, I hope you don't mind me saying this, but Shirley isn't getting any younger. She could end up a spinster if you drag this on. Just get married and have the wedding already-"

She had barely finished her sentence when a cold laser-like gaze swept over her and sent a chill running down her spine..

Jordan sneered as he bit out, "First of all, I don't have a girlfriend; secondly, I will never marry her; and thirdly, her evolution into a spinster has nothing to do with me."

This was all he needed to say to nip any possibility of a romantic relationship between them in the bud.

Shirley had always known that the man did not intend to marry her, but he had never made his stance so clear before, nor had he ever broken her heart like this.

Ever since she became the mother to the two princes of the Ford Family, her status in the Yates Family had been elevated, and she would constantly use her ties to the Fords to suppress the other relatives in her family. But as of today, Jordan had as good as publicly declared that the Fords wanted nothing to do with her, thereby stripping her of her glory.

She was trembling all over, and she was in such disbelief she thought she might faint.

At that moment, Rachel returned from the lounge and picked up her purse from her seat at the dining table, then announced, "I'll be taking my leave, then. Goodbye."

"We'll leave together," Jordan suddenly piped up as he straightened up and followed Rachel out of the dining room. With his long legs, it didn't take him more than two strides to catch up with her, and the both of them walked out of the Yates Residence side by side.

Watching them leave together only turned the disappointment in Shirley's eyes into a rage. She was sure that Jordan only chose to humiliate her out of the blue because Rachel was back. That little b*tch must know something!

"My, my, I wonder why Jordan offered to escort Rae out?" Portia was a huge gossip, and she was practically buzzing as she pointed out in amusement, "Greta and Miranda have

never provided accurate insight into this, but I'd just like to know if Rae is interested in Jordan as well."

"You would do well to keep your mouth zipped, Aunt Portia," Shirley hissed. "If I don't become Mrs. Ford, then the Yates will never get the chance to join the ranks of the top-tier elite families!"

"There's no need for you to get testy with me, Shirl," Portia said huffily. "I don't see you snapping at Jordan for humiliating you earlier, and yet here you are snapping away at me when all I did was tell the truth! You're just looking down on me because you think I don't have a right of speech in this family."

"That's right! It's not our fault that you can't win over Jordan's heart!" Greta joined in the spat as well. "Besides, Rae is far prettier than you, so she has a better chance of marrying into the Ford Family than you do. She's also a Yates, and once she becomes Mrs. Ford, then the rest of us will still be able to join the other top-tier elite families."

The two aunts were ganging up on Shirley, and she was so incensed she thought she might implode on the spot.

Taking a deep breath, she lowered her voice and addressed Miranda, "Mom, I can't take this anymore. Let's not wait until tomorrow. We have to get rid of her now!"

Miranda merely patted Shirley's back as she said, "That wench has become warier after our mishap at the graveyard the last time. Good things come to those who wait, and for the sake of the grand scheme of things, we must be patient."