

Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 41

Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 41 A Proposition

Rachel pulled the car door open and slid into the driver's seat. She was just about to start the car when the door on the passenger's side was pulled open.

Jordan ducked into the car, looking insouciant and at ease as if he was getting into his own vehicle.

A sarcastic smile plastered itself on Rachel's face as she asked, "What is the meaning of this, Mr. Ford?"

"Could you drop me home? My car broke down." He settled into his seat and added indifferently, "I promise it'd be worth your while."

She let go of the steering wheel and eyed him coolly, then drawled, "I'm sure the Yates will be more than happy to drop you home. Should I call Shirley for you and see if she can't sort out a ride?"

"Are you that afraid to be alone with me?" Jordan suddenly leaned forward, his handsome face now mere inches away from Rachel's.

Their breaths intermingled, and the air abruptly thickened with unspoken sentiments and strange tension.

Rachel gulped and tried to calm her wildly beating heart. Feigning nonchalance, she turned away from him and gripped the wheel again, then said, "Seeing as you saved my daughter during the Sinclairs' banquet the other day, I suppose I will do you the favor and give you a ride home, Mr. Ford."

With that, she started the car and pulled away from the curb. Soon, they were cruising steadily down the road.

Jordan noticed that she had a tendency to go to the right whenever she was driving, which was evidence of her long stay abroad.

He took an inexplicable interest in the past four years of her life, but she had her guard up against him, and he knew she wouldn't answer any of his questions.

He leaned into his seat and asked flatly, "I was actually hoping to talk to you about a collaboration."

She didn't spare him even a sideways glance and merely kept driving. "Let's hear it, then, Mr. Ford."

"Ford Inc. is diversifying, and we have our eyes set on crafting a niche market out of the automobile industry. I've always wanted to combine microchip technology and cars to fully realize the concept of a smart car." He spoke in cool tones, his voice filling the car. "But there aren't a lot of developers in the country who could come up with the artificial intelligence microchip that our company is looking for. I've had this idea for two years now, but I can't set the wheels of it in motion. So, I was wondering if you'd be interested in collaborating with us?"

Rachel narrowed her eyes. "Did you have someone look into my background, Mr. Ford?"

No one outside the Sinclair Family knew of her work in microchip development. Granted, Tiana could be tactless, but she wouldn't blab about Rachel's work and the trade secrets it involved. The only reasonable explanation as to why Jordan had such insight was that he had looked into her background prior to this.

"You're overthinking this, Miss Yates. Why would I have someone investigate you?" Jordan appraised her with his hawk-like gaze. "Sure, you're gorgeous, and you live up to your reputation as Seaview City's Aphrodite, but that doesn't warrant an investigation on my part."

Rachel pursed her lips. She didn't think he would know about her work in microchip development without sleuthing.

"Ford Inc. was recruiting talented programmers abroad when a student by the name of Rachel Yates was recommended to me by a professor from Harvard University," Jordan elaborated. "Rachel Yates, the programming genius' was exactly how the Harvard professor described you. I'm going to assume that you are the programming genius he wouldn't stop praising?"

Rachel flushed in embarrassment. As it turned out, she had indeed read too much into this. Crap, am I paranoid? She cleared her throat and said, "I think your idea is a fascinating one, but I'm going to need to see the relevant documents before I can consider collaborating with you."

For the past two days, she had been going over plans to set up a workshop, and it was admittedly a good thing that an opportunity for collaboration had presented itself. However, she couldn't shake the feeling that this man was bad news.

She had been cautious in everything she did ever since she became a mother to two children. She was plagued by the constant fear that something terrible might happen if she put her guard down for even a moment. As things were, she had way too much to lose.

"Ford Inc. is a titan in the industry with a full-fledged commercial system. A collaboration with us doesn't come with the usual risks one might encounter with, say, any average company," Jordan went on to say, sounding persuasive. "That said, if you decline for any reason at all, then I will respect your decision as well."

She gripped the steering wheel and kept her eyes ahead as she drove down the road in silence, but she was secretly considering the offer. She had done her research on the dynamics of the business world in Seaview City, and she knew that Ford Inc. reigned supreme. Working together with the company would be equivalent to riding on the back of a commercial titan, and once she was on board, she would spend the rest of her days raking in money.

But all things aside, there was no telling why Jordan had decided to recruit her for the smart car project. Just because the Harvard professor recommended me? That doesn't make sense. I'm not the only one who is talented in microchip development; I rank third place at best.

She was consumed by her thoughts, and she seemed to be functioning on autopilot when she pulled up outside the Ford Manor. The manor was situated within the hills, and while the three-story bungalow wasn't large by any means, the swimming pool, expansive gardens, and playground features took up no less than a thousand square meters.

This truly was a mansion.

"Mr. Ford, I'll consider working together with Ford Inc. and I'll let you know my decision in three days' time," Rachel said as her lips curled into a polite smile.

Jordan nodded and opened the door. "In that case, I shall await your good news with bated breath." He stepped out of the vehicle and began making his way up to the house.

Rachel was about to pull out of the driveway when she noticed the black men's wallet on the passenger seat. Jordan was the only one who had sat in her car, so the wallet had to be his. Grabbing it, she got down from the car and cried out after him, "Mr. Ford, you dropped your wallet!"

On the second floor of the house, Damian was reading when he suddenly picked up on a familiar voice.

His eyes widened, and he barreled out to the balcony to take in the scene below. Sure enough, there was a woman dressed in a beige suit standing at the first-floor doorway. She was smiling, and she seemed to dazzle in the sunlight.

The storm cloud that had been hovering over Damian for the last few days instantly cleared. Elated, he ran out of his room and bolted down the stairs.

Joe thought his wizened heart might fall straight through his stomach when he saw the little guy hurtling down the steps without care. Chasing after him, the butler cried out, "Young Master Damian, please stop running and come back! Master is already home, and if you run out now, there's no telling how angry he will be!"

Alas, at Joe's old age, he couldn't keep up with the rambunctious little boy.

Damian, on the other hand, couldn't care less about how incensed his father would be. All he knew at that moment was that he must see Rachel, and that he couldn't let this chance slip out of reach.

Meanwhile, Rachel had only just handed the wallet over to Jordan when suddenly, a dumpling of a boy practically threw himself at her and wrapped his arms around her leg.

Then, with the force of what she imagined was akin to a baby monkey's, the little boy crawled up the length of her body and burrowed into her embrace, his little arms wrapping tightly around her neck as he whined and whimpered, "You're finally here to see me, Miss Rachel!"

Rachel was frozen, and she didn't snap out of her initial shock until a few seconds later. As the sobbing child clung to her like a baby koala, she shot Jordan a bewildered look and mouthed, "What's wrong with your son?"

Joe finally made it out the front door, and he was breathless as he reached for Damian. "I'm sorry, Master; I failed to keep an eye on Young Master Damian, and he rushed out. Here, I'll bring him up to his room right now."

However, the little guy seemed intent on sticking to Rachel, for he showed no signs of releasing his hold on her.

Worried that tugging on the child would only hurt him, Joe dared not forcefully pull him apart from Rachel, and the poor man was already breaking out in cold sweat.

At the sight of this, Rachel kept her tone firm as she pointed out, "Damian, you're pulling on my hair."

It was only then that Damian loosened his grip as though he had touched something hot, and when he looked up at Rachel, his large doe-eyes were filled with guilt.

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Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 42 Cheesy Pick-Up Lines

Rachel looked at Damian solemnly and said, "A man needs to learn how to articulate his words instead of sniveling and crying for no reason." Even Olive hasn't cried this much since the day she was born.

"I won't cry anymore, Miss Rachel..." Damian sniffed, then said in a watery voice, "I just haven't seen you for so long, and I missed you." As he said this, the tips of his ears turned a bright shade of red.

To the side, Jordan felt the corner of his lips twitch in disbelief. Where did Damian learn such a cheesy line, and how did he not know about it? More importantly, he wanted to know what was so special about Rachel that Damian would shed his menacing behavior and assume such a piteous one instead.

Rachel, too, was a little flustered by the little one's emotional display. She actually liked the child, but seeing as he was Jordan's son, she didn't want to get too close to him for fear that others might think of her as angling to get in the Fords' good books.

As such, she carefully hoisted Damian off her and placed him on the ground, then said softly, "I need to get going now to run some errands, so I'll see you around."

"No!" Damian cried and quickly wrapped his arms around her leg to keep her from walking away. He sounded like he was on the verge of tears as he mumbled, "You only just got here, and you can't leave when I haven't even seen you properly."

Jordan was rendered speechless by his son's behavior. Just where did he learn all these cheesy pick-up lines?

Exasperated, Rachel pressed a palm against her forehead and said, "Look, Damian, I really have to go—"

"Why is this happening to me?" Damian whined, and the tears that he had been holding back finally spilled over. "Daddy locks me up in the house and makes me study every single day. I couldn't eat well or sleep well, and I didn't even have lunch. I'm starving to death as it is! And you don't like me at all, Miss Rachel, or you would have stayed instead of walking away minutes after you saw me! Am I that unlikeable?"

The little boy released his hold on Rachel's leg and crouched down, burying his face in his little hands as fat teardrops streamed past his cheeks and onto the ground.

Rachel's heart gave a tight squeeze, and inexplicably, the pain of seeing this child crying before her threatened to suffocate her. She crouched down as well and asked softly, "Did you really skip out on lunch?"

Damian howled miserably. "I haven't had food for a week, and I'm starving! I think I might die!"

Upon hearing this, she looked up at Jordan. There was no mistaking the accusatory gleam in her eyes as her gaze fell upon the man, as though she was silently asking him why he had allowed a child to go hungry for a week.

Jordan pursed his lips unhappily. He didn't think he owed her an explanation, and he certainly didn't have to answer to an outsider on matters concerning his child.

At the sight of this, Joe quickly interjected, saying, "Young Master Damian is a picky eater, and he doesn't like any of the food our chefs have made for him thus far. He would take all but a few spoonfuls before he threw a fit. Master is growing worried as well."

When she heard this, Rachel realized that the child had indeed gone hungry for days now. She reached for his little hand and offered kindly, "How about if I make you lunch today?"

Damian looked up immediately, his eyes wide with disbelief. "Are you serious, Miss Rachel?"

"It depends on whether your father will allow me to borrow the kitchen for the day."

This was all it took to get Damian up on his feet and turn around to hug Jordan's leg. "Daddy, could you let Miss Rachel have the kitchen today so that she could make me lunch? I promise I won't ever talk back to you again, Daddy, and I won't run off without your permission, too."

It was strange to have Damian wrapped around his leg because he had not had such close physical contact with his sons ever since they started to make sense of the world. Damian had also never spoken in such a coquettish manner, at least not while addressing him anyway. Never did Jordan expect that Rachel would be the one to drive the demonic rage out of Damian and tame the boy. This was, by far, the greatest surprise of the day.

Presently, he nodded and said, "You're the one who asked for this, Damian, so you'll have to finish whatever food she makes for you, got it?"

"Yes, Daddy!" Damian nodded excitedly and even bowed at his father. He was sure that a woman as pretty as Rachel would be a culinary genius, and for the first time in a long while, he was looking forward to lunch.

Jordan, on the other hand, was indifferent. As far as he was concerned, he didn't think a gently bred young woman such as Rachel had much experience in the kitchen, much less know how to whip up proper dishes. Even if she did pick up cooking lessons over the years, he highly doubted that her skills and palate could compete with those of the expensive chefs the Ford Family had hired.

Rachel couldn't care less about what both father and son thought as she followed Joe into the house and through to the kitchen. There was a myriad of fresh ingredients laid out on the counters, and the whole space looked like it belonged in a hotel kitchen.

She surveyed the ingredients and grabbed tomatoes and spaghetti, inspired to make a simple spaghetti bolognese.

Standing by the side, Joe noted the ingredients she had chosen and pointed out, "Young Master Damian does not like spaghetti." He was implying that she should try another recipe instead.

However, she merely chuckled like he had just told her something amusing. "The little guy's been starved for days. I figured spaghetti might be easier on his stomach." With that, she turned on the stove and began to cook, her movements swift and mechanical.

Joe remained by the side as he observed her in silence. Young Master Damian usually doesn't care much about anyone else, but he seems to have taken a special liking to this woman. Not to mention, she appears to be on friendly terms with the Master, for he allowed her to come into the house. Reasoning with himself, the butler decided that the woman was someone who got along well enough with both Jordan and Damian, which meant he could not risk offending her.

It didn't take long for the spaghetti to be ready. Rachel spooned the noodles into a plate and walked out of the kitchen, thereafter serving the food on the dining table in the adjoining room.

When Jordan saw the sauce-coated spaghetti, he couldn't help frowning. Just as he expected, cooking was not Rachel's forte, but he found himself wondering if she was just humoring Damian by serving plain old spaghetti. After all, Damian refused to dig in without first seeing a feast decked out before him. The little devil might even flip the table if there was any sparse area on the dining table.

And yet, much to everyone's surprise, Damian clapped his hands happily when he saw the spaghetti. "Wow, Miss Rachel, you sure are efficient! You whipped up this whole plate of spaghetti in no time!" he exclaimed cheerily, then breathed in the tangy fumes of the dish. "This smells amazing! It's delicious! I don't think I've ever smelled anything more delicious in my life! Can I dig in now, Miss Rachel?"

Rachel smiled and rubbed his head affectionately. "Be careful; it's hot."

Without another word, Damian grabbed his utensils and began slurping up the spaghetti, and he didn't seem like he would stop eating until the plate was licked clean.

Joe gaped at the little boy in shock.

The previous chefs had made spaghetti before this, but the moment they brought it out to the dining table, Damian would sweep the entire plate on the floor in disgust. After that, no chef ever dared make spaghetti again. And now, Young Master Damian is going to devour that whole plate of spaghetti in record time. Could it be that the chefs I hired were all phonies?

As things were, Joe couldn't help doubting himself and his judgment.

Meanwhile, Jordan was also in utter disbelief. Damian had been a picky eater since he switched over to solid food, and now he was shoveling the spaghetti into his mouth like it was the most delicious thing in the world.

Is it really that good? Jordan's gaze flickered over to the spaghetti. There was nothing extraordinary about it that looked like it could win over Damian's ultra-refined palate.

All of a sudden, Jordan had the urge to grab a fork and take a bite of the spaghetti just to see what made it so special.

However, perhaps through some innate father-son connection, Damian seemed to sense his thoughts and quickly pulled the plate toward him, warning, "This is my plate of spaghetti, Daddy. Miss Rachel made it for me specifically, and you can't have any!"

Jordan nearly sputtered. As if I would snatch food from a brat! I'm not that desperate to try the spaghetti.

As though deciding that his father might strike to steal his spaghetti at any moment, Damian grabbed the plate and scooted over in Rachel's direction. Just then, he lost his balance and fell forward, and the whole plate of spaghetti landed, without warning, on the front of Rachel's shirt.

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Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 43 Property of Shirley Yates

The spaghetti was coated in a spiced red sauce without any further seasoning, and it went without saying that it made quite a mess on the front of Rachel's shirt the moment it splattered over the fabric. It didn't help that the liquid was seeping through her shirt as well and causing it to cling to her curves, thereby revealing the edge of her undergarment.

All the color drained from Damian's face. "I-I'm sorry!" He couldn't believe that he had done something so foolish on the day Rachel was visiting him, especially since she had never dropped by the house before this. "I'll help you to clean it up!" he offered, then hastily grabbed a handful of tissues as he made to wipe up the sauce on her shirt.

Jordan frowned at this. He couldn't quite describe the feeling in words, but he didn't like the idea of Damian touching Rachel either, at least not while the mess was splattered across such a delicate area of her body. He abruptly rose from his seat and interjected icily, "Maybe you should change out of that shirt, Miss Yates."

Rachel grabbed the tissues and pressed them to her shirt, obscuring the outline of her undergarment and the suggestive view of her curves. As things were, her shirt was already soaked with sauce and she had a feeling that her undergarment did not survive the damage either. She couldn't very well leave the place looking like this.

Pursing her lips, she asked, "Do you think I could wash up and have my clothes thrown in the laundry here, Mr. Ford?"

Damian quickly nodded. "Of course, you can! Come with me!" With that, he earnestly took her hand and led her up the stairs.

He pushed open a door on the second floor and said excitedly, "This is my bedroom. I have plenty of new clothes in my wardrobe, so you're welcome to pick out any shirt you like, Miss Rachel!" He proudly threw open the door to his wardrobe to reveal the vast selection of boys' clothes hanging within.

Rachel gaped at the clothes, unsure of what she should say at the moment. She might have a small frame, but she wasn't small enough to fit into children's sizes.

"Miss Yates, there are a few dresses here that might just suit you," Jordan suddenly piped up from where he had materialized at the doorway of Damian's bedroom.

Rachel affectionately tousled Damian's hair, then followed Jordan into the bedroom next door.

In the room was a long rack from which hung a row of designer dresses with price tags still on them, which meant they were newly bought. "Pick whichever you like," Jordan said as he took a seat on the couch.

"Thank you, Mr. Ford," she said, then pursed her lips as she walked up to the rack. She picked out a white dress without much thought, but just as she was about to head into the bathroom with it, she saw the label on the dress that read, 'Property of Shirley Yates'.

These dresses are all for Shirley! All of a sudden, Rachel felt as if she had touched something dirty and she quickly shoved the dress back onto the rack.

If there was a row of Shirley's clothes in Ford Residence, then her relationship with Jordan was far more intimate than Rachel had thought.

In an abrupt change of mind, Rachel decided she would like to remain in her soiled clothes. She pressed her lips into a thin line before she parted them to say, "I think it'd be best if I head home for new clothes, Mr. Ford. I'll see myself out."

Jordan narrowed his eyes because he had sensed her emotional shift after she saw these dresses. He couldn't understand her aversion toward these new clothes, so he said forthrightly, "Miss Yates, your face alone is enough to inspire wicked thoughts in men. You'd be playing with fire if you were to go out looking like this."

She looked down. Sauce aside, the damp parts of her shirt front made her silhouette even more suggestive and she could even make out the patterns of her lace bra underneath the fabric. Indeed, heading out like this seemed inappropriate.

With a resigned sigh, she muttered, "Then, I'll have to settle for washing the stain off my shirt and drying it."

He stood up and walked out of the room before he returned with a shirt in hand. "Here, this is mine. You could wear it for now, if you don't mind." He casually threw the shirt at her and she reached out with an arm hastily to catch it.

She would much rather wear his shirt than touch another one of Shirley's dresses. Draping the shirt over her arm, she made her way into the bathroom.

Soon, the sound of running water came from the bathroom and filled the silence.

Jordan was seated outside, and inexplicably, his throat felt dry. If he cast a subtle sideways glance into the bathroom, he could see Rachel's silhouette through the glass partition of the shower, and the flickering image of it seemed to stir up the heat in the pit of his stomach.

When Rachel was done showering, she proceeded to wash the stain out of her shirt. She had discarded Jordan's shirt to one side and had no plans of wearing it for the time being.

However, when she wrung out her shirt, she saw that there was no blow dryer in the bathroom. She could rummage through the bedroom for it or ask the man outside to bring her one, but either option would not work if she were to remain half-naked. Exasperated and left without a choice, she pulled on his shirt in the end.

The white shirt was large and reached her knees, which obscured her figure from view. She glanced in the mirror, and after making sure that she looked presentable, she opened the bathroom door and walked out.

The steam from the bathroom escaped at once and shrouded her like some ethereal fog. Even her alabaster skin looked flawless and glistening.

Jordan looked up at that moment, and he was pulled into a stupor.

He didn't think he had ever been at such a loss of composure before, not even when Shirley showed up four years ago with a pair of twins in her arms. However, for some reason, he was captivated by Rachel and her stunning beauty. It was no wonder that she had been crowned Seaview City's Aphrodite as a teenager; she truly lived up to the name.

Rachel was placid most times, but even she was beginning to feel embarrassed by the way Jordan's scorching gaze lingered on her. She cleared her throat and asked, "Mr. Ford, may I know where the blow dryer is?"

Her voice practically dragged him out of his daze. Damn it! How could I stare with an open mouth at a woman who just came out of the shower? Now, she's going to think I'm some uncouth beast! "I'll go and get it for you," he offered hastily, then bolted out of the bedroom into his own. He found the blow dryer, but just as he was about to return to the room she was in, he stopped in his tracks. Taking a second look at that woman is much like jumping into the sea after hearing a siren's song.

Shaking himself out of his reverie, he made to give her the blow dryer when he suddenly remembered that Joe was a man, too. An old man, granted, but a man nonetheless, and there was no evidence that beastly thoughts would wane with age.

Taking a gulp, Jordan braced himself and passed the blow dryer to Rachel, who looked at him and answered, "Thank you, Mr. Ford."

She turned to enter the bathroom and closed the door behind her, thereafter delicately drying her shirt with the blow dryer.

Jordan resumed his seat outside, and as he listened to the whirring sound of the blow dryer, he felt the strange heat that had seized him slowly subside.

Ten minutes later, Rachel wore her own clean shirt and came out of the bathroom. There was a courteous smile on her face as she said, "I'm sorry for the trouble today, Mr. Ford. I've washed and dried your shirt as well." She handed him the white shirt.

He took it over and could still pick up the faint scent of her feminine fragrance on it. Swallowing, he willed his voice to be steady as he said, "Drop by Ford Inc. tomorrow, and we'll talk about the collaboration."

"Alright. I'll see you tomorrow, then." Having said that, she walked out of the bedroom and down the stairs, her high heels clicking against the polished floors.

Presently, Damian was doing his homework in the living room when he saw her coming downstairs. He abandoned his workbook and happily rushed up to her. "Miss Rachel, could you please stay a little longer?"

Like I would have the nerve to, she thought sardonically. She had seen the predatory way Jordan was staring at her earlier, and it made her want to shrink into a corner and hide. "I'll drop by for a visit some other time, Damian. I really have to get going now. Be good and learn how to keep to your boundaries, okay? Or I won't come by anymore."

Damian pouted and waved at her, looking dejected as he replied, "Got it, Miss Rachel. Bye-bye, then."

Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 44

Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 44 Call Me Papa

When Rachel glanced at her watch, she was surprised to find that it was nearly 4.00PM and that school would be over. She couldn't believe just how long she had dawdled at the Ford Residence.

Initially, she had planned on dropping by the workshop to see how things were going, but it was already getting late, and she had to pick up the kids.

Rachel drove over to the kindergarten and waited by the entrance. Before long, she saw her kids walking out of the building hand-in-hand.

It was even more heartwarming to see that a bunch of kids had swarmed around Olivia and Casper, clamoring for their attention.

"You were so cool today, Casper! I bet you're the smartest kid in our school!"

"You're so good-looking, Casper. Can I be your friend, too? Will you sit next to me in class tomorrow?"

"I'll be sitting with my sister," Casper replied indifferently. "But I'll be friends with you if you're willing to be friends with her."

"Olivia is so pretty. I'll be a pretty princess like her, too, if I play with her!"

"I want to be Olive's friend, too!"

And just like that, the little kids surrounded Olivia. They knew she neither liked speaking nor getting touched, so they kept their distance while talking to her. As such, Olivia was

unfazed, though she did not respond to any of the kids' questions and incessant chattering.

Upon seeing this, Rachel felt her heart swell. She never expected these children to have taken such a liking to Olivia, much less extend friendship to her.

She walked over on her heels, and her presence was instantly greeted by gasps and exclamations of awe. "Wow, Casper, is this your mom? She's so pretty!"

"Your mom looks like an angel from heaven! It's no wonder you and Olivia both look so good!"

The children crowded around Rachel and began pelting her with compliments.

A warm smile lit up her face as she said, "If you eat more fruits and drink a healthy amount of water, then your skin will glow, and you'll be really pretty, too!"

The little girls who cared about their looks secretly took mental notes when they heard this.

When Casper bade the little girls goodbye, he took Olivia's hand and helped her into the car.

Rachel drove away from the kindergarten and remarked happily, "Well, it looks like all the kids and teachers here are just lovely. I'm sure Olive will make plenty of new friends here."

Casper nodded. "The kids are all pretty nice, and Olive doesn't seem to mind them, so you can rest easy, Mommy." Indeed, with him around, no one would dare pick on Olivia.

Rachel had witnessed the little kids' enthusiasm at befriending Olivia, which reassured her to no end. She said nothing more about this and kept her eyes on the road.

Casper, on the other hand, turned to look at the passing scenery. Just then, he frowned and pursed his lips, then said, "Mommy, there's a black car that's been tailing us."

Rachel's brows drew together as she glanced into the rearview mirror. Sure enough, there was a black van tailing them, though it kept some distance.

She tightened her grip on the steering wheel and made a left turn, only to see the van following her as well. When she turned right, the van did the same, but it kept a fifty-meter distance from her nonetheless.

"Casper, hold on to your sister and sit tight; I'm going to try to shake that van off!" With that, she stepped on the gas, and the car sped down the road, overtaking cars wherever she could.

However, it was clear to see that the driver of the black van was equally skilled, for she couldn't shake off their pursuit, no matter how fast she was driving.

Casper's frown deepened as he suggested, "Mommy, let's stop by a restaurant and see who the driver is."

At a time like this, Rachel thought that seemed the best way to go about this situation. She turned the wheel and maneuvered the car to the outermost lane, but just as she was about to stop outside a nearby restaurant, a loud crash sounded from behind them.

She glanced into the rearview mirror and saw that a small sedan had rammed into the suspicion van, hence the loud crash. The back of the van caved in from the impact, and by the looks of it, the vehicle could not be driven anymore.

The driver of the van was presumably too afraid to get out of the vehicle and demand compensation, so he sped away despite the van's damaged state.

Meanwhile, the door of the small sedan swung open, and a man dressed in a gray suit came out of the vehicle.

This was a man who would have women screaming fanatically over him. He had brown eyes that glimmered in the evening light, and upon closer inspection, he had the distinct look of a classic heartbreaker.

There was a devilish smile on his lips as the man walked up to Rachel's car, and with his long legs, it took him all but a couple of strides to reach her. He leaned against her window and knocked on it, then chuckled roguishly as he said, "I told you we'd meet again, Rae."

Rachel rolled down her window and eyed him with a smirk. "You really are an incubus no matter where you are."

This man was none other than Asher Kingsley, a scion whom she had met while abroad. He was also a renowned playboy among the upper-class echelons there.

Being the incubus that he was, he had pursued Rachel fervently after their first meeting, and he didn't give up on her until she had thrown him over her shoulders out of self-defense a couple of times.

Once he had stopped pursuing her romantically, the both of them warmed to each other as friends instead. They had dinner together as a farewell gesture before her recent return to the country, and she thought that would likely be the last time they ever saw each other. After all, Asher was mainly based abroad, and she had no plans to leave her homeland after her return.

She certainly didn't think that the incubus would travel all the way here to Seaview City.

"Mr. Asher, what are you doing here?" Casper asked, leaning forward curiously.

"Hey, Casper, I told you countless times that it'd be so much better if you called me 'Dad' than 'Mr. Asher'. We're no strangers to one another, you know." Asher reached out to ruffle the little boy's hair a little brusquely, then smirked as he added, "Though I'll settle for 'Papa' if that's what you prefer to call me."

Casper dodged his hand and pressed his shell-pink lips into a thin line, then pointed out, "I'll call you that when Mommy gives me the green light."

Asher rolled his eyes at this. Yeah, as if Rachel would ever give you the green light to call me 'Papa'. There's a higher chance that pigs would fly before that happens!

He blinked and turned to look at Olivia, who was demure and quiet as usual. "You're still the cutest, Olive. Come here and give me a hug." He burrowed into the backseat and pulled the little girl into his arms.

She was impassive, but she didn't mind him caressing her hair at all. As such, he took the liberty of ruffling the soft tendrils of her hair.

At the sight of this, Rachel laughed and shook her head in exasperation. There were only about a handful of people whom Olivia liked, and Asher happened to be one of them.

While driving, Rachel asked, "So how long will you be staying in Seaview City?"

"Until you get sick of me," Asher replied with a wisecrack grin. "I miss your cooking, Rae, and I am craving desperately for it. I want to try every single specialty dish that Seaview City is famous for, and I mean every one of them!"

"Don't get your hopes up." She glared at him through the rearview mirror. "I'll cook for you, and you'll eat it and get back to wherever you came from."

She pulled up at the supermarket after that and bought a bunch of groceries, then drove home.

Upon their arrival, Asher carried Olivia out of the car and took in the villa before him in wide-eyed wonder. "Holy crap, Rae! Look at the size of this place. Where did you get the money to buy real estate like this?"

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Love's Cruel Stroke Chapter 45 Father-Son War

Muttering to herself as she walked, Rachel carried the ingredients into the villa. "This is my grandmother's house."

"Your grandmother treats you so well." Asher clicked his tongue. "But no matter what, this house still belongs to your grandmother; it's not under your name. How about this? You marry me, and I'll give you a villa by the sea. It will be yours and yours only."

Rachel gave him a kick. "Asher, if you keep spouting nonsense, you can get out right now!"

"Ow! Rae, stop that! It hurts!" Asher held Olivia as he dodged the subsequent attacks. "I'm sorry, alright? I won't tease you anymore." He ran to the living room and sat on the floor, accompanying Olivia in her game of blocks.

Casper gave his sister a look, then habitually turned on his laptop to sign in to his personal account. However, he frowned suddenly, a cold look emerging in his warm eyes.

Someone was attempting to crack the CCTV footage he encrypted, and half of the 108 passwords were already cracked.

He swiftly pulled up the program interface, and he was in battle mode within a second. Every time the unknown hacker cracked a password, he would add another key protection. With all the encryption stacking on top of each other, he had piled on hundreds of keys on this single footage. However, the hacker didn't seem to have the slightest intention of giving up...

"What are you doing, Casper?" Asher suddenly leaned in to look.

When he realized the situation, he suddenly laughed. "I can't believe there exists a pro hacker who can fight head-to-head with you, Casper. How interesting."

This child had expressed an incredible talent for hacking when he was three, and now when he had just had his fourth birthday, he was already one of the top hackers in the entire world.

If Rachel hadn't prohibited Casper from earning illegal money with his hacking techniques, Casper would probably be a millionaire right now. Asher always felt that if Casper got serious, he would definitely be the number one hacker in the whole world.

But now, Casper seemed to have encountered a worthy rival. Asher stared at his screen for a while, then brought over another computer, engaging in battle mode almost instantly.

The two encrypted the footage synchronously, doubling their speed and leaving the unknown hacker far behind...

On the other end of the computer, Dmitri swiftly clicked away on the keyboard, his hands moving so fast that one could only catch their afterimage.

Beads of sweat appeared on his forehead, slowly dripping onto the keyboard. He had been a hacker for more than a year, but he had never encountered such a strong opponent before...

This CCTV footage depicted his mother ambushing Rachel in the graveyard. The video had been uploaded to the public for days, and it had been shared so many times he had to delete it.

Dmitri inhaled deeply, increasing the speed of his hands. However, he couldn't fight two opponents alone. Soon, every screen he had cracked before was enforced with S-class keys...

Just then, Jordan opened the door and walked in. The lights in the study were off, so only the blue light of the computer screen was bouncing off Dmitri's face, enhancing the visibility of the beads of sweat on his forehead.

"What are you doing, Dmitri?" Jordan stood about a yard away from him and said coldly, "Didn't I tell you not to accomplish anything by hacking ever again?"

Dmitri pursed his pale lips and said slowly, "I have to do this for Mom's reputation."

He didn't pause in his actions as he speeded up instead. However, no amount of speeding up could help because the opponent was catching up too fast, and he didn't even have time to breathe.

Step by step, Jordan walked closer until he finally saw the video clearly. It was a CCTV footage uploaded a few days ago, where Shirley carried out an ambush in the graveyard, only to be held in a chokehold by Rachel in retaliation.

Even though the video's popularity was decreasing, as long as it still existed, Shirley could never clear her name.

No matter how evil Shirley was, she was still Dimitri's mother. At this moment, Jordan tensed his jaw before he walked over and grabbed Dimitri by the collar.

"Daddy, let go of me!" Dimitri began to struggle. "I swear this is my last time hacking—"

Jordan pushed him away and took a seat in front of the computer himself. Dimitri thought that Jordan would turn off the computer, but instead, he watched as Jordan's fingers descended upon the keyboard and began releasing a series of commands.

Outsiders only knew Jordan as a business prodigy, but Dimitri was the only one who knew that his father was a true master hacker.

When he was three, he had chanced upon his father fighting illegal foreign hackers on the computer. This was how he himself had opened his eyes to this particular talent. Hence, with his father on the case, he could consider the job done.

Half an hour later...

"Damn! Is the other person even human?" Asher smacked a fist on the computer. "They f*cking countered me!"

Casper bit his thin and pink lip, then said in a light voice, "Someone took over on that side. The one who took over is the real master hacker. I can't beat him."

He had been roaming in the hacker world for a year, but he had never met these two before. The first one was more or less on the same level as him, but the second one was so skilled that he would need 10 of himself to fight back.

He had lost this round.

At that moment, Rachel laid out the dishes and looked over at them. "Asher, what crimes are you getting my son up to again?"

Asher quickly stashed the two laptops under a gap in the couch, saying calmly, "Rae, I was just asking Casper what I should do so that he would call me Daddy for once."

"Maybe in your next life," Rachel said indifferently.

"Rae, you're so cold blooded." Asher put a hand over his heart, exaggerating, "I've been pursuing you for four years, and even a stone heart would be burning right now. How could you be so nonchalant? Oh, woe is me..."

Rachel was speechless. What a drama king.

Casper pulled a chair and sat down, saying calmly, "Mr. Asher, come and eat. If you dawdle any longer, Olive will finish all the food."

Startled, Asher hurriedly took his place at the dining table because he had witnessed Olivia's appetite before; she ate even more than he did. If he got there too slowly, he would only have soup to drink.

After a while, the meal ended in jovial laughter.

However, Asher still held the blanket on the couch, reluctant to leave. "I don't have a house in Seaview City, so I can only stay for the night."

Rachel landed a kick on his leg. "I'll give you money to book a hotel room."

"No can do. I'm very particular about cleanliness, and I'll develop rashes if I sleep on a hotel bed." Asher held Olivia as he sobbed, "Olive, Mr. Asher loves you so much, but your mommy wants to chase Mr. Asher out to sleep on the streets. Mr. Asher will freeze to death in the cold night. Olive, please help Mr. Asher."

It took everything Rachel had not to roll her eyes as she said, "Do you want me to throw you out?"

Just then, Olivia ran with her stubby legs over to the guest room on the first floor, then proceeded to open the door.

Then, she raised her big watery eyes to look at Rachel.

Rachel understood what Olivia meant; she wanted Asher to stay.

Save for Rachel herself and Casper, the third person Olivia trusted was none other than Asher.

Probably because Asher was the only adult male in the little girl's life, she would instinctively trust and depend on him.

Rachel pursed her lips and said, "I'll give you three days tops. You'll have to get out after three days."

Asher took Olivia in his arms and held her high. "Hahaha! Awesome! Olive, you're my lucky star..."