

The Ace at the Apex

Chapter 39 One Should Not Live Their Lives at the Mercy of Others

In truth, Jade had not only agreed to have Javier stay in her home to honor her bet, but she also did it for the Dunhams.

Later on, she came clean with Javier about her thoughts and hoped that by having Javier live in her home, the fellow from the Dunhams would finally give up. If he were to stop pursuing Jade, she would not be forced into marrying him anymore.

However, Javier did not agree with her thoughts. Instead, he merely thought that Jade was unknowingly making him more enemies!

If he were to live in Jade's home, both the Odells and the Dunhams would immediately see him as a hostile presence. However, Javier decided that it didn't matter.

Why should I be worried about those small fries when I'm the one they should be afraid of? Let those foolish idiots come at me as much as they want then! I'll teach them a lesson that they will remember forever... They will come to realize that I'm no mere pushover they can just mess around with whenever they please!

Jade's house was located in an area filled with villas at the heart of the city. It consisted of three floors with a build-up of 500 to 600 square meters, which was not small by any means. According to Jade, her father had left the house to her while he was still alive, so the only people living there were her and her mother, Catherine.

Once they had parked in the courtyard, Jade looked slightly embarrassed as she continued to sit in the car.

Javier could instantly tell what she was thinking and said, "I think I should just stay at the hotel. I really can't bring myself to be a bother to you and your mother.

Although Javier had not intended on pulling reverse psychology on Jade, it ended up being just that

Right after he said that Jade immediately got out of the car. "No, it's no trouble. I trust you!"

Come on, I don't even trust myself that much...'Javier thought to himself. However, he was already being forcibly dragged into her house.

At the time, Catherine was holding a piece of cloth and was on all fours as she wiped the floor.

Jade went up to help her mother get on her feet. "Mom, I've told you many times already... I'll handle the chores myself."

Jade began introducing Javier after she snatched the piece of cloth away from Catherine.

"This is Mr. Kersey, my vice general manager. He's... He's going to be living with us from now on!"

Catherine immediately put a smile on her face upon being introduced to Javier and greeted him warmly.

However, halfway through that, her smile froze... “H-Hang on... What do you mean, Jade?”

“Exactly what I just said.”

Jade’s face flushed red in embarrassment.

She dashed straight to her bedroom after taking off her clothes, leaving Catherine all alone and dumbfounded.

She pointedly looked at Jade’s bedroom and then at Javier, who was in the living room and was trying his best to hide himself. For a brief moment, Catherine could not quite put her finger on the sudden wave of information that was gushing into her head.

‘So... He’s..my son-in-law?!’

At that moment, someone suddenly banged on the door, completely ignoring the doorbell that should have been right next to them.

Catherine hurriedly went to open the door, seeming as though she knew who it was.

Upon the door opening, a furious voice yelled out, “Where’s Jade?! I saw her coming home already. Get the f*ck out here right now!!!”

It was none other than Matthew Odell, Jade’s second uncle, and Kendrick’s father.

Matthew stalked into the living room and scanned his surroundings, but failed to locate Jade anywhere. Although he had cast a very quick glance at Javier, Matthew did not pay any attention to the man since Jade was the only reason he was there that night.

Immediately after that, Matthew turned around to look at Catherine. “Where’s that little b*tch?!”

Before Catherine could even answer, Jade immediately stormed out of her bedroom. She had just been about to change her clothes.

“Who are you calling a little b*tch, Matthew Odell? Whoever in the world are you calling? Is it your sister-in-law? Or maybe your elder brother?!”

Jade did not take a single step back as she bravely faced Matthew’s curses.

On top of that, Matthew was rendered speechless at her retort and had no choice but to change the topic of conversation. He waved his hand and angrily yelled, “I’m not going to waste my time on that nonsense! Now that Kendrick’s never going to be able to stand again, what do you expect him to do now, huh? Tell me!” ,

Jade laughed. “You’re a rather intriguing fellow, Matthew... How does Kendrick not being able to stand anymore have anything to do with me?”

“Bullsh*t! Of course, it has everything to do with you!” Matthew hysterically started yelling again. “If you’d agreed to marry into the Dunhams from the get-go, would any of this nonsense have even happened? You’re the reason for all of this!

“Plus, it’s public knowledge that Zack Dilley’s pursuing you, so I’m sure you were the one who brainwashed him into running Kendrick over!”

Jade was enraged by Matthew’s fantastic conspiracy theory. “I’m the reason this all happened? Let me ask you then. If you hadn’t tried to force me to marry into the Dunhams in the first place and not instructed Kendrick to come up with all those dirty tricks behind my back, would any of this nonsense ever have happened?”

“Also, aside from the fact that Zack did indeed run Kendrick over, I’ve got nothing to do with this at all!”

“Zack and Kendrick were the ones who worked together to go against me, and Kendrick ended up throwing Zack under the bus. So Zack flying into a rage and running Kendrick over was his just desserts!”

“That’s just bullsh*t!!”

Matthew was now so furious that he could no longer be reasoned with. In the next second, he raised his hand and was just about to slap Jade in the face! However, he did not have the courage to actually do so, probably because he was afraid that he might end up offending the Dunhams.

Of course, with Javier right next to them, there was no way Matthew would have been able to slap Jade even if he wanted to.

Instead, Matthew started yelling at Jade once again.

“You’d best take my advice and marry into the Dunhams as soon as possible! I don’t care what this quarterly promise that you’re hoping will arrive is about, but I’ll never allow you to see it to completion! So, if you know what’s best for you, I’ll still show your mother a modicum of respect and see her as my sister-in-law. Otherwise, I’ll have you both thrown out of this place!”

Matthew turned around and left immediately after that.

Halfway, he threw Catherine, who was in his way, with a disgusted expression and angrily retorted, “Get out of my way, you cheap country bumpkin filth!” 1

Meanwhile, Catherine, who was Matthew’s sister-in-law, hurriedly lowered her head and stepped aside, fearful that she was in his way.

Jade was just about to storm toward Matthew to reason with him after seeing him yell at her mother. Yet, before she could even say anything, Catherine immediately stopped her and said, “Jade, listen to me! Drop this matter!”

Jade was so angry that she was almost in tears. “Mom! Can’t you stand up for yourself? He’s literally just bullied you...”

However, Catherine kept on dissuading Jade in a kind tone without a single shred of temper in sight.

Catherine had grown to be cowardly and self-deprecating ever since she married into the Odells, to which she had deeply engraved those traits into her entire being. This was the reason why she did not dare to release any temper whatsoever in front of the Odells, allowing the latter to be more and more relentless whenever they bullied her.

After that night, Javier felt that Jade had suffered a lot growing up. 'Her father's passed away, her mother's a coward, and her second uncle's a crazed hound... It must've been really difficult for her to still be able to grow into the strong woman she is now despite such harsh conditions.'

Javier was now pondering if he was obliged to help Jade all the way and get her out of the trouble she was in!

Meanwhile, Catherine dragged Jade aside, her face filled with fear and concern.

Although Javier could not hear what they were talking about, he could still guess that Catherine was worried that Jade might end up causing both Matthew and the Dunhams to feel unhappy if he were to live with them.

Out of concern that Catherine might have to live her life in fear, Javier was about to take his leave when he was stopped by Jade.

After that, Jade said to her mother, "Mom, you've been letting them have their way your entire life. But has Matthew ever shown you any respect? No! So what we should do now is fight back!

"We have to rely on ourselves if we want to make others respect us instead of living under the mercy of others!"

Chapter 40 They Should Be the Ones Coming to Beg Us!

Jade's words were firm, something that was almost unimaginable for her to have considering her slender and petite frame.

In fact, her fearless temperament bolstered Catherine's courage. Finally, Catherine took a deep breath and nodded her head. "All right then!"

With that, Catherine agreed to have Javier live with them...

That night, Javier was arranged to live on the second floor, while Jade and Catherine lived on the third. Initially, Catherine was worried that Javier might get up to no good during the night, but it turned out that she had been worried for nothing. It was only after this that Catherine wholeheartedly accepted Javier living in their home.

The next morning, Jade and Javier headed to the company, where they entered their own offices and buried their heads into their work.

However, after a mere half an hour, Jade rushed into Javier's office in a panic.

"Javier! Something bad happened!"

Javier could tell from Jade's expression that whatever it was, it was definitely not going to be good. Jade began to briefly explain to Javier about their current situation.

It was about Midnoon Tires, a tire company located in Liamsworth.

In comparison to this company, Beacon Tires was on a slightly larger scale. However, due to a silent agreement about their market beforehand, neither of them was involved in any competition since their target markets did not have any conflict with one another.

On that very day, Jade suddenly received news that Midnight Tires had made a move against them. To make matters worse, they were coming after Beacon Tires on a rather grand scale, snatching away a number of their existing customers in a single swoop. All of them had suddenly cut off ties with Beacon Tires to form new partnerships with Midnight Tires.

What was previously a 13 loss was now once again reverted to being 2/3 after these customers had retracted their purchase orders. On top of that, what scared Jade more was that the other companies that Beacon Tires were supplying to were beginning to waver, ready to jump ship to Midnight Tires at any given moment.

If this were to happen, there was a very high chance that the purchase orders she had accumulated thus far would dwindle to only the recent ones from Fusion and Grazin'! acc

"I've already looked into it, Matthew's personally leading Odello Corp. to put pressure on these companies. That f*cking b*stard!"

Jade was fuming at the mere mention of

the mere mention of Matthew's name. She could not understand for the

life of her why her very own uncle would treat her so horribly.

However, Javier did not ponder too much about the matter. What he was more concerned about was...

"Didn't you draw up contracts before you went into partnership with them? The contracts should have a clause where the party that ends up canceling their purchase order or failure to deliver the products would lead to a breach of contract, whereby whichever party that's involved would have to bear the full responsibility no matter what."

However, the reality of the situation was very different from what Javier was thinking Helplessly, Jade explained, "I wasn't the one who drew up the contracts. When the contracts were drawn, the clauses stated that the customer would only have to compensate a *very* small amount of money, possibly even nothing... The only focus of the sales personnel at that time was to make sure that they secure these customers' business..."

Javier instantly understood what was happening!

"The penalty on them for breaching our contract is so minimal that they aren't afraid of breaching it at all!

After pondering for a moment, Javier stood up and invited Jade to take a trip with him to request the penalty since their contracts had been breached.

"No, what we should do now is to salvage our business. Wouldn't you be sentencing them to death by asking them to pay up the penalty now?"

As much as Jade's retort had made sense, Javier was not going to play by her usual style.

Ignoring her unhappiness about the matter, Javier dragged Jade into the car, and off they went to retrieve their compensation.

Despite how difficult it was for Beacon Tires to pull in more business at the time, it was an extremely easy task to retrieve their compensations for a breach of contract. After visiting three companies that very morning, they managed to accumulate 24 thousand dollars in total.

'Eight thousand dollars of compensation from each company on average huh... Seriously.... Javier wanted to laugh when he looked at the pathetic amount of money.

Meanwhile, Jade's expression was cold and unhappy throughout the entire journey. "Are you happy now? You've just made enemies with our customers and have left us with no way of salvaging the matter anymore."

Javier once again gave Jade a 'business lecture".

"There are many ways to develop a successful business, so you can't always be fixated on one single direction. Lowering your heads to beg for their business is one method, but the other way can be another way as well. You should change your mindset a little."

Jade ended up listening to Javier's lecture for the rest of the trip as they rushed toward the fourth company.

Undeniably, Jade had indeed learned a great deal after listening to Javier's lecture.

However, her current issue was that she still could not understand how Beacon Tires would be able to reach so high that her customers would end up begging them to deliver their products to them.

Without explaining to Jade, Javier brought her along upstairs to meet Dwayne Lewis, the owner of the fourth company.

At that moment, Dwayne was sitting in his office with Clement Lewinsky, having a leisurely chat. The latter was none other than the owner of Midnight Tires himself,

Upon entering the office, Jade's face fell the moment she saw Clement. However, she maintained her professionalism. "What a coincidence, Mr. Lewinsky."

Clement hurriedly stood up and had the word "triumph" written all over his face. He then apologized hypocritically by saying, "My goodness, I'm so, so sorry about everything that's happening, Ms. Odell. I've ended up butting into your territory and taking your customers. But, I have no choice but to do this, which I'm sure you'll understand since we're both businesspeople, right? There's no reason for us not to talk business if a customer calls us up for an inquiry, don't you agree?"

Jade forced a smile but remained silent...

Meanwhile, Javier told Dwayne the reason for their visit that day and requested compensation as per their contract.

Originally, Dwayne thought that the pair were visiting him to try and beg for his business, but what happened was completely out of his expectations.

Thus, he sneered and said, "Ms. Odell, this vice general manager of yours is a finance major, is he? Just look at how high in regards he holds money... At any given moment, he's just thinking about how he can

collect his money. I can't help but think that you've found yourself a wonderful expert at wealth management."

Dwayne's words were obviously filled with scorn, indicating that Javier was a short-sighted man for collecting his company's compensation when he should be trying his best to regain the business his company had just lost. 'What a foolish fellow...'

Jade understood what the man was hinting at very well. In fact, she agreed with Dwayne and that they should be begging for Dwayne's business.

However, both Javier and herself were representatives of Beacon Tires, so of course, she had no choice but to support Javier.

"Mr. Lewis, of course, we would choose to beg for your business should it be an effective route. However, based on the fact that you've chosen to breach our contract, it would seem like you've already made your decision to cease your partnership with Beacon Tires. As such, why shouldn't we choose to ask for compensation?" .

Jade's statement made perfect sense, which Javier was very impressed by.

Next to them, Dwayne was slightly startled, but very quickly smiled and said, "Looks like you're a very straightforward person, Ms. Odell. Fine, 16 thousand dollars as a penalty for my breach of contract means nothing to me. I'll have my finance department transfer the money over to you this afternoon.

"Seeing how it's now time for lunch, how about I treat you both to a meal together with Mi. Lewinsky?"

Jade did not want to take up his invitation, but she could understand the meaning behind Dwayne's words. 'He's not going to pay up if we don't join him for lunch!

On the other hand, Javier could easily read between the lines.

Dwayne's eyes were brimming with so much lust that any man would be able to understand what was happening. 'He's planning on making use of this lunch to get Jade drunk so that she'll embarrass herself. In fact, he might even have some other wild thoughts in mind...

'Sure then, let's see who ends up embarrassing themselves this afternoon...?'

In truth, Javier could not hold his drink very well, but the Kerseys had a medical team that had successfully developed a special drug that would allow the consumer to very swiftly break down any alcohol that enters their system, effectively allowing them to remain sober no matter how much they drank...

"Let's see whether you'll end up feeling frustrated, you sneaky old b*stard..."

Chapter 41 Don't Come Begging Me

Jade's first instinct was to decline, but Javier beat her to the punch and said yes, much to the young woman's initial bewilderment. Of course, by the end of their lunch, Jade saw why. Javier could drink an ocean if he wanted to.

Jade wagered the men had consumed a good 700ml or so worth of white wine each, and yet only Dwayne and Clement were positively sh*t-faced. By the time Jade and Javier left, those two were swinging their clothes around like a lasso while taking their sexiest attempts at twerking

To top it off, Dwayne would even throw his head and spew a drunken, skyward spout every now and then. Clement, being quite the supportive hype-man, would then groggily clap and cheer, "Ooh..Pwetty...fountain!" 1

To sober up after that spectacular foofaraw was to toil in embarrassment.

"You are a f*cking lightweight, Mr. Lewinsky. That was what, a kid-sized pint? And apparently, that's enough to reduce you to a clown!"

"Ha, the pot calling the kettle a terrible drinker, aye? You were throwing up toward the sky and drenching yourself with your own lunch! God, how am I gonna delete your magnificent fountain show from my memory?"

The blame game went on for the rest of the afternoon and almost ended up in fisticuffs. It never came, though, as bringing up a common enemy united their ire. "That son of a bitch acted like he was a helpless little lightweight-big, fat, phony farce could drink like a bottomless barrel! Just what the f-"

Jade considered Javier in amazement as they drove back to the company. What godly kidneys he must have to not be even a little bit tipsy after downing more than 700ml of wine!

While she was still in awe, Javier suddenly spoke up, "There's no need to pause production. In fact, pour more resources and people into it and up the amount. The more we produce, the better."

Jade was incredulous. "But we lost our contracts, didn't we? Who are we making all of that product for?"

"Our previous contractors who canceled their deals, of course. Relax... They'll come back to us pretty soon."

Javier sounded so confident...but Jade's confusion was not diminished. She kept pressing him for why, but she never got her answer. Still, she had unwavering-unconditional, in fact faith in Javier. She would do anything he told her to. If there was anything she was sure of, it was that Javier would only work to benefit her. He would never harm her.

Shortly after returning to the office, one of the employees led a woman in her forties to meet Jade. The newcomer was decked out fashionably and carried herself with a magisterial air that made one immediately see her as a leader of sorts in a company.

"Hi. You must be.?"

"Ms. Odell, pleased to meet you! Mae Kingsley. I heard your company is looking for a CFO."

Jade had indeed put up a hiring notice online for the position, but the woman had been the only one who decided to show up in person for consideration rather than doing so through a call.

After getting ahold of Mae's credentials, Jade's reception had only become warmer and more welcoming. As it turned out, Mae Kingsley was no run-of-the-mill middle-aged woman looking for a job-

she was a veteran who once worked as a Chief Financial Officer in another heavyweight company rivaling Odello Corp.'s prestige. Then, her daughter started attending a university in the area, and Mae promptly moved with her. She decided to get a new job in a new place, and that was how she came to stand in front of Jade. With a resume so illustrious, Jade could not help but think Mae was punching way below her weight. Mae, for her part, insisted that she was convinced by the future of the company rather than the apparent present. She was more than willing to march with the company as it scaled an upward path to greatness!

It was a blood-pumping, exhilarating thing to hear; a sermon that roused spirits. Naturally, Jade gleefully welcomed Mae aboard and told the older woman she could start working tomorrow. As soon as she saw the woman out after copious amounts of merriment, Jade immediately grabbed her phone and ordered a background check on her prospective employee.

She received her report half an hour later: Matthew Odell had arranged for Mae Kingsley to join the company Jade made her way to Javier's office and ran the issue over with him. "I knew it. If something's too good to be true, then it most certainly is, isn't it? She's a mole. We'll have to tell her she's out now, huh?"

Jade's vigilance was admirable, but Javier ultimately thought differently. "Nah. Let her stay. We'll use her as the messenger to get to Matthew," he replied, before adding, "Besides, I've already found you a CFO. She'll be with us tomorrow."

True to his word, the very next afternoon, Mary Jane Gould arrived. A casual chit-chat between Javier and herself promptly followed, in which the woman made a compliment about "Young Master Javier" growing into a fine, strapping young man.

Mary Jane was no slouch. She had worked for over a dozen financial groups within the nation, who then led a charge against foreign competitors in an epic guerilla-styled financial warfare with stakes rising to hundreds of billions of dollars. She had emerged victorious,

upending all of her foreign competitors and launching herself into the international spotlight. Even Warren Buffet, the "Sage" of the stock market, was crowned "the male Mary Jane Gould" when he first carved his acclaimed mark as an investor.

Such was the extent of her deified cachet.

In recent years, she had joined the Kerseys to oversee their financial affairs on a global scale. In other words, she had become an indispensable arm to the sly, all-powerful titan-before Javier dislocated said arm and grafted it onto Beacon Tires' shoulder.

One could only imagine how grouchy the "titan" must be over this...

Of course, Javier had conveniently skirted around Mary Jane's intimidating rep and introduced her only as "the new CFO of the company." He would not want Jade to be too shocked.

Jade, for her part, warmed up to Mary Jane a lot simply out of faith and trust in Javier's judgment. After instructing the veteran to accompany Jade in meeting Mae, Javier did not stick around and left the office in his car. There was nothing to warrant his stay, Mae was a small fry going up against a demigod. She was an ant to Mary Jane's boot.

Javier drove to Liamsworth, a nearby town to meet the man behind Midnight Tires—the shirt flinging, mad-twerking Clement Lewinsky of yesterday. Today, Clement was found rubbing his temples in between gulps of coffee, which was a clear sign that he might not have completely recovered from his hangover.

Still, upon seeing Javier, Clement could not stop himself from remarking, “To what do I owe this pleasure after you’ve set me up yesterday, Mr. Vice GM? Here to rub it in my face and make fun of me like a b*stard?”

Javier had no time for trivial banter. Plopping himself on the couch, he cut straight to the chase, “No. Just here to talk about an acquisition.”

Clement laughed. “Come on, is this necessary, Mr. Kersey? Did me taking some of your business deals hurt you so much that you want me to acquire your company already?” he giped as he pulled out a cigarette and lit it. “And that tone. God. So hurt! So bitter! It’s like you’re licking your wounds and looking for sympathy just because you’ve lost a little in a friendly competition!” he puffed, smoke billowing from his mocking lips.

“Oh, you’re taking this the wrong way, Mr. Lewinsky. I’m here as Beacon Tires’ rep. I’m talking about the acquisition of Midnight Tires by my company.”

Clement was stunned; he did not even realize his coffee was trickling over the brim of his cup as he froze mid-pour. It took him quite some time before he finally recovered his senses. With a scornful snigger, he said, “I know you drank a lot yesterday, but man, you haven’t sobered up? You must be sh*tting me. Beacon Tires dreaming about acquiring Midnight! I have one word for you—ludicrous!”

“Just take a damn look at the state of your company! You’d make more sense if you begged me

to take your company as mine. But no. Instead, you think you can buy out your betters without even a smidge of doubt of how plausible that would be forgive my oh-so-crass language but, were you dropped as a baby?”

Javier snatched the older man’s ceramic ashtray before slamming it hard against the armrest. “Yes, or no?”

His uppity attitude provoked Clement. “F**k off, greenhorn. You’re disrespecting my time with your bullsh*t, and you expect me to play along?! Let’s make this clear in terms even you can understand: Beacon Tires is doomed. Matthew Odell and I have cinched a grand, strategic alliance united against a single enemy. You! Our goal is to see you crash and burn. And all in just a month’s work, too!”

“Your little Beacon is busting, boy! You people can’t even save your own *sses while you waltz in here, chest-pumping like a big boy and talking up a big bluff. You’re a clown sleep talking with his eyes wide open,” he snarled, “I’ve asked you before, but it’s worth repeating Were you dropped as a baby, Kersey?”

Javier planted the burning tip of his cigarette into the ashtray and killed its ember.

The conversation was over. He rose and left, but not without throwing in the last one-liner, sure hope you don’t end up begging me in my office.”

"I ain't a Lewinsky no more if I so much drop my f*cking voice into a pathetic plea in your godd*mn office!"

Chapter 42 You Got What You Wanted

Javier left Midnight Tires and began making calls and arrangements as soon as he got into his car. Satisfied, he played some airy music and drove back to the company, terrifyingly relaxed and chilled.

His return was immediately greeted by a grinning Jade, who sprung into his office, beaming." Oh My God! You wouldn't believe how frickin' cool Ms. Gould is. She's such a bad*ss! Upon arriving at work, Mae Kingsley didn't waste time before planting system-breaking bugs and making up fake accounting to siphon our funding away. Just around-the-clock crippling our financial system!

"But then Ms. Gould came, and do you know how much time it took her to debug the entire system that saboteur tried so hard to ruin? Less than ten frickin' minutes! Then she sniffed out that fake accounting and the stolen funds and wrapped it around Mae's neck like a leash! Ha! That old rat was so scared, she was squealing for mercy and started laying out all the deets...just like that!"

Jade subsequently relayed Mae's confession to him, including naming Matthew as the man who orchestrated her arrival, as well as the one who had directed her to wreak havoc upon Beacon Tires' accounting. The goal was explicit; he wanted Mae to destroy the company from the inside.

Clement to run frontal assault, and Mae to set fire from within, thus attacking the rear. Matthew really brought out his scheming best when he employed a double strike strategy.

"Too bad, his little subterfuge has been cracked! With Mae becoming our captive, she has no choice but to serve us and do whatever we demand of her! And it's all thanks to Ms. Gould... And of course, our very own Vice GM, Mister Kersey!" Jade praised earnestly. "You're one of the heroes too!"

Jade was enlivened. Her cherry lips blossomed like a flower in a sunny meadow, and she somehow managed to become more and more beautiful by the second. Javier could feel an urge ballooning inside of him. He wanted to pull that beautiful, beaming girl into his arms so much...

Before he could try turning his desire into reality though, Jade skipped out of his office in the same sprightly steps she took when she came, humming something about asking Mary Janet to enlighten her on some financial matters or even getting her to be her mentor.

Now that would be a noble pursuit. The leader of a company should always be equipped with a decent understanding of finance and its related matters. An unlearned boss would be akin to owning a potent weapon and yet only her lancer alone knows how to use it. Sure, everything would be peachy if the lancer was loyal to their liege, but one would not want a repeat of Terry Hamer now, would they?

While Jade's face was beaming as much as a sunlit spring, way over at Midnight Tires, Clement Lewinsky's mien had turned into a wintry overcast as he moaned, "Why the hell is this news breaking?!"

Worse, it was serial news-breaking, with Midnight Tires as the main character in every single one of them. Half an hour after Javier left, Clement's secretary had entered with a stack of news reports still warm from its printing.

The article had been taken down from one of the nation's largest newspaper sites, the content unsparing in its details about an accident on the freeway. The tires suddenly burst as the vehicle was cruising, causing the driver and two passengers in the backseat to die on the spot.

It was all old news; a tragedy that had happened last year. And yet, it went viral today. Someone in the comment section had managed to stir up a furor by pointing out that the victims had been using Midnight's tires.

A lone case would not have made much of a dent in the company's reputation, but five or six more old news about similar accidents became viral again later. All of them shared a few commonalities: they were all old news, the accidents involved only the victims' cars, and all of their tires had been from Midnight.

As the noon matured, a hashtag concerning Midnight Tires' supposed problems started trending on Twitter. Its infamy soared so much that it managed to eclipse news about a famous teen idol's alleged affair by late afternoon. Even more ludicrously, the sheer immensity of people giving a damn about Midnight Tires managed to dwarf attention given to a celebrity scandal.

Clement pounded his desk in exasperation. "How the f*ck is this happening?!"

No one could answer him. Not even he himself could.

Alarmed rapping echoed from the other side of the door. Before Clement could say anything, his secretary had marched in uninvited, gasping, "Mr. Lewinsky, you have to see this... This report just came in! An accident just happened, and they were using Midnight Tires..."

Clement snatched the paper up. Godd*mn it, she was right about the news just breaking! A long-distance driver was crossing the interstate freeway when he suddenly wanted to unload himself. Parking his car by the emergency lane, he opted to pee behind his car's door to shield himself from view. That was when the tire he was facing allegedly exploded and the impact threw the driver half a meter away and knocked him out cold.

The title of the piece was very mocking: "Shocking! Midnight Tires Will Punish You if You Pee on It!" The tone did not get any less jeering after that either; it went on a sardonic track, skewering Midnight Tires' quality while gleefully offering links to every other news about all previous accidents.

Unsurprisingly, it blazed through social media and other online platforms, ostensibly to warn all self-respecting car lovers to check if they were currently using Midnight Tires. Those who were current users were advised to "never pee on it to prevent explosions."

Clement was apoplectic. He jumped right into the fray to debunk the article, and yet a crusade of one was hopeless against the deluge of the many eagerly cracking wise and adding their own punch. He produced not even a ripple, let alone a splash.

Before all of this had happened, Clement had thought of capitalizing on his alliance with Ordello Corp. to gain a handsome sum fee for advertising purposes. Now, it looked like he had got what he wanted at no price at all, did he? Not a single dime was spent, and yet the entire internet was talking about his tires.

But at what cost?

Clement just felt like crying by this point!

Midnoon Tires' imbroglio went on to become the evening news in TV channels nationwide. The head of the State Quality Control Department had assured consumers in the interview that they would begin investigating Midnoon Tires at the nearest possible time.

"Le-wins-kyyyyy! What the hell is with this malarkey?! Are you trying to tank my business?! That's it! The contract between us is over! I'm going back to Beacon Tires, and that's final!

"Matthew Odell, you harebrained moron! Do you know how much work I've had to go through to change my supplier? I have to register new model numbers, make new models-those things take at least two or three days to complete! And then there's gonna be a week before the first batch is produced! How is my factory going to survive zero production or work for a whole goddamn week? Am I supposed to sacrifice all that just to please Matthew and his god awful judgment? Bah! Count me out, *sshole!"

Dwayne was hardly the only one coming to that conclusion. Every single one of Clement's soon-to-be-ex partners had similar thoughts. They were businessmen first, after all; capitalists who gravitate toward profit margin over anything else. Tires were tires no matter what brand they were. The only reason they had been willing to change their supplier to a company sanctioned by Odello Corp. was that gaining the Odells' favor seemed profitable at the time, but things had changed. Their bottom line was under threat! Who gives a damn about buttering up Odello Corp.! They had to save themselves from this fiasco!

A deluge of canceled contracts followed. Midnoon Tires was abandoned like a sinking ship. Factory operation was halted for state inspection. Journalists formed a line of coteries united in their desire to interview Clement, so they could question him for coveting profit over scruples when doing business.

Clement had never ever felt so wronged. There was no problem with the quality of his tires! And that was before getting into the facts and truth about why any tire could be punctured. There were literally thousands of various independent reasons that could cause such a thing to happen!

Unfortunately, few people cared. They were all fixated on a wholly unreasonable and unfair point. Since the victims had been using Midnoon Tires, the problem must lie in his tires and absolutely nothing else. There would be no cost on one's moral standing for piling on someone so glaringly at fault!

Finally, the result of the department's investigation came to light. Midnoon's tires were proven to be safe and up to standards. Clement breathed a sigh of relief; finally, it seemed that he was about to be vindicated.

But his optimism was premature. The director of the department had a different idea. "The court of public opinion is completely against you and your product, Mr. Lewinsky. I'm afraid you'll have to endure that," he said, "The people's opinions always come first no matter when and where, you know? So yeah, I know you're innocent and everything... But well, serves you right for provoking the people's ire, huh?"

"Well, that settles it then. Your factory will cease operation for a month. We'll tell them it's for restructuring and all that," the director finally said, "That's it, boys. Our job is done."

With an authorized paper stamped onto the factory's door and a few strips of yellow tape later, the department's team left without a word.

Clement stood, alone, in front of the main door to the factory, his line of vision marred by the stinging cross the department's tape had left on the entry.

Sullen and crestfallen, he murmured to no one in particular, "How on Earth did I get here? Did I offend the Devil or what?!"

Chapter 43 Say Goodbye To Being A Lewinsky!

Waking up to all of her old customers and their contracts pouring back in made Jade Odell

quite ecstatic. She was in a good mood, especially after she arrived at her office to find Dwayne Lewis standing there with a smile that could only be a prelude to flattery.

"Ms. Odell, just the brilliant mind I've been dying to see! Finally, I've been waiting for you!"

Jade scoffed. "For what? Waiting to get Mr. Kersey so drunk that you can finally harass me uninterrupted?"

Her barb cut deeply enough to instantly make Dwayne's face wrinkle in embarrassment. "Oh god, no! That was a misunderstanding, Ms. Odell! A blunder on my part! Don't take it seriously, Ms. Odell..."

Dwayne did not stop there. His flattery and apologies were incessant as he followed Jade into her office. Anything and everything he had done before today, be it trivial or no, had an apology of its own. The goal was to soften Jade up and appeal to her angels, hoping that she would eventually supply tires for his cars once again...or risk having his factory's production grinding to a halt.

So what if he could produce cars? He could not just fashion four metallic rings and call them wheels!

Then, there were the pressing demands coming from car dealers. If he failed to assemble his cars within their stipulated time frame, Dwayne would have to saddle up a mountain of penalties. Hell, the total sum of all of those penalties easily outnumbered Beacon Tires' 15 thousand dollars from back when it was desperate to gain any prospective client. Having to pay all that off was enough to plunge him straight into poverty!

With a crisis looming at large, Jade was his only lifeline now. And for that...no flattery was too much!

Besides, it takes a businessperson to know another. Private grudges or not, even Jade would not say no to a lucrative, desperate source of money. After dishing out a few more barbs and jeers at the man and upping her price, she ultimately signed a new contract with Dwayne.

The man was as enraptured as a junkie getting his fix. He signed without a second thought, a s though worried that even a millisecond of hesitation would give Jade enough time to regret and retract.

Stepping out of Beacon Tires' doors, Dwayne's feet fell into a stop in front of its main entrance before the mother of all sighs burred out of him. "Jesus H. Christ... I've licked the boots of the big suits in the government. Buttered up those pesky car dealers. But to beg a supplier for accepting my money and

doing my business?" he scoffed to himself. "Now this is just straight up bizarre. And yet, I've done that too!"

A supplier doing their best to win a client? Norm. Said client begging the supplier to please please-please take up their business? Now that's a tough sell!

After today, though, Dwayne now had the experience to boot...

Jade could not help but feel her heart swell in jubilation. She made a maddened dash to Javier's office as soon as Dwayne left just to spread the joy. "I've always been the one scrambling for his oh-so-important favor in the past, Javier But just now? Gawd! How the tables turned! He was practically begging me to smile at him! Have you any idea how wild this is?! I wouldn't think this is possible even in a dream!"

She paused in her awe and asked pointedly, "Something's up with Midnight Tires, isn't it? know something's up!"

Javier cracked a small, wordless smile as a tacit admission.

"I still don't get it," Jade admitted. "How did you do it?"

Javier flung the file in his hand aside. "Elementary, dear Jade. Good old internet manipulators," he replied placidly.

Jade had a good grip on how information on the internet worked. She was also no stranger to narrative-pushers and influencers. But never had she ever thought of corporations combining forces with these agents to set a trend. It had worked unbelievably well!

She could not resist holding her thumb up like a kid in awe. "Oh my god, you're a genius!"

"Nah. It's just some underhanded trickery. Not worth mentioning at all."

Javier genuinely thought it was nothing worth mentioning, but Jade saw it as a shining exemplar of ultimate humility. He had the skills and smarts and none of the smugness! Oh, Javier was so cool and awesome, Jade could not help but be floored!

There was one teensy-weensy problem, though. They seemed to have received too many orders-they were producing below demand! Now, they could open up new production lines to ease the load, but that would entail acquiring new plots and applying for a permit to build new factories.

Basically...pure hassle.

Of course, Javier was way ahead in his game enough to have thought about this before it happened. Him, forgetting to plan his next steps for his own master plan? What kind of amateur would he be?

"Please, you don't even have to worry about a thing. Just get ready to attend tonight's regular meeting."

John Odell, the patriarch of the Odell family, had made it a rule that Odello Corp. would have a monthly meeting. Participation from each family member was mandatory, and though John himself was hospitalized, it was no reason to cancel the regular meeting.

Jade nodded. She would require preparation for the meeting, especially since Matthew had no doubt set up new schemes just for her.

She walked out of Javier's office and was preparing to head back when to her surprise, she found a very sullen Clement dragging his feet from the opposite direction.

That was wholly unexpected. Jade could not fathom why he was here at this time, or why he wanted to talk to her right now. "Mr. Lewinsky? Why are you here? Shouldn't you be, I don't know, brainstorming for a contingency plan for Midnight Tires right now?" she questioned. "I wouldn't think that this would be a good time to pay a visit."

Clement shot Jade a side glance before casting his eyes ahead and continuing his slumped march forward. "Wasn't looking for you at all, ma'am. Here to see Mr. Kersey."

That bummed Jade out. She was supposed to be the CEO of the company, and yet somehow, everyone kept bypassing her for every little thing...

But Jade was not the least bit jealous at all. In fact, she was pretty stoked about it! Her precious, master-of-all-trades Vice GM could do everything perfectly! Who wouldn't be giddy about that?!

The only with a soiled mood right now would be Clement because his cursed memory was good enough to remember what he had shouted yesterday: 'I ain't a Lewinsky no more if I so much drop my f**king voice into a pathetic plea in your godd*mn office!

Well, it sure seemed like he was going to become Clement not-Lewinsky very soon... 1

By the time he knocked on that door though, Clement had managed to come up with a more dignity-preserving front to adopt in lieu of his original mopey intentions. "Mr. Javier Kersey! I am not here to beg for your help. I am here to demand answers!"

Javier could smell a last-minute change of attitude from that sloppy facade, but he was going to let something so trivial pass for now. Gesturing toward the chair where Clement should sit, Javier stood up and brewed some coffee for both himself and his guest.

When Clement left the mug untouched, Javier laughed. "Come on. You aren't worried that I'd spike your coffee, right?"

His embarrassing escapade while drunk was the last thing Clement wanted to be reminded of, so he picked the cup up and took a small, courtesy sip. He set it back down. "Mr. Kersey, let's not beat around the bush like a bunch of pansies. Are you behind this or not?"

Javier answered by sipping his coffee, giving yet another tacit confirmation.

Clement was boiling. One could take one look at his teeth and wondered if he intended to bite Javier's nose off. "Motherf**ker! Dirty f**king schemer! You knew there was no problem with Midnight's tires! But you throw up this disinformation to slander my business! *sshole, douchebag, *sshat son of a b*tch! We businesspeople engage in healthy, lawful competition, you f**king sicko!"

While Clement railed and lambasted him to the beat of his stomping foot, Javier let him blow off steam while he sipped his coffee. It took Clement two full minutes to finally reach the limit of his censure before Javier set his mug down.

“You finished? If yes, it’s my turn to speak,” he replied. “First of all, there’s no such thing as being lawful and honorable in business. If you seriously believe there is an honor code in this, well... You might be better off at a nursery school, ’cause your naivety would be perfect for the environment.

“Next, we didn’t start this. Midnight went up in arms to attack us, so we simply retaliated. After that, I came to you-personally, I might add-to give you a chance to repent, but you ignored the dove and wanted the hawk. Not my fault now, is it?”

“Last but not least... Come on, we aren’t children. You can’t solve a problem by throwing tantrums at it. We have to communicate, yea? Like adults. So, let’s communicate,” he said.” Would you like to talk about Beacon Tires’ acquisition of Midnight now?”

Javier’s logic and argument were so impeccable and literally irrefutable that Clement could not even come up with anything to deny the facts. Forced into a corner, he squeezed his reply out of his reluctant teeth. “I don’t want to lose my company, so all I’m asking is if there’s something else we could do about this, okay?”

Javier snickered as he refilled Clement’s cup. “Sorry, but no can do. You can either crash and burn, or...you can say yes to the acquisition. Your choice.”

Chapter 44 Such Tactical Prowess! Such Majestic Air!

Javier had not cared enough to lace his words with the most basic of courtesies. In fact, he was provocative and disrespectful, which only fanned the flames in Clement even more.

Unfortunately, right now, he was hardly in the position to negotiate not continue his previous hissy fit. As Javier had so succinctly pointed out, tantrums were not going to fix the pickle he

was in

“Fine.” It was all he could say by this point. “How much are you willing to fork out to acquire my company?”

Javier made a whole theater production of counting with his fingers before proclaiming,” About 780 thousand dollars.” “You said what now?!” Clement could not believe his ears. It took Javier repeating himself to convince the former that he had not misheard his quotation, and send him into a flying fit.

“Son of a b*tch! Are you f**king kidding me? My company’s fixed assets make up to at least 4.7 million dollars, dumb*ss! And now you’re buying a company worth that much with that paltry 780k dollars?!”

Javier fell back into silently drinking his coffee.

Clement was about to add more into his lambasting when his phone suddenly rang. It was from Midnight’s finance department!

He hardly got a word edgewise when the caller’s voice, strained and alarmed, broke through,” Mr. Lewinsky! I-I-It’s the bank! They were demanding us to pay our debts... Said they had to press us now that our business is at risk of folding, and we’ve only got three days to pay them!”

“Three days? Three godd*mn days?! Do I look like I print money for a living?! How the hell am I supposed to pull some 1.5 million dollars out of my *ss in a span of three days, huh?!”

Railing at his finance department would not work; they were merely the bank's messenger. Realizing that, Clement quickly hung up and dialed the bank director's personal number for help.

Javier let him-it was going to be for naught, anyway, because Javier had made his own call to the director a while ago. It was not a breach of law to do so since Midnight Tires was suffering such a heavy blow to their reputation and sales that any bank would be justified to suddenly pressure Clement into paying up his debt before declaring bankruptcy. So, a little goading call from Javier was enough to put the director into action, pronto.

Clement's call brought him no respite from the bank. The manager was adamant that they stood on the right side of the law, and that there was simply no room for personal favors or leeway.

Clement crashed onto the couch in a spell, as though his bones had all been removed. It was then that Javier spoke again. "Here, I've squared the numbers for you. If you stubbornly hold out like this, the bank will sue you three days from now. The court will take it up, freeze your assets, and then auction them off.

"Think about it. Discounting the penalties you'll have to pay for not meeting your contracts, the debt you owe the bank, a whole host of costs such as worker wages, and all that other crap ... How much are you really left, huh? 470 thousand dollars, give or take. And here I am offering you 780k to inherit that dump you're leaving. Is that really that paltry an amount?"

Well, when he put it that way... It certainly did not seem that terrible. Still, to have a player as big as Midnight Tires be sold off for a stupidly pathetic amount of 780 thousand dollars was as acceptable as Clement welcoming a knife to his gut.

His mind drifted to Odello Corp. and Matthew Odell. Reaching for his phone once again, Clement smirked at Javier, "I'm done with your ludicrous jokes. I'm not going to let you win this one, you b*stard!"

Javier held so little regard for him that he would not even spare a snicker in return. "Oh, hoping that Matthew will send the cavalry, are you? I'd love to see you try, especially since his precious son was no stranger to backstabbing any tool that had long past being useful. So yea, go ahead. Give him a ring. I want to see the nature of the tree that the rotten apple fell from."

Clement found the suggestion utterly objectionable. "There's no way! Mr. Odell could not possibly be that despicable!"

His call connected, and Clement wasted no breath briefing his last lifeline about the calamitous crisis he was trapped in. At the tail of his account, he finished with an appeal, "... As you can see, Mr. Odell, I really need your help to get through this. Your connection reaches far and wide, doesn't it?"

"It's all your fault that your sh*tty product has piss-poor quality, and you just had to drag my plan through the muck along to hell with your incompetent *ss!" came the reproach. "And now you've got the gall to ask me to help you?! Get the f**k out of here!"

That was apparently all Matthew had left to say to him. He would not give Clement even the room to speak before slamming the phone and disconnecting the call, leaving only cold, rhythmic beeping for the bewildered man to hear.

Clement's eyes were mired in pure perplexity.

He never dreamt that he would be so...readily deserted. A bull past its prime, useful no longer, and so slaughtered as a sacrifice to save that b*stard's skin. Clement could not help but compare the niceties Matthew had fed him back when he came to seek an alliance with Midnight Tires with the disgusting attitude used against him right at this moment. He could not help but ball his hands into fists, his entire arms visibly trembling in pure anger..

Had it not been for Matthew-f**king-Odell, he would have never become Javier's enemy!

None of these sh*tty things would have happened to him at all!

*F**k, f**k, f**k! F**k, you to hell and back, Matthew! My only f**king sin was gobbling up your bullsh*t. And now I'm f**ked! F**ked in the *ss and you're the one with the stick!" Clement snarled, bristling to himself for so long that instead of feeling better, his tirade only seemed to bring him to feverish heights.

Javier immediately took advantage of the man's impulsive rage to once again bring up the acquisition. This time, Clement shouted, "F**k it, you can have it! Just take it from me! It's either death or this. At least I'm earning some money from you!"

The deal was done.

With an unsettlingly ready grin baring his teeth, Javier brought out the contract and handed it to Clement. The receiver considered the paper and how Javier had obviously prepared it beforehand, his heart sinking into his stomach. He raised his gaze and met the placid look on the young man's face.

He let out a sigh. God knows how much he loathed losing to Javier. But at the very least-if he was being honest and without care for his image-he at least did not feel too bad. The contract was all the proof Clement needed to know just how much his opponent had masterminded this. He had planned each and every step of his downfall; he never had a chance to climb out of the grave Javier had dug for him. For f**k's sake, that young man even saw through Matthew and knew how he would act.

On the contrary, Clement had bought into the rosy illusion that he was Matthew's most valued ally. In the end, the same man who gained his loyalty backstabbed him and left him to

die. He signed the paper.

Clement tried, with all his might, to disassemble an imperturbable disposition, but his regret stubbornly broke out into every wrinkled feature in his disappointed mien. He should have listened to Javier earlier. He should have sold Midnight sooner. He should have!

But god. It was too late.

Sighing to himself, Clement rose and turned away, so eager to leave that he did not care to bid his farewell. He now had 780 thousand dollars in his bank account, at the cost of losing all title and prestige that his business cards supposedly conferred.

As a disconcerted Clement shuffled his feet to the door, Javier suddenly spoke up. "You know, Mr. Lewinsky, the only changes to Midnight Tires are its shareholder, ownership, and other things pertaining to legality. The company is still yours... And you're liable to receive a 10% performance share. If your

leadership manages to bring 30% growth to company yearly sales, I'll throw 10% more into your performance shares for that year. Continue that streak for a

decade, and honestly? I might as well just return Midnight back to such capable hands." This struck a chord in Clement's heart. He had founded Midnight Tires himself; there was no universe where selling his precious legacy would not bring him painful resentment. Only despair and desperation would make him do such a thing. A path where he had no choice.

But now Javier was telling him that there was a chance that he could take it back? How was he supposed to not react to that?!

"You're...you're not pulling my leg, right?"

Javier placed another contract on the table before the bewildered man. This too was a part of his plan. Everything was part of his plan. He had considered everything.

There was no other emotion left in Clement other than unadulterated awe. This was it. He accepted his defeat, and he did so gladly. Javier was dangling that performance share before him like a carrot in front of a horse. If he could achieve his benchmark, his good master would reward him with a carrot to nibble. And now, in order to take back the very thing he poured his heart and soul into for years, Clement was effectively locked into always giving his all and nothing less. Javier, on the other hand, would not even need to lift a finger. He just had to collect the fruits of his labor, and all he had to pay was 780 thousand dollars.

Clement knew he was no more than cattle from now on, and yet he was willing to be used that way-he had to be. This was Javier's masterstroke.

He could not resist giving the young man a thumbs-up. "Such tactical prowess! Such majestic air! Fine, I'll sign it!"

Clement Lewinsky might never have been particularly remarkable as a businessman throughout all his years, but he has never lost to anyone either. Except for Javier Kersey, of course. God, he was floored!

After seeing Clement off, Javier brought the contracts to Jade's office to share the news. "Midnight Tires is 100% owned by us now, and all we needed to shell out was 780k!" he proudly announced, "All of our canceled orders have come back to us as well. At the time of this incident, our loss stood at less than one-third. And now with our acquisition of Midnight Tires, we have completely covered our remaining losses and have actually started earning profits. Do you know what that means?"

"It means you've fulfilled your end of the deal. You can show this off at tonight's monthly meeting, and Matthew will have no choice but to concede!"

Chapter 45 Promises Made, Promises Kept-the Quarterly Deal

The quarterly deal!

This used to look like Mount Spectacular to Jade. A spectacular benchmark, yes, but also something she believed she could scale. Then a battalion of business difficulties joined forces with family members trying their damndest to frustrate her, and suddenly, Jade found herself facing grueling odds to meet her goal.

However, all of that changed since Javier Kersey appeared. Even the most insurmountable of odds crumbled before him, like a famous landmark helpless before the might of a superhero! And now, even without any long-term preparation, he managed to push her into fulfilling the deal!

As Jade's fair, delicate hands flipped through the contract detailing the change to the ownership of Midnight Tires, they trembled against her wishes. She was astounded that Javier managed to acquire their rival company at a slashed price of 780 thousand dollars. She was ecstatic that she had managed to hold up the end of her deal, thus freeing her from the nightmare of a political marriage.

But above all else, her emotions translated into a single, swelling ball of gratitude-she was grateful for Javier's incredibly selfless help.

"Very few people in my family have been willing to help me since Grandpa's sickness made him permanently bedridden. The only other people who cared enough to lend me a hand have been the elders in our family. Even then, their help had been...inconsistent and selective. They were only doing it out of respect for my late father..."

"I was so alone. So helpless. But you're...you're the only one who has helped me unreservedly at every turn and every step of the way.thank you, Javier! Just...thank you."

With each passing word, her voice phased into a silent, soft hush. And yet, the sincerity of her gratitude filled her stuttering and hushed voice as a thin film began to coat her big, doe eyes. She had no idea how else to express her immense gratitude; saying thanks, over and over again, was the only way she knew how.

Javier presented her with some tissues. "Hey now, don't cry," he cooed, the gentleness in his voice mirroring her own, "Now is not the time to be dwelling on mopey things like these, right? Come on, time to get ready for the monthly meeting! Since I'm not one of you Odells, I'm barred from attending the thing and helping you from the side. You'll have to do this on your own, Jade."

The young woman wiped her tears away and nodded solemnly. "You bet I will. I'm going to... I'm going to show Matthew my achievement... and wipe the floor with his *ss!"

Jade had never said anything so crass before, but by God, no other words had ever made her feel so good before!

After giving Jade a few more passing instructions, Javier made his way to Mae's office. A few moments later, Mae, whom Mary Jane was dangling a threat over, sent a private message to Matthew.

(Beacon Tires' finances are in total chaos, Mr. Odell. Don't worry, they're going under as we speak.)

Matthew was pleased by the revelation. So pleased, that he could not help but to keep on hammering about how Jade's decision to go against him was a suicidal move. "I'm going to have so much fun humiliating that uppity little spring chicken tonight! That hubris of hers needs a good punishment."

After ordering Mae to send a fake financial report to fool the man, Javier returned to his office and gave Clement a call. His latest underling was told to report to Matthew in two hours to relay the same hoax about Beacon Tires's demise as well as Midnight Tires apparent recovery from its crisis.

Clement needed no further convincing. This hoax was his best chance at revenge, and so he took it up without even a millisecond of hesitation.

With everything in place, all Javier needed to do was sit back and wait for the night. The prospect of Jade humiliating Matthew to the maximum degree was just so exciting!

The two had dinner together before Jade drove to the venue for tonight's meeting. Javier, meanwhile, was ready to hang back at home and wait for the good news and epic tale coming his way. He steered his car onto the course that led to home.

Suddenly, an unknown string of numbers reached him. Javier answered it, and a voice, as old and worn as a relic, boomed, "Mr. Kersey, good evening. I am John Odell. And I would like to meet you in person."

John Odell. Jade's grandfather and Matthew's father. The chairman of Odello Corp. But... was Mr. John not currently hospitalized? Why would he want to meet Javier specifically?

The monthly meeting was well underway.

Matthew was listening to the monthly earning reports from the leaders that helmed the family's major industries. He gave some run-of-the-mill directions on which parts to expand, develop, and grow after their report, before eagerly launching into the anti-Jade tirade he had been itching to do since the meeting began.

"As we all know, Odello Corp. has a few, shall we say, underperforming subdivisions that have done nothing more than hog precious resources and money. These underachievers enthusiastically waved their bloodline and surname like it's a free pass to do whatever they like," he began. "To them, the growth of our family business is nothing more than a trifle. Squandering resources? It hardly means a thing to them!"

He kept going. "The way I see it, these parasitic entities are like tumors to our family's .

business. The only way to curb this is to have them removed before they can pilfer and plunder more of our organization's vitality. That is why I solemnly suggest all of us start discussing if we should remove said tumors starting from today!"

Everyone understood who the euphemism was alleging to-Beacon Tires. Matthew's sycophants, on cue, leaped to their feet, lending their voice to removing the "tumor" that he had condemned.

Throughout his rabble-rousing, Jade made herself comfortable in the corner of the meeting room, scornfully admiring the man and his toadies' concerted performance, no matter how crude it was. She waited for the embarrassment to end before rising to her feet.

"Nice try sugarcoating it, but it's clear that you're pointing your finger at Beacon Tires," she snapped back. "We're a tumor to you, huh? You accuse us of squandering and plundering your precious resources. Do you have any evidence to back that up?"

Matthew scoffed and sneered. "Evidence? How about the plummeting sales of your company? Is that enough 'evidence'? But, of course, seeing is believing, right? I prefer showing things in good old black-and-white. So if 'evidence' is what you seek, then 'evidence' is what all of us, including the jury, will get! Let's see if Beacon Tires deserve to exist beyond today!"

Matthew waved, and his secretary quickly presented stacks of documents before the attendees. As their attention focused on the papers, he continued, "Here. The sales report of your company after a month. I invite all of you to take a gander and marvel at her acumen. It's as mediocre as it can get! If this company is supposed to be your proof of competence, then congratulations! You've proved beyond a doubt that you have zero competence whatsoever!"

The attendees quickly flipped through the report. The figures were as down-the-ditch as Matthew had promised; one could easily predict a colossal failure like this going bankrupt at any moment now.

Matthew was giddy and pleased with himself. Tonight was the night he squashed this pesky girl into oblivion. He did not even need to care about that quarterly deal anymore.

To his surprise, Jade took a cursory look at the figures and snorted.

Tossing the report aside, she asked, "God, where did you get these reports from, Mr. Odell?"

"None of your business, girl. I have my sources. You should focus on admitting the truth. That's the least you can do!" Matthew retorted.

His unbridled conceit sparked the powder keg within Jade. Angrily, she snapped, "The truth? Sure! If you want the truth so much, then who am I not to oblige, dear Uncle? I'll show you what's the truth!"

With a cutting declaration like that, Jade picked up her phone and called someone into coming in.

The door to the conference room opened, revealing Mae Kingsley who sniped a second-long leer at Matthew before lowering her head.

Matthew was bewildered to see her. He could not understand why she would even be here.

The woman began to speak. She recounted everything from how Matthew instructed her into joining Beacon Tires, how he had her act as his mole, to the underhanded schemes she was made to do, and how "the ever-so-shrewd Ms. Odell" found out about her deeds almost immediately. And finally, how she became a part of Beacon Tires' counter strike.

At the end of Mae's confession, Jade leveled a frigid glare at the incriminated man. "That hogwash you touted as truth? That was me. I had Mae draft up a fake report to bait you. That's the truth. Mae Kingsley's role in all of this? That's also the truth. The brother of a deceased man concocting a scheme to force his still-grieving niece into a political marriage? That's the truth too! All of it!" she bristled. "You don't even stop to think about how deeply dishonorable and disgusting the tactics and schemes you employ against me are, Matthew! Don't you have any shame?!"

Matthew's face turned into a mask of utter humiliation. His backdoor deeds had been exposed. And to top it off, he was being publicly censured for it. Still, a man had to deny to hell and back even if he was on his last leg, and that was what he did. "It's all for your own good and the family's collective good! Face it, you can't fulfill your end of the quarterly deal anyway!"

Jade snickered. "How are you so sure that I can't, huh?"

"If you can fulfill your end," Matthew snarled in indignant certainty, "Then I'll eat this report right here, right now!"

Chapter 46 Should You Be Holding It in Your Hand?

Chapter 46 Should You Be Holding it in Your Hand? Matthew was exceptionally confident that Jade would not be able to fulfill the quarterly deal they had.

Clement had called him earlier in the afternoon and said that production had recovered while the controversy surrounding Midnight Tires had also died down. Midnight Tires had also reacquired most of the orders that had flocked to Beacon Tires when the scandal broke out.

In Clement's words, Beacon Tires was only a step away from bankruptcy! That was why Matthew dared be so sure.

While those in the meeting shifted their gazes toward Jade, the lady was calm and composed as she retrieved photocopies of a report from her workbag. She tossed them on top of the meeting table and everyone picked up a copy. Everyone got a copy except Matthew.

When they saw the photocopied reports, they gaped. The Matthew's lackeys who had been hollering shut their mouths then. This made Matthew curious. Snatching one from his underlings to see for himself, he was shocked at what he read and stood frozen like a statue.

Jade spoke up, "Beacon Tires has made up for more than two-thirds of loss from the orders from Fusion and Grazin', as well as a few other smaller sales agreements. And now, our acquisition of Midnight Tires has allowed us to start making a profit instead of staying in the loss.

"Compared to when I first took over Beacon Tires a month ago, I've made a 10% profit from the total production value.

"Matthew Odell, haven't you been doubting my ability? This is my proof!

"Also, I wonder who said that he'd eat the fake report if I fulfilled the quarterly deal? As the vice GM of the corporation, I think you should keep your promise, lest you lose credibility as a leader!"

Each of Jade's sentences was logical, backed with evidence, and piercing. It put Matthew in a n awkward position. No matter how he cracked his head, he could not figure out how Midnight Tires was acquired by Beacon Tires.

Recalling how Clement told him so surely through the phone that Beacon Tires was definitely meeting its doom, Matthew was furious. That b*stard of a man had secretly worked together with Jade to trap him and embarrass him tonight!

Right now, however, it was not the time to take care of that. He had to get through his current predicament first. Clearing his throat, Matthew forced a smile as he looked at Jade awkwardly

"Uh... Jade is truly capable. She needed only a month to turn Beacon Tire's loss into profit. That's a good job. This is the Odell family and Odello Corp.'s fortune. Jade is an Odell through

and through. I'm proud of you!"

It felt awkward in the beginning but the more Matthew went on, the smoother it flowed-like he was truly happy for the young woman and like he was not the one who had been pressing her just moments ago.

“Amazing. I’m genuinely happy to have a niece such as you. And on behalf of my late brother, I’m glad. Jade, you’ve done an amazing job. I’m so proud of you!”

Looking at Matthew flash her a big thumbs up, Jade felt absolutely repulsed. Never in her wildest dreams had she dreamt of somebody to be as shameless as this old man. Apparently, it could be worse.

Matthew then continued. “Jade, since you’ve completed the quarter deal, Beacon Tires should be returned to the corporation. After all, Odello sent you to be the GM there to prove your ability, not to give it to you. I’ll send someone over tomorrow morning to take over the management of Beacon Tires. You just go home and get some well-deserved rest!”

It was not just Jade who was stunned at Matthew’s words, the others who were in the meeting were stupefied as well. Burn the bridge after crossing it, yes, but not like this! The woman had salvaged the mess of a company that was on the verge of shutting down, and this man here wanted to kick her out after all she had done? Did he not have any decency?

The reality was that Matthew did not need decency. Any shred of it he had was flushed down the toilet a long time ago.

He waved at one of his followers. “You’ll take over Beacon Tires tomorrow morning.”

It was extremely audacious of Matthew to snatch the company so publicly without any reasonable cause. However, despite being faced with her barefaced uncle, Jade was not angered. She scoffed, “Matthew Odell, you have no shame, do you? I’d like to ask, on what premise are you taking over Beacon Tires?”

“Jade, watch your tone. I’m the vice GM of Odello Corp. and also your second uncle. Do not be rude!” Matthew chided and answered, “Beacon Tires has always been under the corporation, There’s no doubt about it!”

“Of course!” Jade answered right after him and did not retort. She then unclasped her bag again and took out the photocopied documents Javier had prepared for her earlier that afternoon.

Tossing the stack of documents onto the meeting table, Jade spoke up while the meeting attendees automatically distributed the papers, “Beacon Tires has long accepted a full funding acquisition. 100% of the shares belong to the shareholder. Due to confidentiality clauses, I’m unable to disclose the identity of the shareholder, but you will see here that he has transferred 49% of the shares to me without the need for compensation.

“While I’m the general manager of Beacon Tires, the main shareholder is now said investor. As for the shares that once belonged to Odello Corp., they were cleared null by the court when

Beacon Tires applied for bankruptcy.

“In other words, Beacon Tires currently has nothing to do with Odello Corp.!”

As she said those words, Jade could not help being impressed by Javier’s all-rounded consideration. In the afternoon, Javier had told her that Matthew would likely burn the bridge after he crossed it, but she had remained doubtful. Turns out Javier was right! If he had not prepared in advance, all the time and effort Jade had spent to revive Beacon Tires would fly to someone else’s hands now!

After Jade's announcement, those in the room had already gone through the various share transferring contracts they had. All of them understood that this was Jade's tactic but legally, Beacon Tires was no longer tied to Odello Corp. No one could do anything but watch.

All of them here were smart people. While Beacon Tires' shares had been transferred here and there, they were still under Jade. It was not an asset leaving the Odells. Since it was just a matter of name, no one poked their nose into it.

Nevertheless, they began to feel surprised at Jade's tactics. Not only had she turned a loss into profit within a month, but she had also tricked Matthew and taken Beacon Tires away from right under Odello Corp.'s nose. The girl was doing great!

Matthew was befuddled at the photocopied contracts of share transfers. He had never expected Jade to be able to do this. Not only had he failed to reap the fruit that was the current Beacon Tires, but he had also lost his grip on the company as well. Realizing that he had been tricked like a circus monkey, the elder man shook in rage.

"Meeting dismissed!" Gritting that out through his clenched teeth, Matthew wanted to leave just like that but Jade was not having it.

"Uncle, should you still be holding that financial statement in your hand?" He said that he would eat it, so that was exactly what he was going to do!

Chapter 47 The Price for Being Defiant

Chapter 47 The Price for Being Defiant And lo and behold, before everyone's eyes, Matthew crammed the fake report into his mouth. He could not have backed out even if he wanted to. As Jade said, he had made that declaration in front of so many people and could not lose his credibility as the vice general manager of the corporation.

As he chewed, his eyes burned with a rage that looked like they could spew out and burn Jade alive. As an authority figure within the corporation, forcing him to eat the fake report was akin to having his face slapped. This infuriated Matthew.

After swallowing the paper, Matthew glared daggers at Jade before turning around and storming out. He was too humiliated to stay any longer.

When the monthly meeting had been wrapped up, Jade was in a great mood. The first thing she did going back to her car was to pull out her phone to call Javier and share the good news with him.

Surprisingly, she could not reach his phone. The automated operator said that the phone was turned off. This put Jade on edge for some reason. She even mused that the 'ancient general' had gone off to live in seclusion once he had successfully conquered the world. She was worried that Javier would go missing out of the blue and disappear from her world just like that.

It was not that Jade was hoping for Javier to keep taking the world on for her, but she had gotten used to having the man by her side. With that longing in mind, she drove back home as fast as she could to see if Javier was still there.

Just as she stepped inside the porch, she saw a man seated there and puffing away on his cigarettes. The delight painted her face at this discovery and she was beaming for no reason.

Jade complained to Javier after she got out of the car, "Why did you switch your phone off? I thought you had left. You worried me for nothing."

"Worried about what? You can't possibly have fallen for me, have you?" Javier chuckled.

Jade blushed instantly at the suggestion. "N-no. Cut it out."

She felt her heart thumping wildly, losing its usual rhythm. She could not help wondering if she had really fallen for Javier. Why else would she be worried about him? The more she thought about it, the more bashful she grew. She dared not entertain the thought any longer and diverted the topic.

"Right, Javier, you didn't see how I clapped back at Matthew Odell tonight..."

As she retold the story to him, Jade could not help the thrill that buzzed through her. It was like she had finally released a breath full of hot air. When she got to the part of Matthew eating the financial report, she became even more animated. Her happiness was palpable.

Jade then turned to Javier. "And it's all thanks to you. If it hadn't been for you, things wouldn't have gone this smoothly. Beacon Tires would've been bankrupt by now. Thank you, Javier."

Javier waved away the woman's sincere thanks. The woman then took a seat beside him and gazed up at the clear starry sky in a pleasant mood.

"There are no clouds. The sky is as clear and bright as my mood right now. Finally, I won't be forced to get married anymore. This feels amazing!"

As he observed the charming face under the light of the moon, Javier did not say much. Accompanied by the beautiful nightfall and a gorgeous lady, he did not want to spoil the mood with the truth. Despite Jade's assumption, he knew that it was impossible that Matthew would give up trying to force her into a political marriage even though the quarterly deal was over now.

And reality proved Javier right. The next morning when Javier and Jade were just heading out to work, they were stopped by Matthew. His stance was clear. For the corporation to be listed and to generate more profit, the decision for Jade to marry into the Dunhams remained.

Jade was infuriated and snapped, "Was the deal we made all bullsh*t to you?"

Matthew waved. "I'm not arguing with you. You have to marry into the Dunhams, and that's final!"

Unreasonable as he was, he then pointed a finger at Javier, nearly poking the latter in his nose. "And you, you b*stard. This is my final warning. Get the hell out of Jade's house right now or I'll-hey, hey, ow, let go! Let go of me! It hurts! Let go right now!"

Before Matthew could finish threatening Javier, the younger man had gripped his finger and bent it forcibly. It made Matthew hiss as he squirmed and cried in pain.

"I advise you to heed my warning. Point at me again and I'll break your finger!"

Amidst Matthew's dog-like yelps, Javier let go of him and gestured for Jade to get in the car to leave. Nursing his finger, Matthew wanted to retort but did not dare speak up. He only raised his voice and thundered after Javier had driven hundreds of meters away with Jade next to him, "Kersey, stop the car if you dare! I'll kill you!" Cursing under his breath, Matthew pulled out his phone. "Hello, Mr. Langdon. I need a favor..." In the car, Jade stomped her foot in indignation as they drove to the office. "How could Matthew Odell be so shameless? We've agreed on a deal and he's breaking it just like that!"

Javier was indifferent about it. "It's normal. You just think too nice of him.

"The quarter deal was only a tactic for him to force you toward the Dunhams. Since that didn't work, of course, he'll continue resorting to other tricks to accomplish his goal of marrying you off to the Dunhams."

Jade now understood, but what could she do? When she raised the question to Javier, the man answered with a grin, "Marry me. This problem would then be solved once and for all."

Jade glared at him and muttered with a flushed face, "Be serious."

Of course, Javier was only joking, but Jade being forced to get married meant very little to him. Odello Corp. was just a tiny thing, a puny entity that was not even qualified to kick up a fuss in front of him, so Javier was not worried about it at all.

"Don't worry. No one can coerce you into marrying to the Dunhams if you don't want to-no one."

Javier spoke pretty nonchalantly but his words quickly placated Jade's anxious heart. From her perspective, Javier was like the bane of all her troubles. As long as he was around her, she did not have to be scared of anything.

It felt..nice. Great, in fact. She liked it. Hence, as she discreetly stole glances at Javier, there was an involuntary smile on her face.

Upon reaching the office, both of them went to their own hustle. Now that Beacon Tires had acquired Midnight Tires, there were plenty of things to take care of. Javier even drove over to Midnight Tires to discuss a few things with Clement.

In the afternoon, he went out to handle several other matters. But just as he was about to hop into his car, two vans-one at the hood and one at the trunk of his car-screached to halt, pinning his car in the middle.

The doors of the vans opened and over a dozen thugs rushed out, encircling Javier while holding batons in their hands. Their leader, a man in his forties with a shiny bald head without even a single strand of hair and a fleshy face, looked menacing.

"Javier Kersey? Someone has instructed me to cut off your ear as a price for being defiant. "Make your choice. Do you want me to cut the left one or the right one?"

Chapter 48 Quiet but Deadly

As he observed the circle of men that surrounded him, Javier did not say a word. Instead, he proceeded to empty his pockets, tossing his items into his car. He was not even bothered to ask who had sent them. He could guess as much from Matthew's barks earlier this morning.

The bald guy snorted at Javier's actions. "Don't worry. We're only cutting your ear off. We won't take your things."

"You think too much. I'm just afraid that I have to waste more time looking for my stuff if I lose them while taking care of you guys."

Javier's reply stunned the baldy for a few moments. He then guffawed and looked back at Javier like he was an idiot. "You? You think you can beat all of us?"

"I, Sam Langdon, have spent years in the underworld. And you're the first to ever amuse me even before I do anything to you. That's pretty nice. To reward you, I'll cut both your ears off so you maintain your symmetry. No need to thank me. 1-

Sam was still speaking when Javier threw a fast punch. The baldy barely had time to react. The only thing that registered was a sting as a gust of wind rushed toward his mouth.

The next instant, his whole mouth felt numb. He even felt some of his teeth coming loose. The unforeseen heavy blow made him stumble backward involuntarily and almost fall to the ground. As Sam stood there holding his jaw, he saw Javier initiating the fight against the members he had brought along.

Like an action-packed film, Javier suddenly sprang up and kicked his legs out in a split, hitting one guy on his left and one on his right. As he landed, he raised his arm and elbowed the skull of the guy in front of him.

Sam did not know how else to describe it. He believed that if there were to be running commentary here, the story would be an epic one. Alas, he was no storyteller and could only describe what he saw with the simplest of words.

His mouth was still bleeding, but he could care less about it as he watched Javier throw the guys he had brought to the ground within two minutes. Each of them was either holding their head or chest looking agonized.

Dusting his hands off in a few claps, Javier then walked up to Sam, seeming as though he had done nothing. Sam sucked in a cold breath and instinctively feared for his life. This guy was skilled. He was a tough one. Nonetheless, Sam was no coward. He pulled out a dagger from behind his back.

Before Sam could make a move, Javier fished out a packet of cigarettes from the baldy's shirt pocket. After lighting up a stick, he said, "Three things. One, I ran out of cigarettes, so I'm taking yours. Two, I'm not one for small talk. Three, move your d*mn car. It's in my way."

Despite the dagger in his hand, he was befuddled. He was here to cut off the man's ear, but the latter had stolen his cigarettes instead? If word got out, his reputation was going to take a huge hit.

While Sam was caught in his daze, Javier spoke up again. "You deaf? Do I need to repeat myself?"

Snapping out of it, Sam quickly put his dagger away. "No, no, I can hear you loud and clear. I'll move the car right now..."

And that was exactly what Sam did. He ordered his underlings to get back into the vans and drove off hastily.

After they left, Javier went toward his car and got back inside as well. Just as he got comfortable and was ready to start the car, he saw that someone had plopped down on his car hood in front of the vehicle.

The guy wore a white raggedy shirt, loose black pants, and had one of his feet-which were in a pair of slippers-on the hood. What would catch one's attention was his wavy, shoulder length hair that made him look like an artist. There was a brush perched on his ear.

At the sight of the man, the corner of Javier's lips curled upward and he stealthily pressed down on his honk. At the sudden beep, the guy on his car hood turned around, slow as a sloth. "If you scare me to death, will you bury me?"

"No," Javier answered. He then got out of his car while the man seated on the hood came down as well.

Both of them walked toward each other, swiftly closing the distance between, and only stopped when the tip of their toes nearly touched each other. They then moved simultaneously, wrapping their arms around each other in a tight hug.

Javier was delighted as he asked, "Kenzo, what brought you here?"

"I came back to take care of some stuff. Figured I'd visit you after I was done."

Kenzo, or Mackenzie Spencer, was in charge of the Kerseys' black market influences and was also Javier's closest childhood playmate. Although "play" was a stretch, considering that what Javier had learned from Mackenzie included shooting, wrestling, and whatnot.

The two men got back inside the car and smoked while they did some catching up. After that, Mackenzie brought up something more serious. "The old man called me yesterday to ask if my location was far from you. He didn't ask me to come, but I can guess what he's thinking. He wants to know when you'll be back."

Javier was silent for a while before he replied, "There's the coming of age ceremony. I have to go back anyway."

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Mackenzie flashed a smile. That was enough to reassure him and for him to go back and reassure the patriarch.

As they chatted, they heard honking. Three vans sped over and surrounded Javier's car once more. This time, over 20 thugs rushed out of the vans. They did not even say a word as they dashed over with their sticks, embodying the quiet-but-deadly vibe.

"All right, that's it for now then. We'll have a good chat when I see you back at home. I'll be going now."

With a pat on Javier's shoulder, Mackenzie opened the car door and got out. Nobody saw him raise his arm but the brush that was perched on his ear was now in his hand.

Its handle was red whilst its bristles were snow white. It looked like a brush of good quality.

When Mackenzie flicked it, however, the bristles separated to reveal a sharp blade in the center...

After Mackenzie got out of the car, Javier turned on the radio. The current song had yet to reach the chorus but Mackenzie was already waving from a distance away to gesture that he was leaving.

The aggressive-looking gang of thugs was shaking in pain as they held the sides of their heads. Sam, who was holding onto a pair of binoculars in a car farther away, felt his hands tremble at the horror that was the scattered ears on the ground.

That long hair monster had reaped all of his underlings' left ears within half a minute. If that brush that felt more like a mini spear had slashed not their ears, but their necks...

Sam had thought that he would definitely be able to regain his dignity. But at the scene before his eyes, he dared not think about it anymore. He fumbled for his phone to ask his men to retreat but the device rang first. The flash of Matthew's name on the screen infuriated him.

If it had not been for this b*stard, Sam's men would not be missing an ear each right now, would they?

When he answered the call, though, he showed no sign of his fury.

"Haha, Mr. Odell, don't you worry. I've taken care of Javier Kersey. I guarantee he'll listen well from now on..."

Hanging up, Sam looked menacing. He would let Matthew continue provoking Javier since the older man had caused over 20 of his men to lose their ears. It was only a matter of time before Matthew dug a large enough hole for himself!

At the same time, the father-son duo, Matthew and Kendrick, were at the hospital and were up to new troubles again.