

A Life Debt Repaid Chapter 1 - 10

Chapter 1

The former top heiress of North City was getting married, despite her reputation that was left

in tatters for her alleged debauchery.

Naturally, high society was left in an uproar once word got out.

...

Cordy Sachs, who was dressed in a Franconia designer wedding dress, was looking at the

reflection of her dazzling, beautiful face in the mirror.

After dating Kyle Wickham for three years, they were finally tying the knot—he still loved

her even though everyone was trying to put her down.

Smiling expectantly with tears welling in her eyes, she reared her chin slightly as she lifted

her skirt and started toward the door... only for rolling wisps of smoke to seep through the

slit around the door, creeping into the washroom impatiently as if looking for an outlet.

A fire?!

Cordy's face fell. Pinching her nose as she stepped outside, she found the banquet hall that

had been exceedingly lively a second ago now empty.

There was only the thick smoke and fire that seemed bent on consuming everything.

She did not hesitate to head toward the location of the exit in her memory, but she would be

lying if she said she was not afraid of the rolling smoke and the blinding flames.

That was when a man suddenly charged inside the hall.

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It was Cordy's fiancé, Kyle Jessop.

Seemingly seeing salvation, she cried out as she coughed and spluttered, "Kyle, I'm here..."

Kyle, however, ignored her as he looked around anxiously.

Then, pausing for a moment as if finding his target, he did not hesitate to run in the opposite

direction from Cordy, even though every second counted.

Then, as Cordy looked on, he picked up another woman who had been caught within the hall

like Cordy and hurried outside.

"I knew you would come for me, Kyle..." Cordy could clearly hear the woman's enfeebled

voice, at once tender and aggrieved. "I was so afraid..."

Cordy abruptly felt as if she was bludgeoned, her vision blacking out as she felt a dull pain

over her chest.

The voice belonged to her stepsister, Noel Sachs.

And Kyle would put everything on the line to save Noel, but not her!

Her heart was in pieces as if sliced through by a razor blade, and it was a suffocation more

lethal than the smoke around her!

Even as she was rendered speechless, the glass chandelier overhead suddenly came crashing

down!

Clang!

It landed in front of Cordy, cutting off her escape even as she dropped to the floor, her soul

seemingly displaced.

Kyle turned around just then and saw Cordy falling behind him—but he never stopped.

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When Cordy looked up again, he had already dashed out of the hall without a care with the

other woman in his arms.

She was on the verge of death, but she could still clearly hear him tenderly assuring Noel,

"It's alright. I'm here now."

'I'm here now...'

Cordy blinked even as violent heat surrounded her but she felt utterly cold inside.

She could only watch as that familiar figure slowly disappeared from sight.

...

Cordy managed to survive—amid her despair, the firefighters arrived just in time and rescued her.

However, she had inhaled too much smoke and suffered blunt trauma on her right leg—she

was unconscious when they got her out, and they rushed her to the hospital right after.

It was not until the next morning that she woke up.

There was a gentle breeze in the air—it was a beautiful early summer day in North City and

a ray of sunshine landed on her pale, frail cheeks and her long, thick eyelashes.

She was looking coolly out at the blue sky and the clouds above. Her calm visage showed no

emotion, and she was so still she could well still be unconscious.

She did not realize that someone had suddenly opened the door to her ward, and she turned

to find her father, stepmother, and Noel in the room already.

"Are you alright, Cordy?" Noel asked tearfully.

All Cordy could think about right then was the sight of Kyle saving Noel. She averted her

eyes from them.

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"You're always so rude! Don't you see that your sister cares about you?" her father, Simon

Sachs, snapped right then.

On the other hand, Cordy's stepmother, Sue Yorkman, could see that Cordy did not want to

talk. Sue quickly told him, "Simon, Cordy is just a child. We have more important matters

anyway."

Simon did not want to waste his breath with Cordy either, and said right away, "You probably know by now, but Noel's the one Kyle actually loves, and it's a lucky coincidence

that the wedding was disrupted. So give them your blessing and announce the annulment of

your engagement with Kyle."

Cordy laughed despite her fury and she asked Simon, "Why?"

"Because they love each other," Simon said with utter conviction. "You'd already dragged

our family's name through the mud when you had a child out of wedlock! All of North City

knows that, and did you really think the Jessops would accept someone with such a questionable past? They are giving you a way out, so take it!"

Cordy's questionable past went as far as she was eighteen.

Noel had tricked Cordy to show up at a bar, where she was drugged and ended up waking up

in the bed of a man she did not recognize.

She was so distraught she did not even look at the man before running away, and she was too

young to understand contraceptives. In fact, she was already five months pregnant before she

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realized what was happening, and Noel had sent the paparazzi after her when she tried to get

to the abortion despite her pain.

That was how Cordy ended up being the biggest laughing stock of North City.

Things went from bad to worse when the doctor told her that she could not get an abortion

for health reasons, and she therefore kept the child. She eventually came to accept it, only for

it to come out stillborn... but in her anguish, when she needed comfort the most, Simon

ruthlessly sent her abroad, leaving her to her own devices and without a word of concern for

seven years.

In fact, he never asked after her although she just escaped death, but he was already telling

her to give up on Kyle because of his precious Noel?!

How cold could a father be that he could tell her something so cruel, to rip open her old scars

and draw blood?

"I guess being a mistress runs in the family," Cordy said with a sneer. "Drag the family's

name through the mud? You already did when you married your mistress while my mother's

body was still warm, and the child you had with her is somehow just half a year younger

than me. No one else would dare claim the throne of infamy in this city when you're around!"

"Cordy..." Simon growled, infuriated.

On the other hand, Noel and Sue were humiliated by her contempt.

Not in the mood to continue arguing with her so-called family, Cordy snapped, "If the

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Jessops really refuse to have me, have Kyle himself tell me himself! You have no reason to be here, so leave before I call the cops! What more do I have to get embarrassed about, right?"

Simon knew very well that Cordy was just delicate on the surface like her mother. Her stubbornness and unreasonable nature was ingrained in her very bones, and if they really upset her, no one was going to stop her!

"Don't make me send you abroad again, Cordy Sachs!" he barked before turning to leave,

with Noel and Sue naturally hurrying off after him.

However, Cordy scoffed at Simon's threat—did he think she was still her old self from seven

years ago, allowing him to do anything he wanted with her?

She would not allow anyone to walk over her and her life from now on!

"Mommy?"

A small, crisp voice brought Cordy to her senses just then...

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Chapter 2

Cordy turned toward the voice to find a boy who looked around five years old standing at the door of her ward. He was dressed in a patient's garb like her, and his little face was so beautiful one could not take their eyes off him.

At the same time, Cordy's heart skipped a beat. She felt as if she was tugged somewhere in her body, but she could not quite describe it.

The boy then ran up to her bed and climbed up to it on his little feet without a pause, snuggling up to her and hugging her with his soft, little body. "Were you bullied, Mommy?"

He then released her and carefully wiped her tears with his stubby hands.

Cordy realized then that her tears were leaking from sheer frustration, and her heart almost

melted from the boy's comfort.

Even so, she was still positive that she did not know him.

Smiling and tousling the boy's smooth curly hair, she spoke with unexpected mildness.

"You

have the wrong person, kid."

"No, you're my mommy. Daddy and I will protect you from now on." The boy spoke with

confidence and excitement. "Daddy has a bad temper, always pulls a long face, doesn't like

to talk, comes home late, gets stomach aches because he doesn't eat on time, and smokes...

but he's rich and handsome. Please don't leave us ever again, Mommy."

Cordy was left speechless and smiling helplessly. "You're adorable—but I'm not your mommy."

"Dicky."

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A cold yet alluring voice spoke from the door just then. The boy flinched and turned his little head in that direction, with Cordy following suit. A man stood at the doorway, his white shirt unbuttoned at the collar, and he carried the air of indescribable abstinence. His facial features seemed sculpted to perfection and his visage projected wit and composure. He stood towering and upright with a noble but nonchalant air. None of the rich and important men she met held a candle to those bewitching looks! "Daddy!" Timmy greeted him primly and properly. Even as Cordy turned toward Timmy again, she realized the reason why the boy was so good looking. Nonetheless, the man said sternly, "Back to your room, now." Timmy pouted, but nodded tamely despite his reluctance—he must have been properly disciplined back home. Still, Timmy turned toward Cordy and said, "I have to go, Mommy. But I'm just next door, so could you visit me later?" Cordy could not refuse him once she saw his yearning look, and she nodded. "Okay." She could also explain to him properly that she was not his mommy when she did. "Oh! My name is Richard Levine, but everyone calls me Dicky. You should too, Mommy." After introducing himself, little Richard reluctantly walked over to the man, who must be over six feet tall from a single glance at his tall frame. The height difference made Richard appear cuter, even perfect, as the child stood beside him. As the man took Richard's little hand and left, he did not glance his way. However, despite

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that stiff and aloof demeanor, Cordy somehow did not find him rude... perhaps that was the privilege of good-looking men.

For Cordy's part, she did not enjoy talking much, and she actually felt comfortable with the man's distant reaction toward a stranger.

She got out of bed then.

Although walking was inconvenient since her right foot was plastered, she stubbornly leaned

on her crutches to reach the floor. It seemed to have grown into a habit, but she was used to

being alone—even if she had been dating Kyle for three years, she would never trouble or rely on Kyle too much.

She suddenly felt lucky that she was like this, allowing her to persevere despite the prospect of facing troubled times ahead.

However, after it took her considerable effort to leave the washroom, Cordy stepped out and

found that Richard's daddy had returned.

She was startled, and the man watched as her face turned pale.

"Do I look that scary?" he asked with his deep, magnetic voice.

"No." Cordy shook her head. "I just didn't expect someone else here."

She was just feeling fortunate that he was aloof—his abrupt visit left her slightly repulsed.

Seeing the change of attitude in her eyes, the man pursed his lips ever so slightly. "The name's John Levine. The venue where you held your wedding happened to be mine, Ms.

Sachs."

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Cordy realized with a start as John cut to the chase—as the owner of the venue, he certainly

had a responsibility for the fire.

"I'm sorry that you were caught in the fire and suffered a fracture in my premises,"

John

continued then, his tone as businesslike as it was solemn. "I hence offer to cover for all your

expenditure while you're staying here in this hospital, and that includes the fees for treatment, hospitality, rehabilitation, and the like. You may also seek damages for labor

injury, emotional distress, as well as the cancellation of your wedding."

"No," Cordy said flatly. "Just covering my medical fees would be enough."

John looked at her a little weirdly just then, whereas Cordy's feet were getting numb from

standing too long.

Still, he obviously sensed that she had trouble moving around. He asked, "Would you like

my help?"

"No... Oh!"

Cordy had barely finished when her crutches suddenly twitched.

However, just as she was about to fall, John darted forward and caught her squarely in his

arms.

Despite her shock, Cordy smelled a clean minty scent and seemed to hear his heart pounding

from his chest, loudly and a little too quickly.

She quickly tried to get away from him because she was really uncomfortable with such

intimacy.

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In the three years she spent together with Kyle, they at best held hands since Kyle learned that she was averse to intimacy with men due to past trauma. He used to care for and respect her... and yet. Truly, the heart is fickle. Still, as Cordy straightened herself with John's help, her crutches were still on the floor. Without any support, she tried to stand on one foot. However, it proved unsteady—she started to teeter as she could not lean on anything. Startled, she quickly wrapped her arms around John's neck... but as soon as she did so, she realized that she was being overly intimate and she quickly released him. Her cheeks, drained of color at first, were now blushing red. John could naturally tell everything Cordy was doing, but he remained silent as he saw the stubbornness in her eyes. She probably did not want anything further to do with him. After all, the ward was just that wide and it was just a few paces to her bed—all she had to do was bear with it for seconds. Pursing his lips, John eventually moved and carried her to her bed. "What are you doing?!" As the familiar voice of a man suddenly resounded in the ward, sounding obviously angry, Cordy felt her heart skip a beat and she bit her lip. John, however, was unmoved—even deaf to the other man's outburst. He seemed to have his eyes fixed on Cordy even as he walked steadily and unhurriedly to put Cordy in her bed. "Cordy!" Kyle yelled even as he strode toward them. "You never changed, did you?!"

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Chapter 3

Cordy was glaring coldly at Kyle.

She was certainly disenchanted with him after he abandoned her to save Noel.

However,

forgiveness notwithstanding, she could afford to listen to an explanation because they had

been together for three years.

And yet, she felt that asking for one would only demean herself.

On the other hand, Kyle turned to look at the other man and paused because he was too

good-looking. Kyle soon recognized him as one of the firefighters who had rushed into the

hotel last night and saved Cordy. Still, he did not see his face clearly at the time and merely

found his stature towering.

That was when Cordy said, "Let's break up, Kyle."

Kyle actually felt an aching over his chest as she declared the end of their three-year relationship, and he wheeled on her with a look of disbelief.

Overwhelmed with rage, he bellowed as he pointed at the other man, "Do you even know

who he is, Cordy Sachs?! He's just a firefighter! You're dumping me for the likes of him?!"

John's eyes twitched ever so slightly—there was contempt and coldness in his gaze.

However, he chose to remain there in silence, appearing to have no inclination to leave.

"You know very well why we're breaking up!" Cordy's cool tone was now showing a tinge of

anger. "Everything was clear when you chose to save Noel last night, so don't treat me like

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"I'm an idiot!"

Kyle's indignant expression stiffened right then, and he had no comeback against that. He stayed silent for a while, myriad emotions tangling in his eyes, though he soon found solace.

"Maybe we never should have been together," he said, looking at her with regret and misery.

"You're so strong and independent, Cordy... I felt inconsequential. I feel stressed when I'm with you. You never needed me."

Cordy watched him in return, and she suddenly smiled despite the numbing pain she felt inside.

She met Kyle while they were abroad—she was working as a street musician. He had been

young and innocent at the time, his smile was as warm as summer. Cultured and refined, he

dropped a generous donation for her performance, and he would come by often to support her afterward.

As time went by, these strangers became lovers in another country.

She told him that she had a troubled past but he dismissed it, saying that he wanted a future with her.

Later, as his family business faced a crisis, his family recalled him to the country as soon as

he graduated from university. Cordy returned with him as her career started to take off and

both of them promptly joined Jessop Corp, working long nights together, going to various

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social events or to cajole any willing investors.

They eventually brought Jessop Corp back on track and he used to be grateful, even vowing

never to leave her... And now, he was saying that being with her was stressful, and that her

strong and independent nature was a mistake?

Despite Kyle seeming guilty, he also appeared relieved. "Take care. You can come to me if

you're ever in need, since we're still friends..."

"Save your pity and goodwill! I'm no loser who needs your alms, nor would I ever trust a

man who would abandon me when it matters!" Cordy snapped, her tone icy and taunting.

"Remember this, Kyle Jessop—I was the one who dumped you! I earnestly wish you would

live happily with Noel for the rest of your life and not regret ever choosing her!"

Her scolding left Kyle humiliated.

It was his fault for abandoning her last night, and there was nothing he could say.

And she was now clearly unreasonable, with no way to talk things out with her.

Giving her a long look, he then quietly said, "You should rest."

He started to leave when he paused and turned toward John, who returned his gaze with

apathy.

"I've seen too many men like him who have the looks but are penniless," he growled, indignant from the injustice. "They're all losers, oily bastards who trick women out of money

and pleasure. Don't fall for his—"

Cordy did not want another word from him. "Do I look like a loose woman, Kyle Jessop?!"

John tactfully straightened his hair just then.

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The gesture made his stance obvious.

"If you want to end up in the dumps, suit yourself," Kyle retorted and stormed off, leaving

the ward in abrupt silence.

"Thank you for helping me to my bed and with Kyle," Cordy eventually said. "But may I ask

you to leave, Mr. Levine?"

John nodded. "Sure. Please get some rest, Ms. Sachs."

Still, just as that towering figure was about to leave, he returned to put a stack of tissues near

her bed while saying, "If a man feels stressed being with you, it is he who's lacking—it's not

your fault."

Cordy did a double take as she suddenly found John different from other men.

...

John's pace slowed down after he left Cordy's ward and he whipped out his phone to make a

call. "Winston."

"Yes, Mr. Levine?" The response was respectful.

"From now on, always prepare another portion of food for the patient staying next to Dicky."

"...Yes, Mr. Levine."

As soon as John hung up, he got a call.

Glancing at the caller ID, he greeted, "Bob."

"I heard there's a fire in your hotel as soon as you return to the country?" Bob Davis teased.

"Yeah," John replied.

"The damage must be in the eight figures, right? How are you feeling?" Bob kept going.

"It's good that the fire happened when it did."

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"...Hey, you're not losing it, are you? Why don't you hang out with us boys for a bit, get

some drinks to douse your sorrows?"

"Nope, but I don't mind joining if you're celebrating for me instead," John replied.

"That

said, I'm not actually free."

Bob was left dumbfounded right then.

It had not been that long since they last met, but John had suddenly managed to brush up on

his humor?!

Bob needed a while to come to his senses. He then asked, "Anyway, isn't Dicky getting

discharged today?"

In fact, John only returned because of Richard's appendicitis, and the party to celebrate

John's return had to be postponed.

"Not yet," James said. "I'm having him stay for another half a month."

"Wait, is Dicky alright?" Bob asked nervously.

"Yeah," John replied flatly. "We're just staying for fun."

Bob was dumbfounded again—was the hospital some sort of hotel to John?!

"Talk to you later."

"Wait, Johnny." Bob quickly stopped him. "I could bring a psychiatrist to you, take a look..."

"Do that for yourself!" John snapped and hung up.

He turned to look at the next ward as he did so, pursing his lips before entering his son's

ward.

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Chapter 4

Kyle headed to Sachs Mansion after leaving the hospital, with Simon Sachs asking him urgently, "Did Cordy agree to annulling your engagement with her?" Kyle shook his head, his eyes fixed on the adorable yet docile Noel Sachs as he said mildly, "We've broken up. The annulment would just be a matter of time. Sorry to keep you waiting again, Noel." "No, it's alright." Noel shook her head, her eyes twinkling with tenderness. "I'll be happy as long as I'm with you, Kyle." Kyle's heart certainly turned into mush from her tameness—he was right to choose her! Still, he restrained himself and said, "I was just going to visit Cordy, but she was with another man—that firefighter from last night." "Old habits die hard, huh? You should have dumped her from the start! She doesn't deserve you!" Simon snapped shortly. Kyle nodded—Cordy was certainly too filthy! "Honestly, let's not bother with her already. She can do whatever she likes—I'll just pretend I never had such a shameless daughter!" Simon scoffed ruthlessly at the mention of Cordy before changing the topic of conversation. "I heard a while ago that John Levine, the scion of Levine Ventures, has just returned to the country. You should meet as Starstream Group's CEO when you have the chance, Noel."

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"Are you letting me take over the company, Dad?" Noel asked a little excitedly. After all, Cordy's mother was the one who founded Starstream, and this meant that she would be taking what Cordy desired most.

"Thank you, Daddy! I won't let you down!" She hurried and showed her determination.

"Of course I trust you," Simon said affectionately.

"By the way, the Levines are the richest family in the city, aren't they? John was also said to

have a child abroad, but there's nothing known about the mother?" Noel asked in curiosity.

Simon nodded. "Word is that his grandfather Alan Levine was taken ill, and Alan has asked

John to return and take over the family business. John's been bringing the Levines' business

in the foreign market to new heights, and his acumen for business was said to match even

Alan's. You're around the same age, Kyle, so try to make his acquaintance—the Levines

basically own North City, after all."

"I've spoken to my father about it myself—I will visit the Levines once John formally takes

over," Kyle said humbly.

"He's only twenty-seven, right?! But he's already so young and successful... I wonder what

he looks like?" Noel murmured to herself just then.

"It's Alan Levine's seventieth birthday next month. We'll be able to meet him then," Kyle

said as he watched her. "What, are you interested in him?"

"No way!" Noel denied it, purring, "I'm only interested in you, Kyle... I think he must be

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ugly, which was why he got dumped! He probably looks like those middle-aged men with those giant bellies. In North City, only you have it all, Kyle: looks, success, and family connections."

Kyle could not help smiling at that, as they seemingly nonchalantly changed the subject.

...

The bleak ward where Cordy was staying was a stark contrast to the cheerful atmosphere in Sachs Mansion.

Cordy was a little hungry, though she did not expect herself to cry over an hour over Kyle, who was absolutely not worth it.

Still, before she could order her food, a man in his fifties entered the ward, followed by two ladies who looked to be in their twenties.

"Good day, Ms. Sachs," the old man greeted her respectfully. "I am John Levine's valet, but you can call me Winston."

As Cordy blinked in confusion, Winston introduced, "This is Flora, and this is Scarlet. They are professionally trained maids that Mr. Levine has brought to assist you, and you may order them around as you require while you're staying here."

Then, he instructed, "Girls, present Ms. Sachs' lunch, please."

Flora and Scarlet swiftly brought over the lunchboxes, laying out an assortment of dishes

that would serve as Cordy's overly scrumptious lunch on her overbed table, even holding out

her knife and fork with both hands, respectfully. "Please enjoy your meal, Ms. Sachs."

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Cordy actually thought then that John was overdoing it—he did not have to go so far for her, especially since the fire at his hotel must have inflicted serious damages. Still, she took the knife and fork while saying, "Thank you." Though the food tasted far beyond expectations, Winston suddenly put on a pair of reading glasses and whipped out a little notebook, recording everything while observing Cordy closely. "Apologies if the food isn't to your taste. May I ask if you have any sort of preferences, or ingredients you don't like?" Cordy was stumped for a moment, but she then slowly said, "No." Winston did not press her further, but simply observed her quietly nearby, while writing down in his notebook: Ms. Sachs prefers fish, but is averse to carrots and onions... As he wrote, he looked up again at the dishes Cordy ate, and summed things up: Refer to Mr. Richard's preferences. After Cordy finished her lunch, Winston presented her with a box. It contained a mobile phone equipped with a SIM card. Cordy thanked Winston, and he left without lingering since his job was done. On the other hand, Flora and Scarlet stayed since they were supposed to attend to her. "Don't mind me," Cordy said as she got into a wheelchair and wheeled herself out of the ward. She had agreed to visit Richard and it was a principle of hers to keep promises, not to mention that there were matters she felt she should discuss directly with John. As she knocked on the door to the next ward, it opened. John's towering form appeared before her. His shoulders were broad, his waist muscular, and his legs long—the sleeves of his white

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shirt were rolled up, revealing his chiseled hands.

Still, Cordy noticed just then that he was bandaged around the wrist...

And he had carried her in his arms!

Averting her eyes, she asked, "Is Dicky in?"

"Yes, but he's having a nap." John replied.

Cordy wondered to herself if he was trying to keep her away from his son, and she pursed

her lips. "I'll come by later..."

However, Richard seemed to hear her from inside. He suddenly asked out loud, "Are you

there, Mommy? Can you sleep with me?"

"I need to step out for the moment. Please keep him company if you're not too busy, Ms.

Sachs," John said right away before Cordy could say anything. "Dicky just had an appendix

surgery and his doctors have insisted on bed rest. Help me coax him to sleep if you can."

With that, John left without waiting for her to agree.

On the other hand, Cordy was mystified by his behavior. Was he not afraid that his adorable

son would be affected?!

"Mommy?" Richard called out sweetly to her just then.

Cordy inhaled deeply and refrained from correcting him. "Alright, just take a nap. I'll be here

with you."

"Thanks, Mommy," Richard said, wrapping his little hands firmly around her arm and holding it against his chest.

Then, he closed his eyes and yawned, falling asleep at the very next instant.

She was certainly envious of the child's ability to doze off with such ease—she had been

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taking melatonin pills for years.
Still, seeing that he was asleep, she drew her hand out of his grasp.
No sooner had she done that when Richard's little pudgy hands tightened around her,
even as
he murmured, "Mommy, don't leave me..."
Cordy decided that she could not help it—even as she looked at Richard's tiny,
adorable
cheeks, she wondered how heartless his mother could be to bear to abandon him.
She could not help leaning in and giving him a kiss.
As she looked up, she suddenly saw that John had returned to the ward, his dark gaze
watching her every move, but his thoughts impassive.
Cordy felt caught in the awkwardness right then, because she had been caught
red-handed
kissing another person's child...

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Chapter 5

John spoke up just then, alleviating the awkwardness.

"Dicky waited for you for over an hour. He usually naps earlier."

Cordy's heart skipped a beat, but she pursed her lips and said, "Actually, Mr. Levine, you

could've just explained that I'm not his mommy."

John simply watched her with his black eyes quietly then, and the sudden silence left Cordy

wondering if she had misspoken.

Still, she did not dwell on it and continued, "The fire was just an accident anyway.

You didn't

have to bring me lunch or have those maids take care of me. And how much for the phone?

I'll wire the money to you."

"I thought you were smart, Ms. Sachs."

Cordy was at a loss. Was there anything about her that made her look stupid?!

"Dicky needs a mommy," John continued in his alluring voice, as if it was only natural.

"So?" Cordy raised a brow.

John simply kept his dark eyes fixed on her for a long while.

After the pause, his pitch seemed to deepen. "And he likes you. So you might be able to tell

that I'm wooing you, Ms. Sachs."

Cordy was speechless.

She could never have told. All she felt was that everything he did was imposing!

"You don't need to respond immediately, Ms. Sachs. After all..."

John then trailed off, as if musing on the right words, "We're not acquainted yet."

Obviously, they were just strangers who crossed paths by chance.

Taking a deep breath to calm herself, Cordy said, "Don't you think you're being a little

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childish about a relationship, Mr. Levine?"

John raised a brow—she was already a difficult person, and she appeared even more distant

now.

"Wooing me just because your son likes me? Am I just a tool to you? What if your son stops

liking me and chooses another woman to be his mommy one day? Are you going to woo her

too, Mr. Levine?"

Cordy paused to calm herself just then, as she noticed that she was getting a little harsh. "I'm

sorry, Mr. Levine, but I don't share your perspective."

"Wooing has nothing to do with my son. He just happens to like you too, just as I do,"

John

said plainly then.

Cordy actually thought she misheard.

A sudden declaration of love... It must be a joke, right?!

They had just met hours ago!

"You don't have to worry about my son falling for another woman either, Ms. Sachs,"

John

said, enunciating every word. "Devotion runs in our family."

Cordy was left speechless again.

Did that man just endorse himself and his son at the same time?

Even offering her... a promise?!

Still, she was not about to be caught in his pace, not to mention that she absolutely could not

respond to the feelings of people she just met. "Whatever you're aiming to do, Mr.

Levine,

I'm serious when I tell you that I'm rejecting you."

John simply stared at her with his jet-black eyes.

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"Please don't disturb me ever again, Mr. Levine. All you have to do is offer me due compensation—"

"I reject your rejection," John said, cutting her short with an assertive tone.

Anger flashed in Cordy's eyes. "Do you even know my past? I'm not as ideal as you'd like to think."

"I never doubt my judgment, nor do I take issue with a person's past."

"Someone told me that before too, and you saw how that ended up."

Therefore, how would she ever trust a stranger she just met?

"Don't compare me to scum."

The ward suddenly turned silent.

John's thin lips twitched ever so slightly, his expression so icy it left Cordy's heart skipping a beat.

His reaction made her feel as if she genuinely insulted him.

Still, she suddenly laughed without knowing the reason herself.

Probably because there was still someone in this world who would side with her.

In everyone else's perspective, Kyle was too good for her—a notion shared even by her own biological father.

There was a change in John's gaze as she watched her laugh, and he said, "In the days to

come, I will demonstrate the difference between myself and scum, Ms. Sachs."

In other words, he would go all out to woo her!

With those words, he turned to leave, seemingly reluctant to waste more time on this matter.

After all, no one could change his mind after he made a decision.

"Mr. Levine." Cordy quickly stopped him when she came to her senses.

John stopped, but he did not turn around.

"I suggest that you find out about my past first."

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"I don't have to."

With those short and direct words, he left without stopping this time.

...

Cordy returned to her ward and got into bed.

When she glanced at the phone, she remembered that she had yet to wire the money for it to

John.

Still, she soon decided against it—he did not look like he would miss the money, and she

could just consider it compensation for her emotional distress.

She hence dialed an unfamiliar number that she engraved in her memory. "Mr. Jacobs?

It's

me, Cordy Sachs."

"Good afternoon, Ms. Sachs."

"I wish to inherit Starstream Group—the company that my mother left me. Would there be

any issues?"

"Of course not," the lawyer replied right away. "Your mother made it clear in her will that

the company belongs to you. You can claim it anytime you want."

Ever since her mother's death, Starstream Group, whose main business was in fashion, had

been taken over by Simon as custodian, even after Cordy was sent abroad. Cordy had wanted

to take over and manage it when she returned to the country with Kyle, but she had poured

her time and strength into saving Jessop Corp from its crisis instead. Unable to divert her

attention, she had set the idea aside until now.

"Please do accompany me to the company's office when the time comes."

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"I will be ready whenever." Andrew Jacobs agreed to it right away.

...

Cordy stayed at the hospital for a week, and Richard would visit frequently. While she did

not hate it even though it took up most of her time, that meant seeing John from time to time.

That being said, she did not find him repulsive—after he 'declared' his love to her the other

day, he did not actually do anything.

In fact, there were times he was so quiet he might as well have not existed.

She hence began to wonder if he had actually just said that out of the heat of the moment, or

if he perhaps did not have any idea what 'wooing' entailed.

The only thing that qualified as effort was his insistence that Winston delivered her meals

every day, which also happened to fit her palate better with each passing day.

As Cordy packed her things, she took away nothing other than the phone John gave to her.

"Mommy, will I ever see you again?" Richard gave her a miserable look, wistfulness showing all over her face.

The boy was certainly a stark contrast against the seemingly nonexistent man who stood

nearby.

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Chapter 6

"Of course!"

Cordy certainly came to like Richard a lot after spending a week with the boy. "I've left you my number, so call me anytime you miss me. I'll even come to meet you when I'm free."

"Liar, liar, pants on fire..."

Cordy dropped to a crouch then, which took her considerable exertion.

Nearby, the nonexistent man was left frowning as she tenderly tousled Richard's hair from

the same height as the latter. "Yes, pants on fire."

Richard beamed adorably then and gave her a peck on the cheek.

The nonexistent man frowned even harder then.

"I have to go now," Cordy told Richard with a tender look.

"Okay, Mommy. Don't run or you might fall," Richard called after her sweetly—the boy

simply refused to stop calling her that even after a week.

When Cordy tried to, Richard would become alarmed, thinking that she was abandoning her,

his little eyes turning red and welling with tears from misery.

It certainly stopped Cordy from being stubborn—the boy would get it when he was older

anyway.

As she limped out alone from her ward on her crutch, John kept following her.

She wanted to stop him more than once, but she held her tongue.

It was not until they reached the main entrance that she spoke. "Mr. Levine..."

However, he simply walked past her, opening the door of the black Maybach parked in front

of her like a gentleman.

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As Cordy frowned, he said, "I'll give you a ride home."

"I shouldn't trouble you. I can get home by myself."

"I have a car," he insisted simply.

Cordy stared at him. Was he bragging?

"It's no trouble," he added.

Cordy genuinely found it difficult to talk to him, but she compromised regardless.

He seemed to have this mystical ability to stop her from refusing, though refusing was just

going to be a waste of time—it would never work.

As she got into the luxurious sedan, John asked, "Where do you live, Ms. Sachs?"

"North Garden," she replied.

She never returned to Sachs Mansion ever since she returned to the country, and her so-called family never cared.

"Yeah," John said, giving the chauffeur a look.

The chauffeur quickly nodded and slowly drove out of the hospital.

That was when John suddenly leaned toward Cordy.

She was startled even though she was clearly wary—John had always kept his distance.

Still, she looked on as he helped her put on her seatbelt, and she was left pursing her lips.

After he was done, he said evenly, "You don't have to clench your fists, Ms. Sachs."

Cordy promptly looked down.

She did not notice that she was doing that.

As the awkwardness of the situation unfurled, John added, "Don't worry, Ms. Sachs.

I'm not

the type to sleep around."

Cordy was speechless.

How narcissistic could he get?!

Unable to hold back just then, she blurted, "How did you get a kid if you really were?"

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She regretted it almost as soon as she said it—she was not close enough to John that they

could joke like that.

Indeed, John turned to look at her and held her gaze for a long while.

However, just as she thought about changing the subject, John said, "It was against my will."

Cordy was dumbfounded—something like that could happen to a burly man who measured

up to six feet tall?!

"I guess she's quite assertive." Cordy tried to play along.

"She was on that day." John nodded, glancing at her again with his dark gaze.

Somehow, Cordy felt like their conversation was not that dull.

"And? How did you two end up separated?" Cordy asked, trying to change the subject—she

was also curious as to why Richard's mother would leave them.

"She doesn't like me."

Cordy was dumbfounded again—someone dumped a man as gorgeous as him?!

"If she doesn't, why would she bear your child?" It just did not make sense.

"She never wanted Dicky," John said coolly. "She was actually going to abandon him after

delivering him."

Cordy's heart actually felt as if it was cut by a blade right then. She did not even want to

imagine the scene where a newly born Dicky, so young and defenseless, was almost dumped

without an ounce of sentiment.

"It's right to separate yourself from a woman like her," she said earnestly.

John pursed his lips and stared fixedly at her, as if there was something on her face.

Cordy touched her own cheeks self-consciously. "Mr. Levine?"

John turned away and kept the back of his head to her for the rest of the journey.

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Cordy frowned—he was certainly volatile.

Still, considering that she mentioned his unpleasant relationship, it would make sense that he

would be in a bad mood.

The car was silent until it stopped outside Cordy's apartment.

"Thank you," Cordy said as she maintained her distance from him.

John nodded. "Take care, Ms. Sachs."

"Yeah," Cordy replied, while feeling relieved inside.

She had to admit that she was slightly worried that John would insist on walking her to her

apartment unit. Her tolerance toward strangers was already at its limit after he brought her to

her apartment block.

He was certainly considerate, and she actually felt less wary toward him—even though she

should be very wary against him.

...

Meanwhile, in the car, the chauffeur called out to John. "Sir?"

Cordy was already gone from sight, but John was still staring at the direction from which she

left, while his phone had been ringing for a while.

John eventually turned away, remaining impassive as he answered the call. "Grandpa."

"Isn't Dicky getting discharged today? Why isn't he here?" Alan Levine asked.

"We will arrive soon," John replied. "But I must be clear—we won't be staying at the manor."

"Why?" Alan sounded clearly upset.

"Dicky's introverted—he doesn't like having too many people around. I'll bring him over to

meet you, and then leave with him," John said staunchly.

"At least have dinner before you leave."

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It was Alan's final compromise.

"...Sure," John agreed.

He rarely returned to North City following his parents' death, and he would not have returned at all if his grandfather did not coerce him with his own mortality.

And if he did not, he probably would not have met her again.

...

Monday was a clear day.

Cordy put on a business suit and light makeup, while letting her silky hair loose nonchalantly over her shoulders. Even though she was still on crutches, it did not hamper her

weathered yet beautiful appearance.

Her lawyer, Andrew Jacobs, accompanied her to Starstream Group.

A man quickly approached them, greeting Cordy. "Ms. Sachs."

"Mr. Lang." She nodded.

Stephen Lang, the deputy general manager of Starstream Group, was one of Cordy's mother's most trusted employees. When Simon took over, he went on a major reformation,

swapping out much of the old guard—only Stephen remained.

His position and influence in Starstream certainly went without saying from that fact alone.

"Let's go," Cordy said without delay.

"Actually, Ms. Sachs, today is..."

Cordy frowned at Stephen's hesitation to speak.

"I just got the news when I came in today. The board chairman... I mean, your father is

going to appoint Noel Sachs as CEO of Starstream Group, giving her full authority over all

company affairs. They're actually holding a succession ceremony now."

Simon Sachs and his daughter were as despicable as they were shameless!

Even so, Cordy said coolly, "It doesn't matter."

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Chapter 7

The vast meeting was filled with Starstream Group key executives, and Noel was standing on the podium.

She was about to speak as she assumed the post of CEO when she suddenly noticed Cordy standing at the door, and she froze.

Simon, who was seated in the middle of the front row, turned around to look when he saw

the weird look in Noel's eyes.

He glowered the instant he saw Cordy and sprang to his feet, storming toward Cordy with a

look of disgust and contempt as everyone else looked on. "What are you doing here?!"

"This is my mother's company. Is there a problem?" Cordy asked in return.

She was calm but no less imposing, and she was certainly not cowed by Simon.

"I don't want to argue right now," Simon snapped impatiently. "Get out of here right now—I

don't have time to waste on you today. Whatever it is, you can tell me later!"

However, Cordy shared the same sentiment and simply walked straight into the conference room.

Noel watched as she did so, her eyes flashing dangerously for an instant.

Still, an angelic smile appeared on her face the next second. "Hey, sis! Did you come to see

my appointment as CEO? I'm so glad!"

Cordy actually thought that it was a waste that Noel was not an actress.

Simply ignoring her, Cordy whipped out a document in front of everyone and made an announcement.

"Greetings, I'm Cordy Sachs. I have come to Starstream to assume ownership over the

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company as per my later mother's wishes. I'm grateful to my father for taking care of the

company before my return."

The conference room was left in an uproar right after she spoke.

What?! Starstream actually belonged to Cordy?! Then what did Simon and Noel amount to

in the company?!

Cordy appeared unconcerned about their shock. "Starting today, I have full control over

Starstream. I hope I have your support."

She then bowed, although it was a gesture to assert her dominance.

Noel was left standing awkwardly on the podium, still holding the speech she prepared

especially for this occasion.

Cordy's announcement left everyone staring at Noel—this was the first time she was left

looking like a fool, and Cordy was the one who did this to her!

She was supposed to take over Startstream Group today, only for Cordy to give her a slap

across the face!

She certainly had never been humiliated like this. She always got anything she wanted even

as a child, with Cordy ending up battered and looking like an idiot.

Her eyes suddenly welled with innocent tears as she asked gingerly, "Do you need money...

sis?"

Cordy was glowering but said nothing, so Noel quickly pressed, "Calm down, sis. I just don't

understand... You never cared about Starstream, so why would you suddenly want to take

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over? I even heard from Kyle that you fell for a firefighter the other day, and that you might

be in trouble?"

Noel's seemingly offhand comment left the executives in an uproar again.

So Cordy was so horrific that she caused trouble just to get money for her lover?! Did she

not feel embarrassed?!

At the same time, Simon's expression darkened. "I'll pay you a million dollars right, so get

out! Don't ever show up here—you shouldn't be here!"

Simon's outburst only solidified the impression that Cordy was short on money, but she

laughed despite her rage.

On the other hand, Noel was upset to hear that Cordy would be given money. From her

perspective, Cordy deserved nothing!

Still, considering that she would get the entire company in return, she said, "I can wire you

the money today if you need it urgently—I just hope you won't hook up with that man anymore..."

"Hook up? You mean like how you hooked up with my fiance?"

Noel's face turned pale. "Kyle and I never did anything like that..."

Her affair with Kyle Jessop certainly must not be exposed, since both their families' reputation would be tarnished!

"That's enough! Stop trying to distort the facts!" Simon barked. He then whipped out his

checkbook to quickly write a check. "Here, it's 500 grand. I'll wire you the rest once you sign

over the company!"

With that, he tore out the check and threw it at Cordy's feet.

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Check looked down at it and slowly arched her back to pick it up. Nearby, Noel was sneering, thinking to herself that Cordy was a gold-digger like any other person, and certainly never that noble! However, Cordy merely leveled a cool glare at Simon after she picked up the check. Then, she tore it into pieces as everyone looked on and threw the pieces back at Simon. "Starstream Group's net profits reach dozens of millions per annum, and its net worth is well over hundreds of millions! And you're brazenly telling me to give it up for a million?!" Cordy's sharp words were a slap to Simon's face, putting him down and leaving him utterly awkward in front of everyone! Noel's face fell, surprised that Cordy would know such intricate details. "You have one day to settle any outstanding tasks and to pack your things," Cordy snapped. "Or suffer the consequences!"

...

Noel's succession ceremony hence ended with utter disgrace, and she was crying in her office. In fact, she was doing that ever since they left the conference room. "Dad, how is this different from robbery?! We've worked so hard to bring Starstream to where it is, and she's just going to take it from us?! I can't take it..." Simon was incensed too, and he snarled through his teeth, "I'm old, but not senile! A kid like her doesn't hold a candle to me! If she wants Starstream so badly, I'll teach her why people

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should be careful about what they wish for!"

Noel finally stopped crying at that and smiled evilly.

After all, she would take everything from Cordy—her family, her reputation, her love interest, and her money.

And Cordy had never won against her, not once!

...

The CEO's office on top of Levine Ventures' headquarters had a perfect view of North City,

with its glass wall taking up three sides of the room.

The interior was monochrome, but the solemnness did not lose in extravagance.

Randy Martin was listing the day's routine before adding, "The board chairman insisted on

your presence at the executive meeting in half an hour."

"I see," John Levine replied.

This was his first day working here. He brought in Randy as an assistant from abroad, and he

had instructed Randy to learn the company's operation structure a month ahead of time.

"Have you compiled the dossiers on the executives?" he asked Randy just then.

"I have," Randy said, handing him the papers respectfully.

While John read through it, Randy stood behind him.

After some thinking, he said, "I heard that Ms. Cordy Sachs will take over Starstream Group

today."

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Chapter 8

As John's eyes twitched, Randy continued, "Noel Sachs was supposed to be appointed as CEO, but was left downtrodden after Ms. Sachs crashed her party. I wonder if things would go smoothly for Ms. Sachs after she took over, however, since Simon Sachs and Noel were in charge all this while."

Randy then noticed his boss tapping his long fingers on his desk intermittently. Cordy must be special to him, or he would not have risked his life to save her from the fire.

However, John had always been distant toward women, but that somehow changed right after he returned to North City.

Still, Randy would never dare to pry in his boss's private affairs, and he simply stuck with

the man's preferences. "Should I try to smooth things out for her quietly, sir?"

John was quiet for a moment. "She went in alone and managed to claim ownership over

the entire company. That means she knows what she's doing—that means we should trust

her."

"Of course, sir," Randy replied respectfully.

He thought then that the woman his boss had his eyes on would certainly be no pushover.

...

Cordy had just gotten home from Starstream Group when her phone abruptly rang. She glanced at the caller ID but answered it anyway.

"Why did you do that to Noel?" Kyle started complaining the instant she did. "What

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happened between us has nothing to do with her. If you have an issue, take it up with me.

Don't bother her."

In short, Noel already complained to Kyle.

Still, Cordy was used to it—Noel had always been a specialist in playing the victim and

causing rifts between everyone and Cordy.

"You give yourself too much credit, Kyle Jessop. I'm just taking back what's mine."

"Look, Cordy—you just have to tell me if you need money," Kyle continued earnestly, ignoring her. "We may have broken up, but that doesn't mean you can't work at Jessop Corp.

I never said anything about dismissing you. You don't have to hurt yourself like this! Just

come to work as usual, and we'll pay you what you're due."

Cordy inhaled sharply in turn, knowing that there was no reasoning with him. "This is the

last time I tell you this, Kyle! My mother left Starstream Group to me, and Noel has no stake

in it at all. Even if I don't want it, I'd rather liquidate it and donate the shares to charity than

allow a mistress' daughter to touch it! Also, I'll no longer work at Jessop Corp. I'll pack my

things at the time, but you can have it thrown out if you don't like it—there's nothing worth

keeping. Last but not least, don't try to humiliate me with money. You'd just make a fool of yourself!"

With that, she hung up on him without giving him a chance to retort.

Kyle was left sitting and scowling in his car.

Cordy had actually cut off his call and spat in his face despite his goodwill!

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What makes her so confident that she could treat him like this?!

Indignant, he called her again, only to have Cordy hang up on him mercilessly!

Eventually, he was left shaking with rage, his fingers clenching over his phone!

...

As the calls from Kyle kept coming in, Cordy eventually lost it and answered her phone

without looking at the screen the next time it rang, yelling, "Stop calling me if you don't

want to embarrass yourself any further!"

There was only silence from the other end, and Cordy soon noticed that something was

different.

She quickly glanced at the screen, her heart skipping a beat when she saw the unfamiliar

number.

Before she could speak, a deep, alluring voice spoke from the other end. "Does that mean I

should keep calling you if I want to be embarrassed?"

Cordy felt her heart racing a little just then and she pursed her lips.

She had never expected John Levine himself to call. She said in apology, "I'm sorry, I didn't

know it was you... and what I said wasn't meant for you."

"So who was it for?" John raised a brow.

Cordy was silent for moments before slowly saying, "I think you know, Mr. Levine."

John's eyes narrowed, his fingers tapping his desk twice as his lips twitched. "Do you need

help?"

"No." Cordy refused right then, intent on being distant. "Anyway, why did you call me, Mr.

Levine?"

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"No reason in particular," John replied.

As Cordy frowned, he added, "I was just testing if the number Dicky gave me works."

"...I would never trick a kid," Cordy said a little angrily.

Moreover, he was the one who bought her this number. How would he not know?!

"Are you free tonight?" John asked suddenly.

The sudden change in subject left Cordy stunned.

"Let's have dinner together," John said. "I'll come to get you."

"I'm sorry, but..."

"It's to celebrate my first day at my new job."

Cordy decided then that she and John existed on different wavelengths, and that their conversation was utterly non-sequitur.

"I'll see you at six," John finished and hung up.

Cordy breathed a lengthy sigh then—there were times when John's domineering nature could

not be stopped at all.

Musing to herself for a while, she eventually texted him.

[I'm sorry, Mr. Levine, but I'm busy tonight and won't be able to make it. That said, congratulations on your new job.]

After she sent it, Cordy used to herself for a while and sent him an Amazon gift card as a

way to congratulate him.

She felt that this was a polite refusal to strangers that would not be insulting to them.

On the other end, John was staring at the gift card for a while before bursting out in laughter.

Beside him, Randy's jaw dropped.

Did he just live long enough to see his boss laugh?! And so eerily at that!

"Randy," John suddenly said.

"Yes, sir?"

"Why do you think a woman would give a man money?"

Randy's eyes widened.

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Then, as John looked at him, his mind worked rapidly and he said uncertainly, "To be the

man's... sugar mommy?"

John's lips curled up even more visibly, while Randy's cheeks were twitching.

He was suddenly very curious—how much did Ms. Sachs give him that he would look so

content?!

That was when they heard a polite knock on the office door, with Debbie the secretary entering and asking respectfully, "Mr. Levine, Kyle Jessop—CEO of Jessop Corp—is asking

to meet you. Would you like to see him?"

Kyle Jessop?

Randy flinched abruptly—Kyle was John's rival for Cordy's heart!

"No." John refused right away.

"Well, when would you like to—"

"Never," John said icily.

Debbie's heart was sent pounding right then. "Alright, I will send him away."

John said nothing, but Debbie took it as a silent approval and left panickily.

It was her first day being acquainted with her new superior and she simply could not get a

read on his personality.

"Wait," John suddenly said.

Debbie quickly turned around. "Yes, Mr. Levine?"

"I'll be attending a board meeting soon, but I may be free afterwards."

The secretary understood. "Yes, Mr. Levine. I'll pass the message to Mr. Jessop."

Randy watched as Debbie left before turning around and studying his boss.

Did Kyle just come to their doorstep to get abused...?

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Chapter 9

After a while, Randy told John it was the time for the meeting, and John left his office. Kyle—who had been waiting in the guest room—watched as all the executives walked past

from behind the glass wall.

"Is that Mr. Levine?" Kyle asked.

Debbie the secretary glanced at the people outside, and quickly said, "Yes, Mr. Levine is on

his way to a board meeting."

Kyle lowered his teacup and studied the people outside, and Randy just happened to turn

around.

Kyle quickly smiled and nodded in greeting at Randy.

Although Randy was frowning, he nodded politely and followed John into the elevator.

Randy certainly did not know that Kyle could not see John from his perspective, only that

everyone else was walking behind Randy.

Kyle returned to his seat in turn to wait for 'John'.

Levine Ventures would soon be establishing the biggest commerce guild in the world in

North City, with a building to be completed soon. Since Jessop Corp's main business was

high fashion and they were looking to get involved in electronic commerce, they would get a

good spot soon if they built a partnership with Levine Ventures early on.

However, John spent the entire morning at the board meeting.

When Kyle asked at noon, he was told that John had left for lunch with a partner and would

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return in the afternoon.

When he asked in the afternoon, he was told that John was at an on-site survey, but he probably would return.

When he asked in the evening, most employees in the building, including John, had already

left work for the day!

Kyle's face was left ashen.

He was the scion and the CEO of one of North City's top corporations, and yet he ended up

being stood up by John for an entire day. Even if Debbie kept apologizing, he felt that John

was deliberately messing with him!

And he had no grudge with him!

Furious, he stormed out of Levine Ventures headquarters and got into his car, and that was

when he received a call. "Noel."

"Hey, Kyle! I heard you spent the whole day at Levine Ventures. You must've had a pleasant

meeting with John Levine, right?" Noel asked fawningly.

Kyle's expression darkened as Noel continued. "I'm going to have dinner with Mandy. Would

you like to join us, or are you eating with Mr. Levine?"

"I'm fine. You girls enjoy yourself."

He certainly was not going to tell Noel he was not even allowed to meet John, and that he

was not in the mood to hang out with them.

Still, Noel was sharp enough to notice. "What's wrong? Are you in a bad mood?"

"No, I'm just a little tired. I'm thinking about going home soon to sleep."

"Alright, have a good night." Noel appeared to care enough. "By the way, what does Mr.

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Levine look like? Is he like one of those middle-aged men with dad bods?"

"No, but his looks are average," Kyle critiqued.

"I guess." Noel giggled. "Alright, I won't keep you, Kyle. I'm arriving at the restaurant soon."

Kyle, however, was left glowering after hanging up.

Cordy had already left him infuriated in the morning, and now John humiliated him. He was shaking even as he tried to restrain his temper!

...

Over at North Garden, Cordy was planning to order takeout for the night when her phone started to ring.

It was the number from this morning—it was not hard to remember it when the number 8 was all over the screen.

Taking a deep breath, Cordy refreshed his memory, having planned how to reject the man's invitation.

"Mommy!"

However, when Richard's chipper voice exclaimed from the other end, Cordy's words were left stuck in his throat.

At the same time, Richard continued excitedly, "I missed you so much, Mommy. Daddy and

I are coming to pick you up for dinner. We'll be there in ten!"

Cordy was speechless.

John was certainly cunning!

...

Eventually, Cordy limped out to the entrance of the apartment block on her crutches, where

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John was leaning against his all-too-conspicuous Maybach, somehow more eye-catching than the car. She could already see a crowd around him. Men, women, young, and old—they were all staring at him, but he ignored them. In fact, his gaze finally showed focus when he saw her, and he strode toward her and took away her crutches. While Cordy frowned, he scooped her up in his arms the next instant and headed toward the car. It drew even more stares, but Cordy took a deep breath and decided to give her silent assent. When they got in the car, Richard called out to her adorably, "Mommy!" The boy was smiling sweetly at Cordy, and her heart always softened every time she saw him. It was just three days since they were apart, but Richard promptly gave her a big hug while exclaiming excitedly, "I missed you so much, Mommy! Daddy said that we will be having a big dinner today. Are you hungry, Mommy?" "Yes, I am." Cordy smiled. "Me, too! We should eat more soon." "Of course." As the car took them to the restaurant, Richard and Cordy were making merry. John simply sat near them without butting in, but the smile on his face was obvious. When they arrived at the restaurant, a waiter led them to a window seat. However, Cordy blinked just as they sat down.

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It was a minute gesture, but John sharply noticed it although he was holding the menu. He turned around and saw Noel, who was having a happy conversation with Mandy Jessop at the next table.

As Kyle's sister, Mandy's contribution was indisputable in Noel's success in seducing Kyle and stealing him away from Cordy.

Mandy was herself an actress—not first-rate, but she had a fanbase regardless.

"Shouldn't you be on a plane? I heard you have another project coming up."

"Yeah, but they are shooting it in North City. I'd never leave if they shot elsewhere," Mandy

replied loftily.

"I'll come visit you when you're free," Noel said, and added as she suddenly remembered,

"By the way, Levine Ventures are investing in the production too, yes?"

"Oh, don't even mention them." Mandy's eyes flashed with disgust.

"What? Why?"

"Their heir, John Levine, has just returned to the country, but they're saying he has his eyes

on me and wants to arrange a marriage interview."

"Really?" Noel gasped in surprise, while John remained impassive nearby.

He continued to order more food, while asking Cordy what she liked from time to time.

"Oh, this is killing me." Mandy was still complaining indignantly. "There's no way I'd choose him! Not only is he ugly, but he also has a kid! Who would want to be a baby mama?"

"That's true. You're so gorgeous and it'd be a waste to marry him," Noel said, flattering her.

"I'm so worried now that he's so obsessed he might get aggressive. You know how important

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his family is in North City—my dad would've played along," Mandy said unhappily.

"Well, it's your fault for being too beautiful," Noel joked.

Mandy looked smug right then—Noel really knew how to flatter a person, and Mandy certainly relished it.

"Oh, let's forget about him. By the way, how are things going with Kyle? Why isn't there an

announcement to annul his engagement yet?"

"He's been with my sis for years. He has to be considerate for her sake," Noel said understandingly.

"Considerate? To Cordy Sachs?!" Mandy was almost speechless. "What is there to be considerate about when she slept around at eighteen and had a child out of wedlock?

I'd just

jump off a building if I were her instead of showing my face anywhere!"

Cordy completely ignored her, while letting Richard pick the desserts he wanted.

John suddenly rose to his feet. "I need the washroom for a moment."

"Okay," Cordy replied.

He returned soon enough, while the waiter from before approached Noel and Mandy.

"Apologies, ladies, but this restaurant has been reserved for the night."

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Chapter 10

"Reserved?" Noel exclaimed in shock. "It's only 6 PM! Has there been a mistake there?"

"There isn't. I'm afraid I would have to ask you to leave."

"Why? We haven't finished our food!" Mandy snapped—ever self-important, this naturally left her furious.

"There's no reason in particular. You're just not welcome in this premises."

"Don't you know who I am?!"

"No, I don't," the waiter replied plainly.

"You don't know who Mandy is? She's a top star and the heiress to Jessop Ventures." Noel

name-dropped beside them.

"Oh," the waiter said, but he remained cold as ever. "This way please, Ms. Jessop."

Mandy and Noel were both left gritting their teeth in rage, but just as they got to their feet to

leave, they suddenly saw Cordy sitting at the next table.

What was she doing there?!

They soon noticed the man and child with Cordy as well.

Despite her pride, Mandy was instantly bewitched by John's sheer beauty.

She was left wondering when someone that handsome existed in North City—not even the

top stars in showbiz could match him!

Noel came to her senses then and called out, "Sis?"

Cordy simply ignored her.

Noel turned to John then. She was likewise bewitched, but also jealous that Cordy could get

himself such a beautiful man.

Not even Kyle was anywhere near that good-looking!

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Aggrieved, she then remembered something at the next second and quickly said,

"That's the

firefighter you fell for, right?!"

Beside her, Mandy was immediately disappointed.

It was not surprising that she had never met him before—he was completely beneath them.

Turning toward Richard then, Noel continued, "That's his son, right? You just broke up with

Kyle and you're already got yourself a man on the rebound... Or could it be that you want to

get back at Kyle? Please, you shouldn't be mean to yourself, getting a man with a kid!"

Richard furrowed his little brows hostilely at Noel, who was pretending to be kind as she

continued to mock Cordy.

She was intent on driving a wedge between John and Cordy by telling him that he was just

the backup lover. "Also, you actually brought him here? It costs several grand to eat here at

any time, you know!"

Cordy suddenly sprang to her feet.

She leveled an icy glare at Noel, but she did not actually want to retort.

She did not want to throw a fit—at least not in front of Richard—but she could not stand

Noel's escalating behavior.

Gently putting her hands over Richard's ears, she snapped coolly, "Word of advice: you

should cease that despicable behavior of yours. Do you really think that everyone is like you,

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preferring second-hand goods like Kyle Jessop? He can't even keep it in his pants, so why

would I get sad or want payback for someone like him?! The instant I dumped him, he's

nothing to me!"

"You b..." Noel's face turned pale from Cordy's retort.

That was when Mandy coolly butted in, "Oh, you're just being sour grapes!"

Cordy turned to Mandy and the latter met her gaze without flinching. "That's what you are.

Everyone in North City knows what you're really like! I guess it is what it is... My brother

dumped you and you deserve to be with a man like him!"

She glanced at John as she spoke—even if he was not from the dregs of society, he had a

child too!

Mandy had certainly given up on him. She would never sink so low to become the sugar

mommy of a man like him!

Nonetheless, John's eyes narrowed and he barked, "A man like me?!"

His deep voice sent chills down the spine—both Noel and Mandy gasped, their hearts skipping a beat right then.

Mandy was left biting her lip, afraid to say what was on her mind.

Noel was cowed too.

"Whatever I am, it isn't up to you to criticize!" John continued darkly. "You want to know

what's between me and Cordy? Fine! I like her and I'm wooing her, so if there's anyone

affecting our relationship, I shall make them suffer. This is not a statement—it's a threat!"

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When he was finished, he gave the waiter a look, who hurried toward them and told Mandy

and Noel icily, "This way, please."

Noel and Mandy were still left petrified by John's outburst and it took them a long while to recover.

Once they did, Mandy snapped, "Why aren't they leaving?!"

Why were they the only ones who had to leave?

"Because it's just the two of you who need to leave."

Incensed, Mandy bellowed, "I am the fiance of John Levine, CEO of Levine Ventures! How

dare you chase me out?!"

The waiter was actually left stunned for an instant, but he was soon staring at her as if she

was an idiot.

"Now buzz off!" Mandy demanded.

However, the waiter simply replied coolly, "I'm going to have to call security if you insist on staying."

"You little...!" Mandy's face was flushed with rage.

"It's alright, Mandy. Let's go," Noel pulled her along then—she did not want to make a scene, but she threw a jibe regardless. "We won't be coming again next time. "

"There won't be a next time, I'm afraid. Both of you have been blacklisted."

Mandy was left bristling.

Seeing that Mandy was going to lose control, Noel quickly stopped her. "There might be

paparazzi nearby. Just bear with it—we'll get back at them soon enough."

Mandy was worried that someone watching would try to make a story out of this, which

would in turn hurt her reputation.

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As such, she had to leave with Noel, albeit furiously.

Quietness returned to the restaurant once they were gone, and things were back to normal at the table.

Seeing that Richard was not good with a knife, Cordy cut her steak into tiny pieces and traded it for his steak.

"Thanks, Mommy." Richard happily got to his little feet and gave her a peck on the cheek.

As John looked up, he saw the adoring smile on Cordy's face.

She lowered her eyes again to cut her steak... only for a big hand to take her entire plate away.

Cordy did a double take until she saw John swapping his steak with hers—he had already cut it up too.

Pursing her lips, Cordy slowly said, "Thank you."

"You could convey your gratitude with action," John said, his gaze lowered as he slowly cut his steak with elegance.

Cordy actually was confused right then. How poor were Kyle and Noel's judgment that they would believe that John was a mere firefighter?

"Like Dicky did," John added just then.

Cordy certainly knew what he was getting at. She said, "I know. I cut Dicky's steak for him, and you did it for me. But it's just good manners."

John smiled vaguely and quietly said, "I guess."

After the main course, Richard happily proceeded to dessert, vehemently introducing, "You

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have to try this parfait, Mommy. It's great!"

Unable to refuse him, Cordy leaned in to take a bite.

"Isn't it sweet?"

"Yeah."

"Really?" John suddenly asked.

He had been poring over his phone as if busy with something, and he chimed in when he

heard them, "Let me try it too."

Richard frowned—his daddy never usually ate anything sweet, but he tamely scooped a

spoonful and fed it to him.

Cordy would have liked to tell Richard to use another spoon, but she decided against it.

After that, it would mean she and John shared an indirect kiss.

While she pretended not to notice, Richard asked John after feeding him, "Isn't it sweet,

Daddy?"

"It is." John pursed his lips, suddenly looking up at Cordy as he added, "It really is."

Cordy felt her cheeks turning warm for some reason, having the feeling that John meant

something else entirely

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