

The Ace at the Apex

Chapter 9 Mr. Dilley and His Money

Jade's furious questioning caused Zack and Terry to stammer. They did not know how to answer her.

Despite that, Jade could not lash too harshly as Zack had once pulled some strings behind the scenes and landed her some sizable contracts. That was how the office fell into an awkward silence for the next half a minute.

Wanting to put a stop to the awkward situation, Terry spoke up and suggested, "It's almost noon now. Let's have lunch together and we can discuss the issue about the investment."

This suggestion was met with approving nods from Zack and Jade as they wanted out from the bubble of awkwardness, but Javier caught a crucial point in what Terry had said.

"Ms. Odell has just found out about the issue with the company's investor. Terry Hamer, how did you know?"

"Huh?!"

Terry had not even noticed his slip of the tongue and started panicking at Javier's unexpected question. He put on a tough front and raised his voice to question the man back instead of explaining himself, "What gives a lowly employee like you the right to question me?!"

At this outburst, Jade recovered from the awkwardness and cast a serious look at the man. "Terry, Javier is now—"

"I'm now the vice general manager because I managed to pull in some funding for the company. Ms. Odell has promoted me based on this merit."

Jade was slightly taken aback, not understanding why Javier had chosen to lie. But after a few moments of contemplation, she figured it out. She had overheard her employees arguing earlier and was aware that Javier and Selena had gotten a divorce this morning. The 1.5 million dollars that Javier had invested into the company must have been part of his premarital asset so if he were exposed, he would have to give half of it to Selena. He must be hiding this fact because he was reluctant to share 750 thousand dollars with her!

Considering that Selena was not innocent either, Jade quietly went with Javier's statement. She then told Terry, "That's correct. Javier is the vice general manager now. He's not lying. As for you, Mr. Hamer, I'd really like to know how you found out about the investment issue!"

Javier being suddenly promoted to vice general manager was a hard pill for Terry to swallow. Faced with Jade's interrogation, he explained halfheartedly, "I overheard you guys talking in the office just now."

The answer made Jade and Javier exchange a look but both of them decided to not question it. Terry went silent as well, afraid that he would slip up the more he talked. Zack took the opportunity to divert the topic.

"Let's go for lunch. I haven't had breakfast this morning and I'm starving."

Jade got up, agreeing to Zack's prompt and as if believing Terry's explanation. It made the latter sigh in relief but he secretly cursed Javier out in his mind for nearly exposing him.

He looked at the man with a chuckle. "Mr. Kersey, congratulations on being promoted to vice general manager. I think you won't be able to escape buying lunch today. Don't try to run away now. We'd all love to share in your delight."

Javier immediately saw through Terry's plan. The man must be trying to embarrass him again by forcing him to pay for lunch with money Terry assumed he did not have. Too bad though, Terry was going to find out that bullying him will prove much more difficult than before. He was about to reply when someone else next to him spoke up.

"So what if he's been promoted to vice general manager? Did you think just anyone could pay for this lunch? One has to be qualified to do so. Today will be my treat!"

Zack acted like he was the richest one in the room and walked out the door proudly without giving the others a chance to speak up. Javier glanced at Jade's sprained foot while the latter shook her head to tell him that it was fine. He then told her that he did not wish to go, but upon Jade's insistence, he relented and went along with them.

...

They decided to have lunch at the most luxurious hotel in town—Duxom Hotel. All the patrons of this hotel were either affluent or influential. It was said that obtaining a membership to this hotel required at least 15 thousand dollars and the restaurant declined any non-members.

Zack looked as proud as a peacock as they were seated at a table in a lavishly decorated room.

"Go on, order whatever you like. No need to feel bad for my pocket. To be frank, this is nothing to me!"

Right after Zack said that the cogs in Terry's mind turned quickly and he suggested, "Mr. Dilley, Mr. Kersey has just been promoted. Why don't we give him some face and let him order the dishes? Besides, he's never been anywhere this classy before. Just look at it as fulfilling his wish of becoming a wealthy man and allow him order."

Zack understood the meaning behind Terry's words. Terry was trying to set Javier up! Viewing Javier as an obstacle—pulling in investments and spoiling his plans when he had purposely created an opportunity to save the damsel in distress—he waved generously.

"Sure. Let's give Mr. Kersey the chance to feel like a rich man then. Go ahead, Mr. Kersey!"

A female server stood to the side, an iPad in her hand and a smile on her face, waiting for Javier to make the order. Zack and Terry watched with a snicker, waiting for Javier to embarrass himself. No menu had been given to them. They watched and waited to see how the man who had never been here before was going to order. It would be hilarious if the pauper only ordered salad and lettuce!

Jade, noticing the situation, spoke up, "I have a few dishes I would really like to have. Let me order them!"

She was mindful of her words, careful to eliminate the embarrassment factor and not letting anything slip so that it wouldn't cost Javier his pride. Javier appreciated the kind gesture but he did not think making a lunch order would hurt his pride.

"Allow me, see if what I order fits your taste, Ms. Odell."

Terry could not help but be amused when he heard Javier's insistent words and him declining Jade's attempt to save him. What an idiot! Could he not tell that Jade was trying to salvage the situation and he was foolishly insistent on making the order himself!

Zack was sneering as well, waiting for Javier to humiliate himself.

As for the man in question, he turned to their server with a smile on his face. "Hi, we'd like to have some sake-steamed abalone and scallops, four pax; white escargot caviar over white truffles, four pax; foie gras pate drizzled with a cherry gastrique, four pax; lobster and avocado french toast, four pax; some Coffin Bay King Oysters on the side..."

The mocking smirks that Zack and Terry had been wearing slid off their face and were replaced by looks of shock when they heard the dishes Javier had ordered. The dishes he had just ordered were at least 200 dollars per portion and Javier was still going, ordering a whopping total of eight dishes which summed up to about six to eight thousand dollars! And Javier was still ordering!

Terry panicked. He had dug the trap for Javier but it seemed like he had thrown himself in it instead!

"Javier, are you a glutton? Can you really finish all those dishes?"

Javier turned to look at the man and asked innocently, "Didn't you say not to feel bad for your pocket just now and say that nothing was too much for you? Why? Is this too much, Mr. Dilley?"

"Bullsh*t! I have all the money in the world, nothing's too much! Go on, keep ordering!"

There, see, Javier liked dumb*sses like him who felt like they were the richest man in the world when they only had a dime or two in their pocket. He went on to order another four more items—nothing expensive, they were only about 1,500 dollars.

After that, Jade quickly stopped Javier. Otherwise, he would probably end up ordering all of the most expensive dishes the restaurant had to offer.

Zack calculated in his head. That was already eight to ten thousand dollars out of his pocket and they had not even ordered wine yet! He was instantly disgruntled. He had planned to spend around 1,500 dollars just to show off to Jade but their lunch ended up being as expensive as a regular sedan.

The more he thought about it, the more frustrated he felt. The plan was to make Javier look like an idiot but he was the idiot that got tricked in the end. Looking at Terry who had a meek and embarrassed look on his face, Zack felt his rage come to a boiling point.

If Terry had not suggested this, he would not have suffered such a loss! He spoke up, "Right, Mr. Hamer, I heard that you've got a girlfriend and you're getting married soon? That's great news! I think you're the only one qualified to buy lunch today, so I shall step out of the way and stop hogging the limelight. Congratulations, by the way!"

Terry had done nothing but stay seated on his chair and seemingly out of nowhere, the bill landed on his head. Terry was flabbergasted.

Chapter 10 It's Nothing at All

Just two sentences from Zack and a bill costing eight to ten thousand dollars hit Terry in the face. He dared not reject the man because Zack had yet to send him the eight thousand dollars he had promised him for sabotaging the investment. Even if Terry was fuming internally, he could only plaster on a smile. "Of course, thank you, thank you..."

When the dishes were served, Terry was irked by Javier's presence. Who knew where the latter had scouted the names of these dishes from and put up such an act, causing him to lose so much money.

The more he thought about it, the more disgruntled he grew, so he spoke up with a fake grin, "Mr. Kersey, you must've had a hard time in the past, working in the office during the day and sending food delivery during the night. I bet you've never tried these delicacies before. Have more of them. Who knows if you'll ever get another chance."

Javier ignored him, like how he had ignored the cutlery on the table, but Terry did not stop there.

"Don't worry, help yourself. I won't ask you to foot the bill. Not everyone's like you, you know? So poor that your pocket is emptier than a beggar's bowl. I'm not like that. I can still afford to buy a meal for you. It feels like giving charity.

"There was once, I took some burgers out to the streets and these stray dogs kept barking since they were starving, so I did some charity and fed them those burgers."

Terry was not planning on stopping his stream of abuse but Jade interrupted him, "Mr. Hamer, the dishes are quite decent. Please, try them."

Terry scowled but kept his mouth shut after Jade's intervention. After that, however, he still made occasional indirect remarks that were targeted at Javier. The latter said not a word in retaliation and was instead focused on his cellphone, which seemed like a rude thing to do during lunch, but Javier was actually scrolling through the black market app in the exclusive OS on his phone.

Illegal items were not the only things for sale in the black market. There were services as well, including finance hackers which Javier currently required.

As lunch went on, the fact that Javier busied himself on his phone without taking a single bite displeased Zack greatly, especially because he was still resentful about Javier's expensive orders that had ended up backfiring on him. Although he had transferred the grievance to Terry, he was still miffed.

Unable to help himself, he slammed his cutlery on the table. "Javier Kersey, who are you trying to show your scowl to? No one owes you anything here!"

Terry, that groveling *ss, was quick to side with Zack despite just being ripped off by him, and made another jab at Javier.

"Sigh, don't remind him, Mr. Dilley. I owe him. He's taken care of my wife for years, and he did it well too."

Zack was momentarily stunned before his face lit up with delight.

"I heard that you snatched your current chick from someone but I didn't expect it to be him!

"I see, that's understandable now. Look at your sour and sullen face..."

"Alright, I allow you to keep wearing that ugly look on your face. Keep it on, you look quite good with it, haha!"

After the mocking laugh, Zack continued telling, "Seriously though, Mr. Kersey, we men can be without anything but not money. You can be healthy, yes, but being poor is a debilitating condition! If you're too poor, that's not just a condition, it's a crime. And if this crime were to be penalized... Well, let's just say you'd be shot seven times. Hahaha!"

Zack seemed to get a kick out of taunting Javier as he was about to speak up after guffawing but Jade cut him off. "Terry, you've stepped over the line."

Although Jade had said Terry's name, everyone at the table knew whom her words were meant for.

When Zack turned to Jade, he had put on an entirely different expression, beaming brighter than the sun. "Aww, Jade, don't get mad. I'm just joking with him. No need to be so serious."

He then looked at Javier. "No offense, yeah. It's a joke. If I wish to kick a dog, I have to check who its owner is, right?"

Javier, who had not even spared Zack a proper glance, finally focused his gaze on the man's sneering face.

"Zack Dilley, you having fun ribbing me huh? Just because of those pricey orders I made? Do you feel bad over a handful of pretty pennies?"

"Man, you shouldn't have to feel that way. Mr. Dilley and his money, right? It wouldn't make sense if you're feeling the pinch."

"It's just a simple meal and look at how miserable you're acting. That's very 'successful' of you!"

Being poked in his sore spot in front of Jade served to charge Zack's rage and embarrassment. He slammed a fist on the table and sent his cutlery flying.

"Bullsh*t! I'm upset over money? That's the funniest joke in the world, ever!"

Zack waved for their attending server immediately.

"Go, get your POS machine here. I'm reloading 1,500 dollars to the member card. Let's show this peasant what a rich man is!"

Javier leaned back in his chair and smirked. "You deny it when I say you're butthurt over the dimes and want to reload a mere 1,500 dollars? Stop embarrassing yourself and turning yourself into a joke for the staff."

Zack was shaking in anger as he pointed a shaking finger at Javier. "You sound smug, don't you? Fine, you think 1,500 dollars is too little? You reload an amount you deem suitable then. I'll double however much you're reloading—even the same amount would be an offense to me. Go on!"

Zack was officially at loggerheads with Javier and Jade could not help but be worried for the latter. She had asked him when he was massaging her ankle earlier and he said that he had won 2 million dollars in the lottery. After the 22% tax deduction, he was only left with 1.6 million dollars. After the investment he had made this morning, he was now left with 60 thousand dollars.

He could barely win Zack with...a mere 60 thousand dollars, right?

Jade gave Javier's leg a light kick under the table with her high heels to warn him but the man dismissed her with a smile.

Opposite of them, Zack was ready for a showdown, his spirit high and burning.

"Come on! Do it if you're a man! Do the reload if you dare or get your *ss out of here!"

Javier gave Zack no reply and turned to smile at the server. "Hi, please bring your card machine here. I'd like to sign up to be a member."

"Tch, mindlessly bold huh!"

Zack patted Terry's head and chuckled. "Make sure to keep your eyes open and watch how he shoots himself in the foot later!"

Terry promptly responded with a servile grin, "Of course. You're so rich, Mr. Dilley. Anyone who dares challenge you is seeking their doom!"

Every line of their back and forth served to mock Javier and both men seemed to revel in doing so.

Javier could care less about them, swiping his card when the server brought over the machine and a new member card. "30 thousand dollars, please."

"How much?!" Zack asked in surprise before the server had even confirmed it with Javier.

He realized that things were unlike what Terry had told him on the way to the hotel. Terry had said that Javier could not even produce three thousand dollars as he was penniless. That was exactly why he dared to bluff about going double however much Javier decided to put in the membership card.

Now that the bluff was too much and he could not just bullsh*t his way out of it, he could only retrieve his bank card in feigned generosity.

"Only this much? What a waste of effort. Here, 60 thousand dollars!"

The beeping of the payment terminal as it printed out the receipt sounded like the erratic beat of Zack's heart which was bleeding inwardly. While it was true that his family had four to six million dollars, there were all fixed assets. It was not like the family factory had been sold off and was cashed into his card.

The 60 thousand dollars he was swiping on his card had been obtained through insistent pleading and whining, squeezed out of his old man's hands in the name of buying a car. Well, look at what had just happened. The receipt came out easily with a few beeps but his Audi A8 was turning into an Audi A4.

And he still acted nonchalant and proud!

“It’s only 60 thousand dollars. This is nothing at all to me, like a drop in the ocean!”

A drop in the ocean, huh... That would be the best.

Javier was going to test the water today. Let’s see how deep Zack’s ocean was!

Chapter 11 Not a Very Deep Ocean

After Zack had finished gloating, he glanced at Jade in hopes of seeing an impressed or admiring gaze, Unfortunately for him, Jade’s head was turned toward the window and was paying him no mind.

Zack decided to speak up some more and attract the woman’s attention.

“60 thousand dollars isn’t much to me actually. This sum is like a drop—”

“Another 30 thousand dollars,” Javier cut in and told the server, not even giving Zack even an inch of opportunity to brag.

The words “in the ocean” died in Zack’s throat as a bewildered look overcame him. Again? Where had the man got another 30 thousand dollars from?

Zack’s head snapped in Terry’s direction, his face filled with a seething, questioning gaze. The latter was on pins and needles. He had no idea either! He heard from Selena that Javier was close to being penniless yet the man was somehow pulling out 30 thousand dollars left and right...

With a loud clap, Terry thought that he had figured out where the money had come from and whispered into Zack’s ear, “Mr. Dilley, I saw him being intimate with a woman this morning. He claimed that she’s his younger sister but now thinking back, he’s most likely her toy boy.”

“Being a gigolo doesn’t bring that much, 60 thousand dollars should be the limit. I’m sure this is Javier’s last run!”

Fueled by the boat he had made in front of Jade and bolstered by Terry’s confident guarantee, Zack allowed his bank card to be swiped once more. His Audi would just have to become a Suzuki, that was fine.

“Okay, okay. Another 60 thousand dollars then. Your dawdling is really boring to me. 30 thousand dollars once, 30 thousand dollars twice... With the way you’re going about this, God knows how long will it be before you finish all the money on my card.”

Look at him shooting his mouth off! It was as if Zack had billions in his bank card.

Javier did not care to give him a reply. Once Zack had swiped another 60 thousand dollars on the payment terminal machine, lazily and languidly, he pushed the man’s button again.

“Here, another 30 thousand dollars.”

“You’re reloading again?!”

Zack exploded instantly and he turned to stare at Terry, his eyes shooting daggers at the cowering man. Terry felt wronged. He thought that his guess had been rather accurate. Who knew how Javier could afford another 30 thousand dollars?

Suddenly, a possibility struck him and he told Zack softly, "Go on. I think he's bluffing this time."

Realizing the same thing, Zack urged the server to charge Javier's card.

But the reality was that...no one was bluffing here.

The machine beeped as it coughed out yet another receipt. When the third receipt from Javier was placed on the table, Zack was stunned. The charged amount was printed on the three receipts, clear as day: 30 thousand dollars each.

Zack only had two receipts with him, 60 thousand dollars each. He wanted to produce a third one as well, but he had no more money! He had only managed to squeeze his old man for 150 thousand dollars. Even if he added on whatever he could scrape together by himself, he could not possibly produce a third receipt which required another 60 thousand dollars.

Javier finally spoke up, "Mr. Dilley, it hasn't been very long yet. Is it possible that you've spent all the money on your card already?"

The jab to his sore spot enraged Zack. "Bullsh*t! All I have is money, more than you could ever see in your life. This sum is just a drop in the ocean for me!"

Javier knocked on the payment terminal machine placed on the table. "I won't argue with you. Pay up if you have the money, shut up if you don't."

Zack was infuriated. He had never been this insulted in his entire life but he did not know what else he could do. The remaining balance in his card stopped him from taking this farce any further. He turned to look at Terry, gesturing at the man via a hooked finger behind his back. He was asking for Terry to foot the next 60 thousand.

While Terry had some money saved throughout the years, he had recently bought a house and a car and was not very liquid at the moment...

"Ha!"

After half a minute of silence, Javier scoffed at Zack and turned toward Jade, turning his back on Zack.

"Ms. Odell, please excuse me. I still have some things to attend to. Please collect the reloaded card on my behalf. You may keep it for company use.

"Oh yeah, and don't pay for today's lunch. I'm not about to steal the limelight from Mr. Hamer."

Javier would much rather grab a cheap burger from a fast-food chain restaurant than sit down to lunch with Terry and Zack. A drop in the ocean? That was not many drops at all! Three times and the ocean was already emptied. It was total bullsh*t!

Zack only yelled in retaliation when he saw Javier turn the corner at the end of the walkway, “Don’t leave if you dare! I have the money. Let’s swipe our cards again! I’ll suffocate you with all my money, you piece of trash!”

The hotel server reminded him with a smile, “Sir, Mr. Kersey has left but if you need to speak to him, I can inform the lobby and have the front desk relay your message to him.”

Well, this was awkward. Zack was only yelling to salvage whatever was left of his pride. He had not expected the server to be so naive. On top of that, the server was not just saying it. She picked up the walkie-talkie pinned to the back of her hips and brought it up to her lips.

“Lobby, lobby, we’re—”

“Hey! Hey, there’s no need. No need to relay anything.”

Zack quickly stopped the server and turned to Jade with a shameless grin. “He’s your worker after all. I ought to save you some face!”

Jade nodded with a courteous smile. “Thank you, Mr. Dilley. I have something to attend to as well, so I’ll be taking my leave now.”

The moment Jade turned to leave, the smile on her face vanished and was replaced by a look of complete disdain. It was not a matter of how rich they were, it was just that she was incredibly put off by someone bluffing and exaggerating their wealth. This sole reason alone was enough for Jade to never give Zack a chance!

After Jade left, Terry tried to excuse himself as well but Zack was not letting him off the hook so easily. Instead, Zack dismissed the server and closed the door to their room. Zack then grabbed a chair and stalked over to Terry.

“Terry Hamer, good job there putting me on the spot and telling me that Kersey only has 60 thousand dollars. Wonderful job!”

Terry inched his way into the corner and finally stammered out an explanation when he had nowhere left to go.

“Mr. Dilley, Mr. Dilley, listen. I really saw him this morning—”

“Ah! Don’t hit me, no! Ow!”

After lunch, Jade called for a management meeting at work to announce Javier’s promotion to the position of vice general manager.

Those in attendance were Jade, Javier, the HR manager, the heads of the various departments, and the finance director, Terry. The man’s head had been wrapped up. The bandages covered over his right eye, while his exposed left eye was bruised and swollen.

After Jade made the announcement, the others clapped in congratulations for Javier’s promotion. The applause was deafening despite the unknown extent of sincerity. Terry was the only one who did not even lift a finger. His exposed and swollen eye dripped with resentment.

If it had not been for Javier, Zack would not have beaten him up so violently. That man had broken three, solid wooden chairs in the process. And the most infuriating part? As he was gingerly stepping up into the ambulance that had come to pick him up, the hotel staff had gone after him and requested that he settle the bill first!

After a few more communal announcements, Jade was about to signal for the end of the meeting when Terry suddenly stood up and boomed, “Ms. Odell, I want to request a raise!”

He then went on to list his contributions to the company over the years, talking about how hard he worked, offering his current state of insisting to stay on and work despite having his head bandaged as proof. He whined and tried his best to garner the pity of his audience. Finally, he threw out an ultimatum. If he was not given a raise, he would resign.

As the company was in need of workers at the moment, Jade had to accept the man’s threat despite how irritated she felt. She reluctantly agreed to Terry’s request. Terry still was not satisfied. He pushed further and requested remunerations that matched the vice general manager’s.

Jade was ticked off. She slowly scanned the rest of the people in the meeting room. “What do the rest of you think?”

No one dared to meet her eyes as she swept her gaze across the room. They either stared at the ceiling or under the table. Some even covered their eyes with their hands. It seemed that everyone wanted a boost in their salary and payment package, given the chance.

This made Jade’s blood boil. There was an entire room of people but no one was taking her side.

“I disagree!”

As disappointment and even despair filled her, Javier spoke up. It felt like a torch in the dark.

Chapter 12 Ruthless Mr. Kersey

Javier’s promotion to the position of vice general manager ruffled Terry’s feathers. It prompted him to snatch the opportunity and show off his hard work and accomplishments, even requesting an increment and better benefits in the process.

He believed that everyone at the table shared his sentiment, so he felt that he would definitely have their support. Reality proved that he was right but he had not expected Javier to step up in the final moment and voice out his disagreement.

“What right do you have to disagree? You got promoted to vice GM with that meager investment you managed to pull in based on your sh*tty luck. Did you hear us say anything about that?”

“Ask everyone here today. Which of us hasn’t worked diligently all these years? Which of us hasn’t put in hard work and the merits to show for it? The total contributions from any one of us are greater than yours!”

“And you want to voice a disagreement? Did you even ask if we agree with you becoming the vice GM?!”

Terry's words brought with it a chorus of assent from the other executives present. The calm of the meeting room broke as people began complaining about their displeasures aloud and joined the side that asked for increments and better benefits.

Jade repeatedly asked for them to quiet down but even as general manager, she could not suppress the collective fervor Terry had instigated because everyone wanted to look out for their own.

The meeting turned into a denouncing rally and things got out of hand.

Javier scanned the group and finally landed on Terry. The latter's gaze glowed with victory and even a hint of a challenge. It was as if he was telling Javier, "Let's see if Jade eliminates you to appease everyone, or gives us all a raise!"

Seeing through the pathetic trick, Javier scoffed and stood up. He strode toward the printer in the corner of the meeting room and connected his cellphone to the machine. After a few swipes, he had printed out a small stack of documents.

As everyone continued arguing their case, he distributed said stack of papers. Everyone except for Terry received a set of documents. This caused the man to be taken aback as he had no idea what Javier had printed.

What was even more shocking was that anyone who was done browsing the document clamped their mouth shut and proceeded to remain seated in silence. It did not take long before the meeting room fell into a state of pin-drop silence.

"What are you guys rea—"

"Terry Hamer!"

With a slam of the table, Jade sprang up, not giving Terry a chance to finish his question. Enraged and shaking, she pointed a finger at him. "I trusted you and this is how you treat me and the company?!"

Alarmed, Terry snatched the document from the person beside him. As his eyes scanned the document, he felt his legs giving out from the panic that was starting to rise once he realized what was written in it.

The embezzlement of company funds he had been involved in, bribes and commissions he had accepted, the accounting numbers that he had manipulated, and whatnot were recorded in detail on the document before him. All of it was real, including some older entries that even the perpetrator himself had forgotten.

Terry had kept all of this information to himself and had never mentioned a word to anyone before. How did Javier manage to find them?

"Hamer, what else do you have to say for yourself?!"

Terry, who was inwardly panicking, forced himself to maintain his composure and cried loudly in defense of his innocence despite Jade's shout.

"This is slander! Someone's framing me! I've toiled for years in this company, making many contributions, if not accomplishments. My conscience is clear, you can't humiliate and defame me like this!"

Javier was not in the mood to fight Terry's vehement denial, so he turned to Jade and said, "Ms. Odell, please call the police. Who knows, the police might actually find Mr. Hamer innocent."

Jade nodded and picked up her phone to do just that.

At his wit's end, Terry tried to run toward Jade but got tripped by the leg of a chair and fell to the floor. As he heard the sound of numbers being dialed, he wailed, "Don't call the police! Don't call the police!"

The man was fearful. He did not want to be put behind bars. Staying on the floor, he begged for mercy, "Ms. Odell, Ms. Odell, I'm in the wrong. I admit it. I got greedy and it blinded me. I'm sorry, I've disappointed you, I've broken your trust. I'm guilty toward the company. I'm scum, I'm worthless. Please... Please don't call the police..."

Jade shook with fury. It had never crossed her mind that her company was keeping such a rotten apple.

"Enough! Keep whatever you have to say for the police!"

Hearing that Jade insisted on calling the police, Terry scrambled to his knees. He pleaded and begged tearfully. As he got on his knees, it was indeed a pitiful sight.

Jade's heart softened and she put down her phone. She decided not to call the police. Instead, she told Terry to put the money he had embezzled back into the company account and leave.

"Oh, and bring Sean Johnson, your accomplice, out of this company as well!"

"Yes, of course, yes. Thank you, Ms. Odell, thank you."

Terry scurried out of the meeting room as quickly as he could.

Javier was not bothered to watch the man leave. Instead, he turned to look at those who were still in the meeting room.

"Ms. Odell won't allow me to put everything up here but that doesn't mean that I have no proof. A sincere word of advice to you guys, get a clear conscience, and do your job as you should. The company won't mistreat you, your reward will go up with the results you produce.

"But if you try to execute any nefarious plan you may have in your head... Well then... Ha!"

The last word came out as more of a scoff that sounded so grating to the ears that it put everyone on pins and needles. When Jade finally dismissed them, they all left the meeting room like they were fleeing for their lives.

After Javier had used Terry to set a precedent, it was obvious that they were all afraid of the man. As someone at the management level, no one dared to say that they had no hidden dirt. What happened today had truly alarmed them, making them realize that their new vice general manager, Mr. Kersey, was ruthless!

After the others had scrambled off, Javier was about to leave the meeting room as well but Jade stopped him.

"Javier, hold on for a minute. I'd like to talk to you."

At the same time, Sean stood outside the meeting room in the common area, boasting to his coworker.

"I knew about Javier's promotion to being vice general manager right after lunch. Don't worry. He won't last. Who knows, maybe he'll even be sacked today? We have Mr. Hamer, y'know. He is Beacon Tires' head of finance. Do you think that Ms. Odell would dare offend him? Hah!

"Let me tell you. There's no use bootlicking anyone else in the office. You gotta be like me, just pander to Mr. Hamer."

As he spoke, Terry walked up to Sean and said, "Let's go!"

"Sure!" Sean tossed a preening gaze to his coworker and got up to follow Terry. "Where to, Mr. Hamer?"

Terry ignored him and kept marching ahead with a glower on his face. But since his face was mostly covered in bandages, Sean did not realize the ugly mood the man was in. Eager to know where they were headed, Sean kept repeatedly asking Terry where they were going.

Annoyed by the constant questions, Terry turned to growl at the man, "We've both just been fired! We have to get out of the office right now. Are you happy?"

Sean was astounded. He was just bragging to his coworker about how wonderful it was to follow Terry and now they were fired? Snapping back to reality, he continued to ask Terry why but the man paid no attention to him.

When they reached the company entrance, Terry pulled out his phone to call Zack. After some pleading humbly and servilely for a few minutes, he got himself a new job and would be starting immediately at Zack's company. As he thanked the man repeatedly, Sean kept poking Terry's chest to remind him, "Me, me. What about me?"

Once Terry hung up, he shoved Sean away. "F*ck off! P*ss of wherever you want!"

Sean froze from shock.

After a few moments, Selena exited the building and came after Terry. The man left with an arm around the woman. He had lost his job, but lucky for him, he still had a beauty in his arm.

As they walked away, Selena asked, "Was Javier...really promoted to vice general manager?"

Chapter 13 Bum of a Vice General Manager Visits

Jade was seated at the head of the table in the meeting room while Javier sat next to her. She was grateful to the man for helping her to keep the management executives who were trying to rebel in check, and building her intimidation factor on behalf of her. Despite that, she was still curious and wanted to know how Javier found these things out.

How? Javier had depended on the finance hackers who hacked into Terry's phone and computer. They then tracked down all this information for him, but Javier was not about to disclose that fact.

"I've kept an eye on him a long time ago, so I've been investigating."

His answer did not satisfy Jade. "But how did you get into the details?"

Not wanting to linger on the topic, Javier tried diverting the conversation.

“Ms. Odell, I thought that you asked me to stay because you wanted to talk to me about the additional clause on our contract!”

Jade instantly blushed at the mention of it.

It had been really awkward this morning. She tried to excuse herself but in her rush, she tripped and sprained her ankle. Now that it was brought up again... What could she do? Excuse herself once more?

Just as she was at a loss, her phone rang suddenly.

“Oh, look. I have an important call. That’s all then.”

With that, Jade grabbed her phone to leave, her high heels clicking on the floor hastily with a hint of panic.

Javier shook his head with a chortle but did not stop Jade as he watched her flee. Pulling his phone out, he went through the data the hacker had sent him that not only included Terry’s dirty work. It also contained information regarding Jade.

From what the hacker sent, he unintentionally found out Jade’s real identity during his investigation. The director of the Odello Corporation, one of the top three local companies, was Jade’s grandfather. The woman had left Odello Corp. to prove herself because she was unhappy with the contract marriage that her family had arranged for her.

Her family had given her a tire company that was at the brink of bankruptcy and asked her to bring it in profits within three months. By completing the target for this quarter, Jade would be able to prove herself and free herself from the arranged marriage that was based on only profit and interest. Otherwise, she would have to go home and obey her family’s wishes—sacrifice herself and get married for the family’s greater good.

With Jade’s wish to promote Javier to the department director and help him out of the predicament in the hotel restaurant, the man thought that she was decent.

“I shall give you a hand then. I’ll help you hit this quarter’s target!”

Just as he murmured his decision, Jade returned to the meeting room with a haste in her stride.

“Mr. Kersey, I have an important client to meet this afternoon but I just got an emergency call just now. Please go to this appointment on my behalf as the vice general manager. Don’t worry, I’ll send someone with you to negotiate the deal.”

Javier understood what she meant. He did not have to personally be involved in the negotiation. She just needed him, the vice general manager, to be there in person as a sign of respect. Despite that, Javier did not see himself as a pretty vase. He was one capable talent!

“No need. I can do it on my own.”

“No way. You have never negotiated before. I’ll send someone with you and that’s final!”

After leaving her instructions about the company and executives they were to meet, Jade left in a hurry. By the time she came back to the meeting room with the person who was supposed to go with Javier, the man himself was gone.

“Ugh, Javier must’ve gone to the appointment himself. This is infuriating!”

Jade’s phone rang again, the same number from just now blinked up at her. Unable to care more, she could only hurry off. As for Javier attending the business deal on his own, Jade could not come up with a better solution. She was not hopeful that he would succeed but she hoped the deal would not sour.

Fusion Electric Cars, a rather famous local electric car manufacturer, was the client that Jade had a business appointment with this afternoon.

The purchasing manager of Fusion Electric Cars, Jeremy Laster, was chatting animatedly with Zack in his office at the factory’s office building.

“Mr. Dilley, you’re so capable despite your young age. The car seat company Mr. Dilley Sr. is managing now will surely flourish under your leadership in the future.”

“Oh, Mr. Laster, you flatter me. I did nothing. It’s all due to my father’s efforts. If it weren’t for him, I might only be a regular worker in the company now,” Zack said humbly.

“Unlike you, Mr. Laster, you’ve gotten to the purchasing manager position based on your talent and hard work. I’m really impressed...”

The atmosphere in the office was warm as Jeremy and Zack showered each other with praises. The box of expensive cigars under the table, specifically, had sweetened the mood.

As the men chatted happily, the landline in the office rang. Jeremy put the phone on speaker. “Hello.”

“Mr. Laster, it’s the security booth. We have a vice general manager from Beacon Tires here who says he has an appointment with you.”

Jeremy remembered the appointment and asked the security guard to let the man in. However, Zack was pressed up against the window and was looking down at the entrance.

Beacon Tires was Jade’s company, so the vice general manager had to be...Javier! As he watched through the window, a scowl crept onto his face. Just as he suspected, it was Javier! When he recalled the embarrassment in the hotel restaurant he had suffered earlier this afternoon, Zack’s blood boiled.

Javier wanted to negotiate a business deal now? Dream on!

Thinking quickly, Zack told Jeremy, “Jade’s getting more arrogant now. She’s always gone to negotiate deals personally but why is she sending the vice GM to meet you?”

“I know this man. We just had lunch today. Guy’s bullsh*t.”

“And Jade sent him to talk to you? Is she looking down on this deal or is she looking down on you, Mr. Laster?”

Jeremy’s face fell the moment he heard Zack’s words. “Is that true?”

Zack looked offended. “Mr. Laster, what do you mean? Perhaps you could doubt me if I was their rival, but I manufacture car seats, not tires. What good will it do for me to sabotage them?”

“This man’s name should be Javier Kersey. Call the security and confirm it with them if you don’t believe me!”

Jeremy waved. “Mr. Dilley, you’ve misunderstood me. I didn’t mean it like that.”

Jeremy only looked icier after the perfunctory explanation. He called the security booth and ordered, “Bring the vice GM to the booth so I can speak to him!”

A moment later, Javier’s voice sounded from the other end of the line. “Hello, I’m—”

“Javier Kersey, right? You don’t have to come. I don’t have time to meet a small fry like you. Ask Jade Odell to meet me personally!”

Jeremy hung up right after that, feeling disgruntled. He was annoyed. He had thought that Jade seemed decent. He had not expected this to happen. Not only was she not here personally, but she also sent a bum of a vice general manager to see him. This was blatant disrespect!

While he fumed inwardly, the security booth called again. The moment Jeremy answered, Javier’s voice spoke up, “Laster, don’t regret refusing to see me.”

“Are you threatening me? You’re trying to sell your parts and you’re threatening me?!”

Jeremy was enraged. He had never seen someone so impudent! A supplier was threatening a purchasing manager—had the world lost its mind?!

Zack had poured gasoline into the fire in the office and made Javier out to be someone absolutely outrageous and flippant. It angered Jeremy sufficiently as he growled at the phone, “I’m not seeing Jade even if she personally comes here today. Unless you’re fired, she can forget about supplying tires to us, ever!”

“F*cker, I could go to anyone for tires. How dare you threaten me?”

Zack gloated at the scene, laughing in his mind, ‘Javier Kersey, you’re going down!’

Chapter 14 I Shouldn’t Have Been Rude

Javier put down the phone in the security booth and turned to see the security guard giving him a thumbs up.

“Awesome, man. This is the first time I’m seeing a supplier threatening a purchasing manager. You’re the sh*ts!”

“What a pity you aren’t a robber. The police would have to run if they see you otherwise because you’re absolutely the sh*ts!”

Ignoring the guard’s mocking, Javier left the security booth and found a rock to sit on in the shady area outside of the building. He pulled out his phone to call Ciara.

“Ciara, I’ll send you the company’s name. I want their company’s list of tire orders. Don’t disclose my identity...”

Javier had no wish to come into contact with his family, for now, so he left it to Ciara. After the call, he pulled out a cigarette and lit it up before puffing on it leisurely, not at all looking remorseful that he had just offended a purchasing manager.

The security guard looked at him from afar like he was looking at an idiot, unable to understand which unlucky company would hire an idiot like him for a salesperson.

About ten minutes later, a fat man ran over from the factory’s office area, his extra weight jiggling as he did. He looked completely out of breath but he continued to dash for the entrance anyway.

The security guard straightened up once he saw the fat man and greeted respectfully, “Mr. Farlow!”

The fat man was the general manager of Fusion Electric Cars, Wade Farlow. He ignored the security guard and ran over to Javier’s side, huffing and puffing, before he greeted him servilely, “Hello, you’re Mr. Kersey, the vice GM of Beacon Tires, right?”

Javier nodded and Wade introduced himself immediately as he stretched out his hand to shake Javier’s in a friendly manner. After the pleasantries, Wade probed, “You’re related to...”

Javier did not know who Wade was referring to. There were too many people in the Kerseys and they must have gone through several levels down to where Wade was. Who knew how many petty connections it had taken? There was no way Javier would know whichever small fry Wade was speaking of.

With a side-eye at the man, Javier answered curtly, “That’s beside the question. I’m here for sales!”

Wade grinned awkwardly. “No way, someone as brilliant as you came here for sales? Is this a joke?”

Javier, who was seated on the rock, retorted, “Am I close to you? Why would I joke with you?”

Well, that made the situation awkward for Wade. Fortunately, Javier did not put him in the spot for too long as he spoke up again, “Your purchasing manager, Jeremy Laster, is it? That man’s a wonder, huh? He refused to even see me when I’m here for a business deal and threatened me with the sales, asking for my boss to fire me. Question for you, what’s so great about him, yeah?”

D*mn it. He knew it. Wade knew that something must have happened. Why else would the commerce bureau’s higher-up call him personally?

Wade was furious the moment he heard that Jeremy had caused trouble. That b*stard could not wait for his company to go down, could he?

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Kersey. My apologies. I had neglected to train my staff and they have caused you trouble.”

After a series of apologies, Wade called Jeremy. “Get yourself here right this instant—the factory gate!”

Jeremy was reveling in Zack’s pandering and flattery in his office. He had to mention that expensive cigarettes did taste smoother, too.

Suddenly receiving his boss' enraged call, he got up to rush to the man's side. Wade slapped a hand down Jeremy's head the moment he got to the gate.

"Either do your job properly or get the hell out of here!"

Jeremy was bewildered. "Mr. Farlow, why are you hitting me?"

Did he just ask that? He had the cheek to ask him? Wade kicked the man out of rage and pulled him to the side to relay the entire situation.

Jeremy was startled. He had completely thought that Javier was nothing but a fool only for the latter to turn out to be some big shot. He plastered on a smile—more like a grimace really—as he walked toward Javier.

"Mr. Kersey, I apologize for looking down on you and insulting you just now. I was blind. I shouldn't have been rude..."

As Jeremy apologized, he felt wronged. Who was the rude, insolent one here? He was a purchasing manager who got threatened by a supplier and he had to bow down and apologize meekly. Oh, the grievance!

Javier did not make things difficult for Jeremy, saying, "I just want to know why you called the security guard to chase me out when you've already agreed to let me in, and taunted me too, at that. Care to share the reason?"

Jeremy was infuriated once this was brought up. He had Zack to thank for! If it were not for Zack, he would stay unscathed today. Would he have offended this big shot? Would he have been slapped and kicked by his boss?

Almost instantly, he poured out everything that Zack had told him, the whole truth of the matter, out clean.

Zack Dilley, the man who had the ocean... They met again. Great. Javier smiled at Jeremy and asked, "Mr. Laster, regarding the order for our company's tires..."

Before Jeremy said anything, Wade decided there and then. "All of it. As long as our factory's manufacturing, the order is your company's!"

Javier nodded. "And Zack Dilley's car seat company..."

Jeremy was quick to speak up this time. "Rejected, nullified. Anything we have. We'll cease all collaborations with them from now on!"

"And my identity?" Javier tossed the last question he had.

"Kept confidential!" Wade and Jeremy answered simultaneously.

Very well. Javier was happy with the men's attitudes, so he stood up, patted the dust off his bottom, and glanced over at the security guard who stood straight like a flag pole.

The security guard felt his soul leaving him when he felt Javier's gaze on him. How could he possibly know that the visitor was someone so influential that their general manager had to bow down to him? If the latter knew that he had just mocked the man, he would be sacked immediately!

Despite what had happened, Javier ignored him and turned to leave. It made the guard breathe out a sigh of relief. He was aware that Javier did not find fault with him not because he had forgotten about it, but because he couldn't care less. This was the mannerism of someone successful—generous and magnanimous!

At the same time, Zack was puffing a cigarette in a great mood in Jeremy's office. He could not help imagining Jade kicking Javier out for ruining the business when he returned to the company. And as Jade fretted over the deal, Zack would then arrive like a heroic savior and put in a few good words for her to Jeremy.

When the deal went through successfully later, Jade would look at him with starry eyes filled with admiration, give him her heart and a kiss... The more Zack fantasized, the more excited he grew that he nearly laughed out loud to himself.

It was at the same time the door to the office opened and in came Jeremy.

"Dilley, get the f*ck out of here! With your car seats!"

Chapter 15 Drop the Rich Act

Zack was stunned. The earlier mood had been pretty friendly. What happened? He was still thinking of striking the deal and signing the new contract today, so imagine his surprise when Jeremy came in and blurted out those words.

Before he could recover from the shock, Jeremy dashed to his work desk and tore up the contract that Zack had brought into shreds.

"Trying to seal the deal? Deal my *ss! Leave with your car seats right now!"

Zack was anxious and looked flummoxed.

"Wait, Mr. Laster. Didn't we agree that there's no issue with the new contract? I've produced and sent the car seats here without having the contract signed first based on my trust for you. You can't do this! Even if we're not signing the new agreement, for now, that's fine, but you could at least take this batch of car seats off my hands first!"

Pulling out a pack of cigarettes, Zack wanted to go up and offer Jeremy a stick but the latter swatted it away. Not only was he not accepting the stick, but he also grabbed the expensive cigars under the table and tossed them all at Zack.

"You better leave now with those car seats in the warehouse. Otherwise, I won't be paying you a cent even if they get installed in the cars!"

Zack was at the brink of tears. "No, wait. Mr. Laster, tell me what's going on!"

"What's going on? It's none of your business. P*ss off!"

Not wanting to say another word to Zack, Jeremy hauled him out angrily and threatened to call the security if he refused to leave.

Zack, who had just been a guest earlier, stood at the office door like an unwelcome dog in just a blink of an eye. He was still muttering aggrievedly, "Why..."

At the same time, Jade was on the road, speeding her way home. When her phone rang, her heart dropped at the sight of the name on the screen.

"Sh*t! Jeremy's calling. I knew I shouldn't have let Javier go alone. See, we're in big trouble now!"

Answering the call promptly, Jade was already rehearsing her sincere and genuine apologetic speech. But before she could say a word, Jeremy's voice came through.

"Ms. Odell, our talk went well. Fusion will be taking its entire supply of tires from you from now on."

"What?!"

Jade's apology hung off her lips at Jeremy's announcement. It surprised her so much that she nearly ran into the car in front of her that was making a turn. It was after some frantic swerving that she managed to park her car by the curb.

"Hold on, Mr. Laster. What did you just say? I didn't quite catch it."

Unable to believe her ears, Jade realized that what she heard was real after Jeremy repeated himself. The man hung up politely after informing her about the signing of the contract. Jade was left in a stupor as she held the phone against her ear.

"How did Javier go about the negotiation? This is amazing! He managed to score the deal within half an hour and it's an exclusive supply deal!"

Delight filled Jade's face as she murmured to herself. Although she was skeptical about Javier's negotiation, what mattered most was that she had something to bring back home! Her family had been asking her to come back but she was without any concrete accomplishments. This time, she could finally keep her head high.

She had filled up one-third of the company's loss now and there were still two and a half months before the quarter was over. As long as she could get two more deals in the remaining time and recover Beacon Tires' loss, she would win!

Jade could not help but be thrilled once she thought of it and danced in her car, her limbs flailing as she squealed like an excited lunatic. A passerby stopped his bicycle to peer into the car in surprise and asked, "Do you... Do you need me to call for help?"

Embarrassed, she said no and quickly drove off. Despite that, Jade felt that Javier was truly her lucky star. He was brilliant for securing the investment and scoring such an important deal!

While Jade was overjoyed, her self-acknowledged lucky star, Javier was glum. He had been waiting for a ride by the side of the road but buses sped past with blinking signals despite reaching the stop and the cabs that passed were all filled with passengers, even Uber had no driver available. It had already been more than ten minutes since he started waiting.

He had millions of dollars in his pocket but he could not even get a ride. Javier was indignant. He was going to buy a car!

Recalling that there was a car dealership by the road from when he passed by earlier, he made his way there instantly. As for the USSV Rhino GX, that tank of an SUV was too eye-catching. Javier did not like that and decided he would give it to Ciara.

As he crossed the street and strolled past shaded walkways, he came to the dealership a few minutes later.

“Hello, welcome to Mercedes-Benz.”

The saleslady welcomed Javier with a smile, to which the latter nodded in response and moved to walk in.

It was exactly at that moment that a mocking voice spoke up behind him. “Oh, look who got himself in with a Mercedes dealer. What now? You didn’t get your sales and you’re trying to put up a façade with a new Mercedes? Or are you here to enjoy the free air-conditioning?”

Javier turned to see Zack’s derisive sneer staring back at him.

The latter was here to buy a car too. Although he had spent 120 thousand dollars loading up the restaurant card this afternoon, he was a crafty one! He put in another 15 thousand dollars before he left the hotel and went home to show it off to his old man.

“The hotel’s having a promotion now. There’s a complimentary 7.5 thousand dollars for each 60 thousand dollars reloaded and 15 thousand dollars for each 120 thousand dollars. I was thinking that we usually host our clients and guests there, so we’d get 15 thousand dollars for nothing. Instead of buying the car I wanted, I put 120 thousand dollars in the card.”

His old man was delighted at the news, praising Zack for being sensible and giving him another 150 thousand dollars to buy a car.

Zack had wanted an Audi but that would not do now. He had tanked the order with Fusion Electric Cars and the car seats sent there were currently being sent back to their own plant in a truck. He’d better buy his car now or his old man would withdraw the money when he found out and got angry.

That explained why Zack had come to the nearest Mercedes-Benz dealer—so he could spend what he had and get himself a car first!

He was not expecting to run into Javier here, so his disgruntlement prompted him to taunt the man.

“Hey, Kersey. I heard from Terry that you got a sugar mommy? What, is it her 60th birthday today, so you’re making her buy you the car in the name of gifting it to her?”

The car dealership was a public space. Javier had no right to make Zack shut up but he could ignore him. Turning around, Javier entered the lobby and began browsing the cars as he was led by the saleslady.

“See, he won’t admit that he’s poor and is still putting up a rich act. You’ll leave empty-handed by the end of the day anyway! Pfft!”

Making a show of entering the showroom, Zack raised his right hand.

“I’m buying a car, a luxury Mercedes. Get a pretty girl to serve me. I have the money, come get your commission!”

It was not like the salesladies in the dealership had never met nouveau riches before, but this was their first time seeing one who was so insolent. Out of their professionalism, however, a saleslady went up to Zack and inquired amicably.

“Hi, sir. What model would you like? We have the A-Class, the CLA coupe, the GLA...”

Zack was immediately offended. “What are you trying to say? I told you, I want the luxury one. Why are you introducing the 30-45 thousand dollars subcompacts to me? Are you looking down on me? Do you think I don’t have the money?”

“I’m letting you know I have the money! It’s just a stupid Mercedes. The price is like a drop in my money ocean!”

Alright... The saleslady understood the man.

“Here, sir. Please come this way. This is the latest model we have, G500. It is 248 thousand dollars and a perfect match to your honorable status.”

Uh... The car looked wonderful and the status befitted Zack’s but... he did not quite have enough money for it...

Chapter 16 Ashamed to Be Driving the Same Brand

Having boasted really loudly but being unable to afford the car was simply embarrassing, but Zack, who was a master of such scenarios, was not at all fazed by an awkward accident like this.

“There’s no hurry. One can’t just look at the honor of buying a car. There’s a vibe too. I’ve got to pick one that matches my vibe.”

As he tried to pave his way out of the embarrassment, he walked around and browsed through the other cars. Looking at the price tags placed atop the cars, Zack was distraught when he saw none cost less than millions of dollars. However, refusing to show his distress, he shook his head at the GLS with his fingers clasping his chin.

“Nah, I don’t like the 9AT gearbox.”

When Zack came to the G500, he put on a deep frown. “What the heck is this? Its corners are so angular that it looks like a coffin. What a bad omen...”

The man did not even stop in his tracks when he passed the performance line of the brand, the AMG GLE-class. “I don’t like coupes. Horrible combination. The engineers must have lost their mind when they were designing this trash...”

Whatever car it was, as long as the price went over several hundred thousand dollars—whether it was the retail price or the out the door (OTD) price, Zack would find reasons to dislike it. And of course, none

of the reasons had anything to do with the cost of the cars. He tried to make it sound as though he was rich enough to afford them, and that he just did not like them.

As he picked and complained, he finally came to an area of the showroom that had models within his budget of not more than several hundred thousand dollars OTD.

“This is it! These match my vibe and status with their lofty and exquisite looks. Its luxury is low-profile and muted. What a gorgeous car... It’s like they were designed specifically for me. The designer knows exactly what I was looking for. Brilliant!”

The saleslady felt that this man was absolutely despicable and wanted to put on a grimace, but out of her professionalism, she had to plaster on a warm smile.

“Sir, this is an AMG GLC-class. the 3.0T costs 101 thousand dollars, the 4.0T costs 152 thousand dollars...”

The saleslady droned on about the car but Zack was not listening to her and was doing the calculations in his mind.

‘Buying the low spec would make me look cheap but the full spec... Sales tax is about 10%, I’m guessing insurance goes up to around three thousand dollars, the registration fee is probably some 50 dollars...’

After some calculation, Zack concluded that he would need a little less than 173 thousand dollars for the car. That’s fine, he had that amount. He had 15 thousand dollars extra from noon, so that would cover it.

Now assured, Zack began to bluster.

“Save your speech. I’m not petty with my purchases. I’ll buy it if I like it and I’ll buy the best available! I’ll take the 4.0T. As for discounts and whatnot, do as you please. I won’t ask about it, just get it done for me.”

With a confident wave of a hand, Zack sent the saleslady to get the contract.

He kept his hands clasped behind his back as he strolled to where Javier was and preened at the latter. The saleslady who was serving Javier greeted him politely, “Sir, have you decided on the car you want?”

“Of course. A full spec AMG at over a hundred thousand dollars, OTD. I liked it so I bought it. Such a small sum doesn’t matter to me!”

Zack then continued to tell the saleslady, “But I feel bad for you. If you’d served me, you’d be counting your commission in glee already. You didn’t, though. You’re serving him. He’s so poor that his wife ran off with someone else and he’s here looking at Mercedes?”

“I’m just putting this out there for you. The man his wife ran off with? He was crying and begging me to give him a job just this afternoon!”

The corner of Javier’s lips twitched. He had not wanted to bother with the guy but he couldn’t hold himself back anymore.

“Man, just admit that you don’t have the money. Why are you making up so many excuses? Did you hear yourself just now? How embarrassing did you sound when you talked about vibe and status? And as if you know so much about cars... You said you don’t like the 9AT gearbox, but don’t you know that the car you picked has the same exact transmission spec, a 9AT gearbox?”

“And to boast here about buying a full spec AMG... AMG my *ss! It’s only a GLC-class and you’re crowing about it?”

“When you pranced around the showroom earlier, you must have been thinking which model would cost less than several hundred thousand dollars at OTD price, huh? What? Don’t have enough money for it?”

Javier’s retorts were snarky and were aimed right at Zack’s sore spots. It flustered the latter and the man glared back at Javier.

“Bullsh*t! Since when do I not have enough money? Money’s all I have! It’s just a stupid car. How much would it cost me? It’s like a drop in the ocean for me!”

“Do you think everyone here’s like you? Spending so much time here just to find some stupid A-Class that’s over 30 thousand dollars? Good job!”

“I’m not even trying to make fun of you at this point. You can’t even afford an A-Class. You best put your hands together and pray. Oh, dear lord, please. Let me make a big fortune so that I can afford a Mercedes in the future. I don’t even mind if it’s an A-Class!”

Not only was Zack putting on a high-pitched whine as said those last words, he even put his hands together as if in prayer to drive home his mockery of Javier, as if he wouldn’t relent until he made sure he had quashed Javier completely.

Before he continued with his taunts, the saleslady that had been serving him came back with his car sales agreement.

“What a waste of my effort talking to you. Scum! I’m not bragging but you won’t be able to afford my car your entire life!”

“And you’re still checking out the A-Class. If you actually get around to buying it, it’d be a humiliation to my car. I’m ashamed to be driving the same brand as you!”

After another round of tirade, Zack went off to sign and pay in glee.

Javier scoffed. He actually had no intention of buying the A180L, he just found the new sedan pretty nice looking. The saleslady attending to him spoke up, “Don’t mind him, sir. Some people are just like that.”

Javier paused and turned to glance at the saleslady. She wore a kind smile that could warm anybody’s heart. He felt she was rather decent. Since he had already taken a look at the cars he wanted, Javier decided to buy a car and let the lady earn her commission, figuring that a kind person should be repaid for her kind deed.

“I saw that you have a special edition G63 in your inner foyer just now?”

The saleslady nodded. "We do. It had just arrived in the showroom. It's a display unit for an auto show which is in two days from now."

Nodding in comprehension, Javier continued asking, "Can it be bought?"

The saleslady answered with a chuckle, "Who knows? It's over 300 hundred thousand dollars. It's hard to tell if anyone could buy it"

What Javier meant was that if the car was for sale but the saleslady's reply had indirectly answered him. Hence, he pulled out his Messer card and passed it to her.

"There's no password. You can just swipe it. I'd like to drive off with it today."

The saleslady was astonished. She thought that Javier was joking but his serious look did not look like he was at all. Skeptically, she went to the payment counter with the metal bank card.

A while later, Zack came out holding an envelope and his car key looking smug.

"Ah, I'm only buying a car. Look at you guys insisting to throw me some sort of celebration ceremony. Hah... It's just a car over a hundred thousand dollars. It's not worth that sort of formality. What an exaggeration! I don't even care for that amount of money!

"It's not even money. It's just a drop of water, a drop of water in the ocean. Hah, that's how rich I am!"

Javier watched Zack blow his own trumpet and could not even bring himself to scoff at the latter.

A few minutes later, the staff at the dealership was done with preparing the small ceremony, had put out the red carpet, and had driven the new car over. There was another one of them holding a big ribbon to put on the car.

Zack threw a victorious glance at Javier. "Scum, you want to drop the act now? Come on, buy a car. Come stand next to me too!"

While he gloated, the manager of the dealership came out to instruct the staff farther away. "Hey guys, come here. Put that pause on the ceremony. Put out another red carpet. We're ringing the bell twice today!"

Chapter 17 A Grand Ceremony

Ringling the bell twice would mean that the car dealership had made two sales at the same time.

When Zack found out from the staff beside him, he was upset about it. He and Javier were the only two customers in the dealership. Who else could have bought a car after him?

"F*ck this sh*t, no way I'm accepting this. I bought an AMG. Why should his cheap A-Class get to share my glory?"

"That dirt-cheap A-Class standing next to my car will be a big humiliation to it. I..."

As Zack shot off his mouth, he saw the special edition G63 that cost 387 thousand dollars parked in the showroom being driven out. There was no denying that the car looked lofty and Zack let the admiration

color his eyes. He thought that he was definitely buying himself a G63 too when he had the money in the future!

When he unintentionally discovered that Javier was paying attention to the car as well, he sneered almost instinctively.

“Kersey, yo, you’re not thinking that this car is yours, right? Stop fantasizing. They’re just backing the car so that they can drive your stupid A-Class out.

“What an honor that trash of an A-Class of yours has, ay? A G63 has to move out of the way for it. Do you know how much this car is? At least 300 thousand dollars OTD. This might actually be your only moment of glory in life, y’know, having a G63 make way for you? Hah!”

Javier ignored Zack, afraid that he would catch the man’s stupidity if he talked to him. Zack still rambled on, as if his status would be elevated the harsher he taunted the former. And a few moments later, he realized that the G63 was not making space for anyone. It was actually being driven to the red carpet.

The staff quickly went up and tied a huge ribbon around it.

On the left was a G63 which was over 300 thousand dollars OTD while on the right was an AMG a little over 100 thousand dollars. They were both parked on the red carpet side by side. Since the brand logos were the same, it was even more awkward as the class difference between the cheaper and more expensive models was obvious to everyone who saw it.

The kind-hearted sales lady came at that moment to pass the envelope to Javier.

“Mr. Kersey, the car purchasing agreement, the car key, and your bank card are all inside along with the manuals and whatnot.”

Javier accepted it and nodded at her with a smile. “Alright, thank you for going through all that trouble for me.”

The saleslady waved in dismissal quickly. “No trouble at all. I should be thanking you instead.”

She was being sincere. Although the commission selling luxury cars was rather low, it was still some eight to ten thousand dollars...

Zack, who was standing a little ways away, was thoroughly dumbstruck. He had just made fun of Javier for buying an A-Class and taunted that the most glorious moment in his life would be the G63 making way for him, only to realize that the man had bought said G63. Oh, the loud slap in the face!

Looking at the smiling faces around him, no matter how he looked at it, it was like they were laughing at him for being a total dumb*ss. Flushed red in embarrassment, Zack was too mortified to stay for the little ceremony the dealer had for him. He had made a complete fool out of himself.

“Forget about the ceremony. My time is valuable. I make tens of thousands per minute. No time to be wasted over you guys!”

Zack stomped toward his car and pulled the ribbon off to get into the vehicle when Javier asked him, “Mr. Dilley, is it because you’re ashamed to be driving the same brand as me?”

With what he said being thrown back at him, Zack was both embarrassed and angered. No matter how he looked at it, the words were grating and they brimmed with mockery. It made him feel like rushing up to Javier and choking him dead!

Smiling, Javier shook hands with the saleslady. "The ceremony is nice but I'll have to excuse myself. I still have things to attend to, my apologies."

After a polite exchange, Javier got into the car and drove off, not even sparing Zack a backward glance.

Hearing the G63's engine purr deliciously as it sped off, Zack was close to exploding as he was filled with rage. He lifted his leg to kick the tire of his car but missed and got the wheel fender instead, causing a large dent and the mudguard to crack.

Zack was befuddled. He had kicked the tire to vent his frustration but missed his target completely. Promptly crouching to pat the dent, Zack looked pained. His new car! It was damaged!

A staff member went up to comfort him amicably. "Sir, our workshop is just at the back. We have the parts. It's not expensive to replace the fender and mudguard. We'll even give you a discount on the workmanship. You don't have to feel too upset."

Zack was infuriated, shouting indignantly, "I'm upset? Bullsh*t!"

"Do I need your discount? I have the money! This petty sum is a drop in the ocean to me!"

As the employee secretly cursed out the bragger, Javier was already on his way back to the office. As he drove, he figured that he ought to find some time to go back to his place and pack up his personal belongings. Just as he thought about it, he spotted Selena standing by the side of the road.

Without a shade around, Selena was standing under the hot sun and looked rather miserable. Javier wanted to step on the accelerator and zoom off but ultimately stopped next to her after some silent contemplation.

"What are you doing standing by the road under the hot sun?"

As the window came down, Selena looked fretful when she saw it was Javier who popped his head out of the Mercedes G63. She quickly tugged some hair over her left cheek but not before Javier noted the bruise there.

"I-I'm fine. I'm just taking a stroll."

Javier did not expose the woman's blatant lie and just opened the door to his passenger seat instead.

"Hop in. I'll send you back," he added upon spotting the sight of Selena's awkward expression. "Don't worry. I'm not trying to show off. I'm on the way back to the house anyway, to grab my stuff."

After a moment's hesitation, Selena stiffly got into the car.

The car cruised along the road smoothly, taking the pair to the rented unit they had stayed in together. Selena kept her head down and did not say a word as Javier stayed quiet as well.

When they were home and were packing up, neither of them said much to the other either. It was not until Javier was done packing up and was about to leave that the silence was broken. He informed the woman out of courtesy, "I'll be leaving now."

Selena did not reply, and Javier did not need her to, as he headed for the door with his suitcase. The moment his hand came into contact with the doorknob, however, Selena cried from the living room.

"Javier!"

With a slight frown, the man turned to see the woman sobbing on the couch, cradling her head.

"I'm sorry, Javier. I'm sorry. I was wrong..."

"I betrayed our vows and your feelings for me, I'm so sorry..."

"Greed and materialism blinded me. I'm a materialistic woman, I deserve it..."

If Selena was only apologizing to him because of his new job and his new car, Javier refused to accept it. But through her tears, Selena told him in tears that she was not asking him to get back together with her. She told him that she had had a fight with Terry and the man had slapped her before abandoning her by the side of the road. It was only then she realized the difference between Terry and Javier.

"I'm not asking you to get back together with me. I'm just apologizing for the hurt I've caused you. I'm sorry."

Javier stood at the door in silence for a moment before finally saying, "It's all in the past now. Let's just leave it there."

With that, he opened the door and left with his suitcase. To Selena, however, Javier was not only leaving with his suitcase—he was leaving with her only happiness in life.

When the door to the apartment shut, sobs and wails of remorse rang out from inside...

As Javier was closing the door to his old unit, Jade was opening the door to her house. Her mother was not the only one at home. There was also her second uncle who had come to force her to agree with the arranged marriage.

Chapter 18 It's for Your Own Good

The call that Jade had received in the meeting room earlier had been from her mother, Catherine Nance-Odell, who had urged her to return home.

The moment Jade opened the door, Catherine hurried up to her and spoke urgently, "Jade, your Uncle Matthew's here to ask you to get married again..."

"I know, mom. You told me on the phone. Don't worry."

Soothing Catherine, Jade entered the living room and was greeted by Matthew Odell who was sitting on the couch, smoking with one leg crossed over the other.

“Uncle Matthew, according to the agreement I’ve made with the family, there’s still two months before the end of the quarter. What are you trying to do by coming to our house and forcing me to get married?”

Matthew frowned instantly. “What do you mean forcing you to get married? Am I doing that? This is for your own good. I’m doing this for my niece’s sake!

“My elder brother passed away early and left the two of you all alone. I want to find you good in-laws so both of you mother and daughter will have good support and a safety net to fall back on. Is that so wrong of me?”

After the man questioned Jade, he turned to Catherine.

“You too, sis-in-law. Look at how you’ve spoiled Jade. She does what she wants without caring for the family’s best interest or her own wellbeing, fighting back and insisting to prove herself... Why is there any need to prove herself?”

“People say that a spoiled child is the result of their parents’ doing. Brother has passed on. As her mother, are you going to bear the responsibility of failing to educate your child?”

Catherine was quick to nod timidly at Matthew’s berating. “It’s my fault, it’s my fault...”

Catherine had come from the countryside. Jade’s father had married her despite his family’s prohibition back then. Without any education, ability, or background, Catherine had to swallow her pride the day she was married into the Odells and had always acted like a meek servant whenever he was facing the family.

Back when Jade’s father was still around, someone could protect her. Now that her man was gone, she could only bow even lower.

“Mom!” Jade was exasperated at her mother’s weak spine. “You’re his elder sister-in-law. Why are you bowing down to him?”

Jade then raised her voice at Matthew. “This is your elder sister-in-law! You should at least respect that rank. Is this how you should be talking to her?”

Jade never backed down from a confrontation and was a stark contrast to Catherine.

“And don’t think I don’t know what you and your people are up to!

“Odello Corp. wants to get listed and grandfather wants to get it done legitimately. But since he had fallen ill, you guys are trying to take the shortcut and are trying to force me to get married to pander to that b*stard from the Dunhams because he likes me. You’re hoping to gain support from the Dunhams.

“Don’t think that you can hide something so obvious from me. I’m not a fool!”

With his plan exposed, Matthew was enraged by the embarrassment. He threw the remaining half of his cigarette on the floor and cursed.

“Bullsh*t! If I really wanted to force you, do you think you could still fight for that so-called chance to prove yourself?”

Jade scoffed audibly at Matthew's attempt to defend himself. "Uncle Matthew, save yourself some pride. If it weren't for the old men in the corporation supporting me due to my deceased father, would you have spared me the chance?"

With everything out in the open, Matthew felt like he had been slapped in the face. Seeing as he could no longer hide the truth, he decided to divert the topic.

"I'm not here for your nonsense. You whine about proving yourself, so what have you proved? How useless you are?"

"I sent someone over to check yesterday. It's been half a month and that tire company basically achieved nothing under your management. There's no accomplishment nor result. If this is your ability, I'd suggest you put on the wedding dress and get married straight away.

"Get yourself married and become Dunham's daughter-in-law, then help Odello Corp. get listed. This will be the biggest achievement you could accomplish as a woman!"

Jade snorted. "You sent someone to check on me yesterday? Why didn't you send them again today?"

"Sorry to disappoint you, Uncle Matthew. I just got a big order. It's more than enough to fill up one-third of the loss within our agreed time. Give me another half a year and I could turn Beacon Tires' losses into profits with this order alone!

"Didn't you ask what I've proved? This is what I'm proving—my ability!"

Matthew was stunned by Jade's retort. He had come today to force Jade to let the agreement go and get married soon due to the information he had received yesterday, not expecting that there would be a turn of events today. Jade had gotten herself a big order.

As for the results of the agreed three months, the man did not doubt Jade at all. It was just that...had Jade really filled up one-third of the loss when so many people had been powerless when it came to this pathetic tire company that was close to bankruptcy?

While Matthew was still at a loss for words, Jade questioned, "What else do you have to say?"

Gaping and stammering, Matthew's embarrassment got the better of him and he slammed the table angrily.

"Watch your tone! I'm your uncle! How dare you speak to me like this?! I'll also have you know that you won't last long in business over a stroke of luck! You're not built for the business world. Just get married! That's the right choice for you!"

With that, Matthew got up to leave without giving Jade a chance to fight back.

After sending the man off with a forced smile, Catherine went back to Jade and persuaded her softly, "Jade, why don't you just get married? The man's family is well to do and we'll have a good life. You should just stop fighting them..."

"Mom!" Jade was incredulous. "If you don't support me, fine. But why would you side with the outsiders?!"

Catherine muttered softly with a lowered head, "It's for your own good."

Her own good again. Everyone who asked her to get married said the same thing, that it was for her own good.

Indignant, Jade was about to argue with Catherine that she ought to give her freedom and not interfere with her life if she really cared about her own good, but once she saw how meek the woman was, she felt bad for her mother.

"Alright, Mom, stop fretting. We don't have to depend on others. Trust me, I can do it..."

After placating Catherine, Jade left and drove back to the office. All the way there, she sulked until she recalled the shock Matthew had been in when she threw the accomplishment in his face. For that, she was grateful to Javier for what he did. Otherwise, she would not have been able to stand tall and proud today.

Driving into the company parking lot, Jade ran into Javier who had just got back after taking care of his personal affair. When she saw the brand new Mercedes G63, she went around the car, clicking her tongue as she went.

"Mr. Kersey, looks like you won quite a big lottery huh? I don't think it's just 2 million dollars."

Javier chuckled and replied perfunctorily before asking, "So, when are we carrying out the additional clause, Ms. Odell?"

Jade clammed up immediately. Forget about where Javier's money came from, forget about how Javier got the business deal. The additional term she had personally added was her Achilles' heel. Any poke or prod at it felt horrible.

The woman diverted the topic swiftly. "A big company's preparing to call for tender. It'd be wonderful if we can get it. They're publishing the invitation and proposal this afternoon so I'll be going there to check it out instead of going into the office."

With that, Jade turned to leave but Javier caught her arm. She thought that she was doomed. The man would not try to force himself on her, would he? She was then greeted with the sight of the keys to the Mercedes. Javier pushed them toward her as he spoke, "Take this car. Your appearance represents the company's capability to some extent."

Thinking that he was right, Jade did not refuse the offer. She exchanged the key to her Volkswagen Passat with Javier and left with his new car.

Walking into the building, Javier headed back to his office. Just as the doors opened, he spotted a young man who was barely 20 years old sitting in his chair. The latter had both his legs propped up on Javier's desk as he toyed with his phone leisurely.

With a tilt of the head and a side-eye at Javier, the young man made a waving gesture. "Javier Kersey, is it? No need to stand there while you attend to me. I'm not big on formalities. Sit down!"