

An Understated Dominance by Marina Vittori Chapter 31 -

Chapter 31

Dustin drove over to the Nicholsons' home at noon. The villa was in a secluded neighborhood, with flowers and hedges decorating the front yard.

Dahlia was right outside. Dustin tried to avoid her but was still spotted.

"Stop right there! I need to talk to you!"

"What is it?" Dustin asked. Their backs were to each other as they spoke.

"I haven't told Granddad about our divorce because of his condition."

"Do you think we can keep him from finding out?"

"I'll find a chance to tell him after, just not today."

"Alright. Anything else?"

"Nope." Dahlia turned and went inside the house without another word.

They never once looked at each other, acting like complete strangers.

Dustin took a deep breath and went in as well, wine in hand. The living room was filled with people, including most of the Nicholsons.

Only John, Dahlia's father, was absent, still outside on his trip.

Yet someone was sitting in his usual seat this time, an outsider too—Chris Nolan.

"How rude to have us elders wait on him like this," Florence jeered, her expression

mean.

“Shh, Mom. He might get upset and hurt you!” James chirped loudly. He hadn’t let go of what had happened yesterday. The bruises were still visible on his face.

“Alright, now that everyone’s here, let’s have dinner.” Henry Nicholson announced, beaming at Dustin. “Come and sit beside me, kid.”

“Sure.” Dustin smiled in return and helped the old man to his seat.

James scowled, his eyes burning with jealousy. “Kiss—ass!”

He had never understood why his grandfather doted on Dustin. James was the old man’s grandson by blood!

“Come, let us all drink!” Henry toasted.

“Granddad, look at this.” James pulled up a decorated box of wine. “Chris brought this beautiful wine over, a fine Grand Cru from La Romanee Conti. We should all toast with this!”

“La Romanee Conti? That’s a really expensive vintner, no?”

“Yes, it is. It was 100 thousand dollars a bottle!” Chris boasted.

“What? 100 thousand dollars a bottle?!” everyone exclaimed in shock. The sky-high price had been way beyond their expectations.

The Harmons were pretty well-off, but even they hadn’t had a chance to try something this expensive.

“Why’d you spend all that money on this, Chris? It’s too much, no?” Florence questioned, though pride laced her tone. After all, Chris was her first choice for a son-in-law.

“100 something thousand isn’t much. I have another barrel of this at home, so please, you all enjoy,” Chris grinned like a cat that ate the canary. The pride was evident on his face, however.

“Mr. Nolan, you’re really generous.”

“Yeah, we’re really in for a treat tonight!”

The family began praising Chris for his wine, feeding his ego further.

“Hey, boy, look at how sincere James is. His wine costs 100 thousand dollars. But what about yours, hm? You bought them from the dollar store, didn’t you? Cheapskate!” Florence sneered and even kicked James in the calf.

“Why don’t we have a look?” James proposed with a conspiring smile. He swiftly opened Dustin’s box of wine.

An Understated Dominance by Marina Vittori Chapter 32 -

Chapter 32

The wines were quickly unboxed for everyone’s viewing pleasure.

“Teh, and here I thought they were decent quality. Looks like these are just craft brews, worth no more than two thousand dollars, I bet.” James had a look of disdain on his

face. “How could these compare to Grand Crus?”

“Craft brews have long lost their value on the market. We don’t even give our servants. these!” someone exclaimed,

Craft brews weren’t actually that terrible in terms of quality, but they were nothing compared to Grand Crus.

“What a cheapskate!” Florence scoffed,

“How are craft brews cheap when they’ve been on the rise in the country? Is our taste. in fine wine only limited to those brewed overseas?” Dustin casually responded.

“How is it not cheap when they cost only a couple thousand? Chris’ wines cost more

than 100 thousand dollars.” James rolled his eyes.

“Wines don’t have to be expensive to be good. Plus, you don’t know how much exactly

my wines cost.”

“Are you still trying to make a comeback?” James sneered.

Florence scowled. “Hmph! So damn stubborn, that one.”

“I’m not going to waste any more of my time trying to explain to people who won’t listen to reason,” Dustin said. He really didn’t want to waste his breath any longer.

“That’s enough. What matters most is the flavor, not the cost. I prefer whites over reds. anyway.” Henry finally interrupted, popped open one of the craft brews, and poured himself a glass.

“Wait, why is it so yellow? Shouldn’t craft brews be pale white?”

“It’s murky too! It isn’t fake, is it?”

“My goodness, bringing fake wine to dinner! What kind of person would do that?”

The people started whispering to each other upon seeing the yellow liquid in the old man’s glass.

“Now you’ve really done it! How dare you mock us all with this sham of a gift?! ”

Florence cried, slamming the table with one hand.

“What if something happens to us after drinking it?!”

“I never expected him to be so evil! Is he trying to poison us all or what?”

A commotion broke out at the table in an instant.

Cheap wine was already embarrassing enough, but fake wine? That was a conspiracy waiting to happen!

Not even the old man knew how to calm the situation down now. He never drank much

craft brews, but even he knew it was supposed to be a pale, nearly transparent color. Yet the wine Dustin had brought was not only yellow; it even seemed opaque.

It didn't look like anything good.

"This is how fine—aged craft brews usually turn out to look like," Dustin explained.

"Bullshit!" James cried. "Do you think we're idiots? No wine looks like this! It's piss,

that's all it is!"

"Yeah! Why do you continue to lie through your teeth?" Florence huffed.

Chris shook his head with faux empathy. "Oh, Dustin. You should've told me if you couldn't bring anything to the table. I could've given you a bottle or two for show. Why would you want to drag us down like this?"

His words seemed kind, but in truth, he was leaping for joy internally. Dustin truly was no match for him. His victory over this family nearly felt effortless.

"I don't care if you trust me or not. All I can say is this wine is genuine and as good as they come," Dustin reaffirmed.

"Whoa, what a crowd!"

Suddenly, a man appeared in the doorway, still dressed in his business suit, holding several gifts.

"Dad? You're back from your trip already?" James gasped.

It was John Nicholson, Dahlia's father.

"Well, the deal was a success, so I came home early." John smiled. The wines on the

table caught his attention. “Oh, is that La Romanee? It’s a recent brew I think, but it must cost at least 100 thousand dollars a bottle, am I right?”

“Good on you, Dad! You’re right!” James beamed.

“Dear, Chris brought this over for dinner. Isn’t he sweet?” Florence spoke up, then she turned to glare at Dustin. “Unlike some people who tried to poison all of us with fake wine!”

“Fake wine?” John exclaimed.

“Yeah, look!” James showed his father the glass of yellow liquid. “Dustin brought this over for dinner. If we hadn’t noticed in time, God knows what would’ve happened to us if we drank it.”

John took a close whiff of the wine, then tossed the entire glass down in one go.

“Dad, what are you doing? Don’t drink that! You’ll kill yourself!” James yelled.

Yet John seemed to be reveling in the taste of the wine. “A smooth, creamy body, followed by a heady finish, this isn’t fake. This is a priceless aged craft brew!” “What?!” Everyone gasped.

An Understated Dominance by Marina Vittori Chapter 33 -

Chapter 33

“You must be kidding, right, Dad? This can’t be aged wine!” James’ eyes were wide as dinner plates.

“Look at how yellowish it looks, though. It must be fake!” Florence accused.

“You guys must not have seen brews like this before. Aged craft brews get this color, and it only darkens the longer it’s been aging. Every wine connoisseur knows this.”

The looks on everyone’s faces quickly changed. Their accusations had just been dampened significantly, not by just anyone but by John Nicholson himself, a well-known wine enthusiast. His judgment couldn’t be wrong.

"I was blessed to be able to try such a fine wine years ago with a government official, but this brew right here must be finer than the one I had that body and finish tell me it must've been aged for at least 50 years!" John smacked his lips, still enjoying the brew's aftertaste. ?

"How much would it cost on the market?" James asked curiously.

"It's priceless. You couldn't find a willing seller even if you offered a city's worth. But if we judge based on recent wine auction values, it should cost at least two million dollars,"

"Two million?!" Everyone gasped. They've never even heard of wine that costs this much! Chris' Grand Cru was nothing compared to that!

"N—no way!" Florence refused to believe it. "Are you sure about this, John? How could Dustin be able to afford this?"

"Yeah! He can't even afford a nice pair of pants, not to mention something this expensive!" James cried. His argument brought forth the table's resounding agreement.

"He has a point. How could that **vagrant** have that much money?"

"Hmm... where did you get this brew, Dustin?" John asked gently.

"A friend gave it to **me**," he answered truthfully.

"Gave it to you?" Florence scowled. "How could **someone** like you have friends rich enough to buy a drink like that? Even if they did, why would they give it to you in the first place? I bet you stole it from them!"

"Yeah, he must've stolen it!" James nodded vigorously, finding a new accusation to

slap Dustin with. He refused to believe Dustin could afford this sort of quality wine, whether or not it was given to him by a friend.

"Why did you have to steal this of all things, Dustin? Do you know how

many years you'll have to spend in prison for theft?" Chris huffed, appearing to be considerate.

How could that pauper have gotten a hold of something not even he could.

“Whether you believe me or not doesn’t matter to me. I didn’t steal it, and that’s enough for me,” Dustin droned.

First, they called his wine cheap. Then, after revealing it wasn’t, they find another accusation of him having stolen it. Next, they would just say he blackmailed Natasha into giving it to him.

That’s why there was no use explaining to them further.

“Hah, see? Where’s your excuse now? I knew you stole this!” Florence screeched.

“You thief! I can’t believe you stole this just to look good in front of us!” James gasped, playing along.

“Whatever. I got this wine for Granddad and Granddad only, so you guys don’t have to drink any if you don’t want to!” Dustin rolled his eyes. He had had enough of this crap.

“Enough, all of you! I trust Dustin with my whole heart, and I know he didn’t steal this wine, so stop it!” Henry finally ground out.

“But Granddad...

“Be quiet! Eat your food!” the old man ordered once again. Only then did everyone shut

1. up.

Even Florence and James, who still didn’t believe **he** could have lawfully gotten his

hands on the craft brew.

Dinner finally began. Even though everyone had their turn at smearing Dustin’s name, they still gladly took their share of the craft brew. Even those who didn’t drink alcohol tried a few sips.

After all, this brew cost over two million dollars on the market, a precious delicacy they had never had the luck to try before. Why pass on the opportunity?

Dustin could only snort at how stubborn this family of people was.

Dinner **soon** came to an end.

An Understated Dominance by Marina Vittori Chapter 34 -

Chapter 34

Chris rapped on the table, calling for everyone's attention.

"Everyone, I would like to share some good news with you all. Nolan Pharmaceuticals has been looking to increase its share pool, so we are currently welcoming new investors. Is anyone here interested?"

"New investors?" Everyone's attention was immediately captured.

Nolan Pharmaceuticals was an industry-leading corporation with very limited shares available. That was why Chris' announcement came as a shock to everyone at the table.

"Hasn't the company been doing alright, Mr. Nolan? Why the sudden invitation?" Dahlia asked curiously.

"Of course, it has been. We've just been planning to list our company publicly, that's why. As everyone knows, our company is not short on talent or the capability to overcome competition. This share listing is just so we have some funds to give our employees a good bonus this season." Chris smiled. "We haven't officially announced this to the public yet, and the spots are **limited**. If anyone here is interested, we can save some spots for you.

That sure got everyone on board. Nolan Pharmaceuticals could easily bag them all hefty profits!

"Count me in, Mr. Nolan. I have five million to spare!" James called out eagerly.

"Eight million on me!" Florence followed.

Chris beamed. "Alright, two spots for you guys.

"Hey, I want a share too! You've got yourself another three million!"

“Five... five million for me—that’s all my life savings!”

The family started shouting over each other, worried they wouldn’t be able to get at **share**. It was a perfect example of herd mentality.

“What about you, Dahlia? How **many** shares would you like to get?” Chris turned to Dahlia. “I can give you extra from the pot, given our relationship.”

“I...” Dahlia gave it some thought.

She had learned a lot on her way up to where she **was** today. Naturally, she knew not to make decisions based on **personal** sentiment.

“Don’t you trust me, Dahlia? I’m offering you a share because you’re important to me. You can say no if you want to—there are loads of other people waiting to get their share.” Chris huffed lightly.

“I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just that I’ll be joining as a shareholder in a company with the Harmons very soon, so I’m being extra careful with how I’m spending my funds, just in case,” she explained.

“How much do you have in hand right now?” Chris asked.

“Not much. So million tops.”

“That’s more than enough! To be frank with you, you don’t need that much to work with the Harmons. Why don’t you consider investing in my company instead? We pay out really solid dividends each year.”

“He’s right, Dahlia. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!” Florence cried.

“What are you waiting for, sis? You can trust Mr. Nolan. He’s already helped you out so many times!” James added.

“If you believe in me, Dahlia, then invest in my company. But if you don’t, it’s fine too,” Chris finally relented.

“L... Alright then.”

After some hesitation, Dahlia finally nodded. She was only doing this to pay back the favor she owed Chris, and he had insisted so much that it would be disrespectful to reject his offer.

This investment wasn't a bad idea either.

Just like that, Dahlia's So million dollars were all promised to Nolan Pharmaceuticals.

"What about you, Dustin? Wanna buy a share?" Chris suddenly asked with a smirk he didn't bother hiding.

"Oh, and by the way, one million is the minimum investment amount. You can have at go at earning big if you have that much as a starter."

"Thanks, but no thanks."

"Heh, I see... Are you not interested? Or... don't you have that much to **spare**? How about this: For Dahlia's **sake**, I'll let you have a ten-million share if you can fork out a **hundred** thousand dollars at least." Chris grinned.

Dustin replied nonchalantly, "No, thank you. I have no interest in a company that's on

the verge of packing it up."

That brought Chris' mood to a shocked standstill.

An Understated Dominance by Marina Vittori Chapter 35 -

Chapter 35

"What did you say?"

Chris froze, thinking he had misheard him.

"I said I'm not interested in a business that's about to go bankrupt," Dustin repeated.

"Bankrupt?"

Everyone was too stunned to react to his words.

“How dare you! That’s nonsense!”

Chris was shocked, but he quickly denied it. “Nolan Pharmaceuticals is raking in profits every day and is at its prime. How could we go bankrupt? Stop fear-mongering!”

“Only you know whether this is fear-mongering or not. Anyways, I’ve received news that Nolan Pharmaceuticals will be investigated due to the sale of counterfeit illicit drugs. It’s just a matter of time before they go bankrupt.” Dustin’s words were very shocking.

“Counterfeit drugs? Investigated?”

Now, everyone was even more puzzled.

Their

gaze turned to Chris.

“Nonsense! All of it is nonsense!”

“Dustin, stop spreading these rumors. Nolan Pharmaceuticals is a law-abiding company. How could it go under investigation? I can sue you for defamation!” Chris threatened.

His words may appear firm, but he was in turmoil on the inside. Nolan Pharmaceuticals was indeed under investigation and would go bankrupt soon. He intended to list the company as a publicly traded company to raise capital so he could run off with a fortune.

However, the news had been suppressed. How did Dustin know without it being leaked?

“Dustin, what nonsense are you spewing? How **can** a company as successful as Nolan Pharmaceuticals go bankrupt?” Florence reprimanded.

“That’s right! Everyone knows **that** Nolan Pharmaceuticals has good assets and is at the peak **of** success. Stop spreading lies!” James also piped in.

It was obvious they doubted him. After all, the Nolan family had a long history in

Swinton. They also maintained a good reputation, so it did not seem possible to have

issues.

“It’s the truth. Nolan Pharmaceuticals is about to go under, and the so-called ‘capital increase and share expansion’ is nothing than a money-grabbing scam.”

Chris even contacted Mason to borrow money. The investigation of the company and its bankruptcy were obviously true.

“Bullshit! I just wanted to do everyone a favor because we’re close. It’s fine if you

choose not to accept my offer, but how dare you slander me? What intentions do you have?” Chris cried out.

“Mr. Rhys, it’s fine if you’re not able to help us. But why cause trouble when Chris just wants to help us? You’re really devious!”

“That’s right! This fellow must be slandering Chris because he’s jealous!”

“Dustin, you’re so despicable!”

Everyone started to chime in, one after another.

Dustin was poor, while Chris had power and money. Between the two, they were more inclined to believe Chris.

Dustin couldn’t help but frown as he watched the commotion. He did not expect his kind intentions to be returned with such a negative reaction. This proved that no one would believe a **man** without money or power. 1

“Dustin, do you have proof that Nolan Pharmaceuticals is going bankrupt?” Dahlia suddenly asked. She had invested eight million worth of funds. Naturally, she had to be

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“I don’t have evidence. But what I said was the truth. You can check if you don’t believe me. You should be able to trace the information,” Dustin replied coldly.

Dahlia’s expression darkened at his words. Did this mean he was just making it up? She even had high expectations for him. It turned out he was just making false accusations. This must be the result of his jealousy turning into hatred.

“Everyone, since Dustin claimed I’m a swindler, just forget the matter about the

shares, lest I rip off everyone.”

Seeing that the timing was right, Chris deliberately put on an act as if he had been wronged.