

Love in the Season of Blossoms

chapter 3

The room erupted in murmurs.

The auctioneer blinked. “Sir, did you just say...”

Neal Blauner explained, “I’m Mr. Wilder’s assistant. His instructions are clear. Whatever lot Ms. Vivian bids on today, we’ll cover every raise to secure it for her.”

The auction hall exploded.

“Mr. Wilder? As in the Wilder family’s sole heir? That famous scion of Blythera?”

“Isn’t he uninterested in women? Why’s he backing Ms. Vivian’s bids?”

“Looks like Ms. Vivian just hit the jackpot...”

Whispers coiled through the crowd. Vivian’s face shifted—shock first, then delight, and at last, triumph blazed in her eyes.

“Where is Mr. Wilder? I’d like to thank him in person,” Vivian said. Her cheeks were flushed.

Neal answered respectfully, “Mr. Wilder isn’t available at the moment. But when the time comes, he’ll meet with you himself.”

Only then did Vivian turn to Willow. Her eyes were bright with victory. “Still bidding, Willow?”

Then, with feigned innocence, she added, “Oh, I nearly forgot—Mr. Wilder’s covering every raise for me. If you keep going, you might just bankrupt yourself. After all, who in this circle could possibly outbid him?”

Willow’s face darkened. She whipped her head toward Alden, only to find him gazing at Vivian with naked adoration. His expression was unbearably tender.

What followed was pure spectacle.

Every piece Vivian so much as glanced at, Neal snatched up for her, outbidding every rival without hesitation.

The pigeon blood ruby necklace, the centuries-old porcelain set, even Whispers of the Lilies—the famed masterpiece opening at 80 million dollars—all fell into her hands inevitably.

Willow shot to her feet. Her composure shattered at last. “Is Mr. Wilder not leaving any lots for the rest of us?”

Neal flicked a glance at Alden, who gave the barest nod.

“My apologies, Ms. Willow,” Neal replied coolly. “These are all gifts from Mr. Wilder to Ms. Vivian. His only concern is her enjoyment of the auction. As for everyone else’s feelings... Well, they’re not his priority.”

Willow laughed as her nails bit into her palms. She turned to Alden. His gaze never left Vivian, who stood basking in triumph.

Alden was something else. The thought burned through Willow. Really, he was something else.

When the auction ended, Vivian was swallowed by a rush of socialites. Their honeyed words and glittering smiles clung to her like perfume.

Willow couldn’t stomach the charade for another second. She turned on her heel and marched out of the hall. She went straight into the idling car.

“Nightfall Club,” she told the driver.

She needed liquor to drown the thoughts clawing at her.

But before the door closed, Vivian wedged herself inside. “Willow! You’re heading to the club, right? I’ve been dying of boredom. Let me come!”

Willow was half a second from shoving her out when Alden appeared. His hand was braced against the doorframe. He told the driver, “Drive.”

Vivian spent the ride gushing about the auction. “Den, why was Mr. Wilder so nice to me? We’ve never even met!”

Alden’s voice became low and uncharacteristically soft. “Because he’s into you.”

Vivian’s eyes widened, and her cheeks flushed scarlet. “Den, don’t joke like that!”

“Men understand men best.” His gaze burned into her. “Where a man spends his money is where his heart lies. And besides... Ms. Vivian, you’re exceptional. It’s no surprise he fell for you.”

“Then... are you into me too, Den?” Vivian blurted out.

Alden stiffened. His reply died on his lips as Willow’s voice sliced through the air. “If you two want to flirt, get the hell out of my car!”

Vivian’s eyes welled up instantly. “I’m sorry, Willow. I didn’t mean to disturb you. I’ll be quiet.”

Willow turned away and stared fixedly out the window. In the reflection in the glass, she saw it all—Alden’s tender, yearning gaze that lingered on Vivian, then his disdainful gaze when he glanced at Willow.

She let out a quiet, bitter laugh. All men preferred bitches in the end.