

## **Bumpkin 1231**

### **Chapter 1231 I Want You Dead**

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From the pecece's top, one could gaze down upon the bustling city center of the hidden clan, evoking a feeling of dominance.

As Veronica and Matthew exited the parking lot, a vibrant red off-road vehicle honked at them. The vehicle pulled over, and the person in the passenger seat leaned out, waving. "Hey, we meet again."

The one talking was Zec. He nonchalantly swung open the car door, exchanged greetings with the driver, and closed the door before strolling straight over to her.

"Are you also here for the gathering?"

In his usual silver-grey suit, he looked even more handsome with his strong facial features. However, the marks on his face were quite prominent.

He lifted his hand to ruffle his short, golden hair, flashing a confident and charming smile.

Upon his arrival, Veronica didn't bother to pay much attention to him and just made a brief noise in response before carrying on walking ahead.

Zec completely ignored Matthew beside her and jogged to catch up with Veronica, walking alongside her. "I know you still resent me because of Matthew. But let's face it, you can't kill me."

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Zac completely ignored Matthew beside her and jogged to catch up with Veronica, walking alongside her. "I know you still resent me because of Matthew. But let's face it, you can't kill me."

Shrugging indifferently, Zac arrogantly continued, "However, I can offer myself for your use. We could team up to take on the hidden clan. How does that sound?"

His words made her pause briefly. She turned to him and sneered. "For my use? How generous of you, Prince Zac."

"You came here out of necessity, and I know you have no interest in becoming the head of the clan. If you're open to collaborating with me, I'm ready to accept any terms you propose."

Although his earnest demeanor might appear genuine at first glance, Veronica found it easier to believe in ghosts than him.

"Alright. Are you sure you'll agree to everything?" she countered.

"Yes, of course!"

With his hands in his trouser pockets, Zac nodded confidently while exuding the air of a prince.

Veronica lifted her hand to brush the strands of hair the wind had tousled, her cold gaze fixed on him. She parted her red lips gradually and spoke, each word deliberate. "I want you... dead. Can you do it?"

She purposely spoke slowly, her tone heavy with a sense of murderous intent.

Chapter 1232 Is Everyone Present?

Veronica remained still, her fists tight with simmering anger. "They've finally taken action against our children."

"Yes, just as we thought." Matthew remained composed. "Let's go."

They did not say much to each other, yet it was as if an unspoken understanding existed between them to leave the topic untouched.

Entering the palace, Zac, Veronica, and Matthew reported their identities and were guided by the servants to a side hall on the palace's east wing. Xavier, Hendrey, and Tiffany were already present there, waiting.

Everything went as the couple had expected.

"Master, you finally came. I've been waiting for you." In a red dress, Eleanor hurriedly greeted Matthew upon his arrival. Her long hair cascaded down, and she had a silver crown on her head, like a wreath of flowers. The silver tassels on her crown jingled like charming silver bells as she approached.

In the central area of the side hall, there were rows of chairs on both sides, each with a small table in the center holding an assortment of desserts, fruits, and beverages.

"Princess Eleanor." Matthew nodded slightly toward her while deftly avoiding her extended hand.

Observing this, Veronica arched an eyebrow and smiled faintly.

"Hahaha, I've mentioned it multiple times. Just call me Eleanor. You're my master. There's no need for the formalities."

Despite his rejection, Eleanor displayed no sign of disappointment. Instead, she reached out and held Veronica's arm in a friendly manner. "I haven't seen you in a while either. I've missed you. I've reserved a spot for both you and my master. Come, sit next to me."

Veronica was taken aback and glanced at Matthew as if conveying through her eyes, Thanks to you, I'm getting some advantages here.

"Thanks for your concern, Princess Eleanor," she replied.

Sitting beside them, Tiffany glanced at Veronica and sarcastically remarked, "You sure are amazing. Since when you and Princess Eleanor became such close pals?"

Her resentment toward Veronica had intensified as she recalled the embarrassment of their previous gathering. A sense of unease crept over her at the sight of Veronica getting friendly with Eleanor.

Tiffany used to shine the brightest, but everything slipped away from her ever since Veronica came into the picture. The only thing that could ease this resentment was Veronica's death.

"Why does it concern you who I'm close to?" Eleanor did not hide her displeasure from Tiffany.

Being scolded publicly, Tiffany felt angered but chose to hold her tongue. She lowered her head and remained silent.

Sitting in the main seat above, Dominik scolded Eleanor, "Eleanor, everyone here is a guest. Be respectful."

Chapter 1233 The Reason for the Gathering

"Certainly. It's nearly time for our hidden clan's yearly autumn hunting, and I've brought you all here because I want you to participate."

The hidden clan always upheld its traditions, including seasonal rituals like the annual prayer ceremony and hunting events in spring and autumn.

As most of the men in the hidden clan had a privileged upbringing in martial arts, they were trained and became skilled in archery from a young age. As time passed and society evolved, hunting activities now allowed the use of both bows and rifles.

Following Eleanor's words, Dominik carried on, "The hunting ceremony spans five days, and the victor will be rewarded generously."

"Why does a simple hunting event need to go on for five days?" Hendrey voiced his skepticism.

"The hunting grounds are located between Mount Manos and Mount Gazette. Given the vast space between these mountains, this challenge demands speed, wilderness survival, and self-defense skills. Except for the opening day, there are four days. On the event day, the target will be revealed in the morning. The winner is whoever reaches the finish line with the target first." Dominik concisely explained, adding, "Should someone locate the target and return to camp on the first day, the game will conclude then."

Once he concluded, everyone exchanged glances and murmured among themselves.

Veronica glanced at Matthew beside her and whispered, "From what I know, the hidden clan's hunting events used to wrap up in two or three days. This current hunt seems more complex than it appears."

Her thoughts mirrored those of everyone in attendance.

Tiffany suddenly grew anxious and blurted out, "Only skilled individuals can participate in the hunting, right? As a delicate woman, I'm not joining the fun."

Given the circumstances, where life and death were on the line, her participation would only put her life at risk.

"Why are you afraid? You have Hendrey protect you," Eleanor remarked with a smile. "I've already enrolled everyone here for the event, including him. Wouldn't you be in greater danger if he isn't there to protect you?"

She dismantled Tiffany's notion of avoiding participation with just a few words.

Faced with implied threats and warnings, Tiffany appeared to have no alternative but to comply.

"Yes, Princess Eleanor's point is valid." Antheena nodded in accord.

Though she addressed Tiffany, her gaze subtly conveyed a message to Veronica, a glint of iciness shimmering in her deep blue eyes.

Coincidentally, Antheena locked eyes with Veronica, their eyes meeting briefly before they both quickly averted their gazes.

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#### Chapter 1234 Playing the Cards Perfectly

After leaving the palace in the afternoon, Matthew drove the car with Veronica seated in the passenger seat, lost in thought.

Matthew began. "Tanya is truly cunning. During the hunting ceremony, all the officials of the hidden clan will be invited. Notably, she's arranged for Hayley to attend alongside you. This is an excellent opportunity for her to publicly introduce you to everyone in the hidden clan, which will help you in your future competition for the position of head of the clan."

"Hayley would never refuse. There is no reason to." He sighed, feeling melancholic.

Veronica also sighed as she said, "So, Tanya plans to invite me into the trap. She wants me to participate in the hunting ceremony and eliminate me during the event. After all, everyone participating in the ceremony must sign a death waiver."

She scoffed lightly while shaking her head. "She has played her cards perfectly. By enticing Hayley to invite me to the ceremony, it will be widely known. How could I decline the hunting by then? If I do, I will lose the support of the people and bring shame to the Elrods. If I want to compete for the position of head of the clan in the future again, I'm afraid Hayley's supporters will also turn against me."

It was an unwritten rule of the hidden clan that the prince and the young master were obliged to participate in the hunting ceremony unless there were exceptional circumstances.

Only the courageous could become the ruler of the hidden clan and lead them to prosperity. This ideology deeply resonated within the hearts of the hidden clan members. Given the prevalence of martial artists in the clan, those lacking in combat skills were looked down upon.

Matthew replied with concern, "This time, not only must you take part in the hunting ceremony, but you also have to strive to emerge as the victor."

Danger arrived sooner than I expected. The participants in the hunting grounds were all outstanding individuals, and many of them were assassins sent by Tanya. How many people could Hayley arrange in order to protect Veronica? It's a life-or-death situation.

Both of them fell into silence.

After returning to Mountainside Gardens, they saw Hayley seated in the hall as soon as they entered. Veronica glanced at the table in the living room. There were still five or six teacups on the table, indicating the recent presence of several visitors.

Then, she looked at Matthew, who nodded. "Master Waylen, Madam Hayley, I'll go upstairs first."

As a part-time chef and bodyguard, he didn't have the qualifications to listen to their conversation.

"Okay, go ahead." Crayson nodded.

Veronica made her way to the sofa and settled in. Before Hayley could speak, she said, "We should hire an additional chef. There are more and more things to do, and it's unfair to expect him to prepare three meals daily while also ensuring my safety."

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#### Chapter 1235 A Carefully Laid Out Plan

Coincidentally, Crayson was also looking at Veronica, his murky eyes deep and mysterious.

She quickly averted her gaze and glared at Mateo. "Master Crayson is right. You should focus on protecting yourself with those mediocre skills of yours."

Although she said so, Mateo's words echoed in her mind. "He refuses to let me protect you and says that Iron Pillar will do everything to keep you safe."

Crayson usually kept a low profile and rarely exaggerated when he spoke, so these words sent her into deep thought.

"Veronica, when you went to the palace today, did they mention the hidden clan's hunting banquet to you?" Hayley, who had arrived in the morning and had been waiting for Veronica, couldn't help but ask when she saw her return.

"Yes," Veronica answered readily and smiled. "They asked me to participate in some hunting ceremony, but I'm not interested, so I declined."

This time, Veronica had no choice but to attend the hunting banquet, but she wanted to see how Hayley would convince her.

"You declined?"

Hayley was surprised and glanced at Crayson, then quickly said, "This hunting ceremony is a grand event that takes place once every ten years. The participants are all prominent figures of the hidden clan. Tanya invited me and your master to participate in the ceremony and said that I could bring you along and publicly reveal your identity. This is a great opportunity to reveal your identity. Why did you refuse?"

"Oh. I only need to attend the hunting event, not actually participate in the hunt, right?" Veronica pretended to be confused. "That's fine, then. I'll attend without hunting."

"Well..."

Hayley was at a loss for words after Veronica stopped her from saying what she wanted, and she looked to Crayson for help, gesturing for him to speak.

Crayson held a cigarette in his hand and took a few puffs. "If you attend the event, you will definitely have to participate in the hunt. Not only that, but you also have to excel in it. You may not know this, but although it's a hunting event, it also tests the abilities of the leader of the hidden clan. The leaders of the hidden clan in the past have all shone in the hunting event, proving their own abilities and gaining the trust of others."

"Yes, in the hidden clan, strength is respected." Hayley sighed, her brows furrowed with anxiety.

Mateo, who was sitting beside her, sat up straight, his anxious gaze fixed on Veronica. "Doesn't that mean Roni will be in danger? Eleanor and her elite soldiers want to get rid of her. It would be easy for them to do so during the hunting event."

Chapter 1236 No One Wants To Be a Puppet

"Tiffany is officially working with Hendrey and Zac, but from what I know, she has been in frequent contact with Dominik and Liam recently. She must have her own plans. After all, she is ambitious and uncontrollable."

Crayson frowned tightly. A faint smoke escaped from his nostrils, but it couldn't hide the worry on his face.

It had been less than a month since they returned to the hidden clan, and everything was beyond their control, which made him feel powerless and exhausted.

"Yes. Tiffany is completely uncontrollable. Even if we arrange something for her, she won't agree." Hayley sighed deeply but sat on the sofa with her legs crossed, her back straight, maintaining her elegant and noble demeanor despite the worries weighing on her.

"If she's uncontrollable, how do you deal with her?" Veronica asked curiously, her cool gaze fixed on the two people opposite her, waiting quietly for their answer.

In fact, Veronica had been feeling resentful of their words, but she tried to restrain herself. The way they kept repeating the word 'uncontrollable' felt as if they were saying that she was easy to manipulate in comparison. Little did they know, only puppets were easy to control. What did they really think of her?

"Tanya's goal this time is not only you but also Tiffany. She probably won't leave this hunting ceremony alive unless something unexpected happens." Crayson's tone was heavy as he smoked, trying to ease his worries.

"It's a pity to give up on the seed player we have carefully cultivated for over twenty years, isn't it?" Veronica leaned back on the sofa, smiling as she asked.

Her sarcastic smile pierced Hayley's heart. She knew that Veronica was very resistant to them, so she was trying to mend their relationship. However, she didn't expect the relationship to become more distant, leaving her feeling helpless.

"Man proposes, God disposes." Crayson frowned, his tone serious. "Veronica, I know you feel it's unfair, but our original intention was for your own good. Of course, whether Tiffany will continue or not is a matter your mother and I still need to discuss."

As Veronica had said, abandoning the 'chess piece' they had cultivated for over twenty years was a pity.

"Well then, I should thank you for that." After saying that, she got up and walked towards the stairs. "I'm tired, so I'll rest upstairs for a while."

"Come back!" At the sight of her getting up to leave, Crayson's face darkened, and he slammed the cigarette on the table. "Hayley has been waiting for you all day. It's rude for you to just leave like this."



Veronica was in a bad mood. She raised her hand and brushed past Matthew, walked around him, sat on the wicker chair, and rested her forehead on her hand. Her tone was serious as she said, "Matt, Crayson has probably discovered your identity."

After saying that, she looked up at Matthew, her eyes full of worry.

Upon seeing her gloomy face, Matthew walked to her side and held her hand, before he pulled her up. He then took a seat on the sofa, letting Veronica sit on his lap.

"Actually, it'd be scarier if he doesn't even have this level of insight," he said.

Veronica sat sideways on his lap, furrowing her brows in confusion. "Are you saying that if Crayson hasn't discovered your identity, it means his insight and vigilance are weak, and he's not capable of handling important tasks?"

"How smart." He rubbed the back of her hand with his right hand and continued, "Since he's assisting Hayley, he naturally has extraordinary abilities. It's only a matter of time before he discovers my identity, so it's not surprising."

"But if he has discovered it, why hasn't he exposed it?" This was the real question that troubled Veronica.

"Perhaps there is a purpose behind it, and we don't know what it is. Of course, the most likely scenario is that he wants to make Zac and Xavier underestimate the situation, and then conspire with me to deal with them, catching them off guard."

His analysis was logical and well-founded, and Veronica felt ashamed of her overly anxious reaction. She was only worried because she cared too much.

After listening to Matthew's analysis, Veronica's anxious heart finally calmed down. She leaned against his chest like a deflated balloon and murmured, "They will send Tiffany to participate in the hunting activity this time. Once she goes, there is a high chance that she won't be able to come back alive. Do you think Master Crayson, who has carefully cultivated her for more than twenty years, would willingly give up on her like this?"

Matthew smiled lightly. He raised his hand and stroked her cheek, then said, "Why would you ask me when you already have the answer in your heart?"

"I've learned before that the hidden clan has a method to seal memories. Crayson has mentioned that they plan to do this to Tiffany, but there has been no action so far. That's why I can't figure out their intentions, and they are also wary of me."

"Don't think too much; everything will be clear in due time. Besides, the ascension ceremony of the head of the clan is approaching. Just wait for another month, at most two months, and we can leave

here." Matthew comforted Veronica, "Don't worry, I'm here."

His words were like a reassurance pill for Veronica, gradually relaxing her tense emotions. However, in the next second, she remembered what Zac had said to her today.

#### Chapter 1238 Why Are You Plotting Against Me?

At the Elysium Hotel.

After resting at Mountainside Gardens in the afternoon, Veronica found an excuse to take Matthew out after dinner and headed straight to Elysium Hotel.

Since she had Zac's contact information, Veronica dialed his number. "I'm here. Where are you?"

"Room 507. I'm waiting for you." Zac was concise with his words.

With that said, he hung up the phone right away.

Veronica looked at her phone that had been hung up, then glanced at Matthew beside her and entered the elevator.

As the elevator ascended, they arrived on the fifth floor. They found room 507 and knocked on the door.

Matthew and Veronica stood outside the room for a while. The room door opened, and Zac tilted his head, looking at Veronica at the door. He smiled. "I've been waiting for you."

After speaking, he stepped aside from the doorway, swinging the room door wide open. "Come in."

Veronica glanced at him coldly and walked in. Matthew, who was behind her, followed, but Zac raised his hand to stop him at the entrance. "Why are you coming in?"

After finally getting Veronica to come over, he couldn't let a bodyguard come in and cause trouble.

Veronica turned her head and gestured to Matthew with her eyes. "You can wait outside."

It was just a door away. Matthew could still rush in if anything unexpected happened, so there was nothing to worry about.

"Alright," he responded and glanced at Zac with a hint of warning.

After he left the room, Zac closed the door.

Veronica walked to the living room and took a seat on the sofa. Curiously, she inquired, "What did you want to say outside the palace today? Is something wrong with my child?"

"Have a drink first. We can talk about other things slowly."

Zac took a bottle of red wine from the wine cabinet, brought two stemmed glasses, and sat across from Veronica. While opening the wine bottle, he said, "You're quite passive in the hidden clan. I know you didn't want to be here, but if you're willing to help me, I can let you leave the hidden clan peacefully. Veronica, are you sure you don't want to consider it? I'll offer you favorable terms."

"Are you trying to buy me with the money you extorted from Yvonne's parents?"

Whenever she faced Zac, Veronica couldn't help but recall Yvonne's ordeal and associate Zac with the despicable acts he and Conrad had committed.

#### Chapter 1239 The Same Scheme

Veronica's lips curved slightly. She wasn't surprised by Zac's words.

"I came here today to ask about my two children. If you don't want to tell me, then forget it."

She paused for a few seconds. "As for cooperation, do you really think I would work with someone who killed my husband?"

Only a fool would willingly engage in such a dangerous alliance.

Veronica couldn't understand why Zac believed she was foolish enough to think they could work together.

Zac maintained his composure and swirled the red wine in his glass. His azure eyes fixated on the swirling crimson liquid, completely ignoring Veronica.

It seemed that he was confident in the matter of cooperation.

Seeing that he had no intention of responding, Veronica rose to leave.

However, as she attempted to stand, her vision darkened. She collapsed back on the sofa, feeling utterly weak.

In an instant, Veronica felt completely powerless, unable to exert any strength. Even sitting up became a challenge for her.

"What... What did you do to me?"

Her eyes flared with anger at Zac, demanding an explanation.

She struggled to muster her energy, and her voice came out as faint as a mosquito's buzz.

"Your cleverness has outwitted you." Zac laughed and reclined. "Knowing how clever you are, I had a special incense burned, one that's both colorless and odorless."

He raised his hand slightly, wiggling the stemmed glass, gesturing to Veronica. "Here, the wine is the antidote. I gave you a chance, but you didn't cherish it."

Zac placed the antidote in the wine and poured it for Veronica.

Yet, he was confident that she, with her cautious nature, would never drink it.

As expected, everything went as planned.

Veronica's gaze fixated on Zac, then shifted to the glass of wine on the table. She strained to raise her hand to grab it, but no matter how hard she tried, her hand wouldn't budge.

That sense of powerlessness was akin to struggling in a nightmare where efforts were futile.

"The... The bodyguard is at the door, Zac... I advise you not to bring trouble to yourself," she warned him.

"That foolish bodyguard? I've had him taken away using a diversionary tactic. I suppose he won't live past tonight."

Zac raised his glass of wine as he spoke and drank it all.

He slammed the glass heavily on the table, then ran his hand through his golden hair with a wicked smile. He rose from the seat, moved toward Veronica, lifted her off the sofa, and headed toward the bedroom.

The overwhelming smell of alcohol assaulted her senses as she neared him, making her feel nauseous.

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