

Bumpkin 961

Chapter 961 Eleanor Has Changed

"That's more like it." Eleanor took Veronica's arm and walked into the main hall. The minute she passed Matthew, she fixed her eyes on him and remarked, "Your real face looks better. That awful look from earlier made me feel sick."

"Pardon me for making you sick, Your Highness." Matthew's attitude changed. He turned to Liam and said, "Prince Liam, please come in."

Liam knew that Matthew had been in disguise, but he was still astonished by Matthew's actual looks. "Have you always been this good-looking? Eleanor was right—you were hideous before."

He stared straight at Matthew, inching closer to take a better look and even reaching out to touch Matthew's face to verify the fact for himself.

Before he could do so, Matthew slapped his hand away and warned, "Do you still want your hand intact?"

With lips twitching in anger, Liam complained to Eleanor, "Eleanor, look at him! He wants to cut my hand off!"

She lifted a brow in amusement and shrugged with her palms up. "You did that to yourself." Then, she wrapped an arm around Veronica's neck and said, "Let's go upstairs. I have something to talk to you about."

"Sure."

"Hello? Eleanor? Are you going to ditch me? Am I still your 'Big Bro Liam'?" Although Liam was younger than Eleanor, she sometimes called him 'Big Bro Liam' to honor a bet from their childhood, and it became a habit.

She stopped in her tracks and turned around, after which his frown turned into a grin. "I knew you wouldn't leave me behind."

To his disappointment, she merely pointed at Matthew and said, "Master, Goddess Veronica has promised me your homemade dinner as a thank-you for saving your life. Don't renege on your words."

Chapter 962 The Poisoned Needle

It was the dream of most men to join the harem of the young leader of the hidden clan, who was poised to be the head soon. Alas, the wealthy Matthew did not even need her riches, and she had nothing left to attract his attention. To put it bluntly, he was not interested in Eleanor's possessions.

"Thanks." Veronica took a seat beside her and offered a sincere thank you.

"What for?" Eleanor turned to the side, resting her arm on the back of the chair. There was a gleeful smile on her porcelain face. "I never promised to give up on pursuing him."

She was only forced to give up after she failed to get his romantic interest. It was rather regrettable, but at least she witnessed the true love between Matthew and Veronica.

Hearing that, Veronica smiled but said nothing. Although Eleanor refused to admit it, Veronica could tell she had been less obsessed with Matthew.

"By the way, I heard about you in the palace. You're something else. How could you drive a car off that high mountain? Weren't you afraid of dying?" The more Eleanor got to know Veronica, the more she admired the woman and understood the reason behind Matthew's deep love.

Veronica was a woman who shined brightly; she was beautiful, wise, and decisive. No man could resist her charm.

"Death awaits everyone at the end of life. It's just a matter of time. It's nothing to be afraid of," Veronica answered with a smile.

"You're awesome!" Eleanor gave her a thumbs up. "I'm very impressed."

"You were waterboarded by your mother for saving Matt's life. I'm immensely grateful but feel sorry for you. But, more than anything, I admire your courage," Veronica confessed her thought. Then, she added, "You could've had Matthew to yourself if you sealed his memory. Why did you help him escape?"

"Ah, drop that." Eleanor waved dismissively and took a sip of the tea as she shook her head. "I had a change of heart. At first, I wanted badly to show off my heroism in front of my master, hoping to change his heart, but he was heartless! My efforts were in vain, and I even got into trouble."

Eleanor bluffed with a straight face. Veronica watched on, pretending to believe in her words. "Oh, that must've been a huge loss."

"Right? I thought so too." Eleanor lifted her thin brow. "So, how are you going to repay me?"

"Shall I give you my hand in marriage to repay you?" Veronica joked.

"Sure. If you divorce Master now, I don't mind adding you to my harem."

Chapter 963 Discovering Crayson's Evil Plot

Veronica's mind buzzed loudly, which was reminiscent of the time she got into the car crash. Her mind was blank, and her ears were ringing. Eleanor went on for a while until she realized that Veronica was frozen in her seat, prompting her to wave her hand in front of Veronica. "Hey, are you okay?"

"What?" Veronica snapped back to reality as her focus returned, but her countenance was solemn. "Are you sure you didn't hold the watch wrongly?"

"How is that possible? There's a button for time adjustment on the watch. Master reminded me many times that the button is for dispatching the needle, and I pressed on it. I was surprised when I found out that the needle came out from the same side—from the eSIM card slot, to be precise—instead of the opposite end."

While speaking, she combed through memories from that day and added, "Master even turned around and checked the watch. He tried to release the needle one more time just to test it. I remember he looked super shocked, and his face was so pale, perhaps because he was poisoned..."

She glanced at Veronica and suddenly pointed at her. "That's right! He looked as pale as you are right now—" She stopped and frowned when she realized something was wrong. "Who gave him the watch?" she asked cautiously.

A smirk appeared on Veronica's pale face. "My master." She could tell that something was wrong judging from Matthew's behavior after he was poisoned and returned from the palace. She wondered if Crayson was involved in the poisoning, but Matthew kept denying it.

At first, she thought Crayson would not lay a finger on Matthew during the hunting because Matthew needed to protect her. She mistakenly believed that Crayson would choose a different time to get rid of Matthew, but she underestimated his desperation to remove him from the picture. How could he modify Matthew's watch?

Shocked, Eleanor finally understood the reason behind Matthew's response and why Veronica seemed as pale as her husband. "W-Waylen Elrod is your master. Why would he want to—"

Matthew was Veronica's husband, and both grew up in Bloomstead. However, she was also the ex-leader of the hidden clan. Waylen and Hayley tried so hard to reclaim power over the hidden clan because they wanted Veronica to inherit the position of the leader. However, she would never conform to that out of her undying love for Matthew, for whom she could sacrifice her life.

Enraged, Eleanor banged on the table. "What a rotten old chap! He's evil!" She huffed and puffed as she glared at Veronica. "I wouldn't have let my master go home if I had known! He's in danger when he's with you." She was struck by another sudden thought. "No wonder someone leaked the news to my mom. They told her someone would break into the research center to rescue Matthew. I bet it was the doing of that rotten old chap! That was a dirty move!"

Chapter 964 His Excellent Knife Skills

"I understand all the problems you laid out, and my mom knows it too, but more than half of the wealthy tycoons in the hidden clan were once under Hayley's influence. It was your mom who gave them the power and control over the gold, silver, and diamond mines. With their wealth, they broke

free of your mom's control and shifted their support to my mom. That led to the internal war that lasted for two decades."

Eleanor added, "Everyone mistook my mom as being incapable of management. They even accused her of turning a blind eye to the wealth those families amassed. These are all problems from Hayley's reign. The change would take time." She was frank. "To be honest, I do not care much for the position of the clan leader. It's not something I set my eyes on. What I yearn for is world peace, not the illusion we have now."

Veronica was slightly surprised but still deeply convinced by Eleanor's words. She had a strong hunch that Eleanor was to be trusted. "What do you plan to do after the coronation?" she questioned.

"My mom's been thinking of ways to reduce the wealth disparity and rein in the power of a few tycoons, but they work closely with each other and own the mining rights. She's stuck in a dilemma." Eleanor sighed and leaned back against the chair. She tilted her head, expressing her thought, "Thankfully, Hayley signed a thirty-year mining contract with a few tycoons. The contracts will expire on the day of my coronation. I can retrieve a few mines by then, but not without serious internal conflict."

After that, she elaborated on her plans and strategies to improve livelihoods and the wealth gap. It was then that Veronica developed a greater respect and admiration for this future leader.

and strategies to improve livelihoods and the wealth gap. It was then that Veronica developed a greater respect and admiration

suggested to Eleanor after listening to

leader position, by any chance? Not a problem!

speechless at Eleanor's carefree attitude

clan, but why do you treat

"I'm a free spirit by nature who looks forward to life outside the hidden clan." Next, she grinned. "Do

Veronica nodded. "I do."

Chapter 965 Shirley Was a Recluse

Hearing that, Matthew paused and lifted a cube of tofu with his knife. The smooth tofu was placed in a bowl of water. With a gentle tap on the water surface, he split the tofu into sections from the core, turning it into a lovely flower.

"My goodness!" Liam went closer with a shocked look. "That's awesome! How did you learn that?" While praising Matthew, he took some photos for his Instagram Stories.

While editing the text captions, he was again shocked by a sharp dagger in front of his eyes. "F*ck!" He gasped and jumped backward, prompting his phone to fall onto the floor and roll over to Matthew's heel.

"What are you doing? Do... Do you plan to kill the prince? You're in the hidden clan territory, mind you! If you kill me, Eleanor will not spare you too!" Liam pointed at Matthew, adding, "I was just trying to help you with the baked fish. I'm cool if you don't want to make that dish, but you don't have to kill me!"

"What's on your mind?" As cold as ever, Matthew flipped the blade in his hand. "Look, there's the fish. If you can gut a fish properly, I'll let you help with the dish."

Next, he pointed at the two fishes in the water tank, which were much alive, as he assigned the task to Liam. However, Liam was only capable of fishing, not gutting them. After some hesitation, he took the knife and knelt to pick up his phone. He grumbled, "It's easy to hurt someone with a knife! Don't fool around and scare the others. Just tell me if you want me to kill the fish. You made it look like you were planning to kill me!"

a scaredy cat." Matthew took a jab at him and drew another knife from the rack as he resumed a jab at him and drew another knife from the rack as

finally ready. The ten-course meal would be delivered to the Sky Lounge on the top floor. Then, the door, Skyler quickly text just now?" he

silent mode." Due to the disfiguration incident, Shirley had been steeped in anxiety and slept poorly. When she managed

They heard her

here, so I made

looked hesitant. "I'll check

noded, and Skyler went into the

Chapter 966 Add You to My Harem

"No problem." Matthew took the seat next to Veronica and turned to her. Pointing at the food, he said, "I made you your favorites—pot roast and short rib chili."

At the same time, Veronica was still troubled by her conversation with Eleanor and riddled with guilt toward him. She felt worse when he exerted the effort to make the pot roast and short rib chili separately for a dinner that was supposed to be a thank-you to Eleanor. The pot roast was a dish that took time to prepare, but he did not mind it at all, never complaining about cooking her favorite dishes.

Feeling sorry, she choked as her eyes turned misty. Wanting to hide her emotions from him, she took a deep breath and blinked her tears away. Before she spoke, Eleanor protested, "Master, I thought you promised to prepare a feast for me!"

He looked up and pointed at the dishes on the table. "Try finishing everything before you complain."

"I..." She was at a loss for words as she checked out the ten-course spread on the table that came in huge portions. Then, she realized that it would be challenging to finish the food.

to just stare at the food? I'll get started." Liam,

at the food? I'll get

to take

on Veronica. As a guest, she felt that she was invited just to witness their lovey-dovey moments. "Hey! Are you done with the PDA?" She pointed a fork at them. "You'd better not cross a line! I might not be the best at everything, but I'm good

was feeling low, instantly burst out laughing. "Yeah, sure, it's our bad. Everything you say is right, pretty princess." She

shot a glance at Matthew and hinted, "Master, you should learn from your wife. You can be quite

yourself?" He was as unsmiling as usual and dished out his cold treatment to the others. One might even suspect that he had an alter ego because of the stark contrast between

Chapter 967 Antheena's Secret Plot

Zac sat in his chair, lazily sipping on the tea in his right hand.

"I came to you this late at night to help you with your problems, of course," Antheena answered, her eyes keenly staring at him.

His right hand trembled a little, shaking the tea in the cup. His eyes gleamed as he pointed at the couch across from him. "Take a seat."

She boldly sat down and went straight to the point. "Prince Zac, I know Matthew Kings is a thorn in your flesh that you wish to remove. I have a plan. Do you wish to listen to it?"

"What are the conditions?" He knew she would not offer help without getting something in return, so he was smart enough to ask about the conditions before proceeding.

"It's nothing difficult."

Zac crossed his legs and leaned back against the chair. He lifted his chin, looking confident. "Go ahead."

"Let's get rid of Matthew and Veronica!" she replied. "Matthew is the biggest threat to both of us. I want him dead more than you do."

As long as Matthew was alive, he would be protecting Veronica. To get rid of Veronica, she would need to remove Matthew first.

"Hahaha..." Zac laughed loudly, throwing his head back. "You went to great lengths for Xavier Crawford."

"Indeed."

"Don't you think you're getting the short end of the stick, doing all these for him?"

"I don't care about that if I love someone. I always get what I want." Her determination to kill Veronica was as steely as her unchanging love for Xavier. She had once saved Veronica's life, but that ungrateful woman dared to abduct her to blackmail Xavier. The incident had bugged her for a while, and she could not get over it.

"Great." Zac nodded and lifted the stump on his left arm, revealing a chilling smile. "I lost my hand because of her. I need to make her pay!" His blue eyes were scrunched-up, looking cold and distant like a hungry wolf ready to devour its prey and lick it clean.

"It's not easy to rid Matthew in the hidden clan with your current capability, Prince Zac, but I have someone in mind, who could work with you," she suggested outright.

"Who's that?"

"Dominik Ledger."

Chapter 968 Serve Tea to Master

The implication was that Dominik would eventually eradicate them to prevent any future troubles if they decided to cooperate and support him to become the head of the clan.

"You're the prince of Castron. Use that as a condition to negotiate with Dominik. I believe you'll obtain some unexpected gains from each other," Antheena concluded her speech. Her words seemed to awaken Zac from a dream.

A sudden realization struck him, and his eyes flickered with a dim light of understanding. Then, he smiled knowingly. "You're intelligent, Antheena."

Her kind reminder filled his satisfaction toward her that day. Subsequently, he glared at the servant nearby. "Why are you standing there doing nothing? Don't you know how to serve tea to the guest?"

That night, Zac secretly met with Dominik. They shared a private discussion in the room that lasted more than two hours before they departed the venue separately.

That was a night where few people would be able to sleep peacefully. The ascension ceremony was getting closer with every minute. Hence, the Ledgers and the Elrods were training their troops secretly to carry out various schemes.

When Veronica and Shirley were hospitalized, Crayson kept attempting to visit them at the hospital, but Matthew repeatedly rejected the man's request.

After learning that they were about to be discharged, he decided to visit One Piece Restaurant in person to meet with them. He entered before Dean went upstairs to knock on Veronica's door, stating, "Miss Murphy, Mr. Crayson is here."

Veronica had been resting on a deck chair on the balcony when she heard Dean's announcement. A layer of frost instantly appeared on her chilly countenance. Rising to her feet, she walked over and opened the door to tell Dean, "Let him up."

"Alright." He nodded.

Just as he was about to leave, she halted him. "Wait."

"Do you need anything else, Miss Murphy?"

"Don't let Skyler and Shirley know about his arrival," she reminded anxiously.

"Okay." Dean accepted the order and went back downstairs.

A few minutes later, Crayson appeared outside the living room. He wore a black double-breasted shirt with short sleeves, a pair of gray, loose pants, and a headpiece with a black-and-gray plaid pattern. It was the typical dressing style of the hidden clan.

Standing by the door, the usual hale and hearty man seemed mournful and bleak, giving off dispirit. In the beginning, Veronica did not even bother to glance at him; instead, she simply sat on the couch and brewed a pot of tea. Her movements were slow, almost as though she enjoyed the leisurely moments in life. At the same time, it felt like she was waiting for something.

"Are you alone?" Crayson casually inquired upon seeing her solitude.

Chapter 969 Childhood

Veronica sneered. "What are you trying to say? That you harmed her by accident?" She slowly placed the teacup on the table. Picking up the teapot again, she poured herself another cup of tea and calmly continued, "Unfortunately, the law does not consider accidental harm to be absolved of guilt. Don't you think that your words are meaningless?"

A woman's appearance was significantly important. Ever since Shirley was wounded, she had lost nearly ten pounds even though she had never been chubby. Her once slender and shapely figure was now sickly thin, and her face was no longer rosy. The current changes in her appearance were comparable to a beautiful blooming flower gradually withering away due to a lack of water.

The brilliant smile that used to light up her entire face was gone. On the contrary, she seemed as lifeless as a man who had lost the will to live.

Veronica could not help feeling distressed by the sight.

Crayson took a bank card from his pocket and placed the card in front of her. "Here is 1 million as compensation for Shirley. Converted to Destorian Dollars, the amount is worth around 7.5 million. That's enough for her to live comfortably for the rest of her life." He believed that money was the best method of compensation.

She had just picked up her teacup when she heard those words. Her movement froze for a second, and she abruptly raised her head to glare at him with her dark eyes. The look in her gaze was clear and bright, but her expression was frosty.

Crack...

The teacup in her hands was crushed to pieces, causing the scalding tea to spill all over her hands; the tea was sizzling.

Nevertheless, she did not even blink from the pain and simply threw the shattered cup pieces in her hand on the table. "Master, do you think Shirley needs the 7.5 million?"

With the word 'Master', the relationship between them had been alienated to an irreparable state.

Staring at the blood dripping from her pale fingers, he furrowed his graying eyebrows and grumbled in frustration, "I know I was wrong, but I've apologized and offered compensation. What else do you want from me? All I have are these old bones. Do you want me to pay for my mistakes with my life?"

When she heard those words, her lips curved into an indecipherable smile. She leaned over and opened the drawer of the coffee table. Then, she took out a dagger from it and slammed the blade down in front of him with a loud thud. "I was just waiting for those words!"

There was nothing but disappointment left in Veronica toward Crayson. From the moment he walked into the room, she had been trying to discuss matters related to Matthew. However, he avoided the issue and changed the topic to Shirley's condition.

He had chosen to take the easy way out. Thus, she could not help losing her temper.

Her unexpected reaction left him flustered. He stared at the dagger on the table with a wooden expression, the muscles in his aging face twitching slightly. Due to his advanced age, his forehead displayed countless wrinkles.

In the past, Veronica would have reached out her hand to smoothen the wrinkles on his forehead whenever she saw him frowning deeply. She would also tug at his greying beard to comfort him teasingly.

"Don't keep frowning like an old man. You're still very young, after all."

Her comforting words had always made him burst into laughter, but the old man in front of her seemed to change in appearance. All of a sudden, it felt like she was transported to more than a decade ago when she was still an ignorant child. She would playfully climb onto his back and force him to carry her around. She would even pull on his ears, sometimes to the left and sometimes to the right.

Veronica could almost 'hear' their hearty laughter from those good, old times. Everything used to be so beautiful.

Chapter 970 Skyler Goes on a Rampage

Veronica could vividly see the struggle and pain in Crayson's eyes. Even so, she did not back down in the slightest.

"If you want this frail life of mine, then I'll give it to you." He slowly lifted his head and sighed. "But, now is not the time. The clan's fate has not been decided, and I have a mission to accomplish. When you're firmly seated as the head of the clan, you can take my life at any time."

"Huh..." She laughed mockingly. Reaching out her hand, she pulled out several tissues to wipe the blood from the palm of her hand. "What if I refuse? Will you threaten me with the lives of my two children in Bloomstead?"

Bullseye.

Therefore, he did not bother to hide his intentions and earnestly replied, "Both you and Matthew are part of the hidden clan. I am simply worried about the safety of your children. You must know that Tanya is eyeing them. I'm merely keeping them safe."

It was true that Tanya harbored ill intentions toward the two children due to Veronica's identity; she wanted to use them to threaten Veronica. However, Crayson was one step ahead by whisking the children away and disrupting her plans in one swoop.

"Are you implying I should thank you for your efforts instead?"

Veronica was not surprised that Crayson had voluntarily admitted to his involvement. From the day she entered the hidden clan, she had known they would never leave her children alone. At the same time, she also understood that they would not harm her children for the time being.

"I had no other choice." He spread his hands and sighed helplessly. "I had to act for the sake of the millions of pitiful citizens living in miserable conditions."

In his opinion, Tanya was the cause of many impoverished citizens living in the slums of the hidden clan. "Tanya Ledger is delusional and incompetent. She is not worthy of becoming the head of the clan," he strongly emphasized once more.

Veronica smiled and remained silent. In her eyes, the so-called profound understanding of righteousness he so often preached was nothing more than a joke. Performing nasty deeds under the banner of justice was a vile act.

"Where are the children?" She finally raised the question after a brief hesitation.

"Don't worry. They're safe with me. I've hired three nannies and bodyguards. Nothing will happen to them."

"I guess you didn't get it. I'm asking, where are my children?" Her expression was frosty. She clenched the tissue so tightly that her knuckles turned white.

"Not in the hidden clan, but I am taking good care of them. There's no need for you to worry."

"Where are my children!?" she questioned again through gritted teeth. At that point, she was so furious that she could barely control her temper.

"They're in Bloomstead—"