

The Understated Dragon Lord

Read Chapter 401 - 450

Chapter 401 Evasion

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Defeated by a single country kid without him ever moving an inch—a country kid at that! This was a humiliation Soldier couldn't bear.

But he wouldn't dare lead his crew against Daniel again. He was no fool. Soldier knew full well that they could fight a hundred more times and still end up whooped. They simply couldn't beat Daniel, the country kid.

So he needed an excuse, a story to spin.

"Lady, you can't blame me and my guys," Soldier said. "We all got badly beat by the Tiger King. We're still licking our wounds, which is why we couldn't take down this country kid. Give us time to heal, and it won't need to be a group thing—one of us could knock the stuffing out of him!"

He couldn't admit defeat—that was a man's last stand of defiance.

Beauty, of course, recognized the nonsense Soldier spouted, but she didn't call him out on it. She needed this story to set up another challenge for Daniel.

She had come to Spirit Animal Valley because the Tiger King had escaped, and it was now out of control. If the Tiger King got away, she couldn't explain it to Kind.

After all, Beauty was the head honcho of Spirit Animal Valley.

Looking at Daniel with a mischievous smile, she said, "Being a tough guy means nothing these days. Fighting doesn't solve anything. You might be tough, but with just a gun, I could easily take care of you."

"Beauty, you've been talking a lot. Are you trying to challenge me? Don't hold back—I'm ready for anything."

"I'm not giving you a challenge, I'm offering you an opportunity. You want to go with Jessica to New York for my grandpa's birthday bash, right? If you make yourself useful today, I'll have a word with grandpa for you."

Beauty's words sounded nice, but she definitely didn't mean it. Speak well of this country kid to Kind? She figured not bad-mouthing him was already doing him a favor!

"Come on, Beauty, we've had our close moments, we're tight. Stop beating around the bush. What do you really want me to do?"

"Didn't you call the Tiger King just a big kitty cat? Here's your chance: go catch that big cat and bring it back."

"The big cat got away?"

"Yeah!"

Beauty nodded, visibly annoyed.

"That beast is just like you—untamable and not a shred obedient! I've been treating it to the best food, even hired a team to look after it, and it still ran off. When we catch it, I'm going to whack it with a big stick until it understands. We'll see if it ever tries to run away again!"

"Whacking a tiger's behind? Not the best idea, but you two do share something in common."

Daniel said this with a laugh, but Beauty instantly sensed the jab.

"This country kid, so gutsy, how dare he backhandedly insult me?"

"You're the one who's like that beast, not me!"

"I'm not! Because I'm no tiger."

"You little country punk, you think you can insult me with your roundabout words!"

"I admit I did insult you, but I definitely didn't try to hide my intention!"

Chapter 402 The Tiger

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"I'm gonna kick your butt!"

Beauty lifted her leg and landed a solid kick on Daniel's behind, sending the off-balance man tumbling to the ground. She chuckled merrily at the sight of Daniel finally getting a taste of his own medicine.

Dusting himself off from the ground, Daniel wore a look of disbelief.

"You're laughing?"

"I sure am, hehe..."

"What a tedious woman."

Not in the mood to bicker with her, Daniel quickly changed the subject. "So where's this big kitty cat?"

The Tiger King from Spirit Realm had caught Daniel's interest. He liked cats, especially the big ones. If he could find the Tiger King and turn it into his pet, that would be one amusing feat!

Listening to Daniel inquire about the Tiger King, Soldier suddenly had an idea. He looked at Daniel with a mocking tone.

"Country kid, why you asking about the Tiger King? You don't think you've got what it takes to handle it, do you? With your scrawny body, you wouldn't serve as more than a single bite to the Tiger King. It's no ordinary tiger—it's several times the size of a normal one, bigger than a grown elephant and faster than the quickest cheetah. Standing in front of the Tiger King is just asking for trouble!"

While Soldier rattled on, Beauty grew impatient.

"Enough talk! Just take us to where the Tiger King is now! What a bunch of losers, can't even handle a country kid. Turns out, it might just take a country kid to bring back that beast. Only someone like him might have the skills to tame such a creature."

Beauty wasn't really praising Daniel; she was setting a trap.

Of course, she didn't actually want to endanger his life, so she thought she'd just bring him along for a scare. It was about teasing the country kid, not about tiger snacks.

Women are changeable creatures—what's true one second may change the next—and Beauty's attitude towards Daniel was a full display of that fickle nature.

Soldier led everyone to a locked room. The Tiger King was kept there before its escape.

Inside was a huge iron cage with bars as thick as an adult's arm. Several of the bars were broken, seemingly bitten through by sharp teeth.

Beauty pointed at the cage and asked, "What happened exactly?"

"Tiger King bit through the bars and ran off into the hills behind here. My men and I tried to track it down a few times, but we were attacked by the beast every time we encountered it."

Soldier was only telling half-truths; the first part was right, but the second half was a lie.

He'd never dare to lead his men into the hills searching for the Tiger King; it was a fierce animal and definitely a man-eater.

Wouldn't searching the hills for it be tantamount to signing their own death warrant?

"Lead us to the hills then! Let's see where the Tiger King's gotten to," Beauty demanded.

Her request filled Soldier's face with worry. After some thought, he responded, "Lady, Tiger King is very dangerous. Maybe you should stay behind, and I'll just take the country kid with me."

Chapter 403 A Woman's Plan

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As long as Beauty didn't tag along, Soldier figured things would be much easier to handle. Worst case scenario, they could find a way to eliminate the country kid and dump him in the hills.

Anyway, Soldier didn't want to venture into the hills searching for the Tiger King. It was a suicide mission.

"No way! I have to go check on that beast myself! I need to see how it's doing and if it's been hurt."

"Lady, the Tiger King's gone rogue; it's really dangerous. I'm worried you might get hurt. It's best if you stay behind!"

"Are you trying to tell me what to do?"

"Of course not! I wouldn't presume to! I'm just trying to warn you that the Tiger King has lost its mind. It's uncontrollable now."

"Uncontrollable? What do you mean? Are you saying our expensive Tiger King, raised by The Matthews, is no longer ours? That we can't make use of it?"

Beauty's question made Soldier visibly uncomfortable.

"Lady, the Tiger King of the Spirit Realm isn't some ordinary tiger. No matter what we do, we can't domesticate it. Once it has awakened, no one can control it. Anyone who tries is nothing but tiger food."

The fear was real.

Before the Tiger King's escape, several of Soldier's men were devoured alive by the beast.

They tried sedating it with loads of tranquilizers, but it was no use. The usual sedatives did nothing to it.

In the end, the Tiger King ran off into the hills.

Soldier dared not follow, but he dispatched several teams of his men.

Unfortunately, none of them returned.

It didn't take a genius to guess that they'd been eaten by the Tiger King on those hills.

So, it wasn't just about avoiding the Tiger King. Even the hills themselves were off-limits for Soldier.

Seeing fear in Soldier's eyes, Beauty let out a scoff.

"Heh!"

After her brief laugh, she challenged him. "Are you scared? Afraid of going into the hills? Afraid of the Tiger King? If you're scared, maybe you should quit this job."

The risk of losing his job made Soldier immediately protest.

"Lady, I'm not scared! Not the slightest bit!"

Beauty ignored Soldier and turned to Daniel, speaking leisurely.

"Country kid, you've heard how dangerous the Tiger King is. Are you scared? If you're fearful, I'll let you skip the trip to the hills. But I'll definitely tell Jessica you chickened out, that you're a coward."

"Scared of a tiger when I'm not even afraid of you? Now that's a joke."

Daniel was brimming with confidence, not at all frightened. After all, he carried the essence of seven dragons within him—he was the Child of the Seven Dragons. A mere big cat was nothing compared to the power he wielded.

"So you're not afraid, and you say the Tiger King's just a large kitty. In that case, how about I let you take care of it? Capture and tame it for me, and I'll reward you handsomely!"

Beauty wasn't joking; she was deliberately putting pressure on Soldier. Her real intention was to manipulate him, ensuring he valued his lucrative job and did it well.

Chapter 404 Soldier's Plan

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Soldier panicked at Beauty's words. "Lady, this country kid is just bluffing. He's never even seen the Tiger King. The moment he hears it roar, he'll wet his pants, let alone facing it!"

"A roar will make me wet my pants? Listen big guy, did that happened to you? Is that why you seem so familiar with the sensation?" Daniel's retort turned Soldier's face beet red with embarrassment. He'd hit the nail right on the head—Soldier had indeed been scared to the point of an accident by the Tiger King.

"You're the one who'll wet your pants! How could I be scared of it? If I catch that Tiger King, a couple of slaps will have it howling."

Although Soldier was fearful and hesitant, he didn't want to show it.

"You're so brave, Soldier? You can make that big cat howl? Alright, when we head to the hills, make sure to give it those slaps. Teach it a good lesson!" Daniel challenged, eager to see just how Soldier would handle the frightful encounter with the Tiger King.

Soldier would never dare to actually slap the Tiger King; he couldn't even look the beast in the eye. But he believed Daniel wouldn't be able to find it anyway. Although hesitant to venture into the hills himself, Soldier had dispatched drones to survey the area. The drones had flown far and wide without spotting any sign of the Tiger King.

Soldier suspected the Tiger King had run off somewhere, possibly even returning to the Spirit Realm, comforting himself with that thought.

"As long as you can find the Tiger King," Soldier declared with false bravado, "I'll give it a good slap and tame it until it howls!"

"Good! Get me a chicken, and it better be a hen!"

Daniel's demand puzzled Beauty. With a confused look, she asked, "What do you need a chicken for?"

"Tigers love eating chickens, right? We'll use it as bait! Unless you'd rather volunteer? You're not a chicken, are you?"

"You..."

Fuming, Beauty stomped her foot and glared at him. "Country kid, if you keep spouting nonsense, I'll tear your mouth off!"

"I'm not talking nonsense! I'm speaking the truth! You're obviously not a chicken. Or are you suggesting otherwise?"

"You... I... I'm gonna kick your butt!"

Unable to outargue him, Beauty opted for physical retaliation, aiming another kick at Daniel's behind. It was her preferred target since it had more padding, and she enjoyed seeing him stumble and fall.

She had previously gotten the upper hand by bringing him down, but repeated victories were not always satisfying. One day, she knew, she'd tire of it.

This time, Daniel decided not to indulge her any further.

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Chapter 405 Thick Skin

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Just as Beauty's kick was flying his way, Daniel caught her by the ankle.

"Ah!" Beauty yelped, sounding almost charming in her surprise.

"Country kid! You pervert! Let go of me!"

"Shouldn't you be calling me 'dear' instead?"

"Get lost!"

Beauty bent over and pummeled Daniel with several hard punches, determined to teach this country boy a lesson.

Soldier had sent someone to fetch a hen, and the group then headed for the hills. Daniel was holding the chicken and whispering advice to its ear.

"Chicken, you need to behave! No straying, alright? You walk where I tell you. If you don't, and you get eaten by the big kitty, you can't blame me!"

Daniel's talk with the chicken left Beauty speechless.

"Are you... talking to the chicken?"

"I mean, I'm not talking to you, chicken—unless you're one, right?"

"You... Keep spouting nonsense, and I swear, I'll rip your mouth off! You jerk, you absolute bastard!"

"Is it wrong to say you're not a chicken? Unless, you are?"

"You..."

Incensed, Beauty clenched her fists at her hips and yelled, "You're the chicken! Your whole family is made of chickens!"

"You know all about my relationship with Jessica. So, technically, my whole family includes you! By saying my family is made of chickens, you're including yourself in that! Really going for it, aren't you, Beauty?"

"I'm not part of anything! I do not recognize your relationship with Jessica!"

"What good does that do? You're not her. Can you dictate her choices? You have the right to not accept it, but that doesn't change anything between you and me!"

"What relationship do I have with you? Nothing!"

"Really, no connection at all? Have you forgotten what happened earlier in the car?"

"Country kid, shut it! No more wild tales! What happened in the car? Nothing happened at all! If you keep this up, trust me, I'll shred your mouth to pieces!"

"Oh Beauty, how forgetful you are! Since you're so forgetful, after we catch that big kitty and wrap everything up, maybe we should head back to the car to... reminisce about that happy tale."

"Happy? I'll make you howl with joy!"

Frustrated and unable to out-talk him, Beauty decided to take action. Learning from her previous encounter, she chose not to kick this time but instead pinched Daniel's sides.

"Ow! Ow, ow!"

Daniel started howling in mock pain, crying out, "Beauty, this is pure ecstasy!"

"You still dare to talk nonsense? I'll twist you into silence!"

"Ah! Beauty, this is bliss! Keep going! Yes, more pressure! It feels absolutely heavenly when you pinch me like that!"

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"Bastard! Pervert! You're so indecent!"

Beauty cursed and twisted even harder, but to no avail. Daniel wouldn't yield. Finally, she let go, muttering "What thick skin!"

"Beauty, you really have a talent for massage. What parlor do you work at? How about I come every day to get a massage from you?"

Chapter 406 Making a Bet

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"If you keep talking nonsense, country kid, believe me, I'll record you and show Jessica!"

Beauty was out of options and played her trump card, knowing that this country kid feared nothing but Jessica. The thought of it stirred a strange feeling in her heart—was it possible she was jealous?

Daniel immediately shut up at the mention of recording for Jessica, not daring to utter another word. Beauty found his silence oddly disconcerting. Without him teasing her, she felt uneasy.

Seeking to provoke a response, she questioned him about the still chicken lying on the ground, "What's the deal with it? Why doesn't it run away when it's on the ground? Shouldn't a chicken be like you, running wild once it's free?"

"This here is a regular hen, but after meeting me, it's become a well-organized, disciplined hen. It moves when I say move. If I say east, it won't go west."

Before Daniel could finish, Beauty interrupted with disbelief, "Bull!"

"Bull? I don't spout bull. If you don't believe me, let me show you." Daniel pointed at the hen and commanded cheerfully, "Walk two steps forward!"

After his order, to Beauty's utter amazement, the hen actually started walking—it took precisely two steps forward and stopped without any extra movements.

"You actually have the hen following your commands?"

"Money can do anything, right? Commanding a hen is no big deal."

"Wow! This hen listens so well, how much did you pay it?"

"Chickens don't need money. It wants bugs, so I promised to give it some if it behaved."

Soldier couldn't suppress a sarcastic chuckle in response to Daniel's claim.

"Country kid, you sure do know how to boast! I can believe a dog might heed your call, but a chicken? I've never heard of anyone training a chicken to take orders."

"Regular men can't train chickens as pets. But I, sir, am no regular man. Training chickens is my forte. Any chicken, once under my training, will become docile and obedient."

Beauty rolled her eyes at Daniel's claim, exasperatedly responding, "I never realized you were such a rogue, country kid."

"Where am I not being serious?"

"You just are! You're in denial! What a jerk!"

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Envious of Beauty and Daniel's teasing banter, Soldier suddenly felt jealousy creeping in.

"Heh!"

With a mocking laugh, he broke into their conversation and challenged Daniel, "Country kid, you say that chicken listens to you, I don't buy it. How about we make a bet?"

"A bet?" Daniel looked at Soldier with a playfully shrewd gaze, intrigued by what the sly man was proposing. "What kind of bet?"

"If you can make this chicken obey you, I'll kneel and call you grandpa. If not, you kneel and call me grandpa!"

Chapter 407 IQ

Chapter 407 IQ

Soldier saw an opportunity to salvage his pride after failing to best Daniel in a fight. He was convinced that with his military intelligence, he could easily outsmart this country kid—who likely had little wit. A true man's worth wasn't proved by force but by intellect, and Soldier was set on crushing Daniel's dignity under his intellectual might.

Daniel didn't rush to accept the challenge but clarified with Soldier first: "Are you sure you want to make this bet?"

"Absolutely!"

"Well, if you're keen on betting against me, we'll need a witness." Daniel gestured towards Beauty, "Let's have Beauty ensure that our bet is fair and square. I trust her character—she won't allow any cheating."

"Agreed!" Soldier consented, and Beauty, arms crossed as she watched the unfolding drama, nodded with a smile.

"Alright! I'll be the witness for your bet. Whoever loses must kneel and call the winner 'grandpa.' And if anyone tries to weasel out of it, not only are they no man, but I'll also punish them to uphold my authority as a witness!"

Beauty was entertained regardless of the outcome; she'd get to witness a good show no matter who had to kneel.

Confident after Beauty's firm decision, Soldier immediately laid out his terms.

"Country kid, the way you just had this hen walk two steps doesn't prove anything. To show us this hen really listens to you, you need to make it do something more complex."

"More complex? Name it," Daniel smirked, then commanded the hen, "You—peck his butt!"

At his command, the hen immediately flapped its wings, flew right up, and landed squarely on Soldier's hindquarters.

"Cluck, cluck, cluck!"

After a triumphant few clucks, the hen pecked fiercely. Its beak, sturdy enough to peck through stones after years of use, made for an agonizing impact.

"Ow!" Soldier screamed in pain and swatted at the hen.

"Get away! Shoo!"

The hen had promptly obeyed Daniel's single-peck order and took off right after, so Soldier missed and hit the air instead.

"Cluck, cluck, cluck..."

The hen squawked smugly, while Beauty was doubled over with laughter. She playfully hit Daniel, saying, "Country boy, you're full of surprises! Who would have thought this hen would actually listen to you?"

"Don't touch me like that, trying to take advantage!" replied Daniel with mock distaste.

"I'm taking advantage of you? There's a line of handsome guys waiting for me to notice them. And here you are, a country bumpkin, claiming I'm taking advantage of you? You must be an idiot!"

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Chapter 408 Playing Dumb

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After getting a rise out of Daniel, Beauty turned to Soldier. "You lost the bet to the country kid. You agreed to it; now kneel down and call him 'grandpa.'"

"Lady, I haven't lost!" Soldier flatly refused to concede defeat. Falling to his knees before a country kid and calling him 'grandpa' was unthinkable for a man of his stature.

Seeing Soldier's defiance, Beauty's previously amused expression turned thunderous. As the witness, his refusal to own up to the loss was a slap in her face.

Beauty's face darkened as she challenged him, "Are you trying to weasel out of the bet?"

"Lady, I would never! In my whole life, I've never backed out of a lost bet!"

"If you're a man of your word, then now that you've lost, get on with it! Kneel down and call him 'grandpa!'"

"Lady, I didn't lose!"

"Didn't lose? He ordered the hen to peck you, and it did just that. Everyone saw it; your own men saw it. Are you still going to play dumb?"

"The hen did peck me, but that doesn't prove it's listening to him! What if—just what if—it's pecking me because I caught it and it's holding a grudge against me for the stew pot?"

Soldier's excuse was a stretch, but not completely unreasonable. Beauty didn't immediately take sides but turned to Daniel instead.

"Soldier claims he didn't lose. What do you say?"

"If he insists he didn't lose, then let's keep playing! I can play until he admits he's lost. That hen can peck through hard stone. Is Soldier's butt tougher than that?"

With that, Daniel looked at the hen and cheerfully ordered, "Go! Keep at it! Peck his butt nonstop until he admits defeat!"

At Daniel's command, the hen sprang into action, cackling as it targeted Soldier's behind.

"Ow!"

"Ahhh!"

"Get off me! Get away!"

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Soldier flailed at the hen while running forward, but the hen was too nimble. In the end, he could only plead with Beauty for help. "Lady, please save me! This hen's going to peck my butt into a paste."

Exasperated, Beauty gave Daniel a punch. "Country kid, that's enough! Stop it!"

"Yes, ma'am, Beauty!" Daniel called out to the hen, "Stop!"

At his word, the hen ceased moving.

"Now do you admit defeat? Have you lost?" Daniel asked Soldier.

"I don't admit anything! I haven't lost! The hen pecking me is not because it listens to you; it has a grudge against me! If you want me to admit defeat, you'll have to make it

do something harder. Otherwise, you're the loser, and you'll kneel and call me 'grandpa!'"

Soldier didn't see it as being unfair; he was just using the rules to his advantage.

"Something harder? What do you mean?"

Soldier's gears turned quickly, and he came up with an idea on the spot. "Have it solve a math problem. I'll make up the problem, and you get it to solve. If it answers correctly, then I'll concede. If it gets it wrong, then you lose!"

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Chapter 409 Beauty Is Stunned

Chapter 409 Beauty Is Stunned

Soldier's request immediately furrowed Beauty's brow. "Are you trying to play tricks? How on earth can a hen do math?" she questioned.

"If this hen truly listens to this country boy, it means it can be domesticated. Monkeys in the circus can do math, so this hen should be able to as well. If it can't, then it proves the country kid can't control it. Then he's lost, and he has to kneel and call me 'grandpa!'" Soldier's logic was clearly a desperate grasp, but Beauty decided not to interject and turned to Daniel instead.

"What do you make of his challenge?" she asked, finding the whole spectacle increasingly amusing.

"Math problems?" Daniel nodded thoughtfully. "Alright! Since Soldier here has made the request, I'll oblige. You set the math questions, and I'll have the hen answer."

"Remember, country kid, you agreed to this. Don't back out when you lose."

"Whoever chickens out, is a chicken!" Daniel chuckled.

Beauty couldn't resist joining in, jokingly prodding Daniel, "That means you're a chicken."

"Beauty, you like puppies?" Daniel shot back, playing along.

"Puppies are adorable, of course, I like them."

"You like the cuteness of puppies, right? Or is it because puppies lick you?"

"Get out of here!" Beauty shot Daniel a look and retorted, "You're so inappropriate!"

"But you like it when I'm inappropriate. If I were all prim and proper, it wouldn't be as fun, right?"

The two engaged in their own world of playful banter, becoming increasingly risqué. Soldier felt like an outsider, and worse, a forgotten one.

Beauty was his goddess!

The goddess he dreamed of, whose image made him drool in his sleep!

But now, his goddess was openly flirting with a country kid in front of him. It was more painful than being scammed.

"Ahem!" Soldier coughed to break up the flirtation, then snapped off a twig and announced, "Prepare to kneel, country kid! I won't be too harsh; I'll even go easy on the chicken. Let's keep it simple with addition and subtraction within ten."

After scratching out the problem on the ground with the twig: $3+2=?$

Daniel looked down and instructed the hen, "There's your question laid out by Soldier. Get to it. Sure, you're just a hen, but I bet your IQ can crush this guy."

"Cluck, cluck, cluck..." The hen clucked proudly a few times, then used its claw to scratch out the number "5" after the equals sign.

Witnessing this, Beauty was shocked. "Can this hen really solve math problems? Is it still just a chicken?"

"It's been trained by me, after all. Naturally, it's extraordinary and not just any ordinary chicken," Daniel boasted with a grin.

Soldier was gobsmacked, shaking his head in disbelief. "Impossible! It can't be possible! It's just a hen—how could it do math? It's a coincidence! It must be a random scratch from the chicken's claw that just happened to land on the number '5.'"

Convincing himself it was just a fluke, Soldier quickly came up with another problem. This time, he increased the difficulty several fold. $3+(2-1)=?$

Chapter 410 One Shot

Chapter 410 One Shot

Soldier was escalating the difficulty from first to third grade math with the introduction of brackets. Seeing the problem, Beauty frowned with displeasure, "Are you trying to find a loophole? How could a hen solve such a difficult math problem?"

Daniel burst into laughter upon seeing the question. "No worries, Beauty. By demanding this, Soldier just wants to prove that he has lower intelligence than a chicken!"

Enraged by the insinuation, Soldier retorted, "Country kid, don't insult me! You think I, a commanding officer, have lower intelligence than a chicken?"

"Even if you are an officer, your IQ might still be lower than a chicken! Why don't you try competing against the hen?"

"How would we compete?"

"By solving math problems. It answers one question, then you answer another."

"Okay!" Soldier was quick to agree because he had a plan in mind.

"If the hen loses, that means you lose. I only win if the hen does."

That was Soldier's strategy. Although he'd essentially lost earlier, Daniel gave him a chance to turn the tables, and he intended to seize it.

Beauty was sharp enough to see through Soldier's façade. "You're trying to outsmart a hen in math?"

"It was the country kid's idea; he wants to bet like this. Either he's scared and his words mean nothing, or we continue." Soldier was goading Daniel, afraid the other man might back down.

"I am no coward; I stand by my word like a true man. Even though it's just a hen, I believe it's intelligent enough to outsmart you."

Daniel pointed at the equation Soldier scribbled in the dirt, urging the hen, "Go on, calculate it."

The hen etched the number "4" in the ground—it had got it right again. Daniel suggested, "Let's not waste time; let's settle this once and for all. You both make ten problems then solve them at the same time. Whoever gets more right, wins. If there's a tie, the faster one is the winner."

"Fine!" Soldier agreed without hesitation.

Could he really lose to a hen in math? He was the commanding officer; he prided himself on his arithmetic skills. Beating a hen should be no challenge at all.

With Beauty presiding over the contest, Soldier and the hen both set their problems. Soldier used a twig to write on the ground, while the environmentally-friendly hen used its claw.

The hen finished posing all ten problems while Soldier was still on the eighth; he was deliberately making them tough to stump the hen. The hen's questions, on the other hand, were simple—basic first-grade level.

Even so, Beauty was still astounded by the hen's ability to come up with problems. "Can this hen really come up with math problems?"

"Didn't I say? Under my guidance, this is no longer an ordinary hen—it's a miraculous chicken!"

"Nonsense! That's the hen's own smarts, not your training! Or do you want me to 'train' you a bit?"

Chapter 411 Shame

Chapter 411 Shame

"Beauty, how would you like to 'train' me?" Daniel asked with a sly grin.

"Scram! You're so inappropriate!" Beauty retorted, refusing to continue such an indelicate conversation. She was a proper lady, after all.

By now, Soldier had prepared all ten questions. Beauty examined them and saw, to her irritation, that Soldier had included not only addition and subtraction but also multiplication, division, equations, and even square roots.

With a mocking chuckle, she said to Soldier, "You were once a king on the battlefield, now stooping to test a hen with such complex problems. Don't you feel one bit ashamed?"

"These are all arithmetic questions. It's what he agreed upon. If the hen can't solve them and loses to me, the country kid has to kneel and call me 'grandpa!'" Soldier insisted, clinging to his ploy.

Daniel laughed confidently. "Rest assured, Soldier, I said this hen is smarter than you, and it certainly is! A problem with equations and square roots? Piece of cake!"

He had to be confident because, in truth, the hen couldn't solve math problems on its own. Daniel used his own draconic abilities to guide the hen's consciousness and have it write the correct answers.

As soon as Soldier finished presenting his problems, Daniel had all the solutions ready. When it was time to calculate, he would simply have the hen write down the pre-determined answers quickly and without error.

Beauty was uneasy, doubting that a hen, no matter how miraculous, could tackle such advanced math, nearly comparable to a college-level exam.

"Country kid, are you really okay with Soldier setting these problems for the hen fighting on your behalf?" she asked, giving Daniel a chance to object so Soldier could adjust the difficulty.

"I'm sure. Soldier's intelligence can't match this hen's, no matter what."

Still full of self-assurance, Daniel accepted the questions, despite their difficulty. Those solutions were nothing more than two-digit numbers at most.

Daniel's own questions for the hen were simple but their answers were trickier, with some reaching eight decimal places. Any adult with a sound mind could work them out accurately, although writing down the answers would take a while, certainly longer than it would take the hen.

Speechless, Beauty glared at Daniel skeptically, "You really like the idea of kneeling and calling someone 'grandpa' that much?"

"Do you lack faith in me, Beauty?"

"Not at all!"

"You may doubt me, but don't you dare doubt my hen! It's a magical chicken among hens, and it can definitely crush Soldier's IQ into dust."

"If you won't seize the chances I give you, then I can't wait to see how you lose, country boy," Beauty declared.

Under her supervision, Soldier and the hen started solving the arithmetic problems simultaneously.

Chapter 412 Triumph

Chapter 412 Triumph

Everyone present at the gathering, whether it was Soldier's subordinates or Beauty herself, was convinced the hen would lose. They were certain that Daniel would soon kneel down and call Soldier 'grandpa.' However, to everyone's surprise, before Soldier could even finish writing the answer to the second question, the hen had already completed all ten.

Soldier's men started mocking the hen's achievement, "Typical chicken, useless! How could it get all the answers down so quickly? They're probably all wrong!"

"Of course, they're wrong! There's no way our boss's problems could have such simple answers."

"Exactly! Look at what the hen wrote: single or two-digit numbers. These problems look complex; the correct answers should at least have decimals!"

...

Their rationale sounded convincing, and although Beauty hadn't voiced her thoughts, she agreed with them. She too was sure the hen had blindly written down the answers and missed the mark completely.

Despite Beauty's good academic background, she only briefly skimmed the questions without actually trying to solve them. The idea that a hen could solve such challenging math problems was beyond her belief.

Even though the hen had finished all ten problems, Soldier wasn't worried. He had convinced himself that the hen's answers could not possibly be correct. Although he had set the problems, they were written haphazardly, with no concern for their difficulty. As for the answers, he hadn't bothered to calculate them. There were even problems he couldn't solve himself.

The questions posted by the hen for Soldier might have seemed easy, involving just basic arithmetic, but they were tedious to solve, some featuring numerous decimal places. Unable to match the hen's speed, Soldier's only chance of competing was in accuracy. His goal was to correctly answer all ten questions to secure his victory. After all, even if by some stroke of luck the hen got one or even half of the questions right, the chance of guessing all ten correctly was practically nil.

After ten minutes passed, Soldier completed the last answer, beaming with confidence, "I'm done! And they're all correct!"

"Soldier, the hen had already finished way before you did, and you're still pleased with yourself? Even if your answers are all correct, you've still lost because you're slower than a chicken! Slower than a hen!" Daniel teased.

"We agreed earlier that accuracy comes first, then speed. This hen might have been faster, but there's no way all ten answers are right. If it got one or two right, that's just your good luck," Soldier argued, insisting on his presumed advantage.

"Don't underestimate chickens, especially this magical hen. Every single answer it wrote is correct," Daniel said confidently.

Turning to Beauty with a smile, he asked, "Beauty, you must have been a great student back in the day, right? You can solve all these problems, can't you?"

"I went to New York University, scored almost perfect on the SAT. These questions are for kids!"

"Since you're so skilled, Beauty, why don't you check the answers the hen wrote? Whatever you decide, we'll go with that."

Chapter 413 Shock

Chapter 413 Shock

"Of course, I should validate it! I'm the judge! It's up to me to decide who wins or loses between you and Soldier," Beauty said, with her hands on her hips, exuding an air of integrity.

"Then please, Beauty, issuing your verdict fairly," Daniel said confidently.

"Don't worry, I am always fair. I definitely won't be biased toward a country bumpkin like you—the one who never takes anything seriously!"

With that, Beauty began to check the math problems.

"The hen got the first question right."

"The second question is right too?"

...

In no time, Beauty validated nine questions. Astoundingly, the hen had gotten them all right. She couldn't believe it and asked Daniel, "How is this hen so capable? It managed to solve these difficult math problems?"

"Beauty, can't you count? Soldier presented ten questions, not nine. Therefore, the hen got all ten right, not just nine."

"You're the one who can't count!" Beauty replied with annoyance. "Look at this last question. It has such a long solution—how could it be so simple? How could '1' be the answer? So the hen definitely got the last question wrong."

Beauty's judgment was preemptive and absolute.

"Beauty, you're a fair woman; how could you spout nonsensical conclusions? You haven't calculated the final question, so how can you say it's wrong? The answer to the last question must be '1'!"

Were the first nine questions all correctly answered by the hen? Soldier was shocked!

Once he regained his composure, he quickly claimed, "Who says Beauty didn't solve it? She did, hence she said the hen got the last question wrong."

Looking triumphant, Soldier continued, "The hen did well to get nine questions right, but it messed up the last one. According to our rules, country kid, you've lost. So, kneel down and call me 'grandpa!' Hahaha..."

"Who says I lost? The last question was definitely solved correctly by the hen," Daniel retorted confidently, looking over at Beauty. "Have you finished calculating?"

"Don't rush me! I'm working on it!"

"You've been at it forever, slower than a chicken."

"You're worse than a chicken!" Beauty shoved Daniel with her knee, landing it on his plush behind.

"Ah!" Daniel yelped cheerily.

"Shush!" declared Beauty fiercely.

"You hit me and I can't even make a sound? You may be pretty, but that doesn't give you the right to be so bossy!"

"Shut up! Don't distract me from solving this! You, country kid, distracted me so much I have to start over. Idiot!"

After giving Daniel a good scolding, Beauty went back to working through the problems. Ten minutes later, she had the result. After double-checking it several times, the answer turned out indeed to be "1"!

"The answer to the last question is '1,' and the hen has won." Beauty's announcement left Soldier in disbelief.

He shook his head insistently, "Impossible! That just can't be! The answer to the last question can't be '1.' It can't be '1'!"

Soldier's reaction caused Beauty's initially amused face to darken.

Chapter 414 Be Careful or I'll Hit You

Chapter 414 Be Careful or I'll Hit You

"Are you questioning me? My fairness, or that I got it wrong?" Beauty asked, her voice cool.

"Lady, I wouldn't dare!"

"Then if you wouldn't dare, kneel down! Call him 'grandpa!'" Beauty demanded fiercely, and Soldier, frightened, knelt down in front of Daniel in an instant.

Although Soldier was on his knees, his heart seethed with indignation, and he grudgingly muttered, "Grandpa," almost crushing his molars.

He was the King of Soldiers, a figure revered on the battlefield, and now he faced such a humiliating defeat before this country kid? Intolerable!

"I don't have such a foolish grandson who can't even outsmart a hen," Daniel scoffed, then added, "Get up."

After the drama had concluded and Daniel looked up at the sky stained blood-red by the setting sun. "The sun is going down. The big cat should be coming out soon. Let's head into the forest. These creatures love dense woodlands."

Daniel turned to Soldier, "Lead the way, grandson."

"Country kid, watch your tone! I'm not your grandson! If you keep this up, be careful, or I'll hit you!"

"Oh? You still want to fight? Didn't you have enough earlier? Or, do you want to get beaten up again?"

Remembering the recent beating he'd received, Soldier instantly felt frightened but didn't let it affect his feigned bravado. "Country kid, don't think you can go around hitting people just because you're strong. That's crude, and it's low! If you're so capable, then go fight that Tiger King! If you manage

to tame it, I won't just call you 'grandpa,' I'll even bow to you! But if you can't, and you don't defeat it, you'll kneel and call me 'grandpa!'"

He was determined to reclaim the respect he'd lost today, tonight!

"Soldier, I thought you were just silly, but you really are a special kind of stupid, aren't you? You think I can't defeat the Tiger King? Haven't I said it's nothing but a big kitty cat to me? I tell it to roll over, and it rolls over! Tell it to lie down, and it won't dare stand up! So, get ready to call me 'grandpa' later and prepare to bow!"

While Daniel showed confidence in his abilities, Beauty well understood the ferocity of the Tiger King and was convinced that Daniel was bragging aimlessly again. She couldn't help but smile mockingly, "Country boy, you haven't even seen the Tiger King, and here you are, betting with Soldier again. He's definitely going to win this time. When you lose, you'll have to kneel and call him 'grandpa.'"

Seeing Beauty's schadenfreude expression, Daniel cheekily proposed, "Beauty, do you want to place a bet with me too?"

"What's the bet?"

"If I can make the Tiger King as obedient as a big kitty cat, you give me a kiss."

"Country kid, you lewd rogue, keep dreaming!" Beauty scolded, then with a stern face, added, "And what if you don't manage it?"

Chapter 415 Shamelessness

Chapter 415 Shamelessness

"If I fail to do it, you can handle me however you want. Whatever you ask, I'll do," Daniel nonchalantly replied.

"Done! I'll take that bet!" Beauty readily agreed.

She didn't believe Daniel could win. What truly mattered was that if she won this time, she could demand Daniel divorce Jessica and leave her forever. Then, Jessica could marry Smart, and Beauty's own plans would flourish—a victory for The Matthews. Pushing Jessica into another marriage meant Beauty could avoid an arranged marriage herself and wouldn't have to sacrifice her happiness to someone she didn't adore. If she left The Matthews due to marriage, she'd lose any standing in the family; their prosperity would mean nothing to her. Beauty had no intentions of enduring such a loss, hence her plan to have Jessica take on the obligation, which was the real reason why she had agreed to Avery's request to convince Jessica to reconsider.

"Beauty, you agreed so quickly. Do you really want to kiss me that much?" Daniel teased.

"Kiss you? In your dreams!" Beauty rolled her eyes. "You country bumpkin will definitely lose! When you meet the Tiger King, you'll probably freeze in fear, let alone tame it."

Soldier suddenly had a thought and quickly chimed in. "Country kid, this hen was your idea. You said it could lead us to the Tiger King. So if we don't find the Tiger King within an hour, that means you lose, and you'll have to kneel and call me 'grandpa!'"

In a last-ditch effort to make Daniel lose—and kneel before him—Soldier was tossing aside all pretense of dignity.

Daniel didn't respond directly but turned and smiled at Beauty. "What do you think?"

"Think about what?"

"About what Soldier said. He wants me to find the Tiger King within an hour. If I don't, I lose?"

Hearing this, Beauty couldn't help but laugh. "When you bet with Soldier, I was a fair judge. Now, I'm no longer impartial. Like Soldier, I'm hoping for your defeat."

"Hoping for my loss? That hope won't be fulfilled, I'm afraid," Daniel grinned.

"Country kid, since you're so confident you won't lose, why are you afraid? Just accept Soldier's conditions and bet with him!"

"Beauty, you really like taking advantage of me! Taking such big advantage, doesn't it weigh on your conscience?"

"I don't have a conscience," Beauty retorted bluntly, leaving Daniel at a loss for words.

Seeing Daniel struck silent, Beauty prodded, "What's the matter? Weren't you always so confident? Why so afraid now?"

"Afraid? Fear is not a word in my dictionary!"

"Well, country kid, since you're not scared, go ahead and accept the challenge! Agree to Soldier's terms and find the Tiger King within an hour!"

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Chapter 416 Borrowing Something from You

Chapter 416 Borrowing Something from You

"To find the Tiger King within an hour is not impossible. But." Daniel looked at Soldier seriously and grinned, "Are you sure you want me to do that?"

"Sure!" Beauty answered crisply.

"I need to borrow something from you."

"Borrow something from me?" Beauty's suspicion grew; she felt that the country kid was up to no good and asked coldly, "What do you want to borrow?"

"Something only you have."

"Only I have?" The suspicion on Beauty's face intensified. She glared at Daniel warily, "Country kid, are you plotting something?"

"Beauty, how would I dare to plot against you? If we're talking about schemes, you're far more cunning than I am."

"Hehehe..." After a sly laugh, Daniel grabbed Beauty's arm and pulled her to the side.

"What are you doing?" A puzzled Beauty asked.

"I need to whisper something to Beauty, something that only you can hear. It wouldn't be good for Soldier to listen in." Daniel then brought his mouth close to Beauty's ear and muttered a few words.

No sooner had he finished speaking than Beauty's face flushed red with embarrassment.

"Get lost! You pervert! Don't you even think about it! Just get away from me!" While cursing him out, Beauty began hammering away at Daniel furiously.

The country kid was beyond reprehensible for suggesting... for having the audacity to request such a thing from her!

"If you don't agree, then let it be. That Tiger King is not just any animal; it's a Spirit Animal. The Matthews have invested so much in that Tiger King, surely it's meant for something big! If you don't provide what I asked for, I can't guarantee I'll find the Tiger King."

"If the Tiger King isn't found within an hour, you lose; you'll have to kneel before Soldier, head bowed, and call him 'grandpa.'"

"You know as well as I do, Beauty, I'd rather be shameless. Worst case, I'll just refuse to acknowledge the loss! Soldier can't beat me anyway! And as for you, Beauty, if you can't bring back the Tiger King, I don't think you'll be able to explain it at the old man's eightieth birthday bash back in New York."

"Get lost! I would never give you that! You think I don't know you're playing a prank. So getting that thing will allow you to find the Tiger King?"

"Beauty, you spent quite some time with the tiger, didn't you?" asked Daniel.

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"How? Well, you're a perfect tigress!"

"You dare call me a tigress, I'll scratch you to death!" Angered, Beauty scratched Daniel's chest twice.

"If I'm not mistaken, that Tiger King is male, right? Once he smells the scent of a tigress like you, he'll come out on his own."

"Nonsense! I don't believe it! I'm not a tigress!"

Quick as lightning, Daniel suddenly reached out and plucked several strands of hair from Beauty's head.

"Ah! My hair!" she shrieked.

But Daniel, with his quick reflexes, succeeded in his sneak attack, snagging a few strands of hair from her.

Fuming, eyes nearly shooting flames, Beauty was livid with rage.

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Chapter 417 Lost Direction

Chapter 417 Lost Direction

Nevertheless, Daniel remained unconcerned, brandishing an impish smile. "Although Beauty didn't want to give me hairs from certain private areas, your head hair will do. The scent might not be as strong, but it was taken from you! It should work well enough."

"You pervert, I'll twist you to death!" Furious and gnashing her teeth, Beauty pinned Daniel to the ground and furiously twisted at his waist with her hand. After giving the rascally Daniel a good thrashing, she huffed, "I'm starting the clock now. If you don't find the Tiger King within thirty minutes, you lose. You will kneel before Soldier and headbutt the ground, calling him 'grandpa.' And I will punish you!"

"What kind of punishment will you give me?" Daniel asked with a grin.

"I'll pluck every last hair from your head, one by one, leaving you bald!"

"Whoa! Beauty, don't you think that's a bit extreme?"

"You asked for it! That's what you get for irritating me!"

Daniel scratched his head, mulling over the situation seriously. Something didn't feel right as he recalled, "Beauty, when we made the bet just now, we said one hour, didn't we?"

"It was an hour before, but it's thirty minutes now."

"Why is that?"

"Because I said so! I decide! If you lose after thirty minutes, I'll pluck every hair from your head!"

Beauty was utterly unyielding. After asserting her rules, she internally contemplated a wicked idea but quickly dismissed it.

No, no! How could she even consider that?

She was a lady, after all.

Besides, if she did that, wouldn't she be giving the country boy what he wanted?

Daniel fashioned the captured hair strands into a butterfly knot and tied it atop the hen's comb.

"Let's go!" At his command, the hen led the way, clucking as it moved forward.

Before long, fifteen minutes had passed. Despite the hair linked to Beauty tied to its crest, the hen seemed unable to locate the Tiger King. It had started circling in place. Beauty noticed the telltale sign and lashed out at Daniel with irritation.

"You useless country kid, yanking my hair out hurt! And what's the result? Look at this hen, it's lost all direction!"

"As I said, the hair is just a stopgap measure! It couldn't guarantee the best effect. There was something much better that could definitely lure the Tiger King out, but you wouldn't give it to me."

"Get lost! If you spout another word of nonsense, I'll rip your mouth apart!"

"My mouth has been torn apart by you plenty of times!"

"You think I won't?"

"Beauty, how could you not? You'd miss out because my mouth is quite useful to you; it brings you joy. If you tear it up—smack!—there goes your happiness."

"Country boy, quit your chattering! While you've been wasting time talking, another five minutes went by. Now you only have ten minutes left. If you still can't find the Tiger King then, you lose!"

Chapter 418 Win-Win

Chapter 418 Win-Win

In fact, Beauty's intuition told her Daniel probably had the ability to find the Tiger King. Likewise, her intuition convinced her that with only ten minutes left, it was impossible for Daniel to locate the Tiger King. Consequently, Beauty's heart was blooming with joy. She wanted Daniel to lose, but she also wished the Tiger King to be found. Losing Daniel and finding the Tiger King would indeed be a win-win situation.

Noticing Daniel was staring intently at a crooked tree, Beauty, puzzled, poked him gently in the waist. "Ouch!" Daniel exclaimed cheerfully. His mock annoyance piqued Beauty's curiosity. "What? You!" She couldn't help but respond with a playful retort. Spending time with the country kid had rubbed off on her; his shamelessness seemed to have infected her, and she unconsciously enjoyed their less than serious banter—even if it was just that, a joke.

"What are you staring at that crooked tree for? You think there's a beauty up there?" Beauty teased.

"Yes!" Daniel replied earnestly, nodding. "There is a beauty—a great one at that! However, compared to you, Beauty, she falls a bit short. And compared to Jessica, well, it's no contest."

"What do you mean? You're saying I'm not as pretty as Jessica?"

"Yes! I'm just an honest man telling the truth. Honest men like me are rare these days."

"You... You're anything but honest! You're a bastard!" Beauty pointed at the crooked tree, asking, "Where's this great beauty you mentioned?"

"Come on out, beauty!" Daniel called out.

Suddenly, the crooked tree emitted white smoke, enveloping the vicinity in a haze. A woman in a red dress emerged gracefully from a hollow in the tree.

The apparent beauty, hands clasped in front of her, bowed slightly, asking delicately, "Gentleman, how may I assist you?"

"Lady, may I inquire your name?"

"I am Lily. Might I inquire your surname, gentleman?"

As Daniel and the woman, Lily, chatted away enthusiastically, a flare of jealousy sparked in Beauty. Though she wasn't sure who this Lily was or where she had come from, Lily's eyes seemed to possess an alluring spell.

"She is no gentleman, just a country kid," Beauty quickly corrected for Daniel and then asked Lily with a hint of vinegar, "Do you live here?"

"Yes, I do," responded Lily, pointing at the tree. "That is my home."

Beauty, following Lily's indication, saw the hollow space and grasped the situation. "Are you a fairy?" she inquired.

"I am a fairy of a thousand years."

"A fairy? You seem more like a harlot to me! A harlot who knows nothing but luring men! You could have chosen someone capable, but you set your sights on even a country kid! You're bringing shame to all fairies!"

"These words are too harsh for simply speaking a few sentences with this gentleman. Is he perhaps your husband?"

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Chapter 419 Shamelessness

Chapter 419 Shamelessness

"Ugh! He's not my husband! Even if I were blind, I would never marry a man like that!" Beauty declared with a look of disdain. Deep down, she didn't realize that acting so repulsed was actually a sign of how much she cared about Daniel.

"So if he's not your husband, what concern is it of yours if I talk to him?" Even as a fox fairy, Lily had her pride and wasn't one to be trifled with. And she sensed an intoxicating scent on Daniel, something she craved, a scent unlike any ordinary man.

"If I can claim this man," Lily thought, "I could transform from a mere fairy to a celestial being." While a thousand-year-old fox fairy might have immense power, the gap between being a fairy and a celestial being was vast. A fairy remained a magical creature of legends, whereas a celestial being could live forever. With this revelation, Lily adopted a demure persona and demurely asked Daniel, "Sir, you called for me. Do you need anything?"

"I am Daniel. You shouldn't call me a country kid; that's an insult. Only someone rude, a real bitch, would call me that."

Beauty's anger flared upon realizing Daniel was indirectly calling her a bitch. She kicked him in the backside so hard that he stumbled forward—straight into Lily's awaiting embrace.

Lily's body was surprisingly soft, and Daniel caught a whiff of a delicate fragrance—a mix of floral and herbal aromas. A fox intent on becoming a fairy needed many rare herbs and even spirit medicines. Since Spirit Hill was a gateway to the Spirit Realm, such potent ingredients might actually exist right there on the mountain.

Fuming as she watched Daniel cluelessly enjoying Lily's embrace, Beauty stomped her foot. "You've got no shame, do you? Are you so hungry you're trying to get a meal right here, now? You're utterly disgraceful!"

Beauty, cursing, grabbed Daniel by the scruff of his neck and dragged him out of Lily's arms. "There's dinner here?" Daniel asked, visibly still yearning for more.

"You're the epitome of shamelessness! I'll definitely tell Jessica when I get back!"

"Tell her what?"

"Tell her about your conduct just now! It's disgusting!"

"What did I do? I didn't do anything! I was standing right here when you decided to kick me over. You kick me and then accuse me of shamelessness. You really have no shame, Beauty!"

"You dare accuse me of having no shame? I ought to twist you to death!"

Beauty was fuming with rage. To vent her frustration, she grabbed Daniel by the waist and twisted it sharply.

"Ow! Owww!" Daniel's screams were almost inhuman. She really meant business—it felt like his waist was suddenly not his own.

"Do you dare call me shameless now?" Beauty snapped, although by now she'd let up on her grip somewhat.

"Beauty, I wouldn't dare! I'm sorry, I was wrong!" Daniel pleaded for mercy, eager to escape her wrath.

Chapter 420 Can't Beat Him

Chapter 420 Can't Beat Him

In his mind, Daniel vowed to get back at Beauty for twisting his waist, determined that one day he would bring her to heel.

"If you continue to speak nonsense to me, rest assured that I won't let you off so lightly next time," Beauty warned after letting go of his waist. Having disciplined the country boy, she felt clear-headed and triumphant.

"Why did you summon this fox spirit?" she asked Daniel.

"Just as you said before, for dinner!"

"You're still saying such things?" Beauty raised her hand to act again, but Daniel, wincing from the previous twist to his waist, quickly scampered out of her reach.

"Five more minutes, and the time will be up. If you haven't found the Tiger King by then, you will have lost," Beauty said, hands on her hips assertively.

Daniel was unfazed and looked at Lily with a mischievous smile. "You must know where the Tiger King is, right?"

"I don't know," Lily lied, but Daniel saw right through her.

"Are you sure you don't know? Don't you want to think it over?" Daniel picked up a twig and lightly prodded Lily's chest with it.

"Ah!" Lily let out a yelp, and a puff of white smoke billowed from her chest.

"You're bullying me!" she exclaimed.

"If you won't tell me where the Tiger King is, I'll not only bully you, but I will also humiliate you!" Daniel jested before prodding her again on the other side.

"Ah!" Lily yelped once more, remarkably sounding rather pleasant to the ear. Soldier, watching nearby, felt a thrill and even contemplated whether he should also pick up a twig and prod in mimicry.

Without hesitation, Soldier grabbed a twig nearby and aimed it in Lily's direction, copying Daniel's action.

"Smack!" The twig hadn't touched her when Soldier found himself on the receiving end of a sharp slap to the face. His face swelled immediately, the impact sending him flying, and his two front teeth clattered to the ground.

Lily, the one who dealt the slap, glared at him furiously. "How dare you try to take liberties with me?" she shouted with ice-cold intent. "Do you not believe I would kill you?"

Completely dumbfounded, Soldier touched his stinging face, puzzled. "Why did you slap me? This country boy prodded you twice, and you didn't even flinch, but I get slapped before I can even touch you?"

"I can't beat him, but can't I beat you? Had it not been for my inability to outfight the country kid, I would have sent him sprawling in search for his teeth with a left and right slap long ago," Lily fumed, staring down Daniel with a huff.

"Humph!" She snorted with disdain and indignantly said, "Sir, if you persist in frivolity, I will end up belonging to you!"

The threat made Daniel shudder. "Whoa! Lily, that's not happening! I'm human, you're a spirit; we're not suitable for each other."

"You're my honey!"

Daniel was left speechless...

Watching Daniel and the fox spirit flirt, Beauty's patience reached its limit, regardless of how forgiving she might have been otherwise. She grabbed Daniel's ear and scolded fiercely, "Country boy, what do you think you're doing?"

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Chapter 421 Tiger King

Chapter 421 Tiger King

"Beauty, I didn't do anything! I was just asking the fox spirit questions!" Daniel hurried to explain.

"Is that right? Were you just 'asking questions'? Looks to me like you were flirting with her."

"If you're jealous, Beauty, you're welcome to flirt with me too! I wouldn't reject you," Daniel said with a sly smile.

"Scumbag!" said Beauty, her voice dripping with disdain. Then, fiercely: "You've got three minutes. If you don't find the Tiger King, you lose! And then, you'll have to kneel before Soldier, headbutt the ground, and call him 'grandpa.' I wonder what you'll do then, country boy?"

At that moment:

"Roarrrr!"

A tiger's roar resounded suddenly. Hearing it, Soldier's legs went weak, and he sat down hard on the ground, creating an unmistakable wet patch. At the same time, an acrid smell filled the air.

The nearby undergrowth began to stir, and a tiger, larger than an elephant and golden, approached with definitive steps.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The Tiger King was approaching. With every step, the ground trembled violently, as if a minor earthquake had struck.

Lily took one look at the Tiger King and hurriedly hid behind Daniel. It was obvious; she feared the Spirit Animal.

Daniel couldn't help but laugh. "You, a thousand-year-old fox spirit, scared of the Tiger King?"

"Since when do foxes not fear tigers? This is a Spirit Animal! It's dangerous! Ever since the Tiger King escaped, many animals on Spirit Hill have vanished. Those who could escape did, and many that could not have ended up in its stomach."

Beauty, however, showed no fear, standing beside Daniel. He glanced at her curiously. "Aren't you scared of the Tiger King?"

"It's a pet raised by my family. Why should I be afraid? Besides, I have you here. You're so capable, why don't you take control of it?"

Daniel gestured at Soldier—sitting on the ground, already soiled with fear—and reminded Beauty with a chuckle, "It was him you hired to guard the Tiger King. He took the salary, so why should I have to do the work? Whoever gets paid should do the job!"

"I...I can't. The Tiger King is too ferocious; it'll eat me!" Soldier confessed candidly, giving up any pretense of bravery.

In front of Daniel, he could feign toughness, but in front of the Tiger King, the pretense crumbled. After all, a Spirit Animal was still an animal—one capable of devouring humans.

As Soldier shook his head and retreated, he spoke: "Country boy, just a moment ago you called the Tiger King a big house cat. If that's true, rubbing its head should be no problem. If you're so skilled, go ahead and rub the Tiger King's head! See if it won't bite your head off!"

"It is a big cat! Just a pat on its head. What could be easier than that?"

With those words, Daniel strolled casually toward the Tiger King.

As she watched, Beauty was struck with fear. She quickly warned him, "Country boy, stop right there! Have you lost your mind? That's the Tiger King; its jaws are bigger than your head. Don't be careless; it might just eat you up!"

Chapter 422: A Woman's Favoritism

Chapter 422: A Woman's Favoritism

Beauty's cries couldn't halt Daniel's advance. He glanced back with a carefree grin and assured her, "Don't worry, Beauty, even if the Tiger King musters all its courage, it wouldn't dare bite me. And if it does try, it'll get a slap from my left hand, one from my right, and it'll howl in defeat."

As he spoke, Daniel had approached the Tiger King. The enormous creature bowed its head and opened its jaws—larger than a wellhead—lunging for Daniel's head.

"Country boy, be careful!" Beauty yelled in panic, then, disregarding her own safety, dashed towards Daniel.

At that moment, Daniel looked up sharply and lifted his hand in a swift motion.

"Smack!"

A crisp slap landed on the Tiger King's forehead.

"Roar!" The Tiger King howled—but before it could react, Daniel delivered another slap.

"Roar!"

"Smack!"

"You dare growl? Shut your mouth!"

"Roa—"

"Smack!"

"Still want to roar?"

Defeated, the Tiger King fell silent, gazing at Daniel with eyes full of misery and fear. As Daniel raised his hand again, the Tiger King promptly collapsed to the ground, rolling onto its back like a submissive giant kitty cat, begging for leniency.

Beauty was stunned by this scene. "This... this is the Tiger King! How does it turn into a big kitty in front of you, country boy?"

"The Tiger King? Even the fiercest tigers become gentle as kittens before me," Daniel replied with cheeky arrogance.

Beauty sensed something off in his words and narrowed her eyes distrustfully. "Who are you calling fierce and good-looking?" she challenged.

"Whoever fits the description," Daniel said with a teasing shrug.

"I'll pummel you!" In a fit of rage, Beauty pounded Daniel's chest with her fists.

Suddenly, Daniel remembered something. "Oh, I just won a bet, didn't I?"

His question instantly put Beauty on alert. "What bet did you win?"

Anticipating that Beauty might try to deny the bet, Daniel pointed at Soldier and asked, "Soldier, shouldn't you be kneeling down to kowtow and call me 'grandpa' now?"

Hearing Daniel's demand, Soldier naturally resisted. The shame of kneeling and calling someone 'grandpa' was something he couldn't bear a second time.

"Why would I kneel? Why should I call you 'grandpa'? I didn't bet with you!"

In his shamelessness, Soldier resorted to outright denial to avoid the humiliation.

Seeing Soldier's refusal, Daniel immediately turned to Beauty. "Beauty, he's trying to weasel out of the bet! This isn't just an insult; he's trying to shame you! After all, you were the witness to our bet!"

Beauty was always biased. She would never side with Soldier—only Daniel. Thus, with a stern expression, she ordered Soldier: "Kneel down, kowtow to the country boy, and call him 'grandpa' to honor your bet!"

Chapter 423: Bullying

Chapter 423: Bullying

Soldier had no choice but to obey Beauty's command. With clenched teeth, he knelt down. Daniel, hands in his pockets, looked down at Soldier with a smug grin.

"Big guy, your grandpa is ready. Though I won't really acknowledge you as my grandson, you better start bowing down!"

Feeling humiliated yet again, Soldier's fists balled in fury, and he roared, "Country bumpkin, don't push me too far!"

"Pushing too far? Have I really bullied you? I don't think so! I'm just asking you to honor our bet. After all, it wasn't me who insisted on betting; you were the one eager to take on the challenge. So really, you brought this on yourself. No blaming me!"

"You..." Soldier wanted to rise, his anger about to boil over, but Beauty shot him a fierce look.

"Honor your bets and don't embarrass yourself!"

Those words came like a thunderbolt, stunning Soldier. Had he served Beauty for so long only for her to reprimand him because of some country boy? Had he lost her trust?

No matter how bold he was, Soldier dared not defy Beauty. Gritting his teeth, he performed a kowtow and grudgingly called out "Grandpa!" to Daniel.

"You might be calling me 'grandpa,' but I'm not accepting you as my grandson. That said, if you want to bet with me again and call me 'grandpa,' I won't stop you. A few free calls of 'grandpa' from you certainly won't cost me anything."

"Country boy, you better stop gloating! I'll settle the score with you one of these days! One day, I'll make you kneel before me, make you bow a hundred times, and call me 'grandpa' a hundred times!"

"That day will never come! Every time you provoke me, you'll face another loss. Feel free to provoke me anytime if you're up for losing again!"

With that reminder, Daniel turned to face Beauty. He hadn't settled his account with her yet.

Seeing Daniel staring intensely at her, Beauty could tell that idiot was up to no good. So, she put on a composed face and asked, "Country boy, why are you looking at me like that? Is there something on my face?"

"Beauty, your face is prettier than any flower," Daniel complimented.

"No matter how pretty, you're not allowed to stare! Take your eyes off me or believe me, I'll gouge them out!"

"Beauty, shouldn't you honor our bet when you attempt to gouge out my eyes?"

"What bet?"

"The one where if I found the Tiger King within half an hour, you agreed to kiss me. Surely you haven't forgotten? My memory is quite good, even if yours isn't."

With just a cold hum, Beauty gave no clear answer.

"Beauty, what's this about? Are you trying to back out?"

"Back out? I'm not the kind of person to go back on my word. I honor my bets. Come on, stretch out your face so I can kiss you."

Generously, Beauty agreed to uphold her bet, much to Daniel's surprise.

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Chapter 424: Closing Eyes

Chapter 424: Closing Eyes

Daniel wondered whether Beauty was serious about following through with their bet or if she was planning a trick. Either way, he decided to stretch out his face, ready to see what she had in store.

"Close your eyes!" Beauty commanded.

Daniel obeyed, closing his eyes.

"All of you, turn around!" Beauty ordered Soldier and the others.

They all obediently turned their backs. Her actions made Daniel think that maybe, just maybe, a real smooch was about to happen. Anticipating the sweet moment, Daniel puckered up with closed eyes. But what he got was not a kiss but rather a sharp slap across the face.

With a surprised and angry face, Daniel asked, "Did you just slap me?"

"No, I was giving you a kiss! Didn't you ask for a kiss? I used my palm to deliver a warm smack right to you! How was that? Was it heartfelt enough? I can add a bit more force if you want."

"You...ugh! You shameless woman!"

"Dare say that again, and I'll slap you proper!" Beauty raised her hand, looking ready to strike.

Just then, Daniel noticed that Lily had disappeared. He quickly changed topics, "Hey, where'd the fox spirit go?"

Beauty glanced around, unable to spot Lily, and replied with irritation. "Wasn't she summoned by you? Shouldn't you know where she went off to? Instead of asking me?"

"You had me close my eyes, so I missed out on your sweet 'kiss,' got a slap instead, and now the fox spirit's gone. I was hoping to ask her for some information."

"Information? What, you wanted to ask that fox if she'd sleep with you?"

"Does that kind of thing need asking? No, that's something you figure out by doing, okay?"

"Doing?" Beauty's fists rained down on Daniel like hail. Her mood soured further, suspecting Daniel of more mischief. "Who are you doing that with? I should beat you senseless, you scoundrel!"

As Beauty pummeled him, the Tiger King was secured back into its artificial mountain enclosure. Because of its previous escape, Beauty felt uneasy. She asked Daniel, "What if the beast escapes again?"

"Give me a kiss, and I'll fix it. I guarantee the beast won't dare stray again."

Beauty lifted her hand again. "Here comes the kiss!"

"It's supposed to be with your lips, not your hand."

"Well, I only know how to 'kiss' with my palm, Daniel!"

Smack!

Beauty's hand landed another slap, but this time it wasn't on Daniel's handsome face but on his backside.

"Now spill it, how do we make sure the animal doesn't run off again?"

"What else? Just talk to it!"

Daniel approached the Tiger King and declared, "Big kitty, you don't have a name yet, right? You're all shiny gold, so how about I name you? With all that glitter, you're unbeatable in the universe. From now on, you'll be Gold."

"Roar..."

The Tiger King let out a sound, clearly not fond of the name.

Chapter 425: Taming the Tiger

Chapter 425: Taming the Tiger

"Listen, you! The name I've given you, you hear? If you dare refuse it... from now on, you're Gold. And let me tell you, Gold, if you don't stay put and dare to run off, I'll break those tiger legs of yours!" Daniel threatened the mighty Tiger King.

"Roarr..." The Tiger King protested with a growl that filled the air. It seemed to agree with the name, but it didn't like being confined to the artificial mountain—it longed for freedom. The Tiger King, fierce with spirit, would rather die than lose its freedom.

"You don't want to stay in this fake mountain, wanna roam free on Spirit Hill? Fine! You can! I'll keep the gates open for you—all the time, so you can leave whenever. But here's the deal: come back here every night. If you dare to skip a night and I catch you, I'll spank you so hard your stripes will hurt!"

With that, Daniel gave the tiger a slap on its rear. "Roar!" The tiger yelped. "Got it now?" "Roar!" "No growling. If you understand, wiggle that tail!"

Daniel's request to wiggle the tail seemed to amuse Beauty to no end. She poked him and said, "Country boy, it's a Tiger King, not a dog. And you're asking it to wiggle its tail?"

"Why can't tigers wiggle their tails? They've got tails, right? If it's got a tail, it means it can wiggle!" Daniel defended his logic, tapping Gold on the head. "Gold, shake that tail!"

With another protest, "Roar!" the Tiger King actually started wiggling its tail.

Having truly tamed the Tiger King, Beauty and Daniel left Spirit Animal Valley, heading back to the Matthews' mansion, arriving well past midnight.

Jessica hadn't gone to bed yet. Dressed in her nightgown, she was lounging on the living room couch, deeply engrossed in a soap opera.

"Staying up this late for TV? Watch out for those dark circles!" Beauty teased.

"Why are you two back so late?" Jessica asked.

"Didn't I tell you? I took country boy here to Spirit Animal Valley. But give country boy some credit; he actually got the job done. Now, I'm handing him back to you. Enjoy!" After her words, Beauty nudged Daniel, who stumbled and fell right onto Jessica.

"Ah! Idiot, get up! You're crushing me!"

"Giggle, giggle, giggle..." Beauty covered her mouth, chuckling before announcing, "I'm heading upstairs! I'll leave you two alone. And just so you know, I won't be coming back down, so don't worry about a thing."

"Brat!" Jessica scolded Beauty, then grabbed a throw pillow from the couch and tossed it at her.

While the two beautiful women engaged in playful banter, Daniel swiftly made his escape. The close calls of the day, while not crossing any lines, left him feeling somewhat guilty, as if he might have done something wrong by Jessica.

Once back in his room, Daniel quickly took a shower and then sprawled out on the expansive king-size bed, flicking through short videos on his phone. He'd just stumbled upon a clip of a stunning beauty dancing enticingly when the bedroom door creaked open.

With a gentle squeak, Jessica entered the room, looking captivating in her slinky nightgown.

Chapter 426: Misjudgment

Chapter 426: Misjudgment

"What are you doing?" Jessica demanded, startling Daniel into instinctively hiding his phone under the covers.

"What are you hiding?" she asked, snatching the phone from his grasp. When she saw the beautiful woman on the screen, her face clouded over. "You're hiding under the covers looking at this?"

"Well, if you'd twirl for me, honey, I wouldn't need the app! If you're willing to dance for me, I might even delete it," Daniel teased.

"I should twirl for you? I'll show you a twirl!" Upset that Daniel had been secretly watching dance videos, Jessica grabbed his thigh and twisted hard.

"Ow! Ow!" Daniel's pitiful cries filled the room.

"Quiet!" Jessica yelled, her voice ferocious.

"You're making so much noise, it's like I'm bullying you."

"Aren't you bullying me? You've turned my whole thigh blue," Daniel complained, rolling his eyes.

"You jerk! How dare you roll your eyes at me! Try it again, and see what I'll do!"

She was incredibly aggressive tonight. Daniel figured she must be upset from waiting too long, so he tried to get rid of her quickly with a cheeky grin. "So, honey, what brings you to my room in the middle of the night?"

"What do you think?" she snapped back.

"Oh... I get it."

Daniel then stretched out on the bed, invitingly spreading his arms and legs.

"What do you mean by that?" Jessica asked, taken aback.

"Do you even have to ask, honey? It must be me you want, right? I'm fresh out the shower, clean and waiting—come on!"

Smack!

Jessica gave him a light slap on the behind. "Get up! I came to discuss something serious."

"Serious? What's up?"

"Tell me everything you did with Beauty today - every single detail, don't leave anything out."

"What do you mean, honey? Are you suspecting something between me and Beauty?"

Jessica's expression darkened at his words. "Do you want something to happen with her?"

"Why are you framing it like I want something to happen with her? What if she wants to be with me?"

Hmph!

Jessica scoffed. "Think Beauty would be interested in you? She's an ambitious woman, and I doubt she'd give you the time of day."

Jessica was confident about this. Even if Daniel had many qualities, she believed no other woman could see what made this goofy man so special, especially someone like Beauty, a member of New York's power-society Matthews family.

"So, knowing she wouldn't be interested, you still lent me to her. Did you know that she took me to a place called Spirit Animal Valley and called dozens of people to ambush me? Those guys came from battlefields, special forces soldiers who could take on ten at a time."

"And then?"

"Well, those dozens of nobodies didn't lay a finger on me. I laid them out flat. They were all rolling on the ground, howling in pain. Even their boss, that 'Commando King,' ended up kneeling and calling me 'grandpa!'"

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Read Chapter 427: Misjudgment

Chapter 427: Misjudgment

Chapter 427: Misjudgment

"You're already a grandpa at your age? Idiot!" Jessica playfully punched Daniel and asked, "What about that Tiger King? Wasn't the reason Beauty went out to Spirit Animal Valley because it ran off?"

"Yeah, the Tiger King had run off, but I caught it up on Spirit Hill and brought it back. Gave it a name too; I called it Gold."

"You tamed the Tiger King? How'd you do that?"

"Just a couple of slaps—left and right! It roared and hollered, but eventually, I got it to submit."

"And then what else?"

"What do you mean 'what else'? What else is there that I haven't told you? Go ahead, spill it!"

Jessica's interrogation was clear baiting.

"What haven't I told you?" Daniel scratched his head, grinning mischievously. "Well, there is something... but come closer, I'll whisper it."

"Talk!"

Jessica leaned in, and Daniel planted a quick kiss on her cheek.

"I've missed you."

"Get lost!" She feigned outrage.

"Come on, can't we just sleep together tonight?"

"Scram!"

"You're agreeing?" Daniel perked up immediately and sprawled out on the bed, saying earnestly, "Honey, go for it. I promise I won't resist."

"No! You shameless man!" With a light shove, Jessica stood up and left the room.

She didn't dare stay any longer, fearing that something more might happen.

As for Daniel, he had the opportunity to take the initiative just now. But he respected Jessica's boundaries—she had to make the first move. In reality, he was afraid of being rejected and didn't want to ruin the close relationship they had built. Good things come to those who wait, he thought. A woman just needs to be wooed properly.

The next morning, Daniel was roused from a beautiful dream by Jessica dragging him out of bed.

"Honey, what's the deal?" he groaned.

"What do you mean what's the deal? The sun's high, and you're taking me to the office. You're not going anywhere today; you're staying at the office and working!"

Jessica hadn't slept well the night before, burdened by an unexplained worry that her man might get snatched away by someone else...

By mid-morning, as Daniel was working on preparing reports, Beauty paid a visit.

"Well, aren't the two of you busy bees?" Beauty greeted cheerfully while Jessica eyed her suspiciously, "What do you want?"

"Not much; I just wanted to borrow your man for one more day. He was rather useful yesterday, so thought I'd use him again."

"Why would I let you borrow him? He's not a thing to be lent out or used whenever you feel like it." Before Jessica could even respond, Daniel expressed his refusal. After yesterday's outing with Beauty, where she had pinched and prodded him, he was left covered in bruises.

Reflecting on this, Daniel felt a twinge of relief for not having taken things further with Jessica the night before.

Chapter 428: Fortune Antiques

Chapter 428: Fortune Antiques

Otherwise, Daniel was sure Jessica with her keen eyes would spot the bruises, clearly marks from a woman's clutches. That would be a trickier situation to explain. After all, Jessica was no fool to be easily deceived.

Beauty couldn't help but laugh outright at Daniel's remark. "Ha! So you realize you're just a country boy?" she taunted.

Daniel was at a loss for words. Caught off guard by Beauty's retort, he faltered, which she seemed to find hilarious.

"Why so tongue-tied, country boy? It's not up to you to decide. You're Jessica's assistant. It should be her call."

Beauty looped an arm cozily around Jessica's, grinning from ear to ear. "My dear, let me borrow our country boy here and take him out for another spin."

"Don't you agree with her? I'm your man, not some item to be lent to another woman!" Daniel interrupted before Jessica could reply, fervently rejecting the idea.

But Jessica didn't give Daniel any face; instead, she answered with a smile, "Sure, as long as you return him in one piece. If you want to use him, feel free to borrow him."

Jessica was confident Beauty wasn't interested in Daniel. Besides, she had her own plans in mind. Although Jessica wasn't actively involved with the Matthews family matters, she still kept a distant eye on them. She knew Beauty wanted Daniel to help out the Matthews, so Jessica saw it fit to lend Daniel out—both as a member of the Matthews and to keep tabs on their affairs.

"Aren't you generous!" Beauty patted Daniel on the back and commanded, "Country boy, your boss has just lent you out to me, so be a good boy and listen. If you dare not, I'll whip you to tears!"

Despite Daniel's strong reluctance, Beauty eventually dragged him into the car. As usual, she tossed the car keys to him. "Drive," she ordered.

"Drive? Where to?" Daniel was puzzled.

"Fortune Antiques."

The destination left Daniel stunned. "Fortune Antiques? You're taking me antiquing in broad daylight?"

"What, you want me to take you to a nightclub during the day?"

"They're open during the day? If they are, I'm all for it!"

"Knock it off and start driving."

"Beauty, you hail from New York. Why come to New York City to shop for antiques? And what's so special about Fortune Antiques that got your attention?"

"The owner of Fortune Antiques, Leo Turner—his family's been tomb raiding for generations. He's got quite the collection of rare treasures."

Beauty shared the insider info with Daniel.

"Leo? So he's a tomb raider? That doesn't sound very reputable. So, taking me with you, are you worried about danger and need my protection?"

"Humph!"

Beauty merely snorted in response, then, like a proud swan basking in self-satisfaction, tilted her head high.

Chapter 429: What Do You Want

Chapter 429: What Do You Want

"Beauty, taking me to such a risky place with just a hum doesn't seem very sincere, does it?" Daniel quipped.

"What kind of sincerity do you want?" Beauty shot back.

"You can rest easy; I'm not interested in your body. So, what's the real reason you're taking me to Fortune Antiques?"

"The real reason is to buy antiques, what else?"

"To buy antiques? I'm not buying it," Daniel retorted, skeptical.

"Aren't you just a little pup? Come on, bark for me."

"Like heck I will! One more joke at my expense and I might just bite you!"

"Where exactly would you bite if there's so much to choose from?"

"Knock it off, you joker! One more word and I'll tell Jessica everything you've said."

"Tell Jessica? You wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because you enjoy it way too much! You love our banter. Why else would you borrow me for a day and then come back for more today? It's clear you like the flirtatious vibe between us."

"Flirt? Not a chance! I borrowed you because it seems like you might actually have some skills," Beauty conceded, before ordering him with a nudge, "Hurry up and drive; stop dawdling!"

As Daniel reached for the gearshift, his hand accidentally brushed against Beauty's thigh.

Smack!

With a crisp slap, Beauty scolded him, "What kind of driving is that? Where do you think you're going?"

"Just Mercedes; top-class luxury!"

"Cut the nonsense and drive properly!"

With the car started, they drove for half an hour before reaching the entrance of Fortune Antiques.

"Beauty, we're here. Anything I need to know before we head in?" Daniel asked, his intuition telling him there was more to this visit than met the eye.

"It's my first time at Fortune Antiques, and I've never met Leo before. Don't let him know who I am. To him, we're just ordinary folks."

"Don't worry, being ordinary is my natural state. But you, standing out like you do, you'll need to act more low-key."

"Stop talking nonsense! Once we're inside, you're my assistant, got it?"

"Are we really buying antiques once we're in there?"

"Of course! I need to see if Leo has anything worthwhile."

With that, Beauty, clicking along in her high heels, strutted into Fortune Antiques.

As soon as they entered, a kindly looking old man wearing a blue traditional robe and a goatee came to greet them. He was naturally Leo.

"Miss, here to purchase antiques? We've just acquired several unique treasures at Fortune Antiques. Are you interested in calligraphy, jade, or maybe something else? Whatever it is, our shop has a wide variety; we have it all!"

Chapter 430: Arch-Enemies

Chapter 430: Arch-Enemies

Beauty's attire clearly spoke of wealth. Sensing the opportunity to make a hefty profit from a well-off client, Leo eagerly boasted about his collection, hoping to land a lucrative sale. After all, in the antique business, one sale could accrue enough profit for three whole years.

"My grandfather's birthday is coming up next week, and I want to get him a gift. He's fond of calligraphy and paintings. Do you have any masterpieces here?" Beauty inquired.

"Masterpieces, you say? Indeed, I have something. There's an original Piet Mondrian, 'Gray Tree,' right here. Let me get it for you," Leo offered, unlocking his safe and spreading out the painting on the table.

The painting appeared authentic in every brushstroke, structure, and detail, as if done by Mondrian himself. Beauty inspected it closely, unable to discern its true origins. Not being knowledgeable about antiques and artworks left her genuinely impressed by the painting's quality, but whether it was a Mondrian original was beyond her.

At that moment, Smart walked in, not alone, but accompanied by Xavier Reed, the president of the USA Antique Association and the nation's leading appraiser.

Caught sight of Beauty, Smart immediately engaged cheerfully, "Beauty! Long time no see! What brings you here?"

"What a surprise! Smart, out of all places, we bump into each other in an antique shop," Beauty said, matching his enthusiasm.

Given their knowledge of each other's intents with the Matthews, their encounter felt less like coincidence and more like crossing paths with an arch-nemesis.

Then Smart noticed Daniel and asked with a confused expression, "What are you doing with this country boy?"

"He's Jessica's assistant. I needed a driver for my errands in New York, so I borrowed him for the day," Beauty explained, insinuating something less significant about Daniel's role.

Smart felt a spark of joy at her words. He had always doubted that Jessica could seriously marry a country boy. Not when she was not only a scion of New York's illustrious Matthews family but also their only granddaughter. For the sake of preserving face alone, Smart reasoned, the Matthews wouldn't marry her off to a nobody.

Smart had, of course, investigated Daniel's background, finding he was indeed just a country boy from the mountains, without connections or family in New York City.

Now confident in his understanding, Smart turned to Daniel with a stone-cold reminder, "Country boy, remember the unsettled score from the other night?"

"Sure do!" Daniel replied, his smile not reaching his eyes. "That moron got the beating of a lifetime, didn't get enough? Want another thrashing so you can go tooth-hunting again?"

"Country boy, don't get cocky! Don't think just because you have a few fighting tricks up your sleeve you can insult me like that! That night was a surprise, but just you wait till I'm prepared. I'll make you crawl and beg for mercy!"

After those harsh words, Smart's tone took an unexpected turn.

"Country boy, I'll give you one last chance. This is it. Miss it, and you're done for. You're going to end up so sorry you'll wish you were dead!"

Chapter 431: Smart's Humiliation

Chapter 431: Smart's Humiliation

Daniel was well aware that Smart was up to no good, scheming to get him. However, Daniel wasn't worried. To him, Smart was no match; he could play games with Smart and make him cry if he wanted to.

"What opportunity could you possibly be giving me?" Daniel asked with a grin.

Smart pulled a hundred-dollar bill from his LV wallet with a flick.

Whoosh!

The bill fluttered down to the floor with a satisfying crisp sound. Daniel watched the display and shrugged.

"Smart, what's that about? If you've got too much money and feel like tossing it around, there are poor kids who could benefit from your generosity," Daniel said mockingly.

"This Benjamin isn't for charity, it's for you, country boy. Take it and disappear from New York, stay out of Jessica's life, or things will get ugly," Smart threatened, intending not so much to be generous as to humiliate Daniel.

"A hundred bucks? Really, Smart? You think a measly hundred can buy my love? Is that what you think it's worth?"

The mention of love triggered a burst of mocking laughter from Smart.

"You and love? Don't make me laugh. Just look at yourself--your background, your status, your upbringing. You're just a country bumpkin, gutter trash thinking about love? You'd be lucky to find love in your village, let alone anywhere else. Even village girls these days aim for city guys with money. What are you worth compared to them?"

But Smart's mocking didn't faze Daniel. He picked up the bill, smiled back, and said, "Thanks for the cash, Smart. I'll donate it to those in need. But as for my love, you can't afford it. If you're so able, why don't you win over Jessica?"

You go on about me being a country boy, but here you are, the heir of the New York Evans family, and still falling short to me. Isn't that the real embarrassment? Wouldn't your ancestors turn in their graves knowing you can't hold a candle to me?"

With that, Daniel prepared to take Smart down a peg. He pointed at the 'Gray Tree' painting and boldly exclaimed to Leo, "This painting isn't genuine; it's not Piet Mondrian's work."

Beauty was astonished and looked at Daniel incredulously, "Country boy, you know about antiques and artwork?"

"Just a little! Just a little," Daniel modestly replied, only to be met with a derisive snort from Leo.

"Heh," Leo chuckled disdainfully. "A mere country bumpkin dares to spout nonsense here. This painting is undoubtedly an original Piet Mondrian 'Gray Tree.' Your claim of its falsity is blasphemy, baseless hot air!"

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Chapter 432: The Decline of The Matthews

Chapter 432: The Decline of The Matthews

Leo had paid a hefty sum for the painting "Gray Tree," and after countless inspections, he was confident it was the real deal—an authentic Piet Mondrian.

Fuming yet certain, he turned to Gary Smart.

"Gary, you saw this Mondrian's 'Gray Tree' last time you dropped by," Leo mentioned pointedly. "You declared it genuine, willing to shell out fifty million to make it yours. Though, just to be safe, you insisted on a master's appraisal first."

With a nod toward Xavier, Leo asked, "This gentleman here, he's the expert you brought along, right?"

At Leo's words, Gary beamed triumphantly. After all, the lovely Bella was watching, and he had to show off his chops. Secretly, he longed to marry Bella, the granddaughter of the Matthews clan and one of New York's top beauties.

But the Matthews wouldn't agree to marry off Bella to him, so he set his sights on Jessica, Bella's cousin. That didn't mean he would turn down a fling with Bella if the chance arose. His ultimate dream? To win over both Jessica and Bella—why choose if you don't have to?

"Do you know who this is, Leo?" Gary boasted. "This is Xavier, the chairman of the American Antiques Association and the premier appraiser in the USA!"

Gary's chest swelled with pride as he introduced Xavier.

"Xavier? You've actually managed to bring Xavier here? That's incredible! Xavier gracing Fortune Antiques with his presence is a true honor. I've heard getting him is tougher than calling on heaven itself!"

Leo's words gave Gary just the opening he needed to strut his stuff.

"That's right," Gary quickly replied. "Xavier is no easy man to summon. Just last year, the Matthews family head wanted his consultation, and Xavier turned them down flat. Mind you, the Matthews rank third among New York's eight prominent families—even if they fall short of the Evans—still a dynasty of repute."

At this, Bella's face darkened, and she asked coldly, "What are you implying, Gary?"

"I'm just stating facts," Gary shrugged. "The Matthews, despite their rank, have been losing influence. Otherwise, why would they fail to engage Xavier? They're only holding onto third place because the other elite families respect the old man Matthews' dignity. Sadly, the descendants of the Matthews are... lacking."

Bella stamped her foot, frustrated and without a comeback.

The Matthews were indeed on the decline, their next generation not quite living up to the legacy. Bella, despite being a woman, was the most capable of her generation. And as for her father's generation, their infighting had thrown the family into chaos.

Daniel watched the drama unfold with hands in his pockets, amused. He was genuinely curious whether Xavier, lauded as the top appraiser in the USA, truly had the goods or was all talk. The "Gray Tree" on the table was a forgery—a very convincing one, capable of deceiving even a seasoned expert. After all, even those with real talent could sometimes be fooled.

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Chapter 433: Leo's Plan

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Chapter 434: Set on Winning

Chapter 434: Set on Winning

Gary thought briefly before asking coldly, "Leo, are you certain you want to do this?"

"Absolutely sure!" Leo replied with a grin.

"If that's the case," Gary warned, "let me be clear. If Xavier's appraisal reveals that 'Gray Tree' is a fake, I won't buy it. Furthermore, I'll have Xavier issue a statement broadcasting to the world that your 'Gray Tree' is a counterfeit, ensuring it will never sell."

"If Xavier determines that 'Gray Tree' is fake, I'll torch it on the spot!" Leo retorted, brimming with confidence. He was certain that Gary was desperate to possess the Mondrian. Authentic works by Mondrian, especially those as well-preserved as "Gray Tree," were a once-in-a-lifetime find. A hundred million might be astronomical for the average Joe, but for the Evans family, it was pocket change – akin to a hundred bucks to an ordinary person.

"Deal!" Gary nodded in agreement.

He turned to Xavier and instructed, "Xavier, begin. Be meticulous, we can't afford any mistakes. Losing a hundred million is trivial, but a dent in your reputation would be a true loss."

The subtext of Gary's words was not lost on Xavier, who quickly nodded, all smiles, and reassured him, "You have my word, Gary. Art appraisal is my forte. Mondrian is one of my favorite artists, and when it comes to his work, if I'm second best, then nobody dares claim to be the first."

"That's what I like to hear!" Gary nodded in satisfaction.

Xavier pulled out a custom-made magnifying glass from his bag, designed specifically for examining artworks. With the ability to reveal every detail of paper and ink, combined with Xavier's appraisal skills, the evaluation was virtually fail-safe.

Xavier scrutinized every detail of the painting through the magnifying glass, and finally, he nodded.

"Well? Is 'Gray Tree' a genuine Mondrian?" Gary asked eagerly.

Next month marked the 90th birthday of Elliot Evans, the patriarch of the Evans family. Elliot was an art aficionado, particularly fond of Mondrian's works. If "Gray Tree" was authenticated, presenting it as a birthday gift would surely earn Elliot's appreciation and catapult Gary to the forefront of the Evans grandchildren. It was an opportunity to truly shine at Elliot's 90th birthday celebration.

"It appears genuine," Xavier replied.

His answer left Gary somewhat confused.

"What do you mean by 'appears genuine'?" Gary asked.

"It means that 'Gray Tree,' from every angle, seems to be a genuine Mondrian. Whether it's the brushwork used, or any of the details, even the canvas—it's all typical of Mondrian's usual materials," Xavier explained.

"So you're saying," Gary sought confirmation, "that 'Gray Tree' is indeed painted by Mondrian and is an authentic piece?"

"Yes," Xavier nodded confidently. "I assure you, 'Gray Tree' is a true Mondrian original; there's no doubt about it."

Chapter 435: Why Should I Pay for You?

Chapter 435: Why Should I Pay for You?

Adding to his assessment, Xavier stated, "Moreover, this 'Gray Tree' may very well be considered Mondrian's magnum opus. Gary, you're lucky to get it for a hundred million!"

After hearing Xavier's appraisal, Leo hatched a quick plan. He turned to Bella and asked, "Bella, you're interested in an authentic Mondrian too, right? Both you and Gary are big players, and I can't afford to offend either of you. How about a fair competition? Whoever bids higher, I'll sell this Mondrian's 'Gray Tree' to."

No sooner had Leo made his suggestion than Gary became incensed. "Leo, what's this about? Didn't we just agree that after Xavier's appraisal, I'd buy the 'Gray Tree' for a hundred million?"

"Gary, it's not that I don't want to sell you the 'Gray Tree' for a hundred million," Leo explained. "But in business, integrity is everything. Bella came to my shop first today and expressed interest before you. So, if I were to sell the painting at a hundred million, shouldn't I ask Bella first?"

Before the last word had left Leo's mouth, Daniel chimed in with a bid. "A hundred million, we'll take it!"

Of course, Daniel had no intention of buying the 'Gray Tree' – he recognized it as a fake at first glance. By bidding now, he aimed to simply drive up the price and trap Gary.

Seeing Daniel jump into the fray only made the already angered Gary verge on exploding. "Country boy, what are you shouting about? Can you even produce a hundred million? A hick from the hills – I bet you can't even cough up a hundred bucks! A hundred million? You're not even worthy of mentioning that figure!"

"Gary, does it matter if I don't have a hundred million in my pocket?" Daniel retorted. "As soon as I make a bid, my Bella will back me up."

Daniel slung an arm around Bella's shoulder, grinning as he asked, "Isn't that right, Bella?"

"Get lost! I'm not your mom! Why should I pay for you?" Bella protested.

"But you're my Bella! Besides, I don't want the 'Gray Tree,' you do. I'm just helping you bid," Daniel explained cheekily. "If Bella doesn't want the painting anymore, I'll stop bidding. Gary only needs to bid a hundred million and one dollar, just a buck more than my last bid, and he can walk away with this Mondrian 'Gray Tree.'"

"Do whatever!" Bella blurted out.

She indeed wanted the 'Gray Tree' but didn't know much about paintings and their true value. She feared that bidding too high could lead to a significant loss if she ended up purchasing it. So, she left the matter in Daniel's hands. If he drove up the price and she overpaid, she would certainly settle the score with him later. And if Daniel's bid fell short and Gary ended up buying the painting, she would hold Daniel accountable all the same. In any case, Bella was going to make Daniel pay!

Chapter 436: Obeying Commands

Chapter 436: Obeying Commands

Bella didn't have any ulterior motives; she just wanted Daniel to be indebted to her. That way, she could have him at her beck and call, ensuring he followed her every command.

Gary, growing more irritated, warned Daniel, "Country boy, you'd better keep your mouth shut! If you keep blabbing nonsense, I swear I'll make you pay!"

"Gary, my mouth is none of your business; only Bella can shut me up. And good luck trying to 'get' me. If I've got anything, it's a strong will to live. The way I see it, I'm indestructible. So, your threats? They're empty," Daniel challenged.

"Country boy, you'd best face reality!" Gary spat, no longer wanting to waste breath on Daniel. He made his bid to Leo: "I'll offer a hundred million and a hundred dollars."

Though trivial, the additional hundred dollars was well within Gary's means. However, Leo felt insulted by Gary's gesture of bidding the bare minimum - just one hundred dollars more to claim the 'Gray Tree.' He blamed himself for not specifying a minimal increment when setting the rules, which now left a loophole for Gary to exploit.

Without the option to enforce a minimum bid raise, Leo turned his attention to Daniel, seeing an opportunity to use the gullible country boy to his advantage. "Country boy," he began slyly, "when Bella told you to 'do whatever,' she was assigning you a task to secure the 'Gray Tree' at any cost. Gary is now bidding a hundred million and a hundred dollars. Do you have the guts to beat that?"

Daniel raised two fingers in response to Leo's goading. Confused, Gary mockingly asked, "What's that supposed to mean, country boy? Are you admitting you're a fool?"

"I bid two hundred million," Daniel declared.

The bold bid floored Bella. Glaring at Daniel, she hissed, "Are you trying to get yourself killed, country boy? Raising the price by a hundred million in one go; I ought to sell you off!"

"Do you think I'm worth two hundred million?" Daniel replied mischievously.

"You know you're not worth two hundred million, yet you're yelling out bids like a madman?"

Gary was unwilling to match the lofty figure Daniel threw out. Quickly, he reminded Bella, "Bella, this country boy's arbitrary bid can't possibly stand, can it? Although the Matthews might be able to come up with two hundred million, the money didn't just fall out of the sky! Letting some country boy squander it recklessly won't look good to your family, will it?"

"If I've given the country boy authority, then his bid is as good as my decision. So, if he says two hundred million, I'm on board," Bella firmly answered.

Even though she wasn't sure about the true value of the 'Gray Tree,' it had been authenticated as a genuine piece by Mondrian, appraised by Xavier himself. She figured even at the price of two hundred million, it was a fair deal.

Bella's response infuriated Gary. Pointing at Bella, he questioned loudly, "Are you trying to cross me on this?"

Chapter 437: Quick-Witted in a Pinch

Chapter 437: Quick-Witted in a Pinch

Bella replied to Gary with a cold laugh and then retorted, "Oppose you? I have no interest in doing that. You're not worth my time. But this 'Gray Tree' has been appraised by Xavier as a genuine Mondrian. I figure two hundred million is a fair price to secure it. If you're feeling left out, Gary, you can always raise your bid. Why not add another hundred on top of the two billion? After all, that seems to be your style, barely daring to increase your bid, not even outdoing a country boy!"

Bella's jab turned Gary's face an ashen shade of anger. This sharp-tongued woman was actually insinuating that a country boy was better than him? He was determined to claim her, to show her his worth, and he wondered if she would still dare to belittle him when she was under his control.

Provoked by Bella's words, Gary couldn't afford to be outdone by Daniel. Yet, instead of simply raising his bid, he turned his wits towards Xavier and questioned skeptically, "Xavier, are you sure about your earlier inspection? Are you certain this 'Gray Tree' is an authentic work by Piet Mondrian?"

Xavier wasn't foolish; he picked up on the insinuation in Gary's question. However, having just verified the painting as a genuine Mondrian, denying his word now would be contradictory. But Xavier was clever. With a quick mental pivot, he came up with a plan.

"This 'Gray Tree' is indeed an authentic Mondrian, there's no doubt about it. But when painting it, Mondrian made a few mistakes. Moreover, 'Gray Tree' is an early work. Thus, both its style and technique are somewhat immature," Xavier offered his revised critique.

Daniel couldn't help but give a thumbs-up to Xavier's ingenuity. "Impressive! Xavier, how impressive! Just moments ago, you declared this 'Gray Tree' as Mondrian's pinnacle. How has it suddenly become immature within five minutes?"

"You country bumpkin, what do you know? When I said it was his masterpiece, I was referring to Mondrian's early peak. However, it was his later works where he truly excelled. So, this 'Gray Tree,'

even among all of Mondrian's works, is not the worst but it's certainly subpar. Even if it's authentic, it's not worth much. On the market, it might fetch at most one hundred million. Now with your two hundred million bid, by all means, buy it. After all, it's not your money you're spending; it's Bella's. Spending someone else's money wouldn't pain you," Xavier retorted.

With Xavier's commentary, Gary found his excuse. "I really do like this 'Gray Tree.' Although Xavier says it's worth at most one hundred million, and paying two hundred million would be foolish, I can be a fool for something I love. My final offer is two hundred million and one thousand dollars," Gary declared, gritting his teeth as he bid. To make a show at Elliot's upcoming ninetieth birthday in front of the entire family, he was willing to go all in. Two hundred million was, after all, only two months of Gary's pocket money.

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Chapter 438: What Are You Doing?

Chapter 438: What Are You Doing?

The very thought of his money—pocket change that could amount to a month's worth—vanishing because of that country boy made Gary seethe with anger. He had expected Daniel to back down after his bold bid, but Daniel surprised him by casually flashing a hand with all fingers extended, announcing, "Five hundred million!"

Five billion? Did that country bumpkin just bid five billion?

Bella's jaw nearly hit the floor, and she twisted Daniel's arm harshly in disbelief. "What on earth are you doing?"

Leo, on the other hand, was ecstatic. Seizing the moment, he said, "Brother here is representing Bella, and he says five billion, so it's five billion. Bella, you can't back out!"

Leo had acquired "Gray Tree" for thirty million, and selling it for fifty million would have been a massive profit. Through a fortunate turn of events, and now thanks to his clever

tactics, he was looking at a mind-blowing sale price of five billion. It was like free money that he couldn't afford to lose.

"That's right! I authorized the country boy to bid for me. So no matter the price he names, I acknowledge it!" Bella confirmed, ready to play the high-stakes game. Five billion wasn't a significant sum for her, especially after Daniel had just recently done her a significant favor by bringing back Tiger King. Considering Daniel's feat, even fifty billion would be worth it for his choice of celebration.

Intuitively, Bella felt that Daniel was just toying with Gary. Despite his unsophisticated appearance, Daniel was far from foolish—he was sharp. Bella was curious to see how he would outplay Gary. Arms crossed, she looked directly at Daniel with a hint of amusement in her eyes, reminding him, "Country boy, you better not disappoint me! If we end up overpaying for this 'Gray Tree,' I'll make sure you regret it."

"Don't worry, Bella. Even if we bid five billion, based on Xavier's appraisal, this painting could fetch at least ten billion at auction. After all, 'Gray Tree' is Mondrian's masterpiece!" Daniel reassured her, then turned to Gary and goaded, "So, Gary, are you raising the bid? If you add just a thousand or something minor, I might go straight to ten billion."

"Country boy, does it not hurt because it's not your money?" Gary gritted his teeth, consumed by fury and finally called out, "Nine billion!"

Gary's bid of nine billion stemmed from Daniel's threat of ten billion. Deciding he no longer wanted "Gray Tree," Gary aimed to stick Bella with the bill, forcing her to bear the loss due to Daniel's recklessness.

After announcing his bid, Gary watched Daniel expectantly, waiting for the whopping ten billion counter offer. But Daniel didn't raise the bid. Instead, he smiled at Gary and cheerfully said, "Congratulations, Gary!"

This unexpected congratulation left Gary bewildered. Staring at Daniel in confusion, he demanded, "Country boy, what do you mean by that?"

Chapter 439: What Are You Doing?

Chapter 439: What Are You Doing?

"No big deal, I'm just congratulating Gary for successfully securing the 'Gray Tree' at nine billion!" Daniel said nonchalantly. Gary immediately felt played as Daniel's words sunk in. Glowering at Daniel with fiery eyes, Gary bellowed, "Country boy, you dare to toy with me?"

"Toy with you? Oh, absolutely! You were so keen on this 'Gray Tree,' Gary. I thought letting you have it for one billion was too cheap for someone of your caliber—The young master of New York's Evans family. So I kindly helped drive up the price for you," Daniel retorted with a grin. "Tell me, Gary, do you feel like nine billion isn't high enough? Want me to help hike it up a bit more?"

The moment Daniel suggested he might raise the bid again, Gary tensed up, believing the country boy would follow through since it wasn't his money.

However, Gary had to get the painting no matter what, so he would have to keep up with any price Daniel called out. To avoid any more unpredictability, Gary quickly turned to Leo and clarified, "Leo, I've offered nine billion now. If this country boy makes any more wild bids, he'll have to front the money, not just run his mouth."

"So you're saying you can provide nine billion as a guarantee?" Leo asked.

"Of course!" Gary confidently pulled out his phone and declared, "I'll transfer you nine billion right now. If the country boy wants to bid higher, he needs to pay cash. If he says ten billion, he'll have to transfer it!"

As a scion of the Evans family, Gary had the funds available, so he promptly transferred nine billion to Leo. After completing the transaction, Gary turned to Daniel with a smug grin. "Country boy, I've wired the nine billion. Do you have the cash to keep bidding? You might be representing Bella, but I bet she's not willing to let you continue this bidding war over Mondrian's 'Gray Tree.'"

"Why should I fight you for it? Gary, now that you've paid, let me be straight with you. The 'Gray Tree' you bought isn't a Mondrian original; it's a copy, meticulously imitated but still a fake, just good enough to deceive," Daniel stated bluntly, which only elicited a cold laugh from Gary.

Gary retorted disdainfully, "What do you think you are? A country boy like you understands art and painting? And now you say this piece is an imitation? This 'Gray Tree' has been authenticated by Xavier."

He grabbed the painting and turned to Xavier, saying, "Now that this 'Gray Tree' is mine, you can be honest. How much is this painting really worth?"

Xavier, with a smug smile of self-satisfaction, praised the piece. "This 'Gray Tree' was passionately created by Mondrian in his later years, reflecting on a youthful romance. In terms of artistic achievement and depth of thought, it's the most elevated of all his works. If this painting were taken to auction, it could easily fetch hundreds of billions of dollars."

Chapter 440: Too Early

Chapter 440: Too Early

Xavier's claim about the painting's value was certainly an exaggeration. Yet, the price at auction often depends on the seller's clout. With the Evans family's influence, it was indeed possible for them to sell this Piet Mondrian's 'Gray Tree' at a premium. The painting's real value might be five billion at most, but by monopolizing the market and restricting the circulation of Mondrian's works, the value of 'Gray Tree' could at least double tenfold. With the right business strategy, a hundred billion wasn't beyond the realm of possibility.

Gary knew Xavier was puffing up the price, but he was thrilled all the same. When Gary thanked Leo for selling the painting for nine billion, Leo graciously accepted the praise, happy to play along with Gary's delight. After all, Leo was an expert and well aware of the 'Gray Tree's actual value; he knew that Xavier's hundred-billion figure was just to indulge Gary.

When Gary flaunted his acquisition in front of Bella, attributing a hundred-billion-dollar value, Bella looked visibly annoyed.

"Country boy, this is all your fault!" she snapped at Daniel.

Daniel chuckled and warned Gary, "Gary, the 'Gray Tree' you've bought is not by Mondrian; it's a meticulously crafted imitation. If you present it as a gift during your grandfather's ninetieth birthday celebration, it will be an embarrassment. Spending nine billion on a forgery will make for quite the disgraceful grandson. If I had a grandson like that, I'd disown him on the spot."

"Country boy, are you just jealous because you didn't manage to get a Mondrian painting for yourself? No use in being green with envy. You, a country bumpkin, never had a chance at owning a genuine Mondrian anyway," Gary taunted back, confident in his triumph.

Chapter 441 Another Bet

Chapter 441 Another Bet

"It's just a Piet Mondrian painting; I can snag one for barely anything, not even close to nine billion, just a hundred bucks tops."

Daniel's claim instantly made Smart burst into heart laughter. "Ha ha ha ha..."

After his laughter subsided, he said, "Farm boy, what are you babbling about? You're saying you can get a Piet Mondrian for a hundred bucks? If you pull that off, I'll call you grandpa."

"You really wanna be my grandson, Smart? Alright! I'll take you up on that! But just so you know, I'm not necessarily agreeing to be your grandpa. A spendthrift like you isn't fit to be my grandson!"

"If you can get a genuine Mondrian for a hundred dollars, I'll call you grandpa. But if you can't? Not only will you kneel and call me grandpa, you'll also have to leave New York and disappear from Jessica's life."

Smart wanted to make a bet, one he was sure he'd win. It was impossible to buy an original Mondrian for mere pocket change.

"Deal! I'll take that bet! But if I win, you, the moron, have to kneel and call me grandpa, too. As for Jessica, that's your problem. You can go after her all you want; you won't get her anyway."

That was how confident Daniel was!

"Deal! I'll take that bet," Smart nodded, then said with an air of victory, "Go ahead! Show me how you're going to get a real Mondrian with a hundred bucks."

Daniel pointed to a basket of paintings in the corner, which had a sign: "One Hundred Dollars Each."

"Leo, are all these paintings a hundred bucks each?"

"Yes! All these are fakes, some even prints. Take your pick, a hundred each," Leo confirmed.

"Got any Mondrians in there?"

Daniel's question made Leo laugh uncontrollably. "Ha ha ha ha... Farm boy, are you kidding me? A hundred-dollar print and you're asking if it's a Mondrian? Have a dig through; maybe you'll find something, though it'll be a print."

Daniel rummaged through the basket and finally found one. It was labeled 'Piet Mondrian' and titled 'The Red Cloud.' It featured a swath of red clouds but was indeed a print.

"This one, Mondrian's 'The Red Cloud,'" Daniel held up the print and asked Leo, "A hundred bucks, right?"

"Correct, a hundred dollars," Leo nodded.

Daniel turned to Madison with a grin, "Madison, time to pay up! I've got you Mondrian's 'The Red Cloud' for a hundred bucks."

Daniel's move left Madison speechless.

With hands on her hips, she huffed, "I wanted an original Mondrian, not a worthless print!"

"How's this worthless? Didn't Leo say it costs a hundred? A hundred dollars is still money!"

"You... I..."

"Cut the chit-chat; we're practically family. Madison, fasten up, pay up, and you might just get a surprise!"

Chapter 442 Distinguishing Real from Fake

Chapter 442 Distinguishing Real from Fake

"You annoying fool, I have to see what kind of surprise you've got for me? If it's not a surprise, you better watch how I'll deal with you!" Madison grumbled but ultimately handed over a hundred bucks.

Daniel unfolded 'The Red Cloud' in his hand and pointed at it triumphantly to Smart. "See this moron? This is the genuine Piet Mondrian I got for a hundred bucks. You lost, so get on your knees and call me grandpa!"

Smart replied with a cold laugh, followed by a mocking response. "Country boy, what are you saying? You're calling that thing a genuine Mondrian? Anyone with eyes can see it's just a print."

"A print? Oh, Smart, you are living up to your nickname. Here I am with a real Piet Mondrian and you're calling it a print? You spent nine billion on what's clearly a fake and you think it's real. It's clear now, you can't tell real from fake."

Daniel turned to look at Xavier with a smile, "Xavier, as the leading appraiser and the president of the Antiques Association, what do you think of my 'The Red Cloud' by Piet Mondrian?"

"I think? Ha!", Xavier let out a scornful laugh and said coldly, "You call that a painting? It's a print, worth maybe five dollars on a street stall, if anyone would even take it."

"Xavier, you're the top antique guy in the country, and you're saying my genuine Mondrian isn't worth more than a five-dollar street stall item? Could it be you're as senseless as Smart?"

Daniel's words turned Xavier's face green with anger. "Who are you calling senseless, farm boy? You're the fool! With a print worth less than five dollars claiming it's a Mondrian original, spending a hundred on such trash, you must be out of your mind!"

After berating Daniel, Xavier pointed at 'The Red Cloud' and questioned Leo, "Leo, how much did you pay for that thing?"

"It's worthless! That whole basket is junk I got for ten bucks total. It's there to fool the fools, you know? Some fools always look for valuable things at low prices. A ten-dollar investment for a basketful selling at a hundred each—that's thousands of times the profit!"

Pausing, Leo continued his ridicule of Daniel, "Although that basket is all profit, it sells poorly. Just look at the thick layer of dust on it. They hardly ever sell because fools like this country boy here are rare. It takes a long time to find one!"

Hearing Leo's words, Smart burst into roaring laughter. "Ha ha ha ha..."

After laughing, Smart, full of mockery, asked Daniel, "Did you hear that, country boy? Leo said your 'The Red Cloud'—he got a whole basket for ten bucks. Each one cost less than ten cents and you? You paid a hundred dollars for it."

Chapter 443 Clash

Chapter 443 Clash

"Does it really matter how much I paid for it? What matters is how much this painting is worth. 'The Red Cloud' may not be Piet Mondrian's most famous work, but it's surely among his significant ones," Daniel retorted confidently while holding up his hand, "It's worth at least a billion dollars."

Smart burst into a fit of laughter. After his laughter subsided, he sneered at Daniel, "Farm boy, is your head screwed on right?"

"It's perfectly on straight and clearer than ever!"

"If you were in your right mind, would you seriously claim that thing is worth a billion dollars? Do you seriously think there are no taxes on tall tales?"

At this point, Leo joined the conversation. "Country boy, if what you have is truly 'The Red Cloud,' a genuine Mondrian, indeed it might be worth a billion. But as far as I'm aware, Mondrian's 'The Red Cloud' is in the possession of a wealthy family in New York. How could it possibly end up here?"

Leo's words prompted Smart to ponder, and then it clicked. "Leo, you're talking about that 'The Red Cloud'? I know the piece. It's in my house; my grandpa bought it over a decade ago for a hefty sum from abroad. It cost us half a billion even back then!"

Turning to Daniel with a sneer, Smart continued, "Country boy, if you had to pick a Mondrian to brag about, you should have picked one that's not in my family's collection. Oh wait! That's right, my grandpa adores Mondrian, and we buy up any original that hits the market, sparing no expense. So, no exaggeration, out of every ten Mondrians, we own at least seven or eight. That's the kind of clout the Evans have."

Smart was looking at Madison as he spoke, a victorious gleam in his eyes. It was as if he was telling her that although both of their families valued Mondrian's art, her grandpa couldn't compete;

not even when it came to snatching up paintings. The Evans owned almost all of Mondrian's works, while the Matthews didn't have a single one.

None of the eight wealthy families of New York lacked funds to buy Mondrian's paintings. However, the Evans always managed to acquire them, showcasing their true strength. Among the elite, it wasn't just about having money—as that was the easiest thing to acquire. Rather, they competed over antiques and masterpieces, for those were unique. Each piece was one-of-a-kind in the world, which is why Smart boasted about owning Mondrian's pieces in front of Madison and why he was willing to spend a billion to secure 'The Gray Tree.'

"Smart, you don't suppose that dim-wittedness runs in your family? Your patriarch spent half a billion on a fake Mondrian, doesn't exactly sound sharp, does he?"

"Farm boy, you're bold to insinuate my grandpa's not so sharp."

"If he spent half a billion on a fake, could he be anything but?"

Chapter 444 Fetch and Carry

Chapter 444 Fetch and Carry

Smart was fuming with anger as he glared at Daniel, "On what grounds do you say that the painting my grandpa bought for half a billion dollars is a fake?"

"On what grounds? Oh, Smart, you're really not the sharpest tool in the shed, are you? There's only one 'The Red Cloud' by Piet Mondrian, and this one is the original. So, naturally, if I have the real one, the one your grandpa's got must be a fake!"

"Your words alone don't make it real. It's just a print! Who are you trying to fool by claiming it's authentic?"

"If I say it's real, then obviously, I have a way to prove 'The Red Cloud' is genuine."

"You have proof? How will you prove it?" Smart asked, brimming with curiosity.

Daniel didn't reply directly but instead turned to Madison with a smile, "Madison, could you run down and buy me a lighter and also a bottle of vodka?"

Madison's eyes widened in disbelief as she looked at Daniel, "Country boy, what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing much! Just need you to grab a couple of things."

"What do you mean, 'a couple of things'? You want me to run errands for you? Am I your servant or something?"

"Madison, that painting is yours after all. Don't you want to find out whether it's truly 'The Red Cloud'? If it's an authentic Mondrian?"

Daniel's remark left Madison flabbergasted. She stared at him incredulously, "You're claiming that painting is a genuine Mondrian? Are you sure you're not joking? You're not just messing with me,

right?"

"Madison, not for a hundred guts would I dare to play you for a fool! You know you can get fierce. If I played a trick on you, wouldn't you scratch me to death?"

"What does a lighter and vodka have to do with whether or not this is a genuine Mondrian painting?" Madison asked, genuinely curious.

"Just do as I say. I'll show you the connection soon. Trust me, Madison, I'm going to blow your mind!"

"Blow my mind? If you're brave enough to have me fetch things for you, you better not fail. Or I'll deal with you!"

Tapping her heels, Madison walked away and was back shortly, carrying a bottle of vodka in one hand and a lighter in the other.

"Here's your stuff. Now I want to see what trick you're pulling, country boy. Just so you know, this vodka and lighter cost me over three thousand dollars. If in the end you can't use these to prove that the painting is an authentic Mondrian, you owe me ten times the money!"

"And if I can prove it is a genuine Mondrian, what's my reward, Madison?"

Daniel had a mischievous look that told Madison he was up to no good. Irritated, she said, "I'll reward you with a slap! And if one isn't enough, you'll get two!"

Madison's tone was fierce, and her pretty face looked just as intense. She even lifted her hand, ready to give Daniel a smack.

Daniel knew she was trying to intimidate him, so he boldly leaned his face toward her outstretched hand.

Chapter 445 Flames

Chapter 445 Flames

"Go on then, hit me! If you do, I won't let you see the true nature of this painting," Daniel taunted Madison, clearly holding some leverage.

"Smack!"

How could Madison tolerate such a threat? She slapped Daniel across the face right away. But she held back, making it a light tap rather than a full-force blow.

Daniel looked at her in shock, "Did you really just hit me?"

"So what if I did? When I hit you, it's because I care!"

Madison leaned close to Daniel's ear and added in a whisper, "Behave, or you'll get more than a slap!"

That left Daniel puzzled, "More than a slap? Where?"

"I'll flick that certain place," Madison replied with a sly grin. As she spoke, her eyes darted downwards involuntarily, and her mind conjured up some imagery. She wondered what that private area of his might look like and what his reaction would be if she flicked it. Could it be delightful to see how a little flick makes this country boy howl?

"Pervert!" Daniel returned Madison's jest.

Their whispered exchange, although inaudible to Smart, was enough for him to sense the flirtation based on their expressive interaction, which sparked an instant surge of jealousy.

"Country boy, stop trying to distract us with your antics. You've got the vodka and the lighter now, so get on with your proof. Prove that this worthless print is a ten-billion-dollar original by Piet Mondrian," Smart demanded.

"Didn't expect to see you in such a hurry, Smart. Are you so eager to kneel and call me grandpa? Since you're so impatient, I'll start my demonstration."

Daniel handed the painting to Madison, "Hold this for me, will you?"

Madison held the painting while Daniel unscrewed the vodka bottle and poured its contents all over the canvas.

"You're pouring three thousand dollars' worth of vodka on worthless print? You really are a fool, aren't you? Such a waste when you could have enjoyed drinking it—what a shame!" Smart mocked Daniel without understanding his intent.

Daniel ignored Smart and turned to Madison, "Make sure you hold it steady now! Don't let go no matter what."

While he spoke, he took out the lighter. Seeing this, Madison immediately became alarmed.

"What are you planning to do, country boy?"

"What else? I'm going to light it, of course! A real painting won't fear the flame. I'm going to set this painting on fire, and after it burns, the truth will be revealed."

"What did you say? Set it on fire? Are you trying to burn me alive, country boy?"

"Oh! Madison, you won't get hurt."

"You... I ought to kick you to death!"

In her irritation, Madison gave Daniel a light kick with her high heel. Still, 'The Red Cloud' remained in her hands; she didn't throw it away.

"Madison, you need to trust me. If I asked you to hold onto it, then I can guarantee one hundred percent that after it's lit, the fire won't touch you."

Chapter 446 What Trick Are You Playing?

Chapter 446 What Trick Are You Playing?

"Absolutely won't burn me? If you say it won't burn me, does that mean it really won't? What if it actually ignites and I get burned?"

"If it burns you, Madison, I'll let you deal with me however you want. No resistance, I promise."

"You're saying that now, but if this fire lights and burns me, you'll see how I'll handle you!"

Madison was quite curious; she didn't truly believe the painting wouldn't burn her after being set on fire. But for some reason, she believed Daniel's outrageous claim, thinking that maybe this country boy wasn't actually deceiving her.

With intrigue, Madison urged Daniel, "Country boy, hurry up! I want to see what trick you're pulling."

Daniel pulled out the lighter. Snap! The lighter ignited, and he slowly brought it closer to the lower left corner of the painting.

As soon as the flame touched the canvas, whoosh! It burst into flames, casting a green fire that quickly danced over Madison's fingertips. Nevertheless, she felt no heat, only a chilly sensation as if snowflakes were landing on her skin. It was an interesting feeling indeed.

"How about it, Madison? Told you the fire wouldn't burn you, didn't I?"

"Country boy, why is this flame so green? Even greener than you!"

"What do you mean 'greener than me'? Madison, what are you trying to say? You want to get in bed with me?"

"Country boy, stop spouting nonsense or I'll end you! I have no such relation with you!"

"So, Madison, you're saying you've been with someone else?"

"What do you mean 'been with someone else'?"

"You know what I mean. Have you never heard of sex?"

"Sex your ass! I'll kick you where it hurts!"

Madison lashed out with a kick and hissed, "I'm still a virgin!"

Daniel's eyes lit up as he smirked at her, "Are you sure about that, Madison? You're really a virgin?"

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I'm simply a bit excited."

"You jerk! You country boy, don't even think about it; you're not getting a piece!"

"Not my piece? Then who's the lucky one?"

"If you keep blabbering, believe me, I'll smother you with this burning painting!"

"Calm down, Madison. This painting is a ten-billion-dollar genuine Piet Mondrian. If you smother me with it, my face might get ashy, but the painting would be ruined. Then, goodbye ten billion."

"If this painting turns out not to be a genuine Mondrian, I'll be the one to set your hair on fire."

"Which hair?"

"Which hair do you think? Of course, the one on your head!" Madison rolled her eyes at Daniel and scolded, "Pervert!"

As the two bantered, the green flames on the painting gradually extinguished. The painting itself turned into what looked like burnt charcoal, blackened with cracks running throughout.

Seeing this, Smart burst out laughing. After his laughter subsided, he pointed at the charred canvas, "Country boy, that's a genuine Mondrian? That thing is worth ten billion? Haha..."

After taking in the sight, Leo also chimed in with his own jibes and mockery.

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Chapter 447 Shock

Chapter 447 Shock

"It was worth at least ten cents as a print, but now that you've burnt it, it's not even worth a dime!"

Xavier, of course, wouldn't miss his chance to chime in at such a moment. He added, "What a waste! Such a pity for that vodka! Such good liquor gone to waste!"

Madison didn't mock, but she immediately turned to Daniel with an angry look, questioning, "Country boy, where's that genuine Piet Mondrian you were talking about? You better not be telling me that this charred thing is it!"

"This is the genuine Mondrian! If you don't believe me, just give it a shake."

"A shake?" Madison's face was full of confusion, "Shake what?"

Daniel subconsciously glanced downward, and upon noticing where he was looking, Madison scolded him sharply, "You pervert!"

"How am I a pervert now? I meant shake the painting, not your chest. Besides, if you wanted to shake your chest, it would only be for me to see. With all these animals around, how could I possibly ask you to do that?"

"Shake for you alone? Believe me, I'll gouge your eyes out!"

After her retort, Madison shook the painting vigorously.

Woosh! A cloud of black smoke rose up, covering her with ash. Then, the once blackened painting she held suddenly became clean, turning into a stark white canvas. On it was a vividly detailed picture, "The Red Cloud," and by the looks of the signature, it truly seemed to be painted by Piet Mondrian himself.

At the sight of the painting, Smart went stiff with shock. The piece Madison was holding looked identical to the "The Red Cloud" at his home.

Madison herself was utterly stunned. She truly hadn't expected such a result from a simple flick of her hand. A blackened canvas had transformed into a brilliant, stunning painting.

"Is... is this painting really Piet Mondrian's 'The Red Cloud'?" Madison asked incredulously.

"Of course, it is! When have I ever lied to you? Every word I say is trustworthy."

Madison only responded to Daniel's boastfulness with a cold laugh.

"Heh!"

After her laugh, she clenched her fist threateningly, "If this isn't Mondrian's 'The Red Cloud,' you're dead!"

Smart, having snapped out of his initial daze, obviously wouldn't believe that the painting in Madison's hands was an original Mondrian. After all, "'The Red Cloud'" was at his home.

"Heh!" Smart let out a scoff to break the silence.

Drawing everyone's attention, Smart pointed at the painting and said, "Country boy, is this some kind of magic trick you're putting on with Madison? I have to say, it does look quite convincing, quite impressive. But no matter how realistic your trick is, it's still just a trick. You might fool others, but you can't fool me, heh!"

'The Red Cloud' by Piet Mondrian is presently sitting in my house. So whatever you 'magically' produced right here has to be fake."

Chapter 448 I'll Give You a Million

Chapter 448 I'll Give You a Million

As Smart's words settled, Leo quickly took up the conversation. "We don't even need to look closely at the painting, just look at the canvas! Piet Mondrian was from the 19th century, which is over two hundred years ago. No matter how good the canvas he used for his paintings, they would've turned yellow by now. Look at this one; it's as white as snow, like it's brand new. How could it possibly be from the 19th century?"

Leo's rhetoric made Daniel ask, "How long have you been in the antiques business, Leo?"

Though taken aback by the question, Leo, eager to flaunt his experience, boasted, "I started dealing in antiques when I was just sixteen years old. It's been almost fifty years now."

"Nearly fifty years in the antiques business and you still can't recognize a genuine Mondrian that's right in front of you? You mistake a fake for the real deal?"

Leo scrutinized the 'The Red Cloud' painting, this time focusing on the artwork rather than the canvas. On closer inspection, he was a bit startled as he started feeling that what he initially dismissed as fake somehow seemed genuine. But even with that creeping suspicion, he certainly wasn't ready to admit that 'The Red Cloud' might be real. He scoffed again in cold denial.

"Heh!"

After his scoff, he mocked, "Country boy, the artistry on your painting does look good, I must admit it's no longer just a print. But this painting is a fake, a reproduction. Judging by the quality of the art, it might be worth ten or twenty thousand dollars."

Meanwhile, Xavier had been staring intently at 'The Red Cloud,' the more he scrutinized, the more shocked he became. So much so that he instinctively reached for his magnifying glass.

"Madison, please put the painting on the table. Let Xavier have a good look at it."

Madison placed the painting on the table, and Xavier immediately approached with his magnifying glass, examining the details closely. After a while, Xavier couldn't help but nod his head. Although the canvas looked brand new, the more he observed, the more the painting resembled a true Mondrian original.

Seeing Xavier pack away his magnifying glass, apparently having seen enough, Daniel asked with a grin, "How about it, Xavier? Is this a genuine 'The Red Cloud' by Piet Mondrian?"

"An original?" Xavier shook his head, "The painting indeed looks identical to Mondrian's 'The Red Cloud,' but it's impossible for it to be an original. However, whoever copied this painting is a master; it's convincing enough to pass for real."

Turning to Madison with a serious expression, Xavier proposed, "Madison, this is a counterfeit copy and therefore, not much use to you. Why don't you sell it to me? I'm willing to offer you a million for it."

The price of a million dollars was a calculated offer by Xavier. Not too high, but not too low. In truth, he had already judged the painting to be a genuine 'The Red Cloud' by Piet Mondrian.

Chapter 449 Coward

Chapter 449 Coward

Regarding why the canvas was so pristine, Xavier really couldn't understand; he racked his brain but could not come up with a convincing explanation.

Madison, with her sharp intellect, immediately sensed something fishy when Xavier expressed a desire to purchase the painting and even offered a million dollars for it.

Before Madison could respond to Xavier's offer, Daniel interjected, "Xavier, you're really something, aren't you? Trying to con someone as beautiful and innocent as Madison. To think that you would attempt to acquire her ten-billion-dollar genuine Piet Mondrian with a mere million. Can you really live with your conscience trying to swindle a young lady like that?"

"This painting isn't a genuine Mondrian, it's a replica. How could the canvas of an original be so new?"

Daniel didn't even bother with Xavier after that. Wrapping an arm around Madison's waist, he said cheerfully, "Let's go, Madison!"

As the two left, Leo was itching with frustration. Even though he didn't believe the painting was a real Mondrian, Xavier's million-dollar bid suggested he had sold the painting for far too little.

Watching Daniel slip his arm around Madison's waist, and seeing how she didn't resist, Smart was gritting his teeth in jealousy and rage. After nearly grinding his molars to dust, he turned to Xavier.

"Xavier, why would you offer a million for that painting? Could it actually be a real Mondrian?"

"Uh... Well..."

Xavier hesitated before saying, "There's a lot about that painting that indeed looks like the real deal. It's just that canvas... it's too new. After hundreds of years, the canvas of a true original wouldn't look so fresh."

"If that painting is real, does that mean the 'The Red Cloud' at my place is a fake?"

"Even if his painting is real, it doesn't necessarily mean your 'The Red Cloud' is fake. Mondrian might have painted two identical pieces."

"That country boy somehow bought a genuine Mondrian for just a hundred bucks. I have to get that painting back and tear that country bumpkin limb from limb!"

Smart's loathing for Daniel intensified now that he perceived Daniel to have gained an upper hand.

Back in the Mercedes, Madison pointed at the painting and asked, "Country boy, is this really an original Mondrian?"

"Yeah! It's real! Otherwise, why would that old fox Xavier offer a whopping million dollars to buy it?"

"If it's real, then you won the bet with Smart, right? Shouldn't he be kneeling down and calling you grandpa? Or are you scared because he's the young master of the Evans family?"

"Scared? That word isn't even in my dictionary!"

"If there's no fear in your dictionary, then why didn't you make Smart kneel and call you grandpa?"

"I said 'The Red Cloud' is a genuine Mondrian, but Smart won't admit it, neither will Xavier or Leo."

"So, you are scared after all?" Madison asked with a teasing smile.

Chapter 450 Assassin

Chapter 450 Assassin

Being called coward by a young woman was not something Daniel would admit to, and he immediately retorted, "Who says I'm scared? Isn't his grandfather turning ninety next month? I'll just go to the Evans' birthday celebration and make Smart kneel and call me grandpa in front of everyone at The Evans. That will have much more impact!"

Madison, only half-believing him, responded dryly, "Braggart!"

"Braggart? How could such a humble man like me brag?"

Madison let out a cold laugh, "Stop it, you're definitely not humble!"

"How do you know that?"

"I just do."

"Then why don't you run away when you see me?"

"You... I... I'll beat you, you're such an indecent man!"

Madison playfully punched Daniel as if her small fists were raindrops showering upon him.

In another scene, as soon as Smart left Fortune Antique, he received a phone call.

"Smart, Kojima, the world's ninth-ranked assassin and Japan's number one, is now in New York waiting for your orders."

"Good! Tell him to take out that country boy immediately! And, that country boy has a Piet Mondrian painting with him; make sure Kojima retrieves it for me."

"Yes, Smart!"

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The Mercedes AMG was moving leisurely down the road when suddenly a Harley Davidson motorcycle appeared behind it, roaring loudly. Daniel, driving, took one glance in the rearview mirror and realized something was off about the motorcycle.

The rider on the Harley seemed to be tailing him. Could it be that person was after him?

Although the rider was wearing a helmet, Daniel had the amazing ability to see through things. His eyes could penetrate the helmet and get a good look at the person's face.

Well, well, a Japanese individual!

He hadn't offended any Japanese people recently, so why would one be following him?

Daniel focused on the rearview mirror again and noticed the killer aura emanating from the Japanese man. So, it appeared they sent an actual skilled assassin after him.

But no matter how formidable the assassin was, in Daniel's eyes, they would end up as easy prey.

Who would send an assassin after him? Daniel didn't have to ponder for long before he thought of someone.

That retard! It had to be Smart who sent him.

After all, the Japanese killer exuded an air that only someone with deep pockets could afford to hire. This killer was part of the global elite of assassins, commanding fees in the tens of millions of dollars.

With an assassin on his tail, Daniel couldn't lead him back to the Matthews mansion. So, he steered the Mercedes AMG onto a dimly lit side road.

Madison instantly sensed something amiss and questioned, "Country boy, what are you doing? Why have you driven us down this dark alley? What are you planning?"

"What could I do to you, Madison? Even if anything happens, it'll be because you did something to me."

Daniel threw another indelicate comment her way and then pointed to the rearview mirror.

"Madison, take a good look."

Focusing intently, Madison noticed the Harley motorcycle trailing them. Curious, she asked, "Is the person on that bike here to cause you trouble?"