

Under the Heiress' Facade #Chapter 251 - Read Under the Heiress' Facade Chapter 251

Chapter 251

Amelia's eyes widened with a sudden sense of dread as Hera revealed that Queenie had concealed the truth about Isabella and Madison's deaths. Queenie was intending to frame her for the crime.

Amelia's mind raced. This was a matter of life and death, and she, Queenie's biological daughter, struggled to comprehend such betrayal.

Despite Queenie's disdain for her, she couldn't believe her own mother would stoop that low.

"No, this couldn't be true!" Amelia quickly dismissed the accusation.

She figured that Hera must have been trying to drive a wedge between them.

Amelia quickly masked her shock and snapped, "Stop spreading lies just to stir up trouble! Keep an eye on her!"

Her latter sentences were aimed at Eric as she clicked away in her high heels.

Eric hurriedly shut the wooden door and locked it again.

Hera let out a sigh of relief when the door closed before collapsing weakly to the ground.

After a while, she rummaged through her pocket and retrieved a small packet of black pills. Hera quickly tore it open and poured the pills into her mouth. After swallowing them dry, she closed her eyes to rest.

Eric caught up with Amelia outside the woodshed.

"Ms. Gaskell, Mrs. Gaskell wants you to handle this," he said while making a throat-slitting gesture.

Amelia was stunned. She wondered if he was saying that she should kill Hera.

She had never even slaughtered a chicken before, and yet Queenie wanted her to take a life.

She silently questioned if Queenie was genuinely her mother. Amelia's mind was in turmoil. She contemplated how much Queenie had kept hidden from her.

"Mrs. Gaskell said once you've handled this, she'll promote you to chief financial officer. It's such a good deal. Stop hesitating," Eric urged after lighting a cigarette.

Amelia listened to his casual tone. It was as if he were asking her to take a few extra steps, not commit murder. She couldn't help but wonder how many lives Eric had taken to be so indifferent.

A chill ran down her spine as Amelia said, "I need to return and discuss this with my mom first."

With that, she boarded her private jet.

Three and a half hours later, Amelia arrived at the Gaskell residence.

Queenie was enjoying an at-home spa treatment when suddenly, the door was flung open, startling her spa therapist.

"Why are you back?"

Queenie frowned at Amelia's unexpected return.

"Why did you lie to me?"

Amelia's eyes were red as she confronted Queenie.

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During her journey back, she had spoken to several people and confirmed the deaths of Isabella and Madison. Queenie had concealed the truth from her completely. Content belongs

"What are you talking about?" Queenie asked, dressed in a bathrobe.

After sitting up, she gestured for her spa therapist to leave.

Now left alone with Queenie, Amelia got straight to the point.

"Isabella and Madison are dead. Yet, you lied and claimed they had escaped. You made me deal with the person who helped them!" Queenie's face darkened.

"Who told you that?"

Seeing Queenie's lack of denial, Amelia's heart sank, and tears welled up in her eyes.

Summoning all her courage, she

pressed on, "That's not the tota

The point is, you wanted me

the blame for this, didn't you o

Content belongs

Amelia had repeatedly convinced herself

attempts to sow discord, but gl

couldn't help but confront, Queenie.

t to fall for Hera's

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Content belongs

If Queenie denied it, Amelia would fly straight back to that rundown woodshed and kill Hera. However, Queenie remained silent.

Chapter 252

Amelia's tears overflowed, and they streamed down her cheeks without restraint.

"Amy," Queenie called softly after noticing Amelia's tears.

She got out of bed, walked over, and gently cupped Amelia's face to wipe away the tears.

With uncharacteristic patience, Queenie said, "I had no choice. For the sake of our family, you need to make a small sacrifice."

"A small sacrifice."

It was the same old authoritative tone, leaving no room for negotiation. However, this was a matter of life and death, not mere trivialities like giving up on piano for accounting.

How could Queenie have said it so casually?

Amelia couldn't help but question her existence in the Gaskell family. She wondered if she was merely a pawn to them.

Amelia tried to speak as she was filled with defiance. But faced with Queenie's cold stare, words failed her.

Tears flowed uncontrollably, soaking her clothes and chilling her heart.

"Alright. Enough with the tears now. It's not a big deal. Just go and do it. Aurora and I will side with you," Queenie coaxed gently as she patiently wiped away Amelia's tears with a tissue.

Amelia stared blankly at her.

In this moment, Queenie appeared like a caring mother, offering the affection Amelia had always longed for to coax her forward. But beyond her lay an abyss.

A knock on the door interrupted them, and the butler's voice came faintly from outside, "Mrs. Gaskell, Mr. Graham has arrived." "Let him in."

Queenie patted Amelia's shoulder, signaling her to relax.

As the door opened, Amelia quickly turned her back as she didn't want to be seen in her current state.

"Mrs. Gaskell, I've cleared all the contents from the memory card," Alfred Graham said.

Memory card? Amelia glanced at Alfred as he handed Queenie a small white envelope. Inside was a memory card from an old phone.

She vaguely remembered the

el

memory card. Last night, before

Queenie sent her to Lensvale,

someone had brought it, claiming it had been found in some woods.

Content belongs

"Great. Thank you. You may go," Queenie said after taking the memory card.

After Alfred left, she briefly examined the card. With a cold chuckle, she tossed it into the trash can.

Afterward, she called the spa therapist back to continue her treatment.

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Seeing that Amelia had stopped crying, Queenie said, "Amy, if you have no more questions, you should return now. When you come home, we can have a spa day together." Content belongs

Amelia looked at Queenie, who lay on the bed, with a conflicted expression.

After a long silence, she replied, "Alright."

Before leaving, Amelia deliberately walked past the trash can. When she stepped outside, a memory card was hidden in her palm.

Meanwhile, after taking the pill, Hera rested for two hours in the woodshed. Her headache eased, and her cold sweats and fever began to subside.

However, she felt parched and exceptionally hungry. She needed water urgently.

Suddenly, there was a noise outside

the door, followed by the sound of a lock turning. Hera quickly resumed her position on the floor, pretending to be tied up. Content belongs

The door opened, revealing Joseph Allen, the sly-faced man who had knocked Hera out the night before.

Joseph entered, leaving the door ajar. Carrying a tray, he approached Hera with a lecherous grin.

"Hey babe, I've brought you some food."

Hera almost gagged at the middle-aged man calling her "babe".

Noticing the slightly opened door, Hera flirtatiously smiled at Joseph.

She lowered her eyes and said softly, "But I can't eat with my hands tied. Can you untie me?"

Chapter 253

Joseph noticed Hera's captivating smile, and his grin took on a more sinister edge.

It had been a while since he'd been with a woman, and now that he had this innocent young woman in his grasp, he intended to make his move while Eric and the others were occupied with dinner.

Joseph swallowed hard and casually pushed the plate aside. As he edged closer to Hera, his hands fidgeted nervously.

"My babe, let me help you with those ropes..."

As he unsuspectingly crouched down, Hera seized the moment. Her gaze turned icy, and in one swift motion, she grabbed his neck.

Joseph was caught off guard. He wondered when she had freed herself.

"Y-you..."

Before he could utter another word, Hera's grip tightened around his neck. Her fingers pressed into his acupuncture points, sending a sharp pain through his throat that silenced him.

In the next instant, Hera's other hand reached for a wooden stick hidden behind her. She struck him hard on the back of his head as retribution for the previous night's attack.

Joseph's eyes widened in disbelief. Within seconds, his struggling hands fell limp, and his eyes closed.

After putting him down, Hera checked his pulse, confirming he was still alive. She quickly took the rope to bind his hands and feet, then quietly cracked open the door to survey outside.

Hera was held captive in an old mountain cabin. It was deserted, with faint sounds of conversation and clinking dishes drifting from the main house where everyone was gathered for dinner.

Across from the woodshed, an old SUV was parked under a tree. Hera would have to walk past the main house to reach it and risk being spotted.

Glancing up at the overcast sky, she struggled to determine her bearings. Deciding to leave the area first, she slipped out and closed the woodshed door behind her.

Hera slowly circled around to the back of the woodshed. Suddenly, she froze.

A was tied to a tree behind While gnawing on a b

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its head at the sound. of her

s. Content belongs to

For a few seconds, their eyes locked. Then, the wolfdog erupted into a frenzy of barking.

Back in the main house, Eric paused over his meal to listen to the commotion.

"Why's that wolfdog going nuts? Brian, go check it out."

Ever since Isabella and Madison ran off, Eric had kept an oversized wolfdog for security.

Brian promptly set down his cutlery and went outside.

Just as he reached the door, Eric added, "And check out why Joseph hasn't returned yet."

Brian grumbled as he headed out.

Moments later, his voice carried from outside, "Eric, this is bad! Joseph's tied up, and the girl's gone!"

"Go after her!"

Eric abandoned his meal, grabbed a weapon, and dashed out to search for Hera.

Winter in Southburrow was nothing

like Norburgh's evergreen foliage and rugged, untamed terrain. Running through these bumpy woods could easily lead to getting lost or injured. Content belongs

However, Hera had grown up in the mountains and knew the primal forest like the back of her hand.

She quickened her pace, aware of the wolfdog and the SUV trailing behind her.

"Stop right there! You better fucking stop, or I'll shoot!"

Eric leaned out from the passenger seat and aimed a long gun at Hera, though the bumpy ride made aiming

difficult. Content belongs too

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Chapter 254

Hera glanced over her shoulder at the closing SUV and the oversized wolfdog. Without breaking her stride, she quickly scanned her surroundings and dashed toward the densest part of the forest.

Suddenly, she spotted three or four fallen trees blocking the path ahead. Their trunks were crisscrossed with vines. After adjusting her breath, she sprinted toward them.

Using one hand to vault herself over a tree trunk, she gracefully dodged the vines and wove through the scattered trees.

The SUV screeched to a halt in front of the trunks. The men inside jumped out, but the wolfdog leaped over the trees before they could react and continued chasing Hera.

"Eric, should we keep following her? She's heading into the deep mountains!" Brian's voice quivered with fear.

Years ago, Brian had cut down those trees to mark the boundary. Beyond this point lay danger-wild, ferocious animals and an ancient, haunted graveyard that the villagers avoided at all costs.

Brian had once dismissed these fears as superstition. But when he ventured into the mountains once before with Eric for a big hunt, they barely escaped with their lives.

Only four of the ten men returned, and Eric's facial scar was a constant reminder of that nightmarish ordeal. It was terrifying. Eric seemed possessed at that moment and continuously slashed his own face with a knife.

Ultimately, the four of them stumbled and crawled their way back. After that, Brian never dared to return and deliberately cut down those trees to block the path.

"Forget it!"

Eric spat on the ground. His expression was grim.

"Call the dog back. You two stay here and keep watch."

He figured that Hera, alone and unarmed, wouldn't survive the night in the mountains. It spared him the trouble of dealing with Hera himself.

Deep in the forest, Hera finally stopped running when she was sure no one was following her-not even the wolfdog.

Panting and exhausted, she removed her jacket and leaned against a tree, her legs trembling.

Hera hadn't eaten or drunk anything all day except for a few pills. Now, with a fever and after running so long, her body was reaching its limit.

She glanced around and spotted a

bush with clusters of green and blackberries. She remembered eating these wild berries as a child. The green ones were poisonous, but the black ones were safe in small amounts. Content belongs

Hera picked some blackberries to soothe her dry throat and hungry

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stomach. Then, she found a corkwood tree with yellow fruits. She didn't like the yellow fruit's sour taste, but with limited resources, she forced herself to eat a few. Content belongs

However, instead of feeling full, Hera felt even hungrier.

She longed for the perfectly seared steak that Bernard used to make.

Hera let out a frustrated laugh as her stomach grumbled in response.

Hera looked up at the darkening sky and realized the night was approaching.

While foraging, she gauged her

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location by the density of the trees

and their moss patterns. Hera

figured out that she was deep in the mountains, far from the village.

Content belongs

She knew she couldn't make it out before nightfall and needed to find a way to survive the night. When she returned, she vowed to have Bernard cook that steak again.

Chapter 255

Meanwhile, Eric drove back to the main house. He leaped out of the car and checked his phone, finding no signal connection.

"This is strange," he muttered to himself.

"Why isn't there any signal here? I always get reception in this spot. Is the transmitter acting up again?"

He urgently needed to call Queenie to inform her that Hera had escaped. Just as he looked up, he noticed movement inside the house. Before he could react, a booming voice echoed behind him.

"Freeze! Put your hands up! You're surrounded!"

"Who the fuck are you?" Eric cursed.

He turned around to find himself surrounded by a group of special forces from the police department, each aiming a gun at him.

One wrong move and he could instantly be riddled with bullets.

However, Eric was no stranger to this kind of situation. He was a regular at the police station, and his frequent visits had familiarized him with Stephen from the department, though the buzz-cut man beside him was new.

"Mr. Hall, what's with the grand entrance today?" Eric asked with a sly grin. He then pulled out a pack of cigarettes and offered one to Stephen.

Without hesitation, Stephen seized Eric's arm, swiftly flipped him over, and pinned him to the ground in a single fluid motion. Eric's face was slammed into the ground alongside his dropped cigarette.

"Where did you hide her?" Stephen demanded sharply.

Eric winced in pain but still played dumb.

"Who? I have no idea what you're talking about!"

Stephen twisted Eric's arm even harder.

"Hera Youngworth! Where is she?"

Eric groaned but was still defiant.

"I really don't know what you're talking about! This is police brutality! Let me go, or I'll report you!"

Nathan stepped forward and patted Stephen's arm.

Thinking Nathan was concerned about Eric's threats, Stephen reassured him, "Don't worry about him. This guy has a long rap sheet. He's not going to talk without some rough persuasion." Content belongs

Nathan simply pointed to the sky and urged, "Hurry up. They're coming."

Stephen heard it, too—the approaching helicopter. As it hovered above them, the rotor blades swayed the surrounding trees.

Eric's heart leaped, hoping it was Amelia returning. But as the ladder descended, two men emerged instead.

The first was a baby-faced man in camouflage, and the other was a strikingly handsome man in a tailored black suit, exuding an intimidating presence.

Eric gulped, and his earlier hope dissipated as cold sweat broke out on his forehead. These two looked like Bernard and Aaron.

"Mr. Killian, Mr. Ludden," Nathan and Stephen greeted respectfully.

"Have you found her?"

Bernard's sharp eyes locked onto Nathan.

"No," Nathan replied with a shake of his head.

"We've searched the house and the surrounding area, but there's no sign of Hera. We only found someone tied up in the woodshed who claims Hera knocked him out and left." Content belongs

With a frown, Bernard's gaze turned cold as he looked at Eric.

"Has he told the truth yet?"

"Not yet. He's a tough nut to crack. Give me some time, and I'll get him to talk," Stephen replied.

"Aaron."

Bernard turned to Aaron with a meaningful look.

Aaron nodded, signaled to two special forces members, and then walked toward the back of the house. The soldiers quickly took Eric from Stephen, each gripping one of his arms as they followed Aaron. Content belongs

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Eric struggled and shouted, "What are you doing? Let me go! You can't threaten me like this!"

Stephen and Nathan exchanged glances, then...

Chapter 256

A chilling scream pierced the air behind the main house, startling the forest birds and sending shivers down Stephen and Nathan's spines.

The scream echoed for what felt like an eternity before abruptly ceasing. Soon after, Aaron emerged from behind the house and vigorously wiped his hands with a handkerchief, looking disgusted.

Following closely behind him, two special forces dragged Eric out. Despite appearing unharmed, his expression was vacant, starkly contrasting his previously defiant demeanor just minutes earlier.

Stephen swallowed hard, struggling to comprehend how Aaron could have so thoroughly shattered Eric's spirit in such a short span of time. "Bernard, he said Ms. Youngworth had fled into the deep mountains," Aaron reported to Bernard.

Bernard checked his watch.

"Five minutes. That's progress."

Aaron replied, "Still not as swift as your three-minute record, though."

Bernard had once extracted crucial information from an FBI spy in just three minutes.

Stephen's eyes widened in disbelief. Three minutes? What sort of hellish interrogation technique could have achieved that?

"Search the mountains. No matter what it takes, find her before nightfall!" Bernard ordered coldly.

"Yes, sir!" the team chorused in response.

Aaron then led a team of special forces, accompanied by search dogs, into the depths of the mountains.

Meanwhile, Bernard remained at the main house, clenching his fist. Hera feared the dark, and he was determined to bring her back before night descended.

"Bernard, all signal jammers are in place," Douglas said through the earpiece.

"Alright," Bernard replied and turned to board the awaiting helicopter.

As it flew toward the mountains, Bernard activated two laptops. One displayed 12 surveillance feeds from different angles. He inserted a USB drive on the other laptop and swiftly typed commands. Lines of code rapidly scrolled across the black screen. Content belongs

Meanwhile, an alert blared across the screen in the satellite monitoring office at Meridian's military aviation base, jolting the night shift into action. Content belongs

"UTA-224 is under attack again! Brace for impact!"

"Is it Raven again? He was here yesterday, and now he's back?"

"Track his location!"

"The intrusion point matched yesterday's, but the method's different. Looks like S's work." "That doesn't fucking matter right now! Just stop them! He's altering the satellite's trajectory!" "They must be a team!"

"Seriously. Can't they find someone else to mess with instead of hitting the same target?"

While that happened, Hera gathered dry branches to set up a fire to last the night. As she was located deep in the mountains, she planned to leave at dawn. Content belongs

Suddenly, the roar of helicopters filled the air. It was not just one, but several, drawing closer.

Unsure if they were friend or foe, she darted into the nearest bushes, only to lose her balance and tumble down.

Chapter 257

Hera reacted swiftly and clutched the vine. However, the branch tore through her sleeve and sent a sharp pain shooting up her arm.

Just as her other hand scrambled for a foothold, the vine snapped unexpectedly, causing her to plummet. With a resounding crash, Hera landed on bent knees to brace herself against the impact.

Despite the fall, she managed to grab enough vines to avoid a worse fate, though both of her palms were now scraped raw and stinging.

Ignoring the pain, Hera surveyed her surroundings. Above her, a narrow strip of sky marked the crevice she had fallen from, now hundreds of feet above and out of sight.

Sunlight filtered through, casting an eerie glow downward, revealing what appeared to be a gaping maw in the mountain.

Hera wouldn't have noticed that there was such a large opening on the upper ground if she hadn't accidentally stepped into thin air.

The split in the mountain seemed almost naturally formed, opening into a vast, semi-oval space that looked partly excavated. It seemed bottomless and shadowy within.

A small stream flowed with crystal-clear mountain water among the scattered rocks on the ground. Alongside the stream, a few plump, giant rats cautiously watched her.

After ensuring it was safe, Hera went to the stream to wash her hands and face. She took a few refreshing sips of the ice-cold water that was almost painfully cold against her lips.

Hera's arm was still bleeding, so she ripped a strip from her torn sleeve to bandage the wound.

Her jacket was left above ground, leaving her in just a thin sweater that was now torn at the sleeves. As time passed, the chill of the cave began to set in.

With dusk approaching and the knowledge that it would only get colder after nightfall, Hera needed to leave the place as soon as possible.

Retracing her steps back up seemed impractical, so Hera followed the mountain water flow downstream. Her movement startled a few giant rats that scurried deeper into the darkness.

Eventually, she reached a small pond where the stream converged. She observed that its flow was directed back toward the excavated space behind her.

There seemed to be a second layer beneath, but it appeared deep and foreboding. As it was shrouded in darkness, Hera was hesitant to proceed. With mountains blocking her escape, climbing was out of the question. Her only options were to press on into the unknown or face an uncertain fate. Left with not much of a choice, Hera steeled herself and cautiously advanced step by step.

Suddenly, a faint "clink" echoed

through the silent cave. Hera had kicked something—an old military flashlight. Dusty and seemingly disused, it surprisingly flickered to life at a touch. Content belongs to

With the newfound light, Hera spotted a worn-out backpack not far ahead. She kicked a stone toward it when she noticed something inside still moving.

A rat the size of a cat darted out with a squeak, disappearing into the shadows.

Tracking its escape with the flashlight, Hera stumbled upon a bronze door hidden deep within the cave.

She rummaged through the

worn-out backpack and wrinkled her

nose at the stench of rat urine. After wavering her hand in front of her face in disgust at the smell, she continued searching. Content belongs

et

The bag's surface was covered in dust and marks from being dragged across the ground, likely by rats from somewhere nearby. The zipper had been chewed through, and most of its contents had been lost along the way. Content belongs

After clearing the initial debris, she mainly found ruined contents a few crushed packs of compressed biscuits, a water bottle, and a knife.

Hera took the knife for protection and approached the bronze door.

Chapter 258

The ground before the bronze door was paved with concrete and adorned with a mosaic of black-and-white tiles forming the Wheel of the Year. They had excavated such an ample space within the mountain and even installed a bronze door. She considered if it could have been a tomb or something else entirely.

Hera approached the ancient bronze door, its surface weathered with time. On either side, the guardians Michael and Gabriel were engraved, though their forms were obscured beneath a layer of dust.

In the center, a lock shaped like the letter "H" was covered in dust.

Below it, a T-shaped keyhole hinted that it could be unlocked with the correct key, though Hera knew it wouldn't be so straightforward. Even with the correct key, a labyrinth lock would require precise alignment of internal mechanisms.

The challenge of deciphering such a secretive lock intrigued Hera, almost tempting her to attempt it then and there. But the timing wasn't right. She needed to leave first.

With her flashlight, she scanned the area and spotted what seemed like a hidden passage to her right. As she moved closer, her foot suddenly caught on something.

Moving her foot to the side and shining her flashlight on the ground, Hera discovered a black pearl earring nestled between two white ceramic tiles. It was about the size of a thumbnail.

The earring seemed oddly familiar. She picked it up and noticed its rusty hook, suggesting it had been there for some time.

Hera recalled crafting a pair of black pearl earrings for Daphne when she was five. It was a Mother's Day gift she had proudly shown to Lucius and Daphne.

The memory stuck with Hera because she had pricked her finger while drilling the hole for the pearl and had bled quite a bit.

She hadn't dared to tell Daphne and Lucius, but Bernard had come to her rescue as he helped her handle the injury and even finish crafting the earrings.

In the end, those earrings became their joint gift for Daphne.

Hera remembered how Daphne used to wear those earrings with such joy. But after a business trip, Hera never saw her wearing them again. She once asked Daphne about them, and Daphne had regretfully admitted to losing one.

Hera fiddled with the black pearl earring and struggled to recall its original appearance fully.

She considered the possibility that that Daphne had visited here years ago.

Glancing back at the bronze door,

Hera resolved to return again. Next time, she'd be better prepared for further investigation. Then, she

tucked the black pearl earring

her pocket and continued down the hidden passage. Content belongs

The passage ascended like a staircase but was unevenly constructed. Hera could glimpse a faint glimmer of light from above, accompanied by a draft of wind, hinting at an exit.

Without hesitation, Hera hurried

upward. But midway, her flashlight flickered twice and then died, engulfing her in night's darkness. Hera felt her forehead grow cold with sweat. Content belongs

"It's fine... Don't panic... Keep climbing... Keep climbing..." Hera murmured to herself, pushing forward.

She couldn't afford to stop now. Daphne's killer remained at large, Lucius' name needed clearing, and Bernard's steak was still in her mind.

With each step, Hera repeated these thoughts to herself. With her eyes tightly shut, she forced her trembling limbs to press onward.

It felt like an eternity, but Hera finally

reached the opening, drenched in cold sweat. As she collapsed at the edge, she panted heavily, and her limbs trembled uncontrollably.

Content belongs

Then, a low growl echoed in the darkness. Hera's eyes snapped open to find dozens of eyes glowing with an eerie green light fixed upon her.

Chapter 259

As evening approached, Bernard used satellite surveillance to scan half the mountain. Eventually, he found Hera's jacket deep in the forest. Bernard descended from the helicopter and notified Aaron of its location. The group then swiftly mobilized, combing the area surrounding where the jacket was found.

As darkness fell, Bernard's expression grew increasingly grim. He was clutching Hera's jacket so tightly that his knuckles turned white.

Aaron, who had been on more than a dozen S-class missions with Bernard, had never seen him this tense.

He tried reassuring Bernard, saying, "Don't worry too much. Hera will be fine. She grew up in the mountains and knows how to handle herself out here."

"Yeah," Bernard replied.

He then instructed Douglas through the earpiece, "Bring some searchlights," before returning to the helicopter to resume searching through the surveillance.

Night fell, and Nathan finally uncovered traces of Hera in a thicket half a mile away. There were freshly broken branches, snagged wool fibers, and bloodstains on the leaves.

After pushing through the bushes, they found an opening with signs of something that slid down the grass.

"Mr. Killian, Captain Ludden, over here!" Nathan called out to Bernard and the others.

Bernard set aside his laptop and joined Aaron at the scene.

Nathan explained the clues he found.

"It looks like Hera fell in here. No wonder we couldn't find her."

Bernard still held onto Hera's jacket with a stoic face, betraying none of the turmoil he felt. Yet, the tension around him was palpable.

"Clear it," Bernard ordered after glancing at the bushes that were blocking the opening.

Aaron quickly summoned a few men to clear away the obstructing foliage.

Soon, the foliage revealed an

opening about six feet wide and 50 feet long. As it was hidden by the bushes, it was hard to spot even from aerial surveillance. Content

belongs

The group approached the edge and shone their flashlights down. However, the beam failed to reach the bottom.

Despite the flashlights' powerful

beams extending up to 1,500 feet

they still couldn't probe

depths, indicating the hole

was

deeper than expected. Content belongs

"It's more than 1,500 feet deep. We have no idea what the situation is down there," Nathan said.

Instantly, everyone's expression turned grave. The prospect of Hera falling from such a height loomed ominously.

"Mr. Killian, you'll have to prepare yourself. Even if she survives, from this height..." Stephen's voice trailed off. "Shut up!" Bernard snapped.

Stephen, who had been trying to offer some comfort, felt a suffocating pressure from Bernard's outburst and shuddered. No one else dared to speak. Bernard gripped Hera's jacket even tighter. He believed she would be okay. She had survived 11 years ago and would also make it alive now.

His primary concern was Hera enduring the darkness as night fell. They needed to find her quickly.

Seeing Bernard's worsening expression, Aaron interjected, "Don't be so pessimistic. Ms. Youngworth is resourceful. She'll be fine."

Aaron knew all too well that a fall

from over 1,500 feet would likely be fatal, even for him. But as the team's leader, he couldn't afford to entertain negative thoughts. Content belongs

"I'm sorry. It's all my fault. I'll go down and check," Nathan said, feeling guilty.

Chapter 260

Nathan was consumed with guilt. If only he had intervened sooner with Hera, perhaps she wouldn't have been kidnapped or fled deeper into the mountains.

The thought of such a vibrant soul suffering because of his mistake weighed heavily on him.

Bernard shot him a glance before turning to Aaron.

"Angle the lights down and send two men to check it out," he ordered briskly.

As he spoke, a chorus of wolf howls echoed nearby, accompanied by faint sounds of combat.

Bernard's gaze darted beyond the cave's entrance toward the source of the commotion.

A sudden realization gripped Bernard, and he declared abruptly, "I'll go check it out."

With that, he swiftly bypassed the cave and sprinted toward the noise.

"I'm coming too. You guys stay here," Aaron shouted as he chased after Bernard.

Nathan and Stephen exchanged glances and quickly followed, leaving behind a group of bewildered special forces in uniform.

As they approached, the sounds of combat and wolf cries intensified, mingling with the metallic tang of blood in the air.

Despite being in his tailored suit and polished shoes, Bernard moved swiftly and reached the scene first. However, what he saw before him made him freeze in his tracks.

Aaron caught up just in time, narrowly avoiding a collision as Nathan and Stephen stumbled into him.

"What's going on?"

Stephen managed to regain his balance after falling backward.

They then noticed that the fierce battle had ended, leaving only the lingering echoes of wolf cries.

Dark clouds obscured the moon, and the night wind rustled through the leaves as a figure stood among the trees. The air was heavy with the scent of blood, creating an eerie atmosphere.

Nathan directed his flashlight at the figure. The figure had disheveled hair, torn clothes, and multiple wounds still oozing blood.

Clenched in her left hand was a dagger whose tip gleamed ominously under the light, stained crimson. Surrounding her were a pack of wolves that collapsed on the ground, barely alive.

The sight left Nathan and the others speechless. They wondered how Hera had managed to defeat an entire pack of wolves.

Wolves were known for their teamwork and prowess. Yet there she stood alone, victorious over them all.

"Aren't these wild wolves? They're terrifying in battle!"

Even Aaron doubted he could have escaped such a situation.

As Aaron recalled Shaun's reminder to not mess with Hera, Stephen thought, "Can I take back what I said earlier?"

Nathan swallowed hard, torn between concern for Hera and the wolves lying at her feet.

At the forefront, Bernard frowned as he watched Hera, who emanated a menacing air.

He was too late. Hera was already gripped by her fear of the dark. She

vel

et

had snapped and unleashed violence without hesitation, even under the harsh glare of the light. Content belongs

"Ms. Youngworth, are you alright?" Stephen called out.

He wanted to approach, but Nathan soon held him back.

Suddenly, Hera lifted her head. Her cold and blood-smeared face became visible to everyone.

With her eyes blazing red, Hera flashed an eerie smile, sending a chill down Stephen's spine. It was then that Stephen only realized the depth of her peculiarity, and he couldn't help but shudder. Content

belongs

Hera's hand twitched unexpectedly, and in the next instant, she lunged forward with the dagger.

Bernard swiftly intercepted by grabbing her wrist that held the blade.

However, Hera anticipated his move. She released the dagger and caught it in her other hand, thrusting it straight toward Bernard's vulnerable spots.

With his other hand, Bernard swiftly seized hers.

With both of her hands locked in a tense struggle, Hera used her feet to push against him, forcing Bernard to release her.

Soon, they engaged in a swift exchange of fists amidst the trees.

Bernard's arm now bore a fresh cut from the dagger. Unlike the previous round, Hera's attacks were fiercer and more relentless this time. She remained unresponsive as though she was possessed. Content belongs

Under the Heiress' Facade #Chapter 261 - Read Under the Heiress' Facade Chapter 261

Chapter 261

Bernard may have held back last time and easily subdued Hera, but this time was different.

Hera, now in full fight-or-flight mode, proved much stronger. Her relentless and deadly attacks didn't allow him to hold back.

Bernard quickly realized that the harder he fought, the more powerful and faster Hera's attacks became. She seemed to enter a state of relentless aggression that grew fiercer with each passing moment.

"This can't go on. Such intense assault would eventually exhaust Hera's body, potentially to the point of death," Bernard thought.

He had to find a way to make her stop.

With their flashlights illuminating the fierce battle, Aaron, Nathan, and Stephen watched in shock. They hadn't witnessed such an exhilarating fight in ages.

Bernard and Hera both displayed striking appearances and skills, making the fight more impressive than any movie stunt. They were captivating to watch.

Aaron even pulled out his phone to record the scene, planning to show it to his comrades once he was back at their base.

Aaron thought Bernard was already incredibly skilled, but seeing Hera match him blow for blow and grow fiercer with every strike was astonishing.

Despite Hera's abnormal state, her explosive power was undeniable. It was no wonder she had caught the attention of someone as discerning as Bernard.

Together, they formed an unstoppable force. They were a duo not to be trifled with.

As the three watched with rapt attention, Bernard's attacks noticeably weakened.

Seeing this, Stephen asked, "Is Mr. Killian getting tired?"

"A man can never admit he's tired," Aaron replied knowingly.

"He's doing it on purpose."

Nathan grasped Bernard's intention as he observed.

Bernard had intentionally weakened his attacks and was even exposing his vulnerabilities.

Meanwhile, Hera quickly seized

these openings and lunged at him. Then, Bernard kicked off a tree trunk, flipped over, and landed behind Hera. Unexpectedly, he delivered a precise blow to the back of her neck. Content belongs

Hera's movements instantly halted.

Her bloodied knife dropped to the ground as she collapsed into Bernard's arms. He held her tightly, only then noticing her burning fever and twitching limbs from

exhaustion. Content belongs to

Bernard felt a pang of sorrow at Hera's disheveled state of blood and sweat-matted hair and parched lips.

As he wiped the blood from her face, his eyes darkened.

"Sweetie, I'm sorry. I was too late. I should have been there when you needed me."

The intense fight had ended, leaving the three spectators unsatisfied. They were almost ready to applaud for an encore.

Aaron saved the video recording. He was impressed by Bernard's final flip, though the final blow seemed overly harsh.

How could he have beat such a delicate... no, such a beautiful woman that hard?

"Do you guys think I brought you here for entertainment?"

Bernard's chilling glare swept through the air, jolting the trio back to reality.

They quickly got to work to notify the others and clean up the scene.

"Bernard, how should we handle the kidnappers?" Aaron asked.

"Once we find the mastermind, leave them in the mountains with the wolves."

With Hera in his arms, Bernard headed toward the helicopter. Despite his steady steps, his

I

expression exuded menace. Content belongs

Chapter 262

In the mountains, the two special forces assigned to watch over Eric and the other three kidnappers had just received their orders and hadn't even started their interrogation.

However, Brian cracked when he heard that they were being taken deep into the mountains.

"I'll come clean! I'll tell you everything. Amelia from the Gaskell family hired us. I was just doing it for money.

"I know I was wrong, and I'll never do it again. Please, don't take me into the mountains. I have a family to look after."

"M-Me too! Ms. Gaskell was the one who ordered us. She even had us imprison a mother and daughter for over a month before.

"It was all on her orders. Since I told the truth, can you please let me go?" another chimed in eagerly.

They all worked under Eric and had no idea who the real mastermind was. They had only seen Amelia and naturally assumed she was behind everything.

After all, Amelia did seem to have a deep hatred for Hera.

Recalling Queenie's previous instructions, Eric saw that his men had already implicated Amelia, so he followed the lead and confirmed her guilt. He angrily kicked each of them.

"Cowards! How dare you guys betray our employer? Don't expect to get a single cent of the money!"

"Eric, I was wrong. I don't want the money. I just want to go home."

The four kidnappers started arguing among themselves while the two special forces exchanged glances, finding their story believable.

After gathering enough information, the special forces swiftly knocked each of the kidnappers out with a quick chop to the neck. Then, they dragged them into the mountains, left them there, and returned to give their report.

When Hera woke up three days later, her head throbbed with a dull ache. As she moved, she realized it wasn't just her head. Her whole body ached as if it had been dislocated and reassembled. Content belongs

The sharp scent of disinfectant filled her nose, and she saw an IV drip hanging by the bed.

Feeling disoriented, she wondered, "Am I in a hospital? Am I still alive?"

Hera stared at the white ceiling, trying to piece together the events before she passed out.

She remembered struggling to climb out of a hole, only to be surrounded by wolves. Everything after that was a blur to her, though she vaguely remembered having a nightmare.

In the dream, she was back in the small, dark room where human traffickers had locked her up as a child. No matter what she did, she couldn't escape.

"Sweetie, you're awake. Are you feeling alright?"

A deep, familiar, and maic male voice sounded beside her.

Hera turned her head to see Bernard's chiseled, handsome face. He was sitting by her bedside and looking at her with soft eyes.

The moment she saw him, all the

pain and fear she had bottled up burst out like a flood breaking

through a dam. Tears filled her eyes, and she sat up abruptly, throwing

herself into his arms. Content

belongs

Bernard was caught off guard but soon felt the warm wetness soaking through where her face was buried against him. His heart softened instantly.

It struck him then that despite Hera's cool, aloof demeanor, she was just 17. Her independence and decisiveness often made people forget how young she was.

Usually, young people her age still

et

sought comfort in their parents' arms. Yet, she had performed high-risk surgeries, outbid him for the Eclipse Stone at an auction received offers from top international universities, and created life-saving medicines. Content belongs

Her ability was impressive but heartbreaking.

Bernard gently soothed Hera by patting her back with his large hand. "There, there. Everything's alright now."

Chapter 263

Hera buried her face in Bernard's neck. The faint tobacco scent on him gave her a deep sense of security.

She stayed like that for a while, letting the sudden wave of emotion subside before realizing she'd let her guard down.

As she pulled away, she noticed a damp spot on his shirt collar and felt a twinge of embarrassment.

"I've been missing the steak you make. I thought I'd never get to taste it again," Hera said, attempting to mask her feelings with a cough.

Bernard saw right through her and smiled.

"Just the steak I make?"

He gently tucked a few stray hairs behind her ear as he spoke. The casual gesture left Hera's mind in a whirl, and her skin felt warm where his fingers had touched.

Hera avoided his gaze and replied firmly, "Yes."

"Not the person who makes it?" Bernard asked with a hopeful glint in his eyes.

Hera remained silent.

Her silence made Bernard worry she was about to get angry again, but then she whispered, "Yes."

Bernard's heart soared.

He couldn't resist teasing her, "Who do you miss?"

Hera was speechless. She suspected he was doing it on purpose.

Her beautiful face returned to its usual cool demeanor as she looked at him seriously and said, "I miss you... your steak. I'm hungry."

Bernard chuckled softly. Even for those first three words, he'd make her steaks for a lifetime.

"I'll cook it for you once you're discharged. For now, you need to eat light."

Hera was mesmerized by Bernard's smile. He was already devastatingly handsome, but when he smiled, he was even more dazzling, like an angel. It was irresistible.

Who was he trying to seduce?

Hera turned her face away, determined not to fall for his charm.

Just then, there was a knock on the door, and Bernard called out, "Come in."

Aaron and Johnson walked in carrying thermal containers. When they saw Hera awake, they greeted her. Johnson noticed the empty IV bag and helped remove the needle. Content belongs

Aaron's eyes fell on the wet patch on Bernard's collar and asked, "Why's your shirt wet, Bernard?"

He wondered if Bernard had been crying secretly.

His gaze shifted between Bernard and Hera, sensing something amiss. It didn't seem likely either of them would have cried.

Johnson glanced at Bernard and asked, "Did you cry?"

Hera stayed silent as her thoughts raced.

Bernard glanced at her and lied smoothly, "The heater was set too high. I got hot."

Hera remained speechless, but her expression was unreadable.

"What brings you here too, Mr. Ludden?" she quickly changed the subject.

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As she turned her head, a sharp pain shot through her neck, like a injury from a heavy blow. Hera rubbed it, wincing. Content belongs

"Bernard heard about your kidnapping and called me for backup," Aaron said.

"Thanks."

Hera continued rubbing her neck and asked Johnson, "Why does my neck hurt so much?"

She didn't remember injuring her neck.

Johnson frowned slightly. He hadn't

been

of the rescue but had

hear Aaron about Bernard

ne

and Hera's intense battle. Content

belongs

Because of that, Bernard had specifically asked him to monitor Hera's symptoms.

Chapter 264

"Don't you remember what happened that night?" Aaron asked, surprised.

He glanced at Bernard and recalled his decisive move.

"Bernard is really ruthless. He even treated his own woman so harshly. Did he hit her so hard that she lost her memory?" he thought.

Bernard remained silent.

"What happened?"

Hera followed Aaron's gaze to Bernard and noticed the bulge under his shirt sleeve. It looked like a bandage on his left arm. She frowned slightly.

Johnson saw Hera's confused reaction and realized she genuinely had no memory of that night.

Her symptoms seemed more severe than Bernard's past episodes. At least Bernard regained some fragmented memories after taking his medication. But Hera remembered nothing.

"Let's eat something first. Weren't you hungry?"

Bernard unpacked the thermos Aaron had brought, revealing a light, nutritious chicken soup.

Hera sensed something was off in their expressions. She instinctively knew that something else had happened while she was unconscious. However, she chose not to push further since they refused to discuss it.

She decided to fill her stomach first, as she hadn't eaten for days and was starving.

Hera reached out for the bowl in Bernard's hand, but he held it back, saying, "Since you're not feeling well, I'll feed you."

Hera remained silent, refusing the idea.

Bernard scooped a spoonful of soup, blew on it gently, and brought it to Hera's lips.

"Here. Open wide."

Hera hesitated.

Sensing her hesitation, Bernard glanced between her lips and the spoon.

"Is the spoon too big? Should I find another way to feed you?"

Hera was caught off guard. Her intuition screamed that Bernard's alternative method was something she didn't want to experience, so she quickly opened her mouth.

Bernard smiled.

"Great job."

Aaron and Johnson watched their exchange in surprise and mentally noted Bernard's method.

Hera felt much better after filling her

stomach As Bernard finished the remaining soup, Johnson started changing the bandages on the former's arm on the adjacent hospital bed. Content belongs

Hera glanced over and observed that the wound appeared to have been caused by a sharp blade.

Just then, she remembered the dagger she found in the cave and the bite mark on Bernard's collarbone from their trip back from Lumiville.

Her suspicions deepened. Something must have happened during her blackouts, but Bernard obviously wasn't going to reveal anything.

Thus, Hera decided she needed a thorough check-up once things settled down.

Turning to Aaron, she asked, "Are Nate and Stephen okay? And what about the kidnappers?"

"They're fine. But the kidnappers confessed that Amelia was behind it. The police are searching for her now. Nathan is handling the case so that he has all the information," Aaron replied. Content belongs

Hera narrowed her eyes at the mention of Amelia. That didn't seem right to her.

Although Hera hadn't interacted much with Amelia, she had tested her once in the woodshed.

Amelia's shocked reaction made it clear that she didn't know the specifics. Later, when pressed, Amelia seemed eager to verify something and left in a hurry.

Compared to Amelia, Queenie

seemed more suspect. She had been uncooperative throughout the investigation, and her reaction when asked about Isabella's family was far more telling than Amelia's surprise. Content belongs

"Where's my phone?" Hera asked, remembering that she hadn't had it since being held hostage in the woodshed.

She was about to ask Aaron to borrow his phone since she wasn't sure if hers was lost in the car or taken by the kidnappers.

"Here," Aaron said as he handed her phone from the table.

Hera also noticed a laptop and an acupuncture kit on the table items she thought she'd lost.

She sighed in relief. Losing the phone and computer was one thing, but she would have been very upset if she had lost the gold needles Bernard had given her.

She turned on her phone to see ten missed calls and over 99 unread WhatsApp messages. Ignoring them for now, she searched for Nathan's number.

Chapter 265

It was already 10:00 pm. Hera wondered if Nathan was still awake. So, instead of calling, she decided to send a text.

Hera: "Nate, I think Amelia might just be a scapegoat."

To her surprise, Nathan replied almost instantly.

Nathan: "Hera, you're awake? I suspected that, too. I just found a new lead. I'm on a mission right now, but I'll come see you when it's over. We need to talk in person. Get some rest."

Hera stared at the words "new lead" momentarily before reaching for her pocket, only to realize she was wearing a hospital gown.

"Who changed my clothes? Where are the ones I was wearing?" she asked, looking up.

"Bernard?"

Aaron looked puzzled. Bernard had brought her to the hospital, so he wasn't sure about the details. He glanced at Bernard.

"They've probably been thrown away, right?"

Hera's face flushed at the thought of Bernard changing her clothes. She wondered if that meant that he saw everything. She felt a mix of embarrassment and anger.

But she quickly shook it off. So what if he saw her? She figured that for Bernard, seeing a woman's body was likely as ordinary as it was for her to see another woman's body.

"It was the nurse who helped change you. The clothes were discarded," Bernard said, unaware of her inner turmoil.

As Johnson had just finished bandaging his wound, Bernard walked over and handed Hera a small bag from his pocket. "Is this what you were looking for?"

Hera was speechless. She had been internally conflicted, only to be told it was the nurse who had changed her.

A hint of frustration crept in. She'd never been like this before, but ever since she ran into Bernard again, he had a way of stirring up her emotions.

She pondered if she was starting to fall for Bernard. The idea startled her.

She glanced at him. She wondered why, of all the people she could fall for, did it have to be a gay man.

Bernard noticed her sympathetic look and glanced at the small bag in his hand.

"Isn't this what you were looking for?"

"Yes," Hera said, pulling herself back to the present. She reached out and took the bag from him.

Sensing their tension, Johnson said, "It's getting late now. We'll leave you to rest. Goodbye, Bernard, Ms. Youngworth."

He nudged Aaron with his elbow, signaling him to leave.

"Good night. Sweet dreams," Aaron said. He waved as he left and even closed the door behind him.

Now

Hera checked her

misss. Four were from Leon

and the rest were from the

probably trying to reach felon

her.

belongs

She opened her WhatsApp and sent a message to the Everett family's group chat, saying she had been out with friends for a few days and missed their messages due to poor signal. Content belongs

Gideon called immediately.

"Hera, where are you? Are you okay?"

Hera checked her location using her phone.

"I'm in Southburrow. I'm fine."

"That's good to hear."

Gideon sighed with relief.

"Amelia came to see me the day before yesterday. She said something weird and left. I got worried when I couldn't reach you."

Amelia had seen Gideon?

She did not want him to worry, so she said, "I went hiking with my

I

the mountains. What did she
3s, and the signal was bad in
say?"

Content belongs

"Sweetie. Here, drink some water," Bernard interrupted, handing her a glass of water and some pills.

Gideon heard Bernard's voice over the phone and frowned.

"Are you with Bernard?"

Hera glanced at Bernard, suspecting he did it intentionally.

She obediently took the pills and replied, "Yes."

Chapter 266

Even though Gideon had his differences with Bernard, he believed that Hera would be safe as long as Bernard was with her. This made Amelia's concerns seem unfounded.

"Do you want to talk to him?" Hera asked Bernard when she noticed him eyeing the phone.

"Yes," Gideon responded, thinking she was addressing him.

Hera was speechless for a second.

She handed the phone to Bernard. At the same time, she wondered if these two men were secretly conspiring right under her nose.

Bernard was slightly puzzled but took the phone.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Killian, if you dare do anything indecent to my sister, I'll make sure you pay dearly," Gideon threatened through gritted teeth.

"Oh," Bernard replied nonchalantly.

Gideon was infuriated by Bernard's indifferent response. Then, he realized the call had been disconnected.

He considered calling back to confront Bernard but decided against it. He thought it would be childish and only make Bernard think the Everetts were easy to bully. So, he let it slide.

Noticing how quickly Bernard ended the call, Hera gave him a curious look. She wondered what the two men had secretly discussed.

"Gideon asked me to take good care of you," Bernard explained, seemingly aware of her curiosity as he returned her phone to her.

"Oh."

Hera mimicked his earlier nonchalant tone.

No wonder his response seemed so reluctant.

Bernard was left speechless by her mimicry.

Hera scrolled through her unread WhatsApp messages to pass the time. She was actually waiting for Bernard to leave so she could contact Leon. However, Bernard showed no signs of leaving.

Just as she was about to hint at him to go, she noticed Bernard staring intently at the small pouch in her hand containing the black pearl earrings. "Do they look familiar to you?" Hera asked.

"Those are the Mother's Day gifts you made for Ms. Daphne when you were five," Bernard replied after snapping out of his trance. Hera was taken aback.

"You remember?"

"Of course. You pricked your finger making them and cried your eyes out," Bernard recounted.

He then gently took her left index finger and rubbed his thumb over the pad.

"Right here."

His touch sent a tingle through her, making her heart flutter. She pulled her hand back and took the earrings out of the clear pouch.

Waving them before him, she asked, "These are just ordinary black pearls. How can you be so sure they're the same ones?"

"You can check the clasp's backing to see if there's a small hole from when you pierced it wrong back then," Bernard said confidently.

Hera immediately pried open the rusty backing, and as he had said, there was indeed a small hole underneath. This really was

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Daphne's earring. Content belongs

Daphne had been to that cave. Hera wondered what could be inside there.

Queenie had imprisoned her in the mountains of Lensvale, not far from that cave. Hera wondered if there was a connection or if it was simply a coincidence. Content belongs

"Where did you find these?"

Bernard noticed her eagerness to verify the earrings. It seemed like they weren't something she carried around but had recently acquired. "Grandma gave them to me."

Hera didn't want to mention the cave. She reattached the backing and returned the earrings back in the pouch.

Bernard didn't press further. Just then, his phone rang, so he stood up and went to the bathroom.

Hera took the opportunity to switch to her Raven account on WhatsApp and found Piglet.

They had agreed to message in an emergency and call in a dire

emergency. He had called four

times, indicating that something was very wrong. Content belongs

As she had anticipated, the latest message in their chat read, "Boss, you're wanted by International Police!"

Chapter 267

Hera replied, "What's going on?"

"Boss, you're finally online! I was starting to think you got caught."

Leon's reply came quickly.

He then sent over a link to a post on Cyber Web titled, "Satellite UTA-224 Hacked, Miridian Seeks Hacker 'Raven' Through International Police".

"Why did you hack a satellite out of the blue?" Leon asked.

Hera glanced at the post's content and then replied to Leon.

Raven: "Oh, that. It was an emergency. I just borrowed their satellite to take a picture."

Piglet: "Why didn't you just fly up and shake hands with the sun while you're at it? But seriously, according to sources, another hacker also hacked UTA-224.

"They got lucky and escaped identification, unlike you. Maybe you should learn a thing or two from them. You should probably stay offline for a while and lie low."

Raven: "Okay. Logging off then."

Hera felt a bit stressed when she saw the post's high view and comment count. Since that post was trending, she wondered if S had seen it. She considered apologizing in advance.

She exited her chat with Piglet and found her chat with S. Their last conversation was when S had sent her Queenie's information. They hadn't been in contact since.

She sent a kneeling sticker but got no reply. She figured that S was probably not online yet and was unaware of the situation.

Just then, Leon messaged again.

"Wait, one more thing. Remember Amelia Gaskell, the Gaskell family's heiress? She needs help recovering data from a phone memory card. Interested?"

Hera thought for a second. Recovering memory card data was a basic task. She wondered why Amelia was asking her for help.

Raven: "Why don't you do it yourself? Don't you like money in your pocket?"

Piglet: "I do. And I've already had her

insert the memory card into the computer. I tried remotely, but it can't be recovered. The memory card has been encrypted and set to be permanently unrecoverable. Content belongs

"She seemed really desperate. She asked you to name your price. She's tried others, but no one could help her. It's been three days, and she hasn't posted the job on the mission board, so the data must be even more sensitive than the last hack on the Gaskells." Content belongs

Raven: "When did she contact you?"

Piglet: "Let me check... December 26th, 7:00 pm."

Seeing the date and time, Hera

recalled that Amelia had stormed off

after

ting her that morning. I

7:00 pm, she had fled to the

큼니

mountains. Instead of returning to the mountains, Amelia was seeking data recovery help. Content belongs

Hera remembered Isabella's email about something buried under a tree. Her eyes narrowed as she typed, "I'll accept the job, but no remote work. Have her send the card to you. I'll come to you."

"Got it," Leon replied.

While Leon was still typing, the bathroom door suddenly opened. Hera quickly switched her WhatsApp back to her personal account.

Standing at the bathroom door, Bernard unfastened his cufflinks with one hand. He slowly rolled up his sleeves, revealing his long, slender arms. "Do you want a bath or just a rubdown?" he asked.

The question, paired with his actions, made Hera feel like a child about to be bathed by a parent.

She had been bedridden for three days and was eager to move around.

"A bath."

As she started to get up, Bernard swiftly crossed the room and scooped her up.

Hera gave a small gasp and struggled.

"What are you doing? Put me down."

Holding her securely, Bernard headed to the bathroom.

"You're still recovering. I'll carry you."

Chapter 268

"My foot is fine. I can walk by myself," Hera said.

Bernard retorted, "Stay still. When I was injured before, you took care of me. Now it's my turn to take care of you."

"But you didn't ask me to help you bathe."

Bernard paused in his steps as he looked deeply at Hera in his arms.

Only then did Hera realize she had spoken too impulsively. When she gave it more thought, she recalled that he didn't ask for her help then.

However, she was getting the sense that he may have hinted at it before.

Seeing her furrowed brow, Bernard spoke in a low voice, "I see you care a lot about that."

He remembered the time they had been in the hot spring. Hera had suddenly approached him, and he pushed her away. She might have misunderstood. Although she didn't say anything then, she still remembered that incident.

He wondered if she had ignored the fact that he was a normal man and couldn't stand her teasing. He figured that if he refused again, Hera would probably ignore him in the future.

After some thought, Bernard asked, "Do you want to help me take a bath?"

Hera was utterly shocked.

"Pervert!"

Her ears turned red as she pushed him away forcefully. Escaping from his arms, she hurried into the bathroom and slammed the door shut. Bernard looked at the closed door, feeling speechless.

Was that not it? He found it harder and harder to understand Hera's thoughts.

net

In a rundown hotel tucked away in small alley in Norburgh, the curtains of the single room were tightly drawn. An old light bulb cast a yellowish glow across the room. The 70-inch bed had washed-out sheets and covers, and the bedding carried a damp smell. Content belongs

Amelia curled up in one corner of the bed, holding her phone. Her eyes were hollow, with dried tears in the corners of her eyes.

Just then, the screen in her hand lit up. It was a WhatsApp notification. She immediately opened it.

It was a message from Piglet.

"Raven has agreed. Send the memory card to this address first."

Amelia's initially empty eyes suddenly brightened slightly.

Noticing that the address sent was in Norburgh, she immediately asked, "Can I hand it to you in person? I'd like to check out your workplace while at it."

"No," Piglet replied.

Amelia hesitated for a long time. The police were looking for her now. Queenie said she would protect her, but Amelia didn't believe her.

This memory card was her last straw. She didn't know its contents but knew that it must be important if Queenie went through the trouble of deleting and tampering with the data.

Amelia figured she'd have to take the fall for Queenie if she gave the memory card away and couldn't get it back. She would be doomed, then.

But if she didn't give it away, there was no hope. If she got caught by the police, the outcome would be the same.

Amelia couldn't keep running

forever. In just three days of hiding,

she couldn't take it anymore. She didn't want to live her whole life as she was at that moment, hiding in cheap hotels where no ID was required. Content belongs

Amelia: "Alright. But you must keep this confidential. It's absolutely necessary. Only the three of us can know about this. No matter who asks, you can't reveal anything. Especially not to the Gaskells." Content belongs

Piglet: "We have a nondisclosure agreement."

Amelia made up her mind.

"Okay."

Chapter 269

Hera had slept for three days straight, so she couldn't sleep anymore that night. She decided to give herself acupuncture. Her body was feeling much better that day.

She got out of bed and prepared to stretch her body. As she passed by Bernard, who was sleeping in the next bed, she inexplicably walked over to him.

His facial features were chiseled and rugged, exuding an air of restrained allure.

His eyes were shut, and his brows were relaxed-signs that he was sleeping soundly.

If he could sleep so deeply now, it meant his condition had improved significantly from before. Hera figured that everything would be fine once he finished his final treatment and got his health back on track with the medication.

At that time, they wouldn't have any sort of relationship anymore, and they wouldn't be living together either. Even meeting casually would require finding an excuse.

At this thought, Hera felt a faint discomfort in her heart. She stared at his flawless face, lost in thought.

Suddenly, she had an idea. She took out her phone, launched the camera app, and discreetly snapped a photo of him.

As she turned to leave, her coat was suddenly grabbed from behind. She turned back to see Bernard, who had woken up at some point, staring at her.

Caught in the act of taking his photo, Hera awkwardly hid her phone behind her back as she tried to maintain a calm facade.

"When did you wake up?"

Bernard was always alert and had heightened senses. He would wake up immediately at the slightest movement. When Hera got out of bed earlier, he was already awake but hadn't moved because he could sense that she was approaching him.

He propped himself up and reached for his phone on the bedside table.

"I just woke up. Do you want to take a picture?"

His voice was slightly hoarse from just waking up. It sounded low and even more pleasant.

Hera didn't know what to say. She felt like he was doing it on purpose.

Before she could say "no", Bernard grabbed her hand and pulled her toward the bed with a strong grip. He leaned in from behind and rested his chin on her shoulder.

Lifting his hand, he said, "Come. Look at the camera."

When Hera felt his firm chest against her back, she suddenly hesitated to move.

She raised her eyes to look at the phone. On the screen, it appeared as if Bernard was embracing her from behind. Their intimacy resembled that of a couple deeply in love.

Hera's eyes flickered. The previous embarrassment was completely gone. Something else seemed to be quietly budding in her heart.

After taking a few selfies together, Hera leaned in to look at the photos on his phone.

"Let me see. Select a few good ones and send them to me."

"Choose whichever you like and send them straight away. I'll go wash up first."

Bernard handed her his phone.

Hera was stunned for a moment while holding his phone.

"Aren't you afraid I'll look at your texts?"

Bernard squeezed toothpaste in the bathroom.

"Go ahead if you want to look through them."

Hera took

phone and looked at

their intimate photos on the s A faint smile crept onto her

a

feeling of bliss welled insigge

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Content belongs

Just then, there was a knock on the door.

When Hera opened the door, she was met with a young man whose face was more beautiful than a woman's, adorned with smoky makeup.

"Who are you? What are you doing in Mr. Killian's ward?"

The young man hadn't expected the

vel.

person who opened the door to be such a pretty lady. Her cold, unfriendly expression suggested that she shouldn't be crossed. Content belongs

el.n

The person who had him instructed him to go there had said that Bernard liked men. The young man wondered why there was a lady dressed in a hospital gown in Bernard's room if that were the case. Content belongs

AQUMS

swn

Before Hera could speak, Bernard emerged from the bathroom.

"Who's that?"

"Mr. Killian, I'm Shay. Don't you remember me from that night on the fourth floor of Imperial Hotel?" the young man said coyly.

Hera knew about Imperial Hotel's fourth floor. There was a bar there where it was said people of all types would gather.

She glanced at Bernard. His lover had come knocking on the door, revealing his rather wild private life.

Bernard shot Shay a cold glare, clearly irritated by this uninvited romantic entanglement.

Every year, dozens of men and women would boldly approach him in various ways to climb into his bed. They all eyed the position of his spouse.

Chapter 270

These uninvited romantic entanglements were usually handled by Douglas. Bernard reckoned that Douglas must have gone out to get breakfast. The bodyguards at the door were also absent.

"Go in first."

Bernard pushed Hera back into the room and closed the door behind her. What was about to happen was too gruesome for her to see.

Back in the room, Hera was speechless.

She suddenly felt that the bliss she had just felt had turned into jealousy.

The next day, Hera received a message from Leon just as she stepped off the plane from Southburrow to Norburgh.

"Boss, I have Amelia's memory card. I'll be waiting for you at this café."

Hera glanced at the location he sent and replied, "Got it."

She put away her phone and noticed the restroom sign ahead.

Turning to Bernard, she said, "I need to use the restroom. You can head back first. Don't wait for me. I'm meeting a friend later."

Bernard stopped in his tracks.

"Which friend?"

Seeing that he wouldn't leave without an answer, Hera said, "Leon."

"Okay," Bernard responded, though a flicker of displeasure crossed his eyes.

Hera was oblivious to his reaction and went into the restroom. She deliberately stayed inside longer to wait until she was sure Bernard had left.

But as soon as she stepped out, she saw Bernard standing at the door, on the phone.

When he caught sight of her, he said into the phone, "Let's talk later."

Hera was at a loss for words.

Bernard glanced at his watch and asked, "Upset stomach? You were inside for so long."

She remained silent.

They exited the airport through the VIP passage, where Douglas and the driver were already waiting.

Bernard opened the back door for Hera.

"Where are you meeting Leon? I'll drop you off."

Hearing that, Douglas quietly reminded, "Bernard, the meeting with Mr. Barry is about to..."

One icy look from Bernard, and Douglas fell silent.

Hera hadn't wanted to tell him, but

ultimately got into his car when she long queue at the stand.

Content belongs

"Bean Bliss."

She gave the address.

During the drive, Bernard sat in the back, working on his laptop

phone. He seemed very det

switching between that and his

Content belongs

Hera didn't quite understand his feelings toward her. He was clearly busy, yet he insisted on staying with her. Despite supposedly being gay, he constantly sent her mixed signals with his actions, only to push her away when she tried to get closer. Content belongs

40 minutes later, the driver stopped at Bean Bliss in the city center.

Hera got out of the car and turned to see Bernard also getting out.

"I'll go with you, or Douglas will. You choose," he said.

Hera frowned. She wondered his reason for sticking to her the last two days.

Noticing her hesitation, Bernard added, "If you don't choose, we'll both go with you."

His tone was domineering, leaving no room for argument.

Hera frowned deeper.

"Are you afraid I'll run off and not treat you?"

Under the Heiress' Facade #Chapter 271 - Read Under the Heiress' Facade Chapter 271

Chapter 271

Aside from thinking that Bernard feared she'd run away to leave him untreated, Hera couldn't come up with any other reason for Bernard shadowing her like a prisoner for the last few days.

Bernard gazed at her intently. He wasn't afraid that she might run away but was afraid she might disappear again.

"Yes," he said, confirming her assumption.

Hera was momentarily speechless.

"You can rest assured. I have medical ethics. I'll take responsibility for you," she said, then turned and entered the café.

"Douglas."

Bernard looked at the driver's seat, and Douglas immediately understood.

Led by the waiter, Hera was taken to a private room reserved by Leon. She knocked and entered.

Inside the room, only Leon was present. He was engrossed in a discussion on Cyber Web's forum.

Discussions have been rampant recently about the UTA-224 hacking incident and the International Police's bounty of 100 thousand dollars for Raven's capture.

Everyone on the forum speculated about Raven's true identity and whereabouts, while another hotly debated topic was the identity of the person who hacked the satellite.

"Boss, take a look at this. Someone on the forum is speculating that S might have been your partner in the UTA-224 hacking. Is that true?" Leon turned the computer screen toward Hera upon her arrival.

Hera immediately glanced at the post's contents but realized it was mere gossip. Most people were just speculating about S and Vulcan.

Both were legends in the hacking world and bitter rivals. Their fans, who typically didn't get along, were now engaged in heated exchanges on the forum.

They were blaming the opposing side for the trouble brewing, as though they were afraid that their idols were wanted criminals.

Vulcan's fans claimed, "Raven is wanted, so obviously his mentor, S, must be involved."

S' fans countered, "Vulcan is just copying S to shift the blame. How despicable!"

Onlookers commented, "Truly top-tier hackers. They can even hack into Miridian's military satellite. Impressive!"

Hera was rendered speechless.

She was curious about this gossip herself. She wondered if it was true and who the other person might be. S hadn't responded to her yet. But now wasn't the time to indulge in gossip.

"Where is it?" she asked.

Leon extracted a small black memory card from his computer and gave it to Hera.

It was

256MB microSD card, a relic

from the era when phones had buttons. It had been a while:

those days. Content below

"Do you have the card reader?" she asked.

"Here."

SW

to

Leon took out a card reader from his bag and handed it to her.

Hera

her laptop over and sat

him. She inserted the card into the computer. Content then

took the reader and then

to

Leon immediately got up and went over to Hera's side to watch.

Hera clicked on the card's icon on her computer and realized it was empty.

At that moment, a waiter brought in

a cup

of coffee and asked, "Miss, is

the gentleman outside your friend?"

Content belongs

Hera peeked through the door crack and saw Douglas standing outside the private room.

Leon also spotted Douglas and knew he was Bernard's personal assistant.

He asked, "Should we invite him in?"

"No," Hera refused.

She wasn't ready for Bernard to know her true identity.

She told the waiter, "Get him a cup of latte and ask him to wait outside."

"Sure," the waiter replied and left, not forgetting to close the door.

Leon caught her meaning.

"Hey, aren't you planning to tell him your real identity?"

Hera raised an eyebrow.

"Tell him, and then wait for him to turn me in for the 100-thousand-dollar bounty?"

Chapter 272

Leon's mouth twitched.

"Will he be that ruthless? If he finds out you're Raven, he'll probably want to recruit you into Killian Corporation.

"Then, the Killian family would be your backer, and you could use their influence to smooth things over with Miridian. You could maybe get them to stop chasing you."

"Forget it," Hera replied casually.

"He's told me before that he's not doing well with the Killian family and wants to make it on his own."

Leon didn't know what to say.

He wondered what "not doing well" meant, given that he could marry, inherit, and become the next head of the family.

Hera drank half of her coffee as they talked. She then pulled out a silver USB drive from her pocket and inserted it into the computer. Shortly after, her fingers danced swiftly across the keyboard.

Leon knew Hera was skilled, but this was the first time he had witnessed her prowess firsthand.

Her fingers moved like graceful reeds, leaving only faint traces on the keyboard. The screen filled with rapidly scrolling white text on a black background before he could decipher any of the code.

Ten minutes later, several documents appeared on the previously empty SD card.

They were named in the default style of old Nokia phone systems. There were albums, recordings, and so on.

However, someone had maliciously shredded the original data, and the recovery was incomplete. The photo albums contained pictures that could no longer be displayed.

Hera listened to an audio file in the recordings.

It was recorded 11 years ago, but the exact date couldn't be determined due to incomplete data recovery.

"Is this it? Boss, you're truly amazing!" Leon exclaimed excitedly as he pulled out his phone.

"I'll text Amelia."

"Wait."

Hera raised her hand to stop him. She double-clicked the audio file and played it.

Leon widened his eyes.

"Boss! I have a confidentiality agreement with her "

"Hush! Quiet," Hera cut him off.

The audio played. Initially, there was only the sound of rustling, possibly due to poor recording or damaged audio quality.

This continued for over five minutes until another voice emerged.

"...If this goes wrong, people could die!"

It was a man's rough voice, deliberately kept low. He sounded nervous.

Hera's eyes lit up. She was listening intently when the rustling sound returned.

Six minutes passed before another voice, a woman's, spoke up.

"I'll give you 500 thousand dollars. Do as I say. Once it's done, regardless of the outcome, I'll look after your wife and daughter..." After that came the rustling sound.

Hera found the voice somewhat familiar. Upon closer thought, she concluded it was Queenie's voice.

The recording ended there, followed by three minutes of rustling, then silence.

Hera considered the information

from the recording-"11 years ago", "people could die", "500 thousand

dollars", and "looking after

lov

someone's wife and daughter". Content belongs

She connected this information to

e

Daphne's car accident from 11 years ago. She wondered if it was Queenie who instructed Robin to cause the accident that killed Daphne. Content belongs

Unfortunately, the crucial evidence in this recording was missing.

She attempted to recover the data again, but the result was the same.

Unwilling to give up, she tried using software to repair the recording, but it still didn't work. It seemed like something had interfered during the recording process. Content belongs

Hera clenched her fists at the thought of Queenie's cunning face.

Seeing her unsettling expression, Leon cautiously touched her shoulder.

"Boss, are you okay? This recording sounds like a contract killing. Could it be related to Madison and Isabella? You asked me to keep an eye on them."

Chapter 273

"Do you think this sounds like a contract killing?"

Hera looked up at Leon.

"Even if it's not, it's definitely some shady business," Leon asserted confidently.

Hera remained silent, mentally replaying the entire situation.

It all started with Isabella's timed email. Hera had double-checked the email's code and sender-it was sent only to her. Judging from the email's contents, whatever was in the box mentioned by Isabella was crucial to the safety of her and her mother.

But when Hera rushed to Lensvale, she was too late. The item had already been taken. There were traces indicating it was removed shortly before her arrival.

This meant that the person who took it knew about it shortly after she received the email. Considering she had only sent it to Nathan, and Nathan had involved Stephen, there had to be a leak between them or perhaps a mole.

Secondly, if this memory card was in the box in the woods, Isabella must have known its contents. Yet now, the recording was incomplete.

At best, the recording suggested Queenie had some shady dealings with someone. But without the parties involved to verify, its exact nature remained elusive.

Hera felt that at least the current situation wasn't a dead end.

She snapped back to reality and called Nathan, only to find his phone switched off. She hung up with a frown.

She almost overlooked something crucial. Nathan worked for Bernard.

The thought of Douglas waiting outside and Bernard's constant monitoring over the past few days sparked a troubling idea in her mind.

What if this whole incident was connected to Bernard? Had she fallen into his honey trap from the very beginning?

Bernard, who clearly favored men, had persistently flirted with her and seduced her to make her fall for him. He dulled her sense of caution toward him.

The possibility sent a chill down Hera's spine.

"Do you need to call the police or hire a detective? Damian has some connections. I can call him," Leon offered when he noticed her troubled expression.

"Thanks. I'll keep that in mind."

After making a copy of the memory card's contents, Hera handed it to him.

"Personally return this to her address."

Leon took the memory card.

"And then?"

Hera gestured with her finger for him to lean closer. She then whispered something in his ear. Leon nodded. "Got it."

Meanwhile, Queenie emerged from a private room in the café with several reporters.

With a smile, she said, "I'll be counting on you."

They were reporters from major

media outlets who were always searching for headlines. They never expected the recently popular Gaskell family to reach out to them for help with news coverage.

Content belongs

Even though the Gaskells provided the article and they only needed to publish it, it was still a highly profitable deal for them.

"Sure thing. Thank you, Mrs. Gaskell."

The reporters nodded, looking happy.

After Queenie bid them farewell, her smile turned even more confident.

Since Amelia was wanted by the police, Queenie had been cleared of being a suspect, and the restraining order was lifted. Now, she aimed to restore the Gaskell family.

Content belongs

Just then, she spotted Douglas sitting in the lobby, sipping coffee. Her eyes lit up at once.

"It's been so long, Mr. Copley," she greeted him.

"Mrs. Gaskell."

Douglas acknowledged her with a nod.

1.ne

Queenie felt a flicker of displeasure at the sight of him sitting there calmly, unflinching. Most people

would bow upon seeing her, and yet Douglas remained unfazed. Content belongs

Chapter 274

If it weren't for Douglas' loyalty to Bernard, Queenie wouldn't have greeted him with such a smile.

Queenie glanced at the empty coffee cup on the table and then toward the door of the nearby private room where Douglas was seated.

"Mr. Killian is also here, isn't he?"

Douglas frowned.

"Is there something I can help you with, Mrs. Gaskell?"

"I was just looking for Mr. Killian. I hope he can attend Gaskell Corporation's annual banquet," Queenie said as she turned around.

Her assistant immediately pulled out an invitation from her bag.

"Is this the room? I'll go in to see Mr. Killian."

She was about to knock on the door, but Douglas stopped her.

"You can't go in, Mrs. Gaskell."

At that moment, the door to the private room opened.

Hera stepped out and caught sight of Queenie and Douglas. Her beautiful brows immediately furrowed.

Likewise, when Queenie saw Hera, her smile vanished instantly. She glanced inside before the door closed again and saw another person, but it was clearly not Bernard.

She wondered why Hera was there.

The message she received said Hera had fled deep into the mountains but was promptly discovered by the police, narrowly saving her life. Hera was supposed to be receiving treatment at Lensvale Hospital.

However, Hera didn't look like she was narrowly saved. She looked completely fine.

Queenie also thought that Shaun was injured. She wondered why he would still care for Hera if that were true.

Queenie didn't believe that Hera, a country bumpkin, had any special talents, so she glanced at Douglas. Zylar had told her before that Hera had hooked up with Douglas.

It would be possible if it were Douglas.

She had heard before that Bernard wasn't very good at managing the company, so he gave his subordinates considerable authority.

Hera's gaze shifted between Queenie and Douglas, and then she chuckled.

"Mrs. Gaskell, did you come all this way for some fresh air? It must have been stifling being cooped up for so long, huh?"

Hera's remark hit Queenie where it hurt, causing the latter to wish she could crush Hera to dust.

Through gritted teeth, she said, "I came to see if you were still alive."

"Don't worry. When the Grim Reaper comes for someone, they'll take the person who will die first. If you've got the time, you'd better run around a bit more," Hera said coldly and left the café. Content belongs to

Douglas immediately caught up with her.

Queenie suddenly realized that Hera was mocking her age. She gritted her teeth and glared viciously at the backs of the departing pair.

She thought, "Does Hera think she

can seduce people and strut around Norburgh like she owns it? Does she really believe Douglas can protect her? She has no idea how things could end for her." Content belongs

...

Once outside the café, Douglas quickly hailed a cab.

After they got in, he asked, "Ms. Youngworth, are you heading back to Skyview Heights or the Everett residence?"

"Where's Bernard?" Hera countered without answering.

Douglas was stunned for a second. He was unsure if it was his imagination, but Hera seemed slightly different that day than usual.

"He's at the office."

"Take me there," Hera said.

Douglas was taken aback. Bernard was indeed at the office but at XS Corporation, not Shuttle Ventures. Directly taking her there would expose Bernard's identity.

"Bernard is currently in a meeting, so

he might not be able to see you. And he has to attend an event after the meeting. How about we go back to Skyview Heights first? Tiramis must be missing you," he suggested tactfully. Content belongs

Hera frowned lightly. The more Douglas tried to keep her away, the more suspicious it seemed.

Chapter 275

Hera insisted, "Take me to the office."

Sensing that he couldn't dissuade her, Douglas reluctantly agreed. He quickly informed the driver of Shuttle Ventures' address and promptly texted Bernard.

Hera sat in the back seat and observed his actions. Her gaze turned increasingly icy.

...

In the CEO's office at XS Corporation, Bernard sat behind his desk, staring at the article Samson had sent him.

The headline read, "International Police Offers 100 Thousand Dollars Bounty Reward for Wanted Hacker 'Raven'."

Bernard hadn't logged onto Cyber Web in a while, only to find major news upon his return.

He was surprised as he was the one who had hacked into the satellite.

He scrolled through the article. His mouse paused mid-scroll when he saw Raven's logo embedded in the middle of the content.

The logo looked familiar. The person who had hacked into his computer last time also had this icon in their code.

Bernard narrowed his eyes. He wondered if there could be such a coincidence.

The Gaskell family's previous uproar with Raven made headlines in Norburgh, and then Raven attempted to hack his computer. After that, Raven hacked into UTA-224 before him. He considered if his actions were secretly aiding the Gaskells.

He quickly messaged Samson.

"Look into Raven's background."

"Bernard, the meeting is about to start," Theo reminded him as he entered the room.

Bernard acknowledged with a grunt. He closed the article tab and cleared his browsing history before getting up.

In the conference room, five top executives were already waiting.

The atmosphere was solemn as each person took turns reporting on the annual financial summary and their plans for the next year.

"This year's total profit is—"

Suddenly, several notification sounds interrupted the meeting.

Theo's expression turned serious as he glanced around at everyone.

"Whose phone isn't on silent?"

Phones should be silenced during meetings. Failure to follow this basic

theft makes one unfit to attend

this top-level meeting. Content belongs

W

After the five executives nervously checked their own phones, t exchanged glances. Finally,

turned to Bernard. Coet

SW

Bernard calmly picked up his phone from the desk. He abruptly stood up when he saw Douglas' text.

"Put the meeting on hold," he announced before heading for the door.

Theo was rendered speechless. He hurriedly followed after Bernard.

"Bernard, what happened?"

"Hera is going to Shuttle to see me."

"Huh?"

Theo couldn't believe his ears.

"Just to see you?"

"Yeah," Bernard confirmed.

Hera had never been this proactive about seeking him out before. He needed to get back quickly.

Theo's face was filled with mixed feelings as he pressed the button to open the CEO's private elevator doors for Bernard.

He wondered if Bernard had

forgotten his tough CEO persona et

and how the latter could abandon such an important meeting simply because Hera wanted to see him. Content belongs

"Haven't you told Ms. Youngworth about your current identity?" Theo asked.

While Bernard kept his identity hidden from the public, a few trusted and close individuals were aware of it.

Chapter 276

Hera's pretty face popped up in Bernard's mind.

He said, "No. She's rather timid and quite frail. I'm worried that she won't be able to handle the truth about my identity." Meanwhile, Theo was rendered speechless after watching Aaron's video of Hera and Bernard engaging in combat.

Finally, the elevator reached the first floor of the underground parking lot.

Theo took out his car keys and asked, "Want me to send you there?"

"No thanks," declined Bernard while getting into the driver's seat.

"Something came up at the Gaskell residence. You have to hurry up and take care of it."

On the other side of town, the taxi driver parked the car just outside Shuttle Ventures. Hera and Douglas got out of the car.

Douglas checked his phone. Bernard was on his way from XS Corporation but was stuck in traffic, so he needed Douglas to buy him some time.

Douglas quickly messaged Bernard.

"We're here," his message read.

Then, he led Hera into the company.

"Ms. Youngworth," he said.

"Bernard's still in a meeting. Let me show you to his office."

When the receptionist saw Douglas leading a beautiful woman-Hera-into the building, her eyes lit up. She smiled politely as she greeted them. After swiping the access card for Douglas and Hera to take the elevator, the receptionist rushed back to the counter, opened a WhatsApp group chat that was specially created for gossiping, and texted away.

Receptionist Cutie: "Oh my! Mr. Copley just brought an attractive lady back with him. She's so pretty! Her skin's perfect!"

Admin Angel: "Mr. Copley's here? Mr. Killian wouldn't be far off, yes?"

Finance Fairy: "Mr. Killian and Mr. Greer are the cream of the crop in doing business. Have you guys not noticed before that every time Mr. Killian comes here, Mr. Greer seems to smile a bit more?"

Admin Angel: "Wait a minute! An attractive lady?"

Receptionist Cutie: "Yes! They're heading to the top floor-Mr. Killian's office."

Admin Angel: "Oh my! Is my Dounard ship going to sink soon?"

Secretary Sean: "Mr. Greer's office is on the top floor, too."

Finance Fairy: "Is my Berold ship going to sink too?"

Receptionist Cutie: "Whatever. We won't lose anything if we start a new ship anyway. The thing is, the lady's simply too pretty! She's like a

et

goddess She and Mr. Killian look like a match made in heaven. shipping them! It's a pity that didn't I get to take any pictures of her just now. You'd know what I mean if you

guys had seen her face. Mr. Copley and Mr. Greer would immediately be removed from the picture." Content belongs

Admin Angel: "Is she really that pretty? Sean, go and take a look if it's true."

Finance Fairy: "I'm so curious! Sean, hurry up and help us see the lady's face."

Secretary Sean: "I'm on it."

The elevator reached the top floor in no time.

As she exited the elevator, Hera said, "Take me to the meeting room. I'll just observe him from outside. I won't interrupt their meeting."

Douglas was surprised. He wondered if Hera had sensed something off about Bernard.

"The walls of the meeting room aren't see-through. You won't be able to see him," Douglas said tactfully.

Hera glanced at him silently,

dubious. She simply wanted to see

Bernard and check if he truly was working at the company the Killians had arranged for him. She also

wanted to ascertain the truth in his words. Content belongs to

If he had really lied to her...

It made Hera upset just by thinking about it, and her eyes turned slightly cold at the thought.

Douglas led her to Bernard's office. Fortunately, the cleaner would come to the office every day to tidy up, so

it looked like it was regularly un

occupied. Content belongs

"Hold on. Let me get you some water," said Douglas.

He checked his phone again.

Bernard still hadn't replied. Douglas was anxious, so he quickly called Bernard.

Meanwhile, in the office, Hera glanced around the room. The interior design was decent.

Her gaze fell on the computer on the table. She started to get up and approach the computer. Just then, there was a knock at the door, and a man in a suit walked into the office.

Chapter 277

The man who entered Bernard's office was one of the secretaries of the vice president.

He was, in fact, "Secretary Sean" in the gossip group chat. After receiving the news in the group chat, he deliberately showed up to see what Hera looked like.

When he saw Hera, he froze. It was just like the receptionist had described-Hera was beautiful.

She was so beautiful that he was jealous of her beauty somehow. Two years ago, when Sean joined Shuttle Ventures, Bernard just so happened to take over the company.

Sean had only caught a glimpse of Bernard's face from afar, but he'd been attracted to Bernard's good looks ever since.

He heard later that Bernard was single and never got close or intimate with women. Bernard would rather let go of the chance to inherit the Killian family's shares than marry just any woman.

At that time, Sean was secretly glad that he was a man because he could get on Bernard's good side. That was why Sean made himself look presentable every day, hoping to get close to Bernard at the company.

Not only was Bernard attractive, but he was also rich and had a good figure. Sean would be content for the rest of his life if he could enter into a "relationship" with Bernard, even if it meant not being able to marry him.

Bringing his attention back to the present, Sean felt that it didn't matter if the woman in the office looked pretty. He was sure that Bernard wouldn't spare her a glance.

"I've brought you coffee," said Sean as he placed a cup of coffee on the table.

His renewed confidence was apparent in his voice.

"Thanks. Are you Mr. Killian's secretary?" Hera asked, glancing at him.

Sean wasn't that dashing compared to others, but his facial features were prominent enough.

His hair was slightly permed, and he looked smart in his clothes. He even smelled of cologne.

If someone were to look closely, they would see that he'd put on some light makeup that was barely noticeable.

Sean clucked his tongue, slightly annoyed. He thought about how wonderful it'd be if he truly were Bernard's secretary and could always stay by Bernard's side.

Unfortunately, Bernard rarely came to the company. Even if he did, he'd give Douglas instructions.

Sean had no opportunity to offer his assistance. At most, he could admire Bernard's handsomeness when he brought drinks into the office.

"Yes. I can help pass on your message to Mr. Killian if you need me," said Sean.

Bernard showed up to the company no more than five times in a year. And since Douglas left without even telling anyone about Hera after bringing her here, it could only mean that she wasn't that significant of a person.

As the vice president's secretary, Sean could do whatever he wished to someone insignificant at the company.

"Are Mr. Killian's secretaries all men?" Hera asked.

Sean was displeased. He didn't like how conceited Hera seemed when she asked him that.

Gruffly, he said, "Yes. So if you're trying to get close to him by seducing him, just give up. He doesn't like women." Hera was flabbergasted.

She wondered if this was a "secret" commonly acknowledged and known throughout the company.

"If you have nothing else to do here, please leave," Sean told her.

"Mr. Killian won't see you. He isn't here at the moment."

Hera's gaze turned cold.

"He isn't here, you say?"

All the staff there were supposed to keep the fact that Bernard rarely appeared at the company a secret.

Realizing that he'd made a slip of the

Sean quickly added, "

has to meet a client so he isn't here." Content

so he isn't here." Content b

to

The moment he finished spe

n

the door to the office abruptly opened. Bernard strode in, looking as cold and unapproachable as usual. Content belongs

QUMS

"Swee-" Bernard started to say but shut up when he saw that he and Hera weren't the only ones in the office.

"M-Mr. Killian!" Sean stuttered, surprised to see Bernard there.

He looked as if he'd seen a ghost.

He pondered why Bernard was present.

No one informed him that Bernard would be at the company that day.

Hera smiled softly when she saw Bernard.

"Didn't you say Mr. Killian wouldn't be here today?"

Bernard's expression turned cold when he heard that. He glanced at Sean, who shuddered in fear.

Douglas, who had been following

from behind, walked i

Be office only to be appalled into et

the

scene unfolding before him. Content belongs

Had he just been thrown under the bus by an awful teammate after having to rush all the way here?

Chapter 278

"Which department are you from? Why are you here? Do you have nothing to do?" Douglas purposely raised his voice at Sean.

"I..."

Sean realized that he'd made a big mistake. He didn't know how to explain himself.

In the end, Douglas forcefully dragged Sean out of the office to the finance department.

When they reached the finance department, Douglas said, "Give him his pay. He doesn't need to come into work anymore after this."

"Tell HR that Mr. Killian doesn't want to see his face ever again."

Shock and fear rattled Sean like a thunderclap in the dark of the night.

He grabbed Douglas' hand and pleaded, "Mr. Copley, I was wrong. I won't do it again. Please don't fire me "

Douglas yanked his hand away from Sean and turned to leave, leaving the finance department staff staring at each other in confusion.

Back in the office on the top floor, Bernard approached Hera and lightly tugged the hem of her sleeve.

"Sweetie, why did you come here all of a sudden? You didn't even tell me beforehand. I could've picked you up."

His deep, attractive voice was gentle to the ears.

The cold, domineering aura he had before this was gone. He pouted like a puppy yearning for its master's attention. He didn't look like the person he was when he just entered the office a moment ago.

Hera had seen his demeanor change drastically several times before. She should've been used to it by now, but this change in his attitude was overwhelming that day.

Taking a step backward to distance herself from him, she tried to sound calm as she said, "If I told you that I was coming here, how would I know if you were telling the truth or just lying to me."

When Bernard saw Hera keeping her distance from him, his expression turned cold again.

He knitted his brows as he ran through the possibilities in his mind. From what Douglas had told him, Hera had gone out to meet Leon.

She had bumped into Queenie at the coffee shop. After that, Hera insisted on going over to the company to see Bernard.

Bernard wondered if Queenie had said something to Hera.

"I was indeed in a meeting just now," Bernard said.

"It wasn't in this company, though. It was at my friend's company."

He moved closer to Hera while looking into her enchanting eyes and continued explaining, "I don't get along well with my relatives at home, so I take on some side gigs. It's not bad to make some extra money, right?"

Hera stared back at him, her gaze cold.

"This isn't the only thing you're hiding from me, right?"

Bernard frowned slightly. Did she perhaps discover his true identity?

"Such as what?" he asked.

"Such as..." she said.

"You don't like women."

Bernard was at a loss for words.

"Who told you that?"

"Everyone in this company knows about this, right?" Hera asked, puzzled.

Bernard's reaction was so intense that she couldn't decide if he was embarrassed because she had found out about it or simply mad because he had been accused of it. Content belongs

Bernard fell silent.

He suddenly remembered the time Frederick and Roman discussed his sexual orientation here in the company.

His face fell. So, the "discussion" had spread in the company like wildfire. And now, even Hera learned of it.

Still, he questioned how she could believe in a rumor like that so easily.

Bernard cursed himself for screwing himself up.

"Is that why you're deliberately staying away from me?" he said, wearing an exasperated smile.

"Why are you always so cute? You have a high IQ, and yet you still believe in a rumor like this?"

He raised his hand to ruffle Hera's hair, but she dodged his touch.

"A rumor?" Hera repeated.

She was skeptical.

"You said you aren't getting along well with your family at home,

why aren't you considering some

getting

married to inherit Grandpa's shares?" Content belongs

If Bernard inherited the shares, the other Killian family members would at least fear him a little, even if they disliked him.

Hera figured that if she could think of it,

it wouldn't believe it for a

moment and should too. She

never occurred to

Content belongs

Chapter 279

Once again, Bernard found himself at a loss for words.

The shares that Albert left for him meant nothing to him. He hated Albert.

Did Albert really think that by giving Bernard the shares after his death, he'd be able to make up for the suffering Bernard's mother endured for so many years after finding out that he cheated on her?

It could never change the fact that the Killian family had cornered her and caused her to die.

Bernard didn't need those shares.

Returning to the matter at hand, he couldn't believe that Hera would make assumptions about his sexual orientation simply because of that rumor.

"The legal minimum age of marriage here is 20," he said.

That single sentence hit Hera like a bomb.

He continued, "So, it's not like I don't want to get married. It's just that the woman I like isn't 20 yet."

Hera was stunned. This was way too much information for her to digest, and she was speechless.

"Aren't you ga-"

"No!" Bernard cut her short.

"Well then, why were you watching..." Hera's voice faltered as she realized that that wasn't the point.

She exclaimed, "There's actually someone you like?"

She wondered who the woman was and what kind of person she was.

Bernard looked into her eyes and said, "Yes."

Hera met his eyes.

Bitterness washed over her for no apparent reason, and she said, "Then why did you...!"

...seduce me?

She didn't voice the last two words.

That's not right! The Bernard she knew was a capricious man. Who knew if he was speaking the truth or just lying to her? She mustn't be fooled by him again.

At that moment, it occurred to her that she didn't know much about him.

Sensing her hesitation to speak, Bernard gently put his hand behind Hera's head and asked, "What did I do?"

"You didn't prove to me that what you said was true!" she snapped, wary of him.

The look of alert on her face made him frown slightly.

"What should I do to prove that to you?"

Hera was speechless. How would she know?

Frustrated, she said, "You-"

Her eyes widened as Bernard's face closed in. They were so close that he could see his reflection in her eyes.

Then, he pressed his lips softly against hers, and her mind turned completely blank.

It was her first kiss.

She pushed him away. Furious, she raised her hand to slap him, but he grabbed her wrist to stop her.

"Does this prove it?" he asked,

et

pressing his other hand against the back of her head as he rested his forehead against hers and stared into her eyes as if in a daze. Content

belongs

Hera's eyelashes fluttered in shock. She had one hand pressed against his chest to stop him from kissing her again.

Hera had always thought she was a

smart woman, but at that moment, her mind seemed to have ceased

working. Her thoughts were a mess, and she couldn't even speako

properly. Content belongs

She stuttered, "H-How could you? Y-You already like someone else."

Bernard thought she looked especially cute when she panicked. He felt the strong urge to pull her into his arms so that she would belong to him and him only. Ble didn't want anyone else to see her. Content belongs

There was a blaze in his eyes when he asked, "Do you still not understand?"

His gaze burned, making Hera's ears turn red from embarrassment. She quickly looked down at her shoes, refusing to meet his gaze.

She didn't dare to look into those fiery eyes of his for fear of losing the last ounce of rationality she had in her.

"Let me calm down for a bit," she muttered, wringing her wrist free from his grasp so she could push him away with both hands.

"I'll keep you company then," Bernard told her as he stood in front of the door.

He wouldn't let her leave.

He realized that he mustn't repeat his mistake. He couldn't take his time to let her slowly make her guesses and discover his feelings for her. He'd learned that he should just be frank by directly telling her about it. Otherwise, who knew what kind of trouble he'd fall into in the future? Hera said, "I can't tell if what you're saying is true."

Chapter 280

"What did I say that made you question my honesty?" Bernard asked.

Hera remembered the awkward moment she and Bernard shared at the hot spring resort and said, "You pushed me away at the hot spring resort back then!"

Bernard fell silent. It was as he expected. She'd misunderstood him.

With a flick of his hand, he locked the office door. Then, he slowly approached her.

"Sweetie, have you forgotten how old you are?"

Hera moved backward, but the heavy rosewood table blocked her path, and she had nowhere to go.

Meanwhile, Bernard continued advancing on her.

He leaned down close to the side of her face, then whispered into her ear, "Your brother looks at me as if I were his rival. If I didn't push you away, he would've stabbed me to death."

His warm breath fanned her ear. It was tingling, and it stirred her heart.

She instantly grabbed a hold of herself. Wasn't she the one who should be questioning him right now?

Hera leaned back and gripped the edge of the table with her hands. She stared at Bernard warily.

She managed to say, "But you even left with your lover just two days ago!"

Bernard couldn't decide if he should be annoyed or amused by that.

Eventually, he said, "Do you know how many people want to get close to me daily? Men and women-there is no exception. They come up with lots of strange excuses every time. Surely they can't all be my lovers, right?"

Hera was flabbergasted. She pondered why he sounded as though he were proud of that fact.

"Don't worry. I've always been waiting for you," said Bernard, tilting her chin upward.

With his gaze locked on her lips, he gently brushed his thumb over them as if trying to remember what the kiss just now felt like.

Hera wavered.

"Really?" she asked, still slightly suspicious.

Her response rendered Bernard speechless.

A moment later, he said, "Are you sure you want to discuss this?"

Hera paused briefly before telling him, "Then why don't you let go of me first?"

The corner of Bernard's mouth tilted upward into a smile. Suddenly, he leaned in closer to her.

Thinking that he was going to kiss her again, Hera placed her hands on his chest to push him away. But before she could do so, she felt the warm touch of his lips against her forehead.

She froze, completely forgetting that she'd just tried to struggle away from him just a second ago.

After that, Bernard released her and took a step back from her.

"Do you have any other questions, my dear?" he asked.

Hastily, Hera turned around so that her back faced him.

She hurriedly took a sip from the cup of coffee that was on the table and snapped, "Nonsense. I haven't agreed to anything!" Content belongs

"Sooner or later, you will," said Bernard with a shrug.

Hera let out a bark of sardonic laughter.

"Why, aren't you quite full of yourself?"

She put on a fake smile.

"I don't even trust you completely."

Just then, Bernard's phone started ringing.

After glancing at the screen, he said, "It's fine. We have plenty of time that. Meanwhile, I think you'll

more interested in this matte fo

regarding Queenie." Content belongs

Hera's eyes lit up at those words. She glanced at his phone and urged him to answer the call.

Bernard chuckled and answered it.

"I'm at Shuttle Ventures," he said into the phone.

"Tell me about it in person here."

Meanwhile, Amelia took a bite from a tasteless piece of bread in her hands in a shabby motel. Her phone screen lit up abruptly, and she quickly tapped the notification to open the message. "The parcel's arrived. Don't forget to take it.-Piglet"

Amelia stuffed the bread into her mouth and texted back, "Okay."

Then, she put on her cap and mask. After altering her appearance slightly to prevent someone else from recognizing her, she gingerly opened the door, ready to leave.

Content

belongs

She was about to walk out into the corridor when several men barged into the room and pinned her onto the ground.

"Police! Don't move!" one of them ordered.

"You're under arrest. You're coming back with us for an investigation."