

Under the Heiress' Facade #Chapter 351 - Read Under the Heiress' Facade Chapter 351

Chapter 351

Hera had seen fireworks before, but never at such a grand scale. It felt as if the entire night sky was on the verge of exploding, with the show continuing uninterrupted for a full ten minutes.

"Happy birthday, Hera..." Bernard said on the other end of the line.

The fireworks were so loud that Hera couldn't hear him clearly.

"What did you say? I couldn't hear you."

As the fireworks gradually quieted, the sky, once filled with vibrant colors, darkened again, and everything fell silent.

"Open the door."

A deep, male voice came through the phone.

Hera blinked. She wondered if Bernard could really be there.

She quickly turned around to open the door, but no one was there.

Her emotions, which had soared like a roller coaster, plummeted instantly. After all, it was New Year's Eve. She didn't think the Killians would possibly let him leave.

"You tricked me..."

Hera trailed off. She looked down in disappointment, only to notice two rows of red rose petals on the carpet that hadn't been there before.

The petals led from her door down the hallway to the stairs. Following the trail, she went to the living room, where at the end of the petals was a pair of white leather shoes.

Hera lifted her gaze to see Bernard standing there with a large bouquet of red roses. His handsome face was soft, and he wore a gentle smile. "Happy birthday," Bernard said, handing her the flowers.

"Did you think that I forgot your birthday?"

"You did it on purpose!"

Hera's heart swelled with emotion as she rushed forward and hugged him tightly.

Bernard held her with one arm and buried his head in her hair, breathing in its light fragrance to fill the void of his days away from her.

"The New Year's feast was filling enough. Can you two stop being so lovey-dovey?" Gino interrupted them.

Hera snapped back to reality and released Bernard, only then noticing that the Everetts surrounded her.

Unbeknownst to Hera, the living room had been transformed into a birthday party.

"Hera, happy birthday."

Lilith wheeled in a delicate cake tower from the kitchen that had 18 candles on the top.

"Happy birthday to you..."

Gideon led the singing and placed a birthday crown on Hera's head.

A warm feeling washed over her as Hera looked at everyone, melting her heart. It was only then that she realized they had done it on purpose. They had pretended to ignore Ker, only to prepare this surprise secretly.

With her hands clasped together, Hera made a wish and blew out the candles.

"Here's your birthday present."

Gino was the first to hand her a gift box.

Then, Gideon and James each

presented her with a share

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certificate. Both certificates were for

10% of their respective companies' shares, Sedna and Everett Group.

Meanwhile, Lilith handed her a property deed.

"Since you're going to study in Jedburgh next year, this is for you. This apartment might be small, but it's better than a dorm room."

Hera was baffled by Lilith's indifference, especially since real estate in Jedburgh wasn't cheap.

"You're 18 now-a young adult. Focus on your studies. It's okay to date, but just be careful," Mildred advised earnestly.

She then took out a red cloth bag, revealing a silver bracelet inside. It was a classic round silver bracelet.

It didn't seem particularly valuable

but James and Lilith knew it was the

token of love Simon Everett had given Mildred years ago. Mildred had always treasured it.

Mildred slipped the bracelet on Hera's right wrist, then took Bernard's left hand and placed it on top of Hera's. "Bernard is a decent young man. We're all pleased with him. As you youngsters say, just get married already."

Hera was speechless.

"Grandma, Hera just turned 18! She's not even legally able to marry!" Gideon reminded her.

Mildred replied, "Back then, 18-year-olds would already have two kids."

Gideon was at a loss for words.

After receiving all her family's gifts, Hera turned to Bernard and asked, "Where's yours?"

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"Let's go."

Bernard extended his hand.

Hera glanced at his broad palm and asked, "Where to?"

"To show you your gift," Bernard replied.

Hera raised an eyebrow. She was intrigued about a gift she had to see for herself.

"Go on. The sooner you go, the sooner you'll be back," Lilith said, handing Hera her coat.

Hera took Bernard's hand. Their fingers intertwined as they left under the watchful eyes of the Everetts.

A helicopter was already waiting for them in the yard. They boarded it, and the night sky exploded with fireworks again.

As the helicopter flew through the bursts of color, Hera leaned against the window. Her eyes sparkled as she watched the display up close.

"Do you like it?" Bernard asked softly in her ear.

Hera turned back to face him. The multicolored sparks reflected off his face, highlighting his chiseled features.

At that moment, her heart was on the verge of bursting. It pounded as loudly as the fireworks outside. Unable to resist, she leaned in and kissed him.

Bernard immediately raised his hand to hold her head in place as he deepened the kiss.

Outside the helicopter, the sky was a riot of colors. Meanwhile, they were wrapped in tender affection inside the vehicle.

Two hours later, the helicopter landed in an ancient courtyard house in Jedburgh.

Hera watched as the fireworks finally ceased.

"No more", she thought.

Fireworks were banned in Jedburgh. If the fireworks display continued, they would end up at the police station until dawn. "Close your eyes," Bernard instructed.

He took Hera's hand as he led her out of the helicopter. After closing her eyes, Hera felt Bernard letting go.

A moment later, Bernard's voice came again, "Alright. Open them."

Hera slowly opened her eyes to see Bernard handing her a lit sparkler.

"This is the last one," he said.

It reminded her of when they were kids, and Bernard would give her sparklers.

"Thank you."

Hera accepted the sparkler, and her face lit up with a captivating smile.

Bernard's eyes softened as he looked at her. He was reminded of the young girl with the radiant grin from his memories. It had been months since he'd seen her this happy.

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cheerful. She wouldn't have changed if it weren't for

d when she used to be sq

and

Daphne's incident.

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"You look so stunning when you smile. You should smile more and not look gloomy all the time," Bernard said.

Unable to resist, he reached out and pinched Hera's soft cheek.

Hera pushed his hand away.

"I don't make a living by smiling."

Bernard chuckled, grabbed her hand, and intertwined their fingers.

"Come see your gift."

With a flourish, he produced a set of keys.

"There's more?"

Hera was surprised. Wasn't the two-hour fireworks display enough?

Bernard I

into

the spent sparkler

gesturerash can by the door a toward the red door det

brass lock.

"Open it and see."

SW

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Hera stared at the brass lock and found a key among the others on the ring. She couldn't help but wonder if Bernard had bought an entire courtyard house for her.

The lock opened with a click. Bernard swung the door open wide and flicked on the lights, revealing a Victorian-carved wooden screen directly ahead.

Stepping around the screen, Hera was surprised to see a renovated space for medicinal herb storage and an alchemy lab. Intrigued, she moved forward to check it out.

The herb storage was neatly organized and stocked with various traditional medicinal herbs.

Meanwhile, the alchemy lab boasted various furnaces, gold and silver acupuncture needles, and all necessary tools neatly arranged. Clearly, everything had been meticulously prepared for her.

Previously, Hera had considered setting up an herb storage in her suburban villa but dismissed the idea due to its inconvenient location. Moreover, she had grown accustomed to the lab in Cavenridge and hadn't bothered with relocating.

Given her impending enrollment at Jedburgh for college, returning to Cavenridge wasn't practical. Bernard's thoughtful gesture of preparing this place for her in Jedburgh took Hera by surprise.

"The other three rooms include a bedroom, a consultation room, and a chemistry lab."

Bernard led Hera into the courtyard and introduced each room.

"This place is close to Quantford University and Bradbury University. You could open a medical clinic here, create pills, and treat patients." Hera glanced at Bernard, suddenly realizing he seemed to know her thoughts. She wondered how he had learned about her plans for Jedburgh. She pondered for a moment before asking, "How did you know I could create pills?"

She had only ever given him pills without explaining how they were made.

Bernard's eyes flickered momentarily. He had almost given himself away.

Indeed, Hera had never disclosed to him that she personally crafted the pills, having only referenced it under her alias, Dr. Shadow.

"Weren't the pills you gave me made by you?" he countered.

"By the way, didn't you say only the Eclipse Stone could cure my illness? Yet, I've recovered. Did you use the Eclipse Stone? Isn't it still with Dr. Shadow?"

Bernard raised an eyebrow and fixed Hera with a skeptical look while waiting for her explanation.

Hera was caught off guard. She sensed that he might have discovered her secret identity as

Shadow. She wondered how he

would've learned that. After a

everyone else believed Dr. Shadow

was Camille.

Camille had been recklessly using Hera's name to practice medicine, which infuriated Hera. She needed to stop Camille, but the timing wasn't right yet.

Hera had overlooked one crucial detail the money she used to set up Queenie had been directly transferred to Astral Nova.

If someone exploited this and infiltrated the Astral Nova system to investigate, they would uncover that the payment from "Raven" was linked to Dr. Shadow.

Therefore, exposing Camille now as

an impostor and claiming her own

identity as Dr. Shadow would

wanted figure with a

100-thousand-dollar bounty head.

reveal Hera as only

Hera needed to wait for the right moment when the Grandmaster of Astral Nova wasn't present to hack into the system and erase the transaction records.

"That just proves how exceptional my medical skills are!"

Hera dodged the question and pointed to the west wing to change the subject.

"Is that the bedroom? It's almost 3:00 am now, and I'm exhausted. Let's sleep here tonight."

Bernard watched her retreat and smiled resignedly. It seemed that Hera wasn't ready to reveal her true identity to him yet.

Using the key, Hera unlocked the door to the west wing.

The lights flickered on automatically, revealing a traditional main hall with a bedroom on the left and a study on the right. Despite the antique decor, the living amenities were modern and complete.

She opened the wardrobe in the bedroom and found neatly arranged men's and women's pajamas, underwear, and outerwear all in one closet. Startled, she turned around.

Bernard leaned casually against the bathroom door with a mischievous smile.

"Sweetie, would you like to join me for a bath?"

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Hera's cheeks flushed with embarrassment as she grabbed a pillow from the bed and hurled it at him.

"You pervert!"

Bernard chuckled softly. He effortlessly caught the pillow and tossed it back onto the bed before disappearing into the bathroom.

Having already showered earlier at home, Hera simply changed into her pajamas and settled into bed. The sound of running water from the bathroom made her inexplicably nervous.

She idly played with her phone, trying to distract herself, but her attention was drawn to a WhatsApp message from Samantha.

Samantha: "Hey! Hera, have you used the gift yet?"

"Don't forget to share your feedback!"

Thinking of the unopened package in her room, Hera replied, "Why? Did you finally get paid for your endorsement?"

Samantha: "Wait, isn't it past 3:00 am there? And you're still awake!"

Hera: "Mind your own business."

Just then, Samantha sent a WhatsApp video call invite, which Hera promptly declined. Deciding to avoid further conversation with Samantha, she switched to another chat.

As she switched to Raven's account, Hera suddenly remembered S' advice and switched to Shadow's account instead.

Shadow's account had few friends, and the first message was from the Grandmaster of Astral Nova.

She suddenly remembered that Camille had already launched the assembly line for special medication and that her own batch was scheduled for auction on the 15th.

Hera had an idea and quickly messaged the Grandmaster of Astral Nova.

Shadow: "Let's reschedule the auction of that batch of special medication."

As she sent the message, Bernard's phone on the bedside table lit up with a WhatsApp notification.

Hera glanced at the phone on the table and then at the conversation box with the Grandmaster of Astral Nova, who had not replied.

Unbothered, she sent another message.

Shadow: "Let me know when the new date is confirmed."

Just as she sent it, a WhatsApp notification popped up on Bernard's phone screen that had just gone dark.

Hera was caught off guard. She wondered if it was a coincidence.

She sent, "Are you there?" to the

Grandmaster of Astral Nova, and a message

new

notification

appeared on Bernard's phone again.

She stared at the phone on the desk, bewildered.

Once or twice could have been considered a coincidence, but three times Row? She seriously

vel?

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considered if Bernard was actually the Grandmaster of Astral Nova.

Hera reached for the phone, but before she could grab it, a large hand covered hers and took the phone away.

"Do you know the passcode? I'll unlock it for you."

Bernard's maic voice came from above.

Hera lifted her gaze. He was still in his bathrobe, warm and damp.

With a quick swipe of his thumb, Bernard unlocked the phone and handed it to her.

"The passcode is your birthday."

Hera took the phone and

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immediately opened his WhatsApp account, only to find three unread messages from Shaun, all of which contained inappropriate words.

Hera's cheeks flushed bright red. She contemplated if it was indeed purely a coincidence.

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"What are you looking at?" Bernard asked as he sat beside the bed.

He leaned in to snatch the phone just as he noticed the chat with Shaun.

"Don't read that."

Hera deftly evaded his grasp and hurriedly scanned the message list. Douglas' avatar showed seven unread messages, with several group chats marked as 99+.

Before she could read the details, Bernard snatched the phone back.

"Let me see it again."

Hera lunged to reclaim the phone, but Bernard held firm.

And so, beneath the enchanting moonlight, the two spent a carefree night together.

In the living room of the Killian residence in Jedburgh, Chad's grip tightened on the newspaper as he exclaimed, "XS Corporation strikes again!" The front page boldly proclaimed, "XS Corporation Invests 200 Million in Everett Group."

"XS Corporation seems to have it out for Killian Corporation. I wonder if this is sheer coincidence or if they have insider knowledge," mused Karen White, the matriarch of the Killian family, standing beside Chad.

Chad had been gearing up to threaten Bernard with the investment contract. However, when he learned that the Everetts had accepted XS Corporation's investment, he felt like he was punching cotton.

Karen's words reminded Chad that if XS Corporation was solely targeting Killian Corporation, it was simply unfortunate. But if it was the latter, it signaled something grave—a spy within Killian Corporation!

"Who's the party pooper stirring up your mood during the New Year, Chad?" boomed a deep voice from outside the door.

Then entered a tall, thin man with a high forehead and sharp features. It was Rhett, the fourth son of the Killian family. Following him was a lavishly dressed woman, Linda Atkins, and Frederick.

"Uncle Chad, Aunt Karen, we've come to wish you a Happy New Year," Frederick said respectfully.

"Rhett, Linda, Frederick, you guys are here. Come in and have a seat."

Karen smiled as she signaled the housekeepers to prepare tea.

"Uncle Chad, is Uncle Bernard still not back yet?" Frederick suddenly asked.

Mentioning Bernard was like igniting a fuse for Chad. Bernard barely touched his New Year's Eve dinner the previous night before leaving and hadn't returned since. Seeing this news early in the morning had only added to Chad's frustration.

"Why are you bringing him up?" Chad snapped.

Rhett glanced at the newspaper Chad had put aside. He had read it and heard about Chad and Bernard's recent falling out.

That was precisely why he had come today.

"Chad, Bernard has always been like

this.

Os not worth getting worked up Look who I've broked up along," Rhett said.

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He turned toward the door.

"Come in."

A figure dressed in a gray cloak with a hood stepped inside as he spoke.

The hood was lifted to reveal an 18-year-old girl. It was Giselle.

Chad sized Giselle up and sensed a hint of familiarity in her features.

Turning to Rhett, he asked, "Who is she?"

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Frederick chimed in, "Uncle Chad, she's Uncle Lucius' daughter. The one mistakenly switched at birth 18 years ago at the hospital. She's Cecily's younger sister."

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Chad frowned deeply.

"Do you have any proof?"

Rhett extracted a document from Linda's LV bag and handed it over.

"Here are the results of the DNA test."

Glancing at the final column, Chad saw the paternity blood relation was over 99.99%, confirming the father-daughter bond.

"Well..."

Chad's gaze shifted from the document to Giselle.

Karen circled Giselle, examining her critically.

"Her features resemble Daphne's."

"Are you sure this result is accurate?" Chad asked seriously.

"I had Lucius' blood sent out from prison. There's no mistake," Rhett confirmed.

Under their scrutiny, Giselle felt her heart race nervously. The atmosphere in the Killian household was far more daunting than that of the Everetts'.

But this was her home now. Despite her biological mother, Daphne, having passed away and Lucius being imprisoned, Rhett had assured her that as long as she obeyed and pleased Chad, she could firmly establish herself within the Killian family.

"Uncle Chad, Aunt Karen, it's a relief to meet you finally. My journey here hasn't been easy."

Giselle kneeled before Chad with tears streaming down her face.

"Over the years, I've been with the Everetts in Norburgh, used as a pawn in their alliances with the Gaskell family. I've lived in turmoil, but after they reclaimed their daughter last year, they not only expelled me but also ruined the Gaskell family.

"Even worse, their newfound daughter knowingly concealed my true identity and left me in the mountains. It was a harsh place, and I almost didn't survive.

"Although I didn't grow up in the Killian family, I carry the family's blood in my veins. Their treatment of me is as though they don't respect the Killian family at all..."

"Poor child. Please stand," Karen said, helping Giselle to her feet.

"The Everetts in Norburgh? Managed by James Everett?" Chad asked.

Giselle sobbed softly.

"Yes."

Chad's expression darkened, and his eyes were filled with an unreadable malice.

"What's your name?"

"I used to be called Giselle," Giselle replied.

Her choice of words was deliberate. By saying "used to be", Giselle implied that since she had returned to the Killian family, she should reclaim her heritage and be given a new name.

Karen saw right through Giselle's

petty schemes. Despite her Killian blood, Giselle's humble upbringing had left her greedy and unfit for refined society. Karen couldn't help but acknowledge it.

"It's good to have you back," Chad said, then turned to Karen.

"Karen, take her downstairs and get her settled properly." "Okay."

Karen nodded, then said to Giselle, "Alright. Come with me."

Giselle felt immense relief as the Killian family accepted her.

"Thank you, Uncle Chad, Aunt Karen."

Rhett exchanged a glance with Linda, and she left with Frederick.

In the living room, only the two brothers remained.

"No wonder we never found the bodies of Dr. Miracle and Cecily. They were never dead to begin with. What a perfectly staged death!" Rhett exclaimed.

Chad smoked his cigar in silence. His thoughts seemed veiled in the swirling smoke.

"So, Bernard might have known

about this all along but stayed silent.

And he got close to the real heiress of the Everetts. Could they have had hidden intentions? After all, back then, that girl-

Chad understood his meaning and cut him off.

"Let's keep today's events from Bernard."

They lost their leverage of the

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Everetts' investment contract against Bernard, but Giselle, the Everetts former adopted daughter, had returned to the Killians.

Sometimes, a setback could lead to unexpected fortunes.

"Got it. I'll go check on Mom," Rhett said.

As he left, a fleeting calculation flashed in his eyes.

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Giselle limped slightly as she followed Karen through the courtyard of the Killian residence.

Aaron's gunshot had left her with a noticeable limp, and it drew curious glances from the housekeepers. Usually, Giselle would adjust her gait to appear more graceful, but she was too excited to care that day.

She felt like a country girl visiting a grand mansion for the first time, her eyes darting left and right in awe. The Killian residence was even more magnificent than she had heard. It resembled a palace.

She felt that this was her true home. She was a direct descendant of the prestigious Killian family, the head of the four influential families.

She thought any of these homes was far grander and more valuable than the Everetts' shabby villa.

Giselle seethed at the thought of Hera calling her a fake Everett heiress when it was she who had stolen her rightful life and blamed her for everything.

Giselle vowed to repay this grudge tenfold.

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Hera woke up at 4:00 pm, roused by hunger. She reached out to find the bed beside her empty. She was alone in the room.

Hera grabbed her phone and saw a WhatsApp message from the Grandmaster of Astral Nova from 11:00 am saying, "Okay."

Recalling Bernard's message list from the night before, she wondered if it was just a coincidence.

After switching back to her personal account, Hera ignored all other messages and went directly to Bernard's chat. There were no new messages. She took a long drink from the cup of water on the bedside table before heading out.

The hall and study were empty, but the door to the east wing stood ajar. Hera made her way over and found that it had been transformed into a chemistry lab.

Inside, she counted 118 transparent glass compartments lining the wall furthest to her. Some of the glass compartments were filled, but most were empty.

Recognizing it immediately as a periodic table of elements, Hera approached Bernard, who stood absorbed by the display with his back turned.

"Is this your collection of elements?" she asked.

"Sweetie, you're awake. Are you hungry? I'll have someone bring you something to eat," Bernard said.

When he turned around, he noticed Hera Swift only a thin nightgown. He removed his coat and draped it over her shoulders.

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Hera replied, "I'm hungry. I want to eat the steak you make."

"Okay. I'll have Douglas send over the ingredients," Bernard said and texted Douglas on his phone.

Hera examined the wall, noticing that all 22 non-metal elements were , while the metal elements were mostly empty.

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"When did you start collecting these? Is this all you've gathered?" she asked.

"About 12 years ago," Bernard answered without hesitation.

"12 years, and you've only collected these 22 non-metal elements?"

Hera raised an eyebrow, her tone tinged with disdain.

Over a few days, around 90 common metal elements, including gold, silver, copper, and iron, could be collected.

"Yes, I collect two elements for every year."

"Is there a reason for this particular selection?" Hera inquired.

Bernard gazed at her intensely.

"Yes..."

Chapter 358

"Everyone thought you were dead back then, but I refused to believe it. I searched for you tirelessly, but I never found you.

"To keep myself from giving up, I created this periodic table," Bernard explained while looking at the meticulously maintained chart on the wall.

Hera gazed at the periodic table, noting the pristine glass. It was obviously maintained daily.

"I've been collecting two elements each year in my search for you. And I vowed to continue until the table was complete or until I couldn't find you," Bernard continued.

Hera turned her gaze to Bernard. His chiseled profile caused her heart to pound heavily.

There were 118 elements in the periodic table, and collecting two yearly would take him 59 years.

12 years ago, Bernard was just a 13-year-old boy when he made that stubborn promise to find Hera.

Throughout that time, Hera blamed Bernard for not accompanying her to Catherine's house and deliberately avoided him.

"Why didn't you come to the station to meet me back then?" Hera asked.

After Lucius was imprisoned, Daphne spent months investigating the incident to clear his name.

When she had finally found some leads, she received death threats from an unknown source. To protect Hera and Bernard, Daphne planned to take them to Catherine's house.

But on the day they were supposed to leave, Bernard changed his mind at the last minute and decided not to go.

That same day, after Daphne had taken Hera to Catherine's house, she died in a car accident on her way back to the Killian residence.

When Hera heard about Daphne's accident, she cried and wanted to return to the Killian residence to find Daphne, but Catherine stopped her.

Catherine warned Hera that returning could mean risking her life, as the Killian family might silence them both.

Refusing to believe Catherine, Hera secretly called Bernard and begged him to take her back to the Killian residence.

She sneaked out of Catherine's house and waited for him at the station all day, but he never showed. Instead, she was abducted by traffickers.

Hera couldn't recall much after the kidnapping. She only remembered that two days later, Catherine found her. They were on the run for six months before they settled in the mountains near the border Content

They might not have been separated for so many years if Bernard had gone with her to Catherine's house.

"I did go to the station to meet you. But Chad's men caught me en route," Bernard said grimly.

Even though his gaze was fixed on the periodic table, he was lost in somber memories.

"By the time I escaped and reached the station, you were gone. Mrs. Jones' house was also burned down."

Hera recalled how Catherine had

indeed set fire to her house and

faked their deaths before they went on the run. Looking at Bernard and then at the periodic table, she suddenly felt a sense of calm.

She moved to speak, wanting to comfort Bernard, but couldn't find the words. Instead, she changed the subject.

"So, you searched for me all these years just because I'm your niece?"

"It wasn't just because of that," Bernard replied cryptically.

Realizing something, Hera leaned closer.

"Oh?"

Bernard hesitated to find the right words as he met her inquisitive gaze. He wondered if she would find it strange to know he'd harbored feelings for her since they were children.

He raised an eyebrow and mimicked her tone, saying, "Oh?"

Since he didn't elaborate, Hera tried a different approach, "When did you start liking me?"

"Figure it out yourself," Bernard responded.

Hera felt a mix of frustration and amusement. He hadn't been this mysterious when he was pursuing her before.

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Hera felt flustered. Bernard's true colors were starting to show now that they were together. "Stop mimicking me!" Hera snapped.

Just then, the sound of the front gate opening echoed across the yard.

Bernard seized the opportunity and said, "Douglas is here. I'll go make you some steak."

He turned to leave.

But the more he evaded her questions, the more curious Hera became. So, she trailed after him.

"You didn't start having feelings for me when you were young, did you?" she prodded.

Bernard froze at being exposed.

"You're such a perv. I was practically your niece back then!" Hera teased.

Bernard remained silent. Suddenly, he stopped and turned, causing Hera to bump into him.

With a mischievous grin, he lifted her chin.

"So, are you scared of falling into a pervert's hands? Hmm?"

Hera was speechless.

Douglas, who had come to deliver some items, witnessed their intimate moment. He quietly placed the items in the kitchen and left, feeling like a third wheel.

The kitchen and dining room were behind the west wing's main hall. Bernard retrieved a box of cake from the items Douglas brought and handed it to Hera.

"Have some cake to tide you over, but don't eat too much. Save some room for the steak."

"Okay."

Hera sat at the dining table. She opened the cake box to find her favorite tiramisu inside.

As Hera enjoyed the cake, she watched Bernard bustling in the kitchen. She suddenly felt a warm wave of happiness wash over her.

She had never considered what kind of life she wanted beyond avenging Daphne and clearing Lucius' name. But now, she had.

"Bernie," Hera called out suddenly.

Preoccupied with marinating the steaks, Bernard responded with a hum.

"Let's continue collecting elements from the periodic table. One each year until we finish," Hera said.

Bernard paused and looked at Hera, wearing a faint smile.

"Alright. But I can't promise we'll complete all 96 remaining elements," he replied.

96 years was nearly a century.

"If we can't finish, our kids can take over," Hera suggested.

Bernard looked at her with deep affection.

"Deal!"

Hera took another bite of the tiramisu, its sweetness spreading from her mouth to her heart.

And just like that, they made a romantic pact to last a century.

After

Hera reminded Leon of

he to give her energy

planned to watch a movie together.

At the theater, while buying popcorn and drinks, Bernard's phone rang.

Having already bought the popcorn, Hera turned to ask Bernard what drink he wanted, only to see him frowning as he listened to the call.

She recalled the New Year

celebrations at the Killians', with their complex rituals and strict etiquette. Bernard had been absent since yesterday, and she was certain the Killians weren't pleased.

Knowing how difficult things were with the Killians, she didn't want him facing more trouble because of her.

Just as she was about to suggest he

with an

go back, her phone vibrated incoming call. It was from She quickly answered the call.

Ellerine.

"Grandma..."

But the voice on the other end wasn't Catherine's. It was a young girl speaking urgently.

"Hello, is this Hera? Mrs. Jones is in trouble!"

Chapter 360

Hera took a redeye to the border airport and then rushed to Evergreen Hospital. She arrived by midday the next day.

At Catherine's bedside, Everly Pierce, her neighbor, watched over her.

Catherine lay unconscious with her head swathed in white bandages. She was wearing an oxygen mask over her face and with an IV drip bag hanging beside her.

"What happened?"

Hera entered the room, concern etched on her face.

"Hera, you're back," Everly said with relief.

She clutched Hera's hand eagerly.

"Hurry. Come check on Mrs. Jones. She still hasn't regained consciousness."

Hera nodded. Her heart sank as she examined Catherine. There was a blood clot in her head—a vicious blow to an elderly woman.

"Who did this?"

Hera's voice tightened with anger.

"Yesterday, loan sharks barged in with an IOU bearing Mrs. Jones' thumbprint. They demanded repayment, but Mrs. Jones had nothing to give. So, they knocked her out cold," Everly explained.

"Loan sharks?"

Hera frowned.

She wondered how Catherine could have gotten involved with loan sharks. After all, Catherine received tens of thousands of dollars in allowance every month.

Hera had also given Catherine a card with two million dollars when she brought Giselle back from the Everett residence. That should have been more than enough to cover their necessities up in the mountains.

"Yes! They threatened to return in three days. And they said that if we don't come up with five million, they will start cutting off Mrs. Jones' limbs.

"Wayne went to report it, but the local police brushed it off as a matter of debt. But Mrs. Jones was always so careful with her money. How could she owe such a huge amount?"

Everly's voice trembled with fear.

"It must be that woman! Ever since Mrs. Jones brought her back, it's been one disaster after another," declared a deep, resonant voice from the doorway.

Hera turned to see Wayne Pierce, a tall, strong man with a weathered complexion. He was holding a bag of takeout, his face etched with fury. He was Everly's elder brother.

Wayne and Everly had lost their

parents when they were young and had lived in the most isolated part of Willowbrook Village. When Catherine and Hera fled to Willowbrook Village years ago, they were shunned by the locals.

At that time, only this kind-hearted sibling duo had taken them in. Afterward, Catherine's exceptional medical skills eventually won over the villagers, and they allowed Hera and Catherine to settle down.

"Was it Giselle Everett?" Hera said the name aloud.

"Yes, she's the one. I can't fathom why Mrs. Jones brought her back. Giselle received free medical care, food, and everything.

"But she demanded imported latex mattresses and branded clothes and insisted on drinking only mountain spring water. She completely refused to touch the water from the tap or well," Wayne ranted.

His straightforward nature and strong build made it clear that Giselle's antics had worn his patience thin.

Hera nodded as she grasped the situation.

As expected, Giselle couldn't adjust to village life after living in luxury with the Everett family for 17 years. Otherwise, she wouldn't have clung so desperately to the Everett family in the first place.

"Where is she now?" Hera asked.

"No idea. She started sneaking out once she could walk. I haven't seen her in a week," Everly replied.

Hera glanced at Catherine, who lay unconscious on the bed, and concluded that Giselle had likely fled.

"I borrowed this money from the villagers and took out my savings. The total is only 35 thousand dollars in total, but you can take it first.

"I'll figure out the rest in a few days," Wayne said, handing Hera a bundle of bills wrapped in a black plastic bag from his coat pocket.