

Under the Heiress' Facade #Chapter 91 - Read Under the Heiress' Facade Chapter 91

Chapter 91

A black Lincoln pulled up at the entrance of Luxent Hotel, and in the back seat were Lily and Zylar.

"Zee, we're here," Lily reminded.

"Do you trust them?"

Zylar looked skeptical.

Lily explained, "The hackers on Cyber Web highly respect Raven. If Raven refuses a job, no one else will take it, even if it's left hanging for months. You'd have to resort to the black market.

"Don't worry. Raven built our family's company firewall. It's been solid with no issues."

Despite posting a reward, the Gaskell family received no responses to the mission. Instead, they faced more hacker attacks.

The security of the Gaskell company's firewall was at risk, causing headaches for the whole family. With even Amelia frantically seeking solutions, Zylar couldn't stay idle and wanted to help.

Although he knew little about managing a company due to his passion for music and arts, he remembered that the Bourne family was in the internet industry and sought Lily out.

Unexpectedly, Lily suggested looking up people from the black market despite the risks involved. But with the Gaskell family pushed to the brink, Zylar decided to proceed with her idea.

As they headed toward the lobby, they spotted Hera rushing from the elevator, followed by a man who looked like a hotel security guard.

Lily's eyes sparkled with curiosity. She wondered about the reason for Hera's presence.

Considering Luxent Hotel's cost and the Everetts' bankruptcy, Lily speculated that Hera might have dined and dashed. The thought excited Lily, as Hera had caused trouble for the Gaskell family, Giselle, and her best friend, Janiya.

Hera had especially troubled Janiya.

Lily had contacted Janiya after the incident, who indirectly implied Hera's involvement in her fate. Lily felt she had to use this opportunity to seek revenge on Hera for Janiya's sake.

At the sight of Hera, Lily said, "Zee, look. It's Hera."

Zyler's first thought was that Hera was stalking him.

"Hera, where are you going in such a hurry?"

Lily blocked her path.

Hera glanced at them indifferently and coldly replied, "Leave me alone."

"You haven't done anything wrong, so why are you running so fast?"

Lily stubbornly obstructed Hera's way and called over the security guards at the entrance.

"She's broke. You'd better hold her and check if there's been a theft in the hotel or if someone's been dining and dashing," Lily confidently declared, which attracted much attention in the lobby.

Some bystanders immediately stepped forward to surround Hera at the mention of a theft.

Lily was delighted at the commotion she had caused. She anticipated seeing Hera thrown out by the security guards, preferably after she received a good beating.

However, the security guard didn't move when he saw the person Lily was accusing.

Instead, he scrutinized Lily and asked, "Who are you? On what grounds are you commanding us?"

The guard had seen Hera arrive with Bernard, who even opened the car door for her. He wouldn't dare touch her.

"What's with your attitude? Do you want to keep your job here? Look closely—I'm a gold VIP member of Luxent, and he's from the Gaskell family!"

"You'd have to sell your own mother before you'd even get close to affording a scratch on his shoes!"

Lily's frustration boiled over as she lashed out at the security guard.

Zyler frowned at Lily's crude behavior. His remaining feelings for her dissipated instantly.

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The lobby manager noticed the commotion and rushed over. At the sight of Zyler and Lily, he quickly apologized humbly.

His modest attitude appeased Lily's anger. Still, she arrogantly pointed at the security guard.

"Get rid of this watchdog right now! I don't want to see him here when I spend my money!"

Lily then pointed at Hera and shouted, "And detain this country bumpkin for interrogation!"

"Yes, yes," the lobby manager nodded repeatedly.

Then, his heart skipped a beat when he noticed Hera's cold and annoyed expression.

"Ms. Bourne, perhaps it's best if you avoid visiting here in the future," the lobby manager said with a professional smile.

With a simple hand gesture, the security guards immediately dragged Lily out despite her resistance.

Both Lily and Zyler were puzzled by the rapid escalation of the situation.

"How dare you treat me like this! I'll file a complaint against you! Let go of me! I have an appointment here—ouch!"

Lily's cursing faded as she was dragged away.

"Escort out the guest Lily Bourne made an appointment with," the lobby manager instructed into his walkie-talkie.

The onlookers gasped. Only those with substantial financial means could afford to spend at Luxent Hotel. Gold card members were obligated to spend at least five million dollars annually.

Yet, a lobby manager dared to cast out such a high-end customer. They had even removed the person she had an appointment with. The onlookers couldn't help but wonder about the identity of the person Lily had offended.

All eyes turned to Hera. They were curious about the drama, but the lobby manager dispersed the crowd.

"Ms. Youngworth, my apologies for the disturbance," the lobby manager said, bowing apologetically.

His obsequious demeanor seemed as if, in the next moment, Hera could command him to kneel and lick the floor clean if she wished.

Zyler felt uncomfortable watching from the sidelines.

"Excuse me. Please step aside!"

Zyler tried to approach Hera but was blocked by Douglas.

Hera ignored Zyler and walked away coldly.

"Dou-Douglas!"

Zyler recognized Douglas.

He was Bernard's personal assistant. Unbeknownst to others, Queenie had instructed the Gaskells to memorize all the direct lineages and even the assistants of essential figures in the Killian family.

Douglas glanced at Zyler and failed to recall who he was. However, chasing after Hera was more urgent, so he ignored Zyler and quickly walked away.

Being ignored by two people in a row infuriated Zyler.

But what enraged him even further was the sudden realization that Hera had struck up a connection with Douglas. Moreover, Douglas seemed to care a lot about Hera.

Piecing it together, he felt it was no surprise that the lobby manager would prostrate before a bankrupt heiress.

The thought ignited anger within Zyler.

He continued to curse Hera in his heart.

"Hera is so superficial and low! She had claimed to like me before, but now she is cozying up to another man!"

He felt even more insulted by the fact that Douglas was merely his cousin's personal assistant.

Even if his status as an assistant wasn't considered too low, Zylar was still the heir to the Gaskell family.

He wondered if Hera honestly thought he was inferior to even Bernard's assistant and if she had actually tried to cozy up to him.

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"Ms. Youngworth..."

Douglas finally caught up with Hera in the parking lot.

Hera glanced at him, expressionless, then opened the car's back door and got in.

"Do you really trust Bernard to be alone with that woman?" Douglas asked.

The heavy sound of the door slamming shut was her response. Perplexed, Douglas scratched his head, wondering if he had said something wrong again.

He had seen Hera leaving alone earlier at the private room entrance.

He teasingly asked, "Ms. Youngworth, why are you alone?"

Then, Douglas noticed Hera's irritation grew. When he didn't see Bernard follow Hera out into the elevator, he realized something was off. He quickly took the elevator to catch up.

"Don't worry, Ms. Youngworth. Bernard is very disciplined. He won't fall for her charms so easily," Douglas explained from the driver's seat.

"Chad arranged for Bernard to meet Ms. Chime. As they say, one can't refuse their elder's kindness, and Bernard—"

"Shut up and drive," Hera interrupted flatly.

Douglas immediately shut his mouth. He found Hera to be much more frightening than Bernard.

After some hesitation, he weakly suggested, "Should we wait for Bernard a little longer?"

With a single glance from Hera, Douglas mimed zipping his mouth shut, but didn't start the car.

He kept his silence.

The thought of Bernard alone with Camille irritated Hera even further. She felt like her time was better spent elsewhere than used to accompany Bernard. She should have stayed at home to watch dramas and play with Tiramisu.

"In that case, you wait for him then."

Hera opened the door, ready to get out, but found it being opened from the outside.

A tall figure cast a shadow over Hera as he blocked the car door. Although it was backlit, his deep eyes glimmered in the dim light, staring at her.

"Why didn't you wait for me?" Bernard asked.

Hera was caught off guard but quickly regained her cold demeanor.

"Well, you were going to send Ms. Chime back, and we're not going the same way," she said, avoiding his gaze.

Bernard smirked at her sarcasm. It seemed that his efforts didn't go to waste, as there was some jealousy in the air that night.

"She's not a child who needs an adult to send her back."

Bernard motioned for Hera to move further in to make room for him.

Hera fell silent as she felt patronized. She wondered if he was implying that she was still a child in his eyes. Whether it was his earlier playful banter or the flirtatious gestures under the table, were they all simply to tease her?

Hera felt particularly irritated.

"Is someone jealous?"

Bernard leaned into the car, his gaze fixed on her.

Hera felt even more irritated and reluctantly shifted over to give Bernard space.

"Why on earth would I be jealous?"

Hera's tone was firm, implying her irritation.

"Does that still mean you're jealous?"

Bernard chuckled softly, finding her angry expression oddly endearing.

Hera remained silent as she couldn't find the words to explain.

Bernard explained, "I'm not interested in her. I only met with her because of her medical skills—"

"It seems to me that Ms. Chime is unprofessional. Instead of seeing patients at a hospital, she makes appointments at fancy restaurants, even inviting patients to candlelit dinners. Her intentions aren't pure," Hera interrupted in a detachedly.

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"I agree. Her medical skills seem lacking," Bernard chimed in.

Douglas remained silent in the front seat.

He mulled over Bernard's comment. Camille was from the renowned Chime family with a century- long legacy in medicine. She was hailed as a prodigy in the field and was even nominated for a Nobel Prize. Douglas wondered how sharp Hera's skills were if she could call Camille unprofessional.

Hera was stunned by Bernard's response. After all, he still followed Camille into the lounge for a private check-up. She couldn't help but curse at him silently.

Sensing the tension, Douglas quickly raised the partition between the front and back seats as he was worried about becoming a target of Bernard's wrath.

"I reluctantly agreed to meet her after being pressured by Chad. I even thought of bringing you along for support, but you were too caught up in your games to notice me," Bernard said in a deep voice, looking at Hera with an innocent expression.

Hera couldn't stay angry looking at him. But the more he feigned innocence, the more irritated Hera felt. Despite there being no chance between them, he continued to push the boundaries of their relationship.

"You don't owe me an explanation. We're in this together just for business. Once we obtain the Eclipse Stone and cure your illness, we'll go our separate ways," Hera stated coldly.

She lowered the divider and instructed Douglas, "Pull over."

Douglas hesitated when he noticed Bernard's stern expression in the rearview mirror.

"I said pull over!"

Hera's tone grew sharper.

Douglas hit the brakes, and Hera immediately stepped out of the car.

As the door loudly slammed shut, Douglas felt the temperature in the car drop. He wanted to turn on the heater, but he didn't dare to do so.

He watched Hera's figure disappear into the night, then glanced at Bernard's expressionless face in the mirror.

"Bernard, aren't you going after her?" Douglas asked.

Bernard watched Hera's retreating figure with bloodshot eyes through the car window. His hands were clenched into fists as if holding back an overwhelming emotion.

"Bernard?"

Bernard's unusual behavior caught Douglas' attention. He turned to check if Bernard's illness was acting up again.

Douglas had already dialed Johnson's number.

Bernard remained silent. He leaned back with his eyes closed.

An image of a sweet smile from a young girl formed in his mind. It was her smile and her gentle voice that had once saved him from the brink of madness. She had diverted him from his path of vengeance by softening his cold heart.

It was a memory so vivid, it felt almost tangible.

"Do you like me?"

"Yes."

"You're my favorite! Mom and Dad, too."

The boy held the girl's hand, gently stroking it without a word.

He yearned to take her away from the Killian family so that he would be the only one in her eyes. He wanted to own her entirely, marry her, and start a family together when they grew up.

But he never dared to confess his thoughts, fearing that she might be taken aback.

Yet, before she could grow up, she vanished from his life.

The Killian family claimed she had died. He refused to believe it and spent years searching for her. Finally, 11 years later, he found her.

However, she was no longer the innocent girl he remembered. She had changed.

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Bernard's eyes flickered open in the dim light after a long silence. His gaze had regained its composure, but it remained deep, akin to an abyss.

"Douglas, how would you treat a treasure that's been lost and found?" he asked.

"I'd probably worship it."

Douglas sighed in relief when he saw Bernard return back to himself. He promptly ended the call to Johnson.

"I was being too anxious," Bernard muttered to himself.

Douglas was confused. He couldn't seem to keep pace with Bernard's thoughts. Relationships, he realized, were like a complex puzzle.

...

Hera hailed a taxi and directed the driver to an address on the outskirts. She owned a villa there that was purchased before her move to Norburgh. Conveniently situated on the border between Norburgh and Jedburgh, it served her future plans well.

As she did, a text message popped up on her phone.

"Are you still alive out there? If you don't return soon, your room will be gone!"

It was from an unknown number, but Hera recognized it as Gino's.

"Sir, please change the destination to No. 8 Oak Estates," Hera instructed.

That was the Everett residence's address.

Hera stepped out of the car at the villa's entrance 40 minutes later. The gate stood wide open, with two large trucks filling the yard and workers in uniforms bustling about seemingly moving belongings.

She wondered if they were moving.

"Mr. Gideon, what about the piano? It's worth a hundred thousand dollars. Perhaps Ms. Hera would still want to use it," Judy fretted as she watched the workers move the piano out.

"I'll get Hera a new one if she wants to learn the piano. There's no need for second-hand items," Gideon stated while seated on the sofa with his legs crossed.

He was busy designing the room layout on his tablet.

"Dad, there are still two pictures to take down on that wall. If it looks too empty, we can take some new ones for Hera another day."

"But... can we keep two of the pictures?" James said hesitatingly while caressing the photo frames.

The wall displayed family photos decorated by Lilith, mostly highlighting the children's achievements.

James was referring to the photos of Giselle's wins in the state piano competitions in primary and junior high school. They were images of James with Giselle and the governor.

It wasn't the photo of Giselle that James valued, but the honor depicted in the photo with the governor.

"No!" Gideon rejected firmly.

"I want every trace of Giselle gone from here! Only then will Hera return to stay."

Upon reflection, Gideon realized Hera's reluctance to stay at home wasn't simply due to the family's favoritism toward Giselle. It was also because Giselle's presence had made her uncomfortable.

Thus, he aimed to remove everything.

"You heard him."

Lilith attempted to snatch the photo album from James, who held it tightly. Lilith failed to snatch it from his hands, so she decided to attend to other matters first.

"Gideon, I think the room you're designing isn't as good as my current study. That was the room she had taken from me before. She treasures it, so there's no need to change it," Gino remarked, pointing to the design on the tablet.

Gideon was redesigning the room where Giselle had been living for Hera's use. As it was a master bedroom, it had a better layout than Hera's current room in every aspect.

"Your study is too small. Girls have a lot of stuff, and there's simply not enough space. If Hera likes the decor of this room, I'll have it redone accordingly."

Gideon firmly insisted because the new room was closest to his.

"The air in Giselle's room still reeks of whore! She might not even want to stay there!" Gino added.

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"That's her choice, so why are you complaining?"

Gideon set down his tablet.

"And show some respect to Hera. Don't you dare curse in front of her!"

"It's none of your business!"

Gino turned his head away proudly.

"Ms. Hera, you're back."

Judy's voice suddenly came from outside.

The four people in the living room immediately looked toward the door.

In the blink of an eye, James immediately threw the photo frame he had been caressing into the trash bin. Lilith was stunned by his actions.

Before Gideon could intervene, Gino swiftly positioned himself in front of Hera.

With his arms crossed, head held high, he declared, "You're back so soon, huh? Are you afraid that I'll reclaim my room? It's obvious your favorite room is still my study!"

Gino would sever ties with Hera if she didn't opt for his study. He wouldn't even offer her pocket money.

Hera remained silent, her expression unreadable.

"Don't mind him. Hera, come and take a look. I designed a new room for you."

Gideon pushed Gino aside. He handed Hera the room design plan and looked at her expectantly.

Hera glanced at the design plan. It was detailed and considerate, with many thoughtful elements. It was evident that a lot of effort had been put into it.

"Not bad," she said.

Gideon was delighted to earn Hera's approval.

"If you like it, I'll have the interior design company start remodeling tomorrow."

Hera was slightly taken aback by his sudden affection, as she wasn't used to having such a caring brother. Seeing him lead the family in making these changes for her brought a soothing warmth to her heart.

Her mood, which had been restless all evening, improved slightly.

"Alright."

She nodded in confirmation.

Gino's eyes widened in disbelief. He couldn't believe her audacity for not choosing him. He felt he was done with this nonsense.

...

Meanwhile, in the CEO's office at Gaskell Corporation, Queenie was holding a glass of wine when she asked Amelia, "It's been three days. Has no one taken the order yet?"

Amelia shook her head.

"No. I have posted on every single platform available both domestically and internationally, but no one is interested."

"These fools. They're idiots for not grabbing the money even when they have the chance!"

Queenie cursed and slammed the wine glass heavily on the coffee table.

"Mom, I'm sorry, I underestimated the influence of Raven. I just found out that Raven is the only disciple of S," Amelia said apologetically.

"What?"

Both Queenie and Terence, who was sitting in the CEO's seat, exclaimed in surprise.

They all knew about the S incident where S was regarded as a national hero. Eight years ago, S was deployed by the nation during Miridian's invasion of the country's defense system.

He single-handedly obstructed the enemy's invasion within a day and also counter-killed the enemy. His actions paralyzed the Miridian's defense system for a week.

At that time, the incident became a global sensation, elevating S to the status of a legend in the hacker community.

However, two years ago, S retired from hacking due to health issues, leaving behind a void in the hacker world. The fact that Raven was S' only disciple was enough to instill fear in hackers worldwide.

And the Gaskells had offended such a terrifying existence in the heat of the moment.

"What took you so long to figure that out?"

Queenie glared at Amelia, full of resentment.

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Amelia felt ashamed of her blunder and lowered her head in embarrassment.

Terence felt irritated and succumbed to smoking one cigar after another until the office was shrouded in heavy smoke and the ashtray overflowed.

Amelia coughed uncontrollably, and she opened the window to clear the air. She urged Terence to smoke less, but her words fell on deaf ears.

At that moment, a knock sounded on the office door, and Zyler entered.

"Dad, why are you smoking in here again?"

He coughed, choking on the thick smoke.

Terence extinguished his cigar and stood up.

"Zyler, how did it go?"

"Here. Have some water first before you tell us," Queenie offered him a glass.

Zyler took a sip of water and said, "He refused to see me."

That night at Luxent Hotel, Adrian was also forced to leave after Lily was ousted. This left Adrian feeling embarrassed and furious, leading him to sever ties with the Bourne family.

Zyler waited for two days, hoping to give him time to cool down before attempting another visit. However, Adrian still refused to meet him.

"How could this be? Don't people operating in the black market prioritize money above all?" Terence questioned.

Desperate times called for desperate measures. They wouldn't choose to work with those in the black market unless the situation were dire.

"It was because..." Zylar recounted the incident at Luxent truthfully.

Queenie's expression darkened immediately.

While those in the black market might prioritize money, they were also proud individuals who valued their pride above all else.

It was no wonder Adrian was furious. He was kicked out by Luxent. It was akin to a slap in his face.

But Queenie also gleaned a significant piece of information. Hera had hooked herself up to Douglas.

"Hera! It's her again!"

Queenie clenched her teeth in anger.

A thought then crossed her mind, and she sneered, "A country bumpkin will always be a country bumpkin. She could do nothing else but pester Bernard's personal assistant!"

She wondered if Hera thought she could escape scrutiny by attaching herself to Bernard's assistant. She felt that destroying Hera would be as effortless as crushing an ant.

Zylar felt a strange discomfort hearing her words.

"With things getting to this point, we can only pay Raven a hundred times the price," Terence concluded.

"Amelia, you handle it. It's best if Raven solves our problem by tomorrow. The fools in our company won't hold out much longer."

Despite all the trouble, not a single penny was saved, and they ended up offending others. Queenie was further disappointed in Amelia.

However, the thought of Raven's power sparked another idea in her mind.

"Give me Raven's contact. I'll handle this personally," Queenie demanded.

"But..."

Amelia looked at Queenie in surprise.

Amelia was the one who negotiated with Raven, securing the deal at a hundred times the original price. If she could finalize this deal, the credit would be hers, and the shareholders would regard her more favorably.

Yet, Queenie sought to take credit for her daughter's achievement at this critical moment.

"No 'buts'. Isn't my authority greater than yours?"

Queenie glared at her.

Amelia felt resentful but still complied.

"Yes. I'll send you the contact information right away."

Hera stayed with the Everetts over the National Day long weekend.

On the first day back to school, Hera felt her phone constantly buzzing at the breakfast table. She glanced at it.

It was a message from Piglet saying, "Raven, the Gaskell family has agreed to pay a hundred times the price! However, this time, it was Mrs. Gaskell who contacted me. Should I ignore her for a while

and then pretend to reluctantly agree?"

She replied, "No need."

"True. It's better to receive the nine-figure sum sooner. I'll agree to her offer immediately," Piglet texted.

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Hera texted Piglet, saying, "That offer has expired. Now it's two hundred times the price."

Piglet messaged, "Oh my gosh! Are you messing with her? Or are you intentionally taking advantage of the situation? Either way, I love it!"

Hera smiled when she imagined the look on Queenie's face upon receiving this message. She set her phone down and continued with her breakfast.

As breakfast neared its end, James got up to fetch the car keys.

"Hera, the driver's off today, and I happen to be free. I'll take you and Gino to school," he said, trying to sound pleasant.

Gone was the dignity of the former head of the household in this fawning demeanor.

Hera glanced casually at him, unimpressed by his attempt to curry favor. She didn't refuse, but it was Gino who objected first.

"I'd rather not ride in the same car as this country bumpkin even if I have to walk to school myself!"

He strode off arrogantly with his small backpack slung over his shoulder. Gino was still sulking over the fact that Hera did not choose to stay in his study.

However, as he reached the yard, he pretended to tie his shoelaces and paused his steps. He figured he could reluctantly agree to share a ride with Hera if she asked him.

But then, he saw Hera shoot him a casual glance before getting into the car. Even James didn't try to persuade him. The car started and drove away.

As the car pulled away, leaving Gino standing in the yard, a surge of disbelief washed over him. He was left behind. The situation left him pondering if he was truly their biological child.

In the car, James kept his eye on the road while occasionally glancing at the back seat passenger through the rearview mirror.

Hera, engrossed in her game, kept her head lowered. Their positions were now vastly different, though her cold demeanor remained unchanged.

"Hera, what's your relationship with Mr. Killian?" James asked.

He had wanted to ask this question for a while now but hadn't found the right opportunity. He wouldn't have ended up in this situation if he had known how well-connected Hera and Bernard were.

At the mention of Bernard, Hera's hand briefly paused the game. They hadn't contacted each other for several days since that night they parted ways.

"It's none of your business," she replied nonchalantly without lifting her gaze.

James nearly choked. His hot temper would have flared up immediately in the past, but now, he felt powerless. In fact, he had to be shrewd. He recognized the situation and knew not to get angry. He dared not get angry, too.

"Yes, yes. It's none of my business. But can you, for the sake of our father-daughter relationship, help me persuade your brother to let me work at his company?" he asked in a low, pleading voice.

Then, he added, "Any position will do."

Gideon looked down on James and wouldn't let him interfere in the company's affairs, so James had to ask Hera for help.

If he didn't, he was at a loss as to what to do, even considering a job on a construction site.

Hera looked up and glanced at him.

"How about a janitor?"

James remained silent before adding, "Could it at least be a managerial position? After all, I am the face of the Everett family to those on the outside..."

He pleaded with Hera, trying to salvage some dignity.

He had once been a CEO. He felt that making him into a janitor would be beyond what he could tolerate.

"A janitorial supervisor?" Hera suggested.

James hesitated.

He considered her suggestion. He figured that the role of a janitorial supervisor was still a managerial position.

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"What?"

Queenie abruptly sat up from the massage table when she read the reply on her phone. Her reaction startled the women undergoing spa treatments next to her.

"What's wrong, Queenie?" one of them asked.

Queenie realized she had overreacted. She simply smiled and then casually reclined back.

"It's nothing. I'm simply discussing a collaboration with a hacker called Raven."

She pretended to be calm, but her inner turmoil went into overdrive when she learned that the price tag soared to two hundred times the original price.

The asking price had exceeded six hundred million. Unexpectedly, Raven had jacked up the price by a hundred times in just a few days. Queenie couldn't help but wonder if the hacker Raven thought money grew on trees.

"Raven? The country's top hacker? My son is always raving about him and thinks he's amazing. With just a snap of his fingers, he's made eight figures. It's impressive to see you negotiating with him," another woman remarked.

"My son is also obsessed with Raven. He's been skipping his studies to learn computer hacking."

"If you manage to recruit Raven, it'll be like obtaining a guardian angel for the Gaskells. Who would dare mess with your family?"

"At this rate, your family is headed to the top. Soon, you'll be mentioned among the four influential families."

"In the future, it won't just be the four influential families anymore. It'll be the five influential families."

As they showered Queenie with compliments and attention, she felt a wave of contentment wash over her. It even soothed the effects of her earlier inner turmoil.

Queenie aimed to elevate the Gaskells to the same level of prominence as the four influential families.

So, she obtained Raven's contact information from Amelia with the intention of recruiting him. Without hesitation, she drafted and sent out the message.

...

At Cavenridge, the Terranish teacher was in the middle of teaching a lesson in class.

Hera's chin was resting on her hand. She was absentmindedly playing the new Candy Crush game that Katie had recommended.

Then, a WhatsApp message popped up on her phone. It was from Piglet.

"Raven, Mrs. Gaskell has agreed to the new price.

"However, she has one condition—she wants to meet you in person. This time, she appeared quite desperate and responded unusually fast."

Hera narrowed her eyes and wondered if their desperation was genuine or if it masking their intentions. Nonetheless, she held the upper hand in the negotiation.

"Alright. But the price won't be the same as before," she replied.

Piglet was taken aback.

"You're planning to increase the price again? Are you doing this on purpose?"

Hera responded, "If she agrees, pass along my contact information."

Piglet asked, "So, how much then? Three hundred times?"

She texted back, "Depends on my mood."

Piglet sent a flexed bicep emoticon and commented, "Your answer implies that you're the one behind the Gaskells' setup."

...

Back at the beauty salon, Queenie frowned as she read the message.

The price was raised again. She felt the situation was an endless cycle of demands.

Considering the Gaskells' ambition and observing her friends' admiring glances, Queenie surmised that news of the Gaskells' interest in collaborating with Raven must have already spread through gossip.

If the Gaskells couldn't close the deal with Raven, their reputation would take a hit, and their company's systems might collapse.

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The Gaskells' stock plummeted, and their losses were in the billions. If this continued, they would soon hit rock bottom.

Queenie gritted her teeth and stomped her foot before reluctantly agreeing to the deal. After obtaining Raven's contact information, she sent a friend request and breathed a sigh of relief.

Queenie was grateful that this ordeal was going to end soon. After all, Hera's surveillance footage had gotten on Queenie's nerves. But once this was resolved, she would show Hera who was the boss.

...

Hera had left Queenie's friend request pending for two days. After Piglet's umpteenth reminder, she finally accepted it.

Saturday had arrived, and that night was the Astral Nova Auction.

Queenie messaged Raven.

"You've finally accepted my friend request. Let's meet up and talk face-to-face."

She added a smiley face with a bead of sweat on its forehead. Her emoji possibly hinted at her annoyance at being ignored for two days but still conveyed her willingness to cooperate.

Hera chuckled and replied using Raven's account.

"Send me the task requirements. I'll review them and get back to you with the price and account details."

After sending the message, she switched accounts and found Bernard's WhatsApp messages. Their last exchange was two weeks ago. She debated whether to tell him about the auction. But every attempt to compose a message felt off. She grew frustrated and tossed her phone aside.

She initially wanted to set clear boundaries. Yet, she didn't understand why she feeling strangely reluctant. She wondered why she should care when Bernard himself didn't even seem concerned about his own well-being.

The neglected phone buzzed with an incoming call. Hera quickly picked it up, expecting it to be Bernard. But her heart sank when she saw Samantha's name flash on the screen instead. Despite the initial disappointment, she answered the call promptly.

"Hera, I'm back in town! I've been busy lately and hardly had time to catch up. How's life at the Everetts'?"

A soft and melodic female voice came through the phone. It was Samantha Steele on the other end. She was an international movie star and Hera's close friend.

They had met on an international flight when Samantha was suffering from severe menstrual cramps.

Hera, who was seated beside her, adeptly applied a few acupuncture needles and eased Samantha's discomfort.

Samantha was so grateful that she insisted on getting Hera's contact number and treated her like a guardian angel.

Hera replied, "I'm fine."

Samantha said indignantly, "Really? I just learned about the Everetts scandal and how they mistreated you.

"Why didn't you tell me about it? By the way, I'm on my way there. I'll confront them."

Hera retorted, "Do you want to be banned from entering the country and never see me again?"

Samantha quickly responded, "Of course not!"

Being a foreigner with a quarter of Elvermark royal lineage, she couldn't risk it.

"Then behave and stop making a scene. I don't want to move again," Hera said.

"Move again?"

Samantha sensed something amiss about her response.

"Let's discuss it when we meet."

Hera deliberately kept Samantha guessing.

She wanted Samantha's opinion on her relationship with Bernard, considering Samantha's experience in matters of love.

"Okay!" Samantha agreed.

"But we might not have much time. I'm heading to the Astral Nova Auction tonight. Would you like to join me? They're auctioning off some rare treasures."

Hera responded, "Well, I'm also heading there."

They arranged to meet in a cozy café booth. After some small talk, Hera briefly mentioned her situation with Bernard.

Samantha's eyes lit up upon hearing that.

"Wow, isn't this like a tragic romance straight out of a Shakespearean tragedy?"

Hera was rendered speechless by her reply.