

HBH

Chapter 99

Melissa was excited beyond belief by what she had heard and had no words to describe her feelings.

“Oh, wow. Matthew, look at the shooting star. Quickly wish for something. I’ve heard that wishes made under a shooting star often come true.”

When she saw the shooting star across the picturesque night sky, she jumped with glee as she placed her hands together. As she tilted her head upward, she started to wish with closed eyes. *Shooting star, please make it so that I’ll be Matthew’s wife in the future!*

Standing by her side, Matthew suddenly thought that Melissa resembled Veronica’s brash yet innocent and naive personality. The woman wasn’t as annoying as he thought he would be.

“Why hasn’t she come out yet?”

After standing there for a while, Matthew began to question Veronica’s whereabouts as he looked around.

boot

“What? Oh, about that... Please wait here, I’ll go and call her.”

Being able to spend a bit of time with Matthew had already left Melissa feeling like she was lucky. Besides being elated, she was extremely nervous to the point where she did not know what else to say.

So, she turned around and fled the scene.

As she

jogged to her room, she opened the door to the sight of Veronica counting the money with a serious expression.

“Oh my God, Veronica, you’re the best.”

When Melissa hugged Veronica, she had pushed the person onto the bed and happily gave her a peck. “Veronica, you’re so smart. I’m elated right now. Here...”

She happily took out another wad of cash and pushed it into Veronica’s hands. “This is for you. Just treat it as the bonus for our first successful cooperation.”

“Yikes, this is kind of disgusting. There’s saliva... Hahaha, really?”

After pushing Melissa aside, the disgusted Veronica wiped the saliva on her cheek with her sleeves as she saw the wad of cash being thrust into her hands.

Stopping for a moment, she then grinned from ear to ear. “Melissa, you’re a good friend. Just like your brother, you both are so likable.”

No wonder they were siblings since they were both so likable.

This was especially so when it came to Melissa's willingness to simply give out money, which made Veronica extremely ecstatic.

"Of course, if my bro likes you, I'll naturally like you too. Now that you also like me, we'll be good friends from now on!"

Melissa was still immersed in the blissful situation as she happily sat on the bed.

After a while, she finally remembered Matthew's words and said to Veronica, "You should quickly head out. Matthew's waiting for you. He'll know something's up if we wait any longer."

"Oh, right."

When she realized that fact, Veronica immediately kept the forty thousand in her bag.

Before leaving, she did not forget to remind Melissa, "Only me, you and God knows where the money is. So, if it's gone by the time I'm back, I'll have you reimburse me."

If these words were said by another person, Melissa would have been absolutely livid.

However, because she was in a good mood, she simply replied, "Don't worry, I'll look after it for you. If it really goes missing, I'll pay you again."

"Tsk, this is why I like you."

Winking at her, Veronica then ran outside to the courtyard.

Although everything was pitch black in the courtyard, Veronica still managed to recognize Matthew standing under a tree at once.

If she did not know beforehand that it was a person, it would have been a bit scary considering the fact that they were on a mountain at the dead of the night.

Hopping over, she asked, "Why are you still here?"

"I was waiting for you."

Hearing Veronica's voice made Matthew turn his head around to answer her.

Reflecting on her reminder to Melissa not to let anything slip, she also needed to do the same; otherwise, she would be burning her own bridge.

"Didn't you say that you have something to talk about just now?"

Putting his hands in the pocket of his pants, Matthew stared at her through the darkness.

Veronica rubbed her head as she thought of the best method to answer his question. "I just wanted to..."

Raising her head, she saw the bright and round moon, so she continued, "I just wanted to look at the moon. Yeah, let's look at the moon together."

Looking at the moon, pfft.

Back when she was growing up in the village, the thing that she did the most was gaze with her foster parents at the moon and stars.

While raising his head, Matthew looked at the bright moon. "Yeah, the moon tonight does look extra round."

"See, I'm right, aren't I?"

After mirroring his action, Veronica also raised her gaze and looked at the moon.

In the end, she knew that this would be another sleepless night for her, so she said to him, "Why don't you bring some chairs over? Aren't you tired of looking at the moon while standing?"

As the ground of the village was all full of mud, they had no place to sit.

"Sure."

After hesitating for a while, the man went back to bring some chairs over.

Looking at his back, Veronica felt a bit perplexed as she thought, *What is happening? He's acting a bit weird today. Why is he so obedient all of a sudden?*

She stood at the entrance in boredom while listening to the croaking frogs. After a short while, Matthew reappeared with two additional chairs in his hands.

Sitting together side by side, they looked at the moon while enjoying the silence of the night.

To them, tonight would be a long night.

Since they were in a village, there were bound to be mosquitoes. That was why the village chief had planted plants that repelled mosquitoes at the village entrance to lessen the insects' overall presence there.

The two of them just sat there in the silence.

Veronica was still over the moon about Melissa giving her forty thousand in cash.

Seeing Veronica not saying anything, Matthew then asked, "Why are you quiet?"

"Yeah?" A confused Veronica replied, "What did you say?" :

"What exactly happened between you and Tiffany?" ;

He finally asked the question that he had been dying to know.

"Nothing much."

She did not want to and did not know how to answer him.

After all, the things that happened with Tiffany were not something that could be easily explained.

The feud between her and the Larsons was a fact that Veronica would not even mention to Matthew.

It was because in her eyes, he and Tiffany were in cahoots.

Being an outsider herself, she knew how to maintain her guard around him at all times.

"I just don't like her," Veronica replied nonsensically.

"That's all?"

"That's all."

"That was not what you said when we were stranded on the mountain at that time," Matthew retorted.

Thinking back, Veronica remembered saying that Tiffany had sworn to kill her.

Now that she thought about it, she must have been out of her mind to have said that in front of him without a care back then. *I was so stupid!*

Veronica had magnified the tiny bit of kindness that Matthew showed her to infinity and even went as far as to let her guard down! *It was not supposed to be like that.*

"Yeah, I was worried about that. Didn't I tell you before that the Larsons were after my bone marrow to treat Floch? I was worried that if I did not agree when the time came, they might kill me over it. If that happens, what can I do then?"

She was speaking out of her ass with a straight face.

Matthew, who was as intelligent as he looked, knew instantly that Veronica was lying. Yet, he did not choose to expose her and instead withheld his opinions on the matter.

The two of them fell silent again.

After sighing, Veronica said, "I wonder what Mom and Dad are doing now. I kinda miss them now."

Chapter 100

Matthew didn't answer Veronica. He only felt that what she had said just now was full of holes, not least because the Larsons were directly related to her previous kidnapping. He wasn't interested in this matter back then, nor did he want to get to the bottom of it, but now... he really wanted to know what had happened.

After a while, Veronica got bored with sitting around, so she returned to the village chief's home and lay down in bed to sleep.

Melissa was already asleep. She was probably in a good mood; even in her sleep, she seemed very happy with a smile on her face.

Veronica didn't know how long it took before she finally fell asleep. The next day, however, she was woken up by Melissa. "What did you do with Matthew last night? I waited for you at home for such a long time, but you never came back." Sitting cross legged in bed with her chin in her hands, she stared inquisitively at Veronica, eager to get the answer from her.

"We went to watch the moon," Veronica muttered with her eyes closed.

"What? You watched the moon with Matthew?" Melissa cried out involuntarily as bitter jealousy surged up within her.

Veronica's sleep was scared away at once by her shrill cries. Sitting up in bed, she glared angrily at Melissa, chiding, "Aren't you wasting your breath by saying that? You wanted me to help you ask him out, which I did. If I didn't make up an excuse to convince him that I really had something to talk to him about, how am I supposed to ask him out again in the future?"

"Oh, you're right. Uh, in that case... Why does he indulge your every whim? My brother and the others said he's indifferent, cruel, and merciless, but I can't help feeling that he's treating you very differently." Melissa spoke her mind right away without reservation.

"Why do you think he's nice to me? Because his grandmother likes me and because I'll be his sister in the future, that's why." Veronica prodded Melissa's forehead hard with her finger. Then, correcting the latter, she said, "Also, you're really blind. Which eye of yours sees him indulging my every whim?"

"Ouch! It hurts..." Melissa massaged her forehead, which ached from being prodded. She muttered, "The way I see it, he's very nice to you."

"Go visit an ophthalmologist if something's wrong with your eyes!" Having gone to bed late last night, Veronica was vexed when she saw it was only about five in the morning. After throwing back her quilt, she got out of bed and walked out.

The village chief and his family were preparing breakfast in the kitchen.

Veronica went over and greeted them one by one before washing up. After straightening herself up, she noticed that it was still early, so she walked out of the yard.

Instantly, what came into sight was the cloud-shrouded sky. The pond's surface was covered with mist, whereas the flowers and plants on the roadside were wet with beads of glittering dew. In the gentle breeze, dewdrops rolled down the leaves and fell into the soil. With singing birds, sweet-smelling flowers, and the wispy mist, the beautiful country scene looked just like a fairyland.

Enjoying the scenery very much, Veronica strolled around the village in slippers to experience a different early morning.

After heading all the way southward from the village chief's home, she arrived at the rice field at the southern end of the village, where an ancient millstone still existed. Just when she felt curious about it, a limping man dressed in shabby clothes with a mask on his face walked past her with the aid of a stick.

Drawn to the man's eccentric way of dressing, Veronica looked sidelong at the stooping masked man, who was also looking at her. His copper mask covered his forehead down to his mouth, revealing only a pair of eyes so that no one could tell what he really looked like.

"Good morning, mister... Aaah!"

Just when Veronica was staring at the masked man, Melissa suddenly turned up and greeted the masked man cordially, only to be taken aback the instant he withdrew his gaze and turned to look at her. The m

an's frosty eyes seemed imperturbable, but they gave an eerie feeling, as though he was hiding many things.

Frightened, Melissa ran to Veronica's side and tugged at her, not daring to speak for a long time. It wasn't until the stooping man hobbled out of their sight with the aid of his stick that she beat her chest with a sigh of relief. "Oh, God! I was scared to death. Why is there such a man in Dawnpol Village?"

Shooting a cold glance at her, Veronica asked, "Why are you following me?"

Being honest and frank by nature, Melissa replied right away, "Hehe, I just thought I

might be able to run into my Prince Charming if I follow you around. And besides, didn't you say you'd ask him out once more for free if I hired you to do so for me? You haven't done it yet."

Veronica couldn't find it in herself to loathe such an honest and frank lady when she saw how innocent and simple-minded she was. "Just be patient. I'll try my best to arrange it."

The two ladies then strolled around the village before returning to the village chief's home for breakfast.

In the morning, they went up the mountain again and started carrying the goods, getting busy for the whole day. Since Dawnpol Village was the outermost village from the mountain, everything had to be moved to the village first before being transferred to other villages.

There were a lot of goods, so it took three full days to finish moving all of them. As a result, Veronica was exhausted. Seeing how hardworking and capable she was, Melissa heaped praise on her. Furthermore, she attentively wiped Veronica's sweat away and handed her drinking water in a groveling manner.

When Hendric saw this again and again, he was really pissed off. Angrily, he glared at Melissa, saying, "Why have I never seen you being so nice to me? I'm your father!" Consumed with jealousy, he detested Veronica even more. He couldn't help thinking that this woman wasn't as simple as she seemed. Not only was Xavier very nice to her, but Melissa liked her as well.

Melissa curled her lips at him. She replied, "Dad, Veronica's my bestie now. Since she's nice to me, I have to be nice to her too, of course."

Hendric felt so hot that he kept fanning himself with a fan while wiping the sweat off his forehead with his sleeve. "Am I not nice to you, then?" he questioned.

"I'm not saying that you aren't nice to me, but my relationship with you is definitely different from my relationship with my bestie, right?" Melissa took a bottle of mineral water and handed it to Hendric with a snort.

Hendric's anger subsided a lot at the sight of this move. The next instant, however, he saw Melissa take another bottle of mineral water and walk toward Veronica. Not only that, but she even thoughtfully uncapped the bottle for Veronica, saying, "Here, Veronica, drink some water."

Veronica had resisted Melissa's excessive attentiveness at first, but she got used to it after a few days.

At the sight of the scene, Hendric turned green with envy, but he could do nothing about it.

Veronica was sitting in the chair for a rest when Melissa sat down beside her and asked, “Veronica—uh, no, Roni—when will you help me ask my Prince Charming out again? I miss him so much.”

Upon hearing her words, Veronica, who was drinking, immediately spat out all the water in her mouth and began coughing nonstop. “Pfft! *Cough... Cough...*”

“Hey, are you okay?” Melissa patted Veronica on the back before wiping the latter’s mouth with a towel. She asked caringly, “How did you choke on water?”

After several coughs, Veronica felt somewhat better. Only then did she say, “Why would you miss him? You see him every day, no?”

“Well, that’s because=”

“Get your butt over here at once, Melissa!” Hendric was infuriated when he saw Melissa, whom he had always doted on and spoiled like a princess, following Veronica around and waiting on Veronica attentively.

“Oh, Dad, you’re so annoying! Why interfere when I’m chatting with my bestie? Hmph!”

Chapter 101

Melissa stamped her foot in anger. Just as she was flying into a rage, she suddenly saw Matthew walking toward Veronica. Her eyes lit up, and she brightened up instantly.

Dressed in black casual clothes, Matthew was wearing a black sports headband on his forehead, which made him look appealingly younger and more handsome while lending him the athletic air of a basketball player on the basketball court. However, Veronica knew that he was only wearing a sports headband to keep the sweat on his forehead from dripping into his eyes and affecting his work. After all, he couldn’t free up his hand to wipe his sweat away while moving things up and down the mountain all the time.

Walking up to Veronica, Matthew spread his hand and held out to her what he was holding. “Here, this is for you.”

9

“What is it?” Veronica asked, before noticing the bright red raspberries in Matthew’s palm. These were a kind of red fruit that grew on the ridges between fields in rural areas, and they tasted great with a sweet and sour flavor, “Where did you get them? I love these!” Delighted at the sight of raspberries, she took them from Matthew and stuffed a few into her mouth right away. “They taste just right; they’re sweet and sour. Thanks,” she said, thanking Matthew while tasting the raspberries.

When she looked up, she saw Melissa looking at the raspberries greedily with eager eyes. She gave her a few raspberries, saying, “Try them. They taste great.”

“Sure! Thanks, Roni.” Melissa took a few raspberries and tasted them before nodding vigorously. “Gosh! They taste so good! Thank you so much, Matthew.”

Veronica was rendered speechless. *Damn it, I'm the one who gave them to you, okay?*

Matthew took a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it. Then, he began smoking the cigarette while standing aside.

It was now afternoon, and those who had been busy all morning were sitting at the village's entrance for a rest. Leaning against a tree, Matthew put one hand in his trouser pocket while holding his cigarette with another. With his right leg slightly bent, he put his foot on the tree trunk to support himself. Even when he was just

standing there, his casual and laid-back posture gave the impression of a handsome and energetic young hunk that would sweep anyone off their feet.

Melissa

was totally taken with Matthew. While Veronica was talking to him, she took out her cell phone and secretly photographed the scene.

"We've finished moving all the stuff here. What we've got to do next is to distribute things to the people in the villages nearby and learn about their situation while we're at it," Mathew said. "We still need to get busy for the next few days."

"I heard that many of the villagers don't let their kids attend school because the school is far away and they can't afford their schooling. Do we need to persuade them otherwise too?"

"Uh-huh," Matthew replied.

"Sigh, life isn't easy," Veronica lamented..

Veronica had time to rest in the afternoon after she finished moving things. However, she was constantly pestered by Melissa, who kept badgering her to help her ask Matthew out on a date. Just when she was at the end of her rope, Melissa used her "superpowers" again, saying, "Here, I'm paying you another 10,000. Just ask my Prince Charming out for me. If you get it done, I'll pay you another 10,000."

With the "superpowers," Veronica's eyes lit up, and her spirits rose at once. "Haha! Sure, no problem! Since you're so generous to me, I'll give you the opportunity to watch the sunset with him. What do you think?"

"What? Really?" Overwhelmed with excitement, Melissa flung her arms around Veronica. "You really are my bestie! I love you so much!" she said while trying to kiss Veronica on the cheek again.

Veronica shoved her away, though. "Ugh, get off me! That's disgusting."

"Hahaha!" Melissa was amused by Veronica's response.

Veronica said, "I'll be going up the mountain at the end of the village first. You tell Matthew later that I've gone up the mountain to look for raspberries and watch the sunset. Tell him that I couldn't find that kind of wild fruit and ask him to help me look for them."

"Okay." Melissa nodded vigorously.

Veronica rested for a while before going up the mountain at about five in the afternoon. She walked alone from the foot of the mountain to the top, picking all the raspberries she could see by the side of the road. As she went up the mountain, she hummed a little tune.

Sitting on the top of the mountain, she enjoyed the breeze while looking down at Dawnpol Village. From a distance, she saw Matthew and Melissa at the village's

entrance

as they headed her way. Matthew was dressed in black sportswear, whereas Melissa was wearing light blue casual clothes. Even though Veronica couldn't make out their faces from a distance, she was able to identify them based on their clothes.

Just when she was gazing at the foot of the mountain, a voice suddenly sounded nearby. "Ouch..."

Veronica turned to look at where the voice had come from, only to find that it was the masked man she had seen at the rice field on the southern end of the village a few days ago. She had asked the villagers about him, and they said he was the son of Henry, one of the villagers. He had been working outside the village before this, but he came back half a month ago after getting injured and disfigured in a car accident.

To her surprise, she didn't notice it when this man walked with a stick at such a close distance from her.

In an instant, something flickered across Veronica's mind. However, she couldn't bear to see a disabled man fall, so she ran up to him and helped him up right away. "Are you alright? Let me help you up."

The masked man grabbed Veronica's wrist while picking himself up with great difficulty. "Thanks," he said in an unusually deep and hoarse voice that gave a sense of old age.

"You're welcome." Veronica smiled, "Why did you come up the mountain? Here. Would you like to try these?" She took out a handful of raspberries from her pocket and handed them to the masked man.

At the sight of the raspberries in Veronica's hand, the masked man was stunned for a moment. He seemed to be lost in thought.

Thinking that he was shy of taking the raspberries, Veronica took his hand to shove the raspberries into his hand. However, the masked man happened to take a sidelong glance in Matthew and Melissa's direction not far away.

"These are very delicious. They're sweet," Veronica said as she was about to put the raspberries in the masked man's hand.

Just then, however, the mysterious man suddenly retracted his hand. "I don't like these," he said. With that, he turned around and left.

"Hey, wait a minute! I'll go down the mountain with you." Veronica noticed that Matthew and Melissa were about to go up the mountain. As an honest and trustworthy "business person," she couldn't play gooseberry in front of Matthew and

Melissa, of course, so she decided to go down the mountain with the masked man.

The masked man didn't answer her.

Matthew and Melissa were going up the mountain from the south, whereas Veronica and the mysterious man were going down the mountain from the north, so the two parties happened to miss each other. However, the path down the mountain was very steep, forcing the mysterious man to walk very slowly with the aid of his stick. At the sight of this, Veronica got somewhat anxious. The man stumbled every now and then, which was worrying.

Seeing how the man had difficulty walking, Veronica stepped forward and took his arm right away, helping him down the mountain slowly. "Let me help you down the mountain."

The masked man darted a look at Veronica, saying, "But I'm dirty."

"What are you talking about? I'm dirty too." Veronica didn't mind these at all. Then, she said, "Since you have difficulty walking, you should avoid going up the mountains in the future. We've brought a lot of stuff here. I'll have someone deliver some basic food ingredients to you later so that it's more convenient for you."

The masked man fell silent at her words. After a long time, he said, "You're very kind

Chapter 102

Veronica let out a chuckle. "No, not really. Helping those in need is one of us Destorians' traditional virtues, no?" she replied with a smile.

The two walked down the mountain for a while. As they walked on a very steep path, the masked man slipped and fell to the ground with a cry of pain. "Ouch!"

"Watch out!" Veronica saw the masked man lying on the ground with the steep mountain slope behind him. If he fell down the slope, he wouldn't die, but he would definitely be seriously injured. Immediately, she rushed to him and grabbed his foot in a tight grasp. "Don't worry! I've got you."

She yanked the masked man toward herself with all her strength, only to realize that the man was very heavy despite his lanky figure. However, she didn't think much about it at the dangerous moment. After dragging him a few steps back, she sat down beside him and reached for his neck to support him. "Come on, get up." Since the man had difficulty walking, it was difficult for him to pick himself up after the fall. Having no alternative, she could only prop up his upper body to help him to his feet.

"Uh, thanks." The masked man took the opportunity to wrap his arm around Veronica's neck.

Veronica helped him up with all her strength. "You're quite heavy despite your skinny build, eh?"

As she was preoccupied with helping the masked man up, she didn't notice the flicker in the man's deep eyes behind his mask. At this very moment, a sharp dagger suddenly appeared in the hand he was wrapping around her neck, and it gleamed coldly under the setting sun. The dagger was aimed right at Veronica's neck, and a stab would be all it took to kill her.

However, before the man could strike, Veronica suddenly cried out, "Watch out!" Then, she shoved him away at once.

At the critical moment, the masked man swiftly put his dagger away at lightning speed and fell onto the slope, whereas Veronica gasped in pain. "Hiss..."

Lying on the ground, the masked man watched Veronica gasp as she clamped a hand over her wrist, which now had two bleeding holes.

"You..." The masked man fell silent without finishing his sentence. If Veronica hadn't shoved him away just now, he would've been the one who got bitten.

Oh no! It's a snakebite! Sh*t! Don't tell me I'm gonna f*cking die here!" Terrified, Veronica looked at her headband at once, wrapping it again and again around her wrist until she could no longer stretch it before letting go. Everything had happened so suddenly that she dared not relax even the slightest bit. Immediately, she sucked on the wound, drawing out the venom and spitting it out to the ground. However, after sucking on the wound several times consecutively, she didn't manage to draw much venom out of it. She looked back at the masked man, saying, "I've got to go down the mountain first. Otherwise, I might die if I can't find a knife to treat the wound." Then, without waiting for the man's answer, she quickly headed down the mountain.

The masked man's hands clenched into fists by his sides as he watched Veronica from behind. After hesitating for a few seconds, he asked, "You need a knife? I've got one."

Veronica paused. "You have a knife?"

"Yeah. Wild animals often roam in the mountains, so it's safer to bring a knife with you," he said while handing the dagger in his hand to Veronica.

Veronica took the gleaming dagger from him. "Thanks! What a nice coincidence." Without saying another word, she made a cross-shaped cut in the wound on her wrist right away.

The dagger was razor-sharp, so it easily made a cut when she gently slid it across her wrist. However, the cut was so painful that she clenched her teeth hard, her hands trembling. Luckily, it was the outer side of her wrist that got wounded. If it were the inner side of her wrist—which was close to the artery—that got wounded, she would probably be beyond help.

Since Veronica got bitten by a venomous snake, she made a deep cross-shaped cut, which hurt so much that she slumped down to the ground right away. In an instant, blood gushed from the cut and trickled slowly down the back of her hand before dripping to the ground. Before long, the ground around her was stained red with blood.

Seeing how Veronica had treated the snakebite, the masked man instantly felt that she wasn't as simple as she seemed. "How did you learn to treat your wound in such a way?"

"I've seen somebody treating a snakebite in such a way after getting bitten," Veronica said to the masked man while struggling to endure the pain. Then, she returned the dagger to him. "Good thing you brought a knife with you. Otherwise, I might die here today."

Veronica's wounded right hand kept bleeding, and as it trembled unstopingly, her consciousness gradually slipped away as well. After a little while, she blacked out and collapsed.

Seeing her lying beside him, the masked man clutched the dagger in his hand for a long time without making any move.

The slightly cool evening breeze blew away the smell of blood before him.

The last rays of the setting sun spilled onto the earth, tinting it with a shade of orange as smoke spiraled upward from the chimneys of the houses at the foot of the mountain. Everything looked as picturesque as an oil painting until the sun went down in the west and darkness fell.

Matthew and Melissa went down the mountain after they didn't get to meet Veronica at the mountain top.

Matthew looked as miserable as sin after being tricked. After going down the mountain, he returned home right away without looking for Veronica. However, after he finished having dinner, Melissa turned up, saying, "M—Matthew... Veronica seems to have gone missing."

Upon hearing her words, Matthew, who was standing at the door to enjoy the evening breeze, felt a tightness in his chest. He asked, "When did that happen?"

"I—

I don't know about that." Melissa dared not tell Matthew the truth. She could only reply, "She'd gone up the mountain before we did, but she hasn't come back even now. C—

Could something have happened to her?" At this moment, she was panicking and at a loss for what to do. If something really had happened to Veronica, she would be guilt-ridden for the rest of her life.

Matthew had thought Veronica was pranking him at the time, and he was even somewhat peeved because of that. Right now, however, he sensed that something was wrong. Immediately, he grabbed the flashlight and went up the mountain with the few people in his house to search for Veronica.

The mountain opposite the village wasn't large, but it wasn't small either. The men didn't manage to find Veronica after searching for two full hours. In the end, the villagers were alerted, and about 30 villagers immediately volunteered to join the search. Only then did they find Veronica in the grass.

When Veronica was found, she was lying unconscious on the ground. The wound on her wrist had stopped bleeding, but there was a broken headband and a pool of blood beside her.

Seeing Veronica's pale face and blue lips, Matthew immediately put out his hand to examine her wound. "Damn it! How did she get poisoned? Quincy, go find the village chief and tell him to find a doctor!"

Quincy, who came with Veronica to Almeida County back then, was also shocked when he saw how pale she looked. He immediately nodded, saying, "O— Okay, I'll go find him at once." He went down the mountain first, whereas Matthew carried Veronica on his back and scurried down the mountain with steady steps.

After reaching the foot of the mountain, Matthew carried Veronica to her bedroom.

Melissa turned pale with fright when she saw Veronica unconscious with her face as pale as death. “W–W–What happened to her?” Terror–stricken, she clapped her hand to her mouth.

One of the villagers muttered, “She probably got bitten by a snake. Oh, dear. This is quite scary.”

“Bitten by a snake, you say?” Feelings of guilt instantly welled up in Melissa’s heart as she felt very sorry toward Veronica. If she hadn’t badgered Veronica to help her ask Matthew out on a date, Veronica wouldn’t have had such a thing happen to her.

Chapter 103

It was 8:00AM the next day when Veronica regained consciousness. Besides Melissa, Matthew was also in the room; the two had kept watch over her the entire night.

Veronica came round and opened her eyes, only to feel a little weak all over.

Seeing that she had regained consciousness, Melissa cried out, “Veronica! You’re awake at last!”

Matthew immediately stood up, walked over, and put a hand on Veronica’s forehead. Seeing that her fever had gone down, he asked, “How are you feeling?”

“How did I get back here?” Veronica asked subconsciously, before raising her wounded hand as her wrist hurt.

“You didn’t come back even by midnight, so Matthew went searching for you with his men.” Melissa sat next to Veronica, her eyes red with hurt. “Luckily, you’re alright. Otherwise, I’d feel very sorry toward you.”

Born in a wealthy and distinguished family, Melissa was usually arrogant and domineering. However, she was crazy about Matthew, and Veronica, who was on friendly terms with him, could help her date him, so she liked Veronica very much as well. Despite her domineering disposition, beneath that flamboyant exterior, she was a kind-hearted person.

When Veronica recalled the masked man yesterday, her eyes darkened. “Did he bring me back?”

“Was there anything wrong?” Matthew sensed that something was amiss. He asked, “Who treated your wound?”

“Me. I did it myself,” Veronica replied.

Matthew didn’t ask any further questions. He always brought a dagger with him when he went up the mountain, so he assumed that Veronica had done the same while going up the mountain last night. It was just that she collapsed near the steep mountain slope, so he thought she might have dropped her dagger down the mountain by accident.

“Glad to hear that you’re alright.” Matthew’s heart was finally put at rest when he saw that Veronica was fine. He said, “Just rest well for the next few days. You don’t have to take part in the rest of the work.”

“Oh, okay.” Having lost quite an amount of blood, Veronica felt somewhat weak, and she didn’t feel like moving either.

The village chief made a chicken stew to nourish Veronica’s health. In the afternoon, the warmhearted villagers came to visit her, bringing things like eggs, fish, chickens, ducks, and geese with them. After all, these were the only things people had in rural areas.

Deeply moved by the villagers’ simplicity and enthusiasm, Veronica felt very glad. She rested for two days, during which time Melissa followed her around and attended to her more eagerly than before, which she enjoyed very much.

That day, when she was fishing for crayfish by the pond near the doorway, she chanced upon the masked man again. Seeing the masked man walking past the other side of the pond with his stick, she yelled, “Hey, you! Stop right there!” Laying aside the stick she was using to fish for crayfish, she stood up and trotted to the other side of the pond. Then, she walked up to the masked man and questioned, “Why did you leave me on the mountain that day? I saved you!” She was really pissed off. *To think that my kindness was reciprocated with ingratitude! Just what f*cking kind of a person is he?*

Supporting himself with his stick, the masked man stooped without looking at Veronica. He merely rolled up his sleeve and pointed at the bruises and grazes on his arm. “I— I fell down the slope while hurrying down the mountain to get somebody to save you that day.”

Veronica looked at the bruises on the masked man’s right arm. Then, seeing him rolling up his left sleeve to reveal the bruises on his left arm, she decided to believe his story. “Alright. I thought you had ungratefully run away.” She finally cast aside the displeasure that had been building up inside her over the past few days. Then, she said to the man, “Let’s go and fish for some crayfish. We’re gonna have spicy crayfish this evening.”

From what the villagers had told her about the masked man’s family, Veronica learned that he was less than 30 years old. Since he was still young, he was supposed to be inclined to have fun, so she thought of doing some crayfish fishing with him and having spicy crayfish for dinner.

With Veronica’s injured arm, she couldn’t do heavy work. On the other hand, Melissa was a wealthy heiress who only came to Almeida for the sake of formality, so there was no way she could do any work. With plenty of free time on their hands and nothing else to do, the two passed the time fishing for crayfish by the pond. After all, life was dull without the internet or TV.

“No, I’ll pass,” the masked man refused right away.

However, Veronica was somewhat moved when she saw that he had tumbled down the mountain slope in order to save her that day. She said peremptorily, “Aw, come on let’s go! I’m not good at crayfish fishing, so I only managed to catch less than half a bucketful of them after a whole afternoon. Many hands make light work, no?”

Crayfish was a popular hot-selling food item in the city. In the mountains, however, the simple villagers mainly raised crops and worked in fields, so they weren't interested in crayfish at all. Because of that, there was an overabundance of crayfish in the pond near the doorway and in the village fields, making it very easy for them to fish for crayfish.

Seeing that Melissa and Veronica were having a great time, the masked man fished for crayfish by the pond without saying a word.

After Veronica lost consciousness that evening, he sat down beside her with the dagger in his hand already aimed at her neck. However, recalling how the lady had gotten poisoned in order to save him, he put his dagger away and went down the mountain in the end. *One's life or death was predestined, so she could only rely on her luck. Alas, she survived!*

In the evening, the masked man left before Matthew came. Veronica repeatedly pleaded with him to stay, but to no avail.

After Matthew came back with Quincy and the few others, they began prepping the crayfish and peeling garlic to make crayfish with garlic. Cooked using the earthen stove in the rural village, the crayfish tasted extraordinarily toothsome and delicious.

After dinner, Veronica, who felt completely stuffed, took a stroll in the village, while Matthew and Melissa followed her closely.

A few more days later, a construction team of about 30 people and a team in charge of installing the signal tower arrived from the outside.

The construction team was sent here by the Bloomstead Public Welfare Foundation to select a site for the construction of a school that the foundation had raised money to build. On the other hand, the team in charge of installing the signal tower was planning to connect the villages to the internet. Consequently, everyone got rushed off their feet, buying fixed-line telephones, televisions, and cell phones for the villagers.

Unfortunately, the weather wasn't cooperating. Just as the construction team was about to start construction for the school, a heavy downpour swept in. The downpour happened swiftly all of a sudden. As they couldn't get in touch with the outside world, those in the mountains were totally unaware of the situation outside.

The downpour hadn't stopped since the afternoon. Although Dawnpool Village stood on slightly higher terrain, it was located at the foot of the mountain, which was more or less worrying

Standing at the village's entrance, Veronica and Matthew watched as the river swelled near the village's entrance. At the sight of the gurgling, muddy, and yellowish river water, Veronica said with a sigh, "When is the rain gonna stop? The kids are attending classes at school. The school's roof is leaking at the moment, I'm afraid." Located in remote mountains, the school was decrepit. It was the farmers in the villages who helped maintain the school building. The school was a simple tile-roofed building, and its roof leaked everywhere whenever it rained, making the kids unable to study with peace of mind.

“Things will get better when the new school building is completed,” Matthew replied.

Veronica

suggested, “Let’s go to the school to take a look. We’ve donated lots of books to the school these days, so let’s not let the rain wet the books.”

“Okay.” Murmuring a reply, Matthew turned around to head for the school with Veronica.

“Give me a minute. I’m going back to get something,” Veronica said to him before going to the village chief’s home, where she currently stayed.

After waiting for a while, Matthew saw Veronica coming back with her backpack. The more time he spent with her, the more he felt that this woman, who seemed ordinary at first, had too many remarkable traits about her that were drawing him to her. “This is for you.” He walked over to her side and handed her something.

Veronica couldn’t see what was in Matthew’s hand since she was merely holding it. She asked, “Don’t tell me it’s raspberries again?”

Chapter 104

Raspberries were known

scientifically as *Rubus idaeus*, but Veronica referred to them by their common name lest Matthew didn’t understand what she was referring to. “Is food all you have in mind?”

The two were each holding an umbrella. As Matthew stared at her, the raindrops that fell between them from the umbrellas looked like a thin curtain of rain that lent a beautiful touch to everything.

“It’s not something to eat? Tsk, who knows what you’re giving me? I can’t read your mind, after all,” Veronica said. She felt that Matthew was deliberately keeping her in suspense, but she nonetheless took what he handed to her, only to find that it was an exquisitely made small box. She lowered her head to take a sniff at it, and it had a faint yet pleasant herbal scent,

Matthew said, “This is an ointment that I asked an old traditional medicine practitioner in the neighboring village to prepare. It speeds up the healing of wounds and removes scars.” Women were relatively particular about their appearance and disliked having scars left on their bodies, so Matthew went to a traditional medicine practitioner to ask for the ointment.

“Tsk, ts, ts.” Veronica clicked her tongue while opening the box. Seeing the creamy white ointment inside the box that was giving off a refreshing scent, she couldn’t help but ridicule, “Are you trying to be nice to me? I’ll take it then.” She closed the little disc-shaped box and put it into her pocket before looking up at him. “Just spill it. What’s the favor you’d like to ask of me?” *Matthew can’t be so attentive as to give me an ointment for no apparent reason. He’s definitely up to something.*

Matthew was having a faint smile on his good-

looking face just a moment ago. The next instant, however, his expression turned somewhat chilly, and he gave off piercingly chilly vibes, as though he was covered with frost from head to toe. After darting a sidelong glance at Veronica with chilly eyes, he went past her right away.

Veronica couldn't help feeling perplexed as she stood where she was while watching the man walk on in the mud. "This is baffling. Why is he angry all of a sudden?" *Is it because I didn't thank him?* She hurriedly caught up to him as they headed for the school together.

It took the pair an hour to get to the school by foot due to the relatively long journey. The heavy rain pattered down as large raindrops splattered down onto the earth with a loud pattering sound, but the sound couldn't drown out the voices of the kids reading aloud in school. The kids were reading aloud, as though they were entirely oblivious to their surroundings with their minds focused on their studies.

The simple school building was made of mud bricks, whereas its roof was covered with tiles. As rainwater dripped from the eaves, a man in a blue raincoat climbed up the ladder onto the roof to fix the roof and prevent it from leaking.

"I also went to this kind of school when I was little." Veronica stood in the rain. As she looked at the scene before her, she felt like she was being taken back to her childhood.

Matthew, on the other hand, was born into a wealthy family. Even in childhood, he would never have experienced what it was like to have the roof leaking in his classroom all of a sudden while he was attending classes.

In order not to disturb the kids while they were in class, the pair merely glanced at them from a distance. Then, they went to the newly vacated library in the school.

As they had expected, the library's roof was leaking badly. Some of the donated books were yet to be unpacked, whereas some were already unpacked, and there were a dozen books that had been drenched in rain. Veronica couldn't find anything to collect the rainwater, so she had no choice but to stand in front of the bookshelf with her umbrella to protect the books from the rain.

There were four classes in the school. The first-graders and the second-graders were attending classes together, whereas there was a class for the third-graders, the fourth graders, and the fifth-graders, respectively. However, there were only two teachers. In such a difficult environment, the two teachers gave a lot for the mere 40 to 50 students of the school. At the thought of this, Veronica was deeply touched.

After a long time, the rain finally stopped, and the sky cleared up. The man in the raincoat rearranged the tiles on the leaking roof. After everything was fine, he trotted up to Veronica and Matthew while panting for breath with an affable smile. "Sorry, I was fixing the roof just now because of the heavy rain."

"It's okay, Mr. Pearson. We came here to take a look because we had nothing else to do. Anyway, it's really admirable of you and your wife to stay here in the mountains to teach the kids," Veronica praised sincerely.

"Haha! We're used to it already. These kids are the future of our nation, so it'll be a shame if nobody cares about them," Mr. Pearson replied while taking off his raincoat. Then, he hurriedly poured Veronica and Matthew some drinking water.

“No, we’re good. You don’t have to do this.” Veronica quickly stepped forward and stopped Mr. Pearson. Then, she took off her backpack, took 40,000 in cash out of it,

and handed the money to the dark-

skinned and skinny teacher. “What was given to the school earlier was donated to you guys by our company, whereas this is a token of my regard. Please keep it and use it as living expenses for you and your wife. The kids will only do better when you two are doing better.” Veronica had met Mr. – Pearson and his wife after coming to Dawnpol Village. They were an incredibly kind hearted couple who taught students without expecting anything in return, which was something that countless people were unable to do.

When Matthew saw the scene from the sidelines, his obsidian-like eyes flickered with surprise. He had always thought of Veronica as a woman who cared for nothing but money, but he never thought she would give away 40,000 to Mr. Pearson and his wife at one go, especially because to the best of his knowledge, Veronica was not only hard up but also penniless.

Mr. Pearson refused the money, saying, “No, no, no, you don’t have to. You’ve given us a lot, so you really don’t have to give us the money.”

However, Veronica shoved the 40,000 into his hand in an uncompromising manner. “Just take it. It’s a token of my regard for you and the kids, so please don’t refuse it.” With that, she took Matthew’s hand and ran away for fear that Mr. Pearson might give the money back to her again if she were a little late.

The two’s trouser legs were stained with yellow mud as they ran in the mud, but Veronica was in a very good mood. Standing on the hill, she sniffed the fresh air after the rain before catching a glimpse of a rainbow at the other end of the hill. “Look, Matthew! It’s a rainbow! It’s so beautiful. Come on, Matthew, come and take a picture of me. Oh, forget it. Let’s take a picture together as a memento of our first time doing charity.”

Matthew didn’t refuse her. “Okay.”

He came to Veronica’s side, whereas Veronica took out her cell phone and held it up, only to find that the man was too tall. She shot him a glare and complained, “You’re so tall that you’re out of the frame.”

Matthew’s distinctly outlined face showed a hint of helplessness. “Are you blaming me for your short stature?”

“In that case, can’t you squat down a little?”

Matthew was rendered speechless. With his personality, he should’ve ignored her unreasonable quibbling, but he stood beside her while bending his knees slightly.

Veronica held her cell phone up high and turned on the selfie mode. After looking at

Matthew and herself in the frame, she said to him, “Squat a little lower.”

Matthew didn’t say a word in response, though he obediently squatted down a little lower

Veronica wrapped her arm around his shoulder as they posed for an intimate photo together. At the click of the shutter, the photo captured them standing before the hillside

e with a huge mountain not far behind them. The mountains were enveloped in a veil of mist, and the sun shone in all its splendor, making the rainbow look unusually gorgeous. The photo's background was beautiful, and the man and woman in the photo were good-looking and well-matched, too, making the photo even more beautiful.

"Nice! It looks pretty good. But Matthew, what's the matter with that look on your face?" Veronica stared at the photo, only to find that while she was looking at the camera, Matthew had tilted his head slightly to look at her. "I wanted to take a friendship photo with you. Why would the photo look like those taken by lovers instead? No, this won't do. I'm gonna delete this."

Chapter 105

Veronica disliked the photo very much and wanted to delete it. The next moment, however, Matthew snatched her phone out of her hand. "Never mind, let me take a photo of you." After taking her phone away, he took a photo of her alone and showed her the photo.

Veronica nodded in satisfaction, but as she scrolled through the photo album on her phone, she asked, "Where's the photo just now?"

Holding the umbrella in his hand, the man walked ahead of her and replied with a casual air, "I deleted it."

"Oh, okay. It's fine that you deleted it. It didn't look good, anyway," Veronica muttered, before setting the photo Matthew had taken as her phone's lock screen wallpaper.

That night, the rain poured down heavily, accompanied by flashes of lightning and claps of thunder.

Veronica lay wide awake in bed until about four or five in the early morning before drifting off to sleep. At some point in time, however, she was woken from her dream by Melissa, who shoved her a few times, saying, "Get up, Veronica! Something bad happened. Veronica, get up!"

Veronica asked in a sleepy daze, "What's the matter?" When she opened her eyes, she saw Melissa looking incredibly worried and anxious.

Melissa explained, "The rain was too heavy, and it caused a mudslide that took down the school on the hillside. The teachers and a few kids who went to school this morning are still there, so some people have been gathered in the village to rescue them. They asked us to tell those in Goon Village to evacuate." Dawnpol Village was situated between two mountains that were very far apart, so it wouldn't be affected even if a mudslide occurred. On the other hand, Goon Village was situated close to the foot of the mountain. If a mudslide occurred, the consequences would be disastrous.

"A mudslide, you say?" Veronica's heart skipped a beat. Startled awake, she sat up in bed at once. "How could this have happened?"

Melissa replied, "You're right! I'm scared to death. Many of the volunteers who came

we want to leave, but the rain's too heavy at the moment. Even if they want to leave, they can't. She was anxious as well. After all, she had always lived in comfort without ever having to do manual labor or fend for herself. She only came to Almeida this time because she got bored with staying in the city and wanted to experience life, but she never thought she would come across a mudslide.

Getting out of bed at once, Veronica got changed and walked out of the house with Melissa. Standing under the eaves of the doorway, she watched the rain outside, which never seemed to stop as though the sky had cracked open with water pouring into the crack. The sight was worrying. Worried about the school, Veronica asked, "What about Matthew and the others? Are they on their way to the school already?"

"Yeah, they are."

"In that case, let's hurry to Goon Village. Something bad's gonna happen if we're late," Veronica said to Melissa.

The two ladies walked out of the yard and stepped on the muddy road together. However, neither of them had time to care for their shoes, which became sopping wet in an instant, as they hurried toward Goon Village.

They hadn't gone far when a voice rang from behind. "Melissa? Melissa! Stop right there, Melissa!"

Upon hearing the voice, the two looked back to see Hendric coming their way in a raincoat. Pointing at Melissa, he questioned angrily, "What are you doing in such a heavy rain?"

"The village chief asked Veronica and me to tell the villagers at Goon Village to evacuate. Are you coming with us, Dad?"

Big raindrops were pattering loudly on the umbrellas in the heavy rain, forcing everyone to shout at the top of their voices so that the other party could hear them.

"I just knew you're going to Goon Village. It's too dangerous over there. Go back with me!" Hendric grabbed Melissa's arm without giving her the opportunity to say no. "It's enough that she goes alone. Go back with me!"

"Let go of me, Dad! I'm going with Veronica. It'll be dangerous for her to go alone instead!" Melissa usually seemed unreliable, but she was worried about Veronica and didn't want to let the latter risk her life by going to Goon Village alone. She argued, "How could you be so selfish, Dad? There are still many people over there. If we're late, they'll be in great danger." Hendric was worried about Melissa, but Melissa was a kind-hearted child at heart, so she was, of course, worried about Goon Village, the

situation of which was unknown.

"Whau nonsense are you talking about? You're my only daughter. How am I supposed to explain myself to your mom if anything happens to you? Go back with me!" Hendric chastised Melissa angrily while dragging her back without allowing her to protest.

Melissa kept struggling while looking back at Veronica. She yelled, "Veronica, what are you waiting for? Hurry up and lend me a hand!"

"You'd better go back with your dad." Veronica shook her head; she wasn't planning to take Melissa to Goon Village. Born with a silver spoon in her mouth, Melissa was very delicate. If she went to Goon Village with Veronica, she would only be a drag on the latter, which wasn't a good thing. Moreover, Veronica supported what Hendric did very much.

Holding the umbrella, she quickly headed for Goon Village. Surprisingly, as soon as she reached the village's entrance, she saw the masked man coming her way with an umbrella in his hand. "You're going to Goon Village?" he asked her, his back bent.

"The school on the hillside has been taken down by a mudslide, so the village chief asked us to hurry up and tell those in Goon Village to evacuate."

"I'll go with you," the masked man said eagerly.

At that instant, Veronica frowned slightly. She shook her head in refusal, saying, "You're in poor health, and you walk slowly. Best if you rest at home. It's more convenient for me to go there alone."

However, the masked man reminded her, saying, "Goon Village's households are scattered throughout the village. How are you gonna notify all of them on your own?"

His words knocked some sense into Veronica. In the end, she could only say, "In that case, just be careful. I'm going first to the eastern end of Goon Village to notify them. You go directly to the western end of Goon Village." There were no phone signals in the mountains. If anything dangerous happened, it had to be communicated to the others in person. Otherwise, no one knew what kind of consequences they would be facing.

"Okay." The masked man nodded slightly.

The two went all the way to Goon Village while holding their umbrellas.

Marsi, Veronica thought the masked man would walk slowly with his stick, but she realized that he could keep up with her no matter how fast she was walking. Gradually, something stirred inside her, and she put her guard up against the masked man all of a sudden. *This man isn't any simple guy*, she thought.

Thunder rumbled as the two headed quickly toward Goon Village. The rain was pouring down heavily all around them, causing them to be shrouded in a layer of mist. Everything looked vague and indistinct, and muddy water was raging down the canal before them without restraint. Above the canal was a simple and narrow wooden bridge that only allowed one person to cross at a time.

Veronica hesitated for a moment while looking at the wooden bridge. Then, she looked back at the masked man and shouted, "You cross the bridge first. With such a strong current below the bridge, the bridge is gonna be flooded. I'll be worried if you cross the bridge after me." She shouted at the top of her voice, as if fearing that the masked man couldn't hear her.

With his stick in one hand and his umbrella in the other, the masked man watched as river water surged rapidly down the canal and splashed against the wooden bridge. He replied with a nod, "Okay, I'll cross the bridge first." Then, he walked past Veronica and walked toward the bridge step by step.

Seeing that everything was safe and sound when the masked man calmly stepped onto the bridge, Veronica couldn't help but doubt herself. *Am I being overly suspicious because I haven't slept well recently?*

Chapter 106

When the masked man was about to get across to the other side, Veronica got onto the bridge as well. Unexpectedly, no sooner had she walked a few steps than the masked man slipped, reeled, and fell onto

the wooden bridge right away. With half of his body submerged in water, he clung tightly onto the wooden bridge with both arms as his umbrella and stick had been swept away by the flood. "Help! Help me! Save me.." He looked at Veronica for help, waiting for the latter to rescue him.

The scene was extremely perilous, and the current was swift. If Veronica were to act slower, the masked man might even get swept away directly by the flood. Having no time to think about anything else, she immediately rushed forward and stretched out her hand to grab him.

Splash! The floodwater slapped against the wooden bridge, resulting in loud splashes. The situation was dire; the current was so rapid that the masked man almost lost his grip on the wooden bridge.

Hurriedly, Veronica dashed toward the masked man and bent down to grab him. "Hold tight to my hand and come on up!" She didn't know where this canal led to. No matter where the canal led to, however, she had to save the man right now.

Stretching out his hand, the masked man held Veronica's hand tightly, climbing up slowly as she pulled him up. After struggling for a while, he finally climbed out of the water and barely steadied himself. "Phew, that was a close call! Thank you so much." His back bent, the man stood in front of Veronica and bowed slightly, thanking her "sincerely."

Veronica waved her hand and let the masked man standing before her get to the other side of the bridge before her. "It's nothing. Let's go... Ah!"

Unexpectedly, the next instant, she was shoved into the current right away by the masked man!

Everything happened very suddenly, but it seemed like everything was just as expected. Veronica let out a cry of alarm, but she stretched out her hand and held onto the masked man at the critical moment. With a loud splash, the two fell into the surging river water and were swept far away by the swift current. Everything happened so fast that they were already a dozen meters away from the bridge before they could even cry for help.

In the river water, Veronica clung tightly onto the masked man. She didn't let go of him no matter how he resisted. *Damn it! I misjudged him after all*, she thought. She

knew very well that the man had taken advantage of her kindness, which was why he had purposely pretended to fall into the water in order to shove her into the water when she let her guard down after rescuing him. But in any case, if she were to die, she would never let the masked man get away with it.

In the surging river, the masked man struggled to shake Veronica off. He wanted to lift his foot and kick her away, but he couldn't exert his strength at all, for all his strength was washed away by the river water.

With that, the two were swept downstream along with the water current.

Veronica looked for opportunities to save herself all the way, but the turbulent waters had swept away everything on the river banks, so there was nothing for her to save herself with. Not only was she unable to save herself, but she even had trouble staying alive at the moment.

“Mmm...” A strong current came and swept Veronica underwater, forcing her to swallow a mouthful of water that was as muddy as mud. “Cough... Cough...” Exerting all her strength, she raised her head and coughed a few times to relieve her discomfort.

The masked man next to her wasn't much better either. Like her, he was swept underwater and choked on the water from time to time.

Just when Veronica was looking at the masked man, her eyes darted a little over his shoulder and caught sight of a thick wooden pole coming at them from behind. Alarmed, she immediately let go of the masked man's hand, fearing that the wooden pole would hit her hard and knock her unconscious on the spot if she were to react any slower.

However, one had to say that this was also an opportunity for her to save herself.

Seeing the thick wooden pole being swept toward them, she swam to the side with all her might. Her movements seemed effortless, but she almost exerted all her strength in the turbulent water.

The next instant, the thick wooden pole came at them. Veronica was unable to immediately dodge the wooden pole, which hit her arm and made a cut on it. However, she didn't notice the cut at all in such a situation. Instead, she lunged back at the wooden pole right away at lightning speed, clinging onto it tightly. As for the masked man, he sank into the water after being hit in the head by the wooden pole.

Everything happened so fast as though it all happened in an instant.

Veronica had no time to feel sorry for the masked man, but she realized immediately

afterward that something was tugging at her ankle in a tight grip, *It's the masked man!* She wanted to kick that asshole away, but she couldn't exert her strength at all. All her strength was washed away by the water current, which obstructed her movements. Consequently, all seemingly simple things were incredibly difficult to do in practice.

Finally, the masked man emerged from the water and clung to the thick wooden pole before him.

Clinging to the wooden pole, the two kept a distance of less than one meter between them.

The wooden pole was very buoyant in the water, so Veronica didn't have to worry about being swept underwater. Looking sideways at the masked man, she asked emotionally, “Who the f*ck are you?” She was emotional not because she was enraged, but because the masked man wouldn't be able to hear her at all if she kept her voice low.

The river was surging, and the sound of the surging water was deafening.

The masked man merely glanced at Veronica without responding to her.

Seeing that he didn't say a word, Veronica didn't speak as well. She remained silent while conserving her stamina.

The river grew wider as the water carried them downstream. Veronica didn't know what was ahead of them, but she knew one thing very well— if they didn't get ashore soon, they would probably be swept into the lake... or even the sea!

Almeida had a large lake, but the county was also hundreds of miles away from the sea. They were heading eastward when they fell into the water, but Veronica had no idea in which direction the winding river had swept them. Consequently, she had lost her sense of direction.

Suddenly, the silent masked man spoke; perhaps he had also noticed their predicament. "Let's team up, shall we?"

"Why should I trust you?" Veronica distrusted the masked man in the first place, but she knew she had to team up with him at the moment. Even if the chance of survival was slim, she had to shoot for it. It was just that whether they would succeed or not would depend entirely on luck.

"If you don't trust me, we're both gonna die!" the masked man replied in a loud voice.

If one of us is going to die, it's better that we die together so that none of us dies alone, thought

Veronica. Inwardly, she wanted to say that, but she knew very well that dilly-dallying would place them in more danger. They had already used up a lot of stamina after drifting in the water for a long time. If they lost all their strength in the end, only one thing awaited them: death. "What should I do?" she asked.

Clinging onto the wooden pole with one hand, the masked man reached under his clothes with the other hand. Finally, he took out a long hemp rope that was as thick as the little finger. Since he had always been stooping, no one could tell that the rope had been hidden around his waist. Swimming little by little to Veronica's side, he said to her, "Tie the rope around your waist."

Veronica hesitated, saying, "You first!" As she wouldn't trust the masked man anymore, she was wary of him at every turn.

Without saying another word, the masked man held one end of the rope with his hand and wound the rope around his waist. However, he couldn't tie the rope to his waist, so he looked at Veronica to signal her to lend a hand.

Veronica reached out her hand and took the end of the rope before working with the masked man to tie the rope to his waist. Then, the man helped Veronica tie the other end of the rope to her waist.

By doing this, if one of them managed to hold onto something, the other person would be saved.

Even so, Veronica didn't trust the masked man, after all. The two of them looked ahead together. Coincidentally, there was a tree ahead of them that was leaning over the river with a part of its trunk submerged in the water.

Chapter 107

After looking at each other, Veronica and the masked man pinned their hopes on the

However, the tree was on the right side, which was also the masked man's side.

Veronica moved to the right, trying to give herself the opportunity to grasp the big tree as it might be her only chance to survive. However, the masked man might become the biggest obstacle to her survival, so she had to seize the opportunity.

The two moved to the right together, but just as they were about to reach the tree, the water surged fiercely against them with even greater resistance. As both of them were on the right side, the thick wooden pole suddenly tilted in the water and flowed downstream vertically, dragging them further away from the big tree horizontally all at once.

"You let go of the wooden pole. I'll grab you." Veronica took the masked man's hand right away while telling him to

let go of the wooden pole and swim to the river bank. After all, even a bit of a struggle could buy them a chance to survive. At this very moment, she had no other choice. Even if the chance of survival was slim, she had to shoot for it—even if the masked man might survive and kill her by cutting the rope. *I don't want to die!* she thought.

With his eyes behind his mask, the masked man gave Veronica a meaningful look. Then, he let go of her. The two had a rope tied between them. After letting go of Veronica, he struggled to swim to the right with all his might.

They were ten meters away from the big tree. Then, as the masked man swam closer and closer to the tree, the distance between them and the big tree shortened. They were six meters away... three meters away... one meter away!

The ten-meter distance was covered in the blink of an eye. At this moment, however, the masked man was still a distance away from the tree.

Veronica's nerves were on edge; she was very nervous, for she feared that they might miss the opportunity again. However, at the critical moment, the masked man suddenly took out a dagger and clutched it in his hand. Just when he nearly brushed past the tree, he suddenly thrust the dagger in his hand into the tree trunk.

Immediately, Veronica let go of the thick wooden pole she was clinging onto to prevent the strong current from sweeping the masked man away and ruining the last opportunity to struggle for their survival.

The masked man clutched the dagger to stay close to the tree. Even though Veronica had put pressure on him, he nonetheless stretched out his arm and hugged the tree trunk. Climbing onto the river bank little by little, he successfully got himself out of danger.

Veronica was still in the water, and she grabbed the rope tied between her and the masked man while swimming toward him. However, the man held up the dagger in his hand. With a slight wave of his dagger, Veronica would be swept away by the river!

Veronica's heart was thumping; she had never been so desirous of staying alive as she was at this very moment. Without saying a word, she continued swimming toward the masked man. However, just when she was getting close to him, he thrust the dagger in his hand downward right away!

At that moment, Veronica's heart sank. She felt like she had seen Death. However, she refused to resign herself to death. At the last moment, she swam against the current with all her strength. Then, she stretched out her hand and tried to hug the tree trunk, but she had underestimated how strong the current was. Instead of hugging the tree trunk, she was swept dozens of centimeters away from it!

Am I really gonna die here? A big question mark popped up in her mind.

Just then, however, the masked man grabbed her hand and pulled her up.

The two reached the river bank by climbing along the tree. Physically exhausted, they lay on the river bank, feeling so worn out that they didn't want to struggle anymore.

Just then, Veronica asked, "Why did you save me?" The moment the masked man thrust his dagger downward, she thought he was going to cut the rope and let her fall into the swift river current. To her surprise, the man merely put away his dagger and pulled her out of danger.

The masked man didn't answer her question, though.

With that, the two lay on the river bank. After recovering their strength, they stood up and headed into the distance.

As they made their way through the woods, the sound of the fiercely surging river water faded away in the distance. Everything became quiet, and even the rain stopped.

The man was no longer stooping and limping as he had been before. Instead, he stood upright and walked at a blistering pace like a normal person.

Veronica should've found out long ago that this man's identity was dubious. However, she and the others had only decided to come to Dawnpol Village not long ago, and the masked man had been in the village before they arrived. Judging by the timeline, she felt that nothing could've been wrong with the masked man, but it turned out that she had underestimated him.

The masked man ignored her as they merely kept walking on. However, there wasn't a soul in sight around them, so they chose to climb up the mountain in the end. When they stood on the top of the mountain breathlessly and looked around, they couldn't see anyone or any village except the thin haze that was curling upward.

"The flood current was flowing at a velocity of at least 40 kilometers per hour," Veronica said while raising her hand to check the time on her wristwatch.

Five hours had passed since she woke up in the morning. It took about half an hour to reach the river bank from the village chief's house, whereas it took an hour for them to get to the mountain from the river. In other words, after falling into the water, they had held out for three and a half hours. This meant they were already 140 kilometers away, which was a very long distance.

Veronica was unfamiliar with the geographical environment around here, so she was somewhat at a loss for what to do for a moment.

The rain, which had just stopped, continued again, but Veronica felt weak all over, and she walked weakly. She looked down at her right arm, which had a scary big cut that turned pale and swelled up after being soaked in water. Her wrist had a cross shaped cut in order to draw out the venom after she got bitten by a snake while saving the masked man last time. The wound had slowly healed, but the scabs had fallen off after the wound was soaked in water.

Veronica's arm hurt very much, but there was nothing for her to reduce the inflammation at the moment. What she feared the most was that the wound might fester. She tied her clothes around her wrist, but it wasn't good to do so since it had been raining all the time. Having no alternative, she ignored the wound and let it be,

The masked man took a glance at Veronica's wound without saying a word as he headed toward the foot of the mountain.

Veronica followed the masked man as they went all the way down the mountain. After walking for some time, she started walking slower and slower. Unable to keep up with the man, she said to him, "Can you walk slower? You're walking too fast."

Unbeknownst to her, though, the masked man had imperceptibly slowed down his pace a lot. It was just that she didn't realize it. He said, "If we can't get out of here, we'll probably starve to death here."

If there was still nobody within a 100-mile radius around them, it would be a great challenge for them. After the heavy downpour, there was muddy and yellowish water everywhere, and such water was undrinkable. Moreover, a long walk would consume a lot of stamina. Without any food to eat, they couldn't get very far.

Veronica willed herself to follow the masked man all the way forward with strong willpower. In the end, when night fell, she got exhausted and slumped down to the ground, unable to walk anymore.

Hearing the sound behind him, the masked man looked back to see Veronica sitting against a tree with a pale face. After looking at her with a complicated expression, he walked up to her and took out his dagger, aiming the razor-sharp edge at her as if saying, "Since you're dying, I might as well kill you myself to complete my task."

Veronica slowly closed her eyes. She neither struggled nor said anything, for she knew that the masked man would've killed her long ago if he wanted to. Why would he wait until now instead? =_ =)

Thud! With a sudden thud, the masked man thrust his dagger into the tree behind Veronica. "I'll let you off today. If we meet again, consider yourself unlucky," he said. Then, he turned around and left right a way, leaving the dagger to her to repay her for saving his life on the mountain that day.

Chapter 108

Leaning against the tree trunk, Veronica watched as the masked man walked further and further away. In the end, stimulated by a strong desire to survive, she stood up and followed step by

step behind him. They were in the wilderness, and it was getting dark soon. If she really were to stay here alone, she didn't know what she would be facing. However, she didn't want to die.

Upon hearing the sound behind him, the masked man walking ahead looked back to see Veronica stumbling after him, and a hint of surprise flickered across his eyes. He didn't say a word, but he slowed down his pace a lot. *This woman is amazingly tough, eh?*

They walked for a while until dusk deepened and they couldn't see any path at all. Only then did they find a suitable place to rest and take shelter from the rain. It was a cave, though. If a mudslide occurred, the mouth of the cave could be sealed at any time, burying the two of them alive. Sitting against the wall, Veronica looked weakly at the masked man with pale lips, asking, "Are you sure it's safe in here?"

"You can go outside if you want." The man darted a look at her. Then, he searched for some firewood and lit a fire with the lighter—

Having walked for a long time, Veronica felt cold and tired, and she shivered with cold. When she finally felt a trace of warmth, she fell asleep on the spot.

The man sitting across from her prodded her with a stick. Realizing that she was already out cold, he turned to look at the wound on her arm. After hesitating for a moment, he walked up to her and touched her forehead, only to realize that she was having a high fever, which was most probably caused by an infection in the wound on her arm. After finding the dagger on her, he examined her wound, hesitating whether to treat the wound for her. In the end, however, he didn't do anything. He merely mumbled, "I'm kind enough not to kill you."

It was already noon the next day when Veronica came round. Even though she was still feeling dizzy, her fever had gone down. Her arm was bandaged with a strip of fabric, and her wound had been treated. She knew it was the masked man who had done these.

Luckily, the mouth of the cave didn't collapse either.

She sat there, yelling, "Hey, is anyone there? Are you there, masked man?"

After not getting any response, she decided to stop yelling. Seeing that the rain had stopped and the sky had cleared up, she dared not waste time any longer. Immediately, she got up and headed outside the mountain.

The deep mountain forest was dense with brambles, making it difficult for her to move even a step. Not only that, but she was also starving. After dragging herself through the woods for an entire day, she found some wild fruits to allay her hunger and drank some water from a mountain spring. Only then did she manage to hold out for a day.

That night, she found a big tree. She climbed up the tree to sleep lest she had nowhere to escape when attacked by wild animals.

As Veronica had expected, she really heard the cries of wolves late at night. Her heart shuddered with fright, and she was panic-stricken. The only thing she could use

to defend herself was the dagger that the masked man had left her. At the moment, her life and death depended entirely on luck.

Being wide awake, she leaned against the big tree while trying her best to hide her presence. However, the wolves' cries slowly approached, making her feel unusually insecure, especially because she was in a thick forest located deep in the mountains. It could be said that she would be up the creek without a paddle in the face of danger.

Suddenly, a wolf craned its neck and howled. "Owooooo!" Its voice sounded very close and unusually distinct.

Veronica tensed up; she didn't feel secure in such darkness at all. Just then, she vaguely noticed a few glittering spots, but when she looked closely, she couldn't help but feel a chill running down her spine. It was because... the glittering spots were actually several pairs of eyes!

It was the wolves! They seemed to be heading her way directly after smelling her odor.

Veronica was sleeping on a three-meter-tall tree, but she noticed twelve greedy eyes. There were six wolves in total. *How am I supposed to deal with these wolves?* She felt like crying. *F*ck! Am I gonna die here?*

The bright moon hung in the sky and spilled moonlight on the earth, making the earth seem like it was covered with a layer of white gauze as everything was faintly visible.

Knowing that the wolves must have realized where she was hiding with their keen sense of smell, she climbed to the top of the tree in the moonlight. Although she had

dared to a high place, she heard the sound of the tree trunk being scratched. The wolves were clawing at the tree while howling repeatedly, as though to summon other wolves.

Veronica felt like she had used up her entire life's worth of bad luck this year, for she encountered one misfortune after another. She vowed that once she left Almeida and returned to Bloomstead, she would definitely go to the Church of Heavenly Yew right away to visit a priest.

As a result, Veronica didn't sleep the entire night, while the hungry wolves waited under the tree all night.

However, it wasn't until dawn the next day that Veronica got a good look and realized that the number of wolves had increased from six to ten. Not only that, but these wolves had no intention of leaving at all. Sitting on top of the tree, she looked at the sky hopelessly. "Is this gonna be the end of me?"

Since the wolves didn't leave, she couldn't leave either, resulting in a war of attrition between the two parties.

Being sleepy, hungry, and thirsty, Veronica knew that if this went on, she would end up being eaten by the wolves. Sitting on the top of the tree, she cut off some branches with her dagger and sharpened them into sharp weapons. Then, she used the bark to make a rope, tying the sharp sticks together and carrying them on her back. After that, she began starting a fire on the tree with some twigs. Luckily, one of the

e tree's branches

withered after being infested with bugs. After finding a spot to put the excess bark and twigs together, she

groped for the lighter and set fire to them. She was grateful for the masked man, who left the lighter and dagger for her, but resented him at the same time for forcing her into such a perilous situation.

The fire was lit, producing puffs of smoke. Watching the fire with great care, Veronica kept the fire burning with some difficulty without letting the burning twigs fall from the tree branch. As wisps of smoke curled upwards, she snapped the branches while keeping the fire burning to produce even more smoke.

She waited from morning till evening. The smoke she had produced failed to attract any help, but it managed to reduce the number of wolves from ten to four.

Knowing that this was her only chance, she climbed down from the top and stood three meters above the ground with her dagger in one hand and a sharp stick in the other. While the wolves weren't noticing, she jumped right away onto one of the wolves, stabbing the wolf on the spot with the dagger and the stick.

"Owo0000..." The wolf howled in pain as the remaining three wolves lunged at her right away

Reacting swiftly, Veronica

rolled away from the wolf to the tree trunk. After standing up, she drew another sharp stick from behind her and looked at the wolves before her, who were circling around her while waiting for the right moment to attack. One of the wolves looked the strongest, and it held its tail higher than the rest of the wolves, so Veronica deduced that it had to be the alpha male wolf that led the wolf pack, the Wolf King. Having settled on her target, she made the first move and immediately dashed toward it.

However, the wolf's reaction was even swifter than Veronica's. After dodging her attack, it bit into her injured right arm right away.

Veronica gritted her teeth in pain as the Wolf King's teeth sank into her skin with a strong bite force. In an instant, however, she thrust the stick in her left hand into its eye. "Go to hell!"

"Owoo00o..." The excruciating pain caused the wolf to howl in pain and let go of Veronica's arm. The next instant, she swiftly thrust the dagger in her right hand into its right eye.

The Wolf King howled and writhed on the ground in agony as it couldn't see anything.