

Million-Dollar 171

Chapter 171

Hazel felt a sudden chill creep up her scalp, and she quietly took two steps back, hoping to sneak off the runway unnoticed.

Mike, who had been engrossed in admiring a strapless gown, finally looked up to see the young, talented designer standing next to him. But upon recognizing the impatient expression on Vivienne's face, he exclaimed in surprise, "Master Charles! Is that you?"

The room fell into a stunned silence.

"What? Mr. Ellington's fiancée is Master Charles?"

"How is that possible? Mike must have mistaken her for someone else."

From the runway below, Arabella had been urging Judith to stop Vivienne, but she hadn't made a move to actually do it herself.

She was hoping that Vivienne would offend Mike, leading to a breakdown in the partnership between the Edwards family and Mike. This would not only ruin Vivienne's reputation but also earn her the enmity of the Edwards family.

If Vivienne's arrogance led to not only her own downfall but also strained the relationship between the

Ellington Group and the Edwards Group, would the Ellington family still want such a troublesome daughter-in-law?

Arabella had her plan all figured out, and when Mike stormed towards Vivienne in anger, she thought her wish was about to come true.

But to her surprise, not only did Mike praise Vivienne's altered design, he even called her "Master Charles."

This Mike must have lost his mind!

She stepped forward and addressed Mike. "Mr. Mike, my sister grew up in a humble monastery and has never touched fashion design. How could she possibly be Master Charles? You must have mistaken her for someone else."

"How could I possibly mistake her?" Mike gave Arabella a strange look and replied. "When my creativity hit a roadblock years ago, it was Master Charles who inspired me and led to my success today. She is like my mentor. Who would mistake their own mentor?"

He then pointed at the obedient Italian model who had been following Vivienne's instructions to the tee.

"Julia is one of the most professional supermodels in the industry. If it wasn't for her respect for Master Charles and knowing my relationship with Charles, would she have so patiently let others touch my clothes?"

This statement set the crowd buzzing again.

"Is Vivienne really Master Charles?"

"No way. That's unbelievable."

But Vivienne on the runway just raised an eyebrow at Mike and nodded. "Long time no see."

Her demeanor was like that of an elder addressing a younger person.

Then she added, "After all this time, you still haven't made any progress."

Mike's excited expression instantly deflated. He now seemed much like a frost-bitten eggplant, and he even looked a bit like a chastised child. "I know I've hit a creative block. I've been wanting to seek your advice again, hoping for new inspiration."

This natural conversation was proof enough that Vivienne was indeed Charles.

The crowd was either dumbfounded or amazed.

Even Percival was surprised, his lips slightly parted in astonishment. His Vivienne was full of surprises.

How many more surprises was she hiding?

Only Cecilia seemed delighted for Vivienne.

Just before Vivienne took the stage, while no one dared openly confront her and Percival due to their status, snide comments and discussions had been reaching their ears.

Some said the Ellington family had poor judgment for choosing an arrogant and ill-mannered daughter-in-law.

Some predicted that Vivienne would make a fool of herself today and that the Ellington family would call off the engagement.

Others even suggested that she, Cecilia, was dissatisfied with Vivienne and was scouting for a new bride for Percival during her poker games.

Rumors!

She had told all her poker friends that she had set her heart on Vivienne as her daughter-in-law.

Stella Pembroke and her mother must be spreading rumors about her. Next time they meet, she'll give them a good slap.

Now, Vivienne had not only proven her taste and ability, but she was also revealed to be the mysterious fashion designer Charles of the fashion world.

If Cecilia wasn't so concerned about maintaining her ladylike demeanor, she would probably be grinning from ear to ear.

Clothes designed by Charles were extremely sought-after.

Many wealthy ladies couldn't get their hands on them, even if they were willing to pay a high price.

They were practically priceless.

From today onwards, who knew how many people would be knocking on their door, hoping for Vivienne to design clothes for them?

While her mind was racing, Cecilia maintained a perfect poker face, showing no surprise at the revelation of Vivienne's identity as Master Charles. This led others to believe that she had known all along.

Arabella's face was a picture of discontent. She stole a glance at Percival.

He was sitting there with a glass of red wine in his hand, looking up at the radiant Vivienne on the

runway. He held his glass in a graceful gesture, toasting to the only girl in his eyes.

She saw Vivienne return his gaze with a smile. Their eyes met, and it was a moment of intimacy that no one else could intrude upon.

Arabella's grip on Judith's hand tightened slightly, causing Judith some discomfort. Following Arabella's gaze, she saw Percival and couldn't help but feel surprised.

Looking at the way he and Vivienne exchanged glances, she instantly suspected his identity.

Who would have thought that the ones who had saved her in Havenwood would turn out to be Vivienne and Percival?

In previous years, due to her dislike for socializing, she was not very familiar with Percival's generation, despite living in Rivenwood, so she didn't recognize him at the time.

Trailing behind Judith were Beatrice and her two sons; their gazes on Vivienne were quite complex.

Just the identity of Master Q, was enough to surprise them. They did not expect Vivienne to be the internationally mysterious fashion designer, Charles.

Beatrice could feel that as Vivienne's identity was revealed, countless people who knew about their previous grudges were looking at her. They were all mocking her for treating Arabella like a treasure

but disregarding the true gem.

Their gazes seemed to be asking her if she regretted it.

Initially, they had sold Vivienne to the "disabled" Percival in order to receive a large money from the

Ellington family to save the Hawthorn Group. Later, they broke ties with Dorian and even helped

Arabella frame Dorian.

She did all this with the sole purpose of saving the Hawthorn Group. She did this to make the Hawthorn

Group prosper, didn't she?

But in fact, just one formula from Master Q, or one clothing line from Charles could solve all these

problems.

If she had been slightly nicer to Vivienne back then, would she be jumping around like she was now?

She made a fool of herself while the Hawthorn Group still failed.

Beatrice clenched her teeth. Her gloomy gaze fell on the interlocked hands of Judith and Arabella.

Then a sinister smile flashed across Beatrice's eyes.

Why did the good fortune always fall on you, Judith?

Why wasn't Vivienne my granddaughter?

Why was she yours?

But what of it?

You will always treat a fake heiress as a treasure.

What I couldn't have, you wouldn't have either!

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Standing on the other side of Judith was Ashley, who began affectionately patting Arabella's shoulder.

"Arabella, your stepsister Vivienne is quite impressive. She's not at all like what you described."

Arabella's complexion changed. Her relationship with Vivienne had always been tense. Complimenting

Vivienne was akin to criticizing her. Somehow, she managed to squeeze out a smile. "Yes. Who would

have thought that Vivienne would be this remarkable?"

"Indeed, she is." Judith looked at Vivienne with admiration, then turned to Arabella. "Since she's your

stepsister and represents your adoptive parents, why don't you invite her down to meet us? I'd like to

have a chat with her."

"Of course, Grandma." Arabella's long lashes veiled the resentment and jealousy in her eyes, replacing

them with a polite smile.

Beatrice, standing behind her, looked on with resentment. Vivienne was not only Arabella's stepsister but also her granddaughter. Judith had praised Vivienne without even casting a glance at her, not even mentioning her once.

From the moment they had entered, Judith hadn't bothered to introduce them to anyone.

Indeed, even after all these years, Judith still considered herself superior to everyone else.

But she would endure.

She had learned to bear in silence over the years. Whatever the Brooks family owed them, she would make sure that Judith and the rest paid it back, bit by bit.

"Sister, I would never have imagined that you were Master Charles." Arabella approached the runway and looked up at Vivienne. "You're truly amazing."

She didn't like talking to Vivienne from this angle. Looking up at her was humiliating.

Especially since Vivienne was standing in the spotlight, making her feel insignificant.

But she had already learned her lesson. She couldn't fight back directly. Hence, she put on a perfect smile, making it seem like she and Vivienne were the closest of sisters, without any disagreements

between them.

"My grandma would like to have a chat with you." Arabella maintained her smile. "And, sister, you've been standing on the stage for a while now. The show can't go on unless you step down. We wouldn't want to spoil everyone's fun, would we?"

It seemed like she was accusing Vivienne of being impolite and causing a scene.

Before Vivienne could respond, Mike interrupted them, dawning a cold expression. "I'm not satisfied with my work at all. I'm canceling the show for today!"

Then he turned to Vivienne with a smile. "Charles, I'll send you my recent designs and finished pieces later. I'd appreciate your feedback."

Helen, standing at the back, was stunned. Was this the same Mike she knew, who always acted aloof and superior?

"But, sister, you can't stay up there forever, can you?" Arabella frowned.

She didn't like Vivienne looking down at her. She wanted her to come down.

"There's still one matter left unresolved." Vivienne's gaze shifted to Hazel in the corner, who was trying to sneak away. "Do you remember what you said earlier?"

Hazel froze at the edge of the runway.

"She said that if Mike praised Vivienne's redesign, she would shave her head right here on this runway and stay bald forever!" Charlotte chimed in loudly.

"Mike, what do you think of my redesign?" Vivienne asked Mike deliberately.

"It's perfect. I can't think of a better design!" Mike gave Vivienne a thumbs-up without hesitation.

"Did you hear that?" Vivienne raised an eyebrow at Hazel. "Hazel, a bet is a bet."

"No, no, I was only joking!" Hazel pleaded in panic.

"A joke?" Charlotte laughed first. "You were so scornful just now. I didn't think it was a joke at all. A bet is a bet. You should just go ahead and shave your head. Stay bald forever!"

"No, I don't want to shave my head." Hazel shook her head vehemently and looked at Arabella for help.

"Arabella, help me; I don't want to shave my head!"

"Sister, why do you have to do this?" Arabella looked distressed. "We're all sisters here. Why make a scene?"

"Who's her sister?" Charlotte stood up. With her hands on her hips, she let out a cold and hearty laugh.

"Is she qualified to be Vivienne's sister? Stop flattering yourself."

"This is my banquet. Please, for my sake..." Arabella continued to plead softly, hoping that someone would speak up for her out of sympathy.

Unfortunately, Hazel had initially chosen to provoke Vivienne, and with Percival sitting there, who would risk offending his fiancée for a minor character?

"Nothing you say carries any weight." Vivienne's eyes narrowed. The cold glint in her gaze was nothing short of terrifying.

Vivienne looked at Hazel. She spoke in a light but assertive tone. "No one has ever dared to default on a bet with me."

"Percival, please talk to my sister." Arabella looked helplessly at Percival.

"No one can default on a bet with my fiancée." Percival's gaze never wavered from Vivienne.

"Grandma!" Arabella had no choice but to seek Judith's help. "Can you help Hazel? She's a girl. If she's humiliated in public, how can she face others in the future?"

"Arabella, you're really strange." Ashley looked at her with a puzzled expression. "When Hazel was provoking and insulting Vivienne earlier, why didn't you help Vivienne? Didn't you think that she'd be

humiliated? Isn't Vivienne your stepsister? Why don't you help your own kin, but instead, help an outsider?"

Arabella's face changed. She didn't miss the gloating look in Ashley's eyes.

While in Rivenwood, Ashley felt that this cousin of hers had no right to steal the love and affection of the Brooks family from her because she wasn't a true Brooks. She took every opportunity to get back at her.

Judith hesitated for a moment but finally said, "Arabella, you should keep your distance from friends who make grandiose promises but back out later."

Today, since her husband, Baron was in the hospital, Judith, being the eldest in the family, represented the stance of the Brooks family.

"No! I won't shave my head!" Hazel's face turned ghostly pale, and she turned to run but found herself suddenly frozen in place, unable to move. "What... what's going on?! Someone help me! I can't move!"

The crowd beneath the runway watched Hazel, who was frozen in her escape pose, puzzled by her sudden paralysis.

"Helen, help me! I can't move!" Hazel swiveled her eyes, pleading loudly to Helen, standing next to her.

"What happened? Did you pull a muscle?" Helen finally came back to her senses from her shock.

Before she could step forward, she heard the sharp sound of high heels stepping on the runway behind her.

Vivienne walked past her with quick and strong steps and stood in front of Hazel. "She can't move

because she still owes me." She stated firmly.

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Hazel wanted to move, but she couldn't.

She stared at Vivienne in fear. "What have you done to me?"

"Acupuncture. Does it hurt?" Vivienne's eyes flicked up as she spoke in a casual tone. "I'm doing this

for your own good. After all, it wouldn't be very good if you got hurt while I was cutting your hair."

It then dawned on everyone that Vivienne was highly skilled in medical techniques, but she was so far

away from Hazel that they didn't even see how she did it. Hazel couldn't move, yet Helen was

unaffected. It was truly a miraculous technique.

"No, don't! Don't touch me!" Hazel's horrified gaze fell on the scissors in Vivienne's hand, thinking she

was going to cut her hair with them.

Vivienne waved the scissors in her hand, laughing lightly. "This isn't sharp enough."

She shook her head. "You're not worth my personal efforts."

Her eyelashes fluttered as she looked around the room with a cold gaze, casually asking, "Who has the time to help Hazel shave her head? I'll give them this modified evening gown."

The crowd under the runway went quiet, then suddenly erupted into chaos.

The women eyed the color-changing gown on the Italian model as their eyes filled with fervor.

From the moment Vivienne had altered the gown, they had barely been able to take their eyes off it.

Who wouldn't want to try on such a stunning and unique design?

Moreover, Vivienne was Master Charles, which added a unique significance to this exquisite gown.

This was a piece created by both Master Charles and Mr. Mike, a combination of their inspirations, and the only one in the world.

If they could get their hands on this unique gown, even if they didn't wear it, just keeping it as a collection piece would be enough to make many people envious.

Even Helen, who stood on the runway, was a bit shaken. Her gaze was now flickering towards Hazel.

But this was about shaving a young girl's long hair in public. If word got out, it wouldn't sound good, so everyone was hesitant.

"I'll do it!"

While most people were too proud to shave Hazel's hair despite wanting the gown, Charlotte had no such reservations.

She was always straightforward and had been eyeing the color-changing gown on the runway. She was thinking about how to approach Vivienne and Mike about it, but now that Vivienne had put forth the offer, she stood up without hesitation.

"Charlotte! How dare you?! If you touch me, I swear..." Hazel glared at Charlotte and continued to shriek. "If you touch my hair, I'll kill you!"

Charlotte ignored her and called a waiter over to bring a razor. She then climbed onto the runway with her gown held high.

After seeing Charlotte approaching with the razor in her hand, Hazel cried out for help from Arabella.

"Arabella! Save me! Please, save me!"

"Grandmother..." Arabella looked pained, again asking Judith for help on Hazel's behalf.

Judith merely raised her eyelids, her face expressionless. Clearly, she had no intention of helping.

Who told Hazel to offend her savior, and to cause trouble at their family reunion dinner, not only

irritating Vivienne but also herself?

Since Judith was unmoved, Arabella turned to Scott. "Dad..."

Scott, however, was staring at Vivienne on the runway, lost in thought.

Why did he find this girl familiar?

But he was sure he hadn't seen her before.

Since Scott was distracted, Arabella tried to get his attention.

"Arabella, Grandmother already said not to associate with friends who like to stir up trouble and can't

face the consequences." Ashley chuckled from the side. "Why are you still defending someone of such

poor character?"

Arabella nearly crushed her silver teeth in rage. Hazel was her good friend, but she was publicly

humiliated by Vivienne at her own banquet. Wasn't this equivalent to a slap in her own face?

She glared at Ashley. Her gaze towards all of them was filled with barely concealed resentment.

When they first took her home, they promised to make up for their past mistakes and treat her well for the rest of her life. But now, they allowed her to lose face at her own reunion dinner?!

"Charlotte, you bitch! If you dare touch me, you'll pay!" Noticing that her pleas for help were futile,

Hazel's eyes flashed with desperation as she began to curse at Charlotte and Vivienne. "Vivienne, you slut! Without Percival, you're nothing! I curse you to..."

Charlotte was so angry that she was about to slap Hazel when Hazel's voice suddenly stopped.

With her mouth half-open, she couldn't make a sound no matter how hard she tried. She could only stare at Vivienne and Charlotte like an idiot.

"Shut up." Vivienne said expressionlessly.

Hazel tried to speak for a long while but couldn't get a word out. She glared at Vivienne with a gaze full of resentment.

"Serves you right for running your mouth." Charlotte waved the razor in her hand. The blade glinted under the runway lights, and she was about to bring it down on Hazel's hair without any hesitation.

"You're all going too far!" Helen couldn't help but stand up to stop them, but as soon as she spoke, she

found herself unable to move or speak.

She looked at Vivienne in fear and, for the first time, felt how terrifying Vivienne was.

Without making a sound, she could control her and Hazel's movements.

Could such a person really have grown up in the countryside?

She didn't believe it.

Charlotte's razor still fell on Hazel's hair. "My skills aren't the best, so if you upset me, I might

accidentally cut your pretty face. And you can't blame me for that."

The moment the first lock of hair hit the ground, Hazel's mouth hung open in silent, internal screams of

fury and frustration. All she could do was watch with wide eyes as her carefully nurtured tresses fell in

clumps, her anger morphing into despair. Tears of humiliation started to well up in her eyes. She was

no longer able to be held back.

If looks could kill, her glare would have impaled Charlotte and Vivienne by now.

"What are you crying for? It's as if I've bullied you." Charlotte grumbled as she continued to shear

Hazel's hair. "You were the one who made that bet. It's time to pay your dues."

Not content with just that jab, she continued with a smirk. "You know, your hair was quite shiny. What

brand of shampoo did you use? Care to recommend?"

Everyone in the room winced as they watched. Each of Charlotte's jabs was aimed like a dagger at

Hazel's weak spots. They couldn't tell if Charlotte was intentionally being mean or if she was just bad at

cutting hair, but she was leaving Hazel looking like a patchwork quilt.

Frankly, the sight of a pretty girl being publicly shorn was a rare spectacle. Even though they felt it was

a bit cruel, a few people couldn't resist capturing the moment on their phones and uploading the videos

online.

The room was silent, punctuated only by the sound of Charlotte's razor and the occasional suppressed

laughter from the crowd.

Vivienne, aside from her initial comment, stood to the side with her arms folded, quietly observing

Hazel fulfill her bet. Her indifferent demeanor suggested that she had no stake in the matter.

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Hazel could clearly perceive a sense of disdain from Vivienne's indifferent demeanor.

She didn't know when her tears started to flow, but she could only stand rigidly under the gaze of

everyone, feeling the cold razor blade being dragged over her scalp again and again. Her heart

fluttered from anger, despair, humiliation, and shame, but she had no choice but to endure it.

After the last strand of hair was shaved off, Charlotte proudly showed Hazel's bald head to Vivienne.

"Well? My skills aren't bad, right? Not a single scratch! This is the skill I honed from years of grooming our family's Samoyed."

Upon hearing this, everyone in the room looked at Hazel's bald head, which was as smooth as a hard-boiled egg, and couldn't help but burst into laughter. It seemed as if Charlotte was treating Hazel like a dog.

Vivienne was somewhat surprised. She had initially chosen a random person to shave Hazel's head, hoping that their lack of skill would cause Hazel some discomfort. But she hadn't expected the result to be so smooth.

A cold breeze rushed into the ballroom, and Hazel suddenly felt a chill run over her bald head. Unable to hold back any longer, she burst into tears.

Clutching her head, she fell to her knees on the glass of the runway, not having the time to ponder how she was suddenly able to move and speak. Amid her tears and curses, she began to berate the two standing in front of her. "Charlotte, Vivienne, you two are..."

"Heh." Vivienne let out a cold, soft chuckle.

Hazel froze, remembering her earlier inability to speak or move, and immediately fell silent.

The whispers and murmurs from the crowd, along with their either gloating or pitying gazes, became too much for her to bear. She pushed herself up and ran from the room.

"Hazel!" Arabella feigned concern as she tried to comfort her.

Hazel brushed off her hand and glared at her resentfully.

"Hazel, why are you looking at me like that?" Arabella took a step back in feigned fear. "You know it's not my fault. My sister wouldn't give me any leeway, and besides, your hair will grow back soon if you take good care of it."

In the end, Hazel shot Vivienne a spiteful look before running out of the ballroom with her bald head under the gaze of everyone present.

"Helen." Arabella looked at Helen on the runway with an innocent expression. "Is Hazel angry with me?"

But I really couldn't help it. I already pleaded with Grandma."

When Hazel was able to move, Helen also regained her mobility. She gave Arabella a complex look.

Helen could see the truth clearly. Hazel had stood up for Arabella, but Arabella hadn't done all she could to help Hazel.

In the end, she could only say, "It'll be okay once her hair grows back."

Upon hearing this, Vivienne's lips curled into a knowing smile. Only she knew that Hazel's hair wouldn't grow back. Hazel had said she wanted to be bald for the rest of her life, so that was what she would get.

"Vivienne, this dress is mine now!" Charlotte had already eagerly run up to the Italian model, unable to take her hands off the dress.

She couldn't wait for the model to take off the dress so she could wear it herself.

Mike was somewhat reluctant. This dress, altered by Vivienne, was something he hadn't even had enough time to admire. But since Vivienne had made her decision, he had no objections.

So he reluctantly followed the Italian model and Charlotte backstage, hoping to get a few more glances at the dress before it was handed over.

Before leaving, he reminded Vivienne, "You promised to help me with the design sketches. You can't go back on your word."

Vivienne nodded slightly. "When have I ever gone back on my word with you?"

With that, Mike left, feeling reassured.

Finally, the commotion on the runway came to an end.

As Vivienne was about to descend the runway, a slender hand suddenly reached out from the side of the stairs, offering a gentlemanly hand to her.

She looked down to see Percival, who had been waiting at the side of the stairs like a knight protecting his princess. Even for these small steps, he wanted to guard her every step of the way.

Vivienne's eyelashes fluttered as she met his deep eyes. She placed her hand in his larger one, using his strength to slowly descend the runway.

Arabella's envious gaze fell on their intertwined hands. Her heart was filled with resentment.

Why was it that she couldn't get close to Percival, but Vivienne could?

She was now the heiress of the Brooks family, so her position was closer to Percival than Vivienne's.

But he never even spared her a glance.

Ashley was also watching Percival, the man with a profile as perfect as a Greek sculpture. He was truly

attractive, but it was a pity he stood beside another woman.

However her meaningful gaze shifted to Arabella. Her recently recognized cousin was clearly harboring inappropriate thoughts about her brother-in-law.

The previous spectacle had been quite entertaining. She had a feeling that the following events wouldn't be boring either.

Just as Vivienne and Percival returned to their seats, hand in hand, Cecilia looked at Vivienne with excited eyes. However, fearful of breaking her ladylike demeanor, she tried her best to maintain her composure.

She was contemplating how to coax Vivienne into agreeing to design some unique clothes for her when she saw the Brooks family encircling Judith, walking towards them.

"Judith, it's been a while." Cecilia politely initiated the greeting, assuming that Judith was there to see her.

However, after a brief nod to Cecilia, Judith turned her pleasant smile towards Vivienne and Percival.

"Ms. Hawthorn, Mr. Ellington, I haven't had the chance to thank you for your help last time."

Upon seeing Judith, Vivienne was taken aback for a moment.

She was the elderly woman she had helped before the engagement party.

Vivienne averted her gaze, casually responding, "It was nothing. It's hardly worth mentioning."

Although she was unsure why the elderly woman was here, she had no desire to get involved with her.

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Judith held a position of considerable influence in Rivenwood, and she had a reputation for maintaining

her dignity. She usually stayed in the upstairs lounge, rarely coming down to entertain guests. So, it

was indeed surprising to see her approach a young one for a casual conversation.

Arabella was particularly taken aback.

Vivienne had turned her banquet into a joke, and Arabella had expected Judith, if not to chastise

Vivienne, to at least give her a cold shoulder.

But what was Judith's intent with this friendly and proactive demeanor?

"Grandmother, do you know my sister?" Arabella asked, feigning curiosity.

Vivienne paused upon hearing this.

The Brooks family?

Her gaze swept across the members of the Brooks family present, briefly meeting Scott's probing eyes,

then passing over the solemn faces of Beatrice and her two sons. She cast an inscrutable glance at Arabella.

Grandmother, huh? Interesting.

"I met Ms. Vivienne when I was in a spot of trouble in Havenwood. She saved my life." Judith began, causing Arabella to gasp in surprise. "It turns out that she's your sister. What a small world, isn't it?"

Judith then continued, expressing her gratitude to Vivienne. "Thank you for your help that day, Ms.

Vivienne. If it hadn't been for you and Mr. Ellington, I might not be here today. I've been looking for an opportunity to thank you both, but I didn't know who you were. Now, I finally have the chance."

Those around them exchanged surprised glances. Vivienne seemed to be quite fortunate. Not only had she won the favor of the Ellington family, becoming Percival's fiancée, but she was also now owed a favor by Judith.

Wouldn't that mean she could do as she pleased in Rivenwood?

Vivienne's attitude remained indifferent, whether it was about the Ellington family, the Brooks family repaying a favor, or settling a grudge.

She never paid much attention to any of these families.

"Grandmother?" Arabella was seething with jealousy.

Judith had never been as respectful to her as she was to Vivienne.

No wonder Vivienne had the audacity to ruin her banquet. She must have known that Judith wouldn't stop her.

"When did my sister save you? What happened?" Arabella clenched her fists, struggling to control her anger.

Judith didn't elaborate but simply smiled at Vivienne. "Today is my granddaughter's banquet. It wouldn't be appropriate to discuss it further. But I will definitely pay you a visit soon to express my gratitude."

She then glanced at Scott, who had been silently following her.

Scott understood her cue and suggested to the crowd, "Since Mr. Mike has decided to put an end to the fashion show, why don't we all go listen to Master Debra's piano performance?"

Everyone present moved to the main banquet hall as Scott's suggestion deftly shifted their focus. No one mentioned the incident that had just occurred. The excitement had already subsided.

In the main banquet hall, a renowned international pianist named Debra, who had been hired by the

Brooks family at a high price, took the stage.

The lights in the hall dimmed suddenly, leaving only a single spotlight on the piano. A young man with a ponytail sat at the piano. His fingers began dancing on the keys, producing a beautiful melody.

Vivienne and Percival stood together, overhearing the sighs of admiration from nearby guests.

Debra was a prodigy, having gained international fame for his piano skills at the age of 18. But perhaps because he spent most of his time practicing the piano and rarely socialized, he was quite reclusive.

After each of his performances, he would simply close the lid of the piano and leave, not bothering to acknowledge the audience.

This time was no different. When he finished his piece, while the crowd was still savoring the beautiful melody, he got up to leave. But something caught his eye, and he paused.

Vivienne's gaze met Debra's across the crowd. He seemed surprised to see her there, and after nodding at her, he turned and left.

His unusual action caused a stir in the banquet hall. Everyone was guessing to whom Debra had nodded.

"Arabella, do you know Debra?" Helen asked in surprise. "He was looking in our direction. Was he

acknowledging you?"

Arabella didn't know Debra. If it weren't for the Brooks family's influence, someone like Debra wouldn't have been invited to her banquet. So, she wasn't sure if Debra was acknowledging her.

But since Helen had mentioned it, Arabella said, "Maybe. But I don't know him."

"If you don't know him, then why would he acknowledge you?" Helen's question drew everyone's attention.

"I don't know. Maybe because I'm the guest of honor today?" Arabella gave a nervous laugh.

"No, I don't think so. My grandpa invited him to his birthday party once. He didn't even acknowledge my grandpa. He wouldn't give you special treatment for that reason." Helen shook her head, then suddenly brightened. "I know! You've won many piano competitions. He must recognize you for that!"

The more Helen thought about it, the more convinced she became. "Arabella, you're so good at playing the piano. You must have won his approval. He respects you, hence the acknowledgement."

"Nonsense, my piano playing is only average at best." Arabella modestly brushed off Helen's compliments, but her eyes darted to Judith and her group. After seeing the pride on their faces,

Arabella felt a sense of satisfaction.

When she was taken in by Beatrice and brought to the Hawthorn Mansion, a piano teacher was immediately hired for her.

She was incredibly gifted, and within just a few years, she was playing like a seasoned pro. In recent years, she even participated in several piano competitions, always coming out with an award.

So, her reputation as the prodigy of Havenwood was not unearned. It was the result of her hard work.

Ashley rolled her eyes in annoyance. Debra was just saying hello to Arabella? Why couldn't she just believe that?

"Arabella, why don't you play a piece for us? Let us appreciate your piano talent." Helen suggested, with the intention of letting Arabella shine.

"Oh, I don't know if that's a good idea." Arabella said, turning to look at Vivienne. "Actually, my piano skills are just average. My sister's the real talent. Maybe she should play a piece."

Vivienne arched an eyebrow.

"Sis, it's my banquet, and I haven't heard you play in a long time." Arabella made this up on the spot.

"Could you play a piece as my gift?"

Vivienne was just a country bumpkin. She was curious to see what Vivienne could pull off.

She was the proud swan, and Vivienne was just the ugly duckling.

In the past, Vivienne had looked down on her because of her status as the Hawthorn family's golden girl. Now, she was the prized jewel of the Brooks family, and she was going to step on Vivienne's face hard.

"Do you think you're worth it?" Vivienne sneered.

"What did you say?!" Helen's rage flared up again. "Arabella just asked you to play the piano. If you think you're not good enough or your piano skills are too poor, just say you're too scared to play.

There's no need for such an attitude!"

Chapter 176

Vivienne shot Helen a half-smile that brought back vivid memories of her recent stage fright. The memory was so powerful that it stole the words right out of Helen's mouth.

"Sis," Arabella said, looking at Vivienne with pleading eyes. "I know I've never been a real sister to you, but all I want is to hear you play the piano once. Is that too much to ask?"

"You..." Vivienne's demeanor turned icy, "aren't worthy."

She was so harsh that they drew furrowed brows from the surrounding crowd, particularly from the Hawthorn clan. Aside from Judith, Scott, and Ashley, everyone seemed irate at Vivienne's cold treatment of Arabella.

After all, Arabella was now the heiress of the Brooks family. Regardless of past quarrels, Vivienne's public humiliation of her seemed uncalled for.

"Vivienne, if you can't play, just admit it. There's no need to put on a show." A brash male voice echoed from the crowd.

Percival's brow furrowed as he turned to face the source of the disruption. It was Paul, whose face was begging to be punched.

The last beating hadn't been enough. Richard had specifically called him back to Rivenwood to keep him away from Arabella, and yet here he was.

"Arabella." Paul stepped forward, presenting her with a gift. "I hope you like it."

Arabella opened the small box to reveal a one-carat diamond necklace. On any other day, such a gift would have thrilled her. But in the presence of Vivienne's Ophelia's Heart, it seemed less impressive.

"I love it." She said. Her voice was hollow, but her face was beaming as she put on the necklace. She

then turned to Vivienne with a look of disappointment. "Sis, won't you really give me this gift?"

The more Vivienne refused to perform, the more Arabella grew certain that she couldn't play. This made her all the more determined to force Vivienne on stage, make her embarrass herself, and highlight her own talents.

"Ha!" Paul scoffed. "She's just a country bumpkin. What would she know about playing the piano?"

Arabella, you're wasting your time."

Before, Paul might have found some agreement among the crowd. However, after the recent runway incident and the revelation of Vivienne's identity as the mysterious designer Charles, no one dared underestimate her.

Paul, newly arrived, was still arrogantly belittling Vivienne. "No matter how much a turkey struts, it'll never be a peacock. Arabella, she's no match for you. Your piano playing has won awards. Why don't you go up and give us a real show?"

This was just what Arabella had been waiting for. She moved towards the stage, turning to Vivienne to say, "Sis, I know you're nervous. Let me go first and warm up the audience. You can follow me."

Vivienne watched as Arabella decided everything on her own. Her face was a mask of indifference.

"Why are you warming up for her?" Paul laughed. "Does she deserve it?"

Percival's eyes narrowed. He was ready to intervene.

"Paul!" Cecilia steered her daughter, Isolde, through the crowd towards him. Her eyes looked cold and frightening.

Paul jumped. "Auntie."

"Apologize to Vivienne." Cecilia demanded, "Don't make me tell your mother how you're embarrassing yourself."

To Cecilia, Vivienne was already part of the family, and she wouldn't tolerate anyone insulting her.

"How am I embarrassing myself?" Paul protested, "Why is everyone siding with this useless woman?"

My dad, and now you?!"

"Vivienne is my daughter-in-law. Should I side with a stranger like you instead?" Cecilia's tone was ice-cold.

"Exactly! You have terrible taste!" Isolde chimed in while pointing at Arabella. "That woman took credit for my recovery and swindled our family!"

The crowd's attention turned to Arabella, who looked utterly mortified.

"That... that was a misunderstanding!" Paul defended Arabella, who had previously duped his family.

"Will you apologize to Vivienne or not?" Cecilia was done arguing with him.

"I didn't say anything wrong! She's just a hick! She doesn't deserve to be compared to Arabella!" Paul's voice grew louder.

Percival caught Thomas' eye from across the room.

"Mr. Ellington," Thomas interrupted Paul, "you've got something on your chin."

Paul reached to wipe his chin, but Thomas was quicker. With a sharp crack, Paul's jaw was dislocated.

"Ow...uh...uh..." Paul's eyes teared up from the pain as he clutched his dislocated jaw, pointing at

Percival and Thomas while making unintelligible sounds.

"Get cousin Paul to the hospital." Percival ordered coldly.

"Right away." Thomas responded instantly and dragged Paul out of the room.

Paul had barely been at the party for ten minutes, and Arabella hadn't even lifted the lid of the piano yet when he was hastily escorted out.

The onlookers looked shocked. Was this some sort of service that included injuring people?

Percival was ruthless, even toward his own family.

However, their shock quickly subsided when they saw Percival's icy demeanor. They all backed off.

Who would dare mess with such a dangerous man?

Arabella, sitting at the piano on the stage, had a slightly darkened expression. Why were the men

surrounding her either disgusting like Elijah or useless like Paul? They couldn't compare to Percival at all.

Her gaze greedily landed on Percival's face through the crowd. She then lifted the piano lid and flashed a confident smile as her fingers began to dance on the keys.

The clear piano music flowed out, echoing throughout the entire banquet hall.

Although her performance couldn't match Debra's earlier one, it was indeed worthy of Arabella's reputation as a talented woman.

Vivienne, standing in the crowd, had a furrowed brow.

Percival instantly asked, "Why the sudden sour face?"

Vivienne's gaze fell coldly on Arabella. "The way she just looked at you... I don't like it!"

Chapter 177

A subtle smirk crossed Percival's face as he realized his darling Vivienne could now feel jealous when it came to him.

"I'm not fond of you keeping secrets with other men either. Was that Debra whom you were exchanging glances with?"

"He's just a friend." Vivienne responded indifferently, offering no explanation.

Percival's gaze shifted, sweeping over Scott, who was standing not far away. "The head of the Brooks family has been eyeing you as well."

Vivienne's cool gaze followed his, colliding with Scott's stare.

Perhaps it was her icy expression that caused Scott, who was accustomed to others cowering before his authority as the long-standing head of the Brooks family, to look away. However, he couldn't resist sneaking another glance.

For some reason, even though he had never met Vivienne, she seemed eerily familiar.

He thought he saw a shadow of Karen in her.

"Scott." After noticing Scott's continuous gaze on Vivienne, Beatrice began feeling a surge of anxiety.

She stepped forward, trying to squeeze a smile onto her gloomy face, intentionally distracting him.

"Arabella is about to take her college entrance exams. Have you discussed with her which university she's considering?"

"She's interested in Rivenwood University." Scott politely responded. Engaged in conversation with Beatrice, his gaze finally left Vivienne and settled on Arabella on the stage.

Arabella, reaching the climactic part of her performance, abruptly lifted her hand. The room fell silent as the piano music dramatically halted. As Arabella stood up to bow, the crowd applauded generously.

The first thing Arabella did was look for Percival's reaction, hoping her piano performance had moved him.

Regrettably, Percival's attention was solely on Vivienne.

Biting her lower lip, she didn't step down from the stage. Instead, she smiled towards Vivienne in the crowd. "Your turn, sister. I'm eagerly waiting for your gift."

Everyone's eyes turned to Vivienne, waiting for her response.

"Arabella." Judith's face fell. "If Ms. Hawthorn doesn't wish to play, don't pester her. It's impolite."

Judith was a tough woman. She had fought alongside Baron during the family feud. In the end, their

efforts made the Brooks family the heads of the Hawthorn clan.

She could see through Arabella's petty games, and naturally, she stepped in to protect Vivienne, her savior.

Arabella went a bit pale. She hadn't anticipated that Judith would publicly reprimand her to protect Vivienne.

This was her banquet!

She was the star of the show!

And yet, Judith accused her of being rude?

"Ms. Hawthorn, it's our fault for not disciplining her properly. Please don't take it to heart." Judith apologized to Vivienne.

"And if I do mind, what then?" Vivienne's eyes narrowed, her gaze on Judith was enigmatic.

"This..." Judith hesitated. "I'll make sure to discipline her properly when we get home."

"There's no need." Vivienne's gaze fell on Arabella as her lips curled into a smile. "Seeing as we're kin, I'll do the disciplining."

She emphasized the word 'kin' heavily.

A puzzled Judith didn't quite understand what she was up to.

Before she could react, Vivienne was already heading towards the stage.

The crowd was taken aback, and they began to whisper among themselves.

They had initially assumed Vivienne couldn't play the piano since she was reluctant to accept

Arabella's invitation. But now that Judith had stepped in to help her save dignity, why was she heading to the stage?

They all knew that with Arabella's impressive performance leading the way, unless Vivienne could match Debra's skills, she would only end up being a laughingstock.

"Sister." Arabella watched Vivienne step onto the stage, feigning a mix of surprise and delight. "I knew you'd grant my wish."

"Is that so?" Vivienne's smile turned colder. "Then enjoy my gift."

Arabella's face flushed with embarrassment. She clenched her teeth and descended from the stage.

She watched as Vivienne gracefully sat before the piano, testing the keys casually and flexing her fingers.

Arabella, observing Vivienne's amateur attempts at tuning, scoffed at her audacity. A girl who grew up

in the country dared to play the piano after her performance, a national award winner.

No matter how well Vivienne could play, she knew she could never surpass her.

This was precisely why she chose to perform first. With her excellent skills setting the bar, anything

Vivienne played afterward would be overshadowed.

A triumphant smirk slowly spread across her lips. However, it froze in the next second.

Vivienne, having loosened her fingers, began to slowly play the black and white keys. A soft melody,

slowly gaining momentum, filled the banquet hall.

The melody started as gentle as a morning breeze. It was like a calm stream, then it gradually

quickened and intensified, transforming into a roaring storm and raging tides, resonating in the ears

and hearts of the audience.

"Is this Rhapsody of Marland?" Melissa Brooks whispered.

Anyone with a basic knowledge of piano could recognize that Vivienne was playing the renowned and

notoriously difficult piece, Rhapsody of Marland.

The composer was inspired to create the piece after experiencing a hurricane disaster and a passionate love affair during his trip to Marland.

The complex techniques and varied emotions encapsulated within the piece have always been daunting for many pianists.

Nobody expected that Vivienne could play the piano. But they were left dumbfounded by her skills.

In fact, her performance could be said to be no less impressive than Debra's earlier, and maybe even a tad better.

Arabella's face had turned ashen a while ago. The piece she had played earlier was called "Summer Dance." It was renowned for its challenging emotional nuances. Not many could play it well, so it was supposed to be an adequate showcase of her talent at this kind of occasion.

However, "Summer Dance" was nothing compared to "Rhapsody of Marland" in terms of both renown and difficulty.

She watched Vivienne play with an air of disbelief.

Helen approached her and asked, "Arabella, what's going on? Didn't you say your elder sister has always lived in the countryside and never learned the piano?"

"I... I don't know when she learned." Arabella managed a forced laugh.

That was right. Vivienne grew up in a monastery, so she never imagined that Vivienne would know how to play the piano.

But now Vivienne's divine piano skills were like a slap in the face.

She thought she could make Vivienne embarrass herself on stage and use her as a foil, but it turned out she herself became the foil.

She had shot herself in the foot.

"Arabella, it seems your sister plays the piano way better than you," sneered Ashley, who had come over. "I thought she didn't know how to play, and you were intentionally making things difficult for her."

"I didn't expect that you sincerely invited her to perform on stage. You even warmed up the stage for her with your own performance to better highlight her excellence."

Chapter 178

Ashley's words cut straight to Arabella's heart, stepping on her sore points.

Arabella's face turned a ghastly green, while Judith, standing next to her, apologized, "Arabella, I misunderstood you before. I thought you were trying to make things difficult for your sister."

This apology was sincere, but Arabella felt like she was going to spit blood.

She had laid all the groundwork just to make things difficult for Vivienne, but who could have guessed that it would turn into a stage for Vivienne to show off her talent?

"Vivienne sure plays the piano beautifully." Melissa said in surprise. "I wonder who she learned from.

With such piano skills, why has she been so low-key?"

She couldn't understand. She herself was quite accomplished on the piano, and to her ears, Vivienne played even better than Debra.

In fact, it reminded her of someone else.

Scott looked at Vivienne with complex emotions. The spotlight on the stage enveloped her, making her silhouette appear both real and ethereal. He could see Karen in her again.

He had once listened to Karen play Rhapsody of Marland. Like Vivienne, she sat in front of the piano with intense concentration, as if nothing else in the world could disturb her.

"Your granddaughter is quite a catch, Aunt Beatrice." Timothy said, praising Vivienne to Beatrice.

Beatrice sneered, her gaze sweeping over Judith and Scott.

Every time she heard someone praising Vivienne, it was like a stab in the heart, as if they were

reminding her of how blind she had been.

Arabella felt even worse. She had showcased her piano skills, but instead of earning a single word of praise from the Brooks family, they had started praising Vivienne in front of her.

But she had to keep her feelings under wraps. She forced a smile and said, "Indeed, my sister plays the piano wonderfully."

Her eyes drifted to Percival, who was looking at Vivienne with admiration. The affection in his eyes was so thick that anyone could see it.

Cecilia, standing beside Percival, was listening to Vivienne's piano playing with a dreamy look on her face. Suddenly, she sighed and said, "Son, what are we going to do? I'm a bit worried."

Percival looked at her quietly, waiting for her to continue.

"I feel like you might not be good enough for Vivienne."

It wasn't that she was belittling her son. It was just that Vivienne was shockingly outstanding.

Not to mention her perfume blending and clothes designing skills, her piano skills alone would probably attract countless admirers. And she was so humble about it.

"I feel the same way." Isolde said, counting on her fingers to Percival. "Vivienne is a doctor, a perfume blender, a clothes designer, and a double major doctorate. And she plays the piano so well."

She looked up at Percival innocently. "Brother, what else can you do besides cooking better than Vivienne?"

Percival fell silent.

He wasn't good enough for Vivienne?

No way!

He wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with her and win everyone's admiration.

He suddenly stood up and walked towards the stage.

He was the center of attention, and every move he made attracted everyone's gaze. Now everyone was watching him curiously.

Under everyone's gaze, he strode over to Vivienne and sat down. After exchanging a glance with her,

Vivienne moved slightly to make room for him. The rhythm of her playing slowed down, and the melody became more gentle.

Percival lifted his hands and placed them on the black and white keys, playing a duet with Vivienne,

following her rhythm.

The Rhapsody of Marland was originally composed by a composer who had experienced disaster and love. When Vivienne was playing alone, the melody was like one person's call and confession to another.

But when Percival joined, the melody turned into a pursuit in a storm and an entanglement in the raging waves.

The man and woman in the melody were dancing in the same way that Vivienne's and Percival's fingers were dancing on the black and white keys. They chased each other, hid from each other, stood side by side, and shared weal and woe.

"Oh my god!" Someone exclaimed. "This is the first time I've heard the Rhapsody of Marland played in such a beautiful way."

"I didn't know Mr. Ellington could play the piano so well!"

"Some people say Vivienne is not good enough for Mr. Ellington, but I think they look quite compatible."

"Yeah, there's a word for how they look together. What's it called?"

"Equals!"

Everyone watched the two on the stage. The only spotlight in the room shone on them. They sat side by side, their movements perfectly synchronized.

Their understanding of each other was so good that it seemed as if they were two people with one soul, so they never lost track of each other.

The Rhapsody of Marland was difficult to play. When Percival first came up to join the fun, Vivienne thought about slowing down the pace to accommodate him.

But she didn't expect that not only could he keep up with her rhythm, but his every note and every emotional expression was in perfect harmony with hers.

She couldn't help but look at Percival in surprise. With just one glance, she fell into the deep affection in his eyes, and her heart started to beat along with the passionate sounds of the piano.

The look they exchanged stung Arabella, who was standing below the stage. She couldn't help but imagine herself sitting next to Percival, playing a duet with him.

If Vivienne hadn't returned to the Hawthorn family...

If Vivienne had died somewhere out there...

The place next to Percival should have been hers!

It was Vivienne's appearance that took everything away from her!

Her envy of Vivienne and her longing for Percival had long made her forget that she was the one who had refused to marry the handicapped Percival. She was the one who had given up on this man, who was outstanding to the extreme.

Ashley's gaze on Percival was also complex. She glanced at Vivienne by his side and had to admit that her excellence was very enviable.

Arabella's face was distorted by jealousy, her features twisting into an unrecognizable mask.

No matter what the audience thought, on the stage, Vivienne and Percival were immersed in their own world.

They communicated through the rhythm of the piano, pouring out all their emotions.

The piano music echoed in the entire banquet hall, reaching a peak, then calming down slowly and gently, like a breeze after a storm, like the tide after crashing waves, or like the tranquility after a disaster, ending at the most concise point.

When the music ended, there was silence in the banquet hall, followed by thunderous applause.

This applause was not the kind of flattery given to Arabella earlier, but a genuine feeling of being moved and conquered by their passion. It was sincere admiration from the bottom of their hearts.

Percival held Vivienne's hand and stood up with her. Her gaze met Arabella's hateful stare on the stage.

She smirked at Arabella. She didn't really enjoy public performances, but she disliked the way Arabella had looked at Percival earlier even more.

With her talent, she told Arabella that her man was off limits.

Chapter 179

Vivienne and Percival descended the stage under the awe-inspired gazes of the crowd.

Vivienne walked up to Arabella with her chin slightly raised in a defiant stance. "Did you like the gift I gave you?"

Arabella's hands clenched into fists, and her eyes burned with jealousy and rage. This was supposed to be her banquet, yet Vivienne had stolen the spotlight.

Why?

Why did she always have to lose to Vivienne?

Feeling everyone's gaze, Arabella forced out a strained smile. "I love it. I didn't know you could play the piano so well. Why didn't you ever mention it? If I'd known, I would've suggested Grandma send you abroad to study. Why waste your time teaching at Cloudcrest High School?"

"Heh." Vivienne chuckled. Her laugh showcased her unapologetic arrogance. "Why would I need to tell you anything?"

Arabella's expression froze. Tears welled in her eyes as she looked at Vivienne with a hurt expression.

"Why do you hate me so much, Vivienne? We're sisters!"

Vivienne brushed her hair, which had fallen over her ears, behind them. Her luxurious gown accentuated her allure. "I used to tolerate you for the sake of Dorian, but that doesn't mean you can walk over me."

Vivienne looked up. Her cold eyes were full of indifference. "My mother only had me. I don't have a sister. Don't try to establish a relationship with me. I don't easily connect with people."

Arabella seethed with hatred, but on the surface, she looked pitiful.

After seeing this, Paul's protective instincts kicked in. He yelled at Vivienne, "Vivienne, enough is

enough! This is Arabella's party... uh..."

Before he could finish his sentence, Paul was silenced.

Everyone stepped back.

It was safer to stay away from Vivienne. One wrong move, and you could find yourself incapacitated.

Vivienne casually slipped the remaining silver needle into her hair. She glanced at Paul and spoke in

an indifferent tone. "Don't yell in front of me again. I hate the sound of barking. If there's a next time,

you can kiss your mouth goodbye."

With that said, Vivienne pulled Percival closer with her gaze fixed on Arabella. "Look closely. He is my

man! Remember his face. Don't reach out too far, or you might lose your status as the Brooks family's

heiress."

Percival raised an eyebrow, looking at Vivienne in surprise.

Little by little, a faint smile appeared on his lips.

The little girl had finally come to her senses.

She knew how to claim her territory now.

Hmm!

The way she declared her territory was truly captivating.

The guests at the party, however, looked rather strange.

She was just Vivienne, a girl who came from a monastery. Even though she was Master Q, the perfumer, and Charles, the fashion designer, her status was still incomparable to the Brooks family's.

She dared make such a bold claim? How could she threaten to ruin Arabella, the Brooks family's heiress?

Did she know what she was saying?

Everyone looked at the Brooks family. The matriarch, Judith, had no expression on her face; her mood was unreadable.

Even Scott was expressionless, only the rest of the family showed their anger.

"Vivienne, you!" Arabella's face twitched with anger.

Damn Vivienne!

How dare she belittle her in front of the Brooks family?

Vivienne couldn't even be bothered to give Arabella a glance. She took Percival's hand and turned to

leave.

As she left, she said coldly, "Arabella, don't bother sending invitations to Dorian anymore. Your relationship with him is over!"

Arabella looked desperate. She turned to look at Judith, hoping she would stand up for her.

Judith caught her gaze and walked towards Vivienne. "Ms. Hawthorn, wait!"

Vivienne stopped. Her eyes were devoid of any warmth as she looked at Judith.

Judith was taken aback by her coldness and the hostility that ran deep in her bones. The last time

Vivienne saved her, although she was cold, she wasn't as indifferent as she was now.

Was it because of Arabella?

After thinking of what Arabella had done in Havenwood, Judith's eyes narrowed.

Quickly, she hid her emotions and smiled at Vivienne. "I've always wanted to thank you for saving my life. Today seemed like a good opportunity. Can I have your address so I can visit you to express my gratitude?"

Vivienne's address wouldn't be hard to find, but out of politeness, she needed to ask for Vivienne's permission.

Arabella watched, wide-eyed. She had thought Judith was standing up for her, but instead, she was

asking for Vivienne's address to thank her.

It was ridiculous!

Truly ridiculous!

Vivienne's eyes were downcast. Her beautiful face was obscured by the shadows. After a moment, she

looked up and spoke in a serious and cold manner. "Judith, if I knew you were the matriarch of the

Brooks family, I wouldn't have saved you."

Judith was taken aback. "Why is that?"

Vivienne ignored her and turned to Percival. "I'm tired."

Percival held her slender hand. "Let's go home."

The two of them left under the watchful eyes of the crowd.

Cecilia glanced at Arabella. Her expression was indifferent and cold. "Judith, you don't need to invite

me to your granddaughter's parties anymore."

With that, she turned and left.

After everyone had left, including Vivienne and Charlotte, the familial reunion banquet thrown by the Brooks family for Arabella came to an abrupt end.

Whether anyone had noticed Arabella's talents remained unknown. However, Vivienne not only dazzled the attendees but also the online community.

Someone had shared a video of Vivienne playing the piano, which had become an overnight sensation on the internet.

After the banquet, Vivienne's mood had taken a dip. Leaning into Percival, her downcast eyes hid her thoughts from the world.

Percival held her, sensing the sudden fragility of the girl in his arms.

Her unusual demeanor was due to Judith and Scott.

He leaned back into his leather chair with his deep-set eyes half-closed. His slender fingers gently tapped on the car window. Suddenly, his fingers halted. After looking down at Vivienne, he noticed that she had fallen asleep, perhaps from exhaustion.

Percival stayed silent for a moment before asking the chauffeur, Thomas, "What was the name of that girlfriend who left Scott just before their wedding?"

Thomas thought for a while before replying, "I think her name was... Karen?"

Percival's cold, narrow eyes contracted, and his imposing aura evaporated. Suddenly, he laughed.

Perfect!

He had noticed Vivienne's off mood today. She wasn't usually one to seek attention, but today, she had

become the center of attention due to Arabella's comments, creating a dress and playing the piano.

It turned out that she was Scott's biological daughter.

No wonder she never called Dorian 'dad.'

She knew everything but said nothing.

Percival squinted, his voice monotone. "The punishment she received in the mental hospital was too

light."

He didn't know why Vivienne, knowing she was a Brooks, kept it to herself. But if Arabella dared take

Vivienne's place, she would pay the price.

Thomas glanced at him through the rear-view mirror, asking, "Mr. Ellington, what do you mean?"

"The Brooks heiress, pregnant at just 18..." Percival looked down at the still-sleeping Vivienne as a

slow smirk spread across his face. "Scott's reaction should be quite the spectacle."

Thomas fell silent. It would be a spectacular spectacle indeed.

Chapter 180

The next day.

When Vivienne awoke, Percival had already prepared breakfast.

After seeing the strawberry cake on the table, Vivienne's eyes lit up and she quickly walked over.

"Strawberry cake?"

Percival handed her a slice of the freshly cut cake. His deep, affectionate eyes were glowing,

showcasing his intentions to do nothing but please her. "Try it. Do you like it?"

Vivienne took a bite and nodded. "It tastes just like it used to. Your cooking is still so good."

After receiving her compliment, the smile on Percival's lips deepened.

He had initially planned to make the cake for her in the afternoon. He thought that having cake in the

morning might be a little heavy. But considering her low spirits the day before, he decided to wake up

early to prepare it.

Her satisfied expression made him feel content.

"Don't eat too much in the morning. I'll make it for you every day." Percival gently stroked her head. His

slender fingers gently threaded through her beautiful hair. His voice was soft and full of love. "My girl, whatever you want, I'll make sure you have it."

Vivienne looked up at him. The morning sunlight highlighted his handsome features. She had to admit that he was incredibly good-looking.

He seemed to have inherited all the best features from his ancestors. His face seemed to have been expertly sculpted, so much so that it drew people in at first glance.

Suddenly, she felt that not canceling their engagement wasn't such a bad idea. At least, seeing his face every day would certainly lift her spirits.

Her gaze fell on his cool lips, and a small flame seemed to flicker deep within her. She put down the cake in her hand and suddenly wrapped her arms around his neck. "Mr. Wolf, don't tempt me."

Percival fell silent.

When had he ever tempted her?

Before he could speak, Vivienne tiptoed and kissed him. The sweet taste of cake still lingered in her mouth.

Percival wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her closer, his voice husky as he said,

"Vivienne... It's you who's tempting me."

"Really?" Vivienne looked up at him with her bewitching eyes. "And are you letting me?"

Percival's flame had been ignited, and he pushed her against the wall. Instead of answering her, he kissed her passionately.

The kiss lasted for a long time before Percival, satisfied, finally let go of Vivienne.

Vivienne's face was flushed. She tidied her disheveled hair, her voice now slightly awkward. "I need to go to school."

She must be crazy. Why did she always want to throw herself at Percival?

She was sure she didn't have true feelings for him.

She was only sticking with the engagement because he was Mr..Wolf, her mother's apprentice.

She wouldn't admit that she seemed to be falling for him.

Never!

...

Cloudcrest High School.

After the students of Class Eighteen resumed their regular curriculum, their academic progress was back on track.

The college entrance test was in just over a week, so all the students were in review mode.

Today was Friday, and the results of the last quiz were out.

Vivienne looked at the scores of the entire class and was very pleased.

As she entered the classroom with the papers in hand, the students of Class Eighteen stood up and respectfully greeted her. "Good morning, teacher."

Their voices were full of vigor and youthful energy.

Vivienne placed the papers on her desk, her expression serious as she looked at the students. "The quiz results are out."

The students tensed up at her serious demeanor.

Vivienne scanned their faces before picking up the papers and distributing them. "Ivy, Literature A, English A, Math A, Science A, last in class, 200th in grade."

Ivy, sitting at the back of the classroom, had a bad feeling when she heard her name. When Vivienne

announced that she was the last in class, she felt disheartened.

However, hearing that she was 200th in the grade was a surprise.

"Ms. Vivienne, are you sure? I'm really 200th?" Ivy asked, feeling incredulous.

The last time she checked, she was 400th in the grade. In just over a month, she had jumped to 200th?!

Her chances of getting into a good university had skyrocketed.

"Absolutely." Vivienne handed her the paper. "See for yourself."

Ivy took the paper, still feeling as if she were dreaming. It wasn't until Vivienne began to read out the next student's score that she returned to her seat.

"Logan, 10th in class, 20th in grade."

"Oberon, 6th in class, 15th in grade."

"Coral, 4th in class, 10th in grade."

"Anna, 3rd in class, 6th in grade."

As Vivienne read out the scores, the class was shocked when she reached Anna's.

"What?! Anna is 3rd in class and 6th in the grade?!"

"Did I hear that right? Anna had always been at the bottom of the class; even Ivy had always scored better than her. How did she suddenly jump to 3rd place?"

"Who knew she was such a dark horse?! Our class really is full of hidden talents. If Anna is only 3rd, who are the top two?"

The students of Class Eighteen were all in an uproar.

Vivienne raised her eyebrows while looking at the calm Anna, who was walking towards her.

"You surprised me."

Anna hung her head low and spoke in a steady voice. "Ms. Vivienne, one cannot be mediocre forever, right?"

Vivienne raised an eyebrow. "Right!"

Anna didn't say anything more. She just took her paper and returned to her seat. Once seated, she looked up at Vivienne with a thoughtful gaze.

Vivienne met her gaze as their eyes clashed like two rockets, sparking fireworks.

Vivienne calmly continued to read the scores. "Faye, second in class, second in the grade, and second

in the whole city."

This was a citywide examination involving all high schools in Havenwood. The citywide rankings were only mentioned if the students had made it into the top 10.

The class was once again buzzing.

But before the exclamations could be fully voiced, Vivienne's voice echoed again, "Charlotte, first in class, first in the grade, and first in the whole city."

The previously buzzing students of Class Eighteen were now as quiet as a hushed stadium.

Not a single word was uttered.

After an awkward pause, someone finally yelled.

"Ah!! Charlotte is the city's top scorer!"

"She's absolutely amazing! My goodness! Class Eighteen finally has a shining star!"

"We have the top two scores in the city, and the whole class made it into the top 200 in the grade. This is a true underdog success story!"

Amid the cheering, Charlotte looked utterly bewildered.

What exactly had she just heard?

First in the class?

First in the grade?

First in the whole city?!

No way!

She must be dreaming!

She had to be!

There were a number of questions on the math and English tests that she wasn't sure about. How could she possibly have gotten perfect scores?

"Charlotte, what are you spacing out for? Go get your paper!" Her deskmate nudged her arm.