

## **Million-Dollar 221**

### Chapter 221

The next day.

Percival had Beatrice's family forcibly sent back to their rural home.

At first, they kicked up a fuss and refused to go. Percival's men were not gentle, so Michael ended up with a broken leg. Only then did his family reluctantly agree to leave.

Before they left, Dorian gave the old woman ten grand and told her he would send her a monthly allowance of two hundred dollars. Not a penny more, not a penny less.

Some might accuse Dorian of being too soft-hearted, but he saw it as his duty.

If Beatrice wasn't his biological mother, he could've washed his hands of the whole thing. But numerous DNA tests had confirmed his lineage. He was indeed her son.

Even though they had disowned each other in name, the law required him to provide for his mother.

Cordelia supported his decision.

Sometimes, you could sever all ties but blood.

"Percival, I've left some people to keep an eye on them. They won't have a chance to disturb your in-laws again." Thomas reported this to Percival, with Vivienne listening in the backseat of the black

sedan.

Her face was calm and expressionless. She didn't care about Beatrice's fate.

After hearing Thomas's report, Percival absentmindedly asked while playing with Vivienne's fingers.

"Vivienne, Scott has sent someone to collect your DNA sample."

"Uh-huh." Vivienne's eyes flickered with amusement as a mocking smile played on her lips.

After Arabella was hospitalized, people had been trying to get close to Vivienne to collect her hair or other samples. They were most likely sent by Scott to collect her DNA.

But they didn't succeed.

"Do you want to return to the Brooks family?" Percival intertwined his fingers with hers as his grip tightened.

Vivienne leaned back in her seat, staring out at the gloomy sky through the window, without answering.

She wanted to return.

Since Arabella hadn't dug up any dirt, she would have to return to the Brooks family and find out for herself.

What was the danger that had forced her mother to flee while pregnant, causing her to hide her identity and agree to a marriage of convenience with Dorian?

Just then, a car in front of them had a tire blowout, swerved, and crashed into them.

Amid the screeching brakes, Percival and Vivienne lurched forward, bracing themselves against the front seats.

He held Vivienne close, shielding her head with his hand. After the car steadied, he checked her over, making sure she was unharmed, before he turned to Thomas with obvious anger in his tone. "What happened?"

"The other car swerved into us, Percival. I'll go check it out." Thomas exited the car.

Thomas got out of the car with a stern face, only to find that the other driver was Ronald.

Ronald was equally surprised to see Percival's car. He quickly apologized to Thomas. "Sorry, it was my fault. I wasn't paying attention. Let me know how much it will cost, and I'll pay you back."

Since Ronald was being reasonable, Thomas didn't say anything harsh. He glanced back at their car and said, "No need. Our young master can afford it."

Ronald didn't argue. He and Percival were not the kind to squabble over money. Too much politeness

would feel insincere.

He'd owe them a favor for now and find a way to repay it later.

With that thought, he nodded at Thomas and returned to his car.

After Percival's men brought a new car to pick up Percival and Vivienne, Thomas got into the damaged Lincoln.

In Ronald's car, a stylish woman in her fifties was in the backseat. "What happened?"

Her name was Mila, a renowned pianist and Calista's mother.

Mila had a piano concert at the Havenwood Grand Theater in two days.

Calista had been invited by the Brooks family to treat Tristan's injuries.

So, when Mila decided to come, since both families were well acquainted and as a show of courtesy,

the Brooks invited her to stay with them at the mansion.

They even sent Ronald to pick up Calista from the airport.

"It's nothing. Just an acquaintance." Ronald answered nonchalantly. "Turns out, I hit Mr. Ellington and his fiancée's car."

Calista, who was sitting in the back seat with Mila, quickly rolled down the window, spotting the cold and proud man protecting a beautiful young girl as they got into the back seat of a black car.

His careful demeanor showed that he cherished the young girl greatly.

Calista instinctively wanted to call out to him, but he didn't even glance their way. He got into the car with the girl, closed the door, and drove off.

"What's wrong?" Mila asked, noticing Calista's stunned expression.

"Nothing." Calista shook her head.

...

Back at the Jade Garden Residences.

Today was the day Cordelia's daughter, Astrid, was coming home.

Vivienne had been in Havenwood for quite some time, but she had yet to meet Astrid.

Astrid had been invited to Percival and Vivienne's engagement party, but since Vivienne was delayed due to saving Judith, when she arrived, Astrid had to leave early due to an important matter.

Since then, Astrid had been busy, and Vivienne had been too, so they hadn't seen each other.

When Vivienne and Percival returned home, Astrid was already there.

Accompanying her was a man dressed in a suit.

Astrid and the man in the suit were playing with Thaddeus in the yard.

"Sis! Bro-in-law!" Thaddeus cheerfully called out as soon as he saw Vivienne and Percival return.

"Hey, why don't I get a bro-in-law from you, Thaddeus?" A man nearby feigned hurt.

"Huh, so you're a bro-in-law, and Percival is too, so that makes two bro-in-laws?" Thaddeus was a bit confused.

"I'm the elder bro-in-law, and he's the younger one." The man laughed as he ruffled Thaddeus's hair.

"You must be Vivienne, right?" Astrid looked at Vivienne with warmth in her eyes. "My mom sent me a bunch of candid shots of you. I thought you were beautiful then, but you're even more stunning in person. Or maybe my mom's photography skills aren't up to par."

"You're very pretty, too." Vivienne nodded in response.

Astrid and Cordelia looked very alike, both with gentle and soft features. Perhaps because of this,

Vivienne felt an instant affinity toward Astrid.

"Oh, and this is my boyfriend, Alfred." Astrid pointed to the young man next to her.

"Nice to meet you." Vivienne nodded at Alfred before pointing at Percival. "This is my fiancé, Percival."

"You two make a good pair." Astrid nodded at Percival in return.

"Vivienne and Percival are back?" Dorian emerged from the villa, greeting the four in the yard with a warm smile. "Come on in; dinner's ready."

Knowing that Astrid was coming home today, Cordelia had made a special trip to the farmer's market and spent the entire afternoon in the kitchen, preparing a feast just for them.

"Sure, Dad." Astrid responded naturally.

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At the dinner table, the family gathered in a warm atmosphere.

Midway through the meal, Astrid lifted her glass of wine and looked at Vivienne and Percival. "Vivienne, Percival, I'm raising a toast to you!"

Vivienne raised an eyebrow as a playful aura emanated from her eyes. "What's the occasion?"

According to family hierarchy, it should be her and Percival toasting Astrid.

Astrid chuckled. "I'm usually swamped with work and rarely get to come home. I know that Arabella has always been dismissive of our parents, and I couldn't help much. But since you came back, you've been taking care of them. I can tell they're much happier now, and that's all thanks to you. I'm toasting

you to thank you for fulfilling the filial duties on my behalf as well."

Her biological father died when she was ten. Later, Cordelia raised her until she was fifteen, and that was when she met Dorian.

Dorian treated her like his own daughter, never neglecting her, even after he and Cordelia had Thaddeus and adopted Arabella.

She truly regarded Dorian as her father. However, due to her job at the secret service, she rarely came home and found it difficult to take care of them.

Vivienne laughed. Her smile was enchanting, sharing her vibrant energy with all those around her.

"Alright! I'll accept your toast. But I don't drink, so I'll substitute with juice instead."

"Good!" Astrid didn't fuss. She raised her glass and downed the drink in one go.

After the meal, Astrid put down her cutlery and looked at Dorian earnestly. "Dad, Mom, I'm back this time for two reasons. First, to see you. Second, because of a work transfer. I need to move to Rivenwood."

Dorian and Cordelia were taken aback, then exclaimed in surprise, "Moving to Rivenwood?! Why the



sudden move? You didn't mention this before."

"It was a last-minute decision from the higher-ups. I might come home even less in the future." Astrid

looked at them apologetically. "When I'm not here, you must take care of yourselves."

"Take care of what?" Cordelia slammed the table angrily. "You've been away for years! You barely

come home, and now you're leaving again? What do you take this home for? A hotel?"

Dorian tried to calm her down. "Why are you mad at her? It's not her fault that her job is transferring

her. You're understanding about everything else, so why are you being so petty this time?"

Cordelia shot him a glare. "Is this petty? Look at her age? She's been dating for years but never got

married! Every time we push them to get married, she brushes us off!"

After saying this, Cordelia turned to Astrid. "I bet you're planning on delaying your marriage for a few

more years, right?"

"Mom!" Astrid was a bit embarrassed. "My work is important. I don't have time for marriage."

"Bullshit!" Cordelia cursed angrily. "What kind of job doesn't allow its employees to get married?"

Summon your boss here; I want to ask him why he doesn't allow his employees to get married. What's

his motive?"

As they bickered, Vivienne and Percival kept quiet, frowning and not voicing their opinions.

Astrid was only twenty-four. She was not that old. But Cordelia, who had experienced a tough life raising Astrid alone after her divorce, hoped that Astrid could find someone who truly loved her.

At one point, Cordelia had mentioned to Vivienne in casual conversation that she didn't really trust Alfred.

He and Astrid had been dating for several years, but he had never visited their home and never mentioned marrying Astrid. This led Cordelia to believe that Alfred was wasting Astrid's youth.

So, when Astrid announced that she was moving to Rivenwood, Cordelia's reaction was intense.

"I told you that my work is important, and it's currently not the right time for marriage." Astrid didn't want

to argue with Cordelia on her first day home, so she patiently tried to diffuse the situation. "Mom, stop worrying about me getting married. When it's time, we'll get married."

Cordelia was determined to get a resolution. Ignoring Astrid, she directly asked Alfred, "Alfred, I need a straight answer from you today. You and Astrid have been dating for a very long time, so when are you getting married?"

Alfred smiled. "We're currently very busy with our work and don't plan to get married anytime soon. But don't worry; once our work stabilizes in a couple of years, I'll definitely marry Astrid and bring her home."

Hearing this, Vivienne, who had been quiet for a while, lifted her eyes. Her icy gaze swept over Alfred.

There was a barely discernible gleam in her eyes, then she lowered her gaze without a word.

Cordelia frowned. "In a couple more years? In a couple more years, she'll be twenty-six. If you don't marry her, she'll be an old maid."

Alfred still wore a smile. "No. I promise, I will marry her."

Hearing this, Percival also lifted his gaze and cast a casual glance at Alfred.

"No way!" Cordelia's face darkened. "Astrid can't wait for two years, nor can we..."

Before she could finish, Vivienne suddenly interjected. "Cordelia, Astrid knows what she's doing. Alfred will marry her."

She pulled out a napkin and wiped some food crumbs from the corner of her mouth while looking up at

Alfred. "Right, Alfred?"

Alfred looked up, meeting Vivienne's penetrating gaze. His heart skipped a beat, but he still managed to smile. "Yes."

Vivienne slightly curled her lips but didn't say anything more.

Seeing Vivienne's stance, Cordelia thought for a moment before saying, "Fine, do as you wish then!"

She didn't understand why Vivienne suddenly said that, but she knew Vivienne was a determined young woman.

If she said so, there must have been a reason, right?

With that thought, she scanned Astrid and Alfred without saying anything more.

Astrid breathed a sigh of relief as she cast a grateful smile towards Vivienne.

After dinner, Astrid pulled out seven tickets to a piano concert at the Havenwood Opera House. Her excitement was barely containable.

"Dad, Mom, my idol Mila is actually coming to Havenwood for her tour. You guys have to come with me on Saturday."

She was originally planning to come back in a few days, but upon hearing about Mila's concert, she chose to take an earlier leave to return home.

"Astrid's always been a big fan of Mila. She had to pull quite a few strings to get all these tickets."

Alfred quipped with a chuckle.

"Sure." Dorian and Cordelia said in unison. They weren't particularly interested in the piano concert, but

they were willing to accompany Astrid for her joy.

After all, Astrid was about to be transferred to Rivenwood soon, and they would have even fewer

chances to meet.

Vivienne and Percival also nodded. They didn't have much interest either, but Astrid had just returned

home, and her happiness was what mattered.

After dinner, Cordelia helped Astrid and Alfred get settled in their rooms. It was only then that Astrid

brought up Arabella. "Mom, is Arabella on the run for her crimes now?"

Upon hearing this name, Cordelia fell silent. She merely sighed and said, "Let her be."

Chapter 223

In an alley notorious for its illicit activities.

Arabella was struggling to stand up in a cramped, damp room. Her legs were weak, and she could

barely manage to move with the support of the stained and disgusting walls.

The men on the ship had skillfully severed the tendons in her hands and feet, only leaving her able to perform basic tasks like eating, but with much difficulty.

After being sold to the owners of this place, she was confined to this small room, where she entertained clients around the clock.

As a newcomer, even with a scar on her face, she was fresh and alluring to their entire clientele. For the past few days, she barely had a chance to rest except during meal times.

She'd had enough. She could no longer endure living in that damp and disgusting room. The foul-smelling men who treated her like a plaything made her feel like she was living a life worse than that of a pig or a dog.

She secretly tore her sheets, intending to tie them to the iron bars covering the window and hang herself.

Just as she was about to do it, the door was suddenly pushed open. The men guarding her saw her actions and began to spew curses in a language she didn't understand. They dragged her off the bed and began pummeling her brutally and mercilessly.

The strips of cloth she had intended to use for suicide became a tool to bind her to the bed.

The men who had beaten her showed no mercy, even though she was already covered in bruises.

She saw a short man entering her room, and then her eyes suddenly filled with an even greater despair.

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Saturday.

At Havenwood Opera House.

Mila's concert was a grand affair, especially in Havenwood, where Debra was invited as a guest.

Debra, with his massive fan base and strong influence, made the concert tickets sell out the moment the news was released.

Astrid had managed to get hold of seven tickets only after much effort.

Astrid was dressed up to the nines for the event since she was a big fan of Mila. Alfred joked that she made it seem as if they were going to a matchmaking event rather than a concert.

Dorian and the others had also dressed formally for the occasion.

Only Vivienne was still in a white T-shirt and jeans. She stood out like a sore thumb among the formally

dressed audience.

She wasn't interested in Mila's piano concert; she was just there to keep Astrid company and make her happy.

She was bored and waiting for Percival to arrive when she noticed a middle-aged man trying to bypass the metal detectors.

She frowned and walked over to him.

...

Backstage at the opera house.

Today, Mila also invited the Brooks family.

Out of courtesy, Judith and Scott had brought the whole family along.

They arrived earlier than Vivienne's family, and Calista had personally led them to the backstage.

Calista was also dressed up. She wore a white split dress, her hair was tied up high, and her usual spectacles were replaced with contacts. She looked less like her usual dignified self and more like an alluring vixen.

Mila, in a royal blue designer dress, had just finished her makeup. Upon seeing the Brooks family walk



in, she immediately greeted Judith with a beaming smile.

Judith returned the smile with a nod.

"Scott, do I look good today?" Mila's gaze lingered on Scott. She intentionally showcased her figure.

"You once said blue suits me best."

"I did?" Scott couldn't recall ever saying that.

"Yes, you did." Mila's face flushed a little. She hadn't seen Scott in two months, which was rare.

Over the years, she frequently visited the Brooks Mansion in Rivenwood, trying her best to get closer to

Scott.

Two months ago, just as she was planning to take their relationship to the next level, Scott suddenly

acknowledged a daughter, Arabella.

Arabella was very smart and saw through her intentions towards Scott. She taunted Mila until she had

no choice but to back off.

Fortunately, Arabella wasn't Scott's biological daughter. Now, without Arabella around, there would be

no one to stop her from marrying Scott.

"Oh." Scott frowned but still complimented her out of politeness. "You look fine."

Mila's lips curled into a smile.

Ashley saw Mila's expression and gave a knowing wink to Melissa and Judith, suppressing her laughter.

Everyone knew about Mila's feelings for Scott over the years.

To be honest, Scott had been mourning Karen for many years. Now that Karen was gone, Judith, as a mother, hoped that there would be someone who could care for her eldest son.

But if Scott had no feelings for Mila, she wouldn't force him. After all, she knew how deep Scott's feelings for Karen were.

"Mila, there's some disturbance at the entrance."

At that moment, a staff member came over to inform Mila about the disturbance.

"What's going on?" Mila frowned. With her manager not around and unable to find anyone else, she turned to Calista. "Calista, could you handle this?"

Calista nodded and followed the staff member to the entrance. She saw Vivienne standing there with a cold expression behind Dorian's family and Alfred.

Calista gave Vivienne a once-over, noticing her casual attire of a T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. She

couldn't help but sneer to herself.

Such poor taste!

She walked over and asked the middle-aged man, who was clearly confronting Vivienne. "What

happened?"

"This woman suddenly attacked me when I was entering!" The middle-aged man angrily pointed at

Vivienne.

Calista finally turned her attention to Vivienne. "Mila's piano performances are a treat for individuals of

refined taste, not for those who thrive on creating a ruckus. Perhaps you should leave; I fear your

presence might tarnish the elegance of this place."

Her tone was courteous, but she was clearly reprimanding her.

Vivienne nonchalantly raised an eyebrow, giving Calista a casual glance. She clearly sensed the

hostility emanating from Calista.

"Miss, you've only heard one side of the story and have made your judgment without a single question.

Don't you think you're being rather hasty?" Astrid stepped forward, positioning herself protectively by Vivienne's side. My sister noticed this individual hiding a knife while trying to sneak past security into the concert hall. That's why she intervened! You can check the surveillance footage if you don't believe me!"

She pointed at the onlookers around them. "If that's not enough, you can ask them!"

The spectators nodded in agreement. "Yes, indeed. We saw the man drop a knife after this young woman stopped him."

It was then that Calista noticed the knife lying on the floor.

"My sister risked her safety for the security of your concert. Yet, you insulted her." Astrid said coldly, "I think an apology is in order."

The crowd agreed as they murmured, "Yes, indeed. You unfairly insulted her without understanding the full situation."

"An apology is due."

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Vivienne felt a warm surge of appreciation as she watched Astrid stand up for her.

Now that onlookers were pressing her to apologize, Calista's face turned from red to white. She

opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She knew her jealousy had gotten the better of her. She had eagerly seized an opportunity to belittle Vivienne, but now she was unwilling to apologize.

"Calista."

Just as Calista was glaring at Vivienne, refusing to back down, Mila, long noticing her absence, came looking for her, accompanied by the Brooks family.

The moment Mila made her entrance, the crowd at the venue gasped in surprise. "Oh my God, it's Mila herself!"

"She looks so young! She's almost fifty, but she looks like she's in her thirties!"

"She's so talented and beautiful. It's truly enviable!"

Mila reveled in the compliments as she stole a glance at Scott.

However, Scott, maintaining his distance, seemed indifferent to the praises. Instead, his eyes lit up when he saw Vivienne.

Mila noticed Scott's reaction and scrutinized Vivienne. The young girl was beautiful and elegant.

A chill ran down Mila's spine. She suddenly had a terrible thought.

Surely, Scott wouldn't be interested in this girl, would he?

"Ms. Hawthorn." Scott greeted Vivienne first.

Mila was taken aback. Was she also a Hawthorn?

Vivienne just gave him a slight nod.

"Ms. Hawthorn." Judith was also delighted to see Vivienne. She had tried to thank Vivienne several times for her past help but had always been politely refused.

This time, however, remembering Scott's suspicion, Judith looked at Vivienne with a newfound affection.

Vivienne, as always, responded with a cold nod.

"Calista, why is it taking so long?" Mila deliberately interrupted the conversation between the Brooks family and Vivienne. She went to Calista, but her gaze was fixed on Vivienne.

"Mom." Calista called out, unsure of how to explain.

"So, she's Mila's daughter." Astrid, who had always admired Mila, would have been thrilled to meet her under different circumstances.

However, Calista's recent rudeness towards Vivienne had made her less fond of Mila.

"Mila." Astrid spoke politely. "This man tried to sneak a knife into the concert, and my sister stopped him."

"But your daughter, without even understanding the situation, just listened to this man's side of the story and humiliated my sister. And she refuses to apologize."

Mila frowned and then turned her gaze to the middle-aged man.

"Mila, I finally get to see you!" The man suddenly became ecstatic; even his words tumbled out of his mouth in a rush. If it weren't for the security guard holding him back, he would have lunged at Mila. "I'm your biggest fan! I really love you! I only brought the knife because I was afraid someone might hurt you. I brought it to protect you!"

Mila, repulsed by the man's sleazy demeanor, attempted to smile reassuringly at him before addressing

Astrid. "He's a fan of mine. Any extreme behavior is just because he likes me too much. I think your

sister is overreacting. My daughter was just defending my fan. There's no need for an apology."

Astrid was nearly amused by Mila's twisted logic. She was at a loss for words.

"So, it's okay for fans to carry weapons, according to you." Vivienne smirked. "Looks like this concert is

quite dangerous."

With that, Vivienne turned and walked down the theater steps, with Dorian and the others following her in solidarity.

The other attendees, upon hearing that there might be extreme fans with weapons at the concert and seeing how Mila defended such behavior, started to reconsider attending the concert.

Shouts for ticket refunds filled the air.

Mila was a big name, and many of the attendees were influential figures in Havenwood. Upon hearing about the potential danger, even those who had already taken their seats started to leave, not caring about the refund.

In an instant, two-thirds of the concert hall was empty.

The remaining third were die-hard Mila's fans, but to the two-thirds who had left, these people seemed like extreme fans who were willing to risk their lives just to attend Mila's concert. This thought sped up their departure.

Mila was livid. She had only spoken in defense of her fan because Calista couldn't bring herself to apologize.



She certainly didn't condone extreme fandom, and she herself tried to avoid such fans as much as possible.

Upon seeing the infatuated and crazed look in the man's eyes after she defended him, she felt like running away.

She hadn't expected Vivienne to twist her words with a few nonchalant sentences, making two-thirds of her concert attendees leave.

If this incident made it to the news, she'd lose all her dignity. It might even affect her upcoming concerts. She could only imagine how her jealous peers would mock her.

She looked at Scott and Judith with a wronged and sad expression, hoping the Brooks family could help.

Scott, however, was keeping an eye on Vivienne. He had people watching her among the chaotic crowd on the stairs.

He watched as they subtly pulled a few strands of hair from Vivienne's head.

Vivienne paused and turned to cast a glance at Scott, her eyes laden with profound meaning.

Scott was taken aback. He could swear that she had figured out their intentions. Was she deliberately letting them get their way?

Otherwise, why was it that just a few days ago, his men had been stalking her, trying to get a sample of her DNA, but to no avail? They couldn't even get a single strand of hair, but this time, everything was so easy.

After seeing Scott's unwavering gaze on Vivienne, Mila's expression changed. She was certain that Scott was harboring a different kind of interest in Vivienne.

Because the Scott she knew would never look at a simple girl in this way.

"Vivienne." A tardy Percival, along with Thomas and the long-absent Leopold, sauntered up.

Chapter 225

Upon seeing Vivienne preparing to leave, Percival furrowed his brows. "What's going on?"

"Vivienne found someone in the audience trying to sneak in with a knife and stopped them." Astrid

relayed the situation to Percival with a tone of indignation. "But when Mila's daughter came out, she

immediately accused Vivienne. She even said that Vivienne would taint this place!"

A shadow passed over Percival's stoic face, and his narrow, deep-set eyes swept over Mila. "Is that

so?"

His voice was sparse and carried an ice-cold chill in it.

"Exactly!" Alfred chimed in. "Then Mila defended the knife-wielding fan, saying she likes such fans, and accused Vivienne of meddling."

"Oh, defending such fans?" Leopold, who had always been a staunch supporter of Vivienne, echoed their sentiments. "Aren't they afraid that the concert will be swarming with such crazy fans? Who would even want to attend?"

"If that's the case, it's better to not attend." Percival took Vivienne's hand as his gaze fiercely swept over Mila and Calista's faces before turning to leave with Vivienne. "So as not to taint your ears."

Calista's face turned a shade paler. She never knew Percival could be this ruthlessly blunt.

"Percival!" Mila's face darkened. "I am your elder! How can you speak like that?"

In her eyes, Percival would always be a pampered crippled who just happened to have power in

Rivenwood. No matter how much Richard doted on him, she never really regarded him seriously.

So even though Percival could stand now and Richard had announced that he would be the next head of the Ellington family, Mila's perception of him never changed.

Percival responded with a cold hum, "Elder? Not everyone is suited to be my elder."

"Mr. Ellington." Calista, unable to hold back, stepped forward. "May I have a word with you?"

"Who are you?" Percival furrowed his brows. His cold eyes were devoid of any emotion, and his face was icy.

"I'm Calista, the head of TIC Research Institute!" Calista exclaimed in disbelief.

Percival was her institute's sponsor, so they had already met several times. Yet she was astounded that Percival had no recollection of her.

"I see." Percival vaguely remembered the name. "Calista".

The unfinished project left by his master was handed over to the TIC Research Institute for continuation. He had personally designated it.

Rather than remembering Calista's face, he had always focused more on the progress of the research project.

He glanced at Calista, his tone indifferent. "You've put on too much makeup. I didn't recognize you."

Leopold couldn't help but laugh out loud. If anyone could land such a cruel blow, it had to be Percival.

Calista's face twisted in embarrassment.

Vivienne's gaze casually swept between Percival and Calista.

She finally understood the source of Calista's inexplicable hostility towards her.

This man seemed to attract a fair amount of attention.

Unfortunately, she didn't like others coveting what was hers.

She let out a cold laugh, unusually taking the initiative to hold onto Percival's arm as her eyes

flirtatiously looked at him and her tone lazily cooed for his attention. "Mr. Wolf, I'm tired."

"Tired? I'll carry you." Percival had never seen Vivienne act so affectionately towards him. Her calling

him "Mr. Wolf" nearly melted his heart.

With no regard for anyone else, he immediately swept Vivienne off her feet and started descending the

theater steps amid gasps from the crowd.

Vivienne had only intended to annoy Calista, wanting Percival to quickly leave with her. She didn't

expect her boyfriend to be so assertive.

She felt slightly embarrassed while he carried her away in front of everyone.

"Percival is mighty!" Leopold, initially stunned, burst into laughter, then abruptly remembered that if this

scene was captured and seen by Vivienne's other eight senior disciples, they would likely find a way to tease him.

Instantly, he could no longer laugh. He hung his head and followed Percival's footsteps with Thomas by his side.

After seeing their daughter being carried away, Dorian and others quickly recovered and followed suit.

Judith and Scott shared a knowing glance at the sight of Percival embracing Vivienne.

"I think I'll be leaving as well." Judith addressed Mila, her tone considerably cooler and devoid of its prior warmth. "I'm feeling a bit tired. Scott, will you walk me home?"

"Yes, mother." Scott firmly supported Judith. He didn't care about Mila's response, so the two of them began to descend the stairs.

Mila's expression flickered. She had already sensed the deep connection between Vivienne, Judith, and Scott, but she had not expected them to slight her because of Vivienne.

Did the Brooks family not care about their longstanding friendship? And Calista was currently attending to Tristan's injuries!

Timothy and Melissa, along with Ashley and Ronald, were left standing in bewilderment. After exchanging glances, they chose to apologize to Mila and follow Judith and Scott. The piano concert, having turned into such a fiasco, was destined to become nothing but a laughingstock. There was no point in them staying behind.

Mila watched as the Brooks family left one by one. Mila bit her lower lip as her face contorted in suppressed rage.

She suddenly realized that the close relationship she thought she had built with the Brooks over the years through her constant attentiveness towards Scott was in fact as fragile as a house of cards.

At that moment, a black limousine pulled up at the bottom of the theatre steps. Debra, dressed in a black tuxedo, and his manager stepped out of the car.

## Chapter 226

A smile adorned Mila's face as she saw the young piano prodigy, Debra, alight from the black limousine. Debra, who, despite being much younger than her, was just as famous and had a fan base that was twice the size of hers. Today, many in the audience had come specifically to see him.

Initially, Mila was hesitant to invite Debra as a guest to her concert at Havenwood. She was afraid his fan base might overshadow her. But now she was hoping that Debra could vouch for her and probably

salvage this chaotic situation.

But to her shock, the first thing Debra noticed after stepping out of the limousine was Vivienne, who was being carried by Percival. With a stoic expression, he asked her, "Are you hurt?"

"The great pianist, Mila's daughter said my shoes would dirty the concert hall." Vivienne replied nonchalantly. "So, I didn't dare step foot into her concert."

Frowning deeply, Debra immediately retracted his foot, which was about to step onto the stairs. "Then I won't step foot in her concert either."

With that, he quickly retreated back into the limousine, followed by his equally impassive manager. The limousine then swiftly drove off, leaving even Debra's fans bewildered.

When they finally realized what had happened, they regretted not seizing the chance to ask for his autograph.

On the stairs, Mila stood dumbfounded. She couldn't believe that Debra knew Vivienne.

What shocked her even more was that this young man was bold enough to disrespect her! After a brief exchange with Vivienne, he simply ditched her concert without so much as a goodbye?!



What was going on?!

All the while, Calista had been glaring at Percival, who was holding Vivienne in his arms. He carried Vivienne down the stairs and into the car, never once sparing a glance for her. Yet he treated the young girl in his arms with the utmost tenderness.

Why?

What made Vivienne so special?

No matter how many degrees Vivienne had, she was still jobless after resigning from her position at Cloudcrest High School. She was wasting her youth and a woman of no ambition. What made her worthy of Percival's attention?

Why couldn't he see how accomplished she was?

After a brief moment of anger, Calista quickly regained her composure. She had let her jealousy cloud her judgement, making her behave embarrassingly. That wasn't like her at all. She shouldn't be competing with Vivienne over trivial matters.

She needed to show Percival that she was the most accomplished woman in the world and that she was the only one worthy of standing by his side. She was determined to complete the research Percival

had entrusted to her.

Mila's piano concert, which started with grandeur and high expectations, ended in chaos and humiliation.

After two-thirds of the audience left and demanded refunds due to the unruly fans, Mila still performed.

However, perhaps because of the earlier incident, her performance was below par. She made several mistakes on stage. Even her loyal fans were disappointed, with many leaving halfway through.

By the end of the concert, only a handful of people remained in the audience, one of whom was the crazed fan who had tried to enter the concert hall with a knife earlier.

Backstage in her dressing room, Calista sat in silence, not even bothering to listen to her mother's performance.

"Calista, do you have a problem with that girl, Vivienne?" Mila asked.

Today's concert could have gone smoothly if not for Calista's irrational conflict with Vivienne.

"Calista, your actions earlier were not like you." Mila's gaze was fixed on Calista, trying to figure out what was going on.

She knew her daughter well. Calista was always calm and focused on her medical research. She was never easily disturbed. It was out of character for her to act this way.

"She's Percival's fiancée." Calista said, having regained her composure.

"So?" Mila asked, furrowing her brow.

Percival was nothing but a worthless cripple. Although he had recovered from his disability, it didn't change the fact that he was worthless. How could such a man be worthy of her carefully nurtured daughter?

"Percival is Mr. Percy." Calista replied.

Mila was taken aback. She had heard Calista mention the mysterious Mr. Percy, who funded the TIC Research Institute. Calista always spoke highly of him, and Mila could see that her daughter had feelings for Mr. Percy. She was happy to hear that her daughter was swooning for such a man.

A mysterious, powerful, and handsome man. He was indeed a good match for her precious daughter.

But she never imagined that this man would turn out to be the once useless and disabled Percival of Rivenwood.

It was all because Calista always avoided social events and had little to do with the upper class of

Rivenwood, so she had never met Percival in person.

Who would have thought that Percival was so good at hiding his true identity?

Everyone assumed that his power came solely from Richard's favoritism, but now it was clear that his hidden influence was much stronger than that of the Ellingtons of Rivenwood. In fact, the Ellingtons might even owe him a thing or two.

A man like him should belong to her Calista, just like Scott should belong to her.

She had long forgotten her disdain for that once useless Percival.

"No worries, I've heard his fiancée comes from a mediocre background, so she probably won't be of much help to him in his career." Mila comfortingly patted Calista's shoulder.

"Remember what I've told you, Calista. In matters of the heart, you must look beyond the present. You are the gem of our Pendleton family, one of the four major clans of Rivenwood. And when it comes to talent, you're a highly praised medical prodigy. Many famous and established corporations are eyeing to get even a small piece of the patents you've developed in your lab. Calista, you must believe in yourself. What you can offer him is far more than what a young chit could ever offer. If he didn't see

your talent, why would he choose you out of all the researchers?"

"I know, Mom." Calista nodded. She instilled this fact in her heart when Percival left with Vivienne in his arms.

Chapter 227

She acknowledged Vivienne's beauty and youth, but even the most radiant flower had its day of wilting.

Only her talent and her astonishing research accomplishments would never fade.

Didn't Vivienne also hold a Ph.D. in medicine?

She didn't care! She would crush that girl in her own field!

"Mom, are you going back to the Hawthorn Mansion today?" Calista, having regained her confidence, met Mila's gaze frankly.

"Of course not. I'm flying straight to the next city for my concert." Mila huffed lightly. "I have been quite kind to the Brooks family over the years. Today, they disgraced me. When they realize their mistake, they will undoubtedly feel guilty.

"If I return to face them, it would only be awkward and counterproductive. Let their guilt ferment for a while. I will make sure that their guilt deepens for their actions today."

She began to calculate and scheme for the future. Anyone could see the ill intent in her eyes. "Next

time we meet, they will back down because of this guilt. As for my things at the Hawthorn mansion, I

will have someone take care of it."

She raised an eyebrow at Calista. "What about you?"

"I will continue to treat Tristan, but I will inform the Brooks family to transfer him to Pendleton Hospital

in Rivenwood." Calista smiled softly. "After all, Rivenwood is my home turf."

Percival valued the project she was working on and often sent people to inquire about it.

As long as she called her research institute and told Percival that the project had made a significant

breakthrough, she didn't believe Percival wouldn't come to see her.

The mother-daughter duo exchanged smiles, their calculations unspoken.

...

On the way back to Jade Garden Residences.

Astrid felt guilty for what Vivienne went through today. She never expected that her idol and her

daughter would be so unreasonable.

She had happily taken her family to a concert, but it resulted in Vivienne being wronged for no reason.

Even though she wasn't in the same car as Vivienne, she kept sending voice messages to Vivienne on WhatsApp to apologize.

"Vivienne, I'm really sorry. I will never like Mila again, and I will definitely not go to her concerts."

"Don't blame yourself." Vivienne replied indifferently on WhatsApp, comforting Astrid.

Percival was to blame for attracting women for no reason.

She glanced lightly at the man sitting next to her. He was leaning back with his eyes closed, and his handsome face was lit up by the light from the car window.

Despite his cool and dignified demeanor, it was clear that his long leg was rubbing against Vivienne.

However, she didn't know if it was intentional or unintentional.

Vivienne sneered in her heart and stomped on Percival's foot without changing her expression.

Percival opened his eyes in pain. He raised an eyebrow at Vivienne, silently asking what was wrong.

"Sorry, my foot slipped." Vivienne replied indifferently.

Although her face was expressionless, Percival was alert enough to sense that his fiancée was angry with him.

But why was Vivienne suddenly angry?

He couldn't figure out the reason.

What should a man do when his fiancée was angry but he didn't know why?

He was perplexed.

Just then, Dorian's phone rang. He answered it and found out it was a call from Tranquil Estates

property management. "Mr. Hawthorn, your house has been burglarized!"

Dorian was taken aback. "What? Burglarized?"

"Yes, your house is a mess. You'd better come back as soon as possible." The property management replied.

Dorian suddenly thought of something. His heart tightened, and he looked at Vivienne.

When he saw Vivienne look back at him, he quickly lowered his eyes and returned to his conversation with the property manager on the phone. "I'm on my way."

"What's wrong?" Vivienne asked calmly.

"The house at Tranquil Estates has been burglarized." Dorian quickly hung up the phone and asked

Percival, "Percival, can you drop me off at Tranquil Estates first?"



"Let's all go together." Percival called Leopold, who was driving the other car, and asked him to take

Cordelia, Astrid, and Alfred back to Jade Garden Residences. He then directed Thomas to change

course and go to Tranquil Estates.

...

Tranquil Estates.

The burglars at the Hawthorn family's home were discovered by two new property management staff

who happened to be changing hallway lights on the Hawthorn family's floor when they saw people

sneaking out of the home.

After knocking them down, the burglars fled. The property management staff immediately called the

police.

When they arrived at Tranquil Estates, it was already 8 p.m. As soon as they entered the house, they

saw that everything was in disarray.

The two new property management staff were young and tall, both with injuries on their faces.

When they saw them return, they accompanied them in. "You better check to see what's been stolen,

so you can report it to the police later."

Vivienne glanced at the two property management staff and exchanged a glance with Percival. A

barely detectable glint flashed in their eyes.

"Thank you." Dorian thanked the two property management staff and quickly went to his and Cordelia's

bedroom.

The bedroom was not spared from the mess. The bedding and mattress were slashed open, spilling

synthetic cotton and sponge fragments all over the floor.

He moved nervously to the corner of the bed, and upon closer inspection, heaved an evident sigh of

relief. He crouched down and lifted the foot of the bed, revealing a hollowed cavity within the seemingly

solid bedpost.

He was torn between replacing the wooden peg that concealed the secret compartment or retrieving

the item hidden within when Vivienne's icy voice echoed behind him.

"So, this is where you've hidden it. No wonder I couldn't find it."

She had searched the Hawthorn household from top to bottom but never imagined that Dorian would

hide the potion in a hollowed-out bedpost. It was cleverly camouflaged.

Unless one were to lift the bedpost, it would be impossible to discover.

"Vivienne..." Dorian hesitantly started. However, he was cut off as his expression morphed into horror.

"Watch out!" He screamed towards her back.

Two gusts of wind came hurtling towards Vivienne from behind her. Without a moment's hesitation, she ducked and swung her elbows, effectively repelling the two intruders, before positioning herself protectively in front of Dorian.

Their faces changed color at the failed surprise attack. Vivienne was clearly prepared for them.

Percival and Thomas stood behind them. Percival casually rolled up his sleeves to reveal his muscular forearm.

"Vivienne, the door's locked. Feel free to start." He said nonchalantly, all the while exuding an icy aura that made his voice sound as cold as the frost of the deep arctic.

Vivienne and Percival had sensed something was off with the two property management staff from the start.

They were physically imposing, yet they moved with a stealth that belied their size. Despite their best efforts to blend in, they couldn't hide the murderous intent that oozed from their pores, a clear sign of

specialized training.

Well, if they had the nerve to show up at her door, they could forget about leaving without a fight.

## Chapter 228

Vivienne scoffed as her fingers twitched to reveal a silver needle.

If she could solve a problem with one needle, she didn't want to use two.

But then the two men surprisingly pulled out hypodermic needles, injecting their bodies with some sort of substance.

"Percival!" Thomas exclaimed, immediately stepping up to shield Percival.

No wonder GTO sent only two men over. They were prepared.

"Dorian." Vivienne's voice turned serious for once. "Stay hidden and protect yourself."

Before Dorian could respond, the two drugged-up men had already rushed towards Vivienne like wild beasts.

Vivienne and Percival, in turn, charged at them like lightning.

As Percival charged out, he ordered Thomas. "Go protect Dorian."

Thomas rushed over, shielding Dorian.

After injecting the substance, the two men's strength and speed increased exponentially as their eyes became bloodshot with madness.

Upon their first clash, both Vivienne and Percival's faces grew grim. They were dealing with the two men's attacks as the air filled with the muffled sounds of fists meeting flesh and bodies colliding.

Dorian, protected by Thomas, was dumbfounded. He had seen how Evelyn, when he first met her, fought like a lone wolf, and now he was witnessing the same scene with Vivienne.

At that moment, the images of mother and daughter overlapped in his vision, and he couldn't help but feel his eyes moisten.

Why did she have to bear the same burden and fate as her mother?

After a few rounds of fighting, Vivienne and Percival skillfully swept their legs, kicking the two men into the living room.

Their large figures crashed into the room like sacks of potatoes, landing amid a mess of items.

The two men, with the last vestiges of their sanity hanging by a thread, couldn't believe their eyes as they stared at Vivienne and Percival. They had injected themselves with a substance that enhanced their physical abilities by burning their life force.

They were among the GTO's finest assassins, and after being enhanced by the substance, no ordinary person could possibly defeat them one on one.

Were these two even human?

"We've been underestimated!" Vivienne looked at the men and scoffed. "Last time, Omen caught me off guard. This time, without any hostages to worry about, you think a cheap drug could stop me?!"

The two men paused, then hardened their faces, howling as they charged again.

...

In the nearby unit, in Coral's bedroom.

Faye, who had come over for a visit with Charlotte, looked towards the balcony inexplicably. "Coral, is there a slaughterhouse near your neighborhood?"

"A slaughterhouse?" Coral looked at Faye as if she were an idiot. "This area is worth its weight in gold.

What kind of boss would dare open a slaughterhouse here?"

"But why do I feel like I heard the sound of a pig being slaughtered?" Faye asked, puzzled.

"That's impossible." Charlotte also started to laugh. "If there were a slaughterhouse near Tranquil

Estates, it wouldn't be able to sell for such a high price."

Just then, Coral's phone rang. She checked her messages and started laughing. "Strange... The neighborhood group chat is also saying they heard the sound of a pig being slaughtered."

The group chat was filled with complaints.

"Who could be so rude? Slaughtering pigs in the middle of the night? It's so noisy!"

"I think it's coming from building 12."

"It is from building 12. I can vouch for that because I live there. It's so noisy. Why isn't the property management doing anything?"

"It seems to be from unit 1601, the same unit that reported a burglary today. I think they're crying because their valuables were stolen."

"That unit is rented, right? It's so sad. They don't have much money, and they were robbed. Let's not complain about them."

"They're crying so miserably. Should we go comfort them?"

"Let's not. They might think we're just there to gawk at their misery. That would be so rude."

Coral, Charlotte, and Faye laughed as they read the messages. Faye sighed and asked, "Poor owner,

do you know them, Coral?"

Coral thought for a moment, but she couldn't remember who lived in unit 1601 of building 12, so she shook her head. "I don't know. Let's continue our game."

So, the three girls went back to their game and ignored the situation.

In reality, the two assassins were indeed close to crying after being beaten by Vivienne and Percival.

Ever since the last kidnapping incident, Vivienne had managed to extract the substance the masked men had injected themselves with from their blood. She sent it to her laboratory in Rivenwood to find an antidote.

Although an antidote had not yet been found, a neutralizing agent that could weaken the enhancing effects of the substance had been developed.

Vivienne had it in her possession, so she decided to test it on these two men.

During their fight, she managed to use the neutralizing agent on the two men, weakening the enhancements they had gained from the substance.

Naturally, they were no match for Vivienne and Percival.



Only after Vivienne and Percival had completely beaten the two men into submission did Dorian and Thomas emerge from the bedroom.

Dorian stared at the unconscious assassins on the floor, while Vivienne was casually stepping on one of their heads.

Then there was a knock on the door.

Percival gave Thomas a look, and Thomas cautiously peered through the peephole. His tense body immediately relaxed.

After opening the door, Leopold bounced in. "Surprise!"

Immediately after, he widened his eyes at the sight of the two unconscious men and Vivienne, who was using one of them as a footrest.

"Vivienne, what on earth are you doing?"

Vivienne's phone buzzed in her pocket. She ignored Leopold and checked it out. It was a message from Draven.

"Boss, Anna has disappeared."

After dealing with Felix, Vivienne dispatched Draven to Rivenwood to keep an eye on and protect

Anna.

She had a premonition that if Anna were to leave, she would most likely expose herself to GTO, but she didn't expect things to go south so quickly.

A slight frown appeared on Vivienne's face.

"Got it; I'll handle it." She replied.

She finally found Anna after searching for so long, but before Vivienne even had the chance to find her in Rivenwood, she went missing again.

"What are you here for?" Percival asked Leopold, his tone indifferent.

Leopold leaned in with a playful smile on his face, but his voice lowered and became serious. "There's news from headquarters. Base number three has been infiltrated and heavily damaged. We need to quickly head back to Rivenwood."

Chapter 229

Percival furrowed his brows and glanced at Vivienne, who was busily texting.

"Percival, this is no time for love affairs." Leopold said sternly.

Percival redirected his gaze. His voice was deep and somber as he said, "Indeed. It's time to return to

Rivenwood."

"Rivenwood?" Vivienne approached, arching an eyebrow. "Mind if I hitch a ride?"

Percival looked at her in surprise. He had been pondering how to convince Vivienne to accompany him to Rivenwood.

Vivienne showed him her phone screen. He noticed the news about Anna's disappearance and felt a sinking sensation in his heart.

Dorian, observing the serious expressions on their faces, had a rough idea of what was happening.

He sighed and asked, "Vivienne, are you leaving?"

"Yes, I'm heading to Rivenwood." Vivienne turned to him, nodding solemnly. "I'm leaving now."

There was no time to waste with Anna's situation. Any delay could mean missing crucial leads.

"Dorian, you've seen how dangerous this object can be in your hands."

Dorian remained silent.

"Consider this. If it had been Cordelia and Thaddeus with you today, what might have happened?"

Vivienne continued, "It's better if I take it."

Dorian glanced at Percival and the others, noticing Vivienne's trust in them through her actions today.

After a long pause, he sighed heavily and handed over a small vial he had retrieved from under the bed to Vivienne. "Vivienne, your mother said that unless you were strong enough, you should never get involved in this mess. It seems you are strong enough now."

At least she had allies to fight alongside her. She was not alone and had people to protect her.

"Thank you, Dorian." Vivienne took the vial.

The transparent green liquid inside the specially reinforced glass vial was mysteriously tempting.

This little object had cost her mother's team their lives years ago.

Her "thank you" was sincere. She was grateful for Dorian's help in hiding her mother within the Hawthorn family.

She appreciated his kindness, despite knowing she wasn't his biological daughter.

She was thankful for his protection of the vial, even though it brought danger to him and his family.

Now, it was time for her to lift the burden that had bound him for so many years. This was her destiny and her responsibility to bear.

"Go on then." Dorian smiled. "But remember, you always have a home here."

"Okay."

"Don't worry, sir. I'll take care of Vivienne." Percival assured Dorian as he wrapped his arm around Vivienne.

Dorian waved them off, his expression bittersweet.

Without further delay, Vivienne and Percival asked Thomas to take them back to Jade Garden Residences to pack.

Back at the Jade Garden Residences, Cordelia was surprised to see Vivienne and Percival hurriedly packing their bags. "Vivienne, Percival? Where are you off to?"

"I have some business at Elite University. I need to leave immediately." Vivienne explained.

Cordelia opened her mouth to say something else, but Dorian cut her off.

"Let them go." He said with a reluctant smile.

Cordelia fell silent, understanding something from Dorian's expression. After a moment, she smiled at Vivienne. "Alright. Be safe."

"Thank you, Cordelia." Vivienne replied softly.

She had grown gentler towards her loved ones, shedding the aggressive demeanor she once had.

When she first returned to the Hawthorn family, she intended to investigate where the vial was and avenge her mother. But over time, she started to appreciate Dorian's kindness and to value the sense of family she found there.

Now, it was time for her to take on her destiny and responsibility. She would protect her family, just as they had protected her.

Vivienne glanced at Thaddeus, who was cradling Zara, and ruffled his hair affectionately with a teasing smile on her face and affection in her eyes. "Thaddeus, you need to behave while I'm gone."

"Can't you take me with you?" Thaddeus's big eyes glistened with tears, and Zara in his arms let out a sympathetic "meow."

"Be good, Thaddeus. I'll be back."

She was heading to Rivenwood this time and probably wouldn't be able to come back often.

Dorian and the others had their own lives to lead. They couldn't possibly bring Thaddeus along.

"Promise you'll come back soon, then." Thaddeus said, bravely holding back his tears.

Vivienne's heart melted. She bent down to hug Thaddeus gently, then handed him something. "Here.

This is a gift for you."

"Vivienne!" Both Astrid and Alfred, hearing that Vivienne was leaving, hurried down from their rooms on the third floor. "Why are you leaving so suddenly?"

"I have some business in Rivenwood." Vivienne replied, smiling at Astrid.

"I see." Astrid didn't press for details. She smiled back. "That's alright. I'll be transferred to Rivenwood in a few days myself. Though my job doesn't give me much time off, we'll still be able to meet up."

"Exactly." Alfred chimed in with a big grin on his face. "When that happens, we will treat you to dinner."

"Deal." Vivienne waved at the Hawthorn family, then turned and left with Percival, who had been waiting at the door.

Once they were gone, something slipped from Thaddeus's grasp since he was holding Zara and fell to the floor with a clatter.

Cordelia picked it up. It was a property deed for a house in Tranquil Estates with Thaddeus's name on it.

Cordelia's eyes widened in shock. She reached out and grabbed Dorian's arm. "Dorian, look at this!"

Dorian looked and was just as stunned. "A property deed for Tranquil Estates? What's going on? Why

is Thaddeus's name on it?"

Chapter 230

Dorian was dumbstruck.

Wasn't this the house he used to rent for five hundred dollars a month?

How did it become Thaddeus's?

"Did you also see Thaddeus' name?" Cordelia looked up with confusion etched all over her face. "I

thought I was seeing things."

The two were silent for a while, then it hit them.

"Vivienne bought the house in Tranquil Estates!"

Cordelia, her eyes welling with tears, plunged into Dorian's arms. "I knew a house for only five hundred

a month in Tranquil Estates was too good to be true. That girl, Vivienne..."

She felt so stupid. Anyone with a grain of sense would know that a house in Tranquil Estates wouldn't

be rented out for just five hundred dollars a month. Moreover, this neighborhood had never been open

to external renters.

Despite this, they had rented it at an incredibly low price.



It was Vivienne's house.

Dorian held Cordelia as a lump began to lodge itself in his throat. He felt bad. He owed Karen and

Vivienne so much, and despite his best efforts to make up for it, he kept accumulating more debt.

Tears kept streaming down Cordelia's face. "Dorian, we can never repay Vivienne."

Dorian gently patted her head and whispered, "Then let's just love her more in the future. I will work

hard to build up my career so we can move to Rivenwood, where we can take care of her."

"Okay." Cordelia said with a smile.

"Mom, Dad, you're old married folks, so why are you so clingy?" Astrid joked to lighten the mood.

"Your boss gave you a week off. You're not in a hurry to leave, are you?" Cordelia didn't answer but

glared at her.

"No, no rush." Astrid was a bit scared when her mother suddenly became upset.

"If you're not in a hurry, then stay home and keep me company for a few more days." Cordelia sighed.

"All my children are leaving the nest. I'm starting to feel lonely."

Astrid fell silent.

Her mom sure was a handful. She didn't have to take her frustration out on her just because she

missed Vivienne.

...

Two days later, in Rivenwood.

In the quiet suburban forest, Anna, with a swift and clean move, plunged a knife into the heart of the

last man in black. After pushing his bulky body away, she staggered back a few steps and leaned

against a tree to catch her breath. Around her, seven or eight men in black lay dead.

Night had fallen, and the cold moon hung high in the sky, seemingly watching the injured girl through

the sparse branches.

Anna caught her breath, tore off a piece of her sleeve with her bloody knife, and used it to bind the

wound on her arm, tying a knot with her teeth.

Just as she released her teeth, she saw a flashlight darting around in the darkness of the forest.

“Damn it! These guys are like flies!” She cursed under her breath as she spat out a mouthful of blood

and headed in the opposite direction.

After she was kidnapped, she managed to escape when her captors let their guard down.

She was now on the run and had been relentlessly shaking off their pursuits and fighting off assassins.

Finally, she sought refuge in this forest. But she wasn't expecting her pursuers to catch up to her so soon.

The cold moon shone ahead, and she moved slowly through the dark forest, one step at a time.

The path ahead was unknown, and there was endless darkness behind her.

Suddenly, she heard the honk of a car horn and ran towards it. If she could stop a car and escape to the city, she could hide better, even if she couldn't contact her people.

Not much later, she saw the light from the street lamps. She quickened her pace as she moved towards it.

She stumbled out of the forest and finally reached the road. She was about to head towards the city when she heard the sound of cars behind her.

Her heart leaped with joy, but it came crashing down when she saw the black cars and the men in black inside them.

The black cars, upon seeing Anna, immediately sped up towards her.

She ran as fast as she could, but suddenly, a silver car and another black car blocked her way. A sense

of despair washed over Anna.

However, just when the leading black car behind her was about to intercept her, the silver car zoomed past Anna and hit the black car, flipping it over.

Anna was stunned. When she saw the beautiful, cold face in the silver car, she was overjoyed. “Ms. Vivienne!”

Vivienne glanced at her and stepped on the gas, making the car swerve to block the other black cars.

The men in the black cars were ruthless. They never slowed down and crashed into Vivienne’s silver car one after another.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Vivienne’s silver car’s passenger side was severely damaged, and the entire car moved due to the impact. The screeching sound of tires brushing mercilessly against the asphalt filled the air.

“Ms. Vivienne!” Anna cried out in worry.

Vivienne suddenly opened the car door, jumped out, rolled over to Anna, and pulled her to run. “Go!”

Percival drove another black car over and stopped beside them. Leopold opened the back door and

pulled them into the car.

Before the car door even closed, Percival hit the gas, spinning the car around and driving off.

At the same time, a installed time bomb in the silver car exploded, taking the engines and fuel tanks of other black cars with it.

The powerful explosion almost flipped Percival's car over.

Anna turned back and saw the burning cars they left behind. In the midst of the flames, several men were crying out in pain and rolling on the ground in agony.

Leopold also turned back. He looked at the calm Vivienne and Percival as he whistled, "That's what you call a real man. Real men never looking back at an explosion!"

"I'm a woman." Vivienne casually corrected him.

"Cough, cough, Vivienne, you're something else!" Leopold could brown-nose as smoothly as a seasoned politician. "Though you're a woman, you've got more guts than any man I know. You're the real deal. No dude can keep up with you."

"Are you implying that I'm some kind of gender-bender?" Vivienne shot him a sly, side-eyed look, revealing a hint of malice in her eyes.

"No, no, I'm complimenting you!" Leopold hastily backpedaled. "I'm saying you're tougher and stronger than any man or woman I know."

"Well, after all these years, I can't say you've made much progress elsewhere, but your silver tongue certainly has." Vivienne remarked nonchalantly.

"That's all thanks to your good teaching, Vivienne." Leopold didn't feel a shred of shame for his buttering-up skills.