

## **Million-Dollar 351**

### Chapter 351

Jeffrey's eyes bulged in disbelief, and for a long moment, he struggled to process what he had just heard.

After a brief pause, he snapped back to reality and roared at Fiona Ellington, "Are you out of your mind? Ten billion dollars to them? Do we look like we're running a charity here?"

With ten billion dollars, you could open a string of world-class art galleries! He thought.

Fiona must have lost her marbles by giving out such an astronomical number.

Fiona shot him an icy glance before turning to Vivienne and Percival, "Give me an account number. I'll transfer the funds to you!"

She wasn't offering this fortune for Jeffrey's sake, but to keep Percival and Vivienne from dismantling the other art galleries.

Some of the galleries Jeffrey had established were a front for under-the-table dealings, which were secrets that outsiders must never uncover. It was a network she had painstakingly built, hidden from her entire family.

Even Jeffrey, the supposed head, was clueless about it.

If these secrets were ever exposed, she'd stand to lose up to thirty billion dollars.

When weighed against ten billion, it was a no-brainer. She had to protect those assets.

And Fiona didn't buy for a second that Percival could go after her family without a reason.

Mr. Percy's stature alone had put him at the zenith of power; he wouldn't bat an eyelid at a few art galleries, let alone a few hundred billion.

Yet, he was insistent on tearing down the galleries. She suspected he knew something.

It seemed Percival had to go. His very existence was the most significant threat to her.

With Percival around, the inheritance wouldn't fall into her hands even if the old man died. Not to mention that Richard Ellington was still alive.

If Percival were out of the picture, the other Ellington nonentities wouldn't stand a chance against her.

Vivienne raised an eyebrow and her gaze harbored meaning, "Alright!"

She promptly provided her account details.

"I'll need to discuss this with my family first, given the sum involved. You'll have the money by tonight at the latest!" Fiona declared confidently. It seemed that she was not the least bit worried about whether

her parents, Henry and Heloise Ellington, would agree to the transaction.

Vivienne nodded, "Agreed."

With that, she made a call to the National Gallery's secretary, and soon after, the team that had come to seal off the premises withdrew.

Jeffrey watched in fury as Fiona casually promised to hand over ten billion dollars. He stormed off, neglecting the gallery's guests. He had to get back and convince his parents not to release the funds.

Fiona also took her leave after she she nodded to Percival and Vivienne.

Once they'd left, Percival and Vivienne made to leave too. But they were suddenly halted by a voice.

"Miss! May I purchase that painting from you?"

Vivienne turned to see an elderly man leaning on a cane; his hair was almost entirely white with just a few strands of black remaining.

He looked to be in his seventies, dressed modestly but exuding a palpable authority. His aged, cloudy eyes seemed sharp as they fixed on her.

Vivienne paused before responding, "This painting is a copy."

"I'm aware," the old man replied, "but you wouldn't sell the original, would you?"

Vivienne smiled and nodded, "Exactly!"

"The person in this painting feels familiar to me. I'd like to buy it to help find her," the old man disclosed without reservation. "I hope you will sell it to me!"

Vivienne looked up, "You recognize the person in this painting?"

It was merely a figure from the back, and only someone who knew the individual very well could identify it.

"There's a mole behind her ear," the old man recounted; his voice was tinged with a hint of melancholy.

"My lost daughter has a mole in the same place. Even though it might not be her, I want to investigate."

Upon hearing this, Vivienne's grip on the painting tightened, "Your daughter? What's her name?"

"Sasha Perez!" the old man said as his tears welled up. "I've been searching for her for thirty years without a trace. I heard she might have come to Rivenwood recently, so I'm here to look."

Vivienne was taken aback.

Sasha? It was a beautiful name.

She couldn't recall meeting anyone named Sasha, yet the name felt eerily familiar.

"Miss, if you're reluctant to sell, I won't insist. But I heard you say the person in the portrait was your mother, who has passed. Is that correct?"

Before the old man could finish, Vivienne interjected, "Yes."

Regretting his words, the old man apologized, "I'm sorry to have touched a raw nerve."

"It's fine," Vivienne replied softly, her thoughts evidently elsewhere.

"If I may be so bold, the mole behind your mother's ear is in the exact spot as my daughter's. May I ask if you know much about your maternal grandparents?"

"They," Vivienne's voice suddenly turned cold, "are in prison!"

Her mother had caused their incarceration personally.

It was after they had started their flight from the past that her mother took her to visit her family in the Rivenwood.

It was her first encounter with her maternal relatives, and it revealed a harsh truth: some parents truly can be indifferent to their own kids.

Long before, her grandmother had planned to let her mother sleep with her grandfather to give birth to a child in order to save the only son of their family.

Vivienne's mother's medical skills hadn't excelled at that time. When Vivienne's grandmother offered her mother a bowl of homemade soup—a first in her life—her mother was overjoyed. Because growing up, she had always been the one to cook and clean.

Her mother's joy blinded her to the drugs hidden in the soup.

Then she could only watch helplessly as she was carried to her grandfather's room, watching him disrobe in front of her; her entire body was fraught with a sense of despair.

In the end, her mother mustered her last bit of strength, grabbed a vase from the table and struck her grandfather's head, fleeing the house.

That day when her mother returned home, she sought to confront them that after all these years of her absence, had they felt even a twinge of remorse?

But the other party showed no signs of remorse, and their audacity knew no bounds. They surrounded

Vivienne and her mom, intent on dragging them off to some seedy nightclub downtown.

Her mother had reached her limit. She'd been quietly gathering dirt on them for months, and she finally handed over the damning evidence to the cops. Not a single one of those crooks got away; they were

all hauled off in handcuffs.

Vivienne had no clue what sort of skeletons her mother had unearthed from her family's closet. She

only knew one thing: their crimes were serious, so serious that they were given a lifelong sentence with

a minimum of fifty years' prison time without parole!

The old man flinched at the news. But seeing the troubled look on Vivienne's face, he quickly

apologized, "I'm sorry!"

Vivienne snapped out of her reverie and handed the painting she was holding to the old man, "This is

for you. It was never mine to begin with."

With those words, she didn't linger. She turned on her heel and walked away.

But as she turned, she caught a glimpse of a familiar figure out of the corner of her eye; her body

tensed up instantly!

When noticed her gaze, the figure turned and vanished into the crowd.

Vivienne snapped back to reality and bolted after it.

Percival was left in a daze by her sudden dash.

Just as he was about to follow, Vivienne called out, "Call Jerry and the guys to tell them I spotted my

mentor!"

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Percival froze for a moment.

Vivienne's mentor?

Wasn't he dead?

After a beat, his eyes narrowed and he grabbed his phone to call Jerry.

He had saved the contact info from the last time they had dug into Vivienne's fellow disciples.

As soon as the call connected, Percival blurted out without waiting for Jerry to speak, "Vivienne said

she saw your mentor. Go find him!"

He could grasped Vivienne's implication in a moment. Though she hadn't explicitly asked Jerry to

search, he knew she was desperate to find her mentor.

On the other end, Jerry's fingers stalled. But he quickly responded, "Got it."

After hanging up, Jerry sent a message to the group chat. [All hands on deck. Vivienne spotted our

mentor within Rivenwood territory. Search party, assemble!]

The message detonated a bomb in the chat.



Dawson: [Did the old coot pull a Lazarus on us?]

Eric: [Just squashed a lab rat and my eyes are acting up. Jerry, are you sure your text said Vivienne saw the mentor?]

Brian: [I get it. The old man's playing us for fools! By pretending to take his own life with poison, he was just testing his latest concoction. He was playing dead before he skedaddled!]

Leopold: [That heartless geezer. I was in bits when I heard the news! He's actually been toying with us! You owe me a river of tears, my mentor!]

The chat blew up with message after message.

Jerry, somewhat exasperated, typed: [Enough chit-chat. Let's start the hunt! If Vivienne didn't call herself, it means the old man's bolted.]

Leopold immediately fired up. [Exactly! We can't let him get away; we need answers!]

Nine people sprang into collective action, dividing and conquering in the pursuit.

...

At the art gallery.

Percival called Thomas, asking him to join forces with Jerry in the search.

Vivienne had dashed off too quickly. By the time Percival notified everyone, she was out of sight. So he decided to wait for her return.

About an hour later, Vivienne came back with a scowl.

"Lost him?" Percival asked.

She shook her head, her expression sour, "He sure is spry for his age!"

She was confident in her chasing skills. But in front of the old man, she felt like an amateur.

She had chased him through several streets, and he had vanished right in front of her eyes!

It wasn't that she couldn't catch up. He just disappeared. He was performing some kind of street magic trick!

Percival looked up at her, "Did you always know he wasn't dead?"

Vivienne dialed Jerry, instructing them to call off the search, before turning back to Percival, "I knew."

She thought her mentor had kept his secret well. But she had sensed something amiss long ago.

Her mother's grave was next to her mentor's. When she visited her mother's grave, she noticed that the soil on her mentor's grave seemed disturbed.

Finnian had his fair share of enemies.

Worried someone might have desecrated the old man's resting place, she exhumed the grave only to find an empty coffin!

The old man had pulled the rug from under her, leaving her the Emerald Monastery while he set off for greener pastures.

"He probably has his reasons for not wanting to meet. When he's ready, he'll show up," Percival tried to console her softly.

Vivienne paused, then straightened up her face, "Who wants to see him? I just want my money back.

He borrowed a thousand bucks before he 'died' and never paid it back!"

Percival was momentarily speechless.

Vivienne! Let's be a bit more generous! I'll give you a thousand bucks instead. He thought.

It seemed she read his thoughts; her delicate face suddenly fell, "That was my salary from Emerald

Monastery! The old man paid me twenty bucks a month and it took five years to save so much money!"

Most of her time before earning her own money had been spent in Emerald Monastery. She rarely left,

except for necessary exams or research. That thousand truly was a fortune to her.

The old man was unethical!

He swindled her out of a thousand bucks and then 'died'!

Percival cleared his throat, "Next time we run into him, I'll help you catch him. Make him pay you back a hundredfold!"

Vivienne smiled slyly, "I could get behind that!"

It was nearing dinner time.

Percival took Vivienne out for a meal at a cozy diner before dropping her back at the Brooks Mansion.

He was eager to have Vivienne move in with him, but with pressing matters at hand, affairs of the heart had to wait.

After seeing Vivienne to the Brooks Mansion, Percival headed to his private flat.

Dorian and Cordelia had been staying there and lying low for the time being, seldom venturing out.

Percival would check on them periodically and assist Dorian with work matters.

Dorian's company was now running smoothly, though he was not yet ready to step back into the public eye. For now, Percival managed all the business on the table.

The grand opening would be scheduled once everything settled down. Currently, the main focus was on factory production and operations, which weren't too demanding.

...

At the Brooks Mansion.

Upon Vivienne's return, Judith was in the living room, speaking with Timothy Brooks and his wife

Cheryl.

Judith glanced up when she saw her, "Back so soon?"

Her demeanor towards Vivienne had cooled significantly since their last encounter.

Timothy and Cheryl also just nodded in acknowledgment.

Vivienne returned the gesture with a noncommittal, "Yeah."

Without lingering for small talk, she headed straight upstairs.

As she reached the staircase, she overheard Judith say, "I understand. I'll discuss it with her."

Vivienne paused mid-step and glanced back at Judith, her eyes narrowing briefly. She didn't linger and headed straight for Thaddeus's room.

As she approached the doorway, laughter spilled out from within.

Charlotte and Thaddeus were both inside, seeming to get along famously.

Having Charlotte tutor Thaddeus was turning out to be a great idea.

After a moment of silence, Vivienne turned and retreated to her own room. Just as she entered,

Matthew climbed through the window.

Vivienne looked up at him and poured a glass of water, "Any news?"

Matthew took a gulp and nodded, "Yeah, Brody just rolled into Rivenwood and headed straight to the

Brooks family's private clinic."

He glanced at the clock, "By now, he should be starting treatment on Calista."

"Right! I get it," Vivienne said, not surprised at all.

"Brian's back too, tailing Brody," Matthew set the glass on the table, "Caught him on the way here.

What's the plan for Brian, Vivienne?"

"Let him rest for now. I'll figure out what to do with him later," Vivienne instructed.

"Got it." Matthew hesitated, then added, "Brody's medical skills could definitely save Calista. Are we

just going to let him do his thing?"

Vivienne's lips curved into a slight smirk, "Let him treat her. Calista isn't the priority. The important thing is I've got the answer I was looking for."

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Outside the art gallery.

Jasper Perez clutched a forged portrait Vivienne had given him, exhaling a wistful breath.

After hours of standing there, long after the gallery had emptied, he couldn't shake the feeling that the silhouette in the artwork was eerily familiar.

Yet it didn't quite match the memory of his daughter, Sasha, who had gone missing years ago.

Perhaps it was just his age playing tricks on him. After all, Sasha was just a ten-year-old kid when she vanished, and the woman in the portrait appeared to be in her mid-thirties. The gap in years made it hard to draw any solid connection.

Or was it simply because of the mole?

Just then, a man in a crisp black suit hurried over, "Dad, you had me worried sick! You can't just disappear like that. The brothers would have my head if anything happened to you!"

It was Jasper's fourth son, Yuri Perez.

Jasper gave him a side-eye and carried a commanding aura, "Since when do I have to report my

whereabouts to you?"

"I didn't mean it like that!" Yuri said with a hint of frustration in his voice.

Ever since Sasha's disappearance, Jasper had never looked at his sons the same way. He had treated them with cold shoulders and hard stares over thirty years.

Yuri sighed, "Your health is not well, Dad. If you go somewhere, at least let me know. It worries us, you know?"

Jasper scoffed, "Instead of worrying about me, why don't you put that energy into finding Sasha?"

"We've already sent people out to look again," Yuri replied.

Jasper peered down at the portrait again, then handed it to Yuri, "Take a look at this. The woman in this picture has passed away, leaving a daughter named Vivienne."

Yuri glanced at the portrait and paused, taken aback, "The mole is so identical to Sasha's. Dad, where did you get this?"

"What does it matter where I got it from?" Jasper shot back, emotionless. "Vivienne has a fiancé,

Percival, who is from the affluent Ellington family. Look into them and see if you can dig up anything



that might lead us to Sasha."

"Okay. I'll get right on it!" Yuri said, a surge of hope in his voice.

Their search for Sasha had been exhaustive and fruitless despite it took the whole family's efforts.

They just found something but the lead was soon cut off. It didn't come to him that the picture, in which a woman having an identical mole behind the ear to Sasha, suddenly appeared.

Now, with a potential lead, he got an intuition that the light had pierced through the constant gloom.

Jasper grumbled with disdain after shooting him a look, "Just go and don't dawdle. I don't want to see you until you have news; seeing you boys just irks me!"

Yuri bristled internally. Some families favored their sons, but Jasper? He appeared to hold a grudge against them as if they were strays in the street.

Wait, they were even worse than strays. Strays at least got scraps from his table, while his sons were lucky to get a grunt.

Yuri knew better than to leave Jasper alone, so he said, "Let's get you home, Dad. Trust me, I'll find Sasha for you."

If he didn't bring his dad home, his brothers might very well tear him apart and feed him to the dogs.

Jasper roared, "Home? I'm not going anywhere until Sasha is found. And I want you to buy me a townhouse. I'll be staying here for a while."

He couldn't shake the feeling of familiarity with Vivienne, and he needed to find out why this young woman seemed so oddly close to him.

"What? You want stay in Rivenwood? It's dangerous here. You're coming home with me!" Yuri protested.

Before he could finish, Jasper swung his cane, striking Yuri on the head. It was followed by a fierce reprimand, "Just do as I say, will you? What dangers are you talking about? Do you see any gangs? If so, I'd like to see them try anything on me. I'll send them running."

Yuri was speechless.

"Still standing there? Go on, get moving!" Jasper bellowed.

Yuri wanted to protest, but seeing his father's temper, he reluctantly agreed, "Okay, I'll get you settled first."

For now, he'd have to comply and quickly inform his brothers. They'd need to arrange for Jasper's

protection. This old man was truly a handful.

Yuri tried to help his father, but Jasper pushed him away, "Since when do I need help walking?"

Jasper glanced at him, devoid of expression, "Until Sasha is found, I'll cling to life. Even Death himself can't take me!"

Yuri sighed in resignation.

The old man's health had slumped for a long time and his whole family told him to recuperate. But the stubborn old cap refused to listen to advice.

"What are you waiting for? Go buy me a townhouse! Do you want to freeze to death here?" Jasper was furious at the sight of his son.

What's the point of raising sons? They had no heart at all and it was better to have a daughter.

How nice little Sasha was. When she was little, she would pester him for a hug every day and give him her favorite treats.

Calling Daddy and Mommy was the first thing she did every day she woke up. And she would speak with her girlish voice, "Daddy, Mommy, I love you two!"

When he was angry, she would come over in time to pat his back and say softly, "Daddy, don't be

angry, I will sing you a song! "

When he was hurt, she would shed her tears and say, "Daddy, I will blow your pain away. "

That was before she was five years old, and he remembered every single piece of memory so well.

And his sons were so useless. They only knew how to make him deadly angry every single day.

Yuri held her tongue. He knew that silence was golden.

...

Back at the Ellington estate, Jeffrey stormed in to seek her mother, Heloise, "Mom, you need to talk to

Fiona. She wants to give ten billion to Vivienne!"

The thought of that sum falling into Percival's hands made him seethe.

Heloise was admiring her latest jewelry purchase, a necklace that must have cost a fortune, when the

words almost made her drop the precious piece to the floor.

She fumbled but managed to catch the necklace just in time, then turned her gaze to Fiona, "Are you

out of your mind? What possessed you to just give away ten billion? Do you think money grows on

trees?"

Their family had scrimped and saved to amass ten billion over the years, and now Fiona was talking about giving it away as if it were nothing!

Heloise really began to doubt if her daughter's head was screwed on right.

Fiona glanced over at Jeffrey with an impassive expression and said coolly, "Why don't you ask your darling son what he's done?"

It was then that Heloise turned to Jeffrey and demanded, "What have you gotten yourself into?"

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Jeffrey felt a pang of embarrassment somehow. After all, painting was his pride and joy, his claim to fame.

But now, having been publicly called out by Vivienne for plagiarism, he also faced the mortifying task of confessing this to his parents. It was the ultimate disgrace.

As Heloise and Fiona watched him with piercing gazes, Jeff's irritation boiled over into anger, "So I copied Vivienne's painting, then what? How was I supposed to know she was Eulalia? If I had known, I wouldn't have copied it!"

"Plagiarism?" Heloise looked bewildered. "How did plagiarism come into this?"

She believed in her son's talent. Though she was no art connoisseur, Jeff's paintings were always a

delight to the eye.

Jeffrey explained the whole fiasco to her.

Heloise's brows knitted together in an instant, "It's just a painting! Why is she being so aggressive?

She's marrying into the Ellington family, for heaven's sake. Does making us pushovers do good to her?"

Fiona glanced at her and then settled herself on the couch, saying coolly, "I don't know what good she wants get. But we must pay the money."

Heloise was instantly resistant, "The money is ours. If we don't want to pay, what's she going to do? Twist our arms?"

This wasn't just a million or two.

Handing the ten billion would leave their family penniless.

Jeffrey nodded in agreement, "Exactly! We're not paying. What can she possibly do about it?"

Fiona's eyes flickered with a chill. "So, you want to let them shut down the galleries?" she retorted.

"It's just a few galleries; if they close, they close!" Judith dismissed the concern. "Worst comes to worst,

I'll just open new ones for my son!"

Fiona scoffed derisively, "Huh. If you want to see my brother ruined, then don't pay."

Heloise wasn't listening. The thought of handing ten billion to someone else made her physically uncomfortable. "I don't care; there's no way I'm parting with that money," she stated.

"Right, with ten billion, you could open countless galleries. I won't let Percival and Vivienne get the best of us," Jeffrey added.

Fiona shot him a look and then turned to Henry, who had been silently listening to the conversation, cup in hand. "Dad, what do you think?" she asked.

Prompted by Fiona, Henry set down his cup, "I agree with your mother. We're all blood relatives here and Percival's been chosen as the heir by the old man himself. He'll have far more than us in the future. It makes no sense for him to come after our wealth. I will not part with that money."

Fiona's lips curved into a sly smile, "Even if it means risking our family?"

Henry paused, uneasy. "What do you mean?" he asked.

Fiona pulled out her phone, clicked on a photo, and handed it to Henry, "I found this in Percival's room.

He's investigating you! Dad, what do you think Grandpa would do if he found out you've been evading

taxes and swapping quality materials for subpar ones?"

Henry stiffened.

His father would not hesitate to throw him in jail. Or worse, he would disinherit their branch from the

Ellington!

After a moment, Henry spoke slowly with furrowed eyebrows, "I'll arrange for the money to be sent

tonight."

"Dad!" Jeffrey exclaimed in disbelief.

If they gave up the money so easily, what would become of them?

"Shut your mouth! If it weren't for your foolish plagiarism stunt, we wouldn't be in this mess," Henry

bellowed.

Jeffrey recoiled instinctively, "I... I didn't expect this to happen, but we also don't need to just hand over

the money. Besides, they have no proof of your misdeeds. Even if it gets to Grandpa, we can argue our

case."

Henry's voice was icy, "We have no case! They'll find everything if they start digging."



"Honey?" Heloise sounded worried.

"Don't worry, it's only temporary. In the end, it'll all come back to us." Henry soothed her.

Heloise had been with Henry long enough to trust him at the most fundamental level.

Eventually, she too nodded in agreement.

Watching this unfold, Jeffrey couldn't help but seethe with rage.

Why Fiona's few words could convince his parents to give up a large sum?

Was Fiona siding with Percival and Vivienne?

But now, he was powerless to stop it.

...

Two days later, Calista was discharged from the hospital.

Scott Brooks called the family to welcome her home.

Vivienne was busy with Percival, playing with anime figurines with little Thaddeus.

Charlotte was stuck at school for the week.

Thaddeus had perked up considerably over the past few days.

Upon hearing Scott's announcement, Vivienne raised an eyebrow.

A welcome party without consultation?

She and Percival headed downstairs with Thaddeus, only to see Calista striding in alongside Scott, head held high like a proud peacock.

Her eyes, brimming with ambition, swept over Vivienne and settled on Percival with a possessive intensity.

Vivienne's gaze flickered over Calista, then just as quickly moved on.

Calista shuddered under Vivienne's scrutiny, her fingers tightening in search of some comfort.

She couldn't shake the memory of the last time when she was hit by Vivienne.

Scott took his place at the head of the table beside Judith and surveyed the room. "Now that everyone's here, I have something to say. I plan to host a family reunion dinner to officially acknowledge Calista." He announced.

"What?" Kala Brooks was the first to react. Her voice was laced with shock, "How can that be?"

She couldn't believe these words were coming from Scott.

No matter what, Calista was just a bastard child, almost a blight on Scott's otherwise impeccable

record.

But now...

Carl Brooks frowned too, his expression turning sour.

Only Judith, the Timothy couple, and some elders of the family including Melissa Brooks, seemed unfazed by the revelation and remained silent.

Kala furrowed her brow as she turned to Scott, "Scott, I respect your choice, but this might not be appropriate. She's illegitimate. What right does she have to a family reunion dinner?"

Vivienne also fixed her gaze on Scott as her lips curled into a mocking smile.

Percival's deep eyes glinted coldly. He glanced at Vivienne and, seeing that the young girl didn't mind, his expression softened considerably.

Carl's eyes landed on Calista, his disapproval evident as he said, "Just bringing her home is enough; a family reunion dinner is really unnecessary."

At first, Carl had taken a liking to Calista, but then the things she had done were quite unbecoming.

Carl felt a sense of shame at the thought of Calista joining the Brooks family.

Scott merely gave them a cool glance and let them argue. He didn't utter a word.

That's when Tristan spoke up, "I think the reunion dinner should be held. Calista is Dad's daughter, and that's an undeniable fact. Not only should the dinner take place, it should also be a big to-do."

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The elders of the Brooks family had no objections to Tristan's proposal.

But Kala wasn't having any of it! She immediately retorted, "A big to-do for what? Tristan, don't forget that Vivienne is the daughter of the person who saved your life! Have you no conscience? Where do you put Vivienne by making such a fuss for Calista?"

Tristan's gaze sharpened, and he glanced sideways at Vivienne, noting her indifferent expression. He replied, "My gratitude and the family reunion for Calista are two separate matters. After all, she is a Brooks, and now that she's back, a proper gathering is called for."

"She's a Brooks, so what?" Kala fumed. "She's not the only daughter in this family."

What was so special about Calista anyway?

If Mila didn't stir the pot, Calista wouldn't be an issue.

Kala's heart ached for Vivienne. Scott had initially claimed to dislike Calista and didn't agree with her return. Yet, in the blink of an eye, not only did he visit Calista in the hospital, but he also hired an

exceptionally skilled doctor to set her broken bones.

Kala had seen it with her own eyes. Calista's limbs were broken, and doctors capable of such a successful procedure were few and far between.

And yet, Scott had managed to enlist Dr. Brody, whose skills were renowned and sought after, often commanding a hefty fee.

And Scott did it all for Calista.

That might have been forgivable, but now he was planning a family reunion for her. Had he spared a thought for Vivienne?

Carl glanced at Calista, who looked smugly triumphant, and a flicker of disdain crossed his eyes.

While the family squabbled over her, Calista maintained an air of victory, which was worlds apart from Vivienne.

Carl was about to speak up for Vivienne when Judith suddenly cut in, "Enough! Calista is our child, and the reunion will go ahead. The matter is settled, no more discussion."

With that, she turned to Vivienne; her tone was suggesting a discussion but her stance left no room for argument, "Vivienne, Calista is your sister. From now on, you two should get along."

Realizing her tone might have been harsh, she took Vivienne's hand and patted it gently, "The best thing for our family is to live together, peacefully and securely."

Vivienne looked at her with a semi-smile on her face but remained silent.

Calista quickly stepped forward and grasped Vivienne's hand, "Vivienne, you can count on me. We're sisters now and I'll treat you right."

Her tone carried the pride of a victor.

Vivienne glanced down at her hand, now in Calista's grasp, and walked over to a nearby table to pick up a wet wipe. She calmly cleaned her hand that had been touched. Then, tossing the wipe into the trash, her voice was cool and detached, "My mother only had one daughter, me. Don't try to forge connections; you're not fit to be my sister!"

With that, she lifted her gaze, her eyes cold, "And another thing, don't touch me again. It's dirty!"

Calista's face contorted with anger.

That damn Vivienne!

How dare she call her dirty? On what grounds?

She was the second daughter of the Brooks family and Vivienne should keep that in mind!

Calista composed herself, hiding her feelings, and said with a smile, "I know you must have misunderstood my past actions, sister. I apologize, and I promise there will be no repeat. We're family after all."

Vivienne gave her a glance but said nothing, taking a seat and adopting an indifferent air.

Scott, who had been silent since announcing the reunion for Calista, looked at Vivienne before speaking, "I'll consult the professionals to pick a date for the reunion. Once it's settled, I'll inform you all.

This decision is final; I don't want to hear any more unpleasantness."

With those words, Scott cemented the decision.

Kala, incensed, began to speak, "Scott..."

But a single glare from Scott silenced her; his eyes were filled with a threatening intent that startled her into silence.

The rest of the Brooks family didn't dare to object either.

Once the matter was decided, Judith turned to Percival, who had been silent throughout, "Percival, we have some family matters to discuss. You may leave."

Percival raised his gaze and gave Vivienne a sidelong look, "Alright."

As an outsider, it surely wasn't his place to be involved in the Brooks' private affairs.

After Percival left, Judith returned to her seat and addressed the room, "There's one more thing we need to discuss."

Everyone looked at her.

Her gaze lingered on Vivienne, who sat languidly with an air of nonchalance about her. Judith retracted her gaze and got to the point.

"Mom, just say what you need," Timothy urged.

Judith's eyes fell on Vivienne once more, "It's not a big deal, really. It's just that Vivienne's engagement to Percival is to be called off."

The announcement swept through the hall like a tempest.

Vivienne lifted her gaze. Her hands were resting on the chair's arms and a smirk tugged at her lips.

Calista, sitting beside her, looked shocked but secretly thrilled. She would have a chance again once the engagement was called off.



Kala was so stunned that she nearly lost her bearings.

It was Ronald Brooks who broke the silence first, "How can you do this? Vivienne and Percival, have been in each other's orbit for so long. How can we just call off the wedding like that?"

The younger members of the family, like Kala, all turned their eyes to Judith, waiting for her to shed light on the situation.

Only the elders seemed unfazed, as if they had been expecting this turn of events.

Judith glanced at Vivienne, whose expression remained stoic, though a knowing smirk tugged at the corner of her lips as if she held all the cards.

She pursed her lips before explaining to the family, "Your great-grandfather had struck a deal with the elder Ellington to bind our families. That was, after three generations, the most outstanding granddaughter of the Brooks family was to marry the heir of the Ellingtons.

Calista might have only recently been acknowledged, but she is undeniably the crème de la crème of the Brooks' granddaughters, and the Ellington heir is none other than Percival."

As Judith unveiled the secret, a ripple of shock passed through the family.

This was news to them.

Judith turned her attention to Vivienne, “Vivienne, what do you make of all this?”

The moment the words left Judith's mouth, she braced for Vivienne’s outrage.

Instead, Vivienne surprised everyone with a laugh. It was a wild, almost predatory laugh that sent shivers down the spine.

She brushed her bangs back with a flourish and her voice was laced with mischief, “Well then, let’s call it off!”

Chapter 356

The room fell into a stunned silence as Vivienne's declaration hung in the air.

She had actually agreed to it?

How could she possibly agree?

Ever since her engagement to Percival, their interactions had been the subject of much scrutiny.

Vivienne may have seemed aloof on the surface, but she treated Percival differently from everyone

else. It was commonly believed that Vivienne held a fondness for him.

Yet, she had just consented to break off the engagement?

Kala and Carl sat with their mouths agape, words failing them.

Even Judith, Scott and Timothy were taken aback by Vivienne's ready acquiescence.

Particularly Judith. She had braced herself for a battle of words when she broached the subject. But to her astonishment, Vivienne had capitulated so easily with barely a sentence spoken.

Kala was the first to snap back to reality from the prolonged moment of shock. She hurried to

Vivienne's side and took a seat, pleading, "Vivienne, think this through. I know it's upsetting that Scott is acknowledging Calista, but you can't just gamble with your happiness like this."

Kala grasped Vivienne's hand earnestly, trying to reason with her. She assumed Vivienne was agreeing to the annulment because of Calista.

But Vivienne simply turned to her with a sudden smile. "Seems like she's got quite the influence, doesn't she? Should we just indulge her?" she retorted.

Her smile was enchanting, and for a moment, Kala was utterly spellbound and forgetting to respond.

Judith, on the other hand, was relieved; a smile graced her face at last.

Vivienne was no longer at odds with her. She thought.

"Good! This is for the best. From now on the Brooks family can finally be at peace,. Nothing is better than family unity," she said with warmth in her voice.

Calista, coming to her senses, quickly chimed in, "Sis, I've made a mistake. Whatever you need, just tell me. I'll do whatever I can to make it up to you."

There was a hint of guilt on her face whereas it was tinged with a smug satisfaction. The thought of becoming Percival's woman filled her with a rush of exhilaration.

Percival would ultimately be hers.

Vivienne scoffed and pulled out her cell phone, dialing Matthew.

He answered quickly and she got straight to the point, "Go to the Ellingtons. Annul the engagement."

Matthew was stunned on the other side. He couldn't believe his ears so he asked, "An annulment?"

"Yes," Vivienne replied coolly. "Just say that the patriarch of the Brooks family and the patriarch of the Ellingtons had arranged a marriage. They now request that the most accomplished granddaughter of the Brooks family marry the heir of the Ellingtons."

Matthew was speechless.

What the hell?

The Brooks family had just welcomed Calista back and now they were doing this to Vivienne?

After hanging up, Matthew texted Jerry: [The Brooks family wants Vivienne and Percival to break off the engagement!]

Since Matthew wasn't in the group chat with Jerry and the other eight junior disciples, he had to send a private message to Jerry.

He then made his way to the Ellington household.

Percival had just returned from the Brooks Mansion and was about to enjoy a drink with Richard when the housekeeper announced Matthew's arrival. Percival was puzzled because Matthew rarely visited without reason.

Could something have happened to Vivienne?

His brow furrowed as he commanded, "Let him in."

In no time, the housekeeper brought Matthew inside.

"Is something wrong with Vivienne?" Percival asked.

Realizing that Percival was unaware of the situation, Matthew cleared his throat awkwardly before breaking the news, "I've been sent by Vivienne... to annul your engagement."

The atmosphere shifted suddenly and there was a palpable tension emanating from Percival.

Richard, alarmed, stood up abruptly, "Why on earth would they annul a perfectly good engagement?"

He turned his glare on Percival, "You little rascal, did you do something to upset Vivienne?"

Percival was at a loss for words. He had no idea at all. He had just left the Brooks Mansion, where everything seemed fine.

He looked directly at Matthew. His presence was icy, "Explain that clearly."

With a resigned sigh, Matthew began to relay the situation at the Brooks family.

"The Brooks family claims there was a prior engagement agreement with the Ellingtons. They want Calista to marry you instead, so they asked us to cancel your engagement with Vivienne. Vivienne is a dutiful grandchild, so she's decided to go along with the Brooks family's wishes."

All the while, Matthew kept a wary eye on Percival for fearing an outburst from the man in front of him.

Percival remained silent while Richard erupted in anger, "Those thugs have heads full of muck! Are they tired of living comfortably by constantly causing trouble for Vivienne? And what's Calista's worth? She thinks she can claim my chosen heir with her homely face? How big does she think her face is?

I hadn't kicked the bucket yet, and here they were, giving my darling Vivienne a hard time. If I were to

pass away, what then? That old cap Baron is unable to keep his house in order. No wonder the Brooks can't hold a candle to the Ellingtons. With that attitude, he'd never catch up to me in a million years."

He reprimanded.

"Nope, I won't stand for this," Richard fumed, "I handpicked Vivienne to be my granddaughter-in-law, and anyone bullies her will walk over my dead body! As for Calista, who the hell is she? Her piece of junk thinks she can vie with Vivienne for my grandson? I will never recognize that girl as a part of the family!"

With that, Richard stormed outside, muttering about blowing up the nursing home where Baron was now.

As Richard vanished into the distance, Matthew glanced at Percival, "Should I head back then?"

Percival gave him a sidelong glance.

Matthew felt like he was being haunted, but he managed to keep a smile plastered on his face.

He couldn't let Vivienne down, after all.

"Go tell Vivienne that the engagement still counts!" he declared.

Matthew shivered at the response. Clearly, his presence was no longer welcome. So he made his way

out alone.

Back at the Brooks Mansion, the Brooks family was anxiously awaiting Percival's decision.

Matthew breezed in, ignored everyone and went straight to the point, "Vivienne, Mr. Ellington won't back down from your engagement!"

Vivienne raised an eyebrow and pulled out a credit card, "I'll give him five million to call it off."

Matthew was speechless.

Vivienne was truly formidable!

He hurriedly took the card back to the Ellington estate.

Percival looked at the credit card and his face turned blue as if he was poisoned.

"To hell with that," Percival growled, tossing the card onto the table, "Here is twenty million. Tell her that

the engagement will still count!"

Matthew felt like crying.

Their game of rich was wearing him out!

But humble as he was, he dared not protest. So he took the card back to Vivienne.



Vivienne glanced at Percival's card, "Here's fifty million. Call it off."

Percival, on the other side, sat in his study and crushed a glass in his hand, "Here's one hundred million. I'm not calling it off!"

Vivienne countered, "I give him two hundred million to call it off!"

Percival upped the ante, "Five hundred million; I'm not backing down!"

Back and forth they went until Matthew's legs were about to give out from exhaustion.

But the battle of wills raged on, and Matthew, in a moment of exasperation, suggested, "Vivienne, maybe we should just go through with it?"

Vivienne shot him a look, then produced a black card, "One hundred billion. The engagement is off."

Matthew was dumbstruck.

As long as Vivienne was happy, he guessed.

But what he didn't expect was that when he delivered the black card to the Ellington estate, Percival just pocketed it and drawled, "Deal."

Matthew's head spun with confusion.

Was he serious?

Chapter 357

On the other side of town, Richard stormed into the bakery with his entourage and bought away every last cake on the shelves. Then, after snatching up a dozen blowguns, he charged towards the nursing home with fury in his eyes.

At that very moment, Baron Brooks was lounging comfortably in a deckchair, soaking up the sun and listening to an opera recording. Life without that pesky Richard was bliss!

Just as he reached for the glass of water on the side table, the door to his room burst open with a violent kick. Startled, he spilled water all over himself and was instantly enraged.

Whirling around, he saw Richard leading a posse with an air of vengeance, each one armed with cakes of all things.

Baron' brow furrowed in anger, "What's gotten into you, you old jerk? Why busting into my place with all

those cakes?

Did Richard finally find his conscience and decide to throw him a birthday bash? He thought.

But that couldn't be right; his birthday was months away, deep in December.

Baron braced himself as suspicious picked his nerves. What kind of nasty trick was Richard planning this time?

Richard merely glanced at him dismissively. Without bothering with a single word, he turned to his bodyguards with an order, "Let 'em have it!"

Before Baron could even grasp what was happening, the guns were loaded with cakes and, with a loud "BANG!", and the pastries smashed precisely onto his bed.

Baron was furious as he bellowed, "Richard! Do you want to get yourself killed?!"

Ignoring his outburst, Richard stood in the center of the room, leaning on his cane with an air of unshakable calm.

The bodyguards fired the cakes one after another, and in moments, the walls, the ceiling, and the furniture in the room were all plastered with creamy shrapnel.

Baron was apoplectic, so much so that he nearly passed out.

All cake cannons were fired after a few minutes.

Richard nodded in approval on seeing the disastrous room, "Perfect! Just what I wanted!"

He had toyed with the idea of blowing up the nursing home, but despite his rashness, he couldn't

muster the nerve. Ignoring the fact that he couldn't get his hands on a real bomb, the nursing home was state-owned. Blowing it up would spell the end for him.

He wasn't about to sacrifice himself just to teach Baron a lesson. It simply wasn't worth it.

So, after much thought, the cake assault seemed like an excellent alternative, and the result was indeed satisfying. The room would take days to clean.

Baron, gasping for breath, was covered in cake splatter; his clothes were a mess.

"Richard! I'll have your head for this!" he shouted and lunged forward, but his foot slipped on a piece of cake, sending him crashing to the floor with a pained "Oof!"

Lucky for him, his regular workouts saved him from a more serious injury.

Richard sneered at the sight, "That's a lesson for you, old man. If you dare to mess with my granddaughter-in-law again, not only your room will be blasted the next time, but the whole Brooks estate!"

He lifted his chin defiantly, "Don't believe me? Just try it and see if I dare to blow your place into the ground!"

Baron, whose face twisted in pain and anger, retorted immediately, "Nonsense! Nobody bullied your baby granddaughter-in-law. You're just stirring up trouble for no reason!"

"Oh, playing dumb now, are we?" Richard's smile was menacing. "Your family people had kicked my door to annul the wedding and you are still feigning innocence here. Do you need me to help recount how your father bonded with my old man years ago?"

Baron was taken aback, "Annulling the wedding? What?"

"Your baby son and your wife tried to call off Vivienne and Percival's engagement and wedding and push for Percival to marry Calista instead! And they were claiming some nonsense about your father and mine arranging a marriage between the best of the Brooks and the Ellington heir. Are you daydreaming?" Richard's gaze was icy, "Back in the day, your dad saw my dad as an easy mark. He conned my old man into that engagement because the Ellingtons were thriving under my leadership. I told you that time that I'd never agreed to it!"

Baron faltered; his memories were flooding back.

There had indeed been such a deal. His father valued the capability and fortune of the Ellingtons so he was aiming to align the Brooks' with that family. It didn't matter which Brooks granddaughter married

into the Ellingtons; securing a match with the heir was all that counted.

Baron had objected, but unlike the Ellingtons, which Richard built and ruled, he had no say in the Brooks family, which was built all by his father at the time.

He acquiesced the situation but Richard paid them a visit just to tell them he rejected the engagement.

The disagreement had simmered down and was eventually forgotten.

Baron was clueless as to why it was being dredged up now.

Richard's cold stare bore into him, "I didn't just disagree back then; I drafted a dissolution agreement, which you signed personally. Have you forgotten everything before sending yourself into the grave, old man?"

Mention of the agreement reignited Baron's fury, "You tricked me into signing that when I was drunk! You

don't agree with it, and neither do I!"

Richard, that wretch, had lured him out for drinks, got him sloshed, and made him sign that accursed agreement.

He nearly got his legs broken by his old man because of that!

"Heh!" Richard sneered with a mocking laugh, "What's the matter? It's fine for your dear old man to pull a fast one on my pops, but I can't play you for a fool? This, my friend, is what they call tit for tat!"

Baron was seething with anger.

"Anyway, I delivered the message that I don't agree with that engagement! I've kept the annulment papers safe and sound. If you dare to go back on your word, don't blame me for wrecking the Brooks family!" Richard glanced at him with a deep voice, "I may not be involved in the family business anymore, but that doesn't mean I can't stir things up! If you push me to the edge, and I'll bring down the full might of the Ellington family on you, and bankrupt you lot!"

With that, he snorted coldly, "The Brooks family is nobody while it always picks on my granddaughter-in-law. I wouldn't even bother with your bunch of clowns if Vivienne is not one of the Brooks!"

Having said his piece, Richard spat on the ground in Baron's direction; and with his bodyguards striding behind him, he left with an air of defiance.

Baron's face was ashen with rage, yet he was utterly powerless to do anything.

That Richard was nothing but a scoundrel! Always going after the easy targets!

Looking around at the chaos in the room, Baron was fuming.

He looked up only to see a bunch of old men at the door, watching the drama unfold. With a roar, he bellowed, "What are you looking at? Get in here and help me up!"

One of the men at the door said, "Who would dare go in there? The floor's covered in cake. If we slip and fall, are you gonna pay up for my medical expenses? No way!"

Baron was left speechless.

Bah!

What a bunch of snobs!

Chapter 358

In the quaint suburban enclave where the Brooks family resided, there was a buzz of anticipation hanging in the air for news from the Ellingtons. Yet in this whirl of excitement, nobody paid the slightest attention to the bombshell Vivienne had dropped: a staggering offer of hundred billion to call off her engagement.

And no one seemed to question how Vivienne, a girl raised in the quaintness of an old monastery, had access to such an exorbitant sum.

When Matthew returned with the news that Percival had agreed to the dissolution of the engagement,



the Brooks household was astounded. It was beyond them why Percival, who had always treated Vivienne like a precious gem, would so readily let her go.

The Brooks were all dumbfounded!

Kala, regaining her composure first, spat out in anger, "Ugh! What a jerk!" She had thought so highly of Percival, charmed by his dotting ways with Vivienne. She had almost believed in true love because of him. But now, an engagement broken so easily? She wished all playboys would just go to hell!

Calista, too, was baffled. Although she had hoped for Percival to be free, she never imagined it would happen so smoothly. Did this mean she could now step into Vivienne's shoes and be with Percival herself? Oh, the very thought made her head spin with delight!

Scott paused briefly upon hearing the news; a glint of calculation passed through his eyes.

Judith, however, was all smiles, "Well, that settles it! Percival is just as sensible as Vivienne. He's such a good lad!"

Vivienne gave her a dry look and said flatly, "Congratulations. You got what you wanted." Without another word, she turned and ascended the staircase.

Matthew hurried after her.

Once inside her room with the door firmly shut, Matthew opened his mouth to speak, but Vivienne held up a hand to stop him.

She pulled out her phone and scanned the room, a red dot flashing on the screen. A cold smirk played on her lips as she swiftly tapped away.

After a couple of minutes, she stowed her phone away.

Matthew, her loyal companion, instantly understood the situation, "They bugged your room?" he asked with a voice tinged with disgust.

"Hmm," was all Vivienne offered; her face was flat.

For Scott to bug her room was expected, nothing surprising there. She left the device untouched so they could still hear what she wanted them to hear. After all, underestimating her was their first mistake.

Did they really think a simple bug would outsmart her?

Matthew knew that, if Vivienne was here to speak up, it meant that she wasn't threatened by the bug anymore. So he ventured, "Vivienne, why did you agree to their wishes and break off the engagement

with Mr. Ellington? And why keep Calista around to stir up trouble?"

Vivienne's eyes were icy as she replied, "The murkier the waters, the better."

Matthew fell silent. He was privy to most of Vivienne's plans, but there were still many things he didn't grasp.

"What about the missing babies? Any leads?" Vivienne changed the subject.

"From what we've gathered, the missing babies should've been taken to the Rivenwood," Matthew said gravely. "Rivenwood must be housing a GTO lab. I suspect they're intending to conduct virus experiments there."

Vivienne's expression turned frosty. The existence of a GTO lab in Rivenwood was within her expectations. Mr. B wouldn't have stayed there for years without setting up a lab. GTO was always a cautious place with numerous hideouts; its members remained strangers unless on a joint mission.

It was an urgent thing to find that lab and save those infants.

"And Brian? What has he been up to lately?" Vivienne inquired.

Matthew looked embarrassed, "He's been living it up at the nightclubs! "

He was surrounded by a bevy of beauties and a sea of wine, song, and dance – he's in heaven.

Vivienne pinched the bridge of her nose, exasperated, "Tell him to get his act together and go after

Brody!"

Matthew jumped at the command, "Right away!"

He had a myriad of questions to ask Vivienne but he didn't dare to ask right now, "Should I just go,

Vivienne?"

"Get lost!"

"Got it."

Matthew made a hasty exit as he bumped into Jerry and his posse of nine, who had stormed over like a

tempest.

He smacked his forehead. Now there was trouble!

Jerry approached with a steely gaze. "How's Vivienne?" he asked.

Matthew blinked, "She's... well, eating and drinking as usual."

Dawson exclaimed, "It's done! Vivienne's non-reaction means she's on the brink of something big."

Leopold clenched his teeth in fury, "Those damned Brooks! How dare they treat our Vivienne this way?"

I swear we'll tear down their home!"

Percival had been dispatched on a mission not long ago, and who would have guessed that in such a short time, the Brooks clan would dare to mess with Vivienne.

They even had the gall to demand she call off her engagement?

What were they thinking?

Were they really naive enough to believe that Vivienne and Percival's bond could be broken that easily?

To use an engagement as leverage against Vivienne... these folks were clearly looking for trouble.

Jerry, as the eldest among his disciples, typically kept a watchful eye over his younger ones. But this time, even he was fuming, "As Vivienne's disciples, it's a shame for us to let somebody bully her like that! We should've been her backbone!"

They might not have been fond of Percival and Vivienne as a couple, but in their eyes, Vivienne deserved nothing but the best.

If the Brooks family dared to push Vivienne into breaking off her engagement, that was a whole different ball game.

"Right!" Gary chimed in, "We've been out of the game for too long, and it seems some folks have forgotten what we're capable of."

Eric added, "Then let's show them what we're made of. Let them see that Vivienne, under the protection of Emerald Monastery, isn't someone they can just trifle with."

Daniel smirked, "Perfect timing. My crew's been itching for some action. Let's use the Brooks family for some target practice."

"Target practice? What's the excitement in that?" Daniel retorted, "Just tie them all up and clean the Brooks family out."

Brian scoffed, "Nonsense. Is that the best you guys can do? If we want to teach them a lesson, it needs to sting. My dogs at the kennel have been hungry for a while now. Let's set them loose!"

Larry, toying with a knife in his hands, lifted his gaze and said with an airy tone, "I've had the bombs delivered. You guys might want to stand back so you don't get caught in the blast."

Leopold was speechless.

Damn! Larry was on another level indeed!

Blowing up the Brooks estate! How had he not thought of that himself?

Indeed, experience trumps youth every time.

As the brothers bantered, Matthew was sweating bullets. With an awkward cough, he interjected,

"Umm... Percival agreed to break off the engagement with Vivienne."

"What?!" Nine voices erupted in unison, deafeningly loud.

Matthew cleared his ears and said earnestly, "Yes, Vivienne offered a hundred billion, and Percival took the money and called it off!"

The brothers' faces turned as dark as coal from the mines, "To dare to abandon Vivienne... he's a dead man!"

Dawson roared, "Forget the Brooks clan for now. We need to settle the score with Percival first!"

With that, the nine men hopped into their cars and sped off.

Matthew was left standing there, bewildered.

He was shouting to himself, "Hey, wait! That's not what I meant! I was just stating the facts and I didn't ask you to go after Percival!"

Chapter 359

Nine men, fire in their eyes, stormed the Ellington estate.

Percival was dealing with his grandfather Richard's tantrum and feeling such a headache.

The old man had returned from a stint at the nursing home only to find out that the engagement had been called off on his behalf. He nearly flipped the roof in his outrage.

First, he laid into Percival without mercy, then he dropped to the floor and began to roll around.

Like now, he was wailing and flailing like a hooligan, crying out, "My dear wife, I can't go on, so come take me away! This ungrateful grandson of mine has gone behind my back and called off the engagement. He must think my days are too long, beckoning the Grim Reaper to come for me sooner!"

"Oh, my baby granddaughter-in-law, I'm so sorry that I let this heartless scoundrel disappoint you. I can't face you. I can only apologize with my death!"

"But rest assured, I'll take this disrespectful grandson with me before I die to avenge you!"

"My dear wife, you gave birth to several boys and girls and I appreciate that. But our genes weren't strong enough. Our kids are worthless. They're killing me with their lack of filiality!"

"It's over, I can't take it. I'm short of breath. My chest is tight, my head's spinning, and all I see is darkness. I might be joining you soon."



"What? You don't want me to come? No, I can't live with the shame, not after my grandson has driven away my granddaughter-in-law. Unless, unless that ungrateful boy gets her back for me."

Percival sighed.

Great!

Looks like his grandpa's performance was set for an encore.

He glanced at Richard, then instructed the maid, "Fetch a cushion; don't let him catch a cold."

Want to play the fool? Play on.

The maid nodded and was about to fetch the cushion when another maid rushed in, "Young Master

Percival, there are nine angry men outside and asking for you!"

Percival mused.

Nine?

Leopold was back too?

Before he could speak, Richard leapt up and was fiery as a rocket, "Perfect timing!"

Percival's lips curled in amusement upon seeing his indignation.

Well, the grandson was more important than granddaughter-in-law at the end of the world!

He followed suit, while Richard was practically sprinting, eager to cover two paces in one.

Jerry and other eight ones saw Richard and Percival emerge; with that, their faces darkened further.

Jerry's voice was ice cold, "Percival..."

Before he could finish, Richard slapped him upside the head, fuming, "You call yourselves Vivienne's disciples? She's been bullied and you only show up now? Did she mean nothing to you?"

He knew these nine were Vivienne's disciples since his last hospital visit.

Jerry and his men were stunned by what he said.

"The next time something like this happens, you'd better show up sooner. Not a minute late!" Richard scolded.

Jerry and his men were more confused.

What's going on?

Seeing their confusion, Richard grew even more irate.

Then, pointing at Percival behind him, he declared, "There! This scoundrel! He's abandoned my granddaughter-in-law. Go settle the score with him. And don't worry, I'll lock the door. He won't escape!"

Percival gasped in surprise.

Are you serious? He spoke to himself.

Seeing the nine still unmoved, Richard slapped Jerry's head again, "What are you waiting for? Go settle the score! Or what? Are you afraid of his power and too scared to confront him?"

Jerry and his men blinked their eyes.

This wasn't right! The story wasn't supposed to go this way!

They were meant to take action, not get lectured by a grumpy old man!

No, this needed a reset! This plot twist was not what they signed up for!

Dawson snapped back to reality. He roared, "Percival! You piece of crap! You played with Vivienne's feelings and now you dare to dump her, huh? Today, you'll learn that we, the men of Emerald Monastery, are not to be trifled with!"

Leopold, looking at Percival, added, "Percival! I never thought you'd be this kind of man. Vivienne was so good to you. She had saved Isolde, helped Richard, sent Mrs. Cecilia perfumes and clothes. She gave you her best, and yet this is how you repay her."

Leopold, who looked heartbroken, declared, "I'm done with you! From now on, we're no longer friends!"

Percival raised an eyebrow, "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely sure!" Leopold stated earnestly.

Percival's lips quirked slightly, "Alright, I get it."

Larry leaned casually against the Ellingtons' front gate, speaking with nonchalance, "Why bother with all this talk? I've already arranged for the Brooks' fireworks to be brought over. Let's blow up the Ellington place and talk after!"

Richard panicked at that, "Blow up the Ellington estate? No way! If you do, where will my granddaughter-in-law stay when she comes back? Oh no, she won't be my granddaughter-in-law anymore; I plan to adopt Vivienne as my granddaughter. This is her home and it can't be blown up. If you must, take that scoundrel out and blow him up, then dig a grave and bury what's left!"

Percival's eyes went wide.

I might need a paternity test to confirm if I'm actually related to you! He thought.

Jerry and his men exchanged their looks, which implied such a message: "So, are we blowing it up or

not? Why it is so complicated to deal with the jerk?"

Larry frowned, then stood up straight, "Fine, we'll take him out and blow him up! Anyone who hurts

Vivienne deserves to die!"

Dawson nodded, "I agree."

"Agreed!" Gary and Eric adhered.

The others nodded in agreement with the plan, except Leopold, who suddenly fell silent.

Though he was mad at Percival, death by explosion could be a bit too harsh. That was his best mate

for over twenty years! Damn it!

Seeing Leopold silent, Jerry shot him a look, "What's up? You got something to say?"

Leopold's head jerked up and met eight pairs of murderous eyes. He shivered, "Nope, no objections

here! I'm all and fully supporting! A scumbag deserves to be six feet under with no stone to mark his

grave!"

Percival raised an eyebrow while giving him a fleeting glance, suggesting a meaning of "wait and see."

The gang of nine was about to rush over and seize Percival, but out of the blue, he calmly picked up

his phone, "Vivienne, you hearing this? They are disrespecting elders and rude as hell. Do you need

me to teach them a lesson?"

All nine of them froze in their tracks.

Damn it!

Was he snitching again?

Before they could recover, Vivienne's icy voice came through the phone, "All of you, get back to

Emerald Monastery and write out the Ten Commandments a thousand times!

The gang of nine all gaped their eyes.

Seriously? A thousand times? That's worse than death!

Their hands were made for swinging swords, not pens!

Hold on!

Didn't this guy break off his engagement with Vivienne?

Well, why Vivienne was still taking his side?

As they stood there stunned, Vivienne's voice drifted over again, "You have one minute to vanish from

the Ellington estate, and half an hour to get out of Rivenwood! Don't make me come over there myself!"

With that, the nine were gone like a gust of wind, vanished without a trace.

Chapter 360

In the nursing home.

Baron was hoisted off the floor by the staff. A surge of rage shot straight to his temples as his eyes

scanned the chaotic mess that was once his pristine living room.

He changed into fresh clothes and, with a storm brewing within, he made a beeline to the Brooks

residence.

Judith was deep in conversation with Scott to discuss the details of Calista's engagement party when

Baron stormed in. She blinked in surprise.

"Why you're back?"

Ever since Baron had checked into the nursing home, he had washed his hands of all matters

concerning the Brooks family. Other than the time he brought back Vivienne. After being scolded by

Richard that time, he moved into the Brooks household for a while before returning to the nursing

home. Then he rarely came back.

But his sudden return today and his grim face both puzzled Judith.

She couldn't fathom who might have crossed him.

"If I hadn't come back, it seems you lot would have really gone off the rails!" Baron's anger erupted, his hand making sharp contact with Judith's cheek as he bellowed, "Who gave you the right to call off Vivienne and Percival's engagement? Who gave you such nerves? Since when is Calista worthy of claiming the title of a Brooks?"

His face turned a shade of thunderous blue as he continued, "If she's smart, she can stay put and behave for the rest of her life. If not, she can get lost and forget she ever belonged to the Brooks family."

Judith clutched her face in disbelief. She didn't believe that he really hit her.

They had lived side by side for decades, not necessarily with deep affection, but always with mutual respect. He had never raised his voice to her before, let alone raised a hand.

Today, not only had he lashed out at her verbally, but he had also struck her physically.

"You... you hit me?" Judith stammered, barely able to squeeze the words out.

Baron glanced at her, his voice cold as ice, "That slap is to remind you that there are consequences for acting out of turn!"



His gaze towards Judith was tinged with disdain.

Their marriage had been arranged, and throughout their life together, they had treated each other with respect. He had given her reign over the household not out of love, but because he needed a woman to run the home.

Judith had handled many things well, but when it came to the big decisions, she lacked judgment and was overly cunning, just like with the matter of Vivienne's broken engagement.

Did she really think he was unaware of her scheming?

The marriage pact between his father and the Ellingtons was known only to Judith, and she was fully aware that Richard disapproved of it.

Her push to marry Calista off wasn't about uniting the Brooks with the Ellingtons in strength; it was personal spite!

She knew full well what Calista was like. Surely, she could see that among all the grandchildren, only Vivienne truly shone as the best of the Brooks.

By pushing Calista onto Percival, she was simply trying not to let the Ellingtons have it too easy.

She resented that woman, but she could never measure up to her! And she resented him for he had

never let go of that woman for years, even though she had long since passed away and turned to dust.

Judith's face flushed uncomfortably as Baron seemed to read her like an open book.

Baron dismissed her and turned to Scott, "And if your mother lacks sense, don't you have any? Do you think engagements can be broken and replaced on a whim?"

Scott's eyes narrowed slightly, casting a glance at Baron with an unaffected expression, "I have my reasons."

"I don't care about your reasons. The marriage between Calista and Percival will not be recognized by Richard, nor by me. Drop the idea unless you want me to take action. I may be old and out of affairs, but that doesn't mean I can't handle you."

Scott remained silent.

Baron continued, "And as for that Calista, throw her a reunion party if you must, but changing her name is out of the question! How could a bastard child carry the Brooks name?"

"Also, if you dare to stir up any more trouble and make that old cap Richard come to me, just don't

blame me for cutting our family ties! You can do whatever you want once I'm gone, but as long as I'm

alive, save me the headaches!"

With those words, Baron turned and headed upstairs. He planned to stay at the Brooks residence for a while. Some people always rigged when he was not around.

But just as he reached the staircase, a thunderous explosion rocked the air, "Boom!"

Scott, who was closer, immediately supported him and asked with a stern face, "What was that?"

Before the echo had faded, another blast shook the house.

Scott's expression turned to ice as he commanded a servant, "Find out what's going on!"

Upstairs, Vivienne was assembling Lego blocks with Thaddeus when the loud noise startled the boy into her arms, trembling uncontrollably.

Vivienne's face darkened instantly. She approached the window, looking down to see Jerry and his gang gleefully tossing bombs onto the Brooks property.

They must have scouted the land for they were aiming at the open spaces. But the bombs were powerful enough to shake the entire building.

Then she heard Dawson shout, "Hurry up, guys! We need to clear out of Rivenwood in less than half an hour as per Vivienne's orders. We only have ten minutes left."

"Yeah, yeah, hurry up! Vivienne's punishments are phycho; I can't risk her upping the ante!"

Vivienne glared at them.

Phycho?

No!

She was gentle! The gentlest girl in the world, according to Mr. Wolf!

Vivienne glanced down at the group. She held Thaddeus close and whispered soothingly, "Don't be afraid; they're just teaching some bad guys a lesson."

Hearing that it was time to teach a lesson to a bully, Thaddeus was no longer afraid. "Sis, with you here, I'm not scared at all."

Vivienne chuckled, then scooped up her brother and settled them both by the window. She grabbed a bowl of roasted peanuts and, with Thaddeus, they cracked nuts and watched the drama unfold from their vantage point.

Outside, Scott emerged with his entourage. His face was a stormy shade of blue as he glared at Jerry and his crew, "Who the heck are you guys? Why are you messing with my property?"

Jerry stood opposite him, hands casually in his pockets, his presence every bit as commanding as

Scott's, "We're Vivienne's brothers-in-arms and we are here to give the Brooks family a wake-up call.

You mess with Vivienne, so you mess with us. If you or your cronies come after her again, next time,

we won't be tossing fireworks into an empty lot. It'll be into your bedroom you'll find them!"

Scott's eyes narrowed, his body radiating a chilling aura.

Just then, the last of the bombs had been set off, and Jerry gave the order with a nonchalant air, "Let's

roll!"

They didn't give Scott a second glance and walked away.

Scott watched their retreat; an ominous energy swirled around him.

Meanwhile, Jerry and his gang hopped into their car, speeding out of Rivenwood.

Their phones rang simultaneously, jolting everyone. Oh no, was Vivienne going to read them the riot

act?

Trembling, they pulled out their phones and found a message from Vivienne: "Scribe the Ten

Commandments 500 times."

They were thrilled upon reading the message.

That's right!

The best way to deal with Vivienne was to stay on her good side.

And the best way to do that? Never messed with Percival.

With Vivienne's command, they slowed down their escape and was no longer in rush.

Dawson had a sudden thought and blurted out, "Larry, man, you brought in all these fireworks and made such a scene. You think the Feds are gonna come knocking?"

Larry lifted his eyes lazily, "I imported a whole five-truckload of gear from Fariana Isle and donated it all to the authorities."

The rest of the crew gave him a thumbs-up, "Epic!"