

Million-Dollar 381

Chapter 381

Scott's normally stern face took on an even more sinister cast as he glared at Vivienne.

"When did you figure it out?" he asked, his voice deep and heavy with accusation.

He had always suspected that Vivienne would uncover his true identity, but he had not anticipated her discovery would come so swiftly.

Perhaps it was not today. Maybe she had known for quite some time, watching him like a court jester, smiling sweetly as he played his part, likely mocking him silently all the while.

"Let me think..." Vivienne propped her chin in her hand, feigning deep recollection. "I'd say it was around the time Rowan and Ismene disguised themselves as my foster parents."

Scott felt his heart tighten, realizing she had known for longer than he thought.

Clearly, he had underestimated Vivienne.

Like mother, like daughter.

As the saying goes, a viper never gives birth to a dove.

"So, you didn't come back to the Brooks family to find your biological father but to avenge your mother?" Scott's voice was a low growl.

Vivienne's lips curved slightly, but she remained silent.

Scott paused for a moment, then spoke again. "Since you know everything, you must also understand that I didn't kill your mother."

He had fallen for Karen at first sight, a love so sudden and all-consuming.

But he knew they would never have a future together.

When he discovered Karen was 'Lark', he knew his feelings would dissipate like mist. Because he was Scott, the high-ranking agent of GTO, the only person apart from the boss who knew the true face of Mr. B.

GTO was his allegiance, and Lark was its arch-nemesis.

For three years, he and Karen explored every nook of Rivenwood's flower fields, witnessing the world's most beautiful vistas together.

He had thought they would be forever, just like an everlasting sunset.

Unfortunately, her intentions were as impure as his.

Then came the decision to use Paula as a pawn to kill Karen at their engagement party.

Making that choice tore him apart. Because it was the woman he loved the most.

But to his shock, Karen fled.

Before she vanished, she used his identity to eliminate over a hundred GTO agents.

It was then Scott realized that Karen had recognized him all along. She had stayed silent, biding her time until she could expose his undercover agents, and then she disappeared without a trace.

At that moment, Scott could not tell if he felt relief or resentment.

But he knew he would never forget her.

When Vivienne appeared, Scott was absolutely certain she was Karen's daughter.

He also knew Arabella was not his child, yet he played along. Why?

Because Vivienne was not his daughter. He had never been intimate with Karen! Even though they had shared a bed that night, and the sheets bore the signs of a lover's tryst, he knew nothing had actually happened between them.

How could Karen, so deeply in love with another man and so cunning, use intimacy with him to fulfill her mission?

He had arranged paternity tests to put to rest the faint hope in his heart.

Every time the results confirmed a genetic match between him and Vivienne, he found solace, repeatedly convincing himself that Karen had loved him.

Even this time, the results from Frostfire Intelligence Agency came back positive: Vivienne was his child.

He almost believed it, believed that he had been with Karen that night.

But now, he knew someone would always shatter his self-deception. That person was Vivienne.

Watching Scott's countenance shift unpredictably, Vivienne knew precisely what he was pondering.

She sat down, her figure sinuous and alluring, like a poppy risen from the underworld. "I know you didn't kill my mother. What does it matter? Mr. Brooks, have you never thought of killing her?"

Scott remained silent.

Vivienne scoffed, her clear eyes brimming with disdain and mockery, "So, spare me the act of deep affection. You're really quite terrible at it."

Her gaze was like a dagger, piercing Scott with icy resolve.

Scott looked at Vivienne, and after a moment of silence, he said, "You didn't come here just to talk

about my identity and your mother, did you? Out with it. What do you want?"

Vivienne smiled. "Why don't you introduce me to Mr. B?"

"Impossible!" Scott rejected the idea outright.

Mr. B was the organization's right hand, the benefactor who had elevated him. He would never betray

GTO, not even for Karen, and certainly not now.

Vivienne had anticipated this reaction.

With a wave of her hand, she released an odorless gas that shot straight for Scott's throat.

Struggling to breathe, Scott gasped for air, hands clutching at his neck, his eyes wide with disbelief as

he watched Vivienne's retreating figure.

"This is my latest concoction, called 'Bloom's End.' There's no antidote yet. Since you were capable of

finding Brody to heal Calista, I'm sure you can find a cure for yourself. Good luck. I'm rooting for you,"

She said nonchalantly as she stood up.

Pausing, she added, "Oh, and do tell Brody that Brian's obsession with the bounty is reaching

madness. It won't be long before he catches him. Run fast. I'll cheer you guys on!"

With that, Vivienne turned and walked away.

Scott, fighting for breath and clutching his throat, could only stare in disbelief at Vivienne's departing silhouette.

She just walked away. Did she not fear he might spill the beans to Mr. B and spook the man into fleeing?

Would the best course of action not have been to silence him permanently?

Yet Vivienne only slipped him poison, and she even figured out something about Brody.

What on earth was she aiming for?

It was not until Vivienne's figure vanished into the distance that Scott caught his breath.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed.

Oh, no!

He did not have time to ponder; he hastily relayed the incident to Mr. B and reached out to Brody.

Outside the Brooks Mansion, Vivienne climbed into a sleek black Lincoln.

The moment she was inside, she was enveloped in a firm embrace.

Breathing in that familiar scent, Vivienne's heart slowly steadied.

"Is it all taken care of?" Percival asked.

Vivienne nodded, resting her eyes as she leaned on Percival's shoulder. "Yeah, now it's all up to Scott's next move."

She had said it early on.

Death, of course, was not the best approach.

Chapter 382

Scott was Mr. B's double, and no one but the head of the GTO could locate him.

So, of course, he could not just drop dead that easily.

Besides, would death not be too kind?

If it had not been for him, would her mother have been hunted down all those years ago?

For years, Scott had been playing the part of a lovelorn soul to the outside world, claiming he could not find Karen and swore to bachelorhood.

But aside from the few peaceful years Karen spent by Dorian's side, was it not the GTO that kept sending goons after her?

Scott was a member of the GTO, and Vivienne's mother's death had his fingerprints all over it.

But that score would be settled later.

Suddenly, Vivienne caught the scent of strawberry shortcake.

She opened her eyes, slightly stunned.

There was an actual strawberry shortcake!

"Mr. Wolf, I just adore you," She said, wrapping her arms around Percival's neck, her eyes sparkling with joy.

Percival looked at Vivienne holding the strawberry shortcake like it was a treasure and could not help feeling a bit helpless.

Did she really like him?

It was clear as day; she was smitten by the shortcake!

Percival, reduced to less than a piece of cake in making his wife happy.

If word got out, it would be the joke of the century!

But, oh well.

He knew his place all along, and it was definitely below a slice of strawberry shortcake.

Percival leaned his head on Vivienne's shoulder, his deep, well-like eyes surprisingly showing a hint of

hurt.

Vivienne blinked back her pain, scooped up a spoonful of the strawberry shortcake, and brought it to

Percival's lips. "Just one bite, no more!"

This was the strawberry shortcake. She could not bear to part with even a single spoonful!

Percival was speechless.

All right then!

He was sure, absolutely sure, he ranked below a cake!

The first man in history to be considered lower than a cake by his wife!

He wanted to disappear from this world for a moment!

Vivienne happily finished her strawberry shortcake, then leaned back against Percival, content and

ready for a nap.

Percival draped his jacket over her, watching her sleeping face, and unconsciously leaned down to kiss

her lips.

Eating a strawberry shortcake this way was indeed the sweetest.

With her eyes still closed, Vivienne smiled slightly and suddenly pulled Percival's neck down, pressing

him firmly to her.

Kissing, after all, would be best when it was a two-way street!

Percival raised an eyebrow. His little lady had teased him once again.

But he would not mind another round.

This was not him being a pervert!

Absolutely not!

With that thought, Percival leaned in once more, claiming her lips with fervor.

Sitting in the driver's seat, Thomas was on pins and needles; he had never felt the Lincoln's driver's

seat this hot before!

Even with the curtain drawn, even with his eyes fixed ahead, even with...

"Beep!"

Thomas cursed under his breath. This was the worst timing for a message, but he had no choice; the

mission was critical!

Thomas cleared his throat. "Percival, the target is on the move."

With a snap, the privacy curtain was drawn back, and the smell of strawberry shortcake mixed with the tang of romance flooded the car.

Thomas glanced in the rear-view mirror.

Great, the two of them were sitting up straight as if they were strangers.

Was he the narrow-minded one?

"Pursue."

With a single word from Percival, his gaze lingered on Vivienne's slightly flushed cheeks, a smile curling at the corner of his lips.

Meanwhile, Vivienne's phone buzzed.

It was Draven.

[Boss, the target has been caught.]

Vivienne smirked at how impatient the target was.

Soon enough, the black Lincoln stopped in a secluded area on the outskirts of some abandoned urban district.

"Vivienne, we've got the area surrounded. I guarantee not even a fly could escape!"

Leopold's smug voice instantly reached the ears of all the operatives within a three-mile radius via wireless communications.

Dressed in a bulletproof vest with special gloves from Vanguard Agency and an earpiece, Leopold was all charged up, heading towards Vivienne.

Before he could get close, Percival blocked his way.

"Stay back, Husky."

Leopold was at a loss for words.

Surrounded by Vanguard Agency operatives, Leopold dared not make a move or would be mobbed, even though he was a mid-level leader known as Husky!

"Percival is right," Leopold gritted his teeth, offering a begrudging compliment.

As they spoke, Percival had already suited up, ready for combat.

Just as Vivienne was about to speak, Percival said, "Vivienne, wait for me here."

Vivienne raised an eyebrow. "Maybe I can help."

"Of course." Percival checked his gun and holstered it at his waist. "You sit here and command me, and

I'll command these knuckleheads."

"Sounds good."

Vivienne did not refuse.

The preparation here was thorough; her presence would be like icing on the cake, but her absence would not be a loss.

Observing the whole situation from here was also a wise choice.

Percival wrapped his arm around Vivienne's shoulder, settled her in the car, and then, mwah~

The Vanguard Agency operatives thought, "Boss, the communications are still on. That kiss, what a sound to our ears!"

"Vanguard Agency, move out!"

At Percival's command, all operatives were ready for action, with Leopold and Thomas flanking him as they headed into the wilderness.

Vivienne sat in the car, booting up the laptop Thomas had prepared.

On the screen was an overview of the area, with little red dots representing each operative's location.

Some were moving towards an abandoned building.

Inside the decrepit building was a state-of-the-art medical lab, and within three rooms, incubators and equipment monitored each newborn.

"Are all the children accounted for?" Scott, clad in a black trench coat with a top hat and a masked face, even his voice altered, asked.

The person he questioned nodded and said, "Yes, Mr. B, all the children are here, with no incidents."

Scott frowned. How could that be?

Vivienne had to know about the secrets of the lab, given that she had figured out who he was.

But if Vivienne had known about this place, she should not have been silent.

And Rowan and Ismene must have turned traitors by now. They might not know the lab's secrets, but they could contact someone within the organization.

Yet, there was no peep from them.

"Evacuate immediately."

Regardless of whether Rowan and Ismene had switched sides, this place was compromised. They needed to get out, and fast.

His subordinate hesitated, "Mr. B, these are all newborns we're talking about. If we evacuate, it'll take many hands. Isn't this a bit hasty?"

"Don't question me, move it!" Scott barked.

As his words hung in the air, the lab's steel door was kicked open with a thunderous bang.

Scott's reflexes were razor-sharp. Before the first gunshot could echo, he grabbed a nearby underling to shield himself from the bullets.

He tossed a smoke grenade to the ground, and in the ensuing confusion, he bolted for safety.

"Chase him!" Shouted Percival, signaling for Thomas and Leopold to give chase.

Chapter 383

Gunshots echoed through the lab, but the Vanguard Agency was ready for anything. The GTO guards left behind were caught off-guard, especially since their boss had hightailed it out of there.

It was a spectacular defeat, like watching petals swept away by a swift stream.

Vivienne continued to monitor the screens, her fingers dancing over the keyboard with urgency, "The left passage is clear. Follow it."

She was analyzing the layout of the building, switching to real-time mode, and connecting to infrared imaging to track Scott's possible escape routes.

Although Percival had come prepared, they were short on hands, what with all the kids around.

Scott knew the place like the back of his hand; if he had planned an escape route in advance, he would be a tough one to catch.

Suddenly, Vivienne spotted a blinking light on the screen. "Mr. Wolf, watch out, there's a bomb!"

A loud explosion rocked the area 800 meters from the lab entrance.

The thermal imager fizzled out, and the screen became a flurry of scrambling red dots.

Vivienne cursed under her breath, slammed her laptop shut, and sprinted toward the blast site.

"Mr. Wolf! You oka..."

"Vivienne." Percival emerged from the ashes, one hand gripping Thomas, the other holding Leopold.

"I'm fine. Check on these two."

Leopold let out a groan. "Vivienne, my hand's done for."

Thomas gestured to his own left hand. "Same here."

Breathing a sigh of relief, Vivienne quickly picked up some scattered wooden planks and expertly fashioned splints for their broken hands.

"This will do for now. We'll get it fixed back at the base. It's not a big deal."

Vivienne's gaze met Percival's.

He was staring into the rubble, his expression grave, eyes sharp as blades.

She understood his frustration.

They had been so close to capturing Scott.

Who would have thought a new type of bomb was buried here, one that even their detectors had not picked up?

If Vivienne had not switched to the real-time map, they might have been dealing with more than just a couple of broken hands. Whether they would even be found in one piece was up for debate!

Vivienne stepped forward, placing a hand on Percival's shoulder. "Mr. Wolf, let's head back."

Percival nodded. Scott was GTO's third in command, not someone they could easily apprehend.

"Captain, we've found all the missing infants. Two are critical and need... Ma'am's attention."

Vivienne blinked at the term 'ma'am.'

Turning around, she saw everyone except Leopold looking at her expectantly.

Oh, the 'ma'am' was her!

"Don't be ridiculous, people, we're only engaged, not married! 'Ma'am' sounds so old!" She protested inwardly.

Leopold, sitting on a rock, kicked the messenger. "What 'ma'am'? Did I give my blessing to be called that? Keep babbling nonsense, and I'll knock your teeth out!"

The team member blinked but ignored the 'little Husky's' outburst, focusing instead on Vivienne.

"Ma'am, we're running out of time."

Vivienne snapped back to the situation, patting her subordinate's shoulder, "Call me Vivienne next time."

With that, she rushed to the lab; time was of the essence.

Percival also dusted himself off, consoling his team member, "Husky's bonus is yours this time."

"Thanks, Captain, thanks, ma'am," The team member beamed, then thanked Leopold, "And thanks, Leopold!"

As Leopold was about to clench his fist, a jolt of pain reminded him of his injury.

'Percival, you heartless man!' But, of course, these words remained unspoken.

Meanwhile, Percival's phone rang. Checking the caller ID, his deep-set eyes narrowed.

After a brief conversation, he announced, "Calista was released three hours ago."

He could not even delay it for a full day.

Vivienne's eyes narrowed, a cold laugh escaping her. "The reach of our adversaries is surprisingly long."

Percival's expression darkened, but he remained silent.

"At least the kids are safe now. We'll deal with that man slowly." Vivienne noticed Percival's mood was off.

Being the team captain responsible for national security and having someone pull strings over his head, it was no wonder he was upset.

Hearing her, Percival managed a smile. "Yes, we'll take care of them one by one."

Back in the lab, the situation with the two infants was indeed dire.

But it was not just them; all the children were affected.

To ensure the infants' normal physical development while keeping them quiet, GTO had injected them with a new type of sedative.

Though it was meant to foster organ growth for their experiments, such a drug could harm the brain, potentially causing brain death.

The two critical children had already been cut open, their half-developed hearts partially removed.

Vivienne's eyes blazed with fury as she realized GTO's intention to use the children's hearts for virus experiments.

Such inhuman cruelty!

She administered the antidote to the sedative to each child. Apart from the two with damaged hearts, the rest were sent to the police station, awaiting their parents to claim them.

The incident became a national sensation.

However, the news erased any trace of the Vanguard Agency's involvement.

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Over in Rivenwood, at an apartment, Brody gave Scott a thorough check-up and found not a single ailment.

Not even a hint of poisoning, not even a mouth ulcer!

"Poisoned, my ass! You got me all excited for nothing, damn it, I'm out!" Brody stormed off.

He had thought they finally had a chance to counteract the Specter Healer's poison, not just treat some simple broken limb. And now, it was all for naught. Disappointing, to say the least.

Scott did not stop Brody.

He had only used the Specter Healer's reputation to lure him in to cure Calista.

Now that Calista was fine and he was not poisoned, there was no reason to keep Brody.

As soon as Brody disappeared, Calista emerged from the room.

Though she owed her recovery to Brody's medical skills, Calista could never shake off a deep-rooted fear of him. Being in the same room felt like walking a tightrope over a pit of snakes. She might just get bitten at any moment.

"Dad." Calista approached Scott hesitantly, her words lingering on the edge of silence.

Released just hours earlier, she'd made a beeline for this place, a sanctuary of sorts.

Scott, already annoyed by Mila's constant clinger act, extended his disdain to Calista, too.

He would not have saved her if she were not useful to him!

Even though Calista was his flesh and blood, he did not care much for her. Things easily gained were

easily disregarded.

"Speak up!" He barked.

Calista flinched, intimidated by Scott's current mood.

She sat slowly, reaching for the first aid kit to tend to his wounds.

Brody had checked for poison, sure, but had not bothered with the injuries Scott got while escaping.

"I was just thinking." She began tentatively, dabbing antiseptic on a cut. "The task you've given me,

maybe with Brody's help, I could do it twice as well. Why not let him join us? You're formidable on your

own, and now that he's alone, the odds are in your favor."

Scott let out a scoff. "If I had pushed him just now, what you'd have in front of you would be nothing but

a skeleton."

Chapter 384

Scott had mulled over the idea of bringing Brody into the fold more than once, but the folks he had sent

out to extend the olive branch had all met untimely ends, and a few had even vanished without a trace,

their bones yet to be found.

Those in the know about Brody understood one thing clearly: He was not beholden to any organization.

It all hinged on whether he was interested, and no one could force his hand to save or snuff a life.

Calista sucked in a sharp breath, the memory of Brody's brutal methods during her treatment sending a shiver down her spine.

Scott exhaled slowly. "You should head back. Get the job done as soon as you can. Once you're back with the Brooks family, don't breathe a word of seeing me. You know what's at stake."

"Yes, I understand." Calista quickly rose, snatching her purse and scurrying out the door.

The room lapsed into a moment of silence as Scott leaned back on the couch, a frown creasing his forehead.

He had overplayed his cards this time.

Vivienne had played him like a fiddle.

The lab had been a pet project of the boss, meticulously overseen to completion. Neither sensor probes nor thermal imagers could detect an exit.

Vivienne had been calm, deliberately cryptic.

And with his cover blown, he had mistakenly thought the lab's location had been compromised.

To think he had actually led Vivienne and Percival straight to the lab.

What a blunder.

Scott chuckled wryly, a shade of melancholy crossing his face as he murmured, "As expected from your daughter, Karen."

At Percival's private clinic, Vivienne treated two children whose lives had been hung by a thread.

Thankfully, they were regaining vitality, and their hearts were beginning to regenerate.

With close observation over the next few days, they could be discharged.

The children's parents had been located and were en route.

"It's wild. I can't tell these kids are twins. Aren't twins supposed to be spitting images of each other?"

Leopold peered through the glass of the incubator at the two infants.

Vivienne playfully smacked his head. "Ever heard of fraternal twins?"

Leopold rubbed the back of his head. "Vivienne, you must've struck me dumb.

"No, you're just plain dumb," A man and a woman said in unison.

Leopold, taken aback, eyed the pair—Vivienne and the unwilling-to-admit-it Percival. "Alright, a duet you two make."

"We're just in sync," Percival said, his arm around Vivienne's waist. She looked every bit the intelligent beauty in her white lab coat, her hair pinned up in a bun, loose strands framing her face.

She was a sight to behold. His wife was beautiful in every way.

Just then, Thomas approached. "Percival, the kids' parents have arrived."

"Yasmine, Natalia."

A sobbing female voice echoed from behind Thomas.

Looking over, Vivienne saw a woman in her mid-thirties, dressed simply yet in fine fabric.

"Zelda, keep it together. We need to be sure first."

Behind the woman stood a man in a suit, none other than Yuri Perez, the fourth son of the old man

Jasper, who had recently bought the plagiarized painting at the gallery.

"You must be Vivienne, hello. I'm Yuri, and we're the children's parents," Yuri said as he supported

Zelda, politeness in his eyes despite the evident anxiety.

Vivienne nodded. "Yes, the children are here. Have a look, but they can't leave just yet. They need more treatment."

Vivienne stepped aside to let Yuri and Zelda see their children.

She held onto a medical report she had not yet passed on. Revealing their suffering to their mother seemed too cruel.

Vivienne could not bear to see a mother's tears.

"Yasmine, Natalia, I'm so sorry. It's all my fault." Zelda's tears streamed down the glass as she collapsed against it.

Yuri, quick to react, caught her. "Zelda, it's not your fault. Please, don't cry."

Vivienne and Percival quietly left the family to their moment, relieved that the children's condition was stable and no longer required her constant attention.

Outside the hospital, Percival's expression was serious. Vivienne sensed his mood. "What's on your mind?"

"I feel like I've seen that Yuri somewhere before. He looks familiar."

Vivienne paused. "I thought I was the only one."

Indeed, the first time she laid eyes on Yuri, she felt as if she had known him long ago, and there was a peculiar familiarity.

As they pondered this, someone called out Vivienne's name from behind. It was Yuri.

"Sorry for shouting your name, Vivienne. You didn't respond, so I..." Yuri said apologetically, then

asked, "May I inquire about my daughters' condition in more detail?"

Vivienne was stunned. She had planned to discuss the situation with Yuri the next day to give him time

to digest the news, but here he was, seeking answers.

Yuri, noticing her hesitation, gave a rueful smile. "They must've suffered. I can't be oblivious as their

father."

Seeing Percival and Vivienne holding hands, Yuri said awkwardly, "Erm, I'm not disturbing your date,

am I?"

"What do you think?" Percival thought but remained silent.

Vivienne handed over the medical report and explained the situation briefly. "I'll check on them every

three days. With me here, there's no need to worry."

A breeze tousled Vivienne's hair, and the clip came loose. Her locks fell across her face.

Yuri's eyes lingered for an instant, a fleeting warmth in his gaze.

Percival tightened his embrace around Vivienne, his tone sharp. "Mr. Perez, is there anything else?"

Yuri snapped back to reality. "I'm sorry for interrupting your date, and thank you once again. Here's my

business card. If you need anything, give me a call anytime." He extended a small card towards them.

Percival did not take it, but Vivienne reached out with a smile and accepted the card.

It was minimalist, with just a name and a phone number, no company name, and no address.

"Got it. See you in three days," Vivienne said, her voice light, a hint of intrigue in her smile.

Arm in arm, she and Percival strolled away.

Yuri watched their retreating figures until they were out of sight.

The resemblance was uncanny. For a fleeting moment, she had looked so much like his sister.

Yuri clenched his fist. His sister had been only ten when she vanished, but seeing Vivienne just now, he

could almost picture his sister all grown up.

Especially that line, " With me here, there's no need to worry ."

He remembered, as a kid, whenever he and his brothers got into trouble, his little sister would stand in

front of them and say, "With me here, there's no need to worry ."

Yuri felt a moisture in his eyes.

"Vivienne, Percival, what, if any, connection do you have to my sister?" He thought.

He had dug through Vivienne's records at least a dozen times, but not a single piece of information

confirmed her identity, and the woman in the portrait offered no clues at all.

Yuri was unsure if someone was deliberately concealing Vivienne's past or if she really was that much

of a ghost.

But one thing was clear to Yuri. He had a gut feeling that Vivienne was the key to finding his lost sister.

Chapter 385

On the road.

Percival eyed Vivienne as she scrutinized the business card, feeling a twinge of jealousy. "Is it that

fascinating, Vivienne?"

Vivienne replied crisply, "It is."

"What's so fascinating about a business card?" Percival could not hide the sourness in his voice.

Finally, Vivienne looked up, locking eyes with him as she said deliberately, "It's not the card that's

fascinating. It's the man."

Percival felt his teeth grind, fists clenched tight.

Yet, he could not lash out.

In the end, as Vivienne chuckled at the look on his face, Percival's frustration only grew.

"Alright, you've got jokes now, huh?" He muttered before leaning in, mindful to protect the back of her head.

Vivienne wrapped her arms around his waist, and a few fiery kisses ensued before they parted.

She teased, blowing in his direction, "Smell that? Is it tinged with a hint of jealousy?"

His fingers ran through her hair as he gazed into her eyes. "Yes, I can't stand the thought of you with any other man."

Vivienne pulled him closer, whispering seductively, "I wasn't finished. The man is handsome, but not as much as you."

Percival's heart swelled as if coated with honey.

Once back at the Brooks Mansion, Vivienne went to her room.

With Scott missing and the whole Judith debacle, the elders were too preoccupied with corporate affairs, and the younger ones had their own lives to lead, leaving Vivienne to her own devices.

Lying in bed, she pulled out Yuri's card again.

For some reason, she found him agreeable, almost familiar, as if she had known him from a long time ago.

Her phone rang; it was Matthew.

"Vivienne, someone's been digging into your background, but the trail is cold, and their intentions are unclear."

"All right, let them dig. Gotta go, someone's here."

Vivienne knew her privacy was impenetrable to those she wished to keep out.

Ending the call, Aaron barged in with a strawberry shortcake, "Cake time, Vivienne!"

"Why are you here?" Vivienne asked, sitting up, her lethargy making her appear unusually languid yet undeniably alluring.

Aaron could not take his eyes off of her.

It seemed that Vivienne gave him a different feeling every time he met her.

At first, he was only dumbstruck by her beauty. Later, he was awed by her gaming skills. In the end, she became all he could think about.

"You forgot again, didn't you?" Aaron presented the shortcake, "You promised to join the team for the

season."

Vivienne's brow furrowed, "I did forget."

The recent chaos with Judith and Scott and rescuing the infants had pushed the competition to the back of her mind.

She took a bite. "Not as good as Mr. Wolf's, but hard to go wrong with strawberry shortcake."

As she enjoyed her dessert, she inquired about the competition.

Aaron sighed. "Didn't you see the message? It's been postponed."

"Really? Why?" She asked, surprised since E-sports events rarely changed dates.

"Because of that old lady," Aaron said, lowering his voice, "Judith, your so-called grandmother."

Vivienne laughed at his choice of words.

"She's dead. How could it be because of her?"

"The Brooks family owns our venue. Due to her, they're reassessing assets. The property's closed, and they could not find another suitable venue so soon, so the competition was delayed."

Vivienne nodded. The Brooks family had indeed been quite occupied lately. With Scott missing for

three days, Timothy had taken over, but he lacked his brother's finesse, leaving the family in disarray.

Seeing her nearly done with the cake, Aaron offered her a glass of warm milk. "Still hot, have some."

She accepted, then asked, "So, where is the competition now?"

"Centurial E-sport Hotel," Aaron replied.

It was one of Rivenwood's largest gaming hotels, famous for hosting international E-sports

tournaments.

"When is it?"

"The day after tomorrow. Can you make it?"

Aaron's hopeful gaze was hard to ignore.

"I can," Vivienne confirmed, despite the fatigue.

Aaron beamed. "That's great! The guys are getting used to the hotel's environment. Want to join us?"

It'd boost morale to have you there."

Checking the time, Vivienne agreed. Nothing was pressing, and she could not just indulge in cake and

warm milk without offering something in return.

"Let's go then."

"Alright!" Aaron exclaimed with a hop and a skip, quickly grabbing Vivienne's purse and jacket.

Vivienne smiled and followed Aaron out the door.

Just as they reached the front gate, they saw Timothy returning home, a Bluetooth headset still perched on his ear as he conducted a meeting, his briefcase in hand, looking utterly exhausted.

Their eyes met, and Timothy paused, saying, "Vivienne, heading out this late?"

"Yeah, Uncle, something up?"

Vivienne had a fondness for Timothy's family and always approached them with a friendly demeanor.

Timothy chuckled and shook his head. "No, just be careful. Our family has been a bit on edge lately. Do you want me to have a bodyguard follow you?"

"No need," Vivienne said, her eyes flickering with curiosity, "Is something wrong?"

Timothy waved his hand dismissively and hurriedly said, "Nothing at all, you go have fun."

His refusal was firm, and he used the meeting as an excuse to retreat into the house, his steps carrying a trace of rush.

Even Aaron sensed something was amiss.

Aaron asked with concern, "Vivienne, is he really okay?"

Vivienne looked away. "If there's an issue, he'll tell us. Don't worry about it."

Despite her reassuring words, Vivienne could not help but text Matthew, asking him to look into any

recent trouble Timothy might be tangled in.

Chapter 386

At the hotel, Aaron's E-sports team was immersed in last-minute training before the big showdown.

Every face bore the same grim expression as if they were each carrying the weight of a debt of

millions.

"We're team fighting! You blind?"

"You're the one to talk! Baron got stolen!"

"Shut up, you two feeders! We're underfarmed. Stop rushing into fights!"

"Can we all just focus, please? The tournament's the day after tomorrow!"

The last to speak was Bennett, the team's good-natured captain. He had not seen Vivienne at the

club's meeting the other day.

"Shut up!" The three of them rounded on Bennett in unison.

Although Bennett was the captain, his authority paled in comparison to the team's youngest member,

Aaron. His seniority was the only reason he held the title.

He sighed. The team's recent losing streak had morale at rock bottom, and Kenneth's taunts had only added insult to injury.

He was relieved Aaron was not there; else, fists might have flown.

Aaron could not find humor in the quarrels inside.

These clashes were common, and their seven-game losing streak, a stark reversal from their previous seven-win streak, was a tough pill for anyone to swallow.

With Aaron around, they managed to keep it together, but in his absence, tempers flared even hotter.

Vivienne frowned. She remembered when this team was a united force set on claiming the championship. Now, it was a stark contrast.

"Vivienne..." Aaron bowed his head, too ashamed to look Vivienne in the eye.

With a loud bang, Vivienne kicked the door open.

Everyone jumped in their seats. Quentin, known for his hot temper, slammed his headset onto the desk.

"Damn it, Kenneth, not again... Holy smokes, Vivienne!"

They all stood up, crowding around as they recognized Vivienne; their anger dissolved into thin air.

"Vivienne, we thought you weren't coming."

"Thank goodness, with you back, Vivienne, we've got a fighting chance!"

"With Vivienne and Aaron, we'll definitely regain our honor!"

Bennett looked at Vivienne with a mix of excitement and speechlessness.

Aaron, too, was moved, his eyes shining like stars as he gazed at Vivienne.

But to their surprise, Vivienne's face was stormy. "You call yourselves pro gamers with this kind of behavior?"

Their smiles faded, and hope dimmed in their eyes. The room fell into an awkward silence, and even

Aaron was unsure what to say next.

Finally, Bennett spoke up. "Vivienne, everyone's just really excited to see you."

Vivienne raised an eyebrow. "Oh? Now you remember you're supposed to lead this team?"

Bennett's voice faded as he looked down, fiddling with his fingers. Despite being the oldest, he seemed small under Vivienne's scolding.

He knew all too well how he had failed as a captain.

What could he do if he was disrespected by his teammates, overlooked by management, and dismissed by rival teams?

He was twenty-six and on the verge of retirement after the World Championships. Who would respect a spent force on the brink of hanging up his mouse and keyboard?

Vivienne pulled up a chair. "Bennett, you're the captain. You're supposed to set the example and earn their respect. But all you do is play peacemaker. How can anyone respect that?"

Bennett felt a wave of inferiority wash over him. "I... My skills are lacking. Naturally, they don't listen to me."

Aaron hesitated, wanting to defend Bennett, but he did not dare with Vivienne fuming.

"Your skills are lacking? You hold the record for the highest kills in Hawk Club. You have the highest solo-win rate. When you were racking up championships, these kids were still in diapers. And now you're telling me you're not up to it?"

Bennett felt a lump in his throat, the glory days still vivid in his mind, now...

Vivienne turned her gaze to Quentin. "Got a big temper, I see. Think you can do better as captain?"

She could hear Quentin being the loudest, even outside the door just now.

"I'm not good enough..." Quentin mumbled a response, clearly not ready to step up.

"Oh, so you do know that!" Vivienne reprimanded, "Have you forgotten how Bennett signed you despite the club's higher-ups not approving? He bet his entire career on you! Before you entered this club, you were on the verge of being fired from the youth team!"

Her words made Quentin's expression shift in color. It was indeed true that he would have never made it into this club without Bennett.

"And you," Vivienne continued, turning to Fergus, "When you couldn't crack the top ten, who was the one who trained with you day and night, helping you win that AD gold medal?"

"It was... The captain," Fergus whispered.

"And Lennox, when your family tried to pull you out, who traveled miles to bring you back, got beat by your parents, and ended up in the hospital for three days to save your career?"

Lennox's eyes reddened. Bennett had shed more blood for him than tears he had cried in his lifetime.

Vivienne did not spare Aaron either. "And you, with your standout solo skills and top-three world

ranking, think you can skip training? You believe you can carry the team to number one all by yourself?"

"Vivienne, I didn't..."

"You didn't? You have been going to the Brooks Mansion so often lately. You think I don't know how much training time you have missed? You think you can take home the championship single-handedly?"

Aaron had been coming to see her recently, but she was too busy to see him until today.

Aaron remained silent. He had no rebuttals.

Standing up, Vivienne's presence was like an icy storm. "Have any of you seriously reviewed your games? Do you even know what you're doing wrong?"

Bennett looked up earnestly. "Vivienne, we'll listen to you."

Aaron blinked in surprise. "Vivienne, you're not going to play?"

The others turned their gaze to Vivienne, their expressions a mix of hope and confusion. They all thought that Vivienne showing up today meant she was gearing up to join them for the big game the

day after tomorrow.

Vivienne scanned the room with a sharp eye. "You guys aren't captain material, and it's not about seniority, it's about smarts."

Among them, only Bennett understood the crux of the issue, but previously, without the clout to make his voice heard, his insights were brushed aside.

The biggest problem with Team Hawk was their disunity and penchant for playing the hero.

Everyone relied too much on Aaron, each player trying to sync with his strategies, but they neglected their own lanes, leaving gaping vulnerabilities.

Add to that a decline in their execution and reaction times, and it was no wonder they were on a losing streak.

Vivienne pushed each of the five players to their respective spots. "You've been training together for years, and you know each other inside out. Just find your groove, and you won't even need me. But for now, I'm here to whip you into shape. Let's play a match, and I'll assess."

Bennett slipped on his headset, feeling a newfound confidence, almost as if he had returned to his

heyday. Rolling up his sleeves, he bellowed, "Listen up, everyone! This round, we pick our best heroes.

Get back the feel of it!"

"Yes!" they responded, a chorus of determination echoing through the room as they rallied, ready to rediscover their strengths and reclaim their former glory.

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Aaron and the team slipped on their headsets, and within moments, their morale soared to its zenith.

Vivienne nodded in approval. This was what a true E-sports team looked like, not a group lost in blame and self-doubt.

...

Meanwhile, at the Ellington residence.

"Bro, you're my flesh and blood. We share half the same genes; that makes us practically brothers from another mother!

Come on, bro, this tournament means the world to me. Please help me out!

After this, I'll do anything you ask, my awesome big brother!"

Percival's night was haunted by endless pleas of "bro," as if the whole world was seen through a 'great big brother' filter.

Growing weary of the incessant nagging, Richard finally said, "You're not busy. Just go take a look and give me a break."

Yet Percival remained immovable, feigning deafness.

After wrapping up some business affairs, he glanced at his phone.

Why had Vivienne not replied yet at this late hour?

His long fingers danced over the screen as he typed a message with his usual aloofness, [Vivienne, I miss you.]

"Bro, just look at me, please!"

Kenneth's wails finally drew Percival's attention, and there he was, Kenneth, rolling on the floor in a full-blown tantrum.

Percival was speechless.

Had he mastered the art of cajoling to perfection?

What happened to the distant young man of usual days?

Had he been possessed?

"Get up," Percival commanded with a furrowed brow.

Like a bullet, Kenneth was at Percival's side the next moment, clinging to his leg. "I won't get up unless you agree!"

A sly smile played on Percival's lips. "Are you threatening me?"

Kenneth shivered, immediately transforming into a masseuse, kneading Percival's legs with servile devotion. "No, no, just talking nonsense. How could I dare threaten my wonderful big brother?"

Mid-conversation, Percival finally received the long-awaited reply.

[Busy, Mr. Wolf. Take your time missing me.]

A map link popped up immediately after.

Centurial E-sport Hotel?

Percival tapped Kenneth with his foot, "Where did you say your tournament is being held?"

"Centurial E-sport Hotel, the one owned by our family. You mean you'll come, bro?" Kenneth's eyes sparkled.

A smile curled on Percival's lips, a flicker of interest in his eyes. "Yes, suddenly I'm intrigued."

...

The World Championship Cup for E-sports proceeded as scheduled.

In the qualifiers, teams drew lots to decide their opponents, competing for points within their groups.

Hawk drew a formidable opponent for the first match—RED, a renowned team from Runic Country.

"The word is RED's starting player is a rookie promoted this year, suspected of hiding his true skills.

But even a rookie should not be underestimated. We're representing our country; we can't afford to

lose the first match, got it?"

In the locker room, Bennett stood before the ready team, delivering his speech.

Off to the side, Vivienne was busy replying to Percival's message.

[Yep, hanging with four hotties.]

On the other end, Percival's response was terse.

"They're all dead meat!" He thought to himself.

A chill swept through the locker room, prompting Aaron to zip up his hoodie, "Don't worry, captain.

We've got this."

After the pep talk, it was Coach Vivienne's turn.

She stood, her clear eyes sweeping the room. "Play well. You've got this!"

"Yes!"

The team cheered, rising to their feet. Despite only two days of intensive training, they had made remarkable progress. Not even Runic Country's RED or their arch-rival Snake could intimidate them now.

Directly across from Hawk's locker room was Snake Club's space.

Kenneth, hearing the commotion from Hawk's side, his eyes resembling Percival's, scoffed with disdain. "A few days apart, and they're already louder."

In this championship, he was determined to get FMNP and overtake that detestable Aaron.

His teammate Callum handed him a Coke and said, "Who cares about them? We've got our secret weapon, right?"

At the mention of the secret weapon, Kenneth managed a smile. "Of course, with my brother's support, not even Aaron or the mysterious coach who led Hawk to seven straight victories could pose a threat."

Another teammate, Wesley, cracked open a Coke and took a swig. "Heard Hawk got themselves a coach too, been holed up in some kind of 'Devil Training' the past few days, not even coming out for

meals."

"Last-minute cramming won't help them. It all comes down to Aaron, anyway. We shouldn't worry.

Who's our coach? Captain Kenneth's big brother, the Ellington family's seventh grandson, Percival!"

Alaric snorted with indifference.

Kenneth shot him a glare. "Complacency leads to defeat. Stand up, all of you."

As captain, Kenneth commanded respect, and the team immediately lined up for his address.

"Watch Hawk's match against RED closely. Don't miss a thing, especially Aaron. Got it?"

"Got it, captain."

In a nearby cubicle, Percival, having heard the pep talk outside, replied to Vivienne's message with a

'see you soon' and stood up to open the door.

With a click, the door swung open.

Kenneth's usually stoic face melted into adoration. "Bro, you're done with your work!"

The teammates were stunned.

This was not the Kenneth they knew a moment ago.

Percival nodded, his casual attire unable to mask his innate aristocratic air.

"The intensive training has yielded results, but don't get complacent. Remember, failure will have consequences."

The whole team, Kenneth included, held their breath at his words, sensing the gravity behind them.

...

Half an hour later, the match officially began.

Kenneth and his crew had snagged their seats in the bleachers bright and early. Their match was not until the afternoon, giving them the perfect opportunity to catch Aaron's match.

In the front row, Vivienne sat with her headphones in, eyes glued to her smartphone where a live feed streamed. It was footage from the hospital showing Yasmine and Natalia in real time.

Though she visited them every three days, Vivienne made it a point to check on the kids through the surveillance feed whenever she found a moment.

Zelda and Yuri had been looking after the two little ones exceptionally well, which put Vivienne at ease.

Suddenly, a large hand appeared over Vivienne's head. Strong fingers rested on her crown but moved tenderly, gently caressing her hair.

Vivienne looked up, meeting a pair of twinkling eyes.

"Mr. Wolf, that was quick," She said, a hint of surprise in her voice.

Mr. Wolf had promised to join her for the E-sports tournament, but she had not expected him to show up so soon.

Percival took a seat next to Vivienne. "Vivienne, how many times do I have to tell you? You can't say a man's quick."

Vivienne was speechless.

She had a hunch that Mr. Wolf was talking about something entirely different, but she had no proof!

Up on the stage, Bennett and his teammates were about to step up when he glanced over at the stands and asked, "Aaron, is that Vivienne's fiancé sitting next to her?"

Aaron looked over, and upon seeing Percival's hand caress Vivienne's face, he clenched his jaw tight.

"No, that's not her fiancé. That's her old lapdog!"

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The team, led by Bennett, was momentarily taken aback.

Old, huh?

But that man was handsome as hell!

Sitting there, they were a sight for sore eyes – literal eye candy!

In the stands, Callum pointed down below and exclaimed, “Holy cow, is that the coach’s fiancée sitting with him? She’s drop-dead gorgeous! An angel in the flesh!”

With a scowl, Kenneth smacked Callum on the head and retorted, “Are you blind? Why would my brother marry a woman like that? She’s not worthy of him.”

Callum clicked his tongue.

Not worthy?

They could not be more perfect for each other if they tried!

Before, Callum could not imagine the kind of woman who would be a match for Percival. Now, it was crystal clear.

Meanwhile, at the heart of the whirlwind, Percival and Vivienne were blissfully unaware that amid the thousands in the arena, Kenneth and Aaron were fuming just because they were seated together!

The match had just begun, and in less than three minutes, Aaron had decimated the enemy's defenses and claimed first blood.

“That kid’s got skills,” Percival commented with a nod of approval.

Just by looking at Aaron's gameplay, it was clear he was a cut above Kenneth.

Vivienne frowned, sensing the tension.

Were they not supposed to hold back in the first game to keep their strategies hidden from Team

Snake?

Aaron's aggression flared, and the game ended in a swift thirty minutes.

Even Kenneth was taken aback by the display. As an old rival, he could tell Hawk’s performance had

improved tenfold.

After a streak of seven losses, Hawk’s first victory sent morale skyrocketing, and cheers nearly shook

the entire stadium.

The fans rose to their feet, shouting in joy. Hawk’s chances for the championship now seemed within

reach.

The next game involved neither Aaron nor Kenneth.

Vivienne and Percival left their seats and saw Kenneth approaching with the Team Snake from a

distance.

“Bro, we're heading to the trainer to prep for the afternoon match,” Kenneth addressed Percival, though

his glare was fixed on Vivienne, filled with malice.

Vivienne had noticed Kenneth’s hostility during their last visit to the Ellington estate. It seemed even

more pronounced now.

“Vivienne, we won!” Aaron approached with a grin. Whether intentional or not, he stumbled near

Vivienne, his knee crashing to the ground.

Vivienne rushed to check on him and helped him up. “Don’t move. You might've hurt your bone.

Where’s everyone else?”

Aaron grimaced in pain. “They went back to the locker room. I was in a hurry to find you, and... Ouch,

that hurts.”

“I’ll help you inside,” Vivienne offered, taking Aaron’s arm over her shoulder to ease the weight off his

knee.

Percival’s eyes narrowed into slits. If looks could kill, Aaron’s hands would be useless by now.

But Aaron was a friend of Vivienne.

He did not dare.

"Come on, I'll carry you." Percival stepped forward, took Aaron's wrist, and pulled him over with ease.

Kenneth was aghast.

"Bro, how could you carry Aaron? You've never even carried me!" He yelled inwardly.

Kenneth blocked Percival's path. "Are you even a man, Aaron? A little tumble, and you're helpless?

Rubbish, why should my brother carry you!"

Aaron arched an eyebrow, a rebellious glint in his eyes. "That's for him to decide, not you."

Vivienne was exasperated. "Stop being childish. I'll help you get to the locker room."

"No!" Percival insisted, gripping Aaron's wrist. "He's too heavy for you to handle."

Was it too heavy for Vivienne?

She could lift Leopold with ease and twirl him around.

Percival glared at Aaron, "I will carry you."

Aaron's eyes narrowed, a silent battle of wills ensuing between them.

"I'll do it!" Suddenly, Kenneth hoisted Aaron onto his shoulders. Kenneth was taller and not as lean as

Aaron, so he carried Aaron off effortlessly to the locker room.

The move startled both the Snake and Hawk's other teammates.

Kenneth dumped Aaron on the sofa, "Drama queen."

Half of his face flushed with anger, Aaron shot back, "You're the drama queen!"

Vivienne and Percival followed them in as they looked set to bicker again.

Vivienne rolled up Aaron's pant leg to inspect his injury as soon as she entered. Thankfully, it was just a superficial wound.

She patted Aaron on the head, "No bone damage, just a flesh wound. Be more careful next time!"

Aaron grinned, "Got it."

At the door, Percival's eyes darkened.

"Nice play, kid." He thought.

"Bro, let's go," Kenneth muttered, pulling Percival away.

But Percival pushed Kenneth off and lifted Vivienne to her feet, his arm wrapping around her waist,

"Vivienne, you must be starving. Let's grab a bite."

Indeed, Vivienne was feeling peckish.

"Sure," She agreed, "Bennett, you guys keep practicing. I'll bring back lunch."

Aaron started to protest, "Vivienne..."

Before he could finish, Percival's hand rested on Aaron's shoulder, his eyes emanating a regal chill.

The forbidding aura flowed from his fingertips, enveloping Aaron with an icy pressure.

With measured words, Percival declared, "Just wait. We'll be quick."

Aaron suddenly found himself unable to speak, a bead of cold sweat trailing down his forehead.

Vivienne stealthily pinched Percival's waist, puzzled by the intense hostility he harbored towards Aaron.

It was not until Percival, with his arm snugly wrapped around Vivienne, exited the break room that

Bennett and the others let out a sigh of relief.

"Man, that was terrifying. Vivienne's fiancé is seriously intimidating."

"Dude, I didn't even dare to speak up. It was just lunch!"

"I'm a bit worried for Vivienne, though. He's not going to be harsh with her, is he?"

"Are you kidding? Vivienne is tough as nails. She can handle herself."

Only Aaron stood in silence, his gaze fixed on the break room door, hands clenched into fists.

"Percival, mark my words, one day I'll win Vivienne back!" He declared inwardly.

...

In an apartment in Rivenwood.

Calista stared at the documents sprawled across the table, too horrified to speak.

Scott, seated opposite her, asked, "What's the matter? Can't handle it?"

Calista set down the papers. "Dad, this is terrifying. Is this really okay?"

Scott had simply tasked Calista with completing a virus experiment, but she had not anticipated it would be of this nature.

If developed, this virus could become the most dreadful creation in human history. Putting aside its lethality, the mere transmission rate alone could outpace any known virus.

"No, Dad, we can't go through with this. This is dangerous."

Calista was backing out.

This was illegal, a crime that could cost them their heads.

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Scott suddenly grabbed Calista's neck, pulling her roughly toward him as his eyes blazed with a chilling intensity.

"No? Then you'll die for it!"

Calista's eyes reddened with fear, and tears streamed down her face instantly.

She knew Scott was serious—he would undoubtedly let her die.

Disgusted, Scott pushed Calista away and wiped his hands with a tissue. "Brody has bugged you. Get back to the lab tomorrow, work on that virus with TIC Research Institute, and don't screw up."

Calista nodded in understanding. "Yes, I've got it."

Scott gave Calista a cold glance that carried the same annoyance as he felt with her mother.

Then, donning his mask, he stood up and left. He still had to track down Rowan and Ismene.

Those two had betrayed the organization, and they would not be forgiven.

In the restaurant, Vivienne bit into a juicy steak, scrolling through messages on her phone.

[Vivienne, Timothy's fine. The Brooks family business is a bit messy, but Baron's in charge, so it's stable. Timothy's been auditing the company accounts lately.]

While chewing on her steak, Vivienne replied. [If Timothy's alright, then check on Carl. Make sure their whole family's safe.]

Matthew responded promptly. [On it.]

Vivienne was engrossed in her phone, oblivious to Percival's longing gaze from across the table.

It was not until Vivienne reached for the next dish that she noticed Percival's eager eyes.

"Mr. Wolf, do I look that appetizing to you?"

A shadow flickered in Percival's eyes, which seemed to linger on Vivienne. "Yes, you do look quite appetizing."

"Then eat up. You've got a match this afternoon." Vivienne forked some salad into her mouth.

Percival raised an eyebrow. "You know?"

Vivienne glanced up. "Snake lost their championship chance in the team match three years ago, but a month later, they came back and took six titles in a row. There's no way they did that by themselves."

After all, as Hawk's top coach, Vivienne knew all about the history of her old rival, Snake.

Snake, though fresher with new blood compared to Hawk, still lagged in skill.

Back in their prime, Bennett and his team could outplay many professional gamers worldwide.

But with slower reflexes now and Hawk's lack of funds to attract promising new players, they were in decline.

Meanwhile, Snake had the backing of Kenneth's financial empire, willing to spend and nurture talent.

With a mysterious coach joining three years ago, they quickly surpassed old rival Hawk to become the top in the nation.

Vivienne had been curious about this secretive coach. She had sent Matthew to investigate but to no avail.

Now that she had met Percival, the pieces fell into place.

She had never imagined facing off against Mr. Wolf.

Percival no longer hid his intentions, switching his finely cut steak onto Vivienne's plate and raising his juice glass in a toast. "Then, Vivienne, good luck."

Vivienne licked the salad dressing from the corner of her mouth, her eyes sparkling mischievously. She raised her glass and clinked it lightly against his. "Mr. Wolf, Hawk won't hold back."

...

The teams for the group stage were announced on the first day of the qualifiers.

Hawk and Snake both made it to the group stage but were not placed in the same group.

Kenneth smirked at the grouping information, taunting Bennett across the room, "Tell Aaron we'll see

him in the finals—if you guys make it that far."

Bennett pocketed the information and said with a nonchalant smile, "Why don't you tell Aaron yourself?

I saw you carrying Aaron back to the lounge at lunch. Seems like you're quite close."

With that, Bennett left the drawing room with a flourish.

Everyone present knew about the tension between Kenneth and Aaron.

But now, Kenneth looked like Aaron's "little lackey," carrying him back to the lounge.

Everyone knew about the fiery temper of Kenneth, the young heir of the Ellington family.

"You!" Kenneth was so enraged he nearly choked.

It was a last resort!

No way would he let his brother get his hands dirty.

Kenneth clenched his jaw fiercely. "Just wait until we meet in the match—your whole team will be

packing their bags!"

The next day, both Hawk and Snake had a breather from the qualifiers. Vivienne and Percival set up

training tasks for their teams and headed to the hospital together.

Though there was no real reason for Percival to go to the hospital, he felt he had to.

Just to prevent some people from distributing business cards willy-nilly.

But Percival was overthinking it; the one prone to careless card distribution, Yuri, was busy pacifying his father.

"Dad, I realize I was wrong."

"What good does knowing you're wrong do? Can it spare my granddaughters any suffering? You're good for nothing but trouble. If your brother hadn't let it slip, I'd still be in the dark about my dear granddaughters being in danger. Have you become so bold as to keep secrets from me now?"

Jasper ranted, pounding his cane, his eyes reddening with anger.

Yuri stood silently, not daring to breathe too loud while his father ranted.

"If outsiders didn't know better, they'd think the Perez family is cursed, always losing our treasures.

Why can't you careless boys get lost instead? It's infuriating!"

Jasper's heart ached for his granddaughters, and his thoughts turned to his daughter.

The thought of something happening to her...

He could not bear to think of it.

Sasha...

Yuri could see the distant look in his father's eyes; it was clear that his father was thinking of Sasha again.

He knelt before Jasper, saying, "Dad, don't be mad, alright? You can yell at me, or heck, give me a whipping. I'll buy a hundred belts, and you can keep going until you're satisfied. How about that?"

Jasper grunted, but anger would never drive him to actually whip his own son.

Flesh and blood, after all, was flesh and blood.

"Get out of here. What use is whipping you? Just make sure Zelda is alright. She must be scared out of her wits. Look after your wife, and don't worry about me."

Yuri chuckled. "Yeah, I got it, Dad. I'll follow your wise words to the letter."

"Scram."

During their exchange, Vivienne and Percival had also approached.

"Mr. Perez," Vivienne called out.

She looked up, taken aback.

This was the elderly gentleman who wanted to buy a painting that day!

Jasper's eyes lit up at the sight of Vivienne, "Oh, it's you, young lady."

"Yes, we meet again, Mr. Perez."

For some reason, Vivienne felt a flicker of excitement.

Why did a chance reunion move her with a man she had only met once?

Jasper stood up, expressing his gratitude. "Young lady, you saved my granddaughters, Natalia and

Yasmine Perez. They owe their lives to you. I can't thank you enough."

Vivienne stopped him. "No thanks are necessary, Mr. Perez. You've already given me a reward."

Yuri helped Jasper steady himself, "Dad, let Vivienne check on Yasmine and Natalia first. We can catch

up later. Please, have a seat."

"Thank you, young lady," Jasper said, looking intently at Vivienne with increasing fondness.

In the past, if anyone stared at Vivienne like that, they would have been in for a world of trouble.

But now, all she felt was warmth.

She could sense the kindness and love of the elderly in Jasper's eyes.

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Vivienne entered the hospital ward, leaving Percival waiting outside, seated opposite Jasper and Yuri.

Jasper and Yuri exchanged brief pleasantries with Percival before disengaging, preferring to keep to themselves.

Percival appeared engrossed in his phone, but with a few discreet taps, he had pulled up thorough profiles on the two men sitting across from him.

Jasper Perez, head of the prestigious Perez family and chairman of Perez Enterprises.

Yuri Perez, the Perez family's fourth son and the CFO of Perez Group.

The Perez family held a status in Sea City comparable to the Ellingtons.

With its century-long history and wealth rivaling that of nations, the family was a force to be reckoned with.

However, the Perez family were known for their discretion, rarely making public appearances and abstaining from social events.

These facts were available to the public, but Percival had accessed more sensitive information using

Vanguard Agency's resources: the Perez family was an ancient warrior lineage.

The details of such ancient warrior lineages, hidden in seclusion, were nearly impossible to trace

without tapping into national databases.

Ancient warrior lineages typically remained out of the public eye, drawing income from their corporate ventures or offering highly sought-after security services at exorbitant prices.

The Perez family, alongside the Martinez family of Rivenwood, were one of the few to step out into the world.

The Perez family had emerged publicly earlier than the Martinez family and conducted their affairs openly, so their warrior lineage identity was a well-kept secret.

Another piece of information piqued Percival's interest. Thirty-five years ago, Sasha, the ten-year-old daughter of the Perez family, had mysteriously vanished and was still missing.

Sasha's photograph, though blurry, hinted at her beauty.

Across the way, Jasper leaned in, his voice low, "What did you find?"

Yuri replied, "Vivienne's mother, Evelyn, took her own life ten years ago, the reasons unknown. No footage or records exist. Vivienne spent most of her years after ten at the Emerald Mountain, seldom coming down."

He glanced at Vivienne, who was busily attending to something in the ward, and asked, "What's

intriguing is Vivienne's identity."

"What about it?"

"She's known as designer Charles, perfumer Q, piano virtuoso Moonlight, and possibly holds other identities, but we can't trace them."

Yuri was confident in the Perez family's intelligence network. Yet, when it came to Vivienne, they could only scratch the surface; her deeper secrets remained elusive.

Jasper looked up at Percival, murmuring, "This girl's got chops. Is the kid up to par?"

Yuri paused before responding, "He's the heir to the Ellington family, betrothed to Vivienne."

Jasper clicked his tongue. "Who was short-sighted enough to arrange that?"

Yuri sighed. "Vivienne is the long-lost heiress of the Brooks family. Her mother, whose real name was Karen, had a romance with Scott Brooks, the eldest son of the Brooks family. She disappeared before their engagement for unknown reasons, later adopting the name Evelyn. It was under that name that she arranged the marriage contract with the old Ellington patriarch."

"What a waste," Jasper exhaled deeply.

He acknowledged Percival's merit among the younger generation. Percival's courage and savvy even surpassed his own son. But still, he felt Percival was unworthy of Vivienne, even after only their second meeting.

Yuri rubbed his temples, thinking how unfitting it was for them to meddle in the young couple's affairs.

The Ellington heir was no fool, after all. Why did Jasper not like Percival?

However, he held his tongue, knowing better than to provoke his father's ire.

"Father, it's unlikely Karen is Sasha," Yuri said cautiously after researching extensively. The information on Karen was scant, aside from what had emerged along with Vivienne. The Wilson family, now incarcerated with no visitation rights, were the only known connection, proving that Karen was one of them.

Moreover, the Wilsons were based far in Rivenwood, a great distance from Sea City. When Sasha disappeared, the Perez family had locked down every exit from the city, monitoring everything from buses to subways, making it improbable that Sasha could have traveled so far.

At this moment, Vivienne stepped out of the ward, followed by Zelda, Yuri's wife.

Vivienne removed her mask and turned to Yuri with a reassuring smile. "Mr. Perez, there's good news

about Yasmine and Natalia. Their hearts are mending, slowly but surely. They'll need to stay in the hospital a bit longer just to make sure everything's completely fine. In the meantime, take good care of them, will you?"

"Of course, Vivienne," Yuri replied, his voice tinged with relief. He became a father later in life and knew the stakes were high. If something happened to her daughters, she would regret it for life. "We'll watch over them diligently. Thank you for everything."

Percival, who had been quietly observing, stood up as well. "Vivienne, shall we head back?"

Just as Vivienne was about to agree, Zelda tugged at her sleeve. "Vivienne, you've been such a blessing to our family. Even though we've settled your fees, I'd still like to express our gratitude. Would you and Percival honor us by joining us for a simple meal as a token of our appreciation?"

Jasper stepped forward with a warm smile. "Yeah, young lady, you've worked so hard. It doesn't sit right with us if we don't get to say a proper thank you."

With the elders making such a heartfelt request, it would have been impolite for Vivienne to refuse, and truth be told, she found herself quite fond of this family.

"Alright," Vivienne accepted Jasper's invitation.

What was referred to as a simple meal turned out to be a reservation at the most luxurious restaurant in Rivenwood, with an entire floor exclusively for their use.

"I wasn't sure what you liked, so I took the liberty of booking this place. They've got everything – barbecue, fondue, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and some continental and Southern cuisine.

Whatever you fancy, we'll order," Zelda said, linking her arm with Vivienne's and guiding her around the dining area.

Vivienne glanced at Zelda, pondering. She had done her homework on the Perez family's background, and Zelda, holding onto her arm, was certainly no stranger to high society.

Zelda, the true heiress of the illustrious Lynette family, had been childhood friends with Yuri. However, since she was injured when she was young, she had faced her share of struggles, having to go through treatment for a very long period before being able to give birth to two wonderful children.

"Vivienne, you really should try this," Zelda suggested, placing a piece of freshly grilled beef onto Vivienne's plate.

Vivienne paused for a moment. Were they already on a first-name basis?

Noticing Vivienne's surprised expression, Zelda quickly apologized, "Oh, I'm sorry, I got carried away and called you by your first name. You don't mind, do you?"

Vivienne shook her head, unfazed. "Not at all. 'Vivienne' is quite endearing; I like it."

Zelda exhaled in relief, her eyes misting slightly. "Seeing you... You remind me of my little sister. She would have grown up to be just as beautiful as you," she murmured.

Vivienne simply smiled and continued enjoying her meal while Zelda, reassured, chatted away, filling the air with light-hearted conversation.