

## **Million-Dollar 541**

### Chapter 541

Gillian's grip did not loosen; if anything, it tightened with a fierce determination.

Just moments ago, she had been planning to invite Percival over to her house to negotiate a partnership with the Ellington family following her father's successful acquisition of the Boyd family.

But then, in a twist of fate as cruel as it was sudden, her father was arrested, the Ashford Mansion was seized, and her family's fortune evaporated into thin air.

The shock was unbearable; she simply could not accept it!

Unable to get her revenge on Percival or Vivienne, Gillian directed all her rage at Mara.

Just as Mara's breath was being squeezed out of her, agents from the DEA arrived in the nick of time, subduing Gillian.

Mara's life was saved, but her face was ruined beyond recognition. The infection from the cuts, made worse by the dirty porcelain doll fragments embedded in her flesh, had spread too far.

"Gillian's been arrested for assault, Mara's fallen into a depression after her disfigurement, Teresa has divorced Theodore and left the country with her kids, and Nancy has absconded with all of the Boyd family's wealth, taking her children far from Sea City. Everyone else is in prison. Ms. Vivienne, that's all

there is," Anna reported the fates of the Boyd and Ashford families to Vivienne.

None of this was surprising or particularly stirring to Vivienne, except Gillian's breakdown – that was unexpected.

"Got it," Vivienne said, tucking the translated contract into her bag and donning a baseball cap before getting into her car. "Tell Mr. Wolf to wait here; I'll be back shortly."

Anna nodded, watching Vivienne drive away, already rehearsing the story she would tell Percival - Ms.

Vivienne had a date!

Vivienne pulled up in front of the restaurant and stepped out, clutching her bag. Inside, the restaurant

hosted only one table of diners, reserved by two familiar faces: Zachary, patriarch of the Churchill

family, and William, patriarch of the Pendleton family.

"Madam." Zachary stood first, his eyes glistening slightly.

William was more composed, for Vivienne was his mentor, even though he had never imagined his

mentor to be the long-sought daughter of Karen.

Vivienne nodded, indicating that they should sit.

"Why did not you tell me the truth from the beginning?" She asked directly.

Zachary and William exchanged looks before Zachary sighed. "Madam, to be frank, we had no idea

you were the boss's daughter nor that her name was Vivienne. You seemed familiar when I met you in

Havenwood, but I never connected the dots... If I had known, I would have safeguarded you long ago."

Realizing that Vivienne hardly needed his protection, he trailed off awkwardly.

"You didn't know my name? Then how did Patrick recognize me so readily?" Vivienne had assumed

her mother had revealed her name to them.

William snorted. "Patrick, that conniving little weasel. He stole the boss's tech reports from us and lied

that they were lost. He wouldn't have been strutting around Sea City if we hadn't lost touch over the

years."

After Karen's death, the three families she had supported had secretly met, agreeing to cut off contact

to avoid drawing attention to their past allegiance to Karen. They all suspected foul play in Karen's

death and wanted to preserve what she had left behind. For a decade, they kept their distance from

each other.

Except for Patrick, the Churches and Pendletons looked for Karen's daughter, intent on protecting her.

But aside from knowing she was female, they had no other information.

Little did they know that Vivienne had grown strong enough to protect them.

"Looking back, the boss must have sensed a traitor among us, which was why she disclosed so little,"

William said with a grave tone, a flicker of ruthlessness crossing his eyes.

Zachary agreed, slamming his fist on the table, "That Patrick—if I'd known he was the traitor, I would

have used my family's entire might to prevent him from getting away with so much for so long, nearly

harming you."

Zachary and William were aware of the incident where Vivienne had been aboard the Ashford family

yacht when a bomb was planted. They still shuddered at the thought.

Vivienne, however, was unfazed. She had known Patrick was up to no good, and the bomb was not his

doing, nor was it the work of the Boyds. She was still investigating the true culprit.

"Let's not dwell on the past. I've called you here because there's a new task I need you to undertake,"

Vivienne said, pulling out the translated documents from her bag and handing them to William and

Zachary.

The Churchill family had been surviving on their own merits, without invoking any of Karen's resources, knowing they lacked the capability to fully harness what Karen had left behind.

They knew the gravity of the situation all too well. The mere exposure of these items could send shock waves through their circles. If anyone connected the dots back to Karen's daughter, it would spell disaster.

Meanwhile, William had been tirelessly devoted to the medical field and had even taken Vivienne as his mentor.

As they perused the document, a flicker of surprise danced across their eyes.

They exchanged glances, then simultaneously pulled out another set of papers from their bags.

"Master, you've got a keener eye. Do these add up to the same thing as your document?" William handed the papers over.

Vivienne leafed through them, and a chuckle escaped her lips.

As it turned out, Karen had divided the bionic research into three parts long before her death, entrusting two parts to the Pendleton and Churchill families and hiding the last piece in her hometown.

She left it for Patrick to uncover.

This meant Karen must have known all along that Patrick was the traitor in their midst.

But then...

Vivienne's grip on the documents tightened.

If her mother knew everything, why would she take her own life?

It just did not add up.

Was there something she was overlooking? Content belongs to Dramanovels.com

"Master?" William called out, noting the increasing severity in Vivienne's expression.

Piecing together the documents revealed the essence of the Boyd family's contract.

It seemed that Karen had indeed completed the research on bionic technology but cleverly divided it into three mixed parts.

Karen remembered everything.

But did she know that she was, in fact, the long-lost daughter of the Perez family?

Chapter 542

William pondered for a moment before speaking up, "It was about two weeks before the boss took her own life. She sent it to me over the local network; it was a burn-after-reading kind of deal, leaving only

this file with instructions to keep it safe, saying it would come in handy later. Then she just vanished without a trace."

"It was the same for me. The boss made me promise not to let these secrets out," Zachary also chimed in.

Vivienne's brow furrowed with concern. It would come in handy later?

How so?

Her mother was dead. What good could it possibly do now?

"Master, could this be... bionic technology?" William ventured to ask.

Vivienne nodded. "Yes, that's exactly what I'm entrusting to you. I've consolidated all the Ashford and Boyd family resources, and the labs are all set up, but I don't have the time to manage them. I'm hoping you can handle it. Will that work for you?"

"Of course, it's perfect," William replied, his voice tinged with excitement. "Master, aside from my work in holistic medicine, I've been relying on this document from the boss to research bionics. I always felt something was missing, but now that you've brought this to us, it's all starting to make sense."

Zachary nodded in agreement. "Yeah, I've always wondered what the boss meant by it might come in

handy. Turns out she was waiting for you to come to us, Madam."

Vivienne's lips curved into a slight smile.

Waiting for her to come to them? Did her mother have the same capabilities as her mentor, to know the future?

How could her mother be so sure that she would come?

A myriad of questions flickered through Vivienne's mind, slowly shaping into a theory.

"You guys can handle the Havenwood and Rivenwood affairs. Patrick has been making progress with the bionics project over the years, but he never quite cracked it. Keep pushing in that direction, and you're bound to see results soon."

After giving her instructions, Vivienne stood up. "If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask me."

With those final words, she left without looking back.

Vivienne felt confident entrusting the bionic technology to the combined expertise of the Pendleton and Churchill families.

With that matter settled, Vivienne made her way to the underground prison where Patrick was being



held.

After a stint with the DEA, Patrick had been secretly transferred here by Percival.

Soaked and shivering in his water cell, Patrick was a pitiful sight to behold.

Vivienne sat across from him, studying his pale and swollen face without a shred of empathy.

Betraying her mother, manufacturing and trafficking drugs, stealing her mother's research for profit,

colluding with GTO...

Each and every act was a betrayal that struck at Vivienne's core.

At the sound of her approach, Patrick struggled weakly and managed to gasp, "Madam... I know I was

wrong. Please, let me go."

Vivienne's eyes narrowed as she asked coldly, "Where's F-Poison?"

Patrick swallowed hard, the chains binding him clanking. "I don't know. I've never met him. We've only

ever communicated online."

"You've never met F-Poison, yet you chose to betray my mother?"

Chilled by Vivienne's icy tone, Patrick shivered and stammered, "Initially, GTO approached me and

offered me a lot. They said I could make a fortune if I followed them. I was desperate for money, I..."

Before Patrick could finish, Vivienne's hand was already tightening around his throat.

Patrick could feel the fury in her grip as he struggled for his life, splashing water everywhere.

"I was wrong... Madam... I was wrong. Please, I beg you, let me go. I know I made a mistake."

Vivienne tightened her grip, her anger making her want to twist his neck right off. But as she saw the blood in Patrick's eyes, she finally let go.

Patrick gasped for breath. For a moment, he thought he was truly going to die.

"Ahem... Madam, I'm telling the truth. I really haven't seen F-Poison, but I did meet a girl from GTO.

She's the only one I've ever met." Patrick hastily tried to prove his loyalty.

But his loyalty meant nothing now.

Vivienne's gaze sharpened, "Did F-Poison ever ask you for the bionics research?"

Patrick choked, avoiding her gaze, "Yes... he did. But the technology is still immature. It only functions for ten seconds in front of people before it collapses. It's useless. Madam, that doesn't change anything, right?"

Patrick's deepest connection was with Keco.

After all, the high-purity drugs they produced were extraordinarily lucrative and had sustained GTO's finances for years.

With a swift chop, Vivienne knocked Patrick out cold. His head sank into the water, bubbling as he lost consciousness.

Stepping out of the water cell and sitting in her car, Vivienne could not shake the feeling that something was off.

When Imogen fled, she had the help of a projector, but no matter what, she could not have escaped from under her and Percival's watch without leaving a trace.

The person who had "exploded" before them, leaving nothing behind, was not a person at all—it was a biorobot created by Imogen using Patrick's bionic technology.

Ten seconds was all she needed.

But everyone's focus had been on finding the bomb; no one had noticed anything odd about Imogen's behavior.

In retrospect, her movements had been logical, but her expressions were stiff, lacking the fear of someone facing imminent death.

Nonetheless, Vivienne had never expected a biorobot to be so convincing.

This also explained why the hair left at the scene was made of synthetic fibers.

Using a projector to cover up bionic technology—this F-Poison was indeed clever.

After all, anyone who could outmaneuver the likes of Karen and Percival for so long had to be smart.

The car's engine hummed as she drove away, her mind racing with the implications of her discovery.

A flash of surprise twinkled in Percival's eyes.

This was the first time Vivienne had resisted the temptation of strawberry shortcake! Content belongs  
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Indeed, time was the best proof.

He had finally triumphed over the strawberry shortcake!

Vivienne took a few deep breaths, reaching for the shortcake.

But Percival held it just out of reach.

"Mr. Wolf!" Vivienne pouted playfully, her voice tinged with a whiny undertone.

Percival pinned her against the car, still keeping the shortcake aloft, but lowered his head to lock eyes

with her. "Kiss me."

Vivienne's face was a picture of confusion.

"Kiss me, and the strawberry shortcake is yours," Percival gestured to his lips, a meaningful gaze fixed

on Vivienne.

Chapter 543

Vivienne blinked, not a hint of hesitation in her eyes as she leaned in and captured those plush, ruby

lips with her own.

It did not matter how many kisses it took.

To score a kiss from Mr. Wolf and savor a slice of strawberry shortcake—what could be better?

This was a win-win if there ever was one!

Back in the car, their personal driver, Leopold, and the ever-watchful bodyguard, Anna, seemed to

materialize from thin air, taking their respective places without a word.

Vivienne indulged in her shortcake blissfully while Percival contentedly watched her enjoy every bite.

The atmosphere was surprisingly harmonious.

Leopold glanced at them through the rear-view mirror and lowered the privacy screen discreetly.

Out of sight, out of mind!

After finishing her dessert, Vivienne peered through a gap in the curtain at Anna and inquired, "What's up with Husky again?"

"Samoyed isn't answering her phone," Anna said dryly, propping herself against the car window.

Caught between the two couples day in, day out—it was downright exhausting!

She should have joined Thomas in handling the Ashford family factory affairs.

Vivienne knew all too well that ever since Griffin had gotten her hands on that new bomb prototype, she had vanished into her lab, immersing herself in work mode with no time for romantic distractions.

Work and love—she kept them separate with precision.

"Are we heading back to Rivenwood now? Does Griffin know?" Percival asked.

Leopold pulled the car over, lifted the screen with due solemnity, and declared, "Percival, you're right.

We need to inform her posthaste. Let's go!"

Anna casually interjected, "Thomas said Griffin told us to head back first. She'll catch up after wrapping up her research. Oh, and she'll be bringing Thomas with her."

Though the Ashford family factory issue had been resolved, GTO's virus research base in Sea City

remained a loose end.

Percival had tasked Thomas to stay behind in Sea City under the guise of guarding the new bomb prototype, continuing the covert investigation.

Meanwhile, he would handle headquarters affairs in Ravenwood.

Silence fell inside the car. Percival purposefully drew the curtain again, wrapping an arm around

Vivienne as they drove off, carefree and content.

Anna turned her gaze to the scenery outside the window.

“Yes, this is nice,” She thought.

Leopold clenched his jaw.

What was going on now?

Thomas again!

That traitor had been in touch with Griffin behind his back!

“Just you wait!” He cursed inwardly.

Leopold floored the accelerator, channeling all his frustration as if the pedal were Thomas's head.

Vivienne could not help but muse—she had not noticed how close Thomas had gotten to Griffin.

She glanced up at Percival.

He nodded, whispering, "We've got to give our scientists some perks."

She knew it!

Percival had his fingerprints all over this.

But perhaps it was for the best. Without a little crisis, Leopold would never learn to appreciate what he had.

Just then, Vivienne's phone buzzed, showing a map with a single marked location.

She recognized it as a tip from Quincy about a GTO stronghold in Sea City.

She forwarded the map to Thomas, telling him to back up Quincy if needed.

But the next image she received was unexpected. It was not from Quincy, just two words—Stay out.

Vivienne frowned. Was this another cryptic message from that mysterious informant?

Somewhere in Sea City, Quincy lay bloodied and barely breathing on the ground. The door burst open, and in walked a pair of red stilettos. The owner sat across from Quincy, legs crossed like a fashion model, tapping her foot on the floor.



"Quincy, who leaked Patrick's factory location? Have you figured it out?" The woman asked.

Quincy caught her breath and looked up, unable to see the woman's face clearly.

Struggling to sit up, her blurred vision making it impossible to open her eyes fully, she gasped. "I don't

know... I only found out that Percival has been tracking Gillian's whereabouts."

After a moment, Quincy's vision cleared enough to recognize the woman.

It was Vivienne!

"How did you... Why are you here?" Quincy stumbled backward in disbelief.

No, this person could not be Vivienne. Vivienne could not possibly be here.

Quincy drew her concealed pistol and pointed it at the woman. "Why are you here? Aren't you

Percival's fiancée?"

"Vivienne" chuckled. "Or I should call you Barnaby; why so agitated? I came after receiving your

message. Don't you get it?"

"You're talking nonsense! Knowing my true name doesn't make you trustworthy. Who are you?" Quincy

demanding, still eyeing the woman warily.

The woman's smile deepened, a smug grin playing on her lips, "Who am I? Shouldn't you know by

now?"

"Vivienne" had had her fun. She stood up and peeled off the silicone mask that had been concealing her true identity.

"I remember when Belle told me you were a talent, I had my doubts. But now, it's clear I was right to think so. All this time, and you never spotted my little cosmetic trick."

Inside, Quincy breathed a sigh of relief. So, it was a disguise, after all. Updated at [Dramanovels.com](http://Dramanovels.com)

She had known that even after sending that picture to Vivienne, there was no way she would show up here.

"Who are you, really?" Quincy asked, her eyes taking in the woman's cascading hair, which fell like seaweed over her shoulders, so beautiful it almost did not seem real.

Settling back into her seat, the woman replied with a hint of pride, "I'm your boss, the one and only F-Poison."

F-Poison's face was shrouded in shadow, making her true appearance indiscernible to Quincy.

Taking a moment to collect herself, Quincy slid down against the wall and removed her own prosthetic

mask. "Turns out you did not notice my little cosmetic trick either. Seems we're even, Boss."

Much to F-Poison's surprise, Quincy had been more resourceful than she had anticipated. To think she was injured so badly and still managed to pull off a disguise, even fooling her.

"Yeah, this time it's real."

F-Poison seemed genuinely intrigued, reaching out to pinch Quincy's cheek somewhat

condescendingly. "I do have a soft spot for little girls, especially the smart ones like you."

Chapter 544

Quincy ducked, but with the wall at her back, there was nowhere left to hide. She had no choice but to succumb to F-Poison's twisted sense of humor.

"Boss, just how many masks are you hiding behind that poker face of yours?"

As F-Poison leaned in close, the disguise became unmistakably clear.

The face F-Poison was wearing was that of Gillian.

F-Poison patted her own cheek. "Doesn't matter, as long as it looks good."

With that, F-Poison pulled a pill from her pocket and popped it into Quincy's mouth. "Life-saving pill, half a mil a pop, you're getting a sweet deal."

The moment Quincy swallowed the pill, the oppressive weight she felt lifted. It was indeed the real Life-

saving pill.

"Boss, my bad. I could not keep a lid on Patrick's factory and let those Vanguard Agency rats find a foothold. And what I said was true: Percival really did get to Patrick's factory by tailing Gillian. To be safe, Patrick always sent Gillian to fetch the samples. Poor girl was clueless and thought she was just helping Daddy with some paperwork, so we never got made.

When Percival showed up, he focused on Gillian, and that's when the spot blew up. I wanted to swipe Keco's formula, but that Thomas was crafty and had bombs rigged up in advance."

F-Poison waved it off. "I know, it's not on you. Rest up. We can't lose our grip on Sea City. I'll hit you up once you're back in the game."

Quincy nodded, watching F-Poison slip away.

Glancing back, F-Poison's smile shone brighter. "Had you not fired, the bomb you were leaning on would have gone off by now. Congrats, you've lived another day."

With that, F-Poison shut the door and left the safe house.

Cold sweat drenched Quincy. It was clear that F-Poison did not let any detail go unchecked, no matter

how small.

And Quincy had not even realized the gun at her waist was rigged to a bomb!

She found the bomb; its countdown halted.

The trigger was the bomb's remote!

Wiping her brow, Quincy reflected on her hesitation to shoot. With Vivienne's sudden appearance and

her clouded judgment, she could have been an easy mark.

Thankfully, she trusted Vivienne would not meddle.

For now, she had survived F-Poison's test.

...

At Rivenwood.

After dropping Vivienne at her place, Leopold drove Percival to the Ellington Mansion.

Parking in front of the grand estate, Leopold killed the engine, reluctant.

"Pick me up at seven sharp tomorrow," Percival said, tapping the seat before exiting the luxury car.

Rolling down the window, Leopold called out, "Hey, when's Thomas getting back? I can't be your

chauffeur forever!"

Percival looked back casually. "Didn't he say he's coming with Griffin?"

It was not even late, but Percival slapped Leopold's shoulder, saying, "Congrats, you're finally free of Griffin."

Leopold could not even voice his complaints.

Free of Griffin? Since when did he want to be?

Had he ever said that?

Never!

Percival strutted off, leaving Leopold alone in the car, yelling his frustration to the heavens.

"Thomas, this means war!"

Fresh from the shower, Percival texted Vivienne.

She replied quickly with a photo of a note that read, [Beware of Vance Edwards.]

Tapping away, Percival replied: [That mystery person again?]

[Yep. Didn't message me this time, came straight into my house.]

Vivienne chuckled, then added: [Seems like they've got tabs on me.]

[Beware of Vance, huh? So, this person is surprisingly very familiar with Vance. Could he be someone from the Vanguard Agency?]

Percival always felt the enigma bore no ill will but remained elusive, never leaving a trail to follow.

Who could it be?

Vivienne turned in her bed and replied: [Doubtful, but definitely linked to Vanguard Agency.]

[Be careful.]

Vivienne shut off her phone, gazing at the night sky.

Last time, it was her mentor sneaking around; now, that mystery man? Perhaps it was time to beef up her estate security?

These folks seemed to waltz into her backyard like it was nothing. Unsettling, to say the least.

...

Somewhere in Rivenwood.

Finnian poured a cup of water for his guest. "Why the sudden urge to tidy her place up?"

"It's been years of neglect. Just a whim," the person replied, sipping water with a smile.

Finnian eyed the person sitting opposite, smirking. "After all this time, what's a little longer?"

The person glanced up. "Any objections?"

"Me? Never," Finnian took a leisurely sip. "Just a heads-up. Knowing my apprentice... if she learns the truth, whether she accepts you is another story."

The person's fingers froze on the cup, whose expression shifting ever so slightly before exhaling,

"She'll understand."

"We'll see," Finnian added.

An apprentice that chased him down for a mere grand for years was petty beyond belief. This bombshell? Forgiveness seemed a tall order.

The person slammed the cup down, frost in the voice, "Mind your own business. Remember, I'm the one who covered for you a few days ago."

Finnian fell silent.

...

The next day.

Leopold dragged himself out of bed to drive to the Ellington Mansion.



Leopold yawned, his voice tinged with the frustration of the sleep-deprived. "I was on the phone with that rascal Thomas till the wee hours. Drove me up the wall." Content of Dṙṁanovels.com

Percival shook his head, got out, and gestured for Leopold to move over to the passenger side.

"Drowsy driving is asking for trouble. You trying to get yourself killed?"

"Hey, don't make it sound so dramatic," Leopold protested with another yawn, but he complied, sliding into the passenger seat to catch some much-needed rest.

Just then, Thomas rang Percival to report in, his voice betraying none of the weariness one would expect.

Whatever had gotten into Leopold in the middle of the night, he just would not hang up.

Percival raised an eyebrow in disbelief. Leopold had spent the entire night on a video call watching Thomas sleep.

Was he that worried about Griffin moving in on Thomas?

That was definitely remarkable.

Leopold, the Husky of humans—loyal to a fault, or maybe just plain loopy!

Chapter 545

Percival steered his car into the Vanguard Agency's Rivenwood headquarters parking lot. Soren, Anna,

and the rest of the crew were already there, all decked out in the Agency's crisp uniforms.

Today was the day Percival would officially step into the role of Deputy Director.

Every member of the Rivenwood Vanguard Agency was dressed to the nines for the promotion ceremony.

In the absence of the Director, the Deputy Director was the top dog. This ceremony was pretty much Percival taking the reins of the Rivenwood headquarters.

"Captain, why are you behind the wheel?" Soren approached, eyeing Percival as he climbed out of the driver's seat. Beside him, Leopold was snoozing like a log, enough to make Soren's teeth itch with irritation.

How could Leopold let the captain drive himself here?

Especially now that Percival was stepping up as Deputy Director, with the whole headquarters watching. Where did that leave his dignity?

Everyone knew Soren was Percival's number-one fanboy. Any threat to Percival's prestige was a no-go in Soren's book.

Micah once joked that if Percival said the Vanguard Agency should cease to exist, Soren would probably tear down all the branches brick by brick.

Like today, Soren was more excited about the ceremony than Percival himself, so excited he had not slept a wink all night.

Percival tossed the keys to Soren and took the uniform jacket Anna handed him. "Get that sleepy mutt on his feet."

Without a word, Soren hoisted Leopold out of the car, nearly popping his shoulder out of its socket.

After changing into his uniform, Percival headed to the auditorium.

The whole staff was there, and as Percival stepped out, applause thundered around the room, Soren's clapping nearly deafening Leopold by his side.

Anna sat behind Soren, rolling her eyes at his antics. She was convinced that if Soren were a woman, he would be Vivienne's fiercest love rival.

Percival took his seat amid the leaders, right in the center.

"The Director's out, I'm calling the shots. Meeting adjourned."

The crowd was stunned. Was Percival, now the Deputy Director, not one for a big speech?

A fellow leader whispered, "Deputy, say a few words, will you? Morale's been low; a pep talk could do wonders."

Percival's brow furrowed subtly.

Low morale?

Nerves frayed?

He took the mic and strolled to the stage, his intimidating presence casting a chill.

"I hear morale's been low. Three miles weighted runs after work, starting today. Let's cut the drama, or do you fancy a short life?"

The Vanguard Agency's missions were critical; low morale meant slack performance, which could end in an unmarked grave with nobody the wiser.

Need a morale boost? Percival saw that as a death wish.

Everyone straightened their backs; no one dared admit to low morale now.

Percival was never one to do a pep talk in meetings. To him, getting the orders passed down was more than sufficient.

What was the point of inspiring speeches?

Even a bonus would be much more effective in boosting morale.

As Percival swept the room with his icy gaze, ready to put the mic down, the auditorium doors swung open.

Without turning, he sensed the newcomer's chilly aura.

With everyone present and Micah in lockdown, who could it be?

As he turned, his eyes narrowed, suppressing a flash of hostility as he saw who it was.

"Percival makes a fair point. Working for the Vanguard Agency means risking your neck. If your morale

is down, that's a one-way ticket to the underworld. Keep that to your pillow talk, and never let it into the

field, or you'll lose your head, and nobody can save you."

Percival watched the man who leaped onto the stage with agile grace, no need for a mic to make his voice heard.

It was none other than Vance, the second-in-command of the Sea City headquarters!

Vance approached Percival with an outstretched hand. "Percival, pleased to meet you. I'm Vance

Edwards."

Percival's handshake was firm, feeling the callouses of a man never far from his gun.

"Percival Ellington," he introduced himself, eyes locked on Vance's.

Percival's brow creased.

Continue as the director of the Vanguard Agency?

Could it be that the long-absent Vanguard Agency Director was Vance?

With the power of both Sea City's second-in-command and Rivenwood director in his hands, his

influence was astronomical.

It was clearly a joke, but no one dared to laugh.

It was supposed to be Percival's knighthood ceremony, his moment of glory, but Vance just had to

crash the party. Was the director trying to show his deputy who was boss around here?

No one cracked a smile at Vance's sudden appearance, and he clicked his tongue in mock

disappointment. "What's with you folks, lost your sense of humor?"

Percival just shot him a look and flashed a half-smile, "Welcome back to the team, Director Vance."

Just like that, Vance stole the spotlight and overturned Percival's orders—a classic power move.

As the meeting dispersed, a few senior leaders took Vance to his office to get him up to speed.

Even though Vance used to run the show at the Vanguard Agency, things had changed over the years, and he would need a refresher.

Meanwhile, Percival headed to what used to be Micah's office, which now bore his own name on the door.

Anna stood guard outside while Leopold and Soren followed him in.

"Damn it," Soren cursed under his breath, "the director clearly came back just to show you up. Does he even have the appointment and personnel decision? This is infuriating!"

#### Chapter 546

Soren was steaming mad. He had not slept a wink all night due to the excitement, and now his face was flushed red, a sure sign he was ready to throw down if pushed any further.

Leopold pulled Soren aside. "Dude, can you keep it down? Do you really want the director to overhear your grumbling? Are you out of your mind, ticking off the brass?"

"You're one to talk, driving around Percival like a chauffeur. Mind your own business and scram!" Soren shoved Leopold away. "No, I've got to have it out with him and find out where the hell he came from."

Before the words had fully left his mouth, the office door swung open, and there stood Anna, frowning.

"No need for questions, the... the director is here."

Vance strolled in, hands clasped behind his back, a smile playing on his lips as he regarded Soren.

"Soren, together with Deputy Director Percival, one of the talented recruits who entered the Vanguard

Agency in the same batch. You led your team to second place in the final test, and now you're the

captain of Special Squad Three. You also earned a commendation a while back."

Soren, taken aback by how well Vance knew him, could hardly muster a word in response to that sly grin.

Percival stood up and said, "Both of you, out. And close the door behind you."

"Hold on a minute." Vance pulled out his phone and showed the screen to Soren after a few seconds. "I

flew here, first class, but don't worry, I won't be filing an expense report."

Leopold quickly tried to lighten the mood. "Boss, you're too generous. Maybe this means us grunts will get a better meal now and then?"

Vance chuckled. "How about I ensure your work meals follow The Sterling Group's cafeteria menu?

Wouldn't we want Mr. Sterling to go to the trouble of sending over his recipes daily?"



"Please, no, our cafeteria is way too greasy as it is. We're good, really. No need to go to any trouble on our account, Boss," Leopold said, ushering Soren out the door.

Scary man, that Vance. A smiling tiger, no doubt. He had only been around half an hour and had everyone pegged.

With a smiling tiger as the boss and a cold-faced wolf as his deputy, how on earth were they going to survive?

Once outside, Leopold shut the door, dragging Soren with one hand and Anna with the other.

"You were supposed to keep watch, not let them in!" Leopold reprimanded Anna.

Anna sighed heavily, rolling her eyes at Soren, explaining to Leopold, "His shouting drowned out my secret knock. Anyone could have heard him. Even a passing dog would have been turned off by the bad vibes, and you blame me?"

Leopold spat at Soren. "You really are negative. Couldn't you have waited to talk about this in private?"

Now you just wait for the director to come down on you."

Soren brushed Leopold off. "Squad Three, assemble. Three miles weighted run!"

With that, Soren stalked off, fuming.

He knew the air of authority Vance emitted was on par with Percival's.

No easy adversary.

Anna followed quickly, and Leopold called after her, "Where the heck do you think you're going?"

Anna threw him a disgusted look over her shoulder, "I'm in his squad!"

What else was there to do?

Follow the Deputy Director's orders: run three miles with weights.

Talk about bad vibes.

Back in the office, Percival emerged from his desk. "I heard from the Ellington Group that the Edwards

Group's overseas cafeterias serve the best food. How about we follow their menu for a change,

Director?"

Vance settled into a chair and gestured for Percival to sit on the sofa beside him. "Let's sit and talk."

Percival sat down and asked, "What did you need to see me about?"

"I've come to deliver a personnel appointment. It's from ten years back, but I am indeed the director.

The digital version will be sent over from headquarters before the day is out."

True to his word, Vance produced an official personnel appointment letter.

This was a classified document, accessible only with the proper biometric verification from the person in question and the headquarters director.

"Ten years ago, just as I got the verbal order from my superior, I tracked down an overseas human trafficking ring that I'd been chasing for a while. To take them down, I went undercover. It turned out to be a ten-year mission, knocking out one crime syndicate after another. I moved up the ranks, but the director's appointment never changed."

Vance offered a brief explanation.

"I came by today because I was suddenly notified, and since everyone was here, I thought I'd make an appearance, steal your thunder a bit. Sorry about that."

Percival chuckled. "No harm done. But I'm sure there's more to your visit than just that. Out with it; we're all busy."

Vance nodded. "Right. I have to head back to The Edwards Group's Rivenwood branch for a meeting.

To cut a long story short, I'm reshuffling the personnel at headquarters. I'm recommending Thomas for

the role of Chief Commander, and I want to integrate the second squad into the first and third. I'm proposing a swap between Leopold and Soren. Additionally, I want Leopold to focus on protecting Griffin to ensure the supply of weapons to both headquarters and the entire agency."

Percival's brow furrowed. Vance was looking to decentralize Leopold's power.

While the captains of the three squads were technically equals, the first squad was always at the forefront, giving Leopold a bit more clout.

And now Vance wanted to move Leopold into the background?

"And why don't you step down yourself?" Percival's tone carried a hint of frost.

Vance fell silent for a few seconds, then said, "I'm having Leopold infiltrate the Martinez family to dig up some secrets, the specifics of which I can't disclose to you." Read at [Dramanovels.com](http://Dramanovels.com)

Even without being told, Percival could guess the gist of it.

The Martinez family had always been in the arms trade, an ancient warrior lineage, too.

Griffin was the heiress to the Martinez family, a prodigy in weaponry, and the sole successor.

Whatever Vance was after, it surely had something to do with arms!

But Vance was the director, and this was a classified matter, so Percival could not meddle.

"Percival, if there are no other objections, the personnel appointment will be announced tomorrow

morning. How does that sound?" Vance asked.

Percival narrowed his eyes. "Fine."

Chapter 547

"Damn it!"

Leopold was floored for a solid half-hour when he saw the personnel appointment circulate with the

new appointments.

Just the other day, he was consoling Soren, warning him to watch his back with the new Director

sniffing around for scapegoats. And now, it turned out he was the one who would be dancing to the

Director's tune!

The joke was on him, and he was the last to know.

Anna clapped Leopold on the shoulder, a look of sympathy in her eyes. "Captain, looks like I'll be

counting on you from here on out ."

Soren walked over, tucking the insignia of the third squad into his desk drawer, but his words were for

Anna. "Don't jump the gun calling him 'Captain' just yet. We're all drawing lots again to decide who

ends up in which team."

Anna blinked in disbelief. She could not fathom landing in Soren's team in this fifty-fifty toss-up!

The whole organization was reshuffling. Anna pulled her lot. When she saw the number "1" glaring

back at her, it felt like the sky was crashing down.

Soren glanced over and patted Anna on the shoulder, "Anna, looks like I'll be counting on you from

here on out."

"Counting on my foot! More like a curse!" Anna screamed inside.

She raked her fingers through her hair, her real worry was not about who would be the captain.

It was whether she would still be tasked with her original assignment amid this grand reshuffle at the

Vanguard Agency.

As it turned out, Anna's concerns were not unfounded.

"Effective immediately, Squad One is on lockdown. All assignments are on hold, and no one leaves

without authorization," Vance announced at the morning briefing.

As a member of Squad One, Anna was naturally confined within the Vanguard Agency, ready for

orders.

After the meeting, Percival retreated to his office.

He looked over the new squad arrangements and frowned slightly.

What was Vance plotting with such a grandiose reshuffling within the Vanguard Agency?

Squad One was now under Vance's direct command, supposedly because the Chief Commander,

Thomas, was out of town.

Soren and Leopold came in, and Leopold spoke up, "Percival, this reshuffle is one thing, but having

Squad One report directly to the Director? Doesn't that seem off to you?"

Percival leaned back. "Has the Director sought you out yet?"

"No, why would he? To apologize?" Leopold grumbled.

Being stripped of authority so abruptly would sit well with no one.

He never cared about power. In fact, he only entered the Vanguard Agency to follow Percival. However,

there was no way he would not be frustrated from being targeted.

It was no secret that Leopold was Percival's man, and the Sterling and the Ellington families had been

allies for generations. This seemed like a blatant attempt to undermine Percival, maybe even to

sideline him.

"Wait till he does. You'll find out soon enough," Percival said, offering no further explanation.

Vance had mentioned a secret mission for Leopold the day before. Without the details, Percival could say no more.

Soren could not contain himself either. "With Squad One answering directly to the Director, isn't that a power grab? When the special squad was formed, it was under the Chief's sole command. Since when does the Director get to butt in?"

Everyone saw Vance's agenda: to dilute Percival's power and render him a figurehead.

If this was day one, what would the future hold?

They were discussing this when Percival's office phone rang with the distinct ringtone of the Director's office.

Percival gestured for silence and picked up the receiver.

"Percival, come to my office. I've got a personal matter to discuss with you."

Vance calling it a personal matter was unexpected. Percival straightened his suit before heading to the Director's office.



"What's up?" Percival asked upon arrival.

Vance handed over two invitations embossed with the Brooks family crest. "My wife would like you and Ms. Hawthorn to join us for dinner tonight. She tried calling Ms. Hawthorn but couldn't get through, so she asked me to deliver these to you."

This surprised Percival.

He examined the invitations; indeed, they were from the Brooks family for a family dinner. The formality was ostensibly to celebrate Vance's return.

Vance had been undercover for years, and to the Brooks and the Edwards families, he was just a man doing business abroad. His role as head of the Edwards family was a perfect cover.

His return was a cause for celebration for the Brooks family, especially after the myriad of events that had befallen them. They hoped to ride the wave of good fortune to attract more business opportunities.

The dinner would host many of Rivenwood's elite, all connected to the Brooks family in some way.

Given the implications for the Brooks family and Vivienne, Percival did not commit immediately but did not decline either. He took the invitations and said, "I'll ask Vivienne. If she agrees, we'll attend the

dinner tonight."

"Great, I appreciate it. I'm also eager to meet this legendary niece who's got our Deputy so obsessed,"

Vance said, his tone carrying a hint of jest.

Percival offered a token smile and left.

Vance moved to the window, watching Percival's car pull away, the smile on his face slowly tightening,

then vanishing.

...

Vivienne sat at home, eyeing a strawberry shortcake on the table.

It was a mess. The strawberries were askew, and the whipped cream was unevenly spread, an obvious

sign that Percival had not made it.

If the cake was not from Percival, then who could it be?

But now, confronted with the strawberry shortcake, she was not so sure.

Her bright eyes narrowed, a storm of anger brewing in their depths.

Who could it be? Updated at [Dramanovels.com](http://Dramanovels.com)

A knock sounded at the door, and Vivienne called out, "It's open!"

Percival stepped in, holding a strawberry shortcake he had just picked up from the bakery on the way.

"Did you buy this yourself?" Percival asked, a hint of jealousy in his voice. After all, he was the one who always brought her the strawberry cakes.

How could Vivienne fetch it herself?

What kind of boyfriend would that make him?

But as he got closer, he realized the cake before them was a sorry sight.

"Where did you get this?" He asked, sitting beside her, his voice turning serious.

Vivienne shook her head. "I don't know. It was here when I woke up."

The cake sat between them like a mystery.

Chapter 548

Percival reached out and swiped a finger through the frosting, popping it directly into his mouth.

The next instant, his face contorted in agony, an expression of pain so intense it had never before graced his features.

"Is it poisoned?" Vivienne yelled out, alarm knitting her brow.

Percival waved her off, steadying himself on her knee. "It's just... incredibly bitter."

Vivienne was speechless.

"Bitter? Really?" She dared a taste herself, almost letting her lifelong love affair with strawberry

shortcake plummet to rock bottom.

It was supposed to be frosting – sweet, indulgent frosting.

Why on earth was it so bitter?

A thought struck Vivienne. "Tastes like something my mom made."

Her words hung in the air, and she and Percival paused, a sudden realization dawning on them.

Slowly, they lifted their eyes to meet, and their gazes converged with silent understanding.

The cake before them indeed bore the mark of Karen's handiwork.

The pair sat in stunned silence, neither willing to voice the conclusion forming in their minds. Yet, all the

strange occurrences of recent days seemed to be pointing inexorably in one direction.

After a while, Vivienne shook her head. "I've never had such a terrible strawberry shortcake."

Percival unveiled a slice of strawberry shortcake he had brought and fed it to Vivienne. "Try this one;

it's sweet."

A chuckle escaped Vivienne's lips, her eyes inadvertently flickering to the bitter disappointment that

was the other cake.

Once they finished the delectable shortcake, Vivienne leaned back against the couch, patting her belly.

"Mr. Wolf, didn't you say you had something to discuss with me?"

Percival presented two invitations, laying them before Vivienne. "Take a look."

Vivienne picked up the invites, glancing over them with a smile. "The director wants to see me? He

could have just said so. Why all the fuss?"

Although the Brooks family hosted the party and extended the invitation to Vivienne and Percival, they

were not fooled. Vance's intention was as clear as day.

This party was nothing but a pretext for him to see Vivienne.

"So, are we going?" Percival asked, already anticipating her answer from the look on her face.

With a grin, Vivienne replied, "Of course, we're going. We can't miss out on the drama, can we?"

...

That evening, Vivienne and Percival arrived in their finest attire at the event.

Melissa Brooks and Ashley were greeting guests at the door. Upon seeing Vivienne, their faces lit up

with joy.

"Vivienne, you made it! I've missed you so much. I've been trying to call with no luck," Melissa said

warmly as she reached out and took Vivienne's hand affectionately.

Her loved one's return had clearly lifted Melissa's spirits; her smile was even brighter than before.

"I've been in Sea City for a while, had my phone off," Vivienne responded with a light laugh, then turned

to Ashley. "Fully recovered?"

After the accident, Vivienne had saved the girl and had not followed up, confident there was no longer

a threat to her life.

Ashley nodded. "Yes, completely. But Carl..."

"What happened to Carl?" Vivienne inquired.

Ashley's eyes welled with tears, weighed down by guilt over Carl's condition. If only she had not been

so stubborn and thrown away her helmet, Carl might not have ended up protecting her and getting

injured in the process.

Melissa sighed. "Carl had woken up, but then, suddenly, his condition worsened one night. After an

intense fight for his life, we managed to save him, but the doctors say he suffered brain damage. He

might be in a vegetative state from now on."

Vivienne was taken aback. Carl was supposed to be recovering; she had performed the surgery herself, and there was no room for error.

What could have gone wrong?

"Why didn't you inform me? Where is Carl now?" Vivienne asked, her voice grave.

The thought that someone she had saved was now in such a state troubled her deeply. And why had the Brooks family not contacted her sooner? With timely notice, Carl would not be in this condition.

Melissa tried to soothe Vivienne, "We wanted to tell you, but... we can't keep bothering you. You've got so much on your plate already."

"We're family, aren't we? How can that be a bother?"

Hearing this, Vivienne grew more frustrated but also felt a sense of resignation. After all, her relationship with the Brooks family would never be as open and straightforward as with Dorian.

The Brooks family felt the same; there was a mutual sense of guilt and obligation.

"Vivienne, we appreciate your concern, but it's hard for us to keep coming to you," Melissa said, wiping

away tears, the guilt resurfacing.

Letting go of her harsher sentiments, Vivienne's tone softened. "Alright, Auntie. Where is Carl now?"

"Ronald has sent Carl abroad for treatment. They say it's a good place for someone in his condition to recover."

Hearing that Carl had been sent away, Vivienne heaved a heavy sigh. With so much going on in

Rivenwood, she could not leave just yet. Carl would have to wait.

"Let's go inside. I will introduce you to your Uncle Vance," Melissa said, drying her eyes and leading Vivienne inside.

Vivienne, ever the diplomat, returned the courtesy with grace.

"Uncle Vance, I've heard much about you. It's a pleasure to finally meet you," she said, her voice soft, though a hint of ice lingered in her eyes.

Vance, unaffected, chose to ignore the chill. "And this must be Mr. Ellington. A pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Vance extended his hand with a polite grace that suggested it was their first encounter.

Percival reciprocated with a firm handshake, saying, "Just call me Percival, Uncle."



After exchanging pleasantries, the party officially kicked off. New chapter available on

[Dramanovels.com](http://Dramanovels.com)

There was not much on the agenda, just some good old-fashioned dining and chatting.

Vivienne and Percival were not much for bustling crowds, so they found refuge in a cozy nook on a plush sofa after making their rounds.

Soon enough, Vance approached with a fruit platter and set it down on the coffee table.

“Since when did the director become a waiter?” Vivienne teased, her gaze locked on Vance with the allure of a dangerous poppy.

Vivienne clearly enjoyed Vance’s wit, the edge in her smile softening as she laughed heartily.

Percival picked a strawberry from the platter and held it to Vivienne's lips. “Strawberries are a rare treat this time of year.”

“They're special, just like my niece here. Always worth the effort to find,” Vance said, nudging the platter towards Vivienne.

From just that exchange, it was clear Vance knew Vivienne well. His eyes suggested a deeper

knowledge of her than one might expect.

Chapter 549

The conversation had taken a turn, and it was clear that light-hearted banter was off the table.

"Vance, let's cut to the chase." Vivienne bit into a strawberry, savoring the burst of sweet, succulent flavor.

Vance sipped his wine, his gaze shifting between Vivienne and Percival.

"Vivienne, what do you know about Percival here?" He asked, nodding subtly towards Percival.

Vivienne tilted her head, eyeing Percival from head to toe. "Inside out," she declared.

Percival nearly choked on his Chardonnay.

What on earth was she talking about?

Were they not here for a formal discussion?

Vance was clearly taken aback, not expecting such a forthright answer from Vivienne.

Nor had Vivienne expected to say it, but seeing Percival's stern and ascetic demeanor, she just could not help herself.

Not everyone could understand the world of someone who cared about looks like she did.

Vance regained his composure and chuckled. "Well then, you must be familiar with his work. I was

wondering if you might be interested in joining him professionally?"

Percival coughed, glancing at Vance.

Was he suggesting Vivienne join the Vanguard Agency?

Vivienne speared another strawberry with her fork, the juice coating her taste buds in satisfaction.

"Director Vance, are you sure you can afford to hire me?"

Her question put Vance in an awkward spot. He flashed a forced smile. "Perhaps the Vanguard Agency does have the means."

"Do you even know who I am?" Vivienne leaned back on the sofa, her features alight with a unique allure.

Vance's smile froze, and he straightened up, his eyes piercing into Vivienne. "Specter Healer, an identity of great interest to my upper echelons. But I'm only interested in one thing."

Vivienne did not respond, her gaze dropping slightly.

"Karen's daughter," Vance said.

Hearing her mother's name, a fierce glint flashed in Vivienne's eyes, and the casual indifference

vanished, replaced by an incomprehensible fury.

"My mother and you were not, I believe, acquainted," Vivienne said calmly, her tone laced with an enigmatic edge.

As far as she knew, when her mother was with the Vanguard Agency, her only real ally had been Micah.

Her mother was naturally a loner, not one to seek out friendships, so the term 'friend' applied to very few.

In her mother's stories, Vivienne had never heard of anyone besides Micah.

Even her mother's favorite protégé, Percival, was someone Vivienne had barely met in her childhood, barely remembering his name.

And now Vance, invoking her mother's name, wanted to recruit her into the Vanguard Agency.

Wishful thinking, indeed.

Vance set down his wine glass and leaned forward. "I was not exactly close with Lark. Quite the opposite, we were adversaries."

His admission carried a hint of sincerity, piquing Vivienne's interest to hear more.

"Lark and I were rivals from the moment she joined the agency. She was stubborn, and so was I. We'd often butt heads, especially during a live exercise not long after she joined. Lark, Ashen Pigeon, and I were assigned to the same squad, tasked with a hostage rescue.

The situation did not leave room for the hostage to be extracted unharmed. I was ready to use a tranquilizer gun, but Lark would not have it. She insisted the hostage not be harmed in any way. We argued, but ultimately, Ashen Pigeon sided with her, and I backed down. Lark took a risk, got herself injured, but managed to get the hostage out safely."

Vivienne remembered her mother telling her this tale.

Ashen Pigeon was Micah.

The purpose of sharing this story, Karen had said, was to teach Vivienne that no matter what, one should never compromise their principles to achieve a goal.

Vivienne had asked if getting injured wasn't a compromise. Karen replied that while protecting oneself was crucial, between one's safety and the hostage's, the hostage must come first—that was the creed of a Vanguard Agency operative.

Despite not fully understanding, Vivienne had confidently told her mother, "I'd make sure never to get hurt if I were rescuing someone. I'd have the enemy hand them over willingly. Now that's the best strategy."

Karen had laughed warmly at that, her eyes filled with pride.

After recounting the past, Vance rubbed his cheek. "Back then, I was young and hot-headed. I didn't see the point in Lark's actions. I thought that if you can't guarantee your own life, how can you protect the people or the nation?

It was not until I went undercover that I finally understood. Your mother's actions were what every operative should aspire to."

Vivienne kept her gaze fixed on Vance. "So, what does this have to do with me?"

Vivienne raised an eyebrow.

Amends?

"The last phone call your mother received was from me," Vance said after a pause.

Vivienne was stunned for almost half a minute, and even Percival could not hide his disbelief.

Karen's last call had been from Vance!

Suddenly, Vivienne stood up, seizing Vance by the collar, the fury in her eyes burning through the room's atmosphere.

As a security guard approached to intervene, Vance gestured for him to back off.

Melissa and her two children watched from the side, their hearts pounding with fear and trepidation.

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Now, as Vivienne's anger burned white-hot, they understood that this was a matter in which intervention was neither welcome nor wise.

"What did you say to my mom? Tell me!" Vivienne ground out through clenched teeth; each word squeezed through her jaw like she was fighting to keep control.

Her eyes blazed with fury, like a lioness on the verge of pouncing, staring down her prey with a grip that threatened to snap its neck at any moment.

Percival did not try to stop her. Even if Vivienne did not lay a finger on Vance, he felt the urge to step in.

His voice carried the same tone as in years past—blame, anger, resentment, reprimand—all rolled into one, yet insufficient to describe his emotional turmoil back then.

Hearing these words, Vivienne slowly let go of her clenched hands.

Chapter 550

Perhaps, when Karen heard those words all those years ago, she already knew there was a traitor within the Agency!

But why, knowing such a brutal truth, did her mother choose the most cowardly and useless way to end it all?

Could it be that Vance was hiding details about the call?

Vivienne sank back onto the couch, looking at Vance's face, which bore a striking resemblance to Darren. "I won't work for the Vanguard Agency. You don't deserve me."

A place that harbored the killer of her mother, a place that had not made any headway against the GTO in a decade, did not deserve her!

It seemed Vance had anticipated Vivienne's response and did not press further. He pulled out his business card and placed it in front of Vivienne.

"It has my number and email. If you ever change your mind, feel free to reach out. And if you need any assistance, don't hesitate to ask. It appears I have slightly more pull than your fiancé right now, so I can certainly make things easier for you."



With that, Vance straightened his crumpled collar—wrinkled from Vivienne's earlier grasp—and stood to leave.

Melissa approached, her face etched with concern as she watched Vance.

He ruffled her hair. "It's just a minor issue, don't worry."

Melissa nodded. "You go mingle with the guests. I'll check on Vivienne."

Vance did not stop her and returned to the social whirl with a glass in hand.

Melissa walked over to find Vivienne back to her composed self, the business card now tucked away without a trace.

"Vivienne, did Vance say something to upset you?" Melissa asked cautiously.

Vivienne shook her head. "Auntie, we're fine. It's just a small matter. Where's Ronald? He texted me that he needed to see me."

Without pressing further, Melissa pointed to Ronald, who was deep in conversation. "Over there. I'll get him for you."

"No need, I'll go over myself," Vivienne said, spotting the people around Ronald and lifting the corners

of her mouth in anticipation.

"Uncle Zachary, a partnership between us would be the icing on the cake for both our families," Ronald said, raising his glass to clink with Zachary's.

Vivienne left Percival by the side and made her way over just in time to catch Ronald's words.

What business did the Churchill family have with the Brooks family?

She approached, and, noticing her first, Zachary put down his drink and said, "Madam, you've arrived."

Ronald turned, his face lighting up with joy at the sight of Vivienne. "When did you get here, Vivienne?"

"I arrived before you, just resting over there," Vivienne replied with a light smile.

"You're just in time. I was discussing a partnership with Uncle Zachary, but he said we should run it by you," Ronald said as they found a quiet place to sit.

Zachary explained, "Madam, about the project you entrusted us with, we were considering moving it to Rivenwood. It's convenient since we're both based here, and fewer people know about it, there's less chance of interference."

Vivienne nodded in agreement; now that she was back in Rivenwood, she could closely monitor

Zachary and William's bionics research progress.

"You're thinking of partnering with the Brooks family?" She inquired.

Zachary nodded. "Yes, the Brooks family has been looking for new business ventures to ensure their continued stability, and we need a strong ally. Plus, you're family to the Brooks, so we thought of collaborating with them."

Though not a Brooks by birth, Vivienne clearly held them in regard.

Those Vivienne protected were few, but it was enough to show their significance to her.

So, it was not without reason when Zachary referred to the Brooks as her family.

Ronald added, "When Uncle Zachary first told me about this project, I thought it was a pipe dream. But knowing it came from you, I was sure it was feasible. Vivienne, do you think the Brooks family can undertake this project?"

Vivienne chuckled. "What do you think, Ronald?"

Ronald took a deep breath, his gaze firm on Vivienne. "I believe the Brooks family can handle it. The Brooks Group has been through a lot, but we are confident to take on this project."

"In that case," Vivienne raised her glass and said, "here's to a successful partnership."

Ronald's eyes sparkled with excitement, and Zachary's heart settled as they toasted with Vivienne.

The deal to collaborate on the development of self-defense bionic tech was settled.

Vivienne sipped her drink and suddenly asked, "Ronald, you referred to Mr. Churchill as 'Uncle'? "

Zachary smiled. "Madam, you might not know, but Faye and Carl are engaged."

Vivienne paused in surprise.

That was news to her!

The world was indeed small; she had no idea Faye and Carl were betrothed!

As far as she remembered, there had been no interaction between Carl and Faye.

"Yep, years back, it was... well, their parents who decided on the arrangement," Ronald mused with a

heavy heart. "Back when Carl and Faye were just knee-high to a grasshopper, they were thick as

thieves, so the folks thought it'd be cute to make a little betrothal agreement. After Faye's accident,

Uncle Zachary wanted to call the whole thing off, but Carl would not hear of it. He said it was unfair to

bail when things got tough. But now, Carl's had his own share of bad luck, and here we are." Content

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Faye had started college and was bound to meet someone who could make her happy. It was not fair

for her to wait for Carl indefinitely.

With a sigh, Zachary added, "Faye has her mind set, and even her mom can't persuade her otherwise.

So, we'll let her wait for now. She can focus on her studies. Ronald, don't carry this burden, too."

Vivienne set down her glass of wine and inquired, "When I left, Carl was starting to come around.

Everyone thought he'd make a full recovery. How did things take such a drastic turn for the worse?"