

Million-Dollar 621

Chapter 621

The shadow of the F-Poison conspiracy loomed large, and there was simply no time for Percival and

Vivienne to entertain thoughts of wedding bells just yet.

Percival got it. He really did.

Sure, the GTO's weapon manufacturing plants and virus research facilities were obliterated. But he

was under no illusion that this was the end.

As long as F-Poison was out there, peace of mind was but a pipe dream.

"Grandpa Jasper and Richard," Percival declared with reassuring confidence, "trust me, I will give

Vivienne the most romantic, the grandest wedding the world has ever seen!"

Given the certainty in his voice, the two old men had no objections to offer.

They shared a silent moment before their gaze shifted to Karen, seated quietly to one side.

As Vivienne's mother, she naturally had a say in her daughter's nuptials.

Karen was lost in a hefty turkey sandwich when she felt her father's eyes on her. Hastily swallowing,

she chimed in.

"Vivienne's right, and besides, there's still someone missing if we were to have the wedding now."

The room paused, puzzled. Zelda, curious as ever, asked, "Sasha, who are we missing here? Isn't

Willa with you?"

Zelda mistakenly thought Karen meant Willa.

But Karen shook her head, nodding subtly toward Vivienne. "Her dad!"

Everyone's confusion cleared. They had never dared to ask Karen outright about Vivienne's biological father's whereabouts.

Even Melissa, despite her curiosity, had held back, fearing that Vivienne's father was no longer alive and that bringing it up might stir up painful memories for Karen.

To their surprise, Karen brought it up herself.

Unable to contain her curiosity any longer, Zelda pressed, "Sasha, where in the world is Vivienne's dad?"

Karen just smiled, "I don't know yet, but when I find him, we'll have a good talk."

While everyone was still at sea about her response, they saw the happiness in Karen's smile and wisely chose not to probe further.

...

That night.

Vivienne and Karen lay in bed, taking the chance to really talk for the first time since their reunion.

The day's events had weighed on Vivienne's mind.

Truth be told, she, too, was eager to know who her father really was.

Neither Dorian nor Scott was her birth father.

Karen teased her daughter's nose, breaking the silence. "Are you wondering where your dad might be?"

Vivienne nodded, moving closer to her mother. "Mom, you didn't get abandoned by him, did you?"

Karen playfully slapped Vivienne's forehead. "Abandoned? Honey, if anything, I would be the one doing the abandoning! He never had the power to leave me!"

Rubbing her forehead, Vivienne persisted, "Why did you two split? You used to say I was too young to understand, but I'm grown up now. You can tell me."

Karen's lips pressed slightly, and her eyes sparkled with a reminiscence that words could hardly describe.

Finally, she said softly, "Frost, if Percival had to leave you one day because he had an important mission to fulfill, would you be angry? Would you feel like you were not the most important thing to him?"

After a moment's thought, Vivienne replied, "No. To carry his mission and honor as a soldier, that's the Percival I love. If he gave up his duty and responsibility for me, I'd eventually become the one abandoned. That's not the man I fell in love with."

Karen nodded in agreement. "Me too. I fell for your dad because he stood by his honor. I wasn't abandoned, and he would never abandon me. Even though we're worlds apart now, we're both working towards the same goal. When the world finds peace, we'll be together."

Vivienne understood that everyone has their mission in life.

Doctors heal, soldiers protect, and even the common folk battle for their families.

Her parents had their own glories to pursue and their own battles to fight.

Karen brushed the hair from Vivienne's forehead, caressing her cheek tenderly, "Don't worry. Your father will be back before you know it."

Vivienne let out a soft acknowledgment, dropping the subject of her elusive father.

"Mom, did you see that photo Noah took back in the day?" Vivienne asked, shifting gears.

Karen's gentle gaze darkened, a hint of ferocity flickering in it. "Yes, I saw myself in it."

"Do you have any memory of that at all?"

"Not a thing. I don't remember ever meeting Noah when I was little, let alone taking that photo."

In the photo, Karen looked to be about ten, and the timing matched closely with when she had been kidnapped.

What puzzled Karen was that when Noah had taken her to the Vanguard Agency, nobody had informed the Perez family.

Vivienne's eyes narrowed. "Mom, there's someone else in that photo."

Karen's gaze lifted, and in the dim light, her eyes – so like Vivienne's – glinted darkly. "Scott!" Content
of Dramanovels.com

"Does that mean F-Poison wasn't there?"

Out of the twelve children, aside from Karen and Scott, the rest were accounted for. F-Poison could not be hiding among them.

Karen shook her head, "Not necessarily. Maybe from the start, F-Poison intended to remain hidden within those kids."

"F-Poison was still a guy back then, right? Playing the part of a kid at his age?" Vivienne asked with a raised eyebrow.

Vivienne nodded, her eyelids heavy, and soon she was lost in the embrace of sleep.

Chapter 622

In Rivenwood, in the depths of an off-the-grid prison unlike any other, the inmates were not your garden-variety criminals. Not even the hardened murderers found solace within these walls.

At present, this prison housed a mere trio of prisoners.

Flynn, Scott, and Fiona Ellington.

Fiona, though her body was a patchwork of decay, possessed sensory faculties that rivaled a healthy man in his prime. However, this heightened perception meant she also endured agonies far beyond the ken of ordinary humans.

Flynn, too, lived each day in excruciating pain, a modern-day Prometheus, his vitals ravaged daily, only to regenerate each dawn anew. This was Vivienne's brand of retribution.

Scott, in contrast, seemed almost content. Free from the physical torment, his punishment was a Sisyphean task of endless paperwork. He accepted his fate with a disarming calmness, even pointing out errors for correction by his wardens from the Vanguard Agency.

Many said Scott was the quietest of the three.

Vivienne and Karen arrived to find Soren and Anna waiting at the gate.

"Ms. Vivienne, Ms. Karen," Anna greeted as she adorned their wrists with security bands.

Back then, Vivienne was Percival's wife, and Percival was the deputy. Thus, she had never needed such measures before, but times had changed.

Soren collected all their communication devices, casting curious glances at Karen. She gave him a playful warning, "Hotshot, any more staring, and you'll be crossing a line."

"My apologies, Captain," Soren blurted a tad too quickly.

His curiosity stemmed from wondering why Percival respected Karen so much to call her master.

"Don't call me Captain; I have no plans of returning to the Vanguard Agency," Karen said with a smirk before stepping through the threshold.

Vivienne followed, knowing all too well Karen's discomfort with the Agency's rigid structure and

protocol. Freedom was what Karen thrived on, and the Agency was anything but.

"Mom, this way," Vivienne gestured toward a cell on the right.

But Karen's eyes were drawn to the left, to a cell secured with a state-of-the-art lock.

"That's Flynn's cell, the former head boss of CK, known as White Tiger," Vivienne explained.

Karen merely nodded, but something about that cell made her skin crawl—a reluctance mingled with an unavoidable pull.

Vivienne sensed Karen's unease and offered, "Mom, do you want to take a look?"

Karen snapped back to reality. "No, let's move on."

They arrived at Scott's cell to find him making the most of his confinement by exercising in a meticulously clean hundred-square-foot space.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself," Karen remarked dryly.

If only things were different and Scott had not been the second-in-command of GTO and had not been Belle's stand-in, he and Karen might have been good friends, like she was with Micah. They shared an unspoken understanding that came from a place of genuine kinship.

Upon hearing her voice, Scott froze, his body tensing up. Without turning, he knew—it was her. But he could not bring himself to look, fearing the disappointment if he had misheard.

Vivienne exited without saying a word. She could tell just how strong Scott's feelings toward Karen were, or he would not have gone easy on her so many times.

Nonetheless, Karen probably did not care about that at all, and neither would she appreciate it.

As Scott could be considered Karen's old flame, it was only polite to give them privacy.

Karen took a seat. "Old friend, long time no see."

At last, Scott turned, his eyes wide with disbelief. Approaching the bars that separated them, his hands shook as currents zapped from the metal. It hurt, but he did not let go.

It was her. She was alive!

His eyes welled up, reaching out as if to touch her face like old times, but the electric barrier was a cruel reminder of the distance between them. His hand lingered before dropping to his side.

Karen maintained her characteristic smile. "Looks like I'm doing all the talking."

Scott let go, the current vanishing from his nerves. "Karen, have you been well all these years?"

His voice cracked, betraying his fragility.

Karen nodded. "I've been fine, thanks for asking."

Scott chuckled sadly, words failing him. Thousands of thoughts choked in his throat, unsaid.

The two sat in silence for a moment before Karen spoke up again.

"Look, I didn't come here to walk down memory lane," she said, "I actually wanted to ask you about someone. Do you know Noah?"

"Don't you remember me?" Karen's brow furrowed with concern.

Scott looked puzzled. "What's that got to do with you?"

She pulled out an old photograph, saying, "We were both in this group picture."

As Scott leaned in to examine the photo, a flicker of recognition crossed his face.

"You really are in this!" he exclaimed.

Karen was only ten at the time, but she had grown proportionately. Scott instantly recognized the little

girl in the photo. New chapter available on Dramanovels.com

Karen shook her head. "I didn't even realize I had taken this picture back then."

Scott's eyes widened as he began to understand.

"It seems F-Poison injected us with some amnesiac drug. No wonder. F-Poison must have been around us back then, making sure to stay hidden."

"How can you be so sure F-Poison was there?"

Scott chuckled. "GTO was not always big. Back then, they didn't have many people. F-Poison had to get his hands dirty."

Chapter 623

Karen had been deep undercover in GTO, and although she had never penetrated its core, she had brushed shoulders with its darkest secrets.

Inside GTO, experiments of unspeakable cruelty were a daily occurrence. For someone like Scott, who had been sold to them as a child, the horrors he faced were beyond imagination.

The fact that Scott had survived and even managed to become a stand-in for Belle spoke volumes of his wit and luck — mostly luck, as without it, he would have been another casualty of those vile tests.

"You just said a woman told you your constitution was not suited for their drugs. Was she... F-Poison?"

Karen inquired.

Scott chuckled. "Impossible. Even with my fragmented memories from that time, I knew F-Poison was a man, an old man, not unlike Baron Brooks back in the day. He vanished soon after, leaving no

impression on me."

"Did he disappear right after Noah rescued you all?"

Scott pondered for a moment, then said, "Seems like it. After we returned from Vanguard Agency with

Noah, I was whisked away to a new base, and that's the last I saw of him. Had you not mentioned it, I

wouldn't have even remembered."

To Scott, the mere act of surviving was a triumph. The identity of his tormentors was the least of his

concerns.

Karen knew that male F-Poison had gone into hiding as a victim during the rescue operation, leaving

GTO to the new female F-Poison.

But considering the current F-Poison's youthful appearance, even if she had aged gracefully, she

should be in her fifties or sixties by now.

Could it be that F-Poison had passed down the mantle to a third generation?

Was the F-Poison Belle called "mother" the same person Scott had encountered?

"Do you remember what that woman looked like?" Karen pressed.

"No clue," Scott admitted. "She always wore a mask. I don't even know Belle's true identity. The higher-ups in GTO kept a tight leash; I had no access."

Karen understood all too well. Her own cover had been blown only because Noah discovered her infiltration, leading to a near-fatal confrontation with Scott.

"I see," Karen said, rising to leave. With no reason to linger, she turned to go.

Scott watched her retreating figure, a mirror image of the day she fled the Brooks family — resolute and detached.

"Karen."

Her name, softly spoken, halted her.

Karen half-turned to face Scott, who stepped forward, his hands gripping the electrified barrier, his gaze filled with longing, regret, and an unspoken plea.

"If there's a next time, could we just sit and reminisce?"

Karen's lips twitched, her eyes locked onto Scott's — cold as moonlight.

"No. Between us, there's nothing worth reminiscing about."

With that, she left, her departure as effortless as the closing of a door.

Karen had always admired Scott's cunning and resilience, qualities that would make them kindred spirits if they were not adversaries. But as enemies, Karen would prioritize killing him every time.

Vivienne watched Karen emerge, clicking her tongue. "He's your old flame, and you're giving him the cold shoulder?"

Karen blinked. "I suddenly remember arranging an arranged marriage for you with Dawson."

"Well, your daughter might just elope with Mr. Wolf then," Vivienne retorted without missing a beat.

Percival entered just in time to overhear Vivienne's mention of eloping with Mr. Wolf and could not help but brighten at the thought.

In that fleeting moment, he imagined countless romantic getaways.

Karen laughed, playfully accusing, "She claims you haven't made an honest woman of her, so she's resorting to elopement!"

Percival snapped back to reality. "Master, you're too old to be making such jokes."

"Who's old?" Karen and Vivienne chorused, then, arm in arm, they strolled away, leaving Percival speechless.

But who could blame him for being smitten with his wife?

After leaving the secret prison, Percival passed the information about everyone in the photo to

Vivienne.

"Excluding the infant from back then and Noah's wife, the rest, including their families, have settled in

hotels owned by the Ellington Group. There's also the eldest, now battling cancer in the ICU."

Among the twelve, excluding Scott, Karen, the infant, Noah's wife, and the ICU patient, seven

remained.

Vivienne took a deep breath. "Looks like we've got seven house calls to make."

Percival smiled, ruffling her hair. "Don't worry, I'm with you."

"Yeah, Mr. Wolf is the best." Vivienne leaned in for a kiss.

Thomas, driving the car, glanced at Karen. She was watching the lovebirds with a content smile, not a

hint of the typical mother-in-law's consciousness.

Thomas sighed; he knew exactly where Vivienne got her fiery spirit.

After all, Percival was another of Karen's protégés.

Family, through and through!

Vivienne and Percival had been busy bees, buzzing through six households in just one week.

Thankfully, Vance, always the dramatist, had summoned all these folks to Rivenwood under the guise of a grand reunion.

These good people, eager to repay a debt of gratitude for a life saved years ago, had all come to participate in what was billed as a nostalgic gathering.

The first six families checked out, every last soul accounted for, male and female alike. The DNA tests lined up perfectly with the old GTO records.

Now, only one remained.

Their child, a high schooler at the time of his abduction, would be no spring chicken by now.

And a boy, no less. Content belongs to Drqmanovels.com

This situation had a striking resemblance to F-Poison.

But when Percival knocked on that final door, it swung open to reveal a couple with more yesterdays than tomorrows between them.

Vivienne glanced from the photo in her hand to the man before her.

Definitely not the same person.

"Your son?"

Chapter 624

"Sir, would you mind sharing the story with us in more detail?" Vivienne inquired.

The old man nodded, "Of course. That year left a deep impression on us. Elliot was the beacon of hope for our entire family. Even our distant relatives had high hopes for him. After all, for a low-income family like ours, having a kid in high school was already a big deal.

Elliot's grades, though, were average at best. He was not exactly a standout student and didn't have many friends. He was a bit of a loner.

But ever since the kidnapping, it was as if he had become a different person. He was much more outgoing. Even got scolded by me for dating a girl from school. Truth be told, I thought the boy who came back was a lot better off. A young man shouldn't be so withdrawn."

Vivienne exchanged a glance with Percival.

Most people would be crushed by such traumatic memories and not emerge more cheerful and sociable.

How could this Elliot have possibly transformed so positively?

The father continued, "Elliot didn't let us down, though. He got into Elite University, and after graduating, he went abroad for further studies."

At the mention of going abroad, the silent mother let out a stifled sob, tears streaming down her face.

Vivienne silently passed her a tissue, "Did something happen?"

The man sighed, his expression growing somber. "We were originally against the idea of him going abroad, but Elliot was determined. He worked his way through, not needing a dime from us.

Reluctantly, his mother and I agreed. But once he left, he never returned."

The woman began to cry louder. "If I had known I'd never see my boy again, I would have never let him go abroad for his studies!"

"What happened to Elliot overseas?" Percival asked.

The man wiped away tears. "Elliot did well in school and work, consistently earning scholarships. But he rarely contacted us; communication was difficult back then, and we couldn't go abroad. Thankfully, he sent photos home, so at least I could see his face from time to time.

After Elliot graduated and got a job at the university, we knew he wouldn't come back. We thought

about moving abroad to be with him since he was settled. But then... there was a shooting at his school. Many students and teachers died, and Elliot was among them!"

The woman, overcome with grief, buried her face in her hands. "My poor son... I didn't even get to see him one last time. How could he have left before us?"

Vivienne could only offer her condolences for the woman's loss.

Perhaps she did not realize that her son had died the day he was kidnapped.

The child they raised was the enemy in their midst!

Once the woman had calmed down, Percival asked, "Would it be too much to ask to see some photos of Elliot? Especially the ones he sent from abroad."

"Sure, there aren't many, especially after the kidnapping, and even fewer from his years abroad, less than ten in total, but they're all here," the father said as he handed over the photo album to Percival.

Percival flipped through the album, noticing pictures of Elliot in graduation robes, on casual outings, and working at a diner.

These photos painted a picture of a simple life, mostly spent on campus.

"What did Elliot study abroad?" Vivienne inquired.

"Medicine. He wouldn't have gone overseas otherwise," the father replied.

Percival's hands paused as he turned the pages, a complex look in his eyes.

Noticing the change, Vivienne leaned in and was equally surprised.

There, in the corner of one of Elliot's photos, was Flynn!

The truth of the matter was becoming apparent.

This person named Elliot was indeed the elusive F-Poison, who had used the art of disguise to hide in

Elliot's home, taking his place and living on before using his time abroad to continue his sinister deeds.

During his studies, he had met Flynn and passed on his despicable skills.

Percival closed the album and said, "Thank you. We've got what we need. Someone will be by shortly to take you to the airport."

"It's no trouble at all. We haven't had anyone to talk to about Elliot for a long time. Thank you for remembering our son," the father said, bowing to Vivienne and Percival, his eyes glistening with tears.

Percival and Vivienne offered a comforting smile before departing.

Copies of the photos were quickly delivered to Percival.

As he looked at Flynn's face on the printout, Percival's fingertips tensed slightly.

Thomas, noticing Percival's expression, asked, "Do you want me to go and ask Flynn?"

"No need. Even if we asked him, he wouldn't say anything. We'd be better off figuring out how F-Poison managed to impersonate a high school student!"

Vivienne's expression darkened. "F-Poison would have been middle-aged by then. It's hard to believe he could pass for a high school student, let alone blend in and eventually study abroad."

Vivienne had a hunch that the secrets F-Poison carried were tied to the final virus experiment GTO was researching.

Her phone rang; it was Karen. "Come to the hospital. Your undercover girl has woken up."

Quincy!

Since being critically injured in the ambush on Noah, Quincy had been in a coma at the hospital.

Karen had treated her, managing to save her life.

And now, she had finally awoken.

Quincy should now be called by her real name, Barnaby.

She had completely severed ties with GTO, and the code name Quincy no longer represented her.

Lying on the hospital bed, her usually vibrant face now pallid and drawn, Barnaby had taken on an almost girl-next-door appearance.

"Deputy Director," Caspian greeted Percival as he walked in, automatically offering a salute out of habit.

Percival waved a dismissive hand. "From now on, just call me Mr. Ellington, or you can just call me Percival like Thomas does." Read at Dramanovels.com

"Yes, Percival, Madam, Ex-Captain," Caspian said, turning towards Percival and Vivienne, as well as Karen, and gave a deep bow. "Thank you for saving my sister."

"There's no need for formalities, Caspian. Barnaby has been a great help to us," Vivienne said as she took a seat.

The chip had integrated so seamlessly with Barnaby's body that it would have gone unnoticed if not for her present condition.

Vivienne had been pondering over what means GTO used to control their people, never suspecting the existence of such chips.

But clearly, Barnaby was unaware, as were probably all the members of GTO.

"So, has the chip been removed?" Barnaby inquired.

Chapter 625

Barnaby chuckled, a hint of steely resolve behind his humor. "I choose to have the chip removed even

if it means I have to be conscious during the process."

No matter the pain, she refused to let someone else dictate the course of her life!

"The chip is currently lodged in your brain, and I'll be performing the surgery with my mom. We'll keep

chatting with you throughout, and you'll even hear and feel us poking around in your noggin, so brace

yourself."

It sounded simple enough, but only those who have been through it knew the agony was beyond any

normal threshold of endurance.

It was akin to the trauma Arabella suffered after Brody and Vivienne had planted and then diffused a

bomb inside her. The psychological scars were likely still unhealed.

Not that she had much time for healing.

Barnaby nodded in agreement. "Alright, let's get on with it."

Time was of the essence. The chip could travel through her bloodstream to any part of her body.

Noah had met his end when a similar chip had migrated near his heart. Barnaby was luckier; the chip was near her stomach when Karen intervened, sparing her life.

But now the chip had moved to his brain, and if F-Poison struck again, it would be too late.

Soon, Barnaby was wheeled back into the OR, with Karen and Vivienne scrubbing in together.

Throughout the procedure, Barnaby's eyes remained open. She could feel the drill and other surgical instruments stirring inside her skull, each nerve echoing the whine of the drill, her glands vibrating with every movement.

The sensation was indescribable.

If she had to label it, 'terrifying' would be a vast understatement.

"When was this chip put in? Can it track our location?" Barnaby inquired, curious despite the circumstances.

"No idea, but it was after Belle was captured. Belle, Scott, Rowan, and Ismene don't have chips, or they'd be dead by now," Vivienne said, her gaze fixed on the screen displaying Barnaby's brain scan.

Karen, manipulating the scalpel, added, "The chip can track and explode inside the body, undetectable

even to the latest scanners. Think back to when you might have lost consciousness and had it implanted."

Barnaby pondered for a moment, then said, "I can't recall anything. Maybe we ingested it without realizing."

"That's a possibility," Karen agreed, nodding at the theory.

"But how could we swallow a chip without noticing?" Vivienne questioned, skeptical.

"Of course." Karen had just pried open another part of the skull and switched instruments to dig deeper.

"The chip could dissolve upon entry and then slowly assemble its particles inside the body."

Pausing, Karen mused, "That's a promising lead. We should engineer something similar. Imagine being able to track your little protégé's runaway dog anytime."

"Yeah, with the pet market booming, who could resist a device that pinpoints your pet's location? We could even link it to the pet's retina, offering a pet's-eye view of the world," Vivienne rambled on, already hearing the cash register in her head.

Barnaby had not expected her casual question to spark such a lucrative brainstorm between mother and daughter.

True to form, they were quite the pair—money-minded through and through!

"Mom! I see it!" Vivienne suddenly exclaimed.

Three hours later, Karen and Vivienne successfully extracted the chip from Barnaby's brain.

Post-surgery, Barnaby slipped into unconsciousness.

"Madam, is my sister going to be okay?" Caspian asked, concern evident.

Vivienne nodded her head reassuringly. "She'll be fine. She just needs some sleep, and my mom ensured she won't remember any of the surgery to prevent any trauma. Don't worry."

"Thank you, Madam, thank you, former captain. I'm in your debt," Caspian said, bowing repeatedly.

Barnaby was his only family left. After years apart, it was only thanks to Vivienne and her team that they could reunite.

Vivienne waved off the thanks. "If you're truly grateful, go do something worthwhile."

Wiping his tears, Caspian was eager. "Anything you need, just say the word."

Meanwhile, Karen had connected the chip to Vivienne's laptop, fingers flying across the keyboard.

Soon, a satellite map appeared on the screen, dotted with numerous red points marking individual

locations.

Vivienne printed the map and handed it to Caspian. "Take this to your commander. It's time to dismantle GTO's stronghold!"

The realization sank in for Caspian. Those red dots were the whereabouts of every member of GTO!

"Yes, right away!"

This was not just a task; it was an opportunity to make a difference!

With the map in hand, Thomas, Leopold, Soren, and their squads arrested every marked individual, using a jamming device developed by Karen and Vivienne to block the chips' signals.

In other words, even if F-Poison wanted to kill them now, there was no way to do so!

Except for F-Poison, who remained at large, all GTO members were captured.

It was Vanguard Agency's first major victory since the "Destruction Plan," earning Thomas, Leopold, Soren, and even Anna medals of honor.

Anna laid her medal at Daphne's grave. After years, she could finally give her mother a proper memorial.

Everyone rejoiced except for Percival and Vivienne, who could not quite muster a smile.

Barnaby had awoken, and Vivienne, toting a fruit basket befitting a hospital visit, came to see her.

Barnaby picked up an apple but hesitated to bite into it directly, instead meticulously cutting it into bite-sized pieces with a paring knife.

A side effect of having your skull cracked open is that certain things become more complicated.

"You've come all the way here, and now you're trying to push me into Vanguard Agency?" Barnaby knew all too well that Vivienne's visit was a recruitment pitch.

With a click of her fingers, Vivienne dangled the bait. "How about a salary of a million a month? Are you in?"

Of course, Barnaby was in!

That was a monthly paycheck, and not just any paycheck—a million! Read at Dramanovels.com

That was more than Caspian could make in a lifetime at Vanguard Agency!

Vivienne sure had deep pockets!

"Boss, from now on, I'm your woman in life and your ghost in death. I'll move mountains for you, and the only thing I ask is that you never skimp on my payday!"

Vivienne nodded in approval, a satisfied grin on her face. Indeed, a mercenary heart was essential for her recruits.

"Deal. Pick a code name for yourself, something to keep it smooth in the underworld," Vivienne said, casually taking a bite from an apple.

After a moment's thought, Barnaby replied, "Armadillo!"

Vivienne nearly choked on her apple. Apparently, coming up with a cool code name was not Barnaby's forte!

Chapter 626

Vivienne pushed open the heavy iron gate, rubbing her arms.

Though the sun was shining bright outside, the place seemed to cast a chilling shadow over everything.

"Mom, Grandpa, are you sure you don't need me to come with you?" Vivienne asked.

Jasper shook his head. "No need, sweetheart. Your mother and I can handle this. You just wait here, okay?"

Vivienne nodded, watching Karen and Jasper disappear through the doorway.

She settled back into the car and began to nibble on a strawberry cheesecake.

As Karen pushed open the door, a nauseating stench hit her full force.

The person inside, hearing the noise, slowly turned her head.

Her hair was a tangled mess, unwashed for days.

Stains marred her clothes, and her bare feet were caked in dirt.

The source of the foul smell was clear—it emanated from her.

Jasper sighed deeply at the sight. "Diana..."

The person trapped here was, indeed, Diana!

After the cliff side explosion, Diana had been rushed to the hospital. Once she survived, the Perez family had locked her away here.

The villa might have looked like a luxury home, but it was more akin to a prison cell.

It had everything—a complete set of furniture.

But the all-black decor and the perpetual darkness turned the spacious abode into a haunted house.

There were no lights, no windows, and even the walls were painted black.

Deprived of sunlight, not even the heat of summer could penetrate the coldness within.

Trapped here, with only the torment of stillness, existing was worse than death.

Food was delivered daily, only to ensure Diana remained alive. Unaware of time or place, she could not hear anything outside her darkness. She relied on touch to find something to eat when hunger struck.

The sudden light was blinding, and it took Diana a while to adjust and recognize the figures before her.

She slowly stood up, mouth agape, but no sound came out.

Diana stared blankly at Karen and Jasper.

After what seemed like an eternity, she suddenly charged at them, screaming, "I am the only daughter of the Perez family, I am the only daughter..."

Karen swiftly pushed her back, protecting her father.

Jasper shook his head, realizing just how deep Diana's obsession ran.

"Diana, it's over. I have nothing to say. I've raised you all these years, but our bond is broken. I can never forgive you. Stay here and fend for yourself."

With that, Jasper patted Karen's hand, signaling it was time to leave.

Karen had no desire to engage with the madwoman before her.

This visit was merely to support Jasper in putting an end to it all. He had truly loved Diana as his daughter, never allowing her to feel slighted.

But their relationship had to be concluded.

As they turned to leave, Diana's eerie laughter filled the room, reminiscent of a deranged spirit from a horror film.

"Bond? Ha, you talk to me about bond?

What was our bond? Was it because someone said adopting a child would bring prosperity to the

Perez family? Or that this adopted daughter would bring blessings to your children?

Jasper, spare me your righteousness! You're nothing but a hypocrite! You adopted me with ulterior motives, and now you preach about fatherly love?

Sasha, my only regret is that I didn't finish you off that day. If I had, there would be no Vivienne, and I wouldn't be in this hell!"

Jasper turned back, giving Diana one last look, then silently walked away with Karen.

Once outside, Jasper explained, "The things Diana mentioned, they're probably rumors she overheard.

Many couldn't understand why I adopted Diana and Willa, especially with so many kids at home.

Rumors spread, and I thought she was educated enough not to believe them. Apparently, I was

wrong..."

Karen was curious, "Dad, why did you adopt her in the first place?"

Jasper paused, looking at Karen, and said, "Diana was the child of one of my men. Her parents died in the line of duty, and I initially planned to send her to an orphanage and support her from a distance. But you wanted a sister, Sasha. Do you regret it now?"

Karen smiled, realizing how the threads of fate entwined. "I don't remember how I felt back then, but I certainly don't regret it."

The concept of regret had no place in Karen's world. Even picking up a proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing did not faze her. After all, she had raised wolves before.

Percival: "Master, could I possibly become a person?"

Vivienne: "Mr. Wolf, you'll always be a wolf to me!"

Jasper looked at his daughter and said, "Vivienne is just like you!"

Karen looped her arm through Jasper's, "Yes, and I'm just like you!"

The pair shared a knowing smile. In their world, there was no room for regret. To them, regret was for those who could not live with the consequences.

Jasper, Karen, and Vivienne—they were not the type to bemoan their fate.

They were masters of their destiny, never allowing anything to break them.

So, naturally, there was no talk of regret.

After Vivienne finished her cake, she and Karen emerged from the villa and drove Jasper back to the Perez Mansion.

Then, they headed to the YQ Research Center.

Vivienne rolled her eyes. "Mom, are you actually complimenting yourself?"

Inside the YQ Research Center, everyone except Brody was gathered anxiously by the doorway.

Vivienne walked in, surprised. "What's going on here?"

Holden looked at her with grave seriousness. "Madam, Rex has been at it again with his experiments.

That's the third explosion this week!" Updated at Dramanovels.com

Three times!

If her memory served her right, was today not just Thursday?

Vivienne was about to dash inside when Karen caught her arm. "Hold on, it might blow."

Muttering a curse under her breath, Vivienne strapped on a gas mask and charged in to drag out a semi-conscious Brody.

Surveying the wreckage of the lab, Vivienne kicked Brody squarely in the thigh.

"Damn it! Which troublemaker wants to bankrupt me? These materials aren't renewable resources!"

Brody let out a shriek, fully snapping to his senses. Upon seeing Vivienne's face, he feigned death.

This was not just some troublemaker—it was the harbinger of doom!

Chapter 627

In an instant, Brody's mind raced with countless ways to make a break for it, his feet itching to bolt.

Unfortunately for him, in Vivienne's grasp, there was no chance of escape.

"Blowing up my lab now, huh? Living a little too comfortably these days, aren't we?" Vivienne said, her grip firm on Brody's shoulder, patting his head like he was a naughty puppy.

Brody glared at Vivienne and retorted, "Cut me some slack, Specter Healer! I was just experimenting!"

"You've got some nerve!" Vivienne raised her hand, poised to strike again.

A real man knows when to fold. Brody, raising his hands to his ears, shouted, "Okay, okay, I was wrong!"

Only then did Vivienne relax her stance.

On the sidelines, Karen chuckled. "You must be Brody, right?"

Hearing her, Brody shot Karen an impatient look, "Yes, and who might you be? Have we met..."

He took a closer look at Karen and realized something about her face seemed familiar. Suddenly, his eyes widened in recognition. "It's you! You're Evelyn!"

Vivienne was taken aback, not expecting Brody to know her mother.

Karen just smiled at Brody, her gaze filled with an enigmatic meaning as she stepped forward and gently placed her hand on his shoulder. "Still as impolite as ever, huh? Don't you know how to greet your master properly?"

As she finished her words, a sharp pain shot through Brody's shoulder, causing him to buckle under her grip.

Vivienne was even more surprised.

Since when had her mother become Brody's master?

But Brody was wise enough to know when to give in. He wailed, "Master, I'm sorry! I was wrong!"

"You're sorry? Stealing my research papers, running off with lab secrets, do you think a simple apology

is enough?" Karen's gaze was fierce, her grip tightening.

Brody's body was nearly doubled over, powerless to resist, like a lamb in the grip of a lioness.

"Mom, since when did he become your disciple?" Vivienne asked with a hint of amusement.

Through his groans, Brody gasped in surprise, "Mom? You two are mother and daughter! No wonder I

couldn't just beat you like that! I knew there must be a reason!"

Karen snorted with laughter. "The boy's got talent. Met him on a mission once, and with a bit of

guidance, he was able to unlock some pretty deep medical mysteries. It's just a shame his mind's

always on the crooked path."

"No wonder he seemed to have a knack for things that align with my thinking, thanks to your

mentoring."

Vivienne sat back, enjoying the show, with no intention of intervening on Brody's behalf.

Brody pleaded with a gloomy expression, "Vivienne, I've got something to tell you. Can you—can your

mom... my dear master let go of me?"

Hearing this, Vivienne finally spoke up leisurely. "Mom, let him go. I've got a job for him."

Karen released her grip, having no real intention of harming him.

Brody stood up, rubbing his shoulder. "No wonder this lab looked so familiar. I couldn't beat you

because you're mother and daughter. It's like I'm cursed by you two!"

If it were not for running into Karen here, Brody would never have remembered that before he became

'Brody,' he had interned in a lab just like this one.

Back then, Karen went under the name of Evelyn. She was busy with her own lab while leading a team

at Vanguard Agency.

Impressed by Brody's talent, she had given him a few pointers.

Little did she know this gifted young man would one day steal her lab secrets and disappear!

And Brody never imagined that, years later, he would run into the daughter of his nemesis!

"How's the task I gave you coming along?" Vivienne inquired.

Brody caught his breath. "Why don't you ask your mom? Wasn't this what she was researching

before?"

Brody's interest in Vivienne's potion stemmed from his experience in Karen's lab, and back then, he

lacked the skills to unravel it.

The trio moved into another lab, one Brody was responsible for his potion research.

He was smart enough to keep his potion experiments separate to avoid another explosion.

"Our previous research direction was indeed effective, but now it seems this thing has a mind of its own. It keeps changing direction with every bit of progress we make. It's devouring the old cells and spawning new ones, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, inexhaustible, an extraordinary phenomenon."

Vivienne and Karen crouched before the potion cultures, engrossed in the phenomenon Brody described.

They had initially thought it only had healing effects, but now it seemed that those effects were merely a prelude to cellular regeneration.

It was like a self-healing process.

Karen frowned. "This thing keeps giving me surprises every time."

She had previously discovered the potion's healing properties and found them odd. But now, this reaction was even more baffling.

"What kind of virus is GTO researching that could cause such a reaction?"

Vivienne was deeply puzzled.

Every poison or remedy in the world has a dual nature, saving or taking lives at the flick of an intention or dosage.

Some poisons, adequately diluted, could become life-saving medicines.

While some medicines, with just a pinch of the wrong substance, could turn into deadly toxins.

But something like the potion before them, with reactions of healing, self-healing, regeneration, and expansion, was entirely unprecedented.

"GTO's ambition might be deeper than we imagined," Karen mused, her brows knitted tightly.

Vivienne shared the sentiment.

Perhaps GTO's ultimate goal was not just to develop something akin to a bioweapon.

What F-Poison sought might be more shocking still!

A new idea suddenly sparked in her mind.

"What if we stop its cellular regeneration? Will it produce some other reaction?"

Brody stood there, stunned for a moment. "What if the potion loses its potency and turns into nothing

but stagnant water?"

A loss of potency would mean that the potion was now worthless, with no further need for research.

For Brody, who was so keen on deciphering the potion's secrets, this would be a catastrophic blow.

Brody raked his fingers through his hair. "You two are quite the daring pair, aren't you? But even so,

how can we figure out how the potion was created in the first place?" Read at Dramanovels.com

"Can't we figure out a poison if we have an antidote?" Vivienne asked, her face a picture of confusion

as she looked at Brody.

Karen nodded in agreement.

Having the answer right in front, how could one miss the question?

Brody was speechless. Even if there was only one answer, there could be countless possible

questions, right?

Fine, a pair of oddballs, he thought. He would not say another word.

Vivienne and Karen spent almost a full day at YQ with Brody, pouring over the potion's research.

Finally, they had a clear direction for the future study of the potion.

While Brody verbally resisted, his actions were exemplary, following their lead without question!

Vivienne had a hunch that the day when the truth would be unveiled was not far off.

Chapter 628

The Ellington Mansion.

Cecilia had just picked up her daughter, Isolde, from school and was looking forward to unwinding with some cartoons and a quick bite of afternoon snacks. This tradition had become their little sanctuary of mother-daughter bonding.

Just as they were settling in, the doorbell chimed persistently.

"Aurelia, who could that be?" Cecilia called out, a hint of annoyance creeping into her voice.

Aurelia, the housekeeper, appeared at a loss for words. "Madam, perhaps you'd better come see for yourself. It's, uh..."

The hesitation in Aurelia's voice was enough to pique Cecilia's curiosity. She set her snack aside and rose from the couch. "Who is it? What's with all the mystery?" she muttered as she approached the door.

As she reached the entryway, Cecilia stopped dead in her tracks, her expression shifting from curiosity to shock. Words failed her as she stood face-to-face with a sight too startling for words.

Isolde scampered over, her youthful curiosity piqued. "Mom, what's wrong? Oh, is that a beggar?"

The figure at the door was indeed a sight to behold. With a wild mane of hair resembling a lion's, a face smeared with grime, and clothes exuding a pungent stench, the visitor looked every inch the part of a beggar. The most frightening feature, however, was the jagged scar slashing across their face.

At Isolde's blunt assessment, the disheveled visitor suddenly collapsed to her knees, crying out,

"Auntie, I've finally found you!"

Isolde clung to Cecilia, startled by the intensity of the moment.

Regaining her composure, Cecilia handed Isolde to Aurelia and knelt to brush the hair from the beggar's face gently. "Mara, how did you end up like this?"

The beggar was none other than Mara Boyd, Cecilia's niece and the youngest daughter of the Boyd family's second branch.

Mara was weeping uncontrollably, her tears tracing clean lines down her dirt-streaked face, adding a touch of absurdity to the tragic scene.

"Auntie, I've finally found you," she repeated between sobs, her voice filled with a heartbreaking mix of relief and despair.

Cecilia promptly instructed Aurelia to prepare a hot bath and fresh clothes, foregoing any further questions for the moment.

Once Mara had cleaned up, her original features emerged from beneath the grime, though the untreated scar still marred her face, red and angry, the edges dark and inflamed. Even in her clean state, Isolde was visibly frightened, and Cecilia, too, struggled to reconcile the image before her with the niece she once knew.

Aurelia brought a bowl of steaming chicken ramen, offering it with a gentle, "Ms. Boyd, please eat something."

Mara nodded, famished, and began to devour the meal with a ferocity born of long deprivation, nearly choking in her haste.

Cecilia handed her a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice and softly patted her back. "Take it slow, there's no rush."

Mara paused, her tears flowing anew. "Auntie, I thought I'd never see you again," she said, her voice choked with emotion.

Cecilia had harbored great disappointment in the Boyd family, especially Mara, whom she had thought different—kinder, not as callous as the rest. However, she was wrong. Yet, seeing Mara so vulnerable, her maternal instincts still took over. Blood was, after all, thicker than water.

"Mara, weren't you and your mother supposed to be abroad? How did this happen?"

The Boyd family had splintered after a scandal, with the daughters-in-law absconding with their children and their shares of the family fortune—a sum substantial enough to ensure a life of luxury.

Cecilia had never expected to see any Boyd again, let alone Mara, and certainly not in such dire straits.

Through sobs, Mara recounted a tale of betrayal and loss. They had indeed gone abroad, found universities, and planned new beginnings, but Mara's mother had fallen prey to a con artist who squandered their wealth and nearly assaulted Mara.

"My mother... she fell under his spell," Mara said, her voice trembling. "When I accused him, she took his side, blamed me, said no man would want me with my scarred face."

Cecilia was stunned. Nancy had always doted on her children; this was a cruel twist she could not have imagined.

Mara continued her tragic tale. After a falling out, she found herself alone when the swindler vanished

with their remaining money, leaving her and her brother Huxley penniless and homeless.

Cecilia sighed and said, "Karma is indeed cruel. What happened after?"

"Huxley and I were expelled because we couldn't pay the tuition. We thought of selling our house and using that money to come back, so at least we'd have some form of guarantee in life. But that swindler had used our house as a mortgage. That was when we found out that guy was a gambler who led our mother down that path as well.

Later, their creditors came to take the house, and my mother was locked up. Using all the money we had left, Huxley and I bought a ticket back to the country. However, during the transfer, I lost signs of Huxley. He had all our luggage. My phone was stolen too. I begged my way back, Auntie," Mara sniffled. "Some kind souls fed me; that's how I survived long enough to find you."

Cecilia listened, her heart aching for her niece. The bond of family, it seemed, could withstand even the bitterest of estrangements.

She was taken aback, never having imagined that Mara's life would have taken such a turn.

She tenderly stroked Mara's hair, saying, "Sweetheart, you rest up here for a while. I'll have the doctor

come and check on you, alright?"

"We'll talk about all that later; just get settled for now," Cecilia sighed.

Though bound by blood to feel compassion for Mara, Cecilia knew that winning over Percival and

Vivienne would be another matter entirely.

Mara had made her share of missteps, and if Cecilia was honest, the likelihood of Percival and

Vivienne truly accepting her seemed slim.

After the check-up, Mara retired to the guest room and quickly succumbed to a deep sleep. Updated at

Dramanovels.com

Cecilia watched her rest, imagining the hardships and indignities she must have faced wandering the

streets.

A young girl, once a debutante, now akin to a beggar, could hardly find peace in her slumber.

Once Mara was settled, Cecilia took out her smartphone and dialed Percival's number.

"Percival, I need you and Vivienne to come home for a bit. I have something important to discuss with you."

As soon as they walked through the door, Isolde, unable to contain her eagerness, blurted out to

Vivienne, "Vivienne, Mara's here."

Chapter 629

Vivienne blinked in confusion. "Mara? Who's that?"

As far as Vivienne was concerned, the name Mara had been flushed down the toilet long ago, just like yesterday's news.

The whole Boyd family had become invisible in Vivienne and Percival's world, let alone Mara.

Their association with the Boyds had been as necessary as a fish needs a bicycle—completely irrelevant!

Isolde nodded emphatically. "Yes, Mara. Mom's niece, the one you've met before."

Vivienne was still clueless, but Percival recalled and said, "The girl from the second branch of the Boyd family."

"Huh?" Vivienne blinked, not following.

Percival chuckled helplessly and flicked Vivienne's forehead. "The one you said had a nose like a button mushroom."

"Oh!" Vivienne's face lit up with realization. "Isn't she supposed to be abroad? Why is she back?"

What Vivienne did not voice was, "How could she have the gall to show her face here again?"

But with Isolde present, such language was inappropriate.

The trio walked into the living room where Cecilia sat, looking somewhat apologetic.

"Mom, what's she doing here? Is something wrong?" Percival inquired.

He knew his mother well enough to realize that although she could be scatterbrained at times, she had a strong moral compass.

The Boyds had been nothing but trouble, and Mara had even tried to break him and Vivienne up—

Cecilia would not forgive that lightly.

If Mara was now settling in at the Ellington Mansion, something must have gone seriously awry for

Cecilia to soften her stance.

Cecilia shared Mara's experience. "I never thought things would turn out this way; I thought we'd gone our separate ways for good. But then this happened."

Cecilia glanced at Vivienne sheepishly, clearly embarrassed. She felt she had no right to face Vivienne.

Vivienne, however, was unfazed. Mara was never a central figure in her life, and Cecilia's sentiments had no bearing on her.

The aunt-niece dynamics were none of Vivienne's business.

"Cecilia, you make your own decision; don't mind me," Vivienne said with a smile, looking at Cecilia with a soft gaze.

Cecilia bit her lip, "Vivienne, I also..."

"Cecilia, Mara is your niece, after all, and probably the only family you have left. She's been close to you for many years, and whatever you decide, I won't object. Just follow your heart."

Cecilia's eyes welled up at Vivienne's words. "Vivienne, you can be sure I won't let Mara trouble you again. If she does, I'll deal with her. Thank you, Vivienne."

"No thanks needed."

"It's none of my business anyway." The last thought was Vivienne's silent addition, mindful of Cecilia's dignity.

With Vivienne's stance clear, Percival had little to add, though he did say sternly, "She can stay but not in the house. And she better not show her face around Vivienne. It's bad karma."

Helping Mara was already a huge concession for Percival.

"I know. I've got people looking for a place for her. Don't speak to your mother like that!" Cecilia

retorted, less patient with her son. She did not want to upset Vivienne, but what was it to him?

Upstairs, Mara stood silently by the door, clenching her fists as she overheard the discussions below.

To those in the know, it was clear Cecilia was the legitimate lady of the house. To the uninformed, it might seem like the Ellingtons were Vivienne's domain.

Mara had not expected that even her stay would be at the mercy of Vivienne's goodwill.

Vivienne subtly raised her gaze, her eyes briefly scanning the slightly ajar door of the guest room upstairs.

Mara jumped, quickly slamming the door shut. Had she been imagining it, or did Vivienne catch her eye? It had sent a shiver down her spine.

Vivienne's lips curled into a mocking smile.

"Oh, and Percival, could you spare a moment to look into Huxley Boyd's whereabouts? Mara

mentioned they had a layover in M State. It'd be good to know if Huxley's still there; it's quite

worrisome," Cecilia said, sighing.

Percival nodded. Locating Huxley would also mean passing Mara off to him, sparing the Ellingtons any

further nuisance.

Soon, Cecilia found Mara a place to stay. With the Ellington family's large number of real estate, choosing a place was no issue.

Everything was arranged for Mara, from a new phone to new clothes.

Holding the credit card, Mara's voice wavered. "Auntie, does this mean Percival... and Vivienne still can't forgive me? Does my being here cause you trouble?"

"I understand, thank you, Auntie," Mara nodded, her fingertips brushing against her cheek, a trace of insecurity flickering in her eyes. "With my face... can I still go to school?"

"What's there to fear? I'll find the best plastic surgeon for you," Cecilia reassured her. "The doctors say you're not ready for surgery just yet. You need to recuperate a bit first. We'll take it slow, alright?"

Cecilia knew all too well that a girl's image was of utmost importance.

Especially for Mara, who had always taken great care of her appearance, indulging in all kinds of cosmetic treatments. Content of Drąmanovels.com

This change must be something she could not easily come to terms with.

At the mention of seeking help, Mara's lips pursed slightly. "Auntie, about Vivienne, would she be willing to help?"

"Okay, I understand. Thank you, Auntie," Mara replied, not pressing further. Her eyes dropped, concealing a layer of resentment.

With another sigh, Cecilia smoothed Mara's hair. "Alright, get some rest. You're enrolling at Elite University tomorrow. You know your way around, so I won't be joining you."

"Sure, goodbye, Auntie," Mara said with a smile as she saw Cecilia off. It was not until the car vanished from sight that her smile slowly faded.

Touching the scar on her face, the hatred in her eyes grew more profound.

Chapter 630

The evening drizzle cast a somber tune against the windowpanes of a cozy suburban home.

Mara lounged in the living room after dismissing her evening help, swirling a glass of Cabernet as she stared blankly at the ceiling.

The front door swung open, but Mara did not flinch.

A chill draft swept through, prompting Mara to frown. "Ever heard of closing the door?"

"Always such a stickler for details, aren't you?"

At the doorway, a woman shook off her umbrella, her stilettos clicking on the hardwood floor as she strode in.

The rhythmic tap of the heels only heightened Mara's irritation, her frown growing deeper. "You've never had an ounce of manners."

The woman sat down, her flawless features stark against Mara's scar-streaked visage.

Eyeing the woman's perfect complexion, Mara's gaze turned venomous, a visceral urge to shatter her wine glass and scar that pristine face.

To aerate the expensive wine with her blood!

"Gillian, didn't I tell you to cover that revolting face when you see me?"

This was the woman who had once been incarcerated for willful harm, Gillian Ashford!

Gillian snorted with contempt, crossing her long legs. "Compared to yours, I think my face is the least of our worries."

Mara stood abruptly, fury in her eyes, and for a moment, she wanted nothing more than to throttle the life out of Gillian.

Gillian, however, nonchalantly gestured. "Sit down and listen to what I have to say, or you'll regret it."

Mara clenched her jaw, reluctantly sitting back down.

Then, she scoffed. "We're both no better than lapdogs, Gillian. Do you think you're still the darling of

Sea City? I've got news for you – you're nothing now. So quit parading around like you're high and

mighty, bitch."

"Watch your mouth," Gillian snapped back, "Do you think you're any better?"

"I'm no saint, and neither are you."

The two women glared at each other, neither willing to back down until a clap of thunder outside drew

their attention away from their standoff.

After a moment, Gillian produced two photographs from her bag.

"This is Aaron Miller. He's a senior at Elite University, aiming for a master's in finance, and he's the heir

to the Miller family."

Mara gave Gillian a withering look, picking up Aaron's photo. "Isn't this the genius gamer?"

Matching Mara's disdain, Gillian retorted, "Yes, last season's champion. He's also Vivienne's protege.

He seems quite taken with her, collecting all sorts of information on her. Your task is to get close to him

and drive a wedge between them."

Mara laughed derisively. "Shouldn't you be the one doing this? Luring men is more your speed. Your goal and his align perfectly – you want to marry Percival, right?"

"Mara, this is serious. Don't forget our master's orders," Gillian reminded sharply.

At the mention of their master, Mara shivered, her tone becoming more subdued. "What else?"

Gillian huffed quietly, "For now, that's it. Oh, and Kenneth from the Ellington family is also at Elite University. He seems to be in touch with Anna from Vanguard Agency, and that woman is trouble.

Kenneth's close with Aaron; you might be able to kill two birds with one stone."

"Fine. Now leave. I can't stand the sight of you," Mara finished her wine in one gulp, clearly dismissing Gillian.

Gillian was all too eager to leave. Their friendship had been one of convenience; Mara was from the Boyd family, a family with a sterling reputation, and she was Percival's cousin. There was no real love lost between them.

"Watch yourself," Gillian said as she left.

As the rain grew heavier, Mara sat in the dark, clutching Aaron's photo with growing resentment.

"Vivienne, just wait."

After the rain, Elite University was fragrant with the scent of cherry blossoms, the air fresh and clear.

But Aaron's mood was far from sunny.

For convenience, he had bought an apartment between the university and the company, though he had kept his dorm room unoccupied.

Since Kenneth arrived on campus, peace had been scarce in Aaron's dorm.

He had come to retrieve something from his room when he was greeted by the sight of a freshly showered Kenneth, casually strolling about in the nude.

Aaron nearly lost it, half-tempted to cry out for security at the sight.

"Can't you see it's raining? Close the door! It's cold," Kenneth said nonchalantly, grabbing a soda from the fridge and taking a swig.

Aaron flung the door wide open. "You know it's cold, and you're drinking that? I wish it would freeze you solid!"

With the door open, passersby got an eyeful of Kenneth's indecency, and their laughter punctuated the

hallway.

"Have you no shame? Close the door," Kenneth rushed to secure their privacy.

Aaron, disgusted by the litter of clothes and underwear on his bed, opted for the small sofa instead.

"You're talking to me about shame?" Aaron chided. "This is my dorm, remember?"

Leaning back on the bed carelessly, Kenneth replied, "We're all friends here. What's the big deal?"

"Friends? Since when?" Aaron scowled. "Can't you put on some clothes?"

"I just showered. Letting it all hang out," Kenneth said with a shrug. "Besides, you're a grown man.

What's there to be shy about?"

Aaron, at his wit's end, yelled, "Don't sit on the bed wet! This is my dorm, my bed. Go dry off at your home!"

Kenneth's expression faltered, and he fell silent.

Ever since Flynn's incident, Kenneth had cut ties with the Ellingtons, holing himself up at school.

He would only occasionally ring up Richard to check-in.

Richard understood Kenneth's temperament and didn't press him to come home, letting him figure

things out at his own pace. Read at Dramanovels.com

Whatever Flynn's mistakes were, they had nothing to do with Kenneth.

Silently, Kenneth got up and dressed, not responding.

Aaron grabbed what he needed and shot Kenneth a look. "I've got classes today. What about you?"

"I'm free. I'll tag along," Kenneth replied, bored and not keen on stewing in his own thoughts.

Knowing he couldn't stop him, Aaron simply shrugged and headed out with his books.

Kenneth followed, shedding his somber demeanor and chattering away, keeping Aaron company on the way to class.