

## **Million-Dollar 661**

### **Chapter 661**

Vivienne paid little attention to the idle chatter as she completed a series of checks on Karen before they entered the operating room together.

Inside the pristine OR, Karen was hooked up to a plethora of monitors, all vital signs stable and within normal range. Lying on the operating table, Karen looked up at her daughter and whispered, "Frost, I'm counting on you."

For Vivienne, there was no turning back now. All hesitation and concern had evaporated the moment they prepped for surgery. All that remained was her unwavering resolve to see her mother healed.

She hugged her mother gently, whispering into her ear, much like Karen had done to soothe her to sleep when she was little. "Mom, just take a nice long nap, and when you wake up, we'll go out for some hearty beef stew." As the operating lights brightened, Brody stood outside, monitoring Karen's condition in real time with precision.

Percival sat rigidly outside, his expression betraying nothing of the turmoil within. Only he knew the depths of his unease—not just for his mentor's condition but for the weight on Vivienne's shoulders.

Outside YQ Research Center, Willa kept vigil by the door, perched on her motorcycle, clutching the ingredients for Karen's favorite beef stew.

Agentle breeze toyed with her long hair, veiling half her face—a portrait of stoic concern.

Back at the Perez Mansion, Maddox was in the yard, building and toppling towers of blocks with Natalia and Yasmine, locked in a cycle of creation and collapse.

In the study, Jasper poured over an album filled with photos of Karen up to the age of ten. It was a thick tome, about eight inches deep, with many gaps representing the thirty-plus years Karen had been away from the Perez family, only to be filled with abundant life snapshots upon her return.

As he flipped through the pages, Jasper's silent prayers weaved through the air.

A day and night passed. Percival's back was soaked with sweat, dried, and then soaked again. The stew ingredients in Willa's grasp had lost their appeal, the blocks gleamed from Maddox's handling, and Jasper, unable to sleep, remained with the album clutched to his chest.

In the OR, Vivienne stitched the last suture, wiping a bead of blood from Karen's face. She pressed the button to signal the end of the surgery, and Brody was the first to rush in.

"How is she? Everything looks normal, no rejection when the ST-1 was administered. Was it a success?" Vivienne didn't answer but simply wheeled Karen out.

As the doors opened, Percival hurried forward, his gaze searching Vivienne's face for answers.

Silently, they moved Karen to the ICU.

Brody looked confused; the surgery had gone well, with no complication in sight. Why the long faces?

Once Karen was settled in the ICU, Vivienne finally removed her mask and called Maddox, Jasper, and Willa. "The surgery was a success. When my mom wakes up, though, will depend on her own willpower."

The procedure had gone incredibly well. Karen's brain had been skillfully repaired, and her body had accepted the ST-1 without issue.

But Vivienne had detected a severe reaction between Karen's nervous system and the ST-1, plunging her mother into a deep coma—locked away in a space all her own, as if trapped within a nightmare.

If Karen could awaken soon, it would mean triumph over this ordeal. If not...

Vivienne sighed, adjusting the IV drip. "Get someone from the hospital over here. The lab's too far from the city; I can't always be here in time."

"Already done," Percival assured her, ruffling her hair affectionately. "You've done great, Vivienne."

A hospital vehicle soon transferred Karen to a high-level ICU, with members of the Nine Mystics Society taking turns to ensure her safety.

Willa, concerned, came to tend to Karen herself, and that's when she and Vivienne officially met. Willa greeted Vivienne with a nod, as cool and laconic as Vivienne had imagined. "Hey, Vivienne."

Vivienne couldn't help but smile, remembering how Karen had described Willa's awkwardness even with Natalia and Yasmine being born in front of her eyes—just a pat on the head, a reserved greeting, as if afraid to harm something so fragile.

When faced with Vivienne, Willa was just as cautious, lightly patting her on the head. Vivienne hugged Willa, feeling her body stiffen before slowly relaxing into the embrace.

"You're beautiful, just like Sasha," Willa said, and they shared a smile that spoke of a deep, instant connection beyond blood.

Percival watched from a distance, giving them space. In moments like these, he thought, whether Vivienne or Karen or Willa, none would want any interruption.

Stepping out of the room, Percival's phone rang—it was Thomas on the line.

"Trouble's brewing, Percival. Flynn's been hijacked by Gillian. They're on the move as we speak, and the agency only just got wind of it!"

Percival's brow furrowed in concern. "But I thought Gillian lost all her privileges at the Vanguard Agency. How can she pull off moving a high-profile criminal?"

"She pulled strings using the headquarters' name," came the reply. "Claims that Captain Lay's lesuleit teshearisod bkdke protocol. They want Flynn transferred to a max-security facility where no one can get to him. HQ's given the green light."

Clutching his smartphone tightly, Percival muttered, "Got it." Down the dusty lanes of the Rivenwood suburb, an armored vehicle trundled along.

Inside, Flynn was a picture of restraints, his body laden with shackles and manjtsfed By a tracking Bycea Wear the vigilant eyes of three Vanguard Agency operatives.

Suddenly, the desolate road was engulfed in a cloud of dust, forcing the vehicle carrying Flynn to a grinding halt. The three operatives huddled protectively around Flynn, eyes peeled for the source of the disturbance.

As the dust settled, the imposing silhouette of a sleek black Bentley blocked their path. From within emerged a figure of chilling elegance.

Dressed in casual black, the man's face was shielded by dark sunglasses. In his hand, he brandished a pistol and advanced toward the armored vehicle.

The operatives, including the driver, stood paralyzed.

With practiced ease, the man unlocked the vehicle and pointed the gun at the chaincakiGntFFivrin's Wal&t: is voice was cool, tinged with a hint of frost, "Unlock him, or it's lights out."

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Three squad members efficiently unshackled Flynn's chains, casting puzzled glances at the man before them. "Cap, what's the deal here?" The man was none other than Thomas!

"Just got a last-minute directive to transfer the prisoner. Head back to HQ, folks." Thomas hefted Flynn single-handedly and stuffed him into the back of a Bentley, speeding away.

The special squad members exchanged confused looks, clueless about what had just happened. With no choice but to follow their commanding officer's orders, they returned to base.

At Vanguard Agency. Gillian was idly nursing the remnants of a scar on her cheek, now mostly healed, revealing her basic features.

With no real power at Vanguard Agency and not exactly popular, she spent her time bored in front of a computer screen, restricted from the outside world—even online shopping was off-limits.

Her colleagues, once courteous, now treated her with a cool distance, leaving her feeling out of place. Thankfully, she was tracking Flynn's transfer.

"Gillian, sign this," Thomas said, dropping a logbook on her desk.

Signing papers was about the most challenging task for Gillian these days.

She shot Thomas a glare filled with disdain. "Oh, how kind of you, Captain Thomas, to deliver this personally." "Not at all, Gillian. You seem quite busy yawning over there," Thomas replied with a casual smile.

The nearby agents couldn't help but chuckle at Thomas's comment.

Gillian's face flushed with embarrassment as she scribbled her name on the logbook.

"Take it!"

At that moment, the three officers who had escorted Flynn approached. "Gillian, our captain..."

They stopped upon seeing Thomas. "Cap, what are you doing here?"

Thomas was surprised, too. "Where else would I be? But what about you guys? Shouldn't you be training instead of hanging around here?"

"We were following Gillian's orders to escort Flynn, but didn't you intercept us on the way?"

Thomas looked at his subordinates as if facing a threat. "What are you talking about? I've been in meetings all morning. I just got a break, and I definitely didn't take any Flynn from you!"

Gillian gasped. "Then who did you hand Flynn over to?!" "Shouldn't I be asking you that, Gillian?" Thomas slammed the logbook down on her desk.

"Do you have any idea what level of security Flynn requires? Three armored vehicles and special protection, plus my presence on the transport. And you sent just three people?"

Gillian was aware of the protocol but had hoped to keep things low-key by moving Flynn discreetly. She hadn't expected someone to intercept them.

Could it have been her boss?

Trying to keep her composure, Gillian retorted, "I had headquarters' approval. What right do you have to question me? Shouldn't you be more concerned with which 'Thomas' whisked Flynn away?"

Thomas snorted and stormed off. However, as he turned his back, his anger seemed to vanish without a trace. Once he was gone, Gillian frantically dialed a mysterious number.

The call connected after a long wait. "Who said you could call me now?"

"Didn't you take Flynn?"

There was a pause on the line before the person said, "Didn't I instruct you to deliver him to the designated prison at headquarters?"

"Yes, but someone impersonating Thomas took him halfway through. Was that you?" "Impossible! I have no time for such antics, and besides, I'm in Sea City!" Gillian's anxiety peaked. "What do we do now? He's gone, and we don't know who took him..."

Before she could finish, the door was kicked open, and a furious voice bellowed, "Gillian! Who do you think you are? Secretly transferring a high-profile prisoner—is that badge just for show?"

Vance stormed into the office, his rage directed squarely at Gillian.

The person on the phone hung up abruptly.

Terrified, Gillian ducked behind her chair. "I had... | had approval from headquarters, I..."

"Headquarters, always headquarters," Vance spat, ripping the badge from Gillian's neck.

"Get out and go back to headquarters now!" He bellowed, "If | see you here in half an hour, you'll replace Flynn in prison!"

Gillian, overpowered by Vance's strength, was flung out of the office and landed on the ground in a heap.

In a car driving down the Rivenwood suburb.

Flynn lay in the backseat, writhing in agony from the poison Vivienne had administered.

After a struggle, he managed to open his eyes and looked at the driver.

"Long time no see, my dear nephew."

The man behind the wheel, masquerading as Thomas, was actually Percival. Percival peeled off the fake mask and tossed it back, hitting Flynn on the head.

Flynn, too weak to remove the mask, managed, "Uncle, you've become quite the hothead since we last met. | thought we might catch up."

Percival ignored him and kept driving down increasingly secluded roads. Finally regaining his strength, Flynn sat up in the back, the chains on his limbs making clinking sounds.

"Where are you taking me that's worth all the fuss?" Flynn asked. He attempted to open the window to get some fresh air, but it was locked.

Percival remained silent as he continued to drive. In front of them was an iron gate with a facial recognition lock.

Percival pressed Flynn's head firmly until it was just inches from the camera lens. With a soft click, the lock disengaged.

Flynn let out a chuckle, "Seriously, Percival? You're the only person who gets hostages? That's rich, even for you."

Percival gripped Flynn's shoulder and ushered him into the room, trapping him behind the first iron door, then turned on his heel to leave.

"Hey, Percival, how's your grandpa doing? Is he still kicking? Does he ever ask about his favorite grandson?"

Percival's steps halted, the rage he had been holding back now erupting like a volcano. He stepped back in and landed a punch that sent Flynn sprawling to the floor.

"You have no right to speak of Grandpa! Keep your damn mouth shut!" Seeing Percival's fury only seemed to amuse Flynn more, his laughter lingering in the air. "Come on, Percival. After all, he is my father. Can't I even ask about him?"

Flynn snickered, his eyes gleaming with mockery, void of any genuine son's longing. He was the epitome of insincerity.

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Percival glared at Flynn with venom in his eyes, yet his clenched fist hung suspended, unable to deliver the blow. A sudden realization washed over him — the man before him was nothing like the uncle he remembered.



This man didn't deserve to carry the name Flynn, didn't deserve the family name, and certainly didn't deserve his fury! With a slow release, Percival let go, watching Flynn crumple to the ground like a free-falling ragdoll.

Flynn made no attempt to break his fall, laughing softly as he hit the floor, a sound as dry as autumn leaves.

No one knew what his laughter meant, nor could they guess what thoughts were twining through his mind.

Percival pulled out a handkerchief, wiped his hands clean, and, with a look of indifference, tossed it beside the fallen man. "White Tiger, | wonder if you'll still be so cocky without your precious ST-1."

The laughter ceased abruptly, and Flynn's eyes, sharp as daggers, fixed on Percival. "What do you mean by that?"

With a mocking laugh, Percival said, "Exactly what | said," and turned to leave. Flynn tried to follow, but chains bound him tightly, rendering him immobile.

All he could do was roar at the iron bars, "Hold it! Clarify your words, stop!"

Percival ignored the shouts and drove away.

Truth be told, his words were a mere guess, sparked by evidence brought back by Willa — a hunch that Flynn had been injecting ST-1.

And it turned out to be accurate.

What was the effect of ST-1 that even Flynn couldn't resist using it?

Vivienne had confirmed that Flynn showed no signs of viral infection and was in perfect health.

But this mystery remained one that Vivienne could only unravel by solving ST-1's effects.

In the hospital, Vivienne headed to her lab, entrusting Karen's care to Willa.

Karen, still in a coma, required no special attention, but Willa felt compelled to stay by her side.

She wiped Karen's palms gently, whispering, "Sasha, when will you wake up?"

She talked endlessly about their childhood memories and the days following Karen's departure from the Perez family.

"After you left, Dad seemed lost, searching tirelessly for you. He fell sick once and never fully recovered. Sasha, if you wake up, could you heal him?"

After that, she started massaging Karen while lamenting, "There was this one time when Maddox said I trained too much and offered a massage. But somehow, he dislocated my arm in the process. The pain lasted for days. Even now, I still suspect he did it on purpose."

"I didn't." Startled, Willa swung around with a swift chop, only to be stopped by a strong grip on her wrist. "I never meant to hurt you. I was trying to help, but you resisted, and I accidentally hurt you."

Maddox, holding a cake, explained, "Vivienne mentioned you haven't eaten. I brought you some cake to tide you over until Sasha wakes up."

Willa pressed her lips and withdrew her hand. However, her stomach betrayed her with a grumble. Maddox smiled and gave the cake to her. "Go eat it." Accepting the cake, Willa began to eat in silence, not resorting to escaping this time.

"Sasha promised she'd wake up, and she always keeps her word. So, let's not worry and just wait for her," Maddox soothed while massaging Karen's wrist, though concern lingered in his eyes.

Of course, how could he not be worried when his sister, who had just reunited with him, was now in a coma? Willa nodded, holding onto hope. She was certain Sasha would wake up.

After Maddox massaged Karen, he sat opposite Willa.

"Willa, when are you coming back? Dad's worried about you."

Willa remained silent.

Despite cutting contact with the Perez family for so long, she had barely found any leads. F-Poison was still at large, the ST-1 mystery was unresolved, and even her inquiries at Scepter University had led nowhere.

She couldn't face the Perez family without answers.

Reading her discomfort, Maddox lightly tapped her forehead. "We'll find F-Poison. Don't carry all the burden yourself. Just like Sasha said, you need to be happy, okay?"

Willa finally spoke up, "Maddox, what is it about me that you like?"

Caught off guard, Maddox's eyes betrayed his surprise.

"I like you... just because. There's no reason."

Willa pressed, "I don't understand your feelings. I feel like you shouldn't like me. It's strange; I see you as a brother." Maddox's emotions were complex, faced with being considered a brother by the one he cared for more.

"Willa, you don't seem uncomfortable with our other brothers. What's different with me?"

This time, Willa became the one who struggled to respond. "With them, it's just... they're my brothers."

Finally realizing the issue, Maddox grasped her hand earnestly. " pet silt. To you, they are brotters?but with rho vou esitate because you only want me to be your brother. That's the difference?"

"What's the difference exactly?"

Maddox paused, then said, "Because, in your heart, | could be more than your brother, right?"

Willa looked down, unsure how to respond.

Maddox bit back further words, a silent mantra echoing in his mind: Don't rush. Keep your cool. Patience is key.

Willa had always been a bit of a stubborn enigma, her understanding of emotions as clear as mud—rushing her would be like pushing a river upstream.

"Alright, let's not think about that now. But do me a favor, will you? Promise me you wantetake betGgain, okay ox's voice was gentle, a soft smile playing on his lips as he gave Willa's hand a reassuring squeeze.

Willa nodded, her resolve firm. "Then

can you promise me ale ee Wait until' e tracketkad nF-Poison

Hw alb he into all this 'liking each other' business. | just... | need to sort

this out first."

"You got it," Maddox agreed, his voice warm with affection. "Your wish is my command."

Chapter 664

Outside, Vivienne wasn't eavesdropping on the conversation; she just happened upon it quite by chance.

Who would have thought that Maddox, the proverbial prodigal son, would be so out of his depth in front of Willa? Their chat was all kinds of odd.

Peering through the glass, Vivienne observed Willa.

Willa seemed oblivious to matters of the heart as if she had no clue what feelings really were.

Toward Jasper, it wasn't kinship but a gratitude that had to be repaid.

Toward Maddox, there was a vague sense of romance, yet she could not fully comprehend it.

She wasn't obsessed with being the Perez heiress like Diana, nor did she harbor an unswerving affection for someone like Vivienne did for Percival.

Even the most obtuse wouldn't be this clueless, right? "What are you thinking about?" Behind her, Percival suddenly appeared, carrying a box of strawberry cheesecake.

Vivienne turned and leaned half against him, gesturing lazily toward the hospital room. "They're playing lovey-dovey in front of my mom."

Percival wrapped one arm around Vivienne's waist and sat down, planting her securely on his lap. "No, they haven't fallen for each other yet. There's no lovey." Vivienne chuckled. "If Uncle Maddox heard you say that, he would hold a grudge."

"It's alright, we're family." Percival rested his chin on Vivienne's shoulder, threading his hands around her waist to untie the box of strawberry cheesecake.

His hands, pale and slender, stood out starkly against the cheesecake, dazzling. Half-leaning on Percival, Vivienne's bright eyes lifted slightly, reflecting his refined profile. "Mr. Wolf, something on your mind?" Percival paused, not denying it. Vivienne always had a knack for detecting his worries.

He forked a piece of the cheesecake and offered it to her lips. "It's alright; today, I moved Flynn, and he asked about Grandpa's condition."

Vivienne didn't take the bite he offered. Instead, she took his wrist and guided the cake to his mouth.

Then, she wrapped her arms around Percival's neck, enveloping him in her embrace.

"Mr. Wolf, cheer up. I'm sharing my strawberry cheesecake with you."

Percival was taken aback for a moment before bursting into laughter.

If his Vivienne was willing to share her strawberry cheesecake, how could he afford to stay downcast?

"Yeah, I'm already happy."

Percival tilted his head back and gently pecked Vivienne's lips, a fleeting touch that didn't cross boundaries. Some kisses convey deep love without the need for passion.

Just then, Maddox stepped out and caught this tender moment. He sighed heavily and sat down beside them.

At over forty, he was still teaching his beloved what liking someone meant, while this twenty-something-year-old girl was already in the throes of cuddles and endearments. What a cruel twist of fate!

Vivienne remained seated on Percival's lap, nibbling on the cheesecake he fed her, and asked, "Uncle Maddox, was Aunt Willa always like this, even as a little girl?"

Maddox snapped back to attention. "Like what?"

"Indistinct about feelings, not quite understanding affection, whether it's familial, romantic, or friendly." Although Vivienne hadn't spent much time with Willa, she felt it.

Willa had her own approach to people. It seemed she didn't know how to relate to others.

Maddox leaned back in his chair, pondering for a moment, then said, "You know, now that you mention it, Willa was much worse as a child."

Vivienne was stunned, nearly retreating entirely into Percival's embrace without realizing it. "What? How was she worse?"

Seeing enough, Maddox pulled Vivienne from Percival's embrace and made her sit properly. "You, stop pawing at my niece in front of me, or I'll skin you alive!"

Pure jealousy! Percival shrugged. "Alright, Uncle Maddox. Next time, I'll tell Grandpa that you won't let me marry Vivienne." "You're taking things out of context; that's outright slander!"

Vivienne pulled Maddox back to the topic. "Uncle Maddox, you're getting sidetracked!"

Maddox relented and continued, "Do you know why Diana is so afraid of Willa?" "Diana's afraid of Aunt Willa?" Vivienne hadn't noticed that. After all, she had never seen Diana and Willa together nor heard anyone mention it.

Maddox nodded. "Yes, in the Perez family, the one person Diana wouldn't dare cross was Willa. Otherwise, she wouldn't have schemed to send Willa away from the family."

"What happened?" Vivienne asked.

"When Willa came to our house, I was six, and she was about one, the same age as Sasha. She was such a quiet baby, never crying or fussing, even when she fell while learning to walk. When Sasha tried to play with her, she ignored her, even pushing her away with apparent disdain."

"We brothers thought maybe Willa was just shy, but years went by, and she stayed the same, only she stopped pushing Sasha away. Later, Diana joined our family. You know, kids tend to emulate their older siblings, and Diana copied Sasha in everything, including trying to be close to Willa."

One year, when I was in middle school, and Sasha was not at home, it was just Willa and Diana around r semper Bian pling with her pet pafakeet when it nipped Willa. Without a blink, Willa just snuffed it out and shoved Diana away, leaving her in tears. Then she just walked off, stone-faced."

Maddox recalled the memory without a hint of horror, just a twinge of sorrow.

Percival mulled over the story for a moment. "Uncle Maddox, you don't have a thing for Aunt Willa's icy demeanor, thinking it's cool, do you?"

"Of course not!" Maddox feigned a scare at Percival and continued, "When Sasha got back and h

about it, s ghag@rstenith Willa. I dont kh Ww what she said, but Willa apologized to Diana afterward. But from that day on, Diana couldn't bring herself to play with Willa again. She just grew up scared of her."

Vivienne nodded thoughtfully. "So what changed? How did Aunt Willa transform?"

Maddox rubbed his chin, respect flickering in his eyes. "I'm not too sure of the details, but Sasha always had the patience of a saint ith her she C by benno rratte what she did. é memory that sticks out to me was during Halloween. Our gang of kids was watching a horror flick together—'Saw', real gory stuff. Even Sasha was hiding behind a book. But Willa? She watched the whole thing without flinching. I thought, man, Willa is so badass!"

Percival chimed in dryly, "So it is because you think she's cool." "Zip it, Percival!" Maddox couldn't hold back and aimed a kick at him, which Percival nimbly dodged. Finally, Vivienne got it. "She has emotional detachment."



"Emotional detachment? What's that?" Maddox inquired.

## Chapter 665

Vivienne explained, "Basically, it's like she can't empathize with others. She doesn't feel happiness, anger, sadness, or joy. When she snuffed out Birdie, she just thought the chirping was annoying. She didn't consider that it was Diana's beloved pet. When she watches a horror movie, she just sees it as a scene of murder, nothing scary. She can't grasp love, friendship, or family ties. She's like a block of ice, pure ice. And even if it melts, it's just a puddle of water."

Maddox shook his head. "But Vivienne, Willa treasures your grandpa and your mom a lot. If she couldn't feel emotions, she wouldn't have shown up today."

People who can't feel emotions don't sympathize with others or worry about them. Yet, Willa clearly wasn't like that.

Plus, she had said in the hospital that she saw everyone as her brothers. So, it didn't make sense that she couldn't feel familial bonds.

"It's not absolute. Emotional detachment can be managed. Didn't you say that my mom had a talk with Aunt Willa? | think that was part of the management, which is why she's so dependent on my mom."

Maddox's eyes brightened in understanding. "You're right. Willa is really dependent on Sasha." Vivienne pursed her lips and continued, "It seems Aunt Willa wasn't born this way. It might be due to medication." "Why do you say that?" Maddox's eyes suddenly took on a fierce edge.

"If it were innate emotional detachment, it wouldn't change so easily. My mom's been gone for over thirty years. If it were innate, Aunt Willa would have stopped caring years ago, thinking, 'If she's gone, she's gone. It's no skin off my back.' But she's been searching all these years and even ran away from home out of shame upon learning she is the daughter of F-Poison.

| think, in Aunt Willa's heart, the interests of the Perez family always come first, followed by my mom, grandpa, and then those closest to her."

Maddox raised a hand. "I'm at the top of that 'closest list!" "Sure, sure," Vivienne said, pressing Maddox's hand down. Men can be so weird, fussing over such trivial rankings!

Vivienne went on, "If it were an innate emotional detachment, it wouldn't be so easy for people to get close to her. In all these years without my mom, it was Grandpa and you guys who gradually influenced Aunt Willa's heart. My mom was the enlightenment, and you guys are the continuation. That's what has shaped Aunt Willa today.

If it's controlled by medication, after a while, when Aunt Willa and I get to know each other better, I'll give her a check-up. That way, we can treat her accordingly and help her recover."

Vivienne finished the last bite of her strawberry cheesecake and added, "But Uncle Maddox, if this doesn't affect Aunt Willa's health, there's no need to worry. It's just a lack of empathy for others' emotions, which is fine, don't you think?"

After listening, Maddox heaved a long sigh of relief as if he hadn't really heard what Vivienne was saying, lost in his own world. "I get it now." Vivienne raised an eyebrow, "What do you get?"

"Willa definitely likes me. She just doesn't understand it yet. Once she does, she'll realize I'm the love of her life, the one she can't live without. When her love comes rushing at me like a tidal wave, I'll respond with a river of my own affection. We'll have seven or eight kids, leave them with the eldest to handle, and I'll take Willa to travel the world. Vivienne, what do you think... Hey, where did they go?"

Maddox turned around to find not only had Vivienne and Percival disappeared, but even the cheesecake box was gone! He clicked his tongue. "Jealous, they're just jealous!"

Vivienne and Percival hadn't left the hospital but had gone to the office Percival had prepared for Vivienne, which held everyone's medical records, including those of Leopold and others who were recuperating on the second floor.

"Soren still hasn't woken up, but Astrid is conscious now, though she can't move much yet. The others are gradually recovering. Soren should be up in a couple of days."

Vivienne flipped through the medical records and finally picked up Karen's chart.

"I wonder when my mom will wake up."

She bit her lip, listing many methods to awaken Karen, each with its risks and not to be tried lightly. Percival gently stroked Vivienne's back, softly saying, "Vivienne, don't worry. Master will be fine."

"Yeah, this surgery cost a fortune. She owes me!" Vivienne said seriously as if she really intended to collect a debt from her own mother.

Percival moved his lips but found himself at a loss for words.

Right, his Vivienne was still the same, not a bit changed!

Over at Elite University, Aaron sat in the café, silently stirring his coffee. Kenneth hadn't bothered him for days since Anna was hospitalized, giving him some peace.

But Aaron couldn't muster any happiness. He didn't know how to approach Vivienne now. The Brooks family saga was over, and he hadn't played any substantial role in it.

Like a side character, popping up now and then but failing to leave a lasting impression on the protagonist, much like his place in Vivienne's heart.

Aaron felt a twinge of dissatisfaction.

Why?

He had known Vivienne first and had grown familiar with her. Why had Percival, that old man, gotten ahead? Or was it, as Mara suggested, that Percival misled Vivienne?

Lately, Aaron felt like he didn't have the strength to jostle with Percival for the top spot in Vivienne's heart. "Hey, Aaron! What's on your mind?"

Aaron snapped out of his reverie to find Mara already sitting across from him at the diner booth.

Ever since that incident a while back, it seemed like they hadn't really crossed paths.

"It's been a while. How's the leg? All healed up?" Aaron inquired with genuine concern.

Mara nodded. "Yeah, the leg's pretty much back to normal, teeity asking. B tyvhataboe Yeu? ou look Tha aah Saving the weight of the world on your shoulders."

Aaron let out a wry chuckle but didn't respond.

But really, how heavy can a young man's troubles be? They usually revolve around just one person, don't they? Mara, of course, knew all too well.

"Has Vivienne come around to see you yet?" Mara asked gingerly.

Aaron's self-mockery was evident as he said, "Why would she come see me? I'm useless, and she knows it. It would be a waste of her time."

Mara sighed, empathy written all over her face. "That's such a shame. I thought Vivienne was the kinda modern L who'd get through a dead-end stance after what happened. She'd be ready to move on, especially with someone like you waiting in the wings. Why on earth would she cling to Percival?"

Then, realizing how her words might have sounded, she quickly tried to backtrack, "I didn't mean it like that! I'm not saying you're just a backup option."

But that wasn't what was eating at Aaron. He asked, "What exactly happened to Vivienne? Has Percival done something to her?"

Chapter 666

Mara gasped, thinking, "Aaron is such a... a sucker for love, isn't he? A real bleeding heart, the patron saint of lost causes. Even the good ol' boy scout would tip his hat to him!"

"It's not like it's entirely his fault, you know. There's been a bit of a mix-up. I'm not even sure if you can call it that. But apparently, Percival's high school sweetheart, the one who got away, has come back into the picture. Sadly, she's fallen ill, sought out Percival, and, of course, his heart's just bleeding for her. He's been doing the hospital dash non-stop.

Oh, and get this: he even had Vivienne step in for surgery. You know Vivienne is the Specter Healer. Bet she agreed to it in a heartbeat."

Aaron clenched his fists so tightly his knuckles turned white. "What did you say? The one who got away? | thought Vivienne was Percival's first love!"

Mara couldn't help but let out a snort of laughter. "You can't be serious. My brother's way past that age. His first love, Vivienne? Come on, it's an open secret in our family. Don't believe me? Go check out the hospital yourself. That 'one who got away' is currently in the VIP ward of my brother's hospital, getting the royal treatment."

"What's her name?" Aaron's voice was dark as storm clouds, his words almost grinding through his teeth. Mara took a sip of her coffee, feigning ignorance. "What's that?"

Aaron's hand slammed down on the table, causing Mara to jump. "Her name! What's the woman's name?" Startled, Mara nearly spilled her coffee. "Her-Her name's Karen..."

Upon hearing the name, Aaron stormed off toward the hospital.

Mara exhaled, setting down her coffee cup and dabbing at the splatters on the table with a napkin. Her lips curled into a wry smile. "Such a firecracker, that one. Absolutely hilarious."

No sooner had Aaron left than another figure took his place.

Mara turned and let out a scoff. "Well, if it isn't the stray dog kicked to the curb by Vanguard Agency. What's the matter, got too much free time on your hands now?"

The woman opposite her was Gillian. But today, Gillian was different. She didn't bite back at Mara's sharp tongue. "Mara, when will you guys quit this pointless banter? As your boss, it's quite embarrassing, you know."

At her words, Mara stiffened like she'd been struck by lightning, her voice trembling. "Boss, |... | had no idea it was you. I'm so sorry, truly sorry!"

The woman with Gillian's face—F-Poison—gestured for her to sit. "No worries, ignorance is bliss. I'm pretty laid back, don't be scared."

Mara swallowed hard. Laid back, huh?

She had seen firsthand how F-Poison had put Gillian in her place, making her wary of Gillian's face for a long time.

F-Poison pulled out a tablet and showed her a video. "Look, your younger brother's doing just fine. I'm here to reassure you." Mara shivered. F-Poison's presence was anything but reassuring; it was a warning to toe the line.

"Don't worry, boss. I'm working hard to drive a wedge between Aaron and Vivienne. Aaron's already on his way to the hospital. There will be results soon, rest assured."

As Mara spoke, her voice was a mix of fear and eagerness to please. F-Poison stirred her coffee absently, twirling a strand of hair around her finger. "The hospital? To visit Anna?"

"No, it's about a woman named Karen. | heard from my aunt Cecilia that Karen had surgery at the hospital, and Percival has been looking after her. So, | spun a tale about the 'one who got away' to make Aaron jealous, and..."

"Karen? You're sure her name is Karen?" F-Poison cut her off, a sly grin spreading across her face.

Mara knew nothing of Karen's real identity. Cecilia kept her in the dark, wanting to spare Vivienne any interference. Mara didn't press; she wasn't interested anyway.

But now, seeing F-Poison's expression, curiosity got the better of her. "Yes, boss. What about it?" she asked.

F-Poison let out a slow chuckle that grew into a full-blown laugh, hands pressing against her stomach as if she had heard the funniest joke.

Mara felt a chill creep up her spine. F-Poison's laughter was more terrifying than her anger. Finally, F-Poison composed herself and looked at Mara. "Have Aaron take out that Karen." "What?" Mara was stunned. "How do I even bring that up?"

F-Poison flicked through her phone for a while before showing Mara a photo.

Then, Mara's phone buzzed with a new message—a photo of Karen working on a virus experiment at GTO, clearly wearing a lab coat and engrossed in her work.

"This is?"

"This is Karen. Show this to Aaron, and he'll understand why he has to take her out." Mara nodded, still puzzled, as she glanced at the photo on her phone.

Karen was beautiful, eerily resembling Vivienne at first glance.

But when Mara looked up again, F-Poison had vanished.

Mara let out a sigh of relief and, clutching her purse, headed to the hospital.

Inside the hospital, Aaron arrived in a fury, approaching the nurse's station. "Excuse me, I'm Perc... Mr. Ellington's driver, here to drop something off."

The nurse hadn't given it much thought; after all, visitors for Karen were strictly limited to a few specially designated individuals, and no one else was granted access.

"It's in the penthouse suite," the nurse said, handing over a security pass. "Just give your items to the guard on duty."

Aaron took the pass, bemused that there was indeed a Karen here.

"Percival, how could you do this to Vivienne?"

Aaron stepped into the elevator, coincidentally joined by a group of young nurses who were also discussing Karen's situation.

"Word is, the chairman is really invested in the patient in the penthouse suite, especially. She's breathtakingly beautiful. I'm dying to know if she's more attractive than the chairman's fiancée."

"Well, that's anyone's guess," another nurse chimed in. "But I do know the chairman is definitely having Special Attention patient. He's been neglecting his best friend, Mr. Sterling, and is practically living in the VIP suite."

"Yeah, and to think he's got his fiancée personally looking after her. Everyone knows how well he treats his fiancée. If he's got her playing nurse, this patient must be something special."

"I'm so jealous of those two women. To be so cherished by the chairman—to the point where dying seems worth it."

## Chapter 667

Karen's identity was shrouded in the utmost secrecy; only the highest echelons within the hospital were privy to her details. The nurses and doctors, not privy to such clearance, only knew that Percival had brought in a VIP patient who was also a knockout beauty.

Aaron couldn't bear to listen to the idle gossip any longer. "Have you lost your minds? What's there to admire about someone who's playing the field?"

His sudden outburst startled the two young nurses, who scurried out of the elevator.



Alone in the lift, Aaron fumed over Percival's audacity. How could he let Vivienne wait on his old flame like that? Sick! Despicable! Some people just shouldn't exist!

Upon exiting the elevator, Aaron used his access card to make his way to the penthouse floor. When he encountered the security guard, he flashed the Nine Mystics Society's token.

As a member of the Nine Mystics Society, the guard recognized the emblem of authority and allowed Aaron to pass without question.

"Master Aaron, the young master is not in. Please wait here," one of Percival's men said, assuming Aaron was there to see Vivienne.

Aaron pocketed his token. "It's fine. Don't bother about me. I'm just looking around. No need to tell Vivienne | was here; | don't want to disturb her."

"Understood." After giving his instructions, Aaron approached the hospital room.

Peering through the glass, Aaron saw Percival tenderly wiping the brow of the woman on the bed with an utterly uncharacteristic gentleness.

So tender, it couldn't possibly be Percival! No mistake about it: this woman was Percival's first love! "Percival, you sleaze, one wasn't enough for you, huh? Alright, just you wait!" Aaron cursed inwardly.

He was about to burst in but held himself back. He had to wake Vivienne up first; he couldn't let her be manipulated by this cad any longer!

With that thought, he turned and left.

Just as Aaron stepped into the elevator, Vivienne emerged from her office, catching only a glimpse of a retreating figure. "Aaron? He came and didn't look for me?" She wondered.

However, Vivienne didn't dwell on it and entered the ward. "How's it going? Did you wipe my mom's face?"

Percival wiped his brow. "Vivienne, | hope | did a clean job!"

Vivienne, pinching the bridge of her nose, sighed. "Mr. Wolf, you really have no knack for this kind of work. Let me do it." She took the washcloth Percival had been using, only to find he had only managed to wipe the forehead. Really! Percival scratched his head. "I thought | did a clean job."

"You nearly wiped my mom's soul off her face," Vivienne said, wetting the cloth to clean her mother's face properly.

Willa, sitting in the corner, couldn't stand it any longer. "Let me take over. You didn't even wring out the cloth properly, and you're getting water into Sasha's mouth."

Vivienne: Really? | didn't notice...

Percival: Vivienne, let's face it, we're both not cut out for this!

Hence, care for Karen was handed over to Willa.

Meanwhile, Aaron stormed out of the hospital, running straight into Mara.

"| finally caught up with you. | remembered this photo; it feels off. Take a look." Mara pulled Aaron aside and handed him the photo.

Aaron's eyes hardened as he spotted the obvious GTO emblem on Karen's clothing. "Where did you find this?!"

Mara noticed the change in Aaron's demeanor. "| found it in Percival's nightstand. At first, | thought it was Vivienne, but on closer inspection, it's not. | knew my brother wouldn't be so kind to Vivienne for no reason. He's treating her like a stand-in."

Mara had already constructed a novel's worth of scenarios in her mind.

The first love stand-in trope. Tsk, tsk, tsk. She hadn't expected her offhand remark to become reality. Aaron, however, was fixated on the GTO logo.

Karen was part of GTO?

What was her purpose in coming back this time?

Did F-Poison send her to get close to Percival and target Vivienne?

No, she couldn't be allowed to stay!

With that, Aaron turned to leave.

Mara grabbed him. "Hey, where are you off to?"

"I'm going to tell Vivienne!"

Mara blocked his way. "No, if you go to Vivienne, wouldn't that be betraying me? | still want to stay in good standing with the Ellington family. Aaron, you can't be so selfish!"

"Do you realize how dangerous this 'Karen' is? | can't let anyone dangerous near Vivienne!"

"Then why don't you just take care of it? You have the means. If it were Percival, he'd just click his fingers, and the problem would be gone. Why drag Vivienne into it?"

Mara's words struck a chord with Aaron.

He stood there, contemplating. "Right, I can take care of her myself!"

Mara breathed a sigh of relief; Aaron had taken the bait.

"Do you need my help? You can't just whisk away a living person from the hospital on your own, can you?" Mara prodded further. F-Poison had made it clear: to ensure Karen's demise. Mara had to confirm it personally.

Aaron gave Mara a once-over. "Fine, let's meet tonight under the hospital. I'll go and get ready."

"Deal," Mara replied, relieved as they parted ways.

Aaron stood still for a moment, watching Mara's retreating figure before turning back to the hospital.

In the dead of night, under the bright moon, the hospital was eerily silent.

On the VIP floor, the guard sat dozing off in a chair, unaware of the plot unfolding in the shadows.

The entire floor was eerily silent, save for the faint sound of Ateathiog Mat \ddyeralbé Nead not even the whisper of a breeze.

Aaron, with Mara in tow, ascended the side stairwell, their footsteps light as feathers, careful not to make a sound. Mara clutched Aaron's wrist tightly, trembling both physically and mentally.

How many ghost stories had their roots in the hushed halls of hospitals!

She had never set foot in a hospital at this ungodly hour before, and it was downright terrifying. "Slow down, I can't keep up!" Mara hissed at Aaron, gripping him tightly.

A look of annoyance flickered across

Aaron's face. "Do you have any,

how many guards on George's brother

AGA ING posted here? If we wake

them up, neither of us is getting out!"

Mara clamped her mouth shut and followed Aaron in silence. As they approached the ward, the guards seemed to be in an even deeper slumber than before. Mara was puzzled. "Did they really not notice us?"

"Nope." Aaron gestured towards an incense burner at the side. "That's the incense burner. I swapped it out when I came by this afternoon."

Realization dawned on Mara. "You always have the best tricks. Let's go in."

Chapter 668

Aaron gently nudged the hospital room door open, slipping inside with Mara close on his heels.

In the bed lay Karen, her breathing steady and the machines around her showing no signs of distress.

Aaron tiptoed over, with Mara following suit.

As they drew closer, Mara pulled out a photograph and held it up for comparison, "It's her. What do we do? Take her with us?"

Aaron nodded. "Yeah. I'll disconnect the equipment. Get ready to lift her. I'm taking her to the Millers' to squeeze out who she really is."

"Aren't we going to... you know?" Mara hesitated. "Man, if he won't do the deed, how am I supposed to complete my mission?" She thought. Aaron replied as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, "What? Kill her? That's illegal!"

Inside, Mara fumed. It was a good thing she had come along, or this mission would be a bust, and she would be the one in trouble!

As Aaron worked on the machines, Mara discreetly reached into her pocket and withdrew a small knife.

Holding the knife over Karen's chest, she swallowed hard. Murder was not on her resume. She hadn't even killed a chicken before. How could she go through with this?

But if Karen didn't die, she would be the one to pay the price.

Aaron, the fool, not willing to dirty his hands with murder, was useless to her.

It was so dark; Aaron wouldn't see. By the time he noticed, she'd be long gone.

Even if things went south, the boss would handle it. No worries.

Mentally pumping herself up, Mara closed her eyes and prepared to plunge the knife down. Just as she was about to commit to the act, her wrist was caught in a vice-like grip. Already strung tight with tension, the sudden grip nearly sent Mara's soul flying from her body. She let out a piercing scream that seemed to split the night, "Ahh!"

At her cry, the lights in the room blazed to life.

Stepping back, her wrist still captured, Mara looked around in panic.

This was no empty hospital room.

Vivienne, Percival, and the woman holding her wrist with an icy glare were all present, along with a few men Mara didn't recognize, all staring daggers at her.

And her supposed ally, Aaron? He stood among them, grinning at her.

"You guys... you..." Mara couldn't handle the shock, her vision darkening as she crumpled to the floor.

Willa released her grip, wiping her hand with disgust. "Vivienne, you called in the cavalry for this piece of trash?" Maddox was equally puzzled. "Seriously, not to mention you, your Aunt Zelda could've handled this one easily!" Yuri nudged Maddox with his shoulder, "Zelda is tough as nails; she wouldn't even blink at this amateur!"

"Why are you so protective? It was just a figure of speech!" Maddox rubbed his shoulder where Yuri had hit him. Fredrick stepped forward, hoisting Mara onto a couch. "Enough bickering. What do we do with her?"

Luke stepped up and said, "Wow, this girl's got a scary face. Lucky for Natalia and Yasmine, they're not here." The Perez brothers shared a look: Seriously, bro? That's your takeaway?

Vivienne approached and pressed her thumb to Mara's philtrum. The unconscious Mara instantly gasped back to life. Her eyes snapped open to find the Perez brothers standing behind Vivienne, watching her.

"Ah! Don't hurt me, please!"

Vivienne hoisted her up with distaste, "When you had that knife to my mom's throat, did you think you'd be begging like this now?"

Mara froze, "She... she's your mom?"

Vivienne's mom looked so young? She seemed about Percival's age. How could it be?

"Aren't you an orphan?"

"Who are you calling an orphan?" Yuri was the first to bristle.

"Don't you go spouting nonsense, girl. We've got four uncles right here, no orphans in sight!" Luke added his voice to the chorus. "Exactly. Keep talking, and I will rip your mouth out!" Fredrick threatened.

Maddox was already gearing up to make good on that threat!

Vivienne held her uncles back. "Alright, uncles, may I please have a word with her?"

The men finally settled down, stepping back.

Vivienne casually pulled up a chair and sat down, with Aaron and Percival standing behind her.

The shock wore off, and Mara realized Aaron had played her.

"You deceitful little twerp; you had me fooled," She glared at Aaron.

She had thought she had won him over, rejoicing that her mission was progressing faster than Gillian's.

But she had been duped.

Aaron chuckled innocently at Mara. "The things you told me were quite convincing, but you forgot one thing." "What's that?" Mara demanded.

Aaron's eyes gleamed with a cunning that belied his youthful face. "I know Vivienne better than you ever could."



Percival shot a sidelong glance at Aaron, his eyes rolling in an uncharacteristically flippant gesture that would have made Leopold laugh for a year had he seen it.

Aaron continued, "I sensed something off about you from the moment you showed up at Elite University trying to get your hands on Aaron. All following encounters were just to figure out your endgame. As for Karen's situation, I was in the dark, and I didn't know Vivienne had found her mom. That was unexpected."

Mara clenched her jaw. She had been outplayed.

"Plus, you made a critical mistake. By showing me that photo, you revealed me on the inside. Since I'm a member of the Nine Wits Society, how could I not know what GTO was up to? A photo like that, Percival would never leave it lying around. And if the person in the photo was a real threat, Vivienne would know."

Percival shot a glance his way, his voice a shade of nonchalance. "Your biggest mistake is thinking I had some first love as if Vivienne here wasn't my first and only." Aaron rolled his eyes with a disgusted look, thinking inwardly, "Why do you even chime in, boomer?"

Vivienne stretched out her hand, bringing the increasingly tangential conversation to a halt.

Her eyes crinkled into crescents as she smiled at Mara, inching closer.

With a grin, the Juggernaut's Hower in Soria. "Mara, we're all family here. I asked you over because there's something we need to discuss. Can you play along?"

Mara felt a chill down her spine. Vivienne's approach felt less comforting than a slap across the face. What was this all about?

"Just spit it out, will you? I'll tell you anything I know. Can we skip the scare tactics?" Mara edged back. Vivienne turned to glance at Percival. "Am I being scary?"

Percival said, "No, my Vivienne is the picture of kindness."

Mara thought silently, "Do you two even hear yourselves?"

Vivienne sat up straight, her gaze cool and calculating. "Spill it, what's the deal with you and F-Poison? And besides Gillian, who else is in on it?"

Mara hadn't expected Vivienne to know even about Gillian. It was clear she wouldn't be leaving until she came clean.

She dropped to her knees, her voice a mix of desperation and fear. "Percival, Vivienne, | didn't mean to betray you all. | had my reasons!"

Vivienne spared her a disinterested glance, motioning for her to continue.

"My brother, Huxley, he's been taken by F-Poison to M State. | had no choice but to save Huxley's life; | had to do as they said. They already killed my mom. | didn't dare disobey!"

It was a predictable story for Vivienne.

Only two people could exert such leverage over Mara - her brother, Huxley, and her mother, Nancy. Even if she wanted to disregard the lives of her own family, she had to consider her own skin.

"What did they promise you in return?" Vivienne pressed.

Mara wiped away a tear, her voice trembling. "Boss said if | turned Aaron to her side, | could rebuild the Boyd legacy, claim back all of the Boyd family fortune, and they'd help me get my revenge... So I..."

Vivienne almost laughed.

Even if Mara regained every last cent of the Boyd fortune, what then? Did she really believe she had the power to restore her family's name?

Vivienne was not looking down on Mara. Mara's lack of capabilities was a known fact. "When you say 'Boss', are you referring to F-Poison?" Vivienne prodded.

Mara shook her head. "I don't know who you're talking about. All I know is Boss looks just like Gillian. They took us both. Gillian resisted at first, but Boss pinned her with a silver needle, leaving her incontinent and vomiting blood until she called her 'Boss'.

My mom was killed then, too, skinned alive. I was terrified. They took Huxley. That's why I agreed to work for her." It seemed Mara was indeed referring to F-Poison.

"When was the last time you saw F-Poison?" Vivienne asked.

"This morning, at the café where I met Aaron. She's the one who gave me the photo."

Aaron clenched his fists, vexed at how close he had been to F-Poison.

Percival immediately booted up his laptop, hacking into the café's surveillance. There was F-Poison. But as she left the café, she vanished into thin air.

Percival frowned, annoyed. "The same old tricks!" They had been after F-Poison for ages, always losing her at the last moment.

Vivienne glanced at Percival's screen, unsurprised. If F-Poison were easy to catch, they wouldn't have been searching for so long.

She pulled Mara to a seat on the couch and asked, "So, you've only seen F-Poison once this whole time and communicated with Gillian alone before?"

Mara nodded earnestly. "I swear, I'm telling the truth."

Vivienne snapped her fingers before Mara's eyes. "Fine. Tell Gillian you messed up, ask her to handle it, and say you're going on the lam. Got it?"

Mara looked bewildered. "What about me? Are you going to punish me? | didn't mean to!"

Vivienne clicked her tongue. "Hadn't thought about it. Let's fix your face first."

Mara's face brightened. "You'll treat my injuries?"

"Of course. | have experiments to conduct, and | can't have you disrupting them. No time like the present." Percival silently handed Vivienne a vial.

She stood and sprinkled its contents onto Mara's face without anesthetic. Mara writhed in agony, the pain worse than any she had known before.

The others ignored her screams, absorbed in their tasks. Vivienne watched, satisfied. It would be easy to let Mara die, but her experiments were too valuable to trade for one life.

After a while, Vivienne settled into Percival's embrace and dozed off.

Once Mara's pain subsided, Vivienne stirred. "How's the integration?" Percival adjusted her in his lap. "Perfect." She yawned and wrapped her arms around his neck. "Good. Mr. Wolf, I'm starving."

Dawn was breaking, and Aaron, who hadn't had a chance to shine all night, seized the moment. "Vivienne, I'll grab us some breakfast. What does everyone want?"

"No need," said Percival as he gently set Vivienne down on the couch, completely disregarding Mara, who had fainted on the floor. "I've already had breakfast brought over."

Just as he finished speaking, Thomas knocked on the hospital room door, "Percival, breakfast is here."

Maddox, who was famished, eagerly grabbed two breakfast platters and sat down beside Willa, carefully opening them and offering her some food.

Vivienne took a sip of her milk, finding it too sweet for her taste, and passed it to Percival with a frown.

She then picked up a breakfast sandwich, took a bite, and, realizing it wasn't her favorite filling, handed it over to Percival as well.

Aaron watched from the side, his heart aching. He could clearly see that Vivienne developed an aversion to Percival. Things she used to dislike, Vivienne would have thrown away without a second thought.

It was only then that Vivienne remembered Aaron was still there. She looked up, "Aren't you eating?"

"No, I'm good, Vivienne. Call me if you need anything. I'm going to head back now," said Aaron, his voice devoid of energy as he clenched his fist and then stood to leave.

Vivienne finished her sandwich and mused, "What's up with that kid?" Everyone except Willa chuckled in unison.

Aaron was fine, but Mr. Wolf was the man Vivienne really needed. There was no helping it. He blames Aaron's current inability to stand up against Percival. The gap between them wasn't just a matter of age.

Compared to his peers, Aaron was indeed mature, but his maturity was insignificant in the face of true power.

Chapter 669

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## Chapter 670

Mara finally came to, her return to consciousness accompanied by the cold, hard reality of the floor beneath her and an awkward blush creeping across her cheeks.

Vivienne, having just finished checking Karen's pupils for any irregularities, heard Mara stir and casually tossed her a smartphone.

"Didn't forget our chat from last night, did you?" Mara pushed herself upright, a thread of hope in her voice. "So, if I help you out, we're square?"

Vivienne chuckled while adjusting Karen's blanket, her gaze still fixed on Mara. "You should get it straight, Mara. You're helping yourself."

Mara paused, the warning in Vivienne's words chilling her to the bone. She dropped to her knees, desperation quivering in her voice. "Vivienne, please, I'm begging you. Save my brother. I'll do anything, work day and night, anything at all. I had no choice!"

Vivienne perched herself on the edge of Karen's bed, her eyes dancing with amusement at Mara's plea. "And what exactly can you offer me in terms of service?"

Mara bit her lip, words failing her. Compared to Vivienne, she felt utterly powerless.

Watching Mara's flustered attempts at negotiation, Vivienne lost interest in prolonging the conversation. "Keep your nose clean, follow my instructions, and once your treatment is done, I'll see to it that you keep your life."

Mara's tears, unbidden, streamed down her face. "My brother's stuck in some godforsaken asylum in M State, Vivienne. It's a loony bin! For the love of all that's holy, he never did you wrong. Please, get him out. He's all the family I've got left in this world!"

Vivienne nearly laughed at the absurdity of it all.

What did that have to do with her?

Was she expected to forgive and go out of her way to rescue Huxley just because he'd never crossed her? Ridiculous.

Disinterested, Vivienne's voice turned icy. "Do as I say, or not even you will make it out alive."

With those final words, she stood and left the room.

Mara slumped to the floor, a portrait of despair.

If Gillian found out she had betrayed her, Huxley's fate was sealed. Yet, failing to comply with Vivienne meant her own demise. Mara was caught between a rock and a hard place.

Willa, who had been watching the drama unfold with a detached curiosity, couldn't fathom Mara's hesitation. In such dire straits, shouldn't self-preservation come first?

Willa couldn't understand it.

She thought, if it were her, she wouldn't hesitate. Even if it meant choosing between her own life and Sasha Perez's, she would save herself first, then find a way to rescue Sasha.

Meanwhile, Gillian waited for a call at her place. With Flynn missing, the boss unreachable, and having been kicked out of Vanguard Agency by Vance, she needed to find a way out of this mess fast or risk becoming expendable.

Unacceptable. She hadn't exacted her revenge and hadn't seen Percival grovel. She wouldn't be cast aside after all she had suffered to get here.

At this moment, her phone suddenly rang.

Gillian snatched it up, "Boss, is Flynn..."

"It's Mara."

Gillian's heart sank. "What do you want?"

"|... [killed someone."

"Come again?" Gillian scoffed. "You, a killer? If you had the guts, you wouldn't be in this mess."

Through sobs, Mara insisted. "I'm serious! It was Karen, Vivienne's mother. Boss made me do it. What now? I've pinned it on Aaron, but Vivienne will trace it back to me. Please, get Boss to help me!"

Gillian, unsure, demanded, "You actually did it?"

"Why would I lie? If Vivienne catches me, you're the first name I'll give up. Fix this!"

With that, Mara hung up.

Gillian called her contact immediately, "Boss, I shouldn't disturb you, but Mara's killed Vivienne's mother, and..." Aman's deep voice interrupted, "Mara killed Karen?"

Gillian nearly gasped aloud. She double-checked the number, correct indeed.

But why was a man answering?

Confused, Gillian pressed, "Who are you? Where's the boss?"

"Don't worry about who I am, Gillian. Your mission is over."

The call ended, and before Gillian could process what had just happened, her phone exploded in her hands. She stumbled back as the phone's remnants scattered on the floor, sparking and hissing before falling silent. The phone was beyond repair; its insides turned to ash.

Stunned, Gillian collapsed, sweat beading on her brow.

Was this it? Had she been discarded?

Panic set in.

She paced her house, unsure of her next move.

No, she couldn't be a castaway again.

With that resolve, Gillian stormed out, driving off into the night.

Watching from the shadows, Draven reported to Vivienne, "Y ngdvestet,

awe apemave San her phone's O Bhsmission No trace of her call."

"Her destination?" Checking his tablet, Draven replied, "Judging by the GPS, she's headed to the Linklater Mansion." The Linklater Mansion? What could Gillian be seeking there?

Vivienne's lips curved into a faint smile. If Gillian didn't remind her of it, she was in danger of nearly forgetting about the Linklaters.

It was Dracon Linklater who had sent Gillian over to the Vanguard Agency in the first place. But now, Gillian had decided to go to Dracon again. It seemed F-Poison had cast her aside.

Another lead had gone cold!

Meanwhile, in a nondescript corner of Rivenwood. F-Poison peeled away Gillian's fake face, revealing a new one brimming with youthful exuberance. This face couldn't be more than seventeen or eighteen, fresh out of high school, and unbearably cute.

She nodded at her reflection with satisfaction, meticulously combing

through her hair. "Cyuhet happened? Suth A ene pawn... Why discard her so readily?"

"He's no longer of any use," the man replied. F-Poison turned to face him. "Do tell."

"If my hunch is right, Mara's been made by Vivienne. She's turn ç-o0çet, and that all Giljam a6 Was Bat, oan aew you out. So, a compromised pawn is better off the board."

“And what makes you so sure Mara's flipped?”

"If Karen were really dead, Vivienne wouldn't be so composed. She's not the same naive girl from a decade ago."