

# The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

## Chapter 1711 The Next Sacrifice

Wynter nodded after listening to Carmila's words. "This so-called River God probably won't fancy an outsider like me. But I noticed you were crying earlier-what's on your mind?"

Carmila wiped away the lingering tears at the corners of her eyes. "This River God... it's very powerful. Back then, Martin and I had a daughter. A few years ago, I even found a family willing to take her in, thinking she'd have a better life.

"But somehow, it was like the River God overheard our plans. The ritual was suddenly moved up, and the clan leader came to our home, demanding my daughter for the ritual by the riverbed. That was the last time I saw her.

"The clan leader told us the River God took a liking to her and wanted her to stay by its side forever. Martin believed him, but I've always felt something else was going on. But I... I couldn't do anything about it."

Wynter nodded thoughtfully. "Mrs. Clove, you've had such a tough life. If the River God does pick me tonight, I'll take a look around. I'll even check if your daughter is still serving the River God. If you have a photo of her, send it to me."

Wynter knew that this so-called River God was much like the previously mentioned cultivator. It had been drawing all the girls in the village to it. What exactly was intended remained a mystery, and she would have to wait until tonight to uncover the truth.

Carmila clasped Wynter's hands tightly. "Thank you so much! If you do see her, please tell her... tell her that I miss her so much!"

In the meantime, outside the house, Martin had disappeared from the tea table, his whereabouts unknown.

Not wanting to be left alone with a stranger for long, Dalton quickly hypnotized Martin, sending him off elsewhere.

The black serpent was still rambling, "My lord, you really need to teach that wretched serpent a lesson! It's been running wild under the old cultivator's protection, breaking every rule you've ever set. I can't stand it anymore! It doesn't even respect you!"

Dalton remained calm, his thoughts unreadable as he gently spun the bracelet in his hand. Only after hearing enough of the black serpent's complaints did he cast a glance its way. "You can deal with it, then."

The black serpent's eyes darted nervously. "My lord, if you truly order me to, I will! Even if it costs my life, I'd obey without hesitation! But let's be honest-I'll just be fodder if I go.

"If that happens, that wretched serpent will think all your followers are weaklings! I still need to stay by your side. I've got civil service exams to prepare for and other duties to fulfill! But whatever you decide, my lord, I'll follow!"

Dalton lightly tapped the wooden table, his expression unchanged. To him, a mere serpent that had managed to transform into a dragon posed no real threat.

Just then, Wynter stepped out of the house and immediately spotted the black serpent poking its head out near Dalton. She strolled over and, without hesitation, grabbed it by its head.

"Didn't I tell you to stay in the bag? What are you doing sticking your head out? Were you planning to bite my fiancé? It looks like you still haven't learned your lesson. Once we're done here, I'll have Wolf roast you!" Wynter warned.

The black serpent hissed indignantly, as if trying to say, "I wasn't biting anyone! I was just speaking with the lord!

However, with its head firmly grasped, it couldn't make a sound, nor could it risk exposing Dalton. Once Wynter finally let go, it quickly slithered back into the bag, its eyes glistening with pitiful tears.

Dalton added a timely comment, "I always feel safest when you're around. Otherwise, who knows? That snake might have bitten me just now."

Wynter was unaware of the real situation. "Be careful. This black serpent failed to transform into a dragon. It must

still be nursing some resentment, and since it doesn't dare to challenge me, it's probably looking for an easy target to take its frustrations out on."

Dalton nodded, giving her a faint smile.

When she wasn't looking, he shot the black serpent a cold glance that clearly conveyed that it could give up thinking about being a snake, much less a dragon if it dared say anything.

The black serpent immediately fell silent, retreating into complete stillness.

Just then, the villagers, who had been searching for the girl who had escaped earlier, began nowhere.

gather around out of

Leading them was Hamilton, whom they had encountered on the mountain. His gaze was cold and calculating, resting on Wynter with a hint of malice.

However, this was a society bound by laws, and they were outsiders wealthy ones, by the looks of them. They couldn't act recklessly.

Once this realization settled in, Hamilton's expression shifted into a smile. "So, are you the ones Martin brought up here earlier?"

Wynter noticed his attempt to play nice and let a smirk form on her lips. It was perfect. Two could play this game. After all, she had always been an excellent actress.

"Yes, that's us. And you must be his granduncle," Wynter responded, as if only recognizing him now. Hamilton glanced at the villagers holding torches behind him. "Put those away! You'll scare our tourists."

Then, turning back to Wynter, he asked, "You guys look really young. Are you still in school?"

He casually sat across from Wynter, but his sharp eyes darted toward Dalton warily. To him, Wynter was an easy prey. However, something about Dalton, especially the bracelet on his wrist, seemed unusual.

Dalton coughed lightly, keeping his head down and saying nothing. He didn't so much as glance up.

In contrast, Wynter's demeanor remained friendly. "Mr. Clove, you've got good eyes."

Hamilton chuckled, appearing harmless. "What brings you all the way out to this remote place? Why didn't you visit the city instead?"

"Oh, we kind of wandered here by mistake and stumbled across Mr. Martin. He mentioned some kind of ritual you're having. It sounded so fascinating!" Wynter sounded like an unguarded college student. "We've never seen it before and wanted to witness it with our own eyes."

Hamilton laughed heartily. "Curious about the Ritual of Devotion, are you? That's no problem at all. Although our village is small, we've worked hard to promote tourism. We've even added things like cultural costume experiences, just like in bigger places."

"Cultural costumes?" Wynter's eyes lit up.

Hamilton nodded. "Of course. Why don't you come with me?"

Wynter was beaming with excitement. "Let's go!"

Hearing that, Dalton finally looked up at her. Meanwhile, the black serpent in the bag remained motionless.

At that moment, Carmila could no longer hold back. She burst out of the house and called out, "Young lady!"

Wynter looked back.

Carmila clutched at her pants nervously. She wanted to warn Wynter and stop her from going, but Hamilton's gaze was already narrowing.

Fear overtook her, and she stammered, "Maybe... How about a meal before you go?"

Hamilton's eyes grew cold, though his face maintained its friendly smile. "The god-worship ritual includes a grand feast with over 100 dishes. Young lady, you'll have plenty of chances to eat and experience everything at the

same time."

"That sounds incredible!" Wynter said cheerfully before glancing back at Carmila. "I won't eat here, Mrs. Clove. I want to experience the ritual. Also, I will remember the things you told me earlier, so don't worry."

Hamilton looked at Carmila before his gaze landed on Wynter. "What did she tell you?"

"Oh, she just mentioned how the mosquitoes here are a real nuisance and told me to use plenty of repellent. Why? Do you have any better tips for dealing with them?" If Wynter truly wanted to lie, not a single crack would be

found.

Additionally, Hamilton seemed noticeably anxious now, given that the time for the Ritual of Devotion was drawing near. He couldn't afford to waste time. Hence, he didn't bother trying to gauge Wynter's honesty.

If there had been a better option, he wouldn't have resorted to choosing an outsider in the first place. "Young lady, you might not know this, but the closer you get to the river's center, the fewer the mosquitoes. Our village has always been protected by the River God."

Hamilton laughed before continuing, "There's no need to worry. You won't even need mosquito repellents." "Does such an amazing place really exist?" Wynter's eyes widened in mock enthusiasm. "I have to see it for myself!

Hamilton suddenly paused. "You can go, but this friend of yours..."

"Can't he come with me?" Wynter asked despite already knowing the answer.

Hamilton weighed his options. "Our ritual is only for girls under 20. However, the two of you can go together if you like. Once you've changed into the ceremonial attire, he can wait across the river, but he shouldn't come any

closer."

"Understood." Wynter nodded and turned to Dalton, grabbing his wrist. "Do you understand what he's talking about? You're to wait across the river for me."

Dalton replied with a soft hum.

Wynter was inwardly worried despite her calm expression. Nevertheless, she retained her grip on Dalton's hand

and walked with him.

Hamilton was the last to leave. Before stepping away, he cast a cold glance at Carmila. "Some things are better left unsaid. If you've already spoken out of turn, you'd best keep quiet from now on. Break the village rules, and you'll

be putting your children's lives at risk."

Carmila froze in fear and dared not follow them any further.

Meanwhile, at the front of the group, wynter took advantage of Hamilton's moment of inattention and swiftly

stuck a talisman onto the black bag.

She whispered to the black serpent, "You'll have stick to my fiancé later. His body's delicate-he can't handle cold drafts, let alone punches.

"If anyone so much as lays a finger on him, you better bite them like your life depends on it. Don't worry about killing. I'll make sure the judiciary counts it as a service to society."

The black serpent froze, its scales tightening in disbelief. It wasn't sure whether to be offended at the comment about Dalton's delicate constitution or to nod in agreement. After all, who in their right mind would dare to try

punching him?

If not for Dalton suppressing his presence, that pesky river dragon would already be crawling on its belly,

groveling. This whole Ritual of Devotion wouldn't even exist!

Hence, the black serpent had no idea why Dalton was even entertaining this charade.

"Why aren't you responding?" Wynter arched her brow. "Do you want to end up as a snake stew?"

The black serpent jolted, hurriedly flicking its tongue in assent. "I'll protect the lord with my life! You can count

on me!"

Satisfied, Wynter handed the black bag to Dalton. "Keep this close. I've placed a talisman on it. If something supernatural pops up, the talisman will handle it. If it's human trouble, the snake will."

She noted that Balmond wasn't around, either. However, given that he was part of the Special Unit, he should be blending into the crowd well.

Her concern, though, remained fixed on the elegant but fragile Dalton. With a sigh, she muttered to herself, "Why

is he so frail?"

Dalton indeed had a bit of a cold. He was still coughing when his eyes sparkled with faint amusement. "Are you

worried about me?"

"Of course! Those villagers would probably knock you out the moment I leave," Wynter had a knack for reading

people.

Dalton didn't seem too bothered. "But you're still here now, aren't you?"

In the Ritual of Devotion, the River God had always favored pure maidens. Hamilton knew it was best to distance Dalton from Wynter. Moreover, there was still a lingering concern for him.

The guards had reported three people entering the village. Yet now, only two stood before him, and no one had

found the third yet. Nevertheless, time was running out, and the Ritual of Devotion couldn't afford further delays.

"Well then, young lady, head on in! There's someone inside who will help you dress and do your hair," Hamilton

said with a forced smile.

Hearing this, Wynter's lips curved slightly. "I didn't expect a complimentary makeover service."

At that point, Dalton could no longer follow her further in, halted by Hamilton's extended arm. "Young man, you can't go any further. Follow them, and wait across the river." He gestured to the villagers with torches, their physiques betraying a life of rugged physicality, likely honed from years of hiking.

Wynter frowned, but Dalton spoke before her. "Alright."

Wynter arched her brow. It seemed that Dalton had a plan to deal with them. If that was the case, she could investigate this so-called traditional costume experience without being worried. Night fell swiftly. Above them was a dark velvet sky scattered with shimmering stars.

The tranquil atmosphere carried a solemn weight as villagers, dressed in coarse linen garments, gathered around a winding river at the edge of the village. Their expressions were solemn as they encircled a hastily constructed altar. Offerings were meticulously arranged at the heart of the altar. There were fresh fruits, bountiful grains, and fragrant flowers-all prepared with care for the impending ritual.

Dalton had been led across the river. As night fully descended, the villagers accompanying him grew restless. Unable to suppress their intent any longer, they tossed aside their torches and prepared to knock him unconscious.

But before the villagers could act on it, they froze mid-motion when Dalton lifted his gaze.

His voice was calm. "Aiding and abetting evil will condemn you to the ninth level of hell."

This was no idle threat. When Dalton spoke these words, the underworld's depths trembled. The river where red spider lilies bloomed the brightest churned, and even hell's signposts trembled faintly.

The Underworld Guards exchanged uneasy glances.

"What's going on?"

"Someone must be provoking him again."

Even beings as high-ranking as them dared not utter his name aloud.

Having delivered his decree, Dalton wasted no time. Large clusters of black feathers rained from the sky as the

crow swooped in.

As the crow flew past, Dalton's clothing had already transformed-its colors and design shifting seamlessly.

The crow greeted Dalton obediently, yet he was genuinely confused. Why had he summoned him?

The black serpent was unwilling to even peek out now.

Dalton's lips curved slightly as he glanced at the crescent moon reflected on the river's surface. "I've waited for

too long. The weather tonight is perfect. It's ideal for a wedding."

The black serpent didn't understand what he was saying at all.

The crow, however, understood all too well. He stiffened in shock. Deep down, he desperately hoped he hadn't

understood at all!

On the other side, as Wynter entered the designated area, a medium approached her. With skilled hands, she began

to meticulously comb Wynter's hair, ensuring that each strand was smooth and flawless.

Her movements were deliberate, accompanied by a soft chant, "First comb to the end of life,

second comb to gray hair and harmony, third comb to children filling the house."

As the combing ceremony concluded, the medium carefully adorned Wynter's newly styled hair with an array of

intricate hairpieces. Gold, silver, and emerald ornaments were placed with precision.



That was when Wynter realized that this was preparation for a wedding.

The bride would don a stunning wedding gown, typically in vibrant red, adorned with intricate embroidery and

gemstones. Every stitch and detail carried blessings and symbolic meanings,

Her attire would be carefully adjusted, and she would be accessorized with exquisite jewelry such as gold

necklaces, earrings, and bracelets.

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### Chapter 1712 Marriage

Wynter reached out to grab the medium's hand. "Is this also part of the costume experience?"

The medium, Layla Orion, was an elderly woman. She didn't reply to Wynter's question.

It was then wynter realized that Layla likely didn't speak Cascadian, as even earlier, she had been chanting in Cantonian.

Layla was the definition of gloomy. It was as if she had been in this place for an eternity, even showing a hint of confusion in her demeanor. She couldn't comprehend why no one spoke their local language anymore.

She paid no attention to Wynter, instead proceeding to pour melted candle wax into the water. With deliberate care, she then sprinkled the water, bit by bit, over a phoenix-shaped coffin.

As someone well-versed in the Arcane Way, Wynter immediately recognized what was happening. This was a ritual for a spirit marriage.

Perhaps fearing Wynter might grow suspicious or be unsettled by Layla's actions, Hamilton stepped forward with a wide smile.

"Young lady, this is one of our local traditions. Decorating the items and using candle wax symbolize blessings for a prosperous year ahead."

Wynter returned the smile, her tone light. "What an unusual tradition. I've certainly never seen anything like it before."

"Other places don't experience such service. That's why it's such a unique experience for our tourists," Hamilton responded matter-of-factly. "We even tie it to our village's legend."

Wynter raised her eyebrows. "Legend? What legend?"

"The tale of the River God seeking a bride." Hamilton was a skilled manipulator. The more groundwork he laid now, the more it would shape everything that followed into nothing more than an experience in his target's eyes.

No matter what happened, he believed that Wynter would never suspect that she was meant to stay there permanently.

But unfortunately for him, his target was Wynter.

"Ah, the River God seeking a bride. If I recall, the textbook version of that story isn't exactly cheerful," Wynter said as she glanced at Layla's expression.

Layla was visibly enraged by her words, muttering something under her breath.

Hamilton gave Layla a subtle nudge before smiling at Wynter as he continued, "The things in textbooks are lifeless and incomplete-they don't capture the full picture.

"When the River God descends... Whether you've seen it or not, as long as you're in its presence, you're guaranteed a long and prosperous life."

Wynter raised her eyebrows again. "Is there such a thing?"

"Of course," Hamilton said confidently. "Those who haven't experienced it wouldn't understand. The River God doesn't just bring us longevity but also grants us great fortune and success."

Wynter chuckled. "The way you're talking, it's as if you've actually seen the River God yourself. Aren't we just here to experience the custom?"

"Yes, it's all about experiencing the custom," Hamilton continued. "Although, you might not believe me if I told you that not everyone here can actually see the River God. But some people truly have. For instance, my mother. Isn't that right, Mom?"

Layla nodded.

"Is it that miraculous?" Wynter asked with raised eyes.

"You might not understand just how remarkable this mountain is. Let me put it this way. This place is built on Celestial Force, and the layout here was guided by a medium." Hamilton spoke with pride.

"Even flying serpents can ascend to dragons. You young folks these days are all about wealth, aren't you? If you do end up meeting the River God, you'd better pay your respects properly."

Wynter didn't miss a beat, keeping her tone light as she replied, "If that's the case, I should definitely say a few extra prayers if I meet it. It would be a shame not to."

"That's the spirit. Time is running short. Mom, hurry up," Hamilton said in Cascadian before suddenly switching to Cantonian. "The River God won't tolerate lateness."

"I know. Where did you find this girl? She's so ignorant," Layla muttered in Cantonian as her gaze fell darkly on Wynter. "I can't stand these unruly ones. What if she offends the River God later?"

Hearing their exchange, Wynter hid her face behind her hand fan, revealing only her amused eyes. She knew they didn't know she could understand Cantonian. If they did, they wouldn't have been so brazen in discussing such matters in front of her.

She didn't let on that she understood every word. Instead, she laughed softly. "This outfit is fantastic-the accessories even look like solid gold. This experience really is worth every penny."

Hamilton glanced at the time, noting it was getting close. "Customer satisfaction has always been our goal. We're hoping that more people will come here to visit through you young folks' promotion. Anyway, enough of that for now I'll take you to the carriage in a bit.

"The carriage will travel for some time. After all, it's meant to replicate grand weddings. Once you're inside, don't panic or make a fuss. There will be offerings in the carriage, and you're welcome to eat them if you like."

Wynter twirled the hairpin in her hand. "Such thoughtful service."

"Of course," Hamilton replied, smiling like a simple and earnest merchant.

A typical girl brought to a place like this might truly believe it was just a cultural experience. After all, travel influencers these days often described their adventures the same way.

Still, Wynter thought she ought to stay on guard in a place like this.

Hamilton continued, "Once the carriage stops, you'll naturally know when to get out. But, you must be well-behaved. The River God likes obedient brides."

Wynter's smile deepened. "Don't worry. I know. I'll be very obedient."

Obedient enough to make this so-called River God remember her for a lifetime.

"Oh, by the way, where's my boyfriend?" Wynter asked, her gaze sharp as it fixed on Hamilton. "I just called him, but he didn't pick up."

Hamilton offered an explanation. "Maybe the noise outside was too loud for him to hear. They're still setting off fireworks near the river. Once you're in the carriage, you can try calling him again."

Once she was in, though, there would never be a chance for her to get out.

However, Wynter wasn't worried about herself. Her concern was for Dalton. It was very uncharacteristic of him to ignore her calls for no reason.

But considering Hamilton's abilities, it didn't seem likely that he could pose a real threat to him.

So, why hadn't he answered? Could it really just be that he hadn't heard it?

A slight frown appeared between Wynter's brows. She was starting to regret not bringing Whitley or Wolf along. Especially Wolf if he were to stand by the river, this so-called River God would probably be scared out of its wits, just like the last time with Sothoth. In Wolf's presence, it had trembled from head to toe in sheer terror.

She wouldn't have to bother with wearing a wedding dress then.

Hamilton stood behind Wynter, giving Layla a meaningful look.

Without hesitation, she retrieved the remaining hair accessories. Among them was an especially ornate flower hairpin, adorned with cascading crystal tassels that sparkled brilliantly.

Just like before, Layla smoothed Wynter's hair and, after completing her preparations, fixed the final touch-a bridal veil-over Wynter's head. At that exact moment, she secured the exquisite flower hairpin in place.

It was instantaneous. Wynter's thoughts froze, and fragments of her memories seemed to drain from her mind, slipping away like sand through her fingers. Seated before the bronze mirror, only one thought remained clear in her now-vacant mind-marriage.

She even picked up a lipstick from the side and began to touch up her makeup.

Seeing this, Hamilton visibly relaxed. After all, no one had ever escaped this flower hairpin's curse. Whoever wore

it would forget everything everything except their impending marriage to the love of their life.

Layla finally smiled in satisfaction. "Now, that's better. Stop bringing ones like this again. Do you hear me?"

Hamilton nodded before gesturing with his hand.

Villagers carrying torches entered the room. As they approached, they stood behind Hamilton and addressed Layla respectfully, "Clan leader."

It turned out that Layla, who had been dressing Wynter, was the village's clan leader.

She looked up and straightened slightly, her voice aged. "Bring the bride to the carriage! Present her to the River God!" She repeated these sentences twice.

The chant rippled through the crowd, echoing outside. The altar was already prepared. With one sweeping motion, torches were lit, their flames devouring the dark sky.

Layla pulled out a bundle of golden parchment. With a flick of her wrist, she tossed the papers skyward while chanting, "One union for bountiful harvests. Two unions for prosperity to rain upon us. Three unions for a life of

endless longevity.

"River God, we humbly request your presence!"

Something metallic jangled faintly.

"River God, we humbly request your presence! We've sent you your bride!"

Amid the cries, Layla led Wynter toward the carriage. Wynter, like a soulless marionette, was guided forward, her movements devoid of will.

She settled into the carriage, its red silk draped low, each strand intricately woven with complex and exquisite golden patterns, resembling brilliant clouds from the heavens descending to earth.

On either side of the carriage, flowers of every color vied for attention, their beauty competing for the spotlight.

Wynter, dressed in a magnificent bridal gown, sat at the carriage's center.

The gown was embroidered with vivid phoenix patterns, and golden threads sparkled in the sunlight, complementing the gold hairpins and emerald ornaments adorning her head, which made her seem even more

distinguished.

As the celebratory drumbeats sounded, the carriage slowly began its procession.

The villagers lined the sides, watching quietly. There were no expressions on their faces, except for Carmila, who

had spoken to Wynter earlier. Her eyes were filled with concern, while the others seemed eager to quickly carry the carriage to the riverbed.

The village was quiet yet strangely lively, as if the entire place was in a state of hushed anticipation. There were no animals in sight, and under the moonlight, the river lay still and serene.

Leo, who was hidden within Wynter's purple sugilite pendant, was truly anxious now. He realized that this was no ordinary wedding ceremony. If the ritual were completed, Wynter's very soul would belong to the other party. He

had to stop this! Hence, ignoring the oppressive sound of the bells on the carriage, he transformed into his human form.

With small hands, he quickly shook Wynter. "Master, wake up! You can't go forward any longer. You'll become the dragon's wife if you enter the riverbed! Master!"

Soon enough, Leo quickly noticed something wrong with Wynter.

"Master, is your soul trapped?" His eyes widened in shock. "How is this possible? What could possibly trap your soul? You're a brilliant cultivator with the Soul Commanding Badge!"

Leo genuinely couldn't believe it. From his perspective, this was utterly unnatural. With Wynter's cultivation, nothing ordinary should be able to influence her, let alone trap her soul! Her spiritual roots were among the rarest

in the world.

Even if there was something with great resentment around, she would've sensed it. But now, even Leo couldn't detect any trace of resentment.

"What's going on? Master, speak to me! Master!"

Looking at the riverbed drawing nearer, Leo was so desperate he almost considered asking for help from other spirits. But he couldn't leave now as it would be even more dangerous to leave her alone in this state.

He couldn't help but wonder where Dalton was at such a time. If he didn't appear soon, Wynter would belong to

someone else!

Just then, the carriage suddenly came to a stop.

Moonlight filtered through the gaps in the tree leaves, casting dappled shadows on the carriage. As Wynter sat

silently inside, the surroundings were eerily quiet. Only the sounds of the villagers pushing the carriage toward the

river could be heard.

Leo was truly anxious now. He wanted to use his resentment to stop the ritual, but to his shock, he found that his resentment had no effect here it seemed to be suppressed by some unknown force!

"What now? What do I do?" Leo paced in circles, his mind racing.

As the veil atop Wynter's head fell, her stunningly beautiful face was revealed. She seemed even more ethereal,

fully dressed in her bridal attire under the moonlight. Her beauty seemed almost otherworldly, and at that moment, it was magnified to the extreme.

Leo couldn't help but gasp. To him, Wynter was really beautiful. She looked just like the angels in stories, living high up in the mountains... though, she could also be a demon. It was hard to say with how she looked. Wynter was usually dressed in black and white, looking cool and aloof. But now, in these bright, fiery colors, she

seemed to radiate beauty to the core, especially with the phoenix crown and the exquisite flower hairpin on her

head.

"Wait! The flower hairpin!" Leo seemed to realize something.

It wasn't resentment he had sensed. was the overwhelming force of heavenly luck tied to that flower hairpin.

That energy's presence nearly threw Leo out of the carriage!

Leo quickly steadied himself and retreated back into the purple sugilite pendant.

He recalled something Morna, the keeper of the afterlife from the ninth level of hell who made sure spirits forgot their past lives as they crossed into the next, had once said.

Years ago, a powerful individual had used heavenly luck and the Eclipse Bloom to craft a hairpin. Any woman who wore that hairpin would willingly marry and would only obey her husband.

At the time, Leo had thought it was just a tale. Morna had warned him not to take it too seriously, as not everyone

could use the heavenly law. But now, he was facing this story in reality. That very hairpin was now in Wynter's hair! No wonder even someone as astute as Wynter, a cultivator immense skill, hadn't noticed anything wrong.

In the cultivators' eyes, anything related to the heavenly law was considered incredibly auspicious. A blessing,

never a curse. Thus, Wynter had no reason to be suspicious.

Leo was at a complete loss now. He recalled that the hairpin could only be removed by the one who had originally

forged it. What if it remained on Wynter's head forever? Wouldn't she become a puppet without emotions, left

vulnerable to the serpent waiting in the underworld?

Meanwhile, in the water cave, the dragon could hear the commotion outside. The sounds of drums were lively and

filled the air. It relished the noise, savoring the ritual's atmosphere.

After all, humans were powerless in the face of its presence, and it had always had a fondness for human maidens.

The saying that snakes were creatures of lust wasn't without reason.

It didn't need to be said for one to imagine how many people it had ruined over the years. But it didn't think of itself as a villain. Instead, it believed its arrival in this world was a blessing for the villagers.

With that thought, it transformed into its human shape, stepping forward, eager to make its presence known.

However, just as it took its first step, it froze. There, just outside of the water cave, was a tall figure who should not have been there.



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## Chapter 1713 Marriage Night

The moon hung low in the sky, and the slender figure seemed to mold seamlessly into the darkness. He walked forward soundlessly, bathed in moonlight.

The "River God", Zhask, was momentarily stunned but quickly recovered. "How dare a foolish mortal trespass on a god's domain? Do you have no regard for your life?"

It advanced step by step, prepared to strike mercilessly-until the figure drew nearer. Under the moonlight, a refined and noble face was revealed.

Zhask froze in its tracks, stiffening in fear.

Before it could speak, the black serpent's head shot out from a nearby cage. "How bold of you! Speaking to the lord like that it seems like you are prepared for death!"

Zhask looked at the black serpent before darting its gaze toward the figure again. The moonlight shone brightly, and Dalton's visage became fully visible.

One look was enough to send a cold shiver down its spine. It shuddered violently and immediately reverted from its human form. "M-My lord! What brings you here? Weren't you..."

Zhask didn't dare speak his mind any longer, though he was sure Dalton had been sealed away by that most talented grand master! It remembered clearly Dalton had defied the heavenly laws by questioning its fairness. How had he broken free? When did this happen? Why hadn't the old cultivator given it even a hint of this news? Zhask trembled uncontrollably. If it had known Dalton was free, it would never have dared to meddle in this village! It couldn't help but wonder if he knew that it had also been tampering with the weather cycles.

It dared not to lift its head any longer, its mind racing with desperate thoughts of self-preservation.

It would never forget the first time it encountered Dalton. Back then, it was nothing more than an ordinary snake. He had passed by, and so happened to have casually saved it. However, in a matter of days, it had managed to evolve into a dragon.

Everyone knew it owed its existence to the heavenly luck. Even the most venerable cultivators bowed to it, all because of the faint trace of Dalton's energy lingering on its body. That energy alone had elevated its destiny.

Zhask knew well enough who gave it the life it had today. But now, it was terrified that Dalton had come to reclaim what was his.

Dalton's pitch-black eyes were like black holes with impenetrable depth. His entire being radiated a terrifying presence, as if he could see straight through Zhask's thoughts.

Step by step, he advanced toward the trembling creature, each footfall sending shockwaves through its very soul, rendering it utterly immobile.

"I hear you've been living quite the luxurious life as a 'god' here," Dalton said, his voice low but bone-chilling. Zhask shuddered violently, the gold coin it had been holding in its mouth clattering to the ground.

Its cave was a chaotic blend of gleaming treasures and scattered skeletons.

The black serpent saw red at the sight. Emboldened by Dalton's presence, it raised its head and hissed sharply, "Didn't you hear the lord's question? Weren't you bragging about killing him just now? What's wrong? Cat got your tongue?"

Zhask hurriedly wiped his sweat. "M-My lord, this wasn't my idea! An old cultivator threatened me! He said he'd destroy my soul if I didn't obey. You know how it is I couldn't resist someone with that kind of power! I didn't have a choice."

Its sudden surrender was almost laughable. One moment, it had been ready to kill, and the next, it was groveling in fear.

Dalton arched his eyebrows. "An old cultivator?"

Zhask sensed an opportunity to mitigate its predicament. "Yes, yes! An old cultivator with extremely high cultivation! But it's not just his power-it's because he carries something of yours, my lord!"

Just as Dalton was about to press for more details, the commotion outside the water cave suddenly ceased. Instead, the sound of musical instruments drew closer, followed by a loud cry. "Set the carriage down!" The ornate red carriage was placed at the cave's entrance. Inside, Wynter sat motionless, her face devoid of expression, as lifeless as a puppet.

It turned out that the River God's wedding didn't involve letting the carriage drift along the river. Instead, it traveled a short distance over water before the bearers lifted it and carried it into a mountain cave.

Standing outside the cave was Layla with a head full of silver hair. Leaning on her cane, she scattered golden parchment offerings toward the sky, her tone reverent. "Oh, esteemed River God, the offerings for this year have arrived. Would you come out to take a look?"

Zhask wiped its sweat anxiously, too terrified to step forward.

Turned out, Layla wasn't just any common mortal, but someone capable of communion with the divine. It was no wonder she acted more like a cult leader than a clan leader.

She mistook the silence for displeasure and hurriedly continued, "River God, please calm your anger. This year's bride will surely bring you joy."

Still, there was no response from within the cave.

Hamilton furrowed his brows. "Mom, isn't the River God usually quick to appear to personally bring the bride inside? Why isn't he responding today?"

Layla narrowed her eyes, her voice low and firm. "Silence. The River God's moods are not for you to question." Hamilton replied anxiously, "I was just worried that he might not heed our prayers despite us bringing the bride." Layla raised the gold ingot offering in her hands high above her head. "Oh, mighty River God, you may not know this, but the villagers have been plagued by illness. What starts as a mild sickness ends in death without fail. our generations

"Esteemed River God, you hold dominion over the rivers and the flow fortune. For the sake of devotion, we implore you to grant us a sliver of your fortune."

The cave remained eerily quiet.

Though disappointed, Layla knew better than to push it. "River God, I shall leave the bride here for you. I trust in your compassion and believe you will not allow your worshippers to fall into ruin."

With that said, she made a hand gesture, signaling for the others to retreat.

Hamilton opened his mouth to protest but stopped at a single glance from Layla.

"We'll discuss this later. Remember, the River God didn't reject the bride. This is a sign of his favor," she said firmly.

In truth, those girls who survived in the past weren't lucky at all. It was simply because the so-called River God didn't fancy them, and the villagers conveniently found an excuse to marry them off elsewhere.

Just like in those old myths, girls who had once been the River God's brides would mysteriously end up pregnant. The so-called River God was nothing more than a lustful serpent blessed with heavenly luck.

Dalton gazed down at the Zhask. "I warned you when I granted you enlightenment-follow Heaven's will and do not summon rain of your own accord. It seems my slumber has lasted too long, and even you have forgotten the rules."

Zhask could no longer hold itself upright, its legs trembling uncontrollably. "My lord, I swear, it was all because of that old cultivator! I wouldn't dare disobey your orders, not even if I had a thousand lives to gamble with!"

Before it could finish pleading, the black serpent interjected again, "Never mind your private rainfall. Let's talk about you harming innocent human girls! Do you know your crime? The only reason you're even groveling now is that the lord has arrived.

"And what's this nonsense about a 'River God's wedding?' Do you even realize who's sitting in that carriage? That's the lord's fiancée! You've got some nerve!"

Dalton cast a sidelong glance at the black serpent, and it immediately lowered its head in silence.

Hearing that, Zhask immediately knelt. "My lord, I wouldn't have dared to entertain such thoughts if I had known

the one in the carriage was your fiancée! This was all the humans' doing! They brought her here of their own accord. I didn't even want to accept her!"

"Didn't want to accept her?" Dalton's eyes swept over the piles of skeletons in the cave, their surfaces still emanating suffocating waves of resentment.

He walked toward Zhask, his tone still calm as ever. "Rape, murder, and plunder. You shall face torment in the Eternal Abyss. No reincarnation, ever."

Zhask frantically pleaded, its voice quivering with desperation, "My lord, I swear I'm not that kind of snake! The old cultivator forced me into this!"

Dalton raised a single finger. "Perish."

In an instant, Zhask vanished without a trace, its existence obliterated.

The black serpent stared wide-eyed at the spectacle, its serpentine features frozen in shock. "My lord is still the same as ever-turning creatures to dust with just a flick of his finger."

Simultaneously, it felt a surge of relief that it hadn't crossed Dalton. Otherwise, knew it would have shared

Zhask's fate.

Dalton paid no heed to the serpent's remarks. Instead, he turned and strode toward the carriage sitting outside the

water cave.

The night was breathtakingly beautiful, with moonlight dancing on the river's surface, reflecting off the gently swaying water lilies.

The place had always been considered a blessed land, and for good reason. It truly resembled a paradise, with a thin veil of mist draping over the mountain valley, dotted with clusters of blooming purple asters.

If not for the ominous legends of the River God, this would undoubtedly be a haven that everyone longed to visit.

Inside the carriage, Leo could clearly sense someone approaching. He had never felt such a genuine surge of

urgency.

There was no response from Wynter no matter how much he shook her. Danger loomed mere steps away, yet she waking. Was she really going to become this so-called River God's bride? Leo refused to

showed no signs

entertain such nonsense!

He knew there was no such thing as a River God. It was merely a serpent who had transformed into a dragon! Under normal circumstances, Wynter could have easily subdued it and used it as a skipping rope. Yet, was she now about to marry it? It was unthinkable!

"No way!" Leo muttered fiercely, determination blazing in its eyes. He had to protect Wynter at all costs. No matter how powerful the dragon was, he would stand his ground even if it meant sacrificing his own essence!

Leo braced himself for a last-ditch effort to defend Wynter. Meanwhile, Dalton was already striding toward the carriage. He lifted his hand and pushed the curtain aside. "You disgusting snake! Go to hell!" Leo shouted, launching himself toward Dalton's chest with all his might. But before he could land a finger on Dalton, he suddenly stopped mid-track. Leo's round eyes widened in shock. "My... My lord?"

Of all the scenarios he had imagined, this was the last it expected. The person lifting the curtain wasn't the "River God"-it was Dalton!

"Weren't.... Weren't you taken..." Leo didn't finish his sentence. He had wanted to ask how he was here if the villagers had taken him away. But realizing how ridiculous his question was going to sound, he stopped himself. long as he was willing think, there was

He should have known-Dalton always seemed to know everything.

nothing he wouldn't know.

Perhaps he had even predicted this situation in advance and arranged to intercept them here. If so, that level of

calculation was terrifying.

Leo knew he wasn't one to be messed with. He was overwhelmed by a torrent of emotions, torn by the weight of

the stories he had heard about Dalton.

The tales spoke of his deep disdain for cultivators, especially his penchant for using grand masters' souls to

cleanse his resentful energy.

And yet, over time, Leo couldn't deny that Dalton had posed no direct harm to Wynter. He had provided whatever

she desired without question. His actions had nearly lulled Leo into letting his guard down entirely.

But now, that innate sense of unease clawed its way back.

Dalton was Wynter's fiancé. And though moments earlier, he had secretly hoped for his arrival, his sudden appearance and in such a commanding manner-left Leo unsure of what to do.

He wasn't sure if it was the right move to step aside. After all, Dalton's power far surpassed that of 100 dragons.

Dalton didn't need to ask to know what Leo was thinking. However, he had no intention of reasoning with a child. With a flick of his wrist, he grabbed Leo and tossed it to the crow, who had assumed a human form.

With a Savior's blessing, one could gain 100 years of fortune. Though the idea of such power thrilled Leo, he wasn't about to betray Wynter for personal gain.

"My lord! If you do this... My master won't be pleased when she wakes up!" Leo exclaimed with all the courage he

could muster.

Dalton replied languidly, "I don't want to hear unpleasant words on my wedding day. Silence it."

The crow replied curtly, "Understood."

With a wave of his right hand, the atmosphere shifted immediately. A dense mix of fortune and spiritual energy

began to permeate the air.

Creatures of the mountain and wandering spirits were drawn to the scene. Even the restless demons lurking

underground stirred, daring to poke their heads out.

They couldn't resist. After all, a single breath of this air might help them escape some future tribulation. This wasn't the kind of ceremony that could belong to a mere River God.

Even the local mountain deity and a dryad emerged from the ground, bearing gifts.

Originally, the dryad had weak spiritual energy without the sustenance of faith. However, with this grand wedding,

he was suddenly revitalized, his glory shining once more.

"Have you heard? That lord is getting married!"

"Which lord?"

The dryad pointed toward the sky. In such a village, a faint trace of a phoenix could be seen gliding gracefully

through the clouds.

The villagers, too, were astonished. This wasn't like any previous River God wedding.

"What's going on? A whole flock of birds is flying that way!"

"Are they carrying flowers in their beaks?"

They were also carrying wine, though they were not visible to ordinary mortals.

Layla furrowed her brows in puzzlement. She couldn't tell that a great blessing was happening, given her limited

spiritual prowess.

"All right, everyone. Let's not disturb the River God," she addressed the others.

The villagers nodded, retreating toward the foot of the mountain. Meanwhile, Wynter sat quietly in the carriage's center. Her elaborate outfit only enhanced her ethereal beauty, as

if she was an angel descended from the heavens, untouched by mortal concerns.

Dalton looked at her face, his brow arching for a moment. Then, he bent down and lifted her out of the carriage in

his arms.

He gently touched her cheek. "It's a pity that you're not awake to see what's before you."

This scene was eerily familiar. But back then, she had despised him greatly.

His gaze then shifted to the flower hairpin in her hair. From the moment he entered this village, he had sensed the

presence of something of his own nearby. He hadn't expected it to be the hairpin he had crafted- the very one that had caused Wynter to be unable to move.

His eyes turned to the purple sugilite pendant hanging around her neck. He said casually, "If she finds out even a fraction of this, your souls will cease to exist."

The spirits inside the pendant dared not lift even a finger after hearing his words, fearful of being destroyed by

him.

## The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

Chapter 1714 The Affectionate Couple



Wynter remained unaware of her surroundings, wandering deep into her subconscious. The hem of her wedding dress swept against the ground as Dalton carried her, seemingly leaving faint ripples in the water.

The night darkened to an inky blackness. In the distance, the azure spring steamed with a warm mist, surrounded by lush greenery that painted a dreamy scene. The natural hot spring, fed by the mountain streams, was veiled in the lavender's soothing aroma lulled all into a peaceful slumber.

Everything had been arranged by the crow himself, including the wedding room's decor. While not a difficult task for a mythical beast, the crow feared the consequences of Dalton's decision.

By all accounts, Dalton was forbidden from marrying-his last marriage had caused many grand masters' downfall. That said, Dalton had no part in it. After all, some things would inevitably decline when they reached their peaks.

Dalton had always remained impassive until he met a certain cultivator. Whenever he thought of marriage, she would come to mind. Unfortunately, his previous wedding had been anything but a pleasant memory.

Lifting his gaze, the crow watched as beings from the three realms arrived to offer their congratulations.

He halted momentarily and inadvertently glanced at the foggy distance, where a pair of cold eyes loomed within. The figure, draped in long black hair, resembled a nobleman from the depths of hell.

The crow quickly averted his gaze, recognizing the warning in that gaze. Dressed in his past outfit, Dalton appeared just as he had been when he first stepped into the human realm.

The demons widened their eyes at the sight and started whispering among themselves.

"Don't you think he looks different this time?"

"That's what I thought! The lord seems gentler than before," a demon chimed in.

"Same here. The souls in the underworld were kept in check during his reign-one wrong move, and they'd be pleading for mercy."

The demons instantly shrank back when Dalton swept a glance over them.

"What a nostalgic feeling. The lord still carries that intimidating presence, cracking his whip even from a great distance."

"It seems like the lord has changed. His attitude toward us hasn't softened, but all his tenderness seems to be reserved for that lady," a demon noted.

As Dalton carefully led Wynter into the decorated wedding hall, a dryad bowed deeply and handed him a pair of wedding rings.

"My lord, this is the human realm's tradition. The bride and groom will exchange rings as a sign of their eternal love," the dryad explained.

She was once the most revered spirit among the people. Aside from the salamanders and leprechauns, the dryad received the strongest devotion. Though the wedding rings she presented seemed plain, they carried the essence of countless joys.

An ordinary couple would surely lead to a blissful marriage upon receiving the rings. But for Dalton, they were useless. As the one who bestowed blessings and delivered punishments to humans, neither could touch him.

Despite knowing the truth, the dryad offered pleasant words. "It's my greatest honor to witness your marriage, my lord."

The air around them was filled with heavenly energy. The dryad couldn't help but believe that the wedding guests were truly fortunate, as though even the gravest sins had been pardoned.

A phoenix soared overhead and placed flowers on Wynter's head, symbolizing wealth and prosperity.

Dalton showed unexpected courtesy toward the dryad. "Since you're familiar with human customs, you shall host the ceremony."

The dryad complied with his request as her eyes lit up excitedly. It would benefit the locals if her energy grew stronger. However, only a few worshipped her in recent years. Hardly anyone had visited her temple, likely due to its small size. In fact, no one came at all.

The villagers chose to devote themselves to the river god-more precisely, it was a deceptive, malevolent dragon they revered. Left without a home, the dryad could only wander like a lost soul.

Though she was meant to fade away in half a year, the dryad was now overflowing with energy.

Before the couple, two seats were placed to represent Theo and Fabian. After placing a ring into Wynter's palm and the other in Dalton's, the dryad naturally called for the couple to exchange their wedding rings.

Just as Dalton was about to slip the wedding ring onto Wynter's finger, a powerful energy suddenly erupted throughout the underworld. The underworld guards were shocked as the mountains quivered, as if an earthquake had struck.

Dark clouds swirled in the sky, as though the heavens were condemning the marriage. Yet, Dalton remained unfazed.

The underworld quaked so much that the ghouls scrambled to retrieve their fallen heads. Even the unborn spirit waiting in line on the bridge couldn't help but inquire, "Do we still need to drink that?"

They were referring to the cup of spilled water that Morna had handed them.

The chaos was all caused by Dalton's attempt to exchange the wedding rings. If Wynter had been conscious, she would've surely noticed something was off about him. After all, whose marriage could possibly shake the earth and sky? Only Dalton's, it seemed.

The crow silently stood at the side as more and more beings from the three realms gathered. They were eager to draw closer, unwilling to pass up the rare chance to claim a bit of heavenly luck

Upon recognizing Dalton's identity, the dryad hurriedly concluded the ceremony. "The newlyweds may now return to the wedding room."

Dalton silently glanced at Wynter before picking her up. He even set up a barrier that stretched for 100 miles, preventing any human or soul from approaching. All contact was severed within the barrier, as if time itself had come to a halt.

Knowing that Dalton didn't want to be bothered, the malevolent spirits sensibly returned to the underworld. Even the animals displayed shrewdness-a caterpillar would've successfully turned into a butterfly in such rare encounters. It was a blessing gifted by the heavens.

But it wasn't only the animals that felt the change. Both the ancient and fearsome beasts that had accompanied Dalton for years responded strongly to the surge of heavenly luck.

Whitley, the silent young man, struggled to contain the power awakening in his blood. Wolf, who had been guarding Logan, hung around in the courtyard. His erratic behavior terrified the restless souls across the streets.

Yet, Wynter remained unaware of the turmoil surrounding her. With the hairpin tethering her soul, she witnessed various scenes playing out in her subconscious-Fabian's death, her brothers' tragic fates, and Marie's and Reuben's demise.

Wynter reached out, desperate to save her family. However, her hands passed through them as they faded away. Amid her fury, she felt a gaze upon her. She turned around to see a man, but his face was obscured.

"You're weak," stated the man.

Wynter charged forward and flung her needles at him. Yet, the needles froze midair, just two inches away from him, as if halted by an invisible wall. No matter how Wynter ran, she couldn't close the distance between them.

"It's pointless," the man added.

Wynter closed her eyes to calm her mind. A burst of energy suddenly coursed within her, and she opened her eyes once more to face the empty space.

She drew a needle and threw it ahead, muttering a spell under her breath. A crack appeared and slowly widened before her. Just when she thought it was over, she was pulled into another dream.

In that dream, she appeared to be at a wedding in the mountains. The sky above stood full of ethereal beings, with heavy chants warning her to cease the ceremony.

A single drop of water splashed onto the bluestone. A large, dreamy Victorian bed gleamed in the heart of the natural hot spring, reflecting a beautiful yet illusory world.

Had Wynter been conscious, she would've recognized the scene as one from the distant past. It was a vision that occurred frequently in her dreams, along with the golden cuffs binding her legs and the faint ringing of bells. Alas, she remained lost in her slumber.

Within the tranquil space, Dalton removed Wynter's wedding dress before carrying her into the hot spring. Dressed only in her undergarments, Wynter was placed against the edge as the warm waters rose to her shoulders.

Her pale face flushed with a rosy hue, and her skin as smooth as silk. Bathed in the soft light, she radiated the delicate beauty of a porcelain doll. Part of her black hair floated atop the water, while the rest cascaded alluringly against her back.

At the tempting sight, Dalton encircled her waist with one hand and gazed at her hair. He knew exactly what adorned her head, for he had been the one to prepare it in the past. Yet, it only brought back some unpleasant

memories.

He had once resorted to such schemes when she showed her disdain for him. But now, he had no intention of using

the same trick.

The moment Dalton removed the hairpin, Wynter was enveloped by his calm, soothing scent. Unlike those that made her recoil, it was a natural, pleasing scent that brought her a sense of ease.

She felt his strong arm tightening around her waist, leaving her no room to struggle. They were so close that they could practically feel each other's breath.

Stunned, Wynter mistook him for Zhask and attempted to break his arm. She hastily shot out a hand, but Dalton caught her wrist as he held her against him. The next second, they tumbled into the warm waters together.

Finding the heat unbearable, Wynter emerged from the hot spring. The dim surroundings and foggy mist clouded her vision, making it hard to see clearly. Before she could speak, she was forcibly pulled away and pinned against a

boulder.

As Dalton moved in behind her, she could feel his muscular chest pressing against her back. A strong hand slid to her front, tearing her undergarment from her shoulders and using it to bind her wrists.

Dalton let out a chuckle, his presence blending seamlessly with the darkness. Rubbing Wynter's lips, he gazed at her alluringly as his handsome face drew closer.

Wynter frowned and attempted to turn away, but he caught her jaw. "Why are you hiding?" he asked.

His deep baritone voice sent a shiver through Wynter, stirring an irresistible temptation. He moved a hand to her silky nape, gently caressing it as if evaluating his meal's quality. As his fingers traced down her neck, she felt a slight tingle run through her and instinctively gulped.

No longer holding back, Dalton grabbed a handful of her hair and tilted her head. The atmosphere grew steamy and sensual as they pressed close together.

Wynter felt her strength fading as she struggled to move, but her hands were tied. His body's heat enveloped her, and she could feel his shape against her skin. Flustered and embarrassed, she desperately wished to escape from

the intimate moment.

Dalton seemed to sense her discomfort, letting out a soft chuckle that her lips drowned out.

Though he seemed to be holding her gently a second ago, he then ruthlessly pinned her against the bluestone and

pressed his body close to hers. His fingers gracefully twirled her hair as his teeth sank into her earlobe. Wynter trembled and closed her eyes. The cold bluestone beneath her clashed with Dalton's warmth, making her desperate to break free from the discomfort. However, her attempts only seemed to awaken something deep within Dalton.

He gazed down at Wynter, whose quivering figure was as fragile and beautiful as shattered porcelain. A soft blush colored her skin, and her teary eyes held a captivating allure. It was truly a beautiful sight.

When she closed her eyes, she seemed to radiate fragility, stirring within him an overwhelming urge to break her. Picking Wynter up, Dalton gently set her aside before pressing his warm lips against her bare back.

"No... Don't touch it there..." Wynter gasped as she felt her fingers going numb.

She could faintly hear the maids' footsteps just outside. Despite being concealed behind bushes and tree shades, she felt her nerves heighten at the sound of the rushing footsteps in the distance.

What was forbidden felt even sweeter and thrilling. All of a sudden, Dalton held her chin and tilted her head back, planting kisses along her delicate neck.

## The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

### Chapter 1715 She Found the Reason

For an instance, Wynter wondered if she was caught in a dream or facing reality. It wasn't the first time she had such dreams, but none had felt so vivid.

She lifted her gaze and locked eyes with Dalton. His hair, slightly unkempt, added a touch of wickedness to his elegant bearing. Everything around her seemed unfamiliar, yet Wynter couldn't shake the feeling that she had experienced it before.

Several images flashed across her mind, too fleeting for her to capture even a glimpse. With her thoughts clouded, she now understood why even the strongest heroes faltered before a beautiful woman.

Dalton was acting differently than usual, and Wynter doubted anyone else could witness his unusual behavior. She could hardly think straight as the tantalizing scent of vanilla wafted toward her. Even in such moments, Dalton remained as irresistible as ever.

Wynter, ever the hedonist, might have taken the initiative had the moment been right. But a flood of images clouded her mind, and she couldn't shake the feeling that they should be in a palace instead.

without thinking further, she halted Dalton's movements and demanded, "What's going on here?"

Dalton's gaze darkened when he recognized her reluctance. With a hand on her waist, he pulled her closer but stopped short of further intimacy. "It's exactly what you see. I'm the one marrying you."

Wynter found it hard to carry on with the conversation in such an intimate position. She could even feel their breaths growing warm against each other.

Desperate to regain her composure, she shifted her gaze to the hairpin. "It's because of the hairpin that. I was stuck in the formation, isn't it?"

Dalton only offered a vague response as he retrieved his arm. The intimate vibe between the two started to wane. Noticing the wedding dress on the ground, Wynter narrowed her eyes and asked, "What about the River God?" Despite recognizing Zhask as a dragon, she sensed no trace of him. To her surprise, the surrounding air was thick with heavenly energy-a situation she had never encountered before.

"He's dead," Dalton replied, clearly displeased that their lovely moment had been interrupted.

When Wynter frowned at his response, he added calmly, "I was abducted here. He was interested in my fortune and tried to steal it but got struck down by lightning,"

Dalton's expression remained impassive as he gave his explanation. Plus, there were burning traces of lightning, just like he said.

Logically speaking, his statement seemed plausible. After all, dragons were infamously known for stealing other's fortunes. Still, Wynter couldn't shake the feeling of loss over Zhask's death-there were so many questions she hoped to ask.

It was obvious that the rain ritual was flawed, but who was the one ordering him to perform it? What had brought him to the village? With Zhask gone, those answers seemed lost forever.

"I did ask him about it, but it turns out he had little involvement. That said, he's not entirely innocent, either," Dalton stated calmly.

Wynter arched an eyebrow, knowing that Dalton had been keeping secrets from her. Although she was skeptical about his earlier answer, she understood now wasn't the right time to discuss it.

"If the dragon has little to do with the polluted river, then there's something I've missed," Wynter mused and swiftly stood up from the waters.

Her beauty was undeniable, and her long hair and slender legs only enhanced her allure. The next second, she draped the wedding gown around her.

"That dragon has likely set up an Illusion Formation here. Come on, let's get out of this place and meet p with my

men," she urged, worrying that something might happen to Balmond, who was waiting outside.

Dalton hummed in response before glancing at the flower hairpin. Since olden days, he had never been the only one in her thoughts. Perhaps, the time had yet to come.

Dalton chuckled softly as the mist thickened, masking the surroundings into the perfect formation that Zhask might have crafted. For the crow, a mythical beast, conjuring such a disguise was child's play.

When Wynter and Dalton stepped out in full attire, there was no one in sight. The river returned to its normal state once the heavenly energy had dissipated, leaving Wynter with the sense that something was amiss.

As the trees had obstructed her view earlier, she hadn't noticed the river's strange alignment. Moreover, the once crystal-clear riverbed had now turned murky.

Wynter narrowed her eyes and turned her gaze toward the west, where the moonlight failed to reach.

Before Dalton could say a word, she noticed a monkey carcass by the riverbank and approached it. She poked a silver needle into the carcass, then drew it out to find the color stayed unchanged.

She turned to the black serpent and asked, "Come here for a sec, Blackie. Can you taste the water and check its quality?"

Blackie was alarmed. "What if I die after tasting the water, my lady? Not that I mind dying, but I need to land an official job first! I can't let my life end over a petty cause!"

However, Wynter grabbed his head and dunked it into the water. "What are you worried about? You're immune to poison!"

Poor Blackie gurgled in the water a few times before Wynter pulled him back up. "So, how's the taste?" she asked. Blackie shook his head and exclaimed, "It's denser than the river at the farmer's market!"



As Wynter nodded at his words, Balmond came over and reported, "I investigated the village, Boss. It seems the villagers have been seriously ill. The ritual is usually held once a year, but they've been doing it more often, hoping the river god will rid them of the illness."

Wynter gave a brief acknowledgment just as Hamilton and Layla arrived with the other villagers. Upon seeing Wynter standing there, Hamilton demanded angrily, "How are you awake? Where's the River God?"

Wynter glanced back and replied, "I guess the River God is a coward, Mr. Clove. He fled the moment he saw my face. Maybe I'm not his type."

"Speak! Where did you hide the River God? We can't be cured without him! It's all your fault!" Layla demanded in Cantonian.

Hamilton was about to translate when they heard Wynter speak in perfect Cantonian. "I have no idea where he's gone, and it's not like you can't be cured. You put too much faith in this so-called River God and his powers, treating a mere dragon as a deity.

"I've found the cause of your illness. There's a dead monkey in the river-the very same you've been drinking from. It was all fine before you fell ill recently. But instead of questioning the water, you believed the River God's wrath was to blame and tried to appease him."

However, Hamilton voiced his doubts about her claims. "You're nothing but words. We've been drinking from the river for ages, so it's hard to believe there's anything wrong with the water.

"Now that the River God is gone, we're left to wait for death! But before that, we'll have to deal with you!"

"But she's not a bad guy. She even gave me candies!" a child suddenly interjected amidst the crowd. She held her forehead and weakly leaned against her mother.

Noticing the child's worsening condition, Wynter walked over and ordered coldly, "Step aside. I'll perform acupuncture on her."

The villagers backed away when faced with her intimidating presence.

Wynter knelt to check the child's pulse, while her other hand gently caressed the child's forehead. The mother

anxiously questioned her skills, but she was more focused on the child's burning temperature and fitful coughs. Taking out a box of needles, Wynter inserted them into the child's acupuncture points. She then gave Balmond an instruction. "Seal off the entire

village and examine every person here. Find the monkey carcasses for further analysis, and make sure to take protective measures."

As Balmond complied with her orders, the villagers couldn't help exchanging uneasy glances. Eventually, Hamilton stepped forward and asked, "Who are you, young lady?"

Balmond noticed that Wynter was busy with the treatment and answered for her, "We're from the CDC."

He briefly showed the villagers his license before putting it away. Though the villagers might not grasp the Special Unit's significance, they had at least heard of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After performing the acupuncture, Wynter turned to Layla and inquired, "Who threw the carcass by the river?"

The villagers shook their heads, clearly unaware of what happened. However, Wynter caught a flicker of evasion in Layla's eyes. She dismissed the other villagers but kept Layla behind and confronted her.

"You were the one who did it, weren't you? There's no point in denying it. I wouldn't have kept you without any evidence," Wynter stated.

Layla appeared flustered but still refused to confess.

So, Wynter continued, "Do you realize the severity of penalties for water contamination? Especially with the river being upstream whatever happens down there is far worse."

Hearing that, Layla could no longer remain silent. "I admit that I threw the carcass, but it wasn't my intention! A medium visited the village some time ago and claimed that our ritual was flawed. The Ritual of Devotion is a custom exclusive to our village, so we were surprised to hear that.

"The medium claimed that sacrificing young girls wasn't enough and that we needed to place monkey carcasses by the riverbank to create a formation. We didn't trust him at first, but he warned that the River God would unleash his wrath if we didn't comply."

Wynter appeared unfazed by Layla's account and merely asked, "What does the medium look like?"

Layla scratched her head as she recalled. "I couldn't see his face clearly. When he stood near me, a fog seemed to obscure his face. Oh, but he was always accompanied by two medics. After gaining my approval, the three of them threw the carcasses by the riverbank."

"I see. Stay in the village for now. The medics will give you a thorough examination soon. And don't move the carcasses-they will be taken for further analysis," Wynter instructed.

Layla nodded compliantly at her words, fearful of being detained.

with that, Wynter led Dalton and Balmond out of the village. Once they reached the foot of the mountain, she ordered Balmond to investigate nearby hospitals to see if any patients there were showing new symptoms.

While Balmond contacted his team for the task, Wynter turned to Dalton and said, "Come with me to the farmers'

market. That place could use a proper reorganization."

Dalton smiled in response. "As you wish, Ms. Quinnell."

The couple chatted as they made their way to the farmers' market, where Wynter had already sent someone to discuss the acquisition. She intended to check on the progress but overheard the vendors' conversation.

"Are you really going to give up your stall, Oscar? We've been here for years. I can't think of anywhere else to go."

A vendor sighed.

"I'm following the young lady's advice. It's for my child's sake," Oscar replied.

"I don't want to give up my stall, either. Unlike you, Oscar, I have no children to care for, and I don't sell wild animals," another vendor said.

The conversation was cut short when Oscar noticed Wynter's arrival. He greeted her warmly, "Hello, young lady! I've been feeling so refreshed since I stopped selling wild animals. My back pain, which has been bothering me for

years, has eased as well. It's all thanks to you."

Noticing the ominous air around Oscar had faded, Wynter acknowledged his recognition of his past mistake.

She then gathered the vendors and announced, "Everyone, I've heard about the Quinnell Group's plan O acquire the farmers' market, and I want to clarify a few things.

"The Quinnell Group treats all of you fairly. They won't force any of you to give up your stall if you wish to stay. But if they take over the market, you're likely to earn more without worrying about germs or protection.

"You'll live healthier, and I'm sure you want the best for your family's well-being. The choice is yours." Unbeknownst to the crowd, someone had been recording the scene from a hidden corner.

Upon hearing Wynter's speech, the vendors couldn't help but exclaim, "Are you saying the acquisition will bring

in more profit than selling wild animals?"

Wynter affirmed, "You have my word. If you don't believe me, you can always verify with the Quinnells or

Yarwoods."

Initially, the vendors feared the acquisition would lead to a loss in profits. However, their concerns were soon relieved by Wynter's assurance. One by one, they voiced their approval.

At that moment, an extravagant man leading a crowd arrived at the entrance. They were all wearing identical badges. Wynter instantly recognized them with a swift glance.

"What brings you here, Ms. Quinnell? You should've informed us of your arrival. We would have prepared a proper welcome." The leader greeted Wynter respectfully, though he could barely conceal his disdainful smirk.

"You must be Mr. Tarvin, head of the Colifernia Chamber of Commerce. How do you know I'm here?" Wynter

inquired.

Bitting on his cigar, Rohan Tarvin snickered. "I heard the Quinnell Group intends to acquire the farmers' market, so

I came to see for myself." Hearing that, the vendors stared at Wynter in disbelief.

"Is this young lady a member of the Quinnell Group? I heard the Quinnells recently found their lost daughter. Is

she the one?" someone inquired.

"I heard about it, too! Rumors said she's coming to Colifernia, but I didn't expect it to be true!" another exclaimed. Wynter narrowed her eyes on Rohan. "Are you trying to interfere with the acquisition, Mr. Tarvin?"

Rohan waved a dismissive hand. "We wouldn't dare, but the farmers' market falls under Colifernia's jurisdiction. Have you even consulted us before making your move?"

"Don't get too cocky just because you're a Quinnell. In Colifernia, even the most powerful have to tread lightly."

He sent a puff of smoke in Wynter's direction as a clear sign of warning.

Wynter couldn't help but smirk at his words. "It seems like you're quite the impressive man in Colifernia, Mr.

Tarvin. If I recall clearly, Grandpa Gordon was the one who established the Colifernia Chamber of Commerce. Yet, you spoke as if you were its founder. "Besides, what does the chamber of commerce have anything to do with my acquisition of the market?"

Rohan took off his shades and glared at her. "What's in the past belongs in the past. Why bother with what's long gone? The Quinnells won't be acquiring the farmers' market because I say so!"

## The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

### Chapter 1716 Some Clues

As Wynter approached Rohan, she silently flung a silver needle at him. Rohan instantly dropped to his knees, as though his strength had been drained away.

The chamber of commerce members rushed to support him and glared at Wynter. "What did you do to Mr. Tarvin?" they demanded.

Wynter clapped her hands and glanced at Rohan. "Oh, nothing much. I was just keeping someone quiet. You sure know how to be ungrateful, Mr. Tarvin. It's a pity you're up against me--your good days are over.

"Just to be clear, it's not essential for me to acquire the market, but this place is dangerous. Unlike you guys, who only look out for yourselves, I have the people in mind."

As she spoke, a cultivator in his 40s, with a feather wand in hand, stepped out from the crowd. The chamber of commerce members hurriedly cleared a path for him, which further bolstered his ego.

The cultivator stopped beside Rohan, drawing out the silver needle from the latter's acupuncture point with a flick of the feather wand. He then turned to Wynter and chided, "You shouldn't needle others for no reason."

With a glance at his shoulder, Wynter recognized the cultivator as a disciple in Kaspar's lineage. Out of respect for Kaspar, she refrained from taking any action against them.

Instead, she explained calmly, "I don't usually act unless necessary. And when I do, it's because I'm dealing with a fiend."

Enraged by her words, Rohan attempted to order his men to strike but was stopped by the cultivator.

The cultivator approached Wynter and introduced himself, "I'm Cornelius Dagworth from Mt. Dragon, a disciple of the renowned cultivator, Alban Silvester. Did you mention this place is dangerous? That's ridiculous. "This site sits strategically at the heart of three vital geomantic points, benefitting from a clear north-south energy flow and sustained by the city's fortune. No matter how you look at it, it's a truly valuable spot. It's definitely not as you've claimed it is."

Although Wynter was more well-versed in fortune-telling and geomancy, she had no interest in debating theories with Cornelius. "Even with a highly strategic location, this area is overrun with humans and animals.

"Without proper management, it becomes a breeding ground for germs, risking potential outbreaks."

She continued calmly, "You're Mr. Silvester's disciple, you say? Does he not advise you to trust in science and medicines rather than relying on mediums? Let's be clear-it's the frontline workers who determine this place's cleanliness, not you."

Cornelius bristled at her words and retorted, "I know you're the Quinnell family's daughter. I've been showing you respect because they are acquainted with Mr. Silvester.

"However, I've trained for years at Mt. Dragon. While I may not be as powerful as Mr. Silvester, I do have some skills.

"But you, Ms. Quinnell, are nothing but ignorant. You insult Mt. Dragon's arts with your nonsensical words. It's an utter disgrace to the Quinnells' name. Or, are the youngsters nowadays perhaps prone to exaggeration?"

When Cornelius mentioned Alban, his eyes gleamed with admiration. In contrast, he addressed Wynter with a tone of disdain, seemingly belittling her for her background.

The chamber of commerce members echoed his assertion.

"Mr. Dagworth hails from Mt. Dragon, while you're just a girl taken in by the Quinnells. You don't measure up to him."

"Mr. Dagworth is the Colifernia Chamber of Commerce's esteemed guest. Since his arrival, we've been on an upward trajectory, especially with his participation in the Arcane Way Forum. He even triumphed over foreign fortune tellers recently, bringing great honor to Cascadia!" a member added.

Cornelius modestly raised a hand. "It's merely a title, nothing more. Let's stay modest."

As Rohan was assisted to his feet, he chimed in, "No need for modesty, Mr. Dagworth. That girl is all talk when she claims this place is dangerous. I'm sure she's just eyeing the profits from the acquisition. Unlike you, who seeks nothing but sees only this land's value."

Cornelius could barely hide his smirk as praises rained down on him. During his time on Mt. Dragon, he had been relegated to house chores and meal duties. While he occasionally trained with Alban, he was far outshone by his more talented peers.

He never expected to be recognized upon leaving the mountains. He had everything he wanted in the Colifornia Chamber of Commerce, to the point where he even dismissed Alban's calls. Lost in the flattery and praise, he started overestimating his capabilities.

Wynter ignored the surrounding murmurs and asked, "What's your relationship with Kaspar Stavius?"

Cornelius was taken aback by the question before replying, "He's Mr. Silvester's mentor. I never expect you to know about him. "

However, he falsely assumed that Wynter admired Mt. Dragon and hoped to train under Kaspar. So, he added smugly, "You're welcome to join Mt. Dragon, though Mr. Stavius is out of your league. I could take you on as my disciple. That way, you might have a chance to meet him."

Wynter couldn't help but chuckle at his words, wondering if Cornelius was truly Mt. Dragon's disciple. After all, he was nothing like Kaspar. She was certain Cornelius would be mortified if he learned that Kaspar had once considered training under her.

Upon hearing the chuckle, Cornelius interpreted it as mockery. "Why are you laughing? Am I not worthy of being your mentor?"

Wynter regained her composure and smirked. "No, you're not. You claimed this place is energized by a clear north south flow and sustained by the city's fortune, but you fail to realize that toxic energy could be flowing through instead

"With its strategic location, it could easily turn into a sinister site if exposed to bloody energy. Tell me, what should be avoided when arranging a formation?"

Cornelius shot her a sharp look at her professional inquiry. Still, he answered with clear disdain, "Closing off the energy gates, obviously."

Wynter continued, "And where, may I ask, is the energy gate of this farmers' market?"

Cornelius confidently performed a swift divination before glancing toward the southwest. "The energy gate is right at it's blocked?"

"It is. That neighborhood was built recently, and it happened to block the energy flow from the north-south side. Even if energy flows in, it's likely to turn toxic under such conditions," Wynter stated calmly.

She turned to Cornelius and scoffed. "Your understanding is shallow, yet you arrogantly jumped to conclusions. It seems the standards at Mt. Dragon are slipping."

Cornelius' face flushed with anger, and he retorted that his vision had been obscured. He snorted coldly and shot back, "Sounds like you have an issue with us, Ms Quinnell. Your family owed us a great favor in the past. Don't you think you're being ungrateful?"

Wynter burst into chuckles. "We owe Mt. Dragon a favor, you say? Does Mr. Stavius even acknowledge such a claim?"

Cornelius, stunned by the disrespect toward Mt. Dragon, nearly lashed out in fury, when a young cultivator held him back. "Don't make a scene," the cultivator warned, shaking his head.

"But she insulted Mt. Dragon!" Cornelius fumed.

The cultivator, Wolstan Wingfield, warned in a low voice, "Why are you so worked up? Anyone who disrespects Mt. Dragon will face retributions. You're only disgracing its name by arguing with an ordinary citizen. Control

yourself, and remember what we're here for.

"I sensed that girl isn't a cultivator. She probably read a few books on fortune-telling and bluffed her way through. Our goal is the Arcane Way Forum and to support the Colifernia Chamber of Commerce. Just ignore her." Though Wolstan was young, his talent clearly surpassed Cornelius'. However, he shared the same arrogance as a cultivator and saw himself above ordinary citizens.

To Wolstan, Wynter was nothing more than an ant unworthy of their time. As he turned to leave, Cornelius followed suit.

Rohan flashed a gloating smirk and sneered. "See that? You'll never acquire the market, even if you try. This isn't like Kingbourne. If I'm not on board, neither is the chamber of commerce.

"You can go to the local Bureau of Land Management, but I doubt they'll entertain you. What an ignorant girl."



Wynter caught Wolstan glancing her way, noting the disdain in his eyes. Instead of confronting him, she turned to Dalton with a smile. "Have I ever told you how much I hated those orthodox sects who always think they're superior?"

Dalton hummed in affirmation. In fact, he recalled she used to say that all the time. Back in the day, Mt. Dragon's cultivators had been infuriated by her antics, yet they could never win against her.

The recollection brought a smile on Dalton's face, though he quickly cleared his throat. "Many grand masters have gone incognito to smaller chapels or lived as ordinary citizens. Only Mt. Dragon remains, and it's thanks to the heavenly blessings they received long ago."

"I know. That place is home to many noble individuals who've contributed to saving humanity. These fools are just basking in their reflected glory," Wynter murmured. Given her temper, she would've acted rather than wasted

time arguing.

As she didn't want publicly embarrass Mt. Dragon, she let the cultivators leave unscathed. Besides, she had a feeling they would cross paths again soon. By then, she would be sure to ask Kaspar how he lectured his disciples. And if the local Bureau of Land Management turned her down, just as Rohan stated, she wouldn't hesitate to take anti-corruption measures.

Dalton saw through her thoughts and coughed softly. "Judging by the time, their blessings should've run dry by

now."

No one realized how powerful those words were. Only Kaspar, speeding toward Hawford on a train, seemed to have sensed a change. He stopped chewing on his favorite bread and abruptly raised his head.

Beside him, Maurice sensed something was off as well. "I feel like my fortune is fading, Mr. Stavius."

"It's not your imagination," Kaspar replied. He couldn't understand why such a thing would occur when nothing

seemed out of the ordinary.

Little did he know, the signboard on the mountains had slanted-an ominous omen for the fortune tellers.

"Whatever the case, it shouldn't be serious enough to rescind the blessings," Kaspar murmured.

Knowing Wynter's unique abilities, neither he nor Maurice had ever thought of crossing her. On the contrary, they held her in high regard and were eager to discuss the Arcane Way with her.

It seemed, however, that Wolstan and Cornelius were lacking in both cultivation and insight. Ultimately, Mt. Dragon had to bear the consequences of their missteps.

Meanwhile, Cornelius took a deep breath. "If ten percent of the fortune is rescinded, Mt. Dragon will be without its talented cultivators for three years. But now, nearly half of it is lost! Who is the fool to cause such a disaster? They're bound to face the heavens' wrath."

The moment he said that, dark clouds swirled above Mt. Dragon, followed by flashes of lightning. Kaspar, sensing the disturbance, was overwhelmed by his distress. He swore to find the fool who had angered the heavens. "The trail leads to Colifernia... Very well, I'll deal with you once I get there!"

At the farmers' market, a man in black approached Wynter after the chamber of commerce members had left. "What should we do now, Ms. Quinnell?"

Wynter swept a glance at her surroundings and said, "Just ignore them. Continue with your tasks. If anyone especially those from relevant departments-comes for questioning, tell them to talk to me."

Before arriving at the farmers' market, she had already informed the higher-ups about the issue. Given how the chamber of commerce members threatened her, she was eager to see who would dare to stop her.

The sight of the polluted river and monkey carcasses heightened only Wynter's caution toward wild animals. After all, the farmers' market was a major source for both wild and aquatic creatures.

Since Blackie was found in the market, Wynter suspected that other aquatic animals for sale hailed from the same river. Though the virus remained unidentified, she was determined to prevent the situation from worsening. "Let's have a meal. You'll think more clearly after some food," Dalton suggested. His deep baritone voice was

pleasing to hear.

Wynter agreed, knowing she had to wait for the bait to be taken. She followed Dalton to a restaurant and settled into her seat to meditate.

Seeing that, Dalton poured her a cup of water and asked, "Are you thinking about the medium Layla mentioned?"

Wynter opened her eyes and gazed at him. "That's right. I'm wondering why he was accompanied by medics. We have no clue who they are, either."

Dalton took a sip of his water and said, "Finding the medics wouldn't be difficult. If they're planning trouble in Cascadia, they'll likely send spies or foreign visitors. Check the nearest hospital to see if anyone has left recently."

Wynter shook her head at his suggestion. "I've already checked the records. There's nothing unusual."

Her phone suddenly rang, and she moved to answer the call.

Lancelot's voice on the other end greeted her, "My dear Ms. Quinnell, as you requested, I found the person whose DNA matched the hair sample. I've sent the details to your phone. Take a look."

Wynter flashed a smile. "That's some impressive speed. Keep up the good work." "Oh, it's my honor to be of service to you, Ms. Quinnell!" Lancelot chirped in perfect Emstianian.

As Wynter was about to hang up, Lancelot continued, "It seems like we're making progress, my dear Ms. Quinnell.

I've also looked into the other matter you asked about. It turns out the hospital is hiding something about their

patients..."

## The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

Chapter 1717 Someone Is Burying the Information

Wynter abruptly stopped in her tracks.

On the other end of the line, Lancelot lowered his voice, as if he had moved to a different place. "From what I've gathered, there are some highly unusual cases in the hospital. They've already been quarantined."

"They haven't reported it." Wynter quickly pinpointed the issue. "These hospitals are afraid of being held accountable."

Ever since learning about the potential pandemic, Wynter had instructed the Special Unit to conduct covert investigations. She'd also ensured official directives mandated cooperation at all levels.

For things to have escalated this far without being flagged, it was clear that someone was deliberately suppressing the information.

"It's easy to discuss things with you, Ms. Quinnell. That's exactly it. They're afraid of responsibility. On top of that, there's currently no evidence proving human-to-human transmission, so the hospitals are still searching for the cause," Lancelot replied.

Wynter lifted her gaze. "It could be monkeys."

"What?" Lancelot sounded baffled.

Wynter narrowed her eyes. "They conducted experiments. Is this confined to just one hospital, or is it happening across Colifornia?"

"Currently, only two hospitals located in the western part of the city are affected." After a brief pause, Lancelot added, "It might also be connected to the DNA sample you asked me to test."

Wynter froze momentarily. "Connected? How?"

"That piece of hair's owner is the attending physician at one of those hospitals," he answered.

Hearing this, Wynter's expression turned fierce. "Lancelot, thank you for this lead. I think I understand what's going on now.

"We might not be able to uncover the full picture ourselves because someone is deliberately suppressing information. But as an overseas Cascadian, you're in a better position than us."

"Oh my, who would've thought this foreign-looking face of mine could be of service to Ms. Quinnell?" Lancelot quipped humorously.

Wynter's tone dropped an octave. "Listen carefully to what I'm about to say. I told you before that one of my team members has gone missing. I need you to find out if either of those hospitals has any special wards.

"Secondly, leave the west district immediately. Go to the city center and get a full medical check-up, including blood and virus screenings.

"If your results are clean, take the testing equipment to the Yarwood family. Tell Mr. Yarwood Senior not to come into contact with anyone or use public transportation. He needs to leave Colifernia as quickly as possible."

Lancelot immediately grasped the gravity of the situation. "Do you suspect this might turn into a pandemic?"

"The strange cases at the hospital already suggest human-to-human transmission. I just don't know the exact mode yet. But Mr. Yarwood Senior is elderly. Returning to Kingbourne is the safest course of action for him now," Wynter suggested.

Dalton was looking at Wynter from the side as she spoke.

Lancelot responded decisively, "Understood, Ms. Quinnell. I'll get it done."

The call ended.

Without offering any explanation to Dalton, Wynter strode purposefully toward her superbike. She placed the helmet on her head with swift determination. "You cannot follow where I'm going this time. Your health won't allow it."

"If there's truly a large-scale infectious disease outbreak, my health isn't the only concern. Your body won't allow you to walk into the outbreak's epicenter without proper protection, either."

Dalton was perceptive-he didn't need to know the details of the conversation to piece things together. He understood the situation fully from the moment Wynter instructed Lancelot to get Theo to safety.

Wynter glanced at him, frustration flickering in her gaze. How was she supposed to handle someone like him? Anyone else would've been easy-she could simply hit a pressure point and leave them behind.

But with him? For reasons she couldn't quite pinpoint, she just couldn't bring herself to do

it.

## The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

However, Wynter realized that if her hypothesis was correct, both she and Dalton had already visited the village, touched the water-soaked monkeys, and been to the farmers' market. Going to the hospital wouldn't make much of a difference at this point.

"Fine. You can come, but don't touch anyone once we're at the hospital. Put on a mask before entering," Wynter said quickly.

Before starting the engine, she made a call to the person overseeing the farmers' market. "If anyone asks, tell them the market renovation is being done under the orders of Mr. Keller from Hawford. Let them go question him if they want."

"Yes, Boss," came the reply.

Revealing the Special Unit was a last resort. Usually, it was strictly against operational guidelines.

Wynter continued, "Also, inform all the Special Unit members in Colifernia to wear masks. If possible, find a way to keep everyone in the market within a designated activity range without causing public panic.

"The market stays closed. If anyone protests, have them call Mr. Keller directly. And do another round of disinfection inside the market."

Though earlier tests hadn't revealed a clear source of the virus, Wynter's unease lingered.

Her earlier remarks to the cultivators from Mt. Dragon weren't just to criticize his poor grasp of his craft.

The reality was that, considering the conditions in the market-whether from a sanitation or geomantic perspective - it was a breeding ground for trouble. It harbored excessive filth and resentment from the wild animals that had died there in the past.

In fact, aside from the hospitals, this market was likely to become the outbreak's second epicenter. Conversely, the mountain village was less of a concern because its natural surroundings were blessed with an abundance of positive energy.

As they drove, Wynter's mind was racing. She had many thoughts, made several plans, and made another call to her superiors.

This time, her stance was unwavering. "I'm requesting the highest level of authority. Every hospital involved must be held accountable immediately. Dispatch investigators now."

This incident was clearly tied to foreign powers, and those protecting these forces might not even realize the full scope of what they were enabling. At this stage, some

departments - eager to downplay the crisis-were likely suppressing reports to avoid escalating the situation.

As for whether evidence of human-to-human transmission existed, Wynter didn't believe for a second that the hospitals didn't already know.

At the same time, in the hospital's conference room, a few leaders from relevant departments convened a video meeting.

"Can someone explain what's going on? Why is the infection rate rising so rapidly?"

The room held a mix of individuals—some intent on assigning blame, and others eager to smooth things over.

"Forget about the transmission details. Just tell me the plan. How do we prevent this?"

With his mask still on, a weary-looking doctor, Nigel Alistair, stood up. His exhaustion was clear as he spoke.

"I believe the hospital should be locked down. Of course, we've responded quickly-we immediately isolated the medical team that came into contact with the patients, which is why I'm maintaining distance from all of you.

"But this can't continue unchecked. We must implement containment measures and conduct a thorough investigation into the infection's source.

"Who was the first patient? What did they come into contact with? Where were they infected? Where do they live, and what's their activity range? We need to act immediately. Regional lockdowns may be necessary."

His words elicited an immediate backlash from one of the leaders on the video call. "Dr. Alistair, do you hear yourself? What kind of catastrophe would warrant a regional lockdown?

## The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

Chapter 1719 Nigel's Dedication

"Exactly!" two others chimed in supportively. "Even cholera wouldn't warrant such drastic lockdowns! You're creating too big of a commotion-how do you think the higher-ups will perceive this? Are we supposed to write a report to justify this?"

"We absolutely must write a report. I suspect this disease's transmission is even more dangerous than cholera," Nigel said as he lifted his gaze.

"Although everyone insists there's no evidence of human-to-human transmission, this is a highly contagious, large-scale illness based on our professional judgment. We need to come up with the right plan to prevent more people from getting infected."

His statement caused even the hospital director, Lennon Haroth, to lose his cool. "We're here to discuss solutions! What are you talking about?"

A voice on the video call intervened, "Enough. Dr. Alistair is still young and doesn't understand the gravity of calling for regional lockdowns in a city. Such suggestions are unnecessary. Focus on treatment instead. If you're worried, improve the isolation measures.

Nigel was about to say more when Lennon turned to him sternly. "Dr. Alistair, this is a direct order. You'd do well to remember that."

Standing there, listening to these dismissive remarks, Nigel clenched his fists. He

understood that speaking further could result in him losing his chance at a promotion, or even being dismissed from the hospital entirely.

Yet, as a doctor committed to saving lives, he couldn't stay silent.

"This approach won't contain the transmission at all because we haven't identified the source. How was the first person infected? What about their family? Who were their close contacts? Until we trace this back, effective control isn't possible.

"Time is of the essence! If we wait too long, the entire Colifernia could collapse!"

Hearing this, the officials' faces darkened. As the people in charge, the last thing they wanted was such a grim outlook.

"Dr. Alistair," one of them snapped, "are you implying we don't understand the situation as well as you do? What do you mean the entire Colifernia could collapse? It's just an illness! Treat it if you can. If not-Mr. Haroth, replace him!"

The video call ended abruptly, and the other two officials left the call without another word as well.

Lennon pointed at Nigel with frustration. "You... What am I supposed to say to you? Go home and rest right now. Don't say or do anything."



Nigel took a deep breath. "I'm not going home. Based on the transmission pathways we've seen, I'm likely already infected. Mr. Haroth, you've been in the same areas I have, so we're

no different. I can't risk infecting my family."

"You haven't gone home or rested in days! Why are you being so stubborn?" Lennon stood far from him, fully dressed in protective gear. "Let me say this one more time. The hospital can't keep you here. Go home."

Nigel lowered his gaze slightly. "Mr. Haroth, you know it as well as I do. The likelihood of human-to-human transmission is over 80 percent. That's why you're wearing that protective suit while talking to me. I can't leave. If I do, I'll be endangering others."

"Nigel Alistair! This isn't your house! You're really pushing it!" Lennon's eyes turned cold. "Let me make it clear one last time. Go home and rest, or I'll have the relevant departments deal with you."

## The Heiress' Return: Six Brothers at Her Beck and Call

### Chapter 1720 A Doctor's Job

Nigel understood the implication. They would pin everything on him if he didn't leave, framing it as a medical malpractice case.

Taking a deep breath, he replied, "Alright, I'll go home and rest."

Lennon finally looked satisfied and walked out of the room.

However, he didn't leave right away. Instead, he went to the decontamination chamber, thoroughly disinfected himself from head to toe, and passed through two more sterilization stations before stepping out. Even the clothes he had worn earlier were discarded.

"Burn them," Lennon instructed, narrowing his eyes as he wiped his hands with a wet wipe. "What a stubborn fool. I had to waste so much time talking to him. What if he infected me?"

A fellow doctor standing beside him reassured him, "Don't worry, Mr. Haroth. Your protective suit is the highest grade available. You'll be fine."

Lennon smiled with satisfaction. "We're all colleagues. If Nigel had half your sense, he'd have been promoted ages ago. But no, he's a blockhead. How could he expect any higher-up to agree to large-scale containment for an issue that hasn't yet made a real impact?"

"Imagine locking down the entire western side of the city-do you know how much economic loss that would cause? If this blows up, none of the officials in charge will escape accountability. Nigel just can't see the bigger picture!"

Although his words were cynical, they weren't entirely wrong. The higher-ups weren't interested in a dramatic response to a situation that hadn't escalated yet. Their priority was suppressing the issue as much as possible.

If containment failed, they'd deal with the fallout then. But admitting failure now would mean risking their careers!

When the other hospital colleagues heard about this, some of them tried to reason with Nigel.

"Don't act rashly. Let's keep investigating the infection's source. Maybe we're overthinking this."

A young nurse, who looked like a newly appointed intern, chimed in, "Yeah, Dr. Alistair! You're so skilled-I'm sure we can save everyone!"

But just as she finished speaking, a commotion erupted nearby.

"Patient in bed 32! Check the patient in bed 32! They can't breathe!" someone shouted urgently.

The young nurse immediately turned and rushed into the patient's room. Nigel moved even faster, his skills honed by years of experience.

Yet, no matter what he did, the patient's heartbeat and pulse were gone within a single minute.

He froze in place, staring at the now lifeless body on the bed. His expression carried not just shock but a deep, indescribable sorrow.

It was often said that doctors, having witnessed so much life and death, may have grown accustomed to it. But no one ever realized that it was only a rational acceptance. More than anyone else, they hoped to save the lives of those lying on the hospital bed with their own hands.

Some entered the medical field for practical reasons-job security and steady income. But others, like Nigel, chose it for a simple and noble reason-to save lives.

Hence, when he saw the young nurse fighting back tears and the other junior staff standing behind him, equally shaken, he made a decision.

They could be crushed like ants beneath the wheel of bureaucracy, but people still deserved to know the truth!

"Dr. Alistair, what are you doing? Hurry up and pack your things!" The voice came through the intercom.

At this moment, that order's irony was almost unbearable.

Nigel's lips curled into a faint, bitter smile. He looked up and replied, "I'll leave once I'm finished here."

"Are you leaving?" The young nurse was the first to speak, her voice trembling. "What about us? What are we supposed to do?"

Indeed, what about them? These people had families at home.

"Meet me in the disinfection room. I have something to say," Nigel said, turning away. Even if he was going to be taken away, there were things he had to say and do as a doctor.