

## The Double 151

### Chapter 151

Summer had been sitting for what felt like an eternity, watching Emmitt immersed in his work without a moment's pause. With a faint sigh, she stood and made her way to his desk. "Emmitt, It looks like you're swamped. I should be heading home."

Emmitt's pen stopped mid-sentence as he finally looked up, his apologetic eyes meeting hers. "I'm sorry, today's just been hectic. How about you hang tight for a bit longer? Once I'm done, we could grab some dinner together?"

A twinkle flashed in Summer's eyes, but she gently shook her head with an understanding smile. "It's fine, really. Work comes first. We can always do dinner another time. I'll be off then." Without waiting for Emmitt to respond, she turned and headed for the door, leaving behind a silhouette tinged with a hint of forlornness.

Emmitt watched her leave, then leaned back in his chair, rubbing his temples in silent contemplation. He quickly reached for his phone on the desk.

Zach had just finished his own pile of work when he noticed two missed calls from Summer on his phone. He swiped across the screen, debating whether to return the call, when suddenly, his phone rang again. Seeing Emmitt's name on the caller ID, he answered without hesitation. "Hey, Emmitt, what's up?"

Surprised by the quick answer, Emmitt hesitated before saying, "Nothing much. Summer stopped by earlier, asking when we could all catch up for a meal."

A shadow of indifference crossed Zach's expression as he pieced together the missed calls. "Dinner's going to be tough. I'm swamped lately and can't seem to find the time."

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After a brief silence, Emmitt prodded, "Zach, is there some kind of misunderstanding between you and Summer?"

Zach paused, puzzled. "Misunderstanding? I'm not sure I follow."

Emmitt continued, "I might have jumped to some conclusions about Mirabella because of the whole Catherine situation, which could have led to some confusion between Mira and Summer..."

Before Emmitt could finish, Zach cut in, "Summer called me twice about half an hour ago. I was in court, and my phone was with my assistant."

Zach's tone grew a touch heavier as he added, "Besides, Mirabella has never mentioned Summer in front of me, so there's no misunderstanding to speak of."

Zach brushed off Summer as simply being prideful yet harmless, but after today, it seems he might need to reassess his opinion of her. He shook his head, not wanting to let Summer's actions deepen any rifts within their group. "Look, Emmitt, if there's nothing else, I need to go. I have a client waiting."

Sensing Zach's impatience, Emmitt didn't press further. "No worries. Go handle your business." After hanging up, Emmitt remained in his chair, deep in thought.

Once outside, Summer hailed a cab and headed straight back to the Gilbert family estate.

The moment she stepped through the door, Mandy's voice, tinged with reprimand, reached her ears. "Where have you been since school let out? The driver called saying he waited at the school gates for ages and couldn't reach you by phone."

Summer glanced at Mandy with little interest in making excuses. "I stopped by the gym and didn't notice my phone ringing in my bag."

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Mandy's expression softened a touch upon hearing her daughter's reply. "Next time, give me at heads up, will you? Otherwise, I'll start to worry."

“Sure,” Summer murmured, drifting into the living room and collapsing into the plush embrace of the sofa with a distracted air.

Mandy glanced at Summer, finally registering her daughter’s troubled look, and asked with a frown, “What’s got into you? You look like you’ve lost your spirit.”

Summer hugged a throw pillow to her chest, her legs curled up on the sofa. She didn’t look at her mother as she spoke in a faint voice. “It’s nothing.”

“Is someone at work giving you a hard time?” Mandy probed, her brows knitting tighter.

“No.” Summer shook her head., “Everyone’s been really nice to me.”

Unaccustomed to such a forlorn expression on her daughter’s face, Mandy pressed further, “Then did something happen at school?”

After a pause, as if a particular name came to mind, Mandy’s face darkened instantly. “Is it Mirabella? Has she been bullying you again?”

Summer rested her head on the pillow without a word, her whole demeanor exuding a sense of deep grievance.

Mandy slammed her water glass down on the marble coffee table with a loud smack, “That brat is nothing but trouble! First, she drove your grandma back to her hometown, and now she’s causing

mischievous at your school. I really don’t understand what kind of upbringing she had with the Davis family.”

Aiden, who had just descended from the second floor, jumped at the sound of the glass hitting the table.

Startled, Summer finally looked up, a strained smile tugging at her lips. "Mom, don't be angry. I'm really okay."

This only fueled Mandy's ire, "You're just too kind-hearted, letting people walk all over you!"

Mandy reached for her phone, flipping through contacts with a scornful laugh. "My daughter won't be bullied for nothing. I need to have a word with the Davis family today..."

Summer panicked at the sight, quickly putting down the pillow and snatching the phone before Mandy could dial, "Mom, it's really nothing. Don't get worked up over someone that's not worth it."

Mandy frowned, "Summer, give me the phone back this instant."

Not daring to comply, Summer placed the phone out of reach, sat next to her mother, gently patting her back in a calming gesture, and whispered, "Mom, I'm serious. It's nothing. Please

don't get the wrong idea."

After a brief pause. Summer changed the subject. "By the way, our monthly exam results came out today. I scored 670, ranked tenth in the grade."

Distracted by this new topic, Mandy's anger dissipated slightly, "Your ranking has improved by a few spots since the end of the last semester. Not bad."

Relieved that her mother had dropped the idea of calling the Davis family, Summer finally let out a sigh of relief.

Aiden, who had been eavesdropping from the staircase, snorted at the mention of her score. "From someone who needs to cheat to compete in a contest...well, who knows how genuine that 670 is."

Summer, noticing Aiden, replied with a hint of sarcasm in her voice, "Could you maybe try thinking before you speak?"

“Sorry, I don’t know what thinking is,” Aiden said with a dismissive wave and a roguish grin.

Summer shook her head in disbelief. “Aiden, you’re really a piece of work...”

However, before she could finish, Mandy interrupted, “Enough. Your brother may be thoughtless, but shouldn’t you know better? Why bicker with him?”

Upon hearing this, Summer’s heart sank.

## Chapter 153

Summer knew all too well her place in the Gilbert household. To the casual observer, Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert doted on her, but their affection was merely the result of her newfound fame from the reality show Superstar Camp, which had brought a gleam of pride to their eyes and bragging rights at the country club.

But when compared to her younger brother Aiden, it seemed she could do no right. His presence alone was enough to cast her as the perpetual villain, no matter the circumstance.

Regret had gnawed at her more than once, wondering why she ever returned to the Gilberts’ posh suburban home when life with the Davises had been free of such indignities.

However, when she thought of her foster parents, the Davises, her emotions tangled into a knot of resentment. Despite their wealth, they chose to masquerade as a hard-up family, their façade far more repugnant than the Gilberts’ blatant callousness.

Taking a deep breath, Summer tried to suppress the surge of unpleasant memories clawing at her mind.

Sensing her own bias, Mandy reached out and gently patted Summer’s hand, her voice softening. “Your brother’s got a sharp tongue and a short fuse, but he means no harm. Try to cut him some slack, will you?”

A small forced smile flickered across Summer's lips as she murmured an indifferent agreement.

Aiden sauntered over and perched himself nonchalantly on the arm of the sofa, feigning boredom. "So, how did that little scaredy-cat do on her exams this time?"

Summer gave him a blank look, not catching on to whom he was referring.

"Scaredy-cat?" echoed Mandy, equally puzzled.

Aiden snorted dismissively. "You know, Mirabella, the one who grew up at Grandma's."

Mentioning Mirabella sent a fresh chill through Summer's gaze.

"Why bring her up all of a sudden?" Mandy inquired.

Aiden's eyes drifted lazily. "Just curious. You always say how bad she is at school. I just want to see if it's true."

Though Mandy had little interest in the academic woes of their foster daughter, Aiden's comment made her turn to Summer for confirmation.

Summer was already irked by Mirabella's top grades that day, and her patience thinned at her brother's probing. "How would I know her scores? We're not even in the same class," she retorted, her tone edged with irritation.

Sensing her annoyance, Aiden narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "Really? Then why did you come

home looking like the victim of some sort of injustice? It's as if she'd bullied you."

Summer instinctively glanced at Mandy, whose expression was once again clouding over. Internally, Summer cursed Aiden to high heaven. She had just managed to divert Mandy from the idea of confronting the Davises, and now the idiot was dragging the conversation back. What a world-class little brother, indeed!

Taking a breath to calm herself, Summer softened her voice. "I really don't know, and why would I care? We're hardly friends."

After a pause, she turned the tables, her eyes fixing on Aiden. "But you seem quite interested in her, don't you?"

"Me? Interested? Don't make stuff up." Aiden blurted out, worried Summer would spill the beans about the time he'd been beaten up at Parkside High School while looking for Mirabella. With that, he stood up and bolted away as fast as he could.

Summer watched him go with a mocking glint in her eye. Mandy missed the undercurrents between them. The mention of grades reminded her of something else, and she turned back to Summer. "Oh, that reminds me, I forgot to ask you last time—did Mirabella get knocked out of the city competition?"

Aiden, halfway up the stairs, paused at her words, turning his head back to listen.

## Chapter 154

Summer was caught off guard when Mandy brought up the competition again. There was a brief pause before she replied, "...I think she advanced to the next round."

Mandy's brows knitted together in mild disbelief. "Her scores were good enough not to get kicked out?"

After a moment of silence, Summer said, "I actually mentioned last time that her grades weren't that bad."

Mandy vaguely remembered the conversation but didn't dwell on it, quickly moving on. "The next round of the contest must be coming up, right? Make sure you go over the material your dad's friend from the Education Association gave you."

Summer nodded, eyes cast downward. "Yeah, I will. I'm going to head back to my room now."

"Alright, off you go." Mandy said with a dismissive wave of her hand.

Delilah and Shawn had been swamped with the renovations of their villa, leaving early and returning late. Concerned they couldn't look after their daughter properly, they hired a part-time housekeeper, Marian, to prepare meals for Mirabella.

That day, as Mirabella walked in the door after school, Marian had already finished cooking. Marian was taking off her apron as she said, "Mira, I've got to dash because of an emergency at home. Oh, and I picked up a package for you this afternoon. It's in the storage cabinet." Pointing towards the cabinet, Marian didn't wait for a response before hurrying out.

Mirabella set her bag down and glanced at the storage unit but didn't rush to check it out.

The table was set with a homestyle spread—an all-American meatloaf, buttered green beans, mashed potatoes, and a bowl of chicken noodle soup—Mirabella pulled out her phone and dialed Zach's number. Zach, who had been coming home for dinner every night, would typically be home by now.

The call connected quickly, and Zach's voice came through, "Mirabella, I won't be home for dinner tonight. Got to head out of town for a few days."

There was an edge of anxiety in his voice. Mirabella's brow furrowed as she asked, "Is something wrong?"

Zach seemed taken aback by her intuition. His tone darkened slightly as he replied, "Nothing serious. Don't worry about it."



As airport announcements echoed in the background, urging passengers to board, Zach hurriedly added, "I've got to board now. We'll catch up later."

Mirabella's expression tightened. She didn't press further, simply acknowledging with a, "If you need help with anything, let me know."

Zach chuckled, not taking her offer too seriously. "Sure."

The call ended shortly after. The background announcement Mirabella had overheard hinted at a flight to the States. She pondered this for a while before setting down her phone.

Delilah and Shawn came home earlier than usual that evening. Mirabella had just started eating when they walked in, deep in a discussion about the renovations. As they approached their daughter, they both fell silent.

Mirabella gave them a quizzical look. "You guys joining..."

Delilah answered cheerfully. "We grabbed a bite on the way home."

Shawn echoed, "Yeah!"

Mirabella just shook her head, slightly bemused.

Delilah tossed her bag onto a nearby cabinet and scanned the room. "Hey, isn't Zach home yet?"

Zach had been coming home on time to keep his sister company lately. His absence felt unusual.

"He had to go on a sudden business trip," Mirabella replied succinctly, omitting the part that she suspected he possibly went abroad.

“Another business trip, huh...” Delilah murmured, her face showing no surprise, accustomed as she was to his frequent travels.

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Shawn gleefully sauntered out of the kitchen with a glass of water in hand. His spirits were visibly lifted by the conversation he overheard. “A man’s gotta focus on his career, right?”

Zach had been wandering around the house for the past few evenings, constantly revolving around Mirabella, which was starting to get on Shawn’s nerves.

Delilah cast her husband a knowing glance, immediately catching onto his thinly veiled enthusiasm. “You got your way,” she said with a hint of amusement.

Shawn simply took a sip of his water, his eyes crinkling with a smile. Even though he had already eaten, he sat down at the dining table, cradling his glass, and quietly watched Mirabella eat her meal.

Despite being accustomed to her father’s watchful gaze, Mirabella couldn’t help but look up. “Dad?”

Shawn gently nudged the bowl of salad closer to her. “Eat up, kiddo. You study so hard every day. You’re getting all skin and bones.”

A twitch of helplessness flickered at the corner of Mirabella’s lips. Ever since she returned to the Davis household, she felt like she had been fed well enough to start rounding out at the cheeks. How could her dear old dad not see that?

Delilah caught her daughter’s look of playful exasperation, and couldn’t hold back a laugh. “Oh, Shawn, give it a rest. At this rate, your daughter’s going to stage a protest.”

Shawn looked up, puzzled. “Protest? What protest?” After asking, he turned his baffled gaze back to Mirabella. She was always such a good girl.

Delilah shook her head and then rubbed her slightly sore shoulders. "Shawn, let the girl eat. Why don't you come and give me a shoulder rub?"

"Sure thing." Shawn stood up and followed his wife to the living room, where he began to knead her shoulders with practiced ease.

Mirabella observed the couple from the dining room. One looked at the other with tender eyes, while the other's face was a picture of bliss. The atmosphere was so warm and fuzzy that it practically bubbled with pink hearts. With a silent sigh, Mirabella turned away from the unexpected display of affection.

After finishing her meal and tidying up the kitchen, Mirabella stepped out to find Delilah had left the living room. Shawn was already preparing his special coffee set, steeping the expensive blend Mirabella had brought home a few days ago. He beckoned her over. "Come join your old man for a cup or two."

Mirabella's lips quirked. Anyone would've thought they were about to share a bottle of wine.

"What have you guys been up to lately?" she asked casually, settling onto the sofa and taking a cup of coffee.

Shawn and Delilah had already planned a surprise for their daughter. He gave a vague response. "Oh, the company landed a big account, so everyone's pulling extra hours," he deflected.

"Really?" Mirabella raised an eyebrow, her beautiful eyes clearly skeptical. "Feels like you're keeping something from me."

Shawn's hand trembled, nearly spilling his coffee. He coughed and asserted with feigned seriousness, "Honestly, what could we possibly hide from you?"

Mirabella let out a prolonged "Oh," her tone rich with implication.

"Too clever by half," Shawn thought, quickly averting his gaze and focusing on his coffee.

Mirabella shook her head, not pressing further. Her phone buzzed in her pocket. Setting down her cup, she fished her phone out and saw a message from James on Messenger. Her fingers flitted across the screen to read it. [Your incense worked wonders. Thanks.]

Mirabella's eyebrows arched playfully as she lounged on the sofa, replying. [Of course, it did. That scent cost a pretty penny, you know!]

Meanwhile, on the other end, James was looking at the online store that Mirabella sent him. It sold the aromatherapy incense "Incense of Calm" and was priced at a cool \$299.

## Chapter 156

James scrolled through his phone, his eyes fixed on an ad for the "Incense of Calm" priced at \$299. A ping diverted his attention to Mirabella's message on Messenger. [Of course, it's pricey stuff!]

He couldn't help but feel a wave of suspicion wash over him. Was this \$299 candle really the sought-after tranquility treasure that was impossible to find in the market nowadays?

After a moment of contemplation, he typed back to Mirabella. [Is this the same shop where you got the one you sent me last time?]

Mirabella pondered for a few seconds, her fingers idly stroking her chin before she replied. [Nope, I got it from a different place.]

James paused, phone still in hand, then glanced at his buddy Wyatt. "Did you place the order?"

Fresh from the thrill of a successful transaction, Wyatt couldn't hide his grin. His phone screen still displayed the purchase confirmation. "Yep, cleared out their entire stock. Didn't leave a single one behind."

His face was a picture of smug satisfaction as if to say, 'Aren't I a genius? Come on, give me

some credit!”

James just pressed his fingers against his temples. Shifting his gaze back to his phone, he typed. [Got a link?]

A couple of taps later, Mirabella’s curiosity spilled into her message. [Why do you need so

many?] What she gave him should last you for half a year, rights

James replied. [They’re really good. Want to stock up.]

“Darling, who are you chatting with? You’ve ignored your coffee,” Shawn chimed in, topping up his daughter’s cup, a hint of curiosity in his voice.

“Just a friend,” Mirabella responded while texting, then glancing up at him, she added, “It’s getting late. Cut down on the coffee, or you’ll have trouble sleeping.”

“I’m used to it. It won’t affect my sleep,” Shawn reassured her, savoring another sip. He’d been running around all day and treasured these quiet evening moments. A day without coffee was more likely to keep him awake.

Back on her phone, Mirabella warned James. [Burning too much of that stuff can be addictive. I wouldn’t recommend it, James.]

Staring at the phone, James let the subtle scent of sandalwood Incense swirl around him. His deep eyes clouded with an unreadable emotion before he typed back. [If I didn’t know you were a high school student, I’d mistake you for a doctor.]

Mirabella raised an eyebrow and shot back. [Ever seen a doctor this young?]

James chuckled but didn't pursue the link anymore. He was already lucky enough to have scored this box of Incense of Calm. After a brief pause, he sent another message. [I've got a box of Blue Mountain. Want some?]

Looking up at her old man, Mirabella queried, "Do you like Blue Mountain?"

Shawn's eyes lit up instantly. "Absolutely."

"OK." And so, Mirabella replied to James. [I'll take it.]

James. [I'll drop it off at your school gate the day after tomorrow afternoon.]

Mirabella. [Cool thanks.]

James. [No problem!]

With their chat concluded, Mirabella reminded her dad once more to go easy on the coffee before heading upstairs.

Meanwhile, James set down his phone and, after a few seconds of thought, turned to Wyatt. "Get the Blue Mountain from the old man's cellar shipped here."

He paused, then added, "I need it the day after tomorrow."

Wyatt's eyes bulged in disbelief. "But don't you have several collector's editions? Why are you eyeing the old man's prized stash??"

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James slouched back in his chair, the overhead light casting a warm glow on his chiseled features, making him look even more like a sculpture carved from the finest marble. "Isn't coffee meant to be drunk?" he mused with a faint smirk playing on his lips.

Wyatt's mouth twitched at the corners. "But that coffee's been in the old man's collection for decades. If we take it and he finds out, won't he raise hell?\*

James gave Wyatt a sidelong glance, his tone casual as he spoke, "Then let's make sure he doesn't find out. He's kept it for so many years, and what's a few more?"

Wyatt rubbed his nose and then gave a respectful nod to his boss. Alright, when it came to being cunning, his boss was leagues ahead. He was the one who had much to learn. "I'll

arrange for someone to go tonight."

"Mhm," James hummed in response.

Fiddling with his phone, Wyatt thought of the dozens of boxes of calming incense he had just ordered. For some reason, a sense of unease settled in his stomach. He looked towards his boss, uncertain, "James, are you sure Ms. Mirabella's incense is from that store?"

Even Nikolai had mentioned that the incense James had was worth a fortune. Yet online, a whole box was going for \$299. Plus, when the seller realized Wyatt needed a bulk order, they even threw in a buy-one-get-one-free deal. Thinking about it now, it all seemed too good to be true.

James lightly tapped a sandalwood stick on the table, his expression unchanging. "Mhm."

Scratching his head, Wyatt didn't question further. "The seller said they'll ship it tomorrow. I asked for express delivery. It should arrive the day after."

"Arrange it as you see fit," James said airily.

Wyatt glanced at James, sensing something off about his reply, but after mulling it over, he couldn't pinpoint any issue. Shaking his head, Wyatt figured he was just overthinking things.

In the States.

Zach had just landed when he saw Collins waving at him from the arrival gate. Collins was Leo's manager.

"Mr. Zach," Collins greeted with a nod, promptly reaching out to help with the luggage. "I'm really sorry to have you make this trip."

\*No problem. How's Leo doing?" Zach'walked alongside Collins, his usually light demeanor replaced with a rare seriousness.

"He's... not good," Collins said, his voice rough with emotion. He took a deep breath. "Let's talk in the car."

"Alright."

Soon, Zach followed Collins out of the airport and into the car. "What exactly happened?" Zach asked, looking at Collins.

"A few months ago, Leo injured his spine during a performance. We all thought it was nothing serious at the time. But after a while, he got hurt again during a personal training session. That's when we found out that the previous injury had already damaged his nerves..."

Collins wiped his face, continuing. "Nerve damage can typically be repaired, but because we ignored it the first time, his condition worsened. After consulting numerous hospitals, we've been given a unanimous conclusion. Leo will never be able to perform on stage again, nor can he engage in any strenuous activities, or the consequences could be dire. Leo was born for the stage. Asking him to give it up is akin to ending his life."



Zach fell silent, reflecting on his words. He knew his younger brother better than anyone. Leo had always loved singing and dancing since he was a kid. Later on, he defied their family's objections, venturing into the entertainment industry on his own without any connections. The hardships he endured to reach his current star status were unimaginable.

## Chapter 158

How did such a fatal mishap befall Leo? Zach's heart ached, and he couldn't bear to imagine what his younger brother must've looked like at that moment.

"After the injury, he had given up hope," Zach recalled, "but when he heard that the international medical prodigy, LIN, had a good chance to cure him..."

Collins hadn't finished his sentence when Zach interrupted upon hearing the name LIN, "Wait, did you say LIN?"

Collins nodded, his voice tinged with complexity. "We only recently found out that LIN is actually Nick."

Zach's lips curved into a half-smile as he explained, "Leo has always been busy, and with Nick settling abroad, they didn't keep in touch much, so it's normal he didn't know. Frankly, I only learned he goes by LIN after he won an international award."

At that, Collins couldn't help but think back to when he first met Leo, "In those early days when Leo joined the scene, he never mentioned his family. I almost mistook him for an orphan with

no parents."

Zach chuckled, "That's why he's considered the most aloof in our family."

Leo had fought his way up all on his own.

"But to his fans, he's a warm-hearted big guy." Collins sighed. "It's just fate playing cruel

games...”

Zach straightened up. “Did you just mention Nick could treat Leo’s condition?”

“We thought so, but...after the examination, LIN said that he probably won’t be able to undergo intense training in the future,” Collins said with a wry smile.

Zach frowned, “So, has he given up on himself?”

Collins hummed softly, acknowledging that Zach truly understood Leo’s temperament. “I told him, if you can’t dance, don’t dance and just sing. But he insists that singing without dance is like a soulless existence. After getting LIN’s verdict, he shut down again and even refused surgery.”

“I couldn’t convince him, and I feared his spinal injury would worsen, so I had no choice but to tell you, hoping you could persuade him,” Collins said.

Zach gazed out the car window, his voice deepening, “I understand. Leo is my brother, and I don’t want him to give up on himself.”

Hearing Zach’s resolve, Collins felt a weight lift off his chest. Now, Zach might be all they could hope for.

After about half an hour, the car entered an estate with a sophisticated security system.

Several checks were required before one could truly enter the estate. This estate was none other than Nick’s private residence. It was Zach’s first visit, and he was fascinated by the advanced equipment and the smart home robots. It was like stepping into a high-tech. wonderland.

“Zach, sorry I was tied up and couldn’t pick you up from the airport myself.” Nick had just returned from the lab and just saw the message from Collins, learning that Zach had arrived in the States. There was a tinge of regret in his eyes as he looked at Zach. His handsome face was unusually pale, the kind of pallor from a lack of sunlight.

It had been years since Zach had seen his brother. He walked over and put his arm around him. his voice tinged with emotion, "It's been a long time, Nick."

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Nick always had a thing about personal space. Even though Zach was his own flesh and blood. their embrace lasted barely a second before Zach hastily stepped back, maintaining a respectful distance.

Zach sighed inwardly, understanding his brother's temperament all too well. However, no sign of displeasure crossed his features. His gaze swept the high-tech hall, and he said with a lightness in his voice. "Seeing you live the good life makes me happy, Nick."

Nick's lips twitched, as if he struggled to muster a smile, but his stoic disposition left his features stiff and rigid. He turned and poured two glasses of water—one for himself and one for Collins. "Make yourself at home," he said, handing over the glass.

Zach took the glass and cut straight to the chase, "Leo's injury really can't be healed. completely?"

"He'll recover but can't do any more strenuous activities, especially performing on stage," Nick replied, his voice detached.

Zach fell silent, knowing that if his brother, an internationally acclaimed medical prodigy, said so, there was no other way around it.

After a moment, Nick glanced up towards the second floor, his tone growing even colder, "If he doesn't want treatment, just persuade him to go back home. I've got a couple of doctors who are quite skilled. I'll refer him to them."

With that, Nick settled onto the couch. The chandelier above cast a brilliant light on his pale, almost translucent face, accentuating his cool, emotionless demeanor.

Collins, who had been listening, became visibly anxious. After several days of interaction, he had come to recognize Nick's peculiar temperament, which matched the rumors to a T. If it weren't for the fact that

Leo was Nick's brother, he doubted Nick would have lifted a finger to

help.

"Nick..." Collins began to speak but stopped as his gaze caught sight of Leo standing at the top of the staircase. He instantly fell silent.

Zach also noticed Leo and, with a sigh, said, "I'll go talk to him."

Nick didn't respond, simply picking up a magazine to read.

Zach turned and made his way upstairs.

Time flew, and soon, it was the eve of the BrainSpark Nationals city finals.

Summer intended to review her study materials one last time, but they were nowhere to be found in her room despite a thorough search. The documents she'd brought from the Education Association had vanished.

Her expression grew stormy. She'd been tied up with training sessions at the company every afternoon after school and had come home too exhausted to do anything but sleep. There had been no time for revision.

She was certain she had left the papers under her pillow. Where could they have gone?

Rubbing her temples, a thought struck her, and she quickly left her room.

The room next door was Aiden's. Without knocking, Summer barged in, "Aiden, did you take my study materials?"

Aiden, who was in the middle of a gaming session with his friends, had headphones on and didn't quite catch what Summer said. He glanced up briefly when she entered, then refocused

on his game.

Summer snatched his phone and yanked off his headphones, her voice filled with accusation, "Give me back my study materials."

Aiden's brow furrowed in annoyance at the interruption, "What's your problem? Give me back my phone right now."

## Chapter 160

Summer didn't just withhold Aiden's phone. She actually took a step back, defiance etched on her face. "Give me back my study notes, or you can kiss your phone goodbye."

Aiden stared at her, his expression a mix of confusion and disbelief. "Study notes? I'm an eighth-grader. Why on earth would I want your notes? Are you kidding me?"

With a scoff, Summer shot back, "Play dumb all you want, Aiden. Who else would swipe my competition prep if not you? Remember how you suddenly turned all saintly at the Education Association and offered to walk me out? Was it then that you hatched this little plot?"

"Accusations without evidence? That's low, even for you," Aiden sneered, clearly irritated. "I told you, I didn't take anything. And since you're so high and mighty, why would you even need those notes?" He added impatiently, "Now give me back my phone."

As he advanced to reclaim his device, Summer, livid, hurled the phone towards the doorway with all her might. It shattered into pieces upon impact.

Aiden's face went ashen, his fists clenched in a brief moment of rage, but he managed to rein in the urge to strike back. With a venomous tone, he spat out a single word, "Scram."

Summer's confidence faltered under Aiden's intimidating glare. She bit her lip and demanded one last time, "Where are my notes?!"

He watched her coldly, then unexpectedly, his lips curled into a mocking smile. "You want to know where your precious notes are? Apologize to me, and admit you were planning to cheat in the competition."

At his words, Summer huffed, "I knew it was you."

Shrugging nonchalantly, Aiden's rebellious smirk returned.

Taking a deep breath, Summer faced him, her pride unshaken as she declared, "You just want to see me humiliated, don't you? Well, I'll never give you the satisfaction!"

With that, she strode toward the door. Pausing at the door, she tossed a scornful look over her shoulder. "Even without my notes, I'll excel."

"We'll see about that," Aiden retorted dryly. His gaze then fell on the remnants of his phone, and his expression soured once more.

"Women," he thought bitterly, "are truly an infuriating species."

The next day, the competition was still set at the local Education Center.

Shawn and Delilah took a break from sprucing up their new villa, and decided to accompany their daughter, just like they had for the previous round.

Before leaving, Delilah opened the storage cabinet to grab some things and noticed an

unopened package. Curiously, she picked it up. “Oh, honey, there’s a package here for you,” Delilah called out to Mirabella, who had just finished putting on her shoes at the entrance.

Mirabella glanced up. Her memory jogged. She remembered Marlan had picked it up for her a couple of days ago, but it had slipped her mind. “It’s probably from a friend,” Mirabella replied nonchalantly.

“Alright then,” Delilah said, placing the package back in the cabinet before taking her own belongings and heading for the door.

Half an hour later, the family arrived at the Education Center. This round was more intense than the last city-level preliminaries, and the crowd of students and parents at the entrance was noticeably thinner.

After watching Mirabella enter the examination hall, Delilah and Shawn planned to wait at a nearby café. However, they’d barely taken a few steps when someone blocked their path.