

The Double 191

Chapter 191

Collins rubbed his nose and offered a sheepish grin. "Quite the unique welcome gift. What's in there? Sand or some quirky trinket?"

Young girls had a penchant for creative stuff. Collins had lost count of how many such gifts he had received on behalf of others.

Leo shot him a glance. "My sister wouldn't give something that's just run-of-the-mill."

"What is it, then?" Collins' curiosity was piqued.

Recalling the serious expression on his sister's face that morning when she handed him the medicine, Leo didn't keep it a secret, "Medicine."

"Medicine?" Collins' face took on a thoughtful expression. "What kind of medicine?"

"It's called Vitality something pill. Supposed to detoxify and repair the body, something akin to a wellness supplement, I guess," Leo explained.

At that, Collins found the name rather exotic. "Sounds like an herbal remedy. Mind if I take a look?"

Leo handed over the small bottle.

Collins opened it and took a whiff. Indeed, there was a distinct herbal scent, rich yet with an underlying freshness, nothing like th

overpowering herbal concoctions one might find at the drugstore.

“This medicine smells pretty good,” Collins remarked, pouring a pea-sized pill into his palm, “Have you tried it yet?”

Leo shook his head with a wry smile. “In my current state, what difference does it make whether I take it or not?” After all, his condition seemed like a foregone conclusion.

“You can’t think like that. Tell you what, I’ll take this pill and later ask my buddy who’s into alternative therapies if it’s safe to use.”

Capping the bottle, Collins handed it back to Leo, then walked over to his desk. He pulled out a couple of tissues to wrap the pill and stashed it in his drawer.

Looking up, Collins said in a teasing tone. “Your sister sure isn’t like the other girls.” Who else would dare give medicine as a gift? That was practically wishing someone to get sick.

Leo’s lips curled into a smile as he thought of his sister’s sweet demeanor. “My sister is definitely one of a kind.”

Collins rolled his eyes, slightly annoyed by Leo’s constant ‘my sister’ talk. “You seemed pretty nonchalant when she first came back. What’s with the change of heart?”

But then again, Mirabella was truly a stunner. If she were to step into the showbiz, she could easily become the envy of female celebrities across the web.

The thought alone got Collins’ blood pumping, and he added with a smirk, “Maybe ask your sis if she’s interested in joining us in the entertainment industry. With her looks...”

“My sister isn’t interested,” Leo cut him off coldly, donned his mask, and strode out of the office. The sound of the heavy door closing left Collins blinking in confusion. “What’s with the mood?”

After leaving the company, Leo headed to his private villa to pack some essentials, then drove back to the Davis family estate. When he tried his key in the lock, he found, to his surprise, that it wouldn’t turn. Puzzled, he rang the doorbell and waited. No one came. He finally resorted to calling Delilah.

Delilah hadn't kept her phone on her, so the call went unanswered. Thus, Leo turned to dial his father.

The phone was swiftly picked up, and as Leo's gaze settled on the security door, he asked, "Dad, why doesn't the old key work anymore? Did we change the locks?"

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On the other end of the phone, Shawn was stepping outside a cozy cafe where he had been catching up with some old buddies. "Oh, we changed the locks at the house a while back. Why do you ask? Are you heading back home for something?"

What? Wasn't that his home, too?

Leo furrowed his brow in confusion. He was always a bit of a straightforward thinker, and though he sensed something odd, he didn't dwell on it, simply stating, "I'm thinking of moving back in for a while."

Shawn's mood soured instantly. "Don't you have your own place? The house isn't exactly a mansion. Where are we going to fit everyone?"

Holding the phone, Leo's face wore a look of bewilderment. Their duplex might not have been a sprawling estate, but at over 400 square meters, it was hardly small.

"Alright, I'm not gonna talk about this now. I'm busy, gotta go." Shawn quickly ended the call without giving his youngest son another chance to speak.

Back in the day, his children weren't interested in staying at home, but now, they are all interested in moving back.

That was unfortunate, cuz Shawn wasn't interested in having them back anymore.

With a huff, Shawn's face regained its smile as he returned to the private room.

When the phone call abruptly ended, Leo stood there, lost in thought for the longest time. Why did it seem like his dad wasn't exactly thrilled about him coming home?

Scratching his head, he glanced at the luggage beside him, feeling as if his family had cast him aside for the first time.

So, when Mirabella got home from school and found Leo squatting by the front door, looking utterly forlorn and abandoned, she almost wondered if she had walked up to the wrong floor.

"Leo... why aren't you inside?" Mirabella asked, regaining her composure.

Hearing his sister's voice, Leo looked up, pushing the brim of his cap back and attempting to stand, only to realize his legs had stiffened from squatting so long. He leaned on the door frame, struggling to get up.

Mirabella went over to help him up, massaging his stiff muscles, figuring he must've been squatting there for a couple of hours.

"I don't have the keys," Leo admitted sheepishly, his ear turning a shade redder as he accidentally kicked his luggage bag.

"Uh... isn't Marian home?" Mirabella asked, puzzled. Usually, their housekeeper Marian would have already been preparing dinner.

Leo paused, then shook his head. "I rang the doorbell, but no one's home."

After a few seconds of thought, Mirabella suggested, "Maybe Marian took the day off."

With that, she pulled out her keys and swiftly unlocked the front door. Then she turned her attention to Leo's luggage bag, effortlessly picked it up, and headed inside..

Leo watched his sister lift his heavy luggage with ease and went into deep thought.

Leo followed her in and shut the door behind him, his hands feeling oddly empty.

“Your room is the first one on the left upstairs, right?” Mirabella called over her shoulder as she climbed the stairs with his belongings.

Leo met his sister’s gaze and instinctively replied with a hum. Mirabella flashed an ‘OK’ sign at him mid-air.

Realizing what was happening. Leo opened his mouth to tell her he could manage his own luggage, but before the words could escape, Mirabella was already briskly ascending the

stairs.

Leo stood there, puzzled. How awkward was it for a grown man to let his slight sister carry his bags?

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After stowing her and Leo’s bag away, Mirabella descended the stairs to find Leo still rooted in the same spot. His normally cool demeanor seemed oddly endearing compared to Zach’s polished appearance. Somehow, Leo came off as much more charming.

Feeling his sister’s gaze, Leo turned to look at her, but by then, she had already redirected her attention elsewhere. However, the hint of a satisfied smirk at the corner of her mouth didn’t escape his notice.

Blinking, Leo felt that curious, indescribable sensation creep up inside him once more.

Unaware of his scrutiny, Mirabella headed to the kitchen and flung open the refrigerator. With Marian off for the day and Leo not exactly looking like the culinary type, it seemed the task of preparing dinner would fall to her.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket at that moment. Juggling vegetables in one hand, Mirabella fished out her phone with the other and saw it was the old man calling. She hit the speakerphone button. "Dad."

"Sweetheart, have you made it home yet?" Shawn's cheery voice came through.

"Yeah, just got in," Mirabella replied, closing the fridge door and then inquired, "Are you and Mom coming home for dinner tonight?"

"No, darling, your mother and I have a gathering to attend and won't be back early. Also, I gave Marian the day off. Don't worry about dinner. I've ordered something special for you. It should be arriving soon, so keep an eye out for the delivery, will you?"

Leo, who had been pouring himself a glass of water nearby, froze at the sound of his father's voice on speakerphone. The phrase 'I gave Marian the day off' kept echoing in his head. "Ah, got it," Mirabella

responded, already returning the untouched vegetables to the fridge.

"Alright then, I'll let you be. Just be careful at home on your own," Shawn paused, adding another line as an afterthought, "Don't open the door for anyone, you hear? It's not safe, especially at night."

Mirabella's face twisted with confusion. Her dad was acting a bit off today; he never usually made those kinds of remarks. Glancing over at Leo standing just outside the kitchen, she responded dutifully, "Don't worry, Dad, Leo's here, too."

Shawn, who was about to hang up, suddenly turned a shade of green at the mention of Leo, his disdain coming through loud and clear, "Why is he still there?"

If Leo had thought the earlier disdain was just his imagination, there was no denying it now. With his water glass in hand, Leo felt like retreating into a shell.

Watching a clearly bewildered Leo, Mirabella pondered momentarily before speaking up. "Dad, I'm on speakerphone."

Shawn, who had been about to say, 'Get him out of our house,' choked on his words. Silence reigned on the line for a long stretch. Finally, Shawn's voice hurried through. "Ah, gotta go, your mom and I are heading out to dinner." And with that, he hung up promptly.

Mirabella cocked an eyebrow, devoid of any guilt for the mischief she'd caused, and pocketed her phone. Stepping out of the kitchen, she announced nonchalantly, "Dad ordered us takeout. so no need to cook tonight."

Leo stared at his sister, looking utterly bewildered. After a long pause, he forced a stiff smile. "Well... that's... great."

Mirabella pursed her lips, suppressing a giggle. How could anyone have such an adorable brother?

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The sound of the doorbell shattered the awkward silence.

"It must be the delivery Dad ordered. I'll get it. Mirabella said as she walked to the door.

When she opened the door, instead of the typical delivery guy in a cap and T-shirt, she found herself face-to-face with a middle-aged man dressed in a sharp suit, exuding an aura of sophistication. He held two elegant boxes in his hands.

Resting her hand on the doorframe, Mirabella asked with a hint of confusion, "And you are?"

With a courteous smile plastered on his face, the man handed over the two boxes. This is your delivery, ma'am. Bon appétit."

The boss had been clear. "Keep it low-key and don't startle my daughter.

It took Mirabella a couple of seconds to process before she reached out to take the boxes. curiosity getting the better of her. "You're really here with a delivery?"

The man's expression froze for a split second before he nodded. "Yes, indeed."

Delivery guys sure were fancy these days, huh? Mirabella didn't press further, thanked the man, and closed the door.

She placed the two ornate boxes on the table in the dining room. Each box had three tiers containing four dishes and two servings of rice – a veritable feast that was more than enough

for two.

As they ate, something occurred to Mirabella, prompting her to look up at Leo, who was quietly enjoying his meal across from her. "By the way, Leo, are you an actor?"

Leo paused mid-bite and shook his head. "No, I'm a singer."

A singer? Could that be why she couldn't find any of his records when she looked him up?

While intrigued, Mirabella didn't want to pry into potentially sensitive matters. However, thinking about the poison that afflicted him, she couldn't resist teasing. "With looks like yours, Leo, I bet you've got a few green-eyed monsters at your label."

Leo's lips twitched at her words, and he glanced at his sister with a complicated expression. It seemed necessary to clarify, "Actually, I thrive because of my talent."

Mirabella nodded absentmindedly, going along with his claim. "Sure, the entertainment industry can be cutthroat. Just watch your back, okay?" With that, she returned to her meal.

Leo felt a pang of melancholy; it was the first time he considered that being attractive might not have been all it was cracked up to be.

After dinner, Mirabella offered to wash the dishes, but Leo was insistent on doing them himself. “Ladies should take care of their hands. Leave it, I’ve got this,” he stated seriously before snatching the dishes from her hands and heading into the kitchen.

Mirabella let him be and decided to prepare some fruit in the living room. She had barely taken a few steps when a series of clangs and crashes echoed from the kitchen.

She pressed her fingers to her forehead, knowing all too well what that meant.

A job that should’ve taken mere minutes ended up being a twenty-minute ordeal for Leo, and ultimately, Mirabella had to step in to finish up.

Settling down on the living room sofa, Mirabella brought over a plate of freshly cut fruit and placed it on the coffee table. Chomping on a slice of apple, she took a few bites before turning to study Leo’s face. After a brief pause, she inquired, “Leo, did you not take the medicine I gave you this morning?”

Though it sounded like a question, the certainty in her voice was clear. Leo watched his sister, noticing her expression growing stern as she spoke, compelling him to sit up straight instinctively.

“I...” Leo began, the words almost tumbling out before he caught Mirabella’s all-knowing gaze, and suddenly, he couldn’t bring himself to finish. After an awkward pause, he finally managed to say, “... forgot.”

Mirabella polished off the last slice of her apple, said nothing, and simply stood up.

Leo watched his sister abruptly walk away, and for some reason, a sense of dread washed over him, reminiscent of the feeling he got when he was caught by a teacher with unfinished homework as a kid.

“Weird,” he thought, “why would I even think that?”

Before long, Mirabella returned with a glass of water, her expression unreadable as she handed

it to Leo.

Sitting up straight, Leo almost robotically took the glass, his hands moving faster than his thoughts. Without needing any prompts, he fished out a bottle of pills from his pocket. "I'll take them right now." He didn't even bother to ponder the possible side effects of the medication; he just popped a pill into his mouth without hesitation.

Watching him swallow the medicine, Mirabella's stern expression softened slightly, but her voice remained firm, "If you want to get better, you need to take the medicine I give you on time."

Leo nodded subconsciously, his usual air of cool detachment and standoffishness dissolving in front of Mirabella as if their roles had been reversed – she the protective older sister, and he the obliging younger brother.

Leo was baffled. After a moment, he snapped back to reality and hesitantly began, "You know about my health problem..."

Mirabella's phone buzzed in her pocket, and she casually pulled it out while absentmindedly replying, "Mhm."

At her nonchalant acknowledgment, Leo's expression flickered with confusion. Aside from Zach and Nick, even Emmitt didn't know about his condition. How could Mirabella be aware of it?

And surely... Zach and Nick wouldn't have told her.

Mirabella ignored the surprise in Leo's eyes and comfortably settled back on the couch to text. Not saying another word.

Leo had so many questions, but seeing her engrossed in her messaging, he finally clamped his mouth shut and sat there, his mind elsewhere.

The message was from a recent contact on Messenger named "No Stealing My Meds."

No Stealing My Meds: The Pharmacist's Guild did have a compounder make a batch of Solace Stem recently, but I heard that it wasn't sold. It's still with the Guild.

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Mirabella crossed her legs on the couch, leaning back lazily. Her eyes narrowed slightly as she read the message. Her fingertips tapped swiftly as she typed a response.

The Pill: Are you sure?

No Stealing My Meds: Positive. The Guild has a lot of rare ingredients, so any high-level meds concocted there are cataloged and not allowed for private sale or removal.

Mirabella's fingers traced the edge of her phone, pondering for a few seconds before replying.

The Pill: Do you know the name of the compounder who made the Solace Stem?

No Stealing My Meds: Not sure about that. I can ask around if you want.

Seeing this, Mirabella quickly replied.

The Pill: No need, it's not important.

No Stealing My Meds: Ok. Hey, are you still compounding?

The Pill: No, no time.

No Stealing My Meds: Alright, let me know when you start again.

The Pill: I can't for now. Senior year is hectic.

No Stealing My Meds: ...

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Mirabella wrapped up her chat with “No Stealing My Meds” and glanced at the clock on the wall. It was getting late, and she remembered her untouched school–assigned essays. The thought nudged her from the comfy couch. “Leo, I’m heading up to do my homework. Don’t stay up too late, okay?”

With that, she took the stairs two at a time, heading to her room.

Leo watched his sister’s retreating figure, his mind foggy from the evening’s distractions, snapping to attention at her mention of ‘homework.’ Mirabella was just a high school senior, yet when she put on her serious face, she commanded the room with more presence than he ever did, looking every bit the part of an adult.

When she had insisted he take his medication earlier, he could hardly believe his timid compliance.

He’s totally whipped.

The day had finally arrived. The BrainSpark Nationals city finals results would be announced.

Typically, after the city finals, the next round would be at the state level. However, Ashford, being a charter city, posed a unique challenge with its higher difficulty level in competitions, allowing those who advanced to skip straight to the nationals.

Despite holding more challenging city finals, the threshold for advancing was higher than in other regions to ensure fairness. This meant that many hopefuls would be cut from the competition once the scores were released.

At ten o'clock sharp, the official website posted the names and scores of students who made the cut. There was no need to enter an exam number. One glance at the online ranking was enough to reveal who had advanced and who had been eliminated.

In the Prodigy Class...

Summer took out her phone with a shaky hand and opened the competition's official site, feeling nervous for the first time at the prospect of checking her results.

The questions in this competition were notoriously difficult, and to add to her anxiety, Aiden had swiped the study materials she had obtained from the Education Association before she had a chance to review them. This left her feeling less than confident about several major problems on the test.

"Summer, how did it go? What score did you get?" Madeline asked, still fumbling with her own phone, not ready to face the results.

Summer's expression was composed, her voice a gentle calm. "I'm just checking now.

Her fingertips tapped the screen as she spoke, opening the homepage where the advancing

scores were prominently displayed. Her heart tightened at that moment.

First place, Mirabella, 150 points.

Second place, Vincent. 148 points.

Third place, Sawyer, 140 points.

Fifteenth place, Will, Tommy, Summer, 120 points.

Out of a perfect score of 150, the cutoff was 120 points.

When Summer saw her name at the bottom of the ranking, her hand trembled. She had barely made it... one point less, and she would have missed the nationals altogether.

And Mirabella, yet again with a perfect score, was at the top.

Summer's gaze darkened. Even Vincent hadn't achieved a perfect score. How could Mirabella, who was rumored to have bought her way through high school back in her hometown, outperform Vincent? It simply didn't add up.

"Summer, congratulations on making it to the nationals," Madeline said, her voice carrying congratulations but lacking the usual exuberance.

After being outshone by Mirabella time and again, Summer's qualification for the nationals, even with her best effort, seemed rather lackluster by comparison.

Summer could sense the shift in Madeline's attitude and felt an increasing irritation. She opened her mouth to respond when her phone vibrated incessantly. Glancing down at the screen, she saw messages from her agent and her girl group members.

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Summer tapped on the Messenger app with a mixture of anticipation and dread. Her screen lit up with a barrage of congratulatory messages that should've warmed her heart, but today, they felt like just another reminder of the facade she had to maintain.

Craig: [Congrats, Summer! National finals? You're not just a Parkside High School Prodigy Class student. You're a star.]

Allison: [Hats off to Queen Summer for making it through to the next round.]

Jenny: [I've got champagne on ice. Let's celebrate your victory tonight.]

Lily: [I'll swing by and pick you up.]

As she scrolled through the well-wishes, Summer's grip on her phone tightened. Inhaling deeply, she began replying to each message, her fingers dancing over the touchscreen with practiced ease. No matter what, she had to keep up her image at the company.

After responding to her squad sisters, she finally shot a message back to her manager Craig.

Summer's manager had always had high hopes for her. As soon as her competition results were out, he'd been on the ball, lining up PR moves to hype her up online.

[Craig]: Oh, and post a Tweet later with a screenshot of your national competition ranking. I've got the PR accounts ready to give you a boost.

Summer got the drift immediately and shot back a quick 'OK.'

[Craig]: I'm in talks with a reality show director about a spot on 'Country Comfort.' It's

broadcast live. If you get on it, your popularity could skyrocket.

Summer's eyes widened, a flicker of excitement betraying her cool exterior. [The one produced by Walker?]

[Craig]: How'd you know? It's still in the planning stages. Even I only heard about it because I know someone who knows Walker.

With fingers flying, Summer replied, [My brother mentioned it to me.]

[Craig]: The one who sings?

[Summer]: Yeah.

Craig stroked his chin thoughtfully. If her brother was in the music scene, that could explain it. [Well, if I can't snag this opportunity for you, see if your bro can get you on the show.]

Walker was a titan in the reality show world, a Midas touch for talent, and a notorious perfectionist. Craig knew about Walker's new project but didn't have much hope of swaying the producer to pick Summer. So, he had been leveraging her competition success to solidify her public persona, hoping to increase her chances with a little heat and popularity.

Meanwhile, Summer's thoughts turned to Leo, and her expression clouded with complexity. Leo was notoriously aloof, even to his closest friends, and they weren't exactly tight—especially since she had managed to rub him the wrong way in the past.

country Comfort' was bound to be a hit, and Summer knew she had to be a part of it, no matter

what.

Quickly, she messaged Craig back with a decisive. (I understand.)

After ending the chat, Summer felt a sense of calm washing over her. She glanced at her competition scores on her phone, and a self-deprecating smile curled her lips. It was just a small contest, yet it had her all worked up. She really shouldn't be so easily flustered.

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Taking a deep breath, Summer's mood lifted like the break of dawn, the sullen shadows on her face retreating. She screenshotted her competition results with a decisive click and crafted a tweet she promptly sent to the Twitterverse.

After posting, she stashed her phone in a desk drawer and mulled things over for a few seconds. before turning to Madeline, who was engrossed in her own phone.

Though it was just a minor competition, Summer had no desire to endure the smugness of certain people any longer.

Mirabella once again scored a perfect score and clinched first place in the competition. To most students, this was no longer surprising: after all, she was in a league of her own, a legend among mere mortals who could do little more than look up to her with a mix of awe and envy.

As the last class of the afternoon ended, Mirabella planned to join Jenna and visit Jake at the hospital to check on his condition.

Stepping out of the classroom, Mirabella looked up and spotted a familiar silhouette leaning nonchalantly against the railing. It was a clear-cut profile she recognized. Flashing through her memory, she recalled the boy who had bizarrely thrown down the gauntlet in the restroom after the city-level competition.

“That’s Vincent from the Prodigy Class,” Jenna whispered from beside her. Instinct told her that Vincent, the former top dog of their grade, now hanging outside the honors classroom, was most likely here for ‘Queen Mira.’”

When kings clash, sparks fly. Jenna’s eyes gleamed with anticipation. Mirabella arched an eyebrow and glanced at Jenna. “So your doom and gloom prediction actually came true?”

Caught off-guard and feeling blamed, Jenna could only gasp in surprise. She had only casually mentioned that someone might see Mirabella as a rival!

Mirabella casually adjusted her backpack strap and coolly looked away, continuing forward as if completely unaware of the impending confrontation.

Jenna gave a silent thumbs-up from behind. That was ‘Queen Mira,’ unshakeable even in the face of a formidable foe. She was treating him like he was thin air.

As Mirabella approached, the previously languid Vincent moved, stepping into the center of the hallway and effectively blocking her path.

The eighteen-year-old boy had the arrogance of youth, especially as one of the school's prodigies, his pride almost palpable.

Mirabella stopped in her tracks, crossed her arms, and slowly lifted her head to meet Vincent's gaze, not a hint of disturbance in her expression.

The rest of the class trickled out, and upon seeing the standoff between the two top performers of the grade, they all paused.

"OMG, is this going to turn into a fight?"

"It sure looks like it. Ever since Mirabella transferred into Parkside High School, she's been taking all the top spots that used to belong to our genius."

"If I were him. I'd hold a grudge against anyone who stole my thunder and plot my revenge."

"With both of their auras so charged, I can't help but get excited. I wonder who would win."

"Idiot, when gods wage war, it's the mortals who suffer. Better stand back."

And so, the onlookers discreetly stepped back, including Jenna, who, like a mouse, inched towards a safer spot, afraid of collateral damage.

For a moment, an eerie silence hung in the air.

The students, eager for a spectacle, dared not even breathe too loudly as they awaited the showdown between the two titans.

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Mirabella arched an eyebrow at Vincent, her voice tinged with defiance, "Looking for a fight?"

Vincent frowned.

With a casual twist of her wrist. Mirabella said. "But... fighting is banned on school grounds. Didn't you know?"

Her words sounded plain enough, but on closer inspection, they carried a brazen undertone. Sure, no fighting was allowed in school, but nothing stopped a tussle off campus.

Vincent caught the hint, and his gaze didn't miss the gesture of her twisting wrist. His frown deepened. "Who said anything about fighting? Aren't you supposed to be a lady? All you talk about is brawling."

Mirabella remained unfazed.

The crowd of onlookers gawked at the standoff. The atmosphere seemed a bit off.

Then, Vincent pulled out a folded piece of paper from his backpack and forcefully placed it in Mirabella's hands, his voice firm. "I want an answer by tomorrow." With that, he turned on his heel and left, not giving Mirabella any chance to refuse.

The scene had shifted so rapidly that all the students who had been anticipating a showdown were left with their jaws hanging.

"What the heck," they thought, "we brought out the popcorn for this?"

Was he passing a love note???

Mirabella came back to her senses and, ignoring the stares of her classmates, glanced at the paper now in her hands. It was folded, but she could make out bits of the content from her angle. A smirk twitched at the corners of her mouth.

After Vincent had walked away, Jenna approached cautiously, her eyes fixed on the note in Mirabella's hand, barely containing her urge to snatch it and read it herself. "Queen Mira, what did Vincent give you?"

The surrounding students perked up their ears at her words, eager to know.

Mirabella nonchalantly slipped the paper into her jacket pocket and said indifferently. "Something you wouldn't understand."

Jenna touched the tip of her nose. "You won't even show me, so how do you know I wouldn't understand it?"

Mirabella turned to Jenna, her smile sly, "Trust me, Jenna. You'd question your sanity..." As she spoke, she reached out and playfully tousled Jenna's hair.

Jenna was baffled. She felt utterly affronted!

Shaking her head with a laugh, Mirabella withdrew her hand and walked on.

About twenty minutes later, Mirabella and Jenna arrived at the hospital.

This was Jenna's regular visiting time, and Kayla wasn't around today. After donning sterile gowns, they entered the hospital room.

Seeing her father lying quietly on the bed, Jenna's eyes reddened. She sat by his side, her voice quivering. "Dad's out of immediate danger, but if he doesn't wake up soon, the chances of him ever waking up are slim..."

Mirabella had come today to assess Jake's condition more closely. While Jenna was caught up in her worries, Mirabella reached out to check his pulse. His pulse was weak but not concerning.

Retracting her hand, Mirabella pondered for a few seconds, then patted Jenna on the shoulder. "It's going to be okay. In a couple of days, your dad will wake up. Don't worry."

Jenna gave a wry smile and shook her head, dismissing Mirabella's assurance.

Without pressing further, Mirabella stayed a few more minutes and then exited the room, leaving Jenna to be with her father. She took the elevator down to the ground floor of the inpatient building and started walking out of the hospital; she was surprised to run into a familiar face in the lobby..

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"Mirabella, what brings you to the hospital?"

Collins was in for a routine prescription pickup and to check on a pal, but bumping into Mirabella was a curveball. Hospitals aren't exactly social hubs like malls, so he gave her the once-over before asking with genuine concern, "Are you feeling okay, Mirabella?"

Mirabella nodded politely at Collins. "I'm fine. Just visiting a classmate's family member who's under the weather."

"Gotcha," Collins said with a grin. "Heading home now?"

"Yep."

"Perfect timing—I'm about to take off, too. Mind if I give you a lift?" Collins offered warmly. Such a lovely young lady shouldn't wander home alone—it was not safe.

"No need to trouble yourself. I'll just hail a cab," Mirabella declined, her expression cool and detached, practically screaming 'Back off. We're not tight.'

At that, Collins touched his nose, amused by the resemblance in the sibling's frosty facades.

He was about to speak again when his doctor buddy came hustling over, urgency written all over his face. “Collins, hold up, there’s something about your medication...”

But the moment he caught sight of Mirabella, he clammed up, switching gears. “Ah, sorry, am I interrupting?”

Collins snapped back to reality. “Not at all.” But considering the pills were a gift from Mirabella... Collins cleared his throat and suggested, “Let’s talk in your office.”

The doctor nodded. “Sure thing.”

However, instead of leading Collins to his own office, the doctor headed for Dr. Ray’s office. Though puzzled, Collins didn’t question it.

Inside Dr. Ray’s office, there was also a silver-haired elder, who stood up from the sofa as Collins entered. His eyes were locked on Collins, and in his hand, he held one of the ‘Vitality’ pills.

“Where did you get this medication?” asked the elder, none other than Nikolai, who had previously appraised scents for James. He and Dr. Ray were old friends and had run into Collins while discussing some business.

Collins’ gaze landed on the pill in Nikolai’s hand, pausing before he replied, “A friend gave it to me.”

At that, Nikolai’s excitement intensified. “Does your friend have a background in pharmacology? Could you introduce us?”

Watching this unfold, Dr. Ray was taken aback by Nikolai’s fervor—it was a side of his longtime

friend he’d rarely seen. His attention shifted back to the tiny pill nestled in Nikolai’s hand.

What was so special about this pill?

Collins couldn't fathom why the old man was so worked up, but it was clear he knew something about the medication Mirabella had provided.

“My friend isn't a pharmacologist. But what exactly does this pill do? Is it safe for someone with spinal nerve damage? Will there be any side effects?” Collins rattled off his questions, his main concern evident.

At the mention of side effects, Nikolai's gaze at Collins shifted. Had his own protege spoken so ignorantly, he might have been tempted to reach for a stick to set him straight.

Such precious medicine was in the hands of a clueless buffoon!