

## The Double 251

### Chapter 251

Hearing the other teacher's remark, Anthony lifted his head and followed the line of sight to look outside. He was taken aback for a moment.

"The questions in this year's competition are even more insane than before. Turning in papers almost an hour early is ridiculous... Did that student just give up?" Another teacher, holding today's competition test in his hand, said skeptically. He found it hard to believe that any student could finish all the problems in under two hours.

"Well, that's not necessarily the case; maybe she has solved all of them already?" The teacher who made this comment seemed to speak with a tone of doubt, yet the sarcastic smile on his face betrayed his true thoughts.

Anthony's attention was entirely fixated on Mirabella, who had turned in her paper early, but he still listened to what the other teachers from different schools were saying.

Turning back to look at the speakers, the surprise he had shown upon seeing Mirabella had faded, replaced by a cool and indifferent expression, "Oh, I have absolute faith that our Parkside High School's student, Mirabella, has completed all the problems."

The teachers, confronted with Anthony's sudden shift from polite amusement to cool detachment, were at first taken aback, then flushed with embarrassment. After all, the students who made it to the national competition were the cream of the crop, and the schools they represented were some of the finest in the city. The pride carried by their teachers was palpable, and no one wanted to appear inferior before their rivals.

Parkside High School was a prestigious institution, ranking among the top five in the nation for over a century. And then there was Mirabella, consistently topping the charts. From any angle, she was the

perfect retort to the overly confident teachers.

Anthony's lips twitched in a faint smirk, but he said nothing more and picked up the paper bag containing his students' cell phones before exiting the office.

Meanwhile, Mirabella was pondering where to find Anthony to get her phone when she saw him approaching.

"Mirabella, you turned in your paper early?" Anthony asked as he neared her.

"Yeah," Mirabella nodded.

Clearing his throat, Anthony asked in a low voice, "The competition was tough this time... Did you really finish it all so quickly?" He knew it was a redundant question but still couldn't help asking.

"It was okay, not too difficult," Mirabella said with a confident lift of her eyebrows.

Not too difficult? Her bold tone carried an implicit message: The problems were not challenging at all.

Anthony's expression grew complex. Just yesterday, he was discussing with Mr. Hammond the

odds of her taking first place again, and now it seemed... he had underestimated Mirabella.

Disregarding Anthony's conflicted look, Mirabella quickly added, "Sir, I have something to take care of. May I leave early?"

Upon hearing this, Anthony, always responsible for his students' safety, thought for a moment and pulled out his phone, "I'll check with Mr. Hammond."

However, It wasn't necessary to report such a minor issue to Mr. Hammond, and since Mirabella was a talent he valued, Anthony felt it was right to inform him.

At that time, Mr. Hammond was at the Biological Research Institute. When his phone rang during a conversation, he saw it was from Anthony, nodded to the person next to him, stood up, and moved to the window to answer the call.

“...Bella turned in her paper early? Just tell her to be safe and let her go.” Mr. Hammond said calmly before hanging up.

Half a minute later, it suddenly dawned on him.

Had she turned in her paper early???

Chapter 252

“Hey, what’s the buzz?” Wade leaned back in his chair, curiosity piqued by Mr. Hammond’s mention of someone turning in their test early.

Mr. Hammond snapped out of his daze and chuckled at Wade, shaking his head. “It’s that student from our school, Mirabella. Anthony says she’s already handed in her test.”

Wade raised an eyebrow in surprise, then glanced at his watch. “This test isn’t a walk in the park. She finished in just over two hours?”

Stowing his phone away. Mr. Hammond settled back into his seat, his tone nonchalant. “Yeah, can you believe it? Is the girl a prodigy or what?”

Wade shot him a look. Wasn’t this just plain old bragging?

“How about we invite the young lady over to my department after the finals tomorrow?” Wade stroked his chin thoughtfully. He had been keeping tabs on Mirabella and was well aware of her academic standing. So the idea of her turning in her test early due to difficulty never crossed his mind.

Mr. Hammond's pride was palpable as he lifted his chin. "I'll have to ask her first. Once her final scores are out, I bet several departments from Prestige College will be vying for her."

He paused, then continued, "Besides, her grasp of physics is exceptional. Remember the problem from last year's Physics Olympiad that only one student could solve? She cracked it in one night—and with a simpler method."

Unsaid was the implication. "Your biology department shouldn't poach a physics prodigy."

Wade's face registered shock again. "She really solved that physics problem in one night?" Finding solutions to Olympiad problems online was a pipe dream.

"Of course. Why would I lie to you? I'll get the physics teacher to send you the problem on Monday," Mr. Hammond said, leisurely sipping his tea.

Wade couldn't help but retort, "Look at you, all smug."

After a brief pause, he added, "The biology department is just as prestigious. We've been friends for years; you have to convince her to come by tomorrow."

How could he not seize such a talented individual? She might just take an interest in his department.

Mr. Hammond waved him off. "We'll see, we'll see." Indeed, having a sought-after student was a delight.

Upon receiving permission, Mirabella retrieved her phone from Anthony and stepped out of Prestige College. She sent a text to Adler. [Are you free right now?]

Adler must have been anticipating her message, for his reply came swiftly. [I am. Where are you? I'll come pick you up.]

Mirabella glanced back at the Prestige College sign, pondered for a moment, and texted back, [How far are you from Prestige College?]

[Not too far. Meet me at the main entrance of Prestige College. I'll be there in about twenty minutes.]

Mirabella responded with an affirmative.

Pulling the hood of her sweatshirt over her head, Mirabella made her way to the roadside.

Twenty minutes later.

Adler pulled up in his Jeep outside the gates of Prestige College, turned off the engine, and got out. With mixed emotions of complexity and excitement, he approached the entrance.

The big shot was a senior in high school, so couldn't be more than seventeen or eighteen. All he had to do was scan for someone that age, and he'd be spot on.

## Chapter 253

The Prestige College entrance was unusually quiet, with hardly a soul in sight. Adler approached, his eyes scanning the vicinity for his expected contact, but to no avail. Frustrated, he raked his fingers through his hair.

He pulled out his cell phone, ready to make a call, when suddenly someone tapped his shoulder. Spinning around, Adler found himself staring at a strikingly beautiful young girl. He was momentarily taken aback.

"You..." Adler couldn't quite reconcile the person before him with the powerful figure he was expecting to meet.

"Adler." Mirabella's voice was calm as she accurately pronounced the name of the man before her, who looked to be in his thirties.

Adler's eyes widened, almost dropping his phone, his voice quivering. "You—you—you... are The Pill? TM

The world was too fantastical; Adler was convinced he was missing something.

Mirabella raised an eyebrow at his stunned expression. "Is it that surprising?"

Adler nodded instinctively. It wasn't just a surprise; it was a shock!

Mirabella glanced at her watch and suggested, "Shall we grab a bite to eat first?"

Adler snapped out of his daze. "Oh, sure, my car is over there..." He trailed off as Mirabella strode towards where he had parked. So, had the big shot seen him from the get-go?

Adler combed his hair back with his fingers, hurried to catch up, and gallantly opened the car door for her.

Twenty minutes later, in a private dining room of an exclusive bistro.

After ordering, they waited for the waiter to leave. Mirabella turned to Adler. "You got the medicine, right?"

Finally regaining his composure, Adler coughed and nodded, "Yeah, it's in my car, along with the few items you asked for."

Mirabella leaned back casually and, without beating around the bush, got to the point, "Could I use your lab?"

Adler was struck by her composed demeanor – it wasn't something anyone could fake.

“You’re going to do some compounding?” Adler wasn’t well-acquainted with Mirabella, but he could guess as much from the ingredients she requested.

“Yes.” Mirabella didn’t bother to hide it.

The main reason she had arranged to meet Adler was to use his lab.

“Sure, no problem.” Adler agreed readily.

“Thanks.” Mirabella expressed her gratitude politely.

Adler smiled, “Don’t mention it. Besides, you’ve helped me out a lot in the past.”

As memories of the past surfaced, Adler’s smile froze slightly. Was the big shot only fifteen or sixteen years old when they first interacted? Some questions were better left unasked. Too much thinking could be disheartening.

Mirabella took a sip of her tea nonchalantly and inquired, “How’s your research on the RO virus coming along?”

Clearly, she was the knowledgeable big shot he remembered—no doubt about it.

Adler gave a wry smile and shook his head. “A year in, and almost no progress.” He paused,

then tentatively added, “Maybe once you’re done, could you take a look at my research data?”

Mirabella shook her head, a hint of regret in her expression. “I haven’t worked with the sophisticated equipment you use. I’m afraid I might not be much help.”

Adler was astonished. “No, really?”

She hadn't worked with lab equipment? Then, where had all those previous research plans come from???

Chapter 254

The door to the private dining room swung open, and the waiter bustled in with plates of food, effectively cutting off Adler's burgeoning sense of astonishment.

As soon as the waiter left, Adler jumped right back in. “So, what about before...?”

Mirabella casually reached for her fork, speared a piece of meat, and replied nonchalantly, “Oh, all that? Just my own wild guesses, and none of it is actually tested in practice.”

Adler was floored.

Wild guesses, untested, yet they pinpointed the solution to a problem that had stumped their research institute for years... Suddenly, he felt a twinge of regret. Why exactly had he thought meeting this big shot was a good idea? It was a blow to his pride, to say the least.

Adler decided to switch gears. “You're not from Riverdale, are you?”

Mirabella gave a distracted grunt of acknowledgment, not even bothering to look up. Adler had no choice but to quell his curiosity and focus on his meal.

After a quiet dinner, Adler led Mirabella to his private residence – the address he had previously given her for the courier delivery. His personal lab was set up in the basement of his villa, decked out with a wide array of equipment.

Mirabella took a sweeping glance at the instruments and felt her resolve to learn strengthen. She turned to Adler with a sigh, “I might need more than just your lab.”

Adler blinked in surprise. "Oh?"

"I'll need to borrow you as well," Mirabella said bluntly.

Adler was stunned. A big shot's words were always dramatic.

Clearing his throat, Adler responded, "Feel free to commandeer my assistance, though my knowledge in pharmacology is quite basic. I'm not too sure about the specifics of the compounds and dosages..."

"No worries. I've got that covered. You just handle the equipment." Mirabella interrupted, placing her collection of ingredients aside. "Do you have paper and a pen?"

"On it," Adler said, moving to a desk to retrieve a stack of paper and a pencil from a drawer and handing them to Mirabella.

She pulled up a chair, sat down, and immediately began to jot down data analysis formulas and the required quantities for each substance. Her steps were meticulous, and she wrote without hesitation, as if the information flowed from her mind with absolute familiarity.

The art of ancient potion-making and modern pharmaceuticals were worlds apart. Creating a concoction with the same efficacy as the old ways was a true challenge, one that tested the depth of one's knowledge.

Adler watched Mirabella scribble formula after formula, and the more he watched, the more indescribable his expression became. As a researcher himself, he understood the precision and attention to detail in her work. If she hadn't mentioned her lack of experience with precision instruments, he wouldn't have been so taken aback. Her clear thought process seemed to surpass even the senior researchers at the institute!

With a complicated look, Adler glanced at Mirabella. She was just a teenage girl, yet her intellect was astounding. It was humbling.

Half an hour later, Mirabella finally set the pencil down and massaged her sore wrist. In this moment, she sorely missed her clan's alchemy chamber, where none of these complex calculations were necessary.

Standing up, she handed the densely written sheets to Adler. "Take a look."

Adler took the papers, and couldn't hold back. "Would you consider taking on an apprentice?"

Mirabella just gave him a look.

## Chapter 255

Adler cleared his throat and didn't say another word. He lowered his gaze and sifted through the figures on the three sheets of paper once more. Minutes later, he said, "This formula looks solid. I can whip it up for you right now."

He paused, then asked, "You really don't know how to use any of these gadgets?"

"Not a clue." Mirabella admitted. Then she added with a hint of mystery. "But who knows about the future?"

Adler rubbed his nose and set the papers aside, then walked over to a cabinet and pulled out two pairs of lab gloves. He handed one pair to Mirabella, saying, "I can walk you through using these machines while I mix up the concoction."

Mirabella slipped on the gloves and declined with a detached tone. "No need. Just focus on the mixing."

Adler took her words to mean that she was worried he'd get distracted and botch the mix, wasting precious ingredients. So, without further ado, he grabbed a medicine box and stationed himself in front of the extraction apparatus.

Whether you're brewing potions the old-fashioned way or using high-tech gear, there's one constant: precision. The formula and measurements have to be down to the milligram. A smidgen too much or too little, and you might as well toss it in the trash it's a bust. It meant Adler had to be laser-focused, especially since he rarely concocted elixirs and now had a big shot looking over his shoulder. The pressure was enough to fray anyone's nerves.

Despite the big shot claiming ignorance about the equipment, Adler couldn't shake the weight of expectation.

Potion-making isn't a quick business, and extraction and purification are especially time-consuming. By late afternoon, they'd only completed a third of the process.

When six o'clock rolled around and Adler was clearly running on fumes, Mirabella stepped in.

"You take a break. I'll handle the rest."

She'd been shadowing him all afternoon and had gotten the hang of the machinery. Taking over wouldn't be too difficult.

Adler watched Mirabella, hesitant. "Better not. I'll keep at it. These ingredients are pretty rare..."

But before he could finish, Mirabella had already taken over his post. She operated the machinery with practiced ease, filtering and precipitating with a rhythm that was only slightly slower than expected, which betrayed no signs of being a novice.

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Adler clammed up, mentally face-palming. Of course, she was a quick study – she was the big shot, after all.

She probably didn't want to hurt his pride by showing him up from the get-go. He felt like he'd

been reduced to a mere automaton.

Two hours later, Mirabella removed the final product from the apparatus, took off her mask, and her cheeks seemed almost translucent under the lab lights. She held the vial to her nose for at

sniff.

“How is it?” Adler asked eagerly.

Pouring the liquid into a prepped glass bottle with a tinge of dissatisfaction in her voice, Mirabella remarked, “It'll do, I guess.”

Though the potion wasn't as potent as those brewed by ancient methods, it was more than capable of neutralizing the poison in her Leo's system. She screwed on the lid and tucked the bottle into her jacket pocket.

Adler's face was a mix of emotions when he heard Mirabella's lukewarm “It'll do.” He'd been part of the process for merely a third of it; the rest was all the big shot who claimed to have never touched research equipment before. And she'd halved the time it usually took. Newbie? Yeah, right – nobody would buy that..

Not to mention, on her first try, with zero screw-ups, she still seemed less than thrilled.

He couldn't bear to think about it any longer – the more he did, the closer he edged toward an existential crisis.

Emerging from the basement back to the ground floor of the lab, Adler clutched the data sheet. Mirabella had composed that afternoon as if it was a rare treasure. After a moment's hesitation, he summoned the courage to ask, "Uh, would it be okay if I made a copy of this data sheet?"

He wasn't certain which specific antidote Mirabella had been working on, but judging by the ingredients she used, it was clear that it was something special. That was why the idea of keeping a copy of the data had crossed his mind. After all, this data sheet was valuable – it might prove beneficial for their ongoing research.

Mirabella glanced at the papers in his hand and casually responded, "No need for that. You just keep it. I don't have much use for it anymore."

Adler's face lit up with surprise at her words and, as if afraid Mirabella might change her mind, he quickly stashed the papers into a nearby storage locker. "Thanks a lot," he said gratefully.

He had half-expected her to refuse. Being a researcher himself, he knew that such comprehensive work couldn't be achieved without months or even years of research. No one would willingly hand over the fruits of their labor for nothing.

"It's no problem," Mirabella said, pressing her lips together in a thin smile.

It wasn't a matter of being overly generous in sharing a formula; it was more that it wouldn't be of much use to him. Just gathering the components was a challenge, let alone actually producing the remedy. Besides, for her, this was just a basic antidote formula – it was no big deal to do a good turn for someone.

Checking the time on his wristwatch, Adler realized it was almost 8 pm. He had been so engrossed in work he had forgotten about dinner. "I'm used to working solo and sometimes lose track of time. You must be famished by now. Let's go grab a bite to..."

Before he could finish, Mirabella waved her hand to cut him off. "No worries. I should be going. Thanks for today."

Although disappointed that his time with the big shot was so brief, Adler wasn't the type to overstep. Without pressing further, he picked up his car keys. "Alright then, I'll drive you. It's late, and it's not safe for a young lady to head back alone."

Mirabella didn't let Adler take her back to her hotel; instead, she gave him a different address. Adler didn't think much of it, assuming she lived there.

The destination Mirabella had Adler drop her off at was actually an old town's bustling night market. Once Adler's car vanished into the streets, Mirabella leisurely strolled into the night market.

The market was accessible only to bicycles and electric scooters. Cars were unable to enter.

The shops on both sides boasted a uniform, rustic charm that evoked a sense of nostalgia.

At this

hour, the night market was at its liveliest, with crowds milling about. Mirabella pulled a face mask from her pocket and donned it. Her eyes occasionally scanned her surroundings with a bright, fragmented

glint.

She walked deep into the market and finally settled at a low table outside a noodle shop, which was adjacent to an antique store.

The noodle shop owner, a man in his sixties with a warm smile, maintained a small but spotless establishment. With no other customers around, he approached Mirabella to take her order.

Mirabella slid the mask off her face. "I'll have a large bowl of spicy minced pork noodles, oh, and add some of that secret chili sauce of yours."

The owner paused, giving Mirabella a curious look. Only regulars craved his homemade chili sauce, but this young lady seemed to be a first-time visitor.

Faced with the owner's puzzled gaze, Mirabella simply smiled.

## Chapter 257

On the other side of town. Anthony was glued to his computer screen, awaiting the release of the exam scores. The clock struck eight, and he immediately punched in Mirabella's ID and hit enter.

His heart was racing, and his fingers were tightly gripping the mouse. As the page loaded and the scores appeared, Anthony was floored. He had expected Mirabella to do well, but another perfect score? That was beyond stimulating.

He remembered visiting Vincent earlier that day, post-exam, to inquire about the test. Vincent hadn't seemed at ease.

"Man, today's paper was brutal, especially that last physics question. I only managed to work through a bit of it, and I'm not even sure I got it right," Vincent had confessed.

Before Mirabella transferred to Parkside High School, Vincent had been the uncontested top student, consistently delivering stellar performances. If even he was uncertain, the exam must have been a beast.

Anthony felt dazed. He stood up, splashed some cold water on his face in the restroom, and came back to double-check the results. They were still the same: a perfect 200 out of 200.

Prodigies had appeared in past competitions, but repeat perfect scores were unheard of. This meant something significant: this year, their nation wouldn't be left off the leaderboard as in previous years.

Grabbing his phone, Anthony didn't care that it was late evening; he called Mr. Hammond. Mr. Hammond was about to check Mirabella's scores himself, but Anthony's call made that

unnecessary.

He was just as stunned, managing to keep his voice steady. "Have you checked Vincent's score?" he asked.

"Oh, right!" Anthony slapped his forehead and switched his phone to speaker mode. "Got so carried away I almost forgot. Let me see... here it is, 186. That's not low at all. I reckon he's probably in second place."

"That's about what I expected," Mr. Hammond said calmly.

Anthony, letting go of the mouse, reflected aloud, "In past years, our school always got outshone by the folks from the neighboring state schools. This year, we finally get our moment in the sun."

Parkside High School was among the top five nationwide, and the other four schools were no slouches either. In previous years, no matter what competition they participated in, they'd been overshadowed by those schools. But this year, if Mirabella could snag a spot in the international competition, Parkside High School would rise with the tide and climb beyond fifth place.

Glory has always belonged to the victors.

In the meantime, after the noodle shop owner went to prepare the food, Mirabella took the opportunity to browse the adjacent antique store.

Her timing was impeccable. As she returned to the noodle shop, the owner was just serving up a hearty bowl of noodles and placing it in front of her. The old man smiled and said, "Enjoy yourself. If you need anything, just tell me." Mirabella nodded politely and then focused on the noodles.

The rich bone broth coupled with the thin noodles, topped with a spicy minced pork and a sprinkling of diced scallions, made for an appetizing sight. The decorative vine patterns on the rim of the bowl added

to the enticement.

The aroma of the pork and chili wafted up, and Mirabella's eyes sparkled with delight. It was just as she remembered, and in a rare moment, she took a photo with her phone.

## Chapter 258

Mirabella uploaded the snapshot to her social feed and within moments, she was diving into her meal with the gusto of someone who truly appreciated good diner food.

The diner owner scooted a chair nearby and sat down, silently observing her with a mix of curiosity and delight. His weathered, wrinkled face couldn't help but break into a smile.

The girl was a vision of loveliness, and her every move exuded a grace that seemed oddly out of place in the humble eatery, yet somehow it didn't clash with the surroundings.

The owner felt a sense of déjà vu as he watched her, even though he was certain this was her first time at his establishment.

Mirabella, oblivious to the diner owner's gaze, paused mid-meal as a thought struck her. She reached for her phone and opened up James' Messenger to send him a message. [Up for a late-night bite?]

Just yesterday at the airport, he had suggested they check out Riverdale's night scene together, but she had declined. She was unsure how long Leo's medicine would take. Now that the antidote issue was resolved, it was the perfect time to return the gesture of hospitality James had shown her on multiple occasions.

Two minutes later, James' reply popped up. [Sure, you at the hotel? Send me your location, and I'll come over.]

James had not noticed her updated social feed.

Mirabella sent the night market's location first and then typed back. [I'm out and about. Heard lots of buzz about this night market online and thought it was quite a vibe. Wanna join?]

James, on the other end, opened the location she'd sent. Seeing it was in the old town district, he fell silent. After half a minute, he replied. [Okay, should be there in twenty.]

[Great, see you.]

James stood up and pulled up the location again, handing his phone to Wyatt, who was lounging nearby. “Head over to this spot.”

Wyatt stood, took the phone, and zoomed in on the screen. His brow furrowed slightly. “James, isn’t this the old town? What’s taking you there at this hour?”

Rubbing his temples, Curtis glanced at the phone and remarked, “Isn’t that a night market?”

Wyatt had been away from Riverdale for a few years, and wasn’t entirely familiar with all its spots. At Curtis’ words, he turned and asked, “Night market?”

“Yeah, it’s popular with the younger crowd and tourists, especially lively at night,” Curtis explained briefly. The implication was clear – it was a crowded place.

Wyatt touched his nose, puzzled as to why his boss would suddenly want to go there, but then

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something clicked, and he sprang to his feet, eager. “Ah, James, I’ll get the car now.”

It must be because of Ms. Mirabella.

Seeing Wyatt’s reaction, Curtis grabbed his arm. There was a trace of concern in his voice, “You know... that’s a night market. Crowded!”

Was their boss someone who’d frequent such places?

Wyatt glanced at his boss, who was already dressed for the outing, and waved Curtis off. "It's just a night market, no big deal."

Curtis couldn't fathom Wyatt's enthusiasm but, seeing their boss' determination, he too rose and followed. "I know that place well. I'll go."

Wyatt, hearing this, pretended not to notice the challenge to his role as the driver and hurried

off.

Chapter 259

Curtis had barely stepped out of the villa when he fished out his cell phone to call his crew, planning to arrange for a few more guys to tail them discreetly.

"No need to have anyone follow," came James' cool, detached voice, which interrupted Curtis' plans. Caught off guard, Curtis had no choice but to hang up. Whatever, they were in Riverdale. their turf, so security wasn't really an issue.

"Yo, Curtis, you can head back. I got James' back," Wyatt said with a look that screamed "you're not needed here".

Curtis' mouth twitched. He had no desire to deal with this blockhead. "You think you know

Riverdale better than me?"

"I've got GPS." Wyatt replied, waving his smartphone for emphasis.

Clearing his throat, Wyatt added, "Ms. Mirabella is just a regular high school girl, man. Your tough-guy look might scare her off."

At that, Curtis' face darkened. He had that rugged, intimidating sort of look, with a buzz cut and a long scar trailing from his ear down to the nape of his neck, which added a touch of menace to his appearance.

"So, boss is hitting the night market to meet this Ms. Mirabella?" Curtis finally caught on to the situation.

A young girl, asking a man out to a night market late at night? Sounded like someone not exactly high society. Curtis' curiosity about Mirabella faded considerably.

"Yeah, man, girls like her dig the night market scene," Wyatt replied nonchalantly.

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Curtis had a complicated expression. "Does she even know who James really is?"

Wyatt glanced at James, who was now ahead of them, and scratched his head. "Doubt it."

Curtis relaxed a bit at that and said, "Alright, you go ahead, but make damn sure the boss stays safe."

"Got it," Wyatt responded with a wave, hurrying to the garage to fetch the car.

Watching Wyatt's departing figure, Curtis shook his head, bored, and turned back to the villa.

Twenty minutes later, they pulled up at the entrance to the bustling night market.

The place was crowded, so parking was a nightmare. James looked out at the throngs of people and immediately felt a wave of discomfort hit him.

He couldn't imagine what had brought him here.

Wyatt parked the car temporarily along the curb, overwhelmed by the crowd. He turned to

James. "Maybe we should give Ms. Mirabella a call?"

James was silent for a moment, as if making a decision. His voice was deep when he finally spoke. "No need, just find somewhere to park." After saying that, he grabbed a baseball cap and a face mask, put them on, and stepped out of the car. His tall, striking figure, exuding an air of refinement, was completely out of place in the night market, with its rich, earthy aromas.

Wyatt held his face in his hands, thankful that Curtis wasn't here. If he'd seen James like this, he probably would have never let his boss out of the car.

After getting out, James called Mirabella and walked about twenty meters into the market. before meeting her.

Mirabella spotted James immediately in the crowd. Even with a cap and mask, his aura of unapproachability was unmistakable. Well, she really shouldn't have asked him to come to a place like this. It just didn't suit him.

Clearing her throat, she approached him. "Fancy a bite? The place I just tried has some killer noodles."

She paused, scanning the throngs of people around them, and then added, "It's less crowded.

further in."

At her words, James responded with a noncommittal hum, almost without thinking.

## Chapter 260

Not long after, Mirabella led James back to the same diner where she had grabbed a bite earlier. The place was still pretty much deserted.

The owner, seeing the young lady return with a companion, grinned and said. "Hey there, girly. is this your boyfriend?"

At that moment. James still had his face mask on, so the diner's owner couldn't get a clear look at him, but he could tell that the man had a good vibe. He was sitting there with the young lady. and they seemed like a good match, which was why he blurted out such a comment.

Mirabella arched an eyebrow. "Sir, you've got it wrong. We're just friends."

James slowly removed his mask, revealing a strikingly handsome face. They were seated outside the diner, where the light wasn't particularly bright, but it only added a moody charm to his looks.

The owner glanced back and forth between their faces and chuckled before asking. "Having another round of noodles?"

Mirabella turned to James. Her eyes were bright and clear. She said with a hearty laugh, "What's your flavor, James? My treat today." A bowl of noodles wasn't going to break the bank. for her.

James' lips twitched slightly. He thought of the photo he'd seen on social media in the car, and said. "The one you posted on your feed."

"Sure thing." Mirabella said, turning to the owner. "We'll have the same large bowl of noodles with minced pork, but hold the chili flakes this time."

"Coming right up!"

As the owner walked away, James turned to Mirabella with a mischievous raise of his eyebrow. “How did you know I don’t do spicy?”

Mirabella blinked playfully. “Just a guess.”

She glanced at James, who was sitting ramrod straight. His hands not even grazed the tabletop. Mirabella sighed. “You know, this place is pretty clean.”

“Uh–huh,” James humored her with a nod, sitting even straighter.

Mirabella didn’t press the point and instead asked, “No Wyatt?”

“He’s parking the car,” James replied coolly.

Mirabella touched her nose, not bothering to continue the conversation. Soon enough, the owner brought over the steaming bowl of noodles.

James looked at the heaping portion in front of him, and his brow involuntarily furrowed.

Mirabella had already grabbed a fork and a spoon, wiped them down with a napkin, and handed them to him. Leaning in close, she whispered, “Sometimes, it’s good to go with the flow. Being too fussy can spoil the experience of good food.”

Her husky voice carried a lazy allure, and as James turned to look at her, her beautiful eyes. seemed particularly enchanting, almost bewitching.

James paused for a second, then cracked a smile, accepting the fork and spoon. “This is quite a lot. How about you help me out with half?”

“The night is long, no rush. Take your time,” Mirabella said firmly, sitting up straight and declining.

James let out a soft laugh.

Twenty minutes later, after paying the bill, Mirabella and James left the diner, both instinctively putting their masks back on as they stepped out.

They didn't linger, and soon they were out of the night market, waiting at the main street for Wyatt to pick them up in his car.

"How did you find your way to this night market?" James asked Mirabella, giving her a sidelong glance.

Mirabella, busy replying to comments on her Messenger feed, didn't even look up. "Saw some good reviews about the street food here online."

She was a bit miffed at the moment. Why did a simple food post turn into something else in the eyes of her two brothers?

Their comments went like this:

Zach said, (Mirabella, don't venture out of the hotel after 6 PM.)

Leo said, [The world's a dangerous place, with too many bad guys. Bbe careful, and don't go wandering off alone.]