

The Double 281

Chapter 281

The barrage of messages and missed calls were all from the two overgrown brothers. They were currently making their way through the airport.

Mirabella replied with a quick voice message before striding confidently toward the exit, her suitcase trailing behind her. In no time, she breezed through the checkpoint and immediately spotted Zach's familiar figure. She quickened her pace, heading straight for him.

"Zach."

Without a word, Zach took over the suitcase and the large shopping bag from her grasp, his concern evident in his voice. "You must be tired, huh?"

"Not too bad." Mirabella arched an eyebrow before scanning around the area. "Where's Leo? Wasn't he supposed to come with you?"

Zach's face darkened at the mention of Leo, and he replied, irritation lacing his tone. "That .doofus is in the car waiting for you."

A twitch of amusement played on Mirabella's lips she had a hunch Leo had managed to get on Zach's nerves again.

"I told him to wait at home, but he insisted on coming. Honestly, with his national boyfriend looks, what good could possibly come from him showing up here?"

Zach practically growled the words, his mind replaying the near-crushing encounter with Leo's fans, a surge of irritation tempting him to throw a punch or two.

National boyfriend looks... Mirabella covertly glanced at her brother Zach, finding the description annoyingly accurate.

Clearing her throat, Mirabella tried to soothe the tension. "Ease up, Zach. Leo can't help it if he's got a fanbase. It's understandable they'd recognize him."

That, however, didn't do much to lift Zach's spirits. Ever since Leo moved back home, Zach felt like he was becoming increasingly invisible.

A few minutes later, they reached the parking lot. As they approached the car, Zach spotted Leo already opening the car door, seemingly ready to hop out. His glare was sharp and warning. "Have your fans left, huh?"

Hearing this, Leo instantly withdrew his foot, and as he leaned forward to speak, a suitcase was shoved in, forcing him to scoot over.

"The trunk's packed, Leo. Squeeze in a little, will ya?" Zach dumped the suitcase and shopping bag onto the back seat with an emotionless face before slamming the car door shut.

Leo was left in a state of bewilderment.

"Mira, you take the front seat." Zach spoke as he gallantly opened the passenger door for

Mirabella.

Leo was still a picture of confusion.

Mirabella quietly took her seat in the passenger side, but not before catching a glimpse of Leo's baffled expression in the rearview mirror, shaking her head in resignation. Poor Leo was always the one

getting picked on.

By the time they got home, it was already half–past ten. Their folks had been waiting in the living room, each holding a confetti popper. As soon as Mirabella stepped through the door, they simultaneously triggered the poppers. Instantly, ribbons and a shower of colorful confetti rained down on her head.

“Congratulations to our scholarly superstar for clinching first place in the finals!”

“Let’s hear it for the champ.”

The couple beamed with pride, taking turns to embrace their daughter.

Caught off–guard by her parents’ exuberant welcome, Mirabella stood rooted to the spot, two strands of confetti dangling before her eyes. She glanced sideways at the gleeful grins plastered on their faces – if they were happy, then so be it. Her lips curled up, almost without her consent.

Once in the living room, Mirabella began distributing the gifts she had bought at the airport, one for each family member.

“Why does Zach get a fancy pen, and I get this?” Leo’s voice, filled with mock indignation, drifted from across the room.

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Clutching the panda plushie that seemed to inflate upon liberation from its vacuum seal, Leo’s eyes simmered with a brooding gaze at Mirabella.

Mirabella cleared her throat with a hint of awkwardness. “The panda is a treasure, you know, sort of mascot. And all your fans call you their lucky charm, Leo. I think it’s fitting.”

“It’s not the same!”

Leo felt his image as the cool older sibling was shattered entirely. He even suspected that his sister had started treating him like a younger brother. No, scratch that, not even a brother, considering the fluffy toy Mirabella gifted him was the kind only little girls adored.

Zach, observing Leo's look of utter despair, couldn't help but feel a sense of completion. Indeed, his sister's knack for knocking people down a peg seemed even more brutal than his own.

As Mirabella parted her lips to speak, Shawn interjected. "If you don't want it, can I have it? I've been looking for a cute little thing to put on my bedside table," said Shawn, shooting a glance at his youngest son.

Upon hearing this, Leo, albeit begrudgingly and under intimidating paternal pressure, mumbled a response. "Who said I didn't want it?"

Leo was at a loss for words. His status in this household seemed to be plummeting by the second.

Delilah, setting her perfume to the side, chimed in, "By the way, darling, did you get any trophies?"

Mirabella nodded, "Yes." With that, she made her way to her suitcase, flipped it open, and pulled out a trophy, a certificate of achievement, and a letter of unconditional acceptance from Prestige College.

The trophy and the certificate were symbols of honor, but it was that letter from Prestige College that truly carried weight.

As Delilah looked at the early acceptance letter from Prestige College, her mind inexplic

wandered back to the time when her daughter first returned home holding her acceptance letter from Parkside High School. She remembered the doubt she had felt back then.

Now, without even having sat her final exams, her daughter had secured a spot at Prestige College. Mulling over this, Delilah's cheeks burned with a mix of pride and embarrassment. Her daughter seemed to be constantly redefining her expectations.

“I’ve got to snap a photo and show off our family genius on social media!” Shawn whipped out his smartphone, arranged the trophy, the certificate, and the acceptance letter, and snapped photos from various angles. He crafted a collage and posted it to his social media.

Mirabella, with a weary smile, let him be. She yawned, her face etched with fatigue. “Mom, Dad, Zach, Leo, I’m heading to bed. I’ve got school early in the morning.”

“Alright, honey.”

As soon as Shawn posted the collage online, his social network was flooded with likes and adoring comments

Summer, meanwhile, was stewing as she scrolled through her Messenger and spotted the images of the trophy, the certificate, and the acceptance letter to Prestige College. She clenched her phone so

tightly that it nearly snapped.

Again, Mirabella. Always Mirabella. Her name had practically taken over Summer’s phone for the day. Social media and class group chats were all about Mirabella’s national competition victory as if that first place had elevated her to some kind of deity in everyone’s eyes.

Watching everyone fawn over her, Summer felt a wave of nausea. These people seemed to have completely forgotten how they used to badmouth Mirabella. The sycophancy was nauseating.

Tossing her phone aside, Summer lay in bed, restless and agitated. She couldn’t fathom how someone so unremarkable in a previous life could suddenly transform into an utterly different

person.

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Mirabella was a classic underachiever, the kind of student who seemed destined to flunk out. yet now she'd pulled a complete 180 and was topping the class. She was once the soft-spoken kid in school, a magnet for bullies, but now she commanded respect and admiration from everyone... Her life's trajectory was a far cry from the path she had tread in his previous life.

Could it be that Mirabella had been reborn, too?

This thought had crossed Summer's mind more than once, but every time she faced Mirabella's cool, detached demeanor, she felt like Mirabella was clueless about everything. This made Summer dismiss the idea.

Yet, everything about Mirabella had changed since she returned to the Davis family from the countryside. In her past life, she would have never set foot in Parkside High School, let alone compete in the BrainSpark Nationals or snag a scholarship spot at Prestige College. Now, not only was she attending Parkside High School, but she was excelling in an eerie, abnormal way that made it hard not to suspect something was up.

If Summer could be reborn, then it was possible for Mirabella as well.

Summer ran her hands through her hair, feeling a surge of resentment. It seemed so unfair Mirabella was given a second chance at life. Why did she have to be reborn after returning to the Gilbert family?

The Gilberts were no match for the Davises. If only Summer hadn't returned to the Gilbert family and Mirabella had remained their daughter, things might have been better.

Summer closed her eyes, forcing herself not to dwell on what couldn't be changed. With the memories of her past life, she was determined to carve her own path out of adversity. As for Mirabella, Summer

could only hope that her suspicions were unfounded.

Tonight was bound to be sleepless.

Emmitt was restless, too, standing on his balcony. His gaze was drifting into the darkness of the neighborhood, as bleak as the depths of his own thoughts.

He'd seen the post his father shared on social media. That photo seemed to mock his past naivety, laughing at the fact that he had so foolishly misjudged his own sister.

Staring at the post, he was at a loss for what to think or do next. No matter what actions he took now, he couldn't undo the hurt his doubts and misunderstandings had caused.

Especially lately, he couldn't shake the image of Mirabella's cold eyes, silently accusing or perhaps mocking him, making him lack the courage to face the Davis family again – because he was the one who had erred.

His presence would only disturb the tranquil atmosphere at home.

Rubbing his tired eyes, Emmitt reached into his pocket and pulled out an empty cigarette pack. Noticing the pile of butts at his feet, he tossed the pack onto the balcony with a

self-deprecating chuckle before finally heading back inside.

The next morning, Mirabella got up and went through her morning routine before heading downstairs.

In the living room, her eyes fell on a trophy in the glass cabinet and the certificates jarringly adorning the wall, disrupting the home's aesthetic.

Her father was engrossed in the morning paper and noticed her gaze on the trophy. Recalling the envious comments praising his parenting skills on social media from the night before, pride beamed across his face. Suddenly remembering something, he said, "Mira, your mother and I discussed it last night and decided to throw a celebration party for you. You should invite your classmates and friends."

He was eager to showcase his daughter's achievements to the world.

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Mirabella sidled over to the sideboard and poured herself a glass of water. Taking a sip, she finally drawled a rejection. "Let's not bother with it, shall we?"

Throwing a party equaled spending money. Inviting guests equaled spending money.

Shawn, who had already made a mental guest list and even picked out the venue, was taken aback when his daughter declined. He looked up at her, perplexed. "Ah, why not?"

Leaning casually against the wall, Mirabella said, "It was just a minor contest, not worth splurging on." In other words, spending money to celebrate a competition without prize money was just a loss.

Shawn opened his mouth to explain, "Darling, our family isn't exactly..." short on cash.

Mirabella raised her hand mid-air, cutting him off seriously. "Dad, we should keep a low profile."

The corners of Shawn's mouth twitched in response. Once upon a time, it was Shawn who preached understatement, but now these words echoed from his daughter's lips. It was oddly disheartening.

Mirabella had already turned and made her way to the dining room, leaving Shawn alone on the couch, his emotions tangled like a knotted necklace. It felt like having a treasure you wanted to show off, yet you had to keep it hidden away—a real downer.

When breakfast time came around, Zach and Leo descended the stairs one after the other. Leo headed over, greeted everyone, and then naturally took his usual spot next to his sister.

Zach, witnessing this, grimaced slightly. Talk about brotherly love! He also sat down for breakfast.

Mirabella took a sip of milk and then glanced at Leo. She noticed his complexion was fair, and the toxins in his body hadn't spread. It seemed he had heeded her advice and taken his medicine.

“Why are you staring, Mira?” Leo blinked, his curly hair and groggy expression making him look adorably clueless.

Suppressing the urge to ruffle his hair, Mirabella lowered her head to nibble on a bagel, “It’s nothing.”

“Oh,” Leo sounded a bit disappointed, having hoped his sister would compliment his good looks for the day.

After Mirabella polished off the last bite of her bagel and wiped her mouth clean with a napkin, she pulled out a small glass vial, no bigger than a shot of cough syrup, from her jacket pocket and placed it by Leo’s hand.

Leo paused before picking up the bottle. “What’s this?”

Zach, sitting across from them, looked on curiously.

Mirabella raised an eyebrow. “I’ve noticed you’ve been quite heated up lately, so I got you this. cooling detox remedy.”

Leo eyed the label-less vial, which did not quite resemble the detox concoctions found in stores.

“Mirabella, I’m feeling hot too. Do I get one?” chimed in Zach, feeling a tad left out.

With a twitch of her lips and a half-smile, Mirabella shot him a glance. “I could give you an acupuncture session.”

Zach hastily shook his head. “I’ll pass.” Mirabella’s smile in these situations was always somewhat terrifying.

Leo had already unscrewed the cap and sniffed the vial. There was a faint scent of herbs, nothing overbearing.

Leaning back in her chair, Mirabella rested an arm on the table edge, her posture slack but her presence somehow imposing. Leo glanced at her, recalling the last time he neglected to take her prescribed remedy and the stern look she gave him. Cautiously, he asked, "Do I just drink it like this?"

"Yeah," Mirabella answered softly, her gleaming eyes lazy yet piercing.

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Leo withdrew his gaze, took a deep breath, tilted his head back, and downed the contents of the glass bottle. He braced himself for a bitter, nasty taste, but surprisingly, the remedy was

virtually flavorless. After he finished, he grabbed a nearby glass of water, took a few sips, and set it down.

Mirabella watched him until he was done, then visibly relaxed. She glanced at her watch, stood up, and said sweetly. "I'm off to school now." Her demeanor was a stark contrast to the solemn expression she had while watching Leo take his medicine.

Shortly after, the sound of the door closing echoed. Leo's gaze followed her departure, and they couldn't help but sigh, "Zach, do you ever notice how kinda intimidating our sister gets when she's serious?"

Zach glanced up, unimpressed, "Hadn't noticed." Even if he had, that wasn't something he was about to admit. What, and risk his pride?

Just then, Leo straightened his back and rubbed the spot where he had been injured. The area was oddly warm, causing a slight shift in his expression.

Zach, catching the change in Leo's demeanor, straightened up and asked, "What's up?"

Leo tilted his head, pressing on his spine, no longer feeling the usual stabbing pain when applying pressure. “Weird, after taking that stuff Mirabella gave me, my injury feels kind of

warm.”

Considering Leo’s words, Zach recalled the remedy Mirabella had given him in the past. After taking it, his chronic ailments hadn’t bothered him since, and even his spirits had lifted significantly. With that thought, Zach said earnestly. “You should get checked at the hospital again.” Pausing, he added, “Mirabella wouldn’t give you medicine for no reason.”

Leo’s gaze dropped, his fingers curling slightly. Since returning from Nick’s, he had been trying not to dwell on his condition. He might have appeared nonchalant, but only he knew the thoughts that haunted him each night in bed, feeling no different from being crippled.

A few days ago, Collins had suggested that Leo check out some alternative medicine. However, Leo refused, even though Collins told him Mirabella’s medicine was precious. He just instinctively resisted the idea of more treatments.

Disappointment had become too familiar, and hope was something Leo rarely allowed himself to feel. But now, with his body’s genuine response, the acceptance of his grim reality wavered.

Maybe, just maybe, it was worth another shot.

Pushing aside his thoughts, Leo nodded at Zach. “Yeah, I’ll go today.”

Relieved that Leo wasn’t being as stubborn as usual, Zach suggested, “How about I come with you?”

“No need, Zach. I’ll have Collins join me. He knows a well-respected alternative healer,” Leo

10:45

replied.

“Alright then, but call me if anything comes up,” Zach said, not insisting further.

“Will do.” Leo acknowledged, then pocketed the glass bottle that sat on the table.

When Collins received a call from Leo, asking to schedule a medical appointment, he was taken aback. It wasn't like Leo to seek help proactively. So, Collins quickly rang up Nikolai, the healer they had met at the hospital, and set up a time to meet.

In the afternoon, Collins and Leo arrived at Nikolai's alternative medicine clinic, hopeful for

what was to come.

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Nikolai hadn't arrived yet, but he'd already given the heads up to the folks at the holistic healing center, so Collins and Leo found themselves ushered into the lounge to wait

Collins fidgeted in his chair, casting anxious glances toward the door every few seconds. Ever since his last hospital visit, he'd done his homework on this Nikolai character. It turned out that the guy was even more of a big deal than his friends had let on.

A scion of a holistic healing dynasty that stretched back a century, Nikolai was renowned for his almost supernatural diagnostic skills. There were a few ailments he couldn't unravel. But a master of his standing rarely made house calls anymore, and snagging an appointment with him was like finding a four-leaf clover.

When Collins had reached out to Nikolai earlier, he wasn't sure what to expect. However, the healer had agreed to see them without any fuss.

Collins turned to Leo, reiterating his earlier advice, “Leo, remember to mind your manners, “okay? It's a real stroke of luck to have a holistic healing guru like him take a look at you.”

Leo's face was partially obscured by a mask, and he mumbled an indistinct acknowledgment.

At three on the dot, Nikolai finally made his entrance. An apprentice beckoned Collins and Leo into Nikolai's private consultation room.

As the door closed behind them, Collins nodded respectfully at Nikolai before gesturing toward Leo. "Nikolai, this here's my buddy."

He hesitated before adding, "My friend, uh, he can't really take off his mask..."

Nikolai waved a dismissive hand. "No worries, let's have a seat first."

Once Leo was seated at the examination table, Collins set down the stack of papers he'd been carrying. "These are all my buddy's medical records from overseas."

Nikolai slipped on his glasses and began perusing the documents. After a few minutes, he set them aside. Without any preamble, he motioned for Leo to extend his hand. After feeling Leo's pulse, Nikolai withdrew his hand, a slight frown on his face. "Your pulse is peculiar. You've been poisoned recently, haven't you?"

Collins paused, then said, "My friend hurt his bones a few months back. The docs said it was nothing serious, but then they found severe spinal nerve damage. As for poison... well, they didn't catch that."

Nikolai stroked his graying beard, pondering briefly. "Like I told you last time, some poisons don't show up in the early blood tests."

Scratching his head, Collins asked, "So, you believe that poisoning caused his condition? If we treat the poison, he'll make a full recovery?"

Nikolai peered at Collins skeptically. "The poison has already been treated."

“Already treated? I’m not following.” Collins said, baffled.

“If I’m not mistaken, the poison was neutralized quite recently, right?” Nikolai’s gaze settled on Leo. His tone was questioning, but his words were confident.

Leo blinked, his mind racing back to the concoction Mirabella had insisted he drink that morning.

Collins, catching on, ventured, “Could it be the medicine he was prescribed last time? He’s been taking it regularly.”

He remembered Nikolai mentioning that the medicine was meant to detoxify and repair damaged nerves.

Nikolai’s expression softened as he recalled Collins’ earlier ignorance. With a deep breath, he avoided looking at Collins, his voice carrying a hint of gravity. “If he’s been taking the medication consistently, then yes, that would explain it.”

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Nikolai paused mid-thought, recalling Leo’s pulse from earlier. “But,” he ventured, “you must have taken something else, haven’t you?”

The question was aimed at Leo, who fell silent for a couple of seconds before reaching into his pocket. He pulled out a glass bottle and placed it on the table. “Yeah, could you help me out here? I need to know if what was in this was for.”

The bottle was empty, but traces of the substance still clung to the glass. Nikolai took the bottle, unscrewed the cap, and took a whiff. His eyes widened almost immediately, and he turned to Leo with an excited tone. “Where in the world did you get this?”

Leo had a hunch about what was coming next. After a brief silence, he replied. "A friend gave it to me."

"Is your friend in the medical field?" Nikolai pressed on.

"No," Leo said, his voice tinged with uncertainty. The medicine had come from his sister, but if she wasn't medically inclined, how could she have known he'd been poisoned and given him the antidote? Leo's mind buzzed with questions, but in Nikolai's presence, he forced them down.

Nikolai set the bottle aside. "Alright then," he said, dropping the subject. He was disappointed but knew that whoever had concocted this remedy was no amateur in medicine—perhaps far beyond his own expertise.

Leo's hands were clenched tight. He fixed his gaze on Nikolai, full of hope. "I want to ask you something else. If the poison in my body is gone as you said, is my spinal problem completely fixed?"

Collins chimed in with urgency. "Right, because he's an actor, you know. He's got to perform and dance...all that physical stuff. Is he all okay now?"

Nikolai took a sip of his herbal tea, and didn't answer right away. "Seems like you don't know much about your miracle-worker friend." The implication was clear: such a trivial concern should not even need to be voiced.

Leo got the hint. Standing up, he nodded respectfully at Nikolai. "Thanks for your time today."

Nikolai waved a hand dismissively. "Don't thank me. I didn't really help you with anything."

After a few more questions, Collins and Leo thanked Nikolai several times before leaving the holistic health clinic.

Once in the car, Collins started the engine and turned to Leo. "So, that antidote—where'd you get it?"

Leo still held the glass bottle, his gaze lowered. "It was from my sister."

“But wasn’t Zach the only one who knew about your condition? How did your sister...?” Collins

was puzzled.

Leo looked at his manager with a complex expression. “Don’t ask. I don’t know either.”

He had taken the medicine because of Mirabella’s forceful insistence. How could he admit to being pressured by her without feeling embarrassed?

Collins shot Leo a disdainful look. “You don’t even understand your sister and call yourself a brother?”

Leo was lost for words.

“Anyway, you should be grateful you’ve got a sister,” Collins remarked thoughtfully.

At that, Leo couldn’t help but crack a smile. Yeah, his sister was like a lucky charm. Since she’d come back, everything seemed to have changed for the better.

Right then, Leo’s phone buzzed. As he pulled it out and saw who was calling, his eyebrows knitted together immediately.

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Collins glanced at Leo with a hint of curiosity as his phone continued to buzz insistently on the table. “Who’s trying to reach you?”

Leo tapped the end call button with a noticeably frosty tone. “Just a scammer.”

“Ah, I get those all the time.” Collins remarked offhandedly. “Block and forget, right?”

“Yeah.” Leo’s gaze lingered on the call log displaying the name Summer. His finger hovered over the screen for a few tense seconds before he reluctantly slid the contact into the block list.

Switching off his phone. Leo shifted the conversation. “So, when’s Walker’s reality show taping?”

“Not sure, the producers haven’t reached out yet. I’m expecting it to be around the end of the month,” Collins answered slowly.

After a brief pause, an ironic snort escaped Collins. “Lucky for you, you’re back in good shape. Vicky’s been hounding me, trying to snag that spot on Country Comfort for Jay.”

Vicky. Jay’s agent, was the same guy who had previously pressured Leo to give up his spot on Neon Paradox.

“Even if I hadn’t recovered, I wouldn’t have given it up.” Leo said coolly, reclining in his seat, his eyes sharp. Besides, this show was special – Leo was going to be on it with his sister.

“Don’t sweat it. Even if we handed the spot over to him, Walker probably wouldn’t bite,” Collins quirked a corner of his mouth.

Leo hummed in response, then turned to look out the car window. They were heading towards the company, which made him shoot Collins a glance. “Hey, Collins, I’m still on vacation here.”

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“You’re fit as a fiddle now. What vacation? Your fans are waiting for your new album. Have been writing songs at home? Practicing the piano? And when was the last time you updated your Twitter, over a month ago?” Collins rattled off a list of questions without pause.

Leo responded, unruffled by his manager’s inquisition, “After all these years you’ve had me on the grind, I think I’m entitled to at least another month off, considering regular vacation time.” Collins looked at

Leo as if he had spoken in tongues. "Since when did you start talking like that? Have I ever stopped you from taking time off?"

"Anyway, I'll keep resting until the variety show begins shooting," Leo, already accustomed to his lazy days, decided to double down. "Now, take me to Parkside High School. My sister's getting out soon."

Collins was shocked. You'd think Mirabella was barely out of toddler years with the way Leo was acting.

Summer mustered all her courage to call Leo during the break, only to be met with a swift disconnection. She had initially thought he might be busy, but after the final bell rang and she tried again, the call dropped straight to an out-of-service message. It didn't take a genius to deduce she had been blocked.

Pale and disheartened, Summer lost the proud luster that usually graced her features. The night before, a photo on Shawn's social media had kept her tossing and turning. Today, a call from her agent urging her to secure a spot on the variety show with Leo, had forced her to reach out. Now... she was blocked.

If it weren't for Emmitt, who had done some recon on Leo's current stance for her, she really wouldn't have wanted to approach Leo personally.

Taking a deep breath, Summer grabbed her purse from the desk and walked slowly out of the classroom. She hadn't gotten far when her phone vibrated in her pocket. Summer stopped in her tracks and quickly pulled it out.

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Summer's eyes flashed with unmistakable disappointment as she saw the caller ID light up on her phone screen. She had hoped it would be Leo,

Hesitating for a brief moment, Summer still picked up the call with a gentle voice as she walked towards the school exit, "Craig."

"Did your brother agree to take you yet?" Craig cut straight to the chase,

Summer's grip on the phone tightened. "He might be busy. I haven't gotten through to him yet. Craig frowned upon hearing this and then pressed on. "You've got to hustle, you know. I've done some digging, and I heard your brother has already signed the contract."

Summer was well aware that Leo would definitely be participating in the shows her current issue was not being able to reach him. What could she do?

"Yeah, you know, my brother's a busy guy. Sometimes it takes ages for him to reply to me." Summer's gaze dropped slightly, her tone steady and calm.

But as soon as she said this, a peculiar expression crossed Craig's face on the other end of the line. After a brief silence, he asked, "How come I heard your brother got injured and is on a break right now?"

"That can't be right?" Summer replied almost reflexively. She remembered from her past life that Leo had been injured – a big fuss had been made about it, and he had eventually given up singing because of it. As for the exact timeline of the injury, she couldn't quite recall.

In her previous life, she had floated through her days, unaware of the specific affairs of the Davis family. Later, when she discovered her biological family was one of the city's prominent clans, the

sudden elevation to a life of luxury had fed her vanity, leading her to abandon the Davis family and return to the Gilberts.

She looked down on the Davis family and didn't keep tabs on them after reuniting with the Gilberts, only to find out too late that the Davis family was exceedingly wealthy.

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"Anyway, it's just hearsay. You're his sister, so if you say there's nothing there, then I'll take

word for it." The agent's voice on the phone once again brought Summer out of her reverie. Unaware of the intricacies between the Gilbert and Davis families, Craig only knew of Summer's affluent background

and her superstar brother. Thus, he rarely doubted what Summer said, though it occasionally struck him as odd that her superstar brother never seemed to take her under his wing.

“Alright, I’ll try contacting him again,” Summer tried to sound as normal as possible.

“Okay, let’s leave it at that for now. We’ll talk later.” With that, the call ended.

Summer held her phone, tilting her head back. No matter what, she had to try again. Even if there had been past tensions, surely a decade of living together meant something.

With this thought, her mood lifted slightly. She slipped her phone into her purse and continued walking out of the school gates.

In the car.

Collins’ gaze remained fixed on the entrance of Parkside High School. “When is Mirabella getting out?”

A wave of students had already emerged, but there was no sign of Mirabella.

Leo, who was scrolling through Twitter in the backseat, glanced at the time, “Should be any minute now.” After saying this, he put on a face mask, preparing to get out of the car.

Seeing this, Collins, from the driver’s seat, called out to him, “Hold on, what are you doing getting out? With the way you’re dressed today, you’re bound to be recognized.”

He paused, “Did you forget the near chaos when you went to pick up your sister from the airport last night?” Collins said with a darkened expression.

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In the dead of the night, Collins was already tucked in when his phone erupted with a call from a colleague in the marketing department at the company. Apparently, Leo had made the trending list again.

And the rumor mill suggested Leo had picked up a girlfriend? Please!

Collins shook his head in disbelief and said, "Cut it out, will you? Just stay put in the car." With that, Collins stepped out of the vehicle. He stood by the car, hands buried in his pockets, waiting.

Summer had just exited the school gates and was scanning the area for the Gilbert family's car. It didn't take her long to spot Collins by the roadside. At first, she only found him vaguely familiar, but upon closer inspection, her eyes widened in recognition. He was Leo's manager, Mr. Collins, whom she had met a couple of times before.

It was obvious he was waiting for someone. For her, maybe? With a flutter of excitement. Summer smoothed down her hair and sauntered over to Collins with a composed pace. As she approached, she greeted him with a smile, "Hello, you're Leo's manager, Mr. Collins, right?"

Collins had noticed Summer moving towards him from a distance, but it took a moment before he remembered who she was. Now, recognizing her, he straightened up and nodded politely.

"Hello."

Summer glanced at the car behind him, half-expecting to see Leo inside, but quickly returned her focus to Collins and asked, "Mr. Collins, is Leo...?"

She had barely begun her inquiry when Collins gestured towards the car, "Leo is right in there. Are you looking for him?"

At his words, Summer's expression flickered momentarily. The implication of 'Are you looking for him?' suggested that Collins wasn't there for her. And if he wasn't there for her, then he must've been there for... Mirabella.

Summer's thoughts spun as she remembered her number had been blocked. She struggled to maintain her composure. Quickly nodding, she didn't wait for Collins to say more and tapped on the car window.

Inside, Leo looked up to see Summer, his expression cold. He pressed the button to lower the window halfway, revealing just his eyes and forehead, before letting go. "What do you want?" His voice was as icy as his demeanor.

Summer's fingers clenched tightly at her sides, her nails digging into her skin without feeling the pain. She pursed her lips, her already pale and drawn face managing a smile that came across as more pitiful than pleasant.

"Leo, I tried calling you this afternoon but couldn't get through. Were you busy?" she asked softly.

Collins was trying not to eavesdrop and couldn't help but cast a skeptical look at Leo in the car. If he remembered correctly, Leo's phone had only rung once that afternoon, and Collins had even asked who was calling. Leo had dismissed it as a scam call.

"Yes. I've been busy," Leo replied, clearly unswayed by Summer's forlorn appearance. He had grown tired of her act of playing the victim at the drop of a hat. He wasn't in the mood to indulge her.

Summer's face grew even paler, stung by his blatant disregard for any sentiment. "Leo, are you still upset about the foolish thing I did before?" Summer swallowed her pride, pleading. "I'm sorry. I was

young and didn't think through the consequences."

Leo's lips twisted in irritation. "We're not related by blood. And as for the past." He gave a disdainful snort. "It's meaningless."