

## The Double 341

### Chapter 341

Stepping out of his villa, Nick made his way to the outdoor storage locker and punched in his cell phone number. Instantly, the door swung open. Sure enough, there was a package waiting

for him.

He reached in, retrieved the parcel, and after closing the locker, he made his way back inside the villa.

Fishing out a pocketknife from a drawer, he sliced through the packaging with ease, revealing a wooden box nestled within. The box was filled to the brim with incense sticks. As soon as he opened it, a wave of sandalwood fragrance hit him, laced with the subtle scent of herbs. The aroma was rich but not overpowering, and at the first whiff, Nick felt a wave of comfort wash over him from his nose to his brain.

This incense was definitely different from any he had used before.

Nick snapped a photo with his phone and sent it to Mirabella. [Got it. Thanks, Mirabella.]

[Remember to use it tonight. It's for a good sleep,] came her immediate reply.

Nick texted back a simple "Okay" and put the phone down. He slowly pulled out an incense stick, gave it another sniff – yes, quite unique – and then retrieved an incense holder from a nearby cupboard.

In no time, he was upstairs with the incense stick and holder, making his way to his bedroom. Lighting the incense, he placed it in the holder and soon, a gentle stream of smoke rose, filling the air with a blend of sandalwood and herbal fragrances.

Nick took a deep breath, lay down on his bed, and thought, "Might not work, but it's worth a shot." After all, this was something Mirabella had sent all the way over.

Before long, Nick, who had not held out much hope for a peaceful slumber, felt his eyelids grow heavy. He drifted off to sleep amid the fragrant haze, and his mind was free from the usual dark entanglements.

When Nick awoke, it was already nightfall the next day. He sat up in the darkness, rubbed his head, and flicked on the bedside lamp. His gaze wandered around the room before settling on the spent incense holder on the side table. His focus finally sharpened.

Had he actually fallen asleep?

Nick couldn't quite believe it as he grabbed his phone from under the pillow and saw the time. He was stunned. Had he really slept for a whole day and night?

Throwing back the covers, he walked to the floor-to-ceiling windows and pulled back the curtains, staring out at the darkened sky for a long while before snapping back to reality.

No nightmares, no sudden awakenings, just a solid, restful sleep, the kind he hadn't experienced in years. It must have been his sister's incense.

11:32

Returning to his room, Nick picked up the box and examined the remaining sticks. Quickly, he typed out a message to Mirabella. [Thanks for the incense, Mira.]

Mirabella was still in class when she eventually saw Nick's message. Clearly, he had tried the incense. After pondering for a moment, she typed back: [Healing the mind takes more than just medicine, Nick. You're a medical student yourself. My incense won't help forever.]

It took a while before she got a reply. LIN: [Yeah, I know.]

LIN:

(Is there a special medicinal component in your incense? Are you into pharmacology?)

Mirabella leaned back in her chair, modestly replying: (Just a bit. I've looked into some alternative medicine literature.)

LIN: (Thinking of studying medicine in the future?)

Mirabella raised an eyebrow. Studying medicine was out of the question for her. As the bell for the end of class rang, she replied with a simple "Nope," and put away her phone.

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When the final bell rang at Parkside High School, it was Shawn behind the wheel of a shiny new car, waiting outside the school. The sleek vehicle was hard to miss, and it wasn't long before it caught the envious glances of passing students.

Inside the car, Shawn grew restless. Boredom got the better of him, so he stepped out to pace the sidewalk. His gaze frequently darted toward the school's main entrance.

Mirabella had been held up by a last-minute visit to her homeroom teacher's office, so she was a little behind schedule.

Meanwhile, Summer, with practice on her schedule, had been one of the first to leave the building. Her personal car was nowhere in sight, so she slipped on her sunglasses and sauntered toward the curb. She had barely taken a few steps when she caught sight of Shawn not too far away. Her stride faltered momentarily.

Ever since Mirabella came back, Summer hadn't sought out her former foster parents. Their coldness during the airport reunion, when she had brought Mirabella home, left a sour taste in her mouth.

She had half-expected the occasional phone call from her foster parents, but silence reigned instead. To them, it seemed she had never existed.

Inhaling deeply, Summer tried to quell the growing irritation within. Readjusting her sunglasses as if nothing was amiss, she pretended not to notice Shawn and continued walking.

Despite everything, a part of her still hoped her foster father would see her and approach. But that hope lingered and faded, until her assistant's voice broke through her reverie.

"Summer, ready to go?" The assistant had stepped out of the car to open the door for her.

Summer's grip on her designer handbag tightened, a clear sign of her agitation. She glanced at her assistant and then back at Shawn, who seemed to be pacing obliviously. The spark of anger within her was hard to ignore.

"Just a minute. I'm waiting for someone," she told her assistant. Her tone was edged with impatience – a contrast to the gentle image she usually projected. Her assistant gave her a surprised look. Clearly, appearances could be deceiving.

As the assistant waited patiently to one side, Summer stood her ground. Finally, she saw Mirabella emerge, even catching her eye.

Summer sneered. Even this country bumpkin had noticed her. She refused to believe Shawn hadn't seen her. The coldness of her foster parents seemed to surpass that of her own power-hungry biological parents.

Mirabella had by now reached Shawn's side and called out to him. "You're a bit late today." Shawn commented casually as he opened the passenger door for his daughter.

"Just a few minutes teacher wanted a word," Mirabella replied lightly before getting into the

car.

Shawn walked around to the driver's side, opened the door, and settled into his seat. As he started the engine and looked up, his eyes finally landed on Summer and her car, ie palMAA for a moment, taken

aback, but quickly averted his gaze, started the car, and drove away:

Summer watched Shawn's car disappear into the distance. The sight of the vehicle's emblem eroded her composure. The facade cracked, and the rawness of rejection she felt was

Impossible to ignore any longer.

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A Rolls-Royce. They actually switched to a Rolls-Royce.

Summer's thoughts drifted to her upbringing within the Davis household. She lived there for over a decade. Her foster father had always stuck to that old Santana, no matter where he went, the same beaten-up car. Despite the family's wealth, he paraded around with a frugality that bordered on miserly.

Now, he changed. The moment his biological daughter returned, he couldn't wait to swap it out for a Rolls-Royce. This was really a double standard.

Feeling an unprecedented sense of injustice, Summer simmered with resentment. Before the mix-up was discovered, she never got to bask in the luxurious lifestyle deserved by a tycoon's daughter. Why should everything change with the return of the blood-related child? Was she not their daughter before?

Biting her lip hard, Summer tried to contain the surge of unfairness, but the image of her father driving that luxury car played on a loop in her mind. She grew more pitiful with each pass, until tears cascaded down uncontrollably.

Her assistant, noticing Summer's sudden outburst, panicked and hastily fumbled for a tissue from her bag. "Summer, what's wrong? Why are you crying?" she asked.

But as she reached out, Summer swatted her hand away fiercely. "Back off! Just leave me alone, all of you."

The assistant, taken aback by Summer's sudden flare-up, stood frozen in shock. Watching Summer crouch and sob, she wanted to offer comfort but hesitated, recalling the harsh rejection.

She didn't understand the cause of Summer's emotional breakdown, but how different was this from the two-faced celebrities they often encountered in the industry?

The assistant only lowered her gaze, she had seen this act before.

Minutes later, Summer stood up, donned her sunglasses to hide her eyes, took a deep breath, and murmured an apology to her assistant, "Sorry for that... I lost my composure."

With a weak smile, the assistant simply shook her head. "It's okay. Let's get in the car. There are too many onlookers, and it's not good for your image."

Without another word, Summer wiped her cheeks and slid into the car. The assistant followed suit, glancing at Summer before suggesting, "Why don't you just go home and rest today?"

Summer leaned back in her seat, and it took her a while to reply, "No need. I'm fine now."

The assistant decided to drop the subject.

Neale, in another vehicle.

Muabella was engrossed in her phone, playing around, when a message from Nikolai popped up on Messenger, She pressed at the bridge of her nose, sensing this wouldn't be pleasant. After a while, she finally opened the message.

Nikdat. (You know how to make incense, right?)

Squinting her eyes, Mirabella recalled the last time she concocted a medicine. Nikolai had been keen to assist her, and now he was asking about incense-making. What sort of mischief was he up to now?

Her response was swift (No, I don't

Nikolak (You must. The Incense of Calm for James was your doing.)

A wry smile tugged at Mirabella's lips as she typed back emotionlessly: [You're mistaken. That was purchased online.

Nikolai: (impossible. The herbs were bought from me.)

Mirabella sent back a series of emojis, feeling exasperated. The audacity of some people nowadays!

She glanced out the window, tempted to block him. Her phone buzzed again.

Nikolai I know everything.]

With a sense of resignation, Mirabella stared at the screen. Her fingers slowly crafted a reply: (Knowing too much can be hazardous to your life, old man.)

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Nikolai chuckled mischievously. (Hey, hey, teach me how to make that incense, and I'll keep my lips sealed.)

Mirabella let out a soft snort. Her fingers danced across the keyboard to type [Old man, time to wash up and hit the sack), but before she could hit send, another message from Nikolai popped

1. up.

Nikolai: [Plus, I'll give you a whopping 70% discount on any herbs you buy from me.]

Her fingers paused, swiftly erasing the typed message, and she replied with a chirpy tone, (Deal, I'll teach you the works.]

Nikolai, who was gearing up for a hard bargain, was dumbfounded now. She just agreed like that? This wasn't going according to plan.

Pocketing her phone, Mirabella glanced out of the car window. Catherine's medicine was running low. It was time to brew a fresh batch and ship it off.

She thought, "Yeah, I'll make a list when I get home."

Soon enough, the car pulled into her neighborhood. No sooner had Mirabella stepped into her home than the ringtone of her phone broke the silence. It was Wyatt calling. Balancing her phone between her ear and shoulder while slipping off her shoes, she answered.

"Ms. Mirabella, are you at home now?" Wyatt asked politely. At that moment, he was standing at the entrance of the Davis family's old neighborhood, with Curtis seated in the passenger seat.

"Oh, I'm at home. What's up?" Mirabella walked into the living room and poured herself a glass of water.

Wyatt held a square box in his hand. "I've got something I need you to take a look at. Can you come downstairs?"

"Right now?" Her eyebrows shot up in surprise.

"Yeah, I'm right outside your building," Wyatt said, gazing out of the car window.

"We've moved, not staying there anymore," Mirabella said, setting her glass on the table.



Her father Shawn, overhearing the conversation and thinking it might be someone he knew, asked, "Honey, who's on the phone?"

"Just a friend you haven't met," Mirabella called back over her shoulder.

Wyatt caught the tail end of the conversation through the phone and recognized the voice, but he couldn't place it. He hesitated before asking, "Ah, well, where are you living now? Could you send me the address?"

After a brief silence, Mirabella replied, "I'll send you my location."

"Alright, I'll head over in a bit," Wyatt said.

Post-call, Mirabella opened her Messenger and sent him her current location. Seconds later, a puzzled question mark popped up in response. Mirabella pursed her lips and chose not to reply.

Staring at the location on his phone, Wyatt was perplexed. Wasn't this the same neighborhood where James now resided?

"What's got you daydreaming?" Curtis, noticing Wyatt's baffled expression post-checking the messenger location, couldn't help but ask.

Wyatt lifted his head and held out his phone for Curtis to see. "Take a look at this." Curtis glanced at the screen, and within moments, his expression matched Wyatt's odd look.

"Ms. Mirabella moved into the same neighborhood as the boss," Wyatt mumbled, starting the car engine.

A couple of minutes later, he sighed, "I was thinking of buying the villa next door. Good thing I didn't go through with it."

Curtis gave him a sidelong glance, thinking to himself, "You couldn't afford it anyway."

Half an hour later, they came back to the neighborhood. Wyatt shot Mirabella another message, inquiring about her exact location. Soon enough, he got a reply.

Upon reading the precise address, Wyatt's mind was boggled once again. Could this be any more serendipitous? The villa he had wanted to buy was actually Mirabella's new home? So the owner he had been dealing with was none other than Mirabella's father, Shawn?

Then, with a mix of emotions, Wyatt turned to Curtis with a complicated look.

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Curtis couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at Wyatt's intense gaze. "What are you staring at me for? What is that address?"

With a somewhat awkward expression, Wyatt shoved the square box into Curtis' hands. "I just remembered I've got something on tonight. You should go see Ms. Mirabella instead."

Clearing his throat, Wyatt admitted, "I'm feeling a bit embarrassed."

With a twitch of his lips, Curtis demanded, "Just let it out."

Wyatt handed over his phone for Curtis to see. He'd actually contacted Ms. Mirabella's dad, trying to buy Ms. Mirabella's new house and then gift it back to her. The thought alone was cringe-worthy. Luckily, her father hadn't caved and sold the house to him.

Curtis quietly massaged his temples. This was indeed an extraordinary coincidence.

Next thing, Curtis took the driver's seat, and Wyatt slipped into the back, ready to hide out and play it by ear. As long as he didn't run into Ms. Mirabella's dad, everything should be smooth sailing.

Two minutes later, Curtis pulled up outside the Davis family's villa. He had Wyatt text Mirabella. Soon enough, Mirabella stepped out, trailed by a curiously looking Shawn. Spotting them from afar, Wyatt ducked down in the back seat, too embarrassed to get out.

Curtis shook his head at Wyatt's antics and, holding the wooden box, opened the car door. "Ms. Mirabella, good to see you," Curtis greeted her with a polite nod.

Mirabella returned the gesture. "Where's Wyatt?"

Coughing discreetly, Curtis explained, "He was suddenly called away for an urgent matter."

"Oh." Mirabella didn't seem to dwell on it. Her attention was on the box. "What did he want to show me?"

"This." Curtis handed over the wooden box with due respect.

Mirabella's eyes quickly scanned the box. She accepted it and opened it to reveal a porcelain bottle, pausing briefly before looking back up at Curtis. "What is this?"

Curtis glanced at Shawn, who had now drawn closer, and was about to speak when his phone vibrated. Checking the message, he suggested, "Maybe you'd like to come next door for a moment, Ms. Mirabella?"

After a moment's thought, Mirabella handed back the box and turned to Shawn. "Dad, I need to step next door for a bit. Do you mind heading back first?"

"Sure, sure, go ahead," Shawn said, rubbing his nose and nodding absentmindedly.

Curtis gave Shawn a courteous nod and then turned to Mirabella. "Please go ahead, I'll go start

the car.”

“Okay,” she agreed and headed toward the neighboring house.

Shawn watched Curtis intently as he got into the car and drove away. It took a moment for him to shift his gaze, contemplating. Curtis had the air of a bodyguard, the kind you could see in corporate settings.

Shawn stroked his chin but then realized something was off. They had just moved in two days ago; how did his daughter already know the neighbors? And wasn't the person who had been eyeing their house from next door?

Shawn's eyes suddenly widened with suspicion. Could it be that they had switched tactics, targeting his daughter after failing with him? No wonder the guy was so obsequious – it was a charm offensive.

Alarmed, Shawn whipped out his phone and messaged Mirabella. [Darling, don't let them sweet-talk you. We're not selling the house, no matter the price!]

## Chapter 346

Mirabella stepped into the living room where James was wrapping up a call on his smartphone. As he caught sight of her, the stern look on his face softened and he said into the phone, “Mhm, gotta go.”

He pocketed his phone and turned to Mirabella. His handsome face exuded a gentle charm. “You've arrived.”

With a light nod, Mirabella approached him. Her pretty, almond-shaped eyes were fixed on him, “Not bad, you're looking better.”

James met her gaze, and his one eyebrow arched slightly. “Is this how you treat all your patients?”

“Hmm?” Mirabella's eyes flickered with confusion.

A wistful look crossed James' face before he chuckled and shook his head. "Nothing." He gestured towards the couch, inviting her to sit, then strode to the fridge and fetched a bottle of soda. He twisted off the cap and handed it to Mirabella.

Mirabella took the bottle without a second thought.

Wyatt and Curtis had just parked the car and walked in when they noticed James' actions. They both paused, exchanged a glance, and silently questioned the odd feeling in the air.

"I never thought we'd end up neighbors again," James said, sinking into the sofa across from Mirabella, with a hint of surprise in his voice.

Taking a sip of her soda, Mirabella set it down on the coffee table and raised an eyebrow, replying in a drawling tone, "Fate has a funny way of messing with us."

James' lips twitched at her remark.

Just then, Wyatt and Curtis approached.

"You finished your work?" Mirabella asked Wyatt. Her curiosity was aroused.

James' attention also shifted to Wyatt, who cleared his throat and said, "All taken care of." The last thing he'd want was for them to catch wind of this situation. It was too embarrassing.

"Oh, that was quick," Mirabella mused, leaning back against the couch.

Wyatt handed her a wooden box. "Take a look at the medicine inside."

Mirabella eyed the box with a sense of foreboding. She opened it and picked up the porcelain bottle, immediately noticing the mark on its bottom. Unscrewing the lid, she sniffed briefly before recapping it.

“Will this help James? Can it cure his condition?” Wyatt asked eagerly.

Mirabella’s expression softened as she replaced the bottle in the box. “No, it can’t.”

Wyatt’s face fell at her words.

“How did you come by this medicine?” she inquired.

Curtis spoke up. “Acquired through special channels. Rumor has it, this medicine can cure all manner of stubborn illnesses.”

Mirabella’s expression grew complex. The medicine was indeed powerful but clearly not the cure for James’ ailment. After a brief pause, she explained, “It’s undoubtedly a fine medicine, but it depends on the patient.”

Turning to James, she added, “At best, it’ll give you a bit of a boost, but don’t count on it for more than that.”

Curtis stood there, dumbfounded. The medicine was said to originate from the enigmatic family of Massolio, whose members were renowned for their extraordinary healing abilities. There was apparently no malady they couldn’t cure. Yet, no one knew the whereabouts of the Massolio family, which made any medicine from them incredibly rare and valuable.

This particular bottle had passed through many hands to reach them, but now, Ms. Mirabella was telling them that it was of no use to James...

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Curtis glanced at Mirabella. His lips parted as if to pose another question, but before he could, James’ voice drifted over.

“We still have you, right?” James tilted his head. His gaze rested on Mirabella’s face. There wasn’t a trace of regret on his sharp features, just a hint of playful mischief.

At James’ words, Curtis and Wyatt felt a weight lift off their chests. Right, Ms. Mirabella was a top– class medicine refiner. Perhaps she could one day concoct a potion to cure James for good?

The Massolio clan was shrouded in mystery, and its very existence was a matter of hearsay. Whether they were real or not, no one knew for sure.

With a stony expression, Mirabella shot a glance at James, “Why do I get the feeling you’re trying to swindle me?” She had prepared countless medicines for him gratis, and now he was trying to stick to her?

It seemed like everyone she had lately run into considered her a pushover. Was she really such an accessible target for exploitation?

James’ eyebrows arched as he let out a soft chuckle, teasingly remarking, “Or perhaps I should let you swindle me?”

“Oh yeah, our James is free to swindle,” Wyatt chimed in eagerly from the side.

Curtis’ lips twitched in exasperation. This guy was beyond help.

“Thanks, I’m one of the good guys,” Mirabella quipped dryly, a forced smile on her lips.

Looking down, she pulled out her phone and noticed a message on Messenger from a few minutes ago, sent by Shawn. She tapped to open it.

[Darling, don’t let them sweet–talk you. We’re not selling the house, no matter the price!]

Confused by Shawn’s message, Mirabella replied with a question mark. It didn’t take long before she received a response.

[The folks who wanted to buy our place last time, are our neighbors.]

The corner of Mirabella's lips twitched as she suddenly looked up at James with a sly smile. "I heard you're interested in buying my family's house?"

Well, that was unexpected.

After a moment, both James and Curtis turned their gazes to Wyatt, and suddenly the spotlight was on him. Covering his face, Wyatt let out a strained laugh, "Uh, Ms. Mirabella, let me explain..."

Minutes later, after getting the full story, Mirabella fell silent for a few seconds before saying. "Hey, I'm not one for a surprise. In the future, if you want to give me something, just send

cash."

Pausing, she added, "I'll send you my bank details when I get home. We all know each other here, so no need for formalities."

Wyatt sighed. That was one way to cut through the pleasantries!

Before long, Mirabella left James' place and returned home, where Shawn eagerly asked, "Mira, what did the neighbors say to you?"

Mirabella, still deep in thought, looked up at Shawn's question and casually replied, "Nothing much. I've persuaded them to drop the idea of going for our house."

Shawn, skeptical, prodded, "Is that all?" He had thought about it after he got home people clearly knew his daughter well, and it wasn't about buying a house.

S



those

After a moment's consideration, Mirabella decided not to reveal that the owner of the house next door was the very 'tutor' Shawn was so desperate to meet. She simply nodded and hummed in agreement.

In the dining room, Delilah was already calling them to dinner. Without another word, Mirabella walked over.

Shawn watched his daughter's retreating figure. Her secrets were wrapped in mystery yet again.

#### Chapter 348

The next day, Mirabella scribbled a list of herbs, snapped a picture, and sent it to Nikolai. She figured it was about time she made a stand or else it would look bad.

When Nikolai got the picture of the herb list from Mirabella, he nearly keeled over.

He could give those ordinary herbs away for free, but the items on that list were centuries-old rarities, and she wanted a boatload of them all at once! It was downright inhumane!

Fuming as he was, Nikolai eventually sent his apprentice off to gather the herbs. A promise made, even through gritted teeth, was a promise to keep.

After school, Mirabella planned to head over to Nikolai's to brew potions and, incidentally, teach the old chap how to make incense. As soon as she stepped out of the school gates, she spotted James' sleek black car waiting outside.

Checking her phone, she saw a message from him on Messenger. Without even reading it, she strode over. The rear car window slid down, revealing James' handsome face. "Nikolai sent me to pick you up," he said.

Mirabella raised an eyebrow, didn't say much, and got into the car.

The car started smoothly, heading towards Nikolai's residence. James leaned casually against the door frame, lazily glancing at Mirabella. "That livestream show you did last week was pretty cool."

Mirabella was surprised he had watched it. Despite her recommendations, he didn't seem like the type to tune into livestreams. She gave him an amused look in response.

Wyatt, who was driving, caught their eye in the rearview mirror and chimed in, "I watched it too. Even dropped a tip." Making his presence felt was, of course, part of the plan.

James spared him a brief glance.

"You're gonna be on that variety show more than once, right?" Wyatt asked Mirabella.

Flicking a strand of hair from her forehead, she replied lightly, "Yeah, there are a few episodes. Just a bit part, really."

Wyatt chuckled dryly. He recalled the last episode. It hardly seemed like she was just playing a bit part.

"Thinking of getting into showbiz?" James asked nonchalantly.

Mirabella shook her head. "If I wanted to be in showbiz, I wouldn't wear a mask on the show."

James smiled but said no more.

Soon, they arrived at the Reeves estate. Nikolai was already waiting. As soon as they entered, he declared, "Let's have dinner first. We can get to work after."

Nikolai's wife had passed away early, leaving him with two sons. His elder son was working with the Riverdale Pharmacists' Guild, and the younger one, Asher, had a knack for medicine and was poised to take over the family practice.

Asher was puzzled by his father's polite and enthusiastic treatment of a teenage girl. He assumed Mirabella was just tagging along with James, hence the special treatment. So, Asher didn't pay much attention to Mirabella.

Nikolai didn't explain too much to his son. After all, Mirabella's ability to concoct S+ grade potions at such a young age was something of a top-tier secret. Knowledge of her skills becoming common knowledge might do her more harm than good.

After dinner, Nikolai led Mirabella to the medicine refining room. He really wanted to observe her technique, but with James still there, it wouldn't do to leave his guest unattended. So he pulled Asher aside.

"Pay close attention to her work, Asher. What you learn is up to you," Nikolai said with a stern look.

Asher, hearing his father's words, looked at him in surprise. "Dad, you're letting an outsider into our refining room, and now I'm supposed to learn from her? Have you lost your mind?"

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Nikolai slapped him atop the head with a playful yet firm gesture. "Keep those kinds of comments between us, alright? Don't you dare say such things in front of her. She's a pharmacist and her skills far surpass your brother's, You best buckle down and learn from her."

Asher dodged his father's hand. The skepticism was etched across his face. "A pharmacist that's just seventeen or eighteen, and yet better than my brother? That... doesn't seem likely,\*

After all, his brother was already an intermediate pharmacist. To surpass him would mean being at an advanced level?

“There’s nothing impossible about it. Don’t be prejudiced, boy. Once you see what she’s capable of, you’ll understand.” Nikolai huffed, adding, “Do you seriously think I’d let you assist her if it weren’t for the fact that James is here?”

Asher looked at Nikolai, thinking his old man had gone soft in the head, as his words were not making any sense.

“Enough chit–chat. Go on now, and learn. This is a one–time opportunity.” Nikolai didn’t linger on the subject; after all, some things could only be believed when seen with one’s own eyes.

Scratching his head, Asher made his way into the room. Nikolai glanced back once before striding off toward the main hall.

Stepping into the room, Asher initially held a dismissive attitude towards Mirabella. Her youth made it easy to overlook her abilities, but his condescension swiftly shifted as he observed her work.

“You... the medicine you’re making...” Asher struggled to find the words as he watched Mirabella in action.

Distraction was a pharmacist’s worst enemy. Mirabella didn’t glance up or respond; she simply continued her meticulous work.

The medicine was for Catherine, not as complex as the one she had crafted for James, and thus quicker to produce. In roughly an hour, she was done. Once she had carefully bottled the finished product, Mirabella let out a long, relieved breath.

Asher was not a pharmacist and didn’t have Nikolai’s breadth of experience. He was simply astonished by the girl’s precision. He couldn’t fully assess the quality of the finished medicine, but judging by the twenty or so pills she produced in one go, he assumed they were... average, at best.

After all, he remembered his brother mentioning that an ordinary pharmacist could at most produce two or three pills at a time, while only an advanced pharmacist could manage five or six. So, he could not agree with the idea that this little girl could outshine his brother. His

brother was now a mid-level pharmacist with the Pharmacists' Guild, which was a distinguished position not easily rivaled by a young girl with less experience.

After Mirabella packed away her medicines, she turned to the ingredients and sandalwood prepared for teaching Nikolai incense-making and looked at Asher. "Do you know how to make incense?" she asked.

Asher blinked, then shook his head. "No, I don't."

Taking a deep breath, Mirabella, considering the favor she owed for the discounted medicine, picked up the nearby tools and offered, "Alright, I'll teach you."

Asher frowned slightly but declined, "No need, really." He had no interest in incense-making.

Sensing his disinterest, Mirabella didn't insist. After all, she had promised to teach Nikolai, not him. She put down her tools and left the room.

Meanwhile, Nikolai was sipping tea with James. His gaze drifted towards the hall, clearly distracted.

Upon seeing Mirabella step in, he quickly rose and approached her. "Mirabella, you finished up for today already?"

Mirabella, looking a bit pale from exertion, nodded at Nikolai.

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Asher strolled in from the outside just in time to catch the anxious look on his old man's face. With a roll of his eyes, he turned toward James, who was seated at the head of the table, and poured him a cup of water with polite reverence.

Nikolai, preoccupied with his own excitement, failed to notice his son's gesture. His gaze was locked on Mirabella as he eagerly inquired, "What sort of concoction did you whip up today? Can I have a peek?"

“Something for the heart,” Mirabella replied without stinginess, handing over the medicine bottle to Nikolai.

A thoughtful expression crossed James’ face when he heard her words. His eyebrows lifted subtly.

Catherine had a heart condition. So, was this medicine crafted for Catherine?

Nikolai uncorked the bottle and shook out a pill, bringing it to his nose for a careful sniff. His eyes lit up instantly. “Ah, it’s another ancient remedy.”

Asher, hearing the term “ancient remedy,” couldn’t help but show a flicker of surprise.

She had concocted an ancient remedy?

While Asher had a decent knack for medicine, he wasn’t as versed in pharmacology as Nikolai. He had once delved into the Hammond family’s heirloom tome of ancient remedies, but after making no significant discoveries, his interest had waned.

Soon enough, Nikolai neatly repackaged the medicine and handed it back to Mirabella, suddenly feeling a wave of nostalgia. It was wonderful how he’d come across several ancient remedies recently.

They were something he’d never touched before.

But then a thought struck him... Could the ancient remedies he’d seen in others’ hands also originate from her?

Nikolai shot a peculiar glance at Mirabella.

Catching the odd look on Nikolai’s face, Mirabella arched an eyebrow. “Nikolai?”

“Have you by any chance concocted a nerve–repair antidote?” he asked.

Mirabella, unfazed, responded, “No, I only know these few common concoctions.”

Nikolai felt his blood pressure spike. Did she just say common? A single top–tier concoction from the Pharmacists’ Guild could have its creator strutting through their halls, but this little prodigy was calling her unique, elusive old world remedies “common”? It was a blow to anyone’s ego.

“By the way, Nikolai, I might not have enough energy for incense–making today. I’ll write down the formula for you later. If you follow it to the letter, it should turn out nearly perfect,”

1/2

10:55

Chander 100

Mirabella stated calmly.

At her words, Nikolai paused for a moment before his gaze shifted to Asher. He saw his son attempting to cozy up to James. His motive couldn’t be clearer.

He had gone to great lengths to secure a chance for the girl to mentor his son. With age creeping up on him, Nikolai had wanted to create opportunities for Asher to learn some real skills, hoping to ensure a longer and more prosperous future for the Reeves family...

Nikolai shook his head, dismissing the thought as a fool’s hope, “Hever mind, seems like I’m not that fortunate,” he said with a wry smile.

Opportunities, once missed, seldom come around again. He couldn't bring himself to shamelessly ask her for another chance.

Mirabella just smiled and remained silent.

Asher, overhearing the conversation, furrowed his brows, but quickly redirected his attention back to James.

After a brief rest, Mirabella left the Reeves estate with James and Wyatt, Only after they had departed did Nikolai make his way to the courtyard. His steps were unsteady. Asher followed, babbling non-stop. "Dad, that young lady sure has a knack for precise formulations." Asher began, pausing before continuing, "But to say she's more skilled in pharmacology than my brother, well, I can't agree with that."

Nikolai stopped in his tracks upon hearing his son's words.