

The Double 401

Chapter 401

was carrying a paper bag, his grip firm yet casual. As he caught sight of his sister, he quickly stashed it behind his back, cutting off her line of sight. "Ah, I'm not heading out, just thinking of taking a stroll around

block

Mirabella's delicate features were etched with suspicion. She glanced at the hand he had concealed and

said, "Oh, well, enjoy your walk then." With that, she stepped aside, clearing the path with a considerate and sweet demeanor.

Zach stood rooted to the spot, torn between going and staying since he never intended to take a walk in the first place.

Mirabella raised an eyebrow. "Zach?"

"I suddenly don't feel like walking anymore," he blurted out, pivoting back toward the house.

Back in the living room, Shawn, noticing Zach's swift return, set his tea cup aside and asked with a tinge of curiosity. "Weren't you going to visit the neighbors next door?"

Following Zach, Mirabella paused briefly, her gaze shifting to his retreating figure. Her eyes narrowed, landing on the paper bag in his hand. Was he not out for a walk?

✍

Sensing the scrutiny from behind, Zach felt a flicker of guilt and, without turning around, mumbled to Shawn, "It's gotten too late. I'll go another day"

“I did mention it was getting late, but you wouldn’t listen.” Shawn shook his head in mild reproof. Zach was speechless. Great, his dad was the master of timing.

With a half-smile, Mirabella sidled up to Zach, her tall frame exuding none of the frailty her gender might suggest. She lazily slung an arm over his shoulder. ‘Zach, how about I accompany you to the neighbors’ right now?’”

At her touch, Zach nearly jerked away on reflex. Turning to face Mirabella, whose expression seemed harmless enough, he couldn’t shake off an eerie feeling. “. Let’s not.”

His reply came off as forced and awkward. Who would’ve thought he’d be intimidated by his sister, who was always so well-behaved and adorable? It was a story no one would believe.

Delilah, carrying a plate of freshly sliced fruit, observed her daughter and son standing close in a seemingly affectionate exchange. She placed the fruit on the coffee table and remarked to her husband, “Zach and our little girl are growing closer by the day.”

2 22 ± 25 ~ ñ 8 9 5 5e

Zach, wearing a look of inner turmoil, held his tongue.

Shawn, who had just prepared two cups of coffee, put one back on the tray. He looked at his daughter with a gentle expression. “Mira, come have some coffee.”

“Sure.” Mirabella obediently nodded, withdrawing her arm from Zach’s shoulder to sit down beside Shawn.

Shawn poured the coffee for himself, Mira and his wife.

Standing aside and slowly realizing something was amiss, Zach adjusted his glasses. Had his father forgotten something? Didn’t Zach need coffee, too?

Shawn, oblivious to his son's expectant gaze, remembered something else. He stood and retrieved a square box from a nearby cabinet,

"Mira, give this to your classmate's dad. The one who gave you that painting last time," Shawn handed over

the box.

Chapter 402

estiled back onto the couch with a sigh and reolled, "Just a pen."

who cherished collecting masterplaces from renowned artists generally hailed from cultured and scholarly families, and gifting something as sophisticated as an item from a writer's set was the perfect touch.

Mirabella nodded, not probing further. She drained her last cup of tea and stood up room. Still got two essays to finish."

"Alright, don't stay up too late," Shawn cautioned.

"Mhm."

"I'm heading to my.

With a polite nod to the others in the living room, Mirabella quickly gathered her things and retreated to her

room.

After a refreshing shower, she sat down at her computer desk, booted up her laptop, and entered safe mode to punch in a series of commands.

The screen soon turned black, flickering with lines of code not much different from what she had seen on Curtis' computer next door.

A minute later, the display shifted, filling with dense data parameters. After contemplating briefly, Mirabella tweaked the firewall settings slightly. With the changes made, she hit the confirm button.

The computer was off in no time, and Mirabella pulled out two essays from her bag, burying herself in academia.

Halfway through the first essay, her phone on the desk buzzed. She paused, glanced at the screen, but ignored it, focusing on her writing.

Only after completing the second essay did she leisurely pick up her phone and check the messages.

Unknown sender: [Kid, can't sleep without showing off your tech skills, huh?]

Unknown sender: [How about a little respect for the hard work of all the hackers out there, okay?]

Mirabella's brows arched slightly, her slender fingers dancing across the keyboard as she typed back: [Oh, no can do. Even a kid's gotta level up]

Unknown sender: [..... Friggin' unbelievable!]

Elsewhere, Curtis' eyes were ablaze with excitement as he stared at his computer screen, fingers flying over the keyboard. After half a month, he was on the verge of cracking the first level of security, a breakthrough that would bump him up in the rankings.

He took a deep breath and hit the enter key for the final step, but instead of the anticipated success message, a glaring red exclamation mark popped up on the screen, freezing his triumphant expression into one of disbelief.

Failure?

Curtis rubbed his eyes. Was he seeing things? How could he have failed?

Wyatt, who was slumped over the back of his chair, yawning and resting his chin on his arms, asked lazily, "Curtis, did you crack it yet?"

Turning his head toward the computer, with half-lidded eyes, he caught sight of the red exclamation mark

shifted in his seat, saying, "Another fail, huh?"

Curtis pressed his lips together and sat in silence. The screen quickly reset to the initial interface, but now the difficulty level had changed from A to A+.

Curtis, with a dark expression, was at a loss for words. Dammit, could someone explain why the difficulty– level just spiked out of nowhere?!

He was so close!

Wyatt glanced at Curtis, touched his nose, and muttered with a hint of skepticism, "Curtis, it seems like your skills are also... kinda not up to par."

Curtis' temple twitched, and he slammed his laptop shut, turning a steely gaze on Wyatt. His tone was laced with threat. "You think you're better? Be my guest!"

Wyatt recoiled slightly. It was just another failed attempt, not the first nor probably the last. Why the rage?

Chapter 403

The next day.

Mirabella, clutching the box Shawn had given her the night before, arrived at school and placed it directly on Jenna's desk.

Jenna glanced at the wooden box, her bright eyes clouded with confusion. She turned her head and fixed her gaze on Mirabella. "Queen Mira, what's this?"

Mirabella set her bag down beside the box and replied in an unhurried tone, "This is my dad's return gift for your dad. It's for that painting you gave me last time."

Jenna touched the tip of her nose, took the box, and upon opening it, found a pen that looked quite ancient. Although she wasn't much into antiques, she could tell it must be valuable.

After closing the lid, Jenna pushed the box back, saying earnestly, "No need for a return gift. You take this back."

Mirabella raised an eyebrow, her pale fingers tapping lightly on the desktop. "Taking it back would mean tossing it in the trash. Are you sure?"

Jenna's lips twitched when she realized Mirabella wasn't joking; she reluctantly took the box back, muttering. "Rich people, always so capricious!"

Mirabella just smiled without a word.

After Jenna put the box away, she seemed to remember something and whispered, "Queen Mira, I have a small favor to ask."

Mirabella tilted her head toward her. "Ask away."

Jenna cleared her throat and said, "My cousin is a huge fan of your brother, right? Her birthday is coming up, and I have no idea what to get her. Could I possibly get an autograph from your bro?"

"When do you need it?" asked Mirabella. She whipped out her phone, shooting a message to Leo.

Jenna quickly added, "No rush, whenever he has the time is fine by me."

Leo didn't reply to the message, and after Mirabella put away her phone, she hummed in acknowledgment.

"By the way, Queen Mira, do you have a Twitter account? Jenna asked again.

Mirabella glanced at her. "No, not into it."

Jenna slapped her forehead, almost forgetting that her desk mate was like a cave dweller when it came to social media. "Why don't you set one up? After your appearance on that live show, so many fans online are begging for your contact info," Jenna suggested.

"No thanks."

"If you did, I bet you'd get at least a million followers, easily outshining Summer," Jenna mused, resting her

chin in her hand.

At that, Mirabella just gave a half-smile. "Ms. Jenna, if you've got time to burn, I've got two boxes of exams that need practice."

At the mention of exams, Jenna clammed up instantly.

Mirabella was a devil. She was always threatening with exam papers.

11.02

Come noon, Mirabella received a call from Collins, who was coming to deliver Leo's autograph. After lunch, she made her way to the school's main entrance to wait. She waited a few minutes before Collins showed

Been waiting long?" Collins handed the paper bag to Mirabella.

"Not really, thanks for making the trip, Collins, Mirabella said politely, nodding her thanks without peering into the bag.

Collins scratched his head and smiled. "No problem, it was on my way

He then took a few more glances at Mirabella, who looked so stylish even in plain school attire. No wonder sportswear brands wanted her; they had spotted her charm right away.

Noticing Collins' odd look, Mirabella called out, "Collins?"

Collins snapped back to reality, expressing his regret, "It's a pity you and your brother turned down the sportswear ad deal."

Chapter 404

Mitabella eyed Collins with a quizzical expression etched on her delicate features. "What

ad?

Collins was taken aback by her ignorance and let out an “Ah” before explaining, “Didn’t your brother mention it? A sports brand wants both of you for a commercial. You don’t even have to show your face, and they’re offering a pretty penny for it.”

The only thing Mirabella caught was the phrase, ‘They’re offering a pretty penny.’ After a brief silence, she probed, “How much are we talking?”

Collins gestured with his hand, a five.

Half a mil? Could she just stand in front of a camera, face hidden, and earn half a mil?

Suddenly, Mirabella realized how lucrative showbiz could be. Snapping back to reality, she remembered Collins’ earlier words, “So, the ad got turned down?”

Collins nodded, “Your brother said you wouldn’t be interested and it would be too much of a hassle, and he declined.” Shaking his head with a sigh, he added, “Five million in ad money, gone. Talk about capricious.”

Five million!

Mirabella felt like the wind had been knocked out of her. Knife, please? She was ready to sever all ties of kinship right then and there!

“Mirabella, I’ve gotta head out. I got a flight to catch. You should get back to campus,” Collins waved at Mirabella and started to walk away.

Watching his retreating figure, she was consumed by one thought, Her five million couldn’t just disappear into thin air!

“Collins, wait,” she called out.

Collins paused and looked back at Mirabella. “Yeah? What’s up?”

“Is there any way to get the ad deal back on the table?” Mirabella asked with a dead-serious face.

Collins was momentarily taken aback but quickly got the gist. “You want to take the gig?”

“Absolutely!” she nodded firmly.

“I’ll talk to the brand and see what I can do. I’ll let you know, okay?”

1/2

8 2 F F 3 S

“Thanks, Collins.”

“No problem. I’m off then.”

“Sure.”

10:28

Mirabella watched Collins disappear before turning on her heel and striding lightly back into the school, her mood significantly brighter than before.

As she entered the campus, she hadn’t walked far when an elderly figure, hair silvered with age and leaning on a cane, shuffled towards her.

Mirabella spared the old man a glance, then, as they drew closer, politely stepped aside to let him pass first.

The old man's movements were painfully slow, and just as he was passing by Mirabella, he suddenly lurched towards her.

Mirabella's eyes narrowed, and the words 'con artist' flashed through her mind. She thought to of stepping back, but noticing his hunched and hobbling figure, she still reached out to steady him.

"Old man, just so you know, I'm just a student. I don't have money," Mirabella stated sternly.

Her message was clear. She was the wrong target for his scam.

The old man had been contemplating a con, but now... he felt oddly compelled to go through with it. Thus, his cane clattered to the ground, and he let his body lean heavily towards Mirabella. "Ouch, my dear, you've bumped into me!"

"My chest hurts, and I'm feeling dizzy. Oh no, I think my high blood pressure and heart disease have flared up because of you.."

Chapter 405

Mirabella's expression darkened the moment she heard the old man's blatant lie.

Why on earth had she reached out to help him? She hadn't even pocketed the five million from the ad deal yet, and was this already shaping up to be a financial fiasco?

"Sir, this is a school, and there are cameras everywhere. Your scam is pointless!" Mirabella ground out through clenched teeth.

The old man's eyes widened then narrowed, his voice whining and wheezing, "Oh, my head is spinning... I feel so unwell... You can't just walk away after knocking me over..."

Mirabella was speechless.

There weren't many students milling about the campus at this time. Still, the few who were there hesitated to approach, seeing Mirabella holding onto the elderly man who was complaining of feeling unwell. Nonetheless, a responsible student quickly whipped out their phone and dialed for an ambulance.

Unable to free herself without seeming forceful, Mirabella found herself inexplicably roped into the old man's charade. Before she knew it, she was being tugged into the ambulance alongside him.

Even when they arrived at the hospital for a check-up, the man wouldn't let go of her hand, claiming he feared she might flee.

In the hospital room, post-examination.

Mirabella sat stone-faced, gazing at the old man who was now making himself comfortable in the hospital bed, still clutching her clothes.

"I want some fruit salad; you better go get me some," the old man demanded with no hint of politeness.

"I'm broke, got nothing, so forget about it!" Mirabella replied coldly.

"You knocked me down, and you're still so brash, not a shred of respect for the old man huffed, trying to provoke her.

your elders!"

"Sorry, but in all my years, I've never seen someone as audacious and scammy as you," Mirabella shot back.

A flicker of guilt crossed the old man's eyes, but his face remained defiant. "I don't care. You hit me, and it's your job to take care of me now."

He paused, then added, "Otherwise, I'll go to your school and make a scene every day."

"Be my guest!" Mirabella shrugged nonchalantly, then stood up, easily pulling her clothing

1028

from his grasp.

The old man sat upright in alarm, pursing his lips and staring at Mirabella, "Trying to make a run for it?"

Mirabella glanced back at him emotionlessly and said, "Yes." After smoothing out her clothes, she added, "Taking you to the hospital was purely out of goodwill. Don't think for a moment that you've got one over on me."

She pulled out her phone, tapped on the keypad with the last ounce of her patience, and asked, "So, what's your family's phone number?"

At that, the old man lying in the bed fell silent. He slid down, pulled the blanket over himself, and turned his back to Mirabella.

"Just leave me be. Let this lonely old man fade away on his own," he mumbled miserably.

Mirabella massaged her temples. In the past, she would've walked away without a second thought, but now she was somehow letting this man take advantage of her.

Checking the time, she gave him one last look and said, "Well, you take care. I've got classes to attend." With that, she strode out of the room.

The sound of the door closing echoed through the hall.

Was she really gone?

The old man's eyes shot open, and after a moment of silence, he suddenly threw off the blanket and sat up with surprising agility.

Had Mirabella been there, she would have seen that the old man had none of the frailty he had feigned earlier. His movements were quick and nothing like the slow, shuffling gait he had pretended to have.

Chapter 406

Mirabella retraced her steps after nearly reaching the elevator. She decided to stop by the nurse's station to leave a few last-minute instructions before finally departing the hospital. By the time she made it back to school, the third afternoon class was well underway. During the break, Mirabella handed Jenna the autograph that Collins had brought for her and then slumped onto her desk with exhaustion.

Jenna, puzzled and not bothering to look at the autographed item, asked, "Queen Mira, how on earth did you manage to bump into an old man on campus today?"

The news of a student colliding with an elderly person and summoning an ambulance had already spread like wildfire through Parkside High School. However, Jenna had never imagined the student involved would be Mirabella.

Mirabella turned her head, her usually expressive face now void of emotion. "I'm just as mystified as you are about why such an old man would even be at the school!" It almost seemed like he was lying in wait to collide with her.

Jenna touched her nose thoughtfully, "Maybe he is a student's relative? But he's okay, right?"

Mirabella shot Jenna a look that clearly communicated her annoyance. "You should be asking if I'm okay."

She was the one who had been targeted. She was the one who had been falsely accused. She was the actual victim here.

Jenna coughed softly, aware of the dangerous edge to Mira's aura, and muttered, "But the whole school is buzzing with the story that you were the one who hit him."

Mirabella scowled. She knew that these old men were nothing but trouble.

"If there's a misunderstanding, we need to get the security footage from the teachers. A collision like this involving an old man is serious. It can lead to all kinds of public backlash," Jenna added.

Mirabella was silent for a few seconds before standing up and heading for the classroom door.

Jenna, startled, called after her, "Queen Mira, where are you going?"

Without turning back, Mirabella waved her hand dismissively and said, "To check the surveillance."

Minutes later, in the school's security office.

"I'm sorry, but there are no cameras covering that particular area," the security guard

1/3

10-391

Informed her with regret.

Security was already aware of the incident between Mirabella and the old man. The

the ambulance arrived

administration had reviewed the surveillance footage whe

Mirabella glanced over the divided screens of several computers, confirming that there was no footage of the corridor she had walked through. The collision couldn't have been more meticulously planned.

Annette expressed her concern, "Mirabella, did the hospital find anything wrong with the old man?"

She trusted Mirabella, but the incident involved an elderly person and occurred in a blind spot without surveillance. If the man insisted Mirabella had hit him, it could be difficult to clear her name.

"Everything's fine with him," Mirabella replied tersely, She knew medicine. She could precisely tell the old man's condition herself. Besides, she had only offered assistance and not caused any harm.

Relieved, Annette said, "That's good to hear. Don't worry, if the man comes looking for trouble, come to us. After all, this happened on school grounds, and we won't ignore it."

Mirabella nodded in acknowledgment. "Thank you."

Annette smiled, "No need to thank me. It's part of our job. It's a shame Mr. Hammond was out this afternoon; otherwise, I would have discussed the situation with him." Annette was aware of Mr. Hammond's high regard for Mirabella.

"It's fine. There's no need to trouble Mr. Hammond," Mirabella said with a slight smile.

After school, Mirabella went straight home, pushing the unpleasant incident with the shady old man to the back of her mind. She had an appointment to administer acupuncture to James, so after dinner, she made up an excuse and slipped out the door.

Next door, in James' bedroom.

“You seem a bit off today. Did something happen?” James asked, propped against the headboard, watching Mirabella sterilize her silver needles.

How could she openly discuss being the target of a scam? Mirabella pressed her lips together, remaining silent. Her beautiful face was a mask of cool detachment, practically emblazoned with the words ‘Do Not Disturb, as the silver needles in her hands gleamed ominously under the light.

James’ forehead twitched more with each glance at the sharp instruments, and he suggested, “Maybe we could postpone the session till tomorrow?”

Mirabella glanced at James, her tone allowing no argument. “Lie down.”

James complied, albeit reluctantly. Mirabella was downright intimidating when she was like this.

James’ acupuncture session was focused on the trauma and hidden ailments within his body. While she wasn’t particularly interested in the details of his background, the old injuries told her he was no ordinary person, especially considering the respect he received from someone like Curtis.

Just as with the previous session, the needles were inserted and probed, and the entire process took nearly two hours.

After removing the last needle, Mirabella’s face was visibly pale, and a fine sheen of sweat coated her forehead. After a brief rest, she instructed Wyatt to add the medicinal

concoction to a prepared bath.

The final step was a medicinal soak combined with acupuncture, a process that couldn’t be interrupted, which meant that they would be alone in the bathroom.

Gender, to her, was as inconsequential as the choice between patients—both simply required her care. Thus, when she found James swaddled in blankets like a newborn babe, with only his head peeking out, a wry smile tugged mercilessly at the corner of her mouth. “James, what’s this? A healing session or a peep show prevention strategy?”

James raised a quizzical brow, wrapping the blankets even tighter around himself as his lips parted just enough to utter, “Decorum, dear lady, decorum.”

Mirabella rolled her eyes, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “Honestly, you’re as undistinguishable as a boiled chicken to me right now.”

Pausing momentarily, she rolled up her sleeves and continued, “Man up, will you? It’s not as if—”

The intensity in James’ gaze sharpened. He was clearly amused, seeing this as a challenge to his manhood.

His grip loosened on the blanket. Mirabella’s words hung suspended in mid-air as she caught sight of the unveiled form before her—a perfect blend of strength and form, tinged with a rosy hue of vitality.

And the only shred of modesty was... Suddenly, Mirabella could feel her cheeks heating up and instinctively averted her gaze.

James noted her reaction with a smirk, stepping forward as his voice took on a teasing note, “Oh? Not as if what? Cat got your tongue?”

Mirabella’s fingers twitched, but she quickly faced him once more, her gaze boldly returning to James.

Why the devil should she feel awkward? She was a doctor, and doctors did not play favorites with gender!

“What should I say? That you’re not well-built?” Her voice carried a proud edge.

The corner of James' mouth twitched. Mirabella was certainly not your average girl-next-door. He stepped into the bath, muscles relaxing beneath the warm embrace of the water.

As Mirabella prepared the silver needles, James' hands rested on the edge of the tub, his eyes lazily fixed on her. "How long is this soak supposed to last?"

"Half an hour," Mirabella responded, her lips pursed in focus as she skillfully inserted a needle into a major shoulder point.

James tapped his fingers idly against the wood. His handsome face was flushed from the steam, and he casually added, "Your medical skills... surely pique one's curiosity."

1/2

10:28

Mirabella paused, then glanced sideways at James, enunciating clearly, "No curiosity allowed."

A gentle smile graced his lips as he met her guarded gaze, his voice warm, "I shall not pry."

With that, Mirabella shifted her attention back to her work, leaning in as her fingertips pressed against his chest, and placed another needle into a vital meridian.

Her hair, loosely tied in a low ponytail, slipped into the medicinal water without her noticing. James raised an eyebrow and, with a featherlight touch, gathered her stray locks and placed them behind her shoulder. Mirabella was so engrossed in her task that James' gesture went entirely unnoticed.

After half an hour, Mirabella finished and let out a long breath. "Done."

James' eyes

slid over her pale complexion, his own voice softening, "Thank you."

She waved her hand dismissively, not one for pleasantries, and said, "Don't forget to transfer the payment."

James sighs. And just like that, the mood was lost by her mundane reminder of financial obligations.

Gender, to her, was as inconsequential as the choice between patients—both simply required her care. Thus, when she found James swaddled in blankets like a newborn babe, with only his head peeking out, a wry smile tugged mercilessly at the corner of her mouth. "James, what's this? A healing session of a peep show prevention strategy?" James raised a quizzical brow, wrapping the blankets even tighter around himself as his lips parted just enough to utter, "Decorum, dear lady, decorum."

Mirabella rolled her eyes, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "Honestly, you're as undistinguishable as a boiled chicken to me right now"

Pausing momentarily, she rolled up her sleeves and continued, "Man up, will you? It's not as if="

The intensity in James' gaze sharpened. He was clearly amused, seeing this as a challenge to his manhood.

His grip loosened on the blanket. Mirabella's words hung suspended in mid-air as she caught sight of the unveiled form before her—a perfect blend of strength and form, tinged with a rosy hue of vitality.

And the only shred of modesty was... Suddenly, Mirabella could feel her cheeks heating up and instinctively averted her gaze.

James noted her reaction with a smirk, stepping forward as his voice took on a teasing note, "Oh? Not as if what? Cat got your tongue?"

Mirabella's fingers twitched, but she quickly faced him once more, her gaze boldly returning to James.

Why the devil should she feel awkward? She was a doctor, and doctors did not play favorites with gender!

“What should I say? That you’re not well–built?” Her voice carried a proud edge.

The corner of James’ mouth twitched. Mirabella was certainly not your average girl–next–door. He stepped into the bath, muscles relaxing beneath the warm embrace of the water.

As Mirabella prepared the silver needles, James’ hands rested on the edge of the tub, his eyes lazily fixed on her. “How long is this soak supposed to last?”

“Half an hour,” Mirabella responded, her lips pursed in focus as she skillfully inserted a needle into a major shoulder point.

James tapped his fingers idly against the wood. His handsome face was flushed from the steam, and he casually added, “Your medical skills... surely pique one’s curiosity.”

10:29

FIN

Mirabella paused, then glanced sideways at James, enunciating clearly, “No curiosity

allowed.

A gentle smile graced his lips as he met her guarded gaze, his voice warm, “I shall not

pry

With that, Mirabella shifted her attention back to her work, leaning in as her fingertips pressed against his chest, and placed another needle into a vital meridian.

Her hair, loosely tied in a low ponytail, slipped into the medicinal water without her noticing. James raised an eyebrow and, with a featherlight touch, gathered her stray locks and placed them behind her shoulder. Mirabella was so engrossed in her task that James' gesture went entirely unnoticed.

After half an hour, Mirabella finished and let out a long breath. "Done."

James' eyes slid over her pale complexion, his own voice softening, "Thank you."

She waved her hand dismissively, not one for pleasantries, and said, "Don't forget to transfer the payment."

James sighs. And just like that, the mood was lost by her mundane reminder of financial obligations..

Chapter 408

Mirabella tucked away her silver needles and strode out of the bathroom with the grace of

seasoned professional.

Wyatt, who had been waiting outside, anticipated her needs with the care of a doting butler and presented her with a steaming bowl of chicken soup. "Ms. Mirabella, thank you, he said with a dutiful nod.

Raising an eyebrow at the gesture, Mirabella took the soup and offered a nod of approval. Scratching his head with a goofy grin, Wyatt inquired, "How's the boss' health now?"

After a sip that soothed her throat, Mirabella replied, "He should be stable for now. As long as nothing extraordinary happens, his chronic issues shouldn't flare up again."

Wyatt practically glowed with relief. It wasn't the perfect fix he had hoped for, but it was light-years ahead of the grim prognoses they'd gotten from other so-called miracle workers.

Just then, a freshly dressed James emerged from his room.

Finishing the last of her soup, Mirabella turned to regard James, and her mind couldn't help but wander to some rather unseemly scenarios. Clearing her throat, she averted her gaze and handed the empty bowl back to Wyatt. "Thanks, I should be getting back now."

Wyatt bobbed his head. "Of course."

He almost offered to escort her but then glanced at James, his eyes twinkling with a mischievous suggestion. "Sir, why don't you walk Ms. Mirabella home? It's quite late, and it wouldn't be safe for her to go alone, would it?"

Despite the awkwardness of the age difference, which made it seem like an older man preying on a younger woman, Wyatt believed Mirabella could be a perfect match for

James.

Mirabella nearly stumbled upon hearing this. She turned back, eyeing Wyatt with an expressionless face. Their homes were a mere fifty meters apart—what could possibly be unsafe?

"Hmm, you make a good point," James agreed, looking quite serious. He seemed pleased with Wyatt's sudden enlightenment.

Straightening his sleeves, he approached Mirabella. "Come on. I'll walk you. The night does have its dangers."

Mirabella's inner voice called out, "Utter nonsense."

As James headed for the exit, Mirabella rubbed her temple in exasperation, hoping she

10-29

wouldn't run into Zach on her way back.

She followed with her box of silver needles, reaching the staircase just as her phone buzzed in her pocket. She saw an unknown number and hesitated before answering.

A gruff voice came through immediately. "You heartless girl. You hit me, and now you won't even check on me? I haven't eaten all day. Are you trying to starve me to death, so you can escape the reality of hitting an old man?"

Mirabella's face turned a shade of green as she was about to retort, but her foot slipped, and she tumbled towards the ground below. In that instant, her exhausted body couldn't react in time, and one thought crossed her mind. "This is all because of that old scammer."

James, who was ahead, sensed the commotion and swiftly turned. He caught sight of Mirabella falling and, with reflexes honed by urgency, reached out and caught her in his arms. "You need to be more careful," James chided, his brows knitting together as he steadied her on her feet.

Mirabella's face, pale but devoid of panic, seemed to soften under his gaze. Feeling a protective impulse, James kept his hand on her shoulder and asked again, "Are you alright?"

Chapter 409

Mirabella felt the pressure on her shoulder diminish, and she seemed to finally snap back to reality. Turning to look at him, it took her a moment before she rasped, "Thanks, I'm fine."

"Be careful. A fall from here isn't just a simple injury," James warned, glancing down before adding with a half-joke, "You don't look like you've got much muscle on you. Need me to play the knight and carry you down?"

James' words resonated clearly through the phone, which was still clutched tightly in Mirabella's hand.

The old man, mid-bite into his apple, perked up at the conversation, a sudden excitement flashing across his face.

A wry smile twitched at the corners of Mirabella's mouth as she shrugged off the hand from her shoulder and headed down the stairs. "I'm alright."

Once downstairs, Mirabella remembered the call was still connected and, with a tone thick with impatience, she held the phone to her ear. "Cut the act. You tick me off, and I won't spare even the elderly."

James, walking alongside, overheard and cast a discreet glance at Mirabella. "The kid's got a short fuse today," James thought.

"Oh, then you'd better come visit me. If you don't, I'll just show up at your doorstep. And hey, I haven't had dinner yet, so sort yourself out," the old man on the other end of the line said nonchalantly before hanging up.

Mirabella sighed. Never had she seen such a brazen freeloader!

James coughed and casually inquired, "Who's this?"

Rubbing her temples, Mirabella quickly pocketed her phone. "It's nothing. I'm heading home, and there's no need to walk me out."

With that, she strode toward the villa's exit, her tall, slender silhouette seemingly radiating a barely-there aura of threat.

Curtis, just entering, greeted her, but she only waved back without a trace of expression. Sensing that same menacing vibe, Curtis approached his boss and asked with genuine curiosity, "Is Ms. Mirabella in a bad mood today?"

With his eyes half-closed, James replied softly, "Seems like something's up."

At that, Curtis piped up, "Should I look into it?" Mirabella had become their savior, so her concerns were now their own, demanding their attention.

James glanced at him and simply said, "No need," before turning to walk into the living

10.29

room, where he settled into a couch with an ease that suggested he had all the time in the world

"Alright then" Curtis followed, ready to deliver his report.

James lounged back, legs casually crossed, embodying relaxed grace. After a moment, he opened his eyes and looked at Curtis. "Where's my grandfather?"

Scratching his head, Curtis looked embarrassed. "The staff report that Donald has left Riverdale, but where to, I'm not sure. He shook off anyone who was following him.*

James massaged his temples, clearly irritated. "Alright, I got it."

"I'll have people monitor the airports, train stations, hotels, and resorts. As soon as they spot Donald, I'll have him followed," Curtis offered,

James hummed in acknowledgment, paused, and then added, "Donald's always been slippery, not one to take the beaten path. It's no surprise if he's hard to track. Just make sure the people in Riverdale don't catch wind that he's gone rogue."

Curtis nodded in understanding. "Got it."

Chapter 410

After getting home from James' place, Mirabella headed straight to her room. After a quick wash-up, without even cracking open a book, she sprawled out on her bed and fell into a deep sleep.

Post-acupuncture, she always required heaps of sleep to recover. So, she flung the unreasonable demands the scamming old man made over the phone, out of her mind like yesterday's newspaper. Before hitting the hay, she had even set her phone to Do Not Disturb mode.

Therefore, poor Donald waited in the hospital for half a day. He was convinced that Mirabella's soft heart would bring her to the hospital, arms laden with goodies. Instead, he was left watching the clock hands complete lap after lap... until 11 PM came and went. There was no shadow of Mirabella, not even a buzz from the phone.

Donald's mustache practically bristled with indignation. "What kind of girl is she? Not an ounce of compassion!" Fuming, Donald fished out his phone and dialed Mirabella's

number.

The phone rang off the hook until an automated voice signaled the call had gone unanswered. Donald mashed the end call button with a forceful thumb.

Just then, the silence of the hospital room was broken by a grumbling tummy. Donald looked down, feeling quite sorry for himself, and patted his belly.

He was so starving.

But then he thought, "If I'm asleep, I won't feel hungry." With that, he laid back down, pulled the blanket over himself, and closed his eyes, trying to sleep.

Five minutes later, as the grumbling grew louder, Donald flung off the covers and sat up, irritated. He glanced at the nightstand, where a lone apple remained in the fruit bowl – the last of four the nurse had brought him that afternoon.

Just looking at that last apple made his teeth itch with acidity, and he mentally tallied a new grudge against Mirabella.

It was just a scam, but this girl was proving to be anything but sweet.

Just like his no-good, ungrateful son. Cold-blooded and heartless!

**

The next day.

Mirabella woke up, refreshed from a dreamless night, and reached for her phone to check the time, only to find it unresponsive.

Pressing and holding the power button, she was greeted with a low battery warning.

1/2

10:29

before the device shut down again. She squinted in confusion; just last night, it had been at eighty percent

Shrugging off the covers, she got out of bed, plugged her phone in to charge, and donned her school uniform before heading to the bathroom.

After freshening up, she didn't bother with the phone again and walked out of her room, making her way downstairs.

Leo had flown out to a neighboring state for a music video shoot the day before, so only her parents and Zach were at the breakfast table. Mirabella greeted the trio and pulled up a chair, digging into her breakfast quietly.

The three had been chatting before she came down.

“Zach, no matter what, you have to go on that blind date this Saturday,” their mom insisted.

Mirabella had just taken a sip of her milk when she heard her mom’s words and nearly choked.

A blind date?

She glanced sideways, taking a quiet look at Zach sitting next to her. Since coming back, she couldn’t recall Zach ever bringing a female friend home.

Zach pushed his glasses up his nose and looked at Delilah with exasperation. “Mom, can we not do this? What century are we living in to still need blind dates?”

Delilah chuckled derisively, “And how else are you going to find someone?”

Zach was speechless. His own mother had hit him where it hurt.

“Even though you’re the most average-looking in our family, and blind dates might not land you the right match, we’re not giving up on you,” Shawn added, solemn and serious.

Zach, known as the most handsome man in the legal world, was at a loss for words.

Great, what a tag-team heart-stabbing duo.