

The Double 411

Chapter 411

Mirabella cast sympathetic glance toward Zach, and she couldn't help but feel bad for the guy. The poor guy. Not only was he girlfriend-less, but he was also on the receiving end of his parents' disapproval.

Zach caught his sister's eye and instantly, his expression darkened even more. "What's with that look, sis? You think this is funny?" he grumbled.

Caught in the crossfire, Mirabella silently withdrew her gaze and said obediently, "Mom and Dad are right. If you don't date, you'll never find someone, Zach."

That was the third time Zach felt like he'd been attacked.

"See, even your sister agrees with us. So it's settled—you're going on that blind date on Saturday. If you don't show, don't bother coming home," Delilah declared with finality.

Zach just stood there, now absolutely convinced that his parents and sister simply wanted to live as a trio, concocting this blind date excuse to kick him to the curb.

They were a trio of devils.

Mirabella polished off her last bite of a breakfast sandwich, wiped her fingers clean with a napkin, then stood up and patted Zach on the shoulder. "Hang in there, Zach. Find yourself a girl, will ya?"

Enough was enough!

In high spirits, Mirabella grabbed her backpack and soon followed Shawn out the door.

Halfway to school, it dawned on her that she'd left her phone on the charger. There was no time to go back, so she gave Shawn a heads up, just in case he tried calling her later and couldn't get through.

Halfway through French class that morning, the vice principal Anthony came in and called Mirabella to the office.

“Mirabella, you had an incident yesterday and hit into an old man. Could you go over the details with me one more time?” the vice principal asked in a gentle tone.

When Anthony had summoned her, Mirabella had guessed it was about that con artist from yesterday. She patiently explained, yet again, that she was the victim of a scam, not the perpetrator of a hit-and-run.

Anthony’s face creased with worry after hearing her out. “Mirabella, it’s not that I don’t believe you, but the old man has called the school again. He’s threatening to make a fuss with the school board if he doesn’t get his way.”

Mirabella had recently brought some glory to the school. This sort of scandal could

tarnish her reputation. A scam like this was tricky—it wasn’t serious enough to cause a stir, but neither was it light enough to ignore. Public opinion was divided, and moral grandstanding could do untold harm.

“We’ve got no surveillance footage of that spot, so this is a bit of a pickle,” Anthony said, scratching his thinning hairline.

Taking a deep breath to calm her rising frustration, Mirabella asked, “Did he say anything else?”

“He’s been complaining about not being able to reach you, asking whether you plan on shirking responsibility,” Anthony summarized the old man’s words for her.

Mirabella listened, her expression unreadable, and simply stated, “I forgot my phone at home today.

So that explained why her phone had died overnight—it must have been bombarded by calls.

Rubbing her temples, Mirabella felt a headache coming on. Just as she had

suspected—aside from her grandmother Catherine, other elderly people seemed to bring nothing but trouble.

Anthony, looking at Mirabella, then suggested, “How about this? I’ll go with you to the hospital right now, and we can try to clear things up.”

Chapter 412

Mirabella’s gaze softened. A slight frown appeared on her face as she pondered for a few seconds before parting her lips to speak in a subdued tone, “Thanks for your concern, Principal, but I’ll handle this myself. There’s no need for you to get involved.”

Anthony quickly interjected, “No trouble at all, Mirabella. Since this happened on campus, the school stepping in might actually make things a bit smoother.”

Students like her, sensible, academically stellar, and not a bother to the school, were a rare find indeed. The idea that she could have collided with someone was something he couldn’t take – not even for a million dollars!

He couldn’t fathom how that old man could stoop so low as to stage an accident with Mirabella. Despicable!

“No worries, I think the school getting involved might not look so good. I can take care of this issue, you don’t have to fret,” Mirabella declined Anthony’s offer graciously.

She couldn’t quite wrap her head around why that old guy had targeted her, of all people. Did she look like easy prey to him?

A cold, mocking smile flickered across Mirabella’s mind.

How naive he was!

Meanwhile, in the hospital, Donald suddenly sneezed a mighty sneeze. 'Figures, staying in the hospital is no good. Too many germs around,' he grumbled, his nose wrinkling in

distaste.

He took out his phone, scrolled through his call log, and pressed the number he had dialed 99+ times. And this time, the phone that had gone unanswered before, surprisingly, picked up.

After leaving Anthony's office, Mirabella returned to her classroom.

Anthony had suggested she take half a day off to go to the hospital and sort things out with the old man, but she refused. She had already been scammed out of eight hundred bucks for a hospital check-up, and now he expected her to miss out on her studies.

As if she'd let that fly!

So, Mirabella calmly waited until noon, had lunch in the cafeteria, borrowed a hundred dollars from Jenna, and then hailed a cab to the hospital.

Once at the hospital, the sight of the empty ward and neatly folded blankets on the bed made Mirabella's expression turn sour. She approached the nurse's station and inquired politely, "Excuse me, do you know where the elderly patient from room 302 went?"

"Oh, that gentleman was discharged this morning. Didn't he get in touch with you?" The nurse, who had been on duty the previous day, remembered Mirabella for paying extra to have some apples bought for the old man in the room.

A crease formed between Mirabella's brows as she thought for a moment before asking. "Did he leave on his own, or did his family come to discharge him?"

“A young couple took care of the paperwork. It looked like they were family,” replied the

nurse

Hearing this, Mirabella internally scoffed. Of course, they were all about scams. Just yesterday, he was playing the lonely old man card.

“But you know, I did feel bad for him. No one was with him last night, and he was so hungry he came out looking for food. My colleague even made him a cup of instant noodles, and the poor thing slurped it all up, even the broth. Sigh, kids these days just don’t look after their elders. The nurse lamented.

Realizing she might have spoken out of turn, the nurse chuckled awkwardly, “Don’t take it the wrong way. I didn’t mean you. You’re not related to that old man.” She had pegged Mirabella as a Good Samaritan who had just helped an old man to the hospital.

Mirabella pursed her lips, thanked the nurse, and quickly exited the hospital.

On her way back to school, she couldn’t help but wonder why that con artist had called the school earlier that morning, threatening trouble, only to suddenly check out.

Was it a change of heart? Her instincts told her that was unlikely.

Chapter 413

Back at school, classes had yet to begin. It was still the lunch break study period.

Jenna glanced up in surprise as Mirabella breezed back into the room far earlier than expected. “Back so soon? Did you get everything sorted out with that old man?”

Mirabella pulled a book from beneath her desk, flipping it open as she replied, “Not exactly. He’s already been discharged from the hospital.”

“Ah... so you went there for nothing?” Jenna touched the tip of her nose, a gesture of mild awkwardness.

“Yep,” Mirabella confirmed, with a nonchalant nod.

Suddenly remembering something, Mirabella turned to Jenna. “Can I use your phone to make a call?”

“Sure.” Jenna fished out her smartphone, unlocked it, and handed it over to Mirabella.

With the phone in hand, Mirabella stepped out through the classroom’s back door. Once out in the corridor, she tapped the screen, pulling up the dial pad to punch in a number. It was the same number that the old man had called from the previous night while she was at James’ place.

The phone rang for ages with no answer.

After hanging up, Mirabella waited a couple of minutes before trying again. This time, the call connected.

“Hello... Who’s this?”

Hearing the old man’s voice, Mirabella’s tone was ice-cold. “Oh, it’s you. I heard you’re threatening to make a fuss at the Board of Education?”

The line

went dead silent at her words, and then she heard the tell-tale beep of the call being disconnected. Mirabella stared at the phone screen, her eyes narrowing in suspicion. With a swift tap, she redialed. But the phone barely rang once before the call was again abruptly cut off. Clearly, he did not want to talk to her.

Frowning, Mirabella knew something was off. That old man had inexplicably targeted her and was up to something. Otherwise, he wouldn't have called the school again that morning.

Without attempting another call, she turned and walked back into the classroom, returning Jenna's phone.,

Jenna, noticing her friend's mood seemed even more somber than before, whispered, "Mira, something wrong?"

Mirabella glanced at her and shook her head. "It's nothing.

Then, she let it go, focusing her attention back on the textbook. After all, it was studying that grounded her and fortified her resolve.

It wasn't Shawn or Delilah who came to pick her up after school. It was Zach.

"Zach, why are you the one picking me up today?" Mirabella asked as she approached the car, her curiosity piqued.

Zach opened the passenger door for his sister. "Mom and Dad were tied up, and I happened to be passing by, so here I am," he said, raising an eyebrow playfully. "Why? Not happy to see your big bro?"

"Not at all," Mirabella replied, sliding into the seat.

After Zach closed her door, he circled the car, hopped into the driver's seat, and started the engine, driving away from the school.

Midway home, Delilah called to ask when they'd arrive. Zach responded briefly with "Soon," then hung up without much chatter.

"We've got company at home today," Zach mentioned suddenly, almost as an afterthought.

“Guests? Relatives?” Mirabella inquired, glancing his way.

“Not sure, could be some friends of Mom and Dad,” Zach answered casually.

“Okay,” Mirabella replied, not particularly concerned—it likely had little to do with her.

Ten minutes later, they pulled into their neighborhood. Mirabella got out to key in the gate code, and the iron gate swung open.

Zach drove into the garage, and as Mirabella entered the house and changed her shoes, she noticed a pair of unfamiliar leather shoes in the shoe cabinet.

Chapter 414

Mirabella retracted her gaze, slipped into her house slippers, and made her way towards the living room.

Three people were seated on the couch, and as Mirabella approached, she could only spot her mom, Shawn, and another person. The third person’s back was turned to her, obscured by the sofa’s high back, revealing only the top of their head.

“Hey, Mom, Dad, I’m home,” Mirabella called out sweetly, her voice devoid of any curiosity to see the guest’s face. She placed her backpack on a nearby cabinet and walked over to the water dispenser, pouring herself a glass of water. Just as she took a sip, her mother’s voice floated over.

“Mira, sweetheart, why don’t you come over and say hello to Grandpa?”

At the mention of “Grandpa,” Mirabella nearly choked on her water, coughing violently as her face turned a shade of red. Once her coughing subsided, she set the glass on the dispenser and headed towards the living room.

That must be her mother's father, she thought. She had been momentarily confused, thinking they were referring to the grandpa Catherine's side of the family, who had passed away years ago.

Lost in thought, Mirabella's eyes widened in shock when she got a clear view of the person on the sofa. "Holy smokes, it's that sneaky old man!"

Donald had been facing Delilah and Shawn, but as Mirabella neared, he turned his head to look at her. Seeing the girl's stunned expression, his lips curved into a pleased smile as he greeted her cheerfully, "My dear granddaughter, it's been too long. I have missed you. terribly."

Missed my foot! The usually eloquent Mirabella almost let out a swear.

Seeing her nearly explosive reaction, Donald turned back to Delilah and Shawn, his eyes twinkling with mirth. "Look at her. She's so overjoyed, and she's speechless."

Mirabella was dumbfounded.

"Ha-ha, indeed, it's been quite a while, Shawn agreed, mistaking his daughter's shock for ecstatic surprise.

"Yes, terribly missed," Donald suddenly feigned a choke-up, his head drooping as he began to tremble and dabbed at his eyes.

Mirabella couldn't believe her eyes. What kind of melodramatic senior citizen was this? One moment he was all smiles, and the next, he was putting on a teaful act.

Delilah quickly handed him a box of tissues, "Oh, Mr. Donald, please don't get so worked up. Now that you're here, feel free to stay as long as you like. Mira will keep you

company

Mirabella's eyebrows knitted together at her mother's words. That wasn't her mom's father?

Sull pretending to dab his eyes, Donald peeked cautiously at Mirabella and asked in a low voice, "Really? Can I truly stay here?"

"Of course! We'd be delighted to have you," Delilah assured him eagerly.

Donald paused in his act, then glanced slyly at Mirabella. "But I'm worried Mira might not want an old guy like me around."

"That's not true," Delilah chuckled. "Mira's a good girl. She's probably even happier than we are that you're staying."

At that, Donald's lips twitched. Good girl? Then who was it that he overheard on the phone last night, threatening to beat up an old man?

Chapter 415

Mirabella, tangled in a web of confusing relations, suddenly blurted out, "Mom, who is this old... Who exactly is he?"

Delilah glanced up at her daughter. "Sweetie, you don't recognize your Grandpa from back

home?"

Grandpa from back home? Yeah, right, since when? She was raised by her grandma, and there was no grandpa in the picture.

Rubbing her temples, Mirabella started, "No, it's not that--"

But before she could finish, Donald chimed in, "Maybe I should be going. I'm just an old country bumpkin, dirty and all. I understand if Mira doesn't want me around." With that, he shakily reached for his cane next to him, struggling to stand up as if ready to leave.

Mirabella was flabbergasted. What an actor!

“Oh, please, it’s not like that at all,” Both Delilah and Shawn rose to their feet, helping

Donald back onto the couch.

Turning to Mirabella, Delilah said, “It was not easy for him to come all the way to the city. You could be a bit more hospitable.”

As her words fell, even Shawn, who usually spoiled his daughter, couldn’t help but give Mirabella a look of mild reproach as if to say, how could you treat an elder like this?

Mirabella, who hadn’t managed two words yet, was left feeling undervalued by her own

parents.

The couple then comforted Donald and assured him he was welcome to stay, quickly telling Mirabella to keep him company before they headed to the kitchen.

Once they were out of earshot, Mirabella took a seat next to Donald, stared him dead in the eye without a trace of emotion, and demanded, “Where did you even come from?”

Without Delilah and Shawn around, Donald dropped his pitiful act. Resting his hands on his cane, he arrogantly replied, “You hit me and thought you could run off? Do you think the world works like that?” In other words, there was no way she was getting rid of him that easily.

Watching Donald’s demeanor switch in an instant, Mirabella felt a pulse throbbing at her temple. “Who hit who? You know exactly what happened”

“Clearly, you hit me. How could a frail old man like myself knock into you?” Donald retorted.

Mirabella, with a steely look, cut straight to the chase. "Fine, how did you

find my

house?"

She paused, then rephrased her question, gazing directly at Donald. "Or rather, what's your purpose for tracking me down? Don't give me that grandpa story. We don't know each other

Donald's gaze wavered slightly, but he stood his ground, "You hit me, so you're responsible for taking care of me."

Mirabella's patience had run dry. "I don't care what you're after, but you better find an excuse to leave my place. Otherwise, brace yourself to be thrown out."

Donald anorted and tilted his chin up even more defiantly, "Go ahead, try throwing out a poor old man like me!"

Mirabella was at her wit's end.

Just then, Zach walked back into the living room. He raised an eyebrow upon seeing the old man and looked questioningly at his sister. "Mirabella, who's this?"

"Oh, I'm Donald, Mira's Grandfather back home," Donald switched back to his kindly facade, answering for her.

Mirabella's face darkened even more as she thought to herself, "It's getting really hard not to punch an old man."

Chapter 416

Zach was oblivious to the look on his sister's face, his thoughts interrupted only by Donald's remarks, His brain scurried to make sense of the situation,

Didn't Catherine raise Mirabella since she was a tot? And wasn't Catherine a lifelong bachelorette? Where the heck did this Donald character pop out from?

Donald, catching the puzzled look on Zach's face, decided to add with a chuckle, "Back in our old neighborhood, I lived right next door to this kiddo. She used to pop by my place all the time as a child."

With that piece of the puzzle, Zach's confusion began to dissipate. The old man was Catherine's next-door neighbor and must've looked out for sis when she was little. Calling him grandpa, though... was kind of odd, but then again, it was not entirely out of line either. So, Zach nodded politely at the elderly gent. "I appreciate you looking out for my sister when she was younger."

Mirabella sighed. Great, another sucker bamboozled. This was just too much.

Donald glanced slyly at Mirabella, noting her silent protest, his lips curling with a victorious smirk. He waved a hand at Zach, "Oh, think nothing of it, my boy. It was my pleasure."

Zach took a seat on the sofa opposite Donald, and the two of them struck up a conversation.

Mirabella shook her head in silent resignation at the sight of the old con artist and her naive brother hitting it off, then stood up. She barely moved a step before Donald, ever watchful, caught her by the arm.

Mirabella shot him a sidelong glance.

Donald cleared his throat. "And where might my dear granddaughter be off to?"

"...The restroom," she replied, her tone icy.

Shaking off his grip, Mirabella made her way out of the living room.

Donald watched Mirabella's retreating figure, thinking, "Feisty one, ain't she?"

After a visit to the bathroom, Mirabella wandered into the kitchen, leaning casually against the doorframe. She

atched as Shawn, her dad, was bustling around with dinner preparations. "Hey, Dad, how did Donald end up at our place?"

Shawn, busy rinsing veggies, didn't question her choice of words and simply responded, "Didn't you leave your phone behind when you went off to school? I heard it ringing, and that's how I found out the old man was at the hospital, alone and out of sorts. So, your mom and I went to pick him up."

na'she suspected.

Mirabella pinched the bridge of her nose. "You guys aren't worried he's a scam artist?"

Shawn glanced at Mirabella, "He told us a lot of stuff about you."

Mirabella frowned, "You got tricked. I don't even know him."

At that, Shawn stopped what he was doing and looked at her seriously, "Now, darling, we shouldn't be ungrateful. The man did look after you when you were little, even if it was in a small country town. You can't just pretend not to know him."

"You heard your father. He's in his eighties. What could he possibly scam us out of?" chimed Delilah from beside him.

Mirabella was shocked.

Great, conman Donald had not only brainwashed her parents but also roped them into his little scheme.

Delilah dished out some steamed veggies, saying, "Alright, no use standing around here. Go call Donald, dinner's ready."

Mirabella touched her nose thoughtfully, then turned to leave the kitchen.

During dinner, Donald clung to Mirabella like glue, seating himself right beside her with a demeanor so cautious, as if afraid of being rejected. To everyone but Mirabella, it was at heart-rending sight. Thus, the three family members went out of their way to cater to

Donald.

As for Mirabella, she was silently slapped with the label of 'disappointing child' in the eyes of her family.

Chapter 417

Back at home for quite some time, Mirabella was tasting the bitter flavor of being ostracized by her father, her mother, and her brother for the first time. She sat at the dinner table, mindlessly pushing food around her plate with a fork, occasionally casting a sidelong glance at Donald, who sat next to her. She just couldn't fathom what kind of sweet talker Donald was, to have hoodwinked them all into doubting her word.

After a lackluster dinner, Mirabella was all set to retreat to her room when Delilah insisted she stick around to keep Donald company. Reluctantly, she stayed put in the living room, not making any effort to strike up a conversation, and instead pulled out her phone for some solitary entertainment.

Shawn, witnessing his daughter's aloof disposition, couldn't help but shake his head in distress. He took a seat beside Donald and struck up a small talk, "Do you enjoy a good cup of coffee?"

As a man who wouldn't end his meal without a cup of coffee, Shawn was naturally expecting to continue his ritual today.

At the mention of coffee, Donald's eyes lit up. "That's one of my few indulgences," he admitted with a nod.

Encouraged by this common ground, Shawn stood up and said, "Give me a moment. I'll fetch the coffee set."

Donald had been away from home for two days without the comfort of his coffee ritual and was feeling rather out of sorts.

Mirabella, clutching her phone, spared a glance at Shawn and Donald, shook her head in dismay, and turned away from them, diving back into the digital world on her screen.

Shawn headed to the temperature-controlled pantry where his precious coffee collection awaited. His eyes scanned the array of prized leaves before settling on a box of Blue Mountain coffee. He hesitated for a brief moment, then grabbed the coffee and a pot, exiting the pantry with a purpose. Donald was a special guest and deserved the best.

Soon, Shawn returned to the living room, cradling a complete set of coffeeware along with the coffee. Donald's gaze fell upon the clay pot in Shawn's hands, betraying a flicker of surprise.

A vintage coffeepot like this could fetch tens of thousands of dollars. Donald tapped his fingers slowly on his knee, lost in thought.

"What kind of coffee do you usually prefer?" Shawn asked while heating the water.

"I'm not picky." Donald replied with a smile. Despite being well into his eighties, his complexion was rosy, and his wrinkles weren't as profound as one might expect, giving him a lively appearance.

"I've recently acquired a box of vintage Blue Mountain. Today's a fine day to share it Shawn said, reaching for the tin box beside him.

Hearing this, Donald perked up. "Well, it seems I'm in for a treat today."

His attention finally settled on the coffee box in Shawn's hands, recognizing the all-too-familiar container. Donald was taken aback. Could it be the same as the one he had treasured for many years?

He rubbed his eyes, thinking he was seeing things, but when he looked again, there it was, the distinctive box he knew so well.

After acquiring a batch of Blue Mountain coffee beans, he had a special airtight container made to preserve it long-term. He was convinced that his batch was one of a kind with no duplicates out there.

So... could this coffee be from his storage?

His mind was racing with confusion as Shawn proceeded to brew the coffee, pouring the first cup

for Donald. As the rich aroma of the aged Blue Mountain filled the air, Shau invited, "Donald, please, have a taste."

27:42

Chapter 418

Donald inhaled deeply, the rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee hanging in the air like an inviting cloud. His mind was buzzing with anticipation..

For a connoisseur like him, the scent alone was enough to judge the quality of the coffee beans. And with that unique coffee tin... there was no doubt about it. This brew had to be from his prized collection.

His gaze settled on the steaming cup of coffee with its caramel crema, and he was utterly baffled. How on earth did his special blend end up

here?

With trembling hands, he lifted the cup and took a tentative sip. The full-bodied flavor enveloped his taste buds, and although it should have tasted heavenly, it felt as bitter as quinine on his tongue. It was enough to make him want to cry.

Shawn, oblivious to Donald's turmoil, savored his own sip and, after a moment of reflection, praised the coffee with closed eyes, "Smooth with a hint of chocolate and a touch of nuttiness. This aged blend is truly a delight."

Hearing Shawn's comments twisted the knife in Donald's gut. Delightful, indeed. He had gone to such lengths to acquire and age this blend for seven or eight years, and it was too precious for him to even consider drinking himself!

As Shawn refilled his own cup and noticed Donald's was empty, he topped it off and casually inquired, "Donald, what do you make of this coffee?"

Donald's hand shook again as he forced a thin smile. "It's quite... quite good..."

After a few seconds, Donald's eyes landed on the coffee tin on the table, and he asked, "Where did you pick up this fine blend, if I may ask?"

A paternal smile spread across Shawn's face as he glanced at Mirabella, who was curled up on the couch, scrolling through her phone. "Oh, it wasn't bought. It was a gift from one of Mira's friends."

At that, Donald felt like exploding. The nerve of some people, using his coffee to curry favor.

He knew it! On his last visit to Riverdale, that brat hadn't bothered to stop by the family home. Now, it was clear he had something to hide.

"I'll be sure to send you back home with some. It's not a large batch, but it's perfect for an occasional indulgence," Shawn offered politely.

Donald, struggling to maintain his composure, shook his head in refusal. "No, no, a gentleman doesn't take away someone else's treasure. I'm already fortunate enough to have had a taste today."

At the mention of 'a gentleman, Mirabella looked up from her phone and cast a dismissive

glance at Donald. If he were truly a gentleman, he wouldn't be here causing trouble in her home.

Donald continued to sip his coffee, the headache rendering him too distracted to engage in much conversation with Shawn. Finally unable to contain his anger, Donald pulled out his phone, scrolled through his contacts, and tapped out a message with deliberate slowness.

[You little brat, you're in for it now!]

With that, he turned off his phone.

Next door, James read the message half an hour later.

"Judging by the content, Donald must have been in a state of extreme rage when he sent this," Wyatt analyzed solemnly, holding James' phone.

After placing the phone down, he asked, "Sir, what have you done today to get under Donald's skin?"

James cast a brief glance at him, "Did you find him?"

"No... not yet," Wyatt admitted, scratching his head.

Well, if they hadn't found him, James couldn't have done something to upset Donald. B why would Donald suddenly send such a message?

Wyatt was stumped. He turned to Curtis, who was standing nearby, and after a moment's thought, suggested, "Curtis, can you trace where Donald sent that message from?"

Chapter 419

Curtis acknowledged with a simple “Okay” before grabbing the nearby laptop and booting it up with swift precision.

Through the magic of the internet, the computer quickly synced with James’ phone, and Curtis’ fingers danced across the keyboard, prompting a satellite map to appear on the

screen.

As the red dot on the map blinked, Curtis zoomed in, narrowing the scope until it pinpointed Ashford. But when he tried to get a more exact location, he hit a wall. It was as if the signal to Donald’s phone was being jammed.

Curtis furrowed his brow, trying other methods to no avail. It was as if Donald’s phone signal had been swallowed by a black hole.

Wyatt, sensing Curtis’ frustration, peered at the computer screen. Other than the blinking red dot, there was no street information. “What’s the deal here?”

Curtis shook his head. “Can’t get a precise fix”

“Huh... Wasn’t Donald flying solo? He’s not exactly a techie, so how come we can’t pinpoint him?” Wyatt’s confusion was palpable.

“I’m not sure. I’ve tried several tricks, but nothing’s working, Curtis replied, his lips pressed in a thin line, his expression solemn.

Wyatt sat up straight, his voice heavy with concern, “Why’s this happening? He isn’t in trouble, is he? Otherwise, he wouldn’t just randomly shoot a message to James.”

Knowing Donald as they did, he wouldn’t leave any digital breadcrumbs if he didn’t want to be found.

The text was... suspicious, to say the least.

“It’s probably not that dire. Donald’s general whereabouts are in the city. If there was any fuss, my guys would’ve noticed, Curtis seemed less worried than Wyatt.

“Fair point. But this hidden location...” Wyatt eyed Curtis with a hint of skepticism. “Curtis, is your hacker mojo fading? Since that museum heist and the recent firewall fiasco, when have you actually nailed the bad guy?” Wyatt shook his head. His admiration for Curtis’ computer wizardry was waning. He was seriously questioning whether Curtis’ global ranking as the seventh–best was just hot air.

“Curtis, you need to up your game. You can’t rest on your laurels, or you’ll be left in the dust,” Wyatt said, patting Curtis’ shoulder with a mix of concern and mockery.

Curtis’ patience was hanging by a thread. He took a deep breath, chose to ignore Wyatt’s jabs, and turned to James. There’s likely a jammer or some kind of signal interference where Donald is, which is why we can’t get a fix.”

After a slight pause, Curtis added with a tinge of regret, “Too bad his phone’s off now, or I could’ve tried a different hack.”

Under the bright lights, James’ handsome face exuded a lazy charm, his deep–set eyes inscrutable, his relaxed posture oozing an air of inherent nobility. He spoke nonchalantly, “He’ll show up when he’s had his fun.”

Wyatt, who had a PhD in Donald’s moods, confidently added, “True. Based on Donald’s knack for sudden mood swings, he’ll probably show up on James’ doorstep within a couple of days.”

Curtis gave Wyatt a sidelong glance. The guy might not be good for much, but when it came to predicting Donald’s temper, he was never off the mark.

“So, no need to rally the troops. We’ll just wait it out,” Wyatt concluded.

Chapter 420

Over here.

After finishing his cup of coffee, Shawn could tell that Donald wasn't his usual sprightly self. He chalked it up to the typical ebb of energy that comes with age, not nearly as robust as the younger lot. So, without further ado, he signaled for his daughter to escort Donald up to the guest room prepared on the second floor for some rest

Once they reached the guest room, she walked in first with Donald trailing behind, and as the door shut, she casually flicked the deadbolt into place. The sound of the lock clicking made Donald spin around, an edgy look in his eyes. "What's with the deadbolt?" he asked, his voice tight with suspicion.

Mirabella crossed her arms and fixed Donald with a piercing gaze. "Donald, I'm giving you one more chance to come clean," she said, her voice soft but laced with a dangerous edge.

Donald hadn't expected Mirabella to be so assertive—it starkly contrasted what he had read in her profile. He put the regret over his coffee aside and slowly made his way to a nearby chair, sinking into it before responding, "Come clean about what?"

She hooked a chair with her foot, pulled it closer, and took a seat herself. A sudden patience seemed to wash over her as she said, "For starters, who are you really? And what's your purpose in seeking me out?"

"Oh, I'm just a lonely old man in need of care. You're easy on the eyes, and you suit my taste. That's all," Donald replied, this time not beating around the bush.

A smirk twitched at the corner of Mirabella's lips. "You really think I'd buy that?"

"Well, there's nothing I can do if you don't believe me. I'm just a harmless old man. If you're itching to get rough, then be my guest," Donald said, spreading his hands in a gesture of indifference.

Mirabella looked at the con artist before her without a flicker of emotion, fully aware that he was playing dumb again, yet infuriatingly, she was at a loss for what to do.

Feeling the intensity of her stare, Donald's scalp tingled. He knew better than to overplay his hand, so he cleared his throat and said, "What's with all the negativity, young lady? I'm not going to harm you. I'm just here to stay for a little while."

"Ha, since when do guests lock themselves in like that?" Mirabella chuckled in disbelief.

A scam artist who had wormed his way into her home? Such a tall tale would hardly be believed if she told anyone.

With a huff, Donald retorted, "It's because of your lack of charity that I had to come to you." The thought of last night's dinner—reduced to a microwaved meal—still irked him.

Mirabella's gaze remained frosty. "Yeah right."

Donald touched his nose, and then, leaning on his cane, he stood and moved towards the bed. "I mean you no harm. I'll be gone in a few days. Just think of it as taking care of a homeless old man."

He sat on the edge of the bed, not even glancing at Mirabella. As he pulled back the covers, he muttered to himself, "Who knows, maybe someday we'll be family."

Sure, the girl had a temper, was rough around the edges, and lacked a bit of compassion for the elderly. But she was a looker. Looks are justice, after all. He had a soft spot for pretty faces.

"Alright, time for bed. It's not good for seniors to stay up late," Donald said with a yawn, then turned his back to Mirabella and shut his eyes, feigning sleep.

Mirabella was in disbelief. Indeed, whether in the past or the present, grandpas were the one she despised the most—without a doubt. Taking a deep breath, Mirabella stood up and left the room.

Once the sound of the door closing echoed through the room, Donald, who had been lying on his side pretending to sleep, suddenly opened his eyes, a smug smile playing across his lips as if he had just pulled off a sly trick.