

## **The Double 491**

### Chapter 491

Donald glanced at Curtis and placed the black checker with an assertive thump on the board, a crisp sound ringing through the air.

Curtis heard the noise, and jolted in his seat, reflexively sitting down with his back ramrod straight, looking every bit the picture of concentration on the game before him.

Trailing behind James, Wyatt caught the scene and couldn't help but think to himself, "Thank God I wasn't the one caught swiping coffee beans back in the day"

James gave the board a cursory look before carefully setting down the plastic cylinder he was carrying on the side table next to his armchair.

Donald caught sight of the cookie design on the container and couldn't help but curl his lip in disdain. "What's with the cookie tin? Don't you know I've never had a sweet tooth?"

James settled into the sofa, a serene grace playing across his handsome features under the lamp's soft glow. He leaned back casually and said, "It's not cookies."

At that, Donald's curiosity was piqued. "Then what is it?"

Massaging his brow, James closed his eyes and replied in a measured tone, "You could always open it and see for yourself."

Veering off from his initial move to pick up another checker, Donald reached for the plastic container instead.

The opaque wrapping concealed its contents, leaving Donald to guess what was inside until he unscrewed the lid and found incense sticks. He paused, momentarily taken aback. Looking up, he inquired, "This incense..."

Before he could finish, Wyatt chimed in with an explanation, "Ms. Mirabella sent that over."

James, who had paused his temple massaging, opened his eyes to give Wyatt a sharp look. Oblivious to the exchange, Wyatt continued, "Ms. Mirabella heard you've been having trouble sleeping and thought this might help."

Donald cast a skeptical eye on Wyatt. "That young lady has a good heart?" He found it hard to believe.

Wyatt straightened up, defending Mirabella with conviction, "Ms. Mirabella is as kind-hearted as she is beautiful, with a temper to match."

Curtis, quietly observing, couldn't help but think how Wyatt seemed to be her number one fan.

Donald's eyelids twitched. Sure, she was beautiful but kind-hearted? With a good temper? Was the same person who once coldly threatened to chase him away and even boasted about fighting seniors a fake?

Taking a whiff of the incense, Donald detected the familiar scent of sandalwood mixed with a hint of medicinal herbs, likely the same kind she had used that one night. After sealing the container, Donald rose to his feet, abandoning the game, and headed upstairs with the incense in hand.

Once Donald had departed, Curtis, who had been sitting up so stiffly, finally allowed himself to relax. He rubbed his stiff knees, his discomfort unspeakable. Faced with the choice between dealing with Donald and working in Antarctica, he'd take the latter any day.

Wyatt clapped Curtis on the shoulder. "Curtis, you've had it tough."

Curtis, expressionless, shrugged off the hand, his face all but spelling out the word 'Scram.'

Wyatt touched his nose and moved around the armchair to avoid Curtis' foul mood, making sure to sit at a safe distance.

Curtis glanced at James and remembered something important. "Oh, James, the security system for the Davis family next door should be from DO Group, right?"

"No way! Doesn't DO'S security only cater to government agencies in m

major nations? How did the Davis. nations family get it? Are you sure you're not mistaken, Curtis?" Wyatt exclaimed in surprise.

DO was renowned internationally as a top-of-the-line security systems company, boasting the most com advanced hacking technology and a grip on countless internet infrastructures worldwide. Even the Shepherd family had tried to negotiate a deal with them multiple times, only to be rebuffed.

The idea of the Davis family using DO's systems.... was almost unthinkable.

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Curtis swiveled his head to look at Wyatt, a dead serious expression on his face. "There's no way I've mixed up anything here." Despite questioning his life choices recently, his reputation as a top-notch hacker wasn't just hot air. How could he misidentify a system?

Wyatt was even more staggered. After a moment, he muttered incredulously, "Does this mean... DO Group is taking on private gigs now?"

Curtis gave him a withering look. "Use your noggin, man. That's not even a possibility."

"If they're not moonlighting, then why would the Davis family be using DO's system?" Wyatt couldn't think of any other explanation.

Curtis fell silent for a beat, then turned back to him. "Have you ever dug into the Davis family's background?"

Wyatt shook his head. Back when he was investigating Mirabella, he'd only looked into her past. Since she was just a kid switched at birth, he'd focused on the Gilbert family, not the Davises. So, his knowledge about the Davis clan was pretty sparse.

However, he did have a hunch that the Davis family wasn't some blue-blooded dynasty. After all, they'd lived in that quaint, weathered neighborhood before. Plus, he'd met the Davis couple - easygoing folks. Aside from their striking good looks, they seemed just like any ordinary Joe and Jane.

Yet, why would such an average family have an international top-tier surveillance system? It was a head-scratcher.

After some thought, Wyatt suggested, "Maybe I should take another crack at looking up the Davis family?"

Curtis was about to agree when James, who had been silent till then, lifted his head and spoke with a cool detachment, "No need."

Curtis watched James, puzzled.

James' eyes were clear and sharp as he glanced at Curtis. "A family with a world-class system installed at home - what do you think your snooping will uncover?"

At that, Curtis fell into contemplation.

Well, probably nothing.

"Maybe we should just ask Ms. Mirabella directly one of these days," Wyatt proposed, pausing briefly. "She seems approachable enough. She might just spill the beans."

Curtis looked at Wyatt, resisting the urge to comment on his naivety. Ms. Mirabella wouldn't know the first thing about it. It'd be a shot in the dark.

Shaking his head, Curtis let the subject drop. If James said no more digging, then that was that.

The next day.

After breakfast, Shawn grabbed his car keys, ready for the usual routine of driving his daughter to school, but she seemed to be in no rush.

"Dad, I forgot to tell you last night I took the day off," Mirabella said, noticing the keys in Shawn's hand and remembering her schedule.

Shawn looked surprised. His daughter always prioritized her studies. Why the sudden day off? "Feeling under the weather?" he asked instinctively.

"No, Leo and I landed a commercial gig. We're shooting it today," she explained.

"Oh, a commercial, huh..." Shawn nodded, and then it dawned on him. "Honey, you're not planning to follow in Leo's footsteps and dive into showbiz, are you?"

Dive into showbiz? Mirabella's face was a mix of amusement and exasperation.

Rich folks sure had a different way with words.

"Showbiz can be a snake pit, sweetie, and you're too genuine for that m scene," Shawn spoke earnestly. Besides, a prospective Prestige College scholar stooping to do commercials seemed like a waste of talent.

Realizing her father's misunderstanding, Mirabella chuckled. "Dad, I'm just riding on Leo's coattails, grabbing a cameo for some quick cash. I'm not aiming for a spot in the limelight."

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Shawn sighed in relief upon hearing the news, yet a nagging thought lingered- his daughter was adamant about not joining showbiz for now, but who was to say she wouldn't change her mind later? And since when did she start prioritizing a commercial shoot over school? It was a clear sign that her brother was slowly reshaping her once steadfast habits.

Squinting his eyes with suspicion, Shawn couldn't help but think, "Leo is no angel, that's for sure!"

With that thought, he tossed the car keys back into the drawer and announced, "I'm heading upstairs." Without wasting a moment, he bounded up the stairs, an almost palpable aura of fury trailing behind him.

Mirabella watched, utterly baffled, as her father ascended. "What on earth is he going up there for?" she wondered.

Upstairs, Leo was still blissfully snoozing, like a teenager who wouldn't dream of stirring until the last minute before heading out. Leo's door wasn't locked, so Shawn burst in to find his son buried under the blankets, imitation surging through him.

Striding over, he yanked the covers back. Early winter mornings were chilly, and the sudden loss of warmth jolted Leo awake. Groggy and disoriented, Leo rolled over, peering up at Shawn with half-open eyes. He managed to snag the blanket and pull it back over himself, and mumbled, "Dad, what's with the blanket snatch?"

Shawn's expression was stone-cold. "Listen here, young man, I don't want you dragging your sister into the spotlight anymore."

Leo, now fully awake and sitting up to tousle his bed hair, was confused. "Spotlight? What are you talking about?"

"Don't play innocent! It's one thing for you to chase after commercials, but to rope in your sister and make her skip class to join you? Doesn't that prick your conscience?" Shawn was livid, and if he had a stick in hand, it might have very well found its way onto Leo.

"Dad, just hear me out. I'm actually..

"Are you telling me you didn't coax your sister into doing that ad?" Shawn cut him off sharply.

"I... well..."

"If I catch you pulling her into another ad or some TV show and messing with her studies, you better watch your legs," Shawn warned coldly before storming out of the room and slamming the door with a resounding thud.

A bewildered Leo stared at the closed door, taking a while to process his father's harsh words. He was actually the victim here, alright?

Twenty minutes later, Leo trudged downstairs, his curls in a chaotic tangle. Seeing his sister sipping tea on the couch next to their dad-especially their dad, who now looked as gentle and benign as could be, in stark contrast to the menacing figure who had just threatened him upstairs-Leo heaved a heavy sigh.

In this household, a son truly had no standing. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

Promptly at nine, Collins arrived outside the Davis family mansion. As Leo climbed into the car, Collins

noticed his star looking wilted and asked with concern, "Leo, what's wrong with you? You look all out of sorts. Feeling under the weather?"

Leo gave him a silent look. His morning had been rough, courtesy of his dear old dad-how could he feel

anything but?

"Nah, just didn't sleep well last night," he muttered, making up an excuse.

Seeing this, Collins suggested, "Well, why don't you catch some more 2's in the car?"

"Sure," Leo responded with a nod, settling into the seat.

Mirabella raised an eyebrow slightly and gracefully slid into the car beside him.

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The location for the commercial shoot was not right in the hustling downtown pedestrian mall. Even though it wasn't the weekend rush of Saturday or Sunday, there was still a healthy stream of shoppers milling about. Today, Collins had opted to drive the family's roomy SUV. The makeup artist had already arranged to meet them by the pedestrian mall, and once the car was parked, she hoisted her makeup kit aboard and began working on the siblings. It was her first time laying eyes on Mirabella's face, and she couldn't help but be completely dazzled by her beauty. She'd seen her fair share of stunners, but most had been touched up with a little nip here, a tuck there—beauty that owed more to the minute of aesthetics than nature.

But Mirabella's face was flawless to the point of disbelief. It was a rarity, the kind of beauty that made the makeup artist hesitate, fearing that any cosmetics might mar its perfection.

Since Mirabella wouldn't be showing her face on camera, the artist only filled in her brows a touch, softening the naturally sharp arch just a bit.

After she finished prepping Leo, the makeup artist shyly pulled out her phone and sidled up to Mirabella. "Hey, would you mind if we snapped a selfie together?" she asked, a blush coloring her voice.

Mirabella blinked in surprise at the request. Leo, catching wind of the conversation, couldn't mask a hint of jealousy. "Gina, I thought you were my number one fan?" he teased.

Asking for a selfie with someone else right in front of your idol? That was bold. Even though that someone was his sister.

Gina giggled behind her hand. "Well, Justin, that was before. I've totally switched teams to now."



Leo was in disbelief. Traitorous fan.

you o your sister Gina then turned back to Mirabella, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "So, what do you say? We can take It with masks on,"

Mirabella nodded. "Sure."

Gino quickly opened her phone's camera app, but as she stood next to Mirabella, ready to capture the moment, she almost wanted to cry.

Mirabella towered over most girls, and Gina was only five-foot-three. In the end, Mirabella had to crouch down slightly to fit into the frame properly.

After one shot, Gina felt too shy to ask for another, but Mirabella offered, "Want a full-body shot?"

wor The offer was too good to be true, and Gina eagerly nodded her head.

Mirabella passed Gina's phone to Leo. "Leo, would you mind taking the picture for us?"

Leo rolled his eyes with mock indignation. "Stealing my fans, and now you want me to play photographer? You've got some nerve!"

Mirabella raised an eyebrow. "Are you going to take it or not?"

Leo playfully touched his nose before obediently taking the phone and snapping several full-body shots of

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the two.

When Gina got her phone back and saw the five selfies in her gallery she looked up at Leo and said with a grin, "Juztin, you know, you're still one of my favorites."

Leo glanced at her stone-faced. "Drop the 'one of when you say that, thanks."

Gina just laughed.

Before long, Collins returned from discussing the details with the sports brand representative, carrying two paper bags. As he approached, he handed one to each sibling. "Here are the outfits for today's shoot. Go ahead and change into them."

Mirabella took her bag and stepped into the SUV to change. Moments later, she emerged, looking like she was made for the camera. The spring sportswear hung on her tall, slim frame with effortless style—especially those legs, long and straight, the kind that could carry any look.

Gina watched, her gaze lingering on Mirabella's face, and sighed, "If only you didn't have to wear a mask, it'd be perfect."

Collins stood with his arms crossed, a glint of insight in his eyes. "Actually, wearing a mask adds a mysterious allure. Trust me, when this ad hits the screens, it's gonna blow the roof off sales for the brand." As a top-notch agent, Collins had a keen eye for potential hits.

Gina nodded in agreement, "You're not kidding. Just looking at her in that get-up makes me wanna rush out and snag one for myself." The vibe was just spot-on.

While they were deep in discussion, Leo had finished changing. He stepped out into a slight chill and felt the briskness through his thin sportswear, so he doubled back to grab his jacket. It was only after zipping up that he felt somewhat comfortable.

Leo approached his sister, huddling within his coat. "Mira, aren't you cold?"

"I'm good," Mirabella replied, unfazed. Her constitution had grown stronger than the average person's after over a year of rigorous training, so a bit of cold was nothing to her.

Leo, however, insisted, "You should probably put on your jacket anyway. Wouldn't want to catch a cold shooting this... damned commercial and regret it later."

Mirabella watched him quietly, a silent sigh in her heart. In the morning, Shawn's take on showbiz was all fun and games, and now here was her brother calling a five million dollar ad 'damned'-was it her lack of imagination, or did poverty indeed have a ceiling?

After a moment's pause, she simply stated, "I'm stronger than I look."

Leo couldn't help but feel that there was an unsaid jab in her words. He glanced down at his own jacket, suddenly overcome with the urge to shrug it off.

"Let's head over. The crew's waiting for us," Collins interjected, gesturing to the team of seven or eight bodyguards standing by.

Leo's popularity skyrocketed after the success of Country Comfort. Considering the crowds that typically thronged their shooting location, it was necessary to have a strong security detail. The central plaza of the pedestrian street had been rented out and cordoned off for the shoot, all equipment at the ready.

The brand's advertising manager's eyes sparkled at the sight of Mirabella in her sportswear-it was even better than he'd imagined. He'd been drawn to her when he first saw her in Country Comfort, sporting similar attire. Although she hadn't shown her face and had minimal screen time in the live show, she somehow radiated a protagonist's aura.

That was why the buzz online wasn't about the top star J Justin, nor the award-winning actress Heather, and not even the veteran actor Hans, but about Justin's sister, Mirabella.

The company hadn't initially planned on hiring Juztin and his sister, mainly because their endorsement fee exceeded that of average A-list celebrities. Plus, the marketing department had reservations about Mirabella's faceless approach to advertising. It was risky, potentially a major loss.

Nevertheless, he felt so strongly that Mirabella was the perfect fit that he'd staked his job on it, vowing to leave the company if the ad didn't hit its sales targets.

The manager, who had been somewhat nervous, now fully trusted his instincts. With his excitement contained, he approached Mirabella and Leo with the script in hand, outlining his creative vision.

After finishing his pitch, he looked down, a bold idea striking him. He then took the lines originally

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intended for Leo and, instead, handed them to Mirabella.

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Mirabella flipped through the script, her eyes scanning the handful of lines she had to deliver. Each sentence was meticulously annotated with the exact tone and expression needed to breathe life into the words on the page. The brief was clear. She was to embody the archetype of a fiercely protective parent.

Glancing sideways at Leo, her brother's adorably clueless demeanor caught her attention. Yep... he definitely looked like someone who needed to be looked after.

Oblivious to his sister's scrutiny, Leo stared blankly at the script. It took him a moment before he looked up, his gaze landing on the brand representative who was still hovering nearby. "Isn't there something off about this character concept?" he questioned.

They wanted him to come off as... cute. For someone who naturally exuded an icy cool vibe, the idea of 'cute' seemed utterly foreign. The manager's eyes darted with a hint of guilt, but his expression remained composed as he reassured Leo, "This character was tailored for you based on how you and your sister came across on that live show. It's well thought out, I assure you." No way was he going to admit that the character swap was a last-minute decision.

Leo's face was a mask of skepticism. Tailored? Since when was his persona anything close to 'cute'? He opened his mouth to argue, but Mirabella, ever the curious one, beat him to it. "What kind of character is this?" Without a word, Leo handed her the script. After a quick glance, she looked up at him and patted his shoulder reassuringly. "I don't see a problem with it." The little princess' character suited him to a T.

Leo was baffled.

Turning to the brand manager, Mirabella chimed in, "No worries, the ad concept is pretty creative."

Having quickly learned that the sister was the more assertive of the two, the manager cleared his throat and said, "Well then.... if you need a few minutes to prepare, I'll just go over some minor details with the photographer."

"Sure," Mirabella responded politely, effectively sidelining her brother.

"But..." Leo protested, trying to hold the man back, only to be restrained by Mirabella's surprisingly firm grip.

"Mirabella, let go. I need some answers..."

Her hand stayed put as she spoke calmly, "Leo, just chill. It's only a commercial."

"It's not about chilling. This feels like a personal insult," Leo fumed, frustration evident in his posture.

Mirabella couldn't help but find his indignant, squirrel-like pout amusing. She wanted to ruffle his curly locks but thought better of it, considering the time spent on hair and makeup. Instead, she patted his shoulder again. "The real focus should be the paycheck."

At the mention of money, Leo's mood soured even more. His sister was actually valuing the ad revenue over his feelings.

After another glance at Mirabella's script, Leo's will to complain drained away. The role reversal was complete. The brand was asking his sister to step into his shoes. He massaged his temples, foreseeing

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the inevitable collapse of his e

hard-earned personance the M commercial aired.

With a heavy sigh, he caught another glimpse of his sister, whose love for money apparently trumped sibling Idyality. Well, if she was happy, he supposed that was what mattered.

No matter how much his little sister exploited him, she deserved his support.

Soon enough, the photography team signaled they were ready, and it was time for the siblings to step in front siblyngedy, of the camera.

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Mirabella had only ever been on the live show Country Comfort once before, so when she first started shooting the commercial, she was understandably a bit rusty. She flubbed her lines twice. But by the third. take, she had fully gotten into the swing of things. She slipped into her role with such ease that it was as if she was born for the camera. On the other hand, Leo, her co-star, seemed to struggle with every take.

Leo was no stranger to endorsements, having done a few commercials himself. You'd think, with his experience, he'd outshine his sister, but as the shoot went on, Mirabella set the pace, leading Leo into the rhythm needed to wrap up the shoot.

The brand manager had been sweating bullets at the start, but as the takes got smoother, he could finally breathe a sigh of relief. Once they wrapped, he reviewed the footage, particularly taken with Mirabella's mysterious, cool demeanor that shone through even without showing her face. He couldn't have been more pleased.

He was convinced-his insistence on casting her was spot on. Plus, this was just the raw vlog footage. Once they added sound effects in post-production, the sales were going to skyrocket.

The manager was bursting with excitement. He whipped out his phone and instructed the ad department to buckle down and finish the production that very night-even if it meant working overtime. A good ad delayed by even a day was a significant loss.

Just after wrapping up, Leo sneezed so hard it seemed to shake his very core. Mirabella glanced at him, noticing the pallor of his skin against the cold, and remarked, "Leo, your immune system could use some work."

Before Leo could respond, he was interrupted by another sneeze. Collins came over, draping his coat over Leo's shoulders, then handed Mirabella her jacket as well.

As she slipped on her coat, Mirabella asked, "Collins, we're all done here, right? No more shots needed?"

Collins pondered for a moment before replying. "Well, if this ad does well, I reckon we might need some additional photoshoots."

Mirabella's eyebrows shot up. "Will that be a separate charge?"

Collins gave her a silent look.

"I recall clause 12, subsection 3 of the contract states the fee covers this commercial shoot only, not any additional photography," she added.

Collins' eyes widened in disbelief. How did she remember that? He recalled how Mirabella had only skimmed the contract when signing it, and he had thought she was merely putting on an act, not really understanding the details.

Now... Collins touched his nose self-consciously. "Mira, how do you remember all that?"

"Is it that hard?" Mirabella shot back.

Feeling like his intelligence was being mocked, Collins muttered to himself. "Was it not difficult? She had pinpointed it down to the exact clause and subsection!"

Leo, rubbing his nose and sounding a bit nasal, chimed in matter-of-factly, "Collins, have you forgotten my sister's a straight-A student?"

Collins shot him a look. Being a straight-A student and having a photographic memory were entirely different things, thank you very much!

Not in the mood to argue with Leo, Collins turned back to Mirabella and said, "If the brand wants additional photos, well renegotiate the fees."

"Mhmm, Mirabella nodded, pleased as punch, as if she was already counting the extra cash that would soon be hers. Leo turned away, unable to watch his sister's mercenary glee. She was such a money grubber.

Suddenly, Collins remembered something. He quickly fished and Mirabella's phone out of his bag and handed it to her. "Oh right, Mira, someone tried to call you earlier. I didn't pick up."

Mirabella took her phone and checked the missed calls. Her eyes narrowed slightly, her fingertips grazing the phone's edge. She didn't call back but instead slipped the phone back into her pocket.



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"Collins, we're all clear, right? Mirabella lifted her gaze to Collins again.

Collins shook his head and looked around before suggesting. "Let's talk in the car."

By now, a crowd had gathered outside the safety barriers, many wielding smartphones, eager to capture the moment. Mirabella glanced up briefly, then pulled her face mask a bit higher on her nose.

Leo's celebrity status had been cemented from the moment his image, captured by a fan during a casual stroll, was shared within fan circles. Now, with his equally intriguing sister on site, the fans were buzzing, many from the local area converging on the shoot location. Their curiosity wasn't limited to the superstar they adored. They were equally keen to catch a glimpse of the badass sister who dominated the live streams.

The fans finally got up close to Mirabella. Even with her face partly concealed, she was more awe-inspiring than her digital persona had suggested a revelation that exceeded all expectations.

Her sporty attire caught everyone's eye, so much so that people began searching online for the brand. Following a leaked video of the shoot, the sports gear Mirabella wore sold out online and in stores even before the brand's official ad had been released.

The power of a top celeb carried weight, and when it came to supporting the sister who had helped her brother rise to the top, the fans were all in.

Originally there to accompany her brother, Mirabella's popularity surged, catapulting her to Twitter trending fame.

Meanwhile, as the brand's staff were packing up the shoot equipment, the company was flooded with calls about the unexpected spike in online sales, leaving the team stunned.

Snapping back to reality, the brand manager checked the sales figures on the company's system, his heart skipping a beat at the numbers displayed. The campaign had barely wrapped, and the impact was already palpable. He couldn't even begin to imagine the frenzy once the ad went live.

Trying to contain his excitement, he shut the sales dashboard and, after a moment's thought, dialed Collins' number.

After an arduous journey through the crowd, shielded by their bodyguard, the siblings finally settled into the SUV. Mirabella removed her mask, massaging her temples the fervor of fandom was indeed overwhelming. She thanked her lucky stars for opting to remain anonymous in her live streams; otherwise, she might have been driven mad by such relentless enthusiasm.

Collins followed the siblings while on the phone with the brand manager. He climbed into the driver's seat and hung up after his brief conversation. Starting the engine, he glanced in the rearview mirror and said, "Mira, the brand wants to shoot some more photos with you."

Mirabella, surprised, arched an eyebrow. "So soon?"

"Yeah, but the photo shoot is..." Collins was interrupted before he could finish his sentence by Leo's Interjection.

"No, she's not taking any more gigs after this ad, and as for the photos, just decline it," Leo stated firmly.

Mirabella turned to look at him, equally confused by Leo's sed by Leo's sudden e

opposition.

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He felt the sting of humiliation at the thought of it. Shawn's threat to break his legs wasn't exactly something you'd brag about at the bar.

Leo's gaze dropped, unable to meet his sister's eyes. "Look, for everyone's... safety, we're going to have to turn down any ad gigs for you," he said.

"Huh..." Collins, though confused, pondered for a moment before suggesting, "We could pass on the other offers, sure, but this photoshoot is one we can't just shove aside."

"It's easy," Leo waved dismissively, "I'll just do a shoot for them, free of charge."

Collins' expression twisted into a complicated grimace. That might have worked once upon a time, but now... After a few seconds of silence, he said, "They made it clear that they only want the photos with her." The subtext was clear - Leo, the star, had lost his shine.

Leo felt a sudden, overwhelming jab from the world around him.

Mirabella coughed and tilted her head toward Leo, who seemed to have retreated into his shell again. "So we do this shoot, then no more after that?"

Leo sighed inwardly. "Fine." It was the only way Mirabella turned her gaze back to the passing scenery outside the car window and pulled out her phone. She scrolled through her call log and dialed Nikolai back. The missed call during the photoshoot had been from Nikolai.

Leo turned to talk to Mirabella but stopped when he saw her on the phone.

The call connected quickly. Mirabella's eyes remained on the view outside as she spoke calmly, "Nikolai"

"Mirabella, I need your help urgently. Can you take leave... no, or I can come to your school and get your excused," Nikolai said without preamble, getting straight to the point. The urgency in Nikolai's voice was evident, suggesting the patient's condition was serious.

Mirabella pondered for a brief moment before responding. "No need. I didn't go to school today."

At that, a look of relief washed over Nikolai's somber face as he eagerly said, "Then do you have time now? I can send Asher to pick you up."

"No, just give me the address. I'll come myself," Mirabella declined.

"Alright, come straight to my place," Nikolai instructed.

"Okay." Mirabella glanced at her wristwatch. "I should make it in half an hour."

"Good, I'll wait for you."

After the call ended, Mirabella looked up at the road ahead and said to Collins, "Could you please drop me off at the next intersection? I need to take care of something."

"Do you want a ride there?" Collins had overheard the phone conversation.

Mirabella shook her head. "It's fine, I'll catch a cab."

"Alright then," Collins didn't press further.

Leo looked at his sister and opened his mouth to speak. Mirabella met his gaze head-on. "No questions."

Leo could only nod in silence.

"I'll get back home on my own later," she added.

Soon, Collins pulled over to the curb, and Mirabella got put swiftly.

As the car pulled away, Leo watched his sister's figure on the sidewalk through the rearview mirror and let out a melancholic sigh. His sister always had her secrets.

Meanwhile, at the Reeves residence.

Nikolai had just hung up with Mirabella when he turned around to find his son lurking behind him, giving him quite the startle. He glared at him. "Sneaking up behind me like that, you trying to give me a heart attack?"

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Asher furrowed his brow as he glanced at his father's cell phone and said, "Dad, were you just on the line with that girl?"

He just couldn't wrap his head around it. That girl was just good at mixing remedies, wasn't she? So how come, in his dad's eyes, she had suddenly become a jack-of-all-trades? And now he even wanted to call her over to play doctor? This was just too far-fetched.

"What girl? Haven't I told you to address her as your mentor?" Nikolai retorted with exasperation.

Asher shook his head, bemused. "What do you need her for? Can she really cure all ailments?" He believed Mirabella probably knew a thing or two about medicine, but... a teenage girl fixing what even his own father couldn't? Yeah, right.

Nikolai had long noticed his son's bias against Mirabella. No matter how much he tried to convince him, Asher just wouldn't buy it. The more he talked, the more impatient the boy got, so he simply said, "Whatever you're thinking, keep it to yourself in front of Mirabella. Offend her, and you'll live to regret it."

Asher scoffed dismissively, not wanting to discuss Mirabella any further, and glanced at his watch. "My brother should be getting home soon. I'll wait for him at the door," When his brother arrived, Asher definitely needed to have a serious talk with him about Donald's current muddled state to prevent him from being duped.

Nikolai's expression softened considerably, and he waved his hand. "Off you go."

After dismissing his son, he gestured for the butler to also wait at the entrance, not for his eldest, but for Mirabella.

Twenty minutes later, Mirabella's taxi pulled up in front of the Reeves family estate. She paid the fare and stepped out of the car.

The butler, waiting at the entrance, approached her with a smile plastered on his face and said politely. "Ms. Mirabella, welcome."

"Thank you," Mirabella nodded in acknowledgment.

The butler, in his fifties, had been groomed by Nikolai himself and had met all sorts of people. Unlike Asher, he did not look down on others with arrogance or prejudice. He could tell that the young woman before him must possess some remarkable skills; otherwise, Nikolai wouldn't hold her in such high regard. Besides, just looking at her, there was a composed sharpness in her eyes that set her apart from the ordinary, seemingly innocuous but with an inscrutable underlying depth.

The butler composed himself, saying, "Mr. Nikolai is waiting for you inside. Please, follow me."

"Please lead the way," she replied, her tone courteous yet detached.

The butler nodded and gestured for Mirabella to walk ahead, treating her with the utmost respect. Leaning against the door, still waiting for his brother, Asher caught sight of the butler's subservient demeanor, and his lips curled into a sneer. Even the butler had lost his marbles.

As Mirabella approached, Asher, with his arms crossed, suddenly threw out a comment, "Ms. Mirabella, don't you have classes to attend?"

The remark caused the butler walking behind Mirabella to stiffen slightly and cleared his throat with a cough.

Before Mirabella even stepped foot inside, Asher was already making unwelcoming remarks which went against the family's code of hospitality - especially since Ms. Mirabella was a guest invited by Nikolai himself.

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Mirabella paused for a moment, her cool demeanor unchanged as her gaze met Asher's. With a calm and collected voice, she replied, "That's the perks of being top of the class."

"Cough, Ms. Mirabella, perhaps we should head inside, the butler m

interjected, fearing Asher might say something else out of line. He quickly stepped forward to lead the way.