

The Girlboss 581

Chapter 581

Raising his hand, Bravo beckoned, and all his men who were already sick of waiting sprang to their feet.

They were all holding weapons, their eyes flashing in excitement.

Bravo then licked his lips and bellowed, “Mr. Lawrence has already dealt with the main issue, and the rest are just Salazar rejects. What do we have to fear?! Let’s go, boys! Charge!”

He led his men as they all dashed toward the Salazars’ hired muscle who had just charged out of the factory.

As both groups collided and a violent scuffle ensued, Frank stayed out of it. This was Kurt’s fight after all, and he should at least let his men have a chance to earn their keep.

Instead, Frank took Jaud’s corpse to a quiet place and searched it.

The man had an assortment of poisons along with a tome called the Hundred Bane Anthology.

After putting away the poisons, Frank read through the tome and was left shocked by the methods and process of harnessing poison from insects and other sources. There were even poisons he had never heard of—if anything, the Snowshade that Jaud used before was basic and insignificant.

That was when he found a note at the very end: [This tome is a secret of Hundred Bane Sect, and the only copy. It must never fall to the hands of others.]

Glancing at Jaud’s corpse, Frank exclaimed in realization, “So that’s why you fled all the way here to Riverton. You stole this from Hundred Bane Sect! Well, it’s useless to me anyway—such a vile thing should not be allowed to exist.”

He struck with pure vigor, tunneling a hole into the ground.

Kicking Jaud's corpse into it, he threw the Hundred Bane Anthology into it as well and burnt both into cinders.

When that was done, he returned to the factory, where the fight was already over.

Aside from the ones who surrendered, Bravo and his men had cut down every hired muscle sent by the Salazars.

With that, Kurt reclaimed his plot of land, while the Salazars were in deep trouble as they lost their trump card for a revival. The newly built factory, along with all the precision machines and other equipment inside, were all now in Kurt's possession, never to be returned.

Bravo had a cut on his head and bled all over his face, but he did not seem to mind.

Seeing Frank return, he excitedly thanked him, "We all owe you for this, Mr. Lawrence. We would never have reclaimed this plot of land otherwise."

"It's nothing. Just doing what I can," Frank said, glancing at the factory's machines and suddenly having an idea. "So what are you going to do with those machines?"

"What, all this junk?" Bravo chuckled. "We just want the land, not this rusty crap. It's worthless to us. Mr. Stinson wouldn't know how to run a pharmaceutical company anyway, and we can't be bothered either... we'll just have someone tow it away and sell it for scraps."

Bravo's indifference delighted Frank, and he said, "I'm sure you know my work, and those machines would be really useful for me—just state a price, and I'll take everything."

Bravo did a double take and soon chuckled cheerfully. "What are you saying, Mr. Lawrence? If you'd just ask, you can even have this land, let alone this scrap—heck, I can make the call here: Take everything you want, and we won't ask for a cent!"

Frank shook his head. "That won't do."

Even as Frank shook his head, he soon had a better idea and told Bravo, “How about this? You probably won’t have any use for this land right after reclaiming it from the Salazars. Why not rent out the land and the factory along with the machines to me? I’ll pay you ten percent more than what the Salazars paid you before.”

“What?!” Bravo gaped and shook his head firmly. “No, absolutely not!”

Frank frowned in turn. “What about twenty percent?”

“No, you misunderstand, Mr. Lawrence.” Bravo quickly understood that Frank had the wrong idea when he raised his price. We’d never charge you the price we charged the Salazars—it’d be going against our conscience.”

He then added, “So, how about this? We’ll only charge you the rent for using our land. The factory and the machinery didn’t come from our money anyway, so you can have it on the house. Don’t turn us down now, Mr. Lawrence, or you’d be disrespecting myself and Mr. Stinson.”

Seeing that Bravo was determined, Frank nodded exasperatedly. “Fine. But I’ll still give you a ten percent cut on any products manufactured here—I’ll be needing some muscle for security.”

“No problem!” Bravo agreed to it right away. “Here’s to a pleasant partnership, Mr. Lawrence!”

“Yeah.” Frank nodded, splitting up the last treasures of the Salazars with just a few exchanges.

—

Donald Salazar only found out that his men were chased out of the factory a day later.

Crash!

He sent his plate of food flying to the floor, leaving his wife in stunned silence.

“Jaud White, you incompetent piece of shit!” Donald cried even as he knocked the entire dining table over before coughing up blood and collapsing unconscious.

Everyone was terrified and promptly did everything to resuscitate him.

After considerable effort, he recovered, when one of his men came in. “Sir, Bocek Ocean and his daughter are asking to see you.”

“Bocek?” Donald was delighted that Sage Lake Sect made contact.

Bocek came days ago and took the Goldeater Cane, but they had not heard from him since. Donald certainly had reason to believe Sage Lake Sect abandoned them.

“Show them in!” Donald cried even as he scrambled to get off the floor.

However, just as he seated himself, he was left staring as Bocek limped inside, needing his daughter’s mutual assistance to walk.

Donald’s pupils widened right then. “What’s this?”

Bocek said he would be using the Goldeater Cane as bait to set a trap to kill Frank.

Why had he and his daughter returned, looking beaten up?!

“Ahem...”

Bocek hacked violently even as he took his hand off Quinn’s shoulder, struggling to straighten himself as he turned to Donald. “Mr. Salazar, my daughter needs a favor—please transport us back to Sage Lake Sect.”

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Donald froze. “Transport you back to Sage Lake Sect? What’s going on here?”

Moreover, Bocek's tone was humble in contrast to when he came before, demanding Donald to do his bidding.

What the hell happened?

Even as Donald looked on blankly, Bocek sighed. "I won't lie to you. My plan failed, and Frank Lawrence has taken the Goldeater Cane while also crippling my cultivation. We are simply no match for him... No, even Sage Lake Sect is no match for him. That's why my daughter and I will return and warn the chief, after which we will leave the sect and all this bloodshed behind us.

"I'd also advise you to give up on your enmity for Frank Lawrence... That is, if you value your life."

Donald was clenching his chair's armrest so hard that it could break, his eyes red as he spiraled towards insanity.

Useless, incompetent fools! All of them!

Bocek was Skyrank's fortieth and a high elder of Sage Lake Sect, but he could not even handle one miserable prick named Frank Lawrence?! And he even came to tell him to give up on beating Frank?!

Donald was livid—what about Drakon? Who would avenge his son?!

Still, he suddenly said, "Actually, Mr. Ocean... It's not as bad as you think."

As the Salazars looked on, Donald slowly walked toward Bocek.

Then, when he was close enough, he suddenly whipped out a dagger from his sleeve and stabbed Bocek in the gut before Bocek could react!

"Arg! What..." Bocek's eyes widened in disbelief as he glared Donald. "H-How dare you..."

His meridian nexus was already destroyed, and he was thoroughly injured inside out or Donald would not have reached him so easily.

“Father!” Quinn screamed, but the Salazars’ guards knocked her down, pinning her on the floor before she could leap towards them.

“Why wouldn’t I dare?” Donald gritted his teeth, his eyes flaring with madness even as he leaned in to whisper into Bocek’s ear. “First Jaud White, and now you... There’s no chance for my family to turn the tables now, but I can still keep going until I avenge my son!”

He then cackled madly. “Your cultivation was lost? Oh, don’t worry. You can show your value by dying—Sage Lake Sect won’t leave your death unanswered, right?”

“You bastard!” Bocek realized right then that Donald was going to kill him and pin the crime on Frank so that Sage Lake Sect’s chief would declare war on Frank!

“Father!”

Quinn’s cultivation was destroyed as well, but she was not injured like Bocek was.

She could still fight with her martial techniques, and she kicked away the Salazars’ guards as she rushed toward Donald.

“Die, you wretch!”

“Don’t you fucking move!”

Donald could not care less—as soon as Quinn leapt toward them to save her father, he pulled out his dagger and pressed it against Bocek’s neck, bellowing, “On your knees—or do you want your father dead?!”

Quinn stared at the dagger dripping with Bocek's blood and dropped to her knees in anguish.

Though Bocek had never been this desperate, he bellowed, "Get up, Quinn! Don't do it!"

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Even as Bocek looked into Quinn's tearful eyes, he bellowed, "Run! Don't worry about me—Donald has gone mad, and you must tell the chief about what happened here! Warn him not to seek revenge against Frank... If he insists, he can have Donald's head!"

"Father!"

Quinn was exceedingly miserable.

She was the one who suggested they seek help from Donald. After all, they had no one to go to, and Bocek urgently needed treatment or his injuries would deteriorate enough to kill him.

Naturally, she believed the Salazars would help for Drakon Salazar's sake, only for Donald to suddenly snap.

Now, Donald was going to kill them and blame their deaths on Frank!

"Just run, Quinn!" Bocek repeated, having seen that Donald had truly lost his mind and was dead set on killing Frank.

There was no way he would run since he was thoroughly hurt and in Donald's hand at that.

The only way to minimize casualties at this point was to tell Quinn to run, or they would both die here!

"No, I won't!" Quinn bawled.

"Quinn..." Bocek appeared in trouble.

Quinn was his only child, and he thought that her marriage to Drakon would prove a rewarding union, as the Salazars were a decent bunch.

Contrary to expectations, the Salazars ended up giving them a terrible enemy even before they got married. In fact, the Salazars themselves turned against them now and were ready to blame their deaths on someone else.

“Hmph. I’ve led a noble life, and I’m not about to be coerced by some despicable worm!”

Bocek snorted coldly and took one last look at his daughter before suddenly rising to his feet and running straight into Donald’s dagger.

It pierced his neck in an instant, splattering blood everywhere.

Quinn screamed right then, her eyes flashing in endless spite for Donald.

She clenched her fist, knowing that her father did it so that she would make the decision to run and not stay as the Salazars’ hostage!

“Just you wait, Donald Salazar!” she bellowed and turned as she dashed out of Salazar House.

Donald froze, surprised that Bocek would go that far and was willing to die rather than be his hostage.

Still, he soon came to his senses—if Quinn managed to make it out, his plan to blame Frank for their deaths would go up in smoke!

Not only would his plan fail, but he would also be making enemies of Sage Lake Sect!

Hence, he promptly yelled at his bodyguards, “Bring her back, dead or alive! The one who brings her to me will be rewarded with ten million dollars!”

Where there was money, there was a way—every single Salazar bodyguard’s eyes were flashing with greed as they charged toward Quinn.

Quinn might have been a martial elite, but her vigor was now crippled, unable to augment her technique.

She was soon on the backfoot and surrounded.

“Kill her!” Donald shouted from a distance.

Quinn watched as the Salazars’ bodyguards kept charging at her, her eyes welling up in misery.

She would never have gotten involved with Drakon if she had known that his family was such ingrates, and she would certainly not take sides with them and make enemies of Frank!

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However, it was too late for regrets now.

The only thing Quinn could do was to flee Salazar House. She must inform Sage Lake Sect that it was the Salazars who killed her father, and they must exact revenge against them, not Frank.

Hence, she did all she could to scale the walls of Salazar House and fled outside.

Still, her consciousness was blurring—she was already hurt physically, and there was her broken meridian nexus to boot.

—

The entire hill surrounding Salazar House belonged to the Salazars, and it was situated in the outskirts of Sunny City.

Quinn kept fighting even as she ran, pursued by the Salazars' bodyguard up the hill, and was cornered over the cliff.

"Put down your weapon! Stop resisting already!"

"We can do this painlessly. It's better for everyone, no?"

The Salazars' bodyguards kept provoking Quinn.

Still, her cheeks clenched in determination as she glanced beneath the cliff and found the river beneath.

"Hah! You'll never take me alive," she cried right then. "And once I return to Sage Lake Sect, you traitors are all going to die!"

Then, throwing the weapon she wrestled from one of the bodyguards earlier, she leapt off the cliff!

Soon, a red-eyed Donald arrived. "So? Is she dead?"

The bodyguards all traded glances, none of them daring to speak.

"What?!" Donald barked. "Have you all gotten mute?! I'm asking a question here! Where is Quinn Ocean?!"

"We pursued her here, and she had nowhere to run... so she leapt off the cliff."

"Yeah, but she'd definitely be dead. The fall is too tall for anyone to survive it..."

Their vague answers only left Donald livid. "You are all useless, incompetent scum! Jaud White, Bocek Ocean... and the whole lot of you! Start searching now—I want to see a body, or we would all be dead once Sage Lake Sect comes for us!"

His bodyguards also realized that they were in deep trouble and promptly drove down the mountain.

Donald remained on the cliff, his white hair flapping against the wind as he stood on the edge and looked downward. "Hmph... Jumping down from here, especially when she's that hurt? She's definitely not going to live."

As he calmed down, he told his men, "Prepare my car. I'm visiting Sage Lake Sect!"

"Yes, Mr. Salazar," his bodyguards quickly responded.

Looking down the cliff one last time, Donald snorted. "It doesn't matter what I have to do. I'll make you pay, Frank Lawrence!"

—

At Skywater Bay, Frank used some of his essence to refine an Ichor Pill and called Trevor Zurich to have someone deliver it to Flora Hall.

Then, after finishing his usual training routine, a call arrived from Vicky Turnbull. "What have you been up to these days?"

Frank had not told Vicky about Neil Turnbull's conspiracy, since he would deliver a present during Helen Lane's wedding anyway.

Still, Vicky was being jovial as always, asking, "So, did you miss me?"

Frank was in a good mood and actually played along. "A little, I guess. I mean, I haven't been to the office for a while."

"Huh..." Vicky paused, surprised by his playful response.

Still, she giggled. "I guess you're in a good mood today. So why not do me a favor and have a drink with me tonight?"

Frank raised a brow. "Where?"

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Vicky mused, coiling her phone's cord around her finger. "Hmm... How about Ninedell Hotel? Some old classmates of mine are inviting me over, and you could be my plus one. They're all beautiful women, I might add."

Frank clicked his tongue. "Then I'll pass."

"Oh, you." Vicky chuckled despite Frank's attitude, snapping playfully, "What's wrong, darling? Afraid that my beauty pales in comparison and you'd fall for someone else?"

"Who's darling?" Frank sighed exasperatedly. "And it's your classmates' reunion. Why should I attend it?"

"Like I said, you're my plus one." Vicky pouted. "All my classmates are married, so it's awkward if I went alone... So are you coming or not?"

"Fine." Frank nodded exasperatedly. "So that's why you called me today."

"Smart." Vicky smiled and put down her phone.

Neil suddenly appeared in her office, glaring at her coolly. "Vicky, I'm warning you—you're engaged, so stop messing around with Frank Lawrence. I'm sure you know what would happen if Titus Lionheart finds out."

"Stay out of my private life, Neil." Vicky returned his cold glare. "Or what? Are you going to rat me out to Titus?"

Neil paused for a moment but snorted. "I'm doing this for your sake, or you'd end up getting killed because of that bastard!"

"So be it. Never liked Titus Lionheart anyway." Vicky shrugged nonchalantly. "And if you push me too far, I'd just elope with Frank... I won't be suffering the short end of the stick even when things go bad, right, Neil?"

Neil was left so livid that he could not argue.

As he stormed off, kicking the door on his way out, Vicky finally appeared concerned.

"The Lionhearts aren't annulling the engagement..." She sighed. "That's troublesome, since Titus is no pushover. Should I really distance myself from Frank?"

She immediately snorted and dismissed the idea. "No way!"

In her mind, Frank was so much better, a man worth more than ten of Titus.

Most importantly, she had realized she was not interested in Titus, which was completely different from the way she felt toward Frank.

"Urgh, whatever. I'll cross the bridge when I come to it!"

Vicky sighed, shaking her head exasperatedly.

—

Frank arrived at Ninedell Hotel as agreed in the evening and did not have to wait for long when he heard Vicky. "Oh! You're early, darling. Can't wait to see me?"

Frank made a face. "Really, Ms. Turnbull? Can't you quit with the 'darling' thing?"

Vicky giggled. "I told you you're my plus one—it's infuriating when the other gals are all married and I'm not."

"Answer's still no. Let's not cause misunderstandings here," Frank said sternly.

"Fine, I'll just settle for dearest." Vicky remained cheerful, humming as she wrapped her hand around Frank's arm, threatening under her breath, "Don't expose me, or I'm docking your pay."

"What, is this part of my job?" Frank raised his brow, staring at her sideways.

"Of course. And you'll be rewarded if you do well." Vicky beamed.

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An attendant led Frank and Vicky to a grandly decorated banquet hall, which was already filled with men and women.

They appeared close with Vicky, and some were even teasing her. "Oh, Ms. Turnbull. Always so busy—don't you know how long we've been waiting?"

"Really? You lot just arrived yourselves." Vicky grinned as she led Frank to their seats.

The eyes of every woman around them lit up when they saw Frank.

"Oh, Vicky! It's really been a while, huh? When did you get yourself a young stud?"

"Nonsense. She's engaged to Titus Lionheart of Morhen."

"Then this must be him. I'm Corey Wallace from Norsedam—your reputation precedes you, Mr. Lionheart."

“Oh, so he is Titus Lionheart? He’s so handsome!”

“What a loving couple, attending every social event together! Hi, I’m Ivana Crawley, and this is my husband Jack Trudish.”

Frank was left smiling awkwardly as everyone spoke to him all at once. Even Vicky’s male classmates were on their feet, nodding and smiling fawningly at Frank.

Vicky quickly smiled and leapt to his defense. “Stop it, guys. This isn’t Titus—he’s the head of Grande Pharma’s pharmaceutical research and my personal bodyguard.”

“Bodyguard...?”

Everyone who was about to shake Frank’s hand and offer toasts paused, most of them frowning. The vibes in the hall clearly changed as they realized he was not Titus, repulsed by his very presence.

A woman in a red gown with a plunging neckline even rolled her eyes at Frank, clearly belittling him.

“Vicky, you shouldn’t bring frivolous people to our gathering,” she said with a snort. “Don’t you agree, Corey?”

“Exactly.” Corey was furious too, embarrassed that he almost fawned over a bodyguard.

“In that case, excuse me.” Frank started to get up, ready to leave.

Things had gotten awkward because of him, and he had no arson to catch more heat.

However, Vicky got up and firmly pressed him back on his chair before turning around and leveling a cool glare at everyone.

“What? Do you have a problem with the man I brought to dinner?” she demanded, her imposing tone leaving the hall silent.

“No way. The gentleman is drop dead gorgeous to me,” a woman in a tracksuit suddenly said as she got up and walked up to Frank. “Hello, I’m Kiki Moss. Pleasure to meet you.”

Most of her face was concealed with a pair of shades and a baseball cap even as she shook Frank’s hand politely.

“Kiki Moss?” Frank did a double take—her name rang a few bells.

Kiki giggled in her sweet voice. “I’m just an ordinary streamer. Sorry about the getup, but I really hate the paparazzi.”

“Oh. Pleased to meet you.” Frank nodded.

“No way! You don’t know who Kiki is?!” a woman sitting a little far exclaimed in shock as she stared at Frank. “She’s the ever sweet streamer who’s always been appearing in clips—”

“Yeah, she’s so popular! All of Draconia knows her!”

“Oh, stop it.” Kiki pursed her lips. “You’re all exaggerating...”

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Vicky’s expression eased as things became amicable, and she returned to her seat.

Suddenly, Ivana asked, “By the way, dear Ms. Turnbull... Does Mr. Lionheart know that you’re cheating on him?”

Beside her, Corey almost choked on his drink, while Ivana continued innocently, “Just think about it, guys—her personal bodyguard! It’s exactly what anyone thinks, right?”

As she raised her brow pointedly and repeatedly, Corey slammed her glass on the table, frowning. "Watch your words, Ivana! Vicky's not like that!"

"Oh, there's the fire! See?" Ivana laughed and clapped, not afraid of adding fuel to fire. "It's alright—we all know how much you love Vicky. I mean, you're single even now!"

On the other hand, the woman in the red gown who mocked Frank earlier pursed her lips, muttering under her breath, "How brazen, cheating on your own fiance."

"What did you just say to me, Olive?!" Vicky bellowed. "Fiance?! Cheating?! I never agreed to my family's arrangement, and I won't mind telling you that I have no feelings for Titus Lionheart. Frank is the one I love!"

"Oh, no!" Ivana quickly said. "Please stop, Ms. Turnbull, or we might all get buried with you if Mr. Lionheart catches wind of this."

As the ladies continued their thrilling debate of Vicky's relationship with the Lionhearts, Corey gestured at Frank.

He wanted to have a word with Frank in private, and Frank was only too happy to flee the chaos.

They headed to the men's room together. Then, once Corey was done with business and started washing his hands, he remained impassive as he growled, "You should stay away from Vicky if you know what's good for you, kid."

"What's it to you?" Frank replied, unaffected as he washed his hands as well.

Corey leveled a solemn look at him, revealing his clear face and slightly pronounced forehead.

It was clear he was a vigor-wielding martial artist and no average Joe, and he sneered as he threatened, "You'll die horribly. Trust me."

“Really?” Frank was certainly having none of it, even retorting bluntly, “Why don’t you tell Titus Lionheart that?”

As Corey was left in stunned silence, Frank continued, “If you love something, you should fight for them. Did you really think that you could lecture me? Someone like you who’s always worried about everything? Don’t make me laugh.”

With that, Frank strode past him, leaving Corey clenching his knuckles.

Still, as Frank got out of the men’s room, a smiling Ivana pulled him back to their table and asked, “Frank Lawrence, was it? Ms. Turnbull’s been saying how good you are... But at what, specifically?”

Seeing that Vicky was hiding a smile, Frank shrugged. “What do you suppose? I’m her personal bodyguard.”

“Ooooh...” Everyone exclaimed, staring pointedly at Frank and Corey as he returned.

Kiki came up just then, taking off her shades to reveal her bright, spirited gaze as she asked, “Mr. Lawrence, are you really good at it? I mean, like really, really good?”

Her eyes actually caught Frank off guard, and he nodded blankly. “I guess.”

“Then could you agree to my request? I want you to be my bodyguard for the next couple days,” Kiki asked, her dewy gaze utterly miserably as she turned toward Vicky. “You’d agree to it, wouldn’t you, Vicky?”

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Before Vicky could answer Kiki, Corey was on his feet.

Leveling a cool look at Frank, he said bluntly, “You have nothing to fear as long as I’m around, Kiki. You know that you can’t count on someone, and there’s every chance he’s more a performer than a real martial artist. I’ve seen too many people like him.”

Naturally, he was referring to Frank, but Frank simply snorted and kept eating his dinner, ignoring Corey completely.

On the other hand, Vicky appeared worried that Frank would get upset and moved between him and Corey's glare of disdain. "I chose him personally, and his abilities are above question."

"Alright, alright... Why are we fighting again?" Ivana quickly tried to keep the peace this time.

"Hmph. That's a certain someone's fault for bringing in someone else who has no business being here." Olive Perkins sneered, folding her arms before her chest.

"Why don't you just cut it out? Haven't you had enough?" Ivana snapped, a little annoyed at that point.

Olive simply snorted coolly and rolled her eyes.

Everyone in this hall was rich or important in Riverton, but Olive always seemed to have a problem with Vicky. Still, she certainly had cause for that—not only was Vicky more beautiful, but her career was also a class above Olive's.

"It's okay," Kiki spoke up just then. "Anyway, I've been having trouble lately, and I need a really strong bodyguard. Since Frank is Vicky's bodyguard, I'm sure he must be really good—"

"Really? I couldn't tell." Corey snorted, pursing his lips. "Don't pin your hopes on the wrong man, Kiki. You'd be in deep trouble if a scandal happens as a result."

He was clearly still upset with Frank.

Suddenly, the doors to the banquet hall were kicked open violently, and everyone turned to find around six men in black striding inside.

One of them even threw a waiter on the floor, who was unconscious and bleeding from his head.

“What’s the meaning of this?!” Corey demanded, realizing right away that the men in black were hostile and leaping to Vicky’s defense right then.

On the other hand, Kiki appeared stunned to see those men, and her gaze was suddenly evasive in clear terror.

That was when a youth with a pale face and a giddy gaze entered.

He looked around, and when he found Kiki cringing in an inconspicuous spot, he laughed icily. “Oh, Ms. Moss... don’t you think you’re disrespecting me, running here alone to Riverton? Don’t tell me that you thought you could escape me?”

“Who are you?” Vicky stood up, glaring coolly at the youth.

Kiki was a good friend of hers, and they had always kept in touch despite barely meeting up after graduating college.

In fact, Kiki came to Riverton to seek refuge from Vicky, which was why she chose Frank without hesitation instead of Corey whom she was more familiar with.

Despite being a personality, she was no fool. She knew enough to understand that Vicky had cause to vouch for Frank.

In fact, Vicky had brought Frank to this reunion party because of Kiki.

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However, neither Vicky nor Kiki had expected them to find them so soon.

“Oh, if it isn’t Vicky Turnbull!” The youth whistled, studying Vicky from head to toe and chuckling. “You really are a devilish beauty. Would you like to join my agency—actually, never mind. I’d never step on Mr. Lionheart’s toes.”

Then, turning towards everyone around the table, he introduced herself. “Everyone, nice to meet you. I’m Hubert Sorano of Morhen.”

“Hubert Sorano?!” Olive was suddenly on her feet, gaping. “You’re Emilio Sorano’s third son?”

“Oh, someone here actually knows me! Not bad!”

Hubert was clapping his hands and laughing. “In that case, I’ll cut to the chase—Kiki is a talent represented by Sorano Media, and I’m taking her with me. Does anyone have anything to say about that? Of course, you’d still have to watch what you say.”

Then, whistling at Kiki as if summoning a dog, Hubert chuckled. “Heel! I’m going to get violent if you don’t move, see?”

“Vicky...” Kiki leveled a pleading look at Vicky even as she got up, scowling.

“Ooooh!!!” Hubert gasped dramatically as if in realization, shaking his head. “So that’s why you came to Riverton—you want Vicky Turnbull’s protection! Shame—I might actually back off if Titus Lionheart were here, but that’s not the case if it’s just Vicky.”

“Where are you taking Kiki?” Vicky glowered even as she demanded.

Hubert shrugged. “I can’t be divulging corporate secrets, can I?”

“Vicky...” Kiki’s tears were splashing all over the table. “They want me to be their hostess and worse...”

“Either way, I won’t let you take Kiki.” Vicky stopped Kiki right then, understanding her friend’s situation.

If Hubert took Kiki back to Morhen, only hell awaited her there.

“Oof, Ms. Moss...” Hubert appeared pained and sighed exasperatedly. “Are you giving up on everything just like that? Don’t you know who pushed you to stardom? Aren’t you going to repay us for everything we sacrificed to elevate you? Hell, your chastity is now worth over ten million thanks to our branding! What commoner could say the same?! Be content!”

The more Hubert spoke, the colder his expression became. “Now come quietly if you know what’s good for you!”

“No!” Kiki cried tearfully. “I’ve already left and paid your agency with everything I had—it’s more than ten times what you’ve invested in me! Please! Why can’t you just let me go?!”

Vicky sprang to her feet at Kiki’s pleas. “You heard what she said. Enough is enough!”

“Shut up! I was already being nice!” Hubert finally had enough, shooting Vicky a cool glare before barking at his bodyguards, “Go, take Kiki, but don’t hurt her, though. Those bigwigs are going to demand a rebate if she gets hurt.”

However, Vicky stood between the burly bodyguards, refusing to budge. “Come if you dare!”