

## Chapter 32 They Had Spent The Night Together The Day Before

The wind raced through the trees and carried echoes that felt like old memories refusing to let go.

A handful of leaves drifted down, barely touching the earth. Brandon, growing impatient with Millie's silence, pressed her for an answer. "Come on. I asked you a question."

Millie fixed her eyes on Brandon's shadow stretching out along the ground. "You really ought to ask Vivian about what she said to me."

A hint of doubt crept into Brandon's expression. "Vivian has never even met you before."

He meant that she was inventing stories.

Millie raised her head and met his gaze. "Mr. Watson, do you truly put all your faith in her?"

For a moment, Brandon was quiet, but that old, strange feeling stirred in him once again.

She added, "There's nothing for me to gain by going after Vivian. She's important to you, and with your influence in Crobert, someone like me could never match up."

A gentle smile played on her lips. "If nothing really happened, why would I put myself in such a difficult position for no reason at all?"

Brandon's frown grew more pronounced.

He realized her argument actually had weight.

Still, what possible motive would Vivian—a woman facing only six months to live—have for going after a stranger?

Deep down, his loyalty remained with Vivian.

He finally spoke. "Whatever happened between you two, Serena, I just want you to remember one thing. She only has six months left. She joined this program to encourage people who are fighting the same battle."

Millie took in Brandon's furrowed brow, his intense eyes, and the certainty in his voice. Her mind wandered back to Vivian's words from earlier that day.

"This world is about marketing. Do you think this show is just about who sings best? Wake up! It's never about how well you sing or write. It's about image. Evans Entertainment didn't invest in you because they love your talent. They're counting on your market value. Monetization. Do you get that?"

Millie could not tell if Vivian was really that good and had managed to fool Brandon, or if he simply wanted to put his trust in her.

She felt lost, and she had no desire to start guessing.

She looked away, her eyes searching for anything else.

"Not everything turns out as perfect as it looks. Sometimes, what you think is wonderful ends up being far from it." Those words were the last advice she chose to give.

Brandon's gaze grew sharper and colder.

She seemed to read him as easily as a book.

From the moment she invited him into the woods, through every question and reply, up to her latest words—she acted as though every bit of his doubt and hesitation was right there in plain view, every thought exposed.

She appeared able to shape the way he thought, even nudging his decisions.

No one but a person who understood him down to the core would be capable of that.

He studied her and said, "Tell me, who are you, really?"

Right then, her mask felt painfully annoying, like it did not belong.

He stretched out his hand, intent on removing it.

Without thinking, Millie moved away, but her high heels dug into the soft ground, making her lose her balance.

Brandon reached out without hesitation and caught her by the arm.

Lightning tore open the sky, and thunder quickly followed, rolling through the trees.

A flash illuminated the groves, and as Millie fought to regain her balance, her long coat slid down her shoulders.

He kept his grip on her slim arm, the sudden light showing fresh bruises on her delicate skin, far worse than what he had noticed on stage.

Thunder came late and loud, the sound crashing through the woods and pounding in Brandon's chest.

Somewhere in his memories, there lingered an image of someone bearing those same painful marks.

It had been Millie, seven years earlier.

Those eyes filled with pain from years ago still appeared clear in his mind, as if time had never moved at all.

"You..." Brandon remarked, but she had already slipped her arm from his grasp.

She pulled her coat up over her shoulders and regained her balance. "Thank you, Mr. Watson."

That formal address jolted him back to the present.

Millie had never called him anything except "Brandon."

Yet, the woman standing before him appeared far more frail than Millie ever had.

Everyone knew she belonged to Charles. Just ten days earlier, she had lost his child.

He recalled how he and Millie had been at the courthouse six days ago. The night before, they had even spent the night together.

That meant it could not be Millie in front of him.

Meanwhile, Charles was already making his way over, clearly sensing that something was off.

Brandon could not hold back any longer. "Charles let you join a reality show even when you're this hurt?"

The words left his mouth before he could stop them.

"That doesn't concern you, Mr. Watson," Millie replied, her tone cold and distant.




Brandon's frown deepened, and he wanted to continue, but Charles stepped in.

Suddenly, dizziness overwhelmed Millie, and she leaned against Charles for support.

"Mil—My God! Serena!" Charles called out, worry filling his voice as he caught her, then threw a glare in Brandon's direction.

Charles seemed ready to confront him, but Millie stopped him with a look.

Brandon pressed his lips together, watching them stand side by side, unable to hide his frustration.

He remarked, "If she's this badly hurt, why would you let her go on working?" 

Charles gave him an exasperated look.

He could not believe Brandon would even ask. After all, those injuries had been caused by Brandon in the first place.

Charles remembered how, during his hospital visit, Alexia had filled him in on all the details.


Millie had only received a mild concussion from the car accident. If she had stayed in bed and rested, she might not have lost the baby.


It had been Brandon who shoved Millie down the stairs later, all because he wanted to shield Vivian.

Now the child was gone, and Millie's body was covered in bruises. In truth, she was fortunate nothing had been broken.

If only Brandon had not insisted on stopping Millie for a conversation, they might have returned to the car without any trouble.

Who was he to say anything now?

Charles could barely hold back from letting loose on Brandon, ready to show him why he was known as Crobert's most hot-tempered man. 

But after noticing how uneasy Millie looked, he just blurted out, "Why don't you mind your own business?!" 

He gathered her in his arms and carried her straight back to the waiting car.

Brandon stood there with a heavy frown, watching as they disappeared. The way Millie's hair draped across Charles' arm sent a sharp pang of jealousy through him.

Wind swept through the area, carrying more leaves to the ground. One floated gently into Brandon's open hand.

He glanced down at the leaf resting in his palm.

Millie's words stayed with him, curling in the corners of his thoughts. She had spoken with a calm certainty, hinting that what looked promising at first glance often carried a weight it didn't show.

Was she right about that?

While he was still thinking it over, raindrops started falling from the sky.

Drops splashed onto the leaf he held, each one falling like silent tears.

... Charles and Millie rode in the car for a while, and then changed vehicles to head to the hospital.

Millie, feeling a bit stronger, turned to look out the window.

Charles continued to grumble under his breath about Brandon, but Millie could not bring herself to care anymore.

Brandon's place in Crobert was far too powerful. No matter how much Charles wanted to help, they could never challenge him.

So why keep struggling?

She decided to focus on what little she had and to work toward her own goals. That alone would have to be enough.

Her phone started to vibrate once more.

A glance at her screen showed a new message from Brandon.③

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Rain poured from the sky in thick sheets.

When the show ended, people scattered quickly, each heading home in a different direction.

To keep the broadcast smooth, the audience had not been allowed to bring any electronic devices.

For that reason, nobody could check their phones until the recording had finished.

Throughout the day, Heavenly Melody was trending online, so when the crowd finally checked their phones, they caught up on all the latest buzz.

Most people were only there to see the drama unfold, but a few began to ask questions.

Why did clips of Serena's performance online seemed so mediocre than it actually did during the live performance?