

Shadows 161

Chapter 161 Don't Stand in My Way " If you're looking for Clive , call him yourself and leave me out of it ! " With that , Tilda walked away . She was sure Wade had lost his mind . Either that or he was just plain crazy . Tilda didn't want to waste another minute dealing with a wacko . Why ruin her mood over someone acting nuts ? Wade's heart tightened . Instinctively , he hurried after her , blocking Tilda's path . He wasn't done yet . Wade desperately wanted to talk to her . He knew deep down Tilda didn't want to see him or talk to him at all .

Some would say Wade was just being pathetic - clinging on , refusing to give up , shameless even . But honestly , this was the only way he could even stay connected to Tilda , no matter how dumb it looked . Suddenly , Tilda's gaze turned icy . " Move it , Wade . Don't stand in my way . If you really want to get yourself killed , I can make that happen . Don't forget , even Howard couldn't take me down . What makes you think you can stop me ? I wouldn't mind sending you off to keep Howard company .

" Did they really think I'm harmless , like some cuddly kitty cat , just because I'm in a good mood and didn't want to fight ? People like Wade need to learn not to push their luck ! " Tilda ... I ... I have something to ask you , " Wade stammered . " When Dominic was in a coma , he called for his mentor . He kept saying sorry to you . What happened between you and Dominic ? " Trust Wade to bring up the one thing Tilda hated most . The second he mentioned Dominic , Tilda's anger shot up like a rocket . " Ask him yourself when he wakes up ! Now get out of my way !

" Tilda- " Before Wade could finish , Tilda shot out her leg and kicked him hard in the stomach . Bang ! Wade never saw it coming ; he took the kick squarely , Sharp pain exploded through his body .

He doubled over , clutching his stomach . His face was grimacing in pain , sweat breaking out on his forehead as he dropped to the ground . No longer have the strength to block Tilda . " Pathetic , " Tilda muttered . She stepped right over him and left without a backward glance .

At that moment , Wade felt like every bit of pride he had - as a man , as a brother - was shattered . Tilda's kick left him stunned and powerless . He didn't even see that coming . When it came to strength , he wasn't standing a chance . As Tilda walked away , the pain in Wade's stomach finally started to ease . He staggered to his feet , feeling as if every drop of energy had been drained from his body . Wade was soaked in sweat . " Hahaha ! " Wade couldn't help but laugh - a bitter , self - deprecating laughter . Protect Tilda ? Yeah , right .

Wade , you're even more pathetic than you thought . Couldn't even stand up to one kick . Look at you , beat up and humiliated . Who do you think you're protecting ? In Tilda's eyes , you must look like a total clown who doesn't know his place . Wade had always thought his image had hit rock bottom in front of Tilda . But because of his stupidity , he'd found a whole new low . Even Wade himself started to feel like he'd lost all hope . " Useless . Wade , how could you be so useless ! Tilda's right . The real arrogant fool here ... is me ! " He punched the ground hard .

Wade could feel the pain shooting through his hand and bones , but he didn't care . None of it mattered anymore . The pain on the outside was nothing compared to what he felt inside . Tilda didn't care about Wade's little episode . Back at her place , she opened her laptop . She used the information Andy gave her to deep dive into the hackers from Cetherland who hang out on the dark web . About DJ , that was her own mistake last time . She wasn't about to let history repeat itself .

This time , she would thoroughly check out everyone's background before reaching out to them . For Tilda , finding out their true identity wasn't a big deal . Once she confirmed they hadn't done anything bad , she considered them to have passed the first test . Tilda hacked right into their forum . There were only four people in the group . She posted , " Hi , I'm Queen . " There's something I want to discuss with you all . If you're interested , reply ' I ' to this post . " I'll reach out to one of you .

" Meanwhile , Jarrett Bell was slurping instant noodles , eyes glued to a show called Awakening Era . " Being born as a Cetherlander is the best thing that has ever happened to me . If there's a next life , I want to be a Cetherlander again . " " Boohoo ! It's not easy living the way we do . We owe it all to the heroes before us ! " As Jarrett sucked up his noodles , tears kept falling onto the table .

Chapter 162 An Unexpected Message from the Queen " Oh no , my contact lens got messed up . I'd better go wash it . " At that moment , Jarrett noticed a new post on the forum he'd created . " Huh ? There's a new post ? Did someone else post something ? " Each squad member had their own way of staying in touch . Actually , no one had used this forum in ages . And with all the hidden IP protections , nobody could post unless Jarrett approved it . That's why this sudden new post caught his attention .

Jarrett set his cup of instant noodles aside , grabbed the mouse , and started clicking through the site . When he saw the post's content , he stopped breathing for a second . It's ... It's Queen ?! The legendary Queen ?! Oh my gosh ! Jarrett's hand shook so hard he nearly spilled his noodles . He didn't even care . This feeling ... It was like being a superfan and suddenly getting a call from your favorite celebrity !

The idol you've admired for years wanted to reach out and claimed she wanted to connect with her fans ! Oh , man , my heart is racing wildly . No ! Calm down !

Calm down , Jarrett ! He clutched his chest , closed his eyes , and took several deep breaths to steady himself . Then- " 111111111 " Jarrett mashed the " 1 " key on his keyboard like a madman . The whole

desk shook , like the house might fall apart . He only stopped when the " I " key finally popped off the keyboard . Jarrett couldn't let someone else get this chance ! This was a once - in - a - lifetime opportunity to talk with Queen . Just as Jarrett sat there . His heart was pounding with excitement .

He kept hitting " F5 " repeatedly to refresh the page , hoping something new would appear . Then , his phone rang . It was an unknown number . Jarrett's heart pounded so loudly he could barely hear . Hands trembling , he pressed the answer button . Hello ? Is this Queen ? " " It's me ." Tilda's voice came through , cool and calm . Jarrett almost burst into tears . Her voice is so melodious ! And she really is a girl ! She sounded like someone who had experienced everything life could throw at her . Queen has to be super pretty in real life , right ? " Jarrett ? " " Yes ...

Idol - uh , I mean , Queen , how can I help ? " E He was so nervous he could barely talk , so he bit his lip ; the pain helped him to stay focused . There was no way he was going to embarrass himself in front of his idol . " You have a dark web account , right ? " " Oh - yeah ! I'll log in right now ! " Jarrett started typing furiously . He dumped his unfinished noodles straight into the trash . Nothing could get in the way of this moment with his idol ! He logged in , staring at his username- " Clown . " " Queen , I've logged in .

" He didn't even get to finish before he saw Queen's friend request pop up . Whoa ! He sucked in a sharp breath . No way this is a scam . This is the real deal Queen's friend request ! Jarrett hit " accept " before he even thought about it . " I'm doing this so you can trust me and know I really am Queen , " Tilda explained . " I've checked you out , all four of you . Sorry about this . I think your group is trustworthy .

You've been fighting against hacker groups trying to break into our country's firewall and steal information , right ? " " Yes ! The four of us got together because we all like this kind of thing . I guess we're pretty good at it . When something like this happens , we want to help . It's just ... our skills aren't that amazing . We've stopped a few attacks . When stronger , more organized hackers show up , it's too much for just us to handle ." Jarrett scratched the back of his head , embarrassed . Saying all this in front of his idol made him want to hide ; it was too embarrassing .

" It's not about how many people you have . What matters is skill , execution , and passion . Too many people , and things get messy . If anything leaks , it's a problem . But if you've made it onto the dark web hacker leaderboard , that means your team is seriously talented . " I want to bring the four of you onto my team . I'll do my best to teach you everything I know about hacking . How much you can learn is up to you . What do you think ? " " What ?! " It took Jarrett a minute to process what Tilda was saying . She repeated herself patiently .

Jarrett finally understood and shouted , " Queen , are you saying you want us to be your mentees ?! " " Sorry , for personal reasons , I'll never take on mentees . But I'd rather call us partners fighting side by side . We're all from Cetherland . No matter what our motives , none of us wants to see our country get hurt , right ? "

Chapter 163 The Squad's New Beginning " Queen , you too ... ! " Jarrett's voice turned serious all of a sudden . He felt like the luckiest person alive . What is this feeling ? Is it a dream come true when an idol and a fan share the same passion ? Just having Queen reach out and recognize him felt like the greatest honor of his whole life . He even felt like Queen's heart was beating like theirs . They wanted to do something - no matter how small -for the better future of Cetherland .

With Queen now leading their squad , the uncertain road ahead suddenly looked bright and full of hope . " You tell the other three all the details , then use this number to contact me , " Queen said . " Yes , ma'am ! " Even after the call ended , Jarrett could hardly believe it . Queen had chosen him . She wanted to join their squad ! " Woohoo ! Long live the Queen ! " he cheered . After talking to Jarrett , Tilda glanced over the information she'd found about the four members . " Jarrett Bell , Theo Woodward , Zach Rowse , Astrid Jenson ... Tilda couldn't help rubbing her temples .

What kind of twisted fate is this ? All four squad members were in Slosa - just like Tilda . " They came from different families : the Bells , the Woodwards , the Rowses ... And one of them was even related to the Jensons . Russell's younger brother , Dwayne Jenson , had a daughter , Astrid Jenson . Tilda didn't remember much about Dwayne . He'd moved overseas years ago , Even if her parents had gone to visit him , they wouldn't have brought Tilda along . All she'd ever seen was a photo of Dwayne with Russell . Other than that , she knew nothing .

Finished As for Astrid , Dwayne's youngest daughter , she'd only just moved back to Slosa for work . Astrid had never visited Russell's house . Russell had invited her once , but Astrid politely declined , saying she was too busy . According to Astrid , there was just too much distance and awkwardness between them . Their families felt like strangers . Astrid didn't like talking to strangers - even if they were technically family . It felt awkward for her . People with special talents often have their quirks . Most of the time , it showed up as social anxiety .

Tilda only hated her immediate family - her parents and her brothers . She didn't have the same feelings toward her cousin . After all , she'd never even met Astrid . And honestly , based on her investigation , this squad was exactly the team Tilda needed right now . It was like destiny had picked them out for her . Just then , Andy called . " Tilda , what do you think about that team ? " " The intel looks good , " Tilda

answered . " They're all skilled , ambitious young people , and , their families are strong ... but- " She told Andy about the identities of the four .

" Tilda , ever since I met you , I've been starting to believe in fate , " Andy said , almost in awe . " Out of everyone in the country , you still end up tied to those same four families . Even when looking for a team online , you find these four , and they're all in Slosa . That's just wild . " Andy used to be a total skeptic . He never believed in anything mystical . People even joked that Andy looked like a vampire - mysterious word , charming look . He had captivated everyone . But after meeting Tilda , he was convinced she must have an extraordinary story - one she just hadn't told .

Otherwise , how could so many strange coincidences keep happening around her ? " Let's hope it's not some kind of cursed fate , " Tilda said with a bitter laugh . After everything with the Jensons and DJ's identity , it felt like nothing could get worse . Oh , by the way , I've contacted that research organization . They were thrilled to hear you wanted to help . If you agree , they want to meet you privately to discuss the details . They say you already helped them a lot before , so you made quite an impression !

" We'll see , " Tilda replied . Finished Dealing with organizations like that , she knew she had to stay alert - even if it was just a science group in Cetherland . She didn't think they'd hurt her , but you never know , " Oh , and by the way , Tilda , " Andy said , " while I was chatting with the contact from that research group , I learned something pretty interesting . The group recently brought in a genius . He's in his 30s , with a mind - blowing IQ of 260. He's all about science , never bothered by emotions or distractions .

" But the crazy part is his name - it's almost the same as the one you mentioned before . His name is Dane Kerrigan . " The second Tilda heard that name , her heart thudded . That was the very name her mentor had talked about . " Do you know where he comes from ? " Tilda asked quietly . " No way . My contact isn't cleared to learn about someone at that level . But apparently , Dane just showed up out of nowhere and took over the whole research group .

Ever since then , a bunch of projects that were stalled because of technical problems or patent issues have started moving forward really fast . "

Chapter 164 The Search for the Mentor He's a total genius , but honestly , with so many people in the world , a few extraordinary ones aren't a surprise . So , Tilda , what do you think ? Are you interested now ? " " Andy , help me get in touch with him . I want to join this group as soon as possible ! " Tilda couldn't hide the excitement in her voice . " I knew you'd say that . I've already reached out . Just wait for them to set up a time for you to come to Slosa . " " Thank you , Andy . You're a lifesaver . " " Tilda ! If you thank me again , I'm getting mad .

We're friends , aren't we ? After all we've been through , there's no need to thank me ." After she hung up , Tilda stood at her window , clutching her phone tightly like a drowning person grabbing for a life raft . Is this man the one her mentor had mentioned before ? Tilda actually knew very little about her mentor . SHSN2 4 2 4 2 52 9 Even though he gave Tilda a home , taught her many things , and helped her unlock her hidden talents , most of his life was still a mystery . Whenever Tilda got picked on , he was always there to protect her .

It was the first time Tilda ever felt like she had family . He never told Tilda his real name . All Tilda knew was that her mentor's last name was Kerrigan . As for Dane , it was a name Tilda overheard him mumbling once and memorized . c6 After Tilda learned all she could , her mentor disappeared without a trace , like he never existed . Tilda searched everywhere , high and low , tracking down people who'd met him . They all said her mentor might be in trouble . To this day , Tilda has never seen a body or even a single clue about what happened . Her mentor never reached out again .

He just disappeared from Tilda's world . Tilda joined the dark web partly to sharpen her skills and earn money . She also hoped this huge underground network might help her find clues about her mentor . She came up empty every time . The name , Dane Kerrigan , was the only clue he ever left . While searching for her family , Tilda never forgot about that name . She had asked Andy to help track him down . Tilda found several people with that name , flying all over the world whenever there was a lead .

However , it was never the man her mentor had mentioned . Now , she'd finally found someone with that name . If only this time she could find something about her mentor . No matter how slim the chance , Tilda had to try ! The next day , Tilda didn't have any classes , so she slept in . After getting ready , she made herself an egg sandwich . Just as she finished , a message popped up from the dark web . Clown wrote , " Queen , we're all set over here . " Tilda saw the message and called Jarrett . He picked up immediately . " Queen ! " M W 3 Y " Hop onto the group forum and start a chat .

It's easier to talk that way . 3 Tilda didn't rush to give Jarrett her personal info . H a Even though she'd already checked out the squad . She knew they were okay . They were even from families she knew well - it's always better to be safe . Years on the dark web had taught her that . " Got it ! " Jarrett replied . Tilda finished her sandwich and went to her computer . She logged into the forum Jarrett had made and joined the group chat . Jarrett announced , " Queen is here ! Everyone , give her a warm welcome ! " Theo asked , " Is this really Queen ? Wow ! I'm your biggest fan !

" Astrid replied , " Me too ." Zach chimed in , " Me too . " Queen asked , " You guys ... ever consider changing your usernames ? " f Jarrett replied , " Aw , Queen , if you wanted to find out who we are , it'd

be super easy for you anyway . We all know each other in real life . No need to hide . " Queen replied , " Alright , I guess I was overthinking it . " After that , Tilda changed her username to just Tilda Jenson .

If Tilda wanted to lead this new squad and really earn their trust , she couldn't act like she was better than everyone else . Everyone else had already shared their real names . Only Tilda was still hiding behind her codename . Keeping her identity secret would only make her seem untrustworthy from the start . Jarrett was shocked . " Wait !!! Is that your real name ? " Theo typed , " Why does that name sound so familiar ? I feel like I've heard it somewhere before ." Astrid wrote , " Hey , that's my last name too !

Tilda Jenson . My Uncle Russell has a missing daughter with that name ." Zach replied , " Agreed ." " All right , time's short , so let's not discuss my personal stuff for now , " Tilda said . " You can call me Queen in private - I actually like that nickname . " She continued , " I've checked your rankings on the hacker leaderboard and the cases you've solved , so I have a pretty good sense of where your skills are at . " I've put together a plan to help you all get better at hacking . How much you improve will depend on your effort and talent . "

Chapter 165 Comet Squad Tilda uploaded the compressed file she'd finished to the group chat . Jarrett exclaimed , " Oh my gosh ! Queen's top - secret guide ! " Theo chimed in , " Waaah ! Idol , can we chat one - on - one ? I really want to be friends with you ! " Astrid rolled her eyes . " Theo , wipe your drool . I can just imagine you looking all gross right now ." Theo groaned . " Astrid , are we still on the same team or what ? Do you have to embarrass me in front of our idol ?

" Zach just typed , " Agreed ." Looking at the cheerful scene in the group chat , Tilda's gaze couldn't help but soften a little . Ambitious young people were drawn together . Together , they were like a blazing fire . When apart , they'd become the stars that decorated the sky . She hoped they wouldn't let her down . Jarrett piped up , " By the way , Queen , can you name our team ? You're the captain now ! " Theo added , " +1 ! " Zach typed , " +2 ! " PN & Astrid replied , " +10086 ! " A team name , huh ? Tilda thought for a moment . She replied , " Let's call ourselves Comet .

May we always keep today's spirit and become the brightest flames in the sky ! " Jarrett laughed . " Comet Squad ? Hahaha ! That's awesome ! Totally fits my patriotic , exemplary youth vibe ! ". Theo said , " The name Queen gave us is so cool . Unlike Jarrett , who once wanted to call us the Roach Squad . I almost punched him for making us sound like cockroaches . " Astrid added , " Well , what can you do ? Jarrett just can't name things . " Jarrett protested , " Ahem ! Let's not bring up the past , okay ? Especially in front of our idol ! " Just then , another message popped up .

It was Simon , from the art department . " Tilda , do you have a minute to take a call ? " Tilda called Simon right away . The phone was picked up quickly . Simon said , " Tilda , your painting amazed all of us old - timers . We want to recommend your work for the National College Art Competition . If it stands out , you could even make it to the world stage and win a gold medal for the country ! " Tilda was surprised . " Professor Linscott ? Are you sure ? " " What's wrong , Tilda ? Is there a problem ?

Your painting is full of life and talent . We all think you could get first place ! " Simon started to get worried . He tried his best to convince Tilda , assuming she might lack confidence and miss out on a great chance . 2 15 Such a talented student should shine for the world to see it would be a huge loss for the nation if she didn't . HIMEMPENINGS لا تهمه Tilda laughed . " Ahem , Professor , you misunderstood . I mean , let me touch it up a bit . If I'm representing the country , I can't just send in something I whipped up . What if I lose ? That'd be embarrassing . " She wasn't kidding .

37 14 MENEN Tilda had only drawn that piece with the snake theme as a quick sketch . Even so , it was way better than Kyla's fancy but empty work . But since it was going to a competition , she might as well go all out - and win by a landslide . " What ? " Simon gasped . He could hardly believe what he was hearing . Oh my God . Tilda simply sketched something , and her work actually defeated the best work of all the old - timers ? The time she spent on it was even less than Kyla did . Maybe it really was a random sketch .

Right then , Simon finally realized just how deep and amazing Tilda's talent was . It was almost scary ! Even now , Tilda's skills could make her a shining star in the art world . " Great ! Absolutely ! Where are you right now ? I'll come get the painting from you . " No need , Professor Linscott . I'll just paint a new one . It won't take me long . I'll give it to you tomorrow so you can submit it for the competition . " Alright , it's a deal ! After hanging up , Tilda glanced at the buzzing group chat on the forum .

A smile curved at the corner of her lips . From now on , it looked like she'd be busy with all sorts of things - and that felt good . There was a new feeling of fulfillment inside her . She didn't need to worry about old grudges or the past anymore . Tilda had found herself again . Her purpose , her dreams , and the Tilda who never let her mentor down . As night fell at Hopewell Hospital , Dominic slowly woke up . Blair was right there by his side . When she saw him open his eyes , her face filled with joy . " Dominic , you're awake ! " " Mom ... " Dominic blinked in confusion .

" What happened ? I feel so weak . Where am I ? " " This is the hospital , pumpkin , " Blair answered gently . She quickly explained everything that had happened , keeping the story short and clear . After hearing it all , Dominic's already - foggy mind felt like it was being swallowed by darkness and torn apart . His heart ached so much , it felt like it was about to split in two . Even the heart monitor by his bed started beeping loudly - beep beep beep !

Chapter 166 No More Lies " Dominic ? " " Mom , I'm fine . " Dominic looked down . He tried to hide the pain in his heart and closed his eyes . The machines in the hospital room soon returned to a steady rhythm .

My poor child , you don't look fine at all . I'm calling the others , and I'll get the doctor right away , " Blair said as she pressed the nurse's button : The doctor arrived a few minutes later . Russell and the rest hurried in when they heard the news . After a careful check , the doctor said , " Mr. Dominic is alright now . He is just waking up , and he is weak .

He needs to get some rest . No heavy activities , eat simple food , get plenty of sleep , and don't stay up late . " " Thank you , doctor , " they replied . Once the doctor left , Russell and Blair hovered around Dominic , fussing over him , worried about every little thing . They even wanted to make him some warm grits . Soon , only Kyla and Wade were left in the room . Kyla wiped her tears , her eyes red and puffy as she spoke , " Dominic , I'm so glad you're okay . I was scared out of my mind . " " I'm sorry for making you all worry , " Dominic answered softly , his voice weak .

Wade gently patted Kyla's shoulder . " Alright , Kyla , Dominic just woke up . Let's give him some peace . We'll come back later . " " Okay , Wade . " Kyla sniffled , following Wade as he left . Now the large , comfortable hospital room was silent , with Dominic alone . He closed his eyes , but his mind wouldn't rest . Tilda's face flashed before him . The night it rained . Her cold , unforgiving eyes were staring at him like she was Satan herself . Her lips moved , and she spoke the words that pushed Dominic into the depths of hell . " You die .

" Dominic jolted awake , drenched in sweat again . Clenching his jaw , he fumbled in the nightstand until he found his phone . Unlocking it quickly , he ignored all the unread messages and missed calls . Instead , he logged into the dark web . This was the only way Dominic could reach Tilda now . Tilda hated her to the core .

She had blocked him everywhere else and deleted every contact . Tilda had erased every trace of him from her world . But there was one thing she couldn't delete - her account on the dark web .

Dominic ignored the rude messages and taunts sent to him . With a mix of hope and nerves , he clicked on Queen's profile . Maybe , just maybe , she'd posted something while he was in a coma . But as soon as he tried to enter her page , a message popped up . " You've been blacklisted . You cannot view this profile . " Dominic let out a self - deprecating laugh . Did you really have to be so cruel , Tilda ? Are you truly erasing every trace of me from your life ? All he could do now was sit and take it .

Even though remembering the good times with Queen felt like his heart was being torn apart . After all , Dominic was still the 11th - ranked hacker on the dark web . He used his favorite software to search for any news about the Queen . Since he couldn't hack into her account , he knew better . If he tried , it would only make Tilda hate him more . Dominic knew this was foolish . But he hoped , maybe , just maybe , he could learn about Tilda through someone else . Most posts were just talk , People bragging or teasing him , or fans worshiping Queen and making fun of Dominic .

Dominic scrolled through them , almost like he was being possessed , until something caught his eye . He froze . Dominic's pupils shrank . There was a post from a user called Clown , posted two hours ago . New skill unlocked ! " It was a programming script . At first , it looked ordinary . But Dominic knew better . This was Tilda's unique coding style ! 99 When Tilda took him under her wing , she taught him these simple , powerful programming tricks . This particular trick was special .

It was Tilda's secret ; she only shared it with her mentee . No one else could possibly know about this , unless Tilda had taught them herself . " No. It can't be . Tilda wouldn't take on another mentee so soon , " Dominic muttered , trying to convince himself . " It's just a coincidence . " Still , he couldn't help but dig into Clown's identity . Dominic wanted to know who this person really was . How did this guy know tricks that only Tilda and Dominic used ? But no matter how hard he tried , he found nothing . Clown had wiped out every trace .

Even with all his hacking skills , Dominic couldn't break through . His face went pale as the truth set in No more lies could hide it . Clown knew Tilda's habit , just like Dominic did . The only way this could happen - the only person who could cover up for Clown and erase every trace- was Tilda .

Chapter 167 The Last Straw Just like how Tilda once protected Dominic and cleaned up his mess . The history just repeated itself . " Tilda ... why ? " It hasn't even been that long . You used to hate me so much . You were so cold , badly injured ... " But now you've already found a new mentee ? Then ... what am I supposed to be ? " You once told me I'd be your only mentee , that you'd never find anyone better than me . " Did you forget everything we shared together ? Was it all fake ? Before we became enemies you said things you can't just take back .

" Dominic was overcome with an impulse . He wanted to burst out of the hospital , find Tilda , and demand answers . Tilda , you can't do this to me What you have done is too much . You broke my heart - so , so bad . Even the phrase " worse than death " couldn't describe the pain Dominic was feeling now . The next morning , Tilda woke up feeling refreshed , like she'd finally found herself again . Even her nightmares had stopped for once . She picked up the artwork she'd spent two hours finishing last night and packed it up carefully . Then she drove straight to the university .

She'd already scheduled an appointment with Simon to deliver the painting . Simon couldn't wait to open the package . The moment he saw the new painting , he was speechless . He didn't even breathe for a while . It took him a long time to snap out of it . " Oh wow , Tilda ! When I saw your first version , I thought it was already amazing . But this new one ? It's even more stunning ; nothing could top it . Honestly , I think you've already got the champion in the bag . Now let's just see if you can stand out on the world stage . " " Thank you , Professor , " Tilda replied , smiling .

She said goodbye and hurried off to class . Simon stayed behind to admire the artwork . That's when his phone rang . It was Kyla calling . " Hello ? Kyla , what's up ? " . " Professor Linscott , sorry to bother you . My brother's been in the hospital , and I've been looking after him . I finished the painting for the national student art competition , and I hope you'll take a look and let me know if it needs any changes . " " It's okay , Kyla . Just focus on taking care of your brother . I've picked someone else for the competition .

We're planning to send Tilda . " " What ?! " Kyla's smile froze . She couldn't help but shout out loud . Realizing she'd lost her cool , she quickly tried to cover it up . " Oh , I'm sorry , Professor Linscott , I'm just surprised . I thought you'd already promised to recommend me . " " Kyla , I'm sorry . I know this must hurt , but you've seen Tilda's painting . She's the best choice to represent us -no one can beat her , and she might even win on the world stage . " This isn't just about winning a prize .

It's a chance for our country to shine and for Tilda to be noticed by the whole world . I hope you understand . " Simon truly understood why Kyla lost control for a moment . He had promised to recommend her before . With Kyla's talent and skills , she could easily have a good result , boost her résumé , and brag about it for years . Because of this , Simon felt a little guilty and didn't blame Kyla for her reaction . But still , he didn't regret his choice at all . There was simply no comparison between Kyla and Tilda . It was a world away .

There was no way a toad could be compared with the swan . " Alright . I understand . Thank you , Professor Linscott ." No one knew how Kyla managed to say those words while holding back all the anger inside her . The moment she hung up , Kyla removed her shoes and started banging them on the bathroom door . Furious tears streamed down her face . Tilda ! Damn you ! Why is this bitch always there to sabotage me ! Tilda had stolen the attention of the whole family . Now she wanted to take away the glory and recognition that belonged to me ! Kyla couldn't believe her bad luck .

Why did she have to run into someone like Tilda in this lifetime ? If only that bitch would just disappear from the world ! She should die .

If only Tilda were out of the picture , everything would finally be peaceful . The whole family could be happy , just like before . I wouldn't have to be eaten up by jealousy every single day or feel like I'm about to lose my mind . With these dark thoughts swirling in her mind , Kyla's eyes grew cold . For the first time , she felt a real , sharp sense of determination .

She picked up her phone and dialed a number . " Hello ? It's me . Remember what we discussed ? Go ahead and get it done . " I don't care how much it costs . I just want anything that can help me deal with Tilda . Any information that's useful ! " At first , Kyla hated the idea of spending so much money . After all , hiring someone that skilled would be expensive . After Kyla lived with the Jensons for years , she had many savings .

Chapter 168 Regret in Their Eyes As a member of the Jensons , the cash gifts and allowances she received were amounts most people could only dream of . On the outside , Kyla pretended to be careful with money . In reality , she spent it like there was no tomorrow . Her family spoiled her , making sure she received every new designer's limited edition every season , year after year . Growing up with privilege , how could Kyla not get used to the finer things in life and develop sky - high standards ?

That's why she barely saved any money over the years . ced with the outrageous price for her hired gun to get the job done , Kyla winced . It would cost her almost 90 % of her savings . Even if she found nothing bad about Tilda , the money was non - refundable . She hesitated . But now , there was no room for hesitation . She had to find something to take Tilda down - fast ! Otherwise , Tilda would just keep taking more and more things away from her . At Hopewell Hospital , Dominic stayed one more day for observation . He was eventually released once they were certain he was okay .

Russell and the others decided not to tell the other kids about Dominic's coma . They covered up the lawsuit between Tilda and Russell . Blair and Wade helped however they could , making excuses to keep things quiet . The other sons , who were still overseas and busy with their lives , didn't rush home . That was probably for the best . If they learned everything that had happened recently , they would be worried sick . After getting Dominic home , Russell and Blair rushed back to the office . While caring for Dominic , they had been splitting their time between home and work .

Given their recent setback , the company needed a leader . Now was the time to restore trust and steady the company . fin sorry , Dad , Mom . If it wasn't for me- Dominic began .

Russell interrupted gently , " Enough , Dominic . We're family . You just need to rest . " Russell wanted to ask something , but he saw Dominic's pale face . He was curious what really happened between Dominic and Tilda . Why had Dominic changed so much ? But before he could get the words out , Blair quickly fugged his arm and shook her head .

Any questions could wait until Dominic was feeling better . Right now , Dominic was in no state to have a serious conversation . Russell and Blair left the room . " Dominic , I actually planned a welcome party for you . " Kyla said this while attempting to flatter him . But Dominic just turned to Wade . " Wade , I'm tired . I need some rest . Could you help me get back to my room ? Wade hesitated for a second , surprised . " Sure . " MILT Kyla was left standing there , feeling completely embarrassed . She felt like a clown that was putting on a show for no one . She trembled all over .

No way ! Dominic actually ignored me ? Before , no matter how busy or worn out he was , Dominic would always smile as soon as Kyla spoke . He'd pat her on the shoulder and answer her questions patiently . But this time , everything was different . OCH Dominic had changed . Kyla could feel it . Dominic was keeping his distance . He was paying more attention to Tilda now , just like Wade . Everything was different because of that witch ! " Arghhhh ! " Kyla's heart filled with jealousy , rage , and frustration . Wade and Dominic didn't notice a thing .

Once Wade helped Dominic back to his room , he said , " Dominic , you should get some rest . " But Dominic stopped him . " Wade , stay with me . I want to talk ." Wade fell silent . When he looked into Dominic's eyes , he saw the same sadness reflected back at him .. It was the kind of pain only brothers could really understand . They both knew where this pain came from - Tilda . Their little sister .

Finished Whether they were amazed by Tilda's talent or hurt by the complicated feelings they had for her , it all felt the same in the end . Now , Wade and Dominic felt it all . Regret , guilt , and a mix of negative emotions they couldn't untangle . Wade quietly closed the door behind them . The two brothers sat side by side . They stared at each other in silence for a long time . Finally , Wade couldn't hold back anymore . " Dominic , what really happened between you and Tilda ? I remember , you used to hate her . " He was putting it lightly .

With Dominic's personality , he used to wish he could strangle Tilda with his hand . Hate didn't even come close to describing how Dominic felt about Tilda . Dominic sighed . " Wade , these past few days felt like I fell from heaven straight into the deepest pit . I thought things were getting better , but I ended up in a nightmare even worse than before . "

Chapter 169 Regret Runs Deep Dominic gave a bitter , self - mocking smile . Seeing how much pain Dominic was in , Wade's heart softened . He let go of his curiosity and tried to comfort him . " Dominic , you don't have to talk about it if you're not ready . I won't push you . Just tell me when you feel like it . " " No , Wade . I want to . Because we're in the same situation . I never understood before why you felt guilty about Tilda , who's supposed to be our enemy , " Dominic said . " Even if she's related to us by blood , she still betrayed our family .

You hated her as much as I did . " He took a shaky breath and continued , " But lately , I get it , but it's too late now . " Dominic felt like he would go crazy if he kept his emotions all bottled up . He had been holding in his emotions and suffering alone all this time . After waking up from his coma , he remembered everything . The pain in his chest felt like it could explode . He had barely survived a long , difficult day . Even now , back at home , his chest ached with guilt and regret . The sharp pain from before was gone .

Now it was a slow , heavy ache that made life feel endlessly hard . He remembered the day Tilda cut him off - the day she asked him to go to hell . Then he remembered how quickly she found someone new to take his place as her mentee . All the promises , memories , and words they shared flashed through his mind . Each memory stabbed into his soul like an invisible knife . It felt like he was dying over and over again , but without shedding a single drop of blood . Dominic knew if he didn't let it out , the pain would get worse . He sometimes even wished he could kill himself .

That way , he could escape the guilt and despair that wrapped around him like poison . Once Dominic finally told Wade everything , a bit of that frustration inside him finally lifted - even if it was just a little . Wade , on the other hand , was completely stunned . He stared at Dominic in disbelief . It took him a long time to process what he'd just heard , " Dominic , I can't believe it . You were her mentee , and you even had another hidden identity ? " Wade said . My gosh , fate is playing some horrible joke on us . " Dominic let out a hollow laugh . " You think I don't know ?

The day I went to meet my mentor , I was excited , only to find out it was Tilda . One person I hated most . I honestly thought the universe was playing a cruel joke on me . It wanted to punish me and make me suffer as much as possible . " Finished He sighed deeply , sounding worn out . " Now , I've been punished for real . I regret everything . I even wanted to go to work today to keep myself busy so no one at home would worry about me . But I just don't have the strength anymore ; I'm so tired .

I just want to sleep and forget about all this pain ." Dominic closed his eyes , looking totally exhausted . Wade gave Dominic's shoulder a comforting pat . " Dominic , to be honest ... I ... " Wade then shared his story with Tilda . When Dominic heard it , he felt even worse . The room was heavy with sadness . None of them could breathe . " Dominic , do you feel guilty about Tilda just because she was your mentor ? " Wade finally asked . Dominic hesitated . " I can't lie . If Tilda hadn't been Queen , I don't think I'd ever have forgiven her .

I probably would have spent my whole life trying to kill her . " That's why , when Tilda accused him , he couldn't even defend himself . " W - we've been so cruel to her , " Wade said quietly . " Dominic , she's our real sister . Mom and Dad's daughter . What have we done ? " Wade spoke what was hidden in the depths of his heart . He had asked himself this question many times . Wade even said it to Tilda but never to the rest of the family . He didn't think anyone would understand why he felt guilty . After all , the family felt they had done plenty for Tilda .

They gave her a comfortable life , never stopped looking for her , brought her home , and treated her as their real daughter . What more could she possibly want ? Wade used to think that , too . He sided with Kyla , treated Tilda unfairly , and bullied her . He considered Tilda a beggar who cheated them out of their money . He didn't care about Tilda . If Tilda had been just an ordinary girl , without all those hidden identities , Wade would never have looked at her twice . And that's not how a brother should treat a sister who went missing for 19 years and really needed her family .

" Yeah , we have been too cruel to her , " Dominic admitted quietly . Dominic realized how badly they'd messed up . They were impressed by Tilda's talents and the things that made her special . They never really saw her as their little sister . Tilda gave up everything . She hid her identity and came home with nothing but a clean slate . Deep down , she must have hoped that they would welcome her as family . They would cherish her , protect her , and love her as their own . But instead ..

Chapter 170 First Contact What had we done to her ? Nothing but humiliate , hurt , and ignore her . Tilda would never forgive them . Doing nothing to them was her being kind . With Tilda's skills , taking revenge and destroying them completely would be easy . Tilda . We regret it now . Now they want to make things right . But is it too late to fix everything ? Tilda had no idea how much Dominic and Wade had changed their minds about her . Even if she knew , she would've just found it ridiculous . Obviously , those two had a hidden agenda , something malicious even .

Even if they were putting on an act , sympathizing , or truly regretting their behavior , Tilda wouldn't forgive them . The moment they made their choices , the ship had sailed . It was too late now . In her previous life , she was mistreated for five whole years . They let her burn alive in the fire . She had suffered a fate worse than death . Being fooled once was enough for Tilda . She would never make another dumb mistake . When Tilda got back to her place , a message from Andy popped up . " Tilda , they said they'll be arriving in Slosa in five days . Do you want their contact info ?

You can choose the time and place to meet . " " Alright , send it to me , Andy . " At first , Tilda wasn't sure if she wanted to meet with the representative from the research group . But now , if she wanted to see Dane and make sure it was really him , she had to take the first step . As soon as Andy sent her the contact , Tilda added the person right away . His profile picture was the country's flag . The username was HareAffair ! Yeah , definitely a full - on patriot . HareAffair asked , " Are you Queen ? " Tilda replied , " Just call me Tilda .

I added you on WhatsApp ; I'm not trying to hide my identity ." Hare Affair replied , " Wow , I never thought I'd get to work with you ! Honestly , I'm so excited . I'm a fan . I saw you take down that foreign country firewall all by yourself on the dark web . That's freaking cool ! Oh , by the way , I'm Kaleb Burn . " Tilda wrote , " Hi , Kaleb . The real reason I reached out is that I'm interested in Dane . If I join and help out , does that mean I can meet Dane ? " Kaleb paused when he saw her message . Kaleb asked , " Well , I'll have to report that .

Why are you interested in Professor Kerrigan ? Do you know him ? " Tilda explained , " He could be someone I've been searching for . Someone really important to me . But I have to meet him to be sure . " Kaleb typed , " I can't decide that by myself . I'll have to ask the higher - ups . Tilda agreed , " No problem . I heard you'll be in Slosa in five days . I'll arrange a place for us to meet Kaleb wrote , Great . Don't be upset if there's a delay . I'm looking forward to meeting you , Queen ." After their chat ended , Tilda narrowed her eyes . Meeting Dane wouldn't be that easy .

She had expected as much . Even though she'd helped their organization many times , Tilda was still just a hacker from the dark web . Her true identity was a mystery . They never met her in person . Of course , there was no way Tilda would be allowed to meet this country's most closely guarded researcher right away . She'd have to work with them , prove herself , and earn their trust . A few days passed in a flash . Finally , Kaleb arrived safely in Slosa . He followed the address Tilda sent him . Kaleb ended up at Sky Dining . Tilda was a VIP at Sky Dining .

Alfie himself had made special arrangements ; whenever she came to eat , she always received the very best service . The staff welcomed Kaleb with great respect and led him straight to Tilda's table . Kaleb looked a bit nervous . His eyes were darting everywhere , like it was his first time in such a fancy place . He was a man just over 30 , but you could tell he felt out of place . Tilda smiled , stood up , and reached out her hand to greet him . Hi Kaleb I'm Tilda .

" H - hello , Queen , " Kaleb stammered .

Finished Meeting his idol for the first time - and finding out she was so young and pretty - made Kaleb even more nervous . Kaleb struggled with words . His hands trembled as he shook Tilda's , and only then did he manage to sit down . Scanning the high - end decor around them , Kaleb asked quietly , " I - Isn't this place super expensive ? " Tilda raised her eyebrows in surprise . " Mr. Burn , you've never been to a restaurant like this before ? " This research group was extremely important for Cetherland .

As their liaison , Kaleb should have had plenty of experience with upscale business dinners . Kaleb shook his head , a little embarrassed . " No , honestly , I'm just a government worker . I'm not as wealthy as you probably imagine , Queen . Most of the time , our group is buried in research . This is the first time I've ever been to a place this nice . " Kaleb had a strong urge to hide his face , It's so embarrassing to meet my idol like this ! Sob , sob , sob . Help ! " I see . " Tilda understood and kindly didn't ask any more questions.