

Shadows 171

Chapter 171 Feast for a King With a snap of her fingers , a parade of delicious food appeared on the table . Kaleb was so nervous . All he could manage was to take a sip of his wine . But it went down the wrong way , and he started coughing hard . Noticing how flustered Kaleb was , Tilda couldn't help but tease him . " Relax , Mr. Burn . That wine you just tasted costs tens of thousands of dollars per sip . You really should savor it . " " What - what did you say ? " Kaleb thought he must've misheard .

" That's a 1870 Château Mouton Rothschild . There are only about 20 bottles left in the world . This one alone is worth five million . " Pfft- Kaleb nearly dropped his glass . A single bottle of wine that costs five million dollars ? Just one sip and tens of thousands of dollar's are gone ? Wow . Is this really how the rich live ? I couldn't believe it . He suddenly dared not take another sip . " I'm treating you with complete respect , " Tilda said . " I want you to see that I'm truly serious about working with your research group . " " You've probably checked my background .

I'm a pure - blooded Cetherlander . I love my country . Since I'm blessed with these talents and skills , I feel it's my duty to do what I can for the nation ." Kaleb stared at Tilda in awe . She didn't rush him . Her eyes , calm and clear , looked right into his . " Uh ... sorry , Queen . I kind of lost my cool for a moment because of what you just said . Honestly , I really didn't expect it ." Kaleb snapped back to reality . He felt a little embarrassed and scratched the back of his head . Tilda said , " Most people wouldn't say something like that , I know .

But I just wanted to be honest , or else I wouldn't have chosen to meet you and work with your group ." " I understand , Queen . I believe you . When Professor Kerrigan hadn't come to help , our group was stuck with plenty of projects . If it weren't for you stepping in , we never would've made so much progress . " Our country is growing fast right now . We really need talented people like you , Queen . If you could join us , we'd be beyond excited ! " Kaleb's honest smile softened Tilda's gaze a little .

Joining this research group and finding out Dane's identity wouldn't take as much time as she thought . After dinner , she said goodbye to Kaleb . Before they parted , Tilda left him with one last message . " I know it's probably hard for you or your boss to trust me or to arrange a meeting with Professor Kerrigan . But could you please pass a message to Professor Kerrigan for me ? " Ask him if he has a relative with the last name Kerrigan , around 50 or 60 years old , with incredible ability . That old man has a lightning - shaped scar on his forehead .

" This was Tilda's only memory of her mentor . She didn't even know if " Kerrigan " was his real last name . All she remembered was that unforgettable lightning scar . By all logic , not many people would have a scar like that . With her skills , it should've been easy to find him . But even after becoming the top hacker on the dark web and trying every trick she knew , Tilda never found a single trace of her mentor . A " I got it , Queen . I swear , I'll pass your message to Professor Kerrigan , " Kaleb promised . " Then you'll know for sure if he's the one you're looking for .

" Thank you , Kaleb ." Tilda gave Kaleb a smile that came straight from the heart . For a split second , it was as bright as fireworks in his eyes . Kaleb's face turned bright red , and his heart started pounding . " Well , I'll go report all this right away , " he stammered . " Please , " Tilda said , " no matter how Professor Kerrigan responds , let me know as soon as possible . " " You have my word ! " Kaleb replied . After they parted , Kaleb returned to his hotel . He barely loosened his tie before calling his boss to report every detail of his meeting with Tilda .

On the other end of the line , an older man was sitting on a couch in a research lab . His hair was streaked with gray . His eyes looked a little tired , but they were still sharp and full of life . Even though he was past sixty , he looked no older than fifty , with a strong build from years of discipline . His military uniform was covered with a dazzling array of medals . All of them were Manfred Parker's pride . " You did well , Kaleb .

Someone as gifted as Queen is precisely the kind of person our team and our country have been searching for , " Manfred said . " But we need to be careful . Even if Queen has helped us out a lot in the past , it's a big risk to bring in a hacker from the dark web . We have to make sure nothing goes wrong . " He stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray . Manfred's eyes were deep and unreadable .

Even though Tilda was a Cetherlander through and through - and had once helped defend the country by breaking into foreign security firewalls and saving its reputation - Manfred knew they couldn't take any risks . Not with something this important .

Chapter 172 The Gamble Now that Dane had joined the organization , there were so many important projects and secrets that even the smallest leak could lead to unimaginable consequences . Queen was like a double - edged sword - a risky bet . If it paid off , the positive impact could be beyond anyone's imagination . Before the organization played this high - stakes game , they needed every preparation to be in place . " I understand , sir , " Kaleb said . " By the way , Queen also asked me to pass on a message to Professor Kerrigan . " Kaleb reported this to Manfred .

Manfred's brow furrowed ever so slightly . " Is that all ? " The last name " Kerrigan " and an old man with a lightning - shaped scar on his forehead . Who is he ? The man shared the same last name as Professor Kerrigan . It was a rather unique surname . Is he a relative ? Manfred couldn't remember ever meeting

anyone like that . " Yes , sir . Please , I can tell Queen means no harm . She genuinely wants to join us and serve the country . " I know I'm not supposed to let emotions cloud my judgment . But you've said it yourself - my instincts are usually spot - on .

I hope you'll at least take my judgment into account . " Kaleb wasn't chosen for his abilities or negotiation skills . There was another reason Manfred had insisted on Kaleb being the liaison for the organization . Kaleb's gut feeling was almost never wrong . As the liaison for Lab Seven , Kaleb had to deal with all sorts of people , including Tilda . If someone tried to trick him , Kaleb would always catch on . Tilda was the dark web's top hacker . That title alone was proof of her talent . Even Manfred himself wasn't sure he could see through Tilda's real intentions .

If Tilda truly wanted to hide her real self and pretend to be sweet and harmless , no amount of clever words would ever give away her true intentions . That's why Kaleb's gut feeling was so important - just as important as any skill or ability . I understand . " " Sir , do you mean ... ? " Kaleb's face lit up with excitement . Was Manfred really about to say yes ? " Don't jump the gun . This is a huge decision . I need more time to think about this . For now , just stay in Slosa and have more contact with the Queen .

When the time's right , I'll give her the assignment . " " Oh ... " Kaleb was a little disappointed , but he got the message . After hanging up , Manfred pulled a cigarette from his pack and lit it . He took a few long drags , blowing out a couple of smoke rings before putting it out in the ashtray . He left the lab and headed deeper into the research center . Manfred stepped into the elevator , swiped his ID card , did the iris scan , and got fully disinfected - every strict procedure . Finally , Manfred arrived at the lowest level of the base . This was the heart of Lab Seven .

It was where the nation's most important projects were being developed . Some of these projects had been stuck for ages . With a genius like Dane on board , everything was moving fast again . Maybe even faster than ever . Every time a staff member saw Manfred , they stopped what they were doing and greeted Manfred with respect . Manfred waved them off and headed straight for a man in a white lab coat . The man stood about six feet two , and short , tidy hair . He had thick , long eyelashes and sharply arched eyebrows . His skin was smooth , and his features were bold and striking .

This man had the look of a model , but it was his eyes that stood out most . Most of the time , those eyes seemed cold and emotionless . Whenever he was deep in his research , they burned with a fiery focus that made people hesitate to get too close . People were almost afraid of getting burned by that fire in his eyes , or maybe they were worried they'd be swept up by it too . The man in front of Manfred

seemed born for science , with an IQ that was off the charts . Dane was so absorbed in his research . He didn't notice Manfred had walked up behind him .

Manfred didn't rush to interrupt . He just watched , fascinated by Dane's work , even though , honestly , he couldn't understand any of it . An hour went by . Finally . Dane pulled his eyes away from the screen and let out a long , relieved breath . Rows of numbers flashed across the computer , moving like a dazzling piece of music . With a final click , he sent his results . Dane finally noticed Manfred standing beside him . He didn't speak . Dane simply looked over , hinting with his eyes about what brought him there .

" Professor Kerrigan , " Manfred said quietly , " I know you're busy ; sorry to interrupt . Someone asked me to pass on a message for you ." After thinking it over , Manfred decided he should share Queen's message with Dane . Maybe he even hoped this would help him get on Queen's good side . Dane was a national treasure . Someone the country wanted to protect at all costs . But Manfred knew Dane couldn't stay hidden away in Lab Seven forever . If Queen joined their team , Lab Seven would be stronger than ever .

Even though Manfred still had to test Queen's loyalty , deep down , he was already leaning toward letting her join the team .

Chapter 173 Meeting in Hetsa Dane was silent for a moment . He picked up a pen , wrote a word on a piece of paper , and showed it to Manfred . " Speak . Hardly any people knew about Dane's condition . Dane couldn't talk . No one had ever heard him speak . He communicated only by writing things down . Doctors had checked Dane's body . They found that there was nothing wrong with his vocal cords . His hearing was perfectly fine . No one could figure out why Dane couldn't speak .

And Dane was a genius - with an IQ of 260 and obsessed with his research . Everyone just thought he was a cold - blooded machine . Someone who never showed emotion and looked at people with the icy calm of a robot . He was so intimidating that even the cold air around him seemed to make people's hearts freeze . Everyone instinctively wanted to keep their distance . Manfred repeated Tilda's message word for word . After hearing it , Dane - who was usually so expressionless , his eyes only lighting up during experiments- finally showed a spark of emotion .

He grabbed his pen and quickly wrote something down . " Where is she ? " Manfred was shocked . " Professor Kerrigan , do you know her ? " " Tell me . This is important . I have to see her ! " Dane was so excited , his handwriting - usually neat and perfect - became a little shaky . Manfred had only wanted to give it a try . He didn't expect that Tilda really did have some connection to Professor Kerrigan . After thinking for a moment , Manfred nodded . " Alright , Professor Kerrigan . I'll arrange for you two to meet at the base . Dane was too valuable to risk moving him to another location .

Manfred decided to bring Tilda to their base instead . The next morning , Tilda woke up to a call from Kaleb . He told her about Dane . Tilda never expected things to move so quickly . The way Dane acted , he seemed to know about her mentor's whereabouts . Could he be the same Dane her mentor had once talked about ? 30.0 " My boss hopes you can come with me to the Hetsa base so you can meet Professor Kerrigan , " Kaleb said . " When are you available , Queen ? " " Right now ! " Tilda replied . " Huh ? " Kaleb was stunned .

By the time Kaleb reached the airport , Tilda was already packed and ready to go : She even bought Kaleb's plane ticket for him . Kaleb was a little frustrated . " Actually , there's no need to rush " Kaleb , I know things happen a little fast for you , but Professor Kerrigan is very important to me . He might be the one I've been looking for all these years . I've searched for him for years , but couldn't find any leads . There were times I was so disappointed that I nearly gave up .

Now that I've finally found a hint of hope , it feels like the first ray of light in a world full of darkness . " Her words were simple and easy to understand . Kaleb immediately understood why Tilda was so anxious . The look in her eyes was filled with excitement and hope , brighter than he'd ever seen before . Kaleb nodded heavily . " Let's go , Queen ! " They boarded the flight to Hetsa . 20 13 After three hours , Kaleb and Tilda landed at their destination . Manfred had arranged a car to pick them up . A man in a suit got out of the car .

He was built like a bear , wore sunglasses , and carried an air of strength that made people uneasy . Tilda caught a faint scent of blood on the man in front of her . He was no pushover ; that was for sure . This was the kind of guy who'd seen real battles . A soldier who had survived life on the edge . Only someone who'd faced danger so many times could give off that kind of icy , intimidating vibe . " Sorry , Queen , " the man said , " we have to take your phone and do a quick body search on you .

You'll also need to wear a blindfold on the way to the base ." Kaleb frowned . " River , don't you think this is a bit much ? " River Barber's rough voice held no emotion . " Those are Mr. Parker's orders . I'm just doing my job . " " I understand , " Tilda replied calmly . She handed over her phone without a fuss . Tilda let them scan her with electronic sensors . She stood still while they body - searched her for carrying anything suspicious . When they were done , they slipped a blindfold over her eyes and helped her into the car .

As they drove toward the base , Kaleb whispered , " Queen , I'm sorry . No one told me they'd do this . " Tilda answered evenly , " I get it . After all , I'm here to see Professor Kerrigan . If I were a bad person and somehow found out something that could interest him , I could use it to lure him out - something terrible could happen . If something were to happen to Professor Kerrigan , it would be a huge loss for the country . You guys can't afford to take that risk . So it's better to be safe . That way , you can trust me more , which is exactly what I want to .

" 12 Kaleb was speechless at how calm Tilda was . She never says anything to resist their demand . In fact , her understanding made him a bit nervous . River , meanwhile , glanced at Tilda in the rearview mirror , a flash of respect in his eyes . No wonder Mr. Parker had his eye on her a long time ago .

Chapter 174 Reunion at the Base River couldn't help but be impressed by how calm and clear - headed Tilda was . This wasn't an act . River knew it for sure . After about an hour and a half of driving , the car finally halted . River got out with Tilda . " Kaleb , go report in . I'll take Queen from here , " River said . " But I- Kaleb started . He knew his job came first ; his rational thinking finally overcame his feelings . He had no choice but to watch River and Tilda walk away They walked forward for about 20 minutes . Then , with a soft ding ; a mechanical door slid open .

River led Tilda inside . The elevator hummed and descended for about a minute before it came to a stop The doors opened . Tilda remained calm the whole time . " River took off Tilda's blindfold . " Sorry , Queen . This was just protocol , " River apologized . " I understand , " Tilda replied , rubbing her arm . She stepped into a security checkpoint . Countless red and green lights swept over her , scanning for anything suspicious .

The machines scanned her ID , did a magnetic check , ran all kinds of background searches , and made sure she wasn't carrying anything she shouldn't have . " After she cleared every scan , did the next mechanical door open ? Inside was a conference room . A long table , chairs , a big screen , cameras , a TV , and even a small plant . The lighting was bright white . As Tilda looked around , the door of the conference room opened . Manfred , in a military uniform , walked in . Tilda could tell right away that Manfred was no ordinary guy .

Her mind raced , recalling everything she knew about him . Manfred offered his hand and smiled . " Nice to meet you , Queen ." Tilda shook his hand and said calmly , " Nice to meet you , too , Mr. Parker . " " So you already know who I am . That makes this easier , " Manfred said . " Honestly , I'm surprised . The legendary Queen , top hacker of the dark web , turns out to be a nineteen - year- old college sophomore . You've been helping our research team solve problems for a few years now .

That means you were just in high school when you started . " He spoke in amazement . Her talent was way beyond that of a young prodigy . It was unreal . A total freak . But for Manfred , in his position , he had met his share of geniuses . He'd seen plenty of freaks before , and it hardly fazed him anymore . Besides , there was already another genius at the base who was just as talented as Tilda . " Mr. Parker , I'd really like to talk with you , but ... what matters most to me is meeting Professor Kerrigan .

That meeting is the actual purpose of my visit , " Tilda said , her impatience showing . Dane meant everything to her . After searching for so many years , this was the first real hope she'd found . " I understand , Queen . And Professor Kerrigan feels the same , " Manfred replied . " I was planning to set up a video call , but Professor Kerrigan insisted on meeting you in person . " With that , Manfred left the room . He looked at Dane , who was waiting outside , and nodded . " You can go in now ." Then Manfred went to the next room to watch the monitors .

He told the security team to keep a close eye on everything - especially Tilda's movements . If anything seemed suspicious , they were to stop the meeting right away . " Mr. Parker , isn't this a bit risky ? " River asked quietly , frowning . " What if Queen has a hidden identity or she means harm ? " Manfred rubbed his temples . " I know . Honestly , I'm starting to regret telling Professor Kerrigan about Queen at all . But he insisted - he even said he'd quit all his research unless he could meet her in person . What am I supposed to do ? " What ?!

felt as if lightning had struck . Dane , who had never cared about anything but his research , threatening to stop working just to meet the Queen ? What is going on between these two ? At that moment , the camera showed Dane walking up to the door . He placed his hand on the door handle and slowly turned it . Manfred and the others all held their breath . Tilda did too . When she heard the door open , her nerves tensed up , and she almost stopped breathing .

Excitement , fear , hope , and doubt - all sorts of complicated emotions - crashed together in her heart . It was just like the day she first returned to her family's house years ago . She thought she'd never feel this way again . But she was wrong . When Tilda saw the man in the lab coat walk into the room , she didn't feel anything special at first - not for a second .

Chapter 175 The Mentor's Legacy For a moment , Tilda wondered if she'd found the wrong person . She thought maybe Dane was related to her mentor , if their eyes and faces shared a hint of similarity . But honestly , Dane didn't look anything like her mentor . The hope that had just flared up in Tilda's eyes faded quickly . Dane watched Tilda quietly , then took a deep breath . He pulled out a small whiteboard and wrote . " You really are the mentee of our mentor . " " What ? " Tilda was startled when she saw the words . It took her a moment to realize what this might mean .

Her voice trembled as she asked , " Are you my senior ? " " Yes . I was the first mentee . My name was given to me by the mentor . " 2 . " I was an orphan . Mentor found me , took me in , and raised me . I didn't have a name until he gave me one . Maybe because it was his first time meeting Tilda , Dane grew excited , and his writing got faster and faster . He had so much to say . " D - Dane ... " Tilda muttered softly , almost in a daze . This was the first time she learned her mentor had other mentees . The first time she realized , she had a senior .

And not just anyone , Dane was a scientist considered the nation's treasure . Suddenly , Tilda's eyes filled with tears . She tipped her head back and took a deep breath . " Dane , did you never know about me ? " No. I have met others , but I didn't know Mentor had taken on anyone else after all these years apart - let alone a girl like you ." Tilda's face lit up with surprise . " There are others ? How many ? " " I'm not sure . I haven't seen our mentor in years . " But he gave all of us the same special last name - Kerrigan .

" He traveled all over the world , adopting and teaching orphans . You're lucky to have your own name . Most of us just got his last name and a first name ." " Really ? " Tilda was a bit disappointed . It seemed like even Dane didn't know where their mentor had gone . The old man , who was the most important figure in Tilda's life , had vanished without a trace . But still , knowing there were other mentees and that she had found her Dane - Tilda felt incredibly lucky . It felt like when one door closed , another quiet window opened for her :: She hadn't noticed before .

Tilda was trapped in her grudge against her family and unable to break free from hatred . From there , Tilda and Dane talked for a long time . They shared memories of learning from their mentor and what they had been through . Honestly , Dane didn't know much more about their mentor than Tilda did . Tilda put together a few key points . First , their mentor loved to travel . He had great power and influence . Even Tilda couldn't find any clues about where he went . Second , their mentor usually took in orphans as students .

If you already had a family name , he let you keep it ; otherwise , he gave you his last name and a new first name . Thirdly , the mentees he took in were never ordinary people . Dane was a genius with an IQ of 260. Tilda had the Omega bloodline . Fourth , when their mentor felt the mentee was ready , he would disappear . He left no trace and no chance for them to find him . Whatever his mentees chose to do with their lives afterward was their own business . He never interfered . Oh , not exactly . Maybe there was one exception .

Whenever that old man taught Tilda and Dane , he always repeated one lesson . " If you are given great gifts , never forget to use them for good . Broaden your mind . Serve your country and your people .

That is your duty ." Tilda wiped her eyes and gave a small , sad smile . " It looks like that old man really was a mystery , wasn't he ? I bet he's still out there , alive and kicking , just like he did with us back then . He's probably traveling the world and nurturing a new mentee somewhere .

" Tilda couldn't help but laugh through her tears . " Back then , he really worried me . He nearly drove me crazy . Silly old man . " She felt like crying again , even though it had been so long since she'd had that urge . After she got a second chance at life , Tilda once promised herself she would never cry again . But this time , for her mentor - the most important person in her life - maybe it was okay to cry a little for him . Dane saw this and pressed his lips together . Then , without warning , he moved closer to Tilda .

In the security room , Manfred and River watched the screens . They tensed up : " Professor Kerrigan , what are you doing ? " Their voices were tight with worry . Dane simply reached out , placed his hand on Tilda's shoulder , and gently patted her . Their mentor used to do that whenever Tilda was sad . He would appear silently , strict but caring , and softly pat her shoulder in that same gentle way . Tilda couldn't hold back her tears anymore . They broke free all at once . She threw herself into Dane's arms and hugged him tightly . " Dane , I really miss him .

I miss him so much , " Tilda sobbed . T " I lost the people I cared about most . I almost lost myself . It's so hard out there ; I've felt so lost all these . years . "

Chapter 176 The Tears She Had to Hide " I wish I could see him just one more time ! " It felt like Tilda had to let out all the pain , anger , and sadness she'd bottled up over so many years . In Dane's arms , she broke down , crying her heart out . Ever since she was reborn , she hadn't shed a single tear . But now , finally , in the arms of her senior , whom she had found after years of searching , Tilda could cry as much as she needed . In her last life , Tilda was naïve , foolish , and hopeless .

After Tilda was reborn , she saw through everything and fought her way forward . Tilda wasn't a machine . She was a person with a real heart . Being mistreated by the Jenson's hurt even more since they were family - bound by blood . All Tilda could do was fight back with everything she had . She hid the pain deep inside her heart , determined never to make the same mistake again . This time , she wanted to live with dignity , not like before - begging for scraps of affection like a stray dog .

When the world was quiet at night and she saw other families together , while she sat alone , she couldn't help but wonder . Why did her family turn out to be a group of demons ? Why did other parents love their children so much ? And those parents who spent years searching for their missing kids - what were they really feeling ? Were they like Russell and Blair , who only brought Tilda home to avoid regrets ? No , real parents would give up everything for their child . They would cry , grieve , and pour their hearts out .

The Jensons claimed they searched for Tilda for years , but with all their money and power , did Blair really suffer ? Typically , they just paid agencies to look for her . Because she'd never really suffered . Blair couldn't understand what it meant to be torn apart by pain . She had never tasted that kind of heartbreak . So , she could stand there acting high and mighty , as if she were doing Tilda a huge favor . Instead of showing understanding , Blair just blamed Tilda for being soft .

Her parents always blamed Tilda for being weak whenever she faced injustice or bad treatment . They'd compare her to Kyla , saying she wasn't even worth as much as Kyla's little toe . Some things , once you see through them , do make you stronger . But that doesn't mean you have to accept them without complaint . Tilda still felt unwilling to accept her fate . She still wished things could have been different . If only her mentor had never left .

If that old man had been there when Tilda realized the Jensons would never truly accept her - that they were monsters through and through - she would have walked away without a second thought . She never would have given them a chance to hurt her . " Professor Kerrigan ! " Manfred and River burst into the office , tense and worried . But Dane shot them a look , warning them to stay back . Q 15 He held Tilda close . Dane gave her the safe harbor she so desperately needed . He let her cry as much as she wanted . Dane could feel the deep sadness inside her .

A grief that had haunted Tilda for far too long , like a nightmare that refused to end . It was something that had haunted Tilda for far too long . Tilda is my family now . My junior . Even though there was no real bond between them , both of them could sense something familiar in each other . It was a special feeling , they found it hard to explain . When Dane shot them a look to stay back , Manfred and River froze in place , too afraid to approach . All they could do was watch , tense and uneasy , as Tilda cried in Dane's arms . River's hand instinctively went to the gun at his waist .

If Tilda made even the slightest move to hurt Dane , he'd be ready to stop her . It would be a huge loss for their nation if Dane is harmed . Tilda quickly pulled herself together . She lifted her head from Dane's shoulder and let go . Tilda met his worried eyes with a small , crooked smile . " Sorry , Dane . I lost it there for a moment , but I'm okay now . " After crying her heart out , she felt a whole lot better . Besides , she'd finally found someone important to her . Dane gently patted her back .

He picked up his writing board and scribbled a message . " I'm here . Don't be afraid . " Tilda spoke up in gratitude , " Thank you , Dane . " Then she turned to Manfred and River , who were still standing there . Those two were visibly on edge . " Don't worry . I have no intention of hurting Professor Kerrigan . I know it's hard for you to believe me , and I sort of lost control just now . I'm sorry . " She gave them a

deep, sincere bow. Manfred and River didn't know what to say. Queen's humility made their earlier overreactions seem somewhat ridiculous.

Manfred gave River a subtle nod, telling him to stand down. O Z Z Z Z After all, Queen was soon to join Lab Seven, and they couldn't offend her. Manfred tried to smooth things over. He cleared his throat and said, "Don't take it the wrong way, Queen. Ahem, it's just ... well, you understand."

Chapter 177 A Secret Only We Share Tilda said, "I understand." Just like that, the tense moment faded away. Dane picked up the writing board again. He scribbled. "You two, please leave." For once, a trace of displeasure crossed Dane's face. I had finally reunited with Tilda. And now these two have to barge in. So annoying. "Hmm ... River glanced at Manfred, unsure what to do. Manfred looked troubled, too. He was torn. If something happened to Dane, how could they explain it to the higher-ups? "It's okay, Dane," Tilda said gently. "Let them stay."

I actually have a few questions for you both. "She turned to Dane. "You can't speak?" That was the question weighing on Tilda's mind. Dane hesitated a little, then he wrote, "I only talk to mentors." Manfred explained, "Queen, we've had Professor Kerrigan checked from head to toe. His vocal cords work perfectly, he hears fine, and he can understand everything written or spoken. We just don't know why ... he can't actually talk." Tilda's heart jolted in surprise. Maybe Dane was just like her?

A special blood type, which gave him incredible talents but also brought a harsh side effect. This wasn't something Tilda wanted to bring up, not with Manfred and River here. If it were true, it was a very private matter to discuss. The group chatted for a while. Manfred and River slowly relaxed, but they couldn't ignore how much Dane cared about Tilda. What if he wanted to be alone with her again? Sure enough, Dane wrote again on his board. "You two, please leave. I want to talk to Tilda alone." "Mr. Parker ...

' River looked at Manfred, clearly troubled. Usually, Tilda and Dane weren't supposed to meet for so long. They only got this much time because Dane requested it - and because Lab Seven wanted to stay on Tilda's good side. If they kept pushing, it would cross a line. Manfred's nerves were fried. He had no idea what to do. Tilda noticed their struggle and spoke up first. "Dane, how about we meet again tomorrow?" PA Dane's eyes showed he was reluctant for her to leave.

His eyes practically hinted, "Tilda, you don't have to worry about them." But Tilda smiled and shook her head. "Dane, this is the dream that you fought for. I'm happy that we got to meet. Tomorrow, could we maybe get a little more time together, Mr. Parker?" "Of course," Manfred said at once.

Queen was considerate enough to ease the pressure on Manfred . If Manfred said no now , it would just seem unreasonable . They believe Queen wasn't a threat . She did seem to be Dane's junior , but there was still that tiny chance that things could go wrong .

What if Queen had found out about Dane having a junior from some secret source and got close to him on purpose ? As long as there was such a possibility , Manfred couldn't let his guard down . Dane was way too important . Not just to the research lab , but to the whole country . If anything happened to Dane , Manfred would never forgive himself . Dane pouted unhappily . No one had ever seen that look on his face before . To Manfred and the others , Dane was always so calm and expressionless - like a robot , except when he was doing experiments .

But now , after reuniting with Tilda , Dane was finally showing some real human feelings . " It's okay , Dane . I already took some time off from school , so I'll be staying in Hetsa for a while . We'll have plenty of time to talk . " The important thing is - we've found each other . I'm not letting you go again . " Tilda gave Dane a bright , reassuring smile . She stood on tiptoe and patted Dane on the shoulder , just like Dane had comforted her a few minutes ago .

It was something she'd learned from their mentor / When she was little , whenever she felt lost about the future or worn out from Mentor's tough training , there was always a big , gentle hand that would rest on her shoulder . It always seemed to make all the worries disappear . That warm , safe feeling was a secret shared only between Dane and Tilda . Finally , Dane nodded , even though he still looked reluctant to say goodbye . Once they left the base , River's attitude toward Tilda had clearly changed . " Queen , let me show you to our guest room , " he offered .

" No thanks , " Tilda said . " Once you've , sorted things out , just have Kaleb let me know what time we'll meet tomorrow . I'd rather stay in the city . These cold , sterile labs just aren't my style . " Honestly , if Dane hadn't been here , Tilda never would have come . She'd planned to help with the lab's research projects remotely , through Andy as her go - between . Even so , she was still determined to do her part for the country's future .

Chapter 178 One Step at a Time Being locked up in a research base day after day , with no freedom , was never what Tilda wanted . " Alright , I'll drive you out . I'll pick you up again tomorrow , right on time . " " Thank you ! " Tilda replied cheerfully and cooperatively , letting them blindfold her . River drove for about an hour . When they reached the city , Tilda stepped out of the car , suitcase trailing behind her . They had stopped right in front of a five - star hotel . " I'm good on my own from here , " she said . River nodded silently and left .

Tilda went inside , checked in , and paid for a whole month in advance . After she unpacked , her phone buzzed with a message from Andy . " So ? Was that guy the one you wanted to see ? " " Yes , Andy . "

Tilda told him everything that had happened . " Tilda , congrats ! I can imagine how thrilled you are . Haha ! " Andy replied .) " Seriously , if you hadn't helped me , I'd still have no idea I actually have a senior . My mentor would still be out there somewhere in the world . Thank you so much , Andy . " " Alright , Tilda , enough with the thanks , or I'll get mad !

But you're so pretty , and I love you , so I can't stay mad at you . Waaa ! You're such a witch , " Andy joked . Tilda smiled , feeling more at ease than she had in days . After finishing the chat with Andy , she noticed it was already dark outside . She texted Una to check in and decided to go out for dinner . Hetsa was renowned for its spicy food . Tilda found the highest - rated Cajun restaurant nearby and ordered a Cajun boil . She snapped a few photos and sent them to Andy and Una . Hmm , might as well send them to Jude , too .

After all , Jude had done her a great favor by helping her find herself again . Deep down , Tilda didn't feel as uneasy about Jude getting close to her anymore . In fact , even if they never made any kind of formal agreement , she wouldn't mind if things kept moving forward between them . It was a surprising change in the way she thought - but Tilda didn't see it as a bad thing . Andy and Una hadn't replied yet , but Jude texted back instantly . Jude asked , " Did you go to Hetsa ?

" Tilda replied , " Yeah , I came to meet someone really important . I found my senior today . " She told Jude what happened . Jude teased , " Should I tell you I'm jealous ? Smiley face emoji . " Tilda chided playfully , " Jude , don't be ridiculous ! He's my senior . " Jude pressed , " A guy , huh ? Smiley face emoji . " Tilda had no words . Jude wrote , " I'll do my best not to be jealous ." After that , Jude sent a few pictures to Tilda . She clicked them open . She saw plenty of foreigners ; they were some kind of celebration .

Tilda praised , " Nice pictures . " Jude explained , " That night , after you found yourself again , I did a lot of thinking . Maybe it's time for me to change how I live , too . " Then he added , " For you . " Tilda answered awkwardly , " Ahem , alright , my food just arrived . I'm going to eat ! " On Jude's side , he saw Tilda dodge the conversation again . He felt a little disappointed , his eyes dimming for a moment . " Looks like I have to be patient with her . " Winning Tilda's heart would take time . " Even so , Jude couldn't help but smile .

At least their relationship was much better than it was before . For Tilda , he had even gone to Alfie and Maurice for advice on how to make a girl feel at ease . Their jaw fell on the ground . Nobody could believe Jude would ever ask their advice about that . Life was full of surprises . Anything could happen .

The longer you live , the weirder stuff you see . Alfie and Maurice , speaking from experience , warned Jude . " Tilda is not a girl you can control . She's got her own mind , and she's incredibly talented .

If you try to win her heart by rushing things or trying to keep her on a tight leash , it'll just backfire . Honestly , your best bet is to take it one step at a time . " So , one step at a time , it is . After dinner , Tilda headed to the restroom . Just as she turned the corner , she nearly bumped into someone familiar . The woman was busy sending a text . " Howard , are you in Hetsa too ? I'm at The Melting Spoon . I'll send you my location . " Tilda didn't pay much attention to the person . But as they brushed past each other , the woman suddenly stopped in her tracks .

She clearly recognized Tilda . With a look of disbelief , she spun around , stared hard , and then gasped before Tilda could say anything . " It's you ?! " The voice was all too familiar . Tilda raised an eyebrow as she looked at the woman , dressed head - to - toe in designer brands and practically swimming in perfume - a look that just screamed bad taste . Isn't this Rebecca ? The same girl I filmed in that embarrassing video ? No wonder . I heard Rebecca had taken a break from college .

She hadn't even been seen at the usual bars or clubs or hanging around with the rough crowd she used to . Turns out Rebecca had run off to Hetsa to lay low and avoid the gossip .

Chapter 179 The Video No One Can Know About When Rebecca saw Tilda , she couldn't help but remember that terrible day at the amusement park . The day she lost a bet and ended up on video , crawling around and barking like a dog while Tilda pulled her hair . It was something Rebecca would never dare report to the police . If Tilda ever posted the video on an international website , there would be no way to erase it . The video would ruin her life . She might even be cast out by her family - and Jude would surely finish her off .

Since Howard and Wade failed to get the video , Rebecca had been living in constant fear and panic . She was terrified that one day Tilda would suddenly release the video and destroy her reputation . She had removed the amusement park's security footage and warned everyone who knew about it to keep quiet . Rebecca even asked Kyla and others to keep it secret . For now , her family didn't know about what happened . But secrets like this can't stay hidden forever . Tilda was like a ticking time bomb . As long as she held onto that video , Rebecca had to live in fear every day .

Her hair was falling out in clumps . She had dark circles under her eyes . No amount of heavy makeup could hide how worn out she looked . If she stayed in Slosa any longer , Rebecca would go crazy . So , she found an excuse to take time off and went to Hetsa to calm her nerves . Just as her anxiety started to fade , she ran into Tilda again ! Is this bad luck or Tilda is haunting me ? Rebecca glared at Tilda with a mix of fear and hate . But Tilda just smiled calmly ; she ignored her and walked right past her into the restroom . That reaction actually left Rebecca frozen in surprise .

What is Tilda up to ? Why did she smile at me ? Rebecca had to admit , Tilda was beautiful , and her smile looked almost angelic . But for Rebecca , that smile was pure torture - both mentally and physically . Did running into Rebecca today remind Tilda about that humiliating video ? Was she planning to post it now ? Maybe Tilda had forgotten about it until today . Rebecca couldn't think of any other explanation . If Tilda wanted to destroy her , all she had to do was send the video . t Rebecca would be doomed when she did .

Just then , Rebecca's phone rang , making her jump like a scared cat . Sweat beaded on her forehead as she fumbled for her sticker - covered iPhone . " Rebecca , where did you go ? Did you fall in the toilet , or something ? " A friend of hers giggled on the other end . They were just a bunch of spoiled rich kids in Hetsa . Suddenly , Rebecca's eyes lit up . She glanced at the restroom behind her . " Vania , perfect timing . I need your help . This is super important - it's life or death for me , " Rebecca . whispered . By the time Tilda came out of the restroom , Rebecca was gone .

It was strange . Normally , Rebecca would have chased after her and asked about the video . Tilda was actually a little surprised . She didn't take this little episode with Rebecca to heart , though . Seeing Rebecca jumpy and scared was enough for her . Rebecca had even started wearing a wig to cover her hair loss . Her eyes were bloodshot . Even with thick makeup , she couldn't hide how exhausted and worn out she looked . Tilda's plan was working perfectly . Making Rebecca suffer little by little was much scarier than just ending things all at once .

After Tilda her meal and paid the bill , she walked out of the restaurant . She wondered when Kaleb would text her so she could meet Dane the next day . Right then , Tilda sensed something strange . A cold , mysterious smile curled on her lips . Well , a little exercise after dinner wouldn't hurt . Tilda didn't bother with her phone . She just put her hands in her pockets and casually strolled in a random direction . The farther she went , the fewer people she saw . The streetlights grew dimmer . There weren't even any security cameras .

Tilda stepped into a dark alley and stopped , facing forward . Then she turned around and saw a group of annoying troublemakers following her . Still , keeping her hands in her pockets , Tilda melted into the shadows . Her face calm , her lips curling slightly as she asked , " So , what do you want ? " Rebecca stepped out from the group . When she saw that Tilda had expected them , her heart sank . " Tilda , you know we were following you all along ? " " Of course , Tilda replied . " With tracking skills that bad , did you really think I'm deaf and couldn't hear your footsteps ?

" Heha , you're bold . I'll give you that . " Vania Eland said , stepping beside Rebecca . She slung her arm over Rebecca's shoulder . Vania waved a metal baton with her other hand , a weapon custom - made for women . " If you knew we were after you , why'd you walk into a place like this ? Are you out of your mind ? There are no people , and no cameras are here . No one's coming to help you , no matter how loud you scream . "

Chapter 180 Tilda's Clever Move Vania snapped her fingers . A few more rough - looking men appeared , each one holding something that looked dangerous . They stared at Tilda with greedy and fierce gazes . One of them sneered , " Hey Vania , this girl's got a pretty hot figure . " Her skin is so smooth , and that long hair ... I bet it feels really nice to touch , " another chimed in . Rebecca tried to keep herself calm . " Tilda , you can't escape now ! Hand over the video ! " Tilda blinked innocently . " Video ? What video ? " " You bitch ! " Rebecca fumed .

" Oh , you mean the one where you crawled on the ground and barked like a dog ? " Tilda replied , like she had just remembered . " Sorry , a lot has been happening lately . My mind's scattered - I almost forgot about it . " Vania gave Rebecca a weird look . " Wait , Rebecca , you were barking like a dog ? What , are you into that sort of thing now ? " " No ! " Rebecca shouted , furious . " It was this bitch ! She made me do it ! " Rebecca was so angry she looked like she could crack her teeth . If looks could kill , Tilda would have dropped dead on the spot countless times .

She knew Tilda was doing this on purpose . She remembered everything , but she said those things to embarrass her in front of her friends . Vania just shrugged . " No wonder you would rather not say what was in the video . Tsk , you actually did something so embarrassing . " Vania started to think Rebecca wasn't as special as she'd thought - not even worth being friends with . Still , Rebecca's family was powerful , and her brother was impressive . Maybe Vania could help Rebecca out and turn the whole situation to her advantage .

Maybe , if things went right , Vania could become Rebecca's sister - in - law someday . As long as Rebecca helped make the introduction , Vania could use this video as leverage . She'd have Rebecca right where she wanted her . If Vania could climb the social ladder and marry into the Bells , it'd be like turning from a nobody into royalty overnight . Thinking of this , Vania ignored the embarrassed look on Rebecca's face and turned to Tilda . " Well , since you messed with my friend and I've cornered you , just hand over the video and we'll call it even .

" Tilda shrugged , " Sorry , but that video isn't with me anymore . I've already handed it over to a friend . I even told him , If I don't message him every twelve hours , he's supposed to post the video online . " She gave Rebecca a sweet but dangerous smile . " So here's a warning , Rebecca - if I don't text him in

the next 20 minutes , that video goes public , and your reputation is . " " What ?! " Rebecca's eyes widened in panic . Tilda , how could you give the video to someone else ?!

" And let me clear up something , " Tilda said , her voice cold and sharp . " You keep saying I forced you , but really , you just lost a bet in archery . You were just following through with the bet like you promised . Why would I waste my time bullying trash like you ? I have better things to do . " Rebecca's expression shifted rapidly . Now what ? She'd counted on Vania and her crew to corner Tilda and get the video back , but now it was out of her hands . If Tilda didn't send that text on time , the video would be published online , and her whole life would be ruined .

Just then , Vania actually smiled . " No wonder you're so confident . Even after you realized we were following you , you still strolled right into this alley without a care in the world , Tilda , are you sure you would rather not text your friend ? " When Tilda didn't reatt , Vania snapped her fingers . " Fine . If you're not going to do something about this , we will . Guys , take off her jacket . Let's make our own video - fight fire with fire . " Vania had been running with this crowd long enough - nothing really shocked her anymore .

Girls like Rebecca , always acting tough and hanging around the wrong crowd , were bound to get themselves in trouble eventually . Not everyone was afraid of the Bells , especially since Rebecca's dad was just the second son , not the head of the family . Out in the real world , sometimes you ran into troublemakers or drunk guys who didn't care who your family was . Fists always talked louder than words in those moments . Vania knew exactly how to handle situations like this . Rebecca's eyes lit up with hope after hearing Vania's plan . " Yeah , Vania , take off her clothes and record it !

Let's threaten her with a video we film . She'll have to give us the original one ! " Rebecca urged . " Go on , boys ! " She shouted . The men , who had hesitated a moment ago , suddenly grinned and closed in on Tilda when they received their instructions . Their faces were full of malicious intentions . Don't move , girly , one sneered . " We wouldn't want to hurt you by accident . " I'll be over soon . We'll be gentle and make sure you look good on camera , " said another , his voice full of

" Maybe we'll even show you some love - give you a night you'll never forget . " Another joked , thinking he was funny . As the group of creeps got closer , Tilda just smiled at them . " Okay , go ahead , " she said , her voice steady . At that moment , a beam of moonlight broke through the darkness and shone straight onto Tilda , wrapping her in a pure , untouchable glow . Her hair floated gently in the night breeze . Her eyebrows arched in quiet confidence , and her eyes stayed calm and collected . Her lips curved into a beautiful smile that lit up her whole face .

The creeps were stunned . Frozen in their tracks by how beautiful she looked . They'd only seen her from a distance before . In the dim light , they hadn't realized just how lovely she was Now , she seemed to glow , stunningly beautiful - so beautiful it made their hearts race . Vania snapped impatiently , " What are you all waiting for ? Hurry and strip her bare ! "