

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 . " 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 Jensions 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 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 react , 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 ! "