

Shadows 401

Chapter 401 Childish :.. But he was wearing a bright floral suit . It didn't match the serious equipment behind him at all . " You are ... " " Oh , let me introduce myself first . I'm Benedict Lamb . This is my brother , Wesley Lamb . He thinks his name sounds lame , so he always tells people to call him Knight . " Ha ! Don't you think he sounds a little childish ? He never grows up . By the way , my codename is Bacchus . " Benedict casually ruffled Wesley's hair . Wesley didn't say anything . Damn ! Is this really my brother ? He just turned and sold out all my identity like that !

The members of Comet Squad were all stunned . Childish ? You're acting way more childish than Wesley ! Bacchus ? What do you think you are , some kind of hero ? Still , that codename sounded familiar . " In 2001 , two hackers managed to resist Motrar's cyber attack by themselves , " someone said . " Back then , Cetherland's networks and systems were still primitive . " They also planted a worm that crashed Motrar's firewall . It took a month to fix all the follow- up holes . " One hacker used the codename Bacchus . The other had no codename , so people called him Mystery X.

" After that fight , those two Cetherland hackers shocked the world . Then they vanished from the public eye very quickly . Nobody heard from them again . " Alfie said in surprise , " 2001 ? It's 2030 now . That's 29 years ago . " Jarrett's eyes lit up . " Oh ! I remember ! The Cetherland Hacker Chronicles recorded those two hackers who appeared like comets and disappeared . " Astrid replied , " I can't believe they were recruited by the state to head the National Cyber Security Center ... and they're twin brothers !

" Zach added , " They look so young . " Zach hit the point . If normal people saw these two on the street , they'd never guess they were in their 50s . They'd think the men were about 20 , maybe taking the SAT . Benedict's mouth curved into a small smile . " I'm surprised the Queen still remembers us . We're honored . " " If any Cetherlander forgets you two , they have no right to call themselves Cetherlanders , " Tilda said . " Because of you two , our country's computer industry exploded . Talent kept coming . " In a way , you two hit back like heroes .

The butterfly effect from that time shaped my team and me . " Tilda gave Benedict and Wesley the highest praise . Cetherland's internet history , more or less , started from its great achievements . Now they sit at the highest table of the National Cyber Security Center . It's the state's medal for heroes . " You saying that really flatters us , " Benedict said . " Young people are better now . Back then , we noticed the Hotel Morloss incident too . " But we couldn't find the signal transmitter and break in like your Comet Squad / did .

We couldn't crack the hotel's network from the inside in time . " We're old now . We're past our prime . Wesley , don't you think we should give more than the young ? " " Fine , Benedict . You tell them yourself . " Wesley rolled his eyes . He stood and gave his seat to Benedict . " I only pointed out some of your flaws . Are you sulking because of that ? " Queen , don't mind him . He never changes - still a kid at heart , just like those punks . Ha ! " Benedict sat where Wesley had been . His expression changed in an instant .

But a faint smile stayed on his lips . Even with a soft , baby face , the power he radiated was undeniable . Jarrett and the others straightened up when they felt it . " Next ... let's talk terms . " Tilda nodded . " Start . " " We have a case . I want you to destroy the target's network system in one day . Erase all the evidence . " You can talk with your team first to decide if you'll take the case ... " No need . We'll take it now ! " Tilda's answer was decisive . No hesitation . " Yes . If we get the chance , we must take it !

" " If we finish this case , does that meet your conditions for our action ? " Jarrett and the others asked . " Of course , " Benedict said . That settled it . Tilda notified Manfred and quickly led Comet Squad back to Slosa .

Chapter 402

After they reached the base , they got the full details of the case from Benedict . The real mission was about to begin . The video call ended . Benedict sat in a chair with his legs crossed , spinning slowly with a little smile on his lips . Nobody knew what he was thinking . Wesley leaned against the wall with his arms crossed . Seeing Benedict's strange expression , he let out a sigh . " Benedict , don't tell me you're cooking up another bad idea . " " What are you talking about ? Wesley , please give me some respect . I'm doing this for Cetherland's future .

How can you call it a bad idea ? " Are you really okay letting so much talent in Comet Squad slip away ? " " I ... of course I'm not okay with it . But they want total freedom . What can I do ? " " If something goes wrong , we can't take the blame . Once they officially become a national task force , with the right access , they'll be able to use the country's info servers ! " For once , Wesley's baby face showed a troubled look . I'd rather just stay up all night coding . At least coding was easier at his age . It was still less of a headache than dealing with Comet Squad .

" You're worried they might betray the country , so you plan to block that risk by refusing their demand . That makes sense , " Benedict said . " But think the other way . If a squad this powerful ends up under another country , they'll become our worst enemy . " After the Hotel Morloss mission , Endralsia already knows Queen led her squad . They'll definitely try to recruit them . " And not just Endralsia . Other nations will soon learn about Comet Squad and use all kinds of tricks . " In the end , we're still betting on this squad's loyalty to the country , aren't we ?

Benedict flipped through Comet Squad's profiles . He tapped Tilda's photo lightly with his finger . Wesley tugged at his hair in frustration . " This isn't even my job . I'm just a coder and manager . " You shoved this on me ... damn it ! You must've already planned how to deal with Comet Squad , right ? " 67 " Don't be silly . I haven't decided . This squad is stronger than even us brothers . If we slip up , the damage will be beyond repair . " That's why I set up this trial .

Wesley , you need to give them the Rosales Foundation's intel . Have them finish the mission within a single day . " Wesley froze . The Rosales Foundation's intel ? Isn't that ... They locked eyes . In that moment , Wesley seemed to understand . " I got it . " ... When Tilda and her squad returned to their base in Slosa , they powered up all the systems and got ready . They messaged Benedict . Soon after , a file arrived . With Benedict's words- " It's officially started " -Tilda quickly uploaded the file to the main computer and shared it with the team .

Astrid skimmed it and muttered , " The Rosales Foundation in Burgola ... they fight human trafficking and save women and kids . From this file , nothing looks off . " " Don't let your guard down , " Tilda said . " The last human trafficking ring we busted also pretended to be a charity caring for seniors . " Underground groups often hide behind legal fronts , sometimes even charities . That's why hackers like us exist - to dig for the truth . " " Sure ! " The squad jumped into work with sharp focus .

After half a year of training , growth , and teamwork - and after their big win at Hotel Morloss- Comet Squad now moved with perfect rhythm . They barely needed words to know what to do next . In just three hours , they cracked into the Rosales Foundation's database . Tilda checked the time . It was 8:00 p.m. If they wrapped this up , she could finally take the squad out for dinner . But Alfie spotted something first . " Queen , look at this . " He sent his findings over . Tilda took a sip of water , opened the file , and her face darkened .

" Queen , we didn't find anything odd on our side either ... " This foundation really looks like a normal charity rescuing trafficked women and kids . " They're even organizing files for an international charity award . " Jarrett and the others reported similar findings . Tilda pressed her lips together and dug deeper . She found out a charity in Cetherland was also competing for the same award . Coincidence , or ... ? " Queen , this group doesn't feel like a crime ring . At least , they didn't leave a single trace of evidence on their servers . "

" Got any leads on your side ? " : 1) , Tilda shook her head . " I already looked into this group while you guys were busy . They're spotless . Just a simple charity project . " " Erm ... " 11 If even Tilda said that , then ... Jarrett and the others exchanged confused looks . Attacking a foreign charity went against everything Comet Squad stood for and the reason they were founded . But Benedict said they had to destroy the foundation's servers to get full autonomy . Now their mission orders and beliefs sat on opposite sides of a scale . The squad didn't know what to do .

One by one , they turned to Tilda . She closed her eyes for a moment , then stood up . Everyone thought she had made her choice . Instead ... " Let's go eat . " " Eat ? " They all stared at her , dumbfounded . " It's already eight at night . We didn't even have lunch . Work matters , but health comes first . " If we don't have our health , we've got nothing . Besides , we already know what the Rosales Foundation really is . We've still got plenty of time left before the 24 - hour limit . " Astrid couldn't hold back . " But ... Queen , they demanded to wipe the data , and we ...

' 19 " What we're going to do is eat first . Then we'll come back and dig deeper into everything about the Rosales Foundation . Got it ? " The second she said it , the whole squad understood her decision . " Sure ! " 67 The call came the next day , around 4:00 p.m. Benedict picked up . " Well ? Did you completely wipe the Rosales Foundation's data ? " Wesley happened to be nearby , sorting through files . He froze at his brother's words , then looked at him with a strange expression .

" We didn't destroy their data , " Tilda said flatly . " Comet Squad cracked the Rosales servers in three hours . But we spent the next 20 hours investigating everything about them . " After careful study , we found the Rosales Foundation is a real charity . No lies . No cover - up . " Comet Squad will never attack a group like that . " Her voice was cold . " Queen , this was both an order and a trial , " Benedict replied . " By saying this , are you declaring you'll abandon the mission ? " His tone turned icy . Even through the phone , his pressure was suffocating .

Tilda had the call on speaker . Everyone in the squad heard him . The tension made their shoulders stiff . " That's right . I'm walking away . " Tilda's answer was sharp and certain . She wasn't shaken by Benedict at all . " You're smart enough to know why I told you to destroy their servers . " This was about Cetherland's honor . For your squad , it's nothing . Just a test of loyalty . " With one keystroke , you'd gain access to the national data vault . With state approval , everything would get easier .

" For hackers driven by curiosity and a hunger for knowledge , this is an offer too tempting to refuse . Are you really going to stop at the finish line ? " His voice softened . He sounded like a devil tempting humans to open Pandora's box . And in that box was a treasure people dreamed of . Even the strongest

wills would bend under that kind of lure . But ... " This kind of honor isn't what Cetherland needs . And it's not something Comet Squad will ever chase .

" If gaining autonomy means breaking our own bottom line and killing our conscience , then we'll never do it . " Mr. Lamb , maybe you don't know where our line is . So I'll say it again . " First , we don't harm national security . " Second , we don't betray basic human decency . " Third , we never stand against the innocent . " Your mission breaks all three . So sorry , but we won't help you . " Tilda's voice rose into a near - roar . Benedict's so - called trial was nothing but an insult to Comet Squad .

If a human threw away their bottom line , they were no better than the Jensions scum who destroyed lives without a care . Tilda would never trade her conscience for a mission . She'd always fight for things in the right way . If the heads of Cetherland's National Cyber Security Center were really people like Benedict Lamb , then she was beyond disappointed . She knew one thing for sure - she would never work with them in this lifetime .

Chapter 404 Perfect Answer It was the first time Jarrett and the others had seen Tilda this angry . Everyone froze for a moment , then voices rose one after another . " Yes , we stand with Queen ! " " The Rosales Foundation is innocent . We'll never attack them ! " 66 " Even if we stay as just a private group , that's still better than crossing the line and living like hollow shells ! " " We don't need that data vault anyway ! " " Hahaha ... " Benedict suddenly laughed . He even started clapping his hands . " What are you laughing at ? " Tilda frowned , barely showing it .

Anyone else would think Benedict was mocking them - seeing them as too young and naive to throw away such a golden chance just because of pride . But Tilda felt something different . His laugh didn't carry mockery at all . It felt more like ... approval ? " You've passed the test , Comet Squad . " As promised , you'll have full independence . Your work won't be much different from before . " You'll also get national - level support , and we'll give you access to the national data vauk " Of course , higher - level clearance in the vault has to be unlocked through your achievements .

That's part of the deal . " His sudden words left everyone stunned . Tilda narrowed her eyes , a dangerous gleam flashing there . " What do you mean by that ? " " Exactly what I said , " Benedict replied calmly . " Back when you hacked into the Hotel Morloss network and solved an international crisis that shocked the world , you already proved your strength . That case stumped the cyber security centers of multiple countries . So in terms of ability , you're the best . No doubt about it . " There's no mission too hard for you .

But this trial wasn't about skill - it was about whether you'd hold your ground in a critical moment . Whether you'd stick to your bottom line and not waver . " Like Wesley said , once you touch the national vault , we can't guarantee you won't leak anything . This wasn't about ability - it was about character . " " I see . " The misunderstanding cleared . Tilda finally understood his real purpose . " For hackers , a national - level data vault , full independence , and access to national resources- that's an almost irresistible temptation .

" You dangled it like bait , just to see what we'd do , didn't you ? " " Exactly . And your answer was perfect . Wesley , you have nothing to say after seeing their choice , right ? " Benedict smiled and glanced at Wesley . " We'll see about the future , " Wesley muttered with a scowl . At least for now , Comet Squad had been flawless . The future ? That would be another problem for another time . " Then it's settled , " Benedict said . " Queen , congratulations . Comet Squad is officially part of the Cetherland National Cyber Security Center . You'll be our most special task force .

" You're welcome to visit headquarters if you'd like . But I suppose you'd rather stay in your own base and keep your freedom , right ? " " Yes ! Thank you , Mr. Benedict ! " " But let me be clear . Letting you in under these terms is an incredible concession . If Comet Squad causes any problems , you'll carry the full responsibility . And as the one who approved your demand , I'll also resign if it goes wrong ! " " Benedict ! " Wesley's face showed pure shock . He wanted to argue , but Benedict raised his hand and stopped him . " Thank you , Mr. Benedict , " Tilda said firmly .

" I believe my squad would never do anything to harm this country . If I didn't trust their hearts and their vision , I wouldn't have built Comet Squad in the first place . I'd have gone solo . " Her eyes shimmered with determination . Jarrett and the others were moved by her faith in them . This woman - this " idol " - had led them over countless peaks . She had brought them to heights . they'd never dreamed of . Without Tilda , they would have stayed just another small private group , their skills never pushing forward .

Without her , they never would've earned the nation's recognition or saved the world from disaster . Tilda was like a blazing light cutting through the darkness , guiding them to a future they couldn't see before . They trusted her completely . And what made them even prouder - someone so strong , so confident , so brilliant - trusted them just as much .

Chapter 405 Trusted Partners Tilda's heart didn't waver . Her resolve was rock solid . At that moment , Jarrett and the others silently made a vow in their hearts . Even if they betrayed the world , they could never betray Tilda's trust . Even if the entire world stood against her , Comet Squad would fight at her side without hesitation . " Queen , your word is enough for me . 66 " And hey , you didn't really think we were so petty , right ? That we wanted you to crash the Rosales Foundation's servers just so our country could win a little recognition ?

" Benedict sounded almost offended . I'm upset here ! Hurry up and comfort me ! Tilda coughed a few times , trying not to laugh . At last , after all that back - and - forth , the matter was finally settled . " After New Year's , find a time to visit headquarters , " Benedict said . " We'll give you your clearance cards . I'll unlock the data you're allowed to access . And we'll even set aside an office for your team . Use it or not - it's up to you . " " Thank you , Mr. Benedict . " When the call ended , Tilda looked up and froze .

Her teammates were all staring at her with red eyes , tears threatening to spill . " What ... what are you doing ? " she asked . " Queen , I can't take it anymore . I'm too touched ! " Theo cried . He rushed forward and gave her a huge bear hug , bawling his eyes out . Tilda blinked in confusion . Then the other three , swept up by Theo's emotions , piled on too . Even Zach , the calmest one , jumped in . Tilda was speechless .

After being knocked over and smothered , she climbed back up and brushed the dust off her clothes .

" So ... do you guys have an explanation for this ? " " We heard what you said to Mr. Benedict , " Jarrett sniffled . " We didn't know you trusted us that much ... " Was this what it felt like to share the same bond as your idol ? I love it ! " You idiots , " Tilda muttered , rolling her eyes . The four of them froze . " We've been trusted partners for half a year already . No - since the very beginning , when I picked you four to form this squad . " I made it clear back then . Did you really think those were just empty words ? If I didn't trust you , I'd be working solo .

Why would I bother training you ? Do you think I've got nothing better to do ? " Without trust , how could we have handled Rosales Foundation and Hotel Morloss so fast ? " She flicked each of them on the forehead with her finger . Hard enough to sting . They winced in pain , but inside their hearts were soaring . It felt like wings had sprouted on their backs . For the first time , they felt it deep down - this squad wasn't just a team . It was home . They felt like they completely belonged here . The four grinned like fools , nothing like the nervous rookies they'd been six months ago .

Tilda's lips curved into a smile . " Since we pulled off a huge win , how about you treat me to a feast ? " " Of course ! " " As if we'd dare not ! " " Cut the chatter . Get it ready ! And I'm in a good mood today , so I don't just want good food . I want the best wine too ! " " Leave / it all to me ! " Theo thumped his chest . Hearing that , Tilda assumed he was taking them to Sky Dining , since it belonged to the Woodward family . But instead , Theo led them to a brand - new place .

It sat right on Skyview Lake - a top - class restaurant built like a castle floating at the center of the water . Its name was Starlight Dining . There were two ways to get there . One was a moving elevator - style walkway . The other was a wooden bridge lit with dazzling lights . The design was spectacular . And just to buy the rights to build such a place in the middle of Slosa's central park had cost at least one billion dollars . Astrid gasped . " Sky Dining's second branch ... Theo , when did this even get built ? How did we not know ?

" " Half a month ago , " Theo said casually . " It's not officially open yet . Right now , it's just in trial mode . Only guests with invites can eat here . " And since it carries the Sky Dining name under Woodward Group , every detail has to be perfect . " He explained as he led them to the entrance . The manager , Kendric Dowdall , had already gotten Theo's call . He greeted them with respect and even prepared a special table just for them . After all , Theo was the boss's son .

They walked across the luxurious red carpet , stepping into the glow of crystal chandeliers that lit the castle like starlight .

Chapter 406 Stepping Stone Tilda and her squad sat down . She opened the menu , and for the first time tonight , her usually calm eyes lit with a spark of interest . At first , when she heard this was a branch of Sky Dining , she thought the menu would be the same . She figured the only difference would be the new atmosphere . But she hadn't expected this . Here , the focus was on Thalorian cuisine and Yvorian cuisine . The original Sky Dining featured Yvorian cuisine and Flonchean cuisine . The first was all about spice . The second was all about unique flavors .

Theo explained , " To balance the two restaurants , my dad and Alfie decided the second branch would carry the Sky Dining name , but with a different focus . Of course , we still serve Yvorian cuisine here . But now guests can also experience Thalorian cuisine alongside it . " " That's a great idea , " Tilda said . Theo had arranged things perfectly . Just then , a young woman in a red evening gown walked toward them . She had a refined beauty , and an artistic air hung about her . " Mr. Dowdall , is it time ? " she asked softly . That voice ... why did it sound so familiar ?

Tilda's gaze sharpened . She couldn't shake the feeling she had seen this woman before . I've definitely seen that face somewhere before ! But where ? For a moment , Tilda just couldn't remember . " Mr. Theo , " Kendric said , " this is our pianist for the soft opening - Ms . Genevieve Lichtenstein . She just won an international award . She's in high demand , and if it weren't for her past work with Woodward Group , we wouldn't have been able to invite such a young , talented pianist . " Jarrett slapped his forehead . " Genevieve ? I've heard that name !

Where was it ... ? " Astrid gave him a look . " Did you forget ? The piano concert we went to last time was Ms. Lichtenstein's . " " Oh , right ! That was her ! Your playing was amazing ! " " Thank you for the compliment , " Genevieve said politely with a graceful smile . Then her eyes shifted . She felt a sharp gaze fixed on her . Looking up , she met Tilda's stare . " Miss , have we met before ? Why are you looking at me like that ? " Tilda smiled lightly . " No reason . You're just very beautiful , so I looked a little longer .

" But the truth was , the moment she heard the name Genevieve , memories from her had come rushing back . past life Wasn't this Justin's girlfriend from back then ? In that life , Justin and Genevieve had kept their relationship secret . Tilda only learned about it shortly before her death . By the time she was dragged into the Jenson Villa , Justin and Genevieve were nearly engaged . Back then , because Kyla schemed , Justin already had a terrible impression of Tilda . She remembered hiding upstairs , peeking down as the Jensons laughed and chatted warmly with Genevieve .

Her heart had felt like it was being torn apart . Genevieve had known the Jensons adored Kyla , so she bent over backward to please her . Tilda , however , was invisible to her . Still , Genevieve hadn't harmed her directly . She simply ignored her , just like the rest of the Jensons . And now , fate had brought them face to face again . Fate was funny that way . Is Justin already with Genevieve at this point in time ? Tilda pushed the thought aside . Not my problem . Genevieve , of course , had no idea Tilda knew so much .

The reason she had approached Kendric was simple . She knew only the rich and powerful could dine here . Though she didn't know one of the women , she knew Theo , Jarrett , and Zach . She hadn't expected Tilda to hang out with them . Genevieve's real goal was to marry into the Jensons . She had already studied their family ties inside and out . And with Tilda being so famous now , it wasn't hard to recognize her face . That worried her . If Justin or the Jensons misunderstood , her plans could fall apart . So Genevieve just gave a polite smile .

" Thank you for the kind words . Mr. Dowdall , I'll head backstage to prepare . " " Thank you , Ms. Lichtenstein . Tonight's performance is in your hands , " Theo said warmly . " Leave it to me , " Genevieve replied . She left , but Theo had noticed something strange . He leaned close and whispered , " Queen , do you know that woman ? I've never seen you stare at someone like that before . " " I just remembered something amusing , " Tilda said . " Don't worry about it . " The lights in the restaurant dimmed . A violinist began to play , the sound smooth and elegant .

When that piece ended , it would be time for Genevieve's solo performance . Backstage , Genevieve sat at a mirror . She applied a fresh coat of lipstick and pressed her lips together . She had sacrificed a lot for this chance . Everyone who had an invitation to Starlight Dining was wealthy , influential , or both . If she played well tonight , she would leave a deep impression . And that could become the stepping stone to her career .

Chapter 407 Guilt Genevieve knew she had to win the Jenson's approval if she ever wanted to become Justin's wife. Only then could she marry into the Jenson family and finally escape her "nightmare." To get there, she needed accomplishments worthy of being praised as the Jenson's future daughter-in-law. She glanced at the clock and figured Justin should be arriving soon. Setting down her lipstick, Genevieve turned on her heels and walked away in her high heels. At that moment, Blair, Russell, and Justin arrived at Starlight Dining.

The invitation was addressed to Justin. Genevieve had pulled strings, trading her performance gig here for a chance to get him an invitation. She hoped he would accept and come hear her play. If it hadn't been for the incident at the Morloss Hotel, Justin would have shown up much earlier. That disaster left a heavy shadow behind. After Dominic and Blair were released from the hospital, Dominic decided Blair should return to Cetherland to rest. Howard didn't follow, along with Santiago, who was on break from school in Motrar, to help expand the business in Endralsia.

The first to come back were Justin, Kayden, and Wade, who had to prepare for finals. The military in Endralsia had already warned the family not to spread word about the Jenson's being caught up in the Morloss case. The terrorist group had taken heavy losses - their leader dead, the rest just mercenaries paid to fight. The military didn't get much more out of it. Each invitation allowed only two guests, so Justin brought Russell and Blair. He wanted them to relax, to ease the lingering fear and darkness from Morloss.

The restaurant had dimmed its lights to match the performance mood. Because of that, Justin and the others didn't notice Tilda sitting quietly in a corner. As soon as Russell stepped in, the violin's soaring notes washed over him. He closed his eyes, letting his mind rest and enjoy the sound. "This violin piece is amazing. Justin, I can't believe you got an invitation to Starlight Dining."

For a family like the Jenson's, it wasn't hard to get into a place like this.

But with all the preparations for New Year's, then Blair and Dominic's sudden kidnapping, Russell had never been in the mood to chase down an invite. "It came from a friend of mine," Justin said, leaving it at that. When he had left suddenly for Motrar, Kayden hadn't gotten the chance to see Genevieve either. Tonight, Justin's main goal was simply to help Blair and Russell breathe a little easier. For now, he chose to set aside his investigation into Genevieve's real identity - and whether she was the one who saved him years ago. The three of them took their seats.

Russell handed the menu to Blair . " Darling , order anything you like . " " I'll have whatever you're having , " Blair whispered softly . She looked elegant , her outfit graceful , her hair and makeup carefully done . But she still couldn't hide the tiredness in her eyes . " Darling , " Russell said gently , " Justin brought us here so we could relax . That's his kindness to us . Stop worrying . It's over . We're still together as a family . That's what matters . " He could see the fear in her eyes . With a sigh , he wrapped an arm around her shoulders , speaking softly . " I know , honey ...

but I keep thinking about what Dominic said . " Tilda saved us . And yet we treated her so cruelly before . Especially me , her birth mother . I was so furious with her that I said things I can never take back . " · Justin and Russell listened to her guilt - filled words but didn't know how to comfort her . For Russell , the weight was even heavier . He knew he owed Tilda the most . Time and again , he had judged her without fairness . He had insulted her , forced her to kneel , and even raised his hand to strike her .

It had backfired on him , of course - Tilda had outsmarted him more than once . But as her father , he could not escape his guilt . He had once thought she was nothing but a disgrace , wishing she would stay far away and never cross paths with the Jensons again . Yet now , Tilda had saved Blair and Dominic . Which meant she had saved Russell's life , too- along with the entire Jenson family in its darkest hour .

Chapter 408 Her Piano Piece Blair's nose stung , like she was about to cry just thinking about everything . She hadn't stepped outside once since coming home these past few days . Russell had cleared his whole schedule , leaving the company in the hands of his son and assistant . He stayed close to Blair , watching her every mood nervously . After all that had happened , Russell finally understood . Money , status , power - none of it meant a thing . If he lost the woman he loved most , the mother of his kids , his whole world would collapse .

Now that he had another chance , he swore nothing would ever hurt Blair again . Not even a scratch ! " Darling , I feel the same . I've been thinking a lot lately , but we still need to live and face the future . We can't just keep hiding away , making the kids worry . Justin brought us here today so we could move forward , not just drown in guilt over Tilda . " Let's do this for them . We're parents - we can't keep drifting like this . " Blair's heart softened . She looked at Russell and Justin's worried faces . Finally , she took a deep breath . " You're right .

Even if it's for the kids , I can't keep falling apart . What happened with Tilda is done . I can't keep making you all worry . " Justin's gaze gentled . " Yeah , Mom . I heard Thalorian Cuisine is famous here . Want to try it ? " " Alright . " Blair forced herself to lift her spirits . Just then , the violin piece ended . A piano performance was next .

A woman in a stunning red dress and high heels appeared on the stage . With her slim figure and glossy , shoulder - length hair , she carried herself with pure elegance .

Her very presence made the whole room sit straighter . Everyone recognized Genevieve , the pianist who'd just won an international piano award . Justin's eyes lit up . He couldn't look away from the woman who seemed to glow under the lights , stunning and magnetic . He was clearly captivated . Russell and Blair caught the look on his face . Russell leaned closer to whisper , " Darling , Justin said a friend gave him the invite here . Could it be her ? " Blair whispered , " Look at his face - it's exactly how you looked at me when you were chasing me .

" " So this isn't only about cheering us up . Our son has got a little secret , huh ? " If that incredible woman was the one Justin liked , they thought it was fine . Russell and Blair didn't bother about status . The Jensions already had plenty of money . What they cared about was their kids being happy . They wanted them to find true love - not some fake gold - digger trying to get close just for influence or cash . As long as the girl was decent and her past was clean , that was all they asked for . Genevieve spotted Justin's table right away .

Each invite had a number , and his seat was right where she had planned . She was the one who arranged it , making sure he got the best seat to enjoy her show . When Justin booked Starlight Dining , the manager quickly gave her the news . With a small smile , Genevieve stepped up to the white piano . Her graceful fingers danced across the keys . The notes rang out crisp and pure , flowing straight into everyone's hearts .

With just a few notes , her talent was undeniable . After the intro , she slid right into the real piece .

The instant Justin heard it , his chest tightened . It was the same song the girl played in that old video that saved him ! With her incredible skill and the hidden magic in the music , she had dragged Justin out of the shadows of autism , like a beam of light shining into his life . Even after all those years , he could still remember that song and how it used to send chills through him . " Hmm ? " Tilda raised an eyebrow . She didn't expect anyone to actually remember that tune . Back then , she'd only played it on a whim . She never even wrote down the sheet music .

But someone had secretly filmed her and posted it online without permission . The clip blew up fast . The poster edited it on purpose so her face stayed hidden in the shadows , keeping her identity a mystery . When she discovered it , she used her hacking skills to wipe the video clean off the internet . She even tracked down the poster and made sure they faced the consequences . And that was the end of that .

Chapter 409 Echoes of a Rose If a pianist watched that video and copied down the notes , it wouldn't be surprising . But Genevieve actually owned the sheet music herself . " This is the first time I've heard anything like this . It's gorgeous . " " It's got something in it that just hits deep . I don't know how to

explain . It feels so warm . " " It's like being stuck with no hope , then suddenly there's a light showing you the way out . " Jarrett and the others closed their eyes , soaking it in . The same image filled their minds .

Out of nowhere , Tilda murmured , " Echoes of a Rose . " " Huh ? Queen , what did you just say ? " Sitting closest , Astrid caught Tilda's words but wasn't sure if she'd misheard . Did she hear that right ? " Echoes of a Rose . That's the title of this piece . " " Queen , you've heard it before ? " Jarrett asked curiously . " Well ... you could say that . " Tilda couldn't exactly say she'd only played it on a whim . She was young and wild at that time , training overseas with Harvey . pote . Back then , she didn't even bother giving it a name , but she remembered every note .

Any piece she improvised , she could later write out perfectly as sheet music . The music ended . Genevieve exhaled slowly . After all , she'd just performed in front of many big shots . And with Justin and his parents watching , the pressure doubled . Even though she'd practiced that piece in secret countless times , she wanted it to sound just as flawless as the version from that old video .

This time , she nailed it . Clapping burst out . Genevieve lifted her head . Justin was the first to rise and applaud .

His eyes sparkled , excitement written all over his face . With him leading , Blair and Russell snapped back and started clapping as well . Soon , the whole place was filled with applause . Genevieve lifted her red dress lightly , bowed with grace , and stepped off stage . Justin's reaction made him the center of attention right away . Tilda spotted him and sneered . Astrid glanced at Tilda , a little worried . " I didn't expect Uncle Russell and the others to show up . " " It's fine . Just act like they're invisible .

It doesn't mess with our dinner." So what if the Jensions were here ? Tilda wasn't about to ditch everything and leave . Why should she ? Besides , they still owed her two lives . If they had any decency , they'd stay far away from her . Honestly , she even doubted the Jensions knew what decency meant . " Yeah . " Seeing how chill Tilda was , Astrid just nodded . Then , she added , " Feels like ... you've changed . " Back then , Tilda always carried some edge whenever she ran into the Jensions . But now , Astrid couldn't sense that anymore .

It was like the Jensions had been erased from Tilda's mind , no longer worth anything . Tilda smiled . " Maybe it's because I've found people who matter more . " She had three mentors , maybe more out there . And Harvey was still alive somewhere , watching sunrises and sunsets . She also got the love she never had in her previous life , the friendships she once gave up , and the values she'd ignored . This

time , she had them all . With those , her so - called " family " didn't matter anymore . They became irrelevant . Theo suddenly asked curiously .

" Who's got you saying stuff like that , Queen ? " " Obviously , you guys. My partners . " " Queen , come on ! You're clearly talking about someone else , but you're dragging us into it ." Even so , hearing it from her made them secretly happy . The performance was over , and the lights came back on . Their appetizers , main courses , and desserts started hitting the table one by one . " Mmm , this is so good . Queen , you gotta taste it . " " This pudding is amazing ! Queen , have some ! " " Queen ...

" 1 Tilda looked at her plate , stacked high like a mountain , and rubbed her forehead helplessly . " Alright , I've got hands and a brain . Eat your own food . Stop dumping everything on my plate like I'm some patient . " " Aw , come on , Queen , let us spoil you ! Look , I'm not bad at all . I'm over six feet , got an eight- pack , hit the gym , eat clean , look great , rich , can be sweet or wild , and I'm great in bed , too ! " Theo batted his eyes at her while dropping a perfectly peeled shrimp onto her plate .

Chapter 410 Her Charm Tilda was speechless . Astrid poked Theo's hand with her fork and snapped , " Are you crazy ? How can you say stuff like that to Queen ? " " Hmph ! Why not ? Queen is young , gorgeous , and talented . Any guy would feel the same . It's normal . Or what , Astrid ? You mad because I had the guts to say it out loud ? Don't tell me you've got a crush on me ! " " ... Theo , go to hell ! " Astrid finally exploded . " Ahem , I kinda ... like Queen too . " Jarrett quietly raised his hand , sneaking a look at Tilda's face before ducking down like some shy schoolboy .

Zach , who barely spoke the whole night , blushed and stammered , " Me ... me too ... Tilda's eyes went wide . What the heck ? This is chaos ! It feels like I just walked into a war zone ! I thought you were all my teammates , but turns out you guys wanna date me ? " Hear that , Astrid ? With a woman like Queen , guys naturally fall for her ! " Theo smirked at Astrid . He hadn't expected Jarrett and Zach to back him up . . . Haha ! This just proves our captain is on another level . Women envy her , and men lose their minds over her ! ds over Astrid gritted her teeth .

" Queen , don't listen to these horny idiots . Just eat . If they ruin your appetite , I'll make them pay ! " " Yeah ... let's just eat . " Tilda had no idea how to respond , so she lowered her head and focused on her plate . The food was good . No wonder it was a Sky Dining branch under Woodward Group .

After cleaning her dish , she made up an excuse to head to the restroom . all ! " Astrid glared at the guys . " See ? You embarrassed her ! This is on you Theo looked deadly serious . " Astrid , we're not joking ! We mean it !

" If you say not one of us has a crush on Queen , that'd be the real joke ! " Jarrett and Zach both agreed .
" Theo is right . " " Yeah , same here . " Astrid was left speechless . Theo lifted his glass , took a sip , and gave her a sly grin . " Astrid , don't tell me you don't feel anything for Queen . " She's strong , leads us , trusts us , gives us hope for the future , and never gives up . You've never thought about her like that ? "
" Are you kidding ? Queen and I are both women . Plus , we're distant relatives . Keep talking trash , and I'll smash your head in !

" Astrid looked flustered , then grabbed her glass and chugged the '82 Lafite in one go . Her face turned red instantly . Jarrett , Theo , and Zach froze . They were just joking around . No way , right ? It must've been the wine . Could Queen's charm truly work on both men and women ? Even Astrid got flustered ? They didn't expect that . Meanwhile , Tilda splashed some water on her face in the restroom . She stared at her reflection , brushing her fingers over her cheek . " This face ... doesn't look that special . Is it truly that eye - catching ? " They're just too relaxed around me .

Now they're cracking dumb jokes at my expense . " She still had no idea how strong her charm was . Right then , a surprised voice came from the doorway . " Good evening , Mrs. Jenson . " Genevieve " accidentally " ran into Blair outside the women's restroom . Of course , it wasn't an accident at all . She'd been waiting for the perfect moment to run into Blair , hoping to make a lasting impression . Blair didn't suspect a thing .

Blair's first impression of Genevieve was good , mostly because of Justin's unique way of treating her and the natural vibe she carried . The earlier performance only made that impression stronger . " Hi , you're Ms. Genevieve , right ? The one who played just now ? I loved your piece . " I've heard lots of piano pieces , but never that one . What's it called ? I wanna download it later . " " Uh ... " Genevieve froze , then quickly smiled . " Actually , it's my original piece . I'm terrible at naming songs , so I was hoping Justin could help me come up with one . " Original ?

Tilda's eyebrows lifted slightly .