

## Shadows 431

Chapter 431 Hollow Place Inside Here Has Already Been Filled Tilda lifted the bottle of wine she'd prepared and poured a little for herself and Jude . " Mm . " " Cheers ! " Their glasses clinked , and both of them smiled . Jude swirled his glass slowly , letting the aroma breathe before taking a sip . The red slid across his tongue like some strange , perfect chemical reaction - so good it was intoxicating . By the time he the glass , a faint blush had risen across his cheeks . His eyes carried a dazed , almost dreamlike glint . Wine was precious , sure . But Jude ?

The man had downed the rarest vintages in the world more times than he could count . Yet tonight ... this one tasted impossibly sweet, too tempting to resist . When he looked at Tilda , a trace of wine still lingered at the corner of her lips . On impulse - and with a little alcohol pushing him forward - he reached out , brushing her mouth with his fingertips . The unexpected , feather - light pressure made her freeze .. She never imagined he'd do that .

Before she could react , Jude lifted the finger that had just grazed her lips and touched it to his own , tasting the faint smear of wine left behind . " Jude ... " Tilda's face burned . God , why does every domineering man have to break character and do something so reckless ? This was so embarrassing ! She wanted to crawl under the table . Has Already Deen Filled " Tastes even sweeter this way . Don't you like it ? " He leaned closer , his voice low , roughened by wine , every word wrapped in that intoxicating . scent . Her heart stuttered .

She'd seen his face countless times , but right now - with his eyes darkened and rimmed with heat , his beauty magnified by that faint blush - he looked devastating . Even Tilda's heartbeat skipped half a beat . She'd seen this face so often she should be used to it , yet a careless glance still felt like a beauty killshot . It could slay even Tilda , who prided herself on iron self - control and an immunity forged by seeing countless pretty faces , leaving her thoughts straying . Yeah , she was a sucker for a beautiful face . Who doesn't love a beautiful face ?

Her pulse thudded in her ears . She could almost hear her own heart tipping into dangerous territory . More than that .... Tilda could hear the sound of her own heart stirring . " Jude , are you ... not even a little embarrassed ? " " Not at all . If anything I kind of want to taste even more . " Jude dipped his chin , one arm on the table , pale , slender fingers tapping lightly on the surface . Every small move carried an elegance so sharp it was almost dangerous . Even his eyes - dark as a black hole - were filled entirely with her . They were pulling her in , like there was no way out .

Tilda's breath quickened . Damn the old saying about femme fatales - men could be just as lethal . It was sometimes worse than women . Pace bride thare Has Shendy Bears 11Hire | " Uh ... here ! Try this stuffed zucchini , I made it myself - it's really good . Nerves got the better of her , so she shoved food onto his plate just to break the tension . Because the way he was looking at her right now was way too dangerous . His stare was direct , predatory , with no attempt to hide it.

And she - two lives lived , yet still a " normal " woman who'd never actually been in love . How the hell was she supposed to fight against this tidal wave of male intensity ? God , please . Let nothing happen tonight . With Jude's pull , she honestly wasn't sure she could stop herself . " Alright , " he said smoothly . So , the two of them settled into eating . The two of them fell into an easy rhythm , swapping old stories , laughing , drinking . And slowly , Tilda relaxed . His gaze didn't feel so intense anymore .

She dug into the food , gulped wine like it was water , and let herself relax . Life , for this brief window , felt simple and satisfying . And hey - she never gained weight anyway , After a few rounds of drinks , even Tilda was feeling tipsy . Most of the food on the table was gone . " Jude , you know ... we're actually pretty similar . In the Bells , you only ever felt warmth from one person . And me ... I only made it because my mentor picked me up and taught me how to survive . " The Jensions threw me away for nineteen years .

When they finally found me , they were nothing but wolves in human skin - cold , cruel , humiliating , dismissive . " Honestly , those days nearly broke me . I wanted to die . " But when life shuts one door , it opens another . We had talent . We grew up . Now we get to own our lives and live the way we want . Fire Ha Adre llety Bonds Caning " That's what really matters , isn't it ? " Even Tilda surprised herself . Her voice was so light , like she was talking about someone else . It was like she was mentioning the weather .

She was calm , almost detached . And it wasn't just the wine . It was more than that . For the first time , she could step back and look at her own mess of a life like an outsider . It didn't feel like she was the girl burned alive , reborn with nothing but a heart full of vengeance . It was a good sign . And she knew why . That hollow place inside her had already been filled . By Una , Andy , Jude , Dane , and Mystro ...

Chapter 432 Endless Road These ties - friendship , love , family - now held an irreplaceable place in Tilda's life , " Sometimes I really am grateful to God . At least ... He gave me another chance . " A chance to take back everything that should've been mine . " And at the same time , let go of the so - called family ties that never belonged to me , the ones I should've never cared about . Tilda rested her cheek in her hand , her eyes glowing with light . She was beautiful in a way that felt almost untouchable . To live again . To correct the stupid mistakes of her past life .

Who wouldn't kill for that chance ? She used to hate God for making her an orphan . But now , when it came to the Jensons , she wanted nothing to do with them . God had already given her more than enough grace . " Tilda ... before I met you . I used to blame fate . I hated the Bells . Sometimes I even hated my own blood , hated being born into that family . " " But after meeting you , falling for you I understood . Heaven is fair . Because at the very least it sent me you . " Letting me sit here , sharing dinner , talking with you like this ... Such an indulgent kind of happiness .

Jude had never imagined - no , he'd never even dared to hope for something like this . For a man like Jude , happiness like this had always been out of reach . And yet now , it was real . It was simple . It was right in front of him . I set out to find you . Round crossing a thousand mountains , and ten thousand rivers . The lights glow bright . You stay like spring wind. I remain clothed in winter showe I boil the winter's frost . pluck flowers and blades of grass , and keep the long night for you .

" On this endless road , having you here - it's enough ." A hint of drunkenness glowed in Jude's eyes , bright as moonlight over water . He had always seemed untouchable - aloof , cold , like a god who could only be admired from afar . But now he was flesh and blood , sitting before her , lips parting , hand reaching forward . His fingers inched closer . The space between them grew smaller . At last , their fingers touched .. Tilda didn't pull back . The touch sparked like electricity . A tingling sensation rushed through her . But it was not painful at all .

Like magnetic poles , opposites pulled together . She thought maybe she was drunk too . Her whole body burned . She could feel her blood racing . And then their hands laced together . Jude leaned in closer .

And for once , she didn't think of resisting . Whatever . It's not like this is the first time . The last kiss had been that night on Christmas Eve in Motrar . She almost missed it . When his lips touched her her heart surged wildly . Something deep inside recognized it , accepted it . He was the one .

If it were this person kissing her , she'd give everything willingly . The kiss started soft , like a dragonfly skimming water . Then deepened , like wind rolling through a wheat field . She couldn't breathe . She couldn't think . She just fell into him , unable to escape . " Tilda remember to breathe , " Jude murmured . He didn't want to let go . She was too sweet . But the girl in his arms was blushing so hard she looked like she might burst . She even forgot to breathe while they were kissing . Jude was worried she'd actually pass out from holding her breath .

He pressed a hand to his forehead . " I I don't know how ... " Losing control was too dangerous for Tilda . She never thought that .... She could master anything - hacking , chess , art , even fighting . Yet when it came to kissing , she was as awkward as a teenager . az Endless Read And for once , she didn't think of resisting . Whatever . It's not like this is the first time . The last kiss had been that night on Christmas Eve in Motrar . She almost missed it . When his lips touched hers , her heart surged wildly . Something deep inside recognized it , accepted it . He was the one .

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Mushed God , how humiliating . Two lives lived , in college already , and she'd never even kissed properly . " It's alright . We've got time . The rest of our lives ... we'll take it slow . " Jude stroked her hair gently , eyes soft with indulgence .

As long as he could hold her like this , taste her sweetness , he had all the happiness he needed . Sometimes , happiness really was that simple . He wanted to take it slow . Cough , cough ! Alright ! Downstairs , Vassal was still waiting . He leaned against the car , cigarette in hand , looking irritated . He checked his watch . The boss had been upstairs for three hours . Sigh . He crushed out the last cigarette and tossed it in the trash . He doused himself with cologne - Jude hated the smell . It was the first time he'd ever waited this long , and it was torture .

If the boss didn't come back tonight ... if he actually stayed at Tilda's place ... Cough , cough , cough ! His cool , untouchable boss - actually giving in to human desire ? The thought alone almost gave him a stroke . Unbelievable . If a little Bell were conceived tonight ... what the hell was he supposed to do ? Back at the Bell Residence , plenty of people were waiting like wolves for the boss to slip up . And Ms. Tilda - she was only a sophomore in college .... Timers Out of the Shadows Tway's Bolland tallenery

Chapter 433 An Expression Never Before Seen His head was spinning Just as Vassal lost in his own paranoid thoughts- " What are you doing here ? " The familiar voice almost scared the life out of him . He s to attention , spine straight , saluting Jude like a soldier . " Boss , I ... I wasn't doing anything ... just standing here , sir . Sorry , I didn't notice you'd already come down- Vassal braced himself for punishment . As Jude's right hand , disappearing without notice , making the boss come looking for him - this was a serious screw - up .

If it had been the old Jude , he'd already be banished to some research station in the Arctic - and wouldn't be back for three months ! He would be cut off from supplies and go through three months of frozen hell . But instead- " Get in . We're going home ." ... What ? " Cold sweat broke out down his back .. He wanted to shut his eyes and pray to God that his fate wouldn't suddenly take a tragic turn . Yet Jude really just let him off ? Or maybe the punishment would come later , back at the house ... When Jude noticed Vassal still frozen like an idiot , his brow twitched ever so slightly .

" How I ever so slightly the many times do I have to say it ? " " Yes , sir ! " Vassal scrambled into the driver's seat , started the Maybach , and risked a glance in the rearview mirror . " Boss ... you seem ... kind of happy ? " Fever Refree Com " Mm . Which is why you got lucky this time . Don't push your luck again He could still taste it - the food , the warmth of someone hustling in his kitchen just for him , the softness in his arms , that kiss he couldn't stop replaying Jude shut his eyes . He pursed his lips .

He was savoring the lingering taste and feel of that kiss . Sitting in the spacious , dark backseat of the Maybach , dressed sharp in a suit , his long fingers intertwined - he looked every bit the Shadow Lord . Who would ever believe this man was thinking about ... kissing ? Vassal finally exhaled in relief . Mama mia , Thank you , Ms. Tilda - no , future Mrs. Boss . You're my holy savior , the North Star itself . You've rescued me from a lifetime of torment ! Thank you ! Amen ! Tilda was taking a bath . Her body was submerged in the warmth of the water .

She replayed everything that had just happened . Her pale skin was tinged with a soft flush . It could have been the heat . It could have been her heart . Tilda let out a deep breath . Her fingertip skimmed across the surface , sending ripples through the pool . She watched a droplet form at her fingertip , then fall , and her lips curved into a smile . " So ... I can still feel like a normal human being . " 50 " How lucky to have met you . "

Never Before Seen Her phone buzzed . It was a message from Jude . " Feeling better ? " " Yeah ... I'm better now , Jude ..

The moment Jude saw her call him that , his finger nearly cracked the screen . " Good . That's all th Pff ! matters , Tilda ." He ended the sentence with a smiley face . There it was again - the mysterious little smiley face . Finishes " You've been calling me Tilda all this time , so close and sweet . I think that means our relationship has already stepped closer . " " So , if I call you Jude , you won't be mad , right ? " " I won't be mad at all . " Jude clearly didn't realize she was using a trending meme . He even added thoughtfully , " I like it .

" He sent an emoji that looked like someone was sweating nervously . Hahaha ! Tilda burst out laughing . In his own way , her clueless , slow - to - react CEO was just too much fun . She kept chatting with Jude , cheerful and teasing , completely unaware ... That Vassal behind the wheel was suffering absolute torture . He nearly lost his grip on the steering wheel . Because in the rearview mirror , he saw Jude's face- An expression he had never once seen before . That smile . That happiness . It was like seeing pigs fly . Vassal was happy for him , sure . Jude was human , not a god .

Everyone had emotions , and finding a woman he liked was a good thing . But after seeing Jude Bell as a ruthless , cold - blooded killer for so long , seeing him like this was honestly even scarier Three days passed in the blink of an eye . " Hmph , lucky you asked in time , Mr. Woodward . Tomorrow , Tilda and I are heading to Jeselton . " One day later , and I'd have marked you down for being insincere ! " As soon as she got out of the car and saw Alfie , Una pulled a face at him .

The resort staff who came to greet them were stunned . Talking to Mr. Woodward like that - this girl must have a death wish . But Alfie only looked at the girl in her pink puffer jacket , barefaced , her whole body glowing with innocent charm . He smiled slightly . " Well then ... guess the timing couldn't be better . "

Chapter 434 Treasure Damn . Mr. Woodward sure spoils people Could she be ... the woman Mr. Woodward has his eve our Everyone who worked at the Woodward Group was sharp as a tack . A thousand possibilities popped into her head in an instant . Tilda looked on , saying nothing . Come to think of it , when did Una and Alfie get so close ? They were already bantering like this . Since Tilda was reborn , she had been helping Una fight her social anxiety . She'd pulled her into better circles and tried to turn Una into a stronger , higher - quality woman .

Not to snag some prize husband , but to give Una the skills to protect herself and build her own life . Still ... Even as her best friend , Tilda had no clue how Una ended up so familiar with Alfie . Was Una being stolen away behind her back ? " Tilda , let's drop our bags ! Today's on Alfie - everything . We're going to eat , sleep , and play like queens . Pick the most expensive stuff ! " Mr. Woodward , you don't mind , do you ? " " I don't mind . Spend however you want . Honestly , I make money faster than you can burn it . " " So cocky ? Hell yes .

Tilda , then we absolutely cannot hold back ! " \* ... Okay . " Tilda clearly heard the fondness in Alfie's voice . That fondness was aimed at Una . Because things between Tilda and Jude had escalated so fast , she could tell - Alfie's tone was flirting somewhere between friend and something more . She wanted to smack her own forehead . Should she be calling Alfie and Jude kindred spirits ? Even the way they treated girls was alarmingly similar . Her best friend could read other people's feelings like a pro .

But when it came to her own feelings , she was hopeless . Una and Alfie kept trading teasing insults like it was nothing . If Tilda hadn't been there . Una would probably have been sold out and still be counting the money for him . Once they reached the room , Una dropped her bag and exploded . " Wow - Tilda , this room is amazing . It's huge and totally Endralsia - style . There's even a fireplace - how cool is that ? " Una bounded around , looking left and right like a kid let loose in a candy store . The place was so big that she hadn't even exploring after ten minutes.

She glanced out the window at the view - forest dusted with silver frost , a lake frozen over , a stream just beginning to break through , a bridge , and smoke curling up from the village below the estate . Tilda moved to Una's side , and Una leaned her head against Tilda's shoulder out of habit . " This is incredible , Tilda . No wonder Woodward Group's flagship resort has such a reputation . " To come here and get to eat , drink , and relax for free - wow , God's been good to us . " Tilda poked Una lightly on the forehead . " You're the heiress of the Colon family , act like it .

Why do you act like you've never seen the world ? " " I'm definitely not as impressive as you or Alfie . A stay at a place like this starts at tens of thousands , and you have to book in advance . " Not to mention the rooms with the best views and the biggest space - you need cash and Woodward connections to stay here . " Tilda ... I realize all the changes in my life came from you . You're my lucky star - my super lucky charm ! " Una rubbed against Tilda like a cat , eyes brimming with longing happiness as her fingertips traced lightly . Her eyes sparkled like stars .

A year ago . Una would never have imagined she'd be like this . She'd gone from a shy wallflower to someone who could act boldly in front of Alfie . All of it was the change Tilda had brought into her life . " I'm really the luckier among us . " Una , you were the one who stayed with me at the start , supporting me . " When the Jensons disgusted me and filled me with hatred and rage , you kept me grounded and helped me do what actually needed doing . " No matter what I decided , you backed me , and you brought me into your home so I finally felt a family's warmth .

" Una , you promised that even if the whole world stood against me , you'd stand by my side and fight without hesitation . " And I would do the same for you . " Tilda reached up and smoothed Una's hair . Her eyes were full of tenderness . She would never forget this : cutting ties with the Jensons . walking away from that hell of demons and dark emotions . It was Andy and Una's company that helped Tilda survive those brutal early days after rebirth . Now , Tilda had even more people she treasured . Her life would be smoother and better from here on .

She would never again become the furious , destructive version of herself who existed for the Jensons .

## Chapter 435

Best Friends and Maybes . " Alright , Tilda , enough with that cheesy stuff ! We're besties , remember ? Hmph ! Don't forget we're gonna be best friends for life ! You better treasure this beautiful friendship ! But I'm scared you'll end up looking down on me ... Tilda , you're just too smart , foo amazing , you're even a world champion ! Compared to you , I'm basically trash ... The more Una talked , the more self-conscious she felt . Even though she wasn't lacking in brains or looks herself , next to someone like Tilda , a total freakin ' genius .

Una felt like a candle flickering next to the sun . She didn't stand a chance . Sometimes she honestly wondered if being friends with someone like Tilda was way out of her league . hwas , No matter how hard she tried to keep up , the truth was , the gap between them only grew wider with time . Ugh ! So frustrating ! stuck with me as your best friend for " You dummy , I'm never gonna look down on you . You're life . But ... if I were gonna complain about something , well , it's that you're not a guy . If you were , we could just date already .

No need to let someone else snatch you away , " Tilda said with a grin . " Ughhh ! Don't say that ! That's like , a critical hit straight to the heart ! " Una was practically in tears . She seriously resented the fact that her parents hadn't given her the right parts when she was born . If she had them , she would've been the perfect boyfriend for Tilda , and she wouldn't have to sit . back and watch her beloved besties get stolen by some random guy . Not even Jude was good enough ! The two of them joked around for a bit , the mood lightening up considerably .

That's when Tilda casually brought it up , like it was no big deal , " So , when did you and Alfie get so close ? " " Hmm ... I guess it just kinda happened ? I mean , thanks to you , I've seen him around a bunch , right ? He's not a bad guy , I can tell . He kinda spoils me a bit , so I've been a little shameless , and Maybes hehe . Tilda , do you think I act too bold around Alfie ? Like I'm too thick - skinned or something ? Una scratched the back of her head , looking sheepish . " So ... how do you feel about him ? " " Feel ?

I guess I feel pretty good about him . " She gave Tilda a confused look . " Tilda , why are you asking me this all of a sudden ? " " No reason . Just curious ." Truth was , Tilda was probably overthinking things . Alfie and Una ? If there was anything real there , it wouldn't happen for a long time . If they were meant to be , well , who knew ? It wasn't impossible . Just like how no one ever expected her and Jude to hit it off , and yet here they were . Still , as Una's best friend , Tilda felt responsible for her happiness .

Una could be way too innocent sometimes , she thought in straight lines and didn't always catch the warning signs . And Tilda really didn't want Alfie turning out to be some playboy who lost interest after three days and tossed Una aside like she didn't matter . If that happened ? Tilda would not let him off the hook . Knock knock- " You guys ready ? I'm about to show you the wonders of this place , " Alfie called out from outside . " Alright , Tilda . Let's go , " Una said . " Mm - hmm , " Tilda nodded . Since it was January , the path up the mountain had become pretty slippery .

So they all decided to take the cable car instead . Inside the cable car , Una stared down at the landscape below , her mouth forming a perfect " O. " " I've been to a lot of places , but this scenery ... it's got this indescribable depth to it . It's like walking through a gallery of nature's finest paintings , " she said , wide - eyed . and Maybes Tilda spoke calmly . " Did the Woodward Group do some landscaping here ? " "Yeah

Turns out my dad knows this geomancy expert , he used to travel all over when he was younge Once he got rich in his forties , he got into the arts . We had him come assess this whole valley . The Woodward Group spent billions bidding on this area . It wasn't just money thrown into a pit . These days , all the rich folks believe in God and in geometry . Combine that with the natural beauty of the place , and it's no wonder this became the top resort in all of Slosa . " It really is impressive . " Tilda admitted . The cable car arrived at the summit .

As soon as they got off , Alfie led the way up a winding trail . " Whoa ! Tilda , look ! " Una suddenly lit up . pointing like she'd discovered a hidden treasure . Tilda followed her gaze and saw it too . A frozen waterfall , mid - cascade , like the head of a wild beast frozen mid - roar , was suspended halfway down the mountain . Below it , mist pooled like smoke over a white abyss , impossible to see through . It looked exactly like what ancient poets once described - the Milky Way falling from the heavens .

From the peak , the view stretched out in all directions , revealing the layered beauty of the surrounding valleys . The crisp air and endless horizon filled them with a powerful energy , as if it were flowing through their veins with every heartbeat . Alfie continued guiding them through more hidden spots across the mountain . They didn't head back until the sun dipped low and bathed everything in golden light . Una was practically glowing with excitement .. " Alfie , I gotta hand it to you , you actually followed through on your promise . This resort is something else .

No wonder it made the top travel list for Slosa ! No surprise it's booked out all the time . " " As long as you liked it , " Alfie said with a small smile . He was dressed casually in a down jacket and a knit beanie , looking more relaxed and effortlessly charming than ever .

Chapter 436 Unexpected Fan Moment Alfie and Una were walking back to the resort , chatting and laughing along the way . " Huh ? Where's Tilda ? " Una suddenly noticed Tilda wasn't with them and

quickly pulled out her phone to send a text . " Tilda , where'd you go ? " Lost ? Fell behind ? If it were Una , maybe . But Tilda ? No way . Tilda texted back , " I went to the bathroom . You and Alfie go ahead and have fun . If you get tired , head back to the room and rest .

I'll see you at dinner ." Una shot back a reply , " Seriously , you went to the bathroom and didn't say anything ? I was gonna wait for you ! Geez ! " Tilda responded with a teasing tone , " You silly girl , waiting outside the bathroom for me ? I'd be embarrassed even if you weren't ! " But truth was , Tilda hadn't gone to the bathroom . She'd quietly slipped off after they returned to the resort . She just wanted to give Alfie and Una some space alone . The two of them were practically glowing , laughing and talking like they were in their own little world .

Tilda felt like she'd turned into a human - sized 5 - million - watt third wheel , blindingly bright and totally in the way . Even if they didn't mind , she sure did . So , she figured it was better to give them some breathing room and enjoy a little peace and quiet on her own . As she passed by one of the smaller buildings on the resort grounds , a distinct scent caught her attention . Even in the middle of January , in the dead of winter , the fragrance hadn't faded , it had grown even richer and more intense . " What is this ... ?

" Tilda felt an odd pull in her chest , something instinctual , and without thinking , she pushed open the door of a red - painted cottage in front of her .. " Beethoven Mozart all rare , one - of - a - kind pieces . Each one named after legendary composers . Easily worth tens of millions , maybe more . And they're just sitting here ? Dour wide open , no lock ? " she whispered .

" Even Tilda was stunned by the sheer trust or audacity of whoever owned this room . Or maybe it wasn't audacity . Maybe it was just unshakable faith in the resort's security system . " Who are you ? " A surprised voice came from behind the door . Tilda turned sharply . It was an older man , hair slicked back , silver with age , no dye to hide the years . The lines at the corners of his eyes spoke of time passed , but his posture remained sharp . He stood tall , about 6'4 " , built like a bear in a puffer jacket , insulated pants , and a pair of ice skates slung over his shoulder .

His gaze was fierce , there was a quiet power in it , as though he hadn't lost a single ounce of strength from his younger years . Not someone to take lightly . " Sorry , I followed the scent of the violin wood . I noticed the door wasn't closed to intrude . I truly apologize , " Tilda said quickly . - She knew she was in the wrong , anyone would mistake her for a thief under these circumstances . She didn't hesitate to own up and explain . " Wait ... it's you ? Tilda ? " When he got a good look at her face , the man seemed to recognize Tilda . Tilda looked genuinely confused . " Wait ...

you know me ? " I didn't mean There was no way Tilda wouldn't remember someone like this , at least , not someone with that kind of presence . " I'm Stephen Woodward , Alfie's uncle . I'm also one of the current shareholders of the Woodward Group . You , on the other hand , are kind of a big deal in Cetherland right now . How could I not know who you are ? " the man said . He chuckled and added , " Besides , I have quite the interest in art myself . I've seen the piece that won you the world championship and even some of your earlier work from the X period . Absolutely brilliant stuff .

In a way , I suppose you could say I'm a fan . Never thought I'd run into my favorite artist here of all places . What luck , huh ? Alfie's told me a bit about you , too . You're making waves , Ms. Tilda . " Stephen's lighthearted tone instantly cut through the awkward tension . Fra Finate Tilda finally let herself relax and breathed a quiet sigh of relief . " Thank you , Mr. Woodward . Honestly , I was worried you'd think I was trying to steal something . Stephen let out a warm laugh .

" With this many priceless violins in one place , you'd think I'd be paranoid , right ? But I leave the door unlocked and walk away without worry , that's how much faith I have in the Woodward Group's security systems . " Then his voice turned a bit more amused . " Actually , I'd love to see which clueless thief would dare try stealing from me . Might be entertaining ." He walked past Tilda like a moving mountain , casual and confident , and picked up one of the violins from the display rack without hesitation .

" If you could smell the wood and recognize it even now , in this weather , then you must know a thing or two about violins . Wanna give it a try ? " he said . " You're serious ? That's ... a limited edition violin . " Tilda's eyes widened slightly . Collectors like this usually didn't let anyone near their prized instruments , not even themselves . They were meticulously maintained , rarely touched , and certainly not handed over to a stranger on a whim . After all , when something is this rare , money isn't the issue , it's the fact that there's no replacing it if anything goes wrong .

One tiny scratch , and it's damaged forever . But Stephen only shrugged . " These were made to be played . If they can't fulfill that one basic purpose , and just sit here gathering dust , what's the point ? I imagine the luthiers who crafted them , and the violins themselves , would be pretty heartbroken . " Then he added , smirking , " Of course , that's assuming you're confident enough in your skills to handle it . If you're not ... well , then maybe best not to try "

Chapter 437 Tension in Major Stephen's tone clearly carried a hint of challenge . A provocation ? Ha . Who was scared of who ? " Well then , if Mr. Woodward doesn't mind , I'll give it a shot . " Tilda wasn't about to back down , not with a chance to play a legendary , priceless violin right in front of her . The opportunity was here , the owner was willing . Why not ? Besides , if anything did go wrong , Tilda could afford the consequences . " Now that's the spirit , that's the idol I admire . Go ahead , pick whichever one you like .

Don't worry , I actually had a friend stop by earlier and do a full tune - up on them , Stephen said with a grin . " Got it ." Tilda's eyes landed on the one named Beethoven . Perfect . Beethoven had always been her inspiration . She ran her fingertips gently along the body of the violin , tracing the graceful curve of the strings . As she brought it up close , she caught a faint , aged scent of sandalwood and red eucalyptus , years of time and care soaked into the grain of the wood . Everything about it was captivating . Intoxicating .

Even Tilda felt a rush of excitement bubble up inside her . For a musician , the chance to play something like this ... there was nothing more exhilarating . " This setup is incredible ... " Tilda narrowed her eyes slightly , admiring the feel and balance . She couldn't help but praise it Whoever this friend of Stephen's was , they had to be a true mauer Someone who resized instruments like living things Now No way an amateur could've tuned and restored a one of a kind vicilin frens the best century to this level of perfection .

Every detail of the strings was flawless , teamless , perfect , not a single flaw to be found . It was as if the violin had been given new life . Almost like it was whispering , silently but insistently . " Play ne Tilda lifted the bow and took her stance . Eyes closed , she tilted her face gently against the violin's shoulder and began to play A flowing , elegant melody soared from the strings .

This time , the piece she chose was none other than the world - renowned classic - Canon in D Warm and expansive , the notes carried a sense of serenity , soothing and timeless , like a healing breeze passing over the earth . Like angel wings brushing away sorrow , bringing light and hope in their wake . As the music built toward its climax , Tilda's playing grew bolder , more impassioned . It was no longer just her and the violin . It was one being now , Tilda and Beethoven as a single force . The sound erupted , powerful , intricate , breathtaking .

It was like color had exploded into the room , each note casting flashes of light , like stained glass reflections dancing in every corner . And in that moment , it felt as if this long - silent , century - old violin had been awakened at last . Given wings . In Tilda's hands , it was the perfect dance partner , executing complex moves and emotional dives with flawless grace . And when the last note finally faded , Tilda slowly opened her eyes . Her heart was still racing . Even in the chill of winter , a light sheen of sweat glistened across her skin .

The sound of applause broke the silence .. Even Stephen , who had probably attended more elite concerts than most people could dream of , didn't hold back . " Ms. Tilda , that was phenomenal ! Truly divine , like something straight from the heavens . You've blown this old man away , " Kinished Tilda smiled softly . " You're too kind , Mr. Woodward . I think the credit belongs to the violin . It really lives up to the name Beethoven . Getting the chance to play it today was worth everything .

" With the utmost care , she placed the violin back on its stand , as gently as if she were returning a priceless treasure to its sacred place . Her eyes shimmered with emotion , golden sunlight pouring in through the windows . In her heart , she whispered , " Thank you for giving me such an extraordinary experience . " Just then , the door creaked open again .. A familiar voice called out , unable to hide the excitement behind it . " Mr. Woodward , were you playing the violin or - wait ... is that you ? Tilda ?

" Kayden stood there in stunned silence , eyes He never expected to run into Tilda here . wide . The moment she saw him , Tilda's expression changed , and her brows knit together . " Mr. Woodward , the friend you mentioned earlier ... don't tell me it's him ? " Stephen coughed awkwardly . " Uh ... yeah . Who else could perfectly fine - tune these rare violins for me ? That kind of precision takes absolute pitch , and only one person I know fits the bill , our genius composer , Kayden . I've been trying to get him out here for ages .

He finally had a window a few days ago and came to the resort to help with the setup ." Stephen hesitated , then added , " I do know the history between you two ... I didn't expect Kayden to still be here . Kayden , didn't you say you went back to your room to rest ? " Kayden lowered his gaze . " I did , but when I heard that violin , I couldn't stop myself . The way it was played ... it moved me . More than any version of Canon in D I've ever heard . " As a composer and a musician . Kayden couldn't ignore a performance like that . He knew it couldn't have been Stephen .

Sure , the man loved violins , but he didn't have the skill to pull off something so emotionally powerful . And he never would've guessed Stephen would let anyone touch those violins them . The last thing he expected was to walk in and find Tilda . Was this what people called a cursed connection ?

Kayden's chest tightened , remembering everything that had gone down recer Jensons , And he never would've guessed Stephen would let anyone touch those violins , let alone play them . The last thing he expected was to walk in and find Tilda . Was this what people called a cursed connection ? Kayden's chest tightened , remembering everything that had gone down recently with the Jensons .

Chapter 438 Ashes of Apologies For a moment , Kayden had no idea how to face Tilda . He had so much he wanted to say to her but now that she was standing right in front of him , the words just wouldn't come " Thank you , Mr. Woodward , for letting me play the violin. I really appreciate it . I'll be going now ." Since Kayden had shown up , she had no interest in sticking around any longer . Tilda gave a polite nod

, then turned to leave . " Hey , hey , hey , wait a second ... Stephen started to say something , but Tilda didn't even glance back . She walked out without a second thought .

Watching her go , Kayden still stood frozen in place . Stephen shot him a look full of disappointment . " Why are you just standing there like an idiot ? When you came to help with the violins , all you did was talk about your sister , and now that she's right here , you're suddenly mute ? What happened to all that courage , huh ? " he said . " I ... I'm sorry , Mr. Woodward . I'm going after her ." Finally , Kayden found the nerve and ran after Tilda . Stephen let out a long sigh . " I must really be getting old , getting involved in stuff that isn't even . my business anymore .

But if this is fate , then , Kayden ... let's just say I've repaid a favor . " Whether it ended well or not , that part was up to him . " Tilda ! " Kayden called out , chasing after her . Tilda didn't slow down , in fact , she picked up her pace , making it clear she didn't want anything . to do with him . But his voice had drawn attention . A few guests passing by in the resort turned . to look , curious about the commotion . Tilda didn't say a word , but she stopped walking . She turned around and gave Kayden a sharp , irritated glare . " Spit it out if you've got something to say .

" " Tilda , I know you hate me . I know you don't want to see me . But running into you today ... it really was just a coincidence . " Asthma Applauses Tilda snorted . " If that's all the crap you've got to say . I'm leaving And you can get the hell out of my sight too ." Seeing that Tilda wasn't giving him even a second to speak , Kayden clenched his jaw and stepped in front of her , blocking her path . " Tilda . I'm not here to talk about me . I'm here because of Justin ! " " Are you serious right now ? I cut ties with the Jenson's ages ago .

I have nothing to do with any of you anymore . So don't go blaming me every time one of you screws something up ! " She looked at him like he was an idiot . This guy had been chasing her down , going on and on nonstop , and now he wanted to dump some Jenson drama on her ? Was this dude actually trying to pin something on her ? She must've been insane to even consider stopping for him . The Jenson's were all the same , one more irrational than the next . " That piano piece you played years ago, the one you uploaded online , it saved Justin's life .

" He knew she had no reason to stick around otherwise , so he rushed to explain . " Tilda , you had no idea , but that video you posted ? It changed everything for him . That one moment , it pulled Justin back from the edge . Without you , there wouldn't be a Justin today , not the one the world knows . You helped create the Justin who's now globally famous . You saved him . Tilda still didn't say anything , but

her eyes flicked up , one brow arching in surprise . That she hadn't known . That was new . Something that hadn't happened in her previous life . No wonder .

Back then , Genevieve had suddenly popped up , become Justin's girlfriend , and eventually married into the Jensions . In this life , Justin and Genevieve had already crossed paths again , seemingly out of nowhere . She had always thought it was just their shared profession that brought Justin and Genevieve together . But now ... Turns out Genevieve had stolen her identity and her work . She'd used it to lie to Justin , to win his trust , just so she could get the Jensions ' backing and climb her way into power .

When Tilda thought about it that way , it was almost funny . Too bad she couldn't go back and watch how it all ended in her last life . United Kyla and Tobias had betrayed them together . Then throw in Genevieve , completely unstable , full of secrets and ulterior motives , married into the family like some kind of time bomb . And the Jensions ? So smug . So convinced they were surrounded by nothing but loyalty and control . In reality , the very people they trusted most had been playing them like fools the entire time .

They thought they had it all figured out . They had no idea that disaster had already started creeping in - silent , patient , inevitable . Just thinking about it made her heart race . If the Jensions didn't end up worse than Tilda had in her last life , burned alive in that fire , she'd honestly feel cheated . " Tilda , you saved Dominic . You saved Mom . You saved the entire Jenson family . And now , you've saved Justin , too ." Kayden's voice cracked with emotion . " Even us , your brothers , you changed us . You saved us . We're blood , Tilda . Real family . We know we messed up . Bad .

Dad and Mom may not say it out loud , but they live with that guilt every single day . And Dominic ? You have no idea how much he blames himself . We all want you back , Tilda . Please . Give us another chance . Come back to the Jensions . Let us make it right ." Kayden was losing control of his emotions . His eyes were red , glistening with tears he could barely hold back . For someone like Kayden , usually so cold and quiet , this kind of vulnerability was almost unimaginable , but that only made it more real .

He knew it probably sounded like emotional blackmail , and he knew he was asking for too much , but he didn't care anymore . All that mattered was getting one more chance , to have one more shot at making things right .

Chapter 439 No Second Chances Kayden was willing to do anything He never wanted to see his family in pain over Tilda ever again . " Tilda , us running into each other today it has to be fate Your played Canon on a ridin I tuned myself . It was flawless . That proves something our talents as siblings , they're unmatched . You're a once - in - a - century musical genius . I can help you . Tilda . If we work together , you'll be immortalized . Just like Beethoven . Like Mozart . A hundred years from now , the world's music history will have your name carved into it . Tilda Jenson .

I'll give you everything to make that happen ! Kayden was desperate . He had no idea what else he could offer her . All he had left were the skills he'd spent his whole life sharpening , his absolute pitch and ability to compose . If only Tilda would come back to the Jensons , if she'd give them one last chance to show her the love they should've given from the start , then Kayden would dedicate the rest of his life to her Write music for no one but her . Even if it killed him . Even if he died unknown , while all the glory went to her . He didn't care . As long as she came home .

Faced with his hoarse , near - hysterical pleading . Tilda stayed cold as ice , and she almost laughed . And in the end , she couldn't hold it back . A quiet , mocking chuckle slipped out . " Tilda ... Kayden flinched as he heard the open ridicule in her voice . It cut through him like a blade . In that moment , he understood . This was her answer . " Ha ... Kayden , oh Kayden . You really are hopeless . Just pathetically naive , " she said , shaking her head . " First of all , I don't care about fame . Playing music is just a hobby , something I do when I'm in the mood .

If it makes me happy , I'll play . If it doesn't , I'll drop it without a second thought . There is one thing I didn't expect , though . I didn't know that random video I posted years ago actually saved Justin's life ." \* She smiled coldly . " Now I just regret not deleting it sooner . If I had , maybe Justin would've stayed in the dark . Like you said , he would've rotted there . Lived a life worse than death Such cruel words , spoken from Tilda's lips without a shred of emotion . Kayden felt like a man walking toward his execution .

Strapped to a cross , flayed alive with red - hot blades , one slice at a time . It hurt . God , it hurt .... His chest ached . His head felt like it was being crushed . Even breathing had become painful . It was like there were razor blades flowing through his veins , tearing him apart from the inside out . Colder than the mountain snow in January , so cold it felt like his bones were about to shatter . Tilda stared at him in that pitiful state and felt nothing . Not even a flicker of sympathy . She would never forget how she died in her past life .

How the Jensons had emotionally broken her down , abandoned her , driven her to death . So what if Kayden hadn't been the one to personally do it ? Did it matter ? This wasn't some fluffy second - chance fantasy where she came back with a clean slate . She had come back with every memory . Every scar . Every ounce of fury burning in her bones . And Kayden ? No matter how sweet his words sounded now - back then , he'd stood right beside . the rest of the Jensons , treating her like a curse , like she was nothing . Mocking her . Ignoring her . Just another brainless follower .

A loyal little puppet for the so - called family he blindly believed . in . It always ended the same way - the one who screamed loudest got the sympathy , and the one who suffered in silence got left behind . If Tilda hadn't shown her brilliance , revealed her power , would Kayden have even remembered she existed ? Doubtful . The second she said no , he probably would've walked away without a second thought . Not this pathetic , clingy , tail - wagging act he was putting on now . Without another word . Tilda turned and walked away . No hesitation .

No looking back . As Tilda's figure grew smaller in the distance , just about to disappear , Kayden suddenly clenched his jaw and dropped to one knee . The air was freezing . The ground was hard . He hit it hard . The sharp crack of bone against stone echoed in the air , his right knee colliding brutally with the ground . The pain shot through him instantly , twisting his face in agony . Some of the guests nearby , those who had paused to watch the drama unfold , gasped at the sound , startled . Tilda heard it too . Of course she did . But she still didn't look back .

She walked on , disappearing from Kayden's view without a single glance behind her . " Kayden ! What the hell are you doing ?! " Stephen had been following from a distance this whole time . Now he couldn't stay longer . He rushed forward and grabbed Kayden by the arm , trying to pull him up . any " You're a man ! You don't kneel like this unless it's to your parents , your savior , or the person . you love . Don't throw yourself away like this . You matter ! You're loved ! You're a goddamn musical prodigy ! " " I'm sorry ... Mr. Woodward . Just leave me here .

I don't have anything But Kayden didn't move . " I'm sorry left . He stared at the space where Tilda had disappeared , her silhouette burned into his eyes , and he let out a bitter , broken laugh . Then , without warning , he lifted a hand to cover his face , his shoulders shaking as the tears finally fell . In the Jenson family of seven kids , Kayden had always been the quiet one . But also the one who felt the deepest .

after everything that had happened , he knew the Jenson's , forgive them , and give them another chance Not even the slightest chance remained

Chapter 440 You Wish I Cared now ? So , what now Just the thought back to the Jenson Villa , facing his family again , with all that growing . festering pain , Kayden felt exhausted . His heart hurt . All he wanted was to run away from it all . Far , far away . He didn't want to face any of it . Didn't want to go back . Maybe like this he could finally start living more honestly . Stephen watched Kayden in that broken state . He saw it all , and it hurt him deeply . He let out a heavy sigh . At the end of the day , it was still the Jenson's ' family business .

Even if Stephen loved Kayden like his own son , what could he really do ? Meanwhile , back at the resort , Tilda returned to the room without mentioning anything about running into Kayden . As soon as she walked in , Una pouted dramatically . " Tilda , what the hell ? You said you were just going to the

bathroom , why were you gone so long ? I thought you ditched me and ran off on your own ! " She shrugged casually . " Just wandered around the resort a bit . We're leaving tomorrow , aren't we ? " " Wait , leaving tomorrow ? That fast ? I thought we were staying for three days . Hold up ...

something happened , didn't it ? Tilda , be honest . Something definitely happened while you were gone , didn't it ? " Una narrowed her eyes . She knew her best friend too well , Tilda felt different now . Not quite the same as when they had split up earlier .

Tilda let out a sigh . " I can't hide anything from you , huh . Having someone who understood her so well , that alone lifted Tilda's mood a little . So she sat down and told Una everything , the whole story about running into Kayden by coincidence . " You've got to be kidding me !

The Jensons are like a damn curse that won't go away ! We're all the way out here and still ran into one of them ? Don't tell me Alfie had something to do with this ! " Tilda shook her head . " Alfie didn't know . It was his uncle who invited him . Maybe I really am cursed to keep crossing paths with the Jensons . But I've woken up now . I've pulled myself out of that mess and cut every last tie . " She couldn't deny it . There was one thing Kayden had gotten right . They had run into each other under circumstances where a meeting should've been nearly impossible . Or maybe ....

Ever since she'd left the Jensons , she'd had strange , almost uncanny encounters with every single one of them . Slosa was huge . Running into someone by accident here ? Practically impossible . And yet , somehow , she kept meeting them . One after another . Was the universe playing some kind of twisted joke ? She'd been given a second life . A fresh start . She'd seen through the Jensons , escaped their grip , and set out to live for herself . To find her own goals , her own identity . She'd been given real friendship . Real love . Real family .

Still , at every turn , at every damn corner , she'd bump into another Jenson . As if the universe couldn't let her forget . As if it wanted her to relive every moment of that last life . Every betrayal , scream , and every second she'd spent burning alive . Was it a sign ? What was fate trying to tell her ? ARDD Whatever it was , she'd already made up her mind . This life , she would use Kyla to tear the Jensons down . She'd make sure they ended exactly the way they had in her last life . That was her only goal and revenge .

The only regret ? If she'd known sooner why Genevieve married Justin , she wouldn't have exposed her so quickly . Even if it meant stomaching the nausea of watching that woman walk around in her place for a little longer , it would've been worth it . The more betrayal the Jensons thought they were safe from ,

the sweeter the downfall . Just then , a pair of warm hands gently wrapped around Tilda's . Tilda , you look awful . Let me guess , those damn Jensons ruined your mood again . Why don't we just leave tonight ?

We've seen everything anyway ." Feeling the comfort of her best friend beside her , Tilda brushed away the chaotic thoughts swirling in her mind . She smiled and gave Una's cheek a light pat . " I'm fine . We can leave tomorrow , it's not safe to head down the mountain at night in this weather . Besides , it's not like I'm afraid of the Jensons . So what if they're here ? Why should I be the one to run away like they're poison ? " She scoffed . " Please . I stopped caring about them a long time ago . Compared to one finger of yours , they're not even worth mentioning .

" And that line , Tilda meant every word of it . " Exactly ! Let them do whatever they want . We'll live our best lives , amazing , happy , and fabulous , while they sit there jealous and bitter , " Una nodded fiercely . " Anyone who treated you like that . Tilda , deserves whatever's coming to them . I can't wait to see karma finally hit the Jensons in the face ! They gave up a one - in - a - million gem , and one day , they'll regret it so badly they won't know what hit them . " " Damn right . " They goofed off a little , laughing again like nothing could touch them .

A little while later, Alfie showed up to take Tilda and Una to dinner . Everything was already prepared . " Alfie , Tilda and I are heading out tomorrow . " Una said . " Already ? You're not staying a few more days ? " A flicker of disappointment crossed Allie's face just for a second , almost unnoticeable . Una was just about to reply , but Tilda beat her to it . " What ? Is the mighty heir of the Woodward Group really so free these days that he can hang around playing host ? " " Who said I was just playing around ?

I'm multitasking , scoping out the resort . It's one of Woodward Group's most promising assets . Can't let the growing reputation go unchecked , right ? "