

Shadows 601

Chapter 601 Shattered Illusions : Tilda returned to her family, hiding her true identity. She didn't come back for money, fame, or status. What she wanted was simple-real love from her parents and brothers. They were her blood. They should have given her that without question. But Russell was the first to misunderstand her. He hurt her so deeply that she left the house in despair. He had promised her the truth. However, he always ends up making excuses, always siding with Kyla. Arrogant and blind, Russell never once admitted he was wrong. He only piled more humiliation on Tilda.

If Tilda had not later proven her strength, Russell would never have looked at her differently. In those days he had not cared about her life, her feelings, or whether she lived or died. The truth was cruel, and Russell should have faced it long ago. Russell knew the truth all along. But to protect the last shred of his pride, he chose to bury it. He didn't want to admit it. Now, with Tilda's raw words tearing into him, that final cover was ripped to pieces. He was exactly what she called him-a selfish, cold-blooded man. Russell had no right to call himself her father.

Aside from the painful bond of blood that had once promised hope but had become a bottomless pit of despair, Russell gave Tilda nothing. He gave her life, but nothing more. Russell never fulfilled the duties of a father. In front of Ashby and Malcom, Tilda crushed Russell's dignity underfoot, leaving him humiliated and broken. What stung most was watching him stand there, silent, timid, and unable to fight back. Ashby and Malcom barely recognized him. Was this really the same Russell they remembered? The man who fearlessly walked into a dangerous city of Kheason to make a deal years ago?

It was because of that bold move when Russell was young. Against all odds, he had survived and also closed the deal. That was why Ashby and Malcom admired him so deeply. Even to this day, that respect has never faded. But now, before his daughter, Russell couldn't lift his head. He looked small. Weak. Tilda turned and walked away. This time, no one dared to stop her. What none of them saw was the pair of eyes watching from the shadows. His lips curled into a mocking smile.

He had only come to meet Malcom, yet stumbled onto something unexpected. Something about Tilda. Interesting. He thought for a moment, then quietly followed the direction Tilda had gone. Russell stayed where he was for a long time, motionless. If not for the rise and fall of his chest, one might have thought he was dead. Ashby sighed and stepped forward. He awkwardly patted Russell on the shoulder and spoke guiltily, "Russell, I'm sorry. If it weren't for me-" "This isn't your fault, Ashby," Russell cut in. "This is on me. It's my sin.

Tilda tore into me, and she was right-she woke me up. But God, it hurts. How could I have been such a terrible father back then? No father would do the awful things I had done? "Tilda said I only think about gain, that I only felt guilty once she did well. She's right. If she hadn't become who she is today, maybe I never would've changed. Maybe I would have forgotten that I had a daughter. "Maybe people like me don't deserve to have children. I only pay attention when they do well. If they don't, I ignore them. How do heartless fathers like me even exist?" Russell's voice broke.

He laughed then-at first a bitter, hollow laugh that climbed into sobs. He coughed until his shoulders shook. He tilted his head backward. He took several deep breaths to stop the tears from spilling and embarrassing himself in front of his friends. Ashby didn't know what to say nor how to comfort his friend. He'd known Russell for years but had never seen him so vulnerable, so broken. Frankly, they were all in their fifties now. If it weren't for Dominic and Tilda's troubles, Russell would probably be retired.

He would be traveling the world with Blair, enjoying life. They'd seen so many kinds of people and things. They were immune to a lot of things. Nothing shocked them anymore. But if you wanted to hurt someone, the sharpest tool was still family-use that like a blade. Malcom stepped forward. "I'm not trying to preach, Russell, but I can see you really want to treat your daughter right. Look how far this has gone. If you'd known, would you have acted differently? You may have cut Tilda's heart deeper than you realize." Russell forced out a breath.

"Yes, if I'd known, I would've done things differently. No wonder people would do anything for a second chance in life. I wish I could go back to the time when Tilda first came home. I would shake some sense into that foolish, narrow, self-satisfied version of myself."

Chapter 602 Shadows in the Night A "Ashby, Malcom, please ... I'm in a terrible mood. Drink with me. Let's go for another round." Russell was drowning in guilt, teetering on the edge of madness. Maybe losing his mind would be easier. If he went crazy, he wouldn't have to carry the pain of losing his daughter or live with the crushing regret of the foolish choices he made years ago. Sometimes being alive-being fully aware-felt like a punishment with no escape. Ashby said, "Alcohol is poison, Russell. Too much will wreck your body. Don't lose yourself like this.

Go back to your hotel room, take a shower, and get some rest. Even if you drink yourself senseless tonight, tomorrow you'll wake up to the same pain. Your body and your mind will both suffer. You'll still have to face it all! "Malcom, let's get him back to the hotel." "Right." As friends, they couldn't just stand by and watch Russell fall apart. Without another word, Malcom and Ashby each grabbed an arm and dragged him toward the hotel. Both ignored his shouts of protest. The night air was calm and cold. Tilda was almost at the hotel when she saw a figure suddenly step out ahead of her.

She froze as soon as she recognized him. Tilda halted her steps. What was with today? She'd only gone out for a walk, yet she kept bumping into familiar faces. It was ridiculous. "You're... Tilda?" The man wore a casual down jacket. He was tall and handsome and had a wicked little smile playing at the corner of his mouth. His bangs fell slightly over his forehead, and his looks bore some resemblance to Malcom. Who else could it be but Tobias?

Tilda hadn't noticed him earlier, but Tobias had been watching her the whole time. He was spying on her argument with Russell and the others from the shadows. Tobias had arrived late and missed the worst of the confrontation. Even so, he could sense the tension among Tilda, Russell, Ashby, and Malcom. He decided to stay hidden, observed the situation, and waited for the right moment to reveal himself. He had only come looking for his father tonight. Tobias hadn't expected to walk into such an "interesting" scene.

It was clear to him now: Kyla was scarred and broken; her desperate late-night confessions to him had said it all. The Jensons' attitude toward Kyla had shifted completely. That meant Kyla might no longer be the key to gaining control of the Jensons' wealth and power. No-right now, the daughter they truly longed for was Tilda. Especially since Tilda had risen so high. Her name, her status-she was everything the Jensons needed. Tobias was certain they regretted cutting her off. They were probably desperate now, willing to do anything to bring her back, to let her shine for the family's sake.

If he could win Tilda over, charm her with a few sweet words, and get her to work for him, Tobias could walk away with the greatest profit of all. The thought made him beam. "Well, what a surprise. Didn't expect to see you here." Tilda's reply was calm but sharp. "It's not a surprise. The one hiding in the shadows, watching us, and then following me-that was you, wasn't it?" In one sentence, she tore through his mask. Tobias's face shifted slightly. He hadn't expected Tilda to notice him. Don't be fooled by his laid-back look. Back in the day, Tobias went through plenty of training.

With raw talent, he stood out among his peers. If his mentor hadn't strongly recommended him, Malcom might never have known this illegitimate son even existed. When it came to stealth and concealing his presence, Tobias was confident with his skill. Yet somehow, Tilda caught him so easily. No wonder he always senses something deep and unfathomable about her. This woman wasn't as simple as she looked. Not at all. A rush of excitement stirred in him; he felt his blood boiling.

It had been a long time since Tobias met someone this intriguing. A woman like Tilda made him feel the thrill of wanting to conquer. Just imagining her one day surrendering to him filled him with a twisted sense of satisfaction. Still, his reason whispered a warning. The woman who stood before him was dangerous. Not someone to mess with. He valued his money, his pride, his position-and his life. No woman was worth losing it all. "You actually noticed me," Tobias said with a wry smile. "Tilda, you're impressive. I'll admit defeat." Tilda brushed him off. "If there's nothing else, I'm tired.

I'm heading home. Good night." If it weren't for the fact that Tobias could still be useful in luring Kyla, Tilda wouldn't have wasted even a glance on him. Men who stalked her like this disgusted her. Push her too far and she'd squash Tobias like a fly. He wouldn't even have a chance to resist. "But I do have something to say to you," Tobias said suddenly, his expression turning serious, "Tilda, that situation at Hotel Morloss-was it you?" "I don't know what you mean." Tilda arched a brow. What is this ? First Sheldon. Now Tobias.

Did everyone suddenly find out that the Comet Squad and I were behind Hotel Morloss?

Chapter 603 Secrets Exposed Dang it ! When did it become so easy for people to pry into my secrets ? Although Tilda and the Comet Squad were exposed during the joint Endralsia rescue at Hotel Morloss, something did not add up. It made sense that Sheldon could track it down. But Tobias? How did he know? There was no way Sheldon told him. Tobias smirked. "The way you're looking at me tells me I've guessed right. At first, it was just a hunch. Back when terrorists attacked Hotel Morloss, I secretly planted a tiny signal transmitter.

To keep them from noticing, I hid it so well only a few world-class hackers could ever pick it up. That was my gamble. After we were rescued, I checked the transmitter. Sure enough, someone had broken in." He removed his watch and handed it to Tilda. Right in front of her, he tapped a few commands. A soft blue light glowed from the back of the watch. Tilda narrowed her eyes. So that was it. Back at Hotel Morloss, she had detected two faint signals. One belonged to Dominic-she knew because it was the survival trick she had taught him. The frequency matched.

The other signal had always been a mystery to Tilda. She had wondered again and again who had sent it. She never expected it to be the man standing right in front of her-Tobias. He had planned this as a backup. No wonder he had been able to charm Kyla and secretly drain so much of the Jensons' money in the past. For someone branded an illegitimate son, Tobias was frighteningly capable. "You wiped the traces clean," Tobias said proudly. "Even I couldn't tell for sure who broke into my transmitter. But I studied this field long enough to piece together a few clues. And I knew Mr.

Oliveson would never just drop the matter. "So not long ago, I tested him. From the way he spoke, I could tell he already knew who saved us back then. Once the target was confirmed, it was easy to lock down the suspect. I didn't expect it to be you. But since you're Dane's junior, pulling such an operation off must've been simple for you." His words tumbled out faster and faster. Tobias was getting excited. He looked like a detective lost in his deduction.

Revealing the truth gave him a thrill, as if he'd solved the greatest mystery of his life. Tilda cut him off with a cool look. "Since you like analyzing my life so much, maybe I should analyze yours." Her gaze sharpened. "Tobias, you've been spending a lot of time with Kyla lately, haven't you?" The question landed like a thunderclap. Tobias met Tilda's deep, still eyes. For a split second, his heart skipped a beat. Under that gaze, he felt naked, as if his very soul had nowhere to hide. It was like she could see right through him. "I do know Ms.

Kyla," Tobias said quickly, "but not as close as you think." The moment the words left his mouth, Tobias realized he had made a huge mistake by approaching Tilda. If she really had the power to save the hostages at Hotel Morloss, something even the police in Endralsia couldn't do. The act alone hinted her hacking skills had to be far beyond what normal people could imagine. And here he was, trying to provoke a hacker of her capability, trying to hide things from her. It was super tough to manage that. He didn't believe his fake identities or hidden tracks could ever fool someone like Tilda.

A woman who could see through his secrets at any moment was terrifying. One small move from her could cost him his life. "I just remembered something urgent," Tobias stammered. "Sorry, Tilda, I have to go." Sweat drenched his back, soaking through his clothes. Even with the night wind cutting against him, it couldn't chase away the fear crawling up from his chest. Tilda gave a soft laugh. "Why so nervous? I'm not going to eat you. Go on. I need to head back and get some sleep.

Let's talk next time-when we're both in better spirits, Tobias." "I'll look forward to it," he muttered. He almost ran as he left. Tobias had come in confident, thinking he was in control. Yet after only a few words, Tilda had ripped apart his armor and left him defenseless. When he finally walked far enough away, he glanced back. The spot where Tilda had stood was already empty. A chill ran through him. What a terrifying woman. In this life, he could afford to offend anyone-but never Tilda. Just then, his phone buzzed. One look at the message darkened his eyes.

He slipped the phone back into his pocket, hailed a cab, and headed for the hotel. Inside, Malcom had just parted ways with Ashby after dragging Russell back to his suite. He returned to his room, unaware of what had just taken place outside.

Chapter 604 A Calculated Proposal A Malcom stood in his pajamas, holding a glass of red wine, staring out through the floor-to-ceiling windows on the 56th floor. The city below glowed like it would never

sleep, the clouds drifting low beneath his feet. His eyes flickered with thought. A knock sounded at the door. "Open the door," Malcom commanded. The voice-activated lock clicked, and the door swung open. Tobias stepped inside. His eyes carried a mix of emotions he tried to hide when he saw Malcom. Respectfully, he spoke, "Uncle Malcom." The two faces looked strikingly alike.

Anyone would assume they were blood relatives. Tobias was in fact Malcom's illegitimate son, born of a shadowed past. Not born from either wife, but from a shadowed past. Tobias was a son most powerful families would rather ignore unless he had exceptional talent. And now, standing in front of his father, Tobias was only allowed to call him "Uncle Malcom." Their relationship was distant, like a subordinate speaking to his superior. For a brief moment, Tobias thought of Tilda. Maybe they were the same. Both trapped by a cursed family, unable to ever break free, except in death.

"Do you know Russell's daughter-Tilda?" Malcom suddenly asked. Tobias lowered his eyes. "Not really. We've only met a few times. Why, Uncle Malcom?" "What if I adopted her? What do you think?" "What?" Tobias never expected Malcom to call him over just to talk about this. He stared at Malcom in surprise. "Why look at me like that?" Malcom's voice was calm, almost amused. "You saw it yourself. Tilda clashed with her family in front of everyone. She humiliated Russell mercilessly. I doubt she'll 1/3
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ever forgive them." : A He swirled the wine in his glass and smirked. "If I adopted her. Haha, well, it's all benefits for Crown Group and our family. No risk at all. And with Tilda, I might even build a link to Professor Kerrigan-the one behind the lithography machine. That connection could be the fastest way to catch up with DY Group, don't you think?" Tobias stayed silent. He was surprised that Malcom had caught on to an opening. This snake was sharper than he imagined. He would have to be twice as careful.

Malcom's instincts were far sharper than Tobias had ever imagined. may have After a pause, Tobias said, "If you're confident, Uncle Malcom, then give it a try. Tilda everything now-success, fame, money-but what she lacks most is family. She won't admit it, but deep down, the Jensons' betrayal cut her badly." Malcom chuckled. "That's what I thought. There's no real loss in trying. And let's be honest- my family aren't exactly small players either, are we?" Malcom had full confidence about his company. After all, he was one of the most powerful figures in Piross.

His position was just like the Bells in Slosa-untouchable, respected, and admired. Countless people wanted to get close to the Lowells but never had the chance. For Tilda, becoming his adopted daughter could mean endless opportunities. If she could bring enough value to the table. The Lowells could give

her far more than she had ever imagined. Tobias, hearing this, couldn't help but think back to the way Tilda had looked at him just moments earlier. That cold, piercing gaze-it cut deeper than anything he had ever faced.

He had always believed there was nothing left in this world that could frighten him. Tobias had survived crisis after crisis, gritting his teeth through every storm. The truth was, Tobias knew surviving this long wasn't just luck. He had strength and skill to back it up. But when it came to Tilda, he crumbled. Fear rose from deep inside him, the kind he couldn't control. His fear ran deeper when he learned that Tilda had the power to dig into his private life without effort.

Tobias's instincts screamed something even stronger. Tilda was someone he must never provoke. That sixth sense had saved him more times than he could count. And every time he remembered her eyes, Tobias grew more certain: Malcom's plan was doomed to fail. It might even bring disaster straight to him. But then again, why not? Let someone else take the risk. Using another man's blade to cut down the people he wanted gone didn't sound so bad. Let Malcom be the one to go up against the demoness herself. Just then, Malcom stepped closer and patted Tobias on the shoulder. "Lately, you've done well.

The few hundred million I gave you has already grown into more than a billion. "And that land we took from Jenson Group-thanks to your plan, it turned into another billion in profit. The future looks bright. "Tobias, I believe in you. When you finally prove yourself, our family will accept you. You'll be acknowledged by the family and become one of our own." Tobias lowered his head, putting on a humble, grateful face. "I will, Uncle Malcom." Time flew by, Seven days passed in the blink of an eye.

Chapter 605 Fame That Burns Too Bright After that one speech, Tilda's life completely changed. Overnight, she became a household name across the world. People dug up her past too-her hidden identity as X, the champion of international student art competitions, and even her racing champion titles. The internet went wild, calling her a genius from another world. To them, she didn't even seem human. With her breathtaking beauty, she could dominate the entertainment world as soon as she decided to debut. Her cold, untouchable aura had drawn in countless admirers.

Men and women alike became her admirers. Fan groups sprang up on Twitter, and their memberships quickly exceeded five million, with numbers still rising. But Tilda never opened a Twitter account, nor did she want to step into show business. After a simple statement posted through the news, she disbanded the fan club. She wanted her life private, not under the world's spotlight. As the top hacker on the dark web, Tilda's ability to protect her information was unmatched. She knew how to stay invisible. The government gave her protection too.

Ordinary people had no chance of digging into her personal life-only the surface details ever showed. Still, a few reckless ones tried. They used underground methods to steal her data and planned to sell it

on the black market overseas. Tilda struck back immediately. She pressed charges for unauthorized access to private data, sent out cease and desist letters, and had the Comet Squad take over the follow-up. Faced with jail time and the risk of their private details being exposed online, those people panicked.

They begged for forgiveness, then vanished without a trace. After word spread, no one in the underground circles dared to chase after Tilda again. Her identity as Queen stayed hidden, known only to a select few. Life carried on as usual. Nothing really changed. Well... almost nothing. Her best friend, Una, had practically vanished. Every time Tilda asked her out for drinks or a night of dancing at the bar, Una always told her she was busy. Busy with what? Tilda had no clue. It left her feeling abandoned, like a loner.

: 5 Weren't they supposed to stick together no matter what? Wasn't Una the one who swore, even if the whole world turns against you, she'll be by her side, fighting with her? Sob ! Sob ! Sob ! Now look at her - such a fickle woman ! One day, Tilda got a message from Sheldon. "Tilda, Crown Group's Mr. Lowell asked me to pass along a request. He'd like to meet you. "Tilda, Crown Group's Mr. Lowell reached out through me. He'd like to meet you." "Mr. Lowell? " Tilda instantly pictured Malcom's cunning face. This man is Tobias's father . Interesting . She replied, "Okay.

I'll give you an address and time, Mr. Oliveson. Please let Mr. Lowell know. "But tell me why are you helping him?" - For someone like Sheldon, a man of such stature, Malcom was practically a junior. He should be flattering Sheldon, not using him as a messenger. Why would Sheldon possibly agree to pass on Malcom's words to Tilda? "When I founded the Hope School Foundation years ago," Sheldon said, "Mr. Lowell had his company give their full support. They helped me a great deal. After all, I was based overseas in Endralsia and couldn't always fly back to handle matters in Cetherland.

During that time, Mr. Lowell took care of everything for me. "In the end, it was a win-win situation. Crown Group gained a fine reputation through the foundation, but I don't like owing anyone favors." "I understand. Please pass my message on to Mr. Lowell," Tilda replied. After hanging up, she tapped her phone against her chin, eyes narrowing in thought. Malcom and Russell were on fairly good terms, though she was sure they still kept their guard up around each other.

A Compared to the rest, though, their relationship was closer. They had no reason to go against each other. That night, Malcom had witnessed her humiliating Russell in public. If he thought he could smooth things over between them now, he was delusional. Malcom thinks too highly of himself. He's nothing but a fool. "Let's see what this man really wants from me," Tilda muttered. "After all, his son ... he does interest me." Meanwhile, Tobias also happened to be in Slosa. He received word that Tilda had agreed to meet Malcom.

A cold smile tugged at his lips. After a moment's thought, he pulled out his phone and sent a message to Kyla. The next day, at the Twilight Tea Room, Malcom arrived at the Orchid Room Tilda had reserved. The meeting was set for noon. Tilda hadn't shown yet. Malcom didn't mind. He sat quietly, sipping tea, his expression calm even as 30 minutes ticked by. Then the door opened. Kyla walked in wearing a mask and a wide-brimmed hat. The outfit she wore was the haute couture of Chanel from last year's spring collection.

Every detail screamed luxury, The only reason she wasn't dressed in this year's collection was simple. The Jensons no longer cared enough to send her any.

Chapter 606 The Eavesdropper In the past, when Kyla bought a limited-edition outfit, she would wear it for just one season. Once the new designs came out, the old clothes were shoved into storage and forgotten. Now she had to pull out last year's clothes and wear them again. All of this-every bit of it-was Tilda's fault. Kyla took a long breath, forcing herself to push the rage down. The reason she stepped out today was simple. First, ever since the accident that ruined her face, she had hardly left the house. It was time to get some fresh air.

She couldn't stay at home forever. Life had to go on. She wasn't about to give up living over one terrible moment. The second reason was Tobias. He had suggested she check out the Twilight Tea Room. Tobias told her that their Honey Orchid Tea was amazing, the place was beautiful, and the music and fountains made it perfect for relaxing. He hoped she'd enjoy it and tell him what she thought afterward. Kyla would never refuse a recommendation from Mr. Perfect, especially when it came with a personal request. After spending so many days with him, she was convinced he had fallen in love with her.

Why else would he care so much about her moods, whether she ate well, slept enough, or kept healthy? He treated her like the most attentive boyfriend, thoughtful in every way. Before the accident, Kyla had absolute confidence in her looks, her figure, and her charm. Tobias didn't even know she had changed. Of course he still saw her the way he always had. That made perfect sense to her. The thought secretly delighted her. Because of Tobias's constant attention, all the troubles she'd been through no longer felt as unbearable. That had to be the magic of love.

With that, Kyla stepped into the Twilight Tea Room. Tobias had made a reservation for her. The host led her into Room Magnolia, which sat directly beside Orchid. She had no idea what was about to happen. Not long after she entered, a BMW M4 pulled up outside. The door opened, and a pair of long, pale legs appeared. Tilda had arrived. She wore a black leather vest with a mini skirt and high heels that showed off her stunning figure.

Her hair fell freely around her shoulders; the healthy glow caught the light like scattered stars. She slipped off her sunglasses and tucked them into her pocket. Tilda walked in with one hand in her pocket, carrying that effortless cool-girl vibe. The manager knew today was important. Dane's junior was meeting with the chairman of Crown Group. To make sure nothing went wrong, he personally welcomed Tilda and guided her into the Orchid Room. When she stepped inside, Malcom finally showed a change in expression. "Sorry, something came up and delayed me," Tilda said smoothly.

"I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long, Mr. Lowell?" "Not at all," Malcom replied with a polite smile. "After all, I was the one who asked to see you. No matter how long I had to wait, it would be worth it. Please, have a seat." Malcom spoke with a calm, even tone. A faint, knowing smile curved on his lips, making it impossible to guess what he was really thinking. Tilda wasn't the type who could read someone's heart just from their eyes, words, or shifting expressions. Especially not when she was facing Malcom-this snake everyone knew too well. Meanwhile, inside Room Magnolia.

Kyla finally pulled off her mask and let her face breathe. She chatted with Tobias while snapping photos, sharing her impressions of the place. "No wonder you recommended this spot, Tobias. The atmosphere's great, and this tea is delicious. " Just as she hit send, a faint sound drifted through the wall. Kyla was shocked. It was so soft; anyone else would have ignored it. But Kyla knew that voice. She could never mistake it. : It was Tilda. The very one who had wrecked her life. Unbelievable! What rotten luck!

Of all days, the one time she went out to relax and talk with her Mr. Perfect, she ran into that bitch. Her good mood vanished in an instant. Kyla rolled her eyes as an idea struck. She tested the wall a few times and discovered the soundproofing wasn't great. Using the old trick of sound travel, Kyla pressed her teacup against the partition wall and tilted her head. The thin panel carried muffled words straight to her ear. If she could grab some dirt on Tilda, she'd strike gold. This was a perfect opportunity. Kyla almost wanted to applaud herself for her cleverness.

And sure enough, the voices from the next room came through loud and clear. Orchid Room. Tilda gave a faint smile and sat down in a chair. Malcom rose and began making tea for her. "Miss Tilda," he said smoothly, "brewing tea is an art in itself. Since you chose such a quiet tea room, I assume you must be a fan of it?" "No," Tilda answered casually. "I just opened an app, saw this place had a good rating for the atmosphere, and it was close by. Saves me the trouble of traveling far."

Chapter 607 A Risky Bet : Malcom's hand froze mid-pour, the teapot suspended in the air. Tilda's words made it clear. She didn't take this meeting seriously at all. To her, it was nothing more than a casual chat over tea. Malcom forced a smile. "Ms. Tilda, you really have a sense of humor." "Mr. Lowell," Tilda said calmly, "smart people don't waste time talking in circles. Just tell me, why did you ask me here? We only

met briefly that night, so I can't imagine what reason you have to seek me out now. Please clear up my confusion." She went straight to the point.

Malcom looked into her eyes-dark, steady, unreadable. For a brief second, a chill slipped into his chest. Feeling that kind of pressure from a twenty-year-old girl was a first in his life. No wonder. She was well-deserved to be Dane's junior. Russell, you fool. You cast aside a priceless jewel. Behind the wall, Kyla's heart jolted. Mr. Lowell? Is that Tobias ? No. This isn't Tobias's voice. The voice was deep, magnetic, and rich with experience. It carried a calm confidence that only came from years of success. He sounded like Russell when he spoke.

It carried the calm, steady strength shaped by years of experience, Just from his voice, Kyla could picture the man: successful, respected, handsome, Her heart pounded in excitement. This was the charm of a mature, wealthy man. Unbelievable ! Has Tilda snatched up another good man? Is she meeting him in secret now ? This bitch already had Dane, Jude, Alfie, and Maurice-isn't that enough? She never stopped chasing after more attention, always seducing men. This slut had trouble. She simply couldn't stop herself from fucking with these men.

Kyla's jealousy cut so deep it almost hurt to breathe. Her eyes burned as if she might cry blood. Then a thought struck her. What if Tilda really was sneaking around with another man? What if Kyla could catch it on camera? A few scandalous photos at the right moment. She could mail them to Jude and the others. They would see the truth-Tilda wasn't the woman. they thought she was, just a lowly slut out to seduce more men. Maybe then Jude and the others wouldn't care so much about Tilda. Maybe they'd start noticing Kyla instead.

And her family? They wouldn't treat her so coldly anymore. Once they saw Tilda's true colors, they'd be disappointed in her all over again. Everything could go back to the start. Back to when Kyla was the real daughter, when all eyes were on her. Back to those happy, shining days she had lost. The thought of that possibility made Kyla restless. She couldn't just stay in this room-there was no way to get any pictures here. Kyla decided she had to sneak outside and try to snap some shots in secret. She knew it was dangerous. One wrong move and she'd be done for.

But if she didn't do it, she'd spend her whole life crushed under Tilda's heel with no way out. "This is my best chance," she whispered to herself. "Kyla, you have to be brave. If you pull this off, the future will finally look bright." Her mind kept racing. "Tilda isn't the kind of enemy you can take down without taking risks." Over and over, she gave herself little pep talks to keep her courage up. Just then, voices

drifted again from Room Orchid. "Well, since you're so straightforward, Ms. Tilda, I'll get right to the point," Malcom said. He poured her a cup of tea and spoke seriously.

"I want to form a partnership with something that benefits us both." you- Tilda pressed her lips together. "I'm listening." "I want to adopt you," Malcom said firmly. "As Crown Group's heiress, you would have access to our resources. In return we would ask you to lend your identity to strengthen our position." The heiress of Crown Group ?! Kyla's mind reeled. She suddenly realized who that man was. It's Malcom! The chairman of Crown Group ! He wasn't just anyone. He was more powerful than Russell.

Crown Group was so strong under his lead that it had once gone head-to-head with DY Group itself. Kyla remembered seeing him at parties when she was younger. She knew Malcom and Russell were close. Unbelievable . Unfair ! Why does this slut , of all people , get the chance to be the heiress of Crown Group ? That identity was far more privileged than being the heiress of the Jenson Group. If Tilda accepted Malcom's offer, she would shine brighter than ever, making Kyla look like nothing more than a clown. And once the Jensons found out?

Kyla didn't need to guess-they'd never be able to let Tilda go. A knock came at the door. "Excuse me, ma'am, we're here to serve your dessert." But Kyla didn't hear a thing. She was too caught up in eavesdropping and drowning in her jealousy.

Chapter 608 The Offer Rejected The server called out again, then pushed the door open when no answer came. She froze in place at the sight. A Kyla was standing in such a strange pose that she couldn't help but blurt out, "Ma'am okay?" Are you Kyla instantly snapped back to her senses. Flustered, she quickly set down her cup, grabbed the mask from the table, and pulled it over her face. Her eyes flashed with anger as she hissed, "What's wrong with you? Don't you know you're supposed to knock and wait until I say you can come in?"

Is this how this place services your guests?" Worried that Tilda might hear through the thin walls and discover she was in the next room, Kyla forced her voice low. She ground the words out between clenched teeth. The server looked helpless. "Ma'am, I-I did knock and call out. You didn't respond, and the door wasn't locked. I thought it was fine to come in." "Enough! Just drop the stuff and get out!" Kyla snapped. She doesn't want to miss out on her chance to eavesdrop on Tilda next door. Room Orchid. "Adopted daughter?" Tilda repeated, her eyes glinting cold.

She thought the proposal sounded ridiculous. "Mr. Lowell, you were there the night I humiliated Russell. You saw it yourself. You should know I don't care about family bonds. Do you really think just because I cut ties with the Jensons and am on my own now, I'd be desperate for affection and willing to be your daughter?" Her voice carried the weight of something dangerous, like a predator hiding in the dark.

Hmph ! This man had underestimated me! Malcom picked up the rejection in her tone, but he tried to smooth things over. "Tilda, don't be upset. It was a suggestion.

I truly admire you, and so does my family. When I told them about you, they felt it was a shame you weren't under our wing. If my words offended you, just laugh it off as a bad joke." "Don't you dare bring this up again!" Tilda cut him off sharply. "You rotten capitalists always treat family like a bargaining chip. In your eyes, blood means nothing. The only thing that matters is who can bring you profit!" She rose to her feet, her eyes cold. "I pity the children growing up in your world.

They'll never know what real love feels like, only transactions dressed up as family. Mr. Lowell, maybe you should listen to your words. Anyone with a brain wouldn't believe the lies you're spinning." With that, Tilda stood and headed for the door. Malcom hadn't expected Tilda to explode like that. He quickly stepped forward to apologize. "I'm sorry, Miss Tilda. If my words offended you, please forgive me! I swear I didn't mean it." "Didn't mean it?" Tilda's eyes narrowed. "You think I can't tell? If I were just some ordinary orphan, would the chairman of Crown Group even care about me?

You'd crush me like an ant without a second thought. At the end of the day, you're no different from Russell. The moment you see value in me, you turn me into a bargaining chip to brag about." She knew that if she accepted Malcom's offer, it would be a sharp blow against the Jensons. But Tilda wasn't crazy enough to risk her future just for revenge. Getting tied to the Lowells-people just as rotten as the Jensons-could never bring her happiness. "Mr. Lowell," she said coldly, "you should try living the life of an ordinary family.

You may have money, status, and power, but you've lost far more than you realize. You'll never understand how precious simple warmth at home really is." Her words cut like ice. A dismissal that couldn't be argued with. Tilda brushed past him and strode out, leaving Malcom pale and shaken, Out in the hall, Kyla had been eavesdropping. She only caught the last few words. She couldn't make out what they were saying anymore. They weren't talking close to the wall on her side. "What happened? What did I miss?" She gently bites her lip. Dammit ! This is driving me crazy!

All because of that useless server barging in earlier. Once this is over , I swear I'll file a complaint and get her fired . Suddenly- Bang! That loud noise nearly scared Kyla out of her skin. Inside the room, Malcom had grabbed a teacup and hurled it at the floor, smashing it into pieces. "Arghhh!" The sharp crash echoed through the hall. The noise brought the manager running. Knowing it was Malcom who occupied that room, the manager rushed in nervously. "Mr. Lowell, wh-what's wrong?

Is there something you're unhappy with?" Malcom drew in a long breath, fighting the urge to unleash his anger on the man. "Nothing. Get lost!" "Yes, Mr. Lowell!" The manager was terrified when he found Malcom lose his temper. He didn't dare stay a second longer and rushed out of the room. Malcom's fists trembled. His face twisted with rage. "Screw you, Tilda. No one has ever dared to lecture me. You're the first."

Chapter 609 Masks Torn Away : "Fine, Tilda! You're tough! I'll give you that, but I'll remember this humiliation!" Malcom was so mad that his teeth nearly cracked. Ever since Crown Group had risen to success, people treated him with nothing but flattery and respect. No one dared give him the cold shoulder. But Tilda had just done the unthinkable-making him wait half an hour like some clown, tossing him aside as if their meeting didn't matter. Moreover, every word that came from her was dripping with sarcasm, contempt, and indifference. That alone was enough to be unforgivable.

And then she had the nerve to call him a rotten capitalist? How amusing . Very amusing . Boiling with rage, Malcom stormed out of the room. The look on his face wasn't that of a man leaving after having tea. It was someone ready to kill. At the doorway, Kyla hurriedly ran over and peeked out. She caught sight of Malcom's back as he left. H-he just walked away? What about Tilda ? Did Tilda agree to his proposal to become his adopted daughter ? That was what Kyla most desperately wanted to know. Yet, she hadn't heard a word of the important part.

Not wasting another second, she dashed into the Room Orchid. She saw it was empty. Tilda clenched her fists, then ran out again. Kyla caught sight of Malcom, but she knew better than to mess with a man like him. No-her focus was still on Tilda. Her eyes swept the area like radar until they locked onto her target. Tilda was sitting behind the wheel of a BMW M4, about to drive off. Kyla sprinted forward and threw herself in front of the car. "Tilda!" The shrill voice made Tilda's brow crease ever so slightly. She glanced out the window.

There was Kyla, sweating under her mask, plastered against the glass like some kind of ghost. Tilda's lips twitched. "Kyla, are you a ghost? Why do you pop up everywhere I go?" That line should've been mine ! Kyla was furious, but she forced herself to stay in character. "Tilda, I never expected to run into you here. What a coincidence." Her voice was soft, trembling with false worry. "I thought I saw you arguing with someone just now. Wasn't that Mr. Lowell-Dad's friend? What happened?"

I'm so worried about you." Even with half her face covered, Kyla's eyes alone carried the perfect look of pity and concern. Tilda nearly rolled her eyes straight to the back of her head. It would be a loss if this woman didn't use her talent and launch a career in show business. With just her eyes, she could put on

an award-winning act. Born to be a drama queen. "Want to know, Kyla? Then why don't you take off that mask and show me what you really look like?" Tilda's voice cut sharp. "I heard you were disfigured. That's pathetic. I'm curious-how much have you recovered?

Enough to make someone who used to worship beauty step outside the house with a face mask?" Tilda's remarks rendered Kyla speechless. She hadn't expected Tilda to be this vile. Every word stabbed at her raw wound. Behind the mask, her lips twitched uncontrollably. Her eyes turned red, brimming with tears. "Tilda, I-I've already suffered so much. Please, I know you hate me, I know you don't like me, but stop hurting me." Kyla's voice broke. "Since my face was ruined, everyone at home keeps their distance.

If even you treat me like this, I don't think I can go on living." Tilda let out a cold laugh. "Then why don't you just go end it? Why drag yourself here to play the poor victim? That act doesn't work on your family anymore. And you think it'll work on me?" Damn you, Tilda! Kyla clenched her jaw. She made up her mind, ripped off the mask, and revealed a face marked by surgery. Tilda lowered her sunglasses a fraction, staring straight at her. "Well, Kyla. This look suits you perfectly.

Any little twitch makes you look like a monster. And you can't pull off that fake sweet act anymore. Now you're just ordinary. Tsk, tsk, tsk. Honestly, this fits you better." Kyla's voice trembled. "Tilda, I know you hate me. I stole 18 years of love from Mom and Dad that should've been yours. I've paid for it-my face is ruined. You, of all people, should understand what that means to a woman." She swallowed hard. "I came to stop you because I was worried. I saw how upset you were with Mr. Lowell earlier. Showing you my face it's proof I mean no harm." ... Tilda pondered this.

She tilted her head, lips curling into a mocking smile. "Fine. At least I don't live like you-lying every second, hiding behind masks, acting your way through life. So here's the truth. Mr. Lowell asked me to be his adopted daughter." Just as she feared! Kyla was deeply shocked. She forced her face into an expression of shock and worry. "Tilda ... what? H-how is that even possible? Mr. Lowell is Dad's friend. He knows everything that happened between you and our family. Why would he ever want to adopt you? Tilda, what do you think? Could it be-

Chapter 610 Kyla's Decision : "Alright. I already told you what I just discussed with Mr. Lowell. As for the answer? I didn't promise you any of that. Goodbye." Tilda slipped on her sunglasses and started the car engine. "What?! Tilda-" Kyla's heart jumped. The answer she wanted most hadn't even been answered yet. How could I let Tilda drive away ? The things Tilda mentioned earlier-Kyla already knew them. But the answer, the truth she desperately needed, was still hanging in the air. Tilda pressed down on the gas.

The car shot forward, leaving Kyla in the dust with no chance to stop her. Kyla quickly hatched another plan. She hit, spun around, let out a loud scream, and threw herself onto the ground, pretending to be The fall left a dark bruise spreading across her thigh. But Tilda never slowed down her car. The roar of the engine faded fast until the car disappeared completely from Kyla's sight. "Tilda..." Kyla spat her name through clenched teeth, her voice filled with hatred. Just then, an older security guard doing his rounds spotted her on the ground. He rushed over.

"Miss, are you alright?" What he saw next made him freeze. Kyla's twisted face, her skin marked with healing scars, looked so raw and frightening under the streetlights that he staggered back. "Arghh! Ghost!" That security guard screamed in terror. He stumbled away as fast as he could, nearly tripping over his feet. "You idiot! You're the ghost!" Kyla shouted after him, furious. She yanked her mask back on, grabbed her aching leg, and limped off into the night.

What she didn't know was that someone had been watching from the shadows the whole time. Tobias leaned against the wall, the corner of his mouth curving into a cold smile. It looked like Tilda had managed to put Malcom in his place, just as Tobias had hoped. After all, only a handful of people in this world could make Malcom choke on defeat. Tobias wasn't one of them-at least not yet. For now, he still had to survive under Malcom's thumb. Well , Malcom , you finally ran into someone you can't push around . Watching you lose your temper like that -it was pure satisfaction .

And more importantly, it cleared the way for Tobias's second plan. Kyla was on her way home to the Jenson Villa. Once she calmed down, doubt crept in. Should I tell everyone what happened today ? Or pretend I know nothing ? Before this, Kyla would've definitely spoken up. Of course, she would give them a twisted version of the story, adding fuel to the fire, and using her bruises to play the victim. It always worked to turn the Jensons further against Tilda. But things were different now. These days, the Jensons were focused on Tilda. Guilt made them softer toward her.

Kyla felt them growing cold to her. If she didn't play this carefully, it could all backfire. What should I do? Her thoughts spun in panic until the sharp ring of her phone cut through. It was Tobias. Only then did Kyla remember-she had ignored his messages earlier while eavesdropping on Tilda and Malcom. She glanced at her screen. Dozens of unread texts. She answered right away. "Hello? Tobias, it's me. Sorry, something happened earlier.

I didn't see your messages." "I'm glad you're okay, Kyla," Tobias replied, his voice full of worry. "You didn't answer for so long. Do you know how worried I was? Are you hurt? What happened?" Hearing his caring words, the panic in Kyla's heart slowly melted into warmth. Yes, she had lost so much lately. But

at least she still had Tobias-the man who loved her deeply. Blinded by that love, Kyla spilled everything that had happened. Of course, she kept up her pure and innocent image. She didn't tell him she had been eavesdropping, only that she happened to overhear things by accident.

She couldn't let Tobias think she was a two-faced schemer. "Wow! That's quite something," Tobias muttered, pretending he hadn't known. He fell silent for a moment. "Tobias, tell me ... What should I do? Should I tell my family about this?" Kyla was torn. If she spoke, it was risky. If she stayed quiet, it was also risky. It was driving her nuts. "Kyla, Tobias said gently, "I think you should tell them. If you keep this to yourself and something happens, they might start doubting you. They might think you're hiding something" Kyla bit her lip.

"But..." She was still unsure, "Of course, the choice is yours," Tobias said softly. "I'm only giving you advice. No matter what happens, I don't want you to get hurt. You know how I feel about you. Just follow your heart, and I'll support you no matter what." Tobias's retreat and then advance convinced Kyla. "Thank you, Tobias. I know what I need to do now." Tobias's steady words steadied Kyla. Her gaze hardened into resolve.

Since she couldn't decide on her own, she would simply trust the man she loved most and leave the rest in fate's hands.