

The Protector Chapter 11

In actual fact, Zoey had been awake for a long time now, but she didn't make a sound.

She looked at Levi wonderingly.

He was right.

The Lopez family really wants me back.

But why?

Zoey's heart leaped into her throat when she heard Levi requesting Harry to come pick her up in person.

Harry had always been high and mighty. Never in a million years would he accept Levi's proposal. Levi was just provoking him by having him personally invite her back.

"Fine. Forget it if Harry refuses to come! Bye!"

Levi hung up.

"Are you crazy?" Zoey nudged him. "How could you ask Grandpa to come and get me? I say we go back on our own and forget about everything. There seems to be something very serious going on based on their tone."

"Don't. Just wait. Three, two, one..."

Sure enough, Zoey's phone rang as soon as Levi finished counting down.

"Dad has agreed to go pick you guys up," Henry's helpless voice sounded. "Now give me your address!"

"University City's Borrmann Hotel!"

"And your room number?"

"You don't need to know that. We'll go down on our own when Harry arrives," Levi said.

This was to prevent Harry from not coming.

"Huh? Is Grandpa really coming?"

Having been living in Harry's shadows since she was a child, Zoey was frightened down to the soles of her shoes.

“What are you nervous for? He’s here to invite you back,” Levi said with a smile on his face.

Zoey was so terrified that she had forgotten Levi’s predictions from before—Harry will invite you back in person.

About half an hour later, a Mercedes Benz came to a halt in front of the hotel with Harry appearing in their line of sight.

“Come on. Let’s go down.”

Zoey was still trembling as she grabbed Levi’s arm, not letting go.

When Harry saw Zoey, he subconsciously yelled, “Zoey, you... Oh, get in the car! Grandpa has something important to discuss with you!”

Zoey was dumbfounded to see the pleasant smile on Harry’s face.

When did Grandpa ever smile at me?

In the car, Harry started, “I’ll get down to business, okay, Zoey? Haven’t you been working on West City Ecological Park development project before this? Well, now’s your chance. Mr. Jennings from the Ministry of Construction asked for you to submit the proposal and elaborate the plans to them.”

“You must do your best! I believe you can do this!”

And so, a few minutes before eight, a confused Zoey and Levi arrived at the office building responsible for this project.

“Ms. Lopez, you’re here,” Orlando greeted, shooting up to his feet and went up to welcome them. “Would Ms. Lopez and this gentleman like tea or coffee?”

“Tea for me and coffee for her,” Levi said curtly as he sat down graciously.

Zoey, however, was completely dumbstruck.

He’s Mr. Jennings! The person in charge of management for the Ministry of Construction!

Even Joseph Garrison has to bow down to him when he sees him.

Why is he so courteous to me?

“Did you hear that? Now go and make the arrangements,” Orlando said to his secretary.

“Ms. Lopez, please, have a seat,” Orlando said respectfully to Zoey.

“Come on. Sit,” Levi said, seeing that she was transfixed, he pulled Zoey to sit beside him.

Soon, the coffee and tea were served.

Zoey lifted her cup with both hands, still shaking while Levi crossed his legs, flaunting the bearing of a tyrant.

Orlando stood before them like a server, reverent and respectful.

He didn't even dare to glimpse at Levi.

He's that legendary man!

Taking in a deep breath, Zoey stood up and handed over the proposal. "M-Mr. Jennings, I'm Zoey Lopez. Nice to meet you. This is my proposal! Please have a look!"

Orlando chuckled. "Your ability speaks for itself, Ms. Lopez. We can leave the proposal aside. You have our full confidence."

Cough...

When Orlando's eyes met Levi's terrifying ones, he quickly took over the proposal and studied it with a few other project leaders, with Zoey explaining at the side.

About half an hour later, Orlando got up and said with a smile, "We were right about you, Ms. Lopez! It's perfect! The plan is ninety-five out of a hundred! After revising some details from our end, it's perfect now."

"Does that mean we got the job?" Levi asked.

Orlando nodded. "We received thirty-three bidding documents from the preliminary selection, and so far Ms. Lopez has the highest score! We have inspected Imperial Meadows Limited and Lopez Group's capabilities before this, and you guys are basically qualified to take on this project! Now we just have to go with the flow and sign the contract three days later."

Zoey knew it was all cut and dried!

Levi got up, pulled Zoey away and said passingly, "Thank you..."

"What? No, no. This is what we should do!"

Hearing Levi's words of gratitude, Orlando was so scared that he almost got down on his knees.

Even after coming outside, Zoey still felt as if she was dreaming.

"Zoey, how was it?" Harry and a dozen others gathered around her.

"Grandpa, we passed the preliminary selection and my score was the highest, ninety-five! Mr. Jennings asked me to drop by three days later to sign the contract. I... We will be responsible for the development of this project. But they are still going through the process, so we have to keep it a secret!"

Zoey originally wanted to say that she would work on this project on her own, but seeing Harry, she

instinctively changed her tone.

“Very good! I’m so proud of you, Zoey! You’re the Lopez family’s hero!”

Harry was excited, and so were the others.

After all, it was a major project of one billion.

For as long as Zoey could remember, Harry had only complimented her twice.

The first time was when she married Levi, an upstart six years ago.

And the compliment this time felt surreal to her.

“Zoey, are you sure we’re getting this project and all we have to do is sign the contract three days later?” Harry asked again, still feeling a little unsettled.

Zoey nodded. “Yes, Grandpa. I’m sure!”

“Okay, that’s a load off my mind!”

Harry heaved a sigh of relief.

Thereafter, Levi, Zoey, and the Lopez family dispersed and returned home, respectively.

“That was so unexpected, Dad!” Henry chortled. “We really got the job! I’ve asked my friend to ask Mr. Jennings’ secretary about it, and it’s true!”

Harry’s face was glowing. “Yes, it’s a great joy for the Lopez family.”

“Grandpa,” Samuel said, after hesitating for a long time. “Are you really going to give Zoey full authority to handle this project? I’m afraid that with Levi’s wild ambition, this project will have nothing to do with us when the time comes.”

Harry laughed. “Oh, Samuel, I’ve thought about that! Didn’t you hear me just now? Now that the project is ours and all we need is to sign the contract three days later, Zoey has no more use-value for us. Besides, can her small Imperial Meadows Limited develop a project of one billion?”

“So, you guys will go and sign the contract three days later! I only gave Zoey a nominal position. I don’t intend on having her take part in the development of this project.”

Samuel laughed sinisterly. “That’s a sick move, Grandpa!”

The Protector Chapter 12

Back home, Aaron and Caitlyn looked at Levi incredulously. “You were right. Dad really came to invite Zoey in person.”

“Dad, it seems you’ve lost this bet,” Levi said, smiling.

“But how could this project fall into our hands? There are so many stronger companies out there. Why would they choose us?” Aaron pondered out loud.

“Yeah, why did they insist on having me sign the contract?” Zoey blinked, waiting for Levi’s explanation.

She couldn’t help but think that Levi was behind all this. It was as if every word he said would come true.

“Don’t you guys remember what Azure Dragon said at the banquet that night?” Levi asked.

“I get it now!” Aaron said immediately. “It was all Azure Dragon’s intentions! A big shot sure does honor his promises! I mean, who else do you guys think could order Mr. Jennings around?”

Zoey smiled bashfully. “I thought Azure Dragon was just making a casual remark.”

“The words of a big shot must be fulfilled!” Levi beamed.

“Gosh, my family is about to go through the roof once we take over this project! Cook your best dish, Caitlyn. It’s a celebration,” Aaron said.

Perhaps it was because of their good mood, Levi looked much more pleasing to the couple’s eyes.

“Don’t worry about finding a job, Levi,” Zoey said. “Just stay with me.”

“Sure. I’ll make sure to assist you well.”

Three days later, Levi and Zoey suited up, ready to go over and sign the contract.

“Levi, I think I should give Grandpa a heads-up. They’re very concerned about this after all,” Zoey said.

“I don’t think that’s necessary. This is none of their business, anyway,” Levi said.

“Still, I think I should give them a call.”

Zoey dialed Harry’s number.

“What’s the matter, Zoey?”

“Grandpa, I’m just giving you a heads-up that we’re going to sign the contract now.”

“Oh, that, your sister and Samuel are already on their way there, so you don’t have to go. Don’t worry. They’re going to sign on your behalf! Just leave this matter alone and go to work at Imperial Meadows in peace,” Harry said, hanging up soon after.

Zoey was so startled that she almost dropped her phone.

“What is it?”

“Grandpa said that this matter has nothing to do with me and someone has already gone to sign the contract on my behalf,” Zoey sniveled.

Levi’s blood boiled upon hearing that.

The Lopez family is just as shameless as the Garrison family!

“Don’t worry. No one can take away what belongs to you,” Levi said in a low voice.

He turned around and drafted a message, sending it directly to the leader of the Ministry of Construction.

Meanwhile, a dozen of entrepreneurs had gathered at the bidding site, waiting for the announcements of the result.

Ultimately, it was Carlos Wayland, the deputy leader of the Ministry of Construction, who made the announcement.

“I hereby announce that the West City Ecological Park project will be developed by Imperial Meadows Limited of Lopez Group!”

The audience burst into an uproar at Carlos’ announcement.

No one could understand the logic behind Imperial Meadows’ victory.

Samuel, Melanie, and the others who went as representatives of Imperial Meadows rose to their feet and accepted the congratulations from the people around them.

“May we have the representative of Imperial Meadows Limited come to the backstage to sign the contract?”

The person who was ultimately responsible for the signing of the contract was still Orlando Jennings.

The deputy team leader only came to announce the result.

“Hmm? Where’s Ms. Zoey?”

Orlando looked up at the few of them with disgust in his eyes.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you again, Mr. Jennings,” Samuel greeted. “Zoey currently has too much on her plate, so she has sent us to sign the contract on her behalf instead.”

“Besides, the result of the bidding has been made and we’re set on taking on the project. What’s the difference between who should sign and who shouldn’t, Mr. Jennings?” Melanie chipped in.

“Oh, there’s a huge difference, my friend,” Orlando snickered. “Let me ask you a question, for example, if you’re here on behalf of Ms. Zoey to sign the contract, will you be signing her name or someone else’s name?”

“I…” Melanie was stumped.

Surely, they weren’t intending to sign Zoey’s name, but Harry’s.

Wouldn’t Zoey become the sole possessor of the project if they signed her name?

“By the way, Mr. Jennings,” Shaun added. “You may not be aware of this, although the Lopez Group has many subsidiaries, the president is Mr. Harry Lopez, who has absolute control of all companies. This time the contract will be signed under Mr. Harry’s name, and Zoey has also agreed to this.”

Orlando shook his head. “That won’t do! We’ve appointed Zoey Lopez to oversee this project. I don’t know who’s this Harry Lopez that you speak of. But since you people have said so, I’ll give Ms. Zoey a call. If she agrees, I’ll approve it on my side as well.”

The trio became flustered at once, knowing that Zoey had been kept in the dark and never agreed to this.

“Ms. Zoey, may I ask if you consented for someone else to sign the contract on your behalf and with Mr. Harry’s name at that?” Orlando asked straightforwardly once the call connected.

Upon hearing that, it dawned on Zoey that the project would have nothing to do with her from now on if she gave her consent, and if she didn’t, she supposed her grandfather would hate her for life. It was a decision she had to make between interests and her grandfather.

“I… I a…”

Zoey hesitated for a long time and was about to agree when Levi seized her phone.

“No! They didn’t even call! What’s going on? Worse comes to worst, we’ll just give up on this project. Just give it to whoever wants it,” Levi said.

Hanging up, Orlando gave Samuel and his companions a death stare, his face gloomy.

Realizing the graveness of this matter, they lowered their heads and dared not look at Orlando.

“I’d made myself very clear, didn’t I? This project has to be accomplished by Ms. Zoey from beginning to the end! No one else can replace her! If you insist on this, I can only replace someone else! There are so many people who can handle this project.”

“Listen, if you want this project, get Ms. Zoey to come and sign the contract now! Otherwise, we’ll take it as you’ve forfeited!”

Hearing Orlando’s words, the three of them ran like the wind.

“What? It has to be Zoey? I thought anyone could sign the contract!”

Harry was flabbergasted when he learned about it.

“Dad, what should we do now?” Henry asked. “Do we really have to let Zoey take over this project?”

“There’s no other way. But even after Zoey takes over, most of the profits will still be in our hands. Zoey is still obedient to me; we’ll just give them a little something when the time comes. After all, her small Imperial Meadows Limited can’t afford to work on this project by themselves. They’ll need our help,” Harry said.

“But Grandpa, how are we going to get Zoey to sign the contract? This has happened for the second time now,” someone asked.

“Hmph, I’ll go pick her up myself,” Harry sneered. “I won’t take no for an answer. Give her a call first!”

After the call went through, it was Levi who answered. “Huh? You guys don’t have to come. We’re busy.”

At that, Levi hung up directly.

The Protector Chapter 13

Everyone in the Lopez family was baffled.

Zoey would have agreed, but with Levi around her, they weren’t so sure about that.

“What do we do now? Who knows if Zoey disappeared with Levi again. If we don’t find them by afternoon, Mr. Jennings will consider us to have voluntarily given up on the project,” Samuel said anxiously.

“Hmph, she’s threatening me! Even going as far as to give me terms!” Harry retorted, then made a call. “What’s the meaning of this, Levi? You don’t want this project anymore?”

“That’s right, it has nothing to do with me, anyway! Weren’t you guys trying to lay Zoey off? We might as well leave this project alone,” Levi retaliated.

“Levi, Grandpa has no other meaning,” Harry toned down. “Come and sign the contract with Zoey. In the future, Zoey will be in charge of this development project. That’s what Mr. Jennings wants too.”

“Well, I’m not so sure about that. I’m afraid that Zoey would be laid off at any time.”

“Name your conditions, Levi. How can I get Zoey to sign the contract?”

Harry was infuriated, but he couldn’t help it.

“Conditions? Number one, Imperial Meadows Limited will fully develop this project, and no other companies of Lopez Group shall be directly involved. Number two, Imperial Meadows Limited shall be separated from Lopez Group and become an independent company. But Zoey has agreed to hand over some parts of the development project to you. I mean, we should all make money together, right? As long as you agree to the conditions mentioned, I’ll bring Zoey over to sign the contract right away!”

Harry blew a gasket after Levi finished speaking.

Levi is getting Zoey to cut all ties with the Lopez family.

In other words, the Lopez family will have nothing to do with this project, and it depends on Zoey if we want to get a piece of the pie.

But at this critical juncture, we should sign the contract first.

I must have this project.

Harry drew in a deep breath. “Okay, I agree!”

“Verbal promises are not enough. We should go through the formalities immediately,” Levi said.

“You...”

How I wish I can skin him alive! He’s not giving me a chance to think.

“Fine. I’ll send someone to get it done!”

...

In just three hours, Harry had completed all the formalities.

Imperial Meadows Limited was completely separated from Lopez Group and became Zoey’s company.

“Okay, we’ll go and sign the contract now!”

Levi brought Zoey to the bidding site and successfully signed the contract with Orlando.

So I’m in charge of a major project of one billion?

From bankruptcy to taking on such a huge project...

Zoey didn’t dare to think too much about it.

With the contract signed, Harry and the others were overwhelmed with mixed feelings.

“Isn’t Levi being too ruthless? He’s burning all our bridges,” Henry said.

“The nerve of him! Can Zoey even handle this project alone? Can she even sign this contract if it wasn’t for the Lopez family?”

“Yeah, she’s monopolizing everything. I refuse to accept this!”

Shaun, Melanie and the others were upset.

“Don’t worry, you guys,” Fabian chuckled. “We can still get this project! Even if Imperial Meadows Limited has become independent, Dad still owns thirty percent of their shares. Besides, developing a one billion project is not something anyone can pull off. Every bit of human and financial resources is indispensable. It’s impossible for a small company like Imperial Meadows to handle this alone.”

“Yeah, Imperial Meadows Limited is almost bankrupt now, and they still owe Grandpa money,” Shaun said. “Where will they get the funds to work on this project?”

“Well, there’s no need to consider Levi; he’s just a piece of trash, and Zoey has no connections of sorts in North Hampton. They’ll have to beg us to invest in them when the time comes.”

“Hahaha…”

Henry smirked. “Dad, I think we should impose a little pressure on them and get back the 2.8 million first!”

Harry laughed heartily. “You’re the worst, Henry. But that should do it! Shaun, go over in a moment and ask for our money!”

…

Aaron and Caitlyn had been informed.

They were so excited that they specially prepared a meal and waited for Levi and Zoey to come back.

However, Zoey looked glum despite signing a big contract.

“Mom, Dad, we’ve completely offended Grandpa this time! I bet they’re going to hate us for life.”

“Just ignore them! Our status has been the lowest in the family all this while and your Grandpa doesn’t even care about us! This time, we must make a name for ourselves and prove it to him!” Aaron said.

“Yes, I must work hard!”

“Levi,” Aaron said. “Although you contributed nothing to this incident, our family seems to be doing well after you come back. Come, let’s have a drink!”

Just as Aaron brought out a bottle of fine wine, Shaun arrived.

“Grandpa sent me here, Uncle Aaron! This is an IOU. Please return the 2.8 million that you owe us.”

Shaun’s statement hit Aaron and his family like a thunderbolt.

“Grandpa said that he’s going to make an appointment with a foreign specialist to seek medical advice,

and he has no money now, so he can only ask you guys to pay him back,” Shaun added. “It’s a little urgent, so you must settle your debt in three days. Otherwise, Grandpa’s health will only deteriorate!”

Shaun left after he gave them the distressing news.

“What’s wrong?” Levi asked.

Zoey bit the bottom of her lips and said, “We’re doomed. There’s no money, not at the company nor at home! The company has just started operating again, and we don’t even have half a million in our account. As for the family, we almost couldn’t afford to pay my brother’s tuition fee.”

Zoey had a younger brother who was studying abroad and was still relying on the family for financial support.

“I knew it,” Aaron sighed. “Dad wouldn’t have let us off that easily. I knew he would drive us into a corner until we pay him back.”

Zoey’s face was drained of all color and animation. “It’s not just about paying them back, we also need funds for the development project. We don’t even have the initial funds to start the project. Investment is needed, but it’s difficult. The project may be shelved when the time comes and the other party might even terminate the contract!”

“You don’t say! We’ve been warned by the bank and we can’t even borrow a single cent now.”

Aaron was on the verge of tears.

After all that talking, it all boiled down to this—money!

They could have solved everything if they had the money, but a man without a penny was no man at all.

Besides, it wasn’t just a matter of a penny now, but 2.8 million!

“I’ve seen this coming,” Aaron continued. “Your Grandpa is tricking us into giving them this project by forcing us to borrow money from them and have them invest in us.”

“If there’s no other way, let’s just give it up and give it to Grandpa,” Zoey said helplessly. “Now that Imperial Meadows Limited is in our hands, let’s take it one step at a time!”

“Why should you give it up?” Levi spoke. “2.8 million is not a problem! Just leave it to me!”

The Protector Chapter 14

Everyone looked at Levi in bewilderment. “What? Leave it to you? You just got out of prison. Do you have the money?”

“I... I’ll come up with something.”

Levi had a card with him, but he didn't know how much was inside.

“Don't force yourself and do anything that is out of line! We'll just let it go if things don't work out,” Zoey said, looking at Levi worryingly, afraid he would do something extreme.

“Don't worry. I'll take care of it,” Levi replied, holding her hands.

The next day, Levi went out alone.

As soon as he arrived at the intersection, a Maybach came to a halt at the side.

Azure Dragon got down from the car and ushered Levi to get in.

“Any updates on the Garrison family? Is anyone coming to apologize?” Levi asked.

Azure Dragon shook his head. “Not one of them are repenting.”

A cold glint flashed across Levi's eyes. “It's time to show them a little something.”

Arriving at the bank, Levi withdrew five million cash in one go.

The staff at the bank looked at him, appalled, and was especially horrified to see the man in military uniform standing next to him.

That's the King of War!

Hans, the general manager of North Hampton Bank's head office, came to serve in person.

In the end, he and Hailey, a tall woman with a pleasant-looking face, helped to carry the briefcases of cash from the VIP passageway.

Hailey couldn't help but steal a second glance at Levi, who seemed familiar to her.

“His identity is so intimidating, even our chief almost ran over here.”

After sending them off, Hans drew in a deep breath.

“Who was that, Mr. Lowery?” Hailey asked curiously. “Is the one next to him in a military uniform someone famous?”

“That person is a bona fide King of War! Having the King of War as his follower... Think about it,” Hans said lowly.

“Damn!” Hailey gasped in shock.

“So don't mention about today and keep everything confidential.”

Hailey nodded. “Understood!”

“No matter who asks, just say it’s a loan, and forge a receipt or something.”

“Yes, sir!”

...

At night, when Levi returned home carrying five briefcases full of cash, Zoey and her parents were dumbfounded.

They counted them three times, and lo and behold, there were indeed five million.

“W-Where did you get so much money? Please don’t tell me it’s from the loan sharks.”

Zoey freaked out.

“What loan sharks! Don’t worry about it! Anyhow, I got the money, so use this to solve your urgent problem first,” Levi said.

“Yes, let’s solve this first,” Aaron concurred.

“But 2.8 million is enough! Why did you get five million?” Zoey asked in confusion.

“You’ll see when the time comes.”

...

Upon hearing the news that they were going to pay up, Henry came to collect the money himself.

“Damn, Aaron. That was fast,” Henry jeered. “You sure there’s 2.8 million? It must be hard on you. I’d thought you couldn’t afford to pay us back.”

Aaron glared at him. “That is none of your concern. Anyway, I’ve put together 2.8 million, and that settles our debt!”

“Who said it’s 2.8 million?” sneered Henry, changing the subject. “We need to take the many days of interest into account. Here’s the IOU. Including the interest, it should be about five million plus, but we’ll just charge you five million.”

“What? Five million? How is it five million? Even the loan sharks are not as demanding as you!”

Aaron and Zoey were thunderstruck.

“Dad lent it to us unconditionally back then,” Caitlyn said. “How can there be interest?”

“My dear Caitlyn, you are so naïve! Dad borrowed the money to help you, but we’re all entrepreneurs; let’s not bring familial affection into this matter. What can I do if you people didn’t read the IOU carefully?”

Zoey and Aaron took the IOU and calculated them, and indeed there was interest.

They finally knew why Levi had brought five million.

However, it was obvious that the IOU had been amended!

How cruel!

I can't believe Grandpa is doing this to me!

Am I just an outsider to him?

Zoey teared up.

Aaron too was crestfallen.

Is he even my biological father?

How could he use such dirty tricks on us?

"What? You won't admit it? Okay, fine! I'll sue you then!" Henry sniggered.

"Why wouldn't we?! Five million, right? Here, take it!"

Levi put five briefcases of cash in front of Henry.

After checking them, Henry and a few others were gobsmacked.

Its real money! And there's exactly five million!

Levi recorded the scene and tore up the IOU.

"Where did you get five million?"

Henry was on the verge of doubting reality.

"That's none of your business. Get lost!"

Levi chased them out.

At the Lopez residence, everyone was staring at the five million on the table with eyes and mouth wide agape.

"How did they get this money? Did they go all out to collect five million just to prevent us from touching that ten billion project?"

Fabian arrived just then.

"Dad, I've found out that Levi borrowed these five million! He seems to have some property that can

be used as a collateral,” he said.

“Are you sure?” Harry asked seriously.

“I’m sure! The person in charge of this transaction was Ms. Hailey Stinson, the senior director of North Hampton Bank’s head office. I somehow managed to contact her, and she admitted herself it was a person named Levi Garrison who borrowed it. I’d spent a hundred thousand to get a copy of the invoice!”

After receiving the invoice, Harry confirmed it was true.

“Haha, borrowed? Let see how he’s going to pay it back.”

“The biggest question is, how are they going to work on this project? They would still have to come to us in the end!”

...

Zoey felt it was too surreal to solve such a big issue.

She was touched when she learned from the Lopez family that it was Levi who borrowed the money to settle their debts.

“We should bring in investments and start the project as soon as possible!”

“But that’s another big problem there. We’ll need lots of funds to develop this project.”

According to Zoey’s budget, a start-up capital of thirty million would be required and at least seventy million would be needed subsequently.

Aaron gave a low moan of despair. It was too difficult a task to accomplish.

“Do you have any idea?” asked Zoey, looking at Levi.

Levi smiled. “We’ll just look for big companies then. We’ll try door to door. This project is a gold mine! I’m sure many companies will be interested.”

Zoey nodded. “I know that, but I’m afraid they’ll ask for a lot in return once they agree. There will be many overlord terms!”

“There’s no harm in trying, right? You’ll never know if there’s someone who would invest with no strings attached if you don’t try,” Levi beamed.

“How is that possible?”

Zoey was deeply suspicious.

If truth be told, it was a matter of Levi's words regarding the investments.

"Oh yeah, don't you worry," said Zoey suddenly. "I'll pay back the five million; hopefully we can reel in some investments as soon as possible."

"There's no need for that. Why are we even discussing this topic?"

Levi smiled.

"But you also have to pay back the money, no? How are you going to do that? You haven't got any money."

At that, Levi nodded.

"Once we earn enough money from this project, I'm planning to get a house. It's inappropriate of us to stay with Mom and Dad," Zoey added.

"Do you still remember our marital home?" asked Levi, remembering suddenly.

"I do. You designed that villa yourself, and it was perfect! What a waste," Zoey sighed.

"I'm going to take back that villa," Levi said.

"That villa belongs to the Garrison family now, Levi. Don't do anything reckless. You can't fight them," Zoey persuaded.

"Don't worry."

Levi was determined to take back what the Garrison family took from him.

The next day, Zoey was busy looking for investment while Levi stayed home. He wanted to let Zoey run into a stone wall before making the necessary arrangements.

Aaron and Caitlyn looked at Levi who was smoking on the couch, their brows furrowed and they looked sullen.

"Put out the cigarette and come with me! I have something to tell you!" said Aaron coldly, glaring at Levi in revulsion.

Levi stubbed out his cigarette and followed suit.

"Dad, just fire away!"

Aaron's brows knitted tightly together into a deep frown. "Are you not aware of our situation now?"

"I think we're good." Levi smiled. "We got the project and as long as we reel in some investments, Zoey and our future will be bright as day."

“Yeah, and it’s because Zoey has a promising future, you’re at risk.”

“What?” Levi’s expression changed from delight to puzzlement.

“You should know that once this project is accomplished, Zoey’s net worth will increase by a few billion. She’ll gain a foothold in North Hampton in the future. Do you think you’ll still be worthy of her then?” Aaron said solemnly. “I’m not questioning your abilities, but you have to understand that you just came out of prison and things are different from six years ago. It won’t be easy to start a business again. The gap between you and Zoey will only grow.”

“That’s right,” Caitlyn agreed. “You’re lazing around and doing nothing all day! You don’t even have a decent job. Do you think you’re worthy of my daughter?”

“Exactly! Just imagine how humiliating will it be for Zoey if you’re still her husband by then.”

“We will find a proper time to discuss this with Zoey regarding your divorce! This is for the best, for both you and Zoey! Just prepare yourself,” Aaron sighed.

Levi chuckled. “Mom, Dad, is this what they mean by burning the bridges?”

“What do you mean, burning the bridges? Do you really think that it was you who secured this project? You only butt in a little. It’s because of Zoey’s ability that we got this project, okay?”

“Yeah. In simpler words, this matter has nothing to do with you!”

Levi could only give a half-suppressed laugh in this regard.

“Rest assured, Mom and Dad. I’ll make Zoey the happiest woman in the world!” Levi proclaimed.

Caitlyn glared at him. “And how do you intend to do that? You don’t even have a house! I could have believed when you had that big villa before, but now? You’re just a pauper with zilch! Not to mention you’re staying at my house! Aren’t you ashamed?”

“Just leave for a few days. I don’t want to see you for a while.”

“Yeah, Zoey has been busy recently, and she’s easily distracted when you’re around,” Aaron added on.

Having been kicked out of the house, Levi wasn’t angry.

This was what he owed Zoey.

Downstairs, a Rolls-Royce Phantom pulled over.

Azure Dragon got out of the car and greeted, “God of War, after you!”

Levi got into the car.

“Aaron, come, quick!” Caitlyn, who was watching through the window, suddenly shouted. “I think Levi just got into a luxury car.”

Aaron hurried over and saw a Rolls-Royce driving past his house.

“That’s a Rolls-Royce Phantom! The car owner must be a big shot! How could’ve Levi gotten into this kind of car?” Aaron said quickly.

“I just saw a figure from the back who looked a little like him. I guess I worried too much,” said Caitlyn with relief. “If he can afford to drive a Rolls-Royce, would we even be staying in this hundred square meters dumpster?”

Aaron snorted. “You’re still hoping on this gigolo?”

“Yes. I hope he starves to death.”

In the car, Azure Dragon asked, “Where to now, Sir?”

“To the Royal Villa!”

I must take back my villa!

“Sir, I’ve found out that the person living in your villa right now is Matthew Green! He’s the current general manager of Skyline Media under Garrison International!”

“He’s currently Ashton’s trusted aide! After betraying you, he immediately devoted himself to Ashton.”

Ashton was Levi’s Uncle, Jacob’s son. He had a reputation for being a man about town. And it was he who said that he wanted to marry Zoey at the banquet that day.

He had been coveting Zoey for a long time now.

Levi’s gaze went cold at the mention of Matthew.

He was once his trusted aide, his henchmen.

It was Levi who promoted him. If it hadn’t been for him, he would have committed fraud and gone to prison.

Levi could still remember that after his downfall, Matthew had become the Garrison family’s lackey who immediately contacted the media reporters to smear his name.

He had even forged a good deal of evidences of Levi’s ‘supposed’ crime and successfully sent him to prison.

Thinking about how Matthew once looked respectful before him, Levi found it ridiculous.

Very soon, he arrived at the Royal Villa.

Standing before the villa that he personally designed, rage bubbled just below the surface of his mind.

The nerve of him to stay at my marital home!

Die!

Upon noticing the two of them, the villa housekeeper came out and asked, “What are you people doing here and who are you looking for?”

Levi grinned. “I’m here to look at my house!”

“What? Your house? Are you sick in the head?”

“I’m telling you, the owner of this villa is Matthew Green, Mr. Green of Skyline Media!” the housekeeper sneered.

Levi tugged his lips into a wider grin. “Then did Matthew tell you who was the previous owner of the villa?”

“You think I care? I only know Mr. Green!”

Right at that moment, a Porsche Panamera pulled in.

The housekeeper immediately went to open the door.

Matthew, dressed in a suit, came down with a secretary supporting him at the side. The secretary, who was dressed in business attire, was hot. Her long legs wrapped in black stockings were especially attractive.

Seeing that they came back together, it was obvious they were up to some shenanigans.

“Who are these people?” Matthew asked, displeasure was written all over his face as he looked at the two people standing in front of the villa.

Levi slowly turned around. In the split second when their eyes met, Matthew got the shock of his life.

It just so happened that he had gone on a business trip during the Garrison family’s celebration banquet, so he didn’t meet Levi until today.

Meeting Levi right now, he could feel nothing but blind terror.

It differed from the rest of the Garrison family. Matthew had a psychological fear and awe for Levi.

Especially since he had done something despicable toward him; he couldn’t look Levi in the eye.

“Life seems good, eh, Mr. Green?” Levi asked with a smile on his face.

“W-W-What are you doing here?” Matthew asked, trembling.

“I’m here to have a look at my house!”

Levi sized up the villa.

“This villa has nothing to do with you now. So leave!” Matthew said, bracing himself and looking at Levi.

Levi smirked. “And if I don’t?”

Matthew’s secretary, Queena, glowered at Levi. “Who do you think you are? How dare you behave like a barbarian? Leave now! Or I’ll inform Mr. Ashton, and you’ll be sorry for this!”

At the mention of Ashton, Matthew suddenly got a newfound courage and he retort, “Levi Garrison, taking into consideration that you were my boss, I will not make things difficult for you. So please leave now!”

“Who do you think you are to make things difficult for me?” Levi disparaged.

“Why don’t you take a look at yourself in the mirror, Levi? You’re a nobody now! How dare you talk to Mr. Green like that?” Queena sneered. “Get down on your knees and crawl your way out!”

The Protector Chapter 16

“Slap them!”

Levi ordered softly.

Azure Dragon stepped up and gave a tight slap across Queena’s face.

His slap came with such shearing force that it knocked her off her feet and sent her flying almost eight meters away.

It ripped her flesh apart with deep cuts across her skin, and a few blood-stained teeth popped out from her mouth. Her hysterical screams filled the air, which sounded as if she was being butchered.

Matthew was stunned.

“D-Don’t you even dare lay a finger on me,” he quivered, “or I’ll call the security...”

Slap!

The slap from Azure Dragon came thick and fast, which made him see stars. Blood spurted out like a fountain from Matthew’s mouth. It almost knocked him out.

“P-Please don’t kill me...please don’t kill me...” Matthew shriveled and pleaded.

Gone was his usual shrewd and bossy demeanor when he was the big daddy of the corporate world. He was now just as powerless and utterly hopeless like a trapped animal!

“I want you to move out of the villa by eight o’clock tomorrow morning.” Levi ordered, “Or you’ll live

to regret for not heeding my call.”

“This is my villa and I shan’t let anyone stain it and pollute the place.” Levi said with a cold spark in his eyes.

The villa had been the den of Matthew and his guys for the past six years. Levi dreaded to think what kind of filth they had brought with them to the villa – which was absolutely intolerable for someone like him, who had an obsession for cleanliness.

“What?” Matthew could not believe his ears.

What makes you think I’ll give you back the villa, you little rotten punk? You’re just someone who’s fresh out from prison!

Levi took off shortly after he had issued the final notice to Matthew.

Meanwhile, Matthew did not return home but headed straight for Ashton, taking his secretary along with him.

Oblivious to what had happened at the villa, Ashton was having a swinging good time at the club, tucking himself between a blonde on his left and a brunette on his right.

“Something terrible has happened, Mr. Garrison!” Matthew shouted as he dashed into the club, “It’s a disaster!”

He recounted what happened at the villa to Ashton, making it sound worse than it actually was.

“There’s nobody but you who can help me now, Mr. Garrison.” Matthew said piteously, “Look at how badly we’ve been beaten up by Levi.”

Indeed, the swollen faces and puffy eyes of Matthew and Queena resembled more like the faces of pigs than human, which threw Ashton into an instant rage.

“Levi, you son of a b****!” Aston gritted his teeth, “Who do you think you are? How dare you beat up my subordinate?”

He threw a bottle of beer to the floor, smashing it.

“What a useless piece of crap you are!” he glared at Matthew scornfully, “How could you let him trample all over you like this?”

“Mr. Garrison, he’s got someone with him who’s a real tough guy.” Matthew bemoaned, “He’d even warned he would kill the both of us if we don’t handover the villa tomorrow.”

“What’s the big deal? It’s just Levi.” Ashton huffed, “He’s just a nobody to me. Let’s see if he’s got the guts to harm me when I bring my men to the villa tomorrow.”

“It’d be safer to bring more men with you, Mr. Garrison.” Matthew advised, “I’m afraid you’d be outnumbered by Levi’s men at the villa tomorrow.”

“Oh yeah? How about I bring Trey along with me then?” Ashton’s eyes gleamed with bloodlust as he spoke.

“That would be a slam dunk!” Matthew said with renewed confidence, “Everybody knows what Trey is capable of. It’ll be just a piece of cake to him!”

Trey was the notorious gang leader in North Hampton with several hundred men under him, known for their brutality and savageness.

He had stained his hands with the blood of so many enemies that he had virtually lost count of the exact number.

Trey had a good relationship with Ashton over the years, rendering his services whenever Ashton needed help in one of his malls.

All Trey had to do was to send over his men armed with axes and knives. That would be enough to scare the hell out of anyone and make them pissed in their pants.

Meanwhile, Zoey had just returned home after a long day to find that Levi was not in the house.

“Mum, Dad, where’s Levi?”

“I have no idea,” Aaron shrugged without even looking up, “perhaps he has gone to look for a job?”

“Let me give him a call.”

Zoey was about to make the call when Aaron stopped her. “You should focus on your career instead of wasting your time on Levi, Zoey.” he advised, “He would only be a distraction to you if he hangs around in the house all the time.”

“What do you mean by that, Dad?” Zoey stared at her father incredulously.

“That’s true, Zoey.” Caitlyn chimed in, “Can’t you see you’re poised for something huge? You’re in an entirely different league now, and you mustn’t let him smear your name.”

“Dad, mum, how could you say such a thing?” Zoey chided her parents for being ungrateful, “You know I wouldn’t even stand a chance if it wasn’t for Levi who had given me the invitation card to the banquet. It was Levi who helped me bag the project!”

“I know he played a role in this project.” Aaron agreed, “But it was your ability and credentials that eventually won you the contract. It has nothing to do with him.”

“Levi could give me advise. I have no qualms about his ability.”

“So you’re just going to let him cling on to you like a parasite that gives you advise?” Aaron snorted, “There’s no way we’d let him stick around with you, unless he elevates his status to be on par with you.”

“Yes, that’s absolutely true!” Caitlyn nodded, “We’ll never agree to it if he stays in his current condition.”

“Argh! You guys are simply unreasonable!” Zoey shook her head irritably, “Forget about it, I’ll go look for him myself.”

Zoey knew that Levi must have been chased out of the house by her parents. She called up Levi and beckoned him to come back.

Soon Levi was back in the house and he followed Zoey to her room.

“Don’t be mad with my parents, Levi. All you need is a little time to work things out, which I’m sure would help you make your comeback in no time.” she offered her encouragement.

“What about your end?” Levi asked, “Any luck on roping in the investments you needed?”

“It’s frustrating.” Zoey sighed, “Everybody has their own demands. It’s impossible to please everyone!”

“Don’t worry. Let me come along with you.” Levi consoled her, “I’m sure we could make it happen.”

“By the way, can you come with me tomorrow, Zoey?” asked Levi, “I’d like to take you to a place.”

“Sure.”

The next morning, Levi brought Zoey to the villa. The time was exactly eight o’clock.

“I’ll be getting our villa back today, Zoey.” Levi said with conviction, “This is supposed to be our house after we’re married. There’s no way I’ll let someone else stay in our place!”

“Huh?” Zoey was at a loss.

“What nerve you have to show up today?” Matthew grinned with malice when he saw Levi and Zoey.

“Have you already moved out of the place?” Levi asked coldly, “I’m taking back my villa today.”

“Who the hell are you to take away the villa from Ashton Garrison? You must be out of your mind!” A high pitch voice pierced through the air like the shrills of a high-stung cat.

It was the voice of Ashton Garrison, who had brought with him a large group of men.

Immediately, they surrounded Levi and Zoey.

A middle-aged man donned in a classic suit stood beside Ashton. He was cradling in his hands two shining walnuts that gave out a clacking sound. The thick, long scar across his face was impossible to overlook. It exuded an aura of evil.

The man was Trey, the big daddy of North Hampton’s underground society.

Everybody was well aware of his merciless killings and the hundreds of men that worked under him. They would avoid him like the plague.

Trey had brought more than a hundred men with him to the villa today. This was what Matthew had wanted to see.

The ghastly look on the faces of these thugs gave Zoey the chills as she nestled herself closer to Levi.

Ashton was all too delighted to see Zoey at the scene. He leered at her with a lewd smile on his face.

He had set his eyes on her for some time now, and today would be just the perfect opportunity to pin her down. He planned to sleep with her once they had beaten up Levi and made him a cripple.

“What brings you here, Levi?” asked Ashton, in his usual smugness.

“I’m here to take back my villa.” Levi replied with a stony look.

“Your villa?” he screeched, “What makes you think this villa belongs to you, idiot? This is my villa and I’ve given it to Matthew.”

“I’ll never forget how you’ve put me to shame the last time when you pissed off my VIP.” Ashton stepped up and gave Levi a shove, “It’s payback time now, kiddo! I’m going to break all your limbs before I take her away and make her mine!”

“Let’s go now, Levi” Zoey pleaded, “We’re hardly their match.”

“Where do you think you’re going? It’s all too late now!” Ashton shrieked, “Do you think you’d get away from Trey and his men?”

Clack! Clack! Clack!

More than a hundred of Trey’s men zeroed in on Levi and Zoey, waving their steel rods and various other lethal weapons as they tried to intimidate the both of them.

Levi was unfazed. He dialed a number and belted out his instructions, “Azure Dragon, send over a regiment from the North Hampton’s camp now. I want everyone to be armed in full battle gear!” Levi mumbled in his deep voice.

Gripped with fear, Zoey was hardly paying attention to what Levi had just said over the phone, while the rest of the crowd failed to make out what Levi had uttered with his low, deep voice.

“So it looks like you’re getting somebody to help you? And you’re even asking them to put on some kind of gear?” Ashton sneered sarcastically, “Fine, I can’t wait to see what kind of help you’ve enlisted to bail you out of this.”

Trey smirked as he looked at Levi with an amused curiosity.

Zoey on the other hand was shivering all over in horror, she felt as if she was standing on the edge of an abyss.

After about ten minutes, the security guards at the gates of the Royal Villas turned wide-eyed and mouth agape when they saw loads of war trucks, one after another, stormed into the premise. Each truck was full of soldiers.

A few of the trucks were even loaded with heavy artillery.

“Do you think there are more than a thousand soldiers in those trucks?” asked one guard.

“Holy cow! This is an entire regiment!”

The Protector Chapter 17

Levi’s villa unit belonged to lot A-88.

Unbeknown to Ashton and his men, the troops had formed a squarish formation surrounding the lots of A87, A88, A89 to B88.

Each of them stood on full alert, armed with fully loaded firearms that are ready to fire the first strike.

All they need was a command.

Outside the villa.

“So what’s the situation now?” Ashton was still grinning his grotesque grin as he taunted Levi, “Where are your men? Are they all having cold feet now?”

Levi signaled with a click of his fingers.

The next moment.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The ground seemed to move under their feet as a synchronous marching of troops roared across the silent air.

“What’s going on here? What’s all that sound?”

Trey’s men looked around frantically, bug-eyed and tense as dogs.

The marching was getting denser and louder, the rhythm was so uniform and disciplined that it almost turned into a deafening boom.

“What the hell is that?”

Trey’s men froze when they saw the approaching troops coming at them from four corners.

Matthew, Trey and Ashton were shell-shocked and rooted to the ground like statues. Everybody was

muted with horror.

Never had they seen such a formation in front of their eyes. The soldiers aligned themselves in uniform rows, each armed with the deadliest weapons fit for a war!

Thud! Thud! Thud! The thumping continued.

Soon the troops stood in position, forming a human barricade as they occupied the four corners and fenced everybody in.

Everyone lifted their guns and aimed their barrels straight at Ashton and his group of men.

Crack!

Racks of heavy machine guns were set up with their positions adjusted accordingly to point straight towards Aston and his men.

Not to mention those massive weapons that include mortar and artilleries...

Clang! Clang!

The clanging sound of rods and other metal weapons resonated in the air. Trey's men had dropped their weapons and raised both hands in fear.

A few of them had even pissed inside their pants.

A strong, pungent smell of ammonia suffused the air.

Trey himself had dropped the walnuts and lifted his hands as well.

For decades, he had ruled the underground triads with his brutality and violent means. He had seen it all and had never been fazed by any opponent.

He could take down dozens of men in one go, breaking their ribs and even slashing their throats. These were all cakewalk to him.

Yet the scene in front of him belonged to a totally different league. War that was confined to the television was now playing out right in front of his eyes!

Thump!

Matthew dropped to the floor on his knees and pleaded, "Please let me go. I have nothing to do with this!"

Ashton stared at the guns pointed at him. Those soulless clanks of metal stared back at him like a plethora of ghostly eyes. It made his face turned ashen and his legs wobbled with fear.

"N-Neither do I. I have done nothing as well."

The unexpected twist of events had absolutely stupefied Ashton. He had never imagined Levi could summon an entire regiment with just one phone call...

Zoey was blown away as well by the dramatic turn of events. She needed a while to recompose herself before she turned her gaze to Levi.

She felt like she saw a magical halo glowing above Levi.

How is it possible that he summoned such a huge regiment with just a phone call?

A man stepped forward among the troops.

He had two gold stripes and three stars embroidered on the shoulder of his military uniform.

They could tell he was an army official.

“Steven Shaw, Colonel of North Hampton’s First Metallic Regiment, reporting for duty, Sir! We are here to protect the God of War, Sir!”

Steven Shaw cast an ambiguous glance at Levi as he raised his left hand to present a military salute.

Another man in military uniform stepped up from the opposing direction. He had a large gold star embroidered on his shoulder and a group of soldiers at his heels.

He had the colossal air of a warrior, he was none other than the King of War.

“The First Metallic Regiment had completely surrounded the compound, General Azure Dragon! Awaiting further orders, Sir!”

Steven Shaw ran up to Azure Dragon and present another military salute.

Azure Dragon took off his gloves and asked in his impersonal voice, “Do you know who owns this villa?”

“C-Could it be that it belongs to the G-God of War?” replied Ashton with a tremulous voice, while his body jerked uncontrollably as if he was having a seizure.

“Bingo.” Azure Dragon gave a set smile, “All the villas in this area belong to him.”

Ashton sucked in a deep breath. He was so gripped with fear that he almost passed out.

Trey was palpitating in horror when he heard the name. It drained his face of all color and immobilized his body, it was as if his soul had departed and left him with a hollow shell.

He would have never dared to step foot in here if he had known this area belonged to the God of War. It was as good as stepping into the gates of hell.

“Why did you bring your men here?” Azure Dragon glared at Ashton and Trey, “Are you trying to take down the God of War?” he snarled.

The Protector Chapter 18

Thump!

Thump!

...

Ashton, Trey, and Matthew, along with over a hundred of their men went down on their knees.

“It was all a misunderstanding. Just a misunderstanding...”

It was quite a spectacular scene to see over a hundred men going down on their knees, bending over their bodies and slamming their heads on the floor as they beg for forgiveness.

Zoey was so choked with fear that she almost fainted.

The turn of events could not be more theatrical than this.

How could so many thugs all turn into a bunch of crying babies all at once?

“Zoey, why don’t you get inside the villa and let them do their stuff?” Levi suggested.

The petrified Zoey gladly took his advice and dashed for the villa.

“Sir, please, I really have nothing to do with this. I’m just somebody who was hired by Mr. Garrison to act under his instructions...”

“Yeah, we’ve got nothing to do with this!”

...

Trey and his men were desperate to draw a line from Ashton by shifting all the blame to him.

Ashton was so contorted with fear that he spat out a mouthful of blood.

“Let them go!”

What came as a shock to Ashton, Trey and Matthew was when they saw it was Levi who gave the order.

His order prompted Azure Dragon to wave them away, “Get your ass out of here and don’t let me see you again!”

It was clear as day that it was not Azure Dragon, but Levi, who was calling the shots. Could it be that Levi...

It all pointed out to one scary truth they all dreaded to know.

Trey and his men tumbled and stumbled as they fled the scene at their quickest pace, fearing they could end up with a bullet in their heads.

“Please let me go, L-Levi, I’m innocent as well. It was Ashton who...” Matthew tried to dissociate himself from Ashton as well.

“Tell me, Azure Dragon, how do we punish a traitor?” Levi turned to Azure Dragon and smiled abruptly.

“All traitors would be slaughtered!” Azure Dragon gave a deafening roar.

Matthew was on the verge of a complete collapse.

But he knew it was all too late. This was the fate for traitors. Matthew must die!

The doomed fate of Matthew scared the daylight out of Ashton, who instantly got down on his knees to beg for his life “We are family, my dear brother. Please forgive me for not knowing your true identity.” cried Ashton, “We are all waiting for you to come home. I’m sure everybody would be thrilled to see you home again!”

Ashton played the emotional card as his last resort to save his own life.

“Don’t you remember how you guys have broken all my limbs and threw me to the streets like a dying dog?” Levi said sarcastically, “Is that how you’re supposed to treat your family?”

“Oh, that’s just a misunderstanding, my brother.” Ashton was almost to tears, “I’m sure it’s nothing but a misunderstanding!”

“Didn’t you just said that you want to sleep with my wife too?” said Levi as he walked closer towards Ashton.

“That’s just a joke, you know,” Ashton felt his legs were going jelly as he stuttered, “nothing but a joke, my brother...”

“What makes you think you can joke about something like this?”

Levi struck a killer punch right into Ashton’s face, which made him see stars and blacked out instantly.

“Send him back to the Garrisons! Tell them that this is my first present for them!”

Levi ordered, his face devoid of expression.

“Understood, Sir!” Azure Dragon replied subserviently.

“Well done, Steven Shaw.” Levi eyed him with satisfaction.

“Greetings to you, Sir!” A yelp from Steven Shaw led the whole of First Metallic Regiment to raise their right hand uniformly to present a military salute.

Levi reciprocated with a standard salute.

When he entered the villa, what greeted his sight was Zoey all curled up on the sofa, quivering with fear.

The spectacular scene today had left her numbed with shock.

She did not even have the courage to glimpse out of the villa.

“It’s alright now, Zoey.” Levi hugged her, “Everything’s over. The villa now belongs to us.”

“Are you sure?” Zoey lifted her head, her tone was uncertain.

“I’m sure!” Levi reassured her, “But I plan to tear down the house completely and rebuild from scratch. There’s no way we can move in now after those thugs had stayed in the house before.”

“I need to ask you something, Levi.” Zoey asked after she had recomposed herself “I want you to be absolutely upfront with me.”

“Sure, what do you want to know?”

Zoey bit her lips in hesitation, “What is your relationship with the God of War and Azure Dragon?” she demanded, “I need you to tell me nothing but the truth!”

The Protector Chapter 19

“I’ve already told you at the family banquet before,” Levi nodded, “I am the God of War.”

“There you go again.” Zoey dismissed his words and rolled her eyes, “You and your blabber.”

She did not believe his confession, and thought that he was just trying to brag around.

“Alright,” Levi said with a helpless shrug, “I have nothing to do with them.”

“But then how did you get Azure Dragon to show up with just a phone call?” she asked, puzzled, “Not to mention he even brought an entire regiment with him?”

“It was all a coincidence, when I was here last night and found out that Azure Dragon was staying in the same vicinity, I was sure that the God of War must be nearby as well.” Levi made up an explanation, “I know Ashton is bringing his men to the villa today, so I tipped off the authorities in advance. I told them that somebody is trying to harm the God of War, that’s why they sent over an entire regiment to protect him.” he could only put up a lie to appease her.

“That makes perfect sense to me now.” Zoey found his explanation plausible, “I recalled Azure Dragon

said the God of War lives around here, which explains why he's on high alert when Ashton and his men came to the villa."

"Do you want to take any of the stuff home with you? There's no way I'm going to stay here!" Levi said with an air of disgust.

"No, let's leave them here." Zoey shook her head, "It would only cause mum and dad to get curious if they see us moving our stuff home."

At Rivervale Mansion, North Hampton.

It was one of the most luxurious mansions in North Hampton. The place was the family mansion of the Garrisons, who had just listed their company shares on the stock exchange.

It had yet struck nine o'clock in the morning and it was still early for the Garrisons to leave for work.

Most of them were still in the house when they carried Ashton into the mansion.

Soon, every member of the Garrison family knew something terrible had happened to Ashton, and they immediately sent him to the hospital.

Joseph, Jaycob, Ben and everybody else rushed to the hospital.

"How's Ashton doing?" Joseph asked.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Garrison." the doctor sighed after he had examined Ashton's condition, "I'm afraid Ashton is not showing any response, he's now in a vegetative state."

"What do you mean he's in a vegetative state?" Jaycob could not believe his ears, "You mean my son has become a vegetable?"

"Ashton suffered from an extremely severe impact that turned him into a vegetable." the doctor explained.

"Who was the one who sent Ashton back to the mansion?" asked Joseph, who had slipped into a dark look.

"They were two guys we've not seen before, dad." Ben lowered his voice, "They left as soon as they sent Ashton back to our house. But they did leave a message..."

"What's their message? Spit it out now!"

The aura from Joseph was one of pure oppression.

"They said that this is the first present sent by Levi." Ben promptly spilled out the words.

"What? You mean this is a present from Levi?"

"So it was Levi who's behind all this?"

“I’m going to skin you alive, Levi!” Jaycob flew into such a rage that he almost flipped the table.

“Tell me, where is Levi now? I’m going to bash his brains in and squash him like the disgusting roach that he is!”

Jaycob was cursing and swearing like a madman, oozing violence and malice.

“Hold on, Jaycob.” Joseph mused over the message from Levi, “Levi said that this is just his first present, so we should expect for his second and third present to come in no time. Looks like Levi has just turned the tables on us, he’s letting us know that he’s now the one calling the shots instead!”

Joseph placed his hands behind his back and gave a brittle laugh.

“I’ve asked Bryan to find out what actually happened, dad.” Ben informed Joseph, “I’m sure he’ll update us soon.”

Soon after, they saw Bryan come running towards them, panting for air.

“I’ve found out what happened, grandpa, dad, Jaycob.” Bryan rasped, “Ashton and Levi had gotten into a brawl because of Royal Villa, which left Ashton being beaten up by Levi.”

“How could this be possible?” Joseph bemoaned, “Didn’t Ashton used to hang around with Trey, that triad leader? How could Levi have beaten the both of them and turned Ashton into a vegetable?”

The Protector Chapter 20

“I can’t figure it out too, since they told me Trey and Ashton had brought over a hundred men with them. So what caused Ashton to end up in such a bad shape?” Bryan shared with them his findings, “I’ve checked with Trey but he refused to say a word about it. All he did was warn us to stay away from Levi and don’t mess around with him.”

“What? How could this be true?” cried Ben in disbelief, “Doesn’t this show that Levi had scared the shit out of Trey? There must be something about Levi that made Trey said such a thing.”

“Judging by his words, it sounds like Trey is terrified of Levi.” Joseph nodded, “What’s going on here? Wasn’t Levi just released from prison? Where did he find the support to oust Ashton and Trey from the villa?”

Bryan’s wife, Victoria, was quick to offer her opinion, “I bet Levi must have become mates with some crooks when he was in prison and garnered their support, dad.” she gave a sly smile, “That could have given Levi the ammunition to stand up to Trey and his men.” While Trey might hold some influence, he was pale in comparison with the real big crooks on the streets.

It was probably one of those crooks who had teamed up with Levi to take out Trey and his men. I mean, didn’t Levi issued us a warning during the banquet to celebrate our share listing last time?

He demanded us to repent and offer an apology in one month's time, or we will have to defend with all we have if we refuse to apologize. It all pointed to the possibility that Levi must have garnered the support of some influential and powerful crooks to back him up.

"Yes, I'm sure that must be the case!" Joseph could not agree more with Victoria, "Levi must have found some real big shots while he was in prison to back him up, so he's now coming after us!"

"Looks like we've underestimated this little b*****d." Ben stroked his chin and said meditatively, "He's no pushover indeed."

"I don't give a heck what big crooks that's backing him up," Jaycob snorted, "I'll get even with him for turning my son into such a horrible state!"

Vengeance and hatred had blinded Jaycob.

"There's no way we would let him off, Uncle Jaycob." Bryan pointed out, "But we need to get a good grasp of the situation before we strike. We must find out who is backing him and what tricks he has up his sleeve. Even though we are not afraid to confront him directly, we still need to do it the smart way."

Joseph nodded in agreement, "Bryan's right. We should play our cards wisely." Levi is too naive if he thinks he could triumph over us simply because he had ousted Trey. What a joke! Trey is nothing more than just one of our lackeys. Our family is almost untouchable in North Hampton.

Besides, we have powerful connections in all kinds of sectors including politics, business, military, and even the mafias and thugs. So what if Levi had some big crooks as his backup? There's no way he could hurt our family, he won't be able to harm even a single hair of the Garrison family!

"You're right. Levi is too gullible to think he could trample over us with the help of some big guns." Jaycob's eyes gleamed with a bloodthirsty look, "I'll flip open all his cards so he'll never be able to play any tricks on us again. That's when we would make him pay with his blood!"

"But I have a bad feeling about this." Rick said with an ominous tone, "Levi is someone who is cold and calculative. I'm pretty sure he must have it all worked out inside his head. We'd better not be too reckless about it."

"I think you're getting a little paranoid about it, Uncle Rick." Bryan smiled over it, "There's nothing for us to fear given our status and influence now. We are as solid as they come. Whatever tricks Levi try to play on us will never work."

"I agree with Bryan." Joseph chimed in, "There's no need to be too worried by that, Rick."

"I don't know about this, but I think it's better to be safe than to be sorry," Rick sighed, "it's just that I can't shake the feeling that something's wrong!"

It was against Rick's reticent nature to say such a thing, but he had an awful premonition that something bad was going to happen.

He knew there was more to Levi than meet the eye. Levi is simply no pushover in any aspect!

...

At night.

Aaron lashed out at Levi the moment they reached home. "What do you think you're doing? Are you looking to get Zoey into trouble?" he snarled, "Get out of my house if you don't want to stay here!"

"What's going on, Dad?" Zoey and Levi were astounded, "What did Levi do?"

The Protector Chapter 21

"Don't think we are ignorant of what you'd done to the Garrison family," Aaron scoffed, "they have warned us to prepare ourselves for a bloodbath."

"Why do you have to piss off the Garrison family? Are you looking to get yourself killed?"

Caitlyn and Aaron were raving mad.

"If it's not for Zoey, I'd have kicked you out of our house a long time ago." Aaron spat with such fury that his veins stood out in his neck, "You could have been sleeping at the streets by now!"

Zoey did not want to aggravate the hostility of his parents towards Levi, but she felt Levi had acted too rashly as well.

We were lucky to have Azure Dragon bail us out this time. But what about next time? Will we get lucky again?

"Who are you to step on the toes of the Garrison family?" Caitlyn glared at Levi with total contempt, "You don't even have a place to stay on your own!"

"Mum, Levi actually has the villa..."

Zoey was trying to explain to her mum that Levi had just got his villa back, but Caitlyn cut her off abruptly, "Don't give me that crap about his villa. He's simply a ticking time bomb, you shouldn't hang around with him all the time. I'd rather you use your time to source for investors instead!"

"You should know well that the Garrison family is untouchable, not even the Lopez family could hold a candle to them. We'll be doomed should the Garrisons decide to come at us. I'm warning you, Levi, I'll get Zoey to seek a divorce with you if you ever dare to infuriate the Garrison family again!"

The next day.

Zoey and Levi planned to source for investors for their upcoming project. They were about to leave the house when Caitlyn reminded Zoey, "It's going to be the National holidays soon and your cousin is coming over to spend the holidays with us. Can you go and pick her up as your dad and I are too busy with our chores?"

“Sure, mum.”

Levi knew both Aaron and Caitlyn had got their hands full at the moment. Caitlyn worked in the hospital while Aaron had just started a small business.

It was another frustrating day for Zoey. Every investor she met had snubbed her proposal.

However, Levi watched quietly without interfering. All he did was take down the names of those companies who had snubbed Zoey’s proposal.

The string of ill-luck days for Zoey had left her with no choice but to hold back her project as long as she could, since she could not source the investments she needed to kick-start her project. She was just three days away from the commencement date, as stipulated in the contract.

It had definitely stressed Zoey to the extreme.

Aaron and Caitlyn were exasperated and wore a worried look on their faces.

“Don’t be too worried, Mum, Dad.” Levi gave a placid smile, “I’m sure the investors would show up when the time comes.”

He said it with an air of confidence, since he knew he had made all the necessary arrangements.

“You should just keep your mouth shut!” Aaron flared, “Of course it’s easy for you to say that, since it’s none of your business!”

Ding Dong...

The doorbell sounded. It surprised them to see Shaun at their doorstep.

“It’s good that you’re all here, Uncle Aaron and Aunt Caitlyn. Grandpa would like all of you to come for a family meeting tonight.”

Shaun left promptly after he had relayed the message.

Shortly after, Levi, Zoey and her parents came to the family complex of the Lopez family.

It was a vast complex that comprised several buildings. Its structure and scale were one of the most affluent and lavish in North Hampton.

Zoey instantly felt animosity in the Lopez family’s members looks when they greeted her. It was as if she had just snatched away the love of their lives.

It dawned on Zoey and her family that they were no longer seen as part of the Lopez family anymore, now, they are seen as enemy who had taken their cake away and have it all to themselves.

“Come over here, Aaron and you guys. Take a seat.” Harry and the rest of them greeted them with an unusual friendliness.

“How’s your project going along, Zoey?” Harry asked once everybody was seated.

“There’s a major issue with the funding, grandpa!” Zoey sighed, “We’re just three days away from the commencement date but I’ve yet to rope in investors for the project.”

“Hahaha....Didn’t I told you that this is too large of a project for a small company like Imperial Meadows?”

“That’s right, it’s good to know your own limits. Don’t act like some big guns when you’re just nothing but a soft and limp fry!”

...

Everyone started to mock Zoey when they heard about her funding problem.

Zoey and her family could only put up with their sarcasm in silence since she could find nothing to rebuke them. The lack of funding had now put her entire project into jeopardy.

The Protector Chapter 22

“I’m a bit offended, Zoey.” Harry smiled ruefully, “How could you forget about your own family?”

“Grandpa, I...”

“You should have come to me instead. The Lopez Group could work out something for you. You know it’s well within our means to take on that Ecological Park project of yours.”

“I could even provide the startup capital for your project!” said Harry seriously.

“I bet there’s going to be some conditions attached to it?” Levi drove straight to the point. “Or you wouldn’t be so kind as to provide the funding.”

He had seen through the ulterior motive for Harry to fund the project.

“Good, I like to deal with smart people.” Harry grinned, “It’d save me a lot of my time.”

His words prompted Samuel Robertson, who was sitting next to Harry, to pass over the contract to Zoey.

“Take a look at this, Zoey.”

Zoey immediately studied the contract when they passed it to her.

The content was straightforward.

The contract stated that Lopez Group would get up to ninety percent of the profits for the Ecological Park project for providing the funds to Imperial Meadows Limited.

It sent Aaron into a fit of rage after he read the contract.

The Lopez family are simply too cruel to ask for such a huge chunk of the profits.

Aaron was utterly pissed off. He felt that Harry had never regarded him as his own son, but just another prey he was targeting.

“Don’t be mad, Aaron and Zoey. Think about it, in three days’ time, the project would be automatically annulled if you can’t come up with the funding.” Harry’s grin was sly and pernicious, as if he was trying to lure the bait to the hook, “You would end up without a cent once the project was annulled. But if you accept our funding, you’d still get a ten percent cut out of the profits. That would translate to quite a considerable sum of a hundred million. It’s up to you to decide...”

“Unless you’re confident to pull in the funds that you need before the stated deadline.”

Given the tight deadline of just three days, Harry was pretty sure it was nigh impossible for Zoey to secure the funds she needed for the project. This would only leave her with no other options but to agree to his terms.

It would make the Lopez family the biggest winner with a whopping ninety percent of the profits. Even Mr. Jennings could do nothing about it.

“That’s true, Aaron.” Henry chipped in, “We should work together since we’re family. Let’s share the profits instead of having the cake all to yourself.”

“There’s no hurry to sign this. I’ll leave you guys alone to discuss it among yourselves.”

Harry and his company left Levi, Zoey and her parents to talk things out.

“Why don’t we just agree to their terms, Zoey?” Aaron and Caitlyn persuaded, “At least there’s still something left on the plate for us. You should know better that your chances of getting the funds are almost as good as zero!”

Their words almost swayed Zoey to put her name down on the contract. But she held back and sought Levi’s opinion.

“Don’t sign it!” Levi was adamant.

“Trust me, Zoey! I’m sure that I can secure the funding you need before the deadline expires!”

A fuming Aaron intervened before Zoey could fumble out a reply, “Don’t give me that crap again! Do we hold you responsible if we lose that hundred million? I firmly believe we should sign it.”

Zoey was in a dilemma as she eyed Levi skeptically. She did not have complete faith in Levi’s words.

“Alright, how about this?” Levi shrugged, “Since we have three days left to go, why don’t we hang on till the last day to see if we could pull in some investments?” he suggested, “It’s still not too late to sign the contract by then.”

“Sounds like a plan!”

“I could work with that!”

Everybody gave their nods of approval.

The same goes for Harry and his men. They agreed to the suggestion readily.

They were certain that Zoey would never secure the investments that she badly needed in just three days' time.

...

For the next three days, Zoey worked tirelessly from day to night to meet with potential investors for the project.

Yet, there was nothing to show for all her efforts.

Those who were interested demanded a ridiculous amount of return for their investments.

It would make more sense to work with Harry, since his offer was more or less the same than the rest.

Three days passed by without a trace. The deadline was set on tomorrow before ten o'clock to kick start the project, once over the given time, the project would be automatically annulled.

“Come on, we've got to sign the contract with Harry now.” Aaron stood up and said.

“What's the hurry? Why don't we just wait a little longer?” Levi tried to dissuade them from signing, “We have all the time till next morning eight o'clock to sign it.”

“Let's wait until tomorrow morning, Zoey. Don't sign the contract today.” Levi instructed.

“I need to step out for a while.” Levi left the house after he urged Zoey to stay patient for one more night.

The Protector Chapter 23

Levi left the house to meet up with Azure Dragon, whom he had instructed to wait for him outside the house.

“What can I do for you, Sir?” Azure Dragon asked.

“I want you to contact these companies.” Levi handed him a list of company names.

The following morning.

Zoey was woken up by Aaron in the wee hours of the morning.

“Where the hell is Levi? I presume he was out last night to source for funding, but what’s taking him so long to come back?” Aaron said disapprovingly, “He just can’t do anything right. He’s a born loser, a good-for-nothing!”

It angered Zoey to think that Levi did not even bother to inform her when he knew he would be out the whole night.

“We’d better sign the contract before it’s too late. Let’s meet up with Harry now!”

Harry and his men were already standing by at the family mansion when Zoey and her family arrived.

An euphoric smile hung on their faces as they greeted Zoey and her family.

It was all too gratifying for Harry and company to see the three of them come begging with their tail between their legs.

“You should have known better than to make a fool out of yourself, Aaron.” Henry and Fabian jeered at him, “Can’t you see that there’s no way you guys could ever get the investments?”

Aaron lowered his head and said feebly, “We’re here to sign the contract, dad.”

Anger welled up in his chest when he thought of Levi.

Had it not been Levi who advised them to hold back for three more days, they would have signed it on the same day when it was offered to them, It would have seemed more like a respectable deal at that time.

It had become anything but respectable in the eyes of Harry and his company now that Aaron had to beg them for the contract. Knowing the contract was now the last resort for Zoey, it would only make Aaron looked desperate and defeated in the eyes of the Lopez family.

Aaron and his family had never felt such humiliation before. This is all thanks to Levi.

“Yes, we are ready to sign it now, grandpa.” Zoey informed Harry.

“Sure, we can sign the contract. But there will be a change of terms.” Harry’s expression changed and he curled his lips into a grim smile, “We are no longer asking for ninety but ninety-five percent of the profits now. The remaining five percent would be yours.”

“What? Didn’t we agreed on a ninety percent cut for you and ten percent for us?”

A sudden terrible pang of shock hit Zoey as she stared at Harry incredulously. Harry had just dropped a bombshell on her.

“Don’t you know the terms changes accordingly?” Harry said scornfully, “That’s our offer. Take it or leave it.”

Knowing the ball was now in his court, Harry knew it was he who called the shots. The change of terms seemed justifiable to him since it was Zoey who desperately needed the contract.

Zoey winced at the cold-bloodiness of these people!

She bitterly resented her grandpa for his callous and selfishness.

“Fine then, I’ll pass! I’ll give up the project altogether!” she said in a fit of rage, “Nobody would get a dime out of it!”

“How could you say that, Zoey? Five percent would still give us fifty million, at least there’s something for us!”

“Your mum is right, Zoey. We can’t afford to lose it, just sign it!”

The relentless pestering from Aaron and Caitlyn left Zoey with no choice but to sign the contract.

“Stop! Don’t sign the contract!”

Just as Zoey was about to ink the contract, Levi showed up and halted her.

“There’s still time before the deadline,” he wrung away the pen from Zoey’s hands, “why do we have to sign it now?” he questioned.

“What do you think you’re doing, Levi?” Aaron almost wanted to slap Levi across the face “Why are you stopping us from getting the fifty million? Is it because you’re jealous you’ve got nothing for yourself?”

“Ten minutes! just give me ten minutes! Once the time is up you can do as you please.” Levi glanced at his watch and said, “You can sign it in ten minutes’ time!”

“Alright! I’ll give you another ten minutes to prove yourself!” Aaron muttered through gritted teeth, “Make sure you produce something in ten minutes’ time, or I’ll never forgive you for the rest of my life, much less allow Zoey to stay with you!”

“Okay!”

The unyielding attitude of Levi intrigued Harry. He was curious to see what would happen in ten minutes’ time.

“Alright, let’s wait for another ten minutes.”

Henry and the rest giggled with excitement. They could not wait to get their popcorn ready to watch some hilarious comedy in ten minutes’ time.

Ten minutes passed in a flash. Everything was at status quo.

“Just sign it!” Henry threw the contract in front of Zoey. He was certain there would be no white knight coming to her rescue.

Vroom! Vroom! Vroom!

At the same moment, a thunderous roar of engine noises filled the whole of the Lopez family mansion.

It attracted the curiosity of everyone to step out of the building.

What greeted their eyes was a succession of luxury cars making their way into the Lopez family mansion. They all came to a halt when they reached their building.

The Protector Chapter 24

It was a succession of top end luxury cars which included Maybach, Rolls Royce, and many more.

Each of these cars could easily cost over tens of millions!

The Lopez family looked on with a dazed expression. What the hell is going on here?

What are all these cars doing here?

Everyone went pop-eyed when they saw the faces of the people who alighted from the cars. They were a group of impeccably dressed, middle-aged men and women who carried an overpowering air of status and power.

Each of them carried a business savvy look synonymous to the directors of some top corporations.

“Huh? Isn’t that the President of Far East Investments, Mr. Feliciano Hayes? What brings him here?”

“Look, that’s the General Manager of Orc Investments Limited, Mr. Roberto Norris!”

“Isn’t that guy the boss of Starlight Property Development Limited, Mr. Lorenzo Woods?”

“Oh, my god! Even Pedro Zinno, the President of Hercules Property Development Company, is here too!”

...

Fabian, Henry, and the rest of them murmured among themselves into a frenzy.

The names they had murmured were the super-rich and powerful leaders who ruled the corporate world of North Hampton. Each of their net worth were in billions.

Lopez Group looked so insignificant in the eyes of these super rich. Any one of them could easily take out the Lopez Group without even battling an eyelid.

The scale and grandeur of so many big shots coming together was a sight to behold for Harry and his men.

It almost took their breath away.

Harry led Fabian and the rest to hurry themselves forward and greeted the billionaires with fawning attention; “Greetings, Mr. Zinno, welcome....”

However, nobody responded to their greetings. All the billionaires walked past them as if they were non-existent and headed straight to where Levi and Zoey were standing.

“How could it be?” Harry said in disbelief, “Could it be they are here to provide funding for Zoey’s project?”

Harry’s eyes widened in stupefaction, his jaws stiffened with astonishment.

Zoey froze when she saw the billionaires walking towards her. She wondered if her eyes were playing tricks on her. These were the same group of people she had approached before to solicit for their interests in her project, and they had all rejected her proposal.

What’s going on? What are they doing here?

“Hello, Ms. Lopez. I’m Feliciano Hayes from Far East Investments!”

“Good afternoon, Ms. Lopez. I’m Pedro Zinno and I represent Hercules Property Development.”

“Nice to meet you, Ms. Lopez. I’m Lorenzo Woods from Starlight Property Development.”

...

All the billionaires introduced themselves in a humble manner towards Zoey.

Everybody gasped in awe.

Harry and the others from the Lopez family were utterly lost for words.

It was beyond their wildest imagination to think that these billionaires would show up to fund for Zoey’s project.

Zoey was still trembling inside even though she tried to recompose herself, “H-Hello everyone...how are you...”

“Don’t be nervous, Ms. Lopez! We’re here to discuss our cooperation on the project!”

Feliciano Hayes flashed a cheesy smile, “Far East Investments would be interested to invest one billion into your project, Ms. Lopez!”

Lorenzo Woods counter-offered immediately, “Ms. Lopez, Starlight Property Development would be willing to provide up to two billion to fund your project!”

“No, Orc Investments is willing to invest up to three billion!”

“We are more than happy to provide up to three billion in funding and even take over the construction of your project. Please let Hercules Property Development be your partner instead!”

“Spark Corporation would invest up to five hundred million in your project! We would not ask for a share of your profits, Miss Lopez. All we want is to offer our sincere help!”

...

It was like some bidding war that had gone out of control. Every billionaire was competing to provide funding for Zoey’s project.

The highest bidder had offered to invest up to seven hundred million.

Everyone was reluctant to give up on the project, which could not had taken more than a billion in total.

But the bidding war had skyrocketed the total available funding by ten times its original amount.

The unexpected twist of events caused Harry’s blood pressure to shoot up exponentially, causing him to pass out on the spot.

Samuel, Shaun and the rest were almost on the verge of puking blood.

What the hell is going on here?

Why is everyone behaving like maniacs?

It was an earth-shattering feeling for Zoey as well.

She could still recall the smug and dismissive look in their eyes when they snubbed her initial proposal.

Yet the same group of people were now lining up to impress her, begging her to let them invest in her project.

Aaron and Caitlyn were too emotional to say a single word. They could only respond with their quivering bodies.

“Calm down, Zoey.” Levi put his arm around her to offer his support, “Why don’t you say a few words to show your appreciation for their interest in your project.”

“Right, I’m so glad that all of you are keen to invest in my project.” Zoey composed herself and said, “All of you are welcome to invest in my project!”

“Really? That’s good to hear it from Ms. Lopez herself.”

All the billionaires let out a hefty sigh and wiped away the sweat on their brows after they heard this.

The Protector Chapter 25

“However,” Zoey added, “I’m afraid you have misunderstood the amount of funding that I’m seeking. The amount you’ve mentioned is way beyond what I’m asking for. All I need for the project is only a hundred million.”

“Just name any amount, Ms. Lopez.” Lorenzo Woods said with an air of indulgence, “Unless you’re asking for tens of billions, I’m ready to pump billions into your project.”

The words of Lorenzo Woods sent Harry’s blood pressure up a few notches when he heard he was ‘ready to pump billions into your project’. His legs wobbled, and he saw stars spinning around his head.

Zoey’s mind was in a whirlwind as she quivered in her reply, “Everybody, I am humbled by your overwhelming interest in my project. But a hundred and fifty million would be more than enough for my project.”

“How about this?” Feliciano Hayes swept his eyes across the room and suggested. “Since there are fifteen of us here, why don’t we each come up with ten million?”

“That would be the perfect solution! It would give each of us an opportunity to help Ms. Lopez.” Feliciano Hayes said, “Make sure we are not treating this as an investment or loan. It should be a giveaway to Ms. Lopez!”

Gulp!

Aaron and Caitlyn were swallowing so hard that everyone could hear them gulp.

A hundred and fifty million giveaway to our daughter?

What makes our daughter turned into a money spinning machine all of a sudden?

Everybody is begging for her to take their money.

“No, it can’t be a giveaway.” Zoey insisted, “We should treat it as an investment.”

“It’s alright, Ms. Lopez. Ten million is nothing to us!”

“Yeah, it’s just some petty cash to me.”

Each billionaire insisted they should treat the ten million as a giveaway to Zoey.

“Hey, didn’t you hear what she’d just said?” Levi snapped, “She said it should be an investment.”

Levi’s sudden bawl made the billionaires shuddered with horror.

“Yes! Sure! Indeed! It should be an investment!”

Everyone nodded emphatically.

“So, ladies and gentlemen, would you mind coming to my company, Imperial Meadows Limited, to ink the contract?” Zoey asked.

“Of course, we are more than willing to come anytime to sign it!”

They continued their frenzied nodding of heads.

“I’m sorry, grandpa.” Before stepping out of the mansion, Zoey walked up to Harry and said apologetically, “I can’t accept your terms now, but I can assure you that the Lopez family will definitely have a share of the project.”

“You!”

Harry was breathless with anger as he pointed a trembling finger at Zoey. He let out a cry and finally passed out.

Levi and company soon left the mansion amidst a wave of awe mutterings and under the envious looks in everyone’s eyes.

It had been an emphatic victory for Zoey and her family.

It restored Aaron’s self-esteem to think he had finally regained his position in the Lopez family.

The signing went smoothly, and the funds all came in as promised.

Zoey was able to launch the project within the stipulated deadline.

Everything was smooth and went accordingly as planned.

It was already nighttime when they finally made it home.

Zoey and her family were staring at Levi with interrogating eyes.

“What’s happening here, Levi?” Zoey asked, “I’m sure you have something to do with it.”

“Yes, it was all orchestrated by me.” Levi admitted.

“But how did you do it?” Aaron was still feeling the effects from the shock, “It’s simply inconceivable!”

“It’s simple, actually.” Levi quipped, “All I did was show them the details of the project and let them know that this project is too good to be missed.”

“That’s impossible.” Zoey said warily, “Isn’t that what I’d just done when we first presented our project to them? What makes them snub my proposal when I’m sure I had given them a more detailed explanation than yours?”

“That’s because I’ve mentioned some names like Orlando Jennings, Azure Dragon and God of War.” Levi explained, “They agreed to it once they knew the whole story.”

“This...” Zoey went silent. She knew it was something she could never do, given her obstinate nature.

“Haha, even though we are hardly connected to God of War, these shrewd businessmen changed their stance once they find out that the God of War has something to do with this project, they’d even start buttering up to Zoey immediately.” Aaron gave a broad grin.

“That’s right.” Caitlyn agreed, “Since it was Orlando who decided on the project, with Azure Dragon keeping a close tab on its progress. These billionaires must have been under the impression that Zoey had garnered the support of all these people as well.”

The Protector Chapter 26

Their explanation seemed plausible to Zoey.

So, it was only because they wanted to please the big guns like Azure Dragon and Orlando that these billionaires showed up in person to invest in my project.

“So did you explain to every one of them in person?”

Zoey looked at Levi and felt her heart ached when she thought about what Levi must have gone through to get the support of those billionaires.

“Yes, I did. It was quite tiring indeed.” Levi smiled gently.

In actual fact, all he needed was just a call. His word was almost as good as a decree.

“I owe it to you, Levi.” Zoey said with heartfelt gratitude, “It’s all because of you that we’re able to pull this off.”

“You’re right. All credit goes to Levi. It was him who had turned the situation around, I had almost given up hope.”

Aaron was extremely pleased with Levi’s performance today.

“I am still grappling with what’s happening, actually.” Caitlyn gushed.

She was starting to see Levi in a more positive light now.

“Levi, why don’t you change into a new set of clothes since you’ve been wearing them for a while.” Caitlyn said, “Just put the clothes in the laundry basket and I’ll get them wash at the hospital. I am on duty tomorrow and I need to get my uniform washed as well.”

“Sure, mom.” Levi simpered, “Thank you.”

The following day.

Zoey and Levi left the house to follow up on the project while Caitlyn took her laundry to the hospital's laundry department.

Here, she could wash her clothes and get them sterilized as well.

The principal reason was because it was free and convenient since she worked in the hospital.

She had been using the laundry department to do her laundry ever since her family condition went downhill because of Aaron's failing business.

"Hey, you're taking your laundry here again to save on your utilities bill?" A woman walked in and asked in a penetrating voice, "Must you be such a cheapskate? Didn't your family used to run a large company?"

The woman's name was Jelena Keaton. She worked in the same department with Caitlyn.

Along with Caitlyn, she was tipped as the favorite to be the department's next assistant supervisor. There had always been bad blood between the two.

The nomination for the department's assistant supervisor would be out anytime soon.

Neither of them liked each other, since Jelena was a prickly character who would taunt Caitlyn whenever she saw the opportunity to do so.

"What's that got to do with you?" Caitlyn refuted, "You're not the one who's paying the utilities fees anyway!"

With Jelena gone, Caitlyn emptied her laundry into the basket.

Just when she was about to toss Levi's clothes into the washer, she found a lump in his pocket.

"What a careless chap! How could he even forget to clear his pockets?"

Caitlyn emptied the contents out of the pocket.

There was a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, both were of a navy green color. Caitlyn did not read the words engraved on the cigarette box and lighter.

If only Aaron was here, he was bound to recognize them instantly. Those were war zone cigarettes that no amount of money could buy!

One would need special connections to have access to those types of cigarettes.

The rarest of them would be those with a sniper logo. They were so rare that even the big guns could not get their hands on those cigarettes.

As it turns out, those cigarettes were only provided to the Special Operations Regiment...

“He should really cut down on his smoke.” Caitlyn frowned and dumped the cigarettes into the dustbin, “They could only do him more harm than good!”

Then there was Levi’s wallet.

Caitlyn thought for a moment and opened it up.

There was some loose change inside the wallet, together with Levi and Zoey’s marriage photo.

The only items remained were two small cards, a few chips and an identification pass.

One of the two cards was a black bank card. “This guy’s a pauper. How much money could he have in that card?” Caitlyn scoffed and put aside the bank card.

Little did she know that the black card was the worldwide limited edition American Express card with no spending limit attached to it. once used, It could even haul a plane to return to its port of embarkation, even when it had already taken off.

The other remaining card was a navy green card with a sniper logo on it.

The bunch of chips hardly interested Caitlyn. Her focus was on the identification pass.

It was a red color document with ‘Officer Pass’ written on it, which bore the symbol of the Divine Guard Unit.

“Huh! An officer pass for an ex-convict?” Caitlyn sneered, “Do you think that would make you a true officer?”

On second thought, she flipped open the Officer Pass.

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“What is this? God of War?” Caitlyn squinted her eyes to read the name written on the document, “What’s written here? Garrison something?”

Caitlyn was trying to figure out the full name on the pass when she was startled by a voice from behind, “What are you looking at, Dr. Black?”

Caitlyn had to put the pass behind her before she could get a good look at the name.

“Oh, nothing.” Caitlyn grinned.

The voice belonged to Jelena Keaton, who was eyeing Caitlyn suspiciously.

“I see, fine.” Jelena shrugged and left.

Unbeknown to Caitlyn, Jelena had been standing behind her while she was checking the Officer Pass. She had even quietly taped down the process with her cellphone.

Jelena sheepishly sneaked to a discreet corner of the hospital and took out her phone.

“Officer, I want to report a theft by Caitlyn Black of The Third District Hospital Cardiac Surgery department.” she whispered over the phone, “I saw with my own eyes that she had stolen an Officer Pass along with a bank card. There was a bunch of chips too, I bet there must be some confidential information inside. I have even taped it down as proof, Officer.”

“Whose Officer Pass is that? Did you see the name and rank?” The officer asked from the other end of the call.

“Oh, it belongs to the God of War, Officer! I am absolutely sure of that. I have the photo and the video to prove it.”

“Okay.”

Shortly after, the sharp shrills of police car sirens filled the air. A succession of police cars stormed into the compounds of the Third District Hospital.

A herd of police officers donned in bullet-proof vests charged into the main building.

Soon, Caitlyn was arrested and tucked into the police car. She was utterly confused and frustrated.

The police took away the rest of the stuff, including the photos and videos taken by Jelena Keaton, which would be used as evidence against Caitlyn.

They brought her directly to the City District Police Station, where the defenseless Caitlyn sobbed and wept woefully.

The nature of the incident alarmed the Captain of Patrol Squad, Xavier Fields, since it involved the theft of an Officer Pass.

He inspected the Officer Pass carefully with his naked eye.

“This couldn’t be fake. It’s a genuine Officer Pass!” he sucked in a deep breath and said, “This is unbelievable! It belongs to God of War!”

The others suggested, “We need to be absolutely sure about this, Captain. Why don’t we get someone from the military to examine it?”

“Yeah, I’ve just informed my buddy, Steven Shaw to come and check it out. He’s from the First Metallic Regiment of North Hampton, he should be here anytime now.”

“Captain, we’ve checked through the bunch of chips and those cards. But we were not granted the level of authority to access them.”

“Let’s wait awhile then.” Xavier Fields ordered, “I want you guys to interrogate that woman we’ve just

caught!”

Inside the interrogation room.

Caitlyn could hardly stop herself from shaking, even though she had almost run out of tears.

“Come clean with us! Where did you get those documents and cards?”

“T-They belonged to my son-in-law!” Caitlyn said nervously.

“Stop spouting rubbish!!! Do you know the importance of this Officer Pass?”

“I-I have no idea...” Caitlyn stared at them blankly.

“This is an Officer Pass that belongs to the God of War!” The officer yelled at the top of his voice.

Boom!

Caitlyn felt like something had exploded inside her head and clogged her brains.

“Do you know there are military secrets inside the wallet? You are now being accused of divulging top state secrets! If you refuse to come clean with us, you’ll be liable to face some real serious charges!”

“Tell me! Where did you steal the wallet and the Officer Pass?” the interrogation officer snarled abruptly at Caitlyn.

Caitlyn was sick with fear. She could feel nothing now but blind terror.

“I-I-I...this stuff belongs to my son-in-law...I’m not lying, I stole nothing...” Caitlyn sobbed.

Meanwhile, Steven Shaw had arrived at the office of the Patrol Squad.

“Where’s the Officer Pass?” Steven hurried over to ask for the pass.

“Here it is!”

Steven Shaw wasted no time in giving his utmost attention to inspect the pass.

After looking at it thoroughly for almost a minute, he put down the documents and sighed, “Yeah, it’s authentic all right!”

“This Officer Pass belongs to the God of War! Where did you find it?” he asked.

“It came from a woman.” said Xavier Fields, “It seemed like she has stolen it from somewhere.”

Steven Shaw seemed to recall something as his expression changed. “Can you find out the name of that woman,” he inquired, “I need to know.”

The Protector Chapter 28

“Sure. Can you find out the name of that woman in the interrogation room?”

“What is it? Caitlyn Black? Are you sure it’s Caitlyn Black?”

Xavier Fields gave the name to Steven Shaw.

Steven Shaw hoicked Xavier Fields to a discreet corner when he heard the name.

“You’ve got the wrong person! Caitlyn Black is the God of War’s mother-in-law!”

“What? Oh, my God!” Xavier Fields got the shock of his life.

“Listen, Xavier.” Steven instructed, “Just block any information and take it that nothing has happened today. Remember, don’t let out any word about it! I’ll inform Azure Dragon and we’ll leave it to the God of War to deal with this.”

“Alright, I’ll do as you say.”

Xavier Fields was still reeling from the sudden shock. He could hardly stop the quivering in his legs.

...

Levi was with Zoey when he received the call from Azure Dragon. He came down to the police station after they briefed him about the matter.

He took back his wallet from Xavier Fields without making a fuss about it.

Xavier and his men could finally heave a deep sigh of relief.

“Just leave the rest to me, God of War.” Xavier suggested, “I’ll follow up with Ms. Caitlyn Black and make sure everything’s back to normal.”

Levi nodded, giving his approval.

“You may leave now, Ms. Black!”

Inside the interrogation room, Caitlyn was so relieved to hear those words. It brought her to tears again, however, this time, it was the tears of gratitude.

“It was all a misunderstanding, Ms. Black. You’re free to go now, since we found out that the Officer Pass was a fake document. But please remind your son-in-law not to use such fake documents to swindle anyone, he could be arrested for it!”

“Sure, Officer!” Caitlyn nodded fervently, “I’ll make sure he gets the message!”

“Your son-in-law is waiting for you outside. You may leave now.”

Caitlyn walked out of the interrogation room.

Her temper flared the moment she saw Levi standing by the counter, waiting for her.

“Mum...”

“Don’t call me mum, I’m not your mum!” Caitlyn fumed, “You almost landed me in deep shit, you fool! Why do I have such a wicked son-in-law?”

It filled Caitlyn with resentment to be treated like a thief when they arrested her and took her to the police station. She had never been to a police station before, and never did she imagine that her first visit to the station was under such deplorable circumstances.

“You should leave Zoey for good. You’ll only ruin her future with those dirty dealings you’ve picked up in prison!” she ranted, “How dare you come up with the idea of making a fake Officer Pass?”

“The pass was real, Mum.” Levi scratched his nose in frustration, “I did not carry a fake pass with me.”

He could only blame his own carelessness, for he could have prevented the disaster.

“What makes you say the pass is real? Do you think you’re more professional than the officers here? I bet you must have been using it to cheat and swindle innocent folks like me. You’d better not get Zoey involved in your vices, or I shall never let you get away with it!” Caitlyn blasted out at Levi, “I’m giving you one last chance and I’ll keep it from Aaron and Zoey about this. You’ll be out of my house for good if I catch you doing this again, you hear me?”

Caitlyn was so full of rage she was about to explode.

“Alright, mum.”

With that said, they left the station and Levi sent Caitlyn back to the hospital.

When she was back at the hospital, Caitlyn was expecting everyone to cast weird glances at her at the hospital.

Contrary to her expectations, everyone behaved as if it was just an ordinary day at work.

What’s going on?

Didn’t a huge commotion happen just now? How could everyone react with such indifference?

“Are you alright, Dr. Black? I was so worried for you. Thank God you’re back!”

“I know I have been mean and crude towards you in the past, and I’m terribly sorry for that.” Jelena came up to her and said, “I’ve backed out from competing for the post of assistant supervisor now, since I believe you’re the better candidate for the job. I’ve informed the hospital about my decision.”

Caitlyn was completely overwhelmed when Jelena Keaton apologized to her and even offered to back

down from the post of assistant supervisor.

It was a post they had both been eyeing for years!

She's backing out from it?

What the hell is happening here?

Don't they know I've just been arrested and sent to the police station? They've even seen it with their own eyes!

But why is everyone behaving so oddly now?

The same goes for Jelena, she seemed petrified of me.

The rest looked equally terrified too.

I could see from their faces and the look in their eyes. I could feel it!

There's something fishy about this. I'll check with Levi!

Caitlyn took out her phone and called Levi, "What's going on here, Levi? Are you hiding something from me?"

The Protector Chapter 29

"I'm not hiding anything from you, mum." Levi repeated, "The pass is real."

"Huh! Do you think I'm a fool to take your word?"

Caitlyn hung up the call when she heard him kept insisting that his pass was real.

She was now certain this had nothing to do with Levi.

Caitlyn concluded that the police must have instructed the hospital to put up a normal front and act as if nothing had happened, in order to avoid tarnishing its reputation.

The project went smoothly for the days that followed.

But they would soon need to halt it because of the upcoming stretch of National holidays.

"Levi, can you go pick up my cousin at the University of North Hampton? Her name is Abigail Rogers." Zoey said to Levi, "I've sent her number to your phone."

She could not take time off from the project at this point of time, so she sought Levi's help to pick up her cousin.

“Sure, leave it to me!”

“But shouldn’t her name be Abigail Black?”

Levi gave her a quizzical look.

“That’s because Abigail has adopted her mother’s surname.” Zoey explained.

Levi called up Azure Dragon after leaving the construction site. “Get me a car, Azure Dragon.” he ordered, “I want to keep a low profile, so a normal car will do.”

Soon after, Azure Dragon showed up with the car.

It was a Maserati Executive GT.

“Whatever!” Levi shook his head helplessly and got into the car.

He parked his car at the main entrance of the east building of the University of North Hampton.

He waited for almost half a day, but there was no sign of Abigail.

Another thirty minutes gone by and Abigail was still nowhere to be seen. Levi took out his phone and dialed the number Zoey had given him.

“Hello, who’s this?”

A pleasant voice answered the call.

“This is Levi, your brother-in-law. I’m here to pick you up at your school!”

“Huh? I thought Zoey said she was too busy to fetch me?” Abigail said in a surprise tone, “I was thinking of going back on my own.”

“Where are you now?” asked Levi, “I’ll come over and pick you up!”

“I see. I’m currently at Dynasty KTV, VIP room 666!”

“Okay, wait for me. I’ll be there shortly!”

In the KTV room, Abigail had just hung up the call when her friend asked, “Who’s that on the phone, Abigail?”

“It’s my brother-in-law, he’s coming to fetch me.”

Abigail knitted her brows in disdain.

“Oh, do you mean that ex-convict, Levi? I know that guy. Everybody in North Hampton knows about his shabby past.”

“So he’s coming to fetch you? Are you sure? Haha!”

“Don’t you feel ashamed to be seen around with a guy like him?”

Abigail clenched her jaw amidst the mockery of her friends. She regretted for having agreed to let Levi come and fetch her.

It was a mere slip of tongue that made her agreed to it. I should have refused it right away.

“Why do you need him to fetch you, Abigail?” A guy asked. His name was Yannick Zann, Abigail’s classmate. He had been wooing her for quite some time. “Why don’t I give you a ride home instead. Didn’t you just see that I’d just got my new car, the BMW x5?”

He came from a rich family who ran a chain of hotels.

The party had been his idea as well.

What the others didn’t know was that he had a sinister motive for holding the party, he wanted to get Abigail drunk so that he could take her to a hotel and rape her.

Dressed in shorts and a cute sling blouse, Yannick could not peel his eyes away from Abigail’s long slender legs and her exposed shoulders which showed her fair skin tone. His blood was raving inside him.

Abigail shrugged. “But my brother-in-law would be here soon.”

“That’s easy. Why don’t you just ask him to go back on his own?” Yannick persuaded, “You know it’s so difficult to get everybody together for a drink.”

Yannick’s desire grew even wilder when Abigail smiled at him. Her rosy cheeks resembled two juicy cherries.

“Come on, let’s have fun and get some booze!”

Abigail’s besties chimed in and suggested they should play some games to encourage her to drink more. They were acting in cahoots with Yannick.

Their motive was to get Abigail drunk.

A few minutes ensued before the door to their VIP room was swung open, Levi walked in.

“Who are you, mister? What are you doing here?”

A few guys stood up and raised their voices at Levi as they flex their muscles in front of the ladies.

Levi gave them the cold shoulder, and merely looked around for Abigail.

When his eyes finally caught sight of Abigail, his gaze settled on her and he said, “I’m here to fetch you, Abigail.”

“Hahaha, so he’s that infamous brother-in-law of yours, Abigail?” Yannick jeered, “I’ve heard so much about him, about how he’d taken advantage of his brother’s wife and how he attempted to murder his adoptive parents. It’s no wonder they called him the ingrate who bit the hand that feeds him. He looked every bit like that type of person to me!”

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“Hahahaha..,”

The rest of them cackled.

Abigail felt utterly disgraced. How she wished there was a hole for her to hide herself without being seen.

She muttered in dismay, “This is so embarrassing! How could Zoey have asked him to fetch me?”

She refused to even lift her head to look at Levi.

Levi ignored the guys who kept taunting him.

“Shall we leave, Abigail?” he asked.

Abigail finally raised her head and looked straight at Levi, “Why don’t you just head back on your own? I don’t need you to fetch me. I know my way home.”

“But Zoey insists that I pick you up.” Levi’s patience was waning, “Come on, let’s go.”

“Hey, you! Didn’t you hear what Abigail said? She asked you to leave her alone. Are you deaf or something? Who do you think you are to insist that Abigail to leave with you? Get lost!”

“Yeah, Yannick will send Abigail when the party’s over.” The classmates cum lackeys of Yannick tried to get rid of Levi, “You’re not welcome here! Get your ass out of here!”

“You’d better leave with me now!” Levi’s eyes never left Abigail. He knew what nasty tricks her classmates were trying to play on Abigail. “I’ve promised Zoey to fetch you and that’s what I’m going to do!”

“I’m asking you to leave!” Abigail snapped, “Why do I have to go with you when I don’t even know who you are? I’ll go back on my own!”

Boom!

The door to their VIP room was blasted open by a forceful kick.

A guy was kicked into the room.

“What happened to you, Peyton?”

Everybody got up to help Peyton to his feet once they recognized he was one of their classmates.

Another girl was then shoved into the room. Her beaten face had swollen to the size of a pumpkin.

“Oh my God! What happened to you, Mae?”

Abigail and the rest rushed forward to lift her up. They were getting worried.

A teary Mae sobbed, “I ran into a group of bullies when I came out of the restroom. Peyton was trying to protect me so they beat him up too!”

At the same time, a few nasty looking fellows stomped their way into their room.

“Well, well, what have we got here? These little sexy students looked yummy to my eyes! Oh, what a grand feast we’ll be having tonight!”

The group of thugs drooled when they saw Abigail and her female classmates.

Their lecherous gaze swept across the pairs of fair, slender legs with salacious intent.

“So you’re the ones who had beaten up my pal?” Yannick stepped up and asked coldly.

A dozen of Yannick’s classmates stood up behind Yannick. They were all staring at the group of thugs with bulging eyes.

There was no reason for them to fear the thugs, given their numbers.

Besides, they could not wait to show how macho they were in front of their female classmates.

“Yeah, we’re the ones that whacked him upside down, so what?”

The leader of the thugs, a guy with his hair dyed in a freakish silver color, taunted Yannick with an amused look.

“I want you to apologize, or I’ll beat the shit out of you!” Yannick warned, determined to flaunt his bravery in front of Abigail.

“Hahaha, this is so funny it almost choked me, guys. Do you really think a few lame students like you could beat the shit out of us? What makes you think we’ll be taken in by your words? Just because you outnumber us?”

“Hahaha...”

The group of thugs chuckled in response to Yannick’s threat.

“Go! Get our men here! Tell our boss there’s a dozen of young schoolgirls here waiting for him! Get him over here, quick!”

The next moment, the expression on Yannick and the other guys turned wide-eyed, their mouths opened to let out a silent scream.

The thugs had called in their men. There were dozens of them with iron rods and shiny knives in their hands. They waved their weapons with a bloodthirsty look in their eyes.

They all gazed at Abigail and her classmates with a devilish grin, whilst they blocked the exit of the VIP room.

The students had never encountered such a ghastly scene before in their young lives. It scared the living daylight out of them and made them pissed their pants.

Even Yannick was starting to wobble.

Slap! Slap! Slap!

The silver-haired thug smacked at Yannick's face and sneered, "So what now? Where's that gutsy look of yours now?"

"Brother, please forgive me. I-I was wrong..."

Yannick's shoulders drooped and his body slumped like a deflated balloon as he surrendered.

Slap!

The silver-haired thug landed a tight slap on Yannick's face.

Bang!

Next, the thugs shoved and kicked at Yannick with such force that it made him spew out a fountain of blood.

The VIP room had now gone completely silent. Everyone muted and held their breath. They could only whisper a prayer in their hearts.