

Love beyond the mask (Whitney) Chapter 101-110

Chapter 101

Elaine could do no wrong. To L she was the epitome of innocence and kindness, a modern-day saint draped in designer threads.

“And me,

I am 17 Petty, huh?” Whitney thought.

Her eyes brimmed with icy frustration, a flicker of rage igniting within. She scoffed. “So, you’re blaming me all for her sale?”

“I’m just being fair and objective,” the man retorted, his brows knotted in discomfort. Seeing her on the verge of tears, a sliver of softness crept into his heart.

But the next moment, Whitney’s disillusionment erupted as she pointed an accusatory finger at him. “You, with all your smarts, are nothing but a blockhead. Do you even know the hostility your precious Elaine harbors against me? Run along, then. Go to her, your darling sister!”

“Say that again? You have absolutely no decency, yet you accuse me and Elaine? It seems I’ve been too lenient to you for too long!”

In a swift motion, the man captured her slender wrist, his grip firm against the door frame, his fury painting her milky skin with shades of crimson.

Tears welled up in Whitney’s eyes; never had she been so insulted.

She wrenched free from his grasp, her voice laced with bitter sarcasm, “So, you’ve decided I’m a tramp? Even though there’s nothing between Bryce, Simon, and me, you’re ever so convinced I’m the problem, no doubt with a nudge from Elaine. Paranoid, much?”

“Are you not? I’ve seen it with my own eyes! And at the Lotus Clubhouse, Elaine spoke up for you. You really don’t know what’s good for you.”

So, he had also been at the Lotus Clubhouse with Elaine by his side. Was it all a setup?

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He did not trust her and even tracked her movements at work. Since he had already judged her, what was there left to say?

“Yes, Elaine is always right, and I’m the loose woman, happy now?” Whitney’s heart turned ice-cold; she had no more words to waste.

She stormed out of his embrace, the embrace that once offered warmth, now just a cold memory.

Elaine watched Whitney storm off in the shadows, a sly smile curling her lips.

She had not gone far when Ludwik appeared, his gaze dark and mysterious.

That feeling sent a shiver down Elaine’s spine.

His eyes were as cold as blades, “I asked you to recommend vendors to her. Why did you hide that it was my idea?”

Elaine had anticipated Whitney’s counterattack and had her defenses ready.

Feigning surprise and hurt, she responded, “Bro, maybe Whitney misunderstood? I never meant to hide your kindness. I just thought she might mind if you interfered on her behalf, so I didn’t stress that part. I guess she doesn’t like me, and that’s why she rejected my offer. It’s all my fault, isn’t it?”

Ludwik cornered her against the wall, his icy presence almost choking her, “Nobody plays me. And if you’re playing me, you better not touch her. Got it?”

A chill ran down Elaine’s spine; her

eyes reddened in feigned hurt, “Did my foolishness cause a misunderstanding between you two? I’ll go clear things up with Whitney!”

“No need. Stay away from her from now on,” Ludwik commanded, still trusting Elaine’s explanation.

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Whitney's hostility towards Elaine seemed deep-rooted. If she had not known his intentions and gone to Bryce for the raw materials...

Ludwik's anger was palpable. However, he could not put down his pride and face her after the harsh words they had exchanged.

As Elaine walked away, her fingers curled into a tight fist. Despite their heated argument, Whitney's explanation had swayed him. His heart softened once again for that woman.

Unacceptable.

Ludwik's suspicions were rising. He warned her to keep her distance from Whitney. Thus, tonight, something had to happen to Whitney! Something that would utterly disappoint Ludwik.

A cruel gleam flickered in Elaine's eyes as she quickly sought out Hannah.

Hannah was fuming over a ruined designer gown stained with juice, thanks to Whitney. She could not stand the thought of Whitney not being ousted from the dinner party, especially when Bro could not spare her a second glance.

"Hannah..." Elaine's voice called out.

Hannah hurried to a secluded column, where Elaine feigned concern and said, "You weren't hurt, were you? Whitney was out of line tonight. I couldn't stand watching her antics, but Bro indulges her, and you suffer for it."

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Her words struck a nerve, and Hannah's eyes reddened with rage. "Elaine, she flaunts her beauty, even Bryce protects her. Doesn't Bro see it? I wish Bro could see through her deceit. It infuriates me to see him fooled by her!"

Elaine hesitated for a moment before hitting the mark. "Whitney's probably just networking with all the

wealthy businessmen here tonight. But I saw her with Mr. Wendt in the garden earlier. We can't let Bro find out. If there's any hint of flirtation, it could ruin everything."

Hannah's eyes lit up with malice. "You just reminded me, Elaine. She's never been chaste. If she's seducing Mr. Wendt, wouldn't that be typical? Hmph."

Elaine did not miss the foolish, scheming glint in her eyes. Hannah, now consumed by hatred for Whitney, would stop at nothing.

Hannah asked eagerly, "Where is Whitney now?"

Pretending ignorance, Elaine replied, "She just left the lounge. Is there something you need?"

"Just wait for the show, Elaine," Hannah smirked before darting away.

Elaine folded her arms, malicious smile playing on her lips. Everything was falling into place. She could not wait for Whitney's downfall tonight. After all that humiliation, would Ludwik still want her?

Whitney stumbled out of the banquet hall, a daze clouding her vision as a tear secretly escaped, only to be crisply chilled by the biting wind.

At that moment, the man inside felt like a stranger to her.

He had trusted Elaine over her, not even giving her a chance to explain. Did he genuinely believe she was some sort of social climber, using her body as a tool for business?

His paranoia and sudden outbursts were becoming frightening.

When she first met him, she was struck by his poised maturity and unyielding strength. But as they grew closer, she felt suffocated by his possessiveness and dominance, his mood swings now as unpredictable as the weather.

Lost in thought, Whitney questioned her feelings. Yes, she liked him, but was being with him the right choice?

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Were they even compatible?

“Whitney?” The suave and debonair Nolan approached, having just arrived.

He had come upon hearing that Whitney would attend the party.

Ludwik, that man devoid of emotional intelligence, had the gall to bring Elaine as his date. Any hope Whitney had of reconciliation now seemed dashed.

“Were you leaving?” Nolan’s voice broke through her reverie as he noticed her glistening eyes.

Whitney looked at Nolan blankly before asking in a frosty tone, “Can I ask you something? Elaine, is she really L’s sister?”

She had asked L the same question twice, and his affirmation had not wavered, but Elaine’s hostility sowed seeds of doubt in Whitney’s mind.

Nolan was taken aback. How could Elaine be Ludwik’s sister? She was, in reality, Ludwik’s...

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Nolan’s face suddenly tensed, and he awkwardly asked, “Is that what Big Bro told you?”

“Yeah,” Whitney locked eyes with him, not missing the subtle shift in his expression. Her heart sank. “Isn’t that the case?”

“If he said so, it must be true!” Nolan replied, his voice betraying his unease. He quickly tried to smooth things over. “Whitney, you must know, Big Bro’s totally into you. Before you came along, he never had a single girl on his mind.”

Except for the girl who saved his life, but she was nowhere to be found.

Nolan convinced himself

he was not lying. "You're smart. If you argue with him over Elaine, you're only hurting yourself. Besides, Big Bro is a tough nut to crack; you need to be more understanding of his temper. There's a reason for it..."

His tone grew somber, "He

doesn't trust easily because of his past. To him, trust means vulnerability. You have no idea what he's

been through. But he's starting to let you into his iceberg kingdom. We

can all see it! Don't be fooled by his stone-cold exterior—

that's just his battle armor. Inside, he's fragile. His anger means he's starting to care about you, to be emotionally involved. You can't let him down, or he'll lose it."

Nolan's heavy warning sent a chill through Whitney, who was already sensing the unusual stirrings of L's emotions, particularly his terrifying jealousy.

So, all his doubts stemmed from past hurt? The mistrust, but now he was opening up his frozen heart for her?

Could it be true?

Whitney thought she must be crazy to buy into Nolan's words.

But women are emotional creatures, and she had guessed that since L lived with Natalie, keeping her close and protected, his family background must weigh heavily on him.

Her heart softened just a bit, but she was still furious that he seemed to favor Elaine.

"Think it over. If you decide to stay with him, please try to be more patient." Nolan sighed, then hurried back to the party, playing the mediator once more.

Whitney stood rooted to the spot, unsure whether to leave or stay.

She was in the parking

lot, next to the garden, where the lights were dim. Her car was just ahead when suddenly, a figure approached her.

She spun around, coming face to face with a portly man she did not recognize

“Ms. Valentine, I’m Mr. Wendt. Were you looking for me?” Mr. Wendt slurred, his gaze on Whitney heated and urgent.

She immediately noticed the off scent on his breath.

“Why don’t we find a quiet place to talk? Did you want to discuss renting a Skye Gem kiosk space in my mall?” Mr. Wendt leered, remembering how this woman seemed to flirt with him during the party. Now that his nagging wife was gone, he was itching for some excitement.

“I wasn’t looking for you, Mr. Wendt. You’re not well. You should see a doctor.”

Whitney quickly shook off his hand and made a beeline for her car.

Suddenly, Mr. Wendt pounced from behind, clamping a chloroform–soaked cloth over Whitney’s mouth and

nose.

She struggled violently. “Mr. Wendt! Let go of me…”

Overpowered, she was no match for his strength. Mr. Wendt dragged her into the dark garden, heading for a

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ground–

floor guest room with a lecherous smile. Inside, another man named Dante was waiting. They exchanged a knowing grin. “Got a tip she’d be alone tonight. With her reputation, we can do whatever we want!”

Whitney, barely conscious, heard their conversation and felt herself being laid on a bed. With the last shred of awareness, she fished out an antidote pill from her dress and slipped it into her mouth, hoping it would counteract the effects of the drug.

“Look at her, lifting her dress in desperation!” Mr. Wendt chuckled nastily.

From the surveillance, Hannah watched everything unfold with a triumphant cackle.

She quickly called Elaine, barely containing her excitement.

“Elaine, everything’s set. Where’s Big Bro?”

Elaine’s eyes sparkled with malice, though her expression remained calm. “Hannah, don’t be naughty. He is still in the lounge.”

“Come and watch the show, Elaine. Whitney will lose Big Bro’s favor completely tonight, and then I’ll have my chance!”

“No, it would be my chance. He has always been mine,” Elaine thought.

She rose gracefully from her seat, unaware that the events in the garden had been witnessed.

Bryce’s assistant rushed back into the party and whispered urgently.

Bryce’s refined face darkened as he asked, “Did you see where they took her?”

The assistant nodded and led the way.

In the lounge, Nolan nearly choked on the smoke. Ludwik sat like a statue, eyes closed, surrounded by a chilly

aura.

Risking a rebuke, Nolan teased, “Ease up on the smoking. You’ve barely started your romance with Whitney; don’t let lung cancer beat you to it. That girl’s pretty obedient. I just played the emotional card, and her eyes softened. Such a delicate, proud woman is easy to tame. I don’t get why you’re so fiercely possessive. Big Bro, I know you’re suspicious by nature. You believe a young woman in the business world can’t be that innocent. But I’ve seen her clear eyes. Even if she’s working with Bryce as a supplier, there’s nothing between them. At worst, she’s just disappointed you.”

“That day in the private room, I saw her throw herself into Bryce’s arms on purpose. I don’t respect such tactics.”

Women in business often put on a show better than men, and Nolan knew Ludwik tolerated no deception.

“You, a man of power, should just find a little housekeeper—no social life, just someone to look after you and warm your bed. But you had to fall for a CEO. You’ve only got yourself to blame.”

“Who says I like her?” Ludwik’s voice was dangerously low.

Nolan shrugged. Ludwik was still in denial, but his possessiveness said it all.

“She came out tonight looking for you. Maybe she’s still waiting out there. Just talk to her. Is she carrying someone else’s child?”

Ludwik’s eyelashes fluttered before he snuffed out his cigarette and glanced out the window into the cold night. Standing up, his expression icy, he asked, “Where is she?”

Nolan’s face lit up, eager to mention something about the parking lot when the door suddenly swung open, and Hannah burst in, her expression a bizarre mix of emotions as she blurted out, “There’s trouble brewing. Just now, outside, there’s this rumor swirling around that Whitney and that Mr. Wendt were caught in a hush—hush chat in the garden, and then—they strolled into the downstairs guest room! And it seems there was another man involved. I mean, what’s with Whitney? Even if she’s at odds with you, she’s got no right to cheat...”

“Hannah, don’t you go spreading tales about Whitney!” Elaine interjected as she approached, her eyes flickering

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with hesitation before settling on Ludwik as if afraid to speak. “The rumors are flying wild outside. I wanted to steer clear of Whitney’s business, but she might be in a fix with Mr. Wendt. Maybe she just wanted to talk business, and Mr. Wendt got the wrong end of the stick. You’ve got to go save her!”

A chilling aura enveloped Ludwik, his demeanor turning icy.

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That damned woman, she just could not stay out of trouble. His gaze bore into Nolan, dark and stormy.

Nolan shivered, realizing every kind word he had ever spoken on Whitney's behalf had gone to waste.

The man's expressionless face gave nothing away as he strode forward with purposeful steps.

Nolan hurried to keep up, sensing Ludwik was about to explode, and whispered urgently, "Whitney must've been set up, man. With all the ruffraff around tonight, why on earth would she be talking business? She'd be fawning over you instead, the big sh ot that you are. Plus, she's pregnant. We need to get her out of there."

Ludwik's heart pounded with suppressed rage that quickly morphed into concern.

Hannah followed, fuming, praying her cousin would not manage to calm Ludwik down.

Elaine lagged behind, her phone vibrating silently. She slipped into a corner to answer it. Her assistant's voice was frantic. "Elaine, we've got trouble. Bryce found the place, and he's on his way there. I don't know if Mr. Wendt had enough time to... you know, make Whitney lose the baby..."

Elaine's brow furrowed.

Then, a sly smile crossed her lips, and she let out a soft, eerie chuckle. "Why is that bad news? Bryce showing up will only spice things up."

This was turning into a show she would not want to miss!

Mr. Wendt was nothing compared to Bryce. The murderous look Ludwik gave Bryce at the party said it all.

Plus, Whitney, drugged and with three guys? That was going to be a scene to remember!

Excited, Elaine quickly followed the others.

Ludwik rechecked his phone. Why did that damned woman not call him for help? Or was it already too late for

her to even ask?

He pushed through the crowd, arriving at the ground floor guest room. As he raised his leg to kick the door down, it swung open.

“Whitney!” Ludwik stormed in, frowning.

In the room, Mr. Wendt was already sprawled on the floor while the bed was a mess. Whitney leaned at the foot of the bed, her body limp and trembling, her gaze barely lucid through the confusion. Blood dripped from her lips, a sight both pitiful and seductive. Above her, a handsome young man leaned down.

His profile was refined, and his smile wry.

Bryce had removed his shirt, lifting Whitney gently. “Looks like fate has thrown us together tonight. I already gave you my jacket, and now I’m giving you my shirt to make sure you’re okay.”

Ludwik’s eyes iced over as he listened, his handcrafted leather shoes chilling the floor beneath him.

He smirked, watching from a distance, his eyes locked on Whitney.

Whitney, coming to, heard his voice and felt her heart jolt. She looked up only to meet his frosty gaze.

Bryce followed her gaze and turned to see the imposing man at the door; his jawline was chiseled even beneath a silver mask.

The room’s temperature seemed to drop.

“Mr. Lutz, would you please let go of me...” Whitney’s voice quivered, sensing trouble.

Bryce was confused, but before he could release her, a force slammed into him, sending him stumbling.

His usually calm face turned cold. “And you are?”

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The tall young man ignored him, fixing his steely gaze on the woman in the bed.

He flashed a twisted smile. "So, you cry out for him and not for me?"

"L, it's not what it looks like," Whitney stammered, her eyes brimming with tears,

How could she have the strength to call for help when she was drugged? Shaking, she said, "I was set up and drugged. Mr. Lutz discovered me by accident ..."

Ludwik's hand tightened around her neck with a deceptive caress. Suddenly, his pupils shrank, and he pulled her up from the bed and into his arms.

"Ah!" He had used so much force that Whitney's entire body ached, her mind trembling.

The veins on Ludwik's forehead bulged, but his tone was calm. "So, my woman needs to be saved by someone else? That's your excuse for being caught red-handed with him?"

Whitney was at a loss for words. "L, listen to me!"

Sensing the depth of their relationship, Bryce interjected, "Sir, I don't know who you are, but Ms. Valentine was nearly violated. I came to her rescue. Please, don't delay her any further."

Seeing how rough Ludwik was with Whitney, Bryce attempted to get Whitney out.

However, Ludwik remained unmoved. Softly pressing the fragile woman's shoulders, he smirked like the devil. "If you don't know who I am, go find out. Are you interested in this woman? Unfortunately, I've already slept with her. Did she not tell you that before you two started messing around? She's got my child."

"L, enough!" Whitney felt her heart penetrated by the painful humiliation. Why did he have to tear her pride apart and step on it in front of another man?

The man's cold gaze shifted to her. Touching her pink lips with his rough fingers, he said, "Why so nervous? Am I not telling the truth?"

With a mocking tone, he continued, "Enough, you said? Then why aren't you leaving?"

Whitney trembled all over. Having no idea what L might do next, she said with difficulty, "Mr. Lutz, I'm sorry that you had to witness such an embarrassing situation after saving me."

Her eager explanation only made Ludwik's eyes grow even gloomier.

Then, she turned around and left.

"Stop right there," He called out.

Walking toward her, he grabbed Bryce's shirt, threw it on the floor, and stepped on it.

Bryce's expression turned ugly at the sight.

With a chilling touch, Ludwik draped his coat over Whitney's shoulders and commanded, "Felix, tie her up. We're taking her away."

"Ms. Valentine, do you need help?" Bryce stepped forward; concern etched on his face.

But Ludwik's grip was unyielding. Whitney, her eyes glistening, shook her head, her face pale.

As Felix and the bodyguards escorted her away, Elaine watched from the shadows, a cold smile on her lips.

Though Whitney had not been defiled, Ludwik was beyond furious now.

Suddenly, Whitney's piercing gaze met hers.

Whitney clenched her fists, then was whisked away.

Ludwik surveyed the room, his eyes icy as he addressed the onlookers. "Nolan, clean this up. If a word of this gets out, heads will roll."

His presence silenced the crowd.

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Hearing such an arrogant remark, Bryce was about to chase after Whitney, but his assistant intervened with a cautionary whisper. "Sir, you've been abroad for so long that you might not be aware of the legend of Mr. Lippert from the formidable Lippert family. As a child, he was known for wearing a silver mask, rumored to be because his out-of-this-world good looks once brought trouble upon him. I have a hunch, sir, that this man is like Mr. Lippert. Only someone of his stature and power would dare to dismiss you so."

A flicker of surprise crossed Bryce's face.

Outside the banquet hall, on a secluded mountain path, Whitney was ushered into a car with a definitive click as the central locking system engaged.

The chilling air seemed to freeze her very soul.

A tall, impeccably dressed man approached with an elegant chill, standing outside to smoke a cigarette, his gaze devouring her through the window.

Trapped in the car, Whitney felt the oppressive fear as her tears glistened in the corner of her eyes, a mixture of indignation and loathing filling her.

After finishing two cigarettes, he finally got in the car, and with Felix trembling at the wheel, the Bentley surged into the night.

Whitney finally burst out at the robust man beside her, unable to contain her frustration from the humiliation she had suffered. "Are you insane? How did I ever cross paths with a tyrant like you, so overbearing and unreasonable... Hmm!"

Ludwik suddenly seized her by the back of her head, pulling her into a fierce kiss that was so intense that Whitney felt as if she was being devoured.

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"You can't..." Whitney tried to resist, only to realize she had provoked a wrathful god.

The man's hands, veins bulging with barely controlled fury, pinned her against the car window without saying a word. His lips crushed against hers without mercy, almost devouring her in his frenzied assault.

Whitney's delicate lips quickly turned red as blood.

Ludwik's thoughts raced to her at the foot of the bed, Bryce dressing her, her lips stained with blood, seductive as a succubus drawing the life from some man.

His rage grew wilder, his kisses trailing down to the nape of her milky-white neck, the lingering scent driving him to madness as he sought to tear away and claim what he saw as his.

Pressed against the edge of the car, the vehicle still moving, Whitney's head knocked against the window while the man, like a lion, was beyond reason, his eyes darkening further as he watched her tears fall one by one beneath his savage kisses. He scoffed at her, 'Don't give me that mournful look. You weren't like this with Bryce.

His voice was a low growl filled with cold fury.

Whitney had no strength left to fight, her small hands clutching pitifully at his shirt, trying to push him away, but only tears remained.

He zipped up the back of her dress as they arrived at the villa.

Ludwik did not say a word, carrying her out of the car. She did not cooperate, so he dragged her in, taking care

not to harm the child she carried.

He dragged her to the second-floor bedroom, his gaze like the frost of a winter night as he looked at her and said icily, "It seems you don't understand. If I want to control someone, it's easy. From now on, forget your job and career. Just stay at home and have this kid!"

He turned and ordered Taryn, his voice harsh. "This woman is restless. Keep an eye on her. Take her phone. My

mother must not find out!"

Whitney lay on the bed like a rag doll, her chest and neck stinging. It took a while before she could gather her senses.

He was grounding her!

“What right do you have to treat me this way, you bastard? Have you gone mad?” She sprang from the bed, reaching for the door.

But Taryn sighed and locked it promptly.

Whitney felt like she was going insane. What kind of devil had she entered into a sham marriage with and then had an actual relationship with?

Downstairs at the villa.

Nolan’s car raced over, and as he got out, he heard Ludwik’s chilling voice instructing the servants, “Call the surgeon over. Check carefully.”

Who they were to examine was obvious.

Nolan sighed, facing Ludwik’s impenetrable, somber visage. The faint sound of a woman’s soft crying and knocking on the door could be heard from upstairs

.

“Big Bro... What are you doing? You can’t keep someone locked up like this.”

Ludwik’s eyebrows knitted together in a chill sweep, “Is there anything I can’t do?”

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Nolan caught the tiredness behind his deep frown, not daring to speak further.

He took a long drag on his cigarette while Whitney’s cries made his veins pulse with increasing frustration

Staying here, he only wanted to destroy her. Thus, he abruptly got into his car and said, “Check the banquet hall incident. Find out who set her up!”

“So, you do know Whitney was set up, huh? Then don’t treat her like this! All because you couldn’t save her, and Bryce did, just by giving her a coat...” Nolan thought. However, he knew that he might have lost it in that situation, too.

The sports car sped away.

Nolan glanced at the villa’s second floor. It was like a little prison cell. “Whitney, oh Whitney, if only you’d listen,” He thought.

Stamping his foot, Nolan had no choice but to follow Ludwik, forced into a reckless midnight car chase.

In a daze, Whitney was thoroughly examined by the female doctor. The drug was inhaled, not affecting the blood, and they had administered the antidote in time the baby was fine.

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She had no new injuries save for her bruised lips and a few marks on her collarbone.

The doctor silently applied a cooling ointment, advising her to be careful when bathing.

Humiliated, Whitney remained silent, eventually drifting off into a troubled sleep.

Come morning, her first instinct was to reach for her phone, only to remember that the bastard had confiscated

1. *it.*

Was he cutting her off from the outside world?

Whitney was on the verge of madness.

She had done nothing wrong; she was the victim, almost defiled, yet he was gounding her.

What era was this to still have such punishments?

Whitney felt more than just humiliation; there was also his extreme coldness. This was his idea of a

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relationship equality only when he was in a good mood. She must have been out of her mind to fall for such

a man.

Whitney kept banging on the door, and Taryn, distressed on the other side, pleaded, “Madam, I’m sorry, but you can’t leave the bedroom. Please eat your breakfast, will you be good?”

“I’ll starve myself.”

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Taryn chuckled bitterly. “Sir just called. He wants a report on your meals three times a day. Please don’t make it hard for us. And the baby’s over three months now; you can’t starve it.”

Whitney’s tear-stained face collapsed against the door.

She had already grown fond of the baby; she could not starve herself.

Why was he so heartless, forbidding her from work when Skye Gem had a pile of urgent matters needing her attention?

Stripping her of her freedom, she could not contact Tiana.

What happened at last night’s banquet was most certainly not an accident; there must be someone behind it. She had seen Elaine’s look when she was taken away it must have been her doing. Whitney was certain, and she wanted to investigate.

But now she was trapped.

Days passed, and Whitney’s eyes began to lose light from being confined.

Her mood was off, and Taryn, worried about depression, reported back to Ludwik.

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In his office, the man's icy demeanor only softened as he put down his pen and picked it up again.

Felix understood. Mr. Lippert was furious this time, intent on punishing Madam, and he would not let up soon.

Rebuffed, Taryn returned and ran into Elaine coming up the elevator.

In her own office, Elaine's gaze narrowed ominously.

Her assistant asked, "Ms. Elaine, with Whitney locked up by Mr. Lippert, what else are you worried about?"

Elaine's brow furrowed. She had thought Whitney was finished after Ludwik's outburst at the banquet, but his grounding of her was, to Elaine, an inadvertent protection. She would find it even harder to act.

And Whitney was still not defeated. Until she was gone, Elaine would not rest easy.

As Ludwik's disenchantment with Whitney peaked, it presented the perfect window of opportunity for her to make her move.

It was time for a swift and decisive strike against Whitney, that wretched woman.

Elaine settled gracefully back into her office chair and suddenly asked her assistant, "Have you dug up the info on that deceased construction worker's family as I asked?"

The assistant, puzzled by the inquiry yet aware of its importance since Elaine had assigned it some days ago, immediately responded, "Yes, I found out. It's the son of a construction worker who died in Elate City. The kid was so poor he was sent off to a boxing gym early on, and he's pretty muscular now. If he's out for revenge against Mr. Lippert, well, Mr. Lippert had better watch out. The

guy's been spotted around Banyan City, keeping his eyes on the Imperial Gem Corporation building."

"Muscular, huh?" Elaine sneered with a deep chuckle, slowly pulling out a photograph to hand to her assistant. "Find someone to make contact with him. Give him this photo and make it clear that she's Mr. Lippert's beloved wife, and throw in a baby on the way as a bonus. Offer a nice sum of money. Just make sure it's a clean job

that can't be traced back to us."

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The assistant peered down at the photograph of Whitney, and her hands trembled ever so slightly. She lifted her eyes to Elaine, knowing this was no laughing matter.

Clearly, Elaine had been plotting this for a long time. Despite her young age, it was terrifying how cunning and

malicious she was

Elaine leaned back into her leather chair, gazing out the window at the cars scurrying like ants below. A sly smirk crept across her face. "Time to spring Whitney from her gilded cage," she said.

"Check on the schedule for the doctor who's attending to Mr. Lippert's mother in her cottage retreat. Find out when he's off-duty," Elaine commanded.

The assistant quickly responded, flipping through her notes with practiced ease.

Elaine chuckled lowly, a sinister plan clearly forming in her mind. "And get me a burner phone," she added.

As per routine, Taryn delivered meals to Whitney on the sixth day. Natalie's villa was nestled behind the golf course, a fair distance from the main manor.

It was a considerate gesture from Mr. Lippert, who wanted his mother to convalesce in peace, the forest air rich with oxygen.

But now, with Whitney confined by Ludwik and Natalie oblivious to her plight, the help from both households remained unaware of each other's affairs.

Today, the day the doctor was off-duty, Xandra had been reassigned to fill in.

Around noon, with her health seemingly stable, Natalie retired upstairs and received an unexpected call from an unknown number that reeked of telemarketing.

She answered the phone with her usual warmth. "Hello?"

"Natalie!" The sing-song voice of Elaine carried through the line, its sweetness veiling malice.

In a flash, it ignited something in Natalie's memory—a warning signal, an echo of danger, telling her that this was the voice of a venomous snake and that she should stay away from it. She stiffened. "Elaine, what can I do for you?"

Elaine's voice was dripping with feigned innocence. "Oh, nothing much. Just wanted to ask why you dislike me so. Why have you made Ludwik hold off marrying me? He's indifferent to everyone else; he could marry anyone. You're quite the thorn in my side, you know? Why are you afraid of me? Could it be because of the time I pushed the girl who liked Ludwik..."

"Ah!" Natalie could not grasp the details, only that this girl was a source of terror. No, she was no girl. She was a scorpion. What had she done? Natalie could not remember, but her head throbbed with pain and fear, an urgent need to escape this conversation...

Natalie gasped for breath, her chest tight, her complexion fading to an ashen hue.

Elaine listened silently as the old lady fell ill, then hung up the phone with a cruel twist of her lips.

She instructed the assistant, "Natalie is going to have an episode. Keep an eye on the cottage. Once chaos ensues, Whitney will get wind of it."

Sure

enough, as Natalie's illness acted out, the cottage descended into disarray. Xandra scrambled to contact Ludwik, but his phone went unanswered—likely tied up in a meeting. It was office hours, after all!

Confusion reigned. Natalie had been improving and eating every meal well. Why this sudden epileptic relapse? Xandra could not understand it.

With no doctor present and staff overwhelmed, a housemaid rushed to the main house for help.

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Taryn had just served Whitney when the landline shrilled from below. She dashed to answer it, leaving the upstairs bedroom door ajar.

Moving with a deliberate slowness, Whitney stepped out of her room, overhearing Taryn's panicked voice. "The matriarch is ill? No doctor? Is she foaming at the mouth?"

"What's wrong with Mom?" Whitney's eyes narrowed with concern.

Taryn spun around. "Madam, I must check on the situation at the cottage. Please stay put."

"Let me see her. If Mom's foaming at the mouth, it's no small matter." Whitney swiftly pocketed a needle kit from her room, concealing it within her clothes.

Taryn ushered her onto the e-bike without a second thought and drove toward the cottage.

As dusk approached, the sky grew overcast. Whitney dashed into the cottage. This was her second visit, and she was very familiar with the place, heading straight into Natalie's room.

Inside, chaos reigned, and the nurses were too afraid to intervene. Whitney ordered everyone out. "Stay outside. I know some first aid."

They complied, leaving Whitney to shut the door behind them.

Natalie's face was pallid, her body spasming. Whitney, recalling some basic emergency procedures, swiftly administered the needle, targeting the acupuncture points. Then, she carefully fed Natalie a sedative pill, one her mother had crafted.

After half an hour, Natalie's spasms ceased, and her complexion stabilized.

Whitney knew she had bought some time, though she was unfamiliar with the specific medical details. She continued with the acupuncture, coupling it with a respirator, until Natalie drifted into a tranquil sleep.

Once Whitney was sure the crisis was averted, she called the nurse back in.

"When will the doctor arrive?" She asked.

"He's been notified. Should be here in an hour or so."

Whitney let out a sigh of relief and stepped outside. The lawn was deserted, and everyone's attention was fixed on Natalie's condition upstairs.

She eyed the silent expanse of the estate. Behind the cottage lay a path leading to an exit, the keys still in the e-bike's ignition.

After six days of confinement, perhaps longing for fresh air or perhaps driven by an innate survival instinct, Whitney saw her chance.

The next moment, she jumped onto the e-bike.

She had to get out, to go anywhere, just to escape the confines of the mansion.

As the e-bike sped away, the security detail inside the gates realized Whitney had vanished.

Panic ensued. It was clear Whitney had fled through the back exit. Taryn, ash-en-faced, immediately redialed Ludwik.

That moment, Ludwik had just concluded a lengthy meeting and was on the way back from the company's north district office to downtown./

The news on the phone hit him like a one-two punch: his mother was ill, and his wife had taken advantage of the commotion to escape. His gaze turned to ice.

Elaine swung her long legs as she sat, a devilish glee in her eyes. "Where has Whitney fled to?"

"She's likely headed to her best friend, Tiana Melford's place," Elaine's assistant murmured, handing over a map

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with Tiana's residence clearly marked.

Elaine's gaze held a venomous gleam. It's getting dark. I remember there's a construction site on that route. Herd her there and let that guy take action. I want her dead tonight! Ludwik's busy up north; even if he gets the call, he'd check on his mother first. Whitney's escape will only infuriate him... He won't go after her."

The assistant was already coordinating the trap over several phone calls.

Elaine's heart pounded with anticipation, a sinister smile playing on her lips as she awaited the outcome.

Whitney's e-bike was no match for the main highway, and a traffic cop stopped her at the intersection, still a good distance from Tiana's place.

She felt like she had been cooped up for ages, emerging without a dime to her name, her cell phone confiscated.

The night was a heavy blanket of gloom, the fog thick and suffocating as if dampening the very depths of her

eyes.

Truth be told, she never intended to run away; she just sought refuge at Tiana's, a safe haven. She knew L would come looking for her, but at Tiana's, he could not just barge in; she could call the cops.

That bastard... To instill such fear in her. In fact, when she heard Nolan's words at the dinner party, her heart nearly softened,

But his constant misunderstandings, even grounding her—how could any relationship survive that?

When they met again, it might just be to clear the air and then break up.

Even the thought of those two words brought an unexpected pang of reluctance, a subtle ache in Whitney's

heart.

She blinked her trembling lashes as a passerby pulled out a phone and asked, "Are you going to keep waiting?"

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Whitney snapped back to reality. She had just tried to call Tiana on a borrowed phone, but there was no answer—Tiana was probably tied up with something.

She knew the way, so Whitney nodded in thanks and revved up her e-bike, speeding down the alleyway as a chill set in.

Suddenly, three motorcycles roared up from behind, speeding straight toward her. Whitney swerved to the side, but it was too late to avoid them completely. She quickly jumped off the bike, sensing the riders had ill intentions. Just past the construction site lay Tiana's neighborhood, a cluster of suburban mansions.

Whitney hurried along the path next to the construction site, but as darkness enveloped her, without her phone's GPS, she quickly lost her bearings. Looking up, she found herself cornered in the middle of the construction site by the three motorcycles.

A helicopter sliced through the sky, heading north over Banyan City.

Felix said gravely, "Mr. Lippert, the mansion's security reported that Madam fled on an e-bike..."

"A bunch of incompetents, can't even keep track of one woman. Doesn't that bike have a tracker?" Ludwik's brows furrowed with anger.

Felix found him intimidating and was surprised that Ludwik had left Natalie unattended to chase after Whitney. It was obvious how important she was to him. He feared that once caught, Ludwik might tear her apart.

"It takes some time to activate the e-bike's tracker," Felix replied, equally anxious.

The helicopter circled several times, clueless about where to search.

Suddenly, Ludwik's phone rang. It was Tiana, her voice laced with urgency, "Mr. L? What's going on with Whitney? She borrowed a stranger's phone to

call me, but I missed it. When I called back, he said she left looking dazed. I'm worried she's in danger..."

"Where did he see her?" Ludwik's voice was icy.

"At the bank on South City Road."

"Head there and land!" Ludwik commanded the pilot.

The helicopter descended rapidly on South City Road. Ludwik leaped out and quickly spotted the e-bike parked at the roadside.

But where was she?

His gaze swept around coldly until he saw a large housing development across a street to the left. His intuition twitched.

Damn that woman, fleeing so far on an e-bike. And now, why had she abandoned it? She was unarmed, and it was getting dark...

Felix pointed to the right. "Madam wouldn't head toward the construction site. There's a supermarket to the right; she might have taken shelter there."

Ludwik glanced toward the supermarket, his eyes darkening.

Whitney stood in the dark, the motorcycles gone.

The empty building loomed ominously, a little terrifying.

She could not tell which direction to go without her phone to light the way.

Suddenly, a chilling laugh echoed

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from above-someone was there!

Whitney's heart raced, and she prepared to run, but a familiar voice descended from the darkness before she could. "Whitney."

L? How did he find her here?

Before she could think further, his voice boomed, "Dodge!"

Confused and sightless in the dark, she heard something crash from above!

Looking up, Whitney saw a piece of glass plummeting from the building, and she froze in terror, unable to

move.

In that instant, a man seemed to appear from nowhere and lunged toward her.

Whitney was enveloped in a familiar warmth. L did not let her fall, but she heard a dull thud above her head followed by the drip of blood on her face.

Panic-stricken, Whitney cried out, "L... you're bleeding!"

The sinister laughter from above grew louder, and then suddenly, the glint of a blade and chaos ensued. Whitney was aware only that she had not been thrown to the ground, and she heard the sound of the knife penetrating the flesh at least twice as the man shielded her like a rock.

Tears streamed down her face as she whispered, "L, are you hurt, aren't you?"

He did not push her out of the way because she was pregnant and could not

afford a fall. He was unwavering in protecting their child, a father guarding his child and the child's mother.

Finally, when he gently pushed her aside, he said, "Run carefully."

Whitney, pale as a ghost, took off in small, quick steps. Looking back, all she saw in the pitch dark was his body poised like a mighty tiger, the assailant wildly attacking, each strike aiming for his life...

"Sir! Damn it!" Suddenly, Felix burst onto the scene with security guards in tow.

The attacker fled swiftly in an instant.

Stunned, Whitney ran to him. He stood unflinchingly, shaking off blood from his chiseled jaw.

He wore a black suit, looking imposing, and Whitney could not see where he was wounded. Her voice shook. "Oh my god... Are you okay?"

"It's just a flesh wound. Stop crying!" He reprimanded her sternly, then scooped her up. "We need to move." "Call an ambulance, now!" Felix's voice was grave, and Whitney heard the unmistakable urgency.

Back at the office, Elaine slammed her hand on the desk as her assistant delivered the news, "What? Ludwik rescued Whitney and got stabbed in the process?"

How could this be? She had initiated her plan as soon as Whitney escaped, and Ludwik was far in the north-how did he find Whitney so quickly?

Trouble, the assistant said, "Mr. Lippert had just ended a meeting early and received a call from the mansion. How he found Whitney so soon is unknown."

Elaine's face clouded with anger. No matter how she plotted, Whitney always managed to escape danger, and now even Ludwik got implicated!

She had not expected to shoot herself in the foot.

Furious, Elaine swept the documents from her desk and stormed out, "Which hospital was Ludwik taken to?"

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Outside the operating room, Whitney clutched Ludwik's personal items, anxiously waiting.

She could not forget the sight of his blood-soaked back as he was wheeled in, haunting her...

He had lost so much blood yet had not uttered a word, carrying her all the way out of the construction site until the ambulance arrived. His imposing frame then collapsed on the stretcher...

What kind of man was he? Whitney could not fathom it. Imposing, powerful, domineering, and bad, yet without a second thought, he risked his life for her.

If it were not for him, she surely would have

Her face was a mask of fear and uncertainty

Soon, Nolan and Parker arrived as well.

The surgery was swift; after two hours, Ludwik was wheeled out.

Nolan and Parker rushed to speak with the doctor.

Whitney sprang to her feet, her gaze landing on the gaunt, chiseled face of the man lying motionless before her, his eyes closed, his head and torso swathed in bandages.

She moved towards him slowly, her heart pounding.

Nolan finished negotiating with the hospital staff and turned to look at the petite woman with a heavy heart. His eyes darted around before he let out a mournful sigh, saying, "How did it come to this?"

Whitney's heart skipped a beat. She looked up at him, "What's wrong?"

Nolan covered his eyes, the pain evident in his voice. "Whitney, the doctor says Bro's not going to make it. That's why they rushed him out here so quickly. The glass shattered and caused severe internal bleeding in his brain. He might not even make it through the night... Alas, if there's anything you need to say to him, say it now. You might not get another chance."

"What?" Whitney felt a chill run through her, her legs nearly giving way beneath her.

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The doctor's words, "Good news, he's fine," were choked in his throat.

Considering Nolan, the doctor could only, with a heavy heart, step aside.

Nolan gave Parker a swift kick, and the two promptly vanished.

For a moment, the wide hospital corridor was left with only Whitney and a gurney.

Silence reigned, broken only by the soft sobs of a young woman, followed swiftly by the tender, quivering touch of a strong man's arm.

Whitney stared at the handsome features beneath his mask, knowing a shard of glass falling from above could be fatal, yet she could not believe it. She collapsed, "No, no, L, please wake up. You were conscious when you

went in!"

She clung to his arm, instinctively trying to acupuncture him to check his vitals

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But L did not respond!

Whitney felt a chill in her heart. She withdrew her attempt at aid, and tears sprang forth as she cried onto the man's chest. "Why did you do this? Why didn't you think before you saved me?"

In that moment, I knew you care about me, about the baby. Otherwise, why would you rather get stabbed than let me fall?" Her heart clenched. Such bravery moved her deeply; no man had ever risked his life for her like

this.

How many times had he saved her now?

"I don't want our baby to lose their father, and I don't want to lose you either. Do you hear me?"

She mustered the courage to whisper these words because he might never know her true feelings if she did

not.

Her feelings were a mess because of him. Was he the master of carrot-and-stick?

Whitney took a deep breath, holding his hand. "Why are you so cruel and yet so kind? You're the kind of man that's easy to love and hate. I was planning to run away, to break up with you when I saw you again..."

Already conscious and listening to her heartfelt words with pleasure, Ludwik was amused.

His anger subsided for a moment, but the next moment, it surged again.

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What the hell did she mean by break up?

Fortunately, in the next second, the little woman cried like a kitten, rubbing her tears on his arm. "But now I'm sure I like you. A man who would risk his life for me is worth falling for. Please hear me and respond, okay?"

Ludwik's heart softened despite feeling a bit exasperated. He knew she had fallen for him long ago. Her confession was as tender and sweet as chocolate melting into his heart.

It was sweet how Nolan had scared her into tears.

He wanted to hold her close and kiss her tears away.

"And what about after you're gone? Have you thought about me and the child?" Whitney, bitter about the future, said, "I'll definitely bring our child into the world, and I probably won't remarry. But life is unpredictable, and if I must remarry for some reason, with your petty nature, wouldn't you be furious even from the grave?"

"Never mind you're thinking about remarrying, but calling me petty? No, wait. How dare you think about remarrying?" Furious, Ludwik thought.

His chest heaved, and he suddenly opened his bloodshot eyes, fearing that if he listened any longer, he would

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"rise from the dead in anger."

Staring at this fickle woman, he questioned her, "Remarry? To whom?"

Whitney was stunned, her pale face lifting to see him speaking with eyes wide open, his voice hoarse but clear. After a brief pause, she bolted down the corridor, "Nolan, come quickly. Is he having his last radiance?"

The little woman was frantic, tears falling.

Ludwik's patience was wearing thin.

Nolan was at a loss for words.

Parker glanced at the tearful little woman, then at Nolan, and snorted, "This is your amazing idea. Wait until Bro gets his hands on you."

Nolan did not know what to say, thinking, "I was trying to use Bro's heroics to soften Whitney's heart in desperation so they could make up, okay? He enjoyed the confession, but it suddenly becomes my fault at the mention of remarriage?"

Nolan was speechless, offering a strained smile as he stepped out to console the grieving little woman. "Whitney, maybe Bro was moved by you, and his condition suddenly improved. Doctor, what do you say?" The doctor, barely keeping his composure, could not comprehend why he was mentioned again.

He stepped forward to check on Ludwik, sporting an even stiffer smile than Nolan's. "Ms. Whitney, he is in critical condition, but his strong constitution has brought him back to consciousness. This is undoubtedly a miracle!"

Whitney, now a tearful mess, was slowly catching on.

She glared at Nolan, then glanced at the pale but lucid man on the bed.

She had been so frantic earlier that she had only tried acupuncture and forgot to check his pulse.

"You... you teamed up to trick me! L, when did you wake up?"

He gave her an inscrutable look, her eyes red from sincere worry and tears. He felt a comforting warmth inside, glancing at the doctor. "My head hurts a lot. Should I be in the ICU?"

The doctor responded quickly, "Of course! Alas, you have to hold on!"

Whitney was speechless. Her eyes were cold as she watched from the side, but hearing that L had to be admitted to the ICU, she was uncertain again.

Seeing her forlorn face, Ludwik looked away with a pale smile and said, "Push me there. What good is a wife who doesn't care for me?"

The onlookers in the hallway, who had been following the drama, whispered among themselves, "She seemed to truly love her husband a moment ago, but now that he's not dead, she's changed her tune?"

"Maybe she's worried she won't get any inheritance."

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"Alas, that's the nature of people. It's such that man is so handsome. If I were her, I'd care for him the rest of my life even if I have to help him to the washroom."

People could be so harsh.

Whitney's cheeks flushed with embarrassment, and she reluctantly pushed his stretcher, only for him to frown and say, "Did I feel a needle earlier?"

She quickly looked away, guilty because she was the one who had pricked him while he feigned unconsciousness.

The doctor came over to inspect. "Mr. Lippert, you're on an IV. It might have poked you."

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Ludwik did not question further, and Whitney pushed him into the VIP ICU.

The hospital room was as opulent as a Presidential Suite, with everything one could wish for at their fingertips. The doctor, holding the medical chart with grave seriousness, said to Whitney, "He has sustained a laceration at the back of his head from shattered glass. Although we've managed to remove all the fragments, head injuries are no trivial matter. The most concerning are the two deep stab wounds he's received near his shoulder blades. They require meticulous care to prevent infection."

Whitney's heart skipped a beat as she glanced at the dried blood by his temples and quietly excused herself to the restroom to prepare some warm water.

The doctor quickly pressed the stoic man, "Mr. Lippert, did that sound severe enough?"

Ludwik looked dismissively at him and said icily, "Write it up as if I'm on death's door. List every possible complication, and while you're at it, bring over a wheelchair."

The doctor was taken aback, thinking, "But you've only sustained injuries above the waist..."

As Whitney returned, Ludwik's pallid lips were set in a firm line.

Sensing the tension, the doctor blurted out, "Are you in great pain? We need to get you on a ventilator! This is troubling, indeed. If we don't get your head injury right, you could end up paralyzed."

Whitney paled.

Why was his condition worsening again?

The man shot the doctor a cold glare, prompting him to hastily tuck away the medical chart and make a beeline for the door.

Now, Whitney could not find Parker or Nolan anywhere; it was just the two of them left in the room.

She approached his bedside, and under his intense gaze, her composure faltered. With a bowed head, she gently wiped the bloodstain from his cheek, her touch as light as a whisper.

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The white towel was stained a crimson hue, her small hands trembling slightly as she felt his gaze upon her, deep as the midnight sky.

She wanted to ask if he was in pain, but the words refused to come out of her throat. Suddenly, her hand was gently clasped by his, his fingertips were icy cold.

Whitney jerked her hand away, and he let out a pained hiss.

"Are you okay?" She asked, panic lacing her voice as she looked at him.

Their eyes met, and it felt like he was about to bleed ink. An oppressive force loomed over her. Whitney blushed under his intense stare.

Ludwik rubbed her wrist, his expression unreadable. "Is what you said in the hallway true? That you're head over heels in love with me, that you can't bear the thought of me dying? That if I were to die, you'd follow me to the grave with our child? Is that it?"

Whitney was speechless, flabbergasted. Was that really what she had said?

She could not believe someone could twist her words to such a degree, his self-love bending them out of shape. But seeing his wounds, she could not bring herself to crush him and quietly protested, "I just said I have feelings for you..."

The man turned cold and pale. "Fine. I nearly died trying to save you, and now that you're safe, you don't love or care about me anymore."

Whitney bit her lip. "No, that's not true... I do love you!"

Ludwik scoffed weakly. "Love? And yet you're all tangled up with other men. Weren't you planning to run off? What's stopping you from going to Mr. Lutz or Perlman?"

Outside the door, two burly men listening in both shuddered.

Nolan, who had been barely holding back his laughter, was now at a loss for words. "Bro's really got a flair for the dramatic," he muttered.

"Man's got age, but he's as petulant as a teenager. Good thing Whitney is down to earth," Parker said with a

smirk.

The 'down to earth' young woman clenched her fists, patience threading her voice as she considered how he had saved her. "I was just scared from the confinement, okay? Can't I even go see Tiana without causing a scene? I've already... confessed just now. You know you're the only man in my heart, so quit being jealous over irrelevant people."

His eyes fixed on her indifferent face. The gloom of recent days seemed to lift a bit as he heard the term "irrelevant people."

Nolan raised his thumb in approval, "Whitney's got a way with words, calming the king of jealousy."

"Obviously, a woman knows how to soothe a man, especially someone like Bro, who's been thirsty for affection," Parker said, his smile laced with mischief.

Nolan joined in with a chuckle. "Whitney's what, about four months along now? Heh, Bro can..."

Their conversation was interrupted by a commotion outside,

A subordinate reported, "Ms. Elaine is waiting outside. She heard about Mr. Lippert's injury and wishes to visit." Parker had already stationed bodyguards outside; Ludwik's injury was not to be publicized, especially not to the Lippert family's matriarch and her vultures. They had always been keeping a close eye on Ludwik.

Nolan frowned, instinctively not wanting Elaine to enter.

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Whitney and Ludwik were on the mend, and Elaine's presence seemed like an unwelcome distraction.

He turned to Parker, inquiring. "What about Elaine? Do we offend her or not?"

With her status in Emperor City, neither Nolan nor Parker would want to cross her lightly.

Parker instructed his men. "Tell Elaine we're on guard against the Lippert family. We can't disclose the extent of Ludwik's injuries. Please ask her to understand that no one can come in at this time"

The message quickly reached Elaine, who stood blocked by bodyguards, her face darkening with displeasure.

Nolan and Parker were clearly siding with Whitney!

By keeping Elaine out, they ensured that Whitney stayed close to Ludwik. Their recent trials only strengthened their bond.

Elaine's nails dug into her palms, her mind racing with schemes as she thought of Natalie, who was at the

cottage...

With a tight-lipped smile and a subtle raise of her eyebrows, Elaine turned and left.

Back in the room, Ludwik had not let go of Whitney's hand, his gaze fixed on her. "Does your stomach hurt?" He asked softly.

A warmth spread through her as Whitney shook her head. "You were in surgery, but a doctor checked on us. Our baby is fine."

He closed his eyes briefly, then opened them, his gaze deepening. "Were you okay at the villa these past days?"

Whitney paused; he was finally asking. Her lips felt dry.

But with him lying wounded for her sake, her grievances seemed trivial.

Whitney picked up a cup of water and dipped a cotton swab to moisten his lips. "Does that feel better?"

His eyes softened, clearly pleased with her gentle demeanor, and he seemed to understand her resentment.

Ludwik changed the subject. "I need to use the restroom."

Whitney blushed. "I'll call a male nurse."

His expression turned frosty. "After saving your life, you can't even help me to the restroom?"

"Nuff said," Whitney thought. With resignation, she helped him up, supporting his trim waist. "I'll help you, okay?"

"That's more like it." Ludwik thought.

However, when they moved only a little, he winced in pain, his grip on her hand trembling.

Whitney suggested, "Maybe you could just... on the bed?"

"Absolutely not!" Ludwik's pride would not allow it.

Leaning on her petite shoulder, his masculine scent overwhelmed her, and Whitney finally realized just how tall and heavy he was. She carefully supported him to the restroom and then turned around, giving him privacy.

He raised an eyebrow, calling out to her, "My pants?"

Whitney was at a loss for words, glancing at his long, attractive body, and stammered, "Your hands are fine. Take them off yourself."

His strength seemed to dissipate instantly, his hands shaking. "It hurts. I saved your life, and you can't even help me with this..."

Alright, fine. He was her savior, after all,

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Whitney reluctantly moved closer, her hand trembling as she reached for his hospital pants, accidentally brushing against his firm abs, hot and solid.

Every fiber of her being reminded her that this was a mature man.

Watching her ears turn a shade of pink, Ludwik found his mood greatly improved. Whitney avoided looking directly at him, waiting for him to proceed, but he stood still, his dark eyes silently demanding: see it through.

Whitney felt her head was about to explode, her face flushed as she protested, "Don't push it."

Ludwik arched an eyebrow, his voice hoarse with a hint of mock grievance. "I saved your life! And after all that, you're still giving me the runaround. Madam, have you no gratitude?"

Whitney clenched her teeth and wished fervently for him to just shut up, her heart pounding in her chest.

Finally done with the awkward task, Whitney was about to stand up when she caught the deeper shade in his

gaze.

Her cheeks burned, and just then, the bathroom door burst open. "Bro, you—ah crap! Sorry, didn't mean to interrupt. I must've been blind for a moment—saw nothing, I swear!"

Whitney's head snapped up. "No, it's not what—he got hurt..."

"I get it, I totally get it," Nolan said, his ears suspiciously red. This was beyond embarrassing.

With a look of exasperation, Whitney felt like jumping out a window. The situation had been ripe for misunderstanding.

“Nolan, listen to me.” She reached out a hand.

*But Nolan was already gone like the wind, muttering,
“Parker, Bro is such a freaking beast...”*

Great. Whitney knew that with Nolan’s big mouth, the whole hospital would be gossiping by now.

She turned with a look of silent reproach to find the man in question looking back at her.

“It’s not the truth anyway. I’m the one feeling hard done by here. Why not make his misunderstanding true, Madam?”

Whitney’s face flushed a deeper red. She quickly helped him tug his pants up, and with efficient movements, she supported him as they left the restroom.

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The night was deep when Nolan ordered a special meal from the five-star hotel’s room service—a pregnancy-friendly dinner for Whitney.

She felt a pang of sympathy for L, who was still recovering from surgery and unable to eat, so she turned away to eat, not wanting to tempt him with the scent of food.

As Whitney quietly nibbled on her meal, a cozy rollaway bed was brought into the room and placed snugly beside Ludwik’s hospital bed. Her brow furrowed in confusion. “L, aren’t you planning on hiring a nurse?” She asked.

“Why would I do that when I have you?” He responded dryly, eyes closed and lips pale. “Money doesn’t grow on trees.”

Whitney was not bothered by the prospect of caring for him—it was not fatigue that concerned her. It was just that the restroom situation earlier had been so inconvenient. Although they were legally married, their relationship was

still in its early stages, and physical intimacy had not yet been a part of it. She felt shy about such matters.

Ludwik's gaze landed on the petite figure of his pregnant wife. Weakly, he patted the bed beside him. "Are you done eating? Hurry up and come sleep next to me. I'm in pain."—

With a sigh, Whitney hastily finished her food and climbed into the rollaway bed, worried that he was in pain. The moonlight softly filtered through the window as she drifted to sleep beside him, her intended role as a caregiver forgotten in her exhaustion.

Ludwik, however, lay awake, silently enduring the pain that made even shifting his position agonizing. He did not have the heart to disturb Whitney; her delicate features were shadowed with fatigue.

The next morning, Whitney awoke from a rare good sleep to Ludwik's stern voice as he instructed his subordinates, with several police officers in attendance. She blinked away sleep to find her head buried under the covers.

One of the subordinates could not help but sneak a glance at the small figure on the bed next to their boss, her pink cheeks peaking from under the covers.

The subordinate said, "The assailant who attacked you has been identified. He's a relative of a deceased worker from the Elate City Sea Bay project. You did not make amends after the accident, which probably sparked resentment. The local manager tried to settle the matter cheaply to report back to you, leading to the family seeking revenge."

"How did he manage to track down Whitney?" Ludwik asked, his brow furrowed.

Whitney caught snippets of the conversation about last night's incident and chimed in from under the covers, "It's strange. Hardly anyone knows about my relationship with you, L. Last night, I was forced into the construction site by motorcycles."

Ludwik's eyes narrowed as

take revenge on you? But speculated, "Could the relative have planned to force Madam onto the site to

take revenge on you? But how did he find out about her? Maybe he saw her with you while tailing you a while back?"

them. They had even been spotted eating take

Realization dawned on Ludwik—he had indeed taken Whitney out publicly when times were good between on the street.

The police suggested, "Since the attacker is skilled and act as bait..."

gerous, and you are injured, we hope Madam could

"Absolutely not! It's your job to catch him, and I'm giving you three days. Dismissed!" Ludwik cut them off sharply, leaving no room for argument. The officers left immediately without daring to say another word.

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Then, Ludwik ordered Felix to increase security at the hospital, ensuring Whitney would be safe.

Once they were alone, he turned to Whitney, who was still hiding under the covers, and said with a slight smirk, "Smart girl, hiding like that."

Whitney just rolled her eyes, all too aware of the misconceptions that always seemed to follow them around. As she moved under the cover, Felix wisely turned away.

Whitney quickly got dressed, her movements prompting Ludwik to say with his pale lips, "I need to go to the restroom."

It was as if he had been waiting for her to wake up so he could say this.

Whitney was speechless.

Why did he not ask Felix to help him?

Ludwik added, "I couldn't sleep all night because of the pain."

"Fine," Whitney conceded, getting out of bed. After all, he got injured because of her.

Felix was speechless.

However, remembering how inconvenient the previous night was, Whitney brought over a new basin with a blushed face and said, "It's bad for your recovery if you keep moving around. Can you do it in bed?"

Ludwik's brows twitched. However, it was her intensive care that he sought, so it was all the same.

With reluctance, he frowned and said, "Fine. Come over here."

Whitney approached, and Felix left right away.

She squatted down and lifted the blanket but could not find it, so she leaned closer.

At this moment, the door opened, and the doctors, led by the head surgeon, entered, catching them in an awkward moment. "I've come for your check-up... Oh! My apologies. Am I interrupting something? Carry on, then," he stammered, backing out of the room.

Whitney's face flushed crimson once she realized the position she and L were in. She wished to dig a hole!

Clearly, she had been misunderstood again.

Before leaving the room, the head surgeon even advised, "I understand you youngsters are energetic, but you guys need to tone it down after surgery. I heard that last night, you guys also... This is not good for recovery. Plus, Madam is pregnant..."

"Doctor, you're mistaken!" Whitney nearly shouted.

Damn that Nolan and his big mouth! Now, she was probably the most infamous woman in the hospital.

Her face was flushing. Suddenly, a female doctor intern said, "This woman is so lucky. Mistaken? I saw it all..."

Whitney's head lowered instantly, her face red as blood as she quickly removed the basin.

However, the man stopped her, looked at her deeply, and said, "I didn't go yet."

Once the doctors left and the door closed, he reminded her, "You're about four months along now, aren't you?" His gaze lingered on her still-flat belly and flushed face, stirring something within her that Whitney did not want to acknowledge.

Retreating to the restroom to hide her embarrassment, she picked up her phone. "Madam, Sir said to give this back to you."

Whitney was interrupted by Felix, who handed her a

phone. Holding her phone, which had been confiscated for days, Whitney felt a surge of resentment. She glanced back at the man, who was pretending to rest. Maybe if she had been a little more affectionate and compliant, she would not have been cut off for so long.

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He seemed a bit regretful last night but did not say anything

Whitney powered on her phone to find a deluge of missed calls—from the office, Tiana, and Simon. It seemed that even amid the chaos, life relentlessly moved forward

She swiftly deleted Simon from all her contacts, dreading another sermon from him. She also hit up Tiana on Facebook, who was already in the loop about Whitney's near-miss last night and the dashing rescue by L.

Tiana was all over Facebook, singing praises. [A guy who'd risk his life for you can't be wrong, girl! Love him with all you've got!]

Whitney could only roll her eyes. Not too long ago, Tiana was bad-mouthing the same guy, calling him a total jerk.

And Tiana was still in the dark about Whitney's grounding for six whole days.

Yet, Whitney's mind was on more pressing concerns. She furrowed her brows and typed out: [Tiana, did you hear about the shindig at Joyful Manor from Parker?]

Tiana: [...]

[Why would you think Parker and I are chummy?]

[Didn't he save you once?]

[That jerk saved me and then ghosted me.] Tiana was genuinely puzzled, feeling like she had somehow majorly ticked off Parker without having a clue why.

got

the scoop from Nolan about your close call at the party. You've been like a trouble magnet lately!]

That remark jolted something in Whitney's memory.

Narrowing her eyes, she had a suspect in mind from the night things went south. "There's a rat at the party. This isn't simple. Mr. Wendt and Dante were played, and I need you to comb through the surveillance footage for clues."

"Got it!" Tiana was on it right away.

Just then, a commotion erupted from outside the ward.

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Whitney emerged from the restroom, rubbing her eyes as Hannah's familiar shriek echoed through the hallways of the grand estate. It was

a sound uniquely hers, piercing and high-pitched, like an off-key violin screeching through the night.

She was about to

ask what was going on when she caught Felix in mid-conversation with L. "Miss Hannah is causing a commotion," Felix explained. "All those involved in the soiree the other night, Mr. Wendt and Dante, they've already been..."

He made a slashing gesture across his throat, unaware that Whitney was within earshot.

Her heart skipped a beat. In the time they had been together, she had seen his ruthless side. That man harbored a devil inside, and she feared Dante and Mr. Wendt might have paid the ultimate price.

"Hannah masterminded the whole affair and instructed Mr. Wendt to kidnap Madam," Felix continued. "You've blacklisted her from the entire entertainment scene, and with her father's position at The Fuller Group now in jeopardy, she and her mother have come to plead their case. But Nolan won't give her the time of day."

"Show them out," Ludwik interjected with an icy brevity that sent shivers down Whitney's spine.

She blinked, stunned. Had he discovered that it was Hannah who had set her up that night?

A mix of emotions churned within her. She had thought him indifferent during her days of confinement, but he had been investigating the gala, seeking vengeance on her behalf, punishing Hannah.

But was Hannah truly the mastermind?

Meanwhile, Elaine accompanied Natalie to Ludwik's hospital for a check-up, seizing the opportunity to access areas where Parker would otherwise bar her.

As the neurologist examined Natalie, Elaine overheard the commotion caused by Hannah outside Ludwik's

room.

A flicker of concern crossed her eyes, but she quickly masked it with indifference. Sh

Hannah's actions and, thus, felt no worry.

had not orchestrated

But Hannah's presence reminded Elaine of the cold, piercing gaze Whitney had given her at the gala.

Whitney surely suspected her.

Now that Ludwik had pinned the blame on Hannah, Whitney would surely disagree. What would Whitney say to

Ludwik?

A smug smile crept onto Elaine's lips. This was why she had spent the previous night 'caring' for Natalie at the mansion. Her 'all-night vigil' must have reached Ludwik's ears by now.

The neurologist expressed surprise at Natalie's recovery. "Madam Natalie is doing remarkably well. Was acupuncture administered during her episode?"

Elaine looked down at the still-confused elderly lady and smiled. "That was my doing. I have medical knowledge and tended to my Natalie all night."

F

The neurologist praised her. "You are quite attentive to Mr. Lippert's mother. Madam Natalie, do you remember how you fell ill?"

Natalie's gaze was hazy as she struggled to recollect.

Elaine's smile deepened. She had tampered with Natalie's memory with her needles the night before. How could she remember her phone call?

As expected, Natalie shook her head, bewildered. "I don't know. I just had a seizure out of nowhere."

15.525

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The family doctor said, "The lady has had her share of ailments. It's likely a complication. It's my fault for taking a day off."

The neurologist nodded, gathering the medical records. "I'll brief Mr. Lippert on Madam Natalie's condition

later."

Elaine released the wheelchair and flashed a smile. "I'll accompany you. I was about to visit him myself.

Back in the hospital room, Whitney settled beside the bed.

Hannah's screams had faded into the distance, carried away by security.

Whitney looked up at the man. "L, do you truly believe that Hannah was so jealous of me that she had Mr. Wendt kidnap me so that you'd see me humiliated?"

"Are you suggesting there's another mastermind?" Ludwik's hawk-like gaze sharpened.

She had saved his life, and everything else seemed trivial by comparison. But she could not swallow the bitter pill of their argument during the gala when he had defended Elaine and wounded her with his words. Whitney cared deeply about that thorn in her side. They had not settled it that day, but now, closer than ever, she wanted to clear the air about Elaine.

"Yes, I suspect Hannah was just a pawn," Whitney said firmly, a hint of sarcasm in her voice. "L, haven't you noticed? We've been arguing a lot lately since Elaine entered our lives."

Ludwik frowned, frustration etched on his face. "Are you still going on about her? I know what you're about to

say,"

Whitney placed her hand over his, her touch gentle but her eyes cold and resolute. "Just hear me out,

You say she's friendly, that she helps us. Logically, our relationship should be sweet, but why all the arguments?

Remember the gemstone suppliers? You had asked her to recommend them to me, but she kept that a secret, saying she recommended the suppliers. Was it really unintentional? Maybe she had already noticed my guard against her, so she used that to stir things between us. And the Lotus Clubhouse? I was discussing business with Mr. Lutz there while you were having a meeting relatively far away. Why did she bring you there to eat? I know she'll definitely say that the Lotus Clubhouse just popped up in her mind out of nowhere, but..."

Ludwik's eyes darkened, his impatience giving way to contemplation. The distance between the meeting venue and the Lotus Clubhouse was indeed significant, a detail he had overlooked while browsing her Facebook that day.

Whitney tried to read his expression, her voice laced with a wry laugh. "And remember the bar incident? She posted a picture with you on Twitter. Would a sister who truly wished us well behave so provocatively, making it seem like you two were having a blast without me?"

Ludwik sighed and ruffled her hair affectionately but with a hint of reluctance. "I was not having a blast that night."

"Don't change the subject," Whitney pressed on. "Do you know what she said to me before the gala? She bragged about taking care of you, about working closely with you. She tried to provoke me, wanted me to lash out at her in front of you. And I bet she played the victim afterward, telling you I was still angry and suggesting that you should come and appease me, right?"

Ludwik's eyes narrowed sharply, a cold gleam flickering as he regarded her. "How did you know?"

Whitney scoffed lightly. "Every time we argue, isn't that how she always tries to mediate? It's a classic case of 'retreat to advance.' I might not use that tactic, but I'm certainly familiar with it."

Monica often employed such low-tier strategies, much to Elaine's chagrin, though she managed to do so without leaving a trace.

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Whitney's gaze turned frosty as she continued, "That night in the private room when Hannah appeared so unexpectedly, I had no idea she harbored feelings for you and targeted me. After all, even if she did have it out for me before, she never found me. Who could connect the dots? So, I have every reason to suspect that on the night of the banquet, Hannah was similarly coached by someone, leading her to concoct that malicious plot against me. Why don't you check if Hannah and Elaine had any private conversations during the event? That would tell us everything, wouldn't it?"

Ludwik's eyes darkened to a deep, cold hue.

Indeed, his marriage to Whitney had been hasty and secretive, giving Hannah no chance to locate Whitney before.

But recently, she seemed to be showing up more at events Whitney attended.

Suddenly, a low sobbing sound came from outside the door.

Both

turned their heads to see a doctor, looking rather sheepish, standing at the doorway, holding a medical chart. "Elaine brought your mother to the hospital today for a neurological checkup..."

Behind him

stood Elaine, her eyes slightly reddened, brimming with a pitiful, damp sweetness.

She stepped forward, eyes on Whitney, and managed a bitter, disappointed smile, "I never expected Whitney to think so poorly of me. Maybe I've been too enthusiastic, overzealous even, and that's led to

misunderstandings. Bro, it's fine. You should take Whitney's side and paint me as the villain. As long as you two make up, I can handle being misunderstood."

“Misunderstood?” Whitney rose to her feet, eyeing Elaine’s perfect damsel-in-distress act, and could not help but snort, “Elaine, your timing could not be better. Care to explain why you insisted on taking your dear Bro to the out-of-the-way Lotus Clubhouse for dinner? Why did not you make it clear that it was L who asked you to recommend a female supplier for me?”