

## Love beyond the mask ( Whitney ) Chapter 76-85

Chapter 76

Stella sneered, "Now that you've stumbled upon our little secret, and within the walls of the Lutz household no less, did you think we'd just sit back and wait for you to tattle? We had to strike first, darling. We're going to set you up for a scandal. Once you're branded as an adulteress, your engagement to Mr. Lutz will crumble, and I'll be the one to take your place as the lady of the house. Tiana, honey, I'm the real Mrs. Lutz material."

"Over my dead body! Gunner Lutz, is this really what you want? You're heartless. I won't let you both get away with this!" Tiana's heart turned to ice as tears reddened her eyes.

"At the end of the day, Tiana, you only have yourself to blame for landing in this mess. If only Whitney had spilled the beans, you wouldn't have fallen prey to our little scheme."

Stella twisted the knife, "Take her away, boys. Make sure she's well looked after. Get some dirt on her, and let's give everyone a show of Tiana's true colors."

"Let go of me, you scumbags! You'll get what's coming to you!" Tiana screamed, and her mouth was forcefully silenced.

Stella sent a triumphant text to Monica.

[Mission accomplished.]

Meanwhile, in Elate City, Elaine also received the message.

Amid a torrential downpour by the seaside, a sleek speedboat returned to shore. Stepping off the vessel was a tall man clad in black suit, his presence both commanding and solemn. His stern face was a mask of cold determination, leaving the trailing executives too shaken to utter a single word.

"Bro!" Elaine called out, drenched as she approached him. He was a giant among men, and she had to tilt her head

back to look up at him, shivering from the cold, "Were there any injuries among the construction workers over at Sea Bay?"

"One fatality," Ludwik replied, his voice as chilling as his gaze.

"It's all my fault, Mr. Lippert," the senior executive was on the brink of kneeling in despair.

Just then, Elaine rushed over with a phone in hand, "Bro, Whitney tried to call you. After the last incident with your personal secretary, no one dared to answer your private line, so I've been waiting here for you. I've just checked the news, and it's not looking good. Something's happened to Whitney..."

"What?" Ludwik snatched the phone from her hands.

With a furrowed brow and a sense of urgency, he checked the calls. She had tried to reach him twice, three hours ago!

He glanced sharply at Felix.

Felix immediately went online, and his expression darkened, "Mr. Lippert, there's been a scandal at Ms. Valentine's company. Counterfeit diamonds passed off as genuine, and the Lutz family patriarch bought a 28-carat fake for Claire's birthday. The Lutz family is in an uproar, and Whitney was taken away by the police this afternoon!"

"I tried calling your work phone as soon as I found out, but there's no reception at Sea Bay," Elaine said, her voice filled with concern, "Bro, shouldn't you head back to Banyan City to sort this out?"

"Mr. Lippert, with the accident at Sea Bay and the families in uproar, it wouldn't be good for you to leave now,"

the executive trembled.

"Felix, get the helicopter ready. We're heading back to Banyan City!" Ludwik ordered without hesitation and turned to leave.

Chapter 76

*Elaine, soaked to the bone, received not even a glance from him. Watching his hurried stride, her eyes narrowed*

*with determination.*

*“I’m coming with you, Bro. Whitney must be terrified,” she said, rushing to keep up.*

*Ludwik couldn’t help but think that Whitney must be frightened. Having been pampered all her life, she had never faced anything like this before.*

*A sense of anxiety, unlike any Ludwik had ever experienced, gnawed at him as he dialed Nolan’s number. His expression grim, he urged, “Nolan, Whitney’s been taken in by the police. Guilty or not, get a lawyer and bail her*

*out!”*

*Nolan, who had been lounging for two days, instantly sprang into action upon receiving the command and rushed to the police station with a lawyer in tow.*

*Ten minutes later, Ludwik received a call from Nolan, his tone defeated.*

*“Bro, it’s a no-go. Hunter Lutz is furious, and Claire’s been hospitalized from the shock. They’ve charged Whitney, and the police can’t release her on bail. Hunter doesn’t realize who Whitney is to you. You need to show up at the Lutz Mansion personally. Your influence will be pivotal. No matter how upset they are, they wouldn’t dare displease you, would they?”*

*The line went dead with an icy silence.*

*Ludwik, eyes closed, asked the pilot, “How much longer?”*

*“Sir, at best, another hour and a half...”*

*“Faster!”*

*Seated in her own space, Elaine’s fingers were tightly clenched. She couldn’t believe he cared for Whitney that*

*much.*

*Regardless, with the time it would take, Whitney would likely be in the holding cells by now.*

*That was a place Monica would handle well.*

*Simon had been waiting outside the Lutz residence for ages, yet Tiana hadn't emerged. A few servants passed by with a large bag, and he gave them a curious glance before stepping aside.*

*He tried calling Tiana again, but her phone was unreachable.*

*Unable to wait indefinitely, Simon reluctantly headed back, making a stop at the Perlman Mansion.*

*Facing a critical situation, Whitney stood the risk of trial if sent to the holding cells. Desperate to secure leniency, Simon sought to appeal his father, Wyatt, only to be flatly turned down in the study.*

*Dejected, Simon exited the room, only to be pulled into another by Phebe, who had overheard everything and was fuming,*

*"Simon, what's gotten into you, pleading for that useless woman, Whitney? Have you lost your mind? Don't anger your father. Your company has suffered, and Faith has been mocking you to your father. Continuing to involve yourself with Whitney, especially now that she's facing criminal charges, do you still want the position of the heir? Monica's out of the picture, and Whitney is even worse! You should pursue the heiress you met at the last social event. Do you understand?"*

*Simon, his handsome face weary, replied in a low voice, "Mom, I've realized I still love Whitney. Heir, heir, heir – that's all you ever talk about. It was Whitney, then Monica. I'm tired of using marriage for political gain. It doesn't feel manly at all!"*

*"What? You're still hung up on Whitney? No way! Have you forgotten that you once wanted to off her? She probably hates your guts by now. How could she possibly have feelings for you? You should've never let her, come back to the firm." Phebe's face was a storm cloud.*

2/3

12:14

*Simon pushed past his mother, his movements abrupt, and stormed out to his car.*

*After a fruitless endeavor, Simon returned to the police station. Unable to confront Whitney, he had no choice but to request the officers to tell her that Tiana's situation had gone south, and the evidence was lost.*

*Whitney's face turned ashen, and she slumped into the chair, fragile shoulders bearing the weight of the world.*

*What happened? Tiana in trouble?*

*She wouldn't just disappear without good reason.*

*"You're just stalling for time! Your four hours of interrogation are up. For now, you'll cool your heels in the holding cell. Your trial is set for the next couple of days!" The cop yanked her up without a shred of mercy.*

*Whitney jolted, her gaze darting outside.*

*Where was L? Why wasn't he here?*

*Didn't he know? On a business trip, right, that must be it. But she'd called him twice—why hadn't he seen it?*

*Last night, she'd sent a video, and he'd picked up almost immediately. His personal phone should be with him.*

*What was going on?*

*Her heart sank, a cocktail of helplessness and confusion.*

*She was quickly locked away in a dimly lit holding cell, stark and unwelcoming. Whitney licked her dry lips, hunger gnawing at her. She was in pain, pregnant, and cold.*

*Dozens of empty bunks, the place felt haunted. She'd never known such hardship and huddled by the door, too wary to venture further in.*

*“Hey, you the new girl?” Suddenly, two more suspects were shoved through the door.*

*The female officer locked them in and left without a backward glance.*

*Whitney looked up, noticing the woman who had spoken—a tall, burly figure with arms inked in tattoos, reeking*

*of booze.*

*She fixed her gaze on Whitney, a strange smirk twisting her lips, and sauntered over.*

## *Chapter 77*

*“Don’t come any closer. I don’t know you,” Whitney said, clutching herself with a mix of caution and fear.*

*“You look familiar though, like a style I fancy,” the woman said with a sleazy and sinister approach.*

*Her accomplice stood by the door, peeking out cautiously.*

*Whitney slowly realized something was off. As she pushed herself up against the wall, her face turned pale.*

*This was no ordinary cellmate situation. Why had they been locked up right after her?*

*She tried to scramble away, but the tall woman swiftly pinned her against the corner with a strong grip on her delicate neck.*

*3*

*“What do you want?” Whitney struggled.*

*The woman confirmed they were in a blind spot and revealed her vicious intent, not at all intoxicated as she had pretended. “Someone wants you to enjoy the ambiance here,” she said with a low chuckle, tightening her grip on Whitney’s neck. “When I ‘drink,’ I love to get rough.”*

*Whitney’s eyes widened in horror as she screamed for help, “Officer, officer! Someone’s attacking me... mph!”*

*Her mouth was promptly silenced. The lookout hissed, "Hit her in the stomach."*

*No... not the baby!*

*Whitney was shoved next to a cabinet as the brute kicked her shin, bringing her down to her knees in agony, unable to stand.*

*The woman quickly aimed another kick at Whitney's stomach, but she curled up tightly, protecting her belly. Unable to pry her open, the woman grew furious and began to pummel her relentlessly.*

*Whitney's face turned ghostly white as she could only think of one person, "L, why haven't you come? Save me, please save me."*

*Tears streamed down her face in desperation, and in her panic, she began to foam at the mouth.*

*The beating continued until the lookout panicked, shouting, "Enough! She's foaming at the mouth; she's not gonna die, is she? The cops are coming!"*

*The assailant stood up and quickly stuffed a blanket into Whitney's mouth.*

*The police were at the door, and Whitney could no longer cry out. The officers didn't notice her plight, "Your folks are here to bail you out. Come with me now."*

*"Sure thing," the two women hastily exited.*

*Once the door shut again, Whitney lay curled up on the floor, trying to crawl. However, even the slightest movement sent waves of pain through her abdomen, causing sweat to bead on her forehead.*

*Panic took hold, and as she lay on the cold ground, her consciousness began to fade. Helplessly whimpering, she uttered, "My baby, my baby is in danger, L..."*

*The helicopter landed swiftly in front of the Lutz Mansion.*

*Ludwik stepped out, feeling an inexplicable heaviness in his chest, a terrible premonition.*

*A car seemed to have been waiting, and a man rushed towards him, "Mr. Lippert, there's trouble at Imperial Gem Corporation!"*

*The man was the materials purchasing manager from Imperial Gem Corporation, and he reported nervously, "My monitoring fell short, Mr. Lippert. Following Whitney's arrest this afternoon, Carter, implicated alongside her, confessed that a few months ago, under Whitney's recommendation, he delivered counterfeit gemstones*

12:15

## *Chapter 77*

*to a subsidiary of our company. These fakes have now been used in the production of diamond rings. It might have gone unnoticed, but today's routine inspection by the commerce and quality inspection bureau discovered a substandard product in our store. This could be a deliberate act by Whitney against Imperial Gem Corporation! We've made the negative headlines now, and the reputation of Imperial Gem Corporation, cherished by aristocrats worldwide, is at stake."*

*Ludwik's expression stiffened, his eyes unreadable in the night.*

*Elaine glanced at the purchasing manager before approaching Ludwik cautiously, "What nonsense are you spouting? Do you even know who Whitney is to Mr. Lippert?"*

*Ludwik gestured for silence with a swift hand.*

*Elaine obediently stopped talking, then whispered, "Bro, you didn't even know Whitney a few months ago. There's some business rivalry between Skye Gem Ltd. and Imperial Gem Corporation..."*

*A chill rippled through Ludwik's eyes, growing more intimidating.*

*He had come to rescue her without fully understanding the situation or knowing that Imperial Gem Corporation was involved.*



*He instinctively trusted Whitney. But he had forgotten, Whitney had been in commerce since her teens, and anyone in business was never simple, including himself.*

*Recollections of her vendetta against Imperial Gem Corporation and her provocative actions came to mind.*

*Since their marriage of convenience, he didn't truly know her character, only being drawn in by her stunning face and vibrant personality.*

*She wasn't a bad person, but could she potentially harm Imperial Gem Corporation? That was harder to say.*

*His mood cooled, and his face grew stern, a change Elaine clearly perceived.*

*Nevertheless, Ludwik dismissed his doubts and remained determined to save her, making his way towards the*

*Lutz Mansion.*

*Elaine, ever understanding, asked, "Bro, do you need me to suppress the news about Imperial Gem Corporation? You could cover this up for Whitney, but we must ensure your dad never finds out."*

*As if on cue, Ludwik's phone rang with a call from the Lippert family estate.*

*The man's face turned icy.*

*Elaine feigned surprise, "Your dad might already know about Whitney's deeds..."*

*"It might not be her doing," Ludwik corrected sharply.*

*Elaine paused.*

*As he quickly entered the Lutz Mansion, Elaine clenched her fingers. He was determined to save Whitney at all*

*costs.*

*Upon catching sight of Ludwik gracing his presence, Hunter immediately grasped the gravity of the situation. The Lipperts, one of*

*the city's four magnates, operated on a different level, with a complex hierarchy matching their sprawling estate.*

*With roots deeply embedded in Banyan City, the Lipperts surpassed other elite families. At the helm of their commercial empire stood Ludwik, the inscrutable third-generation magnate of immeasurable depths.*

*Sensing the weight of Ludwik's prestige, Hunter meticulously prepared some coffee.*

*But Ludwik didn't come for coffee. He sat for barely two minutes before laying bare his purpose.*

*Hunter's expression stiffened. Whitney had been peddling counterfeit diamonds and boldly selling fake diamonds to deceive him. Shame that his wife had such a strong affinity for the True Love Collection'. He was ready to drag that girl through the courts, to have her clapped in irons. Yet here was Ludwik, declaring her*

12:15

*under his protection.*

*Though reluctant to concede, Hunter couldn't ignore the influence of the Lipperts, not just as the first family of Banyan City but with a reach extended deeper into Emperor City.*

*Ludwik, the young patriarch, was the last man in the Lippert line one would want to cross, his tactics daunting even to an old hand like Hunter.*

*A single call to the precinct and Ludwik's brow eased.*

*As the man with the ice-cold aura stepped out of the Lutz Mansion, his commanding silhouette pressed heavy against the night.*

*The Lippert's old butler drove up, blocking the Lutz's gate. His voice trembled as he spoke, "Sir, the master wishes to see you at the mansion. He has questions for you."*

*“Felix, make haste to the station and get her out,” Ludwik ordered into the night, his urgency cloaked in calm.*

*Elaine, ever empathetic, chimed in, “I’ll lend a hand. I’ll get a lawyer. You return to the Lippert Mansion, Bro. We’ll make sure Whitney is released.”*

*“She’s with child. Handle it with care!” Ludwik instructed coolly before climbing into the car.*

*Simon had been pacing outside the police station for hours after two inebriated women had been hauled in earlier.*

*Two hours later, they stumbled out.*

*Simon, leaning against his car and smoking, went unnoticed as they whispered to each other, “She’s been in there so long; hope she hasn’t kicked the bucket.”*

*“We only took a small bribe, why push her to the brink...”*

*Simon froze mid-drag, the cigarette dangling from his lips. He straightened up, his expression shifting rapidly as he bolted toward the station, “Officer! Was Whitney locked up with those two women? She might be in danger. Go check on her now!”*

## *Chapter 78*

*“Simon, you can’t bail Whitney out. It’s best you head home,” said the officer, his tone icy with the assumption that Simon was trying to pull some underhanded trick to free her.*

*Anxiety rippled through*

*Simon as he insisted, “Did you know she’s pregnant? It’s freezing in there, and you’re not even providing any food. At the very least, go check on her.”*

*The officer frowned, taken aback. “Pregnant?”*

*Right at that moment, the sergeant received a call and quickly came over in person. “Where’s Whitney? Which cell is she in? The Lutz family has dropped the charges. Release her immediately.”*

*Remembering what Simon had just said, the officer, torn between doubt and belief, hurried into the holding*

area.

*There, he found Whitney collapsed on the floor- her body frighteningly cold, complexion pallid, and lips turning blue. Startled, the officer immediately had her lifted and brought out.*

*“Whitney, Whitney...” Simon raced over, catching her in his arms and cradling her sideways.*

*The commotion barely brought Whitney back to a semblance of consciousness. She had been desperately hoping for L to rescue her, and as she weakly opened her eyes, tears streamed down her face. “L, is that you?”*

*But the next moment, her expression froze. It was Simon’s face she saw, not L’s.*

*The light in her eyes dimmed.*

*Simon’s face stiffened as he watched her expression change rapidly. She was bruised in many places. He quickly asked, “Did someone hit you? I’m taking you to the hospital right now!”*

*“I can walk on my own,” Whitney said coldly, trying to break free from him, not wanting any ties with him.*

*“Can you even move? Aren’t you pregnant? Don’t be so stubborn, Whitney. What if something happens... Whitney!” Before he could finish, Whitney fainted.*

*Startled, Simon instinctively checked her breathing to ensure she was still alive. Without hesitation, he quickly scooped her up and rushed to his car, simultaneously dialing an ambulance as he ran.*

*Felix drove to the station as fast as he could. While on the way, Elaine took some time to secure a lawyer. Later, the car broke down. It was Elaine behind the wheel when this occurred.*

*Unfortunately, they arrived too late. The police informed them that Whitney had been released half an hour ago, taken away by a man.*

*A man? Felix wondered, confused.*

*Elaine, frantic, asked, "Officer, do you know where they went?"*

*The officer, frowning, replied, "Whitney was in a cell with two drunk women and got into a scuffle. She got hurt. We didn't know she was pregnant; she might have been taken to the hospital."*

*Elaine's eyes fell, her delicate fingers nervously playing with each other. When she looked up again, her face was etched with worry. "Felix, quickly find out which hospital Whitney is in. I'll go to the Lippert Mansion to get Ludwik."*

*Felix immediately started searching, and meanwhile, Elaine got into her car. As the window rolled down, a faint smile graced her face.*

*She is in the hospital? That's good.*

*The man who took her was probably Simon? Even better.*

*The Lippert Mansion.*

*Spread across extensive acres, an impressive mansion housed a grand study. Inside, the imposing presence of Kaden Lippert turned to face Ludwik as he entered,*

*With a harsh tone, he began, "You approached the Lutz family personally over a woman of dubious background? Ludwik, you never stoop to such indignities. Besides, Isn't this Whitney the same woman who's been a thorn in the side of the Imperial Gem Corporation? It's all over the news. She's been mixing fakes into your company's gemstones. Look!"*

*He threw a newspaper onto the desk.*

*Kaden glared at Ludwik, "Why did you keep it from me? I should never have agreed to your mother's ridiculous marriage arrangement. This kind of woman doesn't deserve our name. Find a place for her to quietly have the child and send her away. There's no need for you to waste a year..."*

*Ludwik stood still, his gaze colder than the elder's. He cracked a chilling smile, "Send her away? Like the great example you set?"*

*Kaden faltered, his expression clouding over.*

*Ludwik took a step closer, his presence like a towering mountain, overwhelming the old man's authority. The elder seemed diminished by age in comparison.*

*His eyes narrowed, voice indifferent, "Since when do my personal affairs concern you? You didn't care when I was a child, and you certainly have no right now."*

*Kaden's gaze wavered.*

*Ludwik's half-smile carried a cold edge, "Take care of your second son and your little family of three."*

*Kaden, nearly bursting with rage, retorted, "Do you even regard me as your father anymore? I'm telling you, get rid of that woman. How can the Valentines match you? You're destined to be with the Bartels family's daughter."*

*"She is my woman. It would be wise not to touch her, or I won't be polite."*

*Kaden saw the terrifying fury beneath Ludwik's calm facade and scoffed, "I'm laying it out here, Ludwik. Even if you're powerful and wealthy, you're still the Lippert family's heir, and I'm your father! No son challenges his father. You're in business, but the Lippert family holds sway in Emperor City's political realm. You know the stakes. You either secure an alliance with the Bartels family, or you're no match for me. Your brother is returning from abroad soon. I won't leave Imperial Gem Corporation solely in your hands. He'll co-manage with you; we're family, so don't be too callous."*

*Ludwik's gaze turned icy.*

*He chuckled softly, "My company and my wealth has nothing to do with the Lippert family. Keep your hands off. If you're so concerned about your second son, find another way."*

*"Rebel! You constantly defy me, Do you really think I'm powerless against you?"*

*Ludwik left with a cold laugh, the sound of the door slamming echoing behind him as a heavy paperweight crashed against it.*

*A chilling aura emanated from Ludwik, casting fear among the mansion's servants, who dared not raise their heads.*

*In the Lippert household, Kaden reigned supreme, yet Ludwik, every time he returned, seemed to provoke Kaden to the brink of fury. Since the year he moved out with his mother, Ludwik had evolved from a once young lord into a formidable figure.*

*Over the years, the enigma enveloping the Lipperts, the city's foremost family, had deepened.*

*"Well, look who's back?" The voice drifted languidly through the opulent ground-floor hall.*

12.16 @

Chapter 78

*A middle-aged woman, elegantly dressed and adjusting her mink stole, approached Ludwik with a scrutinizing gaze. "It's not every day we see you here. Don't stir up your father's temper over some fleeting romance and a child born out of wedlock. Will you stay for dinner?"*

*Ludwik cast her an icy glance, causing Rylie to shiver.*

*The man stepped out into the night, leaving Rylie with narrowed eyes, thankful her own son was no less impressive than Ludwik.*

*As Ludwik stepped out of the Lippert Mansion, his godly features wore exhaustion, and his eyes were steeped with a frosty detachment.*

*Elaine hurried over, her face flashing with concern. "Bro, did your dad give you trouble? Oh, by the way, Whitney's been released. She's just at the hospital now."*

*"Why the hospital?" Ludwik's expression chilled.*

*"Perhaps a bit shaken up?" Elaine ventured, trying to keep the mood light.*

Ludwik's eyebrows eased, feeling a bit relieved. If it was only due to being startled, then it wasn't so bad. He got into the car, and while Elaine drove away, he pulled out his phone to call Whitney.

But the call went unanswered.

"Step on it," Ludwik commanded, his brows knitting together again.

They reached the First City Hospital promptly. Elaine asked at the reception and then led Ludwik to the second floor of the inpatient department.

Room 2003 seemed miles away as Ludwik's anticipation grew.

Elaine, full of concern, raced ahead down the corridor towards the room. "Whitney..."

She peered through the door.

552

Suddenly, her spine stiffened, and Elaine slowly turned around.

Noticing her change in expression, Ludwik feared Whitney wasn't inside. His long legs carried him swiftly towards the room, eager to see for himself.

Elaine, stammering and evasive, blocked him. "Ludwik... maybe you should wait. Whitney, she's... she's a bit indisposed right now."

Was it Whitney? What was so 'indisposed' about her?

Ludwik's frown deepened, sensing something was amiss. Brushing Elaine aside, he pushed into the room.

Chapter 79

In the sterile hospital room, Whitney was slowly regaining consciousness after a frantic rush of emergency care. Grogginess gave way to awareness as her eyes fluttered open, only to settle on Simon standing by her bedside. Her heart sank a little; she had hoped to see L instead. Her hand instinctively moved to her belly, seeking reassurance.



Simon looked down at her, his voice devoid of warmth. "You're going to be alright, the baby's fine. But you.... you've taken a beating protecting your child. There are deep bruises all over, and you can't take any pain relief because of the pregnancy. It's going to be a long road to recovery."

Pain shot through her with every movement, and Whitney's throat felt parched. "How did I get out?" she rasped, confusion lacing her words.

Simon wasn't entirely sure himself. He hadn't seen Tiana, but he wanted to appear useful, maybe even a hero. "I went back to the Perlman Mansion and pleaded with my dad for your release..."

"Was it you who saved me?" Whitney asked, puzzled. Simon, driven by his own agenda, didn't deny it.

It wasn't L?

But then again, he hadn't shown up.

A bitter taste filled Whitney's mouth, and she coughed, "What about Tiana? She wouldn't ignore my plight. You said she didn't show up. Did something happen at the Lutz Mansion?"

Simon frowned, his concern growing as Whitney's coughs seemed to wrack her body. He quickly helped her sit up a bit more comfortably. "You focus on healing. I'll take care of those things for you."

"No need," Whitney pushed him away. The sight of Simon now only left her with a chilling void. "Simon, you don't need to do any of this. Whatever you do holds no meaning for me anymore. The only thing I have for you is the pain from when you tried to kill me. If you feel any guilt towards me, just give me my grandfather's address book and any other leads you have."

Simon's face stiffened with her cold rejection. The address book was his leverage, knowing that giving it up meant severing their last tie.

*However, contemplating the address book caused a shadow to darken Simon's face, and he suddenly asked, "Whitney, your uncle..."*

*She had lost contact with her uncle years ago after he cut ties with their grandfather and moved abroad. The last time Whitney had heard anything about her uncle was when she was brought back from a kidnapping, and Yvonne had whispered to Preston about dealing with him eventually.*

*"Do you have news about my uncle?" Whitney asked immediately.*

*"There's a number in the address book that might reach him." Simon watched her closely. "You should focus on recovering first, and we can discuss these matters afterward."*

*Whitney knew he was stringing her along. Just as she was about to respond, a wave of nausea hit her hard, the feeling of impending vomit overwhelming her. "I need to throw up. Must be morning sickness," she said through red, tearful eyes, feeling the violent surge in her stomach, possibly exacerbated by her injuries.*

*Without hesitation, Simon helped her off the bed, and only then did Whitney notice she was wearing a man's sweater. "Is this yours?" she asked, frowning.*

*"Your clothes were torn, and there wasn't a hospital gown available. I didn't want you to catch a cold. But let's not talk about that now. I'll carry you to the bathroom."*

*Too weak to protest, Whitney was carried into the bathroom. She retched violently, feeling utterly drained by her severe morning sickness. Leaning helplessly against the toilet, she longed for L's presence, her tears falling silently.*

12:16

## Chapter 79

*"What's wrong? Is it very painful?" Simon, thinking she was hurting, reached for some tissue to help her.*

*Whitney's hands trembled as she failed to catch the tissue. Simon, pained by the sight, tried to wipe her mouth, but she turned away. Looking down, he tried*

*to find a smile, “Do you despise me that much, Whitney? I know whatever I do now seems redundant to you....*

*“Simon, I thank you for getting me out, but...”*

*Suddenly, the bathroom door was violently kicked in, and a cold, menacing aura that had been lurking outside swept in*

*Whitney felt a chill run down her spine; she was in too much pain to turn around.*

*Observing the masked man at the door, Simon’s body tensed, yet he instinctively drew Whitney closer.*

*In their current position, both facing away from the door, it appeared intimately compromising to an outsider.*

*To Ludwik, who had just arrived, it looked like a forbidden kiss.*

*His eyes deepened with rage, and he overheard Whitney’s soft, vulnerable voice, “Simon, I thank you for...”*

*“Bro!” Elaine burst into the room, clutching at his shirt sleeve, seemingly trying to stop him.*

*However, Whitney couldn’t avert her eyes from the image of Elaine seemingly entering hand in hand with the*

*man.*

*Why were they together?*

*L was late, and he brought Elaine with him.*

*It appeared as though they were a couple.*

*Whitney’s tear-stained face froze, not noticing that Simon was still supporting her.*

*The four stood in silence, the air thick with tension.*

*Ludwik's gaze fell on Simon's hand wrapped tightly around Whitney's waist, a sneer flickering across his face. Overcome with fury, he yanked Whitney away and kicked Simon in the leg, "You dare touch her, you're courting death!"*

*"Don't hurt her!" Simon's face contorted with anger.*

*Whitney was badly injured; she couldn't be treated this way!*

*Ludwik's anger boiled over at Simon's audacity. He dragged Whitney aside and without a word, began to pummel Simon into the floor of the cramped bathroom. At first, Simon managed to fight back, but it wasn't long before he was overpowered, blood spilling from his mouth.*

*Whitney watched, horrified by L's violence. She feared for Simon's life and, clutching at her stomach, intervened, "What are you doing, L? Are you trying to kill him?"*

*L's cold gaze flickered to her, his eyes tinged with red, "You dare plead for this scum? You want to help him up?" Whitney recoiled at the venom in his words, her own pain and frustration surfacing. "L, have you lost your mind? Attacking as soon as you show up, did you even consider how I feel?"*

*"What kind of twisted game are you playing, Whitney? Here you are, all wrapped up in each other's arms, stealing kisses like a pair of love struck teenagers behind the bleachers. And oh, how grateful you are to him, your knight in shining armor! You're practically ready to throw yourself at him right here in this godforsaken restroom. Have you no shame? How low can you stoop? After everything....."*

*Ludwik's chest was a pressure cooker of fury.*

*He had dropped everything, left a project hanging by a thread, and raced back to Banyan City, hoping against hope to be her savior.*

12:16

Chapter 79

*Setting aside his status to approach the Lutz family, only to be hindered by the old*

man back at the Lippert family. Bearing the pressure but determined to take her under his wing, even clashing with Kaden. Even if she harmed his company, he still endured.

*Was it all for nothing? To witness this sordid display?*

*His heart, usually as solid as steel, felt like it had been sucker-punched.*

*Had she forgotten the last time Simon had her pinned down on the couch? Back then, he'd let it slide because she wasn't his lady at the time.*

*However, now she was his!*

*Ludwik's gaze was icy as it locked with hers, and in his eyes, one word was unmistakably written: 'Despicable'*

## *Chapter 80*

*Whitney trembled all over, chilled to the bone as if drenched by a bucket of ice water that stung her eyes and turned them red.*

*Her lips quivered, her face pale as death, not understanding why he was so furious with her. She was already exhausted.*

*She nodded weakly, a bitter laugh escaping her, "Fine, I'm despicable. I'm worn out. It's been too much tonight, and I have no desire to argue with you anymore—especially since you've arrived so late."*

*Bitterness spread from the tip of her heart, and a subtle ache proved more piercing than any physical wound.*

*"Bro, don't stoop to his level, you've hurt your lip," Elaine suddenly panicked, hurrying over.*

*Observing that Whitney didn't turn to Ludwik but instead assisted Simon, Elaine knew tonight would be full of drama.*

*Suppressing her excitement, she worriedly helped Ludwik to his feet.*

*Ludwik's gaze turned colder. Even Elaine, an outsider, knew to help him.*

*Was Whitney a complete fool to assist Simon instead?*

*His eyes fixed on the woman before him, and upon spotting the men's sweater she wore, his temper flared again. He strode over, grabbed her arm without a word, and started tugging at her sweater, "Whose damn clothes are you wearing?"*

*"L, don't touch me..." Whitney's face grew paler still.*

*"I can't touch you? Who can, him?" His anger swelled, his grip tightening on her wrist.*

*Whitney felt as if her arm would snap; the pain left her speechless.*

*"Have you lost your mind? Don't lay a finger on her! Do you have any idea what... what happened to her in jail?" Simon tried to rise, his voice filled with rage.*

*Elaine stomped on Simon, cutting off his words with a yelp of pain. She rushed to Whitney's side, her face etched with concern, "Bro, easy. Whitney might've been hurt in the lockup."*

*Examining Whitney's face, which was indeed pale, Ludwik detected no sign of injury.*

*His expression turned even colder. It was clear that Elaine was trying to cover for her.*

*Just a moment ago, they said she was merely shaken.*

*She seemed energetic enough to cozy up with Simon in the restroom! His judgment clouded by rage, and he was beyond reason.*

*The thought that she believed Simon had saved her put a crack in Ludwik's composure.*

*"She's not hurt. She looked quite fine to me! Cozying up with another man in the restroom, no wonder she didn't answer my calls!" Ludwik's eyes were icy.*

*Whitney's heart chilled upon hearing his tone.*

*Those two women in the holding cell intentionally avoided leaving visible marks on her face, concealing the bruises, yet this didn't mean she was uninjured!*

*Was he blind?*

*Tonight, she had endured immense suffering- beaten while carrying his child, terrified, slandered, sitting motionless in an interrogation room for hours without water, anticipating his arrival, wishing he would intervene as he did at that charity gala...*

*But he didn't show up.*

*1/2*

*12.16*

*And those first two calls she made to him? He didn't answer those either.*

*Now, he arrived at his leisure, with Elaine in tow.*

*The thought of it, the pent-up emotions and tension of the night, all collapsed within her.*

*Summoning her strength, Whitney shoved Ludwik aside. Tears welled at the corners of her eyes as she exclaimed, "Yeah, I'm fine, your baby's fine too! I'm not in pain at all. I was so busy in the restroom, busy vomiting my guts out..."*

*The bastard. It was her first bout of morning sickness, and she wanted to share it with him, wanted his support as the father.*

*The bastard. He was late, and then he misunderstood her.*

*Whitney was also a socialite. She had never experienced such humiliation before.*

*"If I'm despicable, then you're a bastard. You have no idea how I felt in despair. I don't even want to ask what kept you so busy tonight. Why didn't you answer my calls, why you were so late..." Her gaze swept past Elaine and him standing shoulder to shoulder, a cold laugh escaping her, "Now I see, you weren't busy with anything important."*

*Why did he bring his so-called sister on a business trip? Why did he bring his so-called sister when dealing with a personal affair?*

*“Fine, I had nothing important.” His voice was dark and mocking, his face etched with anger, “Whitney, you’re just a heartless woman.”*

*All night he’d been on the move because of her, and it was all for naught.*

*The man turned coldly and walked away.*

*Elaine looked at Whitney with concern, pleading, “Bro, Whitney looks weak. You can’t just leave her like this...”*

*“She’s weak? Weak from kissing?” He spun around, his gaze a storm as he glared at the battered Simon, “Get out!”*

*“At least get Whitney a nurse?” Elaine tried again.*

*“No one’s allowed to get a nurse. Let her fend for herself!” Ludwik’s voice was chilling, his anger sky-high.*

*Whitney was left with nothing but a scornful laugh.*

*Could he not see the medical equipment?*

*She didn’t want to say anything, not wanting to see him lose his mind. Shaking with pain and a coldness in her heart, she supported herself against the wall and glanced at Simon, saying, “You can go.”*

*Simon’s lips tightened with reluctance, but he knew staying would only make things worse for her.*

*Rising with a somber expression, he expressed concern for her, “Be careful. I’ll look into Tiana.”*

*Whitney nodded wearily, her petite face looking even more fragile in the dim light.*

*The room was as silent as snowfall.*

*It took all her effort to slowly make her way back. No doctors came in, and her cup of water was now empty. Thirsty and bewildered by L’s cruelty, Whitney couldn’t comprehend why he would neglect her, especially considering she was carrying his child. Tears streamed down her face, and she exerted herself to stand up and fetch some hot water from outside.*



*Outside in the hospital corridor, cigarette butts littered the floor, the smoke stinging the nose. Nurses dared not approach the man with the silver mask, his imposing figure exuding an icy aura of nobility.*

*Ludwik hadn't left.*

*2/3*

*12:16 B*

*Forbidding a nurse wasn't because he was heartless. He was just trying to force her to capitulate, knowing she'd eventually need help.*

*Even he despised his own duplicity.*

*Elaine stayed close by, understanding the meaning behind his brooding eyes. She clenched her hands and suddenly sneezed,*

*Ludwik seemed to realize she was still there and looked her way.*

*Elaine quickly covered her nose, but then several more sneezes followed, her lips turning pale.*

*Ludwik's brow furrowed as he suddenly noticed Elaine was soaked to the bone. It seemed to dawn on him that she had been drenched since they left Elate City. She had spent the entire night chasing after him in the rain, while his mind was preoccupied with the thoughtless woman inside. He hadn't spared a thought for her condition.*

*The man felt a twinge of remorse.*

*Elaine shivered as she stood up, her beautiful face framed by damp locks of hair. Despite trembling from the cold, she mustered a reassuring smile and said, "Bro, there might be a misunderstanding between you and Whitney. Don't be upset."*

*At the mention of this, Ludwik's mood darkened further. He glanced at her with a frown. He had a sports jacket on, which he casually took off and handed to her. "Put this on and get going. I've troubled you enough tonight, Elaine. You shouldn't get involved in these matters anymore."*

*"It's no trouble. I'm worried about Whitney too, and now I'm afraid you two might argue. Let me stay a bit longer with Whitney," she said gently.*

*Ludwik coldly refused, "It's our business. You don't need to interfere."*

*Elaine tactfully didn't push further. He handed her the jacket, and as she reached out to take it, her hand trembled so violently it seemed as though she couldn't grasp it at all.*

*Ludwik's brow creased, and he decisively draped the jacket over her from a distance.*

*Whitney had just made her way out of the hospital room when she caught sight of this scene.*

12:16 D

3/3

*As Whitney spotted L lingering in the hallway, her heart quivered, and a glimmer of hope lit up in her eyes. She wondered if he was just being tough with his words but so ft-hearted inside. But then she saw him draping his Jacket over Elaine's shoulders with such care, and realization hit her hard.*

*It wasn't about her all.*

*L hadn't left because he was taking care of Elaine, who was soaked to the bone, probably needing to see a doctor.*

*Meanwhile, there she was, having been roughed up, aching all over in her hospital room, with not even a glass of water to drink because he'd refused to hire a nurse for her.*

*And from where she stood, it almost looked like L was pulling Elaine into an embrace.*

*What kind of sister was Elaine to deserve such intimacy?*

*A chill settled in Whitney's gaze.*

*Pushing the IV stand, she slowly made her way out of the room.*

*Elaine, quick to notice, warned the man while taking a step back, putting some distance between them. It was a clear attempt to show innocence, but it only made her look more suspicious.*

*Whitney's gaze turned icy. Suddenly, the cup in her hand felt too heavy, and as it slipped, it crashed onto her foot, eliciting a sharp cry of pain.*

*Ludwik's cold hand reached out to steady her as he scolded, "Can't you be more careful?"*

*He picked up the cup, and seeing her parched lips, a pang of regret hit him.*

*Did she need some water?*

*But Whitney heard only his irritation, a stark contrast to the tenderness he'd shown Elaine just moments before. Her displeasure surged, and she coldly shook off his hand.*

*His displeasure was immediate. He'd already set aside his pride with the gesture of a peace offering, and now she was pushing him away?*

*He wanted to spank her for her insolence.*

*Pressing down on the IV stand, he glared at her with a chilling look, "What's your problem, Whitney?"*

*Her voice laced with self-derision, Whitney retorted, "No problem at all. I wouldn't want to keep you from playing dress-up with your sister."*

*Her words were like ice, and Ludwik's face turned stormy. "What's with the attitude?"*

*Elaine rushed over, her eyes brimming with feigned concern, trying to explain, "Whitney, it was because I was wet, so he kindly offered me his jacket. He didn't mean anything by it. Please don't misunderstand."*

*Whitney scrutinized Elaine, unable to hide her distaste. From the moment Elaine had clung to L's wrist, to the subtle provocation in her voice, Whitney recognized the games she played.*

*She sneered, "I'm not misunderstanding anything, Elaine. You don't have to emphasize that he put his jacket on you. I couldn't care less."*

*Whitney acknowledged feeling somewhat out of control. She knew she shouldn't have said that, but what did it matter now?*

*The man, seemingly indifferent to her, had left her stranded in the hospital room while tending to other women. The thought of her helpless situation in the hospital room stirred a mixture of resentment and anger within her.*

1/3

*Ludwik's expression darkened at her 'I couldn't care less' remark. In any argument, she'd retreat like a turtle into its shell, absolving herself of all blame.*

*He scoffed at Elaine, "Why bother explaining to her? Did she appreciate your efforts to get a lawyer for her? She clearly doesn't care, and if I went to put my jacket on you, I will!"*

*Elaine was eager to express something, but a flicker of darkness passed through her eyes.*

*Whitney, you really don't know how to appreciate things." Ludwik remarked.*

*He must have lost his mind, choosing to stay here. Just moments ago, he had hoped that if Whitney showed any sign of softening, he would smoothly reconcile with her. She shared a room with her ex, mistook Simon for her savior, blamed him for not rescuing her, and misunderstood his relationship with Elaine.*

*Was she deliberately picking a fight?*

*He then declared, "Since you don't care, Elaine, I'll take you home!"*

*"But you can't just leave Whitney here," Elaine pleaded.*

*Ludwik was truly furious now, his aura cold enough to freeze the hallway. He grabbed Elaine and stormed off.*

*Left behind, Whitney leaned on her IV stand, watching them leave hand in hand. Her heart felt colder than the howling wind outside.*

*Finally, her weary eyes closed, and dampness spread to the corners.*

*“Nurse...” Her voice choked up, her abdomen aching, making her want to cry even more.*

*The nurse hurried over, offering support. “Is that your husband? If you’d just apologize, I’m sure he’d*

*understand. He’s been standing there for quite a while, not really talking to that other woman. Seemed like he was waiting for you.”*

*However, Whitney couldn’t hear her through the buzzing in her head. With red eyes, she shuffled back to her room, collapsing into bed, too exhausted to move.*

*Outside the hospital, a downpour began.*

*Elaine, secretly thrilled, was pulled into the car by Ludwik.*

*The rage in Ludwik was quenched by the cold rain, and he released Elaine’s hand, his eyes profound and exhausted. “Go home by yourself, Elaine.”*

*Elaine’s expression froze. He had said he would take her home, but that was just an angry retort meant for Whitney.*

*He was using her.*

*Realizing this, Ludwik offered a half-apology, “I’ll call you a cab.”*

*Elaine felt a scratch at her heart, but this was the path she had chosen. One day, she’d repay Whitney’s scorn a hundredfold.*

*With a demure look, she insisted, “It’s okay, Bro. I just have a little cold. I can make it home on my own.”*

*But Ludwik wasn't really listening, his gaze fixated on the hospital's second floor.*

*Elaine climbed into her car, the scratch in her heart turning into a smirk. This evening had been a triumph. Her 'kindness' was etched in Ludwik's mind, and the relationship between those two began on a discordant note. Reconciliation would be difficult now.*

*The only sour note was that Whitney's pregnancy had not been terminated.*

*Elaine's eyes deepened. She made a call to Monica, "Idiot, who did you hire? Can't even abort a child."*

*Inside the Bentley, the scent of smoke was heavy, and Ludwik's handsome features were etched with a cold, hard edge.*

*2/3*

*22.257*

*He dialed the hospital with a chill in his voice, arranging for a nurse to check on Whitney. No matter what happened to her, the kid couldn't be left to suffer.*

*His thoughts wandered to what that scumbag had said about finding Whitney's best friend Tiana, whom he hadn't seen tonight. With a frosty gaze, Ludwik decided to make another call, this time to Parker, saying, "Use your connections to locate Tiana."*

*After a barrage of orders, Parker, who had just returned from a business trip, felt utterly confused and sensed that Ludwik was in a foul mood. "Bro, what's going on?"*

*The call ended with the howling wind as the only response.*

*Parker stood in silence.*

*Ludwik took a self-deprecating drag on his cigarette, wondering why he even bothered with her well-being—an infuriating woman who seemed to excel only in raising his blood pressure.*

*A cold laugh slipped through his lips, but his thoughts began to sink deeper. Did he*

*truly know this woman? Her business tactics, her way with men- was she genuinely virtuous?*

*Driven by an inexplicable impulse, he had taken her under his wing despite the pressure, even considering a long-term claim by proposing a trial marriage, seriously contemplating a life together. Yet, all she returned was distrust and a likely pitfall for Imperial Gem Corporation in the business world!*

*Was it really worth it, being caught between a rock and a hard place for her?*

*Was the decision at Alpine Springs Resort impulsive?*

*Ludwik, in that moment, coldly questioned himself.*

*His Bentley tore through the downpour, its reckless speed a testament to its owner's turbulent emotions.*

*Chapter 82*

*Parker decided to drop by unannounced in the suburban club to check on his property. His long strides carried him leisurely down the path, his mind barely registering the task Ludwik had mentioned earlier.*

*However, as he passed a certain private lounge, a woman's cry echoed from within, a sound oddly familiar.*

*The refined glint behind his rimless glasses sharpened with curiosity.*

*2 2 2 2 3 2 3*

*What a coincidence, he mused.*

*Parker signaled to his men with a smirk that did not quite reach his eyes.*

*With a forceful kick, the door was flung open.*

*The dimly lit interior was spacious. Parker sauntered in, pulling back the curtains to reveal a chaotic scene on the bed, his eyes flashing coldly. He glanced at the scantily clad woman screaming for help, then leisurely removed his suit jacket and tossed it down at her.*

*“Pa–Parker.” Tiana looked up, her small face a mask of terror and confusion.*

*Parker’s men quickly overpowered the three thugs.*

*His cigarette dangled from his lips as he strolled over and planted his foot on the waistband of one scoundrel’s jeans. The cultured outline of his face, accentuated by his glasses, contrasted with the sinister aura emanating from beneath those lenses.*

*Tiana watched as his cigarette slowly lowered, lighting the crotch of the three men on fire, his foot pinning them down as they began to wail in agony.*

*Meanwhile, he did not even flinch the slightest.*

*Parker finally lifted his foot only when the smell of singed cloth filled the air.*

*Tiana was paralyzed with shock, the threat she had faced moments before from almost getting raped paling in comparison to the dread now gripping her.*

*Staring at the man’s sophisticated profile, she trembled. Was this man a demon?*

*The thugs, their jeans in tatters, crawled away in terror.*

*Parker stood up, his hand nonchalantly pocketed, and glanced at the bed. Frowning, he scolded his men, “Turn around.”*

*After a moment, he realized that the girl on the bed seemed petrified.*

*Why was she scared? He had not even shown a fraction of Ludwik’s brutality.*

*With a mockingly amused look, Parker said, “Kid, how long are you going to stare? I gave you my jacket to cover yourself.”*

*Tiana snapped back to reality with a shiver. Kid? What did he mean by cover ...*

*Then, she suddenly realized her exposed collarbone and quickly covered herself with a scream of indignation. “Parker, you saved me, but how can you be so rude? Who are you calling a kid?”*

*Her anger made her chest swell in defiance.*



*Parker's*

*eyes darkened. Did she even realize she was revealing her lace? He suppressed a snicker. "Quite a plain view."*

*Tiana's face burned with shame. She would have given him a piece of her mind if she were not bruised and feverish.*

*Unable to stand, Parker scooped her up with a look of disgust and carried her out to his car. She seemed off, and he realized she must have been forced to drink some kind of aphrodisiac*

*Chapter 82*

*Once in the car, she clung to him like a kitten, inching closer until she shamelessly crawled onto his lap.*

*The driver chuckled.*

*Parker's patience wore thin. Despite his scholarly appearance, his muscular build made a comforting cradle for Tiana, and she seemed too comfortable to even care about the blood trickling down her face.*

*She fidgeted, then furrowed her brow. "Could you remove the keys from your pocket..."*

*Parker, who had always been calm even in the face of storms, suddenly stiffened, his expression awkward.*

*With*

*a frosty glare, he pushed the intrusive woman away, convinced her shamelessness had led to this "accident."*

*"Drive faster!"*

*Sometime later, he left Tiana at the hospital and did not look back.*

*As dawn approached, Whitney received a call from Simon.*

*She opened her*

*eyes swiftly to find a nurse by her bedside, probably called in by the doctor. She looked away silently.*

*Simon reported that Tiana had been found and was now in the same hospital as her. Thus, Whitney rushed to the fifth floor of the inpatient department.*

*At the room's entrance, Simon was already there, his voice filled with sympathy. "Take it easy. Tiana's hurt, but she's in one piece..."*

*Whitney burst into the room. "Tiana!"*

*Awakened from her stupor, Tiana, hooked up to an IV, her medication wearing off, opened her eyes in fear. "No, don't come any closer..."*

*Whitney's heart clenched at the sight. What had Tiana gone through? She grabbed Tiana's hand, saying gently, "Tiana, Tiana..."*

*Recognition slowly dawned on Tiana, and a chill fell across her face. She yanked her hand free.*

*"What's wrong, Tiana?" Whitney's eyes began to water.*

*Tiana, pale and bitter, mockingly retorted, "What's wrong? I almost fell victim to Gunner and Stella's scheme. You knew, didn't you? Stella said you were aware of their affair. Why did you keep it from me? You made me look like a fool! Or do you not care about how I feel..."*

*Whitney was stunned for a moment. "She found out?" She thought.*

*With her eyes lowered, she whispered, "Tiana, I didn't do it on purpose. I was just worried you might..."*

*"You did it on purpose! And that's why I got humiliated today! Do you have any idea how I felt when I saw Gunner and Stelle having sex? My heart shattered into pieces! I even ended up almost being defiled by them! Whitney, I'm so disappointed in you..." Tiana was too infuriated even to realize how hurtful her words were.*

*Whitney recoiled, her heart pierced by the accusation.*

*Simon intervened, chiding Tiana for upsetting Whitney. "Stop saying such things. Whitney was beaten in jail, and she's been searching for you ever since she got out. She was worried sick!"*

*Tiana faltered, noticing Whitney's frailty and the bruises peeking under her sleeve.*

*Regret and pain collided within her, and her body stiffened.*

*The next moment, Whitney approached and embraced her, her voice filled with remorse. "I'm sorry, Tiana. I was afraid you couldn't handle it, so I cowardly kept silent. I never imagined they would hurt you so badly. I'm to blame..."*

*The gentleness in her voice thawed Tiana's frosty heart.*

2/3

23:351

Chapter 82

*Damn it, Whitney was hurt too. Why had she allowed Stella's words to provoke her?*

*Tiana's tears flowed freely as the two hugged.*

*After hugging for some time, Whitney tentatively asked, "Not mad anymore?"*

*Wiping her tears, Tiana glared. "Mad, yes. But I won't let Stella's betrayal shake our bond."*

*Whitney broke into a relieved smile. Learning of Tiana's humiliation at the Lutz family's hands, her fists clenched with resolve. "You must be heartbroken. I won't let them get away with what they've done today."*

*Tiana let out a wry chuckle tinged with self-derision. "I've totally given up on that jerk. I swear I'll get even. What's with our luck, Whitney? It's like we've both been cursed..."*

*Simon was silent, awkwardness hanging in the air like a thick fog.*

*Tiana's face suddenly flushed with anger as she shot up. "I'm talking about you, you deadbeat! Why don't you just get the hell out?"*

*She pulled back Whitney's sleeve, revealing a patchwork of alarming bruises. Her eyes reddened with tears as she looked towards the door, puzzled. "Where's L? You're hurt this bad and pregnant, too. Why isn't he looking after you?"*

*Whitney stiffened at the mention of his name, and her eyes glossed over with tears almost immediately.*

*Simon spoke with a hint of scorn, "Don't even mention that guy. I was the one who rushed Whitney to the ER. She was throwing up in the restroom because of the pregnancy, and he barged in with some chick. He started beating on me without even asking what was going on, nearly hurt Whitney even worse, and said some really nasty stuff to her. It's a mess."*

*Tiana's jaw dropped; this did not match L's usually reserved and dignified temperament at all.*

*She squinted suspiciously at Simon. "Stop making things up. Get out. I want to talk to Whitney alone."*

*Simon, his face ashen, stormed out.*

*Tiana, her heart aching for her friend, gently urged Whitney to sit down. She asked carefully, "Whitney, is there a chance L misunderstood something between you and Simon?"*

### *Chapter 83*

*Whitney blinked away the tears the*

*Mad gathered in the corners of her eyes, a wry smile etched across her tiny face Misunderstood? I was vomiting my guts out in the bathroom, and Simon was just there to hold my hair back. Even if he misunderstood, he should've checked on me at the very least, or how I was feeling, right?*

*Not only did he not help me, but he didn't even ask if I was hurt. Heck, he even called me cheap and said I was just fine. Tiana, my heart's turned to ice. He doesn't care about me at all. Maybe after I agreed to date him, he just lost interest..."*

*She could not help the bitter thoughts swirling in her head.*

*Tiana immediately interjected, "Don't think like that. L seems so polished and poised; it's not like him to lose control. Maybe something else ticked him off? You said he didn't help you?"*

*"Simon said he was the one who saved me. I was knocked out cold, and it was indeed Simon who helped me to the hospital from the police station."*

*Tiana mused, puzzled. "This case has ticked off Hunter. I know a bit about his temper. Could Simon really persuade them? Don't be too quick to give up on L,"*

*Whitney blinked, her heart heavy with sorrow. "Maybe I just don't understand him at all. When things are easy, he teases me, but when it gets tough, he just leaves me high and dry. Maybe that's just the nature of a mature man in the business world. And his sister, Elaine, always at his side, that's a little too cozy."*

*"Elaine? You've noticed something?"*

*Whitney's eyes narrowed, her voice chilling by an octave. "She's a cunning chameleon, hard for even women to spot, let alone men. If they aren't blood-related, then this sister of his becomes a lot more interesting."*

*Tiana could hear the cold edge in Whitney's voice, and her face set into a frown, "I almost believed she was kind-hearted and naive that day. You need to watch out for that woman."*

*Whitney felt despondent. What was there to watch out now? "After all that's happened, there might not even be a future," She said.*

*Tiana sighed, trying to rationalize, "You just started dating, and you don't really know each other. You both have strong personalities. At the end of the day, it's just a lack of trust. You resent him, and he's mad, that's all. Just cool off, and things will get better. Who knows, maybe he'll come around in a couple of days, anxious to apologize to you and the baby."*

*At that moment, Tiana's assistant brought over her laptop.*

*She quickly changed the subject. "Let's talk about tonight's mess. You really got into hot water. The Lutz family dropping their lawsuit is the least of it. If it hadn't been for that, you'd be looking at a serious business felony, enough to lock you up for a decade. Monica's truly malicious, ready to sacrifice Skye Gem.."*

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*Whitney signaled her assistant to close the door, her voice a frigid whisper. "I've given it some thought, and this doesn't feel like Monica's handiwork. It's too grand. Since when does Monica have the clout to take on the Lutz family?"*

*Tiana jumped, startled. "Are you saying that the powerful man behind Yvonne and her daughter was the one who made the move?"*

*"At least it was his idea. Did you find anything?"*

*"Just about to tell you," Tiana opened her laptop. "After Yvonne had that blow-up with Preston, she spent the night with Kyler. Sure, he's a big shot in Emperor City, but that's just in terms of wealth. You think he has the pull to sway international judges, buy design drafts for a high price, and play Hunter? I don't buy it."*

*Whitney frowned. "You didn't find any connection to someone bigger?"*

*"Nope. Emperor City's out of my reach. Too many big fish, too scary."*

*Whitney's brow furrowed. The person behind Yvonne was no small fry; Kyler was just a front. With the trail going cold, she said, "Now we can only wait for Valerie's report, see if she can dig up anything on the people behind the international judges."*

*The next day, the police visited the hospital for Whitney's statement. With the Lutz family's withdrawal, the business case could go either way. Skye Gem had suffered a blow to its reputation, but there was still a chance for damage control.*

*Whitney provided evidence implicating Monica, who had already planned her escape, pinning the purchase of fake gemstones on the procurement manager while only getting charged with lack of*

supervision. With the procurement manager's confession, the case was closed.

Whitney's expression was icy. Monica had slipped out of her grasp with the help of an expert.

Remembering how she was almost beaten to a miscarriage in the holding cell, Whitney was determined not to let Monica off the hook.

Three days later, Tiana's prediction proved wrong.

L never showed up, not even a glimpse of his assistant.

Whitney's heart grew desolate with cold. Thankfully, the nurses took good care of her, and Tiana procured the best food and medicine.

Unable to take medication orally, Whitney hid in the bathroom to apply it to her skin. The bruising was severe but less painful.

With the company's reputation hanging by a thread, Whitney knew she had to make amends first with Claire. Offending one of the four families was out of the question.

After two more days of recovery, Whitney gathered a few high-ranking executives from Skye Gem and personally visited the Lutz family's private hospital.

They waited from morning until evening until the hospital finally opened its doors.

Whitney hurried into the luxurious ward, and her smile strained as she turned to the venerable matriarch, "Claire, I'm so terribly sorry. I'm Whitney, the general manager of Skye Gem and the designer of the True Love Collection. Our internal mismanagement led to a mistake with the diamond material, causing such trouble at your birthday celebration."

"Who let you in here?" Claire's teacup smashed to the floor with a crash. "You think you've caused me mere trouble? My husband gifted me a diamond the size of a pigeon's egg, and it turned out to be a fake! Do you have any idea how many dignitaries laughed at me? A mere diamond. I appreciated your design

*enough to buy from your company, and this is how you repay me, you insolent girl!”*

*Whitney looked apologetic and nervous as the executives behind her opened the plush velvet boxes they were holding. She said, “This is entirely Skye Gem’s fault. Madam, these pieces are my designs, limited editions, treasures of our company. If any of them catch your fancy, we are prepared to fully compensate you.”*

*Claire glanced at the jewels, visibly impressed but even more infuriated. “Do you think my family’s honor can be bought with a few shiny stones? That’s an insult! Security, show this woman out!”*

*Whitney was at a loss, unable to gauge Claire’s temper.*

*Just then, the doors opened and a suave, pleasant voice called out, “Now, who’s gone and upset my mother?”*

*Claire turned her head, her face softening into a smile, “Bryce, what brings you here?”*

*Whitney glanced up to see a tall figure approaching, a man in the prime of life with strikingly handsome features. He was dressed in a sapphire blue suit, exuding an air of refined sophistication.*

*His eyes gently swept over Whitney before settling on the diamond display behind her. With a warm smile, he teased, “Seems like you’ve got an eye for the finer things, yet you downplay their worth. This must be the work*

*2/3*

*(23:35*

*of a Skye Gem designer, right? Don’t play it down so much, you might scare the poor girl.”*

*Whitney looked at him, slightly taken aback, but then caught the twinkle in his eye.*



*She quickly caught on to his cue, scooped up a bracelet, and confidently approached*

*the sofa to adorn Claire's wrist. "Madam, this is the 'Octuple Fortune' bracelet, featuring eight 8-carat rubies set amid natural diamonds, It symbolizes abundant blessings and will look absolutely stunning on your fair and elegant wrist."*

*"Hey, who said you could..." Claire began to protest, but she was instantly captivated by the beauty of the diamonds.*

*It was undeniable; the design was exquisite and emitted a sense of luxury.*

*"My mother's hands are truly beautiful," the man remarked.*

*Claire's cheeks flushed with a touch of color. "Oh, hush, you're just trying to charm me."*

*Whitney's heart skipped a beat.*

*This charismatic man was the old lady's son, yet he did not look much older than Gunner, her grandson.*

## *Chapter 84*

*"Ms. Designer, if you're sincere about your*

*"I'll bring my A-game, ma'am. You'll be dazzled, I promise!" Whitney assured, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Claire, the formidable lady of the Lutz household, simply huffed. "That's more like it. And as for the bracelet, it's mine now. Bryce, show our guest out."*

*Watching Claire admire the bracelet, Whitney knew she had managed to soothe her ire.*

## *FEE FOE Sis*

*Outside the hospital room, Whitney turned, grateful, only to find herself locked in the warm gaze of Bryce. "Thank you for stepping in today, Mr. Lutz," she said, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.*

*"I'm Bryce Lutz, the second son. I'm a few years your senior," he said with a hint of a smile, clearly intrigued by her. "I'm familiar with you, Whitney, right?"*

*Surprised, Whitney wondered what she could have possibly done to catch the attention of such a prominent*

*family.*

*Seeing her confusion, Bryce explained, "I spent most of my time abroad, so it's only normal you don't know who I am. I saw you once at a social event and was quite taken aback by your beauty and talent. However, you seemed too young, and I thought it wasn't appropriate for me to do anything."*

*Clearing his throat, Bryce offered a charming smile. "Ms. Valentine, remember your promise. Allow me to escort you."*

*"I will keep my word. But I wouldn't dream of troubling you, Mr. Lutz!" Whitney quickly declined, inwardly thrilled that her troubles seemed to be resolving so smoothly.*

*As Whitney walked away, Bryce watched her go, his eyes narrowing slightly. She was stunning and talented—a rare find indeed.*

*:*

*A week later, Whitney was discharged from the hospital, alone. With a lot on her plate at Skye Gem, she returned to the quiet of the villa. The house felt colder with Natalie away at a wellness retreat and no sign of the man.*

*Was this his subtle way of saying he had had enough?*

*She knew that if this went on, the two of them would never make up again, and her heart only grew more bitter. At this moment, she regretted ever agreeing to date him. Given the current situation, it was better for them to be strangers.*

*Maybe it was time to move out. After all, it would be inappropriate to obstruct him from coming home. Plus, Natalie was not around, so it would make things easier.*

*Seated in his executive office at Imperial Gem Corporation, Felix received a call from the nurse, telling him what Whitney ate and the condition of the baby.*

*Today, there was something new. "Madam left the hospital on her own 10 o'clock in the morning today," Felix said to Ludwik.*

*Taking a sneak peek at the man behind the desk, he was just about to speak when Ludwik said, "Why? Has she done her reflection?"*

*Amused by Ludwik's imagination, Felix said bitterly. "She discharged herself."*

*Ludwik's face turned as cold as ice. It's none of my business even if she left the face of earth! Who told you to report her situation to me?"*

*Speechless, Felix realized he had touched a nerve.*

*Ten minutes, Felix received another call. With the resolve to face death, he returned to report to Ludwik. "Mr. Lippert, the driver said Madam drove the car out to house hunt. It seems she plans to... move out."*

*The room fell into an eerie silence, broken only by the sound of a fountain pen shattering on the floor.*

*Trembling. Felix looked at that fountain pen worth more than a million dollars.*

*Ludwik's fury was barely contained as he cursed, "Damned woman."*

*He was really tempted to find out what was inside that brain of hers that could enrage him so much!*

*"What are you waiting for? Find out where she's house hunting!" He ordered Felix as he immediately left the building*

*Then, he stormed into the United Realty Corporation building, only to find Whitney exiting, having been casually browsing for future reference. The cold aura the gorgeous man emanated froze her in her tracks.*

*"Mr. Lippert?" She greeted politely.*

*Ludwik had been so furious he had forgotten to put on his mask.*

*Seeing the smile on her pale face, he was even more furious.*

*Whitney felt numb on her scalp from his stare. However, having recalled some thing, she approached and smiled apologetically, saying, "Mr. Lippert, are you free now? It's lunchtime, and I'd like to invite you to eat with me. I owe you a t hanks, remember?"*

*Ludwik's rage was on the verge of exploding.*

*His response was icy and cutting. "You enjoy inviting men for meals? Can't liv e a day without one? Get lost."*

*Confused and offended, Whitney wondered, "What's wrong with this guy? Sch izophrenia? He shamelessly teased me last time, and now he acts like I'm his enemy? What the hell?"*

*However, she could not afford to offend such a powerful man. Thus, she tried to explain herself, "Mr. Lippert, I'd really appreciate it if you can agree to have this meal with me, there's business I'd..."*

*"Tell her to get lost." Ludwik strode away into the lift.*

*Whitney could not believe it.*

*Hidden from view, Felix shivered, knowing full well Ludwik's wrath. Whitney ha d inadvertently crossed a line, seeking companionship with "Ludwik" while she was quarreling with her 'husband'.*

*On the fifth floor, Ludwik, still reeling from his encounter with Whitney, asked Felix, "Where the hell did she go? Didn't she say she wanted to invite me to a meal? Where's he r sincerity?"*

*Speechless, Felix replied, "Madam seemed to have gone to the ladies' room."*

*Minutes later, Whitney returned, contentedly eating a baked sweet potato. Lud wik glared at Felix. "She was buying a sweet potato. You lied for her."*

*"Perhaps she was simply hungry. She's pregnant, after all." Felix replied, exasperated.*

*Ludwik's mood was a complex mix of irritation and concern, watching Whitney from afar, unable to shake off his feelings for the enigmatic woman who had u nknowingly captured his heart.*

*“Send her up; I’ll grace her with my presence,” the man said darkly.*

*Felix felt like his entire worldview had shattered.*

*Whitney had no clue this guy could flip his lid faster than a pancake on a hot griddle. Because of him, she had*

*2/3*

*23:36*

*Chapter 84*

*not even had her fill of sweet potato.*

*Rushing upstairs, she humbly invited, “Mr. Lippert, thank you for honoring me with your company. Shall we head to the French bistro?”*

*Ludwik’s face darkened further. “A French bistro? Such a fancy joint, you and your hubby probably never set foot in one, huh?”*

*Why was he being so weirdly sarcastic?*

*She pointed across the street. “It’s just convenient because it’s close by,” she explained.*

*Speechless, Felix thought to himself, “The boss is really full of himself.”*

*Ludwik stormed into the private dining room of the French bistro without the courtesy of pulling out a chair for Whitney.*

*She felt like Ludwik was possessed by L.*

*Had it not been for that one time she had seen beneath L’s mask, she would totally think they were the same person. After all, their foul temper seemed all too familiar.*

*Biting back her anger, she ordered their meal while Ludwik gave her the cold shoulder, staring out the window instead.*

*Oh well, she thought, at least his stunning looks helped douse the fire of her temper.*

*Whitney got straight to the point. "Mr. Lippert, I invited you to dine today primarily in my role as general manager of Skye Gem. I wanted to address the slander in the news about me allegedly pushing fake diamonds into your supply chain. I sincerely apologize for any harm this may have caused your company, but I must make it clear- I didn't do it! If you don't believe me, we can go to the police station and confront Carter. The whole story was fabricated by my stepsister, Monica, to frame me."*

*Ludwik paused, taken aback that she had actually invited him to lunch to discuss a serious matter and not for some underhanded reason.*

*As she explained her innocence, her small face was stubborn, and her gaze was direct. Something in Ludwik's chest, which had been heavy for days, shifted ever so slightly.*

## *Chapter 85*

*"You're off the hook now, Carter might not want to cross you," he snorted with feigned indifference.*

*"I won't admit to something I didn't do. I know you're a business tycoon who looks down on female entrepreneurs, but I do have my principles. Believe it or not, that's up to you, Whitney said with a light smile, her lips brightened by the warmth of the heater, looking quite fetching. Ludwik's gaze darkened with longing for that pretty mouth.*

*His Adam's apple bobbed as he spoke with a chilling tone, laced with biting sarcasm, "Congratulations, getting nabbed was supposed to land you life behind bars. Who was blind enough to bail you out? Your husband?"*

*Whitney flinched, life imprisonment? She muttered, "My friend said it would be just over a decade, tops."*

*"Ignorant," he scoffed arrogantly, "Billions in counterfeit diamonds, and the Lutz family pressing charges— did you really think they'd settle for anything less than life? They wouldn't both er otherwise."*

*Whitney felt her blood run cold.*

*With a thin smile, he taunted, "Scared now? Do you actually think that ex of yours could save you? Hunters temper is explosive, and Wyatt is slick as they come. Would he really attract hatred for someone like you? If you're blind, perhaps it's time to wash your eyes out."*

*She sat there stunned, shocked by his furious words.*

*But his reminder made her think. Wyatt was indeed cunning and would not curry favor with the Lutz family over a few words from Simon, a love child.*

*That day, Tiana also mentioned Simon being inconsequential, but she had not seen anyone else but Simon.*

*"Mr. Lippert, perhaps you're privy to what happened that night? Then tell me, who saved me?"*

*Ludwik felt his blood boil with irritation, his handsome face framed with a frosty sneer, "Apart from a husband saving his wife, who else saves someone else's wife? Because you're pretty?"*

*Whitney's face stiffened slightly, she had considered it, but L never mentioned saving her, bursting in only to fight and berate her.*

*Her face showed hurt, eyes brimming with unshed tears.*

*Ludwik knew he had been somewhat...harsh that night.*

*He just would not admit it. And this stubborn little mule would not back down either.*

*So, the cold war lasted until today.*

*Now, assuming the role of 'Ludwik', he explained awkwardly, "If your husband is mad at you, did you ever stop to think why? Maybe he dropped everything to save you, went through all that trouble, and what does he see? An ungrateful woman not only failing to recognize her savior but also tangled up with her ex. How do you think he feels? Isn't it natural for him to lash out at you?"*

*His blunt guidance made Whitney stiffen again.*

*Thinking back to the heated argument that night, she was so furious she was not thinking straight. When L charged in, she was thanking Simon.*

*And*

*when her anger peaked, she sarcastically accused L of being too busy to answer his phone.*

*If it was L who saved her, would that not mean he completely misunderstood her? No wonder he was so angry*

*with her.*

*Her delicate fingers twisted in self-reproach, her face paling.*

*He watched with a touch of satisfaction. Had she finally realized her mistake?*

*Chapter 95*

*Ludwik's eyes softened a bit.*

*But the next moment, she bit her lip defiantly, looking up to challenge him, "Even if he misunderstood, he had no right to berate me without knowing the facts. Does he have any idea how much I've suffered?"*

*Ludwik frowned, "Suffered, how?"*

*It was just a scare, was it not?*

*Tears glittered in Whitney's eyes, and even though he was a stranger to her, she felt an overwhelming sense of injustice. She rolled up her sleeve, revealing the bruising, "I was beaten in the holding cell, and even my child was in danger. But you men are all the same, only caring about your pride and jealousy. He didn't even see my injuries, just mocked me for being just fine."*

*What?*

*His pupils dilated, and he saw the deep bruises on her delicate wrists. She had been beaten in jail?*

*Why had no one told him?*

*He had not noticed that night and he had been so cruel to her.*



*And the caregivers these past days, were they blind or mute?*

*His gaze hardened as he realized how fragile she was and how she should not have been hurt.*

*Damn, he had been blind with rage, oblivious to everything.*

*“Does it... hurt?”*

*“What hurts more is my heart,” Whitney clenched her teeth, pulling her sleeve back down, her eyes stubbornly holding back tears, “Thinking about how I was throwing up for his child in that bathroom, all Simon did was hand me a tissue, and L blindly accused me of kissing my ex. I’m about to die from t his jerk’s rage.”*

*Ludwik’s handsome eyes froze, wondering how many more bruises like that she had, her face barely a hand-span wide, now even thinner, her eyes shimmering as if in pain. His heart softened, mixed with regret.*

*She was angry because he had been negligent and kept taunting her.*

*He reached out with his long fingers, wanting to comfort her, but Whitney sensed it and withdrew like a startled crab, guarding herself. “Mr. Lippert, what are you doing?”*

*His eyes narrowed. Clearly, she still remembered she was a married woman, t hat day with Simon in the bathroom, maybe it really was...*

*“Thank you, Mr. Lippert, for listening to my explanation today, and for letting me vent so much. Skye Gem will slowly return to my hands. Watch out for me as a fair competitor,” she said, picking up her bag and walking away with a smile.*

*He leaned back in his chair, his long legs stretched out awkwardly, dress pants revealing a hint of a sensually bare ankle above his sharp leather shoes, as stern as his expression.*

*“Damn,” he muttered, clenching his fist.*

*Felix followed Ludwik back to his office as the temperature seemed to drop.*

*Ludwik said, "Find out what exactly happened to her in the holding cell that night. And why was there no mention of bruising on her medical records these past days?"*

*Ludwik had been monitoring the baby's condition every day, he had seen her records, too, although he never mentioned it.*

*Elaine received a call from the hospital and stepped into her private office, the caller said, "Elaine, Mr. Lippert is suddenly questioning why Whitney's medical records failed to mention her injuries. I've responded that it wasn't reflected because pregnant women don't take medication."*

*Elaine paused, then said, "You did well, your director's position is secure."*

23:36

## *Chapter 85*

*After hanging up, Elaine's eyes narrowed. She had instructed the doctor to hide Whitney's injuries, hoping to fuel a misunderstanding between Whitney and Ludwik, causing a rift between them.*

*Wasn't Ludwik still angry? Why did he suddenly care about Whitney?*

*An ominous premonition hit her as she picked up a stack of documents and headed to the CEO's top-floor office.*

*Felix was giving his report, "I checked with the attending physician and the nurses, the patient wasn't on any medicine because she's pregnant and it did not show up on her chart. But the nurse mentioned that Madam had been sneaking off to the restroom for a while every day. She's probably self-medicating in secret."*

*What? His woman was reduced to taking medicine on the sly?*

*Ludwik felt a lump in his throat.*

*What on earth had he overlooked?*

*She had mentioned her pregnancy nausea earlier, and as a soon-to-be father, he was desperate to see his little lady, to see his unborn child, to soothe her with a gentle touch.*

*Ludwik's emotions were in turmoil, but his voice was ice-cold. "Fire that doctor!"*

*Elaine walked in just in time to hear him demanding accountability.*

*Was it for Whitney? Her slender fingers curled into a fist.*

*Behind his desk, the man stood tall by the window, his mind clearly not on work. A restlessness marked his brow, yet he suppressed it with an air of nobility, "Felix, call Nolan, tell him to set up a gathering night. It's been too long since we got together."*

*"What? Mr. Lippert, aren't you the workaholic type? Usually, when Nolan invites you out, you tell him to take a hike," Felix thought.*

*Despite his confusion, he carried out the order, only to hear Ludwik add casually, but with a pronounced depth to his words, "Tell him to bring that woman along."*

*"Which woman?" Felix asked, puzzled.*