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Chapter 451 The Lifespan of the Heart

"And exactly what are we proceeding with here?" Asher raked his fingers through his hair, frustration bubbling up in him as he snapped, "Spread the memo and have everyone place this on hold for now. The last thing we need is for her to find out about this."

"Yes, sir," the assistant responded with a nod before he respectfully retreated out of the room.

Now that he was alone in the office once again, Asher shoved everything off his desk in a fit of rage, his face and neck turning crimson as his blood boiled.

He had initially planned on using Charles as a scapegoat by luring Charles into making a critical mistake in Paradigm Co. during Sonia's absence. That way, he would finally have an excuse to force Sonia into surrendering her authority over the company.

After all, Charles' supervisory role in Paradigm Co. was only good on paper; it would be more accurate to say that he was an outsourced assistant.

For her to delegate control over the company to an outsourced assistant like him would definitely get on the nerves of the board of directors, who were constantly wary of his presence and so-called management.

With the existing animosity toward Charles, it would only take a slight mistake on his part for the company to turn against Sonia for her apparent lack of judgment. If that came to pass, Asher could easily demand to have her share of control over the company.

However, just as Asher was about to set the plan into motion, Sonia's abrupt return stymied it.

Now that she was back, Charles would no longer have a reason to stay in Paradigm Co. as her substitute, thereby rendering Asher's plan completely redundant!

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As things were, Asher would have to wait for the next suitable moment to come around before he could plan on taking down Sonia.

Meanwhile, Sonia was back in her office, completely unaware of his antics and how her return had hampered his schemes. She yanked her swivel chair out and took a seat before she placed her purse on the desk.

Daphne, on the other hand, was standing across the room with a folder in her arms as she greeted pleasantly, "Welcome back, President Reed."

"Thank you," Sonia replied with a quick smile as she opened her laptop.

"Oh, by the way, President Reed, Miss Harper from the finance department has tendered her resignation this morning," Daphne informed dutifully while she produced the letter from her folder and handed it over to Sonia.

Sonia took it and said, "I already know about Rebecca's resignation; she called me this morning, as a matter of fact. For the time being, I'd like you to step in to manage the finance department until further notice."

"Yes, President Reed," Daphne answered while closing the folder.

As she penned Rebecca's resignation letter with her signature as a sign of acceptance and returned it to Daphne, Sonia added, "Also, I need you to drop by human resources later and have them see whether there's anyone in the industry who is suited for the role of head of finance. If there is, ask human resources to forward the candidate's details to me."

The head of the finance department was an important position that came with heavy responsibilities. Sonia did not want to risk hiring someone inexperienced, but she couldn't promote anyone within the company either, at least not while Asher's supporters were still roaming around in the departments. She couldn't guarantee that whoever she chose to assume the duties of head of finance wouldn't be on Asher's side.

With that in mind, Sonia knew that she could only hunt among those in the industry to take over Rebecca's place. She hoped to poach someone qualified, but in the event it was impossible, she would rather cultivate one suited for the role, even if it was time-consuming to do so.

Regardless of how things could turn out, she was determined not to allow any one of Asher's supporters to become the next head of finance. As long as it concerned a position as crucial as this, it was a risky gamble.

"Very well, President Reed," Daphne agreed with a polite nod.

Sonia took one of the folders from her desk and began to sift through it. "Well, that's all for now, I suppose. You can get back to work."

"Yes, ma'am." After having said that, Daphne turned to leave the office.

Then, Sonia began to peruse the documents that had piled up on her desk. She wrapped up work earlier than usual that afternoon and asked the driver to drop her off at First Hospital.

Coincidentally, in the VIP ward of First Hospital, Toby let out a dry cough as his eyes finally fluttered open.

He felt like ages ago when he last saw light and now, the blinding lights aggressively greeted him as soon as he opened his eyes. It wasn't until after a while that he finally adjusted and became accustomed to it.

Tom was smoking outside the hospital room, but when he heard sounds from the other side of the door, he froze. Then, he snubbed out the remaining half of his cigarette and tossed it away before hurrying into the room.

"President Fuller!" He called out in surprise when he saw that the man lying on the bed was awake.

Toby turned to glance at him in acknowledgement. "Tom."

"Yes, I'm right here, President Fuller." Tom rushed over to the bed. There was undeniable relief and happiness in his voice as he continued, "This is wonderful, President Fuller! You're finally awake after blacking out for three, four days!"

"Three, four days?" Toby repeated with a frown, clearly bewildered that he was unconscious for so long. All he remembered was that he ran a temperature after spending the night in the cave. He felt his body temperature rising at midnight and it seemed to have worsened

before he finally passed out. However, he hadn't expected that he would remain unconscious for three or four days.

When did I become so weak? He gravely pursed his lips, obviously upset by how feeble he was. While gripping the sheets beneath him, he started to prop himself up.

At the sight of this, Tom panicked and quickly stopped the man from rising up. "Don't move, President Fuller, or the wounds on your back will tear open. More importantly, you need to be on bed rest until your internal organs heal."

"My internal organs?" Toby narrowed his eyes. "What's wrong with my internal organs?"

Before Tom could answer, Tim's voice interrupted from the doorway, "Maybe I should be the one explaining it since I'm a doctor and my words carry professional weight on this point."

Toby and Tom looked over at him simultaneously.

Tim had shown up in such a quiet manner that neither Toby nor Tom noticed him. At the current moment, Tim was currently toying with his scalpel as he leaned against the doorframe.

As he met their curious gaze, Tim adjusted his glasses and straightened his posture. He kept his scalpel in his pocket as he walked into the room and when his gaze fell on the left side of Toby's chest, he explained, "There were signs of blunt force trauma to your body. You sustained wounds on your back, but that's the least of your worries, I'm afraid. We found a slight tear in your liver and spleen, but the worst of all these is your heart."

"My heart?" Toby's eyes widened at this and he almost instinctively placed his hand on top of his chest. "What's wrong with my heart?"

"Your heart-"

Tim was about to answer when Tom suddenly clenched his fists and interrupted hastily, "Don't say any further, Dr. Lancaster."

"Why not?" Toby demanded, his face grim as he shot Tom an unhappy look.

Tom avoided his gaze and said ruefully, "I'm sorry, President Fuller, but you're better off not knowing the details. I don't think you can take it."

"You think I can't take it?" Toby's eyes became dangerous slits as he barked icily, "What do you take me for? Am I some weakling who can't handle the truth? Besides, this is my heart we're talking about, so I'm well within my rights to know what has happened!"

"I didn't mean anything by that, President Fuller. I just—"

"That's enough! Keep quiet, Tom!" Toby ordered in a thunderous voice. After having done so, he turned his attention to Tim. "Come on, tell me what's wrong with my heart."

"Just remember that you're the one who wanted an answer," Tim pointed out with a shrug. A somber look passed over his features as he added, "Your heart is weaker than the average person, what with the heart transplant you did and all, but the blunt force trauma I mentioned earlier has caused a tear in your valve, which significantly shortens the lifespan of the heart."

When he was done speaking, he looked at Toby and awaited some form of response.

It was astonishing that Toby remained as impassive as ever. He seemed unaffected and unsurprised by the fact that the lifespan of his heart was significantly shorter than it had started out with.

Even Tim was a little taken aback by Toby's indifference. He's so calm that he's making me feel uneasy. How can he be so unfazed by this?

In truth, Toby wasn't so much unfazed as he was mentally ready for this. As it turned out, his guess had been correct.

From the very moment Tom had interrupted Tim so brusquely when the subject of Toby's heart was brought up, Toby suspected that there was bad news about his heart.

Following that, Toby didn't think Tim's explanation was all that surprising.

In fact, whatever Tim said only seemed to solidify what Toby had expected all along. His words merely made it feel like the dust had finally settled.

Toby lowered his gaze, which made his emotions indecipherable. Upon seeing this, Tom thought that the man was in shock. "President Fuller..." he called out in worry. "Are you okay?"

Something flashed in Toby's eyes as he looked up and answered, "I'm fine." Then, he turned to address Tim as he gestured to his own chest while asking, "How long do I have before this heart gives out?"

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Chapter 452 Toby's Decision

Tim had his hands in the pockets of his white coat as he commented, "According to the cardiology department, the heart will last you another three years, give or take."

"Three years..." Toby clenched his fists in aggravation. How did my lifespan shorten by so much in such little time? It's supposed to last as long as the average person's heart.

"Yes, three years. So, if you want to keep on living after that, you're going to have to search for a suitable heart within these three years for your transplant," Tim affirmed as he signed with three fingers.

When he heard this, Tom's eyes reddened. "How do you suggest we do that? President Fuller's body and blood type are as rare as they are specific. It could take ages before we look for another heart that is compatible with the rest of his organs! If it's such a walk in the park, then it wouldn't have taken twenty-four years for him to locate a heart in the first place. So, don't tell me that he can find the perfect donor in three years because it's just nonsense!"

"Then, my hands are as tied as yours. If the right donor doesn't come along in the next three years, Toby's heart will wither out and he can do nothing else but wait for death to knock on his door," Tim pointed out nonchalantly, putting his hands out like he was leaving all up to fate.

Upon seeing this, Tom grew incensed and demanded, "What the hell are you even saying? Aren't you a doctor? How can you talk about a patient's imminent death so casually?"

"And what would you rather hear me say?" Tim impassively gazed at the assistant. "I'm a doctor, not a walking organ procurement organization. No doctor can perform a miracle on him without first obtaining a compatible heart for the transplant, so whatever I said were only matters of fact."

"You-"

"That's enough!" Toby massaged the space between his brows and grimly said, "Back off, Tom. He's right; no one can save me if we don't get a compatible heart donor in the next three years. Death really is imminent."

"I know, but I just don't like how he put it," Tom snapped as he glowered at Tim angrily.

Tim slid his glasses up his nose bridge as he pointed out flatly, "If you don't like the way I have described it or if you find that I was way too brusque with my words, go and help your boss to find the perfect heart donor instead of hovering here picking arguments with me. Every day for the next three years is a day he spends fighting for his life, and for what it's worth, that might be all the living he gets to do before his heart collapses. Maybe you guys would get lucky in the end, and the perfect heart would come along to save your boss from the brink of death. That's all I have to say. Goodbye for now."

With that, he turned to leave.

However, Toby called out to stop him in his tracks, "Hey, wait a minute."

"Yes, President Fuller?" Tim halted before he could walk out the door and cast Toby a sidelong glance.

Toby pursed his lips. "You can't let anyone know about this. If word gets out that I have a heart problem—"

Tim interrupted, "You don't have to worry about word getting out. I'm a doctor, so it's a given that I'll remain reticent about your condition. Besides, it's not as if I'm dying to spread the news. I didn't even tell Sonia when she asked about you yesterday, right, Mr. Brown?"

Tom scoffed at this. The only reason why you didn't say anything to Sonia was because I stopped you, he thought sourly.

"Sonia?" Toby stiffened at this. He couldn't hide how flustered he was when he demanded, "How is she doing now?"

"Ask him." Tim jerked his chin in Tom's direction and added pointedly as he walked out of the room, "He knows best."

Now Tim was gone, Toby and Tom were alone again in the hospital room.

Upon receiving a look of askance from Toby, Tom had no choice but to elaborate, "Sonia's fine. She's dandy. I mean, how could she not be after you saved her?"

As he picked up on the snide tones, Toby frowned and asked unhappily, "What, do you have something against Sonia?"

Tom had never intended to hide his displeasure toward Sonia and now that Toby had asked, he was more than ready to admit it. "Yes, I do have something against her. You've been injured way too many times because of her. I won't talk about what happened in the past, but this time, your heart will wither in three years' time because you risked your life to save hers. Am I supposed to congratulate her for surviving at your expense?"

"I'm going to let this go on account of the fact that you've been loyal to me all these years and that you're speaking up for my own good, but I swear I won't forgive you the next time you decide to badmouth Sonia in front of me." Toby eyed his assistant coldly.

Tom's eyes widened to the size of saucers as he gaped at Toby incredulously. "President Fuller?"

"Sonia has nothing to do with this incident," Toby explained somberly. "I was the one who voluntarily jumped off the cliff to save her, so your rage toward her is obviously unjustified. You usually have more sense than to blame everything on her like this."

When he heard this, Tom opened and closed his mouth like a fish. He snapped out of his daze a moment later and muttered numbly, "My apologies, President Fuller."

Toby waved his hand dismissively. "It's fine. We'll let the matter drop now and I don't want you bringing it up again or grumbling about Sonia either, am I clear?"

"Yes, sir." Tom nodded despite his reluctance, lowering his gaze.

The vein near Toby's temple throbbed to signal his weariness and he rubbed it as he asked, "Where's Sonia now?"

"She was discharged this morning. She's fine and probably at Paradigm Co. right now," Tom answered.

With a brief hum, Toby noted, "As long as she's fine. Remember, she can't learn about my heart issue, do you understand?"

He might have jumped off the cliff on his own will, but if Sonia found out about it, she would blame herself and think that she was the reason for his current predicament. She can't ever find out about this. It's for her own good.

"Don't worry, President Fuller. I never planned on telling her anyway," Tom solemnly assured. That much was true. He had no intention of telling Sonia about Toby's injuries, not because he was worried that she would blame herself, but more along the lines of worrying that Toby wouldn't be able to take the hit if she were to confront him about it.

However, now that Toby was aware of the extent of his injuries and calmly accepted his substantially shortened lifespan, it longer mattered.

On the other hand, Toby didn't know the real reason why Tom was keeping this a secret from her. He didn't actually care, as long as she remained oblivious to news of his injuries.

"You'll have to keep this from my mom, my grandma and Tyler as well. I don't want them to worry either," Toby reminded him as an afterthought as he leaned against the headboard.

Tom nodded. "I know, President Fuller. I didn't tell Old Mrs. Fuller and the others in the household, not even about how you jumped off a cliff to save Miss Reed. I didn't breathe a word to the public either; so, as far as they are concerned, you're on a business trip. If word gets out, the company and the market would take a great hit and the press would have a field day making headlines out of your cliff-jumping endeavors."

"You've done well," Toby praised.

A little tremor worked its way into Tom's voice as he promised, "I'll find the perfect heart for you, President Fuller. You'll keep on living. I swear."

The perfect heart, huh? The corner of Toby's lips curled into a half-smile as he commented, "In that case, I wish you all the best."

He sounded optimistic enough, but such words were good for offering empty solaces. Deep down, they both knew that the chances of coming across a compatible heart for a transplant were slim to none.

"How's Tyler doing in the competition?" Toby asked after the thought crossed his mind.

Tom paused for a while before replying, "The U17 Cross-Country Championships that Young Master Tyler took part in has ended and he was able to secure our country a ticket for the FIBA Basketball World Cup. The first round of preliminaries are underway as we speak."

Toby hummed in response. With a small nod of acknowledgement, he lowered his gaze in thought and said, "When the Basketball World Cup is over, pull Tyler out of the team and have him transferred to an elite prep school."

"President Fuller?" Tom looked aghast when he registered this. What does President Fuller mean by this? Is he already making arrangements for Young Master Tyler to take over his duties now that he knows he won't have much longer to live?

Toby knew why his plan would come as a shock to Tom. As he pursed his lips, he changed the subject instead of elaborating further, "Right, why don't you tell me how Sonia and I returned to Seafield?"

"I brought a rescue team with me and found the both of you in some villager's home," Tom explained sullenly. He knew that Toby was intentionally changing the subject, which only served to confirm his suspicions that Toby planned on training Tyler to be his successor.

Tom was more than understanding of this, but it didn't mean he could accept it. Doesn't President Fuller have the slightest bit of faith that he will be able to continue living? It's no easy feat to search for a heart donor, but there's still hope for a miracle, isn't there?

"A villager's home?" Toby repeated, his eyes glimmering with doubt. That doesn't make sense, he thought. We were supposed to be found in the cave.
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