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Abel let out a light chuckle. "I completely underestimated Emma. I thought she was just the owner of a small coffee shop who moonlighted as a stunt artist..."

"Emma used to say that she only became a stunt performer because she was bored," Janie said. "I always thought she was saying that just to irk me, but I guess it's real, huh..."

"When I offered her my credit card, she told me she had money. I even laughed at her and said her money wasn't enough..." Abel smiled at the memory. "Who would've guessed that she was actually loaded!"

"Mr. Ryker, you're not upset that Emma kept it a secret from you, are you?" there was a hint of worry in Janie's voice.

"Of course not," Abel said. "I would've been upset if Emma had to continue making ends meet by herself for the children's sake after being chased out by the Louises five years ago. I couldn't be more thankful that the Adelmars were there for her! How could I be upset with her?"

The group found a nearby hotel to stay for the night. As soon as they settled down, Luca made a call to Sam once more. This time, she finally picked up.

"Oh no," Sam said as soon as she realized her blunder. "I got too used to calling him Benjamin that I forgot his real name. He's known as Benedict Adelmars to people on the island."

"Benedict?" Luca could not hide his surprise. "No wonder the guard said there was no one named Benjamin."

"Let's get some rest for now," Abel said. "We'll visit the manor again after lunch."

"Sounds like a plan," Luca nodded.

Luca ordered some lunch for the group, but Abel was still unable to stomach any food. He left the food untouched but made sure to flush half of it down the toilet as usual so Luca would not suspect anything. He tried to drink some water but could not keep it down as well. Minutes later, he found himself heaving into the toilet bowl again. This time, there was more blood than bile in his vomit, a sure sign of gastrointestinal bleeding. He did not know how he was going to manage the next few days, but he could not allow his personal illness to get in the way knowing he was so close to locating the Adelmars.

"Emma, Emma..." he chanted her name on like a prayer on his lips. "Emma, give me the strength to find you..." He rinsed his mouth with water before swallowing a few more painkillers despite knowing that the medicine barely had any effect any longer. Feeling slightly more energized after having some rest, he changed into a fitting suit before knocking on the door of Luca's room.

"We can leave now! No time to waste," Abel announced. Luca and the four bodyguards who came along scarfed down their half-eaten meals hastily and got themselves ready in five minutes. They knew how desperate Abel was to find his wife.

“Let’s get going, gentlemen,” Luca informed the team of bodyguards. As they opened the door to leave the room, Janie had also appeared from her room.

“Everyone’s here. Let’s go,” Abel said.

“Mr. Ryker, you don’t look too good...” Janie noticed. “Are you sure you’ll be alright?”

“I’m fine,” Abel assured her despite his hand on his abdomen. The pain was killing him.

The entourage called for a cab and left for the manor. Ten minutes later, they were standing in front of the same copper and wood door again. This time, Luca rang the doorbell.

The same guard appeared from the guard post again. “Master has said he won’t be seeing you. Please leave the premises,” he repeated his words from this afternoon.

Luca turned to look at Abel helplessly. “Mr. Abel, what do we do?” he asked.

Abel was not able to answer Luca as he felt a burning sensation in his stomach. The next moment, he projectile vomited all over the gleaming marble tiles of the front porch, staining the floor red.

“Mr. Abel!” Luca exclaimed as he leaped forward to hold Abel up.

“Mr. Ryker just vomited blood!” Janie blurted out in horror. “Oh no... We should get him to a hospital immediately!”

Suddenly, the sound of tires screeching filled the air as a limited-edition Rolls Royce pulled up into the driveway. The shiny black body of the car reflected the light from the surrounding lamps, temporarily blinding the group. The car door opened, and a slender man dressed in dark clothes exited the car first before ushering another man out of the car.

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“Get out of my way,” it was Waylon Adelman’s cold, calm voice that addressed the bodyguards surrounding Abel. The bodyguards, including Janie, were stunned by the authority in the man’s voice and immediately moved to the side. Waylon immediately grabbed Abel by the arm and pierced his chest with a tiny, almost invisible silver needle.

“What are you doing?!” Luca yelled.

“Take him inside,” Waylon ordered. “He’ll need surgery if we wait any longer.” He instructed the guard to open the front doors.

“Mr. Waylon, Master Adelman said they’re not welcomed here,” the guard informed him.

“This man’s stomach is bleeding out. Do you really want him to die in front of our gates?” Waylon challenged, leaving the poor guard caught between a rock and a hard place.

“How do I address you?” Abel asked weakly as he looked at the man who had just stuffed needles inside him. He was a tall man with handsome features, no younger than thirty-five or six.

“I’m Waylon Adelman,” the man said. “And you must be Abel Ryker, I presume?”

“That’s right,” Abel managed.

“The three kids look very much like you,” Waylon added. “I see where they get their good genes from.”

“There’s four of them actually,” Abel corrected. “Emma’s first child is still with me.”

“So I’ve heard from my father... Please go inside first, Mr. Ryker. Your condition needs to be treated immediately,” Waylon advised.

“Thank you, Mr. Adelmarr,” Abel nodded gratefully.

“You don’t have to thank me,” Waylon said. “I’m your brother after all. It’s my father who has a bone to pick with you.”

“It was my fault. I didn’t protect Emma well enough,” Abel said with sadness in his eyes. “I will apologize to the old man as soon as I see him, but...could you at least tell me how she is doing right now?”

“This was the exact reason why my father refused to see you,” Waylon’s expression darkened. “Let’s talk about that later...”

Abel felt his heart catapulting. “Wh... what do you mean by that? Emma...”

“I can’t answer you,” Waylon sighed, cutting Abel off. “Let’s leave it to fate.”

Abel could barely hold it together any longer. He had not been eating or sleeping for the past ten days, only to hear those five brutal words from Waylon. His vision began to blur and darken as he slowly lost consciousness, passing out on the Adelmarr’s front porch.

“Bring him to my car,” Waylon told Luca. “We’re still a distance away from the main building.”

“Yes, Mr. Adelmarr,” Luca and Janie immediately carried Abel onto Waylon’s Rolls Royce, while the other four bodyguards tagged along behind closely. The cars travelled down a windy path shaded by tall trees and passed by several ornamental pavilions before arriving at a castle-like grand building two minutes later.

Waylon got off the car and hollered for Luca and Janie to carry an unconscious Abel. A woman dressed in a maid’s uniform came rushing from the building to greet Waylon. She spoke in a language that neither Luca nor Janie understood.

“My father spotted your entourage from inside the building,” Waylon translated the maid’s message. “Why don’t you bring Mr. Abel to the lounge first? I’ll be with you in a moment.”

“Sure, and thank you for your help,” Luca replied politely.

The maid ushered Luca and Janie together with Abel into a small private lounge in the building. As Abel slowly regained his consciousness, he found himself lying on a plush daybed in a glitzy, gilded room of marble and stone, with a foreign looking woman dressed in a maid’s uniform standing next to him. With all his might, Abel pushed himself up to get into a sitting position.

“Mr. Abel!” Luca immediately rushed over to Abel’s side upon noticing that he had stirred. “Master Adelmarr knows we’re here. We’re waiting in the lounge for now.”

“What did he say? How’s Emma?” Abel asked, still slightly dazed.

“How dare you ask that question?” a voice bellowed from the doorway as a severe looking old man appeared. Abel immediately recognized him as the old man who was at the emergency room that night.

“You’re Master Adelmarr?!” Abel was incredulous, jumping to his feet immediately. “Where’s Emma?”

“You’ve got some nerve coming here demanding for things!” Robert Adelmarr boomed. “I treated and loved her like a daughter. How dare you come looking for her after what you’ve done to her?!”

“Master Adelmarr...” Abel began. “I know I don’t deserve to ask for anything, but... I just want to know where she is, and how is she doing...”

“Didn’t my son tell you?” Robert’s thick, white eyebrows furrowed. “It’s all up to fate now. Which part of that don’t you get?”

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“It’s all... up to fate...?” Abel’s face paled as he stammered. “Has she...”

Robert could not bring himself to answer Abel either, but his eyes began to well up with tears. Emmeline’s injuries were so severe that only a higher power could save her now.

“Ughhh...” Abel clutched his abdomen and writhed in pain all of a sudden before throwing up all over the sofa. Robert stalked over and clapped him on the back twice with some force. To Abel’s surprise, the pain in his abdomen reduced drastically.

“Your stomach ulcers are extremely severe. Your stomach is bleeding out. You’ll die soon without treatment,” Robert said as a matter-of-factly.

“I’m not in any position to care for myself now,” Abel argued. “I have to see Emma.”

“Take this medicine first,” Robert insisted as he fished out a small plastic film with some brown powder inside. “Get someone to mix this into a drink for you!”

“Thank you, Master Adelmarr!” Luca exclaimed as he reached his hand out to receive the medicine, but his hand was swatted away by Abel instead. Abel grabbed the medicine bag himself, opened it and poured the contents on the floor.

“What are you doing?” Robert raised an eyebrow in challenge.

“Mr. Abel...” Luca and Janie were equally dumbfounded.

“Master Adelmarr...” Abel began. “I’m very grateful for your help, but until I see Emma with my own eyes, I will not be receiving any treatment. Please.... Please let me see Emma.”

“That’s impossible!” Robert waved him off. “You should be thankful I’m not pursuing charges against you, and now you have the gall to ask to see her? Dream on!”

“Emma’s my wife. She’s the mother of my four children,” Abel bit out. “You don’t have any right to keep her away from me!”

“I told you she’s on the cusp of death. She can’t see or hear you!” Robert was on the verge of yelling.

“I must see her no matter what,” Abel insisted, trying to stand up from the sofa. “I’m begging you!!”

“No way,” Robert was as unmoving as a mountain. “You’re not getting anywhere near her!”

“Why do you have to be so cruel?” Abel asked. “Is it because of the feud between the Rykers and the Adelmars?”

“Ha! I bet you heard about that from your grandfather, didn’t you?” Robert’s chest puffed up. “Oscar Ryker may have held a grudge against the Adelmars, but we certainly don’t bear any ill will toward the Rykers. Otherwise, you wouldn’t even be standing in front of me right now.”

“Wh... what do you mean?” Abel did not fully understand the old man’s words.

“You should ask your grandfather. I can’t be bothered to explain it all to you...” Robert mused.

“Abel was silent for a moment before speaking. “If you won’t allow me to see Emma, can I at least see Benjamin York?”

“Benjamin?” Robert’s tone held a sharp edge. “Why would you want to meet a dead man walking?”

“Dead man walking?!” Janie gasped. “What did you do to Benjamin?”

“Hmph!” Robert cut Janie a sharp glance. “Who are you, and how dare you speak to me like that?”

“I...” Janie’s face was flush with embarrassment. “I’m... Ben’s woman. I have the right to ask about him!”

“Benedict’s life belongs to the Adelmars!” Robert boomed. “He doesn’t report to anyone else besides me!”

“We just want to see him. What’s the big deal?” Abell retorted.

“No means no!” Robert yelled before pointing an accusatory finger at Janie. “Did that punk forget to protect Emma because he was too caught up in love?”

Ben in love with her? Janie chuckled bitterly. She wished that were true, but Ben never thought of them that way. He was completely devoted to Emmeline Louise.

“You misunderstood me, Master Adelmars,” Janie explained herself. “Ben was completely devoted to Emmeline. He would never neglect his duties toward her.”

“Then why did he allow my Emma to end up like that?” the agony was clear in Robert’s voice. “He’d better be drowning in regret right now.”

“Then you should punish me too!” a tear fell down Abel’s cheek as he spoke. “I failed to protect Emma. If you want to blame someone, I’m willing to accept any punishment you dole out!”

“Hmph! You’re about to die anyway if you don’t receive treatment soon. I don’t need to punish you,” Robert said.

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“I’m just begging you to tell me where Emma is. As long as I can see her, I’m willing to accept any punishment you give me,” Abel pleaded with Robert Adelmars.

“Keep waiting here then!” Robert huffed. “One day, when it suits my mood, perhaps I’ll think about it!”

“Master Adelmarr!” Abel called out, but the old man had already stormed out of the door.

Just as Abel let out a defeated sigh, Waylon Adelmarr entered the room. “Mr. Adelmarr,” Abel greeted although he was visibly in pain.

“My father is acting out only because of how much he is hurting. Please forgive him, Mr. Ryker,” Waylon explained.

“Master Adelmarr was more than gracious. I know he’s hurting over Emma, and I could tell he was reigning his anger in. I would’ve let him beat me up willingly because this was all my fault,” Abel said dejectedly.

“It’s good that you understand. We’re Emma’s family after all,” Waylon remarked.

“But how is she? Please, Mr. Adelmarr, I’m begging you to let me see her just once,” Abel begged once more.

Waylon shook his head. “I’m afraid I cannot promise you that.”

“Mr. Adelmarr, what about Benjamin? Can we see him instead?” Janie tried her luck.

Waylon contemplated her request for a moment before finally nodding. “Follow me,” he said, before leading Abel, Luca and Janie toward the east wing of the manor. They walked through the corridors of the building until they finally reached a tiny flight of stairs.

“Ben is inside the room up these stairs,” Waylon said. “You may go inside and see him. I won’t be following you.”

“Thank you so much, Mr. Adelmarr,” Abel extended his gratitude.

“You’re welcome. Come back to the lounge after you’re done. I’ll get the guest rooms ready,” Waylon said. “But Mr. Ryker, your stomach condition requires immediate treatment or the consequences will be dire,” Waylon added just as he was about to leave.

“I won’t receive treatment before I get to see Emma,” Abel said with strong determination in his voice. “You don’t have to persuade me any further.”

“Alright then...” Waylon turned to leave.

Abel’s group rushed up the stairs and reached a wooden door with intricate carvings of roses and twines. Janie knocked on the door several times.

“Mr. Benjamin... Mr. Benjamin, are you in there?” she asked out loud, but there was no response. Luca was about to reach for the heavy wooden doorknob when the door creaked and opened on its own. Upon entering the room, they found Benjamin right there, dressed in a black silk shirt and black pants, looking like he had lost ten pounds in a short amount of time.

Benjamin looked stunned to see three familiar faces staring at him, almost as if he could not believe his eyes. “Am I dreaming?” he wondered aloud. “I thought I must’ve been hearing things...”

Abel immediately went up to Benjamin and tugged him by the collar. “Ben, where’s Emma?” he growled.

“Abel, how did you find your way here?” Benjamin asked in return.

“Stop asking me questions and answer me! Is Emma here?!” Abel demanded to know desperately.

“Ms. Louise isn’t here,” Benjamin confirmed. “This is where I’m supposed to be reflecting on my mistakes. Why would she be here?”

“Reflecting on your mistakes? Is this Master Adelmars punishment for you?” Janie asked curiously.

“He did not have to punish me. It was my own choice. I’m filled with regret every single day for not accompanying Ms. Louise that day,” Benjamin’s voice was hoarse.

“It’s not your fault,” Abel choked. “As her husband, it was my fault for not being able to protect her well enough.”

“Stop it, you two!” Janie interrupted. “Ben, just tell me where Emma is. How is she?”

“She’s not on this island. Master Adelmars sent her to another island...” Benjamin explained.

“What?” Abel’s heart raced as he processed this information. “Why is she...?”

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“Emma never regained consciousness,” Benjamin teared up as he spoke. “She was still fighting for her life, so Master Adelmars made a gamble...”

“Emma...” Abel stumbled forward on shaky legs.

Luca immediately stepped forward to support him. “Calm down, Mr. Abel...”

“Abel, you don’t look too good. Are you unwell?” Benjamin asked out of concern.

“My gastroenteritis has worsened,” Abel’s face scrunched up in pain. “But I won’t die so easily. At least, not yet...”

“What do you mean?” Benjamin frowned. “You’re Mr. Abel Ryker, the devil from hell himself! How can you be so weak and pathetic?!”

“I’ll be fine as long as Emma is fine,” Abel chuckled bitterly. “If anything happens to her, I...”

Benjamin interrupted Abel before he could finish his sentence. “Don’t forget your four children! Love isn’t everything, Abel!” Benjamin snapped at him.

“What about you then, huh?” Abel challenged. “Benjamin... No, Benedict, what would you do if anything happens to Emma?”

“I...” Benjamin looked down at his feet, unable to answer Abel.

“Didn’t you just say love isn’t everything? Don’t be a hypocrite, Benjamin! Can you really let Emma go?” Abel chided.

Fat tears streamed down Benjamin’s face as he choked out, “I can’t!”

Janie felt her heart sink as Benjamin confirmed her worst fear. His heart only had space for Emmeline despite having slept with her. He was only trying to do the responsible thing as a man, but he was unable to give her what she wanted – true feelings. Still, Janie refused to give up. She rushed over to Benjamin and embraced him.

“You can’t say that, Ben! You still have me, and I already belong to you. You can’t just leave me...” Janie cried out.

“Silly,” Benjamin comforted her, stroking her back. “I’m not saying I’ll leave you. I’ve already promised you marriage, but I can’t give you love. Do you understand how I feel now?”

“I understand, I do...” Janie sobbed. “I miss Emma too, you know. If anything happened to her, I’ll be crushed too, but you need to hang in there. I can’t replace Emmeline, but I’ll be right there with you all the way...”

The group left the room, with Luca helping Abel and Janie holding onto Benjamin. Luca prayed to any higher power that was listening to help Mr. Abel and bring Ms. Emma back safely.

As if remembering something, Janie looked up at Benjamin. “So your name is Benedict Adelman? You’re one of them?”

“I was adopted by Master Adelman,” Benjamin explained. “York was my original family name, but all of the children that he took in will change their last name to Adelman. We’re not his real children, but we do serve the family in whatever capacity we can.”

“Benjamin, which island is Emma on? Can you take me there?” Abel asked.

Benjamin considered Abel’s request for a moment before nodding softly. “Return to your guest rooms for now and come back here at nine. I’ll bring you to Emma.”

“That’s great!” Abel exclaimed, slightly choked with emotion. “We’ll come back at nine.”

They returned to the lounge only to find several maids waiting to bring them to their guest rooms. Together with the four bodyguards they brought along, Abel’s entourage took up five rooms in the Adelman manor. Not long after settling down in their rooms, one of the maids invited Abel and his group for dinner with Waylon Adelman.

“Mr. Abel, the boys and I won’t be joining for dinner. Why don’t you and Janie go ahead?” Luca suggested.

“Mr. Waylon has already made dining arrangements for everyone. He would insist for everyone to join,” the maid explained. Luca and the bodyguards had no choice but to join in for dinner as well.

The group made their way to the lavish dining hall, where dinner was already served neatly on the table. Waylon Adelman sat at the head of the table waiting for his guests. His eyes lit up when he spotted Abel.

“Mr. Ryker! Please have a seat,” Waylon greeted politely.

“Just call me Abel,” Abel insisted. “As you said, we’re not exactly strangers.”

“Mhmm,” Waylon nodded. “Emma is my father’s only disciple and my only sister, so you’re rightfully my brother-in-law.”

“Sounds about right, bro,” Abel jested.

Waylon nodded and chuckled lightly, enjoying the camaraderie.

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The cook brought out dish after tantalizing dish, setting them on the table for Waylon and his guests to enjoy. Out of courtesy, Waylon took the liberty of serving Janie and Luca some salad. However, Abel stopped Waylon just as he was about to serve him. “It’s alright, none for me. It will likely aggravate my condition,” Abel explained himself.

“You just need to take some of that medicine my father offered,” Waylon said. “It helps to reduce the ulcer inflammation.”

Abel just smiled without saying a word.

“You don’t trust my father?” Waylon raised an eyebrow.

“Of course not! On the contrary, I’m very impressed with his medical knowledge,” Abel clarified.

“Then what are you smiling about?” Waylon wondered.

“I just don’t see the point of getting treated if I don’t even know how Emma is doing,” Abel looked visibly saddened.

“If she died, would you lose the will to live as well?” Waylon frowned.

Abel did not answer Waylon immediately. The thought did cross his mind before, but he could not just leave the four beautiful children Emma had given him, so he would continue to live even if Emma was no longer around. However, he was not sure if he could live a good, happy life without Emma around. It was his cross to bear because no one else would understand the pain of losing the woman he loved. It was as if Waylon silently understood what Abel was thinking just from Abel’s expression, so he merely sighed and did not press any further.

After dinner, Abel and his entourage returned to their respective guest rooms as everybody patiently waited for nightfall. At 9pm sharp, Abel, Luca and Janie made their way to the little room in the east wing, where Benjamin sentenced himself to isolation to make up for his mistakes.

The group made their way down the narrow stairs only to find Waylon Adelmar himself at the bottom of the stairs, dressed in a white suit and leaning casually against the wall, as if he had been waiting for them.

“Waylon?” Benjamin exclaimed in shock.

“Don’t worry, I sent Abel to you this afternoon precisely because I knew you’d be persuaded to take them to Emma. I’m coming with you,” Waylon revealed.

“Waylon, I cannot begin to thank you enough,” Abel said as he grabbed Waylon’s hand into a firm handshake.

“No worries, I’d feel better if I tagged along too since you guys may not know how to handle Emma in her immobile state,” Waylon added.

Abel felt a piercing sensation through his heart as soon as he heard Waylon. What in the world happened to his dear Emma? He was both anxious and terrified to find out.

The five of them left the manor in two cars and headed in the direction of the pier. They boarded a luxury superyacht that took them toward another nearby island that was rather similar to Dawn Island. Despite it being midnight, the island city was still lit up by bright lights and colorful LED billboards. It was no surprise to Abel since Sam had explained to them that this was just another of the Adelmars family’s many islands. Half an hour later, the group arrived in front of a large, imposing hospital.

“Is Emma in this hospital?” Abel asked.

Abel nodded slowly. “The hospitals on Dawn Island are older and less well equipped. This hospital has world-class facilities to ensure the best care for Emma.”

“Mm,” Abel made a sound. Ryker Hospital should consider implementing these facilities as well, he thought to himself. Perhaps the Ryker family could work with the Adelmars one day...

The vehicle ferrying the group entered the hospital compound but did not stop at the main building. Instead, they were driven to a standalone block that looked more like a hotel resort. Abel knew that Emma was likely inside that building. He felt his blood rush at the thought of being able to be close to Emma once again.

A few ladies in the same maid’s uniform as those at the Adelmars manor greeted Waylon and his contingent as the car parked in front of the building. Once again, they whispered something to Waylon in a language that Abel did not understand.

“They’re surprised that I’m here at this time,” Waylon explained. “I was just here this morning.”

“Where’s Emma?” Abel asked directly. He could not wait any longer.

“Follow me,” Waylon said as he led the group into the building.

Abel felt his heart racing like a horse. He was about to find out what exactly happened to Emma. My dear Emma... I’m almost there... Wait for me...

The ground floor of the building was a beautifully decorated lounge, but Waylon brought them up a flight of stairs to the second floor. A few doctors and nurses walked past them, and Waylon always made it a point to acknowledge them politely. Finally, Waylon stopped in his tracks as they arrived in front of a European-style door painted in cream.

Emma... Abel’s heart called out for his wife.

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Luca and Janie were visibly nervous too. Benjamin looked down and gave his nose a little pinch, as if to comfort himself. Waylon gently pushed the heavy door open.

The room was a tastefully decorated waiting lounge, filled with warm lights and the scent of fresh flowers. There were two maids in the room who immediately greeted Waylon with a polite bow. Beyond the lounge was another door.

"You may leave the room. I have some guests," Waylon instructed the maids.

Abel glanced intently at the door, wondering if Emma was beyond those doors.

"This is usually where I spend some time with Emma. My father spends half his days here as well," Waylon informed Abel.

"I want to see her," Abel urged. "Is she in there?"

Benjamin walked to the door and opened it, motioning for Abel to step inside first. Abel immediately found Emma lying unconscious on a white king-sized bed covered in pristine white sheets. She was completely still and silent, almost like a wax figure. Abel froze in disbelief. Was his Emma... dead?

"Emma!" Abel called out as he tried to lurch forward, but Waylon held him back with a firm grip on his arm. Abel tried to wrestle himself out, but Waylon only tightened his grip.

"Please, Waylon, let me see her..." Abel pleaded.

"You can see her by all means, or else I wouldn't have brought you here, but you cannot touch her!" Waylon said authoritatively.

"What... why?" Abel asked in surprise. Only God knew how long he had dreamed of the day where he could hold Emma in his arms once again. He would never let her go ever again.

"There's a device under Emma's body that's working to extricate the bullet from her body. If you move her, you will undo all the progress that's been done so far and may even take away her last chance at survival," Abel explained.

"You mean..." Abel inhaled deeply. "... there's still hope for Emma?"

"She's hanging on by a thread. Even my father cannot guarantee that she'll survive..." Waylon sighed before continuing. "The bullet had pierced through Emma's cardiovascular artery. If it was any other normal person, they would've died on the spot, but Emma managed to shut down her meridian points at the very last minute which gave her a fighting chance. We've already consulted with the best doctors around the world. Unfortunately, they've all agreed that they would not be able to retrieve the bullet via surgery, so we finally decided on using this device to slowly extricate the bullet. Emma is also consuming a special supplement formulated by our family that helps to repair her damaged artery, but no one knows how long this process will take. It all depends on Emma's will to live..."

Abel finally understood what Waylon and Robert Ademar meant by "leaving it all up to fate". If Emma was able to overcome this brutal process, she would be out of the woods. If she could not, it would mean certain death.

“Emma!” Abel fell to his knees in front of her bed. “Please, I’m begging you. You must hang in there and overcome this! Our children are still waiting for you... I’m still waiting for you...” he cried.

“Now that you’ve seen her, you may return home, Abel...” Waylon hinted.

“No,” Abel shook his head. “I’m not going anywhere. I’m staying here with Emma until she wakes up!” Abel insisted.

“Emma might not win this battle in the end,” Waylon emphasized again. “There’s no point for you to be here, and who knows how long this process will take?”

“What do you mean there’s no point?” Abel argued defiantly. “Emma knows I’m here. I’ll give her to support she needs to overcome this!”

“Don’t forget that you need to be treated urgently too, or your stomach will bleed out anytime soon...” Waylon reminded him.

“I’m fine. I don’t feel any pain when I’m with Emma,” Abel maintained stubbornly.

“I really cannot win against you,” Waylon sighed, realizing there was no changing Abel’s mind. “Fine, you can stay here for the next few days. The facilities here are free for to use. Just call a doctor or nurse if you need anything.”

“Thank you, Waylon. I really appreciate this,” Abel thanked him.

“Waylon, I’d like to stay here too,” Benjamin said suddenly. “Could you please persuade Master Adelmarr on my behalf?”

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“I’ll try my best,” Waylon nodded. “I’m sure you know Father always had a soft spot for you, but you committed a grave mistake this time.”

“I know that. Emma was the apple of Master Adelmarr’s eye, and I completely let him down,” Benjamin’s eyes filled with sorrowful regret.

“It’s good that you know that,” Waylon said as he gave Benjamin a gentle pat on the back. “Stay here with Abel for the next few days then. You may continue with your reflection when you return home.”

“Thank you, Waylon,” Benjamin nodded somberly.

Waylon said a few words to the in-house maids before bidding goodbye and leaving the room.

“Could you guys leave us for a little while? I want to spend some time alone with Emma,” Abel said out loud.

Benjamin looked like he was about to argue otherwise, but Janie held him back. “Let them have a moment alone,” she whispered to Benjamin before tugging on his arm. Reluctantly, he followed Janie out of the room. Luca, who was the last to leave, closed the door, leaving Abel in the room alone with Emma. He brought a chair close to Emma’s bed and sat down as he observed Emma’s delicate features that decorated her dainty face.

“Emma, I’m begging you. You have to overcome this... You have to get better... I’m waiting right here for you,” Abel said forlornly. “It’s our wedding anniversary in less than a month. I’m still eagerly waiting for you to be my bride officially and for us to spend the night together. The children need you too. How will they be happy without you? Em...” Abel carefully placed her tiny lifeless hand in his. He would have thought that she was dead if not for her body warmth and the softness of her skin.

“Ugh....” Abel moaned as pain shot through his abdomen and a wave of nausea hit him. He put down Emma’s hand gently and rushed to the bathroom to throw up again. As he expected, he was vomiting more blood than bile.

“This is not good...” Abel said to himself as he clutched his abdomen. “Abel Ryker, now that you’ve found her, you can’t let yourself crumble before she wakes up. You still have to be there for her! Hang in there, you weakling!” he scolded himself before rinsing his mouth and wiping his face with a paper towel.

Abel exited the room to find Luca patiently waiting for him outside. “Prepare some soup for me. I’m ready to eat,” he announced.

Luca jumped up from his seat rather emotionally. “Mr. Abel, you... want to eat something?” he asked to confirm.

“Yes,” Abel nodded. “I need to have energy to watch over Emma.”

“Yes, yes, you’re absolutely right, Mr. Abel!” Luca was pleasantly surprised. “It would be a disaster if Ms. Emma wakes up only to watch you pass out!”

“There’s a kitchen downstairs,” Janie added. “I could cook you some soup. You might not be used to the cuisine in this part of the world.”

“That works. I’ll join you in the kitchen. If there’s no ingredients, I can make a trip out to get some,” Benjamin offered.

The two of them took the stairs down to the first floor. Two maids gingerly rushed over to them, addressing Benjamin in their native language. “Mr. Benedict, is there anything we can help you with?” they asked politely.

“We were thinking of using the kitchen. Are there any ingredients available to make some soup?” Benjamin asked.

“Yes, yes, there is,” one of the maids confirmed.

“That’s great. Don’t worry about it, we’ll help ourselves,” Benjamin informed them.

“Oh?” the maids were clearly surprised that one of the Adelmars was personally going into the kitchen.

“Well, then, let us know if you need any help.”

Benjamin and Janie were surprised to find the kitchen stocked full of ingredients enough to feed at least a hundred people. It seemed like Robert and Ademar always had their meals here after visiting Emma. Janie immediately got to work, preparing the ingredients for a hearty vegetable soup.

Half an hour later, Luca brought a bowl of piping hot soup to Abel. Abel sat up on the sofa in the lounge and frowned at the bowl. The soup looked delicious, a testament to Janie's culinary skills, but Abel did not know how his body would react to it. However, he had to try for Emma's sake.

Luca watched the hot steam fogging up Abel's glasses as Abel wolfed down spoonful after spoonful of hot soup eagerly, knowing Abel was trying his best to hide the pain he was experiencing.

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Abel looked much better after finishing Janie's soup. He stood up, thinking of going into Emma's bedroom once again, but he was immediately paralyzed by the chronic pain in his abdomen. The pain was so excruciating that it drained all the color from his face in an instant and caused him to break out in cold sweat.

"Arrghhhh... d*mn it!" Abel cursed.

"Mr. Abel, are you alright?" Luca immediately went to his aid.

"Blerghhhh..." Before he knew it, Abel had involuntarily vomited blood and soup all over the floor.

"Mr. Abel! Mr. Abel!" Luca exclaimed in shock as he rushed to sit Abel back down on the sofa.

"This is terrible. Why can't my stomach just behave?" he moaned in pain.

"I'll get a doctor. Hang in there, Mr. Abel!" Luca said before rushing out of the door.

Benjamin and Janie were chatting on the ground floor when Luca rushed in gasping for breath, shocking the both of them.

"Luca, what's wrong?" Benjamin asked, getting on his feet.

"Mr. York, please call a doctor! Mr. Abel is not doing well!" Luca breathed panickily.

Wordlessly, Benjamin and Janie immediately rushed to the room upstairs only to find Abel lying weakly on the sofa. The room was filled with the unpleasant stench of vomit that covered the floor. The entire scene shook Benjamin and Janie to their core.

"Abel! Abel, how are you feeling?" Benjamin almost yelled, but Abel was not able to answer.

"Mr. Ryker's stomach is probably bleeding profusely. Ben, call a doctor right now!" Janie urged him. Benjamin immediately called the doctors through an intercom machine.

Two minutes later, a few doctors and nurses arrived from the main hospital wing. They immediately carted Abel onto a stretcher and into an ambulance upon assessing his condition. Luca followed beside his employer the whole way.

"Janie, stay here with Emma. I'll keep an eye on Abel," Benjamin told Janie.

"Ok," Janie nodded. "Quick, go with Luca! He doesn't know anyone around here."

The doctors immediately put Abel on an IV drip and painkillers. More than an hour later, the pain and bleeding had finally stopped, and Abel was conscious once again. As he took in his surroundings, he found himself in a hospital ward. Luca was by his bedside watching over him, while Benjamin was

standing by the window. Abel finally realized he had passed out after throwing up and immediately tried to sit up.

"I can't be sitting around here. I'm supposed to be by Emma's side! I can't leave her..." he grumbled as he tried to flip the bedsheets off him.

"Mr. Abel," Luca stopped him from getting off the bed. "The doctors say your stomach bleeding is in critical condition. You need immediate surgery..."

"Don't listen to them," Abel refuted. "There's no way I'm going under the knife right now. I need to be with Emma!" He pulled out the needles attached to his skin forcefully and bolted out of the ward in slippers before Luca could stop him. He ran into the elevator, pressing for the first floor and immediately running back toward the building where Emma was in. However, moments later, pain took over his stomach and body once again and his vision turned dark as he crashed onto the ground.

"Emma..." he groaned out his last word before knocking out.

When he regained consciousness once again, it was already bright outside. Waylon Adelmar was seated by his side this time.

"Waylon," Abel muttered weakly. "I can't be here. I need to be with Emma..."

"You know what you need? You need treatment," Waylon said flatly. "You're in critical condition right now."

"I won't die so easily," Abel argued. "I'm a lover of life, don't you know? If I receive surgery now, I won't be able to get out of the bed for weeks..."

"It's not up to you any longer," Waylon said. "I know you need Emma, but have you ever thought that Emma needs you just as much? If she was awake right now, would you want her to worry about you?"

Abel considered Waylon's words silently. It was true that he would not want Emma to worry about him, but he could not help himself.

"Waylon, please... I'm begging you... just let me watch over her!" Abel pleaded.

"No, you need to be treated right away!" Waylon refused to budge.

"Not yet!" Abel countered.

"Don't put me in a difficult position, Abel..." Waylon said directly.

Abel was silent for a moment before he spoke again. "Or why don't I take Master Adelmar's medicine?" he suggested.

"You'll still need to be treated in the hospital. Your stomach is critically inflamed and needs to be pumped to reduce the swelling," Waylon explained.

"Well then, sue me for insubordination!" Abel snapped as he tried to yank the tubes attached to his flesh once again.

Waylon raised his hand, sending a silver needle shooting straight toward Abel's chest, knocking him out once again.

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A doctor approached Waylon hastily and spoke to him in their native Osean language that neither Janie nor Luca understood. Benjamin, on the other hand, turned pale as he heard what the doctor had said and rushed out of the ward. Waylon quickly followed in his stride as well. Luca and Janie exchanged confused glances with each other.

"Did something happen to Emma?!" Janie suddenly realized.

Luca looked at Abel worriedly. Thankfully, Abel was fully unconscious right now, or he would have gone mad if he heard the news about Emma. On the other hand, Luca wondered how Ms. Emma was doing. He crouched down into a kneeling position and said a silent prayer to protect the couple from any further suffering.

...

Waylon and Benjamin rushed into Emma's room and found her surrounded by several doctors with solemn expressions on their faces. Waylon immediately grabbed Emma's wrist, but he could not feel any pulse. Did this mean... Was Emma...? He dared not finish his thoughts.

"Has Master Adelmarr been notified?" he asked the doctors.

"Yes, he has," one of the doctors responded. "Is there... any hope left?"

Waylon could not answer the doctor. His eyes fogged up with tears. Was there any hope left? He wondered the same too. He could only hope that his father could give Emma a chance. He took out a few silver needles and tried a last-ditch attempt at reviving Emma.

Janie began to sob out loud, crying into Benjamin's chest. "Ben, Emma... She..."

Benjamin held onto Janie, but he was in shock himself. "Emma, don't... don't leave us..." he chanted those words like a prayer over and over again.

Not long after, Robert Adelmarr arrived and chased everyone out of the room except for his son who would serve as his assistant.

"Father, is there... any hope left?" Waylon asked tentatively.

"Let me see..." That was all Robert said before getting to work. The father and son worked on saving Emma from morning until late afternoon.

Benjamin was slumped outside the room, repeating the same prayer over and over again.

"Emma, I'll do anything for you as long as you live... I promise to protect you wholeheartedly and unwaveringly... Emma, please live..." he prayed and sobbed, while Janie sat by his side.

Janie could not help but feel a sense of overwhelming sadness as she saw Benjamin in such a state. Even until now, Benjamin never considered her as someone he could grow to love. His entire world was occupied by Emmeline. The man was promising some higher power that he would never leave Emma's

side as long as she woke up. What about her then? Even then, Janie could not stop praying for Emma too. After all, there were other types of love apart from romantic love. There was familial love, and love among friends...

...

Back in Abel's ward, he had been given a sedative and remained in a deep sleep, under orders from Waylon himself. Waylon was afraid of Abel's condition worsening if he found out about Emma. However, Abel managed to wake up by the afternoon, perhaps as a result of his strong willpower fighting the effects of the sedative.

"I need to be with Emma. She's all alone in that room..." Abel groaned.

"Mr. Abel!" Luca tried to stop him. "You can't leave, Ms. Emma..."

"What happened to Emma?" Abel demanded to know. "Luca, what did you say? What happened to her?!"

"Not... Nothing, Mr. Abel..." Abel wanted to slap himself for almost spilling the beans.

"But I heard you mention her name! What happened to her, Luc?" Abel pressed.

"Ms. Emma... is still unconscious. That's all I was trying to say," Luca said unconvincingly. "Mr. Abel, you shouldn't go over. You need to be on bed rest right now."

"No, I need to be with Emma. She must be lonely on her own. Emma... Emma, wait for me..." he said out loud as he tried to get down from the bed, just as the door to the ward opened and Waylon strode in.

"Mr. Waylon, please talk to Mr. Abel. I can't stop him!" Luca looked at Waylon like he was his savior.

"Abel," Waylon said a little tiredly, but pleasantly, nonetheless. "Just lie down and let the IV drip do its job. It'll help your condition."

"I don't need help. I just need to be with Emma..." Abel insisted and tried to fight his way out of the ward before Waylon flicked his nose with his palm. Abel smelled a familiar scent from that night in the emergency room with Emma, right before he passed out...