

## Love beyond the mask ( Whitney ) Chapter 131-145

### Chapter 131

Whitney bobbed her head, her voice a soft murmur. Without Elaine, I'll be your **right-hand** woman."

"Right-hand woman..."

dwik looked down with a quirked eyebrow and for some reason, his **thoughts** took an

unexpected turn.

Maybe it was the way she snuggled into his embrace, so docile and sweet. After a day of struggle and strife, he led her to the bathroom. With a twist of the tap, a veil of steamy water cascaded down. He rested his hands on her delicate shoulders and coaxed her in a calm, husky voice, "Alright then, Madam, why don't you contribute

When Whitney emerged, she was utterly bewildered.

He had tricked her again!

Biting her lip in a mix of shame and exhaustion, she let herself be cradled in his arms, too shy to meet his gaze. As sleep claimed her before she could finish **their** conversation, she succumbed **to the** fatigue.

Waking up the next day. Whitney's hand searched the bed for L's presence, only **to find** he was *not* there. Glancing at the time, she realized she had overslept.

Rushing through her morning routine, she hurried downstairs.

There he was, L, impeccably dressed in a suit, seated at the dining table with an untouched coffee cup.

Taryn had neatly organized his briefcase.

Was he waiting for her?

As Ludwik's gaze lifted, capturing the sight of the drowsy, flushed young woman, she approached in a soft sweater dress, her belly slightly rounded.

His lips curled into a thin smirk, summoning Felix with a serious call.

Felix entered with a smile, extending two items to Whitney. "Madam, these are from the boss."

One was a vice president nameplate from United Realty Corporation!

And the other, a black card.

"Madam, Boss upgraded the embossed black card he gave you before. This one gives you access to all his assets, meaning *you* can spend until he's bankrupt," Felix said, his lips curling mischievously.

Whitney's jaw nearly hit the floor.

She pointed at the 'Vice President' nameplate, her heart skipping a beat. "This is?"

"You said you wanted to be my right-hand last night? Here's your chance," Ludwik said, stepping toward her, his handsome features accentuated by the silver mask, his voice rich and arrogantly smooth.

Surprised, Whitney looked *into* his deep eyes, wondering if he had misunderstood.

Awkwardly waving her hands, she clarified, "L, when I said those things last night, I didn't mean **to** join your company. I just wanted to say **that** you shouldn't mourn Elaine's loss; I can be capable, too, a woman who can genuinely help you."

Her stubbornness was evident in her eyes, and Ludwik noticed it.

He cleared his **throat**, leaning close to whisper, "Mmm, I saw your **capabilities last night.**"

**Last**

**night? In the** bathroom? Whitney's face flushed as she caught on, glaring at him **for his** occasional **lack** of seriousness.

Chapte

His arm reached out, playfully tugging at her earlobe, then resting on her shoulder, pulling her close. He

returned to a serious tone, saying. Inviting you into the company is a sign of my sincerity Didn't you complain that I was not caring enough?"

When he decided to spoil a woman, he was unreservedly generous

Whitney's heart swelled with sweetness, yet she shook her head, "I really have no designs on your company, and putting me in the spotlight like this, what about your family.

His eyes darkened with intent. This was precisely his point.

He was all in for her, so why not elevate her to the public eye? The more perilous, the safer.

Granting her a status would make those people think twice before crossing her.

A man's deep thoughts are not always comprehended by a woman. He pinched her chin, saying, "Think it over.

If you really want to help me, then join. And let me see for myself how you handle business:

His voice, lofty and teasing, clearly did not take her business acumen seriously.

Whitney pouted, her hand already in his as they entered the car.

Skye Gem was located in the eastern part of downtown. Felix parked the car and let her out.

Whitney turned to bid him farewell, but he left her with the same words, "Think about it. I'll be at United Realty Corporation this morning and can introduce you."

His lips curled in a suggestive smile.

A husband bringing his wife into his company, offering her a position...

Whitney blushed, gathering her brows. "I'll be going now."

But no sooner had she stepped into Skye Gem than her phone rang.

It was an unfamiliar number. She answered to hear Elaine's voice, "Thanks to you, Whitney. I'm headed to the branch office today. Let's meet. There are a few things I want to say to you."

Whitney declined. "No need."

"Don't you want to know about Bro?" Elaine's voice was laced with colder laughter.

Whitney frowned, hesitated, and then agreed.

In the café, Elaine sat under the warm glow of the corner lamp. The eyes that watched Whitney approach were as cold and sharp as hidden blades, filled with loathing.

For the first time, Whitney saw Elaine drop her pretense.

Unafraid and indifferent, Whitney sat gracefully.

Elaine, seething with hatred for Whitney's victorious demeanor, hissed. "I can't believe how shameless you are, clinging to Bro despite being branded a homewrecker. It's me you're after, isn't it?"

"Yes," Whitney did not shy away, her gaze icy, "You were the one who egged Ashton on to confront me about the fiancée issue. Ashton did not realize he was being used, and perhaps L didn't either, but I did. You were convinced I'd crumble and leave, and even if I did, you wouldn't let me off easy. So why not claim this man for myself?"

To protect herself, her child, and Valerie.

Elaine clenched her fists, suddenly sneering. "Don't get too comfortable; your victory won't last long. And don't be smug. Whitney, I'll tell **you**, Bro's heart belongs to another."

Whitney paused, disbelief chilling her spine.

Elaine leaned in, her smile carrying ominous undertones, "His savior, someone he's kept hidden deep within his

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19:09

heart in his eyes, yours just a physical need, nothing more

Besides you and he you won't last. Elaine mused, recalling her mother's words, **her** smile cryptic and chilling

That smile that statement, it made Whitney's brow furrow

What did she mean?

Did Elaine know something?

Whitney could not believe her ears but quickly gathered her thoughts, determined not to let herself be swayed by petty provocations. "You're leaving, and you're trying to smoke me out with your last-ditch shenanigans? Sorry to burst your bubble, but Ludwik loves me. He's handed me the Vice President position at United Realty Corporation"

She pulled out the 'Vice President' nameplate and laid it on the table for Elaine to see.

Elaine's gaze faltered, visibly thrown off. She had not expected Ludwik to bring Whitney into the fold!

This wretch!

Her fists clenched in a cool fury, masking the blow to her pride. She abruptly stood up and sneered at Whitney. "You think just because you've wiggled your way into his company, you've got him all to yourself? Think again, Whitney. You won't last a day at United Realty Corporation. We'll just see about that."

Grabbing her purse and plane ticket, Elaine stormed out.

Whitney's frown deepened as she watched her retreat.

Elaine's words seemed laden with meaning, perhaps let slip in a moment of anger.

Looking at the nameplate, Whitney suddenly grasped it tightly in her hand. She knew United Realty Corporation was likely still riddled with Elaine's influence.

She never wanted to meddle with L's business, not wanting him to think she had ulterior motives.

**But** now, it seemed clear that if she did not step in and cut Elaine's influence off at the roots, leveraging her network, Elaine would soon find her way back into United Realty Corporation.

Elaine was resourceful; there was no doubt about that!

To safeguard her relationship, Whitney felt she had no choice but to make a proactive strike at United Realty Corporation.

With a heavy sigh, she pinned the nameplate to her chest and hailed a cab, heading straight to the towering United Realty Corporation building.

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The towering edifice of United Realty Corporation stood solemn and imposing against the city skyline

Whitney announced her arrival at the reception, and Felix came down promptly with a warm smile as he swiftly ushered her upstairs.

On the grand 50th floor, **behind** the panoramic floor-to-ceiling glass windows, stood the tall and austere figure of a man in a sleek black suit that seemed **to add** depth **to** his already profound presence. Positioned among the cubicles, the work did not **lend the** man his allure; instead, he enhanced the floor's radiance with his very

being

Whitney was utterly captivated by **his** commanding **aura**; **this** was her first real glimpse of him at work.

His presence exuded an unmistakable CEO vibe, **that** innate air of **authority** seeping from his bones, making Whitney wonder if he truly was only the head of United Realty Corporation.

As Whitney observed him, Ludwik's gaze briefly swept over her face, locking onto the name tag pinned neatly to

her chest.

The man's lips curled into a slight smile, and amid the watchful eyes of the entire staff, he beckoned her over with a casual wave. "Changed your mind?"

"Mm—  
hmm." Whitney's ears tinged red as she composed herself and walked towards him.

Ludwik took her hand without any hint of secrecy and guided her to stand beside him, tapping lightly on the

desk beside them.

The room fell silent, including the shareholders and executives who had just dispersed from the morning

meeting.

Their gazes were fixed on the imposing man.

Ludwik glanced up, his voice carrying an authoritative chill. "I would like to introduce everyone to Whitney, the new Vice President of United Realty Corporation. She will be taking over some of my responsibilities. Please, give her your full cooperation."

As his words echoed, nobody dared to speak, but their expressions shifted.

Elaine had stepped down just days ago, and now a new female VP was in place. Could this be the same woman—the temporary Mrs. Lippert—spoken of in hushed rumors?

Whitney promptly introduced herself, feeling the weight of many eyes upon her, some clearly unfriendly. Recalling their faces from the hospital report with Elaine, she recognized Castor among those who looked at her strangely.

“That’ll be all,” Ludwik commanded with a stern chill, gesturing dismissively, “Felix, please show the Vice President to her office.”

Following Felix to her new office, freshly appointed and equipped, he handed her some transition documents and introduced her to her new assistant. “Ms. Whitney, this is your secretary, Harper.”

Harper nodded a greeting.

Soon after, the office door swung open, and a tall man strode in, his overcoat draped over his arm, indicating he was about to leave.

Beneath a mask of silver, his features were sharp and intense. He looked at the tiny woman by the desk, dressed professionally, with a casual and serious gaze, making Whitney slightly overwhelmed.

“Something you need, Mr. CEO?” Suddenly finding themselves in a superior-subordinate relationship, Whitney **felt** an awkward tension.

His piercing gaze made her cheeks warm. “Your first day, make sure to hold **down** the **fort**. The recent issues at

10.10

Skye Gem, delegate them to the KINGHAIRS the

Whitney nodded, having almost forgotten the morning meeting at Skye Gem had been stable way who

it

It was also why she had agreed to assist at United by Cayen

eyézow,



“Can you handle both companies, business investment. He had an epiphany, standing  
dressed towering over her “Skye  
Gem is a small fish. You might as well sell it and focus on helping nat

Whitney noted Felix and Harper had discreetly left, closing the door behind th  
ere.

She retorted, annoyance tinged with pride, “Skye Gem is my grandfather’s leg  
acy I can’t sell it. My grandfather was  
a renowned businessman, Faulkner Tennyson. Ever heard of him, 17

Faulkner?” Ludwik’s expression shifted subtly

Her interest piqued. “You knew my grandfather?”

His gaze darkened, hiding a complexity as he denied, “Not

Something  
about his look seemed off to Whitney. She pushed the thought aside, continui  
ng with a smile. My grandfather was Faulkner, my uncle is Keegan Tennyson,  
and my mother was Parisa Tennyson..

Her cheer faded into a somber chill, her eyes slowly misting Unfortunately, my  
grandfather and mother passed away early, leaving only my uncle

The man watched her closely, his voice dropping low as he comforted, “From  
now on, you have me.”

Feeling the heat radiating from him, warmth seemed to spread through her, di  
ssipating the internal chill

She nodded firmly and glanced at his overcoat. “Are you heading out?”

“United Realty Corporation is just one of my ventures. Your husband is a busy  
man, I have to leave on a short business trip” He glanced at his watch.

Just one of his ventures? Whitney knew her suspicions had been correct; coul  
d he be a business tycoon? Stunned by the thought, Whitney watched him ap  
proach and lower his head to kiss her.

“Mm, you should get going, L... Her face flushed. She glanced around and pu  
shed him lightly grateful for the solid walls.

“Stop moaning, it’s too much for me” Ludwik said with a husky voice. The office setting only added to his fervor, Moments later, he reluctantly let her go, squeezing her cheek. “Get familiar with the company. Harper will assist you, and you call me if needed.”

“Go ahead,” she said, avoiding his gaze.

He turned and strode out, Felix and several assistants falling into step behind **him**.

Whitney sat down to cool off, her mind drifting to her grandfather and mother. Their memorial was approaching at year’s end.

She had been locked in a battle with the Valentine family in the past months. With the Valentines weakened Skye Gem reclaimed, and Elaine gone from Banyan City, Whitney could focus on her own affairs. She needed to contact her uncle before the memorial. The truth behind her mother and grandfather’s deaths needed uncovering.

Her thoughts went to Simon’s possession of her grandfather’s contact book.

Her gaze sharpened; it was time to settle the score with Simon. She dialed the top brass at Skye Gem, “Liquidate Simon’s performance shares at the company.”

If she wanted to corner him, she would have to get **crafty**.

Whitney furrowed her brows when her assistant, Harper, knocked **and** entered, carrying a hefty stack of documents. “Ms. Whitney, here’s the **info** on the execs from United Realty Corporation that **you** requested, plus the latest on the five–star hotel chain project.

Whitney nodded, quickly flipping through the papers. “Are the execs in the conference room yet? Eve just taken the helm, and we’re due for a meet–and–greet.”

Harper hesitated, her expression changing subtly. “Well, I informed them, but they did not show up. It might be because Castor did not give the **nod**.”

Whitney paused. Barely had she stepped into the role, and already, these people were defying her.

After **all**, she get this position out of nowhere, **so** she was not surprised. Her eyes narrowed as she focused on Castor's **file**. "Is he the highest **in** the management after **the** VP?"

"Yes, Castor boosted United Realty's profits by 5% last year. He's highly respected and has a lot of clout."

Whitney remembered Castor, a cold smile creeping onto her **lips**. She was looking for **exactly** these remnants of Elaine's influence.

"Get Castor **to** come to me. I want to **see** him."

Harper left to fetch Castor.

But a few minutes later, she returned disheartened. "Whitney, Castor sends his apologies, **saying** he's tied up in a meeting. Maybe you should call the president?"

Castor was undermining Whitney in the shadows while openly citing another engagement.

Running to L over this would only prove her lack of leadership.

Whitney realized she had to get through this on her own. She leaned back in her chair, checked the time, and then stood up with a smile. "No rush. Let's go have lunch."

"The company's cafeteria is on the 26th floor." Harper stepped into the elevator, filling Whitney in.

Impressive for the top real estate firm's cafeteria, Whitney thought. Just as she was about to enter a dining booth, someone approached.

Castor raised an eyebrow nonchalantly, "Whitney, here for lunch, too? Sorry, but this booth used to be Elaine's exclusive spot!"

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Whitney glanced at him and chose a chair to sit down. “Castor, like **you** said, ‘used to’. Are you just helping everyone to remember that Elaine has already left the company?”

“You...” Castor’s face darkened, and then he added, “This booth is full, Whitney. Perhaps you should find another spot.”

Whitney looked up nonchalantly. “Since you claim it’s a booth reserved for the VP, and you’re not on that level, maybe you should find another seat.”

Castor glared at Whitney, his face turning a shade of steel, and with a huff, he beckoned his entourage to another booth.

Whitney’s eyes swept over the remaining executives, noting who was in Castor’s inner circle.

In the next booth over, Castor’s secretary fumed. “Word on the street is Whitney’s the mistress who climbed to the top. She elbowed Elaine out, and now she’s trying to overshadow Castor.”

Another employee, out of the loop, asked, “Mistress who climbed to the top?”

That was when Castor’s secretary filled them in. “Haven’t you heard about the scandal a few days ago? Elaine had been engaged to the CEO for years, and Whitney just waltzed in and took her spot. Now she’s even trying to snatch Elaine’s job.”

“That’s outrageous.”

“Her? Trying to be the VP? She doesn’t have half of Elaine’s talent.”

As the employees started gossiping, Castor smirked from the sidelines.

The soundproofing between the booths was poor, and Whitney could hear every word from the other side.

Feeling awkward, her assistant, Harper, suggested, “Ms. Whitney, maybe we should go give them a piece of our mind?”

Whitney clenched her fists, coldly pocketed her voice recorder, and shook her head. “Patience, Harper.”

She ordered two light dishes.

But after waiting for half an hour, the food still had not arrived.

Harper went to inquire and came back fuming. “The restaurant manager said there was a mix-up—they served our food to Castor’s booth.”

Whitney narrowed her eyes. “Such a precise mistake?”

“I bet Castor’s got the restaurant manager in his pocket, trying to make you look bad. With the CEO away, they’re...”

Whitney stood up and said coolly, “No matter, we can just order delivery.”

Back at her office, Whitney pored over Castor’s files and called Tiana, “Hey Tiana, could you dig up some dirt for me?”

That entire afternoon, not a single executive reported to Whitney.

Her office was eerily quiet, a clear sign **that** she was being sidelined, with no way to take on any work.

Harper was anxious, thinking, “What if the CEO asks about this tomorrow? Ms . Whitney hasn’t been able to integrate into the workflow here at all.”

Whitney remained calm. After reviewing the five-star hotel project plans, she checked her schedule and asked, “Is it three o’clock already? Isn’t **it** time for the new project meeting?”

“Yes, but Castor hasn’t notified you. He’s clearly not taking you seriously,” Harper said indignantly.

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Whitney stood up, and Tiana’s ‘information’ came through just then. She scanned it, and a sly smile curved her lips. “**If** Castor **won’t** notify me, I’ll just attend the meeting myself. Which floor is it on?”

On the 48th floor, the meeting room was set for the five-star hotel project brainstorming session.

The **executives** took their seats.

Castor was in a secluded part of the hallway, on the phone, boasting, “Elaine, I’ve had Whitney on ice since this morning. She was the laughingstock at lunch, and I’ve spread the news about her affair. Even if she stays at United Realty Corporation, no one will work with her. As for the upcoming project meeting...”

Elaine’s cold laughter came through on the other end. “Make sure she doesn’t attend. Tell the CEO she’s clueless about real estate. He won’t blame you. He’ll just see her as an obstacle. The worse her reputation at the company, the more incompetent she appears, the sooner I can return. Go ahead and *do* it. I’ll promote you when I’m back.”

Boosted by her words, Castor felt a surge of gratification.

He returned to the meeting room. “Let’s start the hotel project meeting.”

One of the managers hesitated, “The hotel project is significant. Not inviting Whitney might...”

“What’s the point of inviting her if she doesn’t understand? A pregnant woman coming to listen to gibberish? We can’t let her jeopardize a hundred-billion-dollar project!” Castor said with disdain.

The manager did not dare say another word.

Just then, the conference room door swung open, and a woman in sleek business attire walked in, her smile calm and collected. “Has the meeting started? I hope I’m not late, Castor. I’m actually quite curious to hear your ‘gibberish.’”

Castor was taken aback by Whitney’s presence, momentarily cowed by her commanding air, reminiscent of Mr. Lippert’s.

But bolstered by Elaine’s support, he sneered. “Whitney, this is a major project the CEO cares deeply about. I hear you’re in the jewelry business. Now, you’re trying to chair a real estate meeting? Doesn’t seem quite right, does it?”

The executives, unfamiliar with Whitney’s capabilities, nodded in agreement upon hearing that her expertise was unrelated to real estate.

“It’s apples and oranges.”

“She wants to chair the meeting just for show, treating a huge project like child’s play!”

Castor looked at Whitney with mocking eyes, “It seems everyone disagrees with you joining the meeting. If you’re so keen on staying, why don’t you just listen from the corner?”

Being put in the corner was akin to being relegated to the sidelines, and Harper clenched his fists in anger.

Whitney, unfazed, walked over to Castor’s seat, glanced at the nameplate, and said with a smile, “This is the VP’s seat. Castor, get up.”

Without waiting for a response, she unceremoniously pushed Castor out of the chair!

“Whitney, you...” Castor, caught off guard and furious, scrambled up, ready to confront her.

“What were you planning to do to a pregnant woman?” Whitney’s cold gaze stopped him in his tracks.

Remembering the baby belonged to the CEO, Castor’s heart sank, and he sat down, his face a picture of discontent.

Whitney looked up and addressed the room, “Let’s proceed with the meeting. Continue your discussion.”

The executives exchanged looks, unsure of what **to** make **of** the situation.

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Castor, now seated at the side, tried to provoke Whitney. We were discussing whether to go with a circular

design or a twin-tower structure for the hotel group. Since the land hasn’t been allocated, it might take up half the city’s area. Perhaps you’d like to share your thought

Whitney

arched an eyebrow and flipped open the project portfolio, confidently breaking the silence “A hotel empire that spans half the city? Circular and twin-tower designs are just too restrictive. Vidre talking about a luxury hotel district here—it needs to be grand. Five-star accommodations demand a focus on both form and spatial efficiency. We should really be taking a page from the Sailsky Dubai Hotel playbook.”

Her words hung in the air, and the room fell silent.

The executives exchanged glances, their expressions shifting.

This was not the talk of a novice, far from it.

The manager could not help but interject, “Whitney, you seem quite knowledgeable on the subject.”

“Knowledgeable? Anyone can speak in generalities,” Castor interjected with a sneer. “If Whitney is so capable, let’s see her get into the nitty-gritty on stage.”

Castor was convinced Whitney was out of her depth, just a jeweler with no real insight into their industry. He was waiting to catch her in a mistake, eager to report her to the president for disrupting the meeting and wasting everyone’s time.

“Sure,” Whitney replied coolly, agreeing to the challenge. Standing up, she passed a USB drive to Harper, who caught Whitney’s knowing glance and promptly left the room.

Striding to the podium, Whitney had not even reached the microphone when the giant screen displaying the hotel model suddenly changed.

An explicit video began to play!

The mingled moans of a man and woman filled the solemn conference room, starkly contrasting the professional atmosphere.

Heads whipped up in shock, only to see that the man in the video was none other than Castor!

There he was, cavorting on a lounge sofa with two women, neither of whom was his wife.



Castor stood frozen, his face turning a sickly shade of pale. He scrambled for ward. Turn it off! Who put this on? Turn it off!” He shouted, panic edging his voice as he faced the scandal unfolding before his very peers.

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Castor searched the conference room for ages, looking for a USB plug, but found nothing.

Just then, the door burst open, and in stormed a middle-aged socialite, her designer purse clutched like a shield. Her eyes locked onto the giant screen that displayed a video of Cantor and two young women doing it. Red-faced with fury, she charged onto the podium. “Castor! You scoundrell Cheating on me?”

“Honey, I swear I didn’t!” Castor’s head spun around, and seeing his wife crash the company meeting turned his face pale as a ghost.

“You didn’t, huh? The video was sent to my phone! You came from humble beginnings, and marrying me got you where **you** are today. Now you think I’m too old, and you’ve been up to no good with that Elaine, haven’t you? I’ll teach you a lesson!” And with that, she launched herself at Castor, fists flying.

## Sucrazy

After taking a few hits, Castor could not take it anymore. He slapped her **across** the face, “You crazy woman! Isn’t my reputation ruined enough for you?”

Meanwhile, Whitney had already slipped out to the front of the United Realty Corporation building. Smirking. Harper said, “The conference room’s a madhouse. Castor’s father-in-law is a minor shareholder, so he always tiptoes around his wife. Now that he hit his wife, this is going to be a disaster for him! The staff are having a field day, secretly filming and sharing the drama in the company chat.”

Whitney nodded. “Send me everything. The real show starts tomorrow morning.”

Harper looked at her in awe, giving a thumbs up behind her back.

In the parking lot, Tiana poked her head out of her car window. "Perfect timing with Castor's wife, huh?" "Thanks for hacking his computer and sending the video to his wife," Whitney said with a grin. "Just following orders. Looks like even with Elaine **gone**, her lackeys **are** here to hassle you!"

Whitney's eyes narrowed, her gaze icy. She had not forgotten Elaine's words that morning.

Elaine undoubtedly orchestrated Castor's antics from afar. Without Elaine's backing, he would not dare be so bold.

These insiders had to be dealt with, or Whitney's stay at United Realty would be fraught with peril.

But this was L's company. Stirring trouble under his nose...

Did he know what she had done?

Feeling slightly guilty about disrupting the meeting, Whitney pulled out her phone to call L.

The man did not pick up, probably busy during the business trip.

Whitney breathed a sigh of relief, got into the car, and Tiana **suggested**, "Valerie's free. How about the three of us grab a drink?"

The trio ended up at a pub.

Tiana raised her glass, teasing Whitney, "Cheers to our Whitney, the new Vice President of United Realty Corporation, with Skye Gem in her grasp, too. A true wealthy lady. I'll be living off you from now on!"

Whitney rolled her eyes at her friend.

Valerie lifted her glass, her usually stony face softening just a bit. "Whitney. I'm thankful for your part in Elaine's departure from Banyan City. I understand what you did for me."

Whitney looked at Valerie's melancholic expression. "Have **you** and Ashton been misunderstanding each other? Now that Elaine is gone, maybe it's time to open **your** hearts to each other."

Valerie **gave** a bitter smile. She had always been open with Ashton, yet he had clamped all for her best.

“Well, you still need to keep a close eye on your husband. Flairs still pulling strings in the shade. Today her cronies targeted Whitney at United Really. She’s eager to return.”

“She won’t get the chance. Whitney’s grip on her glass tightened. Her covert battle with Elaire would show tomorrow.”

Just then, a refined and deep voice interrupted from a nearby table. As Valentine

Whitney turned, slightly surprised, “Ar Luiz?”

Bryce surveyed her porcelain face and then glanced at the two women beside her, his own at a moment for a work-related matter?

Whitney suspected she knew what this was about, but there was no adding it now.

She reluctantly stepped aside with a lam,

Bryce ordered a drink from the bar, sipping lightly as he turned to Whitney, his brooding gaze adverting with a **hint** of resignation. “I didn’t expect you to cancel the gemstone supply contract with the buty Grog. Understand the cancellation, but you didn’t even show up to sign off. I had my confession scare you that much.” Whitney detected a mix of accusation and disappointment in his tone.

He had saved her in the hospital, and she had only compensated him with medical bills, without offering personal care, then briskly terminated the contract.

She fidgeted with her hair, feeling outmatched by the mature man before her, and apologized, “Well, that

I was **not** my intention. It’s just that my partner prefers that avoid any appearance of conflict.”

“But there’s nothing between us. He’s quite possessive, isn’t he?” Bryce shook his head, gazing intensely at her before continuing. “Such a relationship can be

suffocating I know my confession came too late, and your heart belongs to another, but my feelings for you are my own”

Whitney was taken aback by the depth of emotion in his eyes

Had she really left such a deep impression on Bryce since she was 20? But she could not reciprocate, **all** she could offer was a polite response. “Mr. Lutz, I’m grateful for your kindness. If you ever need my assistance, don’t hesitate to ask. My friends are waiting, so I must excuse myself”

Bryce sighed. “We can still be friends, right?”

“Of course

Watching the girl return to her seat, Bryce’s eyes narrowed slightly

As Whitney returned to her seat, Tiana nudged her playfully, teasing, “Was Mr. Lutz talking business or personal matters with you?”

Before Whitney could reply, her phone rang

It was Simon. Whitney’s brows furrowed, and after a brief pause, she answered.

Simon’s voice was frantic and tinged with anger. “Whitney, what do you think you’re doing? Where are you? We need to talk now!”

Whitney had seen it coming from a mile away—

Simon would seek her out today or tomorrow at the latest. Clearly, Skye Gerr’s financial department and board were relatively quick to act

Whitney grabbed her purse and tossed a casual goodbye to Tiana and Valerie, “Gotta jet for a bit. I might head straight home after. You guys don’t wait up.”

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“Hey, I saw Simon on caller ID. What does he want to meet for?” Tiana stood up, her confusion spilling into the space around her.

Whitney waved her off, offering no answer as she rushed out the door.

“Damn, Whitney’s playing with fire today. Better not let L catch wind of this,” Tiana muttered, glancing at Bryce, who was still loitering in the booth.

Valerie lifted her glass. “Whitney’s got her reasons for dealing with Simon, no sweat. Let’s just keep the drinks.

coming.”

Just down the street from the pub.

This was where Whitney had arranged to meet Simon.

A handsome man in a tailored suit walked in, Simon was actually quite a looker, but that was before Whitney’s heart moved on to L, and Simon turned against her with lethal intent.

After his betrayals, the only thing Whitney felt for this man was a burning desire to see him brought to justice. Simon looked worn out, with a hint of red in his eyes. He approached Whitney’s table, staring her down with frustration burning in his gaze.

“Whitney, why the hell did you liquidate my performance shares at Skye Gem? And you got the board to draft a resolution to boot me as CEO—over half the shareholders have signed off on it. You’ve been rallying them, haven’t you? Why do you have to take it this far?”

“Who’s been taking it too far all along? Simon, I’ve been more than fair to you. The original shares of Skye Gem were never yours. I’ve cashed out your performance shares for \$2 billion. You can take that and start your own **gig**. I’ve told you before, hand over my grandfather’s contact book, or it was only a matter of time before I’d come for you.”

## Chapter 135

Simon’s silhouette was etched in shadow as he gazed at her, a pang of panic-flavored pain shooting through his heart.

“That’s the only thing I have left from your Grandpa, and if I give it to you, you’ll kick me to the curb, Whitney...I admit, I realized too late. I know now that it’s you I deeply love, not Monica. Can’t you give **me** another chance?” He stepped forward, reaching out to take her delicate hand.

Whitney recoiled coolly, avoiding his grasp, and met his gaze with a hint of mockery. “If I hadn’t taken back Skye Gem, you’d surely not be professing love for me now. The moment Monica stepped down, your affections shifted so quickly. Now you claim to love me, yet you’re courting Scarlett.”

Simon’s mind raced back to the gala at Joyful Manor, where he had appeared with Scarlett, all witnessed by Whitney.

He clutched his head in torment. “It was my mother’s doing. For the sake of the inheritance, I had no choice. I was wrong, Whitney. I was fooled by Monica’s hypocritical facade. That’s why I mistreated you. But Scarlett is just a front. Just give me some time, leave that masked man at your side. Do you **even** know who he really is? How can you follow such a dangerous man? Come back to me.”

Whitney found him utterly despicable and no longer cared to entertain his pleas. Standing up, she asked, “You won’t give me the contact book, will you?”

“I won’t—not unless you come back to me!” Simon was adamant.

“Simon, tomorrow is the deadline.” Whitney’s eyes were icy as she turned and walked away.

Once in her car, she pondered momentarily before calling a trusted manager at Skye Gem. “Contact Troy and Faith Perlman tonight. Tell them the Skye Gem board has ousted Simon and that we’re interested in a partnership with Troy’s company. Invite them to the office tomorrow.”

The manager hesitated but quickly grasped Whitney’s intent to confront Simon and promptly set out to arrange the meeting.

Whitney then texted Tiana, [Can you get me Scarlett’s number?]

Tiana was puzzled. Scarlett was Simon’s recent date, right? But she immediately responded: [Whitney, what are you plotting now?]

Whitney massaged her temples; she was not plotting. She was desperate to retrieve the contact book **and** reach out to her uncle, her only remaining family.

Whitney arrived early **at** United Realty Corporation the next morning, waiting in her office.

Felix had not returned last night, but Whitney had already contacted him. He said L would be back at United Realty Corporation this morning.

She had their flight details and timed their arrival.

Just past nine, the office door burst open.

Castor, face scratched and bruised, stormed in, pointing **an** accusing finger at Whitney. "You released that video yesterday, didn't you? Just **as** I made you speak at the meeting, chaos ensued. My wife showed up, and I couldn't find you—you're guilty as sin!"

Seething, he had pieced together the debacle after getting home and came straight to confront Whitney.

Whitney stood calmly behind her desk, giving a subtle nod to Harper..

Harper quickly spread the video of yesterday's company turmoil to Whitney's **close** friends.

with innocence and indignation. "What on earth are you talking about, Castor? Your infidelity has become the talk of the entire company, casting a shadow on our reputation. Now, you're dragging the company down with you."

"Don't play the victim with me! You think I don't know your game? You pushed Elaine out, and now you're targeting me? I won't go down without a fight!" Castor was livid, moving to confront her.

Harper stepped between them to shield Whitney, but Whitney subtly waved her aside.

Castor, losing control, grabbed Whitney's arm just as the door opened again. Felix stepped aside to reveal a tall and imposing figure.

"Castor! What the hell **are** you doing? Ludwik's voice was deep and chilling.

Castor spun around to **see** the intimidating CEO and stumbled backward, releasing Whitney. The towering man approached her, his brow furrowed with concern for her well—

being, before turning his icy gaze back to Castor. "What did you want to do to my wife?"

"I've been wronged!" Castor trembled, desperately pleading his case. "You're unaware, sir, that your wife deliberately released my private video at the meeting yesterday. She humiliated me, tarnishing my reputation and jeopardizing the hotel group's project. That's why I came to have a word with her."

Ludwik did not say a word, his formidable presence quieting the room. He circled Whitney's face, aware of the company scandal Castor had stirred up. He assumed Whitney had been waiting for his return today.

His piercing eyes made Whitney uneasy—after all, she had stirred up a storm in his company.

Noticing Ludwik's mood, Whitney denied the accusation. "Castor, you have no evidence to accuse me of sabotaging you. Without proof, your accusations are baseless."

"You..."

"Enough." Ludwik cut him off with a fierce edge. Leaning against the desk, he commanded the room. "Castor, you're fired."

"Why?" Castor paled, his voice quivering with disbelief. "You rarely take direct control of United Realty Corporation, and I know I'm just a minor manager, but I've contributed to the company. My private life doesn't interfere with my professional abilities. Please, be lenient!"

At this moment, Whitney spoke softly, "Causing damage to the company's image, Castor, that's a very direct interference."

"Look, only people in this firm know about the incident, and I swear it won't leak from me. It won't hurt the company's reputation!" Castor pleaded, his desperation palpable.

"Castor, your dirty laundry is trending online. Scores of women scorned by their husbands have seen the video of you hitting your wife. They're livid, and they're tearing you apart on social media. You're infamous now." Whitney smirked as she showed him the trending news on her tablet.

Castor slumped to the floor in disbelief. "This can't be happening. Whitney, did you do this?"



Whitney ignored his accusation and handed a voice recorder to L. “Mr. President, I have a recording here that you might want to hear.”

Ludwik’s gaze was stern as the audio filled the room. It was from the restaurant yesterday, Castor and his cronies mocking Whitney behind her back.

After listening, Ludwik’s expression turned icy. “Felix, bring me everyone who spoke on this recording. especially your secretary.”

Just then, Harper pulled out a delivery receipt from the day before, trying to vindicate Whitney. “Mr. President, Castor bullied the VP to the point that I had to order delivery **upstairs because** the restaurant manager refused to serve her.”

The receipt, a relic of Whitney’s struggle

portrayed her with a touch of vulnerability, “I was fine, really. **It’s** just

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Chapter 135

that I was worried about the baby.”

She cradled her belly, prompting L’s eyes to darken with resolve. He ordered without hesitation, “Someone, throw Castor out and fire the restaurant manager, now!”

“Mr. President...” Castor’s voice trailed off. He collapsed, his face pale as ash. His eyes flickered with fear when he looked at Whitney, realizing she had recorded their conversation, keeping evidence of their little schemes. Today, she had turned the tables on them before the big boss.

Whitney watched, her expression still, as Castor was escorted out. This was a significant victory for her in the United Realty Corporation, as Castor was Elaine’s biggest inside man. With him out of the picture, she had cut off one of Elaine’s main tentacles in the company.

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The CEO’s fury in the executive office was the talk of the town at United Realty Corporation. News of him firing Castor, Castor’s secretary, and the restaurant manager spread like wildfire through the company

Tension gripped the employees; the budding scandal involving Whitney as the CEO's mistress had been swiftly snuffed out by his recent outburst. It was clear to everyone: Whitney was not to be trifled with

In hushed tones, the executives conversed, their opinions of Whitney shifting dramatically. "Whitney's no pushover. That leaked video of Castor's infidelity might just have her fingerprints all over it. In less than a day, Castor was out on his ear—and he was Elaine's right-hand man!"

As they pondered this, the executives who had once been in Elaine's inner circle exchanged uneasy glances, sensing the shifting tides.

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At that moment, one of the executives' phone rang. It was Elaine reaching out from her sphere of influence. The executive answered reluctantly.

Elaine tried to rally her allies. "I've heard about Whitney setting up Castor's dismissal. I'm counting on your support."

"Elaine, I'm tied up at the moment. Maybe try some of the other execs. The executive said.

Afterward, Elaine made several calls, but they were all met with excuses or outright refusal to acknowledge

their past connections.

Sitting in her spartan branch office, Elaine's frustration boiled over.

Whitney, that wretched woman, had played a vicious hand. In just one day, she had neutralized Castor, whom Elaine had hoped to use as a weapon against Whitney, undermining her in the company so that Ludwik would long for Elaine's return.

Now, Elaine's chances of making a comeback in Banyan City through the company were slim.

Furious, she swept the documents from her desk and slumped back in her chair, her eyes flashing with hatred. Then, a sinister smile curled her lips as if struck by a sudden idea.

She

dialed the Riverlyn City dating agency. “I need to meet one of eligible bachelors in Riverlyn City immediately. I’m ready for a romance.”

So, Whitney wanted to push her into a new relationship? She would play along—it was the perfect way to make her return to Banyan City.

Meanwhile, the VP’s office was filled with silence.

Ludwik had just legitimized Whitney’s position in the company and dealt with the execs involved in the previous day’s fiasco. His imposing figure turned to face Whitney, his penetrating gaze resting on her.

His presence was overpowering, his stature imposing.

Suddenly, his voice, **deep** and resonant, broke the silence. “Perhaps it’s time for your friend to retract Castor’s news story?”

Whitney, sipping her water, choked in surprise, spilling some of it. She frantically wiped it away, her fingertips pale against the dark fabric of her blouse. As she turned to face him, she met his intense eyes.

Ludwik’s eyebrow arched as he approached. “The company’s image is important. I don’t mind the small games, but when they escalate, I need to step in.”

She was speechless.

In essence, he admitted he knew about all her little schemes, but as long as they were harmless, he looked the other way.

Embarrassed, her cheeks flushed, Whitney stammered a defense. “Castor was making it impossible for me to

**14-11**

work here, and I couldn’t just walk around the company with the stigma of a mistress. I had to do something..

“Smart move,” he said with a slight curve of his lips, looking down at her. “I left you at the office yesterday to see what you were capable of. **You** took the opportunity to swiftly eliminate Elaine’s leftovers?”

“I didn’t mean to... Whitney stuttered, but realizing that he had seen through her intentions left **her** flustered. She pouted and tried to charm her way out of the situation.

Ludwik, his expression unreadable, took her chin in his hand. “I’ve dealt with the bullies. From now **on**, no one in the company will dare to speak against you. They’ll respect you as they respect me. I’ll make sure your path here is smooth.”

His words sent her heart racing, stirred by his commanding tone.

She produced a voice recorder and a takeout menu, her subtle way of getting back at him, telling him that she did not deserve the label of a mistress.

Thinking he had left her alone to fend for herself the day before, she had not realized he had been aware of her situation. Her hand reached out timidly and wrapped around his waist. With a shy glance at the door, she whispered, “Now that I’ve gotten rid of Castor, are you still upset?”

A subtle movement in his throat was the only sign of his reaction. A slight smile played on his lips.

“He was just a manager. Do you think he mattered that much? United Realty Corporation is very important to me. The truly capable ones are in the core circle.”

His implication was clear: dealing with a small fish like Castor was her prerogative.

He stood tall, holding her hand gently, his lips curving into a smile. “Would you like to be part of the core circle at United Realty Corporation?”

Of course, Whitney nodded eagerly.

“Then come with me to the meeting. Show me if you have any talent in real estate management,” Ludwik said as he walked out of the office

Whitney hurriedly grabbed the portfolio for the five-star hotel group project she had been studying. It was the company’s biggest project, worth hundreds of billions. In the boardroom, she witnessed L’s prowess in business, his decisiveness and authority leaving her in awe, completely enchanted by him.

As the meeting wrapped up around noon and the crowd dispersed, L gave Whitney a covert glance.

Feeling her cheeks redden at his suggestive look, she wondered, “Is he inviting me to his CEO’s office?”

After returning to her office to drop off the documents, Whitney took advantage of the empty floor as the secretaries were out for lunch. She dashed into the CEO’s office, eager for their private encounter.

Whitney’s head popped in and out from behind the cubicle like a curious kitten, catching the attention of the man seated behind the grand oak desk. His lips quirked in amusement as his gaze drifted over to her. “Madam, everyone in this office knows you’re my temporary wife. They might not be clued in on our genuine romance, but you don’t need to hide,” he teased.

“Otherwise, they might start to think I summoned you here at lunch to sneak off to the break room for a little.... intimacy

Whitney’s cheeks flushed a deep shade of crimson.

Especially when Felix, trying to stifle his laughter, looked like he was being force-fed a heavy dose of PDA right at his desk.

Annoyed, Whitney glared at the man, her slender hand on her hip. Then why did you call me over?”

“To eat. You can starve, but I can’t starve our child.” Ludwik frowned as he casually rolled his shirt sleeves, revealing his muscular forearms.

Whitney huffed and sat on the couch with less grace than she intended.

## Chapter 136

Felix, meanwhile, brought over a stack of files, placing them next to the dining table and opening one up

Ludwik firmly believed in not talking during meals, the mark of a gentleman. He picked up his fork with elegance, massaging his temples briefly, his fatigue slipping through the cracks of his composed exterior

He ate his meal while scanning the documents, his eyes flicking rapidly through the pages.

Watching him, Whitney paused, her concern getting the better of her. "You'll get indigestion eating like that."

"There isn't enough time for a proper break."

"Even so, rest is important. I never worked myself to the bone without a break when I was at Skye Gem."

his plate. Whitney's sympathy grew as she spoke, and she tenderly placed a piece of steak on

Ludwik looked up at her, his eyes laced with a hint of disdain. "One company, is it? Do you many I'm juggling?"

even know how

"How many?" Whitney's lips curled into a sly smile, seizing the opportunity to dig a little deeper into his business empire.

## Chapter 137

kuwa quare Wine a versory glance, his the commanding fingers setting down the silverware as a wry

played on hips. You want me to have a proper meal, huh?"

avana, s doe-eyed expression was one of confusion. "Um, yeah"

"Then wait up and come over here" he said, his eyes brooding

Whites did not quite catch his drift but obediently sped up her dinner. Wiping her hands, she rose and approached him

Ludwik casually picked up a dossier. "You read, and I'll eat."

Seriously Whitney was incredulous. He was making her dictate the contents, clearly exploiting her labor.

She protested. "Mr. President, I'm your VF not your secretary. It's her job to assist with the documents!"

you

How about a promotion then? VP and secretary. I'll use you however I see fit, alright?" His words carried an underlying intent

Whitney blushed at the double entendre, choosing not to argue further. Resigned, she took the dossier, gritting her teeth. "Then you better eat properly."

After a quick scan, she stood beside him, the hem of her pencil skirt grazing his crisp suit trousers, a hint of intimacy in the air.

Ludwik's gaze swept over her beautiful legs. Even in flat shoes, Whitney's professional attire was **alluring**..

Noticing the deepening interest in his eyes, she began reading the document.

"Reject it. Next, he interjected as he focused on his meal.

As Whitney presented the following document for his signature, she walked over to his large desk, picked up an expensive pen, and handed it to him. Ludwik signed without looking up.

Curious, Whitney tried to glimpse his signature for a clue to his name, only to find it was indecipherable.

"L did you sign it like that on purpose? Are you afraid I'll find out your name?" She challenged. "Since I joined your company yesterday, there's been no trace of your information, not even a **nameplate** on your office door. Did you arrange that?"

Ludwik reclined on the couch, eyeing her with a mischievous glint, remaining silent.

His controlling demeanor frustrated Whitney. She pressed, "Aren't you going to reveal your identity to **me**?" He wore a mask even in the company, which was unexpected. The staff did not dare gossip; after all, he was the president.

But Whitney wondered if he had worn masks before. His close associates seemed unfazed by it.

As Whitney pondered, Ludwik pulled her onto his lap, their eyes locked. "Curious **again**?"

"Yes, although you said at Alpine Springs Resort that I should get to know you as a person, not by your title. But surely, I can't remain in the dark forever?"

"If you want to know, then by our agreement, have you fallen for me?" His voice was a seductive whisper in her

'll

ear.

Caught off guard by his question, Whitney's heartbeat raced uncontrollably.

"So fast... Does that mean..." His hand slid to her waist, then to her heart.

His voice was dangerously low, "Have you fallen for me?"

"I haven't, not quite yet!" Whitney denied, her face aflame. She needed time to consider such a commitment..

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His lips curled into a knowing smirk, and he pulled her closer, sealing her lips with a forceful kiss. If you haven't fallen for me, I can't tell you who I am. But, you're free to get to know me better

"Mmm. Whitney was swept away again, her mind racing with questions. Why did she have to fall for him to learn his identity?"

But soon, she was lost in his kiss, her body going limp. Just as she **tried** to get up, he tossed another dossier onto her lap, leaning back lazily. "Keep reading, you're working for me this afternoon."



“You’re abusing your power, Whitney accused, her voice tight.

He brushed her swollen lips, his eyes betraying a hint of fatigue. “Go on, I **need** a break.”

Whitney softened, gently squeezing his hand in support. “L, whoever you are, now **that** I’m part of your life and company, I’ll do my best to help. You won’t have to struggle alone anymore.”

His family seemed to weigh heavily on him.

Ludwik looked at her, his gaze a mix of cold intensity and warmth. He held her hand tightly, his voice low and serious as he said, “Remember your promise today. Under no circumstances can you abandon me, or you can’t imagine the consequences.”

She was frightened by his possessiveness but was soon distracted by his whisper. He said, “I didn’t bring you into the company to exploit you but to protect you. From now on, the people I need to take care of include not just my mother but also you.”

Her heart skipped a beat. He wanted to protect her.

Quickly, he regained composure, teasingly tapping her nose. “Are we going to keep flirting, or are we going to work?”

Whitney buried her feelings and grabbed the dossier, continuing to read the key points.

He reviewed the documents much faster, and by the afternoon, he had left the office.

It dawned on Whitney that he had trusted her with the core documents of United Realty Corporation. Was this complete faith in her?

She felt a sweetness growing in her heart.

Her phone rang. It was the manager of Skye Gem informing her that Troy and Faith had arrived.

Whitney returned to the VP’s office, gathered her things, informed her assistant that she would be out for the afternoon, and headed to the meeting at Skye Gem.

At the conference room on the first floor of the Skye Gem Ltd. Building.

Faith and Troy sat comfortably.

Whitney walked in with a portfolio, leaving the door deliberately ajar.

Troy wore a sly grin while Faith eyed Whitney skeptically. “Word on the street is that Simon got the boot from Skye Gem. You handed him two billion dollars in cash. The poor chap’s been having a rough time with the Perlman family these days. And now that you’ve tightened your grip on Skye Gem, you’re knocking on our door for a partnership? What’s your game, Whitney? Trying to push Simon over the edge?”

Faith could not suppress a chuckle, secretly pleased with the turn of events as she supported Troy’s ambitions. Whitney’s youthful face remained composed as she slid the portfolio across the table. “Yes, I’m pressing him. This boutique jewelry store project—if you’re interested, take a look.”

She was interrupted as the office door was slammed open with such force that it reverberated through the

room.

## Chapter 137

“Whitney!” Simon barged in, his face as white as a ghost, desperation flickering in his eyes, his hair in disarray. It was clear he had hurried over to Skye Gem the moment he got wind of the news.

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Whitney lowered her gaze gently, awaiting the precise moment when he stepped into the room.

“Why would you partner with them? Was this intentional? To embarrass me, to make me look bad in front of the Perlman family? Whitney, you’re so cruel!”

“All I wanted was one thing. My uncle is my only family, and you’ve been holding out on me. Who do you think is the cruel one?” Whitney rose sharply to her feet.

Troy watched without interruption.

Faith's expression cooled as she clutched the proposal, eyeing Whitney, "Are you really serious about this?" "Absolutely." Whitney turned, her face set with a chilling resolve, "Faith, this deal with Skye Gem Ltd . is only advantageous for your company. Take it home and mull it over. We'll talk details in a couple of days."

"No way!" Simon lunged for the proposal, "Skye Gem Ltd. will never partner with their company, never!"

"Simon, you're no longer the CEO of Skye Gem Ltd. You can't make decisions for Whitney. And Whitney, I'm looking forward to cooperate with you." Troy smirked, snatched the proposal and left.

After the siblings departed, Simon's eyes reddened with rage as he glared at Whitney, "Why are you driving me into a corner! Do you know that since I lost the position of CEO, my father has started to doubt me? Troy has stolen the show at today's Perlman Group shareholder meeting. Now you're teaming up with them, and I'll be the laughingstock of the Perlman family!"

Whitney observed his frantic and tormented expression indifferently.

Once upon a time, when he and Monica had pushed her into a corner, she had felt just as helpless and desperate.

What goes around comes around.

Ignoring his pleas, Whitney turned and walked out of the office with icy detachment. Simon was furious. He reached out to stop her.

She noticed Simon's grip on

Just then, at the company's main entrance, a stunning figure walked in. Simon's **face** froze as he saw Scarlett.

Whitney's arm and her **face** turned icy instantly, "Simon, what are you doing?"

Scarlett was well-informed about Simon's entanglement with the Valentine sisters.

She was already bothered by it, yet had a fondness for Simon. He had approached her for a marriage alliance, aiming for the support of her substantial family assets.

Scarlett approached with an air of pride.

From a distance, Whitney confronted Simon, whose expression was turning increasingly cold, "I asked Scarlett to come. I have a recording of your sweet nothings from last night in my phone. What do you think will happen

if I let her listen to it now?

Your marriage alliance with Scarlett will fall apart, and so will your inheritance from the Perlman family. Unless you hand over the contact book to me, and I could forget about the collaboration with Troy and Faith!"

Simon clenched his fists, looking at Whitney's angelic yet ruthless face, feeling she was both familiar and a stranger. The cold clarity in her eyes was stunning, not a trace of sympathy left within them.

He'd fantasized about reclaiming his legacy from the Perlman family, rekindling their past romance and winning her back.

It seemed he had overestimated himself. She had left his world completely since long ago.

He was the one who pushed her away! He was the fool, blinded by Monica's frail appearance. He was selfish, unable to wholeheartedly love someone beyond his own benefits.

Twars weed in Semen's eye doven by regret but outweighed once again by self interest

Whitney forced to make a choice

she looked at him

with a darkening gevole choked with difficulty. Fine, I'll give you the contact book Just don't giles that tending to her And the deat with Faith call it off

beg,

Whitney's hund which had been reaching into her bag withdrew slightly

She inhaled, feeling amused inside. She had no recording actually it was a bluff, but she knew Simon

“Cool” she said, her voice as steady as still water.

Scarlett approached in irritation. But before she could scold Whitney, Simon walked over to Scarlett, took her hand and led her away with a softened tone.

Whitney stood in the lobby and texted him [I need to get that today]

Half an hour later, a defeated Simon returned [Come to my place to get it.]

Whitney was cautious and invited the general manager of Skye Gem Ltd to accompany her, then they got into Simon’s car

They drove to his apartment in silence. Whitney had no intention of speaking.

Simon glanced at her through the rear-view mirror several times, his eyes flickering with calculated thoughts. After seeing Whitney the previous day, he had looked through the contact book carefully, noticing a name that kept reappearing

With a sly smile, he turned to Whitney and said cryptically, “Maybe it’s for the best. You might uncover some

secrets.

Whitney frowned, unsure what he meant.

Upon arrival, Simon stepped out of the car.

Whitney waited at the door.

As the sun went down and the sky began to darken, Simon returned with the contact book.

Seeing it, Whitney’s eyes misted over with warmth, as if she saw her grandfather’s figure.

That was his belonging!

She quickly snatched it and turned to leave, but Simon grabbed her wrist. Whitney turned with a furrowed brow “What now?”

His eyes held a meaningful chill **as** he stared at her, “Whitney, I asked you yesterday if you knew the identity of the man behind the mask. You didn’t answer. You still don’t know, do you?”

“Do you **know** who that man could be?”

Whitney paused, her curiosity not piqued by whether L was a fake or not. Today, she had found herself unable to resist asking him again.

Seeing her eyes flickering, Simon **stepped** forward and was ready to share his supposition.

But Whitney cut him off with a mistrustful **tone**, “I’m not going to listen to your wild guesses. You hardly know him. How could you possibly know who he is? I’m not curious because he’s a real part of

of

**my**

“Real, huh?” Simon let out a cold laugh, glancing at the contact book before reminding her, “There’s a name in there you should take **a** good look at when you get home.”

If that masked man truly is Ludwik Lippert...

Simon smirked sardonically.

Whitney watched his smirk with furrowed brows. She was puzzled. She clutched the contact book tightly and entered her car.

Just as she was about to leave Simon’s condo, her cell phone rang.

It was L

Whitney quickly **answered**, a slight smile on her lips, “What’s up?”

“You’re not at the office?” The man’s voice was cool and shadowed with an ominous tone, “You actually went to see Simon without telling me? Have you forgotten what I told you?”

Whitney guessed he must have called the office and spoken to Harper. And then in a fit of anger, he had tracked her down.

She frowned slightly, a bit exasperated, “I didn’t sneak off to see him. I took leave properly, and I had a legitimate reason to meet him. Listen –

## Chapter 139

Whitney’s breath hitched as the man’s brooding exhalation traveled across the phone line. He didn’t hang up which meant he’d give her a few seconds to explain

“Listen, this is the last time I went to see him Whitney rushed to explain. “I needed to retrieve a family heirloom from him, something of my grandpa’s. Then I have to track down my uncle. He’s all the family I have left. And I’ve got it now, so can you please not get all jealous?”

The man on the other end paused, his voice still frosty. “Looking for family? Fine, I’ll forgive you. Now get yourself home!

“I’m on my way,” she muttered, driving with a mixture of irritation and resignation. “You’re being paranoid. Everyone has some secrets, and you’ve already dug into mine. But you...”

Whitney trailed off, her thoughts suddenly snagging on something Elaine had said before leaving—something utterly baffling

She’d hinted that ‘L’ was harboring a secret about someone who had once saved his life.

Whitney pursed her lips, blurting out without thinking, “And speaking of the past, what about you? Do **you** harbor someone in your heart?”

Silence came from the other end of the line.

Then the flight attendant’s announcement filtered through.

Felix reminded him that it was time to board his plane.

His response to Whitney was clipped. “Enough talk. I’m off on a business trip. While I’m gone, stay out of

trouble.”

And with that, he hung up.

Whitney stared at her phone, her delicate brows knitting together. Did he react to her question, or was he hiding something?

Could there really be such a saviour in his life? Or maybe Elaine was just stirring the pot? Whitney let out a sigh, realizing there was no point in clinging to his past.

Resolved, she pressed down harder on the **gas** pedal, her spirits lifting as she drove.

Back at the villa, Whitney pulled out the **small, well-**worn contact book from her bag, cradling it like a precious relic. She stroked its cover, her eyes welling up with tears.

Looking at it **was** like seeing her **grandpa** and mother in person again.

They had died in a terrible accident when Whitney was sent abroad for middle school. By the time she returned, a year had passed,

She was just 13 when she found **that** all of her grandpa and mother's belongings had disappeared. She'd secretly been searching for her grandpa's personal assistant, Torin, but to no **avail**. But it was Simon who had found her grandpa's contact book.

Her grandpa had been a well-known businessman in Banyan City, with a reputation that preceded him and extensive properties. Not adept with computers, he relied on this contact book.

Whitney inhaled deeply and slowly **opened** it.

It was indeed in her grandpa's handwriting. Her eyes burnt with fresh tears.

The contact book was thin, with several pages clearly torn out.

Frowning, she wondered if her grandpa had ripped them out or if someone else had.



She went straight to look for her uncle's contact number

On the third page, there was a name "Keegan". Below it was a sequence of letters,

Whitney remembered playing letter puzzles with her grandpa as a child, and quickly decoded the letters into phone number

Her hands trembled as the numbers came to life on the page.

Why had her grandpa hidden it? Was he protecting her uncle from someone?

Without hesitation, Whitney dialed the number.

She held her breath as the call connected, and a voice spoke through the veil of time, "Is that you, Whitney?"

It was her uncle's voice!

Whitney's **tears** flowed freely, and she nodded vigorously, "Uncle Keegan, is it really you?"

"It's me..." His voice was laced with joy and sorrow, almost quivering. "Whitney, you finally called. Do you have any idea how long I've been waiting for you? Ten years."

Wait, her uncle had been waiting for her all this time?

Confusion swirled in Whitney's mind as **her** uncle choked up, "Before he died, my dad told me to go into hiding abroad. He said when you grew up, if you could find this number, it would mean you were ready to stand by me and fight with me. Whitney, our family has a heavy score to settle."

A jolt hit Whitney's brain.

Did her uncle know the reason behind her grandpa and mother's deaths? Were they killed by the Valentine family?

"Uncle, I've found you now. When are you coming back?" Whitney asked urgently.

“Soon, my girl. I need another half month of treatment, but I’ll make it back for your mother and grandpa’s anniversary,” her uncle replied with a mix of excitement and a hint of a cold laugh. “Ten years... It’s finally the time I came back to claim justice.”

Whitney was shaken. She knew nothing of the past. “Uncle, what happened to you? Is it related to the accident?”

“Yes, you have no idea what I’ve been through these years. But now that I’ve found you, I’ll explain everything to you when I return. Wait for me, Whitney.”

Elated yet filled with anticipation, Whitney ended the call, still unsure of her uncle’s condition.

He seemed reluctant to elaborate, but she had finally connected with her only remaining relative.

Saving her uncle’s number to her phone, Whitney continued to flip through the contact book. Her grandpa had recorded various business contacts and memos.

At the end, one name kept cropping up: Ludwik

On one page, her grandpa had circled the name ‘Ludwik’ in red ink with such force that the pen had nearly torn through the **paper**.

What did it mean?

Ludwik would have been in his early twenties ten years ago. Had he been involved with her grandpa back then? Whitney recalled elders from Skye Gem Ltd. mentioning that Imperial Gem Corporation and Skye Gem Ltd. had been rivals in their parents’ generation. That’s why she always provoked Imperial Gem Corporation back then.

Could it be something more than just business rivalry?

Was there bad blood **between** Ludwik and her grandpa?

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Thinking of Ludwik, the elusive CEO of Imperial Gem Corporation, Whitney hadn’t seen the man in ages

She frowned, considering whether to corner him at the Imperial Gem Corporation headquarters to get some answers.

The next day, Whitney made a detour to the Imperial Gem Corporation building, only to be informed that the CEO was away on business and not in the office.

What a coincidence. Whitney suddenly thought of L, who was also away on a business trip.

She had to let the thought go and reminded herself that her uncle was due back soon. She could simply ask him about the contact book.

With that resolve, Whitney comfortably settled into her role at United Realty Corporation, acting as L's deputy director and personal secretary. She was getting more and more familiar with the real estate business by the day.

She certainly didn't neglect the affairs of Skye Gem Ltd., patiently awaiting her uncle's return.

Whitney received a call from her uncle two weeks later, informing her of his flight number. He would be arriving in Banyan City by noon.

A burst of joy lit up Whitney's face as she dashed from the deputy director's office to the president's suite. The man was busily sifting through paperwork, but he looked up at the sound of her approach.

"L, my uncle's coming back! I'm going to pick him up, and you..."

The happiness on Whitney's face did not escape Ludwik's notice, nor did her clever attempt to gauge his reaction.

The man set down his pen and glanced at his watch, his lips curving slightly. "Let's have lunch together. He's your family, and it would be my pleasure to welcome him."

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Whitney felt a wave of warmth wash over her. "Aren't you due for a meeting soon?"

“Yeah, sorry I can’t join you to pick him up, but I can arrange for the finest lunch.”

Then he grabbed a folder from his desk, striding **past** her. As he did, he gave her waist a gentle squeeze. He straightened his tie and headed towards the conference room. “See you at noon.”

With a small smile, Whitney quickly returned to her office to change and grabbed her car keys, determined to drive to Banyan City International Airport herself.

At the entrance of the conference room, Felix suddenly approached Ludwik. “Mr. Lippert, there’s some crucial information you need to know.”

Ludwik stepped aside with him.

Felix whispered, “Mr. Lippert, it seems Orion Lippert is coming back today. Not a peep from anyone, and the Lipperts haven’t stirred.

“Is this news reliable?” Ludwik’s expression turned icy.

Felix hesitated, “Not certain yet.”

“Find out. Keep a close eye on him!”

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Felix understood the gravity when he saw the frost in Ludwik’s eyes. After severing ties with the Bartels and now openly defying his father, Ludwik was in a high-stakes game. Orion’s return was not good news. Mrs. Lippert and her son, Orion, had been coveting the Imperial Gem Corporation.

It was a quarter past twelve. Whitney waited at the airport, holding up a sign. It had been ten years, and her memories of her uncle’s face were **hazy**.

From the back of the crowd, a thin man in a wheelchair caught her eye.

In that moment, Whitney’s breath caught.

She recognized her uncle’s face! But his left side was obscured by hair, and why was he in a wheelchair?

Her eyes flickered with shock as she called out, "Uncle!"

Behind her uncle, a **tall**, striking figure in a navy blue suit was speaking with him. As they split up, that man's profile caught Whitney's eye, a rogue charm to his young face. He threw a glance in her way as he got into a car from another exit..

Who was this man?

"Whitney!" her uncle was already being wheeled over by his assistant.

Whitney snapped back to reality. Lowering her gaze to her uncle's wheelchair, **she saw the** left side of his face marred by horrific scars and her heart lurched. Her throat felt leaden as tears welled up in her eyes, "Uncle, how did this happen to you?"

"It's been ten **years.**" Uncle Keegan shook his head, his hand resting over the blanket that covered his missing legs.

Tears fell from Whitney's eye.

"Silly girl, don't cry. Your uncle's right here, isn't he?" Keegan grasped her hand tightly. "Let's not make a scene here. Let's get in the car."

Embarrassed by the onlookers, Whitney wiped her nose and quickly opened her car door.

Keegan was helped into the car by his assistant, who then took the driver's seat.

Sitting in the back alongside her uncle, Whitney saw his gaze drop to the slight bulge beneath her sweater.

His brow furrowed with a surprised smile. Whitney, we didn't talk much expecting? Have you got married?"

Whitney composed herself and nodded shyly. "Uncle, I haven't had the chance to

the phone. Are you

"You've grown up. It's natural to start a family, and that's wonderful" Keegan held her hand gently

and grandfather would be happy knowing this. Who's the lucky man?"

Whitney blushed, still unsure of L's full identity. "Uncle, I'm taking you to meet him. He's the CEO of a real estate firm. I really like him, and I hope you will too."

Hearing he was a CEO, Keegan didn't question further and nodded.

With her uncle's blessing, Whitney's spirits lifted, and she quickly sent a Facebook message to L

He replied with an address: Banyan City International Hotel

Whitney escorted her uncle to the opulent yet discreet restaurant. Upon reaching

the private room on the second floor by the window, a towering figure awaited.

Dressed in a sleek black suit and a fine tie, Ludwik's exposed features were handsome and composed.

He exuded nobility, entirely at ease.

Whitney, on the other hand, felt nervous as she wheeled her uncle over to Ludwik, standing beside him. With a smile, she introduced, "L, this is my uncle Keegan Tennyson."

"Uncle, this is my husband," she added, her voice laced with bashfulness.

Ludwik glanced over, and in that moment, Whitney felt her uncle's wheelchair jerk sharply

Bewildered, she looked down to see her uncle's grip tighten on the armrest, his scarred face paling under the cover of his hair.

Ludwik, noticing the man in the wheelchair **and** the scars on his face, paused momentarily. His eyes flickered before resuming his composure. He extended his hand graciously. "Mr. Tennyson, nice to meet you."

But Keegan didn't reach out his hand in return.

Sensing the awkwardness, Whitney bent down to her uncle, "Uncle, are you all right?"

She was worried, recalling her uncle's recent treatments before returning home.

"**Yes,**" Keegan finally spoke, his voice strained as if biting back emotion, "Whitney, push me inside."

Ludwik withdrew his hand, a man accustomed to the ebb and flow of the business world, unbothered by the slight. He offered, "I'll do it."

As he pushed Keegan inside, Whitney saw her uncle's hand trembling.

Ludwik took a seat across from Keegan, no longer examining him. With detached politeness, he began ordering.

Suddenly, his phone rang.

Ludwik handed the menu to Whitney as he answered the call.

However, his expression darkened in **an** instant. He rose abruptly. "What did you say? How could Elaine..."

Whitney's brow furrowed as she heard Elaine's name, and she looked up with confusion.

Suddenly, the door to the private booth burst open. Ashton, clutching his cell phone and fuming, stood in the doorway. His gaze swept the room, and upon spotting Whitney, his eyebrows knitted together in displeasure. He strode over to where Ludwik was sitting, seized him by the collar of his shirt in a fit of rage, and bellowed without any regard for the others present, "You bastard! Did you pressure Elaine into dating someone? She always listens to you, so she went out with some high-roller from Riverlyn City, and what happens? She gets assaulted, and now she's in the hospital trying to kill herself!"

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And here you are, wooing another woman, do you have no shame? How are you going to face the Bartels family if she doesn't make it?"

Ludwik's expression turned icy. It **was** Ashton who had called him, leading him straight to this confrontation a situation Ludwik had not anticipated at all.

His brow was tightly furrowed as he turned to Whitney, his eyes filled with an anxious apology. "I must leave now. Felix will come by to check on you later."

Hearing about Elaine's attempt to suicide shook Whitney, but a cold smirk quickly appeared at the corner of her eye. Elaine had never given up on L. There was no way she would take her own life. This was likely a...

"L, but my uncle is still here..." she said, a frown creasing her forehead.

Ashton scoffed coldly, "Elaine is dying, and you're worried about your uncle? Have you no heart? We're going to Riverlyn Hospital now. She's asking for you!"

Without another glance at Whitney, **the** man left the room hurriedly with Ashton, a deep crease of concern

between his brows.

Whitney felt a surge of frustration watching his retreating figure. She took a deep breath and bent down to explain things to her uncle. It was only then that she noticed his face was ashen, his jaw clenched in agony. He was gasping for air, his **eyes** wide with panic. Suddenly, he collapsed.

"Uncle? What's wrong?" Whitney was stunned. She shouted for help, "Manager, call an ambulance!"

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Next to Banyan City International Hotel stood the hospital.

Whitney sat vigil in the hospital room, reaching out to check her uncle's pulse when suddenly her fingers were gripped tightly, her uncle's nails scraping blood from her skin.

Startled, Whitney turned to see her uncle's eyes flutter open.

Keegan looked at her with a mixture of pain and madness, demanding, "Whitney, why did you marry Ludwik?! He's our nemesis! How could you marry him?" His coughs grew into a fit as he tried to rise, his words laced with desolation.



Whitney stiffened, as if unable to comprehend.

Her mind buzzed as she stared into her uncle's reddened eyes, his face contorted with pain. She denied his accusations, "Uncle, what are you talking about? He's not Ludwik."

She held his hand, trying to calm him, "You must be mistaken. L had a scar on his face—I saw it with my own eyes."

Keegan shook off her hand violently, his anger distorting his face. He turned and rummaged through his bag, pulling out a fractured silver mask and thrusting it into Whitney's hands, "Why do I recognize him? Because of this silver mask! Familiar, isn't it—the one he was wearing!"

Whitney shuddered at the sight of the jagged half-mask.

Keegan spat hatefully, "Foolish girl, do you know that when your mom and grandpa died in that car, I ran to save them and saw this mask stabbed into your grandpa's heart? His last word was 'Ludwik'!

He was just twenty ten years ago, already hiring hitmen. I didn't know the car was rigged. When I tried to move my sister and father, the car exploded. My leg, my face, my body..."

Keegan clutched his scarred face, trembling.

The pain from his amputated right leg seemed to surge back, suffocating him.

Seeing him struggle to breathe, Whitney quickly pressed his philtrum to ease his distress.

She could only shake her head in confusion, "It can't be. L isn't Ludwik. And wasn't the Valentine family implicated in my mother and grandfather's deaths? How could it be Ludwik?"

"It was a business assassination!" Keegan chastised her. "Ten years ago, the Imperial Gem Corporation was a mess. Ludwik's ambition knew no bounds. How else could he build today's Fortune 100 company? You don't believe me? I'll show you his face!"

Keegan, fueled by his rage, was trying to rise from the bed. With only one leg, he immediately fell to the floor. Pity flashed in Whitney's eyes, her heart heavy. She couldn't resist, "Uncle, please calm down. I'll go." Whitney's mind was numbed. She was now on a plane to Riverlyn City, still disbelieving.

But as she followed Keegan to the hospital, standing at a distance from a certain window, Whitney's trust shattered.

Inside Elaine's room, beside Ashton stood a tall man in an unchanged black suit. Whitney's shaky gaze traveled up to his handsome face, It was indeed Ludwik.

Ludwik was too striking to mistake, a face to remember for eons. Whitney could not be wrong.

The scars she saw on L's face at Alpine Springs Resort were gone.

Had he deceived her with a fake skin? Had he gone to great lengths to hide the truth from her?

Whitney felt like a fool.

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She had never connected him to the most esteemed Mr. Lippert of the Lippert family in Banyan City!

Powerful and feared, he controlled the economic lifeline of Banyan City.

No wonder he could have everyone conceal his identity. With a single command, no one dared tell her the truth! "He is Ludwik, Whitney. He's been wearing a mask all along and deceiving you. But why?!" Keegan pulled her into the car, his question piercing her soul.

And in that moment, Whitney felt she had touched upon the answer.

He said he would only remove the mask once she fell in love with him.

Why?

Because by then, even if she knew everything, she wouldn't be able to leave him, and their child would already be born, right?

Whitney sank into misery, her eyes misting as she looked up, "Uncle, are you certain about the cause of my mother and grandfather's deaths? Maybe it wasn't Ludwik, maybe..."

"Shut up!" Keegan erupted, his hatred consuming him, "Having been kidnapped as a child due to his looks, Ludwik had a habit of wearing masks—a fact known among Banyan City's elite. That mask lodged in your grandpa's heart, and what more evidence do you need?"

The car sped through the streets.

Keegan attempted to compose himself, massaging his aching brow, "You were young ten years ago, unaware of many things."

"Our Tennyson family hailed from Emperor City. My father was once a medical professional, ousted unfairly by rivals. He brought your mom here to Banyan City. She was pregnant with you, hiding from your birth father in Emperor City. That's why my father used Preston as a front to settle down."

"Even outside the medical field, my father's ventures were vast. Skye Gem was his renowned jewelry company. He had a map of the Surelia District diamond mines—a map that drove Ludwik to murder him ten years ago!"

A chill went through Whitney as she remembered him claiming to be a self-made man.

"After my sister and father passed away, I fled overseas. I watched the Imperial Gem Corporation soar to new heights, powered by the mining operations in Surelia District. It was built on my father's toil – the foundation laid by the Tennyson family!"

Keegan clenched his fists in anguish. "The Valentine family? They're just pawns manipulated by Ludwik's chain of interests."

Whitney felt as if her mind had been scrubbed clean, still clinging to the faint hope of denial.

“We need to confront the Valentines, uncle. I want the truth about my mother and grandfather’s deaths.”

“Your mother had been ill for a long time, with chronic poisoning,” Keegan ordered his assistant to turn the wheel, “The Valentine family must be held accountable, too. Let’s do it today!”

Their car swiftly arrived at the grand Valentine Mansion.

Preston and Yvonne were both at home. Seeing Whitney and the figure of Keegan behind her, the color drained from their faces in fear.

“Keegan?!” Yvonne’s voice trembled with fear.

Keegan sneered, “Did you think I would never return?”

Preston’s face turned ashen, stammering out, “It wasn’t me, Whitney. Your grandfather and your mother’s deaths... they have little to do with us!”

“That’s right. You only got the scraps of my father’s wealth. The lion’s share went to those above you, on the

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condition you obey and cast the slow poison to my sister, right?”

Yvonne’s face grew increasingly pale as she stumbled backward into the corner of a table.

Seeing her guilt, Whitney advanced, “Did you poison my mother? She knew medicine. How could she fall for it?” “The poison was colorless and tasteless, provided by a mysterious figure. At that time, your grandfather and the Imperial Gem Corporation were at loggerheads, and your mother was overwhelmed with stress. Preston had the servants slip it into her breakfast. By the time she realized, it was too late to save herself.” Yvonne stammered out the grim details.

Keegan let out a bitter laugh, his eyes cold as ice, “Who did you give the Surelia District mining maps to?”

“We... we also gave them to this mysterious figure. We don’t know who he is. He promised us that if we got

rid of your mother and grandfather, the Valentine family would get a slice of your grandfather's vast empire. Your mother was married to me in name, but your grandfather never let me touch any part of the Tennyson family's business. Jealousy took root in my heart."

It was a meticulously crafted conspiracy! Only someone with a jewel company would need the Surelia Dis

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Whitney's hands were clenched so tightly that beads of cold sweat trickled down her skin.

Her heart grew colder inch by inch, as if wrapped in frost.

Keegan wheeled over to her, pushing her out of the Valentine mansion. His gaze was piercing into her shame—filled veins like needles. "Whitney, the Surelia District mining maps fed the Imperial Gem Corporation, catapulting it to greatness and spawning United Realty. But the irony of it is that you married him!"

She crumpled to the floor, her eyes brimming with tears.

Could it really be him?

Her mother and grandfather had died such horrific deaths, and her uncle had lived in such hardship.

Clutching her aching heart, Whitney looked up in confusion, pulling out the executive name tag and the black card that L had given her. "But uncle, you said he was behind my mom and grandpa's death. Then why does he keep me close? He let me into United Realty and gave me a black card with no limit—shouldn't he be wary of me?"

Keegan's chest heaved with fury as he swept the card from her hands onto the ground, "Do you know Ludwik's tricks? He's got you falling for him! With these perks, could you ever leave him with your pride intact? When he met me today, he acted like nothing was amiss, probably thinking I was clueless about the past. He's been spinning you around with a mask! Open your eyes and see the truth! Otherwise, you're betraying your mother and grandfather!"

Whitney's mind reeled, and she slowly collapsed to the ground. Her heart was drowning in anguish.

She had met Ludwik, carried his child, married him, and even fallen in love with him.

Why was fate mocking her?

She thought she had defeated Elaine, that she and L had finally developed a relationship, that they were finally finding happiness.

But the harsh slap of truth followed swiftly.

Her grandfather's contact book was with Ludwik's name. Her uncle said his mask had pierced her grandfather's heart, that the Imperial Gem Corporation had used her grandfather's Surelia District mining maps to build its empire.

She found it impossible to find excuses for him anymore.

Imperial Gem Corporation and Skye Gem Ltd.'s past was not just business competition.

It was blood vengeance—her mother and grandfather had died with eyes wide open!

"I know it's hard to accept, but you need to pull yourself together. I came back to exact revenge on Ludwik! I just didn't expect to find you... by his side," Keegan said, gripping her hand, his eyes cold and sarcastic as he glanced at her swelling belly. "But family vengeance cannot be forgotten! You must cut ties with him completely and stand by me!"

Whitney felt shattered by his words, her heart sliced open, tears clouding her vision.

Realizing she was close to breaking, Keegan softened his tone. "You must be tired. Go home and have a rest. But don't alert him and don't expose me. The day after tomorrow is your mother and grandfather's memorial. You should come, and we'll talk more then."

Whitney nodded. "Uncle, but you don't have a place to stay."

“I’ve bought an apartment before coming back. I have a small company overseas, and I’ve relocated it here.” Keegan managed a wry smile. “As for your cousin, I left her abroad.”

Hearing that her uncle had a daughter gave Whitney a glimmer of solace. “Aunt is taking care of her right?”

Keegan’s expression darkened, his smile turning into a scornful one. “Your aunt ran off long ago. In my condition, what woman would stay? I raised your cousin alone.”

Whitney gasped, her heart aching as if torn asunder.

Her uncle’s life had been bitter, but who was to blame?

She dared not continue that thought, her fingertips trembling as she left her uncle’s apartment, her face pale as death.

Inside the apartment, Keegan watched Whitney’s retreating figure and made a phone call.

The man on the other end had a devilish tone. “How’s the first day back home, Mr. Tennyson?”

“Orion, there’s been a complication,” Keegan’s voice was heavy. “My niece, Whitney, the one you saw at the airport, she’s right by Ludwik’s side.”

“Oh?” The man feigned surprise, then chuckled darkly. “But Mr. Tennyson, is that really such a bad thing?”

Keegan frowned, his thoughts shifting, his eyes revealing a sinister resolve. “Whitney being with Ludwik might not be bad after all. In fact-

“Congratulations, Mr. Tennyson. You’ve got an insider. What’s a little pain for your niece if it means avenging your family and reclaiming what’s yours?” the man hummed.

A cold, obsessive light flickered in Keegan’s vengeful eyes. “Yes, indeed. Thanks for the advice.”

“I’ll support you. Pleasure doing business with you,” the man said before hanging up.

Whitney returned to the villa, a place she had secretly dubbed 'House of Love' just a fortnight ago.

Love had just sprouted, and as tangible as it had become, fate handed her a cruel joke.

The sweetness of before was now the ultimate irony.

She stared blankly at the sudden snowfall outside her window, wishing for a moment that she could dissolve into snowflakes, to avoid the pain, the conflict, the doubt, and the inevitable despair.

Seeing her return with snow on her shoulders, Taryn was horrified and hurried to fetch a towel. "Ma'am, why didn't you use an umbrella?"

But Whitney, pale as a ghost, ascended the stairs and locked herself in her room with a heavy thud.

Late into the night, Ludwik returned.

His overcoat was covered with snowflakes, which he brushed away gently.

This was the first snowfall of the winter, and also the first since he had met her. Maybe in the morning, he could hold her and enjoy the snowfall together.

The weariness etched in his brow eased slightly, though his brow remained furrowed. Donning his silver mask, he pushed open the bedroom door.

Only to find Whitney collapsed on the carpet!

"Whitney?" Ludwik rushed to her side.

Whitney was lost in dreams.

She had dreamed of her grandfather and mother, bloodied and broken in the twisted wreckage of a car accident. Her uncle's severed leg was there too, the sight of it vivid in her mind. Her mother's face always so gentle and beautiful, was contorted with rage and accusation. "Whitney," she hissed, "why do you stay with the



murderer who did this to us? Why are you carrying his child?"

It

wasn't the first time Whitney had dreamed of her mother, but it was the first time she'd seen her so horribly injured, her eyes filled with loathing.

"Whitney," a deep, warm voice called out, as strong hands gripped her shoulders, steadying her. "Did you have a nightmare?"

Through the blur of tears, Whitney looked up to see the man with a silver mask before her.

She shuddered and pushed him away with all her might.

He was back, wearing that mask again – the deceiver and the manipulator.

What kind of ruthless man was he, capable of hiding behind countless facades? The hands that now reached out to her were the same hands stained with her mother's and grandfather's blood.

"Don't touch me," Whitney stammered, her voice a mix of fear and hatred. She recoiled until her back hit the wall, seeking the cold comfort of the corner.

"What's wrong?" Ludwik furrowed his brow, a look of confusion and concern darkening his face as he realized her hands felt icy to the touch.

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Ludwik crouched down, reaching out to her, his brow furrowing in concern. "Why are you sleeping on the ground, freezing like this? You've caught a cold already. Don't you realize you're pregnant?"

The word "pregnant", a reminder of his child inside her was like a dagger to Whitney's heart.

She recoiled from his touch, her eyes filled with icy detachment and her heart quivering. "I told you, don't touch me!"

“What are you talking about?” Ludwik retrieved his hand, irritation creeping into his tone. “What’s wrong with you? I know I left you alone at the diner this afternoon, and that upset you, but Elaine was in a bad way. She slit her wrists. If she’d been taken to the hospital a second later, she’d be dead!”

Why was she giving him the cold shoulder over something like this?

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Had he been too indulgent with her lately?

Whitney’s chilly gaze met his, filled with an unfamiliar strangeness and what seemed like hatred.

Ludwik’s heart skipped a beat.

Why was she looking at him like that?

Was it just because he’d neglected her and her uncle?

A flare of anger lit in his chest, but he tried to reason with her. “Whitney, you’re usually sensible. We can have another dinner with your uncle anytime.

Elaine’s now dealing with depression and a suicide attempt. I bear some responsibility. You were the one who suggested she should date, and I pressured her too. I didn’t think she’d give up on herself, end up with some playboy from Riverlyn City, get taken advantage of. She was nearly raped. Don’t you have any empathy? Did you find out I had her transferred to Banyan City for treatment?”

Seeing no response from Whitney, Ludwik felt certain of his guess. His gaze turned colder. “Her condition is critical, and there was no other choice. It happened on my watch at the branch office, and I have to answer to the Bartels family. Can’t you understand that?”

Whitney’s slow reaction caught up with his words. She couldn’t care less about Elaine’s troubles. In her mind, she clung to his question of “don’t you have any empathy?”

She wanted to laugh bitterly, to ask him where his empathy was.

He had empathy for Elaine, but what about her mother and grandfather? After his business dealings had devastated her family, how could he nonchalantly keep her by his side, trapping her in a web of so-called love, treating her like a plaything?

Whitney could no longer see the depth in his eyes. Once, she thought them mysterious and profound, with a deep-seated allure,

Now, she understood where that depth came from: his ruthless ambition and calculated schemes.

With a bitter chuckle, *she* looked at him coldly. "Is she dead? Was she raped? No. Forgive you? No, I will never forgive you!"

Tears welled up in her red-rimmed eyes, but she was responding to something else.

If he had truly been responsible for her grandfather and mother's deaths, she would never forgive him.

But obviously, her uncle was still alive—a living testimony that Ludwik was a criminal.

Whitney covered her face in agony, the hatred buried deep in her eyes invisible to Ludwik, who mistakenly took her words as a response to the current situation with Elaine.

He grabbed her in frustration, unable to believe her words. "What do you mean by that? She's not dead, she

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The man gazed out the window, his deep profile turning as his fingers twitched restlessly through his thick eyebrows.

I've spoiled her rotten, and now she's overstepping! Such pettiness!" Ludwik's voice was tinged with anger, ice

cold.

“Orion’s back from abroad, Elaine’s attempted to take her own life, and I can’t afford to alienate the Bartels family. At a time like this, when I’m surrounded by enemies, I thought she’d be smart and sharp, but she just could not bear Elaine.”

Parker caught the disappointment in his voice, frowning as he said, “Given Whitney’s EQ, she wouldn’t fight with you over Elaine’s incident. Could there be something else?”

Ludwik paused, then shook his head.

Elaine was the very reason for their argument in the room.

But Whitney had been acting out of character today. When she woke from her nightmare, she pleaded with him not to touch her; her emotions were running high, and her gaze at him was inscrutable.

She had never looked at him like that before. When they first met, she was timid around him. As they got to know each other, she became demure with a bit of sass but never so distant.

“By the end of it, she asked me if I knew her grandfather,” Ludwik said, his brows locked in a frown.

“Her grandfather, Faulkner Tennyson? Ludwik, you had your clashes with him ...” Parker’s expression shifted slightly.

Ludwik, however, remained stoic. “Just the usual business rivalry. The Tennyson family was set up. I witnessed that accident back then; I never thought her uncle would survive.”

Parker had heard about Ludwik’s encounter with Whitney’s uncle today. “Did her uncle say something to upset her? Is she questioning you about what happened to the Tennyson family back then?”

Shaking his head, Ludwik replied, “They don’t even know who I am now. Besides, if they have a grudge, it should be with the Valentine family.”

“You’ll have to wait until after she’s had the baby to explain your beef with Sky e Gem, right?” Parker gestured

towards Ludwik's mask.

Ludwik nodded, continuing to brood over his drink, his face as cold as ever, piecing together the puzzle - Whitney was just harping on Elaine's return to Banyan City.

On this death anniversary, heavy snow blanketed the entire city.

The chill was bone-piercing, devoid of any warmth.

Whitney had been ill *for* days, her fever refusing to break. Pregnant, she could not take any medication, resorting only to acupuncture at specific safe points.

It brought no relief. Tiana watched her face flushed with fever, her breath shallow, and burst out, tears threatening to fall. "Whitney! You can't go on like this!"

What on earth had happened to her? For two days, it was as if her soul had been drained, and she would not speak a word.

It was clear she was in agony.

Tiana followed in her car as the vehicle ahead zigzagged up to the cemetery on Valentine Mansion's hill.

Parking at the foot of the hill, Tiana guessed perhaps the anniversary of her mother's passing had come, and

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Whitney was overwhelmed with grief.

Whitney walked in a daze to the large tree in the cemetery.

Her uncle was already there, shoveling snow from the graves of her mother and grandfather with great difficulty from his wheelchair.

Carefully, Whitney took the shovel from him and said, "Uncle, let me clear the snow."

"You're here," said Keegan, refusing her help as he glanced at the swell beneath her coat. Looking back at the gravestones, a stubborn chill filled his eyes.

“You can’t do this, Whitney. You don’t even have the right to kneel. Carrying Ludwik’s child, I doubt mom and granddad have found peace.”

Whitney stiffened, the snow around her less chilling than the desolation in her heart, doused by her uncle’s icy words.

He had condemned her.

Staring at her suddenly pale face, Keegan leaned over from his wheelchair, wiping the gravestone. “To let them have peace, we must seek vengeance and reclaim what belongs to the Tennyson family!”

Keegan grasped Whitney’s hand, plotting step by step. “I’ve thought it through. You said Ludwik trusts you in the company? For now, don’t leave him. Stay by his side; be my insider. I’ve prepared for a long time; the bigger the corporation, the easier it is to topple, only if you’re willing to help me!”

Whitney’s face stiffened. She had thought her uncle wanted her to break with Ludwik immediately and plot their revenge another way.

But now, her uncle saw her as a sheath, a convenient blade to be concealed by Ludwik’s side.

Her heart felt punctured, panic mixing with pain, and she instinctively cradled her head, “Uncle, I...”

“You can’t refuse. Look at the gravestones. Look at me, looking barely like a human. Does our suffering count for nothing against your private emotions?”

Keegan’s eyes hid schemes, his face etched with sorrow.

Whitney found herself speechless.

“Take your time to think, and when you’re ready, arrange a meeting with Ludwik,” Keegan said, his eyes dark with cunning as he gripped *her* cold hand tightly.

He left her there.

Whitney stood like a forsaken spirit in the icy wilderness in front of the gravest ones, her mother and grandfather's smiling faces causing her unbearable pain

She had always wanted to avenge her mother and grandfather. If it were the Valentine family, she would not

hesitate.

But why him? Why did it have to be him?

"Whitney, the snow's getting heavier. Have you lost your mind?" Tiana called out, holding an umbrella as she approached. Seeing Whitney's tear-streaked face, she asked with concern, "What did your uncle say to you to make you cry like this? What's wrong? Can't you talk to me?"

The pain in Whitney's heart was sharp and raw, yet she could not utter a word

Watching her unsteady stance, Tiana cursed under her breath and steadied her. "Damn it. Your fever has not broken! Come with me to the hospital!"

At the hospital, Whitney shook her head. "I'll just grab some herbs for an herbal bath. I can't take anything else." "I go register. Please give me the list of herbs, and don't you move from here. Wait for me," Tiana said, guiding Whitney to a chair.

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**Whitney** did **not** sit. Dizzy and congested, her face burning with fever, she leaned against the window sill and stepped into the hospital's garden for air

Looking up, she saw a familiar figure.

Across the garden, down the corridor, a man cradled Elaine in his arms, heading toward her.

Their eyes met, and Ludwik's hawkish gaze beneath the mask briefly stiffened.

Whitney stood there, her fever-flushed face slowly turning ghostly pale, her gaze sharp with pain.

“Bro... What’s wrong?” Elaine weakly lifted her head from his chest to glimpse at Whitney. Her face was deathly pale as she flinched, “Is that Whitney?”

Her hand, which was draped around his neck, tightened instinctively.

Ludwik, however, was fixated on Whitney’s frail little face, unnaturally flushed with fever, her lips a stark contrast in their pallor. Her hair was a mess, and her eyes were bloodshot.

What on earth had happened to her?

He was about to transfer Elaine to the wheelchair when, suddenly, she slumped towards the floor. Ludwik had no choice but to hold her tight as Elaine burrowed into his embrace.

“I’m sorry, Bro, there are so many men around... I’m afraid...” Elaine’s gaze darted at the men walking down the corridor, her eyes filled with aversion.

Ludwik’s brows knitted together in concern, holding her close as his heavy gaze shifted back to Whitney.

Just as he was about to approach, his lips parted to speak...

Whitney suddenly withdrew her icy stare, a mocking and self-deprecating smile curling at her lips. All her inner turmoil and agony hardened into a bone-chilling coldness in that instant.

She had fallen for this man, but what was she to him?

While she was lost in excruciating pain, he was devotedly attending to Elaine.

Perhaps he saw her as nothing more than a trophy of conquest, kept hidden, toyed with at his leisure.

Her uncle was right in his scathing words—she had placed too much weight on a laughable infatuation!

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“Whitney!” At that moment, Tiana hurried over with the herbs, her head tilted to see what was ahead, and suddenly she burst into anger, “Mr. L! How can you be holding Elaine, that... that bitch! You...”



“Enough, let’s go.” Whitney grabbed her, her fingers digging into Tiana’s palm. Her departure was cold and unwavering

That indifference and disregard puzzled Tiana and infuriated the man behind even more.

She was just going to leave like that? Whenever she saw him with Elaine, she always came over, green with jealousy, confronting him.

But now she just walked away, leaving him feeling a mix of loss and stifled anger, like punching a cushion. Ludwik’s steps, which were about to chase after her, stopped with embarrassment and fury, his gaze fixed on her pale, paper-like face—it was clear she was ill.

They had fought only three days ago. How did she manage to wear herself down to this state?

And what was with that deep sadness in her eyes?

Ludwik was seething.

“Bro, I did not mean to earlier. Did I make Whitney misunderstand something?” Elaine sighed anxiously.

“Do you think she misunderstood with the way she’s ignoring me?” Ludwik said coldly as he carried Elaine back to the ward, trying not to be harsh. “Don’t overthink it, just rest.”

Then, he left with an icy aura.

Elaine’s mouth curled into a cold smirk as the ward door closed.

Pondering Whitney’s disheveled appearance that she had witnessed earlier, she walked into the bathroom to call Delphine. “Mom, I heard Whitney’s uncle returned a few days ago. You were right. There’s bad blood between Skye Gem and Imperial Gem. She looked so pained today when she saw Ludwik. She couldn’t even bother with her jealousy.”

Delphine chuckled slyly. “Your chance has come, my daughter. With your wits, you’ll clasp it tightly.”

“Of course.” Elaine narrowed her eyes as she hung up and called a confidant. “I need you to check on someone for me, Whitney’s uncle. *Keep* an eye on him starting today.”

Elaine looked at the ugly wound on her wrist. She had risked her reputation to return to Banyan City. This was Whitney’s doing, and she was determined to stay in Banyan City, win Ludwik back, and get her revenge!

Back

at his office, Ludwik could not resist calling Nolan to subtly inquire Tiana about Whitney’s illness.

Was Tiana holding herbs?

Nolan was not very efficient this time, reporting that Tiana simply was not answering her phone.

Ludwik’s eyebrows knitted with cold anger as he leaned back and loosened his tie, his aristocratic fingers tense. “Felix!” He yelled.

Felix appeared in the office in a flash.

“Get her to come to work. She’s the Vice President of United Realty Corporation, and she hasn’t been in for days!”

Felix understood his boss’s volatile mood, but this seemed a bit much. “Mr. Lippert, Madam is clearly ill. She started taking sick leave the day before yesterday, and with what she saw at the hospital today with you and Elaine, she’s probably upset. Maybe I should send our family doctor over to Tiana’s apartment?”

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The man said nothing, suppressing his anger.

Felix immediately set off to arrange it.

Half an hour later, the family doctor called, “Tiana kicked me out, sir. It seems Madam doesn’t appreciate your

concern.”

Felix had just hung up when a wave of cold menace suddenly swept from behind the desk.

With a sharp slap of papers being opened, Ludwik's ice-cold voice came. "Let her live or die as she pleases!"

"Uh... Are not you concerned about your child as well?" Felix thought, but he could see the boss was angry to the core, practically offering a truce that the lady refused to accept.

Oddly enough, despite Elaine's dramatic return to Banyan City, Whitney, usually so clever and wise, pushed Mr. Lippert away with her indifference.

It seemed that was what was infuriating him.

Ludwik could not fathom why she was acting so irrationally these past few days over Elaine, of all people. Was she really ready to freeze him out?

Since she could not prioritize, he was not in the mood to coddle her!

Three days passed, and Whitney was avoiding it all, unable to decide.

Seeing him so intimately caring for Elaine at the hospital had chilled her to the core. If he had offered her even a sliver of loyalty, that would have been something to cling to.

But his lack of commitment and inability to ignore Elaine's schemes enraged her. She had called herself a fool, thinking she should have sided with her uncle.

Yet, there was no turning back once she started down that path. Betraying him and joining her uncle in pushing Ludwik into the abyss was a pain Whitney could not bear to imagine.

She holed up in her room, lost in thought, while Tiana worried incessantly. "Whitney, Valerie and I really don't know what's gotten into you. Even with Elaine back in Banyan City, Valerie is not as shaken as you are. You wouldn't even let Ludwik's doctor see you the other day. Are you planning to have a complete fallout with him

over Elaine?”

How could Whitney explain to her best friend? That it was over between her and Ludwik?

Her phone rang quietly; she glanced down, her pupils dilating, her fingers trembling.

The caller ID read: [Husband.]

That was what she had secretly changed his contact name to half a month ago, after a particularly sweet moment in his office, thinking they could truly become husband and wife...

Taking a deep breath, Whitney hesitated on whether to answer.

Seeing L's call, Tiana swiftly picked up the phone and pressed it to Whitney's ear.

Silence hung on the other end, the man's breaths low and aristocratic.

Then, he spoke with a chilling tone, "Your uncle, Mr. Tennyson, came to see me. He suspects we've had a falling out. I think you owe me an explanation."

Whitney's breathing hitched, her heart pounding.

Why would her uncle confront Ludwik on his own?!

A dreadful suspicion crept into her mind, and she quickly composed herself, her voice husky. "Alright, I'll be right there."

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She dressed hastily and left.

Tiana called after her, "Take it easy. Your belly's starting to show!"

Walking into the café, Whitney spotted the impeccably poised man sitting erect by the window, her uncle, slender and confined to a wheelchair.

Her face was ashen as her gaze locked on her uncle. She had sent several texts on her way, none of which he replied to.

With trepidation, Whitney approached.

Perhaps her uneasy breathing caught Ludwik's attention through his mask. Her pallid face was steamed by the warmth of the café, flushing an unnatural red, making her seem even more fragile, panicked, and noticeably thinner. Being pregnant, how could she afford to lose weight?

Was she really choosing to be at odds with him like this?

Ludwik's deep-set eyes lingered on her delicate features, unable to look away, betraying a glimmer of distress.

"Sit," he commanded in a cool tone.

Whitney did not know how to handle the situation. She scrutinized his face, his expression, her heartbeat racing too fast.

Every nerve in her body was under immense pressure.

Keegan chuckled, breaking the silence. "I suppose I'm just being meddlesome. I noticed you haven't brought Whitney to see me for many days, and I thought maybe you lovebirds had a spat? Or perhaps, Mr. L, you had some thoughts about Whitney having a relative like me?"

"No, Mr. Tennyson, you're overthinking it," Ludwik replied succinctly, his demeanor detached yet graceful.

Whitney's eyes stayed on her uncle, wondering what his intentions were.