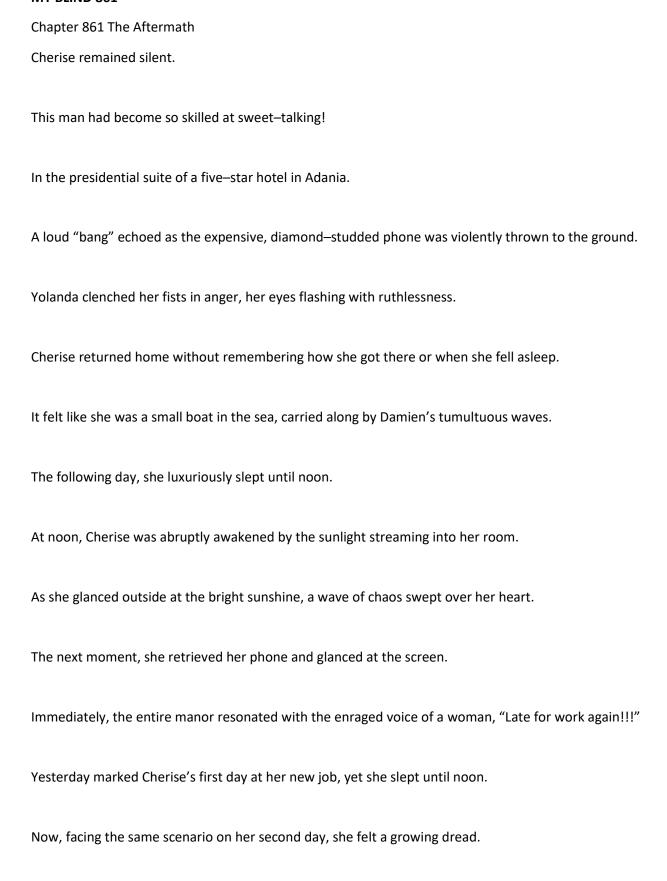
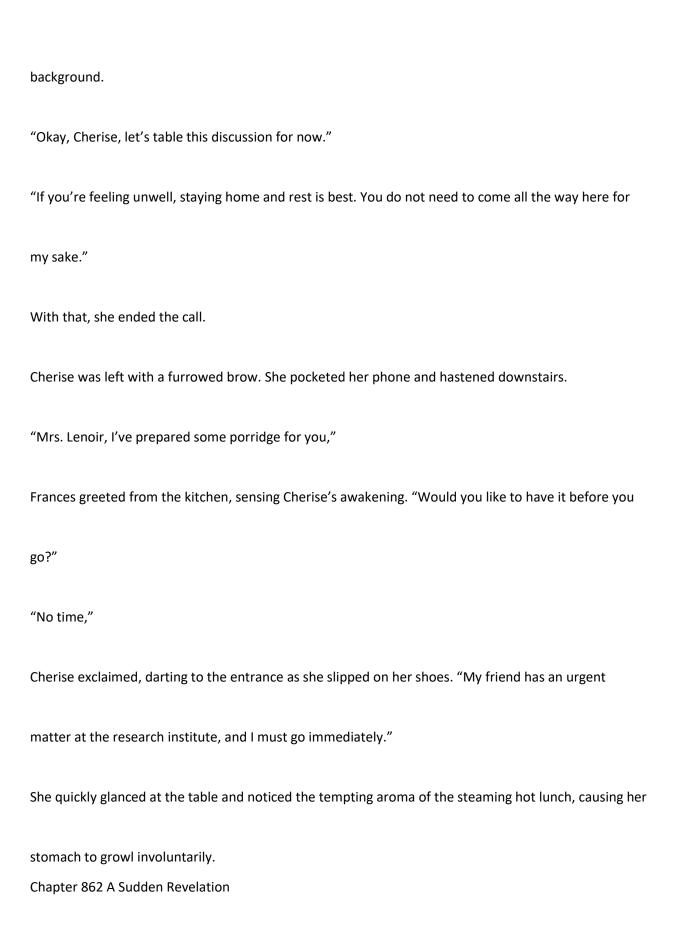
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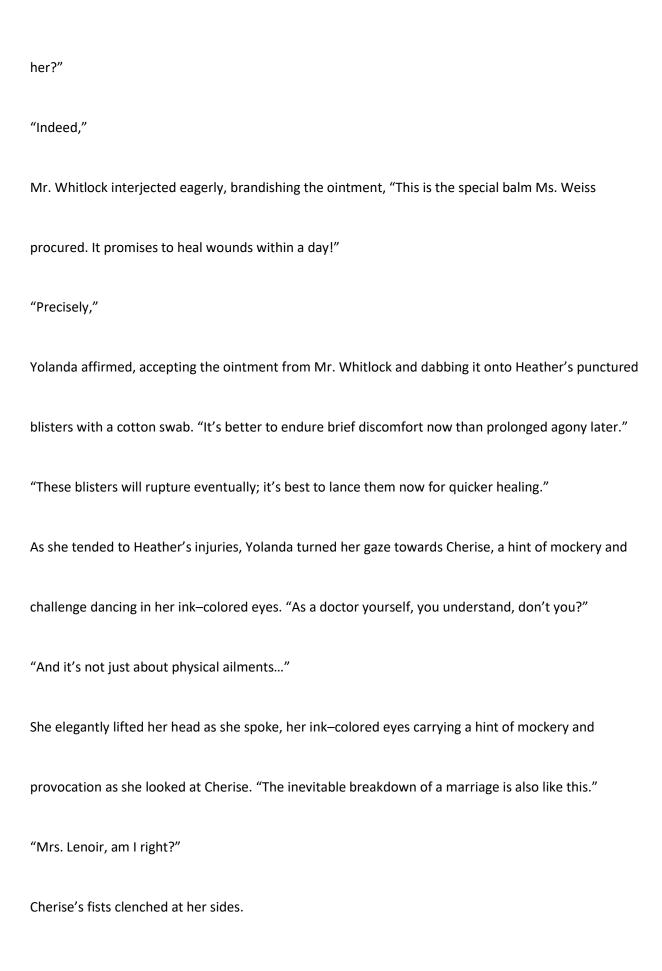


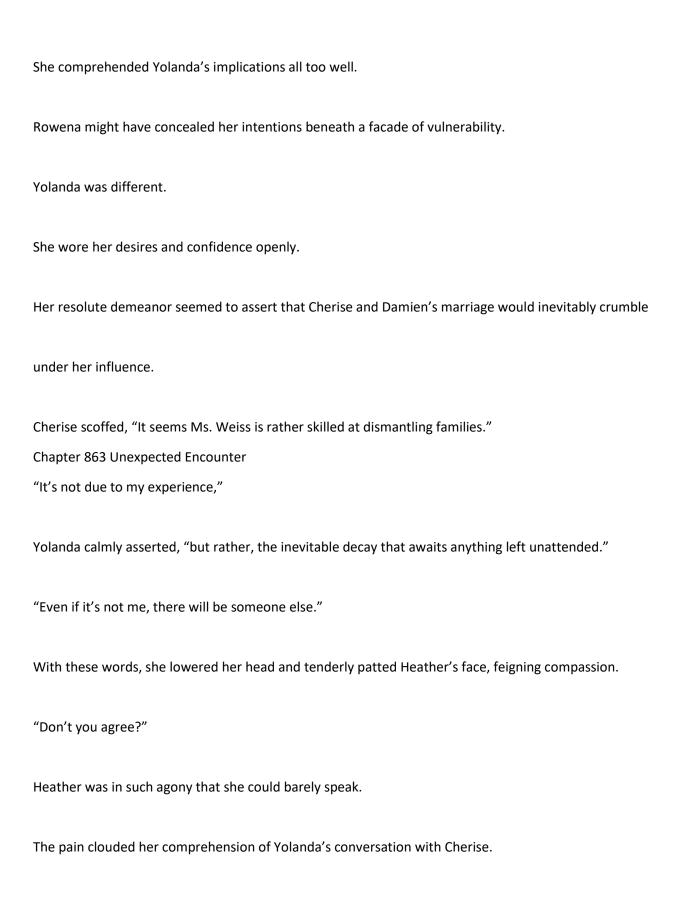


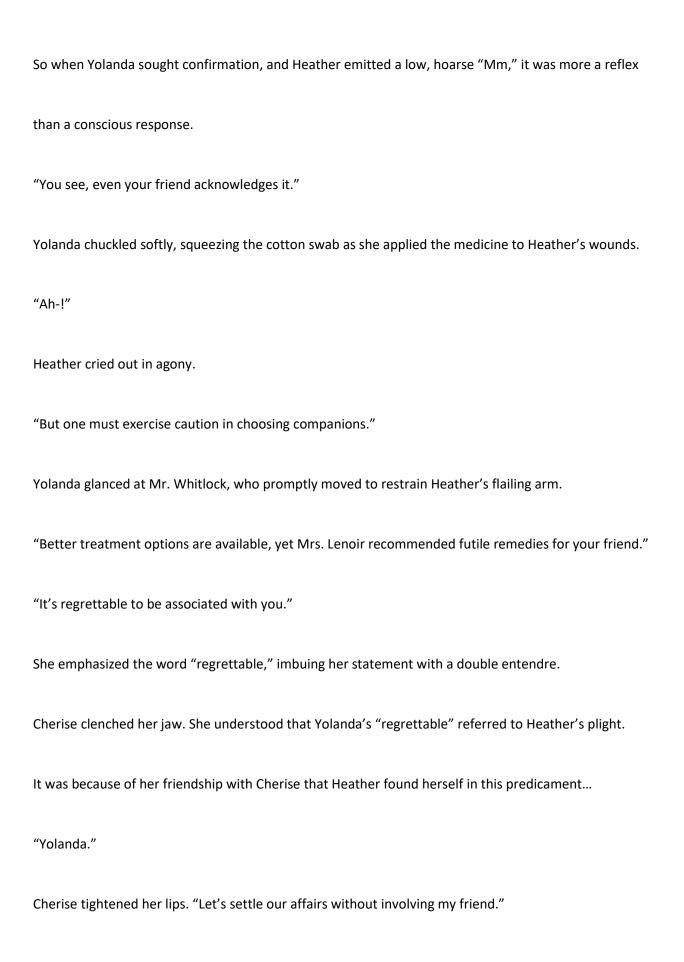
In truth, a pang of hunger gnawed at Cherise's stomach. The ordeal of last night's car ride had sapped much of her energy. She pressed her lips together and instructed, "Pop it in the fridge for me; I'll eat it when I return." With a concerned glance, Frances slipped two packets of hot milk into Cherise's bag. fearing she might grow famished on her way. Cherise sipped on the warm milk, exiting the manor while settling into Mr. Kolson's car. Thirty minutes later, the vehicle pulled up at the research institute. Just as before, upon stepping out of the car at the institute's entrance, Cherise noticed her colleagues' furtive glances and hushed murmurs. The unresolved plagiarism issue cast a pall over her interactions. These silent judgments weighed heavily on Cherise's spirits. She hastened towards Heather's usual workspace, milk in hand. Heather had mentioned earlier that Mr. Whitlock sought to speak with her, prompting Cherise to head straight for his office.

As she approached within twenty meters of the door, Cherise caught the sound of a woman sobbing











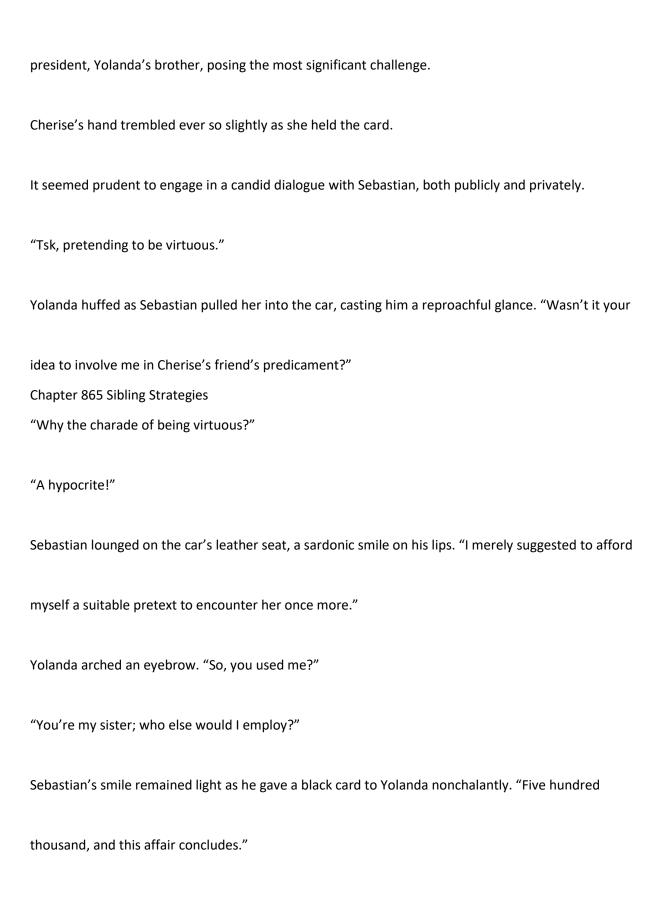


The man's smile was faint. "I'm Sebastian."
Cherise furrowed her brow, wracking her brain until she finally recalled a boy named Sebastian.
He had been her desk mate in junior high school in Shawbury for a year before he was transferred to
another school.
Chapter 864 Strategic Engagement
But in my recollection, Sebastian was a chubby and cheerful lad!
The svelte and elegant figure standing before me could this indeed be the Sebastian back then?
"That's correct, it's me."
Perhaps sensing Cherise's incredulity, Sebastian's lips curved into a faint smile, and he made the
familiar gesture of tapping his temple with his hand.
It was a trademark of the chubby Sebastian of old.
Cherise was taken aback, her mouth agape for a moment.
He He has genuinely undergone a remarkable transformation!
Yet
"Why have you come here?"











"You're aware since Lenoir Group usurped Damien, it's been the most rapidly burgeoning entity in
Adania. Many vie for control of the Lenoir Group. Will we be next in line?"
"But I must acknowledge Damien's acumen is genuinely commendable. I never fathomed his
handsomeness"
Observing Yolanda's enamored countenance, Sebastian narrowed his eyes slightly. "Besides his
appearance, is your eagerness to lay claim to Damien rooted in his business acumen?"
Yolanda faltered, realizing her misstep.
Swiftly, she averted her gaze. "Primarily due to his allure!"
"Well, I'm not averse to a contest."
Sebastian's smile softened as he gazed out the car window. "I'm cognizant of my sister's desire to find
a business rival, ensuring the Weiss dynasty isn't solely within my purview henceforth."
Yolanda's complexion drained of color. "I never contemplated such matters."
"It's inconsequential."
"Now that you've targeted Damien, I'm content to await his ascent to becoming my brother—in—law,

thereafter engaging in competition." "May the superior man prevail. If I falter, it simply signifies my sister's discerning taste." With that, Sebastian lowered his gaze, toying with the strawberry hairpin in his grasp, a relic from Cherise's schooldays. Examining the hairpin, he could vividly recall their time in Shawbury; Cherise's unwavering encouragement, her words resonating deeply. "Sebastian, you're astute and handsome! Pay no heed to others' perceptions!" "Persevere, for there's always someone who values and admires your virtues!" Reminiscing on the Cherise of yore, a wistful smile graced Sebastian's lips. Those days in Shawbury marked the nadir of his existence. Fortune smiled upon him indeed for in those days, Cherise's warmest smile thawed his troubled soul. Without her, how could he have shed weight and smoothly reintegrated into the Weiss fold? Seated in the car's rear, Yolanda regarded Sebastian's enigmatic expression, an inexplicable shiver coursing down her spine.

Her brother... invariably evoked a sense of unease.

Chapter 866 The Journalistic Bombshell: Gwenn's Expose

The incident surrounding Cherise's alleged plagiarism reached a critical juncture.

It was catalyzed by a fresh-faced journalist named Gwenn from Enigma Insight Magazine. In a

damning exposé, Gwenn not only unveiled Cherise's purported act of plagiarism but also shed light on

her purported abandonment of medical practice while still engaging in medical research.

Before long, luminaries from talent agencies affiliated with the Weiss Group began disseminating the

news across cyberspace.

These celebrities' considerable sway and devoted followings ensured the scandal remained a burning

topic online.

It had ignited fervent debates across the internet.

Cherise found her phone inundated with messages.

Laced with concern and urgency, Dr. Penn's voice pierced through the turmoil. "Cherise, what's the

situation? I've spoken with Mr. Whitlock, and it appears the allegations of plagiarism are substantiated.

I require an explanation from you."

Heather's distress resonated through the phone as she reached out to Cherise. "Cherise, I'm at a loss.

My coworkers are casting aspersions due to our association. I'm contemplating resignation..." Lucy's message flashed on Cherise's screen. "I'm en route to Adania. Expect me tonight." However, amidst this deluge of communication, an unfamiliar message caught Cherise off guard. "Shall I handle my sister for you?" the sender queried, anonymously shrouded. After a pause, Cherise realized the sender was none other than Yolanda's younger brother, Sebastian. After a moment of contemplation, Cherise composed her response. "There's no need, and my husband will address it." "If you're truly inclined to aid, perhaps you could persuade your sister. I possess ample evidence to substantiate my authorship of the paper." She simply wished to avoid dredging up the past... Gwenn was keenly aware of the evidence at her disposal. She was merely relishing in Cherise's torment. Cherise's actions might be understandable from a medical standpoint. But as a daughter, Cherise had committed an unforgivable act against her deceased mother.

Gwenn sought to lay bare all of Cherise's vulnerabilities in front of the public eye, to brand her as an



"Silly girl, Mom is more than willing to be your patient. Even if it doesn't yield the desired outcome, it's
still valuable experience, right?"
"Considering you've already succeeded in your experiments on animals, let Mom be first human
patient."
"After all, who could be more suitable than Mom, right?"
"It's indirectly my fault Mom's gone"
Cherise lay cradled in Damien's embrace, her voice heavy with sorrow. "Throughout these years, I've
borne an immense burden"
"Zachary continually attempts to reassure me, insisting it was Mom's decision and not mine"
"Yet, I cannot shake this gnawing guilt within me"
Chapter 867 Unspoken Guilt
Cherise's eyes shut tightly, her features etched with pain. "Your sister's ordeal mirrors my mother's in
many ways. When I operated on her, I took an extra step and that's why she survived."
"Five years ago, when my mother passed, she urged me not to shoulder blame. She insisted it was her
choice."
"But I couldn't forgive myself Because at the time, I entertained the notion of taking that extra step,

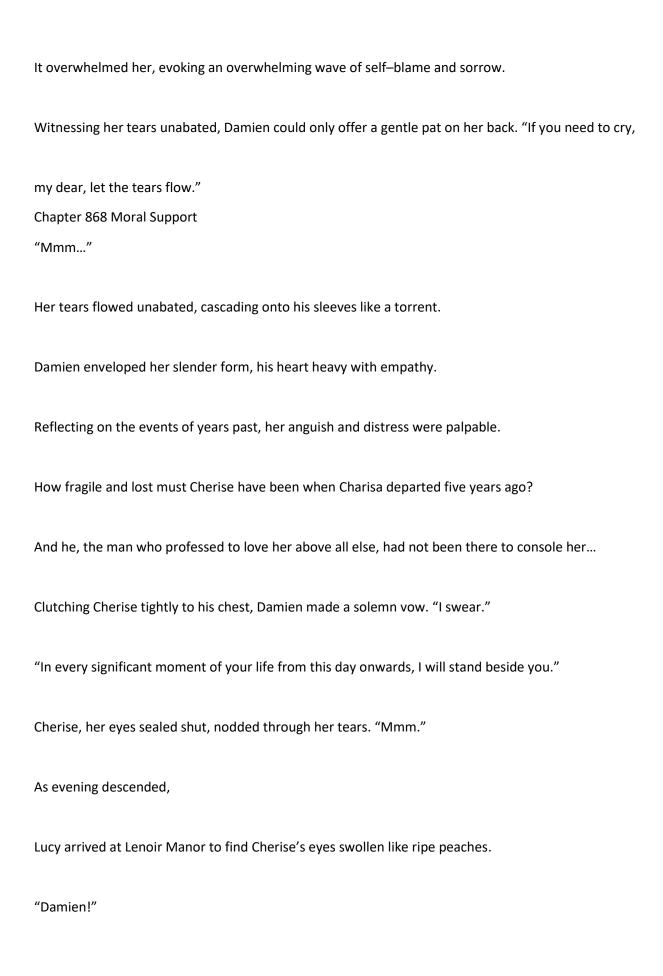
but I faltered. I was gripped by fear Fear that one additional step might jeopardize my mother's
life."
"But it was that one step and my mother couldn't hold on"
Cherise locked these memories away, never daring to share them with anyone
In the years following, each midnight reverie would stir her from slumber, tears staining her pillow in
remembrance of her mother.
Subsequently, Cherise crossed paths with Dr. Keeples, Lermille Hospital's director.
His sage advice resonated deeply with her: the gravest mistake a doctor could make was to operate on
a loved one without absolute conviction.
Such a decision, he cautioned, would yield a lifetime of remorse.
Inspired by his counsel, Cherise made the pivotal choice to join Lermille Hospital's ranks.
But her mother's surgery remained a festering wound, a relentless source of guilt.
Cherise included this narrative in her paper because of Maeve's successful surgery.
As a medical practitioner, Cherise yearned for guidance on navigating such delicate scenarios.

Little did she anticipate that her paper would become Gwenn's weapon of choice against her. Gwenn's relentless actions against Cherise stemmed from a clear understanding of the situation. From the onset, she derided Cherise for her reluctance to perform surgery, and now, she mercilessly exposed Cherise's vulnerabilities. With each calculated move, Gwenn systematically dismantled Cherise's aspirations and livelihood, shattering her dreams and undermining her existence. Damien enfolded Cherise in his arms, his gentle touch a balm to her tormented soul. "It's all in the past, my love. There's no need to fret." "If I were your mother, I would have made the same decision." Cherise's quivering frame stilled momentarily as she wept. Gazing up at Damien through tear-blurred eyes, she asked, "Why?" "Because she, like me, knows the goodness within your heart." Cherise locked eyes with Damien, her lips trembling in silence. Taking a deep breath, Damien tenderly brushed her lips with a kiss. "Zachary informed. me that when

you operated on your mother, it wasn't a rash decision."

"He recounted how you reached out to numerous experts worldwide, seeking counsel on the feasibility of your plan. You tirelessly tended to your mother by day and burned the midnight oil alone, sleeping a mere few hours a night. It took you over a month to finalize your strategy..." "Your intent was solely to grant your loved ones more time, to vanquish their illness." "Before your intervention, this ailment had never been conquered." Damien cupped Cherise's face. "Truth be told, even without your intervention, your mother would have had at most a month left." "If I were her, I would entrust you with the surgery." "Taking a chance outweighs enduring the agony." "Even though you lacked practical experience as a doctor, you're my daughter. I'd sooner place my faith in you than in seasoned professionals." Cherise's lips quivered, tears pooling as she beheld Damien. "I know, I understand the rationale..." Yet, she found herself unable to surmount this inner barrier.

The notion that her mother's plight stemmed from her actions...



Lucy, in a state of disarray, grabbed a cushion from the sofa and hurled it at Damien upon. witnessing
Cherise's distress. "Is this how you promised to take care of her!?"
Damien caught the cushion calmly, his large hand setting it back on the sofa. "You've returned sooner
than expected."
"Of course!"
Lucy rolled her eyes. "What's going on? The news has been inundating my feed, even in Europe!"
"If it weren't for some lingering matters at the company, Mandy would've accompanied me!"
Cherise, having spent the afternoon in tears, now appeared somewhat calmer. She looked at Lucy and
inquired, "Did you go to meet Mandy?"
"Of course!"
Lucy pouted as she sat down, accepting a teacup from Frances. "When Damien mentioned Yolanda, I
went in search of Mandy!"
Cherise furrowed her brow, puzzled as she glanced at them. "It's related to Yolanda?"
Why look for Mandy after learning about Yolanda?

What's the connection between the two?
Damien furrowed his brows, fixing Lucy with a reproachful gaze.
Lucy paused, then laughed off the query. "It's nothing. I saw Yolanda's social media post claiming
Damien as her boyfriend, so I went to vent to Mandy."
Cherise fell silent.
Was it necessary?
But
"Yolanda claimed Damien as her boyfriend on social media?"
"How do you know Yolanda?"
Lucy hesitated.
She scratched her head awkwardly. "Um, I don't know her. I saw it on Lennon's phone."
Cherise furrowed her brow once more. "You used Lennon's phone Did you two reconcile?"
Lucy pursed her lips, uncertain how to respond. In an attempt to change the subject, she reached for
her backpack. "I met your father while in Europe. He asked me to bring back many gifts for you!"
Pulling out a USB flash drive, she continued, "He said to watch it alone when it's quiet. Inside are his



You don't need to pay attention to them."	
Cherise pursed her lips. In fact, she comprehended the rationale behind Lucy's words. Damien had	
reiterated it to her numerous times before.	
She had used these words over the past five years to admonish herself.	
Yet, the prospect of unveiling her scars before a multitude filled her with dread.	
Words wield immense power.	
She dreaded being pointed at and whispered about wherever she went, and she recoiled at the thought	
of enduring the gossip that would follow every job change.	
Nevertheless, it seemed there was no alternative but to confront it.	
"Alright, where there's a will, there's a way."	
Lucy, seated beside Cherise, added, "Besides, you still have Damien by your side!"	
Cherise remained silent, her lips tightly pressed together.	
Initially, Cherise believed that by staying home, she could shield herself from the repercussions	
echoing outside.	

Yet, on the second day of the ordeal, she received an alarming call from her son's kindergarten teacher at noon. "Mrs. Lenoir, you may need to come to the kindergarten." "Your son, Soren, hit two children today, and now the parents are demanding compensation..." At that moment, Cherise was at home meticulously organizing the evidence to refute the plagiarism accusations. When the phone call shattered the silence of her concentration, she leaped from her chair in a sudden jolt of panic. "How could this happen!?" Soren, typically known for his prudence and thoughtfulness, did not resort to physical confrontation. How could he possibly have struck another child? "Teacher, is there a misunderstanding? How could Soren hit someone?" "I assure you, there's no mistake. Soren indeed struck the child." The teacher's tone grew impatient. "Mrs. Lenoir, don't presume others lack professional integrity as you do." "If you can plagiarize papers, who's to say your son's moral fiber isn't tainted?" Before Cherise could respond, the teacher abruptly ended the call.

Cherise was trembling with the phone in her hand.

Raising her gaze, she found herself momentarily blinded by the brilliance of the midday sun, its
radiance too intense for her eyes to bear.
After steadying her breath deeply, she regained her composure, swiftly changed her attire, and stepped
out of the house.
As Cherise made her way from the hospital entrance to Soren's location, she wore a hat and mask to
conceal her identity. Despite her disguise, she couldn't escape the whispers of passersby along the
corridors.

"Hey, I used to admire her, but I didn't expect her to be a thief!"

"Well, you have no taste. I knew from when she openly admitted that she had no medical ethics over a month ago that this woman could do anything without moral boundaries!"

"What a shame... I used to envy the president of Lenoir Group for finding such a good woman as his wife. But now it seems..."

"Hahaha, do you think Damien intended to divorce her after this scandal broke out?"

Cherise maintained her silence.







this kindergarten unsatisfactory, there's no reason for it to continue." After lifting Soren into his arms, the man turned towards the elevator. Upon pivoting, he noticed Cherise standing nearby, tears glistening in her eyes. Furrowing his brows slightly, he questioned, "What brings you here?" The kindergarten teacher interjected nervously, "Mr. Lenoir, I only called Mrs. Lenoir..." Damien's brows knitted in frustration. "You called me first, then my wife?" "Do you presume that I am incapable of handling my son's affairs or that I lack the means to settle the compensation demanded by this aggrieved parent?" The teacher faltered under Damien's gaze, rendered speechless by his imposing presence. The mother sneered, addressing Cherise, "Tsk tsk, hiding under a hat and mask? Let's see the face of the shameless plagiarist!" With a swift motion, she ripped off Cherise's disguise. Simultaneously, Damien attempted to rush forward but was hindered by carrying Soren, and he

couldn't match the woman's speed.

With a resounding "smack," the woman forcefully threw Cherise's hat and mask.
"So this is the face of Cherise, the plagiarist!"
The woman shouted indignantly, "I never expected someone who appears so respectable to lack any
sense of propriety!"