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Adam had said it himself-things between him and Celine were over.

Carly was ecstatic. She threw herself into Adam's arms, hugging him tightly. "Adam, I know Celine is good at seducing men. I don't blame you for liking her **a** little. But I know you'd never leave me. I'm the one you love the most"

It was true; he felt something for Celine. But the one he loved most, the one he would always love, **was** the girl from the cave-his girl, Carly.

Adam wrapped his arms around Carly, holding her close.

Hayden's face lit up with satisfaction. As long as Carly was happy, he was happy too.

Lucy was also pleased, but her eyes darkened with malice at the thought of Celine. She couldn't believe that country girl, **Celine**, had managed to stir even a flicker of interest in Adam.

That little tramp!

Meanwhile, Celine had just arrived at the hospital. Nathan was **already** packed and ready to be discharged.

"Mr. Lynch, I'm so sorry. Something came up, and I

got here late," Celine said apologetically.

Nathan gave her a faint smile. "It's fine. Let's go."

"Okay, I'll grab the luggage," Celine offered.

She walked over to pick up the bags, which were heavier than expected. Exhausted **and** sore all over, she lost her balance and stumbled.

"Celine, be careful!"

Nathan reached out quickly, steadying her with his arm around her waist. The sudden momentum sent them both **tumbling** onto the hospital bed.

Nathan landed on top of her.

At that exact moment, a tall, commanding figure appeared in the doorway. It was Adam

Carly and Nathan were in **the** same hospital, and with Nathan being discharged that **day**, Adam had decided to drop by for a visit.

But as Adam stepped through the door, the scene before him stopped him cold, Nathan pinned Celine on the hospital bed, their **bodies** tangled in an intimate **position**.

Adam froze, his entire body stiffening.

He could still clearly remember how Celine bad rejected him last night. And now, here she was, tangled up with Nathan on a hospital

bed.

A bitter, mocking smile curved Adam's lips. Without a word, he turned on his heel and stormed off, his entire body radiating cold fury.

Nathan looked down at Celine, concern etched across his face. "Celine, are you okay?

Still shaken, Celine quickly shook her head. "I'm fine."

Nathan immediately released her, and the two of them sat up. "Let the driver take care of the luggage," he suggested.

Celine nodded, still catching her breath. But before she could respond, a voice drifted in from outside. "Mr. Alvarez "

Celine's heart skipped a beat. Adam?

Adam is here, in this hospital?

Without **thinking**, she shot to her feet and bolted out of the room. In the hallway ahead, she spotted Adam's tall, elegant figure

retreating in the distance.

"Adam!" she called out, her voice urgent.

Adam didn't stop, didn't even glance back. It was as though he hadn't heard her at all.

"Adam" she called again, quickening her pace to catch up.

Just then, a nurse pushing **a** cart rolled into her path. "Excuse mel **Please** move aside!" the nurse called.

Chupier 201

Celine had no time to react and collided with the cart.

"Celine!" Nathan rushed forward, catching her before she could fall. "Celine, you're hurt!"

Her slender arm had slammed against the edge of the cart, leaving the skin scraped and blood trickling down.

By the time Celine looked up again, Adam was gone. His tall figure had already disappeared around the corner.

Her gaze eventually dropped to the blood that dripped from her arm.

Later, back at the women's dormitory, Celine lay on her bed, holding her phone. She opened WhatsApp and typed a message to her best friend, Robin.

Robin, I have a friend. She slept with her husband for the first time, but afterward, he's been avoiding her and won't talk to her. Why do you think **he's** acting like that?" T

When it came to relationships, Celine was utterly inexperienced. Adam was the first man she had ever been with, and she had no idea. how to navigate this.

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After sleeping with Adam, Celine was left completely baffled by his cold **and** distant attitude toward her. She couldn't make sense of what he was thinking, no matter how hard she tried.

All she could do was turn to her best friend for advice.

Robin's reply came quickly, "It means your **friend** couldn't keep her husband interested in bed. He slept with her once and already got bored."

Is that it? Is that really what happened?

Real, lasting relationships required compatibility in all areas, and intimacy was among the most important

She couldn't help but think about Adam. A **man** like him was bound to have high standards, even in the bedroom. He would need someone who could excite and satisfy him.

Had she failed to meet his expectations? Had Adam slept with her once and already grown tired of her?

Robin's next message popped up, "Celine, this friend you're talking about... It's not actually you, is it? Is there something going on between you and Mr. Alvarez?"

Celine froze, unsure of how to reply. She decided it was better to steer clear of the tople, so she quickly denied it.

"It's not me."

She set her phone aside, her **mind** a tangled mess of emotions, and eventually drifted off to sleep.

When she opened her eyes the next morning, it was early. She got out of bed and began her **usual** routine.

As she brushed her teeth, a sudden and startling realization hit her–Adam hadn't used any protection.

Adam had done it three times, his actions intense and unrestrained, completely losing himself in the heat of the moment. And each time, he'd finished inside her..

She'd been so overwhelmed by the events that she'd forgotten to take the birth control pill yesterday.

Panic seized her. In her current situation with Adam, having a child was

utterly out of the question. There was no way he'd want her to get **pregnant**, either.

now, Sp

It was too late to make her own birth control pill now, so she rushed to the nearest pharmacy.

"What can I help you with, young lady?" the pharmacy owner asked as she entered.

Celine's eyes scanned the shelves until they landed on a box of 48-hour emergency birth control pills.

She recognized the brand, but one of its ingredients triggered an allergic reaction for her. But there **wasn't** any time **to** waste, and there **didn't** seem to be other options.

"I'll take that one," she said, pointing to the box.

Celine took the birth control pill and returned to **Yorhine** University.

It wasn't long before Hailey spotted her, "Celine, I've been looking all over for you! Where did you go?"

Celine's face was ashen, her complexion ghostly pale. The birth control pill she **had** taken had triggered her allergy, and now her stomach was wracked with unbearable pain.

Hailey moved closer, and she noticed the fine sheen of sweat coating Celine's forehead. "Celine, are y you Before Celine could respond, her vision blurred, and darkness consumed her. She collapsed to the ground. "Celine! Celine!" Hailey screamed in panic, her voice trembling

okay? Don't scare m

me like this!"

She immediately rushed Celine to the campus infirmary. Once there, Hailey turned to the school doctor, her words coming out in a frantic rush. "Doctor, what's wrong with her? Why did she suddenly faint?"

The doctor studied the blood test results. "She appears to have had an allergic reaction to a medication"

"Allergic reaction? To what medication?" Hailey pressed.

"Birth control pill. She just took a birth control pill," the doctor replied evenly.

What?

hapter 212

Hailey's eyes widened in shock, her mind reeling. She **hadn't** expected Celine to collapse because of an allergic reaction to a birth control pill

Celine lay on the infirmary bed; her delicate body curled into a tight ball like a shrimp. Her pale face was drenched in cold sweat, and she clutched her stomach with one hand, her expression twisted in agony.

Without a moment's hesitation, Hailey pulled out her phone and dialed Adam.

At that very moment, Adam was at the hospital, sitting with Carly. She was as clingy as ever, resting her head on his chest.

"Carly, do you want some mango?" Lucy asked, walking over with a plate of freshly sliced fruit.

Carly pouted playfully. "Adam, feed me," she said.

Adam picked up a small fork, spearing a piece of mango, and lifted it to her lips.

Just as she leaned in to take a bite, Adam's phone buzzed. He pulled it out and answered the call.

Hailey's panicked voice burst through the line immediately. "Adam, where **are** you right now?"

"I'm at the hospital with Carly."

"Celine is in trouble, and you're just sitting there with Carly? Get to the university right now. Celine fainted from an allergic reaction to a birth control pill!"

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Adam froze.

What had Celine taken that made her pass out? Birth control pills?

He wanted to ask for clarification, but before he could say anything, the call abruptly ended with two short beeps-Hailey had hung up.

Carly had overheard the conversation. Her eyes widened in disbelief as she turned to Adam. "Adam, did I hear that right? Celine **fainted** because she took birth control pills?"

Adam didn't respond. Without hesitation, he pushed her off his lap and stood up. "I'm going to Yorhine University."

Before Carly could react, Adam had already left, moving swiftly.

She turned to Lucy. "Mom, what's going on? Adam and Celine didn't even... do anything. So why would Celine need birth control pills?"

Lucy couldn't understand it either, but her expression was grim. "Don't worry, Carly. I'll figure out what's happening"

Adam arrived at Yorhine University as quickly as possible and headed straight for the campus infirmary,

"Mr. **Alvarez**, you're finally here. Come, look at Celine!" Hailey exclaimed, rushing to grab his arm and pull him **toward** the bed.

Adam's eyes landed on **the** frail figure lying before him. Celine's small, delicate body was curled up on the bed, and even in her **fragile state**, she **had** a heart-**wrenching**

beauty.

At that moment, her eyelashes fluttered, and she slowly opened her eyes.

"Celine, you're awake!" Hailey said, quickly helping her sit up.

Celine froze when her gaze landed on Adam. "Why are you here?"

Adam stood tall and imposing by the bedside, his refined features unreadable. "Hailey called me."

Celine hadn't expected Hailey to call Adam after she had fainted from her allergic reaction to the birth control pills.

She turned to Hailey, her voice soft. "Hailey, you shouldn't have"

But Hailey cut her off, her tone firm. "Celine, you **had** an allergic reaction to birth control pills! Of course, I called him. He needs **to** take responsibility for this!"

Then, without skipping a beat, Hailey turned to Adam, her **tone** filled with accusation. "Mr. Alvarez, do you have any idea **how** harmful birth control pills can be to a woman's body? And Celine is allergic!

"If you didn't **want** a child, then you should have taken precautions! It's not fair to **indulge** yourself and leave her to suffer for it!"

Her words hit like a thunderclap in the quiet infirmary.

Celine's pale **face** flushed red with embarrassment, and she whispered, "Hailey, stop it. Please don't say any more."

Adam stood tall, his imposing frame casting a shadow over Celine as he gazed down at her with a cold, condescending expression. His words, however, were directed at Hailey. "You can leave now."

"Alright, I'll leave you two to talk," she replied, stepping out and leaving the couple alone.

It was just Celine and Adam now.

Celine felt her chest tighten. Would he think she had done this on purpose? That she'd asked Hailey to call him just to force him to take responsibility?

"..." she began, trying to explain.

But Adam's cold voice sliced through the air, cutting her off. "Have you been spending a lot

nding a lot of time with Nath

Nathan lately?"

Celine froze, caught off guard. What kind of question was that?

She had been with Nathan recently at the hospital, taking care of him.

She nodded, her voice quiet. "Yeah."

Adam's lips twisted into a mocking smirk. "So, it's Nathan. She'd been taking birth control pills because of Nathan," he thought. Were she and Nathan so careless that they didn't even bother with protection?

Adam's gaze grew colder, filled with contempt. "Why are you taking birth control pills?"

The question came out sharp and direct, like a slap.

Celine's lashes fluttered. "I don't want to get pregnant."

She doesn't want to g

get pregnant

Adam nodded slowly. "Makes sense. You should be taking birth control pills. Celine, even though we're doing our own **thing**, let me make something clear–if you end up with some bastard kid, don't expect me to claim it."

Celine's eyes widened, her gaze clouding with shock. She stared at him, her mind unable to process his words.

A bastard child?

Her entire body went cold, the warmth she'd felt earlier draining out of her like water slipping through her fingers.

He could sleep with her, discard her, and she wouldn't cling to him, wouldn't beg him to take responsibility. So why did he have to say something so cruel, something that cut so deep?

Adam's smirk only grew. "And after all that, you still had the **nerve** to call me? Don't call me again."

"

Celine's pale face flushed red, her emotions twisting painfully inside her.

She had always known Adam had a way with words–turning them into weapons that could wound as deeply as any blade.

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When Adam wanted to humiliate someone, he never held back. He stripped them of every shred of dignity, cutting them down to the bone without a second thought.

Celine hadn't asked Hailey to call him.

But even if she had, so what? He was the one who hadn't used protection in the first place!

"I understand. Don't worry, I won't call you again, Mr. Alvarez. You can leave **now**," Celine said, her voice brittle.

She lifted her head, forcing herself to hold back the tears stinging her eyes. She was determined not to let them fall, not in front of him.

Adam's sharp gaze caught the redness in her eyes, and an odd, twisted satisfaction stirred **in his** chest. It was as though her pain fed his need for revenge. He hated her.

He hated her for not coming that night.

He had called Leo deliberately, **knowing** Leo would go looking for her. But she hadn't shown up.

And now, **he** hated her even more for calling him when she fainted

She had called him over because of a birth control pill taken for Nathan, as if he **was** nothing more **than** some tool to be used at her convenience.

Adam's thin lips curled into a sneer. His voice came out cold and cutting, like shards of ice. "Let's get divorced as soon **as**

possible. We'll keep it from Grandma for now, but we can finalize the paperwork-

Before he could finish, Celine grabbed the nearest pillow and hurled it at him with all the strength she could muster. "Get out!" The pillow struck his handsome face before falling to the floor.

In an instant, Adam closed the distance between them. Leaning down, he pinned her to the bed in one swift motion.

Celine struggled, but Adam's grip was unvielding

He caught her wrists, pressing them firmly to the sides of the bed. His tone was sharp, cutting through the air like a whip. Celine, who gave you the right to lay a **hand** on me? **Have** I been too lenient with you?"

Celine desperately held back the flood of emotions threatening to overwhelm her, but it was no use. Tears spilled from her eyes, fat droplets streaming down her face like a broken string of pearls.

Her vision blurred.

She was crying

Adam's chest tightened as he watched her. A moment ago, he had wanted to see her break down, but now, her tears only unsettled him.

She was always like t

like this-twisting his emotions and leaving him restless and unsure.

Celine sniffled, her reddened nose twitching slightly as she choked out, her voice cracking with emotion, "Adam, I hate you... I really, really hate you..."

To make her feelings unmistakable, she repeated the words several times, each one laced with raw pain.

Crying, she told him just how much she hated him.

Adam knew exactly what kind of woman she was always trying to seduce men. Even now, at this moment, she was trying to manipulate him.

His Adam's apple bobbed as his throat t

tightened, his voice coming out low and hoarse. "And why do you hate me?"

She was the one in the wrong. She was still his wife!

Tears streamed down Celine's pale face, her voice trembling as her grievance burst out in a wave of emotion that hit him like **a** storm "Because you don't want me... because you always take advantage of the fact that I like you to hurt me.

He'd said once that he wanted her. But he didn't.

chester 214

In all the years they had been married, he had never treated her well. All he ever did was hurt her, again and again.

She really, **really** hated him.

Why did he have to treat her this way?

Adam felt something shift in his chest, an unfamiliar sensation creeping in–a dull ache mixed with a tingle of guilt and an overwhelming numbness.

He opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but then his eyes dropped to her collar.

The way he had her pinned revealed the delicate curve of **her** collarbone beneath the neckline of her shirt. His gaze froze when he noticed the faint love bites scattered across her skin.

The bruises trailed downward, vanishing into the fabric of her clothing.

Adam didn't **need** to see the rest to imagine how wild and heated things must have been between her and Nathan.

A sharp, blood-red fury ignited in his long, narrow eyes, obliterating the fleeting softness he had felt just moments ago.

This was her way of playing men, of seducing them. She didn't care about him at all.

Adam let go of her abruptly, moving to sit on the edge of the bed.

Celine shifted, turning onto her side with her back to him. She used her hands to roughly wipe the tears from her face. "I can get divorced anytime. Just let me know when you've chosen a date."

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Celine lay on her side, her back turned to Adam, while he sat stiffly on the edge of the bed. The two looked exactly like a couple locked in the aftermath of a bitter tight.

Adam's hands were clenched into tight fists, his knuckles white with tension. After a long pause, he finally spoke a single word.

"Alright."

Then he stood and walked away

He was gone.

The tears Celine had fought so hard to hold back spilled out when he left. She grabbed the blanket and pulled it over her face, hiding her tear-streaked cheeks beneath the covers.

It wasn't a big deal; it was just one night. If he didn't like her, then she'd just treat it like a dog had bitten **her**-nothing more.

But her heart ached, deeply and unbearably.

Celine knew the truth-she still loved Adam.

She loved him so much. So, so much.

After that day, Celine and Adam stopped contacting each other entirely.

In the meantime, the person who seemed to be on everyone's lips was Nikki.

Nikki had suddenly burst onto the scene as the breakout star of one of the most buzzworthy reality shows. Her fresh, sweet image had captivated audiences, skyrocketing her to fame almost overnight.

Dubbed "the little sweetheart" by fans, Nikki quickly amassed millions of followers and became the entertainment industry's newest darling

Rumors were swirling that Nikki had already secured the lead role in Shane Vega's **highly** anticipated new film, Whispering Splendor.

As if that weren't enough, her face graced the covers of major magazines, she secured several high-profile endorsement deals, and her commercial value skyrocketed to new heights.

Her meteoric rise in the entertainment industry felt like she had boarded a rocket straight to stardom. She effortlessly landed opportunities that most people could only dream of

Nikki was now **a** bona fide A-list celebrity.

One evening, Celine and Hailey arrived at the Atlas Hotel for dinner. Just as they reached the entrance, a group of black-suited bodyguards stormed out, barking, "Move aside! Make way!"

Without warning, **one** of the bodyguards shoved Celine and Hailey into a corner. They even roped off the area with caution tape.

Hailey stumbled, nearly losing her balance, but Celine caught her arm just in time. Buning, Hailey snapped, "What are you guys doing? Who exactly are we blocking?"

The towering bodyguard, radiating arrogance, shot back, "Ever heard of Ms. Barnett? You're in Ms. Barnett's way."

Nikki?

At that moment, a sleek luxury van sped into the driveway. A young assistant quickly jumped out and pulled open the back door.

Nikki's high-profile manager, Diana Wolfe, emerged first, expertly shielding Nikki as she stepped out of the vehicle.

It had been a long time since Celine and Hailey had last seen Nikki. Of course, they **had** seen her countless times on TV, but seeing her in person now? They almost **didn't** recognize her.

Nikki had changed so much. She was dressed in an elegant high-end designer gown paired with sparking crystal heels, draped **head**-to-toe in luxury brands **that** screamed exclusivity and prestige.

Her delicate face was partially obscured by oversized sunglasses, and she carried herself like a true celebrity.

"Ms. Barnett, welcome!" Gary Greene, the manager of the Atlas Hotel, rushed out to greet her.

Just a short time ago, Nikki **had** been a waitress at this very hotel. Now, in what felt **like** the blink of an eye, she had transformed into a superstar–the kind of person even Gary bent over backward to impress.

Nikki slid off her sunglasses with practiced ease, revealing a perfectly executed no-makeup makeup look that only enhanced her beauty. Her clean, sweet features were sharp, vibrant, and undeniably striking

Flashing a smile in her signature red lipstick, she said warmly, "Mr. **Greene**, hello. Actually, we're not strangers. I used to work here as a waitress."

"Oh, no, no! Ms. Barnett, that was my oversight back then. Please, a luxury private room has been prepared for you. This way, if **you will.**"

With Gary leading the way, Nikki and her entourage swept through the hotel's grand entrance like royalty.

Hailey stood frozen in shock. "Celine, is that really Nikki? She feels like a stranger now."

Celine's gaze lingered on Nikki. Her once sweet and innocent eyes now glimmered with a pride that only success could bring. Frowning slightly, she murmured, "She **does** seem different."

Just as the two were lost in their thoughts, Nikki suddenly glanced back and spotted them.

She stopped mid-stride. "Celine! Halley! What a coincidence seeing you here," Nikki called out.

The two instinctively began walking toward her, but they were abruptly blocked by the black-suited bodyguards.

"Stop right there!" one of them barked.

Nikki waved them off with a casual smile. "It's fine, they're my classmates."

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The bodyguards stepped aside, finally **allowing** Celine and Hailey to approach Nikki.

"Nikki, you've become a big star?" Hailey asked, her gaze fixed on Nikki

Nikki raised an eyebrow, a smile playing on her lips. "Yup. I've got a boyfriend, and he's the one who made me a big star."

"A boyfriend? **Nikki**, you're dating someone? How come we never heard about this boyfriend of yours before?" Hailey exclaimed, eyes wide.

Nikki's smile grew even sweeter. "My boyfriend is handsome, rich, and spoils me endlessly. He loves me so much."

As she **spoke**, Nikki took a step forward and gently took Celine's hand in hers. "Celine, I'm doing so well **now**. You must be happy **for** me, right? You'll give me your blessing, won't you?"

Celine's clear eyes lingered on Nikki's face for a moment. After a pause, she replied, "Nikki, congratulations."

"Celine, thank you. I'll get going now. Let's catch up sometime soon, okay?"

With that, she turned and walked away, her entourage quickly falling into step behind her.

Hailey frowned, her confusion evident. "Celine, who do you think Nikki's boyfriend is? There aren't many people in Mercity who could give someone the kind of resources she's talking about."

Mercity wasn't a massive city, but it wasn't exactly small, either.

The circle of wealthy elites was tight-knit, and the number of those with the power and money to propel someone like Nikki to the top was even smaller.

Celine's gaze lingered on Nikki's retreating figure until it disappeared from view. "I don't know either," she said.

"Celine, I don't think Nikki is really in love. She looks like she found herself a sugar **daddy**. Someone's obviously funding her rise, "Hailey said bluntly. "The question is, **who's** this sugar daddy?"

Celine's gaze lingered in the direction Nikki had disappeared before she took Hailey's hand. "It doesn't matter. Nikki's already gotten what she wanted. Hailey, I'm hungry. Let's go have dinner."

"Alright," Hailey replied, letting the matter drop.

Nikki strade down the hotel corridor with her entourage trailing behind her. Diana walked beside her, matching her pace. "Nikki, tomorrow at 9:00 am, we need to be at ELLA for a magazine shoot."

ELLA?

Nikki's eyes sparkled as a thought struck her. "Isn't Robin Smith the deputy editor of

ELLA magazine?"

"Yes, she is."

Diana nodded briskly, "y

A knowing smile spread across Nikki's face. She remembered Robin all too well; she was Celine's best friend.

"Alright. We'll be there on time," Nikki replied, her voice deliberate.

This was going to be interesting.

The next day, Celine had just finished her class when Halley rushed over.

"Celine, have you heard? Nikki went to ELLA today to shoot a historical-themed magazine spread for her upcoming movie Whispering Splendor, but something happened.

"While she was suspended on the wire rig, the harness snapped, and she fell! She got hurt and had to be rushed to the hospital." Celine froze mid-step, her mind racing. She **hadn't** heard anything about it.

She didn't typically follow celebrity news, but apparently, the entertainment headlines were already ablaze– Nikki had been injured on set during a wire stunt gone wrong-

"How is Nikki?" Celine asked.

"She's hurt, but it doesn't seem too serious."

Celine's brow furrowed deeply as something clicked in her mind. "Hailey, where did you say Nikki went for the shoot?"

"ELLA," Hailey repeated.

Celine's stomach dropped, and a sinking feeling washed over her. She quickly took out her phone and dialed Robin's number.

The phone rang several times, but there was no answer. Growing more uneasy by the second, Celine immediately called Robin's assistant instead

The call connected instantly, and the assistant's trembling, tearful voice came through. "Ms. Smith... something terrible happened. She's been taken! She's at the police station!"

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Robin was taken to the police station?

Celine's face turned pale. Without a second thought, she hung up and turned to Hailey. "Hailey, I must go to the police station

right now."

"I'm coming with you," Hailey said immediately.

At the police station, Celine and Hailey found Robin sitting in the holding area. Celine rushed to her and grabbed Robin's cold hands. "Robin, **what** happened? Why are you here?"

Robin's face was pale, her expression hollow and dazed. "Celine, this is all because of that big star, Nikki Barnett."

Robin's voice quivered as she explained. "Ms. Barnett came to ELLA for the magazine shoot. She needed to use **a** wire harness for

one of the shots, but someone had cut the **wire** ahead of time.

"She fell during the shoot, and afterward, she accused me. She claimed she saw me cut the wire with her own eyes. That's why the police brought me in.

"Celine, you have to believe me! I didn't do it. I would never do something like that. I don't even know Ms. Barnett personally! Why would I harm her?"

Robin's bewilderment was palpable. Nikki's sudden accusation had turned her into a suspect for attempted murder.

Hailey, standing nearby, looked equally stunned. "Who cut the wire, then? If Ms. Smith didn't do it, why would Nikki accuse her? As far as I know, **Nikki**

has no reason to hold a grudge against her."

Robin shook her head, confusion etched into her features. "Exactly! I've never done anything to her. Why would she say it was me? **This** doesn't make any sense."

Celine's **clear**, steady gaze darkened momentarily, a flicker **of** something sharp passing through her eyes.

She gently reassured Robin, "Don't worry, Robin. I'll go talk to Nikki right now. If she changes her statement, the police will have to let you go."

Celine and **Hailey** left the station without delay, heading straight for the hospital.

During the drive, Hailey broke the silence, her voice filled with confusion. "Celine, why do you **think** Nikki would frame Ms. Smith for this? Ms. Smith is your best friend."

What Halley had only just started to suspect, Celine had already begun piecing together. But for **now**, she said nothing.

In the VIP ward, Nikki sat comfortably on the bed.

For a magazine of ELLA's caliber,

safety protocols had been excellent. Even though the wire had snapped during the shoot, a thick foam mat had been placed below, leaving Nikki without so much as a bruise,

When Celine and Hailey stepped into the room, Nikki greeted them as if she had been expecting them. Her red lips curved **upward**. "Celine, Halley, you're here."

Celine walked closer to the bed, her gaze falling on Nikki's injury, "Nikki, are you alright?"

Nikki shook her head lightly. "I'm fine."

"Nikki, we just came from the police station. Ms. Smith would never have cut the wire. Are you **sure** you didn't see it wrong?" Hailey said.

Celine looked at Nikki seriously. "Nikki, Robin is my best friend. I hope you'll reconsider and change your statement so she can be released"

Nikki leaned back lazily **against** the pillow. "I'm feeling a bit thirsty," she said abruptly.

Her assistant, Alice Hum, immediately perked up. "I'll go get some water," she offered.

But Nikki's voice turned sharp as she snapped, "I didn't ask you to do it!"

Alice froze mid-step, unsure of what to do next.

Nikki tilted her head slightly and shifted her gaze to Celine. The message was unmistakable–she wanted Celine to get the water.

Hailey opened her **mouth** to object, but Celine raised a hand to stop her. "It's fine, I'll do it."

Without hesitation, Celine poured a glass of water and brought it to Nikki.

Nikki's lips curled into a smug smile as she took the glass. "Celine, thank you."

She reached out to take the glass, but in the very next moment, her expression shifted. With a dramatic motion, she slapped the glass away, sending it flying.

"This water is so hot! Were you trying to burn me to death?" she yelled.

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The water from the glass spilled all over Celine's hands and clothes.

Hailey immediately pulled out some tissue and started dabbing at Celine's sleeve, "Nikki, what's wrong with you? I've noticed you've been acting strangely toward Celine this whole time. Are you targeting her on purpose

Celine had tested the water earlier; it was lukewarm, nowhere near hot. Her calm, piercing black-and-white eyes lifted and locked onto Nikki's face. "You framed Robin on purpose. It wasn't **about** her. You were coming after me, weren't you?"

Nikki shrugged, her lips curling into a smug smile. "Yes."

Hailey's jaw dropped in disbelief before her anger took o

OVER

"Nikki, are you out of your mind? Celine always treated you as a friend! Have you forgotten who ran to save you when Mr. Holt tried to drag you away at Atlas Hotel?

"And now that you've made it big, you don't just cut people off you repay kindness with revenge? Have you lost your conscience?"

But Nikki showed no trace of guilt. If anything, her sneer deepened. "Finally, you said what you've been thinking. You're jealous of me. Both of you are jealous because I found a rich boyfriend. You're jealous that I became a big star."

Jealous?

Hailey froze,

momentarily dumbfounded. Then she snapped, "If you're so proud of him, then why don't you tell us your boyfriend's name?"

Before Hailey could continue, Celine gently pulled her back, stepping forward to face Nikki. Her calm, clear eyes never wavered." This boyfriend of yours, do I know him?"

Nikki had gone out of her way to flaunt this boyfriend in front of her over and over again. If he was as important to Nikki as she claimed, there was a good **chance** Celine knew who he was.

But Nikki didn't answer.

Just then, her assistant's phone buzzed. Alice answered quickly, then leaned **over** to whisper something urgently into **Nikki's** ear.

Nikki's face immediately lit up with joy. She cast a proud glance at Celine and said, "Sorry, I don't have time to discuss Robin's situation with you anymore. I'm not changing my statement. My boyfriend heard I got hurt, and he's coming to pick me up and take me home."

Hailey's face turned red with anger. "Why you-"

With a smug air, Nikki threw off the blanket, got out of bed, and twirled in front of the mirror a few times, checking her reflection. She adjusted her outfit, ensuring she looked as sweet and innocent as ever. Satisfied, she left with Alice, not sparing Celine or Hailey a backward glance.

"What kind of person is this? We completely misjudged her back then. Who is this sugar daddy of hers, spoiling her so much that she's gotten this arrogant?" Hailey fumed.

Celine's gaze lingered on the doorway Nikki had walked through. "If we **want** to know who **her** sugar daddy is, we can just follow her and find out."

Truthfully, Celine was just as curious. She wanted to know who the man behind Nikki was.

Celine and Hailey followed Nikki downstairs and saw her waiting. Her sugar daddy hadn't arrived yet, so Nikki stood there, poised and obedient, looking so well-behaved.

There he is!" Hailey exclaimed suddenly.

Celine **glanced** up just in time to **see** a long, extended Rolls–Royce gliding toward them.

The luxury car shimmered with a cold, elegant brilliance–like a king making his **entrance**, demanding everyone's attention. Nikki's eyes sparkled instantly. In a heartbeat, she transformed from an arrogant superstar to a lovestruck woman, her demeanor

softening.

As the car pulled up, Alice stepped forward and opened the passenger door. Nikki carefully gathered the hem of her dress, stepping inside with practiced grace.

The car's black-tinted windows completely concealed the interior, and whoever was inside remained hidden, low-key, and mysterious.

Moments later, the Rolls-Royce glided away into the cold night, speeding off until it disappeared from Celine's view.

Hailey frowned, her expression puzzled. "With a car and an entourage like that, Nikki must have landed an unbelievably powerful sugar daddy. But I have no idea who it could be."

As she spoke, she reached for Celine's hand. Celine's hand was icy cold, utterly devoid of warmth. "Celine, what's wrong? Why are your hands so cold? They feel like ice!"

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Out!
Clam
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Celine withdrew her gaze, shaking her head lightly. "Hailey, I'm fine."
Without another word, she pulled out her phone and dialed Alvarez Residence.

Mary's **cheerful voice** answered almost immediately. "**Celine**, you **finally** decided to call me! I've missed you so much!"

Celine's eyes lingered on the faint **outline** of the luxury car disappearing into the distance. "Grandma, I don't have any classes tonight. I can come to Alvarez Residence and have dinner with you"

"That's wonderful! And it's perfect timing. Adam will be back tonight too. I'll be waiting for you."

"Okay."

After ending the call, Celine turned to Hailey. "Hailey, I need to go to Alvarez Residence."

Hailey nodded. "Alright, go keep Mrs. Alvarez Senior company for dinner."

But Celine's expression remained calm as she **added**, "No, I'm going to find out **who** Nikki's sugar daddy really is."

What?

Hailey froze.

The

extended Rolls-Royce **glided smoothly** down the road. **Leo** sat in the driver's **seat**, while Nikki reclined in the back, her gaze

fixed on the man seated beside her.

Adam dressed impeccably in a black, custom-tailored suit. A neatly folded pocket square peeked from his jacket, and the residual authority of a high-stakes meeting seemed to cling to him.

The mutual glow of neon lights filtered through the tinted windows, casting soft reflections on his sharp features, making him appear as distant and unattainable as he had the first time Nikki laid eyes on him.

Adam held the document in his hands, flipping through it with a focused intensity, paying her no attention at all.

Nikki's gaze softened, her eyes filled with a mix of admiration and longing. "Mr. Alvarez, I fell off the wire rig today, but I wasn't

hurt. You didn't have to

He didn't bother to 1/ out of your way to come see me "

dismissive

his handsome eyelids. "Did Celine go to the hospital to see you?" His **tone** was indifferent, almost

Nikki froze, caught off guard.

Adam shut the file with precision. His deep, cold eyes finally locked onto her face. "Don't **say** anything reckless in front of Celine, Do you understand me?"

He looked down at her from his lofty position, his gaze a clear

warning.

Nikki froze completely. She had thought that after her fall from the wire rig earlier today, he had come to see her out of concern.

But in just two sentences, he had made it painfully clear that every word he spoke revolved around Celine. And then, he had gone so far as to warn her, to ensure she didn't say anything inappropriate in front of his wife.

The meaning behind his words hit her like a slap. He didn't want celine to find out that he had "slept" with her.

A wave of humiliation crashed over her, and her misplaced affection burned hot in her chest. Nikki clenched her fists tightly.

How could she not resent Celine for this? After all, Celine **had** come from nothing, just like she had. Celine wasn't born into anything more noble.

But while Nikki had spent her life tiptoeing around others, reading their moods, and living cautiously, Celine had always been calm, confident, **and** sharp–everything Nikki wasn't.

Most importantly, Celine had **married** Adam, the man who seemed almost godlike, and became Mrs. Alvarez.

Why? If Celine could have him, why couldn't she?

Nikki had been watching Adam, carefully observing everything that went on around him. That night, when Leo **had** gone looking

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for someone "clean", she saw her chance.

But when she arrived at Lux Garden, Celine had beaten her to it, claiming that night with Adam as her own.

It should have been her. It should have been Nikki who shared that night with Adam.

She envied Celine.

And she hated her even more.

And Adam's cold, dismissive tone only deepened the hatred. But **Nikki** dared not let it show. Swallowing her pride, she forced herself to nod. "I understand, Mr. Alvarez."

At that moment, a cheerful ringtone broke the silence. A call was coming in from Alvarez Residence.

Adam answered, and Mary's joyful voice rang out from the other end. "Adam, hurry up and come home for dinner. Celine's here."

His sharp features shifted almost imperceptibly. "I'm heading back now."

Ending the call, Adam glanced toward Leo and said, "Pull over."

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Leo brought the Rolls-Royce to a smooth stop.

Adam turned his sharp gaze toward Nikki.

"Get out."

He was leaving her on the side of the road.

Nikki climbed out of the car. But before she could even process what had just happened, the luxury vehicle roared to life and sped off, leaving her in a cloud of exhaust fumes.

Furious, Nikki stomped her foot, her frustration simmering beneath the surface.

Meanwhile, Celine had already arrived at Alvarez Residence. She sat comfortably on the living room couch, chatting casually with Mary.

Before long, the grand front doors swung open. A gust of cold air swept through the room, carrying with it the commanding presence of a tall, elegant figure.

Adam had returned.

The housekeeper greeted **him** with a polite bow. "Good evening, Mr. Alvarez."

At the entrance, Adam exchanged his shoes for house slippers, **his** long strides carrying him toward the living room. His dark eyes fell on Celine.

The two hadn't seen each other since that day in the campus infirmary

She had **grown** thinner since then,

and her already petite frame seemed **even** more fragile now. Her strikingly beautiful face had taken on an ethereal, almost distant quality.

She was still dressed in her uniform, having come straight from the university.

A crisp white blouse tucked neatly into a plaid skirt layered under a fitted jacket. Her jetblack hair was pulled into a high ponytail, giving her a fresh, youthful appearance. She looked every bit the image of innocent college charm.

Adam's gaze lingered briefly on her, but he said nothing.

"Adam, you're back. Let's eat," Mary called.

The three of them gathered in the dining room. Mary took her usual seat at the head of the table, while Adam and Celine sat

across from each other.

A housekeeper approached, carefully setting a steaming bowl of soup in front of Adam. He picked up his spoon and **took** a sip, only to pause with a slight frown. "Grandma, what is this soup?"

Mary smiled mischievously. "It's fertility soup, good for your health."

Adam was momentarily speechless.

"Adam, do you remember what I told you last time? You're not getting any younger, It's time for you and Celine to give me a great -grandchild. Now hurry up and finish that soup, I want to hold a great-grandbaby tonight."

Adam's gaze rested on Celine from across the dining table.

She lifted her eyes to meet his briefly before turning to Mary. "Grandma, I have to go back to campus tonight," she said softly.

Mary blinked in surprise. "Celine, you rarely come home. Can't you stay the night?"

"Grandma, I've been busy with my coursework lately," Celine replied.

Mary reached over to place a piece of sweet vinegar pork ribs onto Celine's plate. "Celine, you've lost weight recently. Eat more After dinner, let Adam drive you back."

Adam's gaze lingered on Celine.

She didn't respond to Mary's suggestion. Instead, she lowered her long lashes, quietly picked up the piece of pork ribs with her fork, and took a small bite.

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There was something about her quietness tonight, and it **tugged** at something deep in Adam's chest.

After dinner, Celine rose from her seat. Adam grabbed his car keys and followed her out the door.

As they walked side by side, a faint scene drifted toward Celine. Sweet, ripe peaches. It was the same perfume Nikki always wore. Earlier, in the VIP hospital room, Nikki had sprayed this exact perfume with **an** almost smug air, mentioning that her "boyfriend"

was coming to pick her up.

Celine's face turned pale. The realization hit her like a cold gust of wind.

It all **made** sense now. In all of Mercity, the only person powerful enough to launch Nikki's meteoric rise was Adam, the city's wealthiest man.

Adam was Nikki's sugar daddy.

Celine had suspected it for a while, but deep down, she hadn't wanted to believe it.

The two of them continued walking across the expansive lawn toward the sleek luxury car parked ahead. Breaking the silence, Adam asked casually, "What made you decide to come home tonight?"

"Mr. Alvarez, do you have time tomorrow?"

Adam glanced at her. "Why?"

"Let's go to city hall and get a divorce," she said.

Adam froze mid-step.

Celine stood her ground, her delicate features unwavering. "Adam, I want a divorce. I don't want to wait even one more day."