

# **No Remarriage: You Don't Deserve Me (Lenora and Zachary) Stay Away**

## **Stay Away 241**

Chapter 241 Are You Trying To Kill Me

Chapter 241 Are You Trying To Kill Me 36%

+10 Bonus

Seeing the message, Elijah felt a chill run down his spine. His hand shook, and he nearly dropped his phone to the floor.

The veins on his forehead pulsed twice as he replied: Ms. Wilkin, please don't do this. Don't get me into trouble! Knowing how jealous Zachary was, Elijah couldn't imagine what would happen if he found out about this.

Just the last time, when Lenora had casually remarked at a restaurant in Nardor that she liked his personality, Zachary overheard and had been after him for boxing practice ever since they got back, under the guise of a sparring session. In truth, it had been a one-sided beatdown.

Elijah couldn't back out, so he went through two rounds with Zachary, who didn't hold back one bit. Each punch felt harder than the last, and the bruises on his body hadn't faded yet.

One more session, and he was done for.

Lenora replied: Trouble is exactly what I have in mind. Otherwise, you'd all just think I'm a fool.

Now, Elijah was sure Lenora knew. He tried to play dumb. I don't get what you're saying.

Lenora sent the recording directly. Quit pretending. You can't hide from this.

Hearing the recording, Elijah went silent, not replying for a long time.

Lenora sneered inwardly. Say something! Don't just play dead!

She added: Let the supplier handle the mediation with the Morris family normally! If you insist on continuing like this, I'll cover the payment to the Morris family myself. Elijah repli

Is this really necessary?

Lenora shot back: And is what Zachary's doing necessary?

She added: He's relentless!

Elijah stayed silent.

Lenora pressed the lock button, switched off her phone, and took a deep breath, unable to quell the frustration welling up inside.

It felt like an endless rainy day, with mold creeping up the white walls in the corner of her mind.

She regretted ever liking Zachary. It had thrown her life into chaos.

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A few days ago, she'd even suspected Richie was using defective materials on purpose, only to realize the real truth: Richie was being set up by none other than her ex-husband. All this misfortune had befallen the Morris family because of her.

Her original goal was to help Connor so he could trust her more, but Zachary had taken it upon himself to act, causing Connor to fear his influence and pull away from her. All her efforts had gone to waste.

What's more, she had known nothing of this, yet had been forced to bear half the blame as if she were some femme fatale.

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X+10 Bonus

She had no genuine feelings for Connor as her interest in him was for another purpose. But what if she did love someone else?

Zachary would continue to disrupt her life, making it impossible to live in peace. The very thought suffocated her.

She had no freedom to speak of.

Lenora opened her chat with Connor and began typing slowly: Connor, I'm really sorry. I just realized that the person in the recording is a friend of Zachary's. I'm sorry. I didn't expect things to turn out like this. I've already spoken to him, and I've asked him to let you go through normal mediation. If that fails, I'll cover the compensation myself, and you can transfer the debt rights to me. Connor quickly replied: I understand, Ms. Wilkin. It has nothing to do with you; you don't need to apologize to me. I've always said that a wonderful person like you deserves better. Losing you is Zachary's loss.

Connor's understanding only made Lenora feel worse.

After the conversation with Connor, Lenora said quietly to Harrietta, "Hattie, I'm going out to take a call. Call me if you need anything."

Harrietta nodded obediently.

Lenora walked to the emergency exit. Her face remained expressionless as she dialed Zachary's number.

Beep... beep...

The phone rang for a long time, and just as it was about to disconnect, Zachary picked up.

"Hey, Nora?" His voice was groggy and hoarse, sounding like he had just woken up.

Ignoring his tone, Lenora demanded coldly, "Zachary, did you have Elijah set up the Morris family? How can you be so underhanded? You promised you wouldn't interfere with me anymore! When have you ever kept your word?" Silence followed for a while before his voice, weak and drained, came through. "Is that really what you think of me?"

He saw her call and joyfully picked up, only to be met with a barrage of questioning that instantly dampened his spirits.

"Isn't it true?" Lenora's

was frigid, each word pointed and accusing.

"Heh." Zachary let out a low, bitter laugh, his voice icy. "Connor's father knowingly bought defective materials. Isn't it only natural that he'd be reported? Why am I being blamed?"

As things stood, Zachary had lost all credibility with her.

Lenora brushed off his words as nonsense.

Even if Richie had used defective materials on purpose, her goal was to gain Connor's trust.

As for Richie, she'd ensure he was brought to justice once she had proof of his involvement in her father's kidnapping and death.

Lenora laughed coldly. "Seems like you know quite a lot about this, huh? So you collaborated with them

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and then reported them. Is that right?"

Is she that afraid Connor would come to despise her?

Zachary began coughing violently, taking a while to catch his breath. When he finally spoke, it was with a tone of resignation. "You're so infatuated with Connor that you're blind to reason. Don't blame me for no reason. You don't spend decades tap dancing on hornets' nests, and not expect to be stung, Richie got reported because he deserved it. It has nothing to do with me!"

Lenora snorted. "Lies! Wasn't Elijah acting on your orders? Why else would he target the Morris family?"

"Elijah is Elijah, and I'm me. What does his behavior have to do with me? How would I know why he targeted the Morris family? Should he report every bathroom trip to me, too? Ha, Zachary, you're not only a liar now but also shameless. Look at the sorry state you're in. I'm so glad we divorced!"

Lenora's words cut into Zachary's heart like a knife, leaving him aching, and bitter.

His eyes were slightly red, as he tilted his head back to gaze at the ceiling, His throat felt as if it was filled with sand, raw and scratched.

He clenched his fists, knuckles cracking, straining to keep his voice steady as he said, "So, in your eyes, I'll always be in the wrong, no matter what? Is that right?"

"You know exactly what you did!"

"I told you it wasn't me. What will it take for you to believe me? Do you want me dead?"

Realizing Zachary still wouldn't admit anything, Lenora lost interest in arguing further and hung up on

him.

She put her phone away, took a deep breath, and walked slowly to the window, gazing out into the distance.

Back then, Zachary had seemed so dazzling to her-handsome, tall, knowledgeable, kind, and from a good family. All these qualities had made her fall for him deeply,

Now, with the fog of youth cleared away, Zachary was no different from any other man, especially with his possessiveness and stubbornness.

The person she once thought of as her heart's mark had now become a faded memory.

Luckily, she had managed to break away in time.

Once she avenged her father, she'd move abroad, putting as much distance as possible between her and Zachary,

The next morning, Lenora was at home with Harrietta, working on crafts.

Thud, thud, thud...

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door,

Lenora walked over to the door and glanced at the electronic screen, seeing Elijah standing outside.

She opened the door, raising an eyebrow at him. "What are you doing here?"

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Elijah looked grim, his lips pressed into a thin line. "What did you say to Zachary?"

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Chapter 242 Never Wanted Him Dead

Lenora was startled. "Why are you asking?"

36%

+10 Bonus

Elijah heaved a sigh. "Zachary suffered from stomach bleeding a few days ago and is now hospitalized for treatment. His condition is already critical, but he has suddenly started starving himself. Since yesterday, he hasn't eaten anything until now, The nurse said the change in him was after he received a phone call yesterday."

Zachary is hospitalized because of stomach bleeding?

Lenora was taken aback, her mind suddenly flashing back to the scene where she thought she caught a glimpse of Zachary's back when she visited Miranda's grandson at the hospital a couple of days ago but brushed it off as a trick of the eye at that time. Seeing her reaction, Elijah continued, "Please go with me to the hospital now to talk some sense into him!"

Lenora snapped back to reality, taking a step back. "No way. He's not a child anymore. He's the one who'll suffer to risk his health. We're already divorced. If I have to go and visit him every time he pulls the same act, will I ever get to live my own life?" Even before they got divorced, she was already well aware that Zachary had a weak stomach due to his constant social socializing outside.

But she kept an eye on him back then and always used various ways to get him to eat, so he never had any episodes.

However, she hadn't expected that he would end up hospitalized right on the heels of their divorce.

Elijah's brows furrowed. "Lenora, I know you're upset over the matter with the Morris family. I promise you it was my doing alone. Zachary had no idea about it!"

"I don't believe it! You two must be teaming up to fool me!" Lenora countered indifferently.

"I swear! If even a word of all I said was a lie, may lightning strike me down!" Elijah vowed solemnly, holding three fingers up.

At the serious expression on his face, Lenora couldn't help but waver.

Striking while the iron was hot, Elijah pressed, "Do you still not believe me? Lenora, do you know what he told me when I came over? He said if only death could prove his innocence, he was willing to give up his life! He even coughed up blood this morning! The doctor said his condition was terrible and was afraid that he wouldn't survive the surgery! Wouldn't you believe me now?"

Afraid that he wouldn't survive the surgery... Is his condition this severe? Even though I find Zachary's persistence annoying, I never wanted him dead.

Lenora pursed her lips and lowered her gaze, a flicker of something complex flashing across her eyes. Her fingers hanging by her sides clutched at the cuff of her sleeves.

Could I have really accused him wrongly?

Before she had a chance to say anything, Harrietta rushed out of the room. She looked up at Elijah, asking anxiously with a worried expression on her face, "My uncle coughed up blood? What happened?"

Elijah knew that she was Zachary's niece, so he explained, "Your uncle has stomach bleeding and is now

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hospitalized."

"Stomach bleeding? Is it serious?" Harrietta's face went pale.

"It's extremely serious and might require a stomach surgery."

36%

+10 Bonus

The mere thought of that scene struck Harrietta with such fear that she shuddered. She grabbed Lenora's hand, "Aunt Lenora, the day you attended the cocktail party, Uncle Zachary drank the entire night. Can we go to the hospital to visit him, Aunt Lenora? He's so pitiful."

Elijah also had his gaze fixed on Lenora. "Lenora, you two were once married. Do you truly want to see him die?"

Taking a deep breath, Lenora looked down and said to Harrietta, "Come, let's go and get changed before heading to the hospital to visit your uncle!"

"Yay!" Harrietta immediately ran back into the room to change.

Lenora twisted her body sideways, allowing him into the house. "Please wait in the living room for a

moment."

"I'll stay out here and wait for you both at the door."

"Suit yourself."

Lenora returned to her room. After changing, she left home with Harrietta.

"Let's go." At the door, Elijah started toward the elevator and pressed the down call button.

Soon, the car came to a stop beneath the building housing the inpatient department.

Elijah's pace was quick. Seeing Lenora falling a few steps behind him with Harrietta, he immediately doubled back and scooped up Harrietta, swiftly ascending the stairs.

Lenora followed behind him with brisk steps. Her chest heaved violently, even as her cheeks flushed hotly. Finally stopping outside a VIP ward, Elijah pointed at the door. "This is his room. Go on in."

Lenora peered in through the window on the door, only to see Zachary lying motionless on the hospital bed with an IV drip hanging at the head of it, appearing as though fast asleep.

She pushed open the door lightly and stepped in.

Harrietta struggled slightly in Elijah's arms, saying in an adorable voice, "I want to go in too, Mr. Levine." Elijah tightened his hold on her. "Hold on. Let your aunt and uncle have a chat first." "Okay, then."

Following the creak of the door opening and closing, Zachary picked up on the sound of footsteps. With his eyes closed, he stated indifferently, "As I've said, there's no need to persuade me further." So, he isn't asleep, after all.

Lenora had already reached the side of the hospital bed. When she got a good look at the man lying there, her heart suddenly clenched, and her breath caught.



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36%

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It had only been a few days since their last encounter, but Zachary had lost weight considerably. His eyes were sunken, and his face was almost gaunt. His chin and jawline were also strikingly prominent. Worse still, his countenance had taken on a sickly pallor. The backs of his hands that were bared were deathly pale, dry, and bony. Veins protruded prominently on them, making it easy for the nurse to find a vein for the IV drip.

How did... he suddenly end up in such a state?

In all the years she had known him, he had always been vibrant and energetic. That was the first time she had ever seen him so weak. It was as if he was a thin sheet of paper that would tear at the slightest touch.

After a long silence without any response, Zachary spoke again. "Aren't you leaving yet?"

"It's me," Lenora admitted softly.

When Zachary heard the familiar voice, his entire body jolted. His eyelashes quivered, but ultimately, he didn't open his eyes.

His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed the bitterness that welled in his throat, his fingers clutching at the bedsheet silently. In an impassive voice, he asked, "Why are you here?"

Lenora took two steps forward, pursing her lips and looking at him with a frown. "I'm sorry I misunderstood you yesterday."

The corners of Zachary's mouth twitched, and he slowly parted his lips. "You weren't wrong about it. I was the one who had Elijah target the Morris family. You were right that I'd not only broken my promise but also lied and stubbornly refused to admit to something I did, stooping despicably low. You were lucky to have divorced me indeed."

For a moment, Lenora's expression stiffened. Then, she forced a smile. "You have quite the memory. Haha..."

"You flatter me."

Words cluded Lenora.

She slowly sat down by the bed, saying gently, "Please don't take to heart the words I blurted out in the heat of the moment without thinking. I'm truly sorry if they hurt you-"

"But that's your true feelings, no?"

cut her off.

He opened his eyes, his unfathomable gaze locking with hers. A hint of mockery flashed through them. "There's no need to apologize. You just like Connor and were worried that he'd hate you because of that matter, right? I understand. Since there's someone you like, your first thought will certainly be for yourself and him. It was unnecessary for Élijah to have asked you over. You don't have to come anymore."

Their gazes crossed, and Lenora's eyes bore right into his ebony ones. Her lips moved slightly, but she had forgotten what she wanted to say.

"As you said, we're already divorced. I won't pester you anymore in the future. My illness has nothing to do with you, so shouldn't you be happy? What's holding you back?"

Despite his words, Lenora

couldn't shake off the feeling that he was being sarcastic.

She paused before earnestly, "I was too impulsive yesterday, I misunderstand yet aside

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X+10 Bonus

willing to apologize as well as accept any censure, but I hope that you don't hurt yourself further with your illness and get treated proactively. Since you don't want me here, I'll be leaving." That had Zachary promptly dumbfounded.

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## Stay Away 243

Chapter 243 The Stubborn Zachary

36%

+10 Bonus

Zachary closed his eyes, smirking as he felt his heart turning colder. I knew it. I'm nothing to her. She can't even bear to spend an extra second by my side.

Seeing Zachary closing his eyes, Lenora shrugged resignedly and stood up. "Well, I'm off then. Take good care of yourself."

Zachary's eyes were tightly shut, his large hand clenched, gripping the bedsheet firmly.

The dormant kindling in his heart was once again doused with a layer of oil by Lenora. A mere spark was enough to ignite it, leading to an uncontrollable and intense blaze.

It was as though a massive amount of dense smoke was gathering in his atrium, threatening to explode at any moment.

She's truly cold and ruthless to me! Yet, I still want her to stay! Just as Zachary was about to speak, a sudden wave of intense pain surged through his stomach.

He coughed, followed by dry heaving.

Lenora halted in her tracks and turned around. She saw Zachary sprawled weakly by the bed, a faint trace of red at the corner of his mouth. Against his pale face, the hint of crimson was startlingly vivid.

His complexion was pale, and he appeared fragile, as if he would break at the slightest touch.

A knot formed in Lenora's heart immediately. She hurried back to the bedside, gently patting his back, and asked with worry, "Zachary? How are you feeling now?"

Zachary took a deep breath, his eyes reddening slightly.

He leisurely took a tissue from the bedside, wiping the corner of his mouth before tossing it into the trash. He brushed off Lenora's hand from his back, turned to lie flat, and gave her a brief, indifferent glance. Pulling his gaze away, he uttered in a deep voice, "It's none of your business."

Lenora was speechless. He sure is stubborn. I bet his mouth can hold up even the sky if ever falls down one day.

Lenora scanned the surroundings, picked up the water jug from the table, and poured a cup of water before handing it to Zachary, saying, "Rinse your mouth."

Zachary glanced at her and wordlessly accepted what she offered. He took a sip, swished it around in his mouth, and then spat it into the trash bin beside the bed. He casually set the cup down on the bedside table.

"Zachary! You've drawn blood with your needle!" Lenora caught a glimpse of the small amount of blood drawn back into the syringe on the back of his hand.

She quickly reached out, gently laying his hand flat.

His hand was cool to the touch, thin and bony, somewhat unsettling.

Lenora adjusted the angle of the drip tube slightly, regulating the speed of the IV drip. As she watched the blood slowly return to the veins, she carefully placed his hand back under the blanket.

Zachary watched her silently as she went about her actions. The fire within his heart was abruptly extinguished. He lowered his gaze, a smile subconsciously tugging at the corners of his lips before Chapter 243 The Stubborn Zachary

disappearing in a blink.

"Do you have a heating pad? Or a hot water bottle?" Lenora asked

Zachary shook his head. "I'm not sure. Why don't you look in the drawer next to Rest

Lenora rummaged through the drawer, and sure enough, she found a bun war bonte

She took a bottle of hot water and carefully pressed it onto the X be

After all was done, Lenora asked with concern, "Do you need me to call a doctor for post

"No need," said Zachary

The hospital room fell silent.

Lenora turned around and headed toward the door

Seeing her about to leave, Zachary grimaced a storm brewing in thús exes. Can't she fear to say a lule langer with me? Why is she leaving in a hurry? Does she detest me that much? Then, she left, her figure blocked by the door

Zachary closed his eyes, seething with anger. With a swift sweep of this hard. The caused the glass cap on the bed to fall to the ground and shatter

"Uncle Zachary! I've come to see you!" Harrietta pushed open the door rusting in with a ligar ng

"Be careful!" Zachary immediately warned

Harrietta halted, casting a puzzled look at Zachary, tilting her head shytty

Zachary pointed at the shattered glass on the floor "Hattie, be careful not to step on in

Lenora followed her into the room, immediately heading to the comer to gaba room are walk through that side. I will sweep this area clean

"Didn't you leave? What are you back for?" Zachary's gaze toward Lenora was infiferen his mice chily

Lenora was sweeping up shards of glass. Frowning, she glanced up at Zachary your so eager for me to leave, I'll do so right away?

Zachary smiled out of anger. She's doing this on purpose to priss me off

Harrietta shook her head in disagreement, wondering how her unde could be so suffer. Why is he trying to push Aunt Lenora away? He should learn from the skinny guy and call to her afieldy. I must ang hun from talking further. Otherwise, he'll piss off Aunt Lenore and make her leave "Uncle Zachary, what happened here?" Harrietta asked, taking a step back in her life boons and partning to the shards of glass on the ground

Zachary's expression softened a bit, his fist resting against his lips as he cleared his dinar liguly in a low vojce, he said, "I was trying to get a drink of water earlier, but I couldn't hold in sady

"Uncle Zachary, why do you talk to me while looking at Aut Letor? Hanema nihed her head back. blinking curiously.

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Chapter 243 The Stubborn Zachary

Lenora was speechless and couldn't help but glance at Zachary.

Her gaze unintentionally met Zachary's.

36%

+40 Bonus

Immediately, Lenora averted her gaze, emptying the shards of glass from the tweezers into the trash bin.

Zachary said lightly, "It's nothing."

Her eyes twinkled. "I get it now. You must be missing Aunt Lenora. I saw a saying on television, 'One day apart seems like three years. Now that I think about it, you haven't seen Aunt Lenora for quite a few years now. That's why you miss her so much and don't want her out of your sight...'"

"Harrietta!" Lenora put on a stern expression. What kind of television drama does she usually watch? It feels like she knows more than adults despite her age.

The smile on Harrietta's face froze for a moment before she closed her chatty little mouth, touched her index finger, and said in an adorable voice, "Uncle Zachary, you've lost so much weight. My heart aches for you. Once you recover, you'll be back to your old self. Uncle Zachary, let me pour you some water!"

She went over to the table and picked up another cup. She filled it with water from the dispenser and handed it to Zachary, saying, "Uncle Zachary, here you go!"

"Thank you, Hattie." Zachary took the cup of water, swirling it lightly in his hand. "Hattie, how has it been living with Lenora these past few days?"

"She's been so kind to me," Harrietta hummed as she clambered onto the bed. "Yesterday, she took me to an art class..."

The girl began to recount the amusing incidents from the past few days animatedly.

Suddenly, a thought crossed her mind, causing her to change the topic. "Uncle Zachary, Mr. Levine mentioned that you had a stomach bleed. Is your stomach in any pain?" Zachary gently shook his head and took a sip of water. "No."

"It's not Did a ghost spit out this blood?" Lenora asked.

Zachary touched his nose. "It doesn't hurt too much..."

For some reason, when he heard Lenora's stern words directed at him, he didn't feel anger. Instead, a subtle, inexplicable sense of joy was stirring within him.

He felt as though, at that moment, Lenora was the one close to him, no longer unreachable.

He also felt as though he and Lenora were an ordinary couple, with the wife chiding her husband.

"Uncle Zachary, you spat blood? Let me rub your tummy for you!" Harrietta's small face was etched with worry as she extended her chubby little hand to rub Zachary's abdomen.

Her strength was minimal. To Zachary, it felt like a mere tickle.

He flashed a grin, grasping Harrietta's petite hand. "I'm not in pain."

"Uncle Zachary, are you going to have surgery?" Harrietta asked with a worried frown. "Mr. Levine said you're going to have a stomach operation. If they remove your stomach, does that mean you won't be able to eat anymore?"

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"Only a little will be removed. I'll still be able to eat later."

Still, imagining that scene gave Harrietta the chills. "So, when is your surgery?"

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+10 Bonus

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**Stay Away 244**

## Chapter 244 So Petty

"It's still uncertain," Zachary said, casting a subtle glance at Lenora. "We need to wait for the doctor to advise us on when the surgery can take place"

Lenora considered that it was likely because his current health wasn't up to par. He needed to regain some strength before he could go under the knife,

"I'll be outside during Uncle Zachary's surgery, keeping him company" Harietta piped up.

"Good girl, Hattic"

"Uncle Zachary, your hand's bony"

"Well, of course they are! With nothing but bones left in his hand, wouldn't it be bony?" Lenora said with a scoff, crossing her arms over her chest as she shot a glance at Zachary, Zachary could only manage a quiet response.

"Aunt Lenora, don't be so hard on Uncle Zachary! He didn't want things to turn out this way." Harietta interjected.

"He didn't want it to be like this? Then why, knowing full well about his weak stomach, did he still drink so much alcohol?" Lenora challenged.

"That night, Uncle Zachary was just too heartbroken!" Harietta feigned a sigh, her eyebrows drooping. "All I can say is that Uncle Zachary loves you way too much..."

"Harietta Fuller" Lenora replied, her expression turning somber.

Immediately, Harietta covered her mouth with both hands, looking at Zachary and blinking innocently

"Why are you getting mad at Hattie? She's right," Zachary chimed in, meeting Lenora's calm gaze.

A slight pause gripped Lenora's heart.

"So what? We're already over. There's no way I would take you back just because you're hurting yourself."

"I'm not trying to guilt-trip you" he said, carefully observing her reaction. "I just hope you won't distance yourself from me... Don't completely abandon me, and at least give me a fair chance to compete with Connor..." He tightened his grip involuntarily. "Uncle Zachary, you're hurting me" Harietta whispered cautiously,



"Sorry" Zachary quickly released Harrietta's hand.

Lenora lowered her gaze, remaining silent.

She returned the dustpan and broom to their designated spots before turning to Harrietta. "Hattie, Why don't you stay here and keep your Uncle Zachary company? I'll be leaving first." Ashadow crowded Zachary's eyes,

She's still not going to agree?

"No, don't!" Harrietta suddenly jumped from her sickbed, clinging to Lenora's leg, "Aunt Lenora, please

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don't go! I don't want you to leave!"

+10 Bonus

Lenora reached down and gently patted her head. "Just stay with your Uncle Zachary, and make sure he takes good care of himself."

"Don't go! Uncle Zachary, say something! Aunt Lenora is leaving!" Harrietta gestured frantically at Zachary, her eyebrows furrowing and eyes wide with panic.

Zachary spoke softly. "Hattie, let her aunt go. She doesn't have me in her heart. Even if I were to die right now, she wouldn't be moved at all."

Upon hearing this, Lenora was completely taken aback.

Is he actually saying that about me? Is this really Zachary? Why does he sound so petty?

Lenora laughed. "Zachary, when did you become like this? It was you who pushed me away, so how am I the heartless one now? If I wanted you dead, I wouldn't have come to see you today!"

"Do you dare say you didn't think about leaving? If I hadn't just been vomiting blood, you'd probably be home by now!" Zachary accused, but inwardly, he felt a surge of delight.

He found himself increasingly fond of the way Lenora argued with him; it felt exceptionally lively.

"Isn't it because of your strange behavior? I was genuinely apologizing to you. Instead of accepting or rejecting it, you mocked me first. Should I really be the one making an effort when you're so indifferent?"

"I can accept your apology, but I have conditions." Zachary abruptly changed the subject.

Lenora was momentarily taken aback before realizing she'd been outmaneuvered. She scoffed, "What gives you the right to set conditions? It's take it or leave it."

After she finished speaking, she suddenly remembered Harrietta was present.

At that moment, she was so furious that she nearly swore.

Zachary lowered his gaze and smiled, his pale complexion and refined features, coupled with the weariness between his brows, giving him an unexpectedly frail charm. He spoke in a disheartened tone. "I knew it. You never really cared about my well-being. If that's the case, why did you bother coming here and giving me hope?" Lenora closed her eyes for a moment, seeing Zachary in this vulnerable state for the first time.

So pretentious. I'm actually scared of him.

After a few seconds of silence, she finally asked, "What are the conditions?"

Just as Zachary was about to respond, Lenora interjected, "Don't push your luck!"

Zachary's eyes were deep and intense as he gazed at her unblinkingly, conveying something of utmost sincerity. "The condition is simple-don't deliberately distance yourself from me. Just give me a fair chance to compete."

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Seeing Lenora fall silent, Harrietta immediately grabbed her hand and shook it. "Aunt Lenora, could you please agree to Uncle Zachary's request? Please?"

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36%

Cy+40 Bonus

Lenora glanced up, shooting Zachary a stern look. She suddenly realized that, at some point, Zachary had become cunningly crafty.

As Lenora remained silent, Zachary's expression shifted abruptly. He furrowed his brows and clutched his stomach, wincing.

"Uncle Zachary, what's wrong? Is your stomach hurting?" Harrietta rushed to his side, concern flooding her eyes as she gently grasped his hand.

"I'm fine," Zachary replied, clearly hiding his discomfort.

"You've been in pain twice in such a short time. Do you need me to call a doctor?" Lenora asked.

Zachary chuckled bitterly. "No need; just let me suffer. After all, you don't care."

Lenora remained silent.

"All right, all right, I agree, okay?" She glared at him, a hint of annoyance flickering in her gaze.

In the end, the decision on who would win was still hers to make.

Zachary paused, raising an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Would you rather I take it back?"

"Of course not. You mean what you say, right? You won't avoid me in the future?"

"I have a condition as well," she said firmly. "Regardless of whether this is real or not, you cannot target Connor in the future. When I'm spending time with him, I don't want you interfering." Lenora was worried that Connor would find out about her complicated relationship with Zachary.

Zachary's expression darkened.

Harrietta anxiously tried to catch Zachary's attention with her eyes. After all, she was on his side. Zachary could have Harrietta play the spy and keep tabs on Connor.

With that, Zachary reluctantly agreed, "All right, I promise I won't target him. But I also hope we can have some time alone together."

"It will happen, but let me clarify this first. If I ultimately choose Connor, I hope you'll be gracious about it."

Zachary merely smiled, neither confirming nor denying her statement.

How could I be?

Neither of them spoke. Suddenly, the hospital room fell quiet.

Harrietta's gaze flicked between the two. "Why have you both gone silent all of a sudden?"

"Every time they met recently, they ended up arguing.

After the so-called "reconciliation,"" ironically, they found themselves at a loss for words."

It was Harrietta who eventually livened up the atmosphere, clutching her iPad and urging Lenora and

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13:03 Mon, 11 Nov GO.

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Chapter 244 So Petty

Zachary to join her for a game.

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30%

+40 Bonus

Zachary looked at Harrietta with adoration, slowly lifting his head to gaze at Lenora. She was holding her own phone, completely engrossed in the same game as Harrietta, lost in the moment.

At last, his restless heart found peace.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were a family of three?

In the midst of it all, a nurse arrived to remove

the IV drip.

bumped into a nurse as soon as she exited the

At noon, Lenora stepped out to buy food and door.

The nurse glanced back at the ward and asked, "How was the patient's condition this morning?"

Would you please tell me what he

Lenora replied honestly, "He threw up some blood. By the way, nurse, can and cannot eat?"

The nurse looked at her, surprised. "Who told you he could eat?"

ww

Lenora's smile froze. "He can't?"

"Don't you know that if someone's stomach is bleeding badly enough to cause vomiting, they aren't allowed to eat? He's been on a nutrient solution drip for several days already." The smile vanished from Lenora's face completely.

What did Elijah say before he left? He told me that Zachary had gone on a hunger strike because of me and hadn't eaten anything for an entire day... D\*mn it! I've been fooled again.

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## **Stay Away 245**

Chapter 245 Hunger Strike

Chapter 245 Hunger Strike 36%

+10 Bonus

Lenora returned to Zachary's ward, carefully arranging each box of food she had brought along on the table, placing them one by one in a neat row.

Harrietta, full of excitement, immediately jumped onto the couch and eagerly surveyed the options. "I'll take this one... and this one too," she announced with a satisfied grin, already picking her portions. Lenora turned her attention to Zachary, her face composed as she asked, "What would you like? Or should I just bring you a little of everything?"

Zachary shook his head. "No, don't bother. I can't eat anything."

Lenora gave a small, cold laugh, raising an eyebrow. "Can't eat? Then why did Elijah tell me you've been on a hunger strike all day because of something I said?" she challenged, her tone sharp with a touch of annoyance.

Zachary's face registered surprise and a hint of wounded pride clouded his pale features. "H-How would I know what Elijah told you? No matter what he does, you'll always end up blaming me for it, won't you?" Lenora sighed.

Fine,

●ou win.

She closed her eyes briefly, finding solace in the darkness that blocked out her frustrations.

During the meal, Zachary sat off to the side, his laptop open, fingers working over the keyboard as he watched them out of the corner of his eye.

After they finished eating, Lenora quietly tidied the table, the subtle clinks and clatters the only sounds breaking the room's stillness.

Just then, a sharp knock sounded from the door. "Mr. Fuller?"

Lenore rose to answer, and on the other side of the door were two middle-aged men, both wearing neatly pressed surts.

Behind them, two younger assistants stood holding a fruit basket and a gift box.

Lenora gave a polite nod. "Mr. Gale, Mr. Quinn," she greeted.

The two men seemed momentarily taken aback to see Lenora, though they quickly masked their surprise. "Ms. Wilkin, is Mr. Fuller available?" "Come in and have a seat." Lenora nodded and stepped aside, gesturing for them to come in.

Harrietta, curious as ever, looked at the men from her spot on the couch, her big round eyes widening as she offered a cheerful, "Hello!"

7

Both men paused, exchanging a glance before one responded, smiling. "Hello there, young lady. You're absolutely charming."

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Inwardly, they wondered, When did Mr. Fuller end up with a daughter?

Jeremiah's gaze finally moved from Harrietta to Zachary. "Mr. Fuller," he greeted, his voice steady.

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Mon,

Chapter 245 Hunger Strike

Zachary gave a nod in acknowledgment, his expression unreadable.

36%

+10 Bonus

Lenora felt it was time to leave, sensing the visitors likely had business to discuss. She looked over at Harrietta. "Hattie, looks like your Uncle Zachary has a few things to discuss with his guests. How about we head out and come back tomorrow?" "Okay." Harrietta nodded and slid off the couch. She waved enthusiastically. "Bye, Uncle Zachary! See you tomorrow!"

"See you tomorrow."

Once they had gone, Jeremiah turned back, his face serious as he signaled to his secretary, who placed the fruit basket and gifts on the table and quietly left, shutting the door behind him. "Mr. Fuller..."

Zachary leaned back on the couch, his fingers lifting from his laptop as he looked at them expectantly. "If you two are here about the same issue as before, I'd suggest you both save yourselves the trouble. My current condition prevents me from managing Fuller Group matters, as you can see."

The two men exchanged a heavy glance. It was hard not to notice the changes in Zachary; his once robust form was visibly diminished, pale and thinner than they remembered.

However, they had no choice. Jeremiah cleared his throat. "We understand your situation, Mr. Fuller, but we really have no alternative at this point. The company is struggling, both internally and externally. Anxiety is spreading, and we need you to take the reins again-if only temporarily to bring stability back to the company."

Johanne wasn't accustomed to Fuller Group's business complexities, and the transition was far from smooth.

Meanwhile, outside competition saw their chance, quickly moving in to seize Fuller Group's resources and projects.

Board members were divided, and two senior executives had already been poached by competitors. Johanne's leadership style did little to unite them, and the stock value had suffered, sinking to its lowest since Zachary's departure

Just before New Year's Day, Fuller Group held an end-of-year press conference. At the meeting, a few outspoken shareholders stirred up trouble, demanding explanations from the management team for the dismal performance and ongoing challenges.

Jeremiah, having endured over two months of turbulence within the company, began to recognize an uncomfortable truth. Perhaps Zachary had been autocratic, but he'd been exactly the type of leader Fuller Group needed. The company required someone with the strength to rally its people from within and confront competitors without.

Zachary's eyes narrowed. "Faced with internal and external troubles?"

Jeremiah nodded solemnly. "It's worse than you might imagine. For two months, several major projects we initiated have been snatched up by competitors in Cutvine. Our other departments are also under attack, with each move appearing strategic, as if aimed at us specifically."

Some directors, still nursing bruised egos, suggested going after those projects or teaching the competition a lesson. Others, however, argued that the company needed stability more than aggression, cautioning that any hasty moves could make the situation worse. 2/4 Mon,

Chapter 245 Hunger Strike

36%A

10 Bonus

Zachary's large hand rested on his knee, his fingers tense. "Any idea who's behind it?" he asked, his voice quiet yet intent.

He could tolerate family rivalries-particularly with Johanne, his older brother-but he had no patience for outsiders meddling with his grandfather's legacy.

"I checked. It's the Hoffman family from Jeahron," Jeremiah said.

"The Hoffman family?" Zachary repeated, his gaze darkening as he absorbed the information, his eyes taking on a thoughtful glint.

Why would they set their sights on Fuller Group?

"Have you reached out to them yet?" Zachary asked.



Jeremiah let out a weary sigh. "I had my secretary arrange a meeting with the head of the Hoffman family, but they kept postponing. I ended up meeting with their two members of their management team, but they were both pretty vague."

Zachary's brow furrowed slightly. "Right now, it's not in our best interest to have a direct confrontation with them. Assign someone to thoroughly investigate if we somehow managed to offend them without realizing it. If there's a chance to reconcile, we should take it. If not, we'll avoid conflict for now and focus on steadying our current projects. We're not in a hurry to expand."

Jeremiah nodded. "Understood. By the way, how are you feeling? When do you think you'll be able to come back to the company?"

"It'll be a while yet, so just keep things steady. There's no need to rush."

Jeremiah and Daniel exchanged glances before reluctantly nodding their agreement.

Once they left, Zachary found himself alone in the quiet of his hospital room.

Not long after, Elijah entered, dropping into the chair across from him and downing a couple of mouthfuls of water. "I got a message from the mental hospital," he said. "Susanna wants to see you. She's getting patient. She said if you keep refusing, she'll expose Lenora's background." Zachary adjusted his cuffs with a look of mild irritation. "Fine, have her come by tomorrow," he said evenly.

The next day, when Zachary saw Susanna, he almost didn't recognize her.

Her once-vibrant appearance had deteriorated-she was gaunt, her complexion sallow, her hair dry and frizzy. Her clothes hung loosely on her frame, a stark contrast to the glamorous star she'd once been.

Her eyes were sunken, large and eerie, and her gaze was unsettlingly fixed, likely from an overuse of sedatives. She stared at Zachary with unblinking intensity.

Catching sight of his surprise, Susanna gave a wry smile, her voice hoarse and bitter. "Shocked, aren't your Thanks to you, I've ended up like this!"

Zachary sat back in a single-seater armchair, tapping the ash from his cigarette into a nearby ashtray. "I treated you well, didn't I? If you'd just gone overseas like you were supposed to, things wouldn't have turned out like this. It's human greed-no limits. You chose this path yourself."

Susanna let out a laugh, her voice hollow, her laughter tipping her back and forth.

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## Chapter 245 Hunger Strike

Unfazed, Zachary took another puff, exhaling smoke in a steady, unhurried stream, his expression impassive.

36%

(+10 Bonus

After a while, Susanna's laughter died down. She settled back on the couch, her gaze unfocused. "You're saying I'm greedy? That I don't know when to stop? Funny. I was meant to be the lady of the Fuller family. You all didn't keep your word, and now you blame me? I gave up so much for you, and for what? To be left with nothing?"

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## **Stay Away 246**

### Chapter 246 Half Sisters

### Chapter 246 Half Sisters

The smoke rose slowly, casting a faint shadow over his expression.

36%

(M40 Bonus

The phrase "you all" made Zachary frown, just slightly. But he didn't dwell on it; he assumed it was a slip of the tongue on Susanna's part or maybe a momentary lapse. After all, their past was long behind him now, a closed chapter he no longer cared to revisit or argue over.

Holding his cigarette between his slender fingers, Zachary asked in a casual tone, "So, you met with Grandpa? What exactly did you two discuss that day?"

Susanna's gaze locked onto him, and there was a playful gleam in her eyes. "You really want to know?" she teased, arching a brow. "Well, too bad! I'm not telling you." Zachary had harbored doubts for some time now.

If Susanna had truly told his grandfather that he couldn't live without her, why would the old man's arrangements with the company shares show no signs of anger toward Zachary himself?

Instead, it had been Johanne who felt the brunt of his grandfather's displeasure. Besides, his grandfather had always known about his emotional struggles-so why would he have so little resilience toward them?

After much thought, he could only conclude that his grandfather's strength had simply run out.

With a short sigh, Zachary let it go, replying, "No point in dwelling on all that." He took a drag from his cigarette. "I heard from Elijah that you've been wanting to see me?"

"Oh, stop pretending," Susanna sneered, her smile sardonic. "You already know what cards I'm holding. It honestly surprised me-Lenora, of all people, turned out to be my half-sister by blood. What an odd twist of fate that both sisters would end up entangled with the Fuller family!"

Zachary didn't react, instead exhaling a thin stream of smoke and asking calmly, "So what exactly do you want from me?"

As the cigarette burned down to its end, he lifted his hand and stubbed it out in the ashtray.

Susanna didn't answer right away. Instead, she laughed coldly. "You've been out of the picture so long, I thought this bargaining chip might've lost its worth. But here you are, back to see me. You're divorced now, yet you're still willing to give up so much for her?" Without missing a beat, Zachary nodded. "Yes. I am."

For a moment, Susanna's expression faltered, and her eyes flashed with jealousy and bitterness. She clenched her teeth, hissing, "She's nothing but a worthless sl\*t!"

In the past, she'd been left with no other choice but to end things with Zachary and go overseas. But only then had she realized how impossible it was to let go of him-not just the man himself, but the power he

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carried.

She regretted it, all of it. She'd waited and plotted for a chance to get back with Zachary, only to find him already married.

Zachary's gaze turned cold as he looked up. "What did you just say?"

His look was cutting, like a blade that could slice through steel and stone.

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Chapter 246 Half Sisters

36%

CXMO Bonus

Susanna didn't back down, lifting her chin to meet his gaze directly. "I said Lenora is no better than her mother, using her looks to cozy up to men. Who knows how many have had their turn with her? Am I wrong?" Zachary's face darkened as he stared at her, his emotions roiling just below the surface. "Seems like you're not here for a reasonable talk. You may as well head back to the mental hospital."

"Oh, don't you dare!" Susanna's face twisted with a sly smile. "If you send me back there, I swear I'll drag Lenora's name through the dirt! You really think I don't have more up my sleeve?" With a smirk, she began to laugh mockingly. "Zachary, you need to wake up and face reality. Lenora's a loose woman, even more pathetic than a common wh\*re!"

Zachary's hands balled into fists without him even noticing, and a vein throbbed at his temple. He'd never raised a hand against a woman, but Susanna was pushing him dangerously close to breaking that rule. Swallowing down his fury, he replied through gritted teeth, "What else do you think you know?"

From inside her coat, Susanna pulled out a photograph, placing it on the table before slowly sliding it toward him. "See for yourself," she said coolly. "Then you'll understand."

Zachary's eyes dropped to the table, and he reached out, pinching the corner of the photo to bring it closer, studying it closely.

In the image, foreign buildings stood around a street corner, and Lenora-wearing a simple skirt-was captured in a candid moment, her figure slim and innocent, clearly a young university student.

But what stood out was the unmistakable swell of her belly; she was heavily pregnant, and it was clear that the photo had been taken near the end of her pregnancy.

Even though he'd already known about Lenora's past, the photograph still hit him hard, an undeniable mix of anger and sorrow washing over him.

His hand tightened around the photo, the veins on his knuckles standing out as he glared at the image, as though his stare alone could burn through it.

Susanna watched his reaction, a pleased smile spreading across her face. "What now? She's got another man's child-are you still in love with her? Also, there's no use destroying these photos. I have plenty of copies left."

Zachary set the photograph back down, eyes closed briefly as he steadied his breathing. "Where did you get this photo?" he asked.

If Susanna had been in possession of this photo all along, she would've used it to force his hand long ago. The fact she was only showing it now meant she'd only just gotten it.

It was no wonder she'd been so eager to meet with him.

His plan was simple-coax Susanna into deleting every copy, shielding Lenora from further disgrace.

Susanna's face twitched with discomfort, but she forced a smile. "You don't need to worry about that. Just agree to my terms, and no one will ever see this photo or know about Lenora's past. But if you refuse, I'll make sure Lenora's reputation is utterly ruined!" The truth was, she didn't even know where the photo had come from herself. One day it had just appeared, left on her desk by an anonymous source.

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Chapter 246 Half Sisters

It seemed that Lenora had angered quite a few people who were just waiting for the chance to use her past against her.

Between Lenora's scandal-ridden mother and her chaotic personal life abroad, it would be impossible for her to restore her name. Zachary chuckled dryly. "So you think, after seeing this picture, that I'd still be willing to negotiate with you on Lenora's behalf?" Susanna's triumphant smile faltered.

"Actually," Zachary continued coolly, "you've convinced me she's not worth it. So, I'm not negotiating. You can go back to where you came from-the mental hospital."

Susanna's calm facade cracked, and her voice turned desperate. "Zachary! Are you serious? Aren't you worried this could destroy Lenora? You'd really let her fall? It might affect you too, you know?"

How could his feelings have changed so quickly?

Zachary's expression didn't waver. "Reputation and gossip? You think I care? Elijah, take her-"

"Think about it! She's still connected to the Fuller family," Susanna interrupted, her tone laced with panic. "What about your family's reputation? Do you want to disgrace everything your grandfather built with a scandal like this?"

Zachary hesitated.

Seeing her chance, Susanna quickly offered her terms. "If you agree to let me walk away, this secret and that photo stay hidden. You'll never see them surface, and I get to live my life. You can't lose here, Zachary!"

In reality, Susanna had hoped Zachary would want more than just her silence-she wanted him to marry her. But if that was out of reach, she'd settle for the next best thing.

"Fine," Zachary said with a calm nod. "But if you want this agreement, I'll need every single copy, the original and any backups."

"If I give you the original, I'll have no leverage. Who knows if you'll suddenly change your mind?"

"Then go back to the mental hospital. Elijah-"

"Deal!" she said, cutting him off. "You'll get the originals and the backups."

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Raising an eyebrow, Zachary studied her for a moment. "You killed my grandfather. I shouldn't let so easily," he said icily. "But for the Fuller family's sake, we'll do this. Elijah will go with you, delete every trace of those files, and then you'll be free to go." Relieved, Susanna whispered, "Fine..."

With the deal settled, it was time for her to leave. But as she reached the door, she glanced at her reflection in the glass-a woman whose beauty had long since faded, barely recognizable even to herself.

With a bitter smile, Susanna paused, then turned back to Zachary. Her eyes filled with sorrow as she asked, "Zachary... did you ever love me?"

**Stay Away 247**

Chapter 247 I Want To See You Every Day

Chapter 247 I Want To See You Every Day

A brief, tense silence hung in the air.

"Uncle Zachary! I'm here!"

A high, innocent voice broke through the stillness.

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With a sudden pop, the door swung open, and Harrietta burst into the room, her small form bouncing with energy.

She paused immediately upon seeing the others gathered in the hospital room, her big eyes blinking in surprise as she looked at Susanna. "Hello?"

Susanna turned, her face haggard, her once beautiful features now starkly emphasized by prominent cheekbones and sunken eyes.

She stared back at Harrietta with such a harsh expression that the little girl shrank away, quickly hiding herself in Zachary's arms. In a small, trembling voice, she whispered, "Uncle Zachary, I'm scared."

Wrapping his arms around Harrietta, Zachary instinctively shielded her. He also made a subtle move, discreetly tucking the photograph off the table and out of sight. He lifted his eyes to meet Susanna's gaze, and his voice was firm yet calm, "You should leave now. Elijah's downstairs, waiting for you."

Susanna glanced once more at Harrietta before turning to the door, but as she stepped forward, she bumped directly into Lenora, who had just entered the room.

Susanna's eyes instantly narrowed, taking in Lenora's serene beauty-the delicate but flawlessly blended makeup, the soft foundation that concealed any hint of scars. Her oval face was striking and smooth, unmarred by time or turmoil.

Lenora was dressed impeccably, her camel-colored coat offset by a light scarf, her plaid skirt skimming mid-thigh, and stylish black ankle boots completing her look. Her dark hair cascaded over her shoulders, a vision of refined elegance.

Susanna's gaze lingered, a spark of disdain flickering as she noticed that Lenora bore little resemblance to Kenneth. Instead, she saw in her the vixen-like allure she attributed to her mother.

Lenora took a second to assess the disheveled figure standing before her, recognizing Susanna-the same woman responsible for Gerald's death.

Her brows furrowed slightly as a flash of anger crossed her face, then faded into confusion.

How did she end up like this? Isn't she supposed to be under Zachary's protection?

Their eyes met, and in Lenora's cool gaze, Susanna saw a flicker of distaste. The sudden awareness of her own disheveled appearance flared up in her mind.

She clenched her fists, her expression hardening with suppressed fury, and as she strode past Lenora, she deliberately bumped her shoulder. Without looking back, Susanna exited, her eyes ablaze with

resentment.

She knew Lenora must be enjoying seeing her so reduced. But she thought bitterly that this moment of triumph for Lenora was temporary-one day, she would rise to greater heights, and when that day came, she would relish treading over those who had wronged her. 1/4 13:04 Mon, 11 Nov GD.

Chapter 247 I Want To See You Every Day

35%

X+40 Bonus

Lenora, though taken aback, remained silent, clenching her fists as she watched Susanna retreat down the hall. She held her composure and then stepped fully into the ward, still unsettled. Harrietta peered up from Zachary's embrace, asking, "Uncle Zachary, who was that lady? She was... kind of scary."

Before Zachary had a chance to reply, Lenora suddenly blurted out, "Why has Susanna become so thin?"

She'd studied Susanna carefully, frowning. It wasn't just that she'd lost weight; her skin looked dull, and the life in her eyes seemed almost gone, like her spirit was fading.

With a look of surprise, Harrietta gasped, "Is she Susanna? The one Grandma adores so much?" Her voice was full of disbelief.

Grandma... just what kind of taste is that?

Zachary gently stroked Harrietta's head. "Hattie, I need a nurse to change my IV. Could you go fetch one for me?"



"Okay!" Harrietta bobbed her head and eagerly skipped out.

As soon as the door closed, Zachary turned his gaze to Lenora and slowly stood. He walked over to her, his tone softening as he spoke. "Susanna's been staying at Triune Hospital recently." "Triune Hospital?" Lenora's brow furrowed, a hint of surprise flashing in her eyes. She hadn't been aware of Susanna's suffering until now. Eyeing Zachary, she wondered, "Did you arrange for that?" "She's the reason my grandfather's no longer here. I wouldn't just let her off." His tone was sharp, but there was a strange calmness to it. Lenora gazed at him, incredulous.

Didn't he once care deeply for Susanna, even to the point where he would've let anything go for her?

Zachary noticed her hesitation and took a small step forward, locking his eyes with hers. "Nora," he murmured. "I've told you before.

No! You're the one I care about. I never wanted Susanna the way you might have thought. Don't you believe me by now?"

Lenora looked away, her gaze dropping to the floor. There had been a time she had stopped trusting him entirely, every word he spoke felt insincere.

Zachary had always assured Lenora of his love for her, but she'd never fully trusted his words. For the longest time, she'd dismissed those pro

But now, hints that he might actually have feelings for her left her mind blank, racing with questions. Was

he truly fond of her?

And if so, what did that mean for their years of shared history-their wedding anniversary, their rocky attempts at building a life together? She wondered, in quiet torment, what it all had meant to him.

Despite Lenora suffering countless humiliations in front of friends, family, and strangers alike, he had chosen to go to Susanna.

All those painful memories that left her restless on long, sleepless nights-what had they amounted to, really? And what about their child, who'd never made it into the world?

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## Chapter 247 I Want To See You Every Day

Maybe he did care for her, but that only went so far.

### XMO Bonus

Because, in her mind, to truly love someone meant one saw them without trying; one's thoughts turned to them often, their presence brought comfort and happiness, and their pain was something one couldn't bear to see. She'd never seen these signs in him-at least, not while he still consistently made sacrifices for Susanna, often at her expense.

Perhaps his attachment wasn't love, but just familiarity-a habit, built from three years of marriage, that made him reluctant to walk away.

"Nora, could you give me another chance, please..." His voice was soft, cautious.

But Lenora said nothing. After a moment of hesitation, Zachary gently reached for her hand, hoping she'd allow him that closeness. Startled, Lenora instinctively took a step back.

He paused, his hand awkwardly hanging in the air before he let it fall, forming a fist to cover his embarrassment. He tugged the corner of his mouth into a wry smile. "I'm sorry," he murmured, "I was too hasty."

After a moment's reflection, Lenora finally spoke. "It's not that I don't trust you," she said slowly, "but... I find it hard to read you now. Not long ago, you were so devoted to Susanna." She glanced up, meeting his eyes. "I even heard her ask you earlier-did you ever love her?"

"At first, I wasn't sure," Zachary replied quietly, his voice firm now. "But now, I can tell you, without question, the answer is no."

Lenora looked at him, genuinely stunned. She couldn't comprehend it. He had done so much for Susanna, treating her with patience, loyalty, and care-how could he not have loved her?

Seeing her expression, Zachary hesitated, his hand brushing over the cigarette box in his pocket. He almost pulled it out but resisted. "Initially," he began, his voice steady, "I was moved by her persistence. But as time went on, I came to realize we weren't right for each other. If that incident hadn't happened... we would have broken up long ago."

When he'd first learned about Susanna's painful past, he'd been overcome with guilt and a sense of duty. But, ultimately, it was just that-guilt, not love. Lenora was the one who touched his heart.

In fact, he'd reasoned, if he could act so rationally and alert the authorities when Susanna was in danger, it clearly meant something was missing.

If it had been Lenora in such a crisis, there would've been no hesitation. He would've done anything, even defying logic, to keep her safe.

Back then, he hadn't yet understood the difference; he'd confused guilt for love.

"Zachary," Lenora said softly, "have you ever thought that maybe it's not love... that maybe you're just used to being with me?"

"I've wondered the same thing," Zachary replied, his eyes dropping as he spoke, his voice gentle. "But then I realized it wasn't just familiarity. I like you, Ah Liang. I wanted to see you every day, and when you're with me, my mood's always brighter. When I see you cry, my heart aches. When you're with Jonas..." He faltered, struggling to find the words. "I can't even describe the jealousy I feel. If this were just a habit, I'd keep you locked away somewhere, like a bird in a gilded cage."

Born into privilege, Zachary had always been the center of attention. With his looks and talent, he was admired, respected, envied, and he'd had everything he wanted for most of his life. Until now, he had

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Chapter 247 I Want To See You Every Day

never felt emotions like envy or jealousy.

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+10 Bonus

Yet, when he learned Lenora might have feelings for someone else, and saw her with Jonas, something in him shifted. He felt bitterness, a sour taste in his mouth that lingered for days, a tightness in his chest he couldn't ignore. Much later, he finally understood what that feeling was-jealousy, raw and unfiltered.

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**Stay Away 248**

## Chapter 248 A Family Of Three

## Chapter 248 A Family Of Three

35%

### XMO Bonus

Before his marriage, Zachary had been pulled into countless social obligations, his calendar always packed and his energy stretched thin. Even his grandfather had warned him not to overextend himself, advising him to take care of his health. But he was young then, ambitious, with a constant feeling that others in the corporation were watching him, waiting for him to slip. He felt he had to work twice as hard, wanting to live up to the faith his grandfather had shown in his leadership.

After their marriage, though, things began to shift. The demands on his time slowly eased, and he would often wrap up his workday and come home in time to have dinner with her. It was hard to deny that he cared deeply—otherwise, how could she have convinced him to step back from his relentless schedule?

Before their life together, he'd had little patience for his employees' mistakes, quick to lose his temper in the high-pressure world of corporate deadlines. Yet, as Lenora looked back, she realized she had rarely seen him be anything but fair and calm with his team. The influence she'd had on him was subtle but profound. And by the time he realized it, it was already too late to go back.

Listening to his heartfelt words, Lenora found herself at a loss. She felt happiness, yes—after all, she'd loved him for almost a decade, and now it wasn't just her one-sided story.

But at the same time, there was an undeniable sadness too. No matter what affection he had for her now, the wounds he'd left from those times he'd put Susanna above her were still there, scars too deep to ever fade completely.

Zachary seemed consumed with regret, wondering to himself if things would have turned out differently had he realized his feelings for her sooner.

But the world doesn't offer second chances for what-ifs.

That marriage had taken everything Lenora had, leaving her too exhausted to return to the person she used to be—the Lenora who loved him with all her heart. Somewhere along the way, she'd lost the ability to love anyone with that kind of intensity. Uncle Zachary, the nurse is here!" A cheerful voice broke the stillness. Harrietta, her short legs hurrying across the room, had come in, bringing the usual warmth with her.

Lenora gave her a gentle smile, patting her head. "Hattie, you're such a good girl."

Then, glancing up at Zachary, she said softly, "You should go get your IV drip changed."

Zachary stayed rooted in place, his expression unreadable as he watched her.

The nurse entered the room, carrying a bottle of medicine and a sealed syringe. She looked over at Zachary. "On the couch or on the bed?"

Zachary sighed and sat on the couch. "Let's do it here."

"All right," she replied, attaching the bottle to the nearby rack and expertly slipping the needle into his

vein.

During the entire process, Harrietta stayed close, watching intently. Once the nurse left, she leaned in close, blowing gently on his hand and whispering, "Pain, pain, go away." Lenora had brought along Harrietta's little backpack, stuffed with all her favorite art supplies—a new set of

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paint colors, a sketchbook, and several pens and brushes.

She laid them all out on the table, hoping she could accompany Harrietta as the girl painted.

Ding!

CXMO Bonus

Just as they were settling, a soft chime sounded. A WhatsApp message notification popped up on Lenora's phone. Casually, she glanced down to see it was from Connor.

The Morriss family had finally settled their issue with the supplier, and Connor was overflowing with gratitude, sending her a heartfelt message. Though it felt unearned, Lenora replied, feeling unexpectedly appreciated.

It didn't directly concern Zachary, but Elijah's interventions had really been for Zachary's benefit, after all.

Connor's message read: Lenora, this matter has nothing to do with you. Please don't blame yourself. My parents and I are sincerely grateful. They actually wanted to invite

you for dinner to thank you, but I made up an excuse to delay it. Would you be free tomorrow night? I'd love to treat you to dinner after work.

Lenora agreed: Sure, how about I pick you up after work?

Connor responded quickly: Oh, no need. Let's just meet at the restaurant.

Lenora: Okay.

Connor: By the way, can we keep it to just the two of us?

Connor was clearly hoping she wouldn't bring Harrietta along.

Lenora couldn't help but glance over at the little girl beside her, absorbed in her sketch. Then, she replied: Sure.

She put her phone down and looked up, only to catch Zachary's gaze from across the room.

Zachary quickly looked away, clearly preoccupied with who could've messaged her.

Was it Connor?

"Are you drawing a family of three?" Ignoring Zachary, Lenora asked Harrietta, leaning in closer.

Without looking up, Harrietta corrected her, "No, I'm drawing the three of us! Here's Uncle Zachary, here's Aunt Lenora, and that's me."

On the paper, she'd drawn two adults on either side of a child walking between them. To any observer, it would look like a picture-perfect family of three.

Lenora brushed a gentle hand over Harrietta's head, smiling. "Hattie, you're so smart, and your drawings are just beautiful."

Zachary, watching from the side, set his laptop aside and chuckled. "Hattie, would you give that drawing

to me?"

Harrietta frowned, torn. "I was going to keep it for myself..." She hesitated before finally nodding. "All right, Uncle Zachary, I'll give it to you." "Actually," Zachary said with a soft smile, "if it means that much to you, Hattie, I won't take it."

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35%

CX+40 Bonus

Harrietta's face brightened. "I wanted it as a keepsake so that whenever I looked at it, I'd remember you and Aunt Lenora."

It seemed she had no intention of staying here for long.

Zachary's face softened. "No rush, Hattie. You still have some time left on your vacation. For now, just enjoy yourself."

Lenora checked the clock and noticed it was already late afternoon. She looked at Harrietta. "Hattie, would you be okay staying with your Uncle Zachary at the hospital tonight? I'll come pick you up later, all right?" "Aunt Lenora, are you going to dinner with Connor tonight?" Harrietta asked, clearly surprised.

Zachary's eyes were fixed on Lenora, his gaze intense and questioning.

Under his scrutiny, Lenora felt an uncomfortable pang, an odd sense of guilt. "Yes, he made things right with the supplier and wants to thank me."

Harrietta was oblivious to the Morris family affairs. Her innocent words, though, seemed directed more at Zachary, even if she didn't realize it.

"I want to go with you," Harrietta murmured.

"I'm sorry, Hattie," Lenora said gently, "but tonight's just for me and Connor. How about you keep your uncle company instead? Look at him-still working when he's this sick, all by himself. Doesn't he look a little lonely?" Harrietta turned to Zachary, studying him closely. He did seem quite alone. "All right," she finally agreed. "I'll keep him company."

Zachary raised a brow, glancing meaningfully at Lenora.

Ignoring his look, Lenora got ready and drove to the restaurant they'd agreed upon.

Connor was already there, waving her over as she arrived. His face lit up at the sight of her, his eyes like stars. "Lenora, over here!"

Lenora joined him, eyeing the spread he'd ordered. "Why'd you get so much food?" she asked, smiling.

Connor poured her a drink, brimming with excitement. "I'm just so grateful, Lenora. You really saved us this time."

"Connor, I didn't do much. Really, if not for me, your dad might not have been dragged into all of this."

"Zachary's choices have nothing to do with you," Connor said firmly. "If you ask me, he's the one who lost out after the divorce." He pushed a cup of coffee toward her. "Eat up, Lenora." "Okay."

Lenora wasn't sure if it was just her, but she felt that Connor was considerably friendlier that night.

They ate together, Connor doing most of the talking while Lenora chimed in occasionally. Just as they were finishing, a waiter approached, bringing a beautiful two-tiered cake on a cart. "Why'd you get a cake?" Lenora asked, surprised.

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Connor gazed at her, eyes filled with warmth and a touch of shyness. "From the moment we met in Nardor, I felt drawn to you. There was something about you that captivated me. I never imagined you were from Jacaster too it must've been fate. After getting to know you, I found myself caring even more?"

Then, with complete sincerity, he asked, "Lenora, I like you. Would you be my girlfriend?"

A small group of waitstaff nearby began to clap, and voices around them joined in the cheer. "Say yes, say yes!"

## **Stay Away 249**

Chapter 249 Making It Official

Chapter 249 Making It Official



A flash of surprise crossed Lenora's face, followed by a brief sigh of helplessness. Inside, her heart was a tangled mess of shock and embarrassment as the crowd around them kept growing, their gazes filled with interest and curiosity.

Holding a bouquet, Connor stood with a look of pure, unguarded affection. His youthful face radiated warmth, his clear eyes reflecting a soft, determined light. Earnestly, he asked, "Lenora, will you be my girlfriend?"

Composing herself, Lenora quickly worked through the myriad thoughts racing in her mind, making a decision on the spot. She tucked away all her hesitations, replaced them with a flawless, graceful smile, and nodded in front of everyone, saying, "Sure." Connor's face lit up instantly, a broad smile spreading across his features, his neat white teeth flashing, and his eyes glinting with surprise and happiness.

He had never imagined she would agree without hesitation; in his most hopeful vision, he thought she might simply not reject him outright, but rather take time to consider.

"Woah!"

The crowd erupted in cheers and applause, sending their congratulations echoing around them.

Under the gaze of the onlookers, Connor stepped forward, offering Lenora the bouquet. Leaning in close, a faint blush crept onto his cheeks, and in a soft voice, he whispered, "Thank you, Lenora." Taking the bouquet, Lenora gave him a gentle smile and replied, "What are you thanking me for?"

The energy from the crowd seemed to intensify as they noticed their exchange. A man seated nearby shouted, "Give us a kiss! Give us a kiss!"

The others picked up the chant, their voices merging into one as they called out, "Kiss! Kiss!"

Connor flushed deeply, his eyes shining with a mix of nervousness and joy as he looked into Lenora's eyes. With his palms dampening from nervous sweat, he asked, "Lenora, would it be okay?" Lenora hesitated momentarily, but then a smile broke across her face as she looked down, her hand lifting to touch her own cheek in a show of affection.

"Thank you," he repeated, his voice full of emotion as he leaned closer. His warm breath brushed lightly against her cheek, and Lenora closed her eyes, stiffening slightly under the sensation. Being affectionate with someone she didn't have romantic feelings for was a difficult line to cross.

Her thoughts wandered as she questioned the nature of emotions and actions, wondering how Zachary could have professed to feel nothing for Susanna yet still been able to display such devotion. Is this how all men are?

Moreover, she found herself unable to stop her mind from drifting back to Zachary,

Just then, Connor's kiss on her cheek was light and brief, like the gentle touch of a dragonfly skimming over water, easing the tension in Lenora's heart.

She opened her eyes and took a steady breath, setting the bouquet down on the table beside her.

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35%

+40 Bonus

Connor turned to the crowd and announced, "Thank you all for joining in. Anyone who wants cake, please feel free to come and help yourselves!"

The cake, decorated with intricate cream frills and topped with fresh fruit, bore a sweetly simple "I love you" written in white chocolate.

Connor cut a generous piece, taking care to avoid cutting through the special words, and placed it before

Lenora.

"Thanks," she said, lifting her fork.

"Lenora you don't have to thank me for this," Connor laughed, his happiness uncontainable.

"Well... I guess I'm still not used to it."

Connor continued to slice the cake and handed pieces to families at the surrounding tables, especially those with young children. Once he started, others joined in, and soon the cake was being enjoyed by many.

Lost in thought, Lenora took a small bite, feeling both pleased and slightly uneasy.

She hadn't anticipated Connor's boldness in confessing his feelings so openly; it left her feeling rushed, as if she'd been swept along without a chance to pause.

Yet, the clarity this brought to their relationship was something she hadn't expected. Now, with their relationship defined, she felt she had a legitimate position to ask more questions about the Morris family's affairs. It was clear that Connor's father, Richie, had kept most family matters from him. Connor trusted his father deeply, and if she asked him directly, he would likely share only the information his father approved. How can I coax information out of Connor without arousing his suspicion?

Still, she found herself uneasy about manipulating Connor's trust and affection. She owed him an apology, though she wasn't sure how she'd manage that if the truth ever came to light.

Noticing her empty plate, Connor asked, "Had enough, Lenora?"

She nodded, setting her fork down. "Yes, that's plenty for me."

Connor stood, a warm smile lighting his face, "How about a stroll by the river? There's plenty of time, and it's a nice night."

She could tell how happy he was, and how he wasn't quite ready to say goodnight yet. Smiling, she agreed. "Sure, let's go."

They walked to the parking lot, where Connor offered to drive. "Lenora, I got my license recently. Let me

? handle it," he said, grinning as he reached for the keys.

She handed him the keys, slipping into the passenger seat.

Inside, the hum of the heater filled the silence, bringing a cozy warmth that contrasted with the brisk air outside. Lenora relaxed into her seat, gazing out at the passing streetlights, while Connor kept his focus on the road.

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+40 Borus

The silence between them felt strange and new, as they adjusted to this sudden shift in closeness.

After a while, Connor broke the silence as they waited at a red light. "Lenora, do you mind if I make our relationship official on social media?"

Lenora thought for a moment, choosing her words carefully. "I'm not opposed to it, but I'd rather keep it from the elders, like Mr. Morris and others. I'd also prefer not to be exposed in any media or marketing posts. My private life isn't something I'd like on display." As Zachary's former wife, she knew the media would leap at the chance to twist anything between her and Connor. She'd had her share of public scrutiny and wasn't interested in revisiting that.

Connor nodded thoughtfully, understanding her concerns. "No problem, I get it."

He had just officially started dating Lenora. If his parents got wind of this, they'd undoubtedly meddle. It seemed wiser to hold off on telling them until things between them were more secure.

As for Lenora's strong feelings about privacy, Connor completely understood. When he learned about her past, he'd even looked into some of the media coverage from back then. The flood of harsh, unrelenting comments under her social media posts had deepened his sympathy and admiration for her strength.

After a moment of thought, Connor suggested, "How about we just post a photo of us holding hands? No tags, no names-it keeps your identity private. What do you think?"

After a pause, Lenora twirled her fingers slightly, hesitating. Finally, she gave a quiet, "Okay."

Soon, the car rolled to a stop in the public parking lot by the river. As Lenora stepped outside, a sharp gust of icy air hit her face, bringing a chill.

It was the middle of winter, and nighttime no less-heading to the riverside now was borderline madness. She considered just turning back to the warmth of the car, but the excitement in Connor's eyes made it clear he was too elated to feel the chill. Resigned, she decided to stay by his side, and they walked together slowly along the riverbank. Connor reached for her hand, his larger, warm hand covering hers completely.

With his eyes up by the neon lights above them, he beamed, "I can finally hold your hand in public."

Seeing his radiant expression, Lenora's heart skipped a beat. She offered a gentle smile and asked, "Would you like to take a photo?"

She knew that when everything eventually came to light, Connor would face some difficult realizations.

There would be the heartbreak of learning that his own father was involved in criminal activities, perhaps even more serious than he'd ever imagined.

And he'd also have to accept that her closeness to him had begun with motives that were anything but pure. She felt a pang of sympathy, averting her eyes slightly as Connor nodded eagerly. "Sure!"

A few minutes later, Connor's friends on social media saw a new post appear on his feed.

With two simple red heart emojis, he shared an intimate picture: two hands-one large, one small- intertwined, radiating quiet affection.

## **Stay Away 250**

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Chapter 250 Clipping Her Wings

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35%

X140 Borus

As usual, Connor kept the post away from family circles, sparing his parents and relatives any immediate knowledge of his new relationship. But with friends, he felt no need to hold back. After all, wasn't that what social circles were for? Just as he'd expected, his friends, classmates, and colleagues sent in congratulatory messages, wishing him happiness.

Among them was a comment from Stanley: Congrats!

Connor replied with a brief: Thanks, Mr. Fuller.

However, Stanley had other ideas and took a screenshot of the post; promptly forwarding it to Zachary.

Zachary stared hard at his phone screen, the dark eyes reflecting something unfathomable and intense. The picture clearly showed the hand of a woman-delicate and fair-skinned, hands he recognized easily after three years of marriage. Stanley, ever thoughtful, also sent screenshots of the congratulatory comments and Connor's responses. Though the post was only a photo and emojis, the warm remarks below confirmed the obvious: this was a relationship made public. Zachary's grip tightened on his phone, his knuckles whitening as veins rose on the back of his hand. Behind the

controlled exterior, a deep fury boiled, barely restrained, as though a beast within him had just awoken, ready to tear through anything in its path. "Lenora!" he muttered under his breath.

You really are something!

Just yesterday, she'd assured him that she wouldn't intentionally pull away from him, even going so far as to say she'd allow him to compete fairly for her attention. She knew how he felt about Susanna, how much he'd valued their connection. Yet that night she had gone to see Connor.

Is she really that fond of him? What is she trying to make of me?

Zachary clenched his jaw, forcing down the tremor of frustration that lodged itself in his throat.

He clicked his screen off, slumping back against the couch with one arm thrown over his eyes. The emotions he'd managed to hold back all day surged forward, fierce and hot, a firestorm lighting up his mind with thick, suffocating smoke. Deep down, something dark took root, pushing through the cold soil of his thoughts.

Since she's going to be so defiant, I should just lock her up and clip her wings. Maybe then she'll stay by my side.

"Uncle Zachary, are you okay?" A small, innocent voice cut through his storm of thoughts.

The child's voice was like a sliver of sunlight piercing a heavy cloud, calming the chaos within him.

Zachary lowered his arm and turned to see Harrietta's concerned little face. "I'm fine, Hattie. I'm just a bit tired."

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"You should go to sleep then, Uncle Zachary," she advised, stifling a yawn of her own.

He shook his head gently, smiling, "I'll wait up for Aunt Lenora to get back."

She checked her watch, yawning once more, "It's almost nine. She'll be back soon, right?" CX10 Bonus

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"Yes," he murmured, his gaze going distant, a shadow flickering in his eyes. "Any time now."

Harrietta eventually couldn't keep her eyes open any longer. Slowly, her head started to droop forward, until finally, she slumped sideways on the couch, sound asleep.

Zachary stood up, gently lifting her and carrying her to the hospital bed. He laid her down carefully, tucking the blankets snugly around her small frame. Then, he settled back onto the couch alone, his eyes locked on the doorway, waiting for Lenora's return. After dropping Connor off at his home, Lenora returned alone to the hospital. When she reached the room, she knocked softly and entered. Her eyes met Zachary's, his gaze dark and steady.

She felt an odd jolt of surprise, looking around. "Is Hattie asleep?" she asked, her voice quiet.

"She is," Zachary replied, his eyes fixed on her, as if trying to peer into her thoughts. His gaze was almost unnervingly intense.

Lenora shifted slightly, an odd chill running down her spine. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Zachary lowered his gaze, but his tone was composed. "No reason. Are you taking Hattie home tonight, or should she stay?"

With a slight chuckle, she replied, "We'll head home. This isn't the best place for her."

She moved toward the bed where Hattie lay, nestled deep in her blankets with only her small head peeking out. Her face was serene in sleep, her tiny mouth moving as she dreamed.

Lenora couldn't resist waking her up at that moment. Thus, she leaned in and poked Hattie's cheek playfully. It was soft and warm.

She began to withdraw her hand but brushed against Zachary, who had somehow approached her without making a sound. She turned, startled, to find him standing close, his expression dark and unreadable, eyes like ink pooling in shadow. Their gazes locked, and for some reason, Lenora felt an eerie chill, her pulse quickening. "Zachary? I didn't hear you walk up..."

"It's because you were too focused."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah."

Lenora felt the atmosphere growing increasingly odd, almost suffocating. She turned back to wake Hattie, wanting only to leave quickly. "Hat-"

Just then, she felt a sharp jab at the back of her neck. Her vision dimmed, her consciousness slipping as her knees buckled.

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Zachary caught her as she fell, a look of fierce possessiveness crossing his face as he held her close. Brushing a soft kiss on her forehead, he murmured, "Don't blame me for this, Nora..."

(40 Borus

At Galaxy Bay, the sound of a car engine in the driveway caught Miranda's attention. She stepped outside, looking slightly surprised to see him there. "Mr. Fuller, I thought you were at the hospital. What brings you back so late?"

Since her grandson's health had improved and she'd heard that Zachary himself had been hospitalized for a stomach bleed and was scheduled for surgery, she had come home two days earlier. She'd planned to visit the hospital the next day.

Zachary shut the driver's side door and walked around to the passenger side, carrying Lenora, who was still unconscious, out of the car. "Hattie's asleep in the back seat. Take her up to her room, and if she wakes up asking for Lenora, just tell her that she's sleeping," he instructed.

"Very well, sir," Miranda replied without any hint of suspicion. She went around to the back seat to retrieve Harrietta and carried her upstairs to her room.

Meanwhile, Zachary carried Lenora directly to the master bedroom. He laid her gently on the large bed, taking a moment to gaze at her face. In the stillness, he couldn't resist the urge to lean forward, his lips pressing softly against hers in a lingering kiss. Unbeknownst to her, he continued to kiss her until her lips were flushed and a gentle warmth radiated from them.

As he studied her peaceful, sleeping face, Zachary found himself thinking that she was at her most compliant and beautiful when she was like this, lost in sleep.



He removed her shoes, scarf, and coat, and, carefully, her skirt, now warmed by the body heat of their ride. Left only in her thermal underwear, she looked serene, her form perfectly outlined by the fabric.

Suddenly, an image from a snowy night in Nardor flitted into his mind, of her standing there in similar layers, the curves of her body enhanced by the snug clothing.

Taking a breath, Zachary gently pulled the blanket over her and moved to her face, gently removing her makeup.

Ding!

The sudden chime of a message broke the silence. Zachary slipped his hand into the cool pocket of her coat and found her phone. He unlocked it to see a message from Connor.

It read: Are you home yet, Lenora?

A faint glint sparked in Zachary's eyes, but he calmed the small storm stirring within and typed a response: Yes.

Connor: That's good then.

Zachary typed back: It's late. I'm going to freshen up. Goodnight.

Connor: Goodnight, Lenora.

Zachary's fingers lingered over the screen before

g through her recent chat with Connor.

Nothing flirtatious stood out, though he noticed they had shared several meals together recently. He

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35%

+10 Bonus

wondered if their closeness was mostly platonic or if, perhaps, the ambiguity was more prominent in real life.

With a steady, serious expression, he set her phone aside. After washing up, he slipped into his own sleepwear and quietly slid into bed next to Lenora.

With one smooth motion, he pulled her into his embrace, the familiar feel of her warmth against him flooding back as if only moments, not months, had passed. Closing his eyes, he breathed in the sweet scent of her hair and the subtle fragrance of her skin, letting it lull him into a deep and contented sleep. In the middle of the night, he was roused by a soft murmur, faint but unmistakable.

"Dad... Dad..." she whimpered, her forehead furrowing, her voice trembling slightly as though she were caught in a dream that wouldn't release her. Zachary reached out, his hand resting on her forehead. The heat startled him-it was unmistakably high.

Lenora had developed a fever.