

The Heiress Revived from the Ashes

The Heiress Revived

The Heiress Revived Ch 31

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Chapter 31 Chains of Blood and Pain

Hearing what David said, Marilyn trembled with anger.

As biological parents, failing to protect their own daughter and losing her at birth was undeniably their fault.

They could adopt another daughter to **ease** the pain of losing their own child

But what about Ms. Bennett

She ended up in an orphanage, enduring who knows how much hardship just to make it to fifteen

Finally, she returned home, hoping for some peace and stability. But those three years were nothing short of a nightmare.

She managed to get into Northcrest University, yet there wasn't **even** a simple celebration. Instead, she was framed and thrown in prison.

When **she** got out, she was skin and bones, her leg crippled, clear evidence of the abuse and beatings she must have endured behind bars.

And now, after finally surviving her release, she had to face yet another round of torment from this twisted family.

Normally, Willow couldn't stand bird's nest soup, she called it "bird spit and wouldn't touch the stuff.

But now that there was only one bowl left, meant for Ms. Bennett, suddenly Willow wanted it.

There's no way Mr. David and Madam Alice didn't know Willow hated bird's nest soup. They knew, yet they still chose to favor **her**. completely ignoring the fact that their **eldest** daughter had lost a finger and was still in the hospital

That poor girl must have the worst luck imaginable to have been born into the Bennett family.

As a mother herself, she couldn't even imagine, if her own daughter had been put through something like that, it would break her heart.

The mix **of** sympathy for Lauren **and** anger toward Bennett family boiled inside her, overwhelming her with emotion.

Marilyn nearly dumped the scalding hot **food** from the thermal container right onto David's cruel, arrogant face.

But her daughter needed money for school, and she relied on her job with the Bennett family. Gritting her teeth, Marilyn lowered her gaze and swallowed her anger.

Willow's eyes gleamed with malice, and no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't hide the smug smile tugging at her lips.

She didn't even like bird's nest soup, but she'd sooner feed it to a dog than let Lauren have a single bite.

Did Marilyn feel bad for Lauren?

Well, today she'd make sure that meddling old hag lost her job because of Lauren, then they'd see if she still cared about Lauren or if she'd start worrying about herself.

With that thought in mind, Willow opened her mouth, ready to stir the pot.

Just then, a loud bang echoed through the room, **startling** all four people inside.

Their hearts racing, they instinctively turned to look; a shattered vase lay scattered across the floor in the middle of the living room. Standing on the second-floor landing **was** Elliot, his expression cold and unyielding as he stared directly at Willow.

Caught under his piercing gaze, a flicker of panic flashed across Willow's face. She quickly wiped away the smug grin been wearing moments ago.

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Elliot shot her a frosty glare before stepping onto the staircase. Each step he took carried a powerful intensity, his presence commanding the room.

His aura **was** overwhelming; even David and Alice **stood** frozen, momentarily intimidated.

With each steady, forceful step, Elliot seemed to pound the floor like a hammer, tightening the tension in the air.

He stopped right in front of Willow. Without a word or hesitation, he snatched the bowl of bird's nest soup from her hands.

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Chapter 31 Chains of Blood and Pain

The bowl shattered, sending shards flying and soup splattering in every direction.

"Ah!" Willow screamed in shock at his sudden outburst, clutching tightly to Alice's **waist**.

"What were you just laughing about?" Elliot's sharp gaze locked onto Willow's face. "Well? Speak up!"

Willow trembled even harder. "Elliot... I wasn't laughing."

Alice, both startled and furious, snapped, "Elliot, have you lost your **mind**? You're scaring Willow!"

+8 Pearls

Elliot stared directly into his mother's eyes. "Mom, is Willow the only one you care about? Isn't Laurie your daughter too? Last night, you pushed her so hard she felt like the only way to repay you for giving birth to her was to cut off her own finger. But it doesn't seem like you care at **all**!"

Alice's face paled at his words. Stammering, she muttered, "I... Of course I care..."

Her voice was so faint, like a whisper carried by the wind, utterly unconvincing.

Elliot roared, "If you really care, then why, knowing full well that Willow doesn't even like bird's nest soup, would you still give it to her instead of saving it for Laurie?"

"Laurie's skin **and** bones right now, Mom. **Can't you** see that? Don't you know who actually needs the nutrition more?"

"Do you have any idea what Laurie has lost? It's not just a finger... there's also...."

His voice faltered, choking back the words. The memory of what Jeffrey had told him last night, that Laurie's left kidney was missing, stabbed at his heart like a knife.

Laurie's only twenty-three. She's too young... Five years in prison, a broken leg and now she's lost a kidney. Her future, can see how hopeless it is from here.

Elliot's bloodshot eyes burned with anguish. "Mom, Laurie is your own flesh and blood. Can't you just show her a little kindness! Just.. pity her, for once?"

Alice stood frozen, speechless. Guilt washed over her face, and tears began to **spill** down her cheeks

"That's enough!" David suddenly barked, his expression dark **and** thunderous.

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Chapter 32 Twisted Lies and Dark Plans

+8 Pearls +8

"Watch your tone! Is that any way to speak to your mother? What did I do to deserve this? Having a daughter like Lauren with such a rotten character, David spat bitterly. "**Lauren** got a twisted **heart**, **no**

Wider no one wants anything to do with her. She brought this on herself. **She** was the one who chose to cut off **her** own finger, no one forced her. Honestly, if you **ask** me, she should've cut off both hands. Then let's see if she'd still have the nerve to push someone down the stairs."

David's anger twisted his face, and the more lies he spewed, the more convinced he became they were true. Blaming Lauren felt easier than facing **the** truth, and he didn't even blink as he piled one accusation after another onto her shoulders.

Asher's brother, Ethan, locked eyes with their father, his face full of disappointment.

"When Mom gave birth to Laurie, she told you over and over to keep an eye on her. But you fell asleep and that's how she got kidnapped. If Laurie hadn't been taken, she would've grown up with a proper education. She wouldn't be **any** less than Willow. At the end of the day, we're the ones who owe her. So how did you twist it around to make it her fault? Was being kidnapped **as a** new-born her fault **too**? Was it her fate to grow up in an orphanage? To live like a stray dog while being born into a wealthy family? Is that what you're saying, that she deserved all of this?"

Elliot's relentless **accusations** hit like daggers, and David's head buzzed with rage, his blood boiling until it felt like it **was** about to explode.

The fire in his eyes burned hotter, a mix of fury and humiliation, the kind that comes when authority is stripped away.

“**You**... you ungrateful **brat!**” David bellowed before raising his hand **and** delivering a brutal slap across Elliot’s face.

The force of the blow jerked Elliot’s head to the side, and a thin trickle of blood crept from the corner of his mouth.

The faint glimmer of hope that had lingered in his eyes, the hope that his father might finally understand vanished completely

Laurie’s hand was broken, her leg was crippled, and she had lost a kidney; she **was** left disabled. Only then did he finally realize he needed to treat her better.

But it all seemed too **late**.

The corners of his mouth lifted slightly, curling into a bitterly ironic smile. With blood trickling down his face, that smile seemed even more striking.

As he kept smiling, his eyes could no longer hold back the surge of tears. Hot droplets streamed uncontrollably down his

face.

Laurie must regret ever coming back to this house, Elliot muttered.

After saying that, he wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth, no longer sparing David, Alice, or Willow a single glance. Instead, he turned to Marilyn and said firmly. “Marilyn, go take some food to Laurie. Whatever she wants to eat, get it for her. If anyone dares to take it from her, I won’t hesitate to cut off their hand.”

His voice was cold as **ice**, sending a chill down everyone’s spine.

Marilyn’s eyes turned red, but she nodded firmly, feeling a sense of relief. “Alright, I’ll go right away

After giving his instructions, Elliot turned and walked away without looking **back**.

Marilyn picked up the insulated food container and was about to leave when Alice called out, “Marilyn, I’ll go with you

Saying that, she gently pried Willow’s hand from her waist.

Willow's eyes widened slightly. Elliot's earlier threat was clearly aimed at her. If she had known he was standing on the second **floor** watching everything, she wouldn't have fought for the bird's nest. Now it all felt like a wasted effort.

She was furious inside, but her face remained pitifully innocent. "Mom, I want to go **to** the hospital with you to see Laurie."

Alice hesitated, her expression conflicted, but in the end, she firmly refused. "Laurie has **some** misunderstandings about **you**. You'd better stay home."

Chapter 32 Twisted Lies and Dark Plans

+8 Pearls

Unable to hold back anymore, **Willow** stomped her **foot** angrily. "Ever since that wretched Lauren came back, **Elliot's** attitude toward her **has** completely changed. He actually yelled at me because of her! Dad, you have to **do** something about Lauren. If you **don't**, she'll steal Mom and Elliot's attention, and soon, she'll be walking all over me!"

Her voice was sharp and piercing, a far cry from the sweet, innocent image she usually portrayed. At that moment, she looked like a frantic peacock stripped of its feathers, desperate, pathetic, and ridiculous.

David sat on the couch, arms crossed tightly over his chest, his face dark and grim. His expression was so cold it seemed like it could freeze the air.

After a moment of silence, something seemed to click in his mind. His harsh expression softened slightly, and he spoke in a calmer tone, "Don't worry. That little brat won't be stirring up any trouble."

Willow's **eyes** brightened with excitement. "Dad, do you have a plan to deal with her?"

A sly grin tugged at the corner of David's mouth. "In a few **days**, the Brooker family from Balewood will be coming to Hoverdale to bid on the Eastgate project. If the Brooker family is determined to win that deal, even if we join forces with the Brooker family, we may **not** be able to compete. The best way to secure our place in that project... is through marriage."

Willow frowned. Dad, you're not seriously thinking about marrying Lauren off to someone from the Brooker family, are you! Marrying her into one of the top elite families in Kingston Vale isn't punishment, that's a reward! I don't agree with this."

David chuckled darkly. "Silly girl, do **you** really think I'd let that little disgrace climb above you? Word is that the Brooker family's golden boy... well, let's just say he's got some

serious issues. He has a violent temper, ruthless **ways, and**, worst of all, he's known for his twisted... tastes. Likes to break women down just to satisfy his sick desires...

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Chapter 33 Blood Ties and Broken Bonds

Willow's eyes sparkled with excitement, and a twisted smile spread across her face.

"If that's the case, then perfect!" she sneered.

With Lauren's broken body, she probably won't survive a few days under that psycho's twisted games. Saves me the trouble of dealing with her myself.

She leaned in closer to David, her voice low and urgent. "Dad, when are you planning to act? Just make sure Elliot doesn't catch on. He's been glued to Lauren's side lately. If he finds out, he'll lose his mind."

David scoffed, waving a dismissive hand. "I've got it covered. Just keep your mouth shut and act like nothing's going on."

Willow grinned wickedly. "Don't worry, I'll just sit back and wait to watch Lauren suffer, trapped in that twisted bastard's hands, begging for death but forced to keep on living."

At the Hospital

Lauren sat quietly, staring blankly out the window.

The sound of footsteps broke the silence **as** Alice and Marilyn entered the room.

Hearing the noise, Lauren turned her head. When her gaze landed on Alice, her expression turned cold and indifferent.

Alice walked to her bedside, took a seat, and looked at Lauren's pale, frail face. Her heart ached.

“Laurie, you must be hungry, Alice said softly. I brought you something-

“You’re not my mother, Lauren cut her off coldly.

Alice froze, her face stiffening. Pain twisted in her chest, but she forced herself to stay calm.

“Whether **you** accept it or not, I am your mother. That’s something that will never change.”

“You’re not, Lauren repeated firmly. “You gave birth to me but failed to raise me. Now I have repaid my debt by cutting at finger and severed ties with you. You’re not my mother anymore.”

Alice’s eyes instantly reddened, tears welling up and threatening to spilt over.

“Laurie... **do** you really **hate** me that much?” Her voice trembled. Tell me... what can I do to make you accept me?”

Lauren remained silent.

She would never accept her in this lifetime.

Seeing her silence, Alice’s heart tightened painfully. Her voice trembled as she choked back a sob.

“Laurie, please... just eat something, please? After you’ve eaten, you can be upset with me however you **want**.”

Her tone was almost pleading

Lauren spoke quietly but firmly, “Madam Alice. I’m not angry with you. I’ve repaid my debt for bringing me into this world. From now on, we’re strangers.”

—

Her voice **was cold**, distant devoid of the warmth a daughter should **have** toward her mother.

Alice felt another sharp stab in her heart. Forcing a strained smile, she whispered, “Okay... okay... you’re not angry. Just hear first, and we can talk afterward.”

“Get out.” Lauren’s voice was cold as ice, leaving no room for negotiation.

“Laurie... Alice tried one last time, desperate to reach her. But Lauren’s next words shattered what little courage she had left.

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Chapter 33 Blood Ties and Broken Bonds

With quiet finality, Lauren **said**, "I can't eat with you here."

+8 Pearls

Alice froze, as if struck by lightning. Her body swayed, her face turned ghostly pale, and tears welled up **in** her eyes. **Just** before they could spill over, she turned sharply and hurried out of the room as if running away.

Outside the **ward**, she leaned against the cold wall, covering her mouth to stifle her sobs. Yet despite her efforts, muffled cries still escaped from her throat.

She didn't know how long she had been **crying**. Only when her emotions finally settled did she glance through the window

on the door.

Inside, she saw Marilyn sitting by Lauren's bedside, carefully feeding her one spoonful at a time.

Faced with **Alice**, Lauren had been cold and distant. Yet now, sitting with Marilyn, she was smiling.

Those once lifeless eyes now held a flicker of warmth.

Alice couldn't hear what they were **talking about**. She could only see Lauren and Marilyn chanting and laughing together.

It was as if they were the real mother and daughter.

The sight pierced her heart like a knife.

For a moment, she had the overwhelming urge to barge **in**, pull Marilyn away, and take her place by Lauren's side.

But she didn't dare.

Over the

past few days, she'd come to realize the painful truth, Laurie didn't care about her anymore. **Worse** still, she didn't want her **as** a mother.

That reality was something Alice simply couldn't accept.

Laurie **was** her biological daughter, blood ties couldn't be severed so easily. No matter what Lauren **said**, how could their bond just end like

that?

Alice waited outside the room for a long time before Marilyn finally came out.

When she saw Alice still standing there, **Marilyn** looked surprised.

"I thought you'd already left, Marilyn said.

"Madam, should we head back now?"

Alice shot her a disapproving look. "You can go home first."

With **that**, she turned and reached for the door handle, **clearly** intending to go back inside.

Marilyn hesitated. "Madam, maybe we should give Ms. Bennett some rest. She's exhausted."

Alice's face darkened, "**What**? Do I need your permission to see my own daughter now?"

"I didn't mean it like that," Marilyn said softly.

"Then why are you still here? Alice snapped.

Marilyn wanted to say more, but one look at Alice's stern, warning gaze made her sigh in defeat.

With a cold huff, Alice pushed open the door and walked in.

This time, Lauren didn't ask her to **leave**,

There were some things that needed to be said face-to-face.

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Chapter 34 A Deal Sealed in Pain

Lauren knew she couldn't just **think about** herself; she had to consider Marilyn and Mia, too.

Before Alice could even **sit** down by the bed, Lauren raised **her** hand and pointed to the chair across the room.

“Sit over there.”

Alice froze for a moment. The cold distance in Lauren’s voice stung her, but she obeyed and quietly took a seat.

Before Alice could speak, Lauren locked eyes with her and spoke first.

“I know what you’re going to say,” Lauren said coolly. “If you want my forgiveness, it’s not impossible. But I have one condition. If you can meet it, I’ll forgive you.”

Alice’s **face** lit up with hope. “Laurie, whatever you need, just tell me. If it means you’ll forgive me, I’ll do anything”

voice **was** firm, her eyes steady and sincere

Her

The determination in her gaze was enough to convince

anyone

she truly

ly meant it.

But Lauren didn’t believe **a** word of it.

“Really?” she asked, her expression calm and indifferent.

Alice nodded firmly. “Laurie, **please** trust me, okay? This time, I won’t let you down again.”

Lauren stared at her, a flicker of mockery flashing across her eyes.

“Alright.”

Hearing her agree, Alice couldn’t stop a smile from spreading across her **face**. But the smile froze just as **quickly as** it appeared.

Lauren’s next words hit her like a slap.

“All you **have** to do is kick Willow out of the house and cut ties with her for good. Do that, and I’ll forgive you.”

Alice’s hand clenched tightly around the fabric of her shirt, her heart caught in a painful tug-of-war.

She looked at Lauren with pleading eyes, only to be met with Lauren's **cold**, unwavering stare.

The ward fell into **a** heavy silence,

After **a long** pause, Alice finally spoke in a dry voice. "Laurie... Willow she's been part of our family for so many years now. Your father and I have always treated her like our own daughter. If we suddenly kick her out and cut ties with her, what will people say about our family? Besides... she hasn't really done anything that terrible. Asking me to **do** that... **it's just...**"

Lauren let out a cold laugh. "If she really didn't **do** anything terrible, Madam Alice, then why did you delete that security footage?"

Alice froze, unable to utter **a** single word in defense.

"Madam Alice, stop **making** excuses for yourself. You've never cared about what people **say about** our family. After all, **five** years **ago**, when the police dragged me out of my own **graduation** party in front of every socialite in Hoverdale, you didn't care about the Bennett family's reputation then.

"The truth is, you're just playing favorites."

"Admit it! In your eyes, Willow is a treasure, and I'm just a weed."

Alice clutched her chest tightly, her face filled with sorrow. "Laurie, L..."

Lauren stared at Alice's heartbroken expression and felt nothing but disdain. With a faint, icy voice, she **said**, "It's fine if you **can't** do it. I expected this outcome. I never really believed you'd do anything for me.

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Chapter 34 A Deal Sealed in Pain

Tears streamed down Alice's face **as** she shook her head repeatedly.

+8 Pearls:

A voice inside her warned that if she didn't make things right this time, her relationship with Lauren would be over, for good. Suddenly, Alice stepped forward, **grabbing** Lauren's hands tightly. Her voice trembled with desperation. "Laurie, **don't** say that. Please... just give me one more chance. As long as Willow can stay, I'll do whatever you **want** me to"

Lauren remained silent.

Seeing her daughter's silence, Alice grew even more anxious. "Laurie, I know you've suffered so much. But I do love you. I just... I just don't know how to show it."

Don't know how to show it?

Willow had the biggest and nicest room in the Bennett Family. She got a 140,000 dollar s monthly pocket money. Her birthday dresses? Each one started at six figures. Everything she wore, from head to toe, was custom-made. Even her casual coffee outings easily cost her a few grand

Alice's love for Willow was loud, obvious, and extravagant.

Alice's

But when it came to Lauren? Suddenly, Alice claimed she didn't know how to show it."

What a joke.

The truth was simple: Alice never really cared.

She wouldn't cherish Alice, yet she couldn't seem to let her,

Not that it mattered anymore.

either.

Five years in prison had made things painfully clear. If that wasn't enough to wake her up, nothing would be.

Lauren slowly lifted her gaze, locking her eyes with Alice for a long moment.

Her gaze was as heavy as a mountain, pressing down on Alice **so** hard that she didn't dare meet her **eyes**.

Lauren spoke slowly, her voice cold and firm. "Alright, I'll give you one more chance. Willow **can** stay in the **Bennett** family, but only if **you** climb the 999 steps of St. **Alaric's** Cathedral on your knees, bowing three times at each step, and ask Reverend Matthew to bless for me. If you do that, I'll forgive you. How about that?"

Alice's face turned even paler than before. Her lips trembled, **and** her eyes filled with fear and hesitation.

The 999 steps at St. Alaric's Cathedral were notoriously steep and treacherous. Even for young people, climbing them. required tremendous physical effort. And now, at fifty years old, no matter how well she had maintained her appearance, Alice's body was far from what it once was.

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Chapter 35 The Price of Forgiveness

And with all that kneeling and bowing at each step, her pampered body would surely suffer, her knees **and** forehead were bound to end up bruised and bloodied.

She was the esteemed wife of the Bennett Group's **chairman**; being seen humbling her self like that would **be** utterly humiliating. If someone recorded it and posted it online, how could she ever face the elite social circles of Hoverdale again?

On top of that, Reverend Matthew **wasn't** someone you could just walk in and meet, he only granted audiences to those he deemed worthy.

If he refused to see her, all her effort would be for nothing

Weighing the pros and cons, Alice's face twisted with hesitation.

"Laurie, can we maybe... talk about a different request?"

Lauren couldn't help but let out a cold, mocking laugh. "Madam Alice, you **claim** you want my forgiveness, yet **you** keep trying to negotiate with me like this is some kind of flea market."

Alice's face flushed crimson. She lowered her head, guilt gnawing at her, her voice barely above a whisper. "Laurie... it's not that I don't want to, it's just... I'm getting older. I really can't manage a climb like **that**."

Lauren's face hardened with disappointment, her eyes glinting **with** an icy detachment. Clearly unwilling to **make** an effort. yet too proud to admit it.

"This won't work, that won't work... What exactly can you do? Are you even serious about making this right? Or did you just come here to **enjoy** the show?"

Alice was heartbroken by Lauren's sharp words, her eyes brimming with tears. Her voice trembled as she choked out, "No, Laurie... Please believe me. Just give me one more chance."

Lauren stared at her coldly, her gaze piercing straight through her. "I already gave **you** a chance and you just didn't value it. All that so-called motherly love of yours? It's nothing but empty words."

"No... it's not like that.

Alice shook her head desperately, her **emotions** on the verge of breaking down.

“Laurie... one last time. I promise, this is the last chance. Just tell me what you want. Whatever it is, I’ll do it, I swear

Lauren closed her eyes, taking a deep breath **as** she tried to steady the storm brewing inside her.

When she opened them **again**, the cold determination in her gaze made **Alice’s** heart tighten.

“Alright, Madam Alice. Since you’re so persistent, I’ll give you one more chance. But this **is** it. If you fail me again, from that moment on, we go our separate ways. No more ties, no more chances.”

Alice, feeling **as** if she’d been **granted** a pardon, nodded repeatedly. But the flicker of panic in her eyes betrayed her unease.

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She stared at Lauren, her body tense and rigid, like she was bracing for impact.

“Tell **me**,” she urged.

Lauren met her gaze directly. “The Bennett family has **supported** Willow for twenty-three years. You’ve spent well over 14 million dollars on her, haven’t you?”

Alice froze. “**Laurie**... are you asking for money!”

Lauren didn’t bother to beat around the bush. What I want from you isn’t something you can give, except money. I **don’t** need 14 million dollars. I just want 1.4 million dollars. If you can manage that, we’ll call it even for everything **that’s** happened.”

1.4 million **dollars** wasn’t a fortune for Alice, but it wasn’t pocket change either.

Chapter 35 The Price of Forgiveness

Compared to the previous two conditions, this demand of these million dollars was the easiest for her to fulfil

Afraid **that** Lauren might change her mind, Alice hurriedly agreed, “Alright, I promise you.”

Seeing her agree. Lauren had nothing more to say. “You should go now. I’m tired.”

“Okay, **okay**... I’ll go now...”

Watching Alice's retreating figure, a mocking smile tugged at the corner of Lauren's lips.

From the very beginning, her goal had been crystal clear, she just wanted the money.

But she also knew that if she had asked for a million dollars outright, Alice would never have agreed.

+8 Pearls

Alier wasn't even willing to give her 70.000 dollars' pocket money monthly, **so** how could she possibly expect her to agree to a million?

So, she deliberately put forward we demands that Alice would find outrageous and impossible to fulfil

That way, when she finally brought up the money. Alice would agree without hesitation.

The next day. Marilyn showed up as usual to bring her food.

This time, Alice didn't come along. Instead, Mia showed up with Marilyn.

A twenty-year-old college student, Mia's eyes were clear and innocent, her whole being radiating youthful energy-

Lauren, only three years older than Mia, felt worlds apart. She was like a withered flower, long stripped of her innocence, left with nothing but weariness.

The moment Mia saw Lauren, her eyes welled up with tears.

She gently took Lauren's injured left hand in hers. Lauren's wounds weren't just limited to her fingers, her hand and arm were covered in angry welts from where David had lashed her with a belt.

The once-fresh cuts had turned purple and bruised, a painful sight **to** behold.

Heartbroken. Mia said. "The Bennett family is unbelievable. How could they hurt you like this? Laurie, **you** need to leave that **place**. Don't stay with those devils any longer

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Chapter 36 Securing a Future

Mia really cared for her, and Lauren could feel it.

During those five years in prison, not a single member of the Bennett family had visited her.

Only Marilyn and Mia had taken the time to visit her, allowing her to still feel some warmth in the world.

They were good people, so she had to protect them at all **costs**.

Lauren smiled at **Mia**, I will listen to you. Mia”

“Really?” A flash of surprise appeared in Mia’s eyes,

Yes, really” Lauren nodded.

But before I left the Bennett family I had to ensure a safe way for Marilyn and Mia. I couldn’t let Elliot use them as a bargaining chip against me again.

Thinking about this, Lauren changed the conversation’s subject and asked about Mia’s school life.

“Mia, how are your studies going?”

“Not bad. I get a scholarship every semester”

Seeing her confidence, Lauren felt relieved. “Mia, have you ever thought **about** studying abroad?”

Mia paused, a flicker of longing in her **eyes**.

But my family couldn’t afford it.

Mum had me in her forties, and my father had died when I was in elementary school. Mum had raised me alone, struggling to make ends

meet

Mom had already worked so hard to put me through college. How could I dare to dream of studying abroad?

“I don’t want to Though her words were firm, Lauren noticed the shift in her emotion

“If, and I mean if, you had the chance to study abroad without worrying about money, would you **go?**”

Lauren smiled bitterly, “Of course I would. But **where** would such an opportunity come from? It’s just a dream.”

Hearing this answer, Lauren’s heart finally calmed down..

As long as Mia wanted to go abroad, things would be easier.

As soon as I received the 1.4 million dollars, I would immediately send Marilyn and Mia abroad.

Mia could finish her studies overseas, and Marilyn could take care of her daughter,

Once they were gone, Elliot would no longer have any influence over them.

If the Bennett family refused to let me go, I would fight them to the end and leave all the money to Marilyn and Mia.

That was why she had demanded 14 million dollars from Alice.

My life had been hard enough. I couldn’t let those who **cared** for me suffer the same fate.

For the next two days, Lauren’s life was peaceful.

The morning after finishing her morning routine, Willow went downstairs for breakfast but was surprised to find that David, Alice, and Elliot were nowhere to be seen.

Willow looked at the breakfast spread on the table and asked the maid, “Are my parents and brother still in bed?”

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Chapter 36 Securing a Future

+8 Pearls

bites and then left as well.

I knew that Dad and Elliot had been extremely busy lately with the Eastgate project, leaving early and returning late every day.

But it was unusual for Mom to leave so early.

“Do you **know** where my mother went?” **she asked again.**

The maid shook her head. “I’m not sure, but Madam Alice took several handbags with her.”

Willow was even more confused.

But she didn’t dwell on it. After **looking** at the breakfast, she lost her appetite.

She went upstairs, changed her clothes, and left the house..

In a few **days**, the auction for the land in the Eastgate would take place. Most of the elite in Hoverdale would attend, and she had been invited as well. She needed to buy some new clothes **and** jewelry to **make** sure she outshone the other women.

Willow went to the most luxurious shopping mall in Hoverdale.

She walked into a high—end custom dress shop. She was a regular customer, so the staff recognized her immediately and greeted her with a smile. “Ms, Willow, you’ve come at the perfect time. We just received some limited edition dresses flown in from Geland. The designs are unique, and the materials are of the highest quality. If you wear one of them, you’ll undoubtedly be the center of attention.

Willow’s lips curled into a proud smile, like a peacock showing off its feathers. Her fingers lightly traced the exquisite dresses, her mind already imagining the envious looks of the other women and the admiring glances of the men at the auction.

The more she thought about it, the more excited she became. She finally settled on a floor—length gown adorned with shiny crystals. The skin shimmered with every movement, like a starry night sky.

The salesman’s eyes sparkled with admiration, showering her with compliments while subtly promoting other products.

“Ms. Willow, we also have handbags that perfectly match these dresses. Would you like to have a look!”

Willow, already floating on the praise, didn’t **hesitate**. Where are the bags? Show them to me.”

“This way, Ms. Willow,”

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Chapter 37 A Mother's Sacrifice

Willow followed the **sales** clerk to the handbag department.

Upon arrival, her eyes immediately landed on several luxury bags. Her pupils dilated in disbelief, "These bags..."

The salesman noticed her pause and followed her gaze. "These **are** second-hand bags that a wealthy lady brought in earlier. Are you interested, Ms. Willow!"

Willow wasn't interested; she recognized these bags.

Most of them were Hermès, limited editions from all over the world. Even the cheapest one had cost nearly a million at the time of purchase.

She knew this because these bags unmistakably belonged to her mother.

At **that** moment, she finally understood why the **maid** had mentioned **that** her mother had **taken** many bags with her when she left **the** house **earlier**. She **had** brought them here to sell them.

But why?

As the wife of the chairman of the Bennett Corporation, she shouldn't be short of money.

If she **wasn't** short of money, why did she sell her bags? And not just any bags, but the ones she usually cherished and rarely used.

Something was definitely wrong.

A feeling of foreboding washed over Willow.

Countless thoughts raced through her mind.

There had been no news of a financial crisis at home recently. Although the Eastgate project was highly competitive, with the Bennett family's wealth, they shouldn't have to sell bags to raise funds.

If it wasn't for the family or the company, then the only possible reason was...

Suddenly, **she** thought of something and quickly pulled out her phone and frantically called her mother.

The call connected, and her mother's soft voice came through. "Sweetheart, are you up yet?"

I'm up, Mom. Where are

you?

"I'm on my way to the hospital to visit Laurie. Do you need anything?"

Willow's grip on the phone tightened.

Mom had just sold her bags and was on her way to see Lauren. Is she planning to secretly give the money from the bags to Lauren?

No, I would never allow such a thing to happen!

Everything in the Lauren family was mine. That bitch Lauren didn't deserve to get a single **cent**.

"Nothing, Mom. Drive safely," Willow said calmly and hung up. She immediately dialed her **father's** number.

As **soon** as the call was connected, she blurted out, "Dad, hurry to the hospital! Mom has sold her bags and is planning to give the money to **that** bitch, Lauren."

"Willow, don't worry. I'll **go** over there right now to stop her

Willow smiled triumphantly and continued to look through the handbags and jewelry,

Meanwhile, in the **hospital**, Alice faced Lauren. This time she seemed much more confident.

Lauren, who was adept at reading people, noticed her mother's cheerful expression and guessed that the 1.4 million dollars

12:25 PM DO

Chapter 37 A Mother's Sacrifice

Although she was eager, she maintained a calm demeanor.

+8 Pearls

Alice sat by the hospital bed and lovingly held Lauren's hand. She first inquired about his health, then pulled out a **card**.

“Laurie, I told you **that** I’d do my best to fulfill your wishes. This card is worth 1.4 million dollars. Once you take it, let’s put the past behind us and never bring it up **again**.”

Lauren’s heart leapt with joy, but her expression remained neutral.

With this 1.4 million. I would no longer have to fear the Bennett family’s threats.

Just **as** she was about to take the card from her mother’s hand, the door to the hospital room was violently kicked open.

Both Lauren and Alice were startled by the sudden noise.

David rushed in, and **without** saying a word, he slapped Lauren’s hand hard, snatching the card from Alice’s **hand**.

Alice was stunned. “David, **what** are you doing?”

Why didn’t you discuss giving her money with me first?” David roared, glaring at Lauren as if she were an enemy

Alice rolled her eyes. “Oh, it’s not that much, only 1.4 million dollars. We’ve wronged Laurie over the **years**. It’s only right to give her some money”

“1.4 million dollars? Does she deserve that much? She’s good for nothing but bringing shame to our family. If she were **half** as reasonable as Willow, I might consider giving her the money. But she’s stubborn and unrepentant. She even tried to stab me once. I’ve worked hard for this money, and I won’t let an ungrateful wretch like her have it. David angrily stuffed the **card** into his pocket.

Lauren’s hand stung from the slap, but she stubbornly held back her tears and stared at her father in silence.

David met her gaze without flinching **and** sneered, “If you want the money, it’s not impossible. As long as **you** agree to a marriage alliance to secure the Bennett family’s position among Hoverdale’s elite, I’ll **give** you the 1.4 million dollars as a **dowry**. If you refuse, don’t expect a single cent.”

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Chapter 38 A Calculated Alliance.

+8 Pearls

After **speaking**, **David** dragged Alice out of the room. Alice looked conflicted, but she couldn’t resist her husband’s strength.

As soon as they left the room, Alice shook off David's grip.

"Why are you being so hard on Laurie? If we give her the 1.4 million dollars, she'll let go of the past. We can still be family. Why do you insist on opposing her?"

"It's not that I **want** to fight her. It's that she doesn't really see us as a family. She once dared to take **a** knife to her own father. Who's to say she won't do it again? Are you really comfortable having a ticking time bomb like her in your home? Who knows when she might explode **and** kill us all? Rather than keep such an unpredictable factor around, it's better to marry her off for an alliance. It might also help the Bennett Corporation cooperate with the Brooker family of Balewood"

"**But...**" Alice hesitated, and David continued, "The Brooker family is competing with us for the Eastgate project. We don't stand a chance. If we can use Lauren for a marriage alliance, it could lead to a win-win cooperation. If you're not willing to sacrifice her, then we'll have to sacrifice Willow. Are you willing to send Willow to **Balewood**?"

Alice shook her head without hesitation.

Willow might not be her biological daughter, but she was as dear as one. I had raised Willow with all her heart and soul and had loved her every step of the way.

I couldn't bear the thought of her precious daughter getting married far away, where she might be mistreated with no one to stand up for her

Just the thought of Willow's suffering made me heartache.

She glanced at Lauren, pale and frail on the hospital bed, and sighed deeply. In the end, she said nothing.

Inside the hospital room, Lauren heard everything and was shaking with rage. She clenched her fingers so tightly that her fingernails dug into her palms,

I never imagined that my biological father could be so heartless, treating me like a commodity to be traded for business gain

Madam

Alice, who begged for forgiveness just a few days ago, now chose to sacrifice her own daughter to protect Willow.

How ironic. How hypocritical.

After a while, she forced herself to calm down.

I wanted to **send** Mia abroad, I would **need** money.

But now, money was exactly what I lacked.

What could I do?

In my current situation, it seemed that the only option was to comply with David's agreement.

Maybe for someone in this position, a marriage alliance wasn't the worst way to escape the Bennett family.

Although I didn't know much about the Brooker family from Balewood, no matter how difficult they might be, they couldn't possibly be worse than the Bennett family.

Leaving the Bennett family and securing a 1.4 million dowry would allow me to send Marilyn and Mia abroad. Once they were safe, the Bennett family would no longer have any influence over me.

In a way, it was a win-win situation.

However, the thought of letting others decide her fate made her feel suffocated.

Lauren got out of bed and limped out of the room, heading for the stairwell to get some fresh air.

Meanwhile, in the stairwell, a voice came out.

Chapter 38 A Calculated Alliance.

+8 Pearls

business and establish a strong foothold in Hoverdale. It would also allow for smoother business between Balewood and Hoverdale. We're not the only ones interested. Many elite families in Hoverdale are vying for it, especially the Bennett and Gray families. The Bennett family in particular has proposed a marriage alliance for mutual benefit. What do you think...

The man didn't answer; he just **gave** his assistant, Josh Blake a cold look.

Josh immediately fell silent and made an "okay" gesture.

"Do you have any further instructions, President? If not, I take care of some paperwork."

"Go ahead," the **man** replied, his voice calm but commanding,

Josh left.

The man leaned against **the wall and** lit a cigarette.

The stairwell was eerily quiet, so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

Lauren had thought the area was empty, but as she entered, she realized that someone was there.

Hearing her footsteps, the man looked up.

Their eyes met, one **standing on** the higher stairs, the other below.

For a moment, Lauren was stunned.

The man was dressed in a black suit, tall and imposing. His face was like a meticulously crafted work of art, with sharp features and deep, mysterious eyes that resembled the night sky.

He stood still, radiating an aura of power that was both intimidating and awespiring.

This stranger was strikingly handsome, surpassing even Elliot and Kenneth, who were considered to be of the highest caliber in appearance.

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Chapter 39 A Feeling Encounter

Lauren was stunned for a moment but quickly regained her composure.

She had just wanted to find a quiet place to be alone for a while, never expecting anyone to be in the stairwell.

She considered turning back, but she had already entered.

After all, it was only a stranger. There was no need to think about it.

With this thought, Lauren relaxed. She supported her heavy legs and slowly descended the stairs.

As she passed the man, the smoke from his cigarette wafted towards her, its strong, pungent scent entering her nostrils and **causing** a brief wave of dizziness.

Lauren stopped and looked at the man.

Coincidentally, he was also looking at her. Noticing her slight frown, he politely said, "Sorry."

He made a move to extinguish the cigarette, but Lauren stopped him. "Sir, do you have another one? Can I have a cigarette?"

The man was visibly surprised, his eyes widening slightly as he studied her.

The woman in front looked pale and tired, her eyes filled with exhaustion. It was clear that she was carrying a heavy burden.

Without a word, he took out a cigarette from his pack and handed it to her.

Thank you, Lauren said quietly, accepting the cigarette. She clumsily put it between her lips.

A faint scratching sound reached her ears, followed by the appearance of a slender, well-defined hand holding a lighter. The flame flickered in the dimly lit stairwell, casting a soft glow on both of their faces.

Lauren hesitated for a moment, then leaned forward to light the cigarette from the flame. She took a deep **drag**, the nicotine flooding her lungs. The harshness of the smoke nearly made her cough, and she exhaled quickly.

The man noticed her inexperience with smoking but said nothing and quietly withdrew his hand.

Lauren sat down on the stairs and smoked silently.

She had often **seen** men smoke when they were upset, but now that she was doing it herself, she realized. It did little to ease my inner turmoil either.

The stairwell fell silent, broken only by the occasional faint crackle of the burning cigarette and the slow dissipation of the smoke in the air.

The man finished his cigarette first, tossing the butt into a nearby trash can.

He took long strides up the stairs, his footsteps echoing in the stairwell.

Just before he stepped out, he glanced down and saw Lauren's silent, solitary figure, the faint glow of the cigarette at her fingertips.

He paused for a moment before continuing on his way.

Lauren sat in the stairwell for a long time before finally leaving.

Her mind **was in** a haze, her heart heavy with exhaustion. **All** she wanted to do was go back to her hospital room and rest.

But when she pushed open the **door**, she found someone already inside, someone she least wanted to see

He was sitting quietly by the window, the sunlight bathing him in a soft glow.

But Lauren knew better. His demeanor might seem gentle, but he was as sharp as a blade, capable of destroying lives with a single stroke.

Lucas looked up to see Lauren. He immediately stood up and walked over to help her, but Lauren deftly avoided his touch.

Chapter 39 A Feeling Encounter

Finished

Lucas's hand hung in the air for a moment before he clenched it into a fist, pretending that nothing had happened. "Laurie, where **have** you been?"

Lauren ignored him and went straight to her bed.

Lucas's expression became awkward. "Laurie, do you want some fruit? I can peel it for you."

Lauren shot him a cold look, her voice laced with irritation. "Mr. Lucas, you're a busy man. You wouldn't come **here** without a reason. Let's skip the small talk and get to the point."

Her coldness made Lucas's heart ache, but he didn't dare to beat around the bush any longer. "Laurie, did you push Willow down the stairs?"

So that's why he was here. Once again, it was Willow

Five **years** ago, in order to protect Willow, he had framed me and sent me to prison.

Now that he heard that Willow had been pushed down the stairs, was he here to defend me again?

Yes, I did it."

Lucas had expected Lauren to deny it and to explain herself. But she didn't. She admitted it outright.

He looked at her in disbelief.

However, Lauren just stared back, her eyes filled with mockery. "So how does Mr. Lucas want to punish me this time? Send me back to prison? For how long? Five years? Or ten!"

Each word cut into Lucas's **heart** like a **sharp** blade.

He felt like something was stuck in his throat, leaving him speechless for a long moment .

"Laurie, we grew up together. You know that I would never do this to you

Lauren was speechless.

If I hadn't spent five years in prison, I might have believed him

no matter how sweet his words were, I would never trust him again.

But now, no

I didn't want to see him, and with his ambiguous words.

Send Gifts

No data found.

Chapter 40 The Breaking Point

#Finished

"If Mr. Lucas is not here to **send** me back to prison, then you can leave. If you want to see me, I'm ready **to** face you anytime."

Lucas's heart ached. "Laurie, I just came to check on you."

Lauren remained icy. "I don't need it."

Her repeated refusals pushed Lucas to the edge of his patience.

He took a step forward, his eyes filled with desperation and pain. "Laurie, what do I have to do to make things right between us? Can't you see how much I care for you? Ever since you got out of prison, I've made time to visit you whenever I could. But you keep pushing me away. What do **you** want from me? Just tell me!"

Lauren finally looked at him directly, her **gaze** like two icy blades. "I spent five years in prison for a crime I didn't commit. and yet you, the lawyer who used fabricated evidence, are the one who feels wronged? Mr. Lucas, you studied law. Don't you know how important innocence is to a person?"

Lucas's face turned pale, his heart bitter.

I didn't want it to be like this, but I had no choice.

Willow had helped him. If it wasn't for her financial support during college, he wouldn't have graduated.

This alone showed that despite being a wealthy heiress, Willow was still kind-hearted and down-to-earth.

I couldn't believe that Willow would push Elaine down the stairs. But since both Mr. David and Madam Alice pointed the finger at Lauren, even if I didn't believe it, Lauren **was** the only possible suspect.

He looked at Lauren with sorrow, hoping that she would understand his dilemma.

His eyes were filled with helplessness and conflict. "Laurie, no matter what happened in the past, we have to move forward. Why are you holding on to the past?"

Lauren felt like she was hearing the biggest joke of her life.

Those who haven't been hurt will never understand the pain

Only now did I see Lucas for what he really was, which is a fool who would deceive me without a second thought.

I had been wrong, and yet I couldn't care. *If* I did, I was the one who was petty and clung to the past.

I hated that!

I hated that it had taken me so long to see his true colors.

If I had known he was like this, why had I worked so hard, taking multiple jobs and entering countless competitions just to earn enough money so he could focus on his studies?

I had been afraid he would worry, so I had never given him the money directly, instead anonymously funding his education.

Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that the law student I had supported would use his knowledge to send me to prison once he graduated.

And now he had the audacity to tell me to move on.

Lauren found Lucas utterly ridiculous, and she couldn't help but burst out laughing.

He claimed to care about me, but **his** real purpose was to accuse me of pushing Willow down the stairs.

When he asked that question, he wasn't looking for my explanation. He had already made up his mind.

He told me not to dwell on the past, to look forward, but I had done nothing wrong. All the accusations had been made up by him.

He was the one who had made the mistake, but he refused to admit it and instead demanded that I be the bigger person.

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Chapter 40 The Breaking Point

Finished

Who did he think he was?

What gave him the right?

As Lauren's mocking laughter filled the room, Lucas's expression grew darker. Her laughter rang in his ears, piercing and unbearable.

"Stop laughing." Lucas growled, his voice deep and filled with suppressed anger.

But Lauren continued to laugh, her eyes reddening, the hatred in her gaze sharp enough to tear through Lucas's **facade**.

"I said stop laughing!" Lucas snapped, his voice rising. He reached out and clamped his hand over Lauren's mouth, pinning her to the bed.

His eyes were bloodshot. "Why have you become **like** this? Why can't you just listen?"

Lauren struggled, but the difference in strength between them made it impossible to break free.

Lucas's hand covered not only her mouth but also her nose.

Lauren couldn't breathe, and her face quickly turned red.

Whether Lucas didn't notice her distress or simply didn't care, he held her down as if he wanted to punish her.

As suffocation set in, Lauren's vision began to blur. Just as she was about to pass out, Marilyn's voice suddenly rang out.

"Stop!"

Without hesitation, Marilyn swung a thermos flask at Lucas's head,

Stunned, Lucas let go.

But the next moment, he kicked Marilyn, sending her flying.

Lauren's heart clenched when she saw Marilyn fall. "Marilyn!" she screamed, her voice filled with fear and anger.