

The Divorce 201

Chapter 201 Right On Time

His clothes were off, and he pressed himself against me. I fought back by biting and kicking as hard as possible and screaming for help. Matthew looked like a crazed panther as he let out a chilling laugh.

You were never like this before. Weren't you the one who loved me the most? Today, I'll make sure you

enjoy it! Haha!"

"Let go of me, Matthew!" I was in despair. Nausea overwhelmed me again. I'd rather die than have him

touch me.

When he hit me again, the world started to spin.

"You don't know what's good for you. I'll love you like I used to. Chlo, I don't want it to be like this either. I don't want to hurt you. After being apart for so long, I've missed you terribly. I want to be with you!"

Crash!

With a booming sound, the door burst open from outside. I yelled, "Help me! Let go of me!"

The instinct to survive made me fight even harder. Suddenly, I felt lighter. I heard a muffled sound followed by a furious roar.

"How dare you touch her?!"

It was Atlas's voice. I quickly grabbed the dusty blanket on the bed and wrapped myself in it, sobbing. I saw Atlas relentlessly punching with his fists and Matthew's wails of agony.

I buried myself even deeper in the blanket, humiliated and violated. The pain in my heart intensified. This man had trampled my entire life, and even after leaving, I couldn't escape his torment.

The sounds of Matthew's cries grew weaker. I softly called out, "Stop!"

I feared Atlas might beat Matthew to death, and he'd have to pay with his life. Matthew wasn't worth it.

Allas stopped and looked at me. His once handsome face was now dark, resembling the devil emerging from hell.

Those narrow, profound eyes gleamed with an icy chill. Matthew struggled to get up, but Atlas kicked him

hard, and he fell unconscious.

Then, Atlas removed his coat and wrapped me in it, pulling me into his arms. He wiped away the blood under my nose, and I completely broke down.

"I want to go home!" I gritted my teeth, my voice barely intelligible.

He held me, standing up and carrying me downstairs. In the narrow living room, a crowd stood in the dark.

Dylan! Take care of it!" Atlas gave the order, and the sounds of doors closing could be heard down the hallway

I closed my eyes. I could never return here.

Atlas carried me back to Amethyst Apartments. He placed me by the bathroom door and gently said, "Go wash up. I be right outside"

I nodded, watching him turn away. I turned on the shower and let the water flow over me. When I emerged, he was waiting outside with a bag of ice.

Then, as he gently applied it to my face, he asked softly, "Does it still hurt?"

I remained silent. The anger I felt toward him dissipated the moment he burst in. Yet, I still sensed an unspoken despair. I thanked him for rescuing me, but how long could he protect me?

"I'm sorry! It's my fault!" There was a trace of guilt in his eyes.

I stared blankly at the ceiling, not speaking. I honestly didn't know what to say or how to say it.

"Are you angry with me? I shouldn't have left you alone!" His eyes were full of regret and restraint.

"You've done a lot. I have no reason to be angry with you." I sounded distant as I said, "You should go back. I need to pick up my daughter."

"I want to be with you." His gaze was filled with reluctance, and his tone was gentle.

Chapter 202 Narrowly Escaped

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"I want to be with you." His gaze was filled with reluctance, and his tone was gentle.

2 his urgency evident. "I can't let you go alone. I'll take you to pick up your daughter, and then you can spend some time with her. I'll step out for a moment, but I'll be back."

I stood up, gritting my teeth. Fear still ran through me, and my body shook. I got dressed, and he walked me downstairs to his car. We drove to Ivanna's house to pick up my daughter.

Ivanna seemed surprised. Her eyes locked onto my face, and she knew something had happened. She hesitated to ask in front of Ava.

I put on a forced smile, took my daughter's hand, and told Ivanna, "We'll talk when there's time."

She nodded, making a gesture indicating a phone call. I nodded, amusing Ava as we descended the stairs. Ava was already exhausted and fell asleep in my arms shortly after.

When we exited the car, Atlas picked her up and carried her back to her room. He kissed me gently and said, "Wait for me. I'll be right back!"

He swiftly went downstairs and disappeared into the night.

I sat by my daughter's bedside, looking at her lovely, smiling face. Even in her dreams, she smiled. My love for her ran deep. I gently held her tiny hand, a tear falling onto the back of it.

The journey ahead was still long, and we relied on each other as mother and daughter.

I switched on the nightlight and quietly left Ava's room. Only then did I realize my bag was nowhere to be

found, and I was unable to make a call.

I sat on the couch, clutching my head. Sure enough, Atlas returned in no time, holding my handbag.

He pulled me into his arms, gently patting my back. "I'm sorry, it's my fault."

"It's not your fault. You've done so much for me." I spoke wearily, "How'd you know he took me?"

"I told Dylan... Oh! He's my assistant. I had him take Stella back first. But when he came out, he saw Matthew storming out in a rage. You had just gotten into a cab. Matthew got into his car and went

straight in your direction.

"He was worried, so he followed while calling me. I happened to be on my way out." He explained briefly.

"He got footage of us, right?" I inquired.

"Yes!" Atlas nodded. "I was too careless. As soon as I let you go, I realized something was wrong and had

Dylan take his phone, deleting everything from it."

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closed my eyes weakly, feeling exhausted. If he had been a few minutes late, I might have fallen into a

temble situation.

He stayed with me for the night, and I must have been both frightened and tired because I ran a fever in the middle of the night. He wanted to take me to the hospital, but I just gritted my teeth and took a couple

of ibuprofen.

By morning, the fever had subsided. However, Atlas had already left. The store-bought breakfast on the table was still warm. It seemed he hadn't been gone for long.

Ava said the pancakes this morning were delicious. I glanced at the label on the pancakes, and it was from the Imperial Kitchen, known for its expensive breakfasts. No wonder she said it was good.

I noticed my car had already been brought back and parked outside. I had no idea what he had done all night. Melanie and the others did not cause a scene like I thought they would.

This surprised me a bit. I had glanced at Matthew's battered body, and he took quite a beating. He was injured in the house we were in before so Melanie must have suspected me. Somehow, she hadn't shown up. There had to be a reason for this.

Chapter 203 A Surprising Gift

In the following days, Atlas would visit my home in the evenings whenever his schedule allowed, always arriving after Avb had gone to sleep.

I had been curious about Matthew. There had been no news of him, as if he had vanished. The sudden calm left me somewhat uneasy, but I didn't dare bring it up with Atlas.

Things at the company were running smoothly, thanks to Grayson. Everything seemed to fall into place with him in the marketing department, and he and Ryan worked together seamlessly.

Stella called a lot, but I always made excuses and avoided meeting her. After the incident at the party, I knew her true intentions. Engaging in constant mind games with her was exhausting.

Today, I returned home early, went to the supermarket, and bought a bunch of groceries. Then I picked up my daughter, and while playing with her, I prepared several dishes. It had been a long time since I had put

this much effort into cooking.

Ava ran around and asked me, “Mommy, are you inviting someone over for dinner? Is it Uncle Ryan again

or Aunt Ivanna?

I looked at her adorable face. “Why do you ask?”

“Because we usually don’t eat that much!”

I chuckled, feeling a bit guilty. I resolved to make our days together even better from now on, no matter what. With the dishes prepared, I called Atlas.

He sounded a bit surprised when he answered. “Is something wrong?”

“Do you want to come over for dinner? I’ve already cooked!” I knew ATL Empire was close to my place. I wasn’t really expecting him to come when I made the call.

His voice sounded delighted. “Sure, I’ll be right there!”

With that, he hung up.

Then, I told Ava, “Mommy is inviting a friend over for dinner!”

She looked at me and asked, “Why?”

“He always helps me with my problems, and I can’t be ungrateful. We must remember to show gratitude. when others do something for us! It’s called repaying kindness!”

“Okay, I’ll remember that, Mommy!” She ran off to her room, holding her doll.

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laughed when he arrived quickly with a box. His foot must have been on the gas pedal the whole time. The large box he brought was beautifully wrapped, but I had no idea what it contained.

He looked around the living room and asked, “Where’s the little princess?”

I pointed upstairs. He smiled and quickly kissed my cheek.

Just then, Ava descended slowly down the stairs. She was timid and didn’t dare to rush down. As she reached the last few steps, she suddenly spotted Atlas and stared at his face in amazement.

Atlas walked over to her and asked, “Are you Ava?”

She looked at me, feeling a bit awkward. After all, apart from Matthew, Ryan was the only other man she

knew.

“Why aren’t you talking to him?” I asked softly, not blaming her.

After hesitating for a moment, she finally responded cautiously. “Hello, Mister! How did you know my

name is Ava?”

Atlas and I chuckled. He gently lifted her from the stairs, even spinning her around in the air. Ava suddenly became ecstatic, giggling and laughing. Then he walked over to the couch and set her down before handing her the big box. "Open it up."

Ava still had a smile on her face as she looked at him and asked, "Is this for me?"

"It's for you!" Atlas even mimicked her tone.

Ava glanced at me, seeking my approval. "Mommy, can I open it?"

"Of course you can. It's a gift from Uncle Atlas!"

Holding the bulky box, she wobbled over and handed it to me. "Mommy, open it!"

I smiled, looking at Atlas. I had no idea what was inside the box. When I tore off the wrapping paper, I saw two limited-edition Barbie dolls with different heads and interchangeable outfits. They were jaw-dropping.

My daughter was stunned, her eyes wide with amazement as she stared at the dolls in the box. She

looked just like a miniature version of them, equally stunning. A pang of sorrow rose in my heart, and my

eyes grew misty. These were the gifts her dad had never given her.

Do you like them, princess?? Atlas crouched to look at her, and she couldn't be happier.

Ava was so excited that she covered her mouth, let out a scream, and hugged his neck before quickly

kissing him on the cheek,

Chapter 204 Happiness Is Simple

During dinner, Ava chatted away, expertly buttering up Atlas. “Uncle Atlas is the best!”

Atlas was delighted and indulgent. “Why is that?”

“You brought Barbie dolls. Now I have a family! There’s a Barbie mommy and two Barbie sisters!” She looked at Atlas. “They’re a family, and I don’t want Barbie Daddy. He’s mean! I want you, not Daddy!”

Atlas was charmed, showing no signs of minding her words. He even fed her.

After the meal, I cleaned up as he and Ava played in the living room. I had never imagined he would get along so well with her, speaking to her in a patient and child-friendly manner.

While playing, Ava suddenly remembered something. She hurried over to Atlas, pulling a piece of candy from her pocket. With great solemnity, she unwrapped it and offered it to Atlas. In her sweet voice, she said, “This is my repayment! Mommy says we should repay kindness!”

That night, she played until very late. I bathed her and put her to bed. Reluctantly, she asked, “Uncle Atlas, will you come again tomorrow?”

Atlas turned the question back on her. “Do you want me to?”

“Yes! I want you to visit every day. Uncle, will you protect Mommy?” She blinked her big eyes earnestly, looking at Atlas, waiting for his answer.

I hadn’t expected her to ask such a question. I couldn’t fathom what was going on in her little head.

“I will! I’ll protect you, too, my little princess!” Atlas’s reply was endearing.

Ava cheered. After her bath, she clung to him for a long time before finally falling asleep. As I nestled into Atlas's embrace, he said, "You've raised Ava so well."

"Next time, don't buy her such expensive toys." I reminded him. I knew that the set of dolls was quite expensive.

"A daughter should be raised in comfort!" He pinched my nose. "You don't understand!"

I was speechless, and finally asked, "Do you like kids?"

He didn't answer immediately, and it was a while before he responded, "I don't know. I just like being here.

It feels like home."

His words stirred something in me. They touched on the hopes deep within me. Suddenly, I thought of his parents and how they had both passed away, but I didn't dare to ask.

Stella had mentioned that it was a sensitive topic for him.

That night, we went to bed early. Softly, I said, "It would be wonderful if things could stay like this forever. Worry-free, just peacefully living our days."

His handsome face beamed. Suddenly, he hugged me tightly. Everything happened naturally, as if it were meant to be this way from the start. He caressed me tenderly, leading me to the peak of pleasure.

Afterward, I gradually regained my senses. I found myself reluctant to leave his embrace.

Whenever I was with him, my emotions surged like an unstoppable force. But once I returned to reality, I felt somewhat dizzy. A sense of loss and melancholy washed over me. I didn't know what we were.

However, I wasn't alone with him in my life, and I felt more fulfilled. This contentment was my only refuge from my worries these days. I even thought I didn't care about whoever he might belong to in the future.

For now, he was mine. With that in mind, I snuggled deeper into his arms, listening to his heartbeat and feeling his breath. He stayed with me through the long night, consoling my lonely soul.

I wished for days like this to continue. I didn't want to wake up, even if it were a dream. Alas, things never

quite went as planned. Eventually, someone else appeared before me.

Chapter 205 There Must Be Someone Else

Morning came, and as the first batch of aluminum-framed windows had arrived, I sent Ava to daycare early. Then, I drove to the warehouse. Before I could finish inspecting the goods, I received a call.

It was from that sharp-witted woman I met last time, inviting me to a suburban club. After entering the address into the navigation system, I realized it was on the border of the neighboring city. It was a long way from here.

I had a feeling the person I was meeting was not her, Someone else must be involved. I debated whether or not to tell Atlas about this as I rushed toward the location.

Ultimately, I decided against it. I still didn't know their intentions for wanting to meet me. Why worry him. unnecessarily? Besides, I was selfish. I feared losing him, even if it meant being far away from him.

When I arrived at the club, my suspicions were confirmed. There stood Atlas's aunt, whom I had met once from a distance. The sharp-witted woman introduced her as Mrs. Celine Pierce.

Perhaps it was the Pierce family genes, but his aunt was undeniably beautiful. She was tall and exuded an air of authority. Stella was right—she was formidable, and there wasn't a trace of warmth about her.

Her every move exuded a cold aloofness, from her hairstyle to her eyes to her clothing. When she saw me, she squinted and raised an eyebrow. "Have a seat."

I sat beside her on the sofa, pretending to be calm despite my nervousness.

"Do

you

know why I asked you here, Chloe?" Her tone was simple and unassuming. I suspected this was her most restrained demeanor. However, her question was tricky, making it difficult to answer.

It would imply I had done something wrong if I said I knew. Yet if I said I didn't know, she would see me as evasive. I looked at her, remaining silent. It wasn't out of disrespect, but I didn't know how to respond.

Fortunately, she didn't press the issue. She calmly produced a stack of photos and slowly flipped through them as if I didn't exist. Her attitude toward me was one of disdain.

She looked at me after going through the thick stack of photos. Then she handed the images over. "The shots are quite good, worthy of a professional. Take a look for yourself."

accepted the stack of photos, puzzled. As my gaze fell on the first one, my head seemed to buzz and

spin.

The photos depicted Atlas and me in passionate embraces. There were moments of our farewell at my doorstep, moments of him opening the door, gazing at the moon together,

villa late at night.

and carrying

myc

my child into the

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There were also pictures of my parents and Ava, captured from various angles, at her daycare, holding hands with her grandma, dining out, or even on a bus...

The child is lovely. She looks very cute!" Celine remarked. "I adopted my daughter when she was just this big. Back then, she was adorable and obedient, with beautiful eyes. I raised her on my own. It wasn't easy,

but it's been quite fulfilling."

I didn't understand the purpose behind her sharing this with me. However, I understood when she mentioned that a professional took the photos. She was subtly implying that her methods were

professional.

I began to regret not telling Atlas before coming here.

“So, ever since I adopted her, I’ve arranged for her future to serve my own.” It seemed that what Stella

said was true. From the day Celine adopted her, she had a purpose in mind.

“You’re a clever woman!” She looked at me, meeting my eyes directly. Her eyes held a haze of unreadable

emotion, but there was still a chilling light.

I clenched the stack of photos tightly, my heart pounding.

“I’m not as clever as you make it sound. Mrs. Celine, please be direct with me. I might be a bit slow.”

She suddenly laughed. Her smile was unexpectedly beautiful, with rosy lips and bright teeth. Her eyes were charming, but it sent a shiver down my spine.

Chapter 206 A Strong Woman

So, you understand what I meant when I called you clever, Celine said. A moment later, she dropped her smile. “Leave Atlas.”

“You should ask his opinion first,” I replied firmly.

I don’t need to ask him. He will accept it if you leave,” Celine spoke confidently, “You’re intelligent, kind, patient, and ambitious. I see great potential in you and can help expand your company to achieve your goals. I can also support your daughter’s education at any overseas institution you choose, but he can’t.”

“Why?”

My question annoyed her. “Why? He’s not an ordinary person. Atlas wants to head ATL Empire, so he must adhere to the family rules. Even without Stella, the family would have complete control of his life.

“He has no privileges or freedom of choice!” Her words were ruthless, “He can’t forget Annalise Synder, even if he loves you, a divorcee with a daughter. Atlas was madly in love with Annalise. Ultimately, he only has two options: whether to give up or compromise.”

Hearing Annalise’s name made me uneasy. I wondered if she was the same woman Stella had

mentioned. It was evident she had a significant connection with Atlas.

Celine continued, “You have no choice either. The Pierce family doesn’t accept outsiders inheriting our wealth and assets. You can propose your terms, and I’ll fulfill them.

She spoke confidently. I was just ordinary, so her demeanor was even more intimidating.

“You can consider your terms and keep these photos as a souvenir. I believe you’ll like them. Kenzie, show her out!” Celine got up and headed upstairs without letting me speak

Kenzie was t

the sharp-witted woman who had called me to the Design Division. It seemed Celine had investigated me for a while now. I knew I couldn’t escape the situation.

My mind began to clear as I left the club. Celine’s words carried significant information, and her intentions were clear. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have pictures of my family. She also emphasized having

professionals take them.

Celine gave me the pictures as a reminder, not just casually. That woman was ruthless.

Some of the pictures were candid close-ups of Ava and my mom. They included shots inside the kindergarten, on a public bus, and even inside my home. The person who took them seemed to be everywhere, which was unsettling.

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pulled over to the side, too agitated to drive. I took the pictures and examined them again, growing increasingly uneasy. I knew Celine had experience with this. She wanted to remind me of her intentions constantly

I tried to piece together what I knew about Celine, but I had little to go on apart from Stella's little information. However, my gut feeling told me she was ruthless.

I couldn't tell Atlas because it could hurt both sides if he confronted her. After all, Atlas had just taken over the ATL Empire, and his foundation was not yet stable.

Despite Atlas taking over, Stella said Celine was still pulling the strings. It indicated that Celine's old network was formidable and loyal. I needed to gather more information about her history with ATL Empire.

I sat in the car to calm my emotions and thoughts. Finally, I started the car and headed back. Suddenly, I sensed a car following me and wondered if it was someone Celine had hired.

Chapter 207 Another Abduction

I deliberately slowed down to observe the vehicle behind me. After some distance, I was sure the SUV was tailgating me. I wanted to see who was in it, so I stopped at a convenience store to buy a water bottle.

I sipped the water and watched the SUV slowly pass by. However, it had tinted windows, and I couldn't see inside. I waited until it was far ahead before returning to my car.

This time, I drove slowly and no longer saw the car following me. I relaxed and thought I might've been overly paranoid.

As I continued to drive, I came across a stretch of road along the coast. After passing through, I could get onto the highway back to the downtown area. However, I was wrong in assuming everything was fine.

The SUV darted forward and blocked my path when I reached an intersection. I slammed the brakes and quickly locked my doors. I tried to reverse, but a black sedan had boxed me in. I didn't know when that

sedan appeared.

However, two I panicked and called for someone on my phone, not even checking whose number I called. burly men with ski masks smashed my car window with fire axes. I couldn't react quickly, and the person!

called hadn't answered.

I screamed, but one of the men got into my car and covered my mouth and nose with something. Soon, I became lightheaded and lost consciousness. When I finally awoke, my head throbbed, and my mouth

was dry.

I realized my hands were tied, too. I tried to move and make a sound, but they had taped my mouth shut.

I was frightened and trembled while continuing to struggle. Eventually, I freed one of my hands and looked around. I thought I was in a small abandoned factory when I saw the scattered tools.

However, I wondered why no one was around despite the chaos. I didn't know the time and soon realized my bag was missing. I remembered calling someone before falling unconscious but couldn't remember who I called or if the person answered.

I hoped the call went through before my phone slipped from my hand. Meanwhile, I prayed I had called someone close to me. If I had called a client, it would further complicate the situation.

I tried to remember the calls I had received earlier in the morning. They were mostly to verify shipments.

If it were someone from Urban Builders, they might have hung up immediately.

Meanwhile, I speculated who might want to kidnap me. Was it Celine or someone else? Nothing added up. After all, Celine could have easily apprehended me when we met at the club. Moreover, she told me to

Celine was unlikely to do this. Perhaps it was my spontaneous visit to the club after receiving a call from the warehouse area. However, I didn't answer calls or inform anyone of my whereabouts. Matthew was the only person I might have offended. Even so, his motive wouldn't make sense.

Chapter 208 A Glimmer of Hope Amidst Despair

I realized I had been here for a while when the sunset. Still, I saw no one around. I wondered if they planned to leave me here to die. If so, it could be Celine because my disappearance would solve all her problems.

However, that would be excessive for a defenseless woman like me..

On the other hand, it didn't seem like Matthew's style. Even if it were him, his motive would be questionable. I grew increasingly frustrated but couldn't understand it.

My hope lessened as the night grew darker. If my phone call hadn't raised suspicions, someone at the daycare would have noticed my absence and contacted someone. They might even call Atlas to take Ava home.

After all, Ava got into Sunnydale with Atlas's help.

I felt slightly at ease with that thought. However, my heart ached when I imagined Ava longing for me. I never expected to end up here and bring suffering to my daughter. I thanked my lucky stars my parents weren't around to see this. Otherwise, my father's life would be at risk.

It was dark, and the silence was eerie. I could only hear rats scurrying around the abandoned factory. I looked around in fear, unable to get up because of the ropes. My shoulders ached from the awkward position. I rolled over to free one arm from under me.

I prayed someone would find me soon. I was about to give up hope when I heard a noise from outside. I felt relieved and screamed to attract attention. However, there was tape on my mouth, muffling my screams.

Thankfully, the sound grew closer. I thought someone was coming to rescue me, but I realized something -the footsteps weren't cautious or discreet. Instead, they were loud and confident. Whoever approached didn't care about being sneaky.

My heart sank as I suspected the ones approaching might be the ones who had captured me. I panicked, wondering what their intentions were.

Sure enough, I heard harsh and angry voices. I could tell there were three of them judging from their footsteps. When they arrived at the door, one asked, "Make sure there's no one around."

A set of footsteps grew distant before returning. "Don't worry, Boss. Not a soul in sight." Then I heard someone unlocking the door, followed by their approaching footsteps.

Chapter 209 Serpentine Tattoo

looked toward the door in terror. Before they reached me, the leader pointed his flashlight at me. The sudden brightness blinded me, and I couldn't see their faces. I didn't recognize their voices either.

One whispered, "What a waste of a pretty woman."

"Shut up!" A stern voice silenced them. "Get her out of here."

I was startled and saw a figure approaching me. I tried to speak, but my words came out as muffled grunts. The man picked me up, and I struggled to free myself, but he kicked me. "Stop moving!"

I looked toward the others standing in the distance. The leader was tall and muscular. They wore ski masks, so I couldn't see features besides their eyes.

I continued to squirm, and the man suddenly dropped me; I continued to make muffled cries and looked at them pleadingly. The man looked at me and then crouched to touch my face.

"Boss, are we going to kill her? That's a shame. Oh, you should have some fun with her first, then we can.

"Shut the hell up! Quit your nonsense and get moving!" the man snapped back, his eyes full of anger.

When he yanked me up a moment later, I noticed a serpentine tattoo on his wrist. I felt a wave of despair,

thinking they were planning to kill me.

The man was burly, and he carried me outside like effortlessly. The surroundings were overgrown with weeds. The dense underbrush scratched my face as he walked with me in tow.

I felt hopeless, not knowing where they were taking me. I wondered if I would ever see Ava again. I needed to know who wanted me dead and why.

Suddenly, a light shone from a distance, and I heard a familiar roar, "Put her down!"

I screamed as loud as possible, "Help me, Atlas!"

My cry sounded horrifying, but the instinct to survive gave me strength. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I yelled.

The man carrying me ran and shouted, "Scatter!"

I continued screaming as I saw the light getting closer. The tall grass scratched my face as the man ran, Suddenly, he tossed me onto his shoulder and sprinted into the thicker grass.

Gunshots echoed around us. I yelped in fear, not knowing who fired those shots. A moment later, another

Chapter 210 Who Is the Mastermind?

Suddenly, blood splattered on my face, and I lost consciousness. When I finally awoke, I smelled disinfectant and saw Ivanna's anxious eyes. "Chlo, you're awake!"

I felt pain all over, especially on my face. Still, I was relieved when I realized I wasn't dead. The man with the knife got shot, and I shuddered when I recalled his knife coming down on me. If he got shot a second

later, I would have died already.

"Thank goodness you're awake!" Ivanna exclaimed. Immediately after, she ran out of the room with teary

eyes. "Chlo's awake!"

Atlas came in, and I choked back my sobs. He hugged me, saying. "Everything's okay now."

I took some time to calm down before asking. "Who did this?"

Atlas shook his head. "The leader got away, and we're still interrogating the lackeys. I want to know who hired them."

"Who realized I went missing?" I wanted to know.

Ivanna said, "It was someone from the kindergarten. No one went to pick up Ava, and the school couldn't reach you, so Ava gave them my number. I rushed to get her, but something felt off, so I called

Mr. Atlas.

"He tracked your car to Strathmore Road. Your phone and bag were there, but someone had smashed.

your car window.”

While Ivanna spoke, Atlas observed my reactions.

I closed my eyes for a moment and then opened them. “Where’s Ava?”

“Don’t worry. My assistant is looking after her.” Ivanna answered thoughtfully.

“...want to

go home,” I said to Atlas. “I want to go home!”

After gazing at me, he told Dylan to ask the doctor about my discharge. The doctor said I was okay to leave since I only had a few cuts on my face. He advised me not to get them wet and prescribed some ointment.

It was nearly 3 a.m. when I got home. I went straight to Ava’s room, where Ivanna’s assistant slept beside

her. Ava clung to the assistant’s clothes, unaware of my presence. I quietly backed out of the room with tears in my eyes.

Atlas sat beside me when I returned to my bedroom. He asked, “Are you okay?”

I looked into his eyes and felt drained. I didn’t know who would want to kill me. My mind was in a mess of uncertainty and fear. A while later, I whispered, “I want to take a bath.”

Ill help you," he offered, but I shook my head. "No, I can do it myself."

He continued to watch me but eventually relented. "Okay, just be careful not to wet your face."

After my bath, he lay beside me and asked, "Do you want to sleep?"

"What do you want to ask me?" I knew he had questions but feared how I would react.

"Did you...see Celine Pierce today?" he asked.

"Your aunt?" I looked at him.

"Yeah." He stared into my eyes.

I nodded. "Yeah, I did. That's why I was on that road. Still, your aunt wouldn't have gone through such trouble to harm me."

Atlas pulled me into his arms. "Get some rest. We'll find out who did this."

I snuggled against him, still thinking of what had happened. I didn't know who wanted me dead and wondered if it was Matthew. However, my thoughts slipped away, and I fell asleep from exhaustion.