

Unrepairable Love / I married a man

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Allen had to hang there for ten hours. Elizabeth stood by the car, watching him teetering on the edge of the tall building. Unsure why, she didn't feel pleased.

Felix strolled over, noticing Elizabeth was deep in thought. He followed her gaze; Allen looked tiny from where they stood. Elizabeth let out a sigh.

"Why the sigh?" Felix asked.

Elizabeth frowned. "It's weird."

Felix raised an eyebrow. "What's weird?"

Elizabeth touched her chest, feeling a twinge of guilt. Could it be because Allen's getting old?

"Elizabeth, you ain't going soft, are you? Don't forget what Allen did to you!" Felix reminded her to stay sharp.

Elizabeth thought back to those hours upstairs; it was a rough ride. The kicker was that Elijah had also hurt Alexander, dragging him into this mess.

Elizabeth turned and got into the car. "Let's roll. Head back. Tell your guys not to let him croak hanging there." She glanced at Felix and added, "Use your brain; if she can't hack it, send her to the hospital or back to the Russell family."

"Chill, I got this," Felix replied.

Then Elizabeth laughed. "Sure, just go ahead and rat me out."

Felix felt awkward. *Why's Elizabeth still hung up on that hacker thing?*

Felix said, "Elizabeth, I'll hack the Tudor Group again for you. This time, it'll be clean! I'll make 'em lose three hundred million bucks!"

Elizabeth was speechless. She rolled her eyes at Felix. "And then I'll have to cover that three hundred million?"

Felix was speechless. The car went quiet.

Elizabeth and Felix exchanged a glance and both chuckled.

Elizabeth asked, "That guy's locked up, right?"

Yeah, Felix nodded.

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Elizabeth said, "I need to see him tomorrow morning."

Felix was taken aback. "No way, you can't see him now."

"I must see him tomorrow morning. Make it happen!" Elizabeth glared at Felix. For Elizabeth, "can't" wasn't in her vocabulary. It had to be done! Didn't Felix just say he could handle it and she could trust him?

Felix was silent, then finally nodded. "Alright. But, why do you wanna see him?"

Elizabeth's lips curled up, a dangerous glint in her eyes.

Elizabeth got back to the hospital at one o'clock. Just as she was about to enter the ward, she spotted someone on the bench nearby.

"Alexander?" Elizabeth called out, surprised.

Alexander looked up and saw her. He frowned. "Where'd you go?"

"Do I need to report to you?" Elizabeth pouted and pushed the door open.

Alexander tried to follow, but Elizabeth immediately blocked him at the door.

"Mr. Tudor, it's super late. Not cool for a guy and a girl to be alone." Elizabeth smiled, keeping her distance.

Alexander just pushed her aside and walked in like he owned the place. Elizabeth glared at his back, wishing she could tear him apart. She gritted her teeth. "Mr. Tudor, it's already past midnight."

"So what?" He turned to her.

Elizabeth wanted to punch him.

“Where’d you go?” He asked again.

Elizabeth plopped down on the sofa, took a bite of an apple, and replied, “I have the right not to answer, right?”

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Alexander strolled up to Elizabeth, eyeing her munching on an apple; his face a mix of emotions. Elizabeth glanced up, locking eyes with him. Alexander leaned on the back of the couch, bending down a bit. “I saw it,” he muttered.

Elizabeth paused, then looked at him. “Saw what?”

He chuckled, a dangerous glint in his eyes. Elizabeth’s gaze drifted from his eyes to his nose and lips. Alexander raised an eyebrow, his voice rough. “In the unfinished building, you and Allen.”

Elizabeth couldn’t help but look up, meeting his gaze again. “So what?” Elizabeth smirked, asking coolly, “Gonna call the cops?”

Alexander squinted, eyeing her calm face, and said, “Ms. Percy, you’re full of surprises.”

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me. Being married to you has been suffocating,” Elizabeth laid it all out. Then she added, “Why don’t you tell Esme her mom’s been kidnapped and go play hero? Oh Mr. Tudor, you’re really busy. Saving one person after another!” She stroked her chin, looking thoughtful.

Alexander sneered, “Elizabeth, I’m not a rescue team.”

Elizabeth’s face gradually turned serious. She looked at him calmly and said, “So, why are you following me?”

“I stumbled upon it, man,” Alexander replied casually.

Elizabeth’s smile was playful. “You should be chilling in the hospital. Why are you out here running around? Esme feeling down, so you went to cheer her up?”

“Is Ms. Percy jealous?” Alexander scrutinized her expression.

Elizabeth was a master of disguise; her eyes were too calm. Even Alexander, who was great at reading people, found her hard to read.

“Jealous?” Elizabeth pushed him away and sighed, “Mr. Tudor, maybe you should take a good look at yourself.”

Alexander’s expression darkened. Elizabeth glanced him up and down, then pouted, “You?”

Alexander was speechless; she was really sharp-tongued. “I’m going to rest now. Leave my room,” Elizabeth moved towards the bed. But Alexander had no intention of leaving.

“Don’t you have your own room?” she asked.

Alexander just wanted to look at her a few more times.

Elizabeth was really annoyed. “If you don’t leave, then I will.”

Alexander raised an eyebrow and said, “I’ll go.” No way he was letting her leave her own room. Elizabeth stared at him, finding him odd.

Alexander walked to the door, looked back at her, and reminded her, “Be safe.”

“I will. Let Esme know I ain’t in a competition with her for you, so quit coming at me.” After all, all these dangers were brought to her by Alexander.

Alexander didn’t say anything, just reached out to touch his arm. Elizabeth saw his bandage was stained with blood. He was seriously injured. Elijah really dared. Didn’t Elijah know he stabbed Alexander? she thought.

The door closed, and the room quieted down. Elizabeth picked up her phone and saw a message from Felix: [It’s done. You can go directly.]

In the morning, Elizabeth had gone out early. Rose came to bring her breakfast but couldn’t find her. Elizabeth left a message for Rose: [Get me discharged. Feeling great. Off to play!] Rose saw the message and was furious.

At the Police Department, Elizabeth sat in the conference room, tapping the table with one hand, legs crossed, not ladylike at all. Plus, she was dressed in black today, looking like a thug. The conference room door opened, and Elizabeth saw the person who kidnapped her yesterday.

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“Go on, get in there. This is the person you need to meet,” Elijah got shoved inside. Elizabeth gave Elijah the once-over, and he stared right back. Just yesterday, Elijah was all fired up, but now he looked like he’d been through the wringer.

“Man, this place really does a number on people!” Elizabeth checked him out from head to toe, then pointed to the chair in front of her, signaling him to sit.

“What do you want from me?” Elijah stayed standing, still stubborn as ever.

“Let’s chat,” Elizabeth flashed a smile.

“Look at you, all smug and stuff!” Elijah scoffed. Elijah had his own swagger; he was a top-notch assassin. Too bad he ran into Elizabeth.

“Only one of us gets to walk out of here, and since I’m still breathing, why can’t I smile?” Elizabeth’s grin widened. Elijah glared at her, feeling his blood boil.

“Yo, I’m here today to drop a bombshell on you...” Elizabeth’s face turned serious. Elijah stared, waiting for her to spill the beans.

Elizabeth tossed a dagger onto the table and said, “Before we talk, cut yourself first.” She blinked, looking all innocent. Elijah was floored and thought, ‘Elizabeth wants me to cut myself? What’s her deal?’

“Revenge for Alexander?” he asked.

Elizabeth shook her head. “He’s not worth it. Stop dragging Alexander into this. I’m my own person.” She wasn’t Alexander’s wife, not Mrs. Tudor. Just Elizabeth! She wasn’t here for Alexander’s sake, but for her own.

Elijah stayed quiet, and Elizabeth knocked on the table, urging, “Come on. Cut yourself.”

“Sir!” Elijah yelled toward the door. ‘Elizabeth’s threatening me in a police station? This has to be a joke!’ he wondered. Elizabeth crossed her arms, looking like she didn’t care how much he shouted. No one was coming. Elijah was speechless. He knew if he got caught, this would be Elizabeth’s world. The Percy family might not be one of the big four, but they had clout in the city.

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Having connections was a given. Plus, he was the one who kidnapped her first.

“Want to see Glory M?” Elizabeth smiled at him.

Elijah frowned, his tone heavy and cautious. “You know Glory M?”

“I do, and I can have her come see you if you cut yourself,” Elizabeth pointed to her arm.

Elijah was skeptical but didn’t move, sarcastically saying, “You think Glory M is that easy to meet?” Elizabeth didn’t mind his sarcasm. She slowly stood up, sighing, “Wouldn’t it be smarter if you handled it? You can dial down the intensity. If I step in...” She reached for the dagger.

Elijah grabbed it first. Elizabeth paused, then looked at him. She wasn’t known for being gentle. If she did it, he might lose an entire arm. Elijah knew that no matter what, he had to cut himself. There was no getting out of it.

He picked up the dagger and slashed his own arm. His clothes and flesh split open, and bright red blood gushed out.

Elizabeth clapped. “What a man!” She leaned on the table with both hands, smiling at Elijah, seductively saying, “You admire Glory M, don’t you? What if I told you that I am Glory M? How would you react?”

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Elijah busted out laughing, a loud, almost obnoxious laugh. “Just you?” He gave Elizabeth the once-over, his eyes dripping with doubt and sarcasm.

Elizabeth arched an eyebrow and shot back, “Yeah, just me.”

Elijah snorted. “You don’t even know which way is up. You think you can pull off being Glory M?” And teaming up with a chick? No way; he’d rather bite the dust.

Elizabeth just stood there, speechless. She pursed her lips, got up, and said coolly, “Believe it or not. Quick question: you wanna bounce or what?”

Elijah looked at her, totally puzzled.

“I’ll get you out, and you can team up with me. Deal?” Elizabeth flashed a sweet smile, looking nothing like the mysterious Glory M.

Elijah stayed quiet, just watching. ‘Is she nuts, or am I losing it? She actually wants to bust me out and team up? Is she outta her mind?’

“I’m serious,” Elizabeth said, her eyes dead serious. She didn’t have any hidden agenda; she just needed a reliable bodyguard who’d take a bullet for her. Sure, she could handle herself, but you never know when things might go sideways. If Allen and Esme had targeted her once, they could do it again. Having a bodyguard was just smart. Even though Elijah had been a bit of a jerk yesterday, Elizabeth thought he was tough. If she could get Elijah on her side, he’d probably go all out for her. Plus, he kinda admired her. That’s why she was willing to give him a shot.

“How can you prove you’re Glory M?” he asked.

Elizabeth grinned and said, “How about I give you a tour of Base M?”

Elijah looked at her and gulped. She looked dead serious, no joke. He couldn’t believe it. Elizabeth greeted the folks around and then took Elijah outside. Felix waited for them, then hopped in the car and drove over when he saw them.

“By the way, what’s your name?” Elizabeth asked as she got in the car. Elijah still had handcuffs on and was in no shape to escape or hurt Elizabeth again. Plus, his arm was messed up. Elizabeth pulled out some gauze to bandage his wound.

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He said, “Elijah Nichols.”

Felix glanced back and teased, “Man, you’re lucky to have the Boss patch you up.” Elijah shot Felix a look. He frowned, totally confused. He really couldn’t wrap his head around Elizabeth being Glory M. Elizabeth finished bandaging him up. He kept staring at her, super wary. Elizabeth led Elijah deeper into Base M. The robots in Base M chimed, “Welcome home, esteemed Glory M.” Elijah froze. Elizabeth and Felix both looked at him. “What’s up?”

“You really are Glory M!” Elijah’s voice shook.

Elizabeth smiled and asked, “Why would I lie to you?”

Elijah just felt like an idiot. He had actually kidnapped the Glory M he admired the most! What had he done?

Elizabeth pointed inside. “Shall we?”

Elijah followed her closely. Elizabeth gave him the grand tour of Base M, and everything screamed that she was indeed the famous Glory M—that mysterious woman.

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The second Elizabeth spun around, Elijah hit the deck, knees first! This dude was a total 180 from the guy who’d just said, “Just you.” Elijah’s eyes were all red with regret. “Ms. Percy, I messed up big time!”

Elizabeth couldn’t care less. She waved him off like he was a fly. “Get up. Don’t be like that.”

Elijah was choking on his words. “I actually kidnapped Glory M and almost...” Elijah gulped, feeling worse with every word.

Elizabeth, though, gave him props. “You’ve got some guts.”

Elijah clammed up. He’d rather hand those guts to someone else; he didn’t want them!

“So, you down to roll with me?” Elizabeth tilted her head, arms crossed, looking all kinds of stunning.

Elijah always thought following a chick was lame. But if that chick was Glory M, he was all in!

Felix just stood there, lips tight, watching the scene, then shook his head. Oliver strolled in from outside, eyes wide at the sight of a dude kneeling in front of Elizabeth.

“What’s the deal here?” Oliver asked, jotting in a small notebook and munching on a lollipop.

Elijah glanced at Oliver and whispered, “Who’s this guy?”

“Him? He’s our hacker, Oliver,” Felix said with a grin.

Elijah’s jaw nearly hit the floor. “He’s Oliver?”

The legendary ace hacker of Base M, the brainiac, was just a young dude. ‘People say the hacker of Base M is over forty,’ Elijah said, still in shock.

“He’s 20,” Elizabeth replied.

Elijah was floored. Oliver didn’t care; everyone reacted the same way when they saw him. The whiz kids of Base M were all super young.

“What’s he do?” Oliver asked Elizabeth.

Elizabeth crossed her arms. “He’s gonna be my bodyguard.”

Even though Felix was solid, he had too much on his plate at Base M. She couldn’t have him babysitting her. She needed someone to watch her back.

“Yeah, with that build and look, he fits,” Oliver nodded. He didn’t know yet that Elijah was the one who’d nabbed Elizabeth.

Felix chimed in, “He kidnapped Elizabeth last night.”

Hearing that, Oliver’s face darkened. “What?”

Oliver was ready to smash his laptop over Elijah’s head. Messing with Elizabeth was a no-go!

“That thing’s pricey. Don’t,” Elizabeth stopped Oliver.

Oliver was fuming. “You’re lucky the Boss stopped me, or you’d be toast!”

Felix just smirked at Oliver’s attitude. Elijah looked like he was about to cry. ‘I’m screwed; I almost offed Glory M. This is gonna haunt me forever, right?’ he mused.

“So, you in or what?” Elizabeth looked at Elijah.

If Elijah wasn’t down, she wouldn’t push him.

“I’m in!” Elijah nodded like a bobblehead. He was totally in.

Elizabeth nodded. “Cool. Sign here. From now on, you’re one of my crew.”

Signing up was the last thing Elijah expected. After a bunch of paperwork, Felix even drew some blood from Elijah. Soon, the names of Elijah’s wife, kids, and family popped up on the big screen in Elizabeth’s tech room. Elijah was stunned and also kinda impressed. This Base M was no joke!

Felix gave him a heads-up, “Don’t let the fact that the Boss is a woman fool you; she’s got a ton of...”

In other words, now that Elijah was part of Elizabeth’s crew, he had to play nice. Otherwise, those tombstones haunting him... would turn into names.

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Elizabeth handled her business and then headed back to the hospital. The moment she walked into the ward, she spotted Rose sitting on the sofa, arms crossed, giving her the death stare. Elizabeth quickly put her hands behind her back and flashed a smile. “Hey, Mom.”

“Oh, so you remember I’m your mom?” Rose snapped. “Where the heck did you run off to this morning? Are you feeling any better? You know you’ve got a bunch of tests today, right? Elizabeth, you’re not a toddler anymore. Can you quit stressing me out like this?” Rose was fuming. She tossed the note Elizabeth had left onto the floor.

Elizabeth hung her head, feeling a bit guilty. “Mom,” she said softly, “I messed up.”

Yeah, she knew she shouldn’t have just left a note and bailed. Rose huffed and turned away, ignoring her. Elizabeth quickly plopped down next to Rose and said sweetly, “Mom, I really messed up. I won’t do it again. I’ll listen to you, stay put, and get all the tests done. I won’t leave the hospital until I’m all good, okay?” Elizabeth was trying to butter her up.

Rose eyed Elizabeth. A mom knew her kid best; Elizabeth wasn’t exactly known for being a goodie-two-shoes. Elizabeth was just trying to get on her good side! Rose let out a deep sigh. ‘What else can I do? Stay mad at her? That’d drive me nuts!’ she thought.

Rose gave Elizabeth a light tap on the forehead. Elizabeth closed her eyes, then opened them and laughed. “I got you breakfast. Eat up,” Rose said, still a bit

grumpy. “Your grandma and grandpa are coming later. Don’t even think about running off.”

“Got it,” Elizabeth nodded. She wasn’t going anywhere. After making sure Elizabeth finished her meal, Rose left.

Bored while waiting for her tests, Elizabeth wandered around the hospital corridor. The hospital gown she had on was a bit too big. She wore shorts underneath, and her face was stunning. Passing patients couldn’t help but take a second look at Elizabeth and smile, saying, “So pretty.” Not many people could pull off looking good in a hospital gown.

Elizabeth accidentally walked by Alexander’s ward and saw it was empty. A few nurses came out, chatting, “Mr. Tudor is really something. Even when he’s sick, he’s still working.” Yeah, shows that the high life isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

Elizabeth asked, “Did he get discharged?” The nurse immediately looked at Elizabeth and nodded. “Ms. Percy...” Elizabeth waited for their response. Yeah, Mr. Tudor said he had a project and had to go on a business trip. He left this morning. His arm was still messed up, but Alexander was off on a business trip?

Even though Elizabeth said she didn’t want Alexander involved in her mess, deep down, she was grateful. Thanks, Alexander, for not ditching me when things got rough. But won’t let it get to her, she wondered.

Elizabeth kept walking and bumped into Nolan. “Ms. Percy!” Nolan greeted her warmly. Elizabeth nodded. ‘Alexander got discharged. What are you doing here?’ To see who?

Nolan replied, “I’m here to see a friend. Mr. Tudor said he left something in the ward, so I grab it.” Elizabeth nodded and asked, “Alexander went on a business trip?” “Yeah, he went abroad,” Nolan said.

Elizabeth frowned. “His injury...” Nolan thought she was worried about Alexander and quickly said, “Mr. Tudor said he’s fine. The work abroad...” Elizabeth didn’t ask more. Nolan also checked on Elizabeth’s health and was about to leave.

After passing by, Nolan remembered something. He turned around and asked, “Ms. Percy, do you know Gabriel Fisher?” Elizabeth stopped and looked at Nolan, puzzled. “No clue. Why?” Elizabeth was surprised.

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Nolan chuckled. “No biggie.” With that, he nodded and strolled off. Elizabeth watched him go, scratching her head. Gabriel... why does that ring a bell? she wondered. Then it hit her. She’d seen that name in the ER that day. This Gabriel dude was from the slammer, some big-shot inmate, and he was in the hospital. But why the heck was Nolan asking if she knew him?

Nolan made his way to Gabriel’s room. Gabriel was chilling in bed, glued to the TV. When he spotted Nolan, he didn’t even flinch. “Having fun?” Nolan sauntered in, glancing out the window. The hospital view wasn’t half bad. Gabriel stayed silent, eyes on the screen. “Your body’s almost good to go, right? You’ll be back in the pen soon,” Nolan crossed his arms, his tone icy.

Gabriel paused, then locked eyes with Nolan. “What do you want?” Nolan stepped closer, dead serious. “I’m asking you a question. Spill it.”

“You’re just itching to find out who bailed out Alexander back in the day. How many times you gonna bug me about it? Ain’t you tired of this yet?” Gabriel snapped. “You know, so just tell me straight. Who saved Mr. Tudor?”

Nolan couldn’t buy that Esme was the hero. From what he’d seen, Esme was all about herself, always scheming. No way she’d risk it all for Alexander. Nolan’s vibe was intense, just like Alexander’s. After all, hanging with Alexander for years, he wasn’t some lightweight. Through Nolan’s eyes, Gabriel saw a bit of Alexander.

Gabriel didn’t want to lie. But Esme had him by the balls; he had no choice. He knew why he’d been in hot water with the cops lately. It was all Esme, scared he’d blab and wanted him gone!

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Plus, she had his kid. Gabriel had no leverage against her! “You guys are a riot. Keep asking, but you don’t believe a word I say,” Gabriel sneered, trying to dodge the topic. “Gabriel, someone got you by the throat?” Nolan squinted.

Gabriel cursed, “No one’s got me! Who the hell is Alexander? Ms. Russell saved him, but he still doubts it. It’s a joke! Does Ms. Russell know you keep bugging me?” Gabriel glared at Nolan. Nolan grabbed Gabriel by the neck. “Gabriel!”

“I’ll say it one last time, the one who saved Alexander was Esme! Esme’s got a scar on her back ‘cause I knifed her. I tossed her in the water, and she almost drowned!”

Nolan frowned. Gabriel’s words hit him hard. He was starting to think maybe Gabriel was right, maybe Esme did save Alexander. “If I were Alexander, I’d marry Esme right now. She risked her life for him, and he still doubts it. A guy like Alexander might as well be dead!” Gabriel spat.

Nolan socked Gabriel in the face, growling, “Mr. Tudor’s business ain’t your concern!” Nolan’s punch was brutal, knocking a tooth loose. He stood up and walked out, radiating authority. Gabriel, watching Nolan leave, slumped back on the bed. He couldn’t help but laugh, tears streaming down his face.

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Elizabeth’s phone buzzed. The news was all over it: some homeless dude stumbled upon the kidnapped Allen in some sketchy, half-built building this morning. Allen was in rough shape but had been taken home now.

Elizabeth squinted and then chuckled. What kind of homeless guy would wander into such a random, unfinished building for no reason? She didn’t need to guess; she knew this had Alexander written all over it.

Elizabeth opened her blacklist, thinking about unblocking Alexander’s number. But after a moment, she decided against it.

In the future, when Alexander and Esme were together, Allen would still be his mother-in-law. No way he’d let Allen suffer for real. Good thing he didn’t send someone to rescue Allen last night, or Elizabeth could bet the next person tied up there would be Alexander.

Elizabeth had just gotten back to the hospital room when Henry called. She didn’t need to answer to know what Henry wanted to say. But she still picked up, put it on speaker, and tossed it onto the nightstand, then went back to her book.

Henry yelled, “Elizabeth! Aren’t you going too far? My mom’s old, but you actually hung her up. If something had happened to her last night, could you handle that?”

Elizabeth heard him and replied calmly, “She’s old, so she’s right? Her life is valuable, but mine isn’t?”

“What do you mean by that?” Henry was fuming.

“Guess Allen didn’t tell you that the night before last, I was kidnapped, and it was her doing.” Elizabeth glanced sideways at the phone.

Silence on the other end. Henry was stunned. What? Allen actually had Elizabeth kidnapped and even got Alexander hurt?

Elizabeth let out a cold laugh, her tone sharp and provoking. “Mr. Russell. I thought you had your act together in the family. Turns out, you’re just like the rest. No idea where the Russell Group is headed with you at the helm.”

Henry was pissed at that. But yeah, he had jumped the gun on this one. He hadn’t expected that it was Allen who had Elizabeth kidnapped first.

“But Elizabeth, even though my mom was wrong, you can’t retaliate in the same way.” Henry’s tone softened a bit.

Elizabeth let out a cold laugh. “Then what should I do? Ask her to sit down and kneel before her? Mr. Russell, you’d better tell your mom and sister to back off. I’m really crazy.” Elizabeth lowered her eyes, her tone full of danger.

Elizabeth could be really crazy when she got going.

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More silence on the other end. After a long while, Henry said faintly, “Elizabeth. This matter is our family’s fault. I’ll come to apologize to you later.”

With that, Henry hung up. Elizabeth hummed and closed her book. The door to the hospital room swung open. Elizabeth looked up and saw Felix.

Felix propped his face with both hands, grinning. “Serenity Leaf has a new lead,” Felix said seriously. “I heard that at 8 PM tomorrow night, Serenity Leaf will show up at an auction abroad.”

Elizabeth paused and then asked, “Wasn’t it said to be in some businessman’s hands?”

Felix nodded. “Yeah. Looks like this businessman is offering this item for a partnership.”

Elizabeth pouted. Nowadays, businessmen would give up anything for a deal. It was wild that they'd just give away Serenity Leaf, such a rare herb.

"Get it," Elizabeth said seriously.

"Alright, I'll go get it," Felix said.

Elizabeth smacked his head with a magazine. "I'm going too!"

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"Yo, how's your body holding up?" Felix pointed at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth flashed a grin. "I'm good, better than you, for sure."

Felix smirked, finally nodding. "Alright, cool!"

Elizabeth made sure to swing by home and let her family know, then she and Felix jetted off that night. She had a promise to keep to Grant, after all.

In Nyxonia. There was a three-hour time difference from Lisbun. When they touched down, it was afternoon in Nyxonia. Felix had snagged the address and invite for the auction, so they were set to roll that evening.

Tonight's auction was a big deal around here, with a bunch of Nyxonia's top dogs showing up. Felix went to grab the fancy clothes; Elizabeth checked in and then bounced from the hotel.

The MS Hotel was the swankiest spot around—a thirty-something-story building with killer views. Nyxonia was all about that romantic, laid-back vibe.

Elizabeth rocked a black dress and some 2.4-inch heels. She wandered down the street and found a chill café. She ordered a coffee and snagged a window seat. The waiter was a good-looking dude in his twenties, and his service was on point.

Elizabeth was about to snap a pic to share with Lila when her phone buzzed. It was Henry. She lowered her eyes and answered.

Henry asked, "You're not at the hospital?"

Elizabeth looked up. "Oh, Mr. Russell, sorry, had some stuff to handle and stepped out."

“When you coming back?” Henry pressed.

Elizabeth thought for a sec. “Not sure yet.”

Henry went quiet for a couple of beats, then said, “Sorry to bug you,” and hung up.

Elizabeth figured Henry was the go-to guy in the Russell family for getting things done. She was chilling with her coffee when she heard a familiar voice: “Yeah, Louis Newman, I’m here with full sincerity. I wanna lock down the whole Valoria market. This ain’t just talk; the Tudor Group got the chops.”

Elizabeth couldn’t help but peek. She saw Alexander, looking sharp in a black suit, coming down the stairs with a crew.

Everyone in the café, customers and waiters alike, couldn’t help but steal glances at Alexander, smiles creeping onto their faces. Nolan was tagging along with Alexander.

Elizabeth was floored. The world was so small; they could even run into each other here? She quickly ducked behind some sparse plants, trying to stay out of sight.

As Alexander came down the stairs, he glanced her way. He thought the back of her head looked familiar, but being in Nyxonia, he figured Elizabeth wouldn’t be here. He then left with Louis.

After they left, Elizabeth watched Alexander through the window. Alexander shook hands with Louis. The woman next to Louis offered her hand too, but Alexander just gave a polite nod.

Alexander kept feeling like someone was watching him. But when he turned around, there was no one. He frowned and looked back at the woman by the window. He thought, ‘She looks way too much like Elizabeth! Could it really be her?’

“Louis, I gotta handle something, so I won’t head back with you. See you at the auction tonight,” Alexander said.

With that, Alexander made a beeline for the café, striding in with purpose.

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Alexander hustled over to where Elizabeth had been sitting just a second ago. But when he got there, she was already MIA. He scowled and scanned the area. A waiter approached and asked, "Need anything, sir?"

"Yeah, where'd the lady who was here go?" Alexander shot back.

The waiter pointed outside. "She just bounced!"

Alexander's eyes darted outside, catching a glimpse of Elizabeth hopping into a car. He bolted after her, convinced it was her. Just as he was about to jump into his own car, Nolan showed up. "Mr. Tudor, what's the deal?"

"I think I saw Elizabeth," Alexander said, ice-cold.

Nolan looked confused. "Ms. Percy? No freakin' way. I just saw her at the hospital before swinging by here. She's probably still there."

Nolan followed Alexander's gaze and got serious. "Mr. Tudor, we have other things to handle. Let's not waste time."

Alexander went quiet. Nolan was right; Elizabeth should be at the hospital.

"Mr. Tudor, your arm?" Nolan asked, eyeing Alexander's injury.

Alexander shook it off. "It's nothing."

"Did our stuff get delivered?" Alexander asked.

Nolan nodded. "Yeah, Mr. Tudor, Serenity Leaf is at the auction site."

"Louis is all about Serenity Leaf, so let him snag it at the auction today," Alexander said, cool as a cucumber. Louis wanted it, and Alexander had it. But Louis was too principled to take gifts. So, Alexander sent it to the auction house, letting Louis win it fair and square. This way, Louis could take it without feeling weird and remember Alexander's generosity. Alexander wasn't cheap when it came to valuable things. It showed he was serious about their partnership.

"I haven't even had my coffee yet!" Felix whined from the car.

Elizabeth glanced back and sighed. "Small world, Alexander's here."

Felix was shocked. "Mr. Tudor's in Nyxonia too?"

“Yeah, here for some business,” Elizabeth said, nonchalantly.

Felix pouted. “You and Mr. Tudor, always running into each other. It’s like fate or something.”

Elizabeth shot Felix a cold look, her eyes full of disdain.

If Felix said one more word, she was ready to deck him.

Felix chuckled. “I picked up the dress. You can try it on later. Everyone at this auction is high society. They might look low-key, but they’re all rocking luxury brands. Even the plain dresses are custom-made.”

Elizabeth leaned on her hand, staring out the window, barely listening.

Felix kept going. “I also borrowed some haute couture jewelry. Boss, you’ll be the most stunning woman tonight!”

Elizabeth glanced at Felix, feeling a headache coming on. “Why so flashy? We’re here to win Serenity Leaf.”

“To win Serenity Leaf, you gotta go all out. Oh, and tonight’s auction is a masked one,” Felix added.

Elizabeth perked up. “What do you mean?”

Felix explained, “Half an hour before the auction, there’s a masked cocktail party. Everyone mingles and socializes. After that, everyone gets a number and heads to their auction rooms for the bidding.”

Elizabeth was surprised. “We don’t sit together?”

“Nope,” Felix shook his head.

Elizabeth smirked. “So many gimmicks?”