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"I've made everything crystal clear, haven't I? But since when have you ever trusted a single word out of my mouth?" Alex snapped.

"You should've laid it all out for me, at the very least! How am I supposed to believe you when you never treat anything with real seriousness?" Sophia fired back, her anger seething.

"So it's my fault again," Alex muttered, feeling a

s of

exhaustion wash over him.

"I'm always in the wrong, no matter what I do. And you? You're forever right. Fine. Have it your way-you're right."

"Of course I'm right," Sophia retorted in a sharp burst, then instantly regretted her words.

"I'm done caring," Alex growled, jerking his arm away from her grip with deliberate force.

"We're finished here. Let go of me."

His eyes bore into her as though she was a complete stranger.

No-she was staring at a man who'd been pushed too far, who'd had enough.

She sensed that if she let him go, he might never return to her side again. "What do you want from

me, Alex? Can't y

t you quit acting so impulsive all the time? Can't you look at yourself and see there might be something wrong with you? Instead of blaming all to me?"

"Me?" Alex scoffed, almost choking on his own disbelief. "Something wrong with me?"

"All I'm asking is for you to act more maturely and sensibly! Am I wrong for wanting that for your own good?" Sophia raised her, voice.

She didn't even believe her own words, but the fear of losing Alex this time was real.

"Mature and sensible?" Alex let out a cold laugh.

"Do you know the biggest mistake I ever made? I fell in love with you. I loved you with everything I had. I was fucking crazy about you. And that-" he paused, voice quivering with bitterness.

"That was my downfall. So here it is-I'm done. No more hoping. No more hurting. I'm walking away-for good."

"You-" Sophia tried to speak, but the words collapsed in her throat.

She stood frozen, trembling, her fingers clinging to the corner of Alex's shirt like it was the only thing keeping her from falling

apart.

"Let's be honest, Sophia. From the first day we met, no matter what I did, I was always just some worthless braggart in your eyes. You never once believed in me, not even for a single second!

"You sure had plenty of faith in Charles or any rich guy who strutted by. You'd prop them on a pedestal every time, while I was barely worth a glance."

"Just admit it, Sophia. You never believe me. You never gave a damn about me!" Sophia stood frozen in shock, her whole-body trembling. "I... I....." "That's enough," Alex said icily.

"I'm done. No more games, no more pretending. I should've seen it all along-you were never going to love me. You couldn't. You wouldn't. And now... I'm just trying to stop the bleeding before there's nothing left of me."

He drew in a ragged breath.

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"Let's part on good terms. This is the last time I'll help you. I hope your life turns out fine, but let's never see each other again. All we do is hurt each other and believe me, it hurts like hell."

With that, Alex climbed into a waiting taxi and was gone in a flash

Sophia stood there as though lightning had struck her, silent for a long, agonizing moment.

"I'm sorry," she whispered brokenly.

"I'm sorry, Alex-God, I'm sorry. I never thought it would end like this,"

"I only wanted to spare your family's contempt, to make them see the man I see."

"But I was a coward-I let their voices drown out my own, and now you're gone because I was too afraid to stand beside you in daylight."

"I was terrified, yet I love you-God, I love you so fiercely." 1

"When you fought for me, when you faced Bella, I should have shouted your name to the sky," Sophia sobbed.

"If only I'd been brave enough to love you openly..."

"Alex... please, Alex. I'm still hopelessly in love with you. I can't bear the thought

of you turning your love off. It hurts too damn much."

"My heart isn't stone; it's yours. I see that only now, when I've already lost you."

"If you can still hear me, even faintly, please come back."

"Alex... I need you in my life."

Sophia sobbed painfully.

"The greatest distance in this world is not between life and death,

but between two hearts that love each other deeply-

lost among billions of reasons and fears,

yet unable to find even one strong enough to bring them together.

When she finally staggered back to her hospital ward, Sophia felt like a hollow shell.

Her face was expressionless, her eyes blank.

She barely noticed the fresh blood seeping through the bandage on her hand.

Alex's wounded gaze flashed in her mind- a look that cut deeper than any wound, like a blade twisting in her chest.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Honey, I just heard-" Florence stormed into her the moments she entered.

"I just heard that Alex poisoned Bella Kane, using her antidote as leverage to force the Kane family's apology. That scoundrel threatened someone's life! He's nothing but a terrorist!"

"That's right!" Jack chimed in.

"This Alex guy, all he wanted was a shortcut to make a name for himself! So he used filthy methods with no concern for decency. It's a good thing he's out of our lives now-we can't ever let him near our family again."

They had been shocked to learn Alex was the one helping them, but upon digging deeper, realized the Kanes weren't afraid of

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him by nature-he had simply backed them into a corner with underhanded tricks.

So while he might've seemed powerful, he was really just using blackmail to get what he wanted.

"When Bella gets her antidote and the poison's cleared up, we'll still be in danger if we keep close to the Kanes or Alex," someone warned.

"Mom, can you all please leave? I just want to be alone," Sophia said quietly, her voice hollow.

"Honey, even if we misunderstood Alex, that doesn't change the fact that he's at fault," Florence insisted.

"I'm tired, Mom," Sophia repeated weakly. "I just want to rest now. Go outside." "But-"Florence began.

"Get out!" Sophia snapped, her voice raw and shaking.

Everyone froze, For the first time, the quiet, kind Sophia had broken-completely.

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"Pardon me, folks-out of the room, now. The patient needs quiet if she's going to heal."

The nurse herded them into the corridor, her heels clicking like a judge's gavel announcing adjournment.

Instead of dispersing, they clustered beneath the fluorescent lights still reeling from the bombshell that had just gone off in their lives.

"Can you believe it? Alex, of all people, is the Lancaster Group's silent bankroll!" Jack's uncle whispered, voice rough with intrigue.

"Think the guy's hiding some secret pedigree?"

"Alex?" Florence scoffed.

"I dug through every record-he's a nobody. Sure, he did a stint in the military, which makes him tough enough to hit Bella, but besides that he's an orphan with empty pockets."

Heads nodded; the story was too tidy to question.

One of the family suddenly asked, "Why are all of you looking down on Alex?"

"Looking down on him?" Florence laughed.

"Impossible. We simply don't care about him. We're not heartless. We don't prejudge people. Even if he's poor, we can't look down on him, right?"

"Yeah," another added.

"He came here to marry Sophia with nothing but the clothes on his back. He's just a poor guy without anything. We're going to do whatever it takes to keep him out of our family."

Once they labeled someone poor, there was no hope.

He would be forever marked unfit, never trusted; every mistake would be laid at

He was guilty-simply because he was poor.

his feet.

"Then there's Charles Kingston," someone murmured. "Didn't see that curveball coming."

Florence rolled her eyes. "Charles is drunk on love for Sophia-lying, scheming, anything to lock down her heart."

"Honestly," another relative chimed in, "a guy who torches his own reputation for love? That's the kind you hitch yourself to forever!"

"Take notes, people! He dumped Bella Kane flat-for Sophia, our Sophia. She ought to be thanking her lucky stars."

In a dizzying U-turn, the crowd vaulted Charles from villain to folk hero.

Stranger still, nearly everyone applauded the reversal.

In the Lancaster family, there was a motto.

If you are rich, everything you say is considered right, and you're never wrong. Whatever you do is forgiven-it's the privilege of the wealthy.

Inside the room, Sophia perched motionless on the mattress, her gaze hollow as winter sky.

Time blurred after the first tear tracked across her cheek, after the tremor set her shoulders quaking

Eventually she folded in on herself, forehead pressed to her knees

-and the dam burst, ragged sobs ripping from her chest.

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She hadn't wept when the company teetered on collapse.

She hadn't shed a tear through humiliation, bruises, even torture,

But now now she drowned in tears she'd never allowed herself.

She was a headline-making CEO, suitors queued for miles, yet none had loved her with Alex's fierce, selfless devotion.

That singular devotion set him apart.

And now... he was gone, footsteps fading beyond reach.

She wept at her own blindness, the epiphany arriving too late.

Her instincts screamed: even if she called Alex now and laid everything bare, he'd brush it off as a lie.

"If he'd just held on a heartbeat longer-loved me a fraction more-I would've shown him I'd changed," she whispered into the sheets.

But the hourglass was empty.

Across town, in the back of a rattling cab, Alex let out a heavy breath.

"One ounce of faith from Sophia," he muttered, "and none of this would've happened."

With his real reputation, women swarmed around him like a pack of treasure hunters stumbling upon the motherlode.

Yet for all their flirtations and flowery promises, not a single one of them genuinely loved him.

On occasion, he believed Sophia was different-her delicate kindness hinted that she might truly care, and that faint hope was why he lingered by her side.

In the end, however, her affection proved nothing more than a mirage, vanishing the instant he tried to hold it.

"Stop lying to yourself. This is the end."

Alex whispered, with sorrow and finality.

A few days later, at Kane Villa, Bella sat sunk into the plush cushions of an ornate

sofa, her gaze distant and troubled.

Jericho Kane strode in, his shoulders tense.

"Are you okay?" he asked, eyes scanning her with anxious intensity.

"Yes," Bella replied softly.

"Then why are you still holed up in your room?" Jericho pressed. "No more parties, no more dancing through the night?" Bella inhaled deeply before letting out a sigh that seemed to bear the weight of unspoken worries.

"What about you, Dad? Why are you still here? Usually you never home."

Jericho's mouth twitched with irony. "You know I lost my position as governor. I've got nothing left on my agenda."

In a rare moment of vulnerability, Bella's voice quavered.

"Dad... can you hug me?"

Jericho's stern features softened with paternal warmth as he drew her into his arms.

Bella melted against his chest, her words barely above a breath, "It's been so long since you hugged me, Dad."

"Yeah," Jericho muttered, a pang of guilt surfacing in his chest as he recalled endless days consumed by political battles and

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towering responsibilities.

"Dad... can I ask you something?" she murmured, looking up at him with wide eyes.

"Sure." Jericho's tone was gentle, a stark contrast to his usual commanding baritone.

"Is Alex strong?"

A heavy exhale left Jericho's lips. "Very strong."

"Stronger than you?" Bella blurted in astonishment. In her eyes, he had always embodied unshakable power.

"Yes," Jericho confessed. "But don't worry, Bella. If you want revenge, I'll get it for you. Even if he's stronger than me."

Bella shook her head slowly, her voice firm despite the tremble in it. "No, it's my mistake, too. I hurt people. There's no need for revenge."

Jericho stared, momentarily speechless.

"Are you okay?" His mind reeled, recalling all her past tantrums over far smaller slights.

"I'm fine," Bella insisted, catching the flicker of astonishment in his eyes.

She forced a small smile. "Maybe I'm just growing up."

"Fine," Jericho said, rising from his seat. His gaze lingered on her, torn between pride and concern.

"If you ever need anything-anything at all-just tell me, okay?"

As he exited, Bella sank deeper into the sofa, a long, wistful sigh escaping her lips.

She picked up her smartphone, scrolling through her hidden gallery.

Dozens of stolen snapshots of Alex flooded the screen, each one capturing him in unguarded moments that sent heat rushing to her cheeks.

"Finally I found you, my prince," she whispered, voice trembling with longing.

"I'll never let you leave my world again. I love you, Alex. I really do."

Never before had she fallen so intensely-her feelings reckless, unstoppable, and all-consuming.

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The days that followed felt eerily calm, the kind of hush that settle after a tempest.

Jasmine Kingston's iron will now reigned over the streets of Vanceiver.

Under her genius leadership, the city rose to unprecedented heights, surpassing anything it had witnessed before..

Alfred Kingston held sway over the sprawling metropolis of Los Angeles.

Even Kelly had carved out her domain in the rugged territory of Vermont.

Though her claim was recent and largely untested, the backing from both Vancouver and L.A. was enough to keep any potential challengers at bay.

Guided by the Kingston family's teachings, Kelly's skills blossomed with startling speed, like a flower flourishing under a midday sun.

During that time, Alex had transformed a decrepit building at the edge of a slum into a humble clinic-and a refuge from the world

He kept his true identity concealed, operating the clinic for a mere two or three hours each day to provide free treatment to those who had nowhere else to go, particularly the homeless.

His remaining hours were devoted to refining his mental and physical abilities, training for inevitable conflicts that lurked on the horizon.

Day after day slipped by in relative peace.

Then the sudden crack of gunfire shattered the quiet on a nearby street.

Alex only heaved a tired sigh. Gang shootouts were commonplace in that forsaken corner of the city, part of the grim daily

routine.

Inside the dimly lit clinic, he poured himself one glass of wine after another, as though trying to drown the turmoil churning

within him.

His face offered no clear emotion, but frustration raged in his gut like a caged beast.

He still had not avenged his mother's death.

He felt stuck. Without a rare herb, he was unable to advance his abilities.

Kingswell was already searching high and low for it, but the item was so scarce that luck seemed the only way to find it.

"Doctor! Doctor!" As the burn of the wine still lingered in his throat, frantic knocking rattled the clinic door.

He opened it, blinking away his haze, to find two young women standing on his doorstep.

One of them wore pristine white, exuding an almost angelic warmth, a sense of mercy made flesh.

To his astonishment, it was Bella Kane.

The other was clad in a sleek black bodysuit. She stood with a fierce, unapologetic energy, though a crimson stain spread at her rib cage-a bullet wound-and blood seeped through her clothes.

Her face had turned pale, teetering on the edge of collapse.

"Excuse me, is the doctor here? My friend is badly hurt and needs help right away!" Bella pleaded, her voice shaking with

concern.

She fell silent in shock when she realized she was speaking to Alex

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Something about their connection was undeniably strange.

"I'm the doctor, come in," Alex said calmly.

Gunshot wounds were hardly out of the ordinary In this neighborhood.

"Thank you so much! Scarlett, let's get inside," Bella urged, turning to her wounded friend.

"Wait a minute! Bella, he reeks of wine. He's young and drunk. And this small clinic. I don't trust him," Scarlett growled through clenched teeth.

"You've lost too much blood. If you don't get treated now, you could die," Bella insisted, worry etched on her face.

Se drunk doctor touch me, I might die even faster. Just give me a painkiller,"

"I can hold on until ambulance arrives. If llet

Scarlett shot back, grimacing.

Her wound was severe enough that even a skilled physician would be challenged,

let alone a doctor who reeked of booze in small

corner of slum area.

"You die in fifteen minutes without proper treatment," Alex stated coolly.

"That's none of your concern, I won't get scammed." Scarlett snapped.

"Believe it or not, it does matter to me if you die right here because then I have to deal with the police and all the paperwork."

"If you refuse treatment, get out so I don't have to handle the mess," Alex replied, waving them off.

"You-!" Scarlett tensed, rage flickering in her eyes as she considered hitting him.

But Alex, remaining unflappable, kicked Scarlett just hard enough to send her stumbling back outside, coughing up more blood in the process.

"You..." Scarlett rasped from the ground. "Is This how a doctor treat...!"

Alex ignored her and slammed the door shut.

"Wait, please! Alex, I'm so sorry on Scarlett's behalf. Don't hold her behavior against her. I promise I'll pay you for your kindness," Bella urged, forcing the door open again.

"Bella, why are you begging him? Even if I'm dying, I'm not letting that man treat me," Scarlett hissed defiantly.

Bella's eyes turned red with anger. "Fine. If you don't bodyguard who's bent on getting herself killed."

want treatment, hand in your resignation first. I refuse to keep a

Alex watched Bella, noticing how different she seemed from their previous encounter.

There was a kindness in her that felt both new and genuine.

"Miss," Scarlett protested.

"Bella, this woman seems to have a screw loose. If you do end up firing her, make

sure you never again hire someone so dim-witted," Alex remarked.

"You bastard!" Scarlett snarled, doubling over. She tried to stand and argue, but her anger or her blood loss got the better of her.

She collapsed in a faint.

"Scarlett!" Bella exclaimed, rushing to lift her, though she lacked the strength. She looked at Alex in desperation.

"Please help her. I'm begging you. I have the money to repay you. Whatever you want-just save her,"

He exhaled and nodded.

"This is a clinic, after all, and you did come looking for help. Of course I'll treat her."

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He grabbed Scarlett by the collar, hefted her like a sack of grain, and unceremoniously tossed her onto the bed.

Without missing a beat, he retrieved a scalpel, sliced open the fabric around her bullet wound, extracted the bullet with swift precision, then stitched and dressed the area to stem the bleeding.

While Alex worked, Bella watched him intently, her pulse racing.

Gathering some courage, she dabbed at the sweat forming on his forehead with a piece of tissue.

"You're sweating a lot," she whispered.

"Thanks," he replied, not looking up from his procedure.

A few minutes later, Alex set the scalpel aside and began cleaning up. "Alright, she's out of danger. I'll write down a prescription. A few days of rest and she'll be back on her feet," he said, rummaging for some basic medication, fully expecting them to dismiss it for something pricier.

"Thank you so much," Bella murmured gratefully.

Alex frowned. "Bella Kane, what brings you to a place like this?"

Bella's cheeks warmed, though she couldn't quite admit she had been searching for him.

"I..I wanted to do some good. Help people in these slums."

"In Vancouver?" Alex asked.

Bella coughed awkwardly. "This district is between Vermont and Vancouver. I just felt the urge to come. But then some rivals of my father ambushed us."

"You-" Alex began, but Bella's attention snapped to Scarlett, who was slowly coming to.

"Scarlett, you're awake. How do you feel?" Bella asked, relieved to see her conscious again.

"Bella? Where am I?" Scarlett mumbled, eyes darting around.

"Alex treated you. He's a remarkable doctor. Just a few stitches and you already stopped bleeding," Bella said with excitement.

"I didn't ask for his help," Scarlett muttered, glaring at the bandages. "Scarlett! He saved your life out of kindness. You could at least be thankful," Bella admonished her. Deep down, she fumed that her new bodyguard was insulting the man who'd saved her.

"Bella, you're far too trusting. You never know what goes on in someone's head.

He could have healed me with some hidden agenda," Scarlett said, rolling her eyes.

"You're mistaken. I believe he's a good person," Bella insisted.

Alex looked at Bella, and he couldn't associate her with the monster who kept violent people around her.

This Bella seemed like someone else entirely-kind and polite? What had drastically changed this woman, Alex wondered.

Scarlett opened her mouth to argue, but the commotion outside cut her short. Heavy footsteps and rough voices resonated through the walls.

"Boss, they're cornered in here. They must be hiding inside. I'll teach them to run

from me. Boys, surround the clinic. Burn it if you must. Don't let so much as a bug slip through."

The doors were kicked in with brutal force.

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A thunderous crash split the air as the glass doors of the center were smashed in, shards spraying across the floor.

Without hesitation, ten masked assassins swept inside.

"Damn it, they caught up to us!" Scarlett spat. They had been ambushed along the way to the slums, where their entire security detail was wiped out.

Only she and Bella survived and managed to escape-or so they thought.

The assassins refused to let them go.

"Bella, I'll hold them off," Scarlett hissed. "You have to get out through the back door."

Bella's face had gone pale. "If I run, you'll definitely be killed. I'm their main target, so they won't harm me. Let me be their hostage."

"Bella, I'm your bodyguard," Scarlett said, planting herself in front of Bella with grim resolve.

"My job is to protect you-so do as I say."

A cold, ragged voice interrupted them.

"No need to argue. This place has no back door-you're not going anywhere. We'll be taking both of you."

A middle-aged man with a scarred face stepped in, laughing cruelly. Unlike the others, he wore no mask, and a murderous aura clung to him.

"Contract Crow?" Scarlett recognized him immediately. He ranked among the top ten hired killers-experts in martial arts, infamous for illegal raids and a bottomless appetite for money.

Their reputation alone sent chills through even the bravest hearts.

"Well, look at that. Little Scarlett knows who I am," the bald man said with a mocking grin.

"Contract Crow," Scarlett began, "no matter what they're paying you, I'll double it if you let us go."

"I do love money," he replied, "but I love what you're worth even more. Once I hand over both of you, the cash will come rolling in."

"You'll regret harming us," Scarlett warned. "Jericho Kane won't stand for it."

"Jericho Kane?" Contract Crow snorted.

"He's already stepped down from the government. His enemies are forking over huge sums to get rid of him and anyone close to him. If I don't take the job, somebody else will."

"And if I kill you here, who'd even know it was me? Though you two are lucky-my client wants Bella alive for a bit of fun."

He gestured to his men, and they surged forward.

"Bella, run!" Scarlett roared.

Ignoring her injuries, she charged the assassins. Despite her wounds, she moved with lightning speed and ruthless precision, proving her martial arts background was more than just talk.

"Such talent at your age," Contract Crow mused. "I see why you're so confident. Still, experience counts for a lot."

Two assassins tried to seize Scarlett. She knocked one aside, but the second tackled her.

Within moments, they had her pinned on the floor and were kicking her relentlessly.

Blood spattered from her mouth with every blow.

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"Scarlett!" Bella cried out. "Stop! I'm your real target, aren't I? I'll go with you, but you have to let Scarlett go!"

Ms. Kane," Contract Crow said, "you have no bargaining power here." He snapped his fingers. "Grab both of them. We're leaving."

One of the assassins eyed the man by the table. "What about the doctor?"

"Kill him," Contract Crow snarled, turning away.

But then he froze at the sound of bodies thudding to the floor.

The three assassins who had gone after Alex now lay motionless.

"You've got a death wish," Contract Crow snarled. "Boys, take him out!"

"Yes, boss!" came the unified shout. The assassins charged at Alex, weapons brandished.

Alex snatched a scalpel from the table and met them head-on.

"So you like using your fists and feet to hurt people," Alex remarked, voice low and cold. "I'll make sure you never do it again."

Each slash targeted nerves in their arms and legs, leaving one attacker after another collapsing with numb limbs.

Contract Crow stood aghast, a tremor running through him.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded, yanking out a pistol. "How dare you interfere?"

"You wanted to kill me," Alex said calmly, "and you expect me not to fight back?" "Bastard!" Contract Crow bellowed, squeezing the trigger.

But Alex was faster. In one swift motion, he slashed Crow's wrist. Blood gushed from the wound, and Crow's fingers went limp. "How many lives have you taken for money?" Alex asked in an icy tone, delivering a backhanded slap that knocked Crow's blade to the ground with a metallic clang. (1)

Crow crashed to his knees, terror in his eyes.

Sweat beaded on his forehead as if a massive weight pressed on him.

"Don't do anything rash! This isn't personal. You don't need to kill me," he pleaded.

He had expected this plan to go off without a hitch. Who could have guessed a doctor in some back-alley clinic was a hidden threat?

Alex's glare was merciless.

"I had no problem with you before, but you tried to take my life. That changes things." He paused, then stepped back.

"But I'm not going to kill you. You've got a few minutes before you bleed out, so go find someone to fix you."

As though given a pardon from death itself, Contract Crow lurched to his feet and stumbled out of the clinic, leaving a dark trail of blood behind him.

Just outside the entrance, a black car came roaring around the corner, engine screaming like a beast.

In the blink of an eye, it slammed into Contract Crow with bone-crushing force.

His body was flung into the air like a ragdoll, twisting midair with a sickening snap of limbs.

Blood sprayed across the pavement as he spun violently before crashing face- first onto the concrete.

The sound of skull meeting stone echoed through the silence-final, absoluté.

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His body lay crumpled and still, a grotesque mess of twisted limbs and shattered pride, his last breath stolen by a moment he never saw coming.

From the car, a young, sharply dressed man stepped out, his expression calm and cold.

He glanced down at Contract Crow's broken body and gave it a dismissive slap with the sole of his shoe, as if brushing off filth.

More cars screeched to a halt behind him, engines rumbling as doors flung open.

Without a word, he turned and strode toward the clinic.

His eyes locked onto Alex. "Hei, bastard. Where's Bella Kane?"

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"Finally, Owen is here!" Bella let out a delighted laugh, her eyes shining with relief.

Belial Scarlett! Are you alright?" The tall, broad shouldered man rushed toward them, completely ignoring Alex as though he were invisible.

He stood with a commanding presence, sharp-eyed and radiating an unmistakable air of nobility that set him apart from common folk.

"We're fine," Bella answered, her voice bright with gratitude, "all hanks to Alex, who saved us."

"Oh, really?" Owen Whitman's tone dripped with skepticism as he raked his gaze over Alex.

"Bella, a man's face doesn't reveal his true character. You'd do we to sicer clear of strangers."

Suddenly, Owen's expression twisted. "Wait. I know you-aren't you the Alex who had the nerve to slap Bella?"

His eyes blazed with fury. "I've been searching everywhere for you after what you did to her."

Bella darted between Owen and Alex, her movements frantic.

"Owen, stop it! It was my fault, and we've settled it already. My father forgave the whole mess. Don't stir up more trouble!" she yelled, voice edged with

desperation.

Owen's jaw tightened as he stared at Bella, then he shook his head slowly.

"Bella, I'm just trying to protect you. You should keep your distance from this guy."

"I'll go wherever I please," Bella snapped. "Don't act like you can order me around, Owen."

"Fine, fine," he muttered, throwing up his hands in a gesture of surrender.

"Bella, let's not waste another moment," Scarlett interjected, her voice urgent. "We should get back home. Your mother's waiting."

Though the support team had arrived, the air still felt tense and unsafe.

"Alex, thank you so much. I owe you," Bella said warmly, turning toward him. "I'll find a way to repay your kindness. Goodbye for now."

Owen's glare grew even sharper when he caught Bella's friendly tone. Jealousy flickered across his face.

"Owen, can you help tidy up this place?" Bella asked. "We caused all this damage; it's only right we fix it."

"No problem," he replied, voice clipped. "I'll have my people handle it. You and Scarlett just go."

Bella slid into the waiting car and offered Alex a bright wave. "We'll see each other again," she called, smiling broadly as the car pulled away.

The moment they were gone, Owen gestured for his men to hop back into their own vehicles, making no effort to clean up the destruction.

He yanked out a fat stack of cash, tore off a fistful of bills, and launched them into

the air like trash-letting them flutter down in slow humiliation.

A few slapped against Alex's face before hitting the floor.

"This should cover the cleanup," he sneered, then leaned in close.

"Here's a warning for you, punk: Stay away from Bella, or you'll regret it."

Without waiting for a response, he stormed out, confident that a "beggar" like Alex didn't deserve another second of his time.

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What a lunatic Alex muttered, shaking his head before draining another gulp of wine,

Suddenly, a flustered voice came from the doorway. "Oh my God,ex, what happened to your clinic?"

Josephine strode into the room, looking around as though she'd stumbled upon a shipwreck.

She spotted the scattered money and couldn't resist scooping it up

After meticulously counting it, she broke into a beaming grin. "Fiy grand! Where on earth did all this come from?"

"Some rich jerk decided to wreck the place and then threw money round to pay for the damages," Alex explained, shrugging as if it hardly mattered.

Josephine's eyes lit up. "Must be nice to have that kind of cash. Fixing this dump won't even cost five thousand dollars."

"Take care of the repairs with it," Alex said, waving a hand dismissively, "and keep whatever's left."

Her joy burst out in a half-laugh, half-cheer. "You're the best boss Maybe we should invite that man to come and destroy the place a few more times, huh?"

That evening in Vermont, Bella sat down to dinner with her parents, recounting every detail of the day's events.

"Dad, Mom, you should've seen Alex-he was incredible!" she gushed. "He took out those thugs with just a couple of quick moves!"

She even sprang from her chair to reenact the moment, her excitement filling the

room.

"Are you sure you're alright?" her mother, Lidia Kane, asked with concern, though her affectionate smile showed she was relieved.

"After all, that's the same man who caused you trouble before."

"Mother, I've grown up," Bella insisted. "I know I messed up in the past, and I don't want to dwell on it

dnymore."

Jericho Kane slammed a hand on the table, rattling the dishes. "Didn't I warn you already? Ever since I lost the governor's position, enemies have been lying in wait, looking for a chance to strike. You're fortunate nothing worse happened today, or you might have died!"

"Dad, it was just an accident," Bella protested, pouting like a scolded child.

"People are targeting us," Jericho shot back, his voice trembling with frustration.

"From now on, you don't leave Vermont without permission. Times have changed-you can't just run wild!"

"Alright, alright, I won't go anywhere!" Bella tried to appease him with a playful, pleading look. "Just don't be mad at me."

"That's enough for one day," Jericho growled. "Go to your room."

"Okay," she mumbled, then hurried off, feeling the weight of her father's anger at her back

Elsewhere, down a dimly lit corridor, a furious man was slapping one of his underlings across the face.

"You told me that mercenary you hired could handle the job, yet he couldn't even snatch two weak women!"

"I'm sorry, sir!" The subordinate's voice quivered.

"Find someone else-this time, spare no expense!" the man snarled. "Pay for three or four assassins if you need to. I want her in my grasp immediately!"

"Yes, sir," the subordinate mumbled.

"And what about that doctor, Alex?" the man demanded.

A sly grin curved the younger man's lips. "Throw some cash at burning down his clinic, then kill him. Bella's got her eye on

2/3

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him, and that's a problem."

"Do it. Now."

Late that night, Alex's phone buzzed. Kelly's voice spilled through he receiver.

"Alex, I've tracked down the Heaven Root you've been hunting." "Seriously?" A surge of excitement sparked in Alex. That herb was notoriously hard to find.

"But the owner's...complicated," Kelly warned.

Alex's tone hardened. "Who are we talking about?"

"It belongs to Jericho Kane," she said quietly.

Alex exhaled, a grim smile forming. It looked like he'd have to face that man again.

26 BONUS

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 246[866 words]

Jericho Kane? What does he want with the Heaven Root?" Alex ed.

"I heard his daughter's suffering from a rare genetic heart condition, and he thinks the Heaven Root can save her," Kelly explanted, glancing at Alex

"Bella Kane?" Alex repeated.

"Yes," Kelly confirmed.

Alex let out a weary sigh. He imagined Bella hiding her pain beneath an elegant façade. No wonder Jericho Kane spoiled her every whim and excused her worst habits.

"Alex, how should we handle this?" Kelly asked, her tone unsettled by the news. "I've got to get my hands on that Heaven Root," Alex declared without hesitation. "There's no time to waste. I'll head to Vermont today."

He stepped outside the clinic and was stunned to see a group of homeless men clashing with two brutish thugs lugging a drum. The looks on those thugs' faces made it clear they were up to no good.

"What's going on here?" Alex demanded.

"Doc, these two louts were about to pour oil around the clinic," one of the homeless men said.

"We figure they planned on burning the place down."

Another homeless man nodded. "You treat us for free, so they must have a death wish trying to torch this clinic."

The two hulking men sneered at the ragtag group. "Mind your own business, you filthy beggars," one spat.

He raised a foot and kicked at one of the homeless men.

Immediately, the others retaliated, hurling empty bottles and whatever they could grab.

Furious at the uprising, the man tried swinging at them, but the homeless group scattered, still pelting him with debris as they darted around.

Alex's eyes narrowed.

"Someone pay you to burn this clinic?" he asked, his voice low and dangerous.

"You bet," one of the men snarled, "and they put a price on your head, too. I'm about to collect."

He snapped open a folding knife and stalked toward Alex.

"How much?" Alex asked quietly.

"Ten grand," the thug sneered.

Alex scoffed. "Your life sure isn't worth much, is it?"

The man lunged. "That ten grand is for your head, not mine!"

But, to his shock, his partner grabbed the same knife and drove it into his side.

"What the hell are you doing?" the first thug roared, eyes wide in confusion.

A moment later, he felt his own arm twist as if some unseen force guided it to stab his friend.

They yelped in horror, stabbing each other again and again, unable to control their bodies.

1/3

sprayed across the pavement as both men collapsed pale and trembling, until they lay still in a crimson pool. One of the homeless men edged closer to Alex, eyes full of shock. "poc, what just happened to them?"

Alex shrugged, voice cool. "They were hired to kill me. Couldn't even decide who'd claim the bounty, so they turned on each other."

Another homeless man spat on the ground.

"Serves 'em right. They counted their chickens before they hatched."

Alex watched impassively as the homeless men rifled through the dead men's pockets, taking everything of value.

The bodies would be dealt with soon enough.

Without another word, Alex hailed a cab. He had more important matters on his mind: the Heaven Root was vital, and such a rare herb wouldn't come around twice.

Two hours later, Alex arrived at the massive Kane Mansion.

Jericho Kane sat in the lounge, a commanding figure whose gaze burned with the memory of their recent clash.

"What brings you here?" Jericho asked, his voice cold and unwelcoming.

Alex met Jericho's stare head-on. "I'm here for the Heaven Root."

Jericho's eyes narrowed. "So, you know about that. Too bad for you, I need it myself. I'm not handing it over."

"You're planning to use it on Bella's heart disease," Alex said flatly. "The Heaven Root won't cure her for good-it's only a temporary fix."

Jericho's lip curled in disdain. "You're no doctor. You're just some Kingwell's dog with a knack for violence, so don't lie to me." "I am a doctor," Alex answered, his tone unwavering.

Jericho barked a laugh. "How convenient. Because you helped Bella the other day, I'll let that slide. Otherwise, I'd have tossed you out on your back by now."

He rose from his seat and glared. "You're not getting the Heaven Root. Dream on. Now get out."

Alex exhaled slowly.

Jericho's spite still ran hot, making negotiations pointless.

He turned and strode toward the exit. In the hallway, he almost ran straight into Bella, who stood waiting for him, cheeks faintly pink.

"Alex," she greeted, her voice shy. "What were you discussing with my father?"

Bella's mind whirled with wild fantasies, conjuring the moment Alex would fall desperately in love with her and beg her father for her hand in marriage.

The thought alone sent her heart thundering in her chest.

Alex studied her closely, noting her radiant beauty.

Bella Kane matched Sophia in grace, but clearly lived with the advantages of wealth and endless resources.

Gently, Alex grasped her wrist, surprising her with his forwardness

Her blush deepened. "What are you doing?"

He focused, taking her pulse.

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"I can heal this heart condition of yours, but I need something in turn," he said firmly. "I want the Heaven Root. It can't save your life anyway."

"What?" Bella asked, confusion knitting her brow.

"Tell your father I can cure you for good," Alex said, releasing her wrist.

"But my price is the Heaven Root. And I should warn you, you don't have long left-

maybe a week at best."

Chapter 247

Chapter 247

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 247[1,303 words]

Alex looked at Bella and let out a weary sigh.

He picked up a small glass bottle with a single pill inside and held out to her.

"If something happens to you," he said quietly, "use this pill. But ark my words do need help...and maybe I'm the only one who can provide it."

this is just a temporary measure. You really

Bella's heart fluttered, her breath caught in her throat, and before he could think twice, the words just tumbled out:

"I believe in you."

Alex blinked, stunned. "...What?"

Bella's eyes widened. "I-I mean-yes! I... I have a heart condition, she stammered, her cheeks turning a soft pink, like the sky before sunrise.

"And I think... only you can fix it."

There was a long, awkward pause.

Then, trying to recover, she waved her hands a little too fast.

"N-not like that! I mean... not the mushy, love-struck kind of heart thing..."

She looked away, biting her bottom lip, her voice dropping to a whisper.

"I mean the real kind. The one that's actually broken."

"A real, serious heart disease."

"Yes, that's what I'm talking about," Alex said. His tone was serious, but there was a gentle note underneath..

Alex turned away and started to walk off, apparently finished with the conversation.

But Bella wasn't ready to let him go.

She reached out on impulse and caught the edge of his coat, her fingers clutching the fabric like it was the last thread tying them together.

Alex stopped, then slowly turned back around. His face was unreadable, calm as ever, but his eyes flickered with something- something unsure.

"Yes?" he asked, voice low.

Bella looked down, her lashes trembling. "Uhm... about last time..."

Her throat tightened, and it took effort to speak.

"I'm... not usually like that. I mean, I used to be this shy, proper girl. I always followed the rules. I never... acted out. But when I found out my life might be short-because of this heart condition-I think something inside me just... snapped."

She laughed nervously, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear.

"So I started doing things I normally wouldn't. I thought maybe if I lived louder, I wouldn't feel so afraid."

Alex didn't smile. He just listened.

Bella took a deep breath, her voice steadier now.

"So... thank you. For snapping me out of it. For being the only one who stop me."

She looked up at him, her eyes shining. "I promise I won't spiral again. I want to be better. I want to be... someone good."

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Chapter 247

There was a beat of silence

Then Alex stepped closer, and with a gentleness that made her chest ache, he reached out and placed his hand on her head. His fingers lingered, warm and grounding.

"I believe in you," he said quietly.

And the words struck her deeper than anything else ever had. Her heart felt like it was waking up-beating faster, brighter-like his voice had poured sunlight into her chest..

Alex left not long after, but Bella stood there frozen in place, her fingers still tingling, her face warm.

It wasn't until ten minutes had passed that she finally moved, her thoughts still spinning, her heart still racing like it had just learned how to fall in love.

Moments later, Bella stormed into her father's study, flinging the door open. "Father, I want to be treated by Alex! Just hand him the Heaven Root, all right?"

"Hmph! That young man has no idea what he's talking about!" Jericho scoffed, his voice dripping with disdain.

"But Father, I believe in him," Bella insisted.

Jericho stood up sharply. "He's the man who slapped you, then stirred up

everyone else to slap you, too. How can you place your faith in him?"

Bella bit her lip, knowing she could not break through his stubborn way of thinking.

In desperation, she rushed to find her mother.

3

Soon enough, Lidia Kane stepped forward. "Jericho, I heard there's a man named Alex who can treat Bella. Is that true?" "He's a nobody," Jericho replied with a dismissive wave. "Maybe he can fight, but a doctor? That rascal has no worth to us."

"Bella said Alex warned her about a heart attack coming in a week and gave her this bottle with a pill as an emergency measure. What do you think?" Lidia asked.

"Hah! Nonsense. Throw it away," Jericho replied coldly.

"We have the finest doctors in Vermont for Bella. We don't need that man. He's overconfident, nothing more. Does he think I'm a fool just because he can best me in a fight?"

Three days went by in peaceful quiet.

Alex went about his days opening the clinic. Occasionally, Josephine came around to lend him a hand.

Then, around four days after his confrontation with Jericho Kane, the tide began to turn.

That day started off unremarkably, with Jericho poring over business matters in his study, when a servant burst in, eyes wide and voice trembling.

"Sir-come quick! It's Miss Bella! She suddenly fainted!"

"What? How did this happen?" Jericho shot to his feet, face darkening with dread.

"I-I don't know!" the maid stammered. "She was walking in the garden, then just collapsed. We've already moved her to her room." Her voice shook with panic.

Jericho didn't wait to hear more. He bolted from his study and rushed straight to Bella's room. The sight that met him there chilled his blood.

Bella lay unmoving, her face pale as a ghost. Jericho placed a trembling hand over her heart and found it all but still.

"This is bad," Jericho muttered, grimacing at death. He reached for Bella's pulse and felt it flicker faintly, her breaths shallow. She

Chapter 247

looked as though she might slip away within the day.

He wasted no time, pouring his internal energy into Bella in a desperate attempt

to keep her heartbeat from falling completely. Soon, her heart started beating once more but slowed to a dangerous crawl.

"Bella!" Lidia cried out in alarm, throwing herself beside her daughter.

"Lidia, hurry!" Jericho snapped. "Call Dr. Joane! Tell her to get here right away!" Lidia grabbed the phone instantly. After a terse conversation, she turned back to him, face pale.

"Dr. Joane is on her way, but she says it'll take about an hour for her to arrive."

"An hour?" Jericho seethed. "That will be too late! Try every other doctor in Vermont. I want them all here in five minutes!" "Alright!" Lidia hurried out, making frantic phone calls.

Within those five minutes, the butler arrived with a group of doctors in tow—some leading departments, some professors, others recognized experts in their fields. 1 One by one, they filed into the room, each of them solemn.

"Whoever saves my daughter will be richly rewarded by the Kane family!" Jericho declared, his voice echoing with raw desperation.

"Rest assured, Mr. Kane," one of the doctors said, eyes gleaming with ambition. "We will do our utmost."

They all knew what healing Bella Kane could mean: wealth, reputation, and the powerful friendship of the Kane family. Their drive to help her soared.

However, as they examined Bella, their expressions turned grim.

One by one, they realized her condition was unlike anything they had seen. It was

a hereditary heart disease with wildly irregular rhythms that defied the latest technology and all known medical knowledge.

For a moment, not one of them dared to act.

"Doctors," Jericho barked, "there are so many of you here. Don't tell me there's nothing you can do!"

They exchanged uneasy glances. "Well..." The muttered word hung in the air.

"A bunch of useless fools!" Jericho thundered, his face contorted with anger. Though a part of him had doubted they could help Bella, the reality still cut him to the core.

"Uncle Jericho!" Scarlett cried out, her tone urgent. "Bella's condition is getting worse!"

They all turned to look. Bella, motionless on the bed of green silk, seemed to be growing colder by the second.

Her breaths were so faint it was as if she hovered on the brink between this life and the next. 1

"Oh no!" Jericho's eyes narrowed with fear. "My channeling can only do so much... It can't cure her."

His voice quivered with helplessness. None of them could deny it: Bella's life hung by a thread.

The Almighty Dominance kidnapped 248[404 words]

Chapter 248

Lidia's voice shook as she clutched Jericho's sleeve.

"What are we going to do now? Tell me Bella's going to pull through, right?"

Jericho leaned in, whispering through clenched teeth, "I don't know," his mind racing for any miracle he still hadn't tried.

His reservoir of inner inner energy was thinning to a dangerous trickle.

Once that final spark died, Bella's heartbeat would follow it into the darkness.

Lidia's gaze darted to the nightstand, where a crimson velvet box tested beside a handwritten note.

The message, penned in Bella's looping script, read, "It I'm ever in danger, use this pill."

She had even doodled a tiny red heart beside the words, her faith sealed in ink and emoji.

"Jericho, we have to try this," Lidia urged, snapping the lid open and lifting the bottle inside.

It was the same elixir Alex had slipped Bella-her treasured keepsake, a vow of forever disguised as medicine.

Jericho scowled. "A trinket from that punk? You really think this'll pull her back. from the grave?"

"We're out of moves, Jericho," Lidia shot back, eyes blazing. "Unless you've got a better miracle up your sleeve, we gamble on his."

"I don't buy it," he hissed.

"It's Bella's wish-don't spit on it," she snapped.

If another path existed, Jericho would never wager his daughter's life on a stranger's pill.

But the room reeked of desperation, and every white-coated expert had already thrown up their hands.

Dr. Joane was still tearing down the highway, and time bled away too fast.

Jericho had no choice but to scrape the bottom of hope's barrel.

"What if it's poison?" he muttered, the question half-strangling him.

Lidia exhaled hard. "Do you really think Alex would lace a toxin for Bella right under our noses?"

Jericho's shoulders sagged into brooding silence.

The Kingswell had plenty of sins, but poisoning an innocent was never on their rap sheet.

He glanced at Bella's frost-pale skin and felt his jaw lock in grim resolve.

With a curt nod he growled, "Fine. We roll the dice."

Lidia drew a breath as deep as prayer, then tipped the capsule past Bella's lips.

The pill melted the instant it touched her tongue, sliding like liquid flame down her throat.

The moment it hit her stomach, an unseen engine roared to life.

A wave of heat surged upward, jump-starting her stalled heart without Jericho's fading chi.

Color flushed across her cheeks, chasing the deathly blue away.

Her breathing evened out, soft and steady as a child's sleep.

Jericho felt the drain on his inner energy vanish and pulled his hands back, stunned,

1/3

Chapter 248

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 249[931 words]

As Alex and Josephine crossed the threshold of the Kane estate, he spotted a semi-circle of white coats aristocracy clustered like ravens in the marbled foyer.

"You're finally here, young man! Come in, quickly!" Lidia cried, her smile nearly swallowing her face

A tingle of unease crawled down Alex's spine before he forced it away.

Vancouver's medical

"You claimed you could cure my daughter," Jericho said, his baritone iron-hard "If you can't, admit it now."

"I stand by my word," Alex answered, a calm smile cutting across his face. "But the Heaven Root is my price yes or no?" Jericho possessed the Heaven Root, a relictare herb.

Fortune and patience had handed him a single piece, and only recently had it ripened enough to be swallowed.

He guarded it for Bella's future years, because every powerful family in the province would claw for it if they smelled the chance. "Fine," Jericho said, frost edging each syllable. "Heal her, and the leaven Root is yours. Fail, and God help you."

"You'll have your answer soon."

Without another word, Alex stepped to Bella's bedside and took her pulse.

She slept soundly, her color already improving under the miracle pill's haze.

To erase the rare defect chewing at her heart, Alex would have to needle open buried meridians, letting energy flush the organ clean and stronger than nature intended; tiny vessels still lay stubbornly blocked.

With his inner force he could burn those channels clear and set the rhythm free. "Well?" Jericho demanded, suspicion coiling in his eyes. "Can you do it?"

"Challenging," Alex admitted with a nod, "but within my reach."

"Then try-but if my daughter suffers, you better..." Jericho growled. "Relax," Alex said, rolling up his sleeves. "I didn't come to watch her die."

He drew his first needle, but a thunderous shout cracked across the hall.

"Stop!"

"Hands off that girl!" the voice boomed.

"Dr. Joane?" someone gasped, and the room exploded with chatter.

The assembled physicians practically melted into gushing fanboys, their excitement punching through the mansion roof.

For standing there was the legendary healer herself-Dr. Joane Fontaine.

In global medicine her name was law; beside her, the other experts shrank to interns.

Youth and startling beauty only sharpened her legend.

Jericho's jaw dropped, then curved into delight. "Dr. Joane!"

"Please-Bella needs you," he pleaded, guiding her toward the bed.

"Mr. Kane, I thought you hired me to heal her. Care to explain?" Alex asked, his brow darkening.

"I value your effort, son," Jericho said, "but with Dr. Joane present, I won't gamble my child's life. You're dismissed."

1/3

Chapter 240

"You summoned me, now you shove me out?" Alex's tone turned lacerating. "That's disgraceful." Owen sneered. "Disgrace is thinking you're in Dr. Joane's league)

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Truthfully, desperation alone had driven him to Alex in the first place. "Hire whoever you like," Alex replied. "But what of the Heaven Root you promised?"

"Promised for what?" Jericho snapped. "You've done nothing. Earn it first." Alex's eyes narrowed. "So your word means nothing?"

Patience was his habit, but Jericho's ingratitude scraped his nerves raw.

"Enough theatrics," Jericho barked. "If it's money you crave, I'll give you more of those pills; I'm paying top price."

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"You heard the man," Scarlet added, arrogance dripping. "Grab the loot and crawl out."

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"Clever move, Mr. Kane. Pity you're betting on the wrong miracle worker."

The room erupted into angry voices.

"Watch your mouth! Dr. Joane has never failed!" someone barked. "People call her an angel!"

"If she can't cure Bella, what hope have you?" another doctor scoffed.

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The ring of doctors closed in, spitting scorn.

Joane's eyes sliced across Alex. "Where did you study, boy? On what planet does arrogance pass for skill?"

Respect was her birthright; no rookie had ever doubted her and lived it down. "Head too big for your shoulders, huh?" Scarlet taunted. "Know your place." Jericho pointed toward the door. "Leave before you make matters worse." Josephine squeezed Alex's hand. "They're blind, Alex. Let's just go."

Alex sighed. "Your daughter teeters on a razor's edge, Mr. Kane. Miss this window and she may never climb back. Remember that."

He shoved the bribe aside, turned on his heel, and walked out with Josephine.

They had barely reached the courtyard when Lidia hurried after them.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "If Bella pulls through, I'll push Jericho to honor the Heaven Root. Please, don't leave the city-we might still need you."

Alex studied her. "Can you guarantee I'll receive it?"

"I'll fight my husband if I must," Lidia vowed.

Alex exhaled. "Then I'll wait."

Chapter 249

She led him to a guest suite "Rest here, ask the staff for anything

Gratitude tugged at her this man had once saved Hella.

"Thank you, Mrs. Kane," Alex said, the edge in his voice softening

At least the house wasn't entirely faithless.

Meanwhile, in Bella's room

"Begin, Dr. Joane," Jericho urged.

Joane settled beside the girl and took her pulse.

"Congenital weakness," she pronounced. "Nothing beyond repair"

Jericho leaned forward. "You have a solution?"

"Certainly. Acupuncture will restructure the heart," Joane replied with a serene smile.

She drew a fan of needles and speared them deftly into Bella's chest.

Her technique was lightning-fast, mesmerising the onlookers.

Rows of needles now quivered across the girl's torso, each aligned with surgical precision.

"And the finisher," Joane said, driving a thicker needle into Bella's heart.

Bella's heartbeat thundered; the needles visibly trembled with the surge.

"Done. Her heart is stable-she'll wake soon," Joane announced.

Relief poured over Jericho. "Incredible! A miracle!"

Owen beamed. "With Dr. Joane, sickness doesn't stand a chance!"

The room flooded with triumphant smiles.

Then Lidia's scream cut through the celebration.

"Why is Bella bleeding from her mouth and nose?"

The Almighty Dominance - kidnapped 250[933 words]

Chapter 240

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Joane settled beside the girl and took her pulse.

"Congenital weakness," she pronounced. "Nothing beyond repair"

Jericho leaned forward. "You have a solution?"

"Certainly. Acupuncture will restructure the heart," Joane replied with a serene smile.

She drew a fan of needles and speared them deftly into Bella's chest.

Her technique was lightning-fast, mesmerising the onlookers.

Rows of needles now quivered across the girl's torso, each aligned with surgical precision.

"And the finisher," Joane said, driving a thicker needle into Bella's heart.

Bella's heartbeat thundered; the needles visibly trembled with the surge.

"Done. Her heart is stable-she'll wake soon," Joane announced.

Relief poured over Jericho. "Incredible! A miracle!"

Owen beamed. "With Dr. Joane, sickness doesn't stand a chance!"

The room flooded with triumphant smiles.

Then Lidia's scream cut through the celebration.

"Why is Bella bleeding from her mouth and nose?"