Intern 601

Chapter 601

forgot how to communicate 6

Maya let out a soft laugh, immediately catching the possessive little title.

“Wife, huh?”

A faint smile finally broke through Damien’s serious expression.

“Yes. My wife.”

Before Maya could respond, Harper proudly cut in.

“She helped me make a decision about how justice was delivered last night. One that completely changed the way we traditionally handle things.”

Damien’s faint smile disappeared.

“You did what?”

“She’s exaggerating,” Maya quickly said.

Harper scoffed. “Oh, please. Don’t downplay it.”

She turned toward Damien, the same pride from earlier returning to her expression.

“Traditionally, their punishment was mine to decide. But I couldn’t decide how I wanted to carry it out… until Maya made me realize something.” Harper glanced at her. “I wasn’t there.”

Damien’s brows drew together.

“I wasn’t the one who went through what they did,” Harper continued. “She made me realize that just because I have the authority to decide someone’s fate doesn’t always mean the decision should be mine to make.”

Understanding slowly began to settle across Damien’s face, while Nicholas, who had remained quiet until then, raised his brows.

“Wait.” He looked at Harper. “So you gave them the prisoners?”

“Yes. I let them avenge their brothers however they saw fit,” Harper replied simply. “But their final breath still belonged to me.”

Nicholas slowly nodded as the pieces fell into place. “Damn… that actually makes sense.”

Damien, however, wasn’t looking at Harper anymore. His attention had returned entirely to Maya.

“That was your idea?”

Maya gave a small shrug. “It just seemed fair. They were the ones who suffered through it. I thought they deserved to have a say in what happened to the people responsible.”

For a moment, Damien said nothing. He simply stared at Maya, clearly taken aback by the answer.

Then his eyes fell to the small handmade gift still resting in her hands.

a Demonstration?

Suddenly, the widows gratitude made perfect sense.

“Who would’ve thought you had it in you?” Nicholas looked at Maya with an impressed grin before giving her a thumbs–up. “I’m proud of you, sis.”

Maya gave him an almost innocent shrug. “It made sense at the time.”

“At the time?” Harper scoffed. “It still makes sense.”

Damien finally spoke.

“I want to know everything.”

Maya immediately shook her head. “There’s really no big-”

“Oh, come on!” Harper cut her off, suddenly looking far too excited to tell the story. She started walking again and motioned for the others to follow. “Let’s get moving. I’ll tell you everything on the way there.”

Maya sighed as the others followed, knowing there was absolutely no stopping Harper now.

As they continued toward the opposite wing, Harper eagerly recounted everything that had happened the night before, starting from the moment she caught Maya following her into the underground passage.

True to form, she spared almost no detail, occasionally earning corrections from Maya whenever her storytelling became a little too dramatic. Nicholas listened with obvious interest, while Damien remained mostly quiet, his attention shifting toward Maya every now and then.

Despite his earlier concern, he couldn't stop the quiet sense of pride growing in his chest as he listened to how bravely Maya had faced a side of his world he had always tried to shield her from.

They had nearly reached the other wing when Harper suddenly stopped mid–sentence.

"Oh, right!" She looked at Damien. "Speaking of which, I'll be Maya's personal trainer from now on."

Damien immediately frowned. "What do you mean?"

Maya chuckled at his reaction. "I asked Harper to teach me how to use knives."

"Ah! Excuse me!" Harper immediately corrected. "Not just knives, Anything sharp."

Damien's frown deepened.

Nicholas glanced at Harper. "Why does that sound significantly worse?"

“If you can’t handle the heat, get out of the kitchen,” Harper shot back.

Nicholas scoffed. “I’m not the one proudly advertising myself as an expert in stabbing people.”

Maya laughed softly. “In fairness, she’s good at it.”

Harper stopped walking.

“Good?”

All three of them looked at her.

a Demonstration?

She placed a hand against her chest, looking personally offended. “After what you saw, good is all I get?”

“Okay, sorry.” Maya laughed. “I stand corrected. Her skills were impressive.”

“Thank you.” Harperlifted her chin with satisfaction. “Much better.”

Nicholas snorted. “Careful, babe. Your ego is showing.”

“My skills justify my ego.“

“That remains to be seen.”

Harper slowly turned her head toward him. “Would you like a demonstration?”

That was enough to make Nicholas immediately raise both hands in surrender. “I fully believe you.”

The exchange between them made Maya laugh, but Damien remained noticeably more serious, his gaze settling on her.

“You really want to learn?” he asked.

Maya met his eyes without hesitation and nodded. “Yes.”

He studied her for a moment before glancing toward Harper.

“And you promise you won’t be careless?”

Harper gave him an offended look. “Do you seriously think I would be careless with my best friend?”

Nicholas casually slipped an arm around Harper’s shoulders. “Do you want him to answer that, babe?”

Harper immediately drove her elbow into his side, making Nicholas recoil with a pained grunt.

“Ouch! I’m just saying!” he protested, quickly putting some distance between them as he rubbed his side.” That hurts!”

“You deserved it!” Harper shot back with a glare before turning her attention back to Damien.

“Okay, I get where you’re coming from. Don’t worry. I promise I won’t be careless.” Her expression suddenly brightened. “Actually, tomorrow, I’ll take you guys to our training grounds so you can see for yourselves.”

She wiggled her eyebrows mischievously.

“Think of it as an audition–slash–live demonstration. What do you guys think?”

Maya glanced at Damien, barely suppressing a smile when she saw the thoughtful look on his face.

Damien caught her gaze, and the corner of his mouth lifted before he turned back to Harper.

“Alright,” he agreed with a small nod. “Let’s see what you’ve got.”

By the time they reached the opposite wing, the others were still gathered in the sitting area, waiting for any news from the medical team.

Dahlia looked up as they approached. “You’re back.”

Maya smiled and took the seat beside her, with Damien settling down next to her.

“Any news about Jaime?” she asked.

Dahlia shook her head. “Nothing yet.”

Maya simply nodded. She had known it was still too early to expect anything, but she couldn’t help asking.

Harper glanced around and noticed someone missing. “Where’s Dad?”

“He went back to his study,” Alice replied.

Harper nodded and was about to sit down when Nicholas suddenly cleared his throat.

She looked at him.

He said nothing, but his eyes shifted pointedly from Harper to her mother, then back to Harper.

Her eyes widened slightly.

Now?

Nicholas raised his brows as if to say, Why not?

Unfortunately for Harper, Kenji caught the entire silent exchange.

A mischievous smile slowly spread across his face.

“Mom,” he suddenly said, “I think Harper has something she wants to tell you.”

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Harper’s head whipped toward him.

The glare she sent her brother could have killed him on the spot.

Kenji only smiled wider.

Alice looked between them curiously. “What is it?”

Harper turned back to her mother, suddenly looking nervous. “Um… Mom, I-

Before she could get the words out, Nicholas stepped forward.

Harper looked at him in surprise as he stopped in front of Alice and gave her a respectful bow.

“Ma’am,” he began, his usual teasing demeanor replaced by unexpected seriousness. “Harper and I finally had a proper talk. We worked things out, and…” He paused and looked at Harper.

Their eyes met.

“We’re together now,” he finished, still holding her gaze.

For a moment, Harper simply stared at him.

Then she slowly looked toward her mother, almost as though bracing herself for whatever reaction would

come next.

Alice blinked in surprise before her gaze moved between the two of them.

“Harper? Is that true?”

Harper swallowed, suddenly looking far less like the fearless woman everyone knew.

“Yeah,” she admitted quietly. “We are.”

time.””

A smile slowly spread across Alice’s face. “Well… it’s about time.”

Harper’s eyes widened. “Mom!”

The room immediately broke into laughter.

Dahlia covered her mouth, clearly delighted, while Cecilia’s face softened into a warm smile.

Young people certainly have a different way of doing things these days, she thought with amusement, her gaze discreetly drifting toward her granddaughter, who sat beside Damien.

“What?” Alice laughed. “Did you think I hadn’t noticed?”

Harper’s cheeks immediately flushed. “There was nothing to notice before!”

“Apparently, there was plenty,” Kenji muttered.

Harper shot him another murderous glare.

Maya laughed beside Damien, genuinely happy for her best friend. After everything Harper had put herself Through trying to deny what she felt, seeing her finally stand there and openly admit that Nicholas was

hers filled Maya with quiet happiness.

Damien glanced at Maya and caught the Took on her face. The corner of his mouth lifted before he turned his attention back to the new couple.

Alice rose from her seat and approached them. Her gaze settled first on her daughter, and whatever teasing had been in her expression softened

“If you’re happy, sweetheart, then I’m happy for you.”

The embarrassment on Harper’s face disappeared.

“Mom…”

Alice reached out and squeezed her hand before looking at Nicholas.

“And you…”

Nicholas straightened almost instinctively.

Alice smiled.

“Take care of my daughter.”

Nicholas’s expression immediately grew serious. “You have my word, ma’am.”

“And find some time to speak with Ken about this yourself,” Alice added before turning toward her daughter. “Your father will appreciate hearing it from you personally.”

Nicholas nodded without hesitation. “Of course, ma’am. I will.”

“Talk to me about what?”

The unexpected voice immediately drew everyone’s attention. Harper visibly swallowed, while Nicholas stiffened beside her.

He hadn’t been lying when he said he would speak with Ken. In fact, he had already planned on asking Harper later for advice on how best to approach her father.

He just hadn’t expected to do it right now.

Ken walked over and stopped beside Alice, his gaze immediately settling on Harper and Nicholas. Earlier, the two had been bickering like children. Now, they were standing noticeably close to each other.

His eyes narrowed slightly.

“What is it you want to talk to me about, Ashcroft?”

Nicholas’s usual confidence suddenly wavered under Ken’s direct gaze.

“Um… sir, I-” He cleared his throat, then quickly bowed. When he straightened again, he forced himself to

meet Ken’s gaze.

“Mr. Takahashi, Harper and I had a chance to talk things through, and we both feel the same way about each other.” He paused briefly before continuing, his voice steadier now. “We’ve decided to be together, and I’d like to ask for your blessing to be with your daughter, sir.”

Ken raised a brow but said nothing, his unreadable gaze remaining fixed on Nicholas for several seconds.

Then he turned to his daughter.

“Hontō ka? Kono otoko to tsukiau koto ni dōi shita no ka?”

Is this true? Did you agree to be with this man?

Harper met her father’s eyes before glancing at Nicholas. Despite the blush still warming her cheeks, a small smile tugged at her lips.

Then she looked back at her father.

“Hai. Watashi wa sō shitai, otōsan.”

Yes. I do, Father.

Ken simply studied his daughter’s face for a long moment before giving a gentle nod of acknowledgment and a quiet hum.

Then he turned back to Nicholas.

“You have my blessing.”

Relief immediately crossed Nicholas’s face. He bowed respectfully. “Thank you, sir.”

“But I’m warning you,” Ken added, his voice becoming noticeably colder. “If you break my daughter’s heart,

I can’t guarantee the Ashcrofts will be spared from the consequences.”

Nicholas swallowed, but he didn’t look away.

“Understood, sir.”

Alice smiled gently and placed a hand on her husband’s arm. Alright, that was unnecessary. Let them figure things out for themselves, and trust your daughter to handle her own heart.”

He glanced at his wife but said nothing.

She gave his arm a reassuring pat before turning back to the young couple and bringing her hands together in a cheerful clap.

“Well, I think congratulations are in order.”

A warm chorus of agreement followed, with Dahlia among the first to voice her delight.

“Absolutely.”

Kenji, meanwhile, flashed his sister a wide grin. “Congratulations, sis!”

Harper rolled her eyes, though there was no hiding her smile. “You’re all making this way more dramatic

then it needs to be”

Nicholas slipped an arrn around her waist and pulled her closer with a grin. “I disagree. This is a historic Troment.”

“Don’t ruini it,” Harper warned, giving him a light elbow to the side.

His grin only widened. “Wouldn’t dream of it.”

Eventually, everyone settled into their own comfortable spots around the sitting area. The earlier excitement gradually faded into casual conversation as they continued to wait.

Cecilia found an opportunity to speak with Maya and Damien, asking them simple questions about their relationship and occasionally turning the conversation toward Damien's business. Nothing too serious- just the kind of easy conversation that helped pass the time and allowed her to get to know the man beside her granddaughter a little better.

At one point, Dahlia received a call from Dominic, who wanted an update on Jaime. Unfortunately, there was still nothing new to tell him.

Another hour gradually slipped by, the occasional conversation making the long wait feel a little more bearable.

The atmosphere remained calm, though beneath it lingered the quiet tension of people waiting for news

that mattered far too much.

Until an unfamiliar sound suddenly shattered the stillness.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

Every conversation stopped.

The rapid electronic alarm was coming from somewhere beyond the operating room doors.

Before anyone could make sense of it, the doors suddenly swung open.

Nurse Daniel and Nurse Sophia rushed out.

There was no reassuring smile. No update. Neither of them even acknowledged the people waiting as they hurried toward an adjoining room with an urgency that sent an immediate chill through Maya.

She slowly leaned forward in her seat, her eyes following them.

Her heartbeat quickened.

Something is wrong.

Chapter 603

Maya wasn’t the only one who felt it.

The sudden tension had spread through the entire waiting area, wiping away every trace of the warmth and laughter that had filled the room only moments earlier.

Harper was the first to move toward Maya, with Nicholas following closely behind her.

Across the room, Alice, Dahlia, and Cecilia had already risen to their feet. Worry was written across all three women's faces, but it was especially difficult for Cecilia to hide.

Maya barely noticed any of them.

Her eyes remained fixed on the operating room doors as moisture began to gather along her lashes.

Something was happening in there.

Something they weren't being told.

Moments later, the doors swung open again.

Nurse Daniel and Nurse Sophia emerged, this time carrying additional medical supplies and several bags Maya couldn't immediately identify.

A fresh wave of dread swept through her.

She immediately rushed toward them.

Damien followed close behind.

“Excuse me!” Maya called as the two nurses hurried toward the operating room. She stepped directly into their path. “Please… what happened? How’s Jaime?”

Both nurses stopped.

For a brief second, Daniel and Sophia exchanged a look.

That single glance was enough to make Maya’s stomach drop.

Daniel gave Sophia a quick nod. Without wasting another second, he shifted everything he was carrying into one arm before taking the supplies from her hands.

“Excuse me.”

He hurried past Maya and disappeared through the operating room doors, leaving Sophia behind.

Maya’s chest tightened.

“Nurse Sophia, please… tell me what’s going on,” she pleaded, her voice beginning to shake as tears pooled in her eyes.

Sophia looked at her, sympathy immediately softening her expression, but she hesitated. It wasn’t her place to explain what had happened or deliver news that should come directly from the doctor.

plication

14er lips parted as though she wanted to answer, only to close again.

Damien’s expression hardened. His gaze shifted toward Nicholas, and the moment their eyes met, Nicholas understood exactly what he was asking.

His own expression immediately turned cold.

He recognized Daniel and Sophia as two of the nurses he had personally assigned to Jaime’s medical team, and he had no patience for hesitation–especially from people under his payroll.

“Speak,” Nicholas ordered sharply. “Now.”

Sophia visibly jerked at the command, her entire body tensing.

Her gaze flickered toward Nicholas before quickly returning to Maya.

“Ms. Maya…” she began carefully.

Maya held her breath.

“There’s been a complication.”

Maya felt the blood drain from her face.

“What?!” She stepped closer, panic immediately taking over. “What complication? What happened? Is Jaime okay?”

The questions tumbled from her lips one after another as her breathing grew increasingly unsteady.

Damien immediately reached for her arm and gently pulled her back against him, wrapping a steadying arm around her as though anchoring her before panic could completely overwhelm her.

“Maya, calm down.”

She turned toward him, tears already spilling freely down her cheeks.

“Damien, you heard her.” Her trembling fingers clutched at his shirt. “Ask her, please… please ask her i need to know how my brother is doing.” Her voice cracked as another tear slipped down her face. “Please, Damien… make her tell us,”

Something in Damien’s expression changed.

He slowly lifted his gaze to Sophia, his eyes turning dangerously cold.

“What happened?”

His voice was low and controlled, but the quiet menace behind those two words was impossible to miss.

Sophia hesitated again, clearly torn between answering the question and returning to the operating room.

“Mr. Blackwood, I’m sorry, but I don’t have the authority to discuss the patient’s condition.”

She turned toward Nicholas. “Mr. Ashcroft, I’m sorry, sir. Please understand.”

Her gaze briefly swept across the worried faces surrounding her before returning to Maya.

anemplication

“Please, just wait for Dr. Anderson, okay? He’ll explain everything as soon as he can.”

“But-” Maya started.

“I’m sorry, Ms. Maya. have to go.”

Before anyone could stop her or ask another question, Sophia hurried back through the operating room doors, her retreating figure disappearing from view as they immediately closed behind her.

Maya stood frozen, staring at the closed doors as a terrible weight settled in her chest. The tears continued to slip silently down her cheeks, but she barely seemed to notice them.

Then whatever strength she had been holding onto finally gave way.

She turned and buried her face against Damien's chest, a broken sob tearing from her throat as her hands clutched desperately at his shirt.

"Damien…"

He immediately wrapped both arms around her, pulling her tightly against him as her entire body began to shake.

"I've got you," he murmured, one hand cradling the back of her head.

Maya cried harder.

A few feet away, Harper quickly wiped beneath her eyes, but it was useless. Tears were already slipping down her cheeks as she watched her best friend fall apart.

Nicholas moved closer to her without a word, his hand settling against her back.

Even Kenji had lost every trace of his usual mischievous expression. His jaw was tight, worry unmistakable in his eyes as he stared at the operating room doors.

Dahlia's eyes had grown wet as well, though she fought to keep herself together.

But Cecilia wasn't holding up nearly as well.

The overwhelming fear, the uncertainty, and the sight of her granddaughter sobbing against Damien became too much all at once.

Her knees suddenly buckled.

"Cecilia!"

Dahlia and Alice caught her from either side before she could hit the floor.

Ken and Kenji immediately rushed forward to help.

"I'm alright…" Cecilia breathed, but the weakness in her voice betrayed her.

"No, you're not." Dahlia tightened her hold around her. "Come on. Sit down."

With Ken and Kenji helping to support her, they carefully guided Cecilia back into one of the chairs.

Complication

Alice crouched in front of her for a trement, studying her pale face before quickly looking over her shoulder.

“Kenji, call Hannah. Tell her to bring our family doctor here immediately.”

Kenji nodded without hesitation.

“Yes, Mom.”

He immediately pulled out his phone and stepped a short distance away from the group as he dialed Hannah’s number.

The call was brief. Whatever he said was quiet and direct, and less than a minute later, he ended it and glanced back toward the others.

His eyes lingered on Cecilia for a moment before shifting toward Maya, who was still crying against Damien’s chest, and then to his sister, whose cheeks were also wet with tears.

Without saying anything, Kenji walked toward a nearby refreshment station and returned moments later carrying several bottles of water.

He handed the first one to Cecilia.

“Here, Grandma Cecilia,” he said softly as he crouched beside her. “Drink some water. The doctor’s coming.”

Cecilia accepted the bottle with trembling hands. “Thank you.”

Kenji gave her a small nod before rising to his feet. He handed bottles to Dahlia and his mother next, then made his way over to Harper and Maya, quietly offering one to each of them.

Time seemed to move painfully slowly after that.

Every minute felt longer than the one before it, stretching beneath the suffocating weight of uncertainty.

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Not long after, the Takahashi family doctor arrived with Hannah and immediately checked on Cecilia.

Thankfully, there was nothing seriously wrong with her. The emotional strain had simply overwhelmed her, but he insisted she remain seated and rest while he stayed nearby to keep an eye on her.

With Cecilia safely under the doctor's care, everyone's attention inevitably returned to the closed doors–and to the uncertainty still hanging over Jaime's condition.

It took some time, and the quiet reassurance of those around her, before Damien finally managed to ease Maya's sobs. But calming her tears was one thing. Calming the fear consuming her was another.

She remained tucked tightly against his side, drawing whatever comfort she could from the arm wrapped securely around her, while her swollen eyes kept drifting back to the closed doors separating her from her brother, his condition still painfully uncertain.

Another hour passed.

By then, the atmosphere in the waiting area had become almost unbearably heavy.

Very little conversation remained. No one seemed to have the energy for it anymore.

The long wait had taken its toll on Maya. She was exhausted from crying, yet the fear inside her hadn't eased. If anything, the longer they went without an update, the harder it became to keep her emotions under control.

Damien never left her side, and neither did anyone else. With nothing more they could do, they simply continued to wait as the agonizing minutes dragged on.

Until a sound suddenly came from behind the closed doors.

Maya’s head snapped up, and the entire waiting area seemed to go still at once.

A quiet mechanical click followed before the doors finally began to open.

Maya immediately shot to her feet.

Dr. Anderson and Dr. Nakamura stepped through.

The moment Maya saw them, her breath caught.

Both surgeons were still dressed in their surgical scrubs, their masks pulled down beneath

their chins. Hours inside the operating room had left exhaustion clearly etched across their faces, but it was the seriousness in their expressions that made Maya’s heart begin to pound.

She couldn’t tell whether they were bringing good news or bad.

And that frightened her more than anything.

“Doctor!”

Maya immediately rushed toward them, with Damien close beside her. Behind them, the others quickly rose from their seats and followed.

The two surgeons barely had time to take another step before Maya stopped directly in front

of them.

“How is he?” she asked breathlessly. “How’s Jaime? Is he okay?”

The two surgeons exchanged a brief look.

Dr. Nakamura was the first to move. “Excuse me. I need to make a call.”

He stepped away from the group, already reaching for his phone.

Maya’s anxious gaze followed him before quickly returning to Dr. Anderson.

Dr. Anderson paused for a moment, taking in the worried faces gathered around him before drawing a slow breath.

“The transplant is complete.”

Dr. Anderson continued before anyone could interrupt.

“The donor heart has been successfully implanted, and it’s functioning as expected.”

For one brief, precious second, Maya forgot how to breathe. A strangled sound of relief escaped her as one hand flew to her mouth.

Behind her, several people released breaths they seemed to have been holding for hours.

“Thank God…” Dahlia whispered.

Maya’s eyes immediately filled with tears again as they met Dr. Anderson’s.

“So he’s okay?” she asked, desperately searching his face for reassurance. “Jaime’s okay?”

Dr. Anderson didn't answer immediately. His expression turned serious again as he gave a

subtle shake of his head.

And just like that, the tiny spark of relief inside Maya disappeared.

"The transplant itself went well," Dr. Anderson explained carefully. "But shortly after we closed him up, his vital signs suddenly began to drop. We discovered internal bleeding, and Jaime suffered significant blood loss."

Maya's face immediately paled. She stared at Dr. Anderson, too overwhelmed to even know what to ask next as her knees suddenly threatened to give way beneath her.

Damien immediately tightened his hold around her, keeping her steady against him.

"How is he now?" he asked, his voice controlled despite the tension in his expression. "Is the bleeding under control?"

"Yes," Dr. Anderson answered immediately. "We managed to control it, and Jaime is stable for now."

Maya released a trembling breath, fresh tears spilling down her cheeks as her fingers tightened around Damien's hand.

But Nicholas immediately caught the two words that mattered.

For now.

His patience finally snapped.

“For now?” he repeated sharply. “What exactly do you mean by for now?”

Dr. Anderson turned toward him. “Mr. Ashcroft-”

“Get straight to the point,” Nicholas interrupted, his expression hardening. “How much blood did he lose?”

“A significant amount,” Dr. Anderson answered. “Far more than any of us anticipated.”

Something in Nicholas’s expression immediately changed.

“Then what’s the problem? What about the blood we had prepared?” His brows pulled together. “There should be more than enough.”

“We used almost all of it, sir.”

Nicholas stared at him, genuine disbelief crossing his face.

“That’s not possible.”

“I’m afraid it is, Mr. Ashcroft.”

“No.” Nicholas stepped closer. “We didn’t prepare the minimum requirement. I personally made sure you had three times the estimated amount available in case something went wrong.”

“I know, Mr. Ashcroft.”

“Then how the hell did you nearly exhaust it?”

Harper immediately moved closer and placed a hand on his arm, silently trying to calm him.

Dr. Anderson remained composed despite the anger directed at him.

“The bleeding was far more severe than anyone anticipated,” he explained. “The amount of blood Jaime lost went well beyond what we had reasonably prepared for.”

He paused briefly.

“If

you hadn’t arranged for that additional reserve, we would be having a very different conversation right now.”

That silenced him.

Maya’s fingers tightened painfully around Damien’s. She didn’t understand everything they were saying.

But she understood that.

The extra blood Nicholas had prepared had helped keep her brother alive.

Her eyes immediately filled with fresh tears.

“Is Jaime going to be okay?” she whispered.

Dr. Anderson’s expression softened slightly.

“He’s stable right now, Ms. Maya. The new heart is functioning as expected, and we’ve controlled the bleeding.”

“Then what do you need?” Damien asked.

Dr. Anderson’s attention shifted to him.

“More blood. We need more blood, Mr. Blackwood.”

Damien immediately straightened.

“How much?”

“At least three to four additional units of compatible packed red blood cells as soon as possible,” Dr. Anderson replied. “More available as backup would be even better.”

Before he could continue, Dr. Nakamura returned, slipping his phone back into his pocket as he stepped beside him.

“The next twenty–four hours are critical,” Dr. Nakamura said. “His blood count is extremely low. He may not need every unit, but after the amount he lost, we will not risk taking him through the immediate postoperative period without an adequate reserve available.”

Damien’s expression hardened.

“Then contact every hospital that has it and have the blood brought here immediately. I don’t

care what it costs or how far it has to come from.”

Dr. Nakamura released a quiet breath.

“I wish it were that simple, Mr. Blackwood.”

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Damien’s expression hardened, his entire demeanor shifting as the fear in his eyes gave way

to cold, commanding authority.

“Then solve it,” he ordered. “Whatever is standing in the way, remove it. Whatever resources you need, use them. Everything has a price. Pay it.”

His voice rose sharply, his composure finally cracking beneath the frustration consuming

him.

“Just make it happen!” he snapped, each word carrying the weight of an order he expected to be obeyed.

“With all due respect, Mr. Blackwood, the problem isn’t our ability to transport the blood,” Dr. Nakamura explained calmly. “It’s finding enough compatible blood to transport in the first place.”

“Jaime has a relatively rare blood type. We can’t simply substitute whatever blood happens to be available. For red–cell transfusions, we’re limited to blood that’s compatible with both his ABO type and his Rh–negative status. That significantly narrows the supply available to

us.”

He paused briefly.

“We’ve already contacted the hospital and had them check with blood banks and nearby facilities. So far, we’ve only located two compatible units. Transport has already been arranged, but they’re several hours away.”

“How long?” Damien demanded.

His jaw was clenched, his nostrils flaring slightly with each controlled breath as he struggled to keep his growing frustration in check.

“Approximately ten hours,” Dr. Nakamura replied, his expression remaining grave.

“And that’s too long,” Dr. Anderson added. “Given Jaime’s condition, ten hours is much longer than we’re comfortable risking. And even when those units arrive, two may not be enough.”

The tension around them sharpened.

Quiet sobs broke through the heavy silence as the weight of Dr. Anderson’s words settled

over everyone.

Harper abruptly stepped forward.

“What’s his blood type?” she demanded.

The panic in her eyes was unmistakable, but her voice carried sharp authority, fear quickly giving way to the instinct to act.

“Test everyone here. There are at least a hundred people on this estate right now, and I can have every single person working for us within a fifty–mile radius brought here immediately.” She looked between the two surgeons. “Whatever you need–do it. Start testing people now. There has to be someone among us who’s compatible.”

Dr. Nakamura gave Harper a small nod.

“Ms. Harper, we can test everyone willing to donate, and we will. But-”

“But what?” Harper cut in, her agitation growing.

“Screening that many people and confirming compatibility still takes time,” Dr. Nakamura explained patiently. “We need to determine their blood type, make sure they’re eligible to donate, and crossmatch any potentially compatible blood with Jaime’s before we can safely use it. With fewer than ten medical personnel available here, we simply don’t have the manpower to test a hundred people at once.”

“Then bring more medical staff in!” Harper snapped. “You need people? I’ll get you people!”

Her expression hardened, the agitation in her features giving way to something far colder. When she spoke again, she didn't raise her voice. If anything, the sudden calm made her more intimidating as she met the doctor's eyes, unmistakable authority settling over her.

"Anata ni koko ni kite moratta no wa, shigoto o shite morau tame desu, Nakamura–sensei. Kore ijō, iiwake wa kikitakunai. Wakarimashita ka?"

I brought you here to do your job, Dr. Nakamura. I don't want to hear any more excuses. Do you understand?

Dr. Nakamura held her stare for only a moment before dipping his head in a respectful bow, clearly recognizing the authority behind her words.

"Understood. We'll begin testing as soon as possible."

He straightened, immediately shifting his attention back to the problem at hand.

"But let's narrow the pool first. That will save us valuable time."

Harper gave a firm nod. "Tell us what you need."

"Anyone who already knows their blood type should come forward immediately. Jaime is

B–negative, so prioritize anyone who knows they're B–negative or O–negative. We'll test and crossmatch them first."

Maya's head suddenly lifted.

Negative.

Of everything Dr. Nakamura had just said, that was the one word that immediately registered.

Before he could continue, Maya cut him off.

"I'm negative."

Damien looked down at her, but Maya was already pulling away from him and stepping

toward the doctors.

"I'm AB–negative," she blurted, her voice trembling as she immediately held out her arm toward the doctors. "Take mine. Take as much as you need. Drain me if you have to. I don't

care.”

“Maya-” Damien started.

But she barely seemed to hear him.

Her tears spilled faster as desperation completely overwhelmed whatever sense of self–preservation she had left.

“Even if it kills me, just do it!” she pleaded, “just save my brother.”

Her voice broke completely as she started to lower herself to her knees, ready to beg if that

was what it took.

Before she could make it any farther, Damien caught her by the arms and pulled her back against him.

“What the hell are you thinking?!” he snapped. “Don’t you dare kneel before anyone!”

Cecilia's expression tightened at the sight. It took everything in her not to rush to her granddaughter's side. Seeing with her own eyes just how desperate Maya had become was almost too much to bear.

People were meant to kneel before someone of Maya's blood, not the other way around.

"No, Damien!" Maya cried, struggling against his hold. "Let go of me!"

She managed to pull herself free and turned toward him, tears streaming down her face.

"You don't understand! Jaime is all I have left!" Her voice broke into a sob. "He's my brother, and I'll do anything for him. Anything!"

"Maya-"

"I mean it!" she cried. "If giving my life means he gets to live, then I'll do it. I'll give them every drop of blood in my body if that's what it takes to save him!"

Damien went completely still.

For a moment, he could only stare at her, the color draining slightly from his face as her words sank in. His jaw tightened, but the anger that had consumed him only moments earlier was gone, replaced by something far more vulnerable.

Fear.

“Then what am I to you?”

The quiet question cut through her panic.

Her breath caught as the meaning of her own words finally sank in. The hurt on Damien’s face was subtle but unmistakable, and seeing it made her chest tighten painfully.

“Damien…” Her lips trembled. “I… that’s not what I meant.”

She wiped helplessly at her tears with the back of her hand.

“You are my future, Damien.” Her voice cracked beneath the weight of the words. “But I can’t imagine that future without my brother in it. I love you. God, I love you so much… but I can’t lose him. I can’t.”

Another sob escaped her.

“He’s my little brother. I raised him. I protected him. I promised him I would always be there.” She shook her head desperately as fresh tears poured down her face. “I can’t stand here and watch him die when there’s something I can give to save him.”

Her breathing broke as she struggled to continue.

“If one of us has to die, then let it be me. I’ll die before I let it be him.”

Chapter 606

Whatever hurt had crossed Damien’s face disappeared beneath something softer and far more pained.

He knew he had no right to compete with Jaime, nor would he ever want to. He understood exactly where Maya’s words had come from. But knowing that didn’t make it hurt any less–not because she would choose her brother, but because she was hurting enough to willingly give up her own life.

And beneath that pain was a fear he couldn’t escape.

Because just as Maya couldn’t imagine a future without Jaime, Damien couldn’t imagine one without her.

He released a slow breath before moving toward her again.

“I will not allow it,” he said, his voice lower now as he reached for her trembling hands. “Selfish as it may sound, I can’t imagine a future without you in it either. So don’t ever say that again.”

He held her hands tightly between his own.

“We’ll find another way, okay? I don’t care what it costs or what it takes. We will find another way.” His eyes remained locked on hers. “You will not lose him.”

Maya’s lips trembled, but she couldn’t bring herself to meet his eyes. She lowered her head instead, tears continuing to fail as she gave a small, broken shake of her head.

She wanted to believe him. Desperately.

But after everything that had happened, she was too terrified to believe that anyone could promise her Jaime would survive.

Damien watched her for a moment before lifting both hands to her face, gently but firmly forcing her attention back to him.

“Look at me.”

Maya shook her head and tried to pull away.

“Maya.” His voice hardened. “I said look at me.”

Her tear–filled eyes finally lifted to his.

“I will not lose either of you,” he said, each word firm and absolute. “Do you understand me? I’ll sacrifice myself first before I ever allow you to sacrifice yourself.”

Something shifted inside Cecilia as she watched them. Whatever doubts she still carried about the man standing beside her granddaughter quietly gave way to remorse, gratitude, and a conviction she could no longer deny.

Love was easy to profess when there was nothing at stake. It was in moments like this–when fear stripped away pride, reason, and every carefully constructed wall–that its truth became impossible to

hide.

And Cecilia could see Damien’s clearly.

He wasn’t merely protecting Maya because he considered her his responsibility. He loved her enough that The thought of a life without her genuinely terrified him.

For the first time, Cecilia felt certain that her granddaughter was in good hands.

But that certainty came with a painful realization of her own.

She had already stood aside once and allowed the people she loved to pay the price for choices she should have fought harder against.

She would not make that mistake again.

Whatever Maya and Damien had built together, Cecilia would protect it rather than stand by and watch others threaten to tear it apart.

Not again.

Before Maya could respond, Dr. Anderson spoke.

“We can’t take your blood, Ms. Maya.”

Everyone immediately turned toward him.

Maya stared at him.

“What?”

“Your blood can’t be used for Jaime.”

Her brows pulled together in confusion. “Why? You said he needs negative blood. I’m negative.”

“You are,” Dr. Anderson said gently. “But being Rh–negative is only part of what determines whether your blood is compatible. Jaime is B–negative. You’re AB–negative.”

Maya stared at him, clearly not understanding why that mattered.

Dr. Anderson continued.

“Your red blood cells carry both A and B antigens. Jaime’s blood is type B, which means his body can react against the A antigen on your red blood cells. Giving him your blood could cause a dangerous transfusion reaction.”

Maya’s lips parted.

“I can’t…” Her voice broke. “I can’t give him mine?”

“I’m sorry,” Dr. Anderson said softly. “Not for a red blood cell transfusion. Your blood isn’t compatible with his.”

The last trace of hope drained from Maya’s expression as fresh tears slipped silently down her cheeks.

Then a quiet voice came from behind them.

“I’m B–negative.”

Cecilia stood among them, her face still pale from everything that had happened, tears lingering in her eyes. But there was no hesitation in her expression as she looked directly at the two surgeons.

“I’m B–negative,” she repeated, more firmly this time. “Take mine.”

Dahlia’s eyes widened.

Her hand immediately closed around Cecilia’s arm.

“Lady Cecilia,” she whispered urgently. “What are you doing?”

Cecilia turned to her, a small, apologetic smile touching her lips.

“Forgive me, Dahlia. I will face the consequences, but I need to save my grandson first.”

Damien caught the words immediately. His expression sharpened.

“Mom? What’s going on here?” he demanded. “What consequences?”

Dahlia stiffened.

Before either woman could answer, Dr. Nakamura stepped forward.

“Madam, if you’re certain you’re willing to donate, we can begin the necessary testing immediately. We’ll need to confirm your blood type, complete the appropriate screening, and crossmatch your blood with Jaime’s before-”

“There’s no need to start from the beginning,” Cecilia interrupted calmly. “My blood is tested and screened regularly. My medical records are current, and you can have them sent to you immediately.“”

Dr. Nakamura studied her. “That will save us some time, but we would still need to crossmatch your blood with Jaime’s. And considering your condition, I would need to examine you before allowing you to donate.

“Then examine me and crossmatch it.”

Cecilia stepped forward.

“If I’m cleared, take one unit from me for immediate use, and I’ll have the remaining units sent over within the hour.”

A stunned expression crossed several faces around the room.

Dr. Anderson glanced at Dr. Nakamura before looking back at Cecilia.

“You have access to several units of B–negative blood that quickly?”

“Yes,”

“How?”

Cecilia didn’t answer immediately.

She closed her eyes briefly.

There was no point in hiding anymore. She had already said too much, and she knew exactly what could happen once she said the rest.

Maya might hate her.

She might refuse to forgive her. She might take Jaime and walk away, leaving Cecilia to lose her grandchildren just as quickly as she had found them.

The thought tore through her.

But none of it mattered more than Jaime's life.

If telling the truth meant saving him, Cecilia would accept whatever consequences came afterward.

Even if those consequences meant they never wanted to see her again.

When she opened her eyes, she looked directly at her granddaughter.

“I have an emergency blood reserve that travels with me whenever I leave home,” she said. “The units are medically screened, properly stored, and maintained specifically for emergency use. There are several units of B–negative blood available.”

Dr. Nakamura’s brows rose. “You travel with your own blood reserve?”

“I do.”

“But even if those units are confirmed B–negative, we would still need to crossmatch them with Jaime before they could be transfused.”

“I understand.”

Cecilia drew a breath.

“And I am confident there is a very good chance they will be compatible.”

Maya stared at her, confusion beginning to break through her grief.

“Grandma Cecilia… What… what do you mean?”

Chapter 607

Cecilia didn’t answer right away.

Her eyes filled with emotions Maya couldn’t quite understand. There was fear in them, but there was something else too, something deeper. Longing. Love. And beneath it all, a quiet sense of surrender.

Suddenly, all the little things Maya had never thought to question began pressing at the edges of her mind.

Cecilia’s unexpected arrival at the estate. The convenient explanation that she was simply an old friend of Dahlia’s. How eager Dahlia had been for them to meet.

Then there was Cecilia herself.

The way she had looked at her from the moment they met. The inexplicable affection she had shown both her and Jaime.

The tears. The protectiveness. That strange sense of familiarity she had felt around her but could never quite explain.

And every time she or Jaime called her Grandma Cecilia, there had always been something in the older woman’s expression. An emotion Maya had noticed more than once but had never thought to question.

Until now.

Could she be…?

Maya's breath caught. Her eyes met Cecilia's, searching them for an answer the older woman had yet to give.

Cecilia didn't look away. Instead, tears slowly filled/her eyes.

"Grandma Cecilia…" Maya whispered, something uneasy beginning to form in her chest. "Who are you?"

Cecilia's lips parted, but no words came. She wanted to tell her, but fear held her back.

Because once the words left her mouth, there would be no taking them back. No more pretending. No more hiding behind the affectionate title Maya and Jaime had so innocently given her.

And Cecilia was terrified that the moment Maya learned the truth might also become the last time her granddaughter ever willingly spoke to her.

But she had no other choice.

Her grandson needed blood, and she had the blood that could potentially save him.

As desperately as Cecilia wanted to protect the fragile relationship she had only just begun to build with her grandchildren, Jaime's life mattered more. If saving him meant risking everything she had only just found, then there was no decision to make.

She drew a deep breath.

"I am your grandmother."

Maya stared at her.

"Around them, shock rippled through everyone who hadn't already known the truth.

"You…" Maya's voice barely came out. "You're…"

"Yes, Maya." Tears slipped down Cecilia's cheeks. "I am Cecilia Lockwood. Your biological grandmother."

Maya's lips parted, but no words came.

Then, slowly, she turned toward Dahlia,

The expression on Dahlia's face only deepened the shock settling over Maya.

"Aunt Dahlia…"

"Maya, I…" Dahlia hesitated. "I can explain."

Before she could say anything more, Damien immediately stepped in front of Maya, placing himself protectively between her and his mother.

"Explain what?" His attention snapped toward Dahlia, his expression hardening. "Mom, what exactly is going on here? What have you done?!"

Dahlia looked at her son.

"Son, I…"

"Excuse me," Dr. Nakamura interrupted. "I hate to interrupt what is clearly a sensitive matter, but we're working against time. If we need to run tests and crossmatch the blood, we need to start now."

Dahlia nodded, then looked around at everyone, her eyes lingering especially on Maya and Damien.

“Let’s talk about this later. Jaime needs to come first. The rest can wait until we know he’s safe.”

As if summoned by her words, the doors to the surgical wing opened.

Every head turned.

Nurse Daniel emerged first, followed closely by Nurse Sophia and another member of the medical team as they carefully guided a hospital bed through the doorway.

Maya’s heart lurched, and she immediately rushed forward.

“Jaime…”

Jaime lay motionless beneath the blankets, his complexion frighteningly pale. An oxygen mask covered his nose and mouth, while several lines and tubes remained connected to his body.

Seeing him like that nearly broke her all over again.

“Oh my God… Jaime.”

Her hand lifted instinctively toward his face, only to hesitate inches away.

She was suddenly afraid to touch him.

He looked so fragile.

Her trembling fingers finally brushed lightly over his hair, the touch so gentle it was barely there as fresh tears spilled down her cheeks,

She carefully reached for his hand, barely closing her fingers around it.

“You’re going to be okay,” she whispered through her tears. “You promised me.”

Her voice broke.

“You better be okay.”

Dr. Brown was the last to emerge, following behind Jaime’s bed.

“Maya.”

She looked at him but didn’t release Jaime’s hand.

“We need to move him into critical care now,” he said gently. “We need to get him connected to the monitors and keep a very close watch on his new heart.”

Maya swallowed. “Can I go with him?”

“Not yet. We need to get him settled first, and because of the transplant, access to the room will be strictly controlled to minimize the risk of infection.”

Maya looked back down at her brother and nodded.

“I understand.”

Every part of her wanted to follow him. To stay beside him until he opened his eyes and she could hear his voice again.

But she knew she couldn’t get in their way now. Slowly, reluctantly, she loosened her fingers from Jaime’s

hand.

“I’ll be right here,” she whispered, brushing her thumb over his knuckles one last time.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

The moment she let go and took a step back, the nurses began moving again.

Maya remained where she was, watching as they wheeled Jaime toward the critical–care room. But before they could disappear inside, Dr. Brown turned back toward the others.

“I’m sure Dr. Nakamura and Dr. Anderson have already explained what happened. His condition is stable for the moment, but his blood count is still dangerously low. We need those additional units available in case his condition changes.”

Cecilia immediately stepped forward.

“Then there’s no reason to waste another minute,”

She turned toward Maya and moved closer, but Damien instinctively shifted as though to shield her

Maya immediately placed a gentle hand on his arm.

It’s okay.”

He looked at her for a moment before reluctantly taking a step back.

Cecilia continued toward her until only a small distance remained between them.

For a moment, she

simply looked at Maya, her expression softening as she took in the familiar features Maya had inherited from her mother.

Then she slowly reached for her hand.

Maya hesitated, but she didn’t pull away when Cecilia took it.

“You look so much like my Malia,” Cecilia whispered, fresh tears gathering in her eyes.

Chapter 608

Hearing her mother's name from Cecilia's lips sent a strange ache through Maya's chest.

There were so many questions she wanted to ask about her mother, about Cecilia, and about

everything she had just learned.

But Jaime was still fighting for his life.

Main

Whatever answers she needed would have to wait. Right now, her brother had to be her priority.

As if understanding exactly what was going through her mind, Cecilia gave her hand a gentle

squeeze.

"I know you're probably angry with me, and you have every right to be. I promise I'll answer every question you have, but right now, I need you to listen to me carefully."

Maya remained quiet. Deep down, she did have countless questions, but angry?

She couldn’t find it in her heart to be angry with Cecilia.

Anger felt too strong for what she was feeling. There was confusion, certainly, and perhaps even disappointment, but there was no anger.

She didn’t say a word. She simply gave a subtle nod, giving Cecilia the chance to continue.

Cecilia glanced at Damien, then at everyone around them before returning her attention to Maya.

“Believe it or not, I didn’t come here to interfere with your life. I just…”

Her voice wavered, and she paused to steady herself.

“I only hoped I could somehow be a part of it. Even if it meant remaining on the outside. Even if all you ever allowed me was the occasional glimpse from the sidelines.”

Her fingers tightened gently around Maya’s.

“I know I have no right to ask anything from either of you after all these years. I missed so much of your lives, and I know I can never get those years back. But finding out about the both of you gave me something I thought I had lost forever when your mother left.”

Cecilia’s voice broke as the emotion she had been struggling to contain finally overwhelmed her. Tears spilled freely down her cheeks, and she lowered her head for a moment, trying to compose herself.

When she finally looked back at Maya, her eyes were filled with a sincerity and longing that needed no explanation.

“I just want the chance to know my grandchildren, however you’re willing to let me.”

Before Cecilia could say anything more, Dr. Anderson approached them.

“Excuse me, Madam. I’m sorry to interrupt, but we need to begin the testing now. We shouldn‘

delay any longer.”

Cecilia nodded in understanding. There was still so much she wanted to explain, but Jaime needed

her more than either of them needed answers right now.

Maya seemed to understand that too.

“Please save Jaime first,” she said softly. “We can talk after.”

Cecilia’s expression softened as she gave Maya’s hand one last gentle squeeze and nodded./

She reluctantly released her hand and turned to follow Dr. Anderson, but she had barely taken a

few steps when Maya called after her.

“Wait.”

Cecilia stopped and slowly turned around.

Maya stood there with her eyes still red from crying, trying to process the truth she had just

learned and everything that came with it.

She wasn’t ready to say that she understood. There were too many questions between them and

too many years Maya knew nothing about. But Cecilia was here now, willing to risk the fragile

relationship she had only just begun to build with them if it meant giving Jaime what he needed,

and Maya couldn't ignore that.

Her expression softened.

"Thank you… Grandma."

Cecilia's breath caught as tears immediately spilled down her cheeks, but this time, they came

with a smile she couldn't suppress as she lifted a trembling hand to cover her mouth.

Maya had called her Grandma countless times before, but this was the first time she had called

her Grandma knowing exactly who she was.

And somehow, that one word meant more to Cecilia than any forgiveness she had been too afraid

to ask for.

Cecilia and Dr. Anderson disappeared into an adjacent clinical room, leaving Maya standing with

Damien and the others in the corridor.

Through the large window, Maya watched as Cecilia settled into a chair and rolled up her sleeve.

One of the nurses from Dr. Nakamura's team tied a tourniquet around her upper arm before carefully drawing several tubes of blood, labeling each one as soon as it was filled.

Maya couldn't seem to look away.

Behind the closed door of the neighboring critical–care room, Jaime was still fighting to recover from the surgery, and now those few small tubes of Cecilia's blood could determine whether they finally had what he desperately needed.

Once the last tube was filled, the nurse pressed a piece of gauze against the inside of Cecilia's arm and secured it in place before handing the samples to the laboratory technician assigned to handle the blood testing and transfusion needs throughout Jaime's surgery.

Maya watched as the technician carried the samples into the small laboratory area that had been set up as part of the estate's temporary medical wing.

Dr. Nakamura approached a few moments later, and Maya immediately turned to him.

"How long will it take?"

"We already know Madam Cecilia is B–negative, but we still need to confirm her blood type, screen

for any unexpected antibodies, and crossmatch her blood with Jaime's," he explained. "If everything is straightforward, we should have the results within thirty to sixty minutes."

Maya glanced through the glass again.

"And if they match?"

"Then we can move forward. If Madam Cecilia is medically cleared to donate, we can collect one unit from her for immediate use. As soon as the units from her reserve arrive, we'll begin crossmatching those with Jaime's blood as well."

Maya's brows pulled together slightly.

“I thought those units were already tested.”

“They are,” Dr. Nakamura assured her. “They would have already been screened, typed, processed, and properly stored before being placed in her reserve. But that only tells us the blood itself is safe for transfusion. We still need to confirm that each unit is compatible with Jaime before we give it to him.”

He gave her a reassuring look.

“Since they’re B–negative, they’re the right blood type for Jaime. But we still need the crossmatch to confirm compatibility, and after everything he’s already been through, we’re not taking any unnecessary chances.”

A small amount of tension left Maya’s shoulders, although nowhere near enough for her to relax

Thirty to sixty minutes.

After everything that had happened tonight, even that felt unbearably long.

Damien leaned closer to Maya, his attention fixed entirely on her.

“Are you okay?”

Maya looked up at him and gave a small nod. Instead of saying anything more, she stepped closer and wrapped her arms around him.

Damien immediately gathered her against his chest, one arm settling firmly around her waist while his other hand moved gently over her back.

Maya closed her eyes and rested her cheek against him, allowing herself to draw comfort from his warmth while they waited.

On the other side of the glass, Cecilia witnessed the quiet exchange. Her eyes lingered on the way Damien held Maya close and how naturally her granddaughter seemed to seek comfort in his

arms.

Despite everything that had happened, the sight brought a faint warmth to Cecilia's expression.

At least she could rest a little easier knowing her granddaughter wasn't facing any of this alone.

Chapter 609

Less than an hour later, the results everyone had been anxiously waiting for finally came back.

Cecilia’s blood was compatible with Jaime’s.

The confirmation brought an immediate wave of relief to everyone. Her blood type had already given them reason to hope, but the completed testing and crossmatch confirmed what they desperately needed to know.

No incompatibility had been detected, which meant Cecilia could safely provide blood for her grandson.

While the testing had been underway, Cecilia had wasted no time. She had made a call and ordered her entire emergency blood reserve brought to the Takahashi estate, insisting that every available unit be delivered as quickly as possible.

True to her word, the blood arrived before the hour was even up.

The sound of approaching footsteps echoed through the corridor, drawing everyone’s attention as Hannah and Kim appeared with an older woman none of them had seen before.

She appeared to be in her sixties, dressed neatly and conservatively, with silver beginning to thread through her carefully styled dark hair. There was something naturally composed and dignified

about her.

A few steps behind them, Lee and Max carefully carried a secured medical transport case

between them.

Cecilia immediately rose from her chair.

“Nora.”

The older woman’s expression softened with visible relief.

“My Lady.”

She crossed the remaining distance in a few hurried steps and stopped in front of Cecilia, her concerned eyes moving over her as though she needed to assure herself that she was truly

unharmed.

“Thank goodness,” Nora breathed. “When I received your call…”

Her voice trailed off as emotion briefly overtook her.

Cecilia reached for her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

“I’m all right.”

Nora still looked unconvinced, but before she could respond, her attention shifted beyond Cecilia

and landed on Maya.

Something in her expression changed as she stared at Maya, recognition slowly replacing the concern on her face. Her eyes moved over Maya’s features, taking in the resemblance that was

impossible for someone who had known Malia so well to miss.

Cecilia followed her line of sight and immediately understood. Her expression softened as she turned toward Maya.

“Nora,” she said gently, “I’d like you to meet my granddaughter, Maya.”

Nora continued staring at Maya, seemingly unable to find her voice. Tears slowly gathered in her

eyes as one hand rose to cover her mouth.

“Good heavens,” she whispered. “She’s… she’s…”

The words failed her.

For a moment, Nora seemed completely lost in the sight of her. Then, as though suddenly

remembering herself, she straightened, quickly composed her expression, and dipped into a

respectful curtsy.

“My Lady.”

Maya’s eyes widened.

“Oh, ma’am, please, don’t do that.”

She immediately stepped forward and reached for Nora’s hands, gently urging her upright.

“That’s completely unnecessary.”

Nora looked startled by the reaction, but as she took in Maya’s obvious discomfort, a flicker of

understanding crossed her face. Of course. Maya hadn’t grown up surrounded by royal titles and

formalities. To her, there was nothing natural about someone bowing before her.

Cecilia approached them with a small smile.

“Maya, this is Nora. She has been my personal attendant and one of my most trusted companions.

She’s been with our family for over four decades now.”

A faint smile touched Nora’s

lips through her tears.

Cecilia’s expression softened further as she looked at Maya.

“She was also very close to your mother. Nora helped me care for Malia from the time she was a

little girl and remained by her side as she grew up.”

Nora’s attention returned to Maya, and the emotion she had tried so hard to contain rose to the

surface once more.

“Oh, my Lady,” she said softly, her voice trembling. “Please forgive me for becoming so emotional.

It’s just… seeing you standing here in front of me, it feels as though I’m looking at Lady Malia when

she was young again.”

Maya’s expression softened at the mention of her mother. She gave Nora’s hands a gentle

squeeze, hoping to ease some of the emotion overwhelming her.

“Please, call me Maya.”

Nora blinked, clearly taken aback.

“My Lady, I couldn’t possibly…”

Maya assured her with a gentle smile. “I’d actually prefer it.”

Nora looked at Cecilia almost instinctively, as though seeking permission after a lifetime of

following royal protocol.

Cecilia smiled and gave her a small nod.

Nora turned back to Maya, still visibly hesitant. “Maya,” she finally said.

Maya’s smile warmed. “Much better.”

Nora continued looking at her for another moment before finally turning her attention toward Dahlia. Recognition immediately lit her eyes.

“Lady Dahlia.”

Dahlia smiled as Nora approached her.

“Nora. It’s been a long time.”

“Far too long, my Lady.”

Dahlia took over the introductions, naturally beginning with Damien before moving on to Harper, Nick, and the others gathered in the corridor.

Nora greeted each of them warmly, but there was barely enough time for the introductions to settle before Dr. Brown and Nurse Sophia suddenly hurried past them toward Jaime’s room.

Maya’s heart dropped.

She instinctively moved to follow them, but Damien caught her hand before she could reach the

door.

Her frightened eyes flew to his.

“Damien, something’s wrong. I need to find out what’s happening. I need to check on Jaime.”

“I know.” His fingers loosened around hers. “But let them do what they need to do first. I’m sure they’ll tell us what’s happening as soon as they can.”

Maya understood. She gave a reluctant nod, although her heart continued pounding as she watched the door close behind them.

A few moments later, the door to the adjoining room opened, and Nurse Emily emerged carrying a bag of blood before hurrying toward Jaime’s room.

Maya immediately rushed over to her.

“Excuse me, Nurse Emily. What’s going on?”

Nurse Emily slowed just enough to answer her.

“Jaime’s hemoglobin has dropped, and he needs another transfusion.”

Maya's face immediately paled.

"Is he… is he okay?"

"He's stable, Ms. Maya. Please excuse me, but I need to get this blood to Dr. Brown. Don't worry, he'll explain everything to you as soon as he can."

Maya nodded in understanding and immediately stepped aside, not wanting to delay her any further.

"Of course. Please, go."

Nurse Emily gave her a quick, reassuring nod before hurrying into Jaime's room.

Maya returned to Damien's side, and he immediately reached for her hand, lacing his fingers through hers as they waited.

The brief warmth that had filled the corridor only minutes earlier had disappeared, replaced by a quiet tension as everyone waited for news. Maya kept her eyes fixed on the closed door, her heart pounding with worry for her brother.

It wasn’t long before the door finally opened and Dr. Brown stepped out. Maya immediately rushed toward him.

“Dr. Brown, how’s Jaime? Is he okay?”

Clare

“His hemoglobin has dropped again,” Dr. Brown explained. “Considering the amount of blood he lost earlier, another drop isn’t entirely unexpected. The important thing is that he’s stable. We’ve already started the transfusion using the last compatible unit from our original reserve.”

Relief washed over Maya so quickly that fresh tears spilled down her cheeks.

“Thank you. Thank you, Doctor.”

Chapter 610

Brown’s reassurance brought a measure of relief to everyone, but the fear that had been hanging over them since Jaime’s surgery was far from gone.

They all knew the next twenty–four hours would be critical, and until they heard the words they were desperately waiting for, that Jaime was truly out of danger, every passing minute would continue to feel painfully uncertain.

Dr. Brown took in the worried faces surrounding him and seemed to realize that they needed more

than a brief reassurance.

“I know everyone is worried, but what happened just now isn’t entirely unexpected after everything

Jaime’s body has been through,” he explained calmly. “What’s important is that he’s stable, his new

heart is functioning well, and right now, we’re not seeing signs that his body is rejecting it.”

Maya visibly exhaled, and Damien’s hand settled reassuringly against the small of her back.

“As for his hemoglobin, we’re prepared to manage it. He lost a significant amount of blood during and after the surgery, so his body needs time to recover and begin replenishing what he lost. Until then, we’ll support him with transfusions whenever necessary and make sure his body has what it needs to produce new blood cells.”

He looked directly at Maya, his expression reassuring.

“The most important thing right now is having enough compatible blood available so that if his levels drop again, we can respond immediately. As long as we have that supply ready, we’re in a much better position to manage this.”

Maya nodded, some of the tension finally easing from her expression.

Dr. Brown continued, “We’ll repeat his blood work after the transfusion and monitor him closely. If his hemoglobin remains too low or drops again, we may need to transfuse another unit.”

He glanced toward Cecilia.

“The unit we collected from Madam Cecilia is being prepared now. Once it’s ready, we’ll have that

available if Jaime needs it.”

His attention then shifted toward the secured medical transport case Lee and Max had carried in.

“I’m assuming those are the reserve units?”

Cecilia nodded immediately.

“Yes. They’re all here.”

Relief crossed Dr. Brown's face.

"Perfect. I'll have the technician start on them immediately. We'll inspect the units and run the necessary compatibility testing against Jaime's blood. The sooner we get started, the sooner we can have additional units cleared and ready if he needs them."

He turned back to Maya, his expression softening. With a gentle smile, he placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

"Don't worry, Maya. Despite everything his body has been through, Jaime is stable, and we're watching him very closely. He's tough, and he's holding on. After all, your brother is a fighter."

Despite the tears still clinging to her cheeks, a small smile appeared on Maya's face.

"He is."

Dr. Brown gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze before turning toward Lee and Max.

"Could you please bring the case into the next room on the left? The technician can start checking the units right away."

As Lee and Max moved to comply, Nora stepped closer to Cecilia, concern flickering across her face.

“Lady Cecilia,” she said quietly, keeping her voice low. “If they open the container…

She didn’t need to finish. Cecilia immediately understood the warning behind her words, and her attention shifted toward the case. In her urgency to get the blood to Jaime, she had pushed the consequences aside, but now there was no avoiding what accessing the reserve could set in

motion.

Lee and Max had barely taken a few steps when Cecilia called out.

“Wait.”

Everyone turned toward her.

Cecilia remained where she was for a moment, but her attention was fixed on Maya. The urgency that had been in her expression moments earlier was now accompanied by something far more serious.

She walked toward her granddaughter and stopped in front of her.

“Maya…

Maya immediately noticed the change in her expression.

“What’s wrong?”

Cecilia drew a quiet breath.

“There’s something I need to tell you before they open that case.”

Maya’s concern deepened, but she simply nodded, giving Cecilia her full attention as she waited for her to continue.

Dr. Brown glanced between them and quickly sensed that whatever Cecilia was about to discuss was a private family matter. Rather than intrude, he gave them a respectful nod.

“I’ll give you some privacy. Just let me know when you’re ready. I’ll be in the next room.”

With that, Dr. Brown quietly excused himself, giving them the space they needed.

Once he was gone, Maya turned her attention back to Cecilia. The seriousness in her grandmother’s expression had only deepened, and whatever she was about to say was clearly weighing heavily on her.

Cecilia took a moment to gather herself before finally speaking.

“When I left, I didn’t tell anyone. Not even your grandfather. He doesn’t know where I am or why I left.” She paused, her expression growing more somber. “I was only able to tell him about your mother’s passing last night, and it… it broke him.”

Her voice cracked. She lowered her head as fresh tears slipped down her cheeks, taking a moment to steady herself before looking back up and meeting Maya’s eyes again.

“I told him I wanted to be alone. Part of me truly did, but another part of me wanted him to sit with what he had learned. I wanted him to think about the choices he made all those years ago and understand what those choices ultimately cost us.”

Cecilia swallowed against the emotion tightening her throat before reaching for Maya’s hand and holding it gently between her own.

“Right now, that’s all he knows. He still doesn’t know where I am, and he doesn’t know anything

about you or Jaime.”

Maya could feel the unease behind Cecilia’s touch, even as her grandmother tried to remain

composed.

“But the moment they open that case, there’s a very real chance he’ll be alerted.”

Cecilia paused briefly before continuing.

“And once that happens, he’ll start looking for answers. I have no doubt about that.”

Cecilia’s expression tightened.

“I don’t know how long we have, but I’m certain it won’t take much for your grandfather to figue out where I am. Once he does, it’s only a matter of time before he comes knocking on that door

Maya studied her carefully, taking in the worry etched across her grandmother’s face.

“Then let him come.”

Cecilia stared at her, visibly taken aback by the calm certainty in her response. A moment later, h surprise gave way to concern.

“Oh, Maya, I wish it were that simple.” Cecilia regarded her seriously.

“You don’t understand. Your grandfather has spent his entire life bound by traditions and beliefs that have been passed down through generations.”

She paused, uncertainty flickering across her face.

“Losing our daughter may have been enough to make him question those beliefs. But I don’t know yet if it was enough to make him abandon them.”

Maya remained quiet, listening as Cecilia continued.

“And until I know for certain, I’m not willing to risk giving him the opportunity to impose those same beliefs on you and your brother.”

A trace of old pain surfaced in Cecilia’s expression.

“Not after what those beliefs did to your mother.”