

# Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel

## Chapter 111

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## Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 111

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Stella lifted her gaze, her usual carefree demeanor gone. “Didn’t you want compensation for his leg? The Trent family will cure your brother’s leg, right here in front of everyone. How about it?”

She was speaking to the burly man, but her gaze skipped past Caleb and landed on Miguel.

Landen hesitated.

Nathan didn’t know what to say.

Even though the Trent family was famous as one of the “Two Pillars of the Medical World”, their real expertise was in medicinal herbs.

They’d already checked the man’s legs, and since the doctors had recommended amputation, they didn’t dare delay any longer.

Miguel sneered. “Anyone can talk big. Landen, I suggest you just get him to the hospital and work out the compensation.”

Landen said, “Our Trent family has run Herbal Haven for a century, ever since our ancestors founded it. We’ve always kept our conscience clear and never sold fake medicine.

“I won’t let Herbal Haven’s name be tarnished while I’m in charge. Whatever this young lady says, I stand by it. Got that?”

Landen knew the situation was already out of control. If he messed this up, the hundred-year reputation of Herbal Haven would be destroyed, and even in death, he'd be ashamed to face his ancestors.

He thought, 'Might as well risk it all.

'Let's take a gamble.

'Besides...

Landen glanced at Stella. He truly believed in her, Dr. Miracle.

Miguel's sneer grew even wider. This was exactly what he wanted: for Landen to make such a bold promise, so when they failed, the slap in the face would sting even more. He said, "But what if you can't cure him?"

Landen declared, "If we can't cure him, every Herbal Haven across Clusia will shut down, and every member of the Trent family will personally come to their door and beg for forgiveness."

"Grandpa..." Nathan didn't even have time to stop him before Landen's words were already out.

Caleb was left speechless.

Caleb couldn't help but think, 'Isn't this a bit much? Do we really have to go all in like this?'

"Landen, you said it yourself, and Mr. Martin is our witness!" Miguel burst out laughing, his smugness

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practically overflowing. He'd been waiting for this moment forever.

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All these years, their Remedy House had always been crushed under the shadow of the Trent family's Herbal Haven. If it weren't for Linda's quick thinking, they never would've gotten this chance.

“You!” Nathan, still young and impulsive, took a step forward, but before he could say anything, a hand landed on his shoulder with a lazy ease, stopping him in his tracks.

“Hold on,” Stella said, her voice carrying a cold edge.

A smug female voice burst onto the scene. “What, getting cold feet now?”

Linda strutted out of Remedy House, her hips swaying, every move screaming arrogance.

She shot Stella a look full of disdain, not having a clue it was someone she knew hiding under that baseball cap and mask.

Stella said, “Just now, he kept whining about how he regretted not going to Remedy House, and claimed Herbal Haven sells fake medicine. Looks like he’s totally lost faith in their medicine.”

Stella paused for a couple of seconds, glanced down at the burly guy, and smirked.

“So what are you trying to say, exactly?” Linda snapped, impatience written all over her face. She was dying to see the Trent family crash and burn so she could show off to her dad.

“So...” Stella’s lips curled into a sly grin beneath her black mask.

She said, “Let’s randomly pick five people from the crowd to supervise, and with the whole thing streamed live by the media, we’ll use your Remedy House’s medicine for the treatment. How about it?”

“Isn’t that a bit risky? If the treatment fails, you’ll just turn around and say it’s our medicine’s fault...” Miguel didn’t think it was a good idea and was about to object, but Landen’s voice interrupted him.

“If the patient dies, it’s all on the Trent family. None of the blame falls on you!” Landen sneered. “What’s wrong, Miguel? Getting cold feet?”

“Mr. Lopez, it’s perfectly reasonable to be cautious. How about this? I’ll go in with you, personally select the medicine, and the rest can supervise. What do you think, Mr. Lopez?” Caleb stepped forward, his tone warm and reassuring.

“Dad, this is our chance to finally make Remedy House famous!” Linda whispered excitedly.

She thought, 'For years, Remedy House has been crushed under Herbal Haven's shadow. Now's our chance to finally flip the tables. We can't let it slip away!'

Seeing Miguel still wavering, Linda took matters into her own hands. "Mr. Martin, let's go."

"What herbs do you need?" Caleb asked.

Stella glanced at Linda, whose face was practically glowing with smugness. With a lazy tilt of her head, she casually jotted down a few herb names on a scrap of paper. "0.1 ounce of each. Pack them separately."

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Caleb wasted no time, leading the media and a handful of random bystanders into Remedy House. A moment later, he came out holding several packets of herbs, holding them out for Stella to take.

"The herbs are here! Just tell me what to do, kid, and this old man will be your assistant!" Landen rolled up his sleeves, rubbing his hands together, all fired up and ready to haul out the stone grinder for grinding the herbs.

Stella shot Landen a complicated look, her eyes saying more than words ever could.

Landen blinked, looking innocent. 'What? Did I do something wrong?'

Stella took the herbs with her hand and headed over to the Food and Drug Regulatory Bureau's director. "Your official cars all have portable drug testers, right?"

"Let's run a quick check and see if Remedy House's herbal medicine is actually mixed with modern medicine. We'll know the truth in seconds!"

Everyone watching was just speechless.

Just like that, the tables had turned.

Miguel's face turned ashen as he finally realized what had just happened. He never saw it coming. This little girl had just pulled a fast one on him, all to stand up for Landen.

Linda was left completely dumbfounded.

Landen's voice wavered, "Kiddo... Boohoo..."

His eyes were brimming with tears.

He was so moved that he could barely speak.

Stella was speechless.

'Seriously, is all this really necessary?' she thought.

Caleb shot the Food and Drug Regulatory Bureau's director a frosty glare. The director didn't hesitate. He immediately ordered someone to bring over the portable drug tester.

One by one, they tore open the packets of Remedy House's herbal medicine, while the crowd leaned in, straining to catch every detail as they waited for the results.

Curiosity was written all over everyone's faces.

They'd all heard Landen's bold words just now. Soon, they'd know if it was all slander, or if the truth would finally come to light.

The media and all the bloggers had their cameras pointed in perfect unison at the Food and Drug Regulatory Bureau's staff doing the tests, afraid they'd miss the juiciest moment.

The rapid test would be done in just one minute.

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Stella lazily pressed down her baseball cap, knowing full well the Lopez family was shooting her death stares, but she didn't care.

In the corner, Jake's hands were numb from gripping the black box so tightly, shaking like crazy.

He wanted to puke.

"If the reagent turns purple, that means it's got modern medicine mixed in. If it's blue, then it's clean!" After a minute, the tester popped the lid open.

Stella yawned, slow and lazy.

The crowd erupted in an uproar.

The reagent was purple.

Turned out Landen was right. Remedy House's herbs really were tainted with modern medicine. And since Caleb picked the herbs out himself, there was nothing fishy.

"What..." Linda gasped, totally shocked. Miguel didn't even hesitate. His face dark as thunder, and he swung and landed a heavy slap right across her cheek.

Landen, finally vindicated, was grinning from ear to ear. "Remedy House! You guys are rotten to the core!" He flashed Miguel a big, sarcastic thumbs-up, looking absolutely over the moon.

Miguel snapped, "Don't start celebrating just yet. There's still someone over there with one foot in the coffin, just waiting for you to mess up!"

Miguel's face was dark as thunder as he reminded them sharply.

"Don't trouble yourself..." Stella drawled, sounding completely relaxed under her baseball

cap.

She waved lazily at Jake in the corner. Jake, hands still shaking, shot a nervous glance at Linda before passing the black box to someone else to deliver.

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“What’s in there, anyway?” Nathan couldn’t help but be curious after seeing Jake’s disgusted face.

Stella shot him a glance. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

She had someone reposition the cart so the crowd could get a clear view. The stench of decay slammed into everyone, and people instantly started retching and recoiling.

Stella, though, didn’t even flinch. She was calm from start to finish.

“Hand him the box.” Stella motioned to Nathan.

“I give the orders, you follow. Understand?” Stella lounged with her arms crossed, clearly not intending to step in herself.

Nathan didn’t know what to say.

‘So that’s why she asked if I was certified to practice medicine earlier,’ Nathan thought to himself.

“Give him a Vitalis Pill. If he won’t open up, just pop his jaw loose,” Stella said, her voice icy. The crowd instantly erupted in shock.

They thought, ‘A Vitalis Pill?’

‘They’re really giving something that rare to this guy?’

Landen might be an old rascal most days, but when it came to serious business, he never messed around. He handed Nathan a pill without a moment's hesitation.

Nathan's face was serious as he twisted off the wax seal and popped the Vitalis Pill into the guy's mouth.

There was a sudden, violent gasp, and the man who'd been barely hanging on suddenly snapped his eyes open, scaring the hell out of everyone.

"Y-You..." the big guy who'd been kneeling on the ground stammered, his voice shaking. When he saw his own buddy wake up, the brute's face went sheet-white, like he'd just been caught in the act.

He dropped to the ground with a thud. Turned out, he was the one who'd smashed his brother's leg, all just to squeeze money out of Herbal Haven.

He'd ignored his brother's cries, refused to give him any medicine, and even let the wound rot in the blazing heat on purpose.

"Open the box," Stella said lazily, not even bothering to look at the guy sprawled on the ground.

Nathan lit up, barely able to hide his excitement.

He'd been dying to know what was inside that box.

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With a crisp snap, he opened it.

Nathan just stared, speechless.

His brain short-circuited for a second.

Landen leaned in, curious. "What is it?"

Then his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

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The folks standing nearby all jumped back, looking totally grossed out. Some even started retching right there.

Inside the box was a squirming pile of white worms.

More specifically, they were maggots.

“I... Ugh...” Nathan went pale as a sheet, especially when he saw those plump, squirming maggots.

Stella frowned, clearly annoyed, and held her hand over the box for a moment. Some powder slipped from her fingers into the box, but everyone was too busy retching to notice a thing.

“Dump them on,” Stella said coolly after she pulled her hand back.

“Dump...?” Nathan looked absolutely miserable. “Where do I dump them?”

Stella was speechless.

“On his leg,” Stella replied.

Nathan felt like half his soul was about to leave his body right there. His arms went rigid as a board, and he wished that box could be a thousand miles away from him.

With a loud dump, the maggots were poured straight onto the man’s leg for everyone to see.

“Spread them out evenly,” Stella ordered again. Nathan looked like he was on the verge of tears.

He just couldn’t do it with his bare hands, so he had someone fetch a stick from Herbal Haven and started poking the maggots around, slow and miserable.

Nathan gagged with every poke.

“I can’t believe I forgot about maggots!” Landen exclaimed. In traditional medicine, maggots were famous for their ability to clean out dead tissue.

He clasped his hands behind his back and bent down, totally fascinated by these plump little maggots.

Each maggot went to work on the man's rotten leg, devouring the dead flesh at insane speed. Landen was floored by how fast they worked.

Normally, maggot therapy would take at least 24 hours to clean up a wound like this. But right now, it looked

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like it wouldn't even take five minutes.

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Turned out, Landen had underestimated them. In just two and a half minutes, all the rotten flesh was gone, leaving only bare bone exposed. The crowd was hit with a brutal dose of reality.

"Won't that mess up anything else?" Caleb blurted out, stunned.

"Maggots only go for dead flesh. They don't care about healthy tissue," Stella explained lazily, giving Nathan a look to put the box next to the guy's leg.

And just like that, each maggot, now nice and plump from their feast, waddled right back into the box.

Nathan didn't know what to say.

He thought, 'Just let me die already.'

'Right now. Immediately.'

Maybe it was the Vitalis Pill kicking in, but the guy lying on the cart didn't really feel any pain at all. He just felt light as air, like he was floating through a dream.

Stella glanced up at Landen, not saying a word.

Everyone else followed her gaze to the old white-haired guy. The moment Landen realized all eyes were on him, his hands moved faster than his brain. He instinctively clutched his trusty old cloth sack.

He shook his head like crazy.

'I just got these, and I haven't even had time to warm them up!' Landen thought, freaking out.

Stella held out her hand, palm up, wordlessly.

Landen, looking utterly pitiful, fished out the little box of Vermilion Berries from his pocket, eyes brimming with tears, clearly reluctant to part with his precious stash.

Stella was speechless.

'What a drama king, Stella thought, rolling her eyes.

She took out three Vermilion Berries and tossed them to Nathan. "Crush them up and put them on his leg.

Nathan felt less like a doctor and more like Stella's personal gopher at this point. Honestly, he was starting to think she was just too lazy to bother doing it herself.

Sighing in defeat, Nathan crushed the berries, all the while wondering, 'Are these legendary Vermilion Berries from the Vermilion Coral really as magical as people say? Can they actually restore bone and flesh?'

"Ha, what a joke. So this is how Herbal Haven treats..." Miguel started to sneer, but he didn't even get the word "patients" out before his face froze and a tidal wave of gasps exploded from the crowd.

Everyone's eyes were glued to the man's leg.

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Every media camera snapped to attention, zooming in for the money shot.

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Right there, in front of everyone, new flesh began to miraculously grow over the exposed bone, slowly covering it up bit by bit. It looked straight out of a sci-fi movie, but it was happening for real, right before their eyes.

Everyone was in total shock.

People were left speechless, frozen in disbelief.

Stella just watched, bored. She'd seen this kind of thing since she was a kid, so all the drama from the crowd just seemed silly to her.

"This is unreal..." Caleb muttered, completely floored. With the whole thing being broadcast live, he could already see the Trent family's stocks going through the roof and people lining up out their door.

'What kind of crazy stroke of luck did the Trent family stumble into?' Caleb thought, feeling jealous as hell.

He eyed Landen and Nathan like he wished he could swap places with them.

'Talk about an effortless win,' Caleb grumbled to himself.

Landen and Nathan exchanged a look with Caleb, catching the envy in his eyes. They just stood there in awkward silence, not knowing what to say.

Truth be told, they were just as lost as everyone else. They still had no clue what was happening.

If Landen hadn't gotten a wild hair and decided to poke around in Nathan's trunk today, he never would've bumped into Stella. No Stella, no Vitalis Pill or Vermilion Berries.

Without those, Herbal Haven and the Trent family would've been the ones taking the fall for selling fake meds and botching the patient's leg.

And they wouldn't be able to expose the Lopez family's Remedy House for sneaking modern medicine into their so-called traditional medicine.

Seriously, this whole thing was a damn perfect chain reaction.

Landen and Nathan turned to stare at Stella, who was still standing there, cool as ever. Suddenly, as if an idea had popped into her head, she waved over the reporters and all those influencers with their cameras.

The moment she spoke, everyone was caught off guard.

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“See you at the International Herbal Medicine Conference in half a month,” Stella said coolly, switching to flawless Tongalian, almost like she was throwing down a challenge to someone who wasn’t even there.

With that, she sauntered back to Landen and Nathan.

“Ms. Carter, you even speak Tongalian?” Nathan looked at her, clearly surprised. She’d already shattered his expectations so many times in such a short span.

Stella’s face didn’t change as she replied unhurriedly, “Just learned it.”

The others were speechless.

‘Yeah, like we’re really going to believe that,’ they all thought.

Stella glanced up at Landen, her tone lazy. “You guys should come, too, in half a month.”

Landen cleared his throat, hesitated, and then muttered, “We can’t.”

Stella raised an eyebrow.

Landen rubbed his nose, looking everywhere but at her. Nathan, unable to watch the awkwardness any longer, explained, “Grandpa isn’t on good terms with the folks at the Traditional Medicine Association headquarters.

“We didn’t get an invite this time.”

Stella was speechless.

Stella didn't bother explaining. She just quietly pulled out her phone and, without a word, fired off a text.

Soon, Nathan's phone buzzed.

He looked down. Then he was completely stunned.

A sleek electronic invitation, with a black background and gold lettering, was sitting quietly in his inbox. Nathan blurted out, "Grandpa!"

"What are you yelling about-" Landen was about to snap, but when Nathan shoved the phone in front of his face, his words died in his throat.

Nathan glanced up at Stella, looking totally thrown. "Ms. Carter..."

Stella was quite calm. "Yeah."

"We got the invitation." Nathan was still in shock. 'No way, is a coincidence like this even possible?' he thought.

Stella stayed cool. "Oh."

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Nathan hesitated. "Ms. Carter, did you have something to do with that invitation?"

Stella cleared her throat. "No idea. No clue. Don't know anything about it."

Nathan didn't know what to say.

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"You can leave now," Stella said, glancing toward the corner as she addressed Caleb. With what was about to happen, it was really not the right place for him to stick around.

Caleb just smiled, not the slightest bit bothered. “Alright, I’ll head out. Just call me if anything comes up.”

With that, he took his people and left.

“Dr. Miracle, what are you planning?” Landen could feel her vibe shift again. Stella turned to look at him, her eyes shadowed beneath her baseball cap, carrying a hint of rogue chill.

She stayed silent, but there was this mysterious, dark energy radiating from her.

Landen didn’t know what to say.

Landen gulped, his throat suddenly dry.

At some point, the guys who’d been lurking in the shadows suddenly stepped out, each one tall and built like a male model. They blocked the exits, cutting off any chance for the troublemakers to slip away in the chaos.

Stella strode straight toward the big guy.

The big guy was drenched in cold sweat. “Okay, okay, I’ll talk! That lady gave me \$150,000 up front, and said if I stirred up enough trouble, she’d give me another \$150,000 after!”

Everyone followed his finger, and their eyes landed on Linda.

Miguel’s face was as dark as a storm cloud.

“Son of a bitch, you only gave us 10 grand!” The fake mourners started cursing.

“Who broke his leg?” Stella asked, her voice cool and indifferent.

Everyone immediately threw the big guy under the bus. “It was him! He broke it!”

Stella didn’t even blink. She just swung her foot and slammed it into the big guy’s leg.

The sound of bone cracking echoed through the room, loud and clear.

Everyone was stunned.

Her kick landed so fast that the big guy’s scream came a split second later.

Stella's deep amber eyes stayed ice-cold. Behind her, Lincoln and the Yates family crew stood there, looking menacing as hell. "Smash it," she ordered.

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She just pointed lazily at Remedy House.

Then she turned around.

Lincoln and the crew marched toward Remedy House, stone-faced and cold.

Ten minutes later, Remedy House became a disaster zone, even worse than Herbal Haven.

Even the sign got yanked off, thrown to the floor, and split right down the middle.

Landen just snickered with satisfaction.

He thought, 'Damn, that's savage. It's almost too good to watch.

'I'm having the time of my life!'

Miguel's eyes were glued to Stella, cold and venomous. He never saw it coming. All his plotting was wiped out by her. 'Who the hell is she, anyway?' he wondered.

On Sandridge Island, in the study, Lucas was quietly stacking gold bars into a little pyramid on the floor.

There seemed to be a tiny storm cloud hovering over his head, crackling with thunder and lightning, casting a gloomy shadow all around him.

Lucas didn't make a sound. His soft, chubby face was drooping with disappointment, his eyes full of misery.

Sebastian sat at his desk, expressionless and radiating a cold, intimidating vibe, not even sparing the little guy a glance.

Lucas was really upset.

With a loud crash, Lucas knocked over his little gold bar pyramid, and then flopped onto the carpet, arms and legs spread wide, rolling around and sulking like a grumpy kid.

He thought, 'I miss Stella!

'I miss Stella so much!'

Suddenly, Snowball dangled upside down from the decorative tree, swung back and forth right in front of Lucas, and opened its mouth.

Eggie chirped.

Lucas was speechless.

The branches of the decorative tree creaked weakly in protest, like they were barely hanging on.

"Sebastian!" The study door burst open and Allan rushed in, frantically carrying a potted plant. With a bang, he plopped it down on Sebastian's desk.

Eggie chirped in confusion.

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Eggie, who'd been lazily sprawled in Snowball's mouth, suddenly lit up. Its eyes sparkled as it flapped its stubby little wings, wobbling its way toward the flower with all its might.

Snowball looked confused.

'Did Eggie just fly away?' Snowball thought.

With a smack, Eggie landed face-first on Sebastian's desk.

Snowball was speechless.

'Seriously, what a disgrace,' Snowball thought.

“What do you want?” Sebastian’s face was dark, his voice cold as ice, totally emotionless.

Allan tugged at the wilted leaves, neither of them noticing Eggie struggling to crawl toward the flowerpot. Allan said, “Stella put this in my room. Is this some kind of medicine or something?”

Guilt flashed across Allan’s face as he spoke. After seeing Lucas drag out the Vermilion Coral, he suddenly remembered Stella had thrown a plant into his room, too. His hand even shook when the memory hit.

After all, he’d always just dumped his coffee grounds and cigarette butts into that flowerpot without thinking.

Sebastian was speechless.

Sebastian just stared at the wilted plant, not saying a word.

With Sebastian keeping quiet, Allan got even more nervous. Meanwhile, Eggie was busy kicking and scrambling, finally flopping right onto the edge of the flowerpot.

Eggie chirped again.

‘Yummy!’ Eggie thought.

Sebastian shot him a look, his face hard to read. “No.”

Allan let out a long sigh of relief and slumped into the chair, finally able to relax. He just watched Eggie chirping away, nibbling at the flower in the pot, and let it be.

“Man, that gave me a scare!” Allan was totally oblivious to the odd look in Sebastian’s eyes. “Even if it’s not worth much, I’ll still take it downstairs for some sun. I don’t wanna mess up Stella’s good intentions.”

As he spoke, Allan stood up, scooped up Eggie, who was still busy chomping on the flower, along with the pot.

Only then did he look down and notice Lucas sprawled out on the white carpet, rolling around and looking all mopey and miserable.

Allan blinked. “Lucas?”

Before Allan could say another word, there was a knock at the door. John pushed it open and said, “Mr. Gray, the person in charge of Red Shadow’s team this time wants to see you.”

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The one leading Red Shadow to Haliville to protect Paul this time was Vincent, captain of the Third Unit. Right now, he was standing in the hall, looking all kinds of restless, which had his subordinates totally baffled.

Ever since Paul arrived in Haliville, they locked down the pier, and Vincent got that call, he’d been acting totally off.

Lately, he’d been jolted awake by nightmares every single night.

‘Just who the hell lives on this island?’ Vincent wondered.

Vincent’s palms were slick with sweat, and he kept secretly wiping them on his pants. If he’d known that man was living here, not even a million guts would’ve made him seal off the island!

Suddenly, he heard something from the stairs.

Vincent, who had just sat down, shot up like his seat was spring-loaded, standing ramrod straight. Then his eyes went wide as he watched a massive white python tumble down the stairs like a giant ball.

The chubby, coiled Snowball finally stopped right at Vincent's feet. It flicked its tongue, slowly stretched itself out, gave Vincent a lazy yawn, and then slithered up the ornamental tree.

'Eh,' Snowball mused to itself. 'Guess rolling really is way faster than slithering!'

Snowball let its tail tip dangle, swinging it back and forth with delight.

Vincent was speechless.

One of his subordinates blurted out, "It's so fat."

Snowball, who'd been chilling, instantly flared up at those words. It shot up, massive head right in the guy's face, and opened its jaws wide in a threatening display, fangs gleaming.

Then, with a crack sound, the branch of the ornamental tree couldn't handle Snowball's weight and snapped.

Vincent's subordinate only saw a flash of white before the big white snake, and the busted branch both hit the floor together with a loud thud.

Everyone, including Snowball, was stunned for a moment.

Embarrassed, Snowball thought, 'Ugh, screw this stupid world. Just blow it all up already!'

Suddenly, the elevator doors slid open.

Sebastian sat in his black electric wheelchair, totally expressionless. Next to him was Allan, clutching a wilted, mystery potted plant, and Lucas, cheeks puffed out like a pouty little pufferfish, looking seriously grumpy.

Seeing this scene, Eggie was shocked.

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All three of the men were just speechless.

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Vincent was caught off guard when he saw Sebastian. His eyes went wide with shock, and without a word, he gave a sharp salute, but his hands and feet were trembling even more.

Sebastian didn't even look his way, his good looks frosty as ever. "John."

John appeared out of nowhere, bringing in the servants to swap out the broken tree for a new one. Lucas scampered over to Snowball and started poking it with his little hands..

Snowball, who'd been playing dead on the floor, instantly buried its big head in Lucas's arms and acted pitiful and upset.

"Who are you?" Sebastian's voice was cold and flat, but it was enough to make Vincent tense up with nervous excitement.

"I'm Vincent, captain of Red Shadow's Third Unit!" Vincent shouted, his voice booming through the room.

Sebastian remained silent.

Allan, hugging his potted plant, quietly reminded, "Vincent Caldwell, Barrett Caldwell, Dennis Caldwell, Eliel Caldwell, and Fabian Caldwell. Those names match up with the five Red Shadow units."

Sebastian nodded quietly, his face unreadable. He dipped his head just a bit, his sharp features half-lost in the shadows, radiating an intimidating, almost dangerous vibe.

Vincent's subordinates kept sneaking glances at Sebastian, totally confused why Vincent was acting so respectfully, almost like he was scared.

While Sebastian stayed silent, Vincent didn't dare say a word. But when his eyes drifted to the potted plant in Allan's arms, he couldn't help but feel familiar.

Big Ben came over from the kitchen with a tray in hand, and when it passed by Snowball, who was blocking the way, it gave it a little nudge to the side and said, "Friendly system tip: Good snakes don't block the way."

Snowball was stunned for a moment. 'I'm done with this!' it thought.

Vincent gawked at the ultra-smart robot in front of him, completely blown away. ‘This thing makes those new bots from Conrad’s lab look like cheap toys!’ he thought. ‘It can even say something to diss the snack!’

Allan just set the potted plant down in a sunny corner where it could soak up some rays.

“Mr. Gray, the chief instructor wanted me to ask when you might be heading back to Jaffina?” Vincent asked, careful not to step on any toes, sneaking a look at Sebastian’s icy expression, feeling extra nervous.

After a moment, Sebastian’s lips barely moved. “Depends on my mood.”

Vincent didn’t know what to say.

Over in a corner where nobody was watching, Eggie was sprawled in the pot, pecking at a sun-bleached, see-through blossom, happily munching away.

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Even the wilted leaves had turned into glossy black crystal.

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“Lucas, what are you doing?” Allan asked, raising an eyebrow as he watched Lucas crouching in the corner, looking all gloomy.

Everyone turned to look.

Lucas picked up his writing board again and wrote: [If Stella doesn’t come back, I’ll turn into a mushroom to wait for her here.]

He even added a chibi-style doodle of a gloomy little mushroom.

Allan shook his head.

But before Allan could say anything, Vincent, who’d been sitting on the couch, suddenly shot up, eyes wide and stunned as he stared at the sunbaked flower. Just as the peregrine falcon was about to take another bite, he yelled, all flustered, “Stop!”

Allan nearly spat out the coffee he'd just taken a sip of.

Eggie tilted its head, looking all cute and clueless.

Vincent strode over to the window, whipped out his phone, and started snapping photos of the flower from every possible angle. He didn't miss a single shot and then sent them off to whoever was waiting on the other end.

Vincent hesitated, his voice uncertain. "Excuse me, but is this an Obsidian Orchid?"

'How the hell does he know?' Allan thought, totally baffled.

To him, it was just a place to dump coffee grounds and an ashtray.

Allan said, "No way."

Then, still looking stunned, he turned to Sebastian and accused, "You said it wasn't a medicine herb."

Sebastian, still expressionless, replied, "It's not."

The next second, Vincent's phone went absolutely wild with notifications, one after another. Whoever was on the other end was clearly freaking out.

Allan stared blankly at Sebastian, only to see him suddenly curve his lips into a cold, dark lord-like smile. "But it's incredibly rare."

Allan rolled his eyes and cursed in his mind.

Maybe because Vincent was taking too long to reply, the other guy just called him up, practically shouting in excitement, words tumbling out so fast that Vincent could barely keep up. Even without the speakerphone on, it was loud enough for everyone to hear.

Vincent said, "Could you slow down a bit?"

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After a while, he finally hung up.

His tough face looked totally lost.

IX 65 vouchers

On the other end was Clusia's top plant guru. The brass had sent Red Shadow to help him hunt through wild mountains and forests for a super-rare plant called the Obsidian Orchid.

When it was out of the sun, the whole thing was a deep green, but after soaking up some rays, the leaves would turn crystal black, and the flowers would go transparent.

The Red Shadow team had been hunting for this thing for nearly seven years.

Allan said, "Just give it to me straight. How much is this thing worth?"

'Just rip the band-aid off already!' Allan thought.

Vincent answered, "It's priceless."

Nobody had ever been able to move one out of the wild. Because when someone touched it, it just shriveled up and died.

Allan rolled his eyes.

"Mr. Gray..." Vincent instinctively looked toward Sebastian.

Suddenly, Lucas, who'd been sulking in the corner pretending to be a mushroom, perked up, his eyes lighting up with excitement.

AD

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 115**

Read Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 115 -

**Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams - 115**

## Chapter 115

55 vouchers

Lucas immediately jumped up, his little legs pumping as he dashed to the front door. But a chubby white blur was even faster, bumping its big head against the doorknob.

The door swung open, and Stella was right there at the door!

Lucas tilted his head up, looking all soft and adorable. It was like pink bubbles of happiness were floating all around him. He was just about to reach out for a cuddle, but Snowball's big white head beat him to it.

Stella, just back and totally confused, was left speechless.

Lucas, who was just about to ask for a hug but got totally upstaged, just stood there and pouted.

Snowball, acting as if it'd just suffered the greatest injustice in the world, dramatically dragged its chubby snake body over and buried its big round head in Stella's shoulder.

'I'm not fat!' Snowball protested to himself. 'I'm so wronged! It's all that dumb tree branch's fault! Humans have a messed-up sense of beauty!'

But then, Stella asked, "Snowball, have you gotten fatter again? You're so heavy!"

Snowball was stunned for a moment.

It creaked its head around like a rusty robot and locked eyes with Stella, giving her a shocking stare.

Confused, Vincent and his subordinates looked towards the door while a chill ran down their spines.

They turned around and locked eyes with Sebastian, whose gaze was so cold that it could freeze their blood. They all swallowed hard.

Vincent just didn't get it.

"Big Ben," Sebastian said coldly. Vincent watched as the robot, way smarter than anything Conrad's lab ever built, moved.

'Is it just my imagination, or did the AC suddenly get colder?' he thought and shivered.

The black blanket that had been draped over Sebastian's legs slipped to the floor. Vincent was about to reach out to pick it up, but Big Ben chimed in, "Hon, best not to meddle."

Vincent was confused.

Soon, Stella came in holding Lucas's hand, while Snowball zipped past and made a beeline for the new tree in the yard.

And then, it started doing sit-ups.

One of Vincent's men whispered, "Boss, this whole island is freaky."

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55 vouchers

Vincent shrugged. 'Did someone turn the AC way down or something? It's freezing here, Vincent thought.

The moment Sebastian laid eyes on Stella, the icy calm in his gaze flickered ever so slightly. He was just about to say something when Allan shouted at the top of his lungs, clutching the flowerpot as he charged toward Stella.

Sebastian's hand, which had been idly turning his prayer beads, froze for a split second. His drop-dead gorgeous face now sported a pair of dangerously narrowed eyes.

Stella smiled helplessly.

"I... I..." Allan stammered, hands trembling as he hoisted the flowerpot for Stella to see. Stella gave it a quick, indifferent glance and said, "The roots are rotten. Just toss it."

Her words felt like hell to Allan.

The others just stared in silence.

“The r-roots are rotten?” Allan blurted out, totally freaked, eyes wide.

Stella didn’t know why he acted so dramatically.

She glanced past Allan’s shoulder, noticed Sebastian’s blanket on the floor, and frowned. Then she said, “If you really want one, I’ll have John grab another pot from the greenhouse later.”

Vincent couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Seriously? There’s another one?”

‘We’ve been chasing after the Obsidian Orchid for seven years, and this island just has two of them lying around?’ Vincent was absolutely stunned.

Stella shot Vincent a look, not showing any emotion, and then walked right over to Sebastian. She bent down, picked up the black blanket, and laid it back over his legs, finally letting out a nonchalant “yep.”

Vincent was starting to realize what Big Ben meant by “meddling.”

Allan stammered, “B-but this is the Obsidian Orchid.”

Stella looked up, surprised. “You actually recognize it?”

‘Did Stella just tease me?’ Allan wondered.

“It’s just a potted plant,” Stella said, thinking Allan was totally overreacting.

But before she could finish, Vincent practically screamed, “Just a potted plant?”

Stella was confused by him.

Sebastian looked up and gave Vincent an indifferent glance, like dumping a bucket of ice water over his head. Vincent instantly sobered up.

Vincent stammered, “Sorry, I got a little carried away. Let me introduce myself. I’m-”

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Sebastian cut him off coldly, “Just a nobody.”

Everyone was speechless.

Snowball, still determined, kept doing sit-ups.

Eggie was still focused on the flowers.

Big Ben stood there with a smile.

Vincent, swallowing back everything he wanted to say, continued, “Yes, a nobody.”

His men thought, ‘Captain can really swallow his pride!’

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55 vouchers

Stella saw the way Vincent was eyeing the Obsidian Orchid. She just gestured at the pot, totally deadpan. “You want this?”

Vincent’s eyes went comically wide, nodding so hard that it looked like his head might fall off.

Stella mused, “You from Jaffina?”

Vincent instinctively glanced at Sebastian, thinking, ‘I swear I didn’t say a thing!’

Stella drawled, “Who wants it?”

Vincent shot another look at Sebastian, and then blurted out the botanist’s name and the whole backstory. When Stella heard the name, she just nodded.

Eggie was still focused on the flowers.

Stella just reached into the pot and yanked out another crazy rare Obsidian Orchid, handing it to Eggie like it was no big deal. Everyone just stared, totally gobsmacked.

“Come with me,” Stella said to Vincent, all casual. Then she paused, shot a look at Allan, and added, “You too. Grab one yourself. Save trouble for everyone.”

Just as she was about to leave, her wrist was grabbed, and at the same time, someone tugged at the edge of her

shirt.

Stella looked down and saw that Sebastian and Lucas were both silently staring up at her.

The three of them just stared at each other in silence.

Lucas paused, and then poked his extra soft, pale cheeks with both index fingers, tilting his head and trying his absolute best to look adorable.

Stella asked, "Wanna come along?"

Everyone tagged along behind Stella into the plant nursery. It was freshly built, and besides the stuff already

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planted outside, all those weird and wild plants that got delivered were just dumped inside.

If there wasn't enough space, she just left the extras by the door.

Vincent couldn't believe his eyes.

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Stella scanned her fingerprint, paused for a moment, and then looked over at Sebastian sitting in his wheelchair.

"Mr. Gray, can you lift your hand?" she asked.

Sebastian glanced at her, responded with a cold "okay," and offered his hand. Stella took it and registered his fingerprint into the nursery system, his face completely unreadable the whole time.

As he lowered his hand, he unconsciously shifted toward Lucas.

Allan shook his head.

Lucas pouted, looking all pitiful. 'Am I still Stella's number one or not?' he thought.

Stella smiled helplessly.

‘Such a bunch of childish idiots,’ Stella thought.

Once Lucas and Allan finished registering their fingerprints, there was a click, and Stella just swung the door open. Instantly, a wave of sweet, heady floral fragrance filled the air, so fresh that it made everyone want to take a deep breath.

“I...” Vincent fidgeted with his phone, looking awkward, not quite sure how to say what was on his mind.

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 116**

Read Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 116 -

### **Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 116**

Chapter 116

Vincent’s phone was buzzing like crazy.

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EX 55 vouchers

Stella rested one hand casually on the door, glancing back at Vincent. She looked pretty chill, not bothered at all. “Yes?”

Vincent awkwardly asked, “Is it okay if I... send a few videos to the experts?”

The leading botanist on the other end of the line was freaking out.

Stella replied coolly, “Sure, but don’t film anyone.” Especially not Sebastian. She shot Vincent a warning look.

In the flowerbed, Allan was still hugging a flowerpot to his chest, moving like every step might set off a landmine.

He’d learned his lesson the hard way. No way was he ever going to underestimate any plant in this place again.

Vincent was dutifully filming, totally forgetting to watch his step. Suddenly, he heard a crack.

He stiffened and looked down. Then his eyes landed on a plant with plain white blossoms.

His boot had accidentally smashed the flowerpot.

Vincent was frustrated but tried his best to hide. Making sure no one was watching, he snapped a photo and sent it off to the expert. The reply came back almost instantly.

Vincent: [What’s this?]

Expert: [It’s just a regular orchid.]

Vincent was just about to breathe a sigh of relief when the expert sent another message. [It is worth about 6 million bucks.] He even added a smiley face at the end.

Vincent thought it was his end day.

Vincent’s crew stared, stunned, as Vincent’s face cycled through every shade imaginable in just one second.

“Well... about that...” Vincent looked up, completely defeated, and did a dramatic reach toward Stella’s back, like he was begging for rescue.

Stella turned around, speechless.

Allan was cracking up. ‘Finally, someone else is the unlucky victim for once!’ he thought.

“Just leave it there. Someone will clean it up,” Stella said, not bothered at all. Her eyes flicked to Vincent’s boots, those heavy-duty, military-grade ones that could only be seen on special ops guys.

‘Jaffina, special ops, combat boots,’ she thought.

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Put all that together, and it was pretty obvious who he was.

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Stella looked away and kept walking, while Vincent, still clueless he’d totally been found out, quickly pulled his foot back, trying to act casual.

Lucas sat on Sebastian’s lap, his eyes wide with silent wonder. ‘Whoa, so many flowers!’ he thought.

Sebastian’s face was pale and sickly, barely paying attention to the flowers around him. He looked completely uninterested, lounging there lazily. “Did you have fun today?”

He turned his head slightly, his thin, cold lips parting just a bit. The sunlight traced his features, softening some of that icy aura he always carried.

Thinking back to how furious and messed up Linda looked when she stormed off, Stella chuckled, “Man, I wish you could’ve seen her face. She was a total wreck.”

Sebastian gave a nod. “Next time.”

For once, his voice actually sounded warm.

Allan, still clutching the flowerpot, thought, ‘Come on, how many times do you want?’

Vincent kept filming and sending clips to the leading botanist he was texting. The expert was losing his mind with every new shot, practically hyperventilating. This flowerbed looked totally ordinary, but it was stuffed with rare, one-of-a-kind plants.

This was a botanist's paradise.

Vincent looked around with a complicated expression, eyes full of awe and disbelief. "With all these rare finds, aren't you worried someone might try to steal them?"

Stella was just about to answer when Allan, looking all clueless, snorted, "Steal? I dare you to try and take one."

"Captain is right. This place doesn't look like it has any security at all!" one of Vincent's guys protested, sounding unconvinced.

Stella shot him a lazy, almost mocking glance. "You really think so?"

Her voice was casual, totally unfazed, but then, with a snap of her fingers, every single light in the flowerbed

went out.

"Cap-" One of Vincent's guys started to say, but the word died in his throat.

In the darkness, Vincent's crew stared in shock as a dense web of red laser lines suddenly appeared right in front of them.

One line after another, stretching out in every direction.

One of Vincent's guys, completely unaware of the danger, just reached out to touch one of the lines.

"Are you looking to die?" Sebastian's voice sliced through the darkness, cold enough to freeze everyone's

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blood.

Vincent's crew member just stared, lost for words.

Still stubborn, he fished out a custom Red Shadow pen from his pocket. Usually, it was just a pen, but when things got serious, it could double as a deadly weapon, and it was supposed to be diamond-hard.

The second the pen touched the red laser line, a nasty burnt smell filled the air. The so-called diamond-hard pen snapped clean in half and hit the floor.

Vincent and his crew member thought. Thank God he didn't use his hand!"

The guy was hit with a wave of terror.

The lights flicked back on, and the dense web of red laser lines disappeared like they'd never existed, almost like Vincent and his crew had just imagined it.

The group kept moving forward, but Vincent and his guys swallowed nervously, lagging a step behind before catching up.

They thought. If this tiny flowerbed is already packed with hidden surprises, just imagine what the rest of this huge island is hiding?"

Soon enough, they arrived at the Obsidian Orchid area.

"We're here." Stella said offhandedly, stepping aside. Vincent looked in the direction she indicated, and the hand he'd been using to film for the expert actually shook a little.

Vincent's silence was deafening.

Red Shadow's Third Squad had spent seven years hunting for the Obsidian Orchid.

Vincent always thought there were only two Obsidian Orchids on the whole island, but right now, he was staring at a whole freaking pile of them.

Weren't these Obsidian Orchids supposed to be impossible to transplant out of the wild?" Vincent thought, completely floored. And didn't they say they'd just shrivel up the moment anyone touched them? Was all that just a misunderstanding?

Allan was just as floored. "Stella, seriously?"

"Just pick one," Stella said, shooting Allan a look. She grabbed the flowerpot with one hand and chucked it into the corner without a second thought.

The thing landed with a loud smack. This insanely valuable plant was treated like total junk, and she didn't even bat an eye. "It's just a flowerpot, no big deal."

Vincent had to admit, if anyone here could say that and actually mean it, it was her. Still totally stunned, he just raised his phone and snapped a pic for the expert. He couldn't even be bothered to record a video

anymore.

## Chapter 116

The expert shot back almost instantly with six exclamation marks.

Vincent instantly felt refreshed when he saw this reply.

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55 vouchers

“Sent it?” Stella glanced over, sounding totally chill. Vincent nodded, and she held out her hand, palm up. can have the flower, but first, I need to cut a deal with him.”

“You

Vincent thought, ‘Savage! Now she drops the catch? Seriously? She just dangled a botanist’s paradise in front of me, letting me look but not touch. Talk about cruel and unusual punishment.

But Vincent was dying to know what kind of terms she was about to lay down.

Burning with curiosity, Vincent handed over his phone and watched as Stella fired off a message, her expression giving nothing away. The expert shot back almost instantly, and just like that, they sealed the deal in seconds.

“Go ahead, pick one,” Stella said, jerking her chin at Vincent with a laid-back air.

Vincent was fidgeting with curiosity, itching to snatch his phone back and see what Stella and the expert had been texting about. He grabbed a flowerpot that caught his eye, hugged it tight, and called out, “My phone!”

“Here you go,” Stella replied, letting out a sleepy yawn as she handed the phone back to Vincent.

Vincent hugged the flowerpot with one arm, unlocked his phone with the other hand, and looked down. The second he saw the screen, he froze on the spot.

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 117**

Read Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 117 -

### **Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams - 117**

Chapter 117

Everything in the chat was deleted, not a single trace left!

Vincent was speechless.

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65 voucher

Allan leaned in, curious. “Stella, what kind of deal did you make?” Even Lucas peeked over, too, all wide-eyed and clueless.

Stella just gave a lazy shrug, clearly not interested in answering. “Just pick one and go.”

Everyone headed out of the flower garden.

“I’ll take Lucas back first,” Stella said, seeing that Sebastian still had something to talk over with the others. She picked up Lucas from Sebastian’s lap. The little guy reached out for her and walked toward the villa.

Vincent watched Stella leave, feeling conflicted.

All along, Stella had stayed cool as a cucumber, while he was the one freaking out. Looking back, Vincent couldn’t help but feel a little embarrassed.

“At 1 a.m., have your people come to the island and take the prisoners from the dungeon,” Sebastian’s icy, emotionless voice cut through the air, snapping Vincent out of his thoughts.

“Yes, Mr. Gray,” Vincent replied automatically, saluting with his dominant hand. But as he did, the flowerpot slipped from his grasp and was about to hit the ground.

Vincent broke out in a cold sweat. “Shit!”

Suddenly, a pale, slender hand shot out and caught the flowerpot just in time.

Vincent and his men were all shocked.

They didn’t even see how Sebastian moved.

“Hold it,” Sebastian said, his eyes dark and intense. With that look, Vincent felt a chill crawl down his spine.

Sebastian continued, “Do I need to spell out what you can and can’t talk about once you’re off the island?”

Vincent held his breath, shaking his head frantically.

\*\*

Stella had just finished her shower and stepped out of the bathroom when she saw Snowball, limp as a noodle, resting its big head on Lucas’s lap, looking like he’d lost all will to live.

Lucas pointed at Snowball, his chubby little face full of worry.

Lucas seemed to be asking, “Did it hurt its back?”

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After a couple of seconds, Stella answered coolly, “Snakes don’t have backs, you know.”

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Lucas stared down at the droopy Snowball, resting his chin on his little hand, cheeks all puffed up, deep in thought.

Stella let out a sigh, patted Lucas on the shoulder, bent down, and said lazily, “Dinner’s ready.”

Suddenly, Snowball, who’d just been moping around, shot up like it’d been hit by a jolt of electricity. Lucas only caught a blur of white, and before he knew it, the snake that had been flopped in his lap had vanished without a trace.

Lucas turned in shock, staring blankly at the door, now cracked open.

Stella stood up calmly, walked over to the table, and flipped open her ultra-thin laptop. Just as she was about to check it, a knock came at the door.

She looked up to see Allan leaning against the doorframe, one hand in his pocket, looking all devil-may-care and mischievous.

When he saw her glance over, he gave her a casual wave.

Stella walked over, still drying her hair with one hand, and pulled the door open. “What’s up?”

“Just a friendly reminder. No matter what you hear tonight, don’t go outside,” Allan said, raising an eyebrow, a playful smirk on his handsome face.

Stella glanced at him and gave a noncommittal “okay.”

“You need something else?” Stella asked, arching a lazy eyebrow when Allan just stood there.

“Stella, there’s something I’m really curious about. Mind helping me break it down?” Allan said, his usual smirk fading, replaced by a thoughtful look.

Stella replied, “Go ahead.”

“Six months ago, a top botanist from the Jaffina Botanical Research Institute went public, claiming he’d found and extracted a mysterious ingredient from an orchid that only grows way up at 3,800 yards.

“If it is put in skincare, it’s supposed to give the user the perfect age-defying effect. Since then, the Everhart family’s luxury skincare brand, Everyyoung, has been trying to lock down an exclusive patent deal with that expert.”

Stella just shrugged, totally chill, and looked up at him. “So?”

“It was pretty much a sure thing, but just a few minutes ago, the whole deal crashed and burned.” Allan chuckled, locking eyes with Stella. “So, Stella, any thoughts?”

Stella paused for a few seconds. “Looks like the Everhart family’s luck just ran out.”

She said it as calmly as ever, like it was nothing out of the ordinary.

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After a moment, Allan leaned against the door and burst out laughing, not just a chuckle, but a full, hearty laugh, covering his eyes with his big hand.

Stella thought, ‘It’s starting to get rude.’

In the corner, John was standing there.

No one knew how long Sebastian had been sitting there in his electric wheelchair, quietly listening.

Eggie chirped. Its fluffy little head poked out from Sebastian’s chest pocket.

Sebastian used his cold, slender finger to hook Eggie out, and the little guy landed with a soft plop in his palm.

“Shh,” Sebastian silenced it, his face completely blank.

Eggie fell in silence as if it understood his words.

“John,” Sebastian called out.

“Yes, Mr. Gray,” John replied.

“Take me back to my room,” Sebastian said.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Had enough laughing?” Stella said coolly. Normally, she just thought Allan talked too much, but today she thought he was noisy.

Allan nodded. “Yeah, I’m done.” The grin was still stuck on his face, though. “Oh, right.” Suddenly, his expression turned serious. “You know Sebastian has sleep issues, right?”

Stella kept towel-drying her hair, giving him a look that said, “Go on.”

“Ever notice he only manages to sleep when you’re around?” Allan asked, his gaze flicking over Stella’s face. He didn’t miss the way her hand froze for a second mid-drying.

Stella didn’t reply to him.

Allan’s eyes darkened. “Could you keep an eye on Sebastian’s sleep these days?”

“Why?” Stella asked, catching the way Allan phrased it.

‘What’s with these days?’ Stella wondered. ‘Just what time frame is he talking about?’

Allan shot a look at Lucas and then dropped his voice. “Because pretty soon, it’s going to be Sebastian’s...”

Stella froze at what he said.

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II 55 vouchers

The bedroom was dim, the black curtains half-drawn, casting a gloomy shadow over the room.

Sebastian sat by the window, swallowed up by the gloom. His face was pale and sickly, completely expressionless. Eggie fluttered over, following the scent, perched on the tree in Snowball's usual spot, then cocked its head and dozed off.

The AC was still cranked all the way down.

Sebastian opened the drawer and grabbed his meds. He seemed wrapped in frost, his fingers so cold, chilling him to the core, just like the icy coffin from the funeral parlor in his memories.

It felt like a bottomless black hole, ready to suck him into another dimension and consume him completely.

A faint, blood-hungry red glimmered at the edge of his eyes.

Right then, someone started knocking at the door.

"Get lost." Sebastian's voice was cold enough to freeze the blood.

But the knocking outside just didn't let up.

He steered his wheelchair over to the bedroom door and threw it open.

Big Ben stood at the door, looking all wounded. "Telling me to get lost is super rude!"

Sebastian was speechless.

Big Ben tilted its head, its marshmallow-soft white body quivering. After a moment of serious thought, it said in a cutesy voice, "You have to apologize to me, please."

Lucas squeezed his chubby little head out from behind Big Ben's leg, giving Sebastian big puppy eyes.

"Say sorry!" Lucas seemed to urge. He was hugging a scruffy little plant in his arms.

Sebastian's eyes were deep and unreadable. "I'm sorry."

Big Ben beamed with happiness. “I forgive you.” It shuffled past Sebastian, trying to squeeze into the bedroom sideways, but its chubby belly inevitably got stuck in the doorway.

They were all rendered speechless.

Lucas tilted his head, looking all confused and adorable.

Big Ben said, “Let me come up with a plan!”

After a moment, Big Ben said, “Guess I need to let out some air.”

With a quick hiss, Big Ben let out air for a couple of seconds, its round belly shrank a tiny bit, and with that little gap, it managed to wiggle into Sebastian’s room.

Big Ben clenched its little fists. “Yes! I’m the best!”

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Lucas copied him, clenching his tiny fists too and making happy noises.

Sebastian propped his head up with one hand, his pale face expressionless as he looked at the big one and the little one. He felt a headache coming on. “Who told you to come here?”

Big Ben walked over to the curtains, stared at the tightly closed drapes in deep thought, then raised his hand and said, “Abracadabra.”

The smart curtains automatically parted.

The once-shadowy room was suddenly flooded with warm sunlight.

Sebastian groaned, “Big Ben!”

Big Ben turned around, gave himself a quick puff, and said, “Stella sent us.”

Sebastian was speechless.

Lucas handed over the scruffy little plant he’d been hugging. It was pretty heavy, and his little hands trembled like crazy.

“Stella just upgraded my system again!” Big Ben announced, its chubby hands stacked on its belly. “Now I can pick up 27 different human emotions!”

Sebastian reached out and took the plant. Lucas instantly felt relieved.

The room was freezing, and Lucas sneezed, a tiny snot bubble forming at his nose.

Big Ben instantly set the AC to a comfy 78°F. “Friendly tip: if you keep the AC too cold, you’ll end up with stiff legs! Ouch, that really hurts!”

“Why didn’t she come herself?” Sebastian muttered, glancing at the doorway, his face clouded over.

Big Ben cocked his head, pausing for a couple of seconds. It thought back to the look Stella gave it when she upgraded its system, but it still couldn’t read her mood at all.

“Oh, right,” Big Ben piped up, as if something just popped into its head. It scooted over to Sebastian, reached out its chubby hand for the medicine bottle Sebastian was holding, and snatched it right out of Sebastian’s hand.

Sebastian watched as Big Ben grabbed the bottle and chucked it straight into the trash. “Stella said if the meds aren’t doing anything, you can stop taking them now!” Big Ben declared.

Lucas puffed out his cheeks and nodded cagerly.

Sebastian shook his head.

“And this!” Big Ben perked up, bent down, and wrapped Sebastian up in a big, squishy hug.

Sebastian was completely smothered in Big Ben’s jiggly, round belly, and honestly, he’d never felt speechless

in his life.

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Big Ben said, “Stella said I should give you this hug!”

Sebastian said, “Let go.”

Big Ben replied, “Okay!”

65 vouchers

Big Ben let go without a second thought and stood off to the side. “That was your very own healing hug. Sebastian.” Then it made a heart shape with its hands.

Sebastian asked, “What did you just call me?” He thought he must have misheard.

Big Ben replied, “Sebastian!” It kept making heart shapes with its hands.

Sebastian’s eyes grew darker, a storm brewing in them.

Big Ben, not a care in the world, just kept making heart shapes with its hands, totally unfazed.

A minute later, Big Ben was still throwing up heart signs at the closed door, and Lucas, who’d just gotten booted out with it, stood there looking adorably clueless.

Inside the room, Sebastian looked down at the scruffy little plant in his lap. There was a sticky note slapped on the pot, the handwriting bold and wild. No doubt, it was from Stella.

[Keep by bedside.] That was all it said on the front.

Sebastian poked at the leaves. “Ugly.”

Like it took offense, the scruffy little plant shriveled up, turning yellow and crispy to protest.

Sebastian thought, ‘Seriously?’

Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted something else scribbled on the back of the note. He flipped it over and saw another wild, bold message: [Don’t call it ugly.]

Sebastian thought, “Too late.

Meanwhile, John had just dropped off the stuff Kendrick sent over. Stella tore open the seal, dumped all the parts onto the table, and flipped through the files.

Snowball, full and content, was coiled up on the tree, looking blissed out, like a big, lazy white noodle.

Suddenly, the sound of a wheelchair came from the doorway.

Stella, back to the door, gave a faint little smile.

But it vanished in an instant.

Then someone knocked on the door.

“Come in,” she said,

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Chapter 117

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55 vouchers

Sebastian rolled in, that shriveled, yellow plant sitting on the black blanket over his legs. Stella glanced over, and for once, she actually caught a flash of guilt on his face.

“It just gave up and died,” Sebastian said coldly.

Stella smiled helplessly.

She slung one arm over the back of her chair, eyeing the sad little yellow plant. “You’re beautiful.”

With a soft rustle, the plant that had looked totally hopeless suddenly sprang back to life. Its wilted, yellow leaves turned bright green and full of energy, like it had been reborn in seconds.

Sebastian was shocked. Maybe it was just his imagination, but for a split second, he could swear he saw a word written all over that plant, “finally!”

“What are you doing?” Sebastian asked, glancing away from the plant and spotting the scattered parts on the table. “Drones?” With a frosty expression, he reached out, only to notice the Ion Wing Drones logo in the lower left corner.

Stella replied offhandedly, “Just wanted to see where their drones fall short.”

“It’s the core tech and the chips,” Sebastian said, his voice low. “The shells are pretty much perfect, but they’ve only survived these years by outsourcing and exporting.”

Keeping the core technology and signature chips locked down domestically, while outsourcing the manufacturing to cheap overseas labor, was a classic trick used by developed countries.

In Clusia, when it came to polls about companies with bleak prospects, Ion Wing Drones ranked number one for three years running.

All of this just proved how hard it was to stage a real comeback.

At the Herbal Medicine Heritage Center in Tongalia, a voice came through the screen, “Half a month from now, see you at the International Herbal Medicine Conference.”

It made several old men in Tongalia’s distinctive traditional garb so furious that they nearly jumped out of their seats.

“This is outrageous! Unbelievable!”

“Let’s teach her a lesson!”

Everyone started shouting at once, the place instantly turning into a noisy mess.

“Bad news!” Suddenly, someone came running in from outside, footsteps pounding in the hallway.

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 118**

Read Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 118 -

### **Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 118**

Chapter 118

55 vouchers

The curator paused mid-stroke of his grizzled goatee, shooting a cold glare. “What’s all the panic about?”

“Sir, the Clusia Traditional Medicine Association and the Dorestan Medical Alliance have already posted the Vitalis pill formula on their official websites!” The messenger gasped, having run all the way.

And then he continued, “They even included scans from ancient manuscripts to prove the pill originated in Clusia three thousand years ago!”

After a while, the curator spoke, “Interesting.” His expression was unreadable, and his eyes were clouded with darkness. “Forget about the heritage application.”

The once lively Herbal Medicine Heritage Center went dead quiet.

Everyone else clammed up, not daring to make a sound.

“International Herbal Medicine Conference, huh?” the curator snorted, “Can’t wait to see it.”

\*\*\*

On Sandridge Island, Stella didn’t spare a glance at the manual as she assembled the drone piece by piece, her face totally unfazed.

Her loose T-shirt hung off one shoulder, showing off her flawless skin, while her messy hair was casually clipped back, making her delicate face look even smaller.

Sebastian couldn’t take his eyes off her face.

When another strand slipped down to block her cheek, he reached over without thinking and slowly tucked it behind her ear.

His cool fingers grazed the curve of her ear.

Stella’s hands froze for a moment.

Sebastian seemed to have switched to a new aftershave, a subtle, bitter scent, cool and strangely alluring. Stella kept her expression neutral. “It smells nice.”

Sebastian was silent for a few seconds. “It’s new aftershave.”

Stella just gave a quiet hum and didn’t pay him any more attention.

Sebastian withdrew his hand, his deep eyes calm and unfathomable, sending a text to John without a hint of emotion.

\*\*\*\*\*

John stared at Sebastian's text, momentarily lost for words.

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Chapter 118

Jake leaned over. "What are you looking at?"

John turned his phone away from Jake. "Nothing."

'It was just Mr. Gray telling me to buy some extra aftershave, just in case,' he thought.

He asked how many.

Sebastian told him to buy as much as he could.

'That's it. No big deal.' John thought and smiled.

EX 55 vouchers

An hour later, Lucas peeked in from the doorway, with Big Ben copying him right behind. Perched on its big, round head was Eggie, freshly woken up and chirping nonstop.

Hearing the commotion, Stella turned around and saw Sebastian curled up defensively on the couch, eyes shut, catching a quick nap.

"Shh," Stella instinctively pressed a finger to her lips in a shushing gesture.

Lucas immediately clapped his chubby little hands over his mouth, his big, bright eyes blinking as he tiptoed in through the door. Snowball, lounging in the decorative tree, lazily lifted its head, rolled over, and went right back to sleep.

Stella leisurely tidied up her things, but her gaze lingered on Sebastian the whole time.

The shadows veiled Sebastian's handsome features, but he still had that cold, detached look about him. His long, thick lashes drooped, casting shadows across his face, and his whole vibe just screamed maturity.

Lucas crouched by the couch, resting his chin in his hands, gazing at Sebastian with an adorably grumpy, slightly annoyed look.

‘That was supposed to be my spot!’ he thought, pouting and pulling a silly face.

Stella’s phone lit up. With her back to Sebastian and Lucas, she shot them a glance over her shoulder.

Behind her, Sebastian, who’d just had his eyes closed a second ago, opened them and shot Lucas a chilly, deadpan look, catching him right in the middle of that silly face.

Lucas lowered his head in guilt.

Eggie flapped its wings, dove into Sebastian’s front pocket, and then popped its fluffy little head out, chirping

away.

Stella turned around and saw the amusing scene. Stella said, “Blake wants to take us out for dinner.”

Sebastian snorted, “I’m not going.”

“Alright,” Stella said, phone in one hand, her tone indifferent. “I’ll just go on my own.”

Sebastian was speechless.

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Chapter 118

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Lucas’s face went all pouty, his eyes looking super pitiful. He scampered over and grabbed Stella’s loose lounge pants with his hands, giving them a little shake.

Stella paused for a moment and then said, “Alright, you’re coming too.”

Lucas’s eyes sparkled, and he started nodding so fast that it looked like his head was on a spring.

Sebastian shook his head.

“You...” Sebastian’s cold voice came from behind Stella just as her fingertips hovered over her phone, ready to reply. She turned to look at him.

“Say that again,” Sebastian said, his voice icy.

Stella arched an eyebrow, thinking her ears must’ve been playing tricks on her, and locked eyes with him, his expression cool and collected.

“Hey!” Lucas shot his hand up, waving in protest.

“Mr. Gray, what did you just say?” Stella piped up, looking confused.

Sebastian said, “Ask me one more time.” This time, his words were sharp and unmistakable, his voice dropping to an even colder, lower pitch.

Everyone went quiet for a moment.

Stella gave a little laugh and looked away, and even her usual chill vibe couldn’t hide the smile creeping onto her face.

Sebastian urged, “Hurry up. Ask.”

Stella flashed a smile and teased, “Blake’s inviting us to dinner. Are you coming or not?”

After a while, Sebastian spoke up, his voice calm and magnetic, “I’ll go.”

\*\*

At the pool hall, a bunch of Haliville Chads were messing around together.

“Mr. Pierce, is it true that Ion Wing Drones, that total money pit, is finally getting spun off from the Pierce Group?”

The rumor was all over the scene, and everyone figured the Pierces had finally wised up. “So, who do you think the new CEO’s gonna be?”

Blake, soon-to-be CEO, felt completely insane and said, “No way it’s me.”

“That money pit? Whoever gets stuck with it is totally screwed!”

“But I heard the Pierce Group gutted the core team from Ion Wing Drones before spinning it off.”

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Chapter 118

E55 vouchers

Blake thought, ‘Where the heck are you all getting this stuff? Even as a Pierce, I don’t know this much!’

Blake was totally huddled up in the corner, unusually quiet tonight. But when his phone lit up with a reply, he literally shot up like a spring.

‘I gotta tell Stella tonight. I’m really not cut out for this!’ he thought.

“I’m heading out,” Blake said, snatching up his black leather jacket and car key and heading straight for the door. He’d called in every favor he could to get a private room at that impossible-to-book restaurant tonight. No way was he showing up late!

On his way there, Blake quickly texted Stella the restaurant address.

Just as Blake was mentally rehearsing how he’d finally work up the guts to say no to Stella, he walked into the restaurant and froze on the spot.

‘Seriously? After all that trouble booking the private room, someone else snatched it right out from under me?’ Blake thought.

Blake’s temper flared. “Who the hell took it?” He shoved past the waiter and stormed straight for the private

room.

The moment he pushed the door open, he saw his cousin Xander sitting there with a bunch of Pierce Group board members, raising their glasses and chatting away.

Everyone froze the second Blake barged in.

“Blake.” Xander stood up, cool and confident, and came over to greet Blake, a glass of red wine in hand, his whole vibe refined and classy.

Blake’s eyes followed Xander’s gesture to the wine cabinet.

It was the bottle of Romanée-Conti he’d set aside here earlier, and it was already opened and being poured

out.

“I had some urgent business to discuss with a few board members, so we used your private room. Hope you don’t mind. You’re not gonna get upset over something so trivial, right?” Xander said, all polite on the surface.

Blake was frozen.

“You and your loser buddies hogging a private room like this and guzzling top-shelf wine? What a waste. Seriously, Blake, do you even deserve it?” Xander mocked.

Xander lifted his glass and, with deliberate flair, slowly poured his red wine down over Blake’s head, letting it trickle all the way from his hair to his collar.

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 119**

Read Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 119 –

### **Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 119**

Chapter 119

From behind, a burst of laughter erupted.

Blake stood frozen, letting the red wine pour over him. He muttered, “Xander.”

He couldn’t figure out why Xander would act like that.

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55 vouchers

Xander still had that gentle smile on his face, as if what just happened was nothing but a dream to Blake.

The waiter, wine chilling in the ice bucket, lingered awkwardly in the hallway.

He didn't know whether to stay or leave.

Out of nowhere, a woman's voice sliced through the tension.

Stella said, "He's not good enough, but you think you are?"

Stella lingered in the shadows, half-leaning against the wall, her posture relaxed, and even her tone was nonchalant, like she couldn't care less.

"Stella," Blake muttered, soaked in red wine. Stella stepped out of the shadows, radiating a dangerous vibe. She didn't even glance at him. With fierce energy, she snatched a bottle from the waiter's ice bucket and marched straight toward Xander.

Before Xander could even react, Stella smashed the bottle down on his head with a sharp crack.

The bottle exploded on impact, glass shards and red wine mixed with blood running down Xander's face.

The smile was still frozen on Xander's face, but he was completely stunned.

The laughter in the private room came to a screeching halt.

The directors jumped up from their seats, and everyone left, stunned by the sudden turn of events.

"Somebody call the cops. Quick," someone yelled.

In no time, a crowd swarmed over to Xander, shooting Stella dirty looks and cutting off her escape.

Not far away, Allan, who crashed the dinner to mooch a meal, let out a low whistle. "Whoa, Stella's pretty wild," Allan said. He glanced down at Sebastian, who casually covered Lucas's eyes. Allan smirked at Sebastian.

Lucas looked up, confused.

"Stella, you go first. I'll cover for you," Blake said, but before he could finish, Stella cut him off with a cold stare. The rest of his words got stuck in his throat, and he felt a chill run down his spine.

"Blake, people who are all guts and no brains never make it far in this world," Stella said, her voice calm but loaded with meaning.

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## Chapter 119

Her tone was cool, but her words carried weight.

Blake just stood there, stunned into silence.

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It was like his brain had been hit with a sledgehammer. He couldn't say a word, only stared as Stella, face icy and unreadable, let the rest of the bottle drop to the floor.

The loud thud made everyone's heart skip a beat.

"Who said call the cops? Wow, I'm just terrified," Stella said. Her face was so chill that nobody actually believed her. She casually grabbed a napkin from the waiter's tray and wiped her hands.

She took her time, cleaning each finger one by one.

"You're going to jail for this," one of the Pierce Group directors yelled, spitting everywhere. Stella swiftly sidestepped, shooting him a look of pure disdain.

The guy looked like he was about to explode from rage.

"Stella," Blake said, his voice tight with worry, his face pale. But Stella stayed cool as ever, whipped out her phone, and started searching right there.

"Let me see how fast the cops show up from the nearest station," Stella said, her fingers tapping away. "Five minutes." She shot Xander a smirk. Xander was clutching his head, the classy smile wiped clean, his face a mess of wine, blood, and humiliation.

Xander glared at her, his eyes dark and venomous, full of silent resentment.

Over in the corner, Allan's grin faded. He was getting restless, couldn't sit still. "Are we really just gonna wait for the cops?" Allan muttered. But Sebastian, calm as ever in his wheelchair, put out a hand to keep Allan from moving.

“Honestly, I kinda hope the cops show up faster. Don’t you think so, Xander?” Stella said, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

She shot him a cool smile, not bothered at all by Xander’s death stare. Her chill was almost unsettling, making the whole crowd on the other side look even more panicked and desperate.

Suddenly, she made a point of tapping on her phone, making sure Xander noticed every move.

Xander’s heart skipped a beat; he suddenly realized something.

“You’re not going anywhere. Just wait till the cops get here. Let’s see if you can still act tough then,” the directors shouted, one after another, totally missing the way Xander’s face went ghostly pale.

Stella just smiled, saying nothing.

“Xander, don’t worry. We’re all here to back you up,” one of the directors shouted.

But Xander jerked his hand away, staring Stella down with a forced, twisted smile. He said, “Ms. Carter, let’s just say nothing happened here, alright?”

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“Huh? Xander, what the hell are you talking about?” the directors asked. Xander’s words left the Pierce Group directors completely floored, and Blake was just as stunned. He turned to Stella, his face full of disbelief.

“We all saw her grab the bottle and,” one of the directors blurted out.

“You’re all mistaken,” Xander said immediately, lying with a straight face. His shameless denial left the guy speechless, unable to get another word out.

Stella’s voice was calm and steady. She asked, “So, what did I do just now?”

“You didn’t do anything,” Xander said. He forced out through clenched teeth, swallowing his pride. “I got hurt because I was careless, that’s all.”

“And this private room?” Stella asked.

“I’ll vacate it,” Xander said, barely holding it together.

“And the wine?” Stella said, her tone casual.

“I’ll cover it,” Xander said, forcing the words through clenched teeth.

Stella and Xander traded lines, leaving everyone in the room so dazed they wondered if they’d somehow wandered into a fever dream. The whole scene was just off-the-charts crazy.

Xander, who was supposed to be the victim, was acting all meek and submissive, while Stella looked bored and laid-back. The crowd was struck dumb, just staring at the two of them, totally shell-shocked.

“Anything else?” Stella said, her expression wiped clean, eyes icy and emotionless as she stared Xander down.

Her aura was pure menace, dark energy radiating off her in waves.

“What else?” Xander asked, totally lost.

Stella reached out and pulled Blake over to her side.

Blake stumbled, nearly losing his balance, but he didn’t say a word.

“What, the Pierce family never taught you how to apologize?” Stella said, her voice cool and detached. But anyone who knew her could sense it; she was right on the edge of snapping.

Xander was a wreck, wine and blood all over him, too stunned to say a word.

His fists were clenched tight at his sides as he glanced up at Blake, asking, “You’re not gonna hold this against me, are you, Blake?”

In the corner, Sebastian sat in his wheelchair, his expression cold and distant as he absently rolled the black prayer beads around his wrist. He was waiting for Blake to answer, just like everyone else.

“Why do you think I wouldn’t be mad?” Blake suddenly said, “Why do you think I’m not good enough for a room like this?”

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Xander’s smile froze; his plan totally backfired.

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“So, apologize to me,” Blake said, lifting his chin and locking eyes with Xander. His face, still dripping with red wine, was all steel and resolve.

Stella’s cold look finally eased up a bit, her frosty vibe relaxing for the first time all night.

“Sorry for everything,” Xander said, each syllable squeezed through gritted teeth as he apologized to Blake. But his eyes were all wolf, none of that usual fake gentleness left.

Stella was cool and collected the whole time, not even a hair out of place. She said, “Make sure you cover all the damage before you start explaining to the cops.”

Xander was so pissed that he was grinding his teeth so hard it was a wonder they didn’t crack.

Downstairs, the faint wail of police sirens drifted up.

AD

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 120**

Read Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 120 –

# Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 120

Chapter 120

1.)

55 vouchers

Inside the private room, the waiter had cleaned up so well that nothing could even tell Xander and his crew had ever been here.

Blake sat across from them, like a kid in kindergarten, ramrod straight, hands in his lap, not daring to move an inch.

With a chirp, Eggie poked her head out of Sebastian's pocket, flapped her tiny wings, and plopped right onto Lucas's head. She snuggled in, perfectly content.

Lucas, just spaced out.

"Do you know why Xander suddenly backed out?" Stella asked, her voice calm but somehow making Blake's scalp tingle.

He shook his head, clearly at a loss, asking, "Why?"

Allan just snorted at that.

Stella lowered her gaze, shadows falling beneath her eyes. She said, "Because he knows I've got leverage on the Greenleaf Club's double surveillance system. He can't, and he wouldn't dare, mess with me."

"But what does that have to do with Xander?" Blake said, but stopped mid-sentence. When he realized what Stella was really saying, his face went pale as a sheet, and he shot up from his seat.

Sebastian gave him a cold stare and asked, "Get it now?"

Blake stared in shock, asking, "Wait, are you saying Xander was the one behind the Greenleaf Club incident?"

"Do you understand now why Mr. Pierce left his inheritance to me and put Ion Wing Drones in your hands?" Stella asked. Her eyes were cold, and there was still a hint of that wild, untamed look in her gaze.

“Why would he do this to me?” Blake asked. He was still reeling, his voice shaking. “We grew up together. He was the one I trusted most. He knew I wasn’t cut out for running a company. I was never a threat to him.”

“Blake, you’re the Pierce family’s eldest grandson,” Stella said calmly, her eyes locked on his. “Just the fact that you’re alive is already a problem for him.”

She said it so casually, but it was the most terrifying truth of all.

Blake just stood there, stunned into silence.

He slumped in his seat like all the air had gone out of him, eyes unfocused. He asked, “So, Ion Wing Drones, for me, it’s just?”

Stella poured Lucas a glass of water, not even bothering to look up. She replied, “Your grandpa was saving your life.”

Blake fell silent again.

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“So, are you still going to say no to Ion Wing Drones?” Stella asked, her voice slow and clear, making sure he caught every word. She knew exactly what he was after, inviting her out to dinner, and now, the ball was in his

court.

If he didn’t want it, she wasn’t going to push. But when it came to drones, Stella was getting in on this, one way or another.

After a long, heavy silence, Blake finally managed to speak, his voice tight with nerves. He asked, “What do you want me to do, Stella?”

“What do you mean?” Stella asked, letting out a small laugh, cocking her head to the side. “Surviving, well, that’s all on you.”

Blake just stood there, fell silent.

He kept replaying that scene when Stella stepped out of the shadows, expressionless, grabbing a wine bottle and smashing it over Xander's head. She was fearlessly bold, and it made his blood race.

Blake wanted to live with that same wild freedom.

"Stella, Mr. Gray. Please, teach me," Blake burst out, fired up and desperate. He bent over in a dramatic bow, but in his excitement, his forehead crashed straight into the table with a resounding thud.

All of them were left speechless.

Blake was so embarrassed.

Clutching his now-red forehead, Blake felt like the biggest idiot alive. He slumped over the table, wishing he could just crawl into a hole and disappear.

"Alright, let's set some ground rules," Stella said, catching Blake's attention instantly. He shot his head up, eyes shining with excitement.

He didn't even wait for her to finish before nodding like crazy. He said, "Just say the word, Stella. Whatever you want, I'm in."

Watching those bright, eager puppy eyes, Sebastian's expression turned ice-cold in a flash. He spun his cup between long fingers, face dark and stormy, radiating a chilling pressure without saying a word.

"Let me ask you. What's the most worthless thing in the world?" Stella said, her tone steady.

Blake blinked, completely stumped. He thought, "The most worthless thing? What does she even mean?"

'If she'd asked about the most valuable thing, I could've answered. But the most worthless? I was totally at a loss.'

"His dignity?" Allan said, waving his hand with a lazy smirk, half-joking as he pointed at Blake. Blake started to protest, but just buried his head in defeat, too embarrassed to say a word.

"The most worthless things in this world were pretend kindness, half-hearted apologies, fake regret, and crocodile tears," Stella said, her voice totally flat. The words hit Blake so hard he just froze, staring at her in

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shock.

“Stella,” Blake said.

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“Kindness needs an edge, or you’ll just end up as someone else’s doormat,” Stella said calmly. “People will step on you, mock you, humiliate you, just like what happened tonight.”

Blake’s pupils dilated in shock.

He’d always been Chad, living for pleasure and never having anyone talk to him like this. He stared at Stella, stunned. She was so much younger, yet her eyes carried wisdom and clarity that saw straight through the world’s cruelty.

She just opened the door to a whole new world for him.

“So?” Blake asked. He was shaking all over, goosebumps rising from pure adrenaline. That blurry idea in his head was finally catching fire, burning brighter by the second.

“If someone acts crazy, you go even crazier. If they’re ruthless, you’ll be even more ruthless. If they want your life, you make them pay with theirs. You get it?” Stella said.

Stella just hit the service button for food, totally unfazed.

She was done talking.

“Stella,” Blake murmured, his nose tingling, eyes misting up. He tried to scoot closer to her for comfort.

But before he could reach them, Lucas’s adorable face turned stone-cold, his tiny hand gripping a dinner knife like a mini mob boss. Behind him, Sebastian stood ghostly pale, his chill no less sharp, both fixing Blake with a death stare.

Blake just stood there, fell silent.

Like he had been hit with a jolt of electricity, Blake snapped upright from a 45-degree lean to a perfect 90, stiff as a soldier at attention. To cover up his embarrassment, he awkwardly started doing calisthenics.

Blake began to beat time for himself awkwardly.

Everyone else just stared at him, dumbfounded.

That was definitely overkill.

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After dinner, at the restaurant entrance, just as Blake was about to drive off, the window of the black Maybach slid down, and Stella's face appeared.

"There's a party at the Lane family estate this Saturday. Sort out your own invitation," Stella said. She didn't wait for Blake to reply, just rolled the window back up, and the car eased away.

Lucas suddenly let out a burp. Lucas, with his full belly, instinctively covered his mouth. His big, dark eyes

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darted around shyly, looking absolutely adorable. In the end, he just buried his little face in Stella's arms and let out a soft sound.

Sebastian's private phone started ringing, but he ignored it completely.

"Mr. Gray, your phone's ringing," Stella said offhandedly. But when she turned to look, she was met with Sebastian's eyes, cold and deep, like a winter ocean.

Sebastian just grunted, didn't even glance at the caller ID before cutting the call.

He moved with a hint of impatience.

"That party on Saturday?" Stella thought, her thoughts lingering.

"Stella, your Edenbury Academy uniform is being delivered tonight," Allan said offhandedly. Edenbury Academy uniforms were all hand-tailored, each with its

own unique serial number. “How’d you know my size?” Stella just asked offhandedly, not really expecting an answer. Allan hesitated, glanced at Sebastian in the rearview mirror, then just shrugged and kept quiet. Lucas looked up, tilting his head, totally puzzled.

He thought, ‘Uniform?’

‘Stella’s gonna wear a uniform?’

He tugged at her sleeve, eyes shining like stars.

‘I wanna see. I wanna see.’

‘She must be so beautiful.’

Half an hour later, Allan drove back to Sandridge Island. As soon as they walked into the villa, they noticed a slim figure standing in the living room, who turned around when she heard them come in.

The first thing Stella saw was her gentle, pretty face, long hair draped over her shoulders, wearing a pale pink floral dress that hugged her waist. She looked smart and graceful, with a 24-inch white suitcase by her side.

Before they arrived, she’d clearly been chatting with Jake.

“Mr. Gray,” she said with a soft smile, her eyes a little wistful. Then she turned to Stella, giving her a once-over. “And who’s this?”

Stella smiled helplessly.

The vibe in the room suddenly got a little weird.

“Celia, you’re here,” Allan said, glancing at Sebastian before stepping up to greet her. Lucas grabbed Stella’s finger and pressed closer to her, chirping.

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Chapter 120

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“Allan,” Celia replied with a smile, then looked over at Stella. “Is she a relative of the Gray family?”

“I’m,” Stella said.

But Sebastian cut her off, grabbing her wrist with a grip colder than ice. His voice was flat, almost inhuman. He said, “Stella.”

The room fell into an awkward silence.

Allan scratched his nose, keeping his mouth shut.

Stella turned to look at Sebastian. Ever since this girl showed up, something about him had changed; his hold on her wrist was way too tight, like he was losing control.

“Hi, I’m Celia,” Celia said with a friendly smile at Stella, then glanced away. “I’ll take my luggage upstairs; am I still in my old room?” She grabbed the handle of her white suitcase and started heading for the elevator.

“Ms. York,” Jake called out quickly, looking a bit embarrassed. “All the guest rooms have been opened up and turned into Ms. Carter’s storage area now, including the one you used to stay in.”

Celia blinked in surprise, then just smiled and said, “Alright, just put me wherever works.”

Jake replied.

They stepped into the elevator together.

Right before the elevator doors closed, Celia gave a little wave to Sebastian, who was sitting in his wheelchair.

After a long, heavy silence, “Mr. Gray?” she asked, lifting her hand. She had thought it might be a while before Sebastian let go of her hand, but he freed her hand quickly.

Stella raised an eyebrow, watching him closely.

He looked even paler than before, his eyes totally blank, like he was lost somewhere far away. Stella couldn’t help but remember that night he’d been coughing up blood.

“Are you?” Stella asked. She started to reach out, worried, but Sebastian blocked her hand almost instantly, shutting her out.

Mr. Gray had reasons.

Stella smiled helplessly.

Allan, who had been scratching his nose, now covered his face with his hand. John came over from the other side, carrying several sets of Edenbury Academy uniforms. He asked, “Ms. Carter, your uniforms have arrived. Would you like to try them on?”

Before John could finish, Stella walked over with a blank expression, took the uniforms from him, and headed straight for the spiral staircase without even glancing back, not even bothering to wait for the elevator.

Allan did not say a word.

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John was shocked.

Yikes, the vibes in here were seriously tense.

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Lucas jolted from his daze, his world shattering as he realized Stella had gone upstairs alone. He shot Sebastian a fierce glare, snatched Eggie from his pocket, and hurried up the stairs after her, determined not to be left behind.

The downstairs went quiet again.

After a long, heavy silence, Allan walked back over to Sebastian. He said, “Stella’s wrist is red where you grabbed her.”

All the things he wanted to say just ended up as that one sentence.

Sebastian looked up, his face even paler and more shadowed than before, the corners of his with sickly red. His lips moved twice, but in the end, he just stayed silent.

eyes

still tinged

In her bedroom, Stella slammed the door shut, the bang echoing down the hallway.

Leaning against the door with a frosty expression, she pulled out her phone and, with zero hesitation, blocked Sebastian on WhatsApp. Once she was done, she turned around, and there, staring up at her with those tiny, red, beady eyes, was Snowball.

Stella and Snowball were both speechless.

Snowball had been sulking in a chubby coil on the floor, but when Stella's deep amber eyes locked onto her, she froze, not daring to budge.

Snowball just gulped down her loneliness.

There was a frantic little knock at the door, low to the ground and out of breath. Stella didn't even have to look. Of course, it was Lucas.

Stella pulled the door open just a crack; only then did she notice the red ring around her wrist.

Stella's anger spiked even higher.

Seriously, she didn't know where all this rage was even coming from.

As the door opened, Lucas, a cartoon shark backpack on his chest, held Eggie overhead like a trophy. Eggie chirped, while Lucas's soft face scrunched up, heartbreakingly cute and tearful.

He even stuffed his backpack with his absolute favorite shark pajamas, just so he'd have them close.

Stella stepped aside to let him in, and when Lucas saw she wasn't mad at him because of Sebastian, his tears vanished in a flash; he broke into a huge grin and dove right into the room without a second thought.

With a click, the door shut behind them.

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Chapter 120

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Outside, a pale pink floral dress slipped through the shadows.

Night fell, black as ink.

¶ 49

55 vouchers

Sebastian emerged from the bathroom, his black bathrobe hanging loose, exposing the broad, sculpted planes of his chest. In the walk-in closet, he stared at his reflection, expressionless, as he untied the robe.

Scars crisscrossed his body, weaving a map of pain across his skin.

They tore apart what could have been a perfect work of art.

The cold shower had left his face so pale that he looked almost ghostly, skin nearly blending into the icy white of the room. He grabbed a fresh shirt, threw it on, and steered his wheelchair back to the bed.

The tree outside was empty, nothing on its branches.

Same with the room, totally empty.

Sebastian glanced at the tightly shut balcony doors, then looked away.

The plain plant was swaying softly in the moonlight, its gentle scent drifting through the air. But the moment it sensed someone nearby, it stopped moving, perfectly still.

Sebastian fell silent.

The plain plant kept still.

Sebastian kept staring at it.

The plain plant still remained its place.

Sebastian said, "So ugly."

The plain plant became furious. It turned yellow and wilted in a flash and died dramatically.

Sebastian was speechless.

He said, "It's not that bad."

The plain plant was still just as wilted and yellow, not even a twitch.

Sebastian said, "Just a little ugly, that's all."

The plain plant got angrier.

Sebastian was speechless.

Staring at the wilted, yellow plant, Sebastian couldn't help but remember the way Stella had looked at it and said, "You're beautiful." His lips twitched, almost forming a smile,

After a long moment, "I'm sorry," Sebastian murmured to the empty room, the words barely audible even to

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