

# Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel

## Chapter 31

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Chapter 31

Sebastian's gaze was deep and thoughtful. In his memories, Lucas had always seemed detached, like a little automaton.

Lucas refused to speak, and if he got mad, he'd go on a rampage smashing stuff everywhere, shutting out the world entirely. The diagnosis was a combination of autism and depression.

Now, Lucas giggled when he saw Sebastian come out, and then patted the black bed with his hand, beckoning him over.

Sebastian stood there in a black bathrobe, his expression unreadable, his presence formidable. But to Stella, he was a bit different now.

Fresh from the shower with his damp hair falling over his eyes, he seemed younger somehow, despite the brooding aura that clung to him.

When Sebastian didn't move, Lucas patted the bed again, harder than before. A ragged huh-uh came out of his mouth, seeming to say, "Hurry up."

Sebastian, with rare patience, indulged him and sat down beside Lucas.

[Stella, can you help Uncle Sebastian and me?] Lucas held up his tablet, looking all cute and hopeful.

Stella just stared, lost for words.

Help? With what? Stella wondered, instinctively glancing at Sebastian, hoping he'd clear things up.

"Blow-dry our hair," Sebastian said, his voice as cool and level as ever.

Lucas nodded vigorously, his big, hopeful eyes fixed on Stella.

The two of them just sat there on the black bed, staring at her. Stella thought to herself, 'What am I supposed to do with these two?'

Soon, the hum of a hairdryer filled the room. Stella had rolled the sleeves of her loose white shirt up to her elbows, revealing slender, flawless arms.

Her graceful fingers moved through Sebastian's hair as he sat quietly with his head bowed, looking nothing like the cold, fearsome tyrant he usually was.

Meanwhile, Lucas, already dry, was trying to balance the little yellow rubber duck on Snowball's head. Snowball instantly went cross-eyed.

Sebastian gazed at Stella's wrist, his mind wandering.

Just then, a knock at the door drew the attention of the trio and the python. Allan leaned casually against the doorframe, one hand in the pocket of his floral swim trunks, the other fiddling with his phone. A playful, knowing smile touched his lips.

"Sorry to break your little family bonding time," Allan drawled, his posture relaxed but his voice ice-cold. "But five minutes ago, Gray Group dropped an announcement on their website." He shot a look at Sebastian, eyes glinting with mischief.

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In the study, Allan sat with his legs crossed, sneering, "The Gray family is such a joke."

On his phone screen, the official Gray Group announcement stated in stark black and white: authorized by the Chairman, Carlos, an emergency board meeting had voted to remove Sebastian as CEO, effective immediately.

In other words, Sebastian had been ousted from Gray Group.

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"That old geezer really thinks he can control you by taking away some CEO title?" Allan's brow arched, his grin wild and untamed. He was barely containing his simmering anger.

"If it weren't for Annette and... Allan swallowed the rest of his sentence as Sebastian shot him a cold look.

But in no time. Allan cooled off and sprawled out on the couch, casual and relaxed. His eyes flickered with mischief. Obviously, he cooked up some plan involving Sebastian.

So, what's your plan?" Allan asked, testing the waters.

"Why not use this as an opportunity to make a big move? Just announce who you are and let them know who's really in charge," Allan grinned. He'd been itching for years to hand over the reins and watch Sebastian take charge.

"No time," Sebastian said, his deep voice radiating that intense, commanding pressure. His eyes were cold and distant.

"No time? What do you mean?" Allan's voice rose before he could stop it.

"I've got other stuff to do," Sebastian said, offering more explanation than he usually would to Allan.

"What the hell else could you possibly have to do?" Allan jumped to his feet, determined not to let this chance for a break slip away.

Sebastian pulled open a drawer and tossed a file onto the desk, the one John had delivered earlier.

Allan didn't hesitate. He immediately opened it. As he read the contents, his expression shifted to one of utter disbelief.

"Wait, what?" Allan blurted out, still in shock.

Allan followed Sebastian out of the study in a daze, still struggling to process what he'd read.

"Where's Stella?" Sebastian asked Jake, his gaze quiet yet commanding.

Before Jake could reply, the roar of a Lightning LS-218 engine thundered from the courtyard. The answer was obvious.

In the courtyard, Lucas sat on the wooden stairs, chin in his hands. Stella was straddling a sleek black superbike, her cold, dangerous gaze locked on her phone screen.

She was checking out Gray Group's announcement. Twitter was blowing up about it.

Stella skimmed through the

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“He doesn’t just skip WhatsApp. He doesn’t even have Twitter, and he never shops online. Seriously, how boring can a guy get?” Allan seized the chance to tease Sebastian, totally missing the slight relaxation in Stella’s expression when she heard Sebastian didn’t use Twitter.

“Even Lucas has WhatsApp,” Allan added. Right on cue, Lucas hugged his tiny phone and nodded adorably.

Then Lucas gazed up at Stella with big, pleading eyes, his whole face saying, “Stella, I want to add you on WhatsApp”

Stella couldn’t resist Lucas’s silent plea. She tried to wiggle her hand free from Sebastian’s grip. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to add Lucas, but Sebastian just wouldn’t let go.

Lucas immediately put his hands on his hips and pulled out his cheeks at Sebastian, looking just like an angry little pufferfish.

Sebastian said nothing, but a wave of intimidating pressure filled the space. Still, Lucas was totally immune. After years of facing off with Sebastian, he wasn’t bothered by that kind of pressure at all.

Allan nearly choked on his laughter. ‘What goes around comes around, and Lucas is Sebastian’s payback, he thought. ‘Lucas has always been fearless, always ready to argue his case. That’s impressive.

“First come, first served,” Sebastian said, his tone icy.

Lucas looked momentarily confused.

[But you don't even have it,] Lucas protested with his tablet.

"I can sign up right now," Sebastian replied, not budging at all. He kept Stella's hand and phone held in his cold grip, his voice frosty as ever.

As he spoke, he glanced at Allan, whose smile slowly froze on his face.

After a while, Sebastian finally released Stella's hand when he saw his new WhatsApp ID on the screen.

"It's just a friend request. Is this really such a big deal?" Stella thought, watching both of them locked in a fierce rivalry. In the end, she decided to stay silent.

"Men," Allan scoffed, crossing his arms as if to distance himself from the childish rivalry.

Yet, in the next moment, he had somehow sidled back next to Stella, presenting his garish custom purple phone with the "add friend" screen open.

Stella shot him a look that plainly said, "Like you're any better."

"You're riding this tonight?" Sebastian's gaze was deep as he observed the superbike.

"Sebastian, 'this'? Show some respect. This is Lightning LS-218, the beast of the road, the king of speed," Allan retorted.

Allan was a true enthusiast when it came to superbikes and racing. He was always down for a race, whether it was an official event or some wild street showdown. The sound of an engine was enough to send his adrenaline soaring.

"I've got a question for you, seriously," Stella said, turning to Allan with a laid-back, almost lazy glance. It was the first time she'd actually bothered to check out what he really looked like since he showed up.

"Shoot." Allan's eyes lit up right away.

"Are you always this chatty?" Stella asked, genuine curiosity in her tone, devoid of any sarcasm.

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Allan's shoulders slumped, and he crouched down, looking totally defeated, 'Ugh, I'll curse you cold-hearted types, he muttered to himself.

Lucas, who had been happily clutching his phone, froze when he learned that Stella was going out.

He dashed over to Stella, looking up with his big, pleading eyes on the verge of tears. He wanted to go, too.

"No." Stella said, glancing down and shutting him down without second thought.

Lucas froze in shock. In a daze, Lucas wandered over to Allan and crouched beside him, looking as defeated as he was.

Allan and Lucas kept casting wounded glances at Stella, their collective gloom almost palpable.

Stella instinctively turned to Sebastian, and his eyes, as deep as ever, were already fixed on her.

Stella was lost for words for a moment.

From the decorative tree, Snowball slithered down, his tiny red eyes locked on her.

With two grown men, a kid, and a python all staring at her, Stella felt she had reached the pinnacle of speechlessness.

"I'm heading out tonight to settle a score," Stella said, her voice casual but with a clear edge, as if she was warning everyone not to mess with her. 'Seriously, do they think it's a group outing or what?' she thought.

[Stella, promise you'll come back.] Lucas held up his tablet from his crouched position. His biggest fear was that she might

not return.

"I promise," Stella said, bending down. Her long hair slipped gently over her cheeks, and the sunlight made her look like she was glowing. She was so pretty. Lucas couldn't help but freeze for a second.

“Relax. If Stella doesn’t come back, we’ll just bail her out at the police station,” Allan said. But the moment he finished, Sebastian, Lucas, and even Snowball all turned and stared at him like he’d just said the dumbest thing ever.

Allan was left speechless.

Little did Allan know his words would totally come true that very night.

Night had just fallen when Hazel called right on schedule, telling Stella to meet her at the Greenleaf Club.

Outside the club, Hazel paced nervously, dressed to look sweet and innocent. She was waiting for Stella. Inside, in a private room, Arrogant Wind and his crew were already gathered.

Hazel had already guessed Arrogant Wind was loaded from the way he threw cash around, but she never expected him to actually be Blake, the eldest heir to the Pierce family, one of the city’s three powerhouse families alongside the Gray and Chase families.

Blake was famous for being fabulously rich and totally wild. If there was ever a day without some scandal about him stirring up trouble, people would swear the sky was falling. He spent money freely and commanded a loyal pack of followers.

Hazel took the moment to touch up her makeup. Compared to the Pierce fortune, the Carter family’s wealth was insignificant. If not for certain connections, she wouldn’t even be at Edenbury Academy. She could never spend like her classmates.

Just thinking about Blake made Hazel’s mind wander. ‘Once Stella shows up with her usual garish, messy makeup, I’ll look even more pure and perfect by comparison. She wants to go up against me? What a joke,’ Hazel sneered inwardly.

Just as Hazel was lost in her daydreams, a deafening engine roar shattered the quiet. A figure on a formidable black

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superbike pulled up, capturing the attention of everyone at the entrance.

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A doorman moved to shoo away what he assumed was a cheap bike, but a colleague quickly grabbed his arm. “Are you crazy? That thing costs a fortune, more than some of the cars here. We definitely don’t want any trouble with that,” he whispered.

Hazel blinked in disbelief as the impressive bike slid to a stop right in front of her. The rider whipped off her helmet, and a cascade of silky hair tumbled free.

To Hazel’s shock, the rider was actually a girl, and she was so young and drop-dead gorgeous that Hazel literally forgot to breathe for a moment.

“Stella?” Hazel gasped, her voice cracking. She stared at the flawlessly fresh, makeup-free face before her. She could hardly believe her eyes. ‘Is this really the same Stella who used to be such an eyesore?’ she thought.

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“Had enough staring?” Stella said, her voice cold and her eyes sharp enough to cut. Her skin was flawless, her hair flowed like silk, and her whole vibe was pure ice.

Hazel’s face twisted with fury. From this distance, she could tell stella wasn’t wearing a speck of makeup. ‘Darn it. Why the hell did Stella wipe off her makeup?’ Hazel cursed to herself.

Stella's natural beauty instantly made Hazel's painstakingly crafted "no-makeup" look seem pathetic. Hazel had planned to use Stella as her background prop, but now the roles were cruelly reversed.

"Stella, why aren't you wearing any makeup?" Hazel forced herself to look uncertain, staring at Stella's face. After years of her and her mom's constant nagging, this trick always made Stella pile on the makeup out of insecurity.

"You only look good with makeup on," Hazel said pointedly.

Inside, Hazel was screaming. Just put on that gross makeup already so you can play the clown and make me look good."

Stella sat astride her formidable black bike, looking at Hazel with a lazy, mocking smile. Her white shirt set off her beauty, making her look almost too perfect to be real.

"I'm too lazy. Why did you tell me to come here?" Stella said, her eyes turning icy as she glanced at the Greenleaf Club sign.

The Greenleaf Club was the city's most famous entertainment spot, with a membership system that cost a fortune. The rich and powerful flocked here, and young heirs bragged about being members. It was a place of pure decadence.

"My classmate's inside. Let's go in," Hazel blurted out, her heart in her throat. She was terrified Stella might sense the trap and flee.

Stella fixed her with an icy stare.

Hazel's skin prickled with goosebumps; the gaze felt like a hand around her throat. She could barely breathe, but still forced a stiff smile.

"Lead the way," Stella said, dismounting with effortless, almost arrogant grace.

Hazel's smile twisted for a second. 'Just keep acting all high and mighty for now. You'll regret it soon enough,' she thought.

Inside the club, an attendant led them to a private room. "Stella, this is the place," Hazel said, pushing the door open.

The room was loud, packed with Blake's usual entourage. The table was loaded with bottles, some already opened, lined up one after another. Anyone could see this was a trap.

The door closed quietly behind Stella, and the lively room went instantly silent as she stepped in. Everyone just stared, captivated by the icy, makeup-free beauty.

“So you’re Starfall?” Blake drawled from the center of the room, clad in a garish wine-red shirt, arms draped over two hostesses. His eyes raked over Stella with a wicked grin.

She was stunning. With a knockout like her here, the girls in Blake’s arms suddenly felt like background props.

“Arrogant Wind,” Stella said, her face expressionless. In the dim light, her sharp features were mesmerizing. Her tone was cool, her gaze locked on the cockiest man in the room.

“You knew it was me and still showed up?” Blake sneered, nudging a hostess with his foot. She hurried to hand him a whiskey

on the rocks.

“How else would I figure out what you guys are plotting?” Stella replied lazily, a mocking laugh in her voice.

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She dragged a chair over and sat down right across from Blake, her dangerous aura unconcealed. The others, however, were too distracted by her face to notice.

“Stella, just apologize to Mr. Pierce, and he’ll let the whole thing lide,” Hazel jumped in, trying to grab some attention.

“Apologize?” Stella echoed, her tone still lazy, showing no fear.

Blake tapped the table, and his crew scrambled over with dozens of empty glasses, filling each one to the brim. Empty bottles were tossed aside.

“Drink up, and we’ll wipe the slate clean,” Blake sneered, taking a wig.

The other guys started chanting, clapping, whistling, and hollering. Stella glanced around the room, her lazy posture belying a hidden danger.

“And what if I don’t?” she drawled, her voice lazy and unbothered

The room went dead silent. Someone thought, ‘Damn, she’s got some nerve.

Blake shoved the hostess's hand away and leaned forward, his eyes dark and dangerous. He flicked his lit cigarette into the glass in front of Stella. It sizzled out.

"That's not up to you. I make the rules here," Blake said, his voice cold and menacing. As he spoke, bodyguards moved to block the door.

Stella didn't even glance back. She looked at Blake and chuckled, elegantly rolling up her sleeves.

"You know why I dared to come here alone?" Stella drawled, slowly coiling her long hair, revealing a graceful neck. She cracked her neck with a sharp pop.

When Lucas was around, Stella would rein herself in a little. But with him gone, her dangerous edge was fully unleashed. That icy, dangerous aura paired with her gorgeous looks made her even more captivating.

"Because I was waiting for you, you idiot," Stella sneered. Before anyone could react, she snatched the glass with the cigarette butt and flung the liquor into Blake's face.

Blake squeezed his eyes shut, liquor dripping down his face. Even the hostesses beside him were splattered.

Hazel clapped her hands over her mouth in horror. 'Has Stella lost her mind? That's Blake. How could she dare?' she wondered.

Everything happened so fast that the whole room went dead silent.

Blake licked his lips, his voice cold and dangerous. "Teach her a lesson."

The bodyguards charged in, but Stella was faster. With a wicked grin, she grabbed an empty bottle and smashed it over the nearest one's head. Glass shattered.

"Come on," Stella said lazily, pressing the jagged edge of the broken bottle right up to the guy's throat. She raised an eyebrow, and then, without even blinking, drove the sharp glass straight into his shoulder.

Screams erupted. No one expected real bloodshed.

A few drops of blood speckled Stella's face. She turned toward the screams, raised a clean hand, and made a shushing gesture. She looked like an angel, but the dangerous aura she gave off was bone-chilling.

Soon, several bodyguards lay on the floor, bleeding.

Stella strolled back to her chair, casually dusting off her clothes, even though there wasn't a speck on them. The move was

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chillingly casual to the terrified onlookers.

“Mr. Pierce, now, I make the rules,” Stella said, her icy gaze sweeping the room. She rested her chin on one hand, flashed a dangerous smile, and pulled out a gun, aiming it straight at him

“Trying to scare me with a toy gun?” Blake snorted, but the next second, the gun fired with a deafening crack right beside his

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A strand of hair drifted down Blake's cheek. He froze, thinking, oly shit! That's a real gun!

“Stella, where did you get a gun?” Hazel screamed.

“Get out,” Stella said, firing another shot at Hazel's feet without blinking.

Hazel shrieked and bolted out of the private room. The place fell dead silent.

Stella let down her hair with a single motion. Her skin was flawless, her eyes rimmed with a hint of red. She had that wild, dangerous beauty that made people want to worship her, even crawl at her feet just to get her attention.

She pressed the service bell. The manager appeared almost instantly, still wearing a professional smile, as if seeing blood was just another day at work.

“One medium-rare steak, and two cases of vodka,” Stella said and then lazily tapped the table. “Clear this and bring us new glasses.”

The manager looked over at Blake, who gave a grim nod. “Rightway,” the manager replied.

Soon, the table was spotless, fresh glasses everywhere. Stella shot a cold look at the nearest hostess, who hurriedly refilled the glasses. Stella then cut into her steak with elegant precision, red juices spilling.

“Fuck you!” One of Blake’s lackeys snatched up a bottle, ready to smash it over Stella’s head. But before it connected, the cold muzzle of Stella’s gun was pressed between his eyes.

With a sharp click, Stella chambered a round. “Better think before you speak,” she said with a lazy smile, tapping his forehead with the barrel. His legs gave way, and he collapsed onto the couch.

Then, Stella’s gaze returned to Blake.

Blake’s brow twitched. “Do you have any idea who you’re messing with?”

Blake steadied himself. He might be wild, but he wasn’t stupid. Facing off against someone this hardcore, he knew he’d be the one to lose if he pushed it.

Stella lifted her eyelids, chewing her steak lazily. Her gaze was intimidating, yet her demeanor was utterly relaxed.

“Let’s make a deal,” Stella said, her voice cold as ice.

Blake scoffed, thinking, “Who does she think she is, trying to make a deal with me?”

“What kind of deal?” Blake sneered, crossing his legs and arms, acting like he was back in control.

But Stella just glanced at her cheap digital watch. Somehow, she made it look like a luxury accessory. Her long lashes lowered, her posture cold and indifferent. “Call your grandpa.”

Blake’s face darkened instantly. “What did you just say?” he growled, his voice tight with anger.

“Call your grandpa. Now,” Stella repeated, her face blank.

Blake’s lackeys didn’t even dare to breathe. Everyone knew Kendrick was Blake’s sorest point, and bringing him up was asking for trouble. They were more like sworn enemies than family.

The next second, Blake exploded. He swept all the bottles off the table, chest heaving. “No way,” he snapped.

Stella watched Blake, who was bracing himself against the table, cins bulging on his forehead. A lazy smile flickered and

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died, replaced by ice.

She twirled the steak knife with a flourish and then slammed it straight into the back of Blake’s right hand. Blake screamed.

The air was thick with the stench of blood. Everyone was stunned. Blake was on the verge of passing out from pain, but Stella wasn’t about to let him.

She reached out, grabbed his chin, and forced him to meet her gaze. “Call him now,” Stella said, each word slow and icy, making it clear she was at the end of her patience.

“Fine. I’ll call him,” Blake whimpered, all his earlier bravado gone. He fumbled for his phone, unblocked Kendrick’s number, and dialed.

The call connected almost instantly. “Hello?” Kendrick’s voice came through.

The familiar, aged voice made Blake’s nose sting, and he quickly turned his head away, trying to hide the sudden rush of emotion.

“Mr. Pierce,” Stella drawled, her tone lazy.

Kendrick was clearly caught off guard by the young woman’s voice on the other end. He was silent for a few seconds, but quickly regained his composure.

“Go ahead,” Kendrick said.

“This is room 1025 at the Greenleaf Club. In two minutes, the cops will arrive because someone tipped them off about drugs. And three bags of drugs were planted under your grandson’s couch before he arrived. There’s enough for a capital charge,” Stella said.

Stella remained calm and cool, yet the room was thunderstruck. Even Blake forgot his pain momentarily, his eyes widened in shock as he flipped the couch to reveal the three bags.

His hands were shaking badly. Blake was a reckless playboy, sure, but drugs and gambling were never his thing.

Almost on reflex, Blake looked to Stella for help. She still looked cool, like she was just hanging out in her own backyard. ‘She said there were two minutes before the cops showed up. Is there still time to run?’ he thought, panic rising fast.

“What do you need me to do?” Kendrick’s voice was steady as ever. Even with his grandson about to get arrested, he didn’t flinch. Stella could hear him getting up, calling for his most trusted aide.

“Bring the best lawyer and meet me at the South District Precinct,” Stella said and then hung up without another word.

Everyone stared at Stella, wide-eyed and tense. She arched her brow, meeting the gazes with a cool, unbothered look.

“Scared?” Stella asked, casually spinning the black gun in her hand, looking like the picture of reckless indifference.

Everyone nodded in unison.

“You know what to say and what to keep quiet about when the cops get here?” Stella asked.

Everyone nodded again, not daring to make a sound.

“The injuries?” Stella asked, a crooked, mocking smirk on her lips.

“We did it to ourselves,” the guys scrambled to answer, each trying to be first.

“The gun?” Stella pressed.

“We didn’t see a thing,” the guys replied, shaking their heads.

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“And them?” Stella jerked her chin toward the bodyguards she’d just wrecked.

“They fell on their own,” a guy said quickly.

The bodyguards were both shocked and speechless.

DO YOUGHTOUST

If anyone from the outside walked in right now, their jaw would hit the floor. These Haliville playboys, who usually acted like they owned the place, were now sitting there like a bunch of cared little kids.

Stella, satisfied, put her gun away. She looked up, picked up the only empty glass left on the table, poured Blake a full glass, and commanded, “Drink.”

Blake clutched his bleeding hand and knocked back the vodka in one go, just to calm himself down.

“Other people might not get it, but you do. The Greenleaf Club Belongs to the Pierces, and the ones trying to frame you? They’re your own blood,” Stella sneered, her tone icy and mocking. The Pierce family was clearly in turmoil.

Blake didn't say a word, his expression stormy. He was the eldest heir to the family, sure, but he and Kendrick were always at each other's throats. Taking over Pierce Group had never even crossed Blake's mind, especially with his cousin in the picture.

Right on cue, the door burst open, and a squad of cops stormed in. "Freeze!" the leader shouted. Not a second off from what Stella had predicted.

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Outside the Greenleaf Club, several police cars were parked with their lights flashing. Blake and the others were loaded into the police cars.

In the shadows, Hazel nervously covered her mouth, wondering how the cops had shown up and hauled those people off.

She felt a surge of relief at her escape. Otherwise, she'd be in the same mess. She was an honor student at Edenbury Academy and couldn't be brought to the police station. She conveniently forgot it was Stella who'd driven her out.

Hazel smirked, thinking Stella was probably in for a world of trouble this time. She spun around and hailed a cab to head home.

Meanwhile, John, who'd been ordered to secretly follow Stella and keep her safe, frowned as he dialed Sebastian. "Mr. Gray, Ms. Carter's in trouble."

At the South District Precinct, Arthur Chandler, the deputy commander, rubbed his temples as he looked downstairs. All the infamous family heirs of Haliville were here today. Normally, their mischief was just petty stuff, but this time, it was about drugs.

"Sir, Mr. Pierce is here with his legal team," one of the officers knocked and reported.

Arthur's jaw dropped. "That was quick, he thought, surprised.

Downstairs, Kendrick stood there, his silver hair neatly combed, his gaze piercing and intimidating. The elite legal team from Pierce Group followed close behind. By his side were his second daughter, Penelope, and her son, Xander.

"Mr. Pierce, you got here so fast," Arthur said with upright composure. His tone was polite, but his attitude made it clear there was no room for negotiation.

"I want to see-" Kendrick said, but was cut off.

"I can arrange a meeting with your grandson," Arthur said.

Kendrick's gaze hardened as he locked eyes with Arthur. "Not my grandson. I want to see someone else."

Arthur was left speechless for a moment. 'What's up with the Pierce family's way of thinking?' he wondered. 'With his grandson in trouble for drugs, he isn't even in a rush to figure out what happened yet asks about someone else?'

Five minutes later, Stella was spinning a pen between her fingers with practiced ease when Kendrick walked in. She didn't even blink. Instead, she leaned back lazily and gestured for him to sit across from her, acting like she owned the place.

Penelope shot Stella a wary look. She couldn't figure out how this pretty, captivating girl, who looked just like a student, had managed to get Kendrick's special attention. He was willing to see her first, not Blake.

"Wait outside," Kendrick ordered in a low, commanding voice.

Though she was clearly reluctant, Penelope didn't dare go against him. She left, closing the door.

Kendrick sat across from Stella, giving her a long, hard look. Stella didn't flinch, just sitting there unfazed and letting him stare.

"You made Blake call me?" Kendrick asked.

"Yeah," Stella replied, skipping the small talk. Her whole vibe was cold and defiant, and she added before he could say anything else, "You're sick. Really sick." She saw right through Kendrick's tough front.

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"Glioblastoma. Malignant," Kendrick said, calmly pointing to his head.

"Will's done?"

"This afternoon..." Kendrick's voice faltered for a moment, a flash of pain in his eyes. Only three people knew about the will he signed today.

"I don't give a damn about the Pierce family's business," Stella said coolly. "Honestly, I knew Blake was being set up before I even walked into that room. But I waited until the cops were almost there before I had him call you."

Stella tapped her fingers on the table, her eyes cold and sharp, every gesture radiating a chill.

"So, what do you want?" Kendrick asked, his brow furrowing even though he'd seen it coming.

"I want Pierce Group to make a public announcement," Stella said. "Starting tomorrow, Pierce Group will cut off every partnership with Gray Group."

A razor-sharp, icy smile touched Stella's lips. "And I mean every single one."

She thought, 'No one messes with my backer. The Gray family? Please. They're nothing.'

"Gray Group?" Kendrick repeated.

Kendrick had heard about all the drama at Gray Group today, but in Haliville, the Gray, Pierce, and Chase families had always kept a delicate balance.

Plus, the Grays were way closer to the Chases than to the Pierces, so Kendrick preferred to stay out of their business.

“Do you even get how deep this goes?” Kendrick frowned at Stella. She had this dangerous vibe about her, living right on the edge but totally in control.

“That’s for you to figure out. Your business or your grandson. You choose,” Stella drawled, slouching back in her chair. The plain white shirt made her face look ghostly pale under the harsh lights, blue veins visible on her neck.

She crossed her arms, her whole posture screaming, “Don’t even think about messing with me.”

“Not worried I’ll change my mind?” Kendrick asked.

Stella curled her lips into a sly smirk. “Feel free to test me.”

They were locked in a standoff when the door suddenly swung open. “Stella Carter?” the officer asked, his gaze a mix of curiosity and something almost... respectful.

“We’ve cleared you. You’re free to go. By the way, someone’s here to pick you up,” the officer said.

With that, the officer held the door and was about to gesture for her to leave when, at lightning speed, Lucas rushed in and barreled straight into Stella’s embrace.

Behind Lucas, Allan strolled in with his usual playboy attitude, pushing Sebastian in a wheelchair. Two men in high-ranking uniforms stood beside them.

Sebastian sat with a black blanket over his legs, his presence dropping the room’s temperature to freezing.

“Stella, we really did have to come bail you out,” Allan said, now in a sharp silver-gray suit, his easy demeanor softening Sebastian’s intimidating aura.

Stella spotted Sebastian and Lucas, and instantly, all that tough, streetwise attitude melted away. She still lounged in her usual lazy way, but now she looked just like any other girl her age

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## Chapter

It had been years since Kendrick last saw Sebastian, but he recognized Sebastian instantly. He also immediately recognized the two high-ranking police officials. One was Bruce Farrell, the commander of the South District Precinct, and the other was clearly from the Haliville Police Department.

Realization hit Kendrick. Thinking about the Gray family's internal strife and Stella's earlier demands, everything suddenly fell into place. 'What exactly is her connection to Sebastian?' Kendrick wondered.

"Are you hurt?" Sebastian's cold eyes lingered on the dried blood on Stella's face, and the chill in the room intensified.

"Nope. It's someone else's blood," Stella replied. Just in case Sebastian didn't buy it, she stood up and did a quick spin to show him she was fine.

There was a sharp smack as a gun dropped to the floor. Kendrick instinctively glanced at the two senior officers beside Sebastian. One studied the ceiling, the other the floor. Neither spared the gun a single look, like it had never even been there.

Kendrick was stunned.

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# **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 36**

Read Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 36 -

# Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 36

## Chapter 36

Stella tucked the gun back into her waistband and hid it under her white shirt, looking completely composed. Kendrick could only stare at her in stunned silence.

Come here,” Sebastian said, his voice cold. The air around him was so frigid that it felt like frost was forming in the lungs. He held out his hand, palm up, black prayer beads glinting.

His presence was an oppressive force, and no one in their right mind would defy him now.

Stella flashed a cocky grin and strolled over, placing her hand in Sebastian’s. She let his dark, fathomless eyes sweep over her, inspecting every inch.

Allan watched with a knowing smirk. ‘He’d do anything to keep Stella safe. The moment he hung up on John, he reached someone from the Haliville Police Department. Poor Bruce must’ve nearly had a heart attack, Allan thought.

“Let’s go home,” Sebastian finally said, his expression still dark. The suffocating tension in the room finally eased slightly.

Lucas looked up at Stella, his fingers tugging at her hand, urging her to go home silently.

“Ms. Carter!” Kendrick shot to his feet, calling out to her as she was about to leave.

“Have you decided?” Stella asked casually, tilting her head. The overhead lights cast a soft glow over her skin, making her look so stunning.

“I accept all your terms,” Kendrick said, deciding to take the gamble.

“Talk is cheap. Get your lawyer in here,” Stella replied, her eyes clear and cold, a sharp glint flashing in there.

Allan rubbed his chin and raised an eyebrow at Stella’s words. ‘What kind of deal is she cutting with Kendrick? Interesting,’ he mused.

One of the Pierce family's elite lawyers rushed in, but the moment he spotted Sebastian in his wheelchair, he was stunned, almost buckling at the knees right then and there.

Everyone in Haliville knew him. Gray Group's meteoric rise was solely his doing.

Just a few years after taking over the crumbling Gray family, Sebastian had turned it into the city's top powerhouse. That just showed how bloodthirsty and terrifying he could be, even though he was still so young.

But what really made people fear him was his unpredictable, violent, and downright crazy temper. He could be grinning at you one second and then put a bullet in your head the next, without even blinking.

The lawyer sneaked a sideways glance at Sebastian's legs, which were hidden under the black blanket. 'And that was all before he got crippled. He must be even scarier now, the lawyer thought.

"Are you looking to get yourself killed?" Stella snapped even before Allan could react, her eyes barely lifting, cold and dangerous. She stepped in front of Sebastian, blocking him protectively, her gaze so full of murderous intent that it was suffocating.

Lucas puffed out his cheeks, hands on his hips, a miniature picture of outrage.

The lawyer froze in terror, his heart skipping a beat.

Sebastian kept that icy look on his face, but when he saw Stella standing protectively in front of him, something almost gentle flickered in his eyes for just a moment.

"Mr. Gray, Ms. Carter, I take full responsibility for my staff's mistake. I apologize," Kendrick said, lowering his stance. Still, he

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couldn't help but wonder just what kind of relationship Stella and Sebastian really had.

The lawyer scrambled to apologize, his voice trembling with nerves.

"Mm." Sebastian's reply was utterly flat, devoid of any emotion.

The darkness in Allan's eyes faded, replaced by his usual careless demeanor. The lawyer had no idea how close he'd just come to disaster.

The lawyer began drafting the document under Kendrick's instruction. The more the others heard, the more peculiar their expressions became.

"Dad, are you out of your mind? Calling off all our deals with Gray Group? Do you even realize how much money we're about to lose?" Penelope finally burst out.

She'd been silent ever since Sebastian and the others walked in, but now she couldn't hold it in anymore. With Blake being such a disappointment, Xander was the one running Pierce Group these days.

Just a couple of days ago, Pierce Group had signed a foolproof deal with Gray Group, which was practically guaranteed to make them rich. Kendrick's move wasn't just an insult to Gray Group. It undermined Xander, too.

As Penelope spoke, she shot Stella a death glare. 'She must've said something to Dad. This is insane,' she fumed inwardly.

"Enough," Kendrick barked, afraid to set Stella off again. He had this gut feeling that today was a golden opportunity for the Pierce family, and if he grabbed it, Pierce Group wouldn't fall apart even after his death.

And most importantly, Blake would be out of harm's way.

"Stella, you're something else," Allan said, hands shoved in his pockets. If he'd been just half-invested in her before, now he was officially counting her as one of his own. 'Anyone who looks out for Sebastian, I'll look out for them, too,' Allan thought.

"If anyone's to blame, it's the ones who got too greedy," Stella drawled, her words dripping with meaning. If someone hadn't set up this whole mess for their own selfish gain, she wouldn't have had the perfect opportunity.

'Every cause has its effect. I should say thank you to those clueless Pierces,' Stella mused.

Penelope shot Stella a glare that could kill, but when she looked up, she was met with a pair of eyes so cold they seemed to freeze the blood in her veins. She shuddered and looked down hastily.

Her heart was still thumping like crazy. Right then, she swore to herself that as soon as she got home, she'd make sure to give the Gray family a heads-up about all this.

Little did Penelope know that every little flicker of emotion in her eyes had been caught by Stella, who looked totally unfazed. Stella's lips curled into a mocking smirk for just a split second before it disappeared.

Soon enough, the lawyer had the agreement drafted up in duplicate.

"Ms. Carter, please take a look," Kendrick said, handing her the document with both hands, showing his utmost sincerity.

Stella took it with one hand, gave it a cold, thorough once-over, and, once she was sure everything was in order, signed her name with cool authority.

"Let's go," Stella said, her dangerous vibe vanishing in an instant. She looked harmless enough now, but everyone knew the little demon was still there beneath the surface.

The group left the meeting room.

Meanwhile, in the holding cell, a bunch of Haliville's most well-known playboys were freaking out. They'd never been humiliated like this before. Though not handcuffed, they feared they might never leave. Among them, Blake sat on the floor,

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dejected.

Suddenly, the iron door swung open from the outside. "Everyone out," an officer said.

Blake's dull eyes suddenly lit up with hope.

In the lobby, Xander, who'd been busy arguing with the cops, was stunned when he saw Blake and his crew being led out. Then another group came in, including Kendrick.

ander's hands froze mid-motion. The person being wheeled in was Sebastian, the guy everyone had been talking about all

right at the center of the storm.

Xander spotted the iconic black prayer beads on Sebastian's wrist. 'I can't be mistaken, but how did Blake's drug mess end up tangled with Mr. Gray?' Xander thought, totally confused.

"Mr. Gray, how come you're-" Xander stepped forward.

"Move aside," a sharp, impatient voice cut him off.

Xander had just mustered up the nerve to greet Sebastian, but was abruptly cut off by a voice dripping with casual defiance. He looked up, only to meet Stella's piercing, impatient eyes.

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 37**

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### **Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams - 37**

Chapter 37

Xander instinctively took a step back, and then it hit him. 'Why should I listen to her?' he thought, a bit annoyed.

But Sebastian's wheelchair had already rolled past him, and he'd totally missed his chance to greet him.

Still, Xander thought, 'If I'm not mistaken, that cherubic little boy sitting on Sebastian's lap must be the very child pulled from his sister-in-law's womb after that infamous car crash years ago.

Meanwhile, when Blake saw Kendrick, his face darkened, radiating rejection. "Take a good look at me. Happy with what you see now?" Blake snapped, every word sharp as a blade.

"Blake, Grandpa is just..." Xander frowned, about to step in and smooth things over like he always did, but before he could, a figure with a dangerous, rebellious energy strolled past. Before anyone could react, she kicked Blake hard in the back of the knees.

Blake's knees buckled from the pain, and he dropped right in front of Kendrick. He cursed, "Damn it. You-"

Stella, expressionless, had one hand in her pocket and gave Blake a loud smack on the back of his head with the other. The sound made everyone wince in sympathy.

"Yeah? What?" Stella arched an eyebrow, her tone flat.

The Pierces were all stunned. Everyone in Haliville knew Blake was an unruly, unmanageable troublemaker. No one had ever dared put him in his place like this. Some expected bloodshed.

But instead of his usual cocky attitude, Blake just clutched his head, looking like a kicked puppy, not daring to utter a word.

"Apologize to your grandpa for all the mess you made," Stella said, giving Blake a kick with the tip of her shoe. That dark, dangerous aura of hers was back.

"I" Blake tried to act tough, desperate to salvage his fragile pride, but when he saw Stella slowly raise her hand again, his eyes widened in panic. The protest died on his lips, and he chickened out instantly.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, voice barely audible.

"Louder," Stella said, getting impatient.

"I'm sorry!" Blake shouted so loudly that it felt like the birds on the precinct roof would scatter.

Kendrick and the rest of the Pierces were all speechless. ‘If you’d just held out a bit longer, we might’ve actually thought you had some guts,’ someone mused.

Blake thought, ‘You guys have no idea. She doesn’t play around. She’ll actually go all out and beat me up. Dignity? Pride? Neither of them means squat.’

Colten Lowe, the commissioner of the Haliville Police Department, cleared his throat, snapping everyone back to reality. “Ms. Carter, you said Blake and the others weren’t involved with drugs. Do you have proof?”

Colten had been transferred from Jaffina a few years back to “keep watch” over Haliville. At least, that was the official story. His true purpose remained unknown.

Colten was famous for being principled. Without solid evidence, even Sebastian’s influence wouldn’t sway him on a drug charge.

Stella glanced up at him. “Yeah, I do.”

Xander racked his brain. ‘Carter? Is there a Carter family in Haliville powerful enough to be tied to someone like Sebastian?’

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## Chapter 37

Then he realized she was saying she had proof that Blake wasn’t mixed up in drugs.

“Ms. Carter, you can’t just throw claims around like that,” Xander said, acting like he was looking out for her.

Stella just gave him a look that was half-amused, half-mocking.

“The surveillance cameras at the Greenleaf Club had some issues, and some footage is missing,” Xander added.

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Just one glance from her eyes, and Xander felt she’d seen right through him. A chill ran down his spine, and his hands went clammy.

Stella didn’t have to ask to know the missing footage was definitely the part showing Blake in the private room.

Lucas, perched on Sebastian's lap, yawned, looking sweet and adorable.

Stella's eyes narrowed when she saw that. Ignoring Xander completely, she headed straight for the only powered-on computer in the lobby, intent on wrapping this up and getting Lucas home to bed.

"What are you—" Bruce started, but Allan cut him off with a casual wave. Allan had no clue what Stella was about to do, but he just had a feeling that it would be entertaining.

And it was. Stella's fingers flew across the keyboard, the screen's glow lighting up her cold, delicate face. Almost instantly, all the LED displays in the lobby mirrored whatever was on the computer in front of her.

But just as quickly, the screens went dark again, and strings of white code flashed across them at lightning speed, making everyone's heads spin. The only sound was the crisp, rapid clack of her touch-typing.

The young guys, who'd been squatting dejectedly in the corner, all looked up, jaws dropping. 'Whoa, her speed is insane!' one of them thought.

Stella typed "kill" calmly, hit Enter with a decisive click, and every screen flickered back to life. In a split second, control of the Greenleaf Club's main surveillance system had been hacked and rerouted straight to the precinct.

"Oh—" Blake started to curse, but swallowed it when Stella's cold gaze landed on him. He could only stare up at the screens, watching the live feed from the club. It was the first time he'd ever seen a hacker at work.

"That's impressive, but what does it prove?" Colten asked. With the most important footage still gone, Blake remained a

suspect.

Penelope instinctively glanced at Xander, who shot her a reassuring look. But before she could even breathe easy, Stella's voice rang out, so calm that it was almost cocky.

"I fixed it," Stella announced. For a moment, everyone just froze, holding their breath.

"You fixed it?" Blake gawked, jaw nearly hitting the floor. 'She just tapped away for a few seconds, and the footage is back?' he thought.

“Even so, it’s just hallway footage. We still can’t see inside the private room, so there’s no way to clear Blake,” Xander said. As soon as he finished, Stella glanced up at him.

Her gaze was lazy and utterly dismissive, as if he were a fool.

“The Pierce family is the actual owner of the Greenleaf Club. Are you telling me that you don’t know the most secure, most private club in Haliville, the one all the rich and powerful flock to, has a double set of surveillance systems?” Stella said.

Stella’s words landed like a thunderclap, stunning everyone. And just then, on the LED screens, crystal-clear footage of the club room now played: a bartender, still in his uniform, was clearly seen slipping three small bags of white powder beneath

the couch.

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Chapter 37

“Are you still thinking about ratting out to the Grays after leaving this place?” Stella turned to Penelope, moving with that casual swagger. But the implication in her words was a noose tightening around Penelope’s neck.

If the rich and powerful discovered that the private rooms of the Greenleaf Club were monitored, and the Pierce family had been collecting their secrets, every major family in Haliville would unite to destroy them.

It was the most direct warning from Stella.

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# Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel

## Chapter 38

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### Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 38

#### Chapter 38

The spacious lobby was dead silent. Kendrick looked at Stella with a mix of emotions. He'd already noticed the tension between her and Penelope when the lawyer was drafting the agreement. But he never expected Stella to wait until now to make her move.

That kind of patience and cunning didn't seem like something a high schooler could pull off.

The drama was finally over. Bruce humbly escorted Colten and the others to the door. He'd been dragged in at the last minute, totally unprepared for any of this.

"Ms. Carter," someone called out just as Stella was about to get in the car. She turned to see Xander.

"What do you want?" Stella asked, one hand resting on the car door. Her demeanor was cold and detached, with a subtle, rebellious edge.

Xander, ever the gentleman, took a gold-embossed business card from his pocket and handed it to her. "If you ever need anything, Ms. Carter, feel free to call me. Consider us friends."

Stella glanced at him, taking the card casually with one hand. "Friends?" She raised an eyebrow, a half-smile playing on her lips as her eyes swept over him.

Xander had never been looked at like that before. His smile was starting to crack.

"No need," Stella said coolly. With a flick of her finger, she sent the card flying back toward him. It hit his chest and fell to the floor.

Xander's expression turned stormy in an instant. "So you think Blake is more valuable than I am?" he asked.

Before Stella could answer, Blake, now cleared of all charges, strolled over, all cocky again, and threw an arm around Xander's shoulder. In a flash, Xander replaced his scowl with a warm, polished smile.

"Starfall, guess we started on the wrong foot. Anyway, from now on, you're under my protection," Blake said, beaming like he just won the lottery.

"Seriously, you better keep an eye on your sister. She's bad news, for real," Blake added.

Xander stood there silently, feeling indirectly insulted.

Blake was just about to throw a friendly arm around Stella's shoulder when, out of nowhere, an icy, murderous aura filled the air. Even someone as oblivious as Blake sensed the danger, like he was suddenly prey.

He stiffly turned his head and met the gaze of Sebastian, who was sitting in his wheelchair not far away.

Blake was lost for words for a moment.

Those eyes were utterly devoid of warmth, so cold that they seemed to freeze Blake's blood. His arm hung awkwardly in the air, not daring to move. 'Somebody help me, he thought desperately.

"Meep-meep," Blake blurted out, using the nonsense phrase as an excuse to withdraw his hand.

Xander was speechless. So was Stella.

Meanwhile, Colten followed Sebastian's gaze until it landed on Stella. "This girl is interesting, he mused.

"When are you coming back to Jaffina?" Colten asked.

If anyone else had been around, they would've been floored by how casually, almost respectfully, Colten spoke to Sebastian.

Sebastian looked away. “Not anytime soon.” That was a hard no.

“People over in Jaffina have been worried about you,” Colten said

Sebastian stayed silent. Colten sighed, muttered a few words, and then headed to his car.

Stella tossed Jake’s gun back to him as soon as she got in the car

“Ms. Carter,” Jake complained, looking all kinds of miserable. ‘Man, how did she even snatch my gun without me feeling a thing?’ he wondered, still totally baffled.

As soon as Stella got in, Lucas struggled free from Allan’s cheek-pinching grasp and tried to bury himself in Stella’s arms, looking pitiful. But before he could get close, Sebastian’s cold, firm hand grabbed him by the collar.

Lucas, all soft and adorable, was flailing like a tiny turtle stuck on its back.

“Sit. We’re leaving,” Sebastian said, his eyes half-closed, his ridiculously handsome face hidden in the shadows.

Lucas was buckled firmly into his seat. Pouting, he crossed his arms. ‘Uncle Sebastian is so mean, he thought.

“Verdant Haven first,” Stella said, sounding totally chill. Verdant Haven was one of Haliville’s upscale neighborhoods, where the Carters lived.

Jake turned the car around immediately.

Sebastian’s phone rang. He picked up, face expressionless. On the other end, someone said, “Mr. Gray, I’ve arrived.”

The usual playful look on Allan’s face disappeared in a flash. He recognized the voice instantly. It was Nathan Trent, the hypnotherapist and psychologist ranked No. 3 among free practitioners.

“Just wait,” Sebastian said and then hung up.

“You look a lot better. I thought maybe you were finally sleeping well lately,” Allan said, frowning with concern.

“Just a routine check,” Sebastian replied, his gaze drifting out the window. His cold face was pale and handsome, his eyes dark and unreadable.

Nathan once said Sebastian was the only case he couldn't crack. There was darkness in him, so deep that even Nathan had nearly been consumed by it.

"What's wrong this time?" Stella asked, casually placing her hand on Sebastian's forehead. It felt normal to her.

Allan just stared, thinking, 'Seriously, you two are way too comfortable with each other already!

Just then, Lucas started fake-coughing nonstop, even brushing his bangs aside and looking at Stella with hopeful, sparkling eyes.

Allan was left speechless again. 'Man, these two are so used to fighting for her attention. Guess I'm the only one nobody fusses over, he sighed inwardly.

The group soon reached Verdant Haven. "I'll be right back," Stella said, glancing up at the brightly lit building. Her eyes narrowed slightly, giving her a cold, dangerous aura.

According to the report Sebastian had dug up, the Carter family's sprawling penthouse was right here. With the Pierce family dealt with, it was time for Stella to settle other scores.

The group watched as Stella headed through the entrance and into the building.

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## Chapter 38

"Don't you think Stella is nothing like the girl in that report?" Allan drawled, elbow propped on the window.

Sebastian shot him a cold look. Allan quickly raised his hands in surrender and changed the subject. "Shark is in Clusia."

Shark was not only the doctor ranked No.1 among free practitioners, with an internationally certified 100% surgical success rate, but also the boss of the Scorpio Syndicate.

The most interesting part was that no one knew Shark's gender, age, or nationality. Yet Shark commanded the world's largest underground organization.

Not long ago, word got out that Shark had been assassinated in Dorestan. The source deliberately linked it to the Dorestan Exchange, trying to implicate its mysterious owner.

But just a couple of days back, Shark's private account got logged into. The IP address was in Clusia, and when people tracked it down, it was right here in Haliville.

"The top hacker alliance in Monterra just dropped a notice on their official site," Allan said, waving his flashy custom purple phone at Sebastian. "They're planning an indiscriminate cyber attack on Haliville."

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 39**

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### **Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams - 39**

Chapter 39

Stella stood at the Carters' door, unable to remember the passcode. She simply rang the bell. The live-in maid answered, expecting Brantley, the master of the house.

"Ms. Carter?" the maid exclaimed after a stunned pause. She was so shocked by Stella's gorgeous face. But before she could even react, Stella brushed past her with a cold look.

Why is it so noisy? Camilla, Stella's foster mother, came out of the bedroom with a face mask on, and the first thing she saw was Stella's back.

"Stella, you've got the nerve to come back?" Camilla's sharp voice rang out.

Stella turned around slowly, giving Camilla a cold, hard stare.

From the moment Stella walked into the Carter residence, her chest tightened, and her breathing grew thin. Her body just reacted on its own, and random memories flickered through her mind.

The Carter family had treated Stella like their personal maid for free. Camilla either yelled at her or slapped her around whenever she liked it.

The reason Stella loved piling on heavy makeup was all thanks to the constant mind games and put-downs from Camilla and Hazel.

They'd been brainwashing her since she was a kid, telling her she was ugly, worthless, and that everything should go to Hazel, the little sister. Even the live-in maid had her own room, but Stella slept on the balcony.

"You..." Camilla was so stunned that her face mask nearly fell off. Is this little bitch seriously this pretty?' she thought.

After years of seeing Stella in thick makeup. Camilla had almost forgotten her real face. But once the surprise faded, that instinctive, woman-to-woman jealousy kicked in.

"What's with that look? You trying to rebel or something?" Camilla snapped, swinging her hand to slap Stella. But before she could touch Stella, Stella caught her wrist and twisted her hand back, landing the slap hard on her face.

Camilla stumbled and fell to the floor.

"Mom!" Hazel came out of the bedroom, fresh from the shower, and caught the whole scene. She stared at Stella in disbelief. "Wasn't she taken to the police station? Hazel wondered.

"Stella, how could you hit Mom?" Anger made Hazel forget the fear Stella had inspired at the Greenleaf Club.

The next second, Stella's cold hand was around Hazel's throat, slamming her against the wall. Hazel's eyes widened in shock.

“So what if I hit her?” Stella lowered her long lashes, hiding the bloodlust in her eyes. Her whole aura was bristling with menace.

Hazel desperately clawed at Stella’s hand, mouth open as she struggled to breathe. Terror flooded her as her feet left the floor.

“You invited me to the Greenleaf Club today. Was it to get me wasted, or were you hoping they would strip me and snap some pics?” Stella sneered, her voice lazy but laced with pure menace. The timid, bullied girl was gone.

“Let go of Hazel!” Camilla, not caring about the sting on her face, lunged forward.

But Stella was quicker. She snatched a vase and smashed it on the floor. Shards flew everywhere.

Camilla’s legs went weak. ‘Has she lost it?’ she thought. ‘She used to bend over backwards just to get a little affection from me,

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never even daring to speak up. She even hand-washed all of my underwear and Hazel’s.

Hazel’s

’s eyes rolled back, and she was on the verge of passing out just then, Stella let go.

Hazel collapsed to the floor, gasping for air. As soon as she caught her breath, she scrambled into Camilla’s arms and burst into tears. Hazel was terrified and thought she was going to die.

Stella dragged a chair over with a loud scrape and sat down right in front of Camilla and Hazel, stone-faced and creepy as hell. “Where’s my necklace?” she demanded.

In her memory pieces, she’d worn a necklace since she was little until Hazel snatched it away. Not long after that, the Carter family suddenly started rolling in cash.

Camilla’s eyes widened in panic. She was totally thrown off by Stella suddenly bringing up the necklace. “I-I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she stammered, her gaze darting everywhere. She was obviously lying.

Stella let out a low laugh, bent down, and casually picked up a shard of the broken vase. Her eyes looked almost bloodshot, wild and dangerous, and the whole room felt colder just from her presence.

“Oh, really?” Stella said with a chilling calm, slipping behind Camilla and slowly pressing the sharp edge to her neck. “Do you seriously not know, or are you just playing dumb?”

Stella’s voice was soft, but the words exploded in Camilla’s ear. Her heart nearly jumped out of her throat. ‘She’s so scary.’ Camilla thought.

“The necklace is gone. It’s not here. We lost it ages ago,” Camilla murmured, her voice shaking. But Stella saw right through her. Those shifting eyes couldn’t hide a thing.

Stella’s face went completely blank, and she pressed harder, the sharp edge digging into Camilla’s skin. A trickle of blood ran down her neck.

“Let go of Mom. The necklace was sold. Someone bought it,” Hazel wailed, tears streaming down her face. For once, she was actually telling the truth.

“Who bought it?” Stella asked.

“I don’t know. I swear, I really don’t know,” Hazel sobbed.

Stella’s icy stare landed on Hazel, and Hazel couldn’t stop trembling. In her eyes, Stella wasn’t just crazy. She was even more terrifying than a lunatic.

Stella dropped the shard to the floor with a sharp clink.

She stood up slowly, snatched a tissue off the table, and wiped her fingers, her face stone cold. Her eyes were dead calm, yet her aura made the other two’s skin crawl.

She walked toward the door, stepping on the broken vase. The maid shrank back in the corner, shaking with fear.

Without a flicker of emotion, Stella let the tissue she’d wiped her hands with drop to the floor. She didn’t look back as she strode for the door, but Hazel’s words kept ringing in her mind.

‘Hazel was telling the truth, but it wasn’t the whole story. Who bought that necklace, and what did they want it for?’ Stella wondered.

“The Carter family’s still rolling in money, and Hazel got into Edenbury Academy even though she didn’t qualify. Is the

with Carter family really not in touch with the buyer all this time? And what about the kidnapping?’ Stella’s mind spun questions.

The elevator doors slid shut, reflecting Stella’s calm face. A lazy, almost amused smile tugged at her lips. ‘Now this is getting

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interesting, she thought.

Stella had been lost in thought the whole ride back to Sandridge Island. As soon as she got out of the car, she scooped up Lucas and headed straight to her room.

“I feel Stella seems down.” Allan remarked, rubbing his chin. She hadn’t spoken the entire ride.

Sebastian just stared as she walked away, not saying a word.

Nathan walked over from a distance, nodding respectfully. “Mr. Gray.”

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## **Paid To Care, Destined To Conquer Novel Chapter 40**

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### **Echoes Of Forgotten Dreams – 40**

## Chapter 40

Nathan looked surprised as he looked in the direction where Stella had disappeared. He thought, ‘Since when did Sebastian have a girl hanging around him? And Lucas doesn’t mind?’

“Nathan,” Sebastian called out, his lips barely moving.

“Yes, Mr. Gray,” Nathan replied, quickly pulling his gaze back with utmost respect. Nathan’s light brown eyes were striking, and he still carried a faint scent of medicine.

“Was she pretty?” Sebastian asked. His gaze was as cold and deep as a frozen lake, locked onto Nathan. Nathan found himself at a loss for words.

Stella stepped out of the bathroom, fresh from her shower. Lucas, clean and already in his pajamas, was fast asleep on her bed.

Snowball lay with its oversized head resting on the mattress edge, its pointed tail lazily swishing back and forth, gently soothing its young owner. When Stella appeared, Snowball opened its mouth in a wide yawn.

Stella let Lucas and Snowball take over her bed, casually drying her hair with a towel in one hand. Suddenly, her custom- built ultra-thin laptop on the desk made a noise. Stella paused, raising an eyebrow.

Bold red letters flashed across the screen, stark and ominous: [Shark, Cosmos Syndicate is about to launch an indiscriminate cybersecurity attack challenge on Haliville!]

Stella leaned in, her fingers gliding over the mouse, her eyes lit up by the cold glow of the screen.

Cosmos Syndicate, the top hacker alliance in Monterra, sent shockwaves through the dark web the moment they threw down the gauntlet. Hackers everywhere were gathering for the showdown.

An indiscriminate cybersecurity attack meant what it sounded like. Government offices, hospitals, schools, banks, and anything else connected to the system were all fair game. Once the attack went live, Haliville’s entire network would be hanging by a thread.

Stella's long lashes lowered, and her face gave nothing away, but anyone watching would feel a chill running down their spine.

With a few lazy keystrokes, she booted out the hacker who'd busted their guts to get in. For Stella, it was a walk in the park.

Stella closed her eyes, trying to tamp down the violent energy swirling inside her. Ever since she left the Carter residence, her temples had been pounding, which explained why she'd been so quiet on the ride home. That bloody, dangerous vibe wouldn't let her go.

Even Lucas tossed and turned restlessly in his sleep. Out of nowhere, a huge, chilly head landed on Stella's shoulder.

She opened her eyes to find Snowball curled up beside her like a child, nuzzling his head against her again and again.

Still stone-faced, Stella reached out and gave Snowball a good rub. The cool, smooth feel of its scales finally helped her chill

out a bit.

Meanwhile, Sebastian reclined on a black leather armchair. The bedroom felt icy, as if it were locked in a snowstorm, and the oppressive atmosphere made Nathan's expression grow grim. He removed his glasses with one hand and rubbed the bridge of his nose in resignation.

Sebastian was the bane of Nathan's medical career. This latest hypnosis attempt had failed again.

When Sebastian opened his eyes, his handsome face was shadowed with a dark, sickly gloom. His lips pressed into a thin, tense line beneath his sharp nose. "Mr. Gray, Nathan began, but the words caught in his throat.

1/3

Sebastian's world was sealed in darkness. He dwelled in an abyss hell he could not escape. His sleep disorder was not a psychological condition. It was self-confinement.

Sebastian seemed deep in thought, his expression cold and brooding, as if a storm were gathering beneath the surface.

Nathan said with a sigh, "Mr. Gray, here are your meds for this round."

He put the meds on the table, but before he could say anything else, his phone started ringing. One look at the caller ID and Nathan groaned inwardly. It was his grandfather, Landen.

Few people knew that Nathan was born into the distinguished Trent family, famous for generations of traditional medicine experts.

His grandfather, Landen, and Paul were once known as the Two Pillars of the Medical World. One specialized in acupuncture, the other in herbal medicine. Between them, they defined the highest standard of traditional medicine nationwide.

Whatever Landen said on the phone, Nathan's face turned serious in an instant. Without wasting a second, he hung up, said goodbye to Sebastian, and headed out.

The bedroom was dead silent. Sebastian reached for the pills, chewing them one by one without bothering with water. His face stayed cold and expressionless, handsome yet shadowed. After another failed hypnosis session, a faint, bloodthirsty red lingered at the corners of his eyes.

Once he finished, he switched off the lights and lay down on the bed, still fully dressed. His eyes, frosted with icy coldness, stared up at the ceiling, and the whole place felt like a scene straight out of hell.

The next morning, the air in the manor was heavy and oppressive. Even the birds, usually chirping away at dawn, were strangely silent.

At the dining table, Sebastian sat in his wheelchair after another sleepless night. His face was drawn, shadowed under the harsh morning light, and his eyes glinted with a sharp intensity. The dark circles beneath them heightened the sense of threat, making the maids tremble.

Across from him, Lucas was glowing, his soft little legs swinging back and forth on the chair. He clutched his little shark spoon in both hands, scooping up his meal like a good boy.

Lucas giggled and waved his wrist at Sebastian, showing off a modified black digital watch strapped to it.

He'd spotted it as soon as he woke up that morning. There was still a cute tuft of hair sticking up on his head, bouncing every time he swung his little legs.

Lucas proudly held up his message board to show off to Sebastian. It read: [Stella made this for me.]

Sebastian gave Lucas a frosty stare. Snowball, curled protectively around its little owner, shivered and scrambled up the indoor tree, curling tightly into a ball and tucking its head deep inside. Snowball desperately tried to hide.

Lucas wrote on the board: [Stella kissed me this morning.] He blushed, hiding his face in his hands, too shy to look up.

Sebastian's gaze stayed icy. Lucas added: [Stella smells so nice.] Sebastian was left speechless.

Jake tried to hide behind John, praying he wouldn't get dragged into the drama.

Everyone held their breath, waiting for something to happen, but Sebastian coldly withdrew his gaze, wiped his lips with a napkin, and steered his electric wheelchair toward the indoor elevator.

Stella was still asleep in the bedroom, but the AC was blasting cold again. The air carried that dark, woody cologne she knew all too well. It felt intense, possessive, and almost suffocating.

2/3

Chapter 40

358 vouchers

'Wait, is that a man's cologne?' Stella thought, slowly opening her eyes. She came face to face with Sebastian, who was standing there in the morning light, yet somehow looked like he was wrapped in a cloud of gloom.

Stella was speechless. She wondered if she had opened her eyes the wrong way. She shut them and tried again, but the darkness swirling around Sebastian only grew heavier.

"Mr. Gray?" she blurted out and wondered what was wrong with him for showing up so

early.

Sebastian didn't say a word. He stared at her, his gaze cold and unsettling. The dark circle..

a wink, and he looked as haunted and unwell as ever.

his eyes said he hadn't slept.

They locked eyes, neither backing down. Seeing she still didn't get what he was after, Sebastian frowned, looking ticked off.

Stella was speechless. She wondered what he wanted now. In the next second, Sebastian reached toward her, slow and deliberate. His wrist was lean and powerful, his fingers long and defined, visible beneath the cuff of his black shirt.

Anyone with a thing for hands would be drooling right now. The black prayer beads swung from his wrist, making his hands look more tempting.

'Great, now he looks even more pissed off, Stella thought.

3/3

AD

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