

Shadows 381

Chapter 381 The Final Countdown Tilda's hands flew over the keyboard . Streams of code flashed against her eyes like streaks of lightning . She devoured the flood of data with a speed that left no space for hesitation . Her gaze sharpened when she caught it . The clue burned bright on the screen . Only 30 minutes remained before Endralsia's deadline hit . " Listen up , all of you . " She clapped once , and the sharp sound drew the squad straight to her back . " There's a signal reflector here . " Her finger pressed against the glowing point on the display . Astrid leaned forward .

" Are you telling me that came from inside the hotel ? " " Most likely , " Tilda answered . She already knew the truth . Dominic . That reckless idiot still carried tricks from the dark web . He had left behind a hidden escape rope and prayed someone sharp enough would pull on it . This was her plan B. Dominic's secret transmitter was the doorway she needed into Hotel Morloss . " I'll break this reflector open . Once I do , we'll have a way to hijack the system . " The clock is ticking , so I need every one of you ready .

The second I send the signal , you'll follow in with the master key . " " Yes , Captain . " Jarrett and the rest scattered back to their stations . They trusted her without question . She had never let them down . Her chest tightened as she dug into the device . You're a cruel jokester , fate . Cruel , indeed . Dominic had learned every move from her .

This transmitter was one of his proudest builds . Now she was tearing it apart like it was her own creation . She slipped through its walls as if walking roads she had paved herself . In moments , it broke .

Her brow creased . The power was too low . Dominic must have realized who he was up against . A strong signal would have screamed for attention and ended with blood on the floor . He had chosen survival . But the weak output couldn't seize the hotel's network . " I'm in . I'll crank the signal higher . " Spread out across ten routes and look for cracks . " " Yes ! " Her voice rang clear . Keys clattered like rain on steel . She didn't pause . This was Plan B. If Dominic had planted one transmitter , then someone else could have planted another .

Two working together might be enough to break the wall . " No go , Queen . It's stuck at the final step . " " This signal doesn't cut it . We need a second entry . " Jarrett's tone carried defeat , and the others echoed him . Every path slammed shut . The clock raced on . Fifteen minutes left . Nobody dared say it aloud . They feared shaking her focus . Tilda sat still , her mind like a blade . She sifted through every trace in the data . The heavier the weight grew , the calmer she became .

Not a single beat of attention slipped away . Not a single detail missed her . She would not allow panic to take over , or she might overlook crucial clues . Her quiet strength filled the room . The strength of dark web's top hacker , Queen . The strength of someone who'd gone through many battles . Even Jarrett and the others steadied under it . Their hearts were steadying . They sank into their chairs and poured themselves into the hunt . The counter slipped below ten minutes when her eyes caught another spark . Finally . At long last , their hunt proved fruitful . " Lowell .

" Her pupils narrowed as she stared at the name tied to the second transmitter . " Hmm ... Lowell . She remembered how Kyla had betrayed the Jensions . She sold their secrets to Tobias . They were business strategies . Tobias had left for Endralsia , and his name had landed on the hostage list at Hotel Morloss . It was the chance she needed . " I found it . Five minutes . That's all I need . " Her fingers tore into the keys like a storm . The others let out quiet breaths and pressed their hopes into her hands . Everything depended on her now .

Breaking into a transmitter buried so deep that even the enemy's finest had missed it was madness . And in five minutes too . That was double the madness . Yet she was Queen . She was the one who could make madness bow . All they had to do was trust her . Five minutes struck , and the device split open . " Move now ! Search the routes . Push hard until it breaks ! " " Yes ! " " A is blocked . " " B failed . " " C shut down . " " E is open ! " Zach's shout cracked through the tension . Heads whipped toward him .

" Zach , hand me your control right now , " Tilda ordered .

Chapter 382 Entry " Yes ! " Zach's fingers flew across the console , and he passed control to Tilda without a single stumble . She cut into the E route , planted the virus , and spread it like fire across Hotel Morloss's defenses . Cameras flickered alive , and feeds poured across her screen in endless streams . And then she spotted the hostages . They were trapped in a basement hall , one level underground . She grabbed her phone and called Manfred . In his study , Manfred paced with a cigarette smoldering between his fingers . Endralsia's deadline had slipped to three minutes .

The commander on video checked his watch . An aide bent down and whispered in his ear . Anton's palm cracked against the table . " Parker , the people you brought can't handle this . We're moving on . " " Wait ! " Manfred's voice broke sharp . " General Anton , we still have three minutes left ! " Anton's face stayed cold . " I never had much faith in your team . We gave you an hour with the key while searching for our own way in . I appreciate the effort , but the enemy is far beyond your reach . " They control the board . Hacking them was never going to work .

" He reached for the switch . " This call is over . We're taking the network key back . " " General Anton , you can't- " Manfred's phone lit up . His chest leapt . Tilda . He fumbled to answer the call . " Queen , tell me you pulled it off ! " Her voice was calm , steady as stone . " We did it , Mr. Parker . We have Hotel

Morloss's system and the enemy is still in the dark . " Put me through to the Endralsia commander . Make it video . " " General Anton is right here ! " Manfred slammed the switch to video . " General Anton , we cracked it !

" What ?! " Anton had already risen to move on to the backup plan . The words froze him mid - step . Manfred turned the camera toward the laptop . A masked figure appeared . Tilda's voice guided Anton through every breach . She showed him live feeds of the hotel , and then the hall where the hostages huddled together . Not once did she reveal her face . A man like Anton was not one to trust . Anton's disbelief fell away . Awe took its place . " Good Lord . I had written you off , and yet you actually did it .

" Your reputation precedes you , Queen of the dark web , and yet you surpass it easily . I'll never forget this night . " He gave a sharp nod . " I'll send you the network key and full control of Hotel Morloss's system . " Tilda's voice hardened . " General Anton , tread carefully . If the enemy staged this much , they've got more waiting . " Watch your own men . Moles are certain . " Anton's jaw set . " Thank you , Queen . I'll keep that in mind . " As Endralsia's most decorated commander , he knew her warning rang true . He'd suspected as much in the first place .

When the transfer was done , Tilda clapped once . " That's it . Tonight's mission is , and you all nailed it . " Jarrett raised a hand . " Queen , what do you want from us now ? " " We've done everything we can . From here it's in Anton's hands and the other teams . " All we can do is trust them to finish the job . " " It's over ... " Relief swept through the squad like a flood breaking through a dam . Their shoulders slumped , drained to the bone . The New Year hasn't struck yet . " Go home and get some sleep .

" I reckon we'll get the results by tomorrow morning . " " Queen , after what we just went through , none of us can sleep . Not tonight . " " I think we should stay here . The base has rooms , showers , and even a game room . We'll stick together . " They were too wired to leave and Tilda knew it . She let out a long sigh . " Fine . But remember this . Giving everything doesn't mean you get the ending you want . Be ready for whatever comes . " " " Yes , ma'am . " Time slipped by like sand in a glass . Inside Hotel Morloss , the enemy leader watched every inch of the feed .

His brow twitched . The silence was wrong . He glanced at his watch . The deadline was past . He pressed the radio . " No response ? Then drag a hostage out and execute them . " The door flung wide . A soldier in armor strode in . " Captain , they agreed to our terms . " The leader's words died in his throat . A smile cut across his lips . " Good . Let them send three reporters inside . No tricks . "

Chapter 383 The Criminals " Once we see anything strange , kill five hostages at once . " " Yes , sir . " When the soldier left , the man pressed his fingers to his forehead . His nerves felt like broken glass cutting under his skin . It was no illusion . This mission had to be perfect . One mistake would destroy them . The moment they chose Hotel Morloss , they buried any fear of death . Only their goal mattered . But they did not know Endralsia's special forces had already slipped through the sewers . Tilda had ripped the system wide open .

The feeds no longer belonged to the militants . A few strokes of code erased the soldiers from every camera . The intruders glowed clear across her screen . In the basement , Blair sat in the corner with Dominic . The room had been stripped bare . Only a cramped patch of space and a steel door sealed shut remained . No one could break it without heavy explosives . Breaking it from the inside was hopeless . Guards outside stood ready with rifles clenched in their hands . Blair breathed out slowly . " I hate to think about how scared they must be right now that they know about our situation .

" Her child whispered , " It's alright , Mom . We'll be fine . They haven't touched us . Their target must be something higher than us . " " I hope you're right . If it was just ransom , it would be simple . Now they refuse to answer us at all . That silence makes everything worse . " Her eyes swept the room . Some women sobbed into their hands . Others clutched their rosaries and begged their gods for mercy . A few sat pale and stiff , lips moving with what could only be final words . Sheldon rose with fire in his eyes .

" I'll speak to them again ! " " But you've already spoken to them , Mr. Oliveson . They didn't bother giving an answer . " " It's been almost a full day . We can't just sit here and die . " 4.He jabbed a finger upward . " This hotel is mine . Its security was my pride , and now the enemy smashed it apart like it was nothing . " I hosted this gala . I put you in harm's way . I cannot walk away from that . " I will take responsibility . No matter how hard this gets , I will bring you out alive . " His voice roared through the hall . The air broke like glass under a hammer .

Faces lifted to him with sudden light . For a moment fear let go of them . Sheldon , Endralsia's oil giant , stood tall as a patriot of Cetherland . Even in the face of danger , he did not bend to panic . " Mr. Oliveson . " Tobias stepped forward . Sheldon turned to him , looking perplexed . He barely knew the man or how he got an invitation to the gala , but it no longer mattered . " What is it ? Do you mean to stop me ? " Tobias shook his head . " No. It's just ... what you said struck me right in my soul . If you're going , I'm going too . Two men are better than one if things turn ugly .

" Sheldon's eyes locked on him with weight . He saw it then . Tobias carried a calm that stood apart . This was no frantic official . This was steady ground in chaos . The young are bold and brave , indeed . He

can make a name for himself . Sheldon nodded . " If death doesn't scare you , then stand with me . " " And me . " Dominic moved to his side . " You're the head of Jenson Group , aren't you ? I've seen you before . Excellent . With two young men standing as my comrades , I feel no fear at all .

" Tobias ' eyes flicked coldly toward Dominic . So Dominic wanted to shine in the moment , stealing the light . This was the perfect chance to get Sheldon's approval . Otherwise , a man like him did not need to risk his skin .. The enemy was merciless . One wrong word and the floor would run with blood . But Tobias knew he had no choice . Fortune lived in danger . If he wanted to cut through the brutal world of the Lowells , he had to take this chance . A voice broke the silence . " Wait . Do you hear that ? " The crowd froze . Metal scraped . A sucking grind pressed against the steel door .

The sound crawled into their bones , raising every hair on their bodies . Sheldon barked , " Everyone , move back from the door ! " The crowd stumbled away until the steel stood far from them . A violent crash shook the floor . The door buckled and slammed down . A squad stormed through with rifles lit red by laser sights . Sheldon raised his hands high , his voice tight but strong . " Please . Don't hurt us . "

Chapter 384 The Soldiers Entered " Mr. Sheldon Oliveson ? We're Endralsia's special forces . We came to get you out . " " Command , Area A is secured . Hostages located . " " Good . Move them out through the sewers . " " Yes , sir ! " They were here to rescue them . No one expected Endralsia to strike so fast or break through so cleanly . Hope burst across the crowd as tears streaked down their faces . Only Tobias and Dominic felt dread sink into their stomachs . Their transmitters must have been cracked . Someone had done it , and neither of them knew who .

In the control room , the leader barked out orders . The monitors glowed steadily . barked No alarms were flashing , yet unease scratched against his nerves until he could barely breathe . For the life of him , he couldn't figure out what it was . " Confirm the system is locked down . " You're sure Hotel Morloss ' network is under our control ? " " No signs of intrusion , " the tech answered in a tight voice . He knew lives depended on him . Even one mistake could be fatal . His skill was known worldwide . With full control in his hands , not even Queen could breach the system .

Unless someone inside was feeding them help . That was the only variable . That was the only danger . He searched hard for that shadow .

Captain , Endralsia has sent three reporters , and their equipment's at the gate . " " Good . Check if they're clear . " The hostages gave them leverage . Endralsia would not risk killing billionaires tied to the nation's economy . The state would never allow that . " Yes , sir . " Victory felt close enough to touch . A sharp chime split the air .

A grenade rolled across the floor . " Damn it ! " He reacted fast , but not fast enough . Fire swallowed the room , tearing through walls and hurling bodies like rag dolls . The explosion roared so loudly that it shook the air . Screens shattered , and glass rained to the ground . He dove behind a table , alive by chance , though his left arm was gone . Blood poured from the wound . Every pulse of pain was stealing his breath . His men were down , and his control room was shattered . His command was gone . " How could Endralsia storm us so openly ? " They are throwing the hostages aside .

" He grabbed his radio . " Start smoking the hostages ! " Silence answered him . " Do you hear me ? " Respond ! " Nothing came back . Dread flooded his chest until he could not think .

Gunfire tore through the halls , closing in like a tide . With shaking hands , he lifted his pistol . He drew in one long breath , pressed the barrel to his temple , and pulled the trigger . The shot ended it .

He never lived to learn how Endralsia had mapped his soldiers down to the last man , turning Hotel Morloss into their hunting ground while his men became prey . The scene turns to Slosa . Tilda read Manfred's message and raised her hand . She flashed an " OK " to the Comets . " Hell yeah ! " The squad erupted in cheers , clapping and shouting as the weight finally lifted . Another message blinked across her screen . " This mission made the higher - ups notice you . Queen , they'll want to bring you into the fold . Get your people ready . " I'll tell my team , " she answered .

A squad this strong , bound tight with loyalty , was too sharp to ignore . Tilda expected this . Any group with true power would eventually draw the eye of the state . The day would come , but it was not today . For now , she would let her team taste victory . The scene turns to the Jensions ' place . They had prayed day and night for Blair and Dominic . When news came that both were safe , their hearts finally let go of the weight . They booked flights without delay and rushed toward Endralsia . Even Santiago , grieving in Motrar after Tilda broke him , scrambled to catch the closest plane .

Only Darell could not come . He was buried in a closed set , chasing his title as Best Actor . Which meant he was out of reach . The Jensions arrived in Endralsia and ran straight to the hospital . There they found Blair and Dominic alive .

" My love , are you alright ? " Russell's eyes locked on Blair the instant he saw her . He was known for his obsession with his wife . He ran to her and clutched her hands , his whole body shaking with relief . Tears blurred his sight as he realized she had survived .

" I'm fine , honey . Look at me . I'm standing right here . You don't have to cry . " Blair's eyes glistened as she gripped his hand back . She felt the weight of their fear pressing in , yet her heart swelled with warmth at seeing them safe by her side .

Chapter 385 Reunited Russell wrapped Blair in his arms and held her like he would never let go . " You got out of that nightmare alive . Surviving it is already a miracle . Don't be afraid , baby . I'm here now , and no one will lay a hand on you again . " His hand pressed gently against her back as his voice softened . Only God knew the night he had endured . His eyes had stayed open till morning , while his heart felt like it was being crushed in a fist of steel . Each breath had been a fight . He could not even imagine a world without Blair .

Just the thought ripped him apart inside . With Russell guarding Blair , the rest of the family shifted their gaze toward Dominic . He met each question with steady words , though his eyes flickered like he was testing his own resolve . When Blair's trembling quieted , Russell stepped up to Dominic's bedside . " Dominic , Blair told me everything . You were brave . You kept your mother safe . You made me proud . " His voice carried pride as clear as sunlight . " Dad , this is what a son is supposed to do . Even if I had to give my life , I would never let Mom be harmed .

" " But you're alive and well . Both of you . Please do not speak of sacrifice again . " " Dominic , please stop . You're scaring me to pieces . " Kyla collapsed into his arms and cried until her shoulders shook . No one tried to calm her down . Their own eyes blurred with tears . They were grateful . Blair and Dominic were alive . After all they had been through , seeing them safe was the only blessing that mattered . " I'm sorry . I should've been more careful . " Dominic's voice grew heavy . " But I need to tell you the truth . Mom and I survived only because of Tilda .

" Without her , we'd still be hanging by a thread . " Silence crashed into the room . Everyone stared at him like the world had stopped . Kyla lifted her tear - streaked face and whispered , " Dominic , what are you even saying ?

" I don't get it . " " Dominic ... don't tell me ... Wade , who knew Dominic's true identity , realized what he must be saying before anyone else could . " Before they dragged me away , I built a signal transmitter in my watch . " The enemy had taken the whole network .

Breaking in from the outside was impossible . " The only way was through my transmitter . It opened a hidden path into the hotel's system . Out of everyone I know , only Tilda could break it . " I checked . It was her . She tore the code apart . " That's how Endralsia took control of the system , uncovered every detail , saved the hostages , and crushed the enemy in one strike . " The more Dominic spoke , the heavier his heart became . That transmitter had not even been his idea . Queen - his mentor , before he knew who she really was - had told him to build it . Tilda had built one too .

It was her way of preparing him for the dangers no one could predict . Death could fall without warning . All those years of training had finally paid off . Tilda had saved his life twice in one day . And she had done far more . She had trained him , taught him , and shaped him . Without her , there would be no Dominic at all . But what had he given back ? He had cursed her . He had told her to drop down and die . The memory struck like knives no one could see . His chest felt like it was being split open . His soul was tearing apart . Bitterness filled his mouth .

" Dominic , are you sure it was Tilda ? " Howard's throat went dry . Once , he would have called Dominic insane . He would have said it was impossible .

But he had seen Tilda's strength with his own eyes . She had beaten him , a WWC world champion , and crushed him under her heel . She had taken the crown of the world championship in the art department as well . At this point , no skill of hers surprised him anymore . It only made sense . This was Tilda . " Dominic's right . She does have that kind of skill . " Wade's voice was low .

He lowered his eyes to hide the storm inside them .. " I never thought she'd do it , though . She hates our guts . And yet she still saved Mom and Dominic . " " It isn't about us . She couldn't care less about our survival . She only did what she believed was right . " Dominic's hands clenched without him noticing . When Queen had trained him , she had given him one rule . Her only demand was that her students love their country . The first law was simple . They could never endanger national security .

Chapter 386 Her Rules The second rule was never to betray basic decency . The third was never to fight against the innocent . 4.Even inside the dark web , where hackers had no lines , morals , and limits , Tilda clung to those three rules . That was why she rose above the rest as the queen of hackers . She would never burn her principles for hate . If she did , she would lose everything that mattered . Nothing she did after that could ever patch things back up . The hospital room went quiet like the air had been sucked out . Kyla's heart dropped the hardest . Excuse me ?

What the hell is this ? She had been happy when she saw Dominic and Blair safe . Then Dominic opened his mouth and said it was Tilda who saved them . Everyone believed him . No one even tried to argue . You can't fucking believe him , can you ? That's obviously bullshit nonsense ! Kyla's chest burned with rage . The useless Tilda pulled that off ? No way in hell that's true . That was something even the best in the country could not manage . If that was true , then Kyla's place in the family was crumbling fast .

If she talked about leaving again and asked for Tilda to take her spot , the family would not fight it like before . Shit . That's probably true . The Jensions were shifting . They were turning into Tilda's family instead of hers . Fear pressed into Kyla until she could hardly breathe . She needed a plan .

She had to crush Tilda . If she failed , she would lose her home . Tilda would take it away from her . After Dominic his tale , the air in the ward turned thick . Every breath felt like it weighed too much .

When the moment came , Kayden and Justin slipped out into the hallway for relief . Justin struck a flame and lit a cigarette . He held the pack out . " You want one ? " Yeah . " The duo barely smoked . Yet now both were leaning against the wall in the smoking zone . Smoke curled into the air as they pulled deep and slow . Justin let the smoke go with a sigh . " Man , that was ... a lot to process . " " You were supposed to meet Genevieve Lichtenstein in a couple of days . " " Forget it . After this , that feels so small it doesn't matter .

" " I never thought Tilda would be the one to save Mom and Dominic . " Justin pulled again , held it , then let it out slowly . " Tell me something . Do you think she saw them as her family when she did it ? Even if it was for a second ? " " Justin , I can't imagine for a second that Dominic might be right . That Tilda didn't really care about Mom or Dominic . She only saved them because it was her code . " Kayden answered , " You really should get out of your head . Think too much and you'll come to a lot of conclusions that'll hurt yourself in the end . " A moment of silence ensued .

Justin stared at him . " Kayden , you sound different . You've changed . " " No. I've just learned to see through my delusions . Wade's giving up too , by the way . "

Kayden could not bring himself to speak of what happened in Motrar with Tilda . He only pressed a hand to Justin's shoulder . " There are plenty of ways to pay Tilda back . " But stop clinging to bringing her back to the Jensons . That'll cut both her and you . " Justin's gut told him Kayden had gone through something with her .

How else could the brother who once fought hardest for her return and step away now ? But Kayden stayed silent . Justin had no way to push . His thoughts were already twisted with the song played by the one he once longed for and the pain Dominic and Blair had endured . " Justin . Kayden . " Santiago walked up the hall . The brothers dropped their cigarettes at once . " Santiago , where is everyone ? " " Howard and Wade are with Dominic . Mom has Dad with her . " He stopped close . " Got another ? I need one . " They handed one to Santiago in silence .

So on January second , three brothers stood outside Endralsia's hospital with smoke rising in silence . " To be real , the first time I met Tilda , I hated her . " What she did made no sense . She tore into the family . She broke the family company . She hurt more people than I could count . " And she dumped her anger on us even though we had no part in it . " " Santiago , stop . " Don't make her look like the villain . " Kayden cut in fast , thinking the hate still sat inside him . " No , listen . Justin . Kayden . There's more .

" I fought Tilda once , in that underground arcade . She beat me . "

Chapter 387 Not Surprised 2 Justin and Kayden stood frozen without a word . Is that supposed to surprise us ? Tilda had beaten Santiago , the genius who lived and breathed games . She had taken the very program he built with years of effort . The blows she delivered never stopped . They even wondered if the blood test had been wrong . She didn't feel like a part of them anymore , given the extent of her skills . Her strength no longer looked human . She moved like something born beyond reason .

As her brothers , guilt dug into their skin 62 % The sons of the Jensons were raised as bright stars , yet next to Tilda they looked like broken glass scattered on the ground . " I stayed out of the family chat . I felt crushed by her , just like Howard once did . " When Dominic said she saved him and Mom , I couldn't breathe . " Gratitude and hate both tore at me . " Sometimes I wish I had never known she lived . Then I could , thank her without this pain . " Santiago's voice struck a chord in both Justin and Kayden . They carried the same burden .

The three brothers smoked in silence and let the bitterness burn away with each exhale . The blood bond with Tilda was a shackle . They could not break it . They could not flee from it . They could only face it . And after facing it , nothing remained . They couldn't do anything about it . The road ahead dimmed .

The light was swallowed whole . The future blurred like fog . Kyla hid nearby , her jaw locked so hard she thought her teeth might crack . She was watching them . And she heard everything .

She had gone into the room planning to win Blair and Dominic's trust . She wanted to try and tend to their needs . But ... But every word circled back to Tilda . Tilda , Tilda , Tilda . That was all they wanted to talk about . Tilda used to be nothing . She was despicable . She wasn't even worth a single strand of Kyla's hair . Kyla had been the one who ruled every room . Tilda was nothing but background . Now less than a year after Tilda cut ties with the family , the balance had turned upside down . What the hell is going on ? Rage spread through Kyla's chest .

She longed to rip Tilda apart with her bare hands . A hand landed on her shoulder . Her fury snapped , and fear clawed through her as if her soul leapt free . Her heart almost jumped out of her chest . She turned to scream , but a hand pressed her mouth . " It's me . " Tobias ' eyes met hers , sharp and blazing , and her heart skipped . His beauty struck like a weapon meant for ruin . Any woman would be sucked into that appearance and lose herself . None could escape him . His glance told her this was no place for talk . He guided her down the hall .

They slipped into the women's restroom , locked the door , and vanished from every camera's eye Of course , they made sure they were not noticed by anyone or anything on the way , either . Kyla drifted in his presence until she realized she was trapped with him . Her lips trembled . " What are you doing here ? " Did you forget ? I was caught in the Hotel Morloss disaster too . You only cared about your family . You forgot about me .

His gaze turned soft , wounded , and his voice sank like a plea that pressed against her skin . Kyla's pride rose high . With her name , her body , and her beauty , it made sense that a man like Tobias , a man equal even to Jude , would kneel at her feet . Yes , Yes . This was how the world should be . This was the life she deserved . Great men should live for her smiles and tears , not gather around Tilda as if she mattered more than her . No. Kyla would not allow these men to ignore her ! A smug glow touched her face , yet frost glimmered deep in Tobias's eyes . She was too easy to read .

The Jensons had spoiled a bomb and handed her their deepest secrets without a care in the world . They're nothing but fools . That such a family grew into a giant in Slosa only proved how weak the rest were . Only Jude stood apart . The others were hollow shells . Ah well , Kyla made his job easy . Tobias could control her without breaking a sweat . That was excellent . Through her , he would strip the Jensons ' secrets bare and give Malcom his prize in record time . " I ... I didn't forget about you . You're mistaken , Mr. Lowell . " " The fact you're calling me Mr.

Lowell proves you've forgotten about me . Just call me Tobias . I told you that , remember ?

Chapter 388 Conversation Tobias leaned close as he spoke , and his breath warmed Kyla's face . The heat danced across her skin like sparks from a flame . Her blood raced . Her heart pounded so hard , it felt like it might tear out of her chest . Her mind collapsed in a rush , and she melted into his arms . Her lips trembled open as her strength drained away . " Tobias ... " " That's more like it . Then I'll call you Kyla . Can I call you Kyla ? " " Of course . " " Kyla , you looked broken just now . It killed me to see it . " " What's happening to you ?

I thought your mother and Dominic were fine ? " " I ... " His worried eyes locked on her , and every wall she had left crumbled . Tears spilled down her cheeks . " Tobias , I'm terrified . " My whole family is drawn to Tilda now . " Nobody even notices me anymore . " If this keeps going on , I won't survive in the Jensons . " They'll throw me out . " Tilda . Tobias's eyes narrowed , and darkness slid across his face . He had just treatment when he saw his transmitter was hacked . At the same time , he found out Dominic used one too . So he listened in on the conversation .

That was when the truth hit him . Tilda was the one who saved them . At the auction , he had felt something about her , and now he knew it was real .

She carried power and secrets hidden deep . Fascinating . His voice turned soft . " So what do you want to do ? " " I ... I don't know . I don't want to hurt her , but with her around I feel like I'm losing everyone I love . " Tobias , tell me what I should do . " " If that's the case , Kyla , then you need to rise higher . " You need to outshine Tilda .

Only then will the Jensons turn back to you . " Outshine Tilda . Kyla sank her teeth into her lip . If only it were that simple . She had once believed she stood above Tilda . Even if Tilda shared their blood , Kyla had everything she lacked . 62 % She had their love and their attention . She had the grace that came from the Jenson's polished upbringing . Even Ryan's family admired her without end . Preston was consumed by her completely . But now it had vanished . Everything was ripped away because Tilda proved herself . Kyla wondered if she could ever take back what was hers .

" You're right . Thank you , Tobias ... " || Her voice faltered . She could only speak in hints . If Tobias missed that , she couldn't speak in any clearer terms . That would be risky . If Tobias thought she was heartless , he might walk away . She could not lose a man like him . So she would find a way . Tilda had to go . The plan could not wait . She had to act while her voice still carried weight in the Jensons .

Tilda had just left Comet's celebration .

Even after the long night , she felt sharp and alive , her body still buzzing with energy . She showered , lay in bed , and replayed the moment Comet lit up the world stage for the first time . Her phone vibrated . Jude texted , " The Hotel Morloss mess is cleaned up . Did you have a hand in it ? " Tilda answered , " Yeah ... but that was settled a while ago . You're only asking now ? " Jude replied . " I figured if you touched it , then it was handled perfectly . I believe in you . " Tilda almost choked . Jude was ruthless . He left her no way to argue back .

Tilda texted , " Alright , stop feeding me lines . Do you need anything else ? Other than praising me , of course . " Jude typed , " Rebecca's trial starts in two days . Care to watch it live ? " Tilda answered , " If I show up , I might get killed . You sure you want me there ? Rebecca's crash already dragged down the Bells , and I was part of it too . " Jude typed , " My grandfather wants you to watch the trial . " Her mind froze . Jude's grandfather ? Abram ? Tilda asked , " Does he plan to make a move on me ? " Jude answered , " Not while I'm here . He wouldn't dare .

" His tone rang with certainty . Jude was no longer prey . Even Abram had to think twice before crossing him . And in truth , Abram wanted this rise . Tilda said , " Oh , you're so manly . I'm so in love with you . "

Jude texted , " I'll take that as praise . And just so you know , the Bells were never about family love. It's always been about profit . "

Chapter 389 Texting " Rebecca ended up destroyed because she wasn't strong enough . " People like her always fall apart sooner or later . " If you think my grandfather would ever defend Rebecca , then you couldn't be more wrong . " Tilda cleared her throat and gave a crooked smile . " I'll admit it feels a little strange to say this , but I am curious about your grandfather . " Fine , I'll go meet him . " 62% Since Abram had asked her to come himself , Tilda wanted to see what kind of games he planned to play .

It was better to face him directly than wait for some hidden blow to strike . The fact that she made up her mind to upload the video to ruin Rebecca meant she wasn't scared of the Bells . Two days passed in a flash . That morning , Jude came to her apartment and picked her up himself . He sat in the backseat , watching her in plain clothes , his lips curving into a smile . " Don't feel any pressure , Tilly . Though I know telling you that is useless . " " It is useless . " I told you before , Jude . " The only one in the Bells whose opinion matters to me is yours .

" The rest of them don't even register . " She was the Queen of the dark web , the most feared hacker alive , and she had every right to say it . Behind her stood not one , not two , but three seniors the entire world respected . If the Bells touched her even slightly , Jude would fight , and her seniors would fight too . " Tilly ... Jude's chest tightened like something had pierced it . Instead of pain , a sweet warmth spread through him . He reached out and held her hand , his thumb moving gently against her skin .

The joy in his eyes could not be hidden . " Don't look at me like that , Jude . I've always believed love has to go both ways . " You give to me , I give to you . That's the only way it works . " She squeezed his cheek with a grin that lit up her whole face . When she first got her second chance at life , she never thought love would be part of it . Being able to rebuild real friendship and family already felt like a gift . But this time , love had come as well . She didn't turn away from it .

If destiny wanted her and Jude together , she would take what was given . The storms waiting for them weren't hers alone to carry . They belonged to both of them . The Bells ' estate came into view when they arrived . The mansion stretched across an entire mountain , its design so grand it left people in awe . Even though it stood outside Slosa in the countryside , its size stunned the eye . It looked less like a house and more like the domain of a king . The Bells could have built something this massive in the city . Yes , they could . But ... But there , it would lose its meaning .

Out here they had open land , green trees , clean air , and quiet far from the noise . The iron gates creaked wide . A butler stepped forward and bowed deeply . " Mr. Jude , Ms. Tilda . " Mr. Bell has ordered a special place prepared for you to watch from ." Behind his polished monocle , sharp old eyes measured Tilda with silence . " Alright , " Tilda said evenly . Side by side , she and Jude followed the butler to a bell tower beside the mansion .

They climbed to the second floor , where a tall window looked straight down into the family chapel .

If you need anything . I'll be right outside , the butler said with a nod . He then shipped our and closed the door behind hin Tilda sat down , the air laced with the faint scent of lavender . Jude , are you are your grandfather really brought me here just to watch Rebecca fall ? " 62 % " There are times I don't even understand what's in his heart , " Jude murmured , pressing his lips together . Abram had once ruled the Bells , and age had turned him into something more than a man . Even Jude , his own blood , could never fully see through him .

And his grandfather was the one who handed the family's reins to Jude himself . That mystery made him dangerous . In the Bells family , warmth didn't exist . If survival was the goal , then even a grandfather or a parent had to be treated like an enemy . " Then we'll see what he plans to show us , " Tilda said quietly . And the stage was being set up fast . Abram entered soon after . He wore a sharp black suit , his hair slicked back , one hand toying with the ring on his thumb . His face carried an easy smile .

His presence was full of energy , as though this was nothing more than a pleasant meeting . They were doing it at a sacred place too . But Tilda could feel the weight of his menace pressing down like a shadow .

Chapter 390 At the Chapel The tremor in Tilda's body told her the truth . Behind Abram's calm smile lay a graveyard of the people he had buried himself . The legend about the master of the Bells was no lie . More members began to arrive . 62 % From Aiden's side came Nathan , the eldest son . He was the same man Tilda had seen at The Melting Spoon . He wore a dark suit . The man nodded at Abram and stepped back to wait in silence . From the third branch came Jarrett , and that caught Tilda off guard . He walked in with his head lowered , and his face was grim .

The guy mumbled a stiff greeting to the elders before sliding into the shadows of a corner . Tilda leaned close to Jude and whispered , " Jarrett looks like he doesn't even want to be here . Why'd he show up ? " " You know him ? " Jude's eyes narrowed with a sharp gleam that cut straight at Jarrett . Jarrett carried the Bells ' bloodline , and he had youth , charm , and rank on his side . To Jude , that alone made him a threat . A rival for the love of Tilda . Jude had no idea , until a moment ago , that Jarrett and Tilda had spoken before .

They were close enough for her to call him by name . " Jude , stop being jealous or I'll smack you , " Tilda muttered , rubbing her forehead . Life with this possessive man would never be dull . Jude let out a sharp , cold breath . " Probably got dragged here against his will . His whole branch can't handle blood . " I always thought his luck was rotten . He always winds up in the middle of the worst messes . " " Yeah . Poor guy , " Tilda sighed , pity slipping into her eyes . But her sympathy only made things worse for him .

Jarrett suddenly felt a stare stab into him like ice , sharp as a blade . 62 % His body shook , the hair on his arms rising , and his eyes darted around the room but found nothing . Still , it felt like the weight of a predator had locked onto him . It was the same feeling he had when he first met Jude . And Jude was already the head of the Bells back then . Then came Ryan , Daphne , and Preston . They were dragging Rebecca with them . She looked like a ghost .

Half her hair was gone , her eyes were sunken and bruised , her skin was pale , her nose was bent , and her veins were blue under the bloodless flesh . The moment she stepped into the chapel , she already knew her fate . Despair clung to her like chains , but when she saw Abram , she dropped hard to her knees . " Grandpa , I'm sorry . I swear I'm sorry . " I should never have dragged the Bells ' name through the mud . " Please , forgive me . Just this once . " I'll never do it again . I promise I won't . " Her voice cracked as she sobbed , clinging to the only hope she had left .

If he would spare her , then she would live . She would have another chance at life . She slammed her forehead against the chapel floor , over and over , until the sharp crack of bone on stone rang through the vaulted hall . Blood streamed down her face , staining her skin purple and blue . Jarrett turned away , his soft heart unable to bear the sight . Nathan's face stayed blank , his thoughts hidden . Preston's hands curled into fists , guilt burning through him . Rebecca had failed them and humiliated them , but she was still his sister .

He had grown up with her , protected her , and spoiled her , yet now her mistakes had nearly destroyed their branch . Daphne's eyes filled with tears as she looked at her daughter .

She had carried her , raised her , and loved her , but Ryan's presence pressed against her like iron . As his wife , Daphne knew his truth better than anyone else . Anyone who risked the family's survival had no right to live . Not a wife . Not a child . Abram was in no hurry to speak . He did not stop Rebecca as she broke herself against the floor .

Instead , he said a quiet prayer to God . The man lowered his head in prayer , rosary beads slipping through his fingers . By the time he , Rebecca's forehead was swollen and bleeding , her face

unrecognizable . " I have always said the one thing the Bells will never allow is family turning against each other , " Abram said in a low voice . " And the other is using our name and wealth outside these walls , only to end up ruined , disgraced , and shamed . " If you let the people out there use you and drag our honor into the dirt , then the punishment is clear .

" So tell me , what will your punishment be ? " His words came quiet and almost tender . It was almost like the voice of a grandfather instead of a man who had taken so many lives . " Grandpa ... I ... I ... Rebecca shook , her body folding under the weight of despair . She could soil herself at any moment now , and she had no courage to answer her grandfather . Ryan spoke first , his tone steady . " We will follow your judgment , Father . "