

## Shadows 531

### Chapter 531

" How did it come to this for you ? I'm sorry . This is my fault . I let you down . I'm so sorry .. His words broke apart into sobs , his crying raw and unrestrained , like a child who had lost his way . No one had ever witnessed Russell this shattered . If word ever left this hospital , if people who knew him as the unshakable chairman of Jenson Group - who built his fortune with grit and ruled with relentless force - saw him like this , they would be floored . Outside the isolation window , the seven Jenson brothers stood silently .

Their eyes brimmed with tears as they watched their father trembling , holding Blair's fragile hand . The grief twisted in their chests like invisible claws , tearing them apart with merciless strength . The anguish was suffocating , unbearable , and impossible to escape . In the darkness beyond , Tilda lingered unseen . She had confirmed Blair's fate . Crippled . A faint smile curved her lips . " So this is what it turned into ." The cruelty of fate felt like a free gift that almost made her laugh .

" Blair , if there is such a thing as justice in this world , then this is the kind that fits you best . " She had not meant for Blair to suffer like this . But pity ? That was something Tilda refused to feel . She told herself she was the last soul alive who had no right to offer compassion to anyone in the Jenson family . If she did , she could never reconcile with the memories of her last life . Their betrayal had left her broken and dead . Her face remained empty of expression as she turned and walked away . 1/4 .

" Stop ! Please stop ! Don't destroy my face ! " Kyla begged , pulling against the ropes , but the cords only pulled tighter , pinning her helpless . Tilda's image flickered . Suddenly it was Dominic . Then Darell . Then Justin , then Kayden , then Howard , then Santiago , then Wade . Each wore the same twisted grin as they dragged their blades across her skin . She couldn't even scream for help . Finally , Russell and Blair appeared before her . The cuts came endlessly . Kyla lost count of how many times the blades tore her flesh .

The blood kept flowing , pouring as if it would drain every drop from her body .

### Chapter 532

" You're awake ? Ms. Kyla , are you feeling pain anywhere ? Hold on , I'll get the doctor right away ! " The caregiver , who had been keeping watch beside her , nearly jumped with relief . She quickly pressed the call button on the wall , her voice trembling with excitement . " I ... what happened to me ... my face ... " Kyla's mind still lingered in the haze of her nightmare .

Her hand , trembling uncontrollably , rose toward her cheek . All she felt was the stiff press of bandages . Her breath caught in her throat . In a single flash , everything returned . The terror at Sunlight Plaza . The collapse . The chaos . " My face my face ... no ! My face ! What happened to my face ? " She lurched upward from the bed , clawing at herself in a frenzy . Her fingers scraped over every inch of skin as though she could peel away the reality that bound her . The frantic tearing pressed hard into her wounds . Sharp pain stabbed across her cheeks .

It struck her like a plunge into ice water , dragging her heart into a frozen abyss . This was not a dream . This was real . The caregiver hurried forward , trying to catch her wrists . " Ms. Kyla , stop ! Please stop ! You're hurt badly , and the doctors have already treated your wounds . If you keep ripping at yourself , you'll destroy the work they've done ! " " Don't touch me ! Stay away from me ! Bring me a mirror ! I need a mirror ! I have to see what happened to me ! " ZU.UV wed , Uct 1 No matter how serious her injuries were , if Blair was hurt too , the family's hearts would belong only to Blair . In the past , if both had been harmed , at least one brother would have stood by her bed . But this time , not a single one . The realization slammed into her chest . Her suspicion had been right all along . The Jenson's were already pushing her out . The reason didn't matter . She couldn't twiddle her thumbs anymore .

If she kept waiting , she would be discarded like nothing . And when that day came , she would have nothing left . Something cruel flashed across her eyes . She did not notice it , but her heart was shifting in ways she could not undo . The path she chose in that moment would one day drag not only her but the entire Jenson family into ruin . The doctor , convinced she had calmed , left after giving her a long list of reminders . The caregiver remained behind . She had worked in hospitals long enough to know that a woman facing the loss of her beauty would not surrender easily .

Still , patience was part of the job , and the pay was worth every extra ounce of kindness . " Ms. Kyla , would you like something to drink ? Are you in pain anywhere ? " Kyla thought hard before answering . " I don't feel much pain now . But tell me ... I know my mom is in surgery . What about the others caught in the collapse ? How are they ? " " I've heard that many were hurt , but most suffered only minor wounds . The two who were hurt the worst are you and Mrs. Jenson . Only one person died .

" It was awful , the entire west wing of the fourth floor came crashing down and pulled you into it ." One person died ? Who was it ? What about Daph ... Mrs. Bell ? What happened to her ? "

### Chapter 533

He lifted his head , stunned as Kyla , wrapped in bandages and limping , came into view . " Kyla ? What are you doing here ?

" Her lips parted , and tears fell in heavy streams down her cheeks . " Preston , tell me the truth . Did Daphne really die ? " Preston did didn't speak . His gaze shifted to the lifeless body beneath the white sheet . Kyla trembled as she stumbled forward , collapsing at the bed , her cries ripping through the quiet . " Daphne , please , open your eyes . Don't leave me . You were the one person who cared about me in this whole world . You deserved good things for your kindness , and this should never have happened ." Her sobs grew harder . " I'd rather it was me .

I'd rather die myself than see you like this . Daphne , wake up . If I could trade my life for yours , I'd do it without a second thought . " Preston's eyes filled as he watched her . The tears he had just forced away returned . The nurse rushed forward . " Ms. Kyla , the doctor warned that you must not get too upset . Please stand up . " " Leave me alone ! Don't touch me ! " Kyla shoved her off , burying her face against the bed as the cries spilled from her in waves . The air in the room grew heavy with grief . The nurse looked helplessly at Preston .

He wiped his eyes , pulled in a steady breath , and stepped forward . " Kyla , my mom is gone . That's the truth . If she were still here , she would never want us drowning in sorrow . " " Preston ... " Kyla turned into his arms , clinging to him . Two broken hearts pressed together in their grief and loneliness . Preston tilted his head back , swallowing his tears , his hand rubbing her back in gentle circles . He did it just like when they were children . He held the tears in place . But hidden against his chest , Kyla let the faintest cold smile curve across her lips .

Her face was ruined , her presence forgotten by the Jensons . She had no choice now but to cling to whatever piece she could still play . She had no time to be selective . For now ... she had to lock onto Preston , her last strand of hope . Tilda pushed open the door of the apartment . The smell of warm food filled the air and wrapped around her . She stepped into the kitchen , where her seniors worked in perfect sync , moving with ease around each other . Her eyes softened as she leaned against the wall , arms crossed , smiling gently . Mystro turned his head . " You're back .

Wash your hands , Tilda . Dinner's almost ready . " " Really ... you managed everything from my recipe list ? " " Of course . Who do you think we are ? Each of us is a master in the kitchen . " Liam lifted the lid of a pot and carried out a platter of freshly steamed crabs . " Wow , getting to eat food cooked by all three of you feels like She looked around . " But where's Rain ? Why didn't I see him ?" pure luck . " " He wanted to help , but he's hopeless in the kitchen . Nearly blew the whole place up ." Mystro laughed . " We had to send him out for a walk .

He'll come back when it's time to eat . " Tilda pressed a hand to her forehead . She never imagined the so - called genius assassin would be completely useless at cooking . it suited him perfectly . They called Rain back for dinner .

#### Chapter 534

Outside the window , fireworks exploded across the night sky , their booming sounds echoing through the streets along with neighbors ' cheers . On the television , a holiday special played , its music flowing softly into the room . " Tilda , try this ! I marinated the chicken myself . It's amazing ! " Mystro held a drumstick toward her with pride . " And this is my fish filet , Liam said with a smile , sliding a piece toward her lips . " Have a bite and tell me what you think . " Before she could answer , Dane slipped several barbecued ribs on her plate .

His eyes locked with hers , sending a quiet message . I made these . Tilda . Please try them . Rain froze . All the food had been made by his seniors . He hadn't done anything . He couldn't offer Tilda anything . The only choice left was to scoop up a few beef meatballs no one had touched and drop them on her plate . " Tilda , here ... try these meatballs . Do you like them ? I picked them out at the store myself . " Tilda pressed her lips together , trying to hold back her laughter , but it spilled out anyway . Her seniors burst into laughter as well . Rain's checks flushed a deep red .

He lowered his head , feeling shame for the first time in his life . Inside , he made a quiet voW . When they went back to the R Organization base , he would find the best teacher and learn how to cook . By next year , he wouldn't embarrass himself like this again . " Alright , I'll try everything ." Tilda lifted her fork . " The chicken is tender and seasoned perfectly . The fish is so fresh , and the sauce brings out its flavor . The ribs are rich and tangy , and the meatballs are chewy and delicious . " Her face lit up . " This is the best meal I've ever had .

Not just because of the taste , but of you put your heart into it . I love it . " Her words came with a smile so bright and warm it filled the entire room . The flavors lingered on her tongue like sweetness she

would never forget . Happiness wrapped around her heart and whispered again and again that she was no longer alone . She had people who cooked for her , laughed with her , watched fireworks with her , and shared the holiday by her side .

She wasn't the ignored girl she used to be at the Jenson's home , shoved to the background while Kyla soaked up all the attention . Her words lifted a heavy weight from her brothers . Until then , they had been afraid she might dislike the food . The thought of letting her down had nearly crushed them .. " Glad you like it . Have some more , " one said quickly . The others jumped in , filling her plate repeatedly until the food piled like a small mountain . Tilda laughed and held up her hands . " Enough , all of you . Rain too . I can't finish this much . I'm not a piglet .

" " Take your time . There's plenty . You said it was good , so eat more , " someone urged " You're too skinny , Tilda . You need to eat more . You'll look healthier . " " Maybe she won't look any different , but she'll be stronger . " urged . Rain leaned across the table with sudden eagerness . " Tilda , these shrimp balls are mine . Try one . " She looked at all their expectant faces . Her thoughts slipped back to another holiday long ago , sitting alone in a corner at the Jenson's house , watching everyone else shower Kyla with love and food . That night , she had been invisible .

But tonight , she was the center of it all , surrounded by love ..

## Chapter 535

Out of the Shadows : Tilla's Brilliant Second Life Tilda , sitting in her place , would have looked like the spare , the unwanted girl taken in to fill a void until the real one returned . And now that the cherished child had come back , the stand - in no longer seemed to belong .

The thought burned so deeply that Tilda's nose stung and her chest swelled with emotions she could hardly hold in . Dane and the others caught sight of her brimming eyes , and alarm raced across their faces . " Tilda , what's wrong ? Did we push too far ? I'm sorry . Please don't cry . " There was nothing more unbearable than a woman's tears . And hers , most of all , because she had become their greatest treasure . Rain jabbed a finger toward the others , his voice sharp . " This is on you three . She said she was full , but you wouldn't stop piling food onto her plate .

Now look , she's upset . " Mystro and Liam shot back in unison . " Don't even start blaming us . You were handing her food too . We all did it , so we're all guilty . We should all apologize . " Sitting closest , Dane leaned forward and gently brushed her hair back , his touch tender and full of worry . " Don't be afraid . Those aren't sad tears . You're crying because you're happy , aren't you ? You're glad to be here with all

of us and Rain , together at one table . This is the kind of joy you never thought you'd get to feel ." Her voice grew soft , almost fragile .

" For so long , I thought this kind of happiness would never belong to me . " But it's here now , real and warm . I think God must be watching over me after all ." Once , she had cursed life for being so cruel . Other children had parents and simple , loving homes . Her birth parents , along with her seven older brothers , had left her with nothing but coldness But hate no longer weighed on her heart . She had finally found her rainbow after the storm .

The road to this moment had been long , bitter , and full of pain , one she had walked at the cost of her very life . And yet , in the end , fate had shown her mercy . It had given her a second chance . It had stripped away the lies and taught her what family truly meant . It had led her straight to the people who would love her as their own . The brothers exchanged glances , their expressions soft and full of feeling . " We feel the same , one of them said . " Meeting you , Tilda , is the best thing that's ever happened to us ." Rain nodded hard , his voice breaking .

" Yeah , Tilda , I almost lost myself for good , but you saved me . Meeting you is the greatest gift God ever gave me . " Dane reached out again , his fingertip brushing away the tears from her checks . Tilda drew in a deep breath , her lips curving into a smile through the shimmer in her eyes . " Alright . Tonight is a holiday . We shouldn't drown in emotions . Let's raise a glass instead ." She opened the bottle of '82 Lafite she had been saving and poured a measure for each of them . " No matter what comes our way , we've survived so much together .

Now we're here , side by side , celebrating . " I hope every year brings us the same joy, the same warmth , the same health and happiness . " " Cheers ! " Their glasses met with a crisp ring , and laughter broke out around the table . Every face shone with happiness . The loneliness , the pain , and the weight of old wounds melted away . What remained was a circle of people bound together by ties no one could tear apart . After a few rounds , Tilda's cheeks turned a soft pink .

She rested her chin on her hand , her eyes tender as she watched her seniors and Rain tease and argue like children . She started to get misty - eyed . She wished the clock would stop . She wished the moment could last forever . It was perfect . After dinner , she stayed with her brothers and Rain , half - watching the holiday program on TV while they talked about everything that had happened lately . She laughed that the show was so dull , saying even the worst streaming service had better scripts .

Rain yawned so wide his eyes watered , stubbornly fighting sleep only because everyone else was still awake . By the time the closing song ended and the clock struck midnight , the night had already slipped into memory . Her phone buzzed . One by one , messages arrived right on time . Una . Andy . Jude . Each sent her the same greeting , " Happy holidays ." She answered each in turn with a quiet reply , " Happy holidays . " When she came to Jude , she typed , " How was your dinner ? Hopefully it wasn't too unpleasant ." His answer came . " It was fine .

Except Uncle Ryan's family was a complete disaster . They didn't even show up . Tilda texted , " Daphne is dead . Preston's in the hospital . Rebecca fainted . And Ryan still didn't appear . " Jude replied , " Things went so wrong he had to handle the Sunlight Plaza mess before Grandpa exploded . He's terrified of losing his position . To him , power and money will always matter more than anything else . Losing a wife means nothing ." Tilda's reply cut sharp . " Your family really is cold . Something so awful happened , and your

grandfather and the others still sat down to dinner like nothing was wrong ."

#### Chapter 536

" Leonard ... he's Jarrett's father , right ? If he raised a son like Jarrett , then Leonard and his family must be as harmless as you said ." " Being born into the Bells family is both a blessing and a curse ." Jude knew that Tilda's Comet had been absorbed into the government , and Jarrett was now among them .

He had been jealous for a long time , even picking fights with Jarrett over nothing . Jarrett had been pushed to the edge by it . But since he didn't dare offend Jude , he had no choice but to endure , miserable and silent . The truth was that Jude respected Jarrett's skill . He wanted him in the DY Group as one of his strongest allies . But without Jude realizing it , Jarrett and Tilda had grown close . " My love , I think I'm beginning to understand why my father became the way he is .

The anger and resentment I've carried toward him feel lighter now ." " Today I really looked at him for the first time . I saw how fragile he has become , and I couldn't stop thinking about the weight he must carry inside ." " Because of you , I've found a weakness that could ruin me . But without you , my life would be frozen , empty , and without warmth . " Jude paused , then let the words spill from his heart . Even though he had told her countless times before , he never grew tired of saying it . He needed her to know , deep down , how much she meant to him .

In Jude's heart , Tilda was worth more than everything he owned . Worth more than life itself . Tilda pressed her lips together and typed a single line on her phone . " I'll find a chance to meet your father ." She pressed send . 20:08 Wed , Oct 1 d . But then his thoughts wandered to Devin , and his gaze lowered , sorrow shadowing his face . In the end , he only replied with one word . " Okay . " Since it was what Tilda wanted , Jude would agree .

If she asked for the stars or the moon , he would find a way to bring them down for her . Later that night , when bedtime drew close , Tilda was still in her room , chatting with Una . Knock . Knock . A gentle knock rapped against the door . " Tilda , are you asleep ? " It was Mystro's voice . " No. Come in , Mystro . " The door opened , and Mystro stepped inside . Tilda set the hair drye down , ran her fingers through her damp hair , and let a faint smile soften her face . " So why are you still up ?" " Uh ... Dane and Liam are probably still dealing with treatment .

Rain was worn out , so he's already asleep . " I ... I just wanted to talk with you for a while ." His eyes shifted uneasily , stealing glances at her as if searching for courage . It was clear he had something to say , but he was holding back . " Mystro , we haven't bond runs deeper , own each other long . But since we're disciples of the same master , our bond runs deeper than time . If you have something to say , ask me straight . There's no need to hold back . " Tilda's voice cut through the silence .

Alright ...

Today we saw the news about the collapse at Sunlight Plaza . They released the list of the injured . " One of them was your mother , Blair ... " As Mystro spoke , his eyes never left Tilda , watching every flicker of her face .

Chapter 537 Late Night Talk J Still , she longed for those dearest to her to stand by her side , to trust she had her reasons . And thankfully , the ones she loved most never wavered . She was no longer the abandoned girl she had been before .

She was no longer alone . That night , Tilda drifted into sleep , wrapped in peace , lost in dreams . Others , though , stayed awake . Dominic stood outside Blair's hospital room , staring through the glass as fireworks lit the night . His eyes were lost , heavy with grief . Once , he had believed this night to be the happiest of the year . It marked the end of one chapter and the start of another . Every year , the family gathered in the Jensons ' home , wrapped in warmth and laughter . There was no scheming , no rivalry , only love and togetherness as they welcomed the new year .

Those had been the best times of their lives . Every year , without fail . But not this year . Never had Dominic imagined that on this night of renewal , they would be sitting in a hospital , hearts weighed down with sorrow . From now on , the Jensons would never again feel that same joy . Not after they had cast out their sister . Not after Kyla's false mask had been ripped away . And not after facing the truth that Blair might never walk again . " Dominic , get some rest . If you keep this up , your body will give out , " Darell said as he walked over , concern soft in his tone .

" I'll be fine . I can take it ."

### Chapter 538

They stayed gathered in the hallway outside the hospital room , waiting for Blair's eyes to finally open . Their mother , the woman who had once been the anchor of their lives , now lay inside , her body frail and broken . How could anyone close their eyes in peace when her life teetered on the edge ? Sleep felt useless . " Darell , do you believe in karma ? " Dominic's voice cracked through the silence like glass breaking . T ...

" Darell's throat tightened . Words almost escaped him but fell back before they reached his lips . He understood exactly why Dominic had asked . They had grown up as children of reason , raised to believe only in what science could prove . Evidence was truth , logic was law , and superstition was nothing but fantasy . But that had been before . Since the night of the dream about Tilda's death , since the encounter with Silva , Darell could no longer insist that retribution was only a myth . Dominic's torment came from the same shadow .

Tilda lingered in his heart , heavy with guilt and regret that no time could wash away . In the pale glow of the corridor lights , Darell studied Dominic's face . The sight made his chest ache . Once , Dominic had been strong and radiant , the bright heir of Jenson Group , admired by all . 1/4 20:08 Wed , Oct 1 d Now he looked hollow , weighed down by grief , his spirit dimmed , as though age had stolen tent years in the span of months . " If karma is real , then this must be ours , " Dominic whispered . " This is what we deserve . We wronged Tilda .

We failed her . That is why this has come upon us . " Every ounce of pain is the punishment for what we did . If I could take it all upon myself , I would . " The words carried regret so raw it bled into the air . He thought of his choices . He regretted letting Queen's charm blind him . He regretted sending the email that drew Queen's attention and chained him as her student . He regretted returning home like a demon

, lashing out at Tilda with cruelty , all to shield a sister who had never been real . The memories tore through him , each one sharper than the last .

Yet he was helpless to defend against them . Why had he been so blind ? Why had he believed himself so clever , so powerful , so in control ? He believed he'd seen the truth . In the end , he had lost the one person who had deserved his loyalty most .. Kyla had lived eighteen years by his side , and he had never seen her mask . Not until Russell revealed the truth . He had even planned gifts for her , pouring his energy and love into a sister who was never truly his . He had told himself he could not lose her after losing Tilda . Now he saw the truth . It was laughable , And it was tragic .

20:08 Wed , Oct 1 d " Dominic , stop , " Darell said , his voice low , though his tone held a quiet urgency . " I know your chest is tight , but this isn't the time . " His gaze drifted to their brothers huddled by Blair's bedside , and to Russell , whose face looked . carved from pain . " Thank you , Darell , " Dominic murmured . " Having you here , listening to me , it lightens the weight . I can't say these words to the others . Every one of them is tied to Tilda . Every one of them carries guilt . " Only you ...

you hardly knew her, and so you're the one person I can speak to without fear ." Darell stayed silent . Unbidden , his thoughts returned to the dreams that haunted him . Hardly knew her , huh ? No ties ? It was true that he had never wronged Tilda . Without the bond of blood , he and she might as well have been strangers , passing each other without a word . Yet whenever he saw his family brought to its knees , dread clawed at him . It felt like the charm Silva had given him was fading . It felt like the dream was returning to claim him again . That feeling was coming back .

That feeling had never lied before . And in that moment , he knew his connection to Tilda ran far deeper than anyone imagined . " Tell me , Darell , Dominic asked softly . " What do you think Tilda is doing now ? While we spend the holidayslocked in grief inside this hospital , what do you think she's doing ? " \* Enough , Dominic , " Darell cut him off , his tone sharpening . " The more you speak of her , the deeper you sink into this sorrow . Stop torturing yourself . Stop thinking about Tilda . " He was speaking to Dominic , but the words rang inside his own chest as well .

The longer I carry this guilt , the more I remember the joy we lost . I can't stop , Darell . I can't stop thinking of her . She must be sitting with her friends , watching the holiday's show , laughing , trading gifts , sending out blessings for the year ahead . Not like us . " This family has already changed . And maybe ... maybe it will never return to what it once was . "

Chapter 539 To Himself Dominic's voice carried sorrow that seeped into every corner of the room , pressing down on the air until it felt too heavy to breathe . Darell couldn't bear to hear it anymore . The longer he listened , the deeper his heart sank , like his chest was being pulled into thick mud with no chance of escape . The hallway broke its silence . Quick , firm steps pounded against the floor , sharp in

the stillness of two in the morning . Heads lifted all at once . A man in a sharp black suit appeared , the seams crisp , the fabric catching faint light .

Dust clung to him . Exhaustion lined his face , but his presence drew every eye . It was Ryan . Russell's brows knit tight . ' Ryan ? Why are you only showing up now ? Do you realize that Daphne has already passed ? " Ryan halted , meeting his gaze . " I got Preston's message . But I had too much to deal with . That's why I'm only here now ." Justin , usually the softest among them , felt anger boil up . " Ryan , Daphne is gone . What could possibly matter more than that ? You're her husband . You should've been here the moment it happened . " Daphne had been dead for over ten hours .

As her husband , the man who had shared her life and her bed for decades , Ryan had arrived . only now . That spoke volumes . " Justin , you're out of line , " Ryan snapped , his tone sharp as glass . " I'm still your elder . You really think you have the right to scold me ? " His pride refused to bend to someone younger . Justin flinched at the cut of his words . The heat drained from his face , and after a pause , he bowed his head . I ... I'm sorry , Ryan . I spoke too harshly . " Russell's expression darkened .

" Ryan , don't be so quick to take offense . Justin's right . Your wife went through something devastating . How could you show up only now ? " He too believed Ryan had crossed a line . Daphne had her flaws - she was proud , sometimes sharp - but she adored Blair and loved the Jenson children dearly . If not for Daphne's friendship with Blair , Russell would have kept Ryan strictly at arm's length . He had always seen Ryan as a man who valued profit over people . Whenever they met , Russell gave polite smiles while keeping his guard raised . He knew Ryan would never reveal his heart .

Trusting this man was the last thing he would do . Ryan's gaze shifted toward the window . Blair lay unconscious there , her body fragile beneath . tubes and machines . His voice dropped low . " Russell , not every family runs like yours . You built everything with your own hands . You and Blair have a marriage built on love , your house is united , and your word carries weight . I respect that . I even envy it . " But my world isn't the same . Behind me stand the Bells and my father . This disaster happened at Sunlight Plaza , which I run . Do you think I wanted this ?

" If it stains the Bells ' name , I'll be the one crushed under the fallout . My brothers won't save me . They'll shove me deeper . Jude is waiting for me to slip . With all that you know , you should understand the position I'm in and the pressure I face . " Russell fell silent . Ryan tugged at his jacket , smoothing the fabric , regaining his composure . Without another glance , he walked past Russell and left . Justin's guilt sank heavy in his chest . " Dad ... I'm sorry . I let my temper run wild . I shouldn't have said it like that ." Russell's voice was steady .

" There's nothing to apologize for . In something like this , everyone carries their own faults . We don't get to dictate another man's choices . " That was the lesson Russell had repeated to the Jensons for years . But this time the loss was Daphne , a woman bound close to their family . Outsiders could speak with clear heads .

To Himself Those inside were blinded by grief . Preston and Rebecca sat beside Daphne's still body .

Rebecca's eyes were swollen red , tears long since drained , her stare empty as she fixed on her mother's lifeless form . Preston's face was hidden in shadow , his thoughts locked away . Then Ryan appeared in the doorway . Rebecca's voice was raw and broken . " Dad ... Mom , she ... Ryan stepped to Daphne's bedside . He stood there in silence , then said , " I'll see that your mother's funeral is handled properly . " He reached out , his hand hovering above the sheet , ready to pull it back for one last look at her face . But his fingers trembled .

His hand stalled in the air , then slowly retreated . " Stay here with her , " he murmured , and turned to leave .. " Dad ! " one Preston shot to his feet . His voice cracked with rage . " You're leaving again ? Mom is and you still can't stay by her side for her final moments ? " " Preston ... Rebecca froze , her voice tiny , startled by his sudden eruption . Ryan turned back . His eyes fixed on Preston , who was red - faced , gasping , shaking with fury . Hatred , grief , and disbelief burned in his stare . " Do you even know who you're talking to , Preston ?

" Ryan's voice came out like ice .

#### Chapter 540

Cold Ryan Ryan's voice dropped to a low murmur , drained of any warmth . His face , still carrying faint traces of the man he once was , looked hard and cold , like frost settling over stone . The air grew heavy , pressing down until Rebecca felt she could barely breathe . Her fear was sharp and real . At home , she had always feared her father . Preston felt the same . They had watched too many times as their mother , Daphne , lowered her head and swallowed her pride around him . Whenever they made mistakes , Ryan showed no mercy .

If Daphne had not stepped in to shield them , their childhood would have been far darker . Now the woman who had protected them was gone . If Preston stood against Ryan , Rebecca had no idea how to stop it . " I do . My father ! " Preston's voice cracked , sharp with anger and grief . He was scared of Ryan , that was true . But Daphne's death , and Ryan's chilling lack of emotion , sent rage burning through him . " Dad , you were Mom's husband . How can you act like she meant nothing after she died ?

" I know your marriage started as business , but after all those years , you felt no pity for her at all ? " She lit up the world in public , but at home she had no voice . She bowed to you even after raising two children . Now she's gone , gone in the cruelest way . " You didn't even look at her . You just turned away . She was your wife ! " " Shut your mouth ! " Ryan's hand lashed out , striking Preston across the face . The sound rang out , sharp and echoing through the room . Preston's head jerked to the side , his cheek burning with pain .

Inside , it felt like his heart had shattered into pieces too small to ever fit back together . " Preston ! " Rebecca cried , pushing forward to stop it . " Dad , he's speaking out because Mom's death hit him hard . Please don't treat him like this . " " Hit him hard ? He's not the only person torn by this ! She's my wife ! " She died without warning . Do you think I'm not grieving ? Do you think I ever imagined this would happen ? But if I stay here and sulk , will she come back ? " You've lived with every privilege . You think that just appeared out of nowhere ?

Your sister has coasted through life , spoiled , adored , and untouchable in her crowd . You think that happened . by luck ? " Your grandfather handed you this life . If he can give it , he can take it back just as fast . If I don't stay strong , this family falls apart . " And you , Preston . Do you have the guts to start from nothing ? Do you have it in you to lose your comfort and struggle at the bottom ? You don't . " The words hit Preston like a storm .. He froze , unable to argue His fists clenched , then loosened , his strength draining away like air from a flat tire .

He wanted to say he had the resolve . He wanted to say , for his mother's honor , that he was willing to endure ruin . But reason , sharp and merciless , told him the truth . He did not . If it meant giving up his wealth and privilege , Preston would rather die . Even stripped of real power by Jude , forced out of DY Group's branch , he was still Ryan's only son . As long as Ryan stood , Preston's life of luxury was secure . Even Rebecca , exiled from Cetherland and barred from returning , lived comfortably overseas .

All of it existed because of the Bells . Because of the Bells ' power . Because of the Bells ' money . Ryan stared him down . " You still have some sense , Preston . You're my son . Because your mother just died , I'll let this go once . " One more thing . Today , while I was drowning in the fallout from Sunlight Plaza , your mother's family barged into my office . They said she owed them sixty million . " The second they heard she died , they came chasing money .

Instead of worrying about me , maybe you should ask why your grandfather's greedy family hasn't even shown their faces for her . " What ? " Only then did Preston and Rebecca understand . Daphne had just died , yet not one of the Kahler family had come . Preston had only told Ryan , waiting for him before

making the next move . But they had overlooked something . Sunlight Plaza was the Bells ' property . The Kahler family had their own ways of gathering information . They knew what had happened . Yet instead of going to the hospital , they had rushed to Ryan , demanding ish .

That was preposterous . Rebecca whispered , stunned , " That's impossible . Mom always had enough for herself . She event kept her own savings . There's no way she would've borrowed sixty million from them .