

A Man with Nerves of Steel

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That night, Fiona got the express DNA test result and was stunned. This test, like the ones Joseph had done, showed that there was no biological relationship between Joseph and Natalie.

Joseph was right. Did that mean Cora really had cheated on him? This was no small matter.

Fiona didn't dare make the call herself. She rushed straight to Cora's home, skipped the small talk, and

went with Cora into the study.

When Cora saw the result, she was just as shocked. She looked at Fiona in disbelief.

Fiona said, "This is a rapid test. It's not as accurate as the three-day or seven-day tests. Legally, more weight is given to the seven-day report. But Cora, you should be mentally prepared. Normally, the rapid test result and the seven-day result don't end up wildly different."

Cora was dazed. “How is this even possible? Natalie is obviously my child with Joseph. How could she suddenly be...”

Fiona said, “There’s one more possibility-the babies were switched at birth. So, we still need to run a test between you and Natalie, using your own sample.”

“Okay. Do it as soon as possible.”

Now, panic was starting to set in for Cora, especially when she thought of how many times Joseph had pulled out the results of the paternity tests he’d had done. Clearly, this wasn’t coming out of nowhere.

She handed her sample over to Fiona. Just as Fiona was about to leave, Cora stopped her. “Fiona, I... I never did anything to betray Joseph, but if the final result really is the worst-case scenario, what am I supposed to do? I don’t want a divorce. I don’t want to lose him.”

Fiona’s heart sank. Had Cora actually cheated?

She thought for a moment, then tried to comfort Cora. “Even in the worst-case scenario, I think he’ll understand you.”

Cora frowned, looking grim.

Fiona went on, “Honestly, he can’t live without you. I looked into his situation on my way here. His career at the hospital hasn’t been going well for all these years. Plus, he’s 40 years old now. Without you, he has nothing. Setting everything else aside, just look at how things have been for him these past few days.

“After leaving the home you two shared, he’s been staying at a hotel. Right now, he’s just acting out of pride. When he cools down and thinks things through, he’ll come back, and the two of you will get past this.”

“You have a point.” Cora felt a little less anxious. After discussing things with Fiona for a while longer, she let the latter leave to deal with her things.

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Another day passed.

Right after finishing a board meeting, Cora received a message from Fiona, and she had Fiona come straight to her office.

Fiona walked in with a grave look and handed her another test result. She said apprehensively, “Natalie is your biological daughter. That part is undeniable. But Joseph’s test results... those are undeniable, too.”

“How is this even possible?” Cora cried out.

She read the conclusion over and over, but she just couldn’t make sense of it. The more she read, the more confused she felt.

“How about I talk to Joseph again?” Fiona suggested.

In her mind, the fact that Cora had cheated already felt like an irreversible truth. At this point, all she could do was work to change Joseph’s mindset toward the situation.

“I don’t want a divorce. That’s my bottom line. That’s the basis for everything...”

Right then, the landline on Cora’s desk rang. It was her secretary, saying Joseph had arrived. She glanced at Fiona, who nodded. She told the secretary to let him in.

She personally got up to open the door. When she saw Joseph, he looked worse for wear. His complexion was poor, and stubble shadowed his jaw. He reeked faintly of cigarettes and alcohol. It was obvious he’d had a rough night.

He told Cora not to touch him and went over to sit down on his own. Then, he shot a glance at Fiona.”

Are the test results out, Ms. Sutherland?”

“Fiona, step outside for now. I need to talk to Joseph,” Cora said.

Once she’d sent Fiona out, she walked over to Joseph and tried to sit close to him. However, he pulled away in disgust. She said, “Yes, the result is out, but it doesn’t make any sense. I refuse to acknowledge

it.”

Joseph sneered. “And why would you refuse to acknowledge it? Since when do things become invalid just because you won’t accept them? Do you think there are no laws and rules in this world?”

Anger flared in Cora. “I never did anything to betray you. What exactly do you expect me to acknowledge and accept?”

“The test result is right-”

“I told you, it’s illogical. It doesn’t reflect the truth. I won’t own up to anything.”

“Natalie isn’t mine. You cheated on me. You betrayed me.”

“Cheated? You never caught me in bed with anyone. How exactly are you going to prove that I cheated? What evidence do you have to accuse me of that?” Cora shot back.

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“Cora, have you no shame at all?” Joseph spat.

He hadn’t expected Cora to be this shameless. The paternity test was the clearest proof there was, yet she still insisted he had to catch her in bed with someone before she would admit to cheating.

Instead of answering him, Cora said, “I don’t want any more misunderstandings between us when it comes to our relationship, Joseph. You have to trust me. I love you, and I didn’t cheat. The paternity test saying Natalie isn’t your biological daughter is wrong. You can’t take it seriously.

“If you keep being so stubborn, I really will turn on you. Do you have any idea what’s going to happen to you if you divorce me and make an enemy of me?”

At that, Joseph felt the crushing pressure of Cora's dominance. Her eyes, which were wide as she glared at him, were particularly intimidating. In the past, he would've backed down, swallowed his anger, and chosen peace for the sake of the family.

But now, he had nothing left. There was nothing more he could lose, and he'd finally seen Cora's true colors. He had no reason to be afraid anymore.

He straightened up and met her eyes. "I wanted an amicable divorce, but I know now that you don't deserve it. I'm going to keep filing for divorce, and I'll even go to the press if I have to. I want to see exactly who it was you were sleeping with behind my back!"

"Joseph, you-"

Cora's face turned pale. If Joseph really did that, society would brand her as a cheater, even if she hadn't done anything. Lowell Group would be dragged into the scandal. The company's stock would nosedive, and the losses would be immeasurable. Years of hard work would likely go up in smoke.

Considering her position and social status, a divorce was no personal matter. It could set off a devastating chain reaction. And judging by Joseph's calm, unflinching expression, it was clear that he would do anything if she kept pushing him and backed him into a corner.

She had no choice but to say, "Let's calm down and talk this through. Airing our dirty laundry in public will only hurt all of us-you, me, and our girls."

Joseph didn't want their marriage troubles to blow up into some huge scandal, either, or become fodder for gossip at the hospital. So, he eased up a little. "Then why won't you listen to me? Natalie isn't mine.

"That alone is enough to prove you cheated. Our marriage is over. Do you really think I'm divorcing you for your money? All I want back is my dignity."

"Joe, don't you know what kind of person I am? Shouldn't you know whether or not I've been messing around with anyone else? We've been together for so many years. Doesn't that count for anything? Haven't we been loving toward each other? You love me, and you satisfy me. Why would I cheat on you?"

"I can't read your mind. I used to think I understood you, but it turns out I was just too naive. You've had someone on the side this whole time-there's always been someone."

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Joseph took a deep breath, forcing himself to calm down. He went on, "These past few days, I went and pulled some of your prenatal checkup records from when you were pregnant with Natalie. Not everything was archived, but what I managed to find is more than enough to support my conclusion."

He took out several copies of Cora's old prenatal exam files and pointed at a few key data points and dates. "We didn't sleep together until our wedding night. That was what you asked for, and I respected it. A month later, you started showing pregnancy symptoms.

“Based on these numbers, you were probably already pregnant with Natalie before the wedding-maybe it was two weeks or even a month before. Counting forward from there, Natalie wasn’t premature at all. She was born right on time. I hate that I was blind. I’m a doctor, and I somehow still missed all of this.”

Cora shook her head. “No. No, that’s impossible. You can’t talk about me like that. And Natalie is definitely your daughter-”

“What’s so impossible about it?” Joseph cut in sharply. “The facts are right in front of you. Why are you still denying it? It’s clear to me you’re not ready to have an honest conversation at all. What the hell is there left to talk about if you’re gonna take this attitude with me?”

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

Outside, Fiona hadn’t gone far. She wanted to talk to Joseph, but he completely ignored her, so she went back into Cora’s office instead.

She said, “I just saw Joseph. He looked really upset. You two couldn’t work things out?”

“He still wants a divorce. I refused, so he’s now threatening to expose the paternity test report.”

“How could he do that? Should I talk to him again?”

Cora stared out at the city skyline, her fist tightening around the paternity test. Her gaze grew darker and more focused.

She controlled a massive business empire and owned countless assets. So many people obeyed her commands and submitted to her. How could she not even keep her own man in line? Sitting there and waiting to be pushed around wasn't her style.

She turned to Fiona and said in a low, steely voice, "Don't bother going so easy on him. I'll give you three days to make him come crawling back to me."

Fiona raised an eyebrow. "Any means necessary is fine?"

Cora didn't answer out loud, but she gave a hard, decisive nod.

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Joseph left Lowell Group and went to a restaurant. He sat down and ordered. While waiting for the food to be served, he sipped his tea and thought about his next move.

Cora had already done the paternity test, yet she refused to accept the result. He'd reminded her that Natalie must've been conceived the month they got married, but even so, she wouldn't own up to her affair. When he told her again that he wanted a divorce, even if he didn't get a cent, she'd switched to playing the emotional card.

Did Cora really want to force his hand? Did she want him to announce the paternity test results for Selena and Kimberly as well? Was that the only way she would admit she'd cheated and betrayed him? If it came down to that, she would effectively be shredding the last of his dignity...

He couldn't bring himself to be that ruthless-or rather, the time just wasn't right yet.

Joseph genuinely didn't understand why Cora was still being so stubborn. After turning it over in his mind, he figured it had to be because she thought he was stupid. He had no background and no real backing, so she could keep him under her thumb while she continued doing whatever she wanted outside their marriage.

Damn it. She'd cuckolded him while she was out there living it up, making money hand over fist and enjoying herself with other men. She was an absolute monster and the most vicious woman alive.

Joseph decided he couldn't let her off too easily. If she still refused to go through with an amicable divorce, he would blow everything up and squeeze some money out of her. Then, he would leave Jenton and go to a place where no one knew him. He would live the life he actually wanted.

Halfway through his meal, he received a voice message from Bill, asking him to return to the hospital that afternoon for a written test on medical theory. Bill wanted Joseph to sit next to him so he could

copy his answers.

He was trying to take advantage of Joseph again. Joseph texted back, “What medical theory test?”

Bill replied with another voice message. “The hospital suddenly decided on it. I asked around, and it seems our test scores might affect this round’s promotions. I haven’t cracked a book in ages, Joe. I can’t remember any of that stuff. I’m counting on you this time, same as always.”

He never did any real academic work and was out fooling around with other women. He should’ve been removed from his position long ago. That was what Joseph thought, but he still asked for the time and place before ending the chat.

As he continued eating, he suddenly heard a server shout, “Is there a doctor here? Is anyone here a doctor?”

He looked around. No one answered, so he raised his hand. “I’m a doctor. What’s going on?”

“Could you please come take a look? There’s a kid who’s choking...”

“Take me there now.”

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Joseph rushed to a private room and saw an eight-year-old boy who was choking and already struggling to breathe. The situation was serious, and the two women with him—one older, one younger—were panicking and not doing anything to help.

He quickly examined the boy, then stepped in and used the Heimlich maneuver. The child coughed up the piece of food that was stuck in his throat, and his breathing finally cleared.

Joseph checked him again, then said to the younger woman, “He’s okay for now, but his asthma is no joke. I strongly recommend you take him to the hospital for a thorough examination.”

He glanced at the boy again. “You should go now. Get him there as fast as you can. Don’t delay this!”

The young woman, seeing how professional Joseph’s movements were and how he’d immediately pinpointed the boy’s chronic asthma, trusted him. On top of that, Joseph was handsome and refined,

which led her to believe he was reliable.

She wanted to get his number, but when he noticed that her phone was a custom model inlaid with diamonds and that her clothes were all from high-end labels, he immediately knew she wasn't from an ordinary family.

For a woman like her to be eating in a place like this with a kid... It felt off. So, Joseph just rattled off a random number, then told her not to waste any more time.

As she kept thanking him, he felt a sense of relief and self-worth, like he'd finally reconnected with who he really was. His medical skills had always been his real strength. Why had he let Cora arrange his life for him? He'd wasted so many years for the sake of a family that wasn't even his.

Fortunately, medicine was a craft built on the accumulation of knowledge and long-term practice. His skills hadn't rusted or regressed in the slightest. Even without Cora, he could live just fine!

With that thought, Joseph let out a soft sigh. His appetite was gone, so he paid the bill and headed back

to his hotel.

After a short break, he went over to the hospital to take the test. He deliberately kept his distance from Bill. One glance at the exam room told him this written test was open to

staff from across the entire hospital. It struck him as odd, but he didn't dwell on it. He quickly answered the questions, then turned in his paper and left.

Around dusk, there was a knock at his hotel room door. It was Fiona. Joseph let her in.

He got straight to the point. "Has Cora come to her senses yet? She's not still being stubborn, is she?"

Fiona sighed. "Joseph, I'll be honest with you. Cora really loves you. She can't bear to divorce you."

Joseph's expression darkened. "What's that supposed to mean? What does she mean by this?"

Fiona hurried to explain. "Calm down, and hear me out. Cora holds a very high position and is under enormous pressure. Every minute of the day, she's responsible for thousands of employees across the

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group and, by extension, thousands of families.

“On top of that, everything tied to the company’s businesses affects hundreds of thousands, even millions, of ordinary people in Jenton. She carries the weight of all of that on her shoulders.

“That’s why she doesn’t have the luxury of living like some carefree woman who only thinks about romance. But I can tell you this with complete certainty-she loves you. She loves you more than she

loves herself.”

“Fiona, you have no idea what she’s done to me. All that talk about responsibility and sacrifice sounds great, but don’t come to me with this nonsense anymore,” Joseph said coldly.

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“Alright, then. We won’t talk about Cora anymore. Let’s talk about you instead,” Fiona said.

She pulled out a copy of Joseph’s personnel file from the hospital. “You’re just an attending physician, aren’t you? If you divorce Cora, you have to think about how your career is going to go from here as well as the child support you’ll have to pay-”

“What child support?” Joseph cut in.

“You and Cora have two more daughters. After the divorce, there’s no way she’ll give you custody, and the court won’t grant it, either. If she has primary custody, then as their father, you’ll still have to pay child support. Based on the lifestyle the Lowells are used to, you’ll likely have to cough up 10 or 20 grand a month...” 1

“Fiona, whatever’s going on between Cora and me is between husband and wife. You’re an outsider who knows nothing, so you don’t need to get involved. If you’re talking to me in a personal capacity as my friend, then I’m not obligated to tell you anything.

“If you’re talking to me as Cora’s attorney, then you’re the defendant’s lawyer, and I’m the plaintiff. We shouldn’t be meeting at all.”

Joseph picked up on the threat hidden in Fiona's words. Feeling that it was utter nonsense, he told her to leave. Selena and Kimberly weren't his, either. The nerve of them, demanding that he pay child support

for them!

He called Cora. It took quite a while before she finally picked up. It sounded noisy on her end. She said, I'm talking business with a friend right now. I'll come by to pick you up and bring you home in a bit."

He said, "Cora, I was originally planning to have a peaceful divorce. I wasn't going to ask you for money, but you just had to send a lawyer over to tell me that I must pay you tens of thousands of dollars a month in child support.

"Fine, then. If that's how you want to play it, we can leave feelings out of the picture and talk about money alone. I'm not just filing for divorce. I'm going to demand a payout of three billion dollars as compensation!"

"Three billion dollars? Sounds like a fantastic project!" On the other end of the line, Cora just chuckled dismissively and ended the call.

Right before the call ended, Joseph heard a middle-aged-sounding man ask what kind of project could possibly be worth three billion dollars.

Was it a lot? She wouldn't even be able to protest if he asked for half of her assets!

Joseph knew what Cora was like. If he wanted money from her, she would have to willingly hand it over. Otherwise, he wasn't getting a single cent.

Getting three billion dollars out of her was like reaching for the sky, but it was also just another tactic to force her to agree to the divorce. He believed that when marriage and money were placed on the table

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together, she would choose money.

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That night, Joseph got a call from Cora telling him to come home immediately. Immediately after he refused, the hotel staff came knocking on his door. They refunded his deposit and asked him to check

out.

He ran into Cora at the hotel entrance. She said, “The hotel won’t let you stay anymore, yet you still refuse to come home. How long are you planning to keep making a fool of yourself?”

His expression was dark. “Was this your doing?”

“Yes, it was. The owners of all the decent hotels in this city will be more than happy to do me such a simple favor. Once I say the word, there’s no way they’ll let you stay. So now, you have to come home with me. Think about how comfy and cozy our home is—there’s no need to be out here putting yourself through this torment...”

Joseph laughed coldly. “You’ve got money, sure, but you’re not powerful enough to single-handedly control everything in this city. All you’re doing right now is making me even more determined to demand a divorce settlement from you.”

With one last sneer at Cora, he got into his car and left. He tried a few other high-end hotels, but sure enough, none of them would check him in. He silently cursed Cora out, then finally went to stay at a cheaper motel instead.

At the start of the new week, Joseph went straight to the courthouse, submitted the necessary documents, and officially filed for divorce once again. ¹

After leaving the courthouse, he went back to the hospital and went to see the hospital director, Walt Loughlin. He knew Walt and Bernard were friends. Once he told Walt what was going on, the news would quickly reach Bernard’s ears.

Walt was delighted to see Joseph. “Joseph, have you gotten your personal matters sorted out? I was about to seek you out to talk to you about something...”

Right now, Joseph only had the divorce on his mind. He said, “Dr. Loughlin, I’ve actually been busy with divorcing Cora these past few days. It’s going to take a while longer, so I can’t come back to work just yet.”

Walt was stunned. When he saw that Joseph wasn’t joking, his smile vanished. “Did I hear you right just now? Did you say you’re divorcing Cora?”

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Joseph didn’t dodge the question. He admitted it outright and even showed Walt a copy of the paternity test he’d had done with Natalie. As the highly skilled head of the hospital, Walt only needed one glance to

see what the issue was.

He told Joseph not to overthink it and to continue with his break. Once he'd sent Joseph away, he called

Bernard and set up a meeting, then went straight over to see him.

After a few pleasantries, once they were alone, Walt got straight to the point. "Your son-in-law came to me for some time off again-this time, to file for divorce. What do you want me to do? Fire him outright, exile him to some negligible department, or do you have other instructions?"

Bernard froze for a moment, then snorted. "That ingrate is airing our dirty laundry in public. Isn't he afraid of becoming a laughingstock?"

Walt didn't hide anything. He took out the copy of the paternity report Joseph had given him and handed it over. "This is what he showed me. Joseph's take is that since Cora has found someone better, she ought to set him free."

"This is fake! Don't you believe a word out of his mouth! I won't let that ingrate get away with this!" Bernard spat.

Seeing yet another copy of the paternity report made Bernard's temper flare. He grabbed it, tore it to shreds, crushed it into a ball, and threw it away.

Walt, however, didn't agree. "All these years, Joseph has been steady and reliable. He's never once slipped up at work or falsified anything. If he actually forged test results just

to get a divorce, it'd be no different from digging his own grave. He can't afford the consequences. So personally, I think this conclusion would stand up to scrutiny."

Bernard fell silent at that. Because if this were true, then the problem was serious. Very serious. That

meant the problem lay with Cora.

He frowned and asked Walt, "What else did Joseph give you? What exactly did he say?"

"He only gave me that report and said it was his reason for filing for divorce. He just asked me to give him time to handle things and said he would come back to the hospital once it was done... Oh, and it sounds like he's already gone to the courthouse to file for divorce from Cora."

"What? He's gone to court to file? That's ridiculous!"

Bernard immediately called Cora and told her to go to the court to block the divorce filing. She reported back that Lowell Group's legal team was already handling it and that the petition had been withdrawn. Only then did he relax a little.

But then he thought of something else-Joseph could file again. Next time, he could go straight to the district or state courts. At that level, it would be much harder for them to yank the filing back.

At the end of the day, only the person who'd caused the problem could fix it. Bernard needed to talk to

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Joseph and figure out what he really wanted. If Cora's marriage crisis triggered wild swings in Lowell Group's stock price and led to massive losses, he would have no choice but to come out of retirement and personally steady the ship.

His mind raced through all of this in an instant. He told Walt to keep Joseph calm and stop him from running around filing lawsuits everywhere.

Walt actually had a way to do that-there was a special joint consultation scheduled that afternoon, and he arranged for Joseph to accompany him over to the other hospital.

Before leaving, Walt said to Bernard, "Bernard, if you're really set on cutting Joseph loose, then hand him over to me. I'll groom him as my successor. He's a rare talent."

Bernard snorted. "Are you sure you want to groom an ingrate like that as your successor?"

"His private life is none of my business. As a doctor, he's outstanding." Walt smiled, then got in his car and drove off.

Bernard turned around and immediately called Joseph, telling him to come over. Joseph flat-out refused.

That ungrateful punk...

Bernard couldn't sit still any longer. After speaking to Cora over the phone, he headed straight to Lowell Group. He met with Cora in the CEO's office and said, "Get Joseph to come here, now. I want to ask him what exactly he's trying to pull."

"I've tried calling him, but he refuses to come. I've also tried texting him, but the result is the same. Wait until tonight. I'll go see him myself," Cora said.

She had Fiona come into the office as well and said, "I just talked to Joseph. He's dead set on filing for divorce again, and he said he'll go from court to court one by one. If Jenton won't take the case, he'll go to Croma. How do we handle that?"

Bernard let out a heavy snort. The thing he'd been dreading was still going to happen.

Fiona had underestimated Joseph's resolve. "If he files at the district and state courts, we'll have no choice but to respond. At that point, we'll definitely be more on the defensive than we are now. The real crux of the problem is Natalie's paternity test, Ms. Lowell. With the current conclusion, the court is going to side with Joseph."

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Cora snapped, “How is that possible? Natalie is my and Joseph’s daughter-how could they conclude that there’s no biological relationship between them? What are those testing centers even doing? I’m going to sue them for issuing such a ridiculous result.”

“You can’t, Ms. Lowell! That’ll only put us in a more disadvantaged position than we’re already in.” Fiona hurriedly stopped Cora.

Once they sued the testing centers, it would blow up into a huge story. The margin of error in a formal paternity report was incredibly small. If they lost the lawsuit, the fallout would be impossible to predict.

Bernard said, “Cora, I’ll keep an eye on the company. You focus on sorting things out with Joseph first.”

Cora looked at the way Joseph had replied to her texts again and felt a headache coming on. In the end, she did as Bernard told and took Fiona with her to seek Joseph out.

Once they were in the car, Cora handed her phone to Fiona to show her the chat log. “What do you think he even means by this?”

“On the surface, it looks like he doesn’t want to keep arguing about the report. He just wants money instead. That might be his ultimate goal, but it could also be that... Cora, are you absolutely sure Natalie is

“Natalie is Joseph’s and mine. Apart from Joseph, I’ve never been involved with another man.” Cora cut in, her tone firm. “Joseph may not be rich, but I don’t care. I didn’t marry him for his money. He’s a decent guy, a doctor, takes care of the family, and he’s healthy. I never had any reason to cheat.

“I carried three daughters for that ungrateful jerk, and now he wants a divorce and is demanding three billion dollars from me. He’s the worst! He’s gonna give me an aneurysm!”

Cora seethed. If Joseph was beside her then, she might not have been able to resist taking a swing at

him.

Fiona was baffled. “Then the test results...”

“It has to be the testing center’s mistake. They must’ve mixed things up and tested Natalie as if she were mine and some other man’s. This is outrageous. I’m definitely going to sue them.”

“It might be better to track Joseph down and talk things through with him first,” Fiona said carefully.

As a legal professional, she instinctively trusted an official judicial appraisal more. To her, that report said the children weren’t Joseph’s, but Cora’s with someone else. Still, she couldn’t ask that question outright.

They went looking for Joseph, but he refused to see them. As soon as he turned off his phone, their search turned into a complete waste of time.

In reality, Joseph had been called away by Walt to another hospital for a consultation. The patient was a 78-year-old woman with an exceptionally sensitive background. She was the family member of a retired

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top official from Croma who'd returned to her hometown in Jenton to spend her later years.

Recently, she'd fallen seriously ill with sudden, severe vomiting and diarrhea without pain. She was also dehydrated, had generalized muscle cramps, and signs of peripheral circulatory failure.

Specialists from the leading hospitals in various big cities, along with famous doctors from Jenton, had all taken turns examining and treating her. However, no one had been able to nurse her back to health.

When Joseph entered the conference room, he didn't rush to offer an opinion-not that he had the standing to speak yet. He simply stood to the side, quietly going through the stack of medical histories and lab reports, building a holistic picture of the case in his mind.

When the room finally fell into a thoughtful silence, he leaned toward Walt and shared his opinion. Walt was stunned by Joseph's line of reasoning, but his deduction did match the woman's symptoms. He gave Joseph the floor.

Joseph's diagnosis sent a shockwave through the room-he suggested that the elderly woman might have cholera. None of the other doctors had dared to go there, but Joseph's reminder snapped everyone to attention. They all bent over the charts again, re-examining every detail of the case.

The treatment team peppered Joseph with pointed questions. His responses were logical, thorough, and grounded in the data. Eventually, the others agreed to order specific tests for cholera.

By evening, the rapid-testing pathway had produced a definitive result-a cholera infection. Only then did the crowd finally let out a collective breath and wrap up the marathon consultation.

The patient's family wanted Joseph to travel to Croma to participate in her full course of treatment, but he turned them down, saying he wasn't skilled enough for the task. The real reason, however, was that he needed to stay in Jenton to deal with the crisis in his marriage to Cora.

After the post-consultation dinner, he returned to his motel. He had just finished his shower when he heard the electronic lock beep. Cora swiped a keycard at the door and unlocked it. If he hadn't latched the security chain, she would have walked straight in.

"You disappeared for a whole day. Were you playing hide-and-seek with me or something? Open up. We

need to talk about the divorce settlement!" she hissed.

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Cora looked at the way Joseph had replied to her texts again and felt a headache coming on. In the end, she did as Bernard told and took Fiona with her to seek Joseph out.

Once they were in the car, Cora handed her phone to Fiona to show her the chat log. “What do you think he even means by this?”

“On the surface, it looks like he doesn’t want to keep arguing about the report. He just wants money instead. That might be his ultimate goal, but it could also be that... Cora, are you absolutely sure Natalie is

“Natalie is Joseph’s and mine. Apart from Joseph, I’ve never been involved with another man.” Cora cut in, her tone firm. “Joseph may not be rich, but I don’t care. I didn’t marry him for his money. He’s a decent guy, a doctor, takes care of the family, and he’s healthy. I never had any reason to cheat.

“I carried three daughters for that ungrateful jerk, and now he wants a divorce and is demanding three billion dollars from me. He’s the worst! He’s gonna give me an aneurysm!”

Cora seethed. If Joseph was beside her then, she might not have been able to resist taking a swing at

him.

Fiona was baffled. “Then the test results...”

“It has to be the testing center’s mistake. They must’ve mixed things up and tested Natalie as if she were mine and some other man’s. This is outrageous. I’m definitely going to sue them.”

“It might be better to track Joseph down and talk things through with him first,” Fiona said carefully.

As a legal professional, she instinctively trusted an official judicial appraisal more. To her, that report said the children weren’t Joseph’s, but Cora’s with someone else. Still, she couldn’t ask that question outright.

They went looking for Joseph, but he refused to see them. As soon as he turned off his phone, their search turned into a complete waste of time.

In reality, Joseph had been called away by Walt to another hospital for a consultation. The patient was a 78-year-old woman with an exceptionally sensitive background. She was the family member of a retired

+15 Bonus

top official from Croma who’d returned to her hometown in Jenton to spend her later years.

Recently, she’d fallen seriously ill with sudden, severe vomiting and diarrhea without pain. She was also dehydrated, had generalized muscle cramps, and signs of peripheral circulatory failure.

Specialists from the leading hospitals in various big cities, along with famous doctors from Jenton, had all taken turns examining and treating her. However, no one had been able to nurse her back to health.

When Joseph entered the conference room, he didn't rush to offer an opinion-not that he had the standing to speak yet. He simply stood to the side, quietly going through the stack of medical histories and lab reports, building a holistic picture of the case in his mind.

When the room finally fell into a thoughtful silence, he leaned toward Walt and shared his opinion. Walt was stunned by Joseph's line of reasoning, but his deduction did match the woman's symptoms. He gave Joseph the floor.

Joseph's diagnosis sent a shockwave through the room-he suggested that the elderly woman might have cholera. None of the other doctors had dared to go there, but Joseph's reminder snapped everyone to attention. They all bent over the charts again, re-examining every detail of the case.

The treatment team peppered Joseph with pointed questions. His responses were logical, thorough, and grounded in the data. Eventually, the others agreed to order specific tests for cholera.

By evening, the rapid-testing pathway had produced a definitive result-a cholera infection. Only then did the crowd finally let out a collective breath and wrap up the marathon consultation.

The patient's family wanted Joseph to travel to Croma to participate in her full course of treatment, but he turned them down, saying he wasn't skilled enough for the task. The

real reason, however, was that he needed to stay in Jenton to deal with the crisis in his marriage to Cora.

After the post-consultation dinner, he returned to his motel. He had just finished his shower when he heard the electronic lock beep. Cora swiped a keycard at the door and unlocked it. If he hadn't latched the security chain, she would have walked straight in.

"You disappeared for a whole day. Were you playing hide-and-seek with me or something? Open up. We

need to talk about the divorce settlement!" she hissed.

Support

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A Man with Nerves of Steel

+15 Bonus

In the past, Joseph would have just found Natalie's cheeky attitude kind of cute-more like a friend than a kid. Being friends with one's child, he'd always thought, could narrow the generation gap and make living together a lot more comfortable.

But after finding out the paternity test results, he had a completely different interpretation. If Natalie wasn't his biological daughter, then of course she wouldn't feel close to him or have any respect for him. Now, her rebellious streak was pure ingratitude and emotional distance.

He was about to speak when his phone rang. It was Walt, asking him to head to the hospital regarding follow-up on yesterday's cholera patient. An idea flashed through his mind-this was the perfect excuse to get away from the girls.

He agreed, ended the call, then turned to Natalie and said, "I have to get to the hospital, so I don't have time to look after you three. Take your sisters home."

Natalie was already disgusted with this cheap motel and didn't want to stay another second. She shot back, "You think I wanna be here? It's just that the queen has spoken. If we don't bring you home, we're not allowed to go home, either. Be a decent guy and just come back with us, Joseph."

Selena nodded in agreement. "Natalie's telling the truth, Dad. Mom is seriously pissed. If you don't come home, then the three of us are sticking with you. Wherever you go, we go. Whatever you eat, we eat.

"As long as you don't go home, we're not allowed to, either. Those were Mom's exact words. And when she said that, she looked really serious. I think she means it this time."

Kimberly had already kicked off her shoes and was bouncing on the bed. “Then we just won’t go home! I

like it here with Dad.”

Joseph frowned. This was exactly the kind of dirty trick Cora would pull-using the girls to tug on his guilt and paternal instincts. Well, if this was how she wanted to play it, then she couldn’t blame him for what happened next.

As he packed up his things, he told Selena and Kimberly to stay in the room. Then, he took Natalie downstairs with him to check out. In the elevator, he asked, “How did you get here?”

“Mary drove us. She dropped us off and left, so don’t get any weird ideas. If you don’t go home with us,

the queen is going to make our lives miserable. Look, I’m begging you. Just do us a favor and come back.

”

“Nat, do you know why I’m not going back?”

“Because you’ve been crushed under the queen’s thumb for years and you finally want to rebel. I totally get it! You’ve rebelled pretty hard this time, and we’ve all seen the fallout. It’s enough, so just accept your fate and come home.

“I already made plans with my friend. I’d be out with them right now if I didn’t have to drag you back. So stop making my life harder, alright? Or I’m done taking your side,” Natalie grumbled.

+15 Bonus

“You’re in high school now and almost 16. You’re basically an adult. There are some things you should know. I’m in the middle of divorcing your mom. That’s why I’m not going back,” Joseph said.

Natalie was stunned. “What? Divorce? Are you serious, Joseph? If Mom hears you say that, she’s going

to tear you apart.”

“She already knows. She’s known for a while, and she’s not alone. Your grandparents know, too. The divorce is moving along fast. Once your mom signs the papers, there’ll be nothing between us anymore.”

“You’re really going through with it? Why?”

“Because of you.”

“Me? Whoa, whoa, whoa. What do your problems with Mom have to do with me? Don’t dump all your crap on me... Hold up. Did you cheat, Joseph? Did Mom catch you with some other woman? With how domineering she is, there’s no way she’d ever forgive you. That’s gotta be it, right?”

Natalie’s mind leaped straight to that conclusion. Some of her classmates’ parents had divorced for that very reason-the father had cheated and done all kinds of horrible things to make everyone furious. The only outcome was divorce. If her own parents were splitting up, surely there had to be some equally messy drama behind it.

Joseph took out another copy of the paternity report from his bag and handed it to her. “Last time you asked me for money to buy a car, which I couldn’t give to you. You said I wasn’t your real dad. Turns out, you were right. We don’t share a single drop of blood.

“Cora made someone else your father-your actual, biological father. You’re a smart girl. Now that you know the truth, you know what you should do. I don’t have to spell it out for you.”

P

Support

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A Man with Nerves of Steel

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Natalie read the conclusion on the paternity report that stated she had no blood relation to Joseph. For some reason, her heart skipped a beat.

She scrutinized Joseph. “Is this real?”

“The evidence is irrefutable. You and I don’t share a single drop of blood. You’re the child Cora had with another man. From now on, you’re on your own, and so am I. There’s nothing tying us together anymore,” he said.

“Then what am I supposed to do?”

“Take your sisters home. Go ask Cora who your biological father is, then go tell him that he’s your dad. Oh, and she’s done a paternity test, too. She was shameless enough to flat-out deny the results!”

“I can’t just take your word for it. I need to go home and confront Mom about this. If this is true, then I’m not your daughter, and you’re not my dad. You don’t get to boss me around anymore!”

As soon as the elevator doors opened, Natalie walked out without another look back. The whole situation just felt surreal to her, and she was exceptionally lighthearted. She couldn't hide the excitement and nerves boiling in her chest.

She thought to herself that, of course, someone as broke and useless as Joseph couldn't be her real father. Her real father had to be rich, powerful, and way better than Joseph. Otherwise, why would Cora have picked him?

Since Cora refused to give her money, she would go ask her real father for it. Honestly, Cora was something else for keeping this from her all these years. She was too much! But beyond that, Natalie was just dying to know what kind of man Cora had picked to be her biological father.

Joseph felt a dull ache in his chest as he watched Natalie leave with barely contained excitement. He had poured his heart and soul into raising her for over a decade, yet she'd walked away without hesitation the moment she learned there were no blood ties between them. She was heartbreakingly cold.

But soon, he let out a breath and forced himself to accept it. After all, the same blood didn't run in their

veins.

After checking out of the motel, he called the housekeeper, Mary Colson, and asked her to pick up Selena and Kimberly. However, Mary only took orders from Cora. Without any direct orders, she didn't dare come to get the girls.

So, Joseph had no choice but to take Selena and Kimberly to the hospital.

When Walt saw the girls, he had his secretary keep an eye on them first. Then, he handed Joseph a set of medical records. They were confidential, so Joseph could only peruse them in front of him.

Once Joseph finished reading, he raised a few questions. They discussed the case for a bit, after which Walt could report to his superiors. Of course, the actual treatment plan still had to be decided by the

+15 Bonus

patient's own medical team.

Walt checked his schedule, then said to Joseph, "I have an important craniotomy coming up. You're assisting me on this one."

Joseph estimated the surgery would be long, quite possibly an entire day in the operating room. With two kids in tow, he hesitated.

Walt saw right through him and said, "I'll call Cora and have her come pick up the girls."

"That'd be great. She dumped all three of them on me first thing this morning, trying to use them to tie me down so I'd give up on the divorce and go back to her as if nothing had happened."

"Three? I didn't see Natalie, though."

Joseph explained, "She's almost all grown up now. She has her own opinions and her own sense of the world. She can handle some things, and she was going to have to face all of this sooner or later, anyway. That's why I didn't hide the truth from her."

"I told her straight up that Cora and I are getting divorced. She went home to demand an explanation from Cora. She should be almost there by now."

"Nat and my granddaughter are the same age. They're almost 16, which means they're practically adults by now. You and Cora were never going to be able to keep this from her. Since she had to find out eventually, telling her earlier rather than later might actually be the better way."

Walt fixed his gaze on Joseph and continued, "I also went to see Bernard. We talked about you and Cora. I heard you asked the Lowell family for a huge compensation payout. Is that true?"

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A Man with Nerves of Steel

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Joseph had only told Walt about the divorce because he knew Walt and Bernard were on good terms. He also hoped Walt would act as a go-between, so he explained, “The money only came up later. After I found out Cora was involved with someone else, I just wanted to end this marriage as soon as possible.

“I didn’t even bring up money at first. But she objected to the divorce, and she even denied the paternity test results. That’s when I brought money into the picture. If she

can't bear to pay me, then she should've just agreed to my original terms for the divorce. Yet she still refused.

"I honestly don't know what's going through her mind. I don't care about the money-I just want the divorce to happen!"

"Did you already find someone else? Are you going to marry this new lady immediately after divorcing

Cora?" Walt asked.

"How can you even say that, Dr. Loughlin?"

"I'm just asking. You just need to answer honestly. Do you have someone new or not?"

Joseph said firmly, "Of course not. I've been wholly devoted to my marriage with Cora and our family all these years. Everything I did revolved around her and the girls. I really did cherish her. I never even looked twice at another woman. And yet, here we are. I don't even know what to say anymore.

"There's not much I can say to comfort you. You'll have to work through this yourself. All I can give you is one piece of advice-you should still put your career first," Walt said.

He stood up and walked over to Joseph. “Back then, I first met you in a classroom at Jenton University. I thought you were a real talent. When you graduated, I hired you into this hospital myself. I had high hopes for you.

“But before you even achieved anything, you rushed into getting married. If Cora weren’t Bernard’s daughter, I would’ve been cursing you both out.”

Joseph lowered his head. Meeting Cora had been a coincidence and the spark that came after was inevitable. Even if he could go back and choose again, at that moment, in that situation, he would probably still fall in love with her. He said, “Ending up like this is on me. I deserve the lecture.”

Walt sighed. “From now on, stand up straight and hold your head high. Focus your energy on your work. I still have full confidence in your abilities.”

He told Joseph to say goodbye to Selena and Kimberly, then went out to wait for him by the operating

room.

As soon as Joseph stepped outside, Walt called Cora and told her to come pick up the girls.

On the other side of town, Cora ended the call, feeling helpless. She had no choice but to change and get ready to head out. Inwardly, she grumbled about Joseph. It was the

weekend-why wasn't he taking the kids to an amusement park or something? Why drag them to the hospital, of all places?

+15 Bonus

Of course Walt was going to rope him into work if he saw him there. As for her plan to use the girls to tie Joseph down and force him to come home, that had clearly gone nowhere.

She had just finished changing when Natalie rushed in from outside, looking windswept. She demanded, "How do you have the nerve to come home alone? What did I tell you? No matter what, you're not to leave your dad. If he doesn't come back, none of you are allowed to come back, either."

Natalie went to the fridge, grabbed a drink, and took several big gulps to tamp down her excitement. Then, she immediately started trash-talking Joseph. "You should see the dump Joseph is living in. There's literally nothing in there.

"It's some cheap little motel that costs, what, a few dozen bucks a night? How is that even fit for a human being to live in? What made you think I'd wanna stay there with him?"

"Watch your mouth with that 'Joseph' nonsense. He's your father, so show some respect. You didn't like the place, so you just dumped your dad and your sisters there and ran home by yourself?" Cora snapped.

“Joseph is exactly what I’m going to call him. I’m not doing anything wrong. I know he’s not my father, Mom. I also know he’s divorcing you.” As Natalie spoke, her lips curled in disdain.

She pulled the copy of the paternity test report from her pocket and handed it to Cora with a bright, almost playful smile. “Drop the act, Mom. Just tell me who my real dad is.”

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The relatively good mood Cora had been in vanished the instant she saw the report. Her expression hardened, and she fixed Natalie with a sharp look. “Where did you get this?”

“Joseph gave it to me. No wonder he kept getting on my nerves. I kept suspecting that I wasn’t his kid, and turns out I was right-he really isn’t my biological father. Hey, why are you tearing it up? That’s

evidence!”

Natalie rushed forward to stop Cora, but it was too late. The report was already in shreds. At the same time, a sharp crack sounded as Cora’s hand connected with Natalie’s cheek, leaving a burning sensation.

behind.

admin

