

Impulsive Vow to an Enigmatic Husband Chapter 1001 to 1050

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Chapter 1001

Dylan asked, "Does my liking for someone have to do with how many times I've seen her?"

Cornelia retorted. And if it doesn't?"

"Stop" Abigail gestured for them to stop. I've made it clear to you, I have a boyfriend and we're planning to get married Please stop spouting this nonsense at me."

"Even if you have a boyfriend, you might break up. If you're married, you might get divorced.." Dylan pulled out his phone," Abigail, can we exchange contact info? If you guys break up, I hope you'll remember me"

Was he cursing her to break up? Abigail was pissed, "I forgot to mention, my mom's cooking might not be enough for an extra person, so I'm not inviting you over for dinner" Dylan said "It's okay, even if there's no food, I can still come and hang out at your place."

Well, she'd never seen someone so immune to embarrassment

Dylan was the top dog at the Hartley Group's Rosenberg branch, the most prosperous enterprise of Rosenberg He often appeared on Rosenberg news, and you could say that hardly anyone in Rosenberg, especially the older folks, didn't know him.

So as soon as he stepped into Abigail's house, Allen recognized him. Even though Allen recognized him, he didn't dare to confirm it. After all, their family were nobodies in Rosenberg How could a news regular suddenly show up at their house? "Abby, who's this?"

Dylan stepped forward, heartily shaking Allen's hand, "Hello! I'm Dylan, a friend of Abby's."

Allen asked, "Dylan? You're THE Dylan from the Hartley Group?"

Dylan nodded, "That's right"

Allen asked, "How did Abby come to know you?"

Abigail explained. "Dad, he's not actually my friend He's a friend of Nelly's husband. Since he picked Nelly up from the airport today, I invited him over for dinner."

"I see. Please, have a seat." Allen let Dylan sit first, and then added, 'Nelly's husband has such impressive friends"

Abigail said, "Nelly's husband is actually very impressive"

Allen asked, "How impressive could he be? Could he be more impressive than Dylan?"

"Dylan is just his Abigail almost let it slip, and Cornelia quickly took over, 'Let me formally introduce you, this is my sister Tahlia."

"She really looks like Allen shouted to Sonya in the kitchen, "Come out and take a look."

"What?" Sonya came out of the kitchen, saw Cornelia and others had arrived, "Nelly, you're back, have a seat. I'll serve the dishes right away"

Allen said, "This is Nelly's newly found sister, check it out, doesn't she look more like her mother when she was young than Nelly?"

1

Sonya's gaze fell on Tahlia, and for a moment, it was as if she had seen Clair in her younger days, "She really looks like her Nelly, your sister and your mother looked like they were made from the same model when she was young Especially those eyes..."

Nelly your eyes resemble your father's more, we can only vaguely see your mother in you, but your sister looks almost exactly like your mother when she was young... If we hadn't seen your mother recently, we would've mistaken her for your mother"

“So my sister’s eyes are very similar to my mother’s when she was young?” But the eyes of Clair that Cornelia remembered were not that similar to Tahlia’s.

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Chapter 1002

Even though Clait was older now and her eyes had changed slightly from when she was young, the basic features, like the shape of her eyes, should not have changed much “ Yeah, especially those eyes, they’re full of kindness when she looks at people, but there’s also this strength in them That was Sonya’s most vivid memory of Comelia’s

mom

Back in the day, Sonya used to wonder how could there be such a captivating woman in the world. She appeared delicate and never got too emotional, almost as if a gust of wind could blow her over Yet, she gave off this vibe of strength, as if nothing could faze her

Sonya continued,

“Nelly, I don’t know what your mom went through, or what happened between you two. I’m not in the position to make excuses for anyone. But I gotta say, your mom is a really good person. Maybe she had her reasons for leaving you guys back then. Give her a chance to explain.”

Comelia, “Thanks. I will

Sonya, “Both your dad and grandma passed away. We thought you had no family left. Now you’ve found your sister, and your mom’s back. Wouldn’t it be great if you guys could reconcile and live happily as a family?”

Comelia. Yeah.”

Abigail, Mom, it's getting late. Let's eat."

Sonya, "You guys have a seat, I'll go get the soup"

Abigail, I'll help you"

Sonya, "No, you and Nelly sit down."

Abigail, "Okay"

Allen enthusiastically asked, "Dylan, fancy a drink?"

Dylan replied, "I'm a lightweight. I'll get drunk after one drink. But if you don't mind me talking a lot, I'll join you"

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The head director of Hartley Group was willing to have a drink with him. Allen's impression of him shot up. "In that case, let's have a few drinks. I don't know if you'll like the food my wife made."

Dylan, "I grew up in an orphanage, had my fair share of hard times. I find everything delicious now"

Dylan's candidness won Allen's trust, who reciprocated with frankness. Abigail tried several times to stop it, but failed

As Dylan drank more, he became more talkative. "I like your daughter Abby: I want to marry her. Would you agree to let her marry me?"

When he said that, Cornelia and Abigail weren't surprised, but Allen and Sonya were taken aback. Fearing Allen might do something inappropriate, Sonya jumped in, "Abby already has a fiancé. He just left Rosenberg today."

Dylan,

"Her fiancé is unreliable. Don't be fooled by his facade. Choose me I'm more dependable than him."

Cornelia couldn't stand it anymore, "Please watch your words."

Dylan retorted, "Ms. Stewart, this isn't work hours, it's my personal time. I have the right to pursue my own happiness..."

Before he could finish, he suddenly spat out a mouthful of blood.

Everyone was taken aback. Cornelia reacted the fastest, "I'll call an ambulance. We need to get you to the hospital."

Dylan waved her off, "No need, it's just my chronic disease. I have medication in my car. Ms. Stewart, could you get it for me, please?"

Chapter 1003

Before

Cornelia could respond, Dylan had already handed the car keys to her. "The medicine is in the box in the middle of the back seat. I hope you can fetch it for me," Dylan said

"Okay" Cornelia turned to Abigail and said, "Abby, you guys keep an eye on him. I'll get the medicine and be back ASAP"

"Alright, hurry up." Abigail looked at Dylan, her heart filled with dissatisfaction. This guy knew he shouldn't drink but he did anyway. If anything happened, their peaceful life might be a goner

Cornelia hurried

downstairs, walked out of the residence area and went to the car to get the medicine. As she opened the back door and got in to fetch the medicine, to her surprise, there was a man in a suit in the back seat.

Realizing she might have been set up, Cornelia tried to escape, but the car door was locked in an instant, and the driver started the car immediately. Cornelia tried to secretly call her emergency contact, but it seemed like the signal was jammed in the car and she couldn't even make the call for help.

Cornelia steadied herself, looked at the driver wearing a hat and mask, and asked, "Who are you guys? Where are you taking me?"

They seemed to ignore her, not saying a word.

"Do you guys realize that it's illegal to deprive a citizen of their freedom? Cornelia asked

*.
At these words, the man next to her let out a cold laugh, as if mocking how ridiculous Cornelia's words were.*

Cornelia checked her phone again, still no signal. All she could do now was to wait, wait for Abigail to realize something was off, wait for them to call the cops and rescue

her

She just didn't know if she could safely wait for help....

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Abigail waited for a long time, but Cornelia didn't return. She took out her phone to call, but Cornelia's phone was unreachable. Worried that something might have happened to Cornelia, she said anxiously, "Dad, Mom, I can't get through to Nelly's phone, can you guys try?"

Allen and Sonya also tried calling Cornelia, but to no avail.

Tahlia tried the same and again couldn't get through. "Abby, I'll go look for her."

Abigail said, "Let's go together."

They all went downstairs together and found that Dylan's car was missing.

In a panic, Abigail grabbed Dylan's collar, "Did you conspire with someone to take Nelly away?"

Dylan said, "Abigail, you need to calm down. The most important thing now is to find her ."

Allen said, "We should call the police right away. They can help us find her more quickly ."

Dylan said, "You guys go look for her. Maybe she went to someone she knows. I'll call the cops."

Allen said, "Abby: you and Tahlia go east, your mom and Tanisha go north, Roy and I will go west. Let's split up."

Abigail said, "Okay"

But Dylan, who was supposed to call the police, didn't actually make the call. He stared at the familiar number on his phone screen for a long time, and finally called it.

On Cornelia's side.

The car passed one wide street after another, then turned into a small road and finally stopped in front of a run-down courtyard.

When the car came to a steady stop in the yard, the man accompanying Cornelia finally spoke, "Ms. Stewart, he is waiting for you inside. Please come in."

"Cornelia asked, "Who's he?"

Chapter 1004

The man replied. "You'll find out once you're inside"

Cornelia looked around trying to memorize the look of the courtyard. If she had the chance to make a distress call, she could give a detailed description of her location. But the man next to her shattered her hope, "Don't bother, this courtyard is equipped with a signal jammer. Your phone won't work, and you won't be able to make any

distress calls"

Comelia fell silent. These people were truly terrifying they even knew what she was thinking

The man spoke again. "He has been waiting for you for a while, please hurry up"

Comelia walked into the courtyard alone. After passing through an arch, the scenery changed. The beautiful building was like a fairyland, completely different from the decrepit scene outside

As Comelia passed the first door, a slim young girl in a pretty dress approached her, "Ms. Stewart, please follow me"

Cornelia didn't ask any questions, and just followed. They walked around a fountain and arrived at a gazebo.

In the gazebo were three people, a middle-aged man sitting, with two women in attractive dresses standing on either side, one of them fanning him. It was like a scene out of a TV show The wealthy man playing chess, with two maids attending to him.

The woman next to Cornelia stepped forward and respectfully said I've brought Ms. Stewart"

The man, still engrossed in his chess game, didn't look up, merely responding. "Good, you all may leave "

"Yes" The three women answered in unison, then left one after the other, their steps surprisingly silent

After the women left, the man continued to ignore Cornelia and focus on his game of chess. He didn't pay her any mind, and Cornelia didn't speak either. She studied the man closely, even seated, he was clearly tall, and there was something about his features that reminded her of Marcus.

If she had to guess, she'd say this man was Marcus' father – Brennen Hartley

Brennen had tried multiple times to meet her, even resorting to extreme measures, but Marcus had always arrived in time to thwart him.

This time, Brennen had managed to bribe someone Marcus trusted deeply, Dylan. If Marcus found out that someone he trusted had betrayed him, he'd be crushed. Cornelia didn't want to see Marcus betrayed by those he trusted most, nor did she want to see him hurt.

After what seemed like an eternity, Brennen finally put down his chess piece and looked up at Cornelia, "Ms. Stewart, it's nice to finally meet you. I'm sure you've already guessed who I am."

Cornelia asked, "Did you bribe Dylan?"

Brennen was taken aback by Cornelia's first question. He paused for a moment, then laughed. "The people around Marcus aren't easy to buy. I merely threatened someone Dylan cares deeply about, so he had no choice but to comply with my wish to meet you"

So Dylan hadn't betrayed Marcus, he had simply chosen between Marcus and someone he cared about, and chosen the latter. Cornelia could accept this explanation. She smiled slightly "You went through all this trouble to kidnap me here. What do you want exactly?"

"Ms Stewart, I invited you to my home. I didn't kidnap you, please don't use such harsh words. Strictly speaking, you are my son's wife. We are family." Brennen pointed to a seat opposite him, "Ms. Stewart, please have a seat. I've ordered some exquisite coffee for us, why don't we chat over a cup"

Chapter 1005

Cornelia was a straight shooter, can't stand phony people. She didn't want to argue with him. "Expensive coffee should be shared with like-minded people. You've got a bone to pick with me, I've got one with you, so there's no p

oint wasting this cup of coffee. If you've got something to spill, just spit it out and don't waste our time"

Brennen countered, "Who said I've got a beef with you? If I really had it in for you, would I invite you for a coffee?"

Cornelia cut to the chase, "Can we drop the act? Doesn't it wear you out?"

This kind of phoniness made her sick to her stomach.

No matter what Cornelia said, Brennen still ordered the coffee. "Ms. Stewart, you standing there makes me look inhospitable. Even if you don't drink the coffee, please take a seat"

Standing was indeed tiring and Cornelia didn't want to make things worse for herself, so she sat down across from Brennen

Brennen didn't let someone else pour the coffee for her, but picked up a cup himself and took a few sips, "Ms. Stewart, do you play chess?"

Cornelia could, but she didn't want to play with him, "I don't"

Brennen expressed regret, "What a shame. I was hoping to play a game of chess with you. If you beat me, I'll let you go. If you lose

Cornelia cut him off, "If I lose, what would you do to me? Lock me up? Or kill me?"

Brennen responded,

'Ms. Stewart, do you misunderstand me? I invited you here just for a chat. Why do you have such a big chip on your shoulder about me?"

Cornelia glared at him, 'Don't you know why do I have such a big chip on my shoulder about you?"

Brennen asked her to explain, "Could you enlighten me?"

Cornelia was speechless. This guy was so phony!

Thank god Marcus wasn't influenced by him

Brennen continued, "Ms. Stewart, I want to say, if you can't beat me, please grant me one request."

Cornelia gritted her teeth in anger, "You had me kidnapped and brought here, if you want to say something, spit it out. Don't beat around the bush"

*Brennen looked at Cornelia and smiled,
"Marcus has been having you followed. Your every move is under his control. I invited you here in this unpleasant way today just to sidestep him and give us a chance to talk alone"*

Cornelia asked, "What do you want to talk about?"

Brennen replied, "About Marcus, about your grandmother's death, and about the man on your marriage certificate, Jeremy Artis. Which one of these three people are you most interested in, we'll talk about them first."

Cornelia had a hunch that Brennen was trying to sow discord between her and Marcus. No matter what he said, she didn't want to hear it, I'm not interested in any of them"

Hearing Cornelia's answer, Brennen didn't seem surprised at all.

Chapter 1006

He smirked a little. "I don't believe them when they say you're simple and naive. I figured anyone who could become the assistant to the CEO of the Hartley Group must have some smarts, at least enough to tell right from wrong"

“But today, it looks like you really can’t tell the difference. Your granny died under strange circumstances. You didn’t dig deeper, and just accepted Marcus’ word that she was killed by a driver.”

“Ms Stewart, have you ever considered that your granny might have been offed by Marcus?”

Cornelia stared at Brennen icily, not buying his story. “Don’t dump all the blame on Marcus. I think I know him better than you do.”

Brennen, “Do you really? Is it possible that the Marcus you know is just a façade, and you haven’t seen who he really is?”

Before Cornelia could reply, Brennen continued, “Ten years ago, he kicked his own mother out and sent his dad to prison. Do you know why he did that? He might tell you it’s because his parents did a lot of wrong by him... Is it possible that’s just an excuse, and he was actually after the Hartley Group?”

Cornelia, “So what if he was after the Hartley Group? I’m his wife, I’ll back him no matter what.”

Cornelia’s resolution seemed to take Brennen aback. He hadn’t expected Cornelia to be so steadfast. But he wasn’t about to let her have her way, “I told you before. Marcus. and Jeremy. They’re twins, not the same person. Marcus killed Jeremy and took his place, even took Jeremy’s wife, you, for himself”

Cornelia grabbed the coffee cup on the table in anger, splashing the coffee in Brennen’s face, “You’re such a jerk! Haven’t you hurt him enough? Now you’re framing him? What on earth did he do to deserve a father like you.”

Brennen, “You’re getting worked up. What are you afraid of? Afraid you put your trust in the wrong person? Afraid you picked the wrong guy? Afraid you’re with the man who killed your husband and granny?”

Cornelia, "Shut up! I won't believe your bullshit."

Brennen, "You don't believe me, I'm not surprised. I said it before, what woman wouldn't want to marry Marcus? Even if you knew he wasn't it, you'd choose not to investigate and keep convincing yourself Marcus and Jeremy are the same person, so you could be with him.."

Cornelia, "Shut up!"

your

husband, you

wouldn't admit

But Brennen

kept talking, planting seeds of doubt in her heart, waiting for them to take root and sprout. Then, the real show would begin.

"Ms. Stewart, will my silence change the facts? As Marcus' biological father, I know him better than you. I've seen his brutal side. Not only did he send his dad to prison. kick his mom out, he even killed his own brother Jeremy to grab hold of the Hartley Group..."

Cornelia, "Shut up!"

Brennen, "Are you scared now? After thinking about it, have you found some red flags? Think about it, observe closely, you might find more. Of course, you can choose to continue to ignore them, remain as the wife of the CEO of the Hartley Group, and let your husband Jeremy and your granny die in vain..."

Cornelia opened her mouth to retort when a deep, familiar, and oppressive voice came from behind, "You know how ruthless I can be, yet you dare to mess with my wife?"

Cornelia quickly turned around, and sure enough, saw Marcus' tall figure approaching

Chapter 1007

Brennen instantly swiveled his head towards Marcus, "So, you're here. I guess I had to invite your wife to get your attention"

Cornelia suddenly realized that Brennen's true target had always been Marcus, and she was just a bait to lure him out

Marcus shot Brennen a cold glance and moved over to Cornelia, pulling her into his side. "Did he hurt you?" he asked

Cornelia shook her head, "How did you get here?"

Marcus gently patted her head, "We'll talk about it later. For now, you need to leave. Ayden is waiting for you outside"

"I want to stay with you" In Cornelia's eyes, Brennen was a man completely devoid of familial affection

Well, that wasn't entirely accurate. It wasn't that Brennen lacked familial affection, it was just that he never saw Marcus as family. To Brennen, Marcus was disposable if he chose to hurt Marcus, it would be brutal. Cornelia didn't want to leave Marcus alone in this predicament. She wanted to stand by his side, if he would allow her

Marcus laughed lightly. "Trust me on this. This is between me and that bastard. I can handle it. Don't worry"

Cornelia wanted to say something, but Marcus cut her off, "I don't want you involved in this."

With Marcus being so straightforward, Cornelia didn't push it. "Alright, I'll be waiting at the door. Just give me a sign if you need me."

Her simple words always had a way of softening him. "Okay..."

"I'll go now Remember. I'm right outside" Just as Cornelia turned to leave, Brennen's chilling voice echoed behind her

He sneered, "Marcus, what are you afraid of? Afraid that you're not the same person as Jeremy? Afraid of your little secret of stealing your brother's wife being exposed? Afraid of the truth about you having her grandmother killed coming to light? Afraid she'll leave you when she learns the truth?"

"Don't worry, this woman is just a pleasure-seeker. She's eager to be the wife of the president of Hartley Group Even if all the evidence is laid bare before her, she won't believe that you're the worst one"

Cornelia spun around, ready to retort, but was met with Marcus deep, abyss-like gaze. He didn't say anything, but she could feel his pain. "Jeremy..."

"Leave," he said.

"No matter what others say to drive a wedge between us, I'll always believe in you," Cornelia said.

Marcus evidently didn't expect her to say that. He paused for a moment, then smiled, "I know"

As Cornelia began to walk away, a loud bang echoed behind her. She whirled around to see a deep wound on Brennen's forehead, blood streaming down his face, painting a horrifying and eerie picture.

Brennen wiped the blood off his face, but he was still smiling "Never thought you, of all people, would care so much about this woman."

Marcus icy voice reached Cornelia's ears again. "Insult me, and I can let it slide. But if you dare to speak ill of her again, I'll make sure you never speak another word"

Brennen smirked, "And what if I do? What can you do to me? Kill me? I'm not afraid of death. If you want to take my life with yours, I won't care"

Marcus retorted, "If you're so eager to die, I'd be happy to oblige!"

Chapter 1008

Cornelia worried about the possible consequences, hurried back to hold him, "Jeremy, chill out, man. He just cussed me out, I've already got him back in my head"

Who knew if it was her words or her warm hug that did the trick, but the viciousness in Marcus eyes vanished without a trace. When he looked at her, all he had was warmth "Why'd you come back? Wait outside for me"

Cornelia said, "Promise me, no rash moves."

Marcus chuckled "Relax, if I wanted to ruin him, there are plenty of ways to do it without leaving a trace or evidence that'd get me in trouble."

Upon

hearing this, Cornelia was finally reassured. She quickly left the room, not hearing what ever was said behind her. When she stepped outside, she found Ayden.

"I'm really sorry," Ayden apologized, "It was my oversight that got you taken by Brenner's men."

Cornelia said, "It's not your fault"

"I was careless " Ayden had failed to recognize the danger when Cornelia suddenly went down to get something from the car, and in a blink of an eye, she was taken away.

He immediately took action, searching for her throughout the city. After tracking the route of the car Cornelia was in, he reported the situation to Marcus in Riverton.

He didn't expect Marcus to be on a plane to Rosenberg as well, having just gotten off the plane. So, he came here first to ensure Cornelia's safety, while waiting for Marcus to arrive from the airport...

“There’s no need to blame yourself,” Comelia said to Ayden. “Ayden, how long have you been with Marcus? Do you know about his feud with Brennen?”

“I’ve been with President Hartley for over twenty years” Ayden respectfully answered. “When I was a child, he saved my mother and me. I didn’t know much back then. Everything I know, he paid for me to learn. I wasn’t with him the year he had the conflict with Brennen, so I’m not quite sure about what exactly happened between them.”

Cornelia asked, “What about your mother, Dr. Dawson? She was with Marcus at the time, right? Did she ever mention anything to you?”

Ayden shook his head

Cornelia asked. “Where did Marcus send your mother?”

Ayden answered, “He allowed her to retire early.”

Cornelia asked. “Did she ever complain about us?”

Ayden replied, “She didn’t understand her role and made mistakes. President Hartley was very lenient in not punishing her. She has no right to blame him.”

Cornelia asked, “Do you have her contact info? I want to call her to ask about what happened back then.”

Ayden answered, “I have it, but I can’t give it to you.”

Cornelia raised an eyebrow and asked, “Why not?”

Ayden replied, “Because President Hartley doesn’t want you to interfere with his issues with Brennen. Besides, my mother won’t blame President Hartley, but she’ll blame you. She believes that the reason why President Hartley let her retire early and not stay with him was because of you”

Cornelia realized that there was no chance of getting the details about the past from Dr. Dawson.

"Maybe she should blame me," Cornelia slightly smiled, turning her head, she could see Marcus' upright figure in the pavilion in the distance from the doorway.

Chapter 1009

Marcus was standing with his back to her, tall and straight as a rod

He was probably saying something Brennen was also talking, but she couldn't hear anything All she could feel was the tension building up around them because of their standoff.

Every second of her wait felt like pure agony. In an attempt to chill out a bit, Cornelia decided to chat up Ayden, "Ayden..."

Ayden responded in a calm tone, "What's up?"

Cornelia asked, "Could you maybe stick with him? He won't let me be there, but he didn't say you couldn't. Could you...?"

Ayden assured her, "President Hartley is a tough cookie. Brennen's got nothing on him. You've got nothing to worry about."

It was not that she doubted Marcus' strength, but she was worried that Brennen would use family ties to hurt Marcus. Marcus might seem cold as ice on the surface, but deep down he was actually quite sensitive. When faced with the truly heartless Brennen, even if Marcus came out on top, it could still wound his soul

But she didn't know how to express all this to Ayden, so all she could do was wait in silence, hoping Marcus could settle the score with Brennen ASAP

Cornelia waited anxiously. About half an hour later, Marcus finally turned around and walked toward her. Cornelia rushed up to him, grabbing his hand.

In such hot weather, his hand was as cold as ice. She rubbed his hand, "Why are your hands so cold? What did he say to you?"

Marcus scoffed, "What else could he say? He's just trying to get something he wants from me"

He didn't want to go into detail, and Cornelia didn't push it, "Let's get out of here."

From the moment she stepped in, Cornelia felt there was something off about this place. It gave her the creeps.

"Alright, let's head home Marcus led her out, hand in hand, with Ayden following behind.

"

As they were about to step out, Brennen's voice echoed from behind "Marcus, the Hartley Group is the fruit of the Hartley family's blood, sweat, and tears over generations, not your personal business empire. You should give your siblings their fair share, or I won't hesitate to bring down the whole Hartley Group and leave us all with nothing"

Marcus kept walking, not even turning around to acknowledge Brennen's threat.

Cornelia gripped Marcus hand tighter, looking up at him. His face was expressionless, and she couldn't read

his thoughts. She didn't know what she could do for him, and all she could do was hold his hand, giving him some warmth, letting him know she was always there.

Soon, they left this place.

Ayden drove while Marcus and Cornelia sat in the back.

Marcus closed his eyes, resting in the back seat, not even acknowledging Cornelia. She wanted to ask what Brennen had said to him. She almost opened her mouth a few times, but in the end, she couldn't bring herself to do it.

The car drove for a

while. He kept his eyes closed, then spoke up, "Do you want to know what Brennen said to me?"

Cornelia nodded, "Can you tell me?"

Suddenly, Marcus opened his eyes. The sharp look in his eyes vanished the moment he saw her worried face.

He reached out, cradling the back of her head, pulling her towards him swiftly, and planted a kiss on her lips.

His kiss was passionate and intense, like a predator on the hunt. Cornelia's lips were numbed by it, but she didn't shy away, instead, she tried to match his pace.

God knew how long it lasted, Cornelia's lips were about to lose all feeling when he finally let her go.

Cornelia blushed, lightly biting her lip.

Chapter 1010

Marcus noticed her small gesture and gently stroked her kiss bruised lips with his thumb. "Did I kiss too hard? Did I hurt you?"

Cornelia nodded a little, whispering. "A bit."

Marcus asked, "Then why didn't you dodge me?"

Suddenly, Cornelia flung herself at him, hugging his waist tightly. "Because I want you to know that no matter what happens, I'll always be by your side."

Marcus held her tightly, his hand gently caressing her back. "Why don't you believe what Brennen said?"

Cornelia asked, "Why should I?"

Marcus replied, "He slandered me. Haven't you ever doubted that I might have done those bad things?"

Cornelia quickly covered his mouth with her hand "Don't you dare say that."

Marcus held her hand, kissing it gently “Cornelia, I am Jeremy Jeremy is me. I don’t have a twin brother like Brennen said”

Cornelia had never doubted that he wasn’t Jeremy, but hearing him assert it so confidently made her feel even more assured. “I know You are Jeremy. You’re the same person. I never doubted that.”

Marcus fell silent for a moment. If one day, I lose everything, would you still want to stay by my side?”

Cornelia lifted her head from his chest, looking at him. “Did I marry you because I knew you were rich?”

Marcus replied, “No”

Cornelia said, “Then what do you have to worry about?”

He fell silent again. He had too many worries, but he couldn’t tell her all of them.

Cornelia said, “Your hands are so cold. Are you feeling okay? Let’s have Ayden drive us to the hospital.”

Marcus replied, “I’m fine.”

Cornelia said, “Jeremy...”

Marcus asked, “What?”

Cornelia thought for a moment, then continued, “If one day the Hartley Group collapses, and you lose everything, it’s okay. I can work and support us. I’m very capable, not just to support you but also Granny Luisa and Bri. So, you don’t need to worry”

Marcus held her hand again, kissing it. “Okay, you can support me then.”

Cornelia added. “So, you don’t need to worry”

Marcus agreed, “Okay”

As they spoke, the car had already returned to Cornelia's neighborhood.

Dylan had been waiting at the entrance to the neighborhood and, seeing Cornelia returned safely by Marcus, he breathed a sigh of relief. "President Hartley, I will resign."

Marcus didn't even glance at him and just walked into the neighborhood with Cornelia.

Cornelia began, "Dylan didn't betray you. He was threatened by Brennen and had to..."

Before she could finish, Marcus coldly cut her off. "Cornelia, you don't have to feel sorry for everyone. Not everyone deserves your defense."

Cornelia felt hurt by his outburst. "Who said I was defending him?"

She was so upset she was on the verge of tears. Seeing this, Marcus quickly softened his voice. "If you want to forgive him, I will forgive him. Can you please not cry?"

Cornelia snapped angrily, "Who wants you to forgive him? He's not my friend. What's his situation got to do with me? I only care about you! I'm worried that you'll start doubting your own actions because you feel betrayed. What I want to tell you is that you weren't betrayed. You're a respectable and excellent CEO"

Chapter 1011

Cornelia was pissed off, ranting and raving, but Marcus only caught one sentence.

She said the only person she cared about was him. That was all he needed to hear. The rest didn't matter

He reached out, cupped her face gently. "Do you really think I give a damn if Dylan really betrayed me?"

This only made Comelia angrier. She turned her head away refusing to look at him, "Maybe I'm overthinking"

Marcus turned her face back to him, forcing her to look at him. "Cornelia, you're the only one I care about too."

The unexpected confession left Cornelia flustered. She blushed, avoiding his gaze. But Marcus wouldn't let her. He leaned in closer to her.

Cornelia thought he was going to kiss her again and instinctively closed her eyes. However, she didn't get the kiss she expected, just heard Marcus' low chuckle.

Cornelia opened her eyes, her face flushed, glaring at him unhappily, "What are you laughing at? Stop laughing!"

Marcus pulled her into his arms, "You're such a bossy boots!"

Cornelia, "I am bossy. Are you not happy? Then bite me!"

Marcus did just that, biting her soft face. He bit a bit hard, leaving a circle of teeth marks.

Cornelia became angry, mimicked him, and bit him, too. Because of their height difference, she couldn't reach his face, so she bit his lip. She bit hard, breaking his lip and the taste of blood quickly filled the space between them.

After, Cornelia felt a bit regretful, "Did I hurt you?"

Marcus, "I'm not in pain!"

Cornelia, "How can it not hurt?"

He was a normal person, not made of iron.

Marcus smiled, "Compared to emotional pain, this physical pain is nothing"

The emotional pain he was referring to must be about Brennen, what the hell did that bastard say to him?

Cornelia felt heartbroken hearing this but didn't ask more. If he didn't want to discuss it now, asking was useless. When he was ready, he would tell her.

She took his hand, "Let's go home."

"What a shameless hussy." A neighbor coming towards them gave Cornelia a sidelong glance. On recognizing her, the words became even harsher.

"A girl should be reserved. Making out with a man in broad daylight is absolutely shameless. If my daughter dared to do such a thing, I would break her legs with her father."

Cornelia didn't want to bother with this person, but she kept crossing the line, "Your mother left you a few months after you were born, and your father died young. You've grown up without a mother. Now that your grandmother who raised you is also gone, I wouldn't be surprised by any shameless thing you do."

Cornelia wasn't going to let this woman insult her, "What's wrong with me hugging my husband? Are we affecting you?"

The middle-

aged woman blanched, then haughtily retorted, "Who knows if he's really your husband? After all, you've tried to seduce other women's husbands before. We don't know where you got that video from, but you got Orlando sent to jail....."

The middle-

aged woman was still ranting when she suddenly felt a chill run down her spine.

She lifted her head to meet a pair of threatening eyes, and it scared her so much that she forgot to breathe for a moment. She kept quiet, and Cornelia paid no mind to her. Grabbing Marcus, she was ready to leave. "Are you coming with me to pick up Tablia from Abby's or going to my place first?"

Marcus. Til wait for you here. You go get her

Cornelia Alright. People here love to gossip, if you hear anything just ignore them."

Marcus just smiled. "Sure"

After Cornelia left Marcus quickly went back to the woman. He looked at her. "Didn't you know that several families in your neighborhood have moved out?"

Leila and Marina Orlando's family, sold their houses at a low price and hurriedly moved out a few days ago. It looked like they were fleeing.

The neighbors said that Orlando had committed a crime and his family were so ashamed that they quickly sold their house at a low price and several families quickly left

Rosenberg

The woman never doubted these words before But now, hearing his tone, it seemed that things weren't that simple

The woman clenched her fists tightly and looked at Marcus with fear. "Did they move because of you? What are you trying to do?"

Marcus laughed coldly. "Are you thinking of moving too?"

The woman quickly shook her head. The neighborhood was old and the house prices were low. The money from selling her house wouldn't even be enough for a down payment on a new one. She didn't have a salary, her family was living off her husband's meager wage. They were already struggling, and she had no money to get a better

house

Marcus. "If you don't want to move, do as I say"

The woman didn't know what she should do, so she just nodded, "I do as you say"

When Cornelia reached Abigail's house, she knocked on the door but there was no answer. She called Abigail and found out everyone was looking for her

Upon receiving her call, Abigail suddenly started crying, "Smelly Nelly, I was so scared when I couldn't find you. Do you have any idea how terrified I was?"

Cornelia chuckled and gently said. "What are you afraid of?"

Abigail, "There's a lot of things that scare me"

Abigail was scared that Cornelia wouldn't be able to recover from losing her grandma, she cared that Cornelia would be tormented to the point of suicide, and even more scared that someone would hurt Cornelia.

During the time she couldn't find Cornelia, all sorts of terrible thoughts came into Abigail's mind. The more she thought about them, the more scared she got. Thankfully.

Cornelia was safe

Cornelia. "I'm okay, you guys hurry back."

Abigail, "Okay, I'll notify everyone."

Cornelia. "Jeremy is also in Rosenberg I'll take him home first. Can you bring Tahlia to my place later?"

Abigail. "He's here again? Seems like he really can't leave you alone. The moment you arrived at Rosenberg, he followed. Were you picking him up just now, is that why your phone wasn't reachable?"

Cornelia didn't want Abigail to worry, so she nodded, "Yes, I got a call from him and rushed to the airport I accidentally switched my phone to airplane mode."

Abigail sighed in relief, "Smelly Nelly, as long as you're okay..."

Cornelia, "Nothing will happen to me, don't overthink "

Abigail, Then you just stay home and wait for me. Don't go wandering around."

Cornelia, "Alright"

When Cornelia went downstairs and walked out of the building, she saw the woman standing at the door, looking around as if she was waiting for her. Cornelia originally planned to pretend she didn't see her, but the woman came over smiling as soon as she saw her.

Her attitude towards Cornelia had completely changed, "Nelly, I misspoke earlier, I said something wrong. I'm sincerely sorry, I hope you can forgive me."

Chapter 1013

No doubt, Cornelia knew it must be because Marcus had done something So those people who were hostile to her before, suddenly changed their attitude towards her "What did my husband say to you?"

The woman shook her head "He didn't say anything"

Camelia raised an eyebrow staring intensely at the woman

She didn't say anything, but the woman felt guilty and so she honestly told Cornelia. "He just asked me if I wanted to move

Cornelia, Is that all?

The woman went on “Do you remember Leila and Marina, Orlando’s aunts? They recently sold their houses at a price lower than the market price and then hastily left Rosenberg saving they would never come back I like others, thought they left because Orlando went to jail

and they felt disgraced. But just now I learned from your husband that he must have done something that forced those families to sell their houses and leave Rosenberg”

By the time she got to this point, Cornelia had understood.

The day she returned to Rosenberg with her grandmother’s ashes, Leila and Marina insulted her, and Marcus heard it. Cornelia thought it was over, but she didn’t expect Marcus to do so much for her silently

The woman went on. “Nelly, you know, my family has been living here for generations, where else can we move to? Please forgive me. You should know how much influence I have in the community as long as you forgive me. I promise there will be no one in our community who will defame you again. I can even help you look after your house for free. I won’t let Robison take over your house”

Probably worried that Cornelia would hold a grudge, the woman hurriedly continued, “If you don’t forgive me, your husband will definitely make me move It’s possible that we won’t

just be moving out of this community, we might not even be able to live in Rosenberg anymore. I have elderly parents and school-aged children at home I really

can’t move

The woman was crying as she spoke. “Nelly, your husband is not an easy man to deal with. I accidentally offended him before, and I really won’t dare to do it again.

Cornelia had no major grudge against this woman, so she didn’t need to force her to leave Rosenberg

Cornelia. “If you can keep your promise, then I won’t hold it against you today”

"I will definitely keep my promise, and I will change the perception of people in the community towards you as soon as possible" The woman smiled at Comelia. After all, I have no grudge against you, and I don't need to always trouble you"

Cornelia smiled, "You just realized now that I have no grudge against you? Then why did you curse me before?"

The woman scratched her head awkwardly. "That was before. It will never happen again. Next time you come back, everyone will definitely praise you."

Cornelia said, "Well, thank you in advance"

The woman said. "I have a daughter too, so I understand the importance of chastity for girls. You were able to show evidence that you were framed and put Orlando in jail, I'm very glad"

Comelia asked, "You're really glad?"

Fearing that Cornelia did not trust her, the woman quickly explained, "I wasn't intentionally defaming you, I only spread damaging rumors about you because I was paid by others"

Cornelia didn't expect that there was a chain of interests behind all this. Who was it that was secretly defaming her? She decided to find out who it was, "Who paid you?"

The woman replied. "I don't know what his name is. I just know he not only paid me, but Robison also got a lot of money from him. That's why Robison has been slandering and belittling you all these years"

Cornelia asked 'All these years?'

The woman replied I can't remember exactly when Probably about two years ago"

Cornelia silently repeated the woman's words, "Two years ago?"

Chapter 1014

Two years ago, it was exactly the time when she and Jeremy got married. During that period, someone was deliberately throwing a wad of cash to tarnish her reputation.

So, was the cash-thrower someone who knew Marcus? And this person who knew Marcus, wanted to push him into a deep pit from which there was no return, and had the power to pull off these wicked schemes. Apart from Brennen, Cornelia couldn't think of a second person

She asked again, "How did they contact you?"

The woman replied. "The person was very careful, never contacting us by phone. The person meeting us was always changing, and they always arranged to meet in places without surveillance I haven't been able to get a good look at their face"

Cornelia asked, "Apart from slandering me, did they ask you to do anything else?"

The woman replied, "No"

Cornelia continued to ask, "Has he contacted you since Orlando was jailed?"

The woman shook her head, "No."

Cornelia said, "Okay, let's keep in touch. If he contacts you again, let me know."

The woman said, "Cornelia, I'm sorry. My husband is the only one bringing home the bacon in my family. He has to support the whole family by himself. I just wanted to bring in a little extra dough, so I took the money"

Cornelia said, "If he gives you money again, just take it"

The woman said, "If he finds out, he'll definitely not let me off easily. Even though I haven't seen his face, I can tell from his back that he's not an easy person to deal with."

Cornelia said, "Whatever."

The woman said. "If there's nothing else, I'll leave first."

Cornelia nodded, watching her leave. Once the woman was far away, she whispered, "You can come out now."

With

her words, Marcus' tall figure emerged from behind a nearby bush. He had heard the whole conversation between Cornelia and the woman.

Cornelia asked, "Do you have anyone in mind?"

Marcus sneered, "Who else could it be?"

Cornelia thought the same.

Cornelia asked, "Is he doing this to sway the public opinion and tarnish the Hartley Group when you disclose my identity in future?!"

Marcus said. "He wants to snatch the company from my hands."

Cornelia asked, "Then..."

Marcus cut her off, "What if I let him have it?"

Cornelia was taken aback. She was a little angry. "The Hartley Group has grown step by step under your management to the scale it has today. You've put so much effort into it. How can you just hand it over to him?"

Marcus said, "I've only been managing the Hartley Group for a decade or so. Before I took over, it already had a history of nearly a hundred years. There are many complex matters involved. Even though I've made a major reshuffle of the internal personnel, there are still some people I couldn't replace due to the large number of employees."

Cornelia had a nagging feeling that something bad was about to happen, "Did Brennen find some leverage to threaten you, or what?"

Chapter 1015

Marcus chuckled, not replying. "Let's head home first"

Cornelia asked. "You're not going to tell me, are you?"

Marcus replied, "I'm hungry, can you whip up something to eat when we get home?"

Seeing he wouldn't say more, Cornelia didn't press, "Alright, let's go"

Meanwhile, Brenner's guys managed to locate Dylan again, bringing him to the courtyard where Cornelia had just left.

The two men who found Dylan, the same ones who found Cornelia, were significantly nicer to Dylan, 'Mr. Brennen is waiting for you inside, right this way'

Dylan followed them into the courtyard, passing the fountain and finally entering an elegantly decorated dining hall.

Various mouth-watering dishes were laid out.

Brennen greeted Dylan with a smile, "I know you skipped lunch. I had some dishes prepared for you. Hope you like them."

Dylan sat across Brennen, his face expressionless, "I've done what you asked Where's Carolina?"

Dylan, an orphan, was raised by Carolina from the orphanage To him, Carolina was as important as a mother.

Brennen knew this weakness of Dylan, which was why he had taken Carolina hostage.

Knowing Carolina was in danger. Dylan couldn't just ignore it. After some thought, he made a tough decision.

Brennen said, "When you tricked Cornelia into getting into the car, our people would have already returned Carolina to her home. I'm a man of my word I promised not to hurt her as long as you did what I asked."

Brennen was far from trustworthy, so Dylan quickly video called Carolina to ensure she was safe at home. Only then he breathed a sigh of relief.

As he ended the call, Brennen filled his glass with wine, "What are you planning to do now?"

Dylan drained his glass in one gulp. "You should know well, Marcus won't let me off the hook easily after I betrayed him. Whether I can save my own skin is still up in the air. The one thing I'm certain of is that I won't be able to keep my job as the head of Rosenberg branch of the Hartley Group. Even if Marcus doesn't kill me, no other companies would dare to hire me. I might have to live off my savings from now on"

Brennen looked at the troubled Dylan, "Your next employer is sitting right in front of you, haven't you considered teaming up with me?"

Dylan lifted his gaze, staring at Brennen coldly.

"I haven't forgotten how you used Carolina to threaten me. I hold grudges."

Brennen responded, "Good that you hold grudges, I'd be worried if you didn't."

Dylan said, "Whatever you want, I won't collaborate with you"

Dylan rejected him, but Brennen wasn't in a rush, "No problem! You'll have plenty of time to consider working for me. With me, I might not be able to guarantee other things, but at least I can ensure your safety"

Dylan smirked. "Ten years ago, he was a minor, and you were no match for him. Do you think you can snatch his people away from him now?"

Brennen filled his glass again, "Ten years ago, I was caught off guard by his sudden attack. But things are different now. I'm fully prepared. Snatching someone from him should be a piece of cake for me"

Dylan paused for a moment, then asked, "Can you really guarantee my safety?"

Brennen replied, "Whether I can save you or not, you have nothing to lose at this point, why not give it a shot?"

Dylan asked. "You're asking me to gamble with my life?"

Brennen responded, "If you don't try, can you be sure you'll survive?"

Dylan replied, "Maybe I can plead with Cornelia."

Chapter 1016

Brennen said. "That woman is all over her husband like white on rice. She won't hear a word against him. If you're fantasizing about her pleading your case to him, you're barking up the wrong tree"

Dylan didn't pick up the thread. He just started chowing down, wolfing his food down and washing it down with a few drinks. "If I were to work for you, what do you want me to do?"

**Deal with Marcus, of course," Brennen replied. "You've been up close and personal with him for years. You must have your hands on some juicy stuff I want."*

Dylan took a swig straight from the bottle, "I just want to stay alive! My life is in my own hands."

"So?" Brennen prodded.

"I'm in," Dylan declared

Brennen wasn't surprised at all, he'd seen it coming from a mile away. "Great, here's to a fruitful partnership."

Dylan looked at the hand Brennen extended, hesitantly shook it and said, "I just want to live"

“As long as you want to, you will,” Brennen replied, securing his grip on one of Marcus’ Ioyalists. A smug grin spread across his face. He couldn’t wait to see what Marcus could pull out of his hat against his carefully laid plans. Maybe, in no time, the Hartley Group would be back under his thumb.

Marcus skipped lunch, so Cornelia cooked him a plate of spaghetti. He wasn’t really a fan, but because she made it, it tasted good.

While he was eating. Cornelia just sat across from him, watching him. He was not only handsome with an elegant bearing but even his eating manners were a feast for the eyes. She could watch him forever.

Marcus noticed her gaze. “Why are you staring at me? Got something on my face?”

“You’re so handsome! You’re the most handsome man I’ve ever seen!” Cornelia blurted out.

Marcus grinned, “Learned to flatter now,

“No, I haven’t.” She protested

“Then spit it out, Marcus said

have you?”

“Between you and Brennen..” Cornelia started but the mention of the name immediately darkened Marcus’ face.

“Don’t bring him up in front of me, especially not during mealtime. I don’t need that scum bag ruining my mood. Didn’t you say you were going to clean up your grandmother’s stuff? Get on it then. Once I’m done here, we’ll head back to Riverton together, Marcus said

“I’ve arranged a charity event with Sallie. We’re helping women. I won’t be able to go back with you,” Comelia replied.

“Then I’ll wait for you,” Marcus said.

"I can go back on my own..."

Marcus suddenly snapped at her, "I said we're going back together. This is not a request, it's a statement."

Chapter 1017

*She was dumbfounded by his sudden outburst
Comelia blinked, staring at Marcus with a puppy-dog face.*

Seeing her pitiful expression, Marcus felt a tug at his heartstrings, but he didn't back down, "Just listen to me on this one, okay?"

Cornelia huffed, turning her head away, not wanting to deal with him anymore

Marcus reached out, gently stroking her head, whispering. "Cornelia, I know you can handle your own stuff, but I still want to do something for you. You not letting me do anything makes me feel like I'm useless to you, like whether I'm here or not doesn't matter."

So, he had all these worries

Comelia felt the same way She didn't want to be clingy, didn't want him to think of her as a burden, so she tried to handle some things on her own.

*Since the conversation had come this far, Cornelia decided to open up,
"Whether as Jeremy or Marcus, what you've done for me is more than enough. You're important to me, and you've never been dispensable"*

Marcus, "I got it."

Cornelia, "Eat. If you don't, the pasta will get cold and taste awful"

Marcus, "Alright."

Watching him elegantly eating pasta, seeing his handsome profile, Cornelia couldn't control herself, leaned in, and planted a kiss on his cheek. Realizing what she had just done

e, she quickly pulled away, standing up to leave, I'm going to sort through my grandma's stuff."

But as soon as she got up. Marcus grabbed her arm, pulling her towards him, "You think you can just kiss me and run?"

Cornelia lost her balance, falling into his arms, her nose hitting his hard chest, the pain brought tears to her eyes. Her hot tears soaked Marcus' shirt.

Her tears threw Marcus off, "Cornelia, what's wrong?"

Cornelia sniffed, "Let go of me first."

He held her tight, "No! I won't let go! Not in this lifetime."

Cornelia felt that Marcus was acting a little strange today, "I just bumped my nose. It hurts like hell... I'm not leaving you."

Marcus looked down to see her nose was indeed red. He bent down, gently kissing her reddened nose, "Still hurts? I'll get Dr. Lester to check on you right away."

"No need" Cornelia looked at him, wanting to ask what he and Brennen talked about today.

But before she could ask, there was a knock on the door, followed by Abigail's voice, "Smelly Nelly, open the door!"

Cornelia immediately got up to open the door. When the door opened, Abigail saw her red nose and eyes, "Did you cry? Who messed with you?"

Cornelia, "I just bumped my nose. It hurt so bad my eyes got watery"

Abigail, "Really? It wasn't your husband bullying you?"

Cornelia, "He would never do that."

Abigail checked her over a few times, making sure she was truly safe, then finally relaxed, "I've brought your sister back. I'll leave her with you and I'll be going"

Cornelia asked, "Don't you want to come in and sit for a while?"

Chapter 1018

Abigail said. "Your hubby's around I better not go in I gotta keep a decent distance

Comelia asked, "Didn't you used to enjoy his company? Why the sudden change of heart?"

Abigail replied. "My boyfriend gets ridiculously jealous Just yesterday when he was leaving Rosenberg he told me to keep my eyes off other guys

Cornelia asked. "What's wrong with looking at other guys? Just because you're seeing someone doesn't mean you're blind

Abigail said, "I agree, but he said it makes him jealous, and he had a point. If I've decided to marry him, I should respect his feelings and keep my contact with other guys to a minimum"

Comelia said. "Abby this sounds a bit off

Abigail cut her off, "Enough about that, I gotta go. Hit me up if you need something"

Comelia watched Abigail leave, and as she withdrew her gaze, she caught Tahlia's

Comelia rubbed her head and asked. "What's up. Tahlia?"

Tahlia wrapped her arms around Cornelia and started sobbing "Cornelia..."

Comelia asked. "What's wrong, why are you crying?"

Tahlia said, "I couldn't reach you earlier and I was scared. I was afraid I couldn't find you, afraid of losing you."

Cornelia gently patted her back and said, "That won't happen. We'll always be together. Marcus is here too, go say hi and then we can sort through our grandma's stuff"

Tahlia asked. "I thought he wasn't coming to Rosenberg. Why is he here?"

Cornelia replied, "He's here for some business."

Tahlia said, "Cornelia"

Cornelia said, "Speak your mind, Tahlia I'm your sister, no need to hold back."

Tahlia said, "Once we're back in Riverton, I think I'm going to rent my own place. I still have some savings that should last me until I find a job. I'm an adult now, and since I used to have a thing for Marc, it feels a bit weird to live with you guys."

Cornelia said, "You can stay at my place for now, no need to go anywhere else. Once you're financially stable, you can think about moving out. If it makes you uncomfortable, I won't let Marcus come around when you're there."

Upon hearing this, Tahlia felt even more awkward.

"But it's your house and he's your husband. It doesn't feel right for me to be there and have him not come."

Cornelia said, "You're my sister and I'm your sister. Don't ever say that again."

Tahlia said, "Alright, I'll take your word for it" She took Cornelia's kindness to heart.

She also made a silent vow to work hard, earn money, and become stronger so she could protect Cornelia.

Granny Rebecca didn't leave much behind, hardly anything of value. Cornelia had some savings and bought Granny Rebecca a fridge worth over a thousand dollars. But after they moved to Riverton, the fridge was sold by Robison and his wife

The most abundant things left were books, most of which were textbooks from Granny Rebecca's teaching days, each annotated meticulously by her. As Cornelia was sorting through the books, she came across a notebook wrapped in old newspaper

Opening the cover, she saw Granny Rebecca's handwriting. She kept flipping the pages, and when she saw the contents of the second page, her mind went blank

Chapter 1019

The notebook read

"September 1, 1976, Sunny

Today is the first day of the new school year, and also the day I welcome new students.

Not far from home, I heard a baby crying I followed the sound and saw a new basket by the side of the road with a little baby in it.

The child is still very small, looks like he's just a month old.

The baby is crying his little face is red, and it breaks my heart to see looked around but couldn't find the child's parents. However, I found a note in the basket. The note recorded the baby's birthday, he was born on the fifth of July, 1976.

In addition to the baby's birth date, the note also left a message.

'I had a child out of wedlock, the father of the child is unknown, and as a result, I have become a woman despised by those around me.

My family is ashamed because I had a child before marriage, and my father has more than once asked me to leave home with the child. I want to leave and find the child's father, but the child's father is like he has never appeared in this world, he disappeared without a trace.

I can't find the child's father. I can't afford to raise my child. I can't bear the accusations of those around me. I can't accept them calling me a whore. I can't accept them saying my child is a shameful bastard. I can't accept all of this

I wanted to take my child and leave this world. When I was preparing to jump into the river with my child, my child looked at me with bright eyes, and I hesitated. My child just came to this world, he hasn't seen the beauty of this world, I don't have the right to deprive him of his life. After thinking about it, I decided to abandon the child since I can't raise him, hoping that a kind person can adopt him. If you find my child, please treat him well. I will bless you and the child in another world!

After reading this, I guessed the child's mother might be suicidal. I was busy contacting people to find this woman, but after a day and a night, I couldn't find her.

In the surrounding area,

I didn't hear about an unmarried girl just having a baby. I think the child's mother probably wanted to spare the child from further humiliation, so she abandoned him far away

After careful consideration, and the child is very cute, I decided to take the child home and convinced my husband to adopt this child)

In addition to this note, the notebook also contained a blurred note. This proved that the information just now was not made up by Granny Rebecca

After reading this note, Cornelia's heart trembled.

Cornelia remembered that Robison was born in 1973, while her father Hawthorne was born in 1976, specifically on the fifth of July

If this diary was real, then her father was the child Granny Rebecca adopted! Robison should be Granny Rebecca's biological son. But why in Cornelia's memory, Robison was the child Granny Rebecca adopted?

Cornelia was confused, so she continued to read the diary, which also recorded a lot of information about the adopted child.

"September 10, still sunny, cloudless

Chapter 1020

I've had this kid for ten days now, and he seems to have taken a liking to me. He doesn't cry as long as I'm holding him. We've even given him a fancy name – Hawthorne"

At the sight of this name, Cornelia's heart raced. Turned out, her dad was the kid her grandma adopted!

This meant that all these years. Granny Rebecca's affection for this kid, who had no blood ties with her, actually surpassed her love for her own child

Wait a minute, something was not right

Cornelia quickly realized something was off. If her father wasn't her grandma's biological child, then why did the DNA test between her sister Tahlia and her grandma confirm they were blood-related?

Which piece of info was real? Which one was a sham?

Cornelia couldn't figure it out, so she shot Marcus a text, "Jeremy, when we did the DNA test for Tahlia and my grandma, could someone have tampered with the results?"

Instead of replying, Marcus quickly showed up at Granny Rebecca's room, "What's up?"

Cornelia handed him Granny Rebecca's notebook, "Take a look."

Marcus skimmed through it and got the gist, "So your dad isn't your grandma's biological child? So you suspect the DNA test results between your grandma and Tahlia may have been tampered with?"

Cornelia said. "My grandma couldn't have faked a diary decades ago, and she had no motive to do so. If my grandma is not my dad's biological mother, and Tahlia is my biological sister, and their DNA test shows they're related, then it's likely that something's been tampered with."

Marcus said, "That's impossible."

Cornelia said. "The people you trust wouldn't betray you, but it's not out of the question that they'd be forced to, like Dylan, if threatened."

Marcus said, "The day of the DNA test, from sampling to results, Ayden was there the whole time. Unless someone knew in advance we were doing a DNA test, knew where we were sending it, and bribed the testers that day.."

Cornelia looked at Marcus, slowly asking, "Could someone truly have known all that in advance? After all, when we found out that Tahlia could be my sister, Courtney got the news too. If you hadn't brought Tahlia back in time, she'd probably be in Courtney's hands by now."

Marcus said, "We can't rule out that possibility"

Cornelia said, "Then let's do another DNA test"

Marcus said, "We'll keep this quiet, I'll handle it."

Cornelia said, "I have another doubt..."

Marcus asked, "What's that?"

Cornelia said, "I suspect that the current Clair is not my mother Clair."

Marcus said. "I've considered the possibility of someone impersonating your mother Clair, but as far as I know, your mother has no siblings, and she's an only child, so I dismissed that thought."

Cornelia said, "I know my suspicion might be baseless, but whether she's my mother or not, I still want to do a DNA test with her. If the test shows we're mother and daughter, then I can stop overthinking"

Marcus said, "We'll do it when we get back to Riverton."

Cornelia said, "I always feel like Riverton's been taken over by some people, and everything we do is under their watch."

Marcus gently ruffled Cornelia's hair, "You're one smart girl!"

Chapter 1021

Cornelia said, 'I'm all over the place right now, can't think straight, and I ain't no genius. Don't just go around throwing compliments at me.'

Marcus replied, "If you can't get your head around it, don't even try. You've been busting your chops here for hours, go out and get some air"

Cornelia shook her head and continued reading Granny Rebecca's diary, "I want to keep reading"

Marcus said. "Aight, I'll keep you company"

From the diary, Cornelia

found out that Robison was indeed not Granny Rebecca's biological child. Turned out, Granny Rebecca had an ectopic pregnancy once, which led to a hysterectomy, rendering her unable to have kids.

Her grandpa truly loved her grandma and didn't mind her infertility, and his love for her didn't waver. But back then, being childless after years of marriage was deemed a great sin

People started to badmouth her grandma regardless of the reason. What was more, the Stewart family members even advised Cornelia's grandpa to divorce her grandma. They argued that he was the only male in the Stewart lineage, and they couldn't risk the family line dying out.

Under immense pressure, Granny Rebecca even contemplated divorce, wanting to escape this suffocating environment. But how could Cornelia's grandpa just stand by and watch his wife being belittled?

He claimed that he was the one infertile, and it had nothing to do with Granny Rebecca. Once he said that, everyone around them shut up. The family members who initially advocated for the divorce also changed their attitude towards Granny Rebecca, they were worried that she might leave.

Thanks to Comelia's grandpa, all the gossip was kept at bay, allowing Granny Rebecca to continue her work at ease and even adopt two kids

After reading these records, Cornelia looked at Marcus beside her, "My grandpa loved my grandma so much."

Marcus said, "Let me see."

Comelia handed him the diary and leaned in, "I always thought my grandma was the rock in our family, and my grandpa didn't have to worry about anything. Now I know, he was just as important to my grandma. When my grandpa admitted he was infertile, it was not only a brave act, but also a promise to my grandma that he would protect her and give her the courage to move forward"

Marcus

ruffled Cornelia's hair and said with a smile, "You should also have the courage to move forward, I'll protect you."

"I know" Comelia snuggled into his arms, whispering softly, "Jeremy..."

Marcus replied. "I'm here."

Cornelia snuggled closer and continued, "We should be like my grandparents. No matter what happens, we should discuss and solve it together, and we can't keep secrets from each other"

Cornelia was hinting at something, Marcus got it. He put down the diary, embraced Cornelia, and kissed her

Soon, Cornelia completely forgot about the task at hand.

Cornelia stayed in Rosenberg for two days, tidying up Granny Rebecca's belongings. She didn't hear from Sallie, so she decided to call her.

To her surprise, Sallie was already back in Riverton...

Cornelia asked,

"Didn't you say you were going to do some charity work for a few days, why did you come back so soon?"

Mentioning this, Sallie got really pissed off, "Cornelia, I was tricked.

I thought they genuinely wanted to

do something meaningful for women, that's why I accepted their invitation. But when I got there, I realized they weren't taking it seriously at all, they just wanted to make a quick buck and gain fame. Seeing their hypocritical faces, I was livid, so I ditched the event "

Cornelia replied, "After this incident, a lot of people did take advantage of it for publicity. Some even claimed to be the victims in the video and started live streaming on some platform, claiming to help more girls. But in reality, they were just crying poor to trick sympathy and money out of people."

Chapter 1022

Everyone had got a greedy side. With the world's population being so huge, it was only normal that there were some greedy folks out there, or so though really ground her gears was when these greedy people exploited innocent women just to get some attention.

Sallie said, "I'm done trusting people. You need me to do something, just give me a holler. I'll bend over backwards to help you."

Cornelia responded, "Sounds great, I'll take you out for a meal when I get back to Riverton, gotta hang up now."

Granny Rebecca's stuff had been packed up, no need for Cornelia to stick around in Rosenberg. So, she and a few others hopped on a red-eye back to Riv they got home, it was past midnight. But Marcus was still as chipper as ever, and they kept busy for almost two hours.

Cornelia wasn't sure if it was because she was beat, but Marcus was unusually passionate in bed that night. So passionate, it was like he wanted to melt. In her half-asleep state, she could faintly hear Marcus calling her name in his husky voice, "Cornelia, Cornelia."

His voice was like a lullaby, and she drifted off to sleep peacefully.

When Cornelia woke up again, it was already noon and her man was probably up and about. Business had been buzzing lately, and Marcus had a lot on his her, he had to hold video conferences since he couldn't make it to the office.

She had originally planned to go to work with Marcus the day after their late-night flight back to Riverton, but with what happened last night and all the bus in till noon. Guess she would have to go to work tomorrow.

Cornelia rolled over, planning to get some more Z's, when Marcus called, "You're awake, get up and grab a bite."

"How'd you know I'm awake? Did you bug the room?" Cornelia looked around, "Did you get our actions last night on tape?"

Marcus chuckled on the other end of the line, "What are you thinking?"

Cornelia asked, "Did you bug the room? Let me tell you, surveillance footage can be easily hacked, you should never put one in the bedroom or..."

Marcus cut her off, "I didn't!"

Cornelia sighed in relief, "Good. But how'd you know I'm awake?"

Marcus answered, "I just guessed based on your sleeping pattern. Now get up and eat."

Cornelia whined, "You were too passionate last night, I can barely feel my legs."

Her voice was seductive, playful even.

But instead of Marcus' voice, she heard Ben cough awkwardly, "President Hartley, your phone is on speaker."

Marcus was in a meeting, calling her, with his phone on speaker. That meant, their entire conversation was heard by everyone in the meeting room.

Cornelia hung up immediately and burrowed back into her covers.
She was livid! How was she supposed to show her face at work now!
She furiously texted Marcus: [Marcus, did you do that on purpose to embarrass me?
Now everyone knows what we did last night.]
Marcus replied swiftly: [Darling, my phone's still connected to the projector.]
Cornelia was speechless.

Chapter 1023

Cornelia felt like she just wanted to disappear off the face of the earth She buried her face in her pillow, squealing in embarrassment.

Cornelia got a grip on herself and dialed Tahlia. The call was picked up almost immediately Cornelia said, "Tahlia, I want you to come with me somewhere."

Tahlia responded, "I have something to discuss with you. I've landed a job at The Hartley Group"

Cornelia was surprised, "Weren't you supposed to work with Bri? Why did you apply to The Hartley Group?"

Tahlia explained, "I saw they were hiring last night and just sent my resume on a whim. Everyone knows Hartley Group's hiring process is cutthroat with most applicants getting the boot. I didn't hold my breath. This morning, I got a call from their HR department for an interview at 10. They just skimmed through my resume, asked some basic questions, then told me I was hired"

Knowing how competitive The Hartley Group was and how high their salaries were, it was a shock to Cornelia that Tahlia got in after just one round of interviews. It must have been her exceptional skills that caught their eye.

Thinking about how badass her sister was, Cornelia was thrilled, "I knew you were talented, but not this talented. I had to go through several rounds of gruelling interviews and tests, scoring top marks each time, before I got hired"

Tahlia remarked, "I also find it too good to be true. I suspect they may have given me preferential treatment because we share the same surname."

Cornelia laughed, "I'm just an assistant at The Hartley Group. It's a big deal if someone even praises me to my face, let alone pay special attention to me. You got this job on your own merit. It has nothing to do with me."

Tahlia replied, "Who said it has nothing to do with you? The person who interviewed me even mentioned you. He said it's no big deal if I don't know the ropes of secretarial work, you can teach me."

Cornelia was stunned, "Did you tell the interviewer that you're my sister?"

Tahlia replied, "No. They said the only open position was in the secretarial department and recommended I start there. They said I can transfer to the financial department when a vacancy opens up."

It was strange that a person with no background in secretarial work was placed in the executive secretarial department. Cornelia asked, "So, have you joined the secretarial department?"

Tahlia replied, "I haven't decided yet. I told them I'd discuss it with my family first. Do you think I should take this job? Do you think, I can handle secretarial work?"

Cornelia answered, "You're a top graduate from a prestigious university, and basic secretarial work would be a piece of cake for you. The question is whether you're interested in the job and if you want to give it a shot."

Tahlia said, "I want to try. I want to get my foot in the door at The Hartley Group and wait for the right opportunity to transfer to the department I like."

Cornelia replied, "If that's what you want, then go for it. If you have any questions, just ask me. After years of secretarial work and now being an executive assistant, I know the ropes."

Tahlia said, "Cornelia,"

Cornelia replied, "Yes?"

Tahlia said, "I'm going to go complete the hiring process now."

Cornelia replied, "Alright. Once you're done, meet me at Ma llon. I'm planning to grab a coffee with Clair."

Tahlia said, "I don't want to see her. Can I skip?"

Cornelia answered, "Of course, you have the right to say no."

Chapter 1024

Tahlia said, "Thanks! You go see her first, and after that, I'll treat you to a milkshake." In the past, Clair always banned her from drinking milkshakes, considering them unhealthy and sugar-loaded, which could lead to weight gain.

Due to Clair's ban, even though Tahlia craved milkshakes, she wouldn't dare to drink them.

Cornelia chuckled, "Sure thing."

After ending the call with Tahlia, Cornelia found Clair's number and sent her a text to arrange a meeting. Shortly after sending the message, Clair called back, "Nelly, if you want to see me, no matter how busy I am, I'll make time for you."

Cornelia felt sickened by such fake words, but she calmly said, "Let's meet at Ma Ilon at two this afternoon. Hope you'll be on time."

Clair responded, "Sure, I'm heading out now."

Cornelia hung up without further ado. She knew Clair was trying to acknowledge her as a daughter because Clair knew Marcus was her husband. Clair had clear intentions. She wanted to be the mother of Marcus' wife and get more benefits from him.

Two in the afternoon.

Cornelia arrived at Ma Ilon on time. When she arrived, Clair was already there and had reserved a private room. She warmly greeted Cornelia, "Nelly, sit down quickly. This café is famous for its coffee and desserts. I ordered some for you to try, not sure what you like. If you find something you like, let me know and I'll order more.")

Cornelia responded with indifference, "Do you know why I'm here?"

Clair replied, "I don't know how you see me, but I've wanted to have a heart-to-heart with you ever since I found out you're my daughter. I hope you can forgive me and accept your mother."

Cornelia scoffed.

"Nelly, the dessert is here. Try some. What kind of coffee do you like? I'll have it prepared right away." Clair didn't mind Cornelia's coldness, because her goal was never to get close to Cornelia, but always about Marcus.

Cornelia said, "I'd like an iced Americano, it'll keep me alert so I don't mistake people."

Clair responded, "Who'd dare say you mistake people? If you did, how could you have married a man as outstanding as Marcus?"

Cornelia tried a piece of dessert.

Ma Ilon was said to be the best café in Riverton, serving excellent coffee and desserts. As she ate, Cornelia listened to Clair's continuous chatter. Clair talked a lot, mainly about how she shouldn't have left Cornelia and her father in the past and how she shouldn't have failed to recognize Cornelia when they met.

Clair apologized to Cornelia earnestly, while Cornelia listened with an indifferent face, occasionally responding to show she was listening, "What's your favorite color" Without thinking, Clair immediately answered, "Blue!"

Chapter 1025

"Have you always been a fan of blue? Or did you like other colors when you were younger?" Cornelia asked with a poker face, her heart pounding like a wild tide.

Yesterday, she read a passage in Granny Rebecca's diary. Granny Rebecca mentioned that her mother had a young girl's heart and her favorite color was pink, especially pink bows. But now, Clair claimed her favorite color to be blue.

So, did this mean this wasn't her mother? Not necessarily, people's tastes could change over time.

After asking, Cornelia quietly waited for Clair's response. Maybe her urgency gave it away and raised Clair's suspicion. Clair gave her a vague response with a smile, "I can't remember. All I know is that I've been loving blue lately."

Clair handed Cornelia a cup of coffee, "Nelly, when I left you and your father, I had no other choice. It was only after I left your father that I realized I was pregnant."

As Clair kept talking, Cornelia was fiddling with her coffee cup. Suddenly, the cup fell and shattered.

Clair was startled and saw Cornelia squatting down to pick up the pieces, "Nelly, let the waiter clean it up. Don't hurt yourself."

Cornelia squatted down, picking up the shards, "I'll clean it up."

A look of contempt flashed in Clair's eyes. Despite being married to a noble man like Marcus, Cornelia couldn't hide her small-town roots. She couldn't just stand there watching Cornelia clean up, so she pretended to be helpful, "Let me help you."

"No need!" Cornelia pushed her hand away, accidentally cutting Clair's hand.

The cut wasn't big or painful, but it enraged the beauty-conscious Clair who nearly lost her temper. She took great care of herself and would never allow any scars, "Nelly, I need to treat the wound, I'll leave you now. Bring Natalia next time, we can hang out."

With that said, Clair hurriedly left, fearing the wound would heal if she waited any

longer.

Cornelia collected the shards stained with Clair's blood, then called Tahlia, "Tahlia, are you done?"

Tahlia said, "I've completed the hiring process, I'll start work tomorrow."

Cornelia said, "Where are you now? I'll come to pick you up."

Tahlia said, "I'm at the Hartley Group headquarters."

Cornelia said, "Wait for me, I'll be there in a few minutes."

The place where Cornelia met Clair wasn't far from the Hartley Group, a mere ten-minute walk, plus she drove.

After picking up Tahlia, Cornelia headed out of the city.

Tahlia looked at Cornelia, seemingly with a lot to say, but eventually kept quiet, "Cornelia, even though we just became sisters, I really love you. If only one of us could survive, I would definitely give you the chance to live."

Cornelia freed one hand and gently touched Tahlia's face, "We're both going to make it, let our grandma and dad in heaven know we're doing okay."

Tahlia asked, "Where are we going next?"

Cornelia answered, "I haven't been to the seaside for a long time, I want to take you for a walk there. You start work tomorrow, so we won't have as much free time."

Tahlia responded enthusiastically, "Great!"

Chapter 1026

It was not that Cornelia was overly suspicious, she just liked to stay on her toes. If someone had bugged her and was tracking her every move, ready to outmaneuver her. There was no way she would have gotten the accurate DNA report today.

In the morning. Tahlia got up super early and was soon snoozing away.

Cornelia hit the road, speeding towards the city next to Riverton. About two hours later, Cornelia pulled off the highway and drove to the DNA testing center in the city next to Riverton.

Once she parked the car, she woke up Tahlia, "Tahlia, we're here. Get out of the car."

Tahlia groggily opened her eyes, "Are we at the beach?"

Cornelia responded, "No, we're in the city next to Riverton. I got a blood sample from Clair, and we're going to do a DNA test."

Tahlia was a bit confused, "What?"

Cornelia didn't have time to explain, "Just come with me, I'll fill you in later."

Cornelia took Tahlia to the staff, completed the necessary paperwork. They both gave their samples, then sat quietly waiting.

Tahlia was visibly anxious, "What if I'm not your real sister.

Cornelia responded, "Whether we're blood sisters or not, as long as you're willing to call me your sister, you're my real sister."

Tahlia said, "I definitely will."

Cornelia took Tahlia's hand, her heart filled with unease. She didn't want a mother like Clair, but she was also scared that Clair wasn't her real mother. If it was confirmed that Clair wasn't her mother, that would mean her real mother was likely already dead. Otherwise, no one would be impersonating her.

The results would take a few hours. Cornelia silently waited there for several hours.

Tahlia went out and bought two milkshakes and some snacks, "Cornelia, have a sip of your milkshake."

Cornelia took a couple of sips of the milkshake. The saying that something sweet could lift her mood was true; after a few sips, she felt a little less tense.

Just then, a staff member called her name, "Ms. Stewart, your test results are ready, please come to my office."

Cornelia took Tahlia to the office, "What are the results?"

The staff member handed her several paper reports and showed her the test results on the computer, "Each of us has 23 pairs of chromosomes. A pair of genes at the same location on the same pair of chromosomes are called alleles. Typically, one comes from the father and one from the mother. If an allele at a particular DNA site is found to be the same as the mother, the other should be the same as the father. Otherwise, there's a problem. We did a detailed DNA comparison of your blood sample and the one you provided, and found five different sites."

Cornelia swallowed nervously, "So, we're not related?"

The staff member nodded, "If there was a difference at one or two sites, it could be due to gene mutation, But with five different sites, it completely rules out a parent-child relationship."

Cornelia asked, "Could there be a mistake?"

The staff member smiled and replied, "DNA paternity testing technology is very advanced now. The accuracy is almost 100% I can tell you with full responsibility that you definitely do not have a parent-child relationship with the provider of this blood sample."

Chapter 1027

This DNA test report confirmed that the current Clair wasn't the biological mother of Cornelia. It seemed likely that someone else was masquerading as Clair.

Cornelia then asked, "What about the test results of B and C, and B and D?"

The staff replied, "The test results show that B and C are related. The same goes for B and D."

On hearing this, Cornelia felt puzzled, "Are you sure that B and D are related?"

B represented Cornelia, C was Tahlia, and D was her grandma. It made sense that she and Tahlia, who were sisters, were related. However, Granny Rebecca's diary clearly noted that her father Hawthorne was an adopted child. So why would her DNA test with Granny Rebecca still show a relation?

Did Granny Rebecca's diary have errors? Or did this DNA testing agency make a mistake?

Cornelia couldn't make head or tail of it.

The staff confidently said, "You can take a look at the test report yourself. I can also assure you that the chance of errors in our report is practically zero."

"Thanks!" Cornelia collected the test report and left with Tahlia.

Tahlia asked, "Are we both not Clair's children, or is it just you?"

Cornelia replied, "Neither of us is her child."

Tahlia then asked, "Then who's our mom?"

Mentioning mom, Cornelia felt a sharp pain in her heart. She took a deep breath before continuing, "Tahlia, our mom might have been murdered."

Tahlia asked, "Was it Clair who killed her?"

Cornelia nodded, "We need to find out the truth. If our mom was murdered by Clair, we must ensure that this wicked woman faces justice."

Tahlia asked, "Do you think the woman in the photo could be our mom?"

Cornelia asked, "Which photo?"

Tahlia said, "The one with Clair pregnant that she always shows me. I've shown it to you, remember?"

Cornelia remembered. A few days ago, Tahlia did show her a photo of Clair pregnant. They commented at that time that Clair in the photo had a soft gaze, different from the current Clair.

Cornelia said, "It seems likely that the current Clair took over the Clair in the photo."

Tahlia asked, "When did this Clair take our mom's identity? What was her motive of impersonating our mother? Could it be for the identity of Mrs. Reese?"

Cornelia immediately negated, "The woman who married Granger Reese is this Clair, not our

mother.”

Tahlia asked, “How can you be so sure?”

Cornelia said, “Our grandmother, our father, and everyone in Rosenberg who knew our mother, when they mention her, they always praise her. They all say that our parents were very much in love. Our mother became emotionally unstable and had a major personality change after I was born. Then she asked for a divorce from our father and firmly left Rosenberg. If she truly loved someone, no matter how determined, she wouldn’t be able to leave her husband and baby of only a few months old.”

Tahlia understood, “You mean the turning point of our mother’s personality change was when this woman took over her identity?”

Cornelia thought carefully, the more she thought, the more likely it seemed. Even though she had never met her mother, she had heard from many people that her parents were very much in love. They never fought and were so in love, but one of them suddenly changed drastically and asked for a divorce, and immediately left Rosenberg after the divorce, never returning to Rosenberg for more than twenty years.

The more she thought about it, the fishier it seemed.

Chapter 1028

Cornelia said, “Yeah, it’s quite possible that our mom wasn’t our mom at that time, but the woman we now know as Clair.”

Tahlia asked, “Our dad loved our mom so much, wouldn’t he have noticed if his wife was switched?”

Cornelia replied, “I’m not entirely sure about the specifics of what happened back then. Maybe because our dad loved our mom so much, that’s why he never suspected anything when that woman pretended to be her.”

Tahlia asked, “What do we do now?”

Cornelia said, “The one with all the answers about what happened back then would be Clair. She’s our only lead.”

Tahlia asked, “Is there anything I could do to help?”

Cornelia ruffled Tahlia’s hair and said, “Just keep doing your job. I’ll handle the rest. Let’s head back to Riverton. If Marcus comes home from work and I’m not there, he’ll be worried sick.”

Tahlia asked, “Are you staying at home tonight or going over to his place?”

Cornelia said, “I’ll stay with you tonight. Let him have his house to himself.”

Tahlia said, "You and Mr. Hartley just got married. You should spend more time with him. I don't want to get in the way."

Cornelia said, "Enough chit-chat. Let's go home."

Cornelia drove back the same way they came. Over an hour later, they exited the highway. As soon as Cornelia's car got off the highway, Marcus called.

Cornelia picked up immediately and was met with Marcus' deep voice, "Pull over now!"

She pulled over at once. A familiar luxury car was parked next to her in the parking area.

Marcus slowly rolled down his window and looked at her.

Cornelia asked, "What are you doing here?"

Marcus said, "Get in my car."

Cornelia asked, "What about my car?"

Marcus said, "I'll have Austin drive your sister home."

He looked pissed.

Cornelia didn't dare refuse again. She turned to Tahlia and said, "Tahlia, you go home with Austin. I need to see what's up with Marcus."

Tahlia said, "Okay."

Cornelia went over to Marcus' car. She thought he wanted her to drive, so she headed straight for the driver's seat.

Marcus opened the back door, got out of the car, and said, "You're riding shotgun. I'm driving."

Cornelia obediently sat in the passenger seat.

Marcus started the car and quickly got back on the road.

Cornelia glanced at his grim expression and asked, "What's wrong? Why are you mad?"

Marcus said, "Don't drive alone for a while. I'm worried someone might tamper with your car."

Cornelia's heart skipped a beat, "You mean."

Marcus took one hand off the wheel, held Cornelia's hand, and said, "Brennen wants something I'm not giving him. I'm worried he might hurt you."

Cornelia said, "Okay, I'll be more careful."

Marcus said, "From now on, you can't leave my sight."

Chapter 1029

Marcus was being all bossy like some big shot CEO from a romance novel. Cornelia was a bit worried at first, but his tone made her burst out laughing, "Alrighty, President Hartley!"

Marcus said, "I'm discussing serious matters with you, can you be a bit more serious?"

Cornelia said, "I got your point, I'm being serious all the way."

Marcus was speechless.

Cornelia continued, "You must've heard what I did today, right?"

Marcus nodded, "Yeah."

Cornelia said, "Now I'm utterly confused, I don't know who to believe."

Marcus said, "Go ahead. Spill the beans."

Cornelia said, "My granny's diary clearly states that my father isn't her biological son, but my DNA test with my granny shows we're blood related. So should I trust my granny's diary or the DNA test?"

Marcus said, "I had a DNA test done on you guys too, and the results match what you said. The testing process was legit, no room for scam. So now we're dead sure that Granny Rebecca is indeed your blood granny."

Cornelia was even more baffled, "If Granny Rebecca is my real granny, then why would she scribble such a misleading diary?"

Marcus hadn't spent much time with Granny Rebecca, so he had no idea why she would write such a misleading diary either, "Are you sure the handwriting in the diary is Granny Rebecca's?"

Cornelia said, "Her handwriting is pretty unique, I've known it since I was a kid, no way I'd mistake it."

Marcus said, "If we can confirm that the diary was handwritten by Granny Rebecca, then there must be some secrets she couldn't spill outright. Try to recall if she ever said anything weird to you."

Cornelia's mind was a total mess now, "I can't remember."

Marcus said, "Come a bit closer to me."

Cornelia asked, "What?"

Marcus chuckled, "I mean, come a bit closer to me."

Cornelia moved closer, Marcus reached out a hand and gently ruffled her hair, "No pressure if you can't remember. Take a break, recharge your batteries, and think about it later."

She was exhausted from last night and had been running around all day today; Cornelia was beat, "Alright, I'll pass out for a while, wake me up when we get home."

Seeing that she was seriously going to take a nap, Marcus asked again, "Don't you have anything else to tell me?"

Cornelia asked, "What else do you wanna hear?"

Marcus said, "Aren't you going to tell me about the fake Clair?"

"If you already know, then why ask me?" Cornelia was actually not planning to tell him. She was

going to figure out a way to squeeze the information she needed out of Clair herself. If it was indeed the fake Clair who killed her mother, she wouldn't let her get away with it.

Marcus said, "I want you to tell me yourself."

Cornelia didn't want to cause him trouble, but she didn't plan to keep secrets from him either, so she spilled the beans, "Today I did several DNA tests, and the results show that this Clair isn't my biological mother. If this Clair isn't my mother, then my real mother, the real Clair, was likely killed by the current one."

Marcus replied, "Knowing how dangerous this Clair is, you still met her alone and even took samples from her. You can't do such dangerous things anymore."

Chapter 1030

Cornelia was like, "I got this."

Marcus answered, "I'm already on the case, checking out how Fake Clair managed to replace Real Clair and when it happened. I'll have answers soon."

Cornelia thought her investigation was quick, but Marcus was ahead of her, "You're already on it?"

Marcus answered, "Yeah, I'll let you know when I have something."

Cornelia asked, "Why are you always one step ahead?"

Marcus replied, "Because I care about you."

He added, "I'm taking you to meet a couple of old friends."

At the mention of old friends, Cornelia naturally thought of some key figures, "Steven and Lucas are in Riverton? Did Hannah and Rosie come too? Can you ditch Steven tonight? I wanna chat with Hannah and Rosie alone."

The thought of seeing Hannah and Rosie had Cornelia buzzing. Marcus couldn't bring himself to burst her bubble, but the reality was different, "Not them, actual old friends. Remember Old Mr. Abner I introduced you to?"

Turned out, when he said old friends, he meant really old friends. Cornelia's excitement fizzled out, "Of course I remember, how could I forget?"

Back then, Cornelia didn't know she was Marcus' wife. He had her play his wife to meet an old friend, and she had innocently gone along with it.

Marcus said, "Old Mr. Abner's in Riverton. He wants to meet us. It's not just him today, we have another friend coming."

Cornelia asked, "Is this other friend a young person or an old person?"

Marcus replied, "He's pretty old too. Good friends with me and Old Mr. Abner."

Cornelia said, "You're pretty tight with these old guys."

Marcus nodded, "Yeah."

Marcus had been more mature and sensible than his peers since he was a kid, so he found their childishness annoying. He did indeed have a couple of older friends,

Cornelia asked, "Do they have any pet peeves or something? Let me know so I don't put my foot in my mouth and upset them."

Marcus was like, "They're really sweet. They love young people and kids. He donates to charities every year, funded a bunch of schools in remote areas, and helps sick kids. Basically, if it's something that helps kids, they're all for it."

Mentioning philanthropists, a certain person popped into Cornelia's head, "Wait, are you talking about Mr. Augustine?"

Mr. Augustine was a low-key do-gooder who never bragged about his deeds. The fact that Cornelia knew who he was surprised Marcus, "You know him?"

Cornelia replied, "Heard his name a long time ago."

Marcus was like, "How do you know about him?"

Cornelia replied, "A lot of my classmates have been helped by him."

Cornelia had heard of Mr. Augustine since she was in elementary school. Back then, she learned that he sponsored a lot of underprivileged students in her school.

From middle school to high school to college, she kept hearing his name since many of her classmates had received his sponsorship. His name had been a constant throughout her academic life.

Marcus was like, "Oh, I see."

Cornelia was like, "I heard his wife and kid died in an accident and he was so heartbroken that he started donating to help poor kids. Is it true?"

Chapter 1031

Marcus went, "You absolutely can't bring this up in front of him."

Cornelia asked, "So, all those rumors are true then?"

Marcus said, "He really loved his wife and kids. After they died, he was in a world of pain for a long while before he could start moving on. He's been living alone all these years. Lots of people tried to persuade him to remarry, have another kid to inherit his fortune, but he never budged. He never considered remarrying or having kids again. I remember him saying once that he only ever loved that one woman in his life, and that there's no more room in his heart for anyone else."

Hearing this, Cornelia felt a pang in her heart, “How did his wife and child die?”

Marcus replied, “I’m not sure about the details. He never talks about his sad past, and I never asked.”

Cornelia then said, “Jeremy, if something happens to me, don’t be a fool. Life’s long. You gotta find someone who cares about you to share it with you! Marcus’ face darkened instantly, “Don’t talk nonsense!”

Cornelia sighed, “Why does fate have to torture such a loyal and good-hearted person like this? Why doesn’t fate torture those fickle jerks instead?”

Marcus said, “Rest for a bit now. We might get home late tonight.”

“Okay.” After agreeing, Cornelia leaned back into the chair and fell asleep quickly.

Marcus glanced at Cornelia, his eyes full of tenderness behind his silver glasses, his love for her not hidden at all.

About half an hour later, the car arrived at its destination.

Cornelia was still asleep when the car stopped. Not wanting to wake her, Marcus sent a message: [You guys have some coffee and wait for me. It might be a while before I get there.]

Old Mr. Abner replied quickly: [As long as you bring Nelly to see us, we won’t mind no matter how late it is.]

Marcus chuckled: [She’s more important to you than I am now, isn’t she?]

Old Mr. Abner replied: [If Mr. Augustine didn’t want to see your wife, we would’ve come to Riverton quietly and left quietly, without contacting you at all.]

Marcus was speechless. Sure enough, these two came specifically to meet his wife, Cornelia.

Old Mr. Abner sent another message quickly, [Marc, is Nelly reluctant to see me?]

Marcus replied: [Of course not. She remembers you all the time. I just told her we were coming to see you, and she was very happy.]

Old Mr. Abner replied: [Really?]

Marcus replied: [Have I ever lied to you?]

Old Mr. Abner replied: [I knew Nelly was a good girl, very likable. Mr. Augustine will like her when he sees her. You must bring Nelly. Let him see with his own eyes how likable Nelly is.]

When it came to Cornelia, Marcus became much gentler: [She’s been working hard all day today and is now resting in the car. I hope she can sleep a little longer. Once she wakes up, I’ll immediately take her to see you.]

“Are we there yet?” Suddenly, Cornelia’s gentle voice sounded in his ear.

Marcus turned his head, meeting her sleepy eyes. His heart seemed to be gently touched by

something, trembling slightly.

Cornelia asked, "Why aren't you talking?"

Marcus suddenly put his hand on Cornelia's head, pulling her toward him, then deeply kissed her. The kiss lasted a long time. When they finished, Cornelia's lips were almost swollen.

She glared at him, "How am I supposed to meet them like this?"

Chapter 1032

Marcus said, "It's cool. They can't see that well. They won't notice."

However, as it turned out, the two old men had eagle eyes. As soon as Cornelia stepped into the yard, Old Mr. Abner caught it, "Marc, Nelly's lips are all red and puffy. You must've had a hand in it. You ain't a teenage boy anymore, still acting so reckless."

Cornelia was so embarrassed she even forgot to say hello, only wishing she could find a place to hide.

The other old man cleared his throat, "How about letting Marc introduce his wife first, and then you can spout your nonsense."

Old Mr. Abner retorted, "What? I was just concerned about Nelly!"

Mr. Augustine replied, "Concerned about her? You're obviously just messing around. You're an old man, still teasing girls, don't you feel ashamed?"

These two were tight back in the day, but now that they were older, they always ended up arguing whenever they met. And once they started, they could go on for hours.

Not wanting to waste any more time, Marcus quickly intervened, "Cornelia, come over here, let me introduce you. This is Mr. Augustine."

Cornelia stepped forward, gently saying, "Nice to meet you!"

Mr. Augustine eyed Cornelia without any pretense. He was sure it was the first time he'd seen Cornelia tonight, yet he had this inexplicable sense of familiarity, as if they'd met somewhere before, "You're Cornelia? Where are you from?"

Cornelia replied, "I'm from Rosenberg."

Mr. Augustine felt a pang of disappointment upon hearing this, "Rosenberg is a nice place. Who else is in your family?"

Cornelia said, "Just me and my sister left in the Stewart family."

Accidentally touching upon her sorrowful past, Mr. Augustine felt a bit embarrassed, "I'm sorry!"

Cornelia smiled and said, "It's fine."

Mr. Augustine then said, "Why don't you and Marc sit down. It's eight o'clock already, you must be hungry, I'll have the dinner served."

Old Mr. Abner said to Mr. Augustine, "See, I told you Nelly was charming. You should've trusted my judgement, no rebuttals."

Mr. Augustine replied, "Who said I was fond of her?"

Old Mr. Abner said, "If you're not fond of her, then keep your distance, I'll sit next to her."

Mr. Augustine retorted, "I'll sit beside her. Maybe I'll get to see her good points, then admit that Marc made a good choice."

Marcus chimed in, "Cornelia is great, one of a kind."

Mr. Augustine said, "I didn't say she wasn't."

If he thought Cornelia wasn't good, he wouldn't have spoken to her at all. It was precisely because he thought she was good that he said all this.

Old Mr. Abner said, "Marc, he's just too stubborn to admit it."

Mr. Augustine said, "If you do not what to say, you can keep silent."

Old Mr. Abner said, "If I keep quiet and let you do all the talking, you'd make us all feel awkward."

Mr. Augustine retorted, "Try shutting up and see if I make everyone feel awkward."

And so the two old men started bickering again.

Listening to them, Cornelia felt warmth. Mr. Augustine's hair was gray. He was said to be close in age to Old Mr. Abner, but he seemed a decade older. Not sure if it was because he was busy with charity work, or because the early loss of his wife and children hit him too hard.

Chapter 1033

Marcus didn't play peacemaker, just passed a beef patty to Cornelia, "Old Abner got this especially for you. Give it a whirl, see if you like it."

Cornelia took a bite, "This must be real beef. Tastes great."

Marcus asked, "Is there fake beef?"

Cornelia replied, "Some places make beef patties using horse meat. They pass off low-grade stuff as high-grade beef. Doesn't taste a thing like beef. But of course, they don't charge as much as real beef."

Marcus gave Cornelia another beef patty, "Then have a bit more today."

Cornelia looked up, "How long are those two old men going to bicker?"

Marcus answered, "That's just their way of showing they care for each other. Don't mind them, let them have at it."

Mr. Augustine turned to them, "You're heartless. We're arguing, yet you're happily eating."

Marcus laughed, "You always quarrel when you meet, and miss each other when you don't. I'm

used to it.”

Old Mr. Abner said, “Just because you’re used to it, you can ignore us? Let’s stop arguing. Or they’ll both start laughing at us.”

Mr. Augustine passed a pork chop to Old Abner, “Here’s the grilled pork chop you like. Try it, is it as good as the one your wife made?”

Old Abner replied, “My wife made the best grilled pork chop in the world. It’s just a shame I can’t have it anymore.”

Mr. Augustine patted Old Abner’s back, “Everyone has their time to go. It’s just a matter of sooner or later. She was with you for decades. You should be content. Unlike me…”

Mr. Augustine stopped himself in time, “Nelly, do you want pork chop? This place does a great job with it.”

Old Abner said, “Nelly won’t have it, I ordered a salad for her. Nowadays, skinny is the fashion. Girls are considered attractive when they’re skin and bones. I don’t know when this sick sense of beauty started. Nelly, you look great as you are. Don’t compare yourself to those celebrities. Being skin and bones isn’t normal.”

Cornelia chuckled and had a bite of the pork chop, “I’ll have the pork chop. What girl doesn’t want to eat what she likes? No one wants to limit what they eat. But like Old Abner said, skinny is the trend now. If a girl is slightly overweight, she’s criticized. Even finding a job is hard. Take my job for instance, if I were 20 pounds heavier, I wouldn’t have gotten the chance to be the secretary for the president of Hartley Group, let alone become President Hartley’s assistant.”

Marcus listened, didn’t say anything, but he took note of what Cornelia said. Hartley Group was one of the famous corporations worldwide. If they started to change their beauty standards, and when hiring female staff, they looked at their abilities, character, and values, not their appearance or figure, it would gradually influence mainstream beauty standards.

Old Abner said, “I really don’t know who came up with this abnormal beauty standard. It’s clearly suppressing women.”

Mr. Augustine said, “You’re surprisingly woke, not bad.”

Old Abner said, “My mother’s a woman, so are my wife and daughter. Without women, there would be no us. Yet, some people are full of malice towards women, as if they weren’t born of a woman.”

Chapter 1034

Mr. Augustine murmured, “If society wasn’t so da mn hard on women, my family wouldn’t

have...”

If those rumors and misunderstandings hadn't occurred, they wouldn't have...

But at the end of the day, the one who should really take the blame was him. If he had been by their side, they wouldn't have chosen that path of despair. Reminiscing, Mr. Augustine's eyes filled with a misty fog, as if he had aged years in seconds.

Old Mr. Abner understood him and swiftly changed the subject, “Cornelia, tell us, is Marc good to you?”

“He's really great to me.” Cornelia looked up at Marcus, continuing, “I think Marc treats me so well because of your influence.”

Hearing this, both old men beamed with pride, chiming in unison, “Of course, we've taught him since he was a kid. A man can lack achievements, but he can never treat his wife poorly. A good life belongs only to a man who treats his wife well.”

Cornelia commented, “That's a wise saying.”

Mr. Augustine added, “Marc, Cornelia is a catch. You must never let her down.”

Marcus assured, “I would never let her down.”

Mr. Augustine squinted his eyes, warning sternly, “If you dare let her down, I'll make sure you pay the price.”

Despite helping many, Mr. Augustine was a bit of a loner, rarely engaging in chit chat. Marcus, having known him for nearly two decades, had never seen him show such care for anyone.

Marcus couldn't help but give Mr. Augustine a second look, “Cornelia is my wife.”

Mr. Augustine retorted, “And what if she is? People get divorced all the time.”

Hearing this, Marcus' expression turned serious.

Old Mr. Abner, knowing Mr. Augustine had hit a nerve, lightened the mood, “I've known him for years and I've never seen him care so much for a youngster. He must really like Cornelia. Of course, it's because Cornelia is so likable.”

“Thank you for liking me, I really like you guys too.” Cornelia wasn't sure why they liked her, but she genuinely liked them.

The two old men were on a pedestal she could only dream of reaching, but they felt just like any ordinary elderly couple, very warm and friendly.

Old Mr. Abner continued, “Since meeting you last time in the Capital, I've been wanting to see you again. I've mentioned to Marc a few times to bring you to the Capital, but work always got in the way. Unable to invite you guys over, we just had to come to Riverton.”

Cornelia was surprised, “Did you come to Riverton just to see me?”

Old Mr. Abner replied, "What else? You think Marc is worth us coming all the way here to see?"

Cornelia countered, "Marc is actually quite impressive."

Old Mr. Abner agreed, "Marc is not only impressive, he is outstanding."

Out of the blue, Mr. Augustine interjected, "I suddenly feel like Marc doesn't deserve Nelly."

Chapter 1035

Marcus put a stop to any nonsense, "Whether we're a match or not, we're married. She's mine forever."

"Yours? You're pretty full of yourself." Mr. Augustine quipped, raising an eyebrow as he added more food to Cornelia's plate, "Nelly, I think we get along pretty well. We should keep in touch. You can reach out to me if there's anything you need."

Cornelia said, "Okay!"

Old Mr. Abner added, "Nelly, let's exchange contacts too. I've been kicking myself for not getting yours last time. Don't hesitate to reach out if you ever need help, even if Marcus is giving you a hard time. I'll have your back."

Cornelia jotted down the two old men's contacts with a smile, "With you guys as my protectors, does this mean I'm free to live anywhere in this country?" "That's a given." Old Mr. Abner replied, "Especially with Mr. Augustine's high-ranking status, even your hubby wouldn't dare cross the line."

Mr. Augustine wasn't just a businessman, his family held great power. They were pretty low-key though, hardly the talk of the town.

Cornelia said, "Marcus is my husband. He's always been good to me, never mistreated me. If you guys truly care about me, could you go easy on him?"

Marcus, who had been in a foul mood, brightened up at Cornelia's words.

He shot the two old men a smug look, as if to say, "See, no matter what you say, as long as I have Cornelia by my side, I'm good."

Mr. Augustine shot Marcus a displeased look, "Men are often deceivers. Always stay alert, it's for your own good."

Cornelia made her stance clear, "I might distrust anyone, but I trust Marcus."

Mr. Augustine sighed, "Another naive girl."

Old Mr. Abner asked, "Who else is a naive girl?"

Mr. Augustine didn't reply, instead he continued serving Cornelia food. The more he looked at her, the more he felt a strange bond.

With the two old men's special attention, Cornelia ate so much she felt uncomfortable on the

ride home.

Marcus said, "Silly girl, don't force yourself to eat if you're full."

Cornelia replied, "They were so nice and warm to me. I couldn't bear to reject them."

Marcus said, "Part of growing up is learning to say no. When you can say no, that's when you've changed."

Comelia said, "I can say no to others, but not to those who are kind to me."

Marcus replied, "But you have to learn slowly."

Comelia wanted to say something more but felt too unwell, she leaned back in her seat, "I need to rest a bit. Wake me up when we get home."

"Alright." Marcus drove towards Lakeview Estates.

Soon, he heard Cornelia moan slightly. Marcus touched her forehead, "Are you feeling unwell? I can take you to the hospital to get some digestion pills."

Cornelia turned to look at Marcus, her face flushed, "I think it's not just overeating. I think my period's here."

Marcus also blushed, "What do we do now?"

He was clueless in this situation.

Cornelia pointed ahead, "There's a convenience store not far ahead. You can stop the car and I'll go buy some sanitary pads."

Marcus said, "I'll go buy them, you wait in the car."

Cornelia asked, "Are you sure?"

Many men were uncomfortable buying sanitary pads for their wives or girlfriends, thinking it was embarrassing.

She didn't expect Marcus, the CEO of the Hartley Group, to be willing to do something many guys would find awkward.

Marcus didn't reply, he simply parked the car by the roadside, "Wait here, I'll be right back."

Chapter 1036

He hopped out of the car, striding towards the convenience store without a second thought. Cornelia watched his retreating figure, a surge of warmth flooding her heart. **Just** as Abigail had said, she must've been a saint in her past life to have met Marcus and become his wife in this one. She really owed her past self a big one. If her past self **hadn't** racked up some good karma, there was no way she would've ever crossed paths with Marcus

Within no time, Cornelia spotted Marcus emerging from the store, lugging a massive bag.

What on earth did he buy so much of? What did he get?

Marcus approached, opening the bag for her to see, "I didn't realize there were so many brands and types of sanitary pads. I wasn't sure which you'd need, so I just bought a pack of each type and brand they had."

Cornelia plucked out her usual brand from the bag, "These are fine. You can return the rest. It's too much for me to use, and we shouldn't waste."

She figured Marcus would find returning them a hassle and suggest throwing them away instead. But he didn't, obediently taking the bag back to the store for a refund.

While he was at it, Cornelia snuck off to a nearby public restroom.

After a quick freshening up, her stomach **felt** a lot better. Back at the car, Marcus had returned too. He rubbed her lower abdomen, "Does it still hurt?"

Cornelia shook her head, "**Much** better."

Marcus said, "Then buckle up, we should head home."

Cornelia replied, "**Sure.**"

In no time, Marcus drove them back to Lakeview Estates, to the spacious house he had bought.

Once home, he settled Cornelia on the sofa, fetching a thin blanket to drape over her, "Wait here, I'll make you some hot tea."

Cornelia chimed in, "**I don't think we have any ingredients?**"

Marcus said, "I've already had them delivered."

No sooner than he had finished speaking, the doorbell rang. Marcus collected the groceries, advising Cornelia, "Stay put and rest."

Cornelia responded, "Okay."

Perhaps it was her cramps, or maybe she was just exhausted, but Cornelia fell asleep almost instantly. She didn't know how long she had slept, but suddenly she was having a nightmare, being chased by wolves. She tried to run, but her legs were bound. Just as the wolves were about to devour her, Marcus' deep voice woke her from the **nightmare**.

Cornelia jerked awake, throwing her arms around Marcus, "Jeremy."

Patting her back gently, Marcus asked, "Another nightmare?"

Cornelia nodded, "Yes."

Marcus reassured her, "Don't worry, I'm right here."

Cornelia said, "**As long as** you're here, I'm not afraid of anything."

Taken aback, Marcus replied, "The tea's ready. Get up and have

Chapter 1037

Cornelia sprawled on the couch, absolutely knackered and unwilling to move a muscle, "I don't wanna get up"

"Well, if you don't feel like it, just chill out." Marcus propped a cushion behind Cornelia, then turned to fetch some tea, spooning it to her mouth considerately, "Have a sip."

After sipping it, Cornelia looked up at him, "How did you know hot tea would make my period more bearable? Did you used to make tea for other girls?"

Marcus stared at her, stating in all seriousness, "You're the only one. There's never been anyone else."

Cornelia knew he'd never had anyone else, she was just messing with him. Seeing him so serious, she dropped the teasing and finished the tea in a few gulps. After she finished, Marcus removed the cushion from behind her, pulled her into his arms, and gently massaged her abdomen with his strong hand.

His touch was so light, it tickled and Cornelia squirmed a bit, "That tickles!"

Marcus asked, "So, should I stop?"

Even if he stopped moving, his warmth was still being steadily transferred to Cornelia through his strong hand, it felt so cozy.

She didn't know whether it was the hot tea or his warm hand that did the trick, but in no time, Cornelia's abdomen felt remarkably better, "I don't feel so bad anymore." Marcus suggested, "Rest a while longer, you should be fine. Then you can take a shower."

Cornelia leaned into him, "Jeremy."

Marcus asked, "What is it?"

Cornelia spoke, "Will you always be with me? Can we really stay together forever? I'm scared that this is all a mirage, and I'm afraid I won't be able to cope with being alone."

She used to suffer through her periods alone. Now with Marcus by her side, his care and warmth were a comforting presence. But Cornelia had her fears. She'd gotten used to his care. If one day he left her or stopped caring for her, she wasn't sure if she could cope.

Marcus reassured her, "As long as we want to stay together, we definitely can."

Cornelia muttered, "Who knows."

Marcus asked, "Why the sudden pessimism?"

Cornelia explained, "It's not pessimism. It's because of what happened to Mr. Augustine."

Marcus reminded her, "Everyone has a different fate!"

But Cornelia, as if not hearing Marcus' words, continued on her own, "He loved his wife so much, but she and their child left this world too early, leaving him to live alone. The decades following their departure were pure agony for him."

Cornelia was overly concerned about Mr. Augustine's situation, and Marcus didn't want her to worry too much, "Let's change the subject."

But Cornelia wanted a clear answer, she wanted to fully understand the situation, "Do you really know nothing about what happened to Mr. Augustine's wife?"

Marcus replied, "I know a bit, but not in detail, and I can't be sure if it's true."

chapter 1038

Cornelia was like, "Will you tell me?"

She was super into the whole Mr. Augustine saga, and Marcus didn't want to rain on her parade, so he spilled it all out, "The death of Mr. Augustine's wife and kid is all tangled up with his family."

Cornelia jumped up, "Seriously? His own kin caused his wife and kid to bite the dust? What kind of sc umba gs..."

Marcus told her to cool it and sit back down, "Chill, let me finish my story."

Cornelia was like, "Go on."

Marcus continued, "Mr. Augustine's family is from the Capital, typical blue-bloods. Who he was gonna marry was pretty much a done deal from the mament he was born. But Mr. Augustine wasn't down with the chick his fam wanted him to marry. He tried to call off the engagement a few times, but got shot down each time."

Cornelia sighed, "Rich families always put their interests first, never giving a da mn about how their kids feel. Probably see them as pawns to expand the family business. Whether they're actually happy or not, nobody gives a cr ap."

She then realized that she might have hit a nerve with Marcus, "Jeremy, I wasn't throwing shade at the Hartley family."

Marcus just ruffled her hair, "Still wanna hear about Mr. Augustine?"

Cornelia nodded, "I'm all ears."

Marcus went on, "The news about Mr. Augustine trying to bail on the engagement reached his fiancée pretty quick. So she cooked up a plan to meet him. She confessed she had eyes for someone else and didn't want to get hitched either. They decided to ditch their families and fight against this cr ap py arranged marriage."

Cornelia asked, "Did she make a run for it? Did she end up with the guy she had the hots for? Did she live happily ever after?"

Marcus replied, "She did and they're living the dream. They're both in their nineties now and still kicking."

Cornelia asked, "You know them?"

Marcus nodded, "Mr. Augustine and her might not have wanted to be husband and wife, but they became best buds. They kept in touch and I happened to know them."

Cornelia was like, "Awesome! Now dish on how Mr. Augustine met his wife."

Marcus continued, "After Mr. Augustine escaped from the Capital, he ended up in Sunflower

Springs. That's where he met his wife Mr. Augustine's wife was just a regular gal, but rumor has it that he fell head over heels for her in a heartbeat. Mr. Augustine was a hottie, and from the Capital no less, What girl wouldn't fall for him? He wooed her and in no time, she was all his. They tied the knot and even had a kid. Then Mr. Augustine's grandpa got sick and he went back to the Capital to see him. When he came back, his wife and kid were gone."

Cornelia asked, "Was it an accident?"

Marcus replied, "That's the word on the street. His family might not have been cool with some regular girl, but they wouldn't snuff out Mr. Augustine's kid."

"Mr. Augustine must have been crushed." Just hearing the news made Cornelia feel like the rug had been pulled out from under her like she was suffocating.

She couldn't even picture what it must have been like for Mr. Augustine. Everything was fine when he left, but when he came back his wife and kid were gone. That had to be kick in the teeth.

Marcus said, "I'm not sure how low he was, but I know he's been beating himself up over it for decades. He always says, if only he hadn't gone back to the Capital, his wife and kid would still be alive and kicking"

Cornelia held tight to Marcus' arm, "We never know if a curveball or the future will hit us first. We gotta cherish every moment and not wait until we lose it to regret it."

Chapter 1039

Marcus held Comelia tight, "Yeah."

Comella snuggled up comfortably in his arms, "I'm feeling a lot better now, I need to go take a shower and then we can hit the hay. Tomorrow, I'll go with you back to the office."

Marcus immediately picked her up, "Allow me."

Comelia quickly pushed him away, "I'm on my period."

Marcus said, "What weird stuff are you thinking about? Would I disregard your condition?"

Comelia blushed and buried her head in his chest.

*She wasn't overthinking, it was just that his behavior the night before was too undslial, e
ven
more ferocious than a beast. It scared her, so that was why she reacted like that. Howe
ver, Marcus showed Cornelia through his actions that he was just genuinely helping her
shower, with no other intentions.*

*After the shower, laying on the soft bed, Comelia quickly fell asleep. With Marcus by her
side, she slept really soundly this time, no more nightmares.*

*Marcus watched her peaceful sleeping face for a long time, then bent over to kiss her fo
rehead. He then stood up, took his phone, and went out to the living room balcony He di
aled a number, "Speak"*

*Jayden's voice came from the other end of the phone, "President Hartley, we found out.
The real Clair died twenty years ago when she gave birth to Natalia."*

*Marcus adjusted his glasses, a sharp murderous intent
flashed in his eyes, "(need concrete evidence."*

Jayden said, "We probably can't find her remains."

Marcus asked, "What do you mean?"

A simple question, but it brought a strong pressure

*Jayden quickly
explained, "We found Hank, used some methods, and learned that the current Clair is a
ctually the real Clair's twin sister."*

Marcus said, "Clair had a twin sister? Why didn't you guys find out before?"

*Jayden explained, "No one considered this before, and only a few people know about it.
One is the current Clair, one is Hank, and possibly Granger"*

Marcus said, "Explain in detail."

Jayden continued, "Hank is a punk, knows a lot of people, and isn't afraid of death. We couldn't get him to spill the information we wanted. Finally, Ayden came up with a plan to have someone impersonate the current Clair to contact Hank, and that got him talking."

Marcus asked, "You guys used AI tech?"

Chapter 1040

Jayden nodded

in agreement, "He's stubborn as a mule, but he's got a soft spot for the fake Clair. The moment he gets a video call from Clair and sees her face, he doesn't even question it. He just immediately warns her that someone might be onto her true identity. Once we realized how much he cared for Clair, we knew we had a foothold. The rest was a piece of cake. A few tricks here and there, and he spilled all the beans."

Marcus scoffed, "Hank's a sly fox. He might have already sniffed out the rat and was just playing along"

Jayden swallowed nervously, "It didn't seem like he was onto us."

Marcus said, "Whether or not he smelled a rat, keep going with your story"

Jayden continued, "Back in the day, the Dennis family had twin daughters. But due to hush-hush reasons, only one was announced to the world. The other was kept nameless and hidden away in the basement. The girl in the basement, that's the Clair we're dealing with now."

Upon hearing this, Marcus sneered internally. So, It wasn't just his parents who were heartless bastards. There were worse ones out there.

Jayden, oblivious to Marcus' reaction, went on, "At first, this Clair didn't mind her basement life until her twin sister discovered her and told her about the wonderful world outside. The sister tried to free her, but their

parents put their foot down. Unable to free her, the sister would visit her daily, telling her about the outside world and filling her with longing. One day, the sister stayed in the basement and let her walk out for the first time using her identity. She saw the world outside, and it was a kaleidoscope of experiences.

“As expected, their parents soon found out about the switch and locked her up again, forbidding the sister to see her. She believed her sister loved her and would visit. After waiting for what felt like an eternity, her sister finally returned. The sister told her their parents were dead, and she was free. No one could lock her up again.

“However, she didn’t celebrate. Instead, she harbored a wicked thought. She wanted to replace her sister. Completely unaware of her intentions, the sister was eager to let her out, but she refused. Her reason was simple. After 20 years in a basement the outside world was alien to her. She was scared she wouldn’t fit in. So, she had her sister rent her a house and hire a tutor. She was smart as a whip and quickly adapted to societal life.

“Later, her sister got married and had a child without telling her. When she found out she was livid. So, she locked her sister in the basement and impersonated her, trying to get a divorce. However, the man named Hawthorne was head over heels for Clair, and no matter what she did, he wouldn’t agree to a divorce. It was only when she threatened to kill herself that he gave in. After the divorce, she let her twin meet Hawthorne, but they ended up sleeping together, and hence Natalia was born.”

Marcus asked, “The real Clair was freed. Why didn’t she tell her husband the truth?”

Jayden replied. “The fake Clair was cunning as a fox. She had a few months old Cornelia in her clutches. Any move by the real Clair against her wishes could endanger Cornelia. And with Hank acting as a watchdog, monitoring her every move, the real Clair had no choice but to sacrifice herself to protect her child.”

Marcus listened silently.

Jayden said, "President Hartley, it was Hank and the fake C

Chapter 1039

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Comelia blushed and buried her head in his chest.

She wasn't overthinking, it was just that his behavior the night before was too undslial, even

more ferocious than a beast. It scared her, so that was why she reacted like that. However, Marcus showed Cornelia through his actions that he was just genuinely helping her shower, with no other intentions.

After the shower, laying on the soft bed, Comelia quickly fell asleep. With Marcus by her side, she slept really soundly this time, no more nightmares.

Marcus watched her peaceful sleeping face for a long time, then bent over to kiss her forehead. He then stood up, took his phone, and went out to the living room balcony He dialed a number, "Speak"

Jayden's voice came from the other end of the phone, "President Hartley, we found out. The real Clair died twenty years ago when she gave birth to Natalia."

Marcus adjusted his glasses, a sharp murderous intent flashed in his eyes, "(need concrete evidence."

Jayden said, "We probably can't find her remains."

Marcus asked, "What do you mean?"

A simple question, but it brought a strong pressure

Jayden quickly

explained, "We found Hank, used some methods, and learned that the current Clair is actually the real Clair's twin sister."

Marcus said, "Clair had a twin sister? Why didn't you guys find out before?"

Jayden explained, "No one considered this before, and only a few people know about it. One is the current Clair, one is Hank, and possibly Granger"

Marcus said, "Explain in detail."

Jayden continued, "Hank is a punk, knows a lot of people, and isn't afraid of death. We couldn't get him to spill the information we wanted. Finally, Ayden came up with a plan to have someone impersonate the current Clair to contact Hank, and that got him talking."

Marcus asked, "You guys used AI tech?"

Chapter 1040

Jayden nodded

in agreement, "He's stubborn as a mule, but he's got a soft spot for the fake Clair. The moment he gets a video call from Clair and sees her face, he doesn't even question it. He just immediately warns her that someone might be onto her true identity. Once we realized how much he cared for Clair, we knew we had a foothold. The rest was a piece of cake. A few tricks here and there, and he spilled all the beans."

Marcus scoffed, "Hank's a sly fox. He might have already sniffed out the rat and was just playing along"

Jayden swallowed nervously, "It didn't seem like he was onto us."

Marcus said, "Whether or not he smelled a rat, keep going with your story"

Jayden continued, "Back in the day, the Dennis family had twin daughters. But due to hush-

hush reasons, only one was announced to the world. The other was kept nameless and hidden away in the basement. The girl in the basement, that's the Clair we're dealing with now."

Upon hearing this, Marcus sneered internally. So, It wasn't just his parents who were heartless bastards. There were worse ones out there.

Jayden, oblivious to Marcus' reaction, went on, "At first, this Clair didn't mind her basement life until her twin sister discovered

her and told her about the wonderful world outside. The sister tried to free her, but their parents put their foot down. Unable to free her, the sister would visit her daily, telling her about the outside world and filling her with longing. One day, the sister stayed in the basement and let her walk out for the first time using her identity. She saw the world outside, and it was a kaleidoscope of experiences.

"As expected, their parents soon found out about the switch and locked her up again, forbidding the sister to see her. She believed her sister loved her and would visit. After waiting for what felt like an eternity, her sister finally returned. The sister told her their parents were dead, and she was free. No one could lock her up

again.

"However, she didn't celebrate. Instead, she harbored a wicked thought. She wanted to replace her sister. Completely unaware of her intentions, the sister was eager to let her out, but she refused. Her reason was simple. After 20 years in a basement the outside world was alien to her. She was scared she wouldn't fit in. So, she had her sister rent her a house and hire a tutor. She was smart as a whip and quickly adapted to societal life.

"Later, her sister got married and had a child without telling her. When she found out she was livid. So, she locked her sister in the basement and impersonated her, trying to g

et a divorce. However, the man named Hawthorne was head over heels for Clair, and no matter what she did, he wouldn't agree to a divorce. It was only when she threatened to kill herself that he gave in. After the divorce, she let her twin meet Hawthorne, but they ended up sleeping together, and hence Natalia was born."

Marcus asked, "The real Clair was freed. Why didn't she tell her husband the truth?"

Jayden replied. "The fake Clair was cunning as a fox. She had a few months old Comelia in her clutches. Any move by the real Clair against her wishes could endanger Cornelia. And with Hank acting as a watchdog, monitoring her every move, the real Clair had no choice but to sacrifice herself to protect her child."

Marcus listened silently.

Chapter 1039

Marcus held Comelia tight, "Yeah."

Comella snuggled up comfortably in his arms, "I'm feeling a lot better now, I need to go take a shower and then we can hit the hay. Tomorrow, I'll go with you back to the office."

Marcus immediately picked her up, "Allow me."

Comelia quickly pushed him away, "I'm on my period."

Marcus said, "What weird stuff are you thinking about? Would I disregard your condition?"

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Chapter 1041

Jayden responded, "Yeah, Hank spilled the beans to Clair."

Marcus said, "Hank's a sly fox, and he could be full of crap. You guys better double-check to make sure he didn't pull the wool over your eyes."

Jayden answered, "Roger that."

After a brief pause, Marcus asked again, "When did the real Clair get to see Hawthorne after she was locked up?"

Jayden answered, "In June of that year, when Cornelia was just a wee six months old

Marcus did some quick math. "So the real Clair hooked up with Hawthorne before the divorce, then Hank whisked her away from Rosenberg to Riverton. That same December, the fake Clair tied the knot with Granger, and by March the next year, Natalia was born."

Jayden said, "That's the long and short of it."

Marcus continued, "Three months after fake Clair married Granger, the real Clair popped out Natalia, then this kid was carted off to the Reese family by the fake Clair. To keep people from sniffing around about the kid's real roots, the Reese family judged Natalia's birthday to September. Something this big, you think Granger's in the dark?"

Jayden suddenly got it, "President Hartley, are you implying that the real Clair's death has something to do with Granger?"

Marcus had his suspicions, but no hard proof, "Hank and the fake Clair are both Rosenbergs, they had no clout in Riverton back in the day, making somebody disappear isn't exactly a cakewalk."

Jayden said, "I'll start digging into Granger then"

Marcus said, "Granger definitely knows about the two Clairs, and about Natalia's real parentage. He's all about the bottom line, why the hell did he agree to play daddy for Natalia?"

Jayden said, "The Reese family has been itching to hitch up with the Hartley family and they wanted to marry Natalia off to you. Once Natalia becomes your wife, the Reese family can rake in the dough, that's why he's cool with acknowledging her. Other than that, I can't think of any other motive."

Marcus shook his head, "There's probably more to this than we don't know about, dig deeper."

Jayden responded, "Will do."

After hanging up, Marcus pocketed his phone and looked up at the night sky.

The city was full of towering buildings, and in the heart of it, all he could see looking up was building after building. Stars were a rare sight.

At this moment, he felt like he was lost in a fog. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't see what was ahead..

He lit up a cigarette and took a few hard drags, Brennen's cold words from a few days ago echoed in his ears, "Marcus, if you have to choose between the Hartley Group and Cornelia, what's it gonna be?"

He had responded, "Cornelia's my wife, and the Hartley Group became globally famous under my management, I can't do without either, I want both."

Brennen said, "You want it all? Can you handle it? Marcus, don't bite off more than you can chew, or you might not even know what hit you"

Marcus sneered, "You think you can touch me with your little tricks?"

Brennen replied, "I managed to off Granny Rebecca without you noticing a thing, do you think I couldn't do the same to Cornelia? Of course, you could call my bluff. use her life to test me and see if I'm capable."

Chapter 1042

Marcus was the kind of guy who would try anything, no fear.

But when it came to Cornelia's life, he shouldn't roll the dice.

Brennen went on, "Marc, have you been feeling chest pains, a decline in vision, and chills recently? Do you know what's really up?"

Lately, Marcus had been feeling these symptoms. His chest was constantly in discomfort, his vision was deteriorating rapidly, and his body often felt as cold as

ice

He thought it might be the aftermath of a gunshot wound from years ago, but apparently it wasn't.

Marcus smirked, "When did you slick me?"

Brennen replied coldly, "When you were a kid, about five A buddy of mine developed a deadly drug that can kill without a trace. Once it's injected, the drug slowly destroys the victim's organs. In about twenty years or so, the person's organs would be completely eaten away, leaving only death waiting"

Brennen said such cruel words without a hint of emotion/Marcus seemed unaffected as though he wasn't the one injected with the lethal drug.

Brennen continued,

"Twenty years, that's a long time. Even if the person who was injected dies a horrible death, nobody would trace it back that far, so no one would find the real killer. He used to test on mice, but their lifespan is too short to last twenty years. He wanted to test on a real human, and that's where you came in. You were only five then twenty-five in twenty years, it seemed perfect. So, he injected you."

Marcus stared at the man in front of him. Who could be more cold-blooded than Brennen, willing to kill his own son?

He laughed, "You're so sure I won't kill you for spilling the beans?"

Brennen said, "I have nothing left to lose, what's there to fear?"

Marcus said, "According to you, I should have been six feet under by twenty-five, but I'm almost twenty-nine now."

Brennen said, "I asked my buddy what's the deal, if the experiment had failed. He told me to be patient, that the drug has different effects on different individuals, a three to five years margin of error is normal. There have been cases of people injected with the drug dying around the twenty-year mark."

Marcus said, "You guys don't give a damn about human lives."

Brennen said. "Don't make yourself sound so high and mighty. You've used extreme measures too. As for murder, as long as it's traceless, no one can find me. No one can arrest me."

Marcus said, "I don't mind tossing you back in the slammer for a few decades."

Brennen said, "I'm not worried about myself. Whether it's ten years or several decades in jail, it's all the same to me. But your wife Cornelia is a different story. I've been thinking, if you kick the bucket, could Cornelia handle the responsibility of the entire Hartley Group? How would she deal with all those greedy people outside who want a piece of the Hartley Group?"

Marcus was very familiar with his own health condition. If what Brennen said was true, he might indeed not have much time left.

Chapter 1043

Marcus knew that once he kicked the bucket, if Cornelia was still kicking around the Hartley Group, if she wanted to help Granny Luisa and him keep the Hartley Group, that would be like throwing her to the wolves, fighting for scraps with them.

Thinking back on his convo with Brennen that day, Marcus felt his unease growing stronger. All he could think about was that he couldn't let Cornelia be in such a dog-eat-dog world no matter what.

His train of thought was interrupted by a phone call. Marcus pulled out his phone to see "Zavier Rivera" on the screen. They hadn't touched base for a while, so he had no clue why Zavier was calling this late.

Marcus picked up the call and heard Xavier say, "Marc, how about we grab a few drinks?"

Marcus put out his cigarette, "You in Riverton?"

Zavier laughed, "How else would I invite you for drinks if I weren't in Riverton? You coming?"

Marcus said, "Cornelia's already asleep. Let's do it tomorrow night. I'll bring her along"

Zavier wasn't surprised at all that Marcus turned him down, "Without Cornelia, can't find your way?"

No matter how Zavier tried to rile him up, Marcus didn't bite, "If you don't have anything else, I'm gonna hang up the phone."

Zavier said, "We're mates, can't I just call to shoot the breeze?"

Marcus asked, "What do you want to talk about?"

Zavier chuckled, "About Clair, I've got the lowdown."

Marcus said, "Don't get too chummy with Brennen, it won't do you any good"

Zavier said, "Are you worried about me? Or afraid I might team up with him and you can't handle us?"

Marcus said, "You think you can easily control the situation? Don't forget, that guy is Brennen."

Zavier said, "So what? Didn't you have him thrown in jail, for a whole ten years."

Marcus said. "You don't know..."

He almost spilled the beans about that day, but luckily he stopped himself in time, "Brennen is more dangerous than you think."

Zavier said again, "Even if he is that dangerous, as long as I'm not his enemy, what can he do to me?"

Marcus said. "Some people can hurt their own kin, do you think he cares if you're his enemy or not?"

Zavier said. "Let's drop it, talking about him only brings us down. I just wanted to ask, do you want to know where Clair really went?"

Marcus said, "I've got people on it, we'll have info soon."

Zavier said, "There're only three people who know where Clair went, Hank, Fake Clair and Granger. To get the truth out of them, that's a tall order. So, you might as well call off your people, don't waste resources."

Marcus said, "How would I know if I don't look?"

Zavier said, "Alright, then keep digging. When you're stumped and can't find the answer, you can come to me. I won't ask for anything in return, I'll tell you everything"

Marcus said, "I appreciate it in advance then."

Zavier said, "Marc..."

Marcus said, "Talk"

Chapter 1044

Zavier said, "If you want to show your thanks, do it with actions. Where is Skyler now? How's her life going?"

Marcus replied, "I've told you, I have no idea where she is."

Zavier's voice suddenly turned cold, "You really have no clue where she is? If she gets into trouble, if something happens, I'll make Cornelia feel the same fear"

Marcus responded, "Zavier, I can't accept what you just said" He hung up, his eyes icy and terrifying behind his silver glasses.

Just as he was about to go back to his room, his phone rang again. It was Zavier Marcus rejected the call outright. He called several times in a row, and finally, Marcus picked up.

Zavier said, "Marcus, I was out of line just now, I apologize"

Marcus responded, "I don't accept."

Zavier said, "Why are you doing this to me? It's you who hid my wife. You've messed up with me, and I just said something wrong. Why should I apologize?"

Marcus responded, "I didn't ask you to apologize!"

Zavier cursed, "Damn it!"

Marcus asked, "Zavier, what are your true feelings for Skyler?"

This time, Zavier didn't hesitate or try to hide his feelings, "I love her. I miss her all the time. I'm always hoping she can come back to me. Marcus, I really won't hurt. Skyler again, can you give her back to me?"

Marcus replied, "You once hurt her in the name of love. She chose to abort your child, rather die than be with you"

Upon hearing this, Zavier still felt suffocated, "I always thought Skyler was my pet. spoiled her, took care of her, helped her family, and gave her all the good things. I thought no matter what I did, she would never leave me. I thought she left because she didn't appreciate. But these months without her, I've reflected on this. Loving someone is not the

way I used to do

it. The most basic requirement to love someone is to respect her, just like you do with Cornelia. If a girl can't even get basic respect with me, what right do I have to say I love her?"

Marcus listened, he could hear from his tone that Xavier really seemed to have realized what his problem was, "Skyler is doing well, and I will convey what you said to her, Whether to see you or not, that's her call."

-Xavier was relieved, "Where is her?"

Marcus didn't respond.

Xavier added, "Then please tell her for me, everything before was my mistake. I didn't consider things from her perspective. If she can forgive me, come back to me, I'll do everything I can to make her life better."

Marcus chuckled.

Xavier asked, "What are you laughing at? Every word I say is from the heart. None of it is false."

Marcus said, "Your sweet talk has no effect on me, you should save it for your wife."

Xavier asked, "Marc, do you seem to have changed a bit?"

Marcus questioned back, "Really? What's changed about me?"

Xavier continued. "You've become more persuadable, gentler. It seems Cornelia has had a big influence on you, I really want to know what magic she has to make a man like you change so much."

Marcus answered, "Cornelia is the best girl I've ever met. It's enough that I know how good she is, you don't need to

Zavier said,

“Are you worried that I might steal your wife? Don’t worry, for me, Skyler is the best girl.”

Marcus simply smiled and said nothing more.

Chapter 1045

*After a while, Xavier’s deep voice echoed again in Marcus’ ear through the phone, “Mar
c.*

Marcus lit another cigarette, “Shool.”

*Zavier continued, “We’ve known each other for a decade. You’ve always been an Impor
tant figure to me, and I don’t want to be your enemy.”*

*Marcus flicked the ash, took a deep drag on his cigarette, then said, “If you don’t want to
be my enemy, then get the hell away from Brennen.”*

*Zavier responded, “It’s just a scratch–my–back–t–scmtch–
yours situation with him. We both know better than to trust each other fully. We’re both
watching our own backs. Plus, I reckon if it comes down to it, I could take him.”*

Marcus let out a cold chuckle

Zavier asked, “Are you laughing at me? Doubling my chops?”

Marcus changed the subject, “Did Granger spill the beans about Clair?”

*Zavier answered. “Who else could it be? Granger’s Reese Group is going down the tub
es. If they can’t find someone to bail them out soon, they’ll be declaring bankruptcy. Gra*

nger is desperate now. Anybody who's willing to fork out the dough, hell call daddy. When I heard this affair involved you, I agreed to throw some money at the Reese Group."

Marcus said, "I'm not interested in the backstory, cut to the chase."

Zavier said, "I can confirm that the real Clair is died"

Marcus wasn't shocked. The Reese family and the fake Clair were all snakes who would stop at nothing to achieve their goals. Once the fake Clair replaced the real one, the real Clair was just a ticking time bomb. No way the fake Clair would let that risk hang around.

Zavier continued, "Granger said after the fake Clair usurped her place, she and some guy named Hank tried to snuff out the real Clair Lucky for Clair, she got a second wind after they dumped her in the mountains Granger's men had been tailing Hank and kept him in the loop, so Granger managed to save the real Clair. He claimed he not only saved her, but also helped her change her name and start a new life somewhere else

Marcus asked, "If Granger said Clair's still kicking, why did you say she's dead?"

Zavier chuckled, "Do you buy his story? I don't. Granger doesn't have a pot to piss in tight now, and nobody's willing to lend him a hand. He claimed Clair's alive and only he knows where she is, obviously he's trying to bait you into contacting him, then he can negotiate terms."

Marcus said, "Tell him to pay me a visit."

Zavier asked, surprised, "Knowing his game, you still want to see him?"

Marcus said, "She's Cornelia's birth mother. Regardless of whether it's true or not, I need to verify it myself."

Even though Marcus knew Granger was full of hot air, he couldn't take chances. Even if there was a one in a million chance, he needed to investigate himself to give Cornelia a satisfactory answer in the future.

Zavier said, 'I'll arrange it now, meet us at The Bubbly Barrel.'

Marcus responded, "I'll be there in half an hour"

After hanging up the phone, Marcus went back to the bedroom.

On the bed, Cornelia was curled up into a ball. Her head buried in the pillow, occupying only a small part of the left side of the bed. The air conditioner must have been turned down too low, Cornelia's arm that was outside the blanket was covered in goosebumps.

Marcus gently rubbed her arm until the goosebumps disappeared, then he tucked her arm into the blanket

He moved her to the center of the bed, pulled up the thin blanket to cover her, then planted a soft kiss on her forehead, preparing to leave.

Chapter 1046

In the midst of her slumber, Cornelia suddenly gripped his wrist tight, murmuring his name, "Jeremy, you can't leave me."

Her voice was so gentle that it moved Marcus to the core. He bent down to kiss her lightly, "Cornelia, I'm here, I've always been here. Nothing can tear us apart unless I drop dead."

However, Cornelia didn't respond. She wasn't really awake but just clinging onto him instinctively, scared he might leave her

"What a go!" Marcus held her hand for a while before leaving her side.

Due to staying a bit longer with Cornelia, Marcus was already half an hour late to The Bubbly Barrel. Granger was already there. Not only Granger, but also

Cameron

Seeing Marcus enter, Cameron immediately got up to greet him, "Marc, long time no see"

Marcus just glanced at him without responding and headed straight for the sofa.

Zavier poured him a drink, "Fancy a couple of drinks?"

Marcus replied, "Been having a sour stomach lately. Comelia won't let me drink."

Zavier chuckled, "President Harley, can you stop mentioning Cornelia all the time? You sound like you can't live without her."

Marcus sincerely replied, "Indeed, I can't live without her"

Zavier was speechless.

Marcus turned to Granger, "Spill it."

Granger drained his glass, "Marc, you're a sentimental guy, and you love your wife dearly. You wouldn't want Cornelia's mother to live a lonely life, would you?"

Marcus asked, "Where is she?"

Knowing he couldn't outdo Marcus, Granger cut to the chase. "If you help the Reese Group through this crisis and get us back on track, I'll hand Clair over to you."

Marcus scoffed, "You think you're in a position to bargain with me?"

Granger retorted, "If I weren't, you wouldn't be here. Your presence here shows interest in what I've got, so yes, I am"

Marcus replied, "Hand her over, and I assure the safety of the Reese Group."

Granger challenged, "If I hand her over and you don't help, what can I do? If you help but I don't hand her over, you could take the Reese Group down in a heartbeat."

Marcus stared at Granger, who seemed calm and not lying.

Granger turned to Zavier, "Mr. Rivera, back me up here."

Zavier said, "Marc knows what he's doing, what can I say?"

Just then, Marcus' phone in his pocket suddenly rang. He answered immediately Ayden's voice on the other end was grim. "President Hartley, just as you predicted, someone tried to kidnap Cornelia soon after you left."

Chapter 1047

"I got it!" Marcus hung up the phone, instantly eyeing Xavier, then casting a glance at the other two. He was radiating a cold, intimidating aura that made everyone in the room feel his murderous intent.

Xavier figured Marcus had just gotten some news, but he kept his cool, smiled and said, "Marcus, I know you have your people around Cornelia. I know it won't be easy to whisk her away, and that's why I tricked you into coming here. I didn't exactly lie to you though, I just wanted to share a drink with you."

Marcus adjusted his glasses, looking at Xavier with a chilly gaze, "I can forgive a lot, but this, I can't let this slide."

Xavier dropped the act, smashing his glass on the table, "Marcus, you can hide my wife, but I can't team up with others and take yours?"

Marcus helped Skyler because she was miserable with Xavier and wanted out. What Xavier was doing, however, was teaming up with Marcus' enemies to take Cornelia. Xavier wasn't stupid, he knew what would happen if Cornelia fell into Brennen's hands, but he did it anyway.

Marcus looked at him, his eyes as cold as if he was eyeing a stranger, "Xavier, I gave you a chance. You blew it. From now on, we're enemies."

Xavier sneered, "The moment you hid my wife Skyler and didn't hand her over, we became enemies. You can't possibly still think I don't care about what you did, right? You can't possibly still think that just by telling me Skyler's whereabouts, I'll forgive you. I hate you, Marcus. I despise you to the core. I want to tear you two apart, make sure you never see each other again"

"Give it your best shot. With that, Marcus got up and walked out.

Zavier grabbed a bottle and smashed it on the table, "Marcus, don't think I won't dare to do anything to you. I'm telling you, if you walk out that door, you're my enemy."

Marcus didn't hesitate, and walked out elegantly.

*Seeing Marcus really leave, the Reeses were anxious, especially Granger, "Zavier, you just let him leave? Have our guys got Cornelia?**

Zavier lifted his gaze to Granger, "You've known him for so many years. Do you really not know what kind of person he is? If Cornelia was really taken, could he be so calm?"

Granger replied, "Marcus has always been good at controlling his emotions. I can't tell from his expression whether or not Cornelia has been taken."

Zavier said, "You're such an idiot!"

Granger frowned in anger, "We didn't get Cornelia and Marcus left, what do we do now?"

Zavier retorted, "You're asking me? Don't you have a brain? Can't you think for yourself?"

Granger replied, "Mr. Rivera, things change. Today the Reese Group is in a bad spot and it seems like anyone can insult me. You'd better pray that the Rivera family stays prosperous, or I'll pay you back double for today's insult."

Zavier didn't take Granger seriously, as always, "Well, I'll wait and see if you can rise again, see if you can pay back double."

"Enough! We're partners, stop arguing!" As this stern voice echoed, Brennen appeared at the door.

He glanced at the three men in the room, "We need to work closely together, united as one, to succeed. We absolutely can't afford any internal chaos. We can't let

Marcus defeat us.”

Zavier spat in Brennen’s direction, whose face turned grave, “Mr. Rivera, what’s the meaning of this?”

Zavier replied, “I’ve lived for almost thirty years, I’ve met all sorts of people, but I’ve never seen anyone as cold-hearted and shameless as you. Marc is your own son, look what you’ve done to him.”

Granger listened on, thinking it was best to let these two fight it out for now.

Chapter 1048

Brennen said, “I only have one son, Who the hell is Marcus?”

Zavier was speechless.

Brennen continued, “Our attempt to kidnap Cornella failed. Because of this, Marcus will definitely tighten up her security. It’ll be tougher to get to her next time.”

Granger said, “If we can’t kidnap her, we can trick her into walking right into our trap

Brennen asked, “Got any bright ideas?”

Granger said, “We can spread a rumor that her mom, Clair, is still alive. Once she hears that, she’ll be hell-bent on finding her.”

Brennen said, “That woman is smart. She won’t be easily fooled.”

Granger asserted, “She’s been with Marcus for a while, and they’ve got feelings for each other. Trying to convince her that you made up the story about Marcus killing Jeremy won’t be easy. But this is a different case Her family is dead. If she thinks her

mom is still alive, she'll lose her cool. And people tend to screw up when they're not thinking straight."

Brennen said, "In the absence of a better plan, you can give this a shot"

Granger said, "I'll tell her the news tomorrow. But who should deliver the message to make sure she doesn't suspect anything?"

Brennen said, "Her sister, I guess."

Granger said, "Alright, I'll message the little girl right away"

Zavier let out a cold laugh.

Brennen said, "Mr. Rivera, you have something to say?"

Zavier said, "I thought you were smart, but you're just resorting to petty tricks."

Brennen asked, "Got any bright ideas?"

Zavier pulled out his phone, typed a message in front of everyone, and sent it to Cornelia: I heard your mother is still alive.]

After sending it, he looked at the three men, "Do you know what real bait is? Real bait is concise information."

Brennen chuckled, "Well, we'll be waiting for your good news then."

Zavier waved them off, "You can leave now. Don't interrupt my drinking."

"Mr. Rivera, too much alcohol is bad for your health. Brennen gave some fake advice before leaving.

The people from the Reese family didn't utter a word and followed Brennen out.

After they left, Zavier slouched on the sofa, drinking one glass after another. When he was drunk, he vaguely saw Skyler.

Skyler was wearing her favorite blue dress, standing in front of him, quietly gazing down at him with disappointed eyes.

**Skyler? Skyler, is that you? Are you back?* Xavier lunged forward to grab her hand, and it felt like he really caught hold of something.*

Chapter 1049

Zavier gripped the soft hand tightly, kneading it over and over, “Skyler, is that really you? You’re not mad at me anymore? You’re willing to forgive me?”

The woman tried to get closer to Xavier, “Mr. Rivera, I’m not Skyler. But I can be whoever you want me to be if you’d like.”

Her voice reached Xavier’s ears and he snapped half-awake. He forced his eyes open, looking coldly at the stranger in front of him, “You’re not Skyler? Who sent you to pretend to be her?”

The woman said,

“Mr. Rivera, I’m not pretending to be anyone Mr. Reese sent me so you wouldn’t be lonely.”

Zavier asked, “Granger?”

“Who else could it be?” The woman moved closer to Xavier, “Mr. Rivera, don’t waste time. Let me keep you company in bed.”

Zavier grabbed the woman’s hand and shoved her away forcefully, “Buzz off!”

The woman was taken aback by the rejection but quickly regained her composure. She looked at Xavier with a pitiful expression, “Mr. Rivera, what’s wrong? If I did something wrong, tell me, I’ll change. I’ll try to be like Skyler. You’re scaring me.”

Zavier suddenly reached out, clutching her throat tightly. You think you’re like Skyler?

His actions frightened the woman, and she grabbed his hand begging for mercy. "Me Rivera, I'm sorry, let me go. I won't do it again."

"Go tell Mr. Reese to stop messing with me. If he pisses me off, he'll pay" Xavier let go of the woman, clearly disgusted

When Xavier got angry, few weren't afraid of him. The woman quickly left after being released.

Once again, Xavier was left alone in the room. He poured himself a drink, downing like water and then burst into laughter, "Skyler, you heartless woman. You just left without a trace. Do you know, I've been searching for you all over the world these past few months, living like a ghost. Skyler, have you really forgotten our years of love? Don't you miss our old times?"

Getting to the heartbreaking part, Xavier started chugging from the bottle. Soon, the bottle was empty, but he didn't stop. After searching the world and not finding Skyler, he started drinking every day, not caring about his business, wasting away like a walking corpse.

His grandfather even warned him that if Xavier continued to wallow like this, he would call all shareholders meeting to elect a new CEO, but it had no effect. Xavier was highly capable, and Rivera Inc. was firmly under his control. Not even his grandfather could interfere with him or Rivera Inc.

After finishing a bottle, he opened another. In his drunken haze, he seemed to see Skyler again. He laughed bitterly. "Heartless woman, you left me so easily. Why should I be the one suffering endlessly? Are you worth it?"

Was she worth it?

He knew best! She was so worth it!

Without any unexpected events, he would be drinking till dawn again, falling asleep in a drunken stupor, and waking up groggily.

Chapter 1050

Zavier, you're clearly a cold-hearted dude, stop pretending to be Mr. Romantic. If you keep up this act, you might just trap yourself in your own character, unable to break free. The voice echoed.

Zavier looked up, his vision blurred, and chuckled, "The booze tonight is amazing, getting drunk not only lets me see Skyler but also hear her voice. What is this, drink? I need the waiter to send some over to my place. I can savour it slowly Every time I miss Skyler, I'll have a sip, and then I can see her, hear her voice."

And

with that, Xavier collapsed onto the couch, out like a light. He was unaware that not too far from his couch stood a slim, beautiful woman. The woman was watching him, her face full of disdain.

Meanwhile, Marcus had returned to Lakeview Estates.

He had been out and about, reeking of booze and other unpleasantnesses, so he didn't head straight to his room. Instead, he took a shower, changed into clean pyjamas, and then went back to his room.

Not wanting to wake Cornelia, he walked softly and climbed into bed gently.

However, the moment he lay down, Cornelia snuggled into his arms. Marcus thought she had awakened, but looking down at her, he realised she was still sleeping. just instinctively seeking him out.

He held her close, patting her back gently. And then he heard Cornelia's voice, "Where were you?"

Looking down at her again, he saw her eyes open, "When did you wake up?"

"I woke up when you came back and took a shower" Comelia moved closer to him, sniffing. "Did you sneak out to do something naughty? Why did you have to take a shower before coming back to the room?"

Marcus laughed, "I met a beautiful woman, and I smelled like her perfume. I was afraid you would find out, so I had to take a shower first."

Comelia responded, "If you can sneak out to see a beautiful woman, I can sneak out to see a handsome man."

Marcus retorted, "You wouldn't dare!"

Cornelia countered. "If you can, why can't I?"

Marcus said, "I was just joking. I went out because Xavier asked me to. There was right of her woman)

Comelia asked, "Did Xavier ask you out again? Did he ask you where Skyler is?"

Marcus nodded, "Yes. Do you want to know where she is?"

Comelia said, "I want to know, but don't tell me. I'm afraid I won't be able to resist looking for her and then I'll lead Xavier to her, and Skyler will have to move again."

Marcus suddenly asked, "Comelia, have you ever thought about living in another city?"

Cornelia shook her head, "I left Rosenberg for Riverton to go to college when I was 18 brought my first house here. You're here too. There are too many people and, things here that I can't leave behind. I've never thought about living anywhere else."

Marcus suggested, "The Capital and Harbor City are pretty good"

Cornelia gripped his hand tightly, saying, "If you're tired of Riverton and want to live in another city, I'll go with you wherever you want to go as long as you need my company. As long as you're with me, anywhere can be our home."

“As long as you’re with me, anywhere can be our home.” That was the most comforting thing to hear.