

The Divorce 251

Chapter 251 The Bad Guy Wins Again

Grayson promptly entered my office, and I instructed him to commence his investigation.

Tobshampton Group had indeed forged an agreement with Ardora Construction, which fell under

Matthew's jurisdiction.

As expected, few individuals could orchestrate such a move, and Matthew was the prime suspect.

"But, it wasn't Matthew who initiated this. It was a scheme set up by Liora!" Grayson relayed.

"Liora?" I was surprised. How did she become involved in this?

Grayson explained, "Initially, Tobshampton Group had no intentions of partnering with Ardora Construction. Matthew wasn't even being considered for Topshampton Group's project. During their

previous collaboration, there was friction.

"Matthew substituted Tobshampton Group's genuine product with subpar materials in the construction

process, utilizing a small factory for production. With minor alterations, he passed them off as authentic.

"So, when the incident occurred, Tobshampton Group didn't step forward. This time, Ardora Construction

wasn't even on their list when selecting a new supplier. It was all due to Liora!"

Grayson's investigation was thorough.

"How does Liora have connections with Tobshampton Group?" I was skeptical, considering Tobshampton Group's base wasn't even in Foswood.

"It's a small world. Liora has a friendship with the Tobshampton Group's owner's wife, and... Eleanor is a confidante of Tobshampton Group's owner."

"Confidante?" I was even more astonished. I hadn't expected Eleanor to wield this level of influence.

This paints a clear picture. Thanks to Liora's connection through the owner, she managed to secure the contract and even expressed her frustrations directly to the owner." Grayson smirked. "It's a bit convoluted, isn't it?"

"It's a bit tangled, indeed," I pondered. "So, how did Liora pass the contract to Matthew?"

"Why did you cross Liora?" Grayson sounded somewhat resigned.

"Let me handle this. You can wait for me here."

I was exasperated. It seemed Liora was indeed holding a grudge.

Eleanor hesitated and asked, "You don't want to ask... who signed the contract... with us?"

“I won’t put you in a tough spot,” I said openly, “Whoever it is, there must be a reason.”

I had a vague sense of who it might be, but I couldn’t be sure.

Hearing my response, Eleanor sighed and laughed bitterly. I knew she felt conflicted.

“All right then, until we meet again,” Eleanor said before we hung up.

Carol stomped in frustration. “Damn it! We got played, didn’t we? Who conducts business like that? We

didn’t want to sign the contract, but they insisted and then backed out. What kind of trick is this? Benny

even said they were trustworthy!”

“There’s something wrong here. Get Grayson for me,” I said thoughtfully. I wasn’t angry because I didn’t

sign the deal. It was more about someone interfering with my business, and I wanted to find out who they

were.

I didn’t want to ask Eleanor directly because it could’ve put her in a tough spot. Still, I needed to know.

Chapter 252 An Unexpected Encounter

I felt a sense of relief now that things were clear.

It seemed that the Tobshampton Group was also caught up in this. This might not end well for Matthew,

but he had been too eager to stand out and crush me.

This time, he would have to rely on his luck. He and I were like cunning foxes, yet we couldn't outsmart these two clever vixens.

Looking at it this way, perhaps it wasn't so bad that I wasn't entangled in this battle of wits with them. I preferred making modest profits in peace and finding contentment.

After lunch, I had Benjamin and Carol accompany me to the construction materials market. It had been a while since I last visited.

This market was where we had started our journey, tirelessly seeking clients. Reflecting on those early days brought a sense of satisfaction,

The market was small at the time. It had grown into the country's largest construction materials hub, offering everything needed for large and small-scale construction and decoration.

Grayson was also here. Seeing me caught him somewhat off guard. "Ms. Chloe, what brings you here?"

"It's been a while since I've had a look around. Why not?" I replied.

If we weren't doing project engineering, specializing in one or two types of products could also be a good

business strategy.

Grayson whispered, "I followed up on the project in Muborough. Echelon Group did initially own it. However, how it ended up in Celine's hands is unclear. The two companies were competitors all along. My gut tells me that Celine might have had a hand in this."

I remained silent. Atlas had coveted that piece of land near the city for a long time, and there had to be a

deeper plan behind it.

If Celine was behind this, wouldn't it be self-destructive for her? It seemed she didn't want Atlas to regain what rightfully belonged to him. That meant one thing—Celine didn't want him to succeed.

We'll need to investigate how Celine managed to get hold of the land in Muborough," said in a low

voice. There must be conditions attached to it."

Grayson nodded. After a walk around, we coincidentally ran into Johnson at the entrance. He greeted me

before rushing to the market.

I quietly asked Grayson, "Shall we see what's happening?"

He turned and gave a quick instruction to a young man beside him. I waited in the car. Soon, Grayson

returned and said, "They're taking inventory."

"Inventory?" I muttered. Then, I started the car and headed back to the residence.

I checked the time back at the company and informed Benjamin and Carol, 'I won't be going up.

They both acknowledged it and got out of the car. I drove alone to Crowne Square, leisurely strolling through the mall.

I went to the children's store and bought a bunch of toys along with a few sets of kids' clothes. Then, I also picked up a few sets of spring outfits for my daughter.

With my hands full of shopping bags, I headed towards the exit. A few women approached me, all bright and glamorous. They were chatting and heading into the mall. Leading them was Liora.

I inwardly chuckled. I hadn't expected the world to be so small that I would run into them everywhere.

When her gaze met mine, she hesitated for a moment.

However, she slowed down and looked at me with a determined gaze. I approached with a smile, "Mrs.

Liora, out for some shopping?"

Her eyes met mine, seemingly contemplating how to address me. Her steps, however, came to a halt. The

ladies behind her glanced at us.

Liora turned to them and said, "Go ahead!"

They shot me a glance and proceeded upstairs, chatting and laughing.

Liora turned back to me. "I didn't expect to run into you here!"

I smiled. "I'm just here for some casual shopping."

"Ms Chloe, always so independent. I've always admired that." Liora's tone was flat, but she clearly had something else on her mind.

What do you mean by that?' I asked calmly.

Chapter 253 No Need for Comparison

She smiled. "I thought you were a clean and upright person. It turns out that it's just a facade. You're aiming for the big fish while disregarding the small fry?" Her tone dripped with contempt this time.

"Ms. Liora, why make such assumptions? Have I offended you in some way to deserve this treatment? It's

rather impolite, don't you think?" I feigned innocence.

Since she had laid her cards on the table, I saw no need to dodge the issue. !

"Heh... Is this considered impolite?" She let out a disdainful snort. "You'll do whatever it takes, won't you? Don't act all high and mighty while secretly groveling to the big shots."

"Oh?" I responded with a light chuckle, never breaking eye contact with Liora.

I had no intention of backing down. After all, I had already crossed her, and there was no way to avoid it. There was no need for reconciliation,

“In that case, I’d kindly ask you to go back and talk with Mr. Atticus about how I supposedly groveled before him. I’d love to hear about it.”

I understood she referred to the favor Atticus had shown by helping me resolve the project’s timeline.

However, since Atticus dared to take such action, he must not have been swayed by her influence. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have dared to kick the Thompson family out of Echelon Group.

It was clear that Liora was also a coward in front of Atticus. Atticus was not the kind of man who would give in to a woman’s charms.

I found my impression of Atticus improving a bit.

“In business, everyone has their methods. I don’t resort to underhanded tactics like secret deals or bullying my way to success. I’m just a small business owner, far from having the capital you possess, Ms. Liora.”

My words were delivered without humility or arrogance, yet they carried weight.

Please spare us small business owners, Ms. Liora, The hat is too big for us to hold up.” I smiled gently. Well, I wont keep you any longer. See your

hup my bags and walked briskly towards the axit, leaving Llors without a chance to reply.

Johnson’s house to check on his child and Myre

needed to watch for Marth

At the very least, some individuals wanted to use him.

Myra was very enthusiastic when she saw me. She pulled me to see her child. The little one was adorable and well-taken care of, with rosy cheeks. He was already crawling.

Myra complained to me about Johnson's recent struggles.

She said Melanie constantly meddled in company matters, and the staff complained. They said it was no longer the original Tanum Corporation.

I didn't particularly enjoy hearing her talk about this. I had no interest in their affairs and wouldn't even bother with them if they hadn't consistently obstructed my path. It would be best if we parted ways—a

clean break.

We chatted until it was time to leave. Myra insisted on inviting me for dinner, but I declined.

For now, I didn't need to ask Johnson too many questions. I didn't want to put pressure on him. Those who meant business would naturally resolve such issues. Not many could be as ruthless as Matthew.

This relationship just needed to be maintained.

On the way back, I aimlessly drove around. I glanced at the giant billboards on the roadside. One of them

happened to be for Harmony.

I chuckled lightly. Come to think of it, that face did resemble mine.

Unconsciously, I seemed to have taken a wrong turn. I blinked, realizing I had ended up heading toward

Pleca Park. In a daze, I parked by the side of the road.

Chapter 254 A Mall Event

I sat in the car for a long time, gazing toward Pleca Park. After rush hour, I started the car and drove home.

Perhaps it was from sitting in the car for so long or sheer exhaustion, but I felt dizzy. Luckily, there weren't as many cars on the road at this time, so I arrived home quickly.

arms,

Upon parking, I spotted my daughter playing in the yard. I approached, and she leaped into my arms, exclaiming, "Mommy, you're back!"

She then took my bag and dashed into the house. Shortly after, she returned, grabbing my hand and pulling me outside to play.

I had thought about lying down for a while when I got home. However, seeing her so excited, I couldn't bear to refuse.

We played in the yard together, sometimes watering the plants and other times tending to the flowers. We played until the lights came on, and it seemed that my feelings of exhaustion had dissipated.

My mother called us in for dinner, and we finally entered the house hand-in-hand.

After dinner, I remembered the new clothes I had bought for my daughter. I hurried to the car to fetch them and asked her to try them on. Then, I realized that my daughter had grown taller.

The clothes I bought were too small, fitting her too snugly. It seemed I would have to go and exchange.

them tomorrow

I hugged Ava and kissed her. "When did you grow so much? I didn't even notice. You're turning into a big

girl

"Mommy, I'm five years old!" She proudly declared. "Why isn't Uncle Atlas back yet? He promised to get me a tablet for my birthday."

My heart suddenly flipped. I held her tightly. "Soon! He has gone abroad."

What's abroad? Why does Uncle Atlas always go abroad?

Abroad is a very faraway place, a different city" I answered simply

dom, can we go abroad too?" She looked at me with hopeful eyes

we have the time I'll take your I promised, "Now, go to sleep! I'll get you a tablet,

"No, I want it from Uncle Atlas. Uncle Atlas said he'd get the best one! Mommy, you won't understand!"

She shook her head.

I was speechless. He had once said that daughters should be raised in wealth. I didn't understand it then. Now, my daughter was saying I didn't understand either.

The next day, I went to the mall to exchange my daughter's clothes. However, I arrived during a jewelry brand event. The first-floor lobby was packed, all waiting for some celebrity to arrive.

I glanced at the backdrop on the small stage. It was a renowned International jewelry brand, Sautoir Fine Jewelry, making a grand launch with its new spokesperson.

When I looked at the spokesperson's image, it turned out to be Harmony,

There was a commotion, and the crowd surged forward like a tidal wave. Everyone was rushing into the

lobby, some of the younger ones shouting Harmony's name,

I spotted Harmony walking in, surrounded by bodyguards. She was gorgeous, with her face covered in

make-up.

Ivanna was being pushed along, moving passively toward the small stage. This seemed to be a well-

known event, and Ivanna was a part of it.

I wasn't particularly interested in this, but I had to wade through the enthusiastic fans to get upstairs. It

was a real struggle.

It was no wonder these businesses hired spokespeople. With so many passionate fans, the impact was not to be underestimated.

With an exuberant smile, Harmony took the stage. The emcee on-site was fervently praising her, emphasizing the magnitude of this event.

Honestly, I found it rather distasteful. It was too noisy for my liking. I maneuvered towards the staircase, but it was packed

Everyone was pushing toward the lobby. There were hardly any, like me, going against the flow.

Just then, I heard the emcee booming with excitement, “This time, the owner of Arkadia Plaza, Mr. Atlas

Pierce, is here to support the leading international jewelry brand, Sautoir Fine Jewelry, Let’s welcome our bg boss Mr. Allas Pierce!

was forcibly thrust into my ears, I froze my steps, turning slowly to face the stage.

Chapter 255 A Torrential Downpour

The crowd behind me surged forward, pushing me involuntarily towards the small stage.

I didn’t understand these people. What were they so excited about? They were all shouting and jumping around, and I couldn’t help but look towards the stage.

Finally, I saw him.

Atlas, dressed in a sharp black designer suit and a silver tie, confidently strode onto the stage. He looked even more commanding and charismatic than the last time I saw him. My heart pounded wildly in my chest.

This was my first time seeing him since that day at the hospital. He seemed larger than life, a true king among men. It was no wonder the women in the audience were going wild. They might have even tried to pounce on him if he was any closer.

I hadn't realized that Atlas owned Arkadia Plaza. Even the coveted Sautoir Fine Jewelry, which everyone was clamoring for, was his. I thought Atlas was only involved in development, but I was sorely mistaken.

He waved his hand, signaling the enthusiastic crowd to quiet down. Instantly, thousands of voices fell silent as if under a spell. His magnetic voice resonated throughout the entire hall.

As he gave a brief speech, Harmony stood by, enchanted. She was constantly changing poses, gracefully complimenting him.

Then, together, they drew the winning numbers for the gift bags.

After completing all the procedures, the two exchanged a smile. Like a guardian angel, Atlas escorted Harmony down the stage, disappearing from view.

Even so, the hall buzzed with excitement. It took me a while to come back to my senses.

struggled to get out of the crowd and made my way upstairs. The situation on the upper floors was much better, though crowds were still around the atriums

It seemed that the real driving force behind Harmony's rise was none other than Atlas,

After exchanging Ava's clothes and leaving the mall, I went to the underground parking lot to find my car.

from a distance and was about to get in when someone grabbed my wrist. Startled, I turned

men who had just seemed unreachable stood right behind me.

had he forget what he tended to do, we both just stared at

The car beside us was suddenly unlocked with a 'click.' This snapped me back to reality, and I quickly

withdrew my hand.

"Mr. Atlas... Did you need something?" I stammered.

He didn't say a word and just extended a box toward me. "A birthday gift for Ava."

I glanced down briefly, not daring to meet his eyes. "Thank you. It's not necessary."

His hand visibly tensed for a moment, then quickly retracted. Without saying anything more, he turned

and walked away.

I truly felt like the whole world had abandoned me. What did this mean? He couldn't spare one more word? Was this the end?

I stared blankly in the direction he left for a long time, unable to snap out of it. If it weren't for the owner of the nearby car trying to get to their door, I might have still been standing there.

I quickly left the mall as hot tears streamed down my face. This was for the best. I could finally let go of all the tangled emotions. The painful journey had finally reached its end.

It was something I had to face sooner or later. Before I even returned to the office, the phone rang. I pressed the button on the car phone to answer.

I

"Ms. Chloe? This is Atticus. Do you have a moment? I'd like to meet with you. There's an important matter

Chapter 256 There's No Escape

"Sure, where are you, Mr. Atticus?" I replied.

"I'm at the same clubhouse as last time. I'll send you the location."

"Okay!" I agreed and hung up, receiving the location from Atticus shortly after. After checking the location

and directions, I headed straight to the place. When I arrived, Atticus was already waiting there.

“Mr. Atticus.” I walked in briskly.

He wasted no time and poured me a cup of tea, saying, “I have a favor to ask of you, Ms. Chloe.”

Honestly, my impression of this man improved with each encounter. He was straightforward and didn’t play games. I said, “Go ahead.”

Since I was receptive, he pulled out a document and passed it to me. “Look at this first.”

I glanced at him curiously, then took the document. It was a project contract but not under Echelon Group. The development area was substantial, and someone had done the planning well.

However, I didn’t understand why Atticus showed me this contract. After reading it, I looked at him. “Mr.

Atticus?”

He said thoughtfully. “That’s a mortgage contract. The other party can’t repay their debts, so it’s mine now. Still, I don’t want Echelon Group to handle it. Are you interested? All the paperwork is in order and

won’t

Consider it helping me out.”

e you any tr

I replied, “I... Can I take some time to consider it? After all, I have another partner in the company, and I can’t make such decisions alone. Besides, I’d like to learn more about the contract and the situation beyond it. Of course, assuming you trust me enough.”

“Naturally, I trust you.” Atticus nodded and gave me detailed background information on the mortgage contract. He also explained why he didn’t want Echelon Group to handle it.

I knew there were risks and suspected that this situation wasn’t as straightforward as Atticus made it

Take your time to consider it. I trust you completely. Please provide an answer as soon as possible, Though I’m in a hurry, Atticus said, looking at me earnestly, “I can’t find anyone I trust more than you. Of course, you can set your conditions.”

“All right, (I’ll discuss with Ryan and get back to you. Thank you!” | replied.

“Thank you!” Atticus seemed relieved.

“Here’s what we’ll do. I’ll head back now and meet you here again tomorrow. I’ll let you know the time later.” I stood up. Then, I remembered something and looked at the contract. “...”

Atticus was quick to understand and handed the contract to me decisively. It further showed he trusted

1. me. “You can take it with you.”

“Thank you!” I accepted the contract, feeling its weight. The trust behind this gesture was heavy.

He stood up as well. “Ms. Chloe...”

He hesitated momentarily, lowered his gaze, and then look disrespected you. Don’t mind her. That’s just how she is.”

at me. “I know Liora has probably

I chuckled, feeling light–hearted as I teased him for the first time, ‘Mr. Atticus, I’m not that weak.”

“That’s good to hear. But maybe in the future... you can tell me about it,” Atticus smiled awkwardly.
“There

are some things I don’t know how to say.”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Atticus. I can handle it. If she goes too far, I won’t let her be. If it comes to that, you can’t

blame me for retaliating.”

He smiled and nodded confidently. “No problem! Sometimes, a strong hand is needed to keep her in check. You don’t need to care about me.”

Neither of us said much more. We left the place one after the other. In the car, I called Ryan and asked him to wait for me in the office. This matter weighed heavily on my mind.

Accepting the mortgage contract came with risks, but they were more significant for Atticus. Echelon Group was a publicly traded company, and privately taking over this contract was a major taboo.

On the other hand, declining felt like not repaying Atticus’s favor. When I was at my lowest, Atticus helped me without hesitation, regardless of his intentions and motives.

Being in the business world, I couldn’t escape my obligations. Accepting help meant accepting responsibilities, and I had to repay Atticus. But how to do that was something Ryan and I would need to discuss

Chapter 257 Thorough Analysis

I returned to the company and found that everyone else had left for the day. Meanwhile, Ryan waited for me in his office. As I walked down the corridor, I ran into Grayson. I invited him to join us in Ryan's office.

I explained what Atticus had told me and handed the contract to Ryan. After he finished reading it, he passed it to Grayson. The latter also expressed that this contract likely had secrets.

"Perhaps we should be cautious and politely decline," I looked at them and said, "We just started to see improvements and shouldn't take unnecessary risks."

Ryan chimed in, "I think it's worth considering since Atticus said we can set the conditions. I think it's an opportunity for us."

He leaned into his chair and pondered momentarily, continuing, "I'll talk to him tomorrow. Since risks are involved, we should prepare conditions and a stop-loss strategy. Atticus mentioned the conditions are negotiable, so we shouldn't hold back."

Grayson added, "He helped us significantly when we needed it the most. He's asking for our help this time."

"Help can come in various forms and for different reasons. In business, we must consider our interests and help Atticus. Still, we must carefully decide how we'll do that," Ryan explained, showing his experience.

Grayson agreed with Ryan's perspective.

So, the three of us discussed the details and decided that Ryan would be the one to negotiate the conditions with Atticus. Although we decided collectively, I couldn't help but feel uneasy. However, the two were confident that Atticus would accept the conditions.

After finalizing our decision, we prepared to leave the office. Suddenly, my mother called and told me she had prepared dinner and invited Ryan to join us. I also invited Grayson. After all, we had just finished work

and needed to eat.

When we entered the house, we saw Ivannana and Lauren there. They had almost finished cooking the

Wanna teased Grayson hushedly, "I can't believe it. You guys hire based on looks?"

chuckled, watching her eager eyes. "You spend your days in the entertainment industry, and you're still

calm when you see cute guys

was like today. I almost got trampled at—She didn't even finish saying

I calmly gave her a look. "I saw you there."

"Ah... You were there too?" Ivanna looked at me in surprise. "How'd you end up there?"

"That's a public place, isn't it? I went to buy some clothes for Ava yesterday, but they were too small. I went to exchange them today, and it turned out that your event was happening there."

"Harmony's so lucky. Do you know how much she'll make from this endorsement? None of the top-tier celebrities can even compare. Now she's even more arrogant," Ivanna sounded disdainful.

"Didn't you say she's on the decline?" Lauren questioned.

“Don’t put that on me. Harmony’s assistant told me Atlas hadn’t contacted her privately. It’s obvious Atlas is just putting on a show.” Ivanna was quite confident. ‘Even today, Atlas posed for photos in the jewelry

section, but he left as soon as the event ended.

“Everyone thought he’d have lunch with Harmony, but he took her somewhere and left halfway. Rumor

has it that Harmony was

halfway. Rumor

has it that Harmony was furious.”

While Ivanna described the events, I maintained a calm facade. However, I couldn’t help but feel a sense

of satisfaction

“Atlas is so

unpredictable. Why is he promoting her and then ignoring her? Isn’t it strange? What kind of man does that?” Lauren questioned, looking at Ivanna skeptically.

I also wondered the same thing. Atlas might’ve tried something with Harmony and realized she differed from Annalise Still, he didn’t seem to worry about the public knowing. Wasn’t he worried about provoking Celine, or was he doing this intentionally?

I knew I couldn’t compare to Harmony. I was a divorcee with a child, not a high-profile celebrity like Harmony. So, I wondered if Atlas did all this to attract Celine’s attention even more.

idea suddenly struck me. Could Atlas's grand display of a rumored relationship with Harmony intentionally divert Celine's attention? Still, how would Celine handle Harmony? Would she assign

someone to follow her as she did with me?

ever, I immediately dismissed that possibility. Celine couldn't have someone tailing every woman

with So, was Atlas trying to mislead Celine and shift her focus elsewhere?

ing me too. Suddenly, it all became clear to me. I shocked myself with this idea.

Chapter 258 Ava's Birthday

My hands trembled, and I remembered Atlas asking why I didn't understand his intentions. My emotions were a mess. If not for the people around me, I would've left to seek confirmation from Atlas.

If that was the case, I had misunderstood his intentions. I forcefully regained composure. After all, I still struggled to adapt to Atlas's distant and cold attitude. I decided not to make excuses for myself and

chose to let go.

No matter the circumstances, the path with him would never be easy,

The following day, Ryan, Grayson, and I discussed our upcoming meeting with Atticus. I feared our actions might appear opportunistic. Ryan shook his head, stating we should protect our interests. It wouldn't mean we were abandoning our principles.

He said, "The reason Atticus didn't approach anyone else isn't because he had no other options or didn't want to share the profits. It's because we're the most suitable for this deal. Of course, we don't see all the

reasons for this suitability yet.

“Still, one thing is clear. Atticus is most interested in making a deal with us. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have promised to adhere to our conditions. Do you think he couldn’t find a trustworthy partner after all these years?”

I agreed with Ryan’s analysis. I thought similarly then, but he explained it more clearly. The day after that, Ryan and I met with Atticus. True to our expectations, he was calm and straightforward in our

discussion.

Ryan got straight to the point. Atticus was also generous and agreed to split the costs evenly. However, he insisted we handle all the paperwork with the other party. Ryan was cautious and requested that Atticus sign an authorization agreement just in case.

After some thought, we smoothly reached an agreement.

When Atticus shook my hand, his tone showed a hint of teasing, “Ms. Chloe, this is the beginning of our cooperation. I hope it will be a pleasant one.”

Soon after, we had lunch at the clubhouse and left in high spirits. When we entered the car, Ryan said, “Atticus is a shrewd businessman. His hidden assets aren’t limited to Echelon Group.”

dered Ryan’s words, indeed, it was a loss that Matthew hadn’t allied himself with Atticus. Still, the

nt qualified. While he was somewhat intelligent, he lacked foresight.

wasn’t wrong, but he should have aligned himself more closely with might not have been interested in someone who had risen to power

Next, we finalized all the paperwork, which we signed under Hartz Construction's name. Tanum Corporation remained calm on the surface, and I was relieved. Hartz Construction had been registered in Solaris and had been kept well hidden.

That reminded me of Atlas. The registration of Hartz Construction was primarily thanks to him.

With Atticus's unexpected contract as a foundation, Hartz Construction continued to grow. I passed most of the external affairs to Ryan, which allowed for more efficient development. That included negotiations

with ATL Empire.

I gradually withdrew from the forefront and focused more on my family. I had great confidence in Ryan and gave him ample room to operate.

Soon, it was Ava's birthday. She was excited, having grown one year older and displaying more

independence. Our friends and family were cooperative, as always. They had already chosen a restaurant and ordered a birthday cake two days before the celebration.

Before the workday ended, I arrived at her kindergarten early to pick her up. I knew her too well. It must

have felt like an eternity for her.

When I went inside to pick her up, she was already waiting by the door. As soon as she saw me, she exclaimed joyfully and ran toward me.

I

I informed her teacher that we would be leaving early and was surprised when the teacher handed me a small gift. Looking at my daughter's beaming face, I felt relieved. Every year at this time, Matthew had been the one organizing everything.

This year was different. From now on, Ava's life was missing her father. I didn't know if Matthew would remember today.

We walked hand in hand out of the classroom toward the exit. Ava chirped away, telling me her friends had wished her a happy birthday. They even sang a birthday song at noon. She was overjoyed.

She stopped as we left the gate and tightened her grip on my hand.

Chapter 259 The Best Uncle Ever!

I felt a change in Ava's demeanor and looked at her. She exclaimed in surprise and ran toward someone, calling. "Uncle Atlas!"

I looked toward the entrance and froze. My heart was pounding.

Ava stumbled and nearly fell from excitement and eagerness. I panicked, but Atlas caught Ava as she fell. While he kneeled and held Ava, I saw them giggling. Ava wrapped her little arms around Atlas's neck, saying, "Uncle Atlas, you're the best!"

I couldn't help but smile at her words. Meanwhile, Atlas's typically cold face revealed a warm smile, his eyes full of adoration for Ava. I couldn't believe someone as domineering as him could be so doting

toward a little girl.

"Are you okay? Did you hurt yourself?" I

timidly asked.

He only glanced at me, then gave a box to Ava. "Happy birthday!"

"Thank you, Uncle Atlas!" Ava's voice was pure. She took the box, blinked, and asked, "Is this the best tablet?"

Atlas nodded seriously. "Of course!"

"Uncle Atlas, you kept your promise!" Ava threw herself into his arms again, kissed his cheek, and almost knocked him over. Their interaction attracted several people's attention, and it was clear that his presence was incredibly striking.

Once the excitement died down, Atlas stood up while holding Ava. He looked at her and said, "All right, go home with Mommy."

Ava seemed surprised. "Aren't you coming home with us, Uncle Atlas?"

Atlas and I were stunned. His gaze brushed over me, and I quickly tugged at Ava, wanting to take her down. I said awkwardly, "Come down, sweetheart. Uncle Atlas has something important to do."

Surprisingly, Ava resisted and clutched Atlas's neck. "No, I don't want to leave Uncle Atlas. My birthday is the most important thing for Uncle Atlas!"

words left me flustered, I didn't know when she had become like this. My tone became sterner this

ward didn't know what to do and teared up, too. I understood Ave's attachment dered him a father figure. It Matthew were still here. I doubt she would

it was all my fault for not providing her a sense of security like a father's love

Adas patted her back, saying "Don't worry, sweetheart (celebrate your birthday with you."

he

Ava let go of him and blinked her tearful eyes at Atlas "Really Uncle Atlas? You're not lying to me are

your

Of course not Atlas nodded "Let's go home

I was shocked and didn't know what to do Atlas picked Ava e and approached a car before

commanding "What are you waiting for? Let's go Drive us home

dared and couldn't believe what was

He signaled to his driver before carrying Ava into my car happening My eyes welled with tears at the unexpected situation Nonetheless, I drove home in an awkward situatio

Atlas carried Ava in when we give shocking everyone at home especially Ivana She was utterly confused, as if I had done something

Chapter 260 The Most Heartless One

My dad was the first to break the awkwardness with his warm words, "Mr. Atlas, it's been a while."

Atlas smiled and replied, "It has, Mr. George. I've been quite busy lately and haven't had a chance to visit.

How are you?"

"Grandpa, Uncle Atlas gave me an amazing gift. He's also celebrating my birthday with me!" Ava seemed happy, while I felt awkward. After all, my daughter had put me in an uncomfortable situation.

"Really?" My dad laughed heartily. I was genuinely surprised at how he had become such a good actor.

"Yes!" Ava giggled, looking incredibly cute. "Right, Uncle Atlas?"

"Yes! I promise to do whatever you want!" Atlas was unusually talkative today.

I quickly tugged at Ava. "Come down now and change with Mommy!"

Still, Ava clung to Atlas as if afraid he would leave. "I want Uncle Atlas to help me change!"

I was shocked, wondering when they became so close.

"You're a little girl, so you should let your mommy change you. Don't worry, I won't leave. I'll stay and chat with your grandpa and wait for you," Atlas assured her, "You have to look pretty since you're the birthday

girl."

Finally, Ava released him, and I carried her upstairs. As we went upstairs, she said, "I'll be down soon,

Uncle Atlas! Don't leave, okay?"

Atlas nodded smilingly and then sat to chat with my parents. Ava was in a rush while changing and

cooperated with me to dress her up quickly. Immediately after, she ran downstairs by herself.

My heart still raced, and my hands trembled when I returned to my room. I quickly changed into a dress

and subconsciously put on some light makeup. I didn't know if I wanted to impress Atlas. Whatever it

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was, I couldn't control my actions.

I felt so nervous when I left my room that I could hardly breathe. I took a deep breath before making my

way downstairs.

Everyone was already at the restaurant when we arrived. We saw a giant birthday cake on the table. However, everyone looked shocked to see Atlas carrying Ava in.

Lauror's eyes widened. "Mr. Atlas

faint smile

"S-Sure!" Lauren didn't hold back. "You're always full of surprises!"

This birthday dinner was a joyful occasion. Ava was the happiest, singing one song after another like a songbird. However, there was one person who seemed the most helpless. It was Ryan,

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Meanwhile, I was still in a daze the whole time. I couldn't understand my feelings. Ava was exhausted when the dinner ended, but she clung to Atlas. I felt helpless. Judging from her determination, she wouldn't give up until Atlas came to my place.

I couldn't dissuade Ava, so Atlas picked her up and got into the car. I inwardly prayed to the heavens to help but received no answer. Ultimately, I got into the car and drove home.

Meanwhile, my parents were considerate enough to ride with Ivanna. As expected, Ava fell asleep in Atlas's arms during the car ride. She looked content. However, her biological father didn't even call.

I didn't know if he had forgotten his daughter's birthday or didn't want to remember.

After bringing Ava to her room, Atlas talked with my parents. Then, he calmly said, "Mr. George, I'll have to trouble Chloe to send me home. My driver has some last-minute matters to attend to. I didn't know when the dinner would end, so I let him go earlier."

He made it seem like it was only natural for me to send him home. After all, he had spent the whole day celebrating my daughter's birthday. Not seeing him off would be unreasonable.

I suddenly felt nervous and didn't know how to respond.