

The Divorce 421

Chapter 421 Ava's Sudden Disappearance

The day was busy from start to end. Just as I thought the work was winding down, Benjamin said the warehouse inventory was done, and we needed a quick meeting.

I hurried to the small conference room. I needed to get back soon and surprise my daughter.

The morning scene hadn't faded from my mind. I was sure my daughter felt the same. Let them look, I stubbornly decided. I wanted to see how they felt.

After all, Ava was a child of the Murphy family.

But to my surprise, the meeting ended abruptly. Before it was over, I received a frantic call from my mother, sobbing and wailing. She said Ava was missing.

This was a nightmare come true. I didn't even bother to wrap up the meeting and rushed out. How could an obedient child like her just vanish?

I descended the stairs, and Carol followed. She took the car keys from my hand, hopped in, and we sped out of the underground parking lot.

We made it back to Amethyst Apartments. From a distance,

I saw my mother on her knees, gasping between sobs. I hurried over, "Mom, please don't cry. How did Ava disappear?"

My dad, his face pale, explained the sequence of events. My mom said that after bringing Ava home, she played happily in the yard.

My mom went inside to prepare lunch. Shortly after, my dad called Ava in, but the gate was open. Ava was nowhere to be found in the yard. Her little shovel and other toys were left behind.

They searched high and low, but there was no sign of Ava. Something felt off, so she called me. Typically, our yard was entirely secure, and no unfamiliar faces were around.

Ryan had also rushed over.

He comforted us and suggested, "Isn't there surveillance? Check it!"

Suddenly, I remembered that Atlas had installed surveillance in my yard, but I hadn't used it in a long time.

With my parents at home and no exceptional circumstances, I never bothered to check the footage.

I urgently located and opened the surveillance footage, scrolled to today's date, and then searched for the relevant time. One by one, I reviewed the footage.

Finally, I saw the scene where my mother brought Ava home.

As my father had said, she happily played in the yard, running around.

When I scrolled further, I saw a black car suddenly pulled up in front of the gate.

It seemed to pause momentarily, and Ava immediately dropped her shovel and ran toward the gate. She looked so cheerful.

However, as she opened the gate, the car had already started moving inward.

In the video, Ava seemed a bit disappointed. She clutched her little skirt with one hand and held onto the gate's handle with the other, looking in the direction the black car had gone for a few minutes.

Then, I saw her glance back into the house before she ran toward the direction the car had driven.

My eyes widened in shock. I watched it again.

Ryan also noticed this. "Continue to the next clip. It seems like she went to the back."

I quickly opened the following clip. In it, I could only see Ava's tiny figure running further inside, gradually disappearing from the frame.

I glanced at Ryan fearfully. He grabbed me and said, "Chlo, don't worry. Keep watching the video to see if the car left."

I agreed with his advice and continued watching.

However, there was no trace of Ava.

It was not until 12 minutes after that the car gradually appeared on the screen again. It drove past the front of my house and continued driving away.

There was no sign of Ava anywhere! I felt my whole body go limp. I couldn't bear to think that it was that car that took Ava away.

I sank into a chair, and Ryan caught me. Carol tried to comfort me, and even my father couldn't hold back his tears.

Carol turned to Eleanor and Benjamin, who had just arrived. "Let's look for her! We'll stop by the houses nearby on our way. Let's check if anyone else has surveillance footage we can review!"

Everyone was eager to head to the nearby houses.

Ryan held me close, patting my back gently. "Chlo, try to stay calm."

"That car..." I murmured, then quickly grabbed my phone. * That car is suspicious!"

I shakily returned to the earlier footage, rewatching the part with the car.

When I saw the license plate, my world crumbled. I pointed at the screen and told Ryan, "It's Atlas's car! I recognize this license plate—it's his!"

Chapter 422 That's His Car

My mind went blank. I dialed Atlas's number almost frantically as I clenched the phone. I could feel my whole body trembling uncontrollably.

He answered quickly, but before he could say a word, I shouted, "Atlas, were you at Amethyst Apartments when you got off work?!"

All I could see was Ava standing at the door, looking lost and disappointed as the car pulled in.

"I haven't been there," His voice came through, sure and steady. "What's wrong? What happened?"

"That was your car, and it took Ava away! Bring her back to me!" I screamed, my voice breaking upon hearing his denial.

I dropped the phone, the impact with the floor almost drowned out by my sobs.

Ava must have recognized someone in that car, prompting her to run out and chase after it without a second thought.

Only Atlas could make her brave enough to chase after a car alone.

As this realization hit me, my heart ached even more. "Ava..."

Carol and the others finally returned from checking the area.

Their expressions were grim, and silent headshakes confirmed my worst fears.

Ignoring their pleas for calm, I wanted to rush back and see if Ava had gotten into that car. That was what scared me the most.

Carol held onto me. "Chlo, try to stay calm. We've checked behind, so don't panic just yet.'

"Getting anxious will only make things worse. You need to stay calm!"

I suddenly remembered that my father's health was questionable. I really should try to stay calm.

Ryan had already called Grayson. In urgent situations like this, he was more experienced than any of us.

"I also believe it's that car's doing. It must be the one that took Ava away!" Ryan's tone was resolute.

This was my greatest fear, and upon hearing Ryan say it, I was utterly shaken. Who was in that car? And why did they take Ava?

My mind involuntarily drifted to that burly man and that serpent tattoo.

Just as I felt lost and helpless, the screech of tires filled the air. We all turned to look, and to our surprise, it was Atlas.

The moment I saw him, I completely fell apart. The facade of strength I had been putting on shattered.

He strode over, taking in the scene at a glance. He swept me out of Ryan's embrace and into his own. "Don't cry! I'm here."

Then, he instructed Carol, "Take Chloe's parents inside!" He looked at my parents with precise determination. "Don't worry, trust me! I'll bring Ava back!"

I cried uncontrollably, my heart torn. "That car has your license plate!"

"On my way here, I double-checked. It's a fake plate." Atlas asserted. "Don't worry! Just listen to me."

Carol helped my mother up, and Benjamin also comforted my father.

Dylan and his men had quickly spread out across the estate.

It only took fifteen minutes for them to find the follow-up footage of Ava chasing the car. She was at the entrance of the third villa area, behind Harmony's. Ava saw the vehicle and ran over.

The car door opened, and someone pulled Ava inside. The door closed, and we couldn't make out who was inside. The car then retraced its path, leaving Amethyst Apartments.

"Go to the Department of Motor Vehicles!" Atlas ordered, then turned to me gently. "Stay at home and wait for my updates!"

"No, I have to find her! She... She..." I could hardly speak through my tears. "I must find her! I can't be without Ava!"

He looked at me, then wiped away my tears. "Alright, I'll take you with me. But you have to promise not to cry!"

I nodded vigorously, feeling like a lost child, wiping away tears that wouldn't stop.

He held me close as we got into the car, then turned to my father. "Rest assured! I'll bring her back safe and sound."

Chapter 423 The Car Is Missing We got into the car together, and it sped off.

Though I felt a sense of safety, my heart was still racing.

Ava had never been separated from someone she knew.

Now, she was being taken somewhere unknown.

She must be frightened.

I felt my heart crush as I trembled uncontrollably.

My precious girl! Would she be scared? Would anything happen to her? I prayed silently.

My darling, be strong.

Mommy will find you, and Uncle Atlas won't let anything happen to you.

Atlas's arm wrapped me, holding me close and gently patting my arm.

The car raced to the motor vehicle department.

We all exited quickly.

There were already people waiting there.

No one said more than necessary.

Dylan communicated with them, checking every car that left Amethyst Apartments during that period.

On the large screen in the hall, cars kept flashing by.

I was so nervous that it felt like I couldn't breathe.

I had no idea which one my daughter was in in this sea of cars.

Suddenly, Dylan shouted, "Stop!" We all turned to the screen.

There it was, a black commercial car, speeding away from Amethyst Apartments.

Dylan was slightly relieved as he pointed at the vehicle.

"This is it.

Track its movements!" The people in the hall were busy tracing the car's path, which appeared in various frames.

At first, I could still see the car heading west toward the suburbs.

The timing matched.

I tightly clasped my hands together, my eyes fixed on that car.

My precious girl was in there.

Tears blurred my vision.

I gritted my teeth and wiped them away.

However, as the tears rose again, I felt an unprecedented fear.

I couldn't even bear to think about what might happen next or who had taken her.

My eyes were fixed on that car, afraid it would disappear if I blinked.

That fear came true.

The car continued leisurely on the main road, heading west.

1 However, when it reached Paradise Square, the car seemed to vanish without a trace.

Everyone watched in disbelief as it turned onto the roundabout, then disappeared at various intersections as if it had vanished into thin air.

It was simply baffling.

The busy personnel exchanged glances.

I suddenly felt everything go dark.

Atlas grabbed me and pulled me into his arms, his eyes fixed on the large screen.

He commanded loudly, "Replay the section after the roundabout!" A staff member quickly replayed it.

The car's progress after the roundabout was displayed on the screen.

Everyone went silent and looked at the screen.

The atmosphere seemed frozen, and one could hear a pin drop.

I was utterly shattered.

My legs could no longer support my body.

Atlas's arms were holding me up with all his strength.

"Stop! uw Suddenly, Atlas's commanding voice echoed.

"The upper left, zoom in on the image!" He decisively ordered.

I quickly wiped away my tears and looked at the enlarged image in the upper left corner, which instantly filled the screen.

A black car approached from the right side of the road.

It was going fast, merging into the traffic after the roundabout.

"Zoom in!" Someone enlarged the image of the black car.

As it moved forward, the trunk suddenly popped open, bouncing up and down.

It was at this moment that a horrifying sight appeared.

Chapter 424 Heading West

As the image of that car appeared, everyone in the hall gasped.

The license plate appeared to be quickly replaced after the car trunk popped open, with the trunk jumping up and down.

The car kept moving slowly, never stopping.

This subtle change was hard to notice.

Atlas caught onto this clue.

A police officer beside Dylan immediately instructed his subordinate, "Zoom in on that license plate and find the owner!" Soon, the information came back.

The plate was fake and was registered to a large truck.

I stared at the big screen in despair, afraid the car would disappear again.

Presumably, they had used this clever trick to swap out the front plate earlier.

So, this car seemed to vanish into thin air right before everyone's eyes.

We could conclude that our previous speculation about child abduction for ransom was unfounded.

This was a premeditated kidnapping.

I was stunned by this scene, my mind racing, wondering who could do such a thing.

What were their intentions? Why take my child, and with such craftiness? If it were a simple kidnapping for money, we would have received a ransom call by now.

This wasn't a straightforward kidnapping.

Why have a grudge against such a young child? I couldn't even imagine what Ava is going through right now.

Tears blurred my vision as I looked at Atlas, whispering, "Who are they? What do they want?" Atlas tightened his arm around me and said, "Don't be afraid."

They won't get away.

We're going to get Ava back.

"Trust me!" What more could I say? If I couldn't trust him, who could I trust? At this moment, he once again became my sole pillar of strength.

His hand tightened, patting my back as he held me close, his eyes fixed coldly on the screen showing the car's movements.

Then he turned to Dylan, his voice sharp.

"Get ready!" Though only two words, they carried a chilling edge.

His deep-set eyes were locked onto the prey, like a hawk focused on its target.

Dylan immediately understood Atlas's meaning, his dark eyes flashing with determination.

He exchanged a glance with Atlas before leaving.

I didn't know what "get ready" meant in this context, but I knew Dylan was off to set up the rescue mission.

I instinctively took a deep breath, trying to ease my nerves.

The car on the screen had already left the main road and exited the roundabout.

Watching it drive further and further into the desolation, I grew more and more anxious.

"Where are they headed?" I was losing my composure, resenting Atlas for his calm demeanor.

As the car continued into the wilderness, heading further west, Atlas suddenly held me tighter, asking the traffic police beside him, "Is it done?" The officer nodded.

"It's sealed off!" Atlas immediately turned to another companion.

"Let's go!" I followed him as he turned, completely passive, supported by his lead.

My legs were unsteady and weak.

Perhaps he found my pace too slow, and he lifted me.

He placed me into an off-road vehicle, not the one we arrived in, and a few identical cars followed behind.

Once we were in, the car sped off at lightning speed.

Even on this nearly empty main road, I felt it was too slow.

My daughter had been away from her family for almost two hours.

The sun was setting, and I knew our chances of success would significantly decrease once night fell.

I clenched my fists tightly, my heart feeling as if it had been torn apart.

We were now on the same path that the car had taken.

Chapter 425 Don't Let Hiim on the Bridge

Atlas clasped my hand in his, but neither of us spoke.

He simply cradled me in his arms.

He looked at me, then gently rested his chin on my forehead.

"I promise Ava will be safe." I reached out and hugged him tightly, burying my face in his neck.

"Atlas, save her..."

She's so young and always so well-behaved.

She must've seen something.

Otherwise, she wouldn't have dared to chase after that car." "Don't cry! I understand." Atlas patted my head.

"That car..."

Something in it must have attracted her.

I thought it was you.

She must've seen you, that's why she chased after it...

This morning, she asked me when you'd return from your business trip.

She wanted to travel with you..." I choked on my sobs.

I broke down in Atlas's arms, completely losing control.

"She must've felt so lonely.

When my mom wanted to see her this morning, she refused and asked if her grandmother would bully me.

She's so young, yet she already knows how to protect me.

But I couldn't protect her.

It's all my fault...

She must be scared..." I whispered these words desperately in Atlas's ear, and I could hear his teeth grinding.

Suddenly, I could hear voices from the car device exchanging locations.

Atlas wiped my face gently.

"Listen, I promise we'll bring Ava back.

He then made a shushing sound and listened intently to the conversation on the wireless device.

Atlas patted the shoulder of the aide in the front passenger seat, gesturing for him to hand over the device.

"What's the target's position?" As soon as he spoke, there was a brief pause on the other end before the specific location was reported.

I understood.

It was near the border of Foswood and Murborough, not on the main road but on a fork leading from Murborough to Bourdamun.

At the end of this road was the main street of the Northum Bridge.

The Northum Bridge spanned two mountains, with Foswood on one side and Murborough on the other.

The bridge towered over the deep river below.

"We mustn't let them get on the bridge.

Has the target noticed us?" I understood Atlas's purpose in keeping the car off the bridge.

It was to reduce the risk to the bridge and the people.

"It seems not, but they're moving extremely fast! It looks like they're trying to cross the bridge and enter the border between Murborough and Bourdamun before it gets dark.

There's a mountainous area with dense woods that's perfect for hiding.

They can easily blend in!" I couldn't help but glance out the window.

It was already getting hazy and less visible out there.

"How far am I from them?" Atlas asked.

"Less than a kilometer!" The voice from the device glitched, making it difficult for me to understand.

Atlas's expression grew even darker.

Even though I had known him for so long, I had never seen him look so ominous.

His eyes were filled with hostility, sending shivers down my spine.

"Dylan, intercept them at the bridgehead! Don't let them onto the bridge!" Atlas issued a stern order.

"Ensure the child's safety at all costs!" "Understood!" Dylan's voice came through the device, then fell silent.

One kilometer.

I was only a kilometer away from my daughter.

I felt a shortness of breath.

I craned my neck to look ahead.

The road wasn't easy —a winding path.

Though it was short, it was a challenging route.

At the end of this road was the intersection leading to the bridge, a three-way junction.

Our car was speeding up, and I had a hunch that we were closing in on that car.

It seemed like, in the twists and turns of the road ahead, I could faintly see the taillights of the car.

It flickered in and out of sight as the night fell.

Chapter 426 That Car Fell Off the Cliff

The car burst forth as it chased the elusive tail lights ahead. I was sure those tail lights belonged to the same black car.

At that moment, I wished I could grow wings and fly to my daughter's side. I didn't want to be afraid, thinking I would replace Ava in that car.

Night had fallen, and the streetlights were far behind us, making everything look hazier.

Just then, the car navigated through a sloping bend in the road.

There was a dense forest on the right and a steep valley on the left, with our car being lower and the other higher.

Our car wasn't slow, and I knew the driver had professional training.

He handled the speed and curves exceptionally. I saw the other car despite the darkness.

We could catch up to them once we made it around this bend.

I didn't stop looking at the other car as I grew more anxious.

There weren't many cars on this road, especially in this winding section.

Although the slope wasn't steep, it seemed endless.

I was relieved we were about to catch up, but something horrifying happened.

For some reason, the other car tumbled down the left side of the valley, producing a terrifying crunch.

Even in the dark, I could tell it was a heavy crash as the sound echoed throughout the valley.

I was stunned as I watched everything unfold.

A second later, I escaped Atlas's arms and leaped forward, exclaiming, "Ava, no!"

Atlas pulled me back, but I continued to struggle and scream, "Let me go! Ava!"

Atlas tightened his grip on me to restrain my frantic movements.

"Chloe, calm down!"

"Save her! Ava...My daughter!"

I fought and bit Atlas's restraining arm desperately.

"Let me go—I must save her!"

"Chloe, calm down!"

Atlas shouted at me.

Just then, the radio sounded, "Agent 2, locate the target immediately!"

"Roger!"

Suddenly, I heard an approaching buzzing sound.

I paused and looked at Atlas, then out the window in terror.

When the buzzing grew louder, our car turned onto a parallel road where the other had fallen.

It was bright as day outside the window.

Our car stopped at the bend, where the view was a bit wider.

I realized two helicopters hovered overhead, their searchlights illuminating the valley where the car had crashed.

Atlas held me tightly and pointed toward the burning wreckage.

"Chlo, look!"

Still shocked, I followed his gesture, and my eyes widened.

I Still shocked, I followed his gesture, and my eyes widened.

I then looked back at Atlas, who was smiling slyly.

Immediately after, I glanced back at the SUV rolling down the valley and muttered in disbelief, "An SUV?"

The car I saw wasn't the black sedan we chased but a brown SUV.

"Where's that car?!"

I exclaimed anxiously, "I have to go down!"

Atlas issued an order into the radio, "Search the area!"

Still, he didn't let go of my hand.

"Wait, he's nearby."

"But what about Ava? They have Ava!"

I looked at Atlas agitatedly.

"Aren't you worried about her? You can't leave her—she's just a child!"

"Chloe, trust me. Whoever kidnapped Ava wouldn't dare harm her now. She's their bargaining chip,"

Atlas said as he scanned ahead.

Before I could retort, I heard the faint cries of a child.

Chapter 427 Powerless

The child's cry startled me, causing my ears to perk up as I told Atlas, "Listen, it's Ava!"

We strained our ears to listen for her amid the helicopters above us.

"It must be Ava!"

I took advantage of Atlas's brief distraction and leaped out of the car.

The wind from the helicopters made it difficult for me to stand steadily.

Atlas held me firmly from behind and said, "Get back in the car and listen to me! They're searching for her!"

"Let me go! I can hear her crying!"

I struggled and pushed against Atlas.

Ava's cries were unbearable, and I knew she was nearby.

Suddenly, one of the aides in the car ran over to inform Atlas, "They're on the bridge!"

Atlas and I were shocked.

A moment later, Atlas caught me and brought me back into the car, sternly ordering the driver, "Let's go!"

The driver sped toward the bridge, and we soon saw Dylan's group forming a blockade.

Our car screeched to a halt before them, and I got out to look ahead.

Those who were initially facing the car turned backward.

They initially facing the car turned backward.

They had been checking vehicles coming onto the bridge.

Shockingly, the target appeared, causing everyone to be on high alert. Shockingly, the target appeared, causing everyone to be on high alert.

My eyes widened in shock when I looked at the bridge deck.

It was a terrifying sight.

A tall and burly man held a gun while extending his other hand over the bridge railing.

He held onto Ava as she dangled like a rag doll outside the bridge.

She cried and called for me incessantly.

Beneath her was a seemingly bottomless abyss, and the man could let go at any moment.

I cried mournfully, "Ava!"

I escaped Atlas's grasp and rushed toward the bridge. I recognized the man.

He was the one with the snake tattoo at the hospital that day. He looked at the people who cornered him at the bridge and laughed maniacally.

Gradually, he moved toward the middle of the bridge.

Atlas caught me again and pulled me back into his arms, trying to stop me.

Still, I couldn't hear anything he said.

After all, my daughter was in danger. I couldn't bear to think what would happen to Ava since the burly man could let her go at any moment. I just wanted to run over and snatch Ava away from him. I just wanted to run over and snatch Ava away from him. I struggled and looked at the man, slowly retreating. I yelled, "Put her down! Atlas, save Ava, please!"

"Mommy! No, don't...I want my mommy!"

Ava's cries seemed to drown out the helicopters' buzzing.

She struggled to escape as I shouted, "Don't move, Ava! Don't be afraid! Mommy's here!"

I feared her struggles would cause her to fall.

However, no one dared to act rashly or fire their guns.

They could only helplessly watch as the man retreated.

The man sneered, his words unclear due to the helicopters.

However, I knew he was taunting us from his smug expression.

Fearing for my daughter's life, I struggled like a mad woman to break free from Atlas.

After all, I couldn't just watch my daughter disappear.

Atlas pushed me toward Dylan and shouted, "Watch her closely!"

Though Dylan held me tightly, he shouted at Atlas, "Mr. Atlas! A moment later, I saw the determination in Atlas's eyes as he crossed the barricade, advancing toward the man without hesitation.

Chapter 428 Nothing He Could Do

I watched as Atlas fearlessly approached the man on the bridge.

My sobs and movements suddenly stopped. I was in disbelief, wondering why Atlas would walk ahead like that. I understood Atlas's intentions when he gestured for the others to stop. I broke down again and tearfully told Dylan, "No, don't! Tell Atlas to come back! Dylan, stop him!"

Upon hearing my cries, Dylan handed me to two nearby bodyguards.

"Protect Ms. Chloe."

As he rushed toward Atlas, two gunshots sounded, the bullets hitting the ground near Dylan. I faintly heard the burly man shouting, "Stay back!"

He warned Dylan not to approach but allowed Atlas to go ahead.

I watched Atlas's determined and steady figure stride toward the burly man as the latter pointed his gun at Atlas.

Dylan advanced again, and another gunshot sounded.

Atlas signaled Dylan not to come closer, and I was terrified.

My beloved daughter was on the bridge, and so was Atlas. I couldn't bear the thought of losing either.

I wanted to save Ava but couldn't bear to watch Atlas put himself in danger.

Still, there was no better solution at this critical moment.

"Atlas! Ava!"

I screamed heart-wrenchingly.

Dylan then gave a command, and all vehicles turned on their headlights.

The helicopters ascended further and hovered on the other side of the bridge.

Everything seemed to fall silent as all lights shined on the burly man.

It seemed Dylan wanted to listen to Atlas and the burly man's conversation.

The burly man didn't seem to care, as if he knew he would die soon.

Suddenly, another gunshot sounded as Atlas approached the man, causing everyone to shudder.

I saw a wisp of smoke near Atlas's feet, indicating the man had fired at the ground.

However, Atlas didn't stop while I forgot to breathe.

The man roared, "Stop! Or else she'll..."

His right hand dropped as his words echoed, causing Ava to plummet.

Atlas grew tense, and I couldn't see his expression.

Still, his recent actions assured me he was determined to prevent Ava from facing harm.

Ava cried until she almost ran out of breath.

It took her a while to regain her composure as she called out, "Uncle Atlas!"

I felt my heart tearing into a million pieces. I couldn't breathe, blink, or say anything. I could only clench the bodyguard's arm at that moment.

Meanwhile, Dylan stood at the bridgehead and clenched his fists.

"Please, return the child to me,"

Atlas spoke, but the distance was too great, and the noise from the helicopter made it hard to discern their conversation.

The burly man looked up and laughed maniacally.

He was arrogant, aware that Atlas's people wouldn't dare to make a move against him.

Even though snipers were in position, they could do nothing because Ava was with him.

Moreover, Atlas didn't hesitate to save my daughter, so no one could afford to take him lightly.

I didn't know why Atlas was so confident he would be safe.

I feared the worst as Atlas stood firm.

I couldn't hear what he was saying and almost lost control.

Atlas and the burly man were in a standoff as Ava's crying became hoarse and feeble.

The burly man now stood over a rushing river.

The consequences would be unimaginable if he couldn't hold on or deliberately let go of Ava.

I feared I might never see my precious daughter again.

My mind went blank as I stared at the burly man and my daughter.

Chapter 429 Throwing the Child in the Air

Every movement on the bridge kept everyone's hearts pounding.

Dylan's expression was grim as he clenched his fists.

Meanwhile, the cops taking cover behind the car doors were on high alert.

We were on edge as the situation left us feeling helpless.

Atlas took two more steps, but the man roared, "Stop! You wouldn't want..."

His words were intermittent, indicating Atlas was trying to reason with him. I suspected Atlas knew the man.

Meanwhile, Ava's voice faded like she would run out of breath.

My heart ached, and I felt suffocated. However, I knew no one dared to make any sudden moves.

Everyone feared agitating the man who might let her go.

For some reason, the man became agitated.

He repeatedly pointed the gun at Atlas, shouting angrily.

After his outburst, he threw Ava into the air, and she plummeted toward the surface.

As that happened, the man leaped from the overpass and plunged downward.

Immediately after, I heard several gunshots.

I gasped and screamed maniacally, "No!"

Simultaneously, I saw Atlas dart forward and extend his arms toward Ava.

As she was about to hit the ground, Atlas rolled a great distance upon landing.

Suddenly, Ava's cries ceased.

By that time, Dylan had rushed toward Atlas.

I broke free from the bodyguards and yelled, desperately running toward Atlas.

I didn't know what had happened to him and Ava or if they were injured.

Then, the bodyguards and cops also charged forward.

Before I could reach the two, I heard Ava's cries, "Uncle Atlas! Mommy! I'm scared!"

It felt like everything had finally returned to normal at that moment. I saw Atlas holding Ava as he rose with one hand, sheltering Ava against his chest.

His knuckles were scraped and bleeding as he embraced my daughter. I saw bloodstains on Atlas's white shirt at the elbow.

When I reached them, he embraced me and secured us in his arms.

He pressed his face against Ava's tear-streaked face, saying, "It's okay, my dear Ava. Don't be afraid. Uncle Atlas is here."

Ava was still sobbing as he stroked her back, adding, "Look, Ava, I'm here. Don't be scared."

"Uncle Atlas? I saw you calling me when...Mo-Mommy..."

Ava's words were incoherent as she continued to sob while hugging Atlas's neck.

Her eyes remained wide with fear, trembling uncontrollably.

Occasionally, Ava glanced back at me.

Her words were frightening, and she refused to let go of Atlas.

I pressed my face against hers, realizing she was too frightened to make sense. I cried with her as her helplessness broke my heart.

Atlas examined her and said, "Chlo, we should go to the hospital." Atlas examined her and said, "Chlo, we should go to the hospital."

He called Dylan and instructed him to handle the aftermath before carrying Ava away.

Atlas then pulled me along and quickly got into the off- road vehicle that had arrived beside us.

He told the driver, "To the hospital, quickly."

Chapter 430 The Aftermath

Ava continued to sob as the car sped toward the hospital. She clutched Atlas's shirt, afraid he would disappear if she let go. She gazed at him and could hardly breathe from crying so much.

I felt my heart shatter as her cries rendered me speechless.

My daughter had always been well-behaved and had never cried so hard before.

She kept shaking her head and repeating, "No!"

no matter how much I tend to comfort her.

Atlas held her and assured her, "I'm here now, so you don't need to be afraid anymore. Ava, look at me. I won't let you go, okay?"

I was in disbelief at the usually commanding Atlas being so tender and protective toward my daughter.

Although I was there, he showed no intention of letting her go.

Instead, he continued to soothe and hold her.

His usually indifferent expression now bore a look of fatherly love.

It filled me with gratitude and a sense of security.

My daughter hadn't felt a dad's love for so long, making me feel guilty.

However, Atlas filled that gap in her heart even though he wasn't her dad.

I felt moved as I leaned on Atlas's shoulder.

I silently shed tears as I looked at Ava's terrified expression.

She was still in shock when we reached the hospital.

Ava underwent a comprehensive examination soon after.

Fortunately, she had no physical injuries and only suffered extreme fright.

I took her into my arms, and she clung to me.

However, she turned to Atlas a moment later, making me feel guilty again.

The doctor treated Atlas's wounds and then took Ava into their care.

After much effort, we finally calmed her down.

She held Atlas's neck and rested on his shoulder in a daze.

Later, the doctor advised us to try and cheer her up and provide some counseling to prevent psychological trauma.

My parents and the others were waiting when we returned to Amethyst Apartments.

Although I had informed them of our safety on the way to the hospital, they still cheered when we returned.

Still, Ava remained unresponsive and clung to Atlas like a koala.

She refused to return to her room as she gazed at everyone with vacant and watery eyes.

Ava grasped Atlas even tighter as if he was her only safe place.

I knew she must be afraid someone would take her I knew she must be afraid someone would take her away again.

Her frightened and lost demeanor broke my heart.

Perhaps it was my neglect that led my precious daughter to endure such a terrifying predicament.

She continued to sob and even refused my mom's hug.

Ava only remained calm and quiet in Atlas's arms.

Atlas gestured for everyone not to disturb her and continued to stroke her back.

His phone rang incessantly, and I faintly Atlas gestured for everyone not to disturb her and continued to stroke her back.

His phone rang incessantly, and I faintly overheard that there was no trace of the man who had jumped into the river.

A chill ran down my spine when I thought about how the man had escaped again.

I knew he was desperate when he jumped from that height.

He had deliberately taken Ava to the bridge, possibly planning to use her as a bargaining chip.

The man showed no regard for my daughter's life and threw her at Atlas.

It was a scene I would never forget.

I felt even more troubled because he had repeatedly targeted me, seemingly unafraid of Atlas.

It felt like the man was challenging Atlas's capabilities and patience.

Although Ryan and my mom had prepared dinner, no one stayed when they saw Ava was unharmed.

It was already late at night, so I urged my exhausted and terrified parents to rest.

Ryan looked hesitant, but I persuaded him to leave, too.

Although reluctant, he knew he couldn't help anymore.

Moreover, Ava didn't It was already late at night, so I urged my exhausted and terrified parents to rest.

Ryan looked hesitant, but I persuaded him to leave, too.

Although reluctant, he knew he couldn't help anymore.

Moreover, Ava didn't want to see anyone except Atlas.

I only managed to take her from him when he went to the bathroom.

However, she started crying again after a while, and it was hard to comfort her.

I stayed with her, but she kept calling for Atlas, putting me at a loss for words.

I felt deeply concerned about her condition.

It was as if Atlas could read my mind.

He comforted me, "Everything will be okay. She won't be afraid as long as we're with her."

He stayed with Ava that night, but she kept waking up and crying. She would only stop crying when Atlas comforted her. She would cling to his finger and murmur, "You won't leave me, right, Uncle Atlas? You're here."