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Meanwhile in the dining room, Nicole had a smile on her face as she enjoyed the food prepared by her daughters.

"Your cooking has improved a lot, Maya!"

"I'm just glad you like it, Mommy! I'll adjust the recipes according to your physical condition, so just tell me what you like to eat!"

Nicole nodded happily, but she didn't really have the appetite to eat much. "Mommy can't finish it all, Maya. I'll go check on your Daddy's illness, okay?"

Maya was surprised. Illness? What illness does Daddy have?

"What happened to Daddy?"

Huh? Does Maya not know about Evan's poisoning? Is he hiding it from her, or was the whole poisoning thing a lie to begin with?

"Well... I'll find out after I check his pulse, Maya."

She then ran upstairs with Maya, only to find Evan lying in bed while Nina kept crying beside him.

"What's wrong, Nina?"

"Daddy coughed up blood, Mommy!"

"He what?"

Both Nicole and Maya panicked when they saw his pale face and the bloodstains on the corner of his mouth.

She quickly checked his pulse and frowned at how strange it was.

I've never seen anyone's pulse alternate between being strong and weak like this... What kind of symptom is this?

Unable to determine his condition, Nicole decided to call her mentor Wesley for help.

After hearing about the symptoms, Wesley said, "That's an indicator of severe poisoning. He is in critical condition and must be rushed to a hospital right now!"

"Nina, have the servants take your Daddy to the hospital!"

"I'm on it!"

With that, Nina ran downstairs while Maya looked at Evan with teary eyes. How did Daddy collapse all of a sudden? He was just fine a while ago!

"What happened, Daddy? Can you hear me? Daddy, please say something..."

She kept sobbing as she called out to him, but Evan kept quiet as he had to make it look convincing. Nina knows I took some medicine to make my pulse irregular, so she can explain it to Maya later...

Moments later, the servants arrived to take him to the hospital.

Nicole put on a face mask and a large coat with two layers of shirts underneath before getting into the car with her daughters. This should hide how skinny I am...

Nina felt her heart ache when she saw Nicole like this. "Mommy..." She called out while holding her by the hand.

"Don't worry, Mommy's fine. You be sure to take good care of your Daddy when we get to the hospital, okay?"

Nina nodded. "I will, Mommy."

Maya's eyes were filled with concern as she held Evan's arm tightly and prayed. Please be alright, Daddy... Please be alright...

Evan was rushed to the emergency room upon arrival at the hospital while Nicole waited outside with Nina and Maya.

Maya looks really worried... Should I tell her the truth now? Nina thought to herself.

She then turned to look at Nicole who was pacing about absent-mindedly and decided to drop the idea. On second thought, that can wait... Daddy's efforts would've been for nothing if Mommy hears us!

The doctor came out after a long wait and walked up to Nicole. "Mrs. Seet, your husband is in critical condition. We'll need to get him hospitalized so we can monitor his vitals at all times."

"Alright, sure. You've got to save him, doctor!" Nicole said.

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The tears in her eyes and the concern in her voice just goes to show how much she cares about her husband, so why would he choose to fake his illness? Why would he lie to his wife like this? I just don't get it...

Of course, the doctor didn't dare ask any questions and simply did as instructed by Evan.

"Rest assured that we will do our best, Mrs. Seet."

"Thank you, doctor."

Evan was soon transferred to a regular ward with Nicole, Nina and Maya keeping him company beside his bed.

Nina saw how pale Nicole was and feared that she would collapse. "Maya and I will stay here with Daddy, so you should go on home and get some rest. We'll call you if anything happens, Mommy."

Maya too, was worried about her wellbeing and said, "She's right, Mommy. Don't worry, we'll take good care of Daddy!"

Wesley said it'd take at least three days for him to get here. I hope nothing happens to Evan until then...

Nicole thought to herself as she looked at Evan. "No, the anxiety will drive me crazy if I wait at home. I think I'll stay here with your Daddy too."

Evan's finger twitched slightly when he heard that. Oh, Nicole... If you wouldn't leave my side even for a second now, why did you avoid me when you needed me most? Sigh... Perhaps this is the only way for you to truly understand how I felt back then...

Seeing as Nicole refused to leave, Nina and Maya stopped trying to persuade her any further.

Maya later returned to Imperial Garden and prepared a meal which she delivered to Nicole at the hospital. "Thanks, but I'm not hungry," Nicole said.

"You should eat something, Mommy. How will you look after Daddy if you collapse as well?"

"That's right, Mommy! I can feed you if you'd like!"

Nicole smiled at them as she took the lunchbox over and began munching away. Yeah... I've got to eat well and keep myself healthy so I can look after Evan...

Evan tugged at Nina's hand and winked at her when Nicole got up for a glass of water.

Nina understood what he meant and began brainstorming for a way to get Nicole to leave the ward.

Wait... Did I just see Daddy tug at Nina's hand before closing his eyes again? What's going on here?

Feeling confused, Maya leaned in closer to Evan and whispered in his ear, "Daddy? Can you hear me?"

Of course, she got no response from him at all.

Nicole turned around and looked at Maya. "What's wrong?"

"I...I think I saw Daddy tug at Nina's hand... He..."

Nina cut her off anxiously, "You must be seeing things, Maya. How could Daddy do that if he's still unconscious?"

But... I...I saw it... Maya stared at her blankly.

Nicole figured Maya must have been too worried about Evan that she started imagining things. "Maya, why don't you go out for a walk with Mommy? Let's go get some fresh air, okay?"

A walk could do her good and clear her head.

Nina chuckled inwardly when she heard that. Just as I was struggling to come up with an idea, this opportunity falls right into my lap!

"Go on, Maya! I'll look after Daddy, so don't you worry!"

Maya shifted her gaze back towards Nicole and nodded slowly. "Okay, Mommy."

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"Come on, let's go."

Nina waited till the two of them left the ward before calling out to Evan, "The coast is clear, Daddy!"

Evan opened his eyes slowly and glanced around the room.

Ten minutes later, Nina went running after them with Nicole's coat in hand. "Nina? What are you doing here? Where's your Daddy?" Nicole asked when she saw her.

"Daddy is still in his ward, Mommy. I noticed you forgot your coat, so I thought I'd bring it out for you in case you got cold!" She replied while draping the coat over Nicole's shoulders.

Nicole gave her an uneasy look and said, "Let's go back inside. I'm worried about leaving him alone in the ward."

"Okay!"

"Sure!"

Nina watched from behind as Nicole walked back to the ward in front of them. Her thin and weak figure cast a long shadow under the fluorescent light, but hidden in that weakness of hers was an intense perseverance fueled by her concern for Evan.

Nina could tell that her mommy really loved her daddy, so she wasn't sure if she was doing the right thing by helping him like this. I wonder how Mommy will react when she gets back to the ward...

Nicole's face was as pale as sheet when she opened the door and saw the empty hospital bed inside.

"Nina, where's your daddy?" She asked anxiously.

Nina played along and pretended to look surprised as well. "I don't know, Mommy! D...Do you think he woke up and went to the bathroom or something?"

"Go look for him, now!"

With the help of the doctors and nurses, the three of them searched every nook and cranny of the hospital, but there was no sign of Evan whatsoever.

Suddenly, John came over and handed them a letter from Evan.

"Mr. Seet called. He asked me to hand you this letter."

"Where is Evan?" Nicole asked anxiously as she took the letter over.

"I don't know. Mr. Seet had someone deliver this to the office, and I brought it over as soon as I got it. I haven't seen him at all," John replied.

Nicole tore the envelope open and recognized Evan's handwriting as soon as she began reading the contents of the letter.

Dear Nicole, I am writing to inform you that I'll be leaving. The company, the kids, and Imperial Garden are all yours. Take care, and goodbye.

Nicole shuddered uncontrollably. Evan's gone? He's really gone?

"Mommy, I think this is Daddy's final letter to us! He doesn't want to be a burden to you, so he's gone somewhere far away to wait for his death!" Nina said after reading the letter.

Nicole felt her mind going blank. It was as if her heart and soul had been ripped right out of her body.

Wait for his death? This... This isn't like Evan at all! He wouldn't just up and leave like this! He wouldn't...

Nina clenched her fists when she saw Nicole's eyes tear up. "You did the same thing when you had those hallucinations back then, Mommy! Daddy learned this from you! How noble of him!"

Noble? Perhaps it would seem noble to someone who is afraid of being burdened, but... To me, it's just plain cruel... I was hoping to have the doctors stabilize his vitals while waiting for Wesley to get back and save him, but he just left us all with this note... If he succumbs to the poison, I'll never be able to see him again... No, I can't let that happen!

"No, he isn't like Mommy. He... He'll come back..." Nicole said with a sniffle.

Maya burst out into tears. "Why does it have to be like this? Why can't we all just face it together as a family? Why do you always leave us behind?"

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Why do you always leave us behind?

Those words stabbed at Nicole's heart like a knife, and her tears fell onto the letter in her hand.

I only ran away because I didn't want to end up hurting Evan under the influence of my hallucinations... I...I really wanted to stay by his side... You mustn't do what I did, Evan! You have to come back! I'm willing to look after you! I'm really worried about you... Please come back!

Overwhelmed by her emotions, Nicole felt the ground spinning underneath her as she coughed up a mouthful of blood. "Pfft!"

"Mommy! Are you okay?"

"Mommy! Mommy!"

Both Nina and Maya were on the verge of breaking down at that point. John called for a nearby doctor, and Nicole was rushed into the emergency room immediately.

As she lay on the hospital bed on her way into the ER, Nicole saw Evan's handsome face flashing before her eyes and let out a faint smile.

Say, Evan... Which one of us do you think is going to die first, huh? You think you can run away from me, but you're wrong... I'll be waiting for you in the afterlife! We'll always be together, Evan... Forever and ever...

With that thought in mind, Nicole closed her eyes as her consciousness slowly faded away.

Having no other choice, Nina whipped out her phone and gave Evan a call. "Something's happened to Mommy!"

The next day, Nicole woke up and saw a blurry figure sitting next to her bed.

It took quite a while for her eyes to focus, and she frowned when she was able to clearly see the handsome face spacing out beside her.

Huh... Evan? I thought he left? What's he doing here?

She reached out and held his hand, snapping him out of his trance. "Nicole? Thank goodness, you're finally awake!" He asked while staring at her worriedly.

Is this really you, Evan? Or are we both dead and in the afterlife right now?

Evan called for a doctor when he saw Nicole staring blankly at him.

A doctor? Do we have doctors in the afterlife?

Nicole simply watched on in silence as a few doctors came to check on her condition.

"Your wife's condition is now stable, Mr. Seet. Don't worry, she'll be all better soon."

Evan let out a sigh of relief upon hearing that. "Alright, I understand. Thank you, doctor, you may go now."

"Very well, sir."

The sight of the doctors leaving her ward and the warmth of the sunlight on her skin made it obvious to her that they were both alive. But... What's Evan doing here? I thought he left...

Nicole pressed Evan for answers, but he simply told her that she just had a bad dream. He said he never was poisoned, and that he never left them with a farewell note either.

"A dream?"

Nicole grew uneasy. How could that be? There's no way I dreamt that all! I was awake and alert when it all happened!

At that moment, Nina and Maya came into the ward, feeling overjoyed that their mommy had pulled through.

"I'm so glad you're alright, Mommy! The doctor said you'll be all better in no time if you take good care of your diet!"

"I'll make you something to eat, Mommy! What would you like?"

Nicole looked at them and asked, "Your daddy was hospitalized because of his poisoning, and he wrote a note before leaving us! You were both there when it all happened, so I want you two to tell me... Was it really just a dream?"

Maya wasn't good at lying, so she didn't dare look Nicole in the eye. "Daddy wasn't poisoned..."

She was technically telling the truth, as Evan was indeed never poisoned to begin with.

Besides, Nina had explained everything to her, so she understood what was going on.

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Feeling confused, Nicole turned towards Nina instead.

Nina glanced at Evan and answered exactly the way he told her to. "What Maya said was right, Mommy. Daddy was never poisoned, nor did he leave us with a note or anything. You fainted after coughing up some blood, so we sent you to the hospital, that's all."

Nicole recalled that she coughed up blood after reading Evan's letter.

"That only happened because I read your daddy's letter."

Maya kept quiet.

Daddy lied about being poisoned to teach Mommy a lesson and bring us closer as a family, but he's afraid that she would get mad about it. That's why he told us to act like it was all a dream!

Nina smiled at Nicole and said, "You coughed up blood because your body was still weak from therapy, Mommy! It had nothing to do with Daddy!"

Is that so?

Nicole couldn't shake the feeling that something was off about it and took a good long look at them.

I still remember the contents of that letter as well as the pain I felt when I read it... It feels too real to be a dream... Ugh, I can't even tell what's real and what isn't anymore... Regardless, this has taught me a valuable lesson...

She looked at Evan and asked in a very serious tone, "Evan... Assuming you were to fall ill one day or maybe even get poisoned... Would you leave me?"

"No, I won't!" Evan replied without any hesitation.

Nicole breathed a sigh of relief and vowed, "That's good to hear... Well, I won't leave you either, so you'd better take good care of me!"

"Don't worry, I will!" Evan said with a smile.

I'm going to stay by your side, Nicole... We'll be together in sickness and in health, till death do us part...

Nicole didn't doubt his promise in the slightest. From that moment on, she told him everything, down to the most minute detail. If she had a craving for something, he'd know. If she felt remotely ill, he'd be the first to find out.

As for Evan, he enjoyed how honest and dependent she was on him from the bottom of his heart.

Whatever barriers they had between them were now gone, and they could finally go through challenges in life together.

Soon, Nicole was discharged and returned to Imperial Garden with them.

A smile spread across Kyle's face when he saw his mommy looking bright and happy again.

"How are you feeling, Mommy?"

"Mommy's fine, Kai. I heard you're going to further your studies too. As much as I'm gonna miss you, it's important that you pick up new skills which will benefit you in life later on."

"Don't worry, Mommy. I won't let you down!"

After sending Kyle off, Nina and Maya were the only children left in Imperial Garden.

The two of them continued to look after Nicole while keeping up with schoolwork and their own personal affairs.

Nina was working especially hard as her cosmetics press conference was only a few days away. She didn't want to make any careless mistakes that would affect the release of her new product.

Maya couldn't help but admire how focused she was on her work. Should I have Daddy prepare a culinary press conference for me as well? Hmm... No, I should first aim to have my own cookbook before going for a press conference. That way, I can show people a lot more than just a couple of dishes! Nina has always been better than me in everything except when it comes to food, so I've got to put in more effort if I am to outshine her in something!