

Departure with a Belly Chapter 71

Departure with a Belly Chapter 71

Chapter 71

Alaric?! Why is he here? Victoria almost shrieked.

I thought he was working. Why is he in the study room? I didn't even hear him here. Did... Did I mention the child? Did Alaric hear it when he came in?

As Victoria thought about it, her face went pale. She looked at Alaric nervously but could only purse her lips, trying to remain calm.

On the other hand, Alaric didn't expect her presence as well. When he saw her bewildered expression, he frowned and recalled that she had been acting strange for the past few days, seemingly as if she was hiding something from him. Thinking about it, Alaric pursed his lips and squinted his eyes. His sharp gaze landed on Victoria's pale face as he spoke. "Who were you talking to just now?"

Hearing his words, Victoria was startled.

Does this mean he hasn't heard what I said? she thought. However, she

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didn't dare jump to the conclusion since she feared it was a trap. What if Alaric has heard it and is just testing me?

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As she thought about it, she suppressed her emotions and mumbled,

"What are you doing here? I thought you were at work."

She brushed off his question.

"It's a video conference. I don't have to go to work."

"I see." Victoria nodded. "I was using your study room since I thought you were at work. Yasmin is still unsure about certain things, so I was talking to her." She tried her best to stay calm and acted like nothing had happened.

Alaric stared at her and didn't say anything. He was looking at her with his deep dark eyes that seemed to be able to see through her.

"You seem nervous."

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Hearing his words, Victoria was at a loss for words.

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Alaric walked toward her and stood close to her. They were extremely close to each other, and his scent surrounded her. In that split second, Victoria subconsciously took a step back. However, as soon as she made a move, she felt a pair of hands wrapped around her waist. With little

force, Victoria bumped against Alaric's chest.

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"I guess I was right. You are nervous," Alaric said casually. He held her waist tighter and squinted his eyes.

"Who were you talking to?"

He was asking the same question.

Victoria didn't know whether he had heard her words or not since she thought she was alone and was talking normally. If Alaric could hear her voice, it would mean that he might have heard what she was talking about. Yet, she didn't know which situation it was. Thus, she could only remain calm and avoid blowing up her cover.

"Didn't I tell you already? I was working and talking with Yasmin," she replied as she raised her head and looked at him.

"Is that so?" Alaric didn't believe her. He clicked his tongue and said, "Do you think you are a good liar, Snowball?"

Victoria's heart dropped. "I'm not lying." Then, she gritted her teeth and barked, "Don't ask if you don't trust me, Alaric!" As she spoke, she swatted his hands away.

Alaric's expression turned cold when he saw her reaction. He looked at her with a darkened gaze and said, "Are you mad because I guess it right?"

Fine then. Since you didn't lie to me, do you dare to show me your call history?"

"Call history?" Victoria was speechless by his words. "How old do you think

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you are? Don't you think looking at my call history is childish?"

Then, Alaric grabbed her chin and demanded coldly, "Are you trying to order me around?"

"Don't be ridiculous. I don't have that spare time, nor am I willing to order you around. You can do whatever you want." Victoria shrugged.

"Show me your call history, then." Alaric stretched his hand and looked at her with a stoic expression.

"Are you nuts, Alaric?"

"I thought you said I can do whatever I want."

"I mean to say that you can do whatever you want to yourself, not me.

Care to listen more attentively next time?"

"What's wrong? Aren't you having a call with Yasmin just now? Can't you

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show me the evidence? Does that mean you were talking to someone else?"

Victoria fell silent.

“Is it Noel?” asked Alaric.

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At that moment, Victoria knew why he was testing her and being eccentric. So that’s how it is. He only heard my voice but didn’t know what I was talking about. That is why he mistook me for talking to Noel instead of Yasmin when he saw my panicked expression. Yet, Noel... This is the third time Alaric has gone mad because of him.

As she thought about it, she went silent. At the same time, she was at ease. After all, it wouldn’t matter if he had mistaken her for talking to someone else.

Seeing that she remained silent, Alaric was on the verge of going berserk.

“Why aren’t you saying anything?!”

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Silence means consent. Does that mean she is talking to Noel just now?

Although he had not heard clearly what she was talking about, he could tell that her voice was soft. She has never spoken to me so gently.

Moreover, he could vaguely hear her saying something about a baby and getting rest after lunch. Thus, as he combined the words, he realized that Victoria had called Noel her baby. Moreover, she was telling him to get

some rest and eat well!

He was infuriated as he thought about the woman who was married to him calling someone else their pet name. What was more frustrating was that Victoria seemed calm. She even shrugged when facing his interrogations.

“There’s nothing to talk about. You are right with whatever you say.”

When Alaric heard her words, he recalled that she had promised that she was talking to Yasmin. Yet, after he had seen through her lies, she decided to go with the flow.

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At that moment, Alaric grabbed her chin tightly. He used so much force that Victoria frowned from the pain.

This time, when Alaric talked to her, he didn’t use her nickname. Instead, he called out her full name with a cold voice.

“Listen here closely, Victoria Selwyn. If you dare to hook up with another man before our divorce, I will kill him.”

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Initially, Victoria didn’t want to acknowledge him. However, she was baffled that he would say such a thing. “When did I ever hook up with someone

else? Also, what makes you have the right to say that? Even if I were to hook up with someone else, what's that got to do with you? Do you think you and Claudia have a pure friendship?"

If they were to argue about this matter, Victoria felt that she could make a comeback.

"You know clearly about my relationship with Noel since we grew up

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together. However, what about you and Claudia? She has come looking for you. Do you dare to say that you have nothing with her?"

"She came to me because she knew the truth." Alaric frowned.

"What truth? The truth of our fake marriage? Since she can find you after knowing we are a fake married couple, why can't Noel do the same thing?

Alaric, don't tell me that you allow Claudia to come looking for you and even wear my clothes while I can't even have a phone call with a man."

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As Victoria kept talking non-stop, Alaric realized he couldn't make up a comeback from every word she said.

He knew how amazing Victoria was with her words. When he first took her to negotiation, she was timid since she had never experienced such a

situation at a young age. However, as she participated in more and more cases, she began to work her way around and was able to take charge of the situation quickly. She was fast to react and had critical thinking skills. Thus, she could make a comeback for her competitor.

For example, she was using the same method against him now, and Alaric realized he had no words to say. After all, Claudia had indeed come looking for him and even wore Victoria's clothes.

Seeing that he was quiet, Victoria smirked coldly. "Why are you being quiet, Alaric? Think about it. How would you feel if I brought another man home and let him wear your clothes?"

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Alaric remained silent. Just the thought of Victoria bringing another man home would drive him insane, yet...

Knowing she had won the argument, Victoria pushed him aside, took her laptop, and left. When she returned to her room, she breathed a sigh of relief.

Alaric must be stunned by my words. I'm sure he won't be asking any further questions. Anything is fine as long as my secret is safe with me.

As she thought about it, she kept her laptop and went downstairs to the kitchen to find something to eat. At this moment, the chef was preparing the ingredients for lunch. When he saw her, he immediately greeted her.

Victoria looked around and nodded. "Did you make any snacks this morning, Mr. Campbell?"

“Yes.” Andrew, aka the chef, immediately turned around and opened the cabinet behind him. Then, he took out a small plate of snacks for Victoria.

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Victoria’s eyes lit up when she saw the plate was filled with cream puffs. Noticing her gaze, Andrew knew that he had made the right snacks. Thus, he smiled and said, “Take it, Mrs. Cadogan. I will make some more in the afternoon if you like it. However, taking in too many sweets a day is unhealthy, so I’ll be making other snacks.”

Victoria didn’t refuse since she was starving. Now, she would lose her appetite whenever she saw oily or raw foods. However, she had a craving for sweets.

I have never craved sweets as much as I would now... Gentleness filled Victoria’s eyes as she thought about it.

My baby must be a sucker for sweet foods. Oh dear, I must keep a lookout for my baby when I give birth to it. I need to watch their sweet intake.

As she thought about it, she left the kitchen with the plate of snacks in a good mood.

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When the others saw her leave, they surrounded Andrew. “Did Mrs. Cadogan just take a plate of snacks, Mr. Campbell?”

Andrew nodded his head with a smile. “It looks like she likes today’s

desserts. Prepare some flour and fruit. We'll be making some fruit snacks for her."

"Okay. Though, do you know why Mrs. Cadogan has such a huge change in her food preference, Mr. Campbell? I remember that she doesn't crave sweet stuff."

"What a silly question. People's food preferences will change over the years. This is a normal thing."

"I'm not saying Mrs. Cadogan is abnormal, Mr. Campbell. I'm just saying that she has a different craving because..." The staff smiled mysteriously.

"Is what?" Andrew looked at him with confusion.

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"Could it be that she is pregnant?"

When Andrew heard his words, he was at a loss for words.

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"Umm... I'm just guessing. After all, the fish fumet you stewed was delicious.

I didn't smell any odd scent when I served them. Yet, Mrs. Cadogan had such a big reaction after taking a whiff. My sister-in-law has the same reaction as Mrs. Cadogan. She can't stand the smell of raw food and is more sensitive than us. Not only that, she has a change of food preference too."

The more Andrew listened, the more shocked he was. After all, he felt that the staff seemed to have a point.

If Mrs. Cadogan is really pregnant, I have to change her food! Andrew

thought.

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After Victoria had eaten the desserts, she patted her stomach in satisfaction.

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How did I never know that this food tasted delicious? It looks like my baby is a foodie.

“You are such a food lover,” Victoria whispered as she gently poked her stomach.

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Since the baby was still small, her belly was flat. Thus, it was apparent that it wouldn't respond to her words. However, Victoria was still pleased to talk to it.

After some time, she was exhausted. Then, she brushed her teeth and went to bed. Initially, she wanted to take a small nap. However, when she woke up and looked at the time, it was already 2.00PM.

At that moment, Victoria jolted awake. What? I overslept! The room was silent, so she quickly changed into a new set of clothes and went

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downstairs. However, no one was downstairs too. When the servant saw

her, they greeted her.

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“You’re awake, Mrs. Cadogan.”

“Yes. Is Old Mrs. Cadogan awake yet?” Victoria looked at the servant.

“She has already woken up and had lunch.”

Just as Victoria was about to ask Griselda’s whereabouts, the servant took the initiative and said, “Mr. Cadogan has taken her out.”

“Where did they go?”

“Ah... I’m not sure about this.”

To be honest, Victoria was worried since Alaric was a careless man. She was afraid that he didn’t know how to take care of Griselda. Before she could take out her phone and call Alaric, the servant said, “You just woke

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up, Mrs. Cadogan. Why don’t you have some food first?”

When Victoria heard the word food, she felt hungry.

“I guess I’ll eat first.”

“I’ll tell the chef to reheat the food.”

When Victoria sat at the dining table, she took out her phone and sent a message to Alaric while waiting for the food to arrive.

‘Where are you?’

Just as she was about to send it, she suddenly recalled the argument they had earlier on. Will Alaric think I’m trying to mess with him when he sees the text? After all, we just fought. Thinking about it, she changed the

message.

Where did you bring Grandma to?’

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After editing the text, she was happy with her message and sent it to Alaric. Before Alaric replied, Andrew had placed her food on the table.

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When everything was on the table, she noticed they were all light servings.

At that moment, she was startled. Although she had a huge reaction this morning, she didn’t tell the chefs anything. After all, she had to keep her pregnancy a secret. Plus, she wouldn’t stay here for long anyway. Thus, she decided to leave it as it was. Though, never would she expect that the chefs would be so considerate.

When Andrew approached her, she whispered tentatively, “The food seems different, Mr. Campbell.”

Andrew was an honest man. When he heard her words, he smiled and said, “I specifically made it just for you, Mrs. Cadogan.”

Victoria’s heart dropped when she heard his words.

“What are you talking about?”

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Andrew’s earlier words contained too much information, making Victoria

feel inexplicably uneasy upon hearing it. Did Mr. Campbell discover something from my eating habits?

When he saw her bewildered expression and her fidgeting hands, he chuckled. “You had a change in taste all of a sudden, so I made some adjustments according to your preferences. Is there a problem, Mrs. Cadogan?”

A change in taste... It may raise suspicion if anyone hears this. At this thought, she pressed her lips together and looked at Andrew with a serious expression as she whispered, “Are you sure my tastebuds have changed, Mr. Campbell? I just had a few extra pastries in the morning, that’s all.”

Hearing that, he became puzzled and rubbed the back of his head. Well, she has a point. She only ate a few extra pastries, so why do I think her
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tastebuds have changed?

The moment he realized this, he felt a little embarrassed. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Cadogan. I must’ve been overthinking things.”

“It’s okay, Mr. Campbell. It shows that you’re attentive. I’ve been eating too much greasy food recently, and I want to change my tastebuds. Besides, now that Grandma has returned to recuperate and will undergo surgery later on, let’s make lighter meals.” She raised an eyebrow.

With each sentence, he found her words to be quite reasonable. “No problem, Mrs. Cadogan. I will try to make the food lighter from now on.

Indeed, you're a thoughtful one."

Victoria responded with only a smile and remained silent, hiding her real intentions.

"By the way, would you like some snacks after lunch? I've specially made some fruit pudding for you."

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Fruit pudding... I don't think I've tried them before...

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However, before she could think about it, she babbled, "Sure." By the time her brain caught up, she saw Andrew smiling and nodding before walking away.

Speechless, she looked down at her small belly and secretly thought, You-little glutton! I'm not the one who wants to eat that! She blamed the baby inside her belly, feeling no guilt whatsoever.

Suddenly, her phone vibrated, and she lowered her head to take a look.

Alaric sent a text that read, 'Out.'

Seeing that, she didn't know what to say. I know you're out, but I was asking where you had taken Grandma.

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After being rendered speechless for some time, she had no choice but to send another message. 'Where?'

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This time, he replied relatively quickly. 'Will be back later.'

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Again, he didn't answer her question directly. It seems that he doesn't want to tell me where he is. Perhaps he's with Claudia. Come to think of it, it makes sense that he wouldn't want me to know if he is with her.

At this thought, a hint of mockery flashed across her eyes.

'I don't care where you are, but you took Grandma with you. You know her

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condition, so be sure to bring her home earlier. She needs her rest. After sending the message, Victoria put her phone away and focused on her meal.

In truth, she didn't need to worry so much. Alaric was filial, and Griselda was his biological grandmother—naturally, he wouldn't do anything harmful to her. Even if there was a need to worry, it wasn't her place to do

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After she finished her meal, she went upstairs with nothing to do, and

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Alaric didn't reply to her texts anymore.

During breakfast the next day, Victoria proposed the idea of inviting

Claudia over since she had promised Claudia to do so.

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Alaric was drinking his coffee expressionlessly when he heard her words, and his gaze involuntarily fell on her face as he furrowed his brows. Didn't Victoria claim that my relationship with Claudia seemed ambiguous yesterday? Why is she inviting Claudia over now?

Quickly, a thought appeared in his mind. She's probably being stubborn and trying to provoke me. We argued and gave each other the cold shoulder over this issue yesterday, so she probably wants to retaliate using the same matter. With this in mind, he calmly asked, "Why do you want to invite her here?"

Victoria didn't expect him to oppose the idea, so she was somewhat

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surprised. After all, this would benefit him since he would end up with

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Claudia after their divorce. By then, Claudia would have developed a good relationship with Griselda, and he would face less scolding.

"She gets along well with Grandma and knows how to make her happy, so I thought it would be nice to give her a call and invite her over."

Hearing that, he pressed his lips together and said icily, "How can you just invite her like that? Do you think she doesn't have a job?"

This morning, Griselda woke up and sensed that something seemed off between the two. However, it was normal for young couples to argue,

which was a sign of a good relationship. Therefore, she didn't pay much attention to it.

Now, hearing them discuss this, she smiled and chimed in, "He's right, Victoria. She probably has work to do, and she already spent the whole day with me yesterday. It might not be appropriate to ask her to come

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again today." With that, she reached out and patted Victoria's hand. "It's okay, Victoria."

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Victoria had already promised Claudia yesterday and followed through, but Alaric was the one opposing the idea. Well, I'm not the one breaking the promise, then.

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With this in mind, she scanned Alaric before nodding at Griselda. "Okay, then. Let's not bother her. I just think she likes Grandma, and I thought she wouldn't refuse if we invited her over."

At her words, Griselda smiled and didn't say anything further.

After that, everyone continued their breakfast, but Alaric's expression was still grim. Ever since Victoria suggested calling Claudia over, the atmosphere around him had been icy. This blood-curdling atmosphere persisted until the end of breakfast when Griselda suggested that Hector

take her for a walk.

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Hector agreed and was about to approach when Victoria interrupted, saying, "Let me do it." The moment she placed her hand on the wheelchair, Alaric grabbed her wrist tightly.

"Mr. Bowen, take Grandma for a walk, but be back within 15 minutes."

When Hector saw their clasped wrists, he immediately nodded. "Yes, sir."

With that, he sensibly pushed Griselda's wheelchair and left.

With Griselda's presence just now, Victoria endured the pain of Alaric's grip on her wrist without reacting. It was only when Hector pushed Griselda out that she forcefully freed herself from his grasp. "What's up with you again?"

At this moment, his gaze coldly swept across the hall, where the maids were present. Then, he pressed his lips together before whispering, "Let's talk upstairs."

However, she ignored him and said calmly, "I think we've already made ourselves clear yesterday. What else is there to say?"

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With a calm expression, he stared at her with his dark eyes. "Either you walk, or I will carry you."

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Hearing that, she was taken aback.

“You have three seconds to think about it.”

“Wait, you-”

“One.”

She looked at him, not knowing what to say. Why has he become so childish?

“Two.”

“Alaric are you—”

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The next second, he took a step forward and carried her in his arms.

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As Victoria felt the world spinning around her, only one thought remained in her mind. Wasn't he supposed to count to three? What happened to that?

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With Alaric's tall stature and long legs, they quickly made their way back to the room.

Victoria originally thought that once they returned to the room, he would put her down. However, after Alaric entered the room, he remained standing as though someone had put him under a spell.

“Put me down.”

It seemed like he didn't hear her, for he simply lowered his head and stared at her silently with his dark eyes. "I will make things clear with Claudia."

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At his words, she became startled. What does he mean? Why does he want to make things clear?

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"Didn't you say that my relationship with her feels ambiguous? From today onward, she won't appear in front of you anymore. I won't let her go to the company, nor will I let her come to our house, and I definitely won't let her wear your clothes."

Hearing this, Victoria felt her heart skip a beat. What does he mean by that? Not letting Claudia go to the company or visit our house? Why is he doing that all of a sudden?

"Why?" she asked, no longer feeling resentful.

Meanwhile, Alaric stared at her seriously.

His intense look made her slightly alarmed, for she didn't understand why he was suddenly acting like this.

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"You can't call him anymore," he suddenly said.

At this moment, she was totally confused. What?

“Also, don’t call him ‘baby’ or show concern for him anymore.” Alaric was gritting his teeth as he spoke.

When she heard that, she was almost scared out of her wits.

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She finally understood why Alaric had gone mad and said those things in the study yesterday. Turns out he did hear something yesterday and thought I was referring to Noel when I said ‘baby’! I thought he didn’t hear anything. When he heard me mentioning the word ‘baby, he thought I was referring to Noel. Is that why he brought up Claudia’s matter to make it fair? There’s nothing between me and Noel, though. Ever since becoming Mrs. Cadogan, I have only occasionally been in contact with him.

Sometimes, we don’t even communicate for months. How did Alaric have his eyes on Noel? Was it because we went out for a meal that day?

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“What’s on your mind?” Just as Victoria was lost in her thoughts, Alaric’s icy voice suddenly rang out. When she snapped back to reality, she found him glaring at her with a sharp gaze.

As the corner of her lips twitched, she patted his shoulder gently. “Could you please put me down first?”

He’s really something else. How is he still carrying me?

Not only did he ignore her, he even held her tighter and looked at her with a piercing stare. “Don’t change the subject.”

“Why don’t you put me down first? Do you think it’s appropriate to talk like this?” she asked helplessly.

His face remained cold as he replied, “There’s nothing wrong with it.”

Upon hearing his answer, Victoria became speechless. Well, whatever you say.

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When he noticed her silence, the atmosphere around him grew even colder. “You don’t want to cut ties with him, huh? Victoria, do you realize that you are a married woman now?”

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Since things had come to this, she didn’t want to beat around the bush anymore and asked directly, “What about you? Do you know that you are a married man? Do you realize the state you’re in while saying all these things to me?” She then added, “Don’t forget that our marriage is fake.”

After saying that, she felt him freeze for a moment, and his grip on her seemed to loosen. Since she was in his embrace, she could sense it.

Suddenly, she lowered her gaze and laughed at herself. It seems that he’s well aware of this fact, but he has momentarily forgotten about it. Perhaps his ego was clouding his judgment. It’s ridiculous that I still have some hope in him. I’m such a joke. I should have realized this when Claudia returned; he had been kissing me passionately but left abruptly when he heard the phone ringing. When he lay beside me but brought up divorce, it

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sealed off all possibilities between us.

In the end, she pushed him away and landed on her feet. Even after she returned to her room to rest, Alaric didn't chase after her.

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Strangely, on that day, Claudia didn't call or message her. She remained quiet throughout the day. Since she didn't come to her, Victoria didn't feel inclined to reach out as well.

The next day, Griselda insisted that she didn't need to be taken care of and pretended to be angry, fearing it would delay the young couple's work, so Victoria couldn't argue with her and went back to the company. She and Alaric had mostly stayed at home these past few days to deal with work. However, their progress was still falling behind.

It was still manageable when she wasn't at the company, but once she returned, she was immediately swamped with work, hardly having any spare time to rest.

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In the afternoon, Victoria finally had some time to rest, and she found herself lying on the desk, unable to keep her eyes open.

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In the past, she could handle such high-intensity work for a day or two

without any issues, but now, just a morning of work left her feeling drained. Yasmin even brought her lunch from the cafeteria.

Yet, the cafeteria food wasn't particularly tasty, and Yasmin was probably afraid that she would go hungry, so she had ordered several meat dishes for her. Victoria felt a wave of nausea and immediately closed the lid on the container.

"Are you not eating, Miss Victoria? Is it because I didn't get something to your liking?"

"That's not it." Victoria shook her head, denying it. "I'm just too tired, and I don't feel like eating something heavy. I'll go downstairs and get some congee."

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At her words, Yasmin immediately volunteered. "Let me go and get it for you."

"It's fine. I'll go myself."

She got up and left as she spoke, leaving Yasmin alone in the office, poking at her lunch dejectedly. Why do I feel like I can't be of any help at all?

There was a congee store below the company. It was usually more crowded in the morning than at lunchtime, so there weren't any lines when Victoria went there.

"I'd like a bowl of congee and some custard bread, please." While paying for her food, she thought to herself, To be honest, Mr. Campbell makes

tastier food. Next time, I should ask him to prepare lunch for me in advance and pack it in a lunchbox. Then, I can take it to work and have it for lunch.

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While waiting, she felt bored and decided to look at the work she had to handle in the afternoon on her phone.

Just as she was engrossed in it, she suddenly felt a piercing gaze on her back. After freezing for a moment, she blinked several times before lifting her head from the phone to look around.

There were all sorts of people and cars around her, but everyone was busy with their tasks, and nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Perhaps I'm just overthinking. With this thought in mind, she lowered her head again. However, after a while, that sensation of being watched intensified, even more so than the previous time.

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As she pressed her lips together, she looked in that direction and realized a black Bentley was parked there. Its body looked like a black fog, and it was perfectly positioned in the parking spot. Is it just my imagination? Why

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do I feel like someone inside is looking at me?

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As she pondered about it, the voice of the shop owner interrupted

Victoria's thoughts. "Miss, your congee and custard bread are ready."

At once, Victoria snapped back to reality and saw that the owner had already packed her order, so she reached out to take it. "Thank you. I've already paid."

"Alright. Take care, and thanks for coming!"

She grabbed the bag and turned to leave.

Throughout her journey back to the company, she could feel someone watching her, and it only stopped once she entered the company building.

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Was there really someone inside that black car just now? When she was walking back, she contemplated going over to take a look. After all, she

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would find out by going over to check. However, on second thought, she

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felt a chill in her heart and decided against it. Since the car was parked in the parking lot, no one would be inside the vehicle during the day.

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At this thought, she rubbed her eyes and felt that she might have been overthinking things.

Ding! The elevator arrived, and she stepped inside.

During the busy afternoon, this little incident from lunchtime was

completely pushed to the back of her mind.

Toward the end of the day, Yasmin came looking for her, “M—Miss Victoria, Burke Corporation has scheduled a dinner tonight.” She nervously clasped her fingertips together, her face slightly pale as she struggled to say the next sentence.

“Are you afraid of going?” Victoria easily deduced what she wanted to say. Hearing that, Yasmin nodded lightly and whispered, “I’m sorry, Miss Victoria. I seem to have become a little cowardly. I’ll just go by myself. Please pretend I never mentioned it.”

“Wait.” Victoria stopped her and stood up before saying, “Go and get ready. I’ll go with you.” This should be the last time, though.

“Thank you, Miss Victoria. I’ll go and get ready at once.”

Since she had to accompany Yasmin to dinner, she sent a WhatsApp message to Alaric, informing him that she had to work late and asked him to return first.

Alaric responded, ‘Working late? I don’t recall hearing anything about the company working overtime tonight.’

Victoria replied, ‘Don’t you know what secretaries need to do? I’ll be accompanying Yasmin to discuss a collaboration.’

Exness Markets

12:03 **Mon,**

Chapter **75** Straightforward

‘Why are you accompanying her?’ Alaric texted, not understanding why

4/10

she had worded it that way. Shouldn't Yasmin be accompanying her? Why is it the opposite?

Victoria answered, 'I'm guiding my successor. Otherwise, who will take over my work when I'm gone?' She didn't want to be so blunt, but since a certain someone wanted to get to the bottom of it, she decided to be straightforward.

As expected, after she sent that message, there was silence on the other end, and he didn't reply to her message anymore.

After some time, Victoria and Yasmin went downstairs together. As they neared the ground floor, Victoria asked, "Have you booked a ride?"

"Huh? Oh..." Only then did Yasmin belatedly take out her phone while saying apologetically, "I'm sorry, Miss Victoria, I've forgotten. I'll call for one

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Chapter 75 Straightforward

now."

Victoria wasn't angry and simply nodded.

Before the car arrived, the two of them had already arrived at the company entrance.

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Victoria thought of something and subconsciously glanced toward the spot where the black car had been parked at noon. Sure enough, the car was no longer there. It was replaced by a white Volkswagen.

"Miss Victoria, what are you looking at?" asked Yasmin curiously.

At her question, Victoria snapped back to reality and shook her head.

“Nothing. Have *you* secured a ride?”

“I did. It should arrive in a few minutes. I’m sorry, Miss Victoria. It seems like I’m careless with everything.”

5/10

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Victoria glanced at her and smiled helplessly. “It’s no big deal. Everyone has a first. Others may not necessarily do better than you, and you’re not

6/10

necessarily worse than anyone else. Show some confidence and courage. Don’t be too afraid.”

“Okay.” Yasmin regained her confidence after hearing those words.

As Victoria turned around, Yasmin secretly observed her. Miss Victoria...

She’s truly a great and capable person. When will I be like her?

The designated meeting place was a bar.

As they got out of the car, Victoria frowned at the lively and colorful scene in front of her. “Who chose this place?”

Instantly, Yasmin’s expression turned blank. “B–Burke Corporation did.”

When Victoria heard that, her brows furrowed even deeper. “Bars are crowded and noisy, making them unsuitable for business discussions. Did

Chapter 75 Straightforward

you try suggesting a different location?”

Yasmin was dumbfounded upon hearing those words. “I–I didn’t know. I thought we’d meet them wherever they liked.” Moreover, she had no idea

it was a bar before coming here, and it didn't seem like a formal place either.

"From now on, whenever someone suggests a meeting place, be sure to check if it's suitable for work. If it's not, suggest an alternative."

Yasmin could only nod helplessly. "Yes, Miss Victoria. What should we do now? Should we... not go in?"

With furrowed brows, Victoria pressed her red lips together. "Since we're already here, let's go."

She was grateful that Yasmin had informed her about this. Otherwise, Yasmin would have been here alone tonight, feeling like a helpless little rabbit, and she would probably have been taken advantage of.

7/10

Chapter 75 Straightforward

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8/10

Before entering, she said, "Let's have the HR department hire someone in a few days to help you—someone who is quick-witted."

Yasmin felt extremely guilty, nodding to everything Victoria said.

After that, they found the designated private room with the help of the bar staff.

As they pushed the door open, Victoria immediately caught the strong smell of cigarettes, alcohol, and various chemical perfumes. At once, her face changed, and she almost threw up on the spot. She had to take a few steps back to breathe in the fresh air outside.

What's going on with me? Is it my decreased tolerance for smells after becoming pregnant, or am I just being overly sensitive? Why do I feel nauseous from these smells? It's not like I've never smelled these before. Although I felt uncomfortable in the beginning, I gradually became used to them.

Chapter 75 Straightforward

"Oh, look who's here. It's Miss Selwyn." A voice of exaggerated surprise came from inside the private room.

Caleb Burke, the son of Burke Corporation's president, had a girl with delicate features and fair skin nestled in his arms when he whistled in their direction. Caleb Burke... I didn't expect it to be him.

"Come on in. You guys, make some room for Miss Selwyn."

At his words, his cronies immediately stood up and made space for her. Seeing that, Victoria became speechless. She pressed her lips together and looked at him. "Mr. Burke, why don't we switch to someplace else?"

"What?" Caleb looked at her in surprise. "Miss Selwyn, why should we switch to someplace else? Do you know how much I spent on this VIP suite?"

"The smell of cigarettes here is too strong. I can't tolerate it," she said honestly.

They didn't expect her to be so straightforward. The people in the private room were momentarily stunned, but Caleb smiled and said, "I've long heard that Miss Selwyn is pretty straightforward, and I finally got to witness it myself today."

“Well, are we moving or not?” She couldn’t be bothered with idle talk.

Just then, he clicked his tongue, and his slender eyes assessed her from a distance. However, he still didn’t answer her question.

Chapter 76

Amidst the silence, a bad-tempered man in the room spoke up.

“Why should we move someplace else, Miss Secretary? We’re all friends with Mr. Burke, so is there something we shouldn’t witness? Don’t worry, even if it’s really something private, we’ll just close our eyes.”

When Victoria heard that, she frowned.

She looked at the perverted man with a fierce glare in her eyes.

After being with Alaric for so long, Victoria was beginning to assimilate his aura.

As such, with just a glare from Victoria, the man who spoke up was instantly scared into silence and withdrew slightly.

When she moved her gaze away, the man finally realized what was going

Chapter 76 Do You Think I’m Here for Fun?

1. on.

Damn, what’s wrong with me? How can I be scared of a little girl? Was I possessed? he thought.

“Miss Selwyn, it might not be convenient for us to change places. If you can’t take the smell, we can leave the door open to regulate the airflow.

How does that sound?” As Caleb spoke, he was grinning like a predatory tiger.

A man beside him was quick to shout orders. “Hear that? Put out your

cigarettes and stop smoking! What if Miss Selwyn chokes? She's here to discuss a partnership. If there are any losses, you won't be able to compensate for that."

He sounded sarcastic, which Victoria found annoying.

If she weren't guiding Yasmin, she would've just turned around and left.

She thought for a bit and decided to go over with Yasmin only after the

2/10

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smell had dissipated.

3/10

Yasmin had been following behind Victoria at first, but after some thought, she realized that she would have to handle most things herself after

Victoria left, so she took a few steps forward and stood next to Victoria.

The room was rowdy and filled with people. Victoria picked out a relatively clean spot and sat down.

Yasmin took a seat beside her, then skipped all the nonsense as she immediately took out the contract and said to Caleb, "Mr. Burke, this is the contract we've drafted. You can have a look-"

Before she could finish speaking, Caleb's friend fetched two glasses for the women and immediately filled them up.

Caleb was leaning back against the couch as he crossed his legs. He looked at them with a half-smile, saying, "Hey, beautiful. You don't have to rush things. We're here for fun, so you shouldn't just start talking business.

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How boring that'd be! Have a drink and chat with us.”

Yasmin instantly retracted the contract she had produced, not knowing what to do for a moment.

Meanwhile, Victoria didn't move as she sat there quietly. Her fair skin and beautiful features looked even more alluring under the lights.

Caleb examined her, his fingers curling up as his gaze darkened considerably.

She was wearing the simplest outfit, but she possessed a lethal dose of sensual attraction. Her long, porcelain neck made her look like a proud swan as she sat there.

Caleb gulped, feeling a little tempted. If it weren't for Alaric meddling in his business, this proud swan would've been his by now.

“Come on, pretty secretaries, don't just sit there. Drink.”

4/10

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5/10

Yasmin was a timid person, so when they said that, she moved to take the glass. However, when she saw Victoria staying emotionless and completely still, she changed her mind.

She remembered Victoria telling her not to feed the greed of those people.

“What's the matter?” Noticing her lack of movement, Caleb let go of the woman in his arms and leaned closer to Victoria. “Miss Selwyn, are you unwilling to humor me even once?”

“He’s right. Miss Selwyn, it’s Mr. Burke we’re talking about. Can’t you humor him by drinking just one glass?”

“We’re here for fun, anyway. Just drink it.”

The crowd was egging her on, but Victoria simply glanced at him with a cold look in her eyes. “Do you think I’m here for fun?”

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The smile on Caleb’s lips faded a little. If it were before, he would’ve been 6/10

more careful on Alaric’s account, but he had heard some rumors lately, so he began pining for her again.

At that thought, Caleb curved his lips once more and picked up the glass, then scooted over to Victoria.

“Miss Selwyn, even if we’re talking business, you don’t have to be so serious. You worked so hard, but where did it get you? In the end, he still brought some woman to the company in front of you. Now that things have turned out like this, you should make some plans for yourself, don’t you think so?”

Victoria wondered why Caleb was extra reckless today, but she never thought it was because he had received this piece of news. She glared at him with a look of disdain as if she were saying, ‘Even if I break up with Alaric, do you think you’d have a chance?’

Chapter 76 Do You Think I’m Here for Fun?

Caleb almost lost his smile. He knew that Victoria always looked down on him.

Be it before or after the Selwyns went bankrupt, no matter how hard he tried to pursue her, she never spared him a glance.

7/10

“You’re giving me that look again.” He narrowed his eyes in annoyance, and his voice was tinted with unwillingness as he added, “Victoria, the Selwyns have gone bankrupt, and you only have your current position thanks to Alaric. What right do you have to look down on me? Do you think you’re still the oh–so–mighty daughter of the Selwyn Family?”

He was on par with Alaric in all aspects, and if he got his hands on Victoria, he wouldn’t be like Alaric who coveted other women and brought them to work.

However, the woman in front of him didn’t know what was good for her! Even though Caleb was furious to this extent, Victoria still looked at him coldly.

“Say something.” Caleb gritted his teeth and glared at Victoria.

“Are you sure you want me to say it here?”

“Yes!” Seeing her finally budge, he was a little excited.

When his friends saw him like that, they couldn’t help but exchange glances.

“To be honest, I’m not looking down on you. I just hate you.”

When Caleb heard that, his expression froze. “What do you mean by that?”

“Do you remember what you and your friend said at the hot spring villa five years ago?”

“Five years ago? That’s too long ago, how can I-” Suddenly, Caleb

Chapter 76 Do You Think I'm Here for Fun?

remembered something, and his expression shifted.

Back then, he learned that Victoria would be going to the hot spring, so he got his friend to tag along and look for Victoria.

9/10

Caleb was a braggart, so when he went out of his room to look for Victoria, he boasted to his friend.

“Dude, with someone like Victoria, I only have to move a few fingers to conquer her, eh?”

His friend even retorted, “Forget it. The daughter of the Selwyn Family is super difficult to get. You have to work hard just to get her to give you another look.”

“Tsk, why should I work hard for a mere woman? I'm just playing around, and I'll get sick of her after a few days. Just wait and see. When she falls for me, I'll break up with her right away.”

Chapter 76 Do You Think I'm Here for Fun?

His boasts slowly became clear in his mind, and every single sentence was like a heavy blow to him.

Turns out she heard me boasting back then. No wonder...

The two families were on good terms with each other, and every time he greeted Victoria, she would smile and nod in response.

However, ever since that day, she completely ignored him whenever he greeted her.

10/10

Chapter 77

Seeing Caleb's ashen face, Victoria guessed that he must have remembered.

"So, Mr. Burke? You didn't forget what you said back then, did you?"

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His friend beside him asked curiously, "Mr. Burke, what did you say?"

Caleb's mind was a little blank. He always thought that Victoria looked down on his background and sought after more powerful people, but he never thought that she had heard his boasts.

When he realized that his words caused him to lose out on a potential lover, Caleb wanted to slap himself.

"It's not like that!" Caleb gritted his teeth and explained with reddened eyes, "That was nonsense I spouted just because I found it fun. I had no intentions of offending you."

1/12

Chapter 77 Change

2/12

In reality, if he were just playing around, he wouldn't have gone all the way to the hot spring to look for her just because he heard she was there.

"Fun?" Victoria tilted her head as if she were pondering that word. A moment later, she slowly spoke up. "Those words are fun to you, huh, Mr. Burke?"

Caleb said, "I didn't mean it like that! What I meant was-

"Alright, Mr. Burke. Let's get back to the topic at hand. We're here to discuss

business. If you have no intention of working with Cadogan Group, we shan't stay here much longer."

Caleb refused to back down. He had finally figured out the reason, so how could he just let it go?

Caleb immediately gripped Victoria's slender, porcelain wrist. "Miss Selwyn, I can explain."

Chapter 77 Change

Victoria frowned. "Let go."

"No, please, I can explain. Back then, I was just-"

Boom!

The half-closed door to the room was suddenly kicked open, and everyone in the room was shocked by the noise.

A few muscular men in black attire rushed into the room.

"Who are you? Who let you guys in?"

Someone had just questioned them when one of the muscular men held the person's head and slammed it onto the cold floor.

As the host of this event, Caleb had a shift in his expression as he subconsciously let go of Victoria. He stood up and asked, "What are you doing? Don't you know where this is? Don't you know who I am?"

3/12

Chapter 77 Change

Bang!

Caleb had just finished speaking when a fist landed on his face, and he was immediately sent flying.

“Ah!” The girl sitting beside Caleb let out a terrified shriek.

Yasmin was also startled as she gripped the hem of Victoria’s clothes.

Victoria never thought that she would encounter this scene today. Who exactly did Caleb offend? At any rate, she couldn’t stay here longer.

Victoria glanced at the door, and her expression fell.

A few muscular men were standing there, completely barring the door. If she took Yasmin with her and got up to leave, would they allow passage?

That was what she thought, but Victoria didn’t dare act recklessly. She held down Yasmin’s hand, gesturing for the latter to stay put. Yasmin was

4/12

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Chapter 77 Change

so scared that she could only hide behind Victoria.

The people at the scene could see that the muscular men were not to be reasoned with. After all, they had sent even Caleb flying with one punch. Without their backbone, the others were extremely terrified and dared not make a sound.

An eerily heavy atmosphere hung in the room.

Just when Victoria was wondering if she should move, the muscular man who hit Caleb suddenly walked up to her and bowed respectfully.

“Greetings, Miss Selwyn.”

Victoria was stunned.

What’s going on?

5/12

Chapter 77 Change

Why does he know me? she wondered.

Victoria could only look at him suspiciously. "And you are?"

"Miss Selwyn, our master requests your audience."

With that, the man even put on a gentlemanly attitude.

"Who is your master?" Victoria asked.

The man smiled and retained his original pose, but he didn't answer

Victoria.

However, when she realized that he wouldn't attack her, Victoria finally let out a sigh of relief.

She pursed her lips and remained motionless.

"Miss Selwyn, is anything the matter?"

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6/12

Chapter 77 Change

Victoria then glanced at Yasmin, who was right beside her. "Can you let her leave first?"

The muscular man was surprised, then smiled as he said, "Of course."

After all, their master only told them to fetch Victoria. They couldn't care less about anyone else.

This answer reassured Victoria greatly. Since they agreed to let Yasmin leave, it meant that they weren't trying to do anything bad, so they probably weren't enemies.

If not, they would be worried that Yasmin might ask for help.

“Miss Victoria, I can’t leave.” Yasmin gripped Victoria’s arm tightly. “I’ll stay with you no matter what.”

When Victoria heard that, she creased her fine eyebrows. “You should go back first.”

7/12

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She gave Yasmin a look. She wasn’t sure if Yasmin understood it, but the latter was no longer persistent.

After that, Yasmin kept looking back as she left, and under the gaze of the crowd, she walked out of the room.

As soon as she left the room, she immediately ran outside and took out her phone to make a call.

“Miss Selwyn, can you come with us now?” The muscular man extended the invitation again.

Victoria didn’t move as she said calmly, “Who is your master?”

The man fell silent again at the mention of this.

This was Victoria’s second time asking.

8/12

Chapter 77 Change

“If you don’t tell me, can I not go?” She was testing their limits.

The man was stunned, then seemed to be debating something in his mind. A while later, he said, “Miss Selwyn, our master is an old friend of yours.”

An old friend of mine?

Does that mean I've met him before?

A few names flashed across Victoria's mind.

Seeing how respectful the man was, she felt like there weren't many on her mind who fit the bill.

No matter what, they probably came in peace. It would be better to follow them instead of staying here.

With that, Victoria got up and left with them.

9/12

Chapter 77 Change

As Victoria left, the muscular men who had barged into the room took their leave as well. When they were gone, the room was in a mess.

10/12

Soon, Victoria was taken to a presidential VIP room upstairs. It was lavishly decorated, and it looked very much like a place for business talks. There weren't any disgusting smells of alcohol and smoke either.

She never thought that the bar had places like this, and she felt like she had learned something new today.

"Miss Selwyn, our master is still discussing something, so he'll be right here when he's done. Please wait here."

As soon as he finished speaking, someone came in and served some snacks and fruits.

When Victoria saw the snacks and fruits laid on the table, her expression changed; every item on the table was her favorite.

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It was apparent that this man knew her very well.

Who was he, though?

11/12

For some reason, Victoria remembered the intense gaze she felt when she went out to buy congee at noon.

Could they be the same person?

She didn't touch the food on the table. Instead, she sat there in boredom, and she even took out her phone. The others didn't stop her, seemingly unafraid that she would call the police or something.

After taking out her phone, Victoria happened to see a message from Yasmin.

'Miss Victoria, are you alright? I've already left, but I'm still outside the bar.'

When Victoria saw that, she frowned. 'It's not safe for a lone girl to stay

Chapter 77 Change

here at night. You should go back.'

'No, I have to stick with you. Don't worry, I've already called Mr. Cadogan, and he'll be here right away.'

Chapter 78

Victoria never expected Yasmin to opt for the smart way by calling Alaric.

She would've praised Yasmin for her intelligence if it were not for the ongoing fight.

1/9

Furthermore, he might chew her out upon learning about tonight's

incident. The sheer thought of his father-like scolding caused frustration to bubble in her.

Men would usually treat their partners with care and gentleness so as to not scare them. However, Alaric always showed her that sour face like how a brother would. That was why she figured that he did not have feelings for her.

While she was immersed in her thoughts, there came the steady sound of footsteps. The big guy guarding the entrance greeted, "Mr. Morison."

Mr. Morison? Victoria was stupefied by the last name.

Chapter **78** Give Me A Hug

The aloof yet familiar voice asked, "Where is she?"

"Miss Selwyn is right in there."

"Okay. You may go ahead." His voice was low and husky.

Victoria stayed seated without moving a muscle. She was astonished to learn the identity of the incoming person. The names of her old acquaintances had flashed across her mind, bar one—Bane Morison.

Why is it him?

9

Bane topped her most-hated person list when she was young. Although he was one of Alaric's homies, Bane never respected her. That douchebag kept pulling her braids, hence the hatred.

Forget about calling her Vixie—inspired by the word 'Pixie'—Victoria resented him so much for telling her stories about Alaric and Claudia.

Chapter 78 Give Me A Hug

“Why didn’t you come to Claudia’s birthday party? Alaric gifted her a gorgeous necklace. Have you seen it?”

“Yesterday, Claudia invited Alaric to a masquerade, and they won the Best Couple title! Why didn’t you come?”

“Claudia gave Alaric a custom-made sweater. She personally designed the picture on the back and embroidered the words on the front right shoulder of it. Have you seen it?”

Bane kept blabbering about Alaric and Claudia in front of Victoria, and whenever he did, she would always say seriously, “Stop telling me these, Bane. I haven’t heard anything and I don’t want to know any of them. Do you hear me?”

However, it seemed like he could not understand human language because he never stopped. She gradually grew sick of it until she overheard Alaric himself say that he only had eyes for Claudia in the mini

3/9

Chapter 78 Give Me A Hug

garden one day.

Victoria never threw tantrums at Bane anymore after that, not even when she felt jealous.

Not wanting to hear about Alaric and Claudia wouldn’t change the truth because he would only ever have eyes for Claudia.

Later, when Bane noticed her silence whenever he mentioned the duo, he never brought them up again. On the day he left the country, everyone

sent him off except Victoria. He texted her and asked Alaric to buy a present in his stead.

‘See you soon, Vixie.’

The present was a scarf. Its color and texture were to her liking, yet she kept it in the box after taking a glance at it, It was never opened again.

4/9

“Have some more. You didn’t touch your food after just one bite. Did your preference change? Or is it not to your liking?”

Victoria turned around to face the incoming person. Five years were enough to efface the teen’s sentimentality, making him appear more mature and sharper with a tinge of wisdom sitting upon his raised brows.

He was neatly dressed in that white shirt and dark-colored suit. Pinning on the light-colored tie was a clip, which was the cause for the nuance in her expression.

She did not expect him to keep that tie clip despite all these years.

Her scorching gaze of scrutiny made Bane lift a brow as he smiled. “What’s the matter? You don’t recognize me, Vixie?”

She lost her cool upon hearing that nickname. “Who’s Vixie? Who gave you the right to call me that?”

Chapter 78 Give Me A Hug

He grinned at her puffed cheeks. “You look like a pufferfish. Isn’t this my little Vixie?”

Pufferfish? She frowned at him. “Can you stop giving me nicknames?”

69

“Alright, alright.” Bane approached her with an affectionate smile and ruffled her hair. “Give me a hug.”

A hug? Before she could react, the man already spread his arms and leaned forward. The smell of tobacco became stronger.

The wispy scent of Victoria wafted into his nose as he pulled her into his embrace, boosting the sense of satisfaction in him.

It had been five years, and never once had he forgotten about her. Had she come to the airport five years ago, he wouldn’t have needed to wait until today for a hug.

The soft sensation and satisfaction filled him to the brim, but not the void

Chapter 78 Give Me A Hug

in his heart. He dared not to tighten his arms because it might scare her.

“You’ve grown into a fine woman, Vixie. Pretty, but skinny.”

Victoria suddenly recalled the message he sent her before he left. It was touching to be missed by someone despite the long years of separation.

Still, she deemed it inappropriate to hug each other like this even though they had been friends ever since they were young.

Right when she was going to shove Bane away, she noticed someone standing at the entrance over his shoulder.

It was Alaric, who had rushed all the way here as soon as he received a message of help from Yasmin, in unkempt clothes.

Fearing that Victoria might come out, he jumped through hoops to come all the way here. While he tried to catch his breath, he saw the scene and

his face turned cold. He could not recognize the man from the back.

7/9

Chapter 78 Give Me A Hug

Under Victoria's baffled gaze, he let out an icy smile. "Come here, Victoria!"

Frustration was evident in Alaric's voice, implying the end of his patience.

Bane was stunned momentarily by his voice, and he smiled thereafter.

8/9

Feeling Victoria pushing him, Bane quickly tightened his arms around her waist and whispered, "Don't you want to know how he will react if you don't do as he says?"

How will he react? Victoria did not have to think twice to know that Alaric's egoism would be hurt. This had already happened many times, so she knew the answer.

"I'm not-"

Before she could finish her answer, Alaric suddenly walked over with a somber expression.

Chapter 78 Give Me A Hug

Pow!

9/9

Chapter 79

Even though Bane had mentally prepared himself, he did not expect a full-out punch from Alaric at all. Alaric did not see who the victim was as he yanked Victoria to his back. Lowering his head, he silenced her with a cold and warning gaze.

It was as if he was questioning, “Are you out of your mind? Why didn’t you push him away?”

Bane clucked his tongue and wiped off the streak of blood before looking at Alaric with a smirk. “Is this my welcome gift? Wow. I don’t think this is right, Alaric.”

The familiar voice stunned Alaric. Only then did he shift his gaze from Victoria to Bane, meeting the man’s gaze. Awkwardness filled the air.

It took Alaric a moment to regain his composure. He gazed at Bane and said indifferently, “You’re back.”

1/8

Chapter 79 Resentment Took Root in Her Heart

Bane took out his handkerchief to wipe the blood off his hand elegantly.

“Seems like someone’s not happy to see me.”

Alaric pursed his lips as his gaze spoke of condemnation. “What were you doing just now?”

Nonchalantly, Bane glanced at Victoria’s face before refocusing on Alaric with a smile. “I was asking Victoria if she wants to know how you will react upon seeing us hugging.”

**

Alaric fell into silence, and the cold air around him subsided. So, it’s to check my reaction. I thought Bane had feelings for...

“Tsk, tsk, I didn’t expect you to overreact.” Bane raised a brow.

Alaric only scoffed and didn’t make any comments. He held Victoria’s hand while talking to Bane. “When did you come back? Why didn’t you tell

me?"

2/8

12:08 **Mon, 19**

71%

Chapter 79 Resentment Took Root in Her Heart

Bane looked at the duo's hands and smiled. "I took the morning flight. I landed around noon."

3/8

Hearing that, Victoria somehow recalled the black vehicle at the company and that scorching gaze that almost penetrated her this afternoon. As an afterthought, she looked at Bane, who was staring at her as well.

Alaric did not notice, for his attention was solely focused on her small hand. He thought he was holding a wisp of marshmallow due to the soft and smooth sensation.

They rarely spent time together nowadays, so he did not have the chance to hold her hand. Now that he had the opportunity to do so, he realized how much he had been missing it.

Next, he even laced his fingers with Victoria's forcefully, causing her to look at him with a frown. He said, "It's getting late. Not a time for a welcome party. How about tomorrow?"

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Chapter 79 Resentment Took Root in Her Heart

3

"Sure." Bane nodded. "Catch up tomorrow. Remember to call the gang

over.”

Alaric nodded. “Yeah. We’ll get going first.”

”

“Bye.”

“Let’s go.” Holding Victoria’s hand, Alaric led the way out of the room.

71%

4/8

Once they were gone, the smile on Bane’s lips vanished. Coldly, he cleaned the wound by his lips with a handkerchief before throwing it into a

1111

trash can nearby.

After the duo left the bar, something came into Victoria’s mind. “Where’s Yasmin?”

We came together but she went to call for help when I was meeting Bane.

She said she would wait. I wonder where she is right now.

12:08 Mon, 19 Jun

Chapter 79 Resentment Took Root in Her Heart

“She left,” replied the man aloofly.

“She left on her own will?”

5/8

“What else? Do you think she would wait for you here? Do you know where we are right now?” Alaric snapped.

Victoria was speechless. There he goes again. That parent-like scolding.

He’s always like this!

She freed herself from Alaric's hand indignantly. "I know very well, but so what? If I'm gone, Yasmin is the only person to take over my position, so, of course, I have to accompany her to business dinners."

"Did it have to be here?" Indifference filled his face.

"Yes."

His brows knitted together. "What did you say?"

12:09 Mon, 19 Jun

Chapter 79 Resentment Took Root in Her Heart

The ire from the encounter with Caleb had yet to dissipate. Caleb disrespected Victoria because Alaric had been bringing Claudia to work lately. She was affected by the rumors that were circulating amongst the employees, saying that she was the abandoned one.

She knew that she should not bear resentment because she did not have the right to do so. In fact, she owed him a debt of gratitude.

Not only did Alaric teach the bullies a lesson, but he also helped her father without her knowledge. He even gave her the chance to learn and grow by inducting her into the company.

She should be grateful, but for some reason, resentment took root in her heart. Shrouded by darkness, jealousy sprouted and flourished rapidly.

6/8

Victoria was aware that she shouldn't feel this way, hence the suppression and self-restraint. She tried to look at Alaric and Claudia in a positive way

because they had helped her.

12:09 Mon, 19

Chapter 79 Resentment Took Root in Her Heart

However, whenever she woke up from her dreams on those quiet nights, she recalled those weird gazes she received at work. Thoughts then began whirring in her mind.

Why? Just why? It's only until Grandma's surgery is over. It won't take long but why does he have to bring Claudia to work right now and put me on everyone's lips?

Why did I have to fall for him out of all? Things would have been better if I didn't fall for him.

Needless to say, Alaric did not have an inkling of her thoughts at all. All he knew was she was standing there in a daze with reddened eyes. It was then that he realized how fierce he was just now.

7/8

But if I don't reprimand her, she won't know how evil the world is. What if the person she met tonight wasn't Bane but a stranger? What would have happened if I didn't pick up Yasmin's call? The situation would have been bad.

271%

Chapter 79 Resentment Took Root in Her Heart

He softened his voice. "Didn't I tell you to pick a better location for business dinners? If the other party doesn't agree, you don't have to meet them.

You're Mrs. Cadogan. No one can pressure you."

8/8

Victoria laughed at that. "Mrs. Cadogan? No one can pressure me? What will happen once I lose that title?"

He was riveted at the spot, and she looked at him while saying softly, "How
www.0

will they perceive me if they find out that it's a fake marriage?"

The Selwyn Family had long been bankrupt, consigning her to nil. For the past two years, she gave her all in work in an attempt to prove that she didn't gain respect from others by virtue of her title of Mrs. Cadogan.

Even after all her effort, it turned out that she would still be nothing without that title.

Chapter 80

Alaric and Victoria sat in silence on the way home. Alaric's expression was dark. He clutched the steering wheel so tightly that one feared he would accidentally pull it out.

He was troubled by what Victoria said to him earlier. The idea that she would leave one day never crossed his mind, but he sensed that something was brewing when she purposely brought it up.

He stole a glance at Victoria. After getting in the car, she closed her eyes and curled up into a ball on the passenger seat, as though she wanted to shut out the whole world.

After all these years of living together, he witnessed her hard work and her ambition to prove herself, but today, she ran into a wall,

On the way to Victoria, he heard about the incident today from Yasmin. In

the end, Yasmin was stammering and hesitating. Seeing that, he quickly

1/8

12:09 Mon, 19 Jun

Chapter 80 Leave Soon

0271%

forced her to tell him more. As Victoria's right-hand woman, Yasmin grabbed the chance to help Victoria air her grievances. "Well, Mr. Cadogan, I hope you won't blame me for telling the truth. And don't tell Miss Victoria that it was me who told you."

2/8

"Cut the nonsense." He frowned.

"Okay. Here we go!" She took a deep breath and said loudly over the phone, "Mr. Burke said that Miss Victoria doesn't need to work too hard because Mr. Cadogan has brought his mistress into the company. Mr. Burke also told Miss Victoria that she was going to be abandoned soon, and since the Selwyns are bankrupt, she'll be bullied by others. Mr. Cadogan will never help her anyway."

Alaric's veins were throbbing. "What did you say?"

Yasmin emphasized, "Mr. Cadogan, I didn't say that! I was just paraphrasing!"

12:09 Mon,

71%

Chapter 80 Leave Soon

He rubbed his temples and grunted. When he gathered himself, he felt a

headache creeping up.

3/8

Half an hour later, he parked the car in the underground garage of Cadogan Residence. Victoria was still curled up in a ball as she finally opened her eyes and happened to meet Alaric's gaze.

He gestured at her to leave with his chin. "You should go up first.

Grandma's probably staying up for you." She understood what he meant and nodded at him. "Sure, I'll greet her." Then, she unbuckled her seatbelt to get out of the car.

"Wait."

Victoria turned around with a confused look to see Alaric leaning over, surrounding her with his crisp alpine scent. His good-looking face was only inches away, and she could see the cracks in his lips. Shocked, she widened her eyes and leaned backward.

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He paused for a moment, and his eyes turned cold when he realized what she had done. "Why? Do you dislike me this much? Did you think I was going to kiss you?"

4/8

Staring at his mildly enraged face, she realized that she must have misunderstood his intention. She pursed her lips and turned her face away from him. She had wanted to explain herself, but any explanation seemed unnecessary at this point. She gave up and asked, "Why did you suddenly

come closer to me?”

He scoffed but didn't answer. Instead, he went back to his seat with a long face. “You should go. Don't forget to get rid of the smell of alcohol before you meet Grandma.”

She finally understood his action just now. He was checking if she smelled like alcohol. She wanted to say something to diffuse the awkwardness, but in the end, she left without a word.

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Silence returned to the car after Victoria got out. He pulled out the car key, got out of the car as well, and leaned against it while using his phone. He said coldly to someone, “Look into the recent acquisitions for me.’

Since Victoria **did** not drink, she only needed to change out from the outfit that stank of alcohol from the bar. After that, she washed her face and greeted Griselda. The old lady had not gone to bed—she sighed in relief when she saw Victoria safe and sound.

5/8

“You're safe. Everything's good.” Griselda patted Victoria's hand and advised her earnestly, “I don't even know if I will survive the surgery. I might not have a chance to see you again if the surgery fails. I don't wish for much, except for the health and safety of my children and grandchildren at this age.”

Victoria's expression changed. “Grandma, what are you talking about? The surgery will be a success, and you'll be with us for a long time! Don't say

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that again or you'll make me angry!"

3

71%

6/8

Sensing Victoria's change in expression and tone, Griselda chuckled. "I know you care about me. Alright, alright. I'll try my best to survive." Next, she poked Victoria's puffed cheeks and muttered, "I'll let you in on a secret, girl."

"Secret? What's it about?" Victoria looked curious.

"When Alaric heard that something had happened to you, he rushed out without changing. He didn't even put on a jacket on this chilly day."

Victoria was taken aback by Griselda putting in a good word for her grandson. She had probably noticed that something was amiss between them.

Victoria was right because before she could reply, Griselda asked her, "Are you both still not over the argument last time?"

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Victoria didn't want to talk badly about Alaric, so she pursed her lips and said in a hushed voice, "No. This is a new argument."

"Huh?"

She bit her lower lip and said helplessly, "It was an argument about work

We have different opinions, so..." This was the best excuse she could offer to convince Griselda.

However, Griselda didn't believe Victoria. "Is it only an argument about work?"

Victoria stared at her with doubt. Griselda chuckled. "Does it have nothing to do with that woman, Claudia Johnson?"

Victoria tried not to expose her emotions, but her eyes gave her away.

"Grandma, you..."