

Departure with a Belly Chapter 101

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Chapter 101

After Victoria and Alaric returned to their work desks, Victoria began to get on with her work. Before the two of them parted ways, they agreed to bring Griselda to the hospital the next day and decided to tell her about it together later that night.

For some reason, the duo didn't bring up the matter relating to their divorce as if they tacitly knew not to. After all, the fact that they rushed to the Civil Affairs Bureau early in the morning in a fit of pique last time didn't end well when Griselda's operation didn't carry on as usual. To avoid any unforeseen circumstances, Victoria decided to wait until Griselda was done with her operation this time before settling their divorce. With that idea in mind, Victoria believed Alaric felt the same way.

Later that afternoon, Victoria headed downstairs and bought herself some congee as usual for lunch. However, before she could speak to the seller,

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she was interrupted by the sound of her phone ringing.

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She was stunned when she saw Bane calling her, and she subconsciously looked toward the parking lot she had noticed a few days ago. As she expected, she saw the familiar car parked there.

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As Victoria turned around, the car window rolled down, whereupon Bane's handsome face came into view. With his phone in his hand, he waved and smiled at Victoria. Nevertheless, Victoria couldn't seem to believe they ran into each other there and then, but after hesitating for a few seconds, she decided to approach Bane's car.

"What brings you here?"

Bane curled his lips and put his phone down. "I happened to be nearby for business. I didn't think I'd run into you around here. Pretty lucky, aren't I?"

"A coincidence, you say?" Victoria had doubts about Bane's claim, thinking there was no way he would park his car in the same spot she noticed a

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few days ago even though he might have been there for business.

Furthermore, she found the coincidence uncanny for Bane to call her only when she came downstairs. When she noticed the necktie clip she had gifted to him on his necktie, her face darkened somewhat.

"What's wrong? Don't you believe me?" Bane raised his eyebrows.

Victoria reacted with a smile, neither admitting nor denying it. However, Bane wasn't desperate to clarify at all as he smiled and asked, "Anyway, would you like to join me for lunch? Since we just ran into each other..."

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Victoria seemed hesitant. She wanted to turn Bane down, but he suddenly interrupted her and said, "Didn't you say you would make it up to me for the ruined farewell party?"

Victoria was rendered speechless, for she had only taken Bane to a congee place despite her promise to make it up to him. What was more, he didn't eat much that day. Well, that was indeed awkward.

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"Alright, then." Victoria eventually agreed to tag along.

Upon hearing Victoria's answer, Bane stepped out of his vehicle to open the door for her, but at that moment, two men in black came running

toward them from afar. "Mr. Morison!" They seemingly failed to notice

Victoria standing there as they walked up to Bane cordially. "I thought you were gone, Mr. Morison, but thank God you're still here. Would you like to join us for lunch?"

Nevertheless, Bane only stepped aside and politely answered, "Well, you're

too late. I already have a lunch date.”

“A lunch date?” The two men were stunned for a second until they noticed a slim figure right beside them. As they took a closer look, they realized Victoria had been by their side all along. “Miss Selwyn? What are you doing here? Are you going on a lunch date with Mr. Morison?”

“Greetings, Mr. Langstrom.” Victoria nodded at him.

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Upon learning that the two of them knew each other, Bane lightened up and became a little friendlier to them, raising his eyebrows in response.

“Victoria and I were neighbors when we were little.”

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“I see. I can’t believe you two are neighbors.” Steven let out a sigh and said,

“In that case, I guess we should leave you two to it.” Steven left with his subordinate, whereas Bane opened the car door and invited Victoria into the car.

“Get in, Vixie.”

However, Victoria remained still and stared at Bane awkwardly, refusing to enter the car. “I thought we agreed that you wouldn’t call me that way.”

When Victoria and Bane were little, Bane always called her that. Although she didn't think there was anything wrong with it back then, she seemed to have outgrown that nickname, which she found strange at her current age.

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"Yeah, you're right. What about Snowball, then?"

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"No, not this one too." Victoria knitted her eyebrows.

"Why not?" Bane raised his eyebrows and asked, "Is it because this nickname would remind you of someone else?" While Victoria was speechless, Bane went on to say, "In that case, I guess I have stories to hear from you." Nevertheless, Victoria continued to stand still until Bane tapped her forehead. "What are you waiting for? Get in the car now."

As such, Victoria helplessly got into the car. After sitting tightly, she said,

"Please stop giving me nicknames. I don't think it suits me now, considering my status."

"What status do you have right now?"

Bane hit the gas pedal and said smilingly, "Everyone else at my farewell

believed you and Alaric were just putting on a show when you both got

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married. Some of them even thought you were doing that because you wanted the power as someone close to Alaric. Bane's words sounded like they hit the nail on the head, rendering Victoria speechless as she only pursed her lips in silence.

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Meanwhile, Bane, who seemingly caught a glimpse of Victoria pouting, chuckled softly and asked, "Are you mad?"

"No, you're just telling the truth." Victoria grunted.

"Good. Adjusting your mood is especially important, considering your current situation. If you fail to do that, you're going to be in deep trouble."

"I know." Victoria kept her head down, recalling when she nearly found herself in trouble earlier. Fortunately, she was mentally tough enough to endure the hardship, or it could have ended terribly for her.

After exiting the company, they drove onto the busy road. While keeping his eyes on the road, Bane asked, "How is Claudia? She seemed pretty

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badly hurt that day. It's going to leave a mark, isn't it?"

"I think so," Victoria replied indifferently.

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"What about Alaric? Is he going to spend the next two days looking after her in the hospital?"

When Victoria heard Bane's question, she subconsciously knitted her eyebrows, thinking she would have misunderstood Bane if she hadn't known he came on purpose. Even so, she still went on to say, "If you want to know so badly, why don't you give him a call yourself?"

"If I call him, wouldn't I ruin his mood?" Bane couldn't help but chuckle in amusement.

"Instead of that, you chose to ruin my mood, eh?"

"Aren't you unaffected by it?"

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Fine. Victoria was rendered speechless once again. She then looked outside the window and said, "I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't 'run into' me again next time."

"What?" Bane chuckled in amusement. "Are you mad or something? I thought everything went well that night." When Victoria didn't say a word

more, Bane continued, "Anyway, what's going on between you and him?"

While I was abroad, I heard that Alaric fell in love with someone else."

"No." Victoria shook her head and added calmly, "He probably can't forget about the person who saved him back then."

"Well, that doesn't amount to love. If you don't have feelings for someone, you can't force it. It has nothing to do with indebtedness."

Victoria also thought the same way, thinking there were many other incidents like hers in the world, but not all of the men and women involved ended up together. Instead, most of them had more gratitude than love

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for each other. As for those who subsequently fell in love with each other, Victoria believed it was fate that brought the lovers together.

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As the car was filled with silence, Bane shifted his attention to his surroundings without continuing their conversation. Instead, he asked what she would like to eat. Nevertheless, Victoria didn't have an appetite for anything else besides congee. However, since she already had congee with Bane that night, she didn't think it would be appropriate for her to suggest having congee again. Thus, she said, "Your call."

Bane paused, feeling stunned about Victoria's decision.

"Are you sure about that? I haven't lived around here for years."

"No worries," Victoria calmly replied, thinking she wouldn't eat much

anyway. Then, something crossed her mind as she added, “Pick anything you’re craving for. It’s on me.”

“Really?” Bane pursed his lips. “In that case, I’m going to take my pick carefully.”

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In the end, Bane picked a Western restaurant. Upon arrival, Victoria stepped out of the car and immediately noticed the restaurant’s high–end interior. Before the Selwyn Family went bankrupt, Victoria always came to places like that with her best friends, but after that, everyone else left her, except Summer. Back then, Victoria was the one who took Summer to high–class restaurants, but after she went bankrupt, their positions were reversed, though they frequented less luxurious restaurants.

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The first time they went to one, Summer looked at Victoria cautiously and said, “Victoria, I can only afford to treat you to meals like this, but don’t worry, once I get rich one day, I’ll treat you to a fancy one.” Victoria couldn’t help but chuckle with joy when she recalled that. Although she hadn’t been to any other high–class establishments since going bankrupt, she felt a lot more fulfilled on the inside than ever before. Furthermore, she was happy that she got to see the grim reality when she was at her lowest, deeming it part of her growth.

“What’s on your mind?” Bane’s voice pulled Victoria out of her train of

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thought.

Victoria snapped out of her trance and smiled. “Nothing. I was just recalling something interesting.”

“What’s interesting?” He raised an eyebrow.

She responded with silence and gave Bane a glimpse without showing any intention of sharing the matter with him. On the other hand, Bane was a man who knew his boundaries well, so he didn’t press on with his questions or pry into the details.

As the two of them sat down and ordered their food, Bane passed the menu directly to Victoria and asked, “Take a look and see what you’d like to eat.”

Victoria was about to say she was fine with anything, but she quickly changed her mind; she didn’t think it would be appropriate for her to do that. After all, she was supposed to show Bane some sincerity for the

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farewell party that didn’t go as smoothly as expected. Therefore, she went on to pick a few dishes and placed her orders before giving the menu back to Bane.

When Bane took a look at their order, he couldn’t help but give the lady a strange gaze. “You seem to prefer bland food now, huh? Why has your diet changed so much?”

“I’ve been practicing a bland diet lately because of my health,” Victoria

said without any change in her facial expression.

Bane smiled and looked at Victoria silently, but Victoria was able to recognize the look in his eyes right away. If we weren't childhood friends, I would be scratching my head while trying to figure out what he is up to, not knowing him well enough.

"If you'd like, I can take you to the doctor after our meal," he asked a few moments later.

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"No thanks. I've already been there."

"Ah, it looks like someone's already grown up, always turning me down."

Bane then went on to tick a few other boxes on the ordering slip before giving it to the waiter. After that, something crossed his mind as he added, "Could you please get a glass of juice for this lady?"

"Sure, sir."

Victoria was stunned when she heard that. "How did you know?"

"I can't exactly remember, but you drank two glasses of juice during the farewell party that night, didn't you? Anyway, one glass should be enough, right?"

Before Victoria came, she wasn't planning to order herself a glass of juice. Thus, she didn't pay attention to the menu, but Bane observed her closely.

"Thanks."

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“You don’t have to thank me. You’re the one who’s going to foot the bill, after all.”

Victoria was speechless at once, finally remembering her purpose of treating Bane to the meal, Goodness, dining in a restaurant like this is probably going to cost me a fortune. With the amount of pay she was receiving, she could afford to foot the bill, but once her baby was born, her burden would most likely increase. After all, she would have to worry about putting food on the table for herself and her baby, as well as affording her child’s education. Because of that, she reckoned it was important to start saving.

Nevertheless, the thought of that was enough to give Victoria a headache, for she had no intention of marrying another man again. Therefore, she would be forced to raise the child alone, which meant she would have to look for more sources of income besides her current job.

“What’s wrong? Don’t tell me you regret treating me to an expensive meal

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right here,” Bane said in a probing manner when he saw her preoccupied look.

When Victoria snapped out of her trance, the first thing she saw was Bane’s ambiguously smiling eyes.

“Judging from the pay you’re getting at Cadogan Group, I doubt it’d trouble you to treat me to lunch.”

“No way.” Victoria was amused by Bane’s words.

He picked up his glass from the table and took a sip, casually saying, "For old times' sake, I don't mind hiring you if the Cadogan Group doesn't pay you enough."

"Are you trying to poach talents for your company?"

"Me, poaching talents?" Bane was slightly stunned when he heard Victoria's words, but deep down, he knew Victoria was right about what he

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had in mind. After all, it was true that he was trying to poach talents for his company, except the talent he just found was no ordinary person.

In the meantime, while Bane didn't admit it, Victoria was somewhat relieved. If the reason he ran into me today was that he was in search of talents for his company, I guess I should have nothing to worry about.

After all, it wasn't a coincidence we ran into each other.

When he saw her expression, his eyes darkened. "You seem nervous. Are you worried that I might have feelings for you?"

Feeling as if the man was able to read her mind, she awkwardly blinked and subconsciously denied it, saying, "No, I wouldn't feel that way. After all, why would you have feelings for me in the first place?"

Bane looked at Victoria gently, curling his lips upward while pinching his nasal bridge. "What if I told you I had?"

Victoria, who was initially relieved, became stunned upon hearing Bane's

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words. "What?" She thought she had misheard him as she stared blankly at the man.

"What's wrong? Don't tell me you got scared." Bane pointed at the table with smiling eyes.

When Victoria noticed Bane's smiling eyes, she realized the man was joking with her. Not only did she take his joke seriously, but she was also frightened by him. Despite being speechless, Victoria felt a lot calmer than before. "No, but I think some jokes are inappropriate among friends and should be avoided."

Bane curled his lips upward, his eyes filled with love and tenderness.

"Alright, I'll quit joking." However, only he knew that he wouldn't be this gentle or humorous anymore when he brought up this issue again.

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Afterward, Victoria found time to go to the restroom to relieve the awkwardness.

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When she came out to the corridor outside the restroom, she unexpectedly ran into someone she knew. She stopped in her tracks when she looked at the sullen-faced young lady.

Victoria didn't exactly know the girl, but they did meet once at the hospital before.

It was Samantha's daughter, Sandy.

Victoria bumped into Samantha at the time she went to the hospital to end her pregnancy. If it weren't for Sandy's situation, Samantha probably would have told the world about Victoria's situation.

Seeing Sandy reminded Victoria of the day at the hospital when the girl

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firmly told Samantha that she was in love with someone.

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Presently, she was not here alone. There was a tall, lean, and handsome man standing in front of her.

The man stooped to grab her by her shoulders, seemingly pleading as he spoke.

"I'm begging you, Sandy. Please abort the pregnancy. You are still young. You can't just drop out of school and have a baby now, can you? Besides,

I'm *not* ready to be a father. Give me some more time and we will have a child someday in the future, alright?"

Victoria only heard the conversation after she got closer to them, and when she did, she was at a loss for words as she cast the man a glance.

However, the two of them were so engrossed in their conversation that they didn't notice the people around them.

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"But that wasn't what you said before! Weren't you the one who said that we would get married if I got pregnant? Don't you like me? What's wrong with becoming a father ahead of time?"

"I do like you, Sandy, but your parents don't like me. We need time to work things out. Think about it. If you have a child now, your parents would only dislike me even more. Will we have a chance to be together in the future?"

Sandy must have been swayed by his words at this point, as she didn't say anything in reply.

When the tall man noticed her hesitation, he gave it another push. "**Look**, we are young and we can have a child anytime we want in the future.

Didn't you say that you can do anything for me? I'm at fault this time, but just this one time... Do it for me, okay?"

Victoria pressed her lips together when she realized that the man was a sc*mbag. What does he mean by asking her to do it for him? And he is

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even trying to manipulate her into doing everything he wants for him?

Delusional *sshole.

Still, this wasn't her business to stick her nose in.

Everyone had their own destiny and path to follow.

Victoria walked past the two of them apathetically. When she was some distance away, she heard the girl say in a faint voice, “O–Okay... I’ll do as you say...”

She promptly stopped walking and quietly sighed. Is this what it means to be blinded by love?

Judging from the sidelines, she thought that the girl was pitiful for being deceived by the man. But what *about me*? Have I stepped back and taken a good look at myself? Do I look like a clown, sticking to Alaric and being his fake wife?

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After Victoria got back to the dining table, she became lost in her thoughts and started spacing out.

When they were almost done eating, she went to the front desk to pay the bill before they left.

“Miss, the gentleman at your table has settled the bill already,” the staff informed her.

When Victoria heard this, she paused for a moment before asking, “How much was it?”

She then went back to the table and told Bane about wanting to transfer him the amount he paid for her.

“You want to transfer money to me?” Bane chuckled and languidly purred,

“You can just tell me that you want my phone number. We have known each other for too many years for you to beat around the bush.”

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Victoria only huffed after a while. “Who said anything about wanting your number?”

“What do you want, then?”

“We agreed that I will treat you.” She raised her chin toward his phone.

“There’s no need to give me your number. Just show me your payment code so I can scan it.”

As she spoke, Bane flicked her outstretched hand. “You insisted on paying last time. There is no place for my dignity if you succeed in paying this time.”

Victoria’s eyebrows furrowed lightly.

“If *you* still feel bad about it, you should resign and come work at the Morison Corporation.”

“Ah... Don’t you think you are going a little off–topic?”

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“Am I?” Bane lowered his gaze, seemingly contemplating. “But as you said, I do want to steal you.”

“You expect me to switch to another company with just a meal? Nice try.”

She then put away her phone and didn't insist on transferring the money to him. I'll let him pay if he wants to. After all, the heir of the Morison Corporation doesn't lack this amount of money. I'd better keep my money for my future child.

"Indeed, a single meal might not be enough to win you over. It seems I'll have to 'accidentally' run into you a few more times from now on, hmm?"

Victoria had noticed that Bane had become much more light-hearted than before.

Every word he said in the past would only leave her infuriated. He was a completely different person back then, so he must have matured after spending all these years abroad.

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After a few minutes, he offered to send her back to the company, which she rejected immediately.

"It's fine. The company is not far from here. I can get a cab in no time."

Bane seemed taken aback for a moment, but he didn't insist on it. He simply nodded and uttered, "All right, then."

The two of them proceeded to leave the restaurant together.

As they went out the door, *Victoria* caught sight of the tall and thin guy she had encountered in the corridor earlier—it was Sandy's boyfriend.

They are still here? she wondered as she took a glance at them. However, her gaze ended up *not* leaving the couple.

The woman in the man's embrace was not Sandy. Instead, it was a mature and powerful-looking career woman.

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She sounded assertive when she demanded, "Are you not done resolving that stupid problem you got? That girlie even followed you to the restaurant. She is pretty loyal, huh? How are *you* so good at winning her heart?"

"I didn't think she would suddenly change her mind, Jean. *We* already agreed to end the pregnancy, but she suddenly decided she didn't want to do that. Sh*t, I don't get it!"

"You don't get it, eh? You didn't 'get it' when you were f*cking her too, did you?"

"Jean, baby. I wouldn't have been deceived if she didn't seduce me in the first place. A gangly girl like her is nothing compared to you. She is not even a fraction of what *you* are. Besides, *you* saved me before, Jean. You are my savior and the one I love. I will not fall for any other woman."

Victoria stopped walking upon hearing that last sentence he uttered. She

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bit her lower lip as she refrained from approaching the couple, but her hands on the sides of her torso were tightly clenched.

You are my savior and the one I love. I will not fall for any other woman.

These two sentences were like sharp swords that pierced through

Victoria's heart, leaving her both in shock and pain.

"Jean, you can rest assured. You will always be the one I love the most."

While the tall, thin man was still expressing his loyalty to the older woman,

a cool and indifferent yet pleasing voice suddenly rang out.

"You love her the most, and yet you kiss and hug another woman. Your

love is dirt cheap, isn't it?"

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The tall and thin man froze when he heard that. When he came back to his

senses, he saw a stunning woman with clear eyes standing in front of him.

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"W-Who are you?"

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The lanky man looked shocked for a moment when he saw Victoria.

She is super pretty, but I don't know her.

The older woman by his side also narrowed her eyes when she saw

Victoria and stared at her carefully.

"Who is she? Did you hook up with another one behind my back?!"

The man hurriedly explained, "No, Jean! I don't know why she's here talking

to me. I don't even know her! H-Hey! Who the hell are you?"

He was actually a temperamental person. However, as much as he

wanted to go off on Victoria for suddenly approaching him and talking to him, he didn't have the heart to get angry, considering how shockingly gorgeous she was.

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"Does it matter whether you know me or not?" Victoria only coldly stared at him. "What matters is what you said. You claim to love her, yet you have a child with another woman. Do you think you are being fair to any of the people involved in this?"

When the man heard this, his face turned red. "W-What does it have anything to do with you?"

Unlike him, the woman beside him remained silent as her face grew somber.

Victoria's lips curled into a smirk. "I simply can't stand your pretentious display of affection."

"How dare you? Don't think I won't beat you up just because you're pretty!"

Perhaps provoked by her words, the man suddenly raised his hand at Victoria, wanting to intimidate her.

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Even though he didn't intend to hit her, a strong hand surprisingly grabbed

him the moment he raised his palm.

“Who the f*ck is touching me?!”

The man looked up and found himself staring into a pair of deep, dark eyes hidden behind a pair of glasses. Although the eyes were concealed, they exuded a profound coldness, sending shivers down his spine.

With a gentle twist of his hand, the man let out a series of agonized screams while sweat rolled down his forehead.

Bane only released his grip when he saw the man in pain. He then took out a clean handkerchief from his pocket to gently wipe his fingers as he raised an eyebrow and mentioned, “This is what you get for wanting to lay a hand on a woman.”

After wiping his hands, he tossed the handkerchief into the nearby trash bin.

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“Let's go.” His voice was much gentler when he talked to Victoria.

Victoria had never seen him in this light before. She instinctively nodded and hummed in acknowledgment upon hearing his voice.

The two of them then left the restaurant together. Even from a distance, they could still hear the tall and skinny man hurling vulgar insults at them.

It wasn't until his voice was drowned out by the bustling city traffic that they could finally find some respite.

And when the cold wind blew, Victoria began to come back to her senses.

“I'm sorry for causing you trouble.”

When Bane heard her apology, he let out a leisurely chuckle. He couldn't

resist the urge to reach out and rub the back of her head as he watched her blame herself.

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Unfortunately for him, Victoria instinctively moved aside, avoiding his touch before his hand could touch her.

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Bane's defined fingers lingered in the air for a moment. His gaze darkened, but he quickly regained his composure and smoothly retracted his hand. He was back to his relaxed and gentle self soon.

"It's nothing."

Victoria felt somewhat awkward about what Bane tried to do. It seemed that he was still subconsciously doing what he was used to when they were children.

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But has he ever considered the fact that we are no longer kids?

Thinking about him casually tossing the handkerchief after wiping his hands, she couldn't help but ask, "Have you developed OCD after being abroad for five years?"

They had only briefly touched each other's hands through a layer of clothes, but Bane immediately took out a handkerchief to wipe his hands. Not only that, he even threw the handkerchief away.

He paused for a moment when he heard that before suddenly grasping

Victoria's wrist.

Although she didn't hate Bane, the physical contact made her feel embarrassed, She instinctively tried to pull her hand back, but Bane already released his grip as he shrugged.

"Do you still think I have OCD?"

He did that to prove that he doesn't have OCD, huh? It seems his personality has completely changed after spending five years abroad.

He promptly added in a calm tone, "I just thought that touching him dirtied my hand, considering how he is involved with two women."

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Victoria's gaze dimmed slightly at that.

She thought about Alaric again.

Seeing her fall silent, Bane sighed and continued, "I don't know if I'm telling you too much, but everyone in our circle has always known about Alaric and Claudia's relationship. As for your marriage with him..."

He paused mid-sentence. I'm not sure what exactly is going on between you two, but it seems that you are not fond of this kind of relationship. If it is causing you pain, it will be better to end it sooner."

Although Victoria had known Bane since childhood, there was always a certain distance between them. She didn't want to share too much about her life with him.

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Hence, she simply smiled and nodded at his advice. "Alright, I understand."

Bane left the matter at that and didn't continue talking about it.

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"Do you really not want me to take you back?"

"Nope. You can go ahead."

"Alright. I'll wait with you here until you get in the car."

Victoria could only agree as she felt hesitant to reject his offer.

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When her ride arrived and she was about to get in, Bane suddenly took out his phone and opened a QR code.

Victoria only glanced briefly at it and noticed that it was a QR code.

"Weren't you going to transfer money to me just now?" he asked.

Victoria only snapped back to reality when she heard his words.

She quickly took out her phone to scan the code, only for it to be a QR code for adding a contact on WhatsApp.

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Bane looked at her with gentle eyes.

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"Let's exchange numbers before you transfer the money."

Even though she was reluctant, she eventually agreed to it.

After adding him to her contacts, she got in the car and left shortly after.

Now that Bane had added her on WhatsApp, he stood by the roadside

and watched her car disappear into the distance. Instead of leaving immediately, he clicked on her WhatsApp Status and carefully browsed through it.

He only remembered something after he was done.

“Look into Victoria’s recent activities and whereabouts,” he instructed after giving his subordinate a call. “Yes. Find out where she has been specifically, and send me the compiled information.”

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After hanging up the phone, he gazed in the direction the car had gone with dark eyes.

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Victoria’s relationship with Alaric was by no means usual.

But the most abnormal thing was her eating habits.

He had seen her five times now, and three out of the five times was when he saw her enjoying her drinks, seemingly without any loss of appetite.

However, she seemed to have a fear of greasy foods.

This behavior reminded him of his young stepmother who hid from and avoided him because she feared that he would harm her during her pregnancy. Despite that, the woman couldn’t hide her eating habits.

It wasn’t like Bane wanted to be suspicious of Victoria.

It was just his past experiences that led him to think that way when he

tol 10x the Woman He Had His Eyes On

saw her like this.

Furthermore, she was the woman he had his eyes on.

Since she was the woman he had set his sights on and wouldn't easily let go, he naturally wanted to know everything about her.

11/11

In fact, after experiencing five years of struggles abroad, the current Bane desired absolute control over what he wanted. He would never just yield to anyone.

The incident when he lost her when he went abroad five years ago and her becoming someone else's wife would never happen again.

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Chapter 105 Do You Not Like Her at All?

Chapter 105

That evening, Victoria and Alaric conveyed Benedict's words to Griselda. Griselda had been in a good state of mind during this period when she stayed at home. Her complexion was healthier than when she was at the recuperation center, and she was also much livelier.

Seeing the two of them coming to talk to her about this together, she happily nodded without fear.

"An examination tomorrow? Sure. No problem."

Griselda was in a good mood now. She was surely enjoying the bustling atmosphere outside, which was why she wanted to complete the surgery as soon as possible and recover quickly.

Victoria was relieved when she heard that.

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“You look happy, Grandma.”

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“I am happy.” Griselda held her hand and sighed as she spoke. “I thought I would be stuck in the recuperation center forever. But I have no regrets even if I die on the operating table if I could see the outside world again before the surgery.”

Victoria was initially glad because of Griselda’s words, but she immediately turned pale upon hearing that last sentence.

“What are you talking about, Grandma...”

2/11

However, there was not a hint of sadness in Griselda’s eyes. She looked at Alaric and motioned for him to come over.

Alaric then stepped forward with a heavy expression.

“Don’t say something so ominous, Grandma. The surgery will be successful. You will be able to see more of the outside world in the future.”

Chapter 105 Do You Not Like Her at Al

“I’m not jinxing myself. Of course, I hope the surgery will be successful, but accidents happen.”

Alaric’s expression turned grim. “Nothing bad will happen,” he insisted.

3/11

“Alright, alright.” Griselda smiled and commented, “Anyway, if anything

happens to me, both of you must live a good life. Don't be sad because of me, and don't quarrel with each other. Al, you are the man in this relationship. You should be more considerate of Victoria. Girls have it the hardest. Do you understand me?"

Plop!

Tears streamed down Victoria's face without warning. Since she was leaning against Griselda's side, the cascade of warm tears landed directly on the elderly woman's hand.

"Victoria..."

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Griselda froze as she stared at the string of pearl-like tears.

"Grandma..."

4/11

Victoria pressed her face against Griselda's hand while she tightly embraced her arm. Her eyes were teary when she sobbed, "Please don't say such discouraging words. The surgery will definitely be successful, and you can continue to experience the beauty of the world outside. Also, Alaric and I argue a lot. We need you to mediate, so please don't let anything happen to you, alright?"

Griselda was only contemplating the possibilities at first. In fact, she had had a healthy state of mind lately. She used to have some regrets but now, she realized there wasn't much for her to feel remorseful about.

She was calm when she said what she said.

No one wanted to die early but if death was unavoidable, Griselda would accept it with a peaceful heart. After all, death wasn't so frightening.

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However, she never thought that her words would make Victoria cry so heart-wrenchingly.

Griselda had always known that Victoria's feelings toward her were not ordinary affection someone would have for their grandmother-in-law.

Victoria grew up being attached to Griselda, and she would always confide in the elderly woman.

Gradually, Griselda realized that Victoria felt differently for her.

She only found out after asking around that Victoria grew up without her mother. It was then that Griselda realized a possibility—Victoria might have regarded her as a female elder to whom she could entrust her emotions.

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And it was today that Griselda realized how deep Victoria's feelings for her were.

"Grandma..."

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Victoria started sobbing when Griselda didn't answer her.

6/11

"Alright, alright," Griselda quickly coaxed Victoria. Her heart had melted into a puddle as she murmured, "I won't say these things anymore. Stop crying,

hmm?”

Thus, Griselda ended up being the one who kept consoling Victoria. It took her considerable effort to finally calm the young woman down. She then contentedly went back to her room to sleep after telling the young couple that she would be there again the next morning.

“Alright, now.” Griselda patted Victoria on the back of her head. “Goodnight, my dear. It is time for you to rest.”

After Victoria left, Griselda cast a piercing glance in Alaric’s direction.

“Have you been quarreling with her a lot lately?”

Alaric came to a small pause before explaining, “She was just teasing you.

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You believed her?”

“Do you think my aging eyes are so clouded that I can’t see the issue between the two of you?”

Alaric only calmly asked in return, “What issue are you talking about?”

“Hmph! You should know best.”

When her words were met with silence, she asked again, “Is it because of Claudia?”

To Alaric’s surprise, his grandmother’s words hit the mark, causing a noticeable change in his expression.

7/11

“Claudia holds a special place in your heart because she saved your life.”

When Griselda saw his lips twitch as if he wanted to deny it, she continued,

“Don’t be too quick to say *no*. I have keen eyes. You used to have such a

good relationship with Victoria, but you have been hit with one problem

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after another lately, haven't you? There must be a reason for that. I initially thought it was just a normal argument between you two, but I changed my mind when I saw Claudia that day."

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Pausing deliberately at this point, she took her time before speaking again.

"Claudia was here for you on the evening we returned from the recuperation center, am I right?"

Alaric did not respond. After all, women who married into the Cadogan Family were not gullible.

Griselda sighed when she noticed her grandson's silence.

"Just as I thought. Does she expect something more from you just because she saved your life? She must be delusional."

Alaric frowned and instinctively defended Claudia.

"She's not, Grandma."

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Upon hearing this, Griselda, who had maintained a relatively calm expression until now, couldn't help the change in her expression as her tone grew sterner.

"So, are you the one with wishful thinking?"

Alaric didn't say anything to that.

“Do you even realize your current status? You are a married man, yet you are involved with another woman. How do you think Victoria feels?”

Alaric’s lips were pressed into a straight line as he kept mum.

Griselda’s gaze became fiercer the longer she stared at him.

That aura and gaze were not befitting an elderly person, let alone someone about to undergo surgery.

“Tell me honestly, Alaric. Do you not like Victoria at all?” she demanded.

9/11

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Chapter 105 Do You Not Like Her at All?

Alaric froze in place upon hearing that.

Like her?

There was a hint of confusion in his dark eyes.

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That being said, how could the astute woman not discern the emotions in his eyes? But the moment she understood what he felt, she was so angry she could barely speak.

But immediately after that, she thought about something that made her anger subside.

Griselda practically watched Alaric grow up.

The main reason she liked having Victoria as her granddaughter-in-law was ultimately because of Alaric himself.

She wouldn’t have entertained the idea of Victoria and Alaric being

Chapter 105 Do You Not Like Her at AB?

together if she hadn't seen how well Alaric treated Victoria or how much he cared about her.

After all, Victoria was an exceptional young woman. If she were to marry, she should marry someone who she truly loved and reciprocated her feelings.

Griselda let out another sigh at the thought of that. It has been so many years, Alaric. Don't tell me you still don't know what you want."

Chapter 106

On this cold night, West maneuvered his way around the crowd in the bar and headed toward the bar counter.

Following closely behind him was Norwood.

It was late at night but once again, they were summoned by Alaric.

They expected to see him drunk and disheveled when they arrived. To their surprise, he was dressed impeccably while sitting at the bar counter, his gaze clear.

He hadn't touched the glass of alcohol sitting right in front of him.

"What's going on? Didn't you call us here to drink?" West asked in surprise as he walked over to Alaric and greeted him.

"Are you okay, Al? You haven't had a drop of alcohol even until now."

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Hearing the familiar voice, Alaric came back to his senses and looked up.

When he saw that West had come with Norwood, he glanced at the latter with a gaze that seemed to be asking why he brought West along.

Norwood paused momentarily and quickly understood what was going on when he saw the look in Alaric's eyes.

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Alaric only called Norwood over, but Norwood also invited West because he wasn't aware that Alaric didn't ask West to come.

But since they were already here, there was nothing they could do. The two men tacitly didn't say anything more.

West, being his carefree self, plopped down and immediately started ordering. He muttered to Alaric, "I have to say, you're really weird. You came to the bar to drown your sorrows because of Victoria last time, right? What about this time? Is it also because of her?"

Alaric felt a knot in his chest when he heard Victoria's name, and he chose

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not to answer West.

3/10

"I thought you two were doing fine before. How did things turn out like this? Since Claudia has come back, shouldn't she reclaim her place by your side? I heard that Victoria pushed Claudia at the farewell party Bane hosted. Claudia even got injured and has a scar. Al, you shouldn't indulge Victoria like this. Even if you were childhood sweethearts, you shouldn't let her harm Claudia like that."

Claudia was West's muse.

He had gotten upset at Victoria the moment he heard about what had happened at the farewell party, which was why he was now angrily complaining about her.

He wasn't satisfied with all that he said as he soon added, "If someone dares to hurt Claudia in front of me, I swear I'll do what they did to Claudia tenfold. They are going to get more than they bargained for."

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Alaric narrowed his eyes and his voice turned cold as he growled, "What did you say?"

Even though West shrank back from fear, he still braved himself and challenged Alaric. "Am I wrong? If a man can't even protect the woman he loves, shouldn't he at least avenge her when someone hurts her? Dude, she is freaking scarred. Don't you know how serious scars are to women?"

Alaric only coldly stared at his friend and demanded, "Who told you that?"

"Al!" West's eyes went wide. "Did Victoria really bewitch you or something in the last two years? She scarred Claudia by pushing her. Everyone at the farewell party saw her do it."

“It wasn’t her.”

Alaric subconsciously denied the accusation for her when he recalled how she couldn’t be bothered with explaining herself during the party.

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West clearly didn’t believe him. “How is that possible? Everyone who came back after attending the party said that Victoria was the one closest to Claudia at that time. Only she was close enough to push Claudia. Who else could it be if it wasn’t her?”

He then mocked in a disdainful voice, “You are not going to say that Claudia tripped over herself, are you?”

Alaric still had a grim expression as he remained quiet.

West paused when he vigilantly sensed something. He then turned his head to exchange a glance with Norwood, who looked back at him indifferently.

“What do you mean?” West couldn’t believe it. “You think Claudia tripped over herself too?”

Norwood pondered for a moment and without confirming whether or not Claudia fell by herself, he simply asked, “I’ll ask you this-what made you

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think that it was Victoria who pushed Claudia? Just because she was closest to her?”

“Her being close to Claudia is one thing, but everyone is saying the same thing,” West insisted.

“Does having everyone say that make it the truth?”

“Well, if everyone is saying it is the truth even though it isn’t, what is the actual truth then?”

West looked at Norwood with a blank expression on his face.

“Norwood, I don’t understand why you always take Victoria’s side every time something happens.”

“Am I taking her side, or are you too biased toward Claudia?”

The bartender brought their drinks right then. Norwood picked up one of

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the glasses and gently swirled it around, the specially crafted cocktail sparkling under the illumination of the bar lights.

“If one's subjective consciousness is constantly dominated by a single ideology, it makes it easy for them to overlook other possibilities.”

Alaric's pupils contracted when he heard those words after staying silent the whole time.

Meanwhile, West stared at Norwood with a strange expression on his face.

“What's this all about? Why are you suddenly so profound, talking about subjective consciousness?”

Norwood only tilted his head and flashed a small smile.

“You think of Claudia as your muse, hmm? Can you accept it if she did something to hurt others?”

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Chapter 106 You're Not Bewitched by Her, Are You?

When West heard this, he exclaimed incredulously with his eyes wide

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open, “That's impossible! Claudia is such a kind hearted person. How could she ever do something to harm others?”

“That's your subjective consciousness at work. It is because you are partial toward Claudia that you firmly believe she is noble and incapable of doing anything wrong. You don't even believe that she can make mistakes.

Whenever there's even the slightest negative news, you automatically shift the blame onto others. That is why you perceive the person closest to her as the scapegoat.”

“When have I ever thought that?” West demanded.

“But am I wrong?” Norwood calmly gazed at him.

“Of course, you are!” West denied rather fervently. “Norwood, what kind of person do you think I am?”

“If it’s not the case, why did you automatically assume it was Victoria who pushed Claudia even though there is no evidence? Why didn’t you investigate before letting Al take revenge on behalf of Claudia?” Norwood’s gaze was sharp, and his words were direct and incisive as he went straight to the point.

9/10

“I...” West was rendered speechless by Norwood’s words. He couldn’t say anything at all for a moment.

What was even more frightening was that he realized Norwood’s logic was actually right.

Everything he had said had been easily overturned.

It was true that West hadn’t witnessed it with his own eyes. He didn’t go to the farewell party as he had something else to attend to. He only regretted not going that night after such a big incident occurred.

Something like that probably wouldn’t have happened to Claudia if he had been there.

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He believed that he could make everything revolve around Claudia when he was near her. She was the center of his universe: Even if someone wanted to harm her, he would protect her and save her from harm.

The Claudia he adored was undoubtedly the most beautiful and kind person in the world. How could she possibly do something to harm others?

With these thoughts in mind, West stood up abruptly, his expression resolute. “You are saying this only because I didn’t look for evidence, right?

Norwood, you think that I’m being partial toward Claudia, but I think you are prejudiced against her. You want evidence, eh? Okay, I’ll get you evidence!”

Chapter 107

West walked away in a huff, leaving his two friends at the bar.

Norwood glanced at Alaric who seemed lost in his own thoughts, and he decided to hold off on what he wanted to say.

After a moment, Alaric asked him in a serious tone, "What do you mean by what you just said?"

Norwood smiled. "You already know the answer, don't you?"

Alaric raised his gaze and cast a somber look toward Norwood upon hearing that. "I'm not sure what you're referring to."

"Alaric, do you recall the last time I asked you the same question here? Have you still not figured out what it is that you truly want even after all these years?" Norwood asked.

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Chapter 107 It Had Been a Long Time Since He Last

Alaric was taken aback when his friend said that. So, Norwood asked me about it before... That explains why it sounded **so** familiar when Grandma brought it up earlier.

However, he didn't pay much attention or take it seriously when Norwood previously mentioned it.

Seeing Alaric remain silent, Norwood let out a soft sigh. "You grew up with her and have witnessed all her joys and sorrows. You know her in every way possible. If I'm not mistaken, you immediately came back when you learned that the Selwyn Family went bankrupt. Am I right?"

"Yes," Alaric admitted. He couldn't deny it.

He didn't know about the bankruptcy at first, but as soon as he received the news, he dropped everything and hurried back.

Norwood chuckled lightly when he recalled the incident. "I heard you were -in the middle of negotiating a big deal at the time. Didn't you think that it

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wouldn't be too late even if you only came back a few days later after sealing the deal? Why did you abandon all your work and rush back right away?"

"Of course, it's because-"

Alaric almost said something, but he hesitated right when his words were on the tip of his tongue.

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"It's because you were worried about her, right?" Norwood went ahead and finished the sentence for him.

It was true that Alaric was worried. He only had one thing going through his mind upon hearing the news.

"You gave up a deal worth millions for her. Have you never seriously considered what your relationship with her is? What you did isn't something childhood friends would usually do for one another, Alaric."

Chapter 107 H Had Been a Long Time Since He Last

Norwood's voice was soft, but it sounded deafening to Alaric. His friend's voice seemed to be amplified countless times at this very moment.

Have I seriously considered my relationship with Victoria? Alaric thought.

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"It is not hard to see through your heart," Norwood continued before Alaric

could respond. "But if you find it hard to decide, why not let her go? Don't hold her back. You can free yourself from the burden as well."

After saying that, Norwood patted Alaric's shoulder. "You can't have the best of both worlds. That's life."

It was late at night when Victoria changed into the pajamas she recently bought. The plush fabric was soft and lightweight, and the warmth it absorbed from the sun made it particularly comfortable to wear.

She had bawled her eyes out before she slept, and she even sniffled when she had fallen asleep.

By the time she was peacefully asleep, Alaric stood tall and graceful by the bed. Victoria looked quieter and more lovable in her sleep, her features illuminated by the warm yellow lamp in the room.

Their relationship could be said to have deteriorated to the extreme during this period.

Although they politely talked on the surface, Victoria's attitude and gaze toward Alaric were constantly punishing and tormenting him emotionally.

It was only after Victoria had fallen asleep that he realized that they had not grown distant. Their relationship was still the same as before.

"You have the answer, don't you?" Norwood's words tonight echoed in Alaric's mind once again.

Suddenly, Victoria's calm expression was replaced by a frown.

Is she having a nightmare?

Alaric crouched beside the bed and instinctively placed his palm on her forehead, wanting to smooth out the frown. He completely forgot that his

hands were icy cold after he had spent the whole night drinking at the bar. As soon as his fingertips touched Victoria's forehead, she shuddered and woke up abruptly at the cold sensation. Their eyes met unexpectedly right then.

Victoria's eyes were still blurry from her sleep. Under the bedroom light, her clear gaze held a hint of warmth that stirred Alaric.

His icy fingertips were still on her forehead.

Victoria only came back to her senses and realized what was going on after a while. She quickly moved away from the man's touch and sat up, her eyes wary as she peered at him.

”

“What are you doing?”

Seeing her acting all cautious made him frown unhappily. “What can I do when you are being so defensive toward me?”

At that, Victoria realized that her reaction might seem a bit excessive.

She could only turn her head to the other side and avoid his gaze. “I'm not being defensive,” she grumbled.

Even if they were not husband and wife, they did grow up together. She doubted he would have any malicious intentions toward her.

In the next moment, Alaric held Victoria's chin with his cold hand, forcing her to turn in his direction.

“Why can't you look at me, then?” he demanded. His gaze was hostile.

As he spoke, he drew closer to her, enveloping her in his chilling aura.

Despite Victoria's attempts to break free, she couldn

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prop her hands on both sides of her body while looking up at him.

At this point, Alaric was close enough **that** he could smell the faint fragrance from her body.

Her scent stirred something in him, and it made him gulp involuntarily as desire flickered in his eyes.

“What are you doing in the middle of the night, Alaric? Don’t you need to sleep? Don’t forget we have to take Grandma for a check–up tomorrow morning!”

Seeing her small, cherry lips open and close when she spoke, Alaric suddenly realized that **it** had been a long time since he last kissed her.

He was so lost in his thoughts that he no longer cared to hear what she was **saying** after that.

”

Halfway through her sentence, Victoria noticed that he was staring at her like a wolf eyeing its prey. He looked like he was going to devour her at any moment.

Feeling a faint sense of foreboding, she pursed her red lips and pulled the blanket tighter around her.

“**If** you’re not going to sleep, I’ll be sleeping first- mmph!”

However, her vision turned dark before she could pull the blanket closer.

The man’s aura had completely engulfed her.

She was caught off guard by the familiarity of the softness she had not experienced in a long time. It wasn’t until she felt a warmth on her lips that

she suddenly came to her senses and pushed the person in front of her away.

Alaric was so absorbed in the kiss that he didn't notice her shoving at him. When he opened his eyes, there was still a lingering desire in his gaze as he ogled Victoria's red lips, which were swollen from the kiss.

He leaned in again shortly after, wanting to resume the kiss they were sharing.

However, Victoria kept him away by pushing his chest. "What the hell, Alaric?!"

The man's eyes were dark, and his voice was hoarse with a hint of seduction when he rasped, "Why are you pushing me away? Didn't you say this is just a physical need?"

Victoria's face quickly fell as her pupils contracted.

Does this mean that he is here because he has needs to fulfill now? What does he take me for?!

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At that thought, Victoria snorted and looked at him coldly. "Go find your darling Claudia to fulfill your physical needs."

Alaric's eyes darkened as he gritted his teeth. "I only want you and no one else."

After speaking, he leaned forwards to seek her lips again but instead received a slap.

"Go! Go and find your darling Claudia. Don't touch me. Just go!" Victoria was shaking with anger since he still wanted to continue after being

slapped.

However, Alaric caught her wrist and raised his voice as he asked, "You're angry now? Your recent role as an obedient wife was played so well. Why aren't you continuing with that?"

She knew he wanted to use her for his physical needs, which was why she became utterly irrational. She felt more reluctant to answer him and merely struggled harder.

Seeing Victoria act like this made Alaric feel angry yet sympathetic, but remembering what Norwood and his grandmother had said made him tighten his grip on her wrist slightly. "You said that of your own volition back then, so why are you getting angry? Snowball, what are you angry at?"

His eyes were fixed on her as he asked the question like he wanted to make sure of something. "Are you angry that I said being with you was merely to fulfill my physical desires, or are you angry that I met up with Claudia?"

Victoria, who had been struggling, suddenly understood after hearing what Alaric said. If she hadn't known why he had suddenly behaved like this, now she did. He wanted to test her.

"What do you really want to say?" She looked at his handsome face and laughed lightly. She had to admit that his looks fit her taste: even now she

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still thought him attractive, She had fancied him intensely back then but that didn't mean she would give him everything without limitations.

His lips moved briefly but he did not speak. However, it was clear what he wanted to say. They had been childhood sweethearts for so long, so they

knew each other really well and took each other seriously. However, it was just because of the latter that some questions couldn't be asked, such as when it came to liking and concern for someone.

Once such questions were asked and a certain boundary was crossed, their relationship would never be the same. It was one thing for it to become less pure but entirely another if it deteriorated. What was more awkward than one person treating the other as a friend but the other fancying the other? They might not be able to continue being friends. That was why Alaric had to ask that question in such a restrained, controlled tone.

However, Victoria wasn't like him and knew what he wanted to ask based on her knowledge of him. She smiled and replied coldly, "Do you think I have feelings for you?"

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His chest felt tight since he did not expect her to mention it so directly. "You
4/9

"Don't worry." She looked at him and continued mildly, "I don't fancy you at all."

When Alaric did not respond, she continued, "I did say it was for our physical needs, but that was based on the condition where you don't go about dabbling in relationships. It's different now, though. You already have Claudia, so why do I need to go to you to deal with my needs? Do I seem so easy to you?"

Her words were light, but they stabbed him right in the heart. His gaze had changed as he stared at her and snarled, "Whom are you going to seek out,

then? Noel or Bane?”

She didn't know what to say.

“Bane sent you home the night of the farewell party, right?”

Chapter 108 I Don't Fancy You At All

Victoria frowned with surprise. How does he know about that? She had assumed Alaric's attention was entirely focused on Claudia.

“You went out with him yesterday too.”

Victoria finally felt suspicious.

“Alaric, did you follow me?” Alarm bells sounded inside her head. She had recently gone to the hospital and while she had gone with Summer, he couldn't find anything even if he really wanted to do so.

“Do I need to?” Alaric threw the question back at Victoria.

Does he not? Does this mean that he didn't get someone to shadow me?

5/9

“How did you know?” It wasn't concerning that he knew about it when Claudia got hurt since he might have seen it when Bane escorted Victoria to the entrance of the villa. However, Victoria hadn't even expected to see Bane when she went out for a meal yesterday, so how did Alaric know about

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that? She had even taken a cab back.

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“Are you nervous?” Alaric snorted. “Snowball, have you heard of the adage ‘what is done by night appears by day’?”

Victoria didn't know what to say in response.

”

As he thought of something, his eyes moved down to regard her sleepwear.

“And your recent style. Are you trying to please them?”

She had no words. “What are you waffling on about? Can't I change my style since winter has arrived?”

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While speechless, she thought the man was being ridiculous. He hadn't suspected that her change in style was due to the baby. Instead, he thought she was trying to pander to Noel or Bane. Even after knowing Alaric for so long, Victoria felt that she didn't really know him since he took everything she had been worried about differently.

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He hadn't been overly concerned about the baby and didn't even ask about it, which didn't make sense. What if...

7/9

As Victoria pondered this, Alaric's cool breath came closer and interrupted her thoughts. She saw his furious face getting closer when she gathered her thoughts.

“Of course, you can, but don't you think the timing is too coincidental?”

Besides, is Bane whom you fancy? He hugged you that night.”

At the mention of that, Victoria's head started to hurt.

“Can we not talk about that right now? I don't fancy anyone, all right?” She couldn't help yawning. “I'm tired, so why don't we sleep first? We can talk

tomorrow if there's anything."

Her main focus was taking Griselda for a checkup the following day, so she didn't want to worry about anything else.

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Alaric froze upon hearing that, probably not expecting her to be so unconcerned about such a serious matter and even wanting to go to bed. How can she fall asleep?

While he remained quiet, she added, "If you aren't tired, then I shall sleep first."

Victoria drew her hand back and pulled back the blanket before carefully lying down, only becoming reassured when she saw that Alaric was still standing there woodenly but not approaching her.

The two of them remained silently in the room. Victoria had thought he would leave if she ignored him, but he stood there staring at her for some reason. She bit her lip. Is he planning on standing there for the rest of the night? Is he crazy? Never mind. I'm now pregnant and need enough rest so as not to become as crazy as he is.

After making up her mind, Victoria turned her back to him and quickly fell

asleep.

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Chapter 109

Victoria's breathing was slow and regular when she slept. Alaric walked to

the other side of the bed from where she had turned her back to him and saw that she really was asleep, and extremely soundly at that.

He raised his hand to touch where he had been slapped, feeling dazed. If his cheek wasn't still stinging, he would have wondered **if** the entire fiasco had been a dream. After all, how could someone be angry one second and fall asleep without any hesitation the next? Victoria had changed far too much, so much so that he almost couldn't recognize her anymore.

He felt restless since some of his emotions couldn't be vented, yet he couldn't say anything after seeing her sleeping peacefully. He even made his steps lighter when he eventually left the side of the bed and soon settled **on** the couch outside. It was already midnight, but his brain was wide awake as he kept replaying what Norwood had said to him before leaving.

1/8

B

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When they left the bar, Norwood had stopped him. "If you can't understand it, I'll change the question."

2/8

Alaric had been feeling unsettled and he glared sideways at Norwood. Even though the former's expression and gaze were filled with impatience, he did not step away.

9

Norwood chuckled as he stated, "It's easy. Just think about whether you can

tolerate Victoria being with other men after leaving you.”

Alaric frowned in irritation. “Norwood, what exactly do you want to say?”

“Can you tolerate it if Victoria hugs and kisses other men, or does whatever couples do with them?”

Alaric couldn't help frowning at the mention of hugging, not to mention the rest. By the time Norwood had finished speaking, there was clear anger in Alaric's gaze.

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As if already expecting this, Norwood smiled slightly. “I was merely being rhetorical, yet you have become this furious. How will you turn out when that really happens, Alaric? Don't wait until things can no longer be salvaged and regret it afterward.”

3/8

If that really happens? Victoria is extremely brilliant and will have plenty of admirers after becoming single. After being freed from her marriage, she will be with someone else once she finds an ideal suitor. How can any man control himself when he's with her? They will surely...

Just the thought of it made Alaric clench his fists. After some time, he leaned backward and lay his head on the couch before closing his eyes in exhaustion. Meanwhile, Victoria slept soundly the entire time in the bedroom.

She felt energized and refreshed when she woke up the following morning.

The minor interlude that had happened the night before had been

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E

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forgotten as she sat up and stretched. She was about to get off the bed to wash up when she suddenly saw Alaric, who had been sitting on the couch. Their gazes met and Victoria could see how bloodshot his eyes were. She paused. Did he sit here the entire night without sleeping? If he did not sleep, does this mean he has been sitting there staring at me the whole time? The thought was scary.

Alaric knew they had to bring his grandmother to the hospital, but he hadn't slept at all during the night. In the end, she chose not to reprimand him. After all, it was his dear grandmother and he should have considered that. After coming to a decision, she got to her feet to prepare herself for the day.

When she came out of the bathroom after finishing her routine, she saw that **he** was still sitting on the couch and couldn't help reminding him, "Uh... Aren't you going to wash up? We need to take your grandma for a check-up."

4/8

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A hint of impatience flashed in Alaric's eyes before he got up. "I know. I don't need you to remind me."

5/8

He then walked past her and into the bathroom. Victoria was speechless

upon hearing that. However, she reminded herself to keep calm as there were only a few days left.

Due to her restful sleep, she had no dark circles under her eyes. As such, she decided to skip her makeup routine, going straight downstairs once she had changed her clothes. When she came down the stairs, she discovered that Alaric's parents were also in the living room and talking with Griselda, who was in a wheelchair.

Victoria wasn't taken aback at the sight of them because they had mentioned the night before that they would come today. They hadn't been able to catch their flight due to it being delayed when the operation was being considered. Even though Griselda hadn't gone into the operating theater, they had felt guilty about it and returned earlier. They had arrived **early** that morning even though they didn't know if an operation was

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needed that day.

Victoria had just come down the stairs when she heard Griselda say to her son and daughter-in-law, "You are extremely occupied with your business matters, so you don't have to rush back here just for this **if** you don't have any free time. I'm old anyway, so no one will probably care if I die on the operating table."

Before hearing the second half, Victoria had thought Griselda was being genuine, but she promptly realized that the elderly woman was just being condescending. She thought to herself, Grandma can be rather cute at

times.

Mary, who had been playing with and studying the teacup on the couch, quickly put down the teapot and got up to kneel before Griselda. She held the elderly woman's hands **as** she murmured, "Mom, what are you talking about? Our business may be important, but it is **not** as important as you are. You take up the most important position in Adrian's heart as well as mine, and nothing can ever compare to **you**."

6/8

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Mary was just as Victoria had imagined her to be, but Griselda withdrew her hand with **a** scornful look. "Do **you** think I **will** believe such fanciful words?"

"Oh, Mom. If just a few fanciful words don't have much effect, I'll continue saying them all the way **to** the hospital."

"That's enough. I'll just complain about you being noisy if you do that."

Griselda looked disgusted but there was a smile lingering on her lips.

Victoria felt truly envious as she watched the scene unfold. Mary seemed able to resolve such circumstances well no matter how bad the person's mood was by perfectly restoring the atmosphere. How capable of her!

Victoria herself didn't have such abilities.

"Victoria?" Griselda saw Victoria and called out to her.

7/8

Mary recovered and followed Griselda's gaze to find Victoria standing there.

Her exquisite face looked delighted. "Victoria."

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Victoria smiled at Mary, forcing a smile despite feeling shy, and greeted everyone. “Good morning, Grandma. Mom and Dad, why have you come so early?”

Adrian was a very emotionally–reserved person but he had watched Victoria grow up. Their families were extremely close, and she was almost like a daughter to him. She had eventually become his daughter–in–law, making Adrian and her father related and thus bringing the two families even closer.

He nodded and gave her a sincere smile. “I was worried about traffic, so I came earlier with Mary.”

Mary came forward and hugged Victoria. “Victoria, sorry for troubling you all this time. I heard that you have been responsible for taking care of Mom.”

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Mary bore a faint scent of lemons which felt refreshing. Victoria felt herself relax physically and emotionally when hugging Mary, and she returned the embrace with fervor. Her female elders were always her favorite.

Mary had sensed that as well and couldn’t help tapping Victoria’s nose. “Did you miss Mom?”

Mary referring to herself as Mom stunned Victoria for a long while and she nodded after taking some time to recover. “Yes, I missed you both.”

“Ha! Darling, we missed all of you too.” Mary then pinched Victoria’s cheek lightly and couldn’t help doing it twice more after thinking about how perfect Victoria’s skin

was. She then turned to Adrian. “Did you bring the presents we got for Victoria?”

Adrian felt around in his pocket before pulling out two boxes. “I did.”

Mary turned to take them before giving them to Victoria. “Here. These are the presents we have gotten for you this time.”

This hadn’t been the only occasion that this happened. Before marrying Alaric,

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Adrian and Mary would always bring her presents whenever meeting her, and all of them were extremely expensive. If Victoria refused to accept their presents, Mary would talk Victoria into eventually accepting them. Presently, the young woman smiled lightly as she reached out to accept them.

“Thanks, Mom. Thanks, Dad.”

“Good girl.”

“At least you have the decency to bring her presents,” remarked Griselda.

“Of course, Mom. Victoria has put so much effort into taking care of you, not to mention that she’s our daughter-in-law. We naturally have to give her the best.”

As everyone chatted happily, Victoria soon forgot about all her woes.

Alaric came down at that moment, his cold expression softening somewhat at the sight of his parents, though he didn’t look good at all. Since he hadn’t been resting enough recently and couldn’t sleep the night before, his eyes were completely bloodshot with dark shadows below them, and he looked very tired.

The look in Mary’s eyes changed just by glancing at him, but she did not say

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anything in front of Griselda, so the elderly woman did not feel pressured by it.

It was until Griselda had been escorted into the car that Mary dragged him to one side and asked him quietly, “What happened to you during the last few days? Your dark circles are so prominent. What have you been up to every night?”

3/7

Alaric looked at where Victoria had joined Griselda in the car before shifting his gaze away. “Nothing.”

Mary snorted at that. “Did you forget who gave birth to you? Trying to keep things from me, huh? Can you manage that?”

He did not even turn around, but his expression was frigid. “So what?”

She wanted to roll her eyes at his behavior but did not show it due to her being the lady of the house, so she only replied scornfully, “What do you mean by that?”

Judging by your unhappy look, did you argue with Victoria?”

He did not respond.

“Looks like I’m right. Why have you offended her again? She’s so good–tempered; how did you manage to fight with her?”

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Good–tempered? Alaric snorted inwardly. Victoria’s words are utterly infuriating.

How can she be good–tempered? My mother has just never experienced how infuriating Victoria can be, which is why she said that.

“Hmph! Al, just look at you. Why are you so picky with her? Just console her when she gets angry and do it again if that doesn’t work. As long as you are stubborn, nothing is impossible.”

“Like how you pursued Dad back then?”

Mary had been happily giving her son some excellent advice and did not expect him to use it against her. “What are you talking about? Your father was the one who refused to give up on pursuing me, which made us what we are today, alright?”

Alaric snorted again, no longer wanting to argue with her. Even if his mother had pursued his father relentlessly back then, all of it happened years ago. Besides, his father loved his mother so much that he would deny the truth and say he had been the one to pursue her. Alaric had already experienced things like this plenty of times.

“Why are you snorting? You don’t believe me?” Mary asked in irritation. “If you don’t,

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why don’t we go ask your father?

“That’s enough,” Alaric replied neutrally. “Let’s get in the car. We still need to get to the hospital.”

Not waiting for his mother’s response, he immediately approached the car

Meanwhile, Mary stood where she was, feeling annoyed by her son. She now knew why he and Victoria had argued. His personality is completely similar to that of his father in that it is serious and boring but while his father is cold, Alaric is a complete blockhead. If Victoria’s personality isn’t like mine, both of them would...

Mary sighed internally and followed Alaric. They couldn’t fit in one car, so Griselda had said that she would ride in Adrian and Mary’s car.

Victoria had followed her inside at once, but the elderly woman spoke after a short while. “Victoria, go ride in Alaric’s car.”

Victoria froze, her heart stuttering, "Grandma?"

Has she noticed something? Why would she ask me to ride in Alaric's car?

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The next moment, Griselda patted her hand reassuringly. "I haven't seen your mother in a long time and want to say some things to her."

Victoria sighed in relief. If Griselda wanted to chat with Mary, then it was understandable. "Then I'll stay with you here, Grandma. I won't interrupt you both."

"Silly girl. I want to talk about some other things with her. What are you doing staying here with me? Go."

Since Griselda had said so, Victoria could only nod helplessly. "Alright, then."

She then got out of the car and promptly bumped into Alaric. Their gazes met for an instant before she looked away with pursed lips and walked toward his car.

He took long strides and got into the car before she did. She had wanted to sit in the back but then chose the passenger seat after some consideration. As soon as she settled down and prepared to put on her seatbelt, she heard his mocking voice.

"You didn't want to ride in my car, no? Why are you here?"

Her movements stopped for a moment before she calmly buckled her seatbelt. "I didn't want to, but this might be our last journey together. Let's just separate

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amicably

Before getting in the car, Alaric had been thinking about what his mother had told him. He was already prepared for it, but the sight of her heading for the backseat

and hesitate before settling in the passenger seat left him uncomfortable. Thus, his words had become more provocative.

Meanwhile, her words were more infuriating than his, enough to make him grit his teeth. "What did you say?"

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