

Departure with a Belly Chapter 221

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Chapter 221

Victoria was surprised. “You know me?”

The person nodded, smiling. “Of course. It’s been five years, and you’re a lot more beautiful than you were, but I recognized you right away. You came to our company for a negotiation back when you were working for Cadogan Group, and I was just a regular employee back then.”

I see. “So, you climbed all the way to top management in five years?”

“Yes.”

“Not bad.” Victoria liked that, but that was not the point. First, they had to settle the company’s issues.

The man she hired was one Henry Poole, and he said, “It’s a simple problem to settle.”

Victoria looked at him. “You seem to have a solution.”

“Angel investors,” said Henry. “If we can have a big company investing in us, we won’t have to worry about the operation or funds anymore.”

Victoria had considered that, of course, but... “You want me to convince someone to invest in us? When we don’t even have ten employees?”

Henry shrugged. “You can do it, can’t you?”

Victoria said nothing. Henry didn't care what she was thinking, and he started listing out the companies they could convince to invest in them. "First on the list is Cadogan Group and the Floyds."

The mention of Cadogan Group made Victoria silent. Noticing that, Henry smiled. "Boss, I know you have some... issues with Cadogan Group, but this is for the future of the company. You won't let the past get in your way, will you?"

Victoria took a deep breath to calm herself down, then she smiled. "Sorry, but I will." Huh? Henry scratched his head sheepishly and coughed. "Very well. Then that leaves us with the Floyds. They're growing strong lately, and that auction a few days ago was proof of it. The new heir showed off his wealth without a care in the world. Ah, but boss, Jordan can be quite the playboy, so don't fall for his tricks when you negotiate, alright?"

Jordan Floyd. He's in my contacts, and he lent me a suit. Perhaps I can use this connection. Quickly, Victoria opened up her contacts and searched for Jordan. They didn't even talk after they added each other's numbers, pretending that they had never met. Since she was busy, Victoria had forgotten that he lent her the suit. She took a long time just to come up with an opening text, and she messaged him. 'Thank you for the suit, Mr. Floyd. I've cleaned it, so when can I give it back to you?' Victoria didn't think he would reply right away so she put her phone down, but then Jordan texted, 'Oh, and here I thought you wouldn't give it back.'

Sheepishly, Victoria texted, 'Sorry. I've been a bit busy. It's not until now that I have time.' She added, 'So when can we meet?'

Jordan answered a bit flirtatiously, 'If it's you, anytime.'

Victoria was silent for a while, then she texted, 'I'd like to talk about work.'

Jordan didn't reply this time. Victoria held her phone tightly, the look on her face slowly becoming solemn. Was I too forward? But if I beat around the bush, he might take it as a hint he can woo me. She was on guard because of what Henry told her about Jordan.

Five minutes later, he texted, 'Eastton's racecourse. Can you come over right away?'

A racecourse? Not the best place to talk business, but it's a chance. Victoria picked up her bag and scarf, then she left. The weather was a bit windy, so she wrapped the scarf around her neck and hailed a ride.

The racecourse was roaring, and dust flew in the air as a big black horse galloped across the course. Sitting on its back was a slender, handsome man with an aloof look on his face. The look on his face was dark, and he held the reins firmly. Even from a mile away, everyone could feel the anger coming off him.

Ever since he got onto the track, everyone else led their horses away lest they incur this man's wrath.

Jordan had just come back from a race. Even though it was winter, he downed half a bottle of cold drink like it was tea, then he screwed the cap shut and looked at the angry man. He teased, "What happened to him? He's miffed today."

The people beside him shook their heads. "Not just today. It's been like this for a

while.”

Huh. “He’s been venting at the course for two weeks now. Thanks to him, business has been bad. The owner’s complaining but he can’t take it up with him. He’d destroy this whole place.”

Jordan clicked his tongue. “Who crossed him anyway? Two weeks and **he can’t even** hold it in?”

Someone said, “Who knows? We have no idea what he’s thinking. Feels like we’re working for a king.”

A king? Jordan chuckled, and he took out his phone to check the text. It’s been twenty minutes. Wonder where she is right now. Just then, his phone beeped, and a text appeared.

‘I’m almost at the course. Where are you? I’ll find you, sir.’

Sir? This is amusing. “Interesting. She’s older than me, and yet she calls me sir.”

Noticing his smile, the people beside him huddled closer. “Oh, a lady? So, you found a new toy?”

Jordan shot him a look. “Bah, none of your business.”

The guy grinned and was about to tease Jordan more, but a rider vaulted over the obstacle and charged straight at them only to stop a few inches before them.

Shocked, a lot of people backed off while grumbling, and some fell on their rear. Only Jordan remained still with his phone in his hand.

The man stopped his horse and looked at Jordan coolly. “Want to race?”

Jordan looked at him and cocked his eyebrow, then he smiled. "Sure, but I'm bringing one more person."

Alaric frowned.

Jordan smiled. "Ever tried racing with a woman riding with you?"

Chapter 222

The cab stopped at the equestrian facility, and Victoria had just gotten out of the car when she saw Jordan standing at the entrance. He was in horse riding attire, which made him look tall and handsome. The moment he saw her, he smiled. "Miss Selwyn."

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Victoria was surprised he would wait for her, so she trotted to him while holding her bag. "Sorry to keep you waiting, sir."

"Ah, don't call me 'sir.' It makes me sound old." Before she could say anything, he raised his hand and said, "Call me Jordan instead."

As if I can do that. We're not even that close, to begin with. "I don't think that's a good idea."

Hearing her response, Jordan narrowed his eyes and gave her a look. "Very well. Call me Mr. Floyd, then. You can always change how you address me later."

Victoria was left rather speechless upon hearing the last part of his sentence.

"Just don't call me 'sir' will do."

She nodded. "Very well, Mr. Floyd."

"I'll take you inside." He then held her wrist and took her into the equestrian facility.

Before she knew what was going on, she was already taken inside. The facility was a huge place, and there were a lot of people going around. Jordan took big strides,

seemingly unconcerned if Victoria could keep up with his pace.

The lady tried to break free from his grasp but failed, so she hastened her footsteps instead.

He asked, "Do you know how to ride a horse, Miss Selwyn?"

"I've never tried."

2/6

"Oh, goodie. That means you can't ride a horse. I don't need you to, either." I'm taking you for a spin, anyway.

Victoria had *no* idea what he was talking about as she let herself be dragged ahead.

She stopped trying to break free after that since Jordan wasn't trying to flirt with her anyway. He was just dragging her to his destination, nothing else.

A long while later, he let go of her hand. "We're here."

by her looks. Her beauty was outstanding, after all.

Her eyes were lively but aloof, her nose and lips were beautifully pink, and her skin was fair as snow.

A moment later, someone remarked, "Mr. Floyd got himself a ten."

Though, Victoria didn't hear that. All she wanted was to convince Jordan to invest in her company, so she followed him. Since negotiation was the only thing on her mind, she didn't notice anything wrong.

The man led her to the fence and waved at the rider in the course, shouting. She looked at where he was looking.

"Alaric! Over here!"

When she saw who the rider was, her smile froze. What a coincidence...

It had been nearly one month since that incident, and she had been busy lately. She

thought the whole thing had blown over. Jasea was not Alaric's turf, so she thought he should have returned to Gandra. So, why is he still here?

The moment Alaric's eyes met hers, Victoria wanted to turn tail and run. However, for some reason, Jordan held her arm. "Miss Selwyn, this is going to be our rival later. Alaric Cadogan of Cadogan Group. You *know* him, don't you?"

Her lips went white. Know him? That's an understatement.

As if he knew she was trying to run away, he kept his grip on her and asked with a grin, "I'm going to race with him later. So, care to join me on my *horse*?"

No. The only thing I care about right now is to get away from here.

However, Alaric had spotted her, and he narrowed his eyes. Then, *he* got off his horse and strode over to them. His equestrian attire made him look more attractive than usual, but the look in his eyes was deadly cold, dissuading anyone from getting close.

Even before he got near, she could feel him looking at *her* sharply.

"Hey, Alaric. This is my partner for the race."

Alaric stood before them, staring at her. "Your partner?"

Jordan cocked his eyebrow. "Not bad, eh? For fairness' sake, why don't you pick one, too?"

There were ladies among the crowd, and they were close. When they heard that, one of them quickly approached the small group. "I can do that, Mr. Cadogan. I've learned to ride a horse, so I'm *not* scared." Then, she smiled at him sweetly.

Jordan glanced her way. "Alright, then. You'll do."

However, no matter what Jordan spoke to that girl, Alaric was still staring at Victoria. It was a sharp, glaring look.

Victoria bit her lip and was about to say something to get herself out of the situation

when Jordan abruptly said, "Well, then. You both should change into ridi

"No, I think-

The other lady quickly held her arm. "Let's go, girl." With that, she took Victoria away without waiting. As they walked, the girl asked, "So, how did you get to know Mr. Floyd? Are you his new girlfriend? Oh, how I envy you."

Chapter 223

"Can you teach me your moves? I want to learn from a pro." The lady wanted to **date** Alaric, so she showed no hostility toward Victoria, whom she thought was Jordan's girlfriend. Quickly, she took her into the locker room.

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When the staff members caught news of the race, they quickly prepared the course, and the ladies were treated like VIPs. The moment they entered the locker room, staff members handed them their riding clothing.

One of them presented the attire to Victoria and praised, "You have a perfect body, miss. It'll be easy to pick your clothes." After saying that, they passed the attire into her hands.

Dammit, I want to run so badly. But if I do that, Mr. Floyd's going to be embarrassed.

Forget about having him invest; we'd be lucky he's not attacking us.

She came into the dressing room, feeling rather down. She wondered if today was

not her

day after all. Why did I not check my horoscope for the day before heading out? Otherwise, I wouldn't have walked into this situation. She had half a mind to

call Henry to ask him if they really needed the investment, but she could already guess how he would answer.

Victoria looked at her rider outfit, deep in thought. A while later, her desire to run a

company eventually took over. More importantly, she had stopped all contact with Alaric and intended to return all the assets he gave her. If things went well, he'd have received everything by now. We're even now. And if I am to run a business in this country, I'll eventually run into him, like it or not. I can't run away every time. It's not possible, and it will only make me look bad. The only choice I have is to charge ahead. This is an opportunity.

Once her head was clear, she took a deep breath and took off her coat before placing it on a rack. When she was about to take off her sweater, someone knocked on the door. "Who's that?"

Victoria thought it was the girl who came in with her. She's fast. She then went to open the door. However, before she could register what was happening, a silhouette slipped inside. Then, the door was closed and locked. When she finally realized who it was, her eyes went wide. Shortly afterward, she snapped out of her stupor and

tried to reach for the door.

Though, she couldn't make it. Alaric held her wrist and pulled it over her head, pinning her against the cold, solid door.

Victoria struggled. "Let me go."

He looked at her coolly. A while later, her hair clip fell. Her hair cascaded down her shoulder, covering her clothes and giving off a faint sweet scent of shampoo. Still, Alaric studied her coldly. It had been five years since they last met, and she was a lot more gorgeous than before. The childlike innocence was gone, but she still radiated the air of purity despite having long hair, though there was a hint of adult seduction within her.

Purity and allure were two opposite qualities, yet they coexisted within her.

However, the only thing was that this woman was glaring at him with fury.

"I said, let me go!"

Her words had been ignored yet again. Alaric didn't let her go; instead, he closed in on her until there was not even a millimeter distance between them. Then, he mocked, "So Bane let you play around with other men, huh? Guess he doesn't care about you."

Victoria frowned at that. "None of your business." She then tried to struggle again. Their bodies were already touching one another, and their clothes were not that thick, either. Thus, the moment she started struggling, he could feel her body rubbing against his, and the look on his face changed. He then held her wrist tighter. Noticing what was happening, Victoria froze and stopped moving altogether. There was a bit of tension in the air. A moment later, she blushed as she glared at him and spoke through gritted teeth, "You're so shameless!"

Alaric didn't look too happy either; he was black as thunder. He retorted in a hoarse voice, "None of this would have happened if you just stayed still."

Even though their body had been sticking to each other since earlier, he didn't feel anything since they didn't move, not to mention he was furious at her. However, now that she was rubbing against him....

Alaric took a deep breath and closed his eyes. He couldn't believe his body would still react so strongly to her after all these years.

Victoria snapped, "So what if I was moving? I wouldn't have done so if you hadn't held me down. And the point about being human is to control your mind, or you're no better than a horndog."

He narrowed his eyes and gritted his teeth. "What did you say?!"

"I stand by what I said. You did this, so you deserve it!"

He took another deep breath and said nothing, but Victoria wouldn't let him off that

easily. She said, "Now, piss off."

Alaric refused to move, so she angrily shoved him, and a grunt escaped his lips.

Just then, she felt something down there change, and her face fell. "How low can you go?"

Her angry yet adorable voice made him freeze, and he looked at her face, a smile curling his lips. "Keep moving, and I'll show you how low I can go."

Victoria would always get embarrassed easily when it came to this, and she was shocked by what he said. A while later, she cursed, "How shameless!"

Alaric smirked. "Thanks for the compliment." A while later, he put some distance between them and turned around. He wasn't sure he could hold himself back if he remained to stay close to her.

The moment he turned around, Victoria reached for the door and was about to leave. However, someone knocked on it before she could even unlock the door. It was the girl who had come in with her earlier. "Hey, are you done changing?"

Victoria froze for a moment. Ah, why does she have to appear now? I don't want anyone to see me with him. She stood still and answered calmly, "Not yet. Have you

done changing? In that case—ah!"

Chapter 224

Out of the blue, Alaric wrapped his arm around her waist, and she couldn't help but let out a surprise gasp.

"Is everything alright?" The girl tried to open the door, though Victoria was unsure whether the girl did it out of worry or suspicion. However, the door was still locked, so she couldn't open it no matter how she tried. "I can't open the door. Are you alright? Say something!"

“I’m alright.” Victoria tried her best to calm down. “Just lost my balance for a bit. I’m fine now.”

“Really?” The girl was still dubious. She looked around and bit her lip. When she was changing, she thought she heard a man’s voice coming from Victoria’s side of the room, and it sounded like Alaric. Hence, she came to check out, but the voice was gone by the time she was there. It was as if what she had heard earlier was just a hallucination. At the thought of that, the girl couldn’t resist asking, “Are you really alright? I think you should open up and let me check on you.”

“It’s alright. I’m almost done. You go on without me.”

“How about I get Mr. Floyd here for you?”

Victoria mused for a bit and nodded. “Sure.” God knows how long she will stay here if I don’t say that. I need her to leave right *now*.

As expected, the girl quickly said, “Give me a minute. I’ll get him right now.” The girl had been wondering if Alaric was in the room, but now that she had confirmed he wasn’t there, she left.

Once Victoria was sure the girl was gone, she turned around and flung Alaric’s hand away. Then, she opened the door. “Out.”

He merely looked at her and didn’t budge.

“Last warning. Out.” She pursed her lips.

He stared at her in silence, thinking about something. After a while, he left abruptly.

Once he was gone, silence returned to the room. Victoria was still fighting with herself, wondering if she should carry on. Nevertheless, she still changed into her horse-riding attire in the end. The staff member got her the smallest size. Aside from the tightness around her chest, everything else felt fine. After she was done

changing, she emerged from the room.

“What? She tripped and fell?” A bemused Jordan was led to the dressing room, and he cocked his eyebrow, thinking, Does she want to do it in the dressing room? Wow, 2/6

she’s wilder than I thought.

Just then, he noticed someone coming out of the locker room. It was Alaric. Jordan and the girl stopped in their tracks. The girl’s name was Zoe Mask, and her eyes went wide upon seeing Alaric coming out of the room. “M–Mr. Cadogan? You were in the room?”

Interested, Jordan cocked his eyebrow. “Why are you here anyway?”

Alaric ignored them and went ahead. Zoe wanted to go after him, whereas Jordan made his way to the dressing room as he remembered Victoria was still waiting for

him there. However, just as he had just taken a few steps, Alaric called out to him, “Jordan.”

“What?” Jordan turned around.

Alaric looked at him coldly. “Where are *you* going?”

“It’s *none* of *your* business, is it?” Jordan grinned. “I heard my partner has sprained her ankle in the dressing room, so I want to check on *her*.”

Alaric narrowed his eyes, and Jordan had no idea why he did that. After the explanation, he turned around and was about to go in, *but then* he froze on *the* spot for a moment. He was staring straight at Victoria, who had changed into rider attire. She looked handsome in that red and white outfit. Her waist looked even smaller in those clothes. Her shoulder looked even more beautiful, and her hair stood out more with the white backdrop. Jordan stared at her dumbly. He didn’t expect she would look so stunning with her hair down while donning rider attire.

His heart skipped a beat, and when he finally snapped out of it, he gulped subconsciously. "I see you've done changing, Miss Selwyn."

Victoria looked at Alaric for a moment before averting her gaze and approaching Jordan. She nodded. "Yes."

There was barely any distance between them, and her beauty struck Jordan even more. His heart started to beat faster again. "Then, let's go."

She mused for a moment, but she *didn't* leave right away. Instead, she smiled. "I've no experience in horseback riding, and I'm scared of it. But since you asked, I'll be more than willing to have fun with you. Though, I hope you'll make some time for me after this race so we can talk about work."

"Of course," answered Jordan almost instinctively. "We can talk about anything you want."

Victoria paused for a moment at his response before smiling. "Thank you."

"It's nothing. Let's go."

She followed Jordan, and they went into the racecourse. Zoe stood beside Victoria, staring at her with astonishment. "You look beautiful in that."

Victoria looked at her. "Thank you. You too."

"My name is Zoe Mask, by the way."

"Victoria Selwyn."

"

The ladies shook hands, and the staff members led two horses toward the riders. All preparations were done. The starting and finishing points were set. "There's a red flag on the top of the mountain in Eastton. The first to retrieve the flag wins. There will be cameras along the way, and traffic's been halted. Not a single car can come in for an hour."

Victoria listened in, and she smirked. Capitalists sure do whatever they want.

Zoe said, "Mr. Cadogan will most likely want to win, but... I want to spend more time with him, so I'll help you slow him down."

After she said that, Alaric got onto his horse. So, she quickly said, "I'll be going now."

Then, she trotted over to Alaric.

Jordan approached Victoria. "We should get on the horse now."

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She was about to nod when Alaric led his horse to her and looked down from above.

"Get up."

Zoe was in utter disbelief. Did he just ignore me?

Jordan was bewildered as well.

Only Victoria pretended she didn't hear him. One second went by. Two seconds went by. Three seconds later, Alaric's patience ran out. He said coldly, "Didn't you hear what I said? Get. Up. Here."

Chapter 225

Zoe and Jordan weren't the only ones who were stunned. Even the staff members were scared by the air Alaric was emanating. It felt like a storm was approaching. He was the most powerful person in the course right now, and no one wished to get on his bad side, so none of them tried to mediate things.

Unlike everyone else, Victoria was calm. She was unaffected by Alaric's displeasure, and she even frowned. "You got the wrong person. I'm with Mr. Floyd, not you." That was a refusal.

Everyone's eyes widened in shock as they were surprised she would say that to Alaric. They were flabbergasted that she would cross him in public.

Alaric narrowed his eyes, staring at her. Then, he kicked the horse's side and charged straight at her.

Zoe covered her mouth, screaming in shock. Everyone else almost shouted when they saw what was happening. He's *not* planning to crash right into her, is he?

Even Jordan was shocked. Thinking that Alaric wanted to attack Victoria, he shouted, "Alaric!" Right then, he tried to pull Victoria over, but someone had beaten him to it.

Alaric had pulled Victoria onto his horse, much to her shock, and she gasped. In all honesty, she wasn't scared at all when he was charging at her. Even though it'd been five years since she met him, she knew him all too well. He would never ram into her for real, so she knew that was just a feint.

That was why she stood her ground, but she never thought he would pull her onto the horse.

"Let's go." Alaric rode ahead, and the howls of wind shocked Victoria into holding tightly onto him, her hair billowing in the wind. The man smiled and pulled her in front of him before stopping the horse.

She glared at him. "What are you doing?" Still, she held him tightly as she looked down below. The horse was big and strong. If I fall from up here... She instinctively held him tighter, oblivious to his smile.

Even though she was angry at him, she held onto him tightly, afraid of falling. The sight of this doused Alaric's anger, and he stared at her with a faint smile. "You were going to ride with someone else? They might fling you into the air if they're not careful."

"Huh? The fact he asked me means he's confident in his horse-riding skill, is he not?"

“Is that so?” Alaric raised his head proudly. “Then, why don’t you ask him if his ribs are all healed? He broke his ribs from a ride last time.”

“Hey!” an angry Jordan shouted. “I heard that!”

Right then, he saw Victoria giving him a doubtful look. Oh, I should not have said that. “Dammit!” he cursed. However, he quickly added, “Wait, why did you take my woman? Do you know her?”

Alaric shot him a look. “Your woman?”

The icy fury in those eyes made Jordan shiver, but the sight of Victoria fueled his courage, and he said, “I brought her here, so give her back to me.”

Alaric sneered and took Victoria away.

The moment his horse started to move, Victoria held him tighter. “Hey, put me down! Put me down!”

Everyone watched as he took her to the starting line. She wouldn’t stop yelling at him, but he wouldn’t even budge, nor did he get mad at her for yelling at him. Jordan cursed again. Guess I’m not getting her back.

He turned around, looking at the dumbfounded Zoe. “Wanna ride with me?”

She snapped out of it and nodded dumbly as she followed him. When she came to his horse, she asked, “Do they know each other?”

“Duh. Why else would he take her? That man wouldn’t even let any woman near him.” Jordan was in a foul mood since Alaric had exposed him in public.

Zoe was a little miffed, and she poked her fingers together in slight grievance. Just then, Jordan looked at her, and she looked back at him. Silence ensued.

A few moments later, he urged, “What are you waiting for? Get up. You’re not expecting me to scoop you up like he did, right?”

Zoe was left speechless upon hearing that. Still, she got up on the horse's back. despite feeling a bit annoyed. Once she settled in, Jordan got up as well. Then, he heard her asking, "Um, is it true you fell and broke your ribs?"

Goddammit, I am not living that down, am I?

They came to the starting line. Seeing Victoria on Alaric's horse angered Jordan. She should've been with me, not him! "The race is nothing without a bit of a side bet, don't you think?"

Chapter 225 Give Her Back

Ever since Alaric got Victoria, he seemed a little lackadaisical. The race didn't matter as long as he had Victoria with him. Thus, he didn't even look at Jordan when he proposed a bet.

5/6

Victoria tried to explain, "Mr. Floyd, about the ne-"

Alaric looked at her and coldly said, "What's the bet?"

He stopped her from talking to Jordan.

Jordan knew what Alaric was thinking, and he sneered. "If I win, we'll race another round." He pointed at Victoria. "But you will have to give her back to me."

She thought, What? Why am I the prize?

Alaric sneered. "You think you can win?"

Jordan provoked, "Just tell me yes or no. Are you up for the challenge?" In most cases, he wouldn't provoke Alaric that way, but the latter had taken it too far. Alaric had embarrassed him, and if he couldn't salvage the matter, everyone would laugh at him.

Alaric took the bait, and he looked at Jordan. "Are you sure about this?"

Strong Teeth

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“Yes”

“Fine” Alaric said languidly, “But I want to change the terms. If I win, you’re never seeing her again.”

Jordan couldn’t believe what he was hearing. After a momentary pause, he shouted,

“Hey, that’s one step too far!”

Chapter 226

“So, still wanna bet?” Alaric taunted.

“Dammit.” Jordan gnashed his teeth and looked at Zoe. “You can take it, can’t you? We have to win this.”

“Um, I think safety comes first,” Zoe responded.

Dammit, Jordan cursed in his mind.

Victoria didn’t want to say anything, but she shared Zoe’s sentiments.

A staff member came up to them and sycophantically said, “The race will begin soon.”

Jordan pulled on the reins and gritted his teeth. “Fine. I know I can win this.”

There was one minute left until the start of the race, so the staff member reiterated the rules. “First to get the flag wins. We have also prepared a present for the winner. Ride safely. Counting down from ten. Ten, nine, eight...”

Victoria was still trying to get off the horse, but the moment she was pulled up,

Alaric had been wrapping his arm around her waist, keeping her from moving.

Then, he suddenly leaned in, his scent covering her. She heard him whisper, “If you’re scared, you can always turn around to hug me.”

What? She was bewildered by his words. "Like hell, I will!"

Right at that moment, the countdown was over, and Jordan charged ahead like a mad dog, and Zoe screamed at the top of her lungs, "Slow down, Jordan! Safety first!"

"To hell with that! I want to win!"

Okay... Victoria watched as Jordan's horse ran into the distance, whereas Alaric remained at the same spot. Since she refused to talk to him, she didn't say a word. A while later, she couldn't take it anymore and asked, "What are you doing? Do you want to lose?"

Ah, I knew she'd talk to me. A hint of satisfaction flashed in the man's eyes. "What? Are you worried he might take you back?"

Ugh, he has no idea how bad I had it, and now he's talking to me like I'm his friend or something. This must be cruelly amusing to the gods. Victoria's face fell, and she mocked, "No. In fact, it's better if you lose. I was here to see him in the first place, anyway."

Alaric's face darkened as soon as he heard that. "What did you just say? Say it again if you dare."

"Sure. If you want, I can say it ten times, too."

Dammit. Before she could say anything further, Alaric charged ahead, and the winds started howling.

The inertia made Victoria fall backward, and she couldn't utter a single word after that. All she could do was keep her screams in. Though she looked calm outside, her reaction spoke of the opposite. At first, she thought that she should try her best to keep some distance between her and Alaric even after the race had begun.

However, she now realized she couldn't even control her own body. She was leaning on his chest and tensing up, worried she might be flung off the horse's back.

Alaric whispered, "Why aren't you saying anything?"

Victoria was too angry to say anything, so she ignored him. The man snickered, then he asked, "Wanna turn around?"

She snapped, "You think I'd do that?"

"Then, sit tight." He huddled closer and leaned his chest on her back. She could feel his warmth on her back, and he inched closer to her ear, whispering, "We'll win this."

The horse started to run faster and faster, and **the** winter wind blew across her face, blowing her hair. Strands of hair tickled Alaric's neck, and he frowned. "Why didn't you tie your hair up?"

Are you seriously asking me that? My hair clip wouldn't have broken had **you not** barged into the room. I don't have any clips left.

There were a few routes leading to the mountaintop, and each path was different. Even though they were halfway through the race, they still didn't see Jordan and Zoe.

"Where are they?" Victoria asked. It's been a while, so why aren't we seeing **them**?

"There are three paths leading to the mountaintop. Two bigger ones and one smaller one." Alaric stopped at the junction and looked at her. "So, which path do you choose?"

"What does that have to do with me?"

"Jordan might take the smaller path just to win. If we take that path and run into him, we might fall off our horses."

The man stared at her, but seeing that she didn't plan on saying anything, he led his

horse to the smaller path.

Realizing what he wanted to do, Victoria's face fell. "What are you doing?" You know he might take this path, and you're still going with it?

Alaric said, "Winning the race." He kicked the horse's side, and the beast charged into the smaller path. The lady didn't even have time to say anything.

When they came into the path, Victoria heaved a sigh of relief. She thought this route would be narrow and winding because Alaric said they might fall off the horse if they ran into Jordan and Zoe, but the path was actually broader than she thought. Still, they were in the mountain, and even though she was leaning on someone, the scenery was still slightly frightening.

Eventually, she realized something was off. The path started getting narrow and winding. At first, it was big enough to allow three horses to pass, but not anymore. With how fast the horse was running, there were a few times she thought it would veer off the path, but Alaric managed to pull it back in the nick of time.

Just like Alaric said, the smaller path was a shortcut. When they came to the top, the flag was still around, and a gift box was right beside it, too. Victoria looked at the flag and sat up straight, holding her nausea in.

Just when she was about to tell him to let her down and take the flag, the man hugged her tightly. So tightly that it almost felt like he would merge with her. The mountain was silent, and she could hear the sound of his heartbeat.

Unlike his earlier arrogant self, Alaric was hugging her without any other motive. He hugged her so tightly that it felt like he would never let go of her forever.

A while later, he whispered, "It's been five years. You're finally back."

Chapter 227

A long while later, the wind blew on Victoria's hair, and her nausea finally went away.

She looked down at the arm around her waist and coldly asked, "Had enough?"

Alaric froze for a moment upon hearing that. She then said, "Let me go. I'm taking the flag." She could feel the person behind her tense up slightly after she said that.

A moment later, he finally let her go.

"Sure." He got off the horse and extended his hand, trying to help her hop off.

She looked at him, but instead of accepting his hand, she got off the horse herself, although with difficulty. Alaric's face turned cold. Victoria took a deep breath and went ahead to take the flag. She didn't take the gift box, as she was uninterested.

The moment she stood back up, Jordan's curse came from afar. "Holy sh*t, you b*stard! You got here before me!" He got off his horse and angrily tossed his leash away. "This is all your fault, Zoe! We could've taken the shortcut, but you just had to stop me!"

The only response he received was Zoe hurling up, and Jordan was speechless. He looked at Alaric and was about to go around to talk to Victoria when Alaric held his hand up. "We had a bet, remember?"

Jordan looked miffed. "Come on. I just want to chat a little. We've been friends for a while now. That bet was a joke, right?"

Alaric didn't move, and he looked at Jordan coldly. "Do I look like I'm joking?"

Jordan opened his mouth and tried to **say** something, but when he noticed the dark storm brewing in Alaric's eyes, he noticed something was off. No, this is not just about the bet. He wouldn't look this furious if that was it.

Jordan glanced at Victoria. She looked beautiful as ever, but there was an aloof look on her face. Something must have happened between them. He stepped backward and conceded. "Fine. I won't talk to her right now. I yield." With that, he scurried

away.

Victoria tried to go after him. After all, she needed to talk to him about the investment, but when she went by Alaric, he grabbed her hand.

“I didn’t say you could leave.”

She frowned at that. Although the flag of victory was in her hand, the triumph did not bring them joy. She stared at the hand holding her and struggled a little before finally breaking free of his grasp. She then flung her hand and looked at Alaric in

amusement. “It’s been five years. You’re no one to me anymore. I’m not someone you can touch however you like. Keep some distance between us, or I’ll sue you for harassment.”

Alaric’s face darkened, and the air around him turned cold, but Victoria wasn’t even scared of him. She said, “Understand?” She heaved a sigh of relief and went around him.

“You’re going out with Bane?”

She stopped in her tracks. A while later, she rebuked, “None of your business.” After saying that, she walked away. Standing some distance away, Jordan looked dumbfounded. When she approached him, he couldn’t help but glance at Alaric.

“Sorry we didn’t get to ride together, Mr. Floyd, but please give me some time. I’d like to talk about work.”

The thought of Alaric’s anger scared Jordan a little, but when he saw her smile, he couldn’t resist. “Very well. Let’s go.”

“Thank you.” Before leaving, Victoria invited Zoe to come with her, but Zoe declined.

“No. One woman’s trash is another’s treasure. I’m going to woo him.”

Hearing that, Victoria couldn’t help wondering, Don’t they know he’s dating Claudia

now? Why are they still trying to woo him? Regardless, it wasn't her place to judge what someone else did with their life. She respected Zoe's decision and nodded. "I see. We'll be going, then." With that, she left with Jordan.

The man led his horse over and scratched his head. "It's a long way down; it will take us a long time to head back on foot. So, wanna ride the horse?"

The whole ordeal just now made Victoria dislike horseback riding, but she needed the investment, so she took a deep breath.

Just when she was about to say yes, Alaric growled, "Get on that horse, and you're going to regret it."

Jordan quickly said, "You know what? I'll get us a ride instead." He swiftly whipped his phone out.

Victoria heaved a sigh of relief. Going back by car was a damn sight better than going by horse. The car came quickly, and just when she was about to get into it, someone got into the back seat before she could. When she saw who it was, she was speechless.

I told him not to come near me. Yet, here he is.

Chapter

Alaric met her eyes as well.

Fine. His friend called the ride. He can use it, but I won't sit with him at the back. She slammed the door shut and went to take the passenger seat.

Zoe and Jordan were a little speechless, and they came into the back seat. The moment Jordan sat down, Alaric said coldly, "You're taking the front seat."

"Why?" Jordan asked in confusion, but when he met Alaric's icy gaze, he shivered slightly. "Fine, fine. I'll take the passenger seat." That's the most dangerous seat

when you're going downhill. He opened the door and said, "Let's switch places, Miss Selwyn."

"Thanks, but no thanks," Victoria declined.

Jordan was in a dilemma. Man, Alaric is being impossible today. He can't expect me to demand something from a girl I like, right?

At that moment, Alaric said, "Switch places, or no one's going anywhere."

The driver held the steering wheel tightly. He almost slammed down on the gas pedal out of nervousness. Scary.

"Why do you do this?" asked Victoria. She didn't turn around, but everyone knew who she was talking to.

Alaric fixed his gaze on the back of her head. "You'll see."

Jordan whispered, "Let's just switch places. It'll all be over once we get off the mountain."

Victoria didn't budge, and Jordan couldn't say anything more. Alaric still looked as cold as ever. Everyone was silent, and the situation came to a stalemate. A long while later, Zoe raised her hand timidly and suggested, "Um, how about I take the passenger seat?"

Chapter Comly?

Chapter 228

1/6

A few minutes later, Zoe went into the passenger seat, closed the door, and buckled

1. up. She would not switch seats anymore after this. As for Victoria, she stood around

for a while after getting off the car. Then, she said, "You go first."

"Alright." Jordan didn't argue. Everyone was going downhill anyway, so he couldn't

care less who was sitting with whom. Just when he was about to get into the back seat, Alaric spoke, "Scram."

Jordan froze for a moment before turning to smile at Victoria. "I think you should go before me. Ladies first."

She stared at him and recalled what had happened at the racecourse earlier. Then, she sighed and got into the car. Jordan followed after her. Since she wanted to keep some distance between her and Alaric, she leaned closer to Jordan.

The moment the car moved, Alaric frowned. "Sit further away, Jordan."

Jordan moved away a bit, not thinking much about it. Of course, he doesn't want anyone else getting close to the woman he likes. With that thought in mind, he moved even closer to the window.

Still, Alaric demanded, "Move away more."

Jordan looked at the unreasonable man speechlessly and shifted again.

"More."

"Are you mad? There's no more space. Unless I get out of the car, that is."

Without missing a beat, Alaric said, "Sure. Get out of the car, then."

"The heck!"

Victoria couldn't take it anymore. She shot Alaric a look and met his gaze. Ever since she got into the car, his eyes had been on her the whole time. "Why don't you get out of the car?"

At that, Jordan gave her a thumbs up. Nice retort.

Alaric didn't like he was talked back to. Still, he smirked. "Are you sure? If I leave, you're coming with me, too."

Victoria looked away upon hearing that and refused to talk to him anymore. She knew he was a man of his word. Since she couldn't change his mind, she would just ignore him. During the ride downhill, she shut her eyes and leaned against the seat

with her back straight. She had no intention of leaning toward anyone.

Initially, she had only planned to rest her eyes, but the journey would take about half an hour since the path was winding and meandering. Plus, all the passengers here were VIPs, so the driver drove slowly. Eventually, Victoria drifted to sleep, and she slowly leaned toward Jordan.

Before that could happen, Alaric held her head and let it rest in his palm. After he confirmed that she wouldn't wake up, he slowly pushed her head toward his shoulder, moving as gently as water.

Jordan was stunned to see that, and Alaric shot him a deadpan look. It made Jordan's heart skip in fear.

Alaric was in a rather good mood for the journey after that. After all, Victoria was leaning on his shoulder, asleep, even though she wanted nothing to do with him while she was awake. She's better when she's sleeping. The girl's cold and arrogant when she's awake. Just thinking about the icy look in her eyes made his heart

twinge.

This was the only moment of peace they had after they met, but it didn't last long. A while later, Victoria's phone rang. The silence was broken, and she woke up.

Alaric tensed up, but the lady didn't even open her eyes. She rummaged through her pockets for her phone, and since he was close enough to see, Alaric noticed that the caller was Bane. His face darkened immediately.

Victoria put her phone to her ear. "Yes?"

Bane could tell that she was sleeping, judging from her groggy voice. "Were you asleep? Where are you now?"

“Mm–hmm,” she replied, her voice soft since she was not fully awake yet. She could vaguely remember she was in a car before she fell asleep. “I’m in a car.” Then, she shifted slightly to make herself comfier, leaning her head further to the soft thing beside her. She then asked, “What is it?”

“You’re sleeping in a car? Did you not get enough sleep last night?”

No. I was just exhausted from all the horseback riding, so I... Right then, Victoria finally realized something, and her mind went blank. Slowly, she opened her eyes,

and when she raised her head, she was met with Alaric’s eyes, though he was staring at her with displeasure.

“Victoria?” Bane called out to her, wondering why she went silent.

Alaric suddenly asked, “Was it comfy?”

Bane froze upon hearing that, and Victoria looked shocked. She quickly realized the man had said that on purpose. He knows I’m on a call, yet he said something suggestive anyway. He must’ve seen the caller’s name.

4

A while later, Bane asked, “Victoria, w–where are you right now?”

She didn’t think much about her meeting with Alaric and hadn’t planned to tell Bane about it. However, she figured she should just be honest with Bane since he had heard everything. She said, “I’m on my way back. Something happened, but I’ll explain once I get back.”

Bane was quiet for a moment. “I see.” A while later, he added, “If you’re in a pickle, you can always get out of the car. Tell me where you are, and I’ll pick you up.”

Victoria was surprised. She knew what Bane was trying to say, but she looked down at her lap. “It’s alright. I’ll be back soon. Just wait for me.”

He said nothing more. She felt a little upset, so she said goodbye and hung up.

Then, she tucked her phone away and sat back up.

“You haven’t answered my question.” Alaric huddled closer. “Was it comfy?”

Victoria turned her attention to him, looking at him speechlessly. I do not lean on anyone when I fall asleep I was sitting right in my spot

“Is that so?” The man smirked. “Then, you don’t know yourself as you think you do.”

Well, I guess it’s a given that people don’t know what they do when they’re asleep. In any case, I think I know you better than you do since I’m your ex–husband. “

Victoria turned her attention to him, looking at him speechlessly. “I do not lean on anyone when I fall asleep. I was sitting right in my spot.”

“Is that so?” The man smirked. “Then, you don’t know yourself as you think you do.”

Well, I guess it’s a given that people don’t know what they do when they’re asleep. In any case, I think I know you better than you do since I’m your ex–husband.”

Chapter 229

The eavesdropping duo, Jordan and Zoe, heard the words ‘bedmates’ and were so shocked that they looked at each other with wide eyes, exclaiming together.

“Bedmates?”

“What does that mean? Did they sleep together?”

Even the driver was shocked to the point of slamming the brake, causing a sharp shriek. Everyone looked at him, and he took a handkerchief to wipe away the sweat on his temples while smiling apologetically. “We’re here.”

Hearing that, Victoria realized that they had arrived at the equestrian facility. Her expression changed slightly as she immediately pushed Jordan away, after which he hurriedly alighted from the car.

Noticing the situation, she wanted to follow suit but heard Alaric's cold voice from behind her. "Are you going to walk away after what you just did?"

She remained silent. Five years have passed, yet he's still as brazen as ever. She swept her gaze across him and taunted, "What can you do about it?" Then, she jumped out of the car and changed her clothes in the room before leaving.

1/8

On her way out, Jordan caught up to her and apologized in embarrassment. "I'm so sorry. If I'd known you had such a relationship with him, I wouldn't have invited you here."

"What relationship?" Her face was calm. "We have nothing to do with each other."

"You have nothing to do with each other? But back in the car-"

"Even if we did, it ended five years ago."

"Five years ago?" He was muttering at first but then seemed to realize something before his eyes widened. "Are you saying..."

Victoria nodded.

"Oh, f*ck. So, that's how it is..." Jordan murmured. "No wonder he became so disorderly and irrational after seeing you."

Alaric had been acting crazy along the road, a side Jordan never saw of him before.

"Mr. Floyd, I hope this doesn't affect our future partnership no matter what."

Partnership... It was then Jordan remembered that Victoria came here today *to* talk

about work, but he was unsure about the details.

She thought about it and asked, "Today's not a good time. Will you be free tomorrow?"

He nodded. "You can come to my office tomorrow."

Slightly surprised, she nodded in return. "Sure. Thank you."

After Victoria made an appointment with Jordan, she saw Zoe approaching her.

"Hello." Zoe waved and smiled. "Can we exchange phone numbers?"

Victoria was somewhat astonished as she did not expect Zoe would want to do that. "Sure."

After that, Zoe asked softly, "So, did you seriously sleep with him?"

When Victoria heard that question, she felt her hand tremble slightly but then straightforwardly asked, "I refuse to answer this question."

"That's fine." Zoe did not mind that answer and shrugged. "I won't ask again."

Then, Victoria bid her goodbye and left the equestrian facility. Before leaving, she sensed a sharp gaze locked on her back. It was a no-brainer whose stare it

belonged to. Then, she opened the cab's door and got in.

3/8

When she returned to her company, she saw Henry coming to welcome her, asking,

"How was it? Am I going to like what I'm about to hear?"

She hopelessly glanced at him.

“Huh. I guess not.”

“Ugh. Don’t even mention it.” She sat on the couch. “We didn’t even talk about the investment, but I’ve arranged to meet him tomorrow.”

When he heard her last sentence, he was relieved. “That’s great. I’m sure you can get the investment when you have a nice chat tomorrow. You are smart, after all.”

Smart? How is that going to get us the investment? It’s going to be a difficult task for sure.

Recalling something, Victoria looked at Henry, asking, “Between Jordan and Alaric, who do you think is better?”

Confusion instantly appeared on his face. “What do you mean? Why would you ask that?”

“Be honest and answer the question.”

Since Henry knew Victoria and Alaric’s past, he was conflicted about how to answer her question. He was unsure whether she would get angry if he said something good about Alaric. After all, she was his current boss.

“What are you worried about?” she asked, sensing his hesitation.

Henry mustered his courage to answer, “I was deciding whether *to* toss the truth bomb or amuse you.”

That answer was interesting and even caused Victoria to smile. “Then, you’d better amuse me with your truth bomb.”

He replied, "Miss Selwyn, that's quite difficult."

At that, she raised an eyebrow. "Take it as the management assessment for your first month on the job."

"An assessment? I'll have to think about it." Henry stood there for a while before continuing, "Regarding seniority, Alaric is better than Jordan because, to Alaric, Jordan is just a newbie. But the underdog who just took over the company has endless possibilities. Doing business is like going into a battle. The last one standing will be the winner."

That answer cracked Victoria up. "I finally know why you made it up to the management level so quickly."

Henry smiled. "You're flattering me, Miss Selwyn."

"One more question."

"What is it?"

"Do you think Jordan Floyd would offend Cadogan Group for a small company like Us?"

When he heard that, he was slightly stunned.

"How about that? Is this difficult enough to answer?"

"Miss Selwyn, I believe you're dissatisfied with my suggestion, so you asked me a challenging one."

"Oh, so you do know."

“That can’t be helped, Miss Selwyn. This company needs to run and develop.” He reminded her, “This is your company.”

Victoria was promptly reminded. “You’re right. This is my company.” In other words, she still needed to work hard despite knowing she would dislike the results.

“I’m glad you understand.”

“Mr. Poole, please come up with a new list of companies besides Floyd

Corporation.” Henry’s visible confusion led Victoria to smile. “A list of possible investors. There’s a huge possibility that tomorrow will fail.”

He stayed quiet for a while before looking at his boss, who still wore her fake smile, and asked with difficulty, “Excuse me for being rude, but who did you meet today, Miss Selwyn?”

“You know the answer to that.”

He pressed on. “You met Mr. Cadogan? What a coincidence.”

“Yes, I did and even offended him.”

Jasea was such an enormous city, but Victoria did not expect to bump into him so often in such a short period. Meanwhile, Henry lost the desire to speak further. He thought her questions were to make things difficult for him, but it turned out... She had offended an important figure..

Chapter 230

Since Victoria had to pick up the children, she left her company early. When she arrived at their school, she was five minutes late because the teacher told her the children’s father had brought them home.

Hearing that, Victoria instantly paled, and her voice uncontrollably raised. “What did you say? Their father brought them home?”

When did Nicole and Nathan have a father? Don't tell me...

The schoolteacher was shocked by Victoria's high-pitched voice and weakly argued, “T-The man that came with you during the children's admissions day. Isn't he Nicole and Nathan's father?”

The man who came with her during admissions? Are they talking about Bane?

Victoria felt relieved to hear that it was him. She was worried Alaric might have found out about the children.

“What's the matter, Miss Selwyn? You seem a little pale. Is... there a problem?” the teacher asked hesitantly.

Victoria came back to her senses and shook her head. “It's nothing. I'm sorry I scared you. I thought they were kidnapped.”

“It's fine. I'm glad it's nothing. Take care on your way home.”

After bidding the teacher goodbye, Victoria hurried home. When she pushed the door open, she was met with the delicious aroma of food. She changed her shoes and went into the living room when she heard her children conversing in their room.

Meanwhile, one of the live-in maids Bane hired for her was busy in the kitchen.

When the live-in maid, Teresa, heard the motion, she turned around and greeted Victoria, “Miss Selwyn, you're home.”

In the meantime, the children heard Teresa and ran out of their room.

“Mommy!”

“Mommy, you're home.”

The two children immediately hugged Victoria's legs and looked up at her. That

scene melted her heart, and she bent down to hold them in each arm. “How was school today? Did you have fun? You didn’t get into trouble with your classmates, did you?”

The children shook their heads in unison and said nothing. In the meantime, Bane came out of the room and looked at Victoria. He silently gazed at her hair and finally stopped on her red lips.

She sensed his gaze and patted the children’s shoulders, whispering, “Go play.”

Once the children left, he continued to stare at her lips for a long time until he was sure there were no abnormal traces before gazing at her eyes. The sound from the kitchen hood and the children chatting became more distant, and Victoria pursed her lips, not knowing what to say. She knew Bane must have something to ask, but...

就在她纠结的时候,墨白轻声询问道:“今天工作进展如何?有没有需要帮忙的地方?”

While she was conflicted, he inquired softly, “How’s work today? Is there anything I can help you with?”

She subconsciously shook her head. “No, everything’s fine.” She hesitantly added, “Hey-”

“You don’t have to say anything you don’t want to.” He softly interrupted her and smiled. “I know you’ve already put it behind you, so I won’t suspect you of anything. Plus, I’m still under observation, so I have no right to ask anything of you.”

Hearing that, Victoria instantly felt relieved. That was even better because she did not wish to explain herself to anybody. “Thank you.” She smiled at Bane, feeling like she owed him big time.

4/6

That night, he stayed for dinner while Teresa cleaned up after the meal and left.

Seeing that it was getting late, Victoria told the children to go to bed and went to

finish her work. When she was done, she looked up and saw Bane still on the couch. Judging from his behavior, he seemed like he did not intend to leave.

The next moment, he took off his golden-rimmed glasses before she could say anything and smiled at her. "It's getting late."

She nodded. "Yeah."

"Your place is far from the hotel, so can I stay the night here? I'll pay the rent, of course."

At the mention of rent, Victoria thought he was exaggerating. "You rented me this home, so you don't have to pay anything. Also, it's just one night. Make yourself comfortable." Then, she got up. "I'll make your room."

Bane followed suit. "That's too much trouble. I can do it myself." He then trailed her to the guest room. Since it was winter, he needed a thick quilt and pillows.

Chapter 230 Their Father Brought Them Home

Since she never expected anyone to stay over, she only had three blankets at the moment. Now that Bane was to stay the night, she decided to give him hers. "Why don't... you use mine, and I'll sleep with Nicole tonight."

"Sure." He readily accepted the offer. "Thank you, my dear Victoria."

My dear Victoria... She tugged her lips after hearing that but did not say anything.

Bane brought the covers into the guestroom while Victoria stood in place for some time before looking for Nicole. When Nicole found out her mother was going to accompany her, she was instantly excited and hugged her mother's waist without letting go. "Mommy, can you tell me a story before bed?"

Victoria agreed. "Sure. I'll think about it if you're a good girl tonight."

"Mommy, what can I do to be a good girl?"

“For example, you could tell me what you did in school today.” Since Bane was here during the day, she spared him some of her time and barely learned about her children’s day. That was also why she did not want to find a better half. It made her feel like she would not have enough time to spend alone with her children.

“What did you do in school today?”

Nicole bowed her head and recalled her day. Then, she looked at Victoria and told her everything that happened. Even if the young girl could not explain herself well and had trouble pronouncing because of her absent tooth from having cavities, Victoria did not mind them and carefully listened, gazing at her with gentleness. Occasionally, she would help Nicole continue when she stopped, but she would listen to the young girl’s adorable storytelling. Near the end, Nicole suddenly stopped and quickly added, “Mommy, many of the kids at school thought Mr. Bane was our father when he came to pick us up today.”

The gentle smile on Victoria’s face froze. “What?”

“Before today, everyone thought Nathan and I didn’t have a father and wanted to laugh at us. Ms. Hodgins tried to help us explain, but no one believed her. But Mr. Bane came today, and even though he’s not our father, the other kids at school won’t laugh at us anymore.”