

Departure with a Belly Chapter 421

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Chapter 421

When Victoria heard the soft sounds, her eyelashes twitched. The bright light almost prevented her from opening her eyes.

It took her a while to adjust to the current brightness and open her eyes.

As soon as she did, she saw Nathan and Nicole standing not far away.

Seeing them, Victoria thought her eyes were playing tricks on her, but she was still taken aback and sat up suddenly.

As she sat up, the two little ones approached and greeted her.

“Mommy, you’re awake!”

Nicole’s voice was loud, and it woke up Alaric, who was still half asleep. When Nicole saw that he was awake, she also cheerfully called out to him.

“Mr. Night!”

She happily walked over, grabbed the corner of his clothes, and asked, “Mr. Night, you slept together with Mommy. Does that mean you’re my daddy now?”

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Although the little girl was young, she was sharp-witted. She had never seen her

mother and Bane sleeping together like this before.

Not to mention sleeping together, there wasn't even a hint of intimacy between them.

One shouldn't be fooled by children's young age; sometimes they understood certain things most clearly.

Alaric was caught off guard by Nicole's sudden question. He remained still for a moment before murmuring, "Daddy, huh?"

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He looked at Victoria, who was sitting on the couch, then lightly pressed his hand on Nicole's head. "Whether I can be your daddy or not depends on your mommy's opinion."

"Mommy?" The little girl looked at Victoria.

"Yes." Alaric nodded. "If your mommy agrees to me being your daddy, then I'll be your daddy. If she doesn't agree, then I will have to try harder to make your mommy accept me first."

After hearing this, Nicole immediately climbed onto the couch and into Victoria's embrace. "So, Mommy, do you accept Mr. Night?"

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Victoria was speechless.

Before she could speak, Nicole murmured, "Mommy, you must have accepted him, or else you wouldn't have let him sleep with you."

Victoria felt dumbfounded at her words.

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It seemed that there was a big misunderstanding. Victoria felt embarrassed and rubbed her forehead. Although she had started to accept Alaric in her heart, she still had some reservations when it came to the matter of the children. After all, she had truly suffered in the past.

Although some of it stemmed from her own misunderstanding, if he had clarified his feelings earlier, how could there have been so many misunderstandings between them?

Her silence made the atmosphere awkward. Nicole was still staring at her and waiting for her answer. At the same time, Alaric was wearing a confident smile as if he was sure that she would agree.

To his surprise, she fell silent.

Alaric himself slowly appeared to understand the reason for her silence. The delight in
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his eyes slowly faded, but he remained calm without becoming angry and simply said, "It's okay, this isn't urgent. Let's discuss it later."

Without waiting for Victoria to speak, he intervened in their conversation.

He then gently patted Nicole's head and whispered, "Nicky, give your mommy some more time, and give me a chance to prove myself, okay?"

Victoria looked at him calmly uttering these words, and it didn't sit well with her.

Given the circumstances, she was surprised that he could still compose himself and say such things. She wondered what he was feeling at that moment.

Nicole also sensed that something was amiss and stopped talking. After a moment, Nathan came forward, took her hand, and brought her to the side.

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*Victoria was silent for a moment before she said,
"I'll go freshen up. How is your injury?"*

"It's much better now. I applied medication and took the pills last night. Did you forget?"

Alaric replied.

Hearing his words, Victoria glanced at him and noticed that his complexion looked much better than last night. The medication seemed to be effective.

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Feeling somewhat relieved, she got up to freshen up.

As she walked away, the two kids quickly followed her. When they reached a spot where Alaric couldn't see them, Nicole asked, "Mommy, why didn't you agree?"

Victoria let out a sigh and said, "It's not the right time yet."

Not the right time?

"When will it be-" Nicole began, but Nathan interrupted her. "Nicole."

He softly advised, "Stop asking. Mommy will tell us when she agrees in the future."

Hearing her brother's words, Nicole obediently nodded and said, "Okay then."

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The three of them entered the bathroom together, and once inside, Victoria noticed that even the children's toothbrushes were prepared. There were blue and pink ones, along with matching children's cups.

With just a glance, Victoria felt instantly soothed by the sight.

Children's items were always cuter than imagined. She didn't know if they were prepared in advance or delivered late last night.

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Victoria squeezed toothpaste onto both brushes and said, "Brush your teeth quickly, and after that, we'll have breakfast."

"Thank you, Mommy," they both replied.

When Alaric approached, he witnessed the scene of the three of them standing together by the sink perfectly aligned. It was a heartwarming sight.

Instinctively, he paused and stood there, savoring the moment.

In the end, Alaric couldn't resist taking out his phone, opening the camera, and capturing this scene.

The shot was perfectly backlit and could easily serve as phone wallpaper.

Alaric stood there, reluctant to leave. After relishing the moment for a while, he promptly changed his phone wallpaper to that photo.

At the same time, he also set it as his phone's screensaver.

Afterward, he stood in place, locking and unlocking his phone. He found himself increasingly fond of the image.

Remaining still, he reminisced for a while. Just as Victoria and the two kids finished

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brushing their teeth, they turned around and happened to catch him staring at his phone. With an expression that seems... somewhat infatuated.

Infatuated?

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This word left Victoria baffled for a moment, but she quickly became interested in what he was looking at.

What could make him look so infatuated?

With that thought in mind, Victoria walked up to him and asked, "What are you looking at?"

However, as Alaric noticed her approach, he quickly pocketed his phone.

Victoria didn't even have a chance to see what was on his phone before he put it away.

"What's so secretive that I can't see?" she asked.

When Alaric heard this, his lips curled up, and he smiled mischievously at her.

"What? Are you interested in what I'm looking at?"

Teased by him like that, Victoria averted her gaze and said, "Not really."

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Victoria didn't intend to inquire further in order to not appear interested in his matters.

She went back to tell the two kids to wash and dry their faces.

"All done. Let's go have breakfast."

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As Alaric approached, Victoria remembered something and asked, "When are we going back home?"

After all, the two kids were growing up, and they had to continue their education back home. They couldn't just abandon their studies while staying abroad.

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"I've told the men to deal with it," Alaric said.

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If he told his men to deal with the issue and did not give them any information, then he had to have encountered something bad.

It was not surprising. Although he had fought off Bane and saved Victoria, her identification papers were still with Bane.

Without any identifying paperwork, it would take some effort for her to get back to Corynthea.

That meant she should not even bother to think about heading home. However, it was exceedingly boring to stay in the villa all day long.

Not long after breakfast, the doctor arrived to change Alaric's dressings.

His wound was serious, so the doctor kept a stricter eye on it. Once the dressings were refreshed, the doctor passed on a few instructions about caring for the wound.

The doctor then checked Nicole's injury.

Once he was done, Terrance walked him out before bringing the two children to their

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rooms. Meanwhile, Victoria stayed to make sure Alaric took his pills.

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The bitter yet candy-looking pills were popped into his mouth. His brows immediately furrowed due to how bitter the pills were. Nevertheless, he forced himself to swallow them down since Victoria was staring at him.

It was such a bittersweet feeling.

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Now that he had taken his medication, Victoria felt like she had completed a third of her task for the day.

She was still worried about something, but since the person she would be talking to was Alaric, she hesitated.

Noticing her hesitancy to speak, he asked, "What's on your mind?"

She stared at him for a moment. In the end, she swallowed back the words lingering on the tip of her tongue.

"It's nothing," she replied with a shake of her head.

He silently stared back, not saying a word. It was clear that she wanted to tell him something, but if she did not want to speak about it now... Well, I can't just force her to

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speak up.

He would wait until she wanted to speak to him.

After an entire day of staying holed up, Victoria decided to head downstairs for a brief stroll after lunch.

She bumped into Terrance as he returned. Seeing him reminded her of the questions she had wanted to ask Alaric previously. Thus, she hurried over to him.

“Mr. Levane,” she called out.

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Judging by how fast she was walking to him when he had just returned, Terrance could tell she wanted something from him. Thus, he stopped walking.

“Is there something you need, Miss Selwyn?”

“Yes. I have a question.”

Victoria looked around to make sure there was no one within hearing distance before continuing, “Do you know why Alaric was hurt last night? I mean... who hurt him? What happened to the culprit?”

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In her mind, she was very subtle and tactful. However, he instantly knew what her actual intent was.

“Miss Selwyn, are you asking about Bane Morison?”

She was at a loss for words.

After a moment of speechlessness, she asked, “It really was Bane, then?”

She could hardly believe it. Why would Bane hurt Alaric this badly? Even if they were now enemies, they used to be friends.

How could someone hurt their friend that badly?

The entire time, Victoria had assumed Alaric's wounds were caused by those who worked for Bane.

She did not think...

"Miss Selwyn, who could have hurt him if not Bane? There aren't that many people who could get so close to Mr. Cadogan."

She bit her lip and fell silent.

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Since she was staying with Alaric, she knew that continuing to push for answers would only make Terrance dislike her.

However, she had never once thought of hurting Bane.

Victoria did not mind if others scoffed at her for being a "saint," but Bane had been a very special friend who helped out during an important phase of her life.

Although she did not continue to ask about Bane, Terrance was a perceptive man. It was impossible for him to be ignorant of her hesitance. He sighed. "Miss Selwyn, are you worried about Bane?"

"Pardon me, but you don't need to worry about him. No matter how nice he was to you, his recent actions had been inhumane. After all, he dragged you to a new country without even asking for your consent. Do you know what people call that? It's a kidnapping! If Miss Jones had not constantly hammered into our heads that you did not want to report him to the police, he might have already been sentenced to imprisonment for years."

She scowled in response.

“He’s just confused. Once he thinks it through, he would turn over a new leaf,” she argued.

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In Victoria’s eyes, Bane had helped her when she was at the lowest point in her life even

though his life was quite depressing as well. He had been suffering from a serious psychological disorder.

This was a very difficult time for him, so how could she abandon him now?

Once he snapped out of it, he could start a new life.

However, if he were imprisoned during this time, his life would be irrevocably ruined.

“Think it through?” Terrance found her statement laughable.

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“Miss Selwyn, if that were possible, he wouldn’t have done this. I say he’s mentally ill.

Unless he’s willing to see a doctor about it, he will never get better.”

A doctor?

She agreed with that; Bane really needed to be treated for his issues. He specifically needed therapy, if he were willing to go to therapy...

Her eyes lit up at that thought.

“Mr. Levane, do you think...”

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“It’s impossible,” he swiftly interrupted before she could finish her question. He was smart enough to know what she wanted to say. “Leave him be. He is likely bedridden right now. Even if he is willing to see a doctor, his subordinates would help him look for

one. Anyway, therapy isn't the only treatment he needs."

Her eyes darkened.

"Is that so?"

Victoria fell silent once more and did not bother him anymore.

"I'll leave you to your work, then. See you around."

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As he watched her glumly turn away from him, he felt disgusted by his response.

She had only wanted to help an old friend out of the kindness of her heart, but he...

Well, he was only speaking his mind. There was no way he could empathize with her on this.

Still, he should not have been so curt with her.

In the end, he spoke up to give a tactful twist to his previous words.

"How about this, Miss Selwyn? I'll help you keep an eye out and notify you if there's any

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news."

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Her eyes lit up once more.

'Really? That won't be too much work for you?'

He smiled. "It'll be fine, Miss Selwyn. I will do my best."

About ten minutes later, Terrance reported the conversation to Alaric.

Alaric scowled hard at the end of the report.

"He's worried about Morison?" he spat out.

Terrance solemnly nodded. "Yes, Mr. Cadogan. Is she not being a little too kind to him?"

He kidnapped her, so why would she want to help him seek treatment?"

Irritation swelled in Alaric upon hearing those questions.

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Alaric was injured. While Victoria was worried about him...

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Her worry had felt wonderful to him. It made him ignore his injuries since it all felt worth

1. it.

However, she was also worried about someone else.

That other party was also the man who had dragged her to another country.

Without Alaric's nostalgic feelings over their former friendship, Bane would never have gotten to where he was now.

"Should we stop holding back, Mr. Cadogan? Otherwise, Miss Selwyn will keep worryin

g about Bane Morison," Terrance asked.

"Hold back? What will we do?" Alaric narrowed his eyes as his voice trembled in anger.

"Despite the fact that his injury is not significant, she is still overwhelmed with worry for him. If we kill him, what would she think of me? Anyway, I have a family now. I have to stay true to the law."

Terrance immediately realized Alaric had misunderstood his words. He sighed. "Mr.

Cadogan, you're mistaken. I actually mean to cut off all contact between the two of

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them, making sure she can never hear any news related to him. That's all. I didn't mean..."

As his voice drifted into nothing, he reached up and made a strangling motion.

Alaric silently stared at him.

This man...

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Impatience rang in Alaric's voice as he looked away. "Enough. Tell me why should I get treatment for him anyway? What illness is he suffering from?"

"You mean Bane Morison?"

"Who else?"

"Well, I'm not too sure... From what Miss Selwyn said, he seems to be suffering from a psychological disorder."

"A psychological..."

Alaric squinted in through. How could it be a psychological disorder? When they were students studying together, Bane acted normal. He did not seem like someone who was suffering from a psychological disorder.

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That meant if anything changed, it would have happened after he moved to another country.

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Bane had cut off all contact after flying off. No one knew what happened to him during that time.

If Victoria said he was suffering from mental issues, then did it mean something bad had happened during that time?

What on earth happened?

He used to be a good friend of Alaric's, and he had taken great care of Victoria in the last five years. Jealousy was the most negative emotion Alaric could muster when it

came to Bane.

"Have the men investigate this. Find out what's going on," he ordered.

He wanted to know what psychological disorder Bane had been suffering that could have pushed him to kidnap Victoria.

Terrance had thought Alaric would have a plan to resolve the situation after letting

Alaric know about the conversation. He did not expect to be instructed to dig deeper into the case.

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What could he even dig up?

Even if Terrance really found out what was ailing Bane, was Alaric going to help his rival?

That was a ludicrous thought.

"Mr. Cadogan..." Terrance hesitated. "Are you serious about this?"

Alaric shot him a confused glance.

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It was an instruction to investigate, so why was Terrance asking if Alaric was serious?

"What is it?"

"In my opinion, even if something did happen to Bane, it is none of our business. More importantly, he nearly hurt Miss Selwyn, and he severely injured you. If not for him, none

of this would have happened."

"Yes, I know." Alaric nodded.

"In that case..."

"Are you unable to follow my instructions?"

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Terrance was at a loss for words. After all, he had been very blunt with his opinion. If Alaric were capable of being persuaded, he would not have asked Terrance to investigate Bane.

Why did it matter if Bane was traumatized as a young man?

How was it any of their business?

Everyone had been traumatized at one time or another.

However, Alaric had made up his mind, so Terrance could not say anything more. "I understand, Mr. Cadogan. Don't worry. I'll dig up every scrap of information on this if that is your wish."

Terrance soon left, leaving Alaric alone in the room.

His lips were so tightly pursed together that they nearly disappeared.

Terrance's words echoed in his mind. Was Victoria that worried about Bane?

Jealousy swelled in him. He could not resist getting to his feet to search for her.

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Victoria had been thinking about Bane ever since her conversation with Terrance.

Her children were currently watching cartoons with their phones in their hands.

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She had a phone as well, given to her by Alaric's men. The night they ran away, they had

been in such a hurry that she left her old phone behind.

Thus, she had no choice but to use the new phone provided by Alaric, along with the new number.

She had to wait until they flew back home before she could get a new SIM card for her

old number.

As she silently stood there, Summer wandered over to her.

“Victoria, everything has been wrapped up here, so the devil and I... Ah, I mean, Mr. Ludson and I will be leaving soon.”

They had only spent a brief moment together last night, but Summer had to leave already.

Victoria was reluctant to see Summer go, and it shone in her eyes as she glanced at Summer.

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“I thought you were staying for two more days,” she said.

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Summer stuck out her tongue in a gesture of disgust before apologizing, “I’m so sorry. I want to stay as well, but Mr. Ludson has spent too much time away from the company. If he doesn’t head back soon, the company would descend into chaos. I had been hoping he would leave without me, but... He insists that I go back with him.”

Victoria knowingly smiled upon hearing the explanation.

“Did he insist on that, or is it because you want to stay with him?”

Summer’s eyes went wide in response. “Are you mad, Vic? Why would I want to stay with him? I am only going with him this time because he helped me out this time. I can’t be that ungrateful. I also can’t just quit. It is somewhat impossible for him to find my replacement that quickly.”

Victoria understood the actual message, however. She smiled and did not try again to convince Summer to stay. “Okay. Safe travel. Thank you so much for coming all the way

here. Once everything is settled, let’s get together for a meal.”

Overwhelmed by sorrow, Summer flung arms around Victoria.

"I don't want to leave you, Vic," she sobbed.

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Victoria's eyes burned with tears as well. She tightened her arms around Summer and buried her face into Summer's neck to hide her hazy vision.

"I don't want you to leave either."

"I'll go looking for you as soon as I'm done with work," Summer said.

Something about the way Summer said that set alarms ringing in Victoria's mind.

"You're not going to quit, are you?"

When the two women broke off from their hug, Summer looked at Victoria with eyes still shimmering with tears and nodded. "I don't want to work there anymore."

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Victoria was stunned.

"You're really going to quit? Why? It's not because of me, right?" she asked.

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"It's not," Summer replied, shaking her head and wiping her tears away. She then looked

down at the floor. "You only gave me a chance to quit. Most importantly, I don't want to do it anymore."

Summer had not spoken of wanting to quit before, so why...

Victoria started blaming herself, worried that she was the cause of this.

"I'm serious," Summer said. "We've been friends for years. Surely, you know you can believe my words. I've always been complaining about the devil, right? He takes up so much of my time that I can't even go on matchmaking dates. If this goes on, I will never get married. My time with him has been exhausting. I do feel like quitting, so why not end it all once we head back?"

She had a long speech prepared because she did not want Victoria to feel guilty about anything.

Victoria knew that if she said anything that hinted at feeling guilty, Summer would spiral

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Into another lengthy explanation. Thus, Victoria nodded.

"Very well. Since you've made up your mind, I won't say anything more."

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They were adults. They should understand their own actions and desires. Be it for good or for bad, everything was fine as long as they could handle the consequences.

"Thank you, Boo," Summer said, hugging Victoria once more. "I just knew you'll support me in everything I do. Just watch me. Once I quit, I'll think of something else today. I plan on being my own boss. I'm fine with being a stall owner. At least, I'll still be my own

boss. I'll always have the last word."

"Okay. Go with what your heart says," Victoria said.

The two of them clung to each other and continued chatting for a few more minutes before Summer finally let her go with a look of reluctance on her face. "I'm off. See you around."

"See you."

After a pause, Victoria walked after her. "Why don't I send you off?"

Summer would love to accept the offer, but upon recalling the fact that Victoria would

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be in danger the moment she left the building, Summer nipped the idea in the bud.

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"Forget it. It's not safe for you out there. It's best that you stay where Alaric can protect you. What if Bane's men capture you when you leave to send us off?"

Summer sighed and continued, "It took so much effort for us to get you back."

It's true. Alaric also suffered serious injuries just to save me. Victoria thought.

"In that case... I'll see you to the door," she said.

Summer nodded. "Okay."

"When will you be leaving?"

"We're going to the airport now," Summer awkwardly replied.

Victoria was at a loss for words.

That meant Summer only came to say goodbye just before leaving for the airport.

"We bought the tickets last night. It was very late by the time I left. If I came back to tell you about it, I would be disturbing your rest. I thought of telling you about it today, but I was so relaxed now that you're safe that I overslept," Summer explained.

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Victoria did not know if she was meant to cry or laugh at that.

"Oh, you," she said with a sigh.

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“We had around 20 minutes from the moment I came over to say my farewells. We only have a few minutes now. Why don’t we spend the rest of the time hugging?”

Victoria had no objections to that suggestion.

When the two women were getting along, they would spend every single moment by each other’s side. Now, they only had about ten minutes to embrace each other.

When Alaric stepped into the room, he found the two women clinging together.

If he had not watched them grow up together and witnessed just how close they were, he might have mistaken Summer’s tight embrace as a sign that she was trying to steal Victoria from him.

As they seemed to be stuck in a fog of sorrow, he silently stood by the doorway and waited instead of disturbing them.

One minute passed.

Two minutes passed.

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Five whole minutes had passed.

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He raised an eyebrow in near-invisible impatience. Why was their hug taking this long?

What if Summer was going to steal Victoria from him?

“Ahem.”

The sound of someone clearing their throat snapped the two women out of their thoughts. Finding the voice familiar, Victoria looked up and, just as she suspected, the newcomer was Alaric.

He was staring at them. From the way he was standing, it seemed like he had been there for a while now.

Summer hurriedly let go of her.

“Mr. Cadogan,” Summer greeted.

Alaric grunted in response.

He strode over to them. “What were you talking about?”

While Summer was a woman, she somehow sensed that Alaric was jealous of her.

Despite her shock, she solemnly replied, “Nothing much. I’ll be leaving soon, so I was

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saying my goodbyes.”

It was now Alaric’s turn to be shocked.

“You’re leaving?”

They had just found Victoria last night. Now, Summer was leaving.

She nodded. “Yes. There is a lot of work waiting for Mr. Ludson and me back at the office, so we have to leave first. Thank goodness, Victoria is safe as well.”

He did not say anything after that and merely nodded. “When is your flight?”

“We’ll be leaving right after I finish saying goodbye. It will take some time to get to the airport.”

As soon as she finished speaking, Erik appeared in the doorway.

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The two men looked at each other. Erik spoke first. “Thank you for taking care of us for the last few days, but we have a lot of work waiting for us. We have to go now.”

“No problem.”

After a brief handshake, Erik then turned to Victoria and held out his hand.

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“It has been a while, Miss Selwyn.”

He was as handsome and proper as she remembered. She smiled. “Hello, Mr. Ludson.

Thank you for coming with Summer.”

She then reached out to shake his hand.

However, Alaric stopped the handshake before it could happen.

He grabbed her hand. “Your hands are as cold as ice. Why don’t you have more layers on?”

She was at a loss for words.

Summer was feeling equally speechless.

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She glanced down at Alaric’s and Victoria’s interlocked hands and glanced back up at Erik’s outstretched hand. She hurriedly stepped over to grab it.

“Oh, your hands are very cold as well, Mr. Ludson,” she commented.

Unfortunately, her social skills were so bad that she could not come up with anything but a burst of awkward laughter to break the tension as she repeated what Alaric said.

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Erik turned to her and narrowed his eyes as emotions warred within them.

His stare made her feel so uneasy that she did not know what to say next.

Victoria was overwhelmed by the second-hand embarrassment she felt upon witnessing that interaction. She had not expected Alaric to get jealous over a simple handshake. That was a little too much.

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At that, she tried to pull her hand out of his grip, but he only tightened his hand around

her as though he thought letting her hand go meant she would immediately head on over to shake Erik's hand.

Exasperated, she shot him a look and whispered, "Let go."

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Alaric pursed his lips as upset simmered on his face. He did not seem to like what Victoria just said to him.

She had no choice but to forcefully tug her hand away.

His eyes immediately shimmered with distress and pain.

That rendered her speechless.

As she tried to free her hand from his grip, Erik spoke up. "Mr. Cadogan, Miss Selwyn, we have to leave for our flight now. Farewell."

He then turned his hand to lock his fingers around Summer's fingers before leading her away.

"H-Hey!"

Summer had not expected to be dragged away so suddenly. When she eventually snapped out of her shock, she called out to Victoria, "I'll see you back home! Once I'm done with my tasks, I'll visit you."

Victoria waved at her. "Okay. See you back home."

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Now, Alaric and Victoria were the only ones left in the room.

After a few minutes of silence, Victoria blurted out, "They're gone. When are you going to let go?"

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He looked down at their linked hands and happily smiled. "Why let go? Can we only hold

hands when others are around?"

She stared down at their joined hands in silence. Then, she said, "It was just a polite handshake. Did you need to do this?"

"Yes."

Alaric turned to stare into her eyes. "I don't like it when other men touch you."

"He was not touching me. It was going to be a handshake. You wouldn't call that a touch," she emphatically said.

To her surprise, he retorted, "That won't do either. Even if you're only shaking his hand, you

would still have come in contact with his skin."

Victoria silently stared at him.

Forget it. She was too exhausted to argue any longer.

With eyes trained on her face, Alaric abruptly said, "Terrance told me you were asking

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about Bane."

She froze. If I had known Terrance would tell him about this, I wouldn't have asked about Bane. Gosh.

Now, Alaric was questioning her over the conversation.

It did not happen that long ago either.

"I shouldn't have asked him. I didn't think he would tell you so soon. Yes, I asked him about Bane. What about it?"

Was he going to lecture her about that?

Victoria saw him purse his lips.

A few moments later, Alaric solemnly asked, "Is your impression of me that bad?"

"What?" For a moment, she did not understand what he was trying to say.

"Are you saying that I'm not worthy of your trust? Is that why you direct your questions at other people instead of just asking me?"

She had thought he was interrogating her. To her surprise, his only concern was about trust. He thought that if she did not ask him those questions, it meant she did not trust him.

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At that, she instinctively opened her mouth to explain herself. "It's not like that. I just..."

"Perhaps you think I might do something to him?" he interrupted.

She silently stared at him in response.

The lack of a proper answer both vexed and worried him. "Speak!"

"What do you want me to say?"

Alaric frowned.

"I didn't ask you because I was afraid you would react like this. That's why I asked Terrance. Since he is unable to do as I ask, then I decided to put it out of my mind. I would never talk about this to your face."

Despite her explanation, he did not feel reassured at all. "Is he more important to you than me?"

Victoria was at a loss for words.

"If I had kidnapped you instead of him, would you have chosen to stay by his side

instead?" he asked.

The question shocked her to the core.

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She had never thought it was possible for Alaric to kidnap her. After all, when he bothered her in the past, he merely acted like a reckless fool at times. She never thought he would ever kidnap her.

However, she had also not expected Bane to kidnap her out of the blue.

Now that Alaric mentioned the possibility, she was snapped out of her dense mindset.

She soon calmed down, however.

Wait, no. She could not let herself get carried away. "That never happened, so the example you used means nothing."

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Alaric's eyes darkened when he heard her reply. "Is it because of the example or because you have no answer for me? Perhaps you're trying to say that your answer will be exactly what I had expected."

Victoria pursed her lips. She tried to imagine a world where Alaric had kidnapped her and forced her to live an isolated life with him and their children.

No way. She could not accept a life like that, even with him.

No matter who it was or how close they were, she was unable to accept a man who committed a crime like that.

With that in mind, she blurted out a frank answer, ignoring the possibility that she might

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hurt his feelings.

"You're right. If you had kidnapped me, I would not have stayed by your side."

There was a gloomy look in his eyes.

“Similarly, leaving your side doesn’t automatically mean I would be by his side. If I am with you, it is because I consented to it. No one could have forced me to do it.”

She had made her stance as clear as possible. As for what he would think of it, that was up to him.

Victoria then turned around and walked out of the room, leaving him alone and frozen in place.

Alaric only snapped back to reality several long minutes after her departure. What had he just said on impulse?

He frowned as remorse crept through his veins.

He had misspoken when he carved into his impulses.

She was right. It was her choice who she wanted to be with. No one could force her to do anything.

At that thought, he raced after her.

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Victoria had not walked that far away though, so he soon caught up to her. He grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her into an embrace.

“I’m sorry. I was too brash just now. Don’t be angry at me, please,” Alaric pleaded.

She shoved at him in response, but as she had accidentally shoved at his injuries, he let

out a muffled groan of pain.

In her anger, she had forgotten about his wounds. She promptly pulled away and glanced up at his face.

“Are you okay?”

Alaric’s dark eyes shone down at her. “I’m fine. Even if I’m not, I asked for it. I have to suffer the consequences. What I said was wrong. You are free to hit my wounds to vent your anger.”

He then grabbed her hands and placed them on his wounds.

Victoria’s face twisted in fright. The minute her skin touched the spot where his injuries were, she pulled her hand out of his grip. Still, the brief touch caused him so much pain that he broke out in a fit of cold sweat.

After her hands were free to move as she pleased, she frantically admonished, “Are you mad?”

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She helped him back to the room they had just left. Then, she unbuttoned his shirt to check on his wounds.

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Just as she expected, the bandages wrapped around his torso were heavily soaked in bright red blood. The contrast of the blood against the bleached fabric made her heart skip in fear.

It was only a few glances down at the stained bandages, yet she could feel her head start to spin. What did it say about the pain he was dealing with?

She pulled out her phone to call the doctor, but he snatched it before she could do it. “I misspoke, so this is my punishment,” he said. “Don’t call the doctor.”