

New Beginnings Chapter 1 - 1

Chapter 1

Gandra.

General Hospital.

“Congratulations. You’re pregnant. The baby is in good health.”

Victoria Selwyn’s hands clenched around the report as she dazedly stared at the doctor.

Pregnant? It was a happy surprise. She could not believe her ears.

“Remember to come in for regular appointments. Where is the father? Call him in. I have some instructions for him.”

The doctor’s words snapped her out of her thoughts. “My husband’s not with me today,” she replied with an awkward smile.

“Honestly, even if he’s busy, he should still be with his family,” the doctor exclaimed.

It was drizzling when she finally stepped out of the hospital. She stroked

her abdomen.

There is now a tiny life growing in there. A child that belongs to Alaric and me.....

Her phone buzzed. She pulled it out; it was a message from her husband, Alaric Cadogan.

‘It’s raining. Get an umbrella to this address.

She glanced at the address sent; it was L’Indigo Country Club.

What was this place? He had a meeting today, right?

Still, she did not question it too much and asked the Cadogans’ family

driver to send her to the country club.

“You may head back first,” she said to the driver upon arrival.

“Do I not need to wait for you, Mrs. Cadogan?”

She paused for a moment before shaking her head. “It’s fine. I’ll wait to head home with Alaric.”

Since she was here for him, she would head home with him.

With that, Carter, the driver, soon drove off.

The rain had started as a drizzle, but it was now a heavy storm.

With the umbrella held over her head, she walked to the entrance of the country club.

It was a luxuriously decorated golf club. She was stopped at the door.

“I’m sorry, miss, but please show me your member card,” the employee said.

She took a moment to think about her next action before finally messaging Alaric.

‘I’m here. When are you done with work? I’ll be waiting for you downstairs.’

Once she was done, she stood near the entrance with the umbrella. As she stared at the rain, she thought about the pregnancy report.

Perhaps she should tell him when he came out? Or should she wait to surprise him on his birthday?

She was lost in her thoughts. Unbeknownst to her, she was a laughingstock for a group of people upstairs.

They were pressed up against the window as they gazed down at her.

“She’s not your actual wife, but she’s quite good at it, Al. She is actually here with an umbrella because you asked. She doesn’t really think you would walk through the rain, right?” one of them asked.

“Is she so in love with you that she has forgotten all about logic?”

“What nonsense.”

A languid voice rang out from a corner of the room.

The speaker was a tall man with long legs and a cold face. His fair skin and wide, slanted eyes highlighted his incredible attractiveness. Dressed in a gray bespoke suit, he sat there with crossed legs.

He raised his hand, revealing the exquisite and luxurious watch on his wrist. “Hand it over.”

The friend who did the prank had no choice but to return the phone.

“Tsk. Are we giving back the phone that quickly?” someone commented.

“Enough. If Claudia wasn’t here, you wouldn’t even have a chance to lay a finger on his phone.”

The crowd continued to joke and laugh as they turned to look at the beautiful woman seated beside the man. She was dressed in a white dress which made her look kind and gentle.

She pursed her lip in a smile when she heard that. “All right,” she softly said. “It was wrong of you to use Al’s phone for a prank, and now, you’re making fun of me.”

The friends did not plan on letting up on their teasing as they called out, “Everyone knows you’re the most important person to Al, Claudia.”

“That’s right. Alaric would say that as well, right?”

When Claudia Johnson heard that, she could not resist glancing at Alaric.

Alaric smiled and did not deny it.

When the group saw that, the teasing worsened.

“I told you, there is no one more important to Al than Claudia!”

As they continued to tease, he glanced down and swiftly messaged Victoria.

‘I don’t need the umbrella anymore. Head home first.’

Victoria was puzzled when she received the message. ‘Did something happen?’ she messaged back.

She stared down at her phone for a long time, but there was no reply.

Perhaps he was really busy.

She decided to head back first.

“Wait.”

Someone suddenly called out to her from behind. She turned around to see two fashionable young women walking over to her.

The taller woman glanced at her and disdainfully asked, “You’re Victoria Selwyn?”

Since hostility was painted all over that woman’s face, Victoria did not hold back and briskly shot back, “You are?”

“My name is not important. What is important is the fact that Claudia is back. If you’re smart, you’ll get away from Alaric.”

Victoria’s pupils shrank in astonishment.

It had been so long since she last heard that name. So much time had passed that... she nearly forgot Claudia existed.

Her reaction was clearly noticed as the other woman shot her a scornful look.

“Why are you so shocked? Have you turned into an idiot after pretending to be Mrs. Cadogan for two years? Did you think the position is really yours?”

Victoria bit her lip as her face was pale white. The knuckles of the hand holding onto the umbrella were also turning white.

“Look at her face. Do you think she’s going to steal Claudia’s man out of spite?” one of the women said.

“Can she, though?”

Victoria walked away, not bothering to listen to what they would say next.

Their shouts were drowned out by the rain.

When she returned to the Cadogan Residence, Hector Bowen, the butler, was shocked to find someone soaked to the core standing on the doorstep. “Mrs. Cadogan!” he exclaimed when he made out who it was.

“What happened to you? Come in.”

Victoria was so cold that her limbs felt rather numb. In just a few seconds

after stepping into the house, she was surrounded by a group of servants wrapping her in a huge towel and drying her hair.

“Draw the madam a hot water bath!”

“Get a cup of tea ready.”

The servants were panicking so badly over how soaked she was by the rain that no one noticed a car driving through the gates, nor did they notice the tall figure standing in the doorway soon after.

That was until a cold voice rang out through the room.

“What happened?”

The sound of the voice made her jump from where she was sitting on the couch. Why was Alaric back?

Should he not be with his Claudia?

“The madam was caught in the rain, sir,” Hector said.

Caught in the rain? Alaric’s dark eyes turned to the petite figure curled up on the couch as he strode over.

He frowned when he properly saw the state she was in.

Currently, she was like a drowned rat. Her soft hair was limp and clung to her pale skin. Her usually pink lips were pale as well.

“What happened to you?” he harshly barked out as he scowled harder.

She waited until she had full control over her emotions before looking up at him and putting on a wan smile. “My phone died,” she explained. “On my way back, I bumped into a kid caught in the rain without an umbrella.”

His eyes suddenly went cold.

“Are you crazy?”

Her smile went stiff.

“You gave him the umbrella, and you ended up walking through the rain,” he continued.

“How old are you? Did you think I would praise you for doing that?”

The servants around them glanced at each other, too afraid to say a word.

Victoria’s lashes hung low. Her vision was blurred by tears by now.

She forced herself to keep quiet and hold her tears back.

It was doable until Alaric walked over and lifted her in a bridal carry. It was only then that she let her tears roll. A drop of tear fell on the back of her hand.

Chapter 2

Alaric shoved Victoria into the bathroom and left.

She kept her head down, waiting until he stepped out of the room before slowly looking up and wiping away the tears on her cheeks.

Moments later.

She locked the bathroom door and pulled out the hospital's report from her pocket.

After being soaked in the rain, the entire report was illegible with every word too blurred out to read.

She had planned on surprising him with it, but now it seemed like it was completely useless.

She had been with him for two years. She knew for sure that he was the kind of person who never let his phone leave his side.

He was also not the kind of man who would intentionally summon her just to tell her to go home.

The only possibility was that someone took his phone to message her so that she would be laughed at.

Perhaps there was a crowd of people laughing at her while she was foolishly waiting outside the country club with the umbrella.

She stared down at the illegible report for long moments before letting out a self-deprecating chuckle and slowly tearing it apart.

30 minutes later.

Victoria calmly walked out of the bathroom.

Alaric was sitting on the couch. His long legs were placed firmly against

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the floor as he focused on the laptop in front of him. He seemed to be working.

When he saw her, he pointed at the cup of tea beside him.

“Drink that.”

“Okay.”

She walked over and picked up the cup of tea. She did not drink it

immediately. Instead, she seemed to be preoccupied with some thought before calling out to him.

“Alaric.”

“What is it?” His voice was cold as he remained focused on the screen before his eyes.

She stared at his sculptured jaw and profile. Her pale lips twitched.

Couple Tere Pet Proced

However, he seemed to have gotten impatient as he snapped up to look at her. Their eyes locked.

As she had just taken a shower, her skin was pink, and her lips no longer looked as pale as before. Still, she looked rather sickly like she might shatter at a touch. Perhaps it was because she had just been drenched in the rain.

With one glance, his desire for her was aroused.

As for Victoria, her emotions were warring inside her, causing her to be oblivious to his emotions. Instead, she was trying to work out what to say.

Eventually, she came to a decision. “You... Mmgh!”

She had just opened her mouth when he grabbed her chin and kissed her as if he could not control himself.

His calloused fingers immediately turned her fair skin red.

His breath was hot like fire against her skin. She eventually ran out of breath. Just as she was about to push him away, his phone began to ring from where it was on the table.

They froze. The passion immediately vanished. He soon moved away, gently nibbling on her lips as if he was still unsatisfied. When he spoke next, his voice was hoarse.

“Finish your tea and rest early.”

He grabbed his phone and walked out of the room.

He had to answer the phone.

The balcony door slid shut.

Dazed by the kiss, she rested on the couch for a few moments before standing.

She did not head into the bedroom but walked toward the balcony.

The glass door was only half-closed. The chill night breeze carried Alaric's voice over to her.

“I won't leave.”

“What are you thinking? Be good and sleep.”

His voice was so gentle and tender.

She stood there and listened for a few minutes before chuckling.

Ah, so he could be gentle and sweet. What a pity the target of his affection is not me.

She turned around and walked into the bedroom. With a blank face, she sat down on the bed.

Their marriage was a mistake in the first place. It was just a deal anyway.

Two years ago, her family, the Selwyns, went bankrupt. She had fallen from grace overnight, becoming the laughingstock of the city.

The Selwyns had been too successful. They had made too many enemies.

After their fall, everyone was rushing to humiliate them.

Someone even bragged that he could help the family out with their debt as long as she gave herself to him.

Prior to the family's downfall, countless men tried to woo her. None of them caught her eye, however. As time went by, people started calling her high and mighty.

A group of men thought of fooling around with her now that she was in

disgrace. They started a secret auction to see who would get her,

When she was at her lowest and most humiliated, Alaric returned,
He took care of those rowdy men and made them pay a cruel price for
their actions. After helping the Selwyns pay off their debt, he then said to
her, "Let's get engaged."

She had stared at him in shock.

At that, he reached out to stroke her cheek.

"Why are you surprised? Afraid that I'll take advantage of you?" he asked.

"Don't worry. It's just a fake marriage. Grandma is sick, and she likes you.
She'll be happy to see us engaged. I'll help you bring the Selwyns back to
glory,"

Oh, it is to be a fake engagement. He does not like me. It is all to make his

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grandmother happy.

Even so, she agreed to marry him.

She knew he did not care about her, yet she still fell for him.

The engagement left her feeling conflicted.

The sudden change in their relationship from childhood sweethearts to an

engaged couple somehow felt weird to her.

He did not appear ill at ease though, attending every event and dinner party with her by his side. A year afterward, his grandmother Griselda Bates' condition worsened, which promoted them to move onto the marriage stage, and she became Mrs. Cadogan, the object of everyone's envy.

Everyone was saying that the pair of childhood sweethearts were meant to be together.

When she snapped out of her thoughts, she could not help but laugh at her thoughts.

Unfortunately, they did not get together for real. It was just a transaction between willing parties.

Suddenly, she heard Alaric speak. "You're still awake."

The spot beside her on the bed soon dipped down as her nose was filled with the refreshing notes of his scent.

"I have something to tell you," he said.

She did not turn around. She could guess what he was going to say.

"Let's get divorced," he continued.

Even though she had guessed it, her heart still skipped. Suppressing her

emotions and trying her best to keep calm, she asked, “When?”

Lying there, she sounded so calm and unaffected, as if she was merely talking about something normal.

Her reaction made him frown as he answered, “Soon. We’ll wait until Grandma’s done with her surgery.”

She nodded.

“Okay.”

“That’s it?” he asked after a pause.

Hearing that, she turned to glance at him. “What?”

Her eyes were so wide and pure that he was stunned by her question. He gulped before letting out a silent laugh.

“Nothing, you heartless woman.”

People liked to say marriage tied people together. They had been married for two years, yet she remained so calm when he suggested a divorce.

Well, their marriage was just a deal anyway. They both got what they needed out of it.

He was merely someone to frighten her suitors away with.

Two years. She probably would have cut ties with me earlier if not for Grandma.

He pushed away the uneasiness he felt at her calmness, lay down beside her, and closed his eyes.

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“Alaric.”

She abruptly called out to him.

His eyes snapped open. His deep eyes glowed in the darkness as he stared at her.

“What is it?”

Her lips opened and closed as she, too, had her gaze on him. In the end, she blurted, “Thank you... For the past two years.”

His eyes darkened when he heard that. He pursed his lips. “You talk too much.”

Did she?

She turned away from him, thinking she would not have a chance to do so after their divorce.

Chapter 3

When Victoria woke up the following morning, she discovered she had caught a cold. So, she reached into her drawer for some fever medicine

and poured a glass of warm water.

The instant she popped the pill into her mouth, a realization dawned on her, causing her eyes to widen and her face to pale. So, she swiftly dashed into the bathroom to spit it out. Then, she leaned over the sink, repeatedly spitting and rinsing her mouth to get every last remnant of the dissolved pill out of her mouth.

“What happens? Why did you rush in here? Are you sick?”

When Alaric’s distinct voice rang out from the doorway, Victoria looked up, startled.

Meanwhile, he had a frown on his face as he stared at her.

Once she caught his gaze, she quickly averted it, and after a moment of silence, she replied, “It’s nothing. I merely took the wrong pill.”

She then wiped away the drops of water on her lips and exited the bathroom.

However, Alaric watched Victoria walk out with a contemplative look. She’s been acting strangely since she returned home yesterday.

After breakfast, the couple left the house together.

Seeing her face ashen, he asked, “Do you want to ride in my car with me?”

After a walk in the rain the day before, Victoria woke up that morning feeling a little under the weather. However, before she could nod, his phone rang.

Hence, Alaric glanced down at it to see that it was a call from Claudia. He wanted to go back inside to answer the phone, but when he raised his

head, he saw that Victoria had already left.

Although married, they did not share the same interests; therefore, she did not routinely listen to his phone calls. That was their way of life for the past two years,

Nevertheless, her swift escape made his heart clench in agony that day.

Soon, the pain faded quickly when he answered the phone call.

Meanwhile, Victoria stood a few feet away and observed Alaric. From the look on his face, she knew who the caller was. His face was so gentle and soft; it was a side of him she had never seen before.

So, she took a deep breath and suppressed the envy swelling in her. Then, she walked toward the garage while pulling out her phone.

Five minutes later, he hung up the phone and turned to find nobody standing beside him. Then, he quickly glanced in different directions but could not find her.

At that moment, his phone buzzed with a new message. ‘I urgently need to get to the office, so I left first.’ As Alaric stared at the text message, his face darkened.

Meanwhile, Victoria forced herself to push past her discomfort and head into the office. The moment she sat down at her desk, she was sprawling out over the table.

My head hurts so bad!

Nonetheless, she knew she could not take pain medication, even if she wanted to, because she was pregnant.

Sometimes, she did not know what she was thinking, especially

12:56 Sun

Chapter 3 Took the Wrong Pill

considering that her marriage to Alaric was fictitious. Even if she were pregnant, Griselda would be the only person genuinely happy for her. In addition, Victoria knew that no one else, including him, would be happy about the birth of her child.

She had hoped that by telling him she was pregnant, he would accept the child and strengthen their marriage until yesterday. Nonetheless, when she learned that Claudia had returned, she realized he still felt the same way about Claudia as he had back then. If Alaric knew, his first instinct

upon hearing the news would be to advise an abortion, fearing for the future of his marriage to Claudia. Nevertheless, a voice inside her head told her to abort the baby immediately, or she would be left with nothing but shame.

“Miss Victoria,” The sweet voice of a woman calling out from nearby snapped her out of her thoughts. She looked up to see that it was Yasmin Labauve, her assistant.

Then, Victoria sat up straight and plastered on a perfect smile. “Good morning. You’re here.”

On the other hand, Yasmin did not return her smile but looked at her with a concerned expression. “Victoria, you don’t look so good. Are you sick?” Victoria was startled by the question, but she soon shook her head in response. “I’m fine. I didn’t sleep well last night. That’s all.”

“Really?” Yasmin did not look like she believed her. “You look really pale, though. Are you really okay? You should probably take the day off and see a doctor.”

“I’m fine,” Victoria replied. “Are you done with yesterday’s work?”

However, Yasmin was helpless against the constant redirection back to work. Ultimately, she handed over her pre-sorted documents from her

desk and poured Victoria warm water.

“Since you refuse to go to the doctor’s, drink this to keep yourself warm.”

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Victoria hired Yasmin, and while she was a dedicated employee, the two of them rarely interacted outside of work.

However, she was surprised by Yasmin’s concern for her. Then, as she took a few sips of the water, it warmed her heart. She had been feeling cold earlier, but after some warm water, she felt much better.

Still, Yasmin was anxiously staring at her. “Miss Victoria, why don’t I hand in the report today while you rest here?”

“It’s fine,” Victoria said, shaking her head. “I can do it.”

It’s only a mild fever, and I’m not that pampered. If I take time off and delegate my duties whenever I am sick, I will eventually become complacent. What will I do if I get sick in the future without anyone to help me?

Soon, Victoria sorted through her documents and walked toward Alaric’s office.

Her office was located relatively far from his. While it was usually fine, the

walk felt tiring that day, likely because she was sick.

Knock! Knock!

“Enter.”

She waited to hear his cold, deep voice before pushing the door open.

As Victoria stepped through the door, she saw another figure inside. It was Claudia, wearing a white dress that highlighted her slender waist. She looked like an angel, her supple hair falling to her waist with the sunlight streaming through the ceiling-to-floor window shining on her.

Meanwhile, Victoria went stiff when she realized who the other person was.

“Oh, Victoria, Claudia greeted. Following that, she walked up to Victoria with a broad grin. Before Victoria could even react, Claudia was embracing her.

Suddenly, Victoria’s body became even more rigid as she locked eyes with Alaric over Claudia’s shoulder.

He was leaning against his desk, staring intently at her with his dark eyes, but it was hard to tell what was happening in his mind.

When Victoria regained her composure, Claudia had already stepped

away from her.

I heard all about your situation from Alaric. You've had it hard." There was a look of distress on Claudia's face. "You must tell me if you need any help.

Chapter 3 Took the Wrong Pill

Victoria was surprised to hear that. Alaric had told Claudia everything?

However, she soon realized why that had been done. Everyone knew about her marriage to him, so there was no way they could keep it from Claudia.

Since it could not be a secret, he must explain himself clearly. Moreover, she owed Claudia.

Then, Victoria shoved aside the bitterness she felt and spread her lips in a smile. "Thank you. When did you get back?"

"I flew in yesterday," Claudia replied.

Yesterday? That means Alaric went to see her as soon as she returned.

Inevitably, Claudia is the one he cherishes the most in his life.

"Why do you look so pale?" Claudia suddenly asked. "Are you sick?"

Hearing that, Alaric, languidly leaning against his desk, suddenly turned to

stare at Victoria. A frown formed on his brow as he scanned her up and down.

“Is it because you got wet walking home in the rain last night?”

“Walking in the rain?” Claudia looked confused.

Victoria sighed and was about to explain when Alaric coldly snapped,

“Why are you forcing yourself if you don’t fool well? The company doesn’t desperately need you. Go home and rest.”

When Claudia heard that, she instinctively turned to glance at him. Why is he suddenly agitated?

Chapter 4

Victoria helplessly objected, “I’m not completely drenched despite the rain.

Moreover, I’m fine.” She then walked over to Alaric’s desk and placed the report for yesterday on it. “This is yesterday’s summary. I’ve sorted it up.

Now, I have work to do, so I’ll leave the two of you to your reunion.”

She glanced at Claudia, who immediately smiled at her.

When she left, Alaric was frowning hard.

“Alaric?”

He only snapped out of his thoughts when Claudia called out to him.

His reaction confused her, but she sounded kind and caring when saying,

“Victoria doesn’t look so well. She might be your secretary now, but she

used to be the precious daughter of the Selwyns before they went bankrupt. You cannot be too hard on her.”

Too hard on her? Alaric internally laughed. Who could be hard on that woman?

However, he did not say any of that; instead, responding with a grunt of acknowledgment.

Meanwhile, Victoria shuffled back to her office with heavy feet and a heavy head. As soon as she sat down, she could not help but slump over her desk. Suddenly, her head was spinning hard.

She lost track of time until she finally heard Yasmin’s voice.

“Victoria, why don’t you go home and rest?”

At that moment, Victoria felt so lethargic and sick that her only response was, “Yasmin, let me sleep for a while.” Following that, she immediately fell into a deep sleep.

She had a dream in which she was eighteen again. On that day, she and

Alaric had their coming-of-age celebration. So, their families decided to co-host the party. That evening, she specifically put on her favorite blue

dress, curled her hair, and had her nails done. She planned to confess her love to him.

After a long, fruitless search, she located him in the garden. As she walked over to him, she heard his friends teasing him.

“You’re an adult now, Al. Are there any girls you like? Maybe you can get engaged,” one of them said.

“Victoria’s quite nice. She’s always hanging around you,” another said.

When Victoria heard that, she instinctively stopped walking, wanting to listen to what Alaric had to say. After all, his answer was vital to what she would do next.

However, she did not hear his response as someone spoke up first.

“Victoria is impossible. Al only sees her as his little sister. Everyone knows

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the only one in his mind is Claudia.”

Claudia...

Then, Victoria snuck a glance at Alaric.

That evening, Alaric sat on the stone bench, his legs so long that they barely touched the ground. He had a faint smile and didn’t object to what they said.

“Indeed. Claudia is more feminine, gentle, and beautiful, but Victoria is only a little girl. Moreover, Claudia is Alaric’s savior.” The boy who spoke was Bane Morison, one of Alaric’s best friends. He loved teasing Victoria. Every time they met, he would insist on pulling on her pigtails.

He was also one of the people Victoria hated the most. I’m not a little girl!

“That’s right,” one of Alaric’s friends said. “The waters were so dangerous back then. If she had not jumped down to save you, Alaric Cadogan might not be alive today.”

Alaric nodded. Finally, there was a response from him as he hummed in agreement.

Under the moonlight, his face looked very calm. “The spot beside me will always be hers.”

Suddenly, Victoria’s heart literally shattered in two when she heard that.

She stood there dumbfounded as the blood drained from her face, turning her skin stark white. However, she did not expect her confession would be rejected before it was even given.

Claudia had saved Alaric’s life, and everyone was talking about it.

Customarily, heroes would rescue damsels in distress. In the case of Alaric

and Claudia, however, a young woman came to the rescue of a man.

On the other hand, Victoria was not aware of the matter.

She had also fallen into the river, resulting in a high fever. When she finally woke up, she had forgotten about the events and had no idea how or why she had fallen into the river. One of her classmates said she accidentally fell in because she was too playful.

However, it always felt like she had forgotten something. Unfortunately, try as she might, she could not remember anything about it. As time went on, she completely forgot about it.

Still, Victoria did not expect Alaric to be obsessed with the person who saved him.

It would have been great if I had been the one to save him.

Her dream self's emotions seemed to merge with her current emotions.

At that moment, her heart felt like it was weighed down by a boulder. Her head throbbed, and she mused, Why wasn't I the one who rescued him back then? If only... If only...

Suddenly, Alaric appeared before Victoria in the dream. His eyes were cold and emotionless. "Abort the baby, Victoria."

Meanwhile, Claudia stood beside him, her vine-like arms wrapped around his side.

“Are you keeping the baby because you want to ruin our love, Victoria?” she asked.

When he heard the word ‘ruin,’ his eyes went colder. He stepped forward and grabbed Victoria’s chin. “Behave, or I will make my move.”

His grip was so hard that it felt like he would shatter her jaw.

She struggled arduously but eventually woke up from the dream, her body

drenched in a cold sweat.

As soon as her eyes opened, she saw a busy highway outside the window.

Is it... a dream? Why does it feel so real?

Then, she heaved a sigh.

“Oh, you’re awake, Victoria.” Hearing the soft voice coming from ahead, she looked up to find Claudia staring at her worriedly. “Thank goodness. I was so worried something had happened to you.”

Why is she here? Realization soon struck Victoria. She turned to look at the driver. It was Alaric, and Claudia was sitting in the passenger seat.

When he heard Victoria had woken up, he glanced at her in the rearview

mirror.

“You’re up. What hurts? Tell the doctor everything when we’re at the hospital.”

Victoria’s heart had been pounding hard from her nightmare. She had finally calmed her heart down, but what he said made it race again from anxiety. “No. I don’t need to go to the hospital. I’m fine.”

He shot her another look when he heard that. “Why are you causing a fuss? Don’t you know you have a fever?”

“Yes, Victoria, you are burning up really badly. You have to go to the hospital,” Claudia said in agreement. “Al said you got wet walking home in the rain yesterday. What happened?”

What happens? Victoria stared at Claudia. Her pale lips moved, but she ultimately said nothing. She was definitely present for yesterday’s prank.

Why else would she inquire if not to imply something?

After a moment of thought, Claudia’s face turned worried as she guiltily asked, “Is it because yesterday—”

“Anyway, we’ll be going to the hospital first,” Alaric interrupted in his deep

and steady voice. “Rest for the next few days until you get better. You don’t need to head into the office during this time.”

Then, Claudia shot him a puzzled look for his interruption.

Meanwhile, Victoria lowered her eyes as a spine—chillingly icy look flashed in her beautiful eyes. He is very protective of the person for whom he cares the most.

It took a few long minutes before she finally looked up and responded, “I won’t go to the hospital.”

He frowned. Today, she seems incredibly stubborn.

“What’s your plan? How can you not go to the hospital when you’re sick?”

“I know my body,” she shot back with pursed lips.

Chapter 5

Victoria could not go to the hospital. The moment she did so, her pregnancy would be exposed. It sounded laughable, but she did not want anyone else to know about the baby. She tried to protect the last remaining shreds of her dignity. She knew her pride was already gone when she agreed to fake a marriage with Alaric. Right now, before him and the woman he loved, what sort of dignity did she even have? Even so...

Then, she glanced down but did not wish to disclose anything that would cause others to ridicule her.

Alaric scowled when he heard that. The car abruptly turned and screeched to a stop by the side of the road,

At that moment, Victoria thought he was telling her to exit his car, so she reached out to open the door.

Clack! The doors were immediately locked,

He was staring at her with a dark look through the rearview mirror. “Why don’t you want to go to the hospital?” he asked.

She had been acting strange since walking through the rain the evening before.

“I can visit a doctor myself if I don’t feel well,” Victoria calmly replied.

He narrowed his eyes dangerously when he heard that.

“Al, is it because of me?” Claudia hurriedly asked. “Why not... Why don’t I get off here while you take Victoria to the hospital? After all, her illness is quite serious. We cannot delay her treatment.” Following that, she leaned toward Alaric as if she wanted to unlock the car doors.

Victoria watched as he stopped her, holding her hand.

“Don’t say that.” Alaric frowned and glanced at Victoria before continuing,

“Don’t overthink it. It’s not because of you.”

Then, Claudia glanced down at their hands as an embarrassed glint flashed in her eyes.

Meanwhile, Victoria silently watched them. After Claudia turned to look at her, Victoria begrudgingly tore her eyes away from them.

“I’m sorry for the misunderstanding, Victoria,” said Claudia. “I thought you were angry at Al because of me. I’m so sorry.”

Victoria calmly glanced back at her. She would have thought Claudia was a manipulator if she did not owe Claudia for helping her once.

Nevertheless, Claudia was her savior as well.

Then, Victoria forced a smile. “It’s fine.”

“Are you unwilling to go to the hospital because you’re afraid of the hospital?” Claudia asked with a grin. “My friend opened a clinic of his own after returning from abroad. Why not go to his place?”

Chapter Pachyrathy

She then turned to Alaric. “What do you think, Al?”

He did not immediately agree to the idea. Instead, he frowned and asked,

“A clinic? Is it reliable?”

“Of course,” Claudia somewhat awkwardly replied. “If he wasn’t reliable, would I introduce him to you? Don’t you trust me?”

After a moment of thought, he nodded. “We’ll go there.”

Victoria frowned. ‘I-’

However, the car was already speeding away, and her objection was useless.

On the other hand, Claudia was even reassuring her. “Don’t worry, Victoria.

My friend’s a good man. He’s very kind and patient. I’ll ensure he knows beforehand that your treatment will be negotiated later, alright?”

Compared to the considerate and gentle Claudia, Victoria seemed to be the exact opposite. Despite her sickness, she still refused to go to the hospital; how very selfish and inconsiderate.

What else could Victoria say to that?

Thus, she kept quiet as the car continued on its way.

After arriving at the clinic, Claudia helped her out of the car, and she softly asked, “Does your head spin? If you feel sick, you can lean on me.”

Her voice was so very soft, and her supporting hands were too. The faint scent of jasmine lingered around her.

However, Victoria lowered her eyes in thought. Claudia is not only stunning but also a wonderful person. Moreover, she once rescued Alaric’s life. If I’m Alaric, I’ll probably fall in love with her too.

After Claudia’s friend arrived, she talked to him for a while. The man in the white coat glanced at Victoria, nodded at Claudia, and walked over to her.

“Hello, you’re Claudia’s friend, right? I’m Dominic Fagan.”

Victoria nodded in greeting. “Hello.”

“You have a fever?” His voice was gentle as he placed the back of a hand against her forehead.

With his unexpected proximity, she jerked to the side. Nonetheless, he found humor in her response. “I’m only testing your temperature,” he said.

Dominic then turned around and pulled out a thermometer. “Let’s get a reading of your temperature.”

Victoria accepted the thermometer.

“You know how to use it, right?” Alaric asked as he stood behind her.

His question rendered her speechless. However, she chose to ignore him.

What makes you believe I have no idea how to use a thermometer?

Nevertheless, her movement was sluggish because she was so sick that her head spun.

Once the thermometer was in place, Dominic told her to leave it there.

Seeing that, Claudia seized the chance to introduce her friend to Alaric.

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Chapter 5 Protect Her So–Called Dignity

“Al, this is Dominic. I mentioned you to him before over the phone. He’s an amazing doctor, but he loves his freedom so much that he decided to open a clinic instead when he returned. Dominic, this is Alaric. He’s-”

She paused before shyly continuing, “My friend.”

“Friend?” Dominic raised his eyebrows when he heard that. He glanced at Victoria before looking back at Alaric. “Hello, I’m Dominic Fagan. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

A few long moments passed before Alaric shook Dominic’s hand. “Alaric Cadogan.”

“I know.”

There was a mysterious smirk on Dominic’s face as he suggestively said, “Claudia talks about you often. She has a very high opinion of you.”

“Dominic!” Claudia’s cheeks immediately blushed red as if that remark struck a chord.

“What? Am I wrong? You’re always singing his praises in front of everyone.”

“Enough. Don’t mention it.”

Alaric glanced at Victoria as the other two spoke.

She was sitting there with half-lidded eyes. Her hair hung low over her forehead, blocking her eyes from view and hiding any signs of her emotions. She silently sat there, calm and unbothered, as if she were an

outsider.

Then, his face instantly darkened upon seeing that.

Five minutes later, Dominic took the thermometer from Victoria. He

frowned. “You’re running a little high. I’ll give you a shot.”

Victoria’s head immediately snapped up. “No shots.”

Dominic looked at her and smiled. “Are you afraid it will hurt? Don’t worry. I’ll be gentle.”

Claudia nodded in agreement. “Your health is vital, Victoria.”

Still, Victoria shook her head and insisted, “I don’t want any shots or medication.”

Her stubborn attitude made Alaric frown once more.

“Our only option is to bring your temperature down externally. I’ll tell the nurse to gather what you need. For now, put a cool, wet towel on your forehead. We don’t want your temperature to go higher.”

When Dominic left the room, Claudia said, “I’ll help him.”

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

Meanwhile, Victoria's head was still spinning. She wanted to grab the wet towel to place it on her forehead, but she could not muster a single ounce of strength.

Then, Alaric, who had been relatively silent the whole time, abruptly spoke

1. up.

“Melodramatic!”

Chapter 6

Melodramatic?

Victoria paused and chuckled to herself after a moment. “Of course, I can't match Claudia's thoughtfulness for others.”

The words slipped out before she could even think twice.

Alaric was stunned, and so was she.

What am I even saying?

While she regretted saying the wrong thing, he lifted her chin and looked into her eyes with his deep black ones. Then, he narrowed his eyes, and his gaze was as sharp as a hawk's.

“Are you jealous of her?”

Her eyebrows twitched. She felt a bit anxious and wanted to brush his hand away.

“What nonsense are you talking about?”

However, she had no strength in her hands, and when she tried to push, her movement felt weak.

This action made him raise his eyebrows and hold her wrist in amusement. “Are you so weak?”

“You’re weak!” Victoria retorted, then pulled her hand back. Since she used too much force, her body fell backward onto the couch, and she couldn’t get up. She was really too weak. Alaric stood there, looking at her with a complicated expression. So, he went to the restroom, filled a plastic basin with water, and returned with a towel. Afterward, he put them on the chair next to her.

He soaked the new towel in cold water, wrung it out, and wiped her with it.

Chapter 6 Wiping Your Body Inside

“What are you doing?”

Seeing him approach her with the towel, she instinctively moved away,

He grabbed her shoulder, and his handsome brows furrowed. “Don’t move;

I'm cooling you down."

She wanted to say no, but when the towel touched her skin, a cold feeling rushed over her, and she couldn't refuse.

Her body temperature was high, and it was better to cool down.

After all, it was only physical cooling...

Thinking this, Victoria let him do as he pleased.

Alaric wiped away the sweat from her forehead, then wiped her cheeks.

As he wiped her, he thought of something, and his lips curled up as he said softly, "Victoria, you're really something."

His words made her eyelids twitch.

"What?"

At that moment, his eyes were as deep as black diamonds. Then, he snorted and said, "What are you pretending to be stupid for? This is my first time doing this for others, so you really are something."

With that, Alaric moved his hand on her shoulder to her collar and pulled it open, revealing snow-white skin. He then inserted the wet towel inside.

At that, Victoria's face changed slightly, and she grabbed his hand. "What are you doing?"

"I'm wiping your body inside," he answered righteously.

However, she was anxious and embarrassed as she pulled her collar back.

“No, I can do it myself.”

However, he looked at her movements and gradually frowned.

“Why are you upset with me?”

His hand didn’t move, and he still held the wet towel over her chest. From a certain angle, it looked like his hand was on...

If someone else saw this...

“I’m not upset with you. I can do it myself.”

He still frowned, looking displeased as he stared at her.

“Are you-” he began.

Bam!

Before he could finish his sentence, a loud noise sounded from outside the door. Alaric and Victoria looked toward the door to see Claudia frantically

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Chapter 6 Wiping Your Body Inside

picking up some things from the ground.

His hand froze mid-air and withdrew it after a moment, looking expressionless. Victoria simply lay there, smirking a little.

Meanwhile, Claudia quickly gathered her things and walked inside, smiling gently at Alaric and Victoria as if nothing had happened.

“I dropped something earlier because I wasn’t holding it properly. I didn’t scare you guys, did I?” she said.

He pursed his lips and was about to say something, but Claudia approached him and stretched out her hand. “Let me do it.”

Chapter 6 Wiping Your Body Inside

Then, he said nothing and handed her the damp towel.

“Dominic already explained everything to me, so you can leave Victoria to

1. me. Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of her,” she said.

Hearing this, Alaric looked at Victoria, lying motionless on the bed like a corpse, before nodding. “Okay.”

Soon, he left the room, closing the door behind him.

The room was quiet momentarily before Claudia rinsed the towel again and walked toward Victoria with it.

“Victoria, let me help you wipe your body,” Claudia said gently.

Victoria was indeed too weak to do it herself. “Shouldn’t we call a nurse?

This is too much trouble for you,” she suggested.

Claudia smiled softly. “It’s no trouble. A nurse won’t do it as well as I.

Moreover, I can do it as long as you don’t mind if I see you naked.”

With things at this point, what else could Victoria say? She could only nod with a smile.

After she agreed, Claudia leaned over and unbuttoned Victoria's clothes.

To avoid any awkwardness, Victoria closed her eyes, unaware of Claudia's scrutinizing gaze, as Claudia unbuttoned Victoria's clothes.

Claudia bit her lip, and her face turned ugly.

If she hadn't been mistaken, Alaric had held a damp towel earlier, intending to help Victoria wipe her body. He had even opened her collar

1. up. Since when did their relationship become so intimate? Did something happen between them when she was abroad that she didn't know about?

Claudia's eyebrows furrowed slightly as she felt a bit uneasy.

As for Victoria's body, Claudia had to unbutton her clothes to realize that her figure was impressive. Even though Victoria was lying down, certain parts of her were very blessed, and her skin was not pale but a relatively soft pink color, making her look very alluring. Even though Claudia was a woman, she could see the perfection of Victoria's body. She bit her lower lip, unable to restrain herself as she whispered, "Thank you for everything you've done for me these years."

Victoria's eyes were closed, and she found the physical cooling effect quite compelling; the feeling of the liquid being wiped on her body was refreshing. The heat on her body dissipated a lot. When she opened her eyes, she met Claudia's beautiful gaze.

"Thank me?" Victoria asked.

Claudia nodded and said, "Yes. Although it may seem like Al married you in a set-up marriage to help you through difficult times, I know that his married status has shielded him from unwanted attention in the past two

years. So, I want to say thank you. Otherwise, when I'm back, dealing with all those cheap suitors around him would be a real hassle."

At these words, Victoria was taken aback. She wasn't dumb and could tell what Claudia was trying to say. Claudia started by expressing gratitude but then went on to remind her that her marriage with Alaric was a sham. Claudia cautioned her to keep her expectations low, pointing out that she was not Alaric's wife.

Victoria pursed her lips and said nothing. Claudia wiped her off for a while and helped her put her clothes back on. She then asked tenderly, "Feeling better? Would you like some water? I'll pour you a glass."

Victoria was indeed a bit thirsty. "Yes, please."

Chapter 6 Wiping Your Body Inside

Claudia went to pour her some water, and Victoria drank it all. Her throat finally felt better. She looked up at Claudia and said what was on her mind, “Actually, you don’t have to worry about Alaric and me. He will always keep your position as his wife because you saved his life. No one can replace that. You also did me a favor, and I won’t forget it.”

Chapter 7

Victoria spoke plainly and straightforwardly, unlike Claudia’s polite but indirect approach.

Suddenly, Claudia felt awkward. “I—I didn’t mean that.”

Nonetheless, Victoria didn’t bother with her and changed the topic. Before leaving the clinic, Dominic gave her some medicine. He advised Claudia, “Although your friend doesn’t want to take medicine, she should try to drink some if possible. I prescribed traditional medicine, and it won’t harm her body. Only drink it a few times.”

“Okay.”

Soon, the three of them left the clinic and returned to the Cadogan Residence. As soon as they pulled into the driveway, Victoria, still in discomfort, attempted to exit the vehicle. All she wanted was to return to her room and sleep it off. Unfortunately, she stumbled and nearly fell

forward as she stepped out of the car. Then, Alaric quickly caught her by the arm and frowned. “You’re in this state, yet you still refuse to take medicine or get a shot. You’re something else.”

Claudia followed them out of the car and saw their hands touch. She hurried over and helped Victoria. “Let me help her, Al.”

She assisted Victoria into the house, and when she saw the maids, she greeted them. The maids looked at Claudia with surprise in their eyes.

“Did I see wrong? Wasn’t that Miss Johnson?”

“Who is Miss Johnson?”

Most of the long-serving maids in the villa knew Claudia, but some newer ones didn’t.

“Claudia Johnson. She’s the woman that Mr. Cadogan likes. Don’t you know that?”

“Mr. Cadogan likes her?” The young maid’s eyes widened. “Isn’t Mr. Cadogan already married?”

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“Most marriages within wealthy families are only business deals. No real love involved,” said the older maid, who had spent many long years in the

Cadogan Residence and spoke confidently. “You guys are new here, so you don’t understand. However, I was there when it all happened. Claudia isn’t any random woman Mr. Cadogan likes. She actually saved his life. She went abroad to study for some time, and he’s been waiting for her ever since.”

“So, why did Mr. Cadogan marry someone else?” asked one of the listening maids.

“Well, that’s because Old Mrs. Cadogan got sick and wanted to see him settle down and start a family. He had no choice but to find someone else.

At that time, the Selwyn Family had gone bankrupt, so you know how it goes,” the older maid finished with a sly smirk. “It’s a secret within

upper-class society. Not many people know about it, so don’t spread it around.”

“I actually thought Mr. Cadogan and his wife were really in love. I had no idea it’s all merely an act,” one of the other maids said, sounding disappointed.

“Of course, it is all an act. Don’t be so naive,” the older maid responded.

As they were about to say more, a cough interrupted them. They turned around to see Hector standing there, his face dark and stern expression.

“Don’t you have work to do?” he asked, and the group dispersed like startled birds.

Once they were gone, he stood there. He was a man in his fifties with gray hairs in his eyebrows. He furrowed his brow when he heard that Claudia had returned.

Chapter 7 Pour Away the Medicine

That explains why the madam had been acting strangely last night.

Meanwhile, Claudia helped Victoria back to her room.

“Thank you,” Victoria said.

“Don’t mention it,” Claudia replied with a smile. “You should get some rest now.”

“Okay.” Victoria took off her shoes and lay down. That was when she noticed Alaric entering the room slowly, his eyes wandering carelessly over her until they landed on Claudia.

“Shall I send you home?” he asked. After all, Claudia was in the Cadogan Residence and had no reason to stay there. So, she nodded. “Sure, thanks.”

Before leaving, she glanced around the room and noticed a handcrafted men’s suit on the coat rack outside. Only Alaric would wear that style.

Suddenly, her face turned a little paler, and she silently followed him with

Chapter 7 Pour Away the Medicine

her lips pursed. Once everyone was gone, Victoria opened her eyes and looked up at the white coiling, feeling lost.

What should I do about the child?

Being pregnant was not like anything else. She could hide her feelings for him well for a year, two years, or even 10 years, but what about being pregnant? She couldn't hide it when the time came for her belly to show.

The more she thought about it, the more her head spun, and she gradually fell into a long, deep sleep.

In her dream, Victoria felt someone undoing her collar and then something cold covering her body. Her body was hot, and she felt comfortable. With a sigh, she instinctively grabbed the person's arm with her arms and legs. Then, she heard a muffled groan and heavy breathing. Her neck was held roughly but gently, and her lips were wetly covered. Soon, something probed into her mouth.

She frowned and bit down on the foreign object, feeling the taste of blood in her mouth and the man's painful gasp. Then, she had been pushed aside before someone forcefully pinched her cheek. She faintly heard the

person say, “I’ve pampered you too much, haven’t I? You even bit down on me.”

She winced in pain, grumbling and pushing away the person’s hand before falling into a deep sleep.

When Victoria woke up, it was already evening.

A maid was by her side, who was delighted to see her wake up. “Mrs. Cadogan, you’re awake.”

The maid approached her, placing a hand on her forehead. “Thank goodness you’ve finally cooled down, Mrs. Cadogan.”

Victoria looked at the maid before her, thinking of specific fragmented memories. Then, she asked, “Have you been caring for me this whole time?”

The maid’s eyes sparkled while she nodded in response. As soon as she heard that, Victoria’s hopeful expression faded, and she looked away.

Those fragmented memories led her to believe that Alaric had been caring for her the entire time, but it wasn’t him.

Victoria was lost in thought when the maid brought a bowl of medicine over. “Mrs. Cadogan, it’s good that you’re awake now. The medicine is still warm. You should drink it now.”

The pungent aroma of traditional medicine filled the air, causing Victoria

to frown and instinctively avoid it.

“Mrs. Cadogan, please drink it while it’s still warm. It will be cold in a while,” the maid said, bringing the bowl closer to her.

Victoria moved back, turning her head away. “Put it down there first. I’ll drink it later.”

“You-”

“I’m a little hungry. Can you go downstairs and get me something to eat? Don’t worry; I’ll finish the medicine when you return with food.” She had slept for a long time and was really hungry now.

The maid thought for a moment before nodding. “Okay, I’ll go downstairs and get something for you. Please drink the medicine, Mrs. Cadogan.”

“Yeah...”

The maid eventually left, and Victoria lifted the covers and climbed out of bed. She carried the dark traditional medicine and walked to the bathroom to pour it down the toilet. As she watched the medicine flush away, leaving no trace behind, she breathed a sigh of relief. Then, she wouldn’t have to be cajoled into drinking it.

She straightened back up with the empty bowl before turning around, only to see that Alaric had arrived without notice. Leaning against the

bathroom door, he stared at her with sharp eyes. “What are you doing?”

Chapter 8

Victoria’s heart skipped a beat at that moment, and her eyes flickered with panic. She felt caught in the act. However, she quickly calmed down and pursed her pale lips. Then, she replied honestly, “Didn’t you see it all?” Her straightforward attitude caused Alaric’s probing gaze to soften a little. He walked over and stared at the empty medicine bowl in her hand. “I had the kitchen labor over this medicine, and you pour it all out like that?” She rolled her eyes at him. “I already told you I’m not drinking it.” With that, she left with the empty bowl. However, he followed her out and asked in a voice clear and sharp, “Did you intentionally go out in the rain yesterday?”

Hearing this, Victoria hesitated, then shook her head, denying it. “No, why would I do something like that?”

Still, Alaric remained suspicious as he continued scrutinizing her. “Really? Then, why did you refuse to go to the hospital? Why are you refusing to drink the medicine now?”

Nevertheless, she could only explain nonchalantly, “The medicine is too bitter. I don’t want to drink it.”

“Is that all?” he narrowed his eyes.

As if he had thought of something, he persisted in saying, “Yesterday—”

He had wanted to ask about the text message and whether she had noticed anything, but after thinking it over, he felt it was impossible. After all, she didn’t even enter the club the other day, so how could she know? Moreover, Victoria didn’t want to keep hashing things out with him because she feared letting something slip. She had secrets now and didn’t want him to know.

At that moment, the maid came in with food, so Victoria took the opportunity to start eating. Since she was still recovering, the maid had prepared light, liquid food for her. However, Victoria had no appetite and only ate a little before putting down her bowl, which the maid soon came to collect.

Alaric watched by the side as his thin lips pursed into a straight line. He didn’t know if it was his imagination, but he felt everything was off. The whole room felt wrong, and even he was odd somehow. Although he had never had a good temper, he rarely felt so frustrated and restless.

Suddenly, he felt like the air in the room wasn't circulating properly, so he turned and left.

Once he was gone, Victoria's facade crumbled, and she slumped down, staring at her toes. Before going to sleep, the maid brought her another bowl of medicine. Victoria realized he wasn't home then, so she decided not to pretend anymore. Then, she spoke frankly, "I don't want to drink it. Furthermore, you don't need to make it again later."

The maid held the bowl of medicine, looking slightly confused. Victoria looked at her flatly as she added, "If there's nothing else, you should go to rest early. I'm tired today."

Then, the maid blinked in bewilderment and walked out of the bedroom.

On the other hand, Alaric didn't return to the room. The bedroom was quiet, with only her alone in it. Due to the fever, she experienced some lightheadedness when she lay down. Her head was heavy, but her mind was clear. He isn't back... It's obvious where he is.

Then, she turned over and closed her eyes with only one thought. If I had been the one to jump down to save him, would we still be divorced?

Unfortunately... She couldn't turn back time.

Soon, Victoria fell into a drowsy state again, with a tear slipping down her cheek that went unnoticed by herself.

In the middle of the night, she felt the mattress being pressed down and wondered if he had returned. However, her consciousness was soon overwhelmed by boundless darkness.

The following day, when she woke up and turned over, her first reaction was to reach out and touch around next to her. Nevertheless, all she could feel was coldness.

So, she pursed her lips, and the light in her eyes gradually sank.

Early in the morning, the maid brought food and a bowl of medicine again.

early in the morning. When Victoria smelled the pungent medicinal scent, she furrowed her eyebrows. The maid said, “Madam, this medicine-”

Nonetheless, Victoria couldn’t stand it anymore, and her tone became harsh. “Didn’t I say not to make it again? Why did you bring it up here?”

She was usually gentle, so the sudden severity surprised the maid.

However, Victoria realized her emotions were out of control and

immediately came to her senses. She reached up and pinched her brow, saying, “Sorry, I’m not feeling well. Please take this medicine away.”

The maid could only take the medicine away. Back in the kitchen, Hector saw the bowl of medicine being brought back and frowned hard. “Does

the madam still refuse to drink the medicine?”

The maid nodded and then explained what had happened earlier. Hearing the maid’s dissatisfaction in her tone, Hector said sternly, “You know how well she treats us usually. It’s probably because she’s sick, so her mood isn’t good. Don’t hold a grudge against her because of this.”

Hearing the housekeeper’s stern lecture, the maid blushed and quickly shook her head. “No, no, how could I hold a grudge against her because of this?”

“That’s good, then. No matter what, she’s still Mrs. Cadogan to us.”

Still Mrs. Cadogan? Didn’t they say yesterday that Claudia Johnson is the

Chapter The

one Mr. Cadogan likes? Wouldn’t the ‘Mrs. Cadogan’ role be replaced with Claudia soon?

While the maid was lost in thought, a cold voice suddenly interrupted, “She still doesn’t want to drink it?”

Hector and the maid were stunned as they looked up at the person who had arrived.

“Sir...”

Alaric stood there with a cold face, holding a suit and his car keys. He had already had breakfast and was getting ready to go to the office when he saw the maid’s tray with the bowl of medicine still full. Thus, he stopped to

ask Hector about it.

Hector nodded. “Yes, sir.” Then, he added, “Sir, what is the medicine for?”

Alaric disliked the fact that Victoria kept refusing to take medicine. She

didn’t take it all day yesterday, and now she still won’t take it today?

“It’s for reducing fever,” he answered.

Relieved, Hector thought it was not a big deal since it only reduced fever.

However, the maid behind him was surprised when she heard it was to reduce fever. Suddenly, she blurted out, “Oh, it’s for reducing fever? I—I thought it was for-” She didn’t finish her sentence before feeling Hector and Alaric’s gazes on her.

The maid realized she couldn’t say anything more and quickly changed her words with a smile. “Anyway, as long as the madam is fine.”

unfinished sentence contained much information. “What do you mean?” he asked.

Startled by his sharp tone, the maid could only lower her head and whisper, “I’m not sure. I only saw what looked like a hospital report while cleaning the bathroom trash can yesterday.”

Hearing that, he narrowed his eyes dangerously. “What kind of hospital

report is it?”

The maid shook her head. “I’m not sure. It was torn up and seemed to have been soaked in the rain. I only saw a few words on the report while cleaning up.”

Alaric then asked, “Where is it?”

Chapter 9

The maid’s face instantly turned pale in response to Alaric’s query. “I’ve already disposed of the report, sir.”

Suddenly, a frown etched on his face, and he snapped, “What did you say?!”

She was so frightened by his gloomy aura that she was on the brink of crying. In a panic, she explained, “I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t throw it away on purpose, but the report was pretty torn up, so I threw it away without much thought-”

The maid was not the type to delve into something the owner threw.

Furthermore, Alaric would usually shred documents that contained highly confidential information. After all, she relied on her job to make ends meet, so she disposed of the report without giving it much thought that day.

Over the past two days, she had been sending Victoria medicine, thinking

it was for her illness. However, it turned out that the medication was intended to treat fever.

Meanwhile, his brows furrowed at what the maid said. Then, he realized that something was amiss with his wife. Even if she had given the umbrella to someone else, she could have sought shelter and called the driver to pick her up or waited until the rain stopped before returning home. Why did she have to run home in the rain?

At that moment, Hector walked toward Alaric and asked with concern, “Sir, is Mrs. Cadogan alright?”

Before saying anything, Alaric handed him the car keys and his jacket. “I’m going upstairs for a while.”

Then, Hector quickly took them without a word.

Meanwhile, Victoria intended to rest after the maid had left, but she was interrupted by a phone call.

It was a call from the secretary of Labauve Group’s vice president, who wanted to discuss the recent project she had been working on. Due to her absence from the office the day before, nobody was available to fill in for her.

After the call ended, she rubbed her brows. The office is busy, and after

being gone for a day, I found that I had a lot of work to catch up on. I have no choice but to start working today. Then, she pulled out her laptop, but as soon as she logged into her email, she heard footsteps coming from the door.

Victoria assumed it was the maid, so she ignored the sound and clicked on her email to start working. Suddenly, she heard a pause in the footsteps and felt a faint, cool breath beside her, so she turned to see who it was.

With a single glance, her gaze locked on Alaric's obsidian eyes.

She was startled at the sight of him. "What are you doing here?"

When he heard that, he pursed his lips lightly and replied, "This is my room." His voice was unwelcoming and distant.

Nonetheless, Victoria was taken aback by his tone and questioned subconsciously, "Did someone upset you? Why do you sound so moody?"

"Upset?" Alaric furrowed his brows. Why does her question sound so ridiculous? Where could I have been early in the morning that caused me to become so upset? After pausing for a moment, seemingly lost in thought, he deadpanned and blurted, "I was home last night."

At that moment, she gaped in shock at his response.

Then, he stared at her. “Why are you surprised? I was lying beside you last night. Weren’t you aware of that?”

After hearing that, Victoria pursed her lips without a word. It turns out that the sensation I had last night of the mattress being pressed down was not my imagination. Remnants of sleep still clouded her mind when that happened, and when she woke up to feel the coolness on the other side of the bed, she thought Alaric hadn’t come home all night.

When she learned he was at home, she felt excitement rising in her chest.

“I thought you wouldn’t come home.”

It was after her sentence that they both went silent.

Even though Claudia had only been back for two days, their relationship had become awkward. Despite that, none of them was willing to address the elephant in the room. The two seemed to be avoiding the subject tacitly, but the reason for their silence was known only to them.

After some time, Alaric suddenly questioned, “Why aren’t you taking medicine?”

Why does he bring it up again? Victoria returned her attention to the laptop screen as if nothing had happened. Then, she explained, “I didn’t

feel like taking it yesterday, and since I felt so much better today, I decided I no longer needed it.”

Suddenly, her calm appearance made his lips twitch, and he inquired, “Really? What about the report, then?”

At that moment, her hands stopped scrolling the mouse when he mentioned ‘the report.’ Victoria almost thought she had misheard him, but the tingling of his breath beside her was proof that he had said those words out loud.

On the other hand, Alaric noticed how her fingers paused abruptly when ‘the report’ was mentioned. Due to that, he narrowed his eyes skeptically. She’s trying to hide something from me.

After a moment, she recollected herself and raised her head to meet his

eyes. Her gaze was doubtful, and she asked calmly, “What report?”

He merely stared at her in response. She’s giving a convincing performance; she looks and sounds completely natural, from her expression and gazes to her tone. If I hadn’t noticed her subtle actions earlier, I would have been duped by her facade.

While staring intently into Victoria’s eyes, Alaric questioned, “I am the one who initiates the inquiry. So, what report are you referring to?”

Hearing that, she was stunned for a moment. “Yes, you were asking me

that, but I'm not sure what report you refer to."

The mere mention of 'the report' throws me off guard, and my first thought is that he must have seen it. So, did he learn about my pregnancy?

Nevertheless, Victoria quickly calmed herself down.

Since the Selwyns declared bankruptcy, she had grown from a pampered

young lady to a well-respected secretary. Even the presidents of companies collaborating with Cadogan Group greeted her courteously when they saw her. They didn't do that simply because she was Alaric's wife but because they acknowledged her abilities. Two years of training and experience molded her into a completely different person. She was no longer the young lady who would panic and get flustered when things were messed up.

I've torn the report into pieces; even if I hadn't, the rainwater would have washed away any traces of the words it contained. In addition, due to prolonged exposure to moisture, the report's contents would be illegible.

After running a mental analysis, she completely calmed down.

Meanwhile, his lips curled into a half-smile. Then, Alaric took a seat in front of Victoria, and the two exchanged glances.

They were childhood sweethearts. After all these years, how could he have missed her dramatic transformation over the last two years?

When Alaric first approached Victoria about working for the company, he intended to foster her development and independence. Within two years, she had matured into the person he had envisioned her to be, and she even became his ideal right-hand woman. Moreover, she could speak calmly in front of hundreds of people, let alone in front of him.

At that thought, he squinted his eyes and asked, “Are you sure you don’t know? Do you think I don’t know you?”

However, she met his eyes fearlessly. “Is that so? Do you really know me?”

The next second, Alaric wrapped his hand around the base of Victoria’s neck and leaned in until their foreheads were so close that their breaths intertwined. A sentence was squeezed out of his lips. “I’ve known you for at least 20 years and shared a bed with you for two years. Who else knows you better than I do, Victoria Selwyn?”

She was immediately dumbfounded. Have we known each other for that long? He says he knows me, but he has no idea I’ve fallen for him.

Chapter 10

After a long time, Victoria sighed inwardly. Keeping the truth from him will keep any awkward situations at bay. Moreover, we can think of *our* relationship as a transaction in which both parties benefit from.

At that thought, she pushed away Alaric, who had leaned in too close for „

her comfort. “It’s not you for sure.”

Then, he frowned upon hearing that. “What do you mean by that? Is there someone else who knows you better than me? Who is it?” He didn’t notice how worked up he was due to her words.

On the other hand, Victoria said nothing in response.

Seeing how she ignored him, Alaric grabbed her shoulders and questioned somewhat viciously, “Is it a man or a woman?”

He applied too much pressure on her, causing *her* to raise her brows and push him away. “It hurts. Don’t touch me.”

Afterward, Alaric let up on the pressure a bit, but he didn’t give up on badgering Victoria. “If you don’t want me to touch you, then be honest with

1. me. Who knows you better than I do? Also, what’s up with that report?”

Under his persistent questioning, she responded, “Nobody. I’m the one who understands myself best. Don’t put too much meaning in my words,

alright? Besides, I don't know what report you're referring to. Is it from the company or somewhere else? If you want a response from me, you should be clear about it, don't you think?"

She took the initiative to express her doubts, causing him to narrow his eyes. There is something fishy about the way that she is reacting.

"The maid claimed she found a piece of torn paper while picking up the trash."

A piece of torn paper? Is the report a piece of torn paper?

Then, Victoria met Alaric's eyes calmly. "What report? Where is it?"

"It was torn and was found in the room. Is it not yours?"

"A torn piece of paper? Yeah, it's mine." Following that, she avoided his gaze and redirected her attention to the laptop. "That's the report I got from the hospital. What's wrong with that?"

Suddenly, he locked his gaze on her. "What kind of report is it?"

Victoria was unwavering and answered, "My body checkup report. Is there a problem with that?"

However, her answer elicited a scoff from Alaric. "Do you think you can fool me? Why would you tear the report?" His tone was stern as he asked the question. Suddenly, he grasped her thin wrist and prodded, "Are you hiding something from me? What kind of report is it?"

Then, he reasoned that her peculiar quirk must have something to do with the report.

As he exerted even more pressure on her, her brows knitted as she explained softly, “I didn’t tear it on purpose. The report was soaked in water due to the rain, and I could no longer read the words. That’s why I threw it away.”

“Why did you have to tear it before you threw it away, then?” Alaric was still dwelling on it. Obviously, he would keep pestering Victoria if she couldn’t convince him with a reasonable excuse.

Then, when she looked into his eyes, she noticed how dark and gloomy they were. After a sigh, she said, “Have you ever considered that I might not have torn it?”

“What?”

“It was raining heavily that day, and when I took the report out, it was already in a soggy state, and some pieces of paper even got stuck on my clothes. I could only take them off one by one.”

Alaric was taken aback by Victoria’s statement as he imagined the

possible scene.

The downpour was so intense that it drenched her completely. Hence, it was only natural that the paper had become soggy. She had *no* choice but to toss it in the laundry basket with the rest of her dirty clothes, but by the time the maids came to clean it up, the paper had dried out and appeared to be torn.

After careful consideration, he decided that her words did not sound suspicious.

Feeling the force on her shoulders loosen, Victoria assumed Alaric was

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convinced by her statement. Dreading her relief, she decided to put everything on the line to dispel any remaining doubts he had about her pregnancy. At that thought, she looked at him and uttered tentatively, “Why are you panicking? Are you worried that it might have been a pregnancy report?”

At first, he had planned to deny it, but hearing her last question, he felt his chest tighten. When he glanced at her, he tried to suppress his emotions.

His glance prompted her to raise her brows. “What’s with that expression?

Are you afraid that my pregnancy might affect you and Claudia’s relationship?”

“Are you pregnant?” Alaric squinted his eyes in skepticism.

Victoria shrugged. “No, or I would have shown you the report. As childhood friends, I suppose you’ll compensate me a fair amount if I go for an abortion, won’t you?”

However, her nonchalant tone and indifferent attitude made his expression change slightly.

“What did you say? Are you going for an abortion?”

On the other hand, his last sentence made her heart skip a beat.

“I’m speaking hypothetically only.”

As if trying to go against Victoria, Alaric questioned, “What if it’s not?”

“What do you mean if it’s not?” She frowned slightly.

Then, he narrowed his eyes as he looked at her, obsidian orbs carrying incomprehensible emotions. “Suppose you are pregnant; would you undergo an abortion?”

She nodded subconsciously and lowered her head. “Yeah, maybe.”

Nonetheless, she didn’t notice how his expression turned dark when she blurted her answer.

Alaric was annoyed by Victoria’s indifference, and he felt something churning in his chest as anxiety surrounded him densely.

Then, Victoria continued, “What will happen to you and Claudia if I don’t abort the child?”

What will happen to Claudia and me? Her question was like having a bucket of ice water dumped on him, causing him to snap out of his stupor and get his bearings.

The woman before him had fair skin and bright red lips; her features were dimensional and delicate, even without makeup. She had such a captivating appearance that it was hard to take one’s eyes off her for even a moment.

After a moment of observing Victoria, Alaric withdrew the emotion from his eyes, stood up, and had since calmed down. He suggested, with a cold voice that sounded entirely different from before, “You don’t have to go to the company today. Take a good rest.”

Soon, he turned and left the bedroom with a cold expression.

Yes, she’s right. Even if she ever gets pregnant, she will be forced to abort the child. I simply could not, and would never, let Claudia down.

Back then, Alaric stumbled and fell into the river. The flow of water was so rapid that even a person who could swim wouldn’t have been able to escape death, let alone jump down to save others.

He was having trouble breathing after taking several mouthfuls of river

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water, his limbs fell heavy, and he was on the verge of losing

consciousness, When he was on the verge of giving up, he saw a slender

figure recklessly diving down and swimming towards him at a rapid pos

Unfortunately, he had lost consciousness before she could swim up to

him,

Later, he awoke to find himself in the hospital, and it was only then that he

learned Claudia had been hurt while rescuing him. Her hands were even

wounded by the stones at the bottom of the river. When he visited her, she

was sitting on the edge of the bed with a pale face and gauze wrapped

around her treated wound. At the sight of him, she hopped off the bed and

staggered toward him to ask if he was alright.

From then on, Alaric was determined to treat Claudia well. He would make

her his wife so long as she was willing to marry him. Since she had risked

her life for him, he had to repay her kindness,