

Chapter 11

After Alaric left, Victoria sat on the couch in a daze before continuing her work. This is the path I have chosen, so I am on my own.

Suddenly, her phone rang, and she glanced at it to see it was from Noel Javier.

After calming herself down, she picked up the call. “What’s up?”

“Victoria, did the secretary of Labauve Group’s vice president call you?”

When Victoria heard that, she scrolled through her inbox until she found the email, clicked it, and nodded. “Yes. So, what’s up?”

“Pass me the tasks on your plate. I’ll settle them for you.”

Then, she paused and questioned with a hint of doubt, “Huh?”

“Yasmin said you were sick. Why didn’t you tell me?” Noel’s voice sounded gentle as he sighed and persuaded her, “Take a good rest if you’re not feeling well and switch off your phone. You think your body’s made of steel, huh?”

He used to be her father’s right-hand man at Selwyn Corporation before the Selwyn Family went bankrupt. However, the company’s sudden bankruptcy derailed what should have been a prosperous future for him.

After the incident, Victoria thought he would look for a position more fitting

to his talents, but he joined Cadogan Group. It came as a shock to her after she learned about it, so she asked him.

Noel, on the other hand, merely offered her a smile. “Did you assume that I joined Cadogan Group because of you? You should be aware that they are the largest corporation in Gandra, right? No other company can offer me a better career advancement than them.”

It’s hard to argue with him when what he says is reasonable. With that in

mind, Victoria felt too ashamed to try to talk herself out of it. Then, she

recalled that her father used to set her up with him before her family went bankrupt. In addition, the way he answered her father still stuck in her mind.

She recalled him looking at her with a gentle expression and smiling softly.

He answered, “Victoria is still young. So, let’s talk about it later.”

Since then, he had treated her warmly and acted as an older brother.

Moreover, he had always been considerate and attentive to her needs.

Gradually, the expression in his eyes when he looked at her changed.

Nevertheless, she was conscious of his intentions. However, her heart had long belonged to someone else.

Few people in this world would have their feelings reciprocated.

Thinking of that, Victoria snapped out of her daze and declined Noel's offer. "Don't worry about it, Noel. It's only a cold. I'm all good now."

Meanwhile, on the other line, he said nothing and sighed heavily, "Are you drawing a line between us now, Victoria?"

When she heard that, she paused in silence.

"Let's put aside Mr. Selwyn being my savior. We're now colleagues in the Cadogan Group. Shouldn't we help each other out during hard times?"

"Noel-"

"Do you think I'm incapable of taking over your responsibilities? Or are you starting to dislike me?"

"Not at all," Victoria hurriedly denied it. "You've treated me very well. Why

would I dislike you?"

She did not have a brother, and Noel, a few years older than her, was always considerate toward her. Moreover, she had always regarded him as an older brother. So, why would she hate him?

Hence, when she denied his statements, she sounded anxious.

Perhaps, her attitude had pleased him, eliciting a chuckle from the other end of the line. His laughter was deep yet sweet.

"If you don't hate me, transfer your tasks over."

Victoria bit her red lips and nodded eventually.

“Okay, then. Thanks for helping out, Noel. I’ll treat you to a meal later.”

“I will remember your promise.”

“Sure.”

After the call ended, Victoria emailed Noel about the task, but she was so concerned about forgetting something that she took her time writing a detailed message.

Meanwhile, it took him a while to text her. ‘Okay. I got it. Stop worrying about it and get some rest.’

Finally, she felt a huge weight lifted off her shoulders that she could delegate her duties to someone she trusted when she was sick. Initially, she had planned to return to the company, but she could now rest at home for another day.

At that moment, she realized another pressing matter that required her attention. Victoria looked down and glanced at her belly before reaching down and gently stroking it with her hand.

Within my body, a new life is beginning to take shape. What am I

supposed to do with the child? Should I go ahead with the abortion?

When she thought about it, she felt utterly helpless.

Then, she fished out her phone and dialed her best friend's number.

“What? You're pregnant! Pfft!”

Meanwhile, Victoria was at a café when the woman in front of her spit out her coffee. The woman's worked-up tone and actions drew a lot of attention.

Victoria was speechless after seeing the woman's reaction.

Then, she quickly looked around to make sure no one she knew was there and heaved a sigh of relief. Afterward, she handed Summer Jones a tissue and whispered, “Lower your voice, would you? Everyone is looking our way.” So, Summer took the tissue and wiped her lips before nodding obediently.

“Sorry. I was too shocked.”

Victoria glanced at her best friend helplessly.

Instead of sipping her coffee, Summer propped her chin on the table and gazed at Victoria with large, round eyes. In a subdued voice, she asked, “Why did you suddenly get pregnant? Didn't you guys take precautions?” “We did.” Victoria sipped the coffee and uttered indifferently, “It was an accident.”

“What are you going to do, then? Are you going to keep the baby?”

Victoria was momentarily taken aback by the question and paused before shaking her head.

Then, Summer looked at her in surprise. “A—Are you not going to keep it? Why? You’ve been married for a long time, and I noticed how well he treats you. You’re invited to every occasion he attends, and if you hadn’t told me you were in a fake marriage, I would have assumed you two were truly in love.”

“Really?” Victoria offered a light smile.

Her reaction... Summer took another glance at her. She thought Victoria was behaving a little too indifferently, but as her best friend for years, Summer suppressed her true thoughts and asked, “Is Alaric aware?”

“I didn’t tell him.”

“You...” Summer held back and questioned, “When are you planning to tell him?”

Nonetheless, Victoria pursed her lips without a word.

In response, Summer gave her a look of doubt. “Wait. What do you mean? Are you not going to tell him about such an important matter? This child is not only yours, you know? He belongs to the both of you.”

When she said that, Victoria still had a stubborn look. Unable to suppress her curiosity, she blurted a thread of sentences, “What’s up with you? How could you be so calm even after what happened? You’re pregnant, and it’s

”

“Claudia is back.”

Her mere sentence made Summer freeze on the spot.

Victoria’s gaze turned colder at this point. “Do you still think it matters if I tell him?”

Chapter 12

Summer initially thought Victoria’s reaction was oddly calm, but after hearing the name ‘Claudia’, Vienna froze silent.

“I—I thought she’d never come back,” she said after taking a long time to come to her senses.

For a moment, neither said anything.

Before the Selwyns had gone bankrupt, Summer, being Victoria’s best friend, hung out with Victoria for a long time in the elite circle. Hence, she naturally knew that people loved talking about how Claudia saved Alaric.

Plus, the two were a good-looking pair, and things could’ve ended up well too, but as Victoria’s best friend, Summer’s heart still ached for Victoria.

Too bad too many crushes go unrequited and even die off silently in the end. Summer bit her lip and felt indignant for her friend.

“Actually, so what if she comes back at this time? I wouldn’t back out if I were you. She and Alaric were never together in the first place. Besides, you two are already married, and you’re now even pregnant. I swear the sky will fall before Alaric tells you to drop the baby!”

“Then you probably don’t know him well enough,” said Victoria, who had been silent all this while. After saying that, she looked up, causing Summer’s eyes to widen with incredulity. “What do you mean? He didn’t... Did he really?!”

“He will,” Victoria affirmed.

“That means you haven’t told him about it, have you?” Summer countered.

“How are you so certain he will?”

At that, Victoria pursed her lips and answered, “I’ve already sounded him out.

“You...” Summer instantly became disappointed in her friend. “What is that going to achieve? As if theory and practice are the same! You should tell him now. Say you’re pregnant. See how he reacts to it.”

Victoria fell silent in response, so Summer added, “Are you scared? Please, I swear on my life that Alaric will never tell you to drop it if he knows you’re

pregnant. Wanna bet on it?”

“That’s not necessary.” Victoria shook her head after a moment of silence.

Then, she grabbed her bag and stood up. “Come on. I’ll get the bill.”

Before Summer could even react to what was happening, Victoria had already gone to the cashier.

Livid, Summer could only grab her bag and follow her friend out.

After exiting the cafe, Summer walked beside Veronica. Seeing that the latter still had no intention of speaking up, Summer couldn’t help but grab

“Victoria!”

her arm. “Victoria!”

Victoria stopped in her tracks and fixed her gaze on her best friend.

“Get a hold of yourself and trust me this once, will you? This isn’t a small issue. I wouldn’t be standing here and persuading you if you could drop your years of love for him. But you love him, don’t you? Our happiness. should lay in our own hands!”

“I…” Her words made Victoria hesitant and seeing so, Summer urged,

“Alright, let me ask you a few questions then.”

“What is it?”

“People will eventually notice pregnancy with time, won’t they?”

Victoria nodded.

“Then, are you worried people will notice?”

Victoria pondered and nodded again.

“There you go. Since you’re afraid people will notice, and you don’t intend to tell Alaric either, you’ll surely find a chance to drop the baby later.”

No, that’s not it. I just haven’t thought this through...

“Since you’ve already prepared for the worst, what’s there left for you to be afraid of? Won’t the worst-case scenario remain the same even if you tell him?”

“But...” Victoria’s lips trembled as her lashes fluttered. “We might still be friends if I keep this a secret, but if I tell him...”

Summer fell silent at that. Alright, I underestimated her love for Alaric.

It wasn’t until moments later that Summer sighed under her breath. “Vic, I know you love him, but has it ever crossed your mind that there’s no point in being friends if you can’t be with him? Besides, don’t you want to sound it out? Don’t you want to know if he feels the same about you? Either way, I refuse to believe he doesn’t have the slightest feelings for you seeing that he treats you so well.”

Yeah, he does treat me well, but... it’s all but a trade...

If it wasn't that Griselda liked her and that the elder also happened to be sick, the two of them wouldn't have gotten married at all. *To* him, she was just a simple childhood friend.

Summer knew there was nothing she could do to persuade Victoria anymore, seeing she was still hesitant. "Anyhow, I've already said all I had to say. You think about the rest. It's ultimately your *decision*, after all. There's nothing more I can say."

Before getting into the car, Summer still couldn't stop herself from running back to her friend and said, "Victoria, our happiness lies in our own hands,

As lost as Victoria was still feeling right then, she smiled from the bottom of her heart and pinched Summer's cheek. "All right, I got it. I'll think long and hard about it."

"Good. Go home, then. Call me if you need anything, okay?"

"Okay."

As soon as Victoria returned to Cadogan Residence, Hector instantly approached her worryingly. "Where have you been, Mrs. Cadogan? Why have you gone out when you're not feeling well? What if something happens to you?"

The butler's worry touched Victoria. She thereafter reassured him, "I'm

fine.”

“That’s good to hear.” Hector sized her up and finally heaved a sigh of relief after he was certain she was fine. “You should go back to rest, Mrs. Cadogan.”

“Alright.”

With that, Victoria went upstairs and returned to her room.

Silence filled the air after she closed the door with a thump. At that moment, Summer’s words rang in her ears now that she was all alone.

Our happiness lies in our own hands.

Actually, she believed in that saying; one should speak out and fight for their love. In fact, she did exactly that in the past. Hence, it was why she decided to confess her love. However, just as she was about to *do* so, she overheard Alaric saying his partner would forever be Claudia.

Forever...

She understood the concept of forever. She also knew Alaric was the kind who practiced what he preached. But...

Victoria clenched her phone.

Ever since hearing Summer’s suggestion, her greed became a vine that

had found something it could attach itself to, absorbing all the nutrients in the soil with all its might, growing rapidly.

Truth was, she actually wanted to follow Summer's suggestion and sound him out.

That said, she certainly wouldn't have the guts to tell Alaric the news right in front of him.

Perhaps... I can try texting him. He'll definitely know once he sees my text.

At that, Victoria's heart raced wildly like she had been triggered. Her hand that was clenching her phone also began trembling, so much so that she

only managed to unlock her phone via password, having failed a few times using her fingerprint.

Victoria opened up her chat history with Alaric.

Perhaps she was feeling apprehensive because she decided to open their text message history instead of using WhatsApp, the portal that they normally communicated with.

However, after she was in, she began feeling at a loss of what to do. How should she tell him about it?

It wasn't after she stared at the phone for a long time that she finally decided to be a little more straightforward.

As Summer said, she was already prepared for the worst, so what was there for her to be fearful of?

At that, she texted, ‘I’m pregnant.’

After that, she closed her eyes and sent it.

Chapter 13

Victoria’s heart suddenly quieted down after the text was successfully sent.

She had done it. All there was left was to wait for his reply.

However, Alaric didn’t answer right away.

Victoria checked the time and guessed that he should be working at the moment. He might be in a meeting, in a business engagement, or his phone might even be silent. He’ll see it once he’s done with work.

The wait was unbearable, so she decided to take a nap.

With that, she changed into her pajamas and drew the curtains to silence the room before climbing into bed.

Ping!

Chapter 13 I Will Grant You All Your Demands

Meanwhile, inside an office of one of Cadogan Group's buildings, Claudia's lashes were trembling uncontrollably right then when she was still sitting calmly on the couch a couple of seconds ago.

Her eyes were fixed on the simple text message she was reading—‘I'm pregnant.’

The young woman had thought it was Alaric's work message or some kind of spam when the text first came in, but who'd have thought it was from Victoria?!

Reflexively, she looked toward the man working away at the desk, reeling in the possibility that he had gotten together with Victoria.

Alaric seemingly noticed her gaze as he looked up at her quizzically.

Startled, Claudia forced a smile and quickly lowered her head, leading Alaric to finally withdraw his gaze.

Chapter 13 I Will Grant You All Your Demands

It was exceptionally quiet in the office, and because they were on a high

floor, the surrounding noises on the ground were inaudible to them.

Meanwhile, grimness laced Claudia's drooped eyes *as* she deleted the text without confirming if Victoria was really the sender.

After the deed was done, the young woman breathed a sigh of relief but fell into deep thought as her nails sank into her palms.

Selwyn... What is she trying to do with that text? Does she want to steal Alaric from me?!

At that, Claudia bit her lip.

She should consider herself lucky that she had asked Alaric for his phone right after entering his office. Sure, he frowned upon hearing it, but he still handed the phone to her very quickly.

If she hadn't asked for it, and if Alaric had seen the text, then the

Chapter 13 I Will Grant You All Your Demands

consequences would be unimaginable!

Minutes later, she returned Alaric his phone and said softly, "Here, Al. I'm done with it. Thanks."

"Sure." He nodded subtly as he took it from her.

“I thought you hated people touching your phone. Why are you willing to lend it to me?” Claudia couldn’t help asking as she looked at his impassive face while recalling Victoria’s text.

To that, Alaric took a gander at her and answered somewhat helplessly,

“Because you’re different from everyone else, of course.”

Chapter 131 Will Grant You All Your Demands

That was all it took to sate Claudia, and she felt overjoyed like her heart had been drenched in honey.

Yeah, I’m different. If anything, I might have been overthinking. Besides, even if Victoria is pregnant, who’s to say Alaric is the father? As if he would ever touch her!

While she was deep in thought, Alaric added, “You saved me once, Claudia. You can make any demands with me. I will grant it all.”

“Thank you, Al.” Claudia nodded while her smile shallowed at the mention of the topic.

As she drooped her eyelids, grimness enveloped her eyes once more while she flipped out deep within.

That again! Can you go one day without telling me I saved you? Am I nothing to you at all if I hadn't saved your life?!

Chapter 13 I Will Grant You All Your Demands

As she recalled the incident, guilt crept up on Claudia.

Though many years had passed, it still felt fresh as if it had just happened the day before.

The river was torrential at the time, and Claudia had been rendered petrified when Alaric got caught in the river. She did nothing but stand by the river as her head buzzed.

By the time she came to her senses and called for help, a slender figure had already run desperately toward her. Because of that, she had forgotten to call for help when the figure brushed past her.

All she did was reflexively stop in her tracks and look over her shoulder when she saw the girl jump into the water without hesitation.

Though the incident happened many years ago, it still shook Claudia whenever she recalled it.

Chapter 131 Will Grant You All Your Demands

The girl was too brave. So much so that Claudia loathed her for a long time after that.

“What is it?” Alaric asked, seeing that she seemed to have fallen into deep thought.

“Nothing.” She shook her head with a faint smile when his voice pulled her back to reality.

She shouldn’t recall the past anymore. Now, she was Alaric’s savior, and it was a fact that would never change—ever.

Following that, Claudia stayed in Alaric’s office a while longer.

Nevertheless, since the man was tied up with work and didn’t have time to

Chapter 13 I Will Grant You All Your Demands

entertain her, she saw herself out a while later. “Al, since you’re busy, I’ll head back for now and visit you another day.”

“Sure,” responded the man with his gaze fixed on his laptop screen. But just

as she was about to leave, a thought suddenly came to him. “Wait.”

“Yes?”

“Who texted?” he asked, staring at her, causing her to freeze.

He hadn’t asked when the notification ping came in, and Claudia probably deleted it without giving it a second thought because she had been startled by it.

But who’d have thought he’d suddenly ask about it now...

“Just a spam message. I didn’t want to interrupt you, so I deleted it without telling you.”

Chapter 13 I Will Grant You All Your Demands

All she received from Alaric was silence, and Claudia couldn’t help panicking at that.

“Are you upset because I deleted your text? I’m sorry, Al. I didn’t give it a second thought when it was just a spam message. I should’ve let you deal with it yourself. I’m sorry. Please don’t be mad at me.”

Her repeating apologies made Alaric ease his brows as he reflected on

himself. What are you doing, Cadogan? She has just deleted a spam message. Do you have to be mad at her for it?

Then again, he was a man of principles, so he still cautioned, “I’m not mad at you, but no more next time.”

“Got it. Sorry.” Claudia nodded and drooped her eyelids.

The air between the two tensed up just like that. Moments later, Alaric offered, “I’ll ask the chauffeur to send you home.”

Chapter 13 I Will Grant You All Your Demands

“Okay.”

D

Very quickly, the chauffeur came up to collect Claudia, who clenched her resting hands into fists after entering the elevator.

It might have looked like Alaric didn’t mind letting her use his phone, but he reacted pretty greatly to her deleting his text.

It seems like even a savior isn’t that much of an exception. Claudia pursed her lips indignantly. Looks like I’ll have to put more effort into Alaric, or he wouldn’t condone me just because I saved him. Still, luckily, I’ve already

deleted the text.

Knowing Victoria, she would likely not tell Alaric in person when she didn't receive a reply to her text.

That said, this was just a temporary fix. She'd have to act quickly...

Chapter 14

Victoria waited until the sun had set but still received nothing from Alaric.

Her phone was silent like it had been cut off from the outside world.

When she was working, she would love nothing more than for her phone to be silent so that she could have more time for herself. But now...

It wasn't until darkness began enveloping the sky that Victoria's phone pinged, startling her.

She hurriedly picked the phone up, only for her gaze to dim upon seeing the content.

It was a text from Summer. 'So? Have you given the idea much thought?

Have you come clean with him?'

Victoria looked silently at her phone for a long time before a

self-deprecating-filled chuckle escaped her.

.

You have known the answer long ago, but why are you so insistent? Why must you lay your wound bare for people to see and scorn? Now, you've done it. How are you going to face him now?

Victoria slid down against the bed and closed her eyes.

Who is he with right now? What is he doing? How did he react when he found out I'm pregnant? Will he share the news with Claudia? What will she think of me after this?

Instantly, Victoria felt as though all the strength in her limbs had been sucked away.

Later that night, Victoria ate no more after taking spoonfuls of soup. When the clock struck nine, her phone still did not have any new notifications.

With that, she could only go downstairs with a jacket wrapped around her.

Hector still hadn't rested yet, so he stood up upon seeing her. "It's already late at night, Mrs. Cadogan. Why are you still up?"

Victoria glanced at the empty gates and asked, “Alaric hasn’t come back?”

A hint of surprise flashed across Hector as he answered, “Mr. Cadogan’s assistant called earlier saying Mr. Cadogan has something important and won’t be coming back tonight.”

Victoria’s heart sank in response.

“Mrs. Cadogan, are you alright?” asked the butler with worry, seeing that she didn’t look so good.

“I’m good.” She forced a smile after returning to her senses. Then, she turned around to head back upstairs. Just as she was about to enter her room, her phone rang.

The name displayed on the screen caused her pupils to shrink—it was

Didn’t he say he won’t be coming back? Why would he call me at this time, then? What does he want to tell me?

At that, Victoria took a deep breath and prepared herself mentally before answering the call.

“Victoria?”

However, a familiar sweet female voice came on the other end of the line.

It was

Claudia. “Al wants me to tell you that he has something going on and won’t be going back tonight. You’re still sick, so rest early, okay?”

Chapter 14 Ive Decided to Drop It

At that moment, all Victoria felt was that her throat was jammed, her heart was sinking, and even her limbs were numb.

Did he ask Claudia to call me? What is he trying to do?

“Victoria? Are you there?”

Victoria took pains to blurt out an ‘okay’ after coming to her senses but still couldn’t stop herself from ending the call in discomfiture.

When Claudia heard the busy tone, she breathed a sigh of relief, then saved Victoria’s phone number into her phone before returning Alaric’s phone to him.

“Here, Al. I’ve made the call.”

“Alright.” Alaric spared a few seconds from his work to look up and retrieve

his phone before asking when a thought came to him. “Has she slept?”

“Not yet.”

At that, Alaric frowned and snorted, mumbling, “She’s so sick, yet she won’t go to bed early. What is that woman thinking?”

Claudia was right next to him when he grumbled. Hearing that, her face blanched at his attitude. She bit her lip while her hands shook slightly. Perhaps, even he himself didn’t realize how apparently affectionate he looked when he said that.

“Have you saved her phone number?” Alaric asked all of a sudden.

Claudia snapped back into reality and answered, “Yeah, I have. Al, I can ask her to hang out with me, can’t I?”

“Sure, that would save her from always burying her head in work.”

Claudia could only chuckle awkwardly in response. But when she turned around, a hint of malice flashed across her usually defenseless face.

The following day, Victoria found her eyes a little puffy when she woke up.

To avoid anyone noticing anything amiss, she deliberately put some ice over her eyes to reduce the puffiness.

Later, she checked her phone and found messages from a couple of people.

‘I’ve already sorted the work out. No need to worry,’ texted Noel. ‘You have to go to the hospital if you don’t feel well.’

‘Are you awake yet? How are you doing? I can take you to the hospital if you need.’

The previous text was sent the night before after she had fallen asleep, while the other one was sent this morning.

Then, there was Summer’s text. ‘Boo, it’s been hours, and I still haven’t gotten a reply from you. Is everything okay? I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have suggested bad ideas.’

The rest of the few messages expressed her concern for her, and Victoria had a feeling her best friend had trouble sleeping last night.

‘I’m fine. Don’t worry,’ she replied to Summer.

After that, she reopened Noel's chat and expressed her gratitude for taking over her task and wanting to treat him to a meal.

Summer hadn't replied. Noel, on the other hand, replied within seconds.

‘How are you doing now?’

Victoria had just wanted to reply to him when his call came directly.

She hesitated for only a couple of seconds before answering it.

“Noel.”

“Hey, feeling better?”

“Much better.”

“You sound a little nasally. Still unwell, aren't you?”

Victoria fell silent at that. The man had always been sensitive about her well-being.

Silence filled the call for a moment before Noel added, “Did Alaric not take you to the hospital?”

The sudden mention of Alaric stumped Victoria for a moment before she diverted the topic. “It's just a minor issue. I'll be fine after some pills. I'm

already feeling much better after resting for two days.”

Noel sighed in response. “You’re headstrong as usual, Victoria. Your father will be heartbroken if he knows about this.”

Victoria pursed her lips. “Not at all. I’ll go to the hospital if I’m really feeling ill. Don’t worry.”

Subsequently, the two chatted a while longer before hanging up.

Coincidentally, just as she ended her call with Noel, Summer called.

“Vic! How did it go? You never replied to my text yesterday. I waited until

Chapter 14 I’ve Decided to Drop It

past midnight before falling asleep. If you hadn’t texted me, who knows when I’d wake up?”

Who’d have thought my text would wake her up? Should’ve replied to her later.

“But thank goodness. I can rest assured now after seeing your text.”

Summer heaved a sigh of relief before asking with doubt, “You told him

about it, didn't you? Alaric, he... How did he react to it?"

Everything was fine before Summer brought him up. Remembering that,

Victoria's heart twinged with a dull pain.

At that, she stared at the empty side of the bed.

He hadn't returned the night before.

He chose to hide away after she told him she was pregnant.

Chapter 14 I've Decided to Drop It

With that, she withdrew her gaze and announced calmly, "Summer, I've decided to drop the baby."

Chapter 15

"W-Why?!" Summer asked after her split-second stump.

"Why else?"

"But..." She huffed with indignation. "You two have been married for two years. Two whole years! Does he not have a sliver of feelings for you?"

Besides, he's the father of your child, for goodness' sake! As a husband and a father, does he not feel any pity for you?"

Victoria fell silent. If she still held some kind of fantasy toward Alaric before sending the text, then it was now dead for good.

What was that popular saying online again? Oh, right... Your child is yours only when he loves you, and when he doesn't—forget about your child—even you are nothing.

Meanwhile, Summer was still rambling, “Even without your two-year

Chapter 15 I'm Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

marriage, you two still grew up together. Does he not share the childhood

sentiment either? Are you sure you made it clear to him, Vic? Why don't I—”

“Summer,” Victoria interjected calmly. “Say no more.”

Any more words, and she would only feel even more humiliated.

One time was enough. What did multiple times count as? Begging? If so, she would rather leave it.

After ending Summer's call, Victoria washed up and energized herself for work. She drove to the company that day, and the first thing she did after arriving at her desk was to check her work. After making sure everything was okay, she finally pulled her phone out and booked an appointment.

Since she had decided to drop the child, she would have to get it done soon,

As the time slots for this week were all taken up, she could only pick a time

BUT, TO J

Chapter 15 I'm Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

next week, but when it came to confirming her booking, Victoria suddenly could not help stopping her fingers.

There seemed to be a voice asking her, “Do you truly want to lose the baby? Can you bear to do it?”

Then, another voice debated, “So what? Are you going to be their father since the baby doesn’t have one?”

“What will be, will be. You’ve just begun your first trimester. A baby has to be conceived for about nine months before it can come out. What are you so worried about?”

“Will the problem be solved just because you avoid it? Even if you don’t do it now, you still have to do it later.”

“But he isn’t just Alaric’s child. He’s yours too. Your blood runs in his veins, no?”

Chapter 15 I'm Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

“So what? You don’t know the pain of growing up with only a single parent.”

At that moment, Victoria was practically torn as two voices argued non-stop. One told her to keep the child, while the other told her to abort it.

Her head was in a total mess right then.

It was then Yasmin came toward her. “Miss Victoria, this is the draft proposal for IC Corp.’s project. Please see if there’s anything to be amended.”

Victoria locked her phone right away and placed it on her desk.

Her speedy action stumped Yasmin a little, but since she was a subordinate and should not be asking about her higher–up’s private

Chapter 15 I’m Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

matters, she could only suppress her curiosity and hand the proposal to Victoria.

Seeing that Yasmin remained standing on the spot after she took the file, she asked, “Yes? Anything else?”

At that, Yasmin took a gander at her and asked softly, “You’re doing okay now, aren’t you, Miss Victoria? You scared me to death when you passed out a couple of days ago.”

Speaking of that, Victoria wondered. “Were you the one who called him over that day?”

“Yeah.” Yasmin nodded. “I couldn’t wake you up no matter how, so I went to Mr. Cadogan.”

No wonder I woke up in his car.

“Miss Victoria, you have no idea how worried Mr. Cadogan was when I told

Chapter 15 I’m Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

him you might’ve passed out that day.”

Victoria was unsure what Yasmin wanted by telling her that. Is she trying to butter up to me? Thus, she chose her words wisely. “Is that so? How nervous are we talking about?”

Yasmin bashfully smiled while answering, “Well, I’ve never seen Mr. Cadogan so nervous and worried apart from that day in all my years in the company. Many executives were reporting work to him at the time, but as soon as he heard you’d passed out, he left them aside and ran here to carry you into the car.”

With that, she blinked at Victoria. “I’m certain Mr. Cadogan cares about you.”

“You think so?” Victoria gazed at her and blurted, “Did you not see another woman by his side?”

Chapter 15 m Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

That was all it took to drench Yasmin’s burning passion for shipping office.

romance. She stood awkwardly on the spot for a long while, unsure of what to say to ease the atmosphere.

Due to Alaric's attitude, she had forgotten about the woman next to him.

However, Yasmin did not make much of it at the time, but now that Victoria had pointed it out, it was indeed somewhat amiss.

It was because... that woman hung out in the CEO's office, and some hearsay had been spreading in the office because of her.

Seeing that the young woman stood blankly on her spot, Victoria rubbed her dull, aching temples and dismissed her softly. "Go on, get back to work."

"Oh, okay."

After Yasmin left, Victoria picked her phone back up and confirmed her booking. There's nothing to hold on to, really, she thought.

Chapter 15 I'm Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

At noon, Noel texted her, inviting her to join him for lunch.

As Victoria's mind was still in a mess, she wanted to turn him down, but at the thought that he had sorted out her work for her, she agreed to it.

When it was lunchtime, she went downstairs and waited for him in the lobby. *He* said he would drive her there, and she did not oppose it.

While waiting for him, she checked her work schedule for the afternoon on

her phone when the people in front began gossiping.

“That’s Mr. Cadogan’s car, isn’t it? Why would he only come in at this hour?”

At that, Victoria reflexively looked up and *found* the black Cayenne at first

Chapter 15 mm Certam Mr Cadogan Cares About You

glance. Her heart skipped a beat as she know only he would drive that car.

The vehicle might not have been slow, but the window was down, and when it passed by, Victoria saw Claudia sitting in the front passenger seat.

She had come to work in a light blue outfit, and her long hair was hung loosely around her shoulders. When she looked out the window, she happened to meet Victoria’s eyes as the young woman stood amongst the employees.

Claudia was taken aback for a second before smiling at her.

Alaric, on the other hand, was focused on the road ahead, so he did not notice it. It was not until the Cayenne entered the building that the employees in front of Victoria began gossiping.

“Who’s that woman? I can’t believe she can sit in Mr. Cadogan’s front passenger seat. I heard they stayed in the office until late last night and also left together.”

Chapter 15 I'm Certain Mr. Cadogan Cares About You

"I also heard this from someone else. She's the woman Mr. Cadogan fancies and has just returned to the country not long ago."

"The woman Mr. Cadogan fancies? But isn't he and Miss Selwyn already married?"

"What are you, an idiot? You don't genuinely think marriages between the rich are real, do you? Everyone's saying that Mr. Cadogan and Miss Selwyn's marriage is fake. Or else, why would she still be a secretary now? Besides, there hasn't been news of her pregnancy even until now."

Chapter 16

"Now that you put it that way, it makes sense."

"It is a fact, to begin with. What young mistress would work as a secretary?"

"But I don't get it. Why a fake marriage?"

"I'm sure there's a reason. Word is that Miss Selwyn and Mr. Cadogan grew up together. Back then, when the Selwyns went bankrupt, Mr. Cadogan started dating her probably because he wanted to help her out. I mean, look at it. Is there anyone who dares bully Miss Selwyn now?"

"Is that so? Well, Mr. Cadogan sure is a great guy."

“I even heard that Mr. Cadogan has been waiting for Claudia Johnson’s return all these years. I swear, only our boss is that loyal.”

As the people gossiped, Victoria stood behind them and listened instead of stepping away. She looked calm on the surface, as though she was not the topic of their gossip.

Soon, Noel pulled over at the entrance and rolled down the window, revealing his dashing looks. “C’mon, get in.”

Just like that, Victoria entered his car under everyone’s gazes, and it was not after the vehicle had gone far that the people who gossiped came to themselves.

“That was... Miss Selwyn, wasn’t it?”

“I think so.”

“Then, do you think she heard what we said earlier?”

“So what if she did? We’re not the ones who spread the rumor. We heard from them. Besides, there’s no wrong with what we’ve said. Are we not

telling the truth? Otherwise, why wouldn’t she correct us? She must be hiding something.”

“She probably didn’t know how to either. After all, that woman was sitting in Mr. Cadogan’s car when he passed by.”

The group continued gossiping as they looked at the car which had already gone far.

Meanwhile, Victoria rolled the window up impassively and watched the retreating trees and buildings with an extremely heavy heart as the employees' heated gossip replayed in her head, as well as... the black Cayenne that flashed past them.

"What's up? You look distracted," Noel asked when he noticed her glumness.

Victoria came to her senses at that and pulled a forced smile. "It's nothing. Might just be the after-effects of being sick."

He sighed in response. "You... How long were you going to keep it from me?"

His words rendered her frozen.

"What are you talking about?"

What have I kept from him? Can he possibly have found out that I'm pregnant? But who was it who told him? The only one who knows I'm pregnant is Summer, other than the doctors at the hospital.

Of course, she ruled out the possibility at once.

Because of her, Summer and Noel knew each other as well and kept an

amicable relationship. Both she and Summer thought of Nool as a big brother figure, but Summer would never reveal anything about her to him. Hence, what he knew might not be her pregnancy.

“Why didn’t you tell me Claudia has returned?” he asked moments later. Victoria froze for a second upon hearing his question. He was not talking about her pregnancy.

In truth, she had become jumpy for the past two days because of her pregnancy. At that, she breathed a sigh of relief and monotoned. “What does her return have to do with you?”

Her words rendered him speechless, and he gazed at the young woman helplessly. Had he not known her well, he would have likely assumed she was retorting him.

“You’re right. It doesn’t, but what about you? Does it have nothing to do with you too?”

Victoria fell silent at that, and Noel continued, “I already know you two were a no-show when you first started dating him. Especially when you

know what he said, but you still...” The man left his words hanging, but his tone and emotions were enough to convey his message.

He was disappointed in her.

On the other hand, she was glad that he did not know about her pregnancy, or his tone would be even more awful than it was now.

Perhaps because she was mostly silent, Noel said nothing more after that.

After taking her to a restaurant and ordering their lunch, he told Victoria,

“Wait for me here. I’ll be back in ten.”

“Alright.” She nodded, having no energy to bother with what he was up to.

Ten minutes later, he returned with a bag of stuff.

“Here, take this.”

“What is it?”

“Medicine.” He revealed. “You’re sick, aren’t you? You’re already a grown woman. You should keep some regular medicine with you at all times, no?

You can pop one in whenever you don’t feel well.”

“But I’m already fine.” She fell into somewhat of a trance as she looked at the bag of items.

“Keep it for next time, then.”

“Okay.”

With that, she put the bag away. In it was a comprehensive pile of regular

pills.

“Thanks, Noel.”

“Don’t mention it.” He poked her head. “Don’t shut me out, okay? Tell me if you’re met with whatever trouble.”

“Got it.”

Subsequently, the two fell silent and ate their lunch quietly.

Moments later, Noel could not resist asking, “You’ve already met Claudia, haven’t you?”

Victoria’s hands froze for a split second before she nodded. “Yeah.”

“So, what is she trying now, coming right for Alaric as soon *as* she comes back? She wants to rekindle their love?”

‘Rekindle their love’ sounded like nails on a chalkboard for Victoria as she corrected. “Not rekindling. What real relationship did they have from the start?”

Sure, Alaric had said what he had said, but the two were not seeing each other at the time.

Speaking of which, Victoria never understood this.

How come the two never dated back then? By right, the two would have become a couple when he declared that the spot next to his would

forever be Claudia, who was also in love with him!

Then again, it was useless even if she figured it out now.

“Already defending him?”

Noel could not help but quirk an eyebrow, leading the young woman to purse her lips and mumble, “I’m just stating a fact.”

He’s already brought her to the office and even let others badmouth you. yet you’re still defending him?” he argued with deeply furrowed brows.

What was it that he overheard at the office pantry this morning?

“You guys have heard about it, haven’t you? Mr. Cadogan’s rightful girlfriend has returned.”

“Rightful girlfriend? Isn’t Mr. Cadogan already married? What rightful girlfriend are you talking about?”

“The marriage is fake, of course. If it’s real, would Mr. Cadogan be willing to let his wife work as a secretary? This one is the real deal. Word is that she had saved Mr. Cadogan once. Plus, she’s from an affluent family and has

finally returned from studying abroad. She and Mr. Cadogan are the real perfect match.”

“What? If she’s seeing Mr. Cadogan, what about Miss Selwyn?”

“Are you even hearing yourself? What else can she do other than to go

back to her rags when she fails to go from rags to riches?!”

Those words had probably ticked their funny bones as everyone in the pantry guffawed uncontrollably.

Meanwhile, Noel, who was standing outside, clenched his mug grimly.

Does she have to do with Victoria’s sudden illness? Or else, how can it be so coincidental?

Chapter 17

After Noel snapped out of his daze, he took a glance at the girl in front of him. She was dressed very simply, with long hair casually pinned behind her ears. She did not even put on makeup today, so she had a morbid kind of beauty that made people unable to resist their pity for her.

He was a person who was aware of his limitations and always knew he could not compare to Alaric; he was in no position to do so either.

When the Selwyn Family went bankrupt, he ran around to many places for help, but unfortunately, he was too insignificant to help in any way. A CEO of one of the companies even told him frankly, “You’re very capable, Noel, and I have high hopes for you too, but the Selwyn Family has fallen now. The smart ones should know how to make choices. You can come to my company.”

At that time, many not only did not want to help but even wanted to

poach him. “The Selwyn Family won’t rise again. Even if someone is willing

to help now, they won’t have their former glory back. So, I advise you to carefully consider your future. After all, you’re not a member of the Selwyn Family, nor are you their son-in-law. There’s no need for you to run around like this for them.”

Hearing all these made Noel’s heart sink, but he seriously considered what he heard on his way back. After that, he called Victoria and asked where she was so he could pick her up, but when he arrived, the second son of the Burke Corporation and his cronies were verbally humiliating her.

“The great Miss Selwyn, you ignored my pursuit in the past when your family was prosperous. Now that the Selwyn Family has fallen, I wonder if you still have such pride. Well, I can help the Selwyn Corporation, but don’t you think you should pay the price? Maybe like sleeping with me for a night?” As soon as he finished speaking, his cronies burst into laughter.

Seeing this scene unfold from the side, Noel almost rushed forward to fight with them. All the plans he had considered for himself when he was

on his way disappeared in that second. At that moment, he only had one thought—he could not leave the Selwyn Family at this critical moment to pursue his future. Also, he could not go up to fight the second son of the

Burke Corporation because he did not have the right to do so. All he could do was pull Victoria away from the scene.

Not long after that, he heard that the Burke Corporation's second son had been beaten up by someone and that the entire Burke Corporation was implicated because of him. Due to this, the Burke Corporation's CEO and his son visited Victoria's home overnight to apologize to her.

The person who helped her was Alaric.

Looking back, it was indeed Alaric who pulled her out of adversity before, but because of what had happened in the past few days, he had put her in another difficult situation.

As Noel pressed his lips together, he said softly, "I don't mean to lecture you, but there are some things you need to consider carefully so that you can make plans in advance."

Just as Victoria was about to answer, her phone vibrated. She took it out and saw that it was a message from Alaric. 'Your assistant said you went out?'

The message was sent via WhatsApp with the same casual tone as usual, as though he was casually asking after realizing she went out.

Not knowing what she was thinking, she only replied with a 'Yes' after

reading the message.

He was probably looking at his phone at the time because his reply came quickly. ‘When are you coming back?’

Their conversation looked normal, just like their usual chat. He did not mention the text last night, nor did he mention his overnight absence.

Meanwhile, she was being ‘understanding’ by not asking him anything. It seemed as if nothing had happened yesterday, and life was continuing as

usual with them having an unspoken agreement to keep this peace.

She replied, ‘I’ll go back when it’s time for work.’

After that, he did not reply again.

As such, she put away her phone and told Noel, “I get it, Noel.”

As his gaze lingered on her phone for a moment, he asked, “He texted you?”

After hesitating for a moment, she answered with a nod.

There was nothing more he could say, so they silently finished the rest of

their meal and paid the bill. Then, he sent her back to the office.

When Victoria got into the elevator, she found that he had also followed her in. Surprised, she asked, “Where are you going?”

Their offices were not in the same location.

With a hand in his pocket, he answered with a calm expression, “I’m going to see Mr. Cadogan. I have something to report to him.”

After getting off the elevator, he looked at his watch and told her, “It’s ten minutes before work starts. I don’t think it’s appropriate to meet Mr. Cadogan now.”

Hearing that, she could only reply, “Come spend some time in my office, then.”

“Sure.”

When they arrived at Victoria’s office, which did *not* require passing by Alaric’s office, Yasmin had already started working early and immediately got up to make coffee for them.

“Thank you.” Noel took the coffee and looked at her, asking, “Did Mr. Cadogan come by here just now?”

Hearing his question, she seemed a bit surprised but still nodded. “He did.”

A mysterious expression took over his face as he asked, “Did he come by himself or…”

Yasmin did not say anything and merely pressed her lips together.

Meanwhile, Victoria took a sip of her coffee and did not talk either, creating a strange atmosphere.

Ten minutes later, Noel put down his cup. “Time for work. I’ll meet Mr. Cadogan now.” He got up to leave, but just as he arrived at the door, he suddenly turned back to look at Victoria and invited her. “There’s some work for the project from yesterday that requires your help to report. Let’s go together.”

Taken aback, she instinctively furrowed her brows.

Sensing her silence, he asked again, “Victoria?”

Only when she heard him again that she finally came back to her senses.

With a nod, she answered, “Okay. I’ll go with you.”

Initially, she wanted to avoid Alaric and Claudia. Ever since she spoke out that piece of news but did not hear back from him, who then had Claudia call to tell her he would not be coming home that night, she did not want to appear in front of those two anymore. To say that she was running away or being afraid was all true. She admitted all that.

However, it was obvious that Noel would not allow her to run away. Frankly, she knew what he wanted to do. All he wanted was to force her to face reality.

As the two of them walked to the office, he knocked on the door.

“Come in.” Alaric’s cold voice came from inside.

With a smile tugging at his lips, Noel pushed open the door and walked in.

As soon as the office door was pushed open, Alaric looked over in their direction. When he saw the two of them walking in together, a trace of displeasure flashed in his dark eyes, but it was so fast that it was not easy for one to notice.

“Mr. Cadogan.” Noel walked to the front. “I’m here to report yesterday’s work to you.”

“Okay.” Alaric nodded slightly with a poker face.

At the same time, Victoria stood behind Noel, watching the two men discuss work.

Alaric at work was completely different from his private self. During work, he was cold, rational, and unsentimental. Just like now, he held his hands together and placed them on his knees, expressionless, listening to Noel’s work report indifferently. However, his gaze occasionally passed over Noel and landed on her face.

She was not sure if it was her imagination, but the way Alaric looked at her was rather chilly.

Chapter 18

Victoria felt a little at a loss seeing Alaric's gaze like this. And wasn't he with Claudia when I went out for lunch? Why isn't she in the office now?

Just as she was lost in her thoughts, Noel asked her something, which promptly pulled her back to reality before answering.

After the work report was finished, Noel was ready to leave. In response, Alaric nodded indifferently.

As soon as he walked away, Alaric's gaze fell entirely on Victoria, She had been standing behind Noel earlier, which had shielded her somewhat, but now, there was no avoiding his gaze at all.

Noel, who was about to walk toward the door, turned around to look at her.

"Victoria, should I come to pick you up again tomorrow at noon?"

Hearing this, she was stunned instantly. At the same time, Alaric also

realized something was going on and arched an eyebrow.

"Do you mind if I talk to Miss Selwyn for a moment, Mr. Cadogan?"

At that moment, she knitted her brows. What is he up to?

However, before she could react, Alaric had already parted his lips and said in a cold voice, "It's better not to. It's working hours after all."

"Oh?" Noel seemed a little surprised by the response, but he did not argue.

"In that case, I'll look for her after work." He left directly after saying that.

In an instant, the office fell silent, so silent that even the sound of a pin dropping could be heard.

Once Noel was gone, Alaric's gaze became even sharper as it landed on Victoria's face. It seemingly carried a hint of displeasure. "You went out with him at noon?"

She nodded since there was no point in denying it, for she and Noel were completely innocent.

Seeing her nod, Alaric furrowed his brows. "What did you guys do?"

"We had lunch and discussed yesterday's work."

At the mention of lunch, his frown deepened, but the moment he heard her say 'discussed work, his furrowed brows slightly relaxed.

Right, they both work for my company now, so it's normal for them to talk about work.

However, he still felt some displeasure. After pressing his lips together, he said, "If someone saw you talking about work during lunch, they might think I'm bullying you."

Instinctively, she responded, "You think you haven't?"

As soon as she said that, both of them were stunned at the same time.

The urge to bite off her tongue came into her mind again at that moment,

indicating her frustration.

It was probably because she grew up alongside him, so she would say anything on her mind and would not hide her true self when she was with him. It might also be because he had seen her ugliest, worst, and most childish side when she was young.

As she was thinking, he suddenly stood up and approached her. Although he was tall and thin, he exuded a strong sense of oppression, presumably due to his aura as a long-term dominant figure.

Instinctively, she took a few steps backward, Seeing that, he grabbed her shoulders and pushed her against the cold wall. With one arm blocking her way, he wrapped his other hand around her to trap her.

“What are you doing?” She was confused, and her breathing became uneven. Although she wanted to escape, the back of her neck was held by his big palm. Then, his hot breath approached and landed on her face.

“Tell me. What did I do to you?” His voice was hoarse and deep. When he spoke slowly, his voice was extremely seductive.

At the same time, his hand lightly pinched the back of her neck over and over again. She felt as though his fingertips were on fire.

With confusion flashing in her beautiful eyes, she thought, What is he

doing?

She thought their relationship should have reached its freezing point after his absence of text and return home last night. Or at least, it should be

awkward and not so presumptuous. He's acting as if he didn't receive that text at all. Or is he pretending that nothing happened?

"Why are you not saying anything?" Alaric pinched her chin, obviously feeling her distraction. While narrowing his eyes, he asked, "What's wrong?"

As Victoria looked at this familiar, handsome face in front of her, her pink lips parted and closed, hesitating to speak. She wanted to say something, to ask something, but only when the words came to the tip of her throat did she realize how powerless she was... Not even a word could come out of her mouth.

What if he suddenly darkens his face and asks me, 'I just wanted to leave you some dignity, so I pretended not to know. Why are you so senseless, Victoria?' What am I going to do if he says that? It's better if things stay this way, maintaining our dignity. I can handle it myself.

14:01 Sun, 18 Jun

Chapter 18 Part Ways with Dignity

"Nothing." She shook her head.

When he heard her answer, his gaze turned serious. She's acting like that again.

Recently, he felt that she was acting strangely and was suddenly distancing herself from him, not willing to tell him anything.

At that thought, the temptation that arose a few moments ago dissipated instantly. He let go of his hand on her chin and took a few steps backward away from her.

While enduring the dryness in her throat, she said, "I should get back to work."

When she turned around, she heard him say, "Wait."

"Yes?"

Chapter 18 Part Ways with Dignity

"You haven't applied for any annual leave this year, right?"

Hearing that, she was startled for a moment before nodding. "Yes."

"You should start taking your annual leave tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes. You've been feeling sick lately. Use up your annual leave to rest for a while. You can take the time to boost your mood as well."

He was saying this because he realized she was in a bad mood these

days, plus the high fever, so he decided to let her rest early.

However, it was a different story in Victoria's ears since she essentially would not take any annual leave at this time of the year. He knew that as well, but now, he was asking her to apply for leave early. Is he warning me to get rid of the baby during my annual leave?

Since they were childhood friends, she knew him very well. He would not say or do anything pointless.

Although she knew that it was just a possibility, she still felt weak in her arms and legs, as though she was frozen inside an ice cave.

Only after a long time did she retrieve her voice from her throat and squeeze out a reply. "Okay. I got it. I'll apply it tomorrow."

When Summer heard what happened, anger rose in her like a tide, and she nearly smashed the tableware of the restaurant. "The f*ck? Is he a human? Has he forgotten about your relationship with him from the past? This is outrageous!"

Victoria knew Summer would yell in rage, so she reserved a room beforehand. Since there were only two of them in the room, Summer would not be heard no matter how loud she cursed.

Compared to Summer's anger, Victoria appeared to be much calmer.

Although she looked calm on the outside, she had never taken a bite of the food on the table. She only kept drinking the tea, whose color was becoming unknown after several times refilling the water.

Faced with a furious Summer, Victoria even calmed her down. “Chill out. We’ll need to pay if you smash anything.”

“Oh, right.” Summer quickly put down the cup in her hand. As she thought of it again, she walked in front of Victoria and shook her shoulders. “How can you be so calm after what happened? Look how he’s treating you!”

Victoria was a little dizzy from being shaken, so she put down the cup in her hand. “What should I do, then? Cry? Make a scene? Or threaten him that I’ll kill myself? Do you want him, Claudia and everyone else to see my family as a joke?” After a pause, she shook her head. “Besides, my relationship with him is just a deal in the first place. When we part ways,

14:02 Sun, 18 Jun

Chapter 18 Part Ways with Dignity

we should also do it with dignity

Chapter 19

Summer calmed herself down after hearing Victoria’s remarks. Since they had been friends for years, she knew Victoria well.

She was someone who knew where she stood, so she had anticipated

that something like this would happen. Even so, Summer's heart broke for her.

"But... Are you willing to do so?" asked Summer as she bit her lip.

"Does it matter?" Victoria replied impassively.

It was not the result that she wanted, but nothing changed even when she tried to alter it. Reality slapped her in the face, which reminded her that she should not be delusional.

"Are you free tomorrow? Can you accompany me to the hospital?" She paused before continuing with a smile, "I don't want to go alone."

"Come on, you're my only best friend. Of course, I'll make time for you. You don't even have to ask. Just let me know, and I'll accompany you."

Summer nodded.

"Let's eat. I wanna rest early." Victoria smiled.

She was so calm that Summer could not tell how she was feeling. Faced with that scenario, she felt like crying when she saw how Victoria was trying to hold back her emotions. Victoria was unlike that before the Selwyn Family went bankrupt. She used to be a typical girl who had a candid personality since the Selwyns would have her back if anything happened. However, ever since their bankruptcy...

"Victoria, you should let it out if you feel sad. Since there are only two of us

in this room and I'm your best friend, you don't have to hide your feelings in front of me."

Victoria was surprised upon hearing that. Did I mean to cry?

She had cried her eyes out multiple times ever since the bankruptcy. It was also then that she understood crying would not solve anything, and that her tears were worthless. Not only that, those who wanted to trample over her would see her as a joke.

Ever since then, she decided she would not shed tears so easily in front of anyone, even if it was someone she trusted.

With that thought in mind, she smiled. "Are you silly? What's there to cry over? Since day one, he had told me clearly that this is a marriage of convenience. I'm here to help him deal with his grandmother, and he would pay off my debt. This is just a deal.*

Her nonchalance enraged Summer. "You're lying. If this is just a deal, why are you pregnant? If he only sees this as a deal, he shouldn't have slept with you and impregnated you. Getting an abortion is bad for your body, so what does he see you as?"

All of Summer's questions struck Victoria's heart as if her heart had been

stabbed.

In the beginning, she and Alaric were unlike how it was now. After they married, they would sleep in the same room to avoid any unnecessary speculations, though he would sleep on the couch. Since he was her savior and someone whom she liked, she could not bring herself to let him sleep so uncomfortably.

Instead, she allowed him to sleep on the bed with a pillow placed in between them. Since it was a big bed, it did not affect their sleep.

This went on for a long time until one night when Alaric brought her along for an event, and she was introduced to some big shot whom she had already known before her family went bankrupt. During that night, she was introduced as Mrs. Cadogan, and nobody dared to embarrass him.

After the event ended, Victoria bought him drinks as she was in a good mood. Both chatted about work as they drank and got drunk.

She had a hard time carrying him back to the room and suddenly fell into his arms after tripping over something. Her being in his arms had somehow aroused him, and he grabbed onto her waist while pressing himself on her.

His slim yet fit figure was on top of hers. She was not sure whether it was due to the alcohol, but she could feel her face boiling. She wanted to push

him away, but before she could do so, he pressed his lips against hers.

Startled, she was about to push him away when he started kissing her. At that moment, her head went blank, and she froze.

When she finally made sense of the situation, she kissed him back. That night, he clung to her, and she let herself go.

When she awoke in his arms the next morning, she noticed the frown on his face. Just as he was about to say something, she interjected. “This is just an accident since we were both drunk last night.”

Hearing that, his gaze darkened as he repeated her words. “An accident?”

“Yes, an accident.” She nodded.

This could only be an accident since it was a marriage of convenience from the start. If something like that happened along the way, it would affect their relationship, and he might not let her stay by his side, thinking that she had an agenda.

His expression turned grave after hearing the word ‘accident’.

It took him a while to finally calm himself down. “As a woman, you’re on the short end of the stick. You can think of what you need from me.”

“Why do I need anything from you? And what makes you think I’m on the short end of the stick? We’re both adults, and this is just a biological need.”

Victoria pretended to be nonchalant.

Alaric's expression turned heavy upon hearing that. "It's just a biological

need?" He glanced at her with his darkened gaze.

"What else could it be? Don't overthink it. If you feel bad, you can just pay

1. me. She shrugged and acted nonchalant about it.

That day, Victoria used her way to convince Alaric that it was just a deal and quietly hid her true feelings from him. Eventually, she asked for a million.

It was unknown whether he thought the amount was outrageous, but ever since that incident, his face had never been any gloomier during all the years she spent with him. Even so, he paid her the money, but both of them did not speak to each other for a long time.

He would always greet her with a long face whenever he bumped into her and purposely go to work early and stay back after work to avoid her.

Thus, both barely saw each other during that period. However, their relationship finally improved after Griselda's birthday.

Victoria sighed as she recalled the past. "There's that. I hope to get over it soon.*

After everything was done, it would be time for her to leave. She could get divorced after Griselda's operation and be free to go anywhere she

wanted!

The next day, Victoria was up early. After meeting Summer, both of them headed to the hospital.

Chapter 20

Upon her arrival at the hospital, Summer looked around her with a strange look and asked softly, “Why don’t we go to a bigger hospital? There is no guarantee that nothing would go wrong in a smaller hospital like this one.”

“That wouldn’t be convenient,” Victoria replied in a neutral tone.

As she did not expect herself to get pregnant, she went to a hospital, in which there were people whom Griselda knew working, for a check-up.

Now that she wanted to have her condition looked into, there was no way she would go back to that hospital if she wanted to keep it a secret. After all, there could be a risk that someone there would tell Griselda about her pregnancy, which was why she decided to visit a smaller hospital for that.

After Summer took care of the registration and payment, Victoria was required to go through several check-ups. Then, the two ladies sat in the chairs and waited for Victoria’s turn to see the doctor. At the same time, Summer could not take her eyes off Victoria as she kept peeking at her

more than ten times in just a matter of minutes. Meanwhile, Victoria

quickly became puzzled and annoyed with her friend's reaction. "What?

Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I was just wondering when you've become this cold," Summer spoke with her eyes turning red.

When Victoria heard that, she could not help but question herself. Have I?

Have I become cold?

"You're... the mother of this child," Summer said with a barely audible voice, but Victoria was somewhat touched by her friend's words as she subconsciously rubbed her belly.

She is right. I'm the mother of my child. Victoria was caught in her thoughts with a heavy heart, but unfortunately, the grim reality did not seem to leave her much of a choice.

When Summer saw the hesitance on her face, she quickly seized the

chance and said, "I'm sure you don't want this to happen, right, Victoria?

Let's think of some other way."

"Some other way?" Victoria was stunned, asking herself if there was another way for her to get out of the hook because it seemed to her that she was already at her wits' end.

"That's right." Summer seized Victoria's shoulders. "Let's think of another

way. I'm sure we'll figure something out because I know the last thing you, of all people, ever want is to lose your child, yet you're forced to... Plus, we only discovered your condition not long ago, so let's just think this through without rushing into a bad decision. You don't want to do something you'll regret later for the rest of your life."

Victoria nodded in response just when she heard someone calling her name. Since it was still early in the morning, there were not a lot of people at the hospital. Thus, she stood up and walked toward the ward. "Alright. I'm going to see what the doctor says."

Thinking they could still decide what to do after the check-up, Summer calmly replied, "Sure, go ahead."

While the interior was filled with a chilly aura, the hospital was mainly a place where people went for abortions. Therefore, when the doctor received Victoria's pregnancy report, he took off his glasses and glared at her. "Are you sure you want to proceed with the abortion?"

After hearing the doctor, Victoria, already overwhelmed by complicated emotions, paused in a trance. In the meantime, the doctor was no stranger to seeing such an expression as it was not surprising at all. Soon, he went on to brief her regarding the process of abortion and told her about the payment. "Well, you can carry on with the payment once you

made up your mind. Next.”

“Thank you.” She stood up and walked out the door.

Summer, who had been waiting for Victoria outside, walked up to her as soon as she saw her. “What did the doctor say?”

When Victoria recalled the doctor’s words, she went weak in her knees and collapsed onto the ground, but Summer was quick enough to get a hold of her. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine...” Victoria nodded.

“What’s wrong? Didn’t you eat this morning?” Summer took Victoria to the bench and sat her down, asking in a worried manner.

Needless to say, Victoria was not in the mood to eat at all. In actuality, she had been suffering from a bad appetite recently, indicating reasons

related to her health problems and pregnancy, but Summer believed it could also be due to that man.

“Your face looks pale. Are you not feeling well?”

“Maybe I’m low on sugar,” Victoria replied.

“I’ll get you a little something to eat. Wait for me. I’ll be back soon.” Summer

closed her eyes and left.

As soon as she did, Victoria leaned on the bench and closed her eyes in exhaustion, but at the same time, she started to hear conflicting two voices in her head.

“What do you think you’re doing? I thought you made up your mind to go ahead with it. Furthermore, you’re already here at the hospital, so what’re you waiting for? You’ll forever be in pain so long as this matter remains unsolved. Don’t forget, he already made it clear that he’d divorce you.”

“So what? You’re a grown adult, Victoria. Can’t you afford to raise a child?”

*Raising a child is not just about money. Think about the mental and emotional stress that a mother has to go through.”

“If you’re worried your child will suffer without a father, you can always marry again. After all, you’re still so young and can find another man who’ll treat you right.”

Overwhelmed by her low blood sugar and the voices in her head, Victoria had a terrible headache until a surprised voice was heard. “Victoria? Is that you, Victoria?”

While the voice did not sound real to her, she thought she was hearing things at first, However, as the voice became clearer, she opened her eyes

and looked in the direction of the voice, whereupon she saw a woman in her forties looking at her with a strange expression.

After taking a few seconds to make out who she was, Victoria sat straight with her face changing, as if the pain in her body was all gone.

“Oh, my God. I can’t believe it’s you.” That woman enthusiastically greeted Victoria once she managed to identify her. “I saw you from a distance earlier, but I thought it was someone else. What brings you here?”

On the other hand, Victoria could not force a smile because she did not expect to see a familiar face in a small hospital. I came here because I wanted to avoid running into acquaintances, yet I still bumped into a familiar face. Why?!

As if it was not surprising enough, what made her stunned even more was that the woman she just ran into was the same woman who always hung around with Alaric’s mother—Samantha Keith.

Unable to escape from that dilemma, Victoria was forced to act calm and face the woman. “Hi, Miss Keith. I came here with a friend who had an appointment.” She knew Summer would not be back so soon and believed

Samantha and Alaric’s mother did not know her friend, so she bet they

would not run their mouths.

“I see.” Samantha shifted her eyes to Victoria’s belly when something crossed her mind, seemingly finding her somewhat fishy.

Aware of Samantha’s mean and sarcastic nature, Victoria knew how terrible this lady was at keeping secrets. Thus, she found herself unlucky to have run into her in the hospital, pursing her lips with a darkened look.

As she expected, Samantha’s big mouth began to indulge itself, her eyes staring at her belly. “So, where is your friend? Why are you alone? Is there something you’re hiding? Tsk! Tsk! Tsk! Mary always praised her daughter-in-law when we hung out, but I bet she has no idea her daughter-in-law is right here hiding something shady from me.”

Although Victoria was bound by her honor to respect someone older than her like Samantha, she could not accept her disrespectful and sarcastic

remark, reacting with a darkened expression. “What proof do you have to say that, Miss Keith? You need to watch your tongue. What do you mean by hiding something shady from you? If you keep smearing my name like that, I’m going to take legal action against you for defamation.”

“Oh, come on.” Samantha acted as if she was frightened. “Why are you overreacting? Calm down. I was just joking. Are you actually...”

*