

The Divorce 211

Chapter 211 A Strange Feeling

I woke up the next day, and Atlas was nowhere to be found. Ava had already been sent to daycare, leaving me alone with Ivanna,

My face had many scratches, and I wondered if the deeper wounds would leave lasting scars. They still hurt, too.

Ivanna said, "Ryan came to see you. He told me to stay here and advised against going to the company.

Chlo...

She hesitated, but I knew what she wanted to say.

"I'm fine," I reassured her. "Where's my car?"

"I've sent it for repairs. You shouldn't go out today!" She sounded urgent. "Let your face heal before making any decisions!"

*Alright." However, I was still thinking about yesterday's events. Atlas approached me based on those photos in my bag.

likely figured out that Celine had

One glance would've told him everything, so I asked Ivanna, "Where's my bag?"

“Huh? I don’t know.” She promptly got up and said, “I’ll go check downstairs!”

She soon returned with my bag, but I found the photos were gone.

The close angles in those photos unnerved me. I had no idea there had been hidden threats nearby.

Ivanna’s phone rang nonstop, and I said, “It’s okay if you need to take care of something. I’m not going anywhere. I just want to get some rest.”

“Alright. Get something to eat, and I’ll be back as soon as I handle this. It won’t take long. Stay here since

Mr. Atlas seemed really upset.”

“Alright!” I said, “Take the keys with you to let yourself back in later! I’ll catch a little more sleep.”

“Got it! They’re in your bag!” After she reassured me, she hurriedly left.

As I heard her car pull away, I knew I needed to leave the house because my mind was racing.

However, before I could change my clothes, Atlas entered with two other men. He spoke gently, “Just taking some precautionary measures.”

Noticing the untouched food on the table, he told me to get up and eat.

Bomplied, but he stayed by my side and scrutinized my face. Then he retrieved a small box from his coat pocket and placed it on the table.

Apply this ointment. It’s for scar removal, and it’s very effective.”

I smiled. "Are you worried I'll end up looking ugly?"

I couldn't shake the feeling that something was different between us because of this incident.

He evaded my question and said, "You won't be ugly."

"I want to bring my parents back here." I explained, "I'll feel more at ease with them by my side. They're too far away, and I can't shake this anxious feeling."

"Alright! Do you want to go personally?"

"I'll ask them about their plans. If it takes a while, I'll go get them," I replied, determined to keep my nearby. This incident had sounded an alarm for me.

Atlas suggested, "Make the call, and I'll go with you. I don't feel comfortable letting you go alone."

I nodded with a smile. "Okay, I'll make the call in the afternoon."

family

The two other men installed cameras around my yard and hidden pinhole cameras indoors. The cameras were linked to my smartphone, allowing me to monitor them at any time.

Atlas also told me to bring Grayson with me whenever I went out.

He led me upstairs once everything was settled. "Get some rest. I have to go out for a bit, but I'll be back by the time you wake up."

I

Chapter 212 Unexpected Visitor

Even though my body hurt, I quickly got out of bed. After pulling back the curtains and looking down, I spotted Stella at the door.

How did she know where I lived? I didn't recall telling her that I stayed at Amethyst Apartments.

She rang the doorbell twice more before I opened the door. Stella had a bright smile on her face as she stepped inside, holding a basket of fruits. She had an innocent expression as if she wouldn't hurt a fly.

"Ms. Stella!" I smiled and asked, "How'd you find this place?"

"Well, you sure went through a lot!" She walked in and looked around as if she owned the place. "Your house is nice, very classic!"

"Please, have a seat! Can I get you something to drink? I have coffee and tea!"

"Anything is fine. Don't trouble yourself!" She cheerily followed me. "How did this happen? It's truly terrifying. Did you offend anyone? How'd you end up kidnapped?"

She seemed well-informed about my situation, which perplexed me.

"Wow, the news traveled fast!" I chuckled, though I harbored doubts.

"Atlas got a call while we were having dinner yesterday. I overheard them saying that you were missing." she explained matter-of-factly. "I was worried, so I called Atlas later to ask. I was so relieved to hear they

found you!"

A tinge of bitterness welled up within me. So they were having dinner together.

Stella studied my face intently. "Chloe, how'd you hurt your face?"

She gasped as if she hadn't noticed when she entered. Her delicate face displayed an exaggerated look of shock.

I gestured for her to take a seat.

"Have you seen a doctor? You must take care of your face, or it'll leave a scar! She leaned in to take a closer look, looking worried. "How could this happen to someone so pretty?"

"It's nothing, just surface wounds!"

I didn't expect it to be this severe!" She sighed, taking a seat.

We talked about various topics, but neither of us mentioned Celine. I chose not to bring it up and

She finally excused herself when she saw I was tired.

At the door, Stella said, "Your injury disrupted my plans. I was going to go shopping with you. I need to pick out a gift tomorrow for Atlas's birthday. I don't have time to return to Nocturnia, so I'll just shop around here."

"Really?" I casually said, "I don't think I can join you in this state. I can't exactly go out like this!"

She held my hand and said, "Alright, take care and get well soon! Be careful if you go out next time."

“Thank you, Ms. Stella!”

“Why are you being so courteous? Well, I’m off!”

She left, and I lazily returned upstairs. I climbed into bed and accessed the recently installed surveillance feed.

Initially, I intended to test the cameras’ performance, but Stella’s expression caught my attention.

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Stella was seen leaving the surveillance footage. When she turned and looked back at my villa, her smile was....

Chapter 213 Unintentional Information

was utterly shocked by what I saw in the surveillance footage. There was no mistaking it—her smile was gloating

This revelation of her smile sent shivers down my spine. What was her true motive? Did she visit me just to revel in my misery?

I started to wonder if she was behind the attack. If Celine had a hand in this, Stella would be the first one to know.

No, no, no! It couldn’t be. She couldn’t possibly want to take my life, would she?

I sat on the bed in a daze with my head in my hands, not noticing when Atlas had returned. I didn't hear him as he came to my room.

Seeing my troubled expression, he rushed to me and touched my shoulder. I screamed and pushed him away frantically.

'Chlo, it's me!'

Atlas quickly embraced me, enveloping me in his familiar scent. Only then did I relax, realizing it was him who had returned.

I looked at him, my fear slowly fading away. He looked concerned. "Don't be scared. What happened? Hm?"

I let out a sigh and shook my head faintly. I didn't want to tell him about this. However, something compelled me to ask, "Did you love Annalise?"

Atlas suddenly froze, staring at me in bewilderment. "Who told you? Celine or Stella?"

"It doesn't matter," I replied. "I just want to know. Does she really look similar to me?"

I looked at him, waiting for his answer. Atlas's expression was somewhat wooden. "Not really!"

His response felt evasive, and I lowered my head, deciding not to press further.

He lifted my chin. "Chloe, no matter what anyone tells you, I hope you'll believe only me!"

Our eyes locked. I found comfort in his eyes, and eventually I relented. I decided to trust only him.

Deep down, doubts still lingered. I wanted to know the extent of his love for Annalise and if I was just a substitute for his unrequited love. Would he still be with me if I didn't resemble her? I knew, deep down,

that it was impossible.

brought Ava home. She rushed into my room, climbed onto the bed, and carefully examined my red face. "Mommy, does it hurt?"

Tears welled up in my eyes as I hugged her tightly. I shook my head and said, "It doesn't hurt, sweetheart. Mommy just wasn't careful during work and got a scratch."

"What scratched you?" She gave me a serious look, her eyes capturing my heart.

It was some dry grass. You have to be careful, okay? Don't play in the grass!"

"Okay. Mommy!" She nodded earnestly, but her questions were never-ending.

Finally, she seemed relieved, gazing at Atlas with admiration.

y and then return

In the evening, after I had called my mother, I decided to stay until after Atlas's birthday

to my

small town to bring my parents back. Having them by my side was the only way I'd feel at ease.

I stayed home for the next two days and focused on tidying up the house. I changed all the bedding, and it felt like I had returned to the old days, just a homely woman waiting for her beloved to come home

from work.

In the evening, I would carefully prepare dinner and set the table, anticipating Atlas's return with Ava. It gave me some tranquility.

Deep down, I knew Atlas couldn't be here as often once I brought my parents back. A faint melancholy settled over me, and I couldn't help but wonder if we'd grow further apart.

Chapter 214 His Birthday

Ryan called to check on my injury just as I considered heading to the office that morning.

When I arrived, he spotted me and rushed over to check my face. "Is everything okay? Will it leave a scar?"

Does it still hurt?"

My face had improved quite a bit over the past few days. The deeper scratches had faded to faint marks, and the finer ones were barely noticeable. It didn't look as bad as it did initially.

He then pulled me to sit on the sofa and updated me on recent happenings at the company. Celine had ordered the abandonment of the land, leading to the Echelon Group's victory.

"Celine gave up?" I asked skeptically.

"It seems like she's trying to slow Atlas's growth."

I was surprised and asked, "Are you suggesting she's sidelining Atlas to diminish his influence?"

"Our joint project with ATL Empire isn't looking great."

I mused

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Estates can step in now.”

ongoing contracts. “It looks like it’s going to get rough. Thankfully, Heartland

“The projects already under construction won’t be affected, but we have a three–year agreement with ATL Empire. Any disruption during this time could hinder our growth.” He looked worried and said, “We should prepare for potential issues.”

As Ryan spoke, I thought of Atticus. I had a feeling that he might be able to help.

However, I quickly dismissed the thought. I shouldn’t get too close to him. Both ATL Empire and Echelon Group had their fair share of uncertainties.

After we talked for a while, I went back to my office. I pondered about this three–way relationship

between our companies.

I had confidence in Atlas. His decision to attend Echelon Group’s celebration party wasn’t simple.

“Why do you think I’d give in to him?” he asked on the phone the other day. I was sure he had a plan.

couldn’t deny the gap in my understanding of ATL Empire’s internal situation. I debated if I should ask Grayson or have him investigate. However, since Atlas had sent me Grayson, I wasn’t sure if my actions

would cross any lines.

On Atlas's birthday, I prepared several of his favorite dishes. However, I didn't rush to make them,

Instead, I made a late night feast. I cooked with care, focusing on every detail, regardless of whether he Red eaten elsewhere.

Sure enough, he returned late that night. Ava had eagerly waited for him to cut the cake, and she wanted to blow out the candles with him.

Ava eventually fell asleep in my arms. I called him, but no one answered for a long time.

I soothed Ava to sleep and waited on the second-floor deck that overlooked the road leading to our home. The night grew deeper, and the dishes grew cold.

A new day was about to begin, yet there was no sign of his car. It seemed he wouldn't be coming back here tonight.

With a disappointed sigh, I turned around. Just as I was about to enter the house, car lights appeared in the distance...

Chapter 215 Infuriated

Those distant lights instantly illuminated my entire world. My heart leaped with joy, and I rushed downstairs, fumbling to put the dishes in the microwave. The excitement made my hands tremble.

I ran to the bathroom to check my appearance and look my best for Atlas. I wanted him to know I'd always be there for him. More than anything, I hoped we could celebrate his birthdays together from now

1. on.

Finally, the door was pushed open. I eagerly said, "You're back!"

Atlas seemed disoriented and was surprised to see me. He pulled me into his arms. "Why are you still awake?"

The air smelled strongly of alcohol. I'd never seen him drink this much before.

I quickly led him to the dining table. When he was seated, I lit the birthday candles and said, "Happy birthday! I hope every day will be as wonderful as today! Make a wish!"

I saw him slowly rise while looking at me. His expression had darkened.

"What did you say, Chloe?" His drunken eyes turned icy and intense. "What did you just say?"

Atlas swept everything off the table, making a loud crash in the quiet night. His demeanor was ice-cold, and he suddenly felt like a stranger. I never thought I'd be afraid of him.

While trembling, I backed away. I didn't understand what had happened. What had triggered such a violent outburst from him?

"Chloe... Who told you to do this? How could you be so stupid?"

Those were his last words as he stomped out, slamming the door behind him.

I was shaken, but a soft voice broke me out of my trance.

“Mommy?”

I turned to see Ava, her small figure crouched by the staircase. She looked at me with wide, frightened eyes. I rushed to pick her up and carried her to her room.

Her big, dark eyes blinked sleepily. “Mommy...”

“It’s okay, sweetheart. Mommy was just a little careless and knocked the table over. Did I scare you?” |

forced a smile. “Go back to sleep!”

Uncle Atlas? She hadn’t forgotten about him and was upset he wasn’t there.

“Something came up, so he couldn’t make it back. How about this? I’ll buy you a cake tomorrow!” My voice choked. “Or, Mommy could bring you to meet Grandma soon?”

She quickly fell into a half-asleep, half-awake state. “Okay...”

Tucked her until she fell back into slumber, then I went downstairs. Looking at the mess, I couldn’t hold back my grief any longer. My heart ached as I sobbed.

When my tears ceased, I cleaned up the shattered items on the ground and wiped away the mess.

I started recalling everything I had said and done since his arrival. It was confusing why his behavior suddenly changed. It was truly unacceptable to me.

He was too aggressive and lacked any of his previous warmth. His attitude made me apprehensive.

Was he really Atlas?

As time passed, my heart felt colder. My tears had dried up, and hope had faded, leaving me feeling empty.

I kept crying as I cleaned, making everything look like it did before, as if nothing had happened. Outside, the sky was slowly getting brighte

Chapter 216 Silly Attempt at Finding Comfort

I gazed at the kitchen and dining area I had cleaned before washing my face. However, I didn't return to my room. Instead, I went to Ava's room and lay beside her. Surprisingly, I fell asleep almost immediately.

Ava had already been awake and playing with her dolls when I woke up. After some thought, I told her, "Let's change our clothes. I'll take you out for breakfast and then to the office. If there's nothing urgent, we can visit Grandma and Grandpa, okay?"

Ava cheered and asked if she could bring her doll with her.

Meanwhile, I called Ryan and told him I'd come by later. I helped Ava prepare, found her winter clothes, and packed them in a small suitcase. I also packed my belongings before we left.

We went to the office after breakfast. Although it was Ava's first time here, she quickly became the office princess. Carol brought her around while I dealt with a few matters with Ryan. I also told him I wanted to return to my hometown today to fetch my parents.

Ryan looked me up and down, then nodded. "All right, go ahead. Don't worry about the company. Carol and I have everything under control. I'll call you if there are any emergencies. Just spend time with your parents. Call me before you return, and I'll pick you up at the airport."

Soon after, Carol booked the plane tickets.

On the way to the airport, Ryan looked at me through the rearview mirror. I said nothing because I wasn't feeling it today. I had dark circles under my eyes, which he noticed. Still, he didn't ask about them or

make me feel uncomfortable.

When we arrived, he escorted me and Ava to the security checkpoint. He repeatedly reminded me to take good care of my daughter, especially since it was cold outside. He didn't want Ava to catch a cold.

The fresh air woke me from a daze when I landed in the snowy north. I took a deep breath and felt more awake in days. Once out of the airport, we took a cab home.

Ava was ecstatic and kept pointing out places to me like a little tour guide. I only turned on my phone when we reached my parents' place. Immediately after, I called Ryan to tell him we had arrived safely.

However, I felt disappointed when I noticed I hadn't received any calls from Atlas. He didn't call me during my few days in my hometown. I felt empty, cold, and hurt. It seemed I was a mere substitute for

his lover.

I stayed with my parents for two weeks, sorting out everything in the house. Afraid that my parents would!

worry, I moved their essentials into my dad's study and locked the door.

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rented out the house to a relative of one of my dad's colleagues. I knew they were trustworthy

enough to look after it.

When boarding the flight, I called Ryan and gave him the flight information. My family and I finally reached Foswood ust before New Year's Day.

Back home, I finally managed to let go of a lingering worry. Regardless of everything, we were together, and my parents were here to look after us.

Everyone was busy preparing for the holidays when I went to the office the following day. This period was typically the busiest for the company since we bid farewell to the previous year and welcomed the new

one.

I tried to keep busy because I feared thinking of Atlas in moments of silence. My heart ached during

these moments.

I knew something went wrong on his birthday, but I didn't know what it was. It was evident he had been drinking that day. I replayed our conversation countless times, unable to find what angered him.

We had another company dinner after the New Year's Eve celebration. Grayson sat beside me this time. More people were here than at the first company dinner, making it livelier. Everyone chatted, toasted, and

wished me a prosperous new year.

That evening, I unknowingly had a little too much to drink.

Then, someone caught my attention when they mentioned ATL Empire. I carefully listened as they discussed how ATL Empire had already started their holiday since Christmas.

I glanced at Grayson and casually asked, "Is that so?"

He looked at me earnestly and said, "It's no surprise. They're a big company with excellent benefits. Having an extra long holiday at the end of the year is just one of them. Their CEO has even returned home

to celebrate Christmas."

I realized Grayson meant Atlas had returned to Oстана. That was where ATL Empire's headquarters was. It explained why I hadn't received any calls from him.

I couldn't help but laugh at myself as that thought crossed my mind. It was a silly attempt at finding comfort.

Chapter 217 Felgning ignorance

I got drunk that night, so Ryan had to send me home. When we exited his car, he carried me on his back. I giggled and refused to go inside.

He walked around the neighborhood with me on his back while recounting everything that happened during my freshman year. I remembered how nice he had been to me. Eventually, I fell asleep on his back.

I didn't remember how I returned to my room, but I felt at ease. I was no longer afraid since my parents were there to care for Ava. I felt like I could do whatever I pleased.

Suddenly, a series of phone calls woke me. My head still pounded, and I knew it was a holiday. I silenced my phone and buried my face in the pillow, forcing myself not to overthink. However, I couldn't sleep or shake the pain in my heart anymore.

Suddenly, my phone rang again.

I picked up my phone and saw Atlas's name. After some hesitation, I finally answered. After all, I had longed for him to call me.

"Yeah?" My voice was hoarse from just waking up.

"Why didn't you answer earlier?" It seemed Atlas had noticed the indifference in my voice. "Why are you

crying?"

"I just woke up."

"If you're unhappy, just say it. If you have questions, ask," Atlas's tone remained cold.

I said nothing and felt a bitter lump in my throat. There was a long silence between us when Atlas finally asked, "Aren't you happy I called?"

"I'm afraid of misspeaking again. After all, I'm pretty dumb," I bitterly replied.

He responded with a mocking scoff and taunted, "You should reflect on yourself. Aren't you dumb?"

"Mr. Atlas, I'm a divorcee, so I've failed in life. You can find someone young and beautiful—" Before I

could finish, he rudely interrupted me and hung up.

I held my phone for a long time before realizing I had gone too far. I felt uneasy again, wondering why I

sought momentary satisfaction like that. Even if we couldn't be together, we didn't need to hurt each

other

I knew this relationship wasn't conventional. Since it was a matter of mutual benefit, it was unnecessary

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want it to be a forced decision. I only wanted to be the one Atlas favored.

However, I dared not say that because I knew my place.

He couldn't give me what I wanted because I had to contend with his complicated family. I knew my insignificance.

I leaned against the bed's headboard and pondered until my mom called me for dinner. I rushed to the bathroom to freshen up and went downstairs. Still, I felt ashamed. Despite what he said, I brought my

parents here to look after me.

During dinner, my mom said, "Why don't you call Ryan and invite him for a meal tomorrow to celebrate the New Year? He's alone in Foswood and can't visit our hometown for the holiday. He can come here for

a meal instead."

I rolled my eyes but dared not argue. To be honest, I became a hands-off leader since Ryan joined the company. Still, he and I agreed he would have his shares once the company became successful and reached certain goals.

Although I felt at ease, I couldn't help but feel reserved about Ryan coming to my house. I won't deny having my own motives about it. Nonetheless, Ryan had been good to me, and I couldn't find faults with

him.

I knew my parents' thoughts, too. I was also aware that Ryan was patiently waiting. He played the perfect role as a backup without complaints.

My parents feigned ignorance, but I refused to believe they hadn't learned about Atlas from Ava. At the very least, Ava would want to flaunt her beautiful doll.

My mom continued when I didn't object, "Ryan cares a lot about you. Don't pretend you can't see it."

"Mom, I didn't say he can't come, did I? Why do you think I'm feigning ignorance?"

My dad knocked on the table. "All right, let her eat."

I

In truth, I had lost my appetite from my heavy thoughts.

Ryan brought many things to my house in the afternoon. It seemed he had been to the market. Although speechless, I acted warmly and looked over everything he had bought. The atmosphere felt homey.

The sudden realization reminded me of Atlas's birthday, and my heart ached. I thought he wouldn't understand this atmosphere because he seemed detached. It seemed he and I weren't from the same

world.

Suddenly, my phone rang. I froze when I saw the name on the screen.

Chapter 218 A Forced Order

I didn't know whether to answer since Atlas was calling.

Meanwhile, my dad seemingly assessed my emotions. I reluctantly answered the call. The voice on the other end said, "I'm at the airport. Come and pick me up.

was speechless at his command. He usually had assistants around him but still wanted me to pick him up. I wondered if he considered me a chauffeur or a servant.

"Sorry, I have guests at home and can't come-" I replied indifferently.

Before I could finish, he hung up. I nearly cursed him aloud for hanging up on me again. I was about to leave my phone on the coffee table when I received a text. It was a picture of Ryan with bags in hand.

Below it, the message read, "Is this the guest you must stay home for? When did he become so important

ou can't leave? Ava must be waiting for me to have dinner with her."

that you

I was outraged while looking at the message. I thought Atlas was bold for accessing the surveillance footage at my house.

"What do you want?" I returned his text. I felt powerless and didn't know what else to do.

"Are you picking me up or not?" Atlas replied, his words even more forceful this time.

If I refused, I knew he would appear at my door within an hour. Also, I didn't want to put Ryan in an awkward spot. I was furious and indifferent. However, I met my dad's gaze when I raised my head and

smiled awkwardly.

7-1 need to head out for a bit," I said to my dad, grinning. Then, I hurried upstairs, changed my clothes, grabbed my keys, and fled. I feared my dad would stop me. I felt pitiful when I got into my car—no wonder he felt entitled to treat me like this.

I sat in the car and sighed before finally leaving. I told myself we'd have to meet sooner or later.

When I arrived at the airport, I called Atlas from the exit. He didn't answer but was already striding toward me. He put his luggage in the back seat and sat in the passenger seat. Although he adjusted the seat, his

tall figure looked a little cramped.

Although silent, it wasn't because I didn't want to talk to him. I just didn't know what to say. I felt nervous.

throughout the drive and remembered how he looked that night.

Neither of us spoke, and I drove in silence. Atlas seemed lost in thought while I subconsciously drove to

my place. Finally, he said, "Do you want me to come for dinner?"

sterthed and unintentionally pressed the brakes. "I don't know the way to your house."

He replied through gritted teeth, "What a dumb driver!"

thalted at the roadside and roared, "You can get out if you want!"

He did precisely that, and my heart dropped. I regretted what I said as I gripped the steering wheel. I flinched when he slammed the car door. Unexpectedly, he walked to the driver's side and pulled me

out.

Immediately after, he walked me to the passenger side and pushed me in. Then, he went to the driver's seat and adjusted it before leaning toward me.

I was frightened and clung to the seat, closing my eyes and turning away. However, Atlas simply reached over and fastened my seatbelt before saying, "You're overthinking again."

I opened my eyes and looked at Atlas, but he had already started the car and sped away. This time, I memorized the route he took. His place was near Pleca Park, a key scenic area.

I inwardly cursed him. I thought having such a massive garden in his house was outrageous and a waste of space. However, he didn't follow the route I remembered. Instead, he turned the other

entrance of the scenic spot.

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I was puzzled but didn't ask about it. I remained indifferent, acting like I could take anything Atlas threw at me.

When the car entered a concealed area within a more prominent scenic spot, my eyes widened in amazement. The view before me was incredible. The entire garden covered a vast area, with only one main building.

It had lush trees and a gigantic phoenix tree, filling the courtyard with a delicate fragrance. A fountain flowed in the front yard, and the back had a lush mountain with pavilions and terraces.

Atlas parked the car at the main entrance and said, "We're home."

Chapter 219

His Reason

My heart sank, and I felt his words weren't for me. I sat motionless as I gazed at the breathtaking scenery before me. I wondered if this was the home under construction he had mentioned.

Atlas exited the car, took his luggage, and opened my door. He led me inside, and I matched his pace. The inside of the house was inexplicable. I heard a sudden exclamation as we entered, "Mr. Atlas, you're

back!"

Several servants rushed over and took the luggage from Atlas. There was a chorus of greetings and laughter that followed. I knew these people were loyal to him.

When he got to his room, he pressed me against the door and said hoarsely, "It seems you didn't miss

me."

My heart ached, and I chuckled with a hint of bitterness. I lowered my gaze. I was always stubborn and never knew how to express what bothered me. Meanwhile, Atlas leaned in and stared at me as if trying to

read my thoughts.

"What's wrong? Don't you want to talk to me?" He continued to gaze at me, making me feel trapped.

His subtle fragrance made my heart race. I feared my eyes would show my longing for him. I avoided his

gaze

and mumbled, “No... I want to talk but don’t know what to say.”

Atlas lifted my chin, forcing me to meet his gaze. His eyes were tender, and he gently bit my lip. “I want to hear anything you have to say. I’ve missed you so much.”

My heart raced even more, and my breathing became shaky. I knew Atlas was flirting with me, but I couldn’t resist his charm. He cradled my face and asked teasingly. “Do you think you can escape me?”

He resembled a cat playing with a mouse, and I playfully pushed him away. “I never considered escaping. You can do whatever you want. I won’t resist.”

He froze like he understood the reason behind my mood. He moved away and approached the floor-to-ceiling window while I remained at the door.

A while later, he turned and said coldly, “That day was the anniversary of my parents’ deaths. They died in a plane crash when I was ten. They were rushing home to celebrate my birthday. Even their assistant,

Rory White, died.”

I was shocked as I froze in place. The pain I felt for him was unbearable. I would’ve fallen over if I wasn’t

leaning on the door.

I looked at Atlas with widened eyes. I joyfully wished him a happy birthday that night, saying, “I hope your

I was such an idiot that night. However, it was all Stella’s fault. I numbly asked him, “Is Stella Rory’s

daughter?

Atlas nodded slowly after a long pause. I finally realized how foolish I had been. I thought Stella had slipped up when she mentioned it at the door. I even cleverly prepared a birthday dinner for Atlas. Even so, Stella had already told me his parents' deaths were his kryptonite.

I'm sorry...

..." "I subconsciously uttered those words.

I

"The fault lies in you not asking me anything. I told you to only listen to me and not believe anyone else," Atlas sounded pained with a hint of suppressed anger, "Do you remember what I said? Chloe, you must believe me no matter what, even if I don't explain myself."

His world was complicated, and I didn't know so much deception existed around him. I finally understood Celine's meaning when she said we weren't from the same world. Suddenly, I realized Stella's sinister smile was for me falling into her trap.

It was terrifying, and I didn't know what was real anymore.

"I returned to Nocturnia to visit them the following day. So..." Atlas seemed unable to continue as he approached and put his arms around me.

He embraced me and lowered his voice, saying, "I know it's not your fault, but I can't escape what

happened that day."

I encircled his waist and felt his loneliness. A premonition washed over me, and an invisible force pushed me, making it impossible to break free

Chapter 220 Provocation

I didn't return to my place for dinner with Ryan and my family that night. Instead, I stayed with Atlas. After what he told me, I couldn't leave him alone in his vast mansion on New Year's Eve.

He told me a lot about his happy times with his parents before he turned ten. However, he didn't mention his life after losing them, and I didn't dare to ask. I believed those were the scars he didn't want to reopen.

No wonder he loved being home so much, and he was so patient with Ava. I guessed he was emulating his dad.

While listening to his stories, I had a strange feeling that I had lost many happy memories. I only remembered things from my senior year of high school but had no memories of what happened before.

I couldn't recall much of my childhood or how my parents treated me. It was as if I had no friends. I even envied Atlas for speaking of his past happiness and sorrow. Still, I wondered if I had chosen to forget certain things.

I wanted to ask him about Annalise, but my words would always get stuck in my throat. Atlas and I spent New Year's Day snuggled together.

Unbeknownst to me, a reception occurred at the Pierce family's mansion in Nocturnia that day. However, it ended in disarray due to Atlas's absence. As a result, it affected me, even though I was in Foswood.

I returned to work when the holiday ended. Surprisingly, the first client to visit my company was Stella. She smiled and cheerfully entered my office, saying, "Happy New Year, Chloe!"

I was stunned but admired her acting skills and impeccable composure. It would be a waste of her skills if I didn't engage her. "It's been a while, Ms. Stella. You look like you had a lovely New Year. Did you

celebrate in Nocturnia?"

I smiled as I spoke.

Stella casually sat on the sofa and said, "Oh, yes! The Pierce family has many traditions and events during the New Year, so I had to return, especially this year. I was in a hurry when I left and didn't have time to say goodbye to you. No matter where Atlas and I are, we must return to visit our parents yearly."

"Oh, your biological parents are also in Nocturnia?" I asked deliberately.

Stella looked at me in surprise, "You didn't know?"

"What?" I feigned curiosity.

My dad used to be the assistant to Atlas's parents. My dad and Atlas's parents last went on a business

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plane crash. W

The family buried them close to each other, so Atlas and I return to pay our respects yearly," Stella spoke of these events without a hint of sorrow, "Later, my mom was heartbroken and fell severely ill. She passed away in less than half a year, and then Mrs. Celine adopted me.

"Atlas and I share a similar fate, and it all started with the Pierce family. That's why they take good care of me, especially Atlas. He once swore at my parents' grave that he would never upset me."

“Oh! I listened with great interest but felt bitter inside. It seemed Atlas had always protected her. I said casually, “No wonder Mr. Atlas’s birthday is so important to you.”

“Haha! Yes, how could I forget? That’s the anniversary of our parents’ deaths and the day Atlas despises the most,” She laughed wickedly, with a cunning look.

Then she stared at me meaningfully and said, “I always prepare gifts for him and find a suitable time to give them to him. It’s a way to celebrate his birthday without touching on his parents’ deaths.”

Stella made perfect sense. She had shifted all the blame to me, causing Atlas’s outburst. I was frustrated at myself for being too stupid not to realize it sooner.

I hadn’t forgotten how Atlas shouted at me that night, asking me who told me about his birthday and calling me stupid. It meant he knew Stella was behind it. Still, he hadn’t blamed her that night.

Otherwise, Stella wouldn’t have come to refresh my memory from that night. It seemed she came to provoke me today.