

The Divorce 441

Chapter 441 A Deep and Abiding Love

"Tvanna...

Ivanna..." As I got to the top of the iron tank, I heard Jared's uneasy voice from the bottom.

I felt dizzy, and my steps faltered.

When I slipped, Atlas caught me and lifted me back up.

I couldn't afford to overthink.

Anxiously, I followed the stairs spiraling down from the top of the iron tank.

My trembling voice echoed, "Ivanna! What happened to her?" T could barely make out the situation below.

A few faint lights swayed at the bottom of the iron tank, and there appeared to be water.

The pungent smell of rust and stagnant water intensified as I descended, chilling me to the bone.

At the base, Jared's men used their phone's flashlights to illuminate the massive tank.

The lights resembled fireflies.

It was like a veil had covered my vision.

In the darkness, I could only see moving figures.

I heard Jared shout, "Knife!" My heart leaped to my throat.

Why did he need a knife? I cursed myself for wearing semi-high heels.

Even though I was anxious, I couldn't rush down.

My steps were excruciatingly slow, and my legs trembled.

It took immense effort, but I finally reached the bottom.

Jared had jumped into the stagnant water as my eyes adjusted to the darkness below.

He pulled Ivanna out, her body pale from soaking in the water.

Someone used a knife to cut the ropes binding her hands and feet.

Ivanna's eyes were tightly shut, and her body was limp, barely holding on.

"_.

Ivanna!" Jared kept calling her name, his voice filled with agony.

"Ivanna, wake up.

I'm here!" As he held the nearly lifeless Ivanna in his arms, he appeared lost.

Figures moved strangely in the dim light, unsettling us when combined with Jared's desperate calls.

"Jared, quick, get her to the hospital!" Atlas, who had just arrived, shouted urgently.

His voice echoed within the tank.

Jared seemed to snap out of it.

He waded through the filthy water, cradling Ivanna.

Jared's love and concern for her were unquestionable at that point.

He had lost all of his composure.

We made way for him.

Even those still descending the stairs quickly turned around and headed back up, fearing the slightest delay.

From above came Lauren's cries, "Ivanna! How is she?" All of us swiftly climbed back up the ladder.

Once we reached the top of the iron tank and descended the spiral stairs again, there was a bright white light.

1 Tension was in the air as two groups of people squared off on the rooftop.

In the center stood Trinity, her smoky makeup giving her a ghostly appearance.

Her face seemed almost skeletal.

"Jared!" Her voice rang out in the night air.

When I finally reached the top after Jared, I was struck by what I saw.

My heart leaped to my throat.

Jared's body stiffened, but he didn't stop moving.

He stood tall and resolute, cradling Ivanna as he strode toward the exit.

1 "Jared, stop right there!" Trinity's voice was sharp and threatening.

It was Dylan's subordinates who were fighting her now, not Jared's.

"Stay put!" Dylan's voice was commanding.

However, Trinity seemed to ignore them.

Her gaze was fixed on Jared, who was approaching her with Ivanna in his arms.

"Jared, don't forget who you are, your responsibilities, and everything you have now!" She said it with a strange expression.

Jared stood firm in front of her, meeting her gaze squarely.

"Are you threatening me?"

Chapter 442 Furious

Trinity stared menacingly at him.

"Jared, you know what I'm capable of! You've seen what happens to those who defy me!" "Then do as you please!" Jared's tone was uncompromising as he carried Ivanna to the exit.

"Get him!" Her people swiftly surrounded Jared, each brandishing ominous- looking objects.

I was instantly on edge and ready to act in anger.

Ivanna couldn't afford any more delays.

She had been soaking in that water for 48 hours.

I could not imagine how Ivanna survived that long in the sweltering heat of the day and the eerie darkness of the night.

"Trinity!" I yelled, fearlessly taking a step forward.

"If any harm comes to her, I won't let you go!" Lauren immediately pulled me back I struggled free from her grasp, locking eyes defiantly with Trinity.

"Let go of me!" Trinity glared at me.

"I've never seen someone so clueless about their mortality!" "Then come at me!" I yelled.

"Right now! Come on!" Trinity approached me with anger.

Atlas, who had been standing by my side, barked, "I dare you!" Trinity hesitated before making her next move.

"Step aside!" Jared's stern command echoed, directed at Trinity's subordinates.

They looked at Trinity for guidance.

1 Before she could speak, Jared said, "Don't force me to act, or it'll be a lose-lose situation.

You're not stopping me from saving her.

You'd better pray she's unharmed!" Jared's words were chilling as he said, "Anyone who dares obstruct me will suffer! Step aside!" "Jared!" Trinity's cry sounded desperate.

"Get out of the way!" Jared's eyes were now burning with intensity.

Instinctively shuffled after this harsh command.

Those who were trying to stop him dropped their arms and stood still.

Jared carried Ivanna and walked out the door.

I quickly grabbed Lauren and followed Jared, not catching Trinity's response.

Upon entering the building, I noticed that Ivanna's face was deathly pale and showed no signs of life.

Water was still dripping from her body.

I felt a sudden wave of despair.

"Ivanna, please be okay!" Jared's face darkened.

His gaze remained fixed on Ivanna's pallid, lifeless face.

Inside the elevator, the only sound was his heavy breathing.

He cradled her, pressing her ashen face against his.

"Ivanna, wake up!" I couldn't help but choke up.

I had wanted to scold Jared, but I swallowed my words.

It was only then that I realized Atlas hadn't come out with us.

I couldn't help but worry.

Could he be in a confrontation with Trinity? Earlier, Dylan's men and Trinity's were poised with guns drawn, ready for a standoff.

T involuntarily glanced at Lauren beside me.

Her face was just as pale, and she stared at Ivanna.

Lauren gave me a reassuring pat.

"Don't worry, she wouldn't dare!" Upon reaching the first floor, the corridor outside was filled with a sea of black-clad figures.

When they saw Jared carrying Ivanna, they made way for him.

Lauren and I followed closely behind, each getting into our respective cars.

We joined the massive convoy on the streets of Foswood that escorted Jared's vehicle.

The cars shot through the street, and when we arrived at the hospital, medical staff were already waiting at the entrance.

It was clearly Atlas's arrangement.

Ivanna was taken in.

Jared, covered in an incredibly foul rust- colored stain, followed closely.

I couldn't even fathom how dirty the water inside that iron tank must have been.

After rushing the whole way, we were finally stopped at the emergency room's doors.

Chapter 443 A Mixed Bag of News

Jared's hands were pressed against the wall of the emergency room door.

Atlas walked over, and that was when he calmed down.

He stood up straight and looked at Atlas.

"Thank you." Atlas only said, "She'll be fine! Trust the doctors!" Two hours later, the lights in the emergency room finally went out.

The weary doctors emerged, bearing news that was a mix of joy and concern.

The doctor explained that Ivanna's vital signs had returned to normal.

She had suffered only minor external injuries.

However, because of being bound for an extended period, there was some tissue necrosis in her arm.

Recovery would depend on how she responded.

I felt a sense of unease.

I rushed forward and asked, "How did it become necrotic? What are the chances of recovery?" The doctor patiently explained, "It's just a sign of necrosis.

We will have to wait for the patient to regain consciousness and assess her sensory response before determining her chances of recovery.

But the outlook is promising." I finally sighed with relief.

Jared got her a high-end private room and stationed guards both inside and outside.

He sealed off any information from leaking out.

If news like this got out, the consequences could be unimaginable.

This was no longer just a matter of emotions.

It will escalate into a dreadful event.

Before long, Ivanna was transported back to her room.

The medical staff had cleaned her, but her complexion still looked pale.

"Ivanna, wake up," Jared whispered as he gently patted her hand.

"Don't be afraid, you're safe now." I could see the pain in his eyes.

With us here, he was holding it together.

Otherwise, he would have surely broken down.

I turned away, wiping away the tears in my eyes.

I looked out the window and noticed that it was getting light outside.

We stayed by her side the whole time.

Though Jared urged her a few times, she still didn't wake up.

I couldn't bring myself to leave.

Eventually, the doctor told us to leave, saying she still showed no signs of awakening.

It was likely a deep sleep phase, and we shouldn't disturb her.

We had no choice but to leave.

Jared stayed to watch over Ivanna.

1 Atlas took us back to the Amethyst Apartments, urging us to rest.

Then he drove off, saying he needed to visit the office.

I knew he must have matters to attend to.

Lauren went to the guest room, and I was genuinely exhausted.

I had rushed back from Celestis Island, stayed up all night, and hadn't even showered.

I fell asleep on the bed without a second thought.

When Lauren woke me up, it was already 7 p.m.

I was startled and asked, "Any news?" "Yeah.

They said she woke up," she whispered.

I quickly got up, brushed my teeth, and freshened up.

I didn't even have time to eat anything before rushing to the hospital.

As I entered the room, I noticed a frai] Ivanna, her complexion still pale.

As soon as she saw us, she burst into tears.

"Chlo, Lauren!" The three of us were on the verge of tears.

Jared stood silently on the side, his eyes filled with guilt and sorrow.

He had changed into a fresh set of clothes, looking clean and refined.

He was a far cry from the man filled with hostility the night before.

However, I couldn't shake the unease in my heart.

Could he handle this situation with Trinity? After all, she was not one to be trifled with.

She was fierce and ruthless by nature, and wouldn't just let this slide.

Now that Jared had openly confronted her, there had to be a reasonable explanation.

An explanation was owed to Trinity and even more so to Ivanna.

Although he had previously stated that Ivanna was his top priority and Trinity was merely a business partner, their collaboration was strange.

It was a complex web, and who could say that something was not hidden between them in their unusual marital relationship? As Jared had put it, things could end in a lose-lose situation.

Chapter 444 A Close Death Encounter

When I saw Trinity at the Vanderberg Palace, I could not figure out why she was so composed.

Now, it all made sense.

She never intended for Ivanna to survive.

Trinity was trying to kill her by putting her in such a hostile environment, isolated and abandoned.

Trinity couldn't be bothered to face her at all.

It was a deliberate decision to leave Ivanna there to fend for herself.

Who would have guessed she'd lock her in that hellish iron tank? No one would've thought about it if not for Jared.

Jared appeared to comprehend Trinity's ruthlessness.

That was why she seemed so calm last night alongside Stella.

I felt compelled to call Grayson and ask him to monitor Stella.

Jared's phone rang, and he stepped out to take the call.

When he returned, he approached Ivanna's bedside and gently said, "I'll be back soon." Ivanna looked reluctant but nodded.

"Mm." Once Jared left, I asked Ivanna to explain what happened.

She gripped our hands and slowly recounted the entire ordeal.

She said she had no idea what had happened.

She got a call from the hotel's front desk, asking her to come back for something that had been left in their private room.

As she hung up the phone and turned the car around, the power went out.

When she tried to start her car, she discovered it was stuck.

Then someone knocked on her window.

As soon as she rolled it down, a large hand covered her mouth and nose.

She had no idea what happened after that.

It was pitch black when she awoke.

She was gagged and bound, sitting in foul-smelling water.

Ivanna choked up as she recounted it, her face turning even paler.

She trembled and said, "Chlo..."

it was so terrifying.

I couldn't move at all...

The water kept rising, and it was pitch black everywhere..." I quickly grabbed her hand.

"Don't be afraid.

It's all over now.

You're safe.

None of us will let anything happen to you." Lauren nodded.

"That's right, Ivanna.

Stop thinking about it.

At least something was brought to light.

It might even be a good thing." I knew that Lauren's remark held a deeper meaning.

She was referring to the revelation of Ivanna and Jared's relationship.

1 Jared would certainly be honest with Ivanna this time.

After all, Trinity was aware of their relationship and had acted on it.

The two of us comforted her, and she seemed to be in slightly better spirits.

Ivanna soon fell asleep again.

Occasionally, she'd wake up screaming in terror.

It was a pitiful sight.

This reminded me of Ava.

I had no idea how she was doing right now.

I quietly left the room to call my parents, who were still on Celestis Island.

Before I could say much, I heard Ava's excited laughter on the other end of the line.

I was a bit surprised.

"Why are you so happy?" My mom sighed.

"It's all thanks to Mr.

Atlas.

He sent a nanny over, and she brought her granddaughter, who's two years older than Ava.

The two of them are getting along really well." I felt reassured.

Atlas was genuinely caring for Ava.

He had thought of everything, even from afar.

It was quite an impressive move.

"He also called Ava last night and spoke with her for a long time.

He said that if the nanny's granddaughter gets along with Ava, they can go to school together." I didn't even know when he found the time to call Ava.

"Well, that sounds great! Ava needs a friend." My mom was genuinely worried about Ivanna.

"Is Ivanna okay? Mr.

Atlas told us she'd been found.

Thank goodness.

Can you believe how audacious people in the big city can be? They just kidnap people for no reason?"

Chapter 445 A Sharp-tongued Warning

I scoffed.

"This isn't just being audacious—it's evil! Luckily, we got to her in time, and now she's okay.

Mom, just stay on Celestis Island for a while.

Once things are sorted out here, I'll pick you up!" I was worried they wouldn't feel comfortable there without familiar faces.

"It's perfect timing since Ava hasn't started school," I reminded her, "You can spend more time together before she does.

If you need anything, just let me know!" "Mr.

Atlas has everything arranged already.

He had a bunch of daily necessities delivered early this morning, enough for a whole year." My mom's tone sounded cheerful.

"The air here is excellent.

Your dad loves it!" "That's great! I'm glad you're all enjoying it." My mom hung up the phone, thoroughly satisfied.

My heart felt more at ease, too.

Hearing Ava's laughter, I knew I didn't need to worry about her.

When I left, my mom wasn't in the best condition, but now she sounded incredibly pleased.

The climate there benefited my dad's health, so everyone was happy.

All of this made me even more reliant on Atlas.

After some thought, I decided to give him a call.

I was still amazed that he found the time to call Ava.

I had been so focused on Ivanna's situation that I forgot about my daughter.

The phone rang twice before Atlas answered.

His warm voice came through.

"Hmm, what's up?" "Where are you?" I asked softly.

"What? Do you miss me already? I'll be there right away!" Atlas turned the question back on me.

"Are you at the hospital? How's she doing?" "She's alright, just stil] traumatized.

But she's asleep." I quietly updated him on Ivanna's condition.

Then I said, "Atlas, thank you! Ww "Thank you for what?" I could tell he was smiling from his charming voice.

"My parents were so well cared for.

I don't know what I would've done without you! Ava was so happy, laughing without care!" I shared, my smile evident.

"Well, if you want to express your gratitude, show it through actions, not just words," he said softly, his tone enticing.

"I miss you very much, you know?" Words were caught in my throat.

This man had a way of making one feel breathless with his words.

"You're so annoying.

Can we focus on serious matters?" "Isn't this serious? Do we still need to be thanking each other like this? One day, what's mine will be yours," he whispered, causing my face to flush and my heart to race.

"Alright! I'm not going to talk to you anymore.

I need to go inside! "T couldn't handle his teasing.

This man was truly something.

He always left me wanting more, but when he turned cold, he could be ruthless.

"Fine! Just remember to eat, take care of yourself, and I'll pick you up later!" He said it flirtatiously.

How annoying! I quickly hung up the phone.

Even though I knew he and Harmony were just acting, I could not get the image of him carrying her away in front of me out of my head.

Which woman could be that generous? I just couldn't! As I entered the hospital room, I noticed Lauren massaging Ivanna's wrists as directed by the doctor.

It aided in blood circulation and recovery.

When Atlas came in, Ivanna had just woken up.

She gave him a nod of thanks, and he responded warmly, "It's nothing.

It was Jared who had saved you." Jared had already returned to the room.

He looked at me and said, " It was because of Ms.

Chloe's timely reminder." I looked at Jared, puzzled.

Why do you say that?" "We searched the entire building with no results.

If you hadn't mentioned Trinity planning everything 'top to bottom,' I wouldn't have considered the rooftop.

Ivanna might have been in danger." He held Ivanna's hand the entire time, his expression full of tenderness.

"In that case, we won't disturb you two!" Atlas stated.

"They both need some rest, too." Jared stood up, releasing Ivanna's hand.

"Yes, thank you both.

I know you genuinely care for Ivanna.

This was all because of my carelessness." "Then you better not be careless in the future!" T couldn't help but be sharp.

I was the only one who could say such things.

After all, we once had an open and honest conversation about Ivanna.

1 Jared nodded, humbly saying, "I won't be."

Chapter 446 It's Been Too Long

Soon after, Lauren prepared to leave us at the hospital entrance. She smiled weakly and said, "I won't go with you, Chlo. I should go home and check on things since it's been almost two days since I returned."

I understood she also had a home to return to. I followed Atlas back to the car but realized I hadn't driven since I returned. He glanced at me with a suggestive smile and asked, "Pleca Park or Amethyst Apartments?"

"Amethyst Apartment, duh!" I felt embarrassed and couldn't look at him.

After driving me home, he got out and followed me inside. He seemed familiar with the place as he removed his coat and entered the kitchen. I hurried after him and said, "Why don't you rest? Let's just make some noodles."

He looked back at me, saying, "You should shower and rest. Let me handle this."

"Did you get any sleep today?" I remembered to ask. After all, he had also been on the go for over twenty hours.

He gazed at me tenderly and asked, "Are you worried about me? Let's go to bed early later."

His words made me blush again. Then, he pulled me in and kissed my forehead, saying, "You don't need to be shy around me. Go on, I'll make you some food."

I was a little skeptical because I hadn't seen Atlas cooking before. He was always too busy when he stayed with me and Ava. Although I was recovering at the time, I did the cooking. I was surprised when he said he would cook for me.

I asked, "You can cook?"

"What, you think I can't do housework?" He washed his hands and put on an apron before taking some ingredients from the fridge. I only had meat left as my vegetables were no longer fresh. He even trashed them for me.

"Food is essential, so I learned to cook long ago. I even had special training in wilderness survival. Would you like to come with me sometime?" Atlas smiled warmly.

I never expected the dominant man I knew to cook for me. I provokingly asked, "Who else have you cooked for?"

"What do you think?" He neither confirmed nor denied it. "Are you jealous?"

"I'm not." I instinctively pouted. "Boyfriends should do these things, shouldn't they? Still, 'someone' seemed to like passing by my house when sending another woman home."

Atlas teased, "It seems like you've been paying much attention to me. Why are you still playing hard to get?"

When he saw an onion in the fridge, he took it and raised his brow, saying, "This is good stuff."

His contented expression stunned me. Even his rascal gesture was charming, making my heart flutter. I helplessly palmed my forehead, and Atlas probably thought I was tired.

He said, "Go and rest. I'll call you when I finish cooking."

I remembered I hadn't taken a break since returning from

Celestis Island and had sweated profusely, I felt uncomfortable and even started to smell.

"I'll go now," I said while running upstairs.

After showering, I walked downstairs and smelled the fragrance from the kitchen. I suddenly felt ravenous from not eating for so long. Atlas saw me coming down and gestured, saying, "I'll finish cooking soon. Have a seat first."

Soon after, he brought three dishes and a soup. It overturned my perception of him. Even someone as cool as him wore an apron, washed his hands, and made soup. I found myself infatuated.

He flicked my nose and said, "You like what you see? There's that look in your eyes again."

He always seemed to guess my thoughts, making me feel slightly unsettled. Atlas served two plates of pasta and sat across from me. He looked at me charmingly. "Try it and see if it's to your taste."

I picked up an onion ring among the other dishes and found it was well-fried and crispy. I took a bite and exclaimed, "It's delicious! It's been a long time since I had onion rings!"

He looked at me intently. "Yeah, they should be well-fried, crispy, and bite-sized, too."

I looked at him in shock, asking, "How'd... you know?"

Chapter 447 Secretly Probing

Since it was my first time eating onion rings around Atlas, I wondered how he knew I liked my onion rings like that.

He raised a brow and lowered his gaze, saying, "It was just a guess. I had a playmate who liked eating onion rings the same way when I was a kid. She used to stay at my house for meals."

I looked at him and thought about the photo of the real Stella. I asked, "Are you referring to Stella?"

This time, he looked surprised instead of me. He looked at me and asked, "How do you know it's Stella? Did you remember something?"

I noticed him scrutinizing me, which made me somewhat doubtful, especially with his follow-up question. I asked, "What do you mean by 'did I remember something?'"

He smiled when I asked that. "I didn't mean it like that. I was just curious how you know Stella. Not the Stella you met, though."

'Yes, I found out about her,'" I confessed, "I told Grayson to look into it, and he found a photo."

Atlas frowned at me. "What photo?"

I regretted saying that, unsure if it was okay to be so open. I had pried into Atlas's privacy, especially the Pierces' privacy, which was highly offensive. I grew nervous, explaining incoherently, "I-I didn't mean to offend you by prying. It's just that... I discovered it by accident."

"It's okay, I don't blame you. I want you to understand me more so you can trust me." Atlas picked up another onion ring with his fork and passed it to me. "Eat. We'll talk slowly."

I felt relieved when he said that. I took my phone, found the photo, and passed it to him. "This is the photo. Grayson told me she's the real Stella."

He froze when he saw the photo. A moment later, he said, "You found this?"

"Yes, look at the next one. It's the writing behind the photo." I observed his expression and felt the photo must be significant to him.

He looked at it and said, "This is Aunt Lucille's writing."

"Aunt Lucille?" I asked curiously.

"Yeah, Lucille Avila is Rory's wife and the real Stella's mom." Atlas's eyes dimmed as he continued to stare at those few words.

"Is Annalise the real Stella?" I asked.

Atlas's eyes flicked when he looked up at me. However, he quickly regained his composure and asked, "How'd you consider looking into this?"

I confessed, "It started with the current Stella. She hinted things about the Pierce family when I first got to know her. She even mentioned her parents. When you told me about your parents' plane crash having more to it, I paid closer attention to her comments about it."

He ruffled my hair smilingly, "Still as clever as ever."

I paused, feeling like I had heard that phrase before, but didn't dwell on it.

"Later, she tricked me into surprising you on your birthday. She mentioned Rory at that time. I don't know why, but I always feel strange whenever I hear that name," I explained, focusing on Atlas's expressionless face.

I was puzzled, wondering if I had guessed wrongly. I continued, "Stella talked about Rory in great detail, saying he died with your parents. She also mentioned Lucille and said her mother passed away

two months later from heartbreak."

Atlas didn't stop looking at me as I continued, "I always thought Stella seemed indifferent whenever she discussed these things. It was like she was talking about someone else's experiences.

"She also looked cold and indifferent when she mentioned your parents' death anniversaries. Stella didn't even look sad, which raised doubts for me. I kept thinking she was either cold-blooded or wasn't their biological daughter.

"That's why I told Grason to investigate the current Stella thoroughly. Sure enough, I found conflicting results. I only became confident the current Stella was an imposter when Grayson found this photo."

I intentionally emphasized “imposter” and observed how Atlas would react.

Chapter 448 The Real and Fake Stella White

Atlas remained composed as he set down my phone and said, “Let's eat the pasta before it gets cold.”

“Atlas, are you... hiding something from me? Well, maybe I shouldn't know too much,” I said cautiously.

He explained, “It's not that I'm afraid you'll know too much. My family's just complicated. I'll tell you about them gradually, not because I'm hiding anything from you. You'll need to know a few things first before you can accept more details.”

Atlas's reasonable explanation eased my mind. I looked at him and asked, “Don't you hate me for investigating you? I honestly didn't mean to.”

“No, I don't. On the contrary, you did well in your investigation. It shows you're actively trying to understand me, which is a good thing. It means you love me,” Atlas spoke frankly with a hint of teasing.

I blushed as I ate a mouthful of pasta to hide my embarrassment. I muttered, “I knew you'd tease me.”

He smirked and said, “Do you even have a good reason to argue? If you didn't like me, why would you investigate me?”

Okay, okay, let's eat.”

After a while, I asked him, “So, you already knew the current Stella isn't the real one?”

“Mhm.”

“Then why'd you let her continue to be Stella?” That was something I couldn't understand.

"Because of Annalise's death at that time," Atlas said casually, showing no sign of sadness.

"They knew Annalise, who was undercover as Stella. She died in a sudden accident. It was difficult to explain to the world, the Pierce family, and the old ministers at the time. So they had the current Stella

replace the real one," Atlas explained.

"Wait, it's so convoluted. But the real Stella and the current one don't look alike. How could they pass her off as the real one?" I still didn't understand the twists and turns.

"At that time, everyone knew Annalise had fallen off a cliff, but whether or not she died was a mystery. The attendants who saw Annalise's appearance all died in accidents. What people knew was that Annalise had gone to Hennesia for plastic surgery.

"Soon, Stella returned with bandages all over her face. Outsiders think Annalise didn't die in the cliff fall." Atlas's explanation was complicated, but I finally understood it. I stared at him, somewhat stunned. "So, they made it seem like Annalise hadn't died but only went to Hennesia for plastic surgery for her disfigured face. When she returned, Celine adopted her?"

"Yes, that's correct." Atlas nodded firmly.

"But Annalise, the real Stella, has already passed away?"

"You can put it that way." Atlas nodded without elaborating.

Then, he urged me to eat. "Finish your food. We can chat into the night after dinner."

I caught his hint and couldn't help but blush, muttering softly, "Here we go again."

"What did I do?" He smirked. "You can't let my craftsmanship go to waste, right? You don't even know how often I practiced to get the perfect onion ring size, fry, and taste."

I sensed something was amiss and asked, "Why did you say 'back then?' Have you cooked it for someone else?"

He paused momentarily, then smiled. "I've only cooked for Stella."

My heart ached, and I felt somewhat jealous. "You could've admitted it just now. Stella's the only one I can think of, but I wonder how many other women you've cooked for."

"Only you. From now on, I'll only cook for you," Atlas claimed. I scoffed in disbelief, but I couldn't be jealous of a dead person.

After finishing our meal, we cleaned the dishes. However, the situation made me feel uneasy. When I wasn't paying attention, Atlas suddenly kissed me and sighed, "This is the life I've always wanted. The feeling of home is perfect, especially when it's just us two."

I faked a glare and retorted, "No one wants to be alone with you."

Although I said that, I was overjoyed. It seemed our harmonious and beautiful days had returned. There was no

Stella, Harmony, or Annalise in our world. It felt like only us two existed.

As we finished tidying everything up, Atlas suddenly picked me up and went upstairs, ignoring my protests. The long-lost passion finally burned between us again. That night, we embraced each other and slept, leaving me with an unprecedented sense of peace.

Without the doorbell that woke us up, I would've continued sleeping like this forever.

Chapter 449 An Unexpected Guest

I quickly got dressed and headed downstairs. Atlas also woke up and looked at me, but I gestured to him, saying, "Go back to sleep."

I wondered who could be at the door and why they pressed the doorbell so frantically early in the morning. It made me uneasy, and I hoped nothing bad had happened.

Unexpectedly, I saw Grace through the peephole and quickly understood what was happening.

After some thought, I opened the door. Grace hurried in and angrily pushed me aside when she saw me. I could do nothing besides shaking my head in resignation.

Once inside, Grace scolded me, "You lied to me! You promised to let me see Ava, but where is she? She's my granddaughter and has the Murphys' blood in her veins. Why won't you let me see her?!"

I gazed at her and realized she had the Murphy family trait of yelling. However, I gave her space to vent because she was the most pitiful member of the family but also cared dearly for Ava.

"Tell your daughter to come down, or I'll go upstairs. You're so carefree living in this luxurious apartment, and it's all thanks to my son. It's unfair that you have a place like this to yourself. Why won't you let me see her?!"

I closed the door and returned to the living room to pour her some water. I said calmly, "Have a seat. Here, drink some water first."

"Don't try to fool me. Where's Ava?!" She turned to head upstairs.

Immediately after, I replied, "She's not home. She went to Celestis Island and won't be home for a while."

Grace froze, looking skeptical. "Celestis Island? Why is she there?"

"I don't go back on my word. Since I agreed to let you see Ava, I won't hide her from you. Stop being a skeptic. I still want to thank you for caring about Ava, no matter what. I won't stoop to your level. I'll call you when she returns, and you can visit her then."

I was composed as I spoke. Grace impressed me by coming so far so early in the morning. I wondered how she persuaded the security to let her in.

“Stop trying to fucking deceive me with your pretenses. You're not a good person either—”

I could no longer stand her shamelessness and cut her off, “ Don't make a scene in my house! You know how well I treat you! Is this how all the Murphys are? Can't you communicate without cussing?!”

Grace shook her head as if to say something, but I didn't let her speak. “I respect you because you're Ava's grandmother. I don't want my daughter to have regrets, but I'll never feel sorry for you again if you don't behave. I'll make sure you never see her again.”

I wasn't trying to scare her. However, I felt conflicted because I didn't want Ava to turn out like the Murphys.

“Whenever you visit her, she gets upset for a week. Then, I have to spend all week consoling her. Have you ever considered that? How is it my fault for not letting her get close to you? It's because you behave so poorly.”

"_"

“What? None of the Murphys have manners. You all love cursing so much and are full of negativity. Do you think I would let you have more contact with Ava? I fear she might end up as uncultured as you.”

My words were harsh and unpleasant, but I had to draw a line because she mistook my kindness for weakness.

“I sent her to Celestis Island because she's unhappy. It has nothing to do with whether or not you visit her. Don't vent your pent-up frustrations on me. I'm not your punching bag!

"I feel sorry for you because you're old and unhappy. I'll revoke your visits if you continue to cause a scene in my house. Don't you remember what Ava told you when you last saw her? Do you want me to remind you?!"

Chapter 450 A Short Time to Live

That day, Ava told Grace to stop bullying me. I knew Grace wouldn't have forgotten it. Indeed, she paled and gluped.

I continued, "Also, stop saying this house belongs to your family. Do you know where your family would be without me and my company?! I was kind enough not to take away your current house.

"You can still be Ava's grandmother if you behave. However, I'll shut you off from her if you insist on harassing me." I looked at her sternly and understood something. I pitied her misfortune but resented her unwillingness to compromise.

Grace stared at me with misty eyes and remained silent for a while. Finally, she cleared her throat and asked, "Then why did you send Ava to Celestis Island? Why do you always seem to send her away whenever I visit?"

I replied, "It has nothing to do with you. Ava and I have other things happening, so you should understand that our lives have nothing to do with your family. Can't we arrange our own lives and schedules? Me sending Ava to Celestis Island was a coincidence."

Grace retracted her aggressive stance and asked with a hint of uncertainty, "When will she get home?"

"She'll return when she's happy again. I told you that I'll call you when she gets home." I glanced at Grace. "Just keep your phone on."

"I... I don't have one," Grace mumbled while avoiding my gaze.

"What?" I was puzzled, wondering how she didn't have a phone.

She lowered her head and grumbled, "Abby took it from me." I sighed and approached the drawer beside the liquor cabinet, finding an old phone I had replaced. I turned it on, deleted my information,

and handed it to Grace. "Here, there are many pictures of Ava inside. You can look at them when you miss her."

She looked at me in shock. "You're giving it to me?"

"Yes." Her demeanor pained my heart, and I wondered where Matthew's filial piety went. "Now, will you stop being so forceful toward me? If you're like this, how could Abby take away your things?"

"What are you afraid of? You raised her daughter, so how can she be so arrogant? You should focus on venting your frustrations on Abby instead of me." I couldn't help but resent her.

Considering Grace's clothes, I knew the Murphys had left her with little. Grace had lost a lot of weight and looked like a different person. With a heavy heart, I said, "You can tell me if you need anything. Since you cared so much for Ava, I'll still help you."

I almost wanted to slap myself after saying that. I wondered why I still bothered with those from the Murphys. However, I would adhere to my words since I had said them. I wouldn't be at odds with an older woman like Grace.

Her demeanor changed, and her voice trembled, "You'll still let me see Ava? You won't stop me, right?"

"No, I never said you couldn't see her. Again, I'll tell you when she returns, and you can come and cook for her," I reiterated.

"Okay, then. I..." She wiped a tear and glanced at me, struggling to speak. "Chloe, I might not... have much time left."

I was startled and looked at her. "What do you mean?"

“Oh, let's not talk about it. Just let me see Ava.” From her expression, it didn't look like she was trying to gain sympathy.

"Is something wrong with your health? Tell me." I had to make sure. If her health was in jeopardy, it could affect my daughter.

She looked at me pitifully before hesitantly saying, "Chloe, my body might not be doing so well."