

Departure with a Belly Chapter 191

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“Here’s your red wine, sir,” said the stewardess. Suddenly, she noticed Nicole.

standing next to Alaric, and her countenance changed at once.

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After setting the glass of red wine down before Alaric, she hurriedly apologized to him, “Sorry, sir, is this child bothering you? I’ll get her out of here in a minute.” After that, she turned to Nicole with a benevolent smile. “Sorry, sweetie, I forgot about you just now. Return to your seat with me now, okay?”

Nicole looked at the stewardess, then at Alaric, who pursed his lips and was also quite reluctant to be parted from her. Still, Nicole was a child, after all. After listening to the stewardess’ words, she nodded obediently and then turned to wave Alaric goodbye without the slightest reluctance. “I gotta go, mister. It’s a pleasure to meet you today.”

Alaric nodded and replied in a deep voice, “Mm–hmm. It’s my pleasure to meet you, too.” He had no choice but to watch the stewardess take Nicole away. No matter how much he loathed to part from her, she was someone else’s child, after all.

After she had left, Alaric found that much of his inner vexation had subsided. He was no longer as ill–tempered and tetchy as when he first boarded the plane; even

the red wine in front of him didn't appeal to him anymore. He had stomach trouble

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and thus had to abstain from alcohol in the first place. Since he had only ordered the red wine on impulse just now, he didn't touch it again. Furthermore, his mind had gone to Nicole, to whom he couldn't help feeling a peculiar attachment.

Alaric never found himself liking children before, but now... He fought back the urge to go over and say hello to the two little ones. First of all, they must be on board with their family. Not only the two of them, but their parents would certainly be there, too. What was he supposed to say after abruptly going over to say hello? Hi, I'm Silent Night, the one who regularly watches your children's live stream?! He couldn't even bring himself to imagine what the scene would look like. Pursing his lips, he leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. Never mind, I'll just wait and see. Perhaps she'll pass by here again, or we might run into each other again as we get off the plane. It won't seem that odd if we meet by coincidence.

After coming back, Nicole immediately told her twin brother Nathan what had happened just now.

The two little ones got together while exchanging whispers.

Watching them from the sidelines, Ethan couldn't help but heave a sigh of

loneliness. He also wanted to have some adorable kids whispering to him. I must've

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fallen under the spell of this lovely pair of twins. A moment later, he decided to check on Victoria. Seeing that she was still deeply asleep, he was finally relieved.

Victoria slept through most of the flight home. When the flight prepared for landing, she woke up for a while, but despite her knowing she was supposed to get up, her bodily functions made her feel drowsy again. As a result, she sank back into sleep soon afterward.

The first-class passengers were privileged, so the stewardess came after the plane came to a complete stop.

Ethan was almost done with the packing when he realized that Victoria was still asleep. So, when the stewardess came over, he said, "Sorry, please let other passengers get off first. We'll get off last."

"Alright." The stewardess nodded in understanding.

Naturally, with Victoria still asleep and Ethan staying put, Nicole and Nathan had no choice but to also sit in their seats waiting.

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Sitting alone in his seat, Alaric stared ahead with his thin lips pressed together. The plane had landed for a long time, but the two little ones had yet to show up. After the little girl had left, Alaric's mind flashed back to the boy he had met in the washroom, who was dressed in the exact same clothes as her. Seeing the little boy struggle to open the door, he opened it for the boy, who then thanked him in return. When he heard the boy thanking him, Alaric thought the boy's voice sounded like Nathan's, but the boy then disappeared so quickly that he thought he was hearing things.

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However, the chance encounter with the little girl on the plane made him realize that the "Thank you, mister," he had heard in the washroom wasn't his hallucination at all. Therefore, after thinking it over, he decided he would like to see the two children together. The sight of them standing before him in the exact same clothes would surely look as though they had come straight out of their live stream. He waited for a long time, but there was nothing ahead until his assistant Terrance came to him. "Mr. Cadogan? It's time for us to get off the plane."

Alaric fell silent for a moment. "Have all the other passengers gotten off the plane?"

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"Yeah, that's right." Terrance nodded. He continued as if it were a matter of course,

“Everyone else has gotten off the plane, while you’ve been sitting here for a long time.” Could Mr. Cadogan be afraid of seeing the economy–class cabin and thus wanted to stay in the first–class cabin for a while longer? he wondered, but he dared not ask or speak about it. Seeing that Alaric didn’t respond, he could only ask again, “Mr. Cadogan?”

Returning to his senses, Alaric looked at him coldly.

“Uh...” Terrance summoned up his courage and urged, “We have to get off the plane. Those sent by the Villower Group have been waiting for us for a long time.”

“One minute,” said Alaric.

“Huh?”

“One more minute and we’ll get off the plane,” replied Alaric. I’ll wait for another minute. If the two children still don’t show up, then I’ll leave.

“Okay...” Not in a position to say anything else, Terrance had no choice but to stand where he was and wait alongside the man. I mustn’t get the wrong seats for Mr. Cadogan again next time. Look how he’s starting to get traumatized. He actually stays in the first–class cabin and is reluctant to get off the plane! he thought.

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A minute passed very quickly, but the plane remained quiet.

Alaric never got to see the two children again.

His tall build cramped the space the moment he stood up. Unwilling to give up, he stepped forward, wanting to go over to see what was going on with the two children. Why aren't they coming over? Normally, with everyone else gone, they'd have to get off the plane as well.

However, no sooner had he walked a few steps than Terrance stopped him, saying, "Wait a minute, Mr. Cadogan. You're heading the wrong way. The exit is this way." Alaric was speechless. Sometimes, he really wished he could smack this Terrance guy, who always did more harm than good. Why would I agree to let Peter have his cousin fill in for him after he resigned back then?

As he was pondering on it, the stewardess came over, too. "Sir." Though not explicitly, she was clearly indicating that they should get off the plane.

"Let's go, Mr. Cadogan. We can't stay on the plane anymore. In any case, you're a half-public figure now," Terrance said before bracing himself to drag Alaric away.

"Goodbye, sir. Enjoy your trip!" said the stewardess.

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Dragged off the plane by Terrance, Alaric glared at him with a sour face. He said in an icy voice, "Let go of me."

Realizing what he had just done, Terrance instantly relaxed his grip on the man before smiling apologetically. "Sorry, Mr. Cadogan. I-I didn't mean to touch you. We were really in a hurry just now-" he said while starting to anxiously wipe his sweat

away. After all, Alaric hated it when others touched him without his consent.

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Surprisingly, the next second, the man walked past him right away with a stony face, as if nothing had ever happened just now.

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When Victoria was woken up, she and her bunch were the only passengers left on the plane.

She got off the plane feeling deeply embarrassed. Rubbing her temples, she asked, "Why didn't you guys wake me up earlier?" She had awoken to find herself being the only passenger left on the plane. Everyone else had been waiting for her, she even saw the pilot eyeing her as they left. She wouldn't want to go through such an embarrassing experience twice.

Ethan replied, "I saw that you weren't feeling well, Miss Selwyn, so I thought I'd let you sleep a little longer. It'd take time for other passengers to get off the plane, anyway."

"That's right, Mommy. You're unwell," Nicole chimed in.

Nathan nodded as well. Apparently, he and Nicole both agreed with Ethan, or they wouldn't have obediently waited alongside him.

Seeing the way that they looked, Victoria continued rubbing her temples while deciding not to dwell further on the topic. Embarrassing as it was, it had already happened, after all. And besides, she had to admit that she had slept well during the 12:35 Sat, 24 Jun

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flight and had woken up feeling much better.

Just then, her phone started vibrating. She took out her phone and took a look before answering the phone with a smile. "Hey, Fiona!"

"Oh, my God! I got through to you at last! I found that your flight had landed, yet I just couldn't get through to you when I called. I was worried to death, darling."

Fiona Garza was a friend whom Victoria had gotten to know after going abroad. She was on good terms with both Victoria and Summer, and a year ago, she returned to her home country and started to learn airport management. She was the daughter of an airline owner. Her father was a native, but her mother was a foreigner, thus making her a mixed-race child.

"Sorry, Fiona. I forgot to turn on the phone."

"Oh, that's okay. Where are you now? I'll have somebody pick you up."

Victoria paused for a moment. Just when she was about to look around, she heard Fiona screaming, "My friend said she just saw you! Just stay there and don't move. My friend's going over to pick you up now."

Standing where she was, Victoria soon saw an airport staff member trotting up to
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her in a uniform. "Hi, are you Victoria Selwyn? I'm Fiona's friend, and I'm here to pick

you guys up on her behalf.”

“Hi.” Victoria gave her a smile before shaking hands with her.

“Well then, please come with me.”

Everyone thus followed the lady.

“Mr. Cadogan, how much longer do we have to wait here?”

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The ones sent by the Villower Group had already picked up Alaric. However, their car had yet to start moving, because he asked to wait at the exit for a moment without explaining why. Since they were here to pick him up, they dared not go against his will, of course, so they had no choice but to park their car there and wait at his request.

Terrance noticed that Alaric’s eyes were focused on the exit the entire time. Back in the first-class cabin, he had thought that the man was traumatized by the economy-class cabin, but now, he didn’t think so anymore. This was because the man seemed to be waiting for somebody at this very moment.

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Suddenly, he had a flash of inspiration. Could something have happened to Mr. Cadogan while he was alone in the first-class cabin earlier? At the thought of this, he took another look at Alaric. Even though it wasn’t obvious with his cold temperament, the way Alaric kept staring at the exit did suggest a hint of anxious anticipation. “Mr. Cadogan.” He leaned closer to Alaric. Then, he cautiously asked, “Did you come across some babe aboard the plane?”

Speechless, Alaric shot a look at him as if looking at an idiot. After his thin lips moved for a moment, he said, “If you’re not using your brains, you may as well give them away.”

Terrance was lost for words. Just say no if you didn’t. Why lash out at me instead? Despite feeling hurt, he was nonetheless curious about it. “If you didn’t come across anyone, then why did you keep staying on the plane just now? You’re even waiting at the exit right now.”

After he said a bunch of stuff, Alaric merely replied, “Mind your own business.”

Fine, it seems that I didn’t manage to coax it out of him. Terrance had no choice but to keep on waiting alongside the man in their seats.

After they waited for a long time, the ones sent by the Villower Group got a phone call, perhaps to ask them why they had yet to arrive after all this time. The staff

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members whispered on the phone, and only after hanging up the phone did they gingerly look back at Alaric. Their lips parted slightly as if hesitating to speak, but in the end, they turned their heads back without daring to say anything.

About a few minutes later, Alaric suddenly looked back and said in a cold voice, “Let’s go.” He had waited for a long time, but it seemed that he wouldn’t get to see the children again today. Perhaps it’s destiny that I only got to meet that little girl on the plane.

“Can we get going now?” The driver was visibly surprised. Nevertheless, he drove immediately without daring to say another word.

They eventually got going, but after that, everyone sensed that the temperature in the car had apparently dropped so much as though they were in an ice cave. The

driver almost trembled with fear as he drove along the way. After dropping Alaric off at their destination, he and his assistant exchanged a brief look and heaved a long sigh. "We've got him here at last! Let's go lest they call us again for something." With that, the car quickly whizzed away.

As soon as Alaric entered the lobby, Jordan Floyd, the Villower Group's new heir, came up and greeted him. "It's been a while, Mr. Cadogan. Shortly after assuming his position as the new heir to the Villower Group, he secured heads of agreement

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with the Cadogan Group. Now, those who had looked down upon him dared not underestimate him anymore.

Darting a glance at the man, Alaric nodded expressionlessly before shaking his hand.

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Other people would've found his attitude disrespectful, but Jordan didn't mind it at all. After bonding with Alaric over horsemanship, he was already used to this side of the man. He said with a smile, "Welcome here, Mr. Cadogan. Come on in." With that, he invited Alaric into the Villower Group. "So, what did you gain from going abroad this time? I heard there are lots of pretty ladies over there. Did you come across some babe?"

This was already the second time Alaric heard the word 'babe' today. He darted at sideways look at Jordan, asking, "Do you want to talk to me about our collaboration, or do you want to talk about something else?"

Jordan changed color slightly at his question. "Hey, don't be angry. Our collaboration comes first, of course. I only talked about other things to help you relax," he said. "But speaking of it, the right hand I'm looking for this time is a great lady from the country you just went to. I heard she's interested in returning to her home country, so I tried to recruit her to my company. Unfortunately, she turned me down."

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Alaric wasn't at all interested in the topic of women, though.

Seeing the way he looked, Jordan said with a smile, "Fine, it seems that I can't talk to you about women. I don't think you have eyes for any other woman other than Claudia Johnson."

Alaric paused at his words. The next second, his eyes narrowed menacingly. "Where did you hear that from?"

Stunned, Jordan stood frozen in place, not knowing what he had said that had pushed the man's buttons. "What's wrong?"

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"What do you mean I don't have eyes for any woman other than Claudia? Where did you hear that from?"

Jordan honestly had no idea that Alaric would actually be angered by this remark. For a moment, however, he didn't know if the man was angry because he disagreed with this statement or because someone else had mentioned Claudia. After a while,

he had no choice but to reply with some deliberation, "It's just a rumor that they're talking about for fun. You don't have to pay too much attention to it."

"A rumor?" Alaric stared at him coldly. "If it's just a rumor, then why bring it up in front of me? Has the heir to the Floyd Corporation inherited the people's gossipy disposition as well?"

Jordan dared not say anything else upon hearing this, of course. He had no choice but to quickly apologize, "Fine, Alaric, it's my bad, okay? I shouldn't have gossiped about you. It's my fault for shooting my mouth off. What can I do to reduce your anger?"

Alaric didn't say another word. However, his temper just now made it clear that Jordan couldn't casually gossip about him in front of him anymore.

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After escorting the man to the break room, Jordan heaved a sigh of relief. "Well then, please rest here for a while. I'm going out and will be back in a minute."

Alaric closed his eyes and reclined on the couch while ignoring him completely.

Having angered Alaric just now, Jordan dared not complain about being ignored by the man at this moment. After all, he knew that he was in the wrong.

However, after he left the break room, his assistant audaciously complained, "Mr. Floyd, this Alaric guy is really going too far! Even if the Cadogan Group is very powerful, he can't treat you like this, no? In any case, you're the Villower Group's new heir!"

"Oh." Jordan darted a look at him. "So, you also know that I'm the new heir, huh? How do you think he should treat me, then? Does he have to bow and scrape to me?"

Hearing the question, the assistant rubbed his nose. "That's not what I mean. I just think he's too arrogant."

"That's because he has the right to be arrogant. When I can reach his position, I'll be even more arrogant than he is. Do you understand?"

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The assistant fell silent for a moment. "Okay."

"Look at you. Why didn't you say that while we were in there just now? Go say that to Mr. Cadogan's face instead. What's the point of saying that to me?"

Hearing his words, the assistant replied sullenly, "I was scared of getting you into trouble."

Jordan replied, "So you know these words would get me in trouble, huh? Do you know that walls have ears, then? The first thing to keep in mind as my assistant is to understand what to say and what not to say. If there's anything that shouldn't be said in public, keep it to yourself even in private. Got it?"

Displeased as he was, the assistant knew that what Jordan said was true. In the end, he just nodded. "I got it."

"By the way, what about that Summer lady whom I asked you to get in touch with? Has she persuaded Victoria Selwyn?"

The assistant looked even gloomier at the mention of this. "Mr. Floyd, I think you'd better forget about this. That Summer lady promised to help us persuade her at first, but for some reason, she suddenly went back on it and told us not to call her

anymore.”

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At hearing this, Jordan instantly gave him a puzzled look. “Was it because the offer you made was too low?”

“No, that’s not possible. The offer we made to her would be tempting to anyone, and no one else could possibly make the same offer.”

“Tsk, not even a lucrative offer could entice her to work for me, huh? Seems like I’ve got to find another way.” Jordan rested his chin in his hand while pursing his lips. thoughtfully.

Suddenly, however, his assistant thought of something, and his eyes lit up. He suggested, “Mr. Floyd, if you really need her talents, why don’t you sacrifice yourself instead?”

Jordan’s eyes narrowed at his words. “What do you mean? You’re telling me to seduce her?”

The assistant let out a chuckle. “You’ve just come in, after all. If you want to nurture talents of your own, you’ve got to focus on the big picture.”

“Get lost! Stop coming up with such bad ideas, will you?”

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“Really, Mr. Floyd, I’m not joking. Miss Selwyn is not only pretty but also very capable,
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and more people are courting her than people trying to poach her.”

Jordan had only heard of Victoria’s name and had never seen her in person, but he knew that his assistant was telling the truth. Still, there was no way he would.

sacrifice himself. There’s no way that I, Jordan Floyd, will be committed to a single partner when there are plenty more fish in the sea. He dared not even think about.

the idea of being bound to a woman or loving one single lady. “Just find another way to approach her through her friend again and increase the offer.”

“Okay, Mr. Floyd.”

Situated in the best part of Jasea, Park View Residence was purchased by the biggest real estate developer in the city before being made into an antique-style manor with a small bridge over a murmuring brook. Be it the bridge, the flowers, the vegetation, or the gazebo, everything in the manor was built with historical accuracy, not to mention the house itself, which was designed in a classic old-fashioned style.

“I heard that the real estate developer dreamed of living like one of the ancient people and had money to burn, so he went out of his way to get this property. At first, he just wanted to fulfill his dream, but to his surprise, the property became

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quite popular when it was completed, and many young people moved in here.”

Victoria rolled down the car window and looked at the scenery around her. Indeed, the scenery around her was quaint; had she not been sitting in a very modern.

vehicle, she would’ve thought that she had been transported to a different era. “I hear that this area is worth a lot of money and was sold at an exorbitant price back then. It’d be harder to build it like this. How much is it priced now?”

Fiona shook her head in depression. “It’s true that the area is worth a lot of money.

But the house..."

Victoria looked puzzled at her words. "What's wrong?"

"The developer refuses to sell it, so it's only available for rent at the moment."

Victoria was stunned for a moment. It surprised her that the developer would actually refuse to sell the property. However, if there was a market for renting such an antique manor, it would indeed make more money than selling the property.

Fiona explained, "The developer said that if he were to sell the property, it would surely end up being bought by scalpers who would then rent out the property at a higher price. In that case, he might as well rent it out himself so that those who liked it didn't have to spend more money."

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'I see. It seems like the developer is a nice person."

"That's right. I thought businessmen were all profiteers."

The two women's lips curled into a smile at the same time as they spoke.

"Now that you're finally back in the country, I'm renting this property for two full years in order for you to stay here. Don't blame me for not renting it for longer, though. The longest lease available here is for two years, so I can't rent it longer than that."

Upon hearing this, Victoria realized something. "How much is the price? It must cost a lot to rent this place. You-"

Fiona interrupted, "Don't tell me you wanna pay the money back to me. I'm not gonna listen to that. I'm renting this place to live here on my own; it's just that the house is too big. It's too lonely for me to live here alone, so I'm inviting you to live here with me. You're not gonna pay any rent for this."

Victoria got the point. "Which means you're going to live with us?"

"Of course! Now that we're reunited at last, we should live together, of course. You won't object to it, will you?"

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"Of course, I won't! I couldn't ask for a better arrangement."

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Victoria realized that her life became far better after she left Alaric.

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When she was married, she couldn't even meet up with her best friends at all.

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However, after the divorce, Summer and Fiona would always visit her and they would lay on the same bed to look at the stars as they gossiped about things like children without a care in the world.

On the other hand, Ethan helped carry the luggage upstairs. It was a double-story house with a balcony filled with a variety of plants.

Therefore, the house had a screen window installed to prevent bugs from flying in, and repellent packs were placed on the windowsill as well.

Victoria fell in love with the environment as soon as she stepped into the house.

At first, she was worried that she needed to spend time looking at houses when she returned, but Fiona had settled it for her in a jiffy.

Besides that, she didn't even need to worry about cleaning the house because Fiona had hired professional help to clean the house. She even went as far as to place scented candles and plants that she loved around the house.

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Ethan secretly took a glance at Victoria's expression before quietly sending a message to Bane when he exited the room.

"Mr. Morison, I've got something to report. The house you prepared for Miss Selwyn isn't needed anymore. We bumped into her friend at the airport, who has already rented a house for her."

After he sent the reply, Ethan couldn't help but regard the house once more. Not bad. She's more thoughtful than Mr. Morison.

The house Bane prepared was free of any procedures that Victoria needed to handle since it was already under her name. He even hired people to check the environment and location.

Unfortunately, he lost to Fiona's creativity.

Fortunately, Bane lost to a woman. If it was a male friend, Bane's position would be at risk.

Soon, Bane replied to him, "Fiona Carza?"

Ethan answered, "Yes, Mr. Morison."

As expected, Bane's reply was calm, "Then, that's alright. Fiona's pretty detail

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oriented. Make sure to check whether there's anything else you can help with."

"Sure, Mr. Morison." Ethan kept his phone away and helped arrange Victoria's things.

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Once everything was about done, Fiona told Ethan, "Mr. Hudson, did you come over on Bane's orders? I heard that you took care of the three of them. Thank you for your hard work."

He hastily waved his hands when he heard that. "Oh, no. It's in my job description.

There's no need for thanks."

That was an overstatement. The three of them didn't need his care at all since Victoria fell asleep the instant they boarded the plane while the two children were sensible and cute throughout the ride. All that he did was push the luggage around.

"You're too nice, Mr. Hudson. You've done more than you should. Anyhow, you're probably tired from the long journey. Why don't you get some rest? Everything is more or less settled."

He instinctively looked toward Victoria with a questioning look in his eyes.

Victoria nodded when she noticed his questioning gaze. "You should rest, Mr.

Hudson."

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After some thought, Ethan nodded as well. "Alright. The auction is tomorrow night. Do remember to prepare for that, Miss Selwyn. Please call me if you need anything else. I'll come right over."

"Okay. Thank you."

Then, Victoria asked the children to bid goodbye to Ethan.

After he left, Fiona and Victoria went to the balcony upstairs and made a pot of jasmine tea.

The rich floral sweet smell of the jasmine flower accompanied by billowing heat comforted them.

Fiona, who once was bibulous, was drinking jasmine tea now.

Victoria couldn't help but tease her, "I thought you'd whip out a few bottles of alcohol and told me to drink that here."

Fiona froze slightly before laughing, "Alcohol? That's not appropriate right now. Both its smell and appearance will spoil the current atmosphere. Besides, I quit drinking. I'm never gonna drink again."

"Oh? You're turning over a new leaf? You were the best drinker among us."

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Fiona became forlorn when that was brought up. "Forget that. I've got gastritis now.

The doctor said I can't drink anymore. I still want to live. Besides, jasmine tea smells great."

Victoria was suddenly worried when she heard Fiona was sick. "How did that happen?"

Fiona pursed her lips as if she didn't want to tell her. After a while, she finally came

clean. *“Actually, I’ve got my eyes on a man.”*

Victoria gave a quizzical look.

“I met him in a bar. He’s absolutely exquisite. With that face of his, I feel like my life will be complete if I married him.”

“Wait. What does this have to do with your gastritis?”

“Big time.” Fiona sighed before saying dejectedly, “He’s a good drinker. I can’t beat him, but I wanted him to notice me. So, I practiced drinking. That’s why...”

Victoria couldn’t help but feel utterly exasperated as she didn’t expect that Fiona would do things harmful to herself for a man. “Are you dumb?” She flicked Fiona’s forehead. “Who would practice drinking for a man they like?”

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Fiona let out a small laugh at that. “You probably think I’m crazy, Victoria, but I really, really like him. I knew he was the man for me from the moment I looked at him.”

Fiona’s eyes turned dreamy when she talked about him. Then, she propped her chin on her hand before recounting. “The first time I saw him, he was sitting there with sharp eyes. The downlight illuminated his features perfectly. I fell in love with him. immediately.”

Even though Victoria didn’t know what that man looked like, she could guess how handsome he looked based on Fiona’s description.

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Fiona had seen many men during her time in foreign countries. For her to still praise him like so, it meant that he was beyond gorgeous.

“Even if you like his looks, what about his personality? Family background? Do you

know what his family is like?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m trying to get closer to him, but he’s so indifferent. I can’t get to know him at all.”

Victoria was slightly surprised by that revelation since Fiona’s beauty and competence would make men fall on their knees for her. “Don’t tell me the reason you’re so stuck on him is because he’s ignoring you?”

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“No!” Fiona gritted her teeth. “If he’s willing to talk to me, I will treat him the nicest I can. Victoria, you don’t know how handsome he is. I even secretly took a picture. Here. Take a look.”

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Then, Fiona took her phone out with a silly grin on her face while Victoria scooted closer with a dotting smile.

“Okay. Let me have a good look and see if this man is worthy of you.”

However, Fiona clicked open the photo album, but couldn’t find that picture at all.

“That’s weird. I was sure I took a picture. Although it’s not that clear since I was standing far away, the entire atmosphere was perfect. Judging by his aura, I’m sure. he’s not an ordinary man, Victoria.”

Alas, Fiona still couldn’t find that picture after scrolling for some time.

“Argh! Where’s my picture? Why is it gone? I tried so hard to get that picture!”

Victoria grabbed her hand as she saw the frustration in Fiona’s eyes. “Hey. It’s okay if you can’t find it. You can take as many as you want once you’re together with him.”

Fiona’s gaze suddenly turned miserable at that. “I don’t even know when that’ll happen. I took that picture while I was hiding in a corner. Even though he was

drinking, he was very alert. S'it! It's probably because he looked over when I was
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about to take the picture... I probably forgot to press the button."

Fiona felt sad that she let that opportunity slip by her fingers just like that.

"Besides, he doesn't usually go there. I've only seen him a few times."

"If that's the case, why don't you go ask for his number the next time you see him?"

Be brave!"

"Who do you think you're talking to here? He didn't even answer me."

Victoria was speechless. She was certain that the man Fiona had her eyes on was
an ice king.

"It seemed like he was troubled. My heart ached for him seeing how lonely he was
when he was drinking."

Victoria stayed silent. Sure enough, a woman in love would be blind. He was just
drinking and still Fiona's imagination ran wild.

2/8

"What about this, then?" Fiona suddenly grabbed her arm and suggested with
smiling eyes, "You should join me tonight. I've been waiting for him for two weeks
and he hasn't shown up. You're my lucky charm. Maybe I'll see him when you come

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with me!"

"No." Victoria rejected her suggestion without a second thought. "I've got to stay
home with Nicole and Nathan."

"They're both good children. I'm sure they can stay home without parental

supervision for a while. You'll only be out with me for two hours at most. If you're still worried, you can ask Mr. Hudson to come over and look after them."

"You were the one who asked Mr. Hudson to rest. Are you saying that he has to come here again to help me look after the children when he's just reached the hotel not too long ago?"

"So what? He's Bane's employee. He'll do anything for you. You're going to be his sooner or later anyways."

That last sentence made Victoria change her expression. "Fiona, don't ever say that again."

"Gosh. I'm just joking. I don't understand you. Bane's a great guy. Why don't you like him? He has his mind set on you. Do you really not feel anything for him after so long?"

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Victoria was at a loss about how to explain this to her and sighed helplessly, "Just. Don't joke about this anymore."

"Okay. Okay. I'll stop it. So, are you going with me or not?"

"No." Victoria turned around and left.

Fiona immediately chased after her and hugged her arm. "Oh, come on. Please. Go with me."

When they passed by a room, Nathan just so happened to come out. So, Fiona urged him, "Nathan, quick! Tell your mom to go out with me tonight."

Then, he lifted his little head and looked at her, "Aunt Fiona?"

Fiona was still insistent about going out with Victoria but got sidetracked by Nathan's cuteness and turned into a kooky aunt.

"Oh, my, my. Come here and let me kiss you."

Victoria just looked at them, utterly speechless.

In the evening, Victoria was cooking, and Fiona went to change her clothes and planned to help Victoria out in the kitchen.

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When Fiona passed by the living room, she took a glance inside and stopped in her tracks when she saw Nathan sitting in front of the coffee table.

The night was fast approaching, and the rays of the setting sun reflected off Nathan's delicate yet sharp features.

The young child sat there focused on studying while a sense of maturity and indifference that didn't match his age showed on his young face.

Fiona stood there and stared at Nathan with her mouth agape in disbelief.

Was it because she's not seen that man in the bar for too long, so she was imagining things?

Why did she see the shadow of that man in Nathan?

After a few seconds, Fiona rubbed her eyes.

"I'm probably just hallucinating from the lack of sleep." Then, she turned around and went to the kitchen to help Victoria.

Nonetheless, she was still flustered by that scene in the living room.

His side profile and that aura he emits. How could they be so alike?

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When she was washing the vegetables, she couldn't help but ask, "Victoria, can I ask you a personal question?"

Victoria stopped cooking and turned her head to look at Fiona helplessly. "Is it about Bane again?"

Fiona immediately denied it, "No. No. What I wanted to ask had nothing to do with him."

If it's nothing to do with Bane... "Then, ask away."

As long as she's not asking about my love life..

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"Really?" Fiona was still a little concerned. "Can I really ask anything?"

"Yea."

Victoria was fine as long as Fiona didn't talk about Bane. It felt as if she was going to explode if anyone mentioned him in front of her.

Before she left, her father had asked about her relationship with Bane. He event questioned when she was going to open up to Bane.

She didn't want to listen to his lecture and started packing her things before returning to her room to sleep.

Bane did treat her well. Everyone knew this. That was why everyone just presumed they were together,

Regardless, Victoria didn't like that presumption because nothing should be assumed, especially feelings.

So, she didn't like that people felt that she should be with Bane just because he treated her well.

“Just ask. As long as it’s not about Bane, I can answer you.”

“Alright. I’m gonna ask now.”

Fiona realized what bothered Victoria the most now was Bane. So, she was chill about the other matters.

If that’s the case, she could finally ask her question with confidence.

Alas, as she thought of the question she was about to ask, she still took in a deep breath, mustering her courage. “I actually wanted to ask this a long time ago but was afraid it’ll bring up bad memories. Since you don’t seem to mind anymore, then I’ll ask...”

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Victoria had a bad feeling when she heard that, but before she could stop Fiona, the
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question had already escaped her mouth, “What I wanted to ask about is the identity of Nathan and Nicole’s father...”

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“He’s dead.”

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Even before Fiona had finished asking her question, the answer that she received truly caught her off guard. As a result, her jaw was practically on the floor as she froze on the spot, staring at Victoria in astonishment. “Huh?”

Victoria simply met her eyes calmly before asking composedly, “What’s wrong?” “H-He’s dead?” This was the last answer Fiona was expecting. Although she knew that her reaction was rather rude, especially since she blurted the same words that fell from Victoria’s lips, she really couldn’t help it. By the time she snapped back to reality, she was overwhelmed with awkwardness and guilt. My god, what am I doing?! I just repeated her answer! I might as well be stabbing her in her sore spot!

At the moment, no words could express the guilt she was feeling, and she regretted it so terribly that she wished she had asked about Bane instead.

That explained why Victoria never mentioned her past, and whenever Fiona asked Summer about it, she wouldn't speak a word about it as well and merely sighed. before telling her, "This is a sad past and you shouldn't ask her about it."

Finally, Fiona understood why Summer's description of Victoria's less-than-fortunate
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circumstances. It also explained why she was raising two kids all by herself.

"I'm sorry!" After Fiona gathered her thoughts together, she immediately sincerely apologized, stammering, "I'm sorry, Victoria... I really had no idea about your... situation. I wouldn't have breathed even a word about it knew."

Hence, she continued to apologize profusely to Victoria. Alas, the damage was done, and her guilt lingered for quite a while. In the end, Victoria didn't know what else she should say anymore. At first, she told others that the father of her children. was dead because she didn't want anyone to ask about him. It wasn't that she didn't trust Fiona, her friend, but she had already decided to seal some things to the back of her mind and didn't want to talk about it ever again. Nevertheless, if she had known that she would startle Fiona so terribly... Well, she wouldn't have changed her answer, but she could have been a wee bit more tactful about it.

Regardless, it seemed that her answer also served to save her from accompanying Fiona to the bar as the other woman felt so guilty that she had probably decided against inviting Victoria out for drinks for the time being.

On the other hand, Victoria went to bed very early because she had spent the day on a plane. Plus, she was on her period whilst suffering from jetlag. Thus, even though she had slept for quite a few hours on the plane, her body was still tired.

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When she woke up the next morning, she was greeted by an energetic Fiona, chirping, "Victoria, guess whom I bumped into last night in the bar?"

Victoria instinctively furrowed her brows. "Didn't you go to bed early last night?" We said good night to each other last night, but she still went to the bar afterward?

A sheepish smile spread across Fiona's face. "You look unwell, so I went by myself."

"So, you bumped into him?"

"Yes." Fiona couldn't help but smile sweetly as she recounted her experience yesterday, "My long hours of waiting have finally paid off and I bumped into him. I you that you're my lucky star, didn't I? I got lucky the minute you arrive."

told

"So, did you get his number?"

A look of disappointment and dismay took over Fiona's originally excited face. "No... He seemed to be in a foul mood last night and had lots of drinks. After that, he even blacked out on the counter, and just when I wanted to approach him, his friend. arrived."

Victoria's expression turned thoughtful at her words. She could understand that people occasionally tend to have a few drinks to destress because adults in modern

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society are under a lot of pressure. Yet, according to Fiona, this man often went to the bar and even knocked himself out after drinking so heavily.

In all honesty, Victoria didn't have a good impression of this man because he sounded like he was using alcohol to numb himself. Can his problems be solved by getting drunk in bars? She sneered silently, but seeing how deeply infatuated Fiona was, she didn't say anything about this.

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In the hotel suite, the curtains were drawn back by a man, and the room instantly turned bright. The glaring light poured over the face of the gorgeous man in the bed, and the man who was laying on the bed like a corpse finally reacted as he opened his eyes with a frown.

"Are you awake?" The crisp voice of a man echoed from the couch.

The sleepy Alaric was able to recognize the owner of the voice-Norwood-and he shut his eyes again in discomfort due to the glaring light, not moving an inch on the bed.

Unfortunately, Norwood was well aware that he was awake. Although he knew that Alaric was deliberately ignoring him, Norwood began, "How much longer do you plan to go on like this?"

The man on the bed continued to treat him as though he was air, which was exactly what he expected. So, he added without waiting for an answer from him, "The doctor has already told you that you shouldn't be drinking anymore, right?"

Still, he received no answer. Eventually, even the usually gentle Norwood couldn't help but snort derisively, "Or do you plan to wear out your body and let your parents organize your funeral?" After that, he said no more, deciding to patiently wait the man out.

A long while later, the man got up from the bed and dragged himself into the bathroom expressionlessly.

Norwood was beyond speechless at Alaric's nonchalant attitude. Ever since Victoria left with Bane five years ago, Alaric had turned into a walking corpse. However, that wasn't to say that he wasn't entirely dispirited.

In contrast, he was performing better at work than he used. Due to his workaholic tendencies, the Cadogan Group was almost unmatched in their field of business. But this was all because Alaric had turned himself into a robot. If he wasn't working, then he was drinking. He refused to participate in any entertainment activities. But somehow, he barely slept, and even developed gastritis due to his appalling lifestyle.

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In the beginning, he could still drink himself to a stupor, but as time passed, even alcohol couldn't numb his sorrows.

It was clear to Norwood that he wasn't trying to get back at anyone or anything; he was simply doing something that could help him escape from reality. At the thought of this, Norwood rose to his feet, paced to the bathroom, and knocked on the door.

"Don't forget about the charity auction tonight." When no reply came from the other side of the door, he contemplated and said, "Claudia is here. I picked up her call in

your stead last night because you were drunk, and she'll be looking for you now that you're awake. I've already passed the message, so I'll be taking my leave now. See you." After that, he simply picked up his coat and left the hotel without further ado. The sound of running water came from the bathroom after he left. As Alaric had blacked out last night, he could only take his shower now and it was thirty minutes later when he finished. He had been toweling his hair when his phone started ringing.

He swept his gaze across the screen and saw that the incoming caller was none other than Claudia. He pursed his lips as he recalled the message Norwood left him. A few seconds later, he twirled around, grabbed a towel, and continued drying his hair, ignoring the call.

His phone rang a few times, but he didn't pick up even once. About fifteen minutes

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later, the doorbell of his room rang, and he opened the door with an expressionless face.

Claudia had her cell phone in hand when she stood outside. Nonetheless, she was a little startled when she saw him answering the door. "Al, I thought that you were still asleep. Why didn't you pick up my call?"

He merely cast a dispassionate gaze at her and answered indifferently, "I didn't hear my phone ringing."

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Then, he spun and went into the room, leaving her standing awkwardly at the door before she finally mustered her courage to trot after him. Although she knew that she shouldn't say it, she still couldn't stop herself from commenting, "I thought that... you didn't want to answer my calls."

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Although Claudia had already brought it up, Alaric didn't bother explaining himself gently as he used to the moment she was aggrieved. Instead, he remained rooted to the spot, nonchalantly staring at her with unwavering, empty eyes until she felt so uncomfortable that she just had to turn to a different topic. "I'm just kidding. Why won't

you pick up my calls, right? Oh, by the way, where's Norwood? He told me that you were drunk when I called you last night. Are you okay? Does your head hurt?" After all that, Alaric merely mumbled, "I'm fine." Then, he went into the bedroom to dress up.

Claudia didn't move a muscle as she stared at his retreating figure and felt her heart wrench. Five years ago, Alaric successfully divorced Victoria, and the latter left the country without a word, disappearing from their lives ever since. While Claudia was surprised that Victoria actually kept her word, she was also looking forward to the day when Alaric would marry her as quickly as possible after the divorce. Yet, before she could rejoice, Alaric had changed his mind.

He asked her and simply said, "Sorry, I'm afraid I can't fulfill my promise."

Claudia gaped at him in stunned silence for a long while before forcing out a smile.

"Why? Is it because of the kidnapping case? Are you still suspicious that I was

behind it? Al, I have to admit that for a little while I was by your side,
but I'm grateful to her for taking care
for taking care of you in my

"She's not your substitute."

"What?"

"Claudia, she's not taking care of me in your place. We were not dating back then."

When Claudia heard that, blood drained from her face, and her body swayed along
as she felt her blood freeze in her veins. "I'll forever remember that you risked your
life to save me, Claudia, and if you run into any difficulties in the future, I'll

Before he could finish, she couldn't stop herself from cutting him off angrily, hissing,

"Al, what do you mean by this? Are you dumping me? Didn't we already agree that
we'll get together after your divorce? How could you do this to me

Yet, it didn't matter how hysterical she was acting as Alaric remained calm

throughout her tirade. Whether it was the look in his eyes or his expression, they
were as still as a lake. There wasn't even a hint of discomfort from his body

language. In fact, he was utterly apathetic to her cries. In the end, he just left her a
simple 'sorry' before departing

In the end, she utterly lost it and kept pestering him about this matter, Sill,

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whenever she brought up their relationship, he wouldn't even consider meeting her
or he would just stand up and leave without another word. So, she eventually
figured that things couldn't go on like this, especially after receiving such cold
treatment from him. Thus, she decided to change her approach.

"I was wrong in the past and know that you haven't sorted out your feelings. Don't
worry, Al. I'll wait for you. I'll wait for the day you're willing to accept me."

Back then, she meant every single word she said. After all, she assumed that Alaric.
was only unable to accept the fact that Victoria had left. Therefore, he had merely
gotten his feelings tangled. Given a little time, he would walk out of it and decide to
return to her. Thus, she was willing to wait, but she never imagined that this wait
would last five years.

Five years... It may seem like just a number but it's five years of my life. She could
only watch helplessly as her youth seemed to be slipping away. To make matters
worse, even her suitors, who were pursuing her, had moved on and had families of
their own. Yet, she was still waiting for her happy ending..

She did think of giving up, but after waiting for so many years, she was unwilling to
give up just like that. Furthermore, the thing that gave her the biggest hope was,
Alaric didn't have any other women by his side. So, it didn't matter even though he
wasn't dating her. As long as she was willing to wait-in addition to her role as his
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savior as the buffer-he would be moved by her feelings for him sooner or later.

All these years, even his parents were touched by her patience. At first, they were.
unwilling and didn't want to accept her. They only felt gratitude toward her, and she
couldn't even get a shard of any other intimate emotions from them. As time
passed, she had made an impression on his parents, instead of Alaric, who was her

prime target. Take the auction this time for instance, it just so happened that his mother had her eyes on one of the auction items. So, she deliberately got two invitations so they could attend this event together.

Claudia knew that it was Mary's way to create an opportunity for them. With this thought in mind, she stepped forward and knocked on the bedroom door. "Al, are you going to the auction tonight?" she asked, not daring to go in.

An expressionless Alaric slipped into a white shirt and paused at her question. He had no interest whatsoever to attend the auction, but when he remembered that his mother wanted that item, he finally decided to play the part of a good son despite his impatience at the idea.

"I got it," he answered coldly.

Claudia sighed in relief upon hearing his agreement. Thank G***d. It's great that he's going to the auction. "Okay, see you later. I'm going to prepare the dress for tonight."

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"Okay."

Finally, a sweet smile spread across her face at the fact that they were going to the auction with her. Indeed, it pays to persevere. As long as he's willing to go to the auction with me, it means that I still have a chance.

Back home, she immediately called the stylists to have them design the most elegant, stunning look for her, and in the evening, she went to look for Alaric in six-inch stilettos.

The charity auction tonight was organized by Villower Group. To secure his position, Jordan had put a lot of effort into this, and this auction was one of his tactics. After the word got out, several members of the upper-class society specially came to attend. The grand finale item for tonight was a secret surprise, and it even brought many big names in the archeological field to the scene.

When Claudia got out of the car, she almost lost her balance due to her stilettos.

Hence, she stood on the spot to wait for Alaric, planning to hold onto his arm. In the end, she didn't know whether it was intentional on Alaric's part, but the way he walked forward just so happened to avoid her touch and she almost fell.

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Claudia heard people giggling softly around her. She could barely maintain the polite smile on her face as she turned to the source of the schadenfreude whispers. When

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she finally found the origins of those noises, she found that they came from a gaggle of young ladies of wealthy families, and she was usually in contact with them, but their friendship was, frankly, plastic. Claudia bit her lower lip as she was aware of what they were sniggering about; they were making fun of her for clinging on to Alaric like a leech.

Damn it, if this had happened in the past... I won't have to go through this.

embarrassment, she cursed. Sadly, she was very humble in Alaric's presence and didn't have the nerve to ask him for anything at all, so she could only sulkily trudge after him.

After a while, she suddenly regretted wearing such high heels because she was just making things difficult for herself. While she was brooding over this, the person in front of her came to a stop, and she approached him in confusion. "Al?"

He looked at her stoically. "Now that you know you can't walk in such high heels, you shouldn't pick such shoes next time."

Claudia smiled awkwardly at that. "The stylist picked it for me. I didn't have a say in their decision process."

"Are you still able to walk?" he inquired.

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She contemplated before saying, "It's a little tough." Actually, what she wanted to say was, Will you hold me?

Unexpectedly, he answered, "If you can't, then you should ask the driver to drive you home or you could change into a different pair of shoes."

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Never once did it cross Claudia's mind that Alaric would think of sending her away.

Her lips turned pale, and she instinctively shook her head. "No. I don't want to go back. Not when I finally have the chance to come here with you. Al, please... It's really been a long while since I last went out with you. So, don't drive me away, okay?" she begged, and her eyes instantly reddened with tears as she looked at Alaric aggrievedly.

To Claudia's dismay, Alaric merely looked at her expressionlessly.

you.

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"I know you have been feeling pressured about the fact that I had saved now, can you try to forget that I am your savior and consider me as a mere ordinary girl who wants to pursue you?" Claudia truly applied the art of speaking when she uttered these words. Outwardly, it looked as though she didn't want Alaric to regard her as his savior, but in reality, her words served as a reminder and a hint to Alaric. Well, I'm not appealing to pathos on purpose. It's just that I have no other reasons I can use to stay by Alaric's side except this, and I will be truly at my wit's end if Alaric doesn't care about this matter.

Fortunately for her, he was always grateful to her for saving his life. Hence, the indifferent look on his face only lingered momentarily before he moved his elbow and said, "Just this once."

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Claudia nearly wept with joy as she took Alaric's arm. "Thank you, Al." As expected, no matter how many years passed, Alaric's heart would always go soft whenever I bring this up. Clearly, he ultimately knows that he might have perished in this world if it wasn't for me. I gave him a second chance in life. And if that doesn't melt his heart, then what else will?

Claudia took his arm and shot a glance at the girls from earlier before heading into the hall with her head held high.

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After Claudia left, the girls, who mocked her just now yet were forced to witness her petty revenge. They instantly got together and kept rolling their eyes at her attitude.

"Did you see how arrogant she was? Those who are clueless might even think she's marrying Alaric tomorrow."

"She has been actively pursuing Alaric for five years, yet there's still no news about a proposal. I truly don't understand what she's so proud of."

"Damn right! The Cadogans would surely ignore her if she hadn't saved Alaric's life back then."

"Speaking of which, what happened to Victoria? Why would she divorce Alaric when their marriage was fine? Does she not care about losing to someone like Claudia?"

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“Perhaps she isn’t as experienced as Claudia. That’s why she had no choice but to leave Alaric.”

“If that’s the case, then why hasn’t Claudia become Alaric’s girlfriend yet?”

Everyone fell silent as soon as someone pointed this out. No one had a clear grasp of the entanglement between Alaric and Victoria’s relationship. Therefore, these girls were curious too. Still, although they had many, many, theories, none of them even came close to the truth.

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As for Alaric, he caused a great commotion as soon as he entered the auction hall. In fact, thanks to his appearance, everyone’s view of Jordan took a turn. Since Alaric hadn’t shown up at public events for a long time, they couldn’t believe the Young Master of the Floyds actually succeeded in achieving such a difficult feat. Given his prestigious status, Alaric naturally became a guest of honor and was seated at the best seat available.

Meanwhile, Claudia sat down next to him. She naturally sensed the gazes from the crowd around her and chuckled to herself in her heart. Then, she straightened her posture and revealed her fair neck, posing like a white swan.

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The sky was drizzling before the charity auction even started. Victoria and Ethan were still on their way to the venue. Victoria reflexively commented upon seeing the weather changing so unexpectedly, “What’s with this weather? The weather forecast didn’t report that there will be rain today.”

When the driver in front heard her, he smiled and added, “It rains frequently and rather unexpectedly in this season. Not to mention, the weather forecast isn’t so

accurate sometimes.”

“Have you brought an umbrella?” asked Victoria, who sat in the back passenger seat with her two children.

Ethan shook his head. “No. I didn’t think it would rain today.”

After she gave a brief glance at her surroundings, she made a quick decision. “It looks like there’s a 24-hour convenience store in front. Sir, can you pull over there later?”

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The light rain at first eventually turned into a downpour, causing the driver’s visibility to be restricted. As a result, Victoria and Ethan were already late by the time they arrived at their destination.

There were very few people in the venue. Ethan took out the invitation letter, and the attitude of the entrance reception staff instantly became reverent and respectful.

“Sir, Miss, this way, please.”

Since Victoria attended this charity auction on behalf of Bane, she naturally became the guest of honor. That was why the staff took Victoria and Ethan to the VIP area. Still, due to their late arrival, the auction had already started. Therefore, they would interrupt other guests of honor if they were to make their way to their VIP seats.

After Victoria gave it a thought, she immediately said to the reception staff, “We’ll just sit in the back row seats.”

The reception staff’s face took on a ghastly expression after hearing that. “I can’t possibly allow that. You are-”

Victoria smiled softly and reassured by saying, “It’s okay. It’s on us. We arrived late.

Besides, sitting in the back row wouldn't affect us from bidding."

Even so, the reception staff still figured it was unprofessional of them to agree to let their VIP guests abruptly sit in the back row seats. After all, things would be awful for them if the higher-ups blamed them for such an arrangement.

"Let's go." Victoria was already making her way toward the back-row seats. When Ethan saw this, he had no choice but to follow her.

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When the staff saw that the dice had been cast, they simply ran over to report this unexpected incident to the management staff instead of dwelling on it.

The first lot had been sold by the time Victoria and Ethan took their seats.

Ethan handed over the auction catalog right after they sat down..

Once she was done browsing through the catalog, she said, "The item that Mr. Morison wants to bid on isn't in these beginning lots."

He nodded. "Yes. I suppose that item would be the finale of this auction."

"Finale..." Victoria seemed lost in thought. "If it's the finale lot, it looks like Mr. Morison will blow a huge hole in his bank account tonight."

Ethan couldn't help but smile after he heard Victoria's metaphor. "Miss Selwyn, don't worry about it. Mr. Morison can still afford to take out this amount of money."

Victoria didn't answer. Of course, I know Bane can afford it. After all, this amount of money is, at any rate, like a drop in the bucket and just as common as ordinary folks buying gifts for their elders to Bane.

"How I wish I could spend as freely as him," she lamented casually. Frankly speaking,

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she was envisioning that she might also have such a chance once she established and further expanded her company. Nonetheless, she would never dare assume that she could come close to Bane's financial status. After all, her family background wasn't on par with Bane's. Still, the profit earned was enough for her and her two children to spend lavishly.

To her surprise, Ethan chuckled and abruptly blurted, "That's easy. Just marry Mr. Morison if you want to spend as freely as him."

Victoria fell silent. At the same time, the initial relaxed atmosphere turned stagnant due to Ethan's words.

He immediately realized that he had made an improper remark. Regrettably, it was already too late as the atmosphere had gotten too awkward. Even so, he tried to salvage the situation by saying, "Well, Mr. Morison fancies you. So, he will undoubtedly let you have the power to control his purse strings."

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If Ethan had known that the atmosphere in the air could get even tenser than it was before this, he would have kept his mouth shut instead of attempting to salvage the situation, for things instantly turned even stranger as soon as those words escaped his lips.

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Victoria didn't answer him, which made Ethan awkwardly touch his nose. It was probably because the atmosphere was too relaxed, so he accidentally blurted that out.

Now, Ethan started to regret what he said.

Luckily, Victoria took the initiative to break that awkward silence after a few minutes. "Mr. Hudson, can you help me bid for the next item?"

"The next one?" He flipped the catalog open to find that it was a beautiful bracelet.

"You like this one, Miss Selwyn?"

Ethan was a little blunt, making it evident that he hadn't thought of the possibility that Victoria would be interested in such an item. Besides, he had never heard that Victoria was particularly fond of crystal accessories.

Fortunately, Bane had ordered him to help Victoria bid on anything she liked, no matter the cost. He even instructed that everything would be under his tab.

However, Victoria merely smiled and didn't say a word.

Alright. I understand."

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When the next item was presented, Ethan straightened nervously as if that item was the last item of the night.

She kindly reminded him when she noticed how anxious he looked, "Don't name your price so soon. Let everyone else bid first."

Ethan nodded vigorously in response.

Soon, bids were called out, and the price of the crystal bracelet went up to 4.5 million.

Once the price became so costly, the number of people joining the bid gradually lessened.

When it got up to 5 million, only two people were still in the running. Then, Victoria glanced at Ethan to gesture to him that it was time.

He nodded and raised the placard to bid.

“5.5 million,” Someone in the VIP seats at the front suddenly interjected before Ethan could.

That was the same amount he wanted to bid. He honestly didn’t expect someone to beat him to it.

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As he had stayed by Bane’s side for some time, he was influenced by his extravagant ways and continued to place his bid. “6 million.”

Alas, Victoria couldn’t react fast enough to stop him from doing so.

Her lips twitched, but she eventually retreated into herself as she thought of something at his determined stance.

After Claudia named her price, she didn’t expect someone else to follow her bid.

Frankly, she didn’t plan on bidding for anything at first, but several people kept throwing their glances at them after Alaric entered.

She couldn’t let this good opportunity pass. She was going to use this chance to show off her position by Alaric’s side.

After all, this was merely an auction. Alaric wouldn’t reprimand her for anything.

Then, she looked at him from the corner of her eyes to find his head ducked down, scrolling his phone with a face utterly devoid of expression. It seemed like he didn’t care about her bidding at all.

Thus, she let out a breath of relief. If he wasn’t reacting, it meant that he didn’t care.

3/8

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Hence, Claudia was relieved and continued placing the bid.

CH

“6 million from Miss Johnson. You seem to have your eyes on the crystal bracelet tonight, Miss Johnson.”

When Victoria heard that, she was shocked and looked at the VIP seats.

Unfortunately, the VIP area was blocked, and she couldn't see anything from her seat.

6 million had surpassed her initial budget. So, she patted Ethan's shoulder. “That's enough, Mr. Hudson.”

Ethan looked at her with wide eyes. “Miss Selwyn, are you going to give up like this? It's something you wanted.”

“Yes, but the price is more than what I expected. So, there's no need to continue.”

She initially estimated to win the bid at around 5.5 million. Nevertheless, if it didn't work out, she would let other people take it..

“But...” Ethan bit his lips. “Mr. Morison instructed me to bid everything you wanted no matter the cost.”

Just as Victoria was about to tell him not to heed Bane's words like he was The

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King; Ethan had already raised the placard again. “6.5 million!”

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6.5 million wasn't a huge sum for influential families. Still, Claudia didn't expect someone would continue bidding against her for that crystal bracelet.

Besides, she was standing right beside Alaric at that moment. Smart people wouldn't go against her.

Who knew that she was still looked down upon?

As she thought of that, Claudia bit her bottom lips. "7 million."

Then, Ethan continued the bid. "7.5 million."

5/8

Victoria was rendered wholly speechless. She felt wrong-footed and couldn't help regretting showing a hint of interest in that bracelet.

The crowd started to gossip. They didn't expect a crystal bracelet could attract such intense bidding.

Now that it had become such a farce, Claudia had no choice but to continue to bid as it reached this stage. "8 million."

Ethan was about to raise the placard when Victoria desperately grabbed his hand.

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"That's enough, Mr. Hudson."

"But Miss Selwyn, Mr. Morison ordered..."

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Victoria looked at him calmly. "I don't like that bracelet any longer. Are you sure you still want to bid for something I don't like?"

Ethan was stunned when he heard that. Even though he wanted to help Bane get on Victoria's good side, he couldn't insist in this situation as he might offend Victoria and all Bane's efforts would be in vain.

After some thought, Ethan finally decided to give up. "Okay, then, Miss Selwyn, but please let me know what item catches your eye later."

Victoria attempted a smile and nodded. Regardless, Ethan had a hunch that she wouldn't tell him anything of the sort even if she indeed saw something she liked. Sigh. It's so hard to please a woman. I don't know how Mr. Morison does it after so many years.

In the end, Claudia got the crystal bracelet at the price of 8 million and the whispered discussion around her made her throw her head proudly.

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8 million was enough to make her the center of attention. Soon, everyone would know that she accompanied Alaric to the charity auction and spent 8 million to buy a crystal bracelet.

Even though she was the one to place the bid, the media would still title the news as Alaric who gave her a crystal bracelet worth 8 million to garner more attention.

That sort of attention was beneficial to the Johnson Family.

Then, the auction continued with the next item. The organizer was an expert at handling the atmosphere and presented the next item before people's emotions calmed down.

So, the atmosphere of the scene gradually got heated and everyone was pumped toward the end. Suffice it to say, several people in attendance highly anticipated their last auction item.

Ethan flipped through the catalog and announced, "There are two items left."

Victoria knew what he was referring to and inquired, "Do we have an estimated value?"

He nodded seriously. "The first estimate was around 90 million, but..." Then, he

Chapter 100 Wan o Pease Hei

scanned the crowd before continuing from where he left off. "There are too many people here today. I figure we might have to increase such an estimation."

Victoria also swept her gaze around her when she heard his remark.

Just as expected, several people had their backs ramrod straight. It was obvious. they came prepared.

Therefore, she nodded in understanding before musing, "It is after all the only one in the world. It's precious."

8/8

Chapter 200 Quite Capable

Chapter 200

Claudia flipped through the auction catalog, then carefully leaned in close to Alaric and reminded him, "Al, the item Mrs. Cadogan wants is coming up soon."

Alaric responded coldly with a grunt as his gaze was still on his phone.

She pursed her lips. Alaric had been looking at his phone ever since he sat down.

They came with a clear purpose, so before the grand item was presented, he wouldn't have any interest in the other items at the venue.

However, no matter how uninterested he was, he was never this engrossed in his phone in the past.

Also, what was he looking at, and what was so good about it?

At that thought, Claudia looked in the direction of Alaric's phone screen.

She was stunned when she caught sight of it. Two children?

Why was Alaric looking at two children?

Was she seeing things?

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Yet, before Claudia could take another look, Alaric's phone screen turned black.

2/9

Right after that, Claudia was faced with Alaric's cold gaze.

"What are you looking at?"

Claudia recovered herself, then instinctively shook her head. "N-Nothing. I just wanted to remind you."

"Got it." Alaric kept away his phone and maintained a steady gaze forward, no longer distracted.

When she saw that, she straightened herself as well.

For some reason, she felt that something was off.

Since when did Alaric start looking at children's photos on his phone?

There never were such things on his phone.

Moreover, he had turned into a workaholic in recent years, so how could he have time to look at children?

In an instant, when Claudia remembered the image she just saw, her expression

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shifted. The color quickly drained from her face, and she immediately turned pale.

If she wasn't mistaken, the children in the photos seemed to resemble Alaric.

In recent years, because Alaric had gotten drunk before, many women were vying

for a chance to sleep with Alaric when he was drunk and give birth to his child. Some even went so far as to make their child go through plastic surgery. Claudia didn't even know how those people managed to find ways to do such horrendous things, but such women truly existed in this world. She was only startled when she saw the child that looked like Alaric at first. This was probably because Claudia knew that Victoria was pregnant when she left back then. Later on, after an investigation, they found that it was plastic surgery carried out by depraved people.

Similar incidents happened quite several times, and the entire farce only ended after Cadogan Group released an announcement.

There was a time that Claudia would become utterly worried, but then after receiving such fake news over and over again, she became exasperated. Toward the end, she stopped worrying about it entirely.

3/9

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Ever since then, whenever she saw a child similar to Alaric, she wouldn't even be the least bit bothered about it. After all, Alaric would never give the children another glance, but today... he was looking at those two children.

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Also, even though she only caught a quick glimpse of the pictures, she felt that the two children were extremely similar to Alaric.

She was originally feeling gleeful because she had successfully shown off to the young heiresses who were also vying for Alaric's attention. Yet, in just a few hours, her triumphant glee fell into depths of despair.

After the last item was auctioned off, the host spoke over the microphone. "There has never been a competitive mood as strong as the one in this auction today. Our auction ends here, but don't blink or you'll miss it. Next, we're presenting..."

Once the staff received his cue, they carried the grand item onto the stage.

Then, the host introduced the item animatedly on stage.

The participants were intrigued by his introduction, and the atmosphere was brought to a boiling point.

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Victoria lowered her head to recheck the catalog.

The item currently presented was the only one of its kind. It was an artifact from some ancient kingdom. The last time it appeared was at an auction overseas.

In the end, it was bought by a mysterious person at a high price.

Everyone was wondering who this mysterious person was, but unexpectedly, the artifact ended up in the hands of the Floyd Family.

Victoria suddenly remembered something, so she asked Ethan, who was beside her.

"So, about the Floyd Family..."

He seemed to have read her mind. Before she could finish speaking, he explained,

"Miss Selwyn, it's the same Floyd Family that was trying to get you on their side."

She never thought that it would be the same family.

As Victoria studied the atmosphere, the corners of her lips curled into a smile. "It looks like the new heir is quite capable."

"Yes." Ethan nodded. "Quite capable, and bold too, especially since they could get their hands on such a fantastic item."

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The auction had already begun.

He sighed. "By the looks of things, I have no idea what the final price will be."

Since it was an item reserved for the finale and the only one of its kind, the starting price was extremely high. Bids could be heard here and there, and in just a few minutes, the item was going for 60 million.

60 million then turned into 75 million.

Numbers were called out so easily at the venue that they seemed to be just numbers instead of real money.

"90 million!!" The host suddenly exclaimed, then announced the name. "Mr. Cadogan is offering 90 million! Do we have a bigger number?"

When Ethan heard the last name, Cadogan, he reflexively tilted his head to look at Victoria.

Victoria acted as if she hadn't heard the last name. She simply sat there as usual with a calm expression on her face.

However, he couldn't be as calm as she was.

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They weren't overseas...

They were in Corynthea.

Also, they were in Jasea, the city next to Gandra.

Not just Jasea, even among all the people in the country, there truly wasn't another man with the last name Cadogan who could offer this price.

Ethan felt that since he already had a person in mind, then Victoria, who was so intelligent, should be able to come to the same conclusion.

Yet, considering how calm she was acting, she probably didn't care whether it was

really Alaric.

After all, it had been five years since then. It wasn't a long time, but it wasn't short, either. Still, it was enough for most emotions to fade away.

Ethan gradually felt himself relaxing. Then, he followed up with a bid of his own. 90 million was the highest price most people could offer.

No matter how desperately they wanted to get their hands on the item, they wouldn't place another bid after it exceeded their estimated budget.

7/0

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So, just like the jade bracelet from before, two parties were left competing.

The staff at the venue turned their gazes from the VIP area to the furthestmost end of the venue. When they saw that the two people sitting there were unfamiliar faces, they couldn't help but become puzzled.

"What's going on today? This item is reaching 105 million, but they're still at it."

"Also, more weirdly, the two who are bidding at the back aren't from the VIP area, but they're bidding so boldly."

"I've never seen them before. Who are they? Are they trying to raise the Cadogans' price on purpose? If they offend the Cadogans, they won't be able to survive."

"If they dared to go against the Cadogans, they're probably not afraid of them, right?"

Every time Ethan raised the paddle, countless gazes turned toward him, boring into him. He didn't mind, but he was worried about Victoria, so he said to her, "Miss Selwyn, you've been sitting here for quite a while. Are you alright? Why don't you go and have a rest first?"

He was mainly afraid that some of the participants would recognize Victoria. Plus,

8/9

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Bane wasn't around at the moment...

More importantly, he never thought that that person would be here.

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Victoria nodded at Ethan's suggestion. "Okay, I'll go outside for some fresh air and rest for a bit. Contact me once you're done."

With that, Victoria stood up and left the venue.